The Spiritist Fallacy

René Guénon

COLLECTED WORKS OF RENÉ GUÉNON

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE PAST CENTURY HAS WITNESSED an erosion of earlier cultural values as well as a blurring of the distinctive characteristics of the world's traditional civilizations, giving rise to philosophic and moral relativism, multiculturalism, and dangerous fundamentalist reactions. As early as the 1920s, the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951) had diagnosed these tendencies and presented what he believed to be the only possible reconciliation of the legitimate, although apparently conflicting, demands of outward religious forms, 'exoterisms', with their essential core, 'esoterism'. His works are characterized by a foundational critique of the modern world coupled with a call for intellectual reform; a renewed examination of metaphysics, the traditional sciences, and symbolism, with special reference to the ultimate unanimity of all spiritual traditions; and finally, a call to the work of spiritual realization. Despite their wide influence, translation of Guénon's works into English has so far been piecemeal. The *Sophia Perennis* edition is intended to fill the urgent need to present them in a more authoritative and systematic form. A complete list of Guénon's works, given in the order of their original publication in French, follows this note.

Many readers of Guénon's doctrinal works have hoped for translations of his detailed exposés of Theosophy and Spiritism. *Sophia Perennis* is pleased to make available both these important titles as part of the *Collected Works of René Guénon*. Whereas *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* centers primarily on historical details, *The Spiritist Fallacy*, though also packed with arcane facts, is unique in revealing how one of the greatest metaphysicians of our age interprets the phenomena, real or alleged, of Spiritism. The doctrinal expositions that accompany his astonishing account of Spiritism offer extraordinarily prescient insight into many deviations and 'psychological' afflictions of the modern mind, and should be as valuable to psychiatrists and spiritual counselors as to students of

esoteric history. And it also offers a profound corrective to the many brands of New Age 'therapy' that all too unwittingly invoke many of the same elements whose nefarious origins Guénon so clearly pointed out many years ago.

Guénon often uses words or expressions set off in 'scare quotes'. To avoid clutter, single quotation marks have been used throughout. As for transliterations, Guénon was more concerned with phonetic fidelity than academic usage. The system adopted here reflects the views of scholars familiar both with the languages and Guénon's writings. Brackets indicate editorial insertions, or, within citations, Guénon's additions. Wherever possible, references have been updated, and English editions substituted.

The translation benefited from the work of two men with extensive experience both translating and interpreting Guénon's writings: Dr. Rama P. Coomaraswamy and Alvin Moore, Jr. Dr. Coomaraswamy, as both priest and psychiatrist, specifically hoped that those whose task it is to deal with maladies of the soul, and their societal concomitants, might benefit especially from the insights Guénon here provides into a region too little exposed to clear metaphysical scrutiny. Careful revisions of the entire text were made by Marie Hansen and James Wetmore. For further assistance with selected chapters and proofreading thanks are owed to Jocelyn Godwin, John Ahmed Herlihy, Jay Kinney, John Champoux, and Cecil Bethell. Cover design by Michael Buchino and Gray Henry, based on a drawing of an early Greek decorative motif, by Guénon's friend and collaborator Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

THE WORKS OF RENÉ GUÉNON

Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines (1921)

Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion (1921)

The Spiritist Fallacy (1923)

East and West (1924)

Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta (1925)

The Esoterism of Dante (1925)

The Crisis of the Modern World (1927)

The King of the World (1927)

Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power (1929)

The Symbolism of the Cross (1931)

The Multiple States of the Being (1932)

The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times (1945)

Perspectives on Initiation (1946)

The Great Triad (1946)

The Metaphysical Principles of the Infinitesimal Calculus (1946)

Initiation and Spiritual Realization (1952)

Insights into Christian Esoterism (1954)

Symbols of Sacred Science (1962)

Studies in Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage (1964)

Studies in Hinduism (1966)

Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles (1970)

Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism (1973)

Reviews (1973)

Miscellanea (1976)

PREFACE

IN TURNING TO THE QUESTION of spiritism[1] we must first make our intentions as clear as possible. Many works have been devoted to this question, and in these last times they have become more numerous than ever. Nevertheless, we do not believe that everything has been said on the subject or that we will be repeating what has been presented in any other book. Nor do we intend to treat the subject exhaustively, for this would oblige us to repeat too many things found easily enough in other works, and so would be a task as enormous as it would be useless. Instead, we prefer to limit our attention to those aspects which until now have been treated most inadequately. And this is why we shall try first of all to dispel those confusions and misunderstandings which we have frequently noted in this order of ideas. Then we shall lay particular stress on pointing out the errors that constitute the basis of spiritist doc-trine—insofar as one can call it a doctrine.

1. The original Anglo-American term for those claiming to communicate with the spirits of the dead, and for their doctrines, was 'spiritualists' and 'spiritualism'. The French equivalents were readily available as *spiritualistes* and *spiritualisme*. However, in the 1850s Allan Kardec (about whom much will be found in these pages) noted that the term *spiritualisme*, as contrasted with *materialisme*, did not adequately describe his new system of alleged communication with the 'spirits' (cf. *The Spirits' Book*, Brotherhood of Life, Albuquerque, NM). His followers therefore adopted the name *spirites*, and called their school *spiritisme*. By the end of the nineteenth century, the French spiritualist world had divided, mainly over the question of reincarnation, into the more numerous *spirites*, who, with Kardec, asserted reincarnation, and the *spiritualistes*, who denied reincarnation and thereby remained closer to the original Anglo-American 'spiritualists'. Evidence of the split, and of efforts to reconcile the factions, can be seen in the official title of the Paris Congress of September 1889: 'International Spiritist and Spiritualist Congress'. Since Guénon's work is particularly directed against the reincarnationist *spirites* and *spiritisme*, he uses these terms, and in the present translation this usage has been followed (except in direct citations), keeping in mind Guénon's reasoned opposition also to the entire movement that the word 'spiritualism' connotes to English speakers. ED.

It would be difficult and of little value to consider this matter from a specifically historical point of view. One could of course write the history of a well-defined sect[2] with a distinct organization or a minimum of internal cohesion; but such is not the case with spiritism. From the beginning, the spiritists have been divided into a variety of schools, and these in turn have split into various independent and often rival groups. Even if it were possible to enumerate all these schools and all their branches, no profit that might thus accrue to the reader could justify such tedium. Further, in order to call oneself a spiritist it is by no means necessary to belong to any association; it suffices to admit certain theories which ordinarily accompany the relevant practices. Many people practice spiritism in isolation or in small groups, and this is an element of the matter that eludes the historian. In this respect spiritism is quite different from Theosophy and the greater number of occultist schools. Though this is far from being the most important point characterizing the spiritists, it is nevertheless the consequence of certain other less obvious differences which we will explain later. We believe that what we have said is sufficient to explain why we will introduce historical considerations only when they can shed light on our study without making the historical aspect the object of special attention.

Another point we do not intend to treat exhaustively is the examination of the phenomena which spiritists adduce in support of their theories and which others, even while admitting the reality of the phenomena, interpret in an entirely different way. We will make clear what we think of these things, but more or less detailed descriptions of these phenomena have so often been given by spiritist practitioners that it would be redundant to return to them. For the rest, this is not an area that particularly interests us; and in this regard we prefer to indicate the possibility of certain explanations which the practitioners in question, spiritists or otherwise, certainly do not suspect. In spiritism, theories are doubtless never separated from experimentation, and so we do not intend to separate them entirely. What we assert is that the phenomena in question furnish

2. Guénon himself wrote such a history, one of his earliest works: *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* (hereafter cited as *Theosophy*). Ed.

only a purely illusory basis for spiritist theories, and that apart from these theories spiritism is no longer involved at all. But this does not prevent us from recognizing that if spiritism were only theoretical it would be much less dangerous than it is in fact, and that if it were only theoretical many people would find it much less attractive. We must insist, however, on the danger that spiritism does actually pose, and this danger is the most pressing of the motives that have impelled us to write this book.

We have frequently pointed out the dire effects that have followed upon the spread, since the late nineteenth century, of various theories that may be designated 'neo-spiritist'. In our day there are assuredly many other errors, many other counter-truths, which also need combatting. But the spiritist theories have a quite special character that probably renders them more sinister, or in any case sinister in a different manner, than those that are presented in simple philosophical or scientific guise. Spiritism is more or less a 'pseudo-religion'. We have applied this term to Theosophy, but it is equally applicable to spiritism, even though this latter aberration has often made a show of scientific pretensions by virtue of its experimental character, in which it believes it finds not only the basis but even the source of its doctrine. Spiritism is fundamentally a deviation of the religious spirit, in conformity with the 'scientistic' mentality shared by so many of our contemporaries. In addition, among all the 'neo-spiritualist' doctrines, spiritism is certainly the most popular and widespread. This is easily understood because it is the most 'simplistic', one might even say the crudest. It is within the reach of every intelligence, however mediocre; and the phenomena on which it rests, or the most ordinary of them at least, can easily be obtained by anyone. It is spiritism, therefore, that garners the greatest number of victims, its ravages having increased in recent times in quite unexpected proportions owing to disturbances that recent events have induced in many people's minds.[3] When we speak of ravages and victims, these are not mere metaphors; everything of

3. The author refers to World War 1 and to the great loss of life in the major combatant nations, losses which led many to seek contact with deceased relatives by spiritist means. Ed.

this nature—spiritism more so than others—results in irremediable disequilibrium and disorder for a multitude of unhappy souls who, had they not encountered these things, might have continued to lead a normal life. This is a peril not to be dismissed as negligible and which, especially in present circumstances, it is particularly necessary and opportune to resolutely denounce. All these considerations combine to reinforce our more general concern to safeguard the rights of truth against all forms of error.

We must add that it is not our intent to offer a purely negative critique; instead, a critique of spiritism, justified by the reasons given above, necessarily provides an occasion to expound certain truths. On many points we will be obliged to limit ourselves to summary observations, but we think it possible nonetheless to provide glimpses of questions that are often ignored even though they can open new avenues of research for those able to appreciate their significance. Furthermore, we must caution readers that our point of view is in many respects very different from that of most authors who have spoken of spiritism—both those who have opposed and those who have defended it. We are inspired, always and above all, by the ideas of pure metaphysics, such as are provided by the doctrines of the East. Indeed, in our judgment it is only in this way, rather than by placing ourself on their level, that certain errors can be totally refuted. We know only too well that from both the philosophical and the scientific points of view these matters can be discussed interminably without coming to a conclusion, and that to lend oneself to such controversies is often to play the adversary's game, no matter how little he may be able to bend the discussion. We are therefore more persuaded than anyone of the need for doctrinal principles from which one should never deviate, for such principles alone enable one to handle certain things with impunity. On the other hand, since we do not wish to close the door on any possibility and want to oppose only that which we know to be false, for us this doctrinal direction can only be of the metaphysical order, understanding this word in the sense which we have explained elsewhere.[4] It goes without saying that such a book as this cannot be

4. Cf. the author's *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, especially pt. 3, chap. 9. ED

regarded as properly metaphysical throughout, but we unhesitatingly assert that in its inspiration there is more true metaphysics than in all that philosophers improperly designate by this name. And no one should be alarmed by this assertion: the true metaphysics to which we refer has nothing in common with the tedious subtleties of philosophy or the confusions it creates and gratuitously entertains. Besides, the present work as a whole has nothing of the rigor of a purely doctrinal exposition. What we mean is that we are constantly guided by principles which for whoever has understood them are absolutely certain, and in the absence of which one is greatly at risk of going astray in the dark labyrinths of the 'world below'. Too many rash explorers, notwithstanding their scientific or philosophical pretensions, have provided sad examples of this.

All this does not mean that we disdain the efforts of those who have adopted perspectives different from our own; quite the contrary. From our standpoint all these points of view, insofar as they are legitimate and valid, can only harmonize with and complete one another. But there are distinctions to be made and a hierarchy to be observed; a particular point of view is valid only within a limited domain and one must be aware of the limits beyond which it ceases to be applicable, something too often forgotten by specialists of the experimental sciences. On the other hand, those with a religious point of view have the inestimable advantage of doctrinal guidance just like the one we have mentioned, but which by reason of the form in which it is clad is not universally acceptable. This doctrinal guidance suffices to keep them from losing themselves but it does not provide adequate answers to every question. Whatever the case, in the face of present events we are persuaded that one can never do too much by way of opposition to certain injurious activities, and that every effort accomplished in this direction, provided it is well-conceived, will be useful and perhaps better adapted than some others to deal with this or that definite point. Finally, and to speak in an idiom that some will understand, we repeat that there can never be too much light shed in dispelling all the emanations of the 'dark Satellite'.

PART 1

DISTINCTIONS AND NECESSARY PRECISIONS

1

DEFINITION OF SPIRITISM

SINCE WE PROPOSED at the outset to distinguish spiritism from various other things which though quite different are too often confused with it, it is indispensable to begin by offering a precise definition. At first glance it seems that one can say this: spiritism basically consists in admitting the possibility of communicating with the dead. This is what constitutes it, properly speaking, and this is what all the spiritist schools accept, whatever their theoretical divergences on other more or less important points, which they always regard as secondary in relation to the former. But this is insufficient: the fundamental postulate of spiritism is that communication with the dead is not only a possibility but it is a fact. If one admits this only as a possibility, one is not on that account a spiritist. It is true that in this latter case one is stayed from a complete refutation of spiritist doctrine, and this is already grave enough; for as we shall show in what follows, communication with the dead, such as the spiritists understand it, is purely and simply an impossibility, and it is only thus that one can completely and definitively cut short all their claims. Apart from this attitude there can only be more or less awkward compromises; and when one begins to make concessions and accommodations it is difficult to know where to stop. We have proof of this in what has happened to some, Theosophists and occultists especially, who would protest energetically—and rightly so—if they were taken to be spiritists, but who for various reasons have admitted that communication with the dead might really take place in more or less exceptional cases. To admit such a thing is fundamentally to acknowledge the truth of the spiritist hypothesis. But

for their part the spiritists are not content with this much, holding that this communication occurs regularly in all their séances, and not only once in a hundred or a thousand. For the spiritists it suffices to place oneself in certain conditions in order to set up this communication, which they regard not as an extraordinary fact but as something normal and commonplace. And this is a detail which it is appropriate to make part of the very definition of spiritism.

But there is something else: up to this point we have spoken of communication with the dead in a rather vague manner, but it must now be made clear that for the spiritists this communication is brought about by material means. This is another essential element in distinguishing spiritism from certain other conceptions in which one admits only mental or intuitive communications, a kind of inspiration; doubtless spiritists admit these too, but it is not these to which they accord the greatest importance. We will discuss this point below, but can say at once that real inspiration, which we are far from denying, has in reality quite another source. But such conceptions are certainly less gross than those proper to the spiritists, and the objections to which they give rise are of a somewhat different character. What we take as specifically spiritist is the idea that the 'spirits' act on matter, that they produce physical phenomena such as the displacement of objects, knockings and other noises, etc. We call attention here only to the simplest and most common examples, which are also the most characteristic. Moreover, it is well to add that this action on matter is supposed to be exercised indirectly through the intermediary of a living human being possessing certain special faculties who by reason of this intermediary role is called a 'medium'. It is difficult to define precisely the mediumistic faculty, and opinions vary; it seems that it is most commonly regarded as physiological in nature, or perhaps psycho-physiological. We note for future reference that the introduction of this intermediary does not do away with the difficulties. At first glance it does not seem any easier for a 'spirit' to act immediately upon the organism of a living being than on any inanimate body whatsoever. But at this point certain more complex considerations intervene.

The 'spirits', notwithstanding the name that is given them, are not regarded as being purely immaterial. On the contrary, it is said that

they are clad in a kind of envelope which, though normally too subtle to be perceived by the senses, is nonetheless a material organism, a true body, designated by the rather barbarous name 'perispirit'. If this is the case, one may ask why this organism does not allow the 'spirits' to act directly on matter of any kind and why it is necessary to have recourse to a medium. This seems illogical, for if the 'perispirit' is incapable in itself of acting on sensible matter, it must be the same for the corresponding element existing in the medium or in any other living being, in which case this element would serve for nothing in the production of the phenomena in question. We only note these difficulties in passing, for it is the spiritists' task to explain them if they can. It would be of no interest to pursue a discussion of these special points since there is much more to say against spiritism than this; and for us it is not in this way that the question must be posed. We believe it useful, however, to linger a little on the manner in which spiritists generally view the constitution of the human being and to state at once, in order to avoid any ambiguity, what we find unacceptable in their conceptions.

Modern Westerners usually consider the human composite in the most simplified and reduced form possible, conceiving it as consisting of only two elements. One is the body and the other is called indifferently soul or mind. We say modern Westerners, for in truth this dualist theory took firm root only after Descartes. We cannot give even a brief history of this question here, but will say that prior to the time of Descartes current ideas of body and soul did not involve this complete opposition of nature which renders their union truly inexplicable. Also, even in the West there were less 'simplistic' conceptions, closer to those of Easterners, for whom the human being is a much more complex totality. At that time one could scarcely have dreamed of the final degree of simplification represented by the most recent materialist theories, according to which man is no longer even a composite since he is reduced to a single element, the body. Among the ancient conceptions to which we have alluded one could find, even without going back to antiquity, many which envisage three elements in man by making a further distinction between soul and spirit. There is a certain fluidity in the use of the latter two terms, but the soul is usually the middle

term, corresponding in part to what the moderns have called the 'vital principle', while the spirit is the veritable, permanent, and imperishable being. Most occultists have wanted to renew this ternary conception, introducing into it a special terminology; but they have not understood its true sense and have emptied it of all significance by the fantastic manner in which they represent the elements of the human being. Thus they make of the median element a body, the 'astral body', which closely resembles the 'perispirit' of the spiritists. All theories of this genre have the fault of being fundamentally only a kind of transposition of materialist conceptions. 'Neo-spiritualism' appears as a broadened materialism, and yet this very broadness is somewhat illusory. These theories approach most closely to vitalistic conceptions, and their origin should probably be sought there; they reduce the median element of the human composite to the vital principle alone, which they seem to admit only in order to account for how the spirit can move the body, an insoluble problem on the Cartesian hypothesis. Vitalism poses the question badly and is, in sum, only a physiological theory. It implies a very special point of view and is subject to one of the simplest of objections: either one admits, with Descartes, that the natures of the soul and body do not have the least point of contact, in which case it is impossible that there could be an intermediary or middle term between them, or on the contrary one admits, as did the ancients, that they have a certain natural affinity, in which case the intermediary becomes useless, for this affinity would suffice to explain how the one could act upon the other. This objection is valid against vitalism and also against 'neo-spiritualist' conceptions insofar as they proceed from vitalism and adopt its point of view. But of course this objection has no force against conceptions which envisage things under entirely different relationships very much anterior to Cartesian dualism and therefore entirely foreign to the preoccupations created by this latter, and which regard man not in order to furnish a hypothetical solution to an artificial problem as a complex being, but in order to correspond as exactly as possible to reality. According to various points of view, a number of divisions and subdivisions can be established in the human being without such conceptions being irreconcilable. The essential thing is that one not

separate the human being into two apparently unrelated halves, and not seek to reunite these two halves after the fact by a third term the nature of which, under these conditions, is not even conceivable.

We can now return to the spiritist conception, which, since it distinguishes spirit, 'perispirit', and body, is ternary. In a sense, this conception may seem superior to that of modern philosophers in that it admits an additional element, but this superiority is only apparent because the manner in which this additional element is conceived does not correspond to reality. We will return to this point below, but there is another feature to which we wish to call attention, although we cannot treat it fully at the moment: if the spiritist theory is already very inaccurate concerning the constitution of the human being in this life, it is entirely false when it is a question of the same human being after death. Here we touch on the very nub of the problem we intend to treat later, but here we can say in a few words that the error consists especially in this: according to spiritism nothing changes at death except that the body disappears, or rather separates from the other two elements, which remain united to one another as before; in other words, a dead man would not differ from a living man except in that he would have one fewer element, the body. It will be readily understood that such a conception is indispensable if one is to admit communication between the dead and the living, and also that the persistence of the 'perispirit', a material element, would be no less necessary in order that this communication might take place by equally material means. There is a certain logical sequence in these various points of the theory; but it is not nearly so easy to understand why, in the view of the spiritists, a medium is an indispensable condition for the production of phenomena. We repeat that we do not see why—admitting the spiritist hypothesis—a 'spirit' would act otherwise by means of an unknown 'perispirit' than by means of itself; or else, if death modifies the 'perispirit' in such a way as to remove certain possibilities of action, communication would then certainly seem to be compromised. Whatever the case, the spiritists insist so much on the role of the medium and attach to it such importance that it can be said without exaggeration that it is one of the fundamental points of their doctrine.

We in no way contest the reality of so-called mediumistic faculties, and our criticism bears only on the interpretation given it by the spiritists. Moreover, experimenters who are not themselves spiritists see no difficulty in using the word 'mediumism' simply to make themselves understood and to conform to received practice, even though the word no longer has its original raison d'être, and so we will continue to do the same. On the other hand, when we say that we do not understand the role attributed to the medium, this is said from the point of view of the spiritists, at least apart from certain specific cases. No doubt if a 'spirit' wants to accomplish this or that action, if it wants to speak for example, it cannot do so except by taking possession of the organs of a living man. But it is not the same thing when the medium only lends to the 'spirit' a certain ill-defined power to which various names have been given: neuric, odic, or ectenic force, and many others. To bypass the objections we raised previously, it must be admitted that this force is not an integral part of the 'perispirit' and that, existing only in the living being, it is rather of a physiological nature. We do not deny this, but the 'perispirit'—if there is a 'perispirit'—must make use of this force in order to act upon sensible matter. And then again one can ask what is the use of a 'perispirit', not to mention that the introduction of this new intermediary certainly does not simplify the question. Finally, it seems that one must either make an essential distinction between the 'perispirit' and the neuric force or simply deny the first in order to keep only the second—or renounce any intelligible explanation. In addition, if the neuric force suffices to account for everything, which accords better than any other supposition with the mediumistic theory, the existence of the 'perispirit' appears as a wholly gratuitous hypothesis. But no spiritist would accept this conclusion, not least because for want of any other consideration it renders very doubtful the intervention of the dead in phenomena that could be more easily explained by certain more or less exceptional properties of the living being. For the rest, as the spiritists would say, these properties are not abnormal; they exist in every human being at least in a latent state. What is rare is that they should attain a degree sufficient to produce obvious phenomena; and mediums properly so called are the ones who find themselves in this situation,

whether their faculties have developed spontaneously or by the effect of special training. Further, this rarity is only relative.

There is one last point we would like to emphasize: the expression 'communicating with the dead' is more ambiguous than is suspected by many people, beginning with the spiritists themselves. If one really enters into communication with something, what exactly is involved? For spiritists, the response is very simple: that with which one communicates is what is improperly called the 'spirits'. We say 'improperly' because of the supposed presence of the 'perispirit'. Such a 'spirit' is exactly the same human individual who lived previously on the earth, and except that he is now 'disincarnated', that is to say stripped of his visible and tangible body, he remains absolutely such as he was during his earthly life, or rather such as he would have been had that life continued. In a word, it is the true man who 'survives' and who is manifested in the phenomena of spiritism. But we would greatly astonish the spiritists, and also no doubt the greater number of their adversaries, by saying that the very simplicity of this response is in no way satisfying. Those who have understood what we have already said regarding the constitution of the human being and its complexity will also understand the correlation between these two questions. The claim of communicating with the dead in the sense we have described is something quite recent, and it is one of the elements giving spiritism a specifically modern character. In earlier times if one spoke of communicating with the dead, this was understood in an entirely different way. We know well that this will seem quite extraordinary to most of our contemporaries, but it is nonetheless true. We will explain this below, but we had to state it before proceeding further, because without it the definition of spiritism would remain vague and incomplete, even though this might go unnoticed; and also because it is ignorance of this question that permits spiritism to be taken for something other than the quite recently invented doctrine that it really is.

2

THE ORIGINS OF SPIRITISM

SPIRITISM DATES FROM EXACTLY 1848. It is important to note this date because various idiosyncrasies of spiritist theories reflect the peculiar mentality of the period in which they originated. It is especially in such troubled periods, owing to the accompanying mental disequilibrium, that things of this kind come to birth and develop. The circumstances surrounding the beginnings of spiritism are known well enough and have been told many times; it will therefore suffice to relate them briefly, emphasizing only those points that are particularly instructive and perhaps less familiar.

We know that spiritism, along with many analogous movements, trace their origins to the United States. The first phenomena were produced in December 1847 at Hydesville, New York, in a house where the Fox family had taken up residence. The family, whose original name was Voss, was of German origin. We mention the German origin because if one day someone wishes to establish the real causes of the spiritist movement, investigation of the German side must not be neglected, as we shall shortly explain. It seems that at the beginning the Fox family played only a quite involuntary role, and that even later the family members were only the passive instruments of some force, in the manner of all mediums. Whatever the case, the phenomena in question, consisting of various noises and displacements of objects, were neither new nor uncommon, but were similar to those observed from time immemorial in what are called 'haunted houses'. What was new was the use subsequently made of these phenomena. After several months someone got the idea of posing questions to the mysterious rapper, questions to

which it responded correctly. At first it was only asked arithmetical questions, to which it responded by a series of regular blows. It was a Quaker, one Isaac Post, who took it upon himself to mention by name the letters of the alphabet, inviting the 'spirit' to designate by a knock those letters that composed words which he (the 'spirit') wanted to make known, thus devising the means of communication called the *spiritual telegraph*. The 'spirit' declared itself to be a certain Charles B. Rosna, during life a peddler who had been slain in the Fox house and buried in the cellar, where in fact some skeletal remains were found. Moreover, the phenomena were produced especially in the presence of the Fox sisters, and it was in this way that mediumship was discovered. Among the visitors who gathered there in ever greater numbers were those who believed, rightly or wrongly, that they were endowed with the same powers. From that time *modern spiritualism*, as it was at first called, was founded. Its first designation was probably the most exact, but, doubtless in the interest of brevity, it most frequently came to be called simply *spiritualism* in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As for *spiritism*, the word was coined in France a little later.

Soon gatherings or *spiritual circles* were formed where new mediums revealed themselves in great numbers. If we are to believe the communications or messages received, this spiritist movement, which had as its aim the establishment of regular relations between the inhabitants of the two worlds, had been prepared by scientific and philosophical 'spirits' during their earthly life; they had been especially occupied with researches in electricity and various other imponderable fluids. Benjamin Franklin was found to be the head of these 'spirits' and it was claimed that he often gave instructions on methods for developing and perfecting ways of communication between the living and the dead. From the very beginning, in fact, ingenuity was strained to search out more convenient and more rapid means of communication with the aid of the 'spirits'; hence, the turning and tapping tables, then the alphabetical dials, the pencils attached to baskets or to mobile boards, and other analogous instruments. The use of Benjamin Franklin's name, other than being natural enough in an American milieu, is quite characteristic of some of the tendencies manifested in spiritism. Franklin himself

was assuredly not involved in this affair, but the adherents of the new movement could not do better than place themselves under the patronage of this moralist of the most incredible banality. And while on this subject let us say that spiritists have retained elements of some theories of the late eighteenth century, a time of obsession with 'fluids'. The hypothesis of an 'electrical fluid', long since abandoned, serves as an instance of many other such ideas. The 'fluid' of the spiritists so much resembles that of the mesmerizers that mesmerism itself, even though far removed from spiritism, can in one sense be regarded as a distant precursor of spiritism and as having contributed in a certain measure to its advent.

The Fox family, which now believed it had a special mission to spread knowledge of spiritist phenomena, was driven from the Methodist Episcopal Church to which they had belonged. They then established themselves in Rochester, New York, where the phenomena continued and where they were at first greeted with hostility by a great part of the populace. There was even a riot during which only the intervention of one George Willets, another Quaker, prevented their massacre. This is the second time we see a Quaker playing a role in this story, and this is no doubt due to certain affinities which this sect incontestably has with spiritism. We refer not only to their humanitarian tendencies but also to the strange 'inspiration' manifested in Quaker meetings, heralded by the quaking to which they owe their name. Here we have something that singularly resembles mediumistic phenomena, even though the interpretation naturally differs. In any event, one can easily imagine that the existence of a sect such as the Quakers may have contributed to the acceptance of the first spiritist manifestations.[1] Perhaps in the eighteenth century there was also an analogous relationship between the exploits of the Jansenist convulsionaries and the success of 'animal magnetism'.[2]

1. In a curious coincidence, the seventeenth-century founder of the Quaker sect was named George Fox. It is claimed that he and several of his immediate disciples had the power to cure illnesses.

2. In order to explain the case of convulsionaries, Allan Kardec [1804–1869] had recourse, in addition to magnetism, to 'underdeveloped spirits' (*Le Livre des Esprits*,

The essentials of the preceding were taken from an account by an American author from whose writings many others have drawn more or less faithfully. It is curious that this author, who has established herself as the historian of *modern spiritualism*,[3] is Emma Hardinge Britten who was a member of the secret society designated by the initials 'H B of L' (Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor),[4] which we have already mentioned in connection with the origins of the Theosophical Society. We say this fact is curious because the 'H B of L', although clearly opposed to the theories of spiritism, nevertheless sought to play a direct role in its founding. In fact, according to information from the 'H B of L', the first 'spiritist' phenomena were produced not by 'spirits' but by men acting from a distance by means known only to several initiates. And these initiates were, precisely, members of the 'inner circle' of the 'H B of L'. Unfortunately, in the history of this organization it is difficult to go further back than 1870, that is to say the same year in which Emma Hardinge Britten published the book just mentioned (a book in which there is of course no allusion to the topic now under consideration). Also, some have believed that in spite of this organization's claims to great age it dates only from this time. But even if this were true, it could refer only to the form the 'H B of L' had most recently adopted. In any case, it had garnered material from several other organizations which for their part certainly existed before the middle of the nineteenth century, such for example as the 'Brotherhood of Eulis' which was under the direction, outwardly at least, of Paschal Beverly Randolph, a very enigmatic personage who died in 1875.[5] But the name and form of the organization that operated in the events we have mentioned is of little importance. We must

pp 210–212). [Kardec's book has been translated into English as *The Spirit's Book* (New York: Arno Press, 1976)].

3. *Modern American Spiritualism* [New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1970 (first ed. 1870)].

4. See *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism*, by Jocelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, and John P. Deveney (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1995). Ed.

5. See *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth Century Black American Spiritualist and Sex Magician*, by John Patrick Deveney (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). Ed.

say that the thesis of the 'HB of L', intrinsically and independently of these contingencies, seems quite plausible, and we shall now try to explain why we say this.

To this end it is not inopportune to make several general observations on 'haunted houses', or what some like to call 'prophetic places'. Phenomena of this kind are far from rare, having been known from the earliest times. Examples are found in antiquity, as for example in the reports of Pliny the Younger, as well as in the Middle Ages and in modern times. Now, the phenomena produced in such cases are quite remarkably consistent. They may be more or less complex, but they share certain characteristics found always and everywhere. Moreover, the occurrences at Hydesville certainly are not to be accounted among the most remarkable, for there only the most elementary of these phenomena were observed. It is worthwhile to distinguish at least two principal cases: in the first, that of Hydesville (if what has been reported is really correct) it is a question of a place where someone has died a violent death and where, in addition, the body of the victim has remained hidden. We point out the coincidence of these two conditions because for the ancients the production of these phenomena was related to the fact that the victim had not received a regular burial accompanied by certain rites, and that only by the accomplishment of these rites after the body was found could these phenomena be brought to an end. This is what Pliny the Younger says, and there is something in his account that must hold our attention. In this connection it would be very important to determine just what the *manes*[6] were, and also what the ancients understood by several other terms that were in no way synonymous, although our contemporaries no longer know how to distinguish among them. Research in this area could clarify the question of evocations in a quite unexpected manner, and we shall return to this question below. In the second case, it is not a question of a death or, to retain the indistinctness belonging to this new order, manifestations proceeding from a death, but rather the action of a living man. There are typical examples of

6. In Roman religion the spirits of the dead and gods of the lower world; hence, ancestral spirits worshipped as gods. Ed.

these in modern times which have been carefully documented in all their details, the one most often cited and now something of a classic being the case of the presbytery of Cideville in Normandy, from 1849 to 1851, only a short while after the events at Hydesville, that is, at a time when the latter was still relatively unknown in France.[7] These were plainly phenomena with all the characteristics of sorcery, which could not be of interest to the spiritists except in that they seemed to furnish a confirmation of the theory of mediumship, understood in a rather broad sense. The sorcerer who wishes to take revenge on the occupants of a house must touch one of them, who afterward becomes his unconscious and involuntary instrument and will serve as 'support' for an action which henceforth can be exercised at a distance, although only when the passive 'subject' is present. This is not mediumship in the sense in which the spiritists understand it since the action of which the subject is the means does not have the same origin; but it is somewhat analogous, and one may at least suppose that forces of the same kind are brought into play in both cases. This is what is claimed by contemporary occultists who have studied the facts and who, it must be said, have all been more or less influenced by spiritist theory. In fact, ever since spiritism began, whenever a haunted house is reported somewhere a medium is sought, and with a little good will one or more is always found. We do not say that one is always wrong in this; but there are also examples of deserted places, such as abandoned houses, where phenomena of haunting occur in the absence of any human being, and it cannot be claimed that accidental witnesses, who often observe these things only from a distance, have played the role of mediums. It is unlikely that the laws governing certain forces, whatever they may be, have been altered, so that we assert against the occultists that the presence of a medium is not always a necessary condition, and that here as elsewhere one must be wary of prejudices that risk falsifying one's observations. We will

7. The facts of Cideville were reported, beginning in 1853, by Eudes de Mirville, who was an eyewitness, in *Des esprits et de leurs manifestations fluidiques*; his book, which contains accounts of some related facts, was followed by five more volumes treating questions of the same kind.

add that haunting without a medium applies to the first of the two cases we have cited, for a sorcerer would have no reason to go to an uninhabited place, and it may be furthermore that in order to act he might have need of conditions not required for phenomena produced spontaneously, even though the phenomena appear to be nearly the same. In the first case, which is that of true haunting, the production of these phenomena is attached to the very place that has been the scene of a crime or accident, and where certain forces are found to be permanently condensed; it is therefore the place itself that should be the principal focus of attention. It is in no way improbable that the action of the forces in question might at times be intensified by the presence of persons endowed with certain characteristics, and it is perhaps thus that the happenings at Hydesville occurred, assuming again that the facts have been accurately reported, which we have no particular reason to doubt.

In this case, which seems explicable by 'something' we have not defined that comes from a dead person, but is certainly not the spirit of the deceased if by spirit one understands the superior part of the being, must the explanation exclude all possibility of the intervention of living men? We do not believe this necessarily to be the case, and we do not see why a pre-existent force could not be directed and utilized by certain men who know the laws involved. It seems that this might be relatively easier than to exert influence where no previously existing force of this kind existed, which nevertheless is what a simple sorcerer does. Naturally, one might suppose that 'adepts', to borrow a popular Rosicrucian term, or initiates of a higher rank, not only have means of action superior to and different from those of sorcerers, but also have different ends in view. As regards the last remark, we should note that there can be many kinds of initiates, although at the moment we are considering these things in a quite general way. In a peculiar address given before an assembly of spiritists, cited *in extenso* in our history of Theosophy,[8] Annie Besant claimed that the 'adepts' who had stirred up the spiritist movement were served by the 'souls of the dead'. As she proposed

8. A talk given at the Spiritualist Alliance of London, April 7, 1898; see *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, chap. 12.

to attempt a rapprochement with the spiritists, she seemed more or less sincerely to take the expression 'souls of the dead' in the spiritist sense.

But we who have no mental reservations at all of a 'political' character may understand her in a completely different sense as referring to that 'something' just mentioned. It seems to us that this interpretation agrees much better than any other with the thesis of the 'H B of L'. This is of course not the most important thing for us, but this observation makes us think that the members of the organization in question, or at least its directors, certainly know where to focus in the matter. In any case, they certainly know better than Mme Besant, whose thesis, despite the correction she made, was not much more acceptable to the spiritists. In light of this, moreover, we believe it exaggerated to involve 'adepts' in the strict sense of the word, but we repeat that it is possible that the initiates, whoever they may have been, provoked the Hydesville phenomena by making use of favorable conditions they found there, or that they may at least have imparted a certain direction to the phenomena after these had already begun. We make no assertion in the matter, saying only that there is nothing impossible in what we have said, in spite of what some might think. But let us add that another hypothesis seems simpler, which is not to say it is necessarily more true, namely that the agents of the organization in question, whether the 'H B of L' or any other, were happy to take advantage of what happened in order to create the 'spiritist' movement, acting by a kind of suggestion on the inhabitants and visitors to Hydesville. This last hypothesis represents a minimum of intervention, and it is necessary to accept at least this minimum, for without it there would be no plausible reason why the consequences of the Hydesville events should have differed from those of other analogous events that had occurred previously. If such an event was, by itself, the sufficient condition for the birth of spiritism, this latter would certainly have appeared at a much earlier time. For the rest, we set little store by spontaneous movements, whether in the political or the religious order, or in a domain as ill-defined as that presently occupying us An impulse is always necessary, as are those people who subsequently become the apparent chiefs and who may often be as

ignorant of the movement's true provenance as is the rank and file. But it is very difficult to say what actually occurred in a case of this kind, for this side of events is obviously not found in any documentation, and this is why historians, who want above all to rely on written records, take no account of such things and prefer to deny them purely and simply, although they represent what is perhaps most essential. In our opinion these last remarks have a quite general import, but we will let the matter rest so as not to digress too far, returning now to what especially concerns the origin of spiritism.

We have said that there have been cases both similar and prior to that of Hydesville, the most similar being that which occurred in 1762 at Dibbelsdorf in Saxony, where the 'rapping ghost' responded in exactly the same way to questions put to it.[9] If nothing else had been necessary, spiritism could certainly have come to birth in these circumstances, and so much the more in that the occasion made enough of an impression to draw the attention of the authorities and of scholars. Moreover, several years before the debut of spiritism, one Dr Kerner had published a book on the case of the 'seer of Prevorst', Mme Hauffe, in whose presence numerous phenomena of the same order were produced. It will be noted that this case, like the previous one, took place in Germany, and although there have been similar occurrences in France and elsewhere, this is one of the reasons why we have called attention to the German origin of the Fox family. In this connection it is interesting to make some other comparisons: in the second half of the eighteenth century certain branches of high Masonry in Germany took a particular interest in evocations. The best known history in this area is that of Schroepfer, who committed suicide in 1774. It was not then a question of spiritism, but magic, which is different in the extreme, as we will explain below, but it is no less true that had practices of this kind been popularized, they could have determined a movement such as spiritism as a result of the false ideas that the public at large would inevitably have formed in their regard. Certainly, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were other secret societies in Germany not

9. An account of this occurrence, drawn from contemporary documents was published in *Revue spirite* in 1858.

affiliated with the Masons, which also occupied themselves with magic and evocations, as well as with magnetism. Now, the 'HB of L', or that of which it was the heir, was precisely in keeping with certain of these societies. Data on this can be found in an anonymous work entitled *Ghost Land*,[10] which was published under the auspices of the 'HB of L' and which some believe should be attributed to Emma Hardinge Britten. This is not our view, although it is likely that she edited the work.[11] We think there is good reason to investigate these societies and the results obtained could contribute significantly to clearing up certain obscurities. Nevertheless, if the spiritist movement was first promoted in America rather than Germany, it is probably because it was likely to find a more favorable ambiance in that country than anywhere else, as is proved by the prodigious proliferation of sects and 'neo-spiritualist' schools that has occurred there since that time and which still continues.

A final question remains: what was the aim of those who originally inspired *modern spiritualism*? It seems that the very name given the movement makes this clear enough. It was a question of combatting the invasion of materialism, which in fact attained its fullest extent at this time, and to which a counterweight was desired; and, by calling attention to phenomena that materialism, or at least ordinary materialism, could not satisfactorily explain, it could in no way be opposed on its own ground. This could have relevance only in the modern world, for materialism properly speaking is of very recent origin, as is the state of mind that grants an almost exclusive

10. This work has been partially and rather poorly translated into French under the title *Au Pays des Esprits*; the title itself is equivocal and does not convey the real sense of the English.

11. Others have believed that the author of *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic* was the same as that of *The Light of Egypt*, *Celestial Dynamics*, and *The Language of the Stars* (Sédir, *Histoire des Rose-Croix*, p122); but that is an error. The author of the last three works, all published anonymously, was T.H. Burgoyne, who was secretary of the 'HB of L'; the first two books were much earlier. [For more information on Burgoyne, see *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, by J. Godwin, et.al. The first two books were attributed to Emma Hardinge Britten in their most recent editions: *Ghost Land, or Researches into the Mysteries of Creation* (Chicago: Progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1897); and *Art Magic, or Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism* (same publisher, 1898). ED.]

importance to phenomena and their observation. If the aim really was what we have just set forth, then, recalling the assertions of the 'HBofL', this is the time to return to what we said above only in passing: namely that there are initiates of very different kinds and that they may often find opposition among themselves. Thus, among the German secret societies to which we have alluded, there are some that professed completely materialist theories, although it was a materialism remarkably broader than that of official science. Of course, when we speak of initiates in this way we are not taking the word in its loftiest meaning, for we intend thereby simply men who possess certain knowledge not in the public domain. This is why we were at pains to specify that it would be wrong to suppose that these 'adepts' had to have been interested, at least initially, in the creation of the spiritist movement. This explains how contradictions and oppositions may exist between different schools. Naturally, we speak only of schools that possess real and serious knowledge even though it may be of a relatively inferior order, but which in no way resembles the many forms of 'neo-spiritism', these latter rather being counterfeit knowledge. Now yet another question presents itself: to give rise to spiritism in order to combat materialism is ultimately to combat an error by another error. Why act in this way? It might be that in the course of extending and popularizing itself the movement promptly deviated, that it escaped the control of those who had inspired it, and that it then assumed a character hardly in line with their intentions. When one tries to popularize, one must be prepared for such accidents, for they are almost inevitable. There are things that are not without impunity placed within reach of just anyone, and such popularization risks consequences that are almost impossible to foresee. In the case that concerns us here, even if the promoters had to some extent foreseen the consequences, they may have thought, rightly or wrongly, that this was a lesser evil than that they hoped to avert. For our part, we do not believe that spiritism is any less pernicious than materialism, even though its dangers are altogether different; but others may assess things differently, believing that the coexistence of two opposing errors, the one limiting the other, may be preferable to the free expansion of one of them. It could even be that the currents of ideas,

as divergent as they might possibly be, may have had an analogous origin and may have been intended to serve as a play of equilibrium, characterizing a very special kind of politics. In this order, it would be very wrong to limit oneself to external appearances. Finally, if a public action of some magnitude can operate only to the detriment of the truth, there are those who will take advantage of this situation. *Vulgus vult decipi* [the people want to be deceived], which is sometimes completed with the words *ergo decipiatur* [therefore let them be deceived], and this is a more common feature of the kind of politics we have just mentioned than might at first be believed. One can thus keep the truth for oneself and at the same time spread errors that one knows to be such, but which are judged opportune. Another attitude consists in speaking the truth to those capable of understanding it, without being overly concerned with the others. Both these contrary dispositions may be justified according to circumstances, but it is probable that only the first permits a wide-ranging general initiative, but this is not of equal interest to everyone, and the second attitude corresponds to more genuinely intellectual concerns. However that may be, we do not appraise, we only offer as possibilities the conclusions to which we have been led by certain deductions which we cannot expound fully here, for that would lead us too far afield and make spiritism seem a quite secondary incident.[12] For the rest, we cannot presume to resolve completely all the questions we have been led to raise; we can affirm, however, that we have certainly said far more than anyone else heretofore on the subject treated in this chapter.

12. See especially the author's *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times;* also *East and West* and *The Crisis of the Modern World.* ED.

3

BEGINNINGS OF SPIRITISM IN FRANCE

FROM 1850, *modern spiritualism* spread throughout the United States thanks to propaganda in which, be it noted, socialist periodicals were particularly conspicuous. In 1852 the 'spiritualists' held their first general conference in Cleveland. It was also in 1852 that the new belief made its first appearance in Europe, having been imported first to England by American mediums. From there it reached Germany the following year and then France. Nevertheless, in these countries there was at that time nothing comparable to the agitation caused in America, where for a dozen years phenomena and theories were the objects of the most violent and passionate discussion.

It was in France, as we said, that the term 'spiritism' was first employed. This neologism served to designate something which, although based on the same phenomena, was in fact quite different in theory from what the *modern spiritualism* of the Americans and English had been until that time. In fact it has often been remarked that the theories set forth in the 'communications' dictated by so-called 'spirits' are generally related to opinions current in the circles in which they are produced and where, naturally, they are all the more readily accepted. This observation enables one to account, at least in part, for their real origin. The teachings of the French 'spirits' thus differed from those of the Anglo-Saxon countries on a number of points which, though not among those included in the general definition of spiritism, are in any case of no less importance.

The greatest difference was the introduction of the idea of reincarnation, of which French spiritists made a veritable dogma, while almost all others rejected it.[1] Also, it was in France that a need was felt to gather together the received 'communications' in such a way as to form a body of doctrine, and this gave the French school of 'spiritism' a certain unity, at least at the outset. This unity was difficult to maintain, however, and various schisms subsequently gave rise to many new schools.

The founder of the French school of spiritism, or at least the person whom his followers agreed to consider as such, was Hippolyte Rivail, a former school teacher from Lyon and a disciple of the Swiss pedagogue Pestalozzi. He had abandoned teaching to come to Paris, where for a time he was manager of the Folies-Marigny theater, and on the advice of the 'spirits', took the Celtic name Allan Kardec, which was said to have been his name in a previous existence. It was under this name that he published his several books, which served as the doctrinal foundation for French spiritists and have remained so for most of them.[2] We say that Rivail published these works, but not that he wrote them by himself, for the composition, and subsequently the founding of French spiritism, was really the work of a group for which he was only the spokesman. The books of Allan Kardec are a kind of collective work, the result of a collaboration, and by this we understand something other than the collaboration of 'spirits' alleged by Kardec, who stated that they were composed with the aid of 'communications' that he and others had received and that had been verified, reviewed, and corrected by 'superior spirits'. For the spiritists, in fact, since man is altered very little by death, one cannot rely on what is said by the 'spirits', among whom there are those who would deceive us, either from malice or from simple ignorance. It is thus that spiritists claim to explain contradictory 'communications'. But one may ask how 'superior spirits' are to

1. But later the belief came to be widely accepted among spiritists. ED.

2. The principal works of Allan Kardec are: *Le Livre des Esprits*; *Le Livre des Mediums*; *La Genèse, les miracles, et les predictions selon le spiritisme*; *Le Ciel et l'Enfer ou la Justice divine selon le spiritisme*; *L'Evangile selon le spiritisme*; *Le Spiritisme à sa plus simple expression*; *Caractères de la révélation spirite*, etc.

be distinguished from the others. Whatever the case may be, there is a widespread but entirely erroneous opinion among the spiritists themselves that Allan Kardec wrote these books under a kind of inspiration. The truth is that he never was a medium but was on the contrary a mesmerizer (we say 'on the contrary' because the two qualities seem incompatible) and that it was by means of his 'subjects' that he obtained his 'communications'. As to the 'superior spirits' by whom these messages were corrected and coordinated, they were not all 'disincarnate'. Rivail himself took part in this work, although apparently not the greater part. We believe that the arrangement of the 'documents from beyond the grave', as they are called, must be attributed to several members of the group that was formed around him. It is probable that most of those in this circle preferred that their collaboration remain unknown to the public; in addition, had it been known that there were professional writers in the circle, this might have cast some doubt on the authenticity of the 'communications', or at least on the fidelity with which they were reproduced, even though their style was far from being remarkable.

We think it well to report here what the famous English medium, Dunglas Home, wrote regarding Allan Kardec and the way his doctrine was composed, for Home often showed himself more sensible than many other spiritists:

> I consider the doctrine of Allan Kardec among the illusions of this world, and I have good reasons for this. . . . I do not in any way question his good faith. . . . His sincerity is projected like a magnetic cloud onto the sensitive minds of those whom he called his mediums. In this way their fingers committed to paper the ideas thus forcibly imposed upon them, and Allan Kardec received his own doctrines as messages sent from the world of the spirits. If the teachings furnished in this way really emanated from great intelligences who, according to Kardec, were their real authors, would they have taken the form which we see? Where did Iamblichus learn contemporary French so well? And how did Pythagoras completely forget Greek, his mother tongue. . . ? I have never encountered a single case of hypnotic clairvoyance

> where the subject did not directly or indirectly reflect the ideas of the magnetizer-hypnotist. This is demonstrated in a striking manner by Allan Kardec himself. Under the dominion of his energetic will, his mediums were so many writing machines slavishly reproducing his own thoughts. If sometimes the published doctrines did not conform to his desires, he corrected them to his liking. It is known that Allan Kardec *was not a medium.* He did nothing but magnetize or 'psychologize'... persons more impressionable than himself.[3]

This is quite true, except that the correction of the 'teachings' must not be attributed to Allan Kardec alone, but to his entire group. In addition, the very tenor of the 'communications' could have been previously influenced by other persons present at the séances, as we shall explain further on.

Of Allan Kardec's collaborators who were not simple 'subjects', some were endowed with various mediumistic faculties. One in particular possessed the curious talent of 'sketching'. We found an article on this subject that appeared in 1859, two years after the publication of *Livre des Esprits*, a passage that we think worthwhile quoting, given the personality in question:

> Several months ago, some fifteen people belonging to educated and polite society were gathered in a salon of a Saint-Germain suburb to examine designs executed by a medium present at the gathering but inspired and dictated by... Bernard Palissy. Indeed, Monsieur S..., a pen in hand and a piece of white paper before him, but with no artistic subject in mind, had conjured up the famous potter. The latter had come and had guided his fingers through the sequence of movements necessary to execute on the paper designs of an exquisite taste, of great richness of ornamentation, and of very delicate and fine execution, one of which represented—if it be permitted—the house occupied by Mozart on the planet Jupiter! In order to forestall any stupefaction, it must be added that Palissy is Mozart's neighbor in that remote place, as he indicated quite positively to the medium.

3. *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritisme*, pp 112–114.

> There is no doubt, moreover, that this house could only be that of a great musician, for it is decorated throughout with musical notes and clefs.... The other drawings also represented buildings on various planets; one of them is that of the grandfather of Monsieur S..., who spoke of gathering them all in an album. This would be, literally, an album of the other world.[4]

This Monsieur S..., who, apart from executing these singular artistic productions, was one of the most steadfast collaborators of Allan Kardec, was none other than the celebrated dramatist Victorien Sardou. Another dramatist, Eugene Nus, much less well known today, belonged to the same group, but he later separated himself somewhat from spiritism[5] to become one of the first French adherents of the Theosophical Society. We will also mention Camille Flammarion because he is one of the last survivors of the first organization, called the 'Parisian Society of Spiritist Studies'. It is true that he came along rather later and was quite young at the time, but it would be difficult to contest that the spiritists regarded him as one of their own, for in 1869 he gave a eulogy at the funeral of Allan Kardec. Nevertheless, Flammarion sometimes protested that he was not a spiritist, although he did so in a somewhat embarrassed manner. His works also show his tendencies and sympathies clearly enough, and here we speak of his works in general and not only of those devoted particularly to so-called 'psychic' phenomena. These latter are more particularly collections of observations in which the author, in spite of his 'scientific' pretensions, had included many facts that were not seriously checked. We add that, whether avowed or not, Flammarion's spiritism did not hinder his being nominated as an honorary member of the Theosophical Society when this latter was introduced in France.[6]

If there was a certain 'intellectual' element in spiritist circles, even a very modest one, it may be asked how it came about that all the

4. 'La Doctrine spirite', by Dr Dechambre, *Gazette hebdomadaire de médecine et de chirurgie*, 1859.

5. See the works of Eugène Nus entitled *Choses de l'autre monde*, *Les Grandes Mystères*, and *A la recherche des destinées*.

6. *Le Lotus*, April 1887, p125.

spiritist books, beginning with those of Allan Kardec, were manifestly at such a low level. In this regard it is well to recall that every collective work reflects the mentality of the most inferior elements of the group by which it is produced. As strange as this may seem, it is nevertheless an observation familiar to all who have studied 'crowd psychology'. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why so-called 'revelations from beyond the grave' are generally only a web of banalities, for in fact they are often done collectively and, as they are the foundation of all the rest, this character is naturally found in all spiritist productions. Further, the 'intellectuals' of spiritism were for the most part literary men; we cite the example of Victor Hugo who, during his sojourn in Jersey, was converted to spiritism by Madame Gira.[7] With men of letters, sentiment most often predominates over intelligence—and spiritism is something especially characterized by sentimentality. We shall have occasion to return to the case of those scholars who have come to the study of [spiritist] phenomena without preconceptions but who have been led in a more or less circuitous and secretive manner to share the views of the spiritists (we do not mean Flammarion, who is rather a popularizer, but scholars enjoying a more serious and better established reputation). We can say here, however, that by reason of their very specialization the competence of these scholars is limited to their own restricted field and that outside that field their opinions have no more value than do those of anyone else. Moreover, genuine intellectuality has very little in common with the qualities required for success in the experimental sciences as these are conceived and practiced in the modern world.

But let us return to the origins of French spiritism. What we said earlier in this context can be reaffirmed, namely that the 'communications' are in harmony with the opinions of the circle in which they occur. In fact the first adherents of the new beliefs were recruited from among the Socialists of 1848. We know that for the most part these people were 'mystics' in the worst sense of the word, or if it be preferred, 'pseudo-mystics'. It was quite natural therefore that they should be drawn to spiritism even before the doctrine was

7. See the account given by Auguste Vacquerie in his *Miettes de l'histoire.*

developed; and as they influenced this development they subsequently found, also quite naturally, their own ideas reflected by those veritable 'psychic mirrors', the mediums. As a Mason, Rivail had been able to consort with Socialist leaders, and had probably read the works of those whom he knew personally. This was the source of most of the ideas he and others of his group expressed, notably, as we said previously, the idea of reincarnation. In this connection we have noted the undisputed influence of Fourier and Pierre Leroux.[8] Certain contemporaries also did not fail to note this relationship, among them Dr Dechambre, in the article quoted from above. Regarding the way spiritists envisaged the hierarchy of superior beings, and after having recalled the ideas of the Neoplatonists (who in fact were far more distant from the spiritists than he believed), he added this:

> The invisible instructors of Allan Kardec would not have needed to converse at such length with Porphyry's spirit to learn of this; they need only have talked with Pierre Leroux, no doubt easier to locate, or again with Fourier.[9] The inventor of the Phalanstère would have been delighted to learn from them that our soul will be clothed in ever more ethereal bodies as it traverses the eight hundred existences (a good round figure) for which it is destined.

Then, speaking of the 'progressive', or as one would say today 'evolutionist', conception to which the idea of reincarnation is closely tied, the same author says again:

> This dogma strongly resembles that of Pierre Leroux, for whom manifestations of universal life, to which he reduces the life of the individual, are at each new existence only one further progressive step.[10]

This conception had such importance for Allan Kardec that he expressed it in a formula from which he made a kind of motto: 'To

8. *Theosophy*, chap. 11.
9. See especially Fourier's *Théorie des quatre mouvements*.
10. *La Doctrine spirite*, by Dr Dechambre.

be born, to die, to be born again and progress without ceasing, such is the law.' It would be easy to find many other resemblances bearing upon secondary points, but for the moment we are not examining spiritist theories in detail, and what we have just said suffices to show that, if in reality the American spiritist movement was brought about by living men, it is to equally incarnate spirits that we owe the doctrine of French spiritists—directly, as concerns the contribution of Allan Kardec and his collaborators, and indirectly, as regards the more or less 'philosophical' influences that were brought to bear. But this time those who thus intervened were in no way initiates, even of an inferior order. For reasons already given, we do not intend to continue following spiritism in all its stages of development, but the preceding historical considerations as well as the explanations to which these have led are indispensable for an understanding of what is to follow.

4

THE MODERN CHARACTER OF SPIRITISM

WHAT WAS NEW in spiritism was not the phenomena, for these had always been known, as we remarked in connection with 'haunted houses'. And in any event it would have been quite astonishing if these phenomena—assuming they were real—had not been manifested before our own time, or at least that no one had perceived them until now. What is new and specifically modern is the interpretation the spiritists give to these things, that is, the theory by which they claim to explain them. But it is precisely this theory that properly constitutes spiritism, as we have tried to make clear from the start. Without the theory there would be no spiritism but something else, something that could even be entirely different. It is essential that we insist on this point because those insufficiently informed on these matters cannot make the necessary distinctions, and because of the confusions entertained by the spiritists themselves, who claim that their doctrine is as old as the world itself. This, incidentally, is an illogical attitude on the part of those who make progress an article of faith. Spiritists do not go so far as to appeal to an imaginary tradition as do the Theosophists, against whom we have voiced the same objection,[1] but at the least they seem to see in the antiquity with which they falsely credit their belief (many no doubt doing so in good faith) a source of some strength. Basically, all these people live with a contradiction of

1. *Theosophy*, chap. 10.

which they are unaware, and if it passes unnoticed it is because intelligence plays only a modest part in their convictions. This is why their essentially sentimental theories do not really merit the name of doctrine, and if they are attached to them it is primarily because they find them 'consoling', and because they are suited to satisfy the aspirations of a vague religiosity.

Belief in progress, which plays such an important role in spiritism, shows that this latter is something essentially modern. For the notion of progress is itself of quite recent origin, dating only from the second half of the eighteenth century, and conceptions from this period have left their imprint in spiritist terminology just as, more immediately, they have inspired all the socialist and humanitarian theories that provide the doctrinal elements of spiritism, among which the idea of reincarnation must be noted in particular. This idea is in fact also very recent, despite frequently repeated assertions to the contrary, and it rests on entirely erroneous assimilations. It was likewise toward the end of the eighteenth century that Lessing gave voice to it for the first time, at least to our knowledge. And this fact draws our attention to German Masonry, with which Lessing was affiliated, as he probably also was with other secret societies of the kind we spoke of earlier. In face of this, it is curious that many so loudly protest that American 'spiritists' originated their own movement. It is pertinent to ask whether this conception expressed by Lessing could have been transmitted a little later to certain French socialists, but of this we cannot be sure. It is not proven that Fourier and Pierre Leroux were aware of it, and it could be that in seeking to resolve a question that greatly preoccupied them, each was led independently to the same idea, namely that of the inequality of social conditions. Whatever the case may be, these were the individuals who really promoted the reincarnationist theory, and it was from them that it was borrowed and popularized by the spiritists, to be sought and embraced by others in their turn. In the second part of this study we will return to this conception for a more thorough examination, for, crude as it is, it has acquired a real importance in our day by reason of its astonishing success at the hands of French spiritism. Not only has it been adopted by most of the 'neo-spiritualist' schools that have subsequently come into existence, certain

ones of which—Theosophy in particular—have been the means whereby it has penetrated into the spiritism of Anglophone countries hitherto refractory to the idea. People now accept the notion without being directly or indirectly attached to any of these schools, thereby placing themselves under the influence of various currents of thought of whose existence they are hardly aware.

For the moment, and reserving the right to explain this later, we will say only that reincarnation has absolutely nothing in common with such ancient ideas as metempsychosis and transmigration, to which the spiritists wrongly wish to assimilate it. From what we have said in trying to define spiritism, we are at least aware that the explanation of the major differences, which is misunderstood by the spiritist, is to be found in what relates to the constitution of the human being; and likewise for the question of communication with the dead, on which subject we shall now concentrate our efforts.

It is a widespread error to try to link spiritism to the cult or veneration of the dead, such as exists in every religion in one form or another, as well as in various traditional doctrines lacking any religious character. In reality, this cult, in whatever form it appears, by no means implies a real communication with the dead. At the most we can perhaps in certain cases speak of a kind of ideal communication, but this never occurs by the material means that constitute the basic postulate of spiritism. In particular, what is called the 'cult of ancestors', established in China in accordance with Confucian rites (which, it must not be forgotten, are purely social and not religious), has absolutely nothing in common with evocatory practices. Nevertheless, this is one of the examples most frequently noted by those who believe in the antiquity and universality of spiritism, who even specify that Chinese evocatory procedures are often quite similar to their own. But here is the reason for this confusion: there are in fact those in China who make use of instruments similar to the spiritist 'turning tables', but what is involved are divinatory practices in the realm of magic, and these are quite distinct from Confucian rites. Moreover, those who make a profession of magic are deeply despised both in China and in India, and the utilization of these practices is regarded as blameworthy, outside of certain specific circumstances with which we need not be concerned here, but which

have only a quite external similarity to ordinary cases. In any event, what is essential is not the phenomenon produced but the end for which it is produced, as well as the manner in which this is accomplished. Thus the first distinction to be made is between magic and the 'cult of ancestors', and indeed, this is more than a distinction, for by right as well as in fact it is an absolute separation. But there is still something more: magic is not spiritism, from which it differs entirely in theory, and, in very large measure, in practice. We should first note that the magician is the complete opposite of a medium; he plays an essentially active role in the production of phenomena, whereas the medium is by definition an essentially passive instrument. In this relationship the magician is more analogous to a hypnotist, while the medium is analogous to the hypnotic 'subject'. But we should add that the magician does not necessarily operate by means of a 'subject'; this is in fact very rare, for his sphere of action is far more extensive and complex than that of the hypnotist. Secondly, magic does not imply the use of forces such as those the spiritists call upon, and even where it presents phenomena comparable to those of spiritism, it offers entirely different explanations. For example, someone can easily use a divination process without in any way assuming that the 'souls of the dead' play any part in the results obtained. Moreover, what we have just said applies very generally: the procedures which the spiritists congratulate themselves for discovering in China also in existed Greco-Roman antiquity. Thus, Tertullian speaks of divination accomplished by means of goats and tables; and other authors, such as Theocritus and Lucian, speak also of vases and sieves that were made to rotate. But all this is exclusively a matter of divination; for the rest, even if the 'souls of the dead' could in certain cases be mixed up in such practices (which the text of Tertullian seems to indicate), or in other words if in exceptional cases evocation is joined to divination, this is because the 'souls' in question are something other than what the spiritists call 'spirits'. They are only that 'something' to which we alluded above in order to explain certain phenomena, but the nature of which we have not yet specified. We will return to this shortly and show that spiritism has no right whatsoever to appeal to magic, even that of the special kind involved in evocations—not that

this constitutes any recommendation for it. But let us now turn from China to India, regarding which they have committed similar errors, and these we shall also treat in detail.

On this subject we have found astonishing things written in a book that nevertheless appears serious, which is why we feel we must make special mention of it. This well-known book is that of Dr Paul Gibier,[2] who is by no means a spiritist. He claims to be impartially scientific, and the whole experimental part seems quite conscientiously reported. But we may ask why nearly all those who occupy themselves with these things, even while claiming to maintain a strictly scientific point of view and refraining from drawing conclusions favorable to spiritism, nevertheless find it necessary to flaunt anti-Catholic opinions that have no direct bearing on what is at issue. This is truly strange, and Dr Gibier's book contains passages of this kind such as would arouse the jealousy of Flammarion, who so loved to interject such rants even into his popularizations of astronomy. It is not this that we wish to consider, however, but rather another and more important issue of which many are unaware, for the same book contains some truly outrageous blunders concerning India. The provenance of these remarks can be easily shown, moreover: the author makes the serious mistake of believing the fantastic accounts of Louis Jacolliot[3] and the no less fantastic documents provided him by a certain 'Atmic Society' that existed in Paris around 1886, and that consisted of little more than its founder, the engineer Tremeschini. We will not pause over errors of detail, such as the author's taking the title of an astronomical treatise as a personal name,[4] for these are of interest only in demonstrating the unreliability of his information. We have spoken of howlers, and we do not believe this expression too strong to describe things like this:

2. *Le Spiritisme ou Fakirisme occidental.*

3. *Le Spiritisme dans le Monde*; *La Bible dans l'Inde*; *Les Fils de Dieu*; *Christna et le Christ*; *Histoire des Vierges*; *La Genèse de l'Humanité*, etc.

4. *Surya-Siddhanta* (spelled *Souryo-Shiddhanto*); it is claimed that this imaginary astronomer lived fifty-eight thousand years ago!

> Modern spiritist doctrine . . . is in nearly complete agreement with the present esoteric religion of the Brahmins. Now this latter has been taught to lower grade initiates in Himalayan temples for perhaps more than *a hundred thousand years*! This similarity is curious at the very least, and one can say without paradox that spiritism is only esoteric Brahmanism in broad daylight.[5]

First of all, there is properly speaking no 'esoteric Brahmanism'; and since we have explained this elsewhere,[6] we will not return to it here. But even if there were such a thing, it would not have the least relationship to spiritism since the latter contradicts the very principles of Brahmanism, and also because spiritism is one of the most grossly exoteric doctrines that has ever existed. If the intention was to allude to the theory of reincarnation, we will repeat that it has never been taught in India, even by the Buddhists,[7] and that it belongs strictly to the modern West. Those who claim otherwise simply do not know what they are talking about.[8] But our author's error is still graver and more complete, for further on we read:

> With the Brahmins, the practice of evoking the dead is the fundamental basis of the temple liturgy and the foundation of their religious doctrine.[9]

This assertion is exactly contrary to the truth. We can state in the most categorical fashion that all Brahmins without exception, far from regarding evocation as a fundamental element of their doctrine and their rites, actually proscribe it absolutely in all its forms. It seems that the 'accounts of European travelers, and probably those of Jacolliot above all, are the source from which Dr Gibier has learned that 'the evocations of the souls of the ancestors can only be

5. *Le Spiritisme*, p76.

6. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, chap 9.

7. At the time Guénon wrote these words he believed that Buddhism was a heterodox doctrine; toward the end of his life, however, he changed his position in this regard thanks to interventions by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Marco Pallis. ED.

8. Dr Gibier goes so far as to translate *avatāras* as 'reincarnations' (p117), and he believes that this term refers to the human soul.

9. *Le Spiritisme*, p117.

performed by Brahmins of various ranks.'[10] Now, practices of this kind, when they cannot be suppressed entirely, are at least left to men of the lowest castes, often even the *chandalas*, that is, men without caste, whom the Europeans call *pariahs*; and yet attempts are made to dissuade them as much as possible from such practices. In many cases Jacolliot is manifestly dishonest, as when he misrepresents *Isha Krishna* as *Jezeus Christna* in order to fit an anti-Christian thesis. But beyond this, he and those like him must occasionally have been mystified, and, if during their sojourn in India they happened to witness real phenomena, they would certainly not have been given the real explanation. We allude especially to the phenomena of the fakirs; but before getting to that we will say this: in India, when it happens that what the spiritists call mediumship is spontaneously manifested (we say spontaneously because no one would ever seek to acquire or develop this faculty), it is considered a veritable calamity for the medium and for his entourage. The common man does not hesitate to attribute phenomena of this kind to the devil, and even those who in some degree involve the dead in these things envisage only the intervention of *pretas*, that is, inferior elements that remain attached to the corpse, elements that are strictly identical to the *manes* of the ancient Latins, and that in no way represent the spirit. For the rest, natural mediums have been everywhere regarded as 'possessed' or 'obsessed', as the case may be, and the concern was only to try to deliver and heal them. Only the spiritists have made a privilege of this infirmity, trying to preserve and cultivate it, even to stimulate it artificially; and only they have surrounded those unfortunates so afflicted with an unbelievable veneration instead of regarding them as objects of pity or revulsion. It suffices to be unprejudiced to see clearly the danger of this strange reversal of things. The medium, whatever the nature of the influences exercised on and by him, must be considered as truly sick, as abnormal and unbalanced. Far from remedying this disequilibrium, spiritism tries with all its might to further it, and so must be denounced as dangerous to public health. But this is not its only danger.

10. Ibid., p118.

Turning again to India, there is one last question that must be dealt with in order to dispel the equivocation in the very title Dr Gibier gave to his book: to characterize spiritism as 'western fakirism' is more than adequate proof that he knows nothing either of spiritism, about which it is only too easy to inform oneself, or of fakirism. The Arabic word *fakir* properly signifies a poor man or a mendicant, and is applied in India to a category of individuals held in rather low esteem, except by Europeans, and who are regarded as tricksters who amuse the crowd by their antics. In saying this, we in no way wish to contest in any way the reality of their special powers, but these powers, the acquisition of which entails a long and wearisome training, are of an inferior order and as such are not judged particularly desirable. To seek them is to show that one is incapable of attaining results of a higher order, to which they can only be an obstacle. And we find here yet another example of the discredit that in the East attaches to all that pertains to the realm of magic. In fact, the phenomena of the fakirs are sometimes simulated; but even this simulation supposes a power of collective suggestion acting on all the onlookers, something that at first glance is hardly less astonishing than the production of real phenomena. This has nothing to do with prestidigitation, which is excluded by the very conditions to which all fakirs are subject, and is also something quite different from hypnotism as practiced in the West. As for the real phenomena of which the others are imitations, they are as we have said the results of magic; the fakir, always active and conscious in the production thereof, is a magician; and in the other case he can be assumed a magnetizer or hypnotist. He in no way resembles a medium, and if an individual possesses even the least trace of mediumship, this suffices to render him incapable of obtaining any of the phenomena of fakirism in the way that is essentially characteristic, for the two methodologies are diametrically opposed, and this is true even for effects that may have some outward resemblance. Moreover, any such similarity exists only in the simplest phenomena that the fakirs produce. Again, no fakir ever claimed that the spirits or the 'souls of the dead' have the least part in the production of these phenomena; or if some of them have recounted such things to Europeans, as they did to Jacolliot, in no way did they believe it

themselves. As with most Easterners, their responses in such situations reflect the preconceptions they discern in their interlocutors, for they have no wish to convey to them the true nature of the forces involved. Moreover, given the mentality of their onlookers and apart from other motives for acting in this way, they feel that any attempt to provide a real explanation would be perfectly useless. Uneducated as some fakirs undoubtedly are, they still retain certain concepts that would appear 'transcendent' to most Westerners; even regarding things they are incapable of explaining, they at least do not have the false ideas essential to spiritism, for they have no reason to fabricate suppositions in complete disagreement with traditional Hindu conceptions. The magic of fakirs is not evocatory magic, which no one would dare exercise publicly; the dead have absolutely nothing to do with it. Moreover, a real understanding of evocatory magic itself would contribute to the destruction rather than to the confirmation of the spiritist hypothesis. We have thought it well to go into all this detail at the risk of some tedium because concerning fakirism and related questions, ignorance is the rule in Europe; the occultists do not know much more about these things than do spiritists and 'psychics'.[11] On the other hand, certain Catholic writers who have written on the same subjects have limited themselves to repeating the errors they have found in others.[12] As for the 'official' scholars, they are naturally content to deny what they cannot explain, except for those, more prudent still, who simply pass over these things in silence.

If in ancient civilizations that still exist, such as China and India, these things are such as we have described them, then we may strongly presume that such was also the case in civilizations that

11. For an occultist interpretation by Sédir see *Le Fakirisme hindou.*

12. See *Le Fakirisme,* by Charles Godard, who cites Jacolliot as an authority. Godard believed in the existence of the 'adept' Koot-Hoomi, and goes so far as to confuse fakirism with *yoga* and with various other things of an entirely different character. This author was formerly an occultist, but he denies it in terms which justify us in strongly suspecting his sincerity (*L'Occultisme contemporain,* p70); now that he is dead it will do no harm to point out that he was a longtime collaborator with the journal *Initiation* under the pseudonym *Saturninus*; in *L'Echo du Merveilleux* he used the pen name *Timothée.*

have disappeared which, according to all that is known, rested on analogous traditional principles. Thus, the ancient Egyptian idea of the constitution of the human being scarcely differed from Hindu and Chinese conceptions. It seems to have been the same for the Chaldeans. We would thus have to draw similar conclusions from this, both regarding posthumous states, and to explain evocations in particular. We need not go into great detail here, but merely touch generally upon this; and we must not be stayed by certain apparent divergences, which are not contradictions but rather correspond to diverse perspectives. The forms may differ from one tradition to another, but the principles remain identical for the simple reason that truth is one. So true is this that peoples such as the Greeks and the Romans, who had already largely lost the raison d'être of their rites and symbols, nevertheless still preserved certain teachings that agree perfectly with what is found in more complete forms elsewhere, but which the moderns no longer understand; and the esoterism of their Mysteries probably included many teachings that are expressed more openly in the East, without for all that being popularized, their very nature not admitting this. Moreover, we have many reasons for thinking that the Mysteries themselves were Eastern in origin. Speaking of magic and evocations, we can thus say that all the ancients understood them in the same way; we find the same ideas everywhere, although clad in different expressions, because the ancients, like the Easterners of today, still knew how these things should be understood.[13] In all that has come down to us we have not found the least trace of anything resembling spiritism; for the rest, let us say that spiritists obviously cannot invoke in their favor what has been lost completely; and if anything can be said concerning such things, it is that reasons of coherence and analogy lead us to think that they would also not find anything here to justify their claims.

To complete what has already been said, we will now consider in greater detail the distinctions between magic and spiritism. In order

13. This statement was written almost eighty years ago (the original edition of the present work was published in 1923). In the contemporary East these things are much different and this statement could no longer be affirmed. Ed.

to avoid certain misunderstandings, let us first say that magic is properly speaking an experimental science that has nothing in common with religious or pseudo-religious conceptions. But this is not so of spiritism, where such conceptions predominate, even when it claims to be 'scientific'. If magic has always been treated more or less as an 'occult science' reserved to a few, this is because of the grave dangers that accompany it. Nevertheless, there is in this connection a difference between one who, while taking all the necessary precautions, consciously produces phenomena of which he has studied the laws, and one ignorant of all these laws, who places himself at the mercy of unknown forces, passively awaiting what they will produce. One thus sees the advantage the magician has over the spiritist, whether medium or merely onlooker, even were all the other conditions comparable. In speaking of necessary precautions, we are thinking of the precise and rigorous rules to which magical operations are subject, all of which have their reasons. The spiritists, on the other hand, neglect the most elementary of these rules; or rather, they have no notion of them, acting like children who, all unconscious of danger, toy with the most formidable machines, and so, without anything capable of protecting them, unleash forces capable of striking them down. It goes without saying that all this in no way recommends magic, indeed quite the contrary, for it only shows that if magic is very dangerous, spiritism is much more so. And it is dangerous in yet another way because it is in the public domain, whereas magic has always been reserved to some few, in the first instance precisely because it was considered dangerous, and then by reason of the knowledge it presupposes and the complexity of its practices. Moreover, it is to be noted that those with complete and thorough knowledge of these things always rigorously abstain from magical practices, apart from some few exceptional cases where they act in a manner completely different from an ordinary magician. This latter is most often an 'empiricist', at least to some extent; not that he is lacking all knowledge, but he does not always know the real reasons for what he does. In any case, although such magicians are exposed to certain dangers, the peril is very limited, since these practitioners are always few in number (and so much the

fewer in that these practices, apart from those that are relatively inoffensive, are quite rightly prohibited strictly by the legislation of all peoples who know what is involved), whereas spiritism is open to all without exception. But this is enough on magic in general. We will now consider only evocatory magic, a very restricted branch and the only one to which spiritism can claim to have any connection. Actually, many of the phenomena manifested in spiritist séances do not depend on this special domain, in which case there is evocation only in the intentions of those present, not in the results obtained. But we reserve for another chapter our explanations on the nature of the forces that intervene in this case. For all that is of this category, even if it is a question of similar occurrences, it is only too obvious that the magical and the spiritist interpretations are entirely different; and we shall see that evocations are scarcely less so in spite of certain misleading appearances.

Of all magic practices, it was those of evocation that were subject to the most unconditional prohibition among the ancients, and yet at the same time it was known that it could not really be a question of 'spirits' in the modern sense, and that the results that could be claimed were, ultimately, of much less importance; how therefore would spiritism have been judged, supposing the spiritists' assertions corresponded to some possibility? It was well known that what can be evoked does not represent the real person, who is beyond reach because he has passed to another state of existence (we will speak more of this in the second part of this study), but are only inferior elements which the being has left behind in the terrestrial domain following that dissolution of the human composite which we call death. As already stated, this is what the ancient Latins called *manes*, and the Hebrews *ob*, the word always used in biblical texts when evocation is involved, and which some wrongly take as designating a demonic entity. In fact, the Hebrew notion of the human constitution agrees perfectly with all the others; and, making use of Aristotelian terms to make ourselves better understood, we say that not only is the *ob* not the spirit or the 'rational soul' (*neshamah*), but neither is it the 'sensitive soul' (*ruah*), or even the 'vegetative soul' (*nephesh*). Doubtless, the Judaic tradition seems to indicate, as

one of the reasons for prohibiting the evocation of the *ob*,[14] that a certain connection subsists between it and the superior principles; and this would be a point worth examining in greater detail, taking into account the rather unusual manner in which this tradition envisages the posthumous states of man. But in any event, the *ob* does not remain directly and immediately linked to the spirit but rather to the body, and this is why rabbinic language calls it *habal de garmin*, or 'breath of the bones',[15] which is precisely what enables us to explain the phenomena we noted above. What is in question, therefore, in no way resembles the 'perispirit' of the spiritists or the 'astral body' of the occultists, both of which are supposed to clothe the spirit even of the dead. And there is a further major difficulty, for it is not a body; it is, if one wishes, like a subtle form that can only take an illusory corporeal appearance when it is manifested in certain conditions, whence the name 'double' given it by the Egyptians. For the rest, it is in every respect only an appearance: separated from the spirit, this element cannot be conscious in the true sense of the word; nevertheless, it possesses a semblance of consciousness, a virtual image so to speak of the consciousness of the living being. And the magician revivifies this appearance by temporarily lending it what it lacks, a reflex consciousness of sufficient consistency to respond when it is interrogated, as when the evocation has divination as its goal—which properly speaking is necromancy. We hope the reader will bear with us if these explanations do not seem perfectly clear; they will be completed by what we have to say regarding forces of another order. It is difficult to express these things in ordinary language and one is forced to use expressions that are only approximations or 'manners of speaking'. The fault lies in large part with modern philosophy, which, totally ignoring these questions, is unable to provide an adequate terminology for discussing them. At this point it is important to avoid an ambiguity in connection with the theory just discussed; from a superficial point of view it might seem that the posthumous element in question could

14. Deut. 18:11.

15. And not 'body of the resurrection', as the German occultist Carl von Leiningen translates it (lecture to the Psychological Society of Munich, March 5, 1887).

be comparable to what Theosophists call 'shells', which they interject into the explanation of most spiritist phenomena. But it is nothing of the sort, even though this latter theory is probably derived from the other by way of deformation, proving the incomprehension of its authors. In fact, the Theosophists believe that a 'shell' is an 'astral cadaver', that is to say the remains of a decomposing body. And apart from the fact that rather than being essentially tied to the 'physical body', this body is supposed not to have been abandoned by the spirit until some more or less lengthy period after death, the very concept of 'invisible bodies' seems to us grossly wrong, and is one of the ideas that leads us to characterize 'neo-spiritualism' as 'materialism transposed'. Doubtless Paracelsus' theory of the 'astral light' contains at least some truth; moreover, it is of much wider import than that which presently concerns us. But occultists have scarcely understood it, and it is related only marginally to their 'astral body' or to the 'plane' which they give the same name. These are entirely modern ideas, notwithstanding the occultists' claims, and are not in agreement with any authentic tradition.

We will also offer a few reflections which, although not directly related to our subject, nevertheless seem necessary on account of the special mentality of modern Westerners. Practically speaking, the greater number of these latter are positivists, whatever their religious or philosophical convictions may be, and it seems they cannot leave behind this attitude without falling into the extravagances of 'neo-spiritism', perhaps because they know nothing else. This is so to such an extent that many sincerely religious men, influenced by current ideas and unable to do other than admit certain possibilities in principle, energetically refuse to accept the consequences, and end up denying in fact if not in principle everything that does not enter into their notion of 'ordinary life'. The observations we have set forth will no doubt seem as strange to them as they do to the most blinkered of 'scientists'. But it is really of little importance to us if these people sometimes believe themselves more competent than anyone else in matters of religion, and in the name of this religion even qualified to judge things that exceed their understanding. This is why we think it well to voice a warning about these things, though without being under any illusion as to the effects it will produce.

Once again, we remind the reader that we have no intention of limiting ourselves to the religious point of view, and that the things we are discussing pertain to a sphere entirely distinct from that of religion. Moreover, if we express certain ideas it is because we know they are true and as such independent of any preoccupations extraneous to pure intellectuality.

Despite the above caveat it may be added that these ideas, more so than many others, enable us to understand certain points concerning religion itself. For example, how can the Catholic cult of relics or pilgrimages to the tombs of saints be justified if it is not admitted that in one way or another something immaterial remains attached to the body after death? However, we will not conceal the fact that in linking the two questions in this way, we oversimplify them. In reality the forces under consideration (we use the word 'forces' advisedly and in a very general sense) are not identical with those we have just been discussing, although there may be a certain relationship between them. They are of a superior order, for something intervenes that is as if superadded, and their application in no way involves magic but rather what the Neoplatonists called theurgy—still another distinction that should not be forgotten. To take another example of the same kind, the cult of images and the idea that certain places enjoy special privileges are completely unintelligible if it is not admitted that these are veritable centers of forces (whatever the nature of these forces), and that certain objects can act as 'condensers'. Let one simply refer to the Bible and see what is said there concerning the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the Temple of Jerusalem, and one will perhaps understand what we want to convey. Here we touch on the question of spiritual influences, but we will not linger on the subject, for to treat it would entail many difficulties, requiring reference to teachings that are properly metaphysical and even of the highest metaphysical order. We will only cite one final case: among certain schools of Islamic esoterism, the founding Master (*Shaykh*), though dead many centuries, is regarded as always living and acting by his spiritual influence (*barakah*); but this in no way concerns his real personality, which is not only beyond this world but also beyond all the 'Paradises', that is to say beyond all those superior states that are still only transitory. One

will see how far we are here, not only from spiritism but also from magic. And if we have spoken of these things it is only in order not to leave incomplete our recital of necessary distinctions; indeed, the difference that separates this last order of things from all the others is even the most profound of all.

We think we have said enough now to show that before modern times nothing comparable to spiritism existed. As regards the West, we have considered antiquity above all, but everything we have said regarding magic remains valid for the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, if one wanted at all costs to find something to which spiritism may be compared, at least up to a point and on condition of considering its practices only (for its theories are not found anywhere else), what one would find would quite simply be sorcery. In fact, sorcerers are manifestly empiricists, although the most ignorant of them probably know more than the spiritists in several respects. They know only the lowest branches of magic; and the forces they bring into play, the most inferior of all, are those with which the spiritists normally deal. Finally, the cases of possession and obsession, closely related to the practices of sorcery, are the only authentic manifestations of mediumship that had been observed before the appearance of spiritism. And since then, have things changed so much that the same words are no longer applicable? We do not at all think so; if the spiritists can only recommend themselves on such suspect and unenviable kinship, we would counsel them rather to renounce any affiliation whatsoever, and to take up their role in a modernity which, in all logic, should in no way be an embarrassment to partisans of progress.

5

SPIRITISM AND OCCULTISM

OCCULTISM IS ALSO QUITE RECENT, perhaps even a little more recent than spiritism. The term seems to have been first used by Alphonse-Louis Constant, better known under the pseudonym Éliphas Lévi, and it seems likely that he coined it. If the word is new, it is because what it designates is also new. Prior to this there were 'occult sciences', which were occult to varying degrees, and of greater or lesser importance. Magic was one of these sciences, and not the whole of them, as some moderns have claimed;[1] and similarly for alchemy, astrology, and many others besides. But there was never an effort to unite all of them into a single body of doctrine, which would essentially imply the dominance of occultism. In fact, this so-called body of doctrine is formed of quite disparate elements. Lévi wished to consolidate it with the Hebrew Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and magic; but those coming after him preferred to give occultism quite another character. Lévi's works, though much less profound than has been claimed, exercised nevertheless a wide influence: they inspired the most diverse *chefs d'écoles*, such as Madame Blavatsky, foundress of the Theosophical Society, particularly at the time when she published *Isis Unveiled*, and also the American Masonic writer Albert Pike, as well as the English neo-Rosicrucians. Moreover, the Theosophists continued to use the word *occultism* to designate their own doctrine, which can in fact be regarded as a special variety of occultism; after all, there is nothing to hinder one from using the word as a generic name for several

1. Papus, *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p324.

schools, each of which has its own particular set of conceptions, though this is not the way it is more commonly understood. Lévi died in 1875, the very year of the founding of the Theosophical Society. In France, some years passed during which there was scarcely any question of occultism; but in 1887 Dr Gérard Encausse, using the name Papus, took up the term again and attempted to group around himself all those with similar tendencies. It was especially from 1890, when he separated from the Theosophical Society, that he claimed a monopoly on the word *occultism* for the benefit of his school. Such was the genesis of French occultism. It is sometimes said that in the end this occultism was only 'Papusism', and this is true in more than one respect, for a large number of its theories are in fact only the product of individual fantasy. Quite simply, it was motivated by the desire to oppose to the false 'Eastern tradition' of the Theosophists a no less imaginary 'Western tradition'. There is no need to lay out here a history of occultism or to expound the whole of its doctrines, but before speaking of its connection with spiritism and of what distinguishes it from the latter, these summary explanations seemed indispensable in order that none might be surprised when we classify occultism among 'neo-spiritualist' ideas.

Like the Theosophists, the occultists are generally full of disdain for the spiritists; this is understandable up to a point, for Theosophy and occultism at least have a superficial appearance of intellectuality lacking among spiritists, and they can address the spiritists from a slightly superior level. Thus we see Papus, alluding to the fact that Allan Kardec had once been a school teacher, refer to spiritism as 'primary school philosophy',[2] and this is how he assessed spiritist circles:

> Recruiting but few believers from scientific circles, this doctrine has been cheapened by the quantity of its adherents coming from the middle classes and especially from the masses. Its 'study groups', each one more 'scientific' than the last, are formed of persons who are always very honest, always of great good faith—former officials, small business people or their employees, whose

2. Ibid., pp324 and 909.

> scientific and especially philosophic instruction leaves much to be desired. School teachers are the 'luminaries' in these groups.[3]

This mediocrity is in fact very striking; but was Papus, who so sharply criticizes the deficiencies in selection among the adherents of spiritism, always exempt from all reproach in this respect regarding his own school? We will have said enough on this question when we note that his role was precisely that of a popularizer. This attitude, quite different from that of Éliphas Lévi, is quite incompatible with pretensions to esoterism, and there is a contradiction here that we will not try to explain. What is in any case certain is that occultism has no more in common with a true, serious, and profound esoterism than does Theosophy. One can have no idea of these things if one allows oneself to be seduced by the vain mirage of a supposed 'initiatic science' that is in reality only a superficial erudition at second or third hand. This contradiction does not exist in spiritism, which rejects absolutely all esoterism, and whose eminently democratic character accords perfectly with a great need for propaganda. This is a more logical attitude than that of the occultists, but the criticisms of the latter against the spiritists are nonetheless well taken, and we shall refer to them on occasion.

We will not return to the sometimes quite violent criticisms directed toward spiritism by the leaders of Theosophy, many of whom passed through the school, because we have already quoted numerous excerpts.[4] The criticisms of the French occultists are generally framed in more moderate terms. At first there were lively attacks in both directions. The spiritists were particularly offended at being characterized as 'profane' by people including some of their former 'brothers'. But subsequently one could note conciliatory tendencies, especially on the part of the occultists, whose 'eclecticism' predisposed them to rather regrettable concessions. The first result of this was a gathering in Paris, starting in 1889, of an 'International Spiritist and Spiritualist Congress' where all the schools were represented. Naturally, this did not make the dissension and rivalries

3. Ibid., p331.
4. *Theosophy*, chaps. 11 and 12.

disappear, but little by little the occultists gave more and more room in their rather incoherent 'syncretism' for spiritist theories—although vainly enough, for the spiritists never consented to regard the occultists as 'true believers', although there were individual exceptions. While this move was taking place, occultism became more and more 'popularly' oriented, and its groups, more open now than at their beginnings, welcomed those who did not cease being spiritists upon entering. These latter perhaps represented an elite in spiritism, although a very relative elite to be sure, and the level of the occultists' circles sank lower and lower; perhaps some day we will describe this reverse 'evolution'. In connection with Theosophy we have already spoken of those who adhered simultaneously to schools whose theories were contradictory, but who were hardly bothered because they were above all sentimentalists. We will add that in all these groups the feminine element predominated, and that in occultism many were interested only in the study of the 'divinatory arts', which gives a fair measure of their intellectual capacities.

Before going further we should explain something we noted at the outset: among the spiritists there are many individuals and small isolated groups, while the occultists are almost always attached to some more or less well-established organization calling its members 'initiates' of something or other, or giving them the illusion of being such. Spiritists have no such initiation and want nothing to do with anything even remotely resembling it, for one of the characteristics of their movement is to be open to all without exception and to preclude any kind of hierarchy. Some of their adversaries are entirely wrong to speak of a 'spiritist initiation', which does not exist (and it must be added, moreover, that the word 'initiation' has been abused from many quarters). Occultists, on the contrary, claim attachment to a tradition, wrongly to be sure, but they nevertheless make the claim; this is why they feel the need of an appropriate organization by which their teachings can be regularly transmitted. And if an occultist breaks with such an organization it is frequently in order to start another and to become in turn a *chef d'école*. Actually, occultists deceive themselves when they believe that the transmission of traditional knowledge must be

accomplished by an organization taking the form of a 'society', taking this word in its modern sense, and their schools are only a caricature of truly initiatic schools. To illustrate the lack of seriousness of so-called occultist initiation, it suffices, without going into other considerations, to mention their current practice of 'initiation by correspondence'. Under these conditions it is not so very difficult to become an 'initiate', for it is a mere formality without value or significance, although an attempt is at least made to safeguard certain appearances. So that no one may misunderstand our intentions, we must add in this connection that we reproach the occultists most of all for representing themselves as something they are not. Our attitude in this respect is very different from that of most of their other adversaries, and in a way it is even the reverse of these. University professors, for example, hold it against the occultists that they want to exceed the narrow limits within which they, themselves, enclose their concepts; but the occultists' error is that they do not effectively go beyond these limits, except on certain particular points where they have only appropriated earlier ideas, although without understanding them very well. For the other side, then, occultism goes or wishes to go too far; for us, on the contrary, it does not go far enough; and in addition, intentionally or not, it deceives its members as to the character and quality of the teachings it provides them. The others remain on this side; we place ourselves beyond, with this consequence: according to occultists, university professors and official scholars are simple the 'profane', just as are the spiritists—and we will not contradict them; but in our view, the occultists, too, are only 'profane', and no one who knows what traditional doctrines really are can think otherwise.

Having said all this, we can return now to the relationships between occultism and spiritism; and we must specify that in what follows it is exclusively a question of Papus' occultism, which, as we have seen, is very different from that of Éliphas Lévi. In fact Lévi was emphatically anti-spiritist, and what is more he never believed in reincarnation; he sometimes pretended that he considered himself Rabelais reincarnate, but this was only a pleasantry. On this point we have the testimony of someone who knew him personally and who, himself a reincarnationist, can in no way be suspected of

partiality. Now, the theory of reincarnation is one of the notions that occultism as well as Theosophy borrowed from spiritism (for there were such borrowings), both of these schools clearly having come under the influence of spiritism, which predated them, and this in spite of the contempt with which they regard it. As for reincarnation, the thing is quite clear: we have recounted elsewhere how Madame Blavatsky took this idea from the French spiritists and transplanted it into Anglo-Saxon circles. Papus and some of the earliest adherents of his school had started out in Theosophy, and almost all the others came directly from spiritism. There is thus no need to look further. On less fundamental points, we have already seen an example of spiritist influence in the primary importance accorded by occultism to the role of mediums for the production of certain phenomena. Another can be found in the idea of the 'astral body', which has some of the peculiarities of the 'perispirit' but with this difference, that after a greater or lesser time following death the spirit is supposed to abandon the 'astral body', in the same way that it had abandoned the physical body, whereas the 'perispirit' is supposed to persist indefinitely and accompany the spirit in all its reincarnations. Still another example is what the occultists call the 'troubled state', that is to say an unconscious state in which the spirit finds itself plunged immediately after death. Papus writes that

> during the first moments of this separation the spirit is not aware of its new state; it is troubled, it does not believe itself to be dead, and it is only progressively, often after several days or even several months, that it becomes conscious of its new state.[5]

This is no more than a plain statement of spiritist theory, but elsewhere Papus takes up the theory again on his own, specifying that 'the troubled state extends from the beginning of the death agony until the liberation of the spirit and the disappearance of the shells,'[6] that is, of the most inferior elements of the 'astral body'. The spiritists speak constantly of men who for several years have remained unaware that they were dead, retaining all the preoccupations of

5. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p327.
6. *L'état de trouble et l'évolution posthume de l'être humain*, p17.

their terrestrial existence, and imagining themselves still to be accomplishing their habitual actions, some among them even giving themselves the bizarre mission of 'enlightening the spirits' in this regard. Eugène Nus[7] and other authors had recounted stories of this kind long before Papus, so that the source from which he drew his idea of the 'troubled state' is not in doubt. It is worth mentioning the consequences attributed to actions effected through the series of successive existences—what the Theosophists call 'karma'. As to the improbability of their accounts of these things, the occultists and spiritists are in competition with each other, and we will return to this when we speak of reincarnation. There, too, the spiritists can claim priority. Investigating further, we would find many more similarities which can only be explained by borrowings from spiritism, to which occultism owes much more than it admits. It is true that the sum of what it owes is not particularly good, but what is most important is to see how and in what measure occultists admit the fundamental hypothesis of spiritism, that is to say communication with the dead.

One of occultism's most visible concerns is to make its theories 'scientific' in the modern sense. When one does not admit—often with good reason—the competence of ordinary scholars in regard to certain kinds of questions, it would perhaps be more logical if one did not imitate their methods or appear to be inspired by their way of thinking; but we are merely stating a fact. It should be noted that medical doctors, from whom the greater number of 'psychists' are recruited (of whom we shall speak in due course), have also contributed their share to occultism, upon which their mental habits, derived from their education and professional activity, have exerted a manifest influence.

This explains the enormous place occupied by what we may call 'psycho-physiological' theories, especially in Papus' writings. Thenceforth the role of experimentation also had to be considerable, so that in order to present a scientific front, or one reputed to be such, the occultists had to turn their attention principally to phenomena, which genuine initiatic schools have always treated as

7. *A la recherche des destinées.*

quite negligible; and let us add that this did not suffice to bring occultism the favor or even the sympathy of official scientists. Moreover, the attraction of phenomena was not only felt by those animated by 'scientific' preoccupations; there are those who cultivate phenomena with entirely different intentions, but with no less ardor; for it is this side of occultism which, along with the 'divinatory arts', is of almost sole interest to a great part of their public, among whom must naturally be included all those who are spiritists to one degree or another. As this last segment expanded, the 'scientific' rigor which had been proclaimed from the beginning was progressively relaxed. But independently of this deviation, the experimental and 'phenomenalist' character of occultism predisposed it to maintain relations with spiritism, which, though not always agreeable and courteous, were nevertheless compromising. What bears repeating is not that occultism admitted the reality of the phenomena, which we do not contest, nor even that they made a special study of them (and we will return to this apropos of 'psychism'), but rather that they accorded this study of phenomena an excessive importance given their claims of a more intellectual order, and above all that they believed it necessary to partially admit the spiritist explanation, only seeking to reduce the number of cases to which it would apply. 'Occultism,' said Papus,

> admits as absolutely real all the phenomena of spiritism; however, it considerably limits the influence of the spirits in the production of these phenomena, and attributes them to a host of other influences acting in the invisible world.[8]

It goes without saying that the spiritists protested as energetically against this restriction as they did against the assertion that

> the human being is split up into several entities after death, and that which communicates itself is not the entire being but debris of the being, an astral shell.

Elsewhere Papus adds that generally 'occult science is far too difficult to understand and far too complicated for the average reader of

8. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p347.

spiritist books,'[9] which does not exactly speak well of these readers. For our part, once the 'influence of the spirits' in these phenomena is admitted in some measure, we do not see what interest there is in limiting it, either in the number of cases in which it is manifested or as to the categories of spirits that can really be evoked. On this last point, here is what Papus has to say:

> It seems incontestable that the souls of the beloved dead can be evoked and can appear in certain conditions. Taking this truth as starting-point, experimenters with a fertile imagination were not long in claiming that the souls of all the dead, ancient and modern, were subject to mental evocation.[10]

There is something really extraordinary in the way a kind of exception is made for the souls of the 'beloved dead', as if sentimental considerations were capable of bending natural laws! Either the evocation of the 'souls of the dead' is a possibility in the spiritist sense, or it is not. In the first case, it is arbitrary to claim to assign limits to this possibility, and perhaps it would be more normal simply to throw in one's lot with spiritism. Under such conditions it is in any case unseemly to reproach spiritism for sentimentality, to which it certainly owes the greater measure of its success; and one hardly has the right to make statements like the following:

> Science should be true and not sentimental; but should it heed the argument that would have it that communication with the dead cannot be discussed simply because it is such a consoling idea?[11]

That is perfectly sound, but to be authorized to say so one must be free of all sentimentalism oneself, and this is not the case here. Fundamentally, there is only a difference of degree between spiritism and occultism; in the latter, the sentimental and pseudo-mystical tendencies have only been accentuated in the course of the rapid descent mentioned earlier. But from the earliest times, and without

9. Ibid., p344.
10. Ibid., p331.
11. Ibid., p324.

leaving the question of communication with the dead, these tendencies were already sufficiently expressed in phrases such as this:

> When a tearful mother sees her daughter clearly manifested before her; when an only daughter all alone on this earth sees her dead father appear to her and promise his help, there are eighty out of a hundred chances that these phenomena are produced by the 'spirits', the 'I' [*moi*] of the deceased.[12]

The reason these are privileged cases is, it seems, that

> for a *spirit*, for the being itself to come and communicate, it is necessary that some kind of *fluidic relationship* exist between the evoker and the evoked.

It is therefore necessary to believe that sentiment must be something 'fluidic'. Are we not right to speak of 'materialism transposed'? Besides, all this business of 'fluids' comes from hypnotizers and spiritists. Here too, in its terminology as well as in its ideas, occultism has undergone the influence of these schools which it characterizes disdainfully as 'primary'.

On occasion the representatives of occultism have dropped their contemptuous attitude toward the spiritists, and the overtures they made in certain circumstances recall to a degree the address in which Annie Besant declared before the Spiritualist Alliance of London in 1898 that the two movements, 'spiritualist' and 'Theosophist', had the same origin. Occultists have gone even further in a sense, stating that their theories are not only akin to those of the spiritists, which is incontestable, but that fundamentally the two are identical with it. Papus said this in so many words in the conclusion of the report he presented to the 'Spiritist and Spiritualist Congress' of 1889:

> It is easy to see that the theories of spiritism are the same as those of occultism, though less detailed. The scope of the spiritist teachings is consequently greater, as they can be understood by more people. The teachings, even theoretical ones, of occultism

12. Ibid., p847.

> are, by their very complexity, reserved for brains disciplined to all the difficulties of abstract conceptions. But fundamentally, it is an identical doctrine which the two great schools teach.[13]

There is some exaggeration here, and perhaps we can describe this attitude as 'political', without however imputing to the occultists intentions comparable to those of Mrs Besant. For the rest, the spiritists remained distrustful and made little response to these advances, fearing attempts to have them combine with other groups. However that may be, the eclecticism of French occultists is singularly wide and quite incompatible with their claim to possess a serious doctrine and to base themselves on a respectable tradition. Further, we will say that all schools having anything in common with spiritism thereby lose all right to present their theories as the expression of a true esoterism.

All the same, it would be a great mistake to confuse occultism with spiritism. If this confusion occurs among the ill-informed, the fault is due not only to their ignorance but, as we shall see, to the imprudence of the occultists themselves. Nevertheless, there is generally some antagonism between the two movements, asserted more vehemently by the spiritists, more discreetly by the occultists. But the occultists have called attention to some of the spiritists' extravagances (which does not keep them from committing some of their own on occasion), and this has been enough for them to run afoul of spiritist convictions and sensitivities. It can now be understood why we said that in order to be a spiritist it is necessary only to admit communication with the dead, in more or less exceptional cases. Additionally, the spiritists on no account wish to hear anything of the other elements which the occultists see as occurring in the phenomena (to which we shall return), unless perhaps there are some among them who are a little less narrow and less fanatic than the others, and who accept that sometimes there is an unconscious action on the part of the medium and those present. Finally, in occultism there are a multitude of theories to which nothing in spiritism corresponds. Whatever their real value, they at least bear

13. Ibid., pp359–360.

witness to less limited concerns, and in sum, the occultists have been somewhat less calumniated when with more or less sincerity they have tried to place the two schools on an equal footing. It is true, though, that in order to be superior to spiritism, a doctrine does not have to be very sound nor very lofty intellectually.

6

SPIRITISM AND PSYCHISM

WE HAVE SAID PREVIOUSLY that although we absolutely deny the theories of spiritism, we do not for all that contest the reality of the phenomena which the spiritists cite in support of their theories. We must now explain this point a little more fully. What we wish to say is that *a priori* we do not contest the reality of any phenomenon, given that it seems to be a possibility; and we must admit the possibility of all that is not intrinsically absurd, that is, of all that does not imply a contradiction. In other words, we admit in principle all that corresponds to the notion of possibility understood in a sense that is at once metaphysical, logical, and mathematical. Now if it is a question of the realization of such and such a possibility in a particular and definite case, other requirements must naturally be considered: to say that we admit in principle all the possibilities in question is not to say that we accept without further examination all the examples that are reported with more or less serious guarantees. But we do not have to critique all this, which is a matter for the practitioners; from our point of view this is of no importance. Indeed, once a given category of facts is possible, it is without interest for us whether some particular fact in this category is true or false. The only thing that interests us is to know how the facts of this order can be explained, and if we have a satisfactory explanation, all further discussion seems superfluous. We understand quite well that this is not the attitude of the scientist who amasses facts in order to be convinced, and who relies only on the results of his observations to construct a theory; but our point of view is far removed from that. Moreover, we do not think that facts alone can

really serve as the basis of a theory, for facts can almost always be explained by several different theories. We know that the facts in question here are possible, for we can link them to certain principles that we know; and as this explanation has nothing in common with the spiritist theories, we have the right to say that the existence and study of these phenomena is absolutely independent of spiritism. Further, we know that such phenomena do in fact exist; moreover, we have witnesses to this who cannot have been influenced in any way by spiritism, in the one case far pre-dating it and in the other coming from circles where spiritism has never penetrated, countries where the very name is as unknown as is the doctrine. These phenomena, as we have said, are neither new nor peculiar to spiritism. We have therefore no reason to doubt the existence of these phenomena, and on the contrary have every reason to consider them real; but it is understood that it is always a case of their existence being conceived in a general way, and besides, given the end we presently have before us, all other considerations are perfectly useless.

We believe these precautions and reservations necessary because, not to speak of accounts entirely invented by hoaxers as bad jokes or for the sake of their cause, there have been innumerable cases of fraud, as spiritists themselves have been forced to recognize;[1] but this is far from maintaining that all is only trickery. We do not understand why the nay-sayers insist so on the confirmed frauds and believe these to be a solid argument in their favor, and we understand it even less in that, as we have said, every hoax is an imitation of reality.[2] Doubtless such an imitation can only be more or less deformed, but ultimately one can think of simulating only something that exists; it would be doing fraudulent people too much honor to believe them capable of producing something entirely new, for this is something human imagination can never achieve. In addition, in spiritist séances there are frauds of several

1. In a manner rather uncharitable to his colleagues, the medium Dunglas Home took upon himself the burden of denouncing and explaining a large number of frauds in *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritualisme*, pp186–235.

2. *Theosophy*, chap. 4.

categories. The simplest but not the only case is that of the professional medium who, when for whatever reason he cannot produce authentic phenomena, is led out of self-interest to simulate them. This is why every paid medium must be considered suspect and watched closely; even without self-interest, vanity alone may incite a medium to cheat. Most mediums, even the most reputable, have been caught in *flagrante delicto*. This does not prove that they do not possess very real faculties, but only that these faculties are not always under the control of their will. In such cases the often impulsive spiritists wrongly swing from one extreme to the other, regarding as definitively false any medium who has had such a misadventure, even if only once. Certain fanatical spiritists would have it that their mediums are saints, surrounding them with a veritable cult; but they are sick, which is something else entirely, despite the ridiculous theories of some contemporary psychologists. This abnormal state must always be taken into account, which helps explain another kind of fraud. The medium, like the hysteric, has an irresistible need to lie, even for no reason, as hypnotists also affirm of their subjects; and in such cases responsibility is greatly diminished, if there is even any blame at all. In addition, the medium is eminently prone not only to auto-suggestion but also to receiving suggestions from the circle around him and consequently to acting without knowing what he is doing. It suffices that production of specific phenomena are expected of him in order for him to simulate them automatically.[3] Thus there are frauds who are so only half-consciously, and others who are totally unconscious—where the medium often demonstrates an ability that he is far from possessing in his ordinary state. All this derives from an abnormal psychology, which incidentally has never been studied as it should be. Many people think this a field for research not without interest, including the domain of simulations. We will now leave to one side this question of fraud, but not before expressing regret that the

3. There is the case of the false mediums who, consciously or not and probably at least partially under the influence of suggestion, seem to have been the instruments of a rather mysterious action; see what we have said concerning manifestations of the so-called 'John King' in our exposé of the origins of Theosophy.

ordinary conceptions of psychologists, as well as their means of investigation, are so narrow that the things to which we have alluded almost completely escape them, and that even when they want to study these things, they hardly understand anything of what is involved.

We are not alone in thinking that the study of these phenomena can be undertaken entirely independently of spiritist theories. This is also the advice of those who are called 'psychists', who are or would generally like to be unprejudiced experimenters (we say 'generally' because here, too, there are distinctions to be made) and who often refrain from formulating any theory. We retain the terms 'psychic' and 'psychic phenomena' because these are the more commonly used and because we have none better at our disposal. But they are not immune to criticism; thus, in all rigor, 'psychic' and 'psychological' should be perfectly synonymous, although this is not the way they are understood. So-called 'psychic' phenomena lie entirely outside the domain of classical psychology, and even if it is supposed that there may be a certain connection with the latter, it is in any case extremely remote. Moreover, the experimenters deceive themselves in our view when they believe they can include all these facts indifferently in what is commonly called 'psycho-physiology'. The truth is that in this domain there are facts of many kinds, and all of them cannot be reduced to a single explanation. But most researchers are not so free of preconceptions as they imagine, and it is 'specialists' who have an involuntary tendency to reduce everything to whatever is the object of their ordinary studies, which is to say that when 'psychists' announce their conclusions, they should only be accepted with reservation. Even their observations may be affected by prejudices; experimental scientists ordinarily have quite particular ideas as to what is possible and what is not, and with the best faith in the world they force the facts to agree with these ideas. On the other hand, those who are most opposed to spiritist ideas may nevertheless be influenced by spiritism, despite themselves and whether they will or no. However that may be, it is certain that the phenomena in question can be the object of an experimental science like all the others, different from them undoubtedly, but of the same order and having neither more nor less importance or

interest. We do not see why some are pleased to call these phenomena 'transcendent' or 'transcendental', which is a bit ridiculous. And this last remark calls for another: the term 'psychism', despite its inconvenience, is in any case preferable to 'metapsychics', invented by Dr Charles Richet and subsequently adopted by Dr Gustav Geley and others. 'Metapsychics', in fact, is obviously patterned after 'metaphysics', but it is not justified by any analogy.[4] Whatever opinion one may have as to the nature and cause of the phenomena in question, they can be regarded as 'psychic' and not 'beyond the psychic'; indeed, some of them fall rather below. Furthermore, the study of any category of phenomena is part of 'physics' in the general sense in which the ancients understood it, that is to say the knowledge of nature, and has no connection with metaphysics, which is 'beyond nature' and thereby beyond all possible experience. There is nothing that parallels metaphysics,[5] and those who know what it really is cannot protest too emphatically against such assimilations. In our times, however, neither scientists nor even philosophers seem to have the least notion of what it is.

We have said that there are many kinds of psychic phenomena, and we will immediately add that the psychic domain seems susceptible of extension to many other phenomena than those of spiritism. Spiritists are very intrusive; they try to exploit a multitude of facts to the advantage of their ideas, facts that are not brought about by their practices and that have no direct or indirect relationship with their theories, since the 'spirits of the dead' cannot possibly intervene. We leave aside 'mystical phenomena' in the proper and theological sense of the expression, for these phenomena entirely elude the competence of ordinary scholars. We may mention here those facts grouped under the term 'telepathy', which are incontestably the

4. There is even a 'Societé d'études de photographie transcendentale', founded by Emmanuel Vauchez and administered by Dr Foveau de Courmelles, which has as its aim to 'encourage and to offer a reward for photographs of beings and radiations of space.' It is curious to see how far certain words can be diverted from their normal sense.

5. Quite recently Dr Richet, presenting his *Traité de Métapsychique* to the Academy of Sciences, stated, literally: 'As Aristotle introduced metaphysics beyond physics, so I present, beyond the psychic, metapsychics.' One could not be more modest!

manifestations of actually living beings.[6] The unbelievable claims of the spiritists to annex the most diverse things contribute to creating and maintaining regrettable confusions among the public. We have had many occasions to confirm that there are those who confuse spiritism with magnetism and even with hypnotism; perhaps this would not be so frequent if the spiritists did not meddle with facts that in no way concern them. Among the phenomena produced in spiritist séances are those pointing to magnetism or to hypnotism, in which the medium behaves like an ordinary sleepwalker. Then there is the phenomenon spiritists call 'incarnation' and which is basically only a case of 'second states', improperly called 'multiple personalities', something frequently manifested among the sick and the hypnotized; but the spiritist interpretation is naturally quite different. Suggestion also plays a leading role in all this, for suggestion or thought transmission is obviously linked to hypnotism or to magnetism (we will not dwell on the distinction to be made between these two things, a distinction which is very difficult to determine and which is of no importance here). Once any phenomenon is determined to be part of the domain of hypnotism or magnetism, spiritism has no claim to it. But we see no reason why such phenomena should not be grouped with psychism, the boundaries of which are very poorly defined. Perhaps the point of view of modern experimenters is not incompatible with treating as a single science what might constitute the object of several sciences for those who study these things in a different manner and who know better what is really involved.

This leads us to speak a little of the difficulties of psychism; if in this domain researchers do not obtain satisfactory results, it is not only because they are dealing with forces about which they are ill-informed, but especially because these forces do not act in the same manner as those which they are in the habit of manipulating, and

6. Many of these facts have been gathered by Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, members of the Society for Psychical Research (London), in a work called *Phantasms of the Living*. There is a French translation of this work, but the translator gave it the bizarre title *Les Hallucinations télépathiques*, which is completely at variance with the intentions of the authors and betrays the narrow views of official science, as the book is concerned with real phenomena.

because these forces can hardly be subjected to the methods of observation that succeed for the former. Scientists cannot in fact boast of knowing with certainty the real nature of electricity, but this does not inhibit them from studying it from their 'phenomenist' point of view or from using it in practical applications. In the present case then there must be something other than that ignorance to which the experimenters so easily resign themselves. We should be aware that the competence of a 'specialist' is quite limited; outside his own field he cannot claim an authority greater than that of having arrived first; and whatever his competence may be, he has no other advantage than a certain precision of observation, an advantage that only imperfectly compensates for certain professional deformations. This is why the psychic experiments of Crookes, to take one of the best known examples, do not in our view have the exceptional importance many attribute to them. We readily acknowledge Crookes' competence in chemistry and physics, but we see no reason to extend this to an entirely different order. The most serious of scientific titles do not protect experimenters from such a common mischance as simply being mystified by a medium. Perhaps this happened to Crookes, but it surely happened to Dr Richet, and the notorious happenings at the Villa Carmen in Algiers do little to recommend his perspicacity. But there is an extenuating circumstance, for these things are apt to lead astray a physicist or a physiologist, or even a psychologist. And, by an unfortunate effect of specialization, no one is more naive and defenseless than certain scholars once they step outside their area of expertise. We know of no better example than that of the fantastic collection of autographs which the celebrated forger Vrain-Lucas passed off as authentic to the mathematician Michel Charles. No psychist has yet attained a similar degree of extravagant credulity.[7]

It is not only in face of fraud, however, that the experimenters find themselves disarmed for lack of better knowledge of the special

7. Henri Poincaré, more prudent than many others, or more conscious of his lack of preparation, refused to attempt an experiment with Eusapia Paladino; he wrote that he was only too certain 'that he would be duped' (article by Philippe Pagnat in *Entretiens Idéalistes*, June 1914, p387).

psychology of mediums and other subjects to whom they have recourse. They are exposed to many other dangers. First, as to the manner of conducting experiments so different from those to which they are accustomed, these scholars sometimes find themselves in the greatest embarrassment though they do not want to admit it, perhaps even to themselves. They do not understand that some facts cannot be reproduced at will, and that these facts may be as real as the others. They want to impose arbitrary or impossible conditions, such as requiring the production in full light of phenomena for which darkness may be indispensable. They would surely laugh, and rightly so, at someone ignorant of the physical and chemical sciences who showed such a complete misunderstanding of the applicable laws and yet wanted to observe some phenomena at all costs. And then from a more theoretical point of view these same scientists refuse to recognize the limits of experimentation, demanding of it what it cannot give. Because they are committed exclusively to this approach, they imagine that it is the only source of all possible knowledge; moreover, a specialist is less well placed than anyone to appreciate the limits beyond which his expertise ceases to be valid. Finally and perhaps most serious of all, it is always extremely imprudent to bring into play forces about which one is entirely ignorant; in this regard the most 'scientific' psychists have little advantage over ordinary spiritists. There are things that cannot be touched with impunity in the absence of the doctrinal guidance required to keep one from going astray. We can never repeat this often enough, especially in the present context, where being misled is one of the most common and most calamitous effects of experimenting with these forces. The number of people who lose their reason is only too great. Ordinary science is absolutely incapable of giving the least doctrinal guidance, and one not infrequently sees psychists who, without going so far as to lose their reason, are nevertheless misled most deplorably. We include in this case all those who set out with purely 'scientific' intentions but who in the end are more or less completely and openly converted to spiritism. It is already unfortunate that men who should know how to think admit even the possibility of the spiritist hypothesis; nevertheless, there are researchers (we would say this applies to nearly all of them) who do

not see why one should not admit it, and who even while rejecting it *a priori*, fear a lack of that impartiality to which they are beholden. Of course they do not believe the spiritist hypothesis, but neither do they completely reject it, holding themselves back in an attitude of pure and simple doubt, removed as far from negation as from affirmation. Unfortunately, the chances are great that those who begin their psychic studies with these dispositions will not remain there and will slide imperceptibly toward the spiritist side rather than toward the opposite. Their frame of mind has at least one point in common with the spiritists: they think 'phenomenologically'. We do not use this word in the sense given it in philosophical theories of this name, but to designate the superstition of phenomena that is fundamental to the 'scientistic' spirit. Then there is the influence of the spiritist milieu with which the psychist necessarily finds himself in at least indirect contact, even if only through the intermediary of the mediums with whom he will work. This ambience is a frightful source of collective and mutual suggestion. The experimenter incontestably influences the medium, and if the medium has the least preconceived idea, however vague, the results are already falsified. But without the psychist being aware of it he can in his turn be subject to suggestion from the medium; and this would still be negligible but for the fact that there are also all the influences which the medium himself brings along, of which the least that can be said is that they are eminently unhealthy. In these conditions the psychist is at the mercy of anything that occurs, and what occurs is usually something quite sentimental. To Lombroso, Eusapia Paladino caused the phantom of his mother to appear; Sir Oliver Lodge received communications from his son killed during the war. Nothing more is necessary to make 'conversions'. These cases are perhaps more frequent than one thinks; there are certainly thinkers who, for fear of a discrepancy with their past, do not dare admit their 'evolution' and frankly call themselves spiritists, or show too much sympathy toward spiritism. There are even those who do not want it known that they are engaged in psychic studies, as if that would discredit them in eyes of their colleagues and the public, who are too prone to assimilate these things to spiritism. Thus Mme Curie and Monsieur d'Arsonval for a long time hid the fact that they engaged

in this kind of experimentation. In this connection it is interesting to cite the following lines from an article carried a long time ago by the *Revue Scientifique* on the above-mentioned book of Dr Gibier:

> Dr Gibier earnestly called for the formation of a society to study this new branch of psychological physiology and seemed to believe that he was the only one among us, if not the first among competent researchers, to interest himself in this question. Let Dr Gibier be reassured and satisfied: a certain number of very competent seekers, those who have begun at the beginning and who have already brought some order into the hotchpotch of the supernatural [*sic*], occupy themselves with this question and continue their work . . . without apprising the public.[8]

Such an attitude is truly astonishing on the part of men usually so fond of publicity, who ceaselessly proclaim that everything that concerns them can and should be broadcast as widely as possible. Let us add that the director of the *Revue Scientifique* at that time was Dr Richet, and he at least, if not others, has not always practiced this prudent reserve.

But there is more to say: without rallying to spiritism, certain psychists have singular affinities with neo-spiritualism in general or with one or another of its schools. Theosophists in particular boast of having drawn many into their ranks, and some time ago one of their journals assured the reader

> that not all the savants who concern themselves with spiritism and who are cited as recognized figures have been led to believe in spiritism (apart from one or two), that nearly all have given an interpretation akin to that of the Theosophists, and that the most celebrated among them are *members of the Theosophical Society*.[9]

It is certain that the spiritists too easily claim as their own all who have dabbled in these studies and who are not their avowed adversaries. But for their part the Theosophists have perhaps been a little too ready to claim certain individuals as members when such was in

8. *Revue Scientifique*, November 13, 1886, pp 631–632.
9. *Le Lotus*, October 1887.

no way definite. They would do well to remember the example of Myers and several other members of the Society for Psychical Research based in London, and also the case of Dr Richet, who only passed through their organization. He was not the last in France to echo the denunciations of the trumpery of Madame Blavatsky made by the Society for Psychical Research.[10] Whatever the case, the sentence we have just cited perhaps contained an allusion to Flammarion, who nevertheless was always nearer to spiritism than to any other idea; it certainly contained a reference to William Crookes, who had in fact joined the Theosophical Society in 1883 and was even a member of the Council of the London Lodge. As for Dr Richet, his role in the pacifist movement shows that he had always had something in common with neo-spiritualists, whose humanitarian tendencies are asserted with no less passion. For those acquainted with these movements, coincidences such as this are a much clearer and characteristic sign than one might suppose. In the same order of ideas, we have already alluded to the anti-Catholic tendencies of certain psychists, such as Dr Gibier. We could even speak more generally of anti-religious tendencies, at least so long as 'lay religion' is not in question, 'lay religion' being a term framed by Charles Fauvety, one of the first apostles of spiritism in France. The following lines sufficiently illustrate his declamations:

> We have faith in Science and we firmly believe that it will rid humanity forever of the parasitism of every kind of Brahmin [the author means priests], and that religion, or rather morality become scientific, will one day be represented by a special section in future academies of science.[11]

10. In a letter we cited in *Theosophy*, chap. 6, Dr Richet said that he had known Madame Blavatsky through Caroline de Barrau; this same person also played a role in Dr Gibier's circle, as is seen in the following encomium of the 'great and conscientious savant' Burnouf: 'We mention especially the considerable work of Louis Leblois of Strasbourg, to whom we owe knowledge of a lady of great merit, Mme Caroline de Barrau' (*Le Spiritism*, p110). The work of Leblois, *Les Bibles et les Initiateurs religieux de l'humanité*, was, next to the work of Jacolliot, responsible for indoctrinating Gibier in false ideas concerning India and its doctrines, which we noted above.

11. *Le Spiritisme*, p383.

We need not dwell on such nonsense, which is unfortunately not inoffensive, but there would be grist here for an interesting study on the mentality of men who are always invoking 'science' but drag it into matters completely outside its domain. This is yet another of the forms of intellectual disequilibrium among our contemporaries, forms which are perhaps more closely related than one might believe. Is there not a 'scientistic mysticism', even a 'materialist mysticism'; and does this not offer as much evidence of the deviation of the religious sentiment as do the 'neo-spiritualist' aberrations?[12]

All that has been said of researchers can also be said of those philosophers who likewise occupy themselves with psychism; they are much less numerous but they do nevertheless exist. We have had occasion before[13] to mention the case of William James, who toward the end of his life manifested very pronounced tendencies toward spiritism. This should be stressed, for some have thought us rather coarse in characterizing this philosopher as a spiritist and especially as an 'unconscious satanist'. On this subject we will alert our possible contradictors, of whatever camp, that we hold in reserve many things still coarser, and their coarseness does not prevent their being rigorously true. Moreover, if they knew what we think of the great majority of modern philosophers, the admirers of 'great men' would no doubt be shocked. As to 'unconscious satanism', this will be explained later; but as for the spiritism of William James, it should be pointed out that this belonged only to his final period (we would say, rather, 'final outcome'), for the ideas of this philosopher varied prodigiously. It is a well established fact that William James vowed to do everything in his power to communicate with his friends and other experimenters after death. This promise, made 'in the interest of science', proves that he admitted the possibility of the spiritist hypothesis,[14] something serious for a philosopher (or it would be if

12. The 'religion of humanity' invented by Auguste Comte is one of the examples that best illustrate what we are speaking of; but the deviation can just as well exist without reaching such a level of extravagance.

13. *Theosophy*, chaps. 3 and 12.

14. This attitude was also that of the French university philosopher Emile Boirac, who in a memoir entitled *L'Étude scientifique du spiritisme* given at the Congress of Experimental Psychology in 1911 declared that the spiritist hypothesis

philosophy were what it should be); and we have reasons to believe that he had gone still further in this direction. It goes without saying that a multitude of American mediums recorded 'messages' signed by him. This story calls to mind that of another no less illustrious American, the inventor Edison, who recently claimed to have discovered a way of communicating with the dead.[15] We do not know what became of this, for a pall of silence has been thrown over the matter; but we have always been quite indifferent as to such results. This episode is instructive in showing yet again that the most incontestably learned men, those whom one might believe to be the most 'positivist', are not immune from the spiritist contagion. But let us return to the philosophers: we have mentioned both Henri Bergson and William James; as to the latter, it is enough to reproduce lines we have already cited, for they are quite significant: 'it would be something, it would be a great thing, to be able to establish on the experiential level the probability of survival, say, for time *x*.'[16] This statement is disquieting at the very least and proves that its author, already so near 'neo-spiritualist' ideas, has truly entered on a dangerous path, which we regret particularly, for those who, having placed confidence in him, risk being drawn after him. In guarding against the worst absurdities, philosophy is hardly worth more than science since it is even incapable of making it understood or merely felt (we do not say of proving, for that would be too much to ask of it), however confusedly, that the spiritist hypothesis is a pure and simple impossibility.

Even leaving aside those suspect of having an interest in spiritism, we could give many other examples indicating that those psychists having 'neo-spiritualist' sympathies appear to be in the greatest number. In France it is especially occultism in the sense understood

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represented 'one of the possible philosophical explanations of psychic facts,' and that one cannot dismiss it 'a priori' as 'anti-scientific'. Perhaps it is neither anti-scientific nor anti-philosophical; but it is certainly anti-metaphysical, which is much graver and more telling.

15. Some time ago now two Dutch spiritists, Zaalberg van Zelst and Matla, built a 'dynamistograph' or 'apparatus intended to communicate with the next world without mediums' (*Le Monde Psychique*, March 1912).

16. *L'Energie Spirituelle.*

in the last chapter that has greatly influenced most psychists. The theories of Dr Grasset (who is nevertheless a Catholic) have some affinity with those of the occultists. Those of Dr Durand de Gros, of Dr Dupouy, of Dr Baraduc, and of Colonel de Rochas, are closer still. We cite only a few names almost at random; to supply supporting texts would not be difficult but we must restrict ourselves to these few, as we would otherwise be led too far from our subject. But we ask whether all this is explained sufficiently by the fact that psychism is a little known and poorly-defined field, or, given that there are so many concordant cases, whether it is not rather the inevitable result of rash investigations undertaken in a field more dangerous than any other, and by men who ignore even the most elementary precautions necessary to approach these things with some safety. In conclusion we will add only this: by rights, psychism is quite independent, not only of spiritism but also of every kind of 'neo-spiritualism'. And if it wanted to be purely experimental, it could in all rigor be independent of any theory whatsoever. In fact, usually psychists are at the same time more or less conscious and more or less avowed 'neo-spiritualists'. This state of affairs is all the more regrettable because in the nature of things it casts a bad light on these studies in the eyes of intelligent and serious men, a discredit that will have the effect of leaving the field entirely to charlatans and the unbalanced.

7

EXPLANATION OF SPIRITIST PHENOMENA

It is not our intent to make an in-depth study of the phenomena of spiritism, but before bringing forward the more decisive arguments against spiritism, we must give at least some summary explanation, if for no other reason than to show that the spiritist hypothesis can very well be jettisoned. We will not follow a purely logical exposition, and it should be noted that apart from any consideration of the phenomena themselves, there are fully sufficient reasons to reject absolutely the hypothesis at issue. Given the impossibility of this theory, it is necessary to seek a satisfactory explanation to account for the phenomena, even if there is no other theory at hand. But since the mentality of our time is turned especially toward experimentation, it will in many cases be better prepared to admit the impossibility of a theory and to examine without prejudice the proofs adduced in its favor if it is first shown that the said theory is useless, and that there are other theories that can replace it to advantage. On the other hand, it is important first of all to state that many if not all the facts in question do not pertain to ordinary science and cannot be forced into the narrow categories to which it is now restricted. The facts in question lie quite outside physiology and classical psychology, contrary to some psychists who are very much deceived in this regard. Feeling no respect for the prejudices of modern science, we do not think we need apologize for the apparent strangeness of some of the considerations to follow; but it is well to anticipate that by reason of their acquired habits of thought some readers may find them simply too extraordinary. This is not to say that we accord to psychic phenomena any

'transcendent' character whatsoever. Moreover, no phenomenon of any kind has such an intrinsic character; but this does not prevent there being many such phenomena that are recalcitrant to the methods used by modern Western science—which is not so 'advanced' as some of its admirers believe, or at least is so only on very particular points. Even magic has absolutely nothing 'transcendent' about it, although it is an experimental science. What can be so regarded is 'theurgy', the effects of which, even when they resemble magic, are totally different as to their cause. And it is precisely the cause and not the phenomenon produced that is of a transcendent order. In order to be better understood, we may borrow an analogy from Catholic doctrine (we mean analogy only and not assimilation, as we do not adopt a theological point of view): there are phenomena in the lives of saints, as well as of sorcerers, that are outwardly quite alike; it is obvious that only those in the first case can qualify as 'miraculous' and properly 'supernatural'. In the case of sorcerers, the phenomena can at most be called 'preternatural'. If, however, the phenomena are the same, the difference then lies uniquely in their cause and not in their nature, and it is only from their 'modality' and 'circumstances' that such phenomena draw their supernatural character. When psychism is in question it goes without saying that no transcendent cause can intervene, whether the phenomena are produced by ordinary spiritist practices or are magnetic and hypnotic, or anything more or less related to these. Thus we need not be concerned here with things of the transcendent order; and there are questions, like those of 'mystical phenomena' for example, which may remain entirely outside such explanations as we have in view. Moreover, we need not examine all psychic phenomena without distinction, but only those having some connection with spiritism. Further, we can leave to one side such phenomena as 'incarnation', which has already been mentioned, or those produced by 'healing mediums', which can be reduced either to suggestion or magnetism, for it is obvious that they can be explained sufficiently quite apart from the spiritist hypothesis. We do not mean to say that there is no difficulty in explaining facts of that kind, but spiritists cannot claim to annex the entire domain of hypnotism and magnetism; and besides, it is

possible that such facts of this may in addition be clarified somewhat by information provided on the others.

After these general observations, which were necessary to establish the parameters of the question, we may recall the principal theories purporting to explain spiritist phenomena. There are many of them, but Dr Gibier believed he could reduce them to four types.[1] His classification is far from flawless but it can serve as point of departure. He called the first of these the 'theory of the collective being', which is defined thus:

> A special fluid is released from the person of the medium, combines with the fluids of persons present to constitute a new person, independent in some measure, producing the known phenomena.

Then comes the 'demoniac' theory, according to which 'everything is produced by the devil or his supports,' which amounts to reducing spiritism to sorcery. In third place there is a theory that Dr Gibier labels with the bizarre name 'gnomic', according to which

> there is a category of beings, an immaterial world, living at our side and manifesting its presence under certain conditions; these are the beings known from all time as genies, fairies, sylvans, lutins, gnomes, farfadets, and so forth.

We do not know why he chose the name 'gnome' rather than one of the others to supply the name for his theory, which he links with that of the Theosophists (attributing it wrongly to Buddhism), which traces the phenomena to 'elementals'. Finally, there is the spiritist theory, according to which

> all these manifestations are due to the spirits or souls of the dead, which make contact with the living by manifesting their qualities or their faults, their superiority or, to the contrary, their inferiority, all as if they were still living.

Each of these theories, except the spiritist theory—which alone is absurd—may contain a part of the truth and explain certain of the

1. *Le Spiritisme*, pp310–311.

phenomena, though not all of them. The error of their respective advocates is to be too exclusive and to want to reduce everything to one theory. As for us, we do not believe that all these phenomena must be explicable by one or another of the theories just listed, for there are omissions as well as confusions in the list; moreover, we are not among those who believe that the simplicity of an explanation guarantees its verity. One might certainly wish this were the case, but things are not obliged to conform to our wishes, and there is no reason why they should be arranged in a way that is most comfortable for us or more likely to facilitate our understanding. Such anthropocentrism on the part of many scientists and philosophers presumes some naive illusions.

The 'demoniac' theory makes both the spiritists and the scientists quite furious, since both profess not to believe in demons. For the spiritists it seems that there cannot be anything in the 'invisible world' other than human beings, and this is the most improbable and arbitrary restriction that can be imagined. As we will be explaining our position below regarding satanism, we will not belabor the point now, noting only that opposition to this theory, scarcely less present among the occultists than among the spiritists, is much less understandable on their part since they do admit the intervention of various beings, proving at least that their theories are less limited. From this point of view the 'demoniac' theory might seem related to the 'gnomic' theory of Dr Gibier, for in both of them it is a question of actions exercised by non-human beings. In principle, nothing is opposed to this, for not only might there be such beings but they might also be as diversified as possible. It is certain that almost all peoples, at all times, have believed in such creatures as Dr Gibier mentions; and there must be something to this, for whatever the names given these creatures, there is remarkable agreement as to their manner of action. We do not think, however, that they have ever been regarded as properly immaterial. Moreover, this aspect of the question was not posed in quite the same way for the ancients as it is for moderns, the very notions of 'matter' and 'spirit' having changed greatly in meaning. On the other hand, the way these beings have been 'personified' relates especially to popular conceptions which rather hide truth than

express it, and which correspond more to manifested appearances than to deeper realities. A similar anthropomorphism, entirely exoteric in origin, can be imputed to the theory of 'elementals', which clearly derives from the preceding, and is in effect its modernized form. In fact, 'elementals' in the proper sense of the word are nothing other than the 'spirits of the elements', which ancient magic divided into four categories: salamanders, or spirits of the fire; sylphs, or spirits of the air; undines, or spirits of the water; and gnomes, or spirits of the earth. It is understood that the word 'spirits' is not taken here in the spiritist sense, but rather designates beings of the subtle realm, having a temporary existence and consequently having nothing 'spiritual' about them in the modern philosophical acceptation. Further, all this is only the exoteric expression of a theory the true sense of which we shall return to below. The Theosophists have accorded a considerable importance to the 'elementals'. Madame Blavatsky probably had the idea from George H. Felt, a member of the 'H B of L', who gratuitously attributed it to the ancient Egyptians. Subsequently, the theory was extended and modified, as much by the Theosophists themselves as by the French occultists, who obviously borrowed it from them, although they claimed to owe them nothing. Moreover, this is one of those theories regarding which the ideas of the various schools were never clarified, and we would certainly not want to be given the task of reconciling all the things that have been said on 'elementals'. Most Theosophists and occultists hold grossly anthropomorphic views, although there are those who have wanted to give the theory more of a 'scientific' allure and who, completely lacking the traditional teachings necessary to restore the original and esoteric sense, have quite simply adapted it to modern ideas or to the caprices of their own fantasy. Some have wished to identify the 'elementals' with the monads of Leibnitz;[2] others have reduced them to nothing more than 'unconscious forces' in the manner of Papus, for whom they are 'the sanguine globules of the universe,'[3] being at the same time

2. Lecture given at the Aryan Theosophical Society, New York, December 14, 1886, by C.H.A. Bjerregaard: *Le Lotus*, September 1888.

3. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p 373.

'potentialities of beings';[4] still others have believed they see in them 'embryos of animal or human souls.'[5] There have also been some who have taken an opposite tack, pushing the confusion so far as to identify the 'elementals' with the 'spiritual hierarchies' of the Jewish Kabbalah; they hold that the name 'elementals' designates angels and demons who by this sleight of hand are made to 'lose their fantastic character'![6] What is especially fantastic is the collection of disparate concepts customary with the occultists. Where something true is found, the concepts do not properly pertain to the occultists but are ancient ideas more or less badly interpreted, and the occultists seem to have taken it as their task to mix up all these notions rather than to clarify them and bring them into some order.

An example of false interpretations has already been given in the theory of 'astral shells', which Dr Gibier has completely forgotten in his nomenclature, and which is another borrowing of the occultists from the Theosophists. We have given above the true meaning of which the 'astral shell' notion is a distortion and we will not return to it here, except to recall that it is only in the manner there indicated that in certain phenomena an intervention of the dead, or rather an appearance of this intervention, can be admitted. The real being of the deceased is in no way concerned and is not affected by these manifestations. As to the theory of 'elementaries' on which occultists and Theosophists differ as little as in the previous cases, it appears to be extremely loose. It is sometimes confused with the 'shells', and at other times, and more frequently, is taken so far as to be identified with the spiritist hypothesis itself, excepting only a few limitations. Papus wrote that 'what the spiritist calls a *spirit*, an '*I*', the occultist calls an *elementary*, an *astral shell*.'[7] We do not believe he spoke in good faith when he made this assimilation, which is unacceptable to the spiritists; but let us continue:

> The inferior principles, illuminated by the intelligence of the human soul [with which they have no more than a 'fluidic link'],

4. Marius Decrespe (Maurice Després), *Les Microbes de l'Astral*.
5. Ibid., p39.
6. Jules Lermina, *Magie pratique*, pp218–220.
7. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p347.

> form what occultists call an *elementary* and float about the earth in the invisible world, while the superior principles evolve on another plane. . . . In most cases, the spirit that comes in a séance is the elementary of the person evoked, that is to say a being possessing only the instincts and the memory of earthly things.[8]

That is frank enough, and if there is a difference between a 'shell' properly so called and an 'elementary', it is that the first is literally an 'astral cadaver', while the second is said to retain a 'fluidic link' with superior principles, seeming to imply that all the elements of the human being must be situated somewhere in space. The occultists, with their 'planes', take a rather gross image for a reality. On the other hand, the statements we have cited do not inhibit the author, in other parts of the same book, from characterizing the 'elementaries' as 'conscious and willing beings', as the 'nervous cells of the universe', nor from assuring us that 'it is they who appear to the unhappy victims of sorcerous hallucinations in the guise of devil, to which [*sic*] one makes pacts,'[9] this last role being most often attributed by occultists to the 'elementals'. Still elsewhere Papus points out that the 'elementary' (he claims that this term pertains to the Kabbalah, although there is nothing Hebraic about it) 'is formed by the immortal spirit in its upper register, by the [upper part of the] astral body in its median register, and by the shell in its lower register.[10] According to this version, therefore, it would be the true and complete human being as he is constituted during the more or less long period he sojourns on the 'astral plane'. This is the prevailing opinion among occultists as well as among Theosophists, and generally both have come to admit that this being can be evoked while in this state, that is to say during the period running from 'physical death' to 'astral death'. Only, it is added that the 'disincarnate' who are most readily manifested in spiritist séances (exceptions being 'deceased loved ones') are people of the most inferior nature, notably drunks, sorcerers, criminals, and also those who have died a

8. Ibid., p351.
9. Ibid., pp373 and 909–910.
10. *L'état de trouble et l'évolution posthume de l'être humain*, pp12–13.

violent death, especially suicides; and it is precisely for these inferior beings, with whom relations are said to be very dangerous, that some Theosophists reserve the term 'elementaries'. The spiritists, who are absolutely opposed to all these theories we have been discussing, do not seem to appreciate this concession. Nevertheless, it is quite serious, amounting in brief to this: the spiritists themselves readily acknowledge that 'bad spirits' mingle in their séances; but if it were only that, one need only scrupulously refrain from spiritist practices. This, in fact, is what the leaders of occultism, and especially the Theosophist leaders, recommend, but without winning the assent of a certain group of their adherents for whom anything of a 'phenomenal' nature possesses an irresistible attraction.

We now come to theories that seek to explain these phenomena by the action of living human beings and which Dr Gibier confusedly groups under the heading (improper for some of them) 'theory of the collective being'. The theory that truly merits this name is really grafted upon another, with which it is not necessarily in agreement, and which is sometimes called the 'animist' or 'vitalist' theory. In its commonest form, which is expressed in the definition given by Dr Gibier, this theory could be labeled 'fluidic'. The point of departure is that in man there is something susceptible of exteriorization, that is, of leaving the limits of the body; and many findings indicate that this is indeed the case. We will only recall the experiments of Colonel de Rochas and other psychists on the 'exteriorization of sensibility' and the 'exteriorization of motivity'. To acknowledge this obviously does not imply adherence to any school, but some have felt the need to picture this 'something' as a 'fluid', which they call either 'nervous fluid' or 'vital fluid'. Those in question are naturally the occultists, who in this as in everything else pertaining to 'fluids', have merely followed in the wake of the magnetizers and the spiritists. In fact, this so-called 'fluid' is identical to that of the magnetizers: it is the *od* of Reichenbach, which some have wanted to link with the 'invisible radiations' of modern physics.[11] It separates from the human body in the form of effluvia,

11. See Papus' brochure entitled *Lumière invisible, Médiumnité et Magie*. This entirely modern notion of *od* is not to be confused with the Hebraic *od*.

which some believe to have been photographed; but this is another question that is outside our subject. As to the spiritists, we have said that they took this idea of 'fluids' from mesmerism and use it to explain mediumship as well. The divergences arise because the spiritists want a 'spirit' to make use of the exteriorized 'fluid' of the medium, while the occultists and psychists more reasonably suppose that in many cases the 'fluid' itself can be responsible for all aspects of the phenomenon. In fact, if something in man can be exteriorized, no extraneous factors are required to explain such phenomena as knocks or the movement of objects without physical contact, which moreover would not constitute 'action at a distance', since a being is everywhere that it acts. Wherever the action is produced, there the medium who projected something of himself, although no doubt unconsciously. Only those who believe that man is limited absolutely by his body can deny that such a thing is possible, proving that they are familiar only with a very small segment of human possibilities. We are well aware that this supposition is habitual with modern Westerners, but it is justified only by shared ignorance. It amounts to saying that the body is the measure of the soul (we use the words body and soul only to make ourself more easily understood), which in India is one of the heterodox beliefs of the *Jains*. This is too easily reducible to the absurd for us to insist on it. Is it conceivable that the soul should or even could conform to the quantitative contours of the body, and that, for example the amputation of a limb entails a proportionate diminution of the soul? Moreover, it is difficult to conceive that modern philosophy could pose such a senseless question as that of 'the seat of the soul', as if there were a question of something localizable. And in this respect the occultists are no more exempt from reproach, for they tend to localize all elements of the human being, even after death. As for the spiritists, they keep repeating that the 'spirits' are in 'space' or in what they call 'erracity'. It is precisely this habit of materializing everything that we criticize in the 'fluidic' theory; we would find nothing to fault if, instead of speaking of 'fluids', one simply spoke of 'forces', as do some of the more prudent psychists, or those among them who are less infected with 'neo-spiritualism'. This word 'forces' is no doubt rather vague, but there is no better

word in such a situation, and we do not see that ordinary science can offer any greater precision.

But let us return to the phenomena by which we can explain exteriorized force. The cases we have mentioned are the most elementary of all, but will it be the same when one finds the mark of a certain intelligence, as for example when the table that moves responds more or less well to questions put to it? We do not hesitate to answer affirmatively for many such cases, for it is rather exceptional that the responses or 'communications' obtained exceed the intellectual level of the medium or those in attendance. The spiritist who, having certain mediumistic faculties, secludes himself for whatever reason in order to consult his table does not suspect that he is simply consulting himself in this roundabout way; nevertheless, this is what most often occurs. In group séances the presence of a number of bystanders complicates matters a bit, for the medium is then not reduced to his own thoughts; on the contrary, his special state renders him eminently open to all forms of suggestions and he can quite easily reflect and express the thoughts of anyone present. Moreover, in this case as well as in the previous one, it is not necessarily a question of a thought that is discernibly conscious at that precise moment, and in any event such a clear thought will hardly be formed unless someone has the definite intention of influencing the responses.

What is manifested usually derives rather from that complex region that psychologists call the 'subconscious'. The term 'subconscious' is sometimes abused because it is convenient to appeal to what is obscure and poorly defined, but even so the 'subconscious' corresponds to something real. There is a little of everything in it, however, and psychologists, limited by the means at their disposal, would be hard put if they had to bring it into some kind of order. First of all, there is what can be called 'latent memory': nothing is ever absolutely forgotten, as is proven by abnormal cases of 'reviviscence' which are often attested. It suffices therefore that something had been known to one of those in attendance even if it was thought to have been forgotten completely; and there is no need to search elsewhere when such a 'forgotten memory' is expressed in a spiritist 'communication'. There are also all manner of 'previsions' and

'presentiments' that occur even in normal circumstances and may become clearly conscious with certain persons; many of the spiritists' predictions that prove true must certainly be related to these premonitions—without forgetting that many other premonitions, probably the greater number, do not come to pass and represent nothing more than vague thoughts like those taking form in any reverie.[12] But we will go further: a 'communication' announcing facts really unknown to all those in attendance may nevertheless derive from the subconscious of one of them; for in this respect, too, one is ordinarily far from knowing all the possibilities of the human being. Each one of us can, by this obscure part of ourselves, be in harmony with beings and things we have never known in the usual sense of this word, and innumerable ramifications may be established to which it is impossible to assign definite limits. We are very far here from the conceptions of classical psychology, and it may all seem very strange, especially that the 'communications' may be influenced by the thoughts of absent persons. Nevertheless, we do not hesitate to assert that there is nothing impossible in all this. When the occasion arises, we will return to the question of the 'subconscious'; for the moment, we speak of it only to show the spiritists' imprudence in citing facts of the kind just mentioned as certain proofs of their theory.

These last considerations enable us to understand the theory of the 'collective being', at least as to the element of truth it contains. This theory, let us hasten to add, has been admitted by some of the more independent spiritists, who do not believe it indispensable to introduce 'spirits' in every case without exception. Such, for example, are Eugène Nus, the first to have used the expression 'collective being',[13] and Flammarion. According to this theory, the 'collective being' is formed by a kind of combination of the 'perispirits' or 'fluids' of the medium and of those in attendance, and with each séance it is strengthened provided those in attendance remained the same.

12. There are also predictions which are not realized because they have acted in the manner of suggestions; we shall return to this when we speak particularly of the dangers of spiritism.

13. *Les Grandes Mystères.*

Occultists seized this conception with so much the more eagerness because they thought they could align it with the ideas of Éliphas Lévi on *eggrégores*[14] or 'collective entities'. It must be noted, however, in order not to push the assimilation too far, that with Éliphas Lévi it was generally a question of what can be called the 'soul' of some collectivity, a nation for example. The great error of the occultists in cases like this is to take literally certain 'manners of speaking' and to believe that it is really a question of a being comparable to a living creature, which they naturally situate on the 'astral plane'. To return to the 'collective being' of the spiritist séances, we will simply say that, leaving aside all 'fluids', here should be seen only the actions and reactions of the various 'subconsciousnesses' present, which we have just discussed—the effect, that is, of the relationships established between them in a more or less durable manner and which are amplified in the measure that the group becomes more strongly constituted. Moreover, there are cases where the 'subconscious' alone, whether individual or collective, suffices to explain everything without there being the least exteriorization of force on the part of the medium or the bystanders. It is thus for 'incarnating mediums', and even for 'writing mediums'; these states, we repeat, are rigorously identical to somnambulist states (at least when there is no question of a real 'possession', but this latter does not happen so generally). In this connection we will add that the medium's hypnotized subject and a natural somnambulist resemble one another closely. There is an ensemble of psycho-physiological conditions common to both, and their manner of behavior is often the same. We will cite here what Papus says of the relationship between hypnotism and spiritism:

> A rigorous series of observations led to the conclusion that spiritism and hypnotism were not different fields of study, but rather different degrees of the same order of phenomena. The *medium*

14. This is how Éliphas Lévi spelled the word, which he took from the *Book of Enoch* and for which he gives an absurd Latin etymology. The correct spelling would be *egregores*. The ordinary meaning in Greek is 'watchers', but it is very difficult to know precisely what this word refers to in the text, which lends itself to all manner of fantastic interpretations.

> showed numerous points in common with the *hypnotic* subject, points that so far as I know have not been sufficiently emphasized heretofore. But spiritism leads to experimental results that are much more complete than those of hypnotism. The medium is certainly a subject, but a subject who pushes the phenomena beyond the boundaries presently known in hypnotism.[15]

On this point, at least, we are in full agreement with the occultists, although with a few reservations: on the one hand, it is certain that hypnotism can be taken much further than as studied by certain researchers until now, but we see no advantage in extending this designation to include all psychic phenomena without distinction. On the other hand, and as we said above, every phenomenon that is linked to hypnotism thereby escapes spiritism; moreover, the experimental results obtained by spiritist practices do not constitute spiritism itself. Spiritism is defined by theories, not by facts; and it is in this sense that we say that spiritism is only error and illusion.

There are still certain categories of phenomena which we have not discussed but which are among those obviously presuming an exteriorization. These are the phenomena known as 'transpositions' or 'materializations'. Transpositions are, in brief, displacements of objects, but with the complication that these objects may come from very distant places; and it often seems that they must pass through material obstacles. If in one way or another the medium emits prolongations of himself in order to act upon objects, great distance counts for nothing in the matter, implying only more highly developed faculties. And if the intervention of 'spirits' or other extra-terrestrial entities is not always necessary, this does not mean that such entities are never involved. The difficulty lies in the real or apparent passage through matter; to explain this, some suppose that there is 'dematerialization' followed by 'materialization' of the object produced. Others construct more or less intricate theories in which a 'fourth dimension' of space plays a leading role. We will

15. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p 874. There follows a comparison between the medium and the hypnotized subject, which it is unnecessary to reproduce here, as we do not intend to enter into the details of phenomena.

not discuss these diverse hypotheses, cautioning only that it is well to be wary of the fantasies that 'hypergeometry' has inspired in neo-spiritualists of various schools. In cases of the transport of an object it seems preferable to simply envisage 'changes in state', which we will not specify further. And we will add that the impenetrability of matter is only a very relative thing, notwithstanding the beliefs of modern physicists. In any case, it suffices to note that here, too, the supposed action of 'spirits' resolves nothing; once the role of the medium is admitted, it is only logical to seek to explain such facts by properties of the living being. Moreover, for the spiritists the death of the human being entails the loss of certain properties rather than the acquisition of new ones. Finally and apart from any particular theory, the living being is obviously more favorably placed to act on physical matter than is a being whose constitution comprises no element of this matter.

As to 'materializations', these are perhaps the rarest of phenomena but also those the spiritists believe most conclusive. How can the presence of a 'spirit' be doubted when it appears in a perfectly empirical manner, when it is enclosed in a form that can be seen, touched, and even photographed (which excludes the hypothesis of hallucination)? Nevertheless, the spiritists themselves recognize that the medium has a role in all this: a kind of substance, at first shapeless and nebulous, seems to separate from the medium's body, and then gradually condense. Everyone admits this, except those who contest the very reality of the phenomenon; but the spiritists add that a 'spirit' then comes and shapes this substance ('ectoplasm' as some psychists call it), gives it its form, and animates it temporarily as a real body. Unfortunately, there are 'materializations' of imaginary persons, just as there are 'communications' signed by Roman heroes. Éliphas Lévi avows that Dunglas Home has evoked phantoms of supposed relatives who have never existed.[16] Cases have been noted in which the 'materialized' forms quite simply copied portraits or fantastic figures borrowed from pictures or designs seen by the medium. Papus tells how

16. *La Clef des Grands Mystères.*

> at the Congress of Spiritists in 1889 one Donald MacNab showed us a photographic negative of a young girl whom he and six of his friends had been able to touch and whom he had been able to photograph. The lethargic medium was seen at one side of the apparition. Now this materialized apparition was only the *material* reproduction of an old drawing dating back several centuries, which had greatly impressed the medium in his waking state.[17]

On the other hand, if the evoked person is recognized by one of those in attendance it obviously proves that this onlooker had an image of the evoked in his memory, and the observed resemblance could very well derive from this memory. Contrariwise, if no one recognizes the so-called 'disincarnated' one who is presented, the identity cannot be verified and the spiritist argument again collapses. For the rest, Flammarion himself had to acknowledge that the identity of the 'spirits' had never been demonstrated, that even the most remarkable cases leave room for doubt. And how can it be otherwise? Even for a living man it is theoretically, if not practically, almost impossible to provide truly rigorous and irrefutable proofs of his identity. It is necessary therefore to hold to the 'ideoplastic' theory according to which not only the substratum of the 'materialization' derives from the medium, but even its form is due to an idea, or more precisely to a mental image (which may be only subconscious) either from the medium also or from someone else present. All facts of this kind can be explained by this theory, and some cannot be explained otherwise. Let us note in passing that, admitting this theory, it follows that it is not necessarily a case of fraud when 'materializations' appear without relief like the drawings which are their models. This of course does not mean that there are not in fact very frequent frauds, but only that cases such as the latter must be closely examined instead of being prejudged. Moreover, we know that there are more or less complete 'materializations'. Sometimes there are forms which can be touched but remain invisible; there are also apparitions that are incomplete,

17. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p881.

these being most often forms of hands. These apparitions of isolated hands deserve further attention. Attempts have been made to explain them by saying that

> since an object is ordinarily seized by the hand, the desire to take hold of an object must necessarily awaken the idea of hand and consequently the mental representation of a hand.[18]

Though accepting this explanation in principle, one may consider that it is not altogether adequate, for similar manifestations have been observed in the realm of sorcery, as we have already mentioned concerning the events of Cideville. The 'ideoplastic' theory does not in fact exclude all outside intervention, as might be believed by those inclined to systematize; it only restricts the number of cases in which such an appeal is made. Notably, it does not exclude the action of living men who nevertheless are not physically present (sorcerers operate in this way), nor that of various forces to which we will return below.

Some say that what is exteriorized is the 'double' of the medium; this expression is improper, at least in the sense that the alleged 'double' can take on an appearance quite different from that of the medium himself. For occultists this 'double' is obviously identical with the 'astral body'. There are those who consciously and intentionally try to effect this 'doubling' or 'astral projection', that is, to realize actively what the medium realizes passively, even while they acknowledge that such experiments are extremely dangerous. When the results are not purely illusory and due to simple autosuggestion, they are in any case interpreted incorrectly. We have already said that the 'astral body' is no more admissible than 'fluids'; these are only very grotesque representations that consist in imagining material states which hardly differ from ordinary matter except in the supposition that they have a lesser density. When we speak of a 'subtle state' we mean something entirely different; it is not a body of rarefied matter, not an 'aerosome' according to the term used by some occultists. The 'subtle state' is rather something that is truly

18. 'Étude expérimentale de quelques phénomènes de force psychique', by Donald MacNab in *Le Lotus*, March 1889, p729.

'incorporeal'; we do not know whether it should be called material or immaterial, and it is of little importance, for these words have only a very relative value for one who places himself outside the conventional framework of modern philosophy. Moreover, these preoccupations are entirely foreign to Eastern doctrines, from which perspective alone the matters in question can be properly studied. We wish to make clear that what we are presently alluding to is essentially a state of the living man, for at death the being is changed quite otherwise than by the simple loss of his body, contrary to what the spiritists and even occultists hold. Also, what can be manifested after death can only be regarded as a sort of vestige of the subtle state of the living being; it is no more this state itself than the corpse is the animated organism. During life, the body is the expression of a certain state of the being, but this being has equally and at the same time incorporeal states, among which the one under discussion is nearest the corporeal state. This subtle state discloses itself to an observer as a force or an ensemble of forces rather than as a body, and the corporeal appearance of the 'manifestations' is only an exceptional addition to its ordinary properties. All this has been singularly distorted by occultists, who correctly say that the 'astral plane' is the 'world of forces', but that this in no way prevents bodies being there. Again, it should be said that 'subtle forces' are very different, both in their nature and in their actions, from the forces studied by ordinary physics.

As a consequence of these considerations, it is odd to note that even those who claim it is possible to evoke the dead (we mean the real being of the dead) should believe it equally possible, and even easier, to evoke a living being; for in their view the dead have not acquired any new elements and whatever the state in which the dead is presumed to be, this state in comparison with that of the living is never so closely similar as when the living are compared among themselves. It follows that the possibilities of communication, if they exist, could not but be diminished and not augmented. Now it is remarkable that spiritists protest violently against this possibility of evoking a living being and seem to find it particularly formidable for their theory. But we who deny any basis for the spiritist theory recognize on the contrary the possibility of evoking a living being,

and we will try and show our reasons a little more clearly. The corpse does not have any properties other than those of the animated organism, of which it retains only certain ones. Likewise, the *ob* of the Hebrews or the *preta* of the Hindus cannot have properties that are new in respect to the state of which it is only a vestige. If therefore this element can be evoked, then the living can also be evoked when in the corresponding state. The *ob* (we use this term for convenience) is not an 'astral corpse'; it is only the occultists who, mixing analogy with identity, have made of it the 'shell' of we have spoken. We repeat that occultists have only collected bits of knowledge which they do not understand. Let it be noted that all traditions agree in recognizing the reality of magical evocation of the *ob*, whatever name they may give it. In particular, the Hebrew Bible reports the case of the evocation of the prophet Samuel,[19] and if this were not a reality the prohibitions of the practice would be meaningless and insignificant. But let us return to the matter at hand. If a living person can be evoked, there is the difference, as compared with the evocation of the dead, that since the composition of the living person is not dissolved, the evocation will necessarily affect his real being. In this regard, therefore, it can have far graver consequences than in the case of the *ob*—which is not to say that there are no serious consequences there as well, but only that they are of a different order. On the other hand, the possibility of evocation should be especially realizable when a man is asleep precisely because he is then in a state corresponding to that which can be evoked, at least when he is in really deep sleep, where nothing can reach him and no exterior influence can be brought to bear. This possibility refers only to what can be called the dream state, between waking and deep sleep; and it is also here that the true explanation of the phenomena of dreaming should be sought, an explanation that is impossible both for psychologists and physiologists. It is hardly necessary to say that we do not counsel anyone to attempt the evocation of a living person, and especially that anyone should voluntarily submit to such an experiment. It would be extremely dangerous to provide the least indication publicly that

19. 1 Sam. 28.

might assist someone to obtain such a result; but what is most unfortunate is that one may happen to obtain the result without having sought it, this being one of the disadvantages of the popularization of the actual practices of the spiritists. We do not wish to exaggerate the importance of this danger, but it is already too much that it exists at all, no matter how exceptional it may be. Here is what a psychist resolutely opposed to the spiritist hypothesis, the engineer Donald MacNab, has to say on this subject:

> It may happen that in a séance the physical identity of a distant person in psychic rapport with the medium is materialized. If one then acts clumsily, this person may be killed. Many cases of sudden death can be traced to this cause.[20]

Elsewhere the same author considers other possibilities of the same kind beyond evocation properly so called:

> A person some distance away may be psychically present at a séance in such a way as to account very well for the fact that the phantom of that person or any other image in his unconscious, including deceased persons he has known, can be observed. The person in question is generally unaware of the manifestation, but does experience a kind of absence or abstraction. This is less rare than is thought.[21]

Let 'unconscious' simply be replaced by 'subconscious' and we will have almost exactly what was said above regarding the obscure ramifications of the human being, which provide an explanation of so many things in spiritist 'communications'. Before going further we will say that the 'materializing medium' is always plunged into this special sleep that the Anglo-Saxons call *trance*, because his vitality as well as his consciousness is then concentrated in the 'subtle state'. As a matter of fact, this *trance* is more like an apparent death than ordinary sleep because in it there is a more or less complete dissociation between the 'subtle' and the corporeal states. This is why in all

20. In the article already cited from *Le Lotus*, March 1889. The last sentence is even underlined in the text.

21. Ibid., p742.

'materialization' experiments the medium is in constant danger of death, no less than is the occultist who attempts 'doubling'. To avoid this danger it is necessary to have recourse to special means unavailable to either the spiritist medium or the occultist. In spite of all their claims, the 'practical' occultists, just like the spiritists, are naive empiricists who do not know what they are doing.

The 'subtle state' that we have mentioned, to which are related not only the general 'materializations', but also all the other manifestations that suppose an 'exteriorization' in any degree whatsoever, carries the name *taijasa* in Hindu doctrine because Hinduism regards the corresponding principle as being of the nature of the igneous element (*tejas*), which is both heat and light. This could be understood better through an account of the constitution of the human being as envisaged in Hindu doctrine, but we cannot undertake it here since it would require a special study which we intend to undertake on some other occasion.[22] For the moment we must limit ourselves to noting very summarily some of the possibilities of the 'subtle state', possibilities that go far beyond all the phenomena of spiritism and to which these latter cannot even be compared. Consider for example the following: the possibility of transferring into that state the integral individual consciousness and not merely a portion of the 'subconsciousness', as happens in ordinary sleep and in hypnotic and mediumistic states; the possibility of 'localizing' this state at any place, which is 'exteriorization' properly speaking, and of condensing by this means and in the said place a bodily appearance analogous to the 'materializations' of the spiritists but without the intervention of any medium; the possibility of giving to this appearance either the form of the body (where it would truly merit the name 'double'), or a form corresponding to some mental image; and finally, the possibility of 'transposing' into that state (if one can use such an expression) the constitutive elements of the body itself, which will doubtless seem even more extraordinary than all the rest. It will be noted that some of this can help explain phenomena of 'bilocation', which are among those to which we alluded

22. The author did later provide precisely such a study in his *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*. ED.

when we said that there are phenomena which on the surface seem similar in both saints and sorcerers. Explanations are also to be found here of those stories, far too widespread to be without foundation, of sorcerers who go about in the forms of animals; and also why blows to these animal forms have repercussions as real wounds on the body of the sorcerer, as also when the sorcerer's phantom is seen in its natural form (though it may not be seen by all present). On this last point as on many others the Cideville case is particularly striking and instructive. On the other hand, it is to rudimentary and incomplete realizations of the last named possibility that phenomena of 'levitation' should be linked, phenomena of which we have not spoken heretofore (and for which the same observation as for 'bilocation' must be repeated). This is also true for changes of weight reported by mediums (changes that have given certain psychists the absurd illusion of 'weighing the soul'); also changes of state, or at least of modalities, which are produced in 'transpositions'. There are even cases that can be regarded as incomplete 'bilocations'; such are the phenomena of 'telepathy', that is, apparitions of human beings at a distance and produced either during their lives or at the moment of death, apparitions which can present extremely variable degrees of consistency. The possibilities in question, being beyond the domain of ordinary psychism, *a fortiori* permit explanations of many of the phenomena that psychism studies; but as we shall see, these phenomena represent only attenuated cases reduced to their most mediocre proportions. We speak only of possibilities and agree that there are things on which it is difficult to insist, especially considering the tenor of the modern mentality. For example, who could be made to believe that a human being, under certain conditions, could quit his earthly existence without leaving behind a corpse? Nevertheless, we will call the Bible to witness again: Enoch 'was seen no more, because God took him';[23] Moses was buried 'in the land of Moab . . . but no one knows his grave to this day';[24] Elijah mounted up to Heaven 'in a chariot of fire,'[25] which reminds us

23. Gen. 5:24.
24. Deut. 34:6.
25. 2 Kings 2:2.

of the 'fiery vehicle' of the Hindu tradition. If these examples imply the intervention of a transcendent cause, it is nonetheless true that this very intervention presupposes certain possibilities in the human being. Whatever the case, we point out these things only as an occasion for reflection for those capable of it, and to enable them to conceive something of the possibilities of the human being, possibilities so completely unsuspected by most of our contemporaries. For these latter, too, we add that everything related to the 'subtle state' closely touches the very nature of life, which latter the ancients such as Aristotle, in accordance with the Easterners, assimilated to heat itself, the specific property of the element *tejas*.[26] Further, this element is as it were polarized into heat and light, whence it comes that the 'subtle state' is linked to the corporeal state in two complementary ways: by the nervous system as to the luminous quality, and by the blood as to the caloric quality. In this we have the principles of a whole 'psycho-physiology' which has no connection with that of modern Westerners and of which these latter lack the least notion. And here we must again recall the role of the blood in the production of certain phenomena, its use in various magical and even religious rites, as well as the prohibition of its use as food in traditional law, such as that of the Hebrews. But all this could take us too far afield; moreover, these are not things that can be spoken of without reserve. Finally, the 'subtle state' must not be conceived only in connection with living individuals; as with every other state, it has its correspondences in the cosmic order. It is to this that the mysteries of the 'World Egg', an ancient symbol common to the Druids and the Brahmins, refer.

It seems that we are quite far from the phenomena of spiritism; this is true, but with our last remarks we are brought back to it, and can now complete the explanation that we began, for something is still lacking. In each of its states, the living being is in touch with the corresponding cosmic milieu. This is obvious for the corporeal

26. It is not a question of a 'vital principle' in the sense of certain modern theories, which are scarcely less distorted than the theory of the 'astral body'; we do not know in what measure the 'plastic mediator' of Cudworth can escape the same criticism.

state, but for other states the analogy must also be pointed out here as in all things. True analogy correctly applied, obviously cannot be held responsible for all the abuses of false analogy that are constantly found among occultists. Under the name of the 'astral plane' they have denatured and caricatured the cosmic environment that corresponds to the 'subtle state'. This environment is incorporeal, and the only image a physicist might make of it is as a 'field of forces', and then only with the reservation that these forces are entirely different from all those that he ordinarily manipulates. Here we have something that can explain the alien actions that in certain cases are added to the actions of living beings, uniting with them for the production of phenomena. And here, too, what is most to be feared in formulating theories is the arbitrary limitation of possibilities which are properly indefinite (note that we do not say infinite). The forces that can come into play are diverse and multiple. As long as one is speaking in generalities it matters little whether they are regarded as coming from special beings, or simply as forces more or less in the sense in which the physicist understands the word, for both the one and the other may be true according to circumstances. These forces include those which are by their nature closer to the corporeal world and to physical forces and which consequently will be more easily manifested when they come into contact with the sensible domain by the intermediary of a living organism, that of a medium, for example, or by any other means. Now these forces are precisely the most inferior of all and therefore those whose effects can be the most baneful, and for this reason they should be most carefully avoided. In the cosmic order, they correspond to the lowest regions of the 'subconscious' of the human being; all the forces generically denominated by Far-Eastern tradition as 'wandering influences' must be grouped here. The management of these forces constitutes the most important part of magic; and their manifestation—sometimes spontaneous—gives rise to all kinds of phenomena, of which 'haunting' is the most commonly known. These forces are, in sum, all the non-individualized energies, of which there are naturally many different kinds. Some of them can be truly 'demoniacal' or 'satanic', and it is these notably that are used in sorcery. Furthermore, spiritist practices can

often attract them, although involuntarily; the medium is a being whose unfortunate constitution gives him a kind of affinity for all that is least commendable in this world and even in inferior worlds. We must also include in this category of 'wandering influences' all those elements coming from the deceased that may occasion sensible manifestations, for it is a question of elements that are no longer individualized. Such is the *ob* itself, and such, all the more, are all the psychic elements of lesser importance which are 'the product of the disintegration of the unconscious (or better, "subconscious") of a dead person.'[27] Let us add that in the case of a violent death the *ob* retains for a time a special degree of cohesion and quasi-vitality, and this accounts for a good number of phenomena. We give only a few examples, and repeat that there is no need to show a necessary source for these influences. Whatever their provenance, they can be captured by complying with certain laws; but ordinary researchers who know absolutely nothing of these laws should not be surprised or disappointed if they cannot make the 'psychic forces' obey them. Indeed, these forces sometimes seem to delight in thwarting the most ingenious arrangements of the experimental method. It is not because this force (which moreover is not *unitary*) is more 'capricious' than another, but because one must know how to direct it; unfortunately, it has other misdeeds to its credit than the tricks it plays on researchers. The magician, who knows the laws of the 'wandering influences', is able to fix them by several procedures, for example, by taking as supports certain substances or certain objects which act as 'condensers'. It goes without saying that there is only a purely outward resemblance between operations of this kind and the action of 'spiritual influences' discussed previously. Conversely, the magician can also dissolve the 'conglomerates' of subtle force, whether these have been formed intentionally by him or by others, or spontaneously; in this regard, the power of points has been known from all time. These two inverse actions are analogous to what alchemy calls 'coagulation' and 'solution'—analogous, but not identical, for the forces put into operation by alchemy and by magic are not of exactly the same order. They constitute the 'summons'

27. Article of Donald MacNab already cited: *Le Lotus*, March 1889, p742.

and the 'dismissal' by which every operation of Western 'ceremonial magic' opens and closes. But these operations are eminently symbolic, and the worst absurdities result when the 'personification' of these forces is understood in a literal sense, though this is what the occultists do. The truth beneath this symbolism is this: the forces in question can be grouped in different classes, and the classification will depend on the point of view; in the perspective of Western magic these forces are distributed in four 'elementary kingdoms' according to their affinities, and no other origin or real significance for the modern theory of 'elementals' should be sought.[28] On the other hand, in the interval between the two inverse phases, the two extremes of his operation, the magician can lend to the forces he has captured a kind of consciousness, the reflection or prolongation of his own; and this synthesizes them as a temporary individual. It is this artificial individualization that gives the illusion of living beings to empiricists who apply rules they do not understand. The magician knows what he is doing, and if he questions these pseudo-individualities he has raised up at the expense of his own vitality, he can see in this artificial development only a means of rendering visible what his own subconscious already contains in a latent state. The same theory is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to all divinatory procedures whatsoever. The explanation of spiritist 'communications' must be sought here, when simple exteriorizations of the living do not entirely suffice, with the difference that the 'wandering influences' not directed by any will, express themselves in a most incoherent and disordered manner. There is also another difference in the procedures used, for prior to spiritism the use of the human being as a condensor was practiced only by sorcerers of the lowest class; and there is even a third difference, for the spiritists are more ignorant than the least of sorcerers, none of whom have ever pushed ignorance so far as mistaking 'wandering influences' for the 'spirits of the dead'. Before leaving this subject we must add that beyond the mode of action of which we have just spoken and which is the only one known to ordinary magicians, at least in the West,

28. Magic also uses classifications based on astrology, but we have no need to be concerned with this in the present context.

there is another that is completely different, whose principle consists in condensing these influences in oneself in a way that permits one to make use of them at will and to have at one's disposal the permanent possibility of producing certain phenomena. The phenomena of fakirs must be linked to this mode of action; but it must not be forgotten that these fakirs are still only relatively ignorant, and that those who best know the laws of this order of things are also those most completely disinterested in their application.

We do not claim that the preceding discussion, abbreviated as it is, constitutes a complete explanation of the phenomena of spiritism; nevertheless, it contains all that is necessary for this explanation, of which we have tried to show at least the possibility before moving on to the proofs of the inanity of spiritist theories. In this chapter we have had to distill considerations which would require several volumes to explain. And again, we emphasize that we would not have done even this if present circumstances had not proven it necessary to oppose certain truths to the mounting flood of 'neo-spiritualist' deviations. Indeed, these are not things on which we wish to focus our attention, and we are far from experiencing the attraction of the 'intermediary world' to which they refer, the attraction felt by lovers of 'phenomena'. In this area we would not want to go beyond general and synthetic considerations, which alone can be set forth without disadvantage. We believe these explanations, such as they are, go much further than anything to be found elsewhere on the same subject; but we must expressly state that they would be of no use to those who might want to experiment or give themselves up to any kind of practices—things which, far from being encouraged in any way, can never be counseled against sufficiently.

PART 2

EXAMINATION OF SPIRITIST THEORIES

1

THE VARIETY OF SPIRITIST SCHOOLS

BEFORE EXAMINING the spiritist theories, it must be noted that although these theories vary widely according to the school involved they all hold in common the hypothesis of communication with and manifestations of the dead by sensible means. Apart from this, divergences may and in fact do exist, even on points as important as reincarnation, which is admitted by some schools and rejected by others. The fact of these divergences itself constitutes grounds for serious doubts as to the value of the so-called spiritist revelations. In fact, what gives spiritism its special character is that what it offers as its doctrine is based entirely upon the teaching of the 'spirits'. This is a counterfeit of 'revelation' as understood in the religious sense, which is a point worth underlining because the spiritists do not hesitate to claim that what is involved is of the same order as the manifestations that accompanied the beginnings of the religions, the founders of which they categorize as men who were very powerful mediums, seers, and wonder-workers combined. They diminish miracles to the measure of the phenomena produced in their séances, prophecies to the 'messages' they receive,[1] and the Gospel healings to the exploits of their 'healing mediums'.[2] It seems

1. In a book entitled *Spirite et Chrétien*, Alexandre Bellemare went so far as to write: 'We reduce the prophets of the old law to the level of mediums; we lower what has been unduly raised up; we rectify a denatured meaning. Further, if we had to choose, we clearly would give the preference to what current mediums are writing over what the mediums of the Old Testament wrote.'

2. See Léon Denis, *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, pp89–91; and *Dans l'Invisible*, pp423–439.

that these people want above all to 'naturalize the supernatural'. We even have the example of a pseudo-religion, Antoinism, a cult founded in Belgium by a 'healer' who had previously been the head of a spiritist group and whose teachings, piously collected by his disciples, scarcely included anything more than a kind of Protestant moralism expressed in an almost incomprehensible jargon. The same can be said almost verbatim of certain American sects such as 'Christian Science' which, if not spiritist, are at least 'neo-spiritualist'. And now that the occasion arises, we must note that the spiritists are fond of interpreting the Gospels in their own way, following the example of Protestantism, the influence of which cannot be denied in all these movements. Thus they even believe they find in the Gospels arguments in favor of reincarnation. If some spiritists willingly call themselves Christians, they are such only in the manner of liberal Protestants, for this label does not imply that they believe in the divinity of Christ who, for them, is only a 'superior spirit'. Such is the attitude of the French spiritists of the school of Allan Kardec (there is even a splinter group calling themselves 'Kardecist Christians'), and also some who adhere to the 'neo-Christianity' imagined by the vaudeville writer Albin Valabrègue, himself Jewish. We know of occultists who, rather than call themselves Christian like everybody else, prefer to be known by the term 'Christic', indicating thereby that they do not belong to any organized Church. The spiritists should also settle on some unequivocal word, for they are certainly further removed from real Christianity than are the occultists we have just mentioned.

But let us return to the teachings of the 'spirits' and to their innumerable contradictions. Even if we take these 'spirits' at their word, what interest can there be in considering what they say when their assertions do not agree with one another and if, in spite of their change of condition, they know no more than the living? We know the spiritist response well enough: that there are 'inferior spirits' and 'superior spirits' and that only the latter are worthy of belief; the others, far from being able to 'enlighten' the living, are often in need of 'enlightenment' by the living. And this is not to speak of 'rogue spirits' who provide a host of trivial and even obscene 'communications' and who must simply be chased away. But how is one

to distinguish between the various kinds of 'spirits'? The spiritists believe they are in contact with a 'superior spirit' when they receive a 'communication' of a somewhat 'elevated' character, or because it has a sermon-like character or because it consists of vaguely philosophical divagations. Unfortunately, those without prejudice generally see nothing but a tissue of platitudes; and, as often happens, if this 'communication' is identified with a great man, it makes us think the deceased has in no way 'progressed' since his death, which casts doubt on spiritist evolution. On the other hand, these 'communications' are those which contain the spiritist teachings properly so called; as there are contradictions among these teachings, they cannot all emanate from 'superior spirits', and the grave tone they affect is hardly a sufficient guarantee. But what other criterion do we have? Each group naturally admires its own 'communications', but challenges those received by others, especially when it is a question of groups between which there is some rivalry. In fact, each of these groups generally has its own recognized medium and these mediums display an unbelievable jealousy in regard to their confreres, claiming to monopolize certain 'spirits' and contesting the authenticity of the 'communications' of others. And the entire group follows them in these attitudes. All the circles in which 'universal brotherhood' is preached are more or less in the same situation. When there are contradictions in the teachings, it is quite another story; all that one group attributes to 'superior spirits' is seen by the others as the work of 'inferior spirits', and reciprocally, as in the quarrel between reincarnationists and anti-reincarnationists; each group appeals to the testimony of its 'guides' and 'controls',[3] that is to say to the 'spirits' in whom confidence is placed, and who obviously try to confirm the group in their own 'superiority' and in the 'inferiority' of those who contradict them. In such conditions and when the spiritists are so far from any mutual understanding as to the quality of their 'spirits', how can one have any faith in their faculties of discernment? And even if the provenance of their teachings is not questioned, can these teachings have much more value

3. The first term is that of French spiritists, and the second that of the Anglo-Saxons.

than the opinions of the living, since these opinions, even when wrong, persist after death as it seems, and are not put aside or corrected except with extreme sluggishness? Thus, for example, while the majority of 'communications', especially in France, reflect the 'deism' of the late eighteenth century, there are some that are frankly atheistic; there are even materialistic ones, which is not so paradoxical as it might seem given that materialism is in the air and given the spiritist conceptions of the future life. For the rest, 'communications' of this kind can also find partisans in other settings. Did not Jules Lermina, the 'little old employee' of the *Lantern*, willingly accept characterization as a 'materialistic spiritist'? In the face of such incoherences, it is only prudent on the part of the spiritists to recognize that their doctrine is not absolutely firm, that it is susceptible of 'evolving' like the 'spirits' themselves; and perhaps, with their special mentality, they may see in this a mark of superiority. In fact, they declare that they 'rely on reason and on the progress of science, reserving to themselves the right to modify their beliefs in the measure that progress and experience demonstrate the necessity.'[4] Certainly no one can be more modern and more 'progressive' than this. The spiritists probably think, like Papus, that 'this idea of progressive evolution puts an end to all the more or less profound theological conceptions regarding Heaven and Hell.'[5] These poor people have no suspicion that, in waxing enthusiastic about this idea, they are quite simply dupes of the most naive of all illusions.

In conditions such as these, it is easy to see that spiritism is somewhat anarchic and that it cannot have a well-defined organization. Nevertheless, in several countries very large associations have been formed wherein diverse spiritist groups are united, or at least the largest among them are, though without renouncing their autonomy; it is a mutual accord rather than an actual managed administration. Such are the 'Federations' that exist notably in Belgium and in several South American countries. In France, a 'Spiritist Union' was founded in 1919 with larger claims, for at its head is a 'Direction

4. Dr Gibier, *Le Spiritisme*, p141. Cf. Léon Denis, *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, p282.

5. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p360.

Committee for Spiritism'; but we do not know how much that direction is actually followed, and in any case it is certain that there are always dissidents.[6] There is not perfect accord even within the bosom of the Allan Kardec school; some, like Léon Denis, say they adhere strictly to pure Kardecism, while others, like Gabriel Delanne, want to give the spiritist movement a more 'scientific' aspect. Some spiritists declare that 'spiritism-religion must give way to spiritism-science';[7] but fundamentally, spiritism in whatever form it may be clothed and whatever its 'scientific' pretensions, can never be anything other than a pseudo-religion. Particularly representative in this respect are the questions that were raised and discussed in 1913 at the International Spiritist Congress held in Geneva:

> What role can spiritism claim in the religious evolution of humanity? Is spiritism the universal scientific religion? What relationships currently exist between spiritism and other religions? Can spiritism be considered a cult?

This list did not emanate from the Kardecist school but is borrowed from the journal of a sect called 'Fraternism' which professes some very strange theories and has gained a considerable following, especially among the working class of northern France. We will speak of this group on another occasion as well as of other sects of the same kind which are not among the least dangerous.

In America, links between all these groups consist in large open air gatherings called *camp meetings* held at more or less regular intervals where several days are spent in discussions and exhortations by the leaders of the movement and by 'inspired' mediums, all this contrasting markedly with the European congresses. It is quite natural, moreover, that in its country of origin spiritism has given rise to very many associations of the most varied character. Nowhere else has it posed more openly as a religion than in some of

6. At the Spiritist Congress in Brussels in January 1910 an even more ambitious project was formed, that of a 'Universal Spiritist Federation'; but it seems that nothing came of it, even though an 'International Bureau of Spiritism' was established under the chairmanship of the chevalier Le Clément de Saint-Marcq.

7. *Le Fraterniste*, December 19, 1913.

these associations. In fact, there are spiritists who have not hesitated to form 'churches', and to organize them in ways very similar to those of the innumerable Protestant sects of the country. Such, for example, is the 'Church of True Spiritism' founded under the inspiration of the 'spirit' of the Rev. Samuel Watson, a Methodist pastor who had converted to *modern spiritualism*. Others prefer the form of secret or semi-secret societies, which are held in such high esteem in the United States, and assume pompous designations all the more impressive to the 'profane'. An American can command respect from those who do not know better when he presents himself as a member of the 'Ancient Order of Melchizedek', otherwise known as the 'Fraternity of Jesus';[8] or as a member of some 'Order of Magi' (of which there are several bearing this name). And one would be quite astonished to discover subsequently that it is only a matter of common spiritists. Some of these organizations are not expressly spiritist, but have many spiritists among their members. For the rest, among the many forms of 'neo-spiritism', there are some which are only a more or less refined spiritism. At this point one may ask whether the appearance of occultism and the esoteric pretensions of this or that group are not simply a mask worn by some spiritists who wish to isolate themselves from the mass and be relatively selective. If the spiritists generally repudiate all esoterism, the presence of some of them in properly occultist circles already proves that there can be many accommodations and transitional situations. The conduct of these people does not always rigorously conform to their principles, if indeed they have principles. The kinds of things just mentioned are found especially among the English and American spiritists. We have spoken elsewhere of a so-called Rosicrucian group in England called the 'Order of the Dew and the Light', which was accused by competing organizations of practicing black magic.[9] What is certain is that it did not have any

8. This Order, under whose auspices 'the Association of Camp Meetings of Sion Hill' (Arkansas) functions, is directed by a 'Supreme Temple' which meets annually in the same locality, and which is composed of delegates 'chosen by the Kingdoms of Light'.

9. *Theosophy*, chap. 3.

connection whatsoever with the ancient Rosicrucians from which it claimed to originate, that most of its members were spiritists, and that in reality they practiced spiritism rather than anything else. In a letter published in a Theosophist journal we read that

> their guides are 'elementals' with the names Francisco the Monk, Mr Sheldon, and Abdallah ben Yusuf, this last being an Arab adept; they sacrifice goats; they have sought to form a circle in order to obtain information in a forbidden manner. There are also among them astrologers and unreasoning followers of Hiram Butler.[10]

This last named person had founded an 'Esoteric Fraternity' devoted to the 'study and development of the true inner sense of divine inspiration and the interpretation of all the Scriptures.' The numerous works Butler published contain nothing of serious interest. In the example given it cannot be said that a properly spiritist school is in question; but it may be supposed either that spiritism had infiltrated a pre-existing organization, or that it was only a disguise intended to deceive by using a usurped name. In any case, if it was really only spiritism, it was a spiritism affecting to be something other than it really was. We have cited this case in order to better show all the forms that a movement such as this may take. And in this connection we will recall the influence that spiritism has manifestly exercised on occultism and Theosophy, notwithstanding the apparent antagonism that exists between spiritism and these two later schools, of which the founders and the heads, for the most part having initially been spiritists, always retained something of their earlier ideas.

10. *Lucifer*, June 15, 1889.

2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MILIEU

ALTHOUGH SPIRITIST THEORIES may be drawn from the 'communications' of alleged 'spirits', they are always closely related to ideas current in the milieu in which they are formulated. This strongly supports the thesis we have advanced, namely, that the real source of these 'communications' is to be found in the 'subconscious' of the medium and of the others present. Let us recall that a kind of combination of the 'subconscious' minds of those present may be formed so as to give at least the illusion of a 'collective entity'. We say 'illusion' because only the occultists, with their mania for seeing living beings everywhere and in everything (although they reproach religion for its anthropomorphism!) let themselves be deceived by appearances to the point of believing that a real being is in question. Whatever the case, the formation of this 'collective entity' explains the fact noted by all spiritists that the 'communications' are clearer and more coherent in the measure that the séances are more regular and held with the same participants. The participants also insist on these conditions, although without knowing the reason for them, and they often hesitate to admit new members into already constituted groups, preferring to have newcomers form new groups. Besides, a gathering with too many present does not lend itself to the establishment of solid and durable ties among the members. The influence of those in attendance may be quite far-reaching and may be manifested in other ways than by 'communications', if the Russian spiritist Aksakoff can be believed. According to him, aspects of these 'materializations' are modified each time new members are brought into séances where

these 'materializations' are produced, even while continuing to present themselves under the same identity. For him, this fact is explained by borrowings of the 'materialized spirits' from the 'perispirits' of the living; for us, however, we can see in this the actualization of a kind of 'composite image' to which each one contributes certain traits, a fusion being effected between the productions of the subconscious minds of diverse individuals.

Of course we do not exclude the possibility of action by extraneous influences, but generally these influences, whatever they may be, must be consonant with the tendencies of the groups where they are manifested. In fact, it is necessary that they be attracted by certain affinities; the spiritists, ignoring the laws by which these influences act, are compelled to receive whatever presents itself and are unable to determine these things according to their own will. Moreover, we have noted that the 'wandering influences' cannot properly speaking be regarded as conscious by themselves; it is with the aid of human 'subconsciousnesses' that they form a temporary consciousness, so that from the point of view of intelligent manifestations, the result is exactly the same as if there were only the action of exteriorized forces of the participants. The only exception to note here concerns the reflexive consciousness which can remain immanent in psychic elements that have belonged to human beings but which are in the process of disintegration. But the responses that come from this kind of source generally have a fragmentary and incoherent character, so much so that the spiritists themselves pay them little heed. Nevertheless, it is only this that authentically comes from the dead, while their 'spirit', or their real being, assuredly is not there at all.

Something else must be taken into account, the action of which may be very important: the elements borrowed not from those in immediate attendance but from the general ambience. The existence of tendencies or mental currents of which the strength is predominant for a period and for a given country, is commonly known, at least in a vague way, so that what we wish to convey is easily understood. These currents act more or less on everyone, but their influence is particularly strong on those who may be called 'sensitive', and among mediums in whom this quality is carried to its highest

degree. On the other hand, with normal individuals, it is chiefly in the area of the 'subconscious' that this kind of influence is exercised. It is more clearly asserted when the content of the 'subconscious' appears outwardly, which is precisely what happens in spiritist séances; and many of the improbable banalities displayed in the 'communications' received in spiritist séances must be traced to this origin. In this order of things there may even be material that might seem of greater interest; there are ideas which are popularly said to be 'in the air', and it is known that some scientific discoveries have been made simultaneously by several persons working independently of one another. If such results have never been obtained by the mediums it is because, even if they receive an idea in this manner, they are quite incapable of drawing the proper conclusions. All they can do is express it in a more or less ridiculous, almost incomprehensible form, but one which will be enough to excite the admiration of the ignorant among whom spiritism recruits the great majority of its adherents. This explains 'communications' of a scientific or philosophical allure, which the spiritists present as proving the truth of their doctrine when the medium, being either ignorant or unlettered, seems obviously incapable of having invented such things. We must add further that in many cases these 'communications' are quite simply the reflection of casual reading, perhaps misunderstood, and not necessarily that of the medium. The ideas or mental tendencies of which we speak act somewhat like 'wandering influences', a term so comprehensive as to include in its scope the former as a special class. They are not necessarily incorporated into the 'subconscious' of individuals; they may also remain as more or less inchoate 'fluid' currents (though this is not to say that they are anything like the 'fluid' currents of the occultists), and nevertheless be manifested in spiritist séances. In fact, it is not only the medium but the entire group that places itself in a state of passivity or, if it be preferred, of 'receptivity'; it is this which permits it to attract 'wandering influences', since a group could never capture these influences by exerting a positive action on them as a magician does. This passivity, with all its consequences, is the greatest of all the dangers of spiritism; it is necessary to add to this the disequilibrium and the partial dissociation that these practices provoke in the constituent

elements of the human being, which are not negligible even with those who are not mediums. The fatigue experienced after a séance by those who have attended is evidence of this, and the long-term effects can be most deadly.

There is another point that demands particular attention. There are organizations that are quite unlike spiritist groups in that they try to provoke and maintain certain mental currents consciously and voluntarily. If one considers such an organization on the one hand, and a spiritist group on the other, it is easy to see what can be produced: one of them will emit a current and the other will receive it; thus there is a positive and a negative pole between which a kind of 'psychic telegraphy' is established, especially if the organization envisaged is not only capable of producing the current but also of directing it. An explanation of this sort also applies to the phenomena of 'telepathy', but here the communication is established between two individuals and not between two collectivities, and in addition is most often quite accidental and momentary, not being willed by either party. This relates to what we have said regarding the real origins of spiritism and the role that living men could have played in it without seeming to have had the least part. Such a movement is eminently suited to the propagation of certain ideas, the provenance of which may remain completely unknown even to those who participate. The disadvantage is that the instrument thus created may also be at the mercy of any other kind of influence, even influences opposed to those originally at work. We cannot dwell further on these things nor give a more complete theory of the centers of 'mental broadcasting' to which we have alluded; even though it would be difficult, it may be that we shall do so on some other occasion. We will add only this in order to avert any false interpretation: when an explanation of 'telepathy' is in question, the psychists willingly appeal to something that more or less resembles 'Herzian waves', an analogy that may at least help represent these things in some measure, if it does not aid in understanding them fully. But if one goes beyond the limits within which such an analogy is valid, nothing remains but an image almost as gross as that of 'fluids', notwithstanding its more 'scientific' appearance. In reality, the forces in question are essentially different from those of the physical order.

Let us return to the influence of the milieu considered in its most general aspect. This influence may previously have acted on the spiritists themselves, or be embodied in their séances, which accounts for most of the variations that the spiritist theories undergo. Thus the 'spirits' are polygamists among the Mormons and in other American circles they are 'neo-Malthusians'. It is certain that the attitudes of various splinter groups toward reincarnation is to be explained similarly. In fact, we have seen how in France this idea of reincarnation found an ambiance quite disposed to receive and develop it. If on the contrary Anglo-Saxon spiritists rejected it, this, according to some, is because of their biblical conceptions. Actually, this does not seem entirely sufficient in itself as the causal explanation, for the French spiritists invoke the Gospel in favor of reincarnation, and, especially in Protestant circles, the most fantastic interpretations are given free rein. If English and American 'spirits' have stated that reincarnation is not in accordance with the Bible (where it is not mentioned for the good reason that it is a completely modern idea), it is because this view represents the thinking of those who interrogated them; were the situation reversed, they surely would have expressed quite another opinion and would not have been embarrassed to cite texts in its support, for the reincarnationists in fact do so. And there is something better still: it appears that in America, in particular, reincarnation is rejected because the possibility of rebirth as a negro is horrifying to whites![1] If American 'spirits' have put forward such a motive, it is not only because they are not completely 'disengaged' from their earthly prejudices, but, as the French spiritists contend, because they are only reflecting the mentality of those who receive their 'messages', that is to say the popular mentality of Americans. The importance accorded such considerations shows how far the ridiculous sentimentalism common to all spiritists can be carried. If today there are Anglo-Saxon spiritists who accept reincarnation, this is due to the influence of Theosophist ideas. Spiritism never does anything but follow mental fashions; it can in no case give birth to them, by reason of the passive attitude we have noted. Moreover,

1. Dr Gibier, *Le Spiritisme*, pp138–139.

the most general theories of spiritism are those of modernity itself, such as, for example, the belief in progress and evolution. All the rest comes from more particular currents acting in less extended circles, but especially and most often in those which can be regarded as 'average' in terms of intelligence and education. From this point of view we should note the role played by ideas that are spread by works popularizing science. Many spiritists belong to the class to which these works are directed; and if there are others of a still lower mental level, the same ideas either reach them through others or are simply drawn from the ambience. Ideas of a loftier character are not subject to the same intense diffusion and thus are never reflected in the spiritist 'communications'; but this is a matter for satisfaction because the 'psychic mirror' that is the medium can only deform them, and this not to anyone's advantage, since the spiritists are perfectly incapable of appreciating anything that goes beyond current conceptions.

When a spiritist school has reached the point of putting together some semblance of doctrine, fixing certain main lines of belief, the variations within this school no longer have any bearing except on secondary points; but within these limits they continue to follow the same laws. It may happen that 'communications' then continue to express a mentality reflecting the time when the school was established, because this mentality has remained that of its adherents even though it no longer corresponds entirely with the ambience. This is what happened with Kardecism, which has always retained the traits of the socialist milieux of 1848 in which it arose. It should also be noted that the spirit that animated these milieux has not entirely disappeared, even outside spiritist circles, and that it has survived under various forms in all the varieties 'of 'humanitarianism' that have subsequently developed. Kardecism, however, has remained closer to the old forms while other stages in this development have 'crystallized' in 'neo-spiritualist' movements of more recent date. Besides, democratic tendencies are generally inherent in spiritism and even in a more or less accentuated way in all 'neo-spiritism'. This is so because spiritism, faithfully reflecting the modern mind in this as in so many other things, is and can only be a product of the democratic mentality. As has been said, the 'religion

of democracy is the heresy in which democracy can only end as religion.'[2] As for other 'neo-spiritualist' schools, they are likewise specifically modern creations, influenced directly or indirectly by spiritism itself. But those which admit a pseudo-initiation, however illusory, and thus a certain hierarchy, are less logical than spiritism, for here we have, willy-nilly, something clearly contrary to the democratic spirit. In this respect, but in a slightly different order of ideas, it is worth noting certain contradictory attitudes such as those of contemporary Masonry (especially in France and in the so-called Latin countries) which, even while ferociously maintaining the most democratic claims, nevertheless carefully maintain the ancient hierarchy without sensing any incompatibility. It is precisely this unconsciousness of contradiction which especially merits the attention of those who study the characteristics of the contemporary mentality; but this unconsciousness is manifested nowhere more conclusively than among the spiritists and those who have some affinities for them.

In certain respects the observation of what takes place in spiritist circles can provide very clear indications as to tendencies prevailing at a given time in, for example, the political arena. Thus for a long time the majority of French spiritists remained attached to socialist notions strongly colored by internationalism. Several years before the war,[3] however, there was a change and the general orientation became radical in character with accentuated patriotic tendencies. Only anticlericalism remained unchanged. Today, internationalism has reappeared in various forms; in circles such as these, naturally, notions about the League of Nations arouse the greatest enthusiasm. Moreover, those among the working class who have been won over to spiritism have returned to socialism, but socialism in a new mode quite different from that of 1848 which was after all a socialism of the 'petty bourgeoisie'. Finally, we know that a great deal of spiritism exists in communist circles[4] and we are convinced that

2. *Les Lettres*, December 1921, pp 913–914.

3. The author refers of course to World War I. Ed.

4. In a conversation with a Parisian school mistress (who had at one time been in trouble with the law), Lenin himself declared that he was a spiritist; it is difficult to know whether this profession of faith was really sincere, or if this was not simply

there all the 'spirits' must preach Bolshevism, for unless they do they cannot gain the least credibility.

In considering these 'communications', we have in view only those that involve no fraud, the others obviously having no interest. Certainly, most spiritists are in good faith and only the professional mediums are *a priori* suspect, even when they provide patent proofs of their faculties. Moreover, the real tendencies of spiritist circles are more fully revealed in small private groups than in the séances of more renowned mediums. Further, one must know how to distinguish between general tendencies and those proper to such and such a group. The last named tendencies reveal themselves especially in the choice of names by which the 'spirits' present themselves, especially the 'guides' recognized by the group. These of course are usually the names of illustrious personages, which would lead one to believe that these latter manifest themselves much more willingly than others, that they have acquired a kind of ubiquity (an analogous comment will have to be made regarding reincarnation), and that the intellectual qualities they possessed when in this life have been grievously diminished. In a group wherein religiosity was the dominant note, the 'guides' were Bossuet[5] and Pius IX; in others priding themselves on literature, the 'guides' are great writers, among whom Victor Hugo is most often encountered, no doubt because he was himself a spiritist. There is something curious about this, however: with Hugo, everything, no matter what, was expressed in perfectly correct verse, which agrees with our explanation. We say 'no matter what' because he sometimes received 'communications' from fantastic entities, such as 'the shadow from the tomb' (one need only refer to his works to find the origin of these notions).[6] But among the general run of spiritists, Hugo seems to

an act of politeness toward a fervent spiritist. In any case, spiritism was for a long time rampant in Russia in all classes of society.

5. Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), tutor to the Dauphin and then Bishop of Meaux, was one of the great pulpit orators of all time. He was instrumental in the condemnation of Madame Guyon and bitterly opposed Fénelon. ED.

6. In this connection, we note that the 'Spirit of Truth' (a name taken from the Gospel) is among the signatories of the manifesto serving as preamble to the *Livre des Esprits* (the preface of the *Évangile selon le Spiritisme* carries this same signature); and also that Victor Hennequin, one of the first French spiritists (who died

have forgotten even the most elementary rules of prosody—when, that is, those who question him are themselves ignorant of them. But there are less hapless cases: a former officer (of whom there are many among the spiritists) who gained renown by his experiments in 'photographing thought'—the results of which are questionable to say the least—is firmly convinced that his daughter is inspired by Victor Hugo. This young woman in fact has an uncommon facility in versification and has even acquired a certain notoriety; still, this proves absolutely nothing, unless one agrees with the spiritists that natural predispositions are due to influences by 'spirits', and that all who show certain talents from their youth are mediums without knowing it. Other spiritists, on the contrary, see in these same phenomena only an argument in favor of reincarnation. But let us return to the signatories of these 'communications'; we cite the views of a psychist who is not suspected of partiality, Dr L. Moutin:

> A man of science will not be satisfied and will not accept these idiotic communications of Alexander the Great, Caesar, Christ, the Holy Virgin, St Vincent de Paul, Napoleon I, Victor Hugo, etc., which is precisely what a throng of pseudo-mediums maintain. The abuse of great names is detestable, for it engenders scepticism. We have often demonstrated to *these mediums* that they are deceived by asking the so-called spirits who are present, questions they should know but of which the mediums are ignorant. Thus, for example, Napoleon I no longer remembers Waterloo; St Vincent de Paul does not know a word of Latin; Dante does not understand Italian; Larmartine and Alfred de Musset are incapable of two lines of verse. Does catching *these spirits* red-handed in their ignorance and pointing the finger of truth at *these mediums* shake their belief? No, for the *spirit-guide* maintains that we are in bad faith and that we seek to impede a *great mission*, a *mission that has fallen to the lot of this medium.*

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insane), was inspired by the 'soul of the earth', who persuaded him that he had been raised to the rank of 'under-God' of the planet (see Eugene Nus, *Choses de l'autre monde*, p139). How do spiritists, who attribute everything to the 'disincarnate', explain these extravagances?

> We have known many of these *great missionaries* who have ended their mission in mental institutions![7]

Papus, for his part, had this to say:

> When St John, the Virgin Mary, or Jesus Christ come with their communications, they seek among those present a Catholic believer, for it is from his brain and nowhere else that the directing idea originates. It is the same, as I have seen, when d'Artagnan presents himself: a fervent follower of Alexandre Dumas is involved.

We only have two corrections to make: first, 'brain' must be replaced by 'subconscious' (these 'neo-spiritualists' sometimes speak like pure materialists); second, as believing Catholics are rather rare among spiritist groups, although 'communications' from Christ or the saints are not at all rare, one must speak only of an influence of Catholic ideas subsisting 'subconsciously' even among those who believe themselves completely 'emancipated' from them—a rather important nuance. Papus continues in these words:

> When Victor Hugo writes thirteen-meter verse, or gives culinary advice, when Madame de Giradin declares her posthumous love for an American medium,[8] there are ninety chances out of a hundred that it is an error of interpretation. The origin of the impulsive idea must be sought much closer to hand.[9]

7. *Le Magnétisme humain, l'Hypnotisme et le Spiritualisme moderne*, pp370–371.

8. That is, Henry Lacroix, of whom we will speak further on.

9. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p847; cf. ibid., p341. — Here is another example cited by Dunglas Home, which can assuredly be counted among the most extravagant: 'In the notes of a séance held at Naples, included among the spirits which presented themselves before three persons were Margherita Pusteria, Denys of Syracuse, Cleopatra, Richard the Lion-Heart, Aladdin, Belcadel, Guerrazzi, Manin, and Vico; then Abraham, Melchizedek, Jacob, Moses, David, Sennacherib, Elias (or Elisha), Joachim, Judith, Jael, Samuel, Daniel, Mary Magdalene, St Paul, St Peter, and St John, without counting the others, for the notes give assurance that all the spirits of the Bible came, one after the other, presenting themselves before the Nazarene and preceded by John the Baptist' (*Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritualisme*, pp168–169).

We say flatly that in these cases and in all others without exception there is always an error of interpretation on the part of the spiritists. But in these instances the real origin of the 'communications' can be discovered more easily. All one need do is make a modest inquiry into the reading matter, tastes, and habitual preoccupations of those present. Of course, the 'communications' that are most extraordinary by reason of their content or their supposed provenance are not those that the spiritists welcome with the least respect and eagerness. These people are completely blinded by their preconceived ideas and their credulity seems to have no limits, while their intelligence and their discernment are very restricted; we speak of the greater number, for there are degrees in blindness. The fact of accepting the spiritist theories may give proof of stupidity or simply of ignorance. Those in the first case are incurable and can only be pitied; those in the second category may be somewhat different, and one can try to show them their error, at least if this is not so deeply rooted as to have marked them with an irremediable mental deformity.

3

IMMORTALITY AND SURVIVAL

AMONG OTHER UNJUSTIFIED SPIRITIST CLAIMS is that of furnishing 'scientific proof' or experimental demonstration of the immortality of the soul,[1] an assertion that implies a number of ambiguities which must be cleared up even before discussing the fundamental hypothesis of communication with the dead. First, there can be ambiguities concerning the very word 'immortality', for it does not have the same meaning for everyone. What Westerners call immortality is not what Easterners designate by terms which may nevertheless seem equivalent, and which sometimes are even exactly so from a merely philological point of view. Thus the Sanskrit word *amrita* is translated quite literally by 'immortality', but it is applied exclusively to a state which is beyond all change; for in this context the idea of 'death' is extended to cover any change whatsoever. Westerners, on the contrary, have the habit of using the word 'death' only to designate the end of earthly existence. They hardly conceive of other, analogous changes since for them our world seems to be half the Universe, while for Easterners it represents only an infinitesimal portion thereof. We speak here of modern Westerners, because for them the influence of Cartesian dualism is largely responsible for such a restricted way of looking at the Universe. It is necessary to insist all the more on these things because they are generally ignored; and, moreover, these considerations will greatly facilitate the refutation of spiritist theory. From the perspective of pure

1. A work of Gabriel Delanne bears the title: *L'Ame est immortelle: Démonstration expérimentale.*

metaphysics, which is the point of view of Easterners, there are not really two correlative worlds, this one and the 'other', symmetrical and parallel with each other, so to speak; there is an indefinite series of worlds, graded in hierarchical order, that is to say states of existence (and not places) in which our world is only one constituent element of neither more nor less importance or value than any other. Just like all the others, it is simply at the place which it must occupy in the totality. Consequently, immortality in the meaning we have just indicated cannot be attained 'in the other world' as Westerners believe, but only beyond all worlds, which is to say beyond all conditioned states of existence. Notably, immortality is beyond time and space and beyond all analogous conditions; being absolutely independent of time and any other possible mode of duration, it is identical with eternity itself. This is not to say that immortality as envisaged by Westerners does not have a real significance, but its significance is quite different; in sum, it is only an indefinite prolongation of life in modified and transposed conditions, but which always remains comparable to those of earthly life. The very fact that it is a question of 'life' is sufficient proof; and it is worth noting that this idea of 'life' is one of those from which Westerners free themselves only with the greatest difficulty, even when they do not have the superstitious respect for it which characterizes certain contemporary philosophers. It must be added that they hardly escape the notions of time and space any more easily; but unless one does effect this escape no metaphysics is possible. Immortality in the Western sense is not outside time understood in its ordinary sense, and even according to a less simplistic conception it is not outside an indefinite duration which can properly be called 'perpetuity' but has no relation to eternity, any more than does the indefinite, which proceeds from the finite by way of development to the Infinite. This conception in fact corresponds to a certain order of possibilities, but the Far-Eastern tradition does not confuse it with that of true immortality, according it only the name 'longevity'. Basically, this is only an extension of possibilities of the human order. One can easily perceive the difference when one asks what is immortal in the two cases. In the metaphysical and Eastern sense it is the transcendent personality; in the Western philosophico-theological sense it is

the human individuality. We cannot develop here the essential distinction between personality and individuality, but knowing only too well the state of mind of many people, we expressly state that it would be vain to look for opposition between the two conceptions, for being of totally different orders, they no more exclude than meet one another. In the Universe there is a place for all possibilities on condition that one knows how to put each of them in its proper place. Unfortunately, it is not the same in the systems of the philosophers and it would be very wrong to get entangled in this contingency.

When it is a question of 'proving immortality experimentally' it goes without saying that metaphysical immortality cannot be in question in any way, for by definition this is beyond all possible experience. Moreover the spiritists have not the least idea of metaphysical immortality, so that there is no basis for discussing their claims except from the point of view of immortality understood in its Western sense. But even from this point of view the 'experimental demonstration' of which they speak appears as an impossibility for one who reflects a little on the matter. We will not dwell on the abusive use made of the word 'demonstration'; experience cannot 'demonstrate' anything in the strict sense of the word, for example that which it has in mathematics. But letting this pass we will only note a strange illusion characteristic of the modern mind that consists in introducing science, especially experimental science, into areas where it does not belong, and the belief that the competence of science extends to everything. Moderns, intoxicated with the developments they have achieved in this very particular domain, and having given themselves so exclusively to this domain that they can no longer see anything outside it, have naturally come to misconceive the limits within which experimentation is valid and beyond which it can yield nothing. We speak here of experimentation in its most general sense and with no restrictions; obviously, these limits are still narrower if one takes into consideration only the few modalities accepted and used by ordinary researchers. In the case with which we are presently concerned there is a misconception of the limits of experimentation; we will encounter another and perhaps even more striking or more singular example in connection with so-called

proofs of reincarnation, which will provide the occasion to complete these observations from a slightly different perspective.

Experience deals only with particular and determinate facts that take place at a definite point in space and in an equally defined moment of time; these at least are the phenomena that can be the object of an experimental or so-called 'scientific' verification (and this is what the spiritists also understand). This is commonly recognized, but one is perhaps more easily mistaken as regards the nature and significance of the generalizations that experience can legitimately yield, generalizations that go beyond experience itself. Such generalizations can bear only upon classes or groups of facts. Each of these groups taken by itself is quite as particular and determinate as those facts from which observations were made and from which the results are thus generalized. Hence these groups are indefinite only numerically and as groups, but not as to their constituent elements. In short, it cannot be concluded that what has been asserted in a certain place on the earth happens in the same way in every other place, nor that a phenomenon observed in a very limited period of time can be extended for an indefinite duration. Naturally, we do not have to go outside space and time in all this, nor consider anything but phenomena, that is to say appearances or outward manifestations. One must know how to distinguish between experience and the interpretation of experience; spiritists and psychists report certain phenomena, and we do not intend to debate the descriptions they give of these. It is the interpretation the spiritists offer as to the real cause of these phenomena that is radically false. Let us admit for a moment, nevertheless, that their interpretation may be correct and that what is manifested may really be a 'disincarnated' human being. Would it necessarily follow that this being would be immortal, that is, that his posthumous existence would really be of indefinite duration? It is easy to see that there is here an illegitimate extension of experience, namely, attributing temporal indefinity to a fact observed for a determinate period of time. This alone would suffice to diminish interest in the spiritist hypothesis to a very modest level even if one accepted their premise. The attitude of the spiritists who imagine that their experiences prove immortality is logically no better than that of a man who, because

he had never seen a living being die, might assert that such and such a being would live indefinitely and changelessly simply because he had been so observed during a certain interval. And this, we repeat, is not to prejudge the truth or falsity of spiritism itself, for our comparison, if it is to be entirely just, implicitly assumes the truth of the spiritist hypothesis.

There are nevertheless spiritists who perceive this element of illusion more or less clearly and who in order to dispel this unconscious sophism have ceased speaking of immortality and now speak only of 'survival'. And we readily concede that they thereby escape the objections we have expressed. We do not mean to say that these spiritists are any less convinced of immortality than the others or that they themselves do not, like the others, believe in the perpetuity of 'survival'; but this belief then has the same character that it has with non-spiritists, not differing appreciably from what it may be on the part of the adherents of any religion except for the support sought, over and above the ordinary reasons, in the witness of the 'spirits'. But the statements of these latter are subject to caution, for in the view of the spiritists themselves they may often be only the results of ideas entertained during earthly life. If a spiritist who believes in immortality explains in this way 'communications' that deny immortality (and there are such 'communications'), by what principle will he grant greater authority to those that affirm it? In fact, it is simply because the latter agree with his own convictions. But these convictions must have another basis, they must be established independently of his experience and be founded on reasons that are not specific to spiritism. In any case, it suffices to observe that some spiritists feel the need to renounce claims to prove immortality 'scientifically'; and this is already a point gained, and even an important point, for determining exactly the scope of the spiritist hypothesis.

The attitude we have just defined is also that of contemporary philosophers with somewhat marked tendencies toward spiritism. The only difference is that the philosophers speak conditionally of what spiritists assert categorically. In other words, the former are content to speak of the possibility of proving survival experimentally, while the latter consider the proof as already accomplished.

Henri Bergson, immediately before writing the sentence cited above wherein he envisaged precisely this possibility, acknowledges that 'immortality itself cannot be proven experimentally.' His position is therefore quite clear in this regard; and as to survival, he is prudent enough to speak only of its 'probability', perhaps because he recognizes to some degree that experimentation does not yield true certitude. But even though he thus reduces the value of experimental proof, he avows nevertheless that 'there is something there,' that 'it could even be a great deal.' In the eyes of a metaphysician however, and even without bringing in so many restrictions, it would amount to very little, and would even be altogether negligible. Indeed, immortality in the Western sense is already quite relative which, as such, is unrelated to pure metaphysics. What, then, to say of mere survival? Even apart from any metaphysical consideration, we do not see that there can be any great interest for man to know, whether probably or even with certainty, that he can count on a survival that may be only 'for a period *x*.' Could this have more importance for him than to know more or less exactly the duration of his earthly life, which also appears to him as of indefinite duration? One sees how this differs from the truly religious point of view, which considers as worthless a survival that is not assuredly perpetual. Given the consequences that result from the appeal of spiritism to experience in this order of things, one can see one of the reasons (and far from the only one) why spiritism will never be anything but a pseudo-religion.

There is still another side of the question: whatever the basis for their belief in immortality, spiritists believe that everything in man that survives is immortal. Let us recall that for them the surviving elements are the ensemble making up the 'spirit' properly so called and the 'perispirit' which is inseparable from it. For the occultists, what survives is likewise the ensemble of the 'spirit' and the 'astral body'; but in this ensemble only the 'spirit' is immortal, while the 'astral body' is perishable.[2] Nevertheless, both spiritists and occultists alike claim to base their assertions on experience, an experience that seems to reveal to one group the dissolution of the 'invisible

2. Papus, *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p371.

organism' of man, while the others would never have had occasion to note anything of the kind. According to the occultist theory there is a 'second death' that on the 'astral plane' is what ordinary death is on the physical plane. And the occultists are forced to recognize that psychic phenomena cannot in any case prove survival beyond the 'astral plane'. These divergences should show the weakness of these alleged experimental proofs, at least as regards immortality, if there is still any need of them after all the other reasons we have given; in our view these other reasons are much more decisive since they establish the complete inanity of the claims for experimental proof of immortality. Nevertheless, it is not without interest to note that for two schools of experimenters using the same hypothesis, what is immortal for the one is not so for the other. It must be added that the question is further complicated, as much for the spiritists as for the occultists, by the introduction of the hypothesis of reincarnation: 'survival' as it is envisaged, the conditions of which are variously described by different schools, naturally represents only the intermediary period between two successive earthly lives, for each new 'incarnation' things must evidently find themselves in the same state they were previously. It is therefore always a provisional 'survival' that is in question, and in the final analysis the question remains entirely unanswered since it cannot be said that this regular alternation between terrestrial and supra-terrestrial existences must continue indefinitely. The different schools may debate this, but experience cannot cast the deciding vote; if the question is deferred, it is not thereby resolved and the same doubt always exists regarding the final destiny of the human being. At least that is what a reincarnationist must admit if he is honest with himself, for reincarnationist theory is less capable than any other of providing a solution, especially if it is based on experience. In fact, there are those who believe they have found experimental proofs of reincarnation, but this is another matter which we will examine further on.

What must be remembered is that what the spiritists say of the 'afterlife' or of 'survival' applies essentially, for them, to the interval between two 'incarnations'. This is the condition of the 'spirits' whose manifestations they believe they observe; this is what they call 'wandering' [*erraticité*] or 'life in space'—as if earthly life did not

unfold in space! A term like 'afterlife' is quite appropriate to designate their conception, for it is literally that of an extended life in conditions as much like earthly life as possible. For them, there is not that transposition which permits others to see the 'future life', even a perpetual life, in a way that corresponds to a real possibility, whatever the place this possibility occupies in the total order. On the contrary, 'afterlife' as represented by the spiritists is only an impossibility, for a literal transposition of the conditions of one state into another implies bringing together incompatible elements. This impossible supposition, moreover, is absolutely necessary to spiritism, because without it communications with the dead would not even be conceivable. In order to manifest themselves as they are supposed to do, it is necessary that the 'disincarnated' be very close to the living in every respect, and the existence of the one be remarkably like that of the other. This similarity is pushed to a hardly believable degree, which shows that the descriptions of this 'afterlife' are only a reflection of earthly ideas, a product of the 'subconscious' imagination of the spiritists themselves. We think it well to pause a little before this aspect of spiritism, which is not one of the least ridiculous.

4

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

IT IS REPORTED THAT CERTAIN SAVAGES depict posthumous existence exactly like earthly life, with the dead continuing to accomplish the same acts, hunting and fishing, making war, giving themselves up to all their habitual occupations, not forgetting eating and drinking. And to be sure, there is no lack of comment on the naïveté and boorishness of these conceptions. Actually, it is prudent to be always a little sceptical of reports concerning savages, and this for several reasons: first, the accounts of travelers, the only source of these stories, are often fanciful; second, someone who believes he is giving a true account of what he has seen and heard nevertheless may have understood nothing and, without being aware of it, may substitute his personal interpretation for the facts; and finally, there are the scholars, or so-called scholars, who superimpose their own interpretations as a result of preconceived ideas. What is obtained in elaborations of this kind is not what the savages think, but what they ought to think according to this or that 'anthropological' or 'sociological' theory. Things are less simple in reality, or rather they are complicated in a different way; for savages, just like the civilized, have their own ways of thinking which are difficult of access to people of other races. There are few resources for understanding savages or for ascertaining how well they are understood; generally, savages are hard pressed to explain their own mental processes, even granting that they know their own minds. As regards the assertions mentioned above, it is claimed that they are supported by many facts (which proves absolutely nothing), such as objects buried with the dead or offerings of

food placed on graves. Similar rites have existed and still exist among peoples who can in no way be considered savages, and these rites do not correspond to the crude conceptions of which they are believed to be evidence.

The real meaning is quite different from that attributed to them by European thinkers, and in reality, these rites concern only certain inferior elements of the human being. Savages, who in our view are not 'primitives' but rather degenerates, may have retained certain rites from a very distant past, but without understanding them; the meaning of their tradition has been lost to them and has become a matter of routine or of 'superstition' in the etymological sense of the word. In such conditions it is not difficult to imagine that some tribes (though one must not generalize overmuch) have come to visualize the future life more or less as reported above. But it is not necessary to go so far afield to discover, with even greater certainty, conceptions or rather descriptions exactly like those mentioned. In our time as much as in any other, they could probably be found among the lower classes even of peoples who boast of their civilization. If a search for such examples were made among the peasants of Europe, we believe the harvest would be abundant. Moreover, in the same countries the clearest examples, those that assume the most precise forms in their crudeness, are perhaps not furnished by the unlettered but rather by people having some education, some of whom are even regarded as 'intellectuals'. Descriptions of this kind are asserted with greater vigor among the spiritists than anywhere else—a curious topic for study which we recommend to sociologists who, at least here, will not run the risk of erroneous interpretations.

We cannot do better than begin by citing some extracts from Allan Kardec himself. This is what he has to say about the 'state of trouble' that follows immediately after death:

> This trouble presents particular characteristics according to the character of the individual and especially according to the manner of death. In violent deaths, deaths by suicide, by torture, accident, apoplexy, wounds, etc., the spirit is surprised, astonished, and does not believe himself to be dead; he stubbornly maintains the contrary; nevertheless, he sees his body, he knows

it is his, and he does not understand that he is separated from it; he goes near loved ones, speaks to them, and does not understand why they do not hear him. This illusion lasts until the entire disengagement of the perispirit; only then does the spirit recognize and understand that he is no longer among the living. This phenomenon is easily explained. Caught unawares by death, the spirit is giddy from the abrupt change that has been wrought in him; for him, death is still a synonym for destruction, annihilation; now, since he thinks that he sees, that he hears, in his own understanding he is not dead; what augments his illusion is that he sees a body shaped like his previous body but has not yet had time to study its ethereal character; he believes it to be solid and compact like his first one; and when his attention is drawn to this he is astonished that he is unable to feel himself.... Some spirits behave thus even though death has not come unexpectedly; but this behavior is always more general among those who, though ill, had not thought of dying. One then sees the singular spectacle of a spirit following his own funeral procession as if it were that of a stranger, and speaking as if it were something of no concern to him, up to the moment when he understands the truth.... In the case of collective death, it has been observed that all those who perish at the same time do not always meet one another again immediately. In the trouble that follows death, each one goes his own way or concerns himself only with those in whom he is interested.[1]

And here is what might be called the daily life of the 'spirits':

The situation of the spirits and the way they view things is infinitely varied by reason of their moral and intellectual development. Generally, spirits of a superior order stay on the earth only for short periods; everything that takes place here is so petty in comparison with the infinite, things to which men attach the greatest importance are so childish in their eyes, that they find little that attracts them, unless they are called upon to cooperate in the progress of humanity. Often the spirits of a middling order

1. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp72–73.

> remain here for longer periods even though they consider things from a loftier point of view than when they were in this life. The coarser spirits are somewhat sedentary and make up the mass of the ambient population of the invisible world; they have kept almost the same ideas, the same tastes, and the same inclinations that they had while in their corporeal envelope; they join in our meetings, our work, our amusements, in which they take a more or less active part, according to their disposition. Unable to satisfy their passions, they take vicarious delight in those who do and urge them on. Among their number are those who are more serious and who see and observe in order to learn and perfect themselves.[2]

It seems indeed that these 'wandering spirits', that is, those awaiting a new incarnation, gather information 'in seeing and observing what happens in the places they pass through' and also 'by listening to the speeches of enlightened men and the advice of spirits superior to themselves, gaining ideas they did not previously have.'[3] The peregrinations of these 'wandering spirits', instructive though they may be, have the disadvantage of being almost as fatiguing as earthly travel, but

> there are worlds set apart for these wandering beings, worlds where they may stay temporarily, kinds of bivouacs or camps for rest from too much wandering, which is always a little painful. These are intermediary positions among the other worlds, graduated according to the spirits who may go there, and to a certain extent these spirits enjoy great well-being.[4]

Every 'spirit' cannot go just anywhere; here is how they themselves explain the relationships prevailing among them:

> The spirits of different orders are seen by one another, but they differ one from another. They flee or approach according to the analogy or antipathy of their sentiments, as happens among us.

2. Ibid., p145.
3. Ibid., pp109–110.
4. Ibid., p111.

> *It is an entire world of which ours is the dim reflection.*[5] Those of the same rank join together through a kind of affinity and form groups or families of spirits united by sympathy and by the ends they agree to pursue: the good by the desire to do good, the bad by the desire to do ill, by shame over their faults and the need to seek their own kind. Like a great city where men of every rank and condition meet and are of the same mind without being confused; where societies are formed on the basis of analogous tastes; where vice and virtue jostle one another without speaking.... The good go everywhere, and this must be so in order for them to exercise their influence on the evil; the regions inhabited by the good are forbidden to imperfect spirits, so that they may not bring trouble by their wicked passions.... The spirits see and understand one another; speech is material: it is the reflection of the spirit. The universal fluid establishes between them an uninterrupted communication; it is the vehicle for transmission of thought as air is for us the vehicle for sound, a sort of universal telegraph that unites all worlds and permits spirits to communicate from one world to another.... They confirm their individuality by the perispirit which makes them distinct from one another, as the body does among living men.[6]

One could easily multiply these citations, and add texts which show the 'spirits' intervening in almost all earthly events, and others that specify 'the occupations and missions of the spirits'; but that would quickly become tedious. Few books are as unbearable to read as is the generality of spiritist literature. We think the preceding extracts need no comment; we will only note once again the idea that the 'spirits' retain all the sensations of the living, because this is particularly important and constantly recurs. The only difference is that these sensations do not reach the spirits through special localized organs but by the entire 'perispirit'. And the most material faculties, those such as sense perception that are most dependent on

5. This sentence is underlined in the text; by reversing the indicated relationship one would have the exact expression of the truth.

6. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp 135–137.

the corporeal organism, are regarded as 'attributes of the spirit', which 'are part of his being.'[7]

After considering Allan Kardec, we do well to cite the most 'representative' of his current disciples, Léon Denis:

> The spirits of an inferior order, enveloped in thick fluids, are subject to the laws of gravitation and are drawn toward matter. . . . Whereas the purified spirit ranges through a vast and radiant compass, sojourns as he pleases on the worlds and hardly perceives any limits to his flight, the impure spirit cannot distance himself from material spheres. . . . The life of the advanced spirit is essentially active, though without fatigue. Distances do not exist for him. He moves with the rapidity of thought. His envelope, like a light vapor, has acquired such subtlety that it becomes invisible to inferior spirits. He sees, hears, feels, perceives, not by material organs which are interposed between nature and ourselves and intercept the greater part of sensations, but directly, without intermediary, through all parts of his being. Also, his perceptions are much clearer and more intense than ours. The lofty spirit swims as it were in the bosom of an ocean of delicious sensations. Changing pictures unroll before his sight, charming harmonies lull and enchant him. For him, colors are perfumes, perfumes are sounds. But no matter how exquisite his perceptions, he can withdraw and recollect himself at will, enveloping himself in a fluid veil and isolating himself in the bosom of space. The advanced spirit is free from all corporeal needs. Nourishment and sleep serve no purpose. . . . The inferior spirits bring with them, beyond the grave, their habits, their needs, their material preoccupations. Unable to raise themselves above the earthly atmosphere, they return to partake of the life of men, become involved in their struggles, their works, their pleasures. . . . In the realm of wandering [*erraticité*] there are immense crowds always seeking a better state which escapes them. . . . It serves in a way as the vestibule of the luminous spaces of the better worlds. All pass through, all sojourn there, but so as to rise

7. Ibid., pp116–117.

> higher. . . . All the regions of the universe are peopled with busy spirits. Everywhere crowds, swarms of spirits rising up, descending, moving about in the bosom of light or in dark regions. At one point, listeners assemble to receive instructions from higher spirits. Further on, groups are formed to fête a new arrival. Elsewhere, other spirits combine fluids, giving them a thousand forms, a thousand mellow shades, preparing them for subtle uses intended by superior geniuses. Other crowds press around the spheres and follow them in their revolutions, gloomy and troubled crowds who, without knowing it, influence the atmospheric elements. . . . The spirit, being fluidic himself, acts upon the fluids of space. By the power of his will, he mixes them, disposes of them as he will, gives them the colors and shapes that answer to his intention. It is by means of these fluids that works defying all comparison and all analysis are executed: changing, luminous pictures; reproductions of human lives, lives of faith and of sacrifice, painful apostolates, dramas of the infinite. . . . It is in these fluidic abodes that spiritual displays and feasts are unfolded. The pure spirits, dazzling with light, are grouped by families. Their brilliance, the variegated nuances of their envelopes, provide the means of measuring their ascendancy, of determining their attributes. . . . The superior rank of a spirit is recognized by his fluidic garment. It is like an envelope woven of the merits and qualities acquired in the succession of his existences. Dark and dull for the inferior soul, his whiteness increases in proportion to the progress he has realized and becomes purer and purer. Already brilliant with the lofty spirit, it gives to superior souls an unbearable splendor.[8]

Let no one say that these are only more or less figurative 'manners of speaking'; all this, for the spiritists, must be taken literally and rigorously.

However extravagant the French spiritists' conceptions of the future life may be, it seems that they are exceeded by those of the Anglo-Saxon spiritists, especially by what is recounted in a book

8. *Après la mort*, pp 270–290.

entitled *Summerland*, as the 'abode of the spirits' is called. We said elsewhere that the Theosophists sometimes severely criticize this foolery, in which they are correct. Thus Annie Besant speaks of 'the coarsest of all the descriptions, those of modern *Summerland*, with its "husband-spirits", its "wife-spirits", its "children-spirits", going to school and to university, becoming adult spirits.'[9] This is very proper, certainly, but one may ask if the Theosophists really have the right to mock the 'spiritualists'.

One can judge this by several citations taken from another eminent Theosophist, [Charles] Leadbeater:

> Arriving on the astral plane after death, people do not understand that they are dead; and even if they become aware of it, they do not at first perceive how this world differs from the physical world.... Thus the recently deceased are sometimes seen trying to eat, preparing for themselves completely imaginary dinners, while others build houses. In the beyond I have definitely seen a man build for himself a house, stone by stone, creating each stone by an effort of thought; he had not understood that by the same process he could quite as easily have built the entire house at once without going to any more trouble. Discovering that the stones were weightless, he was led little by little to understand that the conditions of this new world were different from those to which he had been accustomed on earth, which led him to continue his examination. In *Summerland*[10] men surround themselves with landscapes which they create themselves; however, some avoid this effort and are contented with those that have already been imagined by others. Men who live on the sixth sub-level, that is to say near the earth, are surrounded with the astral counterpart of mountains, trees, and physical lakes, so that they are not moved to construct their own; those who inhabit higher sub-planes, who soar over the surface of the earth, create for themselves all the landscapes they wish.... An eminent

9. *La Mort et l'au-delà*, p 85 of the French translation.

10. The Theosophist author therefore accepts even the term that the 'spiritists' employ.

> materialist, well known during his life by one of our colleagues in the Theosophical Society, was recently discovered by the latter surrounded by all his books, pursuing his studies almost as he did on earth.[11]

Other than the complications of levels' and 'sub-levels' we can hardly see that there is any difference. It is true that Leadbeater is a former spiritist who may still be influenced by his previous ideas, but the same applies to many of his colleagues. Theosophists have really borrowed too much from spiritism to permit them to criticize the spiritists. It should be noted that they generally attribute so-called observations of this kind to 'clairvoyance', while the spiritists admit them on faith as simple 'communications'. Nevertheless, spiritism also has its 'seers', and what is awkward is that where there is divergence between the two schools, there is similar discord between the respective visions, those of one school being conformed to that school's own theories. No greater value can be granted them, therefore, than is granted the 'communications', to which the same conditions apply; in both, suggestion plays a preponderant role.

But let us return to the spiritists: the most extraordinary thing we know of in this kind of affair is a book entitled *Mes expériences avec les esprits*, written by an American of French origin, Henry Lacroix. This work, which was published in Paris in 1889, proves that the spiritists do not have the slightest sense of the absurd. Papus himself considered the author a 'dangerous fanatic' and wrote that 'reading this book is enough to drive any level-headed person away from spiritism.'[12] Donald MacNab said 'those who are not enemies of a gentle gaiety have only to read this work to realize the extravagance of the spiritists' and he 'recommends this case especially to the attention of psychiatrists.'[13] This lucubration must be cited almost in its entirety to show the point to which certain aberrations can go; it is truly unbelievable, and the recommendation of this book would

11. *L'Occultisme dans la Nature*, pp19–2 and 44.
12. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p341.
13. *Le Lotus*, March 1889, p736.

certainly make excellent anti-spiritist propaganda for those not already infected with the spiritist contagion, but who might be attracted to it. Among other curiosities in the book is a description and drawing of the 'fluidic house' of the author (for if he is to be believed, he lives in both worlds simultaneously) and also portraits of his 'spirit-children' drawn by him 'under their mechanical control.' Out of fifteen children, he had lost twelve, but they had continued to live and grow 'in the fluidic world,' where some of them even married! In this connection, and according to the same author, 'in the United States there are frequently marriages between the living and the dead,' and he cites the case of a judge Lawrence who was remarried to his deceased wife by a pastor of his friends.[14] If this is true, it provides a sad idea of the mentality of American spiritists. Elsewhere we learn how the 'spirits' feed themselves, how they dress, how they build dwellings. But better perhaps are the posthumous manifestations of Madame de Giradin and several related episodes. Here is a sample:

> It was night and I was busy reading or writing, when I saw Delphine [Mme de Giradin] come near me with a bundle in her arms, which she put down at my feet. I did not immediately see what it was but I saw soon enough that it was a human form. I then realized what was wanted of me. I was to dematerialize this unhappy spirit whose name was Alfred de Musset! What convinced me was that Delphine had hastily left after doing her work, as if she feared being present at the operation.... The operation consisted of removing from the entire form of the spirit a kind of epidermis (which was tied to the interior of the organism by every kind of fiber or tether) by flaying, which beginning with the head I finally did without losing my composure in spite of the piercing cries and the violent convulsions of the patient, which I heard and which I certainly saw but without paying them any mind.... The next day Delphine arrived to speak to me of her protegé and she said to me that after having squandered on my *victim* all the necessary care needed to bring

14. *Mes expériences avec les esprits*, p174.

> him around after all the effects of the terrible operation that I had made him undergo, friends had organized a 'pagan festival' to celebrate his deliverance.[15]

No less interesting is the account of a theatrical production with the 'spirits':

> While Céleste [one of the 'daughter-spirits' of the author] accompanied me one day on one of my promenades, Delphine unexpectedly came near us and said to my daughter, 'Why don't you invite your father to go and hear you at the opera?' Céleste responded, 'But I must ask the director!'. . . . Several days later Céleste came to tell me that her director had invited me and would be enchanted to receive me with my friends. So one evening I went to the opera with Delphine and a dozen friends [spirits]. . . . The immense hall, an amphitheater, overflowed with spectators. Fortunately for our friends and us our choice seats allowed space to move about freely. The audience, consisting of nearly twenty thousand people, momentarily became an agitated sea when the play moved the hearts of the knowing public. *Aridide, or the Signs of the Times* was the name of this opera, and Céleste, as lead, appeared to advantage, resplendent, inflamed by the artistic fire that animated her. At her twelve-hundredth performance, this collaborative effort of the most renowned minds so captivated the spirits that the crowd of the curious, finding no place in the enclosure, formed a vault (or a roof) with their compressed bodies built up to the edifice. The active troupe, without counting the supernumeraries or the orchestra consisted of one hundred and fifty artists of the first rank. Céleste has often given me the titles of other productions in which she has played. . . . She said that Balzac had composed a very beautiful opera or drama with magnificent scenery which was being performed.[16]

15. Ibid., pp22–24.

16. Ibid., pp101–103. — That does not hinder the 'spirits', apart from these productions especially intended for them, also from attending those given in our world (ibid., pp155–156).

Despite her success, a little while later the poor Céleste fell afoul of her director and was fired! Another time, the author attended a meeting of a different kind, 'in a beautiful circular temple dedicated to Science'; there, on the invitation of the president, he mounted the podium and gave a great speech 'before that learned assembly of five or six hundred scientific spirits; it was one of their periodic gatherings.'[17] Sometime later he came in contact with the spirit of the painter Courbet, cured him of a 'posthumous drunkenness', then had him named director of a great academy of painting which enjoyed a good reputation in the zone where he was.[18] And now comes the Masonry of the 'spirits', which presents some analogies with the 'Great White Lodge' of the Theosophists:

> The 'great Brothers' are beings who have passed through all the degrees of spiritual and material life. They form a society of diverse classes which is *established*, to use an earthly word, at the confines of the fluidic and ethereal worlds, the latter being the highest, the 'perfect' world. This society, called the Great Brotherhood, is the avant-garde of the ethereal world; it is the administrative government of the two spheres, spiritual and material, or of the fluidic world and the earth. It is this society, with the legislative concurrence of the ethereal world properly so called, that governs spirits and 'mortals' through all phases of existence.

In another passage an account is given of a 'major initiation' in the 'Great Brotherhood', that of a deceased spirit from Belgium named Jobard;[19] this bears some resemblance to Masonic initiations, but the 'trials' are more serious and are not purely symbolic. This ceremony was presided over by the author himself who, though still among the living, possessed one of the highest grades in this strange association. On another day he is seen 'placing himself at the head of a troop of the Third Order [*sic*] composed of nearly ten thousand spirits, masculine and feminine,' to go 'to a colony peopled by somewhat retrograde spirits' and by a chemical process known to us

17. Ibid., pp 214–215.
18. Ibid., p 239.
19. Ibid., pp 180–183.

'purify the atmosphere of that place where there are more than a million inhabitants in order to produce a salutary reaction in the ideas entertained by these populations.' It seems that 'this country is a dependency of the fluidic France'[20] because here, as with the Theosophists, each region of the earth has its 'fluidic counterpart'. The 'Great Brotherhood' is struggling against another organization, also 'fluidic', which of course is 'a clerical Order'.[21] Moreover, the author expressly declares that 'the principal purpose of his mission is to undermine and restrain clerical authority in the other world and, by way of consequence, in this world as well.'[22] But enough of these follies. Nevertheless, we had to provide a little glimpse of them, magnified as it were so as to make clear the mentality which in a more or less attenuated degree is also that of many other spiritists and 'neo-spiritualists'. Are we not justified then in denouncing these things as a real public menace?

As a further curiosity we provide this description, differing sharply from the preceding, which a 'spirit' has given of his life in the beyond:

> Most often, man dies without being aware of what is happening to him. He returns to consciousness after several days, sometimes after several months. The awakening is far from agreeable. He sees himself surrounded by beings whom he does not recognize; the heads of these beings resemble skulls. The terror that seizes him often makes him lose consciousness again. Little by little he becomes accustomed to these visions. The body of these spirits is material and is composed of a gaseous mass having more or less the weight of air; it is composed of a head and a chest; there are neither arms, legs, nor abdomen. The spirits move with a swiftness dependent upon their will. When they move rapidly, their bodies are lengthened and become cylindrical. When they move with the greatest possible speed, their bodies take the form of a spiral with fourteen turns and a diameter

20. Ibid., pp152–154.
21. Ibid., pp170–171.
22. Ibid., p29.

> of thirty-five centimeters. The spiral can have a diameter of about four centimeters. In this form they attain a speed equal that of sound. . . . Ordinarily we find ourselves in the homes of men, for rain and wind are very disagreeable to us. Usually we do not see sufficiently; there is too much light for us. The light we prefer is that of acetylene; it is the ideal light. Secondly, the mediums radiate a light which permits us to see about one meter around them; this light attracts spirits. The spirits see the clothes of men only vaguely; the garments resemble a cloud. They even see some interior organs of the human body, but they do not see the brain because of the bony skull. But they hear men think and sometimes these thoughts are heard at quite a distance even though no word has been uttered. In the world of the spirits the law of the strongest prevails; it is a state of anarchy. If séances are unsuccessful it is because an evilly-disposed spirit does not leave the table and remains above it from one séance to another so that the spirits who seriously wish to communicate cannot come near the table. . . . On the average, spirits live from one hundred to one hundred and fifty years. The density of the body increases until the age of one hundred years; after that density and strength diminish, and they finally dissolve, as everything in nature is dissolved. . . . We are subject to the laws of air pressure; we are material; we do not interest ourselves, we bore ourselves. Everything material is subject to the laws of matter; matter decomposes; our lives do not endure for more than a hundred and fifty years at most; then we die for good.[23]

This materialistic 'spirit' and denier of immortality must be regarded by the majority of spiritists as a little heterodox and not very enlightened. The experimenters who received these strange 'communications' give assurances, moreover, that 'the most intelligent spirits positively protest against the idea of God.'[24] We have quite a few reasons for thinking that they themselves have strong

23. Communication received by Zaalberg van Zelst and Matla de la Haye, *Le Monde Psychique*, March 1912.

24. 'Le Secret de la Mort', by Matla and Zaalberg van Zelst, *Le Monde Psychique*, April, 1912.

preferences for atheism and 'monism'. Whatever the case, the men who have seriously registered the divagations we have just sampled are among those who claim to study these phenomena 'scientifically'. They surround themselves with impressive apparatus and even imagine that they have created a new science, 'physical psychology'. Is there not matter here to disgust sensible men as regards these studies, and is one not tempted to excuse those who prefer to deny all this *a priori*? Nevertheless, right next to the article from which we cited the foregoing excerpts there is another piece in which a psychist — really only a poorly disguised spiritist — tranquilly declares that 'the doubters, the contradictors, and the obstinate in the study of psychic phenomena must be considered to be mentally ill'; and that 'the scientific mind exhibited in these researches can, over a period of time, provoke a sort of mania in the researcher, . . . a chronic delirium, convulsions, a kind of lucid folly,' so that at last 'doubt establishing itself firmly on predisposed terrain, may evolve into maniacal folly.'[25] Evidently those who are well balanced must seem fools in the eyes of those who are more or less unbalanced. This is only natural, but it is not reassuring to think that if spiritism continues to gain ground, a day may come when whoever criticizes it will simply expose himself to being committed to a psychiatric asylum.

A question to which the spiritists attach great importance but on which they have been unable to reach mutual understanding is that of knowing whether spirits retain their gender. It interests them especially because of the consequences it may have from the perspective of reincarnation: if gender is inherent to the 'perispirit', it must remain invariable in all existences. Obviously, for those who have been present at 'marriages of spirits', like Henry Lacroix, the question is resolved in the affirmative; or rather, it is not even posed. But not all spiritists enjoy such exceptional faculties. Allan Kardec, moreover, has clearly reached a negative verdict:

> Spirits do not have gender as you understand this, for the sexes depend on the organization [no doubt he intends to say 'on the

25. *Le Monde Psychique*, March, 1912.

> organism']. Among them there is love and sympathy, but based on the similarity of sentiments.... Spirits incarnate as men or women because they themselves do not have gender; as they must progress in all things, each gender, like each social position, offers them tests, special duties, and occasions to gain experience. He who might always be a man would know only what men know.[26]

But Kardec's disciples were not so sure, no doubt because they had received contradictory 'communications'; thus, in 1913, the spiritist journal *Fraterniste* felt a need to pose the question expressly, which it did in these terms:

> How do you conceive the life beyond? In particular, do spirits, or more accurately perispirits, retain their sex, or does one become neuter on entering the astral plane? And if gender is lost, how do you explain that in being incarnated again gender is clearly determined? It is known that many occultists claim that the perispirit is the mold on which the new body is formed.

The last sentence contains an error regarding occultists properly so called, for they say on the contrary that the 'astral body', which for them is the equivalent of the 'perispirit', is dissolved in the interval between two 'incarnations', so that the opinion expressed in this sentence is rather that of certain spiritists. But there is so much confusion in all this that one can assuredly be excused if one loses one's bearings. Léon Denis, after having 'asked the advice of his spiritual guides,' responded that 'gender subsists, but remains neuter and useless,' and that 'at the time of reincarnation the perispirit again binds itself to matter and takes up its customary gender,' at least 'unless the spirit wishes to change sex, which choice is accorded them.' On this point Gabriel Delanne is more faithful to the teaching of Allan Kardec, for he states that 'spirits are asexual, quite simply because in the beyond they do not need to reproduce,' and that

> certain facts of reincarnation seem to prove an alternation in genders for a given spirit according to the aim it had set for itself

26. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p88.

> here below; that, at least, is what seems to be the teaching of communications received nearly everywhere for half a century.[27]

Among the published responses were those of several occultists, notably Papus who, invoking the authority of Swedenborg, wrote this:

> The sexes exist for spiritual beings but these sexes have no relationship to their analogues on this earth. On the invisible plane there are beings who are sentimentally feminine and beings who are mentally masculine. Coming to this earth, each of these beings can take a material sex other than the astral gender that he had possessed.

On the other hand, the dissident occultist Ernest Bosc frankly acknowledges that he conceives life in the beyond absolutely like this lower world, but with the difference that on the other side much more time remains for us to work mentally and spiritually at our evolution since we no longer have to give our entire attention to our material interests. This 'simplification' did not keep him from rightly protesting against the shocking remark that followed the questionnaire of the *Fraterniste*, namely that

> all the importance of this question will be understood when we have said that, for many spiritists, the spirits are asexual, although the occultists believe in incubi and succubi, thus attributing gender to our friends of Space.

No one has ever said that incubi and succubi are 'disincarnated' humans, though some occultists seem to regard them as 'elementals'. But before this, all those who believed in their existence unanimously agreed that they were demons and nothing else. If this is what the spiritists call their 'friends of Space', it is quite edifying!

We have had to anticipate the question of reincarnation somewhat, and in bringing this chapter to a close we will call attention to another point which gives rise to as many divergent opinions as that just discussed: do all reincarnations take place on this earth or can

27. *Le Fraterniste*, March 13, 1914.

they also occur on other planets? Allan Kardec teaches that 'the soul can live several times on the same globe if it is not sufficiently advanced to pass on to a superior world';[28] for him, there can be a plurality of earthly existences, but there are also existences on other planets, and it is the degree of evolution of the 'spirits' that determines their passage from one to another. Here are the details he provides concerning the planets of the solar system:

> According to the spirits, of all the spheres that compose our planetary system the earth is one of those whose inhabitants are the least advanced physically and morally; Mars is more inferior still, while Jupiter is superior in every respect. The sun is not a world inhabited by corporeal creatures, but a rendezvous of superior spirits that by thought radiate from there toward other worlds, which they direct through the mediation of less elevated spirits to whom they transmit themselves by means of the universal fluid. As to its physical constitution, the sun is a focus of electricity. All the suns seem to be identically situated. The volume and the distance of the sun have no necessary relationship with the degree of advancement of the worlds, since it appears that Venus is more advanced than the Earth, and Saturn less advanced than Jupiter. Several spirits that have animated people known on the earth have reincarnated on Jupiter, one of the worlds nearest to perfection. It has been astonishing to see on this very advanced sphere men whom opinion here below would not have considered of such competence. But that should occasion no surprise if it is recognized that certain spirits living on this planet have been sent here to fulfill a mission which, in our view, did not place them in the first rank. Secondly, between their earthly existence and that on Jupiter there may have been intermediary levels in which they could have improved themselves. Third, and finally, in this world [that is, Jupiter] as in our own, there are different degrees of development and between these degrees there may be all the distance that separates the savage from the civilized man. Thus, from the fact of living on

28. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp76–77.

> Jupiter it does not follow that one is on the level of the most advanced beings, any more than the fact of living in Paris implies that one is at the level of a member of its scientific Institute.[29]

We have already had the story of the 'spirits' living on Jupiter in connection with the mediumistic drawings of Victorien Sardou. It may be asked how it happens that these 'spirits', even though living on another planet, can nevertheless send 'messages' to those living on the earth. Do the spiritists, then, believe they have resolved in their own fashion the problem of interplanetary communication? Their opinion seems to be that these communications are in fact possible through their processes but only when this involves 'superior spirits' who, 'although inhabiting certain worlds, are not confined to them as are men living on the earth, and who are more adept than others at being everywhere.'[30] Some occultist and Theosophical 'clairvoyants', such as Leadbeater, claim to have the power of transporting themselves to other planets in order to make 'investigations'; no doubt they must be ranked among the 'superior spirits' of whom the spiritists speak. But even if they too can personally transport themselves to other planets, the spiritists have no need to go to all that trouble, for the 'spirits' themselves, whether incarnated or not, come to satisfy their curiosity and to tell them of all that happens in these worlds. To tell the truth, what the 'spirits' tell is not of much interest; in the book of Dunglas Home which we have already cited in connection with Allan Kardec, there is a chapter entitled 'Absurdities', from which we quote this passage:

> The scientific data we offer the reader has been furnished us in the form of a brochure. It is a valuable account that would delight the learned world. It is seen, for example, that glass has a great role on the planet Jupiter; it is an indispensable substance, the necessary complement to all commodious existence in those latitudes. The dead are placed in boxes of glass, which are then used as ornaments in homes. The houses, too, are in glass, so that it is not good to throw stones on that planet. There are rows

29. Ibid., pp 81–82.
30. Ibid., p 81.

> of these crystal palaces, called *Séména*. A kind of mystical ceremony is practiced in them, and on such occasions—that is, every seven years—the Holy Sacrament is carried in procession through the glass cities in a chariot of glass. The inhabitants are of gigantic stature, as Scarron says, being seven or eight feet tall. They keep a special species of parrot as domestic animals. On entering a house one of them is invariably found behind the door knitting night-caps. . . . If we believe another medium, no less well informed, rice is what is best adapted to the soil of the planet Mercury, if memory serves. But there it does not grow in the form of a plant as it does on Earth; thanks to climatic influences and to a stipulated manipulation, it sends shoots into the air higher than a great oak tree. The citizen of Mercury who desires to enjoy the perfection of *otium cum dignitate* [leisure with dignity] must, while still young, place all his assets into the cultivation of rice. He chooses a stalk from among the loftiest of his estate and clambers up to the very top; then, like a rat in a cheese, he enters the enormous husk to eat the delicious fruit. When he has eaten all of it, he begins the same task on another stalk.[31]

Unfortunately, Home did not give precise references, but we have no doubt as to the authenticity of what he reports, which is certainly greatly surpassed by the extravagances of Henry Lacroix. This foolery, which is quite in character with the usual 'tone' of spiritist 'communications', denotes above all a great poverty of imagination. All this is very far from the fantasies of writers who have dreamed of journeys to other planets, and who at least do not claim that their inventions are an expression of reality. There are cases, moreover, in which such works have certainly been influential: we have heard a spiritist give a description of the inhabitants of Neptune which was clearly inspired by the novels of Wells. It is to be noted that even among writers best endowed with imagination these fantasies always remain fundamentally earthbound; they have shaped the habitants of other planets from elements borrowed from those of

31. *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritualisme*, pp179–181.

the earth, more or less modified either in their proportions or in their arrangement. It could not be otherwise, and this is one of the best examples that can be given to show that the imagination is nothing more than a faculty of sense. This observation should make understandable our comparison of these two conceptions concerning 'afterlife' properly speaking. In both cases the real source is exactly the same, and the result is only what it can be when it is a question of the 'subconscious' imagination of very ordinary and even below-average men. As we have said, this subject is directly related to the question of communication with the dead: it is these very earthly descriptions which permit belief in the possibility of such communication. Thus we are finally led to examine the fundamental hypothesis of spiritism, an examination which will be greatly facilitated by all of the above.

5

COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD

IN DISCUSSING EITHER communication with the dead, or reincarnation, or any other point of spiritist doctrine, there is one category of argument which we shall not take into account, namely, arguments of a sentimental character, which we consider as absolutely null from whatever point of view. We know that spiritists willingly resort to such reasons, which are not reasons at all; that they base their strongest case on them, and that they are sincerely persuaded that these can actually justify their beliefs, all of which is wholly in conformity with their mentality. Certainly, spiritists are far from having a monopoly on the sentimentality generally so predominant among modern Westerners, but spiritist sentimentality takes on forms that are particularly irritating for anyone free of their prejudices. We know of nothing more foolishly puerile than invocations addressed to the 'dear spirits', the singing of which opens most séances, and the absurd enthusiasm in the presence of the most banal 'communications' or the most ridiculous manifestations. In these conditions, it is not surprising that spiritists continually dwell upon what is 'consoling' in their theories. That they find them consoling is their own affair, and no concern of ours. There are others, at least as numerous, who do not share the same appreciation and who even hold the exact opposite, although this in itself proves nothing. In general, when two adversaries use the same argument it is probable that the argument in question is worthless. In cases like the present one we have always been astonished to note that some can find nothing better to say against spiritism than that it is not 'consoling' to picture the dead as spreading foolishness, moving

tables, or giving themselves up to thousands of grotesque stupidities. Certainly, we tend toward such a view rather than that of the spiritists who, for their part, find consolation in these things. For our part, we do not believe that such considerations should intervene when it is question of the truth or falsity of a theory. First, nothing is more relative, since everyone finds 'consolation' in what pleases him, in what agrees with his own sentimental dispositions, and there is no more need to discuss such things than anything else that is simply a matter of taste; what is absurd is the wish to persuade others that such and such an appreciation is worth more than its contrary. And then, since not everyone has the same need for 'consolations', all are not disposed to grant the same importance to these considerations; in our view, such things are only of very minor value because what is important is the truth. Sentimentalists do not see things this way, their way of seeing things being valid only for themselves, whereas truth must be equally binding upon all insofar as it is understood. Finally, truth has no need to be 'consoling'; if there are those who, knowing the truth, find it comforting, so much the better for them; but this is a function of how their sentimental nature is affected. There may be others who are affected in quite different and even contrary ways; and it is certain that it will always be thus, for nothing is more variable and diverse than sentiment. But whatever the case, it has nothing to do with truth itself.

That said, we recall that when it is a question of communication with the dead, this expression implies that what is communicated with is the real being of the dead. This is how spiritists understand the matter, and this is what we must consider exclusively; it cannot be a question of the intervention of just any secondary and dissociated elements coming from the dead. We have said that intervention by precisely these latter elements is perfectly possible, but the spiritists on the contrary do not want to consider this possibility. Therefore we need not be concerned with this at the moment, and the same applies to reincarnation. We recall also that for the spiritists it is essentially a question of communicating with the dead by material means, and it is in these terms that we have defined their claims from the outset because they served well enough to make our meaning clear. There is still room for equivocation, however, for there are

extremely divergent conceptions of matter; what is not material for some may be material for others, not to speak of those for whom the very notion of matter is strange or has no meaning. For greater clarity, therefore, we will say that the spiritists have in view a communication established by sensory or perceptible means.

This in fact is the fundamental hypothesis of spiritism, and it is precisely this which we say is absolutely impossible; and we will shortly give the reasons why this is so. We want our position in this regard to be perfectly clear: a philosopher, even when refusing to admit the truth or even the possibility of the spiritist theory, may nevertheless regard it as representing one hypothesis among others; and even if he finds it implausible, it may be that either communication with the dead or reincarnation appear to him as 'problems' which perhaps he has no means of resolving. For us, on the contrary, there is no 'problem' because they are impossibilities pure and simple. We do not claim that the demonstration of this may be easy to understand for everyone, for it appeals to notions of the metaphysical order, albeit rather elementary ones. Nor do we claim that our exposition will be absolutely complete, because all that is implied in it cannot be developed in the confines of this study, and there are points that we will have to take up elsewhere. Nevertheless, when fully understood this demonstration leads to absolute certitude, like everything else which has a truly metaphysical character. If some do not find it fully satisfying, the fault can only be in our imperfect expression or in their equally imperfect understanding of it.

For two beings to communicate between themselves by sensory, that is perceptible, means it is necessary first of all that their senses be the same, at least partially. If one of them cannot have sensations or if they do not have common sensations, no communication is possible. This may seem obvious enough, but there are truths of this kind which are easily forgotten or to which one gives no attention, but which have an unexpected significance. Of the two conditions mentioned, it is the first that establishes in an absolute manner the impossibility of communication with the dead by means of spiritist practices. As to the second, at the very least it gravely compromises the possibility of interplanetary communication. The last point is

directly connected with what we said at the end of the preceding chapter. We shall examine it first because the considerations introduced will facilitate understanding of the other question, which is the one that primarily interests us.

If we admit the theory that explains all sensations by more or less rapid vibratory movements, and if we consider a chart showing the vibrations per second corresponding to each kind of sensation, we are struck by the fact that the intervals representing what our senses transmit to us are very small in relation to the whole. They are separated by other intervals wherein nothing is perceptible to us; and further, it is not possible to assign a determinate limit to the increasing or decreasing frequency of the vibrations,[1] so that we must consider the chart as subject to prolongation on both extremes by indefinite possibilities of sensations, which for us correspond to no actual sensation. But to say that there are possibilities of sensations is to say that these sensations may exist with creatures other than ourselves, and who by contrast may have none of the sensations which we have. When we say 'ourselves' we do not mean men only but all terrestrial creatures in general, for it does not appear that sense faculties vary to a great degree, and even if these faculties are susceptible of a variable extension they always remain fundamentally the same. The nature of these sense faculties, therefore, seems to be determined by the terrestrial milieu; it is not a property inherent to this or that species but a function of the fact that these creatures live on earth and not elsewhere. Analogically, on any other planet the sense faculties must be similarly determined, but it may be that they coincide in no way with the faculties possessed by terrestrial creatures—and it is even extremely probable that this must be so. Indeed, every possibility of sensation can be realized somewhere in the corporeal world, since all that is of the nature of sensation is essentially a corporeal faculty. These possibilities being indefinite, the chances are quite slim that any one of them would be realized twice, that is to say that two beings inhabiting two different

1. It is obvious that the frequency of vibrations per second does not represent a minimal limit; the second itself is an entirely relative unity, as is every unit of measure, only pure arithmetical unity being absolutely indivisible.

planets should possess faculties that totally or even partially coincide. If it is supposed, however, that despite everything this coincidence could be realized, there is again only the slenderest of possibilities that they would be realized precisely in those conditions of temporal and spatial proximity which might permit communication. These chances, which are already infinitesimal for the entire corporeal order, are illimitably reduced if one envisages only those heavenly bodies existing simultaneously at a given moment; they are reduced immeasurably more if, among these heavenly bodies, only those near to one another, such as are the planets of a given system, are considered. It must be so because time and space themselves represent indefinite possibilities. We do not hold interplanetary communication to be an absolute impossibility; we only say that the chances for something of this kind can be expressed only by a quantity infinitesimal to several degrees and that if the question is posed in a determined instance, as, for example, the earth and another planet of the solar system, one hardly runs any risk in regarding those chances as practically nil. All this is, in sum, only an application of the theory of probabilities. What is important to note is that the obstacle to interplanetary communication does not lie in the difficulties experienced by two men totally ignorant of one another's languages; such difficulties would not be insurmountable because the two beings could always find some measure of remedy in faculties common to both of them. But where common faculties do not exist, at least on the sensible level where communication is presumed to operate, the obstacle cannot in any way be avoided because it arises from a difference in nature of the beings under consideration. If such beings are of such a nature that nothing which provokes sensation in us provokes sensation in them, then so far as we are concerned these beings are as if they did not exist, and conversely. Even if they were at our side we would be no better off for it, and probably would not even perceive their presence, or in any case would probably not recognize them as living beings. Let it be said in passing that this allows us to think it not impossible that there may exist in the terrestrial milieu creatures entirely different from those known to us, creatures with whom we have no means of relating. But we will not dwell on this, especially because if such creatures

exist they would have nothing in common with our humanity. However that may be, what we have just said shows the great element of naïveté in the illusions of certain thinkers in regard to interplanetary communication, illusions deriving from the error we have previously noted, that of projecting purely terrestrial representations everywhere. If it is said that such representations are the only ones possible for us, we would agree; but, then, no representation is better than a false representation. It is perfectly true that what is in question is not imaginable, but it must not be concluded from this that it is inconceivable; on the contrary, it is quite easily conceivable. One of the great errors of modern philosophers consists in confusing the conceivable and the imaginable, an error particularly conspicuous with Kant, although it is not unique to him. It is even characteristic of the Western mentality, at least ever since the Western mind turned almost exclusively toward objects of sense. Obviously whoever confuses things in this way is incapable of metaphysical understanding.

The corporeal order, admitting of indefinite possibilities, must contain beings whose diversity is likewise indefinite. Nevertheless, the corporeal realm in its entirety represents only a single state of existence defined by a certain set of determined conditions common to all that is included in this realm, even while these beings express themselves in extremely varied ways. In passing from one state of existence to another, the differences are incomparably greater because there will be no common conditions, the determining conditions of a given state being replaced by others which analogously define the other state. This time, therefore, there will no longer be any point of comparison with the corporeal and sensible order envisaged in its entirely and considered in such and such a modality, as for example that which constitutes terrestrial existence. Conditions such as space and time are in no way applicable to another state because they are precisely those which define the corporeal state. Even if there is something that corresponds analogically, this 'something' does not admit of any representation by us.

Imagination, which is a faculty of the sensory realm, cannot attain the realities of another realm, any more than sensation itself can do so, for it is sensation that furnishes the imagination with all

the elements of its constructs. It is not through the senses that one can ever find the means to relate to another order; a radical heterogeneity separates them, though not a principial irreducibility. If there is to be communication between two different states, this can only be through a principle both common to and superior to the two states, and not directly from one to another. But it is obvious that the possibility in question here does not concern spiritism in any degree.

Considering only two states in themselves, we said that the possibility of communication between them appears extremely improbable, even though it was still only a question of beings pertaining to diverse modalities of the same state. When it is a matter of beings belonging to two different states, communication between them is an absolute impossibility. To be precise, it is a question, at least for the moment, of a communication that is assumed to be established by means which each of these beings finds in the conditions of its own state, that is to say of faculties that are a result of these very conditions. This is the case with sensible faculties in the corporeal order, and it is in fact sensible faculties to which the spiritists resort. Such communication is an absolute impossibility, for the faculties in question pertain properly and rigorously to a single one of the states envisaged, as do the conditions from which they derive. If these conditions were common to the two states, the two would be confounded and would be only one and the same state, as it is precisely these conditions that define a given state of existence.[2] The absurdity of spiritism is thus fully demonstrated, and we can let the matter rest. Nevertheless, as the very rigor of this demonstration may make it difficult to grasp for those not in the habit of thinking in this way, we add several complementary observations which, by presenting the question under a slightly different and more particularized aspect, will render the absurdity of spiritism still more apparent.

2. One reservation must be made, namely in the sense that it is, as we shall explain further on, a condition common to every individual state, though not to supra-individual states. This does not affect our demonstration in any way, however, which we have tried to present as simply as possible but without compromising the truth.

For a being to be manifested in the corporeal world, it is necessary that it possess the appropriate faculties, that is to say faculties of sensation and action; and it is necessary that the being also possess organs corresponding to these faculties. Such faculties may well exist without the corresponding organs, but only in a latent and virtual state; they would be unactualized potentialities and would be useless for the creature in question. Therefore, even if one supposes that the being that has quit the corporeal state to pass over to another state retains in itself in some manner the faculties of the corporeal state, these faculties could exist only as potentialities and henceforth could not serve in any way to communicate with corporeal beings. Moreover, a being could carry within itself potentialities corresponding to all the states of which it is susceptible; and indeed this must be so in some manner for otherwise those states would not be possibilities for it. We speak here of the being in its total reality and not of that part consisting only of the possibilities of a single state such as the human individuality. Though all this is beyond our present concern, we allude to it in order that we may not overlook anything that might provide an opening for objections.

But in order to eliminate every ambiguity we must add that human individuality is not solely the corporeal state; it also consists of diverse prolongations which, along with the corporeal state itself, constitute a single degree or state of universal existence. This last complication hardly need concern us here, for though it is true that the corporeal state is not absolutely complete, nevertheless it alone is involved in sensible manifestation. Fundamentally, 'corporeal' and 'sensible' are completely identical. To return to our point of departure, we can thus say that communication by sensory means is possible only between two beings that have bodies, which is to say in short that for a being to be manifested corporeally, he must be corporeal, and in this form the dictum is a truism. The spiritists themselves cannot openly oppose this evident truth, which is why, without being aware of the reasons that compel them, they imagine that their 'spirits' retain all the faculties of sensation possessed by terrestrial beings. They attribute to their 'spirits' an organism, a sort of body that is not really a body, as it is presumed to have properties incompatible with the very notion of body and not to have all the

properties essential to that notion. The spiritist 'body' retains some of these properties, such as being subject to space and time, but this is far from sufficient. There can be no middle ground: either a being has a body or it does not. If it is dead in the ordinary sense of the word, which the spiritists call 'disincarnated', this means that it has left the body; henceforth it no longer belongs to the corporeal world, whence it follows that all sensible manifestation has become impossible for it. We almost feel as if we should apologize for emphasizing things that are so fundamentally simple, but we know it is necessary. Let us note further that this line of argument in no way prejudices anything regarding the posthumous state of the human being. In whatever way we conceive this state, we can agree in the recognition that it is in no wise corporeal—at least if we do not accept the gross representations of the 'afterlife' described in the last chapter, with all the contradictory elements involved. This last opinion cannot be seriously entertained, and every other opinion, whatever it may be, must necessarily entail the formal negation of the spiritist hypothesis. This last remark is very important, for there are two further cases to be considered: after death, and by the very fact of this change, the being has passed into an entirely different state defined by conditions other than those of the preceding state, and then the refutation we set forth in the first place applies immediately without any restrictions; or, the deceased remains in some modality of the same state other than the corporeal modality, one characterized by the disappearance of one or more of the conditions which together are necessary to constitute corporeal existence. The condition that has necessarily disappeared (which is not to say that others, too, may not have disappeared) is the presence of matter—or to be more precise, 'quantified matter'.[3] We can readily acknowledge that these two cases represent genuine possibilities. In the first case, the human individuality has given place to another state, whether individual or not, which can no longer be said to be human. In the second case, on the contrary, it can be said that the human individuality subsists in one of its prolongations mentioned, but this individuality is henceforth incorporeal and so incapable of

3. *Materia quantitate signata*, according to the Scholastic expression.

sensible manifestation, a fact that suffices for it to count for absolutely nothing in the phenomena of spiritism. It is hardly necessary to point out that this second case, among others, corresponds to immortality as understood in a Western religious sense. It is definitely the human individuality that is in question, and the fact that the idea of life is brought in, however modified it may be, implies that this state retains certain of the conditions of the preceding state. For life itself, in all the extensions of which it is capable, is only one of these conditions and nothing more. But there is still a third case to be considered, that of immortality understood in the metaphysical and Eastern sense, that is to say the case wherein the being has been delivered, either in an immediate or deferred manner (as regards the final goal it matters little whether there are intermediate states) into the unconditioned state, which is superior to all the conditioned states that have been in question up to this point, and which is the principle of all lesser states. But this final possibility is too transcendent for us to consider at this time; and it goes without saying that spiritism, given its basis in phenomena, has nothing in common with things of this order. Such a state is not only beyond sensible manifestation, but is beyond all manifestation whatsoever.

In all that has preceded we have naturally had in mind communication with the 'spirits' only as this is conceived by the spiritists. After having established the impossibility of such communication, one might still ask if there is not a possibility of communication of quite another kind, conveyed by a sort of special inspiration or intuition in the absence of any sensory phenomena. Though this doubtless would not interest the spiritists, it might interest others. It is difficult to treat this question completely because, although it is a possibility, the means of expression and of giving an account of it are almost entirely lacking. Moreover, the real possibility of such communication would require the actualization of such exceptional conditions that it is practically useless to speak of the matter. Generally, however, we can say that in order to have dealings with a being in another state of existence, one would have had to develop in oneself the possibilities of that state, so that even if the being who might partake of the other state is presently a man living on earth, it is nevertheless not as a human and earthly individual that it could

attain that state, but only insofar as it is something else at the same time. Relatively speaking, the simplest case is where the being with whom it is a question of communicating remains in one of the prolongations of the individual human state. It would then suffice if the living being might have extended its own individuality in a corresponding direction, beyond the corporeal modality to which it is ordinarily limited in act if not in potentiality (for the possibilities of the integral individuality are obviously the same for all, although they may remain purely virtual throughout all earthly existence). This may be realized in certain mystical states, and even produced apart from the volition of the subject of this realization. Then if we consider communication with a being that has passed to an entirely different state, we can say that practically speaking this is an impossibility; it would not be possible unless the living being had attained a superior state sufficiently elevated to be in effect a principle common to both the other two and thereby permitting their union and implying 'eminently' all their possibilities. But then the question would be of no interest, for having reached such a state the being will not have any need to redescend to an inferior state that does not directly concern it. Finally, in all this it is a question of something other than the human individual.[4] As for communicating with a being that has attained absolute immortality, it would presuppose that the living being itself possessed the corresponding state, that is to say it would have actually and fully realized its own transcendent personality. Moreover, one cannot speak of that state as analogous to any particular and conditioned state; it can no longer be a question of anything that resembles individualities, and the word 'communication' itself loses all its meaning precisely because all comparison with the human state ceases to be applicable in this context. These explanations may still seem somewhat obscure, but to clarify them further would require too many developments that

4. We assume that the non-human being is still in an individual state; if it was in a supra-individual though still conditioned state, it would suffice if the living being attained the same state, but then the conditions would be such that one could hardly speak of communication, at least in a sense analogous to the human understanding of the word, as is the case when it is a question of the unconditioned state.

are completely outside our subject,[5] though we may develop them in other studies. Moreover, the question is far from having the importance that some might wish to attribute to it, because true inspiration is in reality something quite different: its source does not lie in communication with any other beings whatsoever, but rather in communication with the superior states of one's own being, which is something totally different. Also in connection with these matters, let us repeat what we have already said in reference to magic, although what we have just been saying is of a far higher order: those who really know what is involved and who have a profound knowledge of it are entirely uninterested in application. As for the 'empiricists' (for whom action in this field is by the nature of things limited to cases where only some extensions of the human individuality intervene), they obviously cannot be prevented from applying, rightly or wrongly, the fragmentary and uncoordinated bits of knowledge which they may have stumbled upon. But it is always good to warn them that they do so only at their own risk and peril.

5. Supposing that the initiative comes from the human side, one must then pose the question in an inverse sense, which would then entail other complications.

6

REINCARNATION

We cannot dream of undertaking an absolutely complete study of reincarnation, for it would require an entire volume to examine the topic in all its aspects; perhaps some day we may return to the subject, for it would be worth the trouble, not in itself of course—because the idea is nothing but a pure and simple absurdity—but by reason of the strange diffusion of this idea which is one of those that contributes most to deforming the minds of so many of our contemporaries. But as present circumstances compel us to treat the subject, we will at least say all that is most essential. Our argumentation will be valid not only against the spiritism of Allan Kardec but also against all the other 'neo-spiritualist' schools which, following Kardec, have adopted this idea with modifications of varying degrees of importance. On the other hand, this refutation is not, as was the previous, directed to spiritism generally, for reincarnation is not an absolutely essential element in all spiritism; one can be a spiritist without believing in reincarnation, but one cannot be a spiritist without believing in the manifestation of the dead by sensible phenomena. It is commonly known that American and English spiritists, that is, the representatives of the oldest form of spiritism, were at first unanimously opposed to the theory of reincarnation which Dunglas Home, in particular, violently criticized.[1] It was only after some lapse of time that the theory penetrated Anglo-Saxon circles by ways unconnected with spiritism. Even in France some of the first spiritists, such as Piérart and Anatole Barthe, separated from Allan Kardec on this point. But today it can be

1. *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritualisme*, pp 118–141.

said that French spiritism in its entirety has made reincarnation a veritable 'dogma'. Moreover, Allan Kardec himself has not hesitated to characterize it in this way.[2] And let us again recall that it is from French spiritism that Theosophy first borrowed this theory, which was then taken up by Papusian occultism and various other schools, all of which have made it one of their articles of faith. Although these schools have reproached the spiritists for conceiving of reincarnation in an 'unphilosophical' manner, the various modifications and complications they have brought to it cannot mask this initial borrowing.

We have already noted some of the differences that exist, either among the spiritists or between them and other schools, on the subject of reincarnation. In this as in all the rest, the teaching of the 'spirits' is rather uncertain and contradictory, and the alleged authentications of the 'clairvoyants' are no less so. For one party, as we have seen, a human being reincarnates constantly in the same sex; for others, the being is reincarnated indifferently in one sex or the other, without it being possible to pin down any law in this regard. For still others, there is a more or less regular alternation between male and female incarnations. In the same vein, some say that man is always reincarnated on the earth; others claim that he can just as easily be reincarnated either on another planet in our solar system, or on any heavenly body; others say that there are generally several consecutive incarnations on earth before passing to some other abode, this being the opinion of Allan Kardec himself. For the Theosophists there are only terrestrial incarnations throughout the duration of an extremely long cycle, after which an entire human race begins a new series of incarnations in another sphere, and so on. Another point no less discussed is the duration of the interval between two successive incarnations. Some think that one is immediately reincarnated, or that this occurs after only a brief lapse of time; for others, terrestrial lives must be separated by long intervals. Furthermore, we have seen that the Theosophists, after first supposing these intervals were minimally of twelve or fifteen hundred years, have reduced them considerably and now make

2. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp75 and 76.

distinctions according to an individual's 'degree of evolution'.[3] With French occultists there is also a rather curious variation to note; in his earlier works, Papus, even while attacking the Theosophists with whom he had broken, retained their view that 'according to esoteric science, a soul cannot reincarnate until after fifteen hundred years, except in certain exceptional cases, such as death in infancy, violent death, death of an adept,'[4] and he even maintains on the authority of Mme Blavatsky and Sinnet that 'these figures are drawn from astronomical calculations by Hindu esoterism,'[5] while in fact no authentic traditional doctrine has ever spoken of reincarnation because this is only a wholly modern and completely Western invention. Later on, Papus completely rejects this so-called law established by the Theosophists, declaring that no law can be formulated, saying (and we carefully respect his style) that

> it would be as absurd to set a fixed term of twelve hundred years as of ten years to the time which separates an incarnation from a return to earth, as to set for human life on earth an equally fixed period.[6]

All this will hardly inspire confidence in those who look at these things impartially. If reincarnation has not been 'revealed' by the 'spirits'—for the good reason that they have never really spoken through the intermediary of tables or mediums—the several observations just made already suffice to show that reincarnation cannot be genuine esoteric knowledge taught by initiates who by definition know what is involved. There is no need, therefore, to go very deeply into all this in order to dispel the claims of the occultists and the Theosophists. Reincarnation is, in effect, nothing more than a simple philosophical concept, and is in fact at the level of the worst of such concepts, because it is absurd in the proper sense of this word. Philosophers also entertain many absurdities, but generally they present them only as hypotheses. The 'neo-spiritualists' deceive

3. *Theosophy*, chap 8.
4. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, pp 42–43.
5. Ibid., p 341.
6. *La Réincarnation*, pp 42–43.

themselves more thoroughly, but we acknowledge their good faith, which for most of the rank and file is not in question, though this is not always so with the leaders. But the very confidence with which they make their assertions is one of the reasons why these claims are more dangerous than those of the philosophers.

We have used the expression 'philosophical concepts'; in these circumstances 'social concepts' might be more apt in the circumstances, considering the real origins of the idea of reincarnation. In fact, for the French socialists of the first half of the nineteenth century who inculcated this notion into Allan Kardec, this idea was essentially intended to furnish an explanation for the inequality of social conditions, which in their view were particularly shocking. This motive is one of those the spiritists still most readily invoke to justify their belief in reincarnation, and they have even sought to extend this explanation to all inequities, whether intellectual or physical. Here, for example, is what Allan Kardec has to say:

> At their birth, souls are undoubtedly either equal or unequal. If they are equal, why these very different abilities? . . . If they are unequal, it is because God has created them so; but then why this innate superiority granted to some? Is this partiality in conformity with his justice and his equal love for all his creatures? Let us admit, on the contrary, a succession of progressive prior existences, and everything is explained. At birth men bring with them an intuition of what they have acquired; they are more or less advanced according to the number of existences through which they have passed and depending on how far they have come from their starting-point, just as in a gathering of individuals of all ages, each will display a development proportioned to the number of years he has lived. Successive existences will be, for the life of the soul, what years are for the life of the body. . . . God in his justice could not create more or less perfect souls; but with the plurality of existences the inequality we see no longer involves anything contrary to the most rigorous equity.[7]

Similarly, Léon Denis says:

7. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp102–103.

> The plurality of existences alone can explain the diversity of character, the variety of abilities, the disproportion of moral qualities, in a word all those inequalities which are so striking. Apart from this law one would ask in vain why certain men possess talent, noble sentiments, lofty aspirations, while so many others share only stupidity, vile passions, and gross instincts. What are we to think of a God who, allotting us a single physical life, made us of such unequal parts, and, from the savage to the civilized, would have given such unequal benefits and such different moral levels? Without the law of reincarnation, inequity governs the world. . . . All these obscurities are dispelled before the doctrine of multiple lives. Beings distinguished by their intellectual prowess or their virtues have lived more, worked more, and accumulated greater experience and more extended abilities.[8]

Similar reasons are alleged even by schools whose theories are less rudimentary than those of spiritism, for the reincarnationist idea has never been able to shed entirely the mark of its origin. Theosophists, for example, also stress social inequities, at least as a side issue. Papus, for his part, does exactly the same:

> Men begin a new journey in the material world, rich or poor, socially happy or unhappy, according to the results acquired in their previous journeys, their preceding incarnations.[9]

Elsewhere he expresses himself even more precisely on this subject:

> Without the notion of reincarnation, social life is an inequity. Why are the unintelligent glutted with money and loaded with honors while beings of value struggle in poverty and in the daily fight for physical, moral, or spiritual nourishment. . . . In general one can say that present social life is determined by the former state of the spirit, and that it determines the future social state.[10]

8. *Après la mort*, pp164–166.
9. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p167.
10. *La Réincarnation*, pp113–118.

Such an explanation is perfectly illusory, and this is why: first, if the starting-point is not the same for all, if there are men who are at a greater or lesser distance from it and who have not passed through the same number of lives (this is what Allan Kardec says), this is an inequity for which they cannot be responsible and which, consequently, the reincarnationists must regard as an 'injustice' for which their theory cannot account. Then, even allowing that there are these differences between men, there must have been a moment in their evolution (we speak from the spiritists' point of view) when their inequities began, and these too must have had a cause. If it is said that this cause consists in the acts these men committed previously, then it must be explained how these men were able to behave differently before these inequalities were introduced among them. This is inexplicable simply because there is a contradiction involved: if the men had been perfectly equal, they would have been alike in all respects, and, allowing this to be possible, they would never cease to be so—unless one contests the validity of the principle of sufficient reason, in which case there would be no place for any law or explanation at all. If these men could become unequal, it is obviously because inequality was one of their component possibilities, and this prior possibility would suffice to make them unequal from the beginning, at least potentially. Believing the difficulty resolved, one has in fact only made it recede, and in the final analysis it subsists in its entirety. But actually there is no difficulty at all, the problem itself being no less illusory than the would-be solution. One can say the same of this question as of many philosophical problems: that it exists only because it is badly formulated. And if it is badly formulated, it is especially because moral and sentimental considerations intervene where they have no proper role. The attitude in question here is as unintelligible as that of a man who would ask why such and such an animal species is not the equal of some other, which is obviously meaningless. It is a purely human point of view that there are in nature differences which we perceive as inequalities while there are others that do not have this aspect; and if this eminently relative point of view is put aside, there is no occasion to speak of justice or injustice in this order of things. In brief, to ask why a being is not the equal of another is to ask why it is different

from another; but if there were no differences the being would be that other being instead of itself. Once there is a multiplicity of beings, it is necessary that there should be differences between them. Two identical things are inconceivable because, if they are really identical, it is not a matter of two things but of a single thing, a point on which Leibnitz was quite correct. Each being is distinguished from others from the beginning in that it carries in itself certain possibilities that are essentially inherent to its nature and not the possibilities of any other being. The question to which reincarnationists claim to offer a response, therefore, quite simply comes down to asking why a being is itself and not another. If one wishes to see an injustice in this, no matter, but it is in any case a necessary truth; fundamentally, moreover, it would be the contrary of an injustice. The notion of justice stripped of its sentimental and specifically human character is in fact that of equilibrium or harmony. Now, in order that there be total harmony in the Universe it is necessary and sufficient that each being occupy its proper place as an element of the Universe in conformity with its own nature. And this means precisely that the differences and inequalities which one is pleased to denounce as real or apparent injustices necessarily and effectively contribute to this total harmony. And this total harmony cannot but be; to wish to have it otherwise would be to suppose that things are not what they are, for it would be an absurdity to think that something can happen with a creature that is not a consequence of its own nature. Thus the partisans of justice can be doubly satisfied without being obliged to go counter to the truth.

Allan Kardec says that 'the dogma of reincarnation is based on the justice of God and on revelation';[11] we have shown that of these two reasons for believing in reincarnation, the first cannot be validly cited. As for the second, he is obviously referring to revelations of the 'spirits', and having previously shown that this 'revelation' does not exist, we have no need to return to the matter. These however are only preliminary observations, for just because one sees no reason to admit something, it does not follow that it is false; one can simply remain in an attitude of doubt in its regard. We should say,

11. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p75.

moreover, that the objections commonly brought against the theory of reincarnation are hardly any stronger than the reasons adduced in its support. This is because the adversaries and partisans of reincarnation commonly approach the question from a moral and sentimental background, and because considerations of this order cannot prove anything. We repeat here the same observation made regarding communication with the dead: instead of asking whether it is true or false, which alone is significant, one discusses whether or not it is 'consoling'; such discussions can go on indefinitely without coming any nearer a resolution because such a criterion is purely 'subjective', as a philosopher might say. Fortunately, there is much more to be said against reincarnation, since its absolute impossibility can be established. But before arriving at that point we must treat another question and make certain distinctions, not only because they are very important in themselves but also because without them some who people might be astonished at our saying that reincarnation is an exclusively modern notion. For a century now so much confusion and so many false ideas have been in circulation that many people, even outside 'neo-spiritualist' circles, have been gravely influenced. This distortion has reached such a point that official orientalists, for example, currently interpret in a reincarnationist sense texts in which there is nothing of the kind to be found; they have become completely incapable of understanding these texts in any other way, which amounts to saying that they do not understand them at all.

The term 'reincarnation' must be distinguished from at least two other terms with totally different meanings, namely 'metempsychosis' and 'transmigration'. These things were well known to the ancients, just as they are still among Easterners, but modern Westerners—the inventors of reincarnation—are absolutely ignorant of these.[12] It must be understood that when one speaks of

12. This could be an occasion to mention ideas of certain Kabbalists, designated as the 'revolution of souls' and the 'embryonic state', but we will not speak of them here because it would lead us too far afield; moreover, they have only a rather restricted bearing here because they involve conditions which, strange as this may seem, are peculiar to the people of Israel.

reincarnation what is meant is that a being that has been already embodied takes a new body, that is, returns to the state through which it has already passed. Further, it is acknowledged that this concerns the real and complete being and not only some more or less important elements that have been incorporated adventitiously. Outside these two conditions, reincarnation can in no way be in question. Now the first condition marks an essential distinction of reincarnation from transmigration as this is understood in Eastern doctrines; and the second distinguishes it no less profoundly from metempsychosis in the sense in which the Orphics and the Pythagoreans understood it. The spiritists, even while falsely proclaiming the antiquity of the reincarnationist theory, are right in saying that it is not identical with metempsychosis; but according to them it is distinguished from the latter only in that the successive existences are always 'progressive' and that human beings exclusively are involved. Allan Kardec says:

> Between the metempsychosis of the ancients and the modern doctrine of reincarnation there is this great difference: that the spiritists reject in the most absolute manner the transmigration of man into animal, and reciprocally.[13]

In reality, however, the ancients never envisaged such a transmigration, nor that of men into other men, such as reincarnation might be defined. Undoubtedly, certain more or less symbolic expressions may give some scope to these misunderstandings, but only when one does not know what they really intend to say, which is precisely this: that there are in man psychic elements which, after death, are dissipated or scattered, and which may then enter other living beings, whether men or animals (and it is not so very important which) from the fact that after the dissolution of the body of this same man the elements which composed him may then serve to form other bodies. In the two cases it is the mortal elements of the man that are in question and not his imperishable part, which is his real being and which is in no way affected by posthumous mutations. In this connection Papus is mistaken in yet another way when

13. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p96; cf. ibid., pp262–264

he speaks[14] of the confusions between reincarnation, or the return of the spirit into a material body after an astral stage, and metempsychosis, or the body's passage through animal bodies and plants before returning to a new material body, not to mention several oddities of expression—which may be simple lapses (animal and plant bodies are no less material than the human body, and they are not 'traversed' by the human body but by elements which derive from it); but that can in no way be called 'metempsychosis', as the formation of this word implies that it is a question of psychic and not material elements. Papus is correct in thinking that metempsychosis does not concern the real being of man, but he is completely deceived as to its nature. And as for reincarnation, when he says that 'it was taught as an esoteric mystery in all the initiations of antiquity,'[15] he simply confuses it with genuine transmigration.

The dissociation following death involves not only corporeal elements, but certain elements which may be termed psychic; we have already explained that such elements may sometimes intervene in the phenomena of spiritism and contribute to the illusion of a real activity on the part of the dead. Analogously, they may in certain cases give the illusion of reincarnation. What is important to understand as regards this latter is that these elements (which in life may

14. *La Réincarnation*, p9. Papus adds: 'One must never confuse reincarnation and metempsychosis; man never goes backward and the spirit never becomes an animal spirit, except on the astral plane, in the state of genii [*jinn*], but this is still a mystery.' It is no mystery for us; it is rather a question of the 'genius of the species', that is, of the entity which represents the spirit not of the individual but of an entire animal species. In fact, the occultists think that, unlike man, the animal is not an autonomous individual and that after death its soul returns to the 'elemental essence', the undivided 'suchness' of the species. According to the theory to which Papus enigmatically alludes, the tutelary genii of the animal species would be human spirits that have reached a certain level of evolution and to whom this function has been especially assigned. Besides, there are 'clairvoyants' who claim to have seen these genii in the forms of men with animal heads, like the symbolic figures of the ancient Egyptians. This occultist theory is entirely erroneous; the genius of the species is definitely a reality, even for the human species, but it is not what the occultists believe and it has nothing in common with the spirits of individual men. As to the 'plane' on which it is found, this does not enter into the conventional frameworks established by occultism.

15. Ibid., p6.

have been either conscious or only 'subconscious') include all the mental images which, resulting from sensory experience, have become part of memory and imagination. These faculties, or rather these ensembles, are perishable, that is, subject to dissolution, because, being of the sensory order, they are literally dependencies of the corporeal state. Moreover, outside the temporal condition, which is one of those defining the corporeal state, memory would have no reason to subsist. This is assuredly quite remote from the theories of classical psychology as regards the 'self' [*moi*] and its unity, theories almost as completely without foundation in their genre as are the ideas of the 'neo-spiritualists'. One other remark of no less importance is that there may be transmission of psychic elements from one being to another without this supposing the death of the first; in fact, that there is a psychic heredity as well as a physiological heredity is hardly in doubt and is even a fact of common observation. But what few take into account is that at the least it supposes that the parents furnish a psychic seed as well as a biological seed. And, potentially, this seed may involve a very complex ensemble of elements pertaining to the domain of the 'subconscious', besides tendencies and predispositions properly so called, which, as they expand, manifest themselves outwardly. These 'subconscious' elements may, on the contrary, not become apparent except in rather exceptional circumstances. This is the double heredity, both psychic and corporeal, expressed in the Chinese formula: 'You will live again in your thousands of descendents'; this would certainly be difficult to interpret in a reincarnationist sense, although occultists and even orientalists have succeeded in other no less remarkable *tours de force*. The Far-Eastern doctrines even prefer the consideration of the psychic side of heredity, seeing in this a prolongation of the human individuality. This is why, under the name 'posterity' (which moreover also admits a superior and purely spiritual sense), they associate it with 'longevity'—which is what Westerners call immortality.

As we shall see below, certain facts which the reincarnationists think they can adduce in support of their hypothesis are explained perfectly well by one or the other of the two cases we have just considered, on the one hand, by the hereditary transmission of certain

psychic elements, and on the other by the assimilation to one human individuality of other psychic elements coming from the disintegration of earlier human individualities, elements which do not have the least spiritual rapport with the former. In all this there is a correspondence and analogy between the psychic and corporeal orders, and this is easily understood because both the one and the other refer exclusively to what may be called the mortal elements of the human being. It is necessary to add that in the psychic order it can happen more or less exceptionally that a rather considerable collection of elements is transferred intact to a new individuality. Naturally, occurrences of this kind are what appear most striking to those who support reincarnation, but such cases are no less illusory than all the others.[16] None of this concerns or in any way affects the real being, but we may wonder why, if this is so, the ancients seem to have attached such great importance to the posthumous fate of the elements in question. We could respond by saying simply that there are men who are concerned with the treatment their bodies might receive after death, without their thinking that their spirits necessarily experience any repercussions therefrom. But we will add that as a general rule these things are not entirely matters of indifference; if they were there would be no reasons for funeral rites, whereas there

16. There are those who think that an analogous transfer can be effected for more or less 'subtilized' corporeal elements, thus envisaging a 'metemsomatosis' as well as a 'metempsychosis'. At first glance, one might suppose that there is confusion here and that they wrongly attribute physicality to inferior psychic elements, but it may really be a question of elements of corporeal origin but which have in some way been 'psychesized' by this transposition into the subtle state, the possibility of which we have previously indicated. The corporeal state and the psychic state, simply different modalities of a same state of existence, cannot be totally separated. We call to the occultists' attention what was said by an author whom they like to cite although they are unaware they are doing so, Keleph ben Nathan (Dutoit-Membrini), in *La Philosophe Divine*, vol i, pp62 and 292–293; this author sometimes mixes many rather hollow mystical declamations with some very interesting insights. We take this occasion to point out an error of the occultists, who present Dutoit-Membrini as a disciple of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (it is Joanny Bricaud who made this discovery), while on the contrary he has expressed himself as regards Saint-Martin in rather unfavorable terms (ibid., vol 1, pp245 and 345). One could write a whole book—and it would be quite amusing—on the erudition of the occultists and their manner of composing history.

are on the contrary very profound reasons for them. Without belaboring the point we will say that the action of these rites is exercised precisely on the psychic elements of the deceased. We have mentioned what the ancients thought of the relation between the non-accomplishment of these rites and certain phenomena of haunting, an opinion that was perfectly well founded. Assuredly, if the being were considered only insofar as it had passed to another state of existence, there would be no point in taking into account the *post mortem* fate of these elements (except perhaps for the tranquillity of the living). But the situation is quite otherwise if what we have called the prolongations of the human individuality are considered. This subject, however, could occasion considerations the very strangeness and complexity of which inhibit us from speaking of them here. In our opinion, moreover, it is a subject which it would be neither useful nor advantageous to treat publicly and in a detailed manner.

Having explained what metempsychosis really is, we must now state the real nature of transmigration. In this case, it is definitely the real being that is involved; but it is not a question of a return to the same state of existence, a return which—if it could take place—would rather be a 'migration' than a 'transmigration'. It is, on the contrary, a question of the passage of the being to other states of existence, states that are defined, as we have said, by entirely different conditions than those to which the human individual is subject (though with the one reservation that as long as individual states are in question the being is always clad in a form, but a form that cannot occasion any spatial or other depiction more or less modeled on bodily form). To say transmigration is in essence to say change of state. That is what all the traditional doctrines of the East teach, and we have many reasons to think that this was also the teaching of the 'mysteries' of antiquity. Even in heterodox doctrines such as Buddhism[17] nothing else is in question, despite the reincarnationist interpretation current today among Europeans. It is precisely

17. Toward the end of his life, Guénon revised his opinion regarding the heterodoxy of Buddhism, basing his judgment on information provided by A.K. Coomaraswamy and Marco Pallis. Ed.

the true doctrine of transmigration, understood according to the sense given it by pure metaphysics, that permits the refutation of the idea of reincarnation in an absolute and decisive manner, and it is on this ground alone that a refutation is possible. We are led thus to show that reincarnation is purely and simply an impossibility, by which it must be understood that one and the same being cannot have two existences in the corporeal world, considering this world in its fullest extent, and it matters little whether such hypothetical existence be on earth or on some other heavenly body.[18] Nor is it of the least consequence whether this might be in the form of a human being or, according to falsified conceptions of metempsychosis, in some other form—animal, vegetable, or even mineral. We will add further that it is of no consequence whether it be a question of successive or simultaneous existences, for some have advanced the ridiculous supposition of a plurality of lives unfolding in various locales at the same time for the same being, most likely on different planets. This brings us back once more to the Socialists of 1848, for it seems Blanqui was the first to imagine a simultaneous and indefinite repetition in space of supposedly identical individuals.[19] Some occultists also claim that the human individual can have several 'physical bodies', as they say, living at the same time on different planets. And they go so far as to say that if it happens that someone dreams he has been killed, it is in many cases because at that very moment he has been killed on another planet! All that would be unbelievable had we not heard it ourselves; but in the following chapter we will see other tales as thick as this. We must also state that our demonstration, which avails against all reincarnationist theories, whatever form they may take, applies equally and for the same reason to certain ideas of a more philosophical allure, such as Nietzsche's notion of an 'eternal return'—in a word, to everything that presumes any kind of repetition in the universe.[20]

18. Reincarnation on various planets is not an idea unique to 'neo-spiritualists'. It is also dear to Camille Flammarion, and was held also by Louis Figuier (*Le Lendemain de la Mort ou la Vie future selon la Science*). It is curious to see how a science as 'positivist' as modern astronomy can occasion such extravagant daydreams.

19. *L'Eternité par les Astres.*

20. 'God does not repeat Himself,' said the medieval Scholastics. ED.

We cannot dream of giving an account here of the metaphysical theory of the multiple states of the being, with all the ramifications this would entail. We plan to devote one or two studies specifically to this when the opportunity arises.[21] But we can at least indicate the basis of this theory, which is also the principle behind the proof of what is here in question: universal and total Possibility is necessarily infinite and cannot be conceived otherwise because, including all and leaving nothing outside itself, it cannot be limited by anything whatsoever. Any limitation of universal and total Possibility would necessarily be exterior to it and would properly and literally be an impossibility, that is to say pure nothingness. Now, to suppose a repetition within universal Possibility, as would be the case in positing two specifically identical possibilities, is to suppose a limitation, for infinity excludes all repetition. Only within a finite set can one return twice to the same element, and even then that element would not be rigorously the same except on condition that the set in question is a closed system, a condition that is never effectively realized. So long as the Universe is really a totality, or rather the absolute Totality, there can never be a closed cycle anywhere. Two identical possibilities would be only one and the same possibility; in order for them to be truly two it is necessary that they differ in at least one condition, and then they are not identical. Nothing can ever return to the same point, even in a system that is only indefinite (and not infinite), as for example the corporeal world. While tracing a circle, for example, a displacement is effected and the circle is not closed except in an entirely illusory manner. This is only an analogy, but it can help one understand that *a fortiori* in universal existence a return to a same state is an impossibility. In total Possibility the particular possibilities which constitute the conditioned states of existence are necessarily indefinitely multiple; to deny this is also to limit Possibility. This must be admitted on pain of contradiction, and suffices to establish that no creature can pass twice through the same state. As can be seen, this demonstration is extremely simple in itself, and if some experience difficulty understanding it, this can

21. Guénon later devoted two major studies to this fundamental cosmological theory: *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *The Multiple States of the Being*. ED.

only be because they lack the most elementary metaphysical understanding. A more developed exposition would perhaps be necessary for such people, but we ask that they wait until we have occasion to present the theory of the multiple states completely. In any case, they may be assured that the demonstration we have just formulated is uncompromising in the essentials. As for those who might think that by rejecting reincarnation we risk limiting universal Possibility in another way, we say simply that we reject only an impossibility, which intrinsically is nothing and augments the sum of possibilities only in an absolutely illusory manner, being only a pure zero. Universal Possibility is not limited when an absurdity is denied, as in stating that a square circle cannot exist for example, or that among all possible worlds there cannot be one in which two and two make five. The present case is exactly the same. In this order of ideas there are men who are strangely scrupulous; thus when Descartes attributed to God the 'liberty of indifference' for fear of limiting divine omnipotence (which is a theological expression of universal Possibility), he did not perceive that this 'liberty of indifference', or choice in the absence of any reason, implies contradictory conditions. To use his language, an absurdity is not absurd because God has arbitrarily willed it so, but on the contrary, because it is an absurdity God cannot make it be something, though this affects His omnipotence in no way whatsoever, absurdity and impossibility being synonymous.

Returning to the multiple states of the being, we must make an essential observation, namely that these states can be conceived as simultaneous as well as successive, and even that in their entirety, succession can be admitted only as a symbolic representation since time is a condition proper to only one of these states; even duration, whatever its mode, can only be attributed to some of them. When speaking of succession it is necessary to make clear that this can only be in a logical and not in a chronological sense. By this logical succession we mean that there is a causal chain between the various states; but even the causal relationship, if it is understood in its true sense (and not according to the 'empirical' sense of certain modern logicians) implies precisely simultaneity or the coexistence of its terms. Furthermore, we should specify that even the individual

human state, which is subject to the temporal condition, can nevertheless present a multiplicity of simultaneous secondary states. A human being cannot have several bodies, but outside the corporeal modality, and simultaneously with its bodily existence, the being can possess other modalities in which certain possibilities that are included in it are developed. This leads us to point out an idea that is closely related to reincarnation and that has a number of partisans among 'neo-spiritualists'. According to this idea, in the course of its evolution (for those who support such ideas are always evolutionists in one way or another), every being must pass successively through all forms of life, terrestrial and other. Such a theory expresses nothing but a manifest impossibility, for the simple reason that there exists an indefinitude of living forms through which no being could ever pass, these being all those forms occupied by other beings. Further, supposing a being had successively passed through an indefinitude of particular possibilities in a domain otherwise extended than that of the 'forms of life', it would not be any nearer its final term, which cannot be attained in this way. We will return to this when we speak of spiritist evolution. For the moment we will only note that the entire corporeal world, in the full deployment of all the possibilities it contains, represents only a part of the domain of manifestation of a single state. This same state then comprises *a fortiori* the potentiality corresponding to all the modalities of terrestrial life, which itself is only a very restricted portion of the material world. This renders perfectly useless—even if its impossibility were not otherwise proven—the supposition of a multiplicity of existences through which the being is progressively raised from the lowest modality, the mineral, all the way to the human, considered as the highest, passing successively through the vegetable and animal kingdoms with all the many degrees included in each of these. There are in fact people who construct such hypotheses, rejecting only the possibility of a retrogression. In reality, the individual in his complete extension simultaneously contains the possibilities corresponding to all the degrees in question (note well that we do not say that he contains them physically). This simultaneity translates into temporal succession only in the corporeal modality, in the course of which, as embryology shows, he in fact passes

through all corresponding stages, starting from the unicellular forms of the most rudimentary organisms; indeed, going back even further, from the crystal all the way to the human being in his earthly form. Let us note in passing that contrary to common opinion this embryological development is in no way proof of 'transformist' theory, which is no less false than all the other forms of evolutionism, being in fact the most gross of them all, a point we shall have occasion to return to below. What must be especially kept in mind is that the perspective of succession is essentially relative, and further that even in the restricted measure in which it is legitimately applicable it loses nearly all its interest by the simple observation that before any development the seed already potentially contains the complete being (we shall shortly see the importance of this). In every case the point of view of succession must be subordinate to that of simultaneity, as is required by the purely metaphysical and therefore extra-temporal (and also extra-spatial, as coexistence does not necessarily presume space) character of the theory of the multiple states of the being.[22]

We will further add, whatever may be the claims of the spiritists and occultists, that nowhere in nature can we find the least analogy favoring reincarnation, whereas there are on the contrary many analogies in the opposite direction. This point has been brought out clearly in the teachings of the formally anti-reincarnationist 'HBofL' mentioned above. It will be of interest, we believe, to cite several passages of these teachings, which show that this school had at least some knowledge of real transmigration as well as of certain cyclical laws:

> The adept author of *Ghostland* expresses an absolute truth when he says that, *as an impersonal being*, man lives in an indefinitude of worlds before reaching this one. . . . When the great stage of *consciousness*, summit of the series of manifestations, is attained, the soul will never again enter into the womb of matter, will

22. It would be worthwhile to critique the definitions Leibnitz gives of space (the order of coexistences) and of time (the order of successions), but failing this we will only say that he improperly extends the sense of these notions, as he also does with the notion of body.

never again pass through material incarnation; henceforth his rebirths are in the realm of the spirit. Those who support the strangely illogical doctrine of the multitude of *human* births assuredly have never developed in themselves the lucid state of spiritual consciousness; for otherwise the theory of reincarnation would have been thoroughly discredited, although it is affirmed and supported by a great number of men and women well versed in 'the wisdom of this world'. An *exterior* education is relatively valueless as a means of obtaining *real knowledge*.... An acorn becomes an oak, the coconut grows into a palm; but though the oak has certainly produced myriads of other acorns, it can never again become an acorn itself, neither does the palm again become a coconut. And similarly for man: once the soul has been manifested on the human plane and has thus attained consciousness of life outside itself, it never again passes through these rudimentary states.... All these so-called 'awakenings of latent memories' by which some people are convinced that they recall their previous lives, can be explained by, and only by, simple laws of *affinity* and of *form*. Each race *considered in itself* is *immortal*. It is the same for each cycle; the first cycle never becomes the second, but the beings of the first cycle are the *generators*[23] of those of the second. Thus each cycle comprises a great family constituted by the reunion of diverse groups of human souls, each condition being determined by the laws of its *activity*, those of its *form*, and those of its *affinity*, a trinity of laws.... It is thus that a man may be compared to the acorn and to the oak: the embryonic, non-individualized soul, becomes a man just as the acorn becomes an oak; and as the oak gives birth to innumerable acorns, likewise man in his turn provides the means for an indefinity of souls to be born into the spiritual world. There is complete correspondence between the two, and it is for precisely this reason that the Druids so greatly honored this tree which was revered beyond all others by the mighty Hierophants.

23. These are the *pitris* of the Hindu tradition.

This is an indication of the purely spiritual sense of 'posterity', though we cannot say more on this point now or on the related cyclical laws. Perhaps some day we will treat these questions if we find the means to do so in terms that are sufficiently intelligible, for there are difficulties inherent in the imperfection of Western languages.

Unfortunately, the 'HB of L' admitted the possibility of reincarnation in certain exceptional cases, such as still-born infants or those dying very young, and born idiots.[24] And we have read somewhere that Mme Blavatsky admitted this possibility at the time she wrote *Isis Unveiled*.[25] In reality, once it is a question of a metaphysical impossibility, there cannot be the least exception; it suffices that a being has passed through a certain state, even if only in an embryonic form, or even in the form of a single germ, in order for it in no case to be able return to that state, of which it has thus realized the possibilities according to the measure its own nature admits. If the development of these possibilities seems to have been arrested at a certain point, it was because there was no need for the being concerned to go further as far as its corporeal modality is concerned. Here the cause of error is an exclusive regard for the corporeal modality, the not taking into account all the possibilities which, for this same being, may be developed in other modalities of the same state. If one were able to take all these modalities into account, it would be seen that even in cases such as these latter reincarnation is absolutely unnecessary, which one can readily admit once one knows that it is impossible and that all that exists, whatever the appearances, contribute to the total harmony of the Universe. This question is in fact analogous to that of 'spirit' communications: in the one case as in the other it is a question of impossibilities. To say

24. There was still a third exceptional case, but one of an entirely different order: it was that of the 'voluntary messianic incarnations' which occurred approximately every six hundred years, that is, at the end of each of the cycles that the Chaldeans termed *Naros*, but without the same spirit ever incarnating more than once and without there being consecutively two similar incarnations in one same race. The discussion and interpretation of this theory would take us entirely outside the scope of the present study.

25. *Theosophy*, chap 9.

that there may be exceptions would be as illogical as to say, for example, that there can be a small number of cases in Euclidian geometry where the sum of the three angles of a triangle do not equal two right angles. Whatever is absurd is so absolutely, and not 'in general'. For the rest, if we begin to admit exceptions we cannot see how to assign them any precise limits. For example, how would one determine the age at which an infant, should he die, might not need to be reincarnated, or the degree of mental debility required before a reincarnation might become necessary? Obviously, nothing could be more arbitrary, and we can acknowledge Papus' correctness when he says that 'if one rejects this theory, no exceptions can be admitted, otherwise a breach is opened through which everything can pass.'[26]

In the mind of its author this observation was addressed especially to certain writers who believed that in particular cases reincarnation could be reconciled with Catholic doctrine. The Count of Larmandie, notably, has claimed that it might be admitted for infants who die unbaptized.[27] It is quite true that certain texts, those of the Fourth Council of Constantinople for example, which at times were held to counter reincarnation, do not really apply. But the occultists need not congratulate themselves, because if this is so, it is simply because at the time reincarnation had not even been imagined. What was in question was Origen's opinion that corporeal life was a punishment for souls which, 'preexisting as celestial powers, had become sated with divine contemplation.' It is plain to see that what is here involved is not an anterior corporeal life, but an existence in the intelligible world (in the Platonic sense), and this has no relation whatsoever with reincarnation. It is difficult to see how Papus could write that 'the opinion of the Council indicates that reincarnation formed part of the teachings, and that if there were some who were voluntarily reincarnated, not from disgust with Heaven but for love of neighbor, the anathema could not affect them' (he imagined that this anathema was aimed at those who 'proclaimed that they had returned to earth because they

26. *La Réincarnation*, p179; cited by Dr Rozier, *Initiation*, April 1898.
27. *Magie et Religion*.

were displeased with Heaven'); and basing himself on this, he asserted that 'the idea of reincarnation is part of the secret teachings of the Church.'[28] As concerns Catholic doctrine, we must mention a truly extraordinary assertion of the spiritists: Allan Kardec maintains that 'the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh establishes that of reincarnation taught by spiritists', and that 'thus the Church herself, by the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh, teaches the doctrine of reincarnation'; or rather, he presents these propositions as questions, and it is the 'spirit' of St Louis who responds that 'this is obvious', adding that 'before long it will be recognized that at each step spiritism stands out from the very text of the sacred Scriptures'![29] What is still more astonishing is that a Catholic priest, albeit one more or less suspected of heterodoxy, can be found to accept and support such an opinion, for the Abbé J.-A. Petit of the diocese of Beauvais, formerly a close friend of the Duchess of Pomar, wrote these lines:

> Reincarnation, as is known, has been recognized by most ancient peoples.... Christ also admitted it. If it is not expressly taught by the apostles, this is because the faithful had to realize in themselves the moral qualities that rendered it unnecessary.... Later, when the great leaders and their disciples had disappeared and Christian teaching, under pressure from human interests, was fixed in an arid creed, there remained as a vestige of the past only the *resurrection of the flesh* or *resurrection in the flesh*, which, taken literally, led to the gigantic error of the resurrection of dead bodies.[30]

We will not comment on this, for no impartial mind can take such interpretations seriously; but the transformation of the 'resurrection of the flesh' into 'resurrection in the flesh' is one of those little tricks which risk placing the author's good faith in doubt.

Before leaving this subject we will say a few words about the Gospel texts cited by spiritists in favor of reincarnation. Allan Kardec

28. *La Réincarnation*, p171.
29. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp440–442.
30. *L'Alliance Spiritualiste*, July 1911.

notes two of them,[31] the first of which follows the account of the Transfiguration:

> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, 'Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.' And the disciples asked him, 'Why then do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' He replied, 'Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.[32]

Allan Kardec adds: 'Since John the Baptist was Elijah, the spirit or soul of Elijah was reincarnated in the body of John the Baptist.' For his part, Papus likewise says:

> First, the Gospels affirm unequivocally that John the Baptist is Elijah reincarnated. This is a mystery. When John the Baptist was questioned, he held his peace; but the others knew. There is also the parable of the man born blind and punished for his prior sins, which provides much occasion for reflection.[33]

In the first place, the text does not indicate the manner in which 'Elijah is already come'; and it is supposed that Elijah was not dead in the ordinary sense of the word, it seems difficult, at the very least, to assume that his return was by reincarnation. Furthermore, why was Elijah not manifested at the Transfiguration in the likeness of John the Baptist?[34] And further, John the Baptist, when asked, did

31. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp105–107. Cf. Léon Denis, *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, pp376–378. See also *Les Messies esséniens et L'Eglise orthodoxe*, pp33–35; this work is a publication of the so-called 'Essenian' sect to which we shall allude below.

32. Matt. 17:9–15. Cf. Mark 9:8–12; this text hardly differs from the other except that the name of John the Baptist is not mentioned.

33. *La Réincarnation*, p170.

34. The other person of the Old Testament manifested at the Transfiguration is Moses, of whom 'no one knows his place of burial.' Enoch and Elijah, who must return at the end of time, were both 'raised up into the Heavens'. None of these can be cited as examples of manifestations of the dead.

not refuse to answer, as Papus claimed, but on the contrary made a formal denial: 'And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he answered, "No".'[35] If it is said that this proves only that he had no memory of his previous existence, we will respond by pointing out another text that is still more explicit: the angel Gabriel, announcing to Zechariah the birth of his son, declares: 'and he will go before him *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.'[36] It could not be shown more clearly that John the Baptist was not Elijah in person, but only that he belonged to his 'spiritual family', if this manner of expression may be allowed. It is in this way and not literally that the 'coming of Elijah' must be understood. Allan Kardec does not speak of the story of the man born blind, and Papus seems quite unfamiliar with it, for he takes as a parable what is an account of a miraculous healing. Here is the exact text:

> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.'[37]

This man was not, then, 'punished for his sins', but this might have been so, if the text had not been twisted by adding a word not found in it—'for his previous sins'. One might be tempted to accuse Papus of bad faith were it not for his manifest ignorance in this matter. It was possible that the infirmity of this man was inflicted as an anticipated sanction in view of sins he would later commit. This interpretation cannot be rejected except by those who push anthropomorphism to the point of submitting God to time. Finally, the second text cited by Allan Kardec is the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus. It is sufficient to reproduce the essential passage in order to refute reincarnationist claims in this regard:

35. John 1:21.
36. Luke 1:7.
37. John 9:1–3.

> Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. . . . 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew."'[38]

It requires an ignorance as prodigious as that of the spiritists to believe that all this is a question of reincarnation, when in fact it is a question of the 'second birth' understood in a purely spiritual sense that is even plainly contrasted with physical birth. This idea of the 'second birth', which we cannot discuss now, is one common to all traditional doctrines, among which, despite the assertions of the 'neo-spiritualists', there is not a single one that has ever taught anything remotely resembling reincarnation.

38. John 3:3–7.

7

REINCARNATIONIST EXTRAVAGANCES

We have said that the idea of reincarnation has contributed greatly to the mental disorder of our time, and we will now demonstrate this by citing examples of the extravagances it has occasioned. Given all the metaphysical considerations we have outlined, we think this will be a rather amusing diversion. To tell the truth, there is something fundamentally sad in the spectacle of all these follies, although occasionally it is difficult to keep from smiling. In this connection, what we most frequently observe in spiritist circles is a special kind of megalomania: almost all these people imagine that they are the reincarnation of some illustrious figure. Judging by the names attached to the 'communications', great men manifest themselves much more willingly than others; we must believe that they also reincarnate more often, even in multiples and simultaneously. In sum, all this differs from ordinary megalomania in one point only: instead of believing themselves grand personages of the present, the spiritists locate their sickly dreams in the past. We speak of spiritists because they are the more numerous, but it is the same with Theosophists, who are no less tainted (elsewhere we have seen Mr Leadbeater giving grave assurances that Col Olcott was the reincarnation of the kings Gushtasp and Ashoka).[1] There are also those among whom this same dream is transformed into a future hope, and this is perhaps why they find reincarnation so 'consoling'. In the teachings of the 'HBofL', some of which we reproduced in the

1. *Theosophy*, chap 10.

previous chapter, allusion is made to men who declare that 'those who have led a noble and worthy life befitting a king (even if this was in the body of a beggar) in their last earthly existence, will live again as nobles, kings, or other personages of high rank,' and it is appropriately added that such statements prove that their authors are inspired only by sentimentality, and are lacking in knowledge.

The anti-reincarnationist spiritists of the Anglo-Saxon countries do not hesitate to make fun of these wild imaginings. Dunglas Home wrote:

> Those who share Allan Kardec's daydreams are recruited especially from the bourgeoisie. It is their consolation—these brave men who are nothing—to believe that they have been some great person before their birth and that they will again be someone important after their death.[2]

And elsewhere:

> Apart from the revolting confusion to which this doctrine logically leads (in family and social relationships), there are material impossibilities to be taken into account, no matter how enthusiastic one may be. A lady may believe as much as she likes that she was the companion of an emperor or a king in a previous existence; but how to reconcile these things if we encounter, as often happens, a good half dozen ladies, equally convinced, each of whom claims to have been the very dear spouse of the same august personage? For my part, I have had the honor of meeting at least a dozen Marie Antoinettes, six or seven Mary Stuarts, a multitude of Saint Louises, and twenty or so Alexander the Greats and Caesars, but never a simple Tom, Dick, or Harry.[3]

On the other hand there are also proponents of reincarnation, especially among occultists, who believe they should protest against what they regard as 'exaggerations' that might compromise their cause. Thus Papus wrote:

2. *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritisme*, p111.
3. Ibid., pp124–125.

> In certain spiritist circles one meets certain poor wretches who coolly pretend that they are a reincarnation of Molière, or Racine, or Richelieu, not to speak of the ancient poets Orpheus and Homer. At the moment we cannot discuss whether these assertions have a solid basis or whether they stem from the realm of incipient mental illness. But let us recall that Pythagoras, reciting his previous incarnations, did not boast of having been a great man;[4] and we note that presenting a Richelieu who has lost all trace of genius and a Victor Hugo writing fourteen-meter verse after his death is a singular way of defending the unending progress of souls in the infinite [the theory of the spiritists]. Serious and educated spiritists, and there are more than one might believe, should take care that such things do not happen.[5]

And further on he says:

> Exaggerating this doctrine, some spiritists give themselves out as reincarnations of all the great and famous men. A stolid worker is the reincarnation of Voltaire . . . but without Voltaire's wit. A retired captain is Napoleon come back from St Helena, though having since lost the knack of success. Finally, there is no group where Marie de Medici, Mme de Maintenon, or Mary Stuart have not returned in the bodies of good middle-class and often rich women, or where Turenne, Condé, Richelieu, Mazarin, Molière, Jean-Jacques Rousseau do not direct some little séance. This is the danger, this is the real cause of the stagnant state of spiritism for the last fifty years; there is no need to search for any other reason than this, added to the ignorance and sectarianism of the group leaders.[6]

In another and more recent work he returns to the same subject:

> The human being who becomes aware of this mystery of reincarnation immediately imagines the person whom he must have been; he finds as if by chance that this personage was always a

4. This is only the usual confusion between metempsychosis and reincarnation.
5. *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, p297.
6. Ibid., p342.

> man of earthly significance and of high position. In spiritist or Theosophist meetings one sees very few assassins, drunkards, grocers, or valets (professions on the whole quite honorable) reincarnated. It is always Napoleon, a great princess, Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, or some celebrated Pharaoh, who are reincarnated in the skin of some worthy men who come to fancy themselves as having been the great persons whom they imagine. For the said great personages this would already be a rather strong punishment, to have come back to earth in such conditions. . . . Pride is the great stumbling-block of many advocates of the doctrine of reincarnation; pride often plays a role as harmful as it is elevated. If one reserves the great personalities of history for one's own reincarnations, it must be recognized that the adepts of this doctrine keep the assassins, the great criminals, and often the much-maligned, for the reincarnations of their enemies.[7]

And here is what Papus has found to remedy the evil he has thus denounced:

> One may have the intuition that one has lived in such and such a time, that one has been in such and such a setting; one may have a revelation through the world of the spirits that one was a great lady, a contemporary of the great philosopher Abelard who was so unappreciated by his crude contemporaries, but one cannot be so certain of this as one is of having lived on the earth.[8]

The great lady in question may not necessarily have been Heloise, therefore, and if one believes oneself to have been such and such a celebrity, it is simply because one may have lived in that person's entourage, perhaps as a domestic servant. Papus evidently thinks these considerations may rein in the ravings brought on by pride, but we doubt that the spiritists will be so easily persuaded that they must renounce their illusions. Unfortunately, too, there are other kinds of maunderings that are scarcely less pitiful. The quite relative

7. *La Réincarnation*, pp 138–139 and 142–143.
8. Ibid., p 141.

prudence and wisdom Papus displays does not prevent him from writing in the following vein himself:

> Christ has an apartment [*sic*] encompassing thousands of spirits. Every time a spirit from Christ's apartment is reincarnated, he obeys the following law while on earth: (i) he is the oldest of his family; (ii) his father is always named Joseph; (iii) his mother is always named Mary, or a name which numerically corresponds to these names in other languages. Finally, there are planetary aspects in the birth of spirits coming from the apartment of Christ (and we do not say of Christ himself) though it would be needless to reveal them here.[9]

We know perfectly well who is alluded to here and we could recount the entire story of this so-called 'Master' who is said to be 'the oldest spirit of the planet', and the chief of the Twelve who passed through the Gate of the Sun two years after the middle of the century. Those who refuse to acknowledge this 'Master' risk a 'delay in evolution' in the form of a penalty of thirty-three supplementary incarnations, neither more nor less!

Nevertheless, in writing the lines which we have just cited, Papus was still convinced that he could contribute thereby to the moderation of certain excessive conceits, for he added: 'Unaware of all that, a crowd of visionaries claim that they are the reincarnation of Christ on this earth . . . and the list is endless.' This prediction was only too well vindicated; elsewhere we have told the story of Theosophical messiahs, and there are many others in similar circles. But the messianism of the 'neo-spiritualists' can be clad in the most bizarre and diverse forms, even apart from these 'reincarnations of Christ' of which one of the prototypes was the pastor Guillaume Monod. In this regard it does not seem that the theory of the 'spirits of the apartment of Christ' is much more extravagant than the others. We know too well the deplorable role it played in the occultist school of France, and continues to play in the various groups which today represent the remnants of French occultism. On the other hand, there is a clairvoyant spiritist, Mlle Marguerite Wolff (we can name

9. Ibid., p140.

her, since the case has been made public), who recently received from her 'guide' the mission of announcing 'the forthcoming reincarnation of Christ in France.' She believes herself to be the reincarnation of Catherine de Medici (not to speak of several hundred other previous existences on earth and elsewhere, of which she would have regained more or less precise memories). She has published a list of more than two hundred 'celebrated reincarnations', in which she has revealed 'what the great men of today once were'; this too is a quite remarkable pathological case.[10] There are also spiritists who have messianic conceptions of quite a different kind: we recently read in a foreign spiritist journal (we were unable to find the exact reference) an article in which the author very correctly criticized those who in announcing the imminent 'second coming' of Christ present it as a reincarnation; but he did so only to declare subsequently that if he was unable to admit such a thesis, it was only because the return of Christ was already a *fait accompli*... by spiritism, that is. 'He has already come, since in certain centers his communications are being recorded.' Truly, one must have a robust faith to believe that Christ and his Apostles manifest themselves in spiritist séances and speak through mediums, especially when one has sampled the quality of the innumerable 'communications' attributed to them.[11] Elsewhere, in some American circles there were 'messages' in which Apollonius of Tyana, supported by various 'witnesses', declared that he himself was simultaneously 'the Jesus and Saint Paul of the Christian Scriptures,' and perhaps Saint John as well, and that he preached Gospels of which the originals had been

10. This escapade had a sad end; after falling into the hands of crooks who odiously exploited her, it seems that the poor woman is now completely disabused of her 'mission'.

11. A rather independent spiritist journal which was published at Marseille under the title *La Vie Posthume* once gave an amusing account of 'pietist spiritism' within which Saint John, Jesus Christ, and Allan Kardec were manifested. Papus has reproduced this account, not without some malice, in his *Traité méthodique de Science occulte*, pp332–339. In this connection let us also mention that the 'prolegomenas' of the Book of the Spirits carry the signatures of Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Augustine, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louis, the Spirit of Truth, Socrates, Plato, Fénelon, Franklin, Swedenborg, etc. Is that not enough to excuse the 'exaggerations' of certain disciples of Allan Kardec?

given him by the Buddhists; several of these 'messages' can be found at the end of Henri Lacroix's book.[12] Apart from spiritism, there was also an Anglo-American secret society which taught the identity of St Paul and Apollonius, claiming that the proof can be found 'in a small manuscript now kept in a monastery in the South of France.' There are many reasons for thinking the said source is purely imaginary, but the agreement of this story with the spiritist 'communications' just mentioned renders these 'communications' extremely suspect, for it suggests something more than the product of the 'subconscious of two or three deranged individuals.[13]

Papus provides other stories of almost the same merit as the 'spirits of the apartment of Christ'; we offer this example:

> Just as there are comets which come to bring strength to a weary sun and which circulate between various solar systems, there are also cyclic envoys who come at certain periods to stir up a humanity made numb by pleasure or rendered weak by a too prolonged quietude. . . . Among these cyclical reincarnations, which always come from the same apartment of the invisible even if they are not of the same spirit, we will cite the reincarnation which has so much struck historians: Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon. Each time a spirit of this plane returns, he brusquely transforms all the laws of war. Regardless of which people may be at his disposal, he dynamizes them into an instrument of conquest against whom struggle is vain. . . . The next time he comes this spirit will find the means of preventing the death in combat of more than two thirds of his troops by the creation of a defensive system which will revolutionize the laws of warfare.[14]

12. *Mes expériences avec les esprits*, pp259–280. The 'witnesses' are Caiphas, Pontius Pilate, the proconsul Felix, Marcion the gnostic (the so-called 'Saint Mark'), Lucian (so-called 'Saint Luke'), Damis the biographer of Apollonius of Tyana, Pope Gregory VII, and finally a certain Deva Bodhastuata, an imaginary personage presented as 'the twenty-seventh prophet after Buddha.' It appears that several among them took as interpreter the 'spirit' of Faraday!

13. The secret society in question designated itself rather enigmatically as the 'order S.S.S and Fraternity Z.Z.R.R.Z.Z'; it was openly hostile to the 'H B of L'.

14. *La Réincarnation*, pp155–159.

The date of this next visit is not indicated, even approximately, which is too bad, although Papus should perhaps be praised for his prudence; for every time he involves himself in even slightly specific prophecies, by incredible bad luck events never fail to give him the lie. But here is another 'apartment' with which he acquaints us:

> Again it is France [he was speaking of Napoleon] which had the great honor of several times incarnating a celestial envoy from the apartment of the Virgin of Light, linking feminine weakness with the strength of the incarnated angel. St Geneviève formed the nucleus of the French nation. Joan of Arc saved this nation at the moment when, logically, there was nothing more that could be done.[15]

And on the subject of Joan of Arc one must not let slip the opportunity for a brief anticlerical and democratic aside:

> The Roman Church is herself hostile to every celestial envoy, and it took the strong voice of the people to overturn the sentence of the ecclesiastical judges, who, blinded by politics, had martyred the envoy of Heaven.[16]

If Papus had Joan of Arc coming from the 'apartment' of the Virgin of Light, there was at one time in France a fundamentally spiritist sect calling itself 'Essenian' (this name has been very successful in all the milieux of this kind) which regarded her as the 'feminine Messiah', the equal of Christ himself, and finally as the 'celestial Comforter' and 'spirit of Truth' announced by Jesus;[17] and it seems that some spiritists have gone so far as to consider her a reincarnation of Christ himself.[18]

15. Ibid., p160.

16. Ibid., p161.

17. There would be some rather curious things to say on this ferociously anti-Catholic sect, which held the pseudo-historical fantasies of Jacolliot in great honor and sought especially to 'naturalize' Christianity. We have discussed these things elsewhere in connection with the role that the Theosophists attributed to the ancient Essenes (*Theosophy*, chap. 20).

18. *Les Messies esséniens et L'Eglise orthodoxe*, p319.

But let us move on to another kind of extravagance which the idea of reincarnation has occasioned. We mean the relationships which spiritists and occultists believe exist between successive existences. For them, in fact, actions accomplished in the course of one life must have their consequences in following lives. This is a causality of a most particular kind. More precisely, it is the idea of moral sanction, but which instead of being applied to an extra-terrestrial 'future life', as in religious conceptions, is applied to terrestrial lives in virtue of the assertion, which is contestable to say the least, that actions accomplished on earth must have their effects exclusively on earth. The 'Master' to whom we have alluded taught expressly that 'it is in the world where one has incurred debts that one must pay them.' The Theosophists have given to this 'ethical causality' the name *karma*—which is completely inappropriate, as the meaning of this word in Sanskrit is nothing other than 'action'. In other schools, if the word is not current (although despite their hostility toward the Theosophists, French occultists use it freely), the idea is fundamentally the same, the variations concerning only secondary points. When it is a matter of precisely indicating the consequences of such and such specific action, the Theosophists are generally rather reserved; but the spiritists and occultists seem to compete with one another in providing the most minute and ridiculous details. For example, if some are to be believed, a person who behaves badly toward his father will be reborn lame in his right leg; or if toward his mother, the lameness will be in his left leg, and so on. There are others who blame accidents incurred in previous lives for infirmities of this kind. We knew an occultist who was lame and who firmly believed that this was because in his previous life he had broken his leg when jumping from a window to escape the Inquisition. There is no telling how far dangers of this kind of thing can go. Especially in occultist circles, one learns daily of someone who of old had committed such and such a crime for which he must expect to pay in this present life. Additionally, he must do nothing to escape the punishment which sooner or later will come to him, and which will be so much the more serious as the quittance has been the more delayed. Under the shadow of such a suggestion the unfortunate individual will truly rush to accept the so-called punishment and

even try to provoke it. If it is a question of an act that depends upon his will, the most absurd things will not give pause to one who has reached this degree of credulity and fanaticism. The 'Master' (still the same) had persuaded one of his disciples that, because of who knows what action committed in another incarnation, he must marry a woman whose left leg had been amputated. The disciple (who, moreover, was an engineer and therefore a man with a certain degree of intelligence and education) placed announcements in various journals in order to locate a woman meeting the requisite conditions and eventually found her. This is only one act among many similar ones, and we mention it only because it is so characteristic of the mentality of the people involved; but there are others which may yield more tragic results. We knew another occultist who, desiring nothing so much as an accidental death that would liberate him from a burdensome *karma*, had quite simply decided not to avoid automobiles that crossed his path; if he did not go so far as to throw himself under their wheels it was only because his death had to be accidental and not suicidal, which latter, instead of freeing him from his *karma*, would only have aggravated it. Do not suppose that we exaggerate in the least; these things are not inventions, and the very puerility of certain details only serves as a guarantee of authenticity. We could if needed give the names of various persons who underwent these adventures. One can only pity those who are victims of such suggestions, but what is one to think of those who are responsible for them? If they are guilty of dishonesty, surely they should be denounced as real evil-doers. If they are sincere, which is possible in many cases, they should be treated as dangerous fools.

When these things remain simple theories they are only grotesque; such is the well-known example (among spiritists) of the victim who sought vengeance against his murderer even into another existence. The formerly assassinated becomes the assassin in his turn; and the murderer becomes the victim avenging himself in yet another existence. Another example of the same kind is that of the coachman who crushes a pedestrian; as punishment—for the posthumous justice of the spiritists extends even to involuntary manslaughter—this coachman-become-pedestrian will in his next life be crushed by the pedestrian-become-coachman. But logically

the latter, whose act does not differ from that of the former, must subsequently undergo the same punishment—always because of his victim, so that these two unfortunate individuals will be obliged to run over one another alternately until the end of time, for there is obviously no reason for this to come to an end. One would like to know what Gabriel Delanne thinks of this reasoning. On this point, too, there are other 'neo-spiritualists' who concede nothing to the spiritists, and we have heard an occultist with mystical tendencies tell the following story as an example of the frightful consequences that may follow on acts generally considered indifferent: a schoolboy amuses himself by breaking a pen and then throwing it away. Through all transformations to which they are subject, the molecules of metal retain the memory of the boy's malicious act. Finally, after several centuries, these molecules pass into some machine and one day an accident occurs and a worker dies, crushed by the machine. Now it happens that this worker was precisely the schoolboy in question, reincarnated so that he might undergo the punishment of his previous act. It would certainly be difficult to imagine anything more outlandish than these fantastic stories which suffice to give an accurate notion of the mentality of those who invent them, and especially of those who believe them.

In these accounts it is, as we see, most often a question of punishments, which may seem rather astonishing on the part of men who boast of having a doctrine that is above all else 'consoling'; but this is doubtless what is most likely to capture the imagination. For as we have said, one hopes for future recompense; but as to knowing what in the present life is recompense for this or that good particular action accomplished in the past, this, it seems, has the drawback of provoking sentiments of pride. But this may be less fateful, after all, than terrorizing poor men with 'payment' of their imaginary 'debts'. Let us add that sometimes more inoffensive consequences are envisaged; thus Papus assures us that 'it is rare that a spiritual being reincarnated on earth is not led by apparently fortuitous circumstances to speak the language of the land of his last incarnation as well as his present language';[19] and he adds that 'this is an

19. *La Réincarnation*, p135.

observation which it would be interesting to monitor,' but unfortunately forgets to give the means by which this might be done. Since we are citing Papus again, let us not neglect to add (for it is a curiosity worth noting) that he taught, though we believe he never dared write it down, that sometimes one might be reincarnated before dying. He recognized that this would be an exceptional case, but he at last offered the description of a grandfather and his grandson having one and the same spirit, which was incarnated progressively in the child (the theory of the occultists is that an incarnation is complete only after seven years) in the same proportion that the old man weakened. Moreover, the idea that one can be reincarnated in one's own descendants was particularly dear to him because from his point of view he saw therein a means of justifying the words by which 'Christ proclaimed that sin may be punished unto the seventh generation.'[20] The conception of what may be called an 'hereditary responsibility' seems to have escaped him entirely, although it is a fact which is incontestable even physiologically. Once the human individual takes from his parents certain corporeal and psychic elements, he prolongs their life, at least partially, under this double relationship; and by this double connection he is truly something of his parents even while being himself, so that the consequences of their actions may in this way be extended even to him. These things may at least be expressed in this way, ridding them of any specifically moral character. Inversely, it can be said that the child, and even all descendants, are potentially included, from the beginning, in the individualities of the parents, always in the double corporeal and psychic relationship; that is to say, not in what concerns the properly spiritual and personal being, but in what concerns the human individual as such. And thus the descendants can be regarded as having in a way participated in the actions of the parents without the former actually existing in the parents' individuality. We have indicated, then, the two complementary aspects of the question and will not linger further over it, although this

20. Ibid., p35. This sentence seems to have no relationship with the rest of the passage in which it is inserted, but we know what Papus thought on this point (cf. ibid., pp103–105).

perhaps will be enough for some readers to catch a glimpse of all that may be of interest in this connection regarding the doctrine of original sin.

Spiritists, precisely, protest against this idea of original sin, first because it shocks their special sense of justice, and also because it has consequences contrary to their 'progressive' theory of original sin. Allan Kardec did not want to see in original sin anything more than an expression of the fact that 'man has come to this earth bearing in himself the seed of his passions and the traces of his original inferiority,' so that for him 'original sin stands for the still imperfect nature of man who is thus responsible only for his own faults and not for those of his fathers.' Such at least is the teaching he attributes to the 'spirit' of Saint Louis.[21] Léon Denis expresses himself in terms both more precise and more violent:

> Original sin is the fundamental dogma on which the entire structure of Christian doctrine rests. The idea is fundamentally true, but false in form and denatured by the Church. It is true in the sense that man suffers from his intuition that he retains the faults committed in his previous lives and from the consequences that they entail for him. But this suffering is personal and merited. No one is responsible for the faults of another unless he has participated in them. Presented in its dogmatic aspect, original sin, which punishes all the posterity of Adam, that is to say humanity in its entirety, for the disobedience of the first couple, only to be saved subsequently by an even greater inequity—the immolation of a just man—is an outrage to reason and to morality in their essential principles, namely kindness and justice.... [Original sin] has done more to distance man from belief in God than all the attacks and all the criticisms of philosophy.[22]

One might ask the author if from his perspective the transmission of hereditary disease is not equally an outrage to reason and morality, which nevertheless does not prevent this transmission from

21. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp 446–447.
22. *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, pp 93–96.

being both frequent and real;[23] or one might ask also whether justice understood in the human sense (and it is thus that he understands it, his conception of God being quite anthropomorphic and 'anthropopathetic') can consist in nothing but 'compensating an injustice by another injustice,' as the Chinese say. But fundamentally, declamations of this kind do not merit the least discussion. What is of more interest here is to call attention to a technique customary with spiritists, which consists in claiming that the dogmas of the Church, as also the various doctrines of antiquity, are a deformation of their own theories; only they forget that these latter are quite modern inventions, a failing they have in common with the Theosophists, who present their doctrine as the 'source of all religions'. Has not Léon Denis formally declared that 'at their origin all religions rest on spiritist facts and have no other origin but spiritism'?[24] In the present case, the opinion of spiritists is that original sin is a figure for faults committed in previous lives, a figure the true sense of which obviously can be understood only by those who, like them, believe in reincarnation. It is unfortunate for the soundness of their thesis that Allan Kardec happens to come along a little after Moses!

Occultist interpretations of original sin and the fall of man are at least more subtle, if not better founded. And there is one that we must point out because it is directly connected to the theory of reincarnation. This explanation is the personal creation of a French occultist, a stranger to Papus' school, who claims for himself alone the qualification of 'Christian occultist' (even though others claim to be Christian, unless they prefer to call themselves 'Christics'). One of his unique characteristics is that on every occasion he mocks the triple and septuple senses of the esoterists and the kabbalists and he wishes to abide by the literal interpretation of Scripture—although this does not prevent him from accommodating this inter-

23. According to Léon Denis (ibid., pp97–98), it is not necessary to be a materialist to admit heredity, but spiritists, for the requirements of their thesis, do not hesitate to deny the evidence. Gabriel Delanne, on the contrary, admits heredity in some measure (*L'Evolution animique*, pp287–301).

24. Talk given at the Spiritist Congress of Geneva in 1913.

pretation to his personal ideas, as will be seen. In order to understand his theory it is necessary to know that this occultist favors the geocentric system, in the sense that he regards the earth as the center of the Universe—if not materially, at least by a certain privilege pertaining to its inhabitants.[25] For him the earth is the only world where there could be human beings because the conditions of life on other planets or in other systems are too different from those of the earth for man to adapt to them. From this it obviously results that by 'man' he understands exclusively a physical individual endowed with the five senses familiar to us plus their corresponding faculties, and with all the organs necessary to the various functions of human terrestrial life. Consequently, human beings can reincarnate only on this earth since there is no other place in the Universe where they could possibly live (it goes without saying that freedom from the spatial condition cannot be in question in all this). Moreover, humans always remain humans in their reincarnations; he even adds that a change of sex is impossible. At the beginning, man, 'leaving the hands of the Creator [in these remarks the most anthropomorphic expressions must be taken literally and not as the symbols which they really are], was placed on the earth to cultivate his garden,' that is to say to develop physical matter, presumed to have been more subtle than that today.[26] By 'man' must be understood the human collectivity in its entirety, the totality of the human race regarded as the sum of all individuals (note the confusion between species and collectivity, which is also quite common among modern philosophers), so that 'all men', without exception and in number unknown (but assuredly very great), were at first incarnated simultaneously on the earth. This is not the view of other occultist schools, which often speak of the 'differences in age of human spirits' (especially those that have had the privilege of knowing the 'the oldest spirit of the planet'), and even of the means of determining these age differences, principally by the examination of 'planetary

25. Other occultists with very specialized astronomical conceptions go so far as to contend that the earth is the center of the universe even materially.

26. See *The Reign of Quantity*, chap. 17, entitled 'The Solidification of the World'. Ed.

aspects' of the horoscope—but enough. In the conditions we have just described there could be no human birth, for there would be no man who was unincarnate; and it would be thus as long as man did not die, that is to say until the Fall in which all would personally participate (this is the essential point of the theory) and which is considered as 'representing a series of events which had to take place over a period of several centuries,' although quite prudently no mention is made of the nature of these events. After the Fall, physical matter became more gross, its properties were modified, and it was subject to corruption; mankind, imprisoned in this matter, began to die, to be 'disincarnated'. Then, likewise, they began to be born because 'disincarnate' man, remaining 'in space' (one sees how great is the influence of spiritism in all this), or in the 'invisible atmosphere' of the earth, tends to reincarnate, to assume again the physical life of the earth in new human bodies, that is to say to return to their normal condition. According to this conception, then, it is always the same human beings who must reincarnate periodically from the beginning to the end of terrestrial humanity (if it is conceded that terrestrial humanity has an end, for there are also schools which hold that the end to be attained is to regain corporeal or 'physical immortality' and that each individual who composes this 'physical immortality' will be reincarnated on earth until this aim has finally been achieved). Certainly, all this reasoning is quite simple and perfectly logical if the starting-point is admitted, and especially if it be admitted that is impossible for the human being to exist in modalities other than the terrestrial and corporeal, which in no way whatsoever is reconcilable with the most elementary notions of metaphysics. It nevertheless appears, at least according to its author, that this is the strongest argument that can be adduced in support of the hypothesis of reincarnation![27]

We can draw to a halt here, for we cannot begin to exhaust the list of these oddities. But we have said enough to show how disquieting the spread of the reincarnationist idea is for the mental state of our

27. This had already bee written when we learned of the death of the occultist to whom we alluded. We can now say, therefore, that the party in question in this paragraph was Dr Rozier.

contemporaries. One must not be surprised that we have taken some of our examples from outside spiritism, because it is from spiritism that this idea has been borrowed by all the other schools that teach it. This strange folly redounds, at least indirectly, to spiritism. Finally, we excuse ourselves for not mentioning names in the preceding. We do not want to engage in polemics, and if one can cite without objection all that an author has published under his own signature or even under a pseudonym, the case is a little different when unwritten materials are in question. Nevertheless, if we feel obliged some day to provide greater detail, we will not hesitate to do so in the interests of the truth; and circumstances alone will determine our conduct in this regard.

8

THE LIMITS OF EXPERIMENTATION

BEFORE leaving the question of reincarnation we must mention the claims of the 'experimental proofs' that are made for it. Certainly, when something is demonstrably impossible, as is the case here, all the facts that can be mustered in its favor are completely without significance, and one can be assured in advance that these facts are badly interpreted. But it is sometimes interesting and useful to bring things in focus, and here we find a good example of the pseudo-scientific fantasies in which the spiritists take pleasure and by which even some psychists allow themselves to become infected, often without knowing it. First, we will recall and clarify what we said previously concerning cases adduced as instances of reincarnation by reason of a so-called spontaneously produced 'awakening of memories'. When these cases are real (for some of them are very poorly controlled, those who handle such things repeating them one after the other without ever making any effort at verification) they are nothing other than simple cases of metempsychosis in the true sense of this word, that is to say the transmission of certain psychic elements from one individual to another. There are even cases for which there is no need to go so far as this; thus it sometimes happens that a person dreams of a place unknown to him, and later when visiting a more or less distant land for the first time he finds there all that he had seen, as if by anticipation. Assuming he believed in reincarnation and if he had not kept a clear and conscious memory of his dream, and if nevertheless the recognition was produced, he might imagine it was a case of the remembrance

of a previous existence. Many cases can in fact be explained in this way, at least among those for whom the places recognized do not evoke the idea of a particular event. These phenomena can be grouped together with so-called 'premonitory' dreams and are far from rare, although those who have them most often avoid speaking of them for fear of being considered hallucinatory (yet another abused word that basically explains nothing). Much the same can be said of the facts of 'telepathy' and of others of the same kind. They bring into play certain subconscious prolongations of the individuality, the existence of which is more easily explicable than is commonly believed. In fact, any being must carry within itself certain virtualities which are like the seeds of all the events that will befall it; for insofar as they represent secondary states or modifications of the being, these happenings must have their principle or raison d'être in its own nature. This is a point which Leibnitz alone among all modern philosophers has seen clearly, although his conception was falsified by the notion that the individual is a complete being and a kind of closed system. The existence of various predispositions or tendencies, psychological or physiological, is generally admitted from the outset; one cannot see why this should hold only for certain of the things that are to be realized in the future while others would not have any correspondence in the present state of the being. If it is objected that there are purely accidental events, we reply that this manner of seeing things implies belief in chance, which is nothing other than the denial of sufficient reason. It is recognized without difficulty that every past event that has affected a being, however minimally, must leave in it some trace, even organically (some psychologists would like to explain memory by a so-called physiological 'mechanism'); the difficulty lies in conceiving that in this respect there is a kind of parallelism between past and future. This is quite simply because the relativity of the temporal condition is not taken into account. There could be a whole theory to expound here, one which would occasion extensive developments; but it suffices to have noted that these are possibilities that must not be neglected even though there may be some difficulty fitting them into ordinary science, which is applied only to a small portion of the human individuality and of the world wherein this

individuality is deployed. What, then, if it were a question of going beyond the domain of this individuality?

As to those phenomena which cannot be explained in the manner just discussed, they are especially those where the person recognizes a place he has never visited but at the same time has a more or less clear idea that he has lived there, or that such and such an event has happened to him there; or, further, that he has died in such and such a place (most often a violent death). In verified cases of this kind it has been ascertained that what the person believes to have happened to him has in fact occurred in that place to one of his more or less remote ancestors. This is a clear example of the hereditary transmission of psychic elements, which we have mentioned. Facts of this kind can be labeled 'ancestral memory', and elements thus transmitted are for the most part of the nature of memory. What is unusual at first glance is that this memory may not be manifested for several generations; but the case is exactly the same for corporeal resemblances as also for some hereditary maladies. It can be readily admitted that during the interval the memory in question has remained in a latent and 'subconscious' state, awaiting a favorable occasion to be manifested. If the person in whom such a phenomenon is produced had not gone to the right place, the memory would have remained in a latent state, as it had up to that point, without becoming clearly conscious. Further, it is exactly the same for what in the memory pertains specifically to the individual: everything is retained because there is a permanent possibility of its reappearance, even what seems most completely forgotten and what is most insignificant in appearance, as is seen in certain more or less abnormal cases. But in order for such and such a memory to actually reappear, it is necessary that circumstances lend themselves to this reappearance; in fact, there are many memories of which one never again becomes clearly and distinctly conscious. What comes to pass in the field of organic predispositions is exactly analogous: an individual may carry latent within himself such and such a malady, cancer for example, but this malady will develop only under the action of a shock or of some cause that weakens the organism. If such circumstances are not encountered, the malady will never develop, but the seed really exists, just as a psychological tendency

not manifested by any exterior act is no less real in itself. We must add that since there cannot be any fortuitous circumstances (such a supposition is even senseless, for our ignorance of the cause of something does not make the cause non-existent), there must be a reason why an 'ancestral memory' is re-manifested in a particular individual rather than in any other member of the same family, just as there must be a reason why a person physically resembles such and such an ancestor rather than another, or his immediate relatives. Here we must introduce the laws of 'affinity' alluded to above, but we would risk straying too far afield if we had to explain how one individual can be particularly linked to another, and so much the more so in that ties of this kind are not necessarily or invariably hereditary, and, strange as it may seem, that such ties may even exist between a human being and nonhumans. Further, beyond natural ties, artificial ties can be produced by certain magical procedures, even magic of a rather inferior kind. On this point as on so many others the occultists have put forward eminently fantastic explanations. Thus, Papus has written:

> The physical body belongs to an animal family from which the greater number of its cells have come, after an astral evolution. The evolutive transformation of the body is accomplished in the astral plane; thus there are human bodies which, by the appearance of their countenance, are linked to the dog, to the monkey, to the wolf, even to birds or fish. This is the secret origin of the totems of the red men and the black race.[1]

We confess ignorance of what the 'astral evolution' of corporeal elements may mean, but after all this explanation is worth just as much as those of the sociologists who imagine that the totem, whether animal or even vegetable, is regarded literally and materially as the ancestor of the tribe. They seem to have no suspicion that 'transformism' is a quite recent invention. In all this it is really not a question of corporeal but of psychic elements (we have seen that Papus was similarly confused as to the nature of metempsychosis). It is obviously unreasonable to suppose that most of the cells of the

1. *La Réincarnation*, pp 11–12.

human body, or rather of their constituent elements, should have an identical provenance; while in the psychic order, as we have noted, there can be conservation of a more or less considerable set of elements that remain associated. As to the 'secret origin of totems', we can state that it has truly remained secret for occultists as well as for sociologists; and perhaps it is better that this be so, for these are not things that can be easily and unreservedly explained owing to the practical applications and consequences some people would not fail to draw. There are already many other such things, also rather dangerous, and one can only regret that they are accessible to any experimenter who happens along.

We have just spoken of cases of non-hereditary transmission; when this transmission involves only peripheral elements it is hardly noted, and indeed it is almost impossible to ascertain clearly. Certainly, there are in each of us such elements coming from the disintegration of individuals who have gone before us (naturally only the mortal part of the human being is in question here). If some of these ordinarily 'subconscious' elements appear as clearly and distinctly conscious, one readily perceives that there is within oneself something of which one cannot explain the origin, but little attention is usually given these elements because they seem incoherent and to have no relation to the habitual content of consciousness. It is especially in abnormal cases, as with mediums and hypnotic subjects, that phenomena of this kind are produced to any extent, and such cases there can also be the manifestation of elements of analogous though adventitious provenance, which adhere only briefly to their individuality, instead of constituting an integral part of it. But it can also happen that once they have penetrated the individual, these elements are permanently fixed therein, and this is not the least of the dangers of this kind of experimentation. To return to the case wherein a transmission is spontaneously effected, the illusion of reincarnation can hardly occur except by the presence of a considerable number of psychic elements with the same provenance, sufficient to represent almost the equivalent of a more or less complete individual memory. Such cases are rather rare but it seems that there are nevertheless some examples. Such would seem to be the case when, an infant in a family having died, another is then

born possessing at least partially the memory of the first. It would be difficult to explain such facts by simple suggestion, which is not to say that relatives might not have played an unconscious role in the real transfer or that sentimentality might not contribute to a reincarnationist interpretation. Memory transfers have also been known to occur with a child belonging to a different family in another setting, which runs counter to the suggestion hypothesis. In any case, when there is a premature death the psychic elements persist more easily without being dissolved, and this is why most reported cases of this kind involve children. There are also cases where people in their youth manifested the memories of individual adults, but some of these cases are more doubtful than the previous, and where everything can be reduced to suggestion or thought transfer. Naturally, if these things occur in a milieu that has been influenced by spiritists, they must be treated as extremely suspect, although there is no question as to the good faith of those who note them, any more than there is in the case of experimenters who involuntarily shape the conduct of their subjects to conform with their own theories. Nothing in any of these facts is impossible *a priori*, except the reincarnationist interpretation itself. Some have also wanted to find proofs of reincarnation in cases of 'child prodigies',[2] which are sufficiently explained, however, by the presence of psychic elements previously elaborated and developed by other individualities. We also add that in cases other than premature death it is even possible that psychic disintegration is sometimes hindered or at least retarded artificially; but this too is a case that it is better not to emphasize. We need not speak of true cases of 'spiritual posterity' in the sense that we have previously indicated because these cases by their very nature clearly escape the very limited means of investigation available to experimenters.

We have already said that memory is subject to posthumous disintegration because it is a faculty of the sensible order. It is worth adding that during the individual's life, memory can also undergo a kind of partial dissociation. The many maladies of the memory

2. Allan Kardec, *Le Livre des Esprits*, p101; Léon Denis, *Après la Mort*, p166; *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, p296; Gabriel Delanne, *L'Évolution animique*, p282, etc.

studied by psycho-physiologists are fundamentally such dissociations, and this is the explanation for so-called dual or split personalities, in particular, where there is a division into two or more different memories that alternatively occupy the field of consciousness in a clear and distinct way. These fragmentary memories must naturally coexist, but only one of them can be conscious at a given moment, the others being repressed into the 'subconscious'. Moreover, there is sometimes a measure of communication between them. Such occurrences are produced spontaneously with some patients, as is natural somnambulism; they can also be realized experimentally in the 'second states' of hypnotic subjects, and most phenomena of spiritist 'incarnation' should be placed in this category. Hypnotic subjects and mediums differ from normal men especially by a dissociation of their psychic elements, which is accentuated with the training they undergo. This dissociation makes possible the phenomena in question, and likewise permits heteroclite elements to be inserted in their individualities.

The fact that memory is not a truly permanent principle of the human being, not to speak of organic conditions to which memory is more or less closely linked (at least as to its exterior manifestations), makes it clear why we have not considered more seriously a frequent objection to the reincarnationist thesis that even its defenders adjudge 'considerable'. This is the objection drawn from the fact of forgetfulness during a given existence, of previous existences. Papus' response is surely weaker than the objection itself.

> This forgetfulness is an ineluctable necessity for avoiding suicide. Before returning to earth or to the physical plane, every spirit sees the trials it will have to undergo; it does not return until it has accepted all these ordeals. Now, if once incarnated, the spirit knew all it would have to endure, its reason would be overcome, its courage would be lost, and deliberate suicide would result from this clear perception. . . . The possibility of suicide must be removed from man if he is to retain with certainty the memory of previous existences.[3]

3. *La Réincarnation*, pp136–137.

It is not obvious that there is a necessary relationship between memory of previous existences and prevision of the present existence; if this prevision was conceived only as a response to the objection of forgetfulness, it was scarcely worth the trouble. But it must also be said that the thoroughly sentimental notion of 'ordeals' plays a great role among occultists. Spiritists are sometimes more logical, without intending to be so. Thus Léon Denis, even while declaring that 'the forgetfulness of the past is for man the indispensable condition of every trial and of all earthly progress' (to which he adds other no less sentimental considerations), simply says:

> The brain can receive and store only the impressions communicated by the soul in its captivity to matter. Memory can reproduce only what it has registered. At every rebirth the cerebral organism is for us like a new book on which sensations and images are engraved.[4]

This is perhaps a bit rudimentary, for memory after all is not corporeal in nature, but at least it is plausible, and so much the more in that the author notes that we seem to have no memory of much of our present existence. Again, the objection is not so grave as one might think, although it has a more serious appearance than those founded on sentiment; it may even be the best that people ignorant of all metaphysics can put forth. But for ourselves, we have no need to resort to such questionable arguments.

We have not yet tackled the strictly 'experimental' proofs (the several cases in question being designated by this name). But something else remains as a matter for experimentation in the strictest sense. It is here especially that psychists do not seem to realize the limits within which their methods are applicable. Those who have followed us this far must already see that the experimenters (that is, those who are so according to the ideas accepted by 'modern science', even if they are themselves kept at some distance by its 'official' representatives) are far from being able to furnish valid explanations for all that is involved. How can the facts of metempsychosis, for example, give rise to their investigations? We have

4. *Après la Mort*, p180.

noted a singular misapprehension of the limits of experimentation on the part of spiritists who claim to 'prove immortality scientifically'; we will soon find another no less astonishing to anyone free of 'scientific' prejudice, and this time not among spiritists but among psychists. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to draw as fine a line between spiritists and psychists as should exist in principle, for it seems there are men who call themselves psychists only because they dare not frankly admit to being spiritists, this latter label having too little prestige in the eyes of many. There are others who allow themselves to be influenced unknowingly, and who would be quite astonished if they were told that their unconscious prejudices had falsified the results of their experiments. Experimenters would have to be unaware of the very existence of spiritism in order to study psychic phenomena without preconceived notions, something that is obviously impossible. If this were actually the case, no one would ever have dreamed of conducting experiments designed to verify reincarnation; and if from the outset there was no idea of verifying this hypothesis, no one would ever have adduced facts such as those just reported, for the hypnotic subjects who are used in these experiments only reflect ideas intentionally or unintentionally suggested to them. It suffices that an experimenter think of a theory, that rightly or wrongly he conceive of it simply as a possibility, for this theory to become the point of departure for interminable ramblings on the part of the hypnotic subject, and the experimenter will naively welcome as confirmation what is only the action of his own thought upon the 'subconscious' imagination of the subject; so true is this that the most 'scientific' of intentions have never guaranteed immunity from certain causes of error.

The earliest accounts of this kind involving reincarnation are those published by the Genevan psychist Professor Flournoy, who took the trouble to gather into a volume[5] everything which one of his subjects had told him of various existences he claimed to have lived on earth and elsewhere. And what is more remarkable is that he was not even astonished that what happened on Mars was so easily expressible in terrestrial language! This story is on a par with any

5. *Des Indes à la planète Mars.*

dream whatsoever and in fact could have been studied from the point of view of the psychology of dreams produced by hypnotic states. It is scarcely credible that something more was believed to be involved, although that is exactly what happened. Somewhat later another psychist, Colonel Rochas, who was reputed to be a serious researcher, wanted to take up the question in a more methodical way, but he lacked the necessary intelligence to know what was really involved in this kind of thing as well as how to avert certain dangers. He was also purely and simply a partisan of hypnotism, and like so many others he was imperceptibly led to an almost total acceptance of spiritist theories.[6] One of his last works[7] was devoted to the experimental study of reincarnation; this was an account of his researches on so-called 'successive lives' by means of what he called the phenomena of 'regression of the memory'. At the time of its publication (1911) an 'Institute of Psychic Research' was established in Paris under the patronage of de Rochas and the direction of L. Lefranc and Charles Lancelin. We should point out that the latter, who identified himself equally as a psychist and an occultist, was really a spiritist, and that he was well known as such. Lefranc, whose tendencies were the same, wanted to repeat the experiments of de Rochas, and naturally the results agreed perfectly with those obtained by de Rochas. Anything contrary would have been surprising since his point of departure was a preconceived hypothesis, an already formulated theory, and since he found no-one better to work with than de Rochas' own former subjects. These ideas are now to be found everywhere; there are some psychists who firmly believe in reincarnation simply because they have subjects who told them of previous existences. One must agree that it is a little difficult to prove such claims, but this does provide a new chapter for the history of what may be called 'scientific credulity'. Knowing something of what hypnotic subjects really are and how they move

6. In 1914 Colonel de Rochas accepted, as did Camille Flammarion, the title of honorary member of the 'Association of Spiritist Studies' (of the Allan Kardec persuasion), founded by M. Puvis (Algol), with Léon Denis and Gabriel Delanne as honorary presidents (*Revue Spirite*, March 1914, p140).

7. *Les Vies successives.*

indiscriminately from one researcher to another, spreading abroad the products of various suggestions they have received, there can be no doubt that in psychist circles they are the carriers of a real reincarnationist epidemic. It is therefore useful to show in some detail what forms the basis for these accounts.[8]

De Rochas believed that with some subjects he had observed 'memory regression'; we say he believed he had observed, for if his honesty is not in question, it is no less true that the facts he interpreted in this way on the basis of pure hypothesis can in fact be explained in quite another and simpler way. Briefly, these facts come down to this: in a certain somnolent state a subject can be put back mentally into some period in the past; 'situated' thus in some past age, he then speaks of it as if it were the present. It is concluded from this that it is not a case of 'remembering' but of 'memory regression'. 'The subject does not recall,' Lancelin declares categorically, 'but is put back into the indicated period'; and he adds with real enthusiasm that for Colonel de Rochas 'this simple remark has been the starting-point for a truly outstanding discovery.'[9] Unfortunately, this 'simple remark' contains a contradiction in terms, for there can obviously be no question of memory where there is no remembering. This is so evident that it is difficult to understand why it was not perceived, which further leads one to think that it is not merely an error of interpretation. This observation apart, it must first be asked if the possibility of pure remembering is really excluded only for the reason that the subject speaks of the past as if it had again become present to him; when, for example, he is asked what he did at such and such a time, he does not respond: 'I *was doing* this,' but 'I *am doing* this.' The immediate response to this can be that memories as such are always mentally present; whether these memories are clearly and distinctly present in the field of consciousness or in the 'subconscious' is of little importance since, as we have said, they can

8. We recall only from memory the 'investigations into the past' to which the 'clairvoyants' of the Theosophical Society devoted themselves; this case is altogether analogous to the other, except that hypnotic suggestion is replaced by autosuggestion.

9. *Le Monde Psychique*, January 1912.

always pass from the one to the other, which shows that it is only a question of a difference of degree. That which for our present consciousness characterizes memories of past events is their comparison with our present perceptions (perceptions being understood as present), a comparison which alone permits the distinction between the one and the other in establishing a temporal relation, that is to say a relation of succession between exterior events of which they are for us the respective mental translations. This distinction between remembering and perceiving pertains, moreover, to the most elementary psychology. If this comparison is for any reason rendered impossible, whether by momentary suppression of any exterior impression or in some other manner, then memory, being no longer temporally localized in relation to other present psychological elements, loses its representative character of the past, keeping only its quality of 'presentness'. Now this is precisely what occurs in the cases we have been discussing. The state in which the subject is placed corresponds to a modification of his consciousness of the present, implying in a certain sense an extension of his individual faculties, although to the momentary detriment of the development of these faculties in their normal state. If therefore the subject is insulated from the effects of present perceptions and if in addition all events prior to a given moment are excluded from his awareness (conditions perfectly realizable by suggestion), this is what happens: when the memories relating to this moment are distinctly presented to the consciousness thus modified as to its range (which is then the actual consciousness of the subject), they can in no way be situated in the past nor even simply envisaged as past, since in the field of consciousness (we speak only of the clear and distinct consciousness) there is no longer any element with which they can be placed in a relation of temporal anteriority.

What is in question in all this is nothing other than a mental state that implies a modification of the conception of time, or better of its comprehension, in relation to the normal state. Moreover, both states are only different modalities of the same individuality, as are the various states, whether spontaneous or induced, which correspond to all the possible alterations of the individual consciousness, including those commonly grouped under the improper and faulty

denomination of 'multiple personalities'. In fact, there can be no question here of superior and extra-individual states in which the being would be freed from the temporal condition, nor of an extension of the individuality implying this same exemption even partially. On the contrary, the subject is placed in a determinate instant which essentially supposes that his present state is temporally conditioned. Further, the states to which we have just alluded obviously cannot be attained by means entirely within the domain of the actual individuality, even considered exclusively within a very restricted portion of his possibilities; and this is necessarily the case in every experimental procedure. On the other hand, even if these same states were attained in some way, they could not be perceived by this individuality whose particular conditions of existence have no point of contact with the conditions of superior states of the being, which, as a particular individuality, is necessarily incapable of sensing, and even more, of expressing, everything that is beyond the limits of its own possibilities. Moreover, in all the cases under discussion, it can only be a question of terrestrial events, or at least events relating to the corporeal state alone. There is nothing there that in the least demands the intervention of superior states of the being, states of which the psychists do not even suspect.

As for effectively returning to the past, this is something as manifestly impossible for the individual as is his being transported into the future. This notion of travel into the future can obviously only be a completely erroneous interpretation of the facts of 'prevision'; but this interpretation could not be more extravagant than the one in question here, and some day such an interpretation may likewise be produced. If we were not familiar with the theories of the psychists in question, we would certainly never have thought that the 'time machine' of H.G. Wells could be considered as anything but pure fantasy, nor that there could be serious talk of the 'reversibility of time'. Space is reversible, that is to say any one of its parts, having been traversed in a certain direction, can then be traversed in the opposite direction; and this is because space is a system of coordinates envisaged in simultaneous and permanent mode; time on the contrary, being a coordination of elements considered in successive and transitory mode, is not reversible, for such a supposition would

be the very negation of the point of view of succession, or in other words it would amount to the suppression of the temporal condition. This suppression of the temporal condition is moreover perfectly possible in itself, as is the suppression of the spatial condition; but it is not so in the cases we have considered since these cases always presuppose time. Moreover, we should observe that the concept of the 'eternal present', which is the consequence of such a suppression, cannot have anything in common with a return to the past or a transport into the future, as it suppresses precisely both past and future, freeing us from the point of view of succession, that is, of what constitutes for our present existence all the reality of the temporal condition.

Nevertheless, there are men who have conceived this idea of the 'reversibility of time' and who have even claimed to base it on a so-called 'mechanical theorem', the formulation of which we believe would be interesting to reproduce in its entirety. It is Lefranc who, in order to interpret his experiments, believed it necessary to pose the question in these terms:

> Can matter and spirit go back through the course of time, that is to say be placed again at a previous time of life? Past time does not return; however, could it not return?[10]

In order to answer this question, he set about researching a previously published work by Breton[11] on the 'reversibility of all purely material movement', even though this author had only offered the conception involved as a kind of mathematical game with consequences which he himself considered absurd. But it is no less true that this a real abuse of reasoning, such as some mathematicians occasionally commit, especially those who are only 'specialists'; and it is notable that the field of mechanics offers particularly favorable ground for this kind of thing. This is how Breton's exposition begins:

10. Ibid., January 1912.
11. *Les Mondes*, December 1875.

> Knowing the complete series of all the successive states of a system of bodies, these states following upon and engendering themselves in a determined order from the past, which functions as cause, to the future, which has the rank of effect [*sic*], let us consider one of these successive states, and without changing anything of the component masses or of the forces acting between these masses[12] or of the laws of these forces, or again of the actual situations of these masses in space, let us replace each speed by an equal and contrary speed. . . .

A velocity opposed to another, or even in a different direction, cannot truly be equal in the strict sense of the word; it can only be equivalent in quantity. On the other hand, is it possible to think of this replacement as changing nothing of the laws of motion under consideration, given that if these laws had continued to be followed in the normal way, the replacement would not have been produced? But let us look at what follows:

> We will call this the *reversal* of all the speeds; the change itself will take the name reversion, and we will call the possibility of this change reversibility of the movement of the system. . . .

Let us pause a moment, for it is just this possibility which, from the point of view of movement itself, we cannot admit. Movement takes place in time; the system in question resumes in the opposite direction in a new series of successive states the positions it had previously occupied in space; but for all that, time never again becomes the same, and it suffices that this condition alone be changed for the new states of the system not to be identical to the previous states in any way. Moreover, in the reasoning which we cite it is explicitly supposed (though in questionable French) that the relation of past to future is a relation of cause to effect. But the true causal relationship implies on the contrary the simultaneity of the two terms, whence the result that states considered as following one another cannot, from this point of view, engender one another, as there would have to be a nonexistent state producing a not-yet-existent

12. 'On these masses', perhaps would have been more understandable.

state, which is absurd. From this it also follows that if the memory of any kind of impression can cause other mental phenomena of whatever kind, it is only insofar as the causal memory is present memory, a past impression being incapable of causing anything. But let us continue: 'Now, when the reversion of velocities of a system of bodies will have been effected. . . .' The author of this reasoning has had the prudence to add parenthetically, 'not in reality, but in pure thought.' Without realizing it, he thereby completely departs the field of mechanics, what he speaks of no longer having any relationship whatsoever with a 'system of bodies' (it is true that in classical mechanics contradictory suppositions are also found, such as that of a heavy body being reduced to a mathematical point, that is to say to a body which is not a body, since it lacks extension). But it should not be forgotten that the author himself regards the so-called 'reversion' as unrealizable, in contrast to the hypothesis of those who have wished to apply his reasoning to 'memory regression'. Assuming the 'reversion' as effected, this is what the problem becomes:

> It will be a question of finding for the reversed system the complete series of its future and past states. Will this search be more or less difficult than the corresponding problem for the successive states of the same system that has not been reversed? Neither more nor less. . . .

Obviously, since in both cases it is a question of studying a movement of which all the elements are given; but in order for this study to correspond to something real or even possible, one must not be taken in by a simple play of notation such as that indicated in what follows:

> And the solution of one of these problems provides the solution for the other by a very simple alteration consisting, in technical terms, of changing the algebraic sign for time, writing $-t$ instead of $+t$, and reciprocally.

This is quite simple in theory but fails to take into account that the notation of 'negative numbers' is an entirely artificial process (and one that is not without its logical consequences) useful for the simplification of calculations; it is one, moreover, that does not

correspond to any kind of reality. The author of this reasoning falls into a serious error shared by many mathematicians, and in order to interpret the change of sign which he has indicated he immediately adds: 'That is, the two complete series of successive states of the same system of bodies will differ only in that the future will become past and the past will become future. . . .' That is certainly a singular phantasmagoria, and it is worth taking notice when an operation as common as the simple change of an algebraic sign is endowed with such truly strange and marvelous power—at least in the eyes of mathematicians of this kind.

> This will be the same series of successive states traversed in the opposite direction. The reversion of velocities at any time simply reverses time; the first series of successive states and the reverted series have, in all the corresponding instants, the same part in the system, with equal and contrary velocities [*sic*].

In reality, unfortunately, the reversion of velocities simply reverts the spatial situations and not the times; instead of being 'the same series of successive states traversed in the opposite direction, it will be a second series inversely homologous with the first, and this as to space only. The past never becomes the future for all that, and the future never becomes the past except in virtue of the normal and natural law of succession such as is produced at each instant. In order for there to be true correspondence between the two series it is necessary that in the system under consideration there be no changes other than simple changes of position. These latter alone can be reversible because they involve space as the only consideration and space is in fact reversible. For every other change of state this reasoning will no longer apply. It is therefore absolutely illegitimate to seek to draw such consequences as these:

> In the vegetable kingdom, for example, by reversion we would see a rotten and fallen pear again become ripe fruit hanging from its tree, diminishing and again becoming a faded blossom, then a newly opened flower, then a flower bud, then a fruit bud at the same time that its component materials again become carbonic

acid and water vapor diffused in the air, on the one hand, and on the others sap, then humus or manure.

It seems that somewhere Camille Flammarion has described almost the same thing, but with the added supposition that a 'spirit' departs the earth at a speed greater than that of light and with a visual faculty enabling it to distinguish at any distance the smallest details of terrestrial events.[13] This is a whimsical hypothesis at the very least, but would not be a true 'reversion of time' since the events themselves would nonetheless continue to follow their ordinary course, their unrolling in reverse order being only an optical illusion. At every instant changes are produced in living beings which cannot be reduced to changes of position; and even in inorganic bodies, which seem to remain the most completely like unto themselves, there are also irreversible changes. 'Inert matter' as postulated by classical mechanics is nowhere to be found in the physical world for the simple reason that whatever is truly inert is necessarily devoid of all quality, sensible or other. It is really too easy to uncover the many unconscious sophisms concealed in such arguments. And yet this is all that is found to justify 'before science and philosophy' a theory such as the claimed 'memory regressions'.

We have shown that one can very easily explain—almost without going beyond ordinary psychology—the so-called 'past-life regression' which in reality is quite simply the recall to clear and distinct consciousness of memories retained in a latent state in the 'subconscious' memory of the subject and relating to some period of his life. To complete this explanation it should be added that from the physiological point of view this recall is facilitated by the fact that every impression leaves some trace in the organism experiencing it. We need not investigate the way in which this impression is recorded by certain nervous centers, for that is a study pertaining purely and simply to experimental science—which is not to say that this science has so far obtained very satisfactory results in this regard. But however that may be, the action exercised by these centers, which correspond to different modalities of the memory, are

13. *Lumen.*

aided by the psychological factor of suggestion, which even plays a principal role, for the physiological order concerns only the conditions of the exterior manifestation of the memory. This action, we say, however it is effected, permits the placement of the subject in the conditions required for the realization of the experiments we have mentioned, at least as regards their first part, that relating to the events in which the subject has really participated or which he has observed at a more or less distant time. But what tends to delude the experimenter is that things become complicated by a kind of 'dream in action', of the type that has given somnambulism its name. However inadequately he may have been led, the subject, instead of simply recounting his memories, begins to mimic them; he will also mimic all that is suggested to him, whether sentiments or impressions. Thus de Rochas 'regressed the subject ten, twenty, or thirty years; he made the subject a little child, a crying baby.' In fact, once he suggested that his subject return to infancy, he should have expected him to act and speak like a true infant. But similarly, if he had suggested that his subject was an animal of some kind, the subject would not have failed, in like manner, to behave as the animal in question. Would he, de Rochas, have concluded that the subject really was an animal in some previous life? The 'dream in action' may have as its point of departure either personal memories or knowledge of the ways of acting of another being, and these two elements may even be commingled to some extent. This latter case is probably what happens when one wants to 'situate' the subject in infancy. It may also be a question of knowledge the subject does not normally possess but which is communicated to him by the experimenter without the latter having the least intention of doing so. It is probably thus that de Rochas

> had regressed the subject to before his birth, making him return to his uterine life where, going backward in time, he assumed the various positions of the fetus.

We will not say, however, that even in this last case there is not in the individuality of the subject some organic or even psychic traces of the states in question. On the contrary, there must be such, and they may furnish a more or less considerable portion (which would be

difficult to determine) of his 'dream in action'. But of course no physiological correspondence whatever is possible except for those impressions which have really affected the subject's organism. And similarly from the psychological point of view, the individual consciousness of any being whatever obviously can contain only elements having some connection with the actual individuality of this being. This must suffice to show that it is perfectly useless and illusory to try to pursue experimental researches beyond certain limits, which is to say, in the present case, prior to the subject's birth, or at least from the beginning of his embryonic life. Nevertheless this is just what one claims to do in 'situating him before conception'; and on the preconceived hypothesis of reincarnation it is thought possible, by 'going always further back, to make him [the subject] relive his previous lives,' even in the meanwhile studying 'what happens to the non-incarnated spirit'!

Here we are obviously in full-blown fantasy; nevertheless, Lancelin assures us that 'the result obtained' is enormous, not only in itself, but for the ways it opens for the exploration of the prior lives of living beings,' and 'that a great step has been taken by that scholar of the first rank, Colonel de Rochas, in the way opened by him, the way of disoccultation of the occult [*sic*],' and that 'a new principle has been posed, the consequences of which, from the present moment, are incalculable.'[14] But how can one speak of the 'anteriorities of the living being' when what is in question is a time when that living being did not yet exist in an individualized state? And how can one mean to take it back beyond its origin, that is, into conditions in which it was never actually found and which for it do not therefore correspond to any reality? This amounts to creating an artificial reality from nothing, that is to say a 'mental reality' that does not represent any sensible reality. The suggestion provided by the experimenter gives the point of departure, and the imagination of the subject does the rest. It may doubtless happen that the subject sometimes encounters, either within himself or in the psychic ambience, some of the elements we have discussed and which come from the disintegration of other individualities. This would explain why

14. *Le Monde Psychique*, January 1912.

he may be able to furnish some details concerning persons who may have really existed; but even if these cases are duly noted and verified they would not prove anything more than the others. Apart from the initial suggestion, all this is generally quite comparable to what happens in ordinary dreaming, where, as the Hindu doctrine teaches, 'the individual soul creates a world proceeding entirely from himself, the objects of which consist exclusively of mental conceptions'; and for this creation the soul naturally utilizes all the elements of diverse provenance which may be at its disposal. Moreover, it is not usually possible to distinguish these conceptions, or rather the representations into which they are translated, from perceptions having an exterior origin, unless a comparison is established between these two kinds of psychological elements; and this can be done only by the more or less clearly conscious passage from the dream state to the waking state. But this comparison is never possible in the case of a dream instigated by suggestion, since on awaking the subject does not retain in his normal consciousness any memory of it (which is not to say that memory of it does not subsist in the 'subconscious'). Further, the subject may in certain cases take as memories mental images which are not really memories, for a dream may include memories as well as current impressions without these two kinds of elements being anything other than purely mental creations of the present moment. Strictly speaking, these creations, like all others of the imagination, are only newly-formed combinations of pre-existing elements. Of course, we are not speaking here of more or less modified or deformed memories of the waking state which are often mingled with dreams; the separation of the two states of consciousness is never complete, at least in ordinary sleep. This separation seems to be much more complete in induced sleep, which explains the apparently complete forgetfulness of the subject on awaking. This separation is always relative, however, because it is basically only a question of diverse modalities of the same individual consciousness. This is clearly shown by the fact that a suggestion given in hypnotic sleep may produce its effects after the subject awakes, while he, the subject, nevertheless seems to have no memory of it. If the examination of dream phenomena were pursued further than we can do here, it would be seen that all the elements called into play also enter into the manifestations of

the hypnotic state, these two states representing only a single state of the human being. The only difference is that in the hypnotic state the consciousness of the subject is in communication with another individual consciousness, that of the experimenter, and can in some measure assimilate to itself elements contained in the consciousness of the researcher as if these merely constituted one of its own prolongations. This is why the hypnotizer can supply data to the subject which the latter will use in his dream. These data may be images, more or less complex representations (as takes place in the most ordinary experience), and also ideas or theories of whatever kind, such as the reincarnationist hypothesis, ideas which the subject will also be eager to translate into imaginative representations. All this is possible without the hypnotizer needing to formulate these suggestions orally and without them even being willed by him. Thus an induced dream is a state similar in every respect to those brought about in a subject by appropriate suggestions, or by partially or totally imaginary perceptions, but with the sole difference that here the experimenter is himself the dupe of his own suggestion, taking the mental creations of the subject for 'awakening of memories', even for a real return to the past. In the final analysis this is the so-called 'exploration of past lives', the only 'experimental proof' properly so called that the reincarnationists have been able to bring forward in favor of their theory.

The 'Institute for Psychic Research' in Paris maintained a 'neurological and pedagogical clinic' where an effort was made (as elsewhere) to apply suggestion to 'psychotherapy', especially to cure alcoholics and maniacs, and to improve the mental condition of some idiots. Such efforts were very laudable, and whatever the results obtained, there is certainly no occasion to find fault with them, at least as to the intentions that inspired them. But it is true that even on a strictly medical level these practices are sometimes more harmful than useful and that those who use them hardly know what they are handling. But in the final analysis it would be better for the psychists to stop there, for if they wish to be taken seriously they must stop using suggestions that lead toward such phantasmagoria as we have just discussed. Nevertheless, one still meets those who boast of the 'clear evidence for spiritism', opposing this to 'the obscurity of metaphysics', which moreover they confuse with the

most everyday philosophy.[15] Quite singular evidence, at least if it not be the evidence of absurdity! Some even claim for themselves 'metaphysical experiences', unaware that, so conjoined, the two words constitute pure and simple nonsense; their conceptions are so completely limited to the world of phenomena that all that exists beyond experience is for them non-existent. Assuredly, none of this should astonish us, for it is only too obvious that all spiritists and psychists, of whatever persuasion, are profoundly ignorant of true metaphysics, the existence of which they do not even suspect. And so, whenever occasion offers we are content to note how such tendencies specifically characterize the modern Western mind, which by a monstrous deviation the like of which is nowhere else to be found, is turned exclusively toward the exterior. Although 'neo-spiritualists' quarrel with 'positivists' and 'official' scientists, their mentalities are fundamentally the same, and the 'conversions' of certain scientists to spiritism do not imply as deep or serious a change as one might imagine, or imply only the following one: the mind of such a scientist, while always remaining narrowly limited, has at least in a certain respect lost the relative equilibrium it had retained until the point of 'conversion'. One can be a 'scholar of the first rank' in a much more incontrovertible way than was Colonel de Rochas (by which we do not mean to deny him a certain merit); one can even be a 'man of genius' according to current 'profane' ideas,[16] and not be sheltered from such accidents. All this simply proves that a researcher or a philosopher, whatever his value as such, and whatever his special field may be, is not for all that necessarily or markedly superior to the great mass of the ignorant and credulous public which furnishes the major part of spiritist-occultist clientele.

15. This is found in an article signed by J. Rapicault included also in *Le Monde Psychique* of January 1912, and is quite characteristic of the propagandist tendencies of the spiritists. 'Simplicity', that is to say intellectual mediocrity, is openly vaunted as a superiority, a point to which we shall return below.

16. Even so, Rapicault perhaps goes too far when he affirms that 'many great geniuses have been adepts of spiritism.' That there are some few who are such 'adepts' is already too much, but it would be wrong to allow oneself to be overly impressed by or to attach any great importance to this; what is conventionally called 'genius' is something very relative, something worth incomparably less than the least particle of genuine knowledge.

9

SPIRITIST EVOLUTIONISM

FOR SPIRITISTS of the Kardec school, as for all others who embrace the idea, reincarnation is closely linked to a 'progressivist', or if preferred, an 'evolutionist' conception of things. Originally the word 'progress' was simply used, but today 'evolution' is preferred, for though fundamentally the same the latter has a more 'scientific' allure. One can hardly imagine the seduction that grand words offering a false semblance of intellectuality exercise on more or less uneducated or 'elementary' spiritists. This is a kind of 'verbalism' which provides the illusion of thought for those incapable of really thinking; it is also an obscurity which passes for profundity in the eyes of the common man. The pompous and empty phraseology in use among all 'neo-spiritualist' schools is certainly not one of the least elements in their success. But spiritist terminology is particularly ridiculous because it is composed in large part of neologisms coined by quasi-illiterates in defiance of all the laws of etymology. For example, if one wishes to know how the word 'perispirit' was coined by Allan Kardec, it is quite simply thus: 'As the seed of a fruit is covered by a *perisperm*, similarly the spirit properly so called is surrounded by an envelop which may by comparison be called *perispirit*.'[1] Those with a penchant for linguistic research could find in this kind of thing the subject of a curious study, but we will only note it in passing. Often, too, spiritists seize on philosophical or

1. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p38. A psychist with occultist tendencies, Count Tromelin, has invented the word *manspirit* to designate the 'perispirit' of the living. The same author has also come up with a '*biolic* force'.

scientific terms which they apply as they may; naturally, the preferred words are those that have been disseminated widely in works of popularization, words imbued with the most detestable 'scientistic' spirit. As for the word 'evolution', which is among these last named, it must be acknowledged that what it designates is really in harmony with the various spiritist theories. Over the past century or so, evolution has taken many forms, but these are just so many variations of the idea of 'progress' which began to spread in the Western world in the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. It is one of the most characteristic manifestations of the specifically modern mentality—which is definitely that of the spiritists and, even more generally, of all 'neo-spiritualists'.

Allan Kardec teaches that 'spirits are neither good nor bad by nature, but it is these same spirits who improve themselves, and who in doing so pass from an inferior to a superior order; and that 'God has given to each of the spirits a mission in order to enlighten them and bring them progressively to perfection through knowledge of the truth, thereby bringing them nearer to Himself'; and further, that 'all will become perfect,' that 'the spirit may remain stationary, but will not go backward,' and that 'spirits who have followed the path of evil can reach the same degree of superiority as the others, but for them *the eternities* [*sic*] will be longer.'[2] It is by 'progressive transmigration' that this ascendant march is effected:

> The life of the spirit, taken as a whole, goes through the same phases that we see in corporeal life. It passes gradually from the embryonic state to that of childhood, then by a succession of stages it reaches the adult state, which is that of perfection. But there is this difference: there is no decline or decrepitude as in corporeal life; the life which had a beginning will not have an end; and from our point of view an immense time is necessary to pass from spiritist childhood [*sic*] to complete development, and the spirit's progress is not accomplished in a single sphere but rather by passing through various worlds. Thus the life of the spirit is composed of a series of corporeal existences each of

2. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp 49–53.

which is an occasion of progress for it, just as each corporeal existence is composed of a series of days in each of which the individual acquires an increase of experience and instruction. But just as there are days in the life of a man which bear no fruit, so in the life of the spirit there are bodily existences which are without issue because the spirit has not known how to profit by them.... The spirits' course is progressive and never retrograde; they gradually rise in the hierarchy and never descend to a station which they have previously attained. In their different corporeal existences, they may descend as men (as regards social position), but not as spirits.[3]

And now a description of the effects of this progress:

In the measure that the spirit is purified, the body it wears becomes more spirit-like. The matter is less dense; it no longer creeps laboriously along the surface of the earth; physical needs are less gross; living beings no longer need be mutually destructive in order to feed themselves. The spirit is freer and has perceptions unknown to us, of things far removed. It sees with bodily eyes what we see only in thought. In the beings in which spirits are incarnated, this purification leads to moral perfection. Animal passions are weakened, and egotism yields to sentiments of fraternity. Thus in worlds superior to the earth, wars are unknown; hatreds and discords have no object because no one dreams of working ill against his neighbor. The intuition they have of their future and the security which gives them a conscience free of remorse means that death gives them no cause for apprehension; they see it approach without fear and as a simple transformation. The duration of life in the different worlds seems to be in proportion to the degree of physical and moral superiority of these worlds, and this is perfectly rational. The less material the body is, the less is it subject to the vicissitudes that disrupt it; the purer the spirit, the fewer passions it has to wear it away. This again is a benefit of Providence, which in this way intends to lessen suffering.... The determining consideration as

3. Ibid., pp83–85.

> to the world into which the spirit will be reincarnated is the degree of its elevation. . . .[4] The worlds, too, are subject to the law of progress. All began in an inferior state, and the earth itself will undergo a like transformation; it will become a terrestrial paradise when men become good. . . . It is thus that the races which today people the earth will disappear, to be replaced by beings more and more perfect; these transformed races will succeed the present race as this has succeeded others still grosser.[5]

Let us cite further a passage concerned especially with the 'march of progress' on the earth:

> Man must ceaselessly progress, and he cannot return to the state of childhood. If he progresses, it is because God so wills it; to think that he may go backward toward his primitive condition would be to deny the law of progress.

This is only too obvious, but it is precisely this supposed law which we formally deny; however, let us continue:

> Moral progress is the consequence of intellectual progress, but it does not always immediately follow. . . . Since progress is a condition of human nature, it is not within anyone's power to oppose it. It is a living force which adverse laws may retard but not stifle. . . . There are two kinds of progress which mutually support one another but which nevertheless do not march abreast: intellectual progress and moral progress. Among civilized peoples the first receives all desirable encouragement in this century. It has thus attained a degree unknown prior to our own times. It is necessary that the second should be brought to the same level; nevertheless, if one compares the social morés of a few centuries ago one would have to be blind to deny the progress that has been made. Why should there not be as much difference between the nineteenth and the twenty-fourth centuries as between the fourteenth and the nineteenth? To doubt the

4. Let us recall that what Allan Kardec calls the worlds are only the different planets which, for us, are only portions of the one corporeal world.

5. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp79–80.

> possibility would amount to a claim that humanity is at the apogee of perfection, which would be absurd, or to claim that humanity is not morally perfectible, to which experience gives the lie.[6]

Finally, this is how spiritism would 'contribute to progress':

> By destroying materialism, which has become one of the open wounds of society, we make men understand where their true interest lies. The future life no longer being veiled in doubt, man will better understand that he can assure his own future through the present. By destroying the prejudices of sects, castes, and races it teaches man the great solidarity that must unite them as brothers.[7]

It can be seen how closely related spiritist 'moralism' is to socialist and humanitarian utopias; all these people agree in situating their 'earthly paradise'—that is, the realization of their dreams of 'pacifism' and 'universal brotherhood'—in a more or less distant future. The spiritists simply add the further supposition that these things are already realized on other planets. It is hardly necessary to note how gross and naive are their conceptions of 'worlds superior to the earth'; but there is no reason for astonishment when one has seen how they represent the existence of the 'disincarnated spirit'. We will only note the obvious predominance of sentimentality in what for them constitutes this 'superiority'. They place 'moral progress' above 'intellectual progress' for the same reason. Kardec writes that a 'complete civilization is recognized by its moral development,' adding that:

> Like everything else, civilization has its degrees. An incomplete civilization is a state of transition which engenders its special ills, unknown in the primitive state. But it constitutes nonetheless a natural and necessary progress carrying with it the remedy for the evil it does. In the measure that civilization is perfected, it brings an end to some of the ills it has engendered, and these

6. Ibid., pp326–329.
7. Ibid., pp336–337.

> evils will disappear with moral progress. Of two peoples that have reached the summit of the social scale, only those can really be said to be the most civilized in the true sense of the word among whom there is less egotism, less greed, less pride; where habits are more intellectual and moral than material; where intelligence can be developed with greater liberty; where there is more kindness, good faith, and mutual benevolence and generosity; where the prejudices of caste and birth are less deeply rooted, for these prejudices are incompatible with true love of one's neighbor; where laws do not sanction any privilege and are the same for the last as for the first; where justice is exercised with less partiality; where the weak always find support against the powerful; where the life of man, his beliefs, and his opinions are most respected; where the unhappy are fewer; and finally where every man of good will is always assured that he will never lack what is necessary.[8]

This passage affirms once again the democratic tendencies of spiritism, which Kardec subsequently develops at length in chapters treating the 'law of equality' and the 'law of liberty'. It suffices to read these passages to be convinced that spiritism is a pure product of the modern mentality.

Nothing would be easier to critique than this foolish optimism which among our contemporaries is represented by belief in 'progress'. But we cannot expand on this beyond measure, for such a discussion would take us far from spiritism, which is only a very particular instance of the general belief. This belief has likewise taken hold throughout the most diverse circles, each of which quite naturally pictures 'progress' in conformity with its own preferences. The fundamental error, the origins of which must be attributed to Turgot and especially to Fourier, consists in speaking of 'civilization' as if it were an absolute. This is something that does not exist, for there have always been and still are 'civilizations', each of which has its own development. Moreover, among these 'civilizations' are those that have been entirely lost, of which those later civilizations

8. Ibid., pp333–334.

have in no way garnered the heritage. Nor can one dispute that there are periods of decadence within a civilization, or that a relative progress in a certain field may be compensated by a regression in others. Further, it would be quite difficult for the generality of men of one people and one age to apply their activity equally in the most widely differing directions. It is certainly the case that in modern Western civilization development is limited to the most restricted domain of all. It seems that it is not so very difficult to think that 'intellectual progress has attained a level unheard of until our day'; but those who think this way show that they are ignorant of all true intellectuality. To take for 'intellectual progress' what is only a purely material development limited to the field of the experimental sciences (or rather, certain of them, for there are sciences of which moderns do not even recognize the existence), and especially their industrial applications, is certainly the most ridiculous of all illusions. On the contrary, from the time of the Renaissance, in our view wrongly so called, there was a formidable intellectual regression for which no material progress can compensate. We have already spoken of this elsewhere and will not take up the matter again here.[9] As to so-called 'moral progress', this is an affair of sentiment and therefore purely and simply a matter of individual appreciation. From this perspective everyone can fashion for himself an 'ideal' according to his own tastes, and that of spiritists and other democrats does not suit everyone. But generally 'moralists' do not understand things in this way, and if they had the power they would impose their own ideas on all alike; for in practice no one is less tolerant than those who feel a need to preach tolerance and fraternity. However that may be, the 'moral perfectibility' of man, according to current concepts, would seem to be 'given the lie by experience,' rather than the other way round. Too many recent events run counter to Allan Kardec and those like him for there to be any need to emphasize this. But the dreamers are incorrigible, and every time a war breaks out there are always those who predict it will be the last. These people who invoke 'experience' at every turn seem perfectly oblivious to all the contradictions it entails. As for future

9. See the early chapters of our *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines.*

races, these can always be imagined according to one's fantasy; in this matter the spiritists at least have the prudence to refrain from the precise details that have remained the monopoly of the Theosophists, and limit themselves to vague, sentimental considerations which though fundamentally of no greater value, have at least the advantage of being less pretentious. Finally, it should be noted that the 'law of progress' is for its proponents a kind of postulate or article of faith. Kardec says that 'man must progress', and is content to add that 'if he progresses, it is God who wills it so.' If one had asked him how he knew this, he would probably have responded that 'spirits' told him. As justification this is weak, but can one believe that those who make the same assertions in the name of 'reason' have a much stronger position? There is a rationalism that is scarcely more than disguised sentimentalism; moreover, there are no absurdities which cannot commend themselves to reason. Kardec himself also proclaimed that 'the strength of spiritism lies in its philosophy, in the appeal it makes to reason and common sense.'[10] Surely, 'good common sense'—so abused since Descartes, who already believed he had to fawn upon it in a thoroughly democratic manner—is quite incapable of making an informed decision between the truth or falsity of any idea whatsoever; even a more 'philosophical' rationality is hardly any better a guarantee against error. Let one laugh if one will at Kardec and his satisfaction in declaring that 'if man progresses, it is because God has willed it so,' but then what must one think of the eminent sociologist, a highly qualified representative of 'official science', who announced seriously (we ourselves heard him) that 'if humanity progresses it is because it has a tendency to progress'? The solemn nonsense of university philosophy is sometimes as grotesque as the ramblings of spiritists. But the latter, as we have said, carry special dangers deriving from their 'pseudo-religious' character, and this is why it is more urgent to denounce them and show up their stupidity.

We must now speak of what Kardec calls the 'progress of the mind', and to begin we will show how he abuses analogy in the comparison he tries to establish with corporeal life; for if, according to

10. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p 457.

Kardec himself, this comparison is inapplicable as regards the phase of decline and decrepitude, why should it be any more valid for the phase of development? Likewise, if what he calls 'perfection', the aim that all spirits must sooner or later attain, is something comparable to the 'adult state', this perfection is quite relative. In fact, it must be quite relative if it is to be reached 'gradually', even if 'an immense time' is required; but we will shortly return to this point. Finally, logically and especially metaphysically, what has no end cannot have a beginning either; in other words, whatever is truly immortal (and not only in the relative sense of the word) is by the same reckoning eternal. It is true that Kardec, who speaks of the 'length of the eternities' (in the plural), is obviously imagining nothing but a simple temporal perpetuity; and, because he does not see the end, he supposes that there is no end. But the indefinite is still finite, and all duration is finite by its very nature. And there is another equivocation to dispel: what is called 'spirit' and is presumed to constitute the true and total being, is finally only the human individuality. Even if repeated in multiples by reincarnation, it is no less limited for that. In a sense, spiritists even limit the individuality overmuch, for they know only a slight part of its real possibilities, and reincarnation is not required for the individuality to be susceptible of indefinite prolongations. But in another sense they give an excessive importance to the individuality in taking it for the [entire] being of which it is—with all its possible prolongations—only an infinitesimal component. This double error, moreover, does not rest uniquely with spiritists, but is shared by almost all the Western world. The human individual is both much more and much less than is commonly believed; and if this individual, or rather a restricted portion of this individual, had not wrongly been taken as the complete being, the idea would never have arisen that it was something that 'evolves'. The individual can be said to 'evolve' if it is understood thereby that it accomplishes a certain cyclic development; but in our day, whoever says 'evolution' means to say 'progressive' development, and this is contestable, if not for certain portions of the cycle at least for its totality. Even in a relative field such as this the idea of progress is applicable only within very narrow limits. Furthermore, it has meaning only if precise details are

given as to the relationship within which it applies, this being true for individuals as well as for collectivities. For the rest, whoever says progress inevitably says succession; the word no longer has any meaning for anything that cannot be envisaged in successive mode. If man attributes it a meaning, it is because as an individual being he is subject to time, and if he extends this meaning in the most abusive manner, it is because he does not conceive of what is outside time. For all states of being not conditioned by time or by any other mode of duration, there can be no question of anything of this kind, even in the case of some relativity or other contingency, however insignificant, for this is not a possibility of these states. If it is a question of the truly complete being, totalizing in itself the indefinite multiplicity of all its states, it is absurd to speak, not only of progress or evolution, but of any development whatsoever. Eternity, which excludes all succession and all change (or rather, which has no relationship with them), necessarily implies absolute immutability.

Before ending this discussion, we should cite several more passages from writers who enjoy uncontested authority in spiritist circles. First, Léon Denis, who speaks in almost the same vein as Kardec:

> The question is one of working arduously at our own advancement. The supreme goal is perfection. The road leading to it is progress. The way is long and is traversed step by step. The distant aim seems to recede as one advances, but at each step the being gathers the fruit of its labor; it enriches its experience and develops its faculties.... Between souls, there are only differences of degree, differences which they are free to make up in the future.[11]

Up to this point there is nothing new; but, writing on what he calls 'evolution of the perispirit', the same author brings in details visibly inspired by certain scientific or pseudo-scientific theories, the success of which is one of the most undeniable signs of the intellectual weakness of our contemporaries.

11. *Après la mort*, pp167–168.

> The time-honored relationships between men and spirits,[12] confirmed and explained by the recent experience of spiritism, demonstrate the survival of the being in a more perfect fluidic form. This indestructible form, companion and servant of the soul, witness of its struggles and sufferings, participates in the soul's peregrinations and is raised up and purified together with the soul. Formed in the inferior regions, the perispirital being slowly climbs the scale of existences. At first it is only a rudimentary being, a rough sketch. Having reached humanity, it begins to reflect more elevated sentiments. The spirit radiates with greater power and the perispirit is enlightened with new gleams.
>
> From life to life, in the measure that aspirations are extended, faculties are purified, and the field of knowledge is enlarged, it is enriched with new senses. Each time an incarnation is achieved, the spiritual body, like a butterfly breaking out of its chrysalis, disengages itself from its ragged clothing of flesh. The soul finds itself whole and free and, considering this fluidic cloak which covers it in its splendid or miserable aspect, it observes its own advancement.[13]

This is what one might call 'psychic transformism'; and to it some if not all spiritists add belief in transformism understood in its most ordinary sense, even though this theory is hardly reconcilable with the theory taught by Kardec, according to whom 'the seeds of all living beings contained in the earth remain there latent and inert until the propitious moment for the birth of each species.'[14] However that may be, Gabiel Delanne, who aims at being the most 'scientific' of the spiritists of the Kardec school, accepts the transformists' theories entirely; but he intends to complete 'corporeal evolution' with 'animic evolution':

12. As examples of mediums 'in touch with the high personalities of space' [*sic*], the author cites 'the vestal virgins of Rome, the Greek sibyls, the Druidesses of the Isle of Sein, and . . . Joan of Arc!

13. *Après la mort*, pp 229–230.

14. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p18.

> The same immortal principle animates all living creatures, manifesting itself at first only under elementary modes in the last stages of life; little by little it perfects itself as it rises up the scale of beings. In its long evolution it develops the faculties which were enclosed within it in a seed state and manifests them in a manner more or less analogous to our own in the measure that it approaches humanity. . . . We cannot conceive why God would create beings subject to suffering without at the same time according them the faculty of benefiting from the efforts they make at self-improvement. If the intelligent principle which animates them were eternally condemned to occupy this inferior position, God would not be just in favoring man at the expense of other creatures. But reason tells us that it cannot be so and observation shows us that there is substantial identity between the souls of beasts and our own, that all is linked and tied together in the Universe, from the least atom to the colossal sun lost in the night of space, from the simplest protozoan to the superior spirit soaring freely in serene celestial regions.[15]

The appeal to divine justice was inevitable here. We said above that it would be absurd to ask why such-and-such an animal species is not the equal of some other; but one must understand that this inequality nevertheless offends spiritist sentimentality almost as much as do social conditions among humans. Moralism is truly something admirable! What is also quite curious is the section that follows, which we reproduce in its entirety in order to show how far the 'scientistic' mind can go among spiritists, with its customary accompaniment of ferocious hatred for everything that has a religious or traditional character:

> How is this genesis of the soul accomplished, through what metamorphoses has the intelligent principle passed before arriving at humanity? This is what transformism teaches us with luminous clarity. Thanks to the genius of Lamarck, Darwin, Wallace, Haeckel, and an army of natural scientists, our past has been exhumed from earth's depths; its archives have preserved

15. *L'Évolution animique*, pp102–103.

> the bones of vanished races and science has reconstructed our ascending line, from the present day through thousands of centuries all the way back to the time when life first appeared on our globe. Liberated from the bonds of an ignorant religion, the human mind has taken free flight; delivered from the superstitious fears that hampered the researches of our fathers, it has dared approach the problem of our origins and has found the solution. This is a primary fact of which the moral and philosophical consequences are incalculable. The earth is no longer a mysterious world that appeared one day at the wave of an enchanter's wand, populated with animals and plants and ready to receive man as its king. Today enlightened reason makes us understand how these fables bear witness to ignorance and pride! Man is not a fallen angel, weeping for an imaginary lost Paradise; he must not bow down obsequiously before the rod of the representative of a prejudiced, capricious, and vindictive God; he has no original sin staining him from birth, and his fate depends on no one but himself. The day of his intellectual deliverance has come; the hour of renewal has sounded for all beings who still bow under their yoke of despotism, fear, and dogma. Spiritism has shed the light of its torch upon our future, unfolding in the infinite heavens. We feel throbbing the soul of our sisters, and the other celestial humanities. We rise up in the thick darkness of the past in order to study our spiritual youth, and nowhere do we find that fantastic and terrible tyrant the Bible so frightfully describes. In all creation there is nothing arbitrary or illogical to destroy the grand harmony of the eternal laws.[16]

These declamations, so similar to those of Camille Flammarion, are of interest chiefly because they illustrate spiritism's affinities for all that is most detestable in modern thought. No doubt the spiritists, fearing that they may not appear sufficiently enlightened, outbid the exaggerations of the savants, or so-called savants, whose favors they cultivate; and they bear witness to an unlimited confidence in the most hazardous hypotheses:

16. *L'Évolution animique*, pp 107–108.

> If the evolutionist doctrine has encountered so many adversaries, it is because religious prejudice has left profound traces in minds which, moreover, naturally rebel against all novelty.... The transformist theory has made us understand that contemporary animals are only the latest products of a long elaboration of transitory forms which have disappeared over the course of the ages to leave only those which presently exist. Every day, paleontology discovers the bones of prehistoric animals which form links in an endless chain, the origin of which lies in the origins of life itself. And as it does not suffice to show this filiation by fossils, nature provides us a striking example at the birth of every creature. Every animal that comes into the world reproduces all the anterior types through which the race has passed prior to arriving at itself. It is a summary, an epitome, of the evolution of its ancestors; it establishes irrevocably the kinship between animal and man, notwithstanding all more or less self-interested protestations.... The animal descent of man is imposed with luminous evidence on every unprejudiced thinker.[17]

And naturally there follows this other hypothesis, which compares primitive man to contemporary savages:

> The human soul cannot be an exception to this general and absolute law [of evolution]. We are bound to state that on this earth it passes through phases embracing the most diverse manifestations, from the humble and paltry conceptions of the savage condition up to the magnificent flowerings of the genius of civilized nations.[18]

So there you have it! But enough specimens of this 'elementary' mentality. What we especially wish to bear in mind is the affirmation of the close solidarity that exists willy-nilly between all forms of evolutionism.

Of course we cannot here offer a detailed critique of transformism because this would lead us too far away from the question of

17. Ibid., pp113–115.
18. Ibid., p117.

spiritism, but we will at least recall what we said above, namely that the consideration of embryological development proves absolutely nothing. Those who solemnly proclaim that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' doubtless do not suspect that what they take for a law is only the enunciation of an hypothesis.[19] It is pure question-begging, for it must first be proven that there is a 'phylogeny', and it is certain that observation has never revealed one species changing into another. Only the development of the individual can be established directly, and from our point of view the various forms traversed have no other raison d'être than that the individual must realize, according to modalities appropriate to its own nature, the different possibilities of the state to which it pertains. To accomplish this, a single existence suffices; indeed, this must be so, for it cannot pass twice through the same state. Besides, from the metaphysical point of view to which we always return, it is simultaneity that is important and not succession, which latter represents only an eminently relative aspect of things. Whoever understands the true nature of a species will thus have no interest in the question of transformism, for not only is it an impossibility, it is merely pointless. Whatever the case, the only interest in all this is the truth. Those who speak of 'self-interested protestations' probably project onto their adversaries their own preoccupations, which are largely sentimental in nature though wearing a mask of rationalism, as we have mentioned. And these things are not free even of certain political machinations of the lowest kind, to which many of these people may quite unconsciously lend themselves. Today, transformism seems to have run its course, having already lost much ground, at least in more serious scientific circles; but the notion may continue to contaminate the mind of the masses, at least so long as there is no other engine of war capable of replacing it. Indeed, we do not believe that theories of this kind are spread spontaneously, nor that those who undertake to propagate them are prompted by purely intellectual preoccupations, for they bring to their task too much passion and animosity.

19. See *The Multiple States of the Being*, chap. 7. Ed.

But let us leave aside these stories of 'descent', which have acquired such importance only because they vividly strike the imagination of the common man, and return to the alleged evolution of a particular being, for this raises questions that are fundamentally more serious. We will recall what we said previously concerning the hypothesis that the being must pass successively through all forms of life; this hypothesis, which is in sum nothing other than the 'animic evolution' of Delanne, is, as we have shown, first of all an impossibility, and then, doubly useless. It is useless in the first place because the being may simultaneously bear within itself the equivalent of all these forms of life, and here it is a question only of the individual being because all these forms pertain to the same state of existence, which is that of the human individuality. They are thus possibilities comprised in the domain of the human individual considered in its integrality. As we have already noted, it is only for the individuality restricted to the corporeal modality that simultaneity is replaced by succession in its embryonic development; but this concerns only a small part of the possibilities in question. Already for the integral individuality, the point of view of succession disappears; nevertheless, this is only a single state of the being, one among an indefinite multiplicity of other states. If one wishes at any cost to speak of evolution, one can see thereby how narrow are the limits within which this idea will apply. In second place, the hypothesis in question is useless as regards the final end which the being must attain, however this is conceived. And we think it necessary to explain ourselves here as regards the word 'perfection', which is so misused by the spiritists. Obviously, for them it cannot be a question of metaphysical Perfection, which alone merits the name, and which is identical with the Infinite, that is to say with universal Possibility in its total plenitude. This is vastly beyond them and they have no notion of it. But let us admit that in a relative sense one can speak analogically of perfection for any being whatever. For such a being this relative perfection will be the full realization of all its possibilities. Now it suffices that these possibilities be indefinite, in whatever degree, for perfection not to be attainable 'gradually' and 'progressively', to use Kardec's expression. The being which would have passed one by one through particular possibilities in

succession, whatever their number, would not have advanced for all that. A mathematical comparison[20] can aid in understanding what we wish to convey: if an indefinite number of elements were to be added together, the final sum would never be attained by adding these elements one by one. It can be obtained only by a unique operation, that is to say an integration; and thus it is necessary that all these elements be taken simultaneously. This is the refutation of that false conception, so widespread in the West, according to which one can arrive at a synthesis only by analysis; on the contrary, if a true synthesis is in question, it is impossible that it be reached in this manner. These things can be further presented in this way: if there is an indefinite series of elements, the final term, or the totalization of the series, is not any one of these elements and cannot be found in the series, so that one could never reach it by passing through the series analytically. On the contrary, the end can be attained in a single operation by integration, but in that case, whether one has gone through the series up to this or that one of its elements is of no importance; there is no common measure between any partial result and the total result. This reasoning is applicable even for the individual being, because this being comprises possibilities susceptible of indefinite development. It serves no purpose to interpose 'an immense time', for even if conceived successively, this development will never be fully accomplished. But once simultaneity is admitted, there is no longer any difficulty—except that this means the negation of evolutionism. Now, if it is a question of the total being and not just the individual, the matter is still more obvious. First, because there can no longer be any question of time or of any other analogous condition, for the total being and the unconditioned state are identical. Then, there are other things that must by all means be considered beyond the simple indefinity of individual possibilities, these latter even in their entirety being only an infinitesimal element in the indefinite series of states of the being. Having reached this point (but of course this is no longer addressed to the spiritists, who are quite incapable of

20. For a fuller treatment of the following mathematical symbolism see *The Metaphysical Principles of the Infinitesimal Calculus.* ED.

conceiving it), we can reintroduce the idea of metaphysical Perfection, and say this: even supposing that a being may have traversed distinctly or analytically an indefinity of possibilities, this whole evolution (if one wishes to use this label) can never be other than rigorously equivalent to zero in relation to Perfection. The indefinite, proceeding from the finite and produced by it (as is clearly shown by the generation of numbers), is potentially contained in the finite and is only the development of the potentialities of the finite; consequently it can have no relation with the Infinite. In other words, considered from the perspective of the Infinite, or of Perfection, which is identical to it, the indefinite can be only zero. Envisaged from a universal perspective, the analytical concept of evolution amounts to no more than adding infinitesimal quantities one by one. It is rigorously equivalent to the indefinite addition of zero to itself in an indefinite number of successive and distinct additions, the final result of which will always be zero. One can escape this sterile sequence of analytical operations only by an integration (in this context involving multiple and even indefinitely multiple elements), which—and we insist on this—is effected in a single stroke by an immediate and transcendent synthesis that, logically, is not preceded by any analysis whatsoever.

The evolutionists, who have no idea of eternity or of anything in the metaphysical order, readily use the word eternity to signify an indefinite duration, that is to say perpetuity; but eternity is essentially 'non-duration'. This error is of the same kind as that of believing space to be infinite—indeed, the one error is almost never found without the other, the cause of both being always a confusion between the conceivable and the imaginable. In reality space is indefinite, but like every other particular possibility it is rigorously null in relation to the Infinite. Similarly duration, even if perpetual, is nothing in relation to eternity. But the most singular thing is that in placing all reality in becoming (so-called temporal eternity, composed of successive and therefore divisible durations), evolutionists of whatever ilk seem to divide themselves into two halves, one past and the other future. As an example (and many others could be provided), here is a curious passage from a work by Flammarion on astronomy:

> If the worlds died forever, if the suns once extinguished were never again relit, it is probable that there would no longer be any stars in the heavens. Why? Because creation is so old that we can consider it as eternal in the past. From the time of their formation, the innumerable suns in space have had ample time to be extinguished. Relative to the past eternity [*sic*], it is only the new suns that shine. The first are extinct. The idea of succession imposes itself upon our mind. Whatever the private belief each of us may have acquired as to the nature of the Universe, it is impossible to admit the ancient theory of a creation finished once and for all. Is not the idea of God itself synonymous with the idea of a Creator? As soon as God exists, he creates; if he had created only once, there would be no more suns in the immensity of space nor planets drawing from them light, warmth, electricity, and life. It is necessary that creation be perpetual. And if God did not exist, the ancientness, the eternity of the Universe would impose itself with still more force.[21]

It is almost superfluous to call attention to the many gratuitous hypotheses brought together in these few lines, hypotheses that are not even very coherent. For example, there must be new suns because the first have been extinguished, but the new ones are only the old ones relit; one must believe that possibilities are quickly exhausted; and what can one say of that 'ancientness' which is the approximate equivalent of eternity? It would be quite as logical to reason in this way: if men once dead did not reincarnate, it is probable there would no longer be men on earth, but since there are men on earth, there has been 'ample time' for all to die. This is an argument we readily offer to reincarnationists, although it will hardly bolster their thesis. The word 'evolution' does not occur in the passage cited, but it is obviously this conception, based exclusively on the 'idea of succession', which must replace the 'old theory of a creation finished once and for all,' a theory declared impossible in virtue of a simple 'belief' (the word is there). Moreover, God himself is subject to time; creation is a temporal act: 'as soon as God exists, he

21. *Astronomie populaire*, pp 380–381.

creates.' God, therefore, has a beginning and probably he too must be situated in space, which, it is claimed, is infinite. To say that the 'idea of God is synonymous with the idea of Creator' is more than contestable. Dare one maintain that all peoples that have not had the idea of creation, in brief all those whose beliefs do not have a Judaic source, thereby have no idea corresponding to that of the Divinity? This is manifestly absurd; and note that when it is a question of creation, that which is so designated is always the corporeal world only, the content of space which the astronomer can see with his telescope. Truly, the Universe is very small for those who place the infinite and the eternal everywhere, but where there can be no question of their presence! If all 'past eternity' was necessary to produce the corporeal world as we see it today, with beings such as human individuals representing the highest expression of 'universal and eternal life', it must be agreed that this is a pitiful result.[22] And assuredly, all 'future eternity' will not be too long to reach the nevertheless so relative 'perfection' of which the evolutionists dream. This brings to mind the bizarre theory of some contemporary philosopher (it may have been Guyau, if memory serves) who pictured to himself the second 'half of eternity' as having to be spent in reparation for the errors accumulated in the first half! These are the 'thinkers' who believe themselves 'enlightened', and who hold in derision religious conceptions!

As we said just now, the evolutionists place all reality within becoming; this is why their understanding is the complete negation of metaphysics, which essentially has as its sphere whatever is permanent and immutable, that is to say that of which the affirmation is incompatible with evolutionism. In these conditions, the very idea of God must be subject to becoming, as is all else; and this is the more or less avowed position of all evolutionists, or at least of those who wish to be consistent with themselves. This idea of a God who evolves (and who, having begun in the world, or at least with

22. Marguerite Wolff, of whom we have already spoken, contended that 'God was misled in making the world because it was his first time and he lacked experience'; and she added that 'if he had it to do over again, he would certainly make it better'!

the world, cannot be the world's principle and thus represents a perfectly useless hypothesis) is not exceptional in our time. One encounters it not only with philosophers such as Renan, but also in some strange sects whose beginnings, naturally, do not go further back than the nineteenth century. Here, for example, is what the Mormons[23] teach regarding their God:

> His origin was the fusion of two particles of elementary matter, and by a progressive development he attained human form. . . . God, it goes without saying [*sic*], began as a man, and by continual progression has become what he is; and he can continue to progress eternally and indefinitely in the same manner. Likewise, man can grow in knowledge and power as long as he wishes. If man, therefore, is endowed with an eternal progression, a time will come when he will know as much as God now knows.[24]

And further:

> The weakest child of God that now exists on earth will in his time possess greater dominion, more subjects, more power and glory than Jesus Christ or his Father possess today, while the power and elevation of the latter will accrue in the same proportion.[25]

These absurdities are no greater than those found in spiritism, from which we have wandered only apparently and because it is good to point out certain parallels: the 'eternal progression' of man, just now mentioned, is perfectly identical to the spiritists' idea on the same subject; and as to the evolution of the Divinity, if they have not reached that point yet it is nevertheless a logical development of their theories, and there are in fact some spiritists who do not recoil before such consequences, which they even proclaim in a manner as explicit as it is extravagant. Thus Jean Béziat, head of the 'Fraternist' sect, wrote an article several years ago intended to demonstrate that 'God is in perpetual evolution', to which he gave the title, 'God Is Not Immutable; Satan is the God of Yesterday'. One will get a

23. For more on the Mormons see *Miscellanea*, pt 3, chap. 5. ED.
24. *The Star of the Millenium*, publication of president Brigham Young, 1852.
25. An extract from a sermon of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism.

sufficient idea from this extract:

> It does not seem to us that God is all-powerful in the moment under consideration, since there is the struggle between evil and good, and not absolute good.... Just as cold is only a lesser degree of heat, so evil is only a lesser degree of good; and the devil, or evil, only a lesser degree of God. It is impossible to respond to this argument. There are quite simply only caloric vibrations, only more or less active beneficent or divine vibrations. God is the evolutive Intention in incessant ascent. Does it not follow that God-Yesterday was less advanced than God-Today, and God-Today less advanced than God-Tomorrow? Those who came out of the divine bosom yesterday are therefore less divine than those who have come out at the present time, and so on. Those sprung from God-Yesterday are naturally less good than those emanating from God-of-the-Moment; and it is quite simply by illusion that one calls Satan that which is not yet God, but only God-Past and not God-of-the Moment.[26]

Certainly, such lucubrations are of insufficient interest to be refuted in detail. But wee should underline their specifically moralist point of departure, since it is only a question of good and evil that is found therein. Let us also note that Béziat argues against a conception of Satan as literally opposed to God, a conception that is only the dualism ordinarily and perhaps wrongly attributed to the Manicheans. In any case, he quite gratuitously imputes his conception to others, to whom it is totally foreign. This leads us directly to the question of Satanism, a question as delicate as it is complex, and another of those which we do not claim to treat exhaustively here, but of which nevertheless we cannot but indicate certain aspects, even though it is for us a quite disagreeable task.

26. *Le Fraterniste*, March 27, 1914.

10

THE QUESTION OF SATANISM

AMONG THOSE WHO pride themselves on being more or less 'modern' it is the convention not to speak of the devil without a smile of disdain or an even more contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. There are those who, even while holding certain religious convictions, are nevertheless not the last to adopt such an attitude, perhaps from fear of being considered 'backward', or perhaps in a more sincere manner. These latter are in fact obligated in principle to admit the existence of the devil although they would be quite embarrassed if they had to affirm his effective action, for that would too greatly upset the restricted range of ready-made ideas in which they are accustomed to move. This is an example of that 'practical positivism' alluded to before. Religious conceptions are one thing, but 'ordinary life' is something else, and between the two care is careful to establish a bulkhead as watertight as can be. This is, in fact, as much as to say that one behaves like a veritable unbeliever, though without the logic. But how else can one act in a society as 'enlightened' and as 'tolerant' as our own without running the risk of being treated as one 'deluded'? A certain prudence is no doubt often necessary, but to say prudence is not to say negation 'a priori' and without discernment. Yet in defense of certain Catholic circles we must admit that the memory of some only too well known hoaxes, such as Léo Taxil's, is not unrelated to this negation; the pendulum swings from one excess to its opposite. If this is still a ruse of the devil to get people to deny him, it must be agreed that he has not done too badly. For our part, we approach this question of satanism with some repugnance, but not for the kind of reasons we

have just indicated. Ridicule of this kind concerns us very little, and since we take a definite stand against the modern mentality in all its forms we do not have to be too ceremonious. But this subject can hardly be treated without stirring up things one would rather leave in the shadows; and one must be resigned to doing this in some measure, for there is a risk that total silence in this regard would be misunderstood.

We do not believe that conscious satanists, that is to say true worshippers of the devil, have ever been very numerous. The *Yézidi* sect is often cited, but that is an exceptional case and it is still not certain that the matter has been correctly interpreted. Everywhere else one finds only isolated cases, sorcerers of the lowest category, for one must not believe that even more or less straightforward sorcerers or 'black magicians' fall equally under this definition; there may even be among them those who in no way believe in the devil. On the other hand there is also the question of Luciferians; certainly there are such, even apart from the fantastic accounts of Léo Taxil and his collaborator, Dr Hacks; and perhaps some remain in America or elsewhere. If they have established organizations, this would seem to go against what we have just said, although not necessarily, for if men invoke Lucifer and perform his cult it is because they do not consider him the devil but rather the 'light-bearer',[1] and we have even heard it said that they go so far as to call him 'the Great Creative Intelligence'. But strange as this may seem to those who do not go to the heart of things, these people, though in fact satanists, are only unconsciously so, for they are mistaken as to the nature of the entity to whom they address their worship. And unconscious satanism in its various degrees is far from rare. As to the Luciferians, we must call attention to a singular error: we have heard that the first American spiritists recognized a relationship with the devil, to whom they gave the name Lucifer. In reality, Luciferians can in no way be spiritists, for spiritism consists essentially in believing in

1. Mme Blavatsky gave the name *Lucifer* to a journal she founded in England toward the end of her life. She feigned to take the name in its etymological sense of 'light-bearer', or, as she said, as 'bearer of the torch of truth'; but she saw in this only a pure symbol, while for the Luciferians it is a real being.

communication with 'disincarnated' humans, and denies the intervention of any other beings in the production of phenomena. Even if it happens that Luciferians use procedures analogous to those of spiritism, they are not thereby spiritists. The thing is possible, though the use of properly magical processes may be more probable. If spiritists for their part receive a 'message' signed by Lucifer or Satan, they do not hesitate for one moment to attribute it to some 'mischievous spirit' since they profess not to believe in the devil, and they are vehement in their denial. To speak to the spiritists of the devil is to risk awakening in them not only disdain but, even more so, fury, which is moreover quite a bad sign. What the Luciferians have in common with spiritists is that they are quite limited intellectually and are equally removed from all truth of a metaphysical order. But they are also limited in another way, and there is incompatibility between the two theories. Naturally this is not to say that the same forces cannot be at work in the two cases, but the respective ideas are completely different.

It is useless to reproduce the spiritists' innumerable denials—or those of the occultists and the Theosophists—on the question of the existence of the devil; one could easily fill a whole volume, which would be monotonous and without great interest. We have already seen that Allan Kardec taught that 'bad spirits' will improve progressively; for him, both angels and demons alike are human beings, though found at the two extremes of the 'spiritual scale'. And he adds that Satan is only 'the personification of evil in allegorical form.'[2] For their part, occultists appeal to a symbolism which they hardly understand and which they accommodate to their fantasies; furthermore, they generally class demons with 'elementals' rather than with the 'disincarnated'. They at least admit beings that do not belong to the human species, and this is already something. But here is the somewhat unconventional opinion (not fundamentally so, but by the appearance of erudition in which it is clothed) of Charles Lancelin, whom we have already mentioned. He summarizes as follows 'the result of his research' on the question of the

2. *Le Livre des Esprits*, pp54–56. On satan and hell, cf. Léon Denis, *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, pp103–108 and *Dans l'Invisible*, pp395–405.

existence of the devil, to which moreover he has devoted special works:[3]

> The devil is only a phantom and symbol of evil. Primitive Judaism was ignorant of him; moreover, the tyrannical and bloody Jehovah of the Jews had no need of this foil. The legend of the angels' fall is found in the *Book of Enoch*, long recognized as apocryphal and of late composition. During the great captivity of Babylon, Judaism received the impression of evil divinities from oriental religions, but this idea remained popular and did not penetrate into dogma. Lucifer is still the morning star and Satan an angel, a child of God. Later, if Christ speaks of the *Evil One* and of the devil, it is simply to accommodate the popular ideas of his time. But for him the devil did not exist. . . . In Christianity, the vindictive Jehovah of the Jews became a Father of goodness. From that time, next to him, other divinities became divinities of evil. As it developed, Christianity came into contact with Hellenism and from it received the idea of Pluto and the Furies, and especially of Tartarus, which it adapted to its own ideas, confusedly assimilating all the bad divinities of Greco-Roman paganism and of the various other religions with which it came into contact. But the devil was really born in the Middle Ages. In that period of incessant turmoil without law and without restraint, the clergy were led to make the devil the gendarme of society in order to check the powerful. They revived the idea of the Evil One and the divinities of evil, blending them all in the personality of the devil and making him the bugbear of kings and people. But this idea, of which he was the representative, gave him an unquestionable power; he was rapidly caught in his own snare, and from that time on the devil existed. In the current of modern times his personality was affirmed, and in the seventeenth century he reigned as master. Voltaire and the encyclopedists began the reaction; the idea of the demon declined, and today many enlightened priests regard him simply as a symbol. . . .[4]

3. *Histoire mythique de Shatan* and *Le Ternaire magigue de Shatan*.
4. *Le Monde Psychique*, February 1912.

It goes without saying that these 'enlightened' priests are all plainly modernists and that the spirit animating them is strangely similar to that affirmed in these lines. This more than fanciful manner of writing history is quite curious, but all told it is the same as that of the official representatives of the so-called 'science of religions'. It is clearly inspired by the same 'critical' methods and the results do not differ greatly. One must be quite naive to take seriously men who make the texts say everything they want them to say, and who always find the means to interpret them in conformity with their own prejudices.

But let us return to what we call unconscious satanism, and to avoid all error let us say first of all that a satanism of this kind may be purely mental and theoretical, implying no attempt to have dealings with any entities whatsoever, the existence of which is in many cases not even considered. It is in this sense that every theory that notably disfigures the Divinity should in some measure be regarded as satanic; and conceptions of a limited God and of a God who evolves should here be placed in the front rank. Moreover, the one is only a particular case of the other, because to suppose that a being can evolve obviously requires that it be conceived as limited. In this context we say 'a being' because in such conditions God cannot be Universal Being but only a particular and individual being, implying a certain 'pluralism' wherein Being in a metaphysical sense can find no place. All 'immanentism' more or less openly submits the Divinity to becoming. This may not be apparent in older forms such as the pantheism of Spinoza, and perhaps this consequence was contrary to Spinoza's intention (there is no philosophical system that does not contain, at least in germ, some internal contradiction). In any case, all this is very clear in Hegel, that is to say ever since evolutionism made its appearance; and in our own times the conceptions of the modernists are particularly significant in this respect. Today the idea of a limited God has many avowed supporters, either in the sects mentioned at the end of the previous chapter (the Mormons go so far as to maintain that God is a corporeal being, assigning him a definite place of residence, the imaginary planet *Colob*), or in certain currents of philosophy, from the 'personalism' of Renouvier to the ideas of William James, which the

novelist Wells tries to popularize.[5] Renouvier denied the metaphysical Infinite because he confused it with the mathematical pseudo-infinite. For James it is quite otherwise, his theory taking its point of departure in a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon 'moralism'. From the sentimental point of view it is advantageous to represent God as an individual, with moral qualities comparable to our own. It is therefore this anthropomorphic conception which must be held as true according to the pragmatist attitude, which consists essentially in substituting utility (whether moral or material) for truth. Furthermore and in conformity with the tendencies of the Protestant mind, James confuses religion with simple religiosity, that is to say he sees nothing in it but the sentimental element. But in the case of James there is something more serious still, and this above all concerns what we have said regarding 'unconscious satanism', an expression which so exasperated some of his admirers, especially in Protestant circles mentally disposed to receive such ideas.[6] It is James's theory of 'religious experience' which makes him see in the 'subconscious' the means by which man communicates with the Divine. It will be agreed that it is only a step from there to condoning the practices of spiritism, conferring on them an eminently religious character, and to considering mediums as the instruments par excellence of this communication. Among widely diverse elements, the 'subconscious' incontestably contains all that which, in the human individual, constitutes traces or vestiges of the inferior states of being and with which it most surely puts man in contact, that is to say everything in our world that represents these same inferior states. Thus, to claim that this is a communication with the Divine is really to put God in the inferior states of being, *in inferis* in the literal sense of this expression.[7] This then is a properly 'infernal' doctrine, a reversal of

5. *Dieu, L'Invisible Roi.*

6. We have been reproached from the same side for what might be called an 'anti-Protestant prejudice'. Our attitude in this regard is really quite the contrary of a prejudice, for we have arrived at our views in a perfectly reflective manner and as a conclusion to many considerations which we have already indicated in various passages of our *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines.*

7. The opposite is *in excelsis*, in the superior states of the being, representated by the heavens, just as the earth represents the human state.

universal order, which is precisely what we call 'satanism'. But as this clearly is not intended, and as those who advance or accept such theories do not take into account their enormity, it is only an unconscious satanism.

Satanism, even when conscious, is always characterized by a reversal of the normal order; it is the exact opposite of orthodox doctrine, and intentionally inverts certain symbols or formulas. Sorcerers' practices are in many cases only religious practices accomplished in reverse. Some very curious things could be said regarding the reversal of symbols, and although we cannot deal with the matter at present, we can say that it is a sign that rarely deceives. We note too that whether this reversal is intentional or not indicates whether the satanism is conscious or unconscious.[8] Thus in the 'Carmeleen' sect founded long ago by Vintras, the use of an upside down cross is a sign that at first glance appears eminently suspect. It is true that this sign was interpreted as indicating that the reign of 'Christ suffering' must henceforth give way to that of 'Christ glorified'; also, it is quite possible that Vintras himself was only a completely unconscious satanist in spite of all the phenomena that occurred around him and which clearly arose from a 'diabolical mysticism'. But perhaps as much cannot be said of some of his disciples and more or less legitimate successors. Moreover, this question would require a special study, which would help shed considerable light on a host of 'preternatural' manifestations throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Whatever the case, there is certainly more than a nuance between 'pseudo-religion' and 'counter-religion',[9] and it is necessary to guard against unjustified comparisons. But between 'pseudo-religion', and 'counter-religion' there can

8. Some have seen inverted symbols in the figure of the 'vine stock sketched by the spirits' which, at the behest of the spirits, Kardec placed at the head of the *Livre des Esprits*; the disposition of the details is in fact strange enough to invite such a supposition, but it is not sufficiently distinct to settle the matter and we note it only as documentation.

9. In sorcery, intentional 'counter-religion' is superimposed on magic; but it must always be distinguished from the latter, even that of the lowest kind, for magic does not in itself have this character. There is no direct relation between the domain of magic and that of religion.

be many degrees by which a passage from one to the other is almost insensibly effected without the movement being perceived. This is one of the special dangers inherent to any encroachment, even involuntary, on the properly religious domain. When one starts down a slope such as this it is almost impossible to know just where one will stop, and it is very difficult to get hold of oneself before it is too late.

We have explained the satanic character of certain conceptions which are not normally so considered, and this in turn entails complementary considerations which we consider indispensable for the reason that too many people do not know how to distinguish between domains that are nevertheless essentially and profoundly separate. What we have just said naturally alludes to the metaphysical theory of the multiple states of the being, and it is this that justifies the language we have used, for all that is said theologically of the angels and demons can also be said metaphysically of the superior and inferior states. This is quite remarkable at the very least, and there is a 'key' here, as the occultists say; but the arcana which this key opens are not within their competence. This is an example of what we have said elsewhere,[10] that every theological truth can be transposed into metaphysical terms; but the reverse does not hold true, for there are metaphysical truths not susceptible of translation into theological terms. On the other hand there is never anything between the two but correspondence, and not identity, nor even equivalence. The difference of language marks a real difference of perspective, and as long as things are not envisaged under the same aspect they do not relate to the same domain. Universality, which characterizes metaphysics alone, is in no way found in theology. What metaphysics properly considers are the possibilities of the being, and of every being, in all states; and of course in superior and inferior states as well as in the present state there may be non-human beings, or more exactly, beings whose possibilities do not specifically include human individuality. But the latter, which seems to be of especial interest for the theologian, does not have the same import for the metaphysician, for whom it suffices to admit that it

10. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, pp 112–115.

must be so once it is an effective possibility, and because no arbitrary limitation is compatible with metaphysics. Moreover, if there is a manifestation of which the principle is in a certain state, it is of little importance whether that manifestation must be referred to this being rather than to another among those situated in this state, and in truth, it may not be connected with any determined being whatsoever. It is the state alone that is to be considered, in the measure that we perceive in the state wherein we find ourselves something like a reflection or a vestige, whether of a state superior or inferior to our own. It is important to stress the point that such a manifestation, whatever its nature, translates only indirectly what pertains to another state. This is why we say it has its principle rather than its immediate cause in that other state. These remarks make possible an understanding of what we have said regarding 'wandering influences', some of which can truly be taken as 'satanic' or 'demonic', whether one regards them as pure and simple forces or as the means of action used by certain beings in the proper sense.[11] Either may be true according to a given case, and we must leave the door open to all possibilities. Yet this changes nothing as to the intrinsic nature of the influences in question. This shows to what degree we intend to abstain from all theological discussion, which is not to say that we do not fully recognize the legitimacy of this point of view. And even when we use certain theological terms, basing ourselves on real correspondences, we only borrow a means of expression appropriate to making ourselves more readily understood—which is our right. That being said in order to put things in focus and to anticipate as much as possible the confusions of ignorant or evil-intentioned men, it is no less true that if they see fit, theologians can make use of the considerations here set forth for the benefit of their point of view. As for others, if there are some who fear words, they will have to find another name for what we will persist in calling the devil or the demon, because we do not see in this any serious disadvantage and because we will probably be

11. Various occultists claim that what appears to us as forces are in reality individual beings more or less comparable to human beings. This anthropomorphic conception is in many cases quite the opposite of the truth.

better understood than if we introduced a less commonly used terminology, which would merely be a perfectly useless complication.

The devil is not only terrible, he is often grotesque; let each one take this according to his own understanding. But as to those who may be astonished or scandalized by such an assertion, let them refer to the absurd details inevitably found in every account of sorcery and then relate these to the inept manifestations which spiritists foolhardily attribute to the 'disincarnate'. Here is one sample taken from among thousands:

> A prayer is read to the spirits and everyone places his hands either on the table or on the pedestal nearby; then the room is darkened.... The table oscillates a little, by which Mathurin announces his presence.... Suddenly a violent scratching, as of a steel claw, scratched the table under our hands, making all of us start with surprise. From this point the phenomena began. Violent blows were struck on the floor near a window in a corner inaccessible to us, then a materialized finger roughly scratched my forearm. An icy hand touched my two hands, one after the other. The hand became warm; it tapped my right hand and tried to take my ring but was unable to do so.... It took my cuff and threw it on the knees of the person opposite me; I did not recover it until the end of the séance. My wrist was pinched between the thumb and index finger of the invisible hand. The bottom of my jacket was pulled down; several times fingers drummed my right thigh. A finger inserted itself under my right hand, which lay flat on the table and somehow—I do not know how—scratched the palm of my hand.... At each of these exploits Mathurin, who seemed enchanted with himself, rolled over on the table near our hands. On several occasions he asked us to sing; he even explained by knocks the parts he preferred, and these were sung.... Before the séance a glass of water containing sugar, a carafe of water, a glass, a small carafe of rum, and a small spoon had been placed on the dining room table near the window. We marvelled to hear the creature approach, put some water, then some rum, into the glass, and open the sugar bowl. Before putting sugar in the grog being prepared, the entity took

> two morsels of sugar, all the while producing strange sparks by rubbing the morsels together. Then she[12] returned to the grog after having thrown the two rubbed morsels on the table and took some sugar from the bowl to put into the glass. We heard the spoon turn, and knocks announced that I was to be offered the drink. To make it more difficult I turned my head so that Mathurin, if he sought my mouth, would find only my ear. But I underrated my guest; the glass came in search of my mouth, which it found without delay, and the grog was delivered brusquely but impeccably, with not a drop spilled. . . . These are the facts which for almost fifteen years were produced every Saturday, with but few variations. . . .[13]

It would be difficult to imagine something more puerile; more than naïveté is necessary to believe that the dead return to indulge in these jokes in poor taste. And what should we think of this 'prayer to the spirits' which begins such a séance? The grotesque character of all this is obviously the mark of something of a very low order. Even when the source is within the human being (we understand this as applying to 'entities' artificially formed and more or less enduring), it surely comes from the lowest regions of the 'subconscious'. And all spiritism, including both its practices and theories, is stamped with this character to a more or less marked degree. We make no exception for what is more 'elevated', as the spiritists say, in the 'communications' they receive. Those claiming to express ideas are either absurd or unintelligible, or of a banality which only completely uncultivated men could fail to see; for the rest, they consist of the most ridiculous sentimentality. Surely, it is not necessary to introduce the devil to explain such productions, which are in fact on the level of the human 'subconscious'; if the devil consented to mix in

12. This 'spirit' was apparently of uncertain gender, for it is referred to by both masculine and feminine pronouns in this account. ED.

13. *Le Fraterniste*, December 26, 1913 (article by Eugène Phillippe, an advocate at the Court of Appeals of Paris and vice-president of the French Society for the Study of Psychic Phenomena). The account of an almost identical séance, with the same mediums (Mme and Mlle Vallée) and the same 'entity' (who is even characterized as a 'spiritual guide'), was given in *L'Initiation*, October 1911.

this, he would certainly have no trouble doing much better. It is even said that when he wishes the devil can be quite a good theologian, but it is true nevertheless that he always lets slip some bit of stupidity, which is his signature as it were. And we will add that only one domain is rigorously forbidden him, that of pure metaphysics. This is not the place to indicate the reasons for this, although those who have understood the preceding explanations can divine some of them without much difficulty. But let us return to the wanderings of the 'subconscious': it suffices that this latter may contain 'demonic' elements in the sense that we have used, and that these may be capable of placing man in involuntary contact with influences which, even if they are only unconscious forces in themselves, are nonetheless themselves 'demonic' as well; we hold that this is enough for the same character to be expressed in some of the 'communications' in question. These 'communications' are not necessarily those which are distinguished by the crudity of their language, as is frequently the case; it can sometimes happen that these are also those before which the spiritists fall in admiration. In this connection there are marks rather difficult to distinguish at first view; here, too, it may be a simple signature, so to speak, constituted by the very tone of the whole, or by some special formula, or by a certain phraseology. And there are terms and formulas which are in fact found almost everywhere and which go beyond the atmosphere of this or that particular group, seemingly imposed by some will that exercises a more general action. We simply note this without intending to draw precise conclusions, preferring to leave discourse on this subject to proponents of the 'third mysticism', that 'human mysticism' imagined by the imperfectly converted Protestant Görres (whose mentality in certain aspects remained Protestant and 'rationalist'). For ourselves, if we had to pose the question in the theological arena, it would not be done entirely in this way since it is a question of elements that are properly 'infra-human' and therefore representative of other states, even if they are included in our humanity. But again, this is not our affair.

The things to which we have just alluded are encountered especially in 'communications' of a particularly moral character, which moreover describes the greater number. Many people will feel

indignant that the devil is brought into this, however indirectly, and that it is being said that the devil can preach morality—this even being an argument spiritists frequently employ against their adversaries who support the 'demoniac' theory. Here, for example, are the terms in which a spiritist—at the same time a Protestant pastor—expresses himself, words which by reason of their double quality merit some attention:

> It is said in the Churches: but these spirits that manifest themselves are demons, and it is dangerous to come into contact with the devil. I do not have the honor of knowing [*sic*] the devil, but let us suppose he exists. What I know of him is that he has a well-established reputation, that of being very intelligent, very malicious, and at the same time of not being an essentially good and charitable personage. Now, if the communications come to us from the devil, how does it happen that they have a character so elevated, so beautiful, so sublime that they could quite well figure in cathedrals and in the preaching of the most eloquent religious orators. How does it happen that the devil, if he is so evil and so intelligent, applies himself in so many circumstances to furnishing those who communicate with him, the most consoling and the most moral instructions? Therefore, I do not believe that I am in communication with the devil.[14]

This argument makes no impression whatsoever on us, in the first place because, if the devil can be a theologian when it is to his advantage, he can *a fortiori* be a moralist, which does not demand as much intelligence; one can even accept with some plausibility that he adopts this disguise in order to better deceive men and make them accept false doctrines. Next, 'consoling' and 'moralizing' are in our view precisely of the most inferior order, and one must be blinded by certain prejudices to find them 'elevated' and 'sublime'. To place morality above everything else, as do the Protestants and spiritists, is again to reverse the normal order of things. This itself is therefore 'diabolic', which is not to say that all who think in this way are in effective communication with the devil.

14. Discourse of pastor Alfred Bénézech at the 1913 Geneva Spiritist Congress.

There is something more to say in this connection: those circles where morality is continuously preached are often the most immoral in practice; explain it as you will, it is a fact. For us, the quite simple explanation is that everything touching this sphere inevitably brings into play what is lowest in human nature. It is not without reason that the notions of good and evil are inseparable from one another and cannot exist except by their opposition. But if an incurable bias has not closed their eyes, let those who admire morality at least see whether in spiritist circles there are not many things that might feed the indignation they so readily manifest. If those who have frequented these groups can be believed, there is much that is very unsavory underneath the surface. F.-K. Gaboriau, then director of *Lotus* (and who some while later left the Theosophical Society) responded to attacks appearing in various spiritist publications[15] thus:

> Spiritist works teach and promote passivity, that is to say blindness, the weakening, both physically and morally, of the unfortunate beings whose nervous system and psyche are kneaded and mangled in the séances where all the worst and most grotesque passions break out.... We could, in retaliation, if retaliation were allowed in Theosophy, publish a series of articles on spiritism, unfolding in *Lotus* all the grotesque and hideous stories we know of (and do not forget that we, the phenomenalists, have all been part of it), showing *all* the celebrated mediums with their hand in the bag (which would take from them only their sanctity, not their authenticity); we could cruelly analyze the publications of Bérels,[16] and they are legion; we could explain all that is in *La Spirite*, the book of Hucher; we could revisit the story of the underside of spiritism, copy advertisements for houses of prostitution from the American spiritist magazines, recount in detail

15. Notably in *Revue Spirite* of September 17, 1887.

16. This involves a medium named Jules-Edouard Bérels who modestly called himself 'the secretary of God', and who published an enormous volume full of the worst extravagances. Another pathological case, though outside spiritism proper, is that of a certain Paul Auvard, who 'under the dictation of God' wrote a book entitled *Le Saint Dictamen*, in which there is a little of everything except good sense.

> horrors of every kind which have occurred and still occur in murky materialization séances in America, England, India, and France; in a word, we could perhaps perform a useful task of cleansing. But we prefer to keep quiet and not trouble minds already sufficiently troubled.[17]

In spite of his reserve, here is a very clear witness and one who cannot be doubted, for it is that of a 'neo-spiritualist' who, having gone through spiritism, is quite well informed. We have more recent ones of the same kind, like that of Jollivet-Castelot, an occultist who has occupied himself with alchemy as well as with psychism, and who long ago broke with the school of Papus, to which he had belonged at the outset. This was at a moment when there was some noise in the press about the incontestable frauds that had been discovered in materialization experiments involving Mme Julliette Alexandre-Bisson (widow of the celebrated writer of vaudeville) and Dr von Schrenck-Notzing, pursued with a medium designated mysteriously only as Eva C... The spiritists were angered when, in a letter published in *Le Matin,* Jollivet-Castelot revealed that Eva C... or Carrière (who had also been known as Rose Dupont) was in fact none other than Marthe Béraud, who had already duped Dr Richet at the villa Carmen in Algiers and was the very same person whom other official savants wanted to experiment with in a laboratory at the Sorbonne.[18] Mr Chevreuil, in particular, heaped insults on Jollivet-Castelot,[19] who, pushed to the limit, brutally unveiled the unspeakable morés of certain spiritist circles—'the sadism mixed with fraud, credulity, and the unfathomable foolishness found among many mediums . . . and experimenters.' He used terms too crude for us to reproduce here, so we will cite only these lines:

> It is certain that the source is often impure. These nude mediums, these examinations of small 'hiding places', these precise

17. *Le Lotus*, October 1887.

18. These experiments, the results of which were entirely negative, have been terminated since this was written; we must believe that more efficacious precautions were taken this time.

19. *Le Fraterniste*, January 9, and February 1 and 6, 1914.

> touches of materialized phantoms, translate into eroticism rather than a miracle of spiritism and psychism. I believe that if the spirits returned, it would be in a manner other than this.[20]

Thereupon, Chevreuil cried:

> I do not want even to pronounce the name of the author who, Psychotic with Hatred [*sic*], has drowned himself in filth; his name no longer exists for us.[21]

But this rather comic indignation cannot take the place of a refutation; the accusations remain intact, and we have every reason to believe that they are well founded. During this time the spiritists discussed the question of whether children should be admitted to séances. It seems that in 'Fraternism' they are excluded from gatherings where experiments are conducted; but to make up for this, 'courses of kindness' [*sic*] have been instituted for them.[22] On the other hand, Paul Bodier declared quite plainly in a conference of the 'French Society for the Study of Psychic Phenomena' that 'perhaps nothing could be more injurious than to allow children to attend experimental séances, which are held almost everywhere,' and that 'experimental spiritism must not be approached until adolescence.'[23] Those spiritists who are somewhat reasonable, therefore, fear the nefarious influence that their practices cannot fail to exercise on the minds of children; but does not this avowal constitute a real condemnation of these practices, whose effect on adults is hardly less deplorable? In fact, spiritists always insist that the study of [spiritist] phenomena as well as the theories by which they explain them, be open to all without exception. Nothing is more contrary to their thinking than to consider that these things should be reserved to a kind of elite that might be better protected against the dangers involved. On the other hand, the exclusion of children—which may astonish those familiar with the propagandist tendencies of spiritism—is only too well explained when one recalls

20. *Les Nouveaux Horizons de la Science et de la Pensée*, February 1914, p87.
21. *Le Fraterniste*, February 13, 1914.
22. Ibid., December 12, 1913.
23. *Revue Spirite*. March 1914, p178.

all the more than dubious things which occur in certain séances, and on which we have offered undeniable testimony.

Another question which casts a strange light upon the mores of some spiritist and occultist circles and which, furthermore, is directly connected to the question of satanism, is that of the incubus and the succubus. We alluded to this when we spoke of an inquiry made in a rather unexpected manner into the 'sex of the spirits'. In publishing the response of Ernest Bosc on this subject, the editors of *Fraterniste* added this note:

> Mr Legrand of Institute no. 4 [this being the name of a *fraterniste* group] called our attention at the beginning of March [1914] to the case of a young woman of eighteen years, a virgin who since the age of twelve has submitted to the passion of an incubus every night. The matter was supported by stupefying and detailed evidence.[24]

Unfortunately, we are not told whether, contrary to the rule, this young woman frequented spiritist séances; in any event she evidently found herself in a favorable milieu for such manifestations. We will not judge whether this was only breakdown and hallucination or whether something else was involved. But the case is not isolated: Ernest Bosc, even while rightly declaring that it is not a question of 'disincarnates', assured the reader that 'widows as well as young women had made absolutely stunning confidences' to him. However he prudently added: 'But we cannot speak of this here, for this constitutes a true esoteric and incommunicable secret.' This last statement is quite simply monstrous. The truly incommunicable secrets, those meriting the name 'mysteries' in the proper sense of the word, are of an entirely different nature; and they are such only because all words are powerless to express them. True esoterism has absolutely nothing in common with these unsavory matters.[25] There are other occultists who are far less reserved on this subject

24. *Le Fraterniste*, March 13, 1914.

25. Mention should be made of certain instances of 'vampirism', which derive from the lowest form of sorcery; even if there were no extra-human force involved, it would hardly be any better.

than Bosc; we know one who has gone so far as to publish in a brochure a 'practical method for incubus and succubus', where it is really only a matter of autosuggestion pure and simple. We will not dwell on this point, but if some should insist on more precise details, we charitably warn them that they will regret it. We have known only too long about certain persons who today pose as 'grand masters' of this or that pseudo-initiatic organization, and who would be better advised to remain in obscurity. We do not willingly elaborate on subjects of this nature, but we cannot neglect to point out that there are those who feel an unhealthy need to mix these things with occultist studies and so-called mysticism. It is well to state as much, if only to make known the mentality of such people. Naturally one must not generalize, but these cases are much too numerous in 'neo-spiritualist' circles to be purely accidental. And there is yet another danger to point out, which is that it really seems that 'neo-spiritualist' circles are prone to produce all these sorts of breakdown, but even when nothing more than that is involved, is the epithet 'satanic', taken in a figurative sense if one prefers, too strong to characterize something so unhealthy?

There is also another particularly serious affair on which a few words must be said. In 1912 the Chevalier Le Clément de Saint Marcq, then president of the 'Belgian Spiritist Federation' and of the 'International Office of Spiritism', published a vile brochure entitled *L'Eucharistie*, meretriciously representing it as an 'historical study', which he dedicated to Emmanuel Vauchez, former colleague of Jean Macé at the 'French League for Education'. In a letter inserted at the beginning of the brochure Emmanuel Vauchez stated 'on the part of superior minds' that 'Jesus was not at all proud of the role the clergy had him play.' One can judge from this the peculiar mentality of these men, who are simultaneously eminent spiritists and directors of associations of free-thinkers. Thousands of free copies of the pamphlet were distributed as propaganda. The author attributed to the Catholic clergy, and even to all clergy, practices the nature of which cannot be detailed; he claimed not to blame anyone, but saw in these practices a secret of the greatest importance from the religious and even political points of view, however unlikely that may seem. The scandal was very great and many spiritists themselves

quite indignant in Belgium,[26] where numerous groups quit the Federation; the resignation of the President was demanded, but the committee declared its solidarity with him. In 1913 Le Clément de St Marcq undertook a round of conferences at various centers in the course of which he was to explain his thinking, but he only succeeded in poisoning things further. The question was submitted to the International Spiritist Congress in Geneva, which formally condemned the brochure and its author.[27] Le Clement de St Marcq was forced to resign, and along with those who had followed him in retirement, he formed a new sect called 'Sincerism', whose agenda he formulated in these terms:

> True morality is the art of bringing peace to conflicts: religious peace, by the disclosure of mysteries and the alleviation of the dogmatic character of the Churches' teaching; international peace, by the federal union of all civilized nations in an elective monarchy; industrial peace, by sharing management among capital, labor, and the public; social peace, by the renunciation of luxury and by applying surplus revenue to works of charity; individual peace, by the protection of maternity and the repression of all manifestations of the sentiment of jealousy.[28]

The brochure on *L'Eucharistie* had already sufficiently demonstrated in what sense the 'disclosure of the mysteries' must be understood. As to the last article in the program, although it was intentionally framed in equivocal terms, it can be understood without difficulty by reference to the theories of those favoring 'free union'. It was in 'Fraternism' that Le Clément de St Marcq found his most ardent defenders. Without going so far as to approve his ideas, one of the leaders of this sect, Paul Pillault, pleaded irresponsibility and found this excuse:

26. In this country there are other truly extraordinary things, as for example the history of the Black Flag; these things are not related to spiritism, but these sects are more intertwined than is normally thought.

27. Discourse presented at the National Spiritist Congress of Belgium at Namur by Mr Fraikin, president, November 23, 1913.

28. *Le Fraterniste*, November 28, 1913.

> As a psychosist, I must declare that I do not believe in the responsibility of Le Clément de St Marcq, who is a very accessible instrument of diverse psychoses, just like any other human being. Having been influenced, he had to write this brochure and publish it; moreover, it is in the tangible and visible part that the cause must be sought, that the action producing the content of the incriminated brochure must be found.[29]

It should be noted that 'Fraternism', which is fundamentally only spiritism with a very strong Protestant bent, gives the name 'psychosia' or 'psychosic philosophy' to its particular doctrine. The 'psychoses' are 'invisible influences' (the barbarous term 'influencism' is also used), of which there are good ones and bad ones, and all their séances begin with an invocation to the 'Good Psychose'.[30] This theory is pushed to the point that it even suppresses man's free will almost completely. It is certain that the liberty of an individual being is something relative and limited, as is the being himself, but this must not be exaggerated. In a certain measure and especially in a case such as the one in question, we readily admit the work of various kinds of influences, but they are not those the spiritists imagine. In the final analysis, however, Le Clément de St Marcq is not, so far as we know, a medium, but merely plays the role of a purely passive and unconscious instrument. Moreover, even among the spiritists not everyone excused him so easily. For their part, the Belgian Theosophists (to their credit, it must be said) were among the first to voice vehement protests, although unfortunately this attitude was not entirely disinterested for it occurred at the time of the Madras scandals[31] and Le Clément de St Marq had judged it advantageous to cite in support of his thesis theories of which Leadbeater had been accused; there was thus an urgent to repudiate such a compromising solidarity. On the other hand, another Theosophist, Theodore Reuss, Grand-Master of the 'Order of Oriental Templars', wrote to Le Clément de St Marcq these revealing lines

29. Ibid., December 12, 1913.

30. Report of the first Congres des Fraternelles, held at Lille, December 25, 1913. *Le Fraterniste*, January 9, 1914; cf. ibid., November 21, 1913.

31. See *Theosophy*, chap. 21.

(we scrupulously retain his jargon): 'I address to you two brochures: *Oriflammes*,[32] in which you will find that the Order of Oriental Templars has the same awareness that is found in the brochure *Eucharistie*.' In *Oriflammes*, published in 1912, we in fact find this, which clarifies the question:

> Our Order possesses the key to all the Masonic and Hermetic mysteries: this is the doctrine of sexual Magic, a doctrine which explains, leaving nothing obscure, all the enigmas of nature, all Masonic symbolism, all the religious systems.

In this connection, we must say that Le Clément de St Marcq was a high level dignitary of Belgian Masonry, and one of his compatriots, Herman Boulenger, wrote in a Catholic journal:

> Is Masonry still enamored of having such an extraordinary exegete of its own? I do not know. But as he declares that his doctrine is also the secret of the sect (and by my faith, although I do not know his processes of documentation, I can believe that he is very well placed to know), his presence there is terribly compromising, especially for those members who have risen up publicly against such aberrations.[33]

It hardly needs saying that there is absolutely no basis for the claims of Le Clément de St Marcq and Theodore Reuss. It is truly tiresome that some Catholic writers have believed they must admit such a thesis as their own, either as concerns Masonry or as concerns the mysteries of antiquity, without perceiving that they only weaken their own position (likewise, when they accept a fanciful identification of magic and spiritism); in reality one can only see in these things the divagations of sick minds that are more or less 'psychosed' as the Fraternists say, or 'obsessed' as we would more simply put it. Allusion was made to Le Clément de St Marcq's 'processes of documentation'; these processes, wherein the most notorious

32. *Oriflamme* is a small German language journal, the official organ of various 'irregular' Masonic groups directed by Theodore Reuss, groups we have discussed in our history of Theosophy (*Theosophy*, chaps. 3 and 25).

33. *Le Catholique*, December 1913.

dishonesty is evident, brought forth a number of denials on the part of those whom he had imprudently implicated. It was thus that he had claimed the support of 'a still active Catholic priest', citing a sentence so out of context as to give it an entirely different meaning than that intended, and which he called 'a formidable confirmation'.[34] The priest in question, Father J.-A. Petit, whom we have mentioned previously, hastened to rectify the matter, doing so in these terms:

> The sentence is this: 'Your thesis rests on a primordial truth which to my knowledge you have been the first to bring before the public.' Presented in this way, the sentence seems to approve the thesis put forth by Le Chevalier Clément de St Marcq. But it is of essential importance that every misunderstanding be dispelled. What is this primordial truth? Catholics claim that in the Eucharist it is the very body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary and crucified, which is present under the appearances of bread and wine. Le Clément de St Marcq said 'no', and in my view he is right. Christ cannot claim to place his body there, especially his crucified body, as the institution of the Sacrament preceded the crucifixion. Christ is present in the Eucharist by the vital principle which was incarnated in the Virgin; this is what Le Clément de St Marcq was the first, to my knowledge, to make public, and which I call a 'primordial truth'. On this point we are in agreement; but the coincidence of our ideas ends there. Le Clément de St Marcq introduces a human element, and I introduce a spiritual element, with all the range that St Paul attributes to this word,[35] so that we are at the antipodes of one another. . . . I am his declared adversary, as my recent refutation of his brochure testifies.'[36]

As it happens, these personal interpretations of Father Petit seem hardly less heterodox than his claim that the 'resurrection of the

34. Ibid., October 1913.

35. 1 Cor. 15:44.

36. *Le Catholique*, December 1913. The refutation in question had appeared in *La Vie Nouvelle*, of Beauvais.

flesh' signifies reincarnation; and then too can he himself be entirely honest in introducing the word 'crucified', as he does regarding the body of Christ present in the Eucharist? In any case, it takes much good will to declare oneself in agreement, even on a single point, with Le Clément de St Marcq, for whom Jesus is only a man, though his response nonetheless constitutes a formal denial. Elsewhere, Msgr Ladeuze, rector of the University of Louvain, addressed the following letter to the *Revue Spirite Belge* on April 19, 1913:

> Your number of March 1, 1913 has been sent to me, in which allusion is made to a passage in the brochure *L'Eucharistie* launched by Le Clément de Saint-Marcq, where the latter cites one of my works in order to prove the existence of revolting practices involving the sacrament of the Eucharist. I will not lower myself so far as to enter into discussion with Le Clément de Saint Marcq on such a base subject. I only pray you to advise your readers that in order to interpret my text as it was interpreted it would have been necessary either to be dishonest or ignorant of the Latin language to the point of knowing nothing of it. The author had me say, for example (I chose this example because it is possible to speak of it without sullying myself, since at this point the author did not introduce into my words the sickening theory in question): 'Lies can never be permitted *unless* to avoid a greater temporal evil.' In the passage alluded to I had actually said: 'Falsehood is never permitted, *not even* to avoid the greatest temporal evils.' Here is the Latin text: *Dicendum est illud nunquam, ne ad maxima quidem temporalia mala vitanda, fieri posse licitum.* A fourth-year Latin student could not misunderstand the sense of this text.

After all this, the label 'Sincerism' seems rather ironic, and we can end the discussion of what Herman Boulenger has called

> a scabrous story in which any reader who is at all up-to-date in mystical theology can recognize the traditional characteristics of diabolic action in the things revealed to him.[37]

37. *Le Catholique*, December 1913.

We will only add that the discord occasioned in Belgian spiritism by this affair was short-lived. On April 26, 1914, the inauguration of the 'House of Spirits' took place in Brussels; the 'Kardecist League' and the 'Sincerest Federation' had been invited. Two discourses were given, the first by Mr Fraikin, the new president of the 'Spiritist Federation', and the second by Le Clément de Saint Marcq; the reconciliation was thereby effected.[38]

We have desired only to put forth some facts which each reader can appraise as he will. Theologians will probably see herein something more and other than simple 'moralists' might find. As for ourselves, we do not want to push things to extremes, and it is not for us to pose the question of a direct and 'personal' action of satan. But this is of little importance, for when we speak of 'satanism', this is not necessarily how we understand matters. Ultimately, questions of 'personification', if one may so express oneself, are perfectly immaterial from our point of view. What we wish to say is in reality quite independent of this particular interpretation as well as of all others, of which we do not intend to exclude any, on the sole condition that they correspond to a possibility. In any case, what we see in all this, and more generally in spiritism and other analogous movements, are influences that incontestably come from what some have called the 'sphere of the Antichrist'. This designation can also be taken symbolically, but that changes nothing in reality and does not render the influences less ill-omened. Assuredly, those who participate in such movements, and even those who believe they direct them, may know nothing of these things. This is where the greatest danger lies, for quite certainly many of them would flee in horror if they knew they were servants of the 'powers of darkness'. But their blindness is often irremediable and their good faith even helps draw in other victims. Does not this allow us to say that the supreme craft of the devil, however he may be conceived, is to make us deny his existence?

38. Le Clément de Saint-Marcq has never renounced his peculiar ideas; recently he even published a new brochure in which he still advances the same theories.

11

SEERS AND HEALERS

SPIRITISTS RECOGNIZE different kinds of mediums, whom they classify and designate according to the special nature of their faculties and the manifestations they produce. Naturally, the accounts they give to all these are quite variable, for they can be divided and subdivided almost indefinitely. Here is one such listing which is rather complete:

> There are mediums who produce physical effects, who provoke material phenomena such as noises or knockings in walls, apparitions,[1] displacement of objects without physical contact;[2] there are sensitive mediums, who by a vague impression feel the presence of spirits; there are auditive mediums, who hear the voices of the 'disincarnated', sometimes clear and distinct as those of living persons, at other times as intimate whispers in their inmost heart; there are speaking mediums[3] and writing mediums, who, either by word or writing, but always with a complete and absolute passivity, transmit communications from beyond the grave; there are seeing mediums who, in the waking state, see spirits; and there are musician mediums, designer mediums, poet mediums, healing mediums, the names of which sufficiently designate the dominant faculty.[4]

1. This case, that of the 'materializing mediums', is often distinguished from the others which are regarded as more common and as not requiring faculties that are as highly developed.
2. Levitation may be added to this list of phenomena.
3. These are what are more often called 'incarnating mediums'.
4. Félix Fabart, *Histoire philosophique et politique de l'Occulte,* p133.

It must be added that several kinds of mediumship may be found in the same individual, and that the most typical mediumship is that which produces physical effects, with all the varieties this may include. Nearly all the rest can be reduced to simple hypnotic states as we have already explained. But there are nevertheless several categories which we should discuss in greater detail, so much the more in that some people attribute great importance to them.

The sensitive, seeing, and auditive mediums, who can be grouped together, are only called mediums by the spiritists in accordance with their preconceived ideas. These are individuals supposedly endowed with certain 'hyperphysical senses', to adopt an expression used by some; some call this the 'sixth sense' without being more precise, while others list 'clairvoyance', 'clairaudience', and so on, as so many distinct senses. Some groups claim that man possesses seven internal senses[5] beyond his five external senses. These are actually somewhat improper extensions of the word 'sense' and we do not see how one can envisage 'internal senses' other than what used to be called the *sensorium commune,* which is to say mentality in its function of centralizing and coordinating sense data. We readily acknowledge that the human individuality possesses certain extra-corporeal faculties which are latent in everyone and which can be more or less developed in some; but these faculties do not really constitute senses, and if one speaks of them by analogy with the corporeal senses it is perhaps because otherwise it would be difficult to speak of them at all. When taken literally this assimilation implies a large element of illusion, arising as it does from those endowed with these faculties, who are constrained to express what they thus perceive in terms that normally designate things of the corporeal order. But there is another cause of more complete and serious illusion: this is the fact that in spiritist circles and in other 'neo-spiritualist' schools, one intentionally tries to

5. We allude here to certain organizations which claim to be 'Rosicrucian' but which do not have the least historical or doctrinal relationship to authentic Rosicrucianism. As we have had occasion to remark elsewhere (*Theosophy,* chaps. 3 and 22), this title is one of the most frequently abused in our time. No occultists of any school have any right whatsoever to claim for themselves links to Rosicrucianism or to anything whatsoever of a truly traditional, esoteric, or initiatic character.

acquire or develop faculties of this kind. Without speaking of the dangers inherent in these 'psychic allurements', which are very apt to unbalance those who give themselves up to them, it is obvious that under these conditions one is often induced to take as real 'clairvoyance' what is only the effect of a suggestion. In some schools such as Theosophy, the acquisition of 'clairvoyance' seems to be the supreme goal. The importance accorded these things proves yet again that, notwithstanding their pretensions, the schools in question have absolutely nothing initiatic about them, for there is nothing in all this but contingencies which seem quite negligible to anyone who has any knowledge of a more profound order. At the very most it is something 'beside the point' which they so continually seek out and which in most cases represents an obstacle rather than an advantage. Spiritists who cultivate these faculties imagine that what they see and hear are 'spirits', and this is why they regard it as mediumship; in other schools one thinks one sees and hears quite different things, but these are of an equally fanciful character.

In sum, it is always a question of a description of the theory of the school where the phenomena were produced, and here is sufficient reason for it to be maintained without fear of being deceived that suggestion plays a preponderant if not exclusive role. One can have more confidence in what is reported by isolated and spontaneous 'seers', those who belong to no group and who have never been beguiled. But here again there are many causes of error. First is the inevitable imperfection of the mode of expression they use; then there are the interpretations they mix into their visions, involuntarily and unawares, for they are never without at least some vague preconceived ideas. And it must be added that generally these 'seers' have no underlying ideas of a theoretical or doctrinal order which would permit them to know themselves and prevent them from distorting things by letting their imagination intervene, an imagination which unfortunately is often quite well developed. When 'seers' are orthodox mystics, their natural tendencies to stray are in some manner held in check and reduced to a minimum; almost everywhere else they have free rein and the result is often a nearly inextricable confusion. The most unquestionable and most celebrated

among them, Swedenborg for example, are far from exempt from this fault, and one cannot take too many precautions if one wishes to extract what is of genuine interest in their works. Better to go to purer sources, for after all there is nothing to be found in the former which cannot be found elsewhere in a less chaotic state and under more intelligible forms.

The defects we have just indicated reach their apogee among unlettered 'seers' who are left to themselves without the least direction, such as the peasant of the Var, Louis Michel de Figanières, whose writings[6] are the admiration of French occultists, who see in them the most extraordinary 'revelations'; and it is here in large part that the origin of the so-called 'living science' should be sought, which is one of their principal obsessions. In frightful jargon these purported 'revelations' express the most anthropomorphic and materialized conceptions, or rather descriptions, that have ever been made of God, who in this context is called the 'great infinite man', 'president of life' [*sic*], and of the Universe, which someone has seen fit to term 'omniverse'.[7] In all this it is a question of 'networks', 'construction sites', 'digestions', 'aromas', 'fluids', etc. This is what the occultists praise as a sublime cosmogony. Among other marvels to be found therein is a history of the formation of the earth which Papus adopted and did his best to disseminate. Not wanting to linger over this subject but wanting to give an idea of these rantings, we will only cite a summary made by the Belgian spiritist Jobard,[8] in which the special language of the original has been carefully preserved:

> Relatively speaking, our globe is quite new. It is constructed of old materials gathered in the great construction site of the universe, out of the old debris of planets brought together by attraction, incrustation, and annexation into a single whole from four satellites of an earlier planet which, having reached the state of maturity, was gathered by the great Gardener to be conserved in

6. *Clé de la Vie*; *Vie universelle*; *Réveil des peuples*.

7. The different parts of the 'omniverse' are called 'universe', 'biniverse', 'triniverse', 'quadriverse', etc.

8. This summary appeared as one of the lead articles in *Clé de la Vie*.

his granaries and to serve for his material nourishment. For just as man gathers the mature fruits from his earthly garden, the great infinite man gathers the mature fruits from his omniversal garden which likewise serve as his nourishment. This is what explains the disappearance of a number of stars, observed for centuries, from the great flower bed of the heavens. What is the digestion of a ripe fruit in the stomach of an earthly godling[9] if not the awakening and the departure of a hominucular population fallen into catalepsy, or an ecstasy of happiness on the little worlds that they have formed and led in harmony by their intelligent works? . . . Let us return to the formation of our incrustative planet by the simultaneous annexation of four ancient satellites: Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, put in magnetic catalepsy by the collective, celestial soul of our earth charged with this operation, no matter how difficult the union of several small kingdoms into a single one or small businesses into a large one. It was not without long negotiations with the fallen collective spiritual souls of the four satellites in question, that the fusion was accomplished. Only the moon, the fifth satellite and the strongest as well as the worst, resisted these solicitations, creating thus her own unhappiness and that of the earthly agglomeration where her place will be reserved at the center of the Pacific Ocean.[10] But the souls of stars, good or bad, have their free will as does the human race, and dispose of their destiny for good or ill. . . . In order to make this sublime and sensible operation of incrustation less painful, the celestial soul of the earth (or the good fluidic seed of the incrustative graft) began, we say, by magnetically putting to sleep the furnishings[11] [*sic*] of the four

9. That is to say, of man; if God is a 'great man', man is a 'little god'. Similar expressions are found elsewhere, in Swedenborg for example; but they can at least be understood symbolically, while here everything must be taken literally.

10. Others have already surpassed this story, claiming that after having occupied its place among the other satellites, the moon later hid itself, but was unable to escape completely from the attraction of the earth, around which it was condemned to revolve in punishment for its revolt.

11. The author whom Guénon cites uses the word *mobilier*, whence Guénon's *sic* above. Ed.

> ancient satellites of good will. Asia, the good material plant of this graft, was far more advanced than the three others, as it had already lived many centuries with its populace entirely awake, while the others were still partly asleep. Men, animals, and all living seed were placed in a state of complete anesthesia during this sublime operation of the four globes becoming confounded under the pressure of the hands of God, of his Great Messengers, their entrails, their crust, their faces, their eyes, their atmospheres, their collective souls.

We can come to a stop here; but this citation quite usefully illustrates where occultists get their pseudo-tradition and their bogus esoterism.

Let us add that Louis Michel must not be held solely responsible for the ramblings that have been published under his name; he did not write, but dictated what a 'superior spirit' inspired; and his 'revelations' were collected and arranged by his disciples, the principal of these being a certain Charles Sardou. Naturally, the milieu where all this was worked out was strongly imbued with spiritism.[12]

'Seers' often have a tendency to form schools, which may even form around them without their playing any intentional part. In this latter case it happens that they are true victims of their entourage, which exploits them consciously or unconsciously, as the spiritists do with all those in whom they discover some mediumistic faculties. When we speak here of exploitation, this must be understood above all in a psychic sense, though the consequences are nonetheless disastrous. For a 'seer' to be installed as a *chef d'école* in reality and not merely in appearance, it is not enough that he desire to be such; he needs a certain superiority over his 'disciples', which his abnormal faculties confer upon him. This was not the case with Louis Michel, but it is sometimes seen in spiritism. Thus there was at one time in France a spiritist school of a rather peculiar character, founded and directed by a 'seer', Madame Lucie Grange, called by the 'mystic' name *Habimélah*, or *Hab* by abbreviation, a

12. The reveries of Louis Michel have also been abundantly developed in numerous works by Arthur d'Anglemont.

name which, it seems, was given her by Moses in person. In this school there was an especial veneration for the famous Vintras, who qualified as a 'prophet'[13] among its members, and the group's publication, *La Lumière*, which began in 1882, counted among its contributors—for the most part disguised by pseudonyms—more than one suspect person. Mme Grange was much occupied with 'prophecies', and she considered that the 'communications' she received were of such a nature. She gathered into a volume a rather considerable number of these 'productions',[14] whether of 'psychographic, psychophonic, or natural clairvoyance' as she called them, indicating thus the several kinds of mediumship she possessed (writing, audition, vision). These 'communications' bear the signatures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel,[15] the chief saints of the Old and New Testaments, as well as illustrious men of ancient and modern history. Some signatures are still more curious, such as that of 'the sibyl Pasipée of the Grotto of the Croissant', or that of 'Rafana, soul of the planet Jupiter'. In a 'communication' St Louis informs us that he was King David reincarnated and that Joan of Arc was Thamar, daughter of David; and *Hab* adds this note:

> A significant connection: David was the founder of a predestined family, and he was the source of our last kings. Saint Louis presided at the first spiritist teachings and in the name of God was made Father of a regenerated Christianity by his special protection of Allan Kardec.

Such 'connections' are especially significant as to the mentality of those who make them, and they have a quite clear sense for whoever knows the politico-religious underside of certain milieux much concerned with the question of the 'survival' of Louis XVII. Moreover, the second coming of Christ as more or less imminent is

13. See a brochure entitled *Le Prophète de Tilly.*

14. *Prophètes et Prophéties.*

15. Mlle Courédon, the 'seer' of Paradise Street, who had her hour of fame, believed she was inspired by the Archangel Gabriel. Her faculty took its origin in her frequentation of the spiritist séances of Mme Orsat. Naturally, the pure spiritists considered the so-called Archangel Gabriel as an 'incarnating medium'.

announced in these circles. Is there thus a desire to imply that Christ will be reincarnated in the new 'race of David' and that he may be the 'Great Monarch' announced by the 'prophecy of Orval' and several other predictions of greater or lesser authenticity? We will not say that these predictions are in themselves totally devoid of value, but as they are formulated in hardly comprehensible terms, each interprets them in his own way; and there are very strange things in what some claim to draw from them. Later, Mme Grange was 'guided' by a so-called Egyptian 'spirit' who presented himself under the composite name *Salem-Hermes*, and who dictated to her a volume of 'revelations'; but this is much less interesting than the manifestations that are more or less directly connected with the affair of Louis XVII, a list of which, beginning with the first years of the nineteenth century, would be quite long but also very instructive for those with a legitimate curiosity to seek for the realities hidden under certain phantasmagoria.

Having spoken of 'seers', we must also say a few words about 'healing mediums'. If the spiritists are to be believed, this is one of the highest forms of mediumship. For example, here is what Léon Denis wrote after having stated that the great writers and the great artists were nearly all 'inspired' and 'auditive mediums':

> The power to heal by a look, a touch, or the laying on of hands, is also one of the forms by which spiritual action is exercised in the world. God, source of life, is the principle of physical health as he is that of moral perfection and of supreme beauty. Certain men, by prayer and magnetic élan, draw this influx upon themselves, this radiance of divine energy which chases away impure fluids that cause so much suffering. The spirit of charity, of devotion pushed to the point of sacrifice, forgetfulness of self, are the necessary conditions for acquiring and keeping this power, one of the most marvelous that God has accorded man. Even today a number of more or less fortunate healers offer their care with the help of the spirits. . . . Above all human Churches, outside all rites, all sects, all formulas, is a supreme center that the soul can attain by the impetus of faith. . . . In reality, magnetic healing requires neither passes nor special formulas, but only the ardent

> desire to relieve others, the sincere and deep appeal of the soul to God, principle and source of all strength.[16]

This enthusiasm is easily explained if one recalls the humanitarian tendencies of the spiritists; and the same author says further:

> Like Christ and the apostles, like the saints, the prophets, and the magi, each of us can lay on our hands and heal if we love our neighbor and have the ardent desire to bring them relief.... Silently gather your wits, alone with the patient; call to the beneficent spirits who hover over human sufferings. Then, from above you will feel an influx descend into you and then reach the subject. A regenerative wave will of itself penetrate to the cause of the evil, and, by prolonging and renewing your action, you will have contributed to relieving the burden of earthly miseries.[17]

It seems that here the action of 'healing mediums' is properly compared to magnetism; there is however a difference to be taken into account, which is the fact that the ordinary magnetizer acts by his own will, without in any way soliciting the intervention of a 'spirit'. But spiritists say that such a one is a medium without knowing it, and that the intention to heal is equivalent to a sort of implicit evocation, even if he does not believe in the 'spirits'. In fact, exactly the inverse is true, for it is that spiritist 'healer' who is an unconscious magnetizer; whether his faculties have come to him spontaneously or have been developed by practice, they are nothing other than magnetic faculties, but in virtue of his particular ideas he imagines that he must appeal to 'spirits' and that it is these latter who act through him, while in reality it is only from himself that all the effects are produced. This kind of alleged mediumship is less harmful than others for those endowed with it because, not implying the same degree of passivity (and even passivity in this context is rather illusory), it does not involve the same disequilibrium. Nevertheless, it would be too much to believe that the practice of magnetism under these or under ordinary conditions (the difference is more in

16. *Dans l'Invisible*, pp453–455.
17. Ibid., p199.

the interpretation than in the facts) might be free from all danger for him who gives himself up to it, especially if he does so habitually, 'professionally' as it were. As to the effects of magnetism, they are very real in certain cases, but one must not exaggerate their efficacy; we do not believe that magnetism can heal or even relieve all maladies without distinction, and there are temperaments which are completely refractory to it. In addition, certain healings must be credited to the power of suggestion, or even to auto-suggestion, more than to that of magnetism. As to the relative value of this or that manner of proceeding, that is a matter of debate (which the different schools of magnetism engage in extensively, not to mention the hypnotists, who are hardly in greater agreement among themselves).[18] This is perhaps not as completely immaterial a matter as Léon Denis claims, at least if it is not the case of a magnetizer who possesses particularly powerful faculties as a kind of natural gift. Such a case, which precisely gives the illusion of mediumship (supposing that one knows and accepts spiritist theories) because it allows no room for any voluntary effort, probably holds for the most celebrated 'healers', except of course when their reputation is usurped and when charlatanism is mixed in, for this too sometimes happens. As for explaining the phenomena of magnetism, we do not need to be concerned with them here, but it goes without saying that the 'fluidic' theory, to which most magnetizers subscribe, is inadmissible. It is here that spiritism got its conception of 'fluids' of all kinds; but this is only a very gross image, and the intervention of the 'spirits', which the spiritists bring in, is an absurdity.

18. We do not want to enter into the controversial question of the relationships between hypnotism and magnetism. Historically, the first derives from the second. But medical doctors, who have denied magnetism, cannot decently adopt it without giving it a new name; on the other hand, magnetism is more extensive than hypnotism in the sense that it often works on waking subjects and is less dependent upon suggestion. As examples of the discussions to which we have alluded we can cite, among the magnetizers, disputes between supporters and adversaries of 'polarity'; among hypnotists, the quarrels between the schools of la Salpètriére and Nancy. On the one side as on the other, the results obtained by experimenters on their subjects always agree with the theories of each, which proves that suggestion plays a capital role, even though often an involuntary one.

The spiritist conception of 'healing mediums' is particularly clear in 'Fraternism', where mediums of this category occupy the first place. It seems that this sect even owes its origin to them if one is to believe what Paul Pillault wrote in 1913:

> It has been barely five years since, at Auby, in my office, and sometimes at my home, I tried my own abilities as healer which our good brother of space [*sic*], Jules Meudon, had uncovered in me and which he urged me to practice. I succeeded with many cures, from blindness to simple toothache. Happy with the results obtained, I resolved to put my healing abilities at the disposal of as many of my fellows as possible. At that point our director, Jean Béziat, joined with me to found *l'Institut général psychosique* at Sin-le-Noble (near Douai), which issued *l'Institut des Forces psychosiques no. 1*, and which, in 1910, began publication of our journal, *Le Fraterniste.*[19]

Still working at healing, they soon began to have more extensive preoccupations (we do not say more elevated, because no more that humanistic 'moralism' is involved), as this citation from Béziat shows:

> We encourage science to undertake researches in spiritism, and if we ultimately lead it to take an interest in this, it will find. And when science will have found and proven, it is Humanity in its entirety that will have found happiness. Thus *Le Fraterniste* is not only the most interesting but also the most useful journal in the world. It is from *Le Fraterniste* that one must await the tranquility and joy of Humanity. When the foundations of spiritism have been demonstrated as well established, the social question will almost be resolved.[20]

If this is sincere, it stems from a truly disconcerting lack of reflection. But let us proceed to the theory of 'fluidic psychosic healings' which was expounded in the court of Béthune, January 17, 1914, the

19. *Le Fraterniste,* December 26, 1913.

20. *Le Fraterniste,* December 19, 1913. Note that pacifism and feminism are special agenda items in the program of this journal.

occasion being a lawsuit against two 'healers' of this school, Messrs Lesage and Lecomte, who were charged with the illegal practice of medicine and were acquitted because they did not write prescriptions. Here is what is important in their statements:

> They treat maladies by the laying on of hands, flourishes, and the simultaneous mental invocation of good astral forces.[21] They provide no remedy or prescription; there is no treatment in the medical sense of the word, nor massage, but care by means of a fluidic force not active in ordinary magnetism, which may be called spiritist magnetism (psychosism); that is, the magnetizers are influenced by forces from good spirits and then transmit these forces to the sick, who then feel a great amelioration or obtain complete recovery as the case may be, this over an equally variable period of time.... In the course of questioning the judge asked for explanations regarding the laboratory where basins of magnetized water were found, prepared by the healers.... From the point of view of healing, the magnetized water has only a relative value; it is not the water that heals; it aids the evacuation of noxious fluids, but it is the spiritist treatment that expels the evil.[22]

Elsewhere they sought to persuade doctors themselves that, if they succeeded in healing the sick, it was also to the 'psychoses' that they owed their success. It was solemnly declared:

> It is the Psychose which heals, Sirs; the healer is simply the instrument. You also, you are the object of the psychoses; but it is useful for you that good things have come from your side, just as they have come from ours.[23]

Note also this curious explanation by Béziat:

> We can assert that a malady, whatever it may be, is one of the numerous varieties of Evil with a capital 'E'. Now the healer, by

21. It will be noted that the 'Fraternists', who are rather eclectic, sometimes borrow from occultist terminology.

22. Ibid., January 23, 1914.

23. *Le Fraterniste*, December 19, 1913.

> his fluid which he infuses into the patient and by his good intentions, kills or injures *Evil* in a general way. As a result he injures the particular variety at the same time, that is to say the malady. That is the entire secret.[24]

All this is in fact quite simple, at least in appearance, or rather quite 'simplistic'. But there are other healers who find it even simpler to deny evil: the 'Christian Scientists' and the 'Mental Scientists' of America are a case in point, and this is also the opinion of the Antoinists, whom we will discuss below. The 'Fraternists' go so far as to call down the 'divine force' in their healings, and it is again Béziat who proclaims 'the possibility of healing the sick by invisible astral energies, by appeal to the Great Universal Dispensatory Force which is God.'[25] If this is the case one might ask them why they find it necessary to appeal to 'spirits' and 'astral forces' instead of addressing God directly and exclusively. But the character of the evolving God believed in by the 'Fraternists' has already been seen. In this connection there is still something else that is very significant: on February 9, 1914 at Arras, Sébastien Faure gave a conference on the 'twelve proofs of the nonexistence of God', a conference which he repeated almost everywhere. Béziat spoke next, describing himself as 'pursuing basically the same aim,' addressing to Faure 'his most sincere felicitations,' and 'inviting the audience to associate themselves sincerely with him [Faure] in the realization of his eminently humanitarian program.' Following his journal's review of this meeting, Béziat added these reflections:

> Those who, like Sébastien Faure, deny the Creator-God of the Church, in our view draw that much nearer to the true God that is the Universal Impulsive Force of the worlds.... Thus we do not fear to advance this paradox: that if Sébastien Faure and those like him no longer believe in the God of the churchmen, it is because they believe more than others in the true God. We say that in the actual state of social evolution, these deniers are more divine than the others because they desire more justice and

24. Ibid., December 19, 1913.
25. Ibid., April 10, 1914.

> happiness for all.... I conclude from all this that if Sébastien Faure no longer believes in God, it is only because he has come to know him more, or in any case to feel him more, since he wills to practice the virtues.[26]

Since that time Sébastien Faure has had some misadventures which illustrate only too well how he meant to 'practice the virtues'; the 'Fraternists', defenders of Le Clément de Saint-Marcq, have decidedly singular friendships.

There are many other somewhat independent spiritist schools founded or directed by 'healing mediums', such as M.A. Bouvier of Lyon, who combined the theories of magnetism and Kardecism, and whose school put out a journal entitled *Universal Peace*, from which the extravagant project, the 'Congress of Humanity' that we have mentioned elsewhere, was launched.[27] The review displayed on its masthead the two following maxims: 'Exact knowledge of oneself engenders love of one's fellows', and, 'In all the world there is no more elevated cult than that of the truth'. It is not without interest to note that the second is a nearly literal transcription (but for the word 'religion', here replaced by 'cult') of the motto of the Theosophical Society. On the other hand, Mr Bouvier, who in the end joined the 'Fraternists', was, contrary to the usual case, on very good terms with the occultists. It is true that the latter have for these 'healers' a veneration at least as excessive as that of the spiritists. The famous 'Unknown Master' of the school of Papus, to whom we have alluded earlier, was essentially only a 'healer' who had no doctrinal knowledge at all, being in fact the victim of the role imposed upon him. The truth is that Papus did not need a 'Master', for he did not want one; what he needed was someone he could present as a Master in order to give the appearance of a serious foundation for his organizations and to encourage the belief that 'superior powers' were behind him. All this fantastic history of 'envoys of the Father' and 'spirits from the apartments of Christ' has nothing other than this as their primary raison d'être. Under these conditions it should

26. Ibid., February 20, 1914.
27. *Theosophy*, chap. 17.

not be astonishing that the naive, who are quite numerous in occultism, believed that among the 'twelve unknown Grand Masters of the Rosicrucians' were other 'healers' as completely destitute of intellectuality as 'Father Antoine' and the Alsacian Francis Schlatter, whom we have mentioned elsewhere.[28] There are still others who, without being so highly placed, are touted in the same school; such is the person concerning whom Papus slipped in this note in one of his works:

> From the quarter of spiritism, we should point out the adepts of theurgy, and especially Saltzman, as propagators of the idea of reincarnation. In his beautiful book, *Magnétisme spirituel,* Saltzman opens up magnificent horizons to every seeking mind.[29]

Saltzman is really only a somewhat dissident spiritist, in no way an 'adept' in the true sense of this word; and what he calls 'theurgy' has nothing at all in common with what the ancients understood by this term, of which he is completely ignorant. This brings to mind a rather ridiculous personage, formerly a Paris celebrity, called *le zouave Jacob.* He too thought well of giving the name 'theurgy' to a common mix of magnetism and spiritism. In 1888 he published a sort of journal of which the title, despite its unwonted length, merits citing in full: *Theurgical, scientific, psychological, and philosophical review, especially examining hygiene and healing by fluids and the dangers of medical, clerical, magnetic, hypnotic, etc., practices, under the direction of Jacob the zouave*—which already gives a clear enough notion of his mentality. We will limit ourselves to providing an appreciation of this person by an author who was himself entirely favorable to spiritism:

28. Ibid., chap. 26.

29. *La Réincarnation*, p173. We could also speak of a group recently instituted by an occultist, which claims to center itself on what it calls 'christic' mysticism, and wherein so-called 'theurgic' treatment of maladies seems to be one of the dominant preoccupations. In the same order of ideas there is an auxiliary organization of Martinism, created in Germany by Dr Theodor Krauss (Saturnus) under the name 'Therapeutic, Alchemical, and Philanthropic Order of Anonymous Samaritans'. And finally, we recall the existence of an 'Order of Healers' among the numerous filiations of the Theosophical Society.

> The 'zouave healer' was quite popular. I came to know him, but I was soon disillusioned. He claimed to operate by the influence of the spirits, but when I risked some objection he was beside himself with insults and rudeness worthy of a buffoon.... Poor arguments in the mouth of an apostle! I write 'apostle' because he said he was sent by God 'to heal men physically, as Christ had been sent to heal men morally'! Many people will remember this typical phrase. It is true that I witnessed astonishing ameliorations experienced instantly by certain sick persons who had been abandoned by doctors. Among others, I saw a paralytic carried in on someone's back because he could no longer move either arms or legs; this man then began to walk on his own, without support or crutches ... only till he left the office of the healer, that is to say as long as he remained in his presence. Once outside the door, the unhappy man again became immobile and had to be carried away in the same manner he had come. As I have heard as well as seen, the cures of the famous zouave were only pseudo-cures, and on returning home his clients again fell into the same infirmities from which he had freed them, along with an additional one, discouragement. In any case, he was unable to cure me of what he called 'moral blindness', and up to this moment I persist in the belief that the secret of his influence on illness was to be found not in the assistance of spirits, as he claimed, but in his deplorable manners. He frightened his clients by furious looks to which, on occasion, he added cutting remarks. He was perhaps a subduer, but not a thaumaturge.[30]

In brief, there was a strong dose of charlatanism along with a certain power of suggestion. We will find something quite analogous in the story of Antoinism, to which we devote a special chapter because of the astonishing expansion of this sect, and also because in it we have a very typical case well suited to serve as basis for judging the mental state of some of our contemporaries. We do not want to say that all 'healers' are of such character; there are certainly some whose sincerity is very respectable and whose real faculties we do

30. Félix Fabart, *Histoire philosophique et politique de l'Occulte*, pp173–174.

not question, even while regretting that nearly all of them try to explain these faculties by theories that are more than suspect. It is also rather curious to note that such faculties are found to be especially well developed in men of modest intelligence. Finally, those who are only 'suggestioners' can in certain cases obtain more lasting results than those obtained by *Jacob the zouave*. And it is not just an appropriate setting that can act effectively on certain ills. It can even be asked whether in the final analysis the most obvious charlatans are not themselves subject to their own suggestions, and whether they do not believe more or less in the extraordinary powers they attribute to themselves. However that may be, we repeat yet again that 'phenomena' of any sort prove absolutely nothing from the theoretical point of view. It is perfectly useless to cite in support of a doctrine healings obtained by men who profess the said doctrine, for one can support the most contradictory opinions in this way, which shows that these arguments are without value. When it is a question of the truth or falsity of ideas, every extra-intellectual consideration must be considered null and void.

exception. As a result charges were brought against him for the illegal practice of medicine and a modest fine was levied. He then replaced his liquor with magnetized water, which could not be characterized as a medication, then with magnetized paper, which was easier to transport. Nevertheless, the sick who gathered at Jemeppe became so numerous that he had to forego individual treatment in favor of gestures or the simple laying on of hands, and he instituted the practice of collective 'operations'. It was at this time that Antoine, who had until then spoken only of 'fluids', began to make faith an essential factor in the healings he accomplished. He began to teach that the imagination is sole cause of all physical ills, and in consequence forbade his disciples (for from that time he posed as the founder of a sect) to seek the care of medical doctors. In the book which he entitled *Revelation,* he has a disciple put this question to him:

> Someone who had thought he would consult a doctor comes to you saying (to himself): 'If I do not become better after this visit, I am going to Doctor so-and-so.' You note his intentions and counsel him to follow his line of thought. Why do you act this way? I have seen sick persons who, after having followed this advice, have had to come back to us.

Antoine responded in these words:

> In fact, certain sick persons may have planned to go to a doctor before consulting me. If I sense that they have greater confidence in the doctor, it is my duty to send them to see him. If they are not healed it is because their plan to visit me is an obstacle to the work of the doctor, just as their intention to consult a doctor is an obstacle to my work. Other sick persons ask me if such and such a remedy may not help them. This thought falsifies my operation in the blink of an eye; it is proof that they do not have sufficient faith, the certitude that I can give them what they seek without medications. . . . The doctor can confer only the results of his studies, which are based on the material order. The cause remains, therefore, and the malady reappears, because whatever is based on matter can cure only temporarily.

In another passages one reads further that

> It is by faith in the healer that the sick person finds his healing. The doctor may believe in the efficacy of drugs, but these are of no use for whomever has faith. . . . Faith is the unique and universal remedy, it penetrates whomever one wishes to protect, even if that one is thousands of leagues away.

These 'operations' (this is the preferred term) end with the formula: 'Those who have faith are healed or helped.' All this bears a strong resemblance to the 'Christian Science' founded in America about 1866 by Mary Baker Eddy. The Antoinists, like the 'Christian Scientists', have sometimes had disputes with the law for having allowed the sick to die without having done anything to care for them. Even at Jemeppe, the municipality several times refused burial permits. These setbacks did not discourage the Antoinists or stop the sect from prospering and spreading, not only in Belgium but also in the north of France. 'Father Antoine' died in 1912, leaving the succession to his widow, who was called 'the Mother', and to one of his disciples, 'the Brother' Deregnaucourt (who himself died after a short time). 'The Mother' and 'the Brother' came to Paris toward the end of 1913 to establish an Antoinist temple, and thence on to Monaco to open another. When the war broke out, the 'Antoinist cult' was on the point of being legally recognized in Belgium, a move which would have resulted in making its ministers' treatments a responsibility of the state. The petition filed to this effect had the special support of the socialist party and of two of the heads of Belgian Masonry, senators Charles Magnette and Goblet d'Alviella. It is curious to note the politically motivated support that aided Antoinism, the adherents to which were recruited almost exclusively from the working classes. On the other hand, we have elsewhere[1] cited evidence of Theosophist sympathy, whereas 'orthodox' spiritists seem to have seen in Antoinism only a troubling and divisive element. Let us further add that during the war singular things were recounted of how the Germans respected Antoinist temples. Naturally, the members of the sect attribute these facts to

1. *Theosophy*, chap. 26.

the posthumous protection of the 'Father', and so much the more in that he solemnly declared: 'Death is life; it cannot remove me from you, on the contrary it will not hinder me coming to all those who have confidence in me.'

What is remarkable about the case of Antoine is not his career as a 'healer', which resembles that of *Jacob the zouave* on more than one count: there was almost as much charlatanism with the one as with the other, and if they obtained some genuine cures, these were very probably due to suggestion rather than to special faculties, and it was doubtless for this reason that 'faith' was necessary. What invites more attention is that Antoine claimed to be the founder of a religion and that he succeeded in this in a truly extraordinary way despite the nullity of his 'teachings', which were only a vague mix of spiritist theories and protestant 'moralism' often written in a nearly unintelligible jargon. One of the most characteristic morsels of this is a decalogue of sorts entitled 'ten prose fragments of the teaching revealed by Antoine the Healer'; even though we are warned that these texts are 'in prose', they are arranged like the blank verse of certain 'decadent' poets, with the occasional rhyme.[2] This is worth reproducing:

> God speaks:
> —*First principle*: If you love me—you will not teach it to anyone—since you know that I reside—only in the breast of man. You cannot testify that there exists—a supreme goodness while you isolate me from your neighbor.
> —*Second principle*: Do not believe in him who speaks to you of me—whose intention may be to convert you.—If you respect every belief—as well as him who has none—you know, in spite of your ignorance—more than he can tell you.
> —*Third principle*: You cannot teach morality to anyone—that would be proof—that you are not doing good—because morality is not taught by words—but by example, and do not see evil in anything.
> —*Fourth principle*: Never say that you are being charitable—to

2. To avoid indentations we indicate the breaks in the text by simple lines.

someone who seems miserable to you—that would be to imply—that I am without consideration, that I am not good—that I am a bad father—a miser—leaving his offspring hungry.—If you act toward your fellows—as a true brother—you are charitable only to yourself—this you must know.—Since nothing is good if it is not shared—you have only bestowed on him—the fulfillment of your duty.

—*Fifth principle*: Strive always to love him who says—he is 'your enemy'—it is for you to learn to know yourself—that I place him in your path.—But see the evil in yourself rather than in him—this will be the sovereign remedy.

—*Sixth principle*: When you seek to know the cause—of your sufferings—which you always rightly undergo—you will find it in the incompatibility of—intelligence and conscience—which establish between themselves terms of comparison.—You cannot feel the least suffering—unless it be to make you aware—that intelligence is opposed to conscience—this is what must not be forgotten.

—*Seventh principle*: Strive to understand yourself—for even the least suffering is due to your—intelligence which always wants to gain more—it makes of itself a stepping-stone for mercy—intending that everything be subordinate to it.

—*Eighth principle*: Do not let your intelligence be your master—which always seeks only to raise itself higher—more and more—it tramples conscience under foot—claiming that it is matter—that gives—the virtues—while it contains only misery—souls which you call—'abandoned'—which have acted only to satisfy—their intelligence which has led them astray.

—*Ninth principle*: Everything that is useful for you in the present—as well as for the future—if you do not doubt in any way—will be given to you over and above.—Improve yourselves—you will recall the past—you will remember—that it has been said to you: 'Knock, I will open to you—I am in the know-thyself. . . .'

—*Tenth principle*: Do not think of always doing good—when a brother comes to your aid—you can act to the contrary—hinder his progress.—Know that a great trial—will be your

> recompense—if you humiliate him and compel respect.—When you want to act—never base yourself on your belief—because it can lead you astray—base yourself always on conscience—which wishes to direct you, it cannot deceive you.

These alleged 'revelations' strongly resemble spiritist 'communications' both in style and content. Certainly it is useless to offer any sustained comment or detailed explanation; it is not even sure that 'Father Antoine' always understood himself, his obscurity being perhaps one of the reasons for his success. What is especially worth noting is the opposition he wishes to establish between intelligence and conscience (this last term being understood in a moral sense) and the way he claims to associate intelligence and matter. In this latter there is stuff to give joy to [Henri] Bergson's supporters, even though such a comparison may in the final analysis be unflattering. However that may be, it will be readily understood that Antoinism makes a point of despising intelligence, and even denounces it as the cause of all evils, representing the demon in man as conscience represents God. But thanks to evolution, everything will turn out just fine. 'By our progress, we will find the true God in the demon, and the lucidity of conscience in intelligence.' In effect, evil does not really exist; what exists is only the 'sight of evil', that is to say it is intelligence which creates evil wherever it sees it. The only symbol of the Antoinist cult is a kind of tree called 'the tree of the knowledge of the view of evil'. One must 'never see evil in anything', because it will then cease to exist. In particular, evil must never be seen in the conduct of one's neighbor, and this is how the prohibition against 'lecturing anyone', taking this expression in its popular sense, should be understood. It is obvious that Antoine could not forbid anyone to preach morality, for he himself hardly did anything else. To this he added precepts of hygiene, which moreover was part of his role as 'healer'. Let us recall in this connection that Antoinists are vegetarians, as are Theosophists and the members of numerous other sects with humanitarian tendencies. They cannot be considered 'zoophiles', however, for they are strictly forbidden to keep animals:

> We must know that animals only appear to exist; the animal is only the excrement of our imperfection [*sic*]. . . . How wrong we

> are in attaching ourselves to an animal; it is a great sin [in the Walloon dialect, which he normally spoke, Antoine said 'a doubt'] because an animal is not worthy of having its home where humans reside.

Matter itself exists only in appearance, it is only an illusion produced by the intelligence.: 'We say that matter does not exist because we have raised our imagination above it.' It is thus identified with evil. 'An atom of matter is suffering for us.' And Antoine goes so far as to declare: 'If matter exists, God cannot exist.' Here is how he explains the creation of the earth:

> Nothing other than the individuality of Adam created the world [*sic*]. Adam was led to form an atmosphere for himself and to construct his habitation, the globe, such as he would have it.

Let us also cite a few aphorisms regarding the intelligence:

> Factual information is not a matter of knowing, but of reasoning about matter. . . . Intelligence, considered by humanity the most enviable faculty from every point of view, is only the seat of our imperfection. . . . I have revealed to you that there are in us two individualities, the conscious self and the intelligent self; the one real, the other apparent. . . . Intelligence is only the bundle of molecules we call the brain. . . . To the extent that we progress, we demolish the intelligent me to reconstruct the conscious me.

It is all rather incoherent; the only idea that comes out of it, if it can even be called an idea, could be formulated in this way: intelligence must be eliminated for the sake of 'conscience', that is to say for the sake of sentimentality. French occultists have recently reached almost the same conclusion, though for the most part they do not have the excuse of being illiterate; but it is worth noting that it was a 'healer' who played a role in this development.

In order to be consistent with himself, Antoine had to limit himself to the utterance of moral precepts of the following kind, which are inscribed in his temples:

> Only one remedy can heal humanity: faith. It is from faith that love is born, love which reveals God himself in our enemies. Not

> to love one's enemies is not to love God, for it is the love we have for our enemies that makes us worthy to serve Him. This is the only love that makes us love truly, because it is pure and from the truth.

Here is what is essential in Antoinist morality; the rest seems to be rather elastic:

> You are free, so act as seems good to you; he who does good deeds will find goodness. In fact, we use our free will to such an extent that God allows us to do what we will with it.

But Antoine also believed he had to formulate theories of another order, and it is here above all that he attained the pinnacle of absurdity. Here is an example taken from a brochure entitled *L'Auréole de la Conscience*:

> I am going to tell you how you must understand the divine laws and how they can act upon us. You know that it is recognized that life is everywhere; if a void existed, nothingness would also have its raison d'être. Something I can also affirm is that love exists everywhere; and just as there is love, there is also intelligence and conscience. Intelligence and conscience, united, constitute a unity, the great mystery—God. In order to make you understand what the laws are, I must return to what I have already said concerning fluids: as many exist as there are thoughts. We have the faculty to manage them and to establish laws for them by means of thought, according to our desire to act. Those which we impose on our fellows, are likewise imposed on us. Such are the laws of the interior, ordinarily called the laws of God. As to exterior laws, called laws of nature, they are the instinct of life which manifests itself in matter, clothing itself in all nuances, taking numerous and incalculable forms according to the nature of the seed of the ambient fluids. This is the way of everything; everything has its instinct; even the stars which hover in infinite space are directed by the contact of fluids and instinctively follow their orbit. If God had established laws for going to Him, they would be an obstacle to our free will; whether they were relative or absolute, they would be obligatory, for we could

> not dispense with them in order to attain our end. But God leaves to each person the faculty of establishing his laws according to necessity; this is yet another proof of His love. Every law must be based on conscience. Do not say 'laws of God', therefore, but rather 'laws of conscience'. This revelation comes from the very principles of love, from that love which overflows from every direction, which is found at the centers of the stars as well as in the depths of the oceans, from that love the perfume of which is manifested everywhere, which nourishes all the kingdoms of nature and which maintains equilibrium and harmony throughout the universe.

To the question: 'Whence comes life?', Antoine replies as follows:

> Life is eternal, it is everywhere. The fluids also exist infinitely and eternally. We bathe in life and in the fluids like a fish in water. The fluids follow one another and are more and more ethereal; they are distinguished by love. Wherever love exists, there is life, because without life love has no raison d'être. If suffices that two fluids be in contact by a certain degree of solar warmth in order that their two seeds of life be disposed to enter into contact. It is thus that life creates an individuality and becomes active.

If someone had asked the author of these lucubrations to explain himself a bit more intelligibly, he would no doubt have replied with a sentence that he repeated at every opportunity: 'You see only the effect, seek the cause.' Do not forget that from the Kardecist spiritism with which he began Antoine had carefully retained not only the theory of 'fluids', which we have just seen him express in his inimitable manner, but also, along with the idea of progress, that of reincarnation.

> The imperfect soul remains incarnate until it has overcome its imperfection.... Before leaving the dying body, the soul has prepared another body in which to be reincarnated.... Our cherished loved ones, said to have departed, have left us only apparently; we do not cease for one instant to see them and converse with them. Corporeal life is only an illusion.

In the eyes of the Antoinists what is most important in the 'teaching' of their 'Father' is its moral content, all the rest being only accessory. Proof of this is found in a propaganda leaflet bearing the title *Revelation by Father Antoine, the great Healer of Humanity, for whoever has faith*, which we quote word for word:

> The teaching of the Father is based on love; it reveals the moral law, the conscience of humanity; it recalls man to the duties he has to fulfill toward his fellows. Even if he is so backward as to be unable to understand it, he can, on contact with those who disseminate it, be filled with the love that flows from it; and this will inspire him with the best intentions and will raise up in him the most noble sentiments. Religion, the Father says, is the expression of love drawn from the bosom of God, who makes us love everyone without distinction. Never lose sight of the moral law because by it we sense the necessity to improve ourselves. Not all of us have reached the same degree of intellectual and moral development, and God always places the weak in our path in order to give us occasion to draw nearer Him. There are among us beings deprived of every faculty, who have need of our help; duty imposes on us the task of coming to their aid in the measure that we believe in a good and merciful God. Their development does not permit them to practice a religion the teaching of which is beyond their comprehension, but our manner of acting toward them will recall them to the respect due them and will lead them to seek the most advantageous surroundings for their progress. If we wish to draw them to us by a morality that rests on laws inaccessible to their understanding, we will disturb them, and the least instruction will become insupportable; they will end by understanding nothing; doubting religion, they will revert to materialism. This is the reason why every day our humanity loses some real belief in God to materialism. The Father has revealed that formerly it was as rare to meet a materialist as today it is to meet a true believer.[3] As long as we are unaware of the moral law

3. It hardly needed a 'revelation' for that; but naturally the Antoinists are ignorant of the fact that materialism dates only from the eighteenth century.

by which we are guided, we transgress it. The Teaching of the Father rationalizes this moral law, which inspires all hearts devoted to the regeneration of Humanity; it does not interest only those who have faith in God, but all men without distinction, believers and non-believers, and whatever their station. Do not believe that the Father demands the establishment of a religion which confines his adepts in a circle, obliging them to practice his doctrine, to observe a certain rite, to respect a certain form, to follow any opinion whatever, to leave their religion in order to come to Him. No, it is not so: we instruct all who contact us in what we have understood of the Teaching of the Father, and exhort them to the sincere practice of the religion in which they have faith, in order that they may acquire the elements of morality that are consonant with their understanding. We know that belief can be based only on love; but we must always try to love and not to make ourselves loved, for this is the greatest of curses. When we are penetrated with the Teaching of the Father there will be no more dissension between religions because there will no longer be indifference, we will love all because we will have finally understood the law of progress, we will have the same regard for all religions and even for unbelief, in the conviction that no one can do us the least ill and that, if we wish to be useful to our fellows, we must demonstrate to them that we profess a good religion in respecting theirs and in wishing them well. We shall then be convinced that love is born of faith which is truth; but we will not possess it except when we do not claim to have it.

This document ends with this phrase printed in large characters: 'The Teaching of the Father is the teaching of Christ revealed by faith in this day.' An article taken from a Theosophist journal, which we have cited elsewhere, also ends with this incredible statement: 'The Father claims only to renew the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, so materialized in our time by religions which claim to represent this great Being.'[4] This claim is so audacious that it can be excused

4. *Le Théosophe*, December 1, 1913.

only by ignorance. And given the state of mind it reveals among the Antoinists, it is not surprising that they have reached the point of a veritable deification of their founder, even during his lifetime. The following extract from one of their publications proves that we do not exaggerate:

> To make of Monsieur Antoine a great lord, would that not be to diminish him? You will admit, I suppose, that we, his adepts, who are aware of his work have completely different thoughts in his regard. You interpret our way of seeing things too intellectually, that is to say too materially, and judging thus without full knowledge you cannot understand the sentiment animating us. But whoever has faith in our good Father appreciates what He really is, because he views him morally. We can ask Him whatever we want and He gives it impartially. Nevertheless it is permissible to act as we wish, without any recourse to Him, for He has the greatest respect for our free will. He never imposes anything whatsoever. If we ask His counsel it is because we are convinced that He knows all our needs, while we are ignorant of them. Is it not infinitely preferable to be aware of His power before wishing to discredit our manner of acting toward Him? Like a good father, He watches over us. When, weakened by sickness, we go to Him full of confidence, He assuages and heals us. If we are crushed under the blows of the most terrible moral pains, He gives us relief and brings hope back to aching hearts. If the loss of a dear one leaves an immense void in our hearts, His love fills the void and recalls us to duty. He has the most excellent balm, true love, which levels out every difficulty, which surmounts every obstacle, which heals every wound, and he lavishes it on all humanity, for he is doctor of the soul rather than of the body. No, we do not wish to make of Antoine the Healer a great lord, we make of him our Savior. He is rather our God, because he wants only to be our servant.

So there it is; and enough on a subject so totally devoid of intrinsic interest. But what is terrible is the facility with which these insanities are spread abroad in our times; in only a few years Antoinism has gathered adherents by the thousands. The fundamental reason

for this success, as for that of similar cases, is that these aberrations correspond to tendencies in the modern mind. But it is precisely these tendencies that are troubling because they are the negation of all intellectuality, and it cannot be denied that they are presently gaining ground. The case of Antoinism, as we have said, is quite typical; among the many sects that have been formed during the past half century or so, some are similar to Antoinism, but this latter has the distinction of having been formed in Europe; most of the others, at least those that have succeeded, are of American origin. What is more, there are some, like 'Christian Science', which have taken root in Europe and even in France in recent years.[5] This is a further symptom of the growing mental disequilibrium of which the appearance of spiritism marks the point of departure; and even when these sects are not directly derived from spiritism, as is the case with Antoinism, the tendencies they manifest are assuredly in large measure the same.

5. Cf. *Theosophy*, chap. 26.

13

SPIRITIST PROPAGANDA

WE HAVE ALREADY called attention to the spiritists' propagandist tendencies, and there is no need to provide further proof because these tendencies, always intimately linked to their 'moralist' preoccupations, are spread throughout spiritist publications. Moreover, we have noted that this attitude is much more readily understood on the part of spiritists than with other 'neo-spiritualist' schools with esoteric pretensions; proselytism and esoterism are obviously contradictory. But the spiritists, who are imbued with the purest democratic spirit, are far more logical in this respect. We do not want to rehash this matter, but it is worth noting some special characteristics of spiritist propaganda and showing how this propaganda can on occasion be as insinuating as that of sects of more or less direct Protestant inspiration; for in the end all this proceeds from the same mentality.

The spiritists believe they can cite the spread of their doctrine as a proof of its truth. Already Allan Kardec wrote:

> Those who say that spiritist beliefs threaten to invade the world thereby proclaim the power of these beliefs, for an idea without foundation and devoid of logic cannot become universal. If, therefore, spiritism is taking root everywhere, and if recruits are found especially among the enlightened classes as everyone recognizes, it is because it has a fund of truth.[1]

1. *Le Livre des Esprits*, p454.

This appeal to a claimed 'universal consent' to prove the truth of an idea is an argument dear to certain modern philosophers. Nothing could be more insignificant. First, unanimity is never realized, and even if it were, one would have no means for ascertaining it. This amounts simply to the claim that the majority must be right. But in the intellectual realm there is every likelihood that precisely the contrary will more often be the case, because men of mediocre intelligence are certainly more numerous, and no matter what the issue, incompetents are in the great majority. To fear the invasion of spiritism is therefore to recognize in it no other power than that of the multitude, that is to say of a blind and brutal force. In order for ideas to spread so easily they must be of a very inferior quality, and if they are accepted it is not because they have the least logical force but only because some sentimental interest attaches to them. The claim that spiritism 'recruits especially among the educated classes' is certainly false, but to see this one must understand just what is meant by this claim and that the 'enlightened' may be so only in a thoroughly relative way. Truly, nothing is more lamentable than the results of a half-education.

As we have already said, the fact that certain more or less specialized scientists have adhered to spiritism has for us no further value as proof, because, for matters on which they lack competence, such men are on exactly the same footing as the common man; and anyway, such scientists are only exceptional cases, the great majority of spiritist clientele being incontestably of an extremely low mental level. Certainly, spiritist theories are within the grasp of everyone, and there are those who wish to see in this characteristic a mark of superiority; for example, here is what we read in an article to which we have previously alluded:

> Place before a worker who has not been thoroughly educated a chapter of a metaphysical treatise on the existence of God, with all the baggage of ontological, physical, moral, and aesthetic proofs.[2] What will he understand? Nothing at all. Amid such teachings he will be condemned to remain without remission in

2. Naturally, all this does not have the least connection with true metaphysics. What the author calls by this name represents only the banalities of university

> the most complete ignorance.... Contrariwise, have him attend a spiritist séance, or even let him be told of one, or read in a journal what takes place there, and he will grasp it right away, without any difficulty, without need for any explanation.... Thanks to its simplicity, enabling it to spread everywhere, spiritism gathers numerous admirers. The good will always progress if everyone understands the truth of spiritist doctrine.[3]

For our part, this vaunted 'simplicity' that is thought so admirable is in fact mediocrity and intellectual indigence. As for the example of the worker lacking elementary religious instruction—which possibility it is prudent to keep in mind—we believe that even 'the most complete ignorance' would be worth far more to him than the illusions and follies of spiritism. Those who know nothing of an issue and those who have erroneous ideas are equally ignorant, but the situation of the first is nevertheless preferable to that of the second, not to speak of the special dangers of the case presently being considered.

Spiritists, even apart from their frenzy of proselytism, sometimes make absolutely stupefying claims: 'The new revelation', Léon Denis exclaims,

> is manifested outside and above the Churches. Its teaching is addressed to all the races of the earth. Everywhere spiritists proclaim the principles on which they rely. The great voice that recalls man to the thought of God and the future life passes through all the regions of the world.[4]

Let the spiritists go and preach their theories to Easterners; they will see how they are received! The truth is that spiritism addresses itself exclusively to modern Westerners, for it is only among them that it can make itself accepted, both because it is a product of their mentality and because the tendencies spiritism expresses are precisely

philosophy; and it is easy to see where, for him, 'in depth studies' lead. In his eyes an undergraduate manual represents the highest intellectuality conceivable!

3. *Spiritisme et Métaphysique*, by J. Rapicault; *Le Monde Psychique*, January 1912.
4. *Christianisme et Spiritisme*, pp 277–278.

those that distinguish this mentality from every other. The search for 'phenomena', belief in progress, sentimentalism and humanitarian 'moralism', the absence of all true intellectuality, in these lie the entire reason for the success of spiritism; its very stupidity is its greatest strength (in the sense of that brutal force just now mentioned), and gains it such a great number of adherents. Moreover, the apostles of the new 'revelation' insist particularly on its 'consoling', 'moralizing', and sentimental character: 'This teaching can give satisfaction to everyone,' says Léon Denis,

> to the most refined minds as well as to the most modest; but it is addressed especially to those who suffer, to those bowed under heavy tasks or painful trials, to all who need a virile faith to sustain them in their march, in their works, and in their sufferings. It is addressed to the human multitude. The multitude has become unbelieving and distrustful in regard to all dogma, all religious belief, for it has the sense that it has been abused for centuries. Nevertheless, there always subsists in it confused aspirations toward the good, an innate need for progress, liberty and light which will facilitate the birth of the new idea and its regenerative action.[5]

The so-called 'refined minds' that may be satisfied by spiritism are not really a problem; but let us note that it is especially the multitude that he addresses, and let us also note in passing this pompous phraseology: 'progress, liberty, light', which is common to all sects of this character and which is in a way one of those suspect 'signatures' of which we have spoken. We cite another passage from the same author:

> Spiritism reveals the moral law to us, outlines our line of conduct, and brings men together by fraternity, solidarity, and common views. It points all toward more worthy and more elevated aims than those pursued heretofore. It brings with it a new sentiment of prayer, a need to love, to work for others, to enrich our intelligence and our heart.... Come and be quenched by this

5. Ibid., pp319–320.

> celestial spring, all you who suffer, all who thirst for truth. It will make a refreshing and regenerative wave flow into your souls. Vivified by it, you will more cheerfully withstand the combats of existence; you will know how to live and die with dignity.[6]

No, it is not truth for which those thirst to whom such appeals as this are addressed, it is 'consolation'. If they find something 'consoling', or if they are so persuaded, they are eager to believe in it, and their intelligence does not play the slightest role. Spiritism exploits human weakness and profits from something it too often finds in our time, which is so deprived of any higher guidance and bases its conquests on the worst of all declines. In these conditions we do not see what can authorize the spiritists to inveigh against such things as alcoholism as they so readily do, for there are also men who find in drunkenness the easing or forgetting of their sufferings. If the 'moralists' with their great hollow phrases on 'human dignity' are indignant at such a comparison, we challenge them to take a census of the cases of madness due to alcoholism on the one hand and to spiritism on the other. Taking into account the respective numbers and proportions of alcoholics and spiritists, we do not know where the advantage would lie.

The democratic character of spiritism is affirmed by its propaganda in the working class surroundings, where its 'simplicity' makes is particularly accessible. It is among the working classes that sects such as 'Fraternism' recruit most of their adherents, and in this respect Antoinism is quite remarkable. It would seem that the miners of Belgium and the north of France constitute a more favorable recruiting ground than any other. In this connection we reproduce the following account found in a work by Léon Denis:

> It is a comforting sight every Sunday to see numerous families of spiritist miners thronging to Jumet [Belgium] and all points in the Charleroi basin. They gather in a vast hall where, after the preliminaries, they listen attentively to the instruction given by their invisible guides through the mouths of sleeping mediums. It is through one of these, a simple and almost illiterate miner

6. *Après la mort*, pp 417–420.

> who commonly speaks in the Walloon dialect, that the spirit of Canon Xavier Mouls is manifested, he being a priest of great value and high virtue, who popularized magnetism and spiritism among the miners of the area. After cruel trials and severe persecutions, Mouls left the area, but his spirit still watches over his dear miners. Every Sunday he takes possession of the faculties of his favorite medium, and after citing sacred texts with a thoroughly sacerdotal eloquence he expounds for an hour in pure French on the chosen subject before them, speaking to the intelligence and to the heart of his hearers, exhorting them to duty and to submission to the divine laws. The impression produced on these good men is great; it is the same wherever spiritism is seriously practiced by the humble of this world.[7]

It would be of no interest to continue this citation, regarding which we will only make this simple observation: the spiritists' violent anticlericalism is well known, but it suffices that a priest be in more or less open revolt against ecclesiastical authority for them to hasten to celebrate his 'great value', his 'high virtue', etc. Thus, some time ago Jean Béziat took up the defense of the Abbé Lemire.[8] An interesting area of research would be the more than cordial relations which the originators of contemporary schisms have maintained with 'neo-spiritualists' of diverse schools.

From another angle, spiritists, like Theosophists, seek to extend their propaganda even to children; many do not dare go so far as to admit children to their séances, but they certainly try to inculcate the theories, which are precisely what constitutes spiritism. We have already noted the 'classes in goodness' instituted by the 'Fraternists', the name of which unquestionably smacks of Protestant humanitarianism.[9] In the journal of the same sect we read the following:

> We know that the idea of sections for children is gaining ground, and we have not neglected their Fraternist education. To educate

7. Ibid., pp329–330.

8. *Le Fraterniste*, May 8, 1914.

9. Elsewhere we have mentioned (*Theosophy*, chap. 23) the 'Ligues de Bonté', clearly of Protestant inspiration, which the Theosophists warmly welcome.

> the child, as has so often been said and written, is to prepare the Fraternism of tomorrow. The child will himself prove to be an excellent propagandist at school and in his circle; he can do much for our work. Therefore know how to direct him in this good way and how to encourage his good dispositions.[10]

Compare these words with those spoken on another occasion by the director of this same journal, Jean Béziat:

> Is it not intolerable in our day to see children inculcated with religious ideas, and what is much more serious, their being made to perform religious acts before they are entirely conscious of what they are doing, acts that they will deeply regret later?[11]

Thus one must not give religious instruction to children, but they should be instructed in spiritism. The spirit of competition animating these pseudo-religious sects could not manifest itself more clearly. Furthermore, we know that there are spiritists who, notwithstanding the advice given them, have children participate in their experiments, and, not content with that, go so far as to develop mediumistic faculties in them, especially clairvoyance. It is quite easy to guess the effects of such practices. Moreover, 'schools for mediums', even if for adults, constitute a public danger. These institutions, which often function under cover of 'study groups', are not as rare as might be believed; and if spiritism continues to wreak havoc, the outlook is not reassuring. As Léon Denis says:

> In future, an experienced spiritist organization will include the creation of special asylums where, along with the material means of life, mediums will find satisfactions of the heart and mind, the inspirations of art and nature—all that can impress on their faculties a character of purity and elevation, in an atmosphere of peace and confidence.[12]

10. *Le Fraterniste,* June 19, 1914 (discourse of the delegate from the group of Anzin at the General Assembly of the Fraternelles, May 21, 1914).

11. Ibid., March 27, 1914 (lecture given at Sallaumines, March 15, 1914).

12. *Dans l'Invisible,* p59.

We know only too well what the spiritists mean by 'purity' and 'elevation'; and these 'special refuges' run a great risk of becoming insane asylums. Unfortunately, their residents will not remain confined there indefinitely, and sooner or later they will go forth to spread abroad their eminently contagious folly. Such enterprises of collective ruin have already been realized in America,[13] and some have recently come into existence in Germany; in France there have only been attempts of more modest proportions so far, but it will happen here, too, unless carefully watched.

We have said that spiritism exploits every kind of suffering in order to win adherents to its doctrines. This is true even of physical suffering, thanks to the exploits of the 'healers'. The 'Fraternists', notably, reckon that 'healings are a powerful means of propaganda.'[14] It is easy to see how this comes to pass: someone is sick and does not know where to turn; he finds a spiritist 'healer', and the invalid's state of mind at the time predisposes him to receive the healers 'teachings'; the latter hastens to oblige, presenting these, if need be, as likely to facilitate his recovery. In fact, at the Béthune trial, mentioned above, this statement was made: 'Although considerably abetting recovery by making its mechanism understood, the sick are not obliged to subscribe to *Le Fraterniste*';[15] but if they are not obliged to subscribe, they can at least be so advised, and oral propaganda is still more effective. If no amelioration is produced, the sick man will be urged to return, and will be persuaded that the lack of amelioration is due to his lack of 'faith'. Perhaps he will 'convert' from the simple desire to be healed; and this point will all the more surely be reached if he experiences the least alleviation that to him seems, rightly or wrongly, attributable to the 'healer'. By publishing the healings that are effected (and there are always some, especially because the element of critical control is weak), other invalids are attracted; and even among those in good health there are some who are impressed by these accounts and who, already

13. We do not speak only of the United States but also of Brazil, where a 'school of mediums' was founded in 1902.

14. *Le Fraterniste*, May 22, 1914.

15. Ibid., January 23, 1914.

sympathetic to spiritism, believe they find in them proof of its truth. In fact, there is a strange confusion here: let us posit a man with unquestionable and powerful healing faculties, but whose professed ideas have no relation to them; in such cases the explanation he himself gives of his own faculties may be completely erroneous. Only the singular mentality of our time, which is almost totally extroverted, would find the criterion for truth in sensible manifestations, and make it needful to insist on such obvious matters.

But what draws most men to spiritism, and in the most direct manner, is the sorrow caused by the loss of a relative or friend. How many have let themselves be seduced by the idea that they can communicate with the departed? We will recall the case already mentioned of two individuals as different as possible in every other respect: Sir Oliver Lodge and 'Father Antoine'. It was after losing a son that each became a spiritist; in spite of appearances, it was sentimentality that predominated in both the scientist and the ignorant man, as it does with the great majority of contemporary Westerners. Moreover, the incapacity to understand the absurdity of the spiritist theory sufficiently proves that the scientist's intellectuality is only a pseudo-intellectuality. We apologize for returning so often to this, but such insistence is necessary as a reaction against the superstition of science. Let no one boast to us of the benefits of these claimed communications with the dead; first, we refuse to admit that any illusion whatever is in itself preferable to the truth; then, if the illusion happens to be destroyed, which is always possible, there is the risk that for some it will only leave in its place a real despair. Finally, before spiritism existed, sentimental aspirations found satisfaction in a hope derived from religious concepts, and there was no need to imagine anything else in this regard. The notion of establishing contact with the dead, especially by procedures such as those employed by spiritists, is in no way natural to man. It can come only from those who have undergone the influence of spiritism, the adherents of which do not fail to exercise by word and pen the most indiscreet propaganda. The most typical example of the spiritists' particular ingenuity is the institution of offices of communication, where everyone may go to obtain news of the dead in whom they may be interested. We have spoken of the bureau of the 'Vinedressers of the

Lord', which was the Antoinists' starting-point, but there is another that is much better known, and functioned for three years in London under the name of the 'Julia Bureau'. The founder was the English journalist W.T. Stead, former director of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews,* who died in 1912 in the shipwreck of the *Titanic.* But after him, the idea of this creation came to a 'spirit' named Julia. Here is the information that we find in a journal which claims to be 'psychic' but which is fundamentally spiritist:

> Julia was the first name of Miss Julia A. Ames; she was on the editorial staff of the *Union Signal* of Chicago, the journal of the *Women's Christian Temperance Union,* a Christian temperance [that is, Protestant] and feminist society. Born in Illinois in 1861, she was of pure Anglo-American background. In 1890, during a trip to Europe, she went to see Mr Stead, and they became fast friends. The autumn of the following year she returned to America, fell ill at Boston, and died in a hospital in that city. Like many other pious souls, Miss Ames had made a pact with her closest friend, who had been practically a sister to her for many years. It was agreed that she would return from the beyond and make herself seen in order to prove the survival of the soul after death and the possibility that the deceased could communicate with their survivors. Many have undertaken this pledge, but few have kept it. Miss Ames, on the advice of Mr Stead, was one of the latest.[16] It was only a short time after the death of Miss Ames that the personality 'Julia' proposed to open a *Bureau of Communication* between this world we inhabit and the other. For twelve years or more Mr Stead was unable to put this suggestion into effect.[17]

It seems that in particular the 'messages' from his dead son finally led him in April 1909 to open the 'Julia Bureau' with the aid of several other persons, among whom we will mention only Robert King

16. In this connection, recall the analogous promise made by William James. As for Stead himself, he was hardly dead before various mediums began to receive his 'communications' *(Le Monde psychique,* June 1912*).*

17. *Le Monde psychique,* February 1912.

the Theosophist, who is today head of the Scottish branch of the 'Old Catholic Church'.[18] We take from another spiritist journal several details illustrating the Protestant character of the ceremonial which surrounded the séances:

> Following arrangements made by Julia herself, each took his turn as leader of the 'service', which consisted first in prayers, followed by a reading of the minutes of the previous meeting, then requests addressed to the Bureau from all points of the world. After it had been in operation for a week or two, Julia asked that the prayer at the beginning of the séances be followed by a short Bible reading. Mr Stead read several paragraphs of the Old or New Testament. Others took their inspiration from communications from Julia or Stainton Moses,[19] and still others from Fénelon or other authors.... The morning séances were reserved exclusively for the small circle comprising the Bureau staff. Strangers were not admitted except in rare cases. The purpose was to form a cenacle which, as Julia explained, being composed of a group of sympathetic persons chosen by herself, would produce a core from which the psychic force could continue to grow. It must form, she said, a chalice or cup of inspiration [*sic*], a pure light vibrating among the seven rays (alluding to the seven persons in the group) who would form a mystical gathering.[20]

And here is something else that is very significant as regards the pseudo-religious character of these manifestations:

> In her letters, Julia recommends the use of the Rosary, but the modernized Rosary. This is how she understands it. Note the names of all those, dead or living, with whom you have had any contact. Each of these names represents a bead of the Rosary.

18. See *Theosophy*, chap. 24.

19. We have already spoken of the Rev. Stainton Moses, also known under the pseudonym M.A. Oxon, and of his relations with the founders of the Theosophical Society.

20. *Echo de la Doctrine spirite* (the organ of the *Association des Études spirites*), November 1916.

> Run through them every day, sending to each of the names an affectionate thought. This radiance diffuses a considerable current of sympathy and love which are like the divine essence of humanity, like pulsations of life; and a thought of love is like an angel of God, bringing a benediction to souls.[21]

Let us now resume our first citation:

> Mr Stead declares that Julia herself has undertaken the day-to-day direction of operations; that is to say that the invisible direction of the office will be hers. Whoever has lost a friend, a dear relative, can turn to the Bureau, which will make known the sole conditions in which an attempt at communication can be made. In case of approval, the consent of the management must be obtained. This consent will be refused to all who do not come to hear those loved and lost. On this point Julia explains her position very positively. . . . The Julia Bureau, as Julia herself never tires of repeating, must focus on its own proper goal, which is to enable devoted persons to communicate after they are separated by the change called death,

Explanations given by Julia on the aim of the foundation are then given:

> The aim of the Bureau . . . is to come to the aid of those who wish to meet again after the change called death. It is a kind of postal general delivery where, examining the correspondence anew, one again tries to distribute it. Where there are no messages of friendship, or of desire on either side to correspond, there is no reason to address the Bureau. The employee charged with this work may be compared with the good town constable who does all he can to find a child lost in the crowd and return it in tears to its mother. Once the two are reunited, the constable's task is done. It is true that one will constantly be tempted to go further and make of the Bureau a center for the exploration of what is beyond. But to yield to this temptation could only be premature. Not that I have any objection to this exploration. It is a

21. Ibid., January–February 1917.

> completely natural, necessary, and most important consequence of our work. But the Bureau, my Bureau, must not take that responsibility. It must limit itself to its first duty, which is to reestablish communication between those who have been deprived of it.[22]

This is clearly an exclusively sentimental and pietistic spiritism. But is it so easy to establish a neat line of demarcation between this and a spiritism with 'scientific' pretensions? Or, as some say, between 'religion-spiritism' and 'science-spiritism'? And is not the second often a simple mask for the first? At the beginning of 1912, the 'Institute for Psychic Research' directed by Messrs Lefranc and Lancelin, whose journal has furnished us the greater part of the preceding citations, wanted to start a 'Julia Bureau' (this became a generic denomination) in Paris, organized on a more 'scientific' basis than its London counterpart. To this end 'a definitive choice of the processes for spirit identification' was made, among which pride of place went to 'the digital anthropometry of the partial materialization of the deceased'; they even went so far as to provide an 'identification sheet' with squares for photographs and impressions of the 'spirits'.[23] Spiritists who want to play at being scientists are surely at least as ridiculous as the others! At the same time

> a school for mediums was opened with the aims of (1) instructing and directing mediums of both sexes, and (2) developing the special faculties of the better endowed subjects in order to facilitate the spirit identification research of the 'Julia Bureau' of Paris.

And it was added that

> each subject will receive the theoretical and practical instructions necessary for the development of their particular mediumship. The subjects will meet twice a week at a given time, for their development. These courses are free.[24]

22. *Le Monde Psychique,* February 1912. Cf. *L'Initiation,* October 1909 and March 1910.

23. Ibid., March 1912.

24. Ibid., February 1912.

This is truly one of those enterprises of collective ruin spoken about above. We believe that it had little success, although it must be noted that spiritism in France did not then have the importance it has lately assumed.[25]

These facts call for some commentary: in reality, there are not two spiritisms, there is only one. But it has two aspects, the one pseudo-religious and the other pseudo-scientific, and according to the temperament of those one is addressing, one can emphasize whichever is preferred. In Anglo-Saxon countries the pseudo-religious side seems more developed than anywhere else. In Latin countries it sometimes seems that the pseudo-scientific side enjoys better success. This is true only in a general way, and the spiritists' skill consists above all in adapting their propaganda to the various groups they wish to reach. Moreover, everyone thus finds matter to occupy himself according to his personal preferences, but the divergences are more apparent than real; in sum, all is reduced to a question of opportunity. Thus some spiritists may on occasion disguise themselves as psychists, and we do not think anything else should be seen in this 'Institute of Psychic Research' whose carryings-on we have outlined. This tactic is encouraged by the fact, well suited to the situation, that the scholars who have joined spiritism have come by way of psychism; this latter can therefore form a means of propaganda to be profitably exploited. These are not simple suppositions on our part: proof is to be found in the counsels addressed to the spiritists by Albert Jounet, an occultist, but one with an unwonted 'eclecticism'. In 1910 he created a Spiritualist Alliance in which he hoped to unite all the 'neo-spiritualist' schools.[26] The same year he attended the International Spiritist Congress at Brussels where he gave a lecture from which we excerpt the following:

> Without some organization, spiritism does not have the influence in the world that it merits.... Let us endeavor to furnish

25. Papus also thought that he would organize a 'Julia Bureau', but nothing ever came of it.

26. Previously, P.-E. Heidét (Paul Nord) already had the idea of a 'Universalist Eclectic Society', which never had an effective existence and which finally merged with 'Fraternism'.

> the organization it lacks. It must be doctrinal and social. The truths of spiritism must be gathered and presented in such a way as to become more readily acceptable. And spiritists themselves must come together and present themselves in such a way as to become more invincible among men. . . . It is, I admit, bitter and humiliating for spiritists, when truths were disclosed and propagated by spiritism, to see that these were not well received in official circles, or by the middle classes, but taken up by psychism. Nevertheless, if spiritists accept this humiliation it will assure their exaltation. This apparent retreat will yield a triumph. But then, you ask indignantly, must we change our name, cease to be spiritists, disguise ourselves as psychists, abandon our masters who at the beginning of this movement suffered and discovered? This is not at all what I counsel. Humility is not cowardice. By no means do I ask you to change your name [as spiritists]. I do not say to you: 'Abandon spiritism for psychism.' It is not a question of a substitution, but of an order of presentation. I say to you: 'Present psychism *before* spiritism.' You have borne the hardest part of the campaign and combat. It only remains to finish the conquest. In order to accomplish this more quickly, I counsel you to send before you those inhabitants of the country who have rallied to you and who speak the language of the country. The maneuver is both simple and primary. In your propaganda and polemics, in discussions with the unbelieving and with adversaries, instead of declaring that spiritists have for long taught such and such a truth and that today psychist scholars confirm it, declare rather that the psychist scholars confirm such a truth, and only later show that the spiritists have brought it out and teach it. Hence the dominant formula for your doctrinal organization is: first psychism, then spiritism.

After going into some detail regarding the 'order of presentation' which he proposed for the different classes of phenomena, the speaker continued in these terms:

> Such an organization would be capable of conferring on experimental survival [*sic*] all the invasive intensity that such a passionate certitude, one with such formidable consequences, must

> have. Arranged and offered in this way, spiritist truths will shed the light of day through the density of prejudice, the resistance of old mentalities. This will be a colossal transformation of human thought. The greatest upsets of history, peoples swallowed up by other peoples, migrations of races, the advent of religions, a titanic overflowing of liberties, all will seem small compared to the soul's takeover of man [*sic*]. Social organization will be added to doctrinal organization. For just as with the spiritist truths themselves, it is urgent that spiritists themselves be arranged and grouped. There, too, I would interpose the formula: psychism first, spiritism afterward. You wish to develop a Universal Spiritist Federation. I entirely approve this work. But I would wish that the Spiritist Federation have a psychist section which one might initially enter. It would serve as an antechamber. Do not misunderstand me as regards my project. The name of the society itself would not change. It would remain the Spiritist Federation. But it would have a psychist section as a preliminary and as an annex. I believe that in the social as well as in the doctrinal domain, this layout would contribute to victory. An analogous arrangement would be repeated with the national Societies or Federations, members of the Universal Spiritist Federation.[27]

The importance of this text will be understood; it is the only one to our knowledge wherein anyone has dared advocate such a 'maneuver' (the word is that of Jounet himself) so openly. That is a tactic which it is indispensable to denounce, for it is far from being inoffensive, and it permits spiritists to annex to themselves, without their being aware, all those whom the attraction of phenomena draws near to them but who nevertheless are reluctant to call themselves spiritists.

Without making any real concessions, the spiritists behave so as not to alarm such people and subsequently endeavor to win them insensibly to the 'cause', as they say in these circles. The great danger in an effort of this kind is the power, in our time, of the 'scientific' mentality; and it is this mentality to which the spiritists appeal. In

27. *L'Alliance Spiritualiste*, November 1910.

the same lecture, which was warmly applauded by the members of the Congress, Jounet said further:

> The proclamation of immortality under these conditions [that is, as a consequence of the psychists' work], is a revolutionary fact, one of those powerful blows that force a change of direction of the human race. Why? Because the immortality of the soul is established not by faith or abstract reasoning but by experiment and observation, by science. And science managed not by spiritists, but by professional scientists. . . . We can cry to the unbelieving: 'You do not want faith, you do not want abstract philosophy. Here is rigorous experiment and observation, here is science.' And we can further say to them: 'You do not want spiritists. Here are scientists.' The incredulous will be unable to respond. The work of Myers and his school [the Society for Psychical Research of London], this is immortality entering into the heart of what is most modern in the modern world, the most positive of the positive. It is the soul anchored in the method of official science and in the professional scientist. It is spiritism, conqueror and master even outside spiritism. Recognize that it is not a bad tactic to present psychism first of all.

We have seen what must be thought of the supposed experimental demonstration of immortality, but the unbelievers of whom Jounet speaks are not very hard to convince; it suffices to invoke 'science' and 'experimentation' in order to render them speechless. Spiritism harvesting the fruits of positivism, there is something Auguste Comte certainly did not foresee. Nevertheless, one sees 'healers' and other mediums forming the priesthood of the 'religion of Humanity'. . . . Let us repeat here what we have said already: psychism, if it is well understood, should be totally independent of spiritism; but spiritists take advantage of tendencies that certain psychists have in common with them, and also of confusions current among the public. We hope that serious psychists finally understand all the harm done them by these connections and that they may find the means to react effectively. For that is not enough for them to protest that they are not spiritists; they must realize the absurdity of spiritism and dare to proclaim it. Let no one object that

it is proper to maintain a pretended scientific impartiality; to hesitate to reject an hypothesis when one is certain it is false is an attitude that has nothing genuinely scientific about it. And it happens that scientists in many other circumstances avoid or deny theories which are however at least possible, whereas the spiritist theory is not possible. If the psychists do not understand it, so much the worse for them; neutrality vis-à-vis certain errors comes very close to complicity. And if they mean to make common cause with spiritists, however slight, they would be more honest to acknowledge it, even while making whatever reservations they might wish; at least one would know with whom one is dealing. Anyway, for our part we intentionally exercise our option of discrediting psychist research, for its popularization is probably more dangerous than useful. If, however, there are those who wish to take up these investigations on more solid bases, let them carefully guard against spiritist or occultist intrusions, let them be wary in every way, and let them find more adequate means of experimentation than those of medical doctors and physicists. But those who possess the qualifications necessary to really know what they are doing in such a domain are not numerous; and in general, phenomena interest them only modestly.

It is when they invoke sentimental arguments in their propaganda that the spiritists best exhibit their essential tendencies; but as they claim to base their theories on phenomena, the two aspects which we have noted, far from being in opposition, are in reality complementary. The quest for phenomena and sentimentalism go together; and there is nothing astonishing about this, because the sensible and the sentimental orders are very close to one another. In the modern West, they are tightly joined in order to stifle all intellectuality. One of the preferred subjects of properly sentimental propaganda is the concept of reincarnation; to those who argue that it helps some people bear painful situations with resignation we might respond by repeating nearly all that we said just now about the claimed benefits of communication with the 'departed', and we refer again to the chapter where we recounted some of the extravagances occasioned by this idea—an idea that terrorizes more people than it consoles. In any event, the very insistence on inculcating these theories in 'those who suffer' proves that it is a question of real

exploitation of human weakness; there is reliance on a state of mental or physical depression in order to gain acceptance for these theories, and this certainly does not stand in their favor. At the present time the theory of reincarnation is the one most vigorously propagated among the masses, and to accomplish this every means is considered good. There is recourse to the artifices of literature, and today this notion is spread through the productions of some novelists. The result is that many people who believe themselves very far from spiritism or 'neo-spiritualism' are nevertheless contaminated with the absurdities emanating from these circles. This indirect propaganda is perhaps the most harmful of all because it assures the greatest penetration of the theories in question. It presents them in an agreeable and seductive form, hardly awakening the suspicion of readers who do not go to the bottom of things and who do not suspect that behind what they see there is an 'underground' whose ramifications extend everywhere, entangled in a thousand ways.

All this enables one to understand that the number of adherents of spiritism continues to grow in a frightening manner; and further, to the adherents properly so called, we must add all those who are subject to the influence or more or less indirect suggestion thereof, as well as all those who move in this direction by imperceptible degrees, whether they began with psychism or otherwise. It would be quite difficult to produce statistics, even for avowed spiritists; the multiplicity of groups, not to speak of isolated individuals, is the chief obstacle inhibiting a somewhat precise evaluation. Already in 1886 Dr Gibier wrote 'that he did not believe he was exaggerating in saying there were one hundred thousand spiritists in Paris.'[28] At the same time, Mme Blavatsky estimated twenty million throughout the world,[29] and the United States alone must have accounted for more than half this number, for Russell Wallace has spoken of eleven million. Today these figures must be considerably greater. France, where spiritism is much less widely spread than in America or England, is perhaps the country where it has gained the most ground in recent years because of the state of turmoil and general

28. *Le Spiritisme*, p35.
29. Letter to Solovioff, February 1886.

disequilibrium resulting from the war. It seems moreover that almost the same can be said of Germany. From day to day the danger becomes more menacing; to underrate it, one would have to be completely blind and ignore the whole mental ambience of our time, or else be oneself under the power of suggestion and be the more irremediably so insofar as one doubts that this is the case. In order to remedy such a state of affairs, we hardly believe in the efficacy of intervention by public authorities, even supposing they might wish to intervene, which many complicities and hidden affinities make doubtful. Such an intervention could only reach some exterior manifestations and it would remain without effect on the state of mind that is the real cause. It is rather for each one to react by himself and in the measure of his own means, once he has understood the need.

14

THE DANGERS OF SPIRITISM

SINCE we have already called attention as occasion arose to the multiple dangers of spiritism, we need not revisit the topic except to take note of certain evidence and some admissions. But first let us say that there are even physical dangers which, if not the greatest or the most common hazards, nevertheless are not always negligible. We offer as proof something reported by Dr Gibier:

> Three gentlemen intending to assure themselves as to whether certain spiritist allegations were correct shut themselves one evening in an unlighted room of an unoccupied house after having solemnly sworn to one another to be absolutely serious and in good faith. The room was completely unfurnished, and by intention they had brought only three chairs and a table, around which they took their seats. It was agreed that as soon as something unusual happened the first would strike a light with a kind of wax match they had with them. They were still and silent for a time, attentive to the least sound, to the least quiver of the table on which they had placed their joined hands. No sound was heard and the darkness was complete, and the three amateur conjurers were growing tired and losing patience, when suddenly a strident cry of distress split the silence of the night. Immediately there was a frightful fracas and a hail of projectiles began to fall upon the table, the floor, and the three operators. Filled with terror, one of them struck a match as had been agreed, and with the light two of them found only themselves present and saw with dread that their companion was missing,

> his chair overturned at the far end of the room. After the initial confusion had passed they found him under the table unconscious, with his head covered in blood. What had happened? It was observed that the marble mantle of the fireplace had been broken free, that it had been thrown against the head of the unfortunate man, and that it had been broken into a thousand pieces. The victim remained unconscious for nearly ten days, hovering between life and death, and recovered only slowly from the terrible cerebral concussion he had suffered.[1]

Papus, who reproduces this account, recognized that 'spiritist practice leads mediums to depression by way of hysteria', that 'these experiments are the more dangerous to the degree that one is unaware and unprepared,' and that 'nothing inhibits obsessions, nervous weakness, and still graver accidents.' And he adds:

> We have in our possession a series of very instructive letters from mediums who have given themselves completely to this experimentation and who are today dangerously obsessed by the beings who, under false names, presented themselves, claiming to be deceased relatives.[2]

Éliphas Lévi had already called attention to these dangers and warned that those who engage in these studies, even from simple curiosity, expose themselves to madness or death.[3] And an occultist of the Papusian school, Marius Decrespe, has also written:

> The danger is certain; some of them have gone mad in horrible conditions because they wanted to push their experiments too far. . . . It is not only one's common sense that is at risk, but one's entire rationality, one's health, one's life, and sometimes even one's honor. . . . The slope is easy; from one phenomenon one passes to another and suddenly one is unable to stop. It is not without reason that the Church forbade all this mischief.[4]

1. *Analyse des choses*, p185.
2. *Traité élementaire de Magie practique*, pp505–507.
3. *La Clef des Grands Mystères*.
4. *La Main et ses mystères*, vol II, p174.

Similarly, the spiritist Barthe states:

> Do not forget that by these communications we place ourselves under the direct influence of unknown beings, among whom there are some so sly and perverse that one cannot be too mistrustful of them. . . . We have had several examples of grave illnesses, mental derangements, and sudden deaths caused by deceiving revelations which became true only by the weakness and credulity of those to whom they were made.[5]

As regards this last citation, we must draw attention to the special danger of predictions contained in certain 'communications'; these act as a veritable suggestion on those who are their object. This danger also exists for those who, apart from spiritism, have recourse to the 'divinatory arts'; but these practices, however little they may be recommended, cannot be exercised in as constant a manner as those of the spiritists, and thus there is less risk of a fixed idea turning into an obsession. There are unfortunates, more numerous than one might think, who do not undertake anything without consulting their [séance] table, even for the most insignificant things: to know which horse will win a race, what number will win the lottery, etc.[6] If the predictions do not come to pass, the 'spirit' always finds some excuse: things would have come about as he said, but such and such a circumstance which was impossible to foresee intervened and changed everything. The confidence of these poor souls is not broken, and they begin again until they are finally ruined, reduced to misery or driven to dishonest expedients which the 'spirit' does not fail to suggest to them. All this ordinarily ends in complete madness or suicide. It sometimes happens that things become complicated in other ways, and that the victims, instead of themselves consulting the pretended 'spirit' by which they let themselves be blindly directed, address a medium who will be strongly tempted to exploit their credulity. Dunglas Home himself reports a remarkable example which occurred in Geneva, and he recounts the conversation he

5. *Le Livre des Esprits;* cited by Msgr Méric, *L'autre vie*, vol II, p 425.

6. Léon Denis recognizes these facts and protests against such 'abuse', which provokes what he calls the 'mystifications of the beyond' *(Dans l'Invisible*, p 410).

had on October 5, 1876 with a poor woman whose husband had gone mad following these events:

> It was in 1853, she said, that some rather singular news arrived, distracting us from our ordinary occupations. Several young women, with a mutual friend, had developed the strange faculty of 'writing mediums'. The father also, it was said, had the gift of placing himself in contact with the spirits by means of a [séance] table. . . . I went to a séance, and, as everything seemed to me above suspicion, I got my husband to come with me. . . . And so we went to the medium, who told us that the spirit of God spoke through his table. . . . In the end, the table gave us to understand that without delay we must install the medium and his family in our home and share with them the fortune that it had pleased God to give us. The communications the table gave were supposed to come directly from Our Saviour Jesus Christ. I said to my husband: 'Let us rather give them some money; their tastes and ours are different and I would not know how to live happily with them.' My husband responded saying: 'The life of Him whom we adore was a life of abnegation and we must seek to imitate Him in all things. Rise above your prejudices, and this sacrifice will prove to the Master your good intention to serve Him. I consented, and a family of seven persons was added to our household. Immediately there began a life of spending and prodigalities. Money was thrown from the window. The table expressly commanded us to buy another carriage, four more horses, then a steamboat. We had nine domestic servants. Painters came to decorate the house from top to bottom. The furniture was changed several times, each time for more sumptuous pieces, this with the intention of receiving with the greatest possible dignity Him who came to see us and to attract the attention of people outside. Whatever was asked of us, we did. It was costly; we kept an open board. Little by little earnest people came in great numbers, mostly young people of both sexes to whom the table prescribed marriage, which was then accomplished at our expense; and if the couple had children, these were given us to raise. We had as many as eleven children at the house. The

> medium in his turn married and the members of the family increased so that it was not long before we had thirty persons at our board. This went on for three or four years. We were already nearly at the end of our resources. Then the table told us to go to Paris and that the Lord would need us. So we went. As soon as we arrived at the great capital, my husband received the order to speculate on the Bourse. There he lost what little we had left. This time it was misery, black misery; but we always had faith. I do not know how we lived. Many days I went without food but for a crust of bread and a glass of water. I forgot to tell you that at Geneva we had been enjoined to administer the Holy Sacrament to the faithful. Sometimes there were as many as four hundred communicants. A monk of Aargau left his convent, where he was the superior, and joined us; so we were not alone in our blindness. Finally, we were able to leave Paris and return to Geneva. It was then that we realized the full extent of our misery. Those with whom we had shared our fortune were the first to turn their backs on us.

And Home adds by way of commentary:

> There it is! A man at a [séance] table reels off a series of blasphemies by the slow and difficult process of calling out the alphabet; and this is enough to cast a pious and honest family into a delirium of extravagance from which it does not extract itself until it is ruined. And even when they are ruined, these poor people remain blind. As for him who has caused their ruin, he is not the only one I have met. These strange creatures, half deceitful, half convinced, whom one encounters all the time, and who, even while deceiving other men, end by taking seriously their assumed role and become more fanatic than those whom they abuse.[7]

It may be said that such misadventures happen only to weak minds, and that those whom spiritism unhinges must have been predisposed thereto. That may be true up to a point, but in more normal conditions these predispositions would never have developed. Men

7. *Les Lumières et les Ombres du Spiritualism,* pp103–110.

who go mad after any kind of accident must also have had such a predisposition, but then, if such an accident had not come to pass they would not have lost their mind, so this is not a valid excuse. Moreover, there are not many so well balanced that they need fear nothing in any circumstance. We would even say that no one can have such an assurance unless he is guaranteed against certain dangers by a doctrinal knowledge that precluded the possibility of all illusion and mental vertigo; and it is not among [psychic] experimenters that one ordinarily encounters such knowledge. We have spoken of scientists who have been led by psychic experiences to accept spiritist theories more or less completely—something which in our view is already an indication of a partial disequilibrium. One such person, Lombroso, after a séance of Eusapia Paladino, declared to his friends: 'I must leave this place now, because I feel that I might become mad; I need to rest my mind.'[8] Dr Lapponi, citing these significant words, rightly remarked that

> when prodigious phenomena are witnessed by minds that are not prepared for certain surprises, the result may be a derangement of the nervous system, even on the part of subjects who are otherwise healthy.[9]

The same writer also says:

> Spiritism presents every kind of danger for the individual and for society, as well as all the fatal consequences of hypnotism; and it presents a thousand others still more deplorable. . . . For individuals who act as mediums and those who attend their séances, spiritism produces either an obsession or a morbid exaltation of the mental faculties; it provokes the gravest neuroses, the gravest organic neuropathies. It is notorious that most of the renowned mediums, and a good number of those who have attended spiritist séances, have died insane or else in a state of profound nervous distress. But beyond these dangers and ills, which are common to both hypnotism and spiritism, the latter presents

8. *Osservatore Cattolico*, September 23–24, 1892.
9. *L'Hypnotisme et le Spiritisme*, p209.

> others infinitely more detrimental. . . . Let no one claim that in exchange spiritism at least offers some advantages, such as that of aiding in the identification and healing of certain maladies. The truth is that, although sometimes the indications obtained in this way are thought to be exact and efficacious, on the contrary they nearly always aggravate the condition of the patient. Spiritists say to us that this is due to the intervention of buffoon or deceptive spirits; but how can we protect ourselves from the intervention and action of such harmful spirits? In practice, therefore, spiritism can never under any pretext be justified.[10]

From another angle, Mr J. Godfrey Raupert, a longtime member of the Society for Psychical Research, London, after many years' experience, declared that

> the impression gained from his studies is that of disgust, and that his experience has shown it to be his duty to warn spiritists, particularly those who ask entities from the other world for consolations, counsels, or even for teachings. . . . These experiences have sent hundreds of people to sanatoria or to insane asylums. Nevertheless, despite the terrible danger for the nation, nothing is done to stop spiritist propaganda. Perhaps these latter are inspired by lofty motives, by scientific ideals; but in the final analysis they place men and women in a state of passivity which opens the mystical gates of the soul to evil spirits. Thenceforth these spirits live at the expense of these weak-souled men and women, driving them to vice, folly, and moral death.[11]

Instead of speaking of 'spirits' as Mr Raupert does (he hardly seems to believe that 'disincarnates' are involved), we would simply say 'influences', without specifying their origin, for they are quite diverse and in any case have nothing 'spiritual' about them. But this changes nothing as to the terrible consequences which the author calls to our attention, consequences which are only too real.

10. Ibid., pp 270–272. This author is wrong in believing that spiritism is identical with magic (ibid., pp 256–257); we have shown how it actually differs.

11. *Daily Chronicle*, November 15, 1913.

Elsewhere we have cited Mme Blavatsky and other leaders of Theosophy, who make a particular point of denouncing the dangers of mediumship.[12] We reproduce here a passage from Mme Blavatsky, which we have summarized elsewhere:

> Your best, your most powerful mediums, have all suffered in health of body and mind. Think of the sad end of Charles Foster, who died in an asylum, a raving lunatic; of Slade, an epileptic; of Eglington—the best medium now in England—subject to the same. Look back over the life of D.D. Home, a man whose mind was steeped in gall and bitterness, who never had a good word to say of anyone whom he suspected of possessing psychic powers, and who slandered all other mediums to the bitter end. This Calvin of Spiritualism suffered for years from a terrible spinal disease brought on by his intercourse with 'spirits', and died a perfect wreck. Think again of the sad fate of poor Washington Irving Bishop. I knew him in New York, when he was fourteen, and he was undeniably a medium. It is true that the poor man stole a march on his 'spirits', that he baptized them in the name of 'unconscious muscular action', to the great *gaudium* of all the corporations of highly learned and scientific fools, and to the replenishment of his own pocket. But *de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*; his end was a sad one. He had strenuously concealed his epileptic fits—the first and strongest symptom of genuine mediumship—and who knows whether he was dead or in a trance when the *post-mortem* examination was performed? His relatives insist that he was alive, if we are to believe Reuters' telegrams. Finally, behold the veteran mediums, the founders and prime movers of modern spiritualism—the Fox sisters. After more than forty years of intercourse with the 'Angels', the latter have led them to become incurable sots, who, in public lectures, are now denouncing their own life-long work and philosophy as a fraud! I ask you, what kind of spirits must they be who inspired such conduct. . . ?

12. *Theosophy*, chap. 12.

> What would you infer if the best students of a particular school of singing broke down from overstrained sore throats? That the method followed was a bad one. So I think the inference is equally fair with regard to spiritualism when we see their best mediums fall a prey to such a fate.[13]

But there is still more; some eminent spiritists themselves avow these dangers even while endeavoring to attenuate them by explaining them away. Here, notably, is what Léon Denis says:

> The inferior spirits, incapable of high aspirations, take pleasure in our company. They mingle in our life, and, preoccupied only with what captured their attention during their corporeal existence, participate in the pleasures and works of men with whom they feel united by analogies of character or habit. They sometimes even dominate and subjugate weak persons who do not know how to resist their influence. In certain cases, their empire becomes such that they can push their victims as far as crime or folly. These cases of obsession or possession are more common than one might think.[14]

And in another work of the same author, we read this:

> The medium is a nervous, sensitive, impressionable being . . . the prolonged fluidic action of inferior spirits can be fatal for him, ruining his health and provoking phenomena of obsession and possession. . . . These cases are numerous, some of them going so far as madness. . . . The medium Philippe Randone, called the *Mediantà* of Rome,[15] was the butt of the evil practices of a spirit designated by the name *uomo fui*, who tried several times to suffocate him at night under a pyramid of furniture which the spirit enjoyed putting on the bed. In the midst of a séance, he [*uomo fui*] violently seized Randone and threw him to the floor, nearly killing him. Until now no one has been able to free the medium

13. *The Key to Theosophy* [Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1972], pp195–96.

14. *Après la mort*, p239.

15. *Spiritualisme Moderne*, April 1903.

> from his dangerous guest. On the other hand, the review *Luz y Union* of Barcelona (December 1902) reports that an unfortunate mother, pushed to crime against her husband and children by an occult influence, and prey to attacks of fury against which ordinary means were powerless, was healed in two months following the evocation and conversion of the obsessive spirit by means of persuasion and prayer.[16]

This interpretation of the healing is rather amusing; we know that spiritists like to address 'moralizing' sermons to so-called 'inferior spirits'; but that is like preaching in the desert, and we do not believe it would have the least effect. In fact, obsessions sometimes cease of themselves; but it happens, too, that criminal impulses like these in question may result. Sometimes also, what is only an auto-suggestion is taken for a real obsession; in this case it is possible to combat it by a contrary suggestion, and this role can be fulfilled by exhortations addressed to the 'spirit', who in such a case is identical with the 'subconscious' of his victim. This is probably what happened in the case just reported, unless there was simply coincidence and not a causal relation between the treatment and the cure. Whatever the case, it is unbelievable that persons who recognize the reality and the gravity of these dangers still dare to recommend spiritist practices, and one must be truly unconscious to claim that 'morality' constitutes sufficient protection to preserve oneself from any accident of this kind—somewhat like attributing to 'morality' the power to protect against lightning or assure immunity against epidemics. The truth is that spiritists have absolutely no means of defense at their disposal, and it cannot be otherwise so long as they are ignorant of the nature of the forces with which they deal.

It would be, if not very interesting, at least useful, to gather the cases of madness, obsession, and accidents of every kind which have been caused by spiritism. Doubtless it would not be very difficult to obtain a good number of authenticated witnesses; and as we have seen, spiritist publications themselves might furnish their share of these as well. Such a collection could have a salutary effect on many

16. *Dans l'Invisible*, pp382–384.

people. But it is not this that we propose. If we have cited certain facts, they only serve as examples; and it will be noted that most of them have been drawn by preference from spiritist authors themselves or from those having affinities with spiritism, writers whom one cannot accuse of unfavorable partiality or exaggeration. No doubt we could have added many others of the same kind; but that would be rather monotonous because all of this is cut from the same cloth and those we have given seem sufficient. To summarize, we say that the dangers of spiritism are of several orders, which can be classed as physical, psychic, and intellectual. The physical dangers are accidents of the kind Dr Gibier reports, and more frequently and commonly maladies provoked or developed especially with mediums, and sometimes with those who attend séances. These maladies, principally affecting the nervous system, are most often accompanied by psychic troubles. Women seem to be particularly susceptible, but it would be wrong to think that men are exempt. Moreover, to establish an exact proportion, it must be taken into account that women are by far the more numerous in spiritist circles. Psychic dangers cannot be entirely separated from physical dangers, but the former appear to be more constant and more serious. Let us recall once more the obsessions of various characters, fixed ideas, criminal impulses, dissociations and alterations of consciousness or of memory, manias, and madness in all its degrees. If one wished to draw up a complete list, nearly all the varieties known to psychiatrists would be represented, not to mention several unknown to them, namely cases of obsession and possession corresponding to what is most hideous in spiritist manifestations. In sum, all this is purely and simply conducive to the disintegration of the human individuality, and this disintegration is sometimes actually attained. The different forms of mental disequilibrium are themselves only stages or preliminary phases; and however deplorable they may already be, one can never be sure things will not go further. Moreover, all this entirely escapes the investigations of medical doctors and psychologists. Finally, the intellectual dangers result from the complete falsity of spiritist theories in all the points to which they refer; a completeness of error which, unlike others, is not limited to experimenters only. We have

called attention to the diffusion of these errors by direct and indirect propaganda among people who do not participate in practical spiritism and who may even believe themselves far removed from it. These intellectual dangers therefore are the most far-reaching, and it is on this aspect of the question that we have been most insistent throughout our study. What we have wanted to show especially and before all else is the falsity of spiritist doctrine; and in our view it is especially because it is false that it must be opposed. In fact, there are truths which it would be dangerous to spread abroad; but if something like this should happen, this very danger would not inhibit us from recognizing that truths are in question. But this need hardly be feared, for things of this kind do not readily lend themselves to popularization. It is a question here of truths which have practical consequences and not those of a purely doctrinal order; as to these latter, there are seldom other drawbacks than those resulting from the incomprehension to which one is exposed whenever one expresses ideas that lie beyond the level of the common mentality, and it would be wrong to be too preoccupied with this. But to return to our subject, we say that these special dangers of spiritism, added to its erroneous character, only render the need to combat it more pressing. This in itself is a secondary and contingent consideration, but in the present situation, and not least for reasons of opportunity, it is not possible to treat it as negligible.

14

CONCLUSION

SOME MAY BE TEMPTED to reproach us for having too seriously discussed theories which are themselves not really serious. Several years ago, truth to tell, we were somewhat of this opinion and would at that time certainly have hesitated to undertake a work of this kind; but the situation has changed. That it has been greatly aggravated is a fact which cannot be concealed, and this provides occasion for reflection: if from day to day spiritism grows more intrusive, if it really threatens to poison the public mentality, it is necessary to take it into consideration and to combat it by means other than those one might employ were it only the aberration of a few isolated individuals without influence. Certainly, spiritism is stupidity; but what is terrible is that this stupidity has reached a point where it exercises an extraordinarily wide action, proving that it corresponds to quite general tendencies. And this is why we just said that one cannot neglect the question of opportunity. As it is not possible to attack all errors without exception—for they are innumerable—it is better to leave to one side those that are relatively inoffensive and have no chance of success. But spiritism, unfortunately, is not one of these. It is only too easy, certainly, to mock the 'table turners' and the 'exhibitors of spirits', to make sensible men laugh at their expense by showing up all their extravagances (some of which we have called attention to), to denounce the deceits of false mediums, to decry the grotesque characters encountered in spiritist circles. But all this is insufficient. Other weapons than ridicule are necessary; moreover, what is involved is something too injurious to be really comic, even though in fact it is comic on more than one count.

Doubtless it will be further charged that the arguments we have

expounded are too difficult to grasp, that they have the drawback of not being within everyone's compass. This may be true in some measure, even though we have always tried to be as clear as possible. But we are not among those who believe it good to conceal certain difficulties or to simplify things to the detriment of the truth. We believe, moreover, that nothing must be exaggerated, that one would be wrong to let oneself be rebutted by the somewhat arid appearance of certain demonstrations, and that everyone can understand enough to be convinced of the falsity of spiritism. Basically, all this is simpler than it may seem at first glance to those not accustomed to such things. For the rest, as with all questions, it cannot be expected that everything will be equally comprehensible to everyone without exception, for there are necessarily intellectual differences between men. Those who understand only in part must turn to those who have greater competence and understand more. This is not an appeal to 'authority', for it is only a question of supplementing a natural insufficiency; and we wish everyone would try to go as far as his capabilities allow. We only note an inequality against which no one can do anything, and which does not only manifest itself in what concerns metaphysics.

In conclusion, we say again that it is only by placing oneself at a purely metaphysical point of view that the falsity of spiritism can be absolutely established; there is no other means of demonstrating that its theories are absurd, that is to say that they represent only impossibilities. All the rest is only approximation, more or less plausible reasons which are never rigorous enough or fully sufficient and which always leave room for discussion. On the contrary, in the metaphysical order, comprehension necessarily entails immediate assent and certitude. When we speak of approximations, we do not have in mind so-called sentimental arguments, which are valueless, and we do not understand why some adversaries of spiritism obstinately cultivate such platitudes; acting in this way, they risk demonstrating that true intellectuality is as lacking in themselves as it is in those whom they would combat. We mean scientific and philosophical arguments; but if any of these have any value, it is quite relative, and nothing of all this can take the place of a definitive refutation; things must be carried to a higher level. We can therefore claim,

without fear of being contradicted, that we have not only done something else, but have done much more than all that has been done hitherto in this field. We are all the more at ease in saying that the merit does not accrue to us personally but to the doctrine which is our inspiration and in regard to which individualities count for nothing. What must be attributed only to us, on the contrary, are the imperfections of our exposé, for there surely are some, notwithstanding all the care we have taken.

Moreover, and as we announced at the outset, the refutation of spiritism, apart from its intrinsic interest, has enabled us to express certain important truths. Metaphysical truths especially, even when they are formulated apropos of an error or to respond to certain objections, nonetheless have an eminently positive bearing. We would certainly much prefer to expound truth purely and simply, without concerning ourselves with all the accessory complications that come with incomprehension; but in this regard, too, one must take opportunity into account. Looking to results, moreover, this state of affairs may present certain advantages; the fact that the presentation of truth is occasioned by such and such a contingency may attract the attention of persons who are not incapable of understanding it, but who, not having engaged in special studies, may wrongly imagine that such truth is beyond them, persons to whom it may not have occurred to seek out truth in treatises too didactic in aspect. We can never insist too much that true metaphysics is not the affair of specialists, that intellectual comprehension has nothing in common with a purely 'bookish' knowledge, that it differs totally from erudition and even from ordinary science. What we have elsewhere called the 'intellectual elite'[1] does not appear to us as necessarily composed of scientists and philosophers, and we even think that very few of them would have the qualifications required to be part of it. For this it is necessary to be much more unprejudiced than is ordinarily the case with such men, and someone who is ignorant but can grow often has greater resources than someone in whom certain mental habits have imprinted an irremediable deformity.

1. See the conclusion to our *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*.

Beyond the metaphysical truths which have served as the principle of our refutation, we have also indicated several others, notably with respect to the explanation of phenomena. These latter are only secondary in our view, but they are nevertheless of some interest. We hope that no one will be stopped by the strangeness of some of these considerations, which will offend only those animated by a most deplorable systematizing point of view; but it is not these whom we address, for this would be wasted effort. We would fear, rather, that too much attention might be attached to these things, either because of their unaccustomed character or because they pertain to the phenomenal order. In any event, we will not have to reproach ourselves for neglecting needed precautions and warnings in this regard, and we are convinced that we have not said anything more than was strictly necessary to dispel confusions and misunderstandings and to cut short false interpretations. Even apart from the reserve imposed in regard to certain points, we do not claim to have treated exhaustively all the subjects we have been led to raise. There are questions that we may have occasion to take up again, as there are those on which our information (as we said at the beginning) will open for others ways of research they do not suspect. The only thing we cannot encourage is experimentation, the results of which are never valuable enough to compensate for certain unpleasant consequences, and in many cases even certain dangers. If, however, there are men who are determined at all costs to experiment, it is surely preferable that they do so from a serious basis rather than from absurd or at the very least erroneous data. But again, we are persuaded that there is nothing in what we have said that anyone can use to launch themselves into more or less unfortunate adventures. And we believe, on the contrary, that the nature of our treatise would rather turn away the imprudent by providing them a glimpse of all they lack in order to succeed in such enterprises.

We will add only one last reflection: in our view the history of spiritism is only an episode in the formidable mental deviation that characterizes the modern West. In order to understand this deviation it is therefore needful to place it within the whole of which it is a part. But for this it is obvious that one must go much further back in order to grasp the origins and causes of the deviation, then

to follow its course with its multiple phases. That is an immense task, no part of which has been done. History, as officially taught, limits itself to exterior events, which are only the effects of something deeper; and it sets these events forth in a tendentious manner under the influence of all the modern prejudices. And further, there is a veritable monopoly on historical studies in the interest of parties, both political and religious. We wish that someone particularly competent might have the courage to denounce, with supporting proofs, the maneuvers by which Protestant historians have succeeded in assuring for themselves a *de facto* monopoly, and have come to impose as a kind of suggestion their own point of view along with their conclusions even within Catholic circles. That would be a very instructive task and would render a significant service. This falsification of history seems to have been accomplished according to a set plan; but if this is so, and its essential aim has been to have public opinion consider this deviation as 'progress', everything seems to indicate that it must be the work of a directing will. For the moment, at least, we do not wish to be more positive in this regard; in any case, it can only be a collective will, for there is manifestly something that goes beyond the sphere of activity of individuals considered in isolation. Furthermore, this way of speaking of a collective will is perhaps a more or less defective representation. Whatever the case, if one does not believe in chance, one is forced to admit the existence of some kind of equivalent of an established plan, but one which evidently does not need to be formulated in any document. Is not the fear of certain discoveries of this kind one reason for the superstition of the 'written document' as the exclusive basis of the 'historical method'? Starting from there, all that is essential necessarily escapes investigation; and to those who might wish to go further, the objection is quickly made that this is no longer 'scientific', which is supposed to render any further discussion unnecessary. This is nothing but the abuse of erudition to limit 'intellectual horizons' and to keep people from seeing certain things clearly. Does this not enable one to understand why such methods, which make erudition an end in itself, are rigorously imposed by university authorities? But to return to the question we were discussing: having admitted a plan, whatever its form, one can

see how each element might converge toward its realization, and how such and such individuals might be able to serve as conscious or unconscious instruments for its effectuation. Recall here what we have said regarding the origins of spiritism, which is that it is impossible to believe in the spontaneous production of movements of any importance. In reality, things are more complex than we indicated; instead of a single will, we should envisage several intentions as well as several results; there could be a whole special 'dynamic' in this, the laws of which would be interesting to ascertain. We say this only to show how the truth is far from being generally known or even suspected, in this domain as in many others. In short, all history would need to be rewritten on entirely different presuppositions; but, unfortunately, many interests are involved, and those who might wish to undertake such a task would have to overcome redoubtable resistance. This cannot be our task, for it is not properly our field; for our part we can only provide some indications and glimpses. Such a task, moreover, could only be undertaken collectively. In any case, this is an order of research that, in our view, is much more interesting and profitable than psychic experimentation. It obviously demands aptitudes not possessed by everyone, but we believe there are some at least who do have these aptitudes and who might advantageously apply themselves in this direction. On the day when an appreciable result of such efforts might be obtained, many 'suggestions' would thereby become impossible. Perhaps this might be one means of contributing in the more or less distant future to a return of the Western mentality to normative ways, ways from which it has been so greatly removed for several centuries.

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