



Allan
KARDEC

HEAVEN HEAVEN HEAVEN
HELL AND HELL AND HELL

– Second Edition –



HEAVEN
AND HELL

HEAVEN AND HELL

DIVINE JUSTICE ACCORDING TO SPIRITISM

A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF DOCTRINES CONCERNING THE PASSAGE
FROM CORPOREAL LIFE TO SPIRIT LIFE. CONCERNING FUTURE PUNISHMENT AND
REWARD, CONCERNING ANGELS AND DEMONS, CONCERNING SUFFERING, ETC.,
FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL EXAMPLES REGARDING THE TRUE SITUATION OF THE SOUL
DURING AND AFTER DEATH

By
Allan Kardec



Translated by Darrel W. Kimble, Marcia M. Saiz and Ily Reis



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CONTENTS

PART ONE Doctrine

Chapter I – The Future Life and Nothingness	11
Chapter II – The Fear of Death	21
Causes of the Fear of Death.....	21
Why Spiritists Do Not Fear Death	27
Chapter III – Heaven	29
Chapter IV – Hell	43
The Intuition of Future Punishment	43
Christian Hell as an Imitation of Pagan Hell	44
Limbo	47
A Portrayal of Pagan Hell	48
An Outline of Christian Hell	57
Chapter V – Purgatory	67
Chapter VI – The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment.....	73
The Origin of the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment	73
Arguments in Favor of Eternal Punishment.....	79
The Physical Impossibility of Eternal Punishment.....	84
The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment Has Had Its Day	87
Ezekiel against Eternal Punishment and Original Sin	89

Chapter VII – Future Punishment according to Spiritism	93
The Flesh Is Weak.....	93
Sources of the Spiritist Doctrine regarding Future Punishment ..	96
The Penal Code of the Future Life	97
Chapter VIII – Angels.....	109
Angels according to the Church	109
Refutation.....	114
Angels according to Spiritism	120
Chapter IX – Demons.....	123
The Origin of the Belief in Demons.....	123
Demons according to the Church	127
Demons according to Spiritism	140
Chapter X – The Intervention of Demons in Modern Communications.....	143
Chapter XI – The Prohibition against Evoking the Dead.....	165

PART TWO
Examples

Chapter I – The Passage	179
Chapter II – Happy Spirits.....	189
Mr. Sanson.....	189
The Death of the Righteous.....	199
Mr. Jobard	200
Samuel Philippe.....	206
Van Durst	211
Sixdeniers.....	213
Dr. Demeure.....	217
Widow Foulon, nee Wollis.....	223
A Russian Physician	232
Bernardin.....	235
Countess Paula.....	237

Jean Reynaud	241
Antoine Costeau	245
Miss Emma	249
Dr. Vignal	251
Victor Leblufe	253
Mrs. Anais Gourdon	255
Maurice Gontran	257
Chapter III – Average Spirits.....	261
Joseph Bre	261
Mrs. Helene Michel	263
The Marquis de St. Paul.....	265
Mr. Cardon, a Physician.....	267
Eric Stanislas	272
Mrs. Anna Belleville.....	274
Chapter IV – Suffering Spirits.....	281
Punishment.....	281
Novel	283
Michel Auguste	284
Regrets of a Bon Vivant.....	287
Lisbeth.....	288
Prince Ouran	292
Pascal Lavic.....	295
Ferdinand Bertin.....	297
François Riquier.....	301
Claire	303
Chapter V – Suicides	313
The Suicide at the Samaritaine.....	313
The Father and the Conscript	316
Louvet, François Simon.....	319
Mother and Son.....	321
Double Suicide out of Love and a Sense of Duty.....	325
Louis and the Boot Stitcher.....	329
An Atheist.....	332
Felicien	339
Antoine Bell.....	343

Chapter VI – Repentant Criminals.....	347
Verger	347
Lemaire.....	351
Benoist.....	354
The Castelnaudary Spirit	358
Jacques Latour.....	366
Chapter VII – Hardened Spirits	383
Lapommeray	383
Angele – Uselessness on Earth.....	389
A Bored Spirit	393
The Queen of Oude.....	395
Xumene	398
Chapter VIII – Earthly Expiations.....	401
Marcel – The Child in No. 4.....	401
Szymel Slizgol	405
Julienne-Marie, the Beggar.....	411
Max, the Beggar.....	416
The Story of a Servant.....	419
Antonio B.	422
Letil	426
An Ambitious Scholar	429
Charles de Saint-G., Mentally Impaired	431
Adelaide-Marguerite Gosse.....	437
Clara Rivier.....	439
Françoise Vernhes.....	442
Anna Bitter	445
Joseph Maitre – A Blind Man	448

Part One



Doctrine

- Chapter I The Future Life and Nothingness
- Chapter II The Fear of Death
- Chapter III Heaven
- Chapter IV Hell
- Chapter V Purgatory
- Chapter VI The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment
- Chapter VII Future Punishment according
to Spiritism
- Chapter VIII Angels
- Chapter IX Demons
- Chapter X The Intervention of Demons in
Modern Communications
- Chapter XI The Prohibition against
Evoking the Dead



The Future Life and Nothingness

1. We live, we think, we act – that is certain. And we die – that is no less certain. But where do we go when we leave this earth behind? What will it be like for us after death? Will we be better off or worse? Will we even exist or not? *Being* or *non-being* – such is the alternative: forever or nevermore; all or nothing. Will we live forever, or will everything end once and for all? Is it even worthwhile to think about all this?

All human beings sense the need to stay alive, to enjoy life, to love and to be happy. If dying persons are told that they will live a while longer, that their time has been delayed, or, especially, that they will be happier than they have ever been, their hearts rejoice. Of what use would such aspirations of happiness be, however, if it only took a puff of air to dissipate them?

Has there ever been anything more disheartening than the thought of complete and utter annihilation? Our dearest affections, our intelligence and progress, the knowledge we have so laboriously acquired – everything dissolved into chaos; everything lost! So what good would it do for us to put forth any effort to make ourselves better individuals, to overcome our passions or to exhaust ourselves trying to enlighten our mind, if we could derive no benefit from any of it, or, especially, if we were to succumb to

the thought that perhaps all of this will be of no use in the end? If such were the case, the fate of human beings would be a hundred times worse than that of wild animals, because animals live entirely for the present in order to satisfy their material appetites. They have no concern for the future. A secret intuition, however, tells us that this cannot be the case.

2. When humans believe in nothingness, they overwhelmingly concentrate all their thoughts on their present life, and there is no real reason for them to worry about a future that they do not expect to arrive. This exclusive preoccupation with the present leads them to think of their own selves more than anything else. It is therefore a most-powerful stimulus for selfishness, and disbelievers are being consistent when they reach the following conclusion: Let us enjoy ourselves while we are here. Let us enjoy ourselves as much as possible because we know that after death it will all end. Let us enjoy ourselves right now, for we do not know how much longer our lives will last. This way of thinking leads them to another assumption that is even more consequential for society: Let us enjoy ourselves in any way we can. "Every man for himself," as they say. Happiness in this world is for those who are the cleverest.

If human respect restrains some persons, what will restrain those who fear nothing? They believe that human laws only apply to those inept enough to get caught, and so they apply all their ingenuity to the best means for evading them. If there is an *insensitive* and *anti-social* doctrine, it is surely *nihilism*, for it breaks the true bonds of solidarity and fraternity upon which all social relationships are based.

3. Let us imagine that for some reason an entire nation of people are convinced that in eight days, in one month – even in one year – they will be wiped out, that not one trace of any individual will remain. What will they do while awaiting extermination? Will

they work for their progress or education? Will they make an effort to survive? Will they respect the rights, property and life of their fellow citizens? Will they submit to any law or authority no matter how legitimate it may be – that of their parents, for example? Will they sense any kind of duty? Of course not. Well then! That which could not possibly happen collectively is nonetheless accomplished by nihilism each and every day on an individual basis. If the consequences are not as disastrous as they could be, it is because that in the first place, for the majority of disbelievers there is more boastfulness than true disbelief, more doubt than conviction – they are more afraid of nothingness than they let on to be; being known as daring individuals stokes their vanity. In the second place, it is because diehard disbelievers are by far in the minority. In spite of themselves, they feel the weight of contrary opinion and are restrained by social forces. Nevertheless, if absolute disbelief were to gain the majority, society would devolve into chaos. That is what propagating the doctrine of nihilism would lead to.¹

However, in spite of the possible consequences, once nihilism were proven to be true, we would have to accept it, and neither contrary theories nor the idea of the ills resulting from it could eliminate it. And we must concede that skepticism, doubt and indifference gain ground everyday, despite religion's best

¹ An eighteen-year-old boy with heart disease was declared incurable. Medical science had told him: You could die within eight days or two years – no more than that. Knowing this, the boy soon gave up his studies and began indulging in excesses of every kind. When he was warned about the dangers of such a irresponsible life, he responded: "What does it matter, if I have no more than two years to live! Why should I hold back? I want to enjoy what little time I have left and have fun until the end." Such is the logical consequence of nihilism.

However, if this boy had been a Spiritist, he would have said: "Death will destroy only my body, which I will leave behind as a worn out object, but my spirit will live forever. In a future life, I will be what I might have been in this one. I will lose nothing of what I have acquired in this one with respect to moral and intellectual qualities because it represents a gain for my evolution. Every imperfection that I will have freed myself from will be one more step towards happiness. My happiness or unhappiness depends on the use or misuse I have made of my present life. Therefore, it is in my best interest to take advantage of the little time I have remaining and avoid everything that could diminish my strength. Which of these two doctrines is preferable? – Auth.

efforts. That is certain. If religion has shown itself to be powerless in overcoming disbelief, it is because religion lacks something in the struggle in such a way that if it were condemned to remaining inactive, it would disappear at some point. What religion lacks in this age of positivism – in which comprehension is sought instead of belief – is undoubtedly the sanction of its doctrines by demonstrable facts, as well as the agreement of its doctrines with the physical data of science. If a doctrine says something is white while the facts prove that it is black, one must choose between the evidence and blind faith.

4. It is under such circumstances that Spiritism has erected a barrier to the invasion of disbelief, not only because of its reasonableness and because of the perspective of the dangers which disbelief poses, but because of physical incidents that have rendered the soul and the future life both visible and tangible.

We are all free to choose our beliefs. We can believe in something or we can believe in nothing, but persons who seek to make the denial of the future prevail in the minds of the masses – especially in the minds of the youth – by supporting themselves on the authority of their own knowledge and the loftiness of their position, sow the seeds of trouble and dissolution in society, thereby incurring a grave responsibility.

5. There is another doctrine that is defended from the accusations of materialism, because it accepts the existence of an intelligent principle outside of matter. It is the doctrine of *absorption into the Universal Whole*. According to this doctrine, upon being born each individual assimilates a portion of the Universal Whole. This portion comprises his or her soul and provides him or her with life, intelligence and feeling. At death, this soul returns to the common center and loses itself in the infinite like a drop of water in the ocean.

This doctrine is undeniably a step above pure materialism since it does believe in something at least, whereas the other

believes in nothing at all. However, the results are exactly the same for both. Whether souls are immersed into nothingness or into a common reservoir, it amounts to the same thing. In the first case, where they are annihilated, or in the second, where they lose their individuality, it is as if they never really existed. Relationships cannot help but be broken forever. What is essential is the preservation of the *self*. Without the self, what does it matter if the soul exists or not? People will perceive that the future is always nil and that the present life is the only thing that interests and concerns them. From the moral consequence standpoint, this doctrine is as unhealthy and hopeless, and excites as much selfishness as does materialism *per se*.

6. Furthermore, one could make this objection: all the drops of water drawn from the ocean resemble each other and possess identical properties as parts of the same whole. But why, then, do souls taken from the great ocean of universal intelligence resemble each other so little? Why does genius live alongside stupidity and the most sublime virtues alongside the most ignoble vices? Why are goodness, kindness and forbearance found right alongside malice, cruelty and barbarity? How can parts of the same homogenous whole be so different from one another? Might it be said that education leads to such differences? If that were the case, where do innate qualities, precocious minds, good and evil instincts regardless of education come from, and which are so often completely at odds with the environment wherein they have developed?

There is no doubt that education modifies the intellectual and moral qualities of the soul, but therein lies another problem: who provides this education that causes the soul to progress? Could it be other souls, who, due to their common origin, could not be any more advanced than the one being educated? Moreover, when the soul reenters the Universal Whole from whence it came after having progressed over the course of its life, it takes a more perfected

member into that Whole. This would imply that the Whole should be continually deeply modified and improved, so how can it be explained why ignorant and perverse souls incessantly come from it?

7. In this doctrine, the universal source of intelligence that supplies human souls is independent of the Divinity; it is not *pantheism* per se. It differs from pantheism, which considers the universal principle of life and intelligence as comprising the Divinity itself. God is concomitantly both spirit and matter. All beings, all the bodies of nature make up the Divinity, of which they are the molecules and constitutive elements. God is the composite of all intelligences taken together, and each individual as a part of the whole is God in him or herself. No superior or independent being rules the whole. The universe is an immense republic without a ruler, or rather, it is a place where each individual is a ruler with absolute power.

8. Innumerable objections may be raised against the pantheistic theory, but the main ones are: Since divinity cannot be conceived of apart from infinite perfection, then, one may ask, how can a perfect whole be formed of such imperfect parts in need of progress? Since each part is subject to the law of progress, then it follows that God also must progress. And if God continually progresses, God must have been very imperfect at the beginning of time. Additionally, how could an imperfect being, formed of such divergent wills and ideas, conceive such harmonious laws that are as admirable in unity, wisdom and foresight as those that govern the universe? If all souls are portions of the Divinity, all must have concurred in establishing the laws of nature. Then why is it that they constantly grumble against the very laws that are their own work? *A theory cannot be accepted as truth unless it can satisfy reason and account for all the facts that it entails. If it is belied by just one fact, it is because it does not contain the absolute truth.*

9. From a moral point of view, the consequences of pantheism are equally illogical. First, as far as souls are concerned it is like the

preceding theory, i.e., the absorption into the whole and the loss of individuality. If we were to believe, as some pantheists do, that souls retain their individuality, then God would have no unified will but would be a composite of myriads of divergent wills. Second, since each soul is an integral part of the Divinity and thus is not subject to a superior power, then it incurs no responsibility for its good or evil acts. Being sovereign in its own right, it has no interest in practicing the good² and can practice evil with impunity.

10. Such theories satisfy neither human reason nor aspiration and they give rise to insuperable problems because they are powerless to resolve all the issues that they in fact engender. *Therefore, humankind has three alternatives: nothingness, absorption or the individuality of the soul before and after death.* It is to this last belief that logic irresistibly impels us, the belief that has formed the basis of all religions since the world came into being.

Now if logic leads us to the individuality of the soul, it also points out another consequence to us: the fate of each soul must depend on its own personal qualities because it would be irrational to believe that the little-evolved soul of the primitive, like that of the evil-minded individual, could be at the same level of development as the soul of the wise and righteous person. According to the principles of justice, souls must take responsibility for their acts, but for there to be such responsibility, they must be free to choose between good and evil. Without free will there is only fatalism, and responsibility cannot coexist with fatalism.

11. All religions accept the principle of the soul's happiness or unhappiness after death, or, in other words, future punishment and reward. This principle is summed up in the doctrine of heaven and hell found in all religions. However, where they differ essentially is in the nature of such punishment and reward, *especially* the conditions that determine one or the other. Thus,

² The good: "Moral righteousness; virtue" (Random House *Webster's* College Dictionary, 1991) – Tr.

contradictory points of faith have given rise to different sects along with the specific duties imposed by each of them to worship God and thereby reach heaven and avoid hell.

12. At their origin, all religions had to have been related to the degree of the moral and intellectual evolution of the individuals comprising them. These individuals were too materialized to comprehend the merit of purely spiritual things, and they made most of their religious duties to consist in following outward forms. For a long time, these forms satisfied reason; later, however, as the light began to shine in their minds, they sensed the emptiness of such forms. Since religion no longer satisfied them, they abandoned it and became philosophers.

13. *If in the beginning religion had been appropriate for humans' limited knowledge, if it had always kept pace thereafter with the progressive movement of the human spirit, there would be no disbelievers, because the need to believe is in humans' very nature and they will readily believe if doing so gives them spiritual nourishment that is in harmony with their intellectual needs.* People want to know where they have come from and where they are headed. If they are told to believe in an end that does not correspond to their aspirations or their idea of God, or to the physical data that science gives them, and, furthermore, if believing imposes on their desired goal conditions whose usefulness their reason contests, they will reject everything. Materialism and pantheism seem more rational to them, because at least they can reason and discuss them, though erroneously. And they are right, because reasoning erroneously is at least better than not reasoning at all.

Nonetheless, present them with an unconditionally logical future, completely worthy of the greatness, justice and infinite goodness of God, and they will reject materialism and pantheism, whose emptiness they feel in their inmost being, but which they have accepted for lack of a better theory. Spiritism gives them something

better, and that is why it is quickly embraced by all those who have been tormented by doubt, those who have not been able to find what they are seeking in common beliefs or philosophies. Spiritism contains within itself the logic of rationality and the sanction of proven facts, and that is why it is futile to fight against it.

14. Human beings instinctively believe in the future, but since they have not until now possessed any certain basis for defining it, their imagination has conjured up theories that have given rise to a diversity of beliefs. Because the Spiritist Doctrine regarding the future is not the more or less cleverly designed work of the imagination, but is rather the result of the observation of material events that are occurring nowadays right before our eyes, it will harmonize these divergent or fluctuating opinions – this is already taking place – and gradually, through the force of things, it will bring about a unity of beliefs concerning the future that will not be based on simple theories but on certainty. *Unity of thought concerning the future fate of souls will be the first point of contact among the various sects, one huge step toward religious tolerance to start with and, later, toward complete unification.*

CHAPTER II



The Fear of Death

Causes of the Fear of Death • The Reason
why Spiritists Do Not Fear Death

Causes of the Fear of Death

1. Ever since they lived in the wild and whatever their social position may now be, human beings have had an innate sentiment about the future. Intuition tells them that death is not the final phase of existence, and that those whose loss we grieve are not irretrievably lost. Belief in the future life is intuitive and infinitely more widespread than the belief in nothingness. Nevertheless, how can one explain that among those who believe in the immortality of the soul, one still finds a great attachment to earthly things and a huge fear of death?

2. This fear is an effect of the wisdom of Providence and a consequence of the self-preservation instinct common to all living beings. Such fear is necessary as long as people are not sufficiently enlightened about the conditions of the future life. Fear acts as a counterweight to the tendency which, without its restraining force, would lead us to prematurely leave our life behind and to neglect the earthly labor that must serve for our advancement.

Thus it is that among primitive peoples the future is a vague intuition, which later becomes a simple hope and,

finally, a certainty, albeit still attenuated by a secret attachment to corporeal life.

3. To the degree that humans better comprehend the future life, the fear of death decreases. Once their earthly mission becomes clear, they calmly, resignedly and fearlessly await the end. Certainty about the future life gives them another course for their thoughts, another aim for their labors. Prior to this certainty, they only labored with an eye on the present. With this certainty, however, they labor with an eye on the future, although without neglecting the present since they know that the future depends on the good or evil direction they take in the present. The certainty of meeting their friends again after death, of reactivating the relationships they had on earth, *of not losing one single fruit of their labor*, of unceasingly growing in intelligence and toward perfection, gives them the patience to endure and the courage to bear the transitory weariness of earthly life. The solidarity they find between the living and the dead enables them to understand the solidarity they must establish on earth, where fraternity and charity have a purpose and a reason for being, both in the present and in the future.

4. In order to free oneself from the fear of death, one must regard death from the right point of view; i.e., one must have entered the spirit world through thought, getting as precise of an idea of it as possible. This denotes on the part of the incarnate spirit a certain amount of development and an ability to detach itself from matter. For those who are not sufficiently advanced, material life prevails over the spiritual.

While people remain attached to appearances, they cannot discern life beyond the body, even though the real life resides within the soul. And if the body dies, everything seems lost to them and they fall into despair. If instead of concentrating their thought on the outer garment, they geared it toward the source of their life – the soul, the real being that survives everything else –

they would grieve less the loss of the body – the source of misery and pain. However, to do so the spirit needs strength that it only acquires with maturity.

The worry about death therefore arises from an insufficient idea about the future life, but it also denotes the need to stay alive and the belief that the destruction of the body is not the end of everything. Additionally, it is triggered by the secret longing for the survival of the soul, still veiled in uncertainty.

Such fear decreases to the degree that certainty increases, and disappears when certainty is complete.

That is the providential side of the issue. For people who are not sufficiently enlightened, whose reason can hardly support the highly positive and alluring perspective of a better future, it would be prudent not to dazzle them with such an idea since it could lead them to neglect the present. The present, however, is necessary for their material and intellectual evolution.

5. This state of things is postponed and prolonged by purely human causes that will disappear with progress. The first cause is the aspect from which the future life has been presented, an aspect that might satisfy little-developed minds, but which cannot satisfy the enlightened reason of reflective individuals. Thus, they say: “Since they present us with principles contested by logic and the positive data of science and claim such principles to be absolute truths, it is because they are not actually true”; hence the disbelief of some and the dubious belief of a great many. The future life is a vague idea to them, more a probability than an absolute certainty. They would believe and they would desire it to be so, but they exclaim: “But what if it really *isn't* true! The present is here and now; let's concern ourselves with it first. The future will take care of itself.”

Then they add, “What is the soul, really? A point, an atom, a spark or a flame of some kind? How does it feel, see or perceive?” The soul does not seem like an actual reality to them, but rather

an abstraction. Those who are dear to them, reduced to atoms – in their way of thinking – are lost to them and no longer appear with the qualities for which they loved them. They cannot comprehend the love of a spark or the love one may have for it, and they are hardly satisfied with the perspective of being transformed into monads. Thus, they feel justified in preferring the physicality of earthly life, which has something more substantial about it. The number dominated by this type of thought is considerable.

6. Another cause for remaining attached to earthly things, even among those who most firmly believe in the future life, is the impression they retain of the childhood teachings related to it.

We must confess that the picture that religion has sketched out concerning the subject is nothing seductive and even less consoling. On one hand, there are the contortions of the damned in eternal torture and flame, paying for the errors of their momentary lives. Centuries follow centuries without any pity or hope for a commuting of their sentence, and what is more pitiless is that repentance would be futile. On the other hand are the souls languishing and suffering in purgatory as they await their deliverance at the goodwill of the living, who will pray for them or who will beseech others to pray for them, without being able to put forth any effort of their own to get out. These two categories comprise the great majority of the population beyond the grave. Above them soars the very limited class of the elect, enjoying contemplative beatitude for all eternity. This eternal uselessness, even though preferable to nothingness, of course, is nothing but a fastidious monotony. This is why in paintings depicting the blessed we see angelic figures that seem to express more boredom than true blissfulness.

This picture neither satisfies aspirations nor the instinctive idea of progress, which is the only one compatible with absolute bliss. It is difficult to imagine that, upon being baptized, the primitive, who only possesses an obtuse morality, is suddenly on the same level as

someone who after long years of labor has reached the highest degree of knowledge and morals. It is even less conceivable that a child who has died at a very early age, before being aware of its own acts, will enjoy the same privileges solely because of a ceremony in which its own will played no part. Such ideas should not hesitate to concern the most fervent believers no matter how little they think about them.

7. If future happiness does not depend on working to progress while on earth, then the ease with which this happiness is believed to be acquired by means of a few outward practices – and even by the possibility of being purchased with money – without serious inner reform of character and habits, places more worth on the pleasures of the world. Many deeply believe that because their future is assured by fulfilling certain formulas or by posthumous gifts that cost them nothing, then it is superfluous to make sacrifices or suffer anything for the benefit of others, since salvation may be had by each working for himself or herself.

Of course, not everybody thinks this way, for there are many noteworthy exceptions; however, one could not deny that most actually do think this way, especially the little-enlightened masses, and that the idea commonly held regarding the conditions for happiness in the other world tends to prolong attachment to the things of this one, and therefore encourages selfishness.

8. We would add that everything – all our customs – contributes toward causing us to mourn the loss of earthly life and to dread the passage from earth to heaven. Death is surrounded with morbid ceremonies that serve more to terrorize than to awaken hope. If one depicts death, it is always done so in its revolting aspect and never as the sleep of transition. All of death's symbols remind us of the destruction of the body, portraying it as dreadful and de-fleshed. The soul is never presented radiantly detaching itself from its earthly fetters. The departure to that happier world is only accompanied by the mourning of the survivors, as if a big disgrace

had befallen the deceased. They say eternal goodbyes as if they will never see them again. What they regret is that the deceased have lost the pleasures of this world as though they have not discovered greater pleasures beyond the grave. Such a misfortune – they say – to have died so young, rich and happy, with the perspective of such a shining future! The idea of an even better future barely passes through their mind, because it has not set down deep roots. Thus, everything works together to inspire the terror of death instead of the awakening to hope. There is no doubt that humankind will take a long time to undo such preconceptions, but such will happen to the degree that their faith is firmly established and to the point that they conceive of a more wholesome idea of the spirit life.

9. What is more, the usual belief places souls in regions that are only accessible to thought, and where they become somehow unknown to the living. The church itself sets up an impassable barrier between the living and the dead, and declares that the relationship is broken and that any kind of communication between them is impossible. If souls are in hell, all hope is lost of ever seeing them again, unless we ourselves also end up there. If they find themselves among the elect, however, they are completely absorbed in contemplative beatitude. All this interposes between the dead and the living a distance that leads us to regard the separation as eternal, which is why we prefer to have beings whom we love right here with us, suffering on earth instead of seeing them leave, even if they are going to heaven. Finally, will the soul who is in heaven really be happy knowing that *its child, father, mother or friends* are burning in hell forever?

Why Spiritists Do Not Fear Death

10. The Spiritist Doctrine completely transforms the way one envisages the future. The future life ceases to be a hypothesis

and becomes a reality. The state of souls after death is no longer a theory but the result of observation. The veil has been lifted and the spirit world has appeared to us in the fullness of its practical reality. Human minds did not discover it through some ingenious conception; instead, the very inhabitants of that world have come to us describing their situation. We have seen them on every degree of the spirit scale, in every phase of happiness and unhappiness, and, finally, in all the situations of life beyond the grave. That is why Spiritists view death so calmly and why they are so serene during their last moments on earth. What sustains them is not only hope but certainty. They know that the future life is but a continuation of earthly life, only under better conditions, and they await it with the same confidence with which they have awaited the rising of the sun after a stormy night. The reasons for such confidence arise from the phenomena they have witnessed and the harmony of such phenomena both with the logic, justice and goodness of God and the innermost aspirations of humankind.

For Spiritists, the soul is not an abstraction. It has an ethereal body, which makes it a defined being. It can be grasped and perceived through thought, which is sufficient for it to clarify for us its individuality, aptitudes and perceptions. The memory of those who are dear to us rests upon something real. They are no longer portrayed as fleeting flames that speak nothing to our thoughts, but as concrete forms that more than anything show themselves to be living beings. Furthermore, instead of being lost in the depths of space, they are all around us. The corporeal world and the spirit world are in constant relationship and they provide mutual assistance to each other. Since doubt about the future is no longer feasible, the fear of death disappears. We calmly see its approach as deliverance through the door of life instead of annihilation through the door of nothingness.

CHAPTER III



Heaven

1. The [French] word *ciel*³ usually designates the undefined space that surrounds the earth; more particularly, the part that is above our horizon. It comes from the Latin *coelum*, formed from the Greek *koilos*, concave, because the sky used to seem to be an immense concavity. The ancients believed in the existence of many superimposed skies, composed of both solid and transparent matter, forming concentric spheres. Earth was in the center. As they spun around the earth, these spheres swept along the heavenly bodies contained in their orbits.

This idea came from limited astronomical knowledge and was employed by all the theogonies, which devised the gradations of heaven and the different degrees of blessedness, the furthest being the abode of supreme bliss. According to the most common opinion, there were seven heavens; hence the expression *to be in seventh heaven* to express perfect bliss. Muslims believe in the existence of nine heavens, and with each one the happiness of believers becomes greater. The astronomer Ptolemy⁴ counted eleven and called the last one Empyrean⁵, because of the

³ The French word *ciel* can be translated into English either as *heaven* or *sky*. This paragraph deals with the entomological discussion of the French word, although the chapter in general deals with the concept of *heaven*. In this particular paragraph, the English translation *sky* is more applicable, although the more poetic term *the heavens* would also be appropriate. – Tr.

⁴ Ptolemy lived in Alexandria, Egypt, in the second century of the Christian era. – Auth.

⁵ From the Greek, *pur* or *pyr*, fire. – Auth.

brilliant light that reigned therein. To date, this continues to be the name poetry gives to the region of eternal glory. Christian theology recognizes three heavens: the first is the region of the air and clouds; the second is the space in which the heavenly bodies orbit; the third is located beyond the second, and is the dwelling place of the Most High, the habitation of the elect, i.e., those who contemplate God face to face. According to this belief, it is said that St. Paul was taken up into the third heaven.

2. The various doctrines related to the dwelling of the blessed all rest upon the double error of regarding the earth as the center of the universe and of limiting the region of the heavenly bodies. It is beyond this imaginary limit that all doctrines have located the blessed region and the dwelling place of the Almighty. It is a strange anomaly that locates the Author of all things, the One who governs all things, at the extremities of creation instead of at the center, where the radiating thought of the Divine could embrace everything!

3. With its inexorable logic employing observation and facts, science has taken its searchlight into the depths of space and has shown how implausible all those theories are. The earth is no longer the hub of the universe, but one of the smallest heavenly bodies traveling through the immensity of space. The sun itself is no more than the center of one planetary vortex, while the stars are other innumerable suns, around which an infinite number of worlds spin. These suns are separated by distances that are only accessible through thought, even though they look like they could touch each other. In this assembly, ruled by eternal laws, and where the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator are revealed, the earth is no more than an imperceptible spot and one of the least favored planets as to habitability. In light of such considerations, it is reasonable to ask why God would make the earth the only seat of life, and relegate his most favored creatures to it. On the

contrary, everything proclaims that life exists everywhere and that humankind is as infinite as the universe itself. Since science has revealed to us worlds that are similar to our own, God could not have created them without some purpose – God must have peopled them with beings capable of governing them.

4. The ideas held by human beings are always the result of what they know about, and like all important discoveries, that of the constitution of worlds has had to set such ideas on a different course. Under the influence of this new knowledge, beliefs have been modified: heaven has been displaced and the unlimited stellar region can no longer serve it. Where is it then? When faced with this question, all religions remain mute.

Spiritism has come to answer this question by demonstrating the true destiny of humankind. Taking the nature of this destiny and the divine attributes as a departure point, one comes to a conclusion; i.e., starting from the known, one reaches the unknown through a logical deduction – not to mention the direct observations that Spiritism offers.

5. Human beings are composed of body and spirit. The spirit is the principal, reasoning and intelligent being, whereas the body is the material envelope that temporarily clothes the spirit so that it can fulfill its mission on earth and carry out the work needed for its evolution. After it has been used, the body is destroyed but the spirit survives. Deprived of the spirit, the body is only inert matter – like an instrument deprived of the part that makes it function. Without the body, the spirit retains everything: life and intelligence. Upon leaving the body behind, it returns to the spirit world, from where it came in order to incarnate.

Hence, there are two worlds: the *corporeal world*, composed of incarnate spirits, and the *spirit world*, composed of discarnate spirits. Due to the materiality of their envelope, the beings of the corporeal world are connected to the earth or some other globe.

The spirit world extends everywhere, however; it surrounds us and fills space without any designated limit. Due to the fluidic nature of their envelope, the beings that comprise it can cross great distances at the speed of thought instead of moving heavily upon the ground. The death of the body is no more than the breaking of the ties that had held them captive.

6. Spirits are created simple and ignorant, but endowed with aptitudes so that they may eventually know everything and evolve as a result of their free will. By evolving, they acquire new knowledge, new faculties, new perceptions and, consequently, new pleasures unknown to less evolved spirits. They see, hear, feel and comprehend what less evolved spirits cannot see, hear, feel and comprehend. *Happiness is the direct result of the progress that has been made; thus, of two spirits, one may not be as happy as the other solely because it is not of the same degree of intellectual and moral advancement; however, it is not necessary for each one to be in a separate place.* Although they may exist side by side, one may be in darkness, while everything seems resplendent to the other – like a blind and a sighted individual who have joined hands; one perceives the light while the other does not receive the least impression of it. *Since spirits' happiness is inherent to their own individual qualities, they can enjoy it anywhere they may find themselves, whether on the earth in the midst of incarnates, or in space.*

A crude comparison will enable us to understand this situation better. If two individuals are at a concert and one is a good musician with a trained ear, while the other is unfamiliar with music and has a “tin ear”, the first will experience a sensation of happiness, whereas the second will remain unmoved, for one comprehends and perceives what produces absolutely no impression on the other. The same applies to all the sensations experienced by spirits, and which are the direct result of their ability to sense them. *The spirit world displays splendors everywhere; harmonies and*

sensations that less evolved spirits under the influence of matter cannot even perceive because they are only accessible to purified spirits.

7. Spirits' progress consists in the fruit of their own labor, but since they are free, they labor for their advancement with greater or lesser activity or negligence according to their will, accelerating or retarding their progress and, consequently, their own happiness. While some advance rapidly, others remain at a standstill in the lower regions for centuries. Spirits are therefore the authors of their own fortunate or unfortunate situation, according to the words of Christ, "To each according to his deeds." Every spirit who lags behind cannot blame anyone but itself, just as the one who evolves quickly has the exclusive merit of its own efforts; thus, it gives greater value to the happiness it has won for itself.

Supreme bliss is only shared in by perfect spirits, or rather, by pure spirits, who have only attained it after having evolved in intelligence and morality. Intellectual progress and moral progress rarely march hand in hand, but whatever a spirit does not succeed at during a given time, it does during another, so that the two areas of progress end up reaching the same level. That is why we often see intelligent and educated individuals who are little-advanced morally, and vice-versa.

8. Incarnation is necessary for the dual moral and intellectual progress of the spirit: intellectual progress through the obligatory activity of labor; moral progress through the mutual need that men and women have of one another. *Societal life is the touchstone of good and bad qualities.* Goodness, malice, sweetness, violence, benevolence, charity, selfishness, greed, pride, humility, sincerity, honesty, loyalty, insincerity, and hypocrisy – in other words, everything that comprises the moral or perverse individual – has its motive, purpose and stimulus in men and women's relationships with one another. *Persons who live in isolation possess neither vices nor virtues. Through their isolation they keep themselves from evil, but at the same time they nullify the good they possess within themselves.*

9. One single corporeal existence is manifestly insufficient for the spirit to acquire all the good it lacks and to eliminate all its evil. How could primitives, for example, bring themselves up to the moral and intellectual level of the most advanced Europeans in only one incarnation? It would be materially impossible. Must they therefore remain eternally in ignorance and barbarity, deprived of the sensations that only the development of the faculties could provide them? Simple commonsense rejects such a notion, which would be not only the negation of divine justice and goodness, but also of the very evolutionary and progressive laws of nature. Thus, God, who is supremely just and good, grants to the spirit as many incarnations as are necessary for it to reach its objective: perfection.

With each new existence, the spirit brings what it had acquired in the previous ones in terms of aptitudes, intuitive knowledge, intelligence and morality. Each existence is thus a forward step on the path of progress.⁶

Incarnation is inherent to the status of less evolved spirits only, finally becoming unnecessary to those who have transcended such a status, and who have progressed either in the spirit state in the spirit world, or in corporeal existences on higher worlds that have none of earth's materiality. To such spirits, incarnation then becomes voluntary for the purpose of exerting a more direct action upon other incarnates for the fulfillment of a mission with which they have been charged. In doing so, they accept through self-denial the vicissitudes and sufferings of incarnation.

10. In the interval between corporeal lives, the spirit reenters the spirit world for a period of time which could be long or short, where it is either happy or unhappy according to the good or evil it has done. Since the spirit state is the spirit's normal, definitive state and since the spirit body does not die, then the corporeal state must be transitory and fleeting. It is while in the spirit state especially

⁶ See footnote 1, chap. I no. 3. – Auth.

that the spirit reaps the fruits of the progress it accomplished through the labor of incarnation. The spirit state is also where it prepares itself for new struggles and makes resolutions that it will endeavor to put into practice when it returns to humanity.

The spirit also progresses while in the spirit state; there, it acquires special knowledge that it would not be able to obtain on earth and it modifies its ideas. The corporeal state and the spirit state comprise the source of two kinds of progress in solidarity with each other, and that is the reason why a spirit must alternately pass through these two modes of existence.

11. Reincarnation can occur on earth or on other worlds. Amongst all the worlds, there are some that are more highly evolved, where existence involves conditions that are less physically and morally difficult than on earth, but to which only spirits who have reached a degree of purity in keeping with such worlds are admitted.

Life on these higher worlds is a reward in itself, since on them we are free from all the earthly ills and vicissitudes to which we are exposed here on earth. The less material – almost fluidic – bodies are not subject to the illnesses and weaknesses, nor to the same needs as on earth. Evil spirits are excluded and the inhabitants enjoy full peace with no other concerns than evolving through intellectual endeavor. There, true fraternity reigns because there is no selfishness; true equality because there is no pride; true liberty because there are no disorderly acts to restrain, nor are there any ambitious individuals who try to oppress the weak. Compared to earth, these worlds are true heavens and represent the various stages along the path of progress leading to the final state. Earth is a little-evolved world meant for the purification of imperfect spirits, and that is why evil will predominate until God transforms it into a dwelling place for more- advanced spirits.

Thus it is that the spirit progresses gradually to the degree that it develops itself and reaches the apogee of bliss. However, before

having reached the culmination of perfection, it enjoys happiness relative to its progress. A child enjoys the pleasures of childhood, later those of youth, and finally the solid ones of maturity.

12. The bliss of the blessed spirits does not consist in contemplative idleness, which, as we have stated many times, would be an eternal and fastidious uselessness. On the contrary, spirit life at all degrees involves constant activity, but an activity without weariness. Supreme bliss consists in enjoying all the splendors of creation, which no human language has ever been able to describe, and of which the most fertile imagination cannot conceive. Moreover, it consists in the knowledge and comprehension of all things, the absence of any physical and mental suffering, inner satisfaction, imperturbable serenity of spirit, pure love that unites all beings due to the absence of friction from contact with evil individuals, and above all, the contemplation of God and the comprehension of the divine mysteries that are revealed to the most worthy. Bliss may also be found in tasks for which one is happy to be made responsible. Pure spirits are the messiahs or messengers of God for the transmission and execution of the divine will. They fulfill great missions and preside over the formation of worlds and the general harmony of the universe, a glorious task entrusted only to those who have reached perfection. Those of the highest order are the only ones who know the secrets of God, deriving inspiration from the divine thought of which they are the direct representatives.

13. Spirits' attributes are proportional to their progress, their degree of enlightenment, their capabilities, their experience, and the degree of trust they deserve from the Supreme Lord. There are no privileges or favors that do not derive from their own merit; everything is measured and weighed on the scales of strict justice. The most important missions are only entrusted to those whom God deems capable of fulfilling them and incapable of failure or compromise. While the most worthy spirits comprise

the supreme council under God's supervision, the guidance of planetary systems is committed to the high order ones, and the guidance of special worlds is entrusted to others. Next, following in the order of hierarchical advancement and subordination are those in charge of more limited responsibilities such as the progress of nations, the protection of families and individuals, the drive behind each branch of progress, and the diverse operations of nature down to the most intimate details of creation. In this vast and harmonious whole, there are occupations for all abilities, aptitudes and strengths; for spirits who aspire to progress, occupations are joyfully accepted and feverously requested because they are a means of advancement.

14. Alongside the great missions entrusted to high order spirits, there are others of all levels of importance. These missions are granted to spirits of all categories, and we may affirm that each incarnate spirit has its duties to fulfill to the benefit of its fellow beings: from being the head of the family who is charged with the progress of his or her children, to the individual of genius who sows new seeds of progress within society. These secondary missions are where the failures, falsehoods and errors occur, but which only harm the individual without affecting the whole.

15. All minds therefore cooperate in the overall work, whatever may be their degree of development, and each one to the measure of its abilities: some in the incarnate state; others in the spirit state. We see activity everywhere, from the bottom to the apex of the scale, all learning and helping in mutual support, and lending helping hands in order to reach the summit.

Thus, solidarity is established between the spirit and corporeal worlds; in other words, between humans and spirits: between captive and free spirits. Hence, true sympathies and noble affections continue and consolidate through purification and continued relationships.

Life, then, is in motion everywhere. Not one corner of the infinite is unpopulated, nor is there one region that is not incessantly traveled by innumerable legions of radiant spirits who are invisible to the crude senses of incarnates but whose sight stuns with joy and awe souls freed from matter. Everywhere, finally, there is happiness relative to all levels of progress, to all fulfilled duties, with each spirit bringing the elements of its own happiness according to the category into which its evolution has placed it.

Happiness depends on the qualities of individuals and not on the physical condition of their environment; thus, happiness is anywhere where there are spirits capable of being happy. Happiness has no circumscribed or appointed place in the universe. Wherever they may be, pure spirits can contemplate the divine majesty, for God is everywhere.

16. Nevertheless, happiness is not just personal. If we were to possess it only within ourselves without being able to share it with others, it would be sad and selfish. We may also find happiness in the communion of ideas that unites sympathetic beings. Happy spirits attract one another through similarity of ideas, tastes, and sentiments, thus forming vast groups of homogenous families, in the midst of which each individual radiates its own qualities and is saturated by the serene and beneficent emanations of the whole. Even though some of its members may be away on a mission, at times they meet at a given point in space to give account of their work, and at other times they congregate around a more highly evolved spirit in order to receive instruction and counsel.

17. Although spirits are everywhere, worlds are their preferred meeting centers because of the similarity between them and the worlds they inhabit. High order spirits abound around advanced worlds just as low order spirits swarm around little-evolved ones. Earth is one of the latter. Each globe therefore has its own population of incarnate and discarnate spirits, which is

mostly sustained by the incarnation and discarnation of these same spirits. This population is more solid on less evolved worlds because of the spirits' attachment to matter, but it is more fluid on higher worlds. From these higher worlds, however, which are true centers of light and happiness, spirits depart to lower worlds in order to sow the seeds of progress, to bring them consolation and hope, and to raise their inhabitants' courage, which has been beaten down by the troubles of life. They sometimes incarnate on them in order to fulfill their mission more effectively.

18. So, in this unlimited immensity, where is heaven? Everywhere. No borders enclose it. Advanced worlds are the last stations leading to it; virtues facilitate the journey to it, while vices hinder access.

Before this majestic picture that peoples all the corners of the universe, giving everything in creation a purpose and a reason for being, how small and trivial is the doctrine that circumscribes humanity within an imperceptible point in space, and which shows it as having begun at a determined instant simply to end with the world that has contained it – all this not having embraced more than one minute in all eternity! How sad, cold and frigid is that doctrine, wherein the entire universe is shown to us before, during and after earthly humankind, to be without life, without movement, like a huge desert immersed in profound silence! How disheartening is the description it gives of the few elect involved in perpetual contemplation, while the vast majority of other souls are condemned to unending suffering! How pungent to loving hearts is the barrier that has been set up between the living and the dead! Happy souls – they say – only think about their own happiness; the lost ones only think about their own misery. Is it any wonder that selfishness reigns on earth when it shows up in heaven itself? So, how narrow is such an idea of the grandeur, the power and the goodness of God!

In contrast, how sublime is Spiritism's idea of God! How its Doctrine enhances ideas and broadens thought! But who says it is true? Reason first, revelation next, and finally, its harmony with the progress of science. Between two doctrines, one which trivializes and the other exalts the attributes of God, one which is in disharmony and the other in harmony with progress, one which remains lagging behind while the other moves ahead, commonsense says which side truth is on. When faced with both, let each consult his or her conscience and an inner voice will speak through it. Such inner aspirations are the voice of God, who cannot deceive humankind.

19. But perhaps one will ask: Why didn't God just reveal the whole truth from the start? For the same reason that one does not teach children what must only be taught adults. Limited revelation was adequate for a certain period of humankind's development, and God provided it according to the moral strength of their spirit. Those who today have received a more complete revelation are *the same spirits* who received only a portion of it in other times, but who since then have grown in intelligence.

Before science revealed the living forces of nature, the composition of heavenly bodies, the true role of earth and its formation, could human beings have comprehended the immensity of outer space and the plurality of worlds? Before geology demonstrated the formation of the earth, could they have removed hell from its interior and understood the allegorical meaning of the six days of creation? Before astronomy discovered the laws that govern the universe, could they have understood that there is no up or down in space, that the heavens are not above the clouds or limited by the stars? Could they have identified themselves with the spirit life before the progress of psychology? Could they have conceived of a fortunate or unfortunate life after death that was not a circumscribed place or under a material form? No. Since

they understood more through the senses than through thought, the universe was too vast for their comprehension. It was necessary to restrain it to smaller proportions and broaden it later on. A partial revelation had its usefulness; it was satisfactory back then, but it no longer is today. The error lies with those who, without taking into account the progress of ideas, think they can govern mature people with the precepts given to them during childhood. (See *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. III)

CHAPTER IV



Hell

The Intuition of Future Punishment • Christian Hell
as an Imitation of Pagan Hell • Limbo • A Portrayal
of Pagan Hell • An Outline of Christian Hell

The Intuition of Future Punishment

1. Down through history, people have believed through intuition that life after death must be happy or unhappy according to the good or evil they practiced during their life on earth. However, their idea about that future life is related to the development of their moral sense and their correct or incorrect notions about good and evil. Their ideas concerning punishment and reward are reflections of their predominant instincts; thus, warlike peoples have always regarded supreme happiness as having to do with honors conferred for bravery during battle; hunters, with the abundance of game; sensualists, with voluptuous delights. While still dominated by matter, people can only comprehend spiritual matters imperfectly and imagine a picture of future punishment and pleasure that is more physical than spiritual – they believe they must eat and drink in that other world as in this one, but in a better manner.⁷ Later, regarding people's beliefs about the future life, we find a mixture of

⁷ A little boy from Savoy, whose priest described the future life, asked him if everybody ate white bread there as they did in Paris. – Auth.

spiritualism and materialism: on one side, contemplative beatitude; on the other, a hell with physical tortures.

2. Since they could only understand what they could actually see, early peoples naturally molded their future on the present. In order to comprehend things beyond those they could see right in front of them, they had to evolve intellectually, which could only occur over time. Moreover, their picture of future punishments was nothing but a reflection of the ills of humankind, but in greater proportion, bringing together all the tortures, punishments and afflictions found on earth. Therefore, in hot climes they imagined a hell of fire; in frigid regions, a hell of ice. Since they had not yet developed the sense that would later lead them to comprehend the spirit world, they could only conceive of physical punishments; thus, with small differences as to form, the hells of all religions actually resembled one another.

Christian Hell as an Imitation of Pagan Hell

3. The pagan hell described and dramatized by the poets was the grandest model of its kind. It was perpetuated by Christians, who had their own bards. In comparing the two hells, one finds in both – except for names and variations in detail – numerous similarities. Both have physical fire as their element of torment, because fire symbolizes the most atrocious means of suffering. But an odd thing! Christians exaggerated pagan hell at several points. Although pagans had the bottomless barrel of the Danaides⁸, the wheel of Ixion⁹ and the stone of Sisyphus¹⁰, these images represented individual torments. Christians,

⁸ "... (in Greek myth) the 50 daughters of Danaus, 49 of whom were condemned to pour water forever into a leaky vessel for having murdered their husbands." (Random House Webster's College Dictionary, 1991) – Tr.

⁹ "A legendary Thessalian king whom Zeus punished for his attempted seduction of Hera by binding him to an eternally revolving wheel in Tartarus." (ibid) – Tr.

¹⁰ "A legendary ruler of Corinth punished in Tartarus by being compelled to roll to the top of a slope a stone that always escaped him and rolled back down again." (idid) – Tr.

on the other hand, held ready for everybody their boiling caldrons, whose lids the angels lift up in order to look in on the contortions of the damned.¹¹ And God listens pitilessly to their wailings for all eternity. The pagans, in contrast, never described the gods of the Elysian Fields as enjoying the sight of the damned in Tartarus.¹²

4. Like the pagans, Christians have their king of hell – Satan – with the difference, however, that Pluto¹³ was limited solely to governing the ghostly empire that he had received as his share. Although he himself was not evil in nature, he held in his kingdom those who had practiced evil, because that was his mission. Furthermore, he did not try to induce people to sin in order to exult in their suffering. Satan, on the other hand, recruits victims everywhere and thrills at tormenting them with a legion of demons armed with pitchforks used to turn them over in the fire. The nature of that fire, perpetually burning without ever consuming its victims, has been a topic for serious discussion, and it has even been debated as to whether or not it might be a fire of bitumen.¹⁴ Thus, pagan hell has nothing over on Christian hell.

5. The same reasons that led the ancients to physically localize the kingdom of happiness also led them to circumscribe the place of torment. Having placed the former in the upper regions, it was natural to reserve for the latter the lower regions, that is, the center of the earth, to which they believed certain terrifying dark caverns served as the entrance. The center of the earth is also where Christians throughout time have placed the habitation of the damned.

¹¹ Sermon preached at Montpellier in 1860 – Auth.

¹² “The blessed, without leaving their place, will be able to withdraw in a certain manner due to their gift of intelligence and their distinct view, in order to behold the tortures of the damned. And upon seeing them, not only will they be insensitive to their *pain*, they will even *remain filled with joy*, and will render thanks to God for their own bliss while watching the ineffable calamity of the impious.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) – Auth.

¹³ Or Hades: “The ancient Greek god ruling over the underworld.” (ibid) – Tr.

¹⁴ Sermon preached in Paris in 1861. – Auth.

Let us draw another analogy regarding the matter: The hell of the pagans contained the Elysian Fields on one side, and Tartarus on the other; Olympus, the home of the gods and divinized human beings, remained in the upper regions. According to the *letter* of the Gospel, Jesus descended into hell, that is, to the *lower places*, to remove the souls of the righteous who had awaited his coming. Hell was therefore not solely a place of torment; like pagan hell, it was simply a *place in the lower regions*. Like Olympus, the home of the angels and saints was in the higher realms. It was placed beyond the starry sky, which itself was believed to be limited.

6. This mixture of Christian and pagan ideas is not surprising. Jesus could not destroy deeply-rooted beliefs in a single blow, since people lacked the knowledge required to conceive of the infinity of space and the infinite number of worlds. To them, the earth was the center of the universe and they knew nothing about its shape or internal structure. Everything was limited to their point of view, and thus notions about the future could not go beyond their understanding. Jesus, therefore, meeting with the impossibility of initiating them into the true state of things, and not wanting to use his authority to sanction accepted prejudices, abstained from rectifying these concepts, leaving that mission to the passage of time. He limited himself to speaking in vague terms about the life of the blessed and the punishments reserved for the guilty, without ever referring in his teachings to the bodily punishment and torment which for Christians have comprised an article of faith.

That is how pagan ideas of hell have continued up until our day. The spreading of modern knowledge and the overall development of human intelligence were needed in order to shed a correcting light on the matter. However, since nothing positive came forward to replace entrenched ideas, the long

period dominated by blind belief was followed by a transitional period of disbelief. The New Revelation¹⁵ has come to put an end to it. It was necessary to demolish in order to rebuild, since it is easier to instill correct ideas in those who do not believe in anything, but who nonetheless perceive that something is missing, than to instill them in those who possess a robust though absurd faith.

7. By localizing heaven and hell, Christian sects were led to believe that there were only two extreme situations for souls: perfect bliss or absolute suffering. Purgatory is only an intermediate and temporary position, from which souls pass without transition to the abode of the righteous. There could be no other hypothesis, given the belief in the definitive fate of the soul after death. If there are no more than two habitations – that of the elect and that of the damned – one cannot accept the idea that there are several degrees in each one without accepting the possibility of ascending up through them and, consequently, progressing. Thus, if there is progress, there can be no definitive fate, whereas if there is a definitive fate, there can be no progress. Jesus resolved the issue when he stated, “*There are many dwelling places in my Father’s house.*”¹⁶

Limbo

8. It is true that the Church admits to a special position in certain cases. Children who die at a very young age without having committed any evil cannot be condemned to eternal fire, but since they have not done any good either, they are not entitled to supreme bliss. Thus, the Church says they remain in *limbo*: that undefined situation in which, although they do not suffer,

¹⁵ i.e. Spiritism. – Tr.

¹⁶ See *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. III. – Auth.

neither do they enjoy blessedness.¹⁷ However, since their fate is irreversibly set, they are deprived of happiness for all eternity. Such privation therefore implies *an eternal and unmerited punishment* even though it is not the result of anything they have done. The same applies to primitives who, not having received the grace of baptism and the light of religion, sin out of ignorance by being driven by natural instincts. Of course, such individuals do not bear the same responsibility or receive the same merit as those who act with knowledge of what they do. Simple logic nonetheless rejects such a doctrine in the name of God's justice, which is fully depicted in these words of Christ, "*To each according to his deeds.*" It is necessary to understand good or bad deeds as those that are done intentionally and freely, because only these entail responsibility. Such cannot be the case with a child, a primitive or anyone else who has not been enlightened.

A Portrayal of Pagan Hell

9. Knowledge about pagan hell has come to us almost exclusively through the narratives of the poets. Homer and Virgil have provided the most complete description, but we must take into account the poetic necessities imposed on such descriptions. Fenelon's description in his *Telemachus*¹⁸ originates from the same source as the ancients' fundamental beliefs, but it has the more precise simplicity of the prose style. It describes the gloomy aspect of the various places and seeks to specifically emphasize the types of

¹⁷ In a 41-page document published by the Catholic News Service, the Roman Catholic Church annulled the concept of limbo. The document states, "People find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants... from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian." The document appears in Vol. 36, No. 45, of *Origins: CNS Documentary Service*. – Tr.

¹⁸ Francois Fenelon was born in 1651 into an aristocratic but impoverished family. Ordained a priest at a young age, he became tutor of Louis XIV's grandson, the Duc de Bourgogne. It was for this royal student that Fenelon wrote *The Adventures of Telemachus* in 1693-4. Tr.

suffering to which the guilty are submitted. Fenelon extends such sufferings to the fate of evil kings with a view to instructing his royal disciple. As popular as this work is, many persons may not be able to recall its description of hell, or they may not have reflected enough on it to make a comparison. Thus, we believe it would be useful to reproduce the sections that most directly bear on our subject, that is, those that refer specifically to individual punishments.¹⁹

10. Telemachus enters and hears the wailings of an inconsolable shade.²⁰ “What is your disgrace?” he asks. “Who were you while on earth?” “Nabopharzam,” replies the shade, “king of proud Babylon. Upon hearing my name, all the peoples of the East trembled with fear. I commanded that I be worshipped by the Babylonians in a temple of ivory, where I was represented by a statue of gold; the most precious incense from Ethiopia burned before it day and night. No one ever dared contradict me without being quickly punished. New pleasures were created every day to render my life more and more delightful.

“I was young and robust. Alas! So much opulence still remained for me to enjoy while on the throne! However, a certain woman whom I loved, but who didn’t love me, made it very clear to me that I was no god – she poisoned me, and now I am no more. My ashes were ceremoniously buried yesterday in a gold urn. People wept and pulled their hair. They feigned throwing themselves on the flames of my pyre in order to die with me, and they will continue to come to weep together at the superb tomb of my ashes – but none will truly mourn for me. My memory

¹⁹ The following narrative by Fenelon contains certain phrases in italics. The italics were added by Kardec to emphasize their harmony with Spiritist principles. – Tr.

²⁰ Shade: “The insubstantial remains of the dead, a phantom without a body or the power of thought. This was the form in which the newly deceased congregated on the infernal shore of the River Styx, awaiting passage in the boat of Charon the ferryman to the kingdom of Hades, ruler of the Underworld. Those who lacked the proper bribe for Charon were condemned to wander the near bank of the river Styx for eternity. Even those who gained their passage had little to look forward to except a bleak and bloodless existence.” (Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology, on line at www.mythweb.com) – Tr.

terrorizes my own family, while here below I am now suffering horrible torment.”

Shaken by this dramatic tale, Telemachus asks him, “Were you truly happy during your reign? Did you feel that sweet peace without which the heart stays oppressed and disheartened even though it is in the midst of delight?” “No,” the Babylonian responds, “I don’t even know what you’re talking about. Sages praise that sort of peace as the sole good, but I myself never felt it. My heart was always being stirred up by new desires, fears and hopes. I sought to numb myself in the turbulence of my passions, employing ways to feed their turmoil in order to make them permanent and uninterrupted. The smallest pause to reason calmly would have been too much. That was the peace I enjoyed; any other would have seemed like a fable, a dream. Such are the things I regret.”

Having spoken thus, the Babylonian weeps like a weakling who has been left debilitated by too much prosperity and hence unable to bear disgrace with resignation. At his side are some slaves who had been put to death in honor of his funeral. Mercury had delivered them to Charon²¹ along with the king. They are endowed with absolute power over him whom they had served while on earth. *These slave shades are not at all afraid of Nabopharzam’s shade, which they hold enchained, inflicting it with the cruelest humiliations.* One says to him, “Weren’t we men like you? How could you have been so insensitive to the point of forgetting your common origin with all men?” Another insults him, “You were right for not wanting to regard yourself as a mere man – you were a monster deprived of humanity.” And another, “So! Where are your flattering admirers now? You no longer have anything to give, you wretch! Now, you can’t even commit evil

²¹ “A ferryman of Greek myth who conveyed the souls of the dead across the Styx.” (Websters, op.cit.) – Tr.

and you have been reduced to being a slave to your slaves. The justice of the gods is slow in coming, but it does not fail.”

At these harsh statements, Nabopharzam throws himself face down on the ground, pulling at his hair in an explosion of anger and desperation. But Charon tells the slaves, “Pull him up by his chain; make him stand up against his will. *He must not console himself by being able to hide his shame. All the shades of the Styx must behold him* that they may recognize the justice of the gods, who for too long tolerated the reign of this impious man on earth.”

Soon thereafter, Telemachus perceives dark Tartarus nearby, emitting black, heavy smoke; its noxious odor would cause death if it spread to the domain of the living. This smoke covers a river of fire, a vortex of flame, whose roar is like that of the mightiest torrents of water when they fall from the highest rocks into deep abysses. It is so loud that no one can hear anything in that dark place.

Telemachus, secretly influenced by Minerva²², fearlessly enters the precipice. First, he notices a large number of individuals who had lived in the most humble conditions. They are now being punished for having sought wealth through fraud, betrayal and cruelty. He also notices many impious hypocrites who, pretending to love religion, had used it as a pretext to satisfy their ambitions and deceive the credulous. These had abused even Virtue itself, the greatest gift of the gods, and they are being punished as the most perverted of all human beings. Children who slew their parents, wives who stained their hands with the blood of their husbands, traitors who sold out their countries after violating all oaths – all these are suffering less punishment than those hypocrites.

The three infernal judges had ordered it to be so for this reason: hypocrites are not content with being evil like other impious individuals, but want to be taken for good persons.

²² “The Roman goddess of wisdom and the arts, identified with the Greek goddess Athena,” (ibid) – Tr.

Through their false virtue, they cause people to stop believing in truth. Having been mocked and despised by these individuals, the gods now take pleasure in doing everything within their power to avenge such insults.

Next to the hypocrites, other individuals appear, who loudly proclaim themselves absent of blame, but whom the gods persecute mercilessly. These are the ingrates, liars and flatterers who worshipped vice; the perverse critics who sought to tarnish the purest virtue. Finally, there are those who, rashly judging matters without knowing the full story, thereby harmed the reputations of innocent men.

Upon seeing the three judges seated and passing sentence on a certain man, Telemachus takes the chance to ask them what his crimes were. The condemned man immediately exclaims, "I never did anything evil. I always took great pleasure in doing good. I was magnanimous, generous, just and compassionate. What are you accusing me of?" Then Minos²³ says to him, "No accusation is being made against you as far as men are concerned; however, did you not owe less to them than to the gods? What is this justice of which you boast? You did not fail in any of your duties regarding other men, who are nothing. You were certainly virtuous, but you attributed all your virtue to yourself and not to the gods, who had bestowed it upon you; instead, you wanted to enjoy the fruit of your virtue as something of your own: *you were your own god*. However, the gods, who made everything solely for themselves, cannot renounce their rights. You forgot them; thus, they forgot you. They handed you over to yourself, since you preferred to belong to yourself and not to them. *Seek now, if you can, consolation within your own heart*. Now and forever you shall be separated from those whom you wanted to please; you are left to your self, your true idol. Know that there

²³ "A legendary ruler of Crete who ordered Daedalus to build a labyrinth to house the Minotaur." (ibid) – Tr.

is no true virtue without respect and love for the gods, to whom everything is due. Your false virtue, which for so many years deceived the naïve, shall be unmasked. Men only judge vice and virtue by what will either please or inconvenience them – they are blind as to both good and evil. Here, a divine light tears down their artificial judgments, often condemning what they admired while justifying what they condemned.”

At these words, the philosopher, as though struck by lightning, can hardly contain himself. The satisfaction that he formerly had in contemplating his own moderation, courage and generous inclinations is transformed into desperation. The sight of his own heart as an enemy of the gods becomes a torment for him. He sees himself as he really is and cannot escape it. He sees the vanity of the judgment of the men whom he had sought to flatter in all his actions. A radical transformation is occurring within him as if all his innards are being overturned. He is no longer the same. He can no longer find support within his own heart. His conscience, whose judgment use to be so favorable toward him, now turns against him, bitterly incriminating the folly and illusion of all his virtues, which from the beginning did not have the worship of the Divinity as their goal. He is confused and dismayed, filled with shame, regret and desperation. *The Furies do not have to torment him, for it is enough that he be handed over to himself* so that his own heart can sufficiently avenge the displeased gods.

He searches for darkness in which to hide himself but cannot find it, for a persistent light follows him everywhere. On all sides, its penetrating rays of truth avenge the truth he neglected to follow. Everything he formerly loved has become odious to him as the source of his unending ills. He murmurs to himself, “You fool! You knew neither the gods nor your fellow beings nor yourself! No, you never loved the true and sole good. All your steps were misguided; your wisdom was only madness; your

virtue was no more than impious and blind pride – you were your own idol in the end!”

Telemachus next perceives some kings who had been condemned because they had abused their power. On one side, an avenging Fury *shows them a mirror reflecting the monstrosity of their vices*. They cannot help but see their gross vanity and their greed for foolhardy praise; their cruelty towards those whom they should have made happy; their insensitivity toward virtue; their fear of the truth; their predilection for cowards and flatterers; their lack of responsibility; their idleness, indolence and unlimited distrust; their pomp and their excessive luxury at the expense and ruin of their people; their ambition for vain glories at the cost of the blood of their subjects; finally, their cruelty in each day seeking new pleasures in the tears and desperation of such misfortunate people. These kings see themselves in that mirror incessantly. They see that they were more monstrous and horrendous than the Chimera defeated by Bellerophon, the Hydra of Lerna struck down by Hercules, or Cerberus vomiting through his three mouths a black and poisonous blood capable of contaminating all the races of mortals who lived upon the earth.

On the other side and at the same time, another Fury insultingly repeats all the praises that flatterers had heaped upon the kings during their lives, while showing them another mirror in which they see how such flatterers really regarded them. *The contradiction between the two pictures comprises a torment to their vanity*. He notices that the worst pictures among these kings are the ones who had received the most glittering praise during their lifetimes, because evil kings are more feared than good ones and shamelessly demand the lying adulations of the poets and orators of their day.

In the depths of that darkness, where they only suffer insults and derision, they hear the agonizing groans of the suffering. Everything around them repels and confuses them and conflicts with them: a

stark contrast to what they had believed about themselves during their lifetimes, deceiving others and convinced that everything had been made to serve them. In Tartarus, they were handed over to the caprice of a few slaves who now subject them in turn to the cruelest servitude. They serve these tormenters with no hope of even one day to soften their captivity. They remain subject to the blows of these slaves – who have become their merciless tyrants – like an anvil under the hammers of the Cyclopes as Vulcan coerces them to work in the fiery forges of Mount Etna.

There, Telemachus sees pale, hideous and disconsolate specters. A dark sadness consumes those criminals. They are horrified of themselves but are no more capable of freeing themselves from this horror than from their very own nature. *They have no need for any other punishment for their wrongs than those very wrongs, which they now see incessantly before them in all their fullness in the form of terrible ghosts pursuing them.* In trying to free themselves of the persecution, they search for a death more powerful than what had separated them from their bodies. In their desperation, they invoke a death capable of extinguishing their awareness altogether. They ask the abysses to swallow them up so that they might escape the avenging rays of truth that torment them; however, they are nonetheless condemned to the vengeance that drips down upon them drop by drop never to cease. *The truth they hated to behold comprises their punishment;* they see it standing against them now, wounding them, destroying them, tearing them from themselves like lightning, not destroying them outwardly but penetrating to their deepest innards.

Among the beings that are making his hair stand on end, Telemachus sees several ancient kings of Lydia being punished for having preferred the pleasures of an inactive life instead of one of service. They should have worked for the relief of their people, a duty inseparable from royalty.

These kings are reproving one another for their blindness. One says to another who had been his son, "Didn't I often recommend in my old age and before dying that you atone for the evils that occurred due to my negligence?" "Ah! Wretched father!" says his son, "It was you who caused me ruin! It was your example that inspired me to ostentation, pride and luxuriousness, to cruelty towards others! Seeing you rule with such recklessness and surrounded by shameless flatterers, I grew accustomed to enjoying flattery and pleasure myself. I believed that other men are to kings what horses and other beasts of burden are to men; that is, animals that are only useful as long as they can provide service and convenience. I believed this and it was you who led me to believe it. Now I am suffering all these evils for having taken after you." To these reciprocal recriminations they add the most acerbic blasphemies and seem ready to tear each other to pieces out of rage.

Like nighttime birds of prey, around the kings hover the cruel suspicions, the hopeless fears, the distrust that avenges the cruelty they used to impose on their people, the insatiable hunger for wealth, the always-tyrannical false glory, and their accursed indolence, doubling all the ills they could possibly suffer and incapable of providing them any sure enjoyment.

A number of these kings are being severely punished not for the evils they had committed but *for having neglected doing the good they could and should have done*. All the crimes of their people that resulted from negligence in observing the laws have been imputed to these kings, who should have ruled only to make sure these laws were obeyed under their reign. Also imputed to them is all the disorder resulting from pomp, luxury and the other excesses that drive men to violence, inciting them to acquiring things by breaking the law. Those who are being treated most severely are the ones who, instead of being good and watchful

shepherds of their people, only cared about devouring their flock like insatiable wolves.

What saddens Telemachus most, however, is seeing in that abyss of darkness and evil a great number of kings who, although having passed upon the earth as very good rulers, have been condemned to the punishment of Tartarus for having allowed themselves to be guided by evil and hypocritical individuals. *This punishment corresponds to the evils they had allowed to be committed in the name of their authority.* Furthermore, most of these kings were neither good nor evil – that was their weakness. They never feared *not* knowing the truth, and thus never experienced the pleasure of virtue and never felt the pleasure of practicing the good.

An Outline of Christian Hell

11. Theologians' idea of hell may be summed up in the following citations.²⁴ This description is taken from sacred authors and the lives of the saints, and may be regarded as the best expression of the orthodox faith on the matter because it is reproduced all the time and with few variations in sermons from evangelistic pulpits and in pastoral teachings.

12. “Demons are merely spirits, and the condemned who are now in hell may also be regarded merely as spirits, since only the soul descends to that place; the bodily remains are given back to the earth to be transformed into grasses, plants, minerals and liquids, unconsciously undergoing the constant metamorphoses of matter. However, the condemned, like the saints, must come back to life on the final judgment day by assuming the same bodies in which they had been known during life, never to leave them

²⁴ These citations are taken from a work entitled *Hell* by Augusto Callet – Auth.

again. What will characterize them is that the elect will return to life in purified and resplendent bodies, whereas the condemned will take on stained bodies disfigured by sin; thus, there will no longer be pure spirits in hell, but men like us. Consequently, hell is a physical, geographical and material place, since it will be populated by terrestrial creatures who have feet, hands, mouths, tongues, teeth, ears and eyes like ours, in addition to blood in their veins and nerves that feel.

“Where might this hell be? Some doctors of the Church have located it within the very entrails of our globe; others on some unknown planet. But the problem has never been resolved by any ecclesiastical council. Hence, we are reduced to pure conjecture on the matter. The only thing we can confirm is that this hell – wherever it may be – is a world composed of physical elements, but without any sun, stars or moon; more sorrowful and inhospitable, more devoid of any sprout of life and any appearance of the good than the most uninhabitable regions of this world on which we sin.

“The most prudent theologians do not dare describe the horrors of that abode in the way the Egyptians, Hindus and Greeks have, but rather limit themselves to portraying it according to the few descriptions given in the Scriptures, which depict it as: the lake of fire and brimstone of the Apocalypse; the worms of Isaiah, which feed forever on the dead bodies of Tophet; the demons tormenting the men whom they managed to lead into perdition; and the humans weeping and gnashing their teeth, according to the expression of the Evangelists.

“St. Augustine does not agree that these physical sufferings are merely reflections of mental sufferings. He sees a real lake of sulfur with real worms and real serpents attacking all the parts of the bodies of the condemned and adding their bites to the fire. Drawing upon a verse in St. Mark, he claims that although this

strange fire is as physical as ours and acts upon physical bodies, it nonetheless preserves them in the same way that salt preserves the bodies of victims. The condemned will feel the torture of that fire that burns without destroying; *it will penetrate their skin*, it will permeate and saturate all their body parts, the marrow of their bones, the pupils of their eyes, the most recondite and sensitive fibers of their being. If they could immerse themselves in the crater of a volcano, it would seem like a cool and restful place.

“Thus speak the most timid, discreet and modest theologians with complete confidence. They do not deny that there may be other bodily punishments in hell, but they say they lack sufficient knowledge to affirm it, at least as far as it concerns the awful punishment of fire and worms. However, there are more daring or more enlightened theologians who provide the most detailed, varied and complete descriptions of hell. And even though they do not know where in space this hell is situated, there are saints who claim to have seen it. They did not go there with a lyre in their hands like Orpheus, or a sword like Ulysses, but were transported there in spirit. St. Teresa belongs to this group.

“According to this saint’s report, there is a city in hell – at least she saw a sort of long, narrow alley like those that are plentiful in old cities – and she walked down it, horrified, stepping on slimy, fetid ground covered with monstrous reptiles. However, she was detained on her walk by a wall that crossed the alley. In this wall there was a niche, where she sheltered herself, but without being able to explain how she did so. She said that the place was meant for her if during her life she abused the grace granted to her by God in her cell at Avila. In spite of the extraordinary ease with which she entered this stone niche, she was unable to sit down, lie down or stand up; still less could she leave. Its horrifying walls began to close in upon her, surrounding her and pressing in upon her as if under their own power. She

felt like they were suffocating and strangling her, while at the same time flaying and chopping her into pieces. She felt herself burning and experienced every kind of anguish imaginable all at the same time.

“With no hope of rescue, there was nothing but darkness surrounding her, and yet, across that darkness, she was amazed to perceive the hideous alley where she found herself, as well as its filthy surroundings – a spectacle as unbearable to her as the confines of her prison.²⁵

“This was undoubtedly no more than a tiny corner of hell. Other spirit wanderers have been more fortunate, because they have seen great cities in hell resembling huge braziers: Babylon and Nineveh – even Rome itself – with their palaces and temples on fire and their inhabitants in chains; dealers at their counters, priests with their courtesans in festive rooms, tied screaming in chairs from which they could not free themselves, and raising flaming goblets to their parched lips; servants on their knees in boiling sewers with arms outstretched to princes, from whose hands flowed a lava stream of molten gold. Others have seen unending plains in hell, tilled by starving farmers. These fields smolder with their sweat, and because the seeds they sow are sterile, they harvest nothing and thus turn to devouring one another. Afterwards, as numerous as before and still wraith-like and starving, they leave in bands toward the horizon in a futile search for a happier land, and their abandoned fields are immediately refilled by other wandering colonies of condemned souls. Still others report having seen hell as a place of precipice-surrounded mountains, groaning forests, dry wells, fountains fed by tears, streams of blood, snowstorms in deserts of ice or boats manned by desperate men sailing across unending oceans. In other words, they have seen everything that

²⁵ In this vision we can recognize all the characteristics of nightmares, and it is probable that St. Teresa was experiencing one of those phenomena. – Auth.

the pagans used to see: a dark reflection of earth, an immeasurably increased projection of its miseries, with its respective natural sufferings eternalized; even dungeons, scaffolds and instruments of torture forged by one's own hands.

“There are also demons who take on bodies in order to better torment men in their bodies. Some have bat wings, horns, scaly hides, hooves with claws and sharpened teeth, presenting themselves armed with swords, pitchforks, pincers, burning clippers, saws, grills, bludgeons and bellows – everything fiery hot – not fulfilling any other task for all eternity other than that of butchers and cooks of human flesh. Other demons, transformed into lions or huge vipers, haul their prey off to lonely caves; some transform themselves into ravens to pluck out the eyes of certain guilty souls; still others, into flying dragons to carry their terrorized, screaming and bloody victims on their backs across dark spaces to cast them into lakes of brimstone. There are clouds of locusts and gigantic scorpions, the sight of which produces nausea and chills, and the contact of which causes convulsions. Multi-headed monsters open voracious gullets wide and shake the manes of asps that adorn their deformed heads as they crunch the condemned with bloody mandibles and then vomit them out all chewed up but alive – for they are immortal.

“These demons in tangible form, who so graphically bring to mind the gods of Amenti and Tartarus, as well as the idols worshiped by the Phoenicians, Moabites and other neighboring peoples of Judea, do not act by chance, however – all have their function and objective. The evil they practice in hell is related to the evil they formerly inspired and instigated on earth.²⁶ The condemned are punished in all their organs and senses because

²⁶ This power to continue practicing on a larger scale the evil done on a lesser scale while on earth is a peculiar punishment! It would seem more rational for them to suffer at the hands of their own malefactors as a consequence of the evil they committed on earth, rather than being given the pleasure of inflicting it upon others. – Auth.

they offended God through all their organs and senses. The transgressors of gluttony are punished by demons of gluttony, the lazy by those of laziness, the fornicators by those of fornication, and so forth, in as great a variety as there are sins. They feel cold while burning and hot while freezing. They desire rest and movement at the same time; they will always be thirsty and starving, they will be a thousand times wearier than slaves at the end of the day, sicker than the dying, feebler and more ulcerated than martyrs – forever.

“No demon refuses or will ever refuse to carry out its dreadful task. In this sense, all of them are well disciplined and faithful in fulfilling *the orders of vengeance they have received*. Without this, what would hell become? Reprobates would rest if their torturers quarreled or became weary. However, there is neither rest nor quarreling among them, for no matter how evil and numerous they are, demons understand each other from one extreme of the abyss to the other. No one in earth’s realms has ever seen an organization of subjects more obedient to their princes, armies more obedient to their commanders or monastic communities more humbly submissive to their superiors.²⁷

“Almost nothing is known about the demoniac mob, those despicable spirits that make up the legions of vampires, toads, scorpions, crows, hydras, salamanders and other nameless animals that constitute the fauna of those infernal regions. However, the names of many of the princes that command such legions are known, among whom are Belfegor, demon of wealth; Abaddon or Appolion, of murder; Beelzebub, demon of impure desires or lord

²⁷ These same demons, who are rebels against God concerning the good, display exemplary obedience as they perform their evil tasks. None of them has ever refused their duties or slowed down, nor will they for all eternity. What an odd metamorphosis has taken place in these beings who were created pure and perfect like the angels! Isn’t it certainly strange to see them provide an example of perfect understanding, full harmony and unalterable concordance, whereas humans do not even know how to live in peace on earth, but tear at each other constantly? Upon seeing the refinement of the punishments reserved for the condemned and in comparing their situation to that of the demons, one must ask who are more deserving of pity: the victims or the executioners – Auth.

of the flies, who engenders corruption; Mammon, of greed. There are Molloch, Belial, Baalgad, Ashteroth and many others, not to mention the supreme chief, the glum archangel, who in heaven is called Lucifer and in hell, Satan.

“Thus, we have summed up the idea given to us about hell from the point of view of its physical nature and also from the physical punishments that are suffered there. Examine the writings of the Fathers and the ancient doctors of the Church; question the holy legends; observe the sculptures and frontal pieces of our churches; pay attention to what is said from the pulpits, and you will learn even more.”

13. The author accompanies this picture with the following reflections. Everyone will comprehend their scope:

“The resurrection of the body is a miracle in and of itself, but God performs yet a second miracle by giving the dead body – already once used for the temporary trials of life and already once destroyed – a quality of subsistence that keeps it from being dissolved in a furnace that would vaporize even metals. We can comprehend the fact that the soul is its own executioner, that God does not persecute it but only abandons it to the unhappy state that it has chosen for itself, but the eternal abandonment of a disgraced and suffering being seems incompatible with the goodness of the Creator. However, what may be said about the soul and spiritual punishment can in no way be said about the body and corporeal punishment. In order to make corporeal punishment last forever, it would not be enough for God merely to withdraw his divine hand; on the contrary, he would have to show it, to intervene and to act; otherwise the body would be destroyed.

“Theologians assume, therefore, that after the resurrection of our bodies, God, in effect, performs that second miracle of which we spoke. First, he takes our bodies of clay from the grave that devoured them; he brings them back the way they were when they were lowered

into it, with their original infirmities and degradations resulting from age, illness and vice. He restores us to that state – decrepit, cold, gouty, full of needs, sensitive to a bee’s sting, all covered with the wounds that life and death had imprinted on us – this is the first miracle. Next, into these miserable bodies, ready to return to the dust from which they came, God infuses a property they had never possessed: immortality – that same gift that in his anger, or rather, in his mercy, he took away from Adam when he expelled him from Eden – and there we have the second miracle. While Adam was immortal, he was invulnerable; when he ceased being invulnerable, he became mortal. Death closely followed through pain.

“Resurrection, therefore, neither returns us to the physical state of innocent men nor to the physical state of the guilty. It is merely a resurrection of our former miseries, but with the extra burden of new ones that are infinitely more horrific. In some ways, it is a true creation, and the most malicious that the imagination has dared to conceive. God changes his mind, and in order to add to sinners’ spiritual torments the physical torments that will last forever, he changes, all at once and through an effect of his power, the laws and properties that he himself established at the very beginning for the components of matter. He resuscitates infirm and decaying flesh, merging into an indestructible union those elements which, when left to themselves, tend to separate from each other, and in doing so, he maintains and perpetuates this living rot of flesh against the natural order. He casts this living dust into the fire, not to purify it but to keep it such as it is: sensitive, suffering, burning, horrible, and just as he wills it to be – immortal.

“Through this miracle, God makes himself into one of the infernal executioners, for if the condemned can only attribute their spiritual ills to themselves, in compensation they can only impute their physical woes to God. Apparently, it is not enough after death for God to abandon them to the sadness, the regret and the anguish

of a soul that feels it has lost the supreme good. On that night – according to theologians – God will go looking for them at the bottom of the abyss, momentarily calling them back to life, not in order to console them but to re-clothe them with a horrendous, burning and imperishable body that is more tainted than the tunic of Dejanira²⁸; it is only then that he abandons them forever.

“But even then he does not actually abandon them, because hell, like heaven and earth, cannot subsist apart from the permanent act of his always-active will; everything would vanish if he ceased to sustain it. Consequently, God will keep his hand unceasingly upon the condemned in order to keep the fires from going out and their bodies from being consumed, willing those unfortunate immortals to contribute their eternal torture to the edification of the elect.”

14. We have rightly stated that Christian hell exceeds pagan hell. In fact, in Tartarus we see that the guilty are tortured by remorse, and always in the presence of their victims and in light of their crimes. They are humiliated by those whom they had harmed while they were alive. We see the guilty fleeing from the light that penetrates them and trying in vain to hide from the eyes that follow them. Their pride is brought down and humiliated there, and all bear the stigmas of their past; all are punished for their own wrongs to the point that for some it is sufficient to leave them to themselves, since it would be pointless to inflict them with any further punishments. However, they are *shades*, that is, *souls with fluidic bodies: an image of their earthly life*. In Tartarus, we neither see humans who have returned with their bodies of flesh to suffer physically nor the fire that penetrates their skin, saturating them to the marrow of their bones; nor do we see the lavishness and refinement of the tortures that comprise the depths of Christian

²⁸ Nessus the centaur was killed by Hercules for attempting to rape his bride Dejanira. Before dying, Nessus gave Dejanira his bloody tunic, telling her to give it to Hercules if he was unfaithful, and his affections would return. When she did this the shirt stuck to Hercules' skin and he burned to death in agony. Ovid, 'Metamorphoses' (Book IX). – Tr.

hell. In pagan hell, we find unbending but just judges who adjust the degree of punishment to the wrong, whereas in Satan's empire the condemned all are immersed in the same tortures. Everything there is based on materiality; any fairness is completely banished.

Nowadays, in the midst of the same Church, there are of course many reasonable individuals who no longer take such things literally, but who see them rather as simple allegories whose meanings require interpretation. Nevertheless, such opinions are individual and not the rule; the belief in physical hell and its consequences continues to constitute an article of faith.

15. We might ask how persons could have seen such things while in an ecstatic state if they do not in fact exist. It is not our place here to explain the source of those astonishing images, which are sometimes produced with an appearance of reality. We will only state that in principle one must remember that ecstasy is the most uncertain of all revelatory means²⁹, because such a state of over-excitement does not always result in as complete a detachment of the soul as one might believe, and in it we often encounter a reflection of our waking-state preoccupations. The ideas with which the spirit is nourished, and of which the brain – or, rather, the perispiritual envelope corresponding to the brain – retains the form or stamp, are reproduced and amplified in a mirage of vaporous forms that develop and mix together to make up strange combinations. Ecstasies of all creeds have always seen things in keeping with the faith they espouse; consequently, it comes as no surprise that ecstasies like St. Teresa were saturated with infernal ideas resulting from the verbal and written descriptions they had received, and had visions that were not, properly speaking, any more than reproductions of such ideas, thereby producing the effect of a nightmare. A devout pagan would have seen Tartarus and the Furies, just as he or she would have seen Jupiter on Olympus with a lightning bolt in his hand.

²⁹ See *The Spirits' Book*, nos. 443 and 444 – Auth.



Purgatory

1. The Gospels make no mention of purgatory, a doctrine that was only accepted by the Church in 593. It is incontestably a more rational dogma and more in accord with the justice of God than is hell, for it establishes less-harsh penalties and allows for the redemption of less-serious wrongs.

The principle of purgatory is thus founded on equity, because, if compared to human justice, it resembles temporary detention rather than a life sentence. After all, what would we think of a country that imposed the death penalty for all crimes, even simple misdemeanors? Without purgatory, there are only two extremes for souls: supreme bliss or eternal torture. According to such a theory, however, what happens to souls who are guilty only of petty wrongs? Either they must share in the bliss of the elect without having been perfected, or suffer the punishment of the worst criminals without having committed such evil. That would be neither just nor reasonable.

2. However, the idea of purgatory was necessarily incomplete, because, knowing only punishment by fire, purgatory was conceived as an attenuated version of hell. Hence, souls in purgatory also burn, but in a less intense fire. And since progress is incompatible with the dogma of eternal punishment, souls in purgatory cannot free themselves by improving themselves, but only by prayers which are said for them or which are paid for to

be said on their behalf. And if the idea was good at first, the same does not apply to its consequences; i.e., the abuses it caused. The paying for prayers transformed purgatory into a more profitable goldmine than hell.³⁰

3. The location of purgatory and the nature of the penalties endured there were never determined. It was reserved for the New Revelation to fill in this gap by explaining the causes of the earthly miseries of life, for which only the plurality of existences could possibly show us justice.

Such miseries necessarily result from the imperfections of the soul, since, if it were already perfect, it would neither commit any wrongs nor have to suffer their consequences. Those who on earth are completely sober and moderate, for example, will not suffer infirmities arising from excess. Most of the time, people are misfortunate because of their own fault; however, if they are imperfect, it must be because they were that way before coming to earth. Here, they expiate not only their current wrongs, but also previous ones that they could not expiate at the time. They expiate in one life the hardships they made others endure in a previous life. The vicissitudes they experience are a temporary correction and a warning as to the imperfections they must yet eliminate in order to avoid evil and progress toward the good. They are the lessons of experience for the soul. They seem cruel at times, but the deeper the impression they leave, the more profitable they are for the future. These vicissitudes give incessant rise to the struggles that develop intellectual and mental powers and faculties. Through these struggles, the soul reinvigorates itself morally and always triumphs after having courageously borne them until the end. The prize for victory is to be found in the spirit life, to which the soul

³⁰ Purgatory gave rise to the scandalous business of indulgences, through which entrance into heaven was paid for. This abuse was the primary cause of the Reformation, and it led Luther to reject purgatory altogether. – Auth.

radiantly and triumphantly enters like a soldier who has stood out in battle and now receives the garland.

4. In each lifetime, an opportunity is presented to the soul to enable it to take a step forward. The length of this step forward depends on its will, which enables it to rise several degrees or to remain in the same place. In the latter case, it will have wasted the opportunity, and since it will have to pay its debts sooner or later, it will have to re-start a new existence under even more dolorous conditions, because to any blemish it has not eradicated, it adds another.

Therefore, it is through successive incarnations that the soul rids itself of its imperfections. It *purges* them – in a word – until it is sufficiently pure to merit being set free from worlds of expiation to go to happier ones, leaving these behind still further on to partake of supreme bliss.

Consequently, *purgatory* is not some vague and uncertain notion; it is a physical reality that we can see, touch and endure. It is found on worlds of expiation, and earth is one of them. On earth, people expiate their past and present for the good of their future. However, contrary to the normal idea on the matter, it depends on each man or woman to shorten or prolong his or her stay on this world, according to the degree of evolution and purity attained through self-effort. We do not leave it behind by having completed a certain amount of time or because of the merits of other people, but by our own merit, according to the words of Christ, “To each according to his deeds,” words that wholly sum up the justice of God.

5. Therefore, those who suffer in this life can tell themselves that it is because they did not sufficiently purify themselves in their previous existence, and if they do not do so in this one, they will suffer further in the next. This is at the same time both equitable and logical. Since suffering is inherent to imperfection, one suffers for as long as one is imperfect, just as a sick person suffers as long

as he or she does not eliminate the cause of the illness. Thus it is that as long as those who are proud remain so, they will suffer the consequences of pride; as long as they are selfish, those of selfishness.

6. Due to its imperfections, a guilty spirit first suffers in the spirit life. Afterward, a corporeal life is given to it as a means of reparation. It is for this reason that it finds itself either with persons whom it had offended previously, in surroundings similar to those in which it had practiced evil, or in situations opposite those it had experienced – for example, poverty if it had used its wealth badly, or humiliation if it had been proud.

Expiation in the world of spirits and on the earth does not comprise a double punishment. Punishment on the earth complements the punishment begun in the spirit world, and acts to facilitate progress through effective labor; it depends on the spirit to take advantage of the opportunity. Isn't it better for it to return to earth with the possibility of gaining heaven than to be condemned without remission once it has left the earth behind? The granting of this freedom is a proof of the wisdom, the goodness and the justice of God, who wants *all human beings to put forth all their efforts to be the artisans of their own future*; if they are unhappy for a shorter or longer amount of time, they have no one to complain about but themselves, for the way of progress is always open to them.

7. If we consider how great the suffering is of certain guilty spirits in the invisible world, how terrible the situation is for some of them there, to what miseries they have become prey, and how painful this situation is for them because of their inability to foresee the end of their suffering, then we could say that they actually are in *hell*, if such a word did not imply the idea of an eternal and physical punishment. However, thanks to the Spirits³¹ revelation

³¹ When we use the term "the Spirits" with a capital "S", the text is referring to the group of highly evolved spirits who were directly involved in revealing the Spiritist Doctrine per se. – Tr.

and the examples they offer us, we know that *the length of expiation depends on the betterment of the wrongdoer*.

8. Spiritism, therefore, does not deny, but rather confirms future punishment. What it abolishes is a localized hell with its furnaces and never-ending torture. It does not deny purgatory – it shows that we are there at this very moment. It further defines and outlines this purgatory by explaining the causes of earthly miseries, thereby leading those who do not believe in it to do so.

Does it reject prayers for the dead? Quite the contrary, because suffering spirits ask for them. It elevates prayer to a duty of charity and demonstrates its effectiveness in *leading such spirits to the good*, thereby shortening their torments.³² And since Spiritism addresses one's intelligence, it has led many disbelievers to faith, inducing prayer within the hearts of those who used to scoff at it. What Spiritism affirms is that the efficacy of prayer is in the thought and not in the words; that the best prayers are those of the heart and not of the lips, the ones we say ourselves and not the ones that are said for money. Therefore, who would dare to criticize prayer?

9. Whether punishment takes place in the spirit life or on the earth, and however long it might last, it always has a termination in the near or distant future. Actually, there are only two alternatives for a spirit: *temporary punishment allotted according to its wrongs, or recompense awarded according to its merits*. Spiritism rejects the third alternative of eternal condemnation. Hell is reduced to a symbolic portrayal of the greater sufferings whose end cannot be foreseen. Purgatory is our present reality.

The word “purgatory” suggests the idea of an enclosed place; thus, it is more naturally applied to the earth – considered as a place of expiation – than to infinite space where suffering spirits roam around, and also because the nature of earthly expiation is a true purgation.

³² See *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. XXVII, “Action of Prayer” – Auth.

As humans better themselves, they will eventually supply the invisible world with only good spirits, and when these reincarnate, they in turn will only supply corporeal humankind with members who are more purified. Then earth will cease to be an expiatory world, and people will no longer suffer the miseries resulting from their imperfections. That is the transformation that is occurring at the moment, and which will raise the earth within the hierarchy of worlds.³³

10. But why didn't Christ speak of purgatory? It was because the idea did not exist at the time, and therefore there was no particular word to represent it. Christ used the word *hell* – the only one used at the time – as a generic term to denote future punishments indiscriminately. If beside the word “hell” he had placed a word equivalent to “purgatory”, he would not have been able to define its true meaning without opening up an issue reserved for the future. He would also have had to affirm the existence of two special places of punishment. Hell, in its normal meaning, revealing the idea of punishment, implicitly entails a *purgatory*, which is nothing more than a mode of punishment. The future will enlighten humankind concerning the nature of punishment, and will consequently reduce hell to its appropriate value.

If the Church found it its duty after six centuries to supplement Jesus' silence on the matter by decreeing the existence of purgatory, it is because it thought he had not said everything there was to say – but why couldn't that be true of other points as well?

³³ Ibid, chap. III, *Progress of worlds* – Auth.



The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

The Origin of the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment
• Arguments in Favor of Eternal Punishment • The
Material Impossibility of Eternal Punishment • The
Doctrine of Eternal Punishment Has Had Its Day •
Ezekiel against Eternal Punishment and Original Sin

The Origin of the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

1. The belief in eternal punishment loses ground each and every day, and one does not have to be a prophet to see that its end is close at hand. It has been fought against with such powerful and peremptory arguments that it would seem almost superfluous to concern ourselves with such a doctrine from now on, and it might be enough simply to let it die out by itself. However, we cannot contest the fact that no matter how obsolete it is becoming, it is still the rallying point for those who oppose new ideas, a point which they defend with all the more obstinacy because it is one of the most vulnerable, and also because they can foresee the consequences of its fall. In light of this, the issue deserves a serious examination.

2. The doctrine of eternal punishment had its reasons for being – as did the physical idea of hell – as long as fear acted as a restraint for souls who were little-advanced both intellectually and morally. Since they would not have been greatly impressed with the threat of spiritual punishment, neither would they have been impressed with mere temporary punishment. They would not have comprehended the justice of gradated and proportioned punishment because they would not have been capable of grasping the often-subtle nuances of good and evil, or the relative value of attenuating or aggravating circumstances.

3. The closer human beings are to the primitive state, the more materially-oriented they are. Moral sense is slow to develop in them, which is why they can only have a very imperfect idea about God and the divine attributes, and an equally vague idea of the future life. Likening God to their own nature, God is no more for them than an absolute dictator who is both terrible and invisible, like a despotic king who shuts himself up in his palace and never shows himself to his subjects. Since they cannot comprehend God's moral power, they only accept God as embodying physical power. They can only perceive of God as being armed with a lightning bolt, or as being in the midst of lightning flashes and storms, sowing destruction and ruin like invincible warriors do. A merciful and wise God would not be God at all, but rather a weak being without any means of forcing obedience. Implacable vengeance and eternal, terrifying punishments are not incompatible with their idea of God, nor repugnant to their reason. After all, humans themselves are also implacable in their cruel revenge on their enemies and are merciless toward the vanquished; hence, God, who is superior to them, must be even more terrible than they are.

In the past, such people needed religious beliefs in keeping with their unrefined nature. A completely spiritual religion, full of love and charity, could not be squared with the brutality of

their customs and passions. Thus, we cannot criticize Moses for his draconian legislation – barely sufficient to restrain an unruly people – or for having made God out to be a vindictive being. It was necessary at the time. The gentle doctrine of Jesus would not have hit a chord with them and would have proven to be powerless.

4. As the spirit develops, however, the material veil is dissipated little by little, and people become abler to comprehend spiritual matters. But this only occurs gradually. When Jesus came, he was able to proclaim a merciful God, to speak of the kingdom of God, which is not of this world, and say to humankind: “*Love one another and do good to those who hate you,*” whereas the ancients had said, “*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.*”

What kind of people lived at the time of Jesus? Were they newly created and newly incarnated souls? If they were, wouldn't that mean that God had therefore created souls who were more advanced than the ones he had created at the time of Moses? But what would have happened to the latter? Were they destined to remain asleep in their primitive state throughout all eternity? The most ordinary commonsense rejects that notion. No, the souls of Jesus' time were the same ones that had lived under the dominion of the Mosaic law, and who over many lifetimes had developed sufficiently to understand a more elevated doctrine, just as today they are even more evolved and capable of receiving an even more complete teaching.

5. Consequently, Christ could not have revealed to his contemporaries all the mysteries of the future. He himself said, “*I would have many other things to tell you if you were capable of comprehending them, and that is why I speak to you in parables.*” Especially regarding morality, that is, human duty, Christ was very explicit, because in touching upon the tangible nature of material life he knew how to make himself understood. As for other issues, however, he limited himself to using allegory to sow the seeds that would have to develop later on.

The doctrine of future punishment and reward belongs to this latter order of ideas. In particular, the idea regarding punishment could not have abruptly broken with preconceived notions. Jesus came to reveal new duties to humankind: charity and love for one's neighbor instead of hate and vengeance, and selflessness instead of selfishness. That was quite enough. He could not logically mitigate the fear of punishment reserved for sinners without at the same time mitigating the principle of duty. If he promised the kingdom of heaven to the righteous, it was therefore closed to the unrighteous. But where were they to go? A counterpart was required capable of impressing highly materialistic minds so that they could understand the spirit life. We must not forget that Jesus was addressing common folk who were the least enlightened segment of society, and who had to be confronted with somewhat palpable images rather than subtle ideas. That is why Jesus did not go into minute detail in this respect. At that time, it was enough for him to set punishment in opposition to reward.

6. If Jesus threatened the guilty with eternal fire, he also threatened that they would be cast into Gehenna. But what was Gehenna? It was nothing more than a city trash dump outside Jerusalem. Should this also be interpreted literally? No, it was one of those powerful images that he used to impress the masses. The same applies regarding eternal fire; if not, he would have been contradicting himself by exalting the clemency and mercy of God, because clemency and inexorability are opposite sentiments that annul each other. Thus, it would be a misunderstanding of the meaning of Jesus' words by attributing to them the sanction of the dogma of eternal punishment, for his entire teaching proclaimed the compassion of the Creator.

In the *Lord's Prayer*, Jesus teaches us to say, "*Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us,*" so if the guilty had no hope of forgiveness, it would be futile to ask for it. Is this forgiveness unconditional, however? Is it grace perceived

as a pure and simple remission of the punishment that has been incurred? No. The degree of forgiveness depends on the way in which we ourselves forgive, which means that if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. In making the forgiveness of offenses an absolute condition, God could not require fragile humans to do what Almighty God would not do. The *Lord's Prayer* is a daily negation of the idea of the eternal vengeance of God.

7. For people who had only a confused notion about the spirituality of the soul, the idea of physical fire was not so shocking, since it could also be found in the popular belief coming from the pagan idea of hell that was almost universally propagated. In the same way, eternal punishment had nothing about it that would be repugnant to a people who had for many centuries been ruled by the laws of a terrifying Yahweh. In Jesus' way of thinking, eternal fire could have therefore been nothing more than a simple image, but it would not have mattered much to him if it were interpreted literally. It would serve as a restraint. He knew very well that time and progress would eventually take care of the allegorical meaning, especially when, according to his prediction, the Spirit of Truth would come to enlighten humankind about all things.

The essential character of unforgivable punishment is the *inefficacy of repentance*, but Jesus never said that repentance would not warrant the Father's grace. On the contrary, on every occasion he proclaimed a kind and merciful God who was ready to receive the prodigal son as soon as he returned to the paternal home. Jesus only revealed an unbending God to the stubborn sinner; nevertheless, if God had punishment in one hand, in the other God always held forgiveness and was ready to grant it to any guilty individual who sincerely repented. This is certainly not the portrayal of an unmerciful God. We must also point out the fact that Jesus never pronounced unforgivable condemnation against anyone, even against those who were guiltiest.

8. In keeping with the character of the various peoples, all primitive religions had warrior gods who fought at the head of their armies. The Hebrews' Yahweh provided his armies with a thousand ways to exterminate their enemies, and he rewarded them with victory or punished them with defeat. According to their idea of God, the ancients believed they could honor or appease God with the blood of animals or humans, which gave rise to the bloody sacrifices that represented such a salient role in all the religions of antiquity. The Jews had abolished human sacrifices, but in spite of Christ's teachings, Christians for a long time deemed it honorable to the Creator to deliver thousands of those whom they labeled as heretics to torture and the stake. This comprised another real form of human sacrifice, since they did it to the *greater glory of God* and accompanied it with religious ceremony. Even today, the *God of Hosts* is invoked before battle and glorified after victory – so many times for unjust and anti-Christian causes.

9. Humankind has taken so long to rid itself of its habits, prejudices and primitive ideas! Forty centuries separate us from Moses, and our Christian generation still sees traces of ancient, barbaric usages that are consecrated or at least approved of by today's religion! The unwavering assertions of the *unorthodox* – those who were regarded as heretics – were necessary to end the burnings at the stake and to bring about an understanding of the true nature of God. However, even though there are no more burnings, material and mental persecutions still prevail – so entrenched is the human idea of divine cruelty. Nourished by sentiments that have been ingrained since infancy, should people marvel that the God to whom they have been introduced and whom they have honored with barbarous acts condemns the guilty to suffer eternally and mercilessly watches them while they suffer?

Yes, the philosophers and the so-called impious are the ones who have been offended at seeing the name of God profaned by acts unworthy of deity. These are the individuals who have shown others

the fullness of God's grandeur, ridding the divine of the passions and pettiness attributed to it by a less-enlightened belief system. On this point, religion has gained in dignity what it has lost in outward prestige, because if there are now fewer people devoted to form, there are more who are sincerely religious through sentiment and the heart.

However, alongside these, how many have been unreflectingly led to deny Providence altogether! The way in which religion has stood still by being antagonistic toward the progress of human reason and without knowing how to reconcile it with religious beliefs has led some to degenerate into deism, and others into outright disbelief – not to mention pantheism. In other words, people have turned themselves into their own god in the absence of a more perfect one.

Arguments in Favor of Eternal Punishment

10. Let us return to the dogma of eternal punishment. Here is the main argument invoked in its favor: People believe that the seriousness of the offense is in proportion to the quality of the offense, that is, an offense committed against a sovereign would be regarded as more serious than one against a common individual, and for that reason would be more severely punished. And since God is much more than a sovereign, because God is infinite, then any offense against God also becomes infinite, and therefore merits a punishment of the same nature, i.e. eternal.

Rebuttal: Any rebuttal is a reasoning process that must have its departure point, a basis upon which it is supported – premises, in other words. We find these premises in the actual attributes of God: *God is unique, eternal, unchangeable, immaterial, omnipotent, supremely just and good, infinite in all perfections.*

It is impossible to conceive of God in any other way, since without infinite perfection, God would not be God, and that

would mean that we could conceive of some other being with qualities that God might not possess. In order for God to be above all other beings, it is necessary that no other being exceed or even equal God in any way. Thus, God must be wholly infinite.

Since they are infinite, the divine attributes can neither increase nor decrease without ceasing to be infinite; otherwise, they would not be infinite and God would not be perfect. If just one of the divine attributes were decreased one tiny bit, God *per se* would no longer exist, because it would then be possible for there to be another being that was more perfect.

The infiniteness of a quality excludes the possibility of the existence of any other opposite quality which might diminish or annul it. An *infinitely good* being could not be the least bit evil, nor could an *infinitely evil* being be the least bit good; an object could not be absolutely black if it contained the least shade of white, and vice-versa.

Now that this departure point has been established, let us refute the above-stated argument.

11. Only an infinite being could make something else that is infinite. Since human beings are finite in virtue, knowledge, power, aptitudes and earthly lifespan, they can only produce limited things.

If humans could be infinite in the evil they commit, they could also be infinite in the good they do, and would therefore be equal with God. However, if humans were infinitely good, they would not commit evil, because absolute good completely excludes all possibility of evil.

If we were to believe that a temporary offense against the Divinity could be infinite, and if God were to seek vengeance through an *infinite* punishment, God would thus be *infinitely vengeful*. And if God were infinitely vengeful, God could not be infinitely good and merciful, since such divine attributes would

exclude each other. If God were not infinitely good, God would not be perfect; therefore, God would cease to be God.

If God is unforgiving toward a guilty person who repents, God is not merciful; if God is not merciful, God ceases to be infinitely good. But why would God give humankind a law of forgiveness if God as God did not forgive? The result would be that if humans were to forgive their enemies and return good for evil, they would be better than God, who remains deaf to the repentance of those who have offended God, denying them the slightest attenuation of punishment *forever*.

Being omnipresent and all-seeing, God must also see the tortures of the condemned, and if God were to remain forever insensitive to their wailings, God would be eternally merciless; without mercy, God would not be infinitely good.

12. Supporters of eternal punishment respond that the sinner who repents *before dying* receives God's mercy and that even the guiltiest can receive such grace. We do not doubt this at all, and we also understand that God only forgives those who repent, while remaining unbending toward those who callously do not. Nonetheless, if God is all-merciful toward the repentant soul before death, then why not toward those who repent afterward? Why would repentance be efficacious only during life – a brief instant – and not during the eternity that has no end? If circumscribed *to a given time*, the divine goodness and mercy would not be infinite, and God would thus not be infinitely good.

13. God is supremely just. Supreme justice is not absolutely unforgiving, nor does it leave any wrong unpunished. On the contrary, it considers both good and evil in the strictest manner, and rewards the former and punishes the latter with perfect equity, without ever being mistaken.

If a soul can be punished forever without any hope of clemency or forgiveness due to fleeting wrongs that always result

from humans' imperfect nature and often from their environment, then there is no symmetry between the wrong and its punishment; therefore, there is no justice.

If the guilty reconcile themselves to God, repenting and asking to right an evil that has been committed, that in itself is a return to the good and good sentiments. However, if punishment were unforgivable, this return to the good would be pointless, since God would not take the good into account and therefore would not practice justice. In the world of humans, the condemned who mend their ways have their sentence commuted and often are even forgiven; thus, there would be more equity in human justice than in divine justice.

If a punishment were incommutable, it would be futile to repent, and the guilty, with no hope of gaining anything by righting themselves, may as well persist in evil; therefore, not only would God condemn them to suffer forever, but they would also remain evil forever. There is neither goodness nor justice in this.

14. Since God is infinite in every way, God must encompass both the past and the future. Upon creating a soul, God must know if it will seriously fail and thus be eternally condemned. If God does not know this, then the divine wisdom ceases to be infinite and God ceases to be God. However, if God does know and intentionally goes ahead to create a soul that is condemned from its very creation to unending torment, God ceases to be good.

If God, however, could confer grace upon a repentant sinner and *remove it from hell*, then eternal punishment ceases to exist and the human conception of it is refuted.

15. To sum up, the doctrine of absolute eternal punishment leads to the negation, or, at least, to the weakening of some of God's attributes, and is thus incompatible with absolute perfection. This leads one to the following conclusion: if God is perfect, there is no eternal punishment; if there is eternal punishment then God is not perfect.

16. The following argument is also called upon to support the dogma of eternal punishment:

Since the reward conferred upon the righteous is eternal, then its counterpart must be found in eternal punishment. It is correct to draw a parallel between punishment and reward.

Counterargument: Has God created souls to make them happy or unhappy?

Obviously, a creature's happiness should be the aim of the Creator, or God would not be good. Individuals attain happiness through their own merit, and once such merit has been acquired, it is never lost; otherwise, the soul could regress. Eternal happiness is therefore the consequence of its immortality.

However, before reaching perfection it has struggles to bear and battles to win over its evil passions. Since it was not created perfect but *susceptible of being so* in order for it to receive the merit of its works then the soul may fail as a consequence of its natural weakness. But if this weakness were to be punished forever, one would have to ask why God did not create it stronger in the first place. Punishment is before anything else a warning as to an evil that has already been committed and it serves the purpose of leading the soul back onto the moral path. If punishment were irremissible, then the desire to improve would be superfluous. Moreover, the goal of creation could never be reached, because there would be beings that had been predestined to either happiness or unhappiness. If a soul can repent, it can be regenerated, and if it can be regenerated, it can aspire to happiness. Would God be just in denying such means?

Since the good is the supreme goal of creation, then happiness, which is its reward, must be eternal, and punishment, as the means of reaching it, must be temporary. The most ordinary sense of human justice proscribes perpetually punishing someone who shows a desire to practice the good.

17. A final argument in favor of eternal punishment is as follows:

The fear of eternal punishment acts as a restraint. Doing away with it and no longer having anything to fear would lead people to plunge into all sorts of excess.

Counterargument: This line of reasoning would be correct if the non-eternality of punishment might lead to the suppression of all divine penal sanctions.

Happiness or unhappiness in the future life is the strict consequence of God's justice, whereas viewing it as parallel to the situation of a moral person and an evil one would be a denial of such justice. However, in spite of not being eternal, punishment is no less distressing, for the greater the conviction, the greater the fear. A punishment in which one does not believe is no restraint, and this is the case of eternal punishment.

As we have already affirmed, the belief in eternal punishment had its usefulness and reason for being at one time; however, today it not only has failed to frighten, but has even led to disbelief. Before rendering this belief a necessity, it is necessary to demonstrate its reality. Furthermore, we would have to observe its effectiveness regarding those who accept it and whether or not they put forth the effort to demonstrate it. Unfortunately, among them there are many who show by their actions that they have no fear of eternal punishment whatsoever. Thus, if the fear of eternal punishment is powerless to repress evil among those who profess to believe in it, what hold could it possibly have over those who do not?

The Physical Impossibility of Eternal Punishment

18. Up to this point, we have only fought the dogma of eternal punishment by using reasoning. We shall now show how it

is contrary to the hard facts that we have observed and that have proven its impossibility.

According to this dogma, the fate of the soul after death is irrevocably set, and the soul is thus definitively barred from any further progress. Well, does the soul progress or not? That is the question. If it progresses, eternal punishment is impossible.

Can this progress be doubted, given the enormous variety of moral and intellectual aptitudes represented on the earth from the primitive to the civilized individual, and confirmed by the differences that one particular culture may display from one century to the next? If we were to believe that they are not the same souls who have reincarnated, we would have to believe that God creates souls of all degrees of development according to time and place, favoring some while relegating others to perpetual inferiority. This would be incompatible with justice, which must be the same for all creatures.

19. It is undeniable that a morally and intellectually less evolved soul, such as that of barbaric peoples, cannot contain the same elements of happiness and the same aptitudes for enjoying the splendors of the infinite as the soul whose faculties are broadly developed. Therefore, if these souls could not progress, they could enjoy only a highly reduced happiness, even under the most favorable circumstances. In order to be in harmony with strict justice, we must thus draw the conclusion that more highly advanced souls were less evolved souls at an earlier time, but who progressed later. However, here we arrive at the big question of the *plurality of existences* as the only and rational means of resolving the problem. Nonetheless, let us disregard this issue for the time being and consider the soul from the point of view that it only lives a single existence.

20. Let us take as an example a young man about 20 years old, who, like so many others at his age, is uneducated, possessed of base instincts and skeptical (he denies both God and the soul); a troublemaker engaged in all kinds of perversity. Later on, this young

man finds himself in a more favorable environment. He works, receives an education, gradually rights himself and finally becomes a pious individual. Isn't this a tangible example of the soul's progress during life, something we see happening every day? Now this man dies as a saint at an old age and naturally his salvation is ensured. However, what would have been his fate if an accident had put an end to his life forty or fifty years too soon? He would have found himself in all the right conditions to be damned, and once damned, all progress would have stopped. We therefore see a man who was saved only because he lived long enough, someone who, according to the doctrine of eternal punishment, would have been lost forever if he had lived less time as a result of a fortuitous accident. If his soul could progress during that given amount of time, then why couldn't it progress further after death if an outside cause had prevented it from doing so during earthly life? Why would God refuse it the means of repentance? Repentance, albeit late, would have come in due time, but if at the moment of death the soul became irrevocably condemned, its repentance would be fruitless for all eternity and its aptitude for progress destroyed forever.

21. The dogma of absolute, eternal punishment is therefore incompatible with the progress of the soul, since it is confronted with an unsurpassable barrier. These two principles obviously cancel each other out – if one is true, the other cannot be. But which one is, in fact, true? The law of progress is obvious. It is not a theory; it is a fact corroborated by experience. It is a divine, non-proscribable law of nature. It is thus a law that cannot be reconciled with the other, which is why the other is untrue. If the dogma of eternal punishment were actually true, St. Augustine, St. Paul and so many others would never have seen heaven if they had died before completing the progress that led to their conversion.

This last assertion will no doubt lead to the response that the conversion of these saintly personages was not the result of

their soul's progress, but rather the grace that was granted them and by which they were touched.

However, this is simply a game of words. If those saints practiced evil and then the good, it is because they became better, and they therefore progressed. Did God grant them a special favor, the divine grace to right themselves? Why favor them more than others? It always comes back to the doctrine of special privilege, which is incompatible with the justice of God and the divine love that is the same for all creatures.

According to the Spiritist Doctrine – according to the very words of the Gospel – and according to logic and strictest justice, human beings are the children of their own deeds both during life and after death – nothing is owed to favoritism. God rewards them for their efforts and punishes them for their negligence for as long as they persist in it.

The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment Has Had Its Day

22. The belief in eternal punishment was maintained as a healthy restraint until humankind was at a point to understand its moral aptitude. The same applies to children, whom one restrains for awhile with threats of fanciful beings to frighten them. However, the time will come when they reach the age of reason and reject such chimeras by themselves, and it will then be absurd to think they can be controlled by such means. If those who guide them try to continue suggesting to them that such fables are in fact true, they will lose their trust. This is the case with humankind, who has left its infancy and its leading-strings.³⁴ People are no longer those passive

³⁴ Narrow strips of fabric attached to children's clothing used in the 17th and 18th centuries to keep them from straying too far or from falling as they learned to walk. – Tr.

instruments bowed under material powers, nor are they gullible creatures who accept everything with “eyes wide shut”.

23. Belief is an act of understanding, and as such cannot be imposed. If during a certain period of humankind the dogma of eternal punishment might have been inoffensive and even beneficial, the time has come in which it has become dangerous. In fact, if it is imposed as absolute truth while reason rejects it, one of two things will necessarily result: people who want to believe in and seek a more rational faith will either avoid those who continue to profess it, or they will completely disbelieve everything altogether. Whoever might want to study the matter rationally will see that in our day the dogma of eternal punishment has made more atheists and materialists than all other philosophies combined.

Ideas follow an incessantly progressive course, and one cannot govern people without following it. Intending to remain stationary on it, to regress, or simply to lag behind while it advances is to lose oneself. Following or not following this evolutionary course is a matter of life and death for religions as well as for governments. Is this good? Is it bad? It is certainly bad for those who, living in the past, see that past disappear from under them; however, for those who look to the future, it is the law of progress – a law of God. And against God’s laws all resistance is futile. To fight against God’s will is to ask for defeat.

Then why use every effort to uphold a belief that has fallen into decrepitude, and which actually produces more harm than good to religion itself? Ah! Sad to say, but a material issue controls the religious issue here. The belief in eternal punishment has been largely exploited by the idea that the doors of heaven can be opened with money, and that one can save oneself from hell thereby. The amount garnered in this manner, both yesterday and today, is incalculable; it is the tax paid on the fear of eternity. Since this fee is optional, the profit is always in proportion to the belief, and if

the belief no longer exists, collections would disappear. Children will willingly give up their piece of cake to whomever promises to chase away the werewolf, but when they no longer believe in werewolves, they will keep the cake.

24. The New Revelation provides more sensible notions about the future life and shows that each one of us can promote our own happiness through our own efforts. Consequently, this Revelation must encounter tremendous opposition because it puts a stop to one of the most lucrative sources of income. Such has always been the case when a new discovery or invention abolishes custom. Whoever makes their living according to old and lingering processes will never cease to defend them and will discredit all new and more economical ones. For example, despite the benefits it has brought to society, do you think the printing press was praised by copyists when it was introduced? No, they obviously must have cursed it. The same has applied regarding various other machines, the railroad and hundreds of other discoveries and applications.

In the eyes of disbelievers, the dogma of eternal punishment is a simple foolishness that they laugh at. To philosophers, the dogma has a social gravity because of the abuses it engenders, while truly religious persons have the dignity of a religion that is interested in destroying the abuses this dogma gives rise to.

Ezekiel against Eternal Punishment and Original Sin

25. Those who intend to find justification for eternal punishment in the Bible can be refuted with unambiguous texts to the contrary. The following words from Ezekiel are the most explicit negation not only of irremissible punishment, but also

of the notion that the responsibility of the sin committed by the father of humankind³⁵ could be passed down to the human race:

¹ *The Lord spoke to me again, saying,* ² *“Where does this parable come from, which you use amongst yourselves and which is proverbially affirmed in Israel: ‘Fathers’, you say, ‘have eaten sour grapes and their children’s teeth are set on edge?’”* ³ *“As I live,” says the Lord God, “this parable shall no longer be used amongst you as a proverb in Israel.* ⁴ *For all souls belong to me; the child’s soul is with me as well as the father’s; the soul that has sinned shall die.”*

⁵ *“If a man is righteous and acts according to equity and justice;”... ⁷ “if he does not sadden or afflict anyone; if he returns to his debtor the guarantee that he has made; if he takes nothing from the assets of another by violence; if he gives his bread to whomever is hungry; if he clothes those who are naked; ⁸ if he is not usurious or does not receive back more than what he has given; if he avoids iniquity and promotes a conciliatory judgment between two who are in conflict; ⁹ if he walks according to my precepts and observes my statutes to work in harmony with the truth, then such a man is righteous and will certainly live long,” says the Lord God.*

¹⁰ *“If that man has a son who becomes a thief, who sheds blood or commits any such sins...¹³ that son shall certainly die for having committed such detestable acts, and his blood shall be upon his own head.”*

¹⁴ *“Now if that son has a son who sees all the crimes committed by his father, he will be afraid and avoid imitating him...”*

¹⁷ *“This son will not die on account of the iniquity of his father, but shall certainly live. ¹⁸ His father, who had oppressed others because of his calumnies, and who had committed criminal acts in the midst of his people, died on account of his own iniquity.”*

¹⁹ *“If you ask, ‘Why won’t the son bear the iniquity of his father?’ it is because the son has lived according to equity and justice; he has*

³⁵ That is, the biblical Adam. – Tr.

kept all my precepts; he has practiced them and that is why he shall certainly live.”

²⁰ *“The soul that has sinned shall itself die; the son will not bear the iniquity of the father and the father will not bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be credited to him and the unrighteousness of the unrighteous shall be credited to him.”*

²¹ *“If the unrighteous man repents of all the sins he has committed, if he observes all my precepts, if he labors according to equity and righteousness, he shall certainly live and not die. ²² I will no longer remember all the iniquity he has committed; he shall live because of the works of righteousness that he has practiced.”*

²³ *“Why would I wish the unrighteous to die, says the Lord God, “rather than wishing their conversion and abandonment of the evil path they have been following?” (Ezekiel 18: 1-23)*

“Speak these words to them: ‘I swear by my name,’ says the Lord God, ‘that I do not wish for the death of the unrighteous, but that they convert, that they abandon the path of evil and that they live.’” (Ezekiel. 33:11)



Future Punishment according to Spiritism

The Flesh Is Weak • Sources of the Spiritist Doctrine concerning
Future Punishment • The Penal Code of the Future Life

The Flesh Is Weak

There are certain depraved inclinations that are obviously inherent to the spirit because they are more related to the moral than to the physical, whereas others seem more the result of the physical organism, and for that reason those who possess them are deemed less responsible. These are inclinations to anger, laziness, lust, etc.

Nowadays, spiritualist philosophers fully realize that the areas of the brain corresponding to the various aptitudes owe their development to the activity of the spirit, and, consequently, that this development is an effect rather than a cause. Individuals are not musicians because they have the gift of music; they have the gift of music because their spirits are already musicians.

If the activity of the spirit acts upon the brain, it must also act upon the other physical parts of the organism. In this way, the spirit is the artisan of the body, which is molded by it, so to speak, in the fashion of the spirit's needs and the manifestation of its

tendencies. Thus, the corporeal perfection of certain individuals is not the product of a distinct creation but rather is the result of the efforts of the spirit, who perfects its physical envelope as its faculties increase.

As a natural consequence of this principle, the spirit's moral dispositions should modify the qualities of the blood, making it more active or less so, thereby causing more abundant or less abundant secretions of bile and other fluids. That is why a glutton's mouth waters before an appetizing dish, for example. It is obviously not the food per se that excites the taste organs, since it doesn't even come in contact with them. It is the spirit, whose sensitivity is awakened, and who acts upon the organ through thought. For another person such a sight would produce no effect whatsoever. Furthermore, it is for the same reason that a sensitive person sheds tears easily. It is not an abundance of tears that makes the spirit sensitive, but rather the spirit's sensitiveness that elicits an abundant flow of tears. Under the influence of sensitiveness, the organism conditions itself to the normal disposition of this sort of spirit in the same way that it conditions itself to the disposition of the gluttonous spirit.

According to this line of thought, one can understand that a hot-tempered spirit is behind a bilious temperament, which does not mean that the person is hot-tempered from being bilious, but is bilious because his or her spirit is hot-tempered. The same applies regarding all the other instinctive dispositions: an indolent and weak spirit will put the body in a state of weakness with respect to its character, whereas an active and energetic spirit will give the blood and nerves qualities that are exactly the opposite. The spirit's action upon the physical body is so obvious that we often see grave organic disorders produced by violent mental disturbances.

The common expression, "Emotion makes the blood boil" is not as devoid of meaning as one might suppose. What could make the blood boil if not the mental dispositions of the spirit?

Consequently, one must admit – at least partially – that the temperament is determined by the spirit's nature, which is the cause and not the effect. We say “partially” because there are cases in which the physical obviously influences the mental, such as when a morbid or abnormal state is determined by an external and accidental cause independent of the spirit, such as temperature, climate, congenital physical defects, temporary illness, etc. The spirit's mental state in such cases may be affected in its manifestation by a pathological state without its intrinsic nature being modified. Blaming its errors on the weakness of the flesh is no more than an excuse to escape responsibility. *The flesh is only weak because the spirit is weak.* This reverses the issue and leaves the spirit fully responsible for all its acts. Since the flesh is devoid of both thought and will, it could never prevail over the spirit, who is a *thinking being* possessed of its *own will*. The spirit is what gives the flesh the qualities corresponding to its instincts, just like the artist who impresses a material work with the stamp of his or her spirit. When freed from its animal-like instincts, it develops a body that is no longer a tyrant over its spiritual aspirations, and that is when men and women begin eating to live and stop living to eat, so to speak.

Moral responsibility for the acts of life therefore becomes intact, but reason tells us that the consequences of the spirit's responsibility must be in proportion to its intellectual development. Thus, the more enlightened it is, the more blameworthy it becomes, since with intelligence and moral sense are born the notions of good and evil, of righteousness and unrighteousness.

This law explains why medicine is ineffective in certain cases. Since the temperament is an effect and not a cause, every effort to alter it is ineffective in light of the mental dispositions of the spirit, who puts up an unconscious resistance that neutralizes the therapeutic action. Consequently, it is the primary cause that

must be acted upon. Thus, if you can, offer courage to the coward, and you will soon see the physiological effects of fear subside. This proves once more the need to take the spiritual influence on the organism into account in the art of healing. (See *La Revue Spirite*, Mar. 1869, p. 65)

Sources of the Spiritist Doctrine regarding Future Punishment

Regarding future punishment, the Spiritist Doctrine is not based on some preconceived theory – it is not a matter of one theory replacing another. In everything, it is based on observation, and that is what gives it its full authority. No one ever imagined that souls after death might be found in this or that condition, but it is these very souls – who have departed the earth – who have come to initiate us into the mysteries of the future life. They themselves describe their happy or unfortunate situations, their impressions, their transformation after the death of their body; in other words, they complete Christ’s teachings on the matter.

However, we are not just dealing with the revelations of only one spirit, who might see things from its own point of view and from only one perspective, or who might still be dominated by earthly prejudices; nor are we dealing with a revelation made exclusively to one particular individual who might be led by appearances or by an *ecstatic vision* that is susceptible to delusion and often is no more than the reflection of an over-active imagination.³⁶ Instead, we are dealing with countless examples furnished by spirits of all categories – from the most high-ordered down to the least on the scale – through many intermediaries (mediums) scattered throughout the earth, so that the revelation would not be any one individual’s special

³⁶ See chap. VI, no. 7, and *The Spirits’ Book*, nos. 443, 444 – Auth.

privilege. Anyone may test and observe it without having to believe in it based upon the faith of someone else.

The Penal Code of the Future Life

Therefore, Spiritism has not come on its own authority to formulate a code of fantasy; its laws regarding the future of the soul have been deduced from studying the facts and can be summed up in the following points:

1) In the spirit life, the soul or spirit suffers the consequences of all the imperfections that it could not correct during its corporeal life. Its happy or unhappy state is inherent to its degree of purity or impurity.

2) Complete happiness is inherent to perfection, that is, the complete purification of the spirit. Every imperfection is at the same time a cause of suffering and the privation of blessedness, just as every acquired quality is a source of blessedness and the attenuation of suffering.

3) *There is not one single imperfection of the soul that does not carry disagreeable and inevitable consequences, just as there is not one single good quality that is not a source of joy.* The amount of punishment is therefore proportional to the amount of imperfection, just as joy is proportional to the soul's good qualities.

A soul that has ten imperfections, for example, suffers more than one with only three or four, and when these ten imperfections are reduced by a quarter or a half, it will suffer less. When all its imperfections are gone, the soul will then be perfectly happy, just as on earth, those who have many maladies suffer more than those who have none or only one. For the same reason, the soul who has ten good qualities has more joy than another who has fewer.

4) Due to the law of progress that endows every soul with the potential to acquire the good it yet lacks and to free itself from

the evil it yet possesses, according to its own efforts and will, then the future is wide open to all individuals. God does not repudiate any of God's children – they are received into the divine heart to the degree they approach perfection; thus, all are left to the merit of their own works.

5) Since suffering depends on the amount of imperfection, and joy on the amount of perfection, the soul bears within itself its own punishment wherever it may be without having to be in some circumscribed place. Hell is wherever there are suffering souls, and heaven is wherever there are joyous souls.

6) The good and evil we do result from the qualities we possess. Not doing good whenever we can is therefore the result of some imperfection. If every imperfection is the source of some kind of suffering, the spirit must suffer not only for the evil it has done but also for the good that it has failed to do.

7) The spirit suffers for the evil it has done in such a way that *with its attention constantly directed toward the consequences of such evil*, it better understands its problems and is thus led to correct itself.

8) Since God's justice is infinite, good and evil are strictly taken into account. If there is not one evil act, one evil thought that does not bring fatal consequences, neither is there one single meritorious act, one good movement of the soul or the smallest merit that will be lost – *even for the most perverse individuals*, because it indicates that progress has begun.

9) Every wrong committed, every evil act entails a debt that must be paid, if not in one existence, then in the next or other future ones, for all existences are in solidarity with one another. A debt that is paid in one existence will not have to be paid a second time.

10) The spirit suffers, whether in the corporeal world or in the spirit world, as a consequence of its imperfections. The misery, the vicissitudes endured in corporeal existence originate from

imperfections and are expiations of wrongs committed both in the present and in previous lives.

By the nature of the sufferings and vicissitudes one endures in the corporeal life, one can deduce the nature of the wrongs committed in a previous existence and the imperfections that caused them.

11) Expiation varies according to the nature and seriousness of the wrong; hence, one and the same wrong can result in several expiations, depending on the attenuating or aggravating circumstances in which it was committed.

12) There is no absolute or uniform rule as to the nature and duration of the punishment. The only general law is that every wrong will be punished and every meritorious act will be rewarded *according to its worth*.

13) The duration of the punishment depends on how much the guilty spirit improves itself. No condemnation for a set amount of time is declared against it. What God requires for the end of suffering is a serious, effective improvement and an authentic return to the good.

In this way, the spirit is always the arbiter of its own fate and can prolong its suffering through persistence in evil, or it can soften and shorten it through its efforts in practicing the good.

Condemnation for a set time would have the double inappropriateness of continuing the punishment of the repentant spirit or of freeing it from suffering while it still persists in evil. And God, who is just, only punishes evil *while it still exists* and ceases to punish it *when it no longer exists*.³⁷ Likewise, since moral evil is in and of itself a cause of suffering, suffering will last as long as the evil remains, or it will decrease in intensity as the evil lessens.

14) The duration of the punishment being subordinate to improvement, it would follow that a guilty spirit who never

³⁷ See chap VI, no. 25, quote from Ezekiel – Auth.

improved itself would suffer forever, and the punishment for such a spirit would be eternal.

15) A condition inherent to less evolved spirits is that they cannot see the end of their situation, and they thus believe they will suffer forever. This is what makes punishment seem eternal to them.³⁸

16) Even though repentance is the first step toward regeneration, it is not enough by itself; *expiation* and *reparation* are still required.

Repentance, expiation and reparation therefore comprise the three necessary conditions for erasing the remnants of a wrong and its consequences. Repentance softens the rigors of expiation because it awakens hope and prepares the way for rehabilitation. Only reparation, however, can annul the effect and thereby destroy the cause; otherwise, *forgiveness would be an act of grace alone and not an annulment of the wrong.*

17) Repentance can occur at any time and in any place, but if later, the guilty spirit suffers longer.

Until the last vestiges of a wrong have disappeared, expiation consists in the physical and mental sufferings that are its consequences, whether in the current lifetime, whether in the spirit life after death, or in a later corporeal existence.

Reparation consists in righting a wrong that has been done to somebody. Those who do not repair their wrongs in one existence either out of weakness or ill will, will find themselves in a later existence being placed in contact with the same persons who had had a complaint against them previously, and in conditions voluntarily chosen beforehand. This occurs in such a way as to give them the opportunity to prove their sincerity to

³⁸ *Perpetual* is synonymous with *eternal*. We say 'the perpetual snows,' 'the eternal ice of the poles', and we also say 'the perpetual secretary of the Academy', which does not mean that these things should be regarded as truly eternal but only as being of an undetermined length of time. *Eternal* and *perpetual* are used in the sense of *undetermined*. In this sense, one may say that sufferings are eternal if one understands them to be of unlimited duration. Thus, for the spirit, its sufferings seem eternal because it cannot see their end – Auth.

those whom they had offended by doing as much good to them as they had done evil.

Not all wrongs result in direct and immediate harm. In such cases, reparation occurs in their doing what they had failed to do, fulfilling duties they had neglected or ignored, or accomplishing missions at which they had failed; in other words, practicing the good in compensation for former evil: becoming humble if they had been proud, caring if they had been austere, charitable if they had been selfish, benevolent if they had been perverse, industrious if they had been lazy, useful if they had been useless, sensible if they had been self-indulgent, demonstrative of a good example if they had been a bad one, an so on and so forth. This is how the spirit progresses by taking advantage of its past.³⁹

18) Imperfect spirits are banned from happy worlds, whose harmony they would upset. They remain on less evolved worlds where they expiate their wrongs through the tribulations of life and purify themselves of their imperfections until they deserve to incarnate on more physically and morally evolved worlds.

If we could conceive of a circumscribed place of punishment, it would be precisely on these worlds of expiation, because it is around such worlds that imperfect discarnate spirits throng,

³⁹ The requirement for reparation is a principle of strict justice, which can be regarded as a true law for a spirit's moral rehabilitation. It is a doctrine that no religion has yet proclaimed. Some persons reject it because they think it would be more convenient for them to be able to erase their wrongs simply by the kind of repentance that involves only a few words and the help of certain formulas. However, even though they might be convinced that they are thus freed, they will find out later that it was not sufficient. We might ask them if this principle is not affirmed by human law, and if God's justice could be inferior to that of humans, or if they themselves would be satisfied when some individual who had harmed them by abusing their trust limited him or herself to merely apologizing. So, why would they feel excused before an obligation that every honest individual should fulfill to the best of his or her ability?

When this perspective on reparation is finally engrained in the belief of the masses, it will act as a more powerful brake than hell and eternal punishment, because it will apply to their current lifetime and will enable them to understand the reasons behind the troublesome circumstances of their current situation – Auth.

waiting for a new existence that will enable them to repair the evils they have done, which in turn will enable them to progress.

19) Since a spirit always has its free will, it sometimes progresses quite slowly and its obstinacy in evil can be quite tenacious. This state can persist for years and even centuries, but the time will finally come in which its stubbornness in defying God's justice abates as a result of its suffering, and despite its boasting it recognizes the superior power that dominates it. At that moment, the first light of repentance dawns and God enables it to catch a glimpse of hope.

No spirit is conditioned to never bettering itself; otherwise, it would be fatalistically destined to remain eternally of a low order and it would escape the law of progress that providentially governs all creatures.

20) No matter how little-evolved and perverse spirits may be, *God never abandons them*. Everybody has their guardian angel watching out for them, supervising the expansion of their soul, making every effort to awaken good thoughts and the desire to evolve, and encouraging them to repair in a new existence the evil they had done in a previous one. However, guardian angels act almost always in a concealed way, without exerting any pressure. A spirit must progress by the *impulse of its own will* – never by any coercion. Good and evil are practiced in virtue of the spirit's free will, without being fatalistically pushed in one direction or the other. If the spirit persists in evil, it will suffer the consequences for as long as it does so, but if it takes one step toward the good, it will immediately feel the beneficial effects.

It would be erroneous to believe that because of the law of progress the certainty of sooner or later attaining to perfection and happiness could stimulate persistence in evil with a view to repenting later on; first, because a little-evolved spirit cannot ascertain the end of its situation; second, because, since it is the

author of its own unhappiness, it finally winds up understanding that it depends on itself alone to end it; third, that the longer it persists in evil, the longer it will be unhappy, because it knows that its suffering will be perpetual if it itself does not put an end to it. Thus, it would be making a calculated error, and it would be the first to be deceived. With the dogma of eternal punishment, on the other hand, all hope would be futile; the spirit would have no interest in turning toward the good because there would be no advantage to it.

The objection regarding God's foreknowledge also falls before this law, because having created a soul, God of course knows that due to its free will it will turn towards the good or evil path. God knows that it will be punished for doing evil; however, God also knows that temporary punishment *is a way* to enable it to understand its error and sooner or later enter onto the moral path. According to the doctrine of eternal punishment, one must conclude that God knows that such a soul will fail and, therefore, that it is condemned beforehand to unending torture.

21) Responsibility for wrongs is completely personal. No one suffers for the wrongs of someone else, except for having caused them in the first place, whether by provoking them through example or by not preventing them when they could have done so.

Consequently, suicide will always be punished, but whoever drives someone by his or her harshness to despair and to commit it will suffer an even greater punishment.

22) Although the diversity of punishments is infinite, there are some that are inherent to how little-evolved the spirit may be; the consequences for these, except for a few details, are more or less identical.

The most common punishment among those who are especially attached to the materialistic life and who neglect spiritual progress consists in the slowness with which the separation of the soul

and body occurs at death, along with the anguish that accompanies it and their awakening to another life, and to the resultant state of confusion that can last for months and even years. On the other hand, for those who have maintained a pure conscience, have identified with the spirit life and have freed themselves from materialism during their corporeal life, the transition is quick and without difficulty; the awakening is pleasant and there is hardly any confusion at all.

23) A very common phenomenon among spirits who have not evolved morally to a certain degree is that they believe they are still alive, and this delusion can last for many years, during which they experience all the needs, torments and perplexities of physical life.

24) For criminals, the incessant presence of their victims and the circumstances of their crimes are a cruel torment.

25) Some spirits are immersed in thick darkness. Others find themselves in complete isolation in space, tormented by their ignorance of the situation as well as the fate that awaits them. The guiltiest suffer tortures that are all the more pungent because they can see no end to them. Some are kept from seeing their loved ones, and all generally endure sufferings whose intensity is relative to the evils they practiced and the pain and necessities they caused others to suffer, until *repentance* and the desire for *reparation* bring them enough tranquility to foresee the possibility of putting an end to their situation *through their own efforts*.

26) It is a torment for the proud to see above them, surrounded and celebrated in glory, those whom they formerly despised on earth, while they themselves are relegated to the lower tiers; for hypocrites, to see themselves pierced by a light that reveals their most secret thoughts, which everyone can read, with no way to hide or disguise themselves; for hedonists to experience all temptations and all desires without being able to satisfy them;

for misers to see their gold being wasted and not being able to save it; for the selfish to be deserted by everybody and to suffer everything they caused others to suffer. They will thirst and no one will give them anything to drink, they will hunger and no one will give them anything to eat. No friendly hands will press theirs, no compassionate voice will console them. They thought of no one but themselves during their lifetime, so no one will think of them or show compassion for them after their death.

27) The only means of avoiding or attenuating the future consequences of a wrong is by freeing oneself of it as much as possible in the present life by repairing it so that there is no wrong left to be more painfully repaired later. The longer reparation for a wrong is postponed, the more painful and harsh its consequences will be in the future.

28) The spirit's situation in the spirit world is none other than what it had prepared for itself during its corporeal life. Later, in another incarnation, it is granted a new opportunity to expiate and repair the previous one by going through new trials, which it profits from to a greater or lesser degree depending on its free will. And if it does not profit from them, it will have to begin again, each time in more dolorous conditions. Thus, it can be stated that *those who suffer much on the earth have much to expiate*, and those who enjoy apparent happiness in spite of their vices and uselessness will pay dearly for it in a later existence. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the afflicted, for they shall be comforted." (See *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, Chap. V)

29) Of course, God's mercy is infinite, but it is not blind. The guilty who are pardoned are not exonerated, and until they have satisfied justice, they will suffer the consequences of their wrongs. We must understand infinite mercy to mean that God is not inexorable, but that God *always* leaves the door open for the guilty to return to the good.

30) Since afflictions are temporary and subordinate to repentance and reparation – both depend on human free will – the same applies to the punishment and *remedies* that must aid in healing the wounds of evil. Spirits who are being punished are not like galley slaves who have been sentenced to years of hard labor, but rather are like patients in a hospital who are suffering from illnesses because of their own fault and who must now endure the required means of cure with the hope of being finally healed. They heal more quickly when they precisely follow the prescriptions of the physician who carefully monitors them. If they prolong their suffering through their own fault, the physician is not responsible for it.

31) To the afflictions that spirits experience during the spirit life are joined those of their corporeal life: the consequences of human beings' imperfections, their passions, the bad use of their faculties and the expiation of present and past wrongs. It is during their corporeal life that spirits repair the evils of previous lives by putting into practice the resolutions they made during the spirit life. This explains the miseries and vicissitudes that at first sight seem to have no reason for being. Nonetheless, they are just, since they were determined in the past and serve on our course towards perfectibility.⁴⁰

32) It is often asked if God would not display more love towards God's creatures if they had been created infallible and therefore exempt from the vices inherent to imperfection. For such to be the case, God would have had to have created perfect beings with nothing more to acquire, whether in knowledge or in morality. Of course, God could have done that, but if not, it is that out of divine wisdom, God wanted progress to comprise a general law.

⁴⁰ See Pt. 1, Chap. VI, "Purgatory", nos. 3 ff; and later, chap. XX, "Examples of Earthly Expiations". See also, *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. V, "Blessed are the Afflicted" – Auth.

Human beings are imperfect, and as such are subject to vicissitudes that are more painful or less so, and since that is the way things are, we would do better to accept it. Inferring God as neither good nor just would be an insensitive revolt against God.

It would have represented true injustice if God had created privileged beings who were more favored than others, enjoying without effort the happiness that others could only achieve through pain or not at all. Divine justice is obvious in the absolute equality that presides over the creation of spirits. They all have the same point of departure, and none are distinguished in their formation by being better endowed than others. There are none whose evolutionary progress is made easier by exception, and like all the others, those who finally reach the goal will have had to pass through the phases of primitiveness and respective trials.

That said, is there anything more just than the freedom of action granted to each one? The road to happiness is wide open to all, and all enjoy the same conditions to attain to it. The law is ingrained into all consciences and is taught to all. *God makes happiness, not favoritism, the prize for labor*, so that each spirit may receive what it deserves. All are free to labor or do nothing at all for their advancement. Those who labor sufficiently and quickly are rewarded sooner, but those who go off the path or waste their time delay their arrival and can only blame themselves. Good and evil are voluntary and facultative. Since human beings are free, they are not fatalistically led one way or the other.

33) In spite of the diversity in the kinds and degrees of punishment that imperfect spirits suffer, the penal code of the future life may be summed up in these three principles:

1. Suffering is inherent to imperfection.
2. Every imperfection as well as every wrong resulting from it brings its own punishment in natural and inevitable consequences. Hence, sickness results from excess, and boredom from laziness,

without there having to be some kind of special condemnation for each wrong or individual.

3. Since all people can free themselves from their imperfections by their will, they can just as easily annul the ills that result from them and can ensure their future happiness.

To each according to his or her deeds, in heaven as well as on earth – such is the law of divine justice.

CHAPTER VIII



Angels

Angels according to the Church • Refutation
• Angels according to Spiritism

Angels according to the Church

1. Every religion humans and acting as intermediaries between them and God. In denying there is any has had angels under various names, i.e., beings superior to spiritual existence apart from organic life, materialism has naturally classified angels among fictions and allegories. Nonetheless, the belief in angels is an essential part of the dogmas of the Church, which defines them as follows:⁴¹

2. “We firmly believe,” states a general and ecumenical council,⁴² “that there is only one true God, eternal and infinite, who *at the beginning of time* took from nothingness two created natures *together* – the spiritual and the corporeal, the angelic and the mundane – and later, as a link between the two, he formed the human nature, composed of body and spirit.’

⁴¹ We have taken this summary from the pastoral letter by Monsignor Gousset, Cardinal Archbishop of Reims, for Lent in 1864. Like the one concerning *Demons*, cited in the following chapter and taken from the same source, this summary may be considered as a definitive expression of the Church’s dogma on the subject. – Auth.

⁴² Lateran Council – Auth.

“According to the Faith, such was the divine plan in the work of creation, a majestic and complete plan as befitting the Eternal Wisdom. Thus conceived, it offers to our thoughts the created being in all its degrees and conditions. Purely spiritual existence and life appear in the highest sphere; purely physical existence and life appear in the lowest; in between, there is a marvelous union of these two substances, a life that is at the same time common to the intelligent spirit and to the organized body.

“Our soul is of a simple and indivisible nature, but it is limited in its faculties. Our idea of perfection enables us to understand that there must be other beings that are as simple as the soul and yet superior to it due to their qualities and privileges. The soul is great and noble, but it is associated to matter and is served by fragile organs that are limited in their action and strength. But why couldn't there be other natures that are nobler still, which are free of such servitude and fetters and endowed with greater strength and incomparable activity? Before God had set man upon the earth to know, serve and love him, wouldn't he have already called forth other creatures in order to comprise his heavenly court and worship him in the splendor of his glory? God, after all, receives from the hands of man the tributes of honor and homage of this universe. Is it therefore any wonder that he receives from the hands of angels the incense and prayers of man? Therefore, if angels did not exist, the Creator's grand work would not have the crowning and perfection that are peculiar to it. This world, which attests to his omnipotence, would no longer be the masterpiece of his wisdom. Our reason, though feeble and frail, could easily imagine a more developed and consummated world.

“On every page of the sacred books of the Old as well as the New Testaments, mention is made of these sublime intelligences either in pious invocations or in historical references. Their intervention appears expressly in the lives of the patriarchs and

prophets. God uses them in his ministry both to impose his will and to announce future events, and angels are also nearly always instruments of his justice and mercy. Their presence is constant in the various circumstances surrounding the birth, life and passion of the Savior. Their memory is inseparable from great men as well as the most significant events of religious antiquity. The belief in angels exists both in the midst of polytheism and the fables of mythology because such belief is as universal and ancient as the world itself. The worship offered by the pagans to good and evil spirits was no more than an erroneous application of the truth, a faint remainder of primitive dogma.

“The words of the holy Lateran Council contain a fundamental distinction between angels and men, teaching us that the former are pure spirits, whereas the latter are composed of a body and a soul; i.e., the angelic nature subsists in and of itself, not only without mixture but without any real possible association with matter at all, no matter how vaporous and subtle it may be perceived to be, while our soul, which is also spiritual, is associated to the body so as to form with it one and the same person, and *this is essentially its destiny*.

“As long as this very intimate union between the soul and body exists, these two substances have a common life and exert a mutual influence on each other; thus, the soul cannot completely free itself from the imperfections of such a condition: ideas come to it through the senses by comparing exterior objects and always under images that are more obvious or less so. That is why the soul cannot contemplate itself or conceive of God and the angels without attributing a visible and tangible form to them. The same applies to angels, who, in order to manifest to the saints and prophets, had to take on tangible and visible forms. These forms, however, were no more than aerial bodies which they used to move about and identify themselves, or they were symbolic attributes related to the mission with which they were charged.

“Their being and movements are neither localized nor circumscribed to any limited or fixed point in space. Since they are not connected to a physical body, they cannot be stopped or limited by other objects as we are. They do not occupy any given place and do not fill any void. However, in the same way that our soul is fully within our body and each one of its parts, angels are also fully and almost simultaneously at all points and in all parts of the world. They are faster than thought and can be anywhere in the blink of an eye, acting by themselves with no other obstacle to their desires than the will of the Creator and the resistance of human freedom.

“While we are condemned to see external things slowly and narrowly, and while supernatural truths appear to us as enigmas in a mirror (according to St. Paul), angels effortlessly see what they must know and are always in direct relation with the object of their thought. *Their knowledge is not the result of induction and reasoning*, but of clear and profound intuition that encompasses all at once the principles and consequences resulting from it.

“Distances of time, differences in place and the multiplicity of objects cannot cause any confusion in their minds.

“Because it is infinite, the divine essence is incomprehensible. It holds mysteries and depths that cannot be grasped. The innermost designs of Providence remain concealed even from the angels, but their secrets are unveiled to them when in certain circumstances they are charged with announcing them to mankind.

“God’s communications with angels and their communications amongst themselves are not made by means of articulated sounds and other gestures. Pure intelligences have no need of eyes to see or ears to hear, much less a vocal organ to express their thoughts; hence, this instrument, so common to us, is unnecessary for them and they communicate their sentiments in a way that is peculiar to them only: it is completely spiritual. To make themselves understood by one another, their will is sufficient.

“Only God knows how many angels there are. Their number is obviously not infinite, and it could not be otherwise; however, according to the sacred authors and holy doctors of the Church, it is considerable and truly prodigious. If it is natural to proportion the number of the inhabitants of a city to its grandeur and extent, and since the earth is only an atom in comparison to the firmament and the immense regions of space, we would have to conclude that the number of the inhabitants of the air and heaven is much greater than that of men.

“Since the majesty of kings derives its splendor from the number of their subjects, vassals and officials, what could give us a better idea of the majesty of the King of kings than the innumerable host of angels that populate the heavens of earth, sea and abysses, and the dignity of those who, *without pause, remain prostrate or standing* at his throne?

“The Church Fathers and theologians generally teach that the angels may be divided into three great hierarchies or principalities, and each hierarchy into three companies or choirs.

“Those of the first and highest hierarchy are designated according to the functions they perform in heaven. Some are called *Seraphim*, so designated for the ardor of love which they radiate before God. Others are called *Cherubim* because they are a luminous reflection of the divine wisdom, and still others *Thrones*, so called because they proclaim the grandeur of the Creator, whose splendor they manifest.

“The angels of the second hierarchy have received names in keeping with the functions attributed to them in the general governance of the universe. They are: *Dominions*, who determine the missions and duties of angels of the lower classes; *Virtues*, who attend to the miracles required by the great interests of the Church and mankind in general; and *Powers*, who by their strength and vigilance protect the laws that govern the physical and mental worlds.

“Those of the third hierarchy share the mission of guiding societies and individuals. They are: *Principalities*, who are appointed to kingdoms, provinces and dioceses; *Archangels*, who transmit messages of greatest importance, and *Guardian Angels*, who accompany each one of us in order to watch over our security and sanctification.”

Refutation

3. The general principle resulting from this doctrine is that angels are purely spirit- beings, who existed prior to humans and are superior to them. They are *privileged creatures who were destined to supreme and eternal bliss at their creation*, endowed by their very nature with every virtue and all knowledge, but without having ever done anything to acquire it. They are on the highest plane of creation, in contrast to the lowest, where life is purely physical. Humans exist halfway between the two; that is, humans are composed of souls, spirit-beings inferior to the angels and connected to material bodies.

Crucial problems result from such a system. First, what is life that is purely material? Does it consist of brute matter? But brute matter is inanimate and has no life in and of itself. Does it perchance refer to animals and plants? If so, it would be a fourth order within creation, because one cannot deny that there is something in the intelligent animal that is more than in the plant, and in the plant more than in the stone. As for the human soul – which comprises a transition point – it remains directly united to a body, which is merely brute matter, for without a soul, the body has as much life as a clod of dirt.

Obviously, this division is obscure for lack of clarity and does not square with observation. It is similar to the theory of the four basic elements⁴³, which was annulled by the progress of

⁴³ Earth, water, fire and air – Tr.

science. Nevertheless, let us accept these three terms: the spirit creature, the human creature and the corporeal creature, for such is (they say) the divine plan – majestic and complete, befitting of the Eternal Wisdom. We should notice before anything else that there is no necessary connection between these three terms, and that they are three distinct creations, formed successively, whereas from one to the next, there is continuity. Everything in nature is linked together, showing us a law of admirable unity, and whose elements, though simple transformations of one another, all have their connecting vestiges. That theory is to a certain extent true regarding the existence of the three terms; however, it is incomplete since it lacks points of contact between them, as is easy to demonstrate.

The Church says that these three culminating points of creation are necessary for the harmony of the whole. If only one were missing, the entire work would be incomplete and would not correspond to the Eternal Wisdom. Nonetheless, one of the Church's fundamental dogmas states that the earth, the animals, the plants, the sun and the stars – even light itself – were created out of *nothing* about 6,000 years ago. Before that time, there was neither human nor corporeal creature; that is, throughout the rest of preceding eternity, the divine work had remained incomplete. The creation of the universe 6,000 years ago comprises an article of faith that is so crucial that only a few years ago science was anathematized because it destroyed the biblical chronology by proving the great antiquity of the earth and its inhabitants.

In spite of this, the Lateran Council, the ecumenical council that drew up law in matters of doctrine, affirmed: “*We firmly believe that there is only one true God, eternal and infinite, who at the beginning of time took from nothingness two created natures together – the spiritual and the corporeal...*” By *at the beginning of time* we can only infer eternity up to that point, since infinite

time, like space, has neither beginning nor end. That expression *beginning of time* is thus a figure of speech that implies the idea of an *unlimited* previousness. The Lateran Council thus believed *firmly* that spirit creatures as well as corporeal ones were simultaneously formed and taken *together* from nothingness at an indeterminate time in the past. Thus, what becomes of the biblical text that sets creation at 6,000 of our years? Admitting that the beginning of the visible universe could have been at that time, it surely must not be regarded as the beginning of time. Which should we believe: the Council or the Bible?

5. The same Council formulated another strange proposition: "Our soul, which is also spiritual, is associated to the body so as to form with it one and the same person, and *this is essentially its destiny.*" Now, if the *essential* destiny of the soul is to be united to the body, this union would constitute its normal state, its purpose, its objective, since such is its *destiny*. However, the soul is immortal while the body is not; the soul's union with it only occurs once, according to the Church, and even if the union were to last a century, what would that be in relation to eternity? And since it only lasts a few hours for many, what usefulness would there be for the soul in such an ephemeral union? When, in relation to eternity, its longest duration would be no more than an imperceptible moment, would it really be precise to say that *its destiny is essentially to be connected to the body?* Actually, this union is no more than one incident, one stage in the life of the soul – it is not its essential state.

If the essential destiny of the soul is to be connected to the human body, if by its nature and according to the providential purpose of creation this union is necessary for the manifestations of its faculties, we must obviously conclude that *without a body, the human soul is an incomplete being.* And so that the soul may fulfill its purposes, then in leaving behind

one body, it needs to take on another, which necessarily leads us to the plurality of existences, in other words, to ongoing reincarnation. It is truly strange that a council regarded as one of the bright spots of the Church identified the spirit being with the material being at this point in such a way that one cannot exist without the other, since the essential condition of their creation is that they remain joined.

6. The hierarchical table of angels shows us that various orders have as their attributes the governing of the physical world and humankind – the purpose for which they were created. According to *Genesis*, however, neither the physical world nor humankind existed until 6,000 years ago, so what would these angels have done before that time, during the eternity when the object of their concern did not yet exist? Have angels been created throughout all eternity? Such must have been the case, since they were meant for the glorification of the Almighty. But if they had been created at some determined time, then until that point, i.e. throughout eternity, God would have been without worshipers.

7. The Council further stated: “*As long as* this intimate union between the soul and body lasts.” Consequently, is there a time in which this union does not exist? This proposition contradicts the one making the union the essential destiny of the soul.

The Council stated still further, “Ideas come to them through the senses, in the comparison of exterior objects.” This is a philosophical doctrine that is partly true, but not so in its absolute sense. According to the eminent theologian, receiving ideas through the senses is a condition inherent to human nature, but he forgets innate ideas, faculties that are at times highly transcendent, and the intuition about things that children bring with them at birth that are not due to any kind of instruction. By means of what senses did those young herdsmen, natural calculators who aroused the wonder of scholars, acquire the ideas needed to almost

instantly resolve the most complicated problems? We would ask the same regarding precocious musicians, painters and linguists.

“Angels’ knowledge does not result from induction and reasoning”; they have it simply because they are angels, without having to learn it because they were created that way by God. The soul, however, must learn. If the soul only received ideas by means of the corporeal organs, what ideas could the soul of a child who dies after a few days have if we believe along with the Church that such a soul is not reborn?

8. This raises a vital issue: Can the soul acquire ideas and knowledge after the death of the body? If it cannot acquire new knowledge once freed from the body, then the soul of the child, the primitive, the mentally impaired or uneducated individual will remain as it was at the time of death, condemned to nullity forever. But if, on the contrary, it acquires new knowledge after its current lifetime, then it can progress. Without the soul’s later progress, one must reach absurd conclusions. With progress, we come to the negation of all dogmas founded on the soul’s stationary nature: immutable fate, eternal punishment, etc. If the soul progresses, where does its progress stop? There is no reason for it not to attain the degree of the angels or pure spirits, and with such a possibility there would be no justification for the creation of special and privileged beings who are exempt from any labor and who unconditionally enjoy eternal bliss, while other less-favored beings can only attain to such bliss by enduring long, cruel suffering and harsh trials. God could have undoubtedly planned it that way, but if we believe in the infinitude of the divine perfections, without which God would not be God, we are also forced to believe that God does nothing useless, nothing that could contradict God’s supreme justice and goodness.

9. “Since the majesty of kings is displayed in the number of their subjects, their officials and servants, then what could be

more fitting for giving us an idea of the majesty of the King of kings than that numberless host of angels that populate *heaven* and *earth, sea* and *abyss*, and the worthiness of those who *constantly remain prostrate or standing* at the foot of his throne?"

Wouldn't it belittle God to compare the divine glory to the ostentation of earthly sovereigns? Such ideas, inculcated within the spirit of the uneducated masses, falsify the idea of God's true grandeur, and always reduce God to the petty proportions of humankind. To suppose that God must need millions of worshipers *constantly prostrating themselves or standing* in the divine presence is to endow God with the weakness of despotic and proud monarchs. What makes truly great sovereigns? Is it the number and glamour of their courtiers? No. It is their goodness, justice and a title worthy of leaders of their subjects. One might ask if there is something more appropriate for giving us an idea of God's grandeur and majesty than a host of angels comprising the divine court. Well, of course there is. It is to represent God to all God's creatures as supremely good, just and merciful, instead of wrathful, jealous, vengeful, unforgiving, life-threatening and partial, creating for God's own glory those privileged angel-beings, endowed with all the divine gifts and born for eternal bliss, while imposing sorrowful conditions on others in their acquisition of happiness and punishing them with eternal suffering for a moment of error.

10. Regarding the union of soul and body, Spiritism professes an infinitely more *spiritualistic* doctrine, not to mention *less materialistic*, and which furthermore is in accord with the observation and destiny of the soul. Spiritism teaches us that the soul is independent of the body; the body is nothing more than a temporary envelope. *Spirituality is the soul's essence and its normal life is the spirit life*. The body is only an instrument for the soul to exercise its faculties in relating to the physical world.

However, separated from this body, it enjoys these same faculties more freely and broadly.

11. The soul's union with a body is necessary for its initial progress and thus occurs only during the period that we may classify as its childhood and adolescence. However, when the soul has reached a certain degree of purification and dematerialization, this union is no longer required and the soul continues to evolve in the spirit world. Moreover, no matter how numerous its corporeal existences may be, they are necessarily limited to the existence of the body, and their sum total does not in any case entail but an imperceptible part of the unlimited spirit life.

Angels according to Spiritism

12. There is no doubt that there are beings endowed with all the qualities attributed to angels. Spiritist revelation on this point confirms the belief of all cultures and enables us to know both the nature and the origin of such beings.

Souls or spirits are created simple and ignorant, that is, without knowledge or awareness of good and evil, but they are capable of acquiring all they lack through labor. The goal, which is perfection, is the same for all. The speed at which they achieve it depends on their free will and their own efforts. All must ascend through the same degrees and must accomplish the same work. God imposes neither a heavier nor lighter obligation on some than on others, for God is just, and since they are all God's children, there are no favorites. God says to them: Here is the law that must comprise your rule of conduct; this law will lead you to your goal; everything conforming to it is good; everything contrary to it is evil. You have complete freedom to obey or break this law, and thus you shall be the arbiters of your own destiny. Consequently, God did not create evil. All the divine laws are for the good, and

it was human beings who created evil by infringing upon them. If they had scrupulously obeyed them, they would never have deviated from the moral path.

13. The soul, however, is like the child during the first phases of its existence, in that it lacks experience, and that is why it is fallible. God does not give it experience directly but gives it the means of acquiring it: each wrong step on the path of evil is a delay for the soul, which in suffering the consequences, learns at its own expense what it should avoid. In this way, it develops little by little, perfects itself, and advances in the spirit hierarchy⁴⁴ until it reaches the state of a *pure spirit* or *angel*. Angels are thus human souls who have attained the degree of perfection that creatures are capable of, enjoying promised bliss in all its fullness. However, before reaching the supreme degree, they enjoy a happiness that is relative to their advancement; their happiness does not consist in idleness but in the tasks with which it has pleased God to entrust to them. Such occupations are regarded as a means of progress. (See chap. III, “Heaven”)

14. Human beings are not limited to the earth: they inhabit countless worlds revolving through space; they once inhabited worlds that have already disappeared and they will inhabit those that are yet to form. God has created throughout all eternity and has never ceased doing so. Long before the earth existed, and farther back than we could ever conceive, there were other worlds on which incarnate spirits traversed the same stages that are being traversed by more recently-formed spirits such as ourselves, and who reached their goal before we had even left the hands of the Creator. Throughout all eternity, then, there have been pure spirits or angels, but since their human existence is lost in the infinite past, we believe they have always been angels.

⁴⁴ See *The Spirits' Book*, nos. 100 ff. – Tr.

15. This is what the great law of the unity of creation reveals to us. God has never been inactive and has always had pure, experienced and enlightened spirits to transmit the divine orders and direct all parts of the universe, from the governance of entire worlds on down to the minutest details. As a result, God has not needed to create privileged beings exempt from the duty to progress. All – ancient and new – have acquired their position through struggle and their own merit. In the end, all are children of their own deeds. Thus God's supreme justice is equitably fulfilled.



Demons

The Origin of the Belief in Demons • Demons according to the Church • Demons according to Spiritism

The Origin of the Belief in Demons

1. Throughout time, demons have represented a prominent role in various theogonies. Although they have been dismissed from mainstream thinking, the importance still attributed to them nowadays lends the issue a certain seriousness because it addresses the very foundation of religious belief. Consequently, it is appropriate for us to examine it in all its aspects.

The belief in a superior power is instinctive in human beings. We find it under different forms and throughout the world's history. However, if today – given the degree of intellectual refinement that we have reached – there is still much discussion regarding the nature and attributes of this power, how much more imperfect people's ideas regarding it in the initial phases of humankind must have been!

2. The picture portrayed of the innocence of primitive peoples in awe before the beauties of nature, marveling at the goodness of the Creator is, without a doubt, very poetic but far removed from reality. In fact, the closer humans come to the primitive state, the more they are dominated by instinct, as may

still be seen today in various barbaric and primitive cultures. What they are most preoccupied with – what they are occupied with exclusively – is the satisfaction of their material needs, for they really have no others. The sense that can render humans accessible to purely mental pleasures develops only slowly and gradually. The soul goes through its own childhood, adolescence and adulthood just like the human body, but in order for it to attain the maturity that will enable it to comprehend purely abstract things, how much more evolution the soul still has to undergo in the human form! Through so many lifetimes it must still pass!

Without having to look back on more primitive eras, we only need look around at rural populations and examine the sense of wonder that is awakened in them at the splendor of a sunrise, the starry firmament, the chirping of the birds, the crashing of the waves or the flowered fields of the meadows. For such people, the sun rises out of habit, and as long as it releases enough heat to ripen the crops without burning them up, that is all they expect. They look at the sky to know if good or bad weather is approaching, and whether or not the birds sing is unimportant as long as they do not eat the seed they have sown. They prefer the clucking of the hen and the grunt of the pig to the songs of the nightingale. What they want from crystalline or muddy creeks is that they neither dry up nor flood; from their fields, that they produce good grass with or without flowers. That is all they desire, and what is more, it is everything they comprehend about nature, and they are already far removed from primitive humans!⁴⁵

3. If we look back on primitive humans, we will be surprised at how exclusively preoccupied they were with satisfying their material needs; that which could help or harm them summed up good and evil for them. They believed in an extra-human power,

⁴⁵ This was written in 1865, before the technology and modes of communication (TVs, PCs, phones, newspapers, etc.) that today exist in most rural areas and farmhouses, poorer countries' rural conditions notwithstanding. – Tr.

and because physical harm was what impressed them most, they attributed it to this power, although they had a very vague idea as to what this power was exactly. And since they could not conceive of anything outside the visible and tangible world, they imagined that this power dwelled in the beings and things that were harmful to them. Dangerous animals were thus its natural and direct representatives. By the same token, they saw the personification of the good in useful things, giving rise to the worship of certain animals, plants and even inanimate objects. However, human beings are normally more sensitive to evil than good, so that whatever was good seemed merely natural to them, whereas whatever was evil had more impact on them. For this reason, in primitive worship the ceremonies in honor of a malefic power were always more numerous: fear supplanted gratitude.

For a long time, humans only understood good and evil from a physical point of view; only later did moral sentiments of good and evil signal the progress of humans' intelligence, enabling them to foresee spirituality and to understand that an extra-human power lay beyond the visible world and not in material things. This fact was of course grasped by a few select minds, which could not, however, go beyond certain limits.

4. Since there was an incessant struggle between good and evil, with the latter often triumphing over the former, and since one could not rationally believe that evil could derive from a benevolent power, it was concluded that there were two rival powers governing the world. From this arose the doctrine of two principles: good and evil, which was a logical doctrine at a time in which humans were still incapable of conceiving of any other and of comprehending the nature of the Supreme Being. Consequently, how could they understand that evil was no more than a transitory state from which good could arise, and that the ills that afflicted them could lead them to happiness and aid in their evolution? The

limits of their moral horizon would not allow them to see beyond the present life – neither the past nor the future; therefore, they could not understand that they had already evolved individually, or that they would evolve further, much less that the vicissitudes of life were the result of the imperfections of the spirit being residing within them, and who pre-exists and survives the body, purifying itself over a series of lifetimes until it finally reaches perfection. In order to understand how evil could result in good, one must take not just one but many existences into account. One must consider them as a unity, because only then do true causes and their effects become clear.

5. The dual principle of good and evil was for many centuries and under various names the basis for all religious beliefs. We see it personified in *Ohura Mazda* and *Ahriman* among the Persians, and in *Yahweh* and *Satan* among the Hebrews. However, just as every sovereign must have his or her ministers, all religions have generally believed in secondary powers – good or evil spirits. The pagans represented them as countless individualities under the generic label of “gods”, and endowed them with special attributes for good and for evil, for vice and for virtue. Christians and Muslims inherited angels and demons from the Hebrews.

6. The doctrine of demons, consequently, has its origin in the ancient belief in the two principles of good and evil. Here we will examine it only from the Christian point of view in order to see if it is in accord with the more precise ideas we possess nowadays regarding the attributes of the Divinity.

These attributes are the starting point, the basis for all religious doctrine. Dogmas, creeds, ceremonies, practices and morality – everything is related to the varying degrees of correctness and elevation of the ideas that have been formed about God from fetishism up to Christianity. If the essence of God continues to be a mystery to our minds, we nevertheless comprehend it better than before, thanks to

the teachings of Christ. Christianity rationally teaches us that: *God is unique, eternal, unchangeable, immaterial, omnipotent, supremely just and good, infinite in all the divine perfections.*

As we stated previously (chap. VI, “The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment”): “If only a small portion of only one of God’s attributes were removed, there would no longer be God, for then another more perfect being might possibly exist.” These attributes in all their absolute fullness are therefore the criteria for all religions, the measuring stick of the truth of each one of the principles they teach. Moreover, for any one of such principles to be true, it must not contravene any of God’s perfections. Let us see if the common doctrine of demons measures up to this requirement.

Demons according to the Church

7. According to the Church, *Satan*, the chief or king of the demons, is not an allegorical personification of evil, but is a *real entity* who practices evil exclusively, whereas God practices good exclusively. Let us take him precisely as he is represented.

Has Satan existed throughout eternity like God, or did he come along later? If he has existed for all eternity, then he would be *non-created* and therefore equal to God. God in turn would no longer be unique, because there would also be a God of evil. But what if Satan came later? In that case, Satan could only be one of God’s creatures. As such, since he practices only evil and is incapable of practicing good and of repenting, God would have had to have created a being devoted exclusively and eternally to evil. However, since evil cannot be the work of God but of one of his creatures predestined to practice it, God would nonetheless always be its primary author, and in that case, God would not be infinitely good. The exact same applies regarding the evil beings called demons.

8. For a long time, such was the Church's belief regarding the matter. Nowadays, its position is as follows⁴⁶:

“God, who is goodness and holiness in essence, did not create them perverse and evil. The paternal hand (with which he is pleased to impress all his works with the stamp of his infinite perfections) bestowed upon them the most magnificent gifts. To the highly eminent qualities of their nature he added the abundance of his grace. He made them equal in every way to the sublime spirits who are in the state of glory and bliss. Distributed amongst all the spirit orders and mingled amongst all the classes, they had the same purpose and identical destiny. Their chief was the most beautiful of the archangels. They could have even merited their position among the righteous forever, and could have been admitted into the delight of the blessedness of heaven. This ultimate favor, which would have completed all the favors that had until then been granted, would have comprised the reward of their docility; however, they became unworthy through a senseless and audacious revolt.

“What kept them from remaining steadfast? What truth did they not realize? What act of faith and adoration did they refuse to offer God? *The Church and the annals of holy history say nothing about the matter for certain, but it does seem certain that they neither acquiesced to the mediation of the Son of God nor to the exaltation of the human nature in Jesus Christ.*

“The Divine Word, creator of all things, is also the sole mediator and savior both on earth and in heaven. The supernatural destiny was given to angels and men only in preparation for the Word's incarnation and merit, for there is no relation between the work of the most eminent spirits and that recompense which

⁴⁶ The following citations are taken from the pastoral letter of Monsignor Gousset, Cardinal Archbishop of Reims, for Lent in 1865. Considering the personal merit and position of the author, we can regard them as a definitive expression of the Church on the doctrine of demons. – Auth.

is none other than God himself. No creature could fulfill such a destiny apart from that wonderful and sublime intervention of charity. And in order to fill in the infinite distance that separates his essence from the essence of his works, he had to join these two extremes within his own person and associate his divinity to the nature of either an angel or a man; he chose the human nature.

“This plan, conceived from all eternity, was divulged to the angels long before it was carried out: the God-Man was shown to them as the One who would confirm them in grace and guide them to glory, but under the condition that they worship him during his earthly mission and forever and ever in heaven. This was an unexpected revelation, a delightful vision for generous and grateful hearts, but a profound and humiliating mystery for proud spirits! That supernatural destiny, that immense glory that had been offered to them would not be the result solely of their own personal worth! They would never be able to attribute the right to such glory to themselves alone! A mediator between God and them – what an insult to their dignity! This unexpected preference granted to the human nature! How unjust! Such an affront to their rights! And would they someday have to behold that human nature – so inferior to their own – deified by being united with the Word, seated at the right hand of God on a resplendent throne? Would they agree to pay homage and adoration to that nature for the rest of eternity?

“Lucifer and a third of the angels succumbed to such envious and proud thoughts. St. Michael and most with him exclaimed, “Who is like unto God? He is the owner of his gifts, the sovereign Lord of all things. Glory to God and to the Lamb, who will be slain for the salvation of the world!” The head of the rebels, however, forgetting that he owed all his nobility and prerogatives to God, preferred to listen to his own impulsiveness and proclaimed, “It is I who shall ascend into heaven; I shall set my dwelling above

the stars; I shall sit upon the Mount of Alliance, on the flanks of Aquilon; I shall rule the highest clouds and shall be like the Most High.” Those from all the hierarchies who shared in his sentiments received these words with murmurs of approval, but their vast numbers did not safeguard them from punishment.”

9. This doctrine raises several objections:

1. If Satan and the demons had been angels, they would have been perfect. Being perfect, could they have failed to the point of not recognizing the authority of the God in whose presence they stood? If they had arrived at such eminence gradually, after having traversed the ranks of imperfection, we might conceive of such a sad regression, but what makes the problem most incomprehensible is that they are portrayed as having been created perfect from the start.

The conclusion is this: God willed to create perfect beings, endowed with every gift possible, but God made a mistake. Thus, according to the Church, God is not infallible.⁴⁷

2. Since neither the Church nor the sacred annals explain the cause of the angels’ revolt against God, but only state that it *does seem* certain that it resulted from their reluctance to acknowledge the future mission of Christ, what value can we place on such a precise and detailed picture of the scenario which took place on that occasion? In what source may we find such clear expressions and even complaints, which have been reproduced as actually having been pronounced on that occasion? One of two things applies: either the scenario is true or it is not. If it is true, there can be no

⁴⁷ This outrageous doctrine is corroborated by the Mosaic record in Genesis 6:6,7: “[God] repented for having created man on the earth, and pierced by pain to the bottom of his heart, he said, ‘I will wipe man, whom I created, from the face of the earth; I will exterminate everything, from men to animals, from those that crawl upon the ground to the birds in the sky, because I *repent* for having created them.’ A God who repented for what God had made would be neither perfect nor infallible, and therefore would not be God. But such are the words that the Church proclaims as sacred truths. Moreover, it is unconceivable as to what the animals could have had in common with the perversity of human beings that would merit their being exterminated along with them. – Auth.

uncertainty. But then why hasn't the Church decided the matter? However, if the Church and history are silent, if the matter only *seems* certain, then it obviously is no more than a theory and this descriptive scene is merely the fruit of imagination.⁴⁸

3. The words attributed to Lucifer portray a surprising ignorance for an archangel who, by his very nature and the degree he had reached, could not share – as far as the organization of the universe is concerned – in the same errors and prejudices that were professed by humankind until science enlightened them. For instance, how could he say: “I shall set my dwelling above the stars and rule the highest clouds”? It is the same old belief that the earth was the center of the universe, that the sky, formed of clouds, extended to the limited region of the star-formed canopy, but which astronomy has shown to extend to infinity in infinite space. Since we know today that clouds do not extend beyond a few miles above the earth, in saying that he would rule the highest clouds, in addition to referring to the mountains, it would be necessary that the observation was occurring while on the earth and that there, in fact, was the dwelling place of the angels. However, if their dwelling was in the heavenly regions, it would obviously be senseless to say that it was situated well beyond the clouds. Attributing to the angels

⁴⁸ Isaiah 14: 11ff. contains the following scene: “Your pride has been cast into hell; your dead body has fallen upon the ground; your bed shall be rotten and your garment shall be worms. How have you fallen, O Lucifer, you who shined so brightly at daybreak? How have you been thrown down to the earth, you, who smote the nations with your blows, and who said *in your heart*, ‘I shall ascend into heaven; I shall establish my throne above the stars of God; I shall sit upon the Mount of Alliance on the flanks of the Aquilon; I shall sit above the highest clouds and I shall be like the Most High?’ However, your glory has been brought down to hell, to the depths of the abyss. Those who see you approach shall say: ‘Is this the *man* who used to terrorize the earth, who filled kingdoms with terror and transformed the world into a desert, and who destroyed cities and retained in chains those he had made prisoners?’ These words of the prophet do not refer to the revolt of the angels; rather, they are alluding to the pride and fall of the king of Babylon, who held the Jews in captivity – attested to in the final verses. The king of Babylon is allegorically designated as Lucifer, but it makes absolutely no mention of the scene described above. Those words refer to the king who spoke them *within his heart* and proudly placed himself above God, whose people he held captive. Moreover, the prophecy concerning the liberation of the Jews, the ruin of Babylon and the defeat of the Assyrians is the exclusive object of that chapter. – Auth.

a language sullied with ignorance would be asserting that modern humans are wiser than the angels. The Church has always erred by not taking the progress of science into account.

10. The Church's response to the first objection is found in the following statement: "Scripture and tradition call heaven the place into which the angels were placed at the time of their creation. However, this was not the heaven of heavens, the heaven of the beatific vision, wherein God shows his face to his elect as they clearly and effortlessly contemplate him because there are no longer any dangers or possibility of sin; temptation and doubt are unknown there; justice, peace and bliss rule immutably; sanctity and glory are imperishable. Therefore, it was in another heavenly region, a luminous and blessed sphere in which such noble creatures, who were highly favored with divine communications, should receive them and accept them with faith and humility before realizing their true reality in the essence of God himself."

This statement means that the fallen angels would have belonged to a less elevated and purified category, not having yet attained to the supreme place in which error was impossible. Well, possibly; but then there is a clear contradiction because the text further states, "God had created them *in every way similar to the sublime spirits* who, subdivided into all the orders and mixed in with all levels, had the same purpose and the same destiny, and that their chief was the most beautiful of the archangels." If they were created in every way similar to the others, they could not have been of an inferior nature, and if they were mixed in with all levels, they could not have been in some special place elsewhere. Therefore, our objection holds up in its entirety.

11. There is another objection, which is certainly more serious and grave.

It is stated: "This plan (the intervention of Christ), conceived *from all eternity*, was disclosed to the angels well before it was carried

out.” God knew, therefore, from all eternity that the angels, as well as human beings, would require this intervention. Moreover, God either knew or did not know that some of the angels would fail and that their fall would carry eternal condemnation with no hope of return; that they would be destined to tempt humans who, if they allowed themselves to be seduced, would suffer the same fate. If God knew about all this beforehand, it would mean that God created the angels for the purpose of their irrevocable loss and for the loss of most of humankind. No matter what is said, it is impossible for us to associate such a creation with God’s supreme goodness. If God did not know it beforehand, then God is not omnipotent. In either case we see a negation of two divine attributes, and without their absolute fullness, God would not be God.

12. If we believe that the fallibility of the angels is like that of humans, punishment is a just and natural consequence of the wrong that has been committed, but if we at the same time believe in the possibility of redemption, the return to goodness and grace after repentance and expiation, then there is nothing that refutes the goodness of God. God indeed knew that they would fail and would be punished, but God also knew that such temporary punishment would be a means of enabling them to understand their wrong and that it would finally turn to their advantage. Hence these words from the prophet Ezekiel: “God does not will the death of the sinner, but his salvation.”⁴⁹ The futility of repentance and the impossibility of regeneration would be a denial of the divine goodness. In accepting such a hypothesis it would be strictly true to say: *Since God could not have been unaware of it, then from their very creation these angels were doomed forever to evil and predestined to become demons in order to entice humans to evil.*

13. Let us now take a look at the fate of these angels and what they now do:

⁴⁹ See pt. 1, chap. VII, no. 20 quote from Ezekiel. – Auth.

“The revolt had barely expressed itself in the language of these spirits, i.e. the impetus of their thoughts, before they were irrevocably banished from the celestial mansion and cast down into the abyss.

“By such words, we are to understand that they were relegated to a place of torment in which they would suffer the punishment of fire, according to the Gospel text, which is the word of the Savior, ‘Go, you who are accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.’ St. Peter expressly states, ‘God bound them in chains and infernal tortures,’ but not all of them would remain there all the time, for they would finally be forever imprisoned with the reprobate only at the end of the world. Presently, God still allows them to occupy a place in the creation to which they belong and within the order of things to which their existence is connected, in the relationships they must have with men and from which they commit the most pernicious abuse. While some remain within their dark abode, serving as instruments of divine justice *against the unfortunate souls they have seduced*, an infinite number of others, forming invisible legions under the control of their chiefs, reside in the lower layers of the atmosphere, traveling here and there throughout the entire globe. They involve themselves in all that transpires here, frequently taking an active part in earthly events.”

The subject concerning the words of Christ regarding the torment of eternal fire was treated in chap. IV, “Hell.”

14. According to this doctrine, only a portion of the demons are in hell. The rest roam about freely, involving themselves in everything that occurs here, having been given the pleasure of practicing evil until the world ends at an indeterminate time that will probably not come very soon. But why such a distinction? Are those of the latter group less guilty? Obviously not, unless they alternate roles as could be inferred from the words, “While some

remain within their dark abode, serving as instruments of divine justice against the unfortunate souls they have seduced.”

Their occupation therefore consists in tormenting *the souls they have seduced*. Thus, they are not in charge of punishing the souls who are guilty of wrongs they freely and intentionally committed, but of those whom they, the demons themselves, provoked. They are at the same time the *cause of the wrong and the instrument of its punishment*, something, strangely enough, that even human justice in its imperfection would not allow: that the victims who succumb out of weakness in circumstances beyond their will are equally or more severely punished than the agents who, through cunning and artifice, caused them to err. Moreover, when they leave the earth behind, these victims go to hell never to leave it. They suffer eternally without respite or grace, whereas the ones who caused their downfall enjoy a deferment of payment and freedom until the end of the world! Isn't God's justice supposed to be more perfect than human justice?

15. That is not all, however: “God allows them to occupy a place within creation and in the relationships they must have with men, and in which they commit the most pernicious abuse.” Nevertheless, couldn't God know about the abuse they would commit out of the freedom granted to them? Then why would God have granted it to them? However, in this case, it is with full knowledge of the facts that God delivers God's creatures to their own mercy, knowing out of divine omniscience that they will succumb and incur the same fate as the demons. Aren't they sufficiently weak in and of themselves without having to be provoked to evil by an enemy who is both dangerous and invisible? If only punishment were temporary and the guilty could save themselves through reparation! But no: condemnation is eternal! Their repentance, their return to the good and their regret are beside the point.

Demons are therefore nothing more than causative agents and destined to recruit souls to hell with the permission of God, who upon creating them foresaw the fate that awaited them. What would we on the earth say about a judge who resorted to similar means to fill the prisons? That would be a strange idea about the Divinity, the God whose essential attributes are supreme justice and goodness! And such doctrines are taught in the name of Jesus, the one who preached love, charity and forgiveness! There was a time in which such anomalies passed unnoticed because they were neither understood nor sensed; humans, bent under the yoke of religious despotism, submitted to them out of blind faith, or rather reason gone awry. Today, however, their hour of emancipation has sounded. They understand justice and they desire it both during their lifetime and after their death. Thus, they proclaim, “God is not like that or God would not be God.”

16. “Punishment follows the fallen and accursed beings everywhere. They carry hell within them. They know neither peace nor repose, and the sweetness of hope has been transformed into bitterness, making them hateful. God’s hand has struck them with punishment in the very act of sinning and their will has been hardened in evil. Having become wicked, they persist in being so and will be so forever.

“After their sin, they became what men are after death. *Rehabilitation for those who fell has become impossible.* From then on their loss was irreparable and they have remained proud before God, hateful towards Christ and envious of humanity ever since.

“Not having been able to win the glory of heaven for themselves due to their excessive ambition, they endeavor to establish their empire on the earth and to banish God’s kingdom from it. In spite of this, the incarnate Word fulfilled his plan for the salvation and glory of humanity. Thus, demons have sought through all means to assure the loss of souls he has redeemed:

artifice and importunity, lying and seduction – they put everything into play in order to entice them to evil and ensure their ruin.

“With such enemies, the lives of men cannot help but be a perpetual struggle from birth to grave, for these enemies are powerful and untiring.

“Actually, these enemies are the same who after having introduced evil into the world, began to cover it with the thick darkness of error and vice; the same who for many centuries made themselves worshiped as gods and who reigned completely over the peoples of antiquity; the same, finally, who still exert a tyrannical influence in idolatrous regions, fostering disorder and scandal even in the heart of Christian organizations.

“In order for us to understand all the resources available to them in their service of evil, we need only to note that *they lost nothing of the prodigious faculties that are the natural prerogative of the angelic nature*. Of course, the future and the natural order, especially, contain mysteries that God has reserved and which they cannot ascertain, but their intelligence is far superior to ours, for they perceive both cause and effect in a flash. This perception enables them to predict future events that escape our conjectures. Distance and diversity of place disappear before their agility. Quicker than lightning and faster than thought, they can instantaneously be at any point on the globe, and from far off can describe events at the same time in which they occur.

“The general laws through which God rules and controls the universe are not accessible to them; they cannot derogate from them and, consequently, predict or perform true miracles. However, within certain limits they possess the art of imitating and falsifying the divine works. They know which phenomena result from the combinations of various elements and they can predict with certainty the phenomena that occur naturally, as well as those they themselves can cause; hence the numerous oracles, the

extraordinary prophecies, whose memories have been preserved in sacred and profane books, serving as the basis and nourishment for all sorts of superstition.

“Their simple and immaterial substance hides them from our sight. They remain beside us without our seeing them; they touch our soul without touching our ears. Believing that we are obeying our own thoughts, we are nevertheless often under their sinister influence. On the other hand, our own dispositions are known to them by the impressions they make on us and they usually attack us at our weakest point. In order to more surely seduce us, they normally use lures and suggestions according to our inclinations. They modify their action according to the circumstances and the characteristic traits of each individual temperament. However, their favorite weapons are hypocrisy and lies.”

17. “Punishment,” it is said, “follows them everywhere; they have neither peace nor rest.” This assertion in no way destroys our observation regarding the respite of those who are not in hell, a respite all the more unjustifiable because, being outside of it, they do even greater evil. Of course, they are not happy like the good angels, but doesn't the freedom they do enjoy account for anything at all? Although they do not enjoy the moral happiness that virtue bestows, they are undeniably less unhappy than their accomplices in the flames of hell. Moreover, for the malicious, there is a certain pleasure in committing evil with full liberty. Ask the criminal which he would prefer: to remain in prison or to run through the fields, committing his crimes as he pleases. It is exactly the same situation.

It was also stated that remorse pursues them without respite or pity. However, we forget that remorse is the immediate precursor to repentance, if not repentance itself. It was stated: “Having become perverse, *they do not want to cease being so* and will be so forever.” However, if they persist in being perverse, it

is because they are not remorseful; on the other hand, if they had the least bit of regret, they would cease to practice evil and would beg for forgiveness. Thus, remorse is not a punishment for them.

18. “After they sinned, they became what men are after death. The rehabilitation of those who fell *therefore became impossible*.” Where did such impossibility come from? We do not understand how it can be the result of their similarity to human beings after death, a proposition that is ambiguous at best. Does such impossibility come from their own will or from the divine will? If the former, such denotes extreme perversity, a complete hardening in evil; consequently, we cannot comprehend how such profoundly perverse beings could have ever been *angels of virtue*, or how throughout the *infinite* time that they spent among the angels, they did not allow a single sign of their natural malevolence to appear; if the latter, we comprehend even less how, as a punishment, God could inflict the impossibility of a return to goodness after the very first wrong. The Gospels mention nothing of the sort.

19. “Their loss” – it is added – “is thus irreparable and they remain in their pride before God.” But why shouldn’t they remain in such pride since it would be futile for them to repent? If they had the hope of rehabilitation, whatever its price might be, goodness would have a purpose for them, whereas in this way it means nothing. If they persevere in evil, it is because the door of hope has been locked against them. But why would God lock the door? In order to avenge the offense resulting from their insubordination. Thus, in order to satisfy divine resentment against a few guilty angels, God wants not only to see them suffer, but also to see them practice evil instead of good in order to induce human beings to evil and cast them into eternal perdition, when, by a simple act of clemency, such a great disaster could be avoided, a disaster foreseen from all eternity!

Would such an act of clemency perchance be a pure and simple act of grace that could be twisted into an encouragement to do evil? No, it would be a conditional forgiveness that depended on a sincere return to the good. Instead of offering a word of hope and mercy, God is portrayed as having said: *Let all humankind perish rather than my vengeance!* And with such a doctrine, people still wonder why there are disbelievers and atheists! Is this the way Jesus portrayed his Father to us? Would he who gave us the express law of the forgetfulness and forgiveness of offenses, who told us to repay evil with good, and who prescribed loving our enemies as the first of the virtues that would lead us to heaven, want people to thereby be better, more just, more indulgent than God?

Demons according to Spiritism

20. According to Spiritism, neither angels nor demons are separate entities; all intelligent beings have been created endowed with one and the same nature. United to physical bodies, these beings make up the humankind populating the earth and other inhabitable spheres. Once freed from the body, they make up the spirit world or the world of the spirits populating space. God created them *perfectible*, with perfection as their goal along with its consequential happiness; however, God did not create them *perfect*. God willed for them to reach perfection through their own efforts so that the merit would truly be their own. From the moment of their creation, beings evolve, whether in the incarnate or spirit state. After reaching the apogee, they become *pure spirits* or *angels* (according to the common expression) so that, from the intelligent being's embryonic state to its angelic state, there is an uninterrupted chain wherein each link represents a degree of progress.

Consequently, there are spirits at every degree of moral and intellectual evolution, according to their top, middle or low

position on the scale of progress. At every degree, therefore, there is ignorance and knowledge, goodness and evil. Within the lowest order⁵⁰ there are spirits who still have a profound propensity to evil and who take pleasure in it. These may be called *demons*, if one so wishes, for they are capable of all the wiles attributed to that word. If Spiritism does not label them as such, it is because it leads to the idea of a creation apart from humankind, one composed of beings with an essentially wicked nature, eternally dedicated to evil and incapable of any progress toward the good.

21. According to Church doctrine, the demons were created good but became evil through their disobedience: they are fallen angels; they are angels who at first were placed by God at the apex of the scale, but who then fell from it. According to Spiritism, demons are as-yet imperfect spirits who are susceptible to regeneration and although located at the bottom of the scale they will nevertheless ascend it.

Spirits who out of apathy, negligence, stubbornness or ill-will persist in remaining within the lower orders for a long time suffer the consequences of their attitude, and their habit of evil renders it difficult for them to leave it behind. However, at some point they grow weary of such a dolorous life and its respective consequences. It is thus that they compare their own situation to that of good spirits and they understand that their interest lies in what is good; hence, they try to better themselves, but through a spontaneous act of their will and without the least coercion. *They are subject to the law of progress due to their aptitude for progress, but they are not forced to progress against their will.* God constantly provides them with the means; however, they are free to accept such means or not. If progress were obligatory, there would be no merit in it, and God wills for all of us to enjoy the merit of our deeds. God does not place anyone at the top of the scale out of privilege, but that spot

⁵⁰ Once again, see Spirit Hierarchy in *The Spirits' Book*, nos. 100 ff. – Tr.

is open to all and they only reach it at the cost of their own effort. The most highly evolved angels have earned their degree as all the others will – by traversing the course common to all.

22. After arriving at a certain degree of purity, spirits are given missions in accordance with their progress, performing all those attributed to angels of the various hierarchies. Since God has created throughout all eternity, it follows that throughout all eternity there have been angels ready to meet the needs of universal governance. In this way, only one species of intelligent being, abiding by the law of progress, is enough. Finally, this unity of creation, allied with the idea that all have the same starting point and the same road to traverse, along with the idea that they progress through self-merit, corresponds more to God's justice than the creation of different species who are favored by differing degrees of natural endowments, which would imply various other privileges.

23. By not accepting the law of progress but nevertheless admitting beings of various degrees, the common doctrine about the nature of angels, demons and souls concludes that they are the product of various special creations. It thus makes God into a biased Father, granting everything to only a few of his children while imposing the harshest labor on the others. It is no wonder that for a long time people did not find such preferences shocking, because they themselves employed them regarding their own children by establishing rights of primogenitor and other privileges of birth. *Could such people believe they were any more wrong than God?* Today, however, the circle of ideas has widened: people see more clearly and have more precise notions of justice. They desire it for themselves, and if such justice is not always to be found on the earth, they hope at least to find it in heaven. That is why every doctrine wherein the divine justice is not displayed in its greatest purity is repugnant to their reason.



The Intervention of Demons in Modern Communications

1. Modern spirit phenomena have attracted attention to incidents analogous to those that have occurred in all ages, and regarding them history has never been more carefully scrutinized than it has been of late. Because of the similarity of their effects, a common cause may thus be inferred. As always happens with respect to extraordinary phenomena not immediately grasped by reason, ignorance has always assigned a supernatural cause to them, and superstition has exaggerated this ignorance by adding absurd beliefs about them. This has led to a multitude of legends which for the most part are an amalgam of little truth and much error.

2. The long-prevailing doctrines about the Devil have exaggerated his powers to such a degree that they have eclipsed God's, so to speak. That is why everything that surpasses human power is attributed to the Devil. The hand of Satan appears everywhere. The best things and the most useful discoveries – especially those that might uproot people's ignorance and widen the circle of their ideas – have often been viewed as works of the Devil. The spirit phenomena of our day, which have increased considerably and have been better observed with the aid of reason

and scientific data, have in fact confirmed the intervention of concealed intelligences. However, these intelligences always act within the limits of natural law, and in their action they reveal a new force and new laws that had formerly been unknown. Hence, the issue is reduced to knowing the order of things to which these intelligences belong.

While there were only imprecise or theoretical ideas about the spirit world, people could continue to be mistaken about it. Today, however, since strict observation and experimental studies have shed light on the nature of spirits, their origin and destiny, their role in the universe and their way of acting, the issue has been resolved by the facts. We now know that spirits are the souls of those who have lived on the earth. We also know that the various categories of good and evil spirits are not composed of different species of beings, but only represent the same beings at *different degrees of advancement*. Depending on the position they occupy in virtue of their intellectual and moral development, the beings who manifest display the profoundest contrasts. Nevertheless, this does not prevent them from having arisen from the same great human family, which, after all, includes primitives, barbarians and civilized peoples.

3. Regarding this point – like so many others – the Church has maintained its old beliefs with respect to demons. It states: “We have principles that have not varied for over eighteen centuries because they are immutable.” Its error is precisely in not taking into account the progress of ideas and in believing that God is not wise enough to provide revelation to human beings according to the development of their minds, but instead speaks to advanced humans in the same language used for primitives. If humankind progresses while religion remains entrenched in its old errors with regards to both spiritual and scientific matters, the time will come when religion will be supplanted by disbelief.

4. Following is how the Church explains the exclusive intervention of demons in modern spirit manifestations⁵¹:

“In their outside interventions, demons disguise their presence in such a way as to lay suspicions aside. Always clever and treacherous, they lure men into their trap before imposing the chains of oppression and servitude upon them. Here they arouse their curiosity in phenomena and childish entertainment; there they awaken their wonder and subjugate them with the spell of the extraordinary. If the supernatural nature of their acts becomes clear and their power is unmasked, they then allay and ease their victims’ apprehension by asking for their trust and by inviting familiarity. Sometimes, they pass themselves off as divinities and good spirits; at other times, they take on names and even the traits of the dead who have left their memory among the living. With the help of these frauds – worthy of the ancient serpent – they speak and are listened to; they dogmatize and are believed; they mix truths in with their lies and propagate error behind every form. This is the meaning of the supposed revelations from beyond the grave, and to achieve this result, wood and stone, forest and fountain, idol sanctuaries, table legs and the hands of children become oracles. That is the reason why the fortune teller prophesies in a state of delirium and why the ignorant person all of a sudden becomes a scientist during some sort of mysterious sleep. To deceive and pervert: that has been everywhere and at all times the final objective of such strange manifestations.

“The surprising results of these observances and practices – for the most part odd and ridiculous acts – cannot come from their intrinsic virtue or any *order established by God*, but can only be attributed to the concourse of occult powers. Such are, in particular, the extraordinary phenomena occurring nowadays

⁵¹ The citations in this chapter are taken from the same pastoral letter as in previous ones; it is the same source and, consequently, the same authority. – Auth.

through the apparently inoffensive incidents of magnetism as well as those of talking tables. By means of modern magic, we see among us the evocations and oracles, consultations, *healings* and tricks that used to adorn idolatrous temples and sibylline caves. Like yesterday, they command wood and it obeys; they ask and it responds in all sorts of languages and on all kinds of subjects. We find ourselves in the presence of invisible beings who usurp the names of the dead, and whose pretentious revelations bear the stamp of contradiction and falsehood. Vaporous forms without consistency suddenly appear and show themselves to be endowed with super-human power.

“Who are the secret agents behind these phenomena, the true actors of these inexplicable scenes? Angels would not accept such unworthy roles, nor lend themselves to any caprice of vain curiosity. The souls of the dead, whom God forbids being consulted, remain in the place to which justice has assigned them and cannot be put at the orders of the living without God’s permission. Therefore, the mysterious beings who answer the first call of the *heretic* or *the impious as well as the faithful*, the criminal as well as the innocent, are sent neither by God nor apostles of truth and salvation, but rather by agents of error and hell. In spite of the care with which they hide behind the most venerable names, they betray themselves in the emptiness of their doctrines, the baseness of their acts and the incoherence of their words. They seek to do away with religious symbols, the dogmas of original sin, the resurrection of the body and *eternal punishment*, as well as all divine revelation, in order to deprive the Church’s laws of their true sanction and break down all the barriers to vice. If their suggestions could prevail, they would end up forming a religion that was appropriate for use by socialists and by all those who find the idea of duty and conscience irksome. The disbelief of our time has prepared the way. By a sincere dedication to the Catholic

faith, may all Christian peoples escape the danger of this new and frightening invasion!”

5. This entire theory derives from the principle that angels and demons are beings distinct from human souls, which are the product of a special creation inferior even to the demons in intelligence, knowledge and every faculty. Its conclusion is that both ancient and modern manifestations of spirits have occurred exclusively as a result of the intervention of evil angels.

The possibility of souls communicating with the living is an issue of fact, the result of observation and experimentation which we cannot go into at this time. However, let us accept as a hypothesis the above-cited doctrine and see if it doesn't fall apart under its own arguments.

6. Of the Church's three categories of angels, one exclusively occupies itself with heaven, another with the universe's governance and the third is in charge of the earth. It is in this third category where the angels in charge of protecting each individual may be found. Only a portion of the angels of this category took part in the revolt and were transformed into demons. If God has allowed them to lead humans into perdition by suggestions of every kind and through ostensive manifestations, then why – if God is truly supremely just and good – has God given them the immense power to enjoy a freedom that they put to such pernicious use, without also allowing good angels to counterbalance it with similar manifestations intended for a good purpose? Admitting that God had given good and evil beings equal power – which would be an enormous favor on behalf of the latter – at least then people would have the freedom to choose between the two. However, in giving the evil angels a monopoly on temptation, with the ability to simulate what is good in order to fool people and to seduce them more effectively, such would be a genuine trap set up for people's weakness, inexperience and good faith. What is more, it would

be to presume an abuse of trust on God's part. Reason refuses to accept such bias in favor of evil. Let us take a look at the facts.

7. Demons, according to the Church, have been granted transcendent faculties – they have lost none of their angel nature. They possess knowledge, discernment, foresight and the clairvoyance of the angels, but additionally a high degree of shrewdness, cunning and artifice. Their objective is to lead humans away from the good and especially to keep them from God in order to drag them down into hell, for which they are purveyors and recruiters.

We can understand that they direct their efforts toward those who are on the morally upright path, and who would be otherwise lost to them if they persisted on this path. We might even understand their seduction through a simulation of the good in order to draw them into their nets. However, what is incomprehensible is that they in fact direct their efforts toward those who should already belong to them in body and soul and they do so in order to guide them to God and the good! Who could be more in the grip of demons than those who deny and blaspheme God, who immerse themselves in vice and the turmoil of the passions? Aren't they already on their way to hell? Having secured their prey, why would these supposed demons exhort them to pray to God, to submit to the divine will and to renounce evil? Why would they hold up before their prey the delightful life of good spirits and paint such a horrible picture of what is in store for evil ones? Who has ever seen retailers praise the merchandise of their competitors to the detriment of their own, recommending their clients to them? Who has ever seen a military recruiter deprecate military life and praise the ease of civilian life? Would they tell their recruits that they will have a life of fatigue and privation, that there is a ten to one chance in favor of their being killed or at least of losing an arm or a leg?

Nevertheless, this is the foolish role attributed to demons, for it is a well-known fact that as a result of the teachings emanating

from the invisible world we see disbelievers return to God every day and pray with a fervor they had never had before, and we see vicious individuals struggle ardently to better themselves. Thus, to attribute such a ruse to the Devil is to confer on him the diploma of *a true simpleton*. And since we are not dealing with a simple supposition but an experiential fact against which there is no argument, we must conclude that the Devil is either completely inept or he is not as cunning and evil as imagined. Consequently, he is not as fearful as previously thought, since he is working against his own interests – or else he is not at all the one behind every manifestation.

8. “They inscribe error under all sorts of forms, and in order to achieve this result wood, stone, forests, fountains, idol sanctuaries, table legs and *the hands of children* become oracles.”

According to this, what would be the value ascribed to these words from the Scriptures: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young people shall have visions and your old people shall dream dreams. In those days, I shall pour out my spirit on all my servants and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17,18). Don’t these words contain a prophecy of the mediumship of our day, and which is being granted to all sorts of individuals, even to children? Was such a faculty condemned by the apostles? No. They pronounced it as a divine grace and not as a work of the Devil. Are today’s theologians endowed with more knowledge concerning this matter than the apostles? Shouldn’t they instead see the hand of God in the fulfillment of these words?

9. “By means of *modern magic* we see among us the evocations, oracles, consultations, *healings* and trickery that used to adorn idolatrous temples and sibylline caves.”

Where do we see practices of magic in spirit evocations? There was a time when people believed in the efficacy of these practices, but today they are seen as foolish. No one believes in

them and Spiritism condemns them. At the time when magic flourished, knowledge about the nature of spirits was highly imperfect and they were regarded as having been endowed with super-human power. They were evoked to obtain the favors of luck and fortune, to discover hidden treasure, to reveal the future or to provide philters⁵² – even at the cost of one's soul. With its symbols, formulas and cabalistic practices, magic was claimed to be capable of revealing secrets for performing wonders and coercing spirits to remain at the orders of humans to satisfy their desires. Today, we know that spirits are merely the souls of the dead and we only evoke them to receive counsel from the good ones, to moralize the imperfect ones and to continue our relationships with our loved ones. Here is what Spiritism has to say on the matter:

10. - There are no means available for coercing a spirit to come against its will. If it is morally equal to or above you, you have no authority over it whatsoever. If it is morally beneath you, you can only act upon it *if it is for its own good* because in that case other spirits will help you. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXV)

- Whenever we want to address serious spirits, the most essential of all attitudes for evoking them is concentration. If we have *faith and the desire for the good*, we make ourselves more capable of evoking higher order spirits. By lifting up our soul for a few moments of concentration at the time we evoke good spirits, we identify ourselves with them and thus predispose them to come to us. (*The Medium' Book*, chap. XXV)

- No object, medallion or talisman has the ability to attract or repel spirits; matter per se has no effect on them. A good spirit would never advise such absurdities. A talisman's virtue can only exist in the mind of the one who believes in it. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXV)

⁵² Love potions. – Tr.

- There are no sacramental formulas for evoking spirits. Whoever might claim to have established such a formula could be accused of charlatanism, since form means nothing to spirits. However, an evocation must always be made in God' name. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XVII)

- Spirits who set dates for communications in gloomy places at inconvenient hours are those who have fun at the expense of whoever will listen to them. It is always futile and often dangerous to give in to such suggestions; futile because absolutely nothing is gained except deception, and dangerous not because of what such spirits might do, but because of the influence that such incidents can exert upon weak minds. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXV)

- There are no specially propitious days or times for evocations; like everything else material, such is completely meaningless to spirits. Besides, belief in these things is mere *superstition*. The most favorable times are those when the evoker can be least preoccupied with his or her habitual concerns, or when his or her body and spirit feel most serene. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXV)

- Malevolent critics enjoy representing spirit communications as surrounded by the foolish and superstitious practices of magic and necromancy. If those who speak about Spiritism without understanding it would endeavor to study it, they would spare themselves much imaginative work and avoid allegations that could serve only to demonstrate their ignorance or ill-will. For the edification of individuals foreign to the science⁵³, we would state that there are no specially propitious days, hours or places for evoking spirits, nor are there any formulas or sacramental or cabalistic words required. No preparation or initiation is necessary. The use of any symbol or material object, whether to attract or repel them, has no effect – thought alone is sufficient.

⁵³ "Spiritism is the new science that has come to reveal to mankind, by means of irrefutable proofs, the existence and nature of the spiritual world and its relationship with the physical world." Allan Kardec, *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. 1, Item 5. (emphasis added) – Tr.

Finally, mediums receive their communications without leaving the normal state, as simply and naturally as if they were dictated by a living person. Only charlatanism could display eccentric mannerisms and add ridiculous accessories to such moments. (*What is Spiritism?* chap. II, no. 49)

- In principle, the future must remain hidden from humankind; only in rare and exceptional cases does God allow it to be revealed. If people knew the future, they would certainly neglect the present and would not act with the same freedom, since they would be dominated by the thought that if such and such must happen, it would do no good to be concerned about it; on the other hand, they might try to find a way to prevent it. God has willed it to be this way so that all may contribute to the accomplishment of things, even to that which humankind would want to avoid. Nevertheless, God permits the future to be revealed whenever the foreknowledge of an event would not hinder but facilitate the event's accomplishment by leading persons to act favorably and not contrarily. (*The Spirits' Book*, pt. 3, chap. X)

- Spirits do not ostensibly guide scientific research or discoveries. Science is the work of genius and can only be acquired through labor because that is how humankind evolves. What merit would there be if in order to know about something, all we had to do was ask spirits? At that price, any simpleton could become knowledgeable. The same applies regarding the inventions and discoveries of industry.

When the time for particular discoveries arrives, the spirits in charge of directing their implementation seek out individuals who are capable of succeeding at them. They inspire them with the necessary ideas so as to leave them all the merit, for the individuals themselves must develop and put them into effect. Such has been the case with all great works of the human mind. Spirits leave every individual within his or her own realm: those

who are only capable of tilling the soil are not made depositories of the secrets of God; nevertheless, spirits can *dredge up from obscurity* those who show themselves capable of assisting the divine plan. Consequently, do not allow yourselves to be led by curiosity or ambition onto a path *which is not the objective of Spiritism*, and which would lead you into the most foolish deceptions. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXVI)

- Spirits do not lead anyone to the discovery of hidden treasure. High order spirits are not concerned about such things and only deceitful spirits would point out treasures that most of the time do not even exist or indicate sites that are diametrically opposite those where the treasures really are. Nonetheless, this has its usefulness in that it shows that true fortune resides in labor. Whenever Providence has destined someone for hidden riches, that person will come upon them naturally and not otherwise. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXVI)

- By enlightening us about the properties of the fluids – the agents and means of action for the invisible world and comprising one of the forces and powers of nature – Spiritism provides us the key to innumerable phenomena that have been unexplainable and which are inexplicable by any other means, and which in the past used to be regarded as miracles. Like magnetism, Spiritism reveals a law, if not unknown, at least poorly understood, that is, a law whose effects we know about because they have occurred throughout history. It is ignorance of this law that gave rise to superstition in the first place. Once the law was identified, however, the extraordinary disappeared and the phenomena entered the order of natural events. That is why spirits do not any more perform miracles by making tables turn or the dead to write than physicians perform miracles by reviving a dying person, or physicists by causing lightening bolts. Whoever claims to perform miracles through Spiritism would either be ignorant of

the science⁵⁴ or would have an interest in deceiving others. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. II)

- Some people have a very wrong idea about evocations. There are those who think they consist in making the dead return from the grave in their funeral garb. Only in novels, in supernatural ghost stories and on stage do we see the fleshless dead come from the grave draped in sheets and rattling their bones. Spiritism, which has never performed miracles, does not produce this kind or any other, and it has never revived a dead body. When the body is buried, it remains there forever, but the fluidic and intelligent spirit being is not buried with its dense envelope. It begins to separate from the body at the instant of death, and once this separation takes place there is no longer anything in common between them. (*What is Spiritism?* chap. II, no. 48)

11. We have dwelled on the above statements in order to show that the principles of Spiritism have no relation whatsoever with those of magic. In Spiritism, spirits are not at the orders of humans; there are no means of coercing them; no symbols or cabalistic formulas; no treasure discoveries or procedures for becoming rich; no miracles or wonders, divinization or fantastical apparitions; nothing, finally, that comprises the purpose and essential elements of magic. Spiritism not only repudiates such things but demonstrates their impossibility and ineffectiveness. Thus, there is no analogy between the purposes and means of magic and those of Spiritism; only ignorance and bad faith could confuse the two. Consequently, since Spiritist principles have nothing secret about them because they are formulated in clear terms without any possibility of mistake, such misunderstanding cannot prevail.

As for healings, admitted as real in the pastoral letter cited above, that example was badly chosen as a way to discourage

⁵⁴ See previous footnote. – Tr.

relationships with spirits. In fact, healings are one of the benefits that impress people most and which all can appreciate. Few people will be disposed to renounce them – especially after having exhausted all other resources – from fear of being healed by the Devil. On the contrary, there will even be those who will say that if the Devil can heal them, then he is capable of good deeds after all.⁵⁵

12. “What are the secret agents of such phenomena, the true authors of such inexplicable scenes? Angels would not agree to perform such unworthy functions and would not lend themselves to the caprices of vain curiosity.”

The pastoral’s author is referring to the physical manifestations of spirits. Among them there are obviously those that would not be worthy of highly evolved spirits. If by the word *angels* we are to understand to mean *pure spirits* or *high order spirits*, then his assertion is in precise keeping with what Spiritism has to say on the matter. However, one cannot place intelligent written, spoken, auditory communications – or communications via any other means – on the same level, because these communications are no less worthy of good spirits than they would be of the most imminent individuals on earth; nor are apparitions, healings and a huge number of others that the scriptures profusely cite as being produced by angels and saints. Thus, if angels and saints produced similar phenomena yesteryear, why wouldn’t they do so today? Nowadays, why would identical phenomena be deemed as the work of the Devil in the hands of some, while deemed as holy miracles in the hands of others? Holding to such a thesis is to abandon all logic.

The author of the pastoral letter errs in stating that the phenomena are inexplicable. On the contrary, today they are

⁵⁵ In wanting to persuade people who have been healed by spirits that it was the work of the Devil, the Church has alienated a large number of them who otherwise would have never considered leaving. – Auth.

perfectly explicable and that is why they are no longer viewed as miraculous or supernatural. Even if they were to still remain inexplicable, it would be no more logical to attribute them to the Devil than it was in the past to attribute to the Devil all the natural phenomena that could not be comprehended.

By the expression *unworthy functions* we must understand it to mean any ridiculous or evil role. However, we cannot qualify as such the acts of spirits who practice the good and lead people to God and to virtue. Spiritism *expressly* states that unworthy functions are not the attributes of highly evolved spirits, as the following precepts demonstrate:

13. A spirit's category is recognized by its language. Those who are truly good and of a high order always express themselves in dignified, noble and logical language that is devoid of any contradiction; it resounds with wisdom, benevolence, modesty and the purest morals. It is concise and without useless redundancy. Among low order spirits, who are ignorant or proud, the emptiness of their ideas is always compensated for by an abundance of words. Every implicitly erroneous thought, every maxim contrary to sane morals, every absurd counsel, every crude, trivial or simply frivolous expression, any sign of malevolence, presumptuousness or arrogance are incontestable indications of a little-evolved spirit.

– High order spirits only concern themselves with intelligent communications aimed at our instruction. Physical or purely material manifestations are most commonly entrusted to low order spirits – normally designated as *rapping spirits* – for the same reason that among us gymnastics are performed by tumblers and not by scholars. *It would be absurd to suppose that a spirit, even a little-evolved one, would enjoy ostentation* (see *What is Spiritism?* chap. II, nos. 37-40, 60. See also *The Spirits' Book*, pt. 2, chap. I – Different orders of spirits; the Spirit Scale, and *The Mediums' Book*, pt. 2, chap. XXIV – Identity of spirits; Distinction between good and evil spirits)

What person of good faith could possibly see in these precepts any unworthy function attributed to high order spirits? Spiritism not only does not group all spirits together, but as far as attributing intelligence to demons – an intelligence equal to that of the angels – Spiritism has verified by observing the phenomena that, on the contrary, low order spirits are ignorant to various degrees, their moral horizon is narrow, and their astuteness is limited. They often hold an erroneous and incomplete idea about things and are incapable of resolving certain issues, and, consequently, of doing all the things attributed to demons.

14. “The souls of the dead, whom God prohibits to be evoked, remain in the place to which justice has assigned them, and *without his permission* they cannot place themselves at the disposition of the living.”

Spiritism also says that spirits cannot manifest without God’s permission, but it is even stricter, for it states that it does not accept the manifestation of any spirit – good or bad – without God’s permission. The Church, on the other hand, does not hold this to be the case with demons. Demons are exempt from such permission. Spiritism goes even further because it affirms that in spite of such permission, whenever spirits answer the call of the living, they still *do not place themselves at their disposal*.

Does a spirit who is evoked come voluntarily, or is it coerced into manifesting itself? *It obeys the will of God*. This means that it obeys the general law governing the universe. It thus judges the usefulness of manifesting, and therein lies its free will. A high order spirit always answers whenever it is called for a *useful* reason, and only refuses to respond when evoked by frivolous persons who treat the manifestation as an amusement. (*The Mediums’ Book*, chap. XXV)

– Can a spirit who is evoked refuse to come? Absolutely. If not, what would become of its free will? Do you yourselves believe

that all the beings of the universe are at your orders? Do you yourselves feel obligated to respond to all who call you by name? When I say that it can refuse, I mean *at the order of the evoker*, for a low order spirit might be obligated by a high order one to manifest. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap. XXV)

Spiritists are so convinced of not having any direct power over spirits and of not being able to obtain anything without God's permission that when they call a spirit they say, *I pray to Almighty God to allow a good spirit to communicate with me; I also pray to my guardian angel to assist me and keep evil spirits away*. And when calling to a particular spirit, they say, *I pray to Almighty God to allow the spirit of so-and-so to communicate with me*. (*The Mediums' Book*, chap XVII, no. 203)

15. The accusations formulated by the Church against evocations do not therefore apply to Spiritism, since they refer mainly to the practices of magic, with which Spiritism has nothing in common. Spiritism condemns such practices as much as the Church does, while at the same time it does not confer a role on high order spirits unworthy of them, nor does it ask anything or obtain anything without God's permission.

Of course, there may be some who abuse evocations, who make a game of them, who denature their providential purpose in order to advance their own personal interests, or who, out of ignorance, frivolousness, pride or ambition, deviate from the true principles of the Doctrine. True Spiritism, serious Spiritism, however, disowns them, just as true religion disowns false believers and the excesses of fanaticism. Therefore, it is neither logical nor reasonable to impute to Spiritism abuses that it itself condemns, or the errors of those who do not understand it. Before formulating any kind of accusation, one must know if it is justified. Hence, we will state: the Church's denunciation falls upon charlatans and speculators, on the practitioners of magic and sorcery – and with

good reason. Whenever religious or skeptic criticism categorizes abuses and stigmatizes charlatanism, it is doing nothing more than restoring the purity of the sane doctrine, which in turn helps to root out evil elements and thereby facilitates our task. The error of criticism is in confusing good and evil, which often occurs through the bad faith of some and through the ignorance of many. However, the distinction that such criticism fails to make, others do make. In any event, denunciation applied to evil, with which any sincere Spiritist would concur, cannot affect the Doctrine.

16. “Therefore, the mysterious beings who answer the first call of the *heretic* or *the impious as well as the faithful*, the criminal as well as the innocent, are sent neither by God nor apostles of truth and salvation, but rather by agents of error and hell.”

Thus, God does not allow good spirits to come to the heretic, the impious person or the criminal in order to draw them from error and save them from eternal perdition! God sends only agents of hell to drive them deeper into the mire! At the same time, God sends only evil beings to the innocent in order to pervert them! Amongst all the angels – those privileged creatures of God – isn’t there one being sufficiently compassionate who might come to the aid of lost souls!? Then what good are the shining qualities displayed by these beings if such qualities are only for their own personal enjoyment? Can they really be good angels if, immersed in the delights of contemplation, they see souls on their way to hell but do nothing to divert them from it? But isn’t that precisely the picture of the selfish wealthy individual who possesses everything with profusion but leaves the beggar to die of hunger at his or her door? Isn’t that selfishness erected as a virtue and set at the very feet of the Eternal One?

You marvel that good spirits might help the heretic and the impious person. Thus you forget the words of Christ, “It is not the one who is thoroughly healthy who needs a doctor!” Can’t

you see things from a higher perspective than the Pharisees in Jesus' day? And if you yourself were called upon by a disbeliever, would you refuse to show him or her the moral path? Well then, good spirits do what you yourself would do – they approach the impious in order to give them wise counsel. Instead of condemning communications from beyond the grave, praise the decrees of God and marvel at the Divine in its omnipotence and infinite goodness.

17. It is stated that there are guardian angels, but when they cannot make themselves listened to through the mysterious voice of conscience or through inspiration, why couldn't they use means which are more direct and physical, and which are capable of impressing the senses if such means exist? Moreover, if everything comes from God and nothing occurs without God's permission, is it possible that God avails only evil spirits of such means while refusing good spirits the right to make use of them? If that were the case, we would have to admit that God furnishes more power to the Devil to lead humans to their ruin than to guardian angels to save them.

Well then, what guardian angels cannot do themselves – according to the Church – demons do for them. By means of supposedly “infernal” spirit communications, demons lead to God those who have denied God, and to the good those who have been steeped in evil. These “demons” present us with the strange spectacle of millions of people who have come to believe in God through the power of the Devil after the Church showed itself powerless to convert them. People who had never prayed before now pray fervently thanks to the instructions of these demons! How many proud, selfish and immoral persons have become humble, charitable and moral! And yet they say that it is the work of the Devil! If that were the case, it is obvious that the Devil has rendered a better service and protection to such persons than the angels themselves have. However, one would have to have a very poor opinion of

human judgment in our day and age to believe that people blindly accept such ideas. *A religion that makes such a doctrine one of its cornerstones; a religion that declares that it would be destroyed at its very foundations if demons, hell, eternal punishment and its idea of an unjust God were removed, is a religion that is committing suicide.*

18. It is said that God sent Christ to save humankind, thereby proving God's love. But then how could God have left them without protection afterwards? Undoubtedly, Christ was the divine Messiah, sent to teach humankind the truth and show them a better way. However, count how many people after his coming have been able to hear his words, how many have died and how many will die without having known them, and finally how many of those who have known them have actually practiced them! Additionally, why wouldn't God, who always desires the salvation of God's creatures, send other messengers, who, upon coming to earth and going into the humblest places among the great and small, the learned and ignorant, disbelievers and believers, would teach the truth to those who have not heard the divine word? Why wouldn't God send such messengers in order to make the word comprehensible to those who do not understand it, overcoming through their *direct* and *multiple* teaching the insufficiency of the attempt at spreading the Gospel, thereby hastening the advent of the kingdom of God? But when in following Jesus' example these messengers come in innumerable hosts to open the eyes of the blind, to convert the impious, to heal the sick and to console the afflicted, the Church rejects them, denies the good they do and calls them demons! Such was the Pharisees' language regarding Christ. They also said that he did good through the power of the Devil! How did he respond? "You recognize a tree by its fruit: a bad tree cannot produce good fruit."

To the Pharisees, Jesus' fruit was bad because he came to destroy abuse and proclaim the freedom that would ruin their

authority. If he had come to flatter their pride, approve their corrupt practices and uphold their power, he would have been received as the hoped-for Messiah of the Jews. However, Christ was alone, poor and frail, and they condemned him to death, hoping to extinguish his word – but his word survived because it was divine. It spread very slowly, however, and after eighteen centuries it is only known by a tenth of humankind, and there have been many schisms even among his disciples. It is thus out of divine mercy that God sent the Spirits to confirm the holy word of Jesus, to complete it, to place it within reach of all, and to spread it throughout the earth. However, the Spirits have not incarnated in only one man, whose voice would have limited reach; they are innumerable; they go everywhere and no one can stop them. Their teaching is spreading with the speed of lightning because they speak to the heart and reason, and so they are understood even by the most humble.

19. “Isn’t it unworthy of heavenly messengers,” the Church asks, “to transmit their teachings by such lowly means as talking tables? Isn’t it an insult to suppose that they entertain themselves with trivialities, leaving their dwelling place of light to put themselves at the disposition of the first person to come along?”

Didn’t Jesus leave the dwelling of his Father to be born in a stable? Where has it been said that Spiritism attributes trivial practices to high order spirits? On the contrary, Spiritism affirms just the opposite; trivial phenomena are only produced by trivial spirits. Nonetheless, such triviality has struck many minds by proving the existence of the spirit world and demonstrating that that world is much different than the picture that had been painted of it. It was just the beginning and it was simple, like everything else at the beginning. But the tree that arises from a small seed later extends its branches over a great area. Who would have thought that the lowly manger of Bethlehem would give rise to the word that would transform the world?

Yes! Christ is the divine Messiah; yes! his word is the truth; yes! the religion founded upon that word will be unshakable, but only on condition that its most sublime teachings are followed and practiced and that the just and good God whom Christ introduced to us is not made into a biased, vengeful and cruel one.



The Prohibition against Evoking the Dead

1. The Church does not in any way deny the reality of spirit manifestations. On the contrary, as we have seen in the preceding citations, it accepts them all but attributes them exclusively to the intervention of demons. However, anyone who would invoke the Gospels in prohibiting them would be mistaken because the Gospels do not say one word regarding the matter. The main, prevailing argument is the prohibition by Moses. In the following, we will provide the words in which the same pastoral letter that we cited in previous chapters addresses the subject:

“It is not permitted to enter into relations with them (spirits), either directly or through the intermediation of those who evoke and question them. The Mosaic Law punished with death the detestable practices in use among the Gentiles. ‘Do not seek out magicians,’ says the book of *Leviticus*, ‘nor seek to know anything from fortune tellers, lest you contaminate yourselves by addressing them’ (Lev. 19:31). ‘Any man or woman in whom there is a necromantic or pythonic spirit must be put to death; they shall be stoned and their blood shall fall upon their heads’ (Lev. 20:27). The book of *Deuteronomy* states, ‘Allow none to remain alive among you who consult diviners, or who observe dreams and omens, or who use spells, sorcery or enchantments, or who consult

those who have a pythonic spirit and practice fortune telling or who inquire of the dead to know the truth. The Lord considers all such things as abominations and at your coming shall destroy the nations that commit such crimes' (Deut. 18:10-12)."

2. To better understand the true meaning of the Mosaic words, it will be useful to reproduce the entire text completely, which was abbreviated in the preceding quotations. Thus:

"Do not turn from your God to seek out magicians; do not consult diviners, lest you contaminate yourselves by going to them. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:31).

"Any man or woman in whom there is a necromantic spirit or pythonic spirit must be punished with death; they shall be stoned and their blood shall fall upon their head" (Lev. 20:27).

"When you have entered the land that the Lord your God shall give you, watch yourselves, so that you do not imitate the abominations of such people. And let there be none among you who intend *to purify son or daughter by passing them through the fire*, or those who consult fortune tellers or observe dreams and omens, or who use spells, sorcery or enchantments; who consult those who have a necromantic or pythonic spirit, or who intend to divine or inquire of the dead in order to know the truth. The Lord considers all such things as abominations and at your coming shall destroy all such peoples because of these kinds of crimes, which they have committed" (Deut. 18:9-12).

3. If the Mosaic Law must be so strictly observed on this point, the same must equally apply to all other points, for why would it apply to evocations but not to other matters? Consistency is required. Since it is recognized that the Mosaic Law is no longer in agreement with our age and customs in certain cases, the same reason applies to the prohibition we are addressing.

Moreover, we must discuss the motives that justified this prohibition – they had their reason for being – but which today

obviously no longer exist. The Hebrew law-giver wanted his people to abandon all the customs they had acquired while in Egypt, where evocations were in use and were subject to abuse, as evidenced in these words from Isaiah: “The spirit of Egypt will vanish by itself and I will overturn the Egyptians’ plans; they shall consult their idols, their fortune tellers, and their magicians” (Is. 19:3).

Hence, the Israelites were not to form any alliances with foreign nations. They would encounter the same practices among these cultures and they would soon be fighting against them. For political reasons, Moses thus had to inspire the Hebrew people’s aversion toward all the customs that had points of contact with the ones acquired in Egypt. In order to encourage such aversion, Moses needed to make them understand such practices as being condemned by God; hence these words: “The Lord considers all such things as abominations and at *your coming* shall destroy the nations that commit such crimes.”

4. Moses’ prohibition was well-justified because evoking the dead did not originate from sentiments of respect, affection or piety toward them. Instead, it was a means of fortune telling, much like the omens and auguries exploited by charlatanism and superstition. Try as he might, however, Moses was unable to uproot these customs. They had been transformed into an object of business, as is attested to by the following passage by the same prophet:

“And when they say to you, ‘Consult the magicians and fortune tellers who murmur their spells,’ answer them, ‘Doesn’t each people consult its own God? And should one inquire of the dead concerning the living?’” (Is. 8:19)

“It is I who enable you to see the falsehood of magical omens; it is I who make those who try to foretell the future appear foolish; it is I who overturn the mind of wise men and confound their vain knowledge” (Is. 44:25).

“Let those fortune tellers who contemplate the heavenly bodies and count the months in order to make predictions, and who desire to reveal the future to you, come forward now and save you. They have been made into straw and the fire has devoured them. They will not free their souls from the burning flames. From the burning fire, there shall not be left any coals with which they can warm themselves or even before which they may sit. This is what shall become of all these things to which you have devoted yourselves so diligently. Those *merchants* that had done business with you since your youth will disappear, and one by one will not be found to draw you from your evils” (Is. 47:13-15).

In this chapter, Isaiah is addressing the Babylonians by using the allegorical figure of the “*virgin daughter of Babylon, daughter of the Chaldeans*” (v. 1). He states that fortune tellers will not prevent the downfall of the monarchy. In the following chapter he addresses the Israelites directly:

“You others, come here, you children of a sorceress, you offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute. Whom are you mocking? At whom do you open your mouths and stick out your cruel tongues? Are you not perverse children and rejected bastards, you who seek comfort in your gods beneath every tree covered with leaves, and who *sacrifice your babes* in the ravines under the overhanging rocks? You have placed your trust in the rocks of the ravine; you have poured out drink offerings in their honor; you have offered them sacrifices. After all this, should my indignation not kindle against you?” (Is. 57:3-6).

These words are unequivocal and clearly show that at that time evocations were for the purpose of fortune telling and that at the same time they comprised a business associated with the practices of magic and sorcery; they were even accompanied with human sacrifice. Moses was therefore right to prohibit such things and to affirm that God loathed them. Such superstitious practices

continued even through the Middle Ages, but today reason predominates and Spiritism has come to show the exclusively moral, consoling and religious purpose of relations with those beyond the grave. Consequently, since Spiritists “do not sacrifice children or make drink offerings to honor gods”; since they do not inquire of heavenly bodies, the dead or sorcerers in order to divine the future that God has wisely hidden from humankind; since they reject any form of making a business of the faculty of communicating with spirits, which some possess; since they are not motivated by curiosity or greed but by a sentiment of piety and a desire to learn, improve themselves, and to comfort suffering souls, then Moses’ prohibition does not relate in any way to them. If those who complain against Spiritists would delve more deeply into the meaning of the biblical words, they would realize that there is no analogy between what was occurring among the Hebrews and the principles of Spiritism. Moreover, Spiritism condemns everything that motivated Moses’ interdict; however, in their blind desire to find arguments to fight new ideas, its adversaries do not perceive that such arguments are completely erroneous.

Contemporary criminal law punishes all the abuses that Moses meant to repress. However, if he pronounced the ultimate penalty against transgressors, it was because he needed severe means for governing such an unruly people. Furthermore, this penalty was constantly present throughout the Mosaic Law code because there was not much else to choose from as a means of repression. There were neither prisons nor correctional institutions in the desert, and his people were not of a nature that was afraid of purely disciplinary punishment. Besides, Moses could not gradate punishments as we can nowadays. It is therefore erroneous to support oneself on the severity of the punishment to prove the degree of culpability for evoking the dead. Out of respect for the Mosaic Law, would it be necessary to retain the death penalty in all

the matters in which it was prescribed? Why so insistently revive this particular article while at the same time keeping quiet about the beginning of the chapter in Deuteronomy, which *prohibits priests from possessing earthly assets and sharing in any inheritance, because the Lord is their proper inheritance?* (Deut. 28:1-2).

5. There are two distinct parts in the Mosaic Law: the law of God per se, promulgated on Mt. Sinai, and the civil or criminal law, adapted to the customs and character of the people. The former law is invariable while the latter changes over time, and it would occur to no one that we should be governed according to the same means as the Jews in the desert any more than we in 19th century France should be governed by the Capitularies of Charlemagne. For example, who would think about reviving this article of the Mosaic Law today: “If a bull gores a man or woman to death, let the bull be stoned to death and let no one eat its flesh; however, the bull’s owner shall be found innocent?” (Ex. 21: 28 ff.).

This article, which seems so absurd to us, had no other object than to punish the bull and hold the owner innocent, and it simply entailed the confiscation of the animal that caused the accident in order to make the owner be more careful. The loss of the bull was the owner’s punishment and would have been very severe for a people of herders. It would have hindered others from allowing the same wrong to happen. However, the loss benefited no one because eating the bull’s flesh was prohibited. Other articles prescribe cases in which the owner is responsible.

Everything had its reason for being in Moses’ legislation, for everything was foreseen in it down to the last detail. But the form as well as the basis was adapted to the circumstances of the occasion. If Moses were to return today to give a new code to a civilized European nation, he would not give that of the Hebrews.

6. It may be objected that all the laws of Moses, as well as those received on Sinai, were dictated in God’s name. However, if we regard

all of them as being of divine origin, why are the commandments limited to the Decalogue? What is the reason for the difference? If all the laws have emanated from God, all are equally obligatory; then why aren't they all observed? For instance, why hasn't circumcision been retained, to which Jesus himself was submitted and did not abolish? It is forgotten that in order to lend more authority to their laws, all ancient legislators attributed a divine origin to them. More than any other, Moses needed such divine support due to the character of his people, and if in spite of this he had so much difficulty in making them obey his law, how much worse the situation would have been if he had promulgated his laws in his own name.

Didn't Jesus come to modify the Mosaic Law, and didn't his own law become the code for Christians? Didn't he say: You know that such and such a thing was said to the ancients, but I now tell you further? But did he touch the law of Sinai? Certainly not; he sanctioned it and his entire moral doctrine is nothing more than a further development of it. Nowhere did Jesus allude to the prohibition against evoking the dead. Nevertheless, it was too serious a subject for him to have omitted it from his teachings, whereas he had addressed others that were more secondary.

7. In sum, it is a question of knowing if the Church places the Mosaic Law above the Gospel Law; in other words, if it is more Jewish than Christian. It is worth noting that of all religions, Judaism opposes Spiritism least because Judaism does not invoke the Mosaic Law against relations with the dead, a law on which the Christian sects themselves rest.

8. There is a further contradiction: if Moses prohibited the evoking of spirits, it was because they could actually appear, for otherwise the prohibition would have been needless. Thus, if they could manifest back then, they can do so today, and if they are the spirits of the dead, then they are not demons exclusively; furthermore, Moses never even spoke of demons.

It is therefore obvious that one cannot support oneself logically on the Law of Moses in this case for the dual reason that it does not govern Christianity and it is not proper for the customs of our time. Nonetheless, even if we were to suppose that the Mosaic Law has as much authority as some grant it, it still would not apply to Spiritism, as we have just seen.

It is true that Moses' prohibition entails interrogating the dead, but only secondarily as an accessory to the practices of sorcery. The word *interrogate* alongside fortune teller and sorcerer shows that amongst the Hebrews evocations were a means of *fortune telling*. However, Spiritists do not evoke the dead to receive illicit revelations but to receive their wise counsels and to seek relief on behalf of those who suffer. Obviously, if the Hebrews had used such communications from beyond the grave for such a purpose, then instead of prohibiting the practice, Moses would have encouraged it because such communications would have greatly benefited his people.

9. Of course, although there are facetious or ill-intended critics who have described Spiritist meetings as assemblies of sorcerers or necromancers and mediums as fortune tellers, if charlatans have sometimes mixed up the name *Spiritism* with the foolish practices that it itself condemns, there are plenty of people who are aware of the essentially moral and serious nature of Spiritist meetings. The Doctrine, written for all people, sufficiently protests against abuses of any kind so that the slander falls upon those who really deserve it.

10. Evocation, they say, shows a lack of respect for the dead, whose ashes should not be disturbed. Who says this? Antagonists from two opposing camps, who join hands: disbelievers, *who do not believe in souls*, and those who, although believing in souls, claim that *they cannot manifest themselves and that it is really the Devil who manifests*.

When an evocation is made religiously and reverently, when spirits are called not out of curiosity but out of affection and sympathy and with a sincere desire for instruction and moral improvement, we do not see how there can be any more lack of respect in calling individuals *after death* than in calling them *while they are alive*. However, there is another peremptory response to this objection, which is that spirits appear spontaneously, without coercion and often without even being called. They also tell of the satisfaction they experience in communicating with human beings and they sometimes complain of being forgotten by those they left behind. If spirits' peace were disturbed or if they did not like to be called, they would certainly say so and would not manifest, but since they are free, then whenever they answer us it is because they have accepted the call.

11. There is a further alleged reason: "Souls remain in the dwelling place to which divine justice has assigned them, that is, in hell or in heaven." Consequently, those who are in hell cannot leave, even though demons are completely free to do so. The souls that are in heaven are completely involved in their blissfulness; they are much too superior to mortals to be concerned about them and they are so blissful that they would never return to this earth full of miseries in the interest of the family and friends they left here. Aren't these souls rather like the rich who look away from the poor so as not to have their digestion affected? If that were the case, they would hardly be worthy of such supreme happiness because it would be a reward for selfishness. Moreover, there are still those who are in purgatory, but they are suffering souls and must think of their own salvation before anything else. Thus, neither the former nor the latter can answer our call; only the Devil can manifest in their stead. Therefore, if they themselves cannot come, then there is no reason for us to be concerned about disturbing their rest.

12. Here another problem arises. If blissful souls cannot leave their glorious mansion in order to help mortals, why does the Church invoke the assistance of the saints, who must be enjoying the greatest bliss possible? Why does it advise the faithful to invoke them in cases of sickness, affliction and for protection against calamity? Why, according to the Church, do the saints and the Virgin herself appear to individuals in visions and perform miracles? Thus, they leave heaven to come down to earth. If those who are high in heaven can leave it, why is it that those who are in a less elevated place cannot?

13. That disbelievers deny the manifestation of souls is understandable due to the fact that they do not believe souls exist in the first place, but what is odd is to see those whose belief rests precisely on the soul's existence and future *angrily oppose the very means of proving its existence and make every effort to show that such is impossible!* It would seem natural, however, for those who have the most interest in the soul's existence to joyfully accept as a grace of Providence the means to refute skeptics with irrefutable proof, since they are the ones who actually deny religion itself. These constantly deplore the avalanche of disbelief that is decimating the flock of the faithful, but when they are given the most powerful means of combating it, they reject it more obstinately than disbelievers themselves. Then when such proofs multiply to the point of leaving no more doubt, they resort to the supreme approach of prohibiting the subject from being discussed at all, seeking to justify their position with an article of the Mosaic Law which no one remembers and to which they strongly intend to give a meaning that it does not have. And they are so joyful at such a discovery that they do not realize that this same article is actually a justification for the Spiritist Doctrine.

14. None of the alleged reasons for condemning relations with spirits can hold up under serious examination. From the

eagerness with which they oppose it, it is easy to deduce the big personal interest connected to the subject; otherwise, they would not be so insistent. In observing such a crusade by all sects against spirit manifestations, one might say that they are virtually *terrified of them*. The real reason could be their fear that because spirits see things much more clearly, they might come to enlighten humans concerning points that the churches would rather keep hidden, and enable people to know exactly what the other world is like and the *real conditions of both the fortunate and misfortunate in that place*. That is why one tells a child, “Don’t go there because of the boogie man,” or why one tells adults, “Don’t evoke spirits because only the Devil will answer you.” It does not matter, however. They can try to prevent people from evoking them, but they cannot prevent them from coming to people, bringing the light out from beneath the bushel.

The creed that holds the absolute truth has nothing to fear of that light because the light makes the truth shine forth; the Devil could not prevail against the truth.

15. Rejecting communications from beyond the grave is the same as rejecting the most powerful means of learning which results from knowing about the future life and the examples that such communications furnish to us. Furthermore, experience has taught us the good that we can do by turning imperfect spirits from evil and helping those who are suffering to detach themselves from matter and improve themselves. To forbid communicating with suffering souls is therefore to deprive them of the assistance that we can and must provide them. The following words of a spirit wonderfully sum up the effects of evocation when done for a charitable purpose:

“Every suffering and unfortunate spirit will tell you about the cause of its downfall and the follies to which it succumbed; it will tell you about its hopes, struggles and fears; its regrets, pain

and desperation; it will show you God, justifiably displeased, severely punishing the wrongdoer. Upon hearing this, you will be moved with compassion for the spirit and with fear for yourselves. And if you follow its complaints, you will see that God has not lost sight of it, that he is always awaiting the repentant sinner, and will open his arms as soon as it begins to progress towards him. You will see the wrongdoer's progress, to which you will have the happiness and glory of contributing; you will follow it with the solicitude of the surgeon seeing the healing of the wound that he cares for daily" (Bordeaux, 1861).

Part Two



Examples¹

- Chapter I The Passage
- Chapter II Happy Spirits
- Chapter III Average Spirits
- Chapter IV Suffering Spirits
- Chapter V Suicides
- Chapter VI Repentant Criminals
- Chapter VII Hardened Spirits
- Chapter VIII Earthly Expiations

¹ Part 2 contains numerous examples of actual spirit communications. In keeping with the period in which they were received and to preserve their personal nature, we have purposefully not used inclusive language in translating them although we maintain it in the text portions by Kardec. – Tr.



The Passage

1. Being certain about the future life does not exclude being apprehensive about the passage from this life to that one. There are many people who do not fear death per se, but what they do dread is the moment of transition. During that passage, do we suffer or not? This is what worries them, and with good reason, for no one can run from that transition. One can decline any trip while in this world, but in the case in question both the rich and the poor will have to make the journey, and if it is a painful one neither status nor fortune will mitigate its bitterness.

2. Upon seeing the peacefulness of some deaths and the awful convulsions of agony of others, one can see very well that the sensations of the moment are not always the same. But who can enlighten us regarding the matter? Who can describe the physiological phenomenon of the separation of the soul from the body? Who can tell us about the impressions of that supreme moment? On this matter, science and religion have nothing to say.

But why don't they? Because they lack an understanding of the laws that govern the relationship between the spirit and matter; one stops at the threshold of the spirit life, while the other stops at the threshold of the material life. Spiritism is the intersecting point of union between both, and only Spiritism can tell us how the transition occurs, whether because of the positive notions it offers about the nature of the soul, or whether because

of the information given by those who have already left life on earth behind. Understanding the fluidic tie that binds the soul to the body is the key to this and many other phenomena.

3. That inert matter is insensitive is a fact; only the soul experiences sensations of pain and pleasure. During life, every physical disaggregation impacts on the soul, which in turn receives an impression that is either more painful or less so. It is the soul that suffers and not the body. The body per se is nothing more than an instrument of pain – the soul is what actually feels it. When separated from the soul at death, the body can be mutilated at will and will feel nothing. The soul is isolated from the body and is no longer touched by any effect of the body's destruction. The soul has sensations of its own but their source is not in tangible matter.

The perispirit is the fluidic envelope of the soul and is not separate from it either before death or afterward. The two together may be said to form a whole, for one cannot be conceived of without the other. During earthly life, the perispiritual fluid penetrates the body at every point and serves as a vehicle for the physical sensations of the soul, whereas the soul operates through the perispirit to act upon the body and guide its movements.

4. The extinction of organic life produces the separation of the soul from the body by breaking the fluidic connection that links them together; however, this process never occurs abruptly. The perispiritual fluid disengages little by little from all the organs so that the separation is complete and final only when not a single atom of the perispirit is connected to any one molecule of the body. *The painful sensation that the soul experiences at that moment results directly from the number of points of contact between the body and perispirit, and this in turn determines the greater or lesser difficulty or slowness of the separation.* It is needless to point out that whether death is more painful or less so depends on the circumstances. We shall now determine what such circumstances might be.

5. First, let us establish the four following cases, which we can view as extreme situations within whose boundaries there are an infinite number of variations: 1) if at the time of the extinction of organic life the disengagement of the perispirit has already been completed, the soul will feel absolutely nothing; 2) if at that time the union of the two elements is still in full force, a sort of rupture will occur that impacts very painfully on the soul; 3) if the union is weak, the separation will be easy and occur without shock; 4) if after the complete cessation of organic life there are still several points of contact between the body and the perispirit, the soul will feel the effects of the body's decomposition until the tie is completely dissolved.

Based on these facts, the suffering that accompanies death will depend on the adhering force that binds the body to the perispirit. Everything that might help to weaken this force accelerates the speed of the disengagement process, making the passage less difficult. Finally, if the disengagement occurs without difficulty, the soul will not experience any unpleasant sensation whatsoever.

6. In the transition from the corporeal life to the spirit life, another crucially important phenomenon occurs: the state of confusion.⁵⁶ During this time, the soul experiences a sort of numbness that temporarily paralyzes its faculties and neutralizes the sensations it feels, at least partly. The soul is in a state of catalepsy, so to speak, because it is almost never consciously aware of the last sigh of death. We say *almost never*, because there are cases in which the soul can consciously perceive the disengagement, as we will soon discuss. The state of confusion at the time of death can thus be regarded as normal and may last for an indeterminate time, varying from a few hours to many years. As the soul gradually frees itself, it is in a state comparable to when someone awakens from a

⁵⁶ See *The Spirits' Book*, pt. 2 chap. III: The spirit's state of confusion after death. – Tr.

deep sleep: its thoughts are confused, vague and uncertain; things are perceived as through a fog, but little by little, sight becomes clearer and memory returns. For some spirits, this awakening process is peaceful, entailing delightful sensations; it is quite different for others, though: full of terror and anxiety, producing the effect of a horrible nightmare.

7. The last sigh of death is not therefore the most painful moment, because the soul is not usually even aware of it; however, the soul can suffer before that moment from the disaggregation of the body's matter during the death throes, and afterward from the anxiety of the state of confusion. We would be quick to add that this situation is not always the rule since the intensity and duration of the suffering (as we have previously stated) are a direct result of the affinity between the body and the perispirit.⁵⁷ Consequently, the greater the affinity, the more difficult and prolonged will be the soul's efforts to disengage itself. There are persons in whom the connection is so weak that the disengagement occurs by itself, naturally; the spirit detaches from the body like a ripe fruit falling from the stem. Such is the case of peaceful deaths and tranquil awakenings.

8. The principal cause behind the greater or lesser difficulty of the disengagement is the soul's moral state. The affinity between the body and the perispirit is proportional to the attachment between the spirit and matter, which is most pronounced in individuals whose preoccupations exclusively and solely involve the material pleasures that life offers. On the other hand, in pure souls who identify themselves with the spirit life beforehand, such attachment is almost non-existent. And since the slowness and difficulty of disengagement are a result of the soul's degree of purity and dematerialization, it depends on us to render the disengagement easy or difficult, pleasant or painful.

⁵⁷ Perispirit (Spirit Body): Questions 93-95, *The Spirits' Book*. – Tr.

Therefore, whether as a theory or as the result of observation, it remains for us to examine the influence the kind of death has upon the soul's sensations during the last moment.

9. In natural death resulting from the extinction of the life forces due to old age or disease, the disengagement occurs over the time prior to death. For individuals whose soul has become dematerialized and whose thoughts have been detached from earthly matters, the disengagement is nearly complete before actual death; that is, even though the body still has organic life, the spirit has already entered the spirit life and is only connected to the body by a very fragile cord that snaps easily with the last heartbeat. In such a case, the spirit may have already recovered its lucidity and can consciously witness the extinction of life from the body, from which it is happy to have freed itself. For such a soul, there is almost no state of confusion whatsoever; instead, the state is no more than a moment of peaceful sleep. It awakens with an indescribable feeling of hope and blessedness.

However, in materialistic and sensual individuals, who have lived more according to the body than the spirit, and for whom the spirit life has meant nothing – it has not even been part of their reality – everything has contributed to *tightening* the material ties. Nothing has been done to loosen them during life, so when death arrives, disengagement does eventually occur, although it demands continued effort. The death throes are the sign of the struggle of the spirit, who wavers between trying to break the resistant cord and trying to hold onto the body; nevertheless, an irresistible force violently shakes the spirit loose molecule by molecule.

10. The more the spirit clings to corporeal life, the less it sees beyond it. It senses that life is escaping and wants to hold onto it. Instead of giving into the forces that are pulling it out, it resists with all its strength and can thus prolong the struggle for days, weeks and months on end. During this time, of course,

the spirit does not enjoy full lucidity, since the state of confusion actually began well before actual death; however, this does not mean that it suffers any less, and the state of mental vacuity in which it finds itself and the uncertainty as to what will happen next increase its anguish. Death has come but nothing ends; the confusion continues. The spirit feels that it is alive, but does not know if this life is physical or spiritual. It continues to struggle until the last connections between the perispirit and the body are broken. Death has put an end to the malady the body had been suffering but it has not stopped its consequences, so that as long as there are still points of contact between the body and perispirit, the spirit is still affected by such consequences and suffers from them.

11. The situation is markedly different for the dematerialized spirit, even in the case of the direst infirmities. Having become quite fragile, the fluidic ties binding the spirit to the body are easily broken. Furthermore, its trust in the future, which it has already foreseen mentally and sometimes actually, enables it to view its infirmities as a trial and death as a redemption; hence the mental tranquility and resignation that ease its suffering. After death, with the ties having been instantaneously broken, it feels no painful reaction whatsoever. Upon awakening, it feels free, animated, relieved of a heavy weight and very happy at not having to suffer any longer.

12. In violent death, the situation is not exactly the same. Since no partial disaggregation has led to a separation between the body and perispirit beforehand, organic life is suddenly snatched away while still fully in force. The detachment of the perispirit only begins after death and in such a case, as in others, this cannot happen all at once. The spirit is taken by surprise and feels bewildered, but perceiving that it can still think, it believes it is still alive. This delusion lasts until it can gain an

understanding of its new situation. This type of intermediary state between corporeal and spirit life is one of the most interesting subjects for study because it presents the peculiar situation of a spirit who mistakes its fluidic body as being its physical one and it experiences all the sensations of organic life. Such a case displays a variety of nuances that depend on the character, knowledge, and degree of the spirit's moral development. It lasts only a little while for those whose soul is purified, because the disengagement always begins beforehand, so that even the most unexpected death merely hastens its completion. For others, however, it can last for years. This state is quite frequent even in cases of ordinary death. For some it presents nothing painful – depending on the spirit's moral qualities – while for others it is a dreadful situation. It is in cases of suicide, especially, that this situation is the most dolorous: the body remains connected to the perispirit by all its fibers, and thus all the body's convulsions reverberate in the soul and it undergoes atrocious suffering.

13. The state of the spirit at the time of death can be summarized as follows: the slower the disengagement of its perispirit, the more the spirit suffers. The speed of the disengagement depends on the spirit's degree of moral development. For the dematerialized spirit with a clear conscience, death is only a temporary sleep, free of suffering, and the awakening is very gentle.

14. In order for people to make every effort to purify themselves by restraining their evil tendencies and overcoming their passions, *they must understand the advantages of doing so for the future*. In order to identify with the future life, aspiring to it and preferring it to earthly life, it is not enough for people to merely believe that it exists. They must understand it. They must regard that life from a point of view which satisfies reason and which is thoroughly in agreement with logic and commonsense, and they must hold an idea of the grandeur, goodness and justice of God.

Of all philosophical doctrines, Spiritism is the one that exerts the most powerful influence in this regard, thanks to the unshakable faith it provides.

Authentic Spiritists are not content with merely believing: *they believe because they comprehend*, and they comprehend by calling upon their reason. The future life is thus a reality that incessantly unfolds before their eyes. They see and touch that life at every moment, so to speak. Doubt cannot enter their mind. The so very limited corporeal life disappears in the face of the spirit life, which presents itself as the true life. This is the reason why they give little importance to incidents along the way and why they confront all life's vicissitudes with resignation, understanding their causes and usefulness. The direct relations that Spiritists maintain with the invisible world uplift their soul. The fluidic connections that bind their spirit to matter become weakened, and thus an initial, partial detachment occurs that facilitates its passage from this life to the next. The state of confusion is inseparable from the transition but is of short duration, because as soon as such a spirit crosses the boundary, it recognizes itself and realizes that nothing is strange; it comprehends the new situation.

15. Of course, Spiritism is obviously not indispensable for arriving at this result, nor does it claim to be the only means to ensure the soul's salvation. Nonetheless, it facilitates it through the knowledge it provides, the sentiments it inspires and the dispositions it gives to the spirit, enabling it to comprehend the need to improve itself. Moreover, it gives each individual the means of facilitating the disengagement of *other spirits* at the time they leave their earthly envelope behind, and the means of shortening their state of confusion through prayer and evocation. Sincere prayer is a form of spiritual magnetization that brings about a more rapid disaggregation of the perispiritual fluid.

An evocation directed with understanding and prudence, using words of benevolence and encouragement, helps the departing spirit out of its bewilderment and enables it to recognize itself more quickly. If it is a suffering spirit, an evocation can incite repentance, the only means of shortening its suffering.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The examples that we are about to cite represent spirits at different levels of happiness and unhappiness in the spirit life. We have not sought out illustrious personages of antiquity, whose situation could very well have changed considerably after the lifetime in which they were known, and thus they would not be able to provide sufficient proof of their authenticity. Instead, we have taken our examples from the most ordinary circumstances of contemporary life, since these are the ones in which we can find greater potential for comparison and from which we can receive the most advantageous instructions. The closer the earthly existence of these spirits is to ours – whether by social position, family ties or relationships – the more they interest us, and the easier it is to authenticate their identity. Commonplace situations are naturally greater in number, and that is why we can more easily derive the necessary applications from them. Exceptional situations affect us less by being outside the sphere of what we are accustomed to. Therefore, they are not the examples we were looking for. Although in these following examples there may be a few known personages, most are entirely obscure individuals. Famous names would add nothing with respect to the instruction and could even wound susceptibilities. We do not address ourselves to the curious or lovers of scandal, but only to those who intend to be instructed.

These examples could be multiplied to infinity; however, we must limit their number and have thus chosen those that could best cast light on the spirit's situation in the spirit world, whether in virtue of the spirit's current condition or by the explanations that it is in a position to give. Most of these communications are unedited and only a few have been published in *Revue Spirite*. We have removed superfluous details from those, retaining only the points essential for our proposed objective. We have added to them supplementary instructions that took place afterwards. – Auth.

CHAPTER II



Happy Spirits⁵⁹

Mr. Sanson

Mr. Sanson, a former member of the Parisian Spiritist Society, died on April 21, 1862, after a year of cruel suffering. Foreseeing his end, he had sent the Society's President a letter containing the following excerpt:

“In the case of a sudden separation of my soul from my body, I wish to remind you of a request I made about a year ago. Please evoke my spirit as soon as possible and as often as is convenient for you, so that having been a sufficiently useless member of our Society during my stay on earth, I may be of at least some use beyond the grave by providing you the means of studying, step by step, through evocation, the various circumstances resulting from what is commonly called death, but which for us Spiritists is only a transformation in accordance with the impenetrable designs of God, though always useful for his purposes.

“Besides this authorization and request for you to give me the honor of this sort of ‘spiritual autopsy’ – which my very little advancement as a spirit will perhaps render unfruitful, in which case your prudence will naturally lead you to go no farther

⁵⁹ In keeping with the time period and in order to preserve the personal nature of the communications in Part 2, we have chosen not to use inclusive language in the communications but have retained it in the Author's texts and comments. – Tr.

than a certain number of experiments – I would dare to ask you personally, as well as all my colleagues, to pray to the Almighty to allow the good Spirits to assist me with their benevolent counsels. In particular, I would ask St. Louis, our Spirit President, to guide me in the choice and time for a new incarnation, an idea that I have been very preoccupied with lately. I fear being mistaken about my spiritual abilities and asking God too early and presumptuously for a corporeal life in which I would not warrant the divine goodness, and which, instead of serving for my advancement, would prolong my stay on the earth or elsewhere in case I were to fail.”

In order to satisfy his desire to be evoked as soon as possible after his passing, we went to the mortuary with a few members of the Society, and in the presence of his body and an hour before his burial, we were given the following communication. We had a two-fold objective in doing this: fulfilling his last request and observing once more the situation of the soul immediately after death, and this with a man who was imminently intelligent, enlightened and deeply convinced of Spiritist principles. It was interesting for us to verify the influence of such convictions on the state of his spirit as it gathered its first impressions of spirit life. Our expectations were not disappointed. With perfect lucidity, Mr. Sanson described the moment of his transition. He had been able to witness his own death and rebirth, an unusual circumstance that was due to the elevation of his spirit.

I

(Mortuary chamber, April 23, 1862)

1. *Evocation*

“I am answering your call in order to fulfill my promise.”

2. *My dear Mr. Sanson, we ourselves are fulfilling a duty and are pleased to be able to evoke you as soon as possible after your death, as was your desire.*

“It is a special blessing of God to allow my spirit to communicate. I thank you for your goodwill, but I am weak and *trembling*.”

3. *You had suffered so much that I thought we might ask you how you feel now. Do you still feel your pain? What sensations are you experiencing in comparing your present situation with that of two days ago?*

“My situation is quite happy, for I feel none of my former pain. I have recovered and am renewed, as you use to say. My transition from earth life to the spirit life might have made everything incomprehensible at first, because we sometimes remain many days without recovering our lucidity. But before dying, I prayed to God, asking him to allow me to speak to those whom I wish well. And he heard me.”

4. *How long did it take for you to recover your mental lucidity?*

“Eight hours. God, I repeat, has given me proof of his goodness. He deemed me more worthy than I actually am and I could never thank him as I should.”

5. *Are you sure that you no longer belong to our world? If so, how can you prove it?*

“Oh! I am absolutely no more of your world, but I will always be close to you in order to protect and uphold you as you proclaim the charity and self-denial that guided my life. In my next one, I will teach the true faith, the Spiritist faith that must uplift the beliefs of the just and good. I feel strong and robust – transformed, in a word. You would no longer recognize me as the old invalid who had to avoid everything, to abandon every pleasure and happiness. I am a spirit. My homeland is the expanse of space and my future is God who radiates throughout the immensity of it all. I would very much like to speak to my children in order to teach them what they always showed themselves ill disposed to believe.

6. *How does seeing your body here affect you?*

“My body, my poor and miserable remains, must return to dust, but I will always have a fond memory of all those who held

me in esteem while incarnate. I look upon that poor decomposing flesh, the dwelling place of my spirit, my trial for so many years! And I say: Thank you, my poor old body! You have purified my spirit. My suffering has been a ten-fold blessing and has earned me a well-deserved place. That is why I have been able to communicate to you so soon.”

7. *Did you retain your awareness up to the last instant?*

“Yes, my spirit retained its faculties. I no longer saw; I foresaw. My entire life unfolded within my memory and my last remembrance, my dying request, was to be able to communicate with you as I am doing right now. I next asked God to watch over you so that the dream of my life could be fulfilled.”

8. *Were you conscious at the moment in which your body breathed its last? What happened to you at that time? What sensations did you feel?*

“Life expires and sight, or rather, the spirit’s sight darkens. You find yourself in the void, the unknown, and then as if carried by an unknown power, you find yourself in a world where all is joy and wonder. I no longer felt anything, nor was I sure about what was occurring; nevertheless, an ineffable happiness surrounded me and I no longer felt the grip of pain.

9. *Do you know... (what I intend to read at your tomb)?*

I had barely begun to speak when the spirit responded before I could finish. Furthermore, and without having been asked, he addresses the discussion that had taken place among the attendees regarding the prospect of reading this communication at the cemetery, and who were concerned about the presence of individuals who might or might not share in our opinions.

“Oh, my friend, I already know because I was with you yesterday just as I am today. I am very satisfied with it! Thank you, thank you! Read it so that they can understand me and appreciate you. Don’t worry, for everyone is respectful in the presence of

death. Read it so that the disbelievers may acquire faith. Goodbye. Read it courageously and confidently so that my children may be converted to such an honorable belief!”

J. Sanson

During the ceremony at the cemetery, he dictated the following words: “May you no longer fear death, my friends. It is only another step for you if you have known how to live well. It is full of happiness if you have worthily deserved it and have completed your trials well. I repeat: Courage and goodwill! Do not assign more than a mediocre value to earthly possessions and you will be rewarded. *One cannot enjoy a lot of things without depriving others of their well-being*, thereby morally committing a great evil. May the earth lie lightly upon me!”

II

(Parisian Spiritist Society, April 25, 1862)

1. *Evocation.* – (Response) “My friends, I’m right here.”

2. *We were very pleased with the conversation we had with you the other day at your burial. If you are willing, we would be happy now to complete the subject for our instruction.*

“I am at your disposal and feel happy because you are thinking of me.”

3. *Since an erroneous idea about the invisible world is what so often leads to disbelief, anything that might enlighten us concerning conditions there and which might enable us to comprehend that world better would be of great value. So don’t be surprised at the questions we are about to ask.*

“I won’t be surprised and I am waiting for your questions.”

4. *You have described your passage from life to death very clearly. You said that at the moment in which your body breathed its last, your*

life expired and your spirit sight darkened. Was that moment followed by any kind of painful sensation?

“Certainly, because life is an incessant sequence of pain, and death is the complement to all of it. A violent rupture occurs as though the spirit has to make a superhuman effort to escape its envelope; it is this effort that absorbs our whole being and renders us unconscious of the transformation we are experiencing.”

This is not the general rule. Experience has shown that many spirits do in fact lose consciousness before death but that among those who have arrived at a certain degree of spiritualization, the separation occurs without effort.

5. Do you know if there are spirits who suffer more at that time? For example, is it more painful for materialists, for those who believe that everything ends at death?

“Absolutely, because spirits who have prepared themselves beforehand have already forgotten their suffering, that is, they have become used to it and the serenity with which they await death keeps them from suffering even further since they know what is in store for them. Mental suffering is the most painful and not having to bear it at the time of death is a big relief. Those who do not believe are like someone who has received the death penalty: they can see in their mind both the blade⁶⁰ and *the unknown*. There is a similarity between this sort of death and that of the atheist.”

6. Are there really materialists who are so hardened that they seriously believe that at their final moment they will plunge into nothingness?

“In fact, there are those who actually do believe in nothingness up until the final moment. But at the very instant of separation, their spirit undergoes a profound reversal; doubt seizes it and tortures it, for it asks what will become of it. It wants to hold onto something, but cannot. Separation cannot occur without this feeling.”

⁶⁰ An allusion to the guillotine. – Tr.

On another occasion, a different spirit gave us the following picture of the death of disbelievers:

“In their final moments, hardened disbelievers experience the anguish of those dreadful nightmares in which you see the rim of a precipice and are about to fall into it. You make a futile effort to escape, but without success. At such times you want to cling to something, to find a point of support, but you feel yourself slipping anyway. You want to cry out but cannot articulate any words. And that is why you see dying persons writhe, wring their hands and moan in agony: sure signs of the nightmare in which they now find themselves. In the ordinary nightmare, waking up frees you from the desperation and you feel happy at realizing it was only a dream. The nightmare of death, however, often goes on and on – for years even – after demise, and what makes the sensation even more painful for the spirit is the utter darkness in which it sometimes finds itself immersed.”

7. *You said that at the moment of death you could not see, but that you could foresee. No longer being able to see with your corporeal eyes is understandable, but before your life finally gave out, could you already glimpse the brightness of the spirit world?*

“It is like I said earlier: the instant of death renders the spirit clairvoyant. The physical eyes can no longer see, but the spirit, which possesses a much deeper sight, instantly discovers an unknown world. The truth suddenly appears before it, *temporarily* conferring on it a profound joy or inexpressible sadness, depending on the state of its consciousness and how it remembers its last life.”

This addresses the instant prior to the spirit losing consciousness and explains the use of the expression *temporarily*, for these same agreeable or painful impressions continue after the spirit awakens.

8. *Would you tell us what impressed you most at the moment in which your eyes reopened to the light? If possible, would you describe how things looked to you?*

“When I came to and saw what was there in front of me, I was dazzled at first and couldn’t perceive things very well, since one’s lucidity doesn’t return all at once. But God gave me profound proof of his goodness by enabling me to recover my faculties quickly. I saw that I was surrounded by many faithful friends. All the protector spirits who come to assist us were smiling around me and an unequaled happiness animated them. I felt strong and well-disposed, and was able to travel easily through space. There are no words in the human language that can express what I saw next.

“I will return to you in order to speak more fully of all my blessedness, but without going beyond the limit set by God. You should know, however, that happiness as you understand it is only a fiction. Live wisely and virtuously in the spirit of charity and love and you will be prepared for the sensations that even your greatest poets could not depict.”

Fairytales are undoubtedly full of absurd notions, but mightn’t they be at some points the picture of what happens in the spirit world? Doesn’t Mr. Sanson’s account resemble that of someone who, having slept in a poor and obscure hovel, suddenly awakens in a splendid palace in the midst of a shining court?

III

9. *Under what appearance have spirits shown themselves to you? Under the human form?*

“Yes, my dear friend, the Spirits have taught us that in the other world spirits retain the transitory form they had while on earth. That is true, but what a difference there is between the crude apparatus that used to drag itself heavily along under the weight of its trials and the wondrous fluidity of the spirit body! Ugliness no longer exists, for the features have lost the harshness of expression that forms the distinct character of the human race.

God has sanctified all these gracious bodies as they move about with great elegance of form, and the language here has intonations that are untranslatable to you. Sight possesses the depth of a star. Use your imagination and try to see what God can do in his divine omnipotence as the Architect of architects and you will get a faint idea of the form of spirits.”

10. *How do you see yourself? With a limited, circumscribed albeit fluidic form? Do you have a head, torso, arms and legs?*

“The spirit, having retained the human yet divinized and idealized form, of course displays all those features. I feel my legs and toes perfectly well, for if we want to we can appear to you and squeeze your hands. Just now I squeezed my friends’ hands, thought they didn’t perceive it. Our fluidity enables us to be anywhere without taking up space and without causing any sensation in people if that is our desire. At this very moment your hands are folded and I have them in mine. I can say that I am showing you affection at the moment, but my body isn’t taking up any space; light passes right through it. If it were visible you would call it a miracle, but for spirits it is only the continued action of all instants.

“Spirit sight cannot be compared to human sight, just as spirit bodies do not bear a true resemblance to human bodies, because everything is different in essence and as a whole. I repeat: the spirit possesses a divine perceptiveness that grasps everything; it can even guess your thoughts. In addition, it can take any form that would be the most suitable for awakening your memories, but in such cases a high order spirit who has finished its trials prefers the form that led it to God.”

11. *Spirits don’t have gender. Nevertheless, since it has only been a few days since you were a man, in your new state do you have a nature that is more male than female? Does the same thing apply to a spirit who left its body a long time ago?*

“We don’t have to be of a male or female nature: spirits do not reproduce. God created them by his will, and since in his wonderful designs he willed for spirits to reincarnate on the earth, he had to include the reproduction of the species through male and female components. But without the need for further explanations, you must know that spirits do not have gender.”

It has always been affirmed that spirits do not have gender, because gender is only necessary for the reproduction of bodies. Since spirits do not reproduce, they have no need of gender. Our question was not meant to obtain confirmation of this fact; however, because of Mr. Sanson’s recent death we wanted to know if he still retained a sense of his earthly gender. Purified spirits understand their new situation perfectly well, but among the less evolved, non-dematerialized ones, there are many who still believe they are under the same conditions as on earth and who hold onto their old passions and desires. Some still regard themselves as male or female and that is why it is sometimes said that spirits have gender. Hence, certain contradictions have arisen, depending on the greater or lesser advanced state of the spirits who communicate with us. The error does not derive from the spirits themselves but from those who interview them without having gone to the trouble of delving into the issue.

12. *What is your appearance when you come to our sessions? To your new sight do you have the same appearance as when you were among us? Do individuals still look the same to you? Is everything as clear and distinct as it used to be?*

“Much, much clearer because I can read everyone’s thoughts, and I am quite pleased – thank you! – for the beneficent impression of goodwill that I’m receiving from all the spirits gathered here. I want this same harmony to exist not only in all the group meetings in Paris but throughout France, where certain groups are estranged from and feel envious of one another. This is a situation instigated by

troublesome spirits who are pleased with disorder; however, Spiritism must be the complete and absolute forgetfulness of one's *self*."

13. *You said you can read our thoughts. Would you explain how this transmission of thought works?*

"That would not be easy. In order to explain this strange ability of spirit sight, it would be necessary to open up an arsenal of new elements about which you would have to know everything that we know. That would be impossible since your faculties are limited by matter. Patience! Become morally better and you will comprehend everything. At the moment you only have what God has granted you, but you have the ability to continue to progress. Later on, you will be like us. Try to die righteously so that you may know a lot. Curiosity stimulates people's thought activity and it certainly accompanies you into death, saving for you until that time the satisfaction of fulfilling all your past, present and future questions. With such in mind, I will respond well or poorly to your question: the air that surrounds you (which is as intangible as we are), receives your thoughts; your very breath, so to speak, is the written page of your thoughts. These pages are read and commented on by the spirits who are constantly near you. They are the messengers of a divine telegraphy that none can escape."

The Death of the Righteous

After Mr. Sanson's first communications given at the Parisian Society, a spirit transmitted the following one under the above heading:

"The death of the man with whom you are concerned at this time was the death of a righteous man, that is, a peaceful death full of hope. As day naturally follows the dawn, the spirit life followed his earthly life without trouble or disruption, and his last breath was exhaled in a true hymn of recognition and love. How few are those who make that difficult passage in such a way! How few are those who, after

life's illusions and disappointments, perceive the harmonious rhythm of the spheres! Just as when a healthy man gets a limb amputated but continues to suffer sensations as if it were still in place, the soul of one who dies without faith or hope is torn and afflicted upon escaping the body; it is cast into space unconscious of itself.

“Pray for such disturbed souls; pray for all who suffer. Charity is not restricted to the people you can see: it helps and consoles the beings who populate the spirit world as well. You saw the touching proof of this in the sudden conversion of that spirit who was moved by the Spiritist prayers you offered at the grave of this righteous man.⁶¹ It is right for you to interview him, for he wants to enable you to progress on the righteous path. Love knows no bounds. It expands throughout space, alternately giving and receiving divine consolation. The sea seems to extend infinitely beyond one's sight. Its edge on the horizon seems to meet the sky and one's spirit is dazzled at the magnificent spectacle of those two immensities. Thus, love, which is deeper than the sea and more infinite than space, should bind all of you, both the living and spirits, in one and the same communion of charity, thereby accomplishing the wonderful fusion of the ephemeral with the eternal.”

Georges

Mr. Jobard

(Director of the Brussels Museum of Industry, born in Baissey, Haute-Marne, died in Brussels from a violent apoplectic attack on October 27, 1861 at the age of 69)⁶²

⁶¹ Allusion to the spirit Bernard, who spontaneously manifested the day Mr. Sanson was buried (See *Revue Spirite*, May 1862, p. 132). – Auth.

⁶² Jean Baptiste Ambroise Marcellin Jobard (1792-1861) became Director of the Industrial Museum in 1841. In an 1838 edition of *Courrier Libéral* he suggested that a small strip of carbon in a vacuum and used as a conductor of a current would emit an intense, fixed and durable light. – Tr.

Mr. Jobard had been the Honorary President of the Parisian Spiritist Society. We thought about evoking him during the November 8 meeting. He had anticipated our evocation and spontaneously gave us the following communication:

“I am here, I whom you have evoked, and who until now had hoped in vain to manifest through this medium.

“First of all, I would like to tell you about my impressions at the moment of my soul’s liberation. I felt an inexpressible jolt. I suddenly recalled my birth, my youth and my old age: my whole life passed in detail within my memory. However, I most fully experienced the desire to find myself in the regions revealed by our beloved faith. Then, all the agitation ceased; I felt freed while my body remained inert. Ah, my dear friends, how joyful it is to be free of the weight of the body! What ecstasy there is in embracing space! But you mustn’t think that I suddenly became one of the Lord’s elect. No, I am among the spirits who have assimilated a little but still have much to learn. It did not take me long to remember you, *my brothers in exile*, and my best wishes surround you.

“Would you like to know which spirits welcomed me? What my impressions were? My friends were all the spirits whom we have evoked, all who have been participating in our work. I saw their splendor but I cannot describe it. I have been applying myself to discerning what was true in the communications. I’m ready to redress all erroneous assertions and am ready to be the same knight of the truth in the other world that I was while in yours.”

Jobard

1. *When you were alive, you recommended that we evoke you when you had left the earth behind. We do so now not only to meet your desire, but especially to renew the testimony of our living and sincere sympathy. We also hope that you may instruct us because you are in a better position than anyone else to provide us with precise*

information about the world where you now find yourself. We would appreciate it if you would answer our questions.

“At this time, instructing you is what is most important. As for your sympathy, I am aware of it without having to hear about it with my ears, a fact that represents great progress for me.”

2. *In order to focus our ideas and not speak vaguely, we would first of all ask you what part of the room you are in right now and how we would see you if we could.*

“I am right next to the medium. I would look just like the Jobard who used to sit at your table, because your still-veiled mortal eyes can see spirits only under their mortal appearance.”

3. *Would it be possible for you to make yourself visible to us? If not, what would keep you from it?*

“Your own personal state. A seeing medium might see me; others wouldn’t.

4. *That place is the same one you used to occupy when alive as you assisted our sessions, and which we always reserved for you. Thus, those who used to see you sitting there might imagine you and see you in the same way. If you do not now have your physical body, your fluidic body nonetheless has the same form that it used to have. If we cannot see you with our physical eyes, we can see you with the eyes of thought. If you cannot communicate with us through speech, you can do so through writing with the medium’s help. Therefore, our relationship has not in any way been interrupted by your death, and we can talk with you as easily and perfectly as before. Is that really the way things happen?*

“Yes, and you have known it for a long time. I will continue to occupy this seat quite often, and although you may not perceive it, my spirit will be here amongst you.”

Let us pay attention to that last phrase: *my spirit will be here amongst you*. In this case, it does not comprise a figure of speech but a reality. Through the understanding that Spiritism gives us

about the nature of spirits, we know that a spirit can be amongst us, not only in thought but *in person*, thanks to its ethereal body, which gives it its individual identity. A spirit can thus be amongst us after death just as it used to be during corporeal life, and even more easily since it can be so whenever it wants. We thus have a multitude of invisible companions, some indifferent and others connected to us through affection. It is especially the latter to whom these words apply: *They dwell amongst us*, which can be translated as: They watch, inspire and protect us.

5. *It was not too long ago that your physical body sat in the same place. Doesn't your present situation seem strange to you? What effects has this change produced in you?*

“My present situation doesn't seem strange to me, because my discarnate spirit enjoys a lucidity that does not leave any question unclear regarding the matter.”

6. *Do you remember having been in the same situation before your last life and do you now perceive any change?*

“I remember my previous lives and I realize that I have improved. I see and understand what I see. At the time of my preceding incarnations as a confused spirit, however, I perceived nothing but my terrestrial gaps.”

7. *Do you remember your next-to-last existence, the one preceding that of Mr. Jobard?*

“Yes. During that lifetime I was a mechanic tormented with poverty and the desire to improve my work. *As Jobard, I fulfilled the dreams of that poor workman.* Now I praise God, whose infinite goodness germinated the tiny seed that he had planted in my mind.”

8. *Have you communicated anywhere else yet?*

“I myself have communicated very little until now, but another spirit has been using my name in several other places. I have sometimes been close to it without being able to communicate directly. My death is so recent that I still feel some of earth's

influences. I need perfect attunement in order to be able to express my thoughts. Before long, I will be able to act indiscriminately, but for now, I repeat, I cannot. When fairly-known individuals die, they are always called everywhere and many spirits hurry to imitate them. That is what has happened several times in my case. I would remind you that few spirits can communicate right after the time of their deliverance, even through a medium of their preference.”

9. *Can you see other spirits who are here with us?*

“I especially see Lazarus and Erastus. Then, farther away, I see the spirit *Truth* hovering in space; farther still, a crowd of eager and benevolent spirit friends surround you. Feel fortunate, my friends, for good influences free you from the calamities of error.”

10. *During your life, you shared in the opinion that was transmitted to us that the earth was formed by the incrustation of four planets that had been solidified into only one. Are you still of the same opinion?*

“That was wrong. New geological discoveries have revealed the periods of earth’s convulsions and its progressive formation. Like other planets, the earth has had its own life and God did not have need of such a great chaos or aggregation of planets. Water and fire are the only organic elements of earth.”

11. *You also believed that humans could be put into a cataleptic state for an unlimited length of time and that the human species was brought in this way to earth.*

“An illusion of my imagination, which always surpassed its purpose. Catalepsy can be long but not unending. Traditions and legends exaggerated by the oriental imagination! My friends, I have already suffered a lot at remembering the illusions with which I used to nourish my spirit: make no mistake about it. I have learned much and can therefore tell you that my mind was ready to grasp vast and diverse studies, and during my last incarnation it retained a love for the extraordinary and the mystical drawn from popular imagination.

“I am now little concerned with purely intellectual questions, however, in the sense in which you consider them. How could I be, when I am in awe, enraptured by the marvelous spectacle surrounding me? Only the bond of Spiritism, more powerful than you humans can conceive, could make my spirit return to this earth which I left behind, not out of joy – for that would be irreverent – but out of profound gratitude for my deliverance.”

When the Society opened a membership on behalf of the workers in Lyon in February, 1862, a co-member remitted 50 francs, 25 under his name, and 25 under Mr. Jobard’s name. Jobard then gave the following communication regarding the matter:

“I am grateful at realizing that I have not been forgotten among my Spiritist brothers. I am thankful to the generous heart who made the offering that I would have made myself if I were still in your world. In the world where I am now, we have no need of money. Thus, I would have to resort to the pocketbook of friendship to materially show that I had been touched by the misfortune of my brothers in Lyon. Brave workers, who ardently cultivate the vineyard of the Lord, you may be certain that charity is not just an empty word, for both great and small have demonstrated their sympathy and fraternal love to you. You are on the broad humanitarian road of progress. May God keep you on it and may you be even happier. Your spirit friends will uphold you and you shall triumph.

“I have begun to live as a spirit now, more at peace and less troubled by the evocations that rain down upon me from every quarter. Fads prevail even regarding spirits. When the ‘Jobard’ fad is replaced by some other and I will have fallen into human forgottenness, I will then pray that my real friends – those whom I see have not forgotten me – I will pray that they will evoke me. Then we shall delve into the issues that have been addressed too

superficially, and your Jobard, completely transfigured, will be able to be useful to you: something he desires with all his heart.”

Jobard

After the earlier occasions dedicated to reassuring his friends, Mr. Jobard took his place among the spirits who are actively working for social renewal as he awaits his next return to be among the living in order to act more directly in this capacity. Since that time, he has frequently given incontestably superior communications to the Parisian Society, of which he continues as an associate, without departing from the originality and good spiritual humor that used to comprise the depth of his character. This is what enables us to recognize him even before he signs his name.

Samuel Philippe

Samuel Philippe was a righteous man in every sense of the word. No one could remember having seen him commit an evil act or having intentionally wronged anyone in any way. He was unrestrictedly devoted to his friends, who were always sure to find him at their service when they needed him, even at the expense of his own private interests. Work, fatigue, sacrifice – nothing kept him from being useful; he served naturally, without being ostentatious, and seemed perplexed whenever anyone gave him any credit for it. He never wished ill on anyone who had harmed him; instead, he sought to be of service to them as if they had actually done good to him. Whenever he endured ungratefulness, he would say to us, “I’m not the one you should pity – they are.” Although he was very intelligent and endowed with much energy, his very laborious life was obscure and full of severe trials. He was one of those elite types who flourish in the shadows, whom the world does not recognize and whose light is not reflected over the earth. Through

an understanding of Spiritism, he acquired an ardent faith in the future life and a great resignation before the ills of earthly life. After having suffered a painful disease, he died in December 1862 at the age of 50. He was truly mourned both by family and friends and has been evoked many times since his death.

1. *Do you clearly remember your last few moments on earth?*

“Perfectly. My memory of them has returned to me little by little, although at the time my thoughts were still confused.”

2. *Because your exemplary life awakened our interest so much, would you mind describing to us, for our own instruction, how your passage from the corporeal to the spirit life occurred, as well as the situation in which you now find yourself in the spirit world?*

“Gladly. This account won’t be useful only to you, but to me as well. In turning my thoughts back to the earth, the comparison will enable me to appreciate even more the goodness of our Creator.

“You know how full of tribulation my life was; however, I never lacked courage in the face of adversity – thank God! And now I must congratulate myself on it. How much I would have lost if I had given in to discouragement! I quake at the thought, for then my suffering would have been of no use and I would have had to start all over again. Oh, my friends! May you grasp this truth, for in it resides the happiness of your future. No, a few years of suffering is certainly not too much to pay for such happiness. If only you knew what a few years are when compared to eternity!

“If my last life did in fact have any merit in your eyes, you would not feel the same regarding the ones before it. It was only due to much personal effort that I have become what I am today. To erase the last traces of my previous wrongs, I had to suffer those final trials and I voluntarily accepted them. I drew from the firmness of my resolution the strength to bear them without complaining. Now I bless them – every single one of those trials. Thanks to them I have broken my connections with the past and

it has become only a memory. I can now with true satisfaction contemplate the path I have traveled.

“Oh, you who made me suffer while I was on the earth, who were hard and ill-willed toward me, who humiliated and afflicted me, whose bad-faith often led me to the harshest privations, I not only forgive you, I thank you! Wishing to do me wrong, you didn't even suspect that you were actually doing so much good. It is therefore true that I owe you for a big part of the happiness I now enjoy, for you provided me an opportunity to forgive, to return evil with good. God put you in my way in order to test my patience and enable me to practice the most difficult kind of charity: loving one's enemies.

“Please don't get impatient at this digression. I will now finally address what you have asked of me.

“Although I suffered dreadfully with my final illness, I didn't pass over in agony. My death was like sleep, without struggle or shock. Since I had no fear about my future, I didn't try to cling to life, and consequently didn't have to struggle during my last moments. The separation occurred without effort, without pain and without my even realizing it.

“I don't know how long that final sleep lasted, but it was brief. My awakening was calm compared to my previous condition. I no longer felt any pain and I exulted in joy. I wanted to get up and move around, but a sort of gentle numbness, which had nothing disagreeable about it – which even had a certain appeal – restrained me and I gladly surrendered myself to it without being aware of my situation but having no doubt that I had just left the earth. Everything around me seemed like a dream. I saw my wife and some friends kneeling and weeping in my room and I told myself that they obviously considered me dead. I wanted to correct them but I couldn't articulate any words, and this led me to the conclusion that I had to be dreaming. What seemed

to confirm this idea was that I saw myself surrounded by many beloved individuals who had died a long time ago, and others whom I did not immediately recognize, but who seemed to be watching me, waiting for me to wake up.

“This state was interlaced with moments of lucidity and drowsiness, during which I alternately recovered and lost consciousness of my *self*. Little by little, my mind became clearer. The light that I had only glimpsed through a type of fog became brighter. I then began to recognize my state and understood that I no longer belonged to the terrestrial world. If I had not known Spiritism, the illusions would have undoubtedly been prolonged for quite some time.

“My mortal remains had not yet been buried. I regarded them with respect, although I felt happy at having been disencumbered of them. I was so happy at being free! I was breathing with the ease of someone who has just emerged from a suffocating atmosphere, and an indescribable sensation of bliss impregnated my entire being. The presence of individuals whom I used to love filled me with joy and I was not surprised at seeing them. It seemed quite natural, as if I were seeing them again after a long voyage. One thing surprised me right at first: the fact that we understood each other without saying anything. We transmitted our thoughts by simply looking at each other, as though by some sort of fluidic penetration.

“Nevertheless, I was still not completely detached from earthly ideas. The memory of what I had endured came back to me from time to time to make me better appreciate my new situation. I had suffered physically, but especially mentally. I had been the target of malevolence, a thousand vexations that were perhaps more painful than patently misfortunate, because they keep us in a state of constant anxiety. This feeling had not yet disappeared completely, and sometimes I asked myself if I was really free of them. It still seemed like I was hearing a few unpleasant voices. I

often worried about the troubles these voices used to cause me and I trembled in spite of myself. I tried to feel myself, so to speak, in order to be assured that I was not being deceived by a dream, and when the certainty hit me that all that had indeed ended, I felt I had been relieved of an enormous weight. It is thus quite true – I told myself – I am finally free of all those worries that used to make my life a torment, and I rendered thanks to God for the fact. I was like a poor man who had suddenly received a large fortune and who for a long time couldn't believe it was real, still feeling worried about his needs. Oh, if only people could comprehend the future life, what power, what courage it would give them amidst adversity! What they wouldn't do during their lifetime on earth in order to guarantee themselves the happiness that God has reserved for the children who have been obedient to his laws! Then they would see how insignificant are the pleasures they envy during their life compared to those they disdain!"

3. Have that world – so new to you, and in light of which ours has such little value – and the many friends whom you have rejoined caused you to forget the family and friends you left behind on earth?

"If I were to forget them, I would be unworthy of the happiness I'm enjoying. God does not reward selfishness – he punishes it. The world in which I find myself might lead me to scorn the earth, but I could never scorn the spirits who are incarnate there. Only amongst men and women do we see prosperity lead to forgetting former companions in misfortune. I visit mine often and I feel happy for the remembrances they hold of me; their thoughts attract me to them. I watch their conversations; I delight in their joys and their worries sadden me; however, because I understand that their problems are only temporary and for their own good; it's not the kind of sadness that is full of anxiety like that which we suffer while incarnate. I feel happy to think that someday they will also come to this happy plane where pain is

unknown. I am striving to help them to become worthy of it. I am doing my utmost to suggest good thoughts to them, especially regarding resignation, which I myself displayed before the will of God. My greatest sadness is seeing them delay that time by their lack of courage, their complaining, their doubts about the future, or by any reprehensible act. Thus, I try to divert them from the path of evil. Whenever I am successful, it is a great happiness for me, and all of us here rejoice; whenever I fail, I sadly tell myself: Once more, they have delayed their moment of joy. But I am consoled when I remember that none are irredeemably lost.”

Samuel Philippe

Van Durst

(Former civil servant, died in Antwerp in 1863 at eighty years of age)

A short time after Van Durst’s passing, a medium asked his spirit guide if he could evoke the deceased and received this reply:

“This spirit is slowly emerging from the state of confusion. He might be able to answer but communication would be costly to him. I would ask you to wait four more days and then he will be able to respond to you. Until then, he will know about the good intentions you have expressed toward him and will come to you gratefully as a good friend.”

Four days later, the spirit dictated the following:

“My friend, my life weighed very little on the scales of eternity. Nevertheless, I am far from being unhappy. I am in a humble situation, but relatively happy for someone who, without striving for perfection, committed few wrongs. If creatures can be happy within a limited sphere, very well – I am one of them. I regret only one thing, which is that I myself did not know then what you do now, for my state of confusion would have been shorter

and less difficult. In fact, that state was lengthy – feeling and not feeling alive, seeing my body and feeling strongly connected to it but unable to use it, seeing those whom I love and sensing the thought that connected me to them vanish; how awful! Oh, what a cruel time! What a moment when bewilderment takes you into its grip and strangles you! And immediately afterward, total darkness; feeling alive and then an instant later feel non-existent; wanting to be aware of your *self* but unable to grasp it; not existing but in a profound state of confusion sensing that you do in fact exist nonetheless! And then, after an incalculable amount of time, a time of suffocating anguish because you can't comprehend it, a time that seems unending, you are slowly reborn to a new existence. You awaken to a new world!

“No physical body, no earthly life, but immortal life! No men or women of flesh, but rather light spirit forms gliding by on all sides, circulating around you without your being able to embrace all of them in one glance because they flutter about in the infinite! Having space before you and being able to travel it at will! Communicating through thought with everything that surrounds you ... my friend, what an entirely new life! What a dazzling life! What a blessed life! O hail! Hail to you O eternity; you have taken me into your heart! Farewell, O earth; you kept me for so long from my true spirit nature! No, I would not request anything else from you, for you are the earth of exile and your greatest happiness is nothing to me!

“But if I had only known what you know, how much easier and pleasant the beginning of this other life would have been! I would have already known before dying what I had to learn much later at the moment of separation, and my soul would have freed itself more easily. You are on the pathway, but you will never have done too much! Tell this to my son; tell him so often that he ends up believing and understanding, for then, when he comes here, we will never be separated.

“Goodbye to all of you, my friends, goodbye. I am waiting for you, and during the time in which you remain on the earth I will come often to learn beside you because I still do not know as much as many of you. But I shall learn quickly here, for I no longer endure the troubles that encumbered me or the old age that sapped my strength. Here, we live fully and evolve, for the horizons stretch out so beautifully before our eyes that we feel impatient to embrace them. Goodbye; I will leave you now, goodbye.”

Van Durst

Sixdeniers

(A morally upright man, killed in an accident and known to the medium while alive) Bordeaux, February 11, 1861

1. *Would you provide me with a few details about your death?*

“After my drowning – yes.”

2. *Why after?*

“Because you already know what happened before.” (The medium actually did know the details of the drowning.)

3. *So would you like to describe your sensations after death?*

“For a long time I couldn’t figure out where I was, but with the grace of God and the help of those around me, when the light finally became visible, I was dazzled by it. Have hope: you will always find more than what you thought you would. Nothing physical; everything touches the hidden senses. There is nothing that can be touched with eyes or hands. Do you understand? It is a spiritual surprise that surpasses your understanding because there are no words to explain it. We can only sense it through the soul.

“My awakening was quite pleasant. Life is one of those dreams that, despite the dreadful idea one connects to the word, I can only describe as having been a horrible nightmare. Imagine that you are shut up in an infected prison, that your body is

being devoured by worms that pierce even your bone marrow and that you are suspended over a flaming furnace. Imagine further that your parched mouth doesn't even have any air to refresh it, that your horrified spirit only sees monsters roundabout you, threatening to devour you. Finally, imagine everything that such a fantastic dream can portray as the most hideous, the most horrible, and then suddenly transport yourself to an Eden of delights. You awaken, surrounded by all the loved ones whom you used to weep for. See about you beloved faces that smile happily at you; breathe the sweetest fragrances; refresh your parched throat in a spring of pure water; feel your body lifted into infinite space, which supports and cradles it like a breeze carrying a blossom detached from the tree; feel yourself wrapped in the love of God like a child who at birth is wrapped in the love of its mother. Only then will you get an imperfect idea of the transition of death.

“I have tried to describe the happiness of the life that awaits men and women after the death of the body, but I've failed; after all, can you describe the infinite to someone whose eyes are closed to the light, and whose limbs could never leave the restricted circle in which they are locked up? To describe such eternal happiness, I say to you: Love! For only love can enable us to sense it beforehand. And whoever means love, means the absence of selfishness.”

4. *Has your situation been happy in the spirit world from the start?*

“No. I had to pay my debt as a man. My heart had not sensed the future of the spirit, and besides, I had no faith. I had to expiate my indifference toward my Creator, but in his mercy he took into account the little good that I was able to do, the pain that I endured with resignation in spite of my suffering; his justice, which is on a scale that people will never comprehend, weighed the good with such kindness and love that the evil was quickly effaced.”

5. *Can you give me news about your daughter?* (Who died four or five years before her father)

“She is on a mission there on your earth.”

6. *Is she happy as an incarnate? I don't mean to be indiscreet.*

“I know. Don't I see your thought set before my eyes like a *picture*? No, she is not happy as an incarnate. On the contrary, all the miseries of earth life are awaiting her. But by her example she will proclaim those grand virtues that are only fine sounding words to you. I will help her because I must protect her. However, she won't have much difficulty in overcoming the obstacles. *She is not there for expiation, but a mission.* So rest assured about her. And thank you for remembering her.”

At that moment, it became difficult for the medium to write, and he said:

7. *If a suffering spirit is now hindering me, I ask it to sign its name.*

“An Unhappy Spirit.”

8. *Don't you want to state your name?*

“Valerie.”

9. *Do you want to say what has caused your punishment?*

“No.”

10. *Are you repenting for your wrongs?*

“You can see that I am.”

11. *Who brought you here?*

“Sixdeniers.”

12. *For what purpose?*

“So you might help me.”

13. *Was it you who prevented me from writing a little while ago?*

“He put me in his stead.”

14. *What is your relationship?*

“He guides me.”

15. *Ask him to join us in prayer.*

(After the prayer, Sixdeniers returned to write) “Thank you for helping her. You have understood. I won't forget you. Think about her.”

16. (Asked of Sixdeniers) *As a spirit, do you have a lot of suffering spirits to guide?*

“No. But as soon as we succeed in leading one back to the moral path, we are shouldered with another, without, however, abandoning the first ones.”

17. *How can you manage a supervision that could multiply infinitely across the centuries?*

“You must understand that those whom we lead back to the moral path eventually evolve and purify themselves. Thus, they are less work for us. At the same time, we ourselves evolve and in doing so, our own faculties develop and our abilities broaden in proportion to our purity.”

Less evolved spirits are therefore assisted by good spirits who are charged with the mission of guiding them. This task is not devoted exclusively to incarnates, who should also take part in it because it is a means for them to progress. When a less evolved spirit interferes during a good communication – as in this case – it of course does not always do so with good intentions. However, good spirits may allow it to do so, whether as a test or as a way for those present to perhaps help it improve itself. It is true that its persistence could degenerate into obsession, but the more tenacious it becomes, the greater the proof that it really needs assistance. It is wrong to turn away such a spirit. We must regard it as a poor creature who has come to beg alms, and we must remind ourselves that it is an unhappy spirit who has been sent by good ones in order for us to instruct it. If we succeed, we will experience the joy of having set a soul on the path of the good, thereby shortening its suffering. This task is often arduous. Of course, it would be more pleasant always to receive good communications and converse only with the spirits of our own preference. However, we deserve the protection of good spirits not by seeking to satisfy our own desires, but by not turning away the occasions that offer us an opportunity to practice the good.

Dr. Demeure

(Died in Albi (Tarn) on January 25, 1865)

Dr. Demeure was a well-regarded homeopathic physician in Albi. His character and wisdom won him the esteem and veneration of his fellow citizens. His kindness and charity were inexhaustible. In spite of his advanced age, he never became tired when administering his care to the poor. Payment for his visits was what mattered least to him. He regarded himself as less inconvenienced by his poorer clients than by the ones whom he knew could pay him. He said that this was because the latter could always find another doctor in his absence. He not only gave his poorer clients prescriptions and medicine without charge, but he often added what was necessary to provide for their physical needs as well, which is sometimes the most effective medicine. We might say that he was a “priest of the medical arts.”

Dr. Demeure ardently embraced the Spiritist Doctrine, in which he found the key to the most serious problems that he had fruitlessly sought for in science and every philosophy. His profound and investigative spirit immediately comprehended the full scope of the Doctrine and he became one its most zealous proselytizers. A most lively and mutually sympathetic relationship was established between us through correspondence.

We found out about his death on January 30. Our first thought was that of obtaining a communication from him, which he provided for us on the same day:

“I’m here. When alive, I promised myself that when I died I would come, if possible, to ‘shake hands’ with my dear teacher and friend, Mr. Allan Kardec.

“Death plunged my soul into that heavy sleep called lethargy, but my mind kept watch. I shook off the dismal torpor that

prolongs the state of confusion after death and woke up, making the crossing in a single bound.

“How happy I am! I am no longer either infirm or old. My body was only a garment imposed on me. I am now young and handsome with that eternal, youthful beauty of the spirits, whose faces are never marked with wrinkles and whose hair never becomes gray with the passage of time. I’m light like a bird that rapidly flies across the horizon of your cloudy sky. And I marvel, contemplate, bless, love and bow – atom that I am – before the grandeur, wisdom and knowledge of our Creator, and before the wonders that surround me.

“I am blissful, I am in glory! Oh, who could ever describe the splendid beauties of the land of the elect: heavens, worlds and suns and their role in the great concourse of universal harmony? Yet, my teacher, I shall try. I will undertake these studies and shall return to deposit at your feet the efforts of my labors as a spirit, and which I dedicate to you beforehand. So long!”

Demeure

The following two communications of February 1 and 2 are related to the illness that had beset me at that time. Although the communications are personal, I have reproduced them here because they show that Dr. Demeure continues to be as good as a spirit as he was as a man.

“My good friend, trust us and take heart. Although this crisis is tiring and painful, it will not last long. With the prescribed treatment, and depending on your desire, you will soon complete the work which is the principal objective of your life. I am always here at your side with the Spirit *Truth*, who allows me to speak in his name. Because I am the most recent among your friends who have crossed over to the spirit world, the others have allowed me the honors. Dear teacher, how happy I am at having died in time

to be with them at this moment! If I had died earlier, perhaps I could have prevented this unforeseen crisis. My discarnation, however, was so recent that I was unable to concern myself with anything but matters of the spirit, but now I shall watch over you, dear teacher. I am your brother and friend, and I feel happy at being a spirit in order to be at your side, taking care of you in your illness. But you know the proverb: 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.' So help the good Spirits in their care for you and follow their prescription exactly.

"It is very hot in here. That coal fire makes you tired. Don't burn any more coal while you are ill; it increases your difficulty in breathing. The gases it releases are harmful."

Your friend, Demeure

"It's me, Demeure, Mr. Kardec's friend. I have come to tell him that I was with him when he survived the accident that could have been disastrous without the timely intervention that I had the happy fortune to assist. According to my observations and information gathered from a good source, it seems to me that the sooner he discarnates, the sooner he will reincarnate, which will enable him to finish up his work. However, before departing he must finish the works that will complete the doctrinal system of which he is the initiator. And he would be guilty of intentional suicide if, through excessive work, he were to contribute to the breakdown of his organism, which threatens to bring him suddenly to our world. You must not be afraid to tell him the whole truth of the matter so that he may be on guard and follow our prescriptions to the letter."

Demeure

The following communication was received in Montauban on January 26 – the day following his death – in the circle of his Spiritist friends in that town:

“Antoine Demeure. I have not died for you, my good friends, but only for those who do not yet know as you do this holy Doctrine that unites all those on earth who love one another, all those who are of the same mind and who have the same sentiments of love and charity.

“I am happy, happier than I could hope, for I am enjoying a lucidity that is quite rare among spirits who have so recently been delivered from matter. Take heart, my good friends. I will always be with you and will not fail to instruct you about things of which we are ignorant when we are connected to our poor material body, as it hides so many splendors and prevents so many joys. Pray for those who are deprived of this happiness, for they do not know the wrong they are committing against themselves.

“I cannot stay long today, but I wanted to tell you that I do not feel completely foreign to this world of invisible beings; it almost seems like I have always dwelt here. I am happy because I see my friends here and can communicate with them whenever I want to.

“Do not weep, my friends. That would make me regret having known you. With the passing of time, God will bring you also to this plane where all of us will be together again. Good night, my friends. May God comfort you. I am with you.”

Demeure

Another letter from Montauban contained the following account:

Due to her extreme sensitivity, we kept Dr. Demeure's death from Mrs. G., who is a seeing medium and a very lucid somnambulist. Obviously understanding our intentions, the good doctor avoided manifesting himself to her. Last February 10, we were gathered at the invitation of our guides, who said they wanted to relieve Mrs. G. of the sprained ankle that had been causing her great misery since the preceding day. We knew nothing of

the matter and were far from anticipating the surprise that our guides had in store for us. As soon as this woman went into the somnambulistic state, she began to scream violently, pointing to her foot. This is what happened:

Mrs. G. saw a spirit, whose face remained hidden, bending over her leg. This spirit rubbed and massaged it, at times making a longitudinal motion exactly as any physician would do. The procedure was so painful that the patient bawled and writhed uncontrollably. However, the crisis soon passed. Within ten minutes, all traces of the sprain and its inflammation had disappeared, and her foot had returned to its normal appearance. Mrs. G. had been healed.

However, the spirit remained unknown to Mrs. G. and insisted on not showing its face to her. It seemed as though it wanted to leave, when Mrs. G., who only a few minutes earlier could not even take a step, leapt to the middle of the room to shake hands with her spirit doctor. Again, the spirit kept its face turned away, leaving only its hand in hers. At that moment, she cried out and fainted to the floor. She had recognized Dr. Demeure as her spirit healer. While she was unconscious, she received the careful attention of several sympathetic spirits. Finally, when she had returned to lucid somnambulism, she talked with them and exchanged warm greetings with them, especially with the spirit doctor, who responded to her displays of affection by enveloping her in restorative fluids.

Isn't this scene striking and dramatic; doesn't it give us the impression that we are watching all these various personages performing their roles as they would in human life? Doesn't it comprise one more proof among so many others that spirits are real beings, endowed with bodies and acting as though they were still on the earth? We were happy to meet our spirit friend, with his same excellent heart and delicate kindness. During his life, he

had been the medium's physician. He knew about her extreme sensitivity and treated her like his own daughter. Isn't this proof of identity – granted to those whom this spirit used to love – striking and at the same time enough to make us view the future life from a more comforting point of view? [End of account]

Dr. Demeure's situation as a spirit is exactly what we might expect because of his worthy and useful life while on earth. However, a no-less instructive fact highlights these communications: the activity he becomes involved in almost immediately after his death in order to be useful. Due to his refined intelligence and moral qualities, he belongs to the order of the most advanced spirits. He is happy, but his happiness does not consist of idleness. Only a few days earlier he was caring for the sick as a physician; once liberated, he rushed to care for them as a spirit. Then what good is it to go to the other world, some will say, if one can't rest there? We would ask them first of all: Doesn't the fact that we will have no more worries or needs mean anything at all, or that we will no longer be subject to the infirmities of human life, or the fact that we will be free to travel space at the speed of thought without tiring, going to see our friends at any time and at any distance no matter where they are? Second, we would add: When you are in the other world, no one will force you to do anything; you will be perfectly free to remain in as beatific idleness as you want. However, you will soon grow tired of such selfish repose and you will be the first to ask for some sort of occupation. Then you might be told: If you are tired of doing nothing, look around for something to do. The opportunities for being useful are not lacking in the spirit world, just as they are not lacking among men and women. Thus, spirit activity does not imply any kind of coercion, but a need, a satisfaction for spirits, who look for occupations according to their likes and aptitudes, preferring those that can help them most in their development.

Widow Foulon, nee Wollis

Mrs. Foulon, who died in Antibes on February 3, 1865, had lived for quite some time in Havre, where she earned the reputation as a skillful miniature painter. Her noteworthy talent at first served her only as an enjoyable distraction. Later, however, when she was beset with bad days, she learned to take advantage of her craft as a precious resource. What made her especially beloved and esteemed, what made her memory so dear to all who knew her, was her amiable nature and her personal qualities, which only those who knew her intimately appreciated in all their fullness. Like all those who possess the innate sentiment of the good, she did not flaunt her qualities – perhaps she wasn't even aware of them. If there was ever anyone who did not allow herself to be dominated by selfishness, it was undoubtedly this woman. The sentiment of personal selflessness has perhaps never been taken so far. She was always ready to sacrifice her repose, her health and her own interests for people for whom she could be useful. From her youth onward, her life had been a long series of sacrifices as well as harsh trials, in the face of which her courage, resignation and perseverance never faltered. However, due to the painstaking nature of her craft, her eyesight weakened day by day, so that after some time, she was completely blind.

When Mrs. Foulon was introduced to the Spiritist Doctrine, it seemed to her a ray of light. It seemed that a veil had been lifted, enabling her to see something that was not foreign exactly, but about which she had had only a vague intuition. She studied it ardently, endowed with that lucidity of spirit and rightness of judgment that were proper of her elevated intelligence. One would have to know about all the perplexities of her life – perplexities that never pertained to her own life per se, but to the lives of those whom she loved – in order to understand how much consolation she found in

the sublime revelation that provided her with an unshakable faith in the future and showed her the emptiness of earthly things.

Her death was as dignified as her life. She felt it drawing near without any baleful apprehension. For her, it was a deliverance from earthly ties that would open to her the spiritual and blessed way with which she had identified herself by studying Spiritism. She died in peace, for she was aware of having fulfilled the mission she had accepted upon coming to the earth and of having scrupulously accomplished her duties as a wife and mother; also because during her life she had avoided any resentment toward those who offended her and those who had repaid her with ungratefulness. She always repaid evil with good and left life forgiving everyone in order to hand herself over to the goodness and justice of God. She finally died with the peacefulness of a pure conscience and certain that she would be no less separated from her children than during corporeal life, since she could still be with them in spirit wherever they might be on the globe in order to help them with her counsels and to cover them with her watch care.

When we first heard about Mrs. Foulon's death, our initial desire was to converse with her. The friendly and sympathetic relationship that the Spiritist Doctrine aroused between us explains a few of her expressions and her casual language.

I

(Paris, February 6, 1865, three days after death)

“I was certain that you would evoke me soon after my liberation and I was ready to answer, for I didn't experience any state of confusion. Only those who are terrified and surrounded by the constricting darkness of fear become confused.

“Well, my friend, I'm happy now. These poor eyes, which had become weakened and only kept a memory of the sights that

had colored my youth with their glimmering luminosity, have been reopened here and have rediscovered the splendid horizons that some of your great artists idealize in their pale reproductions, but whose majestic reality, austere and yet full of enchantment, comprises the most complete reality.

“It has been only three days since I passed away and I already feel like an artist. My aspirations concerning the ideal of beauty in art were the intuition of faculties that I had studied and acquired in other existences, and which I developed during my last one. But what must I do in order to produce a masterpiece worthy of the grandeur that touches my spirit in this region of the light? Paintbrushes, paintbrushes! I shall prove to the world that Spiritist art is the crowning of pagan art, of Christian art endangered at this time, and that to Spiritism alone is reserved the glory of reviving it in all its splendor on your barren world.

“But enough of the artist. Now for my friend:

“Dear friend (Mrs. Kardec), why are you so distraught over my death? Especially knowing what you know about the disappointments and bitterness of my life, you should instead be joyful at seeing that I no longer have to drink from the bitter cup of earthly sorrows that I had to drain to the dregs. You should believe that the dead are happier than the living; to mourn them would be to doubt the truth of Spiritism. You will see me again; be sure of that. I was the first to depart, because my job on that world was over. All persons have theirs and must accomplish it while on the earth. When yours is over, you will rest with me for a little while. Then, we will begin again, if necessary, since it is not natural to remain idle. All have their tendencies and follow them. This is a supreme law that demonstrates the power of free will. So, my good friend, be indulgent and charitable, sentiments that we all mutually need whether in the visible world or in the invisible one. By living according to this motto, everything will turn out well.

“You would not tell me to end this conversation; however, you know this has already been a rather lengthy first-time communication, and that is why I will leave you now in order to turn to my excellent friend, Mr. Kardec. I want to thank you for the affectionate words you spoke to the friend who preceded you to the grave – we almost left together for this world in which I find myself, my dear friend! (An allusion to Kardec’s illness, about which Dr. Demeure spoke). What would the dear companion of your life had said then if the good Spirits had not helped you in time? Yes, she would have wept and groaned, which is understandable. But now she must see to it that you avoid exposing yourself again to such danger before you have finished the work of initiating the Spiritist movement. If she doesn’t, you run the risk of arriving here among us much sooner than you should, and, like Moses, of not seeing the Promised Land except from afar. So keep on your guard; I am warning you as a friend.

“I shall leave now. I want to return to my dear children. Then, I’m going beyond the seas to see if my wandering sheep has finally arrived in port or if she is at the mercy of a storm (one of her daughters used to live in America). May the good Spirits protect her. I am going to rejoin them for that purpose. I will return to converse with you, for I am an untiring talker, as you will certainly recall. Until then, my good and dear friends, so long.”

Widow Foulon

II

(February 8, 1865)

My dear Mrs. Foulon, I was very pleased with your communication the other day and your promise to continue conversing with us.

I realized perfectly well that it was in fact you who were communicating. You spoke about things that the medium could not

possibly have known about, and which could have only come from you yourself. Furthermore, your affectionate language toward us was certainly that of your loving soul. And in your words there was a certainty, a balance and a firmness that I did not perceive during your life. You will recall that I allowed myself to admonish you more than once on certain occasions.

“That is true, but since the time I became seriously ill, I have recovered the firmness of spirit that I had lost due to the sorrows and vicissitudes that at times made me feel apprehensive about life. I said to myself: you are a spirit; forget the earth; prepare yourself for the transformation of your being. Through your thought, see the illumined pathway that your soul must follow upon leaving your body, and which will lead it, happy and free, to the celestial spheres where you must live from hereon out.

“You might think that I was a bit presumptuous in counting on perfect happiness upon leaving the earth behind, but I had suffered so much that I felt I surely must have expiated all my wrongs of that lifetime and the previous ones. That intuition did not delude me; rather, it was what gave me courage, tranquility and firmness during my final moments. Such firmness naturally increased when, after my liberation, I saw my hopes realized.”

Would you mind describing to us your passage, your awakening and your first impressions?

“Indeed, I did suffer, but my spirit was stronger than the physical suffering which the disengagement made it endure. *After my last breath*, I passed through a sort of syncope, losing consciousness of my condition, not perceiving anything, in a vague somnolence which was neither the sleep of the body nor the awakening of the soul. I remained like that for quite some time. Afterward, as if I were emerging from a long fainting spell, I awoke little by little and found I was surrounded by friends whom I did not recognize. They lavished care and attention on

me. They showed me a point in space that resembled a shining star and said, 'You are going there with us, for you no longer belong to the earth.' Then I remembered. I was aided by them as we formed a graceful group rushing toward realms unknown. With the certainty of finding happiness, we rose and rose and the star grew bigger and bigger in front of us. It was a happy world, a higher world on which your good friend was going to finally find rest; I mean rest with respect to the bodily fatigue that I had endured and the vicissitudes of earthly life; not idleness of spirit, for spirit activity is a source of enjoyment."

So you left earth forever?

"I left behind too many loved ones to have abandoned them forever. I will return in spirit, for I have a mission to fulfill together with my children. You know good and well that no obstacle can oppose the visit of spirits from worlds that are superior to earth."

Doesn't your current situation seem to weaken your relationships with those you have left behind on this world?

"No, my friend, love draws souls together. Believe me, you can be on the earth and be closer to those who have attained perfection than to those whose inferiority and selfishness make them whirl around the terrestrial sphere. Charity and love are the two drives behind a powerful attraction. They form a tie which binds the union of souls, and which continues regardless of distance and place. There is distance for physical bodies only but not for spirits."

What is your opinion now about my efforts regarding Spiritism?

"I find that you are a missionary and that your burden is heavy, but I also see the goal and know you will reach it. I will help you as much as I can with my spirit counsels so that you may overcome all the difficulties you meet. I will suggest certain appropriate measures to take during your life regarding the movement of renewal brought by Spiritism. Your friend Demeure, together with the Spirit *Truth*, will be more useful still, since he is wiser and more capable than I. But

since I know that the assistance of the good Spirits is strengthening and sustaining you in your work, you may be assured that I can guarantee you my help anywhere and at any time.”

From some of what you have stated, one might deduce that you will not take a highly personal and active part in the work of Spiritism.

“You are mistaken. It’s just that I see so many other spirits who are more capable than I am at addressing such an important matter; hence, a sentiment of invincible timidity prevents me at present from responding to you as you would wish. Perhaps in time I will be more courageous and bold, but it is necessary that I get to know these spirits better. After all, it has only been four days since my death and I am still dazzled by everything around me. My friend, don’t you understand? I’m not able to express the new sensations I’m experiencing. I need to strengthen myself in order to overcome the allure that these marvels hold; for now, I can only worship and give thanks to God for his works. But this allure will pass. The Spirits have assured me that I will soon grow used to all these magnificent things, and then with my lucidity as a spirit I will be able to deal with all the issues regarding earth’s renewal. Meanwhile, remember that at the moment, especially, I have a family to console.

“Goodbye for now. I will see you soon. Your good friend loves you and always will, my teacher, because you provided her with the only lasting and true consolation she had while on earth.”

Widow Foulon

III

**(This communication was given to
her children on February 9)**

“My children, my loved ones, God has taken me from you but the recompense he has granted me is very great when compared

with the little I did while on the earth. Resign yourselves, my good children, before the designs of the Most High. Draw the strength to support the trials of your lives from all that he has allowed you to receive. Always hold firm in your hearts that belief which made my passing so easy from earthly life to the life that awaits us when we leave that inferior world. God extended his inexhaustible goodness to me after my death, just as he did when I was still on the earth. I give him thanks for all the benefits he has granted you. Bless him, my children; bless him always and at all times. Never lose sight of the goal that has been shown to you or the route that you must follow. Think of your use of the time God has granted you on the earth. You will be happy, my dear ones; you will be happy if you remain united. You will be happy with your own children if you instruct them on the path of the good, the path that God has allowed to be revealed to you.

“You cannot see me, but you can be sure that the tie that bound us together on earth was not broken with the death of my body, because it was not the body that connected us, but the spirit. That is why, my dear ones – thanks to the goodness of the Almighty – I will be able to guide you still, and encourage you in your progress so that we can be with one another again later.

“Press on, my children; cultivate that sublime belief with the same love. Good days are reserved for you who believe. This has already been told to you, but it was not for me to see such days on earth. It is from higher up that I will appreciate those happy times promised by our good, just and merciful God.

“Please don’t weep, by children. May these communications strengthen your faith and your love for God, who has given you so many gifts and who so many times sent help to your mother. Pray at all times; prayer will strengthen you. Abide by the teachings I so ardently followed during the life God granted me.

“I will return to you, my children, but for now I must go help my other poor daughter, who still needs me so much. Goodbye, I will see you again soon. Believe in the goodness of the Almighty. I am praying for you. Goodbye.”

Widow Foulon

Any serious and enlightened person will easily see the instruction that may be derived from these communications, but we will nonetheless call attention to a couple points. The first is the fact that this example shows us the possibility that it might not be necessary to reincarnate on the earth, but that we may instead pass from it to a higher world without becoming separated from the loved ones we have left behind. Thus, those who fear reincarnation because of the difficulties of life here can avoid such fear by working hard to improve themselves. It is like someone who does not want to stagnate in a lower position and who must therefore learn and work to attain a better one.

The second point is the confirmation of the principle that after death we are less separated from our loved ones than during life. Mrs. Foulon, who by old age and illness was confined to a tiny town in the south, had only a part of her family nearby. Most of her children and friends were scattered far away in such a manner that physical obstacles kept her from seeing them as frequently as she desired. The great distances made even corresponding with some of them rare and difficult. However, she had barely departed her body before she could lightly run to be with any one of them, overcoming distances without fatigue and at the speed of light. She could then see them, watch their family gatherings, become involved in protecting them, and through a medium she could converse with them at any time as if she were still alive. And to think there are people who prefer an indefinite separation to such a consoling idea!

A Russian Physician

Mr. P. was a physician from Moscow, as distinguished for his eminent moral qualities as he was for his knowledge. The individual who evoked him knew him only by reputation but had not had any direct relationship with him. The original communication was given in Russian.

(After the invocation) Are you here?

“Yes. On the day of my death I came to you, but you resisted all my attempts to get you to write. I heard what you said about me, and that enabled me to become acquainted with you. I then had the desire to converse with you and to be useful.”

Since you were such an upright individual, why did you suffer so much?

“It was an act of grace from the Lord, who in such a manner wanted to enable me to advance as much as possible while on that world and to enable me to feel the value of my final deliverance from it.”

Did the thought of death frighten you?

“No, I had too much faith in God for that.”

Was the separation process difficult?

“No. What you would call my last moment was nothing. I only felt a very quick jolt, and soon afterward found myself very happy at having become disencumbered of my miserable carcass.”

Then what happened?

“I had the fortune of seeing a large number of friends who had come to meet and welcome me, especially those whom I had had the satisfaction of helping.”

What region are you in? Are you on some planet?

“Surrounding the planets there is what you call space. That is where I am, but how many gradations there are in this immensity; men have no idea! How many rungs there are on this Jacob’s ladder that goes from earth up to heaven; that is, from the abasement of

incarnation on a lower world such as yours up to the complete purification of the soul! One does not come to where I am now except after many trials, meaning many incarnations.”

So you must have had many existences.

“How could it be otherwise? There are no exceptions to the immutable order set by God. The reward can only be given after victory has been won in the struggle. And when the reward is large, it necessarily means that the struggle must have been considerable too. But human life is so short that the struggle is fulfilled only in stages, and such stages are the many successive existences. Now that I am at on a higher rung, it is obvious that I have attained this happiness through a succession of battles in which God sometimes allowed me victory.”

What does your happiness consist of?

“That is more difficult to explain. The happiness I’m experiencing is an extreme self-contentment, not as a result of my merits, which would be pride – and pride is a mark of backward spirits – but a contentment that entails being immersed in God’s love and the realization of his infinite goodness. It is the profound joy of seeing the right and the good, of being able to say: Perhaps I have contributed to the betterment of a few individuals who have lifted themselves up to the Lord. I feel as though I am one with happiness; it is a sort of fusion between the spirit and the divine good. I have the gift of seeing the purest spirits, of understanding their missions and knowing that I will also attain that state. In the incommensurable infinite, I can glimpse regions so resplendent with the divine fire that they dazzle me when I contemplate them through the veil still covering them. But what am I saying? Can you comprehend my words? That fire of which I speak: do you believe that it is like the fire of the sun, for example? No, no. It is something inexpressible to men, for words express objects only, physical or metaphysical matters about which they have a memory,

or an intuition. But since they have no memory whatsoever of what is completely unknown to them, they have no words available that can enable them to perceive it. However, know that it is already an immense joy in thinking that we can evolve forever.”

You were so kind as to state that you wanted to be of some use to me. In what way, may I ask?

“I can help you in your moments of discouragement, strengthen you in your weaknesses and console you in your sorrows. If your faith is shaken by some kind of trouble and you feel perplexed, call me. God will give me the words needed to remind you of him and lead you back to him. If you feel ready to succumb under the weight of tendencies that your conscience feels are incorrect, call me. I will help you bear your cross just as Jesus was helped to bear his – the cross which so mightily proclaims truth and charity. If you weaken under the weight of your sorrows, if despair seizes you, call me. I will come to lift you out of the abyss, speaking spirit to spirit, reminding you of the duties imposed on you, not because of societal or material considerations, but because of the love that you will sense in me, the love that God has dispensed to my being in order to transmit it to those whom he can save.

“Of course, you have friends on earth. Perhaps they have shared in your troubles, and perhaps they have already saved you on occasion. During times of affliction, you seek them out and you take your regrets and tears to them, and in exchange they give you proof of their affection through their counsels, support and tenderness. Well then, don't you think that a friend here might also be a good thing? Isn't it consoling to be able to say: When I die, my friends on earth will be at my deathbed praying and weeping for me, but my friends in space will be at the threshold of my new life and will come smiling to greet me and lead me to the place that I have merited by my virtue?”

Why have I deserved the protection you want to give me?

“Because I have felt an attachment to you since the day of my death. I have seen you as a Spiritist, a good medium and a sincere adherent. Among all those I left below, I perceived you first, so I have decided to contribute to your progress, not only in your own interest but also in the interest of all whom you have called to the path of the truth. You can see that God loves you so much that he has made you a missionary. All those about you will gradually share in your beliefs. Even the most rebellious will at least listen to you, and one day you will see that they too will believe. Do not give up. Always press forward despite the obstacles along the way. Take me as your support if you feel discouraged.”

I wouldn't dare believe myself worthy of such a big favor.

“You are obviously far from perfection, but your ardor in spreading good teachings, your sustaining of the faith of those who hear you, your proclamation of charity, goodness and benevolence – even when someone does not behave properly toward you – your resistance to the impulses of anger that you could easily give in to against those who afflict or belittle your intentions – all these attributes, fortunately, act as a counterweight to the evil still in you. And know that forgiveness of offenses is a powerful mitigating force against evil.

“God has covered you with his grace through the faculty he has given you and it is up to you to develop it through your own efforts in order to work effectively for the salvation of your neighbor. I am leaving you for now, but you can count on me. Try to moderate your earthly ideas and live more frequently with your friends on this side.”

P.

Bernardin **(Bordeaux, April 1862)**

“I am a spirit forgotten for many centuries. I lived on the earth in poverty and shame. I labored tirelessly in order to each day

provide my family with an insufficient piece of bread. Nonetheless, I loved my true Master, and whenever the One who was watching over me on earth increased the burden of my misery, I would say: My God, give me strength to bear this weight without complaint. I expiated my wrongs, my friends, and upon leaving that harsh trial, the Lord received me into his peace. My most earnest desire is to gather all of you around me, my children and brothers, and to tell you: Whatever the price you may be paying while on earth, the happiness that awaits you is much greater.

“I never had regular employment. I was a child in a large family and served anyone who could help me earn my livelihood. I was born in an era in which servitude was cruel and I bore all sorts of injustices, all the burdens and excesses that my master’s subalterns pleased to impose on me. I saw my wife violated and my daughters seduced and then cast aside, without any right to complain about it. I saw my sons taken off to wars of pillage and crime, and then hanged for wrongs they had not committed! Ah! If you only knew, my poor friends, what I endured during such a long lifetime! But I waited, I waited for the happiness that cannot be found on earth, and which the Lord finally bestowed upon me. Therefore, for all of you, my friends, I wish courage, patience and resignation.

“My child, you may keep what I have given you; it is a practical teaching. Those who preach are listened to better when they can say: I have borne up under more than you have, and I have done so without complaining.”

When did you live?

“From 1400 to 1460.”

Have you had a new existence since then?

“Yes, I lived as a missionary amongst you. Yes, a missionary of the faith, but of the true, pure faith – the faith that comes from the hand of God and not the faith contrived by men.”

Do you still have occupations as a spirit?

“Could you possibly think that spirits are inactive? Inactivity and uselessness would be a punishment for them. My mission is that of guiding workers in Spiritism. I inspire them with good thoughts and strive to neutralize thoughts suggested by evil spirits.”

Bernardin

Countess Paula

Countess Paula was a young, beautiful and rich lady born into an illustrious family; moreover, she was a complete model of all the virtues of the heart and spirit. She died at age 36 in 1851. She was one of those individuals whose eulogy can be summarized by everyone as: Why does God take such persons so early? Happy are those who are thus blessed by being remembered in such a way! She was good, sweet and tolerant toward all, and was always ready to forgive or mitigate evil rather than increase it. Slander never stained her lips. Without being haughty or prideful, she treated those below her with a benevolence that displayed no menial familiarity, and she never set herself apart from them with airs of superiority or humiliating condescension. Understanding that those who make a living from their work are persons without means, and that because of their condition and in order to sustain themselves they need the money owed to them, she was never late in paying wages. The very thought that someone might go in want because of a late payment weighed heavily on her conscience. She was not one of those persons who always have money available to satisfy their own fantasies rather than to pay their obligations. She could not understand how it could be in good taste for the wealthy to accumulate debt, and she would feel disgraced if anyone could have said that her suppliers had to grant her an advance. Hence, her death brought much grief but no claims against her.

Her charity was inexhaustible, but not that conventional charity that puts on a show in the full light of day. It was a charity of the heart and not of ostentation. Only God knew about the tears she wiped away and the desperation she relieved, for her good acts were only witnessed by herself and the misfortunates she assisted. She especially knew how to find hidden misfortunates. These were the most desperate and she helped them with a delicacy that raises rather than lowers self-esteem.

Her social status and her husband's high position obligated her to perform onerous household roles from which she could not excuse herself. However, in order to completely satisfy the requirements of her position without being stingy, she did so with great orderliness and managed to avoid ruinous wastefulness and superfluous expenditures, thereby enabling her to reduce by half what others might have spent without doing nearly as well.

She was thus able to save a large part of her fortune for the needy. Having destined a large share of her resources exclusively for this purpose so sacred to her, she regarded it as a reduction in what she would otherwise spend on the upkeep of her household. Hence, she found a way of reconciling her societal duties with her duties toward the needy.⁶³

Evoked twelve years after her death by a relative who had accepted Spiritism, she gave the following communication, responding to several questions asked of her.⁶⁴

“You are right, my friend, in thinking that I am happy. Actually, I am happy beyond anything you could imagine despite my being still far from the highest plane. I used to belong to earth's fortunate ones, for I don't recall having experienced any real sorrow. Youthfulness, health, wealth, praise – I had everything

⁶³ One could say that this lady was a living portrait of the charitable woman described in *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. XIII – Auth.

⁶⁴ From this communication (given in German) were taken the topics of interest to our subject, leaving family matters aside.

that comprises happiness among you. But what is such happiness compared to what may be experienced here? What are your most splendid galas – where people display the most valuable jewels – when compared to the assemblies of spirits who shine with a light that your eyes could not bear, and which is the appanage of their purity? What are your palaces and golden halls before these aerial dwellings, the vast field of space laced with colors that would pale the rainbow? What are your step by step walks in the park before the voyages through this immenseness that may be traveled faster than lightning? What are your narrow horizons full of clouds before the grand spectacle of worlds orbiting around in a limitless universe under the almighty hand of the Most High? How sad and noisy your most melodious concerts are before that soft harmony that makes the fluids of the ether and all the fibers of the soul vibrate! And how sad and insipid your greatest joys are before the ineffable sensation of bliss that incessantly saturates our being like a beneficent fragrance, without any blemish of restlessness, worry or suffering! Here everything breathes of love, trust and sincerity. Everywhere there are loving hearts; everywhere we see friends; nowhere is there envy or jealousy. This is the world in which I dwell, my friend, and to which all of you will undoubtedly arrive by following the morally upright path.

“One would soon tire of an unvarying happiness, however. Don’t think that our happiness is exempt from changing suddenly. It is neither an unending concert, a perpetual festival, nor is it beatific contemplation for all eternity. No. It is movement, life, activity. Although occupations cause no fatigue, they present an incessant variety of aspects and emotions because of the thousands of incidents they entail. Each spirit has its mission to fulfill, wards to protect, friends to visit on earth, processes of nature to oversee, suffering souls to console. There is a coming and going, not from one street to another, but from one world to another. We meet,

depart, and then join one another again; we assemble at a certain point and share what we have done; we congratulate each other on our successes; we consult and mutually assist one another with difficult cases. Finally, I assure you that no one has even a second in which to become bored.

“At present, the earth is our main concern. What activity among spirits! What a multitude of spirits rushing toward the earth to take part in its transformation! They are like a legion of workers occupied with clearing a forest under the command of experienced foremen. Some chop down the old trees with an axe; some pull up deep roots; others clear the land; these plow and sow the soil; those erect a new city upon the smoldering ruins of the old world. Meanwhile, the leaders meet, hold council and send messengers with their orders in every direction. The earth must be regenerated within a certain time; the designs of Providence must be accomplished. That is why everyone is at work. Don't think that I myself am only a spectator of this great work. I would feel ashamed if I were to remain idle while everyone else was busy. An important mission has been entrusted to me and I am making every effort to fulfill it in the best way possible.

“I did not arrive at my present position in the spirit life without a struggle. Rest assured that no matter how meritorious my last existence might have seemed it would not have been enough. Over many lifetimes I passed through the trials of labor and poverty, which I had voluntarily chosen in order to strengthen and purify my soul. I had the pleasure of emerging victorious from those trials, but I had yet to undergo one more – the most dangerous of all: wealth and material well-being, *a well-being without any bitterness*. That is what comprised the danger. Before attempting it, I desired to feel strong enough not to succumb. God took into account my good intentions and granted me enough grace to uphold me. Many spirits are seduced by appearances and

rush to choose wealth. What disgrace befalls them! Too weak to confront the dangers of wealth, they allow material seduction to triumph over them in their inexperience.

“Workers! I am in your ranks. Like you, I, the noblewoman, earned my bread with the sweat of my brow. I suffered privations and passed through harsh times, and that is how I developed the virile forces of my soul. If I hadn’t, I would have undoubtedly failed at my last trial, which would have put me far behind. Like me, you will also have to go through the trial of wealth, but don’t rush to ask for it too soon. You, who are already wealthy, always keep in mind that true fortune, imperishable fortune, cannot be found on the earth, and understand at what price you can merit the grace of the Almighty.”

Paula, while on earth, Countess of...

Jean Reynaud⁶⁵
(Parisian Spiritist Society,
spontaneous communication)

“My friends, how magnificent this new life is! It is like a luminous torrent, carrying along in its immense course souls athirst for the infinite! After breaking my bonds of flesh, my eyes beheld new horizons surrounding me and I drank in the splendid marvels of the infinite. I passed through the shadows of matter to the scintillating dawn that proclaims the Almighty. I have been saved, not because of the merits of my works, but because I knew the eternal principle that enabled me to avoid the stains cast upon poor humankind by ignorance. My death was a blessing. My biographers will consider it premature – how blind they are! They will mourn a few writings born from dust, but will not understand how useful the attention around my newly-shut tomb will be for

⁶⁵ 1806-1863. French socialist philosopher, member of the Saint-Simonian Community and co-founder of the *Encyclopedie Nouvelle*. – Tr.

the holy cause of Spiritism. My work was finished. My predecessors have followed its course. I had reached that culminating point at which a man has given his best and would do nothing but repeat himself. My death has rekindled the attention of the learned and has brought back my main opus, which addresses the Spiritist issue which they pretend to ignore, but which will soon enwrap them. Glory to God! Aided by the high order Spirits who watch over the new Doctrine, I shall be one of the pioneers who blaze your trail.”

Jean Reynaud
**(Paris, a family meeting: another
spontaneous communication)**

The spirit responds to a thought formulated about his unexpected death at a young age, and which had surprised many people:

“Who told you that my death would be of no benefit to Spiritism, its future and development? My friend, have you noticed the line of progress the Spiritist faith has taken? First, God granted the physical proofs: the dance of the tables, the raps and all that sort of phenomena. These were meant to call attention to the matter and were an entertaining preface to it. People needed tangible evidence in order to believe; now, however, it is quite different! After the physical evidence, God began to speak to the mind, to commonsense and to cool reason – no longer through amazing phenomena but through rational things that ought to convince and attract even the most obstinate disbeliever. And still, that was only just the beginning. Pay close attention to what I am saying: a whole series of intelligent and irrefutable phenomena are about to occur and the already great number of followers of the Spiritist faith will increase further. God is going to take over the minds of the elite, the highest of intellect, talent and knowledge. It will be a shining radiance that will expand over the whole earth like an irresistible fluid, and it will

push the most recalcitrant to research the infinite, to the study of this wonderful science that teaches us such sublime maxims. All will gather around you, and regardless of any learned title they may have been conferred with, they will become humble and small in order to learn and be convinced. Later on, when they have been sufficiently taught and convinced, they will use their authority and their famous names to advance the cause even further and to reach the final limits of the goal that has been proposed to you: the regeneration of humankind through a rational and profound understanding of past and future existences. This is my sincere opinion about the current state of Spiritism.”

In Bordeaux

(Evocation) “I am very pleased to answer your call, ma’am. Yes, you are right; I did not experience the state of confusion per se (*this is in response to the medium’s thought*). I had been in voluntary exile on your earth and was charged with casting the first serious seed of the great truths that are enveloping the world at this time. I always kept in mind an awareness of my homeland and quickly felt at home amongst my brothers.”

I thank you for having wanted to come, but I had no idea that my wish to converse with you had exerted such an influence. The difference between us must be so great that I can only be in awe of it.

“Thank you for such kind thoughts, my daughter, but you must also know that whatever may be the distance that separates us as a result of well or not so well-completed trials, there is always a powerful tie that unites us: affinity. And this tie has become stronger through the constancy of your thought.”

Although many spirits have explained their first sensations upon awakening, would you be so kind as to tell me what you experienced after becoming aware of your situation and how the separation between your spirit and body occurred?

“In the same way as for everyone else. I felt the moment of my liberation drawing near, but I was happier about it than many because there was nothing to cause me any anxiety. I had already known about its consequences, although they were more impressive than I thought they would be. The body clouds the spirit faculties, and no matter how enlightened the spirit may have been before incarnating, its abilities are always to some degree stifled by contact with matter. Thus, I went to sleep in hopes of a happy awakening; my sleep was short, but the wonder was immense! Before my eyes, the heavenly splendors unfolded, shining in all their glory. My astonished sight dove into the immensities of those worlds, whose existence and habitability I had believed in. It was an image that was revealed to me and which confirmed the truthfulness of my sentiments. No matter how secure men feel, when they speak, they often have moments of doubt and uncertainty in their hearts. If they do not doubt the truth they proclaim, they many times, at least, distrust the imperfect means used to demonstrate it. Convinced of the truth that I wanted to make accepted, I frequently had to struggle with myself against my lack of courage to see, to touch the truth, so to speak, and to be able to render it tangible to those who were in such great need of believing in it in order to securely follow their path.”

Did you profess Spiritism while you were alive?

“There is a big difference between professing and practicing. Many people profess a doctrine but do not practice it. I practiced it but did not profess it, in the same way that many people who follow the law of Christ are Christian, even if they do not realize it. One may be a Spiritist by believing in the immortal soul, its pre-existence, its incessant progressive evolution and its earthly trials, which are necessary ablutions for its purification. I believed in these things and was therefore a Spiritist. I understood the errant state – that phase of connection between incarnations – the

purgatory in which the guilty spirit rids itself of its dirty garments in order to don new clothes, and where the evolving spirit *carefully weaves the new garments it will wear* and wants to keep clean. I understood all this, and although I didn't profess it, I nevertheless continually practiced it."

These three communications were obtained through three different mediums who were completely unknown to each other. The similarity of the thoughts and the form of the language allow for at least a presumption of identity. The expression: *carefully weaves the new garments it will wear* is a wonderful image that portrays the solicitude with which the evolving spirit prepares for a new existence, during which it must continue to progress. Less evolved spirits are less meticulous and many make disastrous choices that force them to start all over.

Antoine Costeau

Mr. Costeau was a member of the Parisian Spiritist Society and was buried on September 12, 1863 in a common grave in the Montmartre cemetery. He was a man of heart, whom Spiritism had led back to God. His faith in God was complete, sincere and profound. He was a simple street repairer and practiced charity in thought, word and deed in keeping with the frail resources at his disposal, for in spite of such restrictive means, he found ways to help those who had less than he did. If the Society did not acquire a private tomb for him, it was because it seemed more important to him that such money be put to better use in benefit of the living than in the vain satisfaction of self-centeredness. Besides, we Spiritists know better than anyone else that a common grave is a doorway to heaven as much as any expensive mausoleum.

Mr. Canu, the Society's secretary and a staunch materialist in the past, gave the following address at the graveside:

“Dear brother Costeau: A few years ago, many of us – myself first of all – would have seen this open grave as representing only the end of human misery to be followed by nothingness, awful nothingness, that is, where there is no soul to merit or expiate anything, and, consequently, no God to reward, punish or forgive it. Today, thanks to our holy Doctrine, we are witnessing the end of your trials, while you, dear brother, whose remains are returned to the earth, are realizing the triumph of your labors and the beginning of the reward to which your courage, resignation, charity – in a word: your virtue – entitled you, and above all, the glorification of a wise, omnipotent, just and good God. So, dear brother, carry our thanks to the Eternal One who has enabled us to dissipate around us the darkness of error and disbelief, for not long ago, and under these same circumstances, we would discouragingly have said with gloomy faces and smitten hearts: Friend, goodbye forever. But today we say with uplifted countenances, radiant with hope, and with hearts full of love and courage: Dear brother, until then, pray for us.”⁶⁶

One of the Society’s mediums obtained the following communication right there at the still-open grave. All the assistants, including the gravediggers, listened to its reading with *uncovered heads* and profound emotion. In fact, it was a new and startling event to hear the words of a decedent right at the site of his own grave.

“Thank you, friends, thank you. My grave is not yet closed, but in a few more seconds the earth will cover up my remains. You know, however, that my soul will not be buried in that dust, but will hover in space and ascend to God!

“And how consoling it is to be able to say, despite the shattering of our envelope: Oh! I have not died; I am now living the true life, the eternal life!”

⁶⁶ For more details and other addresses, see *Revue Spirite* of October 1863, p. 297 – Auth

“The burial of the poor doesn’t involve large processions, nor are pompous ceremonials performed at their graveside. And yet, my friends, believe me, *there is no lack of an immense crowd here*, for along with you and these pious women, the good Spirits have accompanied the body that is lying there. At least you all have faith and love the good God!

“Oh! Of course, my dear wife, we do not die because our body shatters! Furthermore, I will continue to be at your side to console you and to help you bear your trials. Life will be rough for you, but with the idea of eternity and the love of God in your heart, your sufferings will be so ephemeral!

“My relatives, you who are gathered around my beloved wife, love her and respect her and be like brothers to her. Never forget the mutual assistance you owe one another while on earth if you intend to enter the dwelling place of the Lord.

“As for you, Spiritists – brothers and friends – thank you for having come to this home of dust and clay to bid me farewell. But know, and know very well, that my immortal soul lives, and that at times it will come to ask for your prayers, which you must never refuse in order to help it in the magnificent life that you opened up for it while on earth.

“Goodbye to all of you. We will be able to see one another again somewhere else besides this grave. Souls are calling me to meet with them. Goodbye. Pray for those who suffer. Goodbye!”

Costeau

Three days later, Costeau’s spirit was evoked in a private group and dictated the following message through a different medium:

“Death is life. I am doing nothing more than repeating what has already been stated, but for you there is no other expression than this one in spite of what the materialists believe – those who prefer to remain blind. Oh! My friends, what a beautiful spectacle

it is to see the banners of Spiritism waving upon the earth! Spiritism is a profound, immense science about which you have only spoken the first few words! And what light it brings to men of goodwill, those who, having broken the terrible chains of pride, loudly proclaim their belief in God! People, pray and give thanks for all such benefits. Poor humanity! Ah! If only it were given to you to comprehend! ... But no, the time has not yet come in which the Lord's mercy shall extend itself to all men so that they might recognize the divine will and submit to it.

“It is through your luminous rays, O blessed [Spiritist] science, that they will arrive at an understanding. It is to your beneficial rays that they will come to heat their hearts in the divine fire, the bearer of faith and consolation. It is into your life-giving rays that master and worker will join together and become one, for they will finally understand that fraternal charity proclaimed by the divine Messiah.

“Oh! My brothers, think about the immense joy to have been the first initiates in the work of regeneration. Honor is yours, my friends! Carry on, and someday, like myself, you will arrive at the homeland of spirits and exclaim: *Death is life*. Well, it is more like a dream, a sort of nightmare that lasts only a minute, and from which we awaken to find ourselves surrounded by friends who congratulate us, and who are joyful at being able to embrace us. So great was my happiness that I could not understand why God had granted me such grace, considering how little I had done. It seemed like it was a dream, and since I often had dreamed that I was dead, for a few instants I trembled at having to return to my disgraceful body. However, it didn't take long for me to grasp the reality of the situation and render thanks to God. I blessed the teacher who had known so well how to awaken me to the duties of those who believe in the future life. Yes, I blessed him and thanked him because *The Spirits' Book* awakened within my soul the bonds of love for my Creator.

“Thank you, my good friends, for having brought me into your group. Please tell our brothers that I am often with our friend Sanson. Goodbye; have courage! Victory awaits you. Happy are they who have taken part in the combat!”

Since then, Mr. Costeau has manifested quite often either at the Society or at other meetings, where he has always given evidence of that elevation of thought that characterizes advanced spirits.

Miss Emma⁶⁷

After cruel suffering, Miss Emma died as a result of an accident caused by fire. Someone had proposed that we evoke her at a meeting of the Parisian Spiritist Society, when she spontaneously appeared on July 31, 1863, shortly after her death.

“I am still here on the world scene; I who thought I had buried myself forever in my veil of innocence and youthful. The fire of the earth would save me from the fires of hell – thus I thought according to my Catholic faith, and even if I had not dared to anticipate the splendors of heaven, my timid soul would take refuge in the expiation of purgatory. So I prayed, suffered and wept. But who in my weakness gave me the strength to bear such anguish? Who, in the long nights of sleeplessness and dire fever, bent over my deathbed? Who refreshed my dry, parched lips? It was you, my spirit guide, whose white aura surrounded me, and it was you, dear and beloved spirits, who came to whisper words of hope and love in my ears.

“The flames that consumed my frail body also rid me of its chains, and thus *I died while already living the true life*. I didn’t experience any state of confusion; I entered serenely and consciously into the radiant day that embraces those who, after having suffered

⁶⁷ Emma Livry (September 24, 1842 - July 26, 1863) was the adopted daughter and ballerina protégé of Madame Taglioni. She died in Paris eight months after receiving burns when her costume caught fire from a gas light while rehearsing on the stage of the French Opera. – Tr.

much, know how to wait just a little longer. My mother, my dear mother, was the last earthly vibration that resounded in my soul. How I wish she would become a Spiritist!

“I dropped from the earth tree like a fruit that has ripened before its time. I had not yet been touched by the demon of pride that stimulates misfortunate souls, carried away by the intoxicating and shining success of youth. I bless the fire, the suffering and the trial, which were nothing more than an expiation. Like the light gossamer threads of autumn, I float, carried about on luminous currents; no longer do the starry diamonds shine on my forehead, but the golden stars of the good God.”

Emma

On July 30, 1863, the same spirit spontaneously gave the following communication at another Spiritist center in Havre:

“Those who suffer while on earth receive recompense in the other life. God is full of justice and mercy towards those who suffer there. He grants such pure and perfect happiness that none would fear either suffering or death if it were possible for poor human beings to probe the mysterious designs of our Creator. But the earth is a place of many trials and poignant pain is frequently sown there. Be resigned if you are stricken; bow before the supreme goodness of the omnipotent God whenever he gives you a heavy burden to bear. If he calls you after great suffering, and if there is no complaining or moaning in your heart, you will perceive the recompense that God has reserved for you. You will see in the other life – the happy life – how little the pain and suffering of earth are. I left the earth behind quite early and God wanted to forgive me and give me the life of those who respect his will. Always worship God; love him with all your heart. Pray to him above all; pray to him confidently, he who is your support while on earth, your hope, your salvation.”

Emma

Dr. Vignal

A former member of the Parisian Society, Dr. Vignal died on March 27, 1865. On the day before his burial, a highly lucid somnambulist and capable clairvoyant was asked to sit next to Dr. Vignal's body and narrate what he saw:

“I see a corpse in which an extraordinary process is taking place. There is a quantity of matter that is stirring and something seems to be making an effort to disengage itself, but is having difficulty in overcoming the resistance. I cannot make out a well-defined spirit form.”

An invocation was made at the Parisian Society on March 31:

Dear Dr. Vignal, all your old colleagues from the Parisian Society – and I in particular – have the fondest memories of you and our meaningful relationship, which has never been interrupted. Our reason for evoking you is primarily to express our affinity and we would be happy if you could and would wish to communicate with us.

“Dear friend and worthy teacher: such a fond remembrance and displays of affinity are very pleasing to me. Thanks to your evocation and prayers, I have been able to come today without hindrance to attend this meeting of good friends and Spiritist brothers. As your young secretary rightly said, I was anxious to communicate, and since this evening I have employed all my spirit strength to control my desire. But since the serious subjects you have been addressing interest me very much, they made my waiting less painful. Forgive me, my dear friend, but my gratitude required that I manifest myself.”

First of all, tell us how you found yourself in the spirit world. Describe the process of separation and the sensations at that moment, as well as the time it took you to comprehend your situation.

“I am as happy as one can be in seeing totally confirmed all the secret thoughts one might have had about such a comforting and consoling

doctrine. I am happy! Yes I am, because I can now see unrestrictedly before me the future of the Spiritist science and philosophy.

“But today let’s leave behind such importune digressions. I will return again to converse with you about this subject, knowing fully well that my presence brings you as much pleasure as it brings me when I visit.

“The separation process was quick – more than could be hoped for because of my small merit. I was helped very much by your assistance and your somnambulist gave you a clear enough idea of the process of separation. I don’t have much to add. It was a sort of intermittent oscillation, a kind of pulling in two opposite directions. My spirit finally triumphed, for I am here. I was only able to leave my body completely behind when it was buried; I came here to be with you.

What did you think about your funeral? I deemed it my obligation to attend it. At the time, you were quite free to appreciate it. And did the (silent) prayers I offered on your behalf reach you?

“Yes. As I told you, your assistance helped me greatly and I returned from the cemetery with you, completely abandoning my old cocoon. You know that I was not concerned with material things; I only thought about my soul and God.”

You might recall that at your request five years ago in February of 1860, we did a study on you while you were still alive.⁶⁸ On that occasion your spirit disengaged itself in order to come and communicate with us. Could you describe to us, as much as possible, the difference between your current disengagement and that one back then?

“Yes, I recall that experiment. What a big difference there is between my state then and this one today! During my state in the experiment, matter still held me in its inflexible web; that is, I wanted to but couldn’t completely disengage myself. Today I am completely free. A vast, unknown field has opened before me and

⁶⁸ See *Revue Spirite*, March 1860 – Auth.

I hope that with your help and that of the good Spirits – to whom I commend myself – I will be able to progress and instill as quickly as possible the sentiments I must experience and the actions I must do to bear up under my trials and to merit recompense. What majesty! What grandeur! It is almost a feeling of fear when, as weak as we are, we try to gaze upon such luminous splendors.”

We will continue our discussion of the subject whenever you want.

“I have responded succinctly and haphazardly to several questions. But please don’t ask too much for now from your faithful disciple, because I am not yet completely free. I would love to converse some more, but my guide is moderating my enthusiasm and I have already greatly valued his goodness and justice; thus, I submit myself entirely to his decision despite my disappointment at having to break off our conversation for now. It comforts me to know that at times I will be able to come to your meetings incognito. I will communicate with you whenever I can; I respect you and wish to show it. However, more-advanced spirits take priority, and I must bow to those who have allowed me to give free rein to the torrent of my accumulated thoughts.

“I will leave you for now, my friends, and must doubly thank not only you Spiritists who have evoked me, but also this spirit who has allowed me to take his place, and who on earth had the illustrious name of Pascal.”

He who was and always will be the most devoted of your followers,

Dr. Vignal

Victor Leblufe

Mr. Leblufe, a wharf laborer at port du Havre, died at 20 years of age. He had been living with his mother, a poor shopkeeper, on whom he lavished the most tender and affectionate care, supporting her with

the income from his toilsome work. He was never seen to frequent taverns or to indulge in the excesses that were normal for his line of work, for he did not wish to divert the least bit of his pay from its pious purpose to which he had devoted himself. He dedicated all his free time to his mother to save her from becoming tired. Struck by a long disease from which he knew he would die, he hid his suffering so as not to upset her and so that she would not try to take care of him instead. The boy needed a large stock of moral qualities and strong willpower at his passionate age in order to resist the pernicious temptations of his environment. He was sincerely pious and his death was serene.

On the day before his death, he insisted on his mother taking a nap, telling her that he too needed to sleep. While she was napping, she had a vision: she found herself in great *darkness* and saw a luminous point that grew little by little until the room became illuminated by a bright light, in which she saw the radiant figure of her son rising up into infinite space. She understood that his end was near and, in fact, the next day his beautiful soul left the earth behind while murmuring a prayer.

A Spiritist family who knew about his exemplary conduct and who took an interest in the mother – now alone – got the idea of evoking him shortly after his death; however, he manifested spontaneously and gave the following communication:

“You wish to know how I am right now; I am happy; extremely happy! Do not take suffering and anguish into account, because they are the origin of blessings and happiness beyond the grave. Such happiness! You don’t understand the meaning of that word. Earthly happiness is far from what we experience when we return to the Master with the pure conscience and confidence of a worker who has fulfilled his duty, and who joyfully awaits the approval of that One who is everything!

“Ah! My friends, life is painful and difficult if you do not hold its true purpose before you, but I can truthfully tell you that

when you come to be with us – if you have followed God’s law – you will be rewarded way beyond your suffering or the merit that you feel you have accumulated for the life hereafter. Be good and charitable; show that kind of charity that is unknown to many men, and which is called benevolence. Help your neighbor and do more for others than you do for yourself, for you may be ignorant of their inner misery while aware of your own. Please help my mother, my poor mother, who has been my only concern since leaving earth. She must go through further trials but they are necessary for her to reach heaven. Farewell; I am going to see her.”

Victor

The medium’s Guide: “The bitter sufferings of earth do not always comprise expiation. Spirits who, by God’s will, come to fulfill a mission on earth – such as the spirit who has just communicated with you – are happy to bear ills that for others would be an expiation. Sleep reinvigorates them before the Almighty and gives them the strength to bear everything for God’s greater glory. This spirit’s mission during his last existence was not ostentatious, but even though it was obscure, it was nonetheless meritorious, since it could have come under the influence of pride. Above all, he had a duty of gratitude to fulfill vis-à-vis the one who was his mother; then he had to show that in the worst surroundings one can find pure and noble souls with elevated sentiments, and who are capable of resisting temptation. This is evidence that moral qualities have prior causes, and his example will not have been useless for others to follow.”

Mrs. Anais Gourdon

Mrs. Gourdon, a very young woman known for her gentle character and eminent moral qualities, passed away in November of

1860. She belonged to a family of miners from around Saint-Etienne, a circumstance that made her spiritual position quite interesting.

Evocation

“I’m here.”

Your husband and your father have asked me to evoke you and would be happy to receive a communication.

“And I would be happy to give them one.”

Why were you taken from your family’s affections at such a young age?

“Because I had finished my earthly trials.”

Can you see your relatives sometimes?

“Oh! I am always nearby.”

Are you a happy spirit?

“I am. I hope, wait and love. The heavens do not scare me, and I await with confidence and love for the sprouting of my white wings.”

What do you mean by white wings?

“When I become a pure spirit as resplendent as these celestial messengers who are dazzling me.”

The wings of angels, archangels and seraphim, who are nothing more than pure spirits, are obviously only an attribute imagined by humans to portray the speed at which they move, for their ethereal nature makes any aid unnecessary for crossing space. However, they may appear to humans with such accessories to be in harmony with human thought, just as spirits take on the appearance they had on earth in order to be recognizable.

Can your relatives do anything on your behalf?

“They can stop saddening me with their mourning; they know I’m not lost forever to them. I want their memory of me to be sweet, light and fragrant. My stay on earth was like a flower’s and nothing sorrowful should remain of that brief stay.”

How can your language be so poetic and so little in keeping with your position while on earth?

“It is my soul that speaks. Yes, I possessed previously acquired knowledge; also, *God often allows delicate spirits to incarnate amongst more rustic men to enable them to perceive the refinement and understanding they will acquire later on.*”

Without this highly logical explanation, which is so much in harmony with God’s kindness towards God’s creatures, it would be difficult to understand what might at first glance seem to be an anomaly. In reality, though, what could be more poetic and gracious than the language of this refined young woman in the midst of the roughest work environment? The opposite often occurs as well: low order spirits incarnate among highly advanced peoples, but for the opposite purpose. It is for their own advancement that God places them in contact with an enlightened environment for their instruction, or so that they might act as an instrument of trial. What other philosophy could resolve such anomalies?

Maurice Gontran

Maurice Gontran was an only child who died at eighteen years of age from lung disease. He was precocious, possessed a rare intelligence, loved to study and had a gentle, loving and likeable character – all the qualities that foretell a brilliant future. Having successfully completed his studies early, he then registered at the Polytechnic School. His death caused his parents one of those painful blows that leave deep scars, because, since he had always been of a frail nature, they attributed his premature end to the assiduous studies which they had urged him to undertake. They blamed themselves, saying, “Of what use is all that he learned now? It would have been better if he had remained uneducated, because science did not give him what was necessary for him to live; otherwise, he would undoubtedly still be with us and would be a consolation for us in our old age.” However, if they had known

about Spiritism, they would have reasoned differently; they would have found true consolation. The following dictation was given by the young man to one of his friends months after his decease.

My dear Maurice, your tender affection toward your parents has convinced me that you wish to lift their spirits if it is within your means to do so. The sorrow – even despair – in which your passing left them has visibly affected their health and has led them to loathe their lives. A few words of consolation would certainly work to rekindle their hope.

“My friend, I have been waiting impatiently for this opportunity you are now offering me to communicate. My parents’ pain afflicts me, but it will be assuaged when they are certain that I am not actually lost to them. Get close to them in order to convince them of this truth, which you will certainly manage to do. This has all happened in order to initiate them into a belief that will bring them happiness, for it will keep them from complaining against the decrees of Providence. You know that my father was very skeptical regarding the future life. *God granted him this misfortune to draw him out of error.*

“We will meet again in this world, where life’s disappointments are unknown and to where I have preceded them. However, affirm to them categorically that the fortune of being able to see me again will be refused as a punishment if they lack trust in God’s goodness. It would also prevent me from further communicating with them for the time they have remaining on the earth. Despair is rebellion against the will of the Omnipotent and is always punished by the *prolonging of the cause that has produced it* until there is complete resignation. Despair is truly suicide, for it saps the bodily energies, and those who shorten their days in hopes of more quickly escaping the bitterness of pain will face the cruelest disappointment. On the contrary, they ought to strengthen their body so that it may more easily bear up under the burdens of trial.

“My dear and kind parents, I am now addressing you. Ever since I left my mortal remains behind, I have never left your side. I am there even more often than when I was living. Take heart, for I am not dead; rather, I am more alive than you. Only my body died, but my spirit will live forever. It is free, happy and without disease, infirmity and pain. Instead of feeling afflicted, rejoice in knowing that I am in an environment exempt from concerns and anxiety, and where my heart is full of the purest joy without a shadow of trouble.

“Oh! My good friends, do not mourn those who die prematurely, because it is a grace that God bestows on them, saving them from the tribulations of earthly life. My existence there did not last long this time, because I acquired what I needed to prepare myself for a more elevated mission. If I had lived for many years, do you know what kinds of dangers and seductions I might have been exposed to? Do you know that, had I succumbed to them by not being strong enough to resist, it could have represented for me a delay of centuries? So why do you mourn what has been to my advantage? In a case like this, an inconsolable grief would indicate a disbelief that is only legitimate if one holds to the idea of nothingness. Oh! Yes, those who thus disbelieve are more worthy of grief because for them there is no consolation possible. Their loved ones seem to be irredeemably lost, because the grave has robbed them of their last hope!”

Was your death painful?

“No, my friend, before my death I only suffered the effects of the illness, but the *suffering diminished as my final moment approached*. Then, one day I went to sleep without thinking about death and had a marvelous dream! I dreamed that I had been healed, that I no longer suffered. I took deep breaths of a balmy and invigorating air. An unknown force carried me through space. A brilliant light surrounded me but did not fatigue my sight! I

saw my grandfather, who was no longer emaciated or feeble, but youthful and fresh. He held out his arms to me and gathered me close to his heart. A crowd of others, all smiling, came with him and all benevolently and gently welcomed me. I seemed to recognize them and felt happy to see them. We exchanged greetings and showed our friendship for one another. Well then! What I had supposed to be a dream was in fact reality, for I was not to awaken from that dream on earth, but in the spirit world.”

Then your illness was not the result of excessive study?

“Oh, no! Please don’t think it was. The time that I was to spend on earth had been set and nothing could have kept me there any longer. In its moments of emancipation, my spirit knew this and it was happy at the idea of its approaching deliverance. However, I didn’t fail to take advantage of the time I was there, and now I am happy for not having wasted it. My serious studying strengthened my soul and increased its knowledge, and even though in virtue of my short life among you I couldn’t put it to practical use, I will do so successfully in the future.

“Farewell, my dear friend. I am going to be with my parents in order to prepare them to receive this communication.”

Maurice

CHAPTER III



Average Spirits

Joseph Bre

(Died in 1840 and evoked in Bordeaux by his granddaughter in 1862)

The Honest Man according to God or according to Men

1. *Dear grandpa, would you please tell me how you're doing in the world of spirits and give me any instructive details that might be useful for our progress?*

“Anything you want, dear child. I am expiating my disbelief, but God's goodness is great and he takes circumstances into account. I am suffering, but not like you might think. I regret not having taken better advantage of my time while on earth.”

2. *How can you say you did not employ your time well? You always lived as an honest man.*

“Yes, in the judgment of others, *but there is an abyss between honesty before men and honesty before God.* You want to learn, dear child, so I will try to show you the difference.

“There, among you, men are regarded as being honest when they respect the laws of their country (a respect that is quite flexible for many) and when they do not harm their neighbors by ostensibly taking their property, even though they often

unscrupulously rob them of their honor and their happiness as long as the penal code or public opinion cannot reach them. They are such blameworthy hypocrites! And when they can have their tombstone engraved with the string of virtues they have preached, it is believed that they have paid their debt to humanity. What a mistake! Not breaking the laws of men is not enough before God; above all, one must not have transgressed the divine laws.

“A man who honest in God’s sight is one who out of devotion and love dedicates himself to a life of goodness and to the progress of his fellow man; who, animated by limitless zeal, is active in life: active in fulfilling the physical tasks imposed on him, for he must teach others the love of labor. He is active in good deeds because he has not forgotten that he is but a servant from whom the Lord will demand an accounting someday of how he employed his time. Finally, he is active because he must practice love for God and his neighbor. Thus, men who are honest before God must carefully avoid acid words: that poison hidden under the flowers, which destroys reputations and often ruins upright men, exposing them to ridicule. According to God, an honest man must always have a heart closed to any kernel of pride, envy or ambition. He must be patient and benevolent toward those who attack him. From the depths of his soul, without effort and especially without ostentation, he must pardon those who offend him. He must love the Creator in all his creatures. Furthermore, he must put into practice that concise and grand summary of humankind’s duties: Love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself.

“And that, my dear child, is pretty much what honest men must do before God. Well then, did I do all that? No. I must confess here without blushing that I often failed at many of those conditions; I didn’t do all the things that such an honest man would have done. I forgot the Lord and that in turn drove me to other wrongs, which, even though acceptable according to the

laws of men, were nevertheless offensive to God's decrees. I have suffered much since having come to understand this. That is why I have hope now, but it is that consoling hope in the goodness of God, who sees my repentance. My dear child, say this and repeat it to all whose conscience is burdened: You must get rid of your imperfections through the power of good deeds, and God's mercy will thereby extend over you. God's paternal eyes will take your trials into account and his powerful hand will obliterate your wrongs."

Mrs. Helene Michel

Mrs. Michel was a young woman of 25 years of age, who died suddenly at home from an unknown cause and without suffering. She was wealthy and a bit frivolous, and due to her superficial character, she concerned herself more with the futilities of life than with serious matters. Even so, her heart was good: she was gentle, benevolent and charitable.

Evoked three days after her death by individuals who had known her, she made the following comments:

"I don't know where I am ... such confusion engulfs me! You called me and I have come. I don't understand why I'm not at home; they are mourning my absence, but I am still there and cannot get them to recognize me. My body no longer belongs to me, yet I can feel it cold and frozen ... I want to leave it, yet I'm still attached ... I always go back to it ... I'm two persons ... Oh! When will I understand what is happening to me? I must go there again ... my other self ... what will become of it while I'm away from it? Goodbye."

The feeling of duality is obvious in this case because there was not yet a complete separation. Her fickle character and wealth enabled her to satisfy all her whims, and thus encouraged her tendencies toward frivolousness. Hence, it is no wonder that her

separation was slow to the point that three days after her death she still felt tied to her corporeal envelope. However, since she had no serious vices and deep down was a good person, this situation was not severely distressing and did not last very long. Evoked once more a few days later, her thoughts had already changed considerably. This is what she had to say:

“Thank you for having prayed for me. I have recognized the goodness of God, who has relieved me of the suffering and apprehension coming from the detachment of my spirit from my body. My poor mother will have a very difficult time resigning herself; however, she will be comforted. What to her eyes may seem like a misfortune was meant to occur and was indispensable so that the things of heaven might become to her what they really should be: everything. I will be at her side until the end of her earthly trial and I will help her bear it. I’m not unhappy, really, but I still have much to do to approach the state of the blessed. I will ask God to grant that I may return to the earth, for I must make up for the time I wasted during my last existence. May your faith uphold you, my friends. Trust in the effectiveness of prayer, especially when it comes from the heart. God is good.”

Did it take you long to realize your situation?

“I understood that I was dead the very day you prayed for me.”

Was the state of confusion difficult?

“No, I didn’t suffer. I thought I was dreaming and was waiting to wake up. My life was not without pain, because every incarnate being in this world has to suffer. My resignation to God’s will was taken into account. I am thankful to you for your prayers; they helped me to come to myself. Thank you. I will be happy to return at anytime. Farewell.”

Helene

The Marquis de St. Paul
(Passed away in 1860 and evoked on
May 16, 1861 at the request of his sister,
a member of the Parisian Society)

1. *Evocation*

“I’m here.”

2. *Your sister has asked us to evoke you, because even though she is a medium, she has not yet developed sufficiently to have confidence in herself.*

“I shall respond as best I can.”

3. *First, she wants to know if you are happy.*

“I’m in the errant state, and this transitory condition never entails absolute happiness or punishment.”

4. *Did it take you a long time to come to your senses?*

“I was confused for a long time and came to my senses only to bless the compassion of those who had not forgotten me and who had prayed for me.”

- *Can you say how long your confusion lasted?*

“No.”

5. *Who were the relatives you recognized first?*

“My mother and father. They greeted me upon my awakening and introduced me to the new life.”

6. *To what would you attribute the fact that during the last moments of your illness it seemed as though you were talking with persons who had been dear to you while on earth?*

“Before dying, I had a revelation of the world I was about to inhabit. I was clairvoyant just before my death, but my eyes fogged over at the moment of final separation from the body because the fleshly ties were still quite strong.”

7. *Why did your memories involve those closer to your childhood?*

“Because the beginning of life is much closer to the end than is the middle.”

- *How so?*

“I mean that, *as if in a consoling mirage*, those who are dying remember and see their purer and younger years.”

It is probably due to a similar providential reason that the elderly, as they come closer to the end of their life, sometimes have a precise remembrance of the tiniest details of their earliest years.

8. *When referring to your body, why do you always speak about it in the third person?*

“Because I was clairvoyant, as I have already stated, and I clearly sensed the differences between physical and mental conditions; these differences, linked together by the vital fluid, become highly distinguishable to the eyes of dying persons who are clairvoyant.”

This is a unique particularity presented by the death of this man. During his last moments he would say, “He is thirsty and needs something to drink; he is cold and needs to be warmed up; he has pain in this or that part,” etc. And when someone would say, “But it is you who are thirsty,” he would respond, “No, it’s him.” This displays the two existences perfectly. The thinking *self* is in the spirit, not in the body. This spirit, when partially detached, regarded his body as a separate individuality and rightly said that it did not belong to him. Thus, it was his body that needed a drink and not his spirit. This phenomenon may also be observed sometimes in somnambulists.

9. *What you said about the errant state of your spirit and the duration of your confusion implies that you are not very happy, and yet your qualities as a person would indicate quite the contrary. Moreover, there are both happy and unhappy spirits in the errant state.*

“I am in a transitory state. Human virtues are assigned their true value here. This state is certainly a thousand times more

preferable than that of my earthly incarnation. But I always aspired to what was truly good and truly beautiful, so my soul will not feel satisfied until it soars up to the feet of the Creator.”

Mr. Cardon, a Physician

Mr. Cardon had spent part of his life in the merchant marine as a doctor on a whaling ship, where he acquired habits and ideas that were quite materialistic. He retired to the town of J., where he had a modest practice as a country doctor. After some time, he became certain that he had hypertrophy of the heart, and knowing that the illness was incurable, he sank into a state of inconsolable melancholy at the prospect of dying. Nobody could cheer him up. Approximately two months before his death, he actually predicted the day on which he would die. When the time came, he gathered his family around him to say his final farewell. His wife, mother, three children and other relatives were gathered at his bedside. At his wife's first attempt to lift him up, he went limp and turned a livid purple. His eyes closed and he was thought to be dead. His wife placed herself in front of him to prevent the children from seeing him. After a few minutes he re-opened his eyes, however. His appearance became luminous, so to speak, and filled with an expression of radiant beatitude, he exclaimed, “Oh, my children, it's beautiful... it's sublime! Oh, death! What a blessing! What a sweet thing! I was dead and I felt my soul rise up high, very high, but God allowed me to return in order to tell you: *Do not fear death; it is deliverance* ... I cannot possibly describe the magnificence of all I saw, the impressions I experienced! You would not comprehend them ... Oh! My children, always conduct yourselves in such a way that you will merit the ineffable happiness reserved for righteous men. Live according to the precepts of charity. If you have anything, always give a part of it to those who lack the necessities of life ...

My dear wife, I am leaving you in a less than desirable position. There are debts owed to us, but I beg you not to hound our debtors. If they are in financial straights, wait until they can pay you, and those who cannot repay you at all, forgive them; God will reward you. You, my son, work to support your mother. Always be honest and avoid doing anything that might dishonor our family. Take this cross. I inherited it from my mother. Never lay it aside and may it always remind you of my last words of advice ... My children, help each other and mutually support one another; may harmony reign amongst you. Don't be vain or proud; forgive your enemies if you want God to forgive you..." Then, signaling them to come closer, he took their hands and added, "Bless you, my children," and his eyes closed for good. His face, however, retained such a stately expression that up until the moment of his funeral, crowds of people viewed it with wonder.

A friend of the family supplied us with these interesting details, and we thought that an evocation might be instructive for all of us and useful to the spirit himself.

1. *Evocation*

"I'm right by you."

2. *We have been told about your last moments and we were left amazed. Would you be so kind as to describe to us in more detail what you saw in the time period between what we might call your two deaths?*

"What I saw ... would you be able to comprehend it? I don't know, since I can't find the appropriate expressions to make comprehensible what I saw during the brief moments when it was possible for me to leave my mortal envelope."

3. *Do you know where you were? Was it far from earth on some other planet or in space?*

"A spirit doesn't measure distances as you do. Carried away by some unknown magnificent power, I saw the splendors of a sky

that is only possible in dreams. That race through the infinite was so fast that I can't determine the time it took for my spirit."

4. *And are you now enjoying the happiness you foresaw at that time?*

"No. I would certainly love to enjoy it, but God can't reward me that much. I too often revolted against the blessed thoughts my heart dictated to me, and death seemed like an injustice. A disbelieving physician, I acquired in the art of healing an aversion toward the second nature, which is our intelligent, divine impulse; for me, the immortality of the soul was nothing more than a fiction fit to seduce the uneducated. And yet, nothingness frightened me, because many times I found myself cursing the mysterious agent that strikes over and over again. Philosophy deceived me without enabling me to understand all the grandeur of the Eternal One, who knows how to mete out both sorrow and joy in order to teach humankind."

5. *Did you realize the state you were in right after the final disengagement of your spirit?*

"No. I only came to myself during the transition that my spirit experienced while traveling through the ethereal regions. But after my real death, that did not happen immediately; it took me a few days to awaken.

"God granted me a favor, and I will tell you why: my original disbelief no longer existed; before I died I started to believe, for after having scientifically and truly fathomed the disease that was tormenting me, I could find no other earthly explanation except divine reason, which inspired and consoled me and gave me courage that was stronger than my pain. Thus, I blessed what I had cursed and regarded the end as liberation. The idea of God is as vast as the universe! Oh, what supreme consolation there is in prayer; it arouses ineffable sentiments. It is the most positive element of our non-material nature. Through prayer I understood, I believed firmly and supremely, and that is why God, in weighing my good deeds, rewarded me before the end of my incarnation."

6. *Could one say that you were actually dead during that first instance?*

“Yes and no. Since my spirit had abandoned its body, the flesh naturally started to decay; however, in repossessing my earthly dwelling, life returned to the body, which had undergone a transition, a sleep.”

7. *At that moment, did you feel the ties that reconnected you to your body?*

“Of course. The spirit has a bond that is hard to break and it cannot enter its natural life until the last shudder of the flesh.”

8. *How could it be that at your apparent death and for a few minutes thereafter, your spirit could have disengaged itself instantaneously and without bewilderment, whereas your real death was followed by several days of confusion? It seems that in the first case, with the ties between soul and body lasting longer than in the second, the disengagement should have been slower, which is just the opposite of what actually happened.*

“You have often evoked incarnate spirits and have received precise responses on the matter. I was in a state similar to theirs. God called me and his servants said, ‘Come...’ I obeyed and thanked him for the special favor that was granted to me so that I could glimpse and comprehend his infinite grandeur. I am grateful to those who, before my real death, allowed me to instruct my loved ones so that they might lead good and righteous incarnations.”

9. *Where did you get the beautiful words that you spoke to your family after your awakening?*

“They were a reflection of what I had seen and understood. Good spirits inspired my language and enlivened my expressions.”

10. *What impression do you think your revelation had on those watching over you, especially your children?*

“Surprising, profound; death does not lie. No matter how ungrateful they might be, children always bend an ear to an incarnation that is ending. If we could enter our children’s hearts as they are gathered around the open grave, we would see the beating of true and sincere feelings as they are touched by the unseen hands of spirits who speak to their innermost thoughts: Tremble if you doubt; death is reparation, the justice of God. Let me assure you that in spite of their disbelief, my family and friends believed the words I spoke before I died. Moreover, I was the interpreter of another world.”

11. *You stated that you are not presently enjoying the happiness you foresaw. May we conclude that you are unhappy?*

“No, since I became a believer in both heart and conscience before I died. Pain afflicts us while on earth, but strengthens us from the point of view of our future as spirits. Notice that God took into account my prayers and the absolute faith I had in him. I am firmly on the path of perfection and will some day reach the end that I was allowed to glimpse. Pray, my friends, for this invisible world that presides over your destinies; this sort of fraternal exchange comes from charity; it is a lever that puts spirits of all worlds in communication with one another.”

12. *Do you perchance wish to say a few words to your wife and children?*

“I would ask them all to believe in the powerful, just and immutable God; in prayer, which consoles and relieves; in charity, which is the purest practice of human incarnation; and that they remember that we can always give a little, at least. The alms which the poor give are more meritorious before God, who knows that they give much when they give a little. The rich must give a lot and repeatedly in order to merit as much.

“The future lies in the charity and benevolence of each action, and in the belief that all spirits are family and that we should never let childish vanities prevail.

“You will experience harsh trials, my dear beloved family. But accept them courageously, remembering that God is watching you. Repeat this prayer often: ‘God of love and goodness, who grants all things, give us greater strength to bear all our ups and downs, and enable us to be good, humble and charitable, small of fortune but great of heart. Grant that we may be Spiritists while on earth so that we might comprehend and love you more. May your name, O my God, emblem of freedom, be the consoling aim of all who are oppressed, of all who need to love, forgive, and believe.’”

Cardon

Eric Stanislas
(Spontaneous communication,
Parisian Society, August 1863)

“What blessings we are given by the emotions deeply felt by kindly hearts! O sweet thoughts that come to open up the way of salvation to everything that lives and breathes both physically and spiritually. May the rescuing balm never cease to spread profusely both over yourselves and us! What expressions can we choose to describe the happiness felt by your discarnate friends in contemplating the pure love that binds us all together?

“Ah! Friends, how much good everywhere! Such sweet, elevated and simple sentiments! They are like you and the Doctrine you have been called to spread along the long road you have yet to travel. But how much you will be granted even before you have acquired any right to it!

“I have watched everything that has happened here tonight. I have heard, I have understood and I shall now in turn fulfill my duty and instruct this class of imperfect spirits.

“Listen, I was far from being happy. Plunged into the vastness, the infinite, my suffering was so intense that I could hardly comprehend it. Blessed be God, who allowed me to come to a sanctuary which the wicked cannot approach *without impunity*. My friends, how grateful I am to you; how much strength I have recovered here in your midst! Oh! Men of the good, continue to meet and study often with one another, for you cannot doubt the fruits of your serious meetings. Discarnate spirits who still have much to learn, those who intentionally remain idle, indolent and oblivious to their duties, may be found there among you, due to fortuitous circumstances or otherwise. Surprised by a terrible jolt, such spirits are often given the chance to withdraw into themselves, to take a good look at themselves, to get a glimpse of their hoped-for goal. They feel strengthened by the example you provide and thus seek the means to escape the painful condition they’re in. It is with much satisfaction that I speak on behalf of such suffering souls, for I am speaking to men of heart and I know I won’t be turned away.

“So, generous men, once more accept the expression of my own gratitude and that of all my friends for whom – perhaps without knowing it – you have done so much good.”

Eric Stanislas

The medium’s Guide: “My children, this is a spirit who suffered for a long time after having strayed from the upright way. He has come to understand his errors, has repented and has turned his eyes toward the God whom he used to deny. His position is not that of a happy spirit, although he aspires to happiness and does not suffer anymore. God allowed him to come and hear you and afterward to descend to a lower sphere in order to instruct and stimulate the progress of other spirits, who, like himself, transgressed the Eternal One’s law. Such is the reparation he has been charged with. In the end, he will gain happiness, for he has the will to do so.”

Mrs. Anna Belleville

A young woman of thirty-five, Mrs. Belleville died after a long and cruel illness. Lively, spiritual and endowed with rare intelligence, she possessed rectitude of judgment and eminent moral qualities. She was a wife and devoted mother, and, moreover, possessed an uncommon integrity of character and an expedient spirit that enabled her to never be caught off guard by the most critical circumstances of life. Without harboring resentment towards individuals against whom she might have much to complain, she was always ready to help them when the occasion arose. Having known her intimately for several years, we were able to follow all the phases of her life as well as all the events of her demise.

An accident gave rise to the terrible illness that finally took her away after having held her bedfast for three years and prey to the cruelest suffering, which she bore until the end with heroic courage and with the natural grace of her spirit. She firmly believed in the existence of the soul and the future life, but concerned herself little with the matter. All her thoughts were related to the present, which was very important to her, although she had no fear of death and did not seek material pleasures. Her life was simple, and she could easily do without what she was unable to obtain. Nonetheless, she possessed an innate sentiment of the good and beautiful, which she appreciated in the smallest things. She wanted to live less for herself and more for her children. She knew they needed her and that is what kept her clinging to life. She understood Spiritism without having studied it deeply; she was interested in it but could never manage to think in terms of the future. The future was indeed a reality to her but it did not make a profound impression on her spirit. The good she practiced resulted from a natural, spontaneous impulse without any thought of future recompense or punishment.

There was much despair over her condition, and we expected to see her leave at any moment, a circumstance of which she herself was fully aware. One day while her husband was away, she felt herself failing and understood that her time had come. Her sight clouded over, confusion took hold and she felt all the anguish of separation. However, she held off death until her husband returned. Making a supreme effort, she told herself, "No, I do not want to die!" Then she felt her life return and she recovered the full use of her faculties. When her husband arrived, she told him, "I was about to die, but I wanted to wait until you were next to me because I have a few suggestions for you." Her struggle between life and death was prolonged for three more months thereafter, a time that was nothing but long and painful agony.

Evocation on the day after her death.

"My good friends, thank you for your interest; moreover, you have been like good relatives to me. Well then, rejoice, for I am happy now. Comfort my poor husband and watch over my children. I went to them right after my passing."

It seems that your confusion didn't last very long, since you are responding to us quite lucidly.

"Ah! My friends, I suffered so much ... you well know that I suffered with resignation! Well, my trial is over. You say that I am completely free, but it isn't so. It is true, however, that I'm no longer suffering and that is a big relief! At this time I'm completely healed, I assure you, but I still need the help of your prayers to come back later to work with you."

What could have been the cause of your suffering for so long?

"A terrible past, my friend."

Could you tell us about it?

"Oh! Let me forget about it for a while ... I have paid so dearly for it..."

One month after her death:

Now that you must be completely separated and are more in touch with yourself, we would greatly appreciate a more conclusive hearing with you. Could you tell us what caused your prolonged agony? For three months you hung in the balance between life and death.

“Thank you, my friends, for remembering me in your prayers! How soothing they have been and how much they have worked for my liberation! I still feel the need to be comforted; continue to pray for me. You understand the value of prayer. Your prayers are not like some banal formula, like those murmured by so many others who do not understand the reach and benefit of a good prayer.

“I am suffering a lot, but my suffering has been largely compensated for because I am allowed quite often to be close to my dear children, whom I left behind with so much regret!

“I myself prolonged my suffering at that time. The ardent desire to live out of love for my children made me cling to matter and, unlike others, I stood firm and did not want to abandon my unfortunate body, which I so much needed to break with, and which was for me the instrument of such torture. That was the true cause of my long agony. As for the illness and the suffering I endured, they were an expiation for my past – one more debt paid off.

“Ah! My good friends, if I had but listened to you, how different my life would be right now! What relief I would have felt during my final moments and how much easier the separation would have been if instead I had confidently abandoned myself to the will of God, to the current that was carrying me away! But rather than looking toward the future that awaited me, I only saw the present that I would be leaving behind!

“When I return to earth, I shall be a Spiritist – I assure you. What an immense science! I attend your meetings quite often and listen to the counsels transmitted to you. If I could have understood them while on earth, my suffering would have been lessened. But

the time had not yet come. Today, I understand the goodness and justice of God, although I am not yet sufficiently evolved to detach myself from the things of life. My children attract me mostly, not so much to spoil them, but to watch over them and to make sure they follow the path that Spiritism is presently tracing out on the earth. Yes, my good friends, I still have serious concerns: one especially, because my children's future depends on it."

Could you provide us any information about the past you regret so much?

"Ah! My good friends, I am ready to confess. I scorned someone else's suffering. I watched my mother suffer without showing her any compassion and I regarded her illness as imaginary. Since she wasn't laid up in bed, I believed she wasn't actually suffering and I mocked her misery. That is how God punishes."

Six months after her death:

Now that more time has passed since you left your material envelope, could you describe your situation and your occupation in the spirit world?

"During my earthly life, I was what is commonly called a good person, but I prized my own welfare above anything else. Although I was compassionate by nature, I was not capable of making too much of a sacrifice to ease another's misfortune. Now, all that has changed and although I am still the same me, the 'me' of yesterday has changed. I have grown and I see that, in the invisible world, there are neither categories nor conditions other than personal merit. Here, the one who used to be good and charitable, though poor, is now above the one who used to be rich and who used to humiliate the poor with his alms. I especially watch over those who are afflicted with family troubles, the loss of relatives or the loss of fortune. My mission is to console and encourage them, and in doing so I am very happy."

Anna

An important question arises from the above-stated facts:

Can a person, through an effort of his or her own will, delay the moment of the soul's separation from the body?

St. Louis' response: "To answer this question in the affirmative without any restrictions would lead to erroneous conclusions. Under certain conditions, an incarnate spirit may prolong its corporeal existence in order to finish giving what it regards as indispensable instructions. Such a right might be granted, as in this particular case as well as in many others. This extension of life, however, can only be for a brief time, since it is prohibited for any human being to subvert the order of natural law and cause a return to the earthly life by an act of willpower once the end has been reached. It is nothing but a temporary reprieve. Meanwhile, the fact that it is possible should not lead one to conclude its generality, nor should one believe that it depends solely on the person to prolong his or her life in this way. *As a trial for the spirit* or in the interest of concluding a mission, failing organs may receive an infusion of the vital fluid, which will enable them to add a few moments to the physical manifestation of thought. Such cases are the exception and not the rule. Also, one must not see in this incident God's derogation from the immutability of the divine laws, but a consequence of the free will of the human soul, who, at the final moment, is aware of its mission and, despite death, wishes to accomplish what it has until now failed to do. Sometimes, this prolongation of vitality may be a form of punishment inflicted on a spirit who doubts the future and it will necessarily suffer because of it.

St. Louis

We might marvel at the relative quickness with which this spirit disengaged herself, given her attachment to corporeal life. However, we should realize that such attachment had nothing material or sensual about it, but rather had its moral aspect,

motivated as it was by the needs of her young children. Moreover, she was a spirit who was advanced in intelligence and morality: one degree higher and she could have been among the happy spirits. Her perispiritual links, therefore, lacked the attachment that would have resulted from a greater identification with matter. In fact, one could say that her life, debilitated by her long illness, was only held together by tenuous threads that she wanted to keep from breaking. Nonetheless, her resistance was punished by an increase in her suffering from the illness itself and not from the difficulty of disengagement. Thus, when her spirit finally did separate, her state of confusion was brief.

Another equally important fact that may be derived from this evocation, as well as in the case of most others made over periods of time more or less close to death, is the gradual change that takes place in the thoughts of the spirit and from which progress may follow. With this spirit, such progress occurs not because of better sentiments, but because of a more correct appraisal of the situation. A soul's progress in the spirit life is therefore a fact demonstrated by experience. Corporeal life is the practical application of such progress, the test of the spirit's resolutions, the crucible in which it purifies itself.

Since the soul continues to progress after death, its fate cannot be irrevocably set, because the definitive setting of a spirit's fate is, as we have stated, a denial of progress. Since progress and a set fate cannot coexist at the same time, we must choose the one that is sanctioned both by the facts and by reason.



Suffering Spirits

Punishment

(A general exposition on the state of the guilty upon their return to the world of spirits, dictated to the Parisian Spiritist Society in October of 1860)

“After death, hardened, selfish and evil spirits are soon confronted with cruel doubt with respect to their present and future fate. They look around and cannot see anything on which to exert their evil influence – something that drives them to despair since isolation and inaction are intolerable to evil spirits. They cannot look up toward the places inhabited by pure spirits, and so they take into account only what is around them. Perceiving the abasement of the weak and chastised spirits about them, they attach themselves to them and make them their prey. They torment them with the memory of their past wrongs, which they continuously re-enact through derisive pantomimes. Since this mockery is not enough for them, however, they flock to the earth like starving vultures, seeking among humans a soul who opens up easily to their temptations. When they find it, they seize it, stimulating its covetousness and seeking to extinguish its faith in God, until they finally take hold of its conscience. When their prey is secure, they spread their influence upon whomever approaches – it comprises a fatal contagion.

“An evil spirit feels almost happy as it expresses its hatred and only suffers at times in which it cannot act or in cases where the good triumphs over its evil.

“Nevertheless, centuries pass; the evil spirit notices that darkness has finally swallowed it up; its circle of action has become restricted and its conscience – mute until now – makes it feel the bitter thorns of remorse. Inactive and in the grip of a whirlwind, it wanders aimlessly and, as the Scriptures say, it feels its hair stand on end out of terror. Soon, a great emptiness fills it: the time has come in which it must expiate its wrongs; reincarnation is at the doorstep, menacing; it sees as in a mirage the terrible trials that await it. The spirit would like to retreat, but proceeds forward, dropping down into the gaping abyss of life, wallowing in fear as the veil of forgetfulness falls over its eyes. It lives and acts, guilty still, sensing an unknown disquieting memory of its past. Certain presentiments make it tremble, but they are not enough to make it turn from the path of evil. Finally, depleted of strength and weakened by its life of crime, it approaches death once more. Lying on a pallet or on a bed (it does not matter!), this guilty person, under his apparent immobility, feels a world of forgotten sensations stirring. Beneath his closed eyelids, he sees a light rising; he hears strange sounds; his soul, ready to leave the body, stirs impatiently while his twitching hands try to cling to the covers. He would like to speak, to shout at those around him ‘Keep me here! I can see the punishment ahead!’ But he can do nothing – death has sealed his parched lips, while those watching say, ‘Rest in peace!’

“Nonetheless, the spirit can hear everything as it floats around the body it does not wish to abandon. A mysterious power tugs at it. It sees and recognizes what it sees. Terror-stricken, it darts forth into space wherein it would like to hide, but there is neither refuge nor rest! Other spirits return to it the evil it has

committed; punished, mocked, heckled and confused in its turn, it wanders about and will continue to wander until the divine light permeates its callousness and enlightens it, showing it the avenging God who triumphs over all evil, and whom it will only appease through groaning and expiation.”

Georges

Never has a more eloquent, more horrifying but true picture been painted about the fate of evil spirits. Is there really any need to add the phantasmagoria of flames and physical torture?

Novel

**(This spirit addressed itself to the medium,
whom he had known while alive.)**

“I’m going to tell you about my suffering when I died. My spirit, held to the body by material bonds, had great difficulty in breaking free. That was in and of itself the first phase of cruel anguish. The life I left behind at just 21 years of age was yet so strong in me that I couldn’t believe I had lost it. Thus, I searched for my body but was both amazed and terrified at finding that I was lost in a whirlpool of darkness. Finally, the awareness of my situation and the revelation of the wrongs I had committed during all my incarnations suddenly struck me; an implacable light illuminated the most secret corners of my soul. I felt *naked* and was soon taken with overpowering shame. I tried to run from that feeling by being interested in the new – and thus unknown – objects surrounding me. Luminous spirits hovered in the ether and displayed a blessedness to which I couldn’t aspire, while dark and desolate forms – some immersed in gloomy despair, others

furious or mocking – glided around me or upon the earth, to which I stayed attached. I saw people moving about and I envied how unaware they were. A whole order of unknown, or rather, *restored* sensations invaded me at the same time. Pulled by an irresistible force and trying to run from the cruel pain, I crossed distances, the elements and physical obstacles, and neither natural beauties nor heavenly splendors could calm for one instant the lacerations of my conscience or the terror caused by the revelation of eternity. Mortals can sense impending physical torture by the shivering of the flesh, but their fragile pains, softened by hope, mitigated by distractions or deadened by forgetfulness, will never give them an idea of the anguish of a soul that suffers without respite, without hope, without repentance. After some time (I cannot tell how long), envying the elect whose splendors I beheld, loathing the evil spirits who pursued me with mocking remarks, and despising people whose turpitude I witnessed, I went from a state of profound dejection to one of insensate rebellion.

“Finally, you called me, and for the first time a soft and tender sentiment allayed me. I listened to the teachings that your spirit guides give you, the truth entered my heart and I prayed. God has heard me and has revealed himself to me through his clemency, just as he use to reveal himself by his justice.”

Novel

Michel Auguste (Havre, March of 1863)

Michel was a rich, young *bon vivant*, who enjoyed the material life largely and exclusively. Although he was intelligent, indifference toward serious matters was his characteristic trait. Non-threatening, good rather than evil, he won the hearts of his

companions in revelry because of his qualities as a man of the world. He did no evil, but he did no good either. He died as the result of a fall from a carriage during a ride. He was evoked a few days after his death by a medium who had known him indirectly, and he gave the following series of communications:

March 8, 1863 – “I have only just managed to separate from my body and it is difficult for me to talk to you. The terrible fall that caused the death of my body put my spirit in a great state of confusion. I am anxious as to what will become of me, and such uncertainty is cruel. The dreadful suffering my body experienced is nothing compared to this confusion I find myself in. Pray that God will forgive me. Oh, what pain! Oh, have mercy, my God! What pain! Goodbye.”

March 18 – “I already came to you once, but could only speak with difficulty. I am still in great pain right now as I am communicating with you. You are the only medium whom I can ask for prayers that God’s goodness may draw me out of this confusion. How can I still be suffering when my body doesn’t exist anymore? Why does this horrific pain, this terrible anguish continue? Pray, oh! Pray that God may grant me repose ... oh! Such cruel uncertainty! I’m still connected to my body. It is with difficulty that I see where I’m supposed to be; my body is there, but why do I remain there? Come and pray *over my body* so that I can be rid of that cruel prison. God will forgive me, I hope. I can see the spirits around you and it is with their help that I can talk to you. Pray for me.”

April 6 – “It’s me again; I’ve come to ask you to pray for me. You absolutely have to go *to where my body* is lying so that you may beg the Omnipotent to ease my suffering. I’m suffering! Oh, how I’m suffering! Go there – you’ve got to! – and say a prayer to the Lord that he might forgive me. I see that I could be more at peace, but I keep returning to the place where they buried what used to be me.”

The medium had at first neglected the spirit's request to go and pray over his grave; however, he went there later and received this communication:

May 11 - "I've been waiting for you. I've been waiting for you to come to where my spirit seems to be stuck to its shell, so that you might beg the merciful God that his goodness may ease my suffering. You can help me with your prayers. Don't stop, I beg you. I see how contrary my life was to what it should have been. I see the wrongs I committed. I was a useless being while in the world. I didn't make any good use of my faculties. My wealth only served to satisfy my passions, my taste for luxury and my vanity. I only thought about the pleasures of the body and not those of the soul. Will God's mercy ever descend upon me, a poor spirit who is still suffering for his earthly wrongs? Pray for him to forgive me and free me from the pain that still afflicts me. Thank you for having come here to pray for me."

June 8 - "I can speak and I'm thankful to God for allowing it. I have seen my wrongs and hope that God will forgive me. Shape your life always according to the belief that animates you, for it has reserved a future repose for you that I still don't have. Thank you for your prayers. Until another time..."

This spirit's insistence that the medium pray over his grave is a remarkable particularity, but is reasonable if we consider the tenacity of the ties that held him to his body and how long and difficult it was for him to disengage himself due to his materialistic existence. We understand that when offered close to the body, prayer might exert a sort of powerful magnetic action in assisting with the separation. Mightn't the widespread custom of praying over dead bodies have come from an unconscious intuition to this effect? In such a case, the efficacy of prayer would achieve both a moral and physical result.

Regrets of a Bon Vivant (Bordeaux, April 19, 1862)

July 30 – “Right now I’m less unhappy, because I no longer feel the heavy chain that held me to my body. I’m finally free, but I haven’t concluded my expiation. I need to make up for lost time if I don’t want to prolong my suffering. I hope that God will take into account the sincerity of my repentance and will grant me forgiveness. Keep praying for me still – I beg you. My brothers, I only lived for myself and now I’m expiating it and suffering! May God grant you the grace to avoid the thorns that tear at me. Follow the broad path of the Lord and pray for me, for I abused the blessings that God *loans* his creatures!

“Those who sacrifice their God-given intelligence and good sentiments to their brute instincts are like the animals they often mistreat. Men must soberly use the things entrusted to them and should accustom themselves to living without losing sight of the eternity awaiting them; they must detach themselves from material pleasures. Their food should have no other purpose but to give them strength; luxury should be kept to the requirement of their social position; their tastes and even their most natural propensities should be subject to sane reasoning; otherwise, they become more materialized instead of more purified. Human passions are narrow ties that embed themselves in the flesh, so do not allow them to imprison you. Live, but do not become *bons vivants*. You don’t know the price you will pay when you return to your true homeland! Earthly passions rob you of everything before they cease, and you arrive naked, completely naked before the Lord. Ah! Cover yourselves with good deeds; they will help you narrow the gap that separates you from eternity. Like a bright robe, they will hide your human turpitudes. Wrap yourselves in charity and love – divine garments that no one can take away.”

Comments by the medium's Guide: "This spirit is on the right path, because in addition to repentance he adds advice to be wary of the dangers of the path that he himself had taken. Recognizing his errors is already meritorious and an effective step toward the good. That is why his situation, albeit not happy, is no longer of a suffering spirit. Having repented, the reparation of another lifetime of trials is open to him. Well now, do you know the situation of persons who live sensual lives and who did not give their spirit any other activity than the incessant invention of new pleasures? The influence of matter follows them beyond the grave. Death does not put an end to their material appetites, which their sight, as limited as it was while on the earth, seeks in vain the means to satisfy. Having never sought spiritual nourishment, their soul wanders in the void, without aim, without hope and prey to the anguish of those who have nothing before them except a desert without end. Since they did not pursue spiritual endeavors while on the earth, they naturally cannot pursue any such work as spirits after death. No longer able to satisfy their body, they have nothing to satisfy their spirit either. Thus, they experience mortal boredom and they cannot foresee the end of it. They would prefer nothingness instead, but there is no such thing as nothingness – one can kill the body but not the spirit. They must therefore continue to live this mental anguish until finally, overcome with the weariness of it all, they decide to turn their eyes toward God."

Lisbeth

(Bordeaux, February 13, 1862)

A suffering spirit, writing under the name of Lisbeth.

1. *Would you mind providing me with a few details regarding your current position, as well as the cause of your suffering?*

“Be humble of heart, submissive to God’s will, patient in trial, charitable toward the poor, consoling toward the weak, and sensitive to all suffering and you will not have to experience the torment I’m going through.”

2. You seem to regret the wrongs you committed and which were contrary to the qualities you have stated. Has your repentance brought you any relief?

“No. Repentance is useless when it is but the result of suffering. Effective repentance must be based on the regret of having offended God and on an ardent desire to make reparation. I still haven’t been able to do that, unfortunately. Recommend me to the prayers of all those who are sympathetic toward the sufferings of others, for I have need of them.”

This statement is a great truth. Sometimes, suffering brings about a less than sincere cry of repentance which is not the expression of sorrow for having committed evil, because if the spirit ceased to suffer, it would commit the evil all over again. That is why repentance does not always result in the immediate liberation of the spirit; it predisposes it to liberation – that is all. It will have to prove its sincerity and firmness of resolution by going through new trials, which will be the reparation for the evil it had committed. In carefully pondering all the examples that have been cited so far, we will discover in the words of these spirits – even the most low order ones – profound teachings that put us in touch with the most intimate details of spirit life. While superficial individuals will see in these examples nothing more than picturesque stories, serious and reflective persons will find an abundant wellspring of study in them.

3. I will do as you have requested. Could you provide me with a few details of your last existence? We might derive some useful instruction and thus make your repentance productive.

(The spirit wavered not only in answering this question but also regarding those that followed.)

“I was born into a high social status. I had everything men regard as the source of happiness. Being wealthy, I was selfish; being beautiful, I was vain, insensitive, and deceitful; being noble of birth, I was ambitious. With my power I crushed those who didn't fling themselves at my feet; I even oppressed those who were at my feet, without thinking that the Lord's anger sooner or later crushes the highest brows.”

4. *When did you live?*

“One hundred fifty years ago in Prussia.”

5. *Haven't you made any progress as a spirit since then?*

“No. The influence of matter causes me to rebel and you cannot imagine the hold it still has on me despite the separation of my spirit from its body. Pride binds us in bronze chains, whose links tighten more and more around those who abandon their hearts to it. Pride – that hydra with 100 heads that are constantly replaced – knows how to sing with poisonous hisses that seem like celestial harmony! Pride – that multiform demon that molds itself to all the aberrations of your spirit – hides in all the recesses of your heart. It enters your veins, it envelops you, it absorbs and draws you into the darkness of eternal Gehenna! Oh, yes... eternal!”

This spirit undoubtedly says she has not made any progress because her situation continues to be painful. However, the way in which she describes pride and deplores its consequences is undeniably progress. While she was incarnate and even soon after her death, she obviously would not have been able to reason like this. She understands evil, and that is already something. The courage and resolve to avoid it will come later.

6. *God is too good to condemn his children to eternal punishment. You can trust in his mercy.*

“There will be an end to my suffering, they say, but when? I have sought an end to it for a long time but have seen nothing but suffering... always, always, always!”

7. *Why have you come here today?*

“I was brought here by a spirit who has accompanied me many times.”

- *When did you start seeing this spirit?*

“Not long ago.”

- *Was it when you started to become aware of the wrongs you had committed?*

(After long reflection) “Yes, you’re right. It was then that I began to see the spirit.”

8. *Do you now understand the relationship that exists between your repentance and the visible help given you by your protector spirit? You should see as the origin of such support the love of God, whose purpose is forgiveness and infinite mercy.*

“Oh! How I want that to be true!”

- *I believe I can promise it in the most sacred name of the One who has never turned a deaf ear on his afflicted children. Pray from the bottom of your heart and God will listen.*

“I can’t; I’m afraid.”

9. *Then let’s pray together. God will listen to us.* (After prayer)
Are you still here?

“Yes, thank you! Please don’t forget me.”

10. *Come here every day.*

“Yes, yes, I’ll come every day.”

The medium’s Guide: Never forget the teachings you derive from the sufferings of your wards, especially as to what causes them; they are a lesson from which all may profit. They can save you from the same dangers and similar punishment. Purify your hearts; be humble; love and help one another and may your grateful heart never forget the fount of all grace, that inexhaustible fount from which any one of you can drink, that fount of living water that quenches and nourishes at the same time, that fount of eternal life and blessedness. Go to it, my dear ones, and drink

with faith. Cast your nets into it and they will emerge from its waves laden with blessings. Warn your brothers and sisters of the dangers they may encounter. Spread the Lord's blessings, which multiply without end; the more you spread them around you, the more they will thrive. It is in your hands, because when you tell your brothers and sisters, "There lie the dangers; there lie the obstacles; follow us in order to avoid them; *follow our example*," you will spread the Lord's blessings upon all who hear you. May your efforts be blessed, my dear ones. The Lord loves pure hearts; be worthy of his love.

St. Paulin

Prince Ouran (Bordeaux, 1862)

A suffering spirit presents himself under the name of Ouran, formerly a Russian prince.

Would you like to provide us with some details about your situation?

"Oh! Happy are the humble in heart, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Pray for me. Happy are those who, humble in heart, choose a modest position to fulfill their trial! All you whom envy devours, you don't know the state that those who on earth are regarded as happy become reduced to. You don't know the burning coals that consume them, or the sacrifices imposed by wealth when you seek your salvation in it! May the Lord allow me, a proud despot, to expiate the crimes caused by my pride among those whom I oppressed with my tyranny. Pride! Repeat that word constantly so that you will never forget that it is the source of all the suffering that afflicts us. Yes, I abused the power and favor I enjoyed. I was harsh and cruel toward those below me, those who had to bow down before all my caprices and satisfy all my

depravities. I wanted nobility, fortune and honors for myself. I succumbed to the burden because it was above my strength.”

Spirits who succumb usually claim they had made a commitment that was beyond their strength, which is a further remnant of pride and a way for them to make excuses rather than acknowledge that they failed due to their own weakness. God does not give anyone more than they can bear; God does not require anyone to give more than they can; God does not require a sapling to bear the fruit of a mature tree. Furthermore, God gives freedom to spirits. What they lack is willpower and this depends exclusively on themselves. With willpower there are no insuperable vices; however, whenever *we take pleasure in a vice, it is natural for us not to put forth the effort to overcome it.* Thus, we can only attribute the consequences to ourselves.

You are aware of your wrongs and that is already a step toward regeneration.

“Such awareness is a further suffering. For many spirits, suffering is an almost physical effect, since still under the influence of the humanity of their last incarnation they have no perception of any mental sense. My spirit has released itself from matter, and now my mental sense has assumed all those horrible, cruel sensations that used to be physical.”

- *Do you foresee any end to your suffering?*

“I know that it will not last forever but I can’t see any end to it at present. I must undergo another trial first.”

Do you hope to do so soon?

“Again, I don’t know.”

- *Can you remember anything about your previous lives? I’m asking this for the purpose of instruction.*

“Yes, your guides are present and they know what you need. I lived during the time of Marcus Aurelius. There, once again powerful, I succumbed to pride, the cause of all downfalls. After

being in the errant state for centuries, I wanted to live an obscure existence. So, as a poor student, I had to beg for bread; pride, however, still had a hold on me. My spirit gained in knowledge but not in virtue. Learned and ambitious, I sold my soul to the best offer, serving all manner of vengeance and hatred. I felt guilty but the thirst for glory and wealth strangled the voice of my conscience. My expiation was long and cruel. Then finally, in my last incarnation I wanted to live a life of luxury and power once again. I thought I could overcome the stumbling blocks but wouldn't listen to any advice. It was pride once more leading me to trust in myself instead of the counsel of the protector friends who always watch over us. You know the result of that last attempt.

“Now, I finally understand and await the mercy of the Lord. I place my crushed pride at his feet and ask him to lay on me the heaviest tax of humility, for with the help of his grace, the weight will seem light. Pray with me and for me. Also pray that that diabolical fire will not devour the instincts that will lead you to God. Friends in suffering, may my example be of use to you. Never forget that pride is the enemy of happiness, for it is pride that causes all the ills that afflict humankind and it pursues them up to the heavenly regions.”

The medium's Guide: “You have had some doubts about the identity of this spirit because his language seems to be at odds with the state of suffering characteristic of a less elevated spirit. Lay such doubts aside, for you have received an authentic communication. In spite of his suffering, this spirit has enough cultured intelligence to express himself in such a manner. The only thing he lacked was humility, without which no spirit can reach God. He has finally achieved such humility and we hope that with perseverance he will emerge triumphant from a new trial.

“Our heavenly Father is most just in his wisdom and takes into account individuals' efforts to overcome their evil instincts.

Each victory over yourselves is a rung on that ladder that leans on the earth on one end, with the other at the feet of the supreme Judge. Climb each rung resolutely; the ascent is gentle for those whose will is firm. Always look heavenward for your encouragement; unfortunate are you if you stop and look down! Dizziness soon strikes you and you are terrified at the emptiness surrounding you. Discouraged, you say: what's the use of going any further if I have advanced so little? No, my friends, do not look down. Pride is part of human nature. Very well! Use this pride to give you the strength and courage to achieve your ascension. Use it to overcome your weaknesses and climb to the summit of the eternal mountain."

Pascal Lavie
(Havre, August 9, 1863)

The medium knew nothing about the life or name of this spirit, who communicated spontaneously.

"I believe in the goodness of God, who, in his mercy, will show compassion to my spirit. I have suffered so much; my body perished at sea; my spirit has remained attached to my body and has been wandering for a long time upon the waves. God..."

(The communication was interrupted, but on the following day the spirit continued.)

"God kindly allowed the prayers of those who I left behind on earth to draw me out of the state of confusion and uncertainty in which I found myself immersed. They searched for me for a long time and they were able to finally find my body. It is now at rest, and although my spirit released itself with so much difficulty, it now sees the wrongs it committed. When a trial is spent, God judges fairly and his goodness extends to all who repent.

"If my spirit wandered around together with my body for so long, it was because I had to make expiation. Follow the

upright path if you want God to free your spirit promptly from its envelope. Live in his love; pray, and death, which is fearful to so many, will be softened for you because you have knowledge of the life that awaits you. I succumbed to the sea and they held out hope for me for a long time. Not being able to disengage from my body was a terrible trial and that is why I need your prayers. You hold a belief that redeems and you can ask God on my behalf. I have repented and hope that he will forgive me. It was on August 6 that they found my body. I was a poor sailor and died a long time ago. Pray for me.”

Pascal Lavic

Where did they find your body?

“Not far from here.”

On August 11, 1863, the Havre newspaper ran the following article, of which the medium could have had no knowledge:

News has been received that on the 6th of this month the remains of a corpse were found between Bléville and La Hève. The head, arms and torso had disappeared, but its identification was possible from the shoes that were still on the feet. The body was recognized as that of the fisherman Lavic, who perished on board the “L’Alerte” on December 11 near Trouville during a storm. Lavic was 49 years old and a native of Calais. His widow made the identification.

On August 12, as this occurrence was being discussed in the circle where the spirit first manifested, he once again spontaneously gave the following communication:

“I really am Pascal Lavic and I need your prayers. You can help me, because my trial has been dreadful. My spirit separated from my body only after I realized my wrongs, and even then it still did not completely disconnect, staying close by as the ocean swallowed my body. So, pray that God may forgive me and grant me rest. Pray for me – I beg you. Let this disastrous end to an

unhappy earthly life be a lesson for you! You must always ponder the future and never stop asking God for his mercy. Pray for me; I need God's compassion."

Pascal Lavic

Ferdinand Bertin⁶⁹

A medium from Havre evoked the spirit of an acquaintance and received this response: "I want to communicate, but I cannot overcome the obstacle that exists between us and am forced to let these other unhappy sufferers approach you." Then the following spontaneous communication was received:

"I'm in a horrible abyss! Help me... Oh! My God! Who will rescue me from this abyss? Who will offer a merciful hand to the unfortunate spirit the sea has engulfed? Night is so dark that I'm afraid ... Surrounded by the roaring of the waves and no friendly word to console and help me in this dire moment. This dark night, it is death in all its horrors, and I don't want to die! Oh! My God! It is not the death yet to come; it is the death that has happened! I am forever separated from those dear to me ... I see my body and what I felt a little while ago is nothing but the memory of the terrible agony of separation ... Take pity on me, you who are aware of my suffering. Pray for me, for I don't want to keep feeling anymore, as has been happening since that fatal night! But that is to be my punishment; I sense it ... Pray for me; I beg of you! ... Oh! The sea ... the cold ... I'm going to be swallowed up! ... Help! ... Have mercy; don't push me away! We can both save ourselves on this plank! ... Oh! I'm choking! The waves are going to toss me about, and my loved ones won't have the consolation of ever seeing me

⁶⁹ The name at the top of the message is Ferdinand and at the bottom is François, in keeping with the French edition. This inconsistency has not been corrected in order to reflect Kardec's original. – Tr.

again ... But no! I see that my body no longer will be tossed about by the waves ... My mother's prayers will be heard ... My poor mother! If she could imagine that her son is as miserable as he really is, she would certainly pray more. But she believes that death has sanctified my past and she weeps for me as a martyr and not as an unhappy and punished creature! ... Oh! You who understand it, will you be without pity? No, you shall pray for me."

François Bertin

This name was completely unknown to the medium, who did not have even a vague memory of it. He supposed that this spirit was undoubtedly some unfortunate drowning victim who spontaneously manifested, as had happened in several other cases. He later found out that in fact the name was that of one of the victims of a large maritime disaster that had occurred in those waters on December 2, 1863. The communication was given on the 8th of the same month, 6 days after the tragedy. The individual died while making unheard-of attempts to save the crew and, at the time, thought himself safe from death.

Since he did not have any relationship with the medium, nor was he even known by him, why did he manifest to him instead of to some member of his family? It is because spirits cannot find in all individuals the fluidic conditions that are indispensable for manifestation. In his confusion, he had little freedom to choose and was instinctively led and attracted to this medium, who was obviously endowed with the essential aptitude for spontaneous communications of this type. He also sensed a particular sympathy, like others who have found themselves in identical circumstances. His family, foreign to Spiritism, and even perhaps hostile toward it, would not have welcomed this medium's revelation.

Although death had occurred a few days before, the spirit was still experiencing all the anguish connected with it.

Obviously, he was still not aware of his situation, believing himself still alive, struggling with the waves, but at the same time referring to his body as though he were separate from it. He cries for help and says he does not want to die, but then soon afterward he speaks of the cause of his death, recognizing it as a punishment. All of this denotes the confusion of thought that almost always follows violent deaths.

Two months later on February 2, 1864, the spirit once more communicated spontaneously through the same medium and dictated the following:

“The pity you have shown for my horrible suffering has helped me. I understand *hope* and can foresee forgiveness, but only after being punished for the wrong committed. I suffer continuously, and if at times God now allows me to foresee the end of my misfortune, I owe this mitigation to the prayers of the charitable souls touched by my situation. O hope, heavenly light, how blessed you are as I feel you rising in my soul! But oh! The abyss opens wide. Terror and suffering makes such thoughts of mercy disappear ... The night; always the night! ... The water, the roar of the waves as they engulf my body are but a pale image of the horror that envelops my poor spirit ... I feel calmer when I can be near you, for as entrusting a secret to a friend relieves one who has been oppressed, so your pity, motivated by my entrusting my misery to you, calms my suffering and gives repose to my spirit...

“Your prayers do me good; please don’t refuse them to me. I don’t want to fall back into that dreadful dream that becomes reality when I see it ... Take up the pen often. Communicating with you does me so much good!”

A few days later, this same spirit was evoked at a Spiritist meeting in Paris and the following questions were asked of it. He replied to them in a single communication through a different medium:

Who induced you to manifest spontaneously through the first medium with whom you communicated? How long had it been since your death when you manifested yourself? At that time you seemed to question whether you were dead or alive, but at the same time you experienced all the anguish of an awful death. Do you now understand your situation better? You affirmed that your death was an expiation. Can you provide us with a reason for it? This will provide instruction for us and will bring relief to you. By making a sincere confession, you will merit God's mercy, which we will ask for in our prayers.

“First of all, it seems impossible that a human creature can suffer so cruelly. God! How painful it is to find yourself constantly engulfed in waves of fury, to incessantly feel this torture, this glacial cold that presses on your stomach and grips it!

“But what good is it for you to concern yourselves with such a scene? Shouldn't I start by obeying the laws of gratitude, thanking all of you who have taken an interest in my torments? You asked if I manifested myself long after my death. I cannot easily answer that. Think about it and you will be able to judge how dreadful a situation I'm still in! However, I believe I must have been led to that medium by a will not my own. And by some reason that I can't explain, *I used his hand as easily as I'm using yours right now – it's almost as though it actually belongs to me.* Right now I'm even experiencing much pleasure, a sort of special relief, which, alas, will soon end ... But ... my God! Will I have the strength to make the confession I know I must?”

After much encouragement, the spirit added, “I was very guilty! What tortures me most is being regarded as a martyr, when I am nothing of the sort ... In a previous life I ordered several victims to be put into a sack and thrown into the sea ... Pray for me!....”

Comment by St. Louis on the Communication:

This spirit's confession will bring him much relief. Yes, he really was very guilty! However, his past life was honorable and

he was highly esteemed by his bosses. This circumstance was the fruit of repentance and the good resolutions he had made before returning to the earth, where he desired to be as humane as he had formerly been cruel. The devotion he demonstrated was a reparation, but he had to redeem past wrongs through a final act of expiation – the cruel death he suffered. He wanted to purify himself by experiencing the torture he had inflicted on others. Notice that one idea hounds him: the regret in seeing that he is regarded as a martyr. Know that such humility will be taken into consideration. From that moment on, he departed the path of expiation to enter the path of rehabilitation, upon which your prayers can uphold him, making his steps firmer and more resolute.

François Riquier

François Riquier was an ordinary, miserly old bachelor, who died in C... in 1857, leaving a considerable fortune to distant heirs. For a time he had been the landlord of a lady tenant, who later forgot all about him and didn't even know whether he was still alive or not. In 1862, this lady's daughter, who was subject to bouts of catalepsy followed by spontaneous magnetic sleep, and who was also a good writing medium, saw Mr. Riquier during one of these sleep periods. He told her that he wanted to say something to her mother.

A few days later, he spontaneously manifested and expressed the wish to communicate to that lady, and we had the following exchange with him:

What would you like from us?

“My money! Those wretches took it to split amongst themselves! They sold my farms, houses, everything to divide it all up! They squandered my assets as if they no longer belonged to me. Make them do right by me. They no longer listen to me and I

won't stand for such villainy. They say I was greedy and have kept my money from me! Why don't they give it back if they think it was ill-gotten?"

But you are dead, my dear sir, and you no longer need any money. Ask God to grant you a new lifetime of poverty in order to expiate your greed from this one.

"No, I couldn't live in poverty. I need money to be able to live. Also, I don't need another life because I'm still alive right now."

(This question was asked to try to bring him to reality) *Are you suffering?*

"Oh, yes! I am suffering worse tortures than the cruelest disease, because it is my soul who endures them. I'm constantly aware of the iniquity of my life, which was the subject of scandal for many people. I know good and well that I'm a wretch unworthy of pity, but my suffering is so great that you must help me out of this miserable situation."

We shall pray for you.

"Thank you! Pray that I may forget my earthly riches. Otherwise, I'll never be able to repent. Goodbye and thank you."

François Riquier, Rue de la Charité, No. 14

It is interesting to see this spirit give his address as though he were still alive.

The lady, who did not know anything about the matter, hurried to verify it and was quite surprised to find that the address given really was the last house in which Riquier lived. Thus, after five years he still did not regard himself as dead, and he experienced the anxiety – terrible for a greedy man – of seeing his assets divided amongst his heirs. The evocation, undoubtedly caused by some good spirit, was meant to make him understand his situation and predispose him to repentance.

Claire (Parisian Society, 1861)

The spirit who furnished the following communications was that of a woman whom the medium had known while she was alive, and whose conduct, like her character, fully justified the torment she was experiencing. Moreover, she was dominated by an exaggerated sense of pride and self-centeredness – reflected in her third communication, especially, wherein she expects the medium to pay attention only to her. The communications were obtained at different times, and the last three already denote perceivable progress in the spirit's disposition, thanks to the care of the medium, who had undertaken her moral education.

1. "I'm here – the miserable Claire." What would you like me to tell you? Resignation and hope are no more than mere words to those who know that their sufferings will last throughout interminable centuries as innumerable as the pebbles on the seashore. You say that I can soften my suffering? Such empty words! Where am I going to find the courage and hope to do that? So, in your narrow minds, try to understand what a day that lasts forever is like. Is it a day, a year, a century? What do I know? Time isn't divided into hours and the seasons don't change. Eternal and slow, like water dripping from a rock, this abominable day, this cursed day weighs upon me like a lead pall. I'm suffering! ... I see only silent and indifferent shadows ... I'm suffering!

"But I know that above this misery reigns God, the Father, the Lord, toward whom everything progresses. I want to think about him; I want to beg him for his mercy.

"I struggle and drag myself around like some lame creature crawling along the path. I don't know what force keeps drawing me to you; might you be my salvation? I depart from you feeling calmer and rekindled; like a shivering elderly person in a ray of

sunlight, my spirit awakens, my frozen soul gains new life when close to you.”

2. “My misery increases every day; it increases as my grasp on eternity develops within me. O misery! How much I curse you, you guilty times, times of selfishness and oblivion when I forgot all charity, all devotion, and thought only of my own welfare! Cursed be human interests! Vain are concerns for material interests! Cursed be those who blinded and ruined me! I wither away from the incessant regret for the time I wasted. What can I tell those who are listening to me? Watch yourselves constantly; love others more than yourself; don’t delay your progress on the path of the good; don’t pamper your body at the expense of your soul. Watch yourselves, just as the Savior preached to his disciples. Don’t thank me for these counsels. *My spirit conceived them, but my heart has never listened.* Like a whipped dog, fear makes me cower; I do not yet understand intentional love. Its divine dawn is hindered from rising! Pray for my parched and miserable soul!”

3. “Since you seem to have forgotten me, I have come looking for you. Do you think a few sporadic prayers and simply pronouncing my name are enough to appease my suffering? No, a hundred times, no. I roar with pain; I wander about without repose, without refuge, without hope, feeling the eternal dagger of punishment stab into my rebellious soul. I laugh when I listen to your complaints; when I see you sad. What are your ephemeral miseries? What are your tears? What are your torments that sleep abates? Do I sleep, do I? I want to, do you understand? ... I want you to leave your philosophical meanderings and pay attention to me; make others pay attention to me too. I have no words to describe the anguish that drags on and on with no hours to divide it up. I see only a tenuous ray of hope, and this hope you have given me. So don’t abandon me.”

4. St. Louis: “This picture is completely true and is by no means exaggerated. You might ask what this woman did to be so miserable.

Did she commit some horrible crime? Did she rob or murder anyone? No. She did nothing against human justice. On the contrary, she enjoyed what you might call earthly happiness: beauty, fortune, pleasure, praise; everything smiled on her; she lacked nothing. On seeing her, we would say: What a fortunate woman! And we would envy her luck. So what did she do? She was self-centered. She had everything except a good heart. She broke no human laws; she broke God's laws, because she forgot the first of the virtues: charity. She only loved herself, and now no one loves her; she gave no one anything, now she is given nothing; she finds herself isolated, forsaken, abandoned, lost in the emptiness of space where no one thinks of her or is concerned about her. That is what comprises her torment. Having only sought worldly pleasures that are no longer there for her, only emptiness surrounds her. She sees nothingness, which seems eternal to her. She does not suffer any physical torture; no demons come to torment her. But that is unnecessary since she is tormented by herself, and that is what is most painful to her, for if demons did torment her, at least they would be paying attention to her. Self-centeredness was her joy on earth; now it hounds her – a worm that burrows into her heart – her real demon.”

Saint Louis

5. “I will speak to you about the important difference between divine morality and human morality. The former assists the adulterous woman in her abandonment and says to sinners, ‘Repent and the kingdom of heaven will open to you.’ Also, divine morality accepts every repentance and every acknowledgement of wrong, while human morality rejects them and smilingly accepts secret sins, which, it says, are partially forgiven. The former displays the grace of forgiveness; the latter, hypocrisy. So, choose, you spirits who are avid for the truth! Choose between the heaven open to repentance and the tolerance that accepts the evil which

is not disturbed by self-centeredness or false arrangements, but which rejects the passion and the tears of wrongs openly confessed. Repent, all you who have sinned; renounce evil; renounce the hypocrisy that conceals its ugliness under the laughing and deceptive mask of mutual social conveniences.”

6. “Now I am at peace and resigned to expiating the wrongs I committed. Evil is not outside of me; it resides within me. It is I who must change and not exterior things. We possess heaven and hell within us, and our wrongs are engraved into our conscience and are easily read on the day of our resurrection. We are our own judges, for the state of our soul either abases or elevates us. Let me explain myself: an impure spirit, *burdened* by its wrongs, can neither conceive of nor desire an elevated state that it cannot sustain. Believe it well: just as the various species of beings live, each one within the realm that is proper to it, so spirits, according to their degree of advancement, move about in the environment that is adequate for their faculties. They cannot conceive of any other realm until progress, that instrument of the spirit’s slow transformation, rids them of their inferior tendencies and removes the cocoon of sin so that they can flutter their wings before launching themselves as fast as an arrow toward God! Ah! I still crawl, but I no longer hate and I can now conceive of the ineffable happiness of divine love. So, continue to pray for me as I hope and wait.”

In the following communication, Claire speaks about her husband, who used to give her a great deal of trouble when alive, and about the position in which he now finds himself in the spirit world. She was unable to complete this picture herself, so it was finished by the medium’s spirit guide.

7. “I have come to you, you who have left me forgotten for so long. But I have acquired patience and am no longer desperate. Do you want to know what poor Felix’ state is? He wanders about in darkness, prey to the profound nakedness of his soul. Superficial

and frivolous, degraded by sensuality, he never knew what love and friendship were. Not even passion could illuminate his dark glimmerings. I would compare his present state to that of a child who is incapable of functioning in life and who is deprived of the help of those who could assist him. Felix roams about in fear in this strange world, where everything shines with the brilliance of that God whom he used to deny.”

8. *The medium's Guide*: “Claire cannot continue to comment on her husband's sufferings *without feeling them within herself*, so I shall speak for her.

“Felix, who was superficial in his thinking as well as in his sentiments, who was violent because he was weak and dissolute because he was insensitive, entered the spirit world as naked morally as he was physically. *During his life on earth, he acquired nothing and, consequently, must start his work all over again.* Like a man who awakens from a prolonged sleep and feels his nerves profoundly agitated, when this poor being emerges from his confusion, he will realize that he had lived a life of chimeras, which misled his existence. Then he will curse the materialism that made him embrace emptiness instead of reality. He will rue the positivism that made him regard ideas about the future life as a reverie, the aspiration to it as insanity, and belief in God as weakness. When this unfortunate spirit awakens, he will see that the terms he used to scoff at are the formula of truth, and that, contrary to the fable, hunting the prey was less profitable than hunting the shadow.”

Georges

A Study of Claire's Communications

These communications are instructive in that they show us in particular one of the most common aspects of life: selfishness. They do not portray the great crimes that terrify even the most perverse

individuals, but rather the condition of a huge mass of individuals who live in this world, honored and venerated solely for having covered themselves with a certain veneer while sparing themselves the repressive inconvenience of societal laws. These individuals will not encounter exceptional punishments and shuddering sights in the spirit world, but a simple situation instead, one that is natural and in keeping with the state of their soul and the way they used to live. Isolation, abandonment and helplessness are the punishment for those who have lived only for themselves. As we have seen, Claire was a highly intelligent spirit, but she had an arid heart. Her social position, her wealth and the physical gifts she enjoyed on earth attracted praise that gratified her vanity and satisfied her. Now, she only finds indifference, and emptiness surrounds her: a punishment more poignant than physical suffering because it is humiliating. Her pain at least inspires pity and compassion and is still a means of attracting attention, of making others occupy themselves with her, of keeping them interested in her fate.

The sixth message contains a perfectly true idea regarding the obstinacy of certain spirits in their practice of evil. We marvel at seeing how some of them are so insensitive to the idea and even to the sight of the happiness of good spirits. That is precisely the situation of debased persons, who delight in depravation and in gross and sensual gratification. Such people are in their element, so to speak. They cannot conceive of refined forms of enjoyment; they prefer tattered rags to clean and shining garments because they feel more at ease in them, and they prefer Bacchic orgies to the joys of good company. These spirits feel so in tune with this way of life that it becomes second nature to them, and they believe themselves to be incapable of rising above their current surroundings. That is why they remain as such until a transformation of their being broadens their intelligence, developing their moral sense and rendering them accessible to more subtle sensations.

When these spirits disincarnate, they cannot readily acquire a delicacy of sentiment and for a longer or shorter amount of time, they occupy the lower levels of the spirit world, just as they did on earth. They remain there as long as they rebel against progress, but with time and the experience, tribulations and miseries of successive incarnations, they arrive at the moment in which they perceive something better than what they had until then. They finally lift their aspirations and begin to understand what they lacked, and thus start their efforts at ascension. Once on this path, progress is rapid, for they experience a goodness that is quite superior, and next to which their former experiences are nothing more than crude sensations, which now only inspire repugnance.

(To St. Louis) *What are we to understand by the darkness in which certain suffering spirits find themselves immersed? Is it the kind of darkness so often referred to in the Scriptures?*

“Essentially, it refers to the darkness described by Jesus and the prophets regarding the punishment of evil individuals. However, that was no more than an allegory meant to impress the physical senses of their contemporaries, who could never understand punishment in a spiritual sense. Certain spirits are immersed in darkness, but one should interpret it as a true night of the soul that is comparable to the intellectual darkness of one who is mentally impaired. It does not imply insanity of the soul, but rather an unawareness of one’s self and one’s surroundings whether there is physical light present or not. Principally, it is the punishment of those who have doubted their destiny. They have believed in nothingness and the semblance of this nothingness becomes their torment, until the soul makes an effort to turn itself around and forcefully breaks through the web of moral weakness that had seized it, much like those who under the influence of a bad dream struggle with all of their strength against the terrors that had initially dominated them. This temporary reduction of the soul to a fictitious nothingness while it is nonetheless conscious of its own existence is the cruelest

feeling that can be imagined due to the apparent repose it presents. It is this forced repose, this nullity of being, this uncertainty that comprises its punishment. The weariness that overcomes it is the most terrible of punishments, for it perceives nothing around it – neither things nor beings. That is true darkness for the soul.”

Louis

(Claire) “It’s me. I can also respond to the question concerning the darkness, because I have wandered and suffered for a long time in that limbo where all is weeping and misery. Yes, the visible darkness of which the Scriptures speak exists, and the unfortunate souls who, having ended their earthly trials, die ignorant or guilty, are plunged into that cold region, unconscious of themselves and their destiny. Since they believe their situation will last forever, their language still reflects the words of the life that seduced them, and they marvel and are terrified at their utter solitude. Such regions are darkness indeed; they are peopled and deserted at the same time; spaces in which obscure spirits roam around in mourning, without consolation, without affection, and without any help whatsoever. To whom could they go? ... They feel the weight of eternity pressing down on them ... They tremble and mourn the petty interests on which they spent their time. They regret the absence of nighttime, which, succeeding the day, carried away their anxieties in a happy dream. For a spirit, darkness means ignorance, emptiness, the horror of the unknown ... I cannot continue....”

Claire

We received the following explanation on the subject of darkness:

“Because of its nature, the perispirit has a luminous property that develops under the influx of the soul’s activity and qualities. One could say that these qualities are for the perispiritual fluid what friction is for the match. The intensity of a spirit’s light is

the result of its purity – the least moral imperfection dims and weakens it. The light radiating from a spirit will be more lively the more advanced the spirit is. Thus, the spirit is, in a manner of speaking, its own *beacon* and will see according to the amount of light it produces. This means that spirits who do not produce any light at all find themselves in darkness.

“This theory is perfectly exact as to the radiation of higher order spirits’ luminous fluids, and it has been confirmed by observation, although this does not imply the real cause or, at least, the sole cause of the phenomenon, given that: first, not all low order spirits are in darkness; second, the same spirit can find itself alternately in light and darkness; and third, light is also a punishment for highly imperfect spirits. If the darkness in which certain spirits find themselves were inherent to their personality, such darkness would be *permanent* and *general* for all evil spirits, which is not the case, in that some very wicked spirits can see very well, whereas other spirits, who could not be regarded as so wicked, temporarily find themselves in profound darkness. Thus, everything indicates that, regardless of their own light, spirits also receive light from the outside, which is denied to them according to the circumstances. We must therefore conclude that darkness depends on a cause or an outside will, and that in certain cases it comprises a special punishment determined by supreme justice.”

(Asked of St. Louis): *Why is the moral education of discarnate spirits easier than that of incarnates? The relations that Spiritism has established between incarnates and spirits indicate that the latter are more quickly corrected under the influence of healthy counsels than is the case with respect to incarnates, as is demonstrated in the healing of obsessions.*

(Response at the Parisian Society): “In virtue of their very nature, incarnates are involved in a constant struggle between the contrary elements of which they are comprised, and which must lead them to their providential goal by reacting one upon the other. Matter

is easily influenced by an outside fluid, and if the soul does not brace itself against such influence with all the moral power of which it is capable, it allows itself to be dominated by its body as an intermediary. Thus following the impulse of the perverse influences that surround it, its tendencies toward some dominant passion make it very easy for invisible spirits to subjugate it and attack it at that vulnerable point.

“For the discarnate spirit it is quite the opposite: it is true that it still finds itself under a semi-material influence, but it does not compare to that of the incarnate. Human respect, so customary among human beings, is non-existent for discarnates, and this thought alone is enough to compel them not to resist for very long what the judgment of their own interests indicates as being good. They can struggle indeed, and they usually do so with even more violence than incarnates because they are freer, but no thought of material interest or social position warps their reasoning. They struggle out of love for evil, but they soon acquire conviction about their powerlessness toward the moral superiority that dominates them. The perspective of a better future is more accessible to them because they are already living a life where that future must occur, and this awareness is not lost in the whirl of human pleasures. In other words, freedom from the flesh makes their conversion easier, especially when they have acquired a certain amount of development through the trials they have undergone. A completely primitive spirit would be little accessible to reason, unlike one who has already had much life experience. Any physical action can momentarily suspend the sufferings of a wicked individual, but it cannot destroy the unhealthy principle residing in the soul. *Actions contrary to the betterment of the soul cannot divert it from evil.*”

Saint Louis

CHAPTER V



Suicides

The Suicide at the Samaritaine⁷⁰

On April 7, 1858, at around 7:00 p.m., a well-dressed man of about 50 years of age appeared at the establishment of the Samaritaine in Paris and ordered a bath to be prepared. After about two hours and surprised that the client had not called him, the steward on duty decided to enter his room to see if he was indisposed. When the steward entered the room, he saw a hideous sight: the wretch had slit his own throat with a razor, and the bath water was saturated with blood. Since the suicide's identity could not be verified, the body was taken to the morgue.

This man's spirit was evoked at the Parisian Society six days after his death and gave the following responses:

1. *Evocation*

(Response by the medium's Guide) "Wait, he is here."

2. *Where are you right now?*

"I don't know ... tell me where I am."

3. *You are at a meeting of people who study Spiritism; we mean you well.*

"Tell me if I'm alive or not, because I'm suffocating in this coffin."

⁷⁰ The Samaritaine takes its name from an old water pump near the Pont Neuf. The pump was decorated with the woman of Samaria giving a drink of water to Jesus. – Tr.

Even though his soul had separated from his body, it is still completely immersed in what might be called the vortex of corporeal matter. His earthly ideas are so acute that he thinks he is not dead.

4. *Who urged you to come to us?*

“I feel relieved.”

5. *What drove you to commit suicide?*

“I’m dead? Me? No ... I’m in my body ... You don’t know how much I’m suffering! I’m suffocating ... I wish some compassionate hand would finish me off!”

6. *Why didn’t you leave behind any clue that could be used to identify you?*

“I’m abandoned. *I fled suffering only to find torture.*”

7. *Do you still have the same reasons for remaining anonymous?*

“Yes. Don’t put the red-hot iron to the bleeding wound.”

8. *Could you give us your name, age, profession and address?*

“Absolutely not.”

9. *Did you have a family, wife, children?*

“I was abandoned. No one loved me.”

10. *What did you do in order not to be loved by anyone?*

“How many there are like me! ... When no one loves him, a man can feel abandoned even in the midst of his own family.”

11. *When you were about to commit suicide, didn’t you feel any hesitation?*

“I was eager to die ... I expected rest.”

12. *Why didn’t the thought of your future make you give up your plan?*

“I didn’t believe in it at all. I had no expectations. The future means hope.”

13. *What thoughts came to you as you felt your life slipping away?*

“I didn’t think; I felt ... But my life hasn’t come to an end ... my soul is still connected to my body ... *I can even feel the worms devouring me.*”

14. *What sensation did you experience at the crucial moment of death?*

“Did it occur?”

15. *Was the moment when your life ended painful?*

“Not as painful as afterward, because only my body suffered at the time.”

16. (To St. Louis’ spirit) *What does this spirit mean by saying the moment of death was less painful than afterward?*

“The spirit was ridding himself of the burden that had oppressed him; he felt delight in the pain.”

17. *Does this state always occur in those who commit suicide?*

“Yes. The suicide’s spirit remains connected to the body until the time his life was supposed to have ended otherwise. Natural death is liberation from earthly life; suicide shatters it entirely.”

18. *Does the same apply to accidental deaths, which are independent of one’s will and which shorten the natural duration of one’s life?*

“No. What do you understand by suicide? A spirit is only guilty for its own deeds.”

The doubt that one has died is very common among persons who have recently discarnated, and especially among those who during life did not lift their soul above material concerns. This phenomenon might seem strange at first but it can be easily explained. When individuals are put into a somnambulistic state for the first time and are asked if they are asleep, they nearly always respond that they are *not*, which is a logical response: the questioner has put the question badly by using an inadequate word. In common language, the idea of sleep is linked to the suspension of all the sensing faculties; thus, somnambulists, who think, see and feel and who are aware of their mental freedom, do not believe they are asleep. And, in fact, they are not asleep according to the ordinary meaning of the word. That is why they

respond that they are *not* asleep until they become familiar with the proper way in which the phenomenon is to be understood. The same happens with those who have just died. For them, death meant the annihilation of the being, and, just like somnambulists, they still see, feel and speak; thus, they do not regard themselves as dead. They continue to believe such until they acquire an intuition about their new state. Because it is never complete, this illusion is always either more painful or less so, and this leaves the spirit in a certain state of anxiety. In the above example, it is a veritable torture due to the sensation of the worms devouring the body. This experience will last for the length of time which this man would have lived had he not shortened his life. Such a state is common among suicides, although it is not always exactly the same but varies in duration and intensity according to attenuating or aggravating circumstances. The sensation of the worms and the body's decomposition is not just limited to suicides, but happens quite often among those who lived the material more than the spiritual life. In principle, no wrong goes unpunished, although there is no absolute and uniform rule about the means of punishment.

The Father and the Conscript

At the beginning of the war with Italy in 1859, a Paris businessman and father, held in high esteem by all his neighbors, had a son who was drafted into the military. Since he could not exempt his son from the service due to his social position, the idea occurred to him to commit suicide in order to exempt the young man as the sole surviving son of a widow. One year later he was evoked at the Parisian Society at the request of a person who had known him and who wanted to learn about his fate in the spirit world.

(To St. Louis) *Could you please tell us if it would be possible to evoke the spirit whom we were just talking about?*

“Yes, and he will be very pleased because it will bring him some relief.”

1. *Evocation*

“Oh! Thank you! I’m suffering so much, but ... is just. Yet, he will forgive me.”

The spirit has difficulty writing; the characters are irregular and badly made. After the word ‘but’ he stops and tries in vain to continue; he only manages to make a few indecipherable characters and periods. It is obvious that he could not write the word ‘God’.

2. *Please fill in the gap with the word you didn’t write.*

“I’m unworthy of it.”

3. *You said you are suffering, and there is no doubt that you erred in committing suicide; however, hasn’t the reason why you did it brought you any indulgence?*

“The punishment will not be as long, but the act per se was wrong nonetheless.”

4. *Would you describe your punishment?*

“I’m suffering doubly: in my soul and in my body. I’m suffering in my body, even though I’m no longer in possession of it, like an amputee feels pain in a limb that is no longer there.”

5. *Did you commit suicide solely to exempt your son or were there other reasons?*

“I was completely led by paternal love, though wrongly so. In consideration for this, my punishment will be shortened.”

6. *Do you know when your suffering will end?*

“No, I don’t, but I have the assurance it finally will, which is a relief for me.”

7. *A little while ago you were unable to write the word ‘God’, but we have seen greatly suffering spirits write it. Is this part of your punishment?*

“I will be able to write it after making great efforts to repent.”

8. *Well then! Make such efforts and try to write it; we are sure that if you succeed in doing so, it will bring you relief.* (The spirit ended up writing the following phrase in crude, irregular and shaky characters: *God is very good*).

9. *We are grateful that you came in response to our evocation, and we will pray for you, asking God to be merciful toward you.*

“Yes, please, if you would.”

10 (To St. Louis) *Would you give us your personal appraisal about the spirit whom we have just evoked?*

“This spirit is suffering justly, for he lacked trust in God – a wrong that is always punishable. The punishment would be terrible and very long if it were not mitigated by the praiseworthy motive of keeping his son from being exposed to death in war. God, who is just and sees the depths of the heart, is only punishing this man according to his deeds.”

At first glance, this suicide might seem excusable since it may be regarded as an act of self-sacrifice. Actually, though, this is not entirely correct. As St. Louis stated, this man lacked trust in God. Perhaps his action prevented his son’s destiny from being fulfilled; moreover, he could not be certain that his son would have died in battle, and maybe this career would have given him an opportunity to do something that would have been useful for his evolution. The father’s intentions were undoubtedly good and will be taken into account. Intention mitigates a bad deed and merits indulgence, but it does not keep evil from being evil nonetheless. Otherwise, one could find an excuse for any misdeed whatsoever – one could even murder under the pretext of rendering a service. Would a mother who kills her son in order for him to go straight to heaven be less guilty for having done so with good intentions? According to such a theory, one could justify all the crimes that have been committed as a result of the blind fanaticism of religious wars.

In principle, humans do not have the right to dispose of their own life, for it has been given to them because *of the duties they are to fulfill while on earth*, a sufficient reason for them not to intentionally shorten their life under any pretext. But since they have free will, no one can keep them from doing so, although they will always suffer the consequences. The suicide most severely punished is the one that results from the desperation of seeking to evade life's miseries. These miseries are expiations and trials at the same time, and withdrawing from them is to refuse the task one has accepted, and, sometimes, even the mission one must fulfill.

Suicide does not consist solely in the intentional act that produces instant death; suicide occurs whenever anything is consciously done that will prematurely hasten the extinction of the vital forces.

An act is not regarded as suicide when out of self-sacrifice one exposes oneself to death in order to save another person's life; first, because in that case there is no premeditated intention to withdraw from life; second, because there is no danger from which Providence will not rescue us if our time has not yet come. Death under such circumstances is a meritorious sacrifice because it is a selfless act on behalf of someone else. (See *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, chap. V, nos. 53, 65-67)

Louvet, François Simon⁷¹ (Of Havre)

The following communication was given spontaneously at a Spiritist meeting in Havre on February 12, 1863:

“Will you take pity on a poor wretch who has suffered dreadful torture for so long? Oh! The emptiness ... the space ...

⁷¹ As shown in the original French. – Tr.

I'm falling ... falling ... help me! My God, I had such a miserable existence ... I was a poor devil; I often suffered hunger in my old age and so I took to drinking and became ashamed and sick of it all. I wanted to die, so I jumped ... Oh! My God! What a moment! Why did I want to put an end to my life if I was so close to the end anyway? Pray so I won't have to keep on seeing *this emptiness below me* ... I'm going to dash myself upon those stones! I beg of you; you, who know about the misery of those who no longer belong to this world. Even though you don't know me, I'm addressing you because I'm suffering so ... Why do you want more proof? I'm suffering! Isn't that enough? If I were hungry instead of enduring this terrible suffering, which is imperceptible to you, you would not hesitate to help me out with a morsel of bread. So I'm asking you to pray for me ... I can't stay long ... Ask any of these happy ones who are here right now and you will find out who I was. Pray for me."

François-Simon Louvet

(The medium's Guide) "This spirit who has addressed you just now, my son, was a poor wretch who had to undergo the trial of poverty, but was overcome with disgust. Courage failed him and instead of looking to heaven as he should have, he turned to the bottle and sank to the extremes of despair. He put an end to his sad trial by jumping off the Tower of Francis I on July 22, 1857. Take pity on this poor soul. He is not very advanced but he knows enough about the future life to suffer and to desire a new trial. Pray to God to grant him grace and you will be doing a good deed."

In looking for information on the matter, the following notice was found in the *Journal du Havre* of July 23, 1857. We will summarize it here:

"Yesterday, at 4 p.m., the transients on the wharf were dismayed by a terrible incident: a man threw himself off the tower

and was dashed on the stones. He was an old barge-hauler⁷², whose dependence on liquor drove him to suicide. His name was François-Victor-Simon Louvet. The body was taken to the home of one of his daughters on Corderie Street. He was 67 years of age.”

Six years had elapsed since his passing and he still saw himself falling off the tower and being crushed on the stones below. The void below and the perspective of the fall still terrified him – and that after 6 years! How much longer would such a state last? He does not know, and this uncertainty increases his distress. Isn't this like hell with its flames? Who revealed such punishments? Were they invented? No. The very individuals who must endure them are the ones who have come to describe them, just as others have come to describe their joy. They often do this spontaneously without our thinking about them – which excludes all notions that we are the victims of our own imaginations.

Mother and Son

In March of 1865, Mr. C., a businessman in a small town close to Paris, had at home his seriously ill, twenty-one year old son. Sensing that his time had come, this young man called to his mother and still had enough strength left to embrace her. Sobbing, she said to him, “Go ahead of me, my son, for I won't be long in following you.” Having said this, she left the room, hiding her face in her hands.

The persons who witnessed this contrite scene thought Mrs. C.'s words were a simple outburst of grief that time and reason would dispel. After the young man died, they first searched for her throughout the house and then found she had hanged herself in the barn. Both mother and son were buried at the same time.

⁷² One of the hardest occupations as a manual worker, requiring exceptional physical strength and endurance. – Tr.

The son was evoked several days later:

Did you know that your mother committed suicide out of despair over losing you?

“Yes, and were it not for the sorrow her fatal decision has caused me, I would be perfectly happy. Poor excellent mother! She couldn’t bear the trial of a temporary separation, and so that she could be with her beloved son she took the road that would lead her farthest from him. Alas! And for a long, long time! So she delayed a reunion for who knows how long, but which *would have been near at hand* if her soul had submitted to the will of the Lord, if she would have resigned herself, humble and repentant before the trial she had to undergo, the expiation that would have purified her!

“Oh, pray! Pray for her! ... And especially you mothers who are moved by the story of her death: do not follow her example! Do not believe that she loved her son, her pride and joy, more than other mothers love theirs. No, she did not love him more; she lacked courage and resignation. You mothers listening to me: when agony forces your sons’ eyes to close, remember that, like Christ, they are mounting Calvary. And from there they shall rise to eternal glory.”

Benjamin C.

Evocation of the mother:

“I want to see my son! Do you have the power to deliver him to me? They are so cruel! They took him from me to lead him into the light while they left me in darkness! I want him; I want him; he belongs to me! ... So, isn’t a mother’s love worth anything at all? Well isn’t it! I carried him in my womb for nine months; I nursed him, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood; I guided his first steps; I taught him to utter the sacred name of God and the sweet word *mother*. I molded him into a man full of energy, intelligence,

honesty, uprightness and filial love, just to lose him when he was about to fulfill my hopes for him, just when a shining future was opening up before him! No, God is not just. He is not a God for mothers, for he does not understand their pain and desperation ... And when I bring death upon myself in order not to be separated from my child, they steal him from me again! ... My son! My Son! Where are you?"

The evoker: Poor mother, we sympathize with your grief. Nevertheless, you sought a sad recourse to reunite yourself with your son. Suicide is a crime in God's eyes and you must know that he punishes every infraction of his laws. Being kept from seeing your son is your punishment.

The mother: "No. I thought that God was better than men. I didn't believe in his hell; I believed in the eternal reunion of souls who love each other the way we did ... but I was wrong ... God is neither good nor just because he has not understood the enormity of my grief and my love! ... Oh! Who can give me back my son! Have I lost him forever then? Mercy! Mercy, my God!"

The evoker: Now try not to despair so. Remember that if there is a way to see your son, it is not in blaspheming God as you are doing. Instead of attracting his mercy, you will bring about an even greater penalty.

The mother: "They told me I wouldn't ever see him again, and I understood that they were taking him off to paradise. And I, am I in hell then? The hell for mothers? It does exist; I see it so well..."

The evoker: Your son is not lost forever, believe me. You will certainly see him again, but you must deserve it by submitting yourself to God's will, whereas in rebelliousness you can delay that moment indefinitely. Listen to me. God is infinitely good but also infinitely just. He never punishes without cause, and if while you were on the earth you were afflicted with great pain, it was because you deserved it. Your son's death was a test of your resignation; unfortunately, you failed it while alive, and now, after your death, you are failing it

again. Do you expect God to reward his rebellious children? God is not implacable; he always welcomes the repentance of the guilty. If you had accepted with resignation and humility the trial God sent you through a momentary separation, and if you had waited patiently for the time when he would have taken you from this earth, then at the entrance of the world you now find yourself in you would have immediately seen your son coming toward you with open arms. You would have had the joy of seeing him radiant after that time of absence. But what you did, and what you are still doing at this moment, has placed a barrier between you and him. Don't believe that he is lost in the depths of space; no, he is closer than you think, but there is an impenetrable veil concealing him from your sight. He can see you; he loves you always and mourns the sad condition you have fallen into because of your lack of trust in God. He eagerly waits for the happy moment when he will be allowed to show himself to you; however, it depends only on you to hasten or delay that moment. Pray to God and say with me: "Dear God, forgive me for having doubted your justice and goodness. If you have punished me, I realize I have deserved it. Please accept my repentance and submission to your holy will."

The mother: "What a light of hope you have just made shine in my soul! It is like a shining light in the night surrounding me. Thank you; I will pray ... goodbye."

C...

Death, even by suicide, did not produce in this spirit the delusion that she was still alive; she was perfectly aware of her state. For others, however, their punishment consists exactly in the delusion that they are still alive, which is caused by the ties that still keep them bound to their body. This woman wanted to leave the earth in order to follow her son into the next life, so she had to be aware that she was actually in that world in order to be punished by not finding him there. Her punishment consists in

knowing that she does not live corporeally anymore and in being aware of her situation. Thus, each wrong is punished according to the circumstances that accompany it, and there are no invariable uniform punishments for wrongs of the same kind.

Double Suicide out of Love and a Sense of Duty

The following story appeared in a June 13, 1862 newspaper:

“A young woman and dressmaker named Palmyre, who lived with her parents, was endowed with an enchanting appearance and a most affable character, which made her the object of many suitors. Of all of them, she preferred Mr. B., who felt a vivid passion for her. Despite her love for him, she nevertheless thought it her duty out of deference to her parents to yield to their wishes by marrying Mr. D., whose social standing was regarded by them as more advantageous than that of his rival.

“Mr. B. and Mr. D were close friends and although there were no bonds of mutual interest between them, they were always together. The love between B. and Palmyre (who had become Mrs. D.) did not diminish in the least, and because they made great efforts to contain it, it grew even more intense. In seeking to extinguish it, B. decided to marry a young woman who possessed outstanding attributes and he did his utmost to love her. He soon realized, however, that such heroic means were powerless to heal him. Nevertheless, for four years neither he nor Mrs. D. broke their vows. What they had to suffer is impossible to express because D., who truly loved his friend, was always inviting him over and insisting that he stay whenever he tried to leave.

“One day, the two lovers were brought together by an unsought-for fortuitous circumstance and they shared the state

of their souls. They led themselves to believe that death was the only remedy for the agony they were going through. They decided to die together and to put their plan into action the next day, when Mr. D. would be absent from home for a long period. After having made the final preparations, they wrote a long and touching letter, explaining that the death they inflicted upon themselves was the only way they could remain faithful to their obligations. They ended the letter asking for forgiveness and to be buried in the same grave.

“When Mr. D. returned home, he found them asphyxiated. He respected their last wishes and consented to their bodies not being separated at the cemetery.”

When this incident was submitted to the Parisian Society as a topic for study, a spirit responded:

“These two suicide lovers cannot yet respond to you. I see them; they are immersed in confusion and terrified at the perspective of eternity. The moral consequences for the wrong they committed will weigh heavily on them through *successive migrations*, during which their separated souls will search for each other constantly, subject to the double torture of having an intuition of and desire for each other. Once their expiation is finally complete, they will be reunited forever in the bosom of eternal love. Within eight days, at your next meeting, you can evoke them. They will come but will not be able see each other; profound darkness will separate them for a long time to come.”

1. Evocation of the female suicide: *Can you see your lover, with whom you committed suicide?*

“I can’t see anything, not even the spirits who roam about in this place where I am. Such night! Such darkness! What a thick veil there is before my eyes!”

2. *What sensation did you experience upon awakening after your death?*

“Odd! I felt both cold and burning. I had ice in my veins and fire on my brow! A strange thing, an unheard-of mixture! Fire and ice seemed to consume me! I thought I would die a second time!...”

3. *Are you experiencing any physical pain?*

“All my suffering is here and here...”

- *What do you mean by here and here?*

“Here in my head, and here in my heart...”

If one could have seen this spirit it would have been possible to see her put her hand on her forehead and heart.

4. *Do you believe this situation will last forever?*

“Oh! Forever! Forever! I sometimes hear infernal howling, horrific voices crying out, ‘It will be like this forever!’”

5. *Well, we can tell you with all certainty that it will not be like this forever. Through repentance you can obtain forgiveness.*

“What did you say? I couldn’t hear you.”

6. *I will repeat that you can shorten the duration of your suffering by repenting, and we will help you do so through prayer.*

“I could hear only one word and some vague sounds: that word was – *grace!* Is it *grace* that you wanted to say? You no doubt spoke of grace to the soul who is passing by me – a poor child who is crying and hoping.”

A woman who was present at the meeting and undoubtedly moved stated that she had said a prayer for this unhappy being and that she had, in fact, mentally asked God’s grace for her.

7. *You say you are in darkness; can’t you see us?*

“I’m being allowed to hear a few of your words, but I can only see a black crape⁷³ upon which a weeping face looms from time to time.”

8. *Even if you cannot see your lover, can’t you nevertheless sense his presence next to you? He is here, after all.*

⁷³ Crape: a silk fabric of a gauzy texture, having a peculiar crisp or crinkly appearance. – Tr.

“Ah! Don’t speak to me about him. I must forget about him for the moment so that the image on the crape will be blotted out.”

9. *What image is it?*

“That of a man who is suffering and whose mental existence on earth I have destroyed for a long time to come.”

In reading this account, one might first be disposed to find attenuating circumstances in this suicide, even viewing it as a heroic act brought about by the sentiment of duty. One must realize, however, that it was judged differently, and that the punishment of these guilty souls will be long and dreadful for having intentionally taken refuge in death in order to flee their trial. Their intent not to break their marriage vows was honorable and will be taken into account later on. True merit, however, would have consisted in resisting temptation, whereas they acted like the deserter who dodges his duty in the moment of danger.

As one can see, their punishment will consist in their searching for each other for a long time without reuniting, *whether in the spirit world or during other earthly incarnations*. Additionally, their punishment is temporarily aggravated by the idea that their present state will last forever. This perspective is part of their punishment and thus they were not even allowed to hear the words of hope that were addressed to them. To those who find such a punishment too long and terrible – especially since it will only end after several incarnations – we will say that its duration is not irrevocably set; it will depend on the way in which they bear their future trials, for which prayer can greatly help them. They will be like all other guilty spirits: the arbiters of their own destiny. Even so, isn’t such a fate still preferable to the eternal, hopeless damnation to which they would be irreversibly condemned according to the doctrine of the Church, which regards them as having been handed over to hell forever, and which refused them the last rites as obviously useless?

Louis and the Boot Stitcher

For seven or eight months, a cobbler named Louis G. wooed a young female boot stitcher named Victorine R., whom he was soon to marry; the wedding bans had already been published. Due to this state of affairs, these two young people considered themselves to be almost united for good, and for economic reasons, the cobbler came each day to have his meals with his bride-to-be.

Louis came as usual one day to have supper at his fiancée's. They had a fight over some petty matter, and with both holding stubbornly to their own opinions, things escalated to the point where Louis left the table and swore he would never return.

Nevertheless, the next day he went to ask her for forgiveness. Night is a good counselor – so the saying goes – but the girl believed that perhaps the scene from the night before might happen again after it was too late to remedy the evil. She refused to reconcile. Neither protests, nor tears, nor desperate pleas could make her yield. Several days had passed since their quarrel, and Louis hoped that his beloved would be more reasonable, so he decided to make one last attempt at reconciliation. When he arrived at her home, he knocked in a way that let her know it was him, but she refused to open the door. Renewed appeals on the part of the poor young man and protests made through the door failed to touch the heart of his pitiless fiancée. “Farewell, then, cruel girl!” exclaimed the poor man. “Farewell forever. Just try to find a husband who loves you as much as I do.” The girl then heard a muffled groan, soon followed by a thud as if an object had fallen, sliding against the door. Afterward, all was silent. She thought that Louis had sat down on the doorstep to wait for her to leave, and so she decided not to go out while he was still there.

Around fifteen minutes later, another tenant, carrying a lantern, came upon the scene and let out a scream, crying for help.

Neighbors rushed over, and Miss Victorine, also opened her door. She let out a cry of horror at seeing her fiancé stretched out on the floor, pale and lifeless. Everyone hastened to help him, but it soon became clear that it was all of no use, that he was dead. The poor young man had buried a knife in his heart and it remained sticking in the wound.

(Parisian Spiritist Society, August 1853)

1. (To the spirit St. Louis) *As the unintentional cause of her lover's death, was the young woman at all responsible for it?*

“Yes, because she didn't actually love him to begin with.”

2. *Then, in order to have prevented this unfortunate event, should she have married him in spite of her repugnance?*

“She was looking for an excuse to break up with him; she did toward the beginning of the relationship what she would have done later anyway.”

3. *Then in that case, did her responsibility result from her having fed sentiments that she herself did not share and which eventually resulted in the young man's suicide?*

“Yes, precisely.”

4. *Her responsibility in this case should then be in proportion to her wrong and thus not as great as if she had willingly provoked his death.*

“Obviously.”

5. *Is Louis' suicide excusable due to the torment into which Victorine's stubbornness plunged him?*

6. “Yes, because a suicide out of love is less criminal in God's eyes than a suicide of someone who wants to be freed from life for cowardly reasons.”

(When evoked later, the spirit of Louis G. was asked the following questions)

1. *What do you think about what you did?*

“Victorine was an ingrate and I was wrong in committing suicide because of her. She wasn’t worth it.”

2. *She didn’t love you then?*

“No. At first, she thought she did; she had that illusion; however, the scene I caused opened her eyes and she was happy at having found a pretext to get rid of me.”

3. *And you, did you love her sincerely?*

“Only out of passion; that is all, I think. If my love had been pure, I wouldn’t have wanted to cause her any grief.”

4. *If she knew that you really would kill yourself, would she have persisted in her refusal?*

“I don’t know. I don’t think so, because she isn’t a bad person. However, she would have been unhappy and it is better for her that things turned out as they did.”

5. *When you knocked on her door, did you have the idea to kill yourself in case of rejection?*

“No. I hadn’t even thought of it; I didn’t think she would still be so obstinate. It was only when I saw her stubbornness that I lost my mind.”

6. *It seems that you don’t regret your suicide except for the fact that Victorine wasn’t worth it. Is that the only feeling you have?*

“For now, it is. I’m still totally confused. It seems like I’m still at her door, but I’m feeling something else I can’t quite figure out.”

7. *Will you be able to figure it out later?*

“Yes, when my mind clears up. What I did was wrong. I should have left her alone ... I was weak and am now suffering the consequences of my weakness. Mind you, passion blinds a man and makes him do stupid things, and he only realizes it when it’s too late.”

8. *You said you had one regret ... what is it?*

“I was wrong to have shortened my life. I shouldn’t have done it. I should have endured it instead of ending it before the

proper time. And now, afterward, I'm unhappy. I'm suffering and it's always Victorine who makes me suffer. I seem to still be there at the door – the ingrate! Don't talk to me anymore about this. I don't want to think about it. It makes me feel really bad. Goodbye.”

This case once again is a further proof of the justice that presides over the distribution of punishment according to the degree of responsibility of the guilty party. Here, the first wrong is perpetrated by the young woman for having nourished in Louis a love she did not share. Thus, she bears the greatest part of the responsibility. As for the young man, he is being punished by the suffering he endures. However, his punishment is lighter because he did nothing more than give in to a thoughtless impulse and a moment of excitement rather than to the cool premeditation of those who commit suicide in order to evade the trials of life.

An Atheist

Mr. J.-B.D. was an educated man, but saturated to the core with materialistic ideas. He believed neither in God nor the existence of the soul. At the request of a relative, he was evoked at the Spiritist Society two years after his death.

1. *Evocation*

“I'm suffering. I'm a reprobate.”

2. *We have been asked to evoke you on behalf of your relatives, who want to know about your fate. Tell us if our evocation is agreeable or painful to you.*

“Painful.”

3. *Was your death intentional?*

“Yes.”

The spirit writes with extreme difficulty; the handwriting is large, irregular, shaky and almost illegible. At the outset he shows his anger by breaking the pencil and tearing the paper.

4. *Do compose yourself; we will all pray to God for you.*

“I am being forced to believe in God.”

5. *What motive did you have for killing yourself?*

“Weariness of a life without hope.”

One thinks about suicide when life is *hopeless*; one also wants to escape unhappiness at any price. With Spiritism, the future unfolds and hope is legitimized, leaving suicide without purpose; moreover, one realizes that through suicide one does not escape an evil but falls into another one a hundred times worse. That is why Spiritism already has saved so many victims from committing intentional death. Extremely guilty are those who, through *scientific sophisms and the so-called name of reason*, endeavor to believe in the desperate idea – the source of so many crimes and evils – that everything ends at death! They will be responsible not only for their own errors, but also for all the evils they have caused.

6. *You wanted to escape the vicissitudes of life ... Did you gain anything? Are you happier now?*

“Why doesn’t nothingness exist?”

7. *Please be so kind as to describe to us as well as possible what your present situation is.*

“I’m suffering in being obliged to believe in everything I used to deny. My soul is like a furnace – it is being tormented horribly.”

8. *Where did you get the materialistic ideas you had when alive?*

“In a previous existence, I was evil and my spirit was condemned to suffer the torments of uncertainty throughout my life; that is why I killed myself.”

There is a whole corollary of ideas here. We often ask how there can be materialists, because having passed through the spirit world they should therefore have an intuition about it. Well, it is precisely this intuition that is denied to some spirits, who have preserved their pride and have not repented of their wrongs. Their trial consists in acquiring, during corporeal life *and through their own reasoning*, proof

of the existence of God and the future life that they have incessantly in front of them. Often, however, their self-conceit at not believing in anything above themselves prevails, and they must endure grief until their pride is overcome and they finally surrender to the evidence.

9. *When you drowned yourself, what did you think would happen to you? What were you thinking at the time?*

“Nothing. It was nothingness for me. Afterward, I saw that I hadn’t undergone all my punishment by committing suicide; I still had more to suffer.”

10. *Are you now thoroughly convinced about the existence of God, the soul and the future life?*

“Alas! I am terribly tormented because of it!”

11. *Have you seen your brother?*

“Oh! No.

12. *And why not?*

“Why bring our torment together? Misfortune separates; fortune reunites; alas!”

13. *Would you feel comfortable at seeing your brother? We could evoke him and thereby bring you together.*

“No, don’t; I’m too low for that.”

14. *Why don’t you want us to evoke him?*

“Because he isn’t happy either.”

15. *You are afraid of his presence, yet it might be beneficial to you.*

“Not now. Later...”

16. *Do you have any message for your relatives?*

“That they pray for me.”

17. *It seems that in the social circles you used to frequent when alive, some people shared in your opinions. Would you have anything to say to them on the subject?*

“Oh! Those wretches! May they believe in another existence! That is the happiest wish I have for them. If they could understand my sad situation, it would make them think harder.”

(Evocation of the brother, who had professed the same theories but did not commit suicide. Although he too is unhappy, he is calmer and his writing is clearer and more legible.)

18. *Evocation*

“May the picture of our suffering be a useful lesson to you and persuade you that another life exists, where one expiates one’s wrongs and disbelief.”

19. *Can you see your brother, whom we have just finished evoking?*

“No. He is fleeing from me.”

One might ask how spirits can avoid one another in the spirit world since there are no physical obstacles or refuges that are impenetrable to sight. However, everything is relative in that world and conforms to the fluidic nature of the beings who live there. Only high order spirits have unlimited perception; it is limited in low order ones. For the latter, fluidic obstacles are the same as physical ones. Spirits hide themselves from others by their will, which acts upon their perispiritual envelope and the surrounding fluids. Nonetheless, Providence, who watches over each one individually like a mother over her children, grants or denies this faculty according to each spirit’s moral disposition. Depending on the circumstances, it comprises either punishment or recompense.

20. *You are calmer than your brother. Could you provide a more precise description of your suffering?*

“There on earth, don’t your self-centeredness and pride suffer when you are obliged to admit your mistakes? Doesn’t your spirit revolt at the idea of being humbled by someone who points out your errors? Well, just what do you think a spirit suffers, who, throughout its entire life, was persuaded that nothing existed beyond itself and that it was always right? Finding itself suddenly confronted with the obvious truth, such a spirit feels annihilated, humiliated. Combined with this is the regret of having for so long forgotten the existence of such a good and tolerant God. Its

condition is unbearable; it finds neither peace nor repose; it will not find even a little quiet except in the moment when divine grace, that is, God's love, touches it, because pride has taken hold of the poor spirit and envelops it entirely. It will need a lot of time to rid itself of that deadly garment. Only the prayers of our brothers can help us out of this anguish."

21. *Do you mean incarnate brothers or do you mean spirits?*

"Both."

22. *While we were interviewing your brother, one of the persons here was praying for him. Did this prayer do him any good?*

"It wasn't a waste. If for now he refuses grace, he won't when he finds himself in a state where he will have recourse to that divine *panacea*."

We see here another kind of punishment. Punishment is thus not the same for all disbelievers. For this spirit, besides his suffering is the necessity of recognizing the truths that he reneged on while alive. His current ideas reveal a certain degree of advancement, compared to other spirits who persist in denying God. It is already some sign of advancement and humility to confess that one was wrong. In a subsequent incarnation, it is more than probable that his disbelief will give way to the innate sentiment of faith.

When we delivered the results of these two evocations to the person who had made the request, we received the following response:

"Sir, you can't imagine the huge relief that the evocation of my father-in-law and my uncle has brought me. We recognized them perfectly. The writing of my father-in-law, especially, is remarkably similar to when he was alive, especially during his last few months with us, when it was jerky and indecipherable. Further confirmation may be found in the long strokes, initials and various letters, which are the same. As for vocabulary, expressions and style, the resemblance is even more striking. For us, the similarity is complete except for his now greater knowledge of God, the soul and the eternal life that

he so formally denied before. We are therefore perfectly convinced of his identity. God will be glorified by our firm belief in Spiritism, and our incarnate and discarnate friends will become better because of it. The identity of his brother is no less obvious, the immense change from atheist into believer notwithstanding. We recognize his character, style and turns of phrase. One word especially grabbed our attention – *panacea* – a favorite word of his, which he said and repeated all the time for all things.

“I showed the two communications to several persons, who marveled at their veracity. However, the disbelievers who held the same opinions as my two relatives want even more categorical responses. For example, they would like for M.D. to disclose the place where he was buried, where he drowned himself, how he was discovered, etc. In order to satisfy and convince them, would it be possible for you to evoke him again, and if so, to ask the following questions: where and how did he commit suicide, how long was he submerged, where was his body found, where was he buried, and whether a religious or civil funeral was given to him?”

“I beg of you, sir, to provide a categorical response to these questions, as it is essential for those who still doubt. I am convinced that great benefit will come of it. I’m ensuring that my letter gets to you by tomorrow, Friday, so that you can make the evocation at the Society’s session that same day... etc.”

We have reproduced the above letter because of the fact that it confirms the spirits’ identities, and below we have attached our response to it in order to instruct individuals who are not familiar with communications from the beyond.

“...The additional questions you have asked us to address to the spirit of your father-in-law were incontestably stated with a praiseworthy purpose in mind – to convince disbelievers – since you yourself no longer harbor any sentiments of doubt or curiosity. However, a deeper understanding of the Spiritist science

would lead you to understand that the questions are superfluous. In the first place, asking me to have your father-in-law answer with a categorical response shows that you do not understand the fact that we cannot control spirits at will. They respond whenever and however they want, and often only as they are able. Their freedom of action is greater than when they were alive and they possess ways of avoiding any mental coercion we might wish to exert over them. The best proofs of identity are the ones they themselves furnish spontaneously of their own accord or which arise from the circumstances. Hence, it is almost always futile to try to induce them to provide proofs. According to what you have said, your relative has proven his identity beyond a doubt; consequently, it is more than probable that he would refuse to answer questions that he might regard as superfluous and meant to satisfy the curiosity of individuals who are indifferent to him. His response could very well be the one received by others in similar cases: 'Why are you asking things you already know about?' To this I would add that the confusion and suffering he is experiencing could be aggravated by interrogations of this nature. It would be like trying to elicit from a very ill person the details of his life while he can hardly think or speak; it would show a real lack of consideration for his situation.

“As for the result you are expecting, you can be sure that it would be fruitless. The proofs of identity that your father-in-law has furnished carry more weight because they occurred spontaneously; no clues were given beforehand. Thus, if these disbelievers are not satisfied with proofs of this type, they might be even less satisfied by pre-established questions that could be suspected of having been born out of complicity. There are persons who are not convinced by anything, no matter what. They could see your relative in person with their own two eyes and still affirm that they are victims of a hallucination.

“Sir, a few more words regarding your request for an evocation to be made on the same day I receive your letter. Evocations cannot be done on the spur of the moment. Spirits do not always respond to our appeal. For them to respond, they must be both able and willing. Additionally, there must be a suitable medium (endowed with the necessary special aptitudes) available at the time. Finally, the surroundings must be agreeable to the spirit, etc. In other words, all the unpredictable yet important circumstances must be present if one wants to proceed profitably.”

Felicien

Felicien was a wealthy and educated man, a spirited poet, of good character, kind, very amiable and completely honorable. Bad investments had ruined his fortune, and since he felt his age would not permit him to restore it, he gave in to discouragement and hanged himself in his bedroom in December of 1864. He was neither a materialist nor an atheist, but a man of a somewhat superficial nature and little concerned about life beyond the grave. Since we had known him intimately and because we were inspired by sympathy, we evoked him four months after his death.

Evocation

“I mourn the earth. I suffered disappointments there, but much less than the ones I’m experiencing here. I had marvelous dreams but I am now beneath the reality of my ideal. The spirit world consists of a highly mixed society and to make it bearable it will be necessary to make a good triage. I can’t believe it! What a sketch of spirit customs could be drawn here! Balzac should get to work here; it would be difficult, even for him! But I haven’t seen him ... Where are those great spirits who so forcefully used to curse the vices of mankind? Like me, they ought to live here for a while

before going to higher realms. It is a curious pandemonium that I am delighted to observe as I dwell here.”

In spite of this spirit declaring to us that he was in a highly mixed society, and, consequently, amidst low order spirits, we were surprised at his language, given his type of death, of which he made no mention. Although everything else seemed to reflect his character as we knew him, this left us in some doubt as to his identity.

Could you please tell us how you died?

“How I died? By the death I chose and which suited me most. I thought for a long time about what type of death I should employ to deliver myself from life. But I must admit that in reality I didn’t gain much from it. I freed myself from material concerns only to find more serious and painful ones as a spirit. And I can see no end to them.”

(To the medium’s Guide) *Is this really the spirit of Felicien? Such nonchalant language by a suicide is really astonishing.*

“Yes, it is Felicien. However, due to a justifiable sentiment about his situation – which you understand – he didn’t want to reveal his type of death to the medium. That is why he skirted the issue. Induced by your question, he finally confessed it but it afflicted him a great deal. He is suffering greatly as a result of his suicide and avoids as much as he can all that reminds him of his disastrous end.”

(To the spirit) *Due mainly to the affection and regard we held for you, your death affected us all the more because we foresaw its bad consequences for you. I personally have not forgotten how kind and good you were to me. I would be happy to show you my gratitude if I could do something useful for you.*

“And yet, I could not escape the embarrassment of my financial situation any other way. Right now, all I need are prayers. Especially pray that I may be freed from these awful fellow spirits close by. They hound me with their laughter, their

howls and infernal scornful mockery. They rightly call me a coward, for it is cowardice to renounce life. *This is the fourth time I've succumbed to this trial* in spite of my strong intent not to fail ... Fatalism! ... Ah! Pray ... What torment! How wretched I am! If you pray for me, you will do more for me than what I did for you while on earth. But the trial I failed at so many times lies there in indelible features before me! *I must attempt it again at the right time* ... Will I be strong enough? Ah! To start life over so many times! To struggle for so long, to be carried away by events and to succumb in spite of yourself is heart-breaking, even here! That is why I need strength. One can get it through prayer, they say ... Pray for me; I will pray also.”

Even though this particular suicide was committed as a result of very common circumstances, it nevertheless displays a special characteristic. It shows us a spirit who has succumbed many times to the same trial, which has been renewed with each existence, and which *will be repeated as many times as he lacks the strength to resist it*. It is the confirmation of the principle that, if the purpose of improvement for which we have incarnated is not reached, we have suffered without profit and will thus have to start all over again until we emerge victorious from the struggle.

(To Felicien's spirit) Please listen to what I'm about to tell you and ponder my words. What you call fatalism is nothing but your own weakness, because if there were such a thing as fatalism, people would cease to be responsible for their actions. They are always free and in such freedom lies their greatest privilege. God did not want to make them into moving, blindly obedient automatons. If their freedom renders them fallible, it also renders them perfectible, and it is only through perfection that they will attain to supreme happiness. Only pride leads people to blame fate for their earthly misfortunes, when in reality misfortunes result mostly from their own negligence. You have a striking example of

this from your last incarnation because you had everything you needed to be a happy human being: wit, talent, wealth, earned respect; you had no ruinous vices, but, on the contrary, appreciable qualities ... How then did you compromise your situation in such a way? Solely by your lack of foresight. You have to agree that if you had acted more prudently, if you had known how to content yourself with the lot apportioned to you instead of seeking to needlessly add to it, ruin would not have befallen you. There was no fatalism at all because you could have avoided what happened.

Your trial consisted in a chain of circumstances that should have given you *not the necessity but only the temptation* to commit suicide. Unfortunately for you, despite your talent and education you didn't know how to overcome those circumstances and you now are suffering the consequences of your weakness. As you have rightly guessed, the trial will be renewed once again. In your next incarnation, you will encounter events that will suggest suicidal ideas to you, and this will continue until you have triumphed over them.

Far from accusing fate – which is actually your own doing – marvel at the goodness of God, who instead of irredeemably condemning you for your failure the first time, incessantly offers you the means of repairing it. So you will not suffer forever, but only for as long as you have not redeemed yourself. While you are in the spirit state, it depends on you to make a sufficiently strong resolution to show God that you have sincerely repented, and you must solicit at every instance the support of good spirits so that you may return to the earth armored against all temptations. Once you have achieved this victory, you will walk on the pathway of happiness much more quickly since you have already made considerable progress in other areas. It is therefore one more hurdle to clear and we will help you with our prayers. But they will be ineffective if you do not second us with your own efforts.”

(The spirit) “Oh! Thank you! Thank you for such meaningful exhortations. I needed them all the more since I am worse off than *I had let on to be*. I promise I will take advantage of them and prepare for my next incarnation, this time making sure not to fail. I long to leave this ignoble place that I have been relegated to. ”

Felicien

Antoine Bell

Mr. Bell was the cashier at a Canadian bank and committed suicide on February 28, 1865. One of our correspondents was a physician and pharmacist living in the same town and provided us with the following information:

“I knew Bell for more than 20 years. He was as a quiet man and the head of a large family. A while back, he began to fanaticize that he had bought a poison at my pharmacy, which he then used to kill someone. He came to me several times and begged me to tell him when he had bought the substance. He was suffering terrible hallucinations. He couldn't sleep, accused himself and wailed. The family lived in constant anxiety from 4:00 p.m. to 9 a.m., at which time he would go to the bank, where he kept the books with perfect regularity and without ever making a single mistake. He had the habit of saying that he felt like there was some kind of entity within him who enabled him to perform his bookkeeping correctly and in order. Whenever he seemed about to come to grips with how outlandish his ideas were, he would cry out, ‘No, no; you want to deceive me ... *I remember* ... it's all true!’”

At this friend's request, he was evoked in Paris on April 17, 1865.

1. *Evocation*

“What do you want with me? To subject me to interrogation? That would be needless; I'll admit to everything.”

2. *It isn't our intention at all to afflict you with indiscreet questions. We only want to know what your situation is in the world where you now are, and if we can be of any use ...*

"Ah! If you could, I would be so grateful! I'm horrified at my crime and am very unhappy!"

3. *We hope that our prayers will ease your suffering. Besides, you seem to be in a good situation because you have repented, and that is already the first step toward rehabilitation. God is infinitely merciful and always takes pity on the repentant sinner. Pray with us. (Here, we said the prayer for suicides, which can be found in The Gospel according to Spiritism).*

Now, could you tell us what crime you are guilty of? If made humbly, such a confession will be taken into account.

"First, let me thank you for the hope you have brought to my heart. Alas! A long time ago I lived in a town whose walls were bathed by the Mediterranean. I loved a beautiful girl who also loved me, but since I was poor I was rejected by her family. She then informed me that she was getting married to the son of a merchant, whose dealings went well beyond the two seas; so she rebuffed me. Mad with sorrow, I resolved to end my life, but not without first murdering my hated rival in order to satiate my desire for vengeance. I found violent methods repulsive and was horrified at the idea of committing such a crime, but my jealousy won out. The evening before my beloved was to become his, my rival died of poison, administered by me through the means I found the easiest. That explains these remembrances of the past ... Yes, I reincarnated after that, and now I will have to reincarnate again ... Oh! My God, take pity on my weakness and tears!"

4. *We lament the unhappiness that has delayed your progress and we are truly sorry for you. But since you have repented, God will take pity on you. Tell us if you carried out the suicide you intended to commit afterwards.*

"No, and I'm ashamed to admit that hope arose once again in my heart; I wanted to enjoy the prize of my crime. However,

my remorse betrayed me and I expiated my moment of madness via the ultimate punishment: I was hanged for it.”

5. *During your latest incarnation, were you at all aware of the evil deed you had committed in the other one?*

“Only in the final years, which I will explain: I had been good by nature, and like all murderers in the spirit world, after I had been submitted to the torment of constantly having to see the image of my victim – he pursued me as the living embodiment of remorse – I was finally delivered from him after many years of repentance and praying. I then began my latest existence, which I lived peacefully and meekly. I had a vague intuition of my innate weakness as well as my former wrong, which remained in my memory in a latent state. An obsessing and vengeful spirit, however, who was none other than my victim’s father, easily took hold of me and made me relive in my heart, like a magic mirror, the memories of the past.

“Alternately influenced by him and my protecting Guide, I was both poisoner and the family man who was earning a living to support his children. In the clutches of that obsessor demon, I was pushed to commit suicide. I am very guilty – it is true – but less so than if I had decided by my free will alone. Suicides of my category, who are too weak to resist such spirit obsessors, are less guilty and punished less than those who abandon life solely through their own will. Pray with me for the spirit who so fatally influenced me, that he may renounce his sentiments of vengeance. Pray for me too so that I might acquire the strength and energy needed not to fail in the trial of intentional suicide, *to which, I have been told*, I will be submitted in my next incarnation.”

6. (To the medium’s Guide) *Can an obsessor spirit actually drive someone to commit suicide?*

“Certainly, because obsession, which in and of itself is a kind of trial, can assume all forms. However, this is no excuse. People

always have their free will and consequently can yield to or resist the suggestions to which they are exposed. When they yield, it is always of their own free will. Furthermore, this spirit is right in saying that those who commit evil instigated by someone else are less reprehensible and punished less than when they intentionally commit it. They are nonetheless not innocent of blame, since the moment they allowed themselves to be drawn off the moral path occurred because the good had not yet taken hold in their heart.”

7. How is it that even though prayer and repentance had freed this spirit from the tormenting sight of his victim, he could still be chased by his vengeful obsessor during his latest incarnation?

“As you well know, repentance is only the *first step toward rehabilitation*, and is not therefore sufficient to free the guilty spirit of all its punishment. God is not content with mere promises; actions are required to prove the commitment to return to the upright path. That is why a spirit is submitted to new trials which strengthen it and which at the same time enable it to acquire an even greater merit after emerging triumphant. A spirit is open to the persecution of evil spirits *until they sense that it is sufficiently strong to resist them*. Then they leave it alone, for they know their attacks will be futile.”

These last two examples have shown us the renewal of the same trial in successive incarnations for as long as it is not effectively overcome. Antoine Bell shows us furthermore – as remorse and as a warning – the highly instructive instance of a man persecuted by the memory of a crime committed in a previous existence. By this we have further seen that all existences are in solidarity with one another, that divine justice and goodness are displayed in people’s ability to gradually evolve without ever depriving them of redemption from their wrongs, that wrongdoers are punished by their own wrongs and that punishment, rather than the vengeance of God, is the means employed to enable them to progress.



Repentant Criminals

Verger

(Murderer of the Archbishop of Paris)

On January 3, 1857, Monsignor Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, was mortally wounded by a young priest named Verger as he was leaving the Church of Saint-Etienne du Mont. The criminal was condemned to death and executed on January 30. Up until the very end, he showed no feelings of regret, repentance or sensitivity.

Evoked on the same day of his execution, he gave the following responses:

1. *Evocation*

“I am still retained in my body.”

2. *Hasn't your soul completely disengaged from your body?*

“No ... I'm afraid ... I don't know ... Wait until I can get my bearings ... I'm not dead, am I?”

3. *Are you sorry for what you did?*

“It was wrong to kill, but I was forced to do it by my nature – I couldn't take humiliation ... Evoke me some other time.”

4. *Why do you want to leave already?*

“I would be very scared if I saw him; I'd fear he would do the same to me.”

5. *But you have nothing to fear because your soul has separated from your body. Banish all concerns; they're not reasonable.*

“What do you want? Are you always in control of your feelings? I don’t know where I am ... I’ve lost my mind.”

6. *Try to compose yourself.*

“I can’t because I’m crazy ... Wait! I’m going to try and get my thoughts back in order.”

7. *If you were to pray, would it help you get your thoughts back in order?*

“I’m scared ... I wouldn’t dare pray.”

8. *Pray, for God’s mercy is great! We will pray with you.*

“Yes. God’s mercy is infinite. I’ve always believed that.”

9. *Now do you have a better understanding of your situation?*

“It’s so weird that I still can’t figure it out it.”

10. *Do you see your victim as being present?*

“It seems like I hear a voice that sounds like he’s telling me, ‘I don’t want you around anymore’ ... But it must be my imagination! ... I tell you, I’ve lost my mind because I can see my body on one side and my head on the other ... although it seems that I am alive in space between the earth and what you call heaven ... I even feel the cold steel of the blade slicing through my neck ... but that’s only the fear I have of dying ... It seems like there is a crowd of spirits around me, looking compassionately at me ... they’re *talking* to me but I can’t understand them.”

11. *Among those spirits, is there perhaps one whose presence you find humiliating because of your crime?*

“I would say that there is only one whom I’m afraid of: the one I struck.”

12. *Do you recall your former lives?*

“No. Everything is vague ... I think I’m dreaming ... Again, I need to get my bearings.”

13. (Three days later) *Have you gotten your bearings more by now?*

“I now know I no longer belong to your world and I don’t regret it a bit. I regret what I did, but my spirit is freer. I also know

there is a series of lives that provide us with knowledge we can use in order to become as perfect as anyone can be.”

14. *Are you being punished for the crime you committed?*

“Yes. I regret what I did and this makes me suffer.”

15. *How are you being punished?*

“I’m being punished because I realize my wrong and I ask God to forgive me for it; I’m being punished for my lack of faith in him, and for knowing that we must not shorten the lives of our brothers; I’m being punished by the remorse of having delayed my progress by taking the false path and for not listening to the cry of my conscience telling me that it is not by killing that I would reach my objective. But I let myself be dominated by pride and jealousy. I was wrong and have repented, because men must always make an effort to control their evil passions – and I didn’t.”

16. *What feeling did you experience when we evoked you?*

“Pleasure and fear, since I’m not evil.”

17. *What does this pleasure and fear involve?*

“The pleasure of conversing with men and being able to partially pay for my wrong by confessing it; the fear I wouldn’t know how to define – a sort of shame at having been a murderer.”

18. *Would you like to reincarnate on the earth again?*

“Yes, I have asked to, and I hope to be exposed often to being murdered and being in fear of it.”

After being evoked, Monsignor Sibour said that he had forgiven the murderer and prayed that he would return to the good. He also said that, although he had been present at the evocation, he did not show himself to Verger so that he would not increase his suffering. The mere fear of seeing his victim was a sign of remorse and was already a punishment in and of itself.

(To the Monsignor) *When choosing their new existence, do those who commit murder know they will become murderers?*

“No. They know that in choosing a life of struggle, it is likely that they will kill a fellow man, but they do not know whether they will actually do it or not, for there is almost always an inner struggle.”

Verger’s situation at the moment of his death is like that of almost all those who perish as the result of a violent death. The separation of the soul does not occur all at once, so they remain in a state of bewilderment and do not know if they are alive or dead. He was spared the sight of the archbishop because it was not necessary to excite in him feelings of remorse, whereas others, on the contrary, are constantly chased by the sight of their victims.

Verger added to and aggravated the enormity of his crime by not repenting before dying, and was therefore in full position to incur so-called eternal damnation. However, he had hardly left the earth when repentance dawned on his soul; he repudiated his past and sincerely desired to make reparations. It was not excessive suffering that drove him to make such a resolution, since he had not yet had time to suffer; it was thus the sole cry of his conscience, which he had disregarded while alive, but which he now hears. Why wouldn’t his repentance be taken into account? Why would something that could have saved him from hell a few days before death not be of any value now? Why would God, who would have been merciful before his death, be without pity a few hours afterward?

We might be amazed at how quickly a change of ideas sometimes occurs in the minds of hardened criminals at the last minute, and whose passage to the other side is enough to make them realize the iniquity of their conduct. This outcome is far from being the general rule; otherwise, there would be no evil spirits. Since repentance is often quite slow in coming, punishment is prolonged as a consequence.

Obstinacy in evil during life is sometimes the result of a pride that refuses to yield and acknowledge mistakes, because humans

are under the influence of matter, which casts a veil over their spiritual perception and deludes them. When this veil is lifted, the light suddenly dawns and they find they have sobered up. The immediate return of better sentiments is always an indication of some moral progress which only waits for a favorable opportunity in order to reveal itself. On the other hand, those who persist in evil for a more or less prolonged period of time after death are undeniably less evolved spirits in whom the materialistic instincts have suffocated the seed of the good and for whom the trial of new existences will be necessary in order for them to amend themselves.

Lemaire

(Condemned to death by the Assize Court at Aisne⁷⁴ and executed on December 31, 1857. Evoked on January 29, 1858)

1. *Evocation*

“I’m here.”

2. *What are your feelings at seeing us?*

“Shame.”

3. *Did you remain conscious up to the last moment?*

“Yes.”

4. *Immediately after your execution, were you aware of your new existence?*

“I was plunged into great confusion, and I haven’t yet come out of it. I felt a searing pain and it seemed like it was my heart that suffered it. I saw something I couldn’t recognize roll at the foot of the scaffold. Then I saw blood flowing and my pain became even more acute.”

- *Was it a purely physical pain similar to that caused by a serious wound; by the amputation of a limb, for example?*

⁷⁴ The Assize Court (Cour d’Assises) in France is composed of a popular jury and charged with judging people accused of felonies. – Tr.

“No. It was more like remorse; a great mental pain.”

- *When did you start feeling it?*

“As soon as I was free.”

5. *Was the physical pain caused by the execution felt in your body or in your spirit?*

“The mental pain was in my spirit; my body felt the physical pain, *but my spirit, separated from the body, also felt the physical pain.*”

6. *Did you see your mutilated body?*

“I saw something formless, which seemed I was still part of; however, I felt myself intact outside of it; I was myself.”

- *What impressions did this sight make on you?*

“I felt my pain a lot; *I was completely lost in it.*”

7. *Is it true that the body still continues to live for a few moments after being beheaded and that the execution victim remains conscious of his thoughts?*

“The spirit withdraws little by little; the more the material ties interlace it, the less prompt its separation.”

8. *Some have said that they have seen an expression of anger and physical movements on certain execution victims' faces as if they wanted to speak. Is that an effect of nervous contractions or an actual act of the will?*

“Of the will, since the spirit hasn't left yet.”

9. *What did you feel first upon entering your new existence?*

“Unbearable suffering; a sort of acute remorse whose cause I didn't know.”

10. *Did you find yourself in the company of your accomplices, who were executed at the same time?*

“To our disgrace, yes. Seeing one another is a constant torment; each blames the others for his crime.”

11. *Have you encountered your victims?*

“I see them ... they are happy. Their gaze persecutes me ... I feel it piercing deep inside of me ... I try to flee it in vain.”

- *What feelings do you experience when you see them?*

“Shame and remorse. *I myself caused it* but I still hate them for it.

- *What feeling do they experience at your sight?*

“Pity.”

12. *Do they display hatred and the desire for vengeance?*

“No. Their wishes are for my expiation. *You can't imagine the horrible torture in owing everything to those we hate.*”

13. *Do you regret your corporeal life?*

“I regret only my crimes. If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't succumb.”

14. *Was the penchant toward evil in your very nature or were you influenced more by the environment in which you lived?*

“The tendency toward evil was in my very nature because I was an inferior spirit. I wanted to ascend too quickly and asked for more than I was capable of. I thought I was strong and so I chose a tough trial; but I gave in to the temptations of evil.”

15. *If you had received a solid education, would you have bypassed a life of crime?*

“Yes, but I had chosen beforehand the conditions into which I was born.”

Could you have become a moral man?

“A weak man, incapable of doing either good or evil. During my life, I could have corrected the evil of my nature, but I could not have raised myself up to do the good.”

16. *Did you believe in God while alive?*

“No.”

Nevertheless, it is said that at the last moment you repented. Is that true?

“I believed in a vengeful God ... I was afraid of his justice ...”

And now is your repentance more sincere?

“Alas! I can see what I have done.”

What do you think about God now?

“I sense him, but I don’t comprehend him.”

17. *Do you think the punishment inflicted upon you on earth was just?*

“Yes.”

18. *Do you expect to be forgiven for your crimes?*

“I don’t know.”

How do you intend to redeem them?

“Through new trials, but it seems like there is an eternity between them and me.”

19. *Where are you now?*

“I’m in my suffering.

We mean, in what place?

“Right next to the medium.”

20. *Since you are here, in what form would you appear to us if we could see you?*

“In my bodily form: my head separated from my body.”

Could you appear to us?

“No. Leave me be.”

21. *Would you tell us how you escaped from the prison at Montdidier?*

“I don’t know any more ... my suffering is so great that I have nothing but the memory of my crime ... Leave me be.”

22. *Can we bring any relief to your suffering?*

“Pray for my expiation to come.”

Benoist

(Bordeaux, March 1862)

A spirit presented itself spontaneously to the medium under the name of Benoist, saying he had died in 1704 and was undergoing terrible suffering.

1. *What were you when alive?*

“A faithless monk.”

2. *Was disbelief your only imperfection?*

“It was enough to lead to others.”

3. *Could you give us some of the details of your life? A sincere confession would be counted in your favor.*

“I was poor and lazy. I entered the order not because I had a call, but in order to have a position. Being intelligent, I found myself one. Being influential, I abused my power. Being corrupt, I corrupted those whom I had the mission of saving. Being cruel, I persecuted those who seemed to disapprove of my excesses. Those *at peace* were disturbed by me; hunger tortured many of my victims, and their screams were often silenced through violence. Since then, I have been making expiation and have been suffering all the tortures of hell; my victims stir up the fires that devour me. Lechery and insatiable hunger pursue me and thirst burns my parched lips, without a refreshing drop of water ever falling on them. All the elements hound me. Pray for me.”

4. *Are prayers offered for the dead imputed to you as they are to other spirits?*

“You might believe they would be beneficial, but *for me they have the same worth as the prayers I myself pretended to offer*. I didn’t finish my job, so I can’t receive my wages.”

5. *Haven’t you ever repented?*

“A long time ago, *but it was only the result of my suffering*. But since I was deaf to the cries of my innocent victims, the Lord is now deaf to mine. Justice!”

6. *You have recognized the Lord’s justice. Trust in his goodness and plead for his help.*

“The demons howl louder than I do. Cries choke in my throat. They fill my mouth with boiling pitch! ... I did it. Oh, great ... (The spirit cannot write the word *God*).

7. *Aren't you sufficiently free of earthly ideas to realize that the tortures you are experiencing all have a moral cause?*

"I endure them; I feel them; I can see my tormentors; they all have familiar faces; they all have names that reverberate in my mind."

8. *What could have driven you to commit such infamies?*

"The vices with which I was imbued; the brutality of the passions."

9. *Haven't you ever begged for the assistance of good spirits to help you out of your situation?*

"I can see only the demons of hell."

10. *Weren't you afraid of such demons while you were alive?*

"No, not at all; nothingness was my faith; pleasures at any cost were my worship. The divinities of hell have not abandoned me; I have consecrated my life to them; they will never leave me!

11. *Can't you see an end to your suffering?*

"The infinite has no end."

12. *But God is infinite in his mercy and anything can come to an end if he wills it.*

"If he wills it!"

13. *Why have you come here to communicate in writing?*

"I don't know how, but I wanted to talk; I wanted to scream to relieve myself."

14. *Haven't your demons tried to prevent you from writing?*

"No, but they are right in front of me, waiting for me; that is why I don't want to stop."

15. *Is this the first time you have written like this?*

"Yes."

Did you know that spirits could approach people like this?

"No."

Then how did you find out about it?

"I don't know."

16. *What did you experience when you approached me?*

“A deadening of my terrors.”

17. *How did you notice you were here?*

“It was like when one wakes up.”

18. *What did you do to communicate with me?*

“I don’t understand it. But can’t you sense it yourself?”

19. *We’re not talking about me, but about you; try to realize what you are doing while I’m writing.*

“You are my thought; that’s all I know.”

20. *So you didn’t have the will to make me write?*

“No, I am the one who is writing, but you are thinking through me.”

21. *Try to understand your situation; the good spirits surrounding us will help you with it.*

“No. The angels don’t come to hell. You aren’t alone?”

Look around.

“I feel I’m being helped to think through you ... your hand is obeying me ... I’m not touching you, yet I’m holding onto you ... I don’t get it.”

22. *Ask for the assistance of your protectors. Let’s pray together.*

“Do you mean to desert me? Stay with me; they are going to seize me again. I beg of you ... Stay! Stay!”

23. *I can’t stay any longer. Come back every day; we will pray together and the good spirits will help you.*

“Yes, I want mercy. Ask it for me; I can’t do it myself.”

(The medium’s Guide) “Be of good cheer, my child; he will be granted what you have asked for, although his expiation is still far from over. The atrocities he committed are unspeakable and innumerable; he is all the guiltier because he had intelligence, education and knowledge to guide him; thus, he failed with full knowledge of the facts. His suffering is dreadful, but with the help and example of prayer, it will be softened; he will see that the end

is possible and hope will uphold him. God saw that he was on the path of repentance and granted him the mercy of *being able to communicate in order to be encouraged and comforted*. Think of him often. We will leave him with you to strengthen the good resolutions that he will conceive with the help of your counsels. Repentance will awaken in him the desire for reparation, and he himself will then ask for a new existence on earth to practice the good instead of evil. When God is satisfied with him and sees him steady in his resolve, he will enable him to behold the Divine Light that will lead him to salvation, receiving him into his bosom like the prodigal son. Have faith; we will help you accomplish your task.”

Paulin

Although he had not actually been reached by human justice, we have placed this spirit among the criminals, in that crimes consist of actions per se and not punishment administered by humans. The same applies in the following case.

The Castelnaudary Spirit

In a small house close to Castelnaudary, strange noises and various manifestations occurred, leading people to believe it was inhabited by ghosts. Consequently, an exorcism was performed in 1848, but without results. The owner, Mr. D., had moved into it and died there suddenly a few years later. His son went in to occupy it right afterward, and upon entering one of the rooms received a hard slap from an unknown hand. Since he was completely alone at the time, he had no doubt that it had come from an invisible source, and so he decided to abandon the house once and for all. Moreover, there was a local belief that a great crime had been committed there.

The spirit who had given the slap was evoked at the Parisian Society in 1859 and manifested itself in a violent manner despite all efforts to calm it down. Asked about the matter, St. Louis responded, “This is the worst kind of spirit; a real monster. We made him come here but we have not been able to make him write in spite of all we have said to him. He has his free will, which he has used very badly.”

Is this spirit susceptible to improvement?

“And why not? *Aren't they all*, this one as well as all others? Although some difficulties are to be expected – wretched as he is – exchanging good for evil will end up touching his heart. First, pray for him and then evoke him within a month; you will see that a big transformation will have taken place in him.”

Later, when evoked him again, the spirit showed himself to be gentler and, little by little became more submissive and repentant. Subsequent explanations by the spirit himself and other spirits revealed that he had begun living in the house in 1608. There he murdered his brother out of a suspicion of jealous rivalry, stabbing him in the throat while he slept, and then some years later he murdered the one he had made his wife after his brother's death. He had died in 1659 at the age of 80 without having answered for his crimes, which had aroused little attention during that tumultuous time. Ever since his death, he had never ceased practicing evil and had caused several accidents in the house. A seeing medium who attended the first evocation saw him as he was being compelled to write; he shook the medium's arm violently. He had a dreadful appearance, wearing a blood-soaked shirt and holding a dagger.

1. (To St. Louis) *Please be so kind as to describe this spirit's type of torment.*

“It is atrocious for him; he has been condemned to live in the house where he committed his crimes. They are continually

before him and he cannot think about anything else; thus, he believes he is condemned to such torture forever. He constantly sees himself at the times when he committed the crimes; all other memories have been taken from him and all communication with other spirits proscribed. While on earth he cannot be anywhere but in that house, and if he goes into space, he is enveloped in solitude and darkness.”

2. *Is there any way to dislodge him from the house? If so, what would it be?*

“When people want to break free of obsessive spirits like this one, it is easy to do so by praying for them, which is precisely what people so often fail to do. They prefer to try and scare them away with exorcisms, which for such spirits is a source of great entertainment.”

3. *By suggesting to the interested parties the idea to pray for him, and if we ourselves also pray, will this dislodge him?*

“Yes, but notice that I said to pray *and not to request prayers.*”

4. *He has been in this situation for two centuries. Has he perceived the passage of time in the same way as if he were alive; that is, does time seem longer or shorter to him now than when he was alive?*

“It seems longer to him: *sleep does not exist for him.*”

5. *We have been told that time does not exist for spirits and that to them a century seems like an instant in eternity. Doesn't this apply to all spirits?*

“No. Indeed, it is the case only with spirits who have reached a very high degree of advancement. For less evolved ones, time is frequently very long, especially when they are suffering.”

6. *Where did this spirit come from before his incarnation?*

“He lived among the fiercest and most savage tribes; before that, he lived on a planet less advanced than the earth.”

7. *This spirit is being severely punished for the crimes he committed. If he had lived among cruel tribes, he must have*

committed acts that were no less atrocious than the last ones. Wasn't he also punished for them?

“He was punished but not as severely because he was more ignorant and did not understand the full range of his crimes at the time.”

8. *Is the situation in which this spirit now finds himself that of those commonly called “the damned”?*

“Absolutely not, for there are spirits who are in an even more dreadful situation. Suffering is far from being the same for everybody, even for similar crimes. It varies according to how *accessible* the guilty spirit is to repentance. For this particular spirit, the house where he committed his crimes is his hell; others contain their own hell within themselves – unappeasable passions torment them.”

9. *Notwithstanding his low advancement, this spirit is sensitive to the effects of prayer. We have seen this to be equally true in other perverse spirits of a more brutal nature. How is it possible that more enlightened spirits, whose intelligence is more developed, show a complete lack of good sentiments: those who scoff at everything most sacred; in other words, those whom nothing affects and who never give cynicism a rest?*

“Prayer is only profitable for the spirit who repents. For those who out of pride revolt against God and persist in error by exacerbating it – as unhappy spirits do – prayer can do nothing, nor will it do anything until one day a spark of repentance begins to manifest in them. The ineffectiveness of prayer is yet another punishment for them! Prayer relieves only those who are not completely hardened.”

10 *If one perceives that a spirit is inaccessible to the benefits of prayer, is that a reason not to pray for it?*

“Certainly not, for sooner or later prayer could triumph over its hardheartedness and enable good thoughts to germinate in it.”

It is the same with certain illnesses: the effects of medications take time and cannot be determined immediately; with others,

however, the effect is immediate. If one is convinced of the truth that all spirits are perfectible and that none are fatalistically and eternally destined to evil, one understands that sooner or later prayer will have an effect on them. What seems ineffective at first glance nonetheless plants beneficial seeds within them that predispose them to the good even if it does not touch them immediately. Consequently, it would be a serious mistake for one to become discouraged if success is not immediate.

11. *If this spirit were to reincarnate, in which category of individuals would he be found?*

“That would depend on him and his repentance.”

Several conversations with this spirit resulted in a remarkable moral transformation. Here are a few of his responses:

12. (To the spirit) *Why couldn't you write the first time we evoked you?*

“I didn't want to.”

Why didn't you want to?

“Ignorance and brutishness.”

13. *So, can you now leave the house at Castelnaudary whenever you wish?*

“I am allowed to because I have profited from your good counsels.”

Have you experienced any relief?

“I have begun to have hope.”

14. *If we could see you, what would you look like now?*

“You would see me in a shirt but without the dagger.”

Why wouldn't you have your dagger any longer? What did you do with it?

“I cursed it, and *God has spared me having to look at it.*”

15. *If Mr. D.'s son (the one who received the slap) were to return to the house, would you hurt him again?*

“No, because I have repented.”

And if he still intended to defy you?

“Oh! Don’t ask me that! I wouldn’t be able to control myself; it would be above my strength ... for I’m just a poor wretch.”

16. *Can you foresee the end to your suffering?*

“Oh! Not yet. Thanks to your intercession, it is already enough – even though I don’t deserve it – to know this suffering will not last forever.”

17. *Please describe your situation before we evoked you the first time. Do understand that our request is a way to make ourselves useful to you; it’s not simply idle curiosity.*

“I told you already that I was unaware of anything besides my crimes, and that I couldn’t leave the house where I had committed them except to go up into space, where everything around me was solitude and darkness. I wouldn’t be able to give you an idea about it, because I myself could never understand it. Whenever I would go up into space, everything was dark and empty; I didn’t know what it was. I am presently experiencing a great deal of remorse and am no longer forced to remain in that house of death. I am allowed to wander around on the earth and to seek to enlighten myself with my observations. I better understand the enormity of my crimes, and if I’m suffering less on the one hand, my torment is growing on the other due to my remorse. But at least I have hope.”

18. *If you had to begin another physical existence, which one would you choose?*

“I haven’t seen enough or reflected much to know.”

19. *During your long isolation – and one might even say captivity – did you feel any remorse?*

“Not the least, and that’s why I suffered for so long. It was only when I began to feel remorse that, unbeknownst to me, the circumstances appeared that led to your evocation – an incident to which I owe the beginning of my deliverance. So thank you for taking pity on me and for enlightening me.”

We have seen misers suffer at the sight of gold, which had become no more than a true chimera for them; prideful spirits tormented by jealousy at honors they saw being bestowed on someone else and not on them; men who had been rulers, humbled by an invisible power that forced them to obey and by the sight of their subordinates, who no longer knelt before them; atheists who were experiencing the anguish of uncertainty, finding themselves in absolute isolation amidst the immensity and not meeting one being who could enlighten them. In the world of spirits, if there are rewards for every virtue, there are also punishments for every wrong, and the wrongs that escaped human laws are always reached by the laws of God.

We should also point out that equal wrongs, though committed in identical circumstances, may be punished quite differently, depending on the spirit's level of intellectual development. The lowest order spirits of a brutal nature – like the one we have just now concerned ourselves with – are inflicted with punishments that are to some extent more physical than mental, while the opposite applies to those whose intelligence and sensitivity are more developed. For the former, a punishment is required that is suited to the coarseness of their exterior so that they may grasp the disadvantages of their situation and be inspired to get out of it. Consequently, shame alone, for example, would make little or no impression on the former but would be intolerable to the latter.

In the divine penal code, the wisdom, goodness and foresight of God toward God's creatures are revealed even in the smallest things; everything is proportioned and combined with admirable solicitude in order to facilitate the means of rehabilitation. Their soul's smallest good aspirations are taken into consideration. According to the dogma of eternal punishment, on the contrary, great and small criminals are all mixed together in hell: one-time

criminals as well as one-hundred time offenders, the hardened ones as well as the repentant. Everything is calculated to keep them at the bottom of the pit. No life preserver is offered to them. One single wrong can make them wind up there, without taking into account the good they have done. So, on which side is true justice and true goodness found?

The above evocation has nothing fortuitous about it because it was intended for the benefit of that unfortunate spirit. Seeing that he had started to comprehend the enormity of his crimes, the spirits who were looking after him deemed that the moment had come to offer him effective help, and so brought about the propitious circumstance. This is something we have seen happen over and over.

We asked what would have happened to this spirit if he could not have been evoked, and what happens to all the other suffering spirits who cannot be evoked, or what happens to those we do not even know about. We received the answer that God has innumerable means for saving such creatures – evocation is one means of helping them but it certainly is not the only one – and that God forsakes no one. Thus, collective prayers should exert their share of influence over all spirits who are susceptible to repentance.

God cannot make the fate of suffering spirits depend on the goodwill and understanding of humans. Ever since human beings were able to establish regular connections with the invisible world, one of the primary aims of Spiritism has been to teach adherents the service they can render to their discarnate brothers and sisters through such connections. In this way, God willed to show them the solidarity that exists among all beings in the universe, and to provide a law of nature as the basis for the principle of fraternity. By opening up this new field for the exercise of charity, God has shown them the truly useful and serious side of evocations after ignorance and superstition

had kept them from their providential purpose until now. There has never been a lack of help for suffering spirits in any age, and if evocations have opened up for them a new way of salvation, they have perhaps profited incarnates even more. They provide them with new opportunities for doing good, while at the same time they enlighten them about the conditions of the future life.

Jacques Latour

(Murderer condemned by the Assize Court of Foix and executed in September of 1864)

A female medium was asked to write during a private Spiritist meeting of seven or eight persons in Brussels on September 13, 1864. We were present at the meeting also. Although no specific evocation had been made, the medium began to trace out the following words in very large characters and with great agitation after ripping the paper violently:

“I repent! I repent! Latour.”

We were all surprised by this unexpected communication because no one had elicited it. In fact, no one had even thought about this unfortunate spirit, nor had most of those present known about his death. Nevertheless, we spoke compassionate and encouraging words to him and then asked the following question:

Since we did not evoke you, what motive led you to manifest here instead of somewhere else?

The writing medium was also a speaking medium and responded vocally:

“I saw that you were compassionate souls and that you would take pity on me, whereas others either evoke me more out of mere curiosity than charity, or else they avoid me out of horror.”

Then an indescribable scene followed, which lasted about half an hour. In addition to her speech, the medium's gestures and

facial expressions made it clear that the spirit was attuning himself with her: at times, his desperate voice was very heartrending; he painted his anguish and suffering with such a very disturbing tone and his supplications were so vehement that all present were profoundly touched.

Some of those present were actually frightened by the medium's overexcitement, but we were of the opinion that a spirit who repents and begs for pity does not pose any danger. Since he was borrowing the medium's organs, it would be better to determine his situation and show an interest in his fate (unlike the case with obsessing and possessing spirits, who seek to seize mediums in order to dominate them). Obviously, this particular manifestation had been allowed for the spirit's own benefit and perhaps for the edification of the meeting's participants.

The spirit cried out:

"Oh! Yes, take pity! I really need it, for you don't know what I'm suffering! ... No, you don't know; you cannot understand it ... It's horrible! ... The guillotine! ... What was the guillotine when compared with what I'm experiencing now? Nothing! It was just a moment. But this fire that is devouring me is worse; it is a continual death; it is a suffering without rest or repose ... without end!

"And my victims are all there around me, showing me their wounds ... persecuting me with their stares! ... They're there in front of me ... I can see all of them ... Yes, all ... I can see them all; I can't avoid them! And this sea of blood! ... And this gold stained with blood! ... Everything is there ... always right in front of me! Can you sense the smell of blood? ... Blood, always blood! ... There they are, my poor victims; they're begging me ... and without mercy, I strike them ... I strike again ... I strike without stopping ... The blood is intoxicating! ...

"I believed that after my death everything would be over, and that's why I braved it; I braved God himself, denying him

altogether! ... And when I thought I would cease to exist forever, a terrible awakening occurred ... Oh yes, terrible! ... I'm surrounded by corpses with menacing faces ... my feet waded in blood ... I thought I was dead but I'm alive! ... It's dreadful! ... It's horrible! More horrible than all the tortures of earth!

“Ah! If all men could know what is waiting for them after death! They would know what it will cost them to do evil! There would be no more murderers, no criminals, no malefactors! I would wish that all murderers could see what I'm seeing, what I'm having to go through ... Oh! No, there would no more ... it's awful to suffer what I'm going through!

“I know full well that I deserve it, my God, for I showed no mercy to my victims. I knocked their imploring hands aside when they begged me to spare them ... Yes, I was surely cruel; I killed them like a coward to get their gold! ... I was impious; I denied you; I blasphemed your holy name ... *I wanted to deceive myself and that's why I wanted to convince myself that you didn't exist* ... Oh, my God! I'm a huge criminal! Now I understand. But won't you take pity on me? ... You are God, so you are goodness and mercy! You are almighty!

“Have mercy, Lord! Oh! Mercy! Mercy! I beg of you, do not be unbending! Free me from this hateful sight, these horrible images ... this blood ... of my victims; *their stares pierce me to the heart like daggers.*

“You who are here listening to me, you good souls, charitable souls ... Yes, I see you and you'll take pity on me, won't you? You'll pray for me ... Oh! I beg of you! Don't reject me. Ask God to take this horrible spectacle from my eyes; he will listen to you because you are good ... I beg of you; don't cast me aside as I did others ... Pray for me.”

The participants were deeply touched by his remorse and spoke words of comfort and consolation. God (he was told) is not unbending; what he requires from the guilty is sincere repentance and the desire to repair the evil they have done. Since your heart

is not hardened and you have asked for forgiveness for your crimes, God's mercy will be shed upon you if you persevere in your good intentions to repair the evil you did. Of course, you cannot restore to your victims the lives you took from them, but if you ask fervently, God will allow you to meet them during a new incarnation in which you will be able to show them as much devotion as you once showed them cruelty. And when God deems your reparation to be sufficient, you will re-enter into his grace. So, the length of your punishment is in your own hands and it depends on you yourself to shorten it. We promise to help you with our prayers and to call upon the assistance of good spirits for you. We will now recite on your behalf a prayer from *The Gospel according to Spiritism* for suffering and repentant spirits. We will not recite the one that refers to evil spirits, because, since you have repented, besought God and renounced evil, you seem to be no more than an unfortunate spirit, not an evil one."

After we said the prayer and after a few moments of quiet, the spirit continued:

"Thank you, my God! ... Oh! Thank you! You have shown me mercy ... Those horrible images are moving away ... Don't forsake me ... Send me your good spirits to support me ... Thank you."

After this scene the medium felt exhausted and weary for some time. Her limbs were aching. At first, her memory of what had happened was confused, but little by little she began to recall a few of the words she had said in spite of herself – she felt it had not been she herself who had spoken.

The following day during another meeting, the spirit manifested again, and for a few minutes he repeated the scene of the day before, with the same expressive but much less violent pantomime. Then, with feverish movements he wrote the following words through the same medium:

“Thank you for your prayers. I’m already feeling considerable improvement. I have so fervently prayed to God that he has momentarily granted that my suffering be relieved; yet, I will see them again, my victims ... There they are! There they are! ... Do you see the blood? ... (We repeated the prayer from the previous day. The spirit continued addressing us through the medium).

“Forgive me for having seized you. Thank you for the relief you have provided for my suffering. Forgive all the harm I have caused you, but I had to express myself and you were the only one ...

“Thank you! Thank you! I am already feeling some relief, but I am not at the end of my trials. My victims will return soon. That is my punishment; I deserve it, my God, but be indulgent.

“All of you, please pray for me; take pity on me.”

Latour

One member of the Parisian Spiritist Society prayed for this unhappy spirit and evoked him on different occasions, receiving the following communications:

I

“I was evoked almost immediately after my death, but I couldn’t communicate right away; so a lot of frivolous spirits assumed my name and took my place. I took advantage of the president of Parisian Society when he was in Brussels, and with the permission of superior spirits, I was able to communicate.

“I will come to the Society and make disclosures that will act as a beginning for repairing my wrongs. They might also serve as a lesson for all the criminals who will read and reflect about the account of my suffering.

“The church’s description about punishment in hell produces little effect in the spirits of the guilty. Such images may be

frightening to children and weak men, but criminals don't believe in them. A great criminal is not a cowardly spirit and his fear of the cops is more real for him than a description of the torments of hell. That is why all those who read my account will be struck by my words and suffering. It's not just some made-up fiction. There is not one single priest who can say, 'I've seen what I'm telling you; I myself have witnessed the tortures of the damned.' But when I say, 'this is what happened after the death of my body; see how disappointed I was when I realized I wasn't dead like I expected, that what I had taken to be the end of my suffering was only the beginning of my indescribable tortures!' more than one will stop on the brink of the precipice into which he is about to fall, and every wretch I drive off the criminal path will serve to redeem one of my wrongs. That is how good can result from evil and how God's mercy manifests everywhere, on the earth as in space.

"In order to communicate with you, I've been delivered from the sight of my victims, who had become my executioners. But after leaving you, I will have to see them again, and that idea alone causes me suffering I can't describe. I'm pleased when you evoke me because then I can leave my hell for a few instants. Keep praying for me always; pray to the Lord that he may deliver me from the sight of my victims.

"Yes. Let's pray together. Prayer does so much good! ... I feel more relieved. I don't feel as much of the weight of the burden that encumbers me. I see a spark of hope lighting my eyes. I have fully repented and proclaim: Blessed is the hand of the Lord and may his will be done!"

II

(The medium) *Instead of asking God to deliver you from the sight of your victims, I invite you to pray with me so that you can ask him for the strength to bear up under that expiatory torture.*

(Latour) “I would prefer to be freed from my victims’ sight. If you only knew what I’m suffering! The most insensitive man would be moved if he could see the sufferings of my soul imprinted like fire on my face. But I will do as you advise. I understand it to be a way to expiate my wrongs a little faster. It’s like a painful operation that will restore my gravely diseased body’s health.

“Ah! If the guilty of the earth could see me, how frightened they would be of the consequences of their crimes; they may be hidden from the eyes of men but they are seen by spirits! How fatal ignorance is for so many!

“What a great responsibility is assumed by those who refuse education to the poor classes of society! They think they can prevent crime with a police force. How wrong they are!”

III

“My suffering is terrible, but after your prayers I felt assisted by good spirits, who told me to have hope. I understand the power of the noble remedy you have prescribed. This harsh expiation is equal to the evil I committed, and I ask God to grant me strength to bear up under it. I don’t mean to excuse my atrocities, but except for the few instants of terror that preceded each one of my victims’ death, at least their pain ceased once the crime was committed, and those who had finished their earthly trial received the recompense awaiting them. But since my own return to the world of spirits, I have not stopped suffering the pains of hell, save for the very short instants in which I have manifested myself.

“Despite their frightening images of punishment for reprobates, priests only have a very faint idea of the true suffering that divine justice inflicts on children who have broken the law of love and charity. How can anyone make reasonable people believe that an immaterial soul can suffer in contact with material fire? It’s

absurd and that is why so many criminals laugh at the fantastic portrayals of hell. But the same doesn't apply to the mental pain endured by the condemned after physical death.

“Pray for me, that desperation may not take possession of me.”

IV

“I am deeply grateful to you for the glorious destination you have enabled me to foresee – I'll get there when I'm purified. I'm still suffering a lot, yet it seems like it's getting less. I can't believe that in the world of spirits pain gets less and less as we grow used to it. No. I understand that your benefic prayers have increased my strength and *even though my pain is the same, my strength is greater and so I suffer less.*

“I remember my last lifetime, the wrongs I could have avoided if I had known how to pray. I now understand the power of prayer; I understand the strength of those honest and pious women, weak in the flesh but strong in faith. I understand the mystery that the supposed learned people on earth do not comprehend: Prayer! That word alone arouses laughter in strong spirits. I am waiting for them, and when the veil concealing the truth is torn from them, then in their turn they will come to prostrate themselves at the feet of the Eternal One whom they despised, and they will be happy to humble themselves so they can redeem their sins and crimes! Then they will understand the virtue of prayer.

“To pray is to love; to love is to pray! Then they will love the Lord and will direct their prayers of love and gratitude to him. Regenerated through suffering – because they will suffer indeed – they will pray like me to have the strength to redeem themselves. And once they have stopped suffering, they will pray to thank the Lord for the forgiveness they will have merited through their submission and resignation. Let us pray, my brother, so that I may become stronger ...

“Oh! Thank you for your charity, my brother, because I have been forgiven. God has delivered me from the sight of my victims. O My God! Blessed are you for all eternity for the grace you have granted me! O My God! I feel the enormity of my crimes and I bow down before your omnipotence. Lord! I love you with all my heart and beg that it be your will to grant me the grace to undergo new trials on earth, to return to it as a missionary of peace and charity, to teach children to pronounce your name with respect. I ask you to enable me to teach them to love you, who are the Father of all creatures. Oh! Thank you, my God! I am a repentant spirit and my repentance is sincere. I love you as much as my impure heart can comprehend such sentiment – love is the pure emanation of your divinity. Brother, let us pray because my heart is overflowing with gratitude. I’m free, I’ve broken my chains and I’m no longer a reprobate. I’m a suffering yet repentant spirit, and would like for my example to stay all the criminal hands I see on the threshold, ready to be raised in crime. Oh! Stop, my brothers, stop! The torment you are preparing for yourselves will be atrocious. Do not believe that the Lord will be quickly moved to pity by the prayers of his children. Centuries of torment are waiting for you.”

The medium’s Guide: You say that you do not understand this spirit’s words. Try to take into account his emotions and his gratitude toward the Lord. He believes he could not express or testify to them better than by trying to stop all those criminals, whom he can see but whom you cannot. He would like his words to reach them, but what he did not tell you – because himself he is unaware of it – is that he will be allowed to begin a reparatory mission. He will join his accomplices once more and will seek to inspire them to repentance and will introduce the seed of remorse into their hearts. On earth, one sometimes sees individuals thought to be honest throw themselves at the feet of a priest in order to

confess a crime. Remorse has told them to confess their wrong. If the veil that hides the invisible world from you were lifted, you would often see a spirit who has been the accomplice or instigator of a crime come to seek to amend his wrong – as Jacques Latour will – by inspiring remorse in incarnate spirits.

Your Protector Guide

The same medium who had received Latour's first manifestation in Brussels later obtained the following communication:

“You don't have to fear me any more; I'm much calmer, although I'm still suffering. God has had compassion on me because he has seen my repentance. *I am now suffering from my repentance; it has shown me the enormity of my crimes.*

“If I had received better guidance while alive, I would not have done all the evil I did. But my instincts were not repressed, so I obeyed them without restraint. If all men would think more about God, or if they would at least believe in him, they would not commit similar crimes.

“Human justice, however, is badly administered; for one wrong – sometimes a minor one – a man is condemned to prison, which is always a place for perdition and perversion. He leaves it completely lost because of bad advice and examples. Even if his character is good and strong enough to resist these bad examples, on leaving prison he finds that all doors are shut to him, all helping hands are withheld; all honest hearts reject him. What is left? Contempt and poverty, abandonment and desperation if he has made the good resolution to return to the good. But poverty drives him in everything, and now he also despises his fellow creatures. He hates them and loses his sense of good and evil altogether because he finds himself rejected – he, who has made the decision to become an honest man. In order to get what he needs, he steals, sometimes kills ... then the guillotine!

“My God, the moment my hallucinations are about to imprison me again, I feel your hand extending over me; I sense your goodness surrounding and protecting me. Thank you, my God! In my next life, I shall employ my intelligence and the goodness in me to help poor wretches who have succumbed and to keep them from the fall.

“I thank you [the medium] for not having loathed communicating with me; have no fear; you can see that I’m not evil. Whenever you remember me, don’t picture me as I once was, but as a poor afflicted soul who is thankful for your acceptance.

“Goodbye; evoke me again and pray to God for me.”

Latour

(Study on the Spirit of Jacques Latour)

It is impossible to ignore the profoundness and great significance of some of the words contained in the above communication. Furthermore, it offers one of the aspects of the world of punished spirits, above which one can nevertheless perceive the divine mercy. The mythological allegory of the Eumenides⁷⁵ is not as ridiculous as one might think, and the belief in demons, who, with their horns and forks, have replaced them in the modern belief system as the official torturers of the invisible world, is less rational than these victims who serve as their own instruments of punishment.

In accepting the identity of this spirit, one might be astonished at such a prompt change in his moral state. As we pointed out on another occasion, there is often more willingness in a brutally evil spirit than in one who is dominated by pride or one who hides its vices under the coat of hypocrisy. This prompt change to better sentiments indicates a nature more primitive than

⁷⁵ The furies of Greek myth (*Webster’s*) – Tr.

wicked, and which is only lacking in good guidance. In comparing this spirit's language with that of the spirit mentioned below under the heading *Punished by the Light*, it is easy to conclude which of the two is more evolved morally, in spite of the difference in their education and social standing. One obeyed a natural instinct of ferocity – a sort of over-excitement – whereas the other approached the perpetration of his crimes with the calmness and cold-bloodedness of a slow and persevering premeditation; even after his death he was full of pride as he faced his punishment. The latter suffers but does not accept his punishment, while the former immediately submits to it. Thus, we can foresee which one of the two will suffer for a longer time.

“I am now suffering,” says the spirit of Latour, “from my repentance; it has shown me the enormity of my crimes.” This displays a profound thought: a spirit does not really comprehend the gravity of its misdeeds until it has repented. Repentance leads to regret, to remorse – a painful sentiment that is the transition from evil to good, from moral malady to moral health. It is to avoid this painful transition that wicked spirits stand firm against the voice of their conscience, like ailing patients who refuse the medicine that will heal them. They seek to delude themselves by persisting in evil. Latour reached the point where his hardened heart began to crumble. Remorse entered it; repentance followed; he understood the extent of the evil he had committed; he saw his vileness and suffered for it. That is why he says: “I am now suffering from my repentance.” During his next-to-last incarnation, he should have been worse than during his last one, since if he had repented back then as he has now, his life would have been better. The resolutions he has made in the present will influence his future earthly life; as criminal as his last incarnation was, it nevertheless marked a stage of progress for him. It is highly probable that, during his errant state before

his last incarnation, he was one of those rebellious spirits who persisted in evil, as one often sees.

Many people have asked what advantage we may derive from previous existences, since we neither remember them nor have any idea about who or what we were.

This question is completely resolved due to the fact that if the evil we committed is effaced and no trace of it remains in our heart, then remembering a past existence would be useless because we do not need to concern ourselves with it any longer. As for the evils from which we have not entirely freed ourselves, we can know about them through our current tendencies, and it is to them that we must turn our entire attention. It is sufficient to know who we are, without it being necessary to know who we were.

When one considers how difficult it is during life for the most repentant guilty spirits to rehabilitate themselves, the reprobation of which they are the object, we ought to praise God for having thrown a veil over the past. If Latour had been condemned to serving time, or even if he had been acquitted, what he had done or had been accused of would have made him an outcast from society. Despite his repentance, who would have wanted to make him part of their inner circle? The sentiments he now displays as a spirit give us hope that in his next life he will be an honest, esteemed and respected individual. However, suppose people were to discover that this individual had been Latour: he would remain an outcast. The veil thrown over his past opens the door to his rehabilitation; he will be able to sit without shame or fear among the most honest people. After all, how many persons would at any cost want to be able to erase from people's memory certain years of their life!

What doctrine better harmonizes with the goodness and justice of God than this one! Moreover, this doctrine is not a theory but the result of observation. Spiritists did not dream it up. No, they witnessed and observed the various situations in which

the spirits presented themselves, they sought the explanations that were given to them, and from these explanations the doctrine arose. Therefore, if Spiritists have accepted the doctrine, it is because it is the result of actual observation and has seemed to them more rational than all the other theories presented up until now on the future of the soul.

One cannot deny that these communications convey a lofty moral teaching. The spirit could have been, or probably was, assisted in his reflections – especially in his choice of expressions – by more highly advanced spirits; however, in similar cases, such spirits only influence the style and not the essence, and they never put a less advanced spirit in contradiction with itself. Thus, in Latour's case, they might have refined the expression of his repentance, but they could not have coerced him to express repentance against his will, because a spirit has its free will. They perceived in him the seed of good sentiments, and that is why they helped him express himself, thereby contributing to the development of these sentiments while at the same time asking for commiseration on his behalf.

Is there anything more touching, more moral, more capable of making a vivid impression than the picture of this great repentant criminal expressing his desperation and remorse? Amidst their tortures, and persecuted by the incessant sight of their victims, who would not lift their thought to God and beg for mercy? Isn't this a worthy example for the guilty? We can understand the nature of his anguish: it is rational and terrible, though simple and devoid of phantasmagoric acting.

One might feel surprised at such a huge transformation in a spirit like Latour. But why wouldn't he repent? Why wouldn't he be endowed with an emotional cord? Would the guilty thus always be devoted to evil? Would a moment not arrive in which the light began to dawn on their soul? This moment had arrived for Latour, and that is precisely the moral side of his communications. It is

the understanding of his situation, his regrets and his plans for reparation, which are eminently instructive. Would one find it extraordinary if Latour had sincerely repented before his death, if he had said before he died what he said afterward? Don't we have numerous examples of this?

A return to the good before his death would have appeared to most of his peers to be a sign of weakness, but his voice from beyond the grave is the revelation of the future that awaits them too. He is absolutely correct when he states that his example will be more effective for regenerating the guilty than the perspective of the flames of hell or the scaffold. Why not give this example to those who are in prison? It would cause more than one to ponder the matter. We have already had many examples of it. But how can anyone believe in the effectiveness of a dead man's words when one believes that when one dies it is the end? Yet, the day will come in which everyone will realize this truth: the dead can come back to instruct the living.

Many other important teachings can be taken from these communications. First, it is the confirmation of the principle of eternal justice, by which repentance is not enough to place the guilty in the ranks of the elect. Repentance is the first step toward rehabilitation – it attracts divine mercy. It is the prelude to forgiveness and the abbreviation of suffering. However, God does not absolve unconditionally; expiation is required, and especially reparation. This is what Latour has understood and for what he is preparing himself.

Second, if we compare this criminal with the one from Castelnau, we will find a great difference in the punishments inflicted upon them. The latter's repentance was slow in coming and, consequently, his punishment lasted longer. Moreover, his punishment was almost physical, while Latour's was more mental. As we stated earlier, in one the intelligence was less developed

than the other, requiring something that could strike his obtuse senses; however, mental punishments are no less pungent for those who have reached the level desired to comprehend them. One can infer this fact from the complaints Latour himself articulates. They are not the result of anger, but are rather an expression of remorse, soon followed by repentance and the desire for reparation in order to evolve.



Hardened Spirits

Lapommeray

(Punishment by the Light)

During one of the Parisian Society's sessions in which the state of confusion that usually accompanies death was being discussed, a spirit whom no one had even mentioned or had intended to evoke spontaneously manifested itself in the following communication. Although it was not signed, it was easily recognized as that of a great criminal who had recently been struck down by human justice.

“What are you saying about confusion? Why such pointless words? You are dreamers and utopians. You are completely ignorant about the subject you claim to be concerned about. No, gentlemen, there is no confusion except in your own minds. I am as dead as I can be, but I can see clearly within me, around me – everywhere! ... Life is a dreary comedy! Foolish are they who exit the stage before the curtain falls! ... Death is terror, punishment, yearning, depending on the weakness or strength of those who fear it, brave it or beg for it. For all it is bitter exasperation! *The light dazzles me and pierces like a sharp arrow into the essence of my being* ... I was first punished with the darkness of the jail cell and I was then believed to be punished with the darkness of the grave or the punishments dreamed up by Catholic superstitions ... Well,

it is you, my good gentlemen, who are experiencing darkness, whereas I, a social misfit, find myself on a plane above you ... I shall be who I am! ... Strong in thought, I scorn the warnings that resound around me ... I can see clearly ... Crime! It's just a word! Crime happens everywhere. When it is committed by the masses, it is glorified; by an individual, it is condemned. How absurd!

“I don't want to be pitied ... I ask for nothing ... I am self-sufficient and I shall find out how to fight against *this hateful light.*”

He who yesterday was a man

In this communication (analyzed in the session that followed), one recognizes in the very cynicism of the language a profound teaching, and one can see in the situation of this unhappy spirit a new aspect of the punishment awaiting the guilty. In fact, while some are indeed immersed in darkness or complete isolation, and while others endure the anguish of their final hour for many years or believe themselves to still be in this world, the light shines for this spirit. He enjoys the full use of his faculties; he knows perfectly well that he is dead and does not complain about anything; he asks for no assistance and continues to affront the divine and human laws. Will he thus escape punishment? No. God's justice is accomplished under many forms, and what causes joy for some is a torment for others; the light he mentions is his torture. He rebels against it, and despite his pride, he admits to his rebellion when he states, “I am self-sufficient and I shall find out how to fight against this hateful light,” and also when he says, “The light dazzles me and pierces like a sharp arrow into the essence of my being.” The words, “*the essence of my being,*” are characteristic; he recognizes the fact that his body is fluidic, that it can be penetrated by the light from which he cannot escape, and that that light pierces him like a sharp arrow.

This spirit has been placed in this chapter among the hardened ones because it took him a long time to show the

slightest repentance. This is evidence that moral progress does not always accompany intellectual progress. Little by little, however, he began mending his ways and later provided wisely reasonable and instructive communications. Today he could be ranked among the repentant spirits.

Requested to evaluate the matter, our spirit guides dictated the three following communications. They are worthy of serious attention.

I

From the point of view of existences, errant spirits may be obviously regarded as being in an inactive and waiting state. Even so, however, they can still expiate past wrongs, provided their pride and restless persistence in their errors do not hold them back at the moment of progressive ascension. You have a grim example in the communication of this hardened criminal as he struggled against the divine justice that had captured him after human justice. In such cases, instead of being useful by making them aware of the profound significance of their wrongs, expiation – or rather the baleful suffering that oppresses these spirits – incites them to rebelliousness, causing them to protest, which Scripture, in its poetic eloquence, calls *gnashing of teeth*. An image par excellence! The sign of a humiliated yet defiant sufferer! Lost in pain, the rebellious spirit is still strong enough to refuse to recognize the truth about punishment and reward!

Great errors – as well as highly criminal consciences – almost always persist in the spirit world. To continue to challenge the infinite and to be oneself in spite of everything resembles the blindness of men and women who, like the Galls at the time of Alexander, gaze up at the stars and believe them to be arabesques on a ceiling.

The moral infinite exists! Miserable and small are those who, in the pretext of continuing their abject earthly struggles and boastfulness, can see no farther in the other world than they did on earth! For them there is only blindness, contempt for others; mean and egotistical personalities delaying their own progress! It is so true, O humankind, that there is a secret accord between the immortality of a pure name bequeathed to the earth and the true immortality preserved by spirits in their successive trials.

Lamennais

II

Doesn't plunging someone into darkness or into waves of light actually lead to the same result? In either case, he can see nothing around him, and he will become accustomed more rapidly to the darkness than to the dull electrifying brightness in which he may be immersed. Thus, the spirit who communicated during the last session expresses the truth of his situation very well when he exclaims, "Oh! I shall find out how to fight against this hateful light!" Actually, such light is all the more terrifying and all the more frightening since it pierces him completely, rendering his most secret thoughts visible and apparent. This is one of the most severe aspects of his spiritual punishment. He finds himself committed, so to speak, to the glass house Socrates requested. That is still a valuable teaching, for what would have consisted in joy and consolation to the sage has become an infamous and continuous punishment for the perverse, the criminal, the parricidal spirit, bewildered in his own person.

My children, can you surmise the suffering and terror which must seize those who during their entire sinister lives took great pleasure in planning and plotting the most heinous crimes deep in their hearts – into which they withdrew like wild animals inside their dens – and who today find themselves expelled from that inner lair, where

they had shielded themselves from the gaze and the scrutiny of their contemporaries? Now this spirit's mask of impassibility has been torn away, and each one of his thoughts is reflected right there on his brow!

Yes, henceforth, there will be no repose, no refuge for this great criminal. Every evil thought – and God knows when his soul expresses it – betrays him outside and inside as if driven by a high-voltage electric current. He wants to evade the crowd, but the hateful light unrelentingly pierces him. He wants to flee, and runs a gasping and desperate course through immeasurable space, but everywhere, the light is there! Everywhere, eyes plunge into him! And he rushes again in pursuit of darkness, in search of the night, but darkness and night no longer exist for him. He calls for death to assist him but death is no more than a meaningless word. This unfortunate spirit is constantly on the run! *He flees toward spiritual insanity* – a dreadful punishment! Awful pain! There he will struggle with himself in order to escape from himself, for such is the supreme law beyond the earth: it is the guilty spirit who becomes its own most merciless punishment.

How long will this state last? Until the moment in which his will, finally defeated, bows down before the poignant grip of remorse, and when his haughty brow humbles itself before his appeased victims and before the spirits of justice. Notice the superior logic of the immutable laws, according to which this spirit will accomplish – by an act of his own will – what he wrote last Friday in that haughty communication so clear, so lucid and so disconcertingly egotistical.

Erastus

III

Human justice does not take into account people's individuality when it punishes. By measuring the crime by the crime itself, it strikes

lawbreakers indiscriminately; the same punishment afflicts the guilty without distinction of gender or education. Divine justice proceeds differently, however: *punishments correspond to the degree of progress of the beings on which they are inflicted*. Equality of crimes does not imply equality between spirits; two guilty spirits with the same indictment can be differentiated by dissimilar trials, which may plunge one into the intellectual opacity of the lowest initiatory circles, while the other - having gone beyond such circles - enjoys the lucidity that exempts it from confusion. Therefore, it is no longer darkness that punishes, but rather the keenness of the spiritual light that pierces its earthly mind and makes it feel the pain of an open wound.

Discarnate beings who are haunted by the physical sight of their crime suffer a shock like physical electricity: they suffer through their senses. Those who are already dematerialized in spirit feel a much greater pain, which, in its flood of bitterness, destroys the remembrance of the effects, leaving nothing but the awareness of their causes.

Despite the criminality of their actions, individuals can thus possess an inner progress, in which, while their passions make them act like a brute, their aroused faculties can raise them above the heavy atmosphere of the lower layers. The absence of judiciousness and balance between their moral and intellectual progress produces the frequent anomalies that occur at times of materialism and transition.

The light that tortures the guilty spirit is thus precisely the spiritual ray that floods the secret recesses of its pride with clarity and uncovers the inanity of its fragmented being. These are the first symptoms and anxieties of spiritual agony. They announce the separation or dissolution of the intellectual and material elements that compose the primitive human duality, but they must disappear in the grand unity of the accomplished being.

Jean Reynaud

The three previous communications, obtained simultaneously, complement one another and portray punishment under a new aspect that is eminently philosophical and rational. It is probable that the Spirits, wanting to address this subject by employing an example, caused the spontaneous communication of this guilty spirit.

Alongside this fact-based picture and in order to establish a parallel, let us see the image a preacher drew of hell during Lent at Montreuil-sur-Mer in 1864:

“The fires of hell are millions of times more intense than those of earth, and if one of the bodies that burns there without being consumed were to be cast out onto the planet, it would infect it from one end to the other! Hell is a vast and dark cavern, full of pointed needles, keen swords and sharp-edged razors, into which the souls of the damned are hurled.”

(See *Revue Spirite*, July, 1864, p.199)

Angele – Uselessness on Earth

(Bordeaux, 1862)

A spirit presented itself spontaneously to the medium under the name Angele.

1. *Have you repented for your wrongs?*

“No.”

Then why have you come?

“To try to do so.”

Aren't you happy then?

“No.”

Are you suffering?

“No.”

Then what do you lack?

“Peace.”

While admitting that their mental state is unbearable, some spirits consider suffering to be only that which reminds them of physical pain.

2. *How is it that you lack peace in the spirit life?*

“Regret of the past.”

Regret of the past means remorse. Have you repented then?

“No. It is for fear of the future.”

What are you afraid of?

“The unknown.”

3. *Would you be willing to tell me what you did during your last existence? Perhaps that would help me to enlighten you.*

“Nothing.”

4. *What was your social position?*

“Middle class.”

Were you married?

“I was a wife and mother.”

Did you zealously fulfill the duties of both positions?

“No. My husband and kids bored me.”

5. *How did you spend your life?*

“Entertaining myself as young girl, getting bored as a young woman.”

What were your occupations?

“None.”

Who looked after your house?

“The maid.”

6. *Isn't it in this uselessness that you might find the cause of your regrets and fears?*

“Maybe you're right.”

Agreeing is not enough. Would you like to atone for that useless existence by helping the guilty spirits suffering around us?

“How?”

By helping them improve themselves with your counsels and prayers.

“I don’t know how to pray.”

We will do it together; you will learn. Would you like to?

“No.”

Why not?

“It’s tiresome.”

Instructions by the Medium’s Guide

We teach you by showing you the various degrees of suffering and the position of spirits condemned to expiation according to their wrongs.

Angele was one of those individuals without initiative, whose lives are as useless to others as to themselves. Loving only pleasure, incapable of seeking an education and, in the fulfillment of her familial and social duties, lacking those satisfactions of the heart that make life so appealing because they belong to all ages, she was unable to spend her youth on anything but frivolous distractions. And when more serious obligations arose, *the world was empty around her because she had placed emptiness into her heart*. Committing no serious wrongs, but displaying no special qualities either, she made her husband miserable, compromised her children’s futures and ruined their well-being by her negligence and indifference. She perverted their hearts and judgment by her example and by abandoning them to the care of household servants, whom she hadn’t even put forth the effort to choose. Her life was unfruitful and therefore blameworthy, for *evil originates from neglecting the good*. You must all understand that it is not enough to abstain from error: you must also practice the virtues that oppose it. Study the Lord’s teachings; meditate on them and understand that although they may present a barrier that detains

you on the edge of the evil path, they force you at the same time to retreat and take the opposite path that leads you to the good. Evil is opposed to the good. Thus, those who wish to avoid evil must choose the opposite path; otherwise, their life becomes useless; their works are dead, and God our Father is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

May I ask what Angele's next-to-last existence was?

“She lived in beatific indolence and the uselessness of the monastic life. Lazy and selfish by nature, she next wanted to try out family life, but her spirit had evolved very little. She continually rejected the inner voice that showed her the danger, and since sliding down the slope was gentle, she preferred to abandon herself to it instead of making an effort to stop herself at the beginning. Presently, she still understands the danger involved in maintaining herself in such neutrality, but she doesn't feel the strength to attempt the least amount of effort to leave such a condition. Pray for her; awaken her and force her eyes to open to the light: it is a duty; do not neglect any duty.

“Human beings have been created to be active. The activity of the spirit: that is their essence; the activity of the body: that is a necessity. Therefore, fulfill the requirements of existence as a spirit destined to eternal peace. Since your body is meant to serve you, it is nothing more than a machine subordinate to your intelligence. Work to cultivate your intelligence so that it may provide a healthy impulse to the instrument that must aid it in the fulfillment of its task. Grant it neither rest nor repose, and keep in mind that the peace to which you aspire will only come after work. Thus, the more you neglect work, the longer the anxiety will be for you while waiting. “Work. Work without stopping. Fulfill all your duties without exception; fulfill them with zeal, with courage, with perseverance, and your faith will uphold you. Those who consciously perform the most ungrateful and vile tasks in your society are a hundred times more elevated in the eyes of the Omnipotent than those who

impose such roles on others while neglecting their own. They are all steps to be climbed toward heaven: don't crush them beneath your feet. Know that you are surrounded by friends who are reaching out to you and who uphold those who put their strength in the Lord.

Monod

A Bored Spirit

(Bordeaux, 1862)

This spirit presented itself spontaneously to the medium, demanding prayers.

1. *What has led you to demand our prayers?*

"I'm tired of wandering around aimlessly."

Have you been in such a situation for a long time?

"About a hundred eighty years."

What did you used to do on earth?

"Nothing good."

2. *What is your status among other spirits?*

"I am among the bored ones."

But that does not comprise a category in and of itself.

"Amongst us, everything comprises a category. Every sensation finds its similar, and sympathetic counterparts band together."

3. *Since you were not condemned to suffering, why have you remained for so long without progressing?*

"I have been condemned to idleness, which among us is suffering. Anything that is not a joy is suffering."

So have you been forced to remain errant against your will?

"There are causes too subtle for your material intelligence."

Try to explain them to me; it will be a beginning for you to become useful.

“Since I have no terms for comparison, I couldn’t. An extinguished life on earth bequeaths to the spirit who has not profited from it what fire bequeaths to paper that it has consumed: sparks, which recall what the still-compacted ashes used to be and where they came from, that is, the destruction of the paper. These sparks are the remembrance of the earthly ties that bind the spirit until it has dispersed the ashes of its body. Only then does the spirit regain itself as an ethereal essence and desire to begin progressing once again.”

4. *What might have caused the boredom you complain about?*

“The consequences of my existence. Boredom is the child of idleness; I didn’t know how to employ the lengthy years I spent on earth, and the consequences have been reflected in this world.”

5. *Can’t spirits like you, who are wandering prey to boredom, emerge from such a state if they want to?*

“No, they cannot always do so, because boredom has paralyzed their will. They are suffering the consequences of their existence; they are useless and wanting of initiative, and seek no help from each other. They are left to themselves until the weariness of their idle state makes them desire to change it; then, at the slightest awakening of their will, they find support and good counsel to assist them in their efforts to persevere.”

6. *Could you tell me something about your earthly existence?*

“Alas! Very little. You must understand. Boredom, uselessness and idleness result from laziness, which in turn is the mother of ignorance.”

7. *Didn’t your previous lifetimes enable you to improve?*

“Yes, all of them, but very slightly since they were reflections of one another. There is always progress, but it is so imperceptible that we don’t even notice it.”

8. *While you are waiting for a new existence, would you be willing to come to me more often?*

“Evoke me. I will be constrained to come; you will render me a service.”

9. *Can you explain why your handwriting changes so frequently?*

“Because you ask a lot of questions; that tires me out and I need help in order to write.”

The medium's Guide: It is mental effort which tires him, and which obliges us to help him so that he can respond to your questions. He is as idle in the spirit world as he was on the earth. We brought him to you in order to attempt to pull him out of his apathy and boredom, which is true suffering and sometimes more painful than acute pain would be because it can prolong itself indefinitely. Can you imagine the torment of the perspective of endless boredom? Most of the spirits of this category *look for an earthly existence only as a pastime* and as a means to break the unbearable monotony of their spirit life. That is why they frequently enter their earthly lives without any definite resolution to foster the good, and this in turn obligates them to start all over until finally true progress is felt.

The Queen of Oude

(Died in France in 1858)

1. *What sensations have you experienced since you left the terrestrial world behind?*

“I would not be able to say; I am still experiencing some confusion.”

Are you happy?

“I miss earthly life ... I do not know ... I am experiencing poignant pain from which earthly life would set me free ... I wish my body would rise from the grave...”

2. *Do you regret having been buried among Christians and not in your own country?*

“Yes, Indian soil would weigh less on my body.”

What do you think about the funeral honors rendered to your remains?

“They were quite ordinary; I was a queen and not everybody knelt before me ... Leave me alone ... I’m being forced to speak ... I do not want you to know what I am now ... I was a queen; be aware of that.”

3. We respect your royal position and we would ask you to please respond for our instruction. Do you believe that your son will one day recover the estate of his father?

“Of course. My blood will reign; he is entitled to it.”

Do you attach the same importance to your son’s reintegration as when you were incarnate?

“My blood cannot be mixed with that of commoners.”

4. The place of your birth could not be found on your death certificate; could you now tell us what it was?

“I was born into the noblest blood of India. I think I was born in Delhi.”

5. You used to live amidst the splendors of luxury and surrounded with honors. What do you think about all that now?

“I have the right to them.”

Did the high position you occupied on earth enable you to enjoy a higher position in the world where you are now?

“I am still a queen ... Send slaves to serve me! ... I do not know: no one seems to be very concerned about me here ... and yet, I am still the same...”

6. Did you belong to the Muslim religion or to a Hindu religion?

“Muslim. However, I was too powerful to concern myself with God.”

What difference do you see between the religion you professed and Christianity with regard to human happiness?

“The Christian religion is absurd; it says that all people are brothers.”

What is your opinion of Muhammad?

“He was not the son of a king.”

Do you believe that he was on a divine mission?

“What do I care!”

What is your opinion about Christ?

“The son of a carpenter is not worthy of occupying my thoughts.”

7. *What do you think about the custom where Muslim women are withdrawn from the eyes of men?*

“I think that women were born to rule: I was a woman.”

Have you ever envied the freedom enjoyed by European women?

“No. What do I care about their freedom! Are those who serve them on their knees?”

8. *Do you remember having any other existence on earth previous to your last one?*

“I must have always been a queen.”

9. *Why did you answer our call so quickly?*

“I did not want to; I was forced ... Do you think I would have condescended to answer? Who are you in comparison to me?”

Who forced you to come?

“I do not know ... however, there could not be anyone more powerful than I.”

10. *In what form are you presenting yourself to us?*

“I continue as a queen ... Do you think I would cease being so? ... You show little respect ... You must know that queens are addressed differently.”

11. *If we could actually see you, would we see you in all your arrays and jewels?*

“Certainly!”

How does it happen that, having left all that behind, your spirit retained such appearances, especially your finery?

“They did not leave me ... I am as beautiful as ever ... I do not know what idea you have of me! It is true that you have never seen me.”

12. *How do you feel about finding yourself amongst us?*

“If possible, I would not be ... You treat me with so little respect!”

St. Louis: Leave her alone, the poor creature. Have compassion on her blindness; may she serve you as an example. You do not realize how much her pride suffers.

In evoking this now-entombed fallen grandeur, we did not expect answers of great depth, given the education of most women in that country; however, we thought that we might encounter in this spirit, if not philosophy, at least a closer sense of reality and more rational ideas related to vanity and earthly grandeur. Far from it. In this spirit, earthy ideas have retained all their strength; we see a pride which has lost none of its illusions, which struggles against its own weakness, and which, in effect, must suffer much from its powerlessness....

Xumene

(Bordeaux, 1862)

A spirit used this name in presenting itself spontaneously to the medium, who was accustomed to this type of manifestation because her mission seemed to entail assisting low-order spirits brought to her by her spirit guide with the two-fold objective of aiding her instruction and their advancement.

Who are you? Is this a woman's name or a man's?

“A man's – a man who is as unhappy as can be. I am suffering all the torments of hell.”

But if there is no hell, how can you suffer its torments?

“A pointless question.”

I understand, but others might need an explanation.

“That doesn't concern me.”

Mightn't selfishness be one of the causes of your suffering?

"Maybe."

If you desire relief, you might start by repudiating your bad inclinations.

"Don't worry about it; it's none of your business. Start by praying for me as you do for the others, and then we shall see."

If you don't help me out by repenting, prayer will have little effect.

"If you talk instead of praying, you won't help me advance very much."

So do you really want to evolve?

"Maybe; I don't know. Let's see if prayer relieves my suffering; that's the essential thing."

Then join with me in the strong desire of obtaining your relief.

"Go ahead."

(After the medium's prayer) *Do you feel satisfied?*

"Not like I had wanted."

Medicine administered for the first time can't immediately cure a long-standing malady.

"Perhaps not."

Would you like to come back?

"Yes, if you call me."

The medium's Guide: Daughter, you will have much work ahead of you with this hardened spirit, but there would hardly be any merit in saving those who are not lost. Courage! Persevere and you will succeed. No one is so guilty that he cannot be amended by means of persuasion and example, since even the most perverse spirits end up amending themselves with time. Even if one does not succeed immediately in leading them back to good sentiments – which is often impossible – one's efforts will not be lost. The thoughts one kindles in them stir them up and make them reflect despite themselves. These are the seeds that sooner or later will bring forth fruit. One does not break a rock with the first strike of the hammer.

What I am telling you, my daughter, also applies to incarnates, and you must understand why Spiritism, even among firm believers, does not make perfect human beings immediately. Belief is the first step; faith comes next and transformation will have its turn. But for many it will be necessary to go to the spirit world to renew themselves.

Among the hardened spirits, there are not only wicked and evil ones; there is a large number who, without trying to be evil, remain stationary out of pride, indifference or apathy. They are unhappy nonetheless, in that they suffer all the more from their inertia because they don't have worldly distractions as compensation. The perspective of the infinite makes their situation intolerable to them, and yet they have neither the strength nor the will to exit the situation. They are those individuals who, while incarnate, lead idle existences useless both to themselves and to others, and who often end up by committing suicide with no serious reason other than disgust with life.

In general, these spirits are more difficult to lead back to the good than those who are downright evil, since the latter have energy. Once enlightened, they are as fervent for the good as they were for evil. For the former, many incarnations are needed to evolve appreciably. However, little by little, defeated by boredom - like the latter by suffering - they begin to seek a distraction in any sort of occupation whatsoever, which later on will become a necessity to them.



Earthly Expiations

Marcel – The Child in No. 4

In a provincial sanatorium, there was a boy of approximately 8 to 10 years old, whose condition was difficult to describe. He was designated as “No. 4”. He was completely contorted, whether as the result of a congenital deformity or as the result of the disease itself. His twisted legs touched his neck and he was so gaunt that his bones were about to tear through his skin. His body was covered with sores and his suffering was atrocious. He belonged to a poor Jewish family, and his sad condition had lasted four years. He was remarkably intelligent for his age; his sweetness, his patience and his resignation were uplifting. The physician under whose care he had been placed was touched by compassion for the poor, nearly-abandoned child – his parents seldom seemed to come to visit him – and took a special interest in him. He enjoyed chatting with him, charmed by his intellectual precociousness. Not only did he treat him kindly, but when his duties would permit, he read to him and marveled at his rectitude of judgment on matters that seemed beyond his age.

One day the boy said to the physician, “Doctor, please be so kind as to give me some more of the same pills as the last ones.” “But why, my child?” replied the physician, “I’ve

given you enough already and I'm afraid a bigger dose might be harmful." "Well, it's just that I'm suffering so much. I've been trying not to cry, and I've prayed to God to give me strength not to disturb the other patients, but it's been hard not to. Those pills make me sleep, and when I'm asleep at least I don't disturb anyone."

These words are enough to demonstrate the elevation of this soul enclosed within a malformed body. Where could this poor creature have gotten such sentiments? Certainly not within the environment in which he had been raised. Moreover, he could not yet have possessed such an ability to reason at the age at which he had begun to suffer. These sentiments were thus inborn. However, if he was possessed of such noble instincts, and if we were to accept the fact that his soul was created at the same time as his body – the instrument of such cruel torture – why had he been condemned by God to such a miserable and painful life? Yes, one would either have to deny the goodness of God or accept an anterior cause, that is, the preexistence of the soul and the plurality of existences. The child is dead now and his last thoughts were about God and about the caring doctor who had taken pity on him.

After some time, his spirit was evoked at the Parisian Society, where he provided the following communication (1863):

"You called me, and in order to touch all hearts, I have come to make my voice heard beyond this wall. May the vibrations of its echo reach people in their loneliness and remind them that agony on earth prepares them for the joys of heaven; that suffering is nothing more than the peel of a delectable fruit that yields courage and resignation. That voice will tell them that, upon the invalid's pallet of misery lie those sent by the Lord; their mission consists in teaching humankind that there is no pain that is insuperable with the help of the Omnipotent and the good spirits. That voice will enable them to hear groaning mixed with prayer and to understand

the pious harmony that is much different than the guilty tones of groaning mixed with blasphemy.

“One of your good spirits, a great apostle of Spiritism, has granted me his place tonight.⁷⁶ I would like to take my turn to say something about the progress of your Doctrine, which will aid the mission of those who incarnate amongst you in order to learn how to suffer. Spiritism will be the signpost; they will have its example and voice to follow; groaning will then be turned into cries of contentment and tears of joy.”

From what you have said, it seems that your suffering was not an expiation of previous wrongs.

“My suffering was not actually a direct expiation, but I can assure you that all suffering has a just cause. The one whom you knew as being so miserable had once been handsome, great, rich and admired. I had flatterers and courtesans; I was vain and proud. I had once been truly guilty; I denied God and harmed my fellow beings, but I cruelly expiated my wrongs thereafter, first in the spirit world and then on the earth. The suffering I endured for only a few years during my last and short existence I bore for an entire lifetime into extreme old age in the existence before it. Through repentance, I re-entered the grace of the Lord, who entrusted me with several missions, the last one of which you are familiar with. I myself had asked for them in order to achieve my purification.

“Goodbye, my friends. I will return to you a few more times. My mission is to console, not to instruct. Nonetheless, there are so many here whose wounds lie hidden that they will be happy with my presence.”

Marcel

⁷⁶ St. Augustine, through the medium, with whom he usually communicates at the Society – Auth.

Instructions by the Medium's Guide

Poor weak, ulcerated, and deformed little sufferer! How many cries of anguish he uttered in that asylum of misery and tears! And despite his tender age, how resigned he was, and how much his soul comprehended the purpose of suffering! He felt that the reward for so many stifled groans awaited him beyond the grave! Also, how he prayed for those who didn't have the courage to bear their maladies as he had, and especially for those who cast blasphemies at heaven instead of prayers!

Although his agony had been long and drawn out, his moment of death was not dreadful. Of course, his convulsed limbs contorted, displaying to those watching over him a deformed body revolting against death – the law of the flesh that wants to live in spite of itself. But an angel hovered over his deathbed and healed his heart. Afterward, that angel bore in its white wings that beautiful soul, which freed itself from its deformed body, uttering these words: “Glory to you, my God!” And that soul, ascending toward the Almighty, exclaimed: “Here am I, Lord; you gave me the mission of learning how to suffer. Have I borne the trial worthily?”

And now the spirit of that poor child has resumed its true proportions. It hovers in space, going to the weak and humble, saying to all: “Have hope and courage.” Freed from all matter and all impurities, he is next to you; he speaks to you in a voice that is no longer suffering and mournful, but virile. He says to you: “Those who beheld me saw a child who did not complain. They have drawn a balm for their ills from my example, and their hearts have been strengthened with sweet trust in God. Such was the purpose of my short passage on the earth.”

St. Augustine

Szymel Slizgol

Szymel Slizgol was a poor Jew from Vilna⁷⁷, who died in May of 1865. For 30 years he begged with a small bowl in his hands. Everywhere in town, his call was familiar: “Remember the poor, the widows and the orphans!” Over that time, he collected 90,000 rubles, but he did not keep one single kopeck for himself. He relieved the sick – he himself looked after them; he paid for the education of poor children and distributed the food he was given to the needy. At night, the beggar spent his time preparing snuff, which he sold in order to provide for his own needs. Anything left over belonged to the poor. Szymel had been alone in the world, but on the day of his burial a large part of Vilna’s population followed his funeral procession, and all the shops closed their doors.

(Parisian Spiritist Society, June 15, 1865)

Evocation: I have been here in your midst since the beginning of this meeting, extremely happy at having finally reached my goal, for which I paid a great price. I thank you for your interest in the spirit of a poor beggar; I will happily try to respond to your questions.

A letter from Vilna filled us in on the most remarkable particularities of your life, and the sympathy they have inspired in us awakened our desire to communicate with you. We are grateful that you have answered our call, and since you wish to respond to us, we would be happy to know – for our instruction – your situation as a spirit, as well as the causes that determined the kind of life you led during your latest existence.

⁷⁷ Vilna, capital city of Lithuania, called by East European Jewry, especially in the modern period, the “Jerusalem of Lithuania.” – Tr.

“First of all, please grant to my spirit – which comprehends its true position – the favor of transmitting its opinion regarding a thought that has occurred to you regarding who I was. Please advise me if it is wrong.

“It seems odd to you that the public displays were so impressive in paying homage to the memory of a nobody, whom charity enabled to attract such sympathy. I’m not referring to you, dear teacher, or to you, dear medium, or to you, all true and sincere Spiritists, but to persons who are indifferent toward belief. There is nothing remarkable about what happened. The moral pressure exerted upon humankind through practicing the good is such that no matter how material one might be, one always bows before it; the good is always respected; it is welcome despite the tendency one may have toward evil.

“And now for your questions, which I know are not asked out of curiosity but simply formulated for the sake of general instruction. Since I have the freedom to do so, I will tell you as succinctly as possible about the causes that motivated and determined my last existence.

“Many centuries ago, I lived with the title of king, or at least a sovereign prince. Within the sphere of my power - relatively limited when compared to today’s states - I was nevertheless the absolute lord of my vassals’ fate. I acted as a tyrant, or rather – let us use the proper term – as a tormentor. Of an imperious character, I was violent, avaricious and lustful, and from that fact you can imagine the fate of the poor beings who lived under my laws. I abused my power to oppress the weak, to tax all types of trades, occupations, passions and pains for the service of my own passions. I even imposed a tithe on what beggars made; no one could beg for anything without me first taking the lion’s share of the alms that human pity let drop into the pockets of poverty. There was even more: so that the number of beggars would not decrease among

my vassals, I forbade those unfortunate beings from sharing with their friends, relatives, or kin any of the pittances that remained. In other words, I was the most heartless in every way regarding suffering and poverty.

“I finally lost what you call ‘life’ in the midst of torment and horrendous suffering; my death was an example of terror for those who, like me - though on a smaller scale - shared my outlook. As a spirit, I remained in the errant state for three and a half centuries, and at the end of that time I finally understood that the purpose of reincarnating was something completely different than what my gross and obtuse senses had led me to pursue in the previous one. In answer to my prayers, resignation and remorse, I received permission to take upon myself the physical task of enduring the same torments – and much more – that I had inflicted. I obtained this permission and through my free will God granted me the right to amplify my mental and physical suffering. Thanks to the support of good spirits assisting me, I persisted in my resolution to practice the good, and I thank them, for they kept me from succumbing under the load I had taken upon my shoulders.

“I finally fulfilled an existence which, through self-denial and charity, redeemed what the other had held in terms of cruelty and injustice. Born to poor parents and orphaned early on, I learned to be self-sufficient at an age when many would consider one incapable of understanding. I lived alone, without love and without affection, and from the very start of my life I bore the brutalities that I had inflicted on others. They say that all the sums I collected were entirely consecrated to relieving my fellow beings: that is a fact, to which, without pride or affectation, I might add that so many times at the sacrifice of relatively hard – very hard – privations, I increased the benefit that enabled me to perform public charity.

“I died in peace, trusting in the merit that the reparation of my latest existence earned me, and I have been rewarded far beyond my secret aspirations. Today, I am happy, absolutely happy at being able to tell you that all those who exalt themselves shall be humbled, and all who humble themselves shall be exalted.”

Please be so kind as to tell us what your expiation consisted of in the spirit world and how long it lasted from the moment of your death until your fate was attenuated as a result of your repentance and good resolutions. Also tell us what brought about the change in your thoughts in the spirit state.

“That question awakens many painful memories! How I suffered ... but I don't regret: I remember! ... You want to know about the nature of my expiation. Then here it is in all its horror.

“As I have told you, I had been the tormentor of all sorts of good sentiments, and I remained for a long time – quite a long time – linked by my perispirit to my rotting corpse. Until it had decayed completely, I felt myself devoured by worms, which made me suffer terribly! When I found myself free of the fetters that had kept me prisoner to the instrument of my torture, I had to endure an even crueler torment. After my physical suffering came mental suffering, which was even more long-lasting than the former. I was put in the presence of all the victims I had afflicted. Periodically, a power superior to mine led me to face my guilty actions. I physically and mentally saw all the pain that I had made others endure. Ah! My friends, how terrifying is the constant sight of those to whom we did evil! Amongst you, you have only a faint example in the confrontation between the accused and his victim.

“That is a summary of what I suffered for two and a half centuries, until God, touched by my pain and repentance, and having been asked by the spirit guides who watched over me, allowed me the life of expiation that you are familiar with.”

Was there some particular reason that induced you to choose the Jewish religion during your latest life?

“I didn’t choose it, but heeded the counsel of my guides. The Jewish religion added a small humiliation to my life of expiation, since in certain countries most incarnates despised Jews, especially Jewish beggars.”

In your latest existence, at what age did you begin fulfilling the resolutions you had made? How did the thought occur to you? While you were practicing charity in such a self-denying manner, did you have any intuition of the causes that had led you to do so?

“I was born from poor but intelligent and greedy parents. I was deprived of my mother’s affection and tenderness at a young age. I experienced stronger grief upon her loss than did my father, who, dominated by greed, completely abandoned me. As for my brothers and sisters, they were all older than I and didn’t seem to be concerned about my suffering. Another Jew, moved more out of self-interest than charity, took me into his home and taught me how to work. By using the product of my work – which often exceeded my strength – he made up for most of the expense I might have cost him otherwise. Later, I broke free of his yoke and worked for myself. But everywhere, both in work and in repose, the remembrance of my mother’s tenderness followed me, and as I began to advance in years, her memory became more deeply engraved on mine, and I mourned even more for her solicitude and love.

“It wasn’t long before I was left alone; within a few months, death had reaped all my family. It was at that time that the way in which I would spend the rest of my existence began to manifest. Two of my brothers had left orphans behind, and moved by the remembrance of what I myself had suffered, I wanted to save those poor little beings from a childhood similar to mine. Since my job was not enough to provide for the subsistence of them

all, I began to beg for alms, not for myself but for them. God was not to allow me the consolation of enjoying my efforts, for my poor little nieces and nephews also left me for good. I knew good and well what they lacked – their mother. Therefore, I decided to beg for the unfortunate widows, who, not being able to work both for themselves and their children, endured deprivations that led them to their grave, thus leaving behind poor orphans, abandoned and condemned to the same torments that I myself had had to bear.

“I was a very strong and healthy 30 years old when I turned to begging for widows and orphans. The first steps were very difficult, and I had to bear more than one humiliating word. However, when it was seen that I really was distributing all that I received on behalf of the poor, when it became known that I added to it the surplus of my work earnings, I then acquired a certain regard that was not without its charm.

“I lived for 60 plus years and I never failed at the tasks that I had imposed upon myself, nor had I ever received notice from my conscience that would lead me to deduce that a motive previous to my current existence was the reason for what I was doing. But one day as I was about to go out again to beg, I heard these words: ‘Do not do unto others what you would not want them to do unto you.’ I was struck by the general principles of morality contained in those few words and surprised myself by adding these: ‘Instead, do what you would want them to do unto you.’ Helped by the memories of my mother and my own suffering, I thus continued to tread a path that my conscience told me was a good one.

“I shall finish this lengthy communication by saying, ‘Thank you’!

“I am not still perfect, but knowing that evil only leads to evil, I shall do good – as I already have – in order to reap happiness.”

Szymel Slizgol

Julienne-Marie, the Beggar

In the commune at Vilate, close to Nozai (Loire-Inferieure), there was a poor woman named Julienne-Marie, who was old, in poor health and living on public charity. One day, she fell into a pond, and was pulled out by a fellow citizen, A..., who had helped her on a regular basis. He took her home, where she died shortly thereafter as a result of the accident. The rumor was that she had meant to commit suicide. On the same day as her death, the man who had rescued her, and who was both a Spiritist and a medium, had the physical sensation that someone had brushed against him, but he was not able to explain the cause. When he learned about Julienne-Marie's death, the thought occurred to him that her spirit might have come to visit him.

At the suggestion of one of his friends, a member of the Parisian Society, and to whom he had related the incident, he evoked the woman with the purpose of being useful to her. However, he sought advice beforehand from his protector guides and they gave him the following answer:

“You may indeed evoke her. It will please her, although the service you intend to provide her will be needless; she is happy and completely devoted to those who used to show compassion to her. You are one of her good friends; she hardly ever leaves your side and has conversed many times with you without your having been aware of it. Sooner or later, services – if not done out of obligation – are rewarded by those who were concerned with the person both before and after his or her death. In case the spirit who benefits has not yet had time to realize its new situation, other spirits who are sympathetic will come to express its gratitude. That explains the sensation you felt on the day Julienne-Marie passed away. Now, it is she who will help you in the practice of the good you want to do. Remember what Jesus

said: 'He who humbles himself shall be exalted.' You will enjoy the extent of service that this spirit will be able to render you only if you ask her to help you to be useful to your neighbor."

Evocation: Kind Julienne-Marie, you are happy and that is all I need to know, but it will not keep me from remembering you often and from ever forgetting you in my prayers.

"Trust in God; seek to inspire your patients with sincere faith, and you will almost always succeed. Never be concerned about the reward you will receive; it will be more than what you had hoped for. God will always recompense those who deserve it, those who dedicate themselves to relieving their brothers and who bring *a complete disinterestedness* to their actions; any other way and everything is just and illusion, a chimera. Faith is necessary above all; otherwise, nothing is achieved. Remember this maxim and you will marvel at the results you obtain. The two patients whom you healed are proof of that; under the circumstances, you would have failed with medicine alone.

"Whenever you ask God to allow the good spirits to pour their beneficial fluids over you and the request does not make you feel an involuntary shudder, it is because your prayer was not sufficiently fervent to be heard. Your prayer will only have been answered if you feel the shudder. It was what you felt when you said from the bottom of your heart: 'Almighty God, merciful God, God of infinite goodness, answer my prayer and allow the good spirits to assist me in the healing of Take pity on him, my Lord, and restore him to health, for without you I can do nothing. May your will be done.'

"You have done well in not despising the humble; the voices of those who have resigned themselves to suffering and bearing the miseries of this world are always heard and, as you have seen, a service rendered always receives its recompense.

"Now, a word about me that will confirm what I have just said.

Spiritism explains to you my language as a spirit: I have no need to go into detail about the matter. I also deem it needless to reveal my previous existence to you. The situation in which you knew me on this earth will enable you to understand and determine my previous existences, which were not always without reproach. Condemned to an existence of misery, sick and unable to work, I begged my entire life. I hadn't hoarded money and in my old age my small savings were limited to a hundred francs, which I had saved for when my legs would not be able to carry me any longer. However, God deemed my expiation and trial sufficient and brought it to an end, freeing me, without suffering, from earthly life; I didn't commit suicide as people thought at first. I died suddenly at the edge of the pond at the moment when I addressed my last prayer to God. The slope of the land caused my body to slide into the water.

"I didn't suffer at all, and I am happy that I was able to resignedly complete my mission without impediment. I made myself useful to the best of my abilities and means, and avoided harming my fellow beings. Now, I have received my reward and I give thanks to God, our Divine Master, who mitigates the bitterness of our trials by enabling us to forget our previous existences while we are alive, and who puts caring souls on our path to help us endure the burden of our previous wrongs.

"You too, persevere, and like me you shall be recompensed. I thank you for all your good prayers and the service you rendered me. I shall never forget them. We shall meet again someday and many things shall be explained to you; for the time being, such would be superfluous. You can only be sure that I am entirely devoted to you and that I will always be at your side whenever you need me to relieve those who suffer."

The good beggar woman,

Julienne-Marie

Julienne-Marie's spirit was evoked at the Parisian Society on June 10, 1864, and dictated the following message:

“Thank you for admitting me into your midst, dear president. You have well perceived that my previous existences had been higher in terms of social standing; if I returned to earth to endure the trial of poverty, it was to punish me for my vain pride, which made me reject the poor and miserable. Thus, I bore the just law of talion⁷⁸, which rendered me the most dreadful beggar in the country. But so that I might attest to God's goodness, I was not rejected by everybody, as I had feared I would be. I also bore my trial without complaining, foreseeing a better life from which I would not have to return to this world of exile and calamity.

“How fortunate the day when our soul, still young, can return to the spirit life to see beloved beings once again! For I also have loved and am happy to have found those who preceded me. I give thanks to A..., who has opened the door of gratitude to me. Without his mediumship, I wouldn't have been able to thank and show him that my soul has not forgotten the happy influence of his kind heart, and to recommend that he endeavor to disseminate his divine belief. He has been called to retrieve wayward souls and he can be sure of my support. Yes, I can repay him a hundredfold what he did for me by instructing him on the pathway that you all have chosen. Give thanks to the Lord for allowing the Spirits to give you instructions in order to encourage the poor in their misery and to restrain the rich in their pride. Understand the shame in rejecting the unfortunate. May I serve you as an example so that you may avoid returning to the earth like I did to expiate

⁷⁸ Latin *lex talionis* principle developed in early Babylonian law and present in both biblical and early Roman law that criminals should receive as punishment precisely those injuries and damages they had inflicted upon their victims. Many early societies applied this “eye-for-an-eye” principle literally (**talion**). (2007). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. From Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9071046>. – Tr.

your wrongs through those painful social positions that place you so low, rendering you an outcast of society.”

Julienne-Marie

The above communication was transmitted to A., who then received the following one, which is a further confirmation:

Good Julienne-Marie, since you desire to help me with your good counsels so that I may progress on the path of our blessed Doctrine, please communicate with me. I will make every effort to take advantage of your instructions.

“Remember the recommendation I am going to make and never stray from it. Always be charitable to the best of your ability; you already understand that charity must be practiced in all circumstances of earthly life. Thus, I have no need to teach you anything concerning the matter; you yourself will be the best judge if you always follow the voice of your conscience, which will never deceive you if you honestly listen to it.

“Do not be mistaken about the missions you are supposed to fulfill: great and small, everyone has their mission. Mine was very trying, but I deserved such punishment because of my preceding lifetimes, as I have come to confess to the good president of the Parisian *mater* Society, to which will someday rally. That day is not as far off as you might think, for Spiritism is taking great strides despite all that is being done to hinder it. So, press on fearlessly, fervent followers of the Doctrine, and your efforts will be crowned with success. Who cares what someone might say about you! Set yourselves above the ludicrous criticism that will rebound upon Spiritism’s adversaries.

“The Proud! They deem themselves powerful; they think they can destroy you; you, my good friends, rest assured and do not be afraid to stand up to them, for they are easier to win over than you might suppose. Many among them fear and dread the

fact that the truth has finally come before their dazzled eyes. Wait and they will come in their turn to help the crowning of the edifice.

Julienne-Marie

Here is an account replete with teachings for whomever meditates on this spirit's words; all the great principles of Spiritism are combined in them. Ever since her first communication, this spirit has shown her moral ascendancy by her language; like a beneficent fairy, this woman, now radiant as if completely metamorphosed, has come to watch over the one who did not despise her in her rags of poverty. This is an application of these evangelical maxims: "The great shall be abased and the small shall be exalted; blessed are the humble and afflicted, for they shall be consoled; do not despise the small, for the one who is small in this world may be much greater than you think...."

Max, the Beggar

In a Bavarian village around the year 1850, an old man known as father Max died at nearly 100 years old. No one really knew where he came from, for he had no family. For around a half century, stricken by infirmities that rendered him unable to earn a living, he had no other resources but public charity, which he disguised by selling almanacs and other trinkets among the farm houses and castles. He was given the nickname "Count Max", and children addressed him only by that title, which made him smile without taking offense. Why this title? No one knew, but custom had sanctioned it. Perhaps it was on account of his physiognomy and manners, whose refinement contrasted with his rags. Many years after his death, Max appeared in a dream to the daughter of the owner of one of the castles, where he had been allowed to lodge in the stable, for he had no place of residence. He said to

her, "Thank you for your having remembered poor Max in your prayers, for the Lord has heard them. You are a charitable soul who has taken an interest in an unfortunate beggar and you would like to know who I was; I will satisfy your wish. It will be of great instruction to all."

Then he gave the following account in roughly these terms:

"About a century and a half ago, I was the rich and powerful lord of this region, but I was vain, proud and infatuated with my nobility. I never used my huge fortune for anything but to satisfy my pleasures. My fortune was barely enough, for I was a gambler and a debauchee, and spent my life in orgies. My vassals, whom I deemed worthy of being used like farm animals, were exploited and mistreated to provide for my extravagances. I remained deaf to their complaints, as was the case with all the misfortunate beings who, in my opinion, ought to consider themselves very honored at satisfying my whims. I died at a young age, exhausted by my excesses but without having truly experienced any real misfortune; on the contrary, everything seemed to smile on me to such a degree that I passed as one of the most favored beings on earth. My social position entitled me to a lavish funeral; the *bons vivants* mourned the loss of an extravagant lord, but not a tear was shed at my tomb, nor a heartfelt prayer said to God on my behalf, and my memory was cursed by all those whose misery I had contributed to. Ah! How terrible is the curse of the misfortunate beings whom one has harmed! That curse never ceased ringing in my ears throughout the long years that seemed like an eternity! And after the death of each one of my victims, there was a new threatening or sarcastic face appearing before me to hound me without respite, and without my being able to find a dark corner in which to hide from its sight! Not one friendly glance! My old companions in debauchery – as unhappy as I – fled from me and seemed to say in scorn, 'You can no longer pay for our pleasures.' Oh! What I would have paid for a

moment of repose, for a glass of water to quench the burning thirst that devoured me! But I did not possess anything anymore, and *all the gold that I had scattered by the handfuls upon the earth didn't produce one single blessing, not one, you see, my child!*

“Finally, overcome by fatigue, exhausted like a weary traveler who cannot foresee the end of his journey, I cried, ‘My God, have mercy on me! When will this excruciating situation end?’ Then a voice – the first that I heard after having left the earth – said to me, ‘*When you will it.*’ ‘What must I do, great God?’ I replied. ‘Please tell me; I will submit myself to anything.’ ‘You must repent; *you must humble yourself before those whom you humiliated*; ask them to intercede for you, *for the prayer of the offended who forgive is always pleasing to the Lord.*’ So I humbled myself, and I begged for the forgiveness of my vassals and my servants. They appeared before me, their faces little by little becoming more kindly and finally disappearing altogether. It was as if I had been granted new life. Desperation gave way to hope as I thanked God with all the strength of my soul. The voice added, ‘Prince!’ to which I responded, ‘There is no other prince here but the almighty God, who humbles the haughty. Forgive me Lord, for I have sinned, and if it be your will, make me the servant of my servants.’

“A few years later, I was born once more, but this time into a family of poor villagers. My parents died while I was still a child, and I was alone and without help in the world. I made a living however I could, sometimes as a farmhand or sometimes as a workman, but always honestly because I believed in God this time. At the age of forty, an illness rendered me completely crippled and I had to beg for more than fifty years in the same lands over which I had been absolute lord. I was happy to receive a morsel of bread on the farms that I once possessed and where, by bitter irony, I had been given the nickname of Count Max. I was very fortunate to often find shelter in the stable of the very castle that had once been

mine. While I slept, I took pleasure in roaming that same castle where I had reigned as a despot. How many times in my dreams I saw myself amidst my old fortune! Upon waking, such visions left me with an undefined feeling of bitterness and sadness, but not one complaint ever escaped my lips. And when it pleased God to call me to him, I praised him for having given me the courage to undergo without complaint such a long and painful trial, for which today I have received my reward. As for you, my child, I bless you for having prayed for me.”

We recommend this example to all those who claim humans would have no restraint if they did not have before them the scarecrow of eternal punishment, and we would ask them if the prospect of a punishment like that of Count Max would have less weight to stop those on the path of evil than that of endless torture, which no one believes in anymore.

The Story of a Servant

In a family of the upper nobility, there was a young servant whose intelligent and fine features surprised us with their air of distinction. One could detect nothing base about him from that aspect. His eagerness to serve his masters displayed none of the servility common to those in his position. When we returned to visit this family the following year, the young man was nowhere to be seen and we asked if he had been dismissed. No, we were told, he had gone to spend a few days in his hometown and had passed away while there. We mourned his loss a great deal, for he had been an excellent young man possessed of sentiments *well above his position*. He was very attached to us and had given us proof of great devotion.

Later, we got the idea to evoke the young man and this is what he told us:

“During my next-to-last incarnation, I was from an upstanding family – as they say on earth. However my father squandered our assets in his extravagance. I was orphaned while very young and had no resources. A friend of my father took me in and raised me as his son, providing me with a good education, from which I derived a little too much vanity. That friend is today Mr. G., in whose service you had seen me during my last life. I wanted to expiate my pride by being born into a servile position, and where I would have the chance to demonstrate my dedication to my benefactor. I even saved his life without his ever having known about it. It was at the time a trial from which I emerged victorious since I had enough strength not to allow myself become corrupted by contact with an almost always corrupting environment. Despite bad examples, I remained pure and I give thanks to God, for I have been rewarded with the happiness that I now enjoy.”

Under what circumstances did you save Mr. G.'s life?

“I was following behind him while we were riding horses, when I saw a large tree just ahead starting to fall over, but he did not see it. I called to him by shouting with all my might. He turned aside quickly and the tree fell at his feet; without the movement I had caused, he would have been crushed.”

When we mentioned this incident to Mr. G., he remembered it perfectly well.

Why did you die so young?

“God deemed my trial to have been sufficient.”

How could you have profited from such a trial if you had no remembrance of the cause that motivated it?

“In my humble condition, I still retained an intuition of my former pride. I am quite happy at having been able to control it, a fact that made the trial profitable to me; otherwise, I would have to go through it all over again. During its moments of freedom, my

spirit remembered, and upon awakening it retained an intuitive desire to resist the inclinations I felt to be evil. I earned more merit struggling in this way than if I had clearly remembered my past life. The memory of my former position would have exalted my pride and would have given me trouble, whereas I only had to combat the allurements of my new position.”

What good was the brilliant education you had received during your next-to-last incarnation since you did not remember the knowledge you had acquired?

“Such knowledge would have been useless, even nonsensical, in my new position; it remained latent and I have now regained it. Nonetheless, that knowledge was not completely useless, because it helped my intelligence develop; I instinctively had a predilection for elevated things, which inspired me with repugnance for the low and ignoble examples I had before me. Without that education, *I would have been nothing more than a servant.*”

Are the examples of selfless devotion of servants toward their masters the result of previous relationships?

“Have no doubt about it, for such is usually the case. Sometimes such servants even used to be members of the family, or as in my case, duty-bound persons who pay a debt of gratitude and whose dedication helps them to advance. You do not know all the effects of sympathy or antipathy that these previous relationships produce in the world. No, death does not interrupt such relationships, which often last from century to century.”

Why are such examples of dedication from servants so rare nowadays?

“Blame the selfish and prideful spirit of your time, aggravated by incredulity and materialistic ideas. True faith departs when faced with cupidity and the desire for material gain, and when faith departs, so does devotion. By leading people to the truth, Spiritism will revive forgotten virtues.”

There is nothing better than this example to demonstrate the benefits of forgetting one's former existences. If Mr. G. had remembered who his servant had been formerly, he would have felt very uncomfortable and would not have kept him in his position; he would have hampered the trial that ended up being advantageous to both of them.

Antonio B.

Buried Alive – The law of Talion

Antonio B. was a talented writer, esteemed by his fellow citizens. He lived in Lombardia, and fulfill a civil servant position with distinction and integrity. Around 1850 he fell victim to a condition of apparent death as the result of an apoplectic attack. As sometimes happens, it was unfortunately mistaken for real death. It was easy to make such a mistake because signs of decomposition were seemed obvious on the body. Fifteen days after his burial, a fortuitous incident led the family to request an exhumation. It so happened that a medallion had been inadvertently left in the coffin. The assistants were terribly shocked when, upon opening the coffin, they saw that the body had changed position, that it had turned face downward and – horrible thing! – that one of the hands had been partially gnawed on by the deceased. It was obvious that the unfortunate Antonio B. had been buried alive and that he must have succumbed to desperation and hunger.

Antonio B. was evoked in August of 1861 at the Parisian Society at the request of one of his relatives, and gave the following explanations:

1. *Evocation*

“What do you want?”

2. One of your relatives has asked us to evoke you and *we are pleased to do so; we would appreciate it if you would answer us.*

“Yes, I will answer you.”

3. *Do you remember the circumstances of your death?*

“Ah! Of course, I remember. But why awaken that memory of punishment?”

4. *Is it correct that you were buried alive by mistake?*

“That is the way it must have been, since apparent death displays all the characteristics of real death; I had lost nearly all my blood. But no one is to blame for an incident foreseen before my birth.

5. *If such questions are prone to cause you sadness, should we stop?*

“No, you may continue.”

6. *We would like to know if you are happy, for you left behind the reputation of an honest man.*

“Thank you very much. I know that you have prayed for me. I will try to answer, but if I fail, one of your Guides will help me out.”

7. *Could you describe the sensations you experienced during that horrible moment?*

“Oh! What a grievous trial! Feeling yourself confined between four boards and not being able to turn around or move! Not being able to scream, your voice no longer able to resound in an environment deprived of air! Oh! What torture is that of a misfortunate being who vainly struggles to breathe in an atmosphere depleted of air. Alas! I was like someone condemned to a furnace, only without the heat. Oh! I wish such tortures on no one. No, I wish on no one an end like mine! Alas! Cruel punishment for a cruel and brutal existence! Don't ask me what I thought, but I plunged into the past and caught a vague glimpse of the future.”

8. *You said: cruel punishment for a brutal existence. However, your reputation, intact even today, would not lead anyone to assume such a thing. Could you explain it to us?*

“What is the duration of one lifetime in light of eternity? Of course, I sought to act rightly during my latest incarnation, but I had accepted such an epilogue before I re-entered humanity. Ah! Why question me about the grievous past, which only I and the good spirits sent by the Lord know about? Well, if you must know, I walled up a woman – my wife – alive in a cellar! It is the penalty of talion to which I had to submit: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

9. We thank you for having been willing to answer our questions and we pray for God to forgive your past because of the merit of your latest existence.

“I will return later; besides, the spirit of Erastus wishes to complete this communication.”

Instructions by the Medium’s Guide:

“What you may infer from this communication is that all your existences are interrelated and that none are independent of any of the others; the concerns, the tribulations, as well as the great sufferings that afflict humans, are always the consequences of a previous criminal or ill-employed life. Nonetheless, I must tell you that deaths such as Antonio B’s are rare and if that man’s blameless, latest existence ended in such a death, it was because he himself had asked for it with the aim of shortening his errant state and more quickly reach the higher spheres. In fact, after a period of trouble and mental suffering to further expiate his heinous crime, he will be forgiven and will go to a better world where he will find his victim, who awaits him and who already forgave him long ago. Thus, learn well from this cruel example, my dear Spiritists, so that you may patiently bear mental and physical suffering and all of earth’s little miseries.”

What advantage can humankind gain from such punishments?

“Punishments do not occur in order to develop humankind, but to punish the guilty individual. Frankly, humankind as a

whole has no interest in the suffering of one of its members. In this case, the punishment fit the wrong. Why are there insane, mentally impaired and paralytic individuals? Why do some die by fire? Why do some suffer the tortures of a long agony, unable to live or die? Ah! Believe me; respect the sovereign will and try not to probe the reason behind the decrees of Providence! Know that God is just and does only what is good.”

Erastus

Doesn't this example contain a great and awesome teaching? Thus, God's justice always reaches the guilty, and although it may arrive late sometimes, it does not fail to follow its course nonetheless. Isn't it eminently moral to realize that if greatly guilty individuals live their existence peacefully, and often in abundance of earthly assets, their hour of expiation will nevertheless sound sooner or later? Punishments of this nature are understandable, not only because we can witness them somehow, but also because they are logical. We believe in them because our reason accepts them.

Thus, an honorable existence does not exclude the trials of life, since one has chosen or accepted them as a supplement to expiation; it is the remaining balance on a debt that we pay before we receive the award for the progress we have accomplished.

If we consider how frequent acts of barbarity were in days gone by (but which shock us so much nowadays) even among the highest and most enlightened classes, how many murders were committed in those times when the lives of others were disregarded and when the weak were unscrupulously crushed by the powerful, then one will understand that among our contemporaries there must be those who have cleansed their past. One will no longer wonder at the considerable number of persons who succumb as victims of isolated accidents or general catastrophes. The despotism, fanaticism, ignorance and prejudices of the Middle Ages and

of the times that followed bequeathed to future generations an immense debt that has not yet been liquidated. Many examples of misfortune seem to us to be undeserved solely because we can only see the present.

Letil

Mr. Letil, a manufacturer who lived on the outskirts of Paris, died a horrible death in April of 1864. A vat of boiling varnish caught fire and in the blink of an eye his body was covered with flaming matter; he knew right away that he was lost. Alone with a young apprentice in the shop at the time, he had enough strength to reach his home, more than two hundred yards away. By the time he could be given first aid, shreds of charred flesh were falling off, and the bones on part of his body and face were exposed. He survived for twelve hours in excruciating suffering; despite it all, he kept his presence of mind up to the last moment and put his affairs in order with perfect lucidity. Throughout the cruel agony, no one heard him utter one single groan, one single murmur; he died praying to God. He was a most honorable man of a gentle and benevolent character, loved and cherished by all who knew him. He had enthusiastically embraced Spiritist ideas, though without much reflection; for this reason, and being somewhat of a medium himself, he was the target of several deceptions; nevertheless, his faith did not weaken as a result. In certain cases, his trust in what spirits said to him verged on naiveté.

Upon being evoked at the Parisian Society on April 29, 1864, a few days after his death and still under the influence of the terrible scene of which he had been the victim, he provided the following communication:

“Profound sadness oppresses me! I am still aghast at my tragic death and I feel like I am under the executioner’s axe.

How I suffered! Oh, how I suffered! I'm trembling all over. It seems like I can still smell the fetid odor that my burnt flesh casts around me. An agony of 12 hours that you, O guilty spirit, endured! It has suffered without complaining, and so God will give it his forgiveness.

“Oh! My dear wife! Do not cry over me any longer; my pain will soon abate. I am no longer suffering physically, but the remembrance is the same as the reality. My knowledge of Spiritism is helping me a great deal, and I can now see that without such a sweet belief I would have remained in the delirium into which I was cast by that horrible death.

“However, I have a consoling spirit who hasn't left me since I breathed my last. I was still able to speak, when I saw him already at my side; I thought that a reflection of my pain was making me delirious and causing me to see ghosts ... But no, it was my guardian angel, who, silently and quietly, consoled my heart. As soon as I left the earth behind, he said, ‘Come, my son, greet the new day.’ Then I breathed more easily, believing I had left a horrifying nightmare. I talked about my beloved wife, that courageous child who had devoted herself to me. He said, ‘They are all on the earth, whereas you, my son, are with us.’ I went looking for my house; my angel let me re-enter it in his company. I saw everyone bathed in tears. Sadness and mourning had invaded that once-peaceful dwelling. I couldn't handle the scene of such a painful spectacle any longer, and all emotional, I said to my Guide, ‘Oh, my good angel, let's get out of here!’ ‘Yes, let us leave’, he responded, ‘and seek repose.’

“Since then, I have suffered less, and if I didn't see my wife so inconsolable and my friends so sad, I would be almost happy.

“My good guide, my dear angel, told me why I had experienced such a terrible death, and for your instruction, my children, I want to confess something to you:

“Two centuries ago, I ordered a young girl, as innocent as one could be at that age – about 12 to 14 years – to be burned at the stake. What was she accused of? Alas! For having been the accomplice of a conspiracy against the policy of the clergy. At the time, I was an Italian judge of the Inquisition. And since the executioners didn’t dare touch the body of the poor child, I myself was both judge and executioner. Oh, justice, God’s justice, how great you are! I have yielded to you. I had promised so much not to waver on the day of struggle that I had the strength to keep my commitment. I did not complain and you have forgiven me, O my God! But when will the remembrance of my poor innocent victim be erased from my memory? Is it this which causes me to suffer? She must forgive me too.

“Oh, you children of the New Doctrine, you sometimes say: we cannot remember what we did previously and that is why we cannot avoid the evils to which we expose ourselves. It is due to our forgetfulness of the past! Oh, my brothers! Praise God, for if he were to allow you to have such remembrance, there would be no respite for you while on earth. Constantly assailed by shame and remorse, could you enjoy a moment of peace?

“Forgetfulness is a blessing; remembrance here is a torture. In just a few more days, and as recompense for the resignation with which I bore my suffering, God shall grant me the forgetfulness of my wrong. That is what my good angel has just promised me.”

Mr. Letil’s character during his last incarnation demonstrates how much his spirit had improved itself. His conduct was the result of his repentance and the good resolutions he had made beforehand, but that was not sufficient. He had to crown his resolutions with a great act of expiation. He had to bear as a man the torture that he had inflicted on another. In such a terrible circumstance, resignation was for him the greatest trial, and fortunately, he did not fail it. His understanding of Spiritism undoubtedly contributed greatly to

sustaining his courage due to the sincere faith that it had given him in the future: he knew that life's sufferings are trials and expiations, and he had resignedly submitted to them by saying, 'God is just; I have therefore deserved them.'

An Ambitious Scholar

Mrs. B. from Bordeaux did not have to endure the poignant anguish of poverty, but she was a martyr to physical suffering due to a long string of serious illnesses of which she had been the target for 70 years, from the time she was 5 months old. For nearly every year of her life, they had brought her to the brink of death. Three times she had been poisoned by the tests that a dubious science conducted on her, and her constitution, ruined as much by medications as by the illnesses themselves, rendered her prey until the end of her days to intolerable suffering, which nothing could relieve. Her daughter, a Christian Spiritist and medium, asked God in her prayers to soften her mother's cruel trials but her spirit guide told her to simply ask for her to have the strength to bear them with patience and resignation, and then dictated the following instructions:

"In human existence, everything has its reason for being; there is not one *single suffering that you have caused that does not find an echo in the sufferings you endure*; there is not one of your privations that is not the result of your excesses; there is not one tear that falls from your eyes that is not meant to cleanse a wrong or sometimes a crime. Therefore, as cruel as they might seem, patiently and resignedly bear physical and mental pain and imagine the farmer whose limbs are broken with fatigue but who nonetheless continues to work without stopping, because he always has before him the golden ears of corn that will be the result of his perseverance. This is the fate of the unfortunate beings

who suffer in your world; the aspiration to happiness, which must be the result of their patience, will render them resistant to the ephemeral pains of humanity.

“Thus it is for your mother. Each pain that she accepts as an expiation corresponds to a blemish erased from her past, and the sooner all the blemishes are erased, the sooner she will be happy. *Lack of resignation renders suffering sterile*, for then the trials will have to be recommenced. So, what is most useful for her is courage and submission, and that is what you must pray for God and the good spirits to grant her.

“Your mother had been a good [male] physician in the past, living amidst surroundings that made it easy to live well, and in which he lacked no gifts or praise. Greedy for glory and riches, and wanting to reach the pinnacle of his science, not with a view to relieving his brothers – for he was no philanthropist – but with a view to increasing his reputation and clientele, he didn’t hesitate to do anything to reach his objectives. His mother was martyred on her bed of suffering because he was attempting to do a study on the convulsions which he himself caused; his son was subjected to experiments which he hoped would give him the key to certain phenomena; the elderly saw their lives being shortened and healthy persons felt weakened by experiments meant to prove the effectiveness of this or that potion. All these experiments were performed on unsuspecting, unfortunate patients. The satisfaction of greed and pride, the thirst for gold and fame, were the motives behind such conduct. Many centuries and dreadful trials were needed to tame this ambitious and pride-filled spirit, until repentance began its work of regeneration. The reparation has come to an end, for the trials of her last existence may even be regarded as mild compared to those she bore in the past. Take heart, then, because if her punishment has been long and cruel, the reward bestowed on her for her resignation, patience and humility will be great.

“Have courage, all you who suffer: consider the brevity of material existence; think about the joys of eternity. Call upon hope – that devoted friend of all suffering hearts; call upon faith, its sister, which shows you the heaven where hope allows you to enter beforehand. Also, call upon those friends whom the Lord has provided you, who surround you, who uphold and love you, and whose constant solicitude leads you back to the One whom you have offended by transgressing the Divine laws.”

After her death, Mrs. B dictated communications – either to her daughter or to the Parisian Spiritist Society – which reflected the most eminent qualities and which confirmed what had been said about her previous history.

Charles de Saint-G., Mentally Impaired

(Parisian Spiritist Society, 1860)

Charles de Saint-G. was a mentally impaired 13-year-old boy, who was still living, and whose intellectual faculties were so impaired that he could not even recognize his own parents. He could barely feed himself. He had experienced the complete developmental suspension of his entire organic system.

1. (To St. Louis) *Would you tell us if we could evoke this child's spirit?*

“You can evoke him as if you were evoking the spirit of a deceased person.”

2. *Your response would seem to imply that we may evoke him at any time.*

“Yes, his soul is held to his body by physical ties, but not by spiritual ones; it can free itself at any time.”

3. (Evocation of Ch. de Saint-G.)

“I am a poor spirit held to the earth like a bird tied down by one leg.”

4. *In your present state as a spirit, are you aware of your complete impairment in this world?*

“Of course, I feel my captivity very well.”

5. *While your body is sleeping and your spirit is free, do you have thoughts as lucid as if you were in a normal state?*

“While my unfortunate body rests, I am a bit freer to reach out toward the heaven to which I aspire.”

6. *While in the spirit state, do you experience any sensations of pain as a result of your corporeal state?*

“Yes, since it is a punishment.”

7. *Can you remember your previous existence?*

“Oh, yes! It is the cause of my present exile.”

8. *What kind of existence was it?*

“That of a young libertine during the reign of Henri III.”

9. *You said that your present condition is a punishment; so you didn't choose it?*

“No.”

10. *In your current state of impairment, how can your present life serve for your advancement?*

“It is not null before God, who imposed it on me.”

11. *Can you see how long your current existence will last?*

“No. But a few more years and I will re-enter my homeland.”

12. *What did you do as a spirit between your previous existence and your present incarnation?*

“God imprisoned me because I was a thoughtless spirit.”

13. *In your waking state, are you aware of what goes on around you despite the imperfection of your organs?*

“I can see and hear, but my body neither understands nor perceives anything.”

14. *Could we do anything to help you?*

“Nothing.”

15. (To St. Louis) *Could the prayers we say for an incarnate spirit have the same effectiveness as for an errant spirit?*

“Prayers are always good and are agreeable to God. In this poor spirit’s case, they do not do him any good at present, but they will serve him later. God will take them into account.”

This evocation confirms what has always been said about the mentally impaired. Their mental impairment does not correspond to their spirit’s impairment; regardless of the physical organs, the spirit enjoys all of its faculties. The imperfection of the organs is only *an obstacle* to the free manifestation of thought. Thus, it is like a hale and hearty man whose limbs have been tied.

A Spirit’s Teaching on the Mentally Impaired, Given at the Parisian Society

Mentally impaired persons are being punished for having used their powerful mental faculties badly; their soul is imprisoned in a body whose incapacitated brain cannot express their thoughts. This mental and physical muteness comprises one of the cruelest earthly punishments possible, and is often chosen by repentant spirits who want to redeem their wrongs. Such a trial is not unfruitful, however, because the spirit does not remain idle while in its prison of flesh. Its dazed eyes see and its weak brain thinks, but it can express nothing either in words or gaze. Except for the fact that they can move, these beings are in a mental state similar to that of lethargic or cataleptic persons, who see and hear what happens around them without being able to express it. When you have a terrifying nightmare, during which you want to escape from danger, to scream and cry out for help, but your tongue remains stuck to your palate and your feet to the ground, you are

experiencing for a moment what the mentally impaired experience all the time: *the paralysis of the body joined to the life of the spirit.*

Nearly all infirmities thus have their reason for being, for nothing occurs without a cause, and what you might call an injustice of fate is only an application of the highest justice. Insanity is also a punishment for having abused superior faculties. The insane individual has two personalities: the one that is delirious and the one that is aware of its acts without being able to control them. Regarding the mentally impaired, the contemplative and isolated life of their soul (apart from the distractions of the body) can be as much affected by events as the most complicated existences. Some revolt against their voluntary punishment; they regret having chosen it and experience a furious desire to return to the other life, a desire that makes them forget resignation in the present life and their remorse for their past life, which they are able to remember, because the mentally impaired and the insane know more than you might think. Behind their physical powerlessness a mental power lies hidden, of which you have no idea. The acts of fury or stupidity to which their body is compelled are judged by their inner being, who suffers and is vexed by them. Thus, to mock, injure or otherwise mistreat such individuals – as often happens – is to increase their suffering, for it makes them feel more cruelly their deficiency and abjection. If they could, they would accuse those who act this way as being cowards, knowing that the victim cannot defend him or herself.

Insanity is not one of the divine laws and science may make it disappear, since it is the physical result of ignorance, poverty and filth. The modern hygienic resources that science, having become more practical, has made available to everyone, tends to destroy it. Since progress is an express condition of humankind, the kinds of trials that are imposed will change along with the march of time; they will become completely mental, and when

the earth – still young – will have fulfilled all the phases of its current existence, it will become a dwelling of happiness like other more advanced planets.

Pierre Jouty, the medium's father

There was a time when one would have had questions regarding the soul of the mentally impaired, wondering if they truly belonged to the human species at all. Isn't the way that Spiritism contemplates the facts highly moralizing and greatly instructive? Doesn't such a matter deserve our serious reflection considering that such disgraced bodies contain souls who may have shined on earth at one time, souls who are as lucid and thinking as our own but enclosed in a dense envelope that stifles their expressions; that the same thing could happen to us someday if we were to abuse the faculties that Providence has granted us?

How could mental impairment be explained otherwise? How could we reconcile it with the justice and goodness of God apart from accepting the plurality of existences? If the soul has not lived before, then it must have been created at the same time as the body, but in that case, how may we explain how a just and good God could have created souls as wanting as those of the mentally impaired? Here we are not dealing with one of those accidents, like insanity, for example, which may be prevented or cured, but with beings who are born and die in the same condition. Since they have no notion of good or evil, what is their fate in the eternal life? Might they be as happy as intelligent and hard-working individuals? But why such favoritism if they have done nothing good? Will they be in so-called limbo, that is, in a mixed state that is neither happy nor unhappy? But then why such eternal inferiority? Is it their fault that God has created them mentally impaired? We challenge all those who deny the doctrine of reincarnation to break this impasse. In contrast, by accepting reincarnation, what appears

to be an injustice becomes admirably just, and what seems to be inexplicable is explained in a most rational manner.

Moreover, we know that those who reject this Doctrine have never opposed it with arguments other than their personal repugnance at the idea of having to come back to earth. To that we would respond: God does not ask your permission to send you back to earth, in the same way that the judge does not consult the defendant's preferences before sending him or her to jail. Everyone enjoys the possibility of not having to come back to earth by improving themselves enough to merit going to a higher sphere. However, selfishness and pride are not admitted on those happy worlds; hence the need for all to rid themselves of these two moral diseases through their own efforts, if they want to ascend.

We know that in certain countries the mentally impaired are far from being regarded as objects of scorn but instead are surrounded by benevolent care. Mightn't this sentiment indicate an intuition about the true state of these unfortunate individuals as being more worthy of consideration since their spirit, understanding its condition, must suffer at seeing itself as the outcast of society?⁷⁹

Families in these societies even view it as a favor and a blessing to have one of these beings as a member. Is this a result of superstition? Possibly, because among the ignorant, superstition is often confused with the most sacred ideas, of which they are unaware. Whatever the case may be for such family members, it is an opportunity to practice charity, which is all the more meritorious because they are often poor, and it is thus for them a responsibility from which they derive no material compensation. There is greater merit in surrounding an unfortunate child with affectionate care than one whose qualities offer some sort of compensation. Selfless

⁷⁹ This text was written in the late 1800s and happily these notions have largely changed in our days. – Tr.

charity is one of the virtues most pleasant to God and always attracts divine blessings to those who practice it. To these, this inborn sentiment is equivalent to this prayer: "Thank you, my God, for having given us as a trial a fragile being to uphold, an afflicted being to console."

Adelaide-Marguerite Gosse

Adelaide-Marguerite was a poor, humble maid from Normandy, near Harfleur. At 11 years of age she went to work for some wealthy ranchers in her area. Some years later, the Seine flooded and carried off and drowned all their animals! Other misfortunes followed and the girl's employers fell into poverty! Adelaide identified with them in their misfortune, stifled the voice of selfishness and, listening only to her generous heart, convinced them to accept 500 francs she had saved up. She then continued to work for them without pay. After her employers died, she devoted herself to their daughter – a penniless widow. She toiled in the fields and took her gain to the house. She got married and joined her efforts with those of her husband in order to support the poor woman, whom she still called 'her mistress'! Her sublime self-denial continued for nearly a half century.

The Society of Emulation at Rouen did not forget this woman, so worthy of respect and admiration, and awarded her an honorary medal and some financial compensation. The Masonic Lodges of Havre added to this tribute and awarded her a small sum intended for her welfare. Finally, the town administration also provided for her in a discreet way, sparing her any susceptibility.

An attack of palsy took this beneficent being from the earth suddenly and painlessly. The final respects paid to her memory were simple yet decent. The Municipal Secretary led the funeral procession.

(Parisian Society, December 27, 1861)

Evocation: We pray to Almighty God to allow the spirit of Marguerite Gross to communicate with us.

“Yes, God has kindly granted me such a grace.”

We consider ourselves fortunate to be able to express our admiration for your conduct during your earthly existence and we hope that your self-denial has earned you your recompense.

“Yes, God has been good and merciful toward this servant. Everything I did, and which seems praiseworthy to you, was completely natural.”

For our instruction, could you tell us the cause behind your humble condition while on earth?

“For two successive existences I occupied a high-level position. It was easy for me to practice the good without sacrifice because I was rich. However, it seemed that I was evolving too slowly, and that is why I asked to return in a more humble condition, in which I would have to struggle with privation. I prepared myself for a long time. God upheld my courage, and so I was able to reach my intended goal, thanks to the spiritual assistance he gave me.”

Have you seen your former employers? Please tell us what your position is in relation to them and if you still consider yourself as their subordinate.

“Yes, I have seen them; they were present when I arrived here. I must humbly confess that they consider me superior to themselves.”

Did you have any particular reason for being so fond of them rather than of someone else?

“No obligatory reason. I could have achieved my purposes elsewhere. However, I chose them in order to pay off a debt of gratitude I felt I owed them. In a former life, they had been kind toward me and had rendered me service.”

What do you think your future holds?

“I hope to reincarnate on a world where pain is unknown. You might think me quite presumptuous, but I am speaking to you from the readiness of my character. Furthermore, I submit myself to God’s will.”

We thank you for having answered our evocation. We have no doubt that God will give you his blessings.

“Thank you. May God also bless you, and when you die may you all experience the pure bliss that has been granted to me!”

Clara Rivier

Clara was a 10-year-old girl, the daughter of a family of laborers in the south of France. At the age of 4 she became severely ill. During her short life she was never heard to complain or show any sign of impatience, and even though she had no education, she consoled her stricken family by commenting on the future life and the happiness that she would find there. She died in September of 1862 after 4 days of torture and convulsions, during which she never stopped praying to God. “I’m not afraid to die,” she said, “because a happy life is reserved for me afterward.” She said to her weeping father, “Take comfort; I will come to visit you. I feel my hour is near, and when it arrives I’ll know and warn you.” And indeed, when the fatal moment was upon her, she called her family and said, “I have only five minutes left; give me your hands.” And she expired as she had announced.

Afterward, a rapping spirit began visiting the Rivier’s home. It disrupted everything; it struck the table as if it had a club; it shook clothes and the draperies, and rattled dinnerware. Under Clara’s form, this spirit appeared to her youngest sister, who was only 5 years old. According to this child, her sister often appeared to her and such apparitions caused her to exclaim joyfully, “But see how pretty Clara is!”

1. *Evocation of Clara Rivier.*

“I’m next to you and ready to respond.”

2. *Although you were so young, where did you get such elevated ideas about the future life?*

“From the short amount of time I had to spend on your planet, and from my previous incarnation. I was a medium both when I left the earth that time and when I came back among you. It was predestination; I sensed and saw what I spoke about.”

3. *How could a child of your age not complain at all during four years of suffering?*

“Because my physical suffering was controlled by a greater power – that of my guardian angel, whom I saw constantly beside me. He was able to mitigate what I experienced. He rendered my willpower stronger than the suffering.”

4. *How did you foresee the moment of your death?*

“My guardian angel told it to me; he never deceived me.”

5. *You told your father: ‘Take comfort; I will come to visit you.’ But how do you explain the fact that, although animated by these good sentiments toward your parents, you have returned to trouble them by causing such disturbances in their home?*

“I obviously have a trial – or rather, a mission – to fulfill. If I have returned to see my parents, do you think it is for nothing? The noises and disturbances, the struggles resulting from my presence are a warning. I am aided by other spirits who cause the disturbances for a reason, just as I have my reasons for appearing to my little sister. Thanks to us, many will be convinced. My parents have had to experience this trial. It will soon pass, but not before having convinced a lot of [incarnate] spirits.”

6. *So you aren’t personally causing the disturbances?*

“I’m helped by other spirits who are serving in the trial reserved for my parents.”

7. *Then how do you explain the fact that your little sister has recognized you if you are not the one who is causing the manifestations?*

“She has seen only me. She has second sight for the time being, and this will not be the last time that my presence will comfort and encourage her.”

8. *Why were you affected by so many infirmities at such a young age?*

“I had previous wrongs to expiate. In a prior existence, I abused my health as well as the outstanding position I enjoyed. Thus, God said to me, ‘You have enjoyed too much and without restraint; therefore, you shall suffer in like manner; you have been proud, so you shall be humble; you have been vain about your beauty and thus you shall fall from it; instead of vanity, you shall struggle to acquire charity and goodness.’ I fulfilled God’s will and my guardian angel helped me.”

9. *Would you like for us to say anything to your parents?*

“At the request of a medium, my parents have practiced a great deal of charity; they were right in not praying with their lips: charity must be practiced by hand and heart. Giving to those who suffer: that is prayer; that is what it means to be a Spiritist.

God has granted freewill to all souls, that is, the faculty to progress; he has given everyone the same inspiration, and that is why the humble homespun garment is much closer to the gold-stitched robe than one might generally suppose. Therefore, close social gaps through charity; give shelter in your home to the poor; encourage them, uplift them; do not humiliate them. If we knew how to practice this great law of conscience everywhere, one would not witness the huge misfortunes that beset civilizations from time to time, and which are sent by God to punish them and open their eyes.

“My dear parents, pray to God; love each other; practice the law of Christ: Do not do unto others what you would not want them to do unto you. Appeal to God, who tries you in order to show that his will is great and holy as he himself is. Prepare

yourselves for the future by arming yourselves with courage and perseverance, for you have been called to suffer further. Suffering is necessary to know how to merit a good position on a better world, where the comprehension of divine justice becomes punishment for evil spirits.

“My dear parents, I will always be near you. Goodbye, or rather, until we meet again. Be resigned, be charitable, love your fellow beings and one day you shall be happy.”

Clara

This is a beautiful image: “The humble homespun garment is much closer to the gold-stitched robe than one might generally suppose.” This is an allusion to spirits, who from one existence to the next, go from an outstanding position to a humble or miserable one, for they often expiate in an adverse environment their abuse of the gifts that God has bestowed on them. This is the kind of justice that everyone comprehends.

Another thought, no less deep, is the one that attributes collective calamities to the infraction of divine law, for God punishes nations as well as individuals. Surely, if the law of charity were practiced, there would be neither wars nor great misery. Spiritism leads to the practice of such faith. Is that perhaps the reason why it encounters so many bitter enemies? Are this child's exhortations to her parents those of a demon?

Françoise Vernhes

Françoise had been blind from birth, the daughter of a tenant farmer from around Toulouse. She died in 1855 at the age of 45. She kept herself occupied by teaching Catechism to children in preparation for their first communion. When the Catechism was changed, she had no difficulty teaching them the new one because she knew both by heart. One winter night as she was with

an aunt and returning from a journey to several places, she had to cross a forest on dreadfully muddy paths. The two women had to walk carefully on the edge of the ditches. Her aunt wanted to lead her by the hand, but she said, "Don't worry about me. I'm in no danger of falling. I see a light on my shoulders and it is guiding me. Follow me; I'm the one who is going to guide you." Thus, they arrived home without incident, the blind woman having led the one who could use her eyes.

(Evocation in Paris, May of 1865)

Would you be so kind as to explain to us the light which guided you on that dark night and which only you could see?

"Excuse me!? People like you, who are in constant relation with spirits, need an explanation for an incident like that one? It was my guardian angel who was guiding me."

That was what we thought, but we wanted you to confirm it. Were you aware at the time that it was your guardian angel leading you?

"No, I'll admit, although I did believe in heavenly protection. I had prayed for so long for the good God to take pity on me! ... Being blind is so cruel ... Yes, it is very cruel! But I also realize that it was just. Those who sin with their eyes must be punished through their eyes, and such is the case with all the other faculties with which humans are endowed and which they abuse. Thus, don't look for any other cause for the numerous misfortunes affecting humankind than that which is natural, that is, expiation; expiation which is only meritorious when borne with humility but which can be mitigated through prayer by attracting the spiritual influences that protect the guilty of the *human penitentiary* and infuse hope and consolation into afflicted and suffering hearts."

You devoted yourself to teaching religion to poor children. Although it had been changed in form, and despite your blindness,

was it difficult for you to acquire the necessary understanding of the Catechism you knew so well?

“Ordinarily, the other senses of the blind are doubled, if I may express myself like that. Observation is not one of the least faculties of their nature. Their memory is like an archive wherein teachings related to their aptitudes and inclinations are set permanently in order. Since nothing from the outside can disturb this faculty, it can thus become remarkably developed through education. That wasn’t my case, however, for I did not receive much education. I only thank God for having enabled my education to be enough so that I could fulfill my mission of devotion alongside those children, and which was at the same time a reparation for the bad example I set for them in a previous existence. Everything is a serious subject for Spiritists. All they have to do is to look around them and it will be more useful than if they were to allow themselves to be misled by the philosophical subtleties of certain spirits who mock them by flattering their pride with phrases of great effect but devoid of good sense.”

By your language, we deem you to be intellectually advanced just as your conduct on earth gave us proof that you were morally advanced.

“There is still much for me to acquire. However, on the earth there are many people who are mistaken for simpletons because their intelligence has been veiled by expiation. With death, the veil falls and quite often these poor simpletons turn out to be more educated than those whose disdain they aroused. You can be sure that pride is the touchstone for recognizing people. All those whose heart is accessible to flattery, or who have too much confidence in their own knowledge, are on the wrong path. Usually, they are not sincere; be wary of them. Be as humble as Christ was and carry your cross like he did – with love – in order to access the kingdom of heaven.”

Françoise Vernhes

Anna Bitter

To be struck by the loss of a beloved child is an excruciating cause of grief; however, seeing an only child, the object of all your highest hopes, on whom your only affection has been concentrated, wither before your eyes and fade without pain due to unknown causes, is one of those whims of nature that baffles science. Exhausting all your resources on the matter, becoming certain that there is no hope, and bearing this anguish every day for many years without seeing an end to it, is cruel suffering. It is the kind of suffering that wealth aggravates rather than mitigates, because you had hoped that such wealth would someday be enjoyed by this beloved person.

Such was the situation of Anna Bitter's father, his soul seized by somber despair and his character growing more and more embittered before a distressing spectacle whose end result – albeit indeterminate – could only be fatal. A family friend and disciple of Spiritism believed he ought to ask his protector spirit regarding the matter and received the following response:

“I greatly desire to explain this strange phenomenon, for I know that your asking me does not derive from indiscrete curiosity but from your interest in this poor child. Because you believe in divine justice, it will be a beneficial teaching. Those whom the Lord wills to strike must bow their head and not rebel, for there is never punishment without cause. This poor girl, whose death sentence has been suspended by God, must soon return to be among us, for God has taken pity on her, and her father – that unhappy man in your midst – must be punished through his sole affection in this world for having mocked the trust and sentiments of those around him. For the time being, his repentance has touched the Omnipotent and death has withheld its blow from her dear head. But his rebelliousness is returning and punishment always follows rebellion. Be happy that it is on earth that you are punished! Pray,

my friends, for this poor child, whose tender age will render her last moments difficult. The sap of youth is so abundant in this poor being that, in spite of her frail state, her soul will have difficulty disengaging itself. Oh pray! Later, she will help and console you, for her spirit is more evolved than those around her.

“Due to special permission from our Lord, I was able to answer what you have asked me, since it is necessary that this spirit be helped to make her disengagement easier.”

The father died later after having suffered the emptiness from losing his daughter. Following are the first communications which both gave after their respective deaths.

The daughter: “Thank you, my friend, for being concerned about this poor child and for having followed the counsels of your good guide. Yes, thanks to your prayers it was easier for me to leave my earthly envelope behind because my father ... Alas! He didn't pray; he cursed! I'm not upset with him, however. It was the result of his great tenderness for me. I beg God to grant him the grace of being enlightened before he dies. I encourage him and my mission is to soften his final moments. There are times when it seems that divine light enters him; however, it is nothing more than a passing light and he quickly relapses into his old thoughts. He only has one seed of faith in him, but it is suffocated by worldly interests and will only sprout by means of new and more dreadful trials – at least that is what I fear. On my part, I only had the remnants of an expiation to endure and thus it was neither very painful nor very difficult. I didn't suffer during my peculiar infirmity; I was more of an instrument of trial for my father, for he suffered more at seeing me in such a state than I did. I was resigned to it, he was not. Now I have been rewarded. God granted me the grace of shortening my stay on the earth – for which I thank him. I am happy amidst the good spirits who surround me. We are all carrying out our duties with joy, because idleness would be cruel suffering.”

The father (about one month after his death):

Our purpose in evoking you is to inquire about your situation in the spirit world so that we might be useful to you to the best of our abilities.

“The world of spirits? I can’t see it. I can only see the people I knew, but who do not think of me or miss me; on the contrary, they seem content at being free of me.”

Are you well aware of your condition?

“Perfectly; for a while I thought I still belonged to your world, but I now know very well that I do not.”

Then why can’t you see other spirits around you?

“I don’t know. Everything is clear around me.”

Have you seen your daughter yet?

“No, she is dead. I have looked for her and have called for her in vain. What an awful emptiness her death left in me! When I died, I thought there could be no doubt that I would meet her – but nothing! Always this isolation around me! No one gives me a word of hope or consolation. Goodbye. I am going to go look for my child.”

The medium’s Guide: “This man was neither an atheist nor a materialist, but one of those who vaguely believe without being concerned about God and their future because they are so absorbed with earthly interests. He was profoundly selfish and would undoubtedly have sacrificed everything to save his daughter, but he would also have unscrupulously sacrificed other people’s interests to his own advantage. Except for his daughter, he was not attached to anyone. God punished him, as you know, taking from him his sole consolation on earth. And since he did not repent, she is also kept from his sight in the world of spirits. He took no interest in anyone while on earth; here, no one takes an interest in him. He is alone and abandoned – that is his punishment. Nevertheless, his daughter is close to him even though he does not see her. If he could see her, he would not be punished. But what does he do? Does he speak to God? Does he repent? No. He continues to complain, even to blaspheme;

in other words, he does what he did on earth. So help him through prayer and counsel so that he may come out of his blindness.”

Joseph Maitre – A Blind Man

Joseph Maitre belonged to the middle class of society and enjoyed a modest income that protected him from need. His parents provided him with a good education and meant for him to go into business; however, at age twenty he lost his sight. He died in 1845, when he was almost 50. Around ten years prior to his death, he was struck with a second infirmity that left him completely deaf; thus, he could only relate to the world of the living through the sense of touch. Not being able to see was in itself very hard, but not being able to hear was double torture; having at first enjoyed all his faculties, he felt even more the results of this two-fold privation. What could he have done to deserve such a cruel fate? It was not his last existence, for he had always displayed exemplary conduct. He was a good son with a gentle and benevolent character, and when he found that he had been deprived of hearing, he accepted the new trial with resignation. One never heard him utter a single complaint. His speech displayed perfect lucidity of spirit and an uncommon intelligence.

A person who had known him thought that useful instruction might be received by talking with his spirit. He was evoked and the following communication was received in response to the questions addressed to him.

(Paris, 1863)

“My friends, I thank you for having remembered me, although maybe you would not have even thought of me if you hadn't expected to reap some benefit from my communication;

nonetheless, I know that your motives are authentic. Thus, I am pleased to have answered your call, and since I have been allowed to do so, I am happy to be able to serve for your instruction. May my example add to the many proofs that spirits have provided you regarding the justice of God.

You knew me to be blind and deaf, and you have asked yourselves what I had done to deserve such a fate. I am going to tell you. First of all, it was the second time that I was deprived of sight. During my previous existence at the beginning of the last century, I went blind at 30 years of age due to excesses of all kinds, which ruined my health and weakened my organs. It was already a punishment for having abused the gifts I received from Providence, for I was very talented. But instead of realizing the fact that I was the original cause of my infirmity, I accused that same Providence, in whom I believed very little anyway. I blasphemed against God; I denied him and accused him by saying that if he did actually exist, then he must be unjust and evil for making his creatures suffer as I did. On the contrary, I should have considered myself fortunate because, unlike so many other unfortunate blind people, I didn't have to beg for my bread. But, no, I only thought about myself and about the privations that had been imposed on me. Under the control of such ideas and due to my lack of faith, I became cantankerous and demanding; in other words, unbearable to those who were close to me. From then on, life was purposeless; I couldn't think of the future except as a chimera. After futilely exhausting all the resources of science and realizing that my healing was impossible, I decided to end it all: I committed suicide.

Upon my awakening, alas! I found myself immersed in the same darkness I had been in during life! However, it didn't take long to understand that I did not belong to the corporeal world, but that I was now a blind spirit! Life beyond the grave was thus a reality! I tried in vain to escape from it, to plunge myself

into nothingness, but ended up simply clashing with the void. If this life were eternal – as I had heard – would I be then in this situation for the rest of eternity? That thought was dreadful. I wasn't suffering, but to describe the anguish and torment of my spirit is impossible. How long did it last? I don't know. But it seemed so very, very long!

“Exhausted and weary, a change finally came over me. I understood that a higher power was weighing down on me and I told myself that if this power could oppress me, it could also comfort me, and so I begged for mercy. As I prayed and as my fervor increased, something told me that my cruel situation would have an end. The light finally dawned and my rapture was boundless at beholding the heavenly brightness. I could perceive benevolently smiling spirits – those who surrounded me as well as those who hovered radiantly in space. I wanted to follow them, but an invisible force held me back. Then one of them said to me, ‘The God whom you use to deny has noticed your return to him and has allowed us to restore your sight, but you have yielded only because of constraint and exhaustion. If from now on you want to share in the bliss that we enjoy here, you must prove the sincerity of your repentance and good sentiments by recommencing your earthly trial *under conditions that will expose you to falling again into the same wrongs*, for this new trial will be even harsher than the last.’ I eagerly accepted, promising not to fail again.

“Thus, I returned to earth under the conditions you are aware of. It wasn't difficult for me to be good, because I wasn't evil by nature; I had revolted against God and God had punished me. I returned *with an inborn faith*, and that is the reason why I no longer complained against him, but rather accepted my dual infirmity with resignation and as an expiation which had to have its origin in Sovereign Justice. I felt no desperation during the isolation of my closing years, for I had faith in the future and in

God's mercy. The isolation was very beneficial because during that long night, wherein all was silence, my soul more freely uplifted itself to the Eternal, foreseeing the infinite through thought. When my exile was finally over, the spirit world provided me only with splendors and ineffable delight.

“In comparison with my past, I deem my situation relatively very happy and I give thanks to God for it. However, when I look to the future, I see how distant I still am from perfect bliss. I have completed my expiation, *but I must still make reparations. My latest existence was only profitable to me alone*, and now I hope soon to start a new existence where I can be useful to others, thereby repairing my previous uselessness. Only then will I be able to advance on the blessed path opened to all spirits of goodwill.

“That is my story, my friends. If my example can help to enlighten any of my incarnate brothers and help them avoid the plight into which I had fallen, I will have begun to repay my debt.”

Joseph

Allan
KARDEC

HEAVEN AND HELL

In this book, Allan Kardec approaches divine justice from the point of view of Spiritism. The first part is a comparative analysis of the concepts of different faiths about heaven, purgatory and hell, angels and demons, and future punishments and rewards. The dogma of eternal punishments is specially discussed and refuted by arguments taken from the laws of nature. The second part presents numerous communications with spirits in different situations, and which shed light on the state of the soul after death and its passage from the physical life to the spirit life, which until then had been obscure and feared. It is a sort of travel guide to be used before we enter into a new world!

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