
I: “SOULES SOMETIMES APPEARE AFTER DEATH”

(DOUAI MARGINAL)

IT is generally supposed that amongst other restrictions Catholics (R.C.) are not allowed to believe in ghosts more than they are allowed to read an English Bible. This may be the popular belief, but incidents constantly break in contrariwise. Catholics, both priests and laymen, report ghosts or what are called “psychical phenomena.” Many more notice them but say no more.

Similarly, Catholics read the Bible and stranger still translate it into English. The Church’s prohibitions are conditional in both cases. The Bible, which can be perilous enough in places for the young and uneducated, may be read with careful notes and elucidations in the margins. A prohibition lies over any except guaranteed translations. Prohibitions more severely hedge the practice of necromancy or artificial communication with the dead. But the faithful, if endowed with supersensory power or “second sight,” cannot be blamed for seeing or recording ghosts. They may be considered part of the paranormal, subconscious, and invisible world within and around us. If eventually they shall prove to be possessed by unknown natural laws, they will come under the heading of Science.

This will save much discussion with theologians. Moreover, if souls, presumably suffering the condition of Purgatory, appear after death, their ghostly manifestations must come under the Divine Permission. No one need quarrel with the sensible prohibition against attending

séances, whether from curiosity or from a genuine belief in modern Spiritualism. Between the spiritual and the spiritualistic there is a wide gulf. The Western belief in Purgatory is instanced in the apparitions accepted by Gregory the Great in his Dialogues.

Psychical research presumes an agnostic type of mind, interested, and open to scientific experiment or religious experience. “*Ut videam*—help Thou my unbelief!” is the prayer of the true Agnostic.

Spiritualism covers a vast body of people who believe and practise communication with spirits of every kind. These spirits may be the souls of the dead, controls in the spirit-world, lower manifestations of the type called poltergeist or even demoniacal powers. The truly diabolical appears to be very rare, that is to say absolute manifestations of the Enemy of Mankind. The obsession of the type so often and clearly cured by Our Lord seem to point to hosts of lower spirits, in fact one sufferer alone accounted his as legion.

If there is any subject in the New Testament that is clear and practical, it concerns the casting out of devils. Today they carry medical rather than theological significance. Obsessions and possessions are a constant accompaniment of civilized life. Only medical skill on the one hand or a wise “discerner of spirits” on the other can exactly decide or guess whether the malady is of the mind or of the soul, proceeding from within or from an external influence. Today “possession is found to explain musical prodigies.” The Bible gives two instances of the possession of animals: Balaam’s ass and the Gadarene swine. Oliver Lodge thought “Balaam’s ass may have been direct voice, if anything physical at all.”

Some cases of possession may only be suffering temptations to take drink or drugs, their own lives or the lives of others. But there are cases where the impulse can be connected with an external site or spirit. In this case the

Church permits the dread service of Exorcism, but only under the strictest supervision and after evidential inquiries.

It is generally held that the bishop of the diocese must give permission and that the exorcist should be a newly-ordained priest, who presumably has no sin upon his conscience. The genuine demoniac is believed to have power to retaliate by revealing a knowledge of the exorcist's past life. In the case of Our Lord, of course, the obsessing spirit could only cry out in retaliation, "I know thee, who thou art, thou Holy One of God." And this was equally the experience of Paul and Silas when the woman "having a pythonical spirit" cried out to acknowledge they were the servants of the most High God! We are told that this woman made money for her masters: a kind of spiritual prostitution.

The financial side had already entered the profession which, indeed, has been reckoned the second oldest open to women in the world. This has been a consistent aspect of the modern pythoiness commonly called a medium. This can come under the Law, but small fees seem reasonable.

The immense wave of Spiritualism which has flooded the world consequent upon wars and upheavals of thought and religion, is an excuse for this essay and collection of ghost stories appearing from the uplands of orthodoxy. In spite of the fraudulent and the delusive, spiritualism cannot all be rubbish. Gifted and successful mediums are few, but those who have been willing to submit themselves to the tests of psychical research have acknowledged a scientific basis. A greater number have claimed a religious background. Some have constantly received messages in a Christian and even in a Catholic sense.

The Anglican Communion claims many such, but the church officials have declined to make any pronouncement. In view of the evidence said to be submitted by devoted Anglicans such a pronouncement

could only be favourable. Human evidence however is insufficient for a matter of doctrine or faith. Religion necessarily goes very much behind or beyond evidence.

Mediums have multiplied until many thousands must be earning the pythonical wage. But if only half a dozen have produced results which are credible to other than the credulous, it is sufficient to make a case for investigation. Not yet can we discern whether the invisible in human survival can be affected by unrealized laws. Of course, if one absolute case could be adduced of the spirit of a dead person clearly and unmistakably communicating with the living, the question, though not the answer, is clear—that is to say, the evidential fact could be accepted though the scientific explanation remained as distant as ever.

Catholics and the Christian majority believe in survival of the spirit but on trust. Faith and not merely Hope bids them to believe. The scientific spirit has asked for proofs of everything in the Christian creeds. Both Christian and scientist ask for proofs from the medium, the ghost-hunter and the spiritualist.

The Christian can refer to the vivid and startling chapter in the Old Testament which describes the appearance of the Prophet Samuel after death to Saul in the Cave of Endor at the invocation of a lady who would pass today as a successful professional medium. Even her control is mentioned as “a familiar spirit.” Whether the passage is read in Vulgate Latin or Jacobean English, its strength and beauty are punctuated with shudders. The oldest of all ghost stories in history is warranted by Divine Writ.

The deep and insatiable curiosity felt by mankind towards that bourne, from which, Shakespeare says, no traveller returns, is satisfied with overwhelming power.

The account of Saul’s last night on the mortal plane is worth study. The despairing king seeks a woman with a divining spirit because God has ceased to answer him in

dreams or by word of the priests. In other words, the established clergy had failed him and the normal guidance by vision had left him. Guidance by dream was normal in Scripture for it enters both the Old and the New Testament as a divine agency.

The scene at Endor might occur under modern conditions. Saul went disguised to consult the medium who fears him as though he were an agent provoking her to enter a police snare. In his happier days, he had forbidden wizards. He assures her and at his command she raises the spirit of his ancient mentor Samuel from the dead. "I saw gods ascending out of the earth" is her terrifying description of what took place. Here, indeed, was a reality worth a thousand modern séances, for the dead prophet truly declared the terrible future awaiting Saul: "Tomorrow thou and thy sons will be with me." And so it befell, for they were slain in battle.

Sir Oliver Lodge gives the scientific summary:

It is quite a good mediumistic episode. Orthodox people generally say that the witch was much astonished when Samuel really arrived. I don't see that. She cried out because she evidently got from him the identity of her sitter and immediately realized that she was in danger because of the police prosecutions which he had seen set on foot. However, she behaved very well to him and he got a good prediction.

The Douai version supplied careful notes. St. Augustine first took the view that a devil had taken Samuel's shape, but later, "he sayeth expressly: Samuel the Prophet being dead, foretold future things to King Saul yet living." Five proofs follow to the effect that "his verie soule appeared not compelled by the evil spirite but obeying God's secrete ordinance." This phrase concerning "God's secrete ordinance" will be found very helpful in the twilight between the two worlds, the middle condition which is neither of utter pain or bliss and can conveniently

be called purgatory. In this discrimination of the next world's compartments Dante's geographical ecstasies are found too close to latitude and longitude, but logic and theology combine to adduce purgatory. Otherwise where are we after death? An ante-camera of "yellow light" is more than a convenience betwixt the stark choice of red and green, if we may so dub the Celestial-Infernal alternatives. The departed soul has a better answer than used to be given to the Biblical conundrum—"Where was Moses when the light went out?"

The soul is not in the dark, however far from Divine Light. The twilight of Purgatory is always a happy thought and lends itself to the hopeful propositions of Catholic teaching. Samuel may be thought to have risen from Limbo. The essential reflection that follows a reading of the Endor chapter is that the return of a spirit to earth is a possibility recorded in Scripture and is not outside Catholic doctrine. The story does not occur in the Lessons or in the Breviary, but it remains with convincing realism and uncloaked like the Song of Solomon in metaphors.

Whatever is the bridge between Seen and Unseen (phenomena being the term generally used to describe the latter passing into the former) the Divine Word has hereby shewn that there is such a bridge, and all psychical research is directed towards this bridge. As for such research, whether in the discerning of spirits or reception of signals from the other side, patience in a slightly critical, slightly reverent state of mind is recommended to the seeker. Much is allowable, but all things are not permissible. The Church forbids direct necromancy at what is described in Huysmans' most fearsome pages as the "Black Mass." The general practice of séances is forbidden, though there are priests and laymen who consider themselves permitted to be present at experiments in an unrevealed natural science. Sir Oliver Lodge was acquainted with such, as he mentions in his letters,

Ordinary Catholics are forbidden in the gross to have anything to do with psychical research but exceptions are continually made. For instance —— and ——¹ are Catholics, but they told me they had arranged with their priests to be allowed a free hand.

The Decrees of the Holy Office say: “In all these documents the distinction is clearly drawn between legitimate scientific conversation and superstitious abuses” (Edward Pace: *Catholic Encyclopedia*)

Amongst laymen this was certainly the case with the Hon. Everard Feilding and amongst the clergy with Father Thurston, S.J.

There is no need to pursue ghosts or to discern unwilling spirits. If they are part of the invisible texture around us, they can find their way to us. If they come to a careful researcher, armed with some pre-knowledge, they must take the consequences.

The object of this book is to collect instances of ghosts, apparitions and messages from the other twilight world which have come under Catholic cognizance or suggest Catholic interpretations.

Ghosts or such manifestations need not be always laid to the sinister or Satanic, as they generally were in the Middle Ages. Even so, the records are packed with matters mysterious rather than mystical, and with incalculable happenings apart from the lives of saints.

Ghost stories have always been found useful in the pulpit and collections were made with that purpose. Preserved in the Lambeth Library is a wonderful collection made by the Prior of the Holy Trinity in Aldgate. If such stories had no other value, they made popular reinforcement to the true Gospel read from the altar. They corresponded to legends painted on the walls. They might

¹ The names are left blank for anonymity.

be true or they might not, but they were edifying. At least they often left a moral or the fear of God in the memories of listeners. Compare the wonderful frescoes that have been revealed on the walls of Eton College Chapel—ghost stories honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In modern days, many stories have accumulated which have had not only a Catholic atmosphere but a religious design. Such a collection may well bear as a secondary title—*Deo permittente*—God permitting. The idea certainly occurred to Père Henri who mentions in *Nos Devenirs* that “sometimes the mysterious wishes of Divine Government permit a coming death to be revealed.”

There are three different grades of religious ghost stories:

1. The warning dreams and hints of ghostly appearances which are enshrined in the Bible. These, naturally, have a value which the faithful cannot contest.
2. The astonishing psychic phenomena which are cited in the processes of canonization of saints. These, of course, have been severely contested during the process by a very necessary official of the Church known as the Devil’s Advocate.
3. The ghost stories of old Catholic families, of the sacristy and the whispered *inexplicanda* which the practising clergy sometimes admit but seldom record.

The Church admitted ghosts in the Middle Ages or she would not have been so hostile when she suspected a diabolical origin. In dealing with them she certainly developed her own technique and used a special service for exorcism which has continued in the armoury of the Church although seldom used except in a hole and corner manner. At the same time, it is not necessary to suppose

that either a demon or an angel, an evil or saintly spirit, is the invariable source of manifestations or messages from the other world.

Father Thurston commented on an interesting “Mediæval Ghost” (*Dublin Review*, April 1921), which had received varied treatment:

Victor Langlois *de l'Académie française* has been delivering a conference upon it. It is a curious case of a soul supposed to have come from Purgatory to ask for prayers (A.D. 1323). Hauréau dismissed the story as pure fiction but Langlois shows that there is a remarkable historical foundation. Langlois thinks it was worked by ventriloquism, but I believe myself that it was a genuine visitant from the spirit world.

(“The Ghost of Guy: a famous mediæval tale”)

Ghost stories must be considered apart from all the terrible history of witchcraft (both in Catholic and Protestant repression). The exorcism of those possessed by demons is fair enough, but, as Pope Benedict XIV pointed out, these cases are few and far. That sage Pope rejected twelve of the accepted signs of possession. The whole subject has since passed to the study of hysteria and epilepsy. *The Roman Ritual* lays down certain specifics: (1) the knowledge of an unknown tongue, (2) knowledge of distant or hidden facts, and (3) the manifestation of a physical strength beyond the powers of the subject.

In primis ne facile credat ...

Nota habeat signa ...

Signa autem obsidentis dæmonis sunt ...

These obsessions occur true to type. We take one case out of many. From South Africa comes an authentic story of a girl in a convent who believed (rightly or wrongly) that she had sold herself to the Devil in return for the gifts which she coveted. The good nuns were prepared to take

the speedy advance in her studies as a compliment to their teaching until she took to flying about the place without visible means of support. The bishop decided that these signs deserved Exorcism and proceeded to carry out the service not without prayer and fast. It took an hour to induce the girl to enter a church, where she confessed her ambitious attempt to deal with a malevolent power and collapsed happily *in sinu Ecclesiae*.

To what extent can the theories and experiences of modern psychical research be connected with the mediæval? Does the Church allow ghost stories as a kind of occasional supplement to religious thought? Or may research be applied to such symptoms of an unexplored branch of Nature or sub-Nature, leaving the religious aspect out?

The Society for Psychical Research was an interesting product of late Victorian times. It was founded by Cambridge scholars like Frederic Myers, Professor Sidgwick and Mr. Gurney. It represented a reaction from a University of Mathematical “Wranglers,” materialists and agnostics.

On 3rd December 1869, Myers during a star-lit walk at Cambridge asked Henry Sidgwick whether knowledge could be drawn from ghostly phenomena to solve the Riddle which Tradition and Metaphysics had failed to reach. How to unravel “the incurable incoherence of the Cosmos?”

Sidgwick drew him out of Agnosticism by encouraging a new line of research. German philosophy embraced the clouds. French called for logical negatives, but the dogged Anglo-Saxon seemed mentally suited to wrest the answer from cosmic phenomena. It was like wrestling with an unknown shadow: “I will not let thee go.” So Myers broached his famous line of research. As a poet, he had opposed Shelley; as a philosopher, Darwin. The S.P.R. was

founded in 1882. Myers came by way of Virgil and Plato, whose *Phædo* marked Myers' conversion to the soul's survival. In 1865, he had challenged the unknown by swimming the Niagara at night—an experience he hoped would resemble his view of death: “terrifying but easy and leading to nothing new.” This incidentally was not Lord Desborough's experience as related to the writer. On the second occasion on which his Lordship swam the Niagara, he found himself in difficulties and preparing to fight his way out from waters which might easily have become fatal.

Myers' experiment recalls the suicide of the Greek philosopher, so sweet had Plato's *Phædo* made the prospect of finding survival on the other side.

The S.P.R. was received with perfect fairness until distinguished scientists like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge became persuaded that communications with a spiritualist world were possible. Criticism then became unfair, often refusing to examine what was becoming clearer in evidence. The Society took a perfectly reasonable position. They collected all ghost stories available from good sources, they investigated all, disproved some, and left others to stand on their evidence. Eventually it was supposed that laws in the spirit world might be disclosed. Science rather than Religion entered into the Society, which was joined by members of all Churches and agnostics of every grade. Myers and Gurney published a large collection of cases, from which those who wished could deduce, *The Survival of Human Personality after Death*. It has been remarked that this book may in time prove with Darwin's *Origin of Species* the most remarkable written in the nineteenth century.

The Society continues under a series of eminent Presidents to publish their proceedings, and attested cases of phenomena, which the laws of Euclid, Newton and Einstein ignore as outside their provinces or dimensions.

As yet no *Law* can be certified, only suppositions, hints

and comparisons collected towards a gradual certainty that natural and supernatural Laws are allied in ways not yet revealed to man.

If Science and Religion can be treated as separate tunnels, which cannot meet, or conflict, it is possible that psychical research is approaching an exploration which cannot be claimed as yet by either. It has not yet produced the laws necessary for a Science, nor has it added to the mystical or religious in belief or conscience. It remains a kind of Tom Tiddler's ground, which in the far future Science or Religion may suddenly demonstrate to be part of their demesnes. At present scientists like Crookes and Lodge have testified to phenomena much to their popular disrespect and discomfort. Obviously, they have experimented and taught ahead of their times and critics. Men of religion have often confessed to ghostly happenings in the course of their apostolic duties. Others have preferred to say little about happenings outside moral or pastoral theology. Priests who pay too much attention to ghosts find themselves discouraged in their careers in the manner in which Naval captains who log the Sea-Serpent in the course of a cruise are disapproved at the Admiralty. A Naval commander who saw such an unrecorded monster in peacetime might be expected to have delusions under more exciting circumstances of action. The evidence for Sea-Serpents has always been treated with the same mixture of levity and curiosity as ghosts. It is not surprising that the materialist cannot accept either unless brought to the laboratory in a bottle! "Some bottle!" may be properly remarked, but the phrase is metaphorical of the agnostic wish to touch, weigh, and analyse before credence can be offered. Incidentally, Professor Owen wrote that there was more evidence for ghosts than for one Sea-Serpent.

Two of my collected ghost stories from first-hand came from military sources. As one was a General and another an officer with a career lying before him at the War Office,

we agreed that publicity might prove damaging. The General was a Brigadier when he adventured into the supernatural, but, as he was of Celtic and Catholic origin, his experience comes into the limited orbit of this book.

The best summary for those who find themselves on the side of ghosts in the manner that Disraeli found himself once “on the side of the Angels” may be given in a letter to the writer from Mgr. John Filmer (15th November 1945):

I cannot see how Catholics can avoid believing in Ghosts seeing that the immortality of the soul is part of our Creed as well as the existence of Angels, good and bad. The only doubt in the minds of Catholics about any particular apparition must be whether it is really an apparition from the other world and if it is, whether it comes from God or the Devil.

It is interesting that modern Science has neither lessened the number of queer occurrences nor increased the old-fashioned skepticism. More scientists than ever are now prepared to be persuaded.

It would be interesting if the Census could divide the population into those who have seen a ghost and those who have not, as well as enumerate those who have suffered something queer enough to defy explanation. The difficulty is that *normal* and *paranormal* as scientific terms could scarcely be understood by the public. Nevertheless, if we are to get anywhere, we must postulate the *supra-sensory*.

A great many biographies and autobiographies contain a ghost story or at least one uncanny experience, but they are generally passed lightly over by the reader and no attempt is made to correlate them to other records. It is certain that for everyone told, a half-dozen are omitted, generally for the reason that ghost stories spoil the credence of serious biography. Those that are retailed are often garbled and lack the full evidence which could be taken at the time as well as the cross-examination which psychological research demands.

But the fact that they are often inaccurately told does not make it impossible for something of psychic interest to have occurred.

All such research is ungrateful. Immense trouble and time can be wasted. Further examination and prolonged study based on the first data can end in books of impressions (called evidence) and suggestions (called fancies). A few books collated with painstaking industry remain the classics of this kind: such as the *Adventure of two English ladies in Versailles*, the final account of *Borley Rectory*, “the most haunted house in England,” and the Marquess of Bute’s “Alleged Haunting of B,” a shooting-lodge in Scotland.

The last-named, having been studied chiefly by Catholic investigators, comes within the scope of this book.

Ballechin (to give its true name) was a test case. Catholics interested in the investigation, apart from Lord Bute, included the Hon. Everard Feilding, a Jesuit, two Highland priests, and a bishop. The Jesuit, who brought the hauntings to Lord Bute’s attention, “had done nothing but throw holy water about his rooms and repeat the prayer *Visita quæsumus*. ... It was natural that no result should be produced.” Lord Bute read the Office of the Dead continuously in different places. He felt unseen presences that were “morosely unfriendly.” Lord Bute reported the matter to an archbishop. Meantime the ghost of “Ishbel,” a nun, had been seen by others. The climax came with the arrival of a visiting bishop. By that time there were ten Catholics present. Miss Freer, the hostess and editor of the book, describes the climax:

There was Mass said this morning and as I knelt facing the window I saw “Ishbel” with the grey woman nearer the house than ever before. She looked pensive but as compared with last time much relieved.

It proved her last appearance, so from the Catholic point of view it was satisfactory. There was controversy and nothing was found proven, but it remained a model of careful research for future investigators.

It seems as though apparitions could be rarely vouchsafed but under the strict understanding of *Deo permittente*.

As Dr. J. M. Neale put the matter in his *Communications with the Unseen World*:

It would rather seem that some strict law of the unknown state forbids such apparitions, unless, especially permitted. Doubtless well for us it is so.

How it would alter the whole course of human existence, if such apparitions constantly took place. Whether they lost or whether they still retained their terror, it would hardly be compatible with worldly business that they should be permitted. In all such stories a superintending Providence seems most clearly manifest.

Père Henri in *Nos Devenirs* discusses the religious attitude to mediumship. The word medium in English has acquired such unpleasant insinuation thanks to Browning's unfair attack on Daniel Home in *Sludge the Medium* that it needs clearing and cleansing almost. Henri achieves this in one sentence when he ascribes "the higher mediumship and with what splendour!" to Jean Baptiste Marie Vianney, the Curé d'Ars. In him lay all the characters of true and veritable mediumship. It follows that "the little Thérèse of Lisieux was also a high medium." The life of such saints sufficiently illustrate what mediumship can be. On the films the Curé d'Ars has been vividly portrayed as "*le Sorcier du Ciel*." "Sorcerer" reads a little strong, but the "celestial magician" or "God's spiritualist" perhaps covers the truth. He was saint and medium in one and the two qualities increased and fortified each other. He enjoyed the best safeguard against errors connected with the profession

of mediumship: “reasonable common-sense.”

A medium in its simplest sense is a bridge, a connection, an invisible passage or influence between the Unseen and Seen, between minds disembodied and minds still in the body. The Holy Scripture can be a medium between God and man: likewise every true prophet and every saint, though the gifts which blessed and unhallowed mediums share do not necessarily appear in every saint’s existence. It is difficult to think of prophets who do not possess the mediumistic gift of foretelling the future. Even the witch of Endor through the means of her control caused Samuel to relate the immediate future with agonizing accuracy.

Mediumship appears to be involved in natural but little understood laws. As a form of sub-science it is worthy of investigation and need not come under religious influence or prohibitions at all. When it is caught up by a saint or by some lower spiritism, there are phenomena of different kinds.

Ordinary mediumship connotes table-rapping, clairvoyance or second sight, automatic writing, healing. There are rarer and more difficult phases under the headings of Levitation and Materialization.

As for the evocation of spirits through table-rapping (the only case when a schoolboy would find some use for the First Declension *Vocative, Mensa: O Table!*), Père Henri says, “evidentially there is a fluid within you which mates admirably with the vibration of the wood.”

In automatic writing “doubtless some invisible presence has added its activity to your own cerebral activity.”

The healing emanation of the medium called “Healer” is a well-known faculty puzzling to the medical but acceptable to believers in the passage of vibration from the psychical into the physical.

The subject of Spiritualism is of some anxiety and even interest to Christian Churches.

With the Catholic Church it is more than a matter of warnings and prohibition. Spiritualists like Christian Scientists insist on being a distinct Church instead of a branch of Science. This, of course, is their right, but the Catholic Church has her own technique and views about mental healing as she has about communication by prayer with the dead. Lourdes and other shrines meet the case of healers and the would-be healed. For psychic manifestations, poltergeists, ghosts and dreams the faithful will find if not satisfactory explanation at least reasonable supposition, and in serious cases exorcism. The priests or confessors who can deal with these matters are limited. Priests like Father Thurston, S.J., who made a special study of all supranormal happenings, are very rare. His activities and findings must form a special chapter in every future book dealing with ghosts from the Catholic side. His posthumous *Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* opens a new era in Catholic research.