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# AN OPEN LETTER

To those of my Generation

From

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE,

M.D., LL.D.

"I give you the end of a golden string,  
If you will only wind the ball,  
It will lead you straight to Heaven's gate,  
Built in Jerusalem's wall."

—Blake.

*"Moriturus vos morituros saluto"*

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ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, M.D., L.L.D.

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WINDLESHAM,

CROWBOROUGH,

May, 1929.

MY FRIEND,

I hope my mode of address is not too intimate. If you are elderly, then you and I have arrived together at the same point upon Life's trail, and so we have enough in common to make us friendly. It may be that what I have to say to you may seem worthless, and that you will put it aside. In that case no harm has been done. On the other hand it may prove to be a sign-post which will guide you upon a path which is at all times important, but most important to the elderly. Others have acclaimed this knowledge which I will give you as being the greatest thing which ever came to them in life—and so it may be with you. Anyhow, whether you accept it or reject it, I feel that it is my duty to give you the chance.

Let us look things in the face. We are about to die—you and I. My age is just seventy, and I suppose an Actuary would give five more years. It may be ten, or it may only be one. Who can say? But you and I are suffering from a wasting and incurable disease called old age, and there is but the one end to it. Young folk, even though Death may really be very near them, can reasonably put off the consideration of what is probably a distant event. But it is very different with us. The matter presses and has to be dealt with. That is why I am writing you this letter. I want you not to be overshadowed, but to take the same cheerful view of the future which I do myself.

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I don't know how our ancestors—let us say a hundred years ago—could have felt cheerful in the contemplation of death. But I suppose the folk of 1829 looked at it with an 1829 mind, and the one was adapted to the other. But if you look at the views of 1829 with a 1929 mind, then it would indeed seem a bleak and barren prospect. On the one hand the Free Thinkers of the Hume and Gibbon brand gave the idea that death ended all, so that not only your worldly possessions, which is a small thing, but all that you love, all those dear intimacies, all your own knowledge and character built up at the cost of so much work and such trying experience, all vanished like a burst bubble, and had no place at all in the Universe any more. That was a sad prospect. But the only alternative was even sadder. It was that you would be judged by a revengeful Deity, and that if you were found wanting—and we were expressly told that the vast majority *were* found wanting—you would then be consigned to a Celestial counterpart of the Spanish Inquisition, and suffer such agonies as are unknown upon earth. If on the other hand you were fortunate enough to be in the minority, and so to be among the saved, the bliss held out to you behind a general assurance of happiness, was of a most lugubrious kind, in which music and religious exercises seemed to form the chief part. There are churches even now which try to perpetuate ideas of this sort, but gradually by common consent they are sinking away into legends of the past, and man breathes more freely, relieved from so illogical and miserable a theology. But as it died away the other doctrine of negation gained force, so that now it in turn hag-rides the world, and is the mother of a horrid brood, Materialism, Real-politic, Might-is-right, Every-man-for-himself, and all the other foul offspring who have brought our poor old world to so perilous a pass.

But somewhere in the Empyrean, immense, unthinkable, there is a mighty intelligent force, call it by what name you will, which yearns over that Universe of which it is the central driving power, and which slowly, gradually, but surely meets every want. Therefore at the very moment when Religions which rested upon Faith became largely inoperative, there was released a fresh spring of inspiration, small in its origin as springs are likely to be, but already becoming a notable stream, and destined, as many of us think, to submerge all other philosophies. For eighty years it has withstood all human ridicule, prejudice and misrepresentation. It grows, increases, and broadens. It is a religion of knowledge, and it is gained by getting in contact with Intelligences which are on a higher sphere of spirituality and of power than ourselves.

Do not be abashed or deterred by that ridicule of which I speak. The greater it has been, the stronger is the argument for this new knowledge, since it has survived and spread in spite of it. It is true that there is an aspect of the matter which seems childish. Taken by themselves, these physical phenomena, moving objects, rising tables, irrational sounds,



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are vain and foolish things. But they have a definite object for which they are well adapted, and which in fact they have attained. That object is to attract attention, and to show the existence of an invisible and apparently intelligent force. This could in the first instance be most readily done by appealing to our material senses. All these crude things are to be regarded as signals meant to direct our thoughts into this new channel. They correspond to the ringing of the telephone bell which engages your attention. In each case it is the subsequent message which is the real and solid element in the transaction.

Put yourself for a moment in the place of these invisible entities. They are by no means either omniscient or omnipotent. They are bound straitly by law even as we are. When they descend to matter, which is not their natural environment, they are constrained to use material means in order to appeal to our material senses, and so gradually lead us to a higher mental and spiritual contact. It is no easy task for them, since they have to find means by which to draw power from matter in order to get objective signs. At last they succeed. They produce raps, or knockings, which are the signals which we use ourselves when we wish to gain touch with a friend. In 1848 they got so far as this. The world was bewildered. Some few understood. The great majority laughed. Then more dramatic means were adopted. By choosing the right instruments—people from whom power could be drawn—solid objects were moved about, great weights were lifted, lights were shown in the darkness, finally human figures were materialised, and acted as they had done in life. Great scientists—Dr. Hare in America, Sir William Crookes and Professor de Morgan in England—examined the matter; and were compelled after a searching inquisition to report that it was true. It is equally true that there were fraudulent imitations, but that in no way impaired the importance of the cases which were real. More and more the people became interested. There were set-backs and reactions, but from decade to decade the movement grew. The invisible entities were winning their way. And yet we can conceive how amazed, disappointed and affronted they were when after all their ingenuity, after efforts to touch our senses which strained all their powers, they were met so often by ridicule and insult. Said a great spirit lately: "Try to imagine the situation. We are there. We are solid. We are very much alive, and we cry out to you, 'Hello! Hello!' but you, almost seeing us, surely quite hearing the call, declare you didn't, that the sound and sight were not objective . . . Naturally we wonder why you are so hard to convince, so unwilling to believe. We are your friends, your relatives, your dear ones, and we are doing our utmost to get into touch with you."\*

I did not begin this letter with the intention of telling you the history or the proofs of Spiritualism. I will give you a list of books at the end,

\*"Is this Wilson?" Taken down by Mrs. C. A. Dawson Scott.

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and you can follow the matter up or not, as you please. But I was bound, in as short a way as possible, to show you how the matter began, and what the lead up was to those messages which are the true and direct source of our information regarding the conditions of life in that continued existence which we will soon share. They come in many ways, and they are mixed up with the physical signals, as telephone messages are connected with the bell. They are often on a low level, they are often imperfect, they are sometimes false; and yet, taking them all together and collating them into one whole, they are, in my opinion, the most important event in the history of the world. They constitute the first definite, authentic, detailed news as to the fate which has been reserved for all of us.

Now I must get back to my original purpose, which was to show you how important these messages are for us senior folk who see the great change drawing nearer to us with every birthday. Believe me, we have no occasion to look upon it as an object of dread, but rather as a winning post which is the culmination of our efforts and the beginning of our ease. We are not exterminated, we are not in danger of physical pains, and we are not destined for a questionable heaven. The new information is as comforting as it is reasonable. "I can hardly bear to wait," said Dr. Hodgson.

Briefly, what will happen to you and to me at the time of death is as follows. We learn from those who have been down the path before us that though the preceding illness may be a severe trial, death itself is a sweet and pleasant languor, akin to that of the tired body dropping to sleep, and that it is made easier by the consciousness that those whom we have loved and lost are there to greet us. We often have corroboration of this in the words and attitude of the dying. Many cases are cited in Sir William Barrett's "Death-bed Visions."

And here we must distinguish, for I would not have you think that the same pleasant fate must come to all, however much their lives have differed in quality. That would not be reasonable or just. It is those who love us who meet us and make death a joyous reunion. But if we have never won love they cannot be there. Who is there to meet the selfish man, the cruel man, the man who lives for himself alone? For such people it is indeed a bleak and dismal moment, for they have begun to reap the harvest that they have sown. Let us leave them for the moment, and follow the fortunes of the average kindly man or woman when they are released into the wider life.

First of all, what is it that is released? It is the etheric body, or what St. Paul called the Spiritual Body. It is that facsimile body which

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we carry about with us, an envelope inside an envelope, with the spirit as the ultimate enclosure. There is plenty of evidence in life for the existence of this tenuous, swift-moving duplicate of ourselves. How often has it been seen at a distance from the owner. How often has it appeared to friend or relative when the physical body was dying, or in trouble—projected, as it were, upon the invisible wings of desire. This it is which survives death, your very self, the same in appearance, in character, in knowledge, down to the smallest trait of body or the slightest trick of mind. These new bodies of ours do not, as we learn, live in a vacuum or in any indefinite state, but they pass from this earth into a more complex, but as a whole a far higher, society, in which they have definite duties and congenial work in which they have every chance of developing to the full their own powers, as well as of enjoying those things which give them natural pleasure. We learn also that the bond of sympathy and affection is the one permanent thing which regulates the re-uniting or the sundering of those who have been in contact with each other down here, and that happy re-assembled households are usual there, with all elements of discord removed. If this was all that we brought to mankind what a gigantic step forward—what an enormous advance of knowledge would it represent. It is the unknown nature of death and its severance of all our ties which cast a shadow upon our lives. But if we know that all is natural, that there is nothing to fear, that we are not changed, and that our love ties are not broken, then what a load is lifted!

The apathy and ignorance concerning this spiritual knowledge which is shown among many of the leaders of religion is hard to understand. It is a source of weakness for the Churches which turn away from that spiritual help and inspiration which God's new revelation brings with it. Where does that spiritual help come in? It comes in from the fact that we can use our new powers not only to get into touch with our own loved ones, who may perhaps be on no higher a level of character and knowledge than we are ourselves, but also, when we are worthy, we get clear messages from those who are in a far more spiritual condition than ourselves, and are, indeed, what under the old dispensation would be called high angels.

From these direct communications a flood of spiritual knowledge has come into the world, all of it, as it seems to us, of a beautiful and rational nature. We do not accept such statements blindly. We are not fanatics or visionaries. We weigh the messages with our own God-given reason, and we admit the fact that the medium through whom the message passes may well colour it with his own personality and beliefs. But none the less, making every allowance for this, the messages are so consistent, and on so high a level that they have, as it seems to us, as good a claim to be a divine inspiration as anything which has ever reached the world in the past.

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We have many reasons for thinking that this flood of information is truly supernormal. The explanation of the true scheme of the universe has come from a vast number of independent sources, many of which could by no means have been influenced by the others, and, with some small exceptions, there is a truly remarkable agreement running through them. These messages have come from children, from uneducated people, from all sorts of sources, including, in one case for which I can answer, a confirmed sceptic, who was made an involuntary instrument for writing down the truth.

But the final argument for the truth of our new revelation is that it is the most natural, reasonable, and comforting interpretation of the facts of human life and destiny which has ever been put forward. It is huge, sweeping, all explaining, reaching out to all our difficulties, and giving adequate answers.

Whence, then, did it come? Is it to be imagined that the little group of uneducated people who received the first inspirations were themselves the inventors of this great, sweeping explanation of the universe? Is it to be thought that a man like Jackson Davis, who was perhaps the recipient of as much of the new knowledge as anyone, was the inventor of this knowledge—he being a man who was entirely illiterate at the time? Such ideas are absurd. If the philosophy did not come from external supernatural prompting, then whence did it come?

Now, my friend—if you are still friendly after all this lecturing—I leave my message with you. I repeat to you that the world which soon awaits you is so happy and natural that those who are in it would for the most part be horrified if they were told to go back to earth. But happiness there comes more quickly when one can understand the conditions, and adapt oneself to them. The most unhappy people there are those who have adopted cast-iron systems of theology down here, and who are unable to find the thing which they have taught and believed. Bigotry is one of the sins which weighs most heavily upon the sinner in the next existence.

Is all this true? Can it be relied upon? I know that it is so, and yet flesh is weak, and I have moments when I feel impelled to go over all the ground once more. I consider my own experiences. I consider the experiences of others. I ring every link in the chain to see if it is true. And always when I have finished, my judgment, which has so seldom failed me in the affairs of this world, tells me that there is no error, and that this is indeed the greatest release of consolation and of knowledge

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that has ever come to mankind. This is only a letter, not even a pamphlet, far less a book. But I should like to say a word also to the mourner of any age. All this information as to death applies surely to the mourner as well as to the old. Why should you mourn if you are sure that those you love are the better for the change, and that you will see them again even as they were? And it will be even as *you* were also, for while the young grow to maturity, the old become younger, and end up as their normal selves each at his best. So cheer up, comrades; we may be a little stiff in the joint and hard in the artery, but we don't carry our lime salts with us to the beyond, and the first impression which the sufferer gets as he emerges, is that he has dropped all his bodily ailments as Christian dropped his pack.

If you are interested—and how can you help being interested?—you must read and digest this new knowledge. Don't be discouraged if you come on some rather crude book, or meet with some rebuff or deception. There is always a dweller on the threshold. Soon you will pass that, and then your minds will be cleared of shadow, and the sun will shine upon your path.

There was an old gentleman—eighty years of age. The story is egotistical, and yet I can't refrain from telling it. I taught him this knowledge. He had lost grip of religion, and this cheered him enormously. He used to come to our meetings and speak. When he was eighty-three, he said from the platform, "I am three years old, and there," pointing to me, "is my father." Soon he died in great peace. After he had lain rigid for some minutes, and all thought that life was gone, he opened his mouth and cried in a loud voice, "God bless Conan Doyle?" Then he returned into death. That cry from the grave was one of the rewards which have come to me as ample payment for my work.

I will now draw up a list of books by which you can approach the subject from whichever point of view you feel most congenial. They are all of intense interest. For me the evidential and the religious appeal most. Others want the scientific. This literature is enormous. My private library contains 400 volumes, all psychic. Some society libraries have 3000. And the list of our authors, including those who merely work at the scientific phenomena, as well as those who accept all the religious implications, is such as no other subject in the world can show. Where else could you find such a galaxy as Professors Hare, De Morgan, Hyslop, Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, W. T. Stead, Victor Hugo, Russell Wallace, Charles Richet, Hans Driesch, Dr. Crawford, Dr. Aksakoff, Thiers, Dr. Schrenck-Notzing, Dr. Geley, and so many others? These are not all Spiritualists yet, but all have endorsed the

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phenomena. So don't think it is only I that am talking. I have heavier metal at my back.

And now good-bye, and good luck to you! Don't write to me unless you have to, for I am a busy man, and my post-bag is heavy. But read, read, read, and when you want advice you can always get it at the London Spiritual Alliance, 16, Queensberry Place; The Marylebone Spiritualist Society, 4, Tavistock Square; Miss Stead's Bureau, 5, Smith Square, Westminster; The Psychic College, 59, Holland Park, W.; or at my own Dépôt, The Psychic Bookshop, 2, Victoria Street, S.W. These are all live centres of knowledge and truth. May you be the better for this brief contact.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

## POSTSCRIPT.

Knowledge should always precede experiment. Above all, it is necessary that a subject which is essentially religious should be approached in an earnest spirit. Mere curiosity and sensationalism are not fitting preparations for such a study. It is better that it should be avoided altogether than approached from a wrong angle. It is not for our amusement or for utilitarian purposes that a great new flood of knowledge has been sent into the world. It is to console us, to give us assurance of the future, and to make us happier men and women.

I should advise first a course of reading. The literature of the subject is enormous. By applying to the Psychic Bookshop, 2, Victoria Street, London, S.W., a catalogue would be secured.

There are many excellent books dealing with spirit life and conditions, such as "The Case of Lester Coltman" (4/6), which is the posthumous record of a gallant soldier, Blatchford's "More Things in Heaven and Earth" (3/6), Lamond's "Miracles in Modern Life" (3/6), De Brath's "Psychic Research and Religion" (7/6), Saunders' "Healing by Spirit Agency" (3/6), Rev. Spurr's "Heart of a Father" (2/-), Oliver Lodge's "Why I believe in Personal Immortality" (5/-), Dennis Bradley's "Towards the Stars" (3/6), and "Wisdom of the Gods" (7/6), Lodge's "Raymond" (6/-). Also my own "New Revelation," "Vital Message" and "Pheneas Speaks" (3/6).

Among the more expensive books one would single out Dr. Lindsay Johnson's "Great Problem" (18/-), "The Bridge" (21/-) by Nea Walker, "The Cleophas Script" (12/6), Campbell Holms' "Facts of Psychic Science" (25/-), my own "History of Spiritualism" (2 vols., 42/-), and particularly Rev. Chas. Tweedale's "Man's Survival after Death" (10/6). On the purely religious side, "Spirit Teachings" (6/-), by Rev. Stainton Moses, is essential, and all the works of the Rev. G. Vale Owen and Rev. Drayton Thomas are noteworthy. All can be ordered from the Psychic Bookshop, 2, Victoria Street, London.

"Light" (4d. a week), 16, Queensberry Place, London, S.W.; "Two Worlds" (2d. a week), 18, Corporation Street, Manchester; "International Psychic Gazette" (6d. a month), 69, High Holborn, London, W.C.; and "Psychic Science" (2/6), the Quarterly of The Psychic College, 59, Holland Park, London, W., are among the best British periodicals. "The Harbinger of Light" (9d.) is an excellent Melbourne monthly, and the "Progressive Thinker," of Loomis Street, Chicago, represents the cause in America.

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So far as practical work is concerned, I am not averse from the employment of professional mediums, where their character is good, and I consider that a medium has as much right to be paid as a clergyman. The most convincing results, however, are those obtained by developing private mediumship at home. Every earnest religious circle of four or five persons will, with perseverance, get results, which are better if they are directed originally by someone of experience. But small pamphlets can be obtained which give directions, and with preliminary knowledge and a good intention there is nothing to fear and much to gain. But again I repeat, go into it with high motives or leave it alone.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

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A visit to the Psychic Museum, which is an annexe of the Psychic Bookshop, 2, Victoria Street, S.W., might help you in the objective, physical, evidential side.