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Evidence for the Unseen:
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Spiritualism, and the Quest for a Scientific Religion

A THESIS
The Honors Program
College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Departmental Distinction
and the Degree Bachelor of Arts
In the Humanities

by
Andrea J. Williams
May 1996

PROJECT TITLE: Evidence for the Unseen: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Spiritualism, and the Quest for a Scientific Religion

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Spiritualism in Context: Definitions, Problems, and Acknowledgments

The project of this discussion is to show that the development of spiritualism was not an independent phenomenon which could have occurred in any time at any place, but rather that it was a response to the perceived conflict between Christian orthodoxy and new scientific theories and discoveries, a dichotomy which it sought to reconcile by providing a new ideal of spirituality. The growing acceptance of scientific models for assessing truth or falsehood and establishing reality began to conflict with Christian models for these tasks, and persons involved in both began to feel that belief in science and its methods were incompatible with belief in Christianity. Some, however, felt that the spiritual aspects of life could not be abandoned without serious loss, and it is in this perceived gap that I see spiritualism as having developed. However, spiritualism was not just Christianity revised to accommodate new scientific ideas; rather it was an entirely new religion based on belief in the survival of the human soul in such a way that it could communicate with and advise those still embodied, if the embodied sought such communication. Spiritualism was also significantly informed by the language and methods of scientific study: spiritualists sought to establish a sound foundation of scientifically verifiable evidence on which they could base their belief in the survival of the soul, and, to do so, used empirical testing methods and constructed their arguments in models and with vocabulary borrowed from the science of the day.

In order to focus this study, I have chosen to look mainly at Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's involvement in the movement and at his writing about it: besides being the author of The History of Spiritualism, he was a very prominent member of the spiritualist community, and has been called "the leading spiritualist of his day, if not in academic recognition, at least in that of his name in respect to both spiritualism and Sherlock Holmes" (Rodin, Key, and Pilot 171). In addition to being both a medical doctor and a highly popular author, he was deeply committed to and prominently involved in spiritualism, especially toward the end of his life, and was willing to place his reputation on the line in order to share his conviction in the reality of psychic and spiritualistic phenomena with the world. Although his History of Spiritualism is by no means an unbiased account of the movement, it provides significant insight into to it, in part *because* of its bias; by studying its vocabulary and its models of argument and organization, we can determine the position of spiritualism in the context of the conflict between Christianity and science. Conan Doyle was deeply involved not only in the spiritualist movement, but in the questioning attitude of the period, which in his case arose from his own struggle to coordinate religion with his medical training: biographer Pierre Nordon explains, ". . . [his] mind kept moving to and fro between the scientific and ethical planes, in an effort to make a personal synthesis of the rational and religious elements that he had been unable to get from Catholicism" (151). Conan Doyle spent thirty years trying to resolve this conflict and investigating the emerging spiritualist phenomena and beliefs before he converted to spiritualism, and this, along with his involvement in the movement, make him a perfect example of the mental and moral conflict of his age.

Spiritualism was also influenced by the Victorian preoccupation with progress, which itself was informed by the conflict over models of change, the "revolution vs.

evolution" controversy. Spiritualists saw their movement not only as a new religion, but as a new *form* of religion, designed to fit the spirit and needs of the time, just as other religions had suited their times and places. They felt that people were becoming "materialistic," that is, concerned with things of this world, with material gain and possessions; this was, they felt, antithetical to being "spiritual," that is, concerned with the life of the soul, morality, and preparation for the afterlife. Although spiritualists borrowed from science, they were not allied with it, and felt that, in some ways, science encouraged the materialist attitude because it equated "real" with physically perceptible. Spiritualists even to some extent scorned science: "The world since then [the birth of spiritualism] has dug up much coal and iron; it has erected great structures and invented terrible engines of war, but can we say that it has advanced in spiritual knowledge or reverence for the unseen? Under the guidance of materialism the wrong path has been followed, and it becomes increasingly clear that the people must return or perish" (Conan Doyle History I 85). Spiritualists felt that spiritual advancement was important, and that the spirits had come in order to lead the world back to belief in the unseen by giving some basis for belief that was fresh, not based on what they considered ancient tradition and superstition: "The ultimate aim of the whole movement is to afford earnest minds in this age of doubt and stress some method of gaining knowledge of our duties and our destiny which shall be dissociated from outworn observances and conflicting faiths, so that by actual contact with intelligences which are above our own we may pick our path more easily amid the morass of Religion" (Conan Doyle Psychic Question 22-23). Spiritualists felt that the eventual outcome of this movement toward a fresh belief in the supernatural not based on "outworn observances and conflicting faiths" would be a coming together both of science with religion and of religions with each other, as it would be seen that differences between religions were really inconsequential and that what mattered was a common belief in the survival of the soul and the guidance received from advanced spirits. Conan Doyle described the "ultimate result" of the movement as "the union of Science with Religion, and such an increase of inspired knowledge as will lift humanity into a higher plane and send it reassured and comforted upon its further journey into the unknown" (Psychic Question 23).

In order to construct an argument for spiritualism and the phenomena on which it was based, Conan Doyle borrowed rhetorical models from both science and religion. Throughout my discussion, I have tried to show which or which combination of models is being employed and how that influences the argument at hand. Among those I identified as based in Christianity were narrative description or anecdote; conversion stories, especially from those who were formerly skeptics; and references to self-sacrifice or "martyrs," those who had, in some way, been hurt financially, socially, or physically by their involvement with the spiritualist cause, but who, nevertheless, continued to associate themselves with it. The scientific models employed vary greatly: some are based on deductive reasoning, like a geometry proof; others are experimental or use the method of stating a "null hypothesis" a statement contrary to that which the investigator hopes to prove, and which is subsequently proved false; others rely on reference to models of change in the revolution-evolution controversy, attempting to establish that the events follow a pattern parallel to that defined for some other subject of investigation; still others involve an almost psychological approach in which Conan Doyle lists the training, experiences, and character qualities of an investigator or facilitator of phenomena in an attempt to establish a résumé of absolute sobriety, meticulosity, impartiality, and integrity. The variety and the frequency with which the model changes show that Conan Doyle was influenced by many different models of thinking, and that, in trying to bridge the space between scientific and religious thought, he felt the need to draw from the full range of models and means available in order to build a strong argument for the spiritualist position.

Spiritualism must be distinguished from the phenomena on which it was based. There was, at the same time, a growing interest in psychic phenomena, and many organizations and individuals began to experiment with and test these phenomena. These phenomena did not constitute spiritualism; rather, spiritualism was an interpretation of the significance of these phenomena. Spiritualists believed that the reason these phenomena were occurring was that members of the spirit world were trying to get the attention of the embodied in order to show them the error of materialism, whereas those merely interested in psychic phenomena did not accept any religious interpretation of these occurrences. Throughout my discussion of the position of spiritualism in its historical context, I have tried to keep clear this difference, namely that psychic phenomena were the basis of spiritualistic belief, but that spiritualism itself was an interpretation of psychic phenomena which believed these phenomena to be communications from spirits of the deceased who were willing to make contact with the embodied to guide, advise, and comfort.

A second problem associated with this discussion is the question of whether these phenomena actually occurred. Because my priority is to establish the position of Spiritualism in the context of the conflict between Christianity and science, I have chosen not to address this question. Instead, I believe that the important issue is that those involved in the spiritualist movement *believed* that the phenomena were real, and believed that they were using the best empirical methods to establish that reality. Not addressing the authenticity of these phenomena has allowed me to focus on the spiritualists' reliance on the models and attitudes of science, not on how accurately and precisely they employed them, which has, in turn, allowed me to focus on how scientific thought influenced the development of the movement. The interplay between ideas, not the verification of phenomena, is the significant issue in discussing the contextual development of spiritualism.

Spiritualism also presents the problem of periodicity: it began in the mid-nineteenth century and continued until approximately 1930; therefore, "Victorian" is not an appropriate term to describe the period in which it occurred. The period in which it developed and flourished did not have a homogeneous structure; its most constant characteristic was change. Therefore, I have chosen as points of division 1859, the year Darwin's Origin of Species was published, and 1914-1918, the years of the first World War. These are, I believe, the times at which significant changes in the ways people thought about themselves and their world began to occur: Darwin's Origin made people reconsider the Christian theory of creation and the place of humanity in it; World War I showed them the meaning and atrocities of total war because it affected nearly every family and was so much more destructive in terms of both life and property than any previous war. It was between these that spiritualism emerged and flourished, peaking in popularity during the war and declining after it. I have, in my discussion, used the term "Victorian" to refer to some aspects and portions of this period, especially to the earlier part of it, and to some of the attitudes which are associated with that term. In addition, many of my sources use this term, and so in my quotations and paraphrases from them, it does appear. However, I feel that to understand the spiritualist movement, we need to look at the continuity of change in attitudes beginning with those instigated by the Darwinian theory of evolution through the questioning and confusion caused by World War I and therefore have avoided using a period name which implies homogeneity as much as possible.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my debts to my many sources. Because this discussion is situated at the juncture of disciplines as varied as theology, history, sociology, and biology, I did not begin *de novo*, but instead have relied on the work of others who have explored in depth the issues and events involved in my discussion. In particular, I am indebted to Bernard Cohen for his Revolution in Science, a very thorough discussion both of the changes that took place in this time period and of the manner and implications of those changes; and to Pierre Nordon for his biography Conan Doyle, which discusses Conan Doyle's exploration of psychic phenomena and his eventual conversion to the spiritualist position, almost forming an apologetic to argue that Conan Doyle the detective writer and Conan Doyle the physician were not incompatible with Conan Doyle the spiritualist. Another invaluable source has been back issues of ACD: The Journal of the Arthur Conan Doyle Society, which were provided to me along with many other materials and references by Mr. Thomas Tietze, a reader of this paper and a fellow Doyleian whose comments and corrections were of great help. Without my reliance on the research of these and the many other works to which I have made reference, the amount of reading and research would have been insurmountable, and I encourage any reader who has further interest in any of the supporting issues to consult the sources listed in my bibliography. I would also like to thank Dr. Cynthia Curran for her help in revision, her prompt return of my draft, and her insight on the social history of nineteenth and twentieth century England. Last, I wish to give special thanks to Dr. Cynthia Malone, my research advisor, for helping me through all my revisions, for being so prompt in returning my submissions, and for constantly encouraging me as I worked through the mountain of books and notes to form this synthesis.

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May 1996

Chapter 1: Spiritualism as a Historical Religious Movement

An understanding of the historical nature of the spiritualist movement is necessary before arguing that it constitutes a bridge between science and religion. Although it never gained prominence as a major religion or philosophy, it was representative of its era, both because of its tenets and because of the persons who were involved in it. Its basic premise was belief in the survival of the soul in a manner which could manifest itself in a scientifically verifiable and physically perceptible way in order to communicate with those who were still alive. Communication was generally achieved though a medium, often a woman, who contacted a spirit during a seance, and allowed the spirit to speak through her, manifest itself physically, or communicate through automatic writing. The spiritualist movement was quite prominent in England from 1918 to 1930, after which it began to decline (Rodin, Key and Pilot 147), though it had existed prior to that period and did not totally disappear after 1930. Most of the information discussed below is from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's History of Spiritualism (1926), which he offered both to spiritualists and the general public as the first history of its kind, and which, though it does attempt to legitimize spiritualistic belief, provides a useful chronology of the development of the movement and is, in many ways, very indicative of the nature of it. Even though the obvious purpose of Conan Doyle's History falls between persuasion and evangelism, by studying its format, style, and vocabulary, we can gain valuable insight into the movement and Conan Doyle's part in it. An examination of the persons and events Conan Doyle chooses to describe allows us to assess what he considered important to report, what he considered valid as evidence, and who he considered to be trustworthy facilitators and witnesses. Not only the subject matter, but also the organization and the vocabulary Conan Doyle uses provide comparisons to models based both in Christianity and science; for example, he painstakingly establishes résumés showing the scientific training, sobriety and reliability of his witnesses, yet he speaks about the importance of spiritual harmony among sitters at a seance. By examining these contrasts and the employment of the different frameworks of thought and proof, we can see how spiritualism is situated between science and Christianity, between skepticism and faith.

Origins of the Spiritualist Movement

The first manifestation of the new spiritual revelation occurred in the small town of Hydesville, New York in 1848; in the house of the Fox family, raps began to be heard. They were at times quite persistent, and though the family investigated causes for these noises, none could be found. One of the Fox children, exasperated, addressed the raps and challenged them to repeat the pattern she made by snapping her fingers, and to the family's surprise, her snaps were answered. The family proceeded to ask questions of the raps, answered in numerals, and again received responses. By devising a code so that it might answer their questions, they learned that the raps were being made by the spirit of a man who had been killed and buried in the cellar of that house, which was later confirmed by investigation. The girls of the family soon manifested their powers as mediums for others spirits, and the curious pastime blossomed into an emerging cult of belief in the survival of the spirit (Conan Doyle History I 56-85). This, according to Conan Doyle, was "the supreme sign of a new departure," the birth of spiritualism (History I 60).

The new psychic manifestations observed in America were, according to Conan Doyle's History of Spiritualism, first brought to England in 1852 by Mrs. Hayden, an American medium (I 150). She made an initial impact on the public, but her popularity did not last long; however, Conan Doyle credits her with having "scattered much seed which slowly grew" (I 169). The first adherents to the new belief, according to Conan Doyle, were of the lower, less educated classes, and they "began to experiment and to discover for themselves, though with a caution born of experience, they kept their discoveries for the most part to themselves" (I 169), presumably to avoid the label "credulous."

One of the first publications to document the spiritualist movement and its research was *Light*, a "high-class weekly Spiritualist newspaper" founded in 1881 (History I 185). The most prominent association to investigate spiritualistic and psychic phenomena was the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), formed the following year (History I 185), which generally took a skeptical point of view, and often did not support the claims of mediums and spiritualists; they felt that before they could endorse true phenomena, they had first to clear away the trash. Although their skepticism at times seems contrary to the project of establishing the reality of psychic phenomena, it seems to have given them a reputation for impartiality and thereby have given more weight to the phenomena they did support. They were both a help and a hindrance to the spiritualist community, because their interest in proving psychic phenomena led them to investigate it thoroughly, but from a point of view informed by a different agenda than that of the spiritualists: the SPR meant only to investigate phenomena, whereas spiritualists sought to establish the reality of the phenomena in order to establish a foundation for religious belief.

Definitions of Spiritualism

Definitions of spiritualism varied in response to the situation and the context of the question, and it is helpful to examine several of them in order to get a full picture of the movement. In the History, Conan Doyle offers the following definition: a theory "that man has an etheric body with many unknown gifts, among which a power of external manifestation in curious forms may be included" (I 187). This definition does not mention the manifestations of spirits of the dead, seances, or spirit communication of any kind, but simply refers to a vague, "power of external manifestation in curious forms" which may be achieved by the "etheric body," the non-corporeal counterpart which retains the personality of the individual, a concept which appears to be a direct analogy to the soul in Christian belief. This definition leaves the particular reader or believer to make an individual judgement about which activities and phenomena may be termed "spiritualistic" by stating only the belief in a non-corporeal component of human existence, the nature of which is not fully understood. A broader and more descriptive definition of spiritualism is the one which was printed in each issue of *Light*: "a belief in the existence and life of the spirit apart from and independent of the material organism, and in the reality and value of intelligent intercourse between spirits embodied and spirits discarnate."[1] This definition includes a description of the principal activity of spiritualists, namely, "intelligent discourse between spirits embodied and spirits discarnate." Perhaps more importantly, it makes a statement about the worth of that discourse--it invests it with value and certitude, and thereby legitimizes the foundation of a religion based on these phenomena.

A. E. Rodin, J. D. Key, and R. Pilot, in "Arthur Conan Doyle: The Consummate Spiritualist," provide some definitions of spiritualist terminology: they define spiritualism or spiritism as "a basic principle or essence as, for example, any philosophy, doctrine, or religion which emphasises the predominance of the spiritual rather than the material," or as "the belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living by making their presence known to them in some way, especially through the medium" and a spiritualist or spiritist as "one who believes in and engages in such activities." They define "psychic" as an adjective referring to "extra-sensory, non-physical processes such as extra-sensory perception and mental telepathy," or as a noun meaning "medium." These definitions are in concert with this discussion and with the definitions given by spiritualist organizations, and reflect how I have used these terms, though I have preferred "spiritualism" to "spiritism," and "medium" to "psychic."

Communication with the Spirit World

The primary goal of most spiritualistic activity was communication with the spirit world in order to gain spiritual enlightenment and guidance. This required first establishing a "good connection," then finding a spirit which was advanced enough in its spiritual "evolution" to offer guidance. The quality of communication with the spirits varied, but spiritualists, based on the best of these communications, believed that they were, in fact, in touch with the entire essential self of the spirit, in comparison to the essential self that spirit had possessed when embodied. Conan Doyle explains that it is reasonable that spirits would not always be at their best, even as we are not always at our best (History I 186), and so the quality of the communication, even with an advanced spirit, could vary. The medium could also affect the quality of the communication: mediums who over-used their powers or used them for improper aims (i.e., making money or gaining fame) could experience a sort of psychic burnout which would compromise the quality of the communications (Conan Doyle and McCabe 25). The quality of communication could also be affected by a wide variety of human variables under the broad heading of spiritual harmony or antagonism, which could respectively enhance or disrupt communication with the spirit world. This leads to a sort of psychological science of spiritualism, as the outcome of the seance was determined by the quality and purity of the medium and the state of mind and beliefs of those involved in the seance. In response to the charge of inaccuracy or falsehood in the spirit communications, Conan Doyle points out that although the spirits do have access to information that those on earth do not, that they have a different sense of the passage of time, so that "[v]ery often where the facts are right the dates are hopelessly at fault" (History II 232).

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[1] As quoted in Conan Doyle, History II, 263.

The Spiritualist Mission

Conan Doyle and many other spiritualists felt that once the basis of spiritualism had been established, the important goal was less to continue to gather data and evidence for psychic phenomena than to share the spiritualist message with those who did not yet believe, and thereby lead them to the truth (Tietze Last Bow 95). Conan Doyle made it clear that he believed that the proper applications of mediumship were to provide proof of the survival of the soul, to obtain spiritual guidance from advanced spirits, and to console the families of those who had died by providing communication with the spirit world. Mediums who submitted to performing party tricks such as answering questions about the sitters' lives and secrets or providing advice about "the state of railway stocks or the issue of love affairs" (History I 87), were, he felt, both doing a disservice to the movement and sapping their own power. The Fox sisters, who had begun serving as mediums after the rappings in their house, abused their powers in this way and allowed themselves to be persuaded to perform and had their "jaded energies renewed by the offer of wine when one of them was hardly more than a child" (History I 87). He felt this contributed to the later decline of their powers and led one of them to believe that her powers were the product of occult powers which she subsequently denounced. Another later admitted to having faked phenomena when her powers failed her, and Conan Doyle quotes her wish "that I could undo the injustice I did the cause of Spiritualism when, under the strong psychological influence of persons inimical to it, I gave expression to utterance that had no foundation in fact," and goes on to say that she decided to change her ways on the prompting of her spirit control, who persuaded her that she was acting inappropriately (History I 106). This brings to mind the purpose of the History, to persuade that psychic phenomena and the spiritualist interpretation were correct, and Conan Doyle uses the misuse of power and subsequent repentance to show that the spiritualist interpretation is correct, and that this fallen medium discovered it to be so when she tried to depart from the proper uses of her power.

Conan Doyle felt that when mediums used their powers for worldly goals, they became corrupt, and says of the Fox sisters, who were among the first mediums in America, ". . . had they used their gift . . . with no relation to worldly things, and for the purpose only of proving immortality and consoling the afflicted, then, indeed, they would have been above criticism" (History I 90). The press, too, Conan Doyle felt, had prevented the spiritualist message from being effectively spread to the world by reporting so much negative information about false mediums and negative test results. This was a major concern for Conan Doyle because he believed strongly that spiritualism constituted a new revelation for humanity: ". . . one's heart grows heavy at the success of those forces of obstruction, reflected so strongly in the Press, which have succeeded for so many years in standing between God's message and the human race" (History I 47). The mission of the spiritualist was, in Conan Doyle's opinion, to spread the message of communion with a real and vital spirit world to those who most needed it: "The mission of the Spiritualist does not lie with those [highly developed souls]. His mission lies with those who openly declare themselves to be agnostic, or those more dangerous ones who profess some form of creed and yet are either thoughtless or agnostic at heart" (History II 248). He and other spiritualists believed that spiritual certainty was what the world needed, and that the spiritualist message which had been offered to humanity by the spirit world would bring it back from the materialistic viewpoint to an acceptance of the supernatural as supported by the scientific.

Chapter 2: Social Consequences of Developments in Science

The emergence and development of spiritualism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was closely related to the scientific developments of the period and their interactions with the traditional beliefs of Christianity. Science was a significant challenge to Christianity, because, to those who were thoughtful, it showed that traditional Christianity could not answer the questions posed by a scientific mind. The inadequacy of orthodox Christianity in regard to these challenges and questions created an atmosphere which was ripe for the emergence of a new religion based in scientific-style proof and examination, namely, spiritualism. Spiritualism, because it developed as a response to this controversy, was fully grounded in both science and religion, and borrowed heavily from the vocabulary and models of science. It was part of the scientific debate about models of change in the revolution-evolution controversy, and it borrowed the rhetorical strategies of science in order to support its own arguments. For these reasons, it is important to understand the climate of scientific change and the changes taking place in the intellectual community as it began to rely more on models informed by scientific thought as the means by which to establish a reality.

Scientific Revolution

One of the concepts that was, and still is, being discussed in the scientific community is whether scientific knowledge increases step-wise or in sudden jumps--the evolution or revolution controversy. Because of spiritualism's reliance on vocabulary and models from science, this controversy is a major part of an understanding of spiritualism; spiritualists established a rhetoric parallel to that of science, and, therefore, also shared its indecision. Bernard Cohen, in his book Revolution in Science, discusses many examples and instances in which scientific development can be seen as revolutionary, of which I will discuss only a few. One of the most instructive concepts he covers is that of the emergence of research and development as something constant. He paraphrases Alfred North Whitehead's observation that "the greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of invention" (324). This "invention of invention," Cohen argues, was a major force not only in the scientific community, but in society as a whole, because as the scientific and manufacturing communities proceeded with their research, it was passed on to consumers, who were increasingly aware that "advances in fundamental scientific knowledges have a major thrust in altering the materials of our lives" (324-325). One of the first such changes was in the dye industry, in which from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century natural dyes were almost completely replaced by synthetic ones, not only changing the industry itself, but also having great impact on the economies of areas that had produced natural dyes (Cohen 325-326).

Of course, the most well known scientific revolution took place in biological science with the 1859 publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. Cohen quotes biologist Ernst Mayr's assessment that its effects were not so much in the practical aspects of daily life, but rather in the psychology of it: "It destroyed the anthropocentric concept of the universe and 'caused a greater upheaval in man's thinking than any other scientific advance since the rebirth of science in the Renaissance'" (283). The impact of Darwin's theories on the Victorians' self-concept was huge, for it challenged humanity's traditional monarchial place in nature. The traditional Christian story of creation states that the earth, the plants, and the animals were created by God, and that man and woman were created thereafter to rule over them. But Darwinian evolution not only challenges the theory of special creation; it also implies that humanity is not the intended ruler, but is rather just a recent evolutionary development, which might someday be surpassed.

Cohen argues that Darwin's theories were important not only in biology and in their psychological implications on society's self-concept, but that they also influenced theories in other sciences "ranging from sociology, political science and anthropology to literary criticism" (273-274). This and other developments led to a new concept of what it was to be a scientist: to be a scientist was not simply to learn what was already known and apply it--it was to participate in revolution (Cohen 278), to be part of a "permanent and neverending quest" (Cohen 274). Science, in other words, became an actively involved pursuit that could have implications much further reaching than had been supposed, became a field in which one could contribute to an ever-growing body of knowledge that was constantly changing the definitions of the world. The standards by which a thing was judged true were changed, both by a more skeptical attitude and by the availability of technology which made increased specificity and precision possible. One of the objects of science became to improve the pursuit of science itself, simply to increase knowledge and skill in investigation. The increase in the certainty with which things could be known and in the number of subjects that could be empirically and precisely tested led to an increased reliance on scientific methods as the means by which to know anything: the standard of truth was becoming equal to the standard of scientific measurement and testing, and increasingly anything that could not be so verified, including the teachings of the Christianity, were coming under fire as based on irrational grounds.

Inventions and Discoveries

To further clarify the extent to which scientific research began to affect the general populace and the academic communities in this period, I would like to describe some of the many inventions and discoveries which occurred. This is important to address because the introduction of scientific applications to the public was the means by which the public became aware of many of the innovations, and was the spark that caused many to become interested in scientific investigation, and thereby to adopt scientific modes of thought. Several of what might be considered the most valuable innovations of this period were in medicine, for example, the work of Pasteur and others in biology and medicine (McKay 787), and of Rudolph Carl Virchow's treatise *Cellular Pathology*, which argued that "the cell is the fundamental unit equally under ordinary conditions of health and extraordinary conditions of disease, and that diseases are disturbances of living cells." Also, significant were his "activity in politics and public health and production of a social theory of disease" (Cohen 316).

Darwinian evolution also became a topic of conversation and debate in a way which earlier evolutionary theories had not. Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), for example, had developed a theory of evolution, albeit a flawed one (McKay 788-789), but this did not have the great impact that Darwin's fully reasoned and developed argument did. Although the concept of biological evolution was by no means new with Darwin, he was the first to show "by careful scientific reasoning and a mountain of scientific evidence that the doctrine of evolution of species by natural selection was a sound and plausible one" (Cohen 291). In other words, due to his careful presentation, the idea of evolution could no longer just be brushed aside; both the scientific community and society as a whole were forced to acknowledge and examine it and its implications. Cohen describes the impact of Darwin's clear presentation of the argument for evolution: "The consequence of this revolution was a systematic rethinking of the nature of the world as a dynamic and evolving, rather than static, system, and of human society as developing in an evolutionary pattern," and goes on to comment that "All of these implications [regarding special creation] were not evident at once, but enough were so inescapably obvious that there was an immediate explosion of opinions" (299). Darwinian evolution thus became the springboard for discussions of more than just biology--it became the basis for attempts to develop new definitions of the formerly incontrovertible concepts defining what it was to be human. As I will discuss later, Darwinian evolution even lent its vocabulary to discussions about the future of religion, especially among spiritualists, who spoke of the "evolution" of religion, and of a "new revelation" for a "new epoch."

Although it was not directly related to Darwin's evolutionary theory, Lyell's geological theories provided concomitant evidence to be acknowledged and assimilated into a new concept of humanity. He described geological processes as continuous, inexorable, and infinitely slow (McKay 788), just as Darwin had described natural selection. Although Lyell's theory, both then and now, was and is less a topic of debate than biological evolution, it nevertheless contributes to the questions to be posed to traditional Christianity.

A great many fields of scientific research were newly formed in this period also. In mathematics, there were "non-Euclidean geometry, mathematical statistics, vector analysis" and new approaches to "classical analysis or function theory" (Cohen 319), and there were rapid advances in thermodynamics, chemistry, and electrical theory (McKay 787). Astronomy also underwent great changes: in the 1880's Annie Jump Cannon and her women assistants completed a system of defining spectral classes begun by Harvard astronomer Edward C. Pickering, and by 1926 the Russell-Vogt Theorem had shown that once the mass and composition of any star had been determined, its appearance could be predicted. Although the practical daily application of this information was negligible, "Philosophically these achievements were profound. Eddington [who developed the mass-luminosity relation in 1926] pointed out that human . . . reasoning purely from elementary principles even without telescopic observation, could show that the universe must be populated by objects like stars because gravity causes matter to clump into star-sized masses" (Hartmann 396-397). At the turn of the century, there was great debate about whether nebulae were gas clouds forming stars, or distant stars systems, as they were eventually proved to be by Edwin Hubble in 1923 (Hartmann 549). In 1920, the public was made aware of the rapid discoveries being made in astronomy by ". . . a famous but inconclusive debate [which] took place between two prominent astronomers, Harlow Shapley and Herbert Curtis, on the subject of the scale of the universe . . . . notable because *it focused public attention* on the most important issue in astronomy at the time" [emphasis added] (Hartmann 549). The eventual conclusion reached by Hubble that "the Milky Way was just one in a universe of galaxies, each containing billions of stars and scattered over millions of light-years of space" (Hartmann 551) is obviously yet another challenge posed to humanity's humano- and terra- centric view of the universe. If any other star systems did exist, then other planets like our own could exist, and therefore, intelligent life could exist. God, then, could have other universes on which to focus attention in addition to our own, which led to questions regarding the character of God, and the importance of humanity to God's plan, if indeed such a plan exists. The proof of the existence of objects and phenomena that were beyond normal experience or observation can be compared to spiritualists' attempts to prove the existence of similarly implausible phenomena: formerly, what could not be seen was presumed not to exist, apart from those things associated with religion; now it had been shown that many objects and events which could not be seen were, nevertheless, very real, and could be observed, but through new means. This in effect strengthened the claims of spiritualists: not only could skeptics no longer dismiss phenomena which could not be directly observed, but many psychic phenomena could be directly observed, and so demanded acknowledgment of some kind.

Physics and chemistry also underwent changes in this period which challenged the traditional notions of the nature of the composition of matter and the processes of life. Ernest Rutherford proved in 1919 that atoms could be split. Marie Curie (1867-1934) discovered that "radium constantly emits subatomic particles and thus does not have a constant atomic weight" and Max Planck showed that "matter and energy might be different forms of the same thing," and developed what is now known as quantum theory (McKay 897). Einstein's research further challenged assumptions about time and space, postulating that "time and space are not absolute, but relative to the viewpoint of the observer" (McKay 897), and "stated clearly" what Planck had suggested: "that matter and energy are interchangeable and that all matter contains enormous levels of potential energy" (McKay 899).

Advances like these occurred not only in the laboratory sciences, but also in the social sciences. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), borrowing from Darwin's observations about evolution in the animal kingdom, developed a theory of societal interaction he called Social Darwinism (McKay 790), though Darwin himself did not study or endorse these implications of natural selection. Also developed in this period were Freudian psychology and clinical psychology which were well known by 1910 (McKay 899).

Like the explosion of opinions caused by Darwin's theory, Freudian thought attracted many thinkers, but divergent movements also proliferated quickly. As can be seen from these divergent movements, the concepts of Darwinian evolution became a metaphor for change, progress, and challenge in society as a whole. As more people became aware of Darwin's theory and began to use its vocabulary for other purposes, his theories gained a measure of authority simply from their commonality.

The Assimilation of Scientific Thought into Society

Society had been moving toward more pervasively scientific attitudes and during the mid-nineteenth century, science became an increasingly integral part of the structure of British society. It permeated society, as it still does, both in vocabulary and in the categories that vocabulary defines. Susan Faye Cannon, in her Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period, describes the usage of the word *science* as meaning the methodical study of **any** subject (2), which, considering the use of the term by psychic and spiritualist organizations, included the study of religion. Richard Altick in Victorian People and Ideas states: "Under the sway of the political economy, with its scientific mathematical bent, the Victorians were addicted to statistics; much of the age's essential history, to say nothing of its spirit, is preserved in volumes crammed with tables and columns of figures" (244). He also argues that there was a great interest in magazines and books in scientific and philosophical subjects that the reading public consumed in their leisure hours (63-64). Thus the scientific developments discussed above had an audience much greater than simply the colleagues of those who had made them. The citizenry were interested in the study of their world, and so new theories, inventions, and ideas, including those which challenged traditional thought, were quickly disseminated.

The growing thirst for knowledge sparked many "popularizations" of scientific theories, that is, simplified versions suitable for explaining the gist of a theory to the public and impressing on it the importance of this new idea (McKay 788). In addition, amateur scientific experimentation had long been popular in England, and in this period "came into full flower . . . and a host of avocational scientists were eager to help honor their hobby and promote its intellectual authority" (Altick 260). Many even volunteered to help collect field data for scientists making experiments in natural history. George Levine in Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction describes it this way:

> Popularizations of science were filling lecture halls, journals, and workingman's institutes; "lay sermons" were displacing religious ones; amateur fossil hunting, insect collecting, seashell study were holiday diversions and potential contributions to rapidly expanding scientific knowledge. (3-4)

The concept of a "lay sermon" indicates that religion and science or study were becoming mixed--that the study of science might become, at least metaphorically, the worship of science. Society, even in its leisure-time pursuits, was beginning to define itself in terms of scientific knowledge. More importantly, science was becoming a lens through which all aspects of life were seen. The implications of this, especially in matters of faith, were, from a historical standpoint, obviously bound to clash eventually. This clash is crucial to the argument I am presenting--without it, there would not have been the need for, as spiritualism defined itself, a new, "scientific" religion.

The methods of science were beginning to permeate every aspect of life in very basic ways: the categories used to describe experiences and the types of arguments and evidence required were changing to ones informed by the methods and assumptions of science. George Levine discusses this extensively in his Darwin and the Novelists, but I wish to cover just a few points here, drawing from his text, to describe how attitudes were changing. He argues that: "The ideas of science were helping to form the general view of 'reality' itself, and Darwin's vision, his great myth of origins, was both shaping the limits of the real and being tested in the laboratories of fiction as well as in scientific argument" (4). Levine also points out that Darwin's argument not only increased the degree to which authority, reality, and science were connected (1-2), but that it also "revolutionized the ways we imagine ourselves within the natural world and . . . raised questions about the nature of self, society, history, and religion; and it did not take a scientist to know that this was happening" (1). He argues that Darwinian theories were quickly accepted in part because society was ready to think in new terms, some of which were already emerging in response to other factors in society (3).

Sheelagh Strawbridge also picks up this theme in her essay "Darwin and Victorian social values," arguing that Darwin's compilation of his theories and evidence were possible in part because of the climate of the time, saying that he "was very much a man of his time." She contends that his writings are "more deeply imbued with contemporary attitudes and values than is compatible with the conventional image of science pursuing 'truth' in a disinterested way" (102), and cites Comte, Spencer, and Malthus as major influences on Darwin (105-106). In sum, she argues that Darwin was able to put ideas together in a new way because he was a product of the society that had developed that new way. Owen Chadwick in The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century points out that, in society as a whole, it was not Darwin's theories so much as what they symbolized, namely, science overcoming traditional beliefs, that was influential: "It was Darwin the symbol . . . but however imaginary and however vague still bearing a distinct relationship to a scientific achievement, which few quite understood, the truth of which many doubted, but which everyone, without knowing quite what it was, knew to be a scientific achievement of the first magnitude" (174). Already a discovery or theory proclaimed "scientific" caught the attention of the public, and was accepted at least as something which deserved consideration: even if it did not immediately change their beliefs or opinions, it did impress people as worthy of consideration because it was supposed to be based on facts, not on feelings.

Levine picks the thread up here again, referring to Gillian Beer, who presents the argument that "'reading is an essentially question raising' activity" and that "Ideas . . . 'pass more rapidly into the state of assumptions when they are *unread.*'" [1] Levine says that this concept was a partial inspiration of his examination of Victorian fiction (vii), in which he found that "The project of the Victorian novel increasingly appeared . . . as a cultural twin to the project of Victorian science; even the great aesthetic ideals of fiction writers--truth, detachment, self-abnegation--echoed with the ideals of contemporary science" (vii). He also claims that fiction both reflected the secularization of society and contributed to it by implicitly advocating these scientific ideals (viii).

There was a great demand in this period for light, interesting fiction for a newly literate public, and popular magazines were a very important source of this fiction (Cox 119-120), so Conan Doyle's scientifically minded Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson would have fit in both with the demand for fiction and the integration of science into fiction. In addition, some Sherlock Holmes stories show Conan Doyle exploring psychic phenomena in an every day setting and in the eminent, scientific guise of the detective, usually proving them to be explainable by normal means, and many of his Gothic tales also deal with these themes. Fiction became a way for Conan Doyle to insinuate spiritualist and psychic ideas into society in a manner that was both non-threatening (fiction) and rational (Holmes as scientist and detective). In addition, Pierre Nordon points out that "at the time he [Conan Doyle] was starting his medical studies, Darwin, Spencer and Huxley were the thinkers who dominated his generation" (147), implying that they served as models of scientific thought. In this context, the Sherlock Holmes stories can certainly be seen as exploratory fiction: "stories about how reality is discerned, examined, and discussed" (Busch 15). Frederick Busch, in his introduction to a set of Holmes stories, quotes from Conan Doyle's own description of Holmes and comments on it:

> Doyle presumed that he had made a knight to serve his English ideals and a man "whose character admits no light or shade," he said, criticizing Holmes in his autobiography. "He is a calculating machine," Doyle summarized, "and anything you add to that simply weakens the effect." To some extent, Doyle was right. Holmes was machinelike, in the age made great by romantic ideals coupled with the advance of machinery. Holmes was the protector of order in a world increasingly threatened--by radical movements among the working classes, by a pesky intellectual radicalism among the educated, by exciting ideas about sexual emancipation, and by the rapid growth of increasingly unruly cities in a nation made smaller by railroads. (12)

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[1] As quoted in Levine, 2-3.

The Holmes stories can, in a sense, be seen as a reaction, or as an attempt to explore in a safely unreal environment the changes taking place in society. Busch even argues that Holmes' "typically Victorian worship of science, his often cold demeanor that hid the hivelike activity of his brain, made him *a most extraordinary protector of the ordinary*"[emphasis added] (2). This "ordinariness" could be seen either as that of the standard, law-abiding citizen, or as that of the traditional values that were coming under increasing scrutiny due to an ever growing demand for scientific "proof."

The Impact of Science on Self-Esteem

As the new scientific theories were assimilated into society, an effect on the self concept of the society became evident. Cohen paraphrases Freud as arguing that the blow to humanity's view of itself occurred not with the development of new ideas, but with the public acknowledgment thereof (Cohen 362). He cites Freud as identifying three major blows to humanity's self-esteem:

> Freud declared in 1907 that if asked to name "the 'ten most significant books,'" he would place "among them scientific achievements like those of Copernicus, of the old physician Johann Weier on the belief in witches, Darwin's *Descent of Man*, and others" (1953, *9*, 245). This collection of Copernicus, Johannes Weier, and Darwin is of more than passing interest, since these men represent the three areas in which Freud believed man had received staggering blows to his narcissistic self-esteem: cosmology, psychology, and evolutionary biology. (Cohen 360)

Freud's reference to Copernicus' writing as a blow to self-esteem brings to mind the advances in astronomy described earlier in this chapter: the discoveries made in this time period expanded the perceived size of the universe almost as much as Copernicus' discoveries had, though they were, perhaps, less shocking due to the previous acceptance of Copernicus' theories. Nevertheless, they were a "blow" to humanity's "narcissistic self-esteem," and spiritualism, by embracing the innovations of scientific investigation instead of placing itself in conflict with them, became a means by which people could assimilate those ideas in a way that was less threatening to self-esteem because humanity's place was redefined, not as higher or lower in the grand scheme, but simply as different than it had been.

Darwin's evolutionary theory was a blow not only because it denied the special creation of humanity and its elevated position, but also because of the means by which it functioned: "The principle of natural selection works on chance variations and it was this element of chance that appears to have been one of the most disturbing aspects of the theory as far as Darwin's contemporaries and particularly his religious opponents were concerned" (Strawbridge 107). It seems as if the evolutionary process would have been far more readily accepted if it could have been said that God had directed it in a purposeful manner from the formation of the lowest algae to the pinnacle, humanity. But Darwin's theory of chance mutation would not mesh with such an interpretation. In fact, Cohen argues that "... the Darwinian revolution sounded the death knell of any argument about design in the universe or in nature ..." (299). Spiritualism embraced evolution, rather than fighting it, by incorporating concepts from evolution into beliefs about the human soul. Spiritualists believed that the soul grew and developed through its chance life experiences, comparable to the changes induced by chance biological mutations, that it continued to grow and learn after death, that it could advance to higher spiritual planes, that it could "evolve" to a point where it could give guidance to the less developed souls still trapped in earthly bodies through the cooperation of a medium. However, the "evolution" accepted by spiritualists was a warped version based on the idea of direction leading toward perfection: Darwinian evolution does not claim that evolution leads toward perfection, but rather simply states that mutations occur, and that natural selection operates by selecting for or against a given mutation based on what constitutes the best match between the individual and its environment at that particular moment in time. This may lead to a "perfecting" trend if the environmental conditions remain stable, because the species would, over generations, become increasingly well adapted to its environment; however, there is no driving force that causes beneficial mutations or leads a species inexorably toward "perfection."

It seems that Darwin himself recognized that the theory of the evolution of humanity would be a major obstacle to acceptance of his theories, because in the Origin, he stated merely that "much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history,"[2] and reserved his application of his theories to humanity until 1871 in his Descent of Man. What Darwin did not say was, however, just as shocking: "... Darwin's first readers found it not only easy but inescapable to extrapolate from Galápagos reptiles to man" (Altick 226-227). This was especially so because "biological evolution made it plain, as geological evolution had not, that man was not exempt from the process of change which affected all animate nature" (227).

Altick explores several reasons why the idea of evolution, and particularly natural selection, was so threatening and upsetting to late nineteenth-century assumptions. He argues that evolution challenged the idea of free will--"... science now revealed that in the longer view, far from being free, man was caught up in the inexorable processes of nature from which there was no escape" (229). He conversely finds that the threat of natural selection was that it is *un*directed: "The present distinction of living species could no longer be explained on the traditional ground that they were all differentiated, with infinite wisdom, at the moment of creation. Instead, they were merely the present generation of victors in a ceaseless struggle for existence. Dominant today, extinct tomorrow" (229). Perhaps most importantly, natural selection challenged the idea that the Victorian Briton was the pinnacle both of creation and civility, as it showed "the drives he shared with all living things in their common, grim determination to survive: sex and hunger" (Altick 228-229). The discussion of evolution in society, therefore, caused the nineteenth-century Britons to question their collective self-image, and particularly the parts of it to which they had been accustomed to point as evidence that society really was improving.

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[2] As quoted in Cohen, 298.

The challenge to creation theology implicit in evolutionary theory is an important part of its dynamics in society. Evolutionary theory erased much of the traditional view of the world, "and in the process nature, society, narrative, and language itself were desacralized, severed from the inherent significance, value, and meaning of a divinely created and designed world" (Levine viii). By choosing to accept the ideas of evolution and combining them with a belief that change could be equated with progress, spiritualists could present their religion and beliefs as compatible both with science and with the desire for a spiritual aspect of life. Even some scientists of the period, among them Alfred Russel Wallace, "could not bring himself to believe that natural selection could account for man's development in history, and thought it was necessary to invoke the active hand of a Creator . . ." (Cohen 298). Others tried to merge creation and evolution into a process directed by the Creator:

> ". . . evolution of an orderly Kosmos . . by the continuous operation of mutual attractions according to . . . law . . . should furnish . . . the sublimest exemplification of an Infinite Intelligence working out its vast designs. . ." [3] Or one could believe less mystically, that whatever chance and brutal struggle might have led to the emergence of the human mind, once it emerged things became meaningful and moral: "--from the time when . . the intelligent and moral faculties became fairly developed in man he ceased to be influenced by natural selection."[4] (222-223)

The first of these theories, however, did not satisfy everyone: indeed, the narrator in Conan Doyle's Maracot Deep comments that "'If the object of creation was the production of man, it is strange that the ocean is so much more populous than the land'" (Tietze 97). Obviously, the question could not be so simply settled as simply to ascribe the process of evolution to God as a tool used in creation.

Concepts of Progress

The label of "progress" was an integral part of the nineteenth-century response to change because it allowed inventions and discoveries to be acknowledged in a way that was not only non-threatening, but laudatory to society for its erudition. To many, this optimism must have seemed a logical response: "The brain which had bridged chasms, driven tunnels through mountains, and sent steamboats to defy adverse winds was just as capable of solving the problems of society" (Altick 108). Changes had taken place in nearly every scientific field, and "[a]lthough in some fields practical applications necessarily lagged far behind theory, technology had already constructed ample proof of science's benefit to mankind" (Altick 107). Altick believes that part of the reason for this optimism was that humanity was beginning, in some respects, to be able to control the physical environment through scientific knowledge. This apparent progress provided a pattern from which so-called "moral progress" could subsequently develop (107-108).

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[3] William Carpenter, as quoted in Cohen, 222-223.

[4] Alfred Russel Wallace, as quoted in Cohen, 222-223.

Sheelagh Strawbridge observes that even evolution, when seen from the proper angle, can be seen as contributing to progress: ". . . although natural selection works upon chance variations, which may be either beneficial or detrimental to individuals, it works to select those which are beneficial to the species, thus ensuring that evolutionary change implies progress . . ." (107). She also argues that although Darwin influenced Victorian ideas of progress, he was also influenced by them, and that part of the reason he was able to form his theory was because of this influence, citing as support this quote from The Origin of Species: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend toward perfection" (107). Strawbridge even argues that Darwin believed so strongly in the progress of both biology and society that he believed that races were biologically distinct, and that the pinnacle of evolution truly **was** the English gentleman (108-111). In other words, although evolution is not directed toward a goal, but was based on chance mutation, Darwin apparently believed that humanity had benefitted from the process, and so the net outcome had been progress, even though that progress is not the inevitable outcome of mutation and natural selection. This also left open the question of whether process equaled progress in evolution for society at large, and in particular for spiritualists, who adopted the progressive viewpoint and applied it both to religion as a whole and to the spiritual growth of individual souls.

Science as a New Model of Truth

As science gained more authority as a way to define the world, it moved into a position not only of a method for ascertaining truth, but as a model of truth itself in all areas of enquiry. The implication of the acceptance of scientific enquiry as the means by which truth was ascertained was that Christianity, which claimed to possess "The Truth," could be examined scientifically, and, if it could not withstand this examination, its claim to absolute truth must be reassessed. Levine presents the argument thus:

> Theirs [the Victorians], after all, was a time when science was most forcefully extending its authority in the realm of knowledge and even beyond, into religion and morals, and when it really did seem for a while that apparently insoluble problems could be solved, that the limits imposed on human society by material conditions could be broken, and that knowledge was an aspect of morality, so that the highest Victorian

> virtue was "Truth." (3)

As science proved itself increasingly capable, then, it became increasingly the standard by which accomplishments and ideas were judged. Cohen refers to a 1904 statement made by Simon Newcomb, who stated that, ". . . the primary agent in the movement which has elevated man to the masterful position he now occupies, is the scientific investigator" (275), and as "permanent revolution" became accepted as a model for the process of scientific investigation, truth became "an ever-distant goal toward which we may approach closer and closer but never fully attain" (Cohen 274). This meant that Christianity could and should also be judged by the criteria of science, and, in the estimation of some thinkers, did not stand up very well to them. This perceived weakness in Christianity opened the door for spiritualism both by weakening the authority of Christianity and by endorsing the methodology of spiritualism, because its methodology was, in most instances, parallel to that of science, whereas the methodology of Christianity was not. This eventually progressed to the point where the status of science became so high that "[f]or many, the union of careful experiment and abstract theory was the only reliable route to truth and objective reality" (McKay 788). The investiture of science with such authority gave science and the scientific method enormous influence in society on the whole as well. W. H. Greenleaf observes that this phenomenon was so widespread that it can even be classified as a movement in itself:

> Scientism is a convenient word to describe all these many and varied forms of belief resting on the notion that the only effective method of thinking and analysis is that deriving from, or deemed characteristic of, the inquiries of modern natural science and technology . . . what is not thus scientifically grounded is either merely subjective or . . . no more than vain philosophy, speculative metaphysics--to be cast into the flames. The implication of this position is that scientific method (as variously conceived) is the only means to ensure effective understanding of any aspect of human or natural experience and that genuine knowledge of man and society can only be acquired in the same way that mastery of nature is achieved.[5]

This elevation of science as the means by which truth is obtained to a status of near infallibility not only strengthened the influence of science, but also intensified the conflicts between science and tradition. If science were accepted as the final word, the beliefs of Christianity and tradition could not coexist or be incorporated. Susan Faye Cannon, presents the issue this way ". . . for cultured early Victorians, natural science provided a norm of truth. There cannot, as the Victorians were fond of saying, be two

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[6] As quoted in Strawbridge, 112.

truths, and the norm by which proposed truths were judged was, explicitly or often implicitly, the norm of natural science" (2). For those who could not simply discard the beliefs that they had inherited, this presented a dilemma of faith versus science. Again, this provided a gap for spiritualism to bridge--people wanted to have a belief in some religion, but likewise felt the need to be true to the criteria of scientific analysis. Spiritualism, by trying to supply evidence that would withstand scientific analysis in order to support itself, could bridge this gap by providing both belief in a religion and evidence for those beliefs.

The Rise of Uncertainty

Not everyone could accept that all change was necessarily progress, or that scientific study was the appropriate basis for all thought (Altick 108-109). For some, the growing power and status of science led not to certainty, but rather to uncertainty as to what were appropriate criteria on which to judge a given question. Some began to wonder if change might be just change, or might move in a direction other than forward, and questioned whether the process of change could be identified with progress, and whether change was a linear phenomenon, or perhaps instead cyclical or alternating between extremes. If one of these other models were accepted, it could be argued that progress was only apparent because society was currently in the up-swing of one of these alternative models (Altick 110-111). So the questioning of science and progress in some ways darkened the optimism of society by pointing out that human perspective and skill did indeed have its limitations.

Darwinian evolution itself contributed to uncertainty, as due to the "quest for origins . . . fact was severed from meaning and value, 'presence' became absence, and the world had to be reconstituted not from divine inheritance but from arbitrary acts of human will" (Levine viii). In other words, humanity was suddenly the product not of divine creation which had overseen every aspect of its formation, but rather of chance occurrences, arbitrary environmental changes, the success or failure of individuals irrespective of virtue, and the caprice of mating choices. The traditional hierarchy of the sciences was also threatened by debates over evolution. The structure of the pursuit of truth became fragmented as each discipline developed its own interpretation of scientific method and evolutionary theory: "[t]here ceased to be any universal norm. Art, literature, philosophy, politics, theology, each went its own way in search of the truth. The early Victorian denied the possibility of two truths, but the late Victorians had to live with many, as we do" (Cannon 3). Spiritualism, however, presented itself as a system in which these apparently conflicting ideas could be integrated into a unified whole because of its emphasis on providing a scientifically sound basis for religious belief.

Darwinian evolution challenged not only the scientific norms, but also, of course, those of traditional Christianity. Peter Allan Dale, in his In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age, states his belief that "The essential intellectual history of the nineteenth century may fairly be described as a search for an adequate replacement for the lost Christian totality, an effort to resurrect a saving belief . . ." (5). George Lukács' Marxist analysis is one way to understand the meaning of this loss: "The dialectical conception of totality is the only method capable of understanding and reproducing reality. Concrete totality is, therefore, the category which governs reality."[6] If this line of reasoning is taken to the next step, then one may assume that reality itself had become questionable, which, for some, must have indeed seemed the case.

Others, such as Thomas Henry Huxley, were able to accept not knowing the "why" of the universe. His "On Agnosticism" expresses this acceptance, and even rejects a search for further knowledge:

> The one thing in which most of these good people [adherents of various religions] agreed was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite sure that they had attained a certain "gnosis,"--had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was quite sure I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. . . . (577)

But to those who held onto at least a portion of their faith, the categorical repudiation of a intelligence besides that of the human was unthinkable (Conan Doyle, Psychic 16). Dale believes that romanticism "was bent on remaking Christianity for the modern world, secularizing it as a metaphysical idea of social and individual wholeness, in which all the great enlightenment antinomies, mind and nature, infinite and finite, self and other might be reconciled anew" (5). This attempt at reconciliation is, in terms of this exploration, the crucial concept, because the development of spiritualism was a reconciliation, a response to this need for a new totality by which morality could be governed.

The Clash of Science and Christianity

The growing acceptance of science as the method by which the issues should be examined led to an almost inevitable clash between science and Christianity, for although not everyone understood the exact implications of the new scientific discoveries, they did understand that "'scientists', who have a mighty reputation for their advances in knowledge, tell us that the parsons teach falsehood and no God is" (Chadwick 180). Even if the general public was not ready to accept that the existence of God had been disproved, the question had been raised, and had to be addressed. Chadwick argues that:

> Men like Büchner brought before the middle classes the idea that there

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[7] As quoted in Dale, 6.

> was an alternative explanation to the world different from that which they inherited. What they said was not enough to persuade that man is only an animal, or that everything is matter, or that all priests are rabid, or that all religion is in vain, or that freethinkers are the noblest examples of humanity.
>
> What they said was enough to persuade that the Bible is not what it was thought, that we cannot therefore be so confident over the precise expressions of religion. It was enough to raise the question whether the world can in any sense be thought of as ordered by a providence. It was enough to persuade that miracles are in doubt--but by the time Büchner wrote [1855], miracles were already in question. It was enough, also, to breed popular interest in the problem. (175)

Simply the fact that the question had been raised was a threat to traditional Christianity, because, to a great extent, traditional Christianity was based on *not* questioning certain premises. To question the creation of the universe was to question the very existence of God, upon which all of Christianity rests.

Although scientists themselves did not set out to attack Christianity, the connection seemed unavoidable because of the acceptance of scientific reasoning as the basis for knowledge. Francis Darwin, Charles' son, quotes his father as having said, "'Science has nothing to do with Christ, except in so far as the habit of scientific research makes a man cautious in admitting evidence.' He went on to imply that this caution led him not to believe that any revelation had been given. This was a way of saying that a training in science makes a man test everything, and accept nothing until it is tested."[7] In terms of religion, however, very few absolute answers could be had, for empirical tests of the existence of God are logistically impossible. The consequence of this was that the confidence in the inevitability of progress was overshadowed by a sense of the limitations of the tools of science. Altick explores the implications of this sense of limitation:

> The romantic faith in the powers of the mind, broadly conceived, to command all knowledge gave way to an oppressive sense that the human intelligence, such as it was, had to content itself with a very limited comprehension of the universe in which it had its moment of ill-adapted existence. The only human certainties were that everything, in ethics, religion, history, experience, was relative, and that absolutes, if they did exist, were beyond man's grasp; and that since evolution was the basic law of life, all was flux. (232-233)

This was in direct opposition, not to any particular dogma, as previous threats to

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[8] As quoted in Chadwick, 187.

Christianity had been, but to the entire system of certainty on which it had been based.

The lack of absolutes in ethics as described by science was also in opposition to traditional Christian thought, though this lack reflects back, to some extent, on science itself: "If a middle class reader found it difficult now to commit himself so absolutely to any meaning of the word 'creation'; he found it equally difficult to commit himself to the corresponding dogma proposed by Haeckel or Büchner" (Chadwick 180). Science also had postulated "universal and irreparable decay [in the face of which] the Victorians' confidence in the ongoing, divinely ordained improvement of man's estate could not but seem shallow, narrow, and petty--not to say ill-founded" (Altick 111).

Even though science appeared to conflict with Christianity, "its prestige as an intellectual frame of reference steadily increased" (Altick 233). For intellectuals who did subscribe to the new ideas of science, this was critical. Altick states: "Regarded as it [science] was with veneration and hope . . . it finally made unbelief respectable. One's personal rejection of Christianity need no longer be kept to oneself or admitted in confidence to a few intimates. Doubt, frankly confessed, even made one an interesting human being . . ." (Altick 233). He continues to say that although unbelief was made socially acceptable, at least in some circles, by the status of science, that leaving Christianity was still a major decision, and that various degrees of belief and unbelief existed in late Victorian England (233).

Thomas Henry Huxley was one thinker who was not afraid to reject Christianity publicly. In "An Episcopal Trilogy," he says:

> Theological apologists who insist that morality will vanish if their dogmas are exploded, would do well to consider the fact that, in the matter of intellectual veracity, science is already a long way ahead of the Churches; and, that, in this particular, it is exerting an educational influence on mankind on which the Churches have shown themselves utterly incapable. (579)

Huxley not only saw Christianity as being in conflict with science, but saw science as having predictably and appropriately won the battle. According to Conan Doyle's account in The History of Spiritualism, he apparently did not feel the need to have aspects of the spiritual in his life, and, consequently, refused to participate in an investigation of psychical phenomena (Conan Doyle, History I 319).

Darwin, too, was willing to both critique and reject aspects of Christianity. In his autobiography, he describes the challenge of science to Christianity:

> We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows. Everything in nature is the result of fixed laws. (87)

The "evidence" of the beauty and complexity of nature that had served as proof of the existence of God to Christians and of a cosmic intelligence to spiritualists, did not signify anything more for Darwin than the millions of variations possible through chance mutation and natural selection. He, like Huxley, evidently did not feel he needed a higher power to account for the existence of the universe in its present form.

Darwin also comments on the application of scientific reasoning to Christianity, and the skepticism that it necessarily engenders:

> By further reflecting that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in the miracles by which Christianity is supported,--that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become,--that the men at the time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us,--that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events,--that they differ in many important details, far too important as it seemed to me to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitnesses;--by such reflections as these, which I give not as having the least novelty or value, I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. (86)

This passage is especially instructive because it brings up several of the points which I have been discussed here. First, Darwin put the current methodology and standards for evidence far above those of the "ignorant and credulous" past, implicitly arguing that scientific analysis of data is the one and only means by which to attain truth. Second, he argues that methods of investigation and recording data, when they were employed, were sloppy: "the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events," and "they differ in many important details." Third, he uses the knowledge of the world gained by current scientific experimentation to argue that miracles, on which he says Christianity is based, are simply preposterous: "the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in . . . miracles." He obviously embraces the concept of progress discussed above, as he argues that both knowledge and methodology are becoming progressively more refined, and that the current dogma, science, is sufficient to overthrow the dogma of the past, Christian faith.

Lastly, Darwin constructs an apparently moral argument against Christianity:

> I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished.
>
> And this is a damnable doctrine. (87)

Initially, Darwin's argument does appear to be simply an emotional and personal appeal to equity and relationships, but I think he actually intended to show that the criterion for salvation, namely faith, was inappropriate. In scientific study, faith is not a part of the question or method for any experiment--one simply uses what has been proved and conducts further experiments, recording and analyzing the results. Christianity's assertion that anyone who does not believe will be damned is, in terms of scientific methodology, illogical, as the intention of the requirement for belief is presumably to encourage a moral life, meaning that the criterion should, therefore, be the morality of the life, not the degree of faith.

The position of science in conflict with Christianity did not have a precedent in late nineteenth-century society, for "Prior to Darwin's *Origin*, science had been an ally, and a respected one at that, of the Anglican church. It could be used to put humanity in its place . . ." (Cannon 2-3). It had previously been hoped that science would one day be able to prove the truth of Christianity, but instead Darwin's theory disproved, to those who accepted it, the Christian story of creation (Altick 228). Cohen believes that even so, ". . . if it had not been necessary to put man himself in the evolutionary scale and the evolutionary process, or if it had not been necessary to conclude that human beings are the result of natural selection, then probably religious believers would not have had quite so strong a reaction" (298). Because Christianity was more or less compelled to reject Darwinian evolution, it made it a subject of further discussion: it was "denied [the] normative status" that had been granted to other science, and inspired theological essays from Oxford, whose authors were "proud of their liberality in accepting, often welcoming, 'evolution' in general; and quietly dismissed Darwinian evolution in particular" (Cannon 3). The crux of the matter, really, was that, by challenging creation, Darwinian evolution challenged the foundations of Christianity and Christian morality. Richard Altick describes the relationship this way:

> The consequence of such a world view, of course was that the whole array of Victorian religious and moral assumptions was called into doubt. If the world was not made perfect to begin with (as geology asserted, contravening Genesis) and if there had been no such thing as a freshly created, perfect being who was benevolently set down in Paradise as the progenitor of the human race, then the whole story of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man and, most important of all, the Redemption--the whole basis of Christian faith--collapsed. Since there was no original sin, there was no reason for God to send his son to be sacrificed in behalf of man's salvation. (230-231)

Much of society had been founded on the teachings of Christianity, and if this were proved unsound, the foundation of society was also unsound. This caused some to believe that the moral fabric of society would disintegrate, as science was supposed to lead to atheism, and atheism to immorality (Chadwick 167).

Although the challenge to Christianity was significant in terms of logical proof, and even statements like "*Darwin has disproved the Bible*" were heard (Chadwick 174), Darwinian evolution did not seriously threaten the place of either God or religion in society; rather, it only significantly damaged people's belief in the Bible (Chadwick 167). It is this that I believe sets the stage for the development of spiritualism: society was not ready to give up its belief in what we now term a "higher power," but, because of the challenges to the Bible from science, and in particular from Darwinian evolution, society was ready for a new form of religion, namely spiritualism, which could unite aspects of science and proof with a belief in the spiritual and in absolute morality.

Chapter 3: Interactions Between Science and Spiritualism

Spiritualism as a religion both filled the gap left by the interactions of science and Christianity and was itself informed by the methods and language of science. The proponents of spiritualism sought to support it by capitalizing on the status of scientific study as a means by which to establish truth in order to "prove" the validity of their religion. Spiritualists also borrowed the vocabulary of evolution to describe the place of spiritualism both in its historical context and in its period, referring to it as a "new revelation" for a "new epoch," and speaking of the movement of souls to higher planes of spiritual knowledge, analogous to progress-based views of evolution. In this chapter, I intend to show that spiritualism offered a religion which was compatible with science and yet retained belief in intelligences other than the human and in an afterlife. To this end, I will discuss the methods of spiritualist investigators and the response of the scientific community to their purportedly scientific proofs of these phenomena, the non-scientific aspects of spiritualism, how believers dealt with accusations and proof of fraud, and how spiritualism did emerge as a religion based on scientific habits of mind--even though the arguments presented did not convince the majority of the scientific community. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's History of Spiritualism is the primary source I have used for information on spiritualism in this period.

The Evolution of Religion

Conan Doyle argues from many angles that spiritualism was a movement of its time, an appropriate and inevitable step in the development of the moral consciousness of humanity. In The History of Spiritualism he quotes the London *Times* of December 26, 1872, wherein was published "an article entitled 'Spiritualism and Science,' occupying three and a half columns, in which the opinion is expressed that now 'it is high time competent hands undertook the unraveling of this Gordian Knot,' . . ." (History I 177). Thomas R. Tietze, in "The Other Worlds of Arthur Conan Doyle" remarks that "A generation whose parents had to wrestle with the findings of Darwin, the philosophy of Spencer, and the arguments of Huxley, found itself particularly open to the provisionally affirmative findings of the Society of Psychical Research . . ." (II 207). It seemed that many who were willing to accept these findings were not the intellectual or social elite, but rather of the lower classes. Ruth Brandon, although she does not acknowledge that psychic phenomena could have any factual basis whatsoever, quotes from Lodge's response to the objections of established religion and the intellectual community:

> He rejected those [objections] of the clerics by taking refuge in his position as a scientist who must allow himself to be ruled only be evidence: "I must claim that Science can pay no attention to ecclesiastical notice boards." His testimony, he asserted, was in no way merely theoretical, it was based upon fact. When it came to the objections of intellectuals and rationalists, however, he took quite a different line. He contended that throughout history, whenever science

> had discovered some new and hard-to-credit fact, it had invariably been accepted by "simple-hearted folk" long before the intellectual establishment of the day had allowed that it might be true. (218)

Brandon points out here, though implicitly, that Lodge, like Conan Doyle, considered spiritualism to be not a new religion, but rather a new manifestation of religion for a more analytical age. Lodge's argument that "simple-hearted folk" are characteristically more receptive to new ideas can also be considered support for the statement that spiritualism was simply a new manifestation, because presumably those who have less invested in the system which dictates the predominant beliefs, i.e., the lower, less educated classes, would have less cause to resist change in the system.

John Lamond, in his biography Arthur Conan Doyle says that Conan Doyle specifically linked evolution of species to the evolution of religion: "He found that a system evolution applied not only to the various phases of animal life that function on this material globe, he found the evolutionary process applied to the spiritual life of mankind . . ."[1]. Conan Doyle himself, in an interview published in the Buenos Ayres *Standard* also described spiritualism as evolving:

> But spiritualism is developing. It is undergoing a process of evolution, as our world itself did, according to Darwin. And just as we are told that man has descended from the monkey, so from the visible phenomena of the early days, when spiritualists commenced table-lifting and other like experiments, we are now changing to something higher, something more intelligent. There is, for instance, clairvoyance. That is spiritualism on a higher plane.[2]

Conan Doyle without question borrows from the dialogue of science in this statement, and assumes that his listeners and readers are also familiar on a day-to-day level with the basic theory of Darwinian evolution. In addition, he echoes most certainly the ideal of progress, saying that the current phenomena of spiritualism are on "a higher plane" than those of previous generations, not simply saying that they have changed.

Spiritualism as a Scientific Religion

As is shown by Conan Doyle's comparison of the development of spiritualism to biological evolution, his discourse about spiritualism is permeated by the language of science. Religion, in the model set up by Conan Doyle, can be seen as developing parallel to society: just as the collective view of life had changed from one based in mythical explanations to one based on the scientific analysis of events and phenomena, so religion was changing from being based on faith and tradition to being founded upon evidence provided by the careful investigation of the manifestations from which it grew. Nevertheless, Conan Doyle, at least in his own involvement, was careful never to let scientific experimentation overshadow the religious aspects of the movement, which he believed to be the essential component. He said of it, ". . . I consider all this work of experimental psychic research, though very useful and necessary, to be a sort of super-materialism which may approach, but does not reach the real heart of the subject. The heart is in my opinion a purely religious one" (Psychic Question 22).

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[1] As quoted in Nordon, 165.

[2] As quoted in Nordon, 165-166.

Yet its scientific basis is what distinguished spiritualism from other types of religions because, due to this tenuously maintained balance between proof and belief, it came, as Conan Doyle described it in The New Revelation, "infinitely nearer to positive proof that any other religious development with which I am acquainted" (Rodin, Key and Pilot 166). Pierre Nordon quotes the explanation given by Frederic Myers, another spiritualist, of how he himself balanced science and religion within the movement:

> He treated supranormal phenomena as intrusions from a disembodied or immortal mode of existence into the heart of our world, and assumed that the task of science was necessarily a theological one: to demonstrate the truth of the essential religious dogma of the immortality of the soul, and of its most vital manifestations for Christians--the resurrection of Christ and the communion of the Saints. (Nordon 144).

As is evident from this summary, Myers did not consider spiritualism to be necessarily at odds with Christianity, a subject which I will discuss at greater length in Chapter Four. More significantly, perhaps, Myers viewed science as a tool to be used by religion. For him, as for Conan Doyle, it was important to prove that the phenomena had taken place, but only in order to create a sound foundation for the religion of spiritualism. Conan Doyle felt that faith was no longer sufficient for persons who considered carefully their beliefs, and so a basis of scientific evidence must be provided:

> Faith has been abused until it has become impossible to many earnest minds, and there is a call for proof and knowledge. It is this which Spiritualism supplies. It founds our belief in life after death and in the existence of invisible worlds, not upon ancient tradition or upon vague intuitions, but upon proven facts, so that a science of religion may be built up, and man given a sure path among the quagmire of the creeds. (History II 247)

Science was, for Conan Doyle, a means to an end, a way to provide a justification for spiritualistic beliefs by showing that the phenomena on which they were based were not just romantic delusions, but rather were genuine events. Science was both friend and foe to spiritualism because it served the purpose of obtaining evidence in acceptable forms, but scientists tended to attack the spiritualists' findings nevertheless. Conan

Doyle and other spiritualists considered this just as narrow-minded as the refusal of clergy to accept the reality of new "miracles," and hoped, one day, to convert not only the religious to a new and vital belief, but to provide scientists with a spirituality they could embrace without betraying their scientific ideals.

Scientific Investigators of Spiritualistic Phenomena

Conan Doyle in his History of Spiritualism consistently follows a certain format for introducing both mediums and spiritualistic investigators: he presents a sort of résumé of the person's accomplishments, highlighting particularly any higher education or experience in scientific study or reasoning in order to establish for his reader the credibility of the witness to the psychic event. In fact, the first subject he takes on is a short biography of Swedish psychic investigator Emmanuel Swedenborg, for whom he supplies quite an extensive résumé. Nevertheless, the scientific community of the time was unimpressed; Conan Doyle remarks, "Speaking generally, it may be said that the attitude of organized science during these years was as unreasonable and unscientific as that of Galileo's cardinals, and if there had been a Scientific Inquisition, it would have brought its terrors to bear upon the new knowledge" (History I 185). That Conan Doyle would imagine the scientific community as powerful enough to begin an inquisition into religion is, I believe, a telling point. It shows not only that he regarded science as a powerful force with societal authority, but also that he regarded science as having, at least to some extent, taken over the position of the medieval Church in society.

Some members of the scientific community did acknowledge that the spiritualists were trying to approach religion from a new point of view informed by scientific thought and by the desire to place proof above faith in the establishment of a theology. Those who were willing to at least investigate the phenomena were, in terms of the public's opinion of the movement, very valuable to it:

> Although Thomas Henry Huxley refused on principle to attend a Spiritualist seance, men nearly as eminent, among them William Crookes, Oliver Lodge, and Alfred Wallace, sought out the strongest sort of new evidence--proof of the soul's survival of physical death. Such scientifically trained investigators measured forces exerted by spirits in seance rooms, ascertained physiological changes in the bodies of mediums, and photographed materialized spirits under conditions which seemed to exclude fraud. (Meikle 24)

These men and others like them came to be the pillars of the spiritualist movement, and many of them were involved with organizations such as the Society for Psychical Research, which was concerned with investigating phenomena rather than with the establishment of a religion. Conan Doyle, in defense of his own position as a researcher, referred to his medical training, saying, ". . . the medical profession is at the same time the most noble and the most cynically incredulous in the world" (History I 88). He acknowledged the importance of such prominent persons to the cause of spiritualism in his description of the *Institut Métapsychique*:

> An important side work of the Institute has been to invite public men of eminence in science and literature to witness for themselves the psychical investigations that are being carried on. Over a hundred such men have been given first-hand evidence, and in 1923 thirty, including eighteen medical men of distinction, signed and permitted the publication of a statement of their full belief in the genuineness of the manifestations they saw under conditions of rigid control. (History II 108)

The testimony of such witnesses constitutes a significant amount of the evidence used by Conan Doyle to prove that spiritualistic phenomena had actually occurred, and, more importantly was a sound basis for a religion.

Conan Doyle and other spiritualists of the time have often been accused of being credulous, both by their contemporaries and by modern historians, but others, including Nordon and myself, argue instead that they should be regarded simply as open-minded observers who could acknowledge the phenomena they believed they had witnessed, as is shown by Conan Doyle's essays in The Edge of the Unknown (Tietze, Last Bow 96). Conan Doyle defended himself by the same means of presenting a résumé when describing his own investigation into spiritualist phenomena in "The Psychic Question as I See It":

> I would first state my credentials, since my opinion is only valid in so far as those are valid. In 1886, being at that time a materialist, I was induced to examine psychic phenomena. In 1887 I wrote a signed article in "Light" [a Spiritualist magazine] on the question. From that time I have never ceased to be keep in touch with the matter by reading and occasional experiment. My conversion to the full meaning of Spiritualism was a very gradual one, but by the war time it was complete. In 1916 I gave a lecture upon the subject, and found that it gave strength and comfort to others. I therefore determined to devote all my time to it, and so in the last ten years I have concentrated upon it, testing very many mediums, good and bad, studying the extensive literature, keeping current with psychic research, and incidentally writing several books upon the subject. (15)

In this self-description, Conan Doyle seems concerned to prove that his interest in spiritualism is a serious academic and theological pursuit, not some mere fancy for the exotic or the occult. He describes not only the activities in which he has been involved (observation, reading, testing), but also stresses the duration (since 1886) and the degree of his involvement (speaking, writing books). He continues in this same article to describe himself as "a Doctor of medicine, specially trained in observation"; he also notes that "as a public man of affairs I have never shown myself to be wild or unreasonable" (15). He set up for himself the same sort of résumé of reasonable, scientifically informed action that he did for others to whom he refers as witnesses in order to establish credibility.

Pierre Nordon is also concerned with showing that Conan Doyle was not just a curiosity seeker easily duped by conjurers, and constructs a sort of apology for Conan Doyle's involvement in spiritualist activities. He argues that ". . . Conan Doyle first made a methodical study of a number of books which might justify a thorough investigation of the subject. His essential seriousness is to be seen in this extremely exhaustive preliminary investigation, for the list of books consulted over a period of two years contains more than seventy titles" (149). He cites also Conan Doyle's willingness to defend his investigation of spiritualism as long term and scientifically methodical. In addition, he says, Conan Doyle felt that spiritualism and psychic phenomena were supported by the opinions of "men with irreproachable scientific reputations," one of which Conan Doyle's life had shown him to be, and for Conan Doyle, the "the evidence of his senses had unquestionable validity for him" (160-161). Finally, Nordon refers to Conan Doyle's reading on subjects other than spiritualism:

> It is also interesting that a great number of books on the history of occult religions were among the young doctor's reading: . . . the list of books in the first of the Southsea Notebooks [written during his time on a whaling ship] might be part of a syllabus for the study of comparative religions. So Conan Doyle's later reflections on the significance and value of Spiritualism must be seen against a background of theological and sociological erudition; and this tells us a great deal about his approach to metaphysical research. First we find a scrupulous search for information resulting in an almost encyclopedic erudition, without which no study of metapsychology could be fruitful; secondly, a moral purpose kept steadily in view--that the results of his energy should if possible contribute to a religious revival based on universal tolerance. (149-150)

Conan Doyle's great care in preparation for study of psychic and spiritualistic phenomena does indeed indicate that his interest in it was serious, and, more importantly in relation to my own argument, that his methods and opinions were deeply influenced by the methods of science and its role in society.

His upbringing and schooling also had much to do with Conan Doyle's search for spiritual truth apart from orthodox Christianity, as did the times in which he was born: his mother's was a "merely nominal faith" (Meikle 23), and it was to her that he owed "above all repudiation of all that was materialistic, utilitarian and cynical in the present age (Nordon 118-119); in addition, the year in which he was born, 1859, was also the year Darwin's Origin of Species, which many considered the greatest threat to orthodox Christianity since Copernicus, was published. His elementary schooling was at a Jesuit academy in Lancashire, but instead of inculcating him in the faith, their harsh discipline and dogmatism drove him away from it (Nordon 19-21). Another influence on Conan Doyle was his own reading: as a child, he had taught himself French in order to read the science fiction of Jules Verne (Nordon 22), which shows his interest in the edges of possibility and makes an interesting comparison to the movement of ideas from fiction to scientific realities in the time he was growing up. He began medical school in Edinburgh in 1877 (Nordon 24-25), and while there, ". . . he found time also for immersion in the works of Huxley, Spencer, and Mill" (Meikle 23). Through his thought and reading at that time, he began to further doubt Christianity, moving toward an agnostic position. That he used his medical education in his investigations and the life-long extent of his search for spiritual knowledge were proof, he felt, of the depth and seriousness of his investigations to prove that spiritualistic phenomena were real, and show that he truly believed that careful, long-term, scientific investigation was indeed the method by which truth must be established.

Conan Doyle, in order to establish spiritualism, cites the testimony or beliefs of many prominent persons, and among them physicist Sir Oliver Lodge. Lodge had also been "influenced by the theories of Darwin," and was sympathetic to the search for a rational religion (Jones Pair I 185). Conan Doyle considered him a "famous scientist and . . . [a] profound . . . thinker"; so much so, in fact, that he felt that Lodge's "brave and frank avowal produced a great impression upon the public" (History II 245). Even historian Ruth Brandon, who discounts the possibility of spiritualist phenomena actually occurring acknowledges in her "Whiskey and Cigars on the Other Side" that, "For Lodge . . . to accept something without trying to justify it scientifically would have been impossible" (219). Lodge was a major proponent and investigator of spiritualist phenomena, and his opinion was, for Conan Doyle, as good as having witnessed an occurrence himself.

Sir William Crookes was another investigator to whom Conan Doyle referred as a credible witness. He says that Crookes "began his investigations into psychical phenomena believing that the whole matter might prove to be a trick" (History I 237), and that his "researches were carried out by a man at the very zenith of his mental development, and the famous career which followed was a sufficient proof of his intellectual stability" (History I 236). One very important aspect of Crookes' personality and his investigations into spiritualist phenomena was his manner: spiritualists believed that the medium was not wholly responsible for the results of the seance, but that the mental sympathy of the sitters was also essential. Conan Doyle describes Crookes as one who could assume the "courteous gentleness of demeanour which makes for harmony and sympathy between the inquirer and his subject" (History I 238-239). Conan Doyle also praises Crookes as an investigator because ". . . he had sense enough to realize that in an entirely new subject one has to adapt oneself to the conditions, and not abandon the study in disgust because the conditions refuse to adapt themselves to our own preconceived ideas" (History I 251). This carries out Conan

Doyle's general tendency to assume that academic recognition was equivalent with keen and impartial perception, and as always, assumes that truth can indeed be established through empirical means.

Conan Doyle describes Crookes as "a man of unswerving intellectual honesty" (History I 240), in contrast to those who witnessed phenomena and then denied what they saw or simply recorded that they could not discover the trick (History I 327). Conan Doyle states that the importance of Crookes' research was in "the high scientific standing of the inquirer, the stern and yet just spirit in which the inquiry was conducted, the extraordinary results, and the uncompromising declaration of faith which followed them" (History I 236), and quotes Crookes himself as having said, "For my own part, I too much value the pursuit of truth, and the discovery of any new fact in Nature, to avoid inquiry because it appears to clash with prevailing opinions" (History I 238). Crookes "honestly and fearlessly reported" the results of his investigations, and "caused the greatest possible commotion in the scientific world" (History I 249). "Organized science," Conan Doyle continues,

> came badly out of the matter. In his published account Crookes gave the letters in which he asked Stokes, the secretary of the Royal Society, to come down and see these things with his own eyes. By his refusal to do so, Stokes placed himself in exactly the same position as those cardinals who would not look at the moons of Jupiter through Galileo's telescope. Material science, when faced with a new problem, showed itself to be just as bigoted as medieval theology. (History I 249)

This does not, in my opinion, damage the argument that spiritualism was influenced by science, or that science was considered the ideal of truth; in fact, it strengthens it, for it shows that spiritualist investigators sought the endorsement of scientists as proof of their assertions. They never abandoned their belief that religious truth could be established via scientific enquiry, and the investigation made by scientifically trained yet open-minded persons such as Crookes were, they felt, some of the most valuable. In addition, it provides an explanation for why scientists, if they did not simply discount it as foolishness, were unwilling to observe these phenomena; if the phenomena were to occur, the scientists would have been forced by the ideals of academic integrity to acknowledge them, which they did not want to do.

Some scientists were willing to take on the challenge of examining spiritualistic phenomena; one group who were willing were the members of the committee of the Dialectical Society of London, who were remarkable because of their integrity: "The great majority of the members were opposed to the psychic claims, but in the face of evidence, with a few exceptions . . . they yielded to the testimony of their own senses" (Conan Doyle, History I 326-327), unlike other committees which had refused to believe their own results (Conan Doyle, History I 79), or who would "admit from their own experience that a materialised figure independent of the company, can walk through the room, and talk, and perform intelligent actions," but would not acknowledge it as a spirit (Conan Doyle, Psychic 18). For himself, Conan Doyle remarked that "How such a figure can be differentiated from a spirit is a mystery to those who are endowed with less subtle understandings" (18). At the conclusion of their investigation, the Dialectical Society agreed upon and published several points which they agreed had been sufficiently demonstrated to warrant their endorsement (History 317-322, 326). Because of their belief in scientific testing models, the members of the Dialectical Society were able to accept their findings, indicating that, for them, scientific authority was sufficient for them to believe in hitherto "unbelievable" phenomena which had been dismissed by their colleagues.

Conan Doyle's Writing

Conan Doyle used his other vocation, writing, as another means by which to examine the consequences of applying scientific standards to life, especially in the Sherlock Holmes stories. Conan Doyle himself was usually described as the consummate Victorian Englishman: active, sober, friendly, easy to get along with. An interview by a contemporary of his described him as follows: "There was nothing lynx-eyed, nothing 'detective' about him--not even the regulation walk of our modern solver of mysteries. He is just a happy, genial, homely man; tall, broad-shouldered, with a hand that grips you heartily, and, in its sincerity of welcome, hurts" (How 4). Though Conan Doyle did not take on Sherlock Holmes' character, Holmes was, in many ways, a mirror of his creator: "Doyle was the great ordinary Englishman. And therefore Holmes's energy was directed by Doyle away from the distraction, embarrassments and frights--not to mention mere pleasure--of sexuality, and toward another great Victorian hunger: work" (Busch 14). However, Conan Doyle's reserved manner was not indicative of the sharp and curious mind which drove him to study and investigate thoroughly all that interested him and which concocted the intricately woven Sherlock Holmes stories, just as Sherlock Holmes used his sharp mind in his profession.

Conan Doyle was nineteen years old when his first serious attempt at fiction was accepted by a publisher, who paid a very modest sum for it (How 6). In April of 1886, he finished the first Sherlock Holmes story, a novel entitled A Study in Scarlet (Nordon 33), and by so doing, had begun "preparing the way for a new kind of detective, one who would be an improvement on Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq: where those detectives achieved their results largely by chance, Holmes was to achieve his by scientific reasoning" (Cox 118). In addition, he had no reference books on which to rely, unlike the writers of today who

> can turn to many textbooks on police methods to keep the stories reasonably accurate. In 1886 there was no such textbook. Hans Gross's pioneering work, *Criminal Investigation*, was not published until 1891. Conan Doyle had to rely primarily on his imagination, his encyclopedic knowledge, his eye and memory for detail, his faculty for relating facts to causes, his ability to reconstruct the past from the

> present, plus some knowledge of human nature--in short, some of the methods of Sherlock Holmes himself. (Cox 118)

His dependence on science and observation as the means by which any puzzle could be solved was consistent throughout Conan Doyle's life: in his fiction, in his medical practice, and in his search for spiritual truths on which he felt he could found a belief.

One of the influences on Conan Doyle which prompted him to write the Holmes stories was Dr. Joseph Bell, an Edinburgh physician whom he met after returning from his voyage as staff physician on an Arctic whaling boat (How 6-7). Conan Doyle himself said that Bell had "suggested Sherlock Holmes to me,"[3] presumably because of his uncanny ability to diagnose medical conditions and to ascertain facts about a patient merely through observation (Cox 116-117). It seems that Bell, like Holmes, reveled in his power to amaze others with assessments which seemed to them "almost clairvoyant," later revealing the points on which he had based his conclusions (Nordon 25). Both in real life and in the stories, however, these assessments were always based on some tell-tale mark or sign, unnoticed by the casual observer, but telling to the trained eye, never on any supernatural or intuitive power.

Conan Doyle also used fiction as a way to examine spiritualist thought without accepting or seeming to espouse it, in novels such as The Parasite, a work which he later hoped would be forgotten (Cox 124). His later Land of Mist fared a bit better (Tietze Last Bow 96), as did The Maracot Deep and Other Stories (1929). Conan Doyle also wrote several non-fiction books on spiritualism: The New Revelation (1918), The Vital Message (1919), The History of Spiritualism (1926), Pheneas Speaks (1927), The Edge of the Unknown, published the year of his death, which has since been hailed as a contribution to the then emerging genre of science fiction, and Thy Kingdom Come, a book said to have been dictated by Conan Doyle to a medium two years after his death (Rodin, Pilot and Key 166-169). Conan Doyle also opened a psychic bookshop, library and museum in London in which photographs of ectoplasm and famous spiritualists were exhibited; after his death, it was maintained by his daughter, but its contents were destroyed during the second world war (Rodin, Key, and Pilot 171).

Opposition to Spiritualism from the Scientific Community

Even though spiritualist investigators emphasized scientific methods in studying the phenomena they hoped would provide evidence for their religious beliefs, they were, for the most part, ignored or ridiculed by the scientific community. Conan Doyle states that the "usual 'scientific' objection was that nothing occurred at all, which neglected the testimony of thousands of credible witnesses" (History I 185). Relying on the testimony of witnesses shows a combination of models from science and

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[3] As quoted in How, 6-7.

Christianity: science bases its conclusions on observation, and Christianity relies on the truth and accuracy of testimony for incredible events. Conan Doyle argues that the reason that the scientific community would not or could not acknowledge spiritualistic phenomena was that scientists began their investigations with a prejudice against the spiritualist interpretation. He describes the reaction of one investigator, a Dr. Edmunds, as follows:

> The worthy doctor, while imagining himself to be impartial, is really so absolutely prejudiced that the conceivable possibility of the phenomena being supernormal is never allowed to enter his mind. When he sees one with his own eyes his only question is, "How was the trick done?" If he cannot answer the question he does not consider this to be in favor of some other explanation, but simply records that he cannot discover the trick. (History I 327)

Thus Conan Doyle accuses the scientists themselves of being unscientific in their approach to the study of these phenomena, because they allow their biases to influence their interpretation of the data they collect through observation and testing. He sums up this attitude toward such investigators thus: "There is a certain type of scientific mind which is quite astute within its own subject and, outside it, is the most foolish and illogical thing upon earth" (History I 328). Conan Doyle, by making a condescending "excuse" for the scientists, discredited science to some extent: when science agreed with him, it was irreproachable; if it denied his conclusions, it was irresponsible and careless.

Conan Doyle also rather facetiously excused some scientists, such as Huxley, who in his reply to an invitation to participate on a committee investigating spiritualism, stated "that 'supposing the phenomena to be genuine, they do not interest me,'" by simply saying that even "this great and clearheaded man had his limitations" (History I 319). In response to this attitude of disinterest, spiritualists became only more determined. Conan Doyle quotes an address given by Professor Sidgwick's first presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research (17 July 1882): "Scientific incredulity has been so long in growing, and has so many and so strong roots, that we shall only kill it, if we are able to kill it at all as regards those questions, by burying it under a heap of facts" (History II 58). The spiritualists and other psychical societies did indeed collect a multitude of observational data, which spiritualists generally considered as proof of these phenomena, and argued that they should be acknowledged as sound bases for the religion which they were building.

Another argument leveled against the spiritualist interpretation of phenomena was that they did not occur, but that the mediums who claimed to be able to produce them were suffering from delusions caused by mental or physical unsoundness, as were the sitters who claimed to "see" the effects that the mediums produced. This has sometimes been called the "Pathological Theory," discussed by Celtic historian W. Y. Evans-Wentz and contemporary of Conan Doyle, in his Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries

(461). Evans-Wentz, in his own investigations of psychic phenomena, attempted to establish the mental and physical soundness of his subjects, and argues that the influence of unsoundness can be acknowledged "merely hypothetically" (461).

Very instructive in examining the relationship and interactions between science and spiritualism is the transcript of the 11 March 1920 debate between Conan Doyle, representing spiritualism; and Mr. Joseph McCabe of the Rationalist Press Association (which sponsored the debate) representing the skeptical position. It was conducted in the structured parliamentary debate format, so each was given the opportunity to state his case and rebut the other. I would first like to provide some quotes here which show major points of the argument of each and their responses to each other, beginning with Mr. McCabe:

> The movement or religion which we are discussing before you to-night comes at a somewhat dramatic moment in the evolution of man. It comes at a time when the old faith of all men and women on this globe, is growing somewhat dim and clouded. The authority of creeds is tottering. The speculations of philosophers are less convincing than they were three hundred years ago. (3)
>
> During the last hundred years there has been happening what has happened in every development of civilisation since the world began--the mature mind of man, the maturer knowledge of man, dissolving all those old religious illusions and religious creeds. (3)
>
> Just when men are beginning to wonder if at last religion is doomed, there comes this portentous phenomenon we are discussing in the shape of Spiritualism. I do not wonder that my opponent takes it to be a new religion, a new revelation. (3-4)
>
> This is offered to us--those details almost infallible where they are definite, always indefinite where they are not infallible--are offered to us as a sign of supernatural power on which to base our belief in immortality. (17)

Now follows Conan Doyle's response:

> I found that Materialism was not, as I thought, a terminus, but that it was a junction at which one changed from the line of faith on to the line of experience. (19)
>
> Dr. A. R. Wallace, the greatest Zoologist next to Darwin says: "I was a thorough and convinced Materialist, but facts are stubborn things, and the facts beat me." (21)

> [In reference to charges of fraud] I think that to deceive the living by imitating the dead is the most horrible crime a man could commit. But our hands are clean. We have done all that we can to suppress that horrible traffic. (21)
>
> The facts, when the words are condensed, are that two noblemen and an officer of the Guards saw [medium D. D. Home] do a certain thing. All that Mr. McCabe can say is that they were mistaken.
>
> [Regarding the authenticity of ectoplasm produced by an amateur medium] I will now merely ask you whether Mr. McCabe is in a better position to give an opinion as to what this force is than a man who has devoted five years of his life in a laboratory under test conditions to working at it? (35)

McCabe, in his argument, presents the idea that science indeed presented a significant challenge, and in his opinion even a crushing blow to Christianity. He argues that religion was finally being purged from society, which he seems to favor, and considers spiritualism to be working against this beneficial process. He also argues that the evidence provided by spiritualists is, at best, shaky, commenting that their evidence is vague and circumstantial, and relies only on observation, implying that the testimony of witnesses is insufficient as proof for the phenomena on which spiritualists sought to build their religion.

Conan Doyle counters these arguments by saying that their evidence is truly facts collected through scientific investigation. He returns again to his argument that the opinion of a trained scientist such as himself who has dedicated time to study of these phenomena should be preferred to that of someone who opposes the ideas of spiritualism and who has not devoted time to a study it. In his references to the observations of other men, Conan Doyle makes it almost an issue of academic honesty and integrity, by arguing that it is simply Mr. McCabe's word, based on little knowledge, against the word of those men who have attended seances and tested mediums. He implies that Mr. McCabe, who is uninformed, is accusing the investigators of lying simply because of his prejudice against spiritualism. Clearly, Conan Doyle regarded the observation of investigators as a reliable source of information, whereas Mr. McCabe did not.

That this debate even occurred, and that it was subsequently published indicate that both scientists and the public in general were interested in the interactions between science, spiritualism, and Christianity. The debate itself and the arguments presented by both sides shows an attempt by society to determine what place, if any, either Christianity or spiritualism had in society. The arguments presented show an attempt to determine what is really scientific, what is subjective, and what can be considered fact.

The Influence of World War One

Another criticism leveled against Conan Doyle and many other spiritualists, was that they had been influenced in their beliefs by their horror at the atrocities of the first world war. While it is true that Conan Doyle "conceived of the Great War as a spiritual conflict between forces beyond human comprehension in which the armies of Europe were merely pawns" (Meikle 26), Pierre Nordon defends Conan Doyle by pointing out that

> . . . his conversion took place nearly three years before the armistice and was closer to the beginning of the war than the end of the war. This chronological error follows from a more plausible one relating his conversion to the death of his eldest son, Kingsley. This falsehood is all the less pardonable because is suggests that he was an impressionable and morbid man. (144)

Nordon, and Conan Doyle himself, both argue that the death of Conan Doyle's son was not a contributing factor to Conan Doyle's conversion; both use Conan Doyle's psychological strategy of compiling a résumé of sobriety and training, and refer consistently to the years of careful investigation and to Conan Doyle's medical training as evidence that he was a careful and reasonable man who would not have been swayed in his beliefs, even by personal trauma. Conan Doyle in his History defended himself:

> It has long been said, too, by these unscrupulous opponents that the author's advocacy of the subject, as well as that of his distinguished friend, Sir Oliver Lodge, was due to the fact that each one of them had a son killed in the war, the inference being that grief had lessened their critical faculties and made them believe what in more normal times they would not have believed. The author has many times refuted this clumsy lie, and pointed out the fact that his investigation dates back as far as 1886. (History II 225)

Conan Doyle and other spiritualists insisted on the objectivity of their investigations, and on the "hard evidence" on which they based their beliefs. The important point is not whether the spiritualists were influenced by war and death; rather it is that they believed themselves to be objectively following the methods of science and believed that they were founding a new religion which could move into the future as a bridge between spirituality and scientific questioning. In addition, the movement did not begin during the war, but preceded it by many years and traced its roots to America; regardless of why people joined, one cannot argue that spiritualism began because of the war.

The Society for Psychical Research

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR), formed in 1882, was set up to examine scientifically the psychical phenomena in which spiritualists believed. "A manifesto of the society sets out: 'It has been widely felt that the present is an opportune time for making an organized attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic'" (Conan Doyle, History II 57). The wording of this statement indicates that they did want their research to be accepted in the scientific community, and indeed, by society on the whole, as rational proof of the existence or non-existence of psychic phenomena. The SPR had, according to spiritualists, a "strangely mingled record of usefulness and obstruction" (Conan Doyle History II 55)--spiritualists like Conan Doyle who already believed in these phenomena sometimes were less supportive of the work of the SPR than might be expected, because, as they wrote in *Light*, they felt that by focusing only on the scientific study of the phenomena, they failed to recognize that the phenomena actually constituted the basis for a new religion: "The Society for Psychical Research are busy with phenomena only, seeking evidence of their existence. . . . To them the idea of spirit communion, of sweet converse with dear departed friends--so precious to Spiritualists--has no present interest."[4]

Nevertheless, spiritualists did support the SPR to some extent, because it served the purpose of conducting the research necessary to provide evidence on which the spiritualist religion could be built. The hope of the spiritualists, as expressed in *Light*, was that the SPR would provide ever more ambitious findings, moving from those that they had already verified, such as thought transference, to the existence of more questionable manifestations, such as ectoplasm.[5] Spiritualists made a distinction between those like themselves, who believed that the phenomena did occur and sought only to provide evidence so that others would believe, and the SPR, which did not claim to have any knowledge of the significance of any particular phenomenon, or to subscribe to any religion based on an interpretation of those phenomena. In the opinion of some, this tendency was an attempt "not to . . . prove the truth, but to disprove what seems preternatural" (Conan Doyle, History II 86), and the accusation was leveled that ". . . the society's standard of evidence, when it wishes to prove fraud, is very much more elastic than when it examines some alleged psychic phenomenon" (Conan Doyle, History II 65). Although the SPR did conduct much research, the results were often poor or inconclusive. Conan Doyle believed that this was often due to the attitude adopted by the SPR's investigators toward the phenomena and the mediums:

> In certain directions the work of the society has been excellent, but from the beginning it made the capital error of assuming a certain supercilious

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[4] As quoted in Conan Doyle, History II, 61.

[5] As quoted in Conan Doyle, History II, 61.

> air towards Spiritualism, which had the effect of alienating a number of men who could have been helpful in its councils, and, above all, of offending those mediums without whose willing co-operation the work of the society could not fail to be barren. (History II 55)

Spiritualists had mixed opinions of the SPR for these very reasons--although they felt that the questions they were pursuing were relevant and important, they felt that the manner in which they were being pursued was inappropriate.

In addition to alienating spiritualists and mediums who could have been helpful to its investigations, spiritualists contended that the skeptical attitude of the SPR also could have contributed to negative results, as spiritualists and mediums often argued that good communication with the spirit world could only be established if there were emotional harmony among the sitters at a seance, which could not be achieved if members of the circle were hostile or antagonistic. Conan Doyle himself distinguished two types of skeptics: antagonistic skeptics, of which he seems to have felt the SPR was primarily composed; and open-minded skeptics, such as he had long been--certainly unconvinced of the phenomena, but willing to acknowledge the possibility of their existence. The latter, he felt, could successfully participate in seances, unlike the former who would disrupt the spiritual harmony, and the testimony of the latter, if they were to convert, or even acknowledge the existence of the phenomena without accepting the spiritualist interpretation, made the most convincing testimonials because of their original skepticism.

The reliance on harmony in the circle to produce a satisfactory communication does present a problem in verification, because it leaves a sort of swinging door excuse: if phenomena were observed, it was because they were real and harmony existed; if they were not, it was not because such phenomena never occurred, but rather because, on this occasion, one or more of the inquirers prevented it the phenomena from being manifested through the medium because of an antagonistic attitude. This sort of statement leaves no space for argument, for if the premise of spiritual harmony were accepted, no argument could be made against the existence of psychic phenomena that could not be refuted by accusing the skeptic of creating spiritual dissonance and preventing the very phenomena in which he was supposed to be interested from occurring. Because it is not the project of this discussion to establish the authenticity or inauthenticity of the spiritualists' claims, this is not a major problem; nevertheless, it is a point which I feel is important to note, and which informed the arguments of spiritualism on the authenticity of the phenomena and affected the way they fit their evidence into models of proof.

Spiritualists did benefit from the SPR's meticulous research: "much valuable work has been done by the society, and this has been placed on record in a systematic and careful manner in the society's 'Proceedings'" (Conan Doyle, History II 59). In sum, Conan Doyle's opinion of the SPR seems to have been confusion as to why they would, in the face of the evidence they saw, not accept the spiritualist viewpoint:

> It can only be explained by the fact that there is a certain type of self-centered and limited--though possibly acute-- type of mind which receives no impression at all from that which happens to another, and yet is so constituted that it is the very last sort of mind likely to get evidence for itself on account of its [the mind's] effect upon the material on which such evidence depends. (Conan Doyle, History II 74)

Conan Doyle again states that the attitude of the investigator influenced the outcome of the experiment; that is, that a skeptical researcher could so influence the mood in the room that the atmosphere necessary for spirit manifestation could not be created, which would also explain the tendency of SPR members, many of whom he felt were antagonistic skeptics, to disbelieve psychic phenomena, which relates also to their tendency to view it exclusively as scientific evidence, not religion.

The SPR was also very conservative about announcing its results, at times even seeming to disavow its own research. Sir Oliver Lodge, a prominent spiritualist, described its attitudes and methods thus: "In dealing with strangers, and especially with enemies it seems necessary to over-emphasize every point of weakness. At any rate, that is the conclusion to which the SPR leaders must have come . . . and the fact is a sufficient explanation of the attitude which so many in the spiritualist camp condemn. . . . I am not at all sure that this attitude of the Society may not prove, in the long run, wise."[6] Conan Doyle in The History of Spiritualism comes to a similar conclusion about the SPR:

> Yet when all is said and done, the world has been better for the existence of the S.P.R. It has been a clearing-house for psychic ideas, and a half-way house for those who were attracted to the subject and yet dreaded closer contact with so radical a philosophy as Spiritualism. . . . It has constantly had to fight against the imputation of being a purely Spiritualistic society, which would have deprived it of the position of judicial impartiality which it claimed, but did not always exercise. The situation was a difficult one, and the mere fact that the Society has held its own for so many years is a proof that there has been some wisdom in its attitude; and we can but hope that the period of sterility and barren negative criticism may be drawing to an end. (History II 88)

By recognizing, albeit with qualifications, that the purpose of the SPR was different from that of spiritualist organizations, Conan Doyle and Lodge both provide a framework in which it is acceptable for spiritualists to use evidence collected by the SPR without having to maintain the same air of skepticism and scientific investigation they had adopted. By adopting this qualified acceptance of the SPR, Conan Doyle could continue to use their evidence in his project of proving the existence of the phenomena, but was not limited by their conservative position. Because the History seeks to persuade, this strategy is very effective: it gives the reader the feeling that there is an aspect of scientific skepticism and a search for verification, because that is the attitude of the SPR, and leads the reader to assume that this is the case with all subsequent evidence, whether or not this is the case, thus allowing Conan Doyle more freedom in marshaling evidence for the acceptance of psychic phenomena and the spiritualist interpretation thereof.

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[6] As quoted in Brandon, 205-206.

Conan Doyle's final opinion of the SPR is one of reserved appreciation:

> Yet when all is said and done, the world has been better for the existence of the S.P.R. It has been a clearing-house for psychic ideas, and a half-way house for those who were attracted to the subject and yet dreaded closer contact with so radical a philosophy as Spiritualism. . . . On the whole, like all human institutions, it is open to both praise and censure. . . . It has constantly had to fight against the imputation of being a purely Spiritualistic society, which would have deprived it of that position of judicial impartiality which it claimed but did not always exercise. The situation was often a difficult one, and the mere fact that the society has held its own for so many years is a proof that there has been some wisdom in its attitude; and we can but hope that the period of sterility and barren negative criticism may be drawing to an end. (History II 88).

The statement that the SPR consciously divorced itself from spiritualism and religious interpretations of the phenomena is key to understanding its place in spiritualistic research and thought: it was the position of the SPR that a scientific atmosphere must be maintained in order to preserve the credibility of their results and their "position of judicial impartiality," and to avoid the accusation of claiming to have evidence simply in order to support spiritualistic beliefs. The only way to maintain their authority as an organization that investigated and reported without bias was to adopt the same structure as a scientific organization because the framework of scientific investigation had become the accepted means by which to prove the truth of an assertion.

Scientific Examination of Psychic Evidence and the Quest for Proof

Spiritualists saw scientific investigation of psychic phenomena as one of the most important foundations of their movement because they sought to build it on evidence that could stand up to scientific examination (Conan Doyle, Psychic 18-19). In the words of Thomas Huxley, who in no way supported the spiritualist movement, "[t]here is one moral benefit which science unquestionably bestows. It keeps the estimate of the value of evidence up to the mark . . ." (Huxley, Episcopal 579). Thus those who sought to provide this scientific basis for spiritualism attempted to conduct their experiments by means and under conditions which could be accepted as adequate to provide proof. Conan Doyle states that proof relies on episodes which "occurred within the ken of a practical people who found means to explore it thoroughly and to introduce reason and system into what had been a mere object of aimless wonder" (Conan Doyle, History I 56). Conan Doyle makes implicit reference to Biblical miracles in this passage through terms such as "a practical people" and "means to explore it thoroughly," showing that he did wish to make a sharp distinction between the methods of science employed by spiritualism and the methods of faith employed by Christianity.

The accusation that spiritualists and psychic investigators saw spirits because they wished to and so imagined them was also taken as a challenge by spiritualists. Even though Conan Doyle was one of the most prominent evangelists of the movement, he wrote, "It cannot be too often repeated, however, that the inquirer should exhaust every possible normal explanation to his own complete satisfaction before he adopts the Spiritualist view" (History I 188). He also refused to accept opinions or observations which could not be supported by testable evidence, though he did say that "Such unproved assertions are, it must be admitted, of no value in our present state of knowledge, but they should be put on record as further information may in time shed some new light upon them" (History I 32). Conan Doyle also supported the spiritualist magazine *Light*, and "apparently desired his funding . . . to help produce the empirical evidence he required . . ." (Meikle 25).

One of the issues with which Conan Doyle had a great deal of trouble was the establishment of a method of study for those who wished to examine spiritualism to assess its merits for themselves. In "The Psychic Question as I See It," he describes a few of these frustrations:

> People must realize that there is a Science, that there are laws, and that it is as absurd to approach it *de novo* as it would be for a tyro with no chemical knowledge to endeavour to test some problem in a chemical laboratory.
>
> . . . .
>
> At present every fresh investigator seems to start on the assumption that there has been no investigator before him, and so the alphabet has to be learned over again. No man has a right to be a member of any Committee of Investigation upon so profound a subject until he has put in at least a year of study and a course of reading . . . (22)

It is interesting to note that the method of preparation which Conan Doyle advocates is the one he himself followed in order to be acquainted with spiritualism before he ascribed to it or began investigating its phenomena. In my opinion, this shows that Conan Doyle truly believed that study would lead to understanding, and investigation would eventually lead to truth, that he did not simply advocate this course of preparation as a defensive gesture to discourage skeptics from investigation the phenomena or to discredit those who disbelieved it.

Sincerity of Purpose

A major question for Conan Doyle in dealing with mediums and with investigators of spiritualistic and psychic phenomena was that of the sincerity of their interest in those phenomena, for in order to provide the evidence required for a proof of the spiritualist religion, investigators had to rely on the skills of the mediums who were able to produce these phenomena. Especially when he dealt with mediums, Conan Doyle was careful to assess whether they truly wanted to provide contact with the spirit world or whether they wanted to simply make money or make a stir (Jones Psychical Doyle III 222). Those who were sincere in their purpose were, he believed, both more trustworthy and more likely to produce high quality manifestations.

Conan Doyle tended to trust the "amateur" mediums more than he did the "professionals," because he felt that they were "'free from that deterioration which comes from overstrain'" (Jones, Psychical III 222-223). "Materialisations were considered among spiritualists of the period to be the most convincing of all spirit manifestations . . ." (Jones, Psychical II 149), presumably because they would be more difficult to fake than phenomena such as a spirit voice, which could be faked through ventriloquism. Conan Doyle's son claimed that in "'his 49 years of penetrating and intensive investigation he [Arthur Conan Doyle] was never once deceived by a medium'" (Rodin, Key and Pilot 172). Nevertheless, mediums were subjected to all kinds of test mechanisms in order to show that they were unable to produce the results physically. Sir William Crookes, described above, said of his trials, "I have always tried, where it has been possible, to make the physical apparatus test the things themselves, and have not trusted more than is possible to my own senses. But when it is necessary to trust my senses . . . I maintain a physical inquirer is more than a match [for a professional conjurer]"[7]. Evans-Wentz quotes distinguished American psychologist William James' assessment and conclusions based on the use of observation as proof for psychic phenomena:

> When imposture has been checked off as far as possible, when chance coincidence has been allowed for, when opportunities for normal knowledge on the part of the subject have been noted [in contrast to thought-reading], and skill in "fishing" and following clues unwittingly furnished by the voice or face of bystanders have been counted in, those who have the fullest acquaintance with the phenomena admit that in good mediums there *is a residuum of knowledge displayed* [italics are James's own] that can only be called supernormal: the medium taps some source of information not open to ordinary people.[8]

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[7] As quoted in Conan Doyle, History I, 180.

[8] As quoted in Evans-Wentz, 463.

James' argument is basically the same as Conan Doyle's, only from a different angle--Conan Doyle argues that every normal possiblity should be exhausted before accepting a psychic or spiritualist explanation; James argues that when every normal possibility has been exhausted, the psychic explanation must be accepted. Both stress a very thorough examination of the evidence, and demand that personal bias or interference from outside sources not be allowed to affect the conclusions drawn from the data.

In dealing with other spiritualists, Conan Doyle felt that, to some extent, it was enough assert spiritualist beliefs, and asserts that "[i]t never yet did a man any good to call himself a Spiritualist, I assure you, and we have had many martyrs among our people" (Conan Doyle and McCabe 20), borrowing language from Christianity to make his point. To take the appellation "spiritualist" was, Conan Doyle felt, to accept a social stigma, to be looked at askance and perhaps considered no longer a sober practitioner of one's profession; this, he felt, was a chance that no one would be willing to take unless he or she truly believed in the spiritualist interpretation of psychic phenomena. From the perspective afforded by time, we may ask whether this was truly selfless martyrdom, or whether those who were willing to be "looked at askance" wanted the recognition and hoped to one day be considered heroes of the religion, in a sense, the "saints" of spiritualism; whatever the case, Conan Doyle felt that this willingness to state one' beliefs openly was a sign of sincerity.

Conan Doyle also felt that, as the movement matured, it was becoming more focused and solemn, and to show this, he quotes Mr. J. A. Campbell, president of the Cambridge University Society for Psychological Investigation (1879): "Gradually the movement is clearing itself of such excretions, gradually is becoming more sober and pure, and strong, and as sensible men and educated men study and pray and work, striving to make good use of their knowledge, it will become more so" (History I 183). Mr. Campbell and Conan Doyle appear to have believed that, like the soul, which progresses through levels of spiritual maturity, as the movement became more established and gathered more true followers, it would also mature and allow those still on earth to begin their spiritual maturation through intercourse with advanced members of the spirit world.

Based on these types of methods and assumptions, many people were willing to place at least tentative and provisionary belief in psychic and spiritualist phenomena. Evans-Wentz quotes the opinion of Sir Oliver Lodge:

> On the whole, I am of those who, though they would like to see further and still stronger and more continued proofs, are of the opinion that a good case has been made out, and that as the best working hypothesis at the present time it is legitimate to grant that lucid moments of intercourse with deceased persons may in the best cases supervene.[9]

Conan Doyle quotes another investigator, Professor Sidgwick, in his first presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research (17 July 1882), expressed a similar provisionary acceptance in the assumption that further research would continue:

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[9] As quoted in Evans-Wentz, 478.

> We are all agreed that the present state of things is a scandal to the enlightened age in which we live, that the dispute as to the reality of these marvelous phenomena--of which it is quite impossible to exaggerate the scientific importance, if only a tenth part of what has been alleged by generally credible witnesses could be shown to be true--I say it is a scandal that the dispute as to the reality of these phenomena should still be going on, that so many competent witnesses should have declared their belief in them, that so many should be profoundly interested in having the question determined, and yet that the educated world, as a body, should still be simply in an attitude of incredulity. (History I 57)

The sort of detached and questioning attitude maintained by these investigators in attempting to construct more and better proofs of psychic phenomena was key to maintaining their position as scientific investigators of these events. It was absolutely essential to maintain these methods and attitudes because it was essential to their goals to provide a scientific foundation for the spiritualist religion in order to protect it from the sort of challenges which had been posed to Christianity by Darwinian evolution and other scientific developments of the period.

Ectoplasm

A subject of much discussion and debate among spiritualists and in psychic and public forums was ectoplasm, a material substance that some mediums and spiritualist believers claimed was formed by spirits during their manifestations. Many spiritualists understandably wished to prove the existence of ectoplasm, because to do so would provide physical evidence of spiritual and psychic phenomena. Conan Doyle writes that mentions of ectoplasm, or of a "semi-luminous thick vapour which oozes from the side or the mouth of a medium and [which] is dimly visible in the gloom," were common in early spiritualist writings, which also often described how this substance "solidifies to a plastic substance from which the various structures of the séance room are built up," a phenomenon which scientific investigators claimed to have verified (History II 89). This substance was used by the spirits to create "temporary forms and show material signs of their presence" and could be touched and handled in its "viscous gelatinous" state (Conan Doyle and McCabe 32). Conan Doyle, in his History of Spiritualism, quotes one psychic investigator's theory of how ectoplasm is formed, namely that it is drawn from all the sitters until mass is sufficient for the medium allow the spirit control to use it to manifest itself (History II 111-113), and also refers to other theories and experiences with other mediums (History II 113-116). It is significant that Conan Doyle took such pains to describe this substance, because, although ectoplasm was not the most common manifestation, it was important because it was a physical, weighable, measurable substance, something that could, at least for brief periods, be examined according to the methods of science. When it could be obtained, it was an actual, material, substance which could be presented to the skeptic as proof of the phenomenon, and would give the investigator some actual thing on which he could base his change of opinion, if indeed it did change. Conan Doyle in his History assumes that witnessing the production of ectoplasm would constitute proof to nearly any skeptic, and cites examples of its occurrence and the witnesses who testify to having seen it, implicitly challenging his audience to accept the testimony of the eyes and hands of "men of science" based on their testimony of having witnessed an experimental, scientific test.

The Limits of Physical Observation

Spiritualists acknowledged that there were limits to what could be ascertained by observation, which certainly contributed to their use of physical apparatuses to attempt to have undeniable evidence. Sometimes, however, even these results were cast aside as unreliable. Spiritualists contended that this was simply because those persons who would not accept these results were simply narrow-minded in regard to the nature of the universe:

> . . . it is really a pure superstition, and nothing else, to assume that we are so fully acquainted with the laws of Nature, that even carefully examined facts, attested to by an experienced observer, ought to be cast aside as unworthy of credit, only because they do not at first sight seem to be in keeping with what is most clearly known already. (Conan Doyle, History I 182)

Spiritualists, in contrast to those who doubted the phenomena, were ready to accept that, in a time where so much had changed about the way that the world was defined, that there might be further refinements yet to be found, and that there might be kinds of information that had, as yet, no standard means of transmission among living humans. W. Y. Evans-Wentz called this idea the "x-quantity," the unexplainable "unknown quantity" of the parallel movement he calls the "Fairy Faith" (459). He contended that the phenomena did, in fact, occur, but that they were

> incapable of being explained away by any known laws of orthodox science, [and] have helped to bring about a marked division in the ranks of scientific workers. On one hand there are those scientists who deny the existence of anything not capable of being mathematically tested, weighed, dissected, or otherwise analysed in laboratories; on the other hand, there are their colleagues who, often in spite of previous bias toward materialism, have arrived at a personal conviction that an

> animistic view of man is more in harmony with their scientific evidence than any other. Both schools include men eminent in all branches of biological sciences. (459)

Evans-Wentz later echoes the statement made by Conan Doyle, saying "Science admits that all her explanations of the universe are mere products of human understanding and perceptions of the physical senses . . ." (460), implying that psychic phenomena should then be treated with the same tolerance, recognizing that science must rely on the perceptions of its human researchers and the limitations of the apparatus they are able to construct to gauge phenomena. Evans-Wentz also defined the purpose of science as uncovering the true nature of the world: "Nature is forever illuding the sense; she masquerades in disguise until science tears away her mask" (460). It seems that Evans-Wentz believed that, as there were phenomena and knowledge of which we were unaware and which we could not test until we had developed sufficient apparatuses in sciences such as astronomy and physics, so methods and apparatuses to ascertain the type, source, manner, et cetera, of spirit communication had yet to be developed.

Evans-Wentz argues that reality cannot simply be known "through sensory perception," but rather the scientist

> must always adjust the sense to the world itself: where there are only vibrations in ether, man sees light; and in atmospheric vibrations he hears sounds. We only know things through the way in which our senses react upon them. We sum up the world problem by saying: 'consciousness does not exhaust its object, the world.'[10]" (460)

The sum of the problem, as defined by Evans-Wentz in apparent harmony with the views of Conan Doyle quoted above, is that the testing of psychic phenomena is limited by the range of our senses, the particular senses we have, and our knowledge of what our sensory perceptions indicate. The latter is the most arguable of the three, because it is the one subject to change, as had been eminently proved by the many scientific discoveries of the period. Evans-Wentz states his conclusion thus: "To consider the materialistic hypothesis as adequate . . . would not even be reasonable, and, incontestably, would not be scientific" (461).

Unscientific Aspects of the Spiritualist Movement

Not all aspects of spiritualistic and psychic phenomena could be tested, even in a liberal scientific atmosphere. Spiritual events did not conform to the same rules as the physical or natural sciences, and could not be produced under the same conditions or with the same regularity. The allowances that had to be made for mediums to conduct their seances allowed spiritualists to make the most of the distinction between spiritualism and materialism: to be unbendingly scientific and to refuse to make the necessary allowances was to be *materialistic*, or to be overly concerned with the physical and the current life. In contrast, to be *spiritualistic* was to be focused on the life to come, not to be overly concerned about the events of this life, and to be flexible in one's thinking. Many investigators found the conditions hard to accept, but if they were not met, phenomena were not produced. This did not, however, mean that spiritualists were categorically credulous and unquestioning, or that all mediums relied on fraud which necessitated darkness and other conditions--spiritualists recognized that fraudulent effects could be produced, but also believed that the spirit world had no obligation to conform to the wishes of scientific investigators, since the spirits' objective was to provide religious instruction, not to further scientific enquiry.

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[10] C. DuPrel as quoted in Evans-Wentz, 460.

The allowances made for mediums made many of the investigators uncomfortable, however, especially those with the standard "materialist" scientific training. Conan Doyle describes their reactions in "The Psychic Question as I See It":

> Many scientists could never reconcile themselves to the idea that the results are obtained not by the medium, but through the medium, and that simply to seat him in a chair and blame him or the spiritualistic philosophy when results did not follow was to ignore the very essence of the problem which they were examining.
>
> . . . .
>
> These unusual conditions repelled many scientific men at the very outset of their psychic studies, and they preferred to ascribe gross credulity to their brother scientists, or extraordinary conjuring powers to the innocent mediums, rather that blame their own want of perception as to the true conditions of such an investigation. (19-20)

It is understandable that scientific investigators balked at the conditions imposed on them: it would be obviously difficult to feel that one could adequately assess a situation in the dark while holding hands and trying to be receptive to the phenomena about to occur. Spiritualists, however, balked at the scientific investigators methods as being insensitive to the situation: spirits, they argued, would not "come through" if the harmony in the room were not right. Conan Doyle described the situation thus:

> Spiritualists, and particularly mediums, look upon the investigators and their methods with aversion. It seems never to have dawned upon these people that the medium is, or should be, inert, and that there may be an intelligent force behind the medium which can only be conciliated and encouraged by gentle sympathy and thoughtful, tactful behaviour. (History II 86)

The problem with the investigators, Conan Doyle alleged, was that they were antagonistic to the idea, to the medium, and to the phenomena themselves:

> They fail to understand that they are themselves a part of the experiment, and that it is possible for them to create such intolerable vibrations, and to surround themselves with so negative an atmosphere, that these outside forces, which are governed by very definite laws, are unable to penetrate it. (History I 317)

He goes on to add that practicing and believing spiritualists get superior results because they are able to create a welcoming psychic atmosphere for the mediums and the spirits. Conan Doyle believed strongly in what he called the "primary law of harmony," and believed that the test seances, because the law was broken, nearly always gave the researchers false-negative results, which the researchers were, of course, eager to publish (History I 76).

Conan Doyle did attempt to identify the place at which spiritualistic phenomena and scientific investigation clashed: he argued that science has

> always accustomed itself to think that results can be standardized, and that, given the same apparent conditions and factors, the same effects can always be evolved. It has suddenly been faced by a proposition where this no longer holds good, where there are invisible factors which we cannot control, and where such mental conditions as harmony and sympathy on one side, or suspicion and aversion on the other, may make or mar the results. (Psychic Question 19)

According to this interpretation, no one was really at fault for the inefficacy of the test seances: the mediums were faultless because they needed harmony, but the scientists were merely a product of their training and must be given time to un-learn their skepticism and hostility toward anything which was not immediately explainable by normal methods. The scientists were only to blame if they refused to be flexible in their thinking, so that they were unable to consider the possibility of psychic phenomena being genuine. In order to prove that this is the situation, Conan Doyle described the experiences of Professor James H. Hyslop, the principle psychical researcher in America from 1905 until his death in 1920 and the founder of the American Society for Psychical Research. Hyslop's initial inquiries employed the usual skeptical scientific method:

> It is interesting to note that when on his sixteenth interview Professor Hyslop adopted the methods of the Spiritualists, chatting freely and without tests, he obtained more actual corroboration than in all the fifteen sittings in which he had adopted every precaution. The incident confirms the opinion that the less restraint there is at such interviews, the more successful are the results, and that the meticulous researcher often ruins his own sitting. (History II 75)

Conan Doyle used this as evidence to support his contention that the attitude of the sitters really did make a difference in the success or failure of a particular seance, but did not, at this point discuss whether Hyslop's observation was less acute when he "adopted the methods of the Spiritualists." Detractors would certainly argue that this is problematic in accepting Hyslop's results, but I believe that Conan Doyle felt that he had already justified Hyslop as an investigator by the résumé technique discussed above and by stating that Hyslop had already performed many diagnostic tests and been very analytical, yet achieved very little for his pains.

Conan Doyle used the same sort of explanation in discussing the manifestation of ectoplasm as an indication of spirit activity. He wrote that the manifestations of the early period of research were much more conclusive and dramatic than those of the present because too much emphasis was currently being placed on analyzing the results to be certain they could be used as evidence. "The earlier researchers," he said, "observed one golden rule. They surrounded the medium with an atmosphere of love and sympathy" (History II 93). Thus we see that spiritualists, and Conan Doyle in particular, sought to reach balance between scientific experimentation and unquestioning belief by advocating a sort of sympathetic inquiry into the nature of the phenomena they observed. In this case, Conan Doyle draws from a model which most nearly resembles the judicial mode: he advocates a search for the truth which acknowledges the influence of circumstance and emotion, and makes allowances and draws conclusions on those bases as well as from logical and careful examination.

The Problem of Fraud

As with any new claim, spiritualists had difficulty in persuading the public of the reality of the phenomena in which they professed to believe, and allegations abounded that mediums and spiritualists engaged in elaborate schemes to produce false phenomena. There were, of course, some instances in which this was the case, which made it even more difficult for spiritualists to present their case. The psychic investigator had to be discriminating in choosing a medium through whom to make contact. Conan Doyle himself felt that the best communication was achieved through those who had pure motives, and for this reason usually chose amateur mediums because he believed that they were performing a spiritual service, not working for personal gain of either money or fame. (See Sincerity of Purpose, above.) In defense of belief in spiritualistic and psychic phenomena, he also pointed out that the press tended to report only about exposed imposters, never mentioning those who were true, or at least had never been exposed in fraud (Psychic Question 19). In History of Spiritualism, Conan Doyle gave examples of mediums whose phenomena were never proved false, despite having been thoroughly tested by skeptics, and quoted Mr. William Howitt's claim that the "spiritual phenomena [produced by two mediums] remain as unexplicable on any but a spiritual theory" (History I 175). Conan Doyle quoted Mr. Howitt, and expressed the opinion himself, that despite the claims of fraud, spiritualism had found many converts among the people and that it had grown and would continue to grow, despite the skepticism of some (History I 175). The argument that if the phenomena produced by these mediums were never proved to be faked, they ought, therefore, to be accepted as true, borrows the model of a mathematical proof; if the assumptions are accepted, the result of the chain of reasoning is accepted unless a situation can be described in which the result would not be true. Only one instance is needed to prove the theorem false, but no number of verifications can prove it always true. Similarly, spiritualists argued that if a medium who had submitted to any number of trials to prove authenticity of her phenomena were never proved to be conjuring them through deceit, she must be accepted as a true conduit for communication with the spirit world. By borrowing this structure from science, Conan Doyle establishes a connection between his argument and those of science, which are considered valid, strengthening the argument of the History that the spiritualist belief is accurate.

A major difficulty in establishing a reputation for honesty and reliability for spiritualism was that mediums who created their phenomena through trickery, were, on occasion, publicly exposed. Conan Doyle even acknowledged this problem in the public debate with Mr. McCabe, discussed above: he said, ironically, "The trouble is that you never hear of mediums unless they get into trouble" (Conan Doyle and McCabe 22). Although this is a humorous statement, I think Conan Doyle meant it as a serious criticism of the press coverage given the movement and of the polemic reporting of which he believed the opponents of the movement to be guilty. Presumably because of the possibility of the exposure of mediums as frauds, Conan Doyle was reticent regarding his psychic investigation and his consultations with mediums (Jones Psychical Doyle II 147). Sir Oliver Lodge said in a letter to Conan Doyle:

> They need some machinery for the purpose [of detecting fraudulent mediums], and I think it is one of the jobs we shall have to tackle in one way or other. But the police machinery is unsuitable. Moreover *I am very doubtful whether those we call fraudulent have not got some genuine power, though temptation to eke it out by normal means for stupid or credulous or ignorant sitters has become too much for them*, and whether any genuine power still survives, as it did in Sludge the Medium[11], may be an open question. [Emphasis added.] (Jones, Pair of Spiritists I 187)

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[11] "Sludge the Medium" is a satirical piece contained in Robert Browning's "Dramatis Personæ" (Browning 519-538), written in response to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's belief in spiritualism and frequent visits to mediums. Browning thought his wife entirely too trusting of mediums, believing that she was, in many cases, being duped by them. He did not, however, totally disregard the possibility of spiritualist phenomena; he did, in fact, attend seances on occasion in order to investigate. His position seems to have been that spiritualism had not been proved to his satisfaction, and he could see no purpose in attempting to do so (Orr 209-212).

Lodge indicates a belief that mediumship is work, and that imitation of phenomena might be an act either of frustration or of fatigue. Conan Doyle suggests another possibility which might account for the occurrence of imposture among mediums--he claims that psychic power can be transitory and can fluctuate within an individual, and that the temptation to imitate strong power when one is weak overcame some mediums, though he also brands this practice not only misleading but "immoral" (Conan Doyle and McCabe 24).

Kelvin I. Jones in his series *A Pair of Spiritists: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge* in ACD: The Journal of the Arthur Conan Doyle Society discusses at length what he terms "the question of authenticity," and I am in debt to his work for what follows here. Jones cites the example of William Hope, a professed medium supported by Conan Doyle, who was later exposed as a fraud (I 189). Whenever Conan Doyle was mistaken, detractors quickly took advantage of the opportunity to cast him as gullible and credulous; however "unpublished letters reveal this to be and unbalanced view" (II 200). For example, Jones quotes a letter from Conan Doyle to Lodge in which he warns Lodge about a particular medium he believes to be an imposter, further criticizing the spiritualist magazine *Light* for having "taken him too seriously" (II 200). Jones also discusses Conan Doyle's support of psychic photography, and provides a quotation from a letter from Conan Doyle to Lodge:

> Yes, I agree about caution with psychic photos, but in my heart I doubt whether any faked photo has ever been produced by a professional medium. Plenty by conjurers and amateur experimenters. I believe the others are all genuine, for I can't see a man getting real ones one day and fakes the next. I can understand his getting real ones one day and nothing the next, which of course occurs . . . (II 200-201)

The genuineness of the photographs was verified by the experimenter, who would provide the photographic plates, marking them before the photos were taken, thus ruling out tampering with the plates by the photographer by double exposure prior to the photograph having been taken. Both Conan Doyle and Lodge considered the falsification of results by any means a serious offence, but what to do about it was another question: both felt that, if turned over to the law, investigation was likely to punish innocent, genuine mediums as well as imposters. This they certainly wanted to avoid because it was only through mediums that new knowledge of psychic phenomena could be gained and that the religion of spiritualism could be practiced (I 186-187).

Spiritualism, because of its peripheral status, was under attack from many angles. Its opponents, in some ways, took advantage of its newness and its vulnerability to try to quash it by publicizing negative findings and fraud in a polemic fashion. Spiritualists, however, still sought to prove their personal and collective veracity, and to provide a basis in fact for belief.

Chapter 4: Interactions Between Spiritualism and Christianity

Conan Doyle and other spiritualists did not believe that Christianity and spiritualism were mutually exclusive beliefs, but rather that spiritualist evidence could act as a defense for Christian belief by proving that supernatural events did indeed occur. Conan Doyle believed that any religion was compatible with spiritualism, and that the importance of spiritualism was not that it was a new religion per se, but that it was a new *kind* of religion which was capable of providing both scientific evidence and spiritual guidance, that it was a religion which was of its age. Conan Doyle also saw spiritualism as a means by which religious conflict could be eliminated because, through spiritualist revelations, petty theological questions could be subordinated to a common belief in life after physical death, and religions, through this common ground, could resolve their differences.

Conversion and Its Consequences

Even though he had moved away from Christianity, Conan Doyle never approached atheism, which he found "incomprehensible" (Cox 116). According to Pierre Nordon, Conan Doyle's first experience with the paranormal occurred in 1880, "when he was at Birmingham attending a lecture called 'Does death end all?' by a spiritualist from Boston. At this time one of his friends, an architect called Ball, took him to some meetings devoted to psychic phenomena, but these aroused more curiosity than real interest in him at the time" (Nordon 33). Conan Doyle described the lecture in a letter to his mother as "'a very clever thing, indeed,' but in the end 'not convincing.'"[1] His opposition to Christianity "did not exactly declare itself as agnostic doubt; on the contrary it could be better described as a form of romantic deism, transcending the narrow bounds of the traditional belief he had hitherto passively accepted. 'Nature is the true revelation of the Deity to man,' he was to write afterwards" (Nordon 27). The arctic voyage on which he had gone as a physician "precipitated a spiritual revolution which had probably been secretly working in him since his school days and now emerged in the full light of day as rejection of his Catholic faith" (Nordon 27). Finally when Lily Loder-Symonds, who had been the family's governess, manifested her powers as a medium,

> Not only did she provide proof of survival, since the messages contained information verified only later, but as a trusted member of the family her honesty was beyond question, unlike that of professional mediums. The former agnostic finally embraced a religion founded, as he supposed, on empirical evidence. To retreat now, he informed a friend, would be "like getting into a box & shutting the lid." (Meikle 27)

He felt, because of his careful and long-term investigation, that he was finally compelled to accept the results of his investigations along with their concomitant implications.

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[1] Meikle, as quoted by Nordon 147.

Through his investigation and exploration by means of observation, reading, and writing, Conan Doyle came to the conviction that psychic phenomena were genuine, and that the spiritualist interpretation of those phenomena was correct. Nevertheless, the degree to which he became involved surprised everyone:

> . . . no one, including Doyle himself, had expected him to engage in a vigorous campaign in the cause of spiritualism. Yet his interest in psychic phenomena was hardly sudden. As he insisted in his own defense, he had for thirty years investigated table rappings, hauntings, materialization, and thought transference. (Meikle 23)

His thorough investigation of the phenomena seems to have contributed to his conviction that he had to be involved in the movement: he felt that he had so completely verified the phenomena and so carefully studied the spiritualist interpretation that he was compelled to share his conviction. After fully embracing spiritualism, Conan Doyle became a promoter of it and its causes, and became involved with several spiritualist groups, earning the title of Honorary President of the International Spiritualist Congress in London, for which he chaired many meetings (Rodin, Pilot, and Key 171). Another contributing factor was his contact with a spirit called Pheneas who offered to be Conan Doyle's personal guide (Meikle 35); in fact the later book, Pheneas Speaks, was based on his prophecies. As he became more involved in the movement, he became less personally concerned with scientific evidence for spiritualism, and used it mainly as a "rhetorical device for winning converts" (Meikle 29). As part of his mission to share his belief, he began speaking tours in Britain, Europe, Australia, and America, taking on the role of an "apostle for what he considered the only hope and salvation of mankind," speaking to groups of up to 4000 people (Rodin, Key, and Pilot 154).

Spiritualism as an Answer for Spiritual Seekers

Conan Doyle did not believe that any person should simply accept spiritualism on faith; this would be contrary to one of the precepts which distinguished spiritualism from other religions: it could, and therefore should, be studied and verified, and could therefore claim scientific certainty of its truths. He felt instead that one must study a variety of religions and examine each carefully before committing to spiritualism:

> . . . the man who has received the full benefit of the new revelation is the man who has earnestly tried the gamut of creeds and has found them all equally wanting. He then finds himself in a valley of gloom with Death waiting at the end, and nothing but plain, obvious duty as his acting religion. (History II 248)

The "new revelation" of spiritualism was that there *was* something more than death, and that there was a guiding force beyond duty--the spirits who had left earth for higher spiritual planes could guide those on earth and prepare them for the life beyond.

Spiritualism as a Force to Unite Religions

Conan Doyle saw a convergence of purpose among religions, and believed that the arguments between them were based primarily on close-mindedness and dogmatism; he had been profoundly impressed by religious intolerance throughout his life, and felt that it was purposeless and wasteful. The essence of his belief was this: "A wise man recognizes that God may be approached from innumerable angles. The minds of men and the spirit of the times vary in their reaction to the great central cause, and one can only insist upon a broad charity in oneself and in others" (History I 28). If all religions were simply alternative means of approaching the "great central cause," then, "[t]o the unfettered mind this sect or that seems a matter of indifference . . ." (History I 29). According to Conan Doyle, spiritualism and its beliefs were simply a new manifestation of beliefs that had been held by religious sects throughout the ages, and could, in fact, serve as "a common platform of knowledge on which all earnest men can meet" (Psychic Question 17), and a means by which "every variety of Christian, as well as the Moslem, the hindu [sic] or the Parsee, can dwell in brotherhood" (History I 27). His hope, as expressed in The History of Spiritualism, was that "the ultimate results of this movement will be to unite religion upon a basis so strong, and, indeed, so self-sufficient, that the quibbles which separate the Churches of to-day will be seen in their true proportions and will be swept away or disregarded" (I 82). Conan Doyle felt that this was possible because "[t]he basic facts [of spiritualism] are the continuity of personality and the power of communication after death" (History II 246), which he said were important to the major religions already, so spiritualism could, therefore, have a "universal appeal" (History II 246). The only belief with which Conan Doyle felt spiritualism was "absolutely irreconcilable" was materialism, that is, the belief that there is no spiritual dimension to life or to the world, a belief which he felt was becoming more and more common, against which spiritualists were meant to campaign (History II 246).

Opposition to Spiritualism from Christianity

The spiritualists did define certain tenets of belief, though they were carefully non-dogmatic in their outlook. The Spiritualists' National Union adopted the following seven principles to summarize their belief:

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Saints and Ministry of Angels.
4. Human survival of physical death.

5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation or retribution for good or evil deeds.
7. Eternal progress open to every soul.[2]

Although these are fairly broad, they articulate the important points of spiritualist belief: that a higher power exists and is responsible for the creation of the world; that religions and peoples can be united; that souls survive death and can communicate with humanity for its betterment; that earthly life affects spiritual life; and that souls continue to learn and grow after they leave the body. Within this framework, interpretation is possible, but it was a goal of the movement, and especially of several of its proponents, to leave no rough spot on which dogmatic quarrels could be hung. Despite Conan Doyle's insistence that spiritualism was not in conflict with established religion, the movement encountered a great deal of opposition, not only from the scientific community, but from the religious, and specifically Christian, community. Conan Doyle ascribes this to narrow-mindedness and mental laziness: "The 'religious' people, furious at being shaken out of their time-honoured ruts, were ready, like savages, to ascribe any new thing to the devil. Roman Catholics and the evangelical sects, alike, found themselves for once united in their opposition" (History I 185-186). That they are "united in their opposition" Conan Doyle emphasizes as particularly ironic, because spiritualism was to unite religions, but with, not in opposition to, itself. He believed that the opposition occurred because spiritualism did not easily reconcile with traditional Christian dogma, though its central purposes were the same, so those who did not want to consider change or its implications simply attributed spiritualistic phenomena to powers of evil (History I 24). He felt that one of the missions of spiritualism was to incite a religious revival, the like of which other religions were incapable:

> It may be asked, why should not the old religions be strong enough to rescue the world from its spiritual degradation? The answer is that they have all been tried and all have failed. The Churches which represent them have become to the last degree worldly and material. They have lost all contact with the living facts of the spirit, and are content to refer everything back to ancient days, and to pay a lip service and an external reverence to an outworn system which has been so tangled up with incredible theologies that the honest mind is nauseated at the thought of it. No class has shown itself so sceptical [sic] and incredulous of modern spiritual manifestations *as those very clergy who profess complete belief in similar occurrences in bygone ages, and their utter refusal to accept them now is a measure of the sincerity of their professions.* [emphasis added] (History II 246-247)

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[2] As quoted in Conan Doyle, History II, 260-261.

Conan Doyle believed strongly that spiritualism was the modern revelation to replace the "outworn system" of Christian orthodoxy, and that it could provide new, scientifically verifiable "miracles": instead of "refer[ring] everything back to ancient days," it could give new evidence of "the living facts of the spirit." The opposition of the clergy he saw as merely another indication of the artificial and non-dynamic nature of the old religions and seems, in a sense, to have felt that to claim that miracles were only a thing of the past was to limit the power of the spiritual, or of God, which is an inappropriate response to intelligence and power which are limitless.

The magnitude of the opposition caused Conan Doyle to question "whether the movement was not really premature," and whether any good could be done in an age which he found was "so base and material . . . [that] the idea of outside intervention was . . . impossible to grasp" (History I 169). Nevertheless, the new manifestation had occurred, and spiritualists, including Conan Doyle, felt compelled to try to spread the word, regardless of opposition. To demonstrate to skeptics that spiritual phenomena were genuine and were not evil, however, was sometimes difficult, because "all psychic manifestations become distorted when seen through the medium of narrow sectarian religion . . . [and] pompous, inflated persons attract mischievous entities and are the butts of the spirit world, being made a game by the use of large names and prophecies which make the prophet ridiculous" (History I 27). Many spiritualists believed that souls both retained their knowledge and personality and could continue to learn. Conan Doyle wrote, ". . . death causes no change in the human spirit, . . . mischievous and humourous entities abound, and . . . the inquirer must use his own instincts and his own common sense at every turn. 'Try the spirits that ye may know them'" [I John 4:1] (History I 75). The public, especially clergy and skeptics, often used stories of the "mischievous" entities to argue that spiritualistic phenomena were evil, but spiritualists, based on the belief that the essential personality is unchanged by death, felt that this was simply further proof that all souls survived, and that to have meaningful discourse with the spirit world, one must be discriminating. It seems that the prophesies of some spirits could be considered analogous to the prophesies of the witches in *Macbeth*; the prophesies were true, but were misleading or could be misinterpreted. Thus, according to Conan Doyle, the opinion of a clergyman who believed that spiritual manifestations were from the devil could easily be reinforced by spirits who found it entertaining to play with a spiritual doubter.

Differences Between Spiritualism and Christianity

One of the differences, at least in definition, was the belief of some prominent spiritualists, among them Conan Doyle and physicist Sir Oliver Lodge (Jones, Pair II 198), that embodied spirits could also move about independent of the body. Conan Doyle paraphrased descriptions of out-of-body travel from Andrew Jackson Davis, a spiritualist and psychic investigator:

> He begins by the consoling reflection that his own soul-flights,

> which were death in everything save duration[3], had shown him that the experience was "interesting and delightful," and that those symptoms which appear to be the signs of pain are really the unconscious reflexes of the body, and have no significance. He then tells how, having thrown himself into the "Superior condition," he thus observed the stages from the spiritual side. "The material eye can see only what is material, and the spiritual eye what is spiritual," but as everything would seem to have a spiritual counterpart the result is the same. Thus when a spirit comes to us it is not us that it perceives but our etheric bodies, which are, however, duplicates of our real ones. (History I 44-45)

The psychic counterpart of the body appears to be the same essential part as the Christian soul; however, Christian orthodoxy does not allow for out-of-body travel of the soul, except by analogy in miraculous events such as the resurrection of the dead. It is also interesting to note the slip Conan Doyle makes in referring to the material body as the "real" body; here we can see the tension between the belief that what is physical and scientifically testable is real and the belief that the spiritual constitutes true reality. In trying to establish the reality of phenomena, Conan Doyle moves toward scientific models of truth, and, by so doing, somewhat compromises his argument that the spiritual is primary.

One of the major distinctions that Conan Doyle drew between spiritualism and Christianity was on the issue of tolerance and broad-mindedness. He cites as a formative experience which led him away from orthodox Christianity hearing "Father Murphy, a great, fierce Irish priest, declare that there was sure damnation for everyone outside the Church."[4] This, in part, prepared Conan Doyle for spiritualism by pushing him toward a different view of the spiritual (Nordon 147):

> It was, then, all Christianity, and not Roman Catholicism alone, which had alienated my mind and driven me to an agnosticism which never for an instant degenerated into atheism, for I had a very keen perception of the wonderful poise of the Universe and the tremendous power of conception and sustenance which it implied. I was reverent in all my doubts and never ceased to think upon the matter, but the more I thought, the more confirmed became my nonconformity.[5]

Conan Doyle was consistent in his rejection of intolerance, and felt that one of the major virtues of spiritualism was that it showed the inappropriateness of dogmatism.

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[3] Spiritualists believed that the permanent desertion of the body by the soul constituted death.

[4] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Nordon, 152.

[5] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Nordon 147-148.

Conan Doyle also believed that Christianity was not based on a sound footing, but simply appealed to traditional beliefs, which made its basis and beliefs inadequate for a new, more scientific age, whereas spiritualism sought to base itself on scientifically verifiable evidence of psychic phenomena interpreted according to spiritual ideas without establishing any system of absolutism, intolerance of other beliefs, or paternalism (History I 25). In this way, spiritualism could truly serve as the intersection of all religions, and, in addition, could provide the scientific basis which modern critical thinkers would demand: ". . . the inward struggle," Conan Doyle argues, is "not really between Faith and sin, but really between the darkness of inherited dogma, and the light of inherent reason, God-given, and rising for ever in revolt against the absurdities of man" (History I 29). By starting fresh, apart from the limitations of "inherited dogma," spiritualism could do away with the "absurdities of man" and focus instead on interpreting true revelations from the spirit world.

Conan Doyle also objected to Christianity's contention that humanity was inherently evil, but rather believed that "Man is not naturally bad. The average human being is good. The mere act of spiritual communication in its solemnity brings out the religious side" (History I 14). Instead of interpreting Christ as a savior, then, Conan Doyle saw him as "a very gifted medium whose behaviours provided a moral code" (Rodin, Key, and Pilot 171), thereby giving him a place in the spiritualistic ethos which preserved his role as teacher, but removing the connotations of original sin. He instead describes Christ's "earth life and death as an example rather than a redemption. Every man answers for his own sins, and none can shuffle out of that atonement by appeal to some vicarious sacrifice" (History II 261).

Similarities Between Spiritualism and Christianity

Conan Doyle believed that spiritualism was sufficient as a moral and spiritual guide, but acknowledged that although many were "unable to cast off the convictions of a lifetime," they were "able to accept the new truth without discarding the old belief" (History II 247). He goes on to say that

> . . . if a man had Spiritualism alone as his guide, he would not find himself in a position which was opposed to essential Christianity, but rather in one which was explanatory. Both systems preach life after death. Both recognize that the afterlife is influenced in its progress and happiness by conduct here. Both profess to believe in the existence of the world of spirits, good and evil, whom the Christian calls angels and devils, and the Spiritualist guides, controls, and underdeveloped spirits. Both believe in the main that the same virtues, unselfishness, kindness, purity, and honesty, are necessary for a high character. Bigotry, however, is looked upon as a serious offense by Spiritualists, while it is commended by most Christian sects. To Spiritualists, every path

> upwards is commendable, and they fully recognize that in all creeds there are sainted, highly developed souls who have received by intuition all that the Spiritualist can give by special knowledge. (History II 247-248)

It is evident in this passage that Conan Doyle had in mind the issues on which he believed Christianity has failed, and it is significant that he says that "Both *profess* to believe in the world of spirits" in light of his derision of clergy for believing in past "miracles" but not present phenomena. In this list, he outlines the essential components which spiritualism and Christianity have in common, but reiterates his rejection of dogmatism and intolerance, and refers again to the convergence he saw among religious systems.

Some people felt that the way in which the spiritualistic movement had begun was inappropriate to a religious manifestation, but Conan Doyle also turns this into a parallel between Christianity and spiritualism: "Suddenly in the inexplicable way in which Providence works they all [spirits] concentrated and challenged the attention of the world in the shack house of a peasant in New York State. It was strange and rather sordid, but so for that matter was a carpenter's Son in a manger. Divine values are not ours" (Psychic Question 16). He also correlates the development of spiritualism with early Christianity, and argues that spiritualism, "with its angel, its elders, its deacons, its tongues, and its prophecies, was the best reconstruction of a primitive Christian Church that has ever been made" (History I 28), and lists correlations between early Christian and modern spiritualist practices and vocabulary such as "prophecy" being the ancient term for mediumship and "angel" for high spirit or spirit guide (History II 252-257). Conan Doyle even quotes St. Augustine's *De curâ pro Mortuis* and offers a Spiritualistic interpretation of Augustine:

> "The spirits of the dead can be sent to the living and can unveil to them the future which they themselves have learned either from other spirits or from angels" (i.e. spiritual guides) "or by divine revelation." This is pure Spiritualism exactly as we now know and define it. Augustine would not have spoken so surely of it and with such an accuracy of definition if he had not been quite familiar with it. (History II 253)

Conan Doyle also lists references to other Church Fathers which he says refer to spiritualistic belief (History II 252-256), drawing even closer the parallel between early Christianity and modern spiritualism. He speaks of the communion of Christ with Moses and Elias on the mountain as similar to a spiritualistic event (History I 43), and uses the time of Christ as a reference, saying that the current spiritualist movement is regarded by many as "the most important since the Christ episode . . ." (History I vii). Conan Doyle also refers to the Protestant reformation as a formative circumstance for the development of spiritualism because spiritualism, the purpose of which was to combat materialism, would have been less necessary if the idea of saints and angels had not been abolished, for he says that during the reformation, "[n]ot only did many unreasonable dogmas and ceremonies suffer, but the very idea of invisible beings, communicating with or taking an interest in our human life, became a fairy tale" (Psychic Question 15-16).

Spiritualism as a Justification for Christian Beliefs

Conan Doyle believed that spiritualism was not only *not* in conflict with Christianity, but that it could actually serve as a validation for the Christian belief in the supernatural. He argued that spiritualism had come "not to destroy, but to clarify, regulate and make broader and more reasonable the old conceptions of Christianity by recognizing that cosmic Christ spirit which has descended in various forms and degrees to all the nations of the earth" (Psychic Question 17). He believed that, until Christianity reconciled with spiritualism, Christian beliefs were unreasonable and contradictory as people "were asked to believe in Bible miracles, and at the same time taught that, outside of the Bible records, nothing supernatural had ever happened. But now the whole thing has been reversed. People now believe in the Bible because of Spiritualism; they did not believe in Spiritualism because of the Bible" (History II 264). Some clergymen did believe that spiritualism could provide a basis for belief in the Christian supernatural: Conan Doyle quotes the Reverend G. Vale Owen as having said that ". . . the acceptance of the great truths for which psychic science stands should turn an agnostic into a believer in God, should make a Jew a better Jew, a Mohammedan a better Mohammedan, a Christian a better Christian, and certainly a happier and more cheerful one."[6] Conan Doyle also believed that spiritualism could cause those who had drawn away from Christianity because of their scientific beliefs to return to the Church by providing proof of the sorts of phenomena on which Christianity was based, and particularly by providing proof of life after death (Nordon 166).

The Dangers of Faith

Conan Doyle personally objected to organized religions not only because of their intolerance, but also because of their dependence on faith. He felt that faith required a subjugation of reason which he found unacceptable. In his novel The Stark Munro Letters, one of the characters expresses an opinion which appears to have been Conan Doyle's own: "'I have mastered the principles of several religions. They have all shocked me by the violence which I should have to do to my reason to accept the dogmas of any one of them. Their ethics are usually excellent. So are the ethics of the common law of England. But the scheme of creation upon which those ethics are built!'"[7] In a letter to fellow spiritualist Sir Oliver Lodge, he refers to faith as a "two-edged business" and says that spiritualistic truths are built not on faith, but rather "upon direct reason."[8]

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[6] Reverend G. Vale Owen, as quoted in Conan Doyle, History II, 270.

Conan Doyle objected to faith not only because of its opposition to reason, but because he saw as its inevitable consequences strife and bloodshed. In a 1913 letter to a friend, he expressed his fear this way:

> Faith however is a dangerous thing, for if I may have faith one way, my neighbour may have faith another, and if both our faiths are real and earnest, then we have a an unavoidable result inquisitions, persecutions, religious wars, family feuds and all the other fearful results which have so long plagued humanity--and still in less bloody forms continue to plague it. *I do not admit that any faith--but only pure reason--is needed to get to the idea of God and also to evolve a sufficient moral law for our needs.* Had faith never been we should, as I read history, have been far more united and happier, so it seems to me. [emphasis added] [9]

From this passage, it appears that Conan Doyle believed that the good done by faith, that is, the conformity to a moral standard, was not worth the evil it had done, that is causing strife among people. "Pure reason," he argued, was sufficient to provide both "the idea of God" and a "moral law," and implied that the loss of faith, if replaced by conformity to reason, was not a loss, but a gain.

A New Revelation for a New Era

One of the advantages of spiritualism in contrast to Christianity was its non-dogmatic nature--while Christians and members of other established religions were forced to make facts and ideas conform to their preconceived notions, "[t]he humble Spiritualist sees this [connection between spirits and the living] and *adapts his worship to the facts*" [emphasis added] (History I 179) by accepting both spirit information and scientific information. Conan Doyle believed that anyone who truly sought the truth must have a flexible outlook in all beliefs and must be willing to incorporate new ideas and information: "When men have an honest and wholehearted aspiration for truth there is no development which can ever leave them abashed or find no place in their scheme" (History I 86). In fact, this flexibility forms one definition of spiritualism--"a new cult which professes to show that new sources and new interpretations are still available" (History I 88). This claim of *not* having all the answers yet, but of simply having found a means by which to search for them distinguishes spiritualism from its predecessors by making it, in a sense, dogmatically non-dogmatic. Conan Doyle and other spiritualists saw as their mission sharing the new religious form which had been given to them, thereby revitalizing the spiritual aspects of life by giving humanity "something living, instead of the dead and dusty stuff which is served out to them in the name of religion."[10]

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[7] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Nordon, 153.

[8] As quoted in Jones, Pair I, 184.

[9] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Nordon, 152-153.

The spiritualists believed that the different religious movements had been different spirit manifestations with different leaders, each suited to a particular time and place, but which had all had the same essential message. Among these, Conan Doyle listed "Francis d' Assisi, Joan of Arc, Luther, Mahomet, Bab-ed-Din, and every other real religious leader of history . . ." (History II 249). According to spiritualists, Christ was also a spirit manifestation for a particular time and place, and Conan Doyle regarded him as one of the greatest:

> It is not for our mosquito brains to say what degree of divinity was in Him, but we can truly say that He was certainly nearer the divine than we are, and that his teaching, upon which the world has not yet acted, is the most unselfish, merciful, and beautiful of which we have any cognizance, unless it be that of his fellow saint Buddha, who also was a messenger from God, but whose creed was rather for the Oriental than for the European mind. (History II 149)

Conan Doyle apparently regarded the teachings of Christ as an appropriate model for human conduct, but saw this as distinct from the teachings of Christianity, which he felt were corrupt and stagnant, not "a vital living thing, still growing and working, capable of endless extension and development . . .".[11]

Conan Doyle saw spiritualistic phenomena and belief as representative of a "complete religious revolution" (History I 179), and referred to them as having "ushered in" the "new era that had been announced" (History I 84). Spiritualism did not present a completely new moral code, however; instead, it built upon what had already been established, recognizing that ". . . the best method of human advancement was to get away from sin--not only the sins which are usually recognized, but also those sins of bigotry, narrowness and hardness, which are especially blemishes not of the ephemeral flesh, but of the permanent spirit" (History I 51). Conan Doyle and others felt that morality was not limited, but that the spirit could continually improve as it learned more, and that a portion this improvement could be accomplished on earth though contact with advanced spirits (History I 52) and believed that the absolute truth was something to be sought, not to be possessed (Tietze Last Bow 95). In sum, the view of the spiritualists was that "many who had lost faith in the things of the spirit, in what was perhaps the most material age in the world's history, had begun to examine the evidence and to understand with relief or with awe that *the age of faith was passing and that the age of knowledge . . . was at hand*" [emphasis added] (History I 170). To Conan Doyle and other spiritualists, the "age of knowledge" was the defining characteristic which made a new religious form, such as spiritualism, necessary and appropriate. It was a religion which could answer the needs for a spiritual aspect to life, scientific questioning, and the rapid pace of change, because it was flexible, it sought to base beliefs on scientifically based evidence, and it could accomodate new ideas because of its non-dogmatic nature.

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[10] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Meikle, 37.

[11] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Meikle, 24.

Proof of the Validity of Religious Belief

Conan Doyle and other spiritualists believed that what was needed was a way of thinking about spiritual issues, and of maintaining belief in the supernatural without betraying their belief in science and scientific methodology. Through spiritualistic and psychic investigations, Conan Doyle "hoped to bring religion into accord with empirical evidence, or better yet, provide new evidence as substantiation of religious belief" (Meikle 24). Conan Doyle seems to have believed that western society had experienced an "age of faith" during which people had simply accepted and believed what they were told were religious truths, and that the current age was the opposite of the age of faith, an "age of materialism," in which society would believe only those things based on scientific, material data; spiritualism, then, was to provide the balance between these by creating an "age of spirituality" in which religious truths were compatible with and supported by scientific reasoning. He felt that the religious/spiritual aspects of life were essential, and that a sound basis must be provided for them in order to incite a religious revival:

> I consider it [spiritualism] to be infinitely the most important thing in the world, and the particular thing which the human race in its present state of development needs more than anything else. Nothing is secure until the religious basis is secure, and that spiritualistic movement with which I am proud to be associated is the first attempt ever made in modern times *to support faith by actual provable fact.* [emphasis added] (Psychic Question 15)

The "support of faith," or, more precisely, of belief in the spiritual, was the ultimate goal of all of Conan Doyle's psychic research and his attempts to show new manifestations of spirit activity. Pierre Nordon distills Conan Doyle's work into two major beliefs: that the churches had failed to respond to the move toward materialism and away from faith and had instead become "petrified and decayed, overgrown with thorns and choked with mysteries,"[12] and that "a positive religion (the 'science of religion' as he called it) was possible, and need not be incompatible with traditional religious teaching" (Nordon 158-159). Conan Doyle believed that the spiritual aspect had never been totally lost, but simply had existed as a minority to the "waxing flood of materialism" and that spiritual awareness was characterized by "the belief in the Unseen, *depending not upon faith but upon happenings* which were inexplicable save on the supposition of Intelligences, high and low, apart from ourselves" (Psychic Question 16). Whether he felt that this belief had been continuous from ancient times or had diverged at some point from Christianity is unclear, but it is clear that he felt that balance between the spiritual and the scientific was the essential core of spiritualistic belief and investigation, and that this was what the movement could offer to society.

Conan Doyle did sometimes become frustrated with the reception given spiritualistic and psychic phenomena, and credited what he felt was misinterpretation of the events to the materialistic tendencies of the age. Of the seances of a particular medium, he said,

> It is strange, and perhaps characteristic of the age, *how little the religious implications appear to have struck the various sitters* [at seances], and how entirely occupied they were by inquiries as to their grandmother's second name or the number of their uncles. Even the more earnest seem to have been futile in their questions, and no one shows the least sense of realization of the real possibilities of such commerce, or that *a firm foundation for religious belief could at last be laid.* [emphasis added] (History I 163)

What the sitters at the seances appear to have interpreted as highly entertaining, Conan Doyle and other serious spiritualists viewed instead as religious events which could provide a "firm foundation for religious belief," thereby counteracting the growth of the materialistic viewpoint. Although Conan Doyle did consider the investigation of phenomena and the establishment of genuineness important, he expressed the opinion that their true significance is in their religious implications, and, in a most unusual rhetorical form, quotes from one of his own works ". . . though psychical research in itself may be quite distinct from religion, the deductions which we may draw from it and the lessons we may learn, 'Teach us of the continued life of the soul, of the nature of that life, and of how it is influenced by our conduct here'" (History II 261). Spiritualistic and psychic research had, he felt, provided a sound basis for belief in the supernatural, at least for those who were willing to consider the evidence:

> It was not the clergy but the Free Thinkers who perceived the real meaning of the mesage, and that they must either fight against this proof of life eternal, or must honestly confess, as so many of us have done

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[12] Conan Doyle, as quoted in Nordon, 158-159.

> since, that their philosophy was shattered, and that they had been beaten on their own ground. These men had called for *proofs* in transcendent matters, and the more honest and earnest were forced to admit that they had had them. (History I 164-165)

The spiritualists felt that the conclusions they had reached regarding the survival of the soul were unavoidable if one examined with an open mind the evidence they offered. Spiritualism, would, they expected, shortly take its place as a major creed, the next to hold major influence in the world becasue it responded to the scientific needs of the time while maintaining a belief in the spiritual. One spiritualist described his belief, not in contrast to Christianity, but rather as "a scientific development of the attitude and teaching of Christ."[13] Conan Doyle, too, felt that this was one aspect of spiritualism, that it was, in some ways, a metamorphosed version of older religions, that religion had "evolved" and that new phenomena were occurring to provide the new evidence that the new age required: "This is where the phenomenal side of Spiritualism gives way to the religious side, for what assurance from the most venerable teachers, or of writings, can give us the same absolute conviction as a first-hand account from one whom we have known [i.e., a spirit of a dead loved one] and who is actually leading the life which he describes" (History II 73).

Conan Doyle and other spiritualists believed that spiritualism had truly provided a sound, scientifically verifiable basis not only for their own beliefs, but also for belief in the survival of the soul in any religion. They saw both spiritualism and major religions as different manifestations of the same message, and believed that the purpose of spiritualistic phenomena was to provide the evidence people influenced by scientific methods and thought required to believe in supernatural events. By so doing, they felt that they could provide the world with a new basis for spirituality which could ultimately unite all religions on the common ground of belief in spirit manifestations in the new, spiritualistic age.

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[13] F. W. H. Myers, as quoted in Conan Doyle, History II 272.

Spiritualism: A Historical Response with Implications for the Future

The period in which spiritualism developed saw a change in the status of science from one of the liberal arts to the accepted means by which reality was defined. As the public became more acquainted with and accustomed to scientific methods and modes of thought and investigation, it began to permeate the attitudes and assumptions of daily life, to become not simply another kind of information, but the criterion by which all information, observation, or opinion was judged. As this became the case, those who thought synthetically began to see contradictions between the traditional teachings of Christianity and the new, scientifically obtained knowledge. Consequently, many felt that they could no longer accept Christianity as their source of guidance. Many nevertheless felt a need to retain an aspect of the spiritual in spite of the challenges posed to Christianity, and so turned to the developing spiritualist movement, which sought to provide spiritual guidance through religious belief which did not seek reconciliation with science, but which instead based itself in scientific questioning and observation, thereby forming a synthesis of spirituality and scientific thought.

Spiritualism developed both in and of its historical influences: it used models based in religion equally with those based in science, and borrowed the vocabulary of not only of Christianity, but also of the developing sciences, particularly of biology and geology, to describe events and ideas associated with the movement. Spiritualists sought, and sometimes gained, the endorsement of scientists, though they never persuaded the scientific community at large that their phenomena were genuine. They also relied on the work of scientific societies such as the Society for Psychical Research, the mission of which was to collect data on psychic phenomena to prove or disprove their occurrence, though they did not to put forward any theory regarding either the significance of the phenomena or why they were being observed so much more frequently than they had been previous to what spiritualists called "the new spiritual epoch."

Spiritualists, although considered credulous by many of their contemporary and current detractors, honestly believed themselves to be holding up the highest scientific ideals in their investigations, and considered fraud a serious offence. By employing scientific testing methods, machinery, photography, and other technology, they sought both to detect fraud in imposters and to prove the veracity of true mediums. For them, the synthesis of science and spirituality was a natural response to the kinds of problems that faith-based religions were encountering due to the application of scientific thought and information to their beliefs. They felt that, by basing their beliefs on currently observable and testable phenomena, they could form a religion which was not tied to ancient traditions and old interpretations, but which rather conformed to new definitions of truth based on scientific investigation. They also believed that it offered a perfect alternative to the sectarianism that had developed from divergent traditions, for the spirits had, they felt, shown that the essential beliefs that were common to all religions were all that was necessary. By showing this essential similarity, they hoped that they could one day see the reunion of all religions into a common belief in spiritualism.

Spiritualists believed that spiritualism would be the next major religion in the western tradition, the successor to Christianity. From the perspective of history, we can see that they were mistaken; however, there are still spiritual religions which are trying to answer the questions that confront a scientific society. We are still faced with the same problem of combining spirituality or religion with our dependence on science and the pervasive belief that science is the proper means by which to explore and define our world. Much as we might sometimes like, we cannot divorce ourselves from this dependence on science: nearly every aspect of our lives involves technology that has developed in the past two hundred years, and many of the products and services we use change on a yearly, or even monthly basis. Newspapers and journals are full of discoveries as we search to expand our knowledge of ourselves and our world.

Science has become the defining factor of our lives, but yet it is not able to satisfy the needs of our non-analytic selves: we still feel that there is, or should be, an innate morality, and we feel that life should have some broader meaning beyond the physical, and we feel in ourselves some non-corporeal aspect that is our true selves. Science has not provided a means by which we can determine ethics or morality through laboratory experiments or mathematical derivations; we have not defined through science a purpose for our existence; we have yet to locate or define the non-corporeal self. Yet many do not wish to, or feel they cannot, base their thoughts and actions on what they, like Conan Doyle consider an "outworn system which has been so tangled up with incredible theologies that the honest mind is nauseated at the thought of it" (History II 247). The search for a new mode of religion is still vital: we feel a need to acknowledge the spiritual aspects of ourselves, to base decisions on the guidance of a system of morality that is absolute and incontrovertible, not an artificial creation of the human mind. Like spiritualism, new religions and new sects continue to appear, each approaching the perennial questions from a perspective informed by its time, its members, and the prevailing reality of its time, each hoping to satisfy the both the inquisitive, analytical self and the spiritual self.

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