

12-2009

'Light, More Light': The 'Light' Newspaper, Spiritualism, and British Society, 1881 - 1920.

Brian Glenney

Clemson University, brian.glenney@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses



Part of the [European History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Glenney, Brian, "'Light, More Light': The 'Light' Newspaper, Spiritualism, and British Society, 1881 - 1920." (2009). *All Theses*. 668.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/668

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

"LIGHT, MORE LIGHT":
The "Light" Newspaper, Spiritualism and British Society,
1881-1920.

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters in
History

by
Brian Edmund Glenney
December, 2009

Accepted by:
Dr. Michael Silvestri, Committee Chair
Dr. Alan Grubb
Dr. Megan Taylor Shockley

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the spiritualist weekly *Light* through Late Victorian, Edwardian, and World War I Britain. *Light* has never received any extended coverage or historical treatment yet it was one of the major spiritualist newspapers during this part of British history. This thesis diagrams the lives of *Light*'s first four major editors from 1881 till the end of World War I and their views on the growth of science, God, Christ, evolution, and morality. By focusing on one major spiritualist newspaper from 1881 till 1920, this thesis attempts to bridge the gap in spiritualist historiography that marks World War I as a stopping or starting point.

This continuous historical treatment of *Light* and the ideas developed by the editors in the paper from late Victorian England to the first years following World War I allows various trends to be correctly analyzed. One such trend is the revival of “traditional” images and definitions of God and Christ during World War I. While the two Edwardian editors of *Light*, Edward Walter Wallis and David Gow had steadily moved the paper away from traditional Protestant definitions of God, the war brought them back to the forefront.

This revival further demonstrates that the secularization of British society was incomplete and even temporarily reversed during World War I. In addition this thesis provides fresh insight into the spiritualist movement in general. It demonstrates that the individualistic nature of spiritualism allowed it to shift and morph into whatever a follower wished it to be. This characteristic made spiritualism an extraordinarily difficult

movement to classify for it could maintain both conservative and liberal tendencies and personalities within it.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God, whose breath allows me to live, and my wife, whose love and support have helped me continue even when I thought I could not.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would never have been complete without the help of a number of different people. I want to first thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Michael Silvestri who stuck with me even when separated by a few countries. Your support and guidance were invaluable. I want to also thank my committee members, Dr. Alan Grubb and Dr. Megan Taylor-Shockley, for working with me on a summer defense. The Library of Congress' Rare Reading Room department also deserves a thank you for its diligent work hauling giant bound copies of *Light* to and from their collection innumerable times for me. They were always accommodating and ready to help. Of course I want to thank my parents who have always been my biggest fans, no matter what scheme or plan I devised. Thank you for being there always. My wife has stuck through my adulterous affair with this thesis and for that I am eternally grateful. I love you. Finally, I want to give God glory for giving me the strength to continue, even while teaching full-time and working late into the night. I would be nowhere without His support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	
I. <i>Light</i> , Spiritualism, and the Secularization of British Society	1
CHAPTER	
I. Science, Religion and the First Three Editors of <i>Light</i>	24
II. The Evolution of the Spirit	59
III. The Great War, Spiritualism, and Christianity	95
APPENDICES	140
A: The Readership of <i>Light</i>	141
REFERENCES	143

INTRODUCTION

LIGHT, SPIRITUALISM, AND THE SECULARIZATION OF BRITISH SOCIETY

This thesis originally began with a simple question: If the late Victorian, Edwardian, and World War I eras in Britain witnessed the growth of science and an emphasis on reason, why did they also spawn and cultivate the seemingly illogical religious movement of spiritualism? In the search for an answer I discovered that the question contained at least two false assumptions. To begin with, spiritualism was anything but an illogical movement. The modern movement of spiritualism began in Hydesville, New York, in 1848 with a pair of sisters named Margaretta and Catherine Fox. These sisters claimed to be able to communicate with spirits through various taps and raps that occurred in their home. The movement of spiritualism grew out of these humble beginnings into both a quasi-scientific organization that attempted to prove the afterlife through scientific tests with mediums and a religious faith that looked to the words of the dead, passed through mediums, as inspiration and guidance in this world and the next. The spiritualist movement quickly gathered speed and was carried across the ocean to England. Soon séances (the gathering of people and a medium usually around a table for the purpose of communicating with the dead) were born. Throughout England spiritualist societies and newspapers began to spring up and multiply, while famous mediums could fetch a few thousand listeners when they gave lectures or public séances.

By the turn of the 20th century there were between ten thousand to a hundred thousand spiritualists in England alone.¹

One of the reasons for its popularity, as Jenny Hazelgrove has recently shown, was spiritualism's use of culturally relevant ideas and assumptions that made conversion "feel natural and even inevitable" for many Britons in this era.² Spiritualism not only provided clarity for anyone whose faith in Protestant Christianity had begun to crumble, but did so in a way that combined the familiar Victorian tenets of faith in God, rigid morality, personal responsibility, and an unending belief in progress with newer views of science and evolution. Within spiritualism, a Briton could rest secure, nestled between a materialistic worldview that believed humans had no soul and no purpose and an equally frightening Christian vision that all unsaved men or women were destined for the fiery furnace. Since the movement drew from and rejected parts of both outlooks, it could use both to its advantage while casting aside any part that conflicted with its central message. For instance, spiritualism could believe in eternity without the messy problems of blind faith, and at the same time scold the scientist for ruining a séance because of his unbelieving and disruptive attitude. Spiritualism, therefore, could be hypocritical and contradictory at times, but it was not culturally illogical in the context of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century British society. Rather, it was an attempt by sound and searching men and women to strike a middle ground between the extremes they saw around them.

¹ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50.

² Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars*, (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2.

There have been a number of important studies of British spiritualism but most of them emphasize World War I as a breaking point in cultural history and therefore, most historical treatment of spiritualism never links wartime spiritualism to a larger context. For example, Jay Winter has examined spiritualism during the war and after, while Janet Oppenheim in her landmark work, *The Other World*, stops at the outbreak of the Great War. Oppenheim argues that the postwar context had drastically changed and “new converts were responding, not to the intellectual and emotional crises of the mid- and Late Victorian decades, but to the unprecedented horrors of World War.”³ This is true to a point, but it is the contention of this thesis that the mass of converts who flooded to spiritualism during and after World War I did so for many of the same reasons that late Victorians and Edwardians did. They sought out spiritualism because it provided comfort and meaning in three vital ways. First, it incorporated various “traditional” themes found in Christianity, such as the idea of God, Christ, and the afterlife; all of which held significant meaning and emotional attachment to British men and women. Second, spiritualism proposed that it had replaced faith with knowledge by psychical research and had therefore effectively removed the hindrance of doubt. Finally, it helped provide comfort by refraining from creating a central creed and as a result allowed individuals the freedom to form their own personal religious beliefs.

The fact that spiritualism retained many of the same themes and social positions throughout the Late Victorian, Edwardian, and Great War era points also to the fact that the traditional methods of grief and belief, though in a somewhat altered state, remained

³ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 2.

powerful and pervasive cultural elements well into and past World War I. In order to demonstrate this process it is instructive to look at a single publication's adaptation and views over a long span of time. In an attempt to achieve this, *Light*, one of the leading Spiritualist weeklies during the Late Victorian, Edwardian, and World War I years will be analyzed and studied from its inception in 1881 until 1918. From this study, it is hoped a better understanding will be gained about spiritualism's growth and adaptation, or lack thereof, through the late Victorian and Edwardian period into and past World War I. It will also demonstrate how the cultural process of secularization in Britain was arrested by the Great War.

Founded in 1881, *Light* is the oldest continuously running Spiritualist journal. It served as one of the foremost Spiritualist presses in London and outlived its contemporaries including the popular *Two Worlds*, *Daybreak*, *Banner of Light*, *Spiritual Magazine*, and the French journal *Revue Spirite*. Edmund Dawson Rogers founded the weekly newspaper *Light* on the advice of J.G. Meugens, a British resident of Calcutta.⁴ Its inception began within a power struggle over the control of a Spiritualist organization named the British National Association of Spiritualists (BNAS). Thomas Everitt, a prominent British spiritualist, founded this organization in the mid 1870s in order to bring the scattered elements of British spiritualism together. The BNAS though soon struggled under the weight of a large and divisive central committee, internal power struggles, and financial problems. It disbanded in 1882.⁵ The remaining core of the group attempted to

⁴ Edmund Dawson Rogers, *Life and Experiences of Edmund Dawson Rogers, Spiritualist and Journalist*, (London: Office of Light, undated), 44-5.

⁵ Oppenheim, 53-7, talks about the BNAS foundation and eventual dissolution.

reconstitute the organization and created the Central Association of Spiritualists (CAS) which also quickly floundered and died. During the heated discussion over the direction and structure of the BNAS a complaint was voiced about the lack of control the BNAS had over its official journal, the *Spiritualist*. Some members of the BNAS felt that the journal had not “fairly represented” the views of the BNAS and commissioned Rogers to begin another more easily controlled newspaper to act as the official voice of the BNAS. For a brief period the BNAS published both newspapers, the *Spiritualist* and *Light*, as its official paper but the *Spiritualist* soon disappeared.⁶ The first issue of *Light* appeared on January 8th, 1881 under the business control of Edmund Dawson Rogers and the editorship of John Stephen Farmer.⁷

It is hard to determine the circulation of *Light* for any part of its long publication. There are clues within the publication itself that point to circulation numbers as well as which audience the paper was written to attract. One such hint is a statement in the *Light* in 1884 that the editor (who at the time was William Stanton Moses) received two hundred letters to the editor each week. If this number is true than one must assume that the actual amount of people reading the newspaper would be conservatively much higher in the high thousands or low ten thousands.⁸ Another clue is the common placement within the newspaper of lists of donors to various funds to support *Light*. Two different forms of information can be gleaned from these lists with a careful reading. First, a vague estimate of readership can be discovered by simply counting the amount of people

⁶ This was most likely due to a lack of support. See Rogers, 44-6.

⁷ There is some dispute whether or not J.S. Farmer every actually controlled the editorship of the paper. See for instance Eric J. Dingwell, *Light and the Farmer Mystery*, “Journal?”

⁸ See Appendix

who donated. For instance, in 1884 a call was put forth for readers of the *Light* to donate to a “sustenance fund” to help finance the cost of the paper.⁹ In only one month ninety-four people had already donated.¹⁰ If we reckon that perhaps five percent of subscribers actually donated then the circulation totals of the *Light* can be reasonably estimated at around 5,000 people. In 1917 a similar such list occurred when David Gow wished to rid the *Light* of ads from “professional” mediums.¹¹ Gow, consequently, called on the *Light’s* readers to donate to a fund to replace the revenue from the now banished ads once placed by “professional” mediums. In eight months 141 people gave money to the fund.¹² It is important to note that this was in the midst of total war and severely difficult economic times for almost all Britons. Therefore the amount of people able to donate to this fund would presumably be lower than in 1884. The next year, 1918, 159 people (a few repeating from last year) donated.¹³ Given the difficult circumstances, this was probably a smaller portion of readership than in 1884 (perhaps two or three percent) and readership can be reasonably estimated to have risen to around 7,500 or more.

There is another interesting and vitally important piece of information which can be drawn from the same lists: the class from which the majority of *Light’s* readers came. An example is a “Special Lectures Fund” which appeared in 1883 in an attempt to bring

⁹ “Sustentation Fund” *Light* (November 15, 1884).

¹⁰ This data is from list in *Light* on Nov. 29, Dec. 5, 13, and 20.

¹¹ “Professional” mediums, or mediums that charged money for sittings, were regarded as dangerous elements within the spiritualist ranks. Most looked on them with contempt, claiming that they lied, cheated, and made money off of other people’s grief or curiosity. It was in fact most of the “professional” mediums that were exposed as frauds throughout the history of spiritualism. *Light* (May 26, 1917)

¹² This data is compiled from the following issues of the *Light*, June 2, 16, 23, 30, July 14, 21, 28, August 11, 18, 25, Sept. 1, 22, 29, Oct. 6, 13, 20, 27, Dec. 1, and 8.

¹³ This data is compiled from the following issues of the *Light*, Jan. 19, 26, Feb. 2, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23, April 6, 27, May 4, 11, 18, 25, June 8, 15, 29, July 20, August 10, Sept. 7, 14, 21, Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26, Nov. 16, 30, Dec. 7, and 21.

in interesting speakers for the LSA. This fund had thirty-two people donate to it over the course of two months. Out of these thirty-two, only eight people donated over £ 2, a very small amount. But the following year, donations given to the “sustentation fund” already described the story is much different. From the ninety-four who gave, forty-five donated over £ 2 including nine £ 10 with three at £ 20 each. These were significant gifts given that the average middle-class Briton only made around £ 300-800 a year, while the lower-class made around £ 50-300.¹⁴ This totaled out to about a pound a week for the majority of middle class families. Almost half of the donors, therefore, gave over two weeks pay, a sum that only a middle-class, or upper middle-class could easily part with at a week or two’s notice. The same can be assumed from the list of donors in 1918 which included at least twenty-seven donors over two pounds, which include one twenty-five pound donation and two more of ten pounds respectively. Once again, after four years of heavy war, a substantial (though lesser amount than 1884) were able to donate a large sum indicating a largely middle-class readership.

There are still other hints of the actual and desired readership of *Light*. There are two main issues within the *Light* that point to a desire to attract and appeal to middle-class and upper-class men and women. The first is simply the content. The placement of material such as scientific studies in a prominent place, as well as an absence of any real sensational-type stories of table-tilting and ghost returns shows a yearning for *Light* to be viewed as a credible and level-headed paper, something all middle-class men and women prided themselves on. Advertisements also cropped up and featured a range of mediums

¹⁴ Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian Britain*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 33-34.

and speeches, many of which focused on high brow and sophisticated subjects such as “Chromoscopy; or ‘Spahara’s’ Healdonian System of Mental Spectrum Analysis.”¹⁵ There were also the occasional editorials that spoke of the paper’s high standing and prominent readership, or commercial-like quotes from other newspapers, reprinted in *Light*, about the high level of sophistication found in *Light*.¹⁶ The second issue is the fact that the paper still exists today, as well as the LSA though in different forms. It was the readers of *Light* that donated the money which allowed *Light* to survive the hard times of World War I even when the paper, due to rationing, had to shrink its size and shed almost all of its advertisement space and revenue.¹⁷ It was also the readers of *Light* and the members of the LSA who donated the money necessary to acquire a corner house to serve as a headquarters in London for the LSA and *Light*.¹⁸ Lower-class men and women would never have had the money needed for this type of investment, even if they loved spiritualism intensely.¹⁹

What makes *Light* so unique is that it managed to outlast every other Spiritualist newspaper of its time and still exists as a journal today.²⁰ From its inception it quickly became one of the leading Spiritual publications and maintained that title well after the Great War. In fact in London, save the *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, no other spiritualist publication boasted the affiliation and editorship of more heavy-hitting

¹⁵ Advertisement, *Light* (January 6, 1900).

¹⁶ See footnote 58, and 60, as well as the introduction for further discussion.

¹⁷ *Light* (March 16, 1918).

¹⁸ This fact came from the website of the Light. (<http://www.collegeofpsychicstudies.co.uk/college/history.html>) First accessed on Monday, February 23, 2009.

¹⁹ Both Oppenheim, 46-7, and Barrow agree with this assessment. Barrow calls the LSA, “rather respectable.” (131)

²⁰ With the exception of *The Two Worlds* which still exist today. *Light*, though, was founded six years before the *Two Worlds*.

Spiritualists than *Light*. The editorship reads like a “who’s who” of London Spiritualists: Rev. Stainton Moses, Edmund Dawson Rogers, Edward Walter Wallis, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In *Light*, then, the historian has access to the thoughts and visions of the leaders of British Spiritualism during the late Victorian, Edwardian, and World War I era. As such, a thorough investigation of *Light* will give insight into the minds, beliefs, and activities of British Spiritualists in the years leading up to and including World War I.

While the cultural and religious movement of spiritualism within British society has been a reasonably well documented event ever since its inception in 1848 in the small hamlet of Hydesville, New York, there has been no extended analysis of *Light*.²¹ Indeed

²¹ There are a number of fine studies done on British spiritualism starting with Janet Oppenheim’s work *The Other World*. This work is well-organized and serves as the fundamental text on the parallel movements of spiritualism and psychical research during Mid and Late Victorian England and Edwardian England. One of the first attempts to summarize the history of the spiritualism movement was done by Frank Podmore in his 2 volume work, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, 2 Vols. (London: Methuen, 1902). By this time in his life, Podmore had become skeptical of the truth of spiritualism and writes the history with an eye towards reveal various frauds within the movement. He also wrote a two volume work on various mediums along the same vein called, *Mediums of the 19th Century*, 2 Vols. (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, Inc.) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tried his hand though his two volume study, *The History of Spiritualism* (NY: G.H. Doran Co, 1926) and *The History of Spiritualism Volume 2* (London: Cassell, 1926) and charted the history of spiritualism while attempting to also prove the validity of spiritualist claims. One of the first studies on the activities of Psychic Research was by Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968). Geoffrey K Nelson came out with a fine study on spiritualism the following year titled *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). Nelson focused on the growth of the movement in America and England as well as the social aspects and impacts that spiritualism had on the respective societies. Logie Barrow focused on the socialist tendencies of plebian spiritualists in his book *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986). Alex Owen has documented superbly the interconnections between the woman movement and the rise of spiritualism two different works *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) and *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004). A wonderful look at the strange pseudo-science of mesmerism in Victorian England is Alison Winters work *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998). There are two more recent works of note. The first is done by Jenny Hazelgrove and focuses on the British spiritualist movement between the World War I and World War II, a topic rarely found in the historiography of spiritualism. It is called *Spiritualism and the British Society Between the Wars* (London: Manchester University Press, 2000). The other is a very recent local study by Gerald O’Hara called *Dead Men’s Embers* (York, England: Saturday Night Press, 2006) which focuses on the experiences and lives of a single spiritualism society in York, England over the course of thirty years.

most historians of British spiritualism have utilized the twin publications of the British Society for Psychical Research, *The Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (JSPR), and the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (PSPR) much more than *Light* (or any other Spiritualist press for that matter). There are two reasons for this. First, *Light* does not deal with psychical research in much depth, and second, its content is extremely varied, making it a difficult source to analyze.

To understand why *Light* dealt so sparingly with psychical research, a word has to be said about the Spiritualist movement in general. Spiritualism, as Jay Winter and others have pointed out, is in reality divided into two major movements.²² On the one hand, scientific spiritualism, called commonly psychical research, engaged with “scientific” efforts to prove that life after death exists. It pursued this quest with a spirit of rationality and sobriety that failed many times to pay much mind to the social or religious consequences of spiritualism. The second version of spiritualism was primarily religious in nature. Here spiritualists were less concerned with scientific discoveries and theories that derived from the many tests done on mediums and much more concerned with the spiritual and social ramifications that the knowledge of eternal life might bring. In general, scientific spiritualism concerned itself with proof, while religious spiritualism focused on morality and society. Many historical works on spiritualism have focused on the men of psychical research, a subject that requires extensive use of both the *JSPR* and the *PSPR*. *Light* by contrast is not focused exclusively on psychical research and sporadically voiced its distaste of views promoted by the Society for Psychical Research.

²² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1995), 54-55.

The second reason that *Light* is not more widely studied is because of its tremendously varied content. This variety is one of the things that make the newspaper such a valuable and a frustrating source. This attribute of *Light* is representative of those that formed it and its slogan, “Light, More Light.” This saying by Goethe was later made famous by the revered medium D.D. Home when he began to allow more light into his deathly dark séances, an unheard of event at the time. *Light* was a hodge-podge of various articles taken from other Spiritualist press, from its own contributors, and from any other place that mentioned, whispered, or shouted about spiritualism. It read much of the time like a *Reader’s Digest* of Spiritualist material while the editorial page remained a glorified book review for the most of its first decade.

This scattered content does, however, point towards two conclusions of interest to the historian. First, the paper attempted to have a wide appeal by covering and expounding on a plethora of opinions and in so doing, mimicked the approach of spiritualism as a whole. This is evident from an editorial in *Light* March 8, 1890 entitled “Our Policy and Our Position” whose opening paragraph sums up this desire when it stated that *Light* “must needs be eclectic in tone in order to satisfy, if it may, the multiform elements of its constituency.”²³ Second, the editors believed and acted out their belief within the paper that truth came from a variety of sources. *Light* attempted to remain free from dogmatic stances on most issues, insisting instead that “Whatever doth make light is manifest.”²⁴ This insistence on both the acceptance of truth from many sources and the attempt to appeal to a diverse audience helps to give the paper an almost

²³ *Light*, “Our Policy and Our Position,” March 8, 1890.

²⁴ This was one of the slogans of the newspaper during the latter years of the 19th century.

schizophrenic feeling at times. Articles could range from such diverse topics as “The Genesis of Gems and Their Occult Attributes,” “Are Animals Clairvoyant?” “A Breath From the Past: A Broken Message from an Ouija Board,” and “Insanity by Light of spiritualism.”²⁵ Occasionally *Light* would also feature editorials on a favorite issue of the Editor, such as William Stanton Moses’ criticism of the death penalty, or Edmund Dawson Roger’s and David Gow’s editorials which attacked contemporary press sensationalism.²⁶

It is important to note here that the cultural dialogue in which spiritualism participated is best understood as part of the general transition of Britain to a secular society during the nineteenth and twentieth century. This secularization process involved the ebbing away of religious symbolism and authority from the social, political, cultural, and even economic aspects of British life. There have been and remain a number of different definitions for what exactly “secularization” means.²⁷ One is given by John Sommerville in his work, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith*. Sommerville argues that “secularization” is merely the removal of religious ideas and symbols from the public sphere and the transition of those religious concepts to the private arena of personal experience and belief.²⁸ Even more

²⁵ All articles from *Light*, January 18, 1902; May 14, 1903; January 5, 1918; April 14, 1883, respectively.

²⁶ See for instance Rogers article attacking the *Daily Chronicle*, “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (March 4, 1899); and Gow’s “The Needs of 1919: A Forward Movement,” *Light* (January 11, 1919) It is easy to see why Gow and Rogers would want to take shots at the press since the mainstream press continually took shots at spiritualism.

²⁷ For an extended discussion of the various aspects of the theory of “secularization” see Steve Bruce, ed. *Religion and Modernization: Sociologist and Historians debate the Secularization Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For a brief look at the changing definition of the word “secularization” see Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in 20th Century Britain* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), 3.

²⁸ John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1992).

abrupt and general is the definition offered by K.D.M. Snell and Paul Ell who classify “secularization” as solely non-church attendance.²⁹ It is this author’s contention that the last two definitions are adequate when describing the secularization of the visible political and cultural life of a country, but not broad enough to deal with the secularization of an entire culture. They fail to link ideas (those interior forces) with the opinions and actions (the exterior results of interior forces) of a person.

It seems instead that “secularization” involves at least two major steps. The first will be considered a prerequisite for the second and is marked by the entrance of doubt into a society in which the universal arguments of a religion are challenged and questioned. This might occur in institutions such as education, science, politics, social structure, etc. In other words, once religious ideas and institutions are doubted they begin to lose their grip on the political and social power they once held. The second part of the process involves the actual removal of religious power within a society. This removal can occur at any level – socially, politically, and economically – and usually occurs at different levels at different times. Or as Owen Chadwick simply puts it, “secularization” is “the growing tendency of mankind to do without religion, or try to do without it.”³⁰

One more important point to remember about this process of “secularization” is that it was (and remains) a process, not an action. It is a gradual and complicated transition that in the case of England involved a whole Empire-worth of humanity. As a process secularization remains difficult to trace since different parts of a given society

²⁹ K.D.M. Snell and Paul Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion*, (New York, Cambridge University Press: 2000).

³⁰ *Ibid*, 17.

may be both progressing and regressing towards and away from a more secular society all at one time. Take for one instance the case of England's established church. While it remains to this day the established church of England (a decidedly anti-secular notion) it has lost the majority of its political and economic power that it held in Victorian Britain. Spiritualism, during the years of World War I, was an example of how messy secularization could become. As the pages of *Light* will reveal, the process of secularization was neither inevitable nor irreversible. While before the war spiritualism appeared to be drifting away from Christian ideals about God and towards humanistic principles founded on ideas such as the inner greatness of man, once the war began, spiritualism shifted course and argued, among other things, that the Christian notions of an almighty God and a loving, perfect Christ were essential to British society, that the fact of an afterlife was of paramount importance to the fabric of culture, and even that spiritualism should be sponsored by the military and taught as truth to all soldiers to help strengthen their morale.³¹ All these anti-secular ideas sprang from the same newspaper that had slowly diminished the importance of God over the past forty years to a distant and uninvolved being.³²

With respect to modern British society, there are two conflicting viewpoints regarding the timeframe of this secularization process. The first view is that secularization was, by and large, finalized by World War I. One of the major proponents of this viewpoint is Owen Chadwick who writes that Victorian England faced a “now

³¹ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Military Value of Spiritualism” *Light* (May 11, 1918).

³² God is hardly mentioned under the editorship of E.W. Wallis and the beginning of Gow's editorship. Wallis even printed a number of anti-Christian treatises separately from *Light*.

terrible and now liberating, but always tumultuous,” question: “Is Christianity true?”³³ He proposes that this question also contained the inherent proposition that if Christianity was not true, then the state must rid itself once and for all from the faith. Thus, we see the shift from a national faith and church to a personal faith and church, one of the first steps of secularization for a country. Chadwick goes on to place the bulk of this secularization as occurring between 1880 and 1914. He argues not that Christianity left society abruptly and finally but that the words and images of Christianity morphed and changed so drastically that they implied completely different sensations and thoughts than they formerly did. Chadwick states in his conclusion,

The historian knows how powerless are revolutions. And therefore he might underestimate change and fail to mention that something irreversible happened to the past: that though the instinct of religion might be as powerful as ever, and men use hallowed words to express it, yet they begin to understand those words in a new way, often a radically different way...I do not think it an abuse of such a term to call this radical process...secularization.³⁴

Other eminent historians have agreed with Chadwick’s formulation. Hugh McLeod in his various works on Victorian and Edwardian religion agrees with Chadwick that this process was well established by 1914 and implies that it continued on its determined path until present. His *Class and Religion in the Late-Victorian City* proposes that the Church lost its “respectability” during the 1880s and never recovered it,

³³ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), intro.

³⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 265.

leading to its steady and sustained decline.³⁵ In *Religion and Society in England: 1850-1914*, McLeod again finds that the churches entered into a crisis of belief in Edwardian England as the ideas of Protestantism, the authority of the Bible, and the significance of Christian holidays, all ideas that McLeod found were at least, “passively accepted by the majority of people,” began to decline as doubt entered into upper-middle class England along with changing social patterns of more leisure time, less social responsibility, and the removal of the church as the main vehicle for social gatherings.³⁶ These two interpretations are logical implication of the evidence provided and documented by McLeod and Chadwick. The problem is that by stopping at 1914 both historians exclude the Great War, an event that stemmed and even reversed for a time the process of secularization.

Jay Winter is a chief supporter of this belief. In his *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, he takes exception to what he describes as the current “Modernist” view of European cultural history. This viewpoint finds that “Modernism” and all its cultural components (including the continued removal of religion) flourished during and as a result of the Great War. Winter is troubled by this interpretation and concludes instead that the Great War brought a resurgence of “traditional” cultural forms. In relation to bereaving the dead, Winter writes, “It is unacceptable to see the Great War as the moment when ‘modern memory,’ replaced something else, something timeworn and discredited... [something] I have called

³⁵ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late-Victorian City*, (Hamden, CT, Archon Books: 1974), 282.

³⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England: 1850-1914*, (New York, St. Martin’s Press: 1996).

‘traditional’.’³⁷ Other recent works have also endorsed this argument. Peter Bowler in his 2001 study, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain*, discusses the attempts by Anglican clergy and various scientific men to reconcile what they saw as antagonistic theories between science and religion, such as evolution. He points out that these attempts demonstrate both the friendly relationship between Christianity and science that still existed even into the 1930s, and the importance that both fields gave the other.³⁸ The recent study by Callum G. Brown entitled *Religion and Society in 20th Century Britain* argues strongly that secularization was not completed in England until the middle of the twentieth century when even nominal attachment to religious rites, for instance the use of church weddings, was replaced by secular services. Brown argues that Britons, while shifting and growing in some ways, maintained a “consensual Christian culture” which included agreement on such social areas as gender status, piety, and conservative Christian morality (no sex before marriage, saying grace, observing the Sabbath, etc.) up until the upheaval of the 1960s. The revolutions within the 1960s challenged and shattered the “consensus” of society on Christian notions such as gender roles, sexuality, spirituality, and respect for authority³⁹

This thesis is not concerned with the final stages of this process but does provide evidence that secularization in modern Britain still remained incomplete at the end of World War I. The Great War was indeed great in destruction of both men and ideologies. It helped to push the world along to what Modris Eksteins has called our modern

³⁷ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 4-5.

³⁸ Peter Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2001).

³⁹ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 224.

“preoccupation with speed, newness, transience, and inwardness” by relegating “an entire scale of values and beliefs” to the background.⁴⁰ Yet what is also evident in the growth of spiritualism is that these “values” were not easily dismissed and remained viable and attractive options for many people during and after World War I. The message and cultural dialogue of spiritualism changed from the 1880s to the 1920s, but not in drastic ways. The seeker who came to investigate and believe in spiritualism after the War did so for many of the same reasons that a late Victorian man or woman would have, evidence that prewar themes still carried weight and viability. Indeed spiritualism’s popularity blossomed during the 1920s and continued into the late 1930s while its message remained fairly consistent.⁴¹ Its growth is further evidence of what Winter and others have proposed, namely, the resurgence of “traditional” motifs and ideas prevalent in movements such as spiritualism. It was during this great calamity of uncertainty that people sought continuity and tradition, two things which spiritualism provided.

The second problem I found with my beginning question of why the “logical” people of Victorian England spawned the “illogical” movement of spiritualism was that it assumed the terms “science” and “reason” maintained constant meanings throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. In reality these two terms were (and continue to be) intensely contested. During the Victorian and Edwardian periods, these disputes centered on the connected ideas of authority and methodology. It was during this period that science enjoyed a tremendous growth in stature, even spawning a new intellectual

⁴⁰ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), xiv.

⁴¹ See Jenny Hazelgrove, 13-52; who argues that the apex of spiritualism’s popularity was in the late 30s.

scientific class.⁴² With this growth of science and the modern scientist a new interpretation of how one arrives at truth and scientific fact arose. Scientific research and the scientific “truths” that emerged from that research became increasingly specialized, making most realms of science out of reach to the lower classes and most parts of the middle class. This separation was used by scientists, preachers, social revolutionaries, or anyone else who wished to persuade people, as a battleground for ideas. Owen Chadwick has diagramed this in his work *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*. Men such as Ludwig Büchner and Karl Vogt could use science to defend and promote materialism, the belief that all things are matter and the soul does not exist, while others, like the Protestant John William Draper, could use science to attack the dreaded Catholic Church, which he regarded as locked in a cosmic battle between its outdated and unflinching views and science’s proven facts. Chadwick points out that it was not primarily new scientific theories or facts that influenced or change people’s thinking; it was instead the interpretation and manipulation of science to achieve various ends that influenced people. He writes, “The secularizing force was not Darwin the author of the book, or several books. It was Darwin the symbol, Darwin the name that stood for a process, the name that was hurled from one side to the other in the polemics of secularist platforms or journals, imaginary Darwin, a vague Darwin...”⁴³

While the ideas themselves did receive debate among the intelligentsia, the consequences of those ideas formed a much more widespread concern. “Evolution,”

⁴² See for instance, T.W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982).

⁴³ Chadwick, *Secularization*, 174.

“materialism,” “science,” “soul”: what did all these words truly mean for society? Did evolution mean the enlightenment or descent of man? Was all the world only matter or did man contain a soul? These were questions that Spiritualists attempted to answer, joining in the battle over interpretation and truth. Spiritualism developed among this transformation of the intellectual landscape and was one of the cultural movements that fought to redefine scientific truth and methodology in order to gain a place in society for its beliefs. In its attempt to do this it drew from and defined culture in terms borrowed from the new realms of scientific inquiry as well as from the hallowed halls of the early Victorian Protestant Churches. Here, spiritualists believed, between these two vantage points was a fertile space to create and grow the spiritualist movement. To this end the Spiritualist of the late Victorian and Edwardian period in particular viewed science and religion with ambiguity, neither trusting nor forsaking them, but instead finding them both useful tools for promoting the purposes of spiritualism and, at other moments, enemies waiting at the doorstep.

Spiritualism, then, should perhaps be best viewed as an eccentric religious movement, birthed by Christian notions, yet never truly part of the Christian tradition. Victorian religion has undergone extensive historical analysis and perhaps a brief survey will help place spiritualism into a better conceptual framework. Perhaps the most important point about Victorian religion deals with the question of its importance to Victorian and Edwardian Britons. There is considerable disagreement among historians on this issue. Some, such as Hugh McLeod and Jeffery Cox, find religious activities extremely important to the average Victorian, even when church attendance rolls seem to

be dwindling.⁴⁴ Others such as K.S. Inglis argue that the church was relatively unimportant to the Victorian working classes and perhaps mattered less than normally thought to the other classes as well.⁴⁵ Class is, of course, of utmost importance when discussing Victorian religion. Generally speaking, the aristocracy attended High Church, while the middle classes and upper-working classes generally leaned towards the Low Church, Methodist, Baptist, and other Protestant denominations. The lower, less skilled working class rarely frequented church at all. Spiritualism, with some exceptions, tended to be a middle-class phenomenon.⁴⁶

By the end of the 19th century, Victorian Christianity was beginning to encounter what many historians have described as a “crisis” of faith. The reasons for this crisis are multiple but historians tend to agree that by the start of Edwardian society, church attendance was declining rapidly and doubt had taken a strong presence in the public’s view of Christian dogmas on such issues as the infallibility of the Bible, the person of Christ, the idea of creation, and the reality of hell. While the Victorian religious landscape contained a number of diverse Protestant denominations, English Christianity still maintained a general “consensus” on major points of life and as such was involved in the majority of British lives during Victorian England.⁴⁷ D.W. Bebbington has further demonstrated that this religious consensus fell apart in Edwardian Britain. By 1900, according to Bebbington, Britain was composed of individual groups (including religious

⁴⁴ Jeffery Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930*, (London: Oxford University Press: 1982).

⁴⁵ K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England*, (London, Routledge: 1963).

⁴⁶ Logie Barrow’s work, *Plebian Spiritualism* describes another side of spiritualism that was working-class and lower middle-class. In fact these Owenite spiritualists tended to be hostile to orthodoxy Christianity, but still curiously believed in One God and the afterlife.

⁴⁷ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*.

denominations) that no longer cooperated with each other, but instead were more focused on their differences than their similarities.⁴⁸ By the start of World War I, religion in England had become much more splintered and much more challenged. Religious believers were now faced with more doubts without the Late Victorian social “consensus” of belief to support them. Spiritualism’s growth then might be best viewed as the flowering and budding of a diverse religious entity, vying for space, believers, and respectability in the Late Victorian and Edwardian world.

While *Light* could be scattered and inconsistent in its content it did display various trends throughout its years of publishing and these themes will be the focus of this paper. It is striking how strongly the characters and desires of the first three major editors of *Light* – William Stainton Moses, Edmund Dawson Rogers, and E.W. Wallis – bled into the pages of the weekly. The first chapter therefore will be part biographical in nature since it is necessary to look at the cultural and religious experiences of each editors’ upbringing, as well as their conversion experiences to spiritualism, all of which color what each viewed as important to the present and future life of spiritualism. This chapter will also analyze how each of the three editors viewed science and its role in life and spiritualism. Their views of science were the foundation to each person’s theology, social outlook, and life philosophy, and as such touched all aspects of *Light*. This will provide the background for the second chapter which will focus on how the *Light* viewed issues of religion and science such as morality, Christianity, evolution, civilization, and

⁴⁸ D.W. Bebbington, *The Non-Conformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914*, (London, George Allen & Unwin: 1982).

race. Like the first chapter it will cover *Light* from its inception in 1881 till the death of E.W. Wallis in 1914.

The third and final chapter will examine the last major editor of *Light* during the heyday of spiritualism, David Gow, and cover the period from 1914 until the early 1920s. Here the focus will be on how *Light* responded to the outbreak, course, and aftermath of the Great War. This chapter will analyze how David Gow and *Light* presented spiritualism during the horror of World War I, and how, while dealing with the questions the War created, reached backwards to find “traditional” themes of comfort and meaning. The thesis will end with a few closing remarks on where the historian can go from here and how the analysis of *Light* relates to the historiography of Spiritualism and secularization. It is hoped that this study will, like D.D. Home would have wished, shed “light, more light,” on the curious movement known as spiritualism.

CHAPTER ONE

SCIENCE, RELIGION AND THE FIRST THREE EDITORS OF *LIGHT*

The spiritualist weekly newspaper *Light* featured four major editors through its first half-century, Rev. William Stainton Moses, Edmund Dawson Rogers, Edward Walter Wallis, and David Gow. These four men placed their own stamp upon the paper and highlighted various aspects of spiritualism during their tenures. Since spiritualism maintained only one central tenet, that life after death existed, the ways that each man shaped the spiritualist message and responded to cultural elements that impacted that message reveals some of the inner workings of each editor. Each had the opportunity through *Light* to shape the presentation of the story of spiritualism to the way they felt it should be told. The elements of spiritualism and culture that each chose to highlight also demonstrates how spiritualism remained fluid and varied on the particulars of faith such as the need for prayer, spiritualism's exact relationship with Christianity, and the practice of physical Mediumship, among others, while at the same time staying fairly rigid on more general ideas. Perhaps the best example of this is in the way that *Light* dealt with science.

All four editors viewed science as a necessity and a positive force in life, but all of them couched their discussion of science's usefulness in different ways. They debated the authority of the scientist and the methodology of science, each coming to a different basic conclusion. These conclusions about science stemmed from the temperament and character of each editor, as well as events that occurred during their lives. For instance, the mere fact that both E.W. Wallis and William Stainton Moses were acting mediums in

their lifetimes made them suspicious of a science that constantly attacked and exposed mediums as frauds, while Edmund Dawson Rogers, who never was a medium, was not as sensitive to these exposures and expressed more faith in the goodness of science. This chapter will analyze the careers of the *Light*'s first three major editors, Moses, Rogers, and Wallis who led the paper until the outbreak of World War I.¹ By starting with a general biography of each editor as well as their views on science, a proper basis can be laid for the examination of *Light* and its views on evolution, morality, Christianity, and race since the relationship between each editor and his view of science was a cornerstone theme that helped to dictate how most other themes were presented in *Light*.²

One of the first editors of *Light*, William Stainton Moses, was one of the more influential spiritualist and mediums within Britain. He was better known to spiritualists and the public as "M.A. Oxon.," the pseudonym he assumed during his career. He was born on November 5, 1839 at Donnington, in Lincolnshire to William Moses, the headmaster at the local grammar school.³ From an early age it was evident that William was a brilliant child and after graduation from the public school at Bedford he was

¹ Chapter three will deal exclusively with David Gow's editorship, an editorship which began merely a few months before World War I and extended into the 1930s.

²It was, in fact, these visions of science that appealed to many adherents of spiritualism. In this chapter an examination of spiritualism's detest for the scientific and philosophical theory known as materialism, an idea that all the world was composed only of matter, will not be attempted but will be reserved for the introduction to Chapter Two. It is important to first get a grasp on how the *Light* and its editors portrayed and analyzed science for it is, in fact, the same way that they addressed many other problems. They were masters of the middle ground, occupying intellectual space in between various competing theories on many issues. They were also happy to be there, having grabbed what they considered the most valuable parts of each side; they felt that spiritualism was the shining city on a hill built with rationality and, as it turned out, borrowed materials. Each editor used this approach with science in his own way. In the end though, Moses, Rogers, and Wallis disliked science for its seeming propagation that the spirit, and by consequence spiritualism, was a fable.

³ M.A. Oxon, *Spirit Teachings: Memorial Edition* (London, Spiritualist Press: 1894), 8-17. Most of the following biography is based on the biography at the front of the Memorial Edition of *Spirit Teachings* published after Moses' death in 1892. This biography was composed by Mr. Charlton Templeman Speer, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Speer and the student Moses tutored for a number of years.

accepted into Exeter College, Oxford, at the age of nineteen. Moses quickly impressed faculty with his vigorous studies and aptitude for learning, receiving high marks and praise from his teachers (something he had already received at Bedford, including at one point four awards of excellence in a single term⁴). These accolades, however, came at an extensive cost to the physical and mental health of young William. The voracious nature of Moses' will to succeed eventually drove his body and mind to a breaking point. In 1860, as he prepared for his final examinations, he collapsed. The resulting sickness threatened to kill Moses for months and plagued him with frail health the rest of his life. This physical ailment directly restricted his abilities and career paths and indirectly propelled him to spiritualism.

The first step in his conversion occurred on the return trip from a period of recuperation and rest on the continent. On his way home he stopped and dwelt for a half year at an ancient Greek Monastery called "Mount Athos," where the ancient customs of the inhabitants served to enhance Moses' spiritual appetite. Upon completion of his degree from Oxford in 1863 doctors recommended a rural lifestyle for his infirm state so he sought and received ordination and assumed the quiet life of a curacy at Maughold near Ramsey, Isle of Man. There at the age of twenty-four he began a five year stint tending to two parishes. The Rector of the parishes, an older and sickly man himself, was rarely able to maintain his duties and Moses mostly assumed them. It was during this span of his life that Moses further demonstrated his determined and fearless spirit when a plague of smallpox struck his parishioners. Thrust into the midst of death and disease,

⁴ Oxon, *Spirit Teachings*, 8.

Moses acted as doctor, priest, and sometimes undertaker. Charles Templeman Speer relates that “such was the panic” during the outbreak “that it was sometimes found impossible to induce men to dig graves for the dead bodies of the victims...”⁵ Yet Moses “never flinched” and displayed a caring and perhaps reckless kindness towards others that he would carry over into his work with spiritualism. As one close friend and medical advisors phrased it, Moses “was a most lovable character; kind and generous in his every action.”⁶ Another friend described him as possessing a “singularly kindly, gentle, sensitive nature, shrinking rather than assertive and never aggressive.” Lord Tennyson eloquently branded him “the sweetest soul that ever look’d with mortal eyes,” in a song written in commemoration of Moses’s death.⁷

As kind and generous as he was, Moses remained physically weak and the stress of running two parishes forced a move to the curacy at Douglas, Isle of Man. Here he obtained a pastorate at St. George’s Church and made the acquaintance of Dr. Stanhope Speer and his wife. It was a friendship that was to transform Moses into what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle later called “one of the greatest mediums in all ways that England has ever produced.”⁸ Once again it was Moses’ sickly nature that brought him to Speer when congestion of the liver placed Moses on bed rest shortly after arriving at St. George’s. Speer, a retired doctor, cared for Moses and succeeded in bringing about a full recovery. The friendship remained even when Moses was transferred to Dorsetshire and from there

⁵ Oxon, *Spirit Teachings*, 9.

⁶ J. Arthur Hill, *Spiritualism: Its History, Phenomena and Doctrine* (London: Cassell and Company, LTD., 1918), 67.

⁷ Elliot Coues, “William Stainton Moses,” *Light* November 5th, 1892; and Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Peace, Come Away,” *Light* November 5th, 1892.

⁸ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The New Revelation: My Personal Investigation of Spiritualism* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), 52.

to Salisbury. This was the last Christian post Moses held. His feeble physical state again drove a wedge in his plans and an infection of the throat forced him to retire from preaching and seek a more restful occupation. His connection to the Church effectively severed, Moses took up residency in London at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Speer.

By this time, Moses was moving from orthodoxy towards agnosticism and questions of faith made for lively discussions between Moses and Dr. Speer. In 1871, when Mrs. Speer fell ill and was confined to her room for three months, she chanced to read a spiritualist work by Dale Owen entitled *The Debatable Land*. She was so intrigued by the supposed spiritual phenomena described in the work that she commissioned the help of Moses to research spiritualism. Moses was initially skeptical, but after reading Owens found his curiosity and religious sensibilities stirred. He embarked on a journey into spiritualism that would eventually culminate in his own conversion and his rise to the ranks of Britain's elite mediums and spiritualist spokesmen.

Moses' conversion to spiritualism and his propagation of spiritualism were both characterized by a spirit of plebianism and simplicity. One of his favorite sayings, "few men are important, no one is necessary," summed up his vantage point excellently. He constantly maintained that all men or women could be mediums, though some had more powers than others.⁹ In fact starting on February 16, 1884 and running weekly for months and then sporadically thereafter, *Light* printed a spiritualist tract written by Moses entitled "Advice to Inquirers." Within the treatise is a detailed do-it-yourself manual for séances. It prompts the circle to gather together and "form a circle of from four to eight

⁹ "William Stainton Moses," *Light* September 10th, 1892.

persons, of whom half, or at least two, should be negative, passive temperament, and preferably of the female sex.” This small, often family circle was an example of “ideal” spiritualism untainted by the probes of harsh scientist and cold naysayers.¹⁰ This intimate simple circle, where loved ones “live again in holiest communion with their dead,” and “simple folks,” with “overmastering Faith,” represented the “very core and kernel” of the movement. “So long as these do not fail from amongst us,” Moses wrote, “I have no fear – we shall never lack spiritualists.”¹¹ Faith, though, was not everything, and Moses was also quick to warn against divorcing reason from spiritualist activities. He urged all seekers to “maintain a level head and a clear judgment. Do not believe everything you are told...never for a moment abandon the use of your reason.”¹²

This simplicity of spiritualism was evident to Moses even in the way the movement began. He found that the great number of pioneers and faithful adherents of spiritualism came not from the ranks of scientists, philosophers, or professors, but from the “simpler and plainer folk.” Just as Christ used the common fisherman of his time to start a revolution, Moses argued, spiritualism sprang from seekers who were “not concerned with logical definitions and exact modes of thought.”¹³ The “educated and cultured mind” maintained too much of a critical spirit for him or her to grab hold of

¹⁰ Even with all the talk of spiritualism’s adherence to facts and foundation of proof, there is a strain within Moses’ and Rogers’ writings that applauds and holds up as an ideal the simple “faith” of a private circle, a faith that is applauded because it, “never dreamed of bunging up the living water with deadly doubts.” (“Spiritualists and Psychological Research”, *Light* (April 10, 1897)) Perhaps they idealized this simple faith because they felt it was something they lacked; that spiritualism for them was an intellectual battle, not a religious conviction. Whatever the reason, it is interesting to note that for Moses and Rogers perhaps the purest form of spiritualism was based not on tested methods and scientifically proven psychical events, but on faith in one’s own experiences and belief in a medium’s power.

¹¹ M.A. (Oxon), *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*, (London: E.W. Allen & Co., 1880), 11.

¹² M.A. Oxon, “Advice to Inquirers,” *Light* (London) Feb. 16th, 1884.

¹³ Oxon, *Higher*, 16-7.

spiritualism and accept its phenomena fully. For Moses the pure faith of a grieved family who practiced spiritualism privately within the home was the ideal setting for true spiritualism. There the restrictive gaze and limitations of laboratory study and modern science would be removed to allow the free movement of spiritualist phenomena and séances. Indeed, it was “not in the laboratory of the scientist, or amid the experiments of learned and scientific bodies” that spiritualism was born or first exhibited, but rather “in the homes of those who have no other claim to a public acceptance of their record than that they have ears to hear and eyes to see with” that the evidence of eternity came with “startling force.”¹⁴

It was within a private circle that Moses began his own séance experience. He and the Speers began to attend the circle of Lottie Fowler before branching out to the much more well-known and public mediums, Charles Williams and D.D. Homes. The experiences at these séances led to the growth of Moses’ own mediumistic powers and his first attempts at holding his own circle. He soon gained a reputation as one of the more powerful and impressive mediums within London and England. During his private sittings and even during other mediums’ séances, Moses produced physical manifestations such as raps, lights, musical instruments playing without human interference, matter passing through closed doors into the séance room, table-tilting, lifting, and levitating. In one situation during “broad daylight,” Moses was relaxing at the table of his friend Sergeant Cox merely reading the *Times*. Suddenly the giant table

¹⁴ Oxon, *Higher*, 17.

began to sway and shake “so violently as almost to dislocate the big pillar-like legs.” The table began to seesaw back and forth, rising and falling in rhythm.¹⁵

Moses, however, regarded physical manifestations as one of the baser and less beneficial elements of the spiritualist movement. In his work *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*, he lamented that spiritualism was viewed by the masses as “grotesque convulsions of furniture” and “general absurdity.”¹⁶ “I believe the whole method of conducting materialization séances to be erroneous,” Moses wrote and “calculated to introduce elements of uncertainty, and to produce the results which we are compelled again and again to deplore. In the interests of all concerned these methods should...be abandoned.”¹⁷ Yet Moses continued to demonstrate physical powers through his Mediumship almost as if the spiritualist phenomena followed him without his consent, naturally flocking to his innate psychic power. He even had to forego attending certain séances since his presence would “act as a disturbing element in other circles, and bring away disturbing influences to our own [circle].”¹⁸ Mrs. Speer records how one Sunday morning and afternoon raps, taps, and spiritual miracles followed Moses incessantly. She writes

During the time we were at church, raps were heard by each member of the circle in different parts of the pew in which we were all sitting. On our return Mr. S. Moses found on his bed three things removed from his dressing table, and placed in the form of a cross on his bed...He then locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and left the room vacant

¹⁵ “Proceedings,” *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, vol. ix., pp. 259-260.

¹⁶ Oxon, *Higher*, 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

¹⁸ Oxon, *Spirit Teachings*, 48.

for a time. We went to dinner, and during our meal the large dining-table, covered with glass, china, etc., repeatedly moved, tilted and rapped; it seemed to be full of life and motion... We paid several visits to the locked-up room, and each time found an addition had been made to the cross... Each time we went into the room raps occurred.¹⁹

Physical manifestations for Moses were however to become secondary to his prolific experience and writings done through the process of direct spirit-writing, a mediumistic power that allowed Spirits to communicate through a medium's hand.²⁰ It was through this spiritualist method that Moses would pen under the name M.A. Oxon. numerous works including *Spirit Teachings*, probably the most important religiously-focused spiritualist work and sometimes referred to as the "Bible of Spiritualism."²¹ Even without the use of direct-writing, the Rev. William Stainton Moses was also a leader in the religious aspects of spiritualism. This intense focus on the religious, theological, and moral implications of spiritualism also exhibited itself through the disdain and scorn for science he exhibited in his writings. This distrust of strict science, particularly when it drew its piercing gaze upon spiritualist mediums, is easy to see in all of Moses' works including his editorship of *Light*. Science was the harbinger and champion of spiritualism's archenemy, materialism. As such, science represented for Moses an insidious outsider that probed soul-filled questions while remaining soulless itself. "Science knows nothing of Soul," Moses wrote in a tract in 1877 on the alleged

¹⁹ Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism: Vol. 2*, 27.

²⁰ Later in his life Moses even wrote a book on the process, a process he named Psychography. See *Psychography: A Treatise on One of the Objective Forms of Psychic or Spiritual Phenomena*, M.A. Oxon., (London: The Psychological Press Association; 1882).

²¹ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 78.

exposure of a physical medium named Henry Slade.²² Moses, like many other spiritualists, claimed that the intrusive methods of science and the negative attitudes and nature of those present at the séance combined to create an atmosphere disruptive to spiritual communion. As long as the scientist came with a critical spirit and a hardened heart, the conditions of the séance would automatically either render the medium powerless or bring mischievous and malignant spirits to the circle.

While science was a dangerous outsider, it was not the rationality or logic of science that Moses frowned upon. He repeatedly insisted that those who approached spiritualism must draw near only with their mind fully engaged. He noted that while spiritualism had been driven in its early stages by “enthusiasm and zeal, which does not stop to reason,” it had thankfully come to be guided by “discriminating and calm judgment.”²³ The reasoned gaze of science was different. Moses felt that it failed to meet spiritualism on a level playing field, so to speak, and instead of examining psychical phenomena as a normal seeker would (go to a séance, check under the table, watch the medium, etc.) it insisted on dissecting spiritualism with its own set of rules and from its own supposed intellectual perch. In other words, science lacked faith. It had the habit of viewing psychical phenomenon as a completely material occurrence, while spiritualists believed it to be the work of forces outside of the physical realm. The key word, of course, is *believed*, for they had no solid proof, and could never actually gain any real

²² Oxon, *Higher*, 112. In the case, Slade, who had made his name by placing blank sheets of paper into a sealed box which were later removed full of writing, was caught secretly removing the blank sheets of paper and writing the letters himself.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

proof. They could discover the effects of the spiritual world through séances, mediums, and such; but the actual spirit itself would, and must, remain a mystery.

How could science, Moses reasoned, which prided itself on materialistic definitions and discoveries, ever truly study and test a spiritual reality outside of its realm of knowledge? “Did a scalpel ever discover a spirit?” Moses would ask again and again.²⁴ The blame thus fell on science for its refusal to believe in the existence of that spiritual world. Instead, Moses felt, science had brazenly thrust itself into the task of discovering the “reality” behind the “spiritual” façade of psychic phenomenon and to this end it mistreated and degraded the spiritualist movement. It was this type of scientific investigation that Moses vehemently opposed. In his choice of publication in the “letters to the editor” section in the *Light* and his selection of articles reprinted from other sources, Moses attempted to define science as ineffective and ill-suited for the study of spiritualism. One article by J.H. Mitchiner shows the disgust of science in its title, “Human Testimony is valueless if the strong evidence is to be ignored by science.”²⁵

This battle over the correct position of science in relation to truth and spirituality is effectively demonstrated by *Light*'s coverage of William Crookes and his investigations of spiritualism through the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), an organization that was concerned with proving or disproving through scientific experiments the many supposed powers of the medium. For Moses, Crookes exemplified a reasonable scientific investigator, one who approached spiritualist phenomena with an

²⁴ William Stainton Moses, “Notes by the way,” *Light* October 16th 1886.

²⁵ J.H. Mitchiner, “Human Testimony is valueless if the strong evidence is to be ignored by science,” *Light* October 16th, 1886.

open mind and an understanding that the ways of the soul do not conform perfectly to the strict definitions of the scientist. It also did not hurt that Crookes became convinced that spiritualism was real. Moses reprinted an article that Crookes wrote about his investigation with the medium D.D. Homes in the January 11, 1890 edition of *Light* expressly to convey what true science should look like:

Mr. Crookes concludes his introductory remarks by stating that his object in publication now is to induce competent observers to repeat similar experiments with accuracy and *in a dispassionate spirit*. The words which we have italicized are very important. For the eye often sees what the observer brings with him; and a dominant antagonistic will can easily demonstrate that in its presence nothing of a psychical nature can occur.

Experience should have long ago taught us so much as that. Credulity is bad, but there is a credulity of incredulity which is worse. ‘The dispassionate spirit’ let us have by all means.²⁶

Crookes was the ideal of scientific research into spiritualism because he approached this task not only with tools and instruments, but also with no predispositions against spiritualism. He possessed a “mind [that] is open to the truth,” because he enjoys “spiritual insight... [un]darkened by prejudice or dwarfed by bigotry and partisanship.”²⁷ Moses himself described Crookes as a “true man of science,” and an “honorable exception” to the scientists who conducted “so-called scientific investigations” on spiritualism. “Would there were more!” he lamented.²⁸

²⁶ “Mr. Crookes on Psychical Research,” *Light* January 11th, 1890.

²⁷ J.D. Buck, “Science V. Spiritualism,” *Light* September 19th, 1891.

²⁸ William Stainton Moses, “Notes by the Way,” *Light* March 15th, 1890.

This yearning for a more faith-filled science was a reflection of the focus that Moses was to give *Light* under his tutelage. He would use the paper to push for a greater emphasis on the combination of Christian themes with spiritualism, a topic that will be examined in more depth in Chapter Two. Moses's approach was not, however, followed by his successor, the long-time business manager for *Light*, Edmund Dawson Rogers. Intent to place the spiritualist movement on a steady footing, supported by proven, scientific fact, Rogers shifted *Light's* emphasis to reason rather than religion. It was his own personal journey to spiritualism that dictated the aspects of science which he highlighted during his editorship.

Edmund Dawson Rogers was born on August 7th, 1823, at Holt, Norfolk into a poor, broken family. His father left the family when Rogers was still young and the family survived off an allowance given by one of his uncles and a small school his mother ran from the house. His mother was a devout Wesleyan Methodist, but Edmund was forced to attend the East Anglican Parish Church due to his attendance at the affiliated Grammar School, the Sir Thomas Gresham Grammar School. At the school he studied Latin and Greek and picked up the use of shorthand, a skill that would ease his later transition to writing and reporting.²⁹

As a young man, Rogers worked as an apprentice with the local chemist and pharmacist. In 1843, at the age of twenty, Rogers married and began his spiritual and intellectual conversion to spiritualism. At the time he was still by his own admission “a devout Wesleyan,” but “by nature a thinker, and therefore, perhaps, a doubter. I became

²⁹ Rogers, *Life*, 9. The following biographical material comes almost exclusively from this work unless otherwise cited.

very anxious as to my possible salvation.”³⁰ An acquaintance introduced him to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish mystic whose writings, which he felt were transmitted to him by divine revelation, were to become the foundational text that lead many people to spiritualism. After reading Swedenborg, Rogers came to realize that he “could not rationally accept the doctrine of atonement,” and in “great distress” he abandoned the doctrine of the Wesleyan Church.³¹ During this time of personal soul-searching, Rogers moved to Wolverhampton to work as an assistant to a surgeon. His yearnings for spiritual and psychic knowledge continued to drive him to new studies and a lecture on mesmerism by a Dr. Adair in 1845, prompted him to attempt the practice himself. He was successful in his attempt and cured a man with a palpitation of the heart. Like many other spiritualists before and after him, Rogers’ investigations into mesmerism would provide him with a stepping stone to spiritualism. Less mysterious than spiritualism, mesmerism championed the existence of the soul as an entity outside of the material body. Rogers first attended mesmerism séances and lectures, which could include spiritualist phenomenon (such as clairvoyance, or the ability to witness actions happening anywhere in the world at that moment, and premonition, or the ability to see into the future) among other tests. Once Rogers and others believed in the powers of

³⁰ Rogers, *Life*, 10.

³¹ Swedenborg argued among other things that the orthodox idea of the “atonement”, that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and died for the sins of the world in order to reconcile God to man, as a false assumption. His writings were also a precursor for spiritualism because they supposable came from the spiritual plane, transmitted through visions. There discussion of the spiritual side of the world is along the same lines of spiritualism promotion of the world “beyond the veil.”

mesmerism and the borderline supernatural feats that it could accomplish then it was a much easier leap into the more fantastic claims of spiritualism.³²

His appetite whetted, Rogers was soon driven to leave his work in Wolverhampton due to the poor salary and took up residence in the Staffordshire Potteries, working for a local paper the *Staffordshire Mercury*. While in the Potteries, Rogers was drawn to and befriended a number of religious vagabonds including Joseph Barker, a religious thinker who had been kicked out of the Methodist Church and had founded his own organization called “the Christian Brethren;” Travis Madge, a wealthy maverick who lived in poverty in order to help the poor; and Enoch Travis, a young potter who, while deeply religious, was unable to believe in an afterlife. The *Staffordshire Mercury* quickly fizzled and he moved the family to Norwich in 1848 (the same year the spiritualist movement began in New York with the Fox sisters), where he received a position with the *Norfolk News*, a paper in Norwich with Liberal-Radical leanings. It was here in Norwich that Rogers’s experiences and leanings toward spiritualism progressed into his eventual conversion.

³² For a comprehensive coverage of Mesmerism in Britain during the Victorian era see Allison Winter, *Mesmerized*. Although the term “mesmerism” was associated with a number of different movements, they all stemmed from the idea that one person could have “power” intellectually, physically, and even morally, over another person. This was a distinct difference between mesmerism and spiritualism; the former was portrayed as a test of wills, if the one (usually a man) could place the subject into a trance than they had demonstrated their superiority over the subject, the latter, on the other hand, was the opposite, a medium that could draw a spirit to the table or enter into a trance allowing the spirit to talk through them showed a moral sensitivity that was viewed as superb by believers in spiritualism. For a treatment of the popular notions of both see Louise Henson’s article “‘Half Believing, Half Incredulous’: Elizabeth Gaskell, Superstition, and the Victorian Mind,” in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* Vol. 24 (3) 2002, pp. 251-269. Mesmerism could be used as a sideshow event, a scientific experiment, as a cure for various ills, and even a religious faith. It became somewhat meshed with spiritualism in the late Victorian years since both were practiced in séances. It also argued for the existence of a soul, something that every spiritualist cheered.

Rogers's transition to spiritualism entered its final stage in 1865 when he made the acquaintance of an invalid woman named "Miss A." In this relationship, Rogers's trials with mesmerism were converted into full-scale spiritualistic events. Miss A. suffered from an incurable disease that rendered her bed-ridden and wracked her body with physical pain. Rogers asked a mutual friend, the Rev. Dr. Bailey, to recommend that Miss A. allow Rogers to attempt mesmerism on her in an effort to ease her constant suffering. She consented and Rogers succeeded in placing her into trances during which her pain would vanish temporarily. The apparent supernatural powers of mesmerism gave Miss A. confidence that she could confide in Rogers about her own "abnormal experiences."³³ During the next eight years, Miss A. demonstrated to Rogers some of her spiritual powers including premonitions, clairvoyance, and visions of the spiritual plane. She could see a storm arriving while the sky was still clear, or hear the thoughts of a friend miles away. The tender lady opened her life to Rogers, and Rogers drank his fill, gaining proof of some of his previous convictions.³⁴ At the same time, he also received his first taste of the séance. While Miss A. was mesmerized she would remark that she could see spirits, and during one visit, one such spirit reported to be the stillborn child of Rogers. This incident made such an impact on his life that he soon after formed his own family circle and attempted to contact his daughter's spirit himself. With Miss A.,

³³ Rogers, *Life*, 20. This confidence is further proof of the link between mesmerism and spiritualism. Miss A. correctly believed that if Rogers considered mesmerism, with its unorthodox and extraordinary claims and practices, to be true, than he would be receptive to her more outlandish experiences. Without his introduction to mesmerism first, Rogers may have written off spiritualism as false and be done with it. But his belief in mesmerism helped to soften the impact of spiritualist claims, and prompted him to engage further to test the waters and discover the truth for him self.

³⁴ In his autobiography, Rogers ties most of his experiences with Miss A. back to ideas promoted by Emanuel Swedenborg. Miss A. helped to prove the validity of Swedenborg's writings and in turn, provided proof and a deeper conviction in Rogers that his faith in the gospel proposed by Swedenborg was well placed.

Rogers' mesmerism became his spiritualism, and vice versa. The delicate powers of mesmerism enhanced and complemented Miss A.'s mediumistic power. Spiritualism appeared to Rogers to be nothing more than a continuation of mesmerism, and as such, deserved just attention and examination.

With every new proof of a spiritual plane that Miss A.'s visions provided, Rogers found a verified belief. He brought himself to firm conclusions only after he felt they rested on proven ground, ground that Rogers trod and examined himself. "I have sat with every British medium of note," he later remarked, "...and I have seen every phase of phenomena, and that under test conditions. I began my investigation into spiritualism with a belief that the phenomena were trickery, but I discovered their genuineness...Facts are facts."³⁵ Time after time, his reminiscences, like an Aesop fable, are closed with a learned moral or belief gained from the occasion. In his autobiography (gathered together by his interviewer, the later editor of *Light*, David Gow) Rogers would reflect on specific instances of his life where he learned a valuable lesson. A mesmerism session might have disprove phrenology, or a séance experience could demonstrate that thoughts were solid at times, that sleep is a time of communion between spirits, that every person holds an aura that tells their character, and that evil spirits were limited by another power.³⁶ Through such a method of collecting beliefs, Rogers, and spiritualists in general, tended to collect convictions in an entropic manner.

Over the years his "collection" continued to grow. In 1869, Rogers traveled to the nerve center of English spiritualism, London, intent on sitting in on a séance with the

³⁵ Rogers, *Life*, 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-59.

famous D.D. Home. Daniel David Home was by then a world-famous British medium who had exhibited extraordinary physical manifestations including levitation, passing matter through matter, and materialization (the process that a spirit becomes matter in a séance). Rogers succeeded in gaining entrance to a séance and was treated to flying accordions, levitating tables, and tumultuous raps. Rogers, ever the tester in need of personal proof, took the opportunity to examine the manifestations to his satisfaction. In another séance, he even nearly ruined the spirit-communication by abducting the glass tube through which the spirits would communicate. His conviction grew with every proof and by the 1870 he could confidently inform his employer that “he could not give up [his] faith [in spiritualism] under any circumstances,” even if it meant the loss of his job.³⁷

In 1873, Rogers moved his family to London to begin work at the “National Press Agency,” a press agency he had established to disseminate Liberal political news. It was during the same time that talk began of forming a national spiritualist organization centered in London. The idea led to two consecutive organizations, both of which failed, the British National Association of Spiritualists (BNAS) and the Central Association of Spiritualists (CAS), respectively. *Light* itself was formed during the brief reign of the CAS and was continued and expanded when the CAS was disbanded and consolidated into the smaller, more effective London Spiritualist Alliance (LSA) in 1884. The small committee was composed of some of the major players in the London spiritualist scene including Dawson Rogers, Stainton Moses, J.S. Farmer (a medium, writer of an English

³⁷ Rogers, *Life*, 41.

dictionary of slang, and first editor of *Light*), and Dr. Albert Speer. The LSA had humble beginnings and numbered 109 members at the outset.³⁸ This was a significantly lower number than the BNAS, but still a relatively large spiritualist organization.³⁹ At one specific LSA meeting in 1900, the speech drew at least 238 men and women.⁴⁰ By 1920, however, the LSA had grown to around 1,500 members.⁴¹ Yet even this number must have been much lower than the total amount of people affiliated with the LSA given that many people would have considered themselves part of the LSA, even attending meetings and reading *Light*, without ever paying the membership fee. When Rogers assumed the editorship of *Light* in 1894 after the death of Moses in 1892 and a brief editorship by W. Paice, (also known as MA Lond.), he further attempted to solidify *Light* as a respectable paper, suitable for the refined tastes of the middle and upper-classes of London and Britain.

While Stainton Moses lauded the simple faith of the average spiritualist in his editorship of *Light*, Rogers' editorship tended to launch attacks against a blind adherence to faith or superstition. His insistence on trying all beliefs personally before believing made for a long learning curve, but eliminated the room for doubt. In fact Rogers never wavered from spiritualism after he convinced himself that it was the truth. In his eulogy for Rogers, the Rev. John Page Hopps stated, "He had made a glorious discovery. He had found...that the seen and unseen worlds could blend...and he said so, and he kept on

³⁸ *Light* (March 15, 1884).

³⁹ The B.N.A.S. numbered in 1875 over 400 at its height. The bitter split from the BNAS and latter the CAS probably contributed to the decreased figures for the start of the LSA.

⁴⁰ *Light* (April 20, 1900).

⁴¹ David Gow, *Spiritualism: Its Position and Its Prospects: A Record and A Summary* (London: The London Spiritualist Alliance, Ltd., 1920), 21.

saying so, and never flinched.”⁴² He possessed, as a future editor of *Light* would call it, a “sanity of outlook” that practiced temperance in thought and action.⁴³ He therefore strove to prove through *Light* that spiritualism represented the proven fact of spirit existence and continuance, not the fanatical nuthouse it was portrayed as in the mainstream press.⁴⁴ With such in mind, he presented the weekly paper as refined, dignified, always level-headed, and representative of the upper class. He was the only one of the four major editors during the first forty years of the paper to publicly announce his real name as editor of the paper, a move that signified both the level of confidence Rogers had in his convictions and his urge to make the paper and spiritualism credible.

It was this drive for rationality that shifted the paper away from the spiritual emphasis it had exhibited under Moses. In its place was a cautious call to reason and skepticism through which Rogers hoped to defend his convictions and those of spiritualism by logic, not intuition and emotion. Yet he did not steer as far as some contemporaries. For instance, the Society for Psychical Research veered heavily towards cynicism and pessimism, what Rogers termed “a manifest desire that it should lead to a disproof of our position.”⁴⁵ To Rogers, *Light* in contrast represented a more receptive and open mind, a mind that sought, as its slogan expressed, “Light, more Light” to find

⁴² Rogers, *Life*, 61.

⁴³ David Gow, “An Old Chief,” *Light* October 15th, 1910.

⁴⁴ Take for instance these various articles, “Spiritualistic Exposure,” *Times* (London) September 14, 1882, pg.7; “Thought Reading in St. Petersburg,” *Times* (London) December 26, 1884, pg. 11; “Charge Against a Spiritualist,” *Times* (London) December 4, 1880, pg. 11; and “Proceedings in Lunacy have Recently Occupied,” *Times* (London) April 10, 1884, pg. 9. The last article calls spiritualists nutty and finds they “fiercely resent the intrusion of a breath of common sense into their meetings.”

⁴⁵ Rogers, *Life*, 47

the hidden truth.⁴⁶ Light was to stream in from all around, but Rogers was to make sure it only came from proven sources. Intellect, not emotion; caution, not zealotry, would rule the movement.

Science, then, would find a ready place in *Light* during Rogers's editorship. In reality, it was for Rogers the foundation upon which spiritualism's power and truth rested. Spiritualism would, for Rogers, have to grow like science had through trial, error and accumulated knowledge. All research into psychical matters also needed to be carried through with an open but critical mind. The blind adherence to any and all spirit teachings was "not only unwise, but very risky."⁴⁷ Wisdom was not gained by an unrestrained mind. From this perspective, Roger presented *Light* as a paper devoted to the highest standards of veracity and tempered in opinion and belief. "We maintain that 'LIGHT' is critical," Rogers asserted, "and no one can truthfully say it rushes into credulous courses."⁴⁸ "We are spiritualists because we are rationalist," Rogers reasoned, "The rationalist says, 'I can believe only what I, in some form, know.'" Here faith must be proven and the object of belief "must be in the region of experiment." The end of the article summarized the core desire of Rogers for spiritualists: "We do not want to walk by faith only: we want proof and sight."⁴⁹

Proof and sight, these were the two cries for certainty that emulated constantly from Rogers and *Light*. It was the express belief of Rogers that life, spirituality, and

⁴⁶ As already stated in the introduction this line was originally from Goethe yet also has a long history in Spiritualist circles. D.D. Home used it to demand more light be allowed into the séance room in a call against "false" mediums that acted in the dark. The famous female medium, Emma Hardinge Britton, also used the phrase in one of her last speeches.

⁴⁷ "Notes by the Way," *Light*, January 7th, 1899.

⁴⁸ "Spiritualists and Psychical Research," *Light* April 10th, 1897.

⁴⁹ "Our Christian Neighbors," *Light* January 21st, 1899.

morality were ultimate definable and knowable, not only intuitively, but also verifiably. He may have even believed that spiritualism represented the final page of the religious drama and the questions of life. Spiritualism, along with the late Victorian ideas of rationalism, science, and civilization had for Rogers perfectly demonstrated how the man and the world should function. In an editorial named “Have we a Gospel?” these four pillars of spiritualism, rationalism, science, and civilization are presented as having framed the purpose and path of life. These “blessed modern helpers” trained mankind with laws that governed the universe. Science “taught us that God works everything through laws, Civilization brought home to us the sense of justice; Rationalism trained us to trust the verifying faculties; spiritualism put into its right place the glorious doctrine of evolution.”⁵⁰ Spiritualism showed that evolution did not end in death but continued on eternally in the spiritual progress of man in the afterlife. Spiritualism then, in the light of science, was the final peg in the puzzle of life.

Science was to Rogers a curious mix of friend and foe. He (and Moses for that matter) had a profound respect for the gains and discoveries made by science in every field, except its forays into psychical research. Science and its discoveries were lauded repeatedly within *Light* during his editorship. One article called the spread of scientific knowledge “marvelous,” and Rogers himself in a speech at an LSA lecture referred to science’s discoveries in chemistry in glowing terms: “Science is counting, weighing, and measuring the stars, and even solving the riddle of their chemical composition, enlarging our views by the contemplation of the immensity of space, and sobering our minds by the

⁵⁰ “Have We a Gospel,” *Light* February 18th, 1899.

thought by the humiliating insignificance of our little world.”⁵¹ In the first issue of *Light* the lead article pays honor to science, particularly physicists who had “successfully invaded from all sides the Kingdom of nature, and widened the domain of human knowledge.” It continues to state that the spiritualist will “[render] willingly all honor and homage to the great works accomplished by his brother, the physicist,” but still believes that more work is needed.⁵²

Yet when science did venture to probe the spirit world, Rogers felt its grasp was too firm. He viewed and envied the respect that science commanded from the general public and sought to align spiritualism with the great discipline, but only to a point. Science in his view had a nasty habit of dealing harshly with delicate spiritual matters, things that needed a gentle and open hand. Rogers vented regularly through *Light*, much like Moses before him, the faults of science. In one article written by a supposed member of the Society of Psychical Research (SPR), the writer demands that science look at spiritualist phenomena with an open mind. He writes,

There is, probably, greater nonsense talked, and promulgated, under the name of science than exists in all the fairy tales that delight the nursery...[Scientists believe that] *To arrive at truth we must investigate each subject in accordance with the laws which appertain to that special subject...*Spiritualism is a subject which presents more subtle and complicated laws than any which the world has hitherto had to deal with...For professors of orthodox science to attempt to teach experienced Spiritualists how to investigate a subject which Spiritualist have alone worked out, partakes of the character

⁵¹ Rev. John Page Hopps, “A Scientific and Spiritual Basis”; and Edmund Dawson Rogers, “Mr. Dawson Rogers on Perplexities,” *Light* (March 20, 1890).

⁵² “Our Principles and Purposes,” *Light* (January 2, 1881).

of grandmamma, the child, and the egg. If these ‘professors’ wish to get off their rocking-horses, and are willing to advance, they would do well to practically carry out the motto, *Experto crede*.⁵³

According to Rogers, science and its followers looked upon spirit phenomena with overly critical eyes and predisposed minds. They possessed “an antagonistic condition,” and held “groundless suspicions,” that all mediums were phonies.⁵⁴

Rogers further defined science in other articles and editorials as narrow and unfair. It conducted experiments in “restrictive” settings that hemmed the medium and the spirits into boxes and rules, while demanding proof. While Rogers sought the respect that legitimate scientific research could bring to spiritualism, he also praised the private home circle, which allowed the medium freedom to communicate with unhampered spirits by creating an open and pleasant séance. Rogers felt that “John and Mary, in the little room behind the shop, may have access to powers and conduct experiments which would make Psychical Researchers stare.”⁵⁵ In this “little back parlor,” or “homely kitchen,” the reality of spiritualism was made manifest.⁵⁶

What does it matter, if John and Mary call things by the wrong names, and never dreamed of bunging up the living water with deadly doubts? They really test the phenomena thoroughly, persistently and patiently, year after year, *and let them have their own way*. So, without knowing it, their methods are the methods of true science. They are the best of Psychical Researchers.⁵⁷

⁵³“An old Investigator,” “The Scientific investigation of Spiritual Phenomena,” *Light* June 19th 1897.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ “Spiritualist and Psychical Research,” *Light* April 10th, 1897.

⁵⁶ “O Science, Hear Us!” *Light* November 9th, 1895.

⁵⁷ “Spiritualist and Psychical Research.”

Although Rogers did not believe that science was inherently flawed, he contended that it had been overrun by the materialist viewpoint and remained narrow and dogmatic. Science had donned blinkers that might “keep it undistracted, and not make it nervous,” but blinded it from the grander discovery of spiritual things. If “Science might venture to take off its blinkers,” it would find the claims of spiritualism indeed true, though perhaps unexplainable, and to paraphrase Shakespeare “might discover, to its great gain, that not only are there more things in heaven and on earth than were ever dreamt of in its philosophy, but that all these undreamt of things throw a glorious light upon every one of the things it ever believed or thought it knew.”⁵⁸ Science, then, had to become less scientific to gain knowledge. The “great god Science” with its air of superiority had so bound itself with laws and procedures, that Rogers felt it had to adjust radically its vantage point to see the simple truths of spiritualism.⁵⁹ This reasoning is on full display in a response to a *Times* of London article that criticized the methods of the SPR as unscientific. Rogers in a tone of open caustic glee joyfully relates the irony of the criticism that the SPR has received since the SPR continually criticized mediums and spiritualists as frauds and non-scientific. He writes,

So then, after all, it does not look as though there were a great gulf between them and us. In truth, the poor despised Spiritualist Samaritan seems indistinguishable from the most orthodox Psychical Jew...Pharisee and Publican are all one to [the world]. Anyhow, it is instructive and amusing to watch this little comedy, and to observe the spurious colored lights thrown upon the scene...They might just as well been with us, as Spiritualists. We

⁵⁸ “Science in Blinkers,” *Light* October 25th, 1902.

⁵⁹ “O Science, Hear Us!”

get no worse treatment. In fact, we think we are taken more seriously by the world...The poor Spiritualist may be less scientific –though that depends on what ‘scientific’ means— but they are more sympathetic. They may be less analytical, but they are more receptive. They may be less learned, but they are more patient. They may not be as masterful, but they are more teachable...⁶⁰

Science, for Rogers, could learn from the spiritualist in both knowledge and posture. Science with its “lonely island” and private “cave” which examined all things with a rigid method was unable to discover the hidden mysteries of spiritualism.⁶¹ Yet it was not to be abandoned, for too much still rested on its shoulders. Rogers felt that while science may be “over-rated,” it was still necessary for spiritualism to gain its blessing. He wrote, “And yet we are strongly in favor of Science grappling with this subject – not because we think Science is the umpire, nor because the ways of Science are the ways of the Spirit; but simply because Science has enormous influence.”⁶² Rogers felt that only with a scientific influence could spiritualism gain a steady footing and an honorable platform on which to place its beliefs.

The platform though was not to be made only by science and for all Rogers’ traits of shrewdness and caution, he still maintained a touch of mystical spirituality. While he often, “err[ed] on the side of caution” and would rather “under-state an incident, than make a claim that he felt he could not substantiate,” he also found that wisdom was not

⁶⁰ *Light* June 19, 1897.

⁶¹ “O Science, Hear Us!”

⁶² *Ibid.*

gained entirely through experiment.⁶³ Some came through other means, though only after the initial belief was firmly grounded in fact. Occasionally higher knowledge might remain unknowable. When *Light* refuted a writer in the *Philosophical Journal* who found God to be impersonal it did so by arguing outside of the realms of empiric fact:

It seems to us that the personality of God is absolutely certain; but it is as certain that the mind of man can no more imagine it than the housefly can imagine what the source of the sunshine is...surely the way of wisdom is not to deny because we cannot comprehend, but to admit the intellectual and spiritual necessity and bask in it as the housefly basks in the sunshine it can enjoy but never comprehend.⁶⁴

John Rutherford echoed this sentiment in an article entitled “Psychical and Healing Science,” whose name itself demonstrates the manner in which spiritualists and Rogers sought to validate their beliefs. Rutherford insisted that a belief in the continuation of the soul must not only be “based on objective” grounds but also on “subjective grounds.” The cold facts of science can take a person’s intellect only so far before something else, something anti-analytical must inspire them to knowledge of spiritual things. He wrote, “The mind that is unable to believe in a supreme power, and in the unending career of the personal soul, lacks the necessary subjective element. The organ of appreciation of these great truths is spirituality or wonder.” Without this faculty, spirit manifestations “will appeal to them in vain.” Still, one must not go too far, for wonder, without reason to balance it, will lead one to a “wild chase” after all spirits.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Transition of E. Dawson Rogers,” *Light* October 8th, 1910.

⁶⁴ “Notes by the Way,” *Light*, January 28th, 1899.

⁶⁵ John Rutherford “Psychical and Healing Science,” *Light* January 7th, 1899.

Rogers sustained his desire to align spiritualism with the legitimacy of science while also attacking scientists who scoffed and ridicule spiritualism. He could have easily gone the way of Moses and mostly distanced himself from science, or the path of the SPR leaders who walked hand and foot with science. Rogers instead, as a shrewd businessman and a practical spiritualist believer, found the middle ground that would help to “prove” spiritualism as scientific fact without endorsing the materialist viewpoint that he saw science as largely representing. With the passing of Rogers in 1910, *Light* had lost its founder and leader and it fell to Edward Walter Wallis, a traveling medium, former editor of the London spiritualist newspaper *The Two Worlds*, and a devout political progressive, to take the reigns of the now fairly popular paper. Wallis’ editorship from 1910 to the beginning of 1914 further pushed the paper away from the Christian and religious focus of Moses like Rogers, but also removed the prominent place Rogers had given science in the paper. Wallis instead emphasized the humanistic and healing side of spiritualism while seriously questioning science’s method of obtaining truth.

Edward Walter Wallis grew up in a spiritualist home. He was born on December 8th, 1855 in Teddington, Middlesex, the youngest of four children.⁶⁶ His parents moved to Twickenham when Wallis was four and entered into the grocery business. They ran a grocery store out of their homes and lived a quiet and honest life. The Wallis family was not church-going but sent their sons to the local Baptist school where Wallis was made to

⁶⁶ E.W. Wallis, *The Story of my Life, Development and Experiences as a Medium* (London: James Burns, 1885), 4-5. The majority of biographical information about E.W. Wallis comes from this source. He was the only editor out of the four looked at including Moses, Dawson, and Gow that wrote an autobiography. He accomplished this early in his career, in fact a good twenty years before he assumed the editorship of *Light*, and almost thirty years before he died.

attend the Baptist church. His early experiences with Church and its vivid description of the fiery hell a sinner would go to led Wallis to dread God and the church. He related in his autobiography one such experience that forever impressed him with an intense disdain of the Christian God. His pastor at the Baptist church had lost four children to disease within just a few days of each other and came to the Church, “sobbing like a child,” proclaiming, “The Lord gave, and The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!”⁶⁷ Wallis was “greatly puzzled” that if the Lord was good, why did the pastor cry and at last concluded that “the Lord must be a very hard and unkind sort of being, and [I] felt very much afraid of Him and death too.”⁶⁸ Perhaps the choice of the words “sobbing like a child” reveal a glimpse of why Wallis was unfulfilled by the Christian religion. He found it outdated and unconvincing, a religion for the unsophisticated and childlike. Christianity was not the glorious hope it promised, but rather a tired Behemoth, made up of undignified souls whose groundless faith was worthy of pity at best, derision at worst. In short, Christianity did not offer the proof that Wallis sought, neither intellectually nor spiritually. He provided ample proof of this viewpoint through his editorship of *Light* and the *Two Worlds*, where Wallis would continually criticize Christianity for, as he saw it, its twin weakness: a heavy reliance on faith without proper proof and a constant hypocrisy.

As Wallis aged, even these youthful experiences with the church recessed in his mind. He took great pride in his family’s unorthodoxy and stated in a speech to the LSA in 1912 that “Unlike the majority of those who became spiritualists in the early days of

⁶⁷ Wallis, *My Life*, 4-5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

the movement, I have no complaint to make respecting the religious instruction that I received from my parents.” He did not harbor the “gloomy Calvinistic orthodoxy” as a child and “the old theology was not enforced on my young mind.”⁶⁹ Wallis’ religious beliefs would come rather through his family and particularly his uncle, William Wallace. While Wallis was young his mother, father, and three siblings all exhibited mediumistic powers and the family conducted séances regularly in the home. “For years,” Wallis reminisced, “the spirits were the family advisors, the only doctors my mother would heed or needed.”⁷⁰ The unusual occurrences at the Wallis family raised more than a few eyebrows and persuaded people to stay away lest they catch “Spirits in their tea!”⁷¹ The constant persecution and ridicule drove the family to suppress their powers and the séances ceased. Wallis was still young at the time, so his experiences with the family circle were limited and soon forgotten. It was not until he was seventeen that Wallis began to seriously investigate spiritualism and start the journey that would transform him into a powerful medium and eventually an influential British spiritualist.

On Good Friday, 1872, the year that William Stainton Moses began his career as a medium, Wallis’ uncle William came to the house. William was a traveling missionary medium who specialized in healing various illnesses through the use of spiritual powers and mesmerism. He brought with him a copy of the spiritualist work *Medium* which quickly fell into young Wallis’ hands. At the present time, Wallis had been seriously considering joining a Protestant Church because of the persuasion of a friend who had

⁶⁹ E.W. Wallis, “Interesting Incidents During forty years of Mediumship,” *Light* (Jan 20th, 1912).

⁷⁰ Wallis, *My Life*, 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

converted to it from Judaism. *Medium* sparked his interest and he found out about the local spiritualist meetings at Kingston-on-Thames and pressured his Uncle and Father to take him to one. At Temperance Hall that night, a Mr. Bullock delivered a trance address (an address given by a medium controlled by a Spirit) and William, E.W.'s uncle was also controlled and gave a speech.⁷² The meeting only whetted E.W.'s appetite and he urged his mother to hold a family séance to see what results could be had. During the circle, Wallis was seized by spirit powers and his arms began to tremble uncontrollably. "This experience," he related, "although it frightened me, yet fascinated me, so that I became eager to know more."⁷³

Wallis continued to travel to Kingston to attend a local séance where he was told by one of the spirit guides that he was to be a great medium in the movement. Wallis found the message of spiritualism enticing from the start; "When first the philosophy of spiritualism was explained to me I felt that it was so rational and beautiful that it ought to be true."⁷⁴ He soon exhibited ability in automatic writing and "his hand was influenced to write," and write often.⁷⁵ His powers of mediumship continued to grow and soon Wallis was entranced and used as a vessel for spirits to speak through. It was a spiritual power that Wallis found to be thrust upon him stating, "I found my head affected, my eyes closed so that I could not open them, and finally I was impelled to speak."⁷⁶ And speak he did. With his new wife, Miss Edgar, a medium herself, Wallis embarked on a missionary tour that would take him around the nation and even to the America, the

⁷² Wallis, "Interesting Incidents."

⁷³ Wallis, *My Life*, 6.

⁷⁴ Wallis, "Interesting Incidents."

⁷⁵ Wallis, *My Life*, 11.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

founding land of spiritualism. It was a hard decision for Wallis and his wife to commit themselves solely to the work of spiritualism but Wallis found that he had a calling from the spirits. From henceforth he resolved “to serve the Cause...and in the future would stand or fall by spiritualism, as a worker in the ranks...”⁷⁷

E.W. Wallis’s standing in the spiritualist community continued to grow, both as a medium and as a writer. He helped, with prominent British spiritualist Emma H. Britten Hardinge, to found the spiritualist newspaper, the *Two Worlds* in 1887 and was there until 1899. He became involved in the LSA during the early 1900’s and took over the editorship of the paper for Edmund Dawson Rogers around 1905-6 when the former fell ill. The paper was thus under Wallis’s control for around ten years, up until his death on the eve of the Great War. It may be fitting that Wallis died before the outbreak of World War I, with all its brutality and anguish, for Wallis was an optimist. Spiritualism represented to him both a socially and a morally motivated religion and philosophy that could transform the outlook and actions of its followers. Therefore, spiritualism’s main concern, Wallis believed, was not to prove itself to be true through scientific proof but rather to comfort lives.

Wallis’s desire to consol and uplift his readers led him to devote more time to issues of morality than Edmund Dawson Rogers while demoting science from the forefront of the paper. Wallis felt that science was a losing attempt to understand the grand workings of nature as a whole. It was nature’s unswerving laws that dictated the universe and true knowledge of those laws came not only through the objective lens of

⁷⁷ Wallis, *My Life*, 8-11.

science but also through a subjective and sensitive spiritual awareness of nature's being. Science tended to reduce nature to "that stern, relentless taskmistress."⁷⁸ Nature though was also a living entity, capable of anger, jealousy, revenge, and happiness. One article, "Does Nature Sympathize?" talked about the relation of nature to humanity and tackled the question, "Is it possible, when nature is outraged by some crime against humanity, that she records a protest in her own fashion?" *Light* found the idea not that preposterous, noting that "the idea of some deep and mystical relation between human conduct and natural phenomena is not new even to modern philosophy."⁷⁹

Here in the concept of a living and moral nature could science find a correct place in the world. While its usefulness was limited since it only dealt with the objective side of nature and failed to answer the meanings behind the facts, science did help give understanding to mankind about how the world operated. "Spiritualism welcomes the advance of Science," G.P. Young wrote in a *Light* article, "for its truths are mighty and must prevail. Scientific investigation has strengthened and ennobled our conceptions of man's inherent capabilities, and our ideas of the grandeur of its destiny." Science though also had its faults. He found "The scientist's sphere of knowledge is limited by the boundary lines of the finite, by facts based on experience. The constantly aspiring human spirit, however, is not satisfied with this knowledge." The knowledge that science gave to humanity was only a third of the story; nature still contained both spiritual knowledge

⁷⁸ "The Light of nature," *Light*, November 16th, 1912.

⁷⁹ "Does Nature Sympathize?" *Light* December 14th, 1912.

intuitive to the senses, and emotions; and deductive knowledge gleamed from philosophical logic.⁸⁰

Young went on to state that “Science, however, is but the handmaid of philosophy.”⁸¹ The editor echoed this idea in a piece later in the month entitled “The Light of Nature.” Here the contributor argues that an “admixture of Reason,” will be advisable when dealing with nature’s meaning but adds that it cannot constitute the only skill used to draw from nature. Philosophy may address the question of why, but it also fails to bring man or women into correct communion with the truths and designs of nature. There must also be a subjective communion with the harmonies that nature radiates. He writes,

We have at times in these columns advocated a closer observance of Nature’s ways as a corrective to some of the evils of modern civilization... We are believers in Nature undefiled... We may go into a foul and stuffy room, and recognize Nature in its carbonic acid gas. But we open the windows and let in Nature in the shape of the sunshine and fresh air... And finding that world (the after life) a natural one in the truest and best sense it returns with a deeper appreciation of the significance of Nature in the life that is lived here, There is a new meaning in the sunrise, the flowers have a spiritual message, the skies are ripe with prophesies... Nature, that stern, relentless taskmistress, becomes an indulgent mother overlooking with a smile many little lapses so long as her monitions on vital points are observed.

⁸⁰ G.P. Young, “Spiritualism: Ethics, Morality, and Religion,” *Light* November 2nd, 1912.

⁸¹ Young, *Spiritualism*.

Here nature is alive and humans must learn to live in peaceful communion with her desires, ways, and rhythms. Science is only one piece of the puzzle since nature is complicated, constituting a measure of mind, heart, and soul.

These different visions of science and spiritualism's role in life created a foundational vantage point for William Stainton Moses, Edmund Dawson Rogers, and Edward Walter Wallis to create and propagate their respective views on the world around them. The differences that each saw in science lead them to also emphasize different aspects of spiritualism during their editorships of *Light*. Moses' encounters with science as a threat to mediums lead him away from strongly aligning spiritualism with science and instead he pushed for a more religiously-inspired spiritualism. Rogers, in contrast, felt that what spiritualism needed most was legitimacy and used science to gain this end. Finally, Wallis found Christianity to be offensive with its dependence on "blind" faith and constant criticism of spiritualism, and he viewed science as insignificant since it failed to recognize the spiritual side of life. Wallis wanted spiritualism to replace Christianity in society and become a great social comforter. They each used *Light* as a platform to address bedrock issues that directly impacted the lives of spiritualists and the Late Victorian, and Edwardian world they existed within. These issues included morality, religion, evolution, and ideas of progress. The editors' views on these issues represented the spiritualists' desire to grasp hold of certainty in the tumultuous fin-de-siècle landscape of London.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SPIRIT

The editors and readers of *Light* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century faced a transforming world – a world that during the last fifty to sixty years had witnessed a substantial decline in the power and prestige of the Anglican Church, the transition of England from a rural to urban country, and the rise of science to the apex of intellectual thought.¹ In addition the expensive and fairly humiliating Boer War had recently exposed Britain’s military weakness while raising questions about the supposed “racial degeneration” of the British.² This vision of “racial degeneration” helped lend weight to another pressing question that centered on the heightened tension between old morality and new materialistic rationality. Frank Turner has documented this struggle superbly in his work *Between Science and Religion*, which chronicles the lives of six Late Victorian British men who found themselves caught between the religious dogma of faith and the rigid framework of scientific naturalism. In his work Turner describes scientific naturalism as a loose conglomeration of views that contained various core ideas including the assertion that objective was the only knowable truth, agnosticism was the only acceptable way of tackling the question of God, nature was not imbued with an innate spiritual power but rather was formed from plain and natural atoms, and finally that

¹ For a good overview of those changes see *The Oxford History of Britain*, ed. Kenneth O. Morgan, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988), 518-581. It is also important to note that while the Anglican Church may have been losing ground society remained highly Christian. As noted in the first chapter, the images of Christ, God, salvation, sin, and the use of the Bible as an authoritative text remained prevalent far into the 20th century.

² See for example George Robb’s work, *British Culture and the First World War*, (Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2002).

traditional religion was based on irrational and wrong assumptions about the world.³

This idea of scientific naturalism though did not measure up for many men and women to the claims its proponents ceaselessly ascribed to it. They found it instead to be empty and were troubled by the “incommensurability between their spiritual aspirations and the doctrines of science.”⁴

It is little surprise that they found a science that removed God troubling, due to the overwhelming religious culture that permeated Victorian, Edwardian, and even twentieth-century English culture.⁵ Society was saturated with references and belief in God and religious morals, though that belief was splintered. Steven G. Marks has described it as a time “of intense spiritual searching, especially for those who had rejected traditional religion.”⁶ Searching is an apt term for the times. Religious doubts became more prevalent as the Victorian era progressed and even, as one historian has well noted, gained the ability to be labeled “respectable,” and make a person doubting “a more interesting human being” in the eyes of society.⁷ This same doubt was also troubling because it threatened to rupture what Gertrude Himmelfarb described as “the

³ Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*, (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 1974), 8-37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ As already mentioned in the introduction, new scholarship even places the full decline of religion and the transition to a secular society in the 1960's. See for instance the chapters “The Faith Society: 1900-14,” and, “Christian Culture in Confusion, 1920-1945,” in Brown, *Religion and Society*, and Jennifer Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism between the Wars*, which argues that spiritualism in England between the world wars took off mostly due to the prevalence of religious sentiment and language that existed within the greater society. The fact is fairly evident by the recent census data of 2001 where 7 out of 10 Britons still identify themselves as Christians. This data was taken from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget-print.asp?ID=460>, first accessed April 2008.

⁶ Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 39-40.

⁷ Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern reader of Victorian Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 233.

acceptance of a single moral code by the entire population,” a morality based on the evangelicalism of John and Charles Wesley.⁸ While oversimplified, this statement does help to portray how society *appeared* to be morally monolithic to those within mid-Victorian England. Dane Kennedy’s work on the explorer and writer Sir Richard Burton demonstrates that even the intellectual and sexually deviant still at times attempted to situate their views and actions into accepted British culture. In fact, the attacks that Burton leveled against British culture came from his gradual realization that difference “was a neutral epistemological device, a polarity that contained no inherent meaning,” and as such challenged “the universalist claims of British society”.⁹

By the 1880’s the advent of Science and the claims of higher criticism on the Church and bible had undermined Christianity’s hold on universal truth, while the divisive Oxford movement had shaken the unity of the Anglican Church¹⁰ Doubts about Christianity had also helped to divorce two actions, which before had seemed almost indivisible. Now a respectable Englishman could invoke and swear by Christian morality

⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds*, (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1968), 283.

⁹ Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 9.

¹⁰ It was Higher Criticism that created the most damage for Christianity, both Evangelicals and Anglicans alike since it struck at the very root of Christian belief: the bible. This movement came mostly from German scholars and argued against the authoritative nature of the Bible. The Oxford movement was primarily an Anglican controversy (that merged into Catholicism) and while it did help to infuse life into some clergymen, its bickering and segregation created rifts in the church at a time that it needed to be consolidating and preparing for the social changes in the air. For coverage of the Oxford Movement and higher criticism see, Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, M.A. Crowther, *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian England* (Great Britain: David and Charles Archon Books, 1970), Warren Sylvester Smith, *The London Heretic: 1870-1914* (New York, NY: Dood, Mead & Company, 1968), Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes*, Elisabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain*, in *Context and Commentary* series, Arthur Pollard, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1986), Peter D’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival: 1877-1914, Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, and Peter T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England, 1868-1882* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969).

but maintain no personal faith in the Christian religion. As Richard Altick describes it, “If historical and dogmatic Christianity could no longer compel belief, ethical Christianity could at least serve as a guide to life.”¹¹ The definitions of what a “Christian” was had changed. Furthermore, science and its claims of superiority and specialization had helped to create an intellectual class, something T.W. Heyck argues was non-existent during the early and mid-Victorian era.¹² This intellectual class was created with the emergence of scientific naturalism, a reformation of university life towards research (allowing intellectuals a means to study and conduct research as a living) and the general fragmentation of society. An obvious and unavoidable outcome of this rise of the intellectual class was the demise of the ordinary scientist and consequently, his faith or beliefs about the world. It also created a whole new class of influential people, many of whom were indifferent or hostile to the scientific explanations given by the bible and accepted by Christianity. This dichotomy between supposed “Christian” or “biblical” science and new naturalistic theories caused many to seriously consider their adherence to Christianity.

It is easy to see the anxiety elicited by this rise of scientific naturalism in spiritualists writing including the weekly *Light*. In fact, it was one of the major reasons why people came to believe in and accept spiritualism and its philosophy. Sir William Barrett, leader of the Psychical Research Society for a number of years found “the paramount importance of psychical research is found in correcting the habit of Western thought...that the physical plane is the whole of Nature,” since this “false and deadly

¹¹ Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, 236.

¹² Heyck, *Transformation*.

assumption” destroys all spiritual conceptions (which are naturally assumed to be positive).¹³ Another spiritualist, James Hyslop, the secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research, was troubled by the rise of materialism in the guise of science. It was a theory and philosophy that did “nothing for the spiritual life of man” and added to the sorrow and unhappiness in life by denying life after death.¹⁴ Oliver Lodge found this denial to be based on a narrow view of truth and observation. He instead found that truth was not so narrowly focused:

Truth has many channels for entering the mind, and conviction of truth can be attained during moods not of active inquiry only, but of passive receptivity also. Insight is possible, not so much through mental effort as through a wise acquiescence in those intuitions of genius which may rightly be called faith.¹⁵

Physical science did not adequately account for both versions of truth.

Spiritualism’s response to scientific naturalism and the theory of evolution fell in line with the members of the Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist Church who made attempts at reconciliation. The difference is that spiritualists tended to be less dogmatic and much looser when it came to incorporating various ideas. The mass of Christian leaders who attempted to reconcile parts of Darwinian theory to Christian doctrine reached a point in which they either had to turn back or renounce their faith all together. For some, like the Prime Minister William Gladstone, they merely removed the questions

¹³ Sir William F. Barrett, *On The Threshold of the Unseen: An Examination of the Phenomena of Spiritualism and of the Evidence for Survival After Death* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918), xiv.

¹⁴ James H. Hyslop, *Life After Death: Problems of the Future Life and its Nature* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918), 335.

¹⁵ Sir Oliver Lodge, *Reason and Belief: The Impact of Scientific Discovery on Religious and Spiritual Faith* (London: Methuen, 1910).

created by evolution by placing science and religion into two “distinct intellectual compartments.”¹⁶ Others accepted evolution as a scientific reality but incorporated it into existent theology using it to prove the birth of Christ, give a grander view of God, or even prove predestination.¹⁷ A spiritualist on the other hand clung only to the idea that the afterlife was real. After that everything was, at least in theory, permissible. Those who converted to spiritualism came to realize that without doctrines doubts mysteriously disappear.

For Edmund Dawson Rogers, William Stainton Moses, and Edward Walter Wallis these doubts were familiar territory. They found themselves in between what they saw as the extremes of scientific naturalism and materialism on one side, and the literal interpretation of the bible offered by orthodox Christianity on the other side. K. Theodore Hoppen has found that the thirty to forty years after 1860 were “for many a time of polar opposites: between science and faith, between naturalism and supernaturalism, between order and chaos.” Spiritualism also mimicked this polarity within the movement and as such provided “a unique vehicle for possible reconciliation.”¹⁸ Rogers, Moses, and Wallis also soon discovered that the middle ground between the extremes was fairly crowded. Here they flirted with (some even joining outright) the larger “Victorian counterculture” that existed around them. This counterculture, as defined by Steven G. Marks, was in reality composed of various groups of men and women discontented with traditional “western power and values”

¹⁶ K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation: 1846-1886* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 499.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 499-500.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 502.

including established political forms, classical western Christianity, and materialism both scientifically and economically defined. They sought instead to find “alternatives to Western power and values.”

In their quest to find alternatives to western power and values, these counterculture thinkers, much like many spiritualists, sought out anti-Western forms to replace Western culture.¹⁹ This trend led spiritualists to create views on morality, religion, evolution, and progress that were combinations of many different view points. Spiritualism represented an intellectual vantage point that did rejected what many saw as the groundless faith of Christianity as well as the amoral rationale of physical science. They may have “retreated into spiritualism,” as Ronald Pearsall asserts, but once they found themselves there they put up a spirited fight.²⁰ In fact the faith of the editors of *Light* in spiritualist phenomena was quite remarkable given the constant ridicule (primarily during the first few decades of its existence) the subject received in mainstream press and many parts of society.²¹ Through *Light* they sought to give voice to the vantage point that spiritualism offered society. Perhaps the best demonstration of how spiritualism assimilated different viewpoints is the way spiritualists viewed issues of morality and evolution.

The amazing thing about morality in England during the Victorian Era, as Himmelfarb as pointed out, is that even with the diminishing faith in Christian doctrine and in some cases God himself, as evidenced by the rise of atheism and agnosticism

¹⁹ Marks, *Russia*, 3.

²⁰ Ronald Pearsall, *The Table Rappers* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), 10.

²¹ See for instance *The New York Times* articles “The Trial of German Medium,” April 11, 1903; “Modern Spiritualism,” April 6th, 1909; and “Difficult to Detect Her,” May 12th, 1910. See also footnote 56 in chapter one.

throughout the 19th century, the idea of one's duty to be a "Christian gentleman" did not waiver.²² John Henry Newman described this type of "gentleman" as:

One who never inflicts pain...he absorbs the maxim of the ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves, towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend...he has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned.²³

This type of visible morality or "respectability" was as much a part of the social code as the manner of one's dress.²⁴ Breaking the code could bring public disgrace and condemnation and would certainly affect one's standing within society. In order to maintain one's respectability in Victorian England a person had to follow certain Christian standards of decency such as honesty, temperance, self-control, and hard work.

This moral code (and one's duty to conform to it) gradually fades out of its prominent place in society when Christianity itself lost its respectability.²⁵ Once Christianity was removed from the cornerstone of English life and became merely a decorative aspect, the social standards of morality that had derived from Christianity would also soon follow suit.²⁶ It was evolution and all the implications that sprang from Darwin's biological theory that would eventually topple the overwhelming hold Christianity had on British society, a process some recent scholars have argued was not

²² Himmelfarb, 289-292.

²³ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of an University*, quoted in Mitchell, *Daily Life*, 270.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

²⁵ This is, in fact, the thesis of Hugh McLeod's work, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*. Here McLeod finds that during the Victorian era the Church was a vital part of what made a gentleman "respectable." When the prestige of the Church began to crumb, then membership and involvement also fell. In other words, once the Church ceased to be part of gentlemanly morality, its usefulness also faded.

²⁶ Although, as already noted, the opposite happened for a time in Victorian and Edwardian England.

effectively completed until late in the 20th century.²⁷ Spiritualism itself attempted to hijack evolution and use the theory as the driving force behind all life here and after. When morality was discussed in *Light*, until E.W. Wallis's editorship, it was nearly always tied to the theory of evolution and adaptation. Spiritualism and *Light* attempted to rectify the seeming discordant views of the world that Christianity and evolution presented. They saw in the implications of the bare scientific theory of evolution the destruction of meaning in life and the basis for immorality since it reduced all life to soulless matter. Spiritualism and *Light* therefore sought to display spiritualism as the philosophy that would stem and reverse the tide.

This combination of evolution and morality was logical enough, something some members of the Protestant Church had even picked up on, but it was within the pages of *Light* that it blossomed.²⁸ The reasons why the concept of evolution (or *positive* progress as spiritualist viewed it) tied neatly to morality within the publication *Light* and spiritualism were many but can be narrowed to three reasons.²⁹ First, it just made sense to them. In light of the discovery of evolution and the “marvelous spread of scientific knowledge,” the world appeared more rational and ordered than possibly ever before. As J.J. Morse, one of the most famous spiritualists of the Victorian age remarked, there was no reason to not believe that even the spiritual realm was “hedged” by discernable laws.³⁰

²⁷ See the discussion in the Introduction

²⁸ See for instance, George Harris, *Moral Evolution* (Boston, Houghton, and Mifflin; 1896).

²⁹ This distinction of positive progress is a crucial distinction indeed. As will be examined later in this chapter, progress was viewed as inherently positive by spiritualist in general and *Light* in particular. The reasons for this will be elaborated later but suffice to say for now that they all center around the merging of evolutionary progress, best defined as inevitable, and the Christian notion of a benevolent God who orders and plans the path of the world.

³⁰ “The Birth and Death of the World,” J.J. Morse, *Light* (April 26th, 1884).

If the spiritual world was governed by “Divine laws and principles” then would it not move by the same Divine principles that ruled the natural world? Over the course of the next forty years the editors and writers of *Light* responded with an overwhelming “yes.” During the editorships of Rogers, Moses, Wallis, and David Gow the spiritual evolution of man was evident in *Light*.³¹

The second reason that evolution was joined with morality in *Light* during the Late Victorian, Edwardian, and World War I era is more cynical, yet not less plausible: evolution helped explain why spirits still knew little about the spiritual realm they existed in. This was a real and dangerous criticism leveled against spiritualism during its heyday and usually took the form of the following argument. If mediums truly talk to spirits that live on the other side, and there is only one other side, why, then, do the accounts from various mediums and spirits differ so greatly? Even more troubling was that many times spirits when responding to questions about the afterlife during trances would be unable to answer various queries. This is the line of reasoning in a lively book titled *The Menace of Spiritualism* by Elliot O’Donnell. In his chapter, “The Danger of Fraud,” he muses,

It is a significant fact that, despite the number of clever people that have passed over, and who would, according the Spiritualistic theory of evolution and progression, still go on endeavoring to improve their minds, no information that has been of the slightest value to scientific or medical research has ever been obtained...all the messages so far have been either trite, vulgar, blasphemous, libelous, or silly and sentimental. Far from evolving

³¹ For instance see, “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (March 30th, 1889); “The Process of Evolution,” *Light* (June 12th, 1897); “Spiritualism: Ethics, Morality, and Religion,” G.P. Young, *Light* (November 2nd, 1912); and “The Meaning of Death,” *Light* (January 8th, 1916).

mentally, the spirits of even the greatest of those that have passed over would appear to have hopelessly degenerated.³²

This problem appears within the pages of the *Light* in a reprint of a question and answers time given by E.W. Wallis while in a trance and controlled by a returned spirit. In one typical example E.W. Wallis was asked if the spirit could explain what “spirit lights” were, to which the spirit responded, “We are not sufficiently acquainted with the processes...to be able to explain them. They are outside of our own particular sphere.” Or consider this bit of verbal flourish produced by the spirit later on when probed to respond to a question about how spirit writing, a procedure where a blank writing slate is placed in a sealed box and then mysteriously written on, occurs: “We could possibly answer the question in an individual case if we were present, but we are unable to give a general answer to a particular question of this nature.”³³ Succinctly stated, we do not know.

So why were spirits so seemingly ignorant of the spirit world in which they lived? The answer was the assumption that beings evolved both spiritually and intellectually. Spirits did not know everything because they had not had time to learn everything. In fact, spiritualists argued, those who did know many things had also progressed into higher spiritual realms, away from the material earth. The newly departed spirits remained close to the earth plane of existence since they had little time to evolve and therefore, they appeared most often in séances. Since, the reasoning continued, they were new to the afterlife they could hardly be expected to know many things about their new

³² Elliot O'Donnell, *The Menace of Spiritualism*, (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1920).

³³ E.W. Wallis, “Answers to Questions.”

surroundings. This was Wallis' argument in a biting pamphlet condemning the crucifixion as a lie. In it he replied to the charge that spiritualism was "contrary to science" and "contradictory" writing,

As to the contradictory nature of the teachings, there is very little *real* difference, when we recognize that spirits testify according to their personal experiences; and since Spiritualism affirms the "many states and conditions," to spheres hereafter, where each one "goes to his own place," experiences will naturally differ and testimonies from the world of souls will vary according to the status of the individual.³⁴

There was a kind of hierarchy in the other world, just as there were planes of knowledge and evolution on earth, and the spirits that revealed themselves to the normal circle were usually spirits still drawn to the material world. As such, they rarely know much more than people still among the living. As one contributor to the *Light* put it, "Why and how is it that spirits who have so much power, have not more, it is beyond us to know...My belief is that beatified spirits in the next – a preparatory sphere – know little more than what they know in this (sphere)."³⁵

Furthermore, as the argument went, spirits still confined and drawn to the material plane of life tended to be degenerates, liars, cheaters, morally bankrupt, or all of the above. The higher, "pure ethereal spheres" are the domain of the more spiritually-evolved spirits while the misfits live in the "borderland," a half-material, half-spirit sphere close to the earth and populated with misfits was presumably "dark, gross, and

³⁴ Edward Walter Wallis, *Did Jesus Die on the Cross or Rise from the Dead? A Critical examination, analysis and comparison of the Gospel Narratives*. Manchester: E.W.Wallis, 189-190.

³⁵ S.C. Hall, "Messages from my Wife," No. III *Light* (February 2, 1884).

horrible.”³⁶ It was this type of misfit spirit, spiritualists argued, who was most drawn to the material plane of life since the material side of life was inherently more evil and crude.³⁷

Why were there wrong answers to questions during a séance? Well, either the spirit was still undeveloped or they were devious spirits still unable to progress past their weak moral state. Under Rogers’s editorship, *Light* urged against believing that all spirits were highly evolved in goodness and charity. “There is an erroneous belief among many persons,” he wrote, “that it is the wish and business of spiritual beings to prove that man exists after death. There are low, selfish spirits who have no wish that such knowledge should be possessed by those still on earth.”³⁸

In the same manner, these still corrupt spirits could be drawn to the séance by an evil and devious spirit within a person at the circle.³⁹ This unbelief or sinister attitude in a sitter within the séance could also stop a pure and good spirit from appearing at the circle. Even merely a lack of spiritual awareness could turn the spirit away. This is the point in a quote from the spiritualist newspaper “Banner of Light,” reprinted in *Light*, which reads: “Loving spirits from spheres of wisdom in the world of souls are forever seeking to approach the earth... They reach but few because of the material barrier that men have erected, between the inner and outer worlds in which they live.”⁴⁰ A searcher in spiritualism would get what he or she expects. Seekers who have not morally

³⁶ “What is Hell, or Hades?” *Light* (January 7th, 1889).

³⁷ For instance in one article, “The Mission of Spiritualism,” by M. Leon Denis, the spiritual realms are portrayed as the morally superior area that will illuminate and help perfect the sinful earthly plane.

Spiritualism must “counteract” the evil “gravitation which drags [people] to earth.” *Light* (April 29th, 1899)

³⁸ “The Scientific investigation of Spiritual Phenomena,” *Light* (June 19, 1897).

³⁹ For an excellent treatment of this concept see Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism Between the Wars*.

⁴⁰ Quote from *Banner of Light* reprinted in *Light* (February 11, 1899).

progressed will find spirits in a similar state. Wallis summarized this point in his autobiography:

The modifying influence of conditions upon results is a fertile theme for study. If sitters are stiff, reserved, uncommunicative and unsociable, a heavy and depressing influence settles down on the circle like a wet blanket, and nothing of any value or spiritual benefit can take place until the sphere of influence is changed and new conditions set up.

Intellectual activity, costiveness of mind and thought, or opinionatedness is destructive to conditions favorable for *spiritual* manifestations, and evidences of the presence of loved ones...If sitters come, weary in mind, worn out in body, feeling depressed and gloomy, or intent on getting *their* views expressed, then it is probable they will bring the conditions down to their level.⁴¹

It was the actions of the sitters that drew evil or good spirits to the séance, and it was evolution that accounted for the presence of both.

The final reason for why morality was viewed as evolutionary and progressive was that it fit with the wider view held by many spiritualists (and much of society) that man was, at his deepest core, good. This belief was cherished by many in the spiritualist camp; it was a belief that claimed that man was rational, moral, and ultimately good at the bottom of his soul. This belief in the goodness of man helps to explain why movements such as phrenology which measured the moral qualities of a man by the size of his head were widely accepted and believed.⁴² It also helps to show why eugenics and

⁴¹ Wallis, *My Life*, 26.

⁴² For a good example of this pseudoscience see the introduction of E.W. Wallis, *My Life*, which includes a hefty phrenological sketch of Wallis which includes (among other things) a colorful description of Wallis' willpower as "The posterior region of the crown is subordinate to the anterior, indicating the tendency to be subservient to circumstances and less able to control them to a given end."

phrenology seemed moral, sensible, and even honorable to many spiritualists. By judging a man by the size of his skull you can still pity a criminal instead of hating him. By using physical scientific reasoning to explain immorality you can remove the will to commit crime from the criminal and in effect remove the guilt as well. It is not the criminal who is bad; it is his physical makeup that corrupts his good soul. Seen in this light, phrenology and eugenics are positive movements meant to help heal or identify the physical ailments that taint the goodness of man. Christine Ferguson has documented this superbly in her article, "Eugenics and the Afterlife." She demonstrates how eugenics for a spiritualist was really merely a living version of what spiritualism envisioned for the dead. Both sought *perfection* in humanity and the evolution of the positive and perfect traits in mankind.⁴³ In eugenics, the scientist viewed the human body as capable of perfection and strove through scientific selection and breeding to bring that perfection to the surface. In spiritualism a human being had the capability to moral perfection and through the use of morally positive traits a person could progress to moral excellence. Both possibilities relied on the belief that perfection, spiritually and physically, was already present (though perhaps hidden) within humanity.

⁴³ Christine Ferguson, "Eugenics and the Afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and the spiritualist Purification of the Race," *Journal of Victorian Culture* (Spring 2007), 64-85. Ferguson also points out that some spiritualists even supported the actual euthanasia of mentally retarded, criminals, or invalids since the afterlife was guaranteed and promised each group a more productive and glorious future. In my own research, this seemed to be a very small vantage point within spiritualism. Most spiritualists saw this life as very important for the individual because it served as a moral training ground, a preparatory and necessary stage before the afterlife. If this life was skipped or ended abruptly than the afterlife could actually suffer from the reception of undeveloped and brute souls. This is a common theme in *Light* during World War I. Consider this statement by "A Soul In Travail": "Thousands and thousands of unprepared souls charged with the lowest uncurbed passions are hurled into the inferior spirit planes to add to the influences of hellish disorder, trampling down the growing, promising crops of higher thought, undermining laboriously evolved civilizations, murdering the principles of love and brotherhood and setting up a chaos of crude barbarism." ("The World Tragedy," *Light* (October 3, 1914).) For a good discussion on this point see Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, 153.

These movements found a home in spiritualism and *Light* because they helped to explain away crime without destroying the spiritualist belief in the inherent righteousness of man. This is why *Light* could easily reprint a *New York Herald* article entitled, “Is Crime a Disease?” in which the writer asks,

May it not also be possible that nature has brought men and women into the world who are so affected by prenatal influences that the proper relations of right or wrong are clouded if not wholly obscured? The revolting crimes which it is our daily duty to record, crimes so wholly unnatural and inhuman, that they seem as incredible as they are inhuman, may they not be the result of some disarrangement in the moral nature for which the wretch who is imprisoned or hanged cannot rightly be held responsible?...Is it not possible that some people are made so symmetrical that they can't help being good, and others so rank and crude that they can't help committing crimes?

The article ends with a comment from a writer in *Light* stating, “At the bar of eternal and perfect justice will not many of the gravest offenses...be adjudged, not by infinite mercy, but by infinite knowledge...and will not many a criminal be regarded with boundless pity who has here been doomed by us to boundless punishment?”⁴⁴ In other words, time will tell whether man is good in spirit but his imperfect flesh impinges and corrupts him unwittingly.

In the same way the idea of morality evolving helped to explain a person's criminal nature without calling him or her evil. Evil, as mentioned early, was for spiritualists merely a stage of development, not an indication of the moral nature of the soul. The man or woman therefore who committed horrendous crimes needed not

⁴⁴ “Is Crime a Disease?,” *Light* (October 25th, 1890).

destruction, but advancement. He or she needed to grow and evolve into what he or she was designed and destined for: righteousness. E.W. Wallis during one of his trances declared, “I have never met one *evil* spirit... *everyone eventually* responds to appeals to the divine selfhood within—none are wholly evil, utterly lost, or incapable of response to the appeal of love when it comes in the right way.”⁴⁵ One answer given by another spirit during a trance address even questions the basis of defining actions by “good” and “evil.” When asked if good and evil are co-eternal the spirit guide responds “Evil and good are but terms applied to relative conditions of human experience and in each case arbitrarily determined by the individual for himself...good and evil are the relatives of the point of view concerning actions and opinions.”⁴⁶ Good and evil are what you make them out to be and while at one stage of evolution you might call an action evil, at another stage, the same action might be referred to as noble.

The marriage of evolution and morality then was a perfect fit for spiritualism, wedding the inherent individualism in spiritualism to one’s salvation. Spiritualism proclaimed that everyone is and will be what they make themselves to be. This surprisingly familiar formula (look on any self-help shelf today) is consistently retold in *Light*. In 1883, S.C. Hall wrote a series of letters he had received through direct spirit-writing from his dead wife. In the third letter he spoke about this theme of evolutionary progress even among the dead,

My belief is that beautified spirits in the next –a preparatory- sphere know little more than they know in this (sphere): that they *progress* there is no doubt...Yes! Certain! This

⁴⁵ E.W. Wallis, “A Spirit’s Experience of Death and After,” *Light* (Date Unknown)

⁴⁶ J.J. Morse, “Answers to Questions,” *Light* (February 18, 1899)

life is but a state of preparation for the higher sphere. Happy are they that build the bridge by which they may cross the river.⁴⁷

Hall saw a connection between the actions of this world and one's standing across the "river." He was not alone in this assertion.

Moses repeatedly referred to this mixture in his "Notes by the Way." In 1890, during a political article on the necessity of removing the death penalty from Britain, Moses used the idea of a progressive morality as a reason to abolish the death penalty. He reasoned that hanging a man soon after he commits murder is "a clumsy expedient for removing a man out of sight. It does not kill him. It does not limit his capacity for mischief. On the contrary, it enlarges it." The soul has no time to progress morally when it is abruptly thrust into the afterlife. Therefore Moses warns the public that to kill a murderer is only to transfer the "culprit from a limited area of activity to one much more extended one."⁴⁸ Moses finds, as he writes later in a different article, that the deceased are still "vexed" in the after-life by the wrongs it committed during life.⁴⁹

Under the editorship of Rogers this theme was continued and expanded. In one article entitled, "The Inequalities of Life," the evolving nature of man's morality is tied to the environment in which he lives and grows. This accounts for the diversity within the actions of man, a diversity created by the Divine for each soul to be a unique and "complementary" soul to others. The apparent inequalities of man are merely a result of the different environments and developmental stages each person is on. In fact this physical life "may be intended to develop [only] one phase of character only," while

⁴⁷ "Messages from My Wife, No. III," S.C. Hall, *Light* (February 2nd, 1884).

⁴⁸ "Notes by the Way," M.A. Oxon., *Light* (May 17th, 1890).

⁴⁹ "Infinite Existence," *Light* (May 31st, 1890).

“another stage,” perhaps the afterlife, will work on yet another part. Each person is therefore meant to be different with each progressing toward a personal apex assigned by God.⁵⁰

The concept of the progression of morality also enabled spiritualist to grapple with the question of where evil came from and why it exists. In one article, “Life and Its Trials,” Alfred Kitson, the secretary for the British spiritualists’ Lyceum Union, demonstrates how the presence of evil in life can only be explained by a “progressive” moral nature within man. After first dismissing the Christian doctrine of original sin, and what he calls “the pagan notion” that there exist two competing powers in the world, one good and one evil, Kitson exclaims, “The key to the true solution of the problem of evil is supplied by the theory of evolution.” Evil still exists because man has yet to shed his “selfish instincts” that formerly helped establish his or her dominance in nature. Kitson states, “Man has gradually evolved from a low, brutish stage of existence, in which all the selfish instincts and animal propensities were at their maximum. These were absolutely necessary to enable him to establish himself on earth, and win his way to supremacy as Lord of creation.” Though once there, it took more effort to rid the evil than use it to man’s advantage. “Having firmly established himself” Kitson finds, “...there follow

⁵⁰ “Inequalities of Life,” *Light* (January 4th, 1902). This viewpoint also hints towards a continued “hierarchy” of mankind, even into the afterlife. There are hints of this hierarchy even after death sprinkled throughout *Light* and they deal with the two notions of class and race. They took the form of the subtle use of phrases such as “class” and “kinds of human beings” in a piece imploring men and women to work hard at their respective jobs [“The Spiritual Significance of Work,” *Light* (January 7, 1899)] or more overt forms such as the article run in the *Light* during M.A. Lond.’s brief editorship entitled, “Spiritual Gravitation” that agrees with recent anti-Semitic pogroms as a means to reverse the “consolidated materialism” of Jewish men and women. He argues that the materialistic spirit of Jewish people on earth help their spirits when they die to remain in the material and earth zone, which in turn helps the spirit to propagate the continual material possession and wealth of the Jews. Here race is overtly stated as a determining factor in ones position and standing in the afterlife. [*Light* (May 20, 1893)]

long, weary ages of effort to enable man to eliminate the selfish propensities from his nature, and unfold the divine latent within him.”⁵¹

Here moral evolution resounded with the spiritualist’s belief that the ultimate responsibility for a soul fell on the individual alone. This idea of individual responsibility was paramount to the spiritualist movement. It permeated spiritualism from top to bottom and could be seen in believers’ ideas about morality, methods of salvation, the nature of the afterlife, methods of a medium, and even the lack of a central creed. This last issue was why the London Spiritualist Alliance first came into existence, when the various leaders of British spiritualism attempted to unify the scattered elements of the movement into one doctrinal entity. It failed, most likely due to the spiritualist idea that truth and belief came from observable experiences. As E.W. Wallis termed it, “The point of view of the spiritualist is that of the inductive scientist. He seeks for external, or phenomenal, evidences of human survival.”⁵² Quantitative facts, facts that had come only through observation and experience, were what most believers considered to be the weight of the spiritualist message. It is little wonder, then, that the “facts” promoted by various spiritualists differed since each person experienced the movement differently. Merely take the first three major editors of *Light* as an example. E.W. Wallis experienced spiritualism through his own family’s circle while Dawson witnessed the powers of mesmerism first through his relationship with an elderly woman and then

⁵¹ “Life and Its Trials,” Alfred Kitson, *Light* (January 11, 1902).

⁵² E.W. Wallis, *What Spiritualism Is: Hints for Inquirers and Students* (London: Mrs. M. H. Wallis, 1900-27?), p. 25.

moved onto spiritualism, and finally, Moses' first experienced spiritualism through reading a book by Dale Owens.⁵³

A salvation based on individual responsibility thus was the perfect match for the spiritualist contingent.⁵⁴ E.W. Wallis summed up this vision in one of his writings published in the *Light* after his death in 1914:

The law of continuity insures the preservation of identity, the maintenance of individual consciousness and the retention by us of all knowledge, ability, insights and understandings for use on that other plane of life to which we are all tending. In other words, character survives the shock of death, and the consequences of all our motives, actions and loves—wrong or right—affect us and tend to limit or enlarge our sphere of operations, to decrease or increase our pain or pleasure, to render us unfit or increasingly fit to live the spiritual life...All growth is from within outwards, and it is governed by the law of spiritual evolution...⁵⁵

This salvation was progressive, unstoppable, and personally directed. As Moses wrote in 1889, a spiritualist “learns that his character is his own production as it is his own property, and that each act of his daily life is a factor in its evolution.” His or her actions will ultimately determine where he or she finds him or herself “when the probation of earth-life is over.” He or she will go “to the place he has prepared for

⁵³ In his autobiography, Wallis even penned a new Ten Commandments for spiritualism which included commandment four, “Thou shalt be free from all creeds, doctrines, and dogmas, perceiving that Truth is universal and unfettered.” Wallis, *My Life*, 32.

⁵⁴ It is also likely the reason why Dawson, at least, came to believe in spiritualism as he found the belief in a heaven and hell to be reproachable and disgusting.

⁵⁵ “Spiritual Emancipation by the Elimination of Fear,” *Light* (January 24, 1914).

himself.”⁵⁶ Even when he or she arrived, their continued growth was self-ordained. The famous medium J.J. Morse during one of his trances remarked, “Spiritualism... [has] placed man securely on his feet as responsible to himself for himself... [It] has brought home to all mankind that...each individually [must] earn his own happiness.”⁵⁷ “Until they repent,” Wallis wrote, “and desire to rise they will be content to remain on the plane of self-gratification, on the borderland of the higher spiritual spheres.”⁵⁸ For spiritualists, Heaven and Hell, therefore, were truly what you made of them.

This progressive morality eventually led the later editors of *Light* to view spiritualism as a motivating force in society’s ethics. E.W. Wallis, as noted in chapter one, was one of the main promoters of a socially-directed spiritualism and worked to include many more articles on the positive aspects of life that spiritualism encouraged.⁵⁹ Wallis viewed moral evolution as a call for each person on earth to better themselves and work towards bettering the world. If, Wallis reasoned, spiritualism provided verifiable fact that humanity existed past the grave and that eternity was affected by man’s actions on earth then, it should also clearly provide a plan of action for the present life. Consequently he used the *Light* and his other publications to implore, reprimand, and encourage his readers to fulfill their “duties” which, it turns out, were many. Wallis wrote about these “duties” in his autobiography in a closing monologue on the religious essence of spiritualism,

⁵⁶ “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (March 30, 1889).

⁵⁷ J.J. Morse, “Is Spiritualism Making Satisfactory Progress?” *Light* (December 11, 1909).

⁵⁸ Wallis, *What Spiritualism Is*, 30.

⁵⁹ In fact one of his last wishes to a friend was that *Light* should feature more articles that demonstrated the “consoling power of Spiritualism” to the masses. This is quoted from “Consolations,” *Light* (January 24th, 1914).

The knowledge that I am a Spirit, Immortal, and a Son of God, fills me with joy, and a sense of responsibility, too. Life is so real and earnest, its duties so many, that I feel almost afraid; but the knowledge that perfection awaits me hereafter if I keep on trying, nerves me to try again, and cheerfully hope and work for the Truth and Humanity, and make the best of the present hour with its duties and delights.⁶⁰

These “duties” were then later summed up by Wallis in an appendix to this work entitled “New Ten Commandments.” The new responsibilities of spiritualism (and humanity in general) included, among other things, to “do unto thy fellow-man as thou wouldst be done by, acknowledging in him the same rights as thou claimst for thyself,” (Commandment 2) to “love truth, attain knowledge, be virtuous, aspire unto wisdom, and practice charity,” (Commandment 3) to “abstain from all immoderate practices,” (Commandment 5) and to be “virtuous, knowing that virtue is its own reward.” (Commandment 8)⁶¹

This socially-directed spiritualism would be a common feature during the years of Wallis’s editorship. One article written by G.P. Young in 1912 neatly tied together the connection between morality, ethics, and spiritualistic beliefs:

The central consideration in the adjusting of ethical values and the realization of ideals lies in the question of the survival of personality. Her personal experience and conviction are of the greatest moment of the individual. It banishes pessimism, dread and despair, and thrills him with altruistic love and enthusiasm...This assurance of survival, which Spiritualism brings home to all, leads to a readjustment of ethical values...Spiritual

⁶⁰ Wallis, *The Story of My Life*, 28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

growth on earth will help us to progress in the spheres beyond...The character developed and the experience gained become our enduring possession henceforth.⁶²

Other socially-conscious editorials took up lighter issues such as the article, “Cinema as an Aid to Progress,” which called on “religious or spiritual teachers” to awaken to the power of the movie theater and use them “as agencies for the ethical, educational, and spiritual training of the people.”⁶³ Another called on the readers to enjoy a hearty chuckle,

Laughter is in a sense one of the touchstones of truth...We have heard some serious-minded persons express concern lest a general diffusion of fun in life should lead to levity and light-mindedness. A quite needless anxiety—society is in no danger what ever on that score. Indeed, the reverse is the case. Modern conditions are such that the average individual is often in grave danger of taking himself and his affairs much too seriously. And there is plenty of room for the laughing philosopher, be he learned or simple. Generally there cheerfulness is a gift...Life is all the time on the side of the merry soul.⁶⁴

Other articles took on a more serious tone. One editorial looked at the existence of envy, malice, and hatred in the world and argued that they were merely love misguided.

⁶² G.P. Young, “Spiritualism: Ethics, Morality, and Religion,” *Light* (Nov 2, 1912).

⁶³ W.T. Stead, “Cinema as an Aid to Spiritual Progress,” *Light* (November 30, 1912).

⁶⁴ “The Laughing Philosopher,” *Light* (November 2, 1912).

wherever we behold those ‘bad passions’ we need not deplore their existence in themselves—we have only to regret the form they have taken as ‘inverted loves,’ and to console ourselves with the reflection that it is better that they should take even a fording expression than have failed to manifest their existence at all. In a word, our concern should be not with energy but with its misdirection⁶⁵

Man should not fear these “bad passions” since “in the fullness of time” love and hatred will merge into a unified, peaceful force, or, as the writer puts it: “order will emerge from the disorder that must always precede it.”⁶⁶ It is not only the existence of hatred, envy, and malice, though that is the problem, more troubling is that society continues to commit and seemingly enjoy immoral activities. In a speech by Herbert Burrows British society is blamed for creating conditions that lead to the “the deterioration and degeneration of men, women and child, and this not in one class, but in all.” “The believer in the Spiritualist universe,” he continues,

is in duty bound to try to carry out there conceptions of unity and brotherhood in the life here as well as in the life beyond. Nay, I will go further, and affirm that if the laws be not carried out here, then, for the professed believer in the spiritual life, the road to progress in the beyond will be, if not insuperably difficult, so toilsome that if progress will be incalculably delayed. You cannot violate law on one plane and then expect that violation to have no effect on the next.⁶⁷

This is a serious call to action and even has hints of the Christian concept of hell, a place most definitely “insuperably difficult” to leave. The message is clear: spiritualism should

⁶⁵ “Envy, Hatred, and Malice,” *Light* (July 13, 1912).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ “Herbert Burrows, “The Social Problem and the Spiritual Universe,” *Light* (February 19, 1912).

not merely give a believer relief that he will be all right after death, it should urge him to impact the present life with moral vigor to create a happy ending in the next world.

Wallis and Gow even ventured outside of the realm of spiritualism and addressed political and social issues of the times, unrelated to the religious movement. Both felt they had a duty to provide guidance to their readers on how best to morally improve and evolve. For Gow (as will be discussed in the following chapter) this took the form of editorials on the dangers and evils of war in the months leading up to World War I. Wallis on the other hand included in *Light* many articles only precariously related to spiritualism if he felt they could uplift the audience. While previously *Light* had only rarely ventured to cover anything outside of the realm of spiritualism (except for the occasional article by Moses on the evils of the death penalty) under the guidance of Wallis, current events began to appear in the newspaper, sometimes with little hint of spiritualist commentary. One article in 1909 offered a cursory introduction to the need for “spiritual development...self-reliance...and personal self-mastery” before reporting on the recent words of the British Chief Justice that ninety percent of crime was caused by excessive use of “drink.” It ended with the somber-sounding statement, “It is a very sad fact that upwards of sixty thousand men and women died every year from the effects of intemperance.”⁶⁸

Mostly these commentaries took the form of self-help or motivation articles designed to improve one’s morality and morale more than anything else. Of course stemmed from Wallis’ view that spiritualism’s place in society was to function as an

⁶⁸ *Light* (November 27, 1909).

encouragement that death was not the end, and to help show people a correct system of morality. Instead of defending spiritualism or diagramming theology, Wallis was more concerned with what he saw as the ills of society. These ills were mostly connected with a pessimistic and gloomy future outlook. A good example is the commentary (presumably Wallis') entitled "Lessons in Optimism." The author of this editorial piece seeks to give encouragement to reformers burdened by "the dark pictures...of the strength and activity of the evils... [such as] the 'white slave traffic,' the drink problem, the blight of poverty." The author argues that in the face of these prevalent evils one must not give up or hang his or her head. "Pessimism, then, is the badge of shallowness and immaturity of thought." This is true for all man and particularly apt for the spiritualist who has the understanding that eventually these blights will fade away. "We must take a larger view," he noted in the light of eternal progress. Death then, is a "circumstance" not a finale. In the end, good will develop from bad and right will emerge where there was only wrong before. Yet for all this to occur, Wallis insists that a person must first transform themselves before attempting to conquer the world. It is after this personal metamorphosis is complete that a person can become what Wallis terms, "the greatest [optimist] of all." In other words, the writer insists that a good reformer (which for Wallis should be any good spiritualist as well) must never give up.⁶⁹

How one might achieve this great optimism in the face of society's ills is explained in an article written later that year titled "In Dark December." The piece looks at how, through a sort of mental gymnastics, one can train the mind to withdraw from

⁶⁹ "Lessons in Optimism," *Light* (July 20, 1912).

“external glooms” and fly “on the wings of imagination” to the blessed “gardens of the spirit.” The writer muses, “Submerged in things of sense, the mind takes a wearisome physical journey, frightened with cares and burdens from the Northern glooms to the orange groves of the South. Risen out of the bonds of fleshly circumstance, it travels in a flash from the region of cold, grey skies to realms more radiant and ethereal than any Nice or Cannes.” Here is how to face the problems of the world with enthusiasm and appropriate zeal: think about other things, more precisely, think about spiritual things. It is also readily available for everyone,

And all can do it if they will, just in so far as they gain an appreciation of the realities that lie behind the great illusion that the spiritually blind proclaim as the only Reality. When it has crumbled and faded under their fierce clutch, when it yields no more even a transitory delight, they, too, will turn and, with eyes at last opened to the truth, behold a world made new.⁷⁰

This “world made new” was precisely what Wallis hoped spiritualism would create. It would be a world free from the “purely sensuous and mercenary views of life and its purpose,”⁷¹ and instead would be filled with love, goodness, and equality. And it was not just the present world that hinged on this transformation; in a real way, Wallis saw the afterlife as intricately tied to present actions. Once during a trance address (an occasion where a medium went before a large group of people, entered into a trance and his “Spirit-Control” would answer questions given by the audience) by E.W. Wallis, he faced the question of how people could help those who had passed on but were still in

⁷⁰ “In Dark December,” *Light* (December 14, 1912).

⁷¹ Wallis, *What Spiritualism Is*, 27.

need of “great help.” He replied, “There is nothing so helpful as a good example. If you set them a good example, living your life wisely and intelligently, and send out your sympathetic thoughts, then you will help.”⁷² Stubborn people still needed a little direction and nudging in the right direction.⁷³ Wallis saw a person’s moral evolution as ultimately in the individual’s own hands.

While the idea of moral evolution helped to fill various voids in the spiritualist doctrine and thought, it was not complete without its twin notion of progress. This idea of progress was also firmly established with a notion that it was positive. This “positivity” varied between editors. For Moses and Rogers the “positivity” stemmed from the idea that the world was governed and guided by a positive or good God.⁷⁴ For Wallis and Gow, the “positivity” of progress was aligned with virtues of honesty, peace, and happiness that the evolution of man’s character would continue to create through God’s providence, directly or indirectly applied through scientific laws. Progress for both, in the end was something to be hailed and cheered. When it was combined with the inevitable law of evolution, the pair functioned as the essence of life and the hope for an improved future. It becomes “a true ‘survival of the fittest’ – the fittest to love and be loved, the fittest to develop the angel-side of man – that the Universe may keep its

⁷² E.W. Wallis, “Answers to Questions,” *Light* (January 11, 1902).

⁷³ This reasoning even progressed into the belief that deceased souls need consoling and guidance to advance in the afterlife. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a future editor of *Light*, in his work *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, which recants his evangelistic tour of Australia, tells of numerous occasions where he found himself helping to advance a soul during a séance, usually an unwavering Christian believer that still refuses to admit his error in theological judgment. (*Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921)

⁷⁴ It was always the Christian notion of “God” that the two men and the *Light* referred to. Even when taking aspects of other religions under consideration, the god they referenced was meant to be the Christian Deity.

upward march out of chaos, on to order; out of discord, into harmony; out of darkness, into light.”⁷⁵

On May 26th, 1883, *Light*, under the direction of Moses, printed a lecture by Rev. John Page Hopps entitled, “A scientific and spiritual basis of belief in a future life” in its entirety.⁷⁶ Within this article is an argument for the “positivity” of progress since it is connected to a good and righteous God. This was a crucial distinction since progress, for Moses and Rogers, had no inherent goodness.⁷⁷ It could only be a benevolent force on the future and history of the world if it was directed by a benevolent God. While progress may be guided and directed by the laws of nature and evolution, behind it and working through those laws was a gracious God. Hopps concluded that, “All God’s universe is beautiful with the law of progress and all things move to the music of His own heavenly will.”⁷⁸ Sixteen years later, under Roger’s editorship, *Light* printed an article that seconded this notion. It quoted a writer named A.J. Wells as stating, “Not only is there no gulf of separation between man and God, but there is none between God and the universe”.⁷⁹ God was part of nature and accountable for positive progress. Wells proclaimed that, “the story of our past is one long story of progress,” and that progress would ultimately end in the triumph of good over evil since God controlled all,

⁷⁵ “The Lash and Love,” *Light* (June 28, 1902).

⁷⁶ Rev. John Page Hopps, “A Scientific and Spiritual Basis of Belief in a Future Life,” *Light* May 26th, 1883.

⁷⁷ This is easily seen in the coverage of science by *Light*, which was portrayed as a promoter of materialism, a progressive idea that progressed, for spiritualist, in the wrong direction. New discoveries affirmed a material world only, and as science progressed into new realms, it was portrayed in *Light* as moving in the wrong direction, or perhaps progressing in an evil manner.

⁷⁸ Hopps, “A Scientific,” *Light*

⁷⁹ A.J. Wells, “Matter and Spirit,” *Light* (January 14th, 1899).

To fear, to believe in the final victory of evil, is atheism. Is it a bad world? Then behind it, above it, around it, in it, is a bad God. Ah! How dear, how soothing to man, arises the idea of God...effacing the scars of our mistakes and disappointment. And when we add to this idea of God the necessary idea of absolute goodness, how triumphant life should be!⁸⁰

Here, as in Hopps article, God is tied to progress and without His direction the goodness of progress withers. Positive progress then must always be tied to the idea and proof of God something that the scientific evidence of the afterlife that spiritualism offered, and attempted to prove.

The problem is that it is difficult to determine what any specific *Light* writer or editor truly meant when he talked of God. While some aspects remain fairly consistent with Christianity such as that He was good, powerful, and one, other notions of God remained vague in the pages of *Light*. Moses found that the “Deity” of spiritualism was somehow “nobler” than the traditional God-image of the Anglican Church. It had, he proclaimed, risen beyond a “mediaeval heaven and hell” or “election and eternal punishment” to a vision that was “broader.”⁸¹ It is hard, however, to tell exactly what Moses had in mind when he wrote those words. It was perhaps that spiritualism proposed eternal life for everyone, regardless of traditional ideas of salvation. He seems to point to this in another editorial, this one about John Stuart Mill’s notions of God. After a peer warns Mill that if he does not mend his ways God would punish him, Mill remarked, “It may be that there is such a God as you describe. It may be that He can send me to [a]

⁸⁰ Wells, “Matter and Spirit.”

⁸¹ “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (March 15, 1890).

hell... Very well, to hell I will go.” Moses found this statement “a splendid utterance,” and “a worthy utterance,” that did “something to break down the old bad creation made in the image of man—and not the best man—whom people call God.”⁸² If this was what Moses meant then he was following a part of the traditional church where the notions of hell were shifting away from the visions of fire and brimstone and concentrating instead on the positive attributes of Jesus and his life.⁸³ This “nobler” view of God may also have meant a shift away from the Calvinistic ideas of God’s providence, but this too is unclear. Moses, during a séance in which he was entranced remarked through his spirit-control that, “God rules all things wisely and well,” a far cry from a distant God.⁸⁴

In fact, visions of God during the Late Victorian and Edwardian period were extremely discordant in the pages of *Light*. Not only from the editors themselves, but from the contributors who wrote for *Light*. During the editorship of Rogers, God is described as “supreme above all,” as only a “necessary inference,” as a Deistic God who “works everything through laws,” as an ever-present “absolute goodness” and even the “living God” who speaks through clairvoyance.⁸⁵ There was no universal spiritualist creed on who exactly God was; there were, as stated before, no creeds at all. This diversity further points to the unique individualism of spiritualism and its refusal to fit into any defined theological or spiritual framework. It turned out that there was little need for a definite view of God since it was much easier and superbly more pragmatic to

⁸² “Mr. Haweis on John Stuart Mill,” *Light* (March 1st, 1890).

⁸³ See for instance, Jay, *Faith and Doubt*, 99-127;

⁸⁴ “Spiritualism in London and the Providences,” *Light* (May 5th, 1883).

⁸⁵ The quotes are from respectively, “The Spiritual Significance of Work,” *Light* (January 7th, 1899); “The Evolution of the Spirit,” *Light* (May 19th, 1900); “Have We a Gospel?” *Light*; “Matter and Spirit,” *Light*; and “All Dead,” *Light* (March 23rd, 1903).

allow each man/woman to fashion God to his or her own designs. Then spiritualism could be a haven for all those with slightly unorthodox religious sentiment.⁸⁶ This is demonstrated in the pages of *Light* where one could find reference to incarnation, eastern religions, and paganism alongside articles praising the holy God of the bible.⁸⁷ Yet while there was little agreement on who and what God was, there was a consensus during Rogers' and Moses' editorships that His goodness helped to create hope for positive progress.

The same trend continued into Wallis' and even Gow's editorships but downplayed the direct intervention of God in the world. They saw God rather as merely the source and the pinnacle of positive principles such as love, goodness, honesty, humility, and peace. This discrepancy is best seen through example. For instance, in 1903, *Light* under Rogers printed an editorial on "Our Joy in God." The title itself would have never been printed by Wallis or Gow and implies that joy is found not as a unique and separate entity, but as an experience that finds its meaning and presence through God. The article develops this theme further by quoting from the Bible liberally. It begins with the assumption and hope that spiritualists are filled with "happy thoughts," not because they are frivolous, but because they are certain that "'all things work together for good' to those who love God and know that He loves." It is the image of God for Rogers that gives joy a positive quality. Without the idea of God working in life, joy becomes a foolish and misguided emotion. What would one be joyful for if God was not

⁸⁶ Orthodox is, in this phrase of course a general term but refers to the basic tenants of faith professed by Protestant Christians, including, but not limited to: God is one, he is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; that the bible is the Word of God; and that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁸⁷ For instance reincarnation is a recurrent theme within the paper. For one example see "The Evolution of the Spirit," *Light* (May 19, 1900).

working for those who love Him? Yet, Rogers asserts, God is at work in the world: “we must get a firm confidence in the ultimate life and power and triumph of all things true and good...the Universe is sane and rational, and it is working for the higher sanity and rationality; and the higher sanity and rationality involve moral and spiritual economy, that is to say, the preservation and increase of all the higher and better things.”⁸⁸

In contrast, Wallis’ editorship demonstrated a retreat from the idea that God was the blatant source of goodness in the world. For Wallis this came from his bitter experiences with the Church at a young age and as he grew his attack against the Church increased. As a result Wallis would couch things in “humanistic” terms instead of God terms. For instance, in one tract printed sometime in the 1890s, Wallis talks of the good things that come from a firm belief in spiritualism:

But Spiritualism is not based upon bible statements; it is founded on facts; the phenomenal manifestations of this and all ages, and its teaching, are accordant with the highest spiritual intuitions of the noblest and most inspired of all time...Eternal principles of goodness, purity, and beauty reign supreme, and as we grow in these graces of the spirit we need no other Saviour.⁸⁹

Here were positive principles apart from God as the source. This same idea is evident in another article Wallis printed originally for the spiritualist newspaper, *The Two Worlds*. In it he identifies positive progress as a sort of “divine spirit” within each man. Spiritualism will help man/woman progress to a state of being in which they will be able

⁸⁸ “Our Joy in God,” *Light* (January 10, 1903).

⁸⁹ Wallis, *Did Jesus Die*, 20.

to find “the good in all – in all men, in all religions, in all experiences.”⁹⁰ Inside *Light* this same type of wording and rhetoric continued. One article, “Envy, Hatred, and Malice” is a good illustration. It focuses on the gradual creation of good out of evil, but does not use God’s wisdom, power, goodness, or any other part of God as the source of the final triumph. Instead it merely implies that the “Universal principle of Love” and its “twin principle Wisdom” will “in the fullness of time” come to reign over the “bad passions,” of envy, hatred, and malice. Man’s job, Wallis believed, was to use the abilities innate within him or her to the fullest extent. The expansion and sharpening of these powers was, for Wallis, the progressive realization of positive development in the world. If a person would only realize the powers he or she had within themselves and work to hone these positive traits then the world could look forward to “heaven...manifested on earth, [and] God...made manifest in the flesh.”⁹¹

This might seem to be a small distinction, but it points toward a pattern within *Light* that pushed the Christian conception of God away from a position of prominence within the paper. What it does not mean is that Wallis, and later Gow, had no faith in God. Atheism would not be found in *Light* and neither in the private lives of these two editors. They were still believed strongly in God, in his goodness, power, and control. The idea of morality and progress had changed though between Moses and Rogers, and Wallis and Gow. The concepts of what morality should entail – kindness, humility, loyalty, honesty – all remained constant, but the source of their power had shifted. God

⁹⁰ Edward Walter Wallis, “An Open Letter to Christian Opponents of Spiritualism, To Rev. Fleming and Mr. Waldron and the Public Generally” originally printed in *Two Worlds*.

⁹¹ J.J. Morse, “Is Spiritualism Making Satisfactory Progress?” *Light* (December 11, 1909)

was not the major player anymore in the world, and these principles and character traits came not from his role in the world, but from the man he had created originally. Positive powers in the world, such as honesty, now spring from inherent, though perhaps dormant, internal sources, placed in man originally by the Almighty Power, or God, but now finding their power through the awakening of a man or woman.

Wallis himself makes this point in one of his writings calling positive character traits “divine selfhood within.”⁹² In another article in *Light* under his editorship, these traits are referred to as the “genius in all,” a genius that enables men and women to utilize “a wider range of faculties, innate, though latent, and awaiting unfoldment in all.”⁹³ Gow continued this trend after Wallis’ death in 1914, at least until the outbreak of the war. As the war progressed, the use of God, and consequently his role in the world, once again became a major part of the paper. The weight of the war on the population, the desire to have a divine certainty that the course Britain was taking was a correct one, and perhaps merely the comfort that images of a benevolent Christian God might bring to a British mind, all helped to bring about the reemergence of God in *Light*. Still, it was a different God than Moses or even Rogers would have known. Yet when the Great War burst upon the world without the world truly understanding what it had created, *Light* and Gow trudged along, attempting to make sense of the disaster. God turned out to be one of the ways *Light*, under Gow, coped with and understood the War.

⁹² E.W. Wallis, “A Spirit’s Experience of Death and After.” *Light*.

⁹³ G.P. Young, “Spiritualism: Ethics, Morality, and Religion,” *Light* (November 2, 1912).

CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT WAR, SPIRITUALISM, AND CHRISTIANITY

The Great War was not expected nor was it foreseen. Only after the war began did the *Light* publish weekly ancient prophecies that supposedly predicted the war. Yet the war did come, and it came with a vengeance. *Light* and its new editor, David Gow, faced the war, with its twists, turns, and colossal violence as best they could, trying to cope with the bloodshed that daily streamed from the warfront. It was a difficult task, for what in human history could have prepared England for World War I? The war turned out to be so catastrophic that it threatened to destroy some of the most sacred ideals of Victorian and Edwardian England, ideals such as morality, progress, and chivalry.¹ It held such destruction that it drove Rev. E.A. Burroughs, the Chaplain to the King, to declare, “The resources of man are at an end: civilization, science, progress – all things we trusted in – have failed the world in its greatest need.”² *Light* and Gow lived, breathed, and worked in this world. Gow attempted to make sense of the war and *Light* allowed him and other spiritualists to present their views on why things had fallen into this terrible state, how the world could be made right again, and why spiritualism mattered to England and the world.

The answers that they gave came in a variety of styles but revolved around three major ideas. The first dealt with what spiritualism actually believed about the power

¹ Paul Fussell describes this destruction or threatening of sacred ideals as an “irony of situation” that the war created. For instance he writes, “But the Great War was more ironic than any before or since. It was a hideous embarrassment to the Meliorist myth which had dominated the public consciousness for a century. It reversed The Idea of Progress.” (*The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8) Fussell’s statement is a bit extreme though because for many Britons (particularly spiritualists, as this chapter will demonstrate) it merely threatened the Idea of Progress but did not destroy it.

² Robb, *British Culture*, 206.

behind the world and, therefore, the war. It is within this vein of thought that the curious resurgence of traditional Christian views of God and Christ will be discussed and diagrammed. God was an important part of the spiritualism message during and after the war in a way that He had not been before the war. The second idea focused on the causes of the war. Spiritualism maintained that the philosophy of materialism was a disastrous disease that had infected the earth. Unless it was removed, spiritualists maintained that the world would be lost to darkness and destruction. War had come because it had proved the only way to finally banish materialism from the earth. The third and final idea concerned the role that spiritualism should play in society during the war. Here, Gow and others strongly urged that spiritualism's main concern should be to provide comfort to the multitude of bereaved families in England. All three of these ideas received guidance, formation, and support from David Gow, the man behind *Light* during and after the war. It is important to first understand who David Gow was and what *Light* looked like under his editorship before the war in order to correctly frame the wartime history of *Light* in an appropriate context.

David Gow was perhaps the most important editor of *Light*'s storied history, yet he is also the least well-known. Little, in fact, is known about the man who guided *Light* through the Great War and into the beginning of the 1930s. His tenure was almost as long as those of William Stanton Moses and Edmund Dawson Rogers combined, stretching from January, 1914, until Easter, 1931, when he retired due to ill health. This shroud of mystery is perhaps understandable since Wallis, Moses, and Rogers all wrote much more extensively about Spiritualism outside of *Light*. They also existed in a

different climate for British spiritualism than David Gow. The pre-war spiritualist movement was much smaller than the post-war spiritualist camp when it rose to around a quarter of a million British adherents.³ Pre-War England also had the time and energy to debate issues such as the demonic origins of spiritualism spirits and the chemical make-up of ether; England during the War and post-War England were more concerned with healing the giant wound that wartime casualties and economic devastation had created. In addition, while spiritualism was strongly attacked during the Victorian and Edwardian period it began to receive less criticism and even positive praise starting in the 1920s.⁴

This, of course, is not the only reason why David Gow is not better known, for he also contributed less to spiritualism in general than *Light's* other three major editors. Besides the editorship of *Light* and the articles he contributed to the paper, little remains of his writings.⁵ In addition, unlike Wallis and Moses who were accomplished and famous mediums, and Rogers who practiced mesmerism and ran a family circle, Gow never made any reference to personal attempts at being a medium. In this sense, he was never intimately associated with spiritualism in the same way that the three other editors were. If spiritualism was false, then for Moses it meant his reputation would be ruined and there would be major questions about his sanity.⁶ On the other hand, if spiritualism

³ See the conclusion for a more detailed analysis of spiritualism's numbers.

⁴ Nelson, *Spiritualism*, 161.

⁵ It appears he wrote somewhat extensively outside of *Light*, but it is hard to tell how prolifically. There are hints, for instance Leigh Hunt, Gow's assistant editor for a number of years, referenced in Gow's obituary, Gow's "writings elsewhere," about spiritualism outside of the *Light*. Leigh Hunt, "David Gow—Poet, Journalist, Friend," *Light* (November 9, 1939). Perhaps his only published stand-alone piece was the 1920 essay entitled, *Spiritualism: Its Position and Prospects: A Record and a Summary*. This short pamphlet was published through the London Spiritualist Alliance, the same organization that published *Light*.

⁶ Moses professed to receive messages through spirit writing from, among others, the spirits of Plato, Beethoven, Benjamin Franklin, and President Garfield. (Oppenheim, *Other World*, 78)

turned out to be wrong, Gow would look a bit foolish and gullible, but not loony. People might even pity him for falling prey to what they might deem the greedy and evil mediums. This is not to doubt Gow's faith in spiritualism, which he exhibited for over fifty years, but rather to help explain why he easily fades into the shadows in the presence of Rogers, Moses, and Wallis. They had more to lose and therefore spoke the loudest in favor of spiritualism.

There is, as far as this author knows, no historical biography of David Gow and thus the biographical information collected here is by no means comprehensive. Gow left no record of his spiritualist adventures like Wallis and Rogers; instead his life must be gleaned from the scraps of information available.⁷ He was born in Scotland sometime in the year 1866. Hardly anything is known about his childhood. He was a small man, weak in stature and body who had a tendency to overtax himself with other people's problems.⁸ He displayed a sensitive, artistic and quiet nature, though friends recalled that he "never suffered fools gladly."⁹ He was well-read and used his knowledge to throw a philosophical light on even mundane and ordinary topics.¹⁰ At the same time he displayed great skill with the practical and guided the *Light* through the precarious

⁷ It was in fact Gow who interviewed, collected, and edited the autobiography for Edmund Dawson Rogers, but never did the same for himself like Wallis did.

⁸ Notice the continued reference to his spent, "nervous energy" in various obituaries. (Mrs. Hewat McKenzie, and Miss H.A. Dallas, "David Gow—Poet, Journalist, Friend," *Light* (November 9, 1939).

⁹ Mrs. Hewat Mckenzie, "David Gow."

¹⁰ Mrs. Hewat Mckenzie, "David Gow"; Miss M. Phillimore, "David Gow—Poet, Journalist, Friend," *Light* (November 9, 1939).

dangerous economical times of World War I. He disdained public speaking and had no real knack for it, instead preferring to express himself through his pen.¹¹

He was, from early in his career, a writer. He began by writing poetry, publishing poetry in the 1860s in the annual Scottish anthology of poets. How he came to spiritualism is unknown, though there was a thriving spiritualist movement within Scotland throughout the Victorian period. By the year 1889 at the latest Gow's work had led him to both journalism and spiritualism.¹² He emerged on the scene with the LSA in 1899 when he attended a lecture on March 10 of that same year.¹³ Thereupon he climbed the ranks of the LSA rather quickly and worked with the *Light* for a number of years as a contributor and assistant editor.¹⁴ Through those years he showed himself worthy of the editorship of *Light* when E.W. Wallis became sick and died early in 1914. The last years of Gow's life were marred by illness, and he was forced to retire from the editorship in 1931 due to ill health and, eighteen months later, he went into complete seclusion. Six and a half years later, he died at the age of seventy-three.¹⁵

Gow inherited a much different newspaper from Wallis than the *Light* of Moses and Rogers. Wallis had effectively severed the tie between Christianity and spiritualism within the paper and had instead promoted a spiritualism that was centered on his beliefs in human goodness and progress. In effect, this mirrored what was occurring within Britain as a whole. Secularization was beginning to take root, and the Bible, God, and

¹¹ Mrs. Hewat McKenzie, "David Gow"; Miss M. Phillimore, "David Gow"; and Leigh Hunt, "David Gow."

¹² Leigh Hunt, "David Gow—Poet, Journalist, Friend," *Light* (November 9, 1939).

¹³ *Light* (March 11, 1899).

¹⁴ "David Gow—Poet, Journalist, Friend," *Light* (November 9, 1939).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Christ started to slip into the background of public life.¹⁶ This was particularly true for Gow. While Moses and Rogers had seen the goodness of the world as a result of God's blessings, Gow (as Wallis had before him) proposed that the world was good enough without God. God may have been the source of what was right, good, and true at the start of creation, but now it was up to mankind to develop these attributes already inside them. God had done his work; now mankind needed to cultivate and grow its inherent goodness. E. Wake Cook correctly defined this distinction in 1915 by stating: "We as Spiritualists must remember that the real superman is within us, awaiting the supra-conditions and environment of the next plane of our semi-eternal existence, to burst into full and harmonious manifestation."¹⁷ Gow also believed, like Wallis, that every man and woman must strive in the present life as well to grow this undeveloped "superman."

Gow makes this distinction between an active and involved God and a new, more aloof and less involved deity abundantly clear within his own writings. He preferred to use words such as "Eternal Purpose," "Spirit," "Universal Mother," or "Heavenly Powers" instead of the more traditional and loaded terms of God, Christ, and Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Gow felt that these traditional religious concepts contained too many negative connotations and came from the Christian camp that had spent the last fifty years battling and cursing the spiritualist movement. He might also have felt that they had lost their meaning. God was no longer the mighty, terrible, and all-powerful word it had once

¹⁶ See the introduction for a good discussion of this issue.

¹⁷ E. Wake Cook, "Spiritualism and the Problems Raised by the War: Part Four, The Superman," *Light* (June 12, 1915).

¹⁸ "Notes by the Way," *Light* (August 8, 1914); "Dark Days: Some Consolations," *Light* (August 8, 1914); "Psychology and the War," *Light* (October 24, 1914); and "Notes by the Way: The Great Deliverance," *Light* (November 16, 1918).

been. It had become much less important and confused.¹⁹ Gow believed that new words and descriptions were needed to convey the message and “powers” of spiritualism.

With this in mind, what occurred within *Light* during the war must be regarded as unique and historically important within the history of spiritualism. As already observed, *Light*, under the direction of its last two editors (Wallis and Gow) was moving steadily away from a Christian-affiliated spiritualism and towards a human-centered spiritualism. God was not as important to Rogers as He had been to Moses and He was even less important to Wallis and Gow. Yet we find in the pages of *Light* during the war what might be termed a “revival” of traditional images of God and Christ. This all occurred during the editorship of David Gow who himself almost never even mentioned the word “God” within his own opinion pieces.²⁰ The persons of God and of Christ, when they were referenced in *Light*, began to be described with certain, Christian-affiliated traits. God was called all-powerful and regarded as the controller and director of the world. He was regarded as having an active part in the world. Jesus Christ was referenced with more regularity, though spiritualists tended to focus only on the characteristics of Christ that suited a particular point or opinion they wished to prove. Still, both Christ and God were present in *Light* throughout the war.

¹⁹ Many images and beliefs within Christianity were in flux such as views on heaven and hell, the real Jesus, and God Himself. For discussion of these changes see Smith, *The London Heretics*; Crowther, *The Church Embattled*; Jay, *Faith and Doubt*; and Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁰ The author has found only two uses of the term “God” when Gow is referring to a supreme deity. It occurs in his pamphlet *Spiritualism: Its Position and Its Prospects*, pg 11. As far as can be determined, Gow only used the word “God” once within his writings in *Light* when the armistice was announced. From all the newspapers examined (including every article during 1914-1918) he always used another word when making reference to a God-like figure.

This, of course, begs the question: does *Light* then provide evidence that the process of secularization was slowed and possibly reversed for a time during and after World War I? The answer is “yes.” This affirmative response is justified by two aspects of spiritualism during and after the war. The first is the “revival” of Christian-like portrayals of God and Christ within the “leading journal of spiritualism,” *Light*.²¹ The second has to do with the nature of the spiritualist movement itself. Spiritualism always existed as a type of offshoot from the folds of Christianity. The efforts of Wallis and Gow (during the brief time he was editor) to push spiritualism away from an association with Christianity did not, however, lessen this relationship. This movement was an attempt by the editors to define spiritualism as a unique and individual power, apart from Christianity. The fact remained however that it was still Christianity’s doctrine and influence on society that gave power to the message of spiritualism. Without Christian ideas of heaven, hell, God, Christ, and the soul, all of its visions would have received a cold reception. It would have been like an Edwardian man trying to explain Microsoft Windows to a friend without first explaining the computer. Christian doctrines of the afterlife, God, Christ, and the soul provided the framework for spiritualism’s visions and its explanations of these things. In this way, spiritualism was always inseparable from Christianity. Outside of the realm of Christianity, the spiritualist message lost all coherence. Viewed in this light, the popularity of spiritualism after World War I must also be proof of the resurgence of traditional Christian motifs, particularly when coupled with the “revival” of traditional images within the spiritualist movement itself.

²¹ Mrs. Hewat Mckenzie, “David Gow.”

So where and why did this “revival” emerge? First, the “revival” did not originate from inside the paper itself. What is important to note about this resurgence is that it came not from the editorial pages of the paper, but from everyday readers, guest writers, and material it reprinted. God became prominent again in the pages of *Light* not because the paper had an editor who favored Christianity and spirituality, but because people thought, wrote, talked, and wondered about God more. The violence of the war brought forth a reassessment of where the world was heading and of what ideas would take it on the right course. In striving for an answer, many reached backwards into history to find a steady footing. God and Christ became symbols of hope, continuity, and unity amidst the death and destruction of the Great War.²² Spiritualism joined in with a renewed insistence that it gave proof to the ancient truths of Christianity: God, the soul, and the afterlife.

This reemergence happened for a number of overlapping reasons. First of all, the readers desired it. As already mentioned the mass of references to a traditional view of God and Christ came from sources outside of the editor; Gow continued to refer to vague conceptions when discussing anything close to God. Yet articles printed from other sources and the letters written to *Light* that continued to find comfort and meaning in more time-honored notions. The spiritualist and non-spiritualist who read *Light* wished

²² Winter talks about this repeatedly in *Sites of Mourning*. Others also acknowledge this trend such as Fussell who labels it “myth,” or “fiction.” For coverage of how the theme of the resurgence of Christ and the theme of God were used during the war see Fussell, *The Great War*, 114-154; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, 113-138 and 203-225 (Though in the end they describe it as an “irrational” response to the “war’s modern rationality”); and finally Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 115-130, 170-190, and 227-240.

to cling to more established beliefs about God during, at least, the first years of the war.²³

These beliefs, particularly the idea of an all-powerful and involved God became a common theme in *Light*. They developed and changed as the war went on, but they still remained a more traditional vision of God than what was found in *Light* before the war.

Second, the visions of God and Christ as preached by the Christian church were used by spiritualists to give the movement credibility and meaning. This was the same method utilized by Moses and many other spiritualists. They would argue that the spiritualist message was the true interpretation of scriptures and that Christ himself talked to spirits throughout his life on earth. Indeed, Moses spent his life preaching that spiritualism embodied true Christianity. In the midst of the Great War, many spiritualists used Christ as a representation of a perfect spiritualist. Furthermore the figure of Christ began to appear more regularly in visions by mediums, readers, and accounts from the front. This benefited spiritualism in two unique ways. First, the appearance of Christ helped to add weight to any spiritualist message proclaimed through the vision. Second, the image of the Christ gave more credibility to the reality of the vision itself. It was not only spiritualists who would believe in Christ revealing Himself in truly trying times.²⁴ These visions of God and Christ also helped to prop up other beliefs held by Gow and *Light*, such as Gow's pacifistic stance.

Finally, imagery of and beliefs about God and Christ furnished strong support for the spiritualist's assertion that progress continued in a positive manner. This assertion—

²³ This concentration on God and Christ seemed to have waned slightly towards the end of the war but still remained significantly higher than at the start.

²⁴ This is a common belief of Christianity including Catholicism and Protestantism. There are many stories in the histories of both denominations which include an angel or Christ himself appearing to a holy person in need.

that progress was naturally positive—met its most strenuous test during World War I. It had been a common theme since the beginning of *Light* in 1881 and was a most cherished Victorian ideal. Yet could progress withstand a trench? Was progress chemical warfare? How were the grotesque spectacles of World War I battlefields within the bounds of “positive” progress? These issues became tremendously important to *Light* during and after the war. God was used to help prove the continued goodness of progress because He was referenced as a controlling power that was making good out of evil. Gone were the now-hollow prophecies of Wallis that “Eternal principles of goodness, purity, and beauty” had banished the need for a “Savior”; during World War I a savior was precisely what *Light* needed.²⁵ God became again the Eternal Savior guiding and directing the world for good as *Light* turned to this image to help ensure that spiritualists would not have to abandon their beliefs in the benevolent progression of mankind.

A word must also be briefly said in the opposite direction. It is easy to exaggerate this resurgence and use it to prove that the traditional Christian ideals of God and Christ, and perhaps all the other dogmas of the Church of England, became the actual beliefs of most spiritualists or indeed most Britons through the experience of the war. That is far from the truth. It is obvious that there were those within spiritualism who found or “re-found” the Christian faith during the war and after, but for many the use of images of Christ and God simply provided comfort through an image, an understanding, a memory of ages past, and they were not necessarily an attachment, either intellectual or emotional, to the Christian beliefs that went along with the images. *Light* also used a plethora of

²⁵ Wallis, “Did Jesus Die,” 20.

other images during the war to help make sense of things; some of these supported and some conflicted with their portrayal of Christ and God. It is important to remember that spiritualism was an extraordinarily diverse and individually-driven movement. This attribute contributed to the lack of central creeds and a spiritualist could in theory therefore believe almost anything.²⁶ Once understood, this places the reemergence of traditional views of Christ and God in *Light* during World War I into proper perspective.²⁷

The revival of traditional images of God and Christ is immediately evident in the first issue of *Light* after the outbreak of war. Up until that point, from the time when Gow took over the editorship *Light* had only featured three articles within its publication devoted to God and not a single one on Christ. On August 15, the second issue of *Light* after the War officially started, it ran an article on both God and Christ.²⁸ In addition, it included a letter from Nathaniel Hawthorne's widow, Sophia, which concluded that it was God that gave meaning even in the midst of mourning. She wrote, "God has turned

²⁶ For a humorous example of this see the article by Charles Massey, "Hair Growing from Casts," *Light* (December 15, 1883) in which he recites the strange story of a man that made a cast of a deceased person's head and left it over night. The following morning the cast was found to have hair growing from its chin, eyebrows and head. Massey attributes it to the spirit of the deceased man. While this is interesting enough, the better part comes from the following "letter war" which ensues between a number of different men all with their own opinions. (G. Damiani "Hair Growing from a Plaster Mold," *Light* (December 21, 1883); Henry Atkinson, "Hair Growing from Plaster Casts," *Light* (January 19, 1884); C.C.M. "Hair Growing From Plaster Casts," *Light* (January 26, 1884); C.C.M. "A Statute Weeping," *Light* (February 2, 1884); and G. Diamani, "Hair Growing from Plaster Casts," *Light* (February 2, 1884). Massey once terms the phrase, "magical motion," to explain how the spirit can affect material objects such as statutes, plaster casts, and paintings.

²⁷ These images of Christ and God also appeared in British society, outside of the spiritualist movement and like their treatment inside of spiritualism, they did not automatically indicate adherence to other Christian beliefs. One noteworthy example is detailed by Fussell who describes the many meanings that soldiers subscribed to the image of the crucifix. (*The Great War*, 117-121) Another, written about by Eksteins, was the description by English priests during the war of Christ as a khaki-laden, machine gun-totting war supporter. (*Rites*, 236).

²⁸ *Light* (August 15, 1914).

for me the silver lining; and for me the darkest cloud has broken into ten thousand singing birds...God showed me a gold thread passing through each mesh of a black pall that seemed to shut out the sun.”²⁹ The “gold thread” was none other than the idea that it was God, supposedly a good and righteous God, who ultimately controlled all things. This depiction of God as the all-supreme power and controller helped to provide comfort in uncertainty. Another article from the same issue contained the same theme and referred to God as “the Father,” a soothing representation of what *Light* wished God to be in times of need.³⁰

This focus on the familiar Christian image of God increased in the final months of the year. Once again, this resurgence came from letters to the editor, reprinted material, and guest columnists. It came from the “common man” and Gow either seems to have recognized this desire and increased the amount of space the Christian God received in *Light*, or he had no other option since all around him discussion of God was increasing and its inclusion in the pages of *Light*, like a swollen river, became unstoppable. Whichever view is correct, God was a popular topic of discussion once again. One example of this in *Light* was the inclusion of sample prayers designed to give the readers a guide when they wished to pray for England. These tended to be extremely conservative. One entitled “Universal Prayer before War” could have come directly out of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It read, “Almighty and Everlasting God, Thou who overrulest for good all woes and strife on earth! We turn to Thee in this hour of trial, well

²⁹ Sophia Hawthorne, “Human Affection, Bereavement and Consolation: A Noble Letter on a Great Theme,” *Light* (August 15, 1914).

³⁰ Untitled, *Light* (August 15, 1914).

knowing that, in every last extremity, Thou art the only Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”³¹ This was submitted, appropriately, by *Laus Deo*, (“Praise be to God.”)

This continued in other articles during the last months of 1914. One article which calls God by a traditional Old Testament name, “I Am,” further demonstrates the unique position God could occupy in the pages of *Light*. The article is titled “The Gods in Wartime,” and it is basically an anti-war tract containing Christian themes. God and Christ are described with both classical Christian forms and pagan (in this case, pantheistic) ways. Spiritualists, as they did with most every idea, attempted to synergize and congeal various images of God into one unified vision. Unfortunately, many times the final outcome of this merging of ideas was that it created a final vision that was incoherent and even contradictory. The article is an example of this spiritualist ability. Geraldine de Robeck stated plainly, “Note that I do not believe in Gods, in the ordinary sense, at all, nor perhaps in a personal deity of any sort, yet in a great *I Am* I do believe, but He is not on the side of any man with a gun.” Here God is called the “great *I Am*” but he is impersonal and distant, not involved in the war. Yet in the next sentence, de Robeck hints at an involved and working God. “*If* God is at work, in our midst, at the present moment,” she wrote, “I believe it is in the hearts of those who preach universal peace.” She continues by using the picture of a pacifistic Christ as ammunition against the warring Christian nations,

³¹ “Universal Prayer Before War,” *Light* (May 9, 1914).

And now, to conclude, what about the followers of Christ? What are they doing on the world-plane who should be up and fighting with the armies of heaven in the cause of peace?...Are Christians growing daily less sensual, less selfish, less cruel, less money-grabbing, less insistent on their earthly rights, less materialistic, less wrapped in sense?...There appears to be no difference, therefore, between the aims and works of spiritual men and mortal men!³²

All in one article, the writer uses a grand vision of the “great *I Am*” while rejecting any notion of a personal God, argues that God is fighting for peace, and accuses Christians of errors with the icon of Christ as her proof. God and Christ were found to be very flexible indeed.

Yet the traditional attributes of God were there just the same, even alongside other tangents and ideas. In fact, when one contributor wrote a letter presenting an unorthodox view of God, he elicited an angry and hostile response from other readers. The letter by a person identified only as C.E.B., talks extensively of an “inner God”:

What we have to do is to fix our mind upon that inmost spring of our life’s activities—the Divine Power from which then arise...The clue, then, towards realizing that God is to be sought within consists in first thinking of Him as the only Life-source, Thought-source, Feeling-source, and Activity-source—the innermost origin of all we do, or think, or feel.³³

This unique description, which transformed God into one’s individual personality, brought an angry letter to the editor ridiculing C.E.B. and defending a more traditional conception of God. The letter read,

³²Geraldine De Robeck, “The Gods in Wartime,” *Light* (September 12, 1914)

³³C.E.B., “The God Within Us,” *Light* (September 5, 1914).

Sir,—May I advert to the tendency in numerous correspondents lately (including “C.E.B.”) to claim that God is not to be found outside of us, but inside. So far from this being a priceless flashlight, I can regretfully only see in it a mischievous delusion. How can anyone imagine that the Majesty which rules endless universes can be confined within the contemptible limits of any given human frame or soul?...There is an Indian sect which seeks to attain righteousness by the fixed concentration on its own navel, to block out distraction. One would fear some New-Thought lines landing us in as perilous a risk!...Confused thinking is sometimes taken for mysticism—but it will never replace the solid hold on Christ of our forbears.³⁴

The writer speaks of God as a supreme power. God is “the Majesty that rules endless universes” and He is not found inside of a man. In fact, the writer appeals to the history of spiritualism’s association with the person of Christ as a common ground for understanding and clarity.

The idea that God was in control in a direct way over the events and outcome of the War emerged even more strongly during the middle years of the War in *Light*. One example was the prayer by Laus Deo already mentioned that recognized God as the ruler of all things. Another was a quotation from the *Los Angeles Times* that asked: does God send wars? The author concludes that since it “seems evident” that all “human affairs are ruled by God,” war must be a means used by God to raise man from a low plane of existence to a higher one. It ends by dogmatically insisting that the “battle is not ours, but God’s.”³⁵ A third reference of this kind came from an anti-war piece written by Katharine Bates, a contributor, who asks readers to mentally influence world leaders

³⁴ E.C.H. “Letter to the Editor,” *Light* (September 19, 1914)

³⁵ “Is it not true that God does not send wars?” *Light* (January 15, 1915).

towards a peaceful solution by using Spirits as a type of invisible, telepathy cable to transmit peaceful thoughts to various dignitaries. By doing this, she reasons, one can become a “co-worker with God” guiding the world in the correct way.³⁶

Taken together, these three references to God being the power and controller of earthly events are equivalent to the space given in *Light* to the mention of other controlling powers.³⁷ There was another thread, however, published and discussed almost continuously in *Light* from 1915 to the beginning of 1916, which portrayed a very active and real God who was intimately involved in the everyday events, battles, and outcome of the war. This was exemplified by *Light*'s long-running coverage of the “Angel at Mons” controversy.³⁸ This legend grew out of the 1914 British retreat from Mons. The retreat was thought to be miraculous because of the sheer size of the German force advancing against a weaker British army. The legend itself seems to have come from the fictional story, “The Bowmen,” published in the *London Evening News* on September 9, 1914, by the reporter and writer Arthur Machen. In the story, Machen imagines that during the retreat by the British soldiers at Mons, St. George, the patron saint of England, brings back medieval angel-bowmen to protect the English and destroy the evil Germans. The story was presented as fiction but soon morphed into a “true” story complete with a multitude of witnesses. The Angels at Mons story is referenced in

³⁶ Katharine Bates, “A World Disaster: How It May be Averted,” *Light* (August 8, 1914).

³⁷ The *Light* at times did not use the word “God” to describe the power that caused or was guiding the War, but it was sporadic at best. While it was, of course, extremely true for any editorial piece written by Gow, it was not exclusively confined to him. Sometimes spiritualists preferred to dance around the term “God” with eloquent phrases and verbal flourishes. They might label the power the “Eternal Purpose,” (“Notes by the Way,” *Light* (August 8, 1914)) or perhaps a mysterious “earth-spirit.” (J. Arthur Hill, “Is the Earth Alive?” *Light* (September 5, 1914))

³⁸ For an insightful and detailed look at the origins and progression of the Angels at Mons legend see David Clarke's article, “Rumours of Angels: A Legend of the First World War,” *Folklore* 113, (2002), pp. 151-73.

Light at least twenty-four times in 1915 alone, and it appears that the newspaper, from the outset, regarded the story as true. Someone from the newspaper, perhaps Gow, contacted Machen “within days” of the publication and asked for his sources, to which Machen responded that he had none; the story was completely fictional.³⁹ *Light* proceeded to run an article affirming that the story was false, but then began to give other evidence that a similar event actually happened during the retreat of Mons.⁴⁰

The September 18, 1915 issue of *Light* quoted an *Occult Review* article confirming the reality of divine intervention during the Mons retreat.⁴¹ In this piece the religious theme of Godly intervention on the side of England is already evident. This was a reoccurring part of the visions of Mons, the idea that Christ, God, Angels, and the holy St. George were active participants in the events of the War, and that they were on the British side. In the article a soldier after the battle asks for “a picture or a medal of St. George,” since he witnessed St. George riding a “white horse leading the British” during the retreat.⁴² St. George would become a constant in the ensuing details of the Angels at Mons. This saint provided memories for many about the older, perhaps simpler, days of England and the great heritage of the English nation. It was comforting because it was familiar, and it was familiar largely because it was Christian, a particularly English vision of Christianity at that.⁴³

³⁹ Clarke, 153-7.

⁴⁰ “The Invisible Allies: Strange Story from the Front,” *Light* (September 25, 1914).

⁴¹ Clarke, 156. The *Occult Review* had also contacted Machen to see if the story was really true.

⁴² “The Visions at Mons,” *Light* (September 18, 1914).

⁴³ Linda Colley finds that Christianity was a key component of cultural identity to a Briton helping to defining a person’s “Britishness” and sense of belonging in the nation. This trend continued even during World War I and World War II. See her work *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), pgs. 11-54.

In the accounts printed in *Light* the visions progressively became more explicitly Christian. They started with an emphasis upon a subtle supernatural intervention within the battle and grew into full-blown accounts of St. George leading light-filled angels in a cavalry charge into the German line. At the beginning *Light* quoted soldiers' stories many of which included a type of fog-like cloud that descended and shielded the retreating English from their German foes. One "military officer" came to *Light's* office and stated that a "strange cloud interposed between the Germans and the British...which, it seems, had the effect of protecting the British against the overwhelming hordes of the enemy."⁴⁴ Slowly this image of the cloud grew into something more. Stories were related that inside the cloud mysterious things occurred. One article retold a soldier's account: "Suddenly he saw a sort of luminous cloud, or fog, interpose itself between the Germans and our forces. In this cloud there seemed to be bright objects moving, he could not say if they were figures or not, but they were moving and bright."⁴⁵

This gave way to accounts recalling clearly what those "moving and bright" objects really were. One article called them an army of archers.⁴⁶ Another reprint of an article from the Catholic newspaper *Universe* provided a version laden with Christian symbolism. It tells the story described in a sermon by Rev. Fielding Ould, vicar of St. Stephen's, St. Albans, about a group of British soldiers at Mons who had been discussing their difficult situation. One of them reasoned that perhaps with St. George's help they might overcome the odds against them. The story continued,

⁴⁴ "Invisible Allies," *Light*

⁴⁵ "Supernormal phenomena at the battle front," *Light* (May 8, 1915).

⁴⁶ "The Invisible Allies," *Light* (May 15, 1915).

The men all agreed with him, and with a yell, "St. George for England!" they dashed into the open...as they ran they became aware of a large company of men with bows and arrows going along with them and even leading them on against the enemies' trenches...a few moments afterward the enemy hesitated, stopped and finally fled...one of the latter (German prisoner) who seemed dazed and astonished, demanded to be told who were "the horsemen in armor who led the charge?"⁴⁷

The mysterious fog was now a heavenly army headed by St. George and the Christian associations continued to grow.

During the first half of 1916, the direct meaning of the Angels at Mons story was drawn upon repeatedly in *Light*. If Angels and St. George really were fighting for the English army then God Himself was acting for and protecting England. Sir W. F. Barrett made this assertion directly by sending into *Light* a letter he had received from a soldier at the front. The letter stated among other things,

It was no uncommon thing for tens of thousands of Germans to be repulsed, or even put to flight, by, as it seemed, only three to four thousand of us; hosts of heaven seem to intervene on our behalf... I am sure had it not been for the protecting hand of God and His angels none of us could have lived through such a hell.⁴⁸

The LSA also heard a speech in 1916 on the Mons visions and their significance given by the Rev. A. J. Waldron. In his talk, Waldron addressed the role of God in the war and what the Angels at Mons meant to the English nation. His answer is in typical spiritualist manner: orthodox Christian and heretical at the same time. Waldron argued that "God was working for the allied nations," but also that "surely there were other beneficent

⁴⁷ "St. George and the Phantom Army," *Light* (May 15, 1915).

⁴⁸ "Sir W. F. Barrett on Human Survival and The Mons Vision," *Light* (January 15, 1916).

powers in the Unseen world who were working with Him.” In regard to the conflicting accounts of the visions at Mons, he found that those who were base and unspiritual naturally were unable to see the divine intervention, which only more pure and spiritually-tuned men were able to sense. He boldly proclaimed, “I spoke to men who were in the retreat from Mons...and sometimes I would be told, “No, I never saw anything.” And after I had talked to the man for a while I could only say that I did not wonder at it!”⁴⁹

According to *Light*, the Angels at Mons episode showed beyond a reasonable doubt that God was on the side of the English.⁵⁰ God was also not a distant “Nature,” or “World-Spirit,” but was involved and concerned about the British public and the outcome of the War. Other articles in *Light* unrelated to the Angels at Mons also confirmed this idea. In 1917, two articles from the same week drew on this traditional view of God. The first describes God as Spirit and proposes “that all properties of matter and all natural forces proceed from that Source,” and “that all forms of life live and move and have their being in Him.”⁵¹ The other article asserts that all of humanity exists only through the power of God. It declares, “Eternally we live and move and have our being in God.”⁵² This was a powerful and active God, and it was a much different God than the distant

⁴⁹ Rev. A.J. Waldron, “The true explanation of the Angels at Mons,” *Light* (February 26, 1916).

⁵⁰ This is probably one of the reasons that spiritualists tried so hard to prove that the vision even happened, even holding speeches and lectures presenting all the evidence for the vision. See for instance an advertisement in the *Light* on January 1, 1916, that told of a lecture entitled, “On the side of the Angels: The story of the angels at Mons, including cases of appearance after death, A reply to Arthur Machen.” The other reasons the spiritualist tried so hard to prove the vision correct were because first, the vision gave evidence that spirits existed and therefore gave evidence that spiritualism was correct; and second, they had already spent so much energy and time discussing the validity of the vision, it was too late to deny it.

⁵¹ V.C. Desertis, “The Meaning of Spiritualism,” *Light* (January 13, 1917).

⁵² Winfred Aylwin, “Eternity,” *Light* (January 13, 1917).

powers and cosmic forces that *Light* had used to describe the Deity during the pre-war years.

It was not only this image of God that was offered as a source of comfort and meaning in the War; representations of Christ also sprung up within the paper. The image of Jesus Christ began to be used repeatedly as a model of what a spiritualist's life and what a nation should look like, as well as an image of a personal and caring Spirit who was intensely concerned with the English nation. *Light* had been extremely anti-war in its issues leading up to the beginning of World War I. Once the war was declared however, it softened its stance and became more nationalistic in outlook. Yet at the outset, and at various times during the war, Christ, as the promoter of peace, became a familiar reference point in *Light*. In the month before the war, *Light* displayed open contempt for any sort of violence. In an editorial piece of the August 8th edition of *Light*, four days after Britain had entered World War I, Gow condemns the path which European civilization seemed destined to pursue,

As we write the shadow of a great calamity hangs over the whole earth. There are ominous marching's and counter-marching's in the great "armed camp" of Europe...Heaven send that before these lines appear the great cloud will have passed. If it bursts in all its terror a time of bitter stress lies before all or most of us, and those who have sown the wind will reap the whirlwind...It will be a sad commentary on Christendom and Civilization if they can provide no other way. But for a generation or more the nominal followers of the Prince of Peace have devoted themselves to preparations for combat and the atmosphere has been full of sinister suggestion...Our only hope now is that having gone to the very edge of the crater and beheld the smoke

and flames below, some if not all of the expected combatants among the nations will draw back and go no further. But if the worst happen it will be a fiery ordeal, and even if in the result there is a great purifying of life it will be at a fearful cost of human happiness.⁵³

The image of the “Prince of Peace” accomplished a number of different objectives. First, it drew on the traditional vision of Jesus giving it a sense of significance and meaning. Second, it helped to provide justification of Gow’s anti-war position. Finally, it implied a condemnation to the Christian nations that had declared global war.

Within the same issue, two more articles speak of the senselessness of war and evoke the common heritage of Christianity as a denunciation of any military conflict. One is a reprint of a Mark Twain story that bitterly demonstrates the evils of war. After a congregation prays for victory in war, an angel comes from heaven and tells them that their pray has been answered but then lists its full implications,

O Lord, help us tear the soldiers of the foe to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief. Blast their hopes, blight their lives, water their way with their tears.⁵⁴

The second piece came from the pen of Gow and again focuses on the evils of war. He writes,

At last the great storm, so long threatened, has burst upon the world, mocking the hopes of all who worked for peace and falsifying the calculations of those who taught that

⁵³ David Gow, “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (August 8, 1914).

⁵⁴ “The War Spirit Abroad: A Terrible Rebuke,” *Light* (August 8, 1914).

human passions could be held in check by consideration of material welfare...the great affliction that has come upon humanity is a sign that it is still so undeveloped that it has not yet the power to steer itself aright and resist the impulse of the blind brute forces of its lower nature. The great war is the result not of intelligently directed movements, but of senseless drifting on the part of senates and peoples...These are sad, dark days...

It continued with a bit of good news and consolation: “there is abundance of comfort for all of us who have gained a knowledge of the reality of a Higher World, the power and presence of ministering spirits, the true meaning of death, the supremacy of the Spirit.” Here, Gow was assigning spiritualism an important place during the coming war. Gow felt that spiritualism should provide comfort for the bereaved, soldiers and nation alike. It should provide confidence that positive progress would continue even in the midst of tragedy. Finally, it should give strength to people’s faith in the Christian notions of the afterlife, God and Christ, by supplying scientific proof that they existed. The article ended triumphantly by asserting, “The lights of Heaven always are relit.”⁵⁵

While these articles focused on the Christian heritage of European nations, subsequent articles began to use the image of a tender, peace-loving, and compassionate Jesus Christ to convey nationalistic sympathies and calls for peace. In October 1914, a letter from “A Soul in Travail” appeared pleading with people to realize the grave consequences of the present conflict. The war is thrusting “Thousands and thousands of unprepared souls charged with the lowest uncurbed passions...into the inferior spirit planes.” Once there they can be expected to do nothing more than “add to the influences of hellish disorder” and destroy the “principles of love and brotherhood” which other

⁵⁵ “Dark Days: Some Consolations,” *Light* (August 8, 1914).

souls in the afterlife have been cultivating and creating. In desperation to end this awful event the writer urges his readers to think to the peaceful spirit of Christ, for it is there that the “Christian nations” can see the ideal of peace and love that they should be striving towards. The present bloody war shows instead that at present Europe is “no better than many of the heathen whom we have presumed to teach.”⁵⁶

This idea of a peaceful Christ was the topic of another article in the same month by Geraldine de Robeck, the spiritualist author of *Abnormal Phenomna in the Lives of the Saints*. In it the writer asked, “Does God know” all the horrible things that the “Kaiser” was committing and if He did, why did he not do anything? She came to the conclusion that God and Christ did actually know about all the “brutalities” that were being perpetrated and furthermore, those inhumanities were actually being carried out against the body of the risen Christ. In the ultimate call to peaceful action, Robeck cited the biblical story when Jesus stated that, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!” and used these words to prove that Jesus feels all the pain inflicted by the War. The author wrote, “It is a terrible thought and one which should cause the Christian world to shudder...the terrible hour [will come] when every man shall discover that it was the gentle Lord Christ...who was smitten, tortured, crucified.” Here, Robeck argued not only that Christian nations should never wage war since Christ was peace-loving and gentle, but that the current war, and all its bloody battles, were actually injuring physically the body of Jesus.

⁵⁶ A Soul in Travail, “The World Tragedy,” *Light* (October 3, 1914).

This same argument – that the War is actually physically injuring Jesus Christ – is the object of a soldier’s vision from the battle of Mons. An injured soldier allegedly recounted the story of how he was rescued from the field of battle and tended to by a mystery man. This man was the famed “Comrade in White,” another legend that originated around the Mons retreat.⁵⁷ The “Comrade in White” was the figure of Jesus as a Spirit, back on earth again helping and caring for the British soldiers. He is also intricately tied to the war as the soldier relates,

I could see, as it were, a shot-wound in his hand, and as he prayed a drop of blood gathered and fell to the ground. I cried out. I could not help it, for that wound of his seemed to be a more awful thing than any that bitter war had shown me. “You are wounded, too” I said faintly. Perhaps he heard me, perhaps it was the look on his face, but he answered gently: ‘This is an old wound, but it has troubled me of late.’ And then I noticed sorrowfully that the same cruel mark was on his feet...But it was only when I saw his feet that I knew him.⁵⁸

The gently loving Christ is a stark contrast to the bitter, hate-filled, and venomous war. He is also an assurance that God is fighting on the British side. Other visions of Christ on the battlefield gave the same assurance. One British soldier, Colonel Cochran, had a direct answer from God when he called for help. When he prayed to God for deliverance from his “peril...Suddenly there shone a light close to him, and in the centre of the light the form of our Savior appeared.”⁵⁹ Christ had come to his side immediately; He cared about this English soldier and by association England itself. Other times the

⁵⁷ The legend even spawned a book titled by the same name, W.H. Leatham’s *Comrade in White* (1926).

⁵⁸ “The Friend of the Wounded: Another Mystery of the Battlefield,” *Light* (May 15, 1915).

⁵⁹ Colonel Cochran, “A Vision of Christ,” *Light* (November 17, 1915).

vision was less blatantly nationalistic. One soldier related how both sides of a battle beheld a “white cross” which caused an “absolute silence on both sides.”⁶⁰ In each case it is a Christian image that appears to the soldier and gives peace even in severe times of trouble.

These more traditional views of God and Christ within the paper also aligned with *Light*'s view that spiritualism should provide comfort and meaning to people during the war. This idea was part of the answer to the basic question of what spiritualism's primary role in English society should be during the war, a question that *Light* repeatedly tried to answer. The answer took the form of two separate, but connected, notions. First, spiritualism should provide comfort to the bereaved. This was the primary message spiritualists received through the pages of *Light*. If spiritualism was nothing else, it should at least be a consoling influence on the nation and individual citizens. Second, spiritualism should help people understand the true cause of the war (which *Light* mainly saw as spiritualism's arch enemy materialism) and strive to provide every proof available to the nation that the ideas expounded by spiritualism (the reality and perseverance of the soul, progressive moral evolution, the perversity of materialism, etc.) were, indeed, proven facts of life. The ideas turned out to be complementary and, at times, almost inseparable. They appear often in the same articles, starting with the stated fact that materialism caused the war, and ending with the hope and assurance that spiritualism will eventually conquer and survive. It is best, however, to divide them and examine each separately since in the nature of spiritualist beliefs, they were far from universal within

⁶⁰ “A Vision of the Cross,” *Light* (June 3, 1916).

the spiritualist camp and even in the pages of *Light*. By separating the ideas and examining each more closely, one can get a sense of the diversity that marked spiritualism and the pliability of most spiritualist ideas, even the bigger ones.

The reason for the outbreak of the war was an important subject for spiritualists and for *Light*. This importance stemmed from two major causes: first, the war flew in the face of the optimistic nature of *Light* under the editorship of E.W. Wallis and gave a battering to spiritualists' and more generally, middle-class Britons' belief in progress. The war would have to be defined and explained as merely a piece of the grand progressive motion of history or the cherished belief in progress would have to be discarded and buried somewhere in the mass graves of Flanders. The answer that *Light* gave to this dilemma was to view the war as unavoidable and divinely necessary. As Modris Eckstien has shown, it was the same answer with which most Britons agreed. The war became a cultural crusade, a crusade that found Germany to be a moral as well as intellectual enemy which threatened the cultural livelihood of England.⁶¹ Britons must fight; it was their duty. The world needed a savior and England was ready.

Light was at first reluctant to directly state that the War was inevitable. This was mostly due to its anti-war stance during the first months of the war.⁶² The articles addressing the war on August 8 point to "the senseless drifting" of humanity as the cause of the war and bitterly acknowledges that those who have "sown the wind will reap the

⁶¹ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 115-35.

⁶² There is good reason to believe that this anti-war stance was due to the *Light's* socialist leanings. The Labour party in England had already declared in 1906 that all wars are fought to benefit the rich and on August 2, 1914, it held a huge anti-war rally in Trafalgar Square. See Robb, *British Culture*, 69.

whirlwind.”⁶³ They also include the belief that all things will be made good in the end. This belief would be expanded as the violence and destruction of the war grew. The next week Gow’s editorial in *Light* had already changed course and declared that “this [war] had to come...There was no other way.”⁶⁴ In the subsequent weeks, another bizarre change of course occurred. Progress itself was billed as the actual cause of War, with England its willing servant. Gow argued forcefully:

The fire that rages around us to-day is truly a severe test of faith and patience, but its horrors mark not the limits of the law of Progress, but rather its power and its infinity. It will not suffer its way to be *continually* barred...Something had to be removed a relic of an old dark past out of tune with the newer thought of the world...the world was delivered over to its fiery purging. The clock of world progress, we are told, has been put back fifty years. The clock of world progress, we reply, keeps its hour with the exactitude of the sun and the planets...That is our reading of the tumult and terror of to-day. Amid all that wrings our hearts we may preserve not only the larger hope of world progress but the assurance that even for the individual soul all in the end will be well.⁶⁵

Gow and *Light* pictured the world as a body that was dreadfully sick. It had a cancer that was threatening to engulf and destroy civilization. In order for progress to continue, the disease would have to be removed and killed. This process would naturally be unpleasant and painful, but it was for *Light* the only way to complete the processes of removal and regeneration. With this view, *Light* could explain that progress continued even through this trial of fire. The War was progress’ way of perfecting or “evolving”

⁶³ “Dark Days: Some Consolations,” and “Notes by the Way,” both from *Light* (August 8, 1914).

⁶⁴ “A World Tragedy: The Larger View,” *Light* (August 15, 1914).

⁶⁵ “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (August 22, 1914).

humanity. To drive this point home, *Light* urged its readers to view the terrible destruction of the War as a “purging” of humanity. The war became a great “melting-pot” which would create a “purer” world free from such vices such as “fear and its leprous company.”⁶⁶ Sometimes the newspaper even argued that the act of war itself was the only method that progress had to heal the world. One article made this abundantly plain:

War is the sole means to rid the earth of such a generation rooted in iniquity and hide-bound by misconceptions. Dying for a cause, for honor, for their country...these derelicts of a false civilization, or perverted imaginations and misapplied sciences are, through the dread discipline of disaster, destruction and death, purged of their ignoble natures, leaving all that is still noble and worthy of preservation to survive the suffering, the torture, the dissolution of the body. Thus purified in the fiery crucible of the Supreme Justice, the regenerated and emancipated spirit starts on the upward path.⁶⁷

This visualization of purging fit well with the general tendency of the English to view the war as a battle against, as Modris Eksteins puts it, “the incarnation of flux and irresponsibility in the world.”⁶⁸ He argues that the British entered the Great War with the intent of preserving the world and ridding it forever of the “disruptive [modern] energy” of Germany. This German energy was driven by two visions. The first was *Kultur*, which sought to bring “inner freedom” to the individual by uniting “art, history, and contemporary life” into one grand man; a grand spiritual search for wholeness.⁶⁹ The second vision was *Technik*, a cult of thought that was immensely concerned with

⁶⁶ “Inner Aspects of the Great War,” *Light* (August 22, 1914).

⁶⁷ “The Crucible of War,” *Light* (January 30, 1915).

⁶⁸ Eksteins, *Rites*, 116.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

“scientism, efficiency, and management.”⁷⁰ Ekstein finds that the war became for the Germans “a spiritual conflict” bent on liberation from the old confines of civilization. It were these old confines that the British sought to maintain, for the British believed that their sacred ideals of civilization—morality, law, dignity, and progress—lay within the old confines’ walls.⁷¹ The world then must be rid of this cancerous growth that threatened all that was sacred to England.

Stéphane Audion-Rouzeau and Annette Becker recognized this same thread in the British enthusiasm for the war. Britons saw the war as nothing less than a “defense of civilization” against the “barbarity” of the German nation.⁷² *Light* and Gow felt the same way, and continued to publish articles that reinforced the idea that the only way to redeem civilization from German savagery was via the blood-stained trail of war. Only then could the world continue the upward path of human progress. A 1916 editorial restated this motif:

The vision of Life as something supreme, resistless, and eternally progressive dissolves away all the fears that inspire the jeremiads of faint-hearted observers of the present catastrophe. Human progress is not “going down in night”; civilization in its best and truest sense is in no danger, although the thing which stands for civilization today will be none the worse for its terrific purging—we shall, indeed, be able to contemplate without regret the loss of most of it...Life is like a mighty mother, tireless, unflinching, and wise beyond all human thought in the management of the brawling nursery and its turbulent brood. Her law is obedience, we obey—and the great Power carries us joyfully with it,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷² Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 97 and 102.

riding triumphantly over every obstruction. We oppose—and Life is hard, pitiless and implacable that we may be saved from ourselves.⁷³

Human progress stands as the primary source and ultimately, the result of the conflict. It will continue to push, to grow, and to improve mankind come hell or high water; or in the case of World War I, both.

In this charged atmosphere it is little wonder that God also entered the equation. As Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker put it, “In the Great War, people wanted to claim God. And there is no doubt that their determination to fight against barbarism, a goal central to the idea of a war based on law and civilization, became a holy war.”⁷⁴ The image of God helped to give meaning to the war and power to the idea that it was a “purging” of evil from the world. Once again, the traditional image of God cropped up in *Light*. By 1916 even the term “God’s will” – unheard of for this spiritualist newspaper – crops up. While it is only used as another name for nature’s evolutionary process, its usage obviously implies other things. E. Wake Cook employed this term during a speech discussing the origins of the war. He uses the “purging” analogy but adds the image of God to help give the assertion extra credibility. He stated,

My own views...are roughly these. War is the great energizer, the mother of invention, discipline and organization; a vital triad. Without war we should, probably, be still wandering nomads...War is Nature’s harsh evolutionary means of teaching us her lessons, and compelling us to carry out her purpose, or God’s will...War is the surgeon’s knife cutting our cancerous growths that would fatally poison the whole system—

⁷³ “Life the Revealer of Things,” *Light* (March 25, 1916).

⁷⁴ Audoin-Rouzeau, *14-18*, 116.

horrible, but beneficent in the end—and it can only be avoided by discerning the World-Purpose, and doing the part we have to perform in it...Personally and nationally we must keep in the forefront of progress, or go under as the unfit.⁷⁵

There are two interesting points to make about this article. First, Cook's use of the idea of progress also implied that Britain was to be both a defender and propagator of progress to others. Cook even argues that England must strive to spread progress to the rest of the world by saying,

Personally and nationally we must keep in the forefront of progress, or go under as the unfit. Having trained and organized ourselves and all our resources for defense and progress, we must not rest content with these blessing for ourselves, we must fulfill our share of the greater World-Purpose by extending these blessing to all backward or dozing people, until the whole world is organized in rough analogy with Nature's masterpiece of organization, the human body.⁷⁶

The world is once again compared to the human body, a body that is assumed to have deficiencies and ills. Britain is obviously a wiser part of the body that must help remove the diseased parts (Germany) and bring the other "backward" parts up to speed. Second, the usage of the words "God's will," are significant in that nothing close to this blunt assertion that God is ultimately in control had ever been uttered in the *Light*, even under the editorship of Moses, who favored the use of Christian images.⁷⁷

This idea of supreme control in the universe belonging to God alone is the assertion of another contributor's article during the same year. The piece argues, in

⁷⁵ E. Wake Cook, "Spiritual Philosophy and the War," *Light* (April 8, 1916).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ For instance notice that the prayer mentioned earlier by *Laus Deos* states that God works for good all things, but not specifically that God works all things, period.

stronger language than the *Light* had seen since the editorship of Moses nearly thirty years prior, that God was the final power that ruled the world;

No matter how topsy-turvy affairs may become, they remain clay in the hands of the Potter, and all will be made subservient to His purposes, nor will He fail to fashion the clay into the vessel which He purposes to make...The important aspect of the war, then, is one in which we do not dwell too much upon its past horrors, which, alas! We cannot undo, nor on its present terrors, from which we cannot escape by thinking, but upon its future outbirths, which we are justified in anticipating. We must plod on and “hitch our wagon to a star.”...God alone will finish it.⁷⁸

The author finds meaning and a positive outlook for the current ghastly war only in the fact that God is behind it and will finish it “alone.” The Britons only duty was to “plod on.”

It was a familiar message for the English. The idea of duty was woven deeply into the British culture. It was connected with the Christian heritage of the English in the idea of self-sacrifice.⁷⁹ It was also, as Ekstein has shown, intertwined with the middle class’s views of progress and civilization.⁸⁰ Sir Oliver Lodge referenced this shared belief when he called on England not to grieve to hard for their fallen loved ones. Lodge stated,

It must be remembered that, from the point of view of the individuals who have gone over, there are many mitigating circumstances. They have done their duty; they have sacrificed a useful career here; they have given up all they possessed; and it will be

⁷⁸ C.E.B., “Some Aspects of the War,” *Light* (May 6, 1916).

⁷⁹ George Robb demonstrates this connection in *British Culture*, 215.

⁸⁰ Ekstein, 176-91.

requited to them. By such a death a burden of sin is lightened; some atonement is made... They did their work here, they will do it there.⁸¹

This idea of duty was also easily mingled with the idea of a wise and powerful God. If one did their duty then God, or whatever one wanted to call the good power behind progress, would do the rest. It was this belief that provided hope during the war that progress continued on a positive course regardless of the destruction that occurred during the war. As one author phrased it, "The reins of destiny are in wiser hands than ours."⁸² Even Gow himself argued for this belief in his "Notes by the Way" in 1918 in his frank admission that spiritualists' "faith is in an intelligently ordered and Divinely governed Universe."⁸³ It was this hope of an all-powerful, supreme, and ultimately good God, guiding life which *Light* presented as a reason why Britons must not despair.

But why did God even need to be invoked by spiritualists? Why was the world so sick? What was this cancer that threatened the very foundations of civilization? The answer for a spiritualist was an easy one. The war was the result of that bitter enemy of spiritualism, materialism, the same nemesis that had plagued the movement from the beginning. This philosophy, which proposed that the entire world consisted of matter, had now, according to spiritualists, cast the world into the dark abyss of world war. It was the cancer that must be purged and *Light* never tired of proclaiming this belief to the world.

⁸¹ Sir Oliver Lodge, "A Message to the Bereaved," *Light* (November 27, 1915).

⁸² G.R.S. Mead, "The World-Crisis and Its Purpose," from "Spiritual Use of War," in *Quest from Light* (March 13, 1915).

⁸³ "Notes by the Way," *Light* (January 5, 1918).

Light and Gow immediately made this connection between materialism and the war when the battle began. Gow proposed that it was the philosophy itself that was responsible, not the German people per se.⁸⁴ He felt it was the “ruthless forces” and the “blind, arrogant system” of materialism that had driven the world to war. The work of materialism had in the end, forced war upon the world, or as Gow phrased it, “The offense had grown rank. It smelt to heaven.”⁸⁵ Miss Louise Lind-af-Hageby, (a famous Swedish Countess who was president of the *Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society* and had publicly battled University College over alleged operations on live dogs) in an interview with the paper called materialism a “poison” that had corrupted the world by drawing the European nations towards militarism and war-mongering. Once again the only way to extract the poison was through war. She stated, “The poison worked in its system during a long period bringing about the crisis, and it may be that the sickness had to break out with its pain and misery and suffering so as to make a return to harmony and health possible and thus prepare Europe for a new life.”⁸⁶

Gow continued to argue that materialism was a philosophy that inherently led to war and destruction. One of the reasons that this was true was because materialism, according to spiritualists, was a philosophy that denied God a place in the world. Rev. A.J. Waldron pointed this out in a speech to the LSA in 1916. After hearing the chairman of the LSA stated that Germany believed and relied on God, Waldron insisted instead that

⁸⁴ There is an interesting point here that relates to the idea within chapter 2 that spiritualist believed in moral evolution partly because it justified their belief that all men were good at the core. Gow’s comments in the article hint at this belief when he specifically points out that it was neither the nation nor the people, but the “system” that created the war.

⁸⁵ “The World Tragedy: A Larger View,” *Light* (August 15, 1914).

⁸⁶ “The Great Calamity: Its Cause and Cure,” *Light* (September 12, 1914).

Germany could not believe in God since they were materialists, and as such, disavowed the existence of Spirit and God in general. He added,

This war was the outcome of a philosophy which ignored God, which proclaimed that the only thing that counted in the evolution of the race was to follow in the line of biological necessity. It blotted God out of the universe.⁸⁷

The *Light* also argued that materialism only led to war because it dehumanized humanity. Miss Felicia R. Scatcherd, a London medium pointed this out in a speech before the LSA in 1917. She asked the question, “What is the nature of the war?” and proceeded to give an answer in terms of a philosophic battle,

It is the struggle between two world conceptions, two sets of moral principles, two ways of thinking, two controlling ideas, affecting the whole future of human destiny. It is a battle to the finish between Goliath of a mechanical Civilization and the David of an inspired Humanity—a fateful conflict between the democratic ideal of orderly advance in the direction of progress and the imperialistic ideal, a violently retrogressive step in world-history.⁸⁸

Scatcherd found that materialism removed the soul and the essence of humanity from civilization. It created a world driven only by the law of survival of the fittest and removed the foundations from many of Britain’s most cherished beliefs such as morality, progress, and chivalry.

While *Light* presented materialism as the source of all evil within the German nation, and the philosophy that the war must remove, it offered spiritualism as the philosophy that could take materialism’s place in the world. Materialism as presented by

⁸⁷ A.J. Waldron, “The True Explanation of the Angels at Mons.”

⁸⁸ Miss Felicia R. Scatcherd, “The World Crisis: Part Two,” *Light* (May 19, 1917).

Light was cold, lifeless, hopeless, Godless, and ultimately led to war and destruction.⁸⁹ Spiritualism, in contrast, was portrayed by *Light* as a grand philosophy that gave hope, provided a basis for morality, and based on scientific fact directed mankind towards a peaceful and loving world. As one writer phrased it,

Modern Spiritualism is at once a religion, a philosophy, and a science, united in a way never before thought possible. It touches life at all points; envisages the whole scheme of existence with a calm breadth, a height and depth of perception never before attained, and is thus in a position to discern the truth and falsehood which has plunged the world into this devastating war; and to gather up the crumbs of vital truth in the strange medley of science and insanity which has so enthused a great people to bear heroic sacrifices.⁹⁰

This view of spiritualism as a movement that fused together a number of different social parts is in stark contrast to the way *Light* described materialism. Materialism was the great destroyer that had crushed God, religion, spirit; anything that was not matter. Spiritualism on the other hand, maintained and adopted almost everything for its own uses, from science to Christ to eugenics to socialism. It could (in jest) be called the great “regurgitator” because it tended to chew on others’ ideas until they were slightly altered and then spit them back out. As the war dragged on, *Light* began to sense that their twice-gnawed ideas might be gaining a foothold in the society of wartime England. They saw materialism teetering and rushed forward to knock it down and take its place.

David Gow had a knack for describing the gains that he saw spiritualism making. (And with equal pleasure, the losses of materialism.) Every year he published an end-of-

⁸⁹ For a good example of that believe see “The Great Idea,” *Light* (June 15, 1918).

⁹⁰ E. Wake Cook, “Spiritualism and the Problems Raised by the War.”

the-year editorial about what spiritualism had endured during the previous year. In January 1916 he focused on his belief that spiritualism was replacing materialism as the dominant philosophy in England and the world:

A year of trial and tribulation—*annus horribilis*—draws to its close...and yet it has been a year of wonder, of hope and of promise...Looking forward at the close of last year...we said: From one—and a very important—point of view, the great war has been a mighty ploughing of intractable soil. There has been a vast revolution of human thought, old forms have been destroyed utterly, old and false ideals overthrown, and the newer interpretations of life for which the Spiritualist stands are becoming conspicuous as never before...Today, in looking backwards, we find no reason to repent of the forecast. The sense of things unseen has deepened...The war, it was freely predicted, would bring home many salutary lessons to the world, and this is one of them—‘a sense of eternity.’... [Our doctrine] holds that the storm and ‘earthquake and eclipse’ through which we are passing is serving to remold the order of human life ‘nearer to our heart’s desire,’ breaking it away from the things that were leading down to corruption and spiritual decay.⁹¹

Gow maintained that materialism was “doomed to perish” through the war and spiritualism was the appropriate philosophy to replace it. Only spiritualism’s combination of science, religion, and philosophy could counter the pervasive influence of materialism. Gow stated this manifestly in 1918 in his “Notes by the Way.” He quoted Sir William Barnett as having credited spiritualism with the ability to free mankind from the “blighting and soul-destroying grip of German materialistic philosophy.” Gow went

⁹¹ “At the Turn of the Year,” *Light* (January 1, 1916).

on to argue that churches should join with spiritualism in battling the common enemy of materialism, now identified as Germany. Spiritualism could win the battle against the German-led “rank materialism,” but it could not do it alone. Gow urged for “virile and valiant counsels of courage and commonsense,” not the constant criticism of the Christian churches that accused spiritualism of being from the devil.⁹² Instead, spiritualism should be praised and hailed as the savior of England from the steel, mechanical grip of materialism, not ridiculed and attacked. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle pleaded that *Light* and spiritualism represented “the most living religious cause now existing upon earth, [and] the *only conclusive answer* against materialism.”⁹³

The battle between materialism and spiritualism was not the most important thing for *Light* during and immediately after the war, however. This struggle was secondary to spiritualism’s primary duty to provide comfort to bereaved men and women in England. *Light* and Gow held that the first priority of spiritualism must be to present proof of life after death, consolation that the men who died in the war were still alive and growing, and reassurance to the family members they left behind that their sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands were truly in a better place. One of the most basic ways that Gow sought to present spiritualism as comforting was to saturate *Light* with scientific proofs that verified the claims of spiritualism as true. For instance, in one weekly issue of *Light* Gow ran the following articles: “Psychometric research and prevision,” “Experiments on Levitation,” and “Canon McClure and Psychic Science.”⁹⁴ From 1916 onwards Gow also

⁹² “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (January 5, 1918).

⁹³ Author’s Italics. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Maintenance of Light,” *Light* (January 26, 1918).

⁹⁴ All articles from *Light* (June 24, 1916).

published in each weekly paper a section entitled “The Scientific Investigation of Physical Phenomena,” which came complete with charts, diagrams, and a multitude of four-plus syllable words. These scientific articles allowed Gow to build a groundwork for the claims of spiritualism on what he considered facts. With this groundwork in place, Gow reckoned that spiritualism could be much more effective as a consoling force because its promises of the afterlife came with a scientific evaluation, not just a pledge and a smile.

While ceaselessly presenting spiritualism as proven by science, Gow also pushed for spiritualism to become a comforting force to England during the war. Gow felt that the comfort that could be gained from a belief in spiritualism was truly immeasurable. He believed that it had all the characteristics of the perfect consoling power. First, it allowed space in its beliefs for God and Spirit. As already mentioned, this gave spiritualism an already existent cultural and social framework of belief to build and rely on. Second, spiritualism was presented as a scientific certainty. It claimed that no faith was required since the messages proclaimed by spiritualism were proven by science to be truly supernatural.⁹⁵ Finally, Gow proclaimed that spiritualism was the only movement in England that allowed grieving families direct access to their lost members. Spiritualism not only provided facts that the afterlife existed, it allowed the lost soldier to speak to the family from the afterlife. Gow described this vision early in August 14, 1914. He wrote:

⁹⁵ For a good look at this belief from the pen of Gow himself see his editorial “Men and Creeds,” *Light* (May 20, 1916).

Spiritualists...have made the subject of healing in all its higher phases on peculiarly their own, and the consolations which they can offer to the bereaved are far more real and enduring than those which rest purely upon faith and doctrine. There is work for all of us here...Many of us have sent our nearest and dearest to the great war, and the pain of parting has been wondrously lightened by the knowledge we have gained concerning the hidden realities. We have sources of comfort so abundant that we are able to share them freely...The world for all of us has been turned into an adobe of horror and bewilderment during the last few days. European civilization has shown signs of going down in blood and famine. We have gained the larger view, which brings the terrors of the time into a truer proportion.⁹⁶

With suffering so large, Gow easily sensed that spiritualism could provide a valuable service to the nation. He urged his contributors to send in works focused on “consolation,” works that would “uplift, illuminate and encourage” those that grieved.⁹⁷ He suspected that spiritualism could enter into the grief of the nation and comfort those that were hurting, while likewise gaining converts and respect in society. This attitude was advocated in an address by Percy Street reprinted in *Light*. Percy called on spiritualists to lay “aside our puzzles and metaphors” and to focus on giving comfort to hurting friends and neighbors. He continued,

We must go out with open arms to receive that great class whose need was not so much for science or hard-and-fast laws as for consolation. We could give them that consolation and fill their hearts with a great joy, the joy of knowing that not only would there be a dawn for them a bright tomorrow in which they would be reunited with their dear ones

⁹⁶ “Notes by the Way,” *Light* (August 15, 1914).

⁹⁷ “Light and the War,” *Light* (August 22, 1914).

who had been called hence, but that even now they might enjoy the consciousness of their loving presence. There was a great work for Spiritualists.⁹⁸

This was the true and important message of spiritualism. It was the message that the bereaved did not need to be bereaved, that the fallen were not truly fallen, and that the darkness on earth only contrasted that much more sharply with the bright joy and peace that awaited those that went to the other side. Gow wrote that at the “core and centre” of the spiritualist beliefs, which he saw as “a beacon-light in a dark world,” was the knowledge that “death and every form of physical disaster are transient things.” It was this fact for Gow that had “become more than a great hope. It is a mighty certainty.”⁹⁹

It is also quite clear that this belief in the consoling power of spiritualism was not merely rhetoric. People were comforted by spiritualism, many people in fact.¹⁰⁰ The pages of *Light* are filled with their different stories. Two will suffice to show the general trend. The first came from a soldier who had found faith and confidence in spiritualism. He wrote, “How thankful I feel that my reason has brought me to place implicit faith in the truths of Spiritualism. These [home] meetings to me partake of a sacred nature, and each succeeding one seems to bring me closer and closer to those on the other side, who are my personal friends and protectors.” He later stated in a letter about the family

⁹⁸ Percy R. Street, “The Use and Beauty of Spiritualism,” *Light* (November 18, 1916).

⁹⁹ “In Tranquility,” *Light* (October 13, 1917).

¹⁰⁰ A simple testimony to this is that the current building which houses the present day publication of the *Light* was purchased with funds collected by Gow and the *Light* after the war from men and women who the *Light* had helped give support and comfort to during the war. (<http://www.collegeofpsychicstudies.co.uk/college/history.html>) It is hard to find an precise numbers of Spiritualist adherents at anytime but for attempts see Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, 111-129 and 153-172 which quotes the magazine *Two Worlds* as estimating “at least 100,000 home circles home circles,” in England in the early 20th century. (161) See also Hazelgrove who figures there were perhaps 10,000 -100,000 spiritualists before the war. One study found that membership numbers actually declined in the 1920s for one rural spiritualist organization. See O’Hara, *Dead Men’s Embers*, 190-237.

séances that “the recollection of [them] serve to cheer me through many a dark and weary day.”¹⁰¹ Another article by a doctor described the comfort and joy that a successful séance brought two grieving mothers. The contact with their sons (one was in fact still alive in a POW camp and supposedly communicated this fact to his mother via telepathy) helped to transition their sorrow into peace. In conclusion he declared,

What religious system of what philosophy could so conclusively bring comfort to the mourner or hope to the distressed, as the spiritual science and philosophy which is the function of *Light* to popularize, and what better purpose could any journal serve than to extend the knowledge—not merely *belief*—that there is a persistence of human personality beyond Death’s portals?¹⁰²

Gow’s newspaper faced the war bravely and with a sensitive spirit. Gow sensed the needs of the nation and consequently adjusted *Light* to better meet those unique needs. He gave more space to traditional images of God and Christ because, put simply, people wanted more of those traditional images. He focused on the comforting side of spiritualism because, just as simply, people needed comforting and consoling. He attacked materialism, the philosophy that he felt was responsible for the war. He defended the sacred English belief in progress. He used *Light* to ground spiritualism in scientific proofs and to argue that spiritualism deserved a more respectable and secure place in society. And through all this, he managed to touch a vital nerve along the way. Spiritualism blossomed during and after the war as did *Light* with Gow at the helm.

¹⁰¹ “From a Soldiers Notebook: Spirit Voices in a Home Circle,” *Light* (January 5, 1918).

¹⁰² Dr. Abraham Wallace, “Missing Soldiers: Remarkable Evidence,” *Light* (January 25th, 1919).

During the Great War *Light* lived up to its future catch phrase that it was “The Little Paper with a Great Message!”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Light* (August 19, 1922).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

The Readership of *Light*

There has never been a documented account of the circulation of *Light* and might never be. In an attempt to get a reckoning of any circulation numbers available for *Light* the writer contacted the present editor of *Light*. She informed the author that, as far as she knew, no such numbers existed. Therefore, some rather severe guess work has been attempted. Taking the amount of letters to the editor said to have received each week as a starting point, and a rough estimate of the readership of *Light* was calculated. For instance the Washington Post reportedly gets “thousands of letters a week,” each personally read by an editor. (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/21/AR2009042103705.html#letterselection>, first accessed May 27, 2009) In 2004, the circulation for the Washington Post was 717,696. (Frank Ahrens, “Inflated Circulation Totals: Newspapers Padded Sales Figures to Keep Ad Rates High” Washington Post, (Tuesday, November 30, 2004), Page E01) If we assume that “thousands” means five thousand, then the number of people who write into the newspaper versus the number of readers is less than one percent or .7 percent to be exact. If we assume that “thousands” means the extreme of 9,000 than the average is only slightly higher at 1.3 percent, even in the age of easy access e-mail. If we then assume that one percent of the readers of *Light* wrote in to the editor, the readership in the 1890s would be around 20,000. If we assume a more modest estimate between five to ten percent, than that places the readership around 10,000 to 2,000 people weekly. It is therefore fair to say that the readership fell in between the low ten thousands and the high

thousands. This of course would include normal subscribers as well as the large amount of men or women that did not subscribe to *Light* but would have read it in a reading room, or at a friend's house. See for instance Alan Lee's study *The Origins of the Popular Press in England: 1855 – 1914*, (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 21-41 for a treatment of this form of readership and others. This number is also well within Oppenheim's calculated estimate of 10,000 and 100,000 spiritualists within England during the Victorian and Edwardian period. (*The Other World*, 50) While there was a large number of other spiritualist newspapers available to the Londoner including *Two Worlds*, *Medium and Daybreak*, *The International Psychic Gazette*, *The Spiritualist Magazine*, and *Borderland*, to name a few, it does appear, particular from the number of articles included in the *Light* from other sources, that spiritualists read a number of different spiritualist newspapers. There is a hint that the paper had lower rather than higher circulations, at least before World War I, draw from the constant appearance in *Light* of articles asking for money to keep the paper running. Still, this recurrence can also easily be accounted for due to the fact that most newspaper revenue came from advertisements, of which *Light* had few. As David Gow put it, "It is to their advertisements that papers look for support nowadays, although there is no great scope for these in *Light*." (*Light* (January 5, 1918))

SOURCES CITED

Newspapers:

- 1) *Light*
- 2) *Times* (London)
- 3) *Washington Post*

Journals:

- 1) *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*

Sources written by editors of *Light*:

- 1) Gow, David. *Spiritualism: Its Position and Its Prospects: A Record and A Summary*. London: The London Spiritualist Alliance, Ltd., 1920.
- 2) Oxon, M.A. *Spirit Teachings: Memorial Edition*. London, Spiritualist Press: 1894.
- 3) -----, *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*. London: E.W. Allen & Co., 1880.
- 4) -----, *Psychography: A Treatise on One of the Objective Forms of Psychic or Spiritual Phenomena*. London: The Psychological Press Association; 1882.
- 5) Rogers, Edmund Dawson. *Life and Experiences of Edmund Dawson Rogers, Spiritualist and Journalist*. London: Office of Light, undated.
- 6) Wallis, Edward Walter. *Did Jesus Die on the Cross or Rise from the Dead? A Critical examination, analysis and comparison of the Gospel Narratives*. Manchester: E.W.Wallis, no date.
- 7) -----, *The Story of my Life, Development and Experiences as a Medium*. London: James Burns, 1885.

- 8) -----. *What Spiritualism Is: Hints for Inquirers and Students*. London: Mrs. M. H. Wallis, no date.

Books:

- 1) Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern reader of Victorian Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973.
- 2) Barrett, Sir William. *On the Threshold of the Unseen: An Examination of the Phenomena of Spiritualism and of the Evidence for Survival after Death*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918.
- 3) Barrow, Logie. *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.
- 4) Bebbington, D.W. *The Non-Conformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914*. London, George Allen & Unwin: 1982.
- 5) Bowler, Peter. *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2001.
- 6) Brannon, Ruth. *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.
- 7) Brown, Callum. *Religion and Society in 20th Century Britain*. London: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- 8) Brown, Lucy. *Victorian News and Newspapers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- 9) Brownson, Orestes. *The Spirit-Rapper*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1954.

- 10) Bruce, Steve, editor. *Religion and Modernization: Sociologist and Historians debate the Secularization Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- 11) Chadwick, Owen. *The Victorian Church*. 2 Vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- 12) ----- . *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- 13) Clarke, George, ed. *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War, 1914-1917*. First Series. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.
- 14) ---- *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War, 1914-1919*. Second Series. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919.
- 15) Coates, James. *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portaiture, and other Raer but Allied Phenomena*. New York: Arno Press, 1973.
- 16) Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.
- 17) Cox, Jeffrey. *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930*. London: Oxford University Press: 1982.
- 18) Crowther, M.A. *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian England*. Great Britain: David & Charles, 1970.
- 19) Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The New Revelation: My Personal Investigation of Spiritualism*. New York: Square One Publishers, 2001.

- 20) -----. *The History of Spiritualism*. NY: G.H. Doran Co, 1926
- 21) -----. *The History of Spiritualism: Volume 2*. London: Cassell, 1926.
- 22) -----. *Wanderings of a Spiritualist*. New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921.
- 23) Eksteins, Modris. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.
- 24) Frantzen, Allen J. *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- 25) Fussell, Paul. *The Great War in Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 26) Gauld, Alan. *The Founders of Psychological Research*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968.
- 27) Ghosh, Peter and Lawrence Goldman, eds. *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- 28) Harris, George. *Moral Evolution*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896.
- 29) Hazelgrove, Jenny. *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- 30) Heyck, T.W. *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
- 31) Hill, J. Arthur. *Spiritualism: Its History, Phenomena and Doctrine*. London: Cassell and Company, LTD., 1918.

- 32) Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *Victorian Minds*. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1968.
- 33) Hoppen, Theodore K. *The Mid-Victorian Generation: 1846-1886* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- 34) Hyslop, James. *Life after Death: Problems of the Future Life and its Nature*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918.
- 35) Inglis, K.S. *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
- 36) Jay, Elisabeth. *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain*. Context and Commentary edited by Arthur Pollard. London: MacMillan, 1986.
- 37) Jones, Peter. *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- 38) Kennedy, Dane. *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- 39) Lee, Alan. *The Origins of the Popular Press in England: 1855 – 1914*. London: Croom Helm, 1976.
- 40) Lodge, Sir Oliver. *Reason and Belief: The Impact of Scientific Discovery on Religious and Spiritual Faith*. London: Methuen, 1910.
- 41) Marks, Steven G. *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

- 42) Marsh, Peter T. *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England, 1868-1882*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969.
- 43) McLeod, Hugh. *Class and Religion in the Late-Victorian City*. Hamden, CT, Archon Books: 1974.
- 44) ----- . *Religion and Society in England: 1850-1914*. New York, St. Martin's Press: 1996.
- 45) Mitchell, Sally. *Daily Life in Victorian England*. The Greenwood Press "Daily Life Through History" Series. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- 46) Morgan, Kenneth O. *The Oxford History of Britain*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- 47) Nelson, Geoffrey K. *Spiritualism and Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.
- 48) O'Hara, Gerald. *Dead Men's Embers*. York, England: Saturday Night Press, 2006.
- 49) Oppenheim, Janet. *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- 50) Owen, Alex. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.
- 51) ----- . *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

- 52) Pearsall, Ronald. *The Table-Rappers*. London: Michael Joseph, 1972.
- 53) Podmore, Frank. *Mediums of the 19th Century*. 2 Vols. New York: University Books, Inc., 1963.
- 54) ----- . *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*. 2 Vols. London: Methuen, 1902.
- 55) Robb, George. *British Culture and the First World War*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2002.
- 56) Smith, Warren S. *The London Heretics: 1870-1914*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1968.
- 57) Snell, K.D.M. and Paul Ell. *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion*. New York, Cambridge University Press: 2000.
- 58) Sommerville, John. *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1992.
- 59) Stemman, Roy. *One Hundred Years of Spiritualism*. Great Britain: The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, 1972.
- 60) Taylor, Miles and Michael Wolff, eds. *The Victorians since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- 61) Turner, Frank Miller. *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

- 62) Wheeler, Michael. *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- 63) Wingfield-Stratford, Esmé. *The Victorian Aftermath: 1901-1914*. London: George Routledge and Sons, LTD, 1933.
- 64) Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1995.
- 65) Winters, Allison. *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Articles:

- 1) Ahrens, Frank. "Inflated Circulation Totals: Newspapers Padded Sales Figures to Keep Ad Rates High." *Washington Post* Tuesday, November 30, 2004, Page E01.
- 2) Clarke, David. "Rumours of Angels: A Legend of the First World War." *Folklore* 113, (2002), pp. 151-73.
- 3) Dingwell, Eric J. "Light and the Farmer Mystery." *Journal?*
- 4) Ferguson, Christine. "Eugenics and the Afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and the Spiritualist Purification of the Race." *Journal of Victorian Culture* Spring 2007, 64-85.
- 5) Henson, Louise. "'Half Believing, Half Incredulous': Elizabeth Gaskell, Superstition, and the Victorian Mind." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* Vol. 24 (3) 2002.