PSYCHIC MESSAGES FROM OSCAR WILDE

OSCAR WILDE

NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR

PSYCHIC MESSAGES FROM OSCAR WILDE

EDITED BY
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AUTHOR OF "VOICES FROM THE VOID"

WITH A PREFACE BY
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FOREWORD

In the pages in which I analyse these scripts, purporting to come from Oscar Wilde, I assume throughout that I am speaking of a discarnate personality of whose existence there is no question.

I leave it to my readers to pronounce on the case. I speak with assurance of Oscar Wilde's continued existence, merely for convenience; my own feeling is that of a diver who has pulled up a strange creature from the deep and wonders of what nature he may be! I hope he may excite criticism from every point of view and strengthen the ranks of those who take psychic study seriously. A highly intelligent ghost seems worthy of investigation; I have therefore made an effort to put the case fairly from the three angles which seem possible.

I do not hold myself responsible for any of the literary criticism in these scripts—the opinions expressed by "Oscar Wilde" are not mine.

I dedicate this book, with his permission, to

Sir William Barrett, F.R.S.,

respectfully and gratefully.

HESTER TRAVERS SMITH.

PREFACE

Whatever interpretation the reader may put upon the remarkable scripts which are here published, there can be no doubt that they present an amazing and most interesting psychological problem.

The complete solution of this problem may not be reached for many years, but that any educated person should regard it as unworthy of study, or that science should treat it with scorn, is a view now, happily, very rare. The time has gone by when these novel psychical phenomena were regarded by Dr Carpenter and others as "epidemic delusions," or as "an odious fraud," which is what the *Lancet* said of hypnotism in the middle of the last century.

Psychologists now tell us that to regard these phenomena either as delusions or fraud is nonsense; in fact, hypnotism has become a therapeutic agent, recognised by the medical profession. Automatic scripts are considered as "the emergence of the subconscious," and doubt-

less, in some cases, do indicate "a dissociation of personality."

Recently one of the foremost physiologists in Europe, Professor Richet, after thirty years investigation of psychical research, has startled the scientific world by his courageous publication of the results he has obtained. With noble loyalty to truth he asserts that he has been convinced of the genuineness of phenomena so amazing that many psychical researchers hesitate to admit the facts. He is, however, a materialist and explains his results from that point of view. He divides all psychical phenomena into two classes: either subjective, such as automatic writing and speaking; or objective, such as the physical phenomena of spiritism. He does not believe in survival, and regards the phenomena as merely due to psychical faculties possessed by certain persons who are psychics or mediums. The subjective he attributes to "cryptesthesia," the objective to "pragmatic cryptesthesia." But these polysyllables do not help us any more than the names given by some learned psychologists, who tell us all these psychical phenomena are illustrations of the "exteriorised effects of unconscious complexes."

One is reminded, by this formidable nomencla-

ture, of the numerous and recondite hypotheses by which Ptolemaic astronomers tried to make their observations square with the geocentric theory of the universe. To the plain man it seems simpler, less improbable, and more in accordance with facts, for biologists to recognise, what astronomers have done, that the universe is not explicable from the restricted viewpoint of the earth or of the brain. Personally I am convinced that whilst many super-normal psychical phenomena may ultimately be proved to be due to abnormal conditions of the brain, yet there will be found to remain well attested facts which will compel science to admit the existence of a soul; and also of a spiritual world, peopled with discarnate intelligent beings, some of whom can occasionally, but more or less imperfectly, get into communication with us.

Whether these scripts, purporting to come from Oscar Wilde, will support this view or not it is perhaps too soon to decide. Every reader will form his own conclusions; to me it seems that—given the entire honesty and trustworthiness of the automatists themselves, and of this there is no reason to doubt—they do afford strong prima facie evidence of survival after the dissolution of body and brain. Of the condition of

the soul in the unseen, at present we can only "see through a glass darkly"; for the messages that purport to come from the discarnate are little more than the record of their earth memories and habits. We have little or no evidence of that higher and more ample existence which we desire and mean by eternal life. Perhaps this is because none of those whom the world has known as saints ever seem to communicate; though many stupid personations of the great and good frequently occur.

Since the foregoing was put in type, Miss G. D. Cummins, for many years a friend and collaborator of Mrs Travers Smith, has published in the *Occult Review* for February 1924 an extremely interesting and impartial study of these Oscar Wilde Scripts. Miss Cummins, like Mrs Travers Smith herself, was at first very sceptical and regarded the results of automatism—much as orthodox psychologists do—as merely interesting illustrations of the emergence of the subconsciousness of the automatist. But as time went on, during the eight years she studied these psychical phenomena, she was compelled to abandon her preconceived opinion. The striking personality of the *soi-disant* Oscar Wilde gradually

became apparent. Miss Cummins remarks: "Style, handwriting, personality, the speed of the communication, the facts unknown to the mediums" must all be carefully considered before any judgment can be passed.

It will be seen from the dispassionate examination of the scripts which Mrs Travers Smith gives in the present volume that she is disposed to agree with Miss Cummins, that the whole contents of the scripts afford "more convincing evidence of survival than the giving of certain facts unknown to the mediums."

Nevertheless, my own belief is that, just as here on earth our true personality cannot reveal itself except through some material medium such as the brain, so after death the soul must await the clothing of "the spiritual body" before it can fully manifest itself to others. Be this as it may, the fragmentary and elusive glimpses we get of those who have passed into the unseen do afford to some a basis for religious belief, and frequently they give inexpressible comfort and hope to many bereaved and stricken hearts.

WILLIAM F. BARRETT.

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INTRODUCTION

This book bears the title of "Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde." Twenty-three years have passed since the author of "De Profundis" passed out of the present life. It may seem incredible that he should make an attempt to send his thoughts back again to a world in which his share of ill-fame exceeded his good fame and fortune. Have we adequate reason for supposing that these messages are genuine? That Oscar Wilde still exists? The public must judge of these matters; those to whom the writings came can only transmit them to the world to which they are addressed.

How and by whom were these messages received? They came through automatic writing and the ouija board, two methods of psychic communication which are described later on in this book. In all cases Oscar Wilde was "the communicator," not what is termed "the control." This distinction between "a control" and "a communicator" may not be clear to those who

have not made a special study of Psychic Phenomena. "Control" is a term which is applied to that mysterious entity who professes to be the "spirit guide" of the medium. He is the intermediary who admits suitable communicators. He is a being whose identity it is difficult to establish. The "communicator" professes to be the discarnate spirit of a human being. Our communicators, not our controls, go to prove or disprove survival. These messages came directly from Oscar Wilde to his mediums. My control, who calls himself "Johannes," merely introduces this communicator, rather unwillingly, to me. In the automatic writing there was no control or intermediary.

In the chapters which follow the automatic script I have more fully described the circumstances under which these writings came. I have frequently quoted and referred to the work of Professor C. Richet, not only because I value his conclusions, but also because he has formulated a theory which is logical and not impossible, and by which he seeks to explain psychic phenomena without accepting the spirit hypothesis. It is a significant fact, for those who refuse to consider psychical research seriously, that Professor Richet has devoted thirty years of his life to the

study of this subject. His great distinction, as perhaps the most eminent physiologist in Europe, should give him a hearing, though his present theoretical opinion may be open to dispute. In fact, Sir Oliver Lodge has already dealt very ably with the problem of "cryptesthesia" as an explanation of psychic phenomena. It will seem difficult to many.

The first of our messages from Oscar Wilde came in automatic writing, as follows:

CHAPTER I

AUTOMATIC SCRIPT OBTAINED ON JUNE 8TH, 1923.

Sitters—Mrs Travers Smith and Mr V.

Lily, my little Lily—No, the lily was mine—a crystal thread—a silver reed that made music in the morning. (Who are you?) Pity Oscar Wilde—one who in the world was a king of life. Bound to Ixion's wheel of thought, I must complete for ever the circle of my experience. *Long ago I wrote that there was twilight in my cell and twilight in my heart,* but this is the (last?) twilight of the soul. *In eternal twilight I move,* but I know that in the world *there is day and night, seed time and harvest,* and red sunset must follow apple-green dawn. Every year spring throws her green veil over the world and anon the red autumn glory comes *to mock the yellow moon.* Already the may is creeping like a white mist over lane and hedgerow, *and year after year the hawthorn bears blood-red fruit after the*

white death of its may. (Mrs T.S.—Are you Oscar Wilde?) Yes, Oscar Wilde. (Mrs T.S.—Tell me the name of the house you lived in in Dublin. Tell me where your father used to practice.) Near Dublin. My father was a surgeon. These names are difficult to recall. (Mrs T.S.—Not at all difficult if you are really Oscar Wilde.) I used to live near here—Tite Street. (Mrs T.S.—There is a Tite Street near here and he has spelt it correctly. I don't know where he lived in London. Did you know about it?) (Mr V, the writer of the script.—I have never been in Chelsea before to-day, and to the best of my knowledge I had never heard of Tite Street.) (Mrs T.S.—Well, Oscar Wilde, what was your brother's name?) William—Willie. (Mrs T.S.—Now, what did your mother, Lady Wilde, call herself?) Speranza. Pity Oscar Wilde. (Mrs T.S.—Why have you come here?) To let the world know that Oscar Wilde is not dead. His thoughts live on in the hearts of all those who in a gross age can hear the flute voice of beauty calling on the hills or mark where *her white feet brush the dew from the cowslips in the morning.* Now the mere memory of the beauty of the world is an exquisite pain. *I was always one of those for whom the visible world*

existed. I worshipped at the shrine of things seen. *There was not a blood stripe on a tulip or a curve on a shell* or a tone on the sea that but had for me its meaning and its mystery and its appeal to the imagination. Others might sip the pale lees of the cup of thought, but for me the red wine of life.

Pity Oscar Wilde. To think of what is going on in the world is terrible for me. Soon the chestnuts will light their white candles and the foxgloves flaunt their dappled, drooping bells. Soon the full moon will swim up over the edge of the world and hang like a great golden cheese—Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop! This image is insufferable. You write like a successful grocer, who from selling pork has taken to writing poetry. (Mrs T.S.—Who said that?) Oscar. I find the words in my medium's mind. Try again—*like a great golden pumpkin hanging in the blue night.* That is better, but it is a little rustic. Still, I adore rustic people. They are at least near to nature, and, besides, they remind me of all the simple pleasures I somehow missed in life. (Here Mrs T.S. made some remark about Lady Wilde being a half crazy old woman who thought she could write poetry.) Please do not insult my mother. *I loved and honoured her.*

(Mrs T.S.—We are not insulting her. Spell out the name by which your mother called herself.) Speranza. Yes, it is quite true what I said. I lived for the beauty of visible things. The rose flushed, anemones that star the dark woodland ways, those loveliest tears that Venus shed for Adonis, and shed in vain, were more to me than many philosophies.*

*Mr V wrote with Mrs T S's hand resting on his. When she took her hand off, the pencil only tapped and did not continue. The italics have been inserted in the above copy to indicate quotations similar in style which were afterwards discovered in Wilde's works. Mr V is a mathematical scholar and had no special interest in Oscar Wilde. He stated he had read "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," "De Profundis" and "The Picture of Dorian Gray."

Copy of Automatic Scrip Obtained Monday, June 18th, 1923.

Present.—Mr V, Mrs Travers Smith, Mr B, Mr Dingwall (Research Officer of the Society for Psychical Research), Miss Cummins.

Mr V was the automatist, Mrs T.S. touching his hand.

Oscar Wilde. Being dead is the most boring experience in life. That is, if one excepts being married or dining with a schoolmaster. Do you doubt my identity? I am not surprised, since sometimes I doubt it myself. I might retaliate by doubting yours. I have always admired the Society for Psychical Research. They are the most magnificent doubters in the world. They are never happy until they have explained away their spectres. And one suspects a genuine ghost would make them exquisitely uncomfortable. I have sometimes thought of founding an academy

of celestial doubters . . . which might be a sort of Society for Psychical Research among the living. No one under sixty would be admitted, and we should call ourselves the Society of Superannuated Shades. Our first object might well be to insist on investigating at once into the reality of the existence of, say, Mr Dingwall.

Mr Dingwall, is he romance or reality? Is he fact or fiction? If it should be decided that he is fact, then, of course, we should strenuously doubt it. Fortunately there are no facts over here. On earth we could scarcely escape them. Their dead carcases were strewn everywhere on the rose path of life. One could not pick up a newspaper without learning something useful. In it were some sordid statistics of crime or disgusting detail relating to the consumption of pork, that met the eyes, or we were told with a precision that was perfectly appalling and totally unnecessary—What time the moon had decided to be jealous and eclipse the sun. (Mrs T.S.—Shall we ask him some questions?) Don't degrade me into giving you facts. Enquire about Mrs Chan Toon. I had the honour of her acquaintance some years ago.

(Mr B told a story of Whistler and Wilde.

Wilde had expressed a wish to have made a certain witty remark which had just been uttered by Whistler. Whistler retorted: "You will, Wilde; you will in time.") The pencil suddenly moved and wrote: With James, vulgarity always. begins at home.

Record of a Communication Received at the Ouija Board, June 17th, 1923, at 11.30 p.m.

Recorded by Miss Cummins. The medium was Mrs Travers Smith.

Oscar Wilde. I have come, as you asked for me. I am naturally an interesting person—not only do I flaunt the colours of literature, but I have the lurid flame of crime attached to me also. My dear lady, do you realise that you are talking to a social leper? (Yes, we do.) I do not wish to burden you with details of my life, which was like a candle that had gutted at the end. I rather wish to make you believe that I was the medium through which beauty filtered and was distilled like the essence of a rose.

Forget my history, dear lady, and think of my best powers as they were when London was the haunted house of the . . . Oscar is speaking again . . . the haunted house which was peopled by the shades of Olympus. I think you may reasonably believe you are a living being and I

a chimera of your mind. But let me explain that to me you are a mere chimera, and, in reality, you are less alive than I am. For I am still a living soul and mind, and I have as great a feeling for beauty as I had when I wore a top hat and let my hair stream from beneath it. (Tell us about Mrs Chan Toon.) I will not tell you anything about her. For I want you to make enquiries about the lady. She was a perfect specimen, fit for the satin lining of a jewel-case; and if she is still alive she could tell you much that would throw a light on my life as she knew it. It was not the life of a rustic, but it had something of the rustic element in it, and I can confidently say I had in my heart the innocent joy of a rustic who has never seen the stones of this great prison house, where if a man is unfortunate he is despised and thrown out upon his own mental chance of regeneration. Mine was not a very lucky one. My chance, as I was, when I left that quiet and monastical retreat where justice made me repose and take my pleasures sadly. (Here Wilde was interrupted with the query: "Who did you communicate through at the sitting for automatic writing this afternoon? Through Mr V, or through Mrs Travers Smith?) Through you, dear lady. He is a tool.

You are the light that lets me peep again into the world which seems so dazzling, now that the Divine Justice finds it His pleasure to keep me in dim twilight. (Did you know Mr W. B. Yeats?) I knew Yeats very well—a fantastical mind, but so full of inflated joy in himself that his little cruse of poetry was emptied early in his career. (What of his work?) A little drop of beauty that was spread only with infinite pains over the span of many years.

He will not be interested to know that I have still the voice to speak and the mind to put my thoughts on paper. He is too full of his own literary salvation to worry over a brother in art who fell from too much beauty, or rather, the desire for beauty. (Mrs T.S.—Give us a proof of your identity.) Do not ask me for proofs. I do not wish to visualise my medium as an old spinster nosing into the other world in the hope that she may find salvation for herself when Providence removes her from this sphere. I rather like to think of her as a creature who has a certain feeling for those who strive from twilight to reach the upper air. (We admire your work.) I am infinitely amused by the remarks you all make. You seem to think that I am gratified by your approval and your smiles,

which mean that, in spite of all his crime, he had a certain value for us. I have value as each and all of you have; and I am none the worse for having drunk the dregs as well as the best of the vintage. . . .

Here we are in the most amusing position. We are like so many ants that creep round and round and do our silly tasks daily without any interest in our work. I feel like a very ancient *aunt* nowadays. I am doing what is little better than picking oakum in gaol. There, after all, my mind could detach itself from my body. Here, I have no body to leave off. So one of my most interesting occupations is impossible. It is not by any means agreeable to be a mere mind without a body. That was a very decorous garment, that made us seem very attractive to each other; or, perhaps, supremely the opposite. Over here that amusement is quite out of the question, and we know far too much about the interiors of each others' ideas. They grow very pale in this process, and one tires of one's ideas so easily. You can see them just as you saw the slightly creased and dabbled clothes of your friends on earth. (Have you seen your mother?) Yes, I have seen her. She has not really improved in the process of dying. She is less comely now than when

Speranza used to lead the intelligentsia in Dublin in those days when we had still the relics of civilisation among us. (Will you come again?) I will come again gladly, if you will let me buzz on as an autumn bee might who was tired of hunting for fresh blossoms out of season. I am tired, too, but I like to remind myself now and then of the fact that there are people who regard this little globe as the whole of what is reality.

Copy of Automatic Script Written on July 2nd, 1923.

The writer was Mr V, who was assisted by Mrs Travers Smith touching his hand.

Present—Miss Cummins.

Note.—A portion of this script deals with the novels of Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and Eden Philpotts. Neither Mrs Travers Smith nor Mr V are great novel-readers. They had each read one novel by Arnold Bennett, three or four of H. G. Wells' earlier novels; they had not read anything whatever by Eden Philpotts.

Oscar Wilde. Like blind Homer, I am a wanderer. Over the whole world have I wandered, looking for eyes by which I might see. At times it is given me to pierce this strange veil of darkness, and through eyes, from which my secret must be forever hidden, gaze once more on the gracious day. I have found sight in the

most curious places. Through the eyes out of the dusky face of a Tamal girl I have looked on the tea fields of Ceylon, and through the eyes of a wandering Kurd I have seen Ararat and the Yezedes, who worship both God and Satan and who love only snakes and peacocks.

Once on a pleasure steamer on its way to St. Cloud I saw the green waters of the Seine and the lights of Paris, through the vision of a little girl who clung weeping to her mother and wondered why. Ah! those precious moments of sight. They are the stars of my night, the gleaming jewels in my casket of darkness, the priceless guerdon for whose sake I would willingly barter all that fame has brought me, the nectar for which my soul thirsts. Eyes! what can it profit a man if he loses them, or what can a man give in exchange for them? They are fairer than silver, better than seed pearls or many-hued opals. Fine gold may not buy them, neither can they be had for the wishes of kings. . . . (A pause to rest the mediums.)

It may surprise you to learn that in this way I have dipped into the works of some of your modern novelists. That is, I have not drawn the whole brew, but tasted the vintage. You have much to learn. Time will ruthlessly prune Mr

Wells' fig trees. As for Mr Arnold Bennett, he is the assiduous apprentice to literature, who has conjured so long with the wand of his master Flaubert that he has really succeeded in persuading himself and others that he has learnt the trick. But Flaubert's secret is far from him. Of his characters, one may say that they never say a cultured thing and never do an extraordinary one. They are, of course, perfectly true to life—as true as a bad picture. They are perfectly commonplace, and, for the Clayhangers, the Lessways and the Tellwrights, oblivion will have a plentiful meed of poppy. Mr Bennett has undertaken a grave irresponsibility by adding to the number of disagreeable types in the world. Of late, we understand, he has taken to producing prostitutes. It is pleasanter to turn to Mr Eden Philpotts, who, unlike Mr Bennett, on whose sterile pages no flowers bloom or birds sing, has a real and unaffected love of nature, and, unfortunately, all nature's lack of variety. He is a writer who has been very faithful, far too faithful, to his first love. One wishes that spring would sometimes forget to come to Dartmoor.

The following communication came through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the Ouija Board, July 2nd, 1923, at 11 p.m.

Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Oscar Wilde. I have no very special desire to give my thoughts from this place of dimness to you who are breathing the upper air. But if it gives you pleasure to speak to one, who is in a manner soiled in the eyes of the world, I will continue to talk to you and to spin my webs of thought around you. As you know, I have only dimness around me. It is that darkness, which is reserved for those who are the prey of social conventions, which has cast me into a state which is not beneficial for me from the point of development of mind. My mind is now a rusty lock, into which the key grates with a rasp. It does not move easily and lightly as it used. I will go on and tell you how I have wandered into the minds of the moderns, as you are pleased to call them.

It is a rather entertaining process. I watch

for my opportunity, and when the propitious moment comes I leap into their minds and gather rapidly these impressions, which are largely collective. I spoke to-day of Mr Bennett and Mr Wells. These two writers have somehow managed to attain a summit which has deceived themselves. They actually believe they are fit for the company of the gods who drink the nectar of pure mind. And here they are utterly lost, neither of these gentlemen can do more than prepare a ready-made costume for the lay figure. They cannot create, and even when the lay figure is nailed together they cannot clothe it.

I feel the London of my time has been swallowed up; an article of a coarser quality is now in its place. The women of my time were beautiful, from the outward side at least. They had a mellifluous flow of language, and they added much to the brilliant pattern of society. Now woman is an excrescence, she protrudes from social life as a wart does from the nose of an inebriate. (Do you see women?) I see them now and then, dear lady, when I have the chance of using the eyes of a suitable medium. (Do you see this room?) Yes, a little dimly. (Mrs T.S.—Do you see me?) Yes, I can see you quite clearly. (How do you manage when Mr V and

I sit together?) I can control his hand. I can only control your mind. Your hand is guided by your mind. . . .

(What is your opinion of Bernard Shaw?) Shaw, after all, might be called a contemporary of mine. We had almost reached the point of rivalry, in a sense, when I was taken from the scene of action. I had a kindly feeling towards poor Shaw. He had such a keen desire to be original that it moved my pity. Then he was without any sense of beauty, or even a sense of the dramatic side of life, and totally without any idea of the outside of any human being as he was utterly ignorant of his internal organs. And yet there was the passionate yearning to be a personage, to force his person on the London world and to press in, in spite of the better taste of those who went before him. I have a very great respect for his work. After all, he is my fellow-countryman. We share the same misfortune in that matter. I think he may be called the true type of the pleb. He is so anxious to prove himself honest and outspoken that he *utters* a great deal more than he is able to *think*. He cannot analyse, he is merely trying to overturn the furniture and laughs with delight when he sees the canvas bottoms of the chairs he has flung over. He is

ever ready to call upon his audience to admire his work; and his audience admires it from sheer sympathy with his delight.

(Whom do you admire among the moderns?)

I am not given to admiration, I fear. But if you ask me sincerely whom I admire among the modern dramatists, I think there is only one who has any approach to form and a sense of drama. I feel that if I give you the name of this writer you will think that I praise his work chiefly as Shaw might, with a desire to be original. But I assure you, the only mind I have entered into which appeals to my literary sense is John Galsworthy. He is my successor, in a sense. For although he dives more deeply into the interior of the human being he is ever occupied with the exterior, which is so important in the play of society; and he succeeds, with this very difficult medium, in producing something akin to life with all the artificiality which is so essential to the stage. He is the aristocrat in literature, the man who takes joy in selection, as our poor friend Shaw never did. Shaw plunges in and seizes the first object his hand can grasp and takes a wholesome joy in ripping it to pieces. Galsworthy is slow in his selection, but when he selects he does so from an exquisite sense of

fitness and he presents the complete pattern of his idea. . . .

It gives me pleasure to dive a little into the present time. It is a form of amusement over here.

The following communication came through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the Ouija Board, July 4th, 1923

Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Oscar Wilde is here. I shall readily speak to you, because it seems to me that these glimpses of the sun keep me from growing too mouldy here below. Hamlet speaks of his father's ghost as "old mole." I often used to smile in my unregenerate days at the clumsy way in which the Englisman—for surely our Shakespeare was nothing if not English. . . . The clumsy way in which he addressed the shade of his father used to wound my feelings of delicacy and selection. But now that I am a mole myself I understand. I fully appreciate this expression. It was well chosen and should be of interest to the Society for Psychical Research, as it displays an inward knowledge of the state over here. . . .

So far I cannot be said to have found the after life a state of bliss—rather it is the dimming of the senses and the stultifying of the brain from lack of light and colour. . . . But doubtless the Almighty has an excellent purpose in stamping out as far as possible that taste for his creations which worked so deeply to my detriment. . . .

I am a little astray as to what special subjects are of interest to you. (We are interested in drama.) If you tempt me to speak of drama I shall weary you with my complaints and my fancies. I had a different thought from my fellows when my plays were shaped, and consequently I cannot absorb their attitude towards the stage. My dear lady, how do you approach the theatre? From what side of your nature does it repel or attract you? Have you ever considered whether our task should be to aim at representing life in its rather crude and disgusting shape, or whether the stage, like the other platforms from which we endeavour to bring home the essence of things to the herd, should be reserved for the exposition of beauty in some form. . . . (Do you ask for my opinion?)

Oscar is still here. I do not intend to listen to your modern criticism, because you have the

misfortune to live in an age of harshness. In my lifetime I strove to bring beauty home to the hearts of men. But in your time the main endeavour of the so-called artist is to torture the senses. Pain is the only quality which is essential to any literary work of the present day which is to find its way into the favour of the pleb who rules the world at the present hour. . . .

(Tell me about your plays?) My idea in writing a play was to weave a pattern of humanity, as I mentioned to you before, I think. I am quite sensible of the fact that I sound superficial, and you may argue, if you wish, that the poet who is an artist in weaving patterns from words cannot approach the problem of weaving patterns from the human material at his disposal.

I have never swerved from my ideal. I have served the theatre in my own way, and from my own standpoint I succeeded. (Tell us about your earth life.) . . . I have delayed a little. I feel it an effort now to lay my past feelings before your eyes. They are past, after all; and in our state it is difficult to look into the abyss that lies behind us.

I find it easier to speak of the present time for two reasons. One, that you, my dear lady, are

more useful to me when I speak of what you are familiar with; and the other, that I enjoy my glimpses into the present chaotic conditions. It affords me great happiness when I reflect that I escaped this age of rasp.

Mrs Travers Smith at the Ouija Board, June 20th, 1923.

Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Johannes. (Will you summon Oscar Wilde?) He is unpleasant. You may speak to him, but not often or much. . . . Oscar Wilde is speaking. Yes, I will give you a few minutes'; light; that allows me to look through the peephole. It quite amuses me in a desultory way; it is not strictly an intellectual occupation, but it is a mild distraction from the twilight of my present state, which is somewhat the condition that is suitable for the propagation of a low form of vegetable existence. (Mrs T.S.—I have sent your communications to Mr Yeats.) He will not be gratified by finding me still extant, unless it affords him some proof that he will continue to inflate, in a further state, his ecstatic penetration of the universe. (What about your literary work?) I do not get much literary stimulus over here. I

am rather in the condition of coma of the mind that used to overcome me when the great massed-up population of London oppressed my being. The shades here are really too tumultuous. They are overcrowded and we get confused by seeing into each others' thoughts. . . .

I wish you would just take me as I come. I crawl into your mind like a sick worm and try to bore a hole above the earth so that I may once more look at the sun. . . .

(Why do you speak to me?)

I like to speak to you because you remind me of the time when I too was a creature hampered by that garment you call a body. I really do not miss it much, because there is a joy in that nakedness which leaves all the thoughts and ideas of the mind, whether foul or fair, open to the public gaze. I feel now as if the extreme reticence of wearing a body was almost indecent. It is far more decent to go about blaring one's loves and hates, blowing them in the faces of those we meet —as it were, being so much on the outside that we cannot be said to have an inside. My dear lady, what will it be for you to lose your little shape, to have no shape, to be a fluid and merely stream about in such an undecided way that it is like drifting before a heavy tide. My mind is

not really as repulsive as you would expect. It looks quite respectable at times. Of course there are times when it looks like an ancient thief, who steals away from me with shame in his face. That is only one aspect of me. I have other attractive ones. There is the brilliant orange of my thoughts, and the deep rose red of my desires, which cling to me still. They are perfumed and smell sweet to me. But there is somehow a sense that they are getting a little stale. This condition of twilight is bringing out a delicate mossy mould upon them which rather damages their hue. (Here the sitting was interrupted.)

The following communication came through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the Ouija Board, June 24th, 1923.

Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Oscar Wilde is speaking. I have come, as if I were a servant maid who replied to her mistress's bell with great assiduity.

I am glad to have a little of the upper air to breathe now and then. And you, dear lady, have given me an opportunity. . . . I see you have made up your mind that I am not a reasonable shade, that I am a capricious ghost, who merely behaves as if he had no reason to guide his mind, which now without a body to act as pilot strays about fluidly in space. But, my dear lady, you are mistaken. My mind is quite clear. I am in excellent condition for exploiting the English language, if only you give me a theme to weave patterns on. (Tell us about your time at Trinity College, Dublin.)

I almost forget that time when I was chained

within the walls of the university. I was like a carrier pigeon who had flown by mistake into a nest of sparrows. These Dublin students could see such a short distance. I was a giant among pigmies. (We are great admirers of your plays.)

I bend deeply to your compliment. My plays were scarcely drama. They were more the weaving of character into pattern; and this, with the use of language which I chose in each instance to illustrate the surface of the human being. I did not propose to go deeply into the heart, as it is called—that organ, which is so frequently maligned, did not interest me. I was more intrigued by the human pattern as it appeared on the surface of London society. It seemed to me we used to get more from each other by accepting the outside than by probing into the intestines. The outside of this great machine was at that date comely, and presented to the eye a picture which had the charm of much shade and little light. It was a time when beauty was spoken of, but kept in the innermost chamber and not permitted to walk abroad. . . .

* I feel inclined to relate little tales to-day of my adventures on the surface of society here. I may not be as full of grace if you call me another time. . . . I should rather like to give you some

idea of what it meant to plunge into this huge heap of philistinism. I felt like a goldfish who has choked from devouring too much bread. The meal did not nourish me, it merely distended my stomach. It seemed a foolish thing to go on living in such a world as this was. And I found I had a mission—the mission of drawing aside the veil from beauty and showing her in her nakedness to the world. I had all the ardour of a missionary; and my own rather unusual appearance gave me the suitable garb of a parson. The priest of art, of culture, must of necessity show it in his own form.

The following communication came through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the Ouija Board, July 5th, 1923.

Recorded by Miss Cummins. It was with difficulty the recorder kept pace with the message.

Oscar Wilde. (I have a question to ask.) Your question shall have my best attention, if it savours of what concerns yourself; if it concerns me, I reserve the right to be silent if necessary. (Why did you select me as your medium?) That, my dear lady, is not easy to explain. I have told you how I gazed through the eyes of many nations that I might gain once more a look into the glory of the world. I had often fancied conveying my thoughts from this place of darkness to someone who had a fitting understanding of a mind such as mine is—fantastical and pained by a desire to express beauty in words. I tried many times to secure a vial for my ideas, which could contain them in an essence as it were. But until

the day when I seized the pencil from some unnoticeable being, who seemed to make an effort to press through the brain of "the tool," never before had I found the exact quality I needed. If I am to speak again as I used, or to use the pen, I must have a clear brain to work with. It must let my thoughts flow through as fine sand might if filtered through a glass cylinder. It must be clear and there must be material which I can make use of. I can use the hand of the tool and leave an impress of my writing as I used. But his brain does not serve me. I cannot use it, for ideas would stick there as flies do in a cloyed mass.

Mrs Travers Smith at the Ouija Board, July 6th, 1923, 11.45 p.m.

Recorded by Miss Cummins. This communication came through with the same rapidity as the previous message.

Oscar Wilde. I will try to let my thoughts fly through your brain. (I was tired when I spoke to you last.) I found you less sensitive to my ideas than before, but even when you are tired you are a perfect æolian lyre that can record me as I think. (Mrs T.S.—A legend has sprung up concerning you. It is believed by some that you did not die when you were supposed to have died.)

Men are ever interested, my dear lady, in the remains of those who have had the audacity to be distinguished, and when, added to this, the corpse has the flavour of crime, the carrion birds are eager to light on it. In my case the corpse was taken from the humble place where it was

cast off by my mental portion and conveyed to a retreat where it might decay quietly and in peace. It had none of the gaudy obsequies which would have fitted such as I was. And hence this legend, which had a charm, in spite of the fact that I had passed from the public gaze long before this dissolution took place. It is really delightful to think that when one has striven and conquered London—for I conquered London partly through my supposed crime—it is delightful to think that after the carcase has been conveyed to its modest hole a legend is woven round its decaying particles. You, I am sure, give me credit for the fact that I really accomplished the feat of dying when I was supposed to die. I did not fly from the world a second time in order to create fiction. This legend was merely an accident due to the fact that I was still talked about. (Mrs T.S. took her hand off to rest her arm.)

(Mrs T.S.—Are you there, Oscar?) I waited for your returning strength as a footman might wait for his mistress, standing with deferential pomp behind her. (That is very neat.) Thank, you, dear lady; I smile at your approval.

(What is your opinion of "Ulysses," by James Joyce?)

Yes, I have smeared my fingers with that vast

work. It has given me one exquisite moment of amusement. I gathered that if I hoped to retain my reputation as an intelligent shade, open to new ideas, I must peruse this volume. It is a singular matter that a countryman of mine should have produced this great bulk of filth. You may smile at me for uttering thus when you reflect that in the eyes of the world I am a tainted creature. But, at least, I had a sense of the values of things on the terrestrial globe. Here in "Ulysses" I find a monster who cannot contain the monstrosities of his own brain. The creatures he gives birth to leap from him in shapeless masses of hideousness, as dragons might, which in their foulsome birth contaminate their parent. . . . This book appeals to all my senses. It gratifies the soil which is in everyone of us. It gives me the impression of having been written in a severe fit of nausea. Surely there is a nausea fever. The physicians may not have diagnosed it. But here we have the heated vomit continued through the countless pages of this work. The author thought no doubt that he had given the world a series of ideas. Ideas which had sprung from out his body, not his mind!

I, who have passed into the twilight, can see more clearly than this modern prophet. I also

know that if he feels his work has sprung from courage, which is innate in him, he should be led to realise that "Ulysses" is merely involuntary. I feel that if this work has caught a portion of the public, who may take it for the truth, that I, even I, who am a shade, and I who have tasted the fulness of life and its meed of bitterness, should cry aloud: "Shame upon Joyce, shame on his work, shame on his lying soul." . . . Compare this monster Joyce with our poor Shaw. Here we find very opposite poles. For both these writers cry aloud that they have found the truth. Shaw, like a coy and timid maiden, hides his enormous modesty with bluster. Joyce, on the other hand, is not a blusterer at all. In fact he has not vomited the whole, even in this vast and monumental volume—more will come from Joyce. For he has eaten rapidly; and all the undigested food must come away. I feel that Joyce has much to give the world before, in his old age, he turns to virtue. For by that time he will be tired of truth and turn to virtue as a last emetic.

(You are most amusing.)

I am glad that a poor ghost can bring laughter to your eyes.

(I am interested in literature.)

I quite appreciate that fact. You have a sense

of style, and this helps me to put poor thoughts before you.

(What do you think of Hardy and Meredith?)

I adore the rustic, as you know. His simple mind appeals to mine; and for that reason I should be interested in Mr Hardy's work. But all that is in me of rusticity revolts against this realism that flaunts itself in hopeless wanderings among the fields of Dorsetshire. Think for one moment and reflect that Mr Hardy's works are just the jottings down of a limited village experience with a primitive sense of romance added to it. A very harmless writer, Hardy. He almost succeeded in being a little risky now and then in that dull period when he wrote. I well remember how his Tess set maiden hearts a-throbbing. It was a tale which might attract the schoolgirl who imagined she had just arrived at puberty; but as a work this book is shapeless and has neither value as an artificial rendering of rustic life nor as a minute study of the village. Mr Hardy is indeed the middle class provincial. He never dreamt he could arrive, and yet he had his day, partly because he tried to paint the peasant, who at this period was just about to peep above the horizon for the first time. We were quite interested to meet the peasant; we even

found him rich for a short space, but soon his day had passed. For Mr Hardy wearied us. We wearied of his peasants, and he had to fall back upon a class a little more elevated but totally uninteresting. This, I feel, was the reason for his steady decay.

(What do you think of Meredith?)

I am frankly an admirer of Meredith. He, of course, was a man without any appreciation whatever of beauty, but he had a most ingenious way of plaiting words, so that his most ardent admirers could never extricate his thoughts from them. They clung about his ideas as barnacles on an old ship. And he was so completely clogged that his ideas escaped and only words were left. But, after all, what an immense achievement it is to plait the English language! I never attempted this experiment myself. My plan was to select my words, to cherish them and move them from one corner of my room to another, until they each and all received their due. Meredith collected them and wove them so intricately that his intelligence was cramped by them, and no one ever penetrated their crustated masses.

NOTE.—About a year previous to this sitting Mrs Travers Smith had glanced at a copy of

"Ulysses" for a few minutes in Ireland. Out of seven hundred pages she could not have read more than half a dozen, nor had she read reviews of this work. So she was not in a position to criticize it. She is a great admirer of Meredith, and believes him to have a fine sense of beauty. She therefore almost entirely disagreed with Wilde's caustic estimate of his work.

The following communication came through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the Ouija Board, July 8th, 1923.

Present—Miss D, Mr M.L, Mr C.L. Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Oscar Wilde. (Give us your opinion of women?) Dear lady, do you really wish to speak again to your criminal? I feel rather melancholy to-night. So possibly it is an occasion on which I may reasonably babble about my lost illusions. I have long since passed into a state in which women appear to me merely to exist as the coloured phantoms of an over-excited brain. But even here, in this condition into which the Almighty has found it His pleasure to confine me, he cannot shut out from my only-too-fertile memory the images of those who passed in and out of my life—flashes of lightning flitting across the leaden Heaven. . . .

I desired to say that not one woman passed across my path in life who left no furrow on the

road behind her. My sensations were so varied with regard to your sex, dear lady, that you would find painted on my heart—that internal organ so often quoted by the vulgar—you would find every shade of desire there—and even more. (An interruption.) These women, who like dancing flowers sprang on my path, these jewels, who crowned me with torturing pleasure, were the strings of my lyre. They gave me words to weave, and thoughts to cluster round my words.

(Tell us about one woman?)

Women were ever to me a cluster of stars. They contained for me all, and more than all, that God has created. Evil came through them, and all the best of me was woven from the woman. (Here there was an interruption from those present.)

Oscar is speaking. Woman was to me a colour, a sound. She gave me all. She gave me first desire, desire gave birth to that mysterious essence which was within me, and from that deeply distilled and perfumed drug my thoughts were born; and from my thoughts words sprang. Each word I used became a child to me. I loved my words and cherished them in secret. They became so precious they were hidden from the gaze of men until I nurtured them, and in their

fullness brought them forth as symbols of the woman. . . .

I feel it very difficult to make your simple nature follow me in this matter. Do I insult you if I maintain that woman must ever be to man the force that is creative. That was what made her hateful in my sight—hateful and sweet as a too powerful vintage.

(Were all women the same to you?)

Women came to me like clustered stars. I gathered them as flowers might be culled from a rich garden. All their varied perfumes came to me as an intoxicating draught—not singly, but combined. This twined wreath encircled me through life, and made my days both sweet and bitter. . . .

(Are you there, Oscar?)

Oscar is still waiting on your fainting strength.

(Mr L. What do you think of the Sitwells? Have you read their poetry?) No. I do not spend my precious hours in catching tadpoles. I only leap into the minds of those who have a certain value. Below this standard I do not sink.

The criticism communicated by Oscar Wilde was considered too malicious to be published.

A sitting was therefore held at 15 Cheyne Gardens, Chelsea, January 4th, 1924, and when Oscar Wilde spoke he was asked to write a criticism of George Moore's works which would be less unkind than the previous one. The message was received through Mrs Travers Smith's hand at the ouija board. Recorded by Miss G. D. Cummins.

(What do you think of George Moore?)

My fellow-countryman from Dublin! Dear lady, here is a fine and intricate mind deeply nurtured in culture; steeped in it in fact, to a point that compels him to lose sight of the common forms of man and woman. To my nature, writing of this kind is almost incomprehensible. I used the heavy pen; and, from the soil my tool had turned, roses and flaunting lilies rose; but from the rocky soil, on which Moore strives to plant the rose, only the lichen draws sufficient nourishment. How can we meet on any grounds?

One difficulty, in reading him, is to differentiate between the sexes. To me masculine and feminine are the entirely arbitrary division of nature, while to him they seem perpetually to merge in each other. I am ever intrigued as to whether his men are women or his women men. And yet, what a fine perception of style has

Moore; style, if you like to style it so. A continual flow of words, rippling, as a stream without colour, flows through a level plain—no rush in these waters; they follow their course with a certainty which may be considered monotonous by the full-blooded.

The continual flow and ripple of Moore's prose lulls the reader to a dozing state. It is "half slumber" that carries him through these colourless pages.

Thus Moore murmurs on; never a clear or masculine idea, but the half-tone, delicately sexless, sustained throughout. Do you agree, dear lady? In your mind I find an admiration of Moore's style. Consider my own productions, which have entirely sprung from out the male. How can I speak of one whose delicacy of perception exceeds my own. *My* work was fashioned in the glare of sunlight, *his* in the mist of evening. For, after all, dear lady, even these figures, which move behind the blind in Moore's tales, *are* but shadows.

I cannot speak too highly of what our Moore has said of art; here, indeed, we find the slow but determined intention to criticize where there is no intuitive taste. A worthy critic, Moore! Most conscientious, in that he tries to approach

that which, to him, is almost unintelligible. I cannot praise his industry too highly, for sheer determination has led him to the studio; and what he says is the result of a decision to become what he is not, by nature.

(What do you think of "Hail and Farewell"?)

I have not, personally, a craving for the dissecting room. The enquiring mind of Moore has induced him to lay his friends and enemies thus on the table, in order that he may have the opportunity of observing their entrails while still they are alive. An accurate method, but rather a severe tension for the unfortunate subjects, who have to undergo this ordeal in the cause of literature.

(A pause.)

I have a gentle feeling for poor George. He is so entirely opposed to me in nature that I feel we, perhaps, are the complement of each other; possibly the two halves of the whole. I have a sensation of mild curiosity in trying to discover of what ingredients he is fashioned.

Note.—Mrs T.S. has always been a great admirer of George Moore's work, and more especially his style.

Copy of communication received at the Ouija Board by Mrs Travers Smith, July 12th, 1923.

Recorded by Miss Cummins.

Oscar at your bidding, dear lady. (Do you object to speaking of your prison life?)

I do not at all object to speaking to you about what was to me a most enthralling experience. When I say enthralling I mean that my circuit of the world's pain would not have been adequate without that supreme misery, for to me it was supreme. I, who worshipped beauty, was robbed not only of the chance of beholding her face, but I was cast in on myself; and there, in that barrenness of soul, I languished until my spirit rose once more and cried aloud that this was its great opportunity.

If I may be a little autobiographical, I will go back to the beginning. It seemed to me at first that I had died and passed across the bitter stream to that place of dimness where now I am

confined. There was a desolation of the soul that savoured of despair; and yet within me despair had never found a lodgment. I was a fallen god, a fallen king, and felt I had the dignity of royal blood within me. I hardly realised my state. It seemed impossible that beauty had deserted me. I had been condemned—it seemed a monstrosity—condemned by whom? Not by the world, but by a spiteful, narrow crew who could not steer their ship if it fell on a storm. I knew the value of that crew; the knowledge helped me in my impotence. I sat and brooded on the values of the world. Hounded down by little men and called unclean by Pharisees and Philistines I had a greater place in the world's scheme than they had ever dreamed of. This thought brought me a certain quiet. And as day by day came one by one creeping upon each other in sterile dimness, my soul cried aloud that it was healing. . . .

Oscar, dear lady, waits for you. My soul was healing, but my vision of things seen was blind. What service are the eyes if they behold nothing but bare and ugly walls and barer, uglier humanity? What food for me, or such as I, was then within these prison walls? My eyesight was my food, my nourishment; and every stimulating glimpse of the world's wonder was shut

out from me—the pain to think of beauty there without, but not for me! The agony to feel that still the seasons followed in their courses! Spring dancing in with all its songs and blossoms, and Summer in her fullness of repletion, and Autumn laden downwards with the fruit her womb had born, and Winter ashen white . . . and in my cell was dimness, only dimness!

These were my pains—not suffering because the world was faithless to me, but suffering because all that gave me life and gave the value of my life was shut away from me. But here I learnt what I could never learn when beauty was my playmate and companion. . . .

I learnt the force and use of indignation, which, surging upwards in my spirit, became a fury, a possession. It gave me life again—a scarlet life—flashes of scarlet-on a sombre background. But life it gave me, and from the hour when first I realised the power of indignation I was a living man again.

(Was that what induced you to write "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"?)

Here, in the twilight, I can think about the time I fought within myself and conquered. I lived as fully then as in the days when I proclaimed the triumph of my mistress beauty, and

all the world of London stood still and hearkened to my pæans in her praise.

Dear lady, could you only know the real values of the world, you would not reckon crime a loss rather than a gain. For here I found for the first time what strength is lodged within a man. My daily tasks were easy to me from that day when from out my surging soul came this great revelation of the spirit.

(Are you in dimness because of what you were sent to prison for?)

I worshipped the divine inhuman Power that casts me into darkness once aagin. It is a different darkness from that within my cell. For over here the soul and spirit have reached a realisation of themselves. Here is no glorious birth for soul and spirit as that which sprang from me in Reading Gaol. . . .

(Do you know Galsworthy's play, "Justice"?)

Yes, I know it well. I have carefully digested what our friend has said about a subject he knows nothing of. His fertile brain could not devise a prison such as mine was. The world divides what it is pleased to call our sins from our good deeds. This cleavage is possibly the net result of total ignorance. For what can be called "justice" that rises from half the man?

I, bound as to a wheel which ever in its revolutions adds to my pain, my pleasure and experience can speak of justice; and if you are pleased to listen to me, I will give you what has come to me from joy, an ecstasy of joy, an ecstasy of pain, an ecstasy of knowing every day what can be known both in the body and in this state of fluid mind. . . .

There is no justice possible here or in the world. For justice is the full completion of experience, nothing more. The man who dares to dive below the surface and pick from the depths the creatures of the darkness, must ever be despised and hunted while still upon the earth he lives within the body. The world has formulated many schemes for what he calls the safety of his race; but he has never seen that in this scheme with which he joys to torture those of his fellows who despise his edicts he is providing for himself a torture of the soul's remorse. For here we learn that what is anguish, more acute than human beings can attain to in the world, is the remorseful soul, who, blind, even as a worm is blind, has spent his hour in torturing his fellows as a benediction.

(I am tired. Could you speak of this some other time?)

I should be grateful if your womanhood would bend to hear me longer. . . .

I wither here in twilight, but I know that I shall rise from it again to ecstasy. That thought is given to us to help us to endure. . . . The human spirit must pierce to the innermost retreats of good and evil before its consummation is complete. I suffer here because my term is long, and yet I have the power of knowledge—knowledge, such as all the justice that has tortured the poor world since it was born, cannot attain to.

(I must stop now.)

I shall come again and speak to you of what you must experience before you come to fitness.

Copy of automatic scrip written on July 13th, 1923.

The writer was Mr V, with Mrs Travers Smith touching his hand. Present—Miss Cummins. The communication was written in an hour and a half. The only interruptions were the replacing of one pencil by another when the point was worn down.

Oscar Wilde. Society sent me to prison and then into exile. The world that had welcomed me so gladly thrust me out from its care. With the brand of Cain on my brow and the charity of Christ in my heart, I set out to seek my bread in sorrow—and, like Christ or Cain, I found how weary the way was—and, like Dante, how salt the bread when I found it. The world had no place for me. When I walked in public places I was asked to go, and when in hot confusion I retreated, the curious craned their heads or raised their lorgnettes that they might the better view a monster of vice. I had lost every-

thing except my genius. All the precious things that I had gathered about me in my Chelsea home and that had become almost a part of my personality were scattered to the winds or lost or passed into careless and alien hands. The very children of my imagination were thought unworthy to live, and a lady whom I had trusted and who in the days of my pride had often called me her friend, deliberately destroyed a manuscript of mine. As the man was tainted so must his work be tainted also. The leper with his cowl and little bell was not more shunned than I. . . . But though I have forgiven the world the humiliations that were heaped upon me, and though I can forgive even that last insult of posthumous popularity that has been offered me, I find it hard to forgive them for translating my beautiful prose into German. You may smile, but that to the artist was a very real form of murder. To have maimed my soul was terrible, but to have maimed the soul of my work was more terrible still. For my work, besides being my great memorial, is my one link with the minds of living men. More than that, it is the golden thread that will draw me close to the happier generations in the after time. And I am filled with a noble pleasure when I think that children

yet unborn will read in my pages the story of one who found love better than riches or of him who refused the fair raiment of a king that Justice might hold her sceptre in the land; or of one who denied the mother that bore him and expiated his sin in deeds of mercy and kindness. I once said —I think it was in "Dorian Gray"—that art had a soul but man had not. When I wrote those words they were perhaps no more to me than a phrase flung from the flippant lips of a cynic. I did not realise that they would have any tragic relation to my own life or to the lives of us all. They were perhaps only half true. It would have been better to have said that man has a soul and that the soul finds its true immortality through art. Art is the true Vishnu, the preserver, who embalms the soul for eternity, and embalms it not in natron or in wax or in honey like some poor lifeless thing but in its own living fires.

The makers of history, those who ruled mankind with Justice or with the pitiless sword, may find that the secret springs of their actions are hidden from posterity and their motives misunderstood so that the good they did is accounted unto them as evil and the evil good.

The man of science lives in the name of the flower or the star he has discovered, and, like a

flower or a star, his memory has no secure abiding place. His work can be seen only in relation to the work of others, his theories are superseded.

The little stone of jasper or of beryl is hidden away under the masonry of many hands so that they, who contemplate the finished edifice, forget the individual builder. To take one perfect illustration of this, look at the history of astronomy.

On that wondrous shield forged by Hephæstos for Achilles, on which was depicted the whole of the life of man in its joy and sorrow, we are told was wrought "the earth and the sea and the unwearying sun, the Pleiads and the Hyads, she that men call the Bear who watches Orion, and alone hath no part in the baths of ocean."

That picture in its ageless simplicity of charm is as true to-day as it was in historic times. The mariner at his wheel or the peasant in the silent fields at evening may gaze on the same stars as Homer's heroes, can watch the blazing Sirius and know not that to the Greek it brought fever and pestilence and sorrow, can note the Pleiads and remember not that their rising was the sign for the great horned ships to go forth on the sea. But with science it is very different. We

talk about the changeless constellations, but through the ages of science the scroll of the heavens is a palimpsest on which are written and erased the names of many men. At the coming of Copernicus the heavens of Ptolemy ceased to revolve, and after Copernicus came Galileo and Tycho Brahe, and Kepler followed the Dane, and the fair guiding angel of Kepler's planets faded into the cold dawn of Newton's great formula, and last, like a monstrous fish, Newton himself lies snared in the strange nets of space and time that Einstein has set about him. And of all these men what can we know, what whisper of personality reaches us through the ages? A few anecdotes, and these mostly myths, such as the myth of Newton losing his horse and returning the bridle, or of Newton forgetting he had dined; or of Kepler solving the problem of matrimony by mathematics, or of Galileo telling the bystanders that nature abhorred a vacuum, but a vacuum of not more than thirty feet. And as it was in the past, so it will be in the future. When we have forgotten all that Poincaré did in mathematics, we shall remember that he walked the streets of Paris with a strange bird cage which he had picked up at some stall and was puzzled to know how to dispose of. And

if we turn to the artists and poets we shall find that their lives are just as uninteresting and as incomplete.

Even the love affairs of the poets are like those of ordinary mortals. We feel as we read them they are as purely accidental, as incomplete, and as frankly physical as those of thousands of quite commonplace people. Which of us really wants to pry into Chopin's life at Majorca, or his relations with George Sand; or who, without weariness, can read the ravings of Keats over poor, foolish Fanny Brawne?

These things don't interest us, and simply because they do not reveal to us personality. In fact a ploughman in love and a poet in love present much the same spectacle, only the poet has a capacity for self-deception that the ploughman, happily for himself, can never attain to. These things are of no real vital consequence. They may, like Charlotte Brontes' teapot, furnish lachrymal urns for the sentimental or go to swell the muck heaps of that latest terror of modern society, the psycho-analyst—but to the student of letters, the seeker after personality, they signify so very little. In his search for the real Chopin and the real Keats, he will turn his eyes elsewhere. He will realise that all we should care

to know of Chopin, all at least that it is important for us to know, the poet has put into those impassioned preludes, and in that wonderful last sonnet the soul of Keats shines, as steadfast as the lone star to which it was addressed, and sings as sweetly in the great Ode as the immortal bird once sang in the Hampstead Garden.

Copy of Automatic Script Received on July 13th Through the Hand of Mr V.

Mrs Travers Smith touching his hand.

Tell me, dear lady, what are the virtues that are necessary for a happy life? Tell me in a few words. I don't want to know anything about the vices! (Mrs T.S.—Give me your views.) I have no views. I wish I knew. If I did I should not tell you, since it is always bad advice that is given away. (Mrs T.S.—I really cannot name any virtue that makes for a happy life.) I was afraid you were going to say work. Never having done any in my life I am naturally an authority on it. Ah! I forget! I once trundled the barrow for poor old John Ruskin, and in a moment of weakness I almost renounced the great cardinal doctrine of the indignity of labour. But during those few days I learned so much about the *body* of man under Socialism that afterwards I only cared to write about the soul. I told people that I never even walked. But that

was a pardonable exaggeration. I always walked to bed. Don't talk to me about work, dear lady. It is the last refuge of the mentally unemployed, the occupation of those too dull to dream. To be eternally busy is a sign of low vitality. They who go to the ant to learn her ways always come back *antiquated* but seldom wise. And while it may be true that Satan sometimes finds mischief for idle hands to do, even God does not know what to do with the industrious.

So, dear lady, live to do nothing and be happy. Eschew work and be fine. No one should ever do anything. At least no woman should. The woman who was content to merely *be* was always charming, but the woman who *did* was often detestable. This is a maxim which might be taken to heart by our modern business girls. Then, instead of hunting so diligently for their husbands in dusty offices, they would stay at home and their husbands would come to them.

Copy of Automatic Script Obtained on July 19th, 1923.

The writer was Mr V, Mrs Travers Smith's hand touching his.

Present—Miss Travers Smith, Miss Cummins.

Oscar Wilde. Let me descend for once into the dull abyss of facts. I would like the world to know that the story of Walter Pater wanting to kiss my hand was not true. It was invented by me perhaps to assist in the revival of a lost art. (A story unknown to those present.) Pater, of course, admired me immensely, but he was far too sensible to do that. Pater sat at my feet. In fact everybody sat at my feet. He could not talk at all himself. . . . It is so difficult to drag the past from memory's black cave. One of my earliest recollections was of a little farm in Ireland at McCree . . . Cree . . . no, that's not the name . . . Glencree? . . . where we stayed with Willie and Iso . . . and there was a good old

man . . . used to look after our lessons . . . a priest . . . Father . . . Prid . . . Prideau? There was a beautiful stream near the farm. . . . Other memories. . . . Dining with Arnold and Pater near Hyde Park. Lunching with Margot Tennant, Mrs Fox Blunt and others in London. Asquith was like a fish out of water. I did most of the talking and afterwards told Margot stories. Stayed behind.* . . . (These statements were not within the knowledge of anyone present.) (Here Miss T.S. put her hand on Mr V's hand instead of Mrs T.S. The writing remained the same in character but became considerably larger.)

Oscar Wilde. One of my happiest moments. . . . One of my few happy moments after leaving prison was when I entertained the little schoolchildren at the little village near Berneval? . . .

*In "My Diaries," by Wilfred Scawen Blunt, on pp 178-79, the following entry occurs.

"17th July—A brilliant luncheon with Margot and her husband at 30 Upper Grosvenor Street, and I took her a Wedding Ode which I had written for her amusement. The other guests were, Mrs Grenfell, Mrs Daisy White, Ribbesdale, his brother, Reggie Lister, and Oscar Wilde All immensely talkative, so that it was almost like a breakfast in France Asquith alone, rather out of it I sat next to him and was rather sorry for him, though he was probably happy enough After the rest had gone away, Oscar remained telling stories to me and Margot"

No "Mrs Fox" was present at the luncheon. This confusion may have occurred in connection with the next "memory," referring to Father "Prideau-Fox." Wilde evidently forgot his second name, as he speaks of "Father Prid—Prideau"

Of course I was M. Sebastian *Melmotte* in those days. . . . *Melmoth* from some ancestor of mine. Sebastian in memory of the dreadful arrows. Jean . . . Dupré . . . I knew in a Paris Café. Everything is confused and I misplace events in time.

Another memory of poor Whistler. His painting was quite delightful. It had all the charm of being perfectly incomprehensible, and so formed an excellent basis for criticism. Unfortunately, in a rash moment, and in forgetfulness of a maxim which every conjuror knows, that where there is no mystery there can be no magic, he set about to explain himself. (Mrs T.S.—Do write smaller.) I do the best I can. Have patience.

Poor James! He was really very absurd. I would watch him paint and he would sing to himself some foolish ditty about "his heart being true to Poll." I forget what. . . .

His pictures were interesting, but, of course, not so interesting as the things I should have said about them.

Communication received by Mrs Travers Smith at the Ouija Board, July 26, 1923.

Present—Miss D (recording) and Miss Travers Smith.

Asked about the Epstein monument in Paris.

Allow me to be slightly egotistical for once. The French are a humorous nation, but, at the same time, full of serious moral feelings. They, naturally, wished to do honour to one who had served Art as far as his humble powers would permit him, and hence they raise a mighty tomb, which in its monstrous want of taste does homage to the man whose monstrous want of morals suggested the design.

The French, dear lady, are a nation of moralists. Their morals are condensed, they have packed them so tightly that they cannot allow any sense of humour to come through.

This mighty monument, built and designed to ornament my tomb, outraged the moral sense of the French nation so deeply that they decided

with one voice that Wilde and Epstein taken together were dangerous to France. The moral tone of the great nation would risk a blot upon its escutcheon if this indelicate block of hewn and carven marble was permitted to stand unchallenged.

In this design a part of me is given, that part which the world has chosen as my symbol. But this enormous mass of stone does not contain an atom of that power which came to me direct from my great ancestors. The power which can create and fashion beauty is absent from this mountain, erected by a man who should have known, that each and all of us contain both what is noble and divine, combined with what is built of heavy clay.

The French nation did me honour in refusing to permit a monument which expressed merely the earthy clay.

(Someone said here that the monument expressed the spirit struggling to shake off the clay.)

An insult such as this should not be offered to the artist. The artist does not struggle from the clay. The artist is a spirit which creates, not a mere body which is striving upwards.

My spirit, which created beauty, was spirit; a

passionate spirit craving for form and colour. It did not strive to break its bonds, because no bonds were there to bind it. The monstrous creature shaped by Mr Epstein does not express the soul of Oscar Wilde. In rejecting it, the French did me great service therefore. My wings were spread, ready to carry me away into the heavens, not lying slack and lifeless. This was an instinct in the French, this sure appreciation of my genius.

Oscar Wilde, July 26, 1923.

I bow to your call, dear lady. Why have I lost you? The world cares little for a shade, but if the shadows of my thoughts still interest, I am willing that they should go forth as little moths flit into the deep night.

(Asked about Freud's theory of dreams.)

Dreams, dear lady; in your sterile age, dreams are degraded even as woman. Dreams are the food on which the children of the light subsist, and in your age of cold and harsh ideas dreams have become the offal, not the food. But if you listen to the poet's voice, the priest of beauty in her shrine; dreams dwell far from the world, and in your gross age they live on those who know that life is faded and without form, unless the dream comes which creates for us the verit able image of beauty as she is.

We, who have passed beyond your ken, we only know what these men (Freud and Jung) guess at. Tell the world that vision for it must ever be obscure. While body still exists, the mind is trammelled by weights such as the heaviest burden borne by man cannot compare to.

CHAPTER I

The Automatic Writing

In his recently published volume, "Thirty Years of Psychical Research," Professor Richet, that eminent physiologist, speaks of certain hitherto discredited branches of abnormal psychology as having come within the realm of science. He even opens the door to ectoplasms and pre-vision. The fact that he devotes 626 pages to the demonstration of the scientific value of such subjects means that we, who are interested in what used to be called "ghosts" and "hauntings," need no longer be alarmed at accepting phenomena of that nature as being of supreme interest. We may reasonably cry aloud on the house-tops that we have been wiser than some of our scientific brethren in devoting time and attention to the sifting of evidence in this direction. For, although Professor Richet cautiously limits his declared beliefs to the acceptance of *cryptesthesia as an explana-

*A super-normal power of discovering what is unknown

tion of monitions, premonitions and pre-vision, he confirms his belief in the genuineness of materialisations and so-called ectoplasmic forms as scientific facts, admitting that, so far, he is unable to explain them.

I feel that the acceptance of the phenomena of pre-vision by an eminent scientific man is of supreme importance to psychical research. The impossible seems to have become possible if we are permitted to feel that we may, without ridicule, give grave attention to what comes to us in dreams or from the clairvoyante in its bearing on future events. We shall still have constant backslidings and disappointments, but we are confirmed in believing that every case which comes in our way is worthy of attention.

For many years we have talked about telepathy until that theory has become so extended that it threatens to snap asunder, if it has not done so already. We are still deeply occupied with the study of the sub-conscious. It is flattering to feel that each of us possesses a deep well of stored-up memories into which we may dive if conditions permit us, and from this diving we may draw up creatures rare and strange. Their long sojourn in the waters of Lethe bring them back to us as new ideas.

Now Professor Richet tells us that each of us possesses "cryptesthetic power." We may not discover the fact during our earth existence, but if we analyse our experiences sufficiently carefully we shall recognise that occasionally we have had a glimpse of the unknown; that we have been cognisant of facts which must be outside our sub-consciousness. So here we pause and look back and find that two of the planks on which we stood are floating out to sea. If we are to take Professor Richet seriously we shall begin to put less faith in that speechless converse of mind with mind which served us so long; we shall begin to wonder whether the vast well of our memories really contains this swarming mass of images. The submerged self is a comparatively new suggestion; it has absorbed us since Freud boldly laid his map of our dreams before us.

We wonder what the next step will be. Professor Richet has heaped us with responsibilities. Where it was a case of "agent and percipient," our percipient has vanished; we alone are responsible for what we used to call "telepathic" impressions. We create our own phantoms, we even materialise them in some cases. Our automatic messages are all part of ourselves. They

are largely fished from the great well which we call the sub-conscious, but when we recognise impressions which must be outside our memories, because, as yet they have not become memories, we have created them through that new sense which in future we shall recognise as cryptesthesia. Professor Richet expresses absolute pain in having to make some of these admissions. He has not suffered the supreme pain, however, of accepting the spiritist theory; which, of course, is the simplest explanation of the shadows that beset us from time to time. He seems more ready to believe that angels and demons are in touch with us than to give consideration to the possibility that those, who loved the world and what it contains, may survive in some form and seize any opportunity, no matter how dim, to impress their continued existence on us.

For my own part, I am an agnostic in these matters; I dare not say I believe in the experimental proof of survival, though it seems to me on the whole a less romantic idea than belief in annihilation. At any rate, in our psychic studies, we should always bear in mind the possibility that our communications are coming direct from the minds of human beings who once were imprisoned in the body. After all,

telepathy, the sub-conscious and cryptesthesia are only words which serve to express ideas covering phenomena which are so mysterious that the scientific truth about them to-day may be the childish folly of to-morrow.

One of Professor Richet's arguments against "spirit" communication is, that, in most cases, when we get messages purporting to come from the dead, they are of a poor and trivial nature and rather tend to show that death deprives us of our finer mental parts. I entirely agree with this criticism of much that I have come across. At times we sicken when it dawns on us that death seems to diminish mental vision, if our messages are to be accepted.

I think this difficulty may be largely due to the imperfect means of communication at our disposal. If the medium could be dispensed with and a suitable "telephone" invented between this world and the other, no doubt results would be less uneven and clearer. I am quite certain that the mental and physical condition of the medium makes or mars the messages to a great extent. If conditions are satisfactory the communicator takes entire command; the medium remains absolutely passive and can be "used." Satisfactory conditions chiefly consist in free-

dom from distraction of any kind whatever. Physical upset makes communication almost impossible, any mental worry is still more mischievous; noise, windy weather, etc., all injure the quality of what comes through. The reason is very evident to anyone who has had experience of hypnotism. If we are to be used as "instruments" we must remain passive. In order to acquire complete passivity, anything that jars on the mind or distracts it in any way or keeps the consciousness awake must be eliminated. Trance or "somnambulism" is the most favourable state for good results, but here, when entire control of the personality is possible, that entity which we call the "guide" seems to interfere. I believe that many of the trivial results, attributed to discarnate personalities, are in reality the work of the "guide" or "control" of the medium. This happens less frequently in automatic writing or ouija work, because the hypnosis of the medium is slight and an alteration in the communicator would be observed immediately by an experienced sitter.

The "Oscar Wilde" script which I offer to the public, both because of its literary and psychic interest, seems to me to suggest definitely the possibility that we may be in touch with an ex-

ternal influence. If I were fully convinced of that fact, I should certainly be as fully convinced that Oscar Wilde had spoken to the world again. I should not attribute any messages so characteristic of the whole man to an impersonation on the other side. I think in this case it is a choice of two hypotheses; either Oscar Wilde is speaking, or the whole script, ouija board and automatic writing must be derived from the subconsciousness or clairvoyance of two mediums. In either case, the matter of the messages and the manner in which they came are of such unusual interest that I feel the entire case should be stated as fully as possible. I believe it to be quite outside those which can be accused of being trivial or dull. Perhaps it is best first to explain how these scripts came to us.

A gentleman, whom I shall call " Mr V," had several sittings for ouija board work with me at the British College of Psychic Science. He seemed quite conversant with his subject, but gave me to understand that he had no powers as a medium himself. He is a mathematician and is interested in music, but, so far as I know, he has no special interest in literature. I soon perceived that he was one of those persons, who, in some mysterious way, are helpful at a sitting.

He was very reticent, but I had a sense that he made communication easy and harmonious. There was a clearness of psychic atmosphere when I sat with him which is not usual with strangers who come to me for the first time.

In May of the present year, Mr V joined a small class of mine for the development of automatic writing. I had a firm conviction that he had mediumistic power, but to my disappointment he made no progress at the first two sittings, either with writing or the ouija board. He seemed in fact to have less power than the other members of my class. At the third meeting Mr V wrote for the first time. I rested my hand on his, while he held the pencil, and a sentence or two were written slowly, purporting to come from a deceased friend of his own. This was rather more encouraging, but it did not indicate that Mr V possessed any special facility for automatism.

At the fourth meeting, which took place at my own house, Mr V was the only one of my class able to be present. He wished to continue the automatic writing. So we pursued the same method as on the former occasion. Mr V held the pencil, I sat beside him and rested my fingers lightly on the back of his hand. Before we had

started he asked me whether it would make any difference if he closed his eyes. I was pleased at his suggestion. On two former occasions that desire to work with closed eyes had been the prelude to interesting results.

At first his pencil tapped repeatedly on the paper, then it began to move more rapidly than at our last meeting. He wrote the name of his deceased friend again; the message concerned his daughter Lily. "I want my daughter Lily, my little Lily," it began. As the word "Lily" was written I was sensible of an interruption; I felt instinctively that the communicator had changed. I asked who was speaking; immediately "Oscar Wilde" was written and the message continued more and more rapidly. I looked at Mr V. He seemed only half conscious, his eyes were closed. His pencil was so firmly controlled that I found it very difficult to move it from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. I lifted my hand from his; the pencil stopped instantly; it merely tapped impatiently on the paper.

These first scripts, written by Mr V and myself, were short in comparison with some of the later ones. It seemed that he wrote in a state of semi-coma and this condition was of short duration. He stopped and spoke two or three

times while writing the first communication; as soon as his pencil began to move he closed his eyes and looked unconscious. I was surprised at the clearness and accuracy of the writing. The words were divided, the *t's* crossed, the *i's* dotted, even quotation marks were added and punctuation attended to. The signature struck me as unusual, and on reading the script over I noticed that at times a Greek *a* was used; also that there were strange breaks between the letters of the words, such as *d-eath, vin-tage,* etc. Neither Mr V nor I had evct seen Wilde's writing so far as we could remember. When he was gone it struck me that it would be interesting to compare the script with a fac-simile, if I could find one. I was singularly fortunate, for at the Chelsea Book Club, not only did I see a fac-simile of Wilde's writing, but an autograph letter of his happened to be there for sale. I was amazed; the handwritings seemed similar, allowing for the fact that our script was written with a heavy pencil and the autograph letter, probably, with a steel pen. There was a Greek *a*, used occasionally, not invariably; and there were the long breaks between the letters of certain words.

In this first communication there are many

points of interest; some of them seem to indicate sub-conscious plagiarism. I shall deal in a later chapter with passages which, though not actually quotations, bear a strong resemblance to ideas and sentences in various published works of Oscar Wilde's—"Intentions," "De Profundis," etc. Against the sub-conscious theory is the fact that certain questions I asked were answered in a manner indicating that the communicator did not reply from material which was in Mr V's mind or mine. I asked for the address in Dublin where Sir William Wilde (his father) lived and with which Oscar must have been familiar. I could have written it without a moment's hesitation as I know the house well; probably it was not in Mr V's mind as he does not know Dublin. The reply was: "Near Dublin; my father was a surgeon; these names are difficult to recall." I was disappointed, this savoured of the usual dodging of evidence we meet with so often in automatism. No. 1, Merrion Square, where Oscar Wilde lived, is in the centre of the city. I continued: "Not at all difficult if you are really Oscar Wilde." The pencil moved again and wrote: "I used to live near here, Tite Street." I took my hand off Mr V's for a moment and said: "There is a Tite Street near here and he has spelt it correctly. I

don't know where he lived in London, do you?" Mr V replied: "I have never been in Chelsea until to-day, and, to the best of my knowledge, I never heard of Tite Street." Oscar continued the writing. My next question was, "What was your brother's name?" "William," then a stroke underneath, and below it "Willie" was written. I then asked for Lady Wilde's nom de plume, and "Speranza" was written without hesitation. So far as he can tell, Mr V did not know Oscar Wilde's address in London and neither did I, and yet it was written without my having asked for it. I knew the Dublin address and no attempt was made to give it; I knew Lady Wilde's nom de plume, Mr V did not, yet he wrote it immediately it was asked for. Taking these facts into consideration, it cannot be said that the information was in the mind of the mediums; it might probably be accounted for by cryptesthesia if we exclude the possibility that Oscar Wilde may have been speaking.

At our next meeting several persons were present. Mr Dingwall, research officer of the Society for Psychical Research; Mr B, who is an excellent medium, and Miss Cummins, who has wide experience of psychic work.

Mr Dingwall probably gave the impetus to our

message that day. The entire departure from the redundant style of our first script into the "Wilde" epigram interested and amused us all. It seemed such an unexpected development from that "other side" from which so often we get either trivialities or empty pomposities. My suggestion that we might ask some questions was swept aside haughtily by our communicator. Wilde has twice refused to give definite proofs, but on several occasions he has volunteered information which was not in the mind of either medium, so far as they know, and which proves to be correct. While the little tale about James McNeill Whistler was told by Mr B, Mr V and I sat as before, he holding the pencil while my hand rested on his. When the story was finished the pencil moved and wrote: "With James vulgarity always begins at home!"

I have observed during all these sittings that this communicator is very sensitive to the influence of those present or to the condition of the mind of either medium. This is, of course, quite natural, whether we consider that Oscar Wilde is speaking or that the sub-consciousness of the sitters is responsible. At the first sitting (allowing the communicator was Oscar Wilde) the control seemed passionately

anxious to convince us of his identity; he proceeded to do so by pouring out an essay which would at once arrest attention by reason of its similarity to well-known passages in his prose works. It does not seem to me that the fact that he almost quoted from his own writings proves it to be a case of sub-conscious plagiarism, because, in later scripts, this is not the case. Certainly in this short essay on the Society of Psychical Research he does not quote, and yet, if it was read aloud, the name of the author being kept back, I think it would immediately suggest Wilde to anyone conversant with his work. I need hardly draw attention to what is obvious, that, in judging automatic script, allowance must be made for the intervention of the medium. If the brain of the medium or mediums is used, their personality must lend a certain flavour to the communication. Less of this is traceable in these writings than in the average automatic message. Again, if we return to the suggestion of sub-conscious plagiarism, it is well to make it clear that neither Mr V nor I had ever had any special interest in Oscar Wilde. Mr V states that he had only read "The Picture of Dorian Gray," "De Profundis," and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," and all these before the war. I

had read more than Mr V and I had been interested in Wilde's plays, but, except "Salomé," I had not read a page of Oscar Wilde's work for twenty years past. This, of course, does not reduce the value of the sub-conscious explanation, but it is as well to state exactly how things stood before the first message came and to make it plain that no recent suggestion had recalled Oscar Wilde to our memories.

CHAPTER III

The Ouija Board

More than half this script came to me when I was sitting alone at the ouija board. Perhaps I had better explain this method of communication, as it seems less familiar to most people than automatic writing. The ouija board, which I use, is an ordinary card table covered in green baize. On this the letters of the alphabet are placed; they are cut out singly and arranged in any convenient order. A sheet of plate glass is laid over the table and the letters. When using the board I rest my fingers on a small, heart-shaped piece of wood covered with rubber and shod underneath with three pads of carpet felt. This little "traveller," very much the same as a planchette, without its pencil, flies over the glass from letter to letter. I prefer it to automatic writing because of the speed with which I can get messages in this way. A shorthand writer is at times necessary owing to the rapidity with which the communications are spelt out.

On the evening after the first script had come to Mr V and me, I tried the experiment of asking whether Wilde would speak through the ouija board to me alone. My control, "Johannes," was very unwilling to permit this. Apparently he considered I was getting into bad company. With a little persuasion, however, he consented, and soon the name "Oscar Wilde" was spelt out. The traveller flew from letter to letter with its usual lightning rapidity, occasionally making a pause as if the communicator was feeling for the right word. I gathered that this was a conversation. The script in the afternoon seemed more premeditated and rather of the nature of a short essay; the ouija was a method of "talking" to Wilde. In this first "talk," I interrupted him several times. I hoped that he might give me some definite proofs of his identity. A hint of any intention of the kind was evidently unwelcome. Various circumstances, which were not in my mind or Mr V's, have come through spontaneously, but a definite demand for evidence was always refused. In this first talk Wilde describes his condition on the "other side" in a most depressing manner. In the automatic writing he had spoken of being in twilight, here he makes it plain that some routine work has been

given him which bores him infinitely. He is shut away from the beauty of the world and doing what is little better than "picking oakum in goal." It is here for the first time he speaks of that nakedness of mind which lays our thoughts and feelings bare when the "decorous garment of a body" is cast off. "Ideas grow stale," he says, and look like "the slightly creased and dabbled clothes of our friends on earth." I have never had a statement of this kind in any message before. The average communicator sometimes speaks of seeing into my mind; that is to be expected if it is being used; but no one except Oscar Wilde has mentioned this exposure of thought. Amongst the questions asked was, whether Mr V's mind or mine was used when the automatic writing came through. The reply, "through you, dear lady, he is a 'tool,' you are the light that lets me peep into the world," must not be taken literally. Some explanation was bound to come and this may have been considered flattering to me. It is interesting that the word "tool" should be used of Mr V. In Mr Bligh Bond's first "Glastonbury" scripts two mediums were responsible, Mr Bligh Bond and an automatic writer, and in these scripts the automatist is always spoken of

as "the instrument." In cases of double mediumship, such as the Glastonbury and the Oscar Wilde scripts, it is so difficult to determine how the results are produced that it seems almost idle to attempt to solve the problem. The facts as they stand now are—

1. Mr V and I produced the first five or six automatic scripts. I could not get the handwriting without him; he could get nothing without my help.

2. I found that I could get communications from Wilde sitting at the ouija board alone.

3. I tested Mr V with four different persons at my house, but out of these only one succeeded in getting anything through with him.

4. When my daughter touched his hand the same writing, magnified at least twelve times, appeared. Since then, I understand that Mr V has found two other mediums with whom he can work. The nature of the writings seems to vary with each medium. So far as I know no literary criticism has come with anyone except myself. On the occasion, when a strong circle was present, Mr V was able to write alone. I sat beside

him. The script was long; not Wilde at his best, I thought.*

This case of Oscar Wilde is the third instance of successful double mediumship which has come to me during the twelve years I have been working at Psychical Research. The first opened up the path to the most interesting series of experiments I have ever had.† These were sittings at the ouija board, of which I have spoken before; both the mediums being blindfolded; the messages being taken down by a shorthand writer in absolute silence, so that the sitters had no idea what they had been spelling out until their masks were removed from their eyes. Mr L, my fellow-medium, had never seen a ouija board until one evening he came by chance to my house. He failed to get any movement whatever with his eyes open, but immediately they were closed messages came rapidly when he and I sat with both our fingers on the traveller. Mr L found one other lady with whom he could work, but his results with her were rather different from his

*It must be recognised that in cases of double mediumship the communications cannot be attributed to either operator alone. In my experience the ideas expressed are more definitely connected with the person who lays his hand on the writer's hand than with the actual automatist. The messages are *definitely* a joint production.

†See my book "Voices From the Void" (Rider)

results with me. In this manner we did a long series of most intricate telepathic tests and had many interesting messages, including a very accurate prophecy of the course of the Balkan war, which came to us on the day after hostilities had begun. After these blindfold sittings with Mr L I found one other medium who could work with me in the same way. Mr X had enormous "driving" power at the ouija board, but alone he could not spell out one word coherently. When he and I sat together we never failed to get script blindfolded; without my help he could move the traveller about at a tremendous rate, but there it ended. He got no coherent messages when he worked alone. I quote these two cases of Mr L and Mr X, who worked with me blindfolded, to show that better results often come through double mediumship than through one person. It does not follow that other sitters cannot succeed with either medium, it demonstrates rather that there is a certain psychic harmony in which one automatist seems to complete the other. It is a matter which is difficult, if not impossible, to explain.

Here I think I must impress the fact on those who are not familiar with automatism, that both these ouija scripts and the automatic writing

came from Wilde at such a headlong pace that it is impossible to imagine that the mediums could possibly have improvised them consciously. The only possible accusation might be that they were composed and memorised. I can vouch for my own being entirely unpremeditated, and in double mediumship the fact that both operators have a share in the work, sets that contention aside; memorising would not serve where there was more than one automatist. The speed of both the ouija work and the writing was tremendous. The long script (700 words), in which Wilde mentions the planets, came through in an hour and a quarter on a sweltering day in July.

To return to my ouija scripts. After my first "talk" we had another sitting for automatic writing, and the second half of that afternoon's work was a little essay on the novels of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and Eden Philpotts. Wilde states in that essay that he is permitted to gather a little of the literature of to-day by dipping into the minds of modern novelists. He explains this method rather more fully to me in a later ouija script. He says:

"It is a rather entertaining process. I watch for my opportunity and when the propitious moment comes I leap into their minds and gather

rapidly these impressions, which are largely collective." These statements were, to say the least of it, astonishing. I felt that as the essay in automatic writing had been so entertaining I might test the communicator's powers in that direction a little further. The criticisms of modern writers in the script are not my conscious criticisms, of that I can speak definitely. I cannot answer for my sub-consciousness, but I can hardly imagine that any part of my mind could speak as Wilde does here. I found no difficulty in inducing him to give his opinion in any case which occurs in the script; but twice I asked for his ideas about a writer with whom he must have been familiar and with whom I am familiar also: Henry James. There may have been a complex there; no results came on either occasion. I am personally a great admirer of Henry James and would have been interested to have "Oscar's" ideas on his work.

All through we have the continual repetition of the state of dimness on the other side into which, apparently, "victims of the social convention" are cast. It is quite obvious that Wilde has lost neither his pride nor his egotism, but he complains repeatedly of the dimming of his senses "for lack of light and colour." "My

mind is now a rusty lock into which the key grates with a rasp," he says. "It does not move easily and lightly as it used." Later on he speaks of "these glimpses of the sun keeping him from growing too mouldy here below." It has been objected by some critics that these messages have not the edge which we find in Wilde's finest prose. I feel the persons who expect a style equal to his best know little or nothing of the difficulties of psychic communication. He ended his life a wreck, saddened and disappointed, and he has evidently found a certain need of punishment awaiting him at the other side. He seizes on this chance of speaking again to the world, to which his love of objective beauty still binds him fast. Can we reasonably hope that his brilliance should be still untarnished, that the edge of his wit should be as keen as in the nineties? As I have said in the foreword, I assume throughout this book that I am convinced that Oscar Wilde is actually speaking at these sittings. The fact is, I try to keep an entirely open mind on this point, but "an open mind" means that the spiritist theory must have a hearing, for, to my thinking, our imagination must be called on in any case, whether we accept Professor Richet's cryptesthesia or the sub-conscious or the spiritist theory

as our hypothesis. It seems that, taking into consideration the universal faith inherent in human beings that we survive death,it is equally probable that Oscar Wilde's spirit is communicating with us or that Mr V and I, and in some cases I alone, possess cryptesthetic power, or possibly, that this is a case of plagiarism, arising from the sub-conscious, which is less likely in my opinion. All three explanations must be taken into account, but it is simpler for me to assume that Oscar Wilde is actually with us again when I write of these scripts.

I do not consider that, even if we do accept the view of some of our critics that Wilde's genius is diminished and that the edge of his wit is less finely ground than when he was alive, it detracts from the enormous importance of our having produced something so much akin to his style that it invites discussion. It must be borne in mind that this individual style is coupled with handwriting which is remarkably like Wilde's; that fact adds enormously to our evidence in favour of its being a genuine case of continued personality. It demands a very wide stretch of imagination to believe that sub-conscious memory from a possible glance at Wilde's writing could produce hundreds of pages of script

which never varies in its imitation and is written in a handwriting which is totally unlike Mr V's or mine. Most of those facts which were unknown to the mediums, but which I have verified as being correct, came in automatic writing. One important point, however, occurs in the ouija script which is of great psychic interest. I quote three passages from the ouija messages relating to Wilde's state on the other side.

He says: "My dear lady, what will it be for you to lose your little shape, to have no shape, to be a fluid and merely stream about in such an undecided way that it is like drifting before a heavy tide." Again he says, speaking of his mind that "now without a body to act as pilot strays about fluidly in space."

In another passage he says: "The shades here are really too tumultuous. They are overcrowded. . . ."

In Sherard's "Real Oscar Wilde" (which I did not read until all these scripts came through) he mentions a sitting for automatic writing held at André Gide's house after Oscar's death. Ruyssemberg said: "We would like to know your opinion of life beyond the grave." Wilde answered: "A chaotic confusion of fluid nebulosities, a cloaque of souls." I think it is inter-

esting to find the same idea in two of the three communications which we actually know of from Wilde since he passed over.

In the ouija script, I have on several occasions tried to discover what this process of entering into the brain of the medium actually is. Replies to my questions are as vague as such replies generally are. Wilde says: "If I am to speak again as I used, or to use the pen, I must have a clear brain to work with. It must let my thoughts flow through as fine sand might if filtered through a glass cylinder. It must be clear and there must be material which I can make use of." Again he says: "Even when you are tired you are a perfect æolian lyre that can record me as I think." It is difficult to follow exactly what is meant here, more especially as I cannot reproduce Wilde's handwriting. If the actual content of the medium's brain is used, possibly a training in passivity may serve, also the fact that, in my case, there has been a literary training also.

I felt it rather difficult and dangerous ground to ask about Wilde's prison experience. What goes to prove, I think, that the ouija talks and the automatic writing are from the same source is that Wilde willingly spoke to me of his sufferings in gaol and continued the subject without

any suggestion on our part on the next occasion when Mr V and I sat. This "prison" script is quite in harmony with what came before. It would seem that, if there is a ruling Providence which moulds our destinies, Wilde's love of objective beauty had to be starved before the spirit could assert itself. For, except in "De Profundis" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," we get beauty of a certain type from him, but it is beauty of the flesh not the spirit. If we may carry speculation a little further it may be imagined that his prison life had purged him only to a slight extent. There was a drifting back to evil conditions, partly, perhaps, due to the fact that when he was free again, nothing was left him, not even his power to create. In the "Real Oscar Wilde," Sherard says: "The terrible fact is, that he was drinking because he could not work. He was seeking in the palpable Hell of being unable to produce, because his brain was exhausted, the artificial Paradise that alcohol affords." Possibly his social fall was merely the beginning of what is continued in the Hades where he is now shut away again from the joy of "seeing," which was nourishment his nature demanded.

Despair never really caught hold of Oscar

Wilde; he had a hungry eagerness for what the world contained and even in prison he used, when in the infirmary, to entertain his fellows with jokes and stories. In the ouija script he says that when he learnt the power of indignation he was a living man again. But his present condition is different from his state in Reading Gaol. He says: "It is a different darkness from that within my cell. For over here the soul and spirit have reached a realisation of themselves. Here is no glorious birth for soul and spirit as that which sprang from me in Reading Gaol." I must make it quite clear that until all my ouija talks had come through I did not dare to open a book about Oscar Wilde. I had forgotten most of his work that I had read, and I had never been sufficiently interested in him to look up any facts about his life outside what was made public at the time of his trial. Even now I refrain from reading Ransome's Life in case I should have further sittings. As it is, I feel, having published this book, I have been forced to enquire too deeply into the subject to make further script evidential.

A passage (in the ouija talks) where he speaks of women, is, I think, in its idea at least, very characteristic of the man. "Woman was to me a colour, a sound. She gave me all, she gave me

first desire, desire gave birth to that mysterious essence which was within me. And from that deeply distilled and perfumed drug my thoughts were born: and from my thoughts words sprang. Each word I used became a child to me." This worship of words is underlined in my script. Twice Wilde speaks of "weaving patterns from words" in his poems, and he also speaks of "weaving patterns from character" in his plays. This feeling for the sound of words must have been strong in him, though I believe he, like many other poets, was not musical. I have made several attempts to get him to speak of music, with no success, although music is my own special subject. I asked him to compare music and colour. He immediately replied that colour was far more closely allied to literature than music, and, leaving out the question of music altogether, began discussing its relation to words.

Again and again he emphasises the importance of dealing with the surface of both society and literature and forebearing to "probe into the intestines." His words were in reality his children rather than his ideas. During his prison life, however, ideas dominated him, perhaps for the first time.

CHAPTER IV

The Sub-Conscious

Now that I have described the methods as to how these communications came to us, perhaps it is well to discuss the three explanations which are most likely to present themselves to my readers.

First, and apparently simplest, is the theory that Oscar Wilde has arisen from the sub-conscious memories of one or both of the mediums who produced the script.

I have already disposed of the idea that Mr V or I had been reading Wilde's books immediately before these messages came or that he or I were enthusiastic admirers of his work. That is naturally what the man in the street says when he glances at these writings. It is true that if either of the mediums had been making a special study of Wilde's work, there would be a very strong case for the sub-conscious. Even then there are points which would throw it off its

balance. I shall not discuss this sub-conscious theory except as a possible result of our readings of Wilde many years ago and a less possible result of one or both of the mediums having at some time seen a fac-simile or autograph, which would account for the handwriting.

We are told by Freud and Jung, whose work on this subject has met with very general acceptance, that everything seen, known or heard of is photographed indelibly on the sub-conscious mind; everything, literally, which has become a memory is there. Therefore, if I had at some time in my life (now remote) picked up a book in some shop or stall and glanced at it momentarily, whatever had met my eyes would probably remain in my sub-consciousness, buried, but still alive. So that, if conditions were favourable, that memory might, as well as any other, rise to the surface. Now what are the conditions that send these buried meories floating up to the conscious mind from the sub-conscious? To put it very mildly, the most favourable condition is suspension of consciousness. This occurs, of course, in sleep, in hypnosis, in trance. In a lesser form, I believe it occurs when the medium is writing automatically, using the ouija board or gazing into a crystal. Under these

circumstances we may draw up from the well of our memories anything we have seen, known, or heard of.

I do not attempt to dispute this hypothesis; it has, like many others, been proved and accepted. That of course does not mean that it will not be disproved at some future time. There are stumbling blocks for the unscientific person in accepting this theory. It seems difficult to account for the strange selection of fish that we draw up in our net.

If the sub-conscious really holds all our memories, why is it that what is brought to the surface is frequently what has been of no particular moment to us? For instance, if Oscar Wilde arises from my memories he is one among hundreds of literary persons who has interested me, but distinctly a lesser light, not one of the authors who has made any real impression on my mind. Why should my sub-consciousness amuse itself by plagiarising his style rather than the style of any other writer who has arrested my attention more fully? The reply to this is "because Wilde's style is easy to plagiarise." If we accept the explanation that Mr V and I (either or both of us) have drawn up Oscar Wilde in a moment of suspended consciousness,

what was the process? First, we had both read some of Wilde's work, poems and prose, though not recently. Echoes from that source might readily rise upwards. Then it will have to be supposed that at some unknown time one or both of us had seen an autograph or fac-simile of Wilde's handwriting. Further, we shall have to imagine that at some vague period one or both of us had read or heard a number of small and intricate facts relating to Wilde's life which remain photographed on our sub-conscious memories, while others more important cannot be induced to make their appearance. Now, from these rags and tatters in the sub-consciousness we must imagine we can create a style so similar to Wilde's that the chief question for the critics is whether it is Wilde at his best or whether his "wit is tarnished," and also handwriting which is almost a fac-simile of his manuscript and which continues without a break through hundreds of MS. pages. That point seems to me to be difficult to explain. These buried memories rise rather dimly, as a rule. At times they present themselves as symbols of what is to be conveyed. It requires a wide stretch of the imagination to believe that a glance at a letter of Wilde's at

some undefined period would result in this sustained forgery. I fancy the most accomplished forger would find it a tough job to carry on through even a hundred pages—much less through our manuscript. Of course, speaking from my own small experiments, I am quite aware that the sub-conscious mind can do what the conscious mind is incapable of. Its clairvoyante or "cryptesthetic" powers are entirely different from those of the conscious mind. In fact in my own case semi-hypnosis seems actually to create powers which I do not ordinarily possess. Normally I have no clairvoyante gift at all that I am aware of, yet at the ouija board I develop a power of getting at facts which are not present in my consciousness. In my normal state I might hold an object in my hand for hours and get no impression of its history, but at the ouija board I can do psychometry. These facts are, I take it, due to a state of semi-hypnosis, although any person sitting with me would probably say I was fully conscious. A very important point in this case would be to discover where the suggestion arose which brought about this Oscar Wilde episode. It seems apropos of nothing. I sit at the ouija board and ask my control to write me a poem or an essay, and, at

a speed which far exceeds that of the fastest writing, a poem or essay is written, which is perhaps crude but is quite beyond my powers unless I were to sit and think. Here we have script after script poured out at a headlong rate in Oscar Wilde's style; indeed, in his two styles, for we get his over-ornate and redundant prose and that sharp caustic humour of his alternately.

It is said that Wilde was not quick at repartee. Whistler's rapid shafts of wit used to annoy him because he never could reply with equal speed. If the ouija talks sometimes contain expressions which seem cruder than anything Wilde might be supposed to have used, it should be remembered that they are conversations; they certainly are not prepared as the automatic writings appear to be. The latter nearly always savour of the essay.

I am quite ready to admit that the whole case can be explained by anyone who accepts Professor Richet's theory that, under certain circumstances a clairvoyante power, above and beyond what we possess normally, comes to us; but I am not inclined to think that it is due to sub-conscious plagiarism alone. It is too accurate, too sharply defined. What rises from the submerged past of us is blurred in its out-

lines. It is ever ready to accept suggestion and spin elaborate webs around it, but where there is no suggestion it is inclined to be indefinite. From long practice I have come to recognise little halts and hesitations where the sub-conscious alone is at work. In producing these scripts we have sometimes had long pauses, and with the ouija board there have been halts where the communicator was obviously hunting for a happy expression, but in neither case has there been the groping that comes when one feels instinctively that we are dealing with the sub-conscious mind alone.

All that I have said on this subject seems a special pleading against the conclusion (which might be arrived at rapidly by any intelligent outsider who reads the scripts) that both mediums, having a certain knowledge of Wilde's work, were plagiarising from their submerged memories. I think the opinion of the medium is worth something on that point; I feel instinctively that it was not the case.

If we take these scripts one by one and analyse them we shall find much that speaks in favour of and against this idea. In the first automatic writing we had a dozen or more passages which, though not quotations, were

parallel with passages in "De Profundis," "Dorian Gray," and "Intentions." That fact, of course, is an argument in favour of the sub-conscious idea. On the next occasion we had a completely uncalled for essay on the Society for Psychical Research, suggested probably by the presence of Mr Dingwall. His presence there might have given the sub-conscious mind a suggestion; but, if so, how very aptly it responded! Going back to the first script it should be remembered that when I asked the address at which Sir William and Lady Wilde lived in Dublin, which I knew, the reply to my question was that it could not be recalled; but the Tite Street address, which I did not know, was given. Mr V or I may have had this information at some time, but that cannot be proved or disproved. Later on we had various facts given to us which we could not have known consciously and which go to disprove the sub-conscious hypothesis. Some of these related to Wilde's personality, small details which could not have reached me unless I had read a life of Wilde or met someone who knew him intimately. He left Ireland after he had graduated at Trinity College, and I never came across any member of his family, or, so far as I know, anyone who knew him personally.

Except one, the literary scripts all came through the ouija board. The first, which was in automatic writing, deals with H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and Eden Philpotts. Neither Mr V nor I had ever read a page of Eden Philpotts' work and very little of Arnold Bennett's; rather more of Wells. It is noticeable that very little is said of Wells. Both automatists were more familiar with his work than that of either of the other novelists. Surely more should have been photographed on our sub-conscious minds of Wells, whose works are fairly familiar to us, than of Bennett, who is criticised in greater detail and of whose writing we know far less. Again, in speaking to me at the ouija board of Shaw, Galsworthy, Hardy, Meredith and Moore, if this is sub-conscious criticism direct from my mind, the submerged portion of me must hold entirely different opinions from my consciousness. Joyce I had not read. I had glanced at a few pages at the beginning of his book, but felt the task beyond my powers and resigned myself to being one of the persons who had not succeeded with "Ulysses." I admit, of course, that in some indirect way, I might have gathered that Philpotts wrote about Dartmoor. If so, I have absolutely no recollection of the fact. Mr V was as much

at sea about this allusion to Devonshire as I was. I admit also that my sub-conscious mind may be the direct opposite of my conscious mind. It is a fact which no one can prove or disprove. If so, the literary criticism of my sub-consciousness in its opposition to my consciousness is singularly accurate, except in the case of Galsworthy, where in a sense I agree with Wilde. Then there arises that interesting point, which could not possibly have come from me, consciously or sub-consciously. On those three or four different occasions, always through the ouija board, Wilde speaks of the "fluid state of his mind at the other side." I have referred to this incident in a previous chapter and pointed out that at the séance after Wilde's death he has described his condition in almost the same words as in my script; the *idea* is exactly the same. How did this idea reach me? It does not strengthen the sub-conscious theory.

In the last message that came through the automatic writing—which consists of a series of tattered memories—Wilde says: "I was M. Sebastian *Melnotte* in those days." This was quoted to me as definite proof that the sub-conscious memory had supplied the word, as *Melmoth* was the name which Wilde took after

he left prison. On looking again at the original automatic script, I found that the name was first spelt *Melmotte* and afterwards Melmoth. Strangely enough, some weeks later I saw in *The Times* a notice of a sale of Oscar Wilde's letters. In it was mention of several of these being signed "Sebastian Melmoth," and further, there was one in which Wilde asked that the reply should be addressed M. Sebastian *Melmotte*. He says in that letter that he will explain the change later on. These facts cannot have arisen from either Mr V's mind or mine. Neither of us knew consciously the name Wilde had taken and certainly we did not know that he had used two different versions of that name.

Again, in the script in which the planets are mentioned, some knowledge of astronomy is displayed which might come from Mr V's brain. He, being a mathematician, is naturally conversant with this subject. This can be used as a prop for the sub-conscious case. It seems, however, to be expected that the communicator will make use of what is in the brain of the medium; these references to the history of astronomy are selected by Wilde merely to illustrate his own argument; possibly the literary criticisms may have been helped by the material

in mine, though, of course, that is less probable, as Wilde was distinguished in literature. I therefore ask my readers to pause and consider a while before they decide that the script contained in this book is merely sub-conscious plagiarism from the medium or mediums as the case may be. I am quite willing to admit the possibility that it may arise mainly from the sub-consciousness; but before deciding I would ask that those who take it seriously would weigh what evidence there is, and would consider whether this evidence covers all the ground. To my mind the completeness of these results show some more subtle cause. I feel that the handwriting is the point that almost decides me against this hypothesis. Sceptics are often more credulous than persons who allow their imagination to carry them away in a different direction, who admit that there may be a larger reality outside themselves.

Apropos of the unbelievers I am glad to find in Professor Richet's new book that he sets aside the argument, so often repeated to me, that every medium is a fraud; that the professional medium has taken pains to become so expert a conjuror that he or she might well make an easier living on the music hall stage; or that a private "Scot-

land Yard" is employed by the average clairvoyante in order to discover facts about every client who knocks at his or her door. It seems, on the face of it, rather absurd to imagine that the very moderate fee offered to the professional medium could cover such heavy expenses. These, however, are the arguments put forward by highly intelligent and sceptical persons deeply interested in Psychical Research, perhaps because they suffer the pain which Professor Richet speaks of, the pain which comes from belief being wrung from us in what we hoped was the impossible. I can say with perfect sincerity that I believe in my sub-conscious mind. No one who has worked for so long at experiments under various degrees of hypnosis could deny the fact for a moment. What I doubt is, that as definite an entity as the Oscar Wilde of these scripts can be dramatised by Mr V or myself. Possibly there is a mingled condition here. The sub-conscious may supply a part and under these conditions cryptesthetic power may also come into play. We are dealing largely with words. "The sub-conscious" and "cryptesthesia" express ideas that serve us for a time, and will surely be superseded by others as our knowledge increases. We may, in fact, be coming towards

the time when we shall all be forced to admit the presence of an external influence in cases such as this. We may even be reduced to the stage of believing some of the statements of their identity which our communicators make to us. I admit that in many instances they lead us astray, but I think the best results are obtained by taking them at their face value. That, of course, is the medium's point of view while experimenting. The medium should produce as much evidence as possible, should ask no questions until he has arrived at the limit of production, and then add his criticism to that of the scientists. For, as in some ways the actor is the best and most intimate critic of drama, the medium, who has instinctively *felt* results, can explain them from a point of view arrived at by no other person. We, however, want many opinions on cases such as this. I feel that, when possible, it is a duty to offer such material to the public in order that its value may be thoroughly sifted.

CHAPTER V

Cryptesthesia

Let us now consider this case from Professor Richet's point of view and see how far it will lead us towards solving the problem of Oscar Wilde's unexpected appearance. Let us set aside the suggestion that he may possibly be speaking to us from some unknown region, the conditions of which we are unable to understand, and assume that our script has risen entirely through the medium's clairvoyante or cryptesthetic powers.

To express it simply, Professor Richet's theory is that science has proved, under conditions which cannot be definitely defined, that it is possible to develop "cryptesthesia," a supernormal power by which we become aware of facts unknown to us in either the present, past or future. We have therefore no proof of survival and none is possible.

Such a hypothesis can carry us over all the

ground if we are ready to accept it. In my first chapter I have already spoken of this solution of the difficulties that beset the student of Psychic Science. I shall not say that I am wholly convinced by it, but I am quite ready to admit that it is entirely logical and would probably be entirely satisfactory to certain types of mind. In fact to these persons it will be an immense relief to shake off all the difficulties of proving survival and rest on a basis which seems natural and conceivable.

As I continued to read "Thirty Years of Psychical Research" I grew more and more interested. We progress from telepathy to monitions and premonitions to the problem of psychometry, which seems insoluble to ordinary mortals, to pre-vision, an even more impossible puzzle, and we finish with hauntings. There we call a halt; for, so far, materialisations and *"telekenesis," etc., though scientific facts, cannot be explained; cryptesthesia does not take us quite the whole way.

We must not be alarmed in discussing Professor Richet's theories by the fact that the strain on our imagination will be more severe than if we admit the possibility of survival. Through

*The levitation of objects without contact with the medium.

countless ages we have been taught to look forward to a life beyond the grave where reward or punishment awaits us according to our deserts. This belief is so embedded in our nature that it requires less effort to entertain it than to accept a series of ideas dealing purely with what is intangible; which involves faith in a power, the possession of which has been hitherto discredited by many of our scientists. For cryptesthesia is practically what we used to call clairvoyance. It is more extended in its application; it is the power of "seeing more clearly" than the ordinary mortal, seeing in many directions to which the "clairvoyante" vision was not supposed to extend. What amazes me most in reading Professor Richet's book is that he accepts more than many of us, provided the case fits in with his central idea. Trifles, which seem hardly worth recording, present themselves to him as fresh evidence of his hypothesis. We recognise that with Professor Richet cryptesthesia fills all the cracks; we must preserve a critical attitude and not permit ourselves to be carried away too far by his enthusiasm.

Let us now analyse the case of Oscar Wilde from Professor Richet's point of view.

In speaking of Mrs Piper's phenomena, Richet

says: "When these entities manifest, they make mistakes, trifle so childishly, forget so much and show such reticences that it is impossible to believe that the spirit of a deceased person has returned." That is a very sweeping statement. Even I, with a very limited experience, and that without the help of any professional trance medium, deny that communication purporting to be from the dead is, as a rule, childish and futile; I agree that my communicators seem to have forgotten most facts connected with their earth life, and, more strangely still, they sometimes seem to have forgotten their own names and the names of their friends, but I do not often get what could be called "childish" messages from them. In another passage Professor Richet says: "The poor spiritist personality is not in any way incoherent, it is simply low grade, and very low grade, being with few exceptions much below average intelligence." I have usually five to seven sittings in the week at the ouija board and my results vary considerably. I find, if intelligent questions are asked, intelligent answers are given. In fact I should say that, far from being low grade, the spirit personality I come across is extremely interesting so long as it is speaking of conditions on the other side; the difficulty as a

rule is that its memory of earth life is dim, it forgets names and details, which may be accounted for by its distance from the earth atmosphere. We, however, look naturally for clear and distinct proofs of an earth existence, and if what we get deals chiefly with the future state we attribute the communication to the subconsciousness of the medium, and possibly we are right.

We must, however, for the moment, adopt Professor Richet's explanation of the appearance of Oscar Wilde. We must assume that when we had that first sitting for automatic writing, at which he professed to speak, Mr V and I brought our cryptesthetic powers into play, we impersonated Oscar Wilde and, playing up to the impersonation, through our sub-conscious minds, we made use of the submerged memories of Wilde's works and personality, which we possessed from reading his books. A very remarkable feat at a first sitting for automatic writing. The imitation of style, Professor Richet would say, is "parody, not authorship. It is clever literary work, but it does not come from a Beyond. The human intelligence that composes this prose is in no way beyond human powers." I believe that there have been a good many cases

in which distinguished persons have purported to speak from "Beyond." Most of these have, in reality, been parodies. The style is a dim reflection of that of the author who is supposed to be writing; I have not personally come across a case where a clever imitation of style was combined with a clever imitation of handwriting.

What is Professor Richet's explanation of the handwriting? "The similitude of handwriting need not trouble us," he says, "for there is nothing to show that cryptesthesia may not extend even to that. Helen Smith sees before her the signature of Burnier by her cryptesthesia, and then she imagines herself to be Burnier in virtue of the natural tendency of mediums to impersonate." My only objection to this last contention is that, even if Helen Smith sees Burnier's signature through her cryptesthesia (a signature that includes only a few of the letters of the alphabet), will it leave a sufficiently enduring impression to carry her through hundreds of pages of MS. without any alteration in the handwriting? Perhaps; but we must admit that a great stretch of imagination is required to suppose so; and that at least the Oscar Wilde script is a remarkable case.

I have said that I did not think the explana-

tion of sub-conscious plagiarism covered the ground. I feel sure, however, that cryptesthesia covers it completely if we accept this hypothesis, because, once awakened, that power can develop cognition of facts unknown to the sitters. Therefore, Professor Richet contends it is impossible to prove survival. He also contends that the existence of cryptesthesia is a fact, which is demonstrated by hundreds of instances which he quotes. I agree with Professor Richet that, in a sense, it *is* impossible to prove survival. Proofs on a subject so much outside human experience are, at best, only partially convincing; but in defining "metapsychical facts," he says, "they seem due to unknown but intelligent forces, including among these unknown intelligences the astonishing phenomena of our subconsciousness"; and he defines cryptesthesia further on as "a sensibility" whose nature escapes us. If so, if we are dealing with "unknown" intelligences, we are not in a position to assert that Oscar Wilde is or is not an extension of our own faculties. This "unknown intelligence" may surely be the discarnate mind of Oscar Wilde himself. Professor Richet says, speaking of "Raymond," "Cryptesthesia is *always* partial, defective, symbolical and so

mixed with errors and puerilities that it is difficult to believe that the consciousness of a deceased person can be limited to such a degree." Does that criticism apply to the series of scripts now before us? Symbolism is, I think, ruled out in this case, and, even if the facts in the scripts which were unknown to us are few, they are not "errors" or "puerilities." Therefore, accepting Professor Richet's own statements, this is not a *typical* case of cryptesthesia.

Taking the scripts one by one, we must suppose that the first was largely due to the subconscious. The two mediums had a certain content of Wilde's writing in their minds, and from those memories they built up an essay which had many sentences in it containing ideas from Wilde's published works, sometimes even the words being almost identical with phrases from "De Profundis," "Dorian Gray," etc. The handwriting must have been due to the fact that Mr V or I had glanced at an autograph or fac-simile of Wilde's handwriting at some time, now forgotten. In the state of "semi-somnambulism" induced by automatism, the cryptesthetic powers of one or both mediums was aroused, hence the address in Tite Street, unknown to either of us. It seems strange, under

these circumstances, that the address in Dublin was not given. Mr V knew neither it nor "Speranza," Lady Wilde's nom de plume. I knew both. At the second sitting, at which Mr Dingwall was present, *he* gave the suggestion to the sub-conscious minds of the mediums, and the essay on the Society for Psychical Research was the result. Cryptesthesia was not evident here except in supplying the name of Mrs Chan Toon, who was unknown to either medium.

The second essay on that afternoon, in which Wells, Bennett and Philpotts are spoken of, was, of course, due to the sub-conscious minds of both sitters, except in the case of Philpotts, where cryptesthesia may have accounted for the allusion to Dartmoor. Of course some casual glance at a volume in a book shop or a review of one of Philpotts' novels may have dropped that memory into the sub-conscious mind of either or both mediums.

Then comes that question of Wilde's references to his fluid state of mind and "cloaque of souls" of the seance at André Gide's, which finds an echo in the ouija script. "The shades are really too tumultuous. They are overcrowded and we get confused by seeing into each other's thoughts." I must have, through my cryptes-

thesia, got at the fact that Wilde had professed to speak through automatic writing before and have gathered the ideas that were communicated on that occasion.

Again, in the ouija script, dealing with his prison life, I seem to follow the actual state of Wilde's mind, so far as we can judge from what Sherard, who frequently visited him in gaol, has told us. First, despair seems to have seized him; he, however, rose from this, and, pressing from fury and despair to resignation, made use of the resources of the prison, and before he left, through his good conduct, his life became more tolerable, and he was permitted to have abundant books and periodicals to read. This particular script, I have no doubt, would be relegated by Professor Richet as an entirely sub-conscious production.

Now, taking the last section, which came through in automatic writing, partly through Mr V and myself, and partly through him with my daughter's hand resting on his, we find a number of ragged bits of memory giving us some interesting points which I have been able to verify and some which are of such a trivial nature that it would be impossible to get evidence for their truth or the reverse. I cannot, so far, verify that

a story was spread by Wilde about Pater's wishing to kiss his hand. I have verified the fact, unknown to me when the writing came through, that Pater was a very silent person in company. The next memory, recalling a little farm at Glencree, was interesting. Wilde makes two shots at the name: "McCree—Cree—no, that's not the name—Glencree." I knew; Mr V could not have known, as he has never been in Ireland, that, high up in the mountains twelve miles from Dublin, there is a lonely valley called Glencree. Wilde speaks of staying there with "Willie and Iso." Of course, I knew Willie must be his brother, but I had never heard he had a sister. I find now that Oscar was very much attached to his only sister, "Isola," who died when she was eight years old.

He speaks of an old priest, "Father Prid*—Prideau," who gave them lessons there. I wrote to Glencree reformatory school and, through the courtesy of Father Foley, ascertained that sixty years ago Father Prideau Fox was manager of that school, at Glencree.

We then come to the passage where the village

* This information I now find I could have obtained had I seen *Donahoe's Magazine* (Boston, Mass., U S A) for April 1905 Father Lawrence Charles Prideau Fox states in an article he contributed to that magazine that he knew Lady Wilde and baptised Oscar

of Bernaval is mentioned. At that time my daughter had her hand on Mr V's; she knew nothing whatever about Wilde's life, neither did Mr V nor I know that Wilde stayed at Bernaval when he left prison. Then comes the point about the name *Melmoth* or *Melnotte*, to which I referred previously. The little story about Whistler is so trifling that I hardly hope to confirm it. Here therefore, in this one small section, we have evidence in several instances of the cryptesthetic power of the mediums.

In another short script, speaking of work, Wilde says: "I once trundled the barrow for poor old John Ruskin." This referred to his Oxford days when Ruskin used to invite his students to work in the garden. When the writing came through the fact was unknown to us.

In his final chapter Professor Richet says: "Every phenomena of cryptesthesia must be preceded by an exterior energy that has started it; some unknown vibration, that has set in motion the latent energies of our human mind, unaware of its powers." Therefore even mental mediumship must be in a sense objective, if we allow that it is due originally to an "exterior energy." Strange that any energy or vibration should start two uninterested persons, quite un-

premeditatively, on these long plagiarisms of Oscar Wilde, unless that vibration comes from something that was once the Oscar Wilde we knew. In another passage Professor Richet says: "In certain cases, rare indeed, but whose significance I do not disguise, there are, apparently at least, intelligent and reasoned intentions, forces and wills in the phenomena produced." I cannot help feeling that Richet has almost admitted that an external influence is responsible in some cases at least. He mentions that Geley, who no doubt would prefer to attribute all phenomena to the sub-conscious, states that "the high and complex phenomena of mediumship seem to show external direction and intention that cannot be referred to the medium or the experimenters."

I have tried, as far as is in my power, to put the case fairly to my readers. I feel, personally, that it may well be attributed to cryptesthesia in conjunction with the sub-conscious. The original suggestion puzzles me, however. I fail to see what started us so unexpectedly on this line, if we leave out the spirit hypothesis. In judging these scripts, the greatest weight should be given to the theories of Professor Richet, who is undoubtedly one of the most important living

thinkers on this subject. He is so frank and definite in his statements that we know exactly where we are with him. He has admitted far more than I should have dared to expect, and he has placed at our disposal a very logical explanation of the most difficult points in Psychical Research. He has found an argument to clear up the mystery of psychometry, that power by which through unknown means the history of an inanimate object may be gathered by certain persons. I incline to disagree with him that the presence of an object is not a necessity, and I speak from extended experience. My point is that the suggestion should be there to awake this super-normal power. Again, Richet recognises it as a demonstrated fact that under similar conditions we can see future events. "There *are* premonitions," he says. He explains this as cognition of future events through cryptesthesia; how these suggestions reach the clairvoyante he cannot conjecture. With respect and gratitude to Professor Richet, I feel that his theory is too incomplete to warrant our accepting it in its entirety yet awhile. Myers, who admitted the survival of personality as an explanation of our messages and visions, asked less of our imagination than Richet does. Although we know how

important is the part which the sub-conscious plays in our work, we naturally look for some raison d'etre for visitations like this of Oscar Wilde. If Professor Richet could explain why and from where the original suggestion came, we should listen to the rest of his argument with more conviction. In reading his concluding chapter, I felt that on one very important point he and I take different roads. He speaks most reasonably when he says: "Why should there not be intelligent and puissant beings distinct from those perceptible by our senses? By what right should we dare to affirm, on the basis of our limited senses, our defective intellect and our scientific past, as yet hardly three centuries old, that in the vast Cosmos man is the sole intelligent being and that all mental reality always depends upon nerve cells irrigated with oxygenated blood?" . . . He speaks again of "mysterious beings, angels, or demons, existences devoid of form, or spirits which now and then seek to intervene in our lives, who can by means entirely unknown mould matter at will . . . and who, to make themselves known (which they could not otherwise do) assume the bodily and psychological aspect of vanished personalities—all this is a simple manner of expressing and under-

standing the greater part of metapsychic phenomena."

Now here Professor Richet and I part company. I am as ready as he is to believe in the existence of angels and demons and mysterious beings, but that it should be supposed more conceivable that a case such as the one we are dealing with is an impersonation by an angel or demon, rather than a communication from the discarnate mind of Oscar Wilde, is quite unreasonable to my thinking and simply complicates our difficulties. I am ready to admit that in the early stages of the development of mediumship, impersonations are common. These, however, can be easily recognised by any experienced sitter, and seem to me, if I may speculate, to be of the poltergeist order. The messages are vague and foolish and lead nowhere. The case we are considering is of a different nature.

I believe therefore that, if we are ready to accept Professor Richet's theory in its entirety, we may regard the Oscar Wilde script as a very notable case of cryptesthesia aroused in both the mediums.

CHAPTER VI

The Spiritist Explanation

It may be well now, as we have discussed two possible explanations of Oscar Wilde's appearance, to consider a third. It may be Wilde himself who is speaking to us again. It is the obvious and simple explanation, but many of us set it aside; perhaps because, in accepting it, our imagination is not sufficiently excited. Why are our scientists so slow to admit the possibility that we survive death? Professor Richet's theory of cryptesthesia is difficult. I do not agree with him that it is proved as yet; it does not cover all the phenomena which he admits are genuine. In arriving at this stage he has suffered actual "pain" as each fresh proof forced itself on him; and yet he states that he considers belief in survival superfluous when applied to the hundreds of cases he quotes. I can follow his argument, and I believe he will go further. In my long course of slow, humble experiments I

have experienced no "pain" in advancing towards faith in survival. I *have* found very great *difficulty* in believing that, through my pencil or the ouija board, I am actually in communication with the dead. It has taken me twelve years to arrive at a stage when, reviewing my own work, I can see that it is of some real value. Until a mass of evidence has been piled up, there is little or no use in applying criticism to any psychic subject. A few cases teach us nothing and prove as little.

Those who believe in annihilation are among the credulous; they have fixed a dogma for themselves on very slight grounds, so far as we can see, and every day, I think, will lessen their numbers. I was never one of them, so naturally I fail to understand their attitude. Neither can I understand the attitude of those who accept all the vapid messages we get from what they call "the other side." Professor Richet says that we cannot *prove* survival, and I think he is right. What we can do is to review our evidence fairly and without prejudice; thus each of us can come to his own conclusions. This is demanding a great deal, for prejudices are deeply rooted complexes in the sub-consciousness, which have such a firm hold that we cannot consciously shake

them off. Granting that we have a mass of evidence before us, how should we deal with it? The only really satisfactory method is to *make* our own results; in other words, to arrive at them through our own experiments. We cannot all do this; many of us must take the word of those who have had the power to act as mediums, even in a small way, and who have devoted a great deal of time for a number of years in order to evolve some theory on the subject.

Proof of survival varies with the minds of individuals. I meet a great many people who are most anxious to get in touch with the dead; the proofs they desire might be placed roughly into two classes. They demand either messages of an emotional nature, or a number of small and unimportant details connected with the supposed communicator's earth life. Few are interested in allowing an entire personality to reconstruct itself slowly through the medium. Of course the ideal should be to combine an accurate memory of the earth life with the mentality that we were familiar with and through a number of sittings to heap up evidence that the personality survives. These ideal proofs, however, are very rare; we generally get a few small details of the earth life or a number of rather vapid messages of a con-

soling order from our mediums. Now, if I may express an opinion on such an entirely metaphysical point as to the value of these messages, I should say that the recollection of small details of the existence on earth constitutes, by itself, but a very imperfect proof of continued personality. Still less does evidence such as *The Times* "tests," which, though of enormous value as proving Professor Richet's theory of cryptesthesia and of very great interest, seem to me to be ludicrous as evidence of an after life. In Professor Richet's words, I feel that spirit intervention is superfluous here, unless it is ascribed to the mysterious entity which we call the "spirit guide." If I were at the telephone, anxiously trying to prove my identity to some near friend or relative, I would scarcely be inclined to tell him that the shop window round the corner was broken or that in *The Times* of to-morrow morning he would see on the third column, near the bottom of the page, the name of some place where he and I had stayed, or of some person we had met. It seems to me, looking at it from the rational point of view, that this would be outside probability. Neither do I take it as a proof of survival that the dead are supposed to be occupied in superintending the business affairs of the

living. It is inconceivable that a discarnate mind can trouble itself about the investment of money, the terms of a lease, the taking of a house, etc. Indeed, accuracy in giving names of people and places is no proof either. These can all come through super-normal cognition of the medium or through the "guide." Yet these are the results which convince many persons. To me, even the emotional or sentimental message, if characteristic, is worth more than this. All these cases to which I have alluded are of more value to the student of psychology than any evidence of the after life which we can offer him, and he will do well to devote time and trouble to the study of such surprising phenomena; but, to my thinking, he need not connect this type of evidence with the discarnate spirit of any dead person.

If I were asked, then, to state what I consider proof of an after life, I should reply reconstruction of personality. If we ever really attain to this it cannot be ascribed to cryptesthesia from the medium. If, in twelve sittings with X, I am satisfied that I have been in touch with my father's personality, if his train of thought and ideas have been reconstructed and the style of his conversation preserved, I have a more definite

proof that his mind is still alive than if he told me I ought to invest £100, which I happen to have at hand, in war bonds, or that I should see a sentence in a certain position, on a certain date in *The Times*, in which the word Cork would occur, which is the name of the town in which he was born. The reconstruction of personality coming through a medium, who had not known my father, would require powers quite beyond the scope of Professor Richet's cryptesthesia. It would require sustained powers, lasting through many sittings, if the subtleties of the human mind were revealed. The proof we demand is that *mind* survives; small details could at best be merely an indication that somehow a memory remained. If, however, we believe that inanimate objects retain memories, which I consider an indisputable fact, as I have proved it through dozens of experiments, then it seems possible that any person who retains memories may convey them to the medium telepathically, or that cryptesthesia may be aroused. Trifling details do not necessarily indicate that a discarnate personality is there.

Sir Hugh Lane spoke to Mr Lennox Robinson and me on the evening on which the news of the loss of the Lusitania reached Dublin, and before

either of us knew he was on board the wrecked vessel. That message was, in a sense, very convincing, although some of the details given were incorrect. I confess it did not convince me. A good deal of what came through was personal and could have been constructed by our subconscious minds. The subsequent sittings, however, shook my faith in the worthlessness of this first message. At every sitting for months afterwards, Sir Hugh came pressing through impetuously with messages about the return of his pictures (now in the London National Gallery) to Dublin. Again, I could have constructed the matter, but the manner of the communication and the character were so definitely Sir Hugh's that I have now no doubt that he survives, somewhere, somehow!

I have tried to explain what I consider the only logical method of criticising evidence of human survival, and if we analyse the cases which have been made public we shall find that very few of them are reconstructions of personality, and of course much of the evidence is of such a private and personal nature that the public is unable to follow it. Some communications from celebrated persons have a tinge of what we might expect, but I have not come across any-

thing really valuable in this line. And yet it should be very much easier to reconstruct a public character if the sub-conscious mind is capable of reproducing personality. In Professor Richet's book he quotes several extracts from communications of supposed celebrities, and in reading them I felt he was justified in attributing them to the sub-conscious mind. They seemed hardly more than conscious plagiarism.

The case of Oscar Wilde differs, I think, from those quoted by Professor Richet. Our script is long and continuous; the same personality is there from beginning to end; a personality which is unmistakable, with which we are familiar to an unusual extent because of the strange vicissitudes of his career. We have three separate proofs in this script of the identity of our communicator. First, similar handwriting; secondly, his style, or rather his two styles, and thirdly, his ideas; his mind, in other words.

If we had this handwriting alone, it would be very curious and interesting, because here many of the characteristics of Oscar Wilde's writing are to be found, and his was no ordinary hand which could easily be imitated. It has all the flow and irregularity characteristic of the artist. Of course if this had been our only proof it should

of necessity be attributed to sub-conscious memory. Even if a vague resemblance of style were added, we should still reject it as a proof of survival. What we demand is that, added to this handwriting, there should be the style of Wilde's writings, and, above all, the mind behind it. Now, if we analyse these scripts I think we shall find that we have one of the rare cases where evidence can be said to be complete. Let us imagine that in the Unseen, Oscar Wilde is making an attempt to convince us that he is still alive. He seizes the pencil from another writer at the mention of the word Lily and proceeds to give us a proof of his existence by an essay, in which he continually inserts passages which might remind us of his work. He is naturally rather annoyed with me when I interrupt him and ask questions; he is only experimenting with his mediums and finds them clumsy tools at first. He is not thinking of reproducing his style at its best, he is anxious to force his identity on us.

At the second sitting, he has realised how difficult it is to convince those who are still alive; he therefore finds in the Society for Psychical Research, that society of "magnificent doubters," a fine opportunity. He is in the same position over there as we are here; why should he not

found a "Society of Superannuated Shades" for the investigation of the living. Who but Oscar Wilde could have written this little message; he cannot be said to have lost his sense of humour in the twilight. In the literary talks, again we have all the characteristics of Wilde's mind. His play of words on the ideas of others is a game which he finds irresistible. He shoots out his remarks without any feeling of veneration for his literary brethren; these impish phrases trip off his tongue, grazing the surface of things; even here he is not occupied so much with the writers he is criticising as with his power to dock them off with a few well-selected words.

The spiritist should be interested by some ideas in the oulja script of the life beyond, which are, I think, unusual. I have not come across them myself before. The nakedness of mind, of which I have previously spoken, is new to me, also the fluid mental conditions, which Wilde does not explain, are unlike what we meet with in the usual automatic message. On what plane or sphere are we cast into twilight, shut away from light and beauty and given dull and monotonous tasks to perform? We may well ask why this further punishment has been inflicted on a soul who has suffered so deeply in his earth life. We

can only speculate. Perhaps through his too highly developed senses, Wilde failed to reach his spiritual part except during those dreadful years in prison when he realised for the first time what the beauty of sorrow meant. His spirit may have found expression for the first time within the walls of his cell; it may have owed its birth to misfortune. Two years are a short time out of prison, a long time there. The spirit of Oscar Wilde left Reading Gaol an infant; an infant proud and glad of its birth, if we are to take "De Profundis" as a sincere expression of Wilde's feelings. It left its sterile nursery to face a bitter wind of scorn and disappointment and to realise the supreme misery of mental impotence. Poverty of mind, added to poverty of the material things that had made life a too heavily scented garden, drove poor Wilde towards a new weakness, the drowning of mental sterility with the anæsthetic of drink. He felt instinctively that he had come to the end of everything; his wife and children, social position, property, good name and most of his friends were gone. When the door of his prison opened for him at last, he looked forward to shelter from the few faithful friends who had still the courage to be seen in his company; and he believed

that a fresh spring of literary work, growing out of the birth of the spirit, which had come to him through his fall, was to be his. He found the bread he had to earn, "salt" indeed; the earning of it more irksome when he discovered that an intellectual winter was upon him. The infant spirit shivered and sank away once more.

We, who are human, can hardly blame poor Wilde because weakness overtook him a second time; the moral strength was not there, that was all. We make our own fate perhaps, or perhaps it is shaped for us through our degree of spiritual development. If Wilde had arrived at a surer realisation of his spirit, a glimpse of which he caught in Reading Gaol, he might have passed into a more serene light than most of us, when he put off the garment of his body. As it is he has been cast again into twilight and it is infinitely pathetic to find that he still cries for objective beauty.

He speaks of the wonderful revelation that came to him in prison; there he was able to throw off his body and set his mind free, now there is no body to escape from; he is fluid mind and nothing more. He knows his term of dimness will be long, but he will rise again as the "wheel" revolves; that certainty is given him that he may

endure. In his earth life he experienced more good and evil than the average human being; more evil than good, unfortunately. Now he must complete that experience and pierce to the innermost retreats of good and evil. The dimness in which he withers is not the dimness of his cell, for now he has the power of "knowledge such as all the justice that has tortured the poor world since it was born cannot attain."

If we are to believe in the sincerity of the Wilde of "De Profundis," we may recall what he says of humility. "Humility in the artist is the frank acceptance of all experiences, just as love in the artist is simply the sense of beauty that reveals to the world its body and soul." I fear the Wilde of these scripts has scarcely attained to humility in the sense he uses the word here. All through, even in speaking his spiritual revelations in prison, there is a loud note of egoism and hauteur. He has not "frankly accepted experiences," they have been forced upon him; he has revolted against them and still is revolting. He is not meekly accepting his place of dimness. "Pity Oscar Wilde," he says, "one who in the world was a king of life. Bound to Ixion's wheel of thought I must complete for ever the circle of my experience." He uses the

same simile when in, "De Profundis," he speaks of sorrow: "Before sorrow had made my days her own and bound me to her wheel, etc." "Justice," he says, "is the completion of experience, nothing more." Human justice, according to Wilde, is merely the storing up of remorse which is anguish more acute than human beings can attain to. To torture your fellows as a benediction secures you this remorse at the other side.

We cannot hope that the author of "De Profundis" has remained even on the shoulder of the mountain to which he had climbed towards the end of his time in gaol. It is twenty-three years since he died in sordid poverty and degraded by drink, and he still bemoans his condition. He knows his term will be long; perhaps he has not realised humility or love as he has explained them in his moment of vision.

Through this chapter I have spoken as if I were entirely convinced of human survival. I can say sincerely that no case I have come across has done so much for my belief in the spiritist theory, as this of Oscar Wilde. Hitherto I have felt, and indeed I still feel, that the work of Mr Bligh Bond at Glastonbury is the most interesting page in the book of Psychical Research. We

cannot, however, take the Glastonbury scripts as a proof of human survival. We might describe them better as the most overwhelming cases of cryptesthesia in existence and further, cryptesthesia in four different persons, wholly unconnected with each other, concerning the same subject. It certainly proves the survival of memories, but it can scarcely be described as proving the survival of personality.

This case appeals to me because of its completeness. My critics will no doubt attack it from the literary standpoint and prove again that the dead Wilde is vastly inferior to the living Wilde. These literary critics will not take our difficulties into consideration; they will probably be prejudiced in spite of themselves against the improbability of my tale. The spiritualists and students of metapsychics will merely differ in their explanations of results. The script should appeal to all who take any interest in psychic phenomena.

If Oscar Wilde from the twilight realises that he is the subject of discussion once more it must afford him some amusement that he, who is now a fluid mind, can still make his bow to the public. He will no doubt find entertainment if he can "leap into the minds" of my critics; and, if I give him a sitting at the ouija board, I am sure

he will be ready to answer them. For I am almost tempted to believe that the soul and mind of Oscar Wilde still live and will continue to develop, until, having pierced to the innermost retreats of good and evil, he rises again to ecstasy.

CHAPTER VII

To the Public

It is time that I drop the role of lecturer on psychic phenomena and put myself into the position of those to whom the terms automatic writing, ouija board, sub-conscious and cryptesthesia mean little or nothing, but in whom the fact that we seem to be talking again to so prominent a figure as Oscar Wilde is an adventure which arouses surprise and interest. When portions of these scripts appeared in the *Daily News*, the *Occult Review*, etc., I was infinitely amused at the diversity of criticism which they brought forth. Our first critic, Mr John Drinkwater, who "was interviewed" by the *Weekly Despatch*, frankly confessed that he was entirely out of touch with the psychic side of the matter, but from the literary standpoint he did not consider the style convincing. He cited various expressions which were "not like" Wilde, notably the cruel manner in which he describes the modern woman as "a wart on the nose of an

inebriate" and dismisses the writings of the Sitwells by stating that he does not spend his "precious hours in catching tadpoles." These expressions, Mr Drinkwater says, are "crude." He cites Wilde's horror of anything unpleasant; the horror with which he was inspired by seeing a man with toothache for instance. He suggests that the real Oscar would be incapable of speaking of anything as painful as a wart. I admit that this case is so surprising that if one is suddenly "interviewed" it is probably very difficult to criticise the writings of a discarnate spirit who is speaking from the "twilight." My reply is that Wilde's feeling for what is ugly and painful altered after his prison experience. He probably had not prepared these discourses, and, even in his best period, it is possible that a crude expression may have escaped him now and then, especially in conversation. For instance, being tapped on the shoulder by an acquaintance, with the remark, "Wilde, you are getting fatter and fatter," his retort was: "Yes, and you are getting ruder and ruder." Would Mr Drinkwater consider that a very subtle reply? Other critics have expressed the opinion that Wilde "has not improved in the process of dying," as he says of his mother, Lady Wilde. His wit is "tarnished"

since he "passed over." Do we then expect our shades to "smarten up" in the Beyond? The pathetic part of it is that poor Oscar agrees with these critics; he moans over his mouldy state and cites Hamlet's remarks to his father, when he calls him "old mole," as a case in which the Society for Psychical Research should take an interest. In one rather long article we are accused of raising a "dreary" shade. Now why are we expected to provide a jovial ghost, when we consider poor Oscar Wilde's career? It is suggested that we should let the dead rest, that having been exhumed was bad enough for the poor poet and that I add insult to injury by hauling him back from Hades. The fact, however, is that poor Oscar forced his company on Mr V and myself. He seized the pencil from another communicator and has held on firmly to it ever since. He has insisted on speaking to the world again. It seems to afford him a little relaxation; why should I refuse it? If it relieves him to let fly his bitter shafts of wit once more, I feel, in mere courtesy, I must permit him to relieve his mind.

That first little essay, written probably to convince his mediums, is almost the only case in which Wilde has indulged in what are

practically quotations from his works. If he has failed to select his words as happily as he used, we must allow for distinctly trying circumstances. He pushes in on our sitting, I am taken by surprise and I continually interrupt his flow of language with annoying questions. He even complains of finding unsuitable words in his medium's mind; the only simile he can seize on to describe the moon is a "great golden cheese." He can't bear this and writes, "stop, stop, stop, stop, you write like a successful grocer, etc."

The next time we sat Wilde was determined to let fly at something. He dropped his pathetic tone and used the Society for Psychical Research as a means of expressing his indignation at my having questioned his identity. Really this script cannot be described as the work of a dreary ghost. Are there many persons in the literary world to-day who could improve on the discarnate Wilde's wit when he speaks of the "Society of Superannuated Shades"?

Then, quite uninvited, he begins to criticise modern authors. He prefaces his first criticism by another appeal to our pity. There is real pathos in his description of the chances that offered themselves to him from time to time to see the world again. It is a fantastic idea and

quite characteristic of its supposed author, I think. He says: "In this way I have dipped into the works of some of your modern novelists." These criticisms are all written, it must be remembered, from the standpoint of thirty-five years ago, for, though Wilde may have tasted modern literature, he can hardly be expected to have moved with the times. This "age of rasp" is a positive pain to the Apostle of Beauty, he is glad to have escaped it. "In your time the main endeavour of the so-called artist is to torture the senses. . . . Pain is the only quality which is essential to any literary work of the present day." . . . It is from that angle he speaks of Wells, Bennett, Philpotts, and Joyce His other criticisms are levelled at Shaw, Hardy, Meredith, George Moore and Galsworthy. The latter is the only author who escapes lightly. All the others, even those who were practically his contemporaries, come in for a share of pepper from Wilde's caustic tongue. The note of a colossal egotism is prominent in all these scripts, it never varies. When he speaks of his prison life it is positively shameless: "I was a fallen God, a fallen King," etc. He views his brothers in literature with a certain jealousy, I fear. His fall and the bitter and cruel misery of his last years

appear to have sent him on to further miseries. His literary career stopped dead three years before he died himself; it was short, and fame has come to him, as to many others, after he passed into twilight. He speaks of "having conquered London, partly by his 'supposed crime.'" Wilde was not a great writer and his work might possibly have attracted less attention if he had gone down to posterity as a fashionable poseur. It is true that his life in prison brought out a side of him which otherwise would probably never have seen the light. In fact the discipline of gaol held down his baser nature for a time and gave us "De Profundis" afterwards and the "Ballad of Reading Gaol."

I feel it is quite natural that Wilde should be revolted by a work like "Ulysses." It is entirely out of harmony with his time and ideas. He might easily fail to see what the admirers of Joyce call the "vastness of the book." It is completely ugly; that is enough. His horror of probing into the "inside" of a human being would naturally be aroused by a book which, I believe, practically deals with nothing else.

I am not altogether surprised that Galsworthy appeals to Wilde. There is little real kinship between these two, but it is true that Galsworthy,

in a different sense from Wilde, deals with the surface of social life; that his feeling for form is fine and that his sense of selection is often exquisite. Galsworthy, however, uses the surface of society as a medium through which he expresses intense emotions, emotions which sometimes tend to become sentimental. Wilde never rouses our emotions, he certainly cannot be accused of being a sentimental writer, he never gets the full value out of a moving situation, he is too deeply interested in the "human pattern," as he calls it, to worry about such futilities as joys and sorrows.

The gibes thrown at George Meredith were surely flung off in an airy fashion. Oscar Wilde was in reality a great admirer of Meredith, and if he cracks a joke at his involved sentences he has the later works in mind, which perhaps deserve chastisement. No one can deny that in "One of Our Conquerors" words are inclined to occupy the reader so fully that ideas do perhaps retreat into the distance. The effort to unwind the "plait" certainly requires strenuous effort.

In his criticism of George Moore, Wilde dwells on the even flow of his prose, suggesting that Moore holds his readers rather through style

than through the clear-cut personality of his characters. It is true that Wilde and Moore are opposites, both perhaps more fully occupied in using the English language than in introducing us to a fresh series of acquaintances. Wilde must, of necessity, feel Moore dim; their mediums of expression are far apart. The pastel artist produces his effects less emphatically than the painter who uses colour boldly.

In several of the ouija scripts, Wilde speaks to us about his own "play-making." He dwells on the idea of "pattern," a pattern woven, not from words as in his poems, but from humanity as it presented itself on the surface of London society. "It seemed to me we used to get more from each other by accepting the outside than by probing the intestines." It is interesting to compare this determination to remain on the surface of things with his change of thought in "De Profundis." "The external things of life seem to me now of no importance at all. Nothing seems to me of the smallest value except what one gets out of oneself." In speaking of his own plays in the script he says again: "I had a different thought from my fellows when my plays were shaped and consequently I cannot absorb their attitude to the stage." And further: "I have

never swerved from my ideas. I have served the theatre in my own way and from my own standpoint I succeeded."

We pass on to Wilde's memories of his sufferings in prison. I rather hesitated to ask him about that time, but to my surprise he seemed eager and willing to talk of it. In reading this script it must be borne in mind that I had not read "De Profundis" for over twenty years. Wilde as he was when he left prison was not the Wilde who played with the "surface of society," the "flaneur," as he calls himself. He had learnt the value of humility and love, and was, as he says, a richer man after he had come to realise the sacredness of sorrow. His life, after he left gaol, was more tragic perhaps than while he was there. His present condition seems a continued tragedy. It is painful to feel that after twenty-three years he is still without the beauty and sunlight for which he thirsts. Yet he has the certainty, which few of us have here, that his state is temporary; that he will achieve again all and more than he possessed in his earth life.

In criticising these writings it must be remembered that between the Wilde of the nineties and the Wilde of 1923, two great gulfs are fixed.

The gulf of his imprisonment and the gulf of his death. It cannot reasonably be expected that he is unchanged since he wrote "Intentions" and "The Importance of Being Earnest." In his letter to Robert Ross with instructions regarding the publication of "De Profundis," Wilde says: "Of course I need not remind you how fluid a thing thought is with me—with us all—and of what an evanescent substance are our emotions made." Here again we find the idea of "fluid mind," which came through at the sitting at André Gide's and again to me several times at the ouija board, before I knew he had used the expression before.

In the automatic writing which followed on the script about his prison life, Wilde begins with a quotation from "De Profundis," "Society sent me to prison," and again he quotes from it when he says, speaking of the bread he was forced to earn, "like Dante, how salt the bread when I found it." This script is completely clear and logical from beginning to end. The astronomical knowledge displayed here is merely used as illustration and does not in any way detract from the characteristic turn of the sentence or the application of ideas, which are more in the style of "De Profundis" than his earlier works.

Let us for a moment try to imagine the present position of Oscar Wilde, allowing it is he who writes these messages. He has suddenly found a means of speaking to the world again after twenty-three years' silence. His mediums are, of course, a matter of indifference to him, he merely wants to make use of any possible instrument. It would be futile to speculate as to how or why he discovered us. The word Lily is written; Wilde seizes the pencil; the emblem of the aesthetic movement gives him his opportunity. "No, the lily is mine, not his," he writes. When I have identified him he quotes from "De Profundis." "Twilight in my cell and twilight in my heart." As he goes on he reminds us of "Intentions" and "De Profundis." In "Intentions" we have "The white feet of the Muses brushed the dew from the anemones in the morning." In our first script, "Her white feet brush the dew from the cowslips in the morning." In "De Profundis" the passage occurs: "There is not a single colour hidden away in the chalice of a flower or the curve of a shell to which, by some subtle sympathy with the very soul of things my nature does not answer." In the automatic writing we find, "There was not a blood stripe on a tulip or a curve on a shell or

a tone on the sea, but had for me its meaning and its mystery and its appeal to the imagination."

If any of us had spent twenty-three years in a distant country, and, during that time, had neither visited nor written to our own land, we could scarcely be expected to preserve our memories of it intact, nor could our friends expect us to return completely unchanged and as we were in our prime. Oscar says he is more alive than we are, in spite of the fact that he is confined in a dim Hades. I disagree with one of our critics, who says that the first script is the ghost of Oscar's style as well as of his personality. I quite understand the difficulty presented to the lay mind by phenomena professing to come from the dead. To them the dead are dead in every sense. There may be a vague religious faith in the hereafter deep in the sub-conscious mind, but when it comes to accepting an actual personality which does not approach us with any of the orthodox ideas of the Beyond it seems too preposterous and our criticism of evidence is, very naturally, highly prejudiced. Yet, in all the notices of our script, it is admitted that these communications are not of the order which is generally offered us from the other side. No one can deny that this discarnate Wilde has pre-

served his sense of humour. He regards his present state as in some ways inconvenient and amusing. Poor Wilde, who loved his outward appearance; to whom costume meant so much; suffered intensely from the hideous garb he was forced to wear in gaol. He speaks of the grotesqueness of his garments more than once in "De Profundis," especially on that most degrading occasion when, for half an hour, he stood on the platform at Clapham Junction in prison dress and handcuffed, the target of a jeering crowd. Now he speaks with regret of that garment which we call a body. It served, whether foul or fair, to fix certain reserves between us and our fellows. He is bored by the continual sight of the ideas of other persons. "They grow stale and one tires of them," he says. I admit this is an appalling suggestion. It would rob us of half the mystery and adventure of life if we could take the entire measure of every human being we met. Wilde's boredom continues apparently. Probably the only part of his life in which there was no boredom was his time in prison. There his soul must have been so racked with surprise, remorse, despair and indignation, so vitalised that he can hardly have felt ennui which always hung about him in his days of freedom. If we are

to take any of the information which reaches us from the "Beyond" seriously, what seems to delay progress here, and there also, is a clinging to material things; worship of beauty in the sense that Wilde worshipped it. There the beauty which is given outwards from the spirit is of supreme value, what is received through the senses seems actually to drive the spirit backwards. The author of "De Profundis," had he died in gaol, would perhaps have escaped the twilight in which he suffers now.

I should like to make it quite clear that the speed of both the writing and ouija communications was tremendous. I already mentioned that in one instance 700 words were written in about an hour and a quarter. This essay is a long and logical argument. As regards the ouija board messages, it was difficult to keep up with them even in shorthand; the traveller flew from letter to letter with lightning speed at the rate of 60 to 70 words per minute. If we regard the scripts as a case of sub-conscious imitation, it is interesting to note that style and handwriting were sustained through hundreds of pages at this pace.

All things considered, I feel we may discuss the authorship of these writing from any point

of view without being considered absurd. In most cases it is very difficult to present automatic script to the public, but here, when to the style and humour we add the handwriting, there seems reasonable ground to admit the possibility that we are again in touch with Oscar Wilde. We find traces of the author of " De Profundis " and also of " The Importance of Being Ernest," we find the egoism, the cynical smile, even the paradox in which he delighted.

I am sorry that the subjects spoken of are so scattered. In the automatic writing, Wilde chose them himself. At the first two sittings he seemed to exhaust the power in his mediums very rapidly. There was a pause, and when the pencil moved again an entirely different theme was chosen. The later writings have been longer and more continuous. In the ouija work, I suggested subjects, as a rule. I asked a question and it was promptly followed up.

I value the opinions of those who are not conversant with psychic subjects, also those of persons who, like myself, have studied mental mediumship. Both can help us from entirely different standpoints. The literary critics must make allowance for the difficulties in automatic communication and also for the fact that Oscar

Wilde has passed on to new conditions. They must not demand exactly the mind they are familiar with. From the psychic point of view these scripts must be of value whether they are considered to arise from the sub-conscious or to be a proof of survival. Their value from the literary point of view is quite another matter. I sincerely hope that no prejudice against the method by which they came will injure their chances of having a fair hearing.

A literary ghost is, I think, a new departure in the psychic world. Messages from the dead are usually very vague as to work and interests on the other side. Oscar Wilde may be occupying his time with "what is little better than picking oakum in gaol," but his keen enjoyment of ideas seems the same as ever. He is certainly less changed by the "process of dying" than any other ghost I have come across so far.

I have endeavoured to analyse these writings honestly. I am convinced that they are worthy of investigation. They are certainly so to those who are interested in proof or disproof of survival, and they may be useful also to the faithful: those who have accepted the gospel of annihilation. For them Oscar Wilde's return can be regarded as a fresh proof of the credulity

of even intelligent persons. The theosophist will fall in with us, I think, for here we have evidence of the punishment that awaits our astral part. The spiritualist will add a very important addition to what confirms his faith; he can hardly produce a more definite instance of continued personality than what is before us.

I hope that Oscar, in his state of twilight, may be comforted if he realises that some of us are conscious he still exists. He may give us further evidence that he is still a living mind. If so, I shall publish a sequel to this book. He is still quite willing to talk and write. He has suggested that he is in a position to resume some of his literary work again; but, knowing as I do the difficulties and uncertainty of automatism, I dare not promise anything definite.

APPENDIX

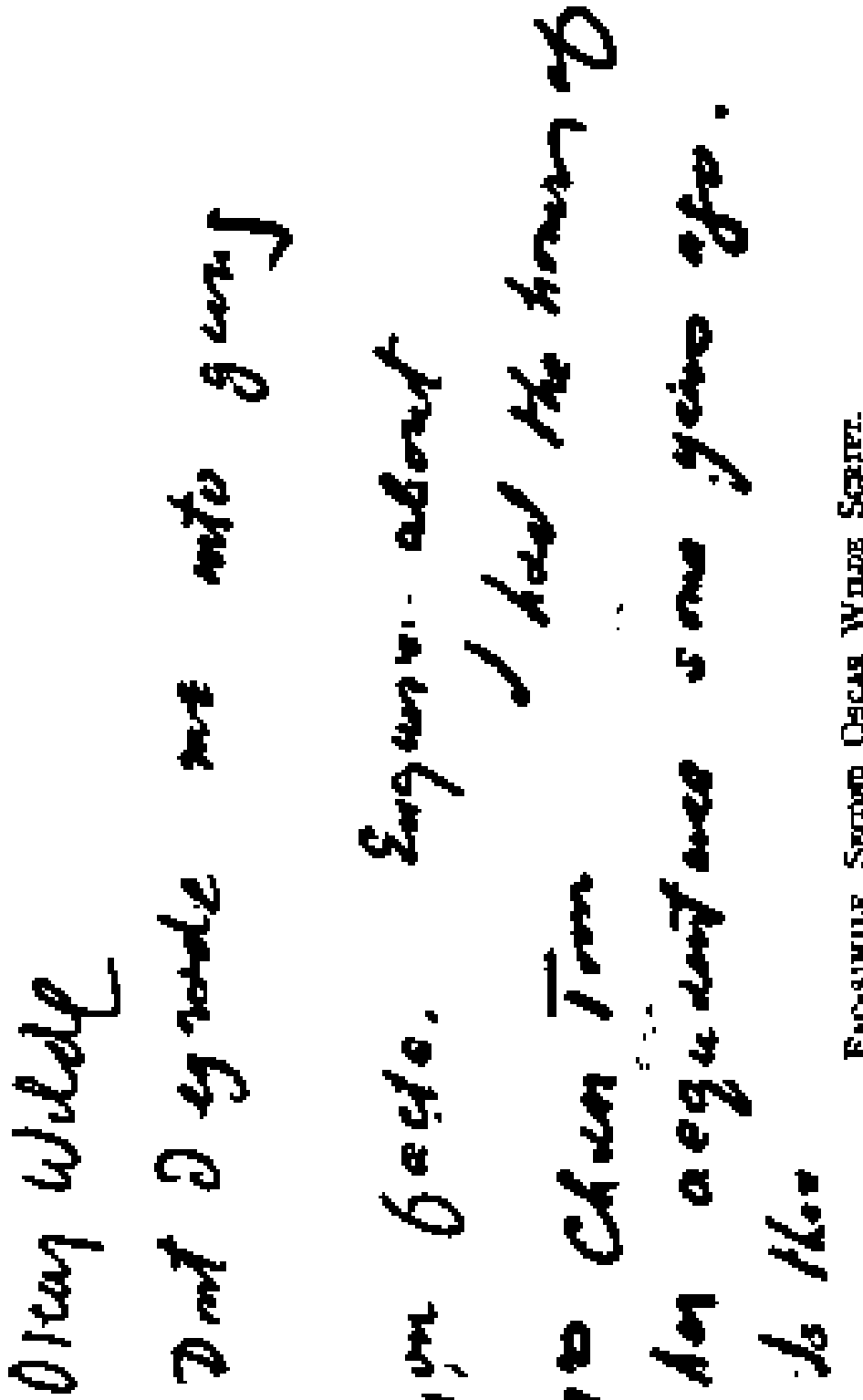
These communications came through from time to time since the first batch of scripts went into press. I add them, although they are slight, as I think the ideas very characteristic of Wilde. The criticism of the production of "The Importance of Being Earnest," at the Haymarket, is reprinted from *The Sunday Express*

Wilde chose a depressing subject
he was somewhere a mental
experience on waking up in
a new brain - but of some
interest I think psychologically
The handwriting throughout was
as good as anything we have
had, and there were several
rather remarkable passages of
well-phrased horror. But on
the whole I do not like
the message. I much prefer
the mundane Wilde.

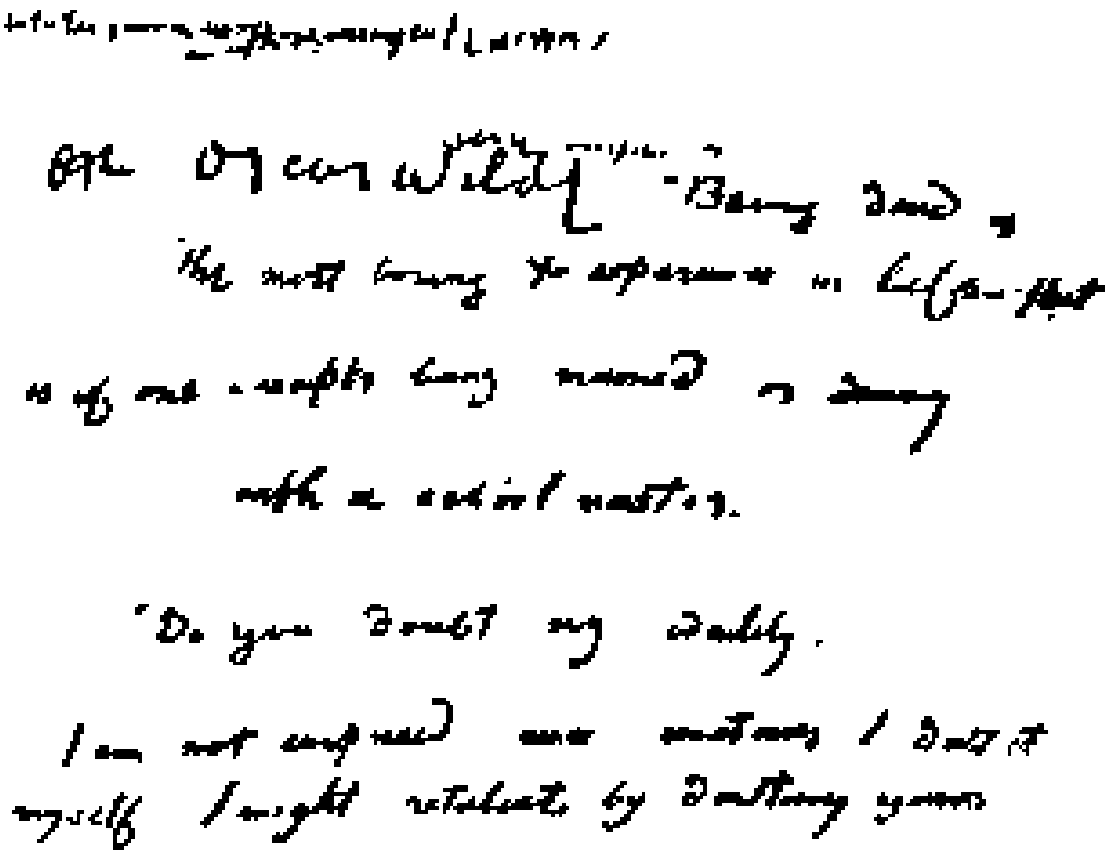
FAC-SIMILE OF MR V'S HANDWRITING

The genius is not necessarily a man who
is in advance of other men. He may be an
entirely unworthy person. Genius is the attain-
ment of a fuller perception of soul; the glimpse
which recurs, but is not inherent in the
daily life of the human being

FAC-SIMILE OF MRS TRAVERS SMITH'S HANDWRITING.



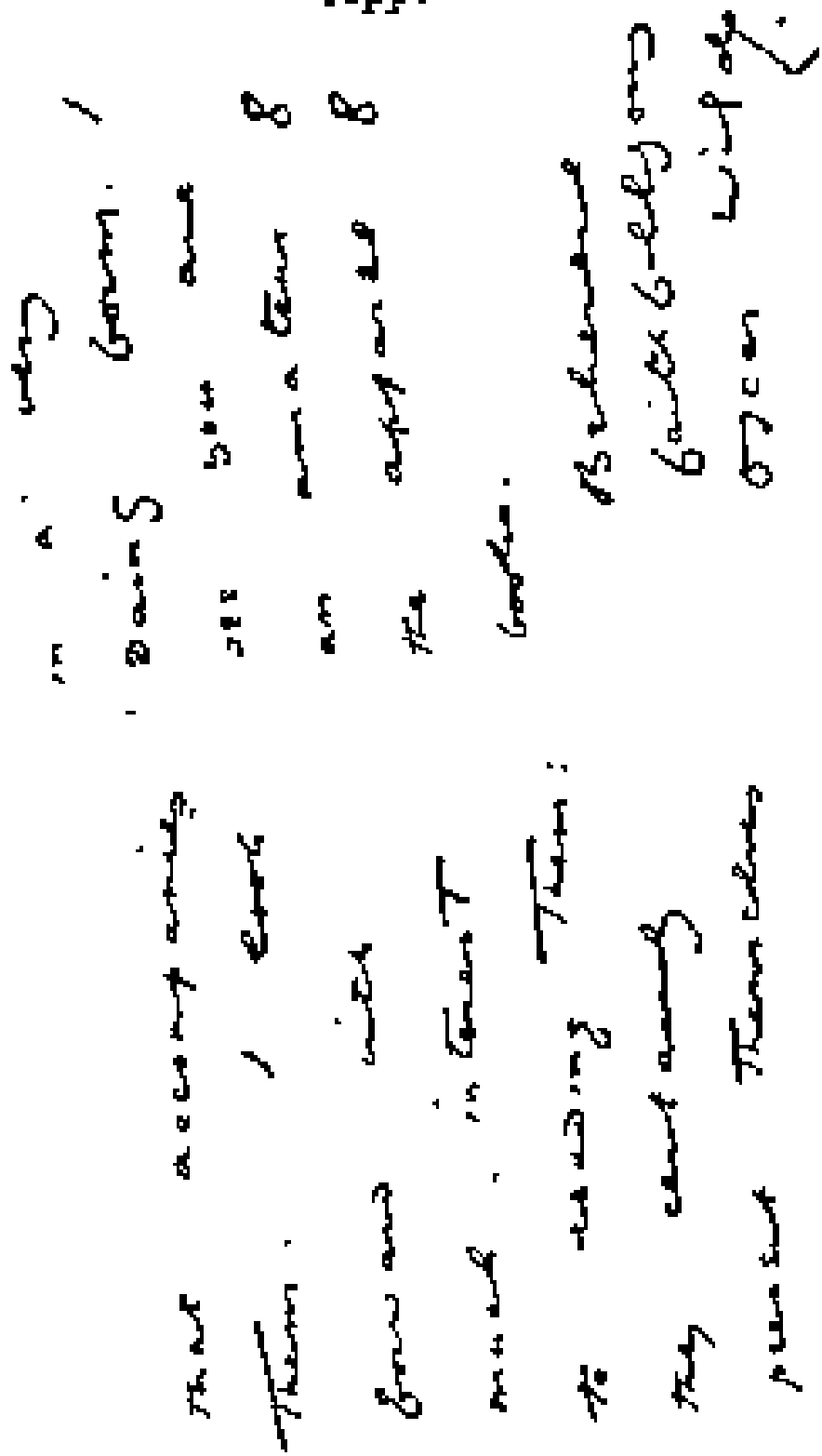
Facsimile, Second Oscar Wilde Letter.



*Result, Mr V's hand holding pencil alone.
†Result, when Mrs Travers Smith touched Mr V's hand.

Fac-simile. Supposed Oscar Wilde Script.

Appendix



Facsimile, Autographs of Oscar Wilde

REPRINTED FROM "THE SUNDAY EXPRESS"

Mrs T.S.—Is that Oscar Wilde?

O.W.—Yes; why doubt my identity, dear lady, before I have spoken even a doubtful word?

Mrs T.S.—Did you come with me to the Haymarket Theatre to see "The Importance of Being Earnest" last Thursday?

O.W.—It was a most amusing experience. I looked through your eyes and saw my children again, and realised for the first time that they were merely marionettes, not human beings. You, who have an idea of what the value of humour is, could hardly grasp, as I could, the attitude of the audience that night. I was pleased to note in their laughter a feeling that, after all, although he had made mistakes in his life, he could still entertain I could see a slightly contemptuous colour in these minds. They felt that he was a shade démodé, but they looked on him as a curio worthy of a dark corner in the drawing-room.

The spectacle presented to me through your eyes was very different from the productions of my time I had, of course, to superintend my own rehearsals, more especially because the balance of my plays was so delicate. And even in those days, when my ideas had all their reality and freshness, there was difficulty in impressing the players with my own conception of these characters. For, although as I said, they seemed to me to have the

quality of marionettes, I intended them to represent the actual outward surface, slightly magnified, of the various ingredients that made up the social pattern of my time. Here, I fear, I was mistaken. In "The Importance of Being Earnest" I had intended to overstep all possible limits and present an entirely unreal problem to the public, but I never intended my play to be taken as a farce.

That night I saw the producer's thought. He had evidently the conception that the play should be smartened for the modern stage, and he has my entire sympathy here. For my presentation was probably too preposterous for an age of realism. He has done his work competently, no doubt. But I must speak to the players singly, and ask them to remodel their work a little, in deference to the author's wishes.

First, please ask Mr Worthing to step up to me and listen to my criticisms of his performance. Worthing takes himself perfectly seriously, of course, but he does not try to force that feeling on his audience. He does not fill the centre of the stage with solemn pomposity; rather, he imbues the public with his own inward sincerity. Ask the gentleman who plays Worthing to *feel* the part a little, not to *act* it quite so arduously.

For Algernon I have a sincere admiration, but let him take into consideration the fact that he is not a mere lay figure. He utters his words as if he were the doll used by a ventriloquist. Ask him, please, to modify his voice a little, and also to modify his general behaviour. He seems to me to move on hinges.

Gwendolen is fairly satisfactory. She gives me the impression of having played the first act with great care and precision, but as she goes on, a delicate diminuendo brings her to total blankness at the end. Urge the lady to keep her mentality on the alert until the play is ended.

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Mrs T.S.—What about Lady Bracknell?

O.W.—She is not exactly the dame of the 'ninetics. The dame of that period certainly might have had some mannerisms, but what really entertained us in her was her complete faith in her own sincerity. Now this lady who plays her, is absolutely convinced of her own insincerity. This is so obvious that it fails to amuse me. I should be amused by the child of my own brain; but hers is only a pose which is feeble in the interpretation of this part of my pattern.

To continue, I think our little Cicely is excellent. I liked her, and more especially her intonation. She need not speak so definitely to the audience. That seems to me, even from my own démodé standpoint, a mistake. For your young girl should hold all her impudence of mind with a certain hypocrisy which is only seemly in a maiden.

I think my pleasant rector was not a horny person. He was, on the contrary, smooth and well living. I feel that the right note has not been struck here. He is far too angular. It is just the smoothness of skimmed milk that is required in him. He does not achieve it.

Miss Prism was quite agreeable to me. I think she got my idea better than the others. I felt she had been memorising my lines with an inward appreciation of my intentions. I should like to tell the lady this, for I feel grateful to her. One is so seldom taken with understanding.

The costumes do not matter much. I should certainly like my own period better. But undoubtedly that is a prejudice with which it would be foolish to comply.

The author is very grateful to the management and cast for putting his poor ideas again before the public. He finds it difficult to enter into the present time. But

so far as he is permitted to see the Haymarket production, it is smartened beyond his powers and given to the present day with a sauce which should make it palatable to all.

He feels that the ingredients of his entremets have been carefully weighed; and the result is an agreeable flavour without any undue spicing which might make it difficult of digestion. He wishes to convey to all those concerned his pleasure in having attended a performance in the theatre once again. . . . . .

I have already spoken to each of the players personally, and now I should like to repeat what I said before Let them all and the producer also, be assured of my surprise at seeing their own complete misapprehension of my play

It is delightful at any time to stand in an ecstasy of observation before what is absolutely perfect; the complete whole, as it were. Here I beheld my own child, and almost failed to recognise it. Its new gown and its new attitude were so unfamiliar.

I do not wish to cavil at the present age, but the Haymarket company and its producer must forgive me if I am surprised rather than enchanted by what they have accomplished.

Art, after all, has many aspects, and this entire perversion of a literary effort is so adequately accomplished that it may be regarded as a striving towards perfection. It has the quality of the exquisitely curved Greek vase—absolutely without life, but perfect, in its entire abstraction from the intention of the author.

Perhaps you would teach me something about the present time It seems to me to be so far removed from mine. The world of London looks as if it had cast off all its beautiful clothing and adopted the grimy garments of the artisan. That is how it strikes me. The whole

theatre wore a "useful" aspect that night when I saw it through your eyes. There was no illusion nor any glamour thrown out from the audience to the stage. It was all in keeping, and all presented a practical and tradesman-like appearance. In my time the actors were helped and inspired by the perfumed and gowned attendants at their work. Now they gain no inspiration to carry them through. The plaudits of the house that evening were pale and gave me the impression that they were there, merely to carry the evening on to its conclusion. This is evidently not an age of leisure. The leisured age is the age which gives the dramatist his opportunity.

I feel now that it would be futile to write a comedy. My own little play is so totally away from its own element that I should like to cover up the poor little nursling and lead it away from the footlights They make its colours pale and dim A sad little effort thus, to revive the feelings of a different age.

Mrs T.S.—Will you go on with the new play.

O.W.—I have been considering it, and it is certain it will be written, and in a manner different from my poor little "Earnest."

December 14th, 1923, 11.45 p.m. Present—Mr Bligh Bond, Miss G., Miss Cummins. The medium was Mrs Travers Smith.

Oscar Wilde. I have been summoned here. May I ask why such an honour is done me?

(Mrs T S.—We want you to communicate an interesting message to us next Sunday, when we are having a special sitting.)

I assure you, dear lady, the garland of my thoughts is withered; the scarlet exotic does not stand a long period in the Arctic winter. I wither because my thoughts are broken on the stem. (The traveller was pointed towards Mr Bligh Bond.) A curious restoration this. Here I find a mind in whose intricacies I should like to plunge. Permit me, sir, to probe your ideas . . . This is a strange construction. Here I find the mediaeval mind, and on it is perched, like a pert bird, the spirit of the twentieth century. A poet could indeed make sport of you, but I have other feelings. For my deep pity is excited—that this intricacy of mind is placed in this dim age of toilsome work. Sir, will you permit me to discourse with you . . . It would give a shade, who shuns the light, great pleasure to share ideas of twenty years ago with you.

(Mr Bond—Surely the glimpses of the world you obtain through this medium must be helpful and refreshing to you?)

Appendix

It is as if a rose had opened in my path, for what can such as I, find in a world of shadows and of dimness. This is not punishment, as you believe, but a portion of my experience, which floats by me like a grey cloud, and which will consummate the full expansion of my soul.

I know that ecstasy is mine. But here I am confined and the rich day is hidden from me. Never can I gaze again upon the blue waters of the sea, or feel the wind come whispering by me in the dim evening light. I am a shadow and the life here, the shadow of a shadow. Can you imagine what I am?

(Mr Bond made some further remarks.)

No, my dear sir; not for a mind like yours the dimness and confinement. Yours is a nature which has not spent its richness in the world. . . . (Mr B made a remark about the eternal life.) Here the eternal life spreads out before us like a silken stuff shaded from grey to gold.

(But you obtain glimpses of the world at times?)

A sunbeam dying on the clouds, a rift within a deep abyss. This is what comes to me from looking once again at the fair world whose beauty was a rich intoxication for my senses. And for this ecstasy of joy, joy in the day, joy in the night, joy in the paleness of the dawn and the grey twilight and the sound of words and company of my fellows, for this I am confined in a dim place of shadows.

(Mr Bond—But there is hope for you and for all?)

Hope, my dear sir, is simply breath, the power of breathing comes from hope, hope that the next breath follows on the present. But hope grows pale with waiting. I know that this will come again—this richness and this joy. I feel as if I, a worm, had burrowed in the earth and the damp soil had filled the eyes, the mouth,

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and all I am. I believed on earth, and now, I believe in eternal joy. This is my consolation.

(Mrs T S—I am publishing your messages. I have written a book about you.)

Pray spare me. These little moths that flew from out my lips are scarcely worth recording.

Copy of a Communication received at the Ouija Board through Mrs Travers Smith's hand, July 19th, 1923.

(Mrs T.S.—How do you study the work of the moderns?)

I can look into their minds and gather collectively what is worth recording in their work.

(Talk to us about painting and its connection with literature.)

Dear lady, pause a moment. Let your imagination strain itself a little. Take one word and let its sound sink deep into your mind and conjure up at the same time a deep and richly coloured tone. Take the word purple. Let the infinite depths of that rich colour penetrate your being and listen to the word and let its music bring to your mind the depths of tone that comes from perfumed violets till word and colour merge into each other. This gives you some idea of how my work was wrought and fashioned, of how my music sprang from word and colour both. For as I wrote I held the picture ever in my mind, of pattern wrought from colour and from sound. And as I wove the web I added richness as I went by, ever fashioning, moulding and forming, until a perfect shape rose from me. This was my own particular form of art—an art which gave me life, which has not vanished with my good name and all that fame the false world heaped upon me. For my art had sprung direct from nature, nature was the force that gave it

being I was the priest who fashioned from it the thing created, perfecting the form with care and infinite pain, until the children of my being had grown to their full stature and like stately swans had floated out upon the waters and escaped from me into the infinite, where they shall never perish.