Life After Death

Neville Randall

ONE
Alf Pritchett's Story

The year is 1960. 4th November. A darkened room in a London flat. Two men and a woman sat waiting, as they had been doing on Monday mornings for the previous five years. Waiting for anyone to accept an open invitation to tell them of an experience that no one on earth has gone through and everyone living one day will.

The silence was broken by a gruff, husky voice with a cockney intonation. A tape recorder was switched on. The voice began to describe the ordeal of a private soldier forty-six years before in the muddy desolation of a Flanders trench in the hell which we call the Great War.

'I was only just an ordinary person,' said the voice. 'And what I have to say wouldn't be of any real weight to most people.'
'May we have your name?' asked the woman.

'Oh,' he replied. 'My name wouldn't mean anything, would it? My name is Pritchett. Alf Pritchett. It doesn't mean a thing.
'It must have been 1917 - or 18. I'm not sure myself now. It's such a long time ago. We had been under a heavy bombardment practically all day. I thought to myself at the time, if we come through this lot we'll be lucky. Then. in the early morning we were given the command to go over the top.

'Well, I thought. This is it, boy. And I must admit it took all I'd got to really get myself over the top.
'I was running forward. Some of the Germans were coming towards me. They rushed straight past me as if they didn't see me! I thought, 'God, this is it.'

'But instead of them attacking me or in any way taking any interest in me, they were rushing past me!
'I thought, 'Well, Good Lord! I can't make this out at all.'

I went on. I can remember running and running and I thought 'Well, if they're not going to see me I'm certainly not going to bother about them. I'm going to get into a little cubby hole somewhere and get out of it.'

'I remember getting into a hole in the ground created by a bomb I expect at some time. I got into this hole, and just crouched down, and thought 'Well, I'll wait till this shindy's over, and hope for the best, I might get taken prisoner. Who knows?'

'I was lying there thinking to myself 'Well it's damned odd they didn't see me. They must have seen me. Yet they went straight past.' And I started to think about it. And I thought, 'Well, I don't know.'

'I don't know how long I must have been there. Anyway I must have fallen asleep or something, because the next thing I knew was that I remember I was seeing a bright light in front of me.

'I couldn't make this out at all. It was a sort of light I'd never seen before, just as if the whole place was illuminated, and it was so dazzling that, for a moment, I could sort of hardly look at it. I had to keep closing my eyes and having a look. And I thought, 'Well, it's a trick of the light.' I got a bit windy.

'Then, all of a sudden it was just as if I saw an outline - shape or figure appearing. It was the outline of a human being, and it was full of luminosity, and gradually it seemed to take shape.

'I was in an absolute sweat. It was an old friend of mine who I knew had been killed some months before, named Smart. Billy Smart! We used to call him 'Ole Bill'. He was looking at me and I was looking at him.

'After a bit I felt myself getting up, and that struck me as odd that I should be conscious of myself getting up. In a strange sort of way I thought well, here's me been lying here probably all night - all night and day. I ought to be feeling stiff and awkward and uncomfortable. But I didn't. I felt as light as a feather. I thought 'Well, something's gone to my head. Perhaps I've got a crack or something.'

Anyway I went towards him as if I was a magnet drawn to him. As I got closer I could see that he was, well, full of

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vitality, full of life. Wonderful sort of color in his face. And then, as I got near to him, it dawned on me that he was dead!

When I first saw him, I didn't think of him being dead, although I must have remembered and realized in a way that he had been killed some months before. Anyway, I was drawn to him. He smiled at me, and I suppose I must have smiled back.

'He sort of held out his hand. I felt a bit daft in a way because I knew it's natural to shake hands, but there was me in a dugout shaking hands with someone who was dead! It put me in a cold sweat and I thought, 'Well, what's going on here? I must be dreaming or something!'

'I could hear him speak and he says, 'All right, nothing to worry about. You're all right, mate. Come on.'

'I thought, 'Well, this is damn daft, this one. There's something wrong somewhere.'

'Anyway I got hold of his hand and suddenly I felt a sort of floating sensation, and before I knew where I was it was just as if I was being lifted up in the air holding his band. It reminded me of something I saw years ago - Peter Pan or something. I thought, 'This is a funny dream this is!'

'There was us sort of floating - I can't say I was doing anything else but floating just with my feet off the ground - going gradually higher and higher as if everything was getting further and further away. And I could see in the distance down below the battlefields, the guns and the lights and the explosions. The war was obviously still going on. And I thought, 'Well, this is a most peculiar dream this is.'

'The next thing I remember was sort of gradually coming in sight of what appeared to be a big city. It was luminous. It's the only way I can describe it. The buildings had a sort of glow about them.

'Anyway to cut a long story short, I suddenly felt my feet touching the ground again. Most peculiar. It felt solid. I remember walking along what appeared to be a long avenue, and on each side were beautiful trees, and between every other tree or so there was what appeared to be a sort

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of statue. And on the sidewalk - I suppose what you'd call it would be: path or pavement - people were going about in a most peculiar sort of dress.

'They were looking as they might have been Romans or Greeks or something you see in pictures. And there were beautiful buildings with pillars, and beautiful steps leading up to them. Mostly flat-roofed, by the way. I don't remember seeing any roofs or gables like one sees in England. They seemed to be in Continental style. And this sort of glow coming from them. All sorts of people there were, and horses.

'Bill was talking away to me. 'Of course,' he says: 'You know what's happened to you?'

'What's happened to me? All I know is that I am having a good time here. It's better than being down there in that lot. I shall be sorry to wake up.

'He says, 'Don't worry. You aren't going to wake up.' ''What do you mean, I'm not going to wake up?' ''You've had it, chum.'

''What do you mean had it?'

''You're dead.'

''Don't be silly,' I says. 'How can I be dead? I'm here. I can see all that's going on around me. I can see you. But I know you died some months ago. You got a packet. But how is that ... I don't know. You may be dead, but I'm dreaming.'

''No you aren't,' he says. 'You really are dead. You got a packet in that charge.'

''Never,' I says. 'How can I have? I wouldn't be here like this would I?'

'That's just it,' he says. 'You are here. You're dead.' ''What,' I says. 'You don't mean to tell me this is heaven?'

''Well not exactly,' he says. 'But it's an aspect.'

'I thought to myself, 'Aspect. What does aspect mean?' And then suddenly it dawned on me.

'Anyway, to cut a long story short, we went up this nice, very pleasant road in this beautiful city, and we came to a sort of hill. And right in front of me I could see what

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looked like a beautiful building. Like - how can I describe it? - like something I've seen in the City of London, only much more white and beautiful. So I said: 'What's that place?'

''Oh,' he says, 'You're going there to meet some of your old friends. That's what we call a reception centre.'

''A what?' I says.

''Like a kind of a hospital.'

''Well,' I says, 'I don't want to go to hospital. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm all right. And in any case I can't get this at all.'

''Don't worry,' he says. 'Don't tax your brain too much at the moment. It'll come to you later. Just relax and enjoy yourself.'

''Well,' I said. 'I'm doing all right. It's. a darn sight better than being down there.'

'So we got to this place. We went in. There were all sorts of people there. But what struck me as odd was that they were dressed much the same way as many people I had known, the way I used to dress myself in civvie street. Suits and that sort of thing.

'I never seem to remember seeing the sun, yet there seemed to be plenty of light. And big windows. And people sitting around talking. There were tables and chairs. I didn't see any beds, and I thought this is a strange hospital, yet it isn't a hospital I suppose.

'Everyone seemed to be quite bright and cheerful. Some were talking, and others were eating, and that struck me. I thought, 'Well, I've got him here. He says this is part of heaven. They shouldn't be eating.' So I says, 'Look. They're eating over there.'

''Ah,' he says. 'What you don't realize is that when you come here, you feel its essential to do certain things. If you feel it's essential to eat and drink, you can.'

'I sat down around a table with several other blokes.

''Just arrived?' they says.

''Yes.'

''We heard you were coming,' says one.

''What do you mean? You heard I was coming? You don't even know me.'

''Well that's what you think,' he says. 'We have our scouts out, you know. Helpers. I was helped in the same way. I've only been here a short time myself.'

''Oh,' I said. 'Settling in?'

''Yes Very nice. Much better than what they used to tell us down there isn't it?'

''How do you mean?'

"Well, you know what they used to tell us down there about heaven and hell, and the last trumpet and all that. Yeah. They've got it all wrong.'

"Well it seems like it,' I says, 'doesn't it?'

"Yeah,' he says. 'All that business about if you're very good you go up to the top storey, and if you are not so good you go down to the old cellar. They've got all that wrong, mate. Here we're just the same as we were, only better. Quite happy. Tomorrow,' he added, 'I'm going away from here.'

"What? Where are you going?'

"Well,' he says, 'I'm going to see my grandparents.' 'Of course all this struck me as a bit crackers, but I thought, 'Well, I'd better keep in touch with them, and talk the same kind of language. After all, if I've got to be here as they say I have, I might as well fit in.'

'So I says: 'Oh, where are they?'

"I've been told,' he says, 'that they're on this plane, as they call it here, but further out. I'm being taken there.' "Very nice. Who's taking you?'

"My guide.'

"Guide?'

"Yes. There's a nice fellow here. Like one of the stewards I suppose you'd call them. And he's found out a little about my background and my people and been given the job of escorting me. By the by, did you notice when you came here how odd it was? How light you felt? That sort of floating feeling?'

"Yes. It did feel a bit strange.'

"Well, that's the way we're going. We're not going to walk. We're sort of going to . . . I suppose some people

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would call it flying. You seem to have taken to it all right.'

"What else can you do?' I says. 'You're told you're dead. The best thing to do when you're dead, I should think, is to follow the instructions and behave yourself. After all, you never know who's going to be judging you and all that.'

''Ha,' he says, 'No one judges you. From what I can make out, you judge yourself. Since I've been here, I've been reflecting. Going back a bit on the old past, and wondering and thinking about things. The only thing is to judge yourself. After all, its your conscience. I've got one, and so have you, I bet. We all have.'

''As far as I can remember,' I says, 'the only thing I ever really did wrong was drowning the cat. Oh, and once I had a pint of beer and never paid for it because there was a crowd in there, and he forgot about it and I never offered it. I don't see anything terribly wicked about that.'

''You'll be all right,' he says. 'Don't worry.'

''I'd like to go back,' I says, 'and see my people, and see how they are getting on. I wonder if they've heard about my being dead?'

''If you want to go back,' he says, 'it can be arranged. One of those fellows who is in charge here can probably arrange it. Of course, it'll only make you miserable, I should think. Because they don't take a blind bit of notice of you. And then what? You can go back and knock on the wife's door. Or you can go and bang on the old parson's door, and he won't take a bloody bit of notice of you, because he's as blind as a bat like the rest of them.'

'Eventually the time came when this friend who'd brought me here came over to me and says: 'I want to show you something.'

'So I says, 'All right, mate,' and went with him.

'He took me down a street. Past very attractive houses with little balconies and beautiful flowers. Down to the end of the street and out into a big square. With a big fountain playing in the middle. I could hear music. Smashing, wonderful music. And I thought, 'This is real nice.' It reminded me of the old days when I used to sit in the park and listen to the band.

17

'We sat down on a little bench under a beautiful tree.

''You'll find it very restful,' he says. 'You just sit there. I'll leave you for a little while and come back to you.'

'I sat there with my eyes closed listening to the music. Then, all of a sudden, I had a feeling there was someone sitting next to me. I opened my eyes and looked and there was a beautiful lady. Beautiful blonde hair she had and looked about nineteen or twenty. I was really taken aback.

'She called me by my name. I thought, 'Well, that's funny, she knows my name, but I don't know her !'

''Are you finding it nice here?' she asks.

''Very nice,' I says. 'Thank-you-er-miss.'

''You don't have to call me miss. Don't you know me?'

''No. I don't know you.'

''My name is Lilly.'

''Lilly? I don't know any Lilly.'

''That's not surprising in a way. I'm your sister. I died when I was an infant.'

''Golly,' I says. 'I remember my mother talking about a little girl who died when she was only a few days old. But you can't be her. You're grown up.'

''That's right,' she says. 'I'm your sister. I died when I was an infant and I've grown up over here.' ''Well it beats me.'

''I'm going to look after you now that you are here. I'm going to take you home.'

''Home?' I says.

''Yes, home.'

'Oh !'

'She took me out of the square down a broad avenue, lined with trees. We branched off, went down a slope and out into the countryside. Gradually we arrived at a small cottage. The nearest thing I'd seen to cottages at home in England. She stopped at a small place in its own garden, with a little gate, a porch and a door. Plenty of lovely flowers, I noticed.

'We went in. Off a little passage was a little room, all very cosy and comfortable. Nice chairs. No fireplace. 'I see you don't have fireplaces here,' I said.

''No,' she said. 'We don't need fireplaces because it's always warm and pleasant.'

'That's nice isn't it. You don't get any rain then?'

'No, we don't have any rain. But we have dew sometimes.'

'We sat there talking. About my mother and father and brother that I still had on earth. She said she often went to see them, and me when I was on earth, from infancy. She'd been with me all through the war years. She couldn't - wasn't with me when I died. But she got everything ready for me, knew I'd be coming and that I'd be brought.

'I thought, 'Oh this is nice.' Then I thought, 'Well, I don't know, it's strange.' But I settled in and stayed with my sister. And perhaps I'd better come another time and tell you more about it.

'I'm told my time is up. I must go. Bye bye.'

The voice faded, and was silent. Where did it come from? Could it really have been the voice of a soldier killed in the Great War?

There is a record of every British soldier killed and buried in every theatre of war. It is kept by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission at Maidenhead in Berkshire.

Pritchett is not a common name. A search through the files turned up only four. One of them was Private 9023 A. Pritchett of the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). He was killed in 1917. And buried in the Potijze Chateau Lawn Cemetery a mile from Ypres.

Was he the owner of the voice who told this story of his own death? He gave one other clue. The name of his old friend and guide. Billy Smart. Killed according to Pritchett, some months before.

Smart is a common name in the British army. There were hundreds of Smarts killed in the Great War and dozens of them had the Christian name of William.

One, and only one, fits the story told by the voice claiming to be Pritchett. Private 20394 William Smart, also of the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). He was killed near Arras in 1916.

19

Pritchett's story is one of five hundred recorded on tape by George Woods and Mrs. Betty Greene, of Worthing, Sussex, through a direct voice medium called Leslie Flint. It is one of five hundred recorded

accounts - a whole library - devoted to telling what will happen to us when we die.

20

TWO
Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?

Three years before the death of Alf Pritchett, early in August 1914, George Woods embarked for France as a trooper in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry with the British Expeditionary Force. He was twenty. A sensitive and non-conforming son of a typical shires squire who, though crippled when a horse fell on him and crushed his thigh, still rode to hounds, and read family prayers every morning to his wife, children and servants.

Young Woods had suppressed a horror of killing, either humans or animals, and joined up because his father wished it. He found himself caught up in a bloody battle which the history books call the Retreat from Mons.

Outnumbered by the Kaiser's army, the Old Contemptibles were decimated. By the end of the first Battle of Ypres, some battalions which had set out 1000 strong were reduced to one officer and thirty men. It was an experience he was never to forget.

One incident haunted him for the rest of his life.

A fellow trooper, mortally wounded, clutched his hand.

'Is there an after life?' he whispered. 'What is going to happen to me?'

'Yes,' he replied with a confidence he did not feel.

The trooper died. Woods put the question to the regimental padre.

'What is going to happen,' he asked, 'to all the poor chaps who are killed?'

'We must believe in the Bible,' replied the padre.

'Has anyone ever come back to prove an after life ? ' asked Woods.

'No one,' said the padre. 'Except Jesus.'

Woods was one of the lucky ones. In 1915 he was wounded in his head and blinded. After six months in hospital the sight of his right eye was

restored. He was never to see out of his left eye again. They called it a Blighty one.

21

He was discharged. In 1916 he returned to help manage his father's new estate, a 400-acre farm at Hardwicke, near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. But his ordeal had provided him with a more compelling ambition: to find the answer to the question which the padre could not answer. What happens to us when we die?

During the twenties and much of the thirties, he tried all the organized varieties of the Christian Church to see if they could offer him an answer which satisfied his yearning for proof.

None of them could.

The thirties was ending. His father was dead. Farming had become a struggle. He moved to Croydon, on the southern fringe of suburban London with a wife and son called Nigel recovering from meningitis. Soon after, walking past a modern red brick building, his eye was caught by a notice: 'Come and hear the dead speak.'

Next Sunday, willing to try anything once, he slipped in and took an inconspicuous seat near the door to watch his first Spiritualist service.

The service, and a promised demonstration of clairvoyance, made little impression. He was preparing to slip out when the officiating female announced: 'I want to come to the gentleman at the back.'

With a shudder of horror and embarrassment, he realized she was pointing at him.

'I have your father here,' she began. He says his name is William Woods, and he is a cripple. When he was on earth he had an accident. He says he wants to speak to his son George. He says he lived in a place called Hardwicke. He is also saying he is very concerned about your son Nigel. He must go to bed earlier or he may have a recurrence.'

Woods stayed on stunned. Was it a trick? How could a woman he had never met have got this information? Was it possible that his father had come back from the dead to answer his question? His mind was confused. As he went home he could think of nothing else. For the first time in his life he had something to work on.

22

He began a new line of investigation by joining the Society for Psychical Research. There he met a man who helped him set a course through the uncharted waters of psychic investigation.

The Rev. Drayton Thomas was a Methodist minister who had joined a daring group of clergymen, frowned on by orthodox churchmen but united by a desire to do something, however drastic, to reverse the waning appeal of orthodox Christianity. They were not yet certain what. But most of them were Spiritualist fellow travelers. And beginning to think that if the 1900-year old records of Christ's resurrection had lost their impact, they would have to be reinforced by the evidence of twentieth-century communications from those who had died in our own times.

This was heady stuff. Today an expanding Churches' Fellowship for Psychic and Spiritual Studies can conduct séances with the backing of Church of England bishops and leading Methodists. In 1945 Archbishop Lang had fairly recently pigeonholed his own commission's report on Spiritualism. Alleged communications from the dead were considered the work of the devil Drayton Thomas introduced Woods to Britain's leading direct voice medium.

Leslie Flint was said to have a strange and rare gift, the ability to attract the spirits of human beings who had died and moved on to another place of existence, and to provide them with a substance called ectoplasm which they drew from his and his sitters' bodies to fashion a replica of the vocal organs - a voice box or etheric microphone.

Through this contraption, about three feet above the medium's head, Woods was told, a spirit transmitted his thoughts. By a process that no living scientist could explain, he created vibrations which enabled him to speak, as though through a telephone, in a voice something like the one he used on earth.

Woods went for a sitting. Several voices, claiming to be his dead relations, spoke to him. From the tone of their voices, and the information they gave him, Woods was decided they were genuine.

His question was answered. His mission seemed to be at an end. In fact it was only just beginning.

THREE
For the Record

Communications from the dead are still suspect. Those who think death is the end call them fraudulent conjuring tricks. Orthodox Christians

think they are the work of the devil. Psychic investigators who have convinced themselves that communication is a reality evaluate it by how it comes, and divide mediums into two main types, mental and physical.

Mental mediums are the common or garden variety. They operate by clairvoyance, an ability to see spirits invisible to normal folk; or by clairaudience, the gift of hearing spirit voices inaudible to normal ears. The most successful, like Ena Twigg, use a combination of the two. The medium claims to see or hear messages from Spirit communicators invisible or inaudible to her sitters, interprets them and relays them in her own voice The accuracy of the message depends on the medium's ability to interpret it.

Physical mediumship is rarer and leaves nothing to interpretation or chance. The medium neither hears nor sees. He receives no impressions and need never open his mouth. He can be just as effective as a passive spectator or fast asleep. His only, but essential contribution is to be endowed with an abundant supply of a substance or life force called ectoplasm which is possessed in some degree by every human being.

An infra-red photograph of a direct voice seance shows cords of ectoplasm emanating from the medium, and to a lesser extent from his sitters, all joining up to form what looks like a ball of mist a few feet above the medium's head. This is called the voice box and is said to be a replica of the human vocal organs. The spirit communicator transmits his thoughts in lowered earth vibrations into the box. By some strange process, unexplained by science, they emerge in a passable imitation of the voice he used on earth.

This is the theory as explained by spirit communicators who use it, with difficulty, to talk to us on earth. What practical tests can be applied to evaluate it we will consider later.

Up to 1945, when George Woods had his first sitting with Flint, communications by direct voice had been heard by very few. Accounts were based on the memory of sitters or notes taken in the dark. And treated with scepticism or disbelief by all but the converted.

After the war a decisive change occurred. Brought about by an invention which was to be as important to psychic education as Caxton's press was to the distribution of books - the portable tape recorder.

Woods acquired an early model and began taking it with him to his sittings. For the first time he was able to record everything the voices

said and play it back to interested friends who could hear it as clearly as if they were sitting with the medium.

Flint was already at the height of his powers. But few outside Spiritualist circles knew of his existence till he published his autobiography, Voices in the Dark, in 1971.

It was a strange, almost unbelievable story of a boy born in a Salvation Army home to unsuited parents who parted when he was a child. Brought up in poverty, he was separated from other children by a frightening ability to be able to see people who his grown-up relations told him were dead.

After a succession of makeshift jobs he was drawn into a Spiritualist group, discovered his strange gift, and found himself giving direct voice sittings in a council house to a widening circle of clients at a guinea a time.

As his reputation grew in the late thirties, well known personalities gravitated to his humble home, first in St Albans', then in a North London suburb. Drayton Thomas and his group of unorthodox churchmen trying to bring psychic research into the Christian fold made him their link with the life eternal promised by Christ.

Through him, he claimed, Queen Victoria sent messages to her last surviving daughter, Princess Louise, Rudolph Valentino spoke to Beatrice Lillie, Leslie Howard communicated to a public meeting presided over by Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, and Mae West held a conversation with her dead mother in a room at the Savoy Hotel.

All this, unreported by a sceptical press, was behind him when Woods began his sittings as just another interested client paying his fee.

But Woods was different from the others. Shortly before the first sitting, traveling on a tram from Croydon to London, he felt an irresistible urge to write. He got out a pad and pencil. His hand, controlled by some unseen force, covered the paper so quickly that he became physically exhausted. When it was released, he found that he had written a philosophical account of the next world, as strange to him as an unopened book, in the handwriting of his father.

Woods was a psychic too.

In 1946 he visited Australia. When he returned to Croydon he booked another sitting. A voice came through claiming to be a man called Michael Fearon. He said he had been a biology master at Taunton

School just before the war, and was killed in Normandy in 1944, two weeks after D-Day. This was easy to check. Woods tracked down Fearon's mother and took her with him to Flint. The voice came through again. Mrs Fearon announced it was her son.

He went back again. Another voice, this time female, announced her identity as Mrs Patrick Campbell, the legendary Edwardian actress who inspired a series of passionate letters from Bernard Shaw and created the part of Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion. She had a message for him. Quite soon he would meet a woman who would be sent to join him in his psychic studies and help him to send his recordings round the world.

At the time it seemed just another message. One of many. He registered it vaguely, like a prediction from a pierhead palmist, and immersed himself in the activities of a growing circle who met every Sunday in the Woods home to hear and discuss the tapes he recorded with Flint.

26

The years passed. He had almost forgotten the message. Till in June 1953 a woman called to ask about a flat he had advertised in his home in Barclay Road, Croydon. He had just let it to another tenant. But to ease her disappointment he showed her round and took her name and address, promising to let her know if it ever became free. Her name was Mrs Greene.

Betty Greene was the daughter of a Croydon bank clerk and church organist who had retired to live in the Cornish fishing village of Polperro. She had married, separated, and was earning her living as a medical secretary at the St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin.

On August bank holiday she was walking down Barclay Road to the paper shop. Woods was working in his front garden, saw her passing and called her over. He had given his tenant notice, he said. Was she still interested in the flat? She moved in two weeks later.

Landlord and tenant soon became friends. He lent her books and played recordings of his sittings with Flint. She listened astonished to the conversations with Michael Fearon, a cockney girl called Rose, and recognized the American accent of a voice claiming to be Lionel Barrymore. In December Woods decided she was ready for the next step in her psychic education - to hear the voices as they spoke through the mediumship of Flint.

They went up to London in a party of five. The lights were turned out. They sat for a few moments waiting in the dark. A female voice broke the silence with 'Good Evening'.

'Good evening,' chorused the sitters.

'And how are you?' replied the voice.

Betty Greene recognized the cockney accent from the tape she had heard several times at Barclay Road.

'Rose T she queried.

'That's right,' answered the voice.

It was Rose, a London girl who once earned a precarious living selling flowers in the forecourt of Charing Cross Station.

Prompted by questions from Mrs Greene, she began to give them a racy, down to earth description of her life on the next plane of existence. Without a moment's hesitation

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she answered questions on the countryside and cities of her new world, the clothes they wore, the things they did and their relations with one another. It was more than the proof of an after life which Woods had been seeking. It was a practical journalistic report on everyday life in a world which till recently none of the five sitters knew for certain existed.

To Woods it was another breakthrough. From now on Betty Greene became an indispensable companion at every sitting.

The final signpost came up two years later, in 1955. Another female voice came through. Very different from Rose. Rich, deep and commanding. The voice, she claimed, of Dame Ellen Terry. Once on earth the voice of Portia and of Ophelia to Irving's Hamlet. A queen of the stage in Edwardian England who died in 1928.

Woods switched on the recorder hoping for another account of the next world. Instead he got a lecture which was to give all three of them a new purpose in life.

'You are going to have some remarkable communications,' she told them. 'And I suggest you keep these contacts going regularly to build up the power and to make possible this link which has been deliberately arranged for your tapes . . . There are souls on this side who have a great desire to make use of these opportunities to pass through messages and information regarding the mechanics of communication between our world and yours ...

'We need willing helpers on your side. We need people of integrity, people of sincerity who are willing to give up their time.

'The tapes you record give us an opportunity to reach many people in all parts of your world ... We shall bring various souls from various spheres to give talks and lectures. You are very important to us because we know that you are sincere ...

'We know that we can achieve a great deal through you, and that is why we want you to come at regular intervals. Much depends on this regular contact. We want you to keep it and not break it.'

It was an order that Woods could not refuse. He was sixty-one. His life's work was about to begin.

28

One Saturday a month for the next five years, Woods and Mrs Greene caught a train from East Croydon to Victoria, lugged the tape recorder on a bus to Paddington in time for a sitting at eleven o'clock. In 1960 they moved to Brighton, in 1964 to Worthing, and caught the Brighton Belle with the recorder on a table or spare seat to protect it from vibration.

When Flint gave up working at weekends, Betty Greene changed her job to one where she could work on Saturday and take Monday off for what was now a fortnightly sitting.

The night before they watched television sparingly, avoiding anything that could set up a train of thought. On the train they read nothing, trying to make their minds blank. Arriving at the flat, they were greeted by Flint's dogs and went straight to the seance room to set up a microphone over a hatstand above the chair where Flint sat, attached it to the recorder on a coffee table and plugged it into the main.

A three-sided cardboard box, specially made by Woods, was placed round the recorder to protect Flint from a dim light that showed Mrs Greene that the reels were turning as they should.

Flint sat down, announced the date and names of the medium and sitters, and turned out the light. They sat waiting in the dark for something to happen.

As soon as a voice was heard, Mrs Greene started the tape running, and kept it running until the two-way conversation was ended by the communicator, or Mickey, Flint's cockney guide, a newspaper boy run over and killed by a lorry, warning them that the power drawn from Flint and Woods was fading.

They sat for a few moments silent in the dark. When the light was turned on, Flint looked tired. Woods felt drained and sometimes sick. Mrs Greene, the only non-psychic, felt unaffected.

Woods and Mrs Greene removed the tape, packed up the recorder, handed over their fee, and set off for home with another addition to their growing library.

29

After fifteen years, with occasional intervals because of illness, they had a library of five hundred clear, vivid and coherent accounts claiming to describe the experience of passing from this plane of existence to the next, and what life is like in the world beyond the grave which men call Heaven.

The voices came from a cross-section of human beings who claimed to have lived on Earth in this and the previous century.

Simple folk, like Alf Pritchett, contented themselves with basic, factual accounts of what it is like to die and find yourself still alive. What happened to them immediately after death. Who they met and where they were taken. Their new homes and gardens. The towns and countryside and what the weather was like in their new environment. Do they eat, drink and sleep? What clothes they wear and jobs they do. What happens to animals and family pets. Why is it so difficult to come back and talk to relations still alive on Earth?

Others were famous and successful personalities when on Earth who described their mental reactions and how they changed their views on a plane of existence where they could think things out free from prejudices and inherited standards of this world.

Actors like Lionel Barrymore and Ellen Terry, and writers like Oscar Wilde and Rupert Brooke explained how they have developed their creative talents and what people like Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw are doing now. Theologians and spiritual leaders like Cosmo Gordon Lang, once Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mahatma Gandhi came back to disentangle the truth from dogma in established religion.

Between them they replaced fear of physical death by a new, natural law of universal immortality. And gave us some of the answers to questions man has asked down the ages.

30

FOUR
I Must be Dead

What is it like to die?

The prospect from this side of the grave is not inviting. Fearful. Painful. If we are lucky, quick. For most of us something we prefer not to think of.

Could we have got it wrong? The message from the other side is rather different. Nothing much to worry about. Just a natural transition from one kind of existence to another.

None of the voices who came back to describe to Woods and Betty Greene what happened to them remember being frightened or in pain. Most of them took quite a while to realize they were not still alive. The moment of death for all of them, was a dream which changed imperceptibly to a new sense of reality. Intellectually puzzling. With little emotion, physical sensation or fear. Their main worry was why the folk they had left behind were scurrying round in such a panic and could not see that they were still alive, happy and well.

As soon as a communicating spirit has mastered the problem of turning his thoughts into words through the ectoplasmic voice box, he usually starts talking with all the eagerness of a traveler ringing up at the end of a long journey to give his impressions of his destination. Betty Greene takes the first opportunity to steer him to telling him what interests us most by putting her stock opening question:

'Could you give us your reaction on finding you were dead?'

This was the question she put to a voice who introduced himself on 11 April 1959, as a Sussex farmer called George Hopkins.

Instead of answering her he launched into a monologue on religion. Mrs Greene let him run on, and waited for a pause.

31

'Mr Hopkins,' she interrupted.

'What, love?'

'Can you give us,' she said firmly, 'any idea of how you passed over?'

This time he clicked.

'Oh yes,' he replied. 'I can soon tell you that. Well, I just had a stroke, or seizure, or heart attack. Or something of that sort. As a matter of fact I was harvesting. I felt a bit peculiar, thought it was the sun and went down in the 'edge. I felt a bit drowsy, a bit peculiar, and must have dozed off. But dear, oh dear, I had such a shock.

'I woke up, as I thought. The sun had gone down. And there was me, or what appeared to be me. I couldn't make it out at all, I was that puzzled. I tried to shake myself to wake myself up. I thought well, this is funny. I must be dreaming. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. It never struck me at all that I was dead.

'Anyway I found myself walking along the road to the doctor's. I thought well, perhaps he can help me. I knocked on the door: but no one answered. I thought well, I shouldn't have thought he would have been out because people were going in the surgery door.

'I saw one or two of my old cronies. They all sort of seemed to walk through me. No one seemed to make any comment about me. I thought this is a how-de-do.

'I stood there for a bit trying to work it out. Then I saw someone hurrying down the road like mad to the doctor's. He rushed in, pushed past me and everybody, and next moment I heard them talking about me. I thought what the hell's wrong? I'm here! I heard them say I was dead!

'The doctor went in his car up the road, and I thought I don't know about being dead. I can't be dead. I'm here. How the hell can I be dead?

'Then I thought to myself 'that's funny. I saw myself lying down. But when you're dead you're done for. You're in heaven or hell. I'm certainly not in heaven and not in hell. I'm 'ere, listenin' to what they're talkin' about.' Gradually I suppose it dawned on me that I must be dead.

'The next thing I saw was them picking up my body and bringing it back. They put me in the Chapel. 'Oh dear,' I thought, 'this is the last straw. I must be dead. I've heard about people dying and I've had it now. I suppose the best thing to do is to go and see the parson. He's sure to know something.'

'So I went up to the vicarage and waited. I saw him come in and sit at his desk. I noticed that nothing was solid. If I sat in the chair - in a sense I sat and yet I didn't - I didn't feel any weight under me.

'I saw the old parson. He came in, walked right past me, went to his desk, started to write letters and doing things. I started talking to him. And he didn't take any notice!

'I thought 'he's like the rest of them. I should have thought he would know something.' So I tapped him on the shoulder.

'Once he turned round as if he thought something was there, and I thought, 'I'm getting on a bit there,' so I tapped him again. He didn't take any notice. Then he got up and sort of shook himself and then I think he was shivering. It was quite a decent sort of morning. I could see no reason why he should have felt cold. Anyway, he didn't seem to realize I was there at all. I thought 'I'm not getting anywhere here.''

George Hopkins sounds a simple soul. Unable by training or education, to work out what was happening without help. Is it any easier for an intellectual?

In 1957, Woods and Mrs Greene were sitting and waiting on a normal Monday morning session. The silence was broken by an upper class voice saying: 'Good morning. I am not quite sure if you can hear me.'

'Yes,' replied Woods. 'We can hear you quite well.'

The voice continued: 'My name is Brooke. Rupert Brooke.'

'Oh, how lovely,' exclaimed Mrs Greene.

Woods' thoughts flew back to the war. When early in 1915 a sonnet by the lyrical poet of Edwardian youth had caught the imagination of all Britain:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England ...

A few months later Brooke died on an island in the Aegean. His voice was stilled: never to be heard again.

Now it was claiming to speak to them in a darkened London room:

'It has been suggested to me that it might be interesting if I make a contact. I really in a sense don't quite know what I can do, or in what way I can possibly be of any service.'

'Well,' said Mrs Greene. 'Shall I tell you, and it perhaps might help you. We would like to know how you passed over, and how you found yourself.'

Brooke launched out into a monologue on the difficulties of speaking into the voice box, then wandered off into a muddled account of his new life and the problems involved in trying to write poetry in the English of the fifties.

'I'm sorry,' he ended lamely. 'Awful mess.'

'Come along,' coaxed Mrs Greene. 'Can you tell us how you passed over?'

'I came over in the First World War,' he replied. 'It was all very sudden. It seemed as if I was in a body which no longer seemed, at first, to be the same, and yet in appearance it was the same. I just couldn't understand it. I just didn't realize I had died.

'Everything seemed in a sense quite natural, and yet the body I was using seemed to be foreign to me. I didn't feel it had any weight. There was a terrible lightness about myself.

'I pinched myself and was startled to find that I did not feel anything. That worried me terribly. Then I had one or two shocks when I realized people didn't see me ... I thought if I can't feel myself when I pinch myself, why should a person see me who was still on earth in the old body? I thought it must be that I am on some vibrational rate which is not common on Earth, and therefore people can't see me.

I could see other people but they couldn't see me. It all seemed so strange.

'I remember vividly sitting beside a river and looking at myself, and not seeing myself. I could see no reflection. I thought, 'That seems most extraordinary. I have a body and yet it has no reflection.' I couldn't adjust myself at all. I was going round to various people that I had known, trying to tell them that I was alive and well, and they just didn't realize I was there.

'I realized that the reason they couldn't see me was because if my body didn't have a reflection, it couldn't be solid to them. It couldn't be on the same vibration: it couldn't be the same sort of matter. I had to adjust myself to the fact that I had a body which was to all outward appearances the same, and yet obviously was not a real body from the point of view of Earth. Therefore I was in what I suppose one would term

a spiritual body, and yet I was not particularly spiritual. I was puzzled and bewildered.'

Brooke's approach to the problem was more intellectual than Hopkins'. His bewilderment was almost the same. Both of them died a fairly natural death. Hopkins had a heart attack. Brooke died from blood poisoning. Is violent death different? This is how one of the 7000 Britons killed on the roads every year described his death on 10 February 1964.

Ted Butler was doing his Saturday shopping with his wife in Leeds. Then . . . 'I was crossing the road, and before you could say Jack Robinson, something hit me. It was some lorry that I think got out of control down the slope. It got me pinned against the wall and I was out.'

No memory of pain.

'I just remember,' he continued, 'something coming towards me, and that's all. It all happened so sudden.'

Mrs Greene interrupted to make sure. 'How did you actually find yourself?'

'Well,' he replied, 'I don't know. All I know is that I saw a crowd of people all standing looking down at something. I 'ad a look with the crowd and saw someone who looked exactly like me!

'At first I didn't realize it was me. I thought, 'That's a coincidence. That fellow looks the same as, I do. It might be a twin brother.' I didn't cotton on. Then I realized that my wife was there crying her eyes out. She didn't seem to realize I was standing beside her.

'They put my body in an ambulance, and the wife got in, and some nurse. I got in and sat with my wife and she didn't seem to realize I was sitting there at all. Then gradually it came on me that that was me lying down there.

'I went to the hospital. Of course they put me in the mortuary. I didn't like that at all. So I got out quick and went home. There was the wife, Mrs Mitchen next door, trying to comfort her. I think that was the worst time of the lot.

'Then there was the funeral. Of course I went to that. I thought to meself, 'All this fuss and expense for nothing, because here I was.' I thought it's all very touching, but at the same time it all seemed so damn silly, because there I was. Nobody took any notice.

'The old parson was standing there reciting away. I thought, 'He should know if anyone knows.' So I went and stood beside him, and kept nudging him with me elbow in the side. He didn't take any notice at all. He just went on with his ritual.

'Then there was the gravediggers. I knew one of them, old Tom Corbett. He was a case he was. I'd many a pint with him and a laugh. He filled in the hole, and the other bloke filled in the old coffin and the grave. I thought this is a fine how-d'you-do. I'm not staying down here with this lot, so I got out.

'I must have hung around my house for weeks I should think. Once or twice I would go on the old trams. At first I was sort of all mixed up. But I used to have a laugh too sometimes. If the Corporation knew I was sitting in here not paying my fare, they would say something.'

Then he noticed something else.

'I began to realize that everyone sitting in that tram wasn't paying their fare either. One of the first real conversations I had was with a woman sitting next to me. I thought she seemed very sort of nice and all that. She started up a conversation.

'What are you doing 'ere?'

'I thought, 'That's a fine way to open up a conversation.' So I said: 'What do you mean what am I doing here? I might as well be here as anywhere else.'

''I know,' she says. 'But you ought to be doing something, not just going up and down in trams and buses and going worrying your wife. You can't do anything that way.'

'Well,' I said. 'It's all very well for you. But where do you go then?'

Of course I realized that she was dead. I thought 'What's she doing on the same lark as me?'

''As a matter of fact,' she says, 'I've been coming up and down in the trams and the buses with you for some time. But you probably never noticed me until just now. I've been waiting for a chance to try to give you a hand."

Ted Butler had reached the end of the first stage of death. He had met the guide who was to take him from this world to the next.

FIVE
Guide to the Next World

Ted Butler was dead. Riding on a tram in Leeds, invisible to his fellow travelers still in this world. Talking to the first person who could see and hear him and had just offered to help.

'What can you do?' he asked.

'Well,' she replied. 'Don't you think it's time you got away out of these conditions? It's only your thoughts that's holding you down. You want to do more than this surely, than hanging about Earth. Nobody takes any notice of you. What's the point of it?'

Butler recalled his first conversation as a spirit.

''Well, some sense in that,' I says. 'It's true nobody takes any notice. But I find it's better than sort of - well, not bothering at all. In any case I don't know of anything else.'

''That's your fault,' she says. 'It's your state of mind that keeps you down here. If you was to release your thoughts and think about things of a higher thought and nature, you'd get away from all this. Of course I understand it's partly due to the way you passed, the suddenness of it, and the thought vibrations of your wife and mother, and one or two others holding you down. But you ought to get away from all this. You come with me.'

''Well, where're we going?'

''Oh, I'll take you. Don't you worry.'

''Well, shall we get off at the next stop?'

''What do you mean, get off at the next stop,' she says.

'It's not necessary to wait and get off at the next stop. We can get off whenever we want to, once you've made up your mind.'

''I don't understand that.'

''You should know by now,' she says, 'that although

you can get in a bus and sit on the bus and get off at the stop and get on at the picking up place and all that, you don't have to. You don't have to do what everybody else does. You're only doing things out of habit. You've got to get out of those habits and realize now that these things are unimportant, and by the mere thought you can transfer from this condition.'

''Well, I don't know.'

'Look,' she says. 'Here's my hand. You hold my hand, just close your eyes, and try not to think of anything in particular. Just make your mind a sort of blank.'

'So I did as she told me.'

Ted Butler was about to take off on the journey to his new home with the help that we are told is sent automatically to everyone who dies - the guide to the next world.

From all recorded accounts, few seem to be able to take this step on their own. Almost everyone who steps out of his dead body appears to remain earthbound till met by a dead relation or trained guide who can coax him away from his earthly ties and lead him to the unknown.

George Hopkins whom we left outside the Vicarage wondering why the Vicar didn't recognize him, seemed compelled to hang around for several days to attend his own funeral.

'They were carrying my body,' he said, 'down the old churchyard in the box, and they .put me there with the old lady. It suddenly dawned on me about Poll, my wife. I thought, 'That's funny. If it's as how I'm dead, I should be with her. Where is she?'

'I was standing there watching them putting this body of mine in the grave. After the ceremony I was walking behind them down the path. There, right in front of me coming up towards me, was my wife!

'But not my wife as I had known her, in the last few years of her life. But as I first knew her when she was a young girl. She looked beautiful, really beautiful. And with her I could see one of my brothers who died when he was about seventeen or eighteen. A nice looking boy who was fair-haired. They were laughing and joking and coming up

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towards me. I thought well here I am and there they are, so I'm all right. They're sure to know what to do now.

'My wife and brother made a proper fuss of me, saying how sorry they were that they were late.

'They said: 'We knew you hadn't been too well, but we had no idea you were coming as sudden as you were. We got the message but we're sorry we couldn't get here quicker.'

'I thought that's odd. How the hell do they get about? I knew I'd got about, but as far as I was concerned I seemed to be walking about, same as I did before, except that everything was much lighter. I didn't seem to have any heaviness of the body, and no more aches and pains like I used to have. They started to try to explain things to me, but they wouldn't say too much. They said I'd got to get sort of adjusted and settled.

'So I said: 'You talk about settling in. Where the deuce do we settle in? Nobody here seems to want to have anything to do with us, and nobody seems to take any notice.'

''Oh, that's all right. Don't worry about them.'

'I told them about the parson.

''You don't want to go and see him,' they said. 'He's the last one to go and see. He knows less than some other people. You're all right.'

'But where do we go?'

''We're going to take you to our home.' ''Where's that?'

''Oh, we can't tell you exactly where it is,' they said. 'But we can take you there, and you'll soon realize its home all right. You'll recognize it.'

''How can I recognize it? I've never been there.'

''Oh yes you have. Many times when you've been asleep. As a matter of fact you know it quite well.'

'I started to think: 'Well, I don't remember. I used to have some odd dreams. Once or twice I remember dreaming about a very pretty place with a lovely garden, and my old dog Rover was there, that died many years ago. I remember I used to think I was just dreaming.'

''No, that wasn't dreaming,' they said. 'That was you.

That was you with us when you was asleep. When your body was asleep your mind was free, and you could travel and be with us.'

''Well it sounds very nice, I must say.'

''Don't you realize that you're different?' they said.

''Well, I feel different. I don't feel old. I don't have the old aches and pains like I used to.'

''Have you seen yourself?'

''No, I never thought of that.'

''Well, come on, we'll show you.'

'I thought, 'Well, this is going to be interesting to see myself.' And then, 'I could have looked in a mirror.'

''Oh no,' they said. 'Not in a mirror.'

'So they took me to what appeared to be a very beautiful place with a lovely setting, lovely scenery, and beautiful houses, more countrified than townified. And they took me to one in a very beautiful field. And it was just the same little place that I had dreamed, or thought I had dreamed about. And there I was as I was in my dreams some years ago.

'I remember once waking up in the early hours of the morning and remembering this, and I thought this is an odd do. It was exactly the same!'

Butler and Hopkins may have been slightly unlucky in the time they had to wait for their guides. With Alfred Higgins, a Brighton painter and decorator, the celestial greetings machine seems to have moved swiftly.

On 14 October 1963 he announced himself in the usual way. Betty Greene began with her usual opening question: 'Can you tell me, Mr Higgins, how you passed over, and your reactions?'

'I fell off a ladder,' he replied promptly. 'I wasn't killed outright, but I was unconscious and I died in hospital. Of course this is quite a few years ago now. I was a painter and decorator. You come from the Brighton area, don't you?'

'Yes I do,' replied Mrs Greene.

'I lived in Brighton for a time,' said Higgins.

'Whereabouts in Brighton?'

'It's a good many years ago now, and like so many places it's changed quite a bit, hasn't it? At the back of the Old Steine.'

'At the back of the Old Steine?' 'Yes.'

'Mr Higgins, can you tell me your reactions on passing over? How you found yourself.'

'How I what ?'

'How you found yourself and your reactions when you did pass over.'

'Well,' replied Higgins, 'when I first had any sort of realization or consciousness of what was happening to me, I was lying on a sort of bank overlooking a river. I couldn't make head or tail of it. I couldn't make out where I was. I didn't recognize the spot and I couldn't think how I got there. Then I saw someone coming towards me dressed in what looked to me as if he was a monk. But I realized of course later that it wasn't. But he'd got a sort of long habit on, and he looked to be a benevolent gentleman, and quite young. I thought he's a young person to be a monk. As a matter of fact, quite frankly, I thought at the time that he looked just like Jesus. At least what I'd seen pictures of Jesus. But I realized of course it wasn't afterwards. He came and stood beside me and spoke to me: 'Ah, you've arrived.'

'I says: 'Arrived? I don't quite know what you mean?' 'He says: 'You don't realize then that you're here, where you are?'

''No,' I says. 'All I know is I don't recognize this place. It's very beautiful.'

''You're dead, you know.'

''What?'

''Yes. You're dead.'

''I'm not dead. How can I be dead? I wouldn't be able to see.'

'I felt myself.

''Look,' I says. 'I'm not dead. I'm solid.'

''Ah,' he says. 'There are a lot of people seem to think that when they're dead they're either nothing at all, or if they're dead that they go up to heaven, or they go to some

other place like hell. There's no such place as heaven, and there's no such place as hell. You are in a condition of life which is as real, as you can see for yourself, as anything you've ever known before. Life beyond what you call death is a state of mind. Your condition at the moment is perhaps a little bewildered. But you're not unhappy, and certainly you seem, as far as I can tell, quite at ease. You seem quite calm and placid. You're not over anxious about anything in particular are you?'

''No,' I says. 'But now I'm beginning to realize that what you say is so. I must admit I'm a bit concerned about my people. It must be a terrible shock for them, you know. I've no recollection of dying. I don't remember anything bar falling. At least I had a feeling I was falling, and then I don't remember no more.'

''Well of course,' he says. 'You died in hospital.'

''Oh, did I?'

''Would you like to go back for just a little while to see your people?' he says. 'Do you think that would help you?'

''Well it would be interesting, wouldn't it. I would like to see them.'

''They won't,' he says, 'take any notice of you, you know.'

''Oh. Why not?'

''Well,' he said, 'they won't realize that you're there because they can't see you and they won't hear you if you speak to them.'

''Well, not much point in going then, is there?'

''Well, it's up to you.'

''I'll go,' I says. 'It's possible that Ada - that's my wife - she might - I'd like to see how she's getting on, anyway.'

''All right. Let's go.' '

Sometimes, soon after death, either while still tied to this world, or soon after arriving in the next, people seem to get an overwhelming urge to visit those they loved best and have got to leave behind. Always they are warned it will be little comfort to them or their families. Almost always they go.

So it was with Alfred Higgins.

SIX
Family Visit

Alfred Higgins had decided to visit his family still in this world before setting off for the next. He turned to his guide.

''Well how do we get there then?'

''You just come with me,' he said. 'We'll just walk up this road.'

'I climbed up the hillside and on to the road. As we walked along he says, 'Just take my hand.' I felt a bit peculiar, you know. I thought it sounds a bit silly me holding someone's hand like this. But still he said hold his hand so I held it. It seemed so strange, but as soon as I touched his hand it was just as if everything went sort of peculiar, as if everything gradually seemed to disappear. It was as if I was sort of going to sleep in a kind of way, yet it wasn't like sleep. It was just a sort of lack of understanding and realization of things around and about me. I became sort of unconscious I suppose.

'The next thing I knew I was standing in our kitchen, and I was watching my wife. She was standing over the sink peeling some potatoes. I thought I wonder if she knows I'm here, and I called her name. She didn't say nothing. She didn't hear me. My friend says: 'She won't hear you, you know.'

''Well I don't know. What could I do?'

''Nothing you could do,' he says. 'But she may sense your presence. You never know. Let's just wait a little while.'

'Then he says to me: 'Concentrate your thought on her. Just think hard. Think as hard as you can. Think her name.'

'I did. And all of a sudden she stood up and looked. She dropped the knife and potato she was peeling, and she looked round. Proper bewildered she looked, almost scared.

I was rather sorry in a way that I'd scared her. I realized it must have been me trying to get at her. She just flew out of that kitchen. She opened the door, and then sort of shut it again, and then she sat down,

put her head on the table and started to cry. I felt awful about this. I thought, 'Oh dear, this is terrible.'

''Don't worry,' he said. 'She senses. She knows in herself, she doesn't understand yet, but she knows in herself that you're near her.'

''Well, if I'm going to make her miserable like this, there's not much point, is there?'

''Don't let that worry you,' he says, 'This often happens. They don't know with any certainty. They've never been told about life after death. They've never been told about the possibility of communication and all that sort of thing. But she'll come ... she senses ... she feels, and deep down in herself, deep down inside, she knows.'

''Isn't there nothing I can do?'

''Nothing,' he says. 'This is not the time. You must wait. Later on perhaps we'll be able to do something.'

''Well what do we do now?'

''I don't think you can do much good here. I think the best thing for us is to go back.'

''All right.' Then I says: 'But I would like to go to one or two other places before we go back, if I may.'

''Well where do you want to go?'

''I thought: I'd like to see various friends.'

''Well, all right.'

''Do you mind coming into a pub?'

'He laughed when I said that.

''You don't mind do you?' I says. 'It seems a strange question for me to ask an angel to come into a pub.'

''Oh, we often go into pubs and places,' he says. 'And I'm not an angel.'

''Well I was under the impression that since you've been here, highly respectable and all that, you must be. But I noticed you haven't got any wings.'

'He laughed again.

''Of course,' he says, 'you don't have wings. That's the old idea that a lot of religious people get on earth. That's

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because they always think that people when they die, that is good people, fly up into heaven. And in the early days they used to think the only way to get up in the sky was to sprout wings like birds!'

'He had a wonderful sense of humour, and I felt so settled with him, I says: 'I would like to go to this pub.' ''All right.'

'I thought to myself this is going to be a bit awkward, because he obviously wouldn't know where the pub is, and I don't know how to get there on my own, not as I am now situated, with no physical body as you call it.

''I know what you are thinking,' he says. 'You just think of the place, close your eyes, and we'll be there.'

'I thought, 'This is all right.' He put his hand out to me. I thought, 'I suppose I put my hand in his again.' So I did.

'The next thing I knew I was standing in the bar of this pub, and there were three of my old mates there. I went and stood beside one, and I remembered what I'd been told to do about the wife - to concentrate, think hard. He'd got this mug of beer up to his mouth, and I was thinking to myself his name, and all of a sudden he dropped it on the counter. He looked quite bewildered.

'He looked round, and said to his mates, my other two friends: 'That's funny. I felt sure I heard, I felt sure I heard ...'

''Heard what?'

''Didn't you hear nothing?'

''No, we didn't hear nothing.'

'He thought, I suppose, he was making a bit of a fool of himself.

''Oh,' he says. 'It's nothing.'

'They laughed and said: 'What's up with you mate? You got the jitters?'

'But he heard me all right. It was done by my thoughts. One of the first things I realized was that you don't have to talk to be heard. You've got to concentrate hard. It's a matter of thinking all the time that you want to

get into touch, or you want to do something, and then it's possible. You just can't do it by speaking out in the old way, you know. It was my first lesson in this sort of thing.'

46

Alfred Higgins seemed to find it hard to make the break and get away, even with the immediate services of a guide. It was even harder for a London cockney who gave his name as Harry in 1957 and admitted that his only relaxation had been the pub.

'I used to like to drink,' he said. 'I'm afraid my idea of a good time was going to the old pub and staying till they chucked me out. When I pegged out I couldn't get rid of the desire to go in a pub.'

It sounds, from his account, a fairly frustrating experience. But at first he wasn't worried.

'When I passed out,' he explained, 'I could neither drink nor natter. But somehow I used to get a certain satisfaction going around the pubs and seeing my old friends and listening to their conversation and seeing others having a drink.'

When he got bored with this, he decided to fill in some gaps in his life on earth and see something of the world.

'It suddenly dawned on me,' he explained, 'if I can be in the 'Rose and Crown', I could be in Timbucktoo. So I decided to have a trip round the world.'

Then even free traveling got boring with no one to speak to. He remembered his Sunday school.

'We used to be taught a lot of stuff about going to Heaven, and all the rest of it. I wasn't happy neither .. . Deep down inside me I suppose there was a desire to have more.

'Then, I began to be conscious of someone following me. That got on my bloody wick it did for a time. I thought, 'Who the hell's this?' I'd look round. No one there. Then one day I thought 'I'll get to the bottom of this.'

'It suddenly dawned on me that perhaps if I sort of got away from the old conditions like, and sort of settled down quiet like, and threw out my thoughts for someone to come and help, I'd get some help. So I went down to a little place I'd been to when I was a kid, a place in Suffolk.'

He fell silent.

'Yes,' said Woods encouragingly.

'Go on,' said Betty Greene. 'This is awfully. interesting.' Harry went on, describing a tree by a stream where he had sat and day-dreamed as a boy.

47

Then, 'Standing right in front of me was a figure of a young fellow - I should think he would be about twentythree. Fair-haired, curly, nice looking, and he'd got on a suit.

'There was this guy, standing there in front of me, and he looks at me and I looks at him and neither of us spoke a blasted word. I thought this is hallucination. It can't be. I never said a word. Neither did he. And yet all of a sudden it was just as if his mind sort of entered my mind, I don't know how it happened quite, even now. I could hear him in a kind of a way within myself sort of saying, 'It's up to you chum, see.'

'I thought yes, up to me what? Then I felt as if I was being mesmerized or something. I stood up and he gradually backed away. I said to myself: 'The bloody fool. If he goes much further he'll fall in that water,' because there was this stream at the bottom as I told you. But no, he didn't. He got down to the bottom, and there was me sort of gradually following him. He got to the water's edge and I thought, 'Here goes now boy, you're going to have it now.' But no, he didn't. It was just as if he walked across the water.

'I don't know why, but that very self same moment when it was happening, I thought of myself at Sunday school. I remembered talking about Jesus walking across the water. But this man can't be Jesus. I was in a proper stew, I tell you, one way and another. I didn't know whether I was coming or going.

'Here was him going backwards. And here was me following him in a kind of trance. I felt a bit of a fool actually, but still, I couldn't resist. I couldn't go backwards. I had to keep following him.

'All of a sudden it was just as if someone had put me in a bloody lift or something. Here was me going up in the air! Of course he was up in the air and all. I thought, 'Christ, I'll shut my eyes to this bit.' I was in a proper state, in a proper panic I was. It suddenly seemed as if I was floating miles up in the air. Everything seemed to get further and further away - the chimneys of the houses, and

48

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the treetops. And it suddenly seemed as if we were up in the clouds, and I could see a plane coming along and it was just as if it was coming straight at me. I thought, 'Oh blimey, I hope I can go quicker than that.' And yet I thought to myself at the same time - it's funny how you think of three or four things all at once in this business. I thought he can't touch me anyway, because I'm supposed to be dead.

'Anyway I was with this chappy - it was just as if we were floating together - and somehow, or in some peculiar way, as we were going higher and higher it seemed as if we were coming closer together. I can't explain this. But all of a sudden it was just as if there was a singing noise in my ear and I lost consciousness.

'Then it was as if I'd come back from a kind of sleep. I suddenly found myself in a very nice room. Very nice it was. Not posh exactly, but clean and comfortable. Nice bed, nice sheets, everything polished, clean, and light streaming through the window. I saw birds - I mean there were birds singing outside - and I thought to myself, 'Where am I ? I can't make head nor tail of this.' I couldn't make anything of it at all, so I thought the thing is to lie back and relax. No good getting in a panic.

'Then the door opened, and, dear oh dear, you could have knocked me down with a feather. The door opened, and it was - my mother!'

Harry had finally made it. Everyone seems to get there in the end. But his experience was hardly typical. For the average sober citizen who leads a normal life, the evidence suggests that the journey from this world to the next can take little longer than commuting on the 8.20 from suburban home to office on a normal working day. Like the journey of a Mr Biggs of Buckinghamshire who described it to Woods and Greene in 1966 in the detailed, down to earth style of a police officer giving evidence on a routine case in a magistrate's court.

'Mr Woods?' he began in a quiet, matter of fact voice. 'Yes,' replied Woods.

'That's right,' answered the voice. 'Mrs Greene. Yes,

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that's right. Heard such a lot about you one way and another. Yes, about the work you do. It's very interesting.'

The voice was elderly. Non-U. But with no identifiable accent. Perhaps the voice of a country craftsman or shopkeeper with little formal education but a natural gift of expression.

'Are you recording this?' he asked. 'Yes.'

'That's right. Yes, I've heard quite a bit about you from various people over here. And Mrs Greene too. You do what you call this tape recording, don't you?'

'Yes,' said Betty Greene.

'And play it for people to listen to, so that they know something about what goes on. That's right.'

'Can you give us a talk friend,' said Betty Greene.

'Me? Oh dear, oh dear! I'm not the sort of person who could give you a talk like some of the people here.'

'Well can't you tell us how you passed over, and how you found yourself?

'Oh, I died.'

'Can you tell us how you found yourself, your reactions on finding yourself so-called dead?

'Oh yes. I was sitting in my chair, and I was reading the newspaper which had just come. I felt a bit sort of odd like, and I thought that's funny. I took my specs off, put them on the table and thought well, just sit quiet for a minute, and it'll pass off. The next thing I knew was that I was sitting there, but I wasn't there. I was sort of standing, so it seemed to me, by the chair, looking at myself! And there was the newspaper on the table, my glasses, and I thought this is odd. Very strange. I couldn't make head or tail of this at all.

'Then I was conscious of the fact that there was someone knocking at the door. I was standing there sort of looking at myself sitting in the chair, and yet it was as if I could hear this knocking at the door and at the same time I was able to see who was knocking, yet I was still standing in the room. It was my sister. She lived a few doors down the road. I thought, 'Oh dear, what am I doing to do ? I can't open the door.' I was in a proper state of panic.

'This knocking went on, and I was getting all flustered like, thinking I was dreaming or something and hoping I'd wake up and go and open the door to my sister. But nothing happened. And then I could see her going down the path. She was looking proper upset and agitated. I thought 'I don't know. What do I do?'

'After what must have been only a few minutes, she came back with a policeman. Oh dear, what'd she go and fetch a policeman for? And it suddenly dawned on me. Of course she couldn't get in. Perhaps she was worried or upset about me. And yet, I thought, there's nothing I can do about it. So I sort of just stood there beside myself. It sounds silly when you say that. I thought if she comes in and sees me slumped in that chair like that she'll get quite a fright. I must try to wake myself up. So I shook myself like mad, and nothing happened. I thought what am I going to do?

'Eventually the policeman got in at the window. He came into the room and I recognized him. I'd seen him many a time on the beat. It was quite a time before I could understand what was going on. He shook me. He thought I was asleep same as I did. Nothing happened. He realized I was dead. He opened the door. Of course my sister came in.

'She was in a proper state. Of course that was all I had left, my sister, at that time. May. They went for the doctor. Old Dr Foskett came, but he was no bloody good anyway. I mean he couldn't do anything for me. It was obvious. I realized that I'd had it.

'I was trying to calm down my sister. She didn't take any notice of me. I went and stood and sort of put my hand on her shoulder and tried to tell her I was all right, it was not me that was there, that I was standing beside her. But she didn't seem to cotton on at all. She just sat there.

'Then the doctor went, and they came and took the body away. They slumped it down like an old sack of potatoes. I thought, 'I'm not going after them. I'm going to stay here in my home. I might as well sit down in my chair now its empty.' So I sat down and tried to think it all out. My sister had gone and I was alone in the house.

51

'All of a sudden it was just as if the fireplace disappeared. It's the only way I can describe it. And there, where the fireplace was, it was as if the wall had disappeared, and I could see beautiful green fields, and trees, and a little sort of - I was going to say river but it was more like a brook. And I could see something - something - at first I didn't know what it was, coming up towards me in the distance. I made it out and it was a figure. It was my mother.

'Dear oh dear. She looked, oh as I'd seen her in the picture which I'd still got in the room hanging up on the wall - my mother when she was first married. She came right up what was the fireplace towards me, and she was smiling all over her face, as happy as a sandboy.

''Come on,' she says, 'You don't want to stay here. It's no good you sitting here. No one's going to take any notice of you. May won't realize, you know. You have to come and be with me.'

''I don't understand.'

''You know it's all over now,' she says. 'You've had it. You know, you're dead, you see. You don't want to stop here slumped in that old chair. This room ... what a fine old pickle you've been living in.'

'She started telling me about the way I'd let myself go. I suppose I had, over the years, living on my own. My old dog had died some time previous, and I hadn't the heart to get another one, because I knew jolly well that I wouldn't live that long to see it out, and it wouldn't be fair on the poor animal.

''You come with me,' she says. 'I've got Mick.' ''Mick?' That was my other dog.

''Mick, yes. We've been looking after old Mick for you.' ''Oh, I'd love to see old Mick,' I said. 'I went with my mother.'

Mr Briggs was on his way from this world to the next. It's time to go with him and see what happens when you arrive.

52

SEVEN
A Talk from Mother

'It was funny,' said Mr Biggs, 'going through what had been my fireplace into this lovely sort of countryside. As we was walking, my mother was nattering away to me telling me all sorts of things.

''How is father?' I said.

''Oh, I see him,' she said. 'I'm not with him, you know because we was separated.'

'Of course I knew all about that. I knew they'd never got on too well.

''I see him,' she says. 'But we're not together. I live with my own people.'

'That's her mother, my grandmother. And also Florrie, her favourite sister who died many years ago when I was a lad.

''Florrie and I,' she says, 'we were like peas in a pod. The same in every sense. You know how upset I was when she died.'

''Oh I vaguely remember that,' I said.. 'I was only a nipper then.'

''Oh well, Florrie and me get on, and we do hospital work.'

''What?'

''We do hospital work.'

''Hospitals,' I says. 'You don't have hospitals? If you're dead you don't need it. You've no aches and pains. What do you want hospitals for?'

''Oh,' she says. 'Well, they aren't in the same way as you know hospitals. But they're necessary for certain types of people who are mentally unsettled and need guidance and help. It's interesting work and I'm happy doing it. And I have a lot to do with the young people too, because - you know your brother Art, I often see him. We're very near.'

53

''Art?' I says. 'I don't remember having a brother Art.' ''Oh no,' she says. 'You wouldn't remember because he died in infancy before you were born.'

''Oh,' I says. 'I vaguely remember something about it.' ''Yes,' she says. 'He died as a baby but he grew up.' ''It don't make sense to me.'

''Oh well, a lot of things won't make sense to you,' she says, 'until you've been here for a time. Then you'll get used to the habit of understanding. These things don't suddenly come to you. You have to be patient.'

''Well what about my stuff back home?' I said. 'What's going to happen to that?'

''Look,' she says, 'don't you start worrying about that. In any case a lot of it wasn't much good, was it?'

''Well, I don't know, it might not have been much good to you,' I said, 'but it was to me. After all . . .'

''Look,' she says. 'Don't think about those things. Try to get your mind away from it.'

''Well if I'm going to have a funeral I ought to be there.'

''Oh well, don't talk about that now,' she says. 'We'll see.'

''OK. I would like to see who turns up,' I said. 'Not that there's many that would, I don't suppose. But there's my old pal Alfie.'

''Oh, forget it.'

'She was nattering away to me. Funny thing I said she was nattering. It was as if she was nattering, yet she wasn't opening her mouth. It suddenly dawned on me I could hear her speaking to me, and yet she wasn't saying anything. That is she wasn't speaking. So I stopped still.

''Come on,' she said.

''But I don't understand it. You're speaking to me, and yet your mouth's not moving. It's like a ventriloquist,' I says. 'Funny, isn't it?'

'Oh you'll soon learn over here to speak by your thoughts, and, after all,' she says. 'You're receiving what I'm saying. You're hearing me aren't you?'

''Yes,' I says, 'but you're not actually speaking. At least it don't look as if you are.'

''Oh you'll get into the habit,' she says. 'Come on, don't let that worry you. You'll understand a lot of things ere long.'

'I thought, 'I don't know.' Real puzzled, I was.

'Then we came to a bridge. Funny about this bridge. As we were going over it, I says to myself - and I didn't realize she could hear me as I was saying it to myself, didn't speak out loud - 'Oh, this bridge. I know this bridge. This is the bridge that used to be in a little place when we were nippers.'

''Yes, that's right,' she said.

''That's funny,' I says. 'How's that come over here? If I'm dead, how is it like this? The bridge that I remember used to be near the old village.'

''Oh well,' she says. 'You'll understand. Over here we've got the sort of replica of everything. I'm taking you here because it brings back happy memories and it'll help you. You remember the little village and the people had all that ?'

'Yes.'

''Well, it's here.'

''How can it be here? It was in Buckinghamshire years ago.'

''Yes, that's right,' she says. 'This is the same, but not the same in a way. But it'll be as real to you as that place.' ''I don't understand. I give up.'

''Well you will boy. Don't worry.' Then she says: 'We're going to May's.'

''Who?' I say. ''May's.' ''Aunt May?' ''Yes.'

''Well she died years ago.'

''Of course she did. So did I. Have you forgotten?' ''Oh blimey no.'

'Didn't know what I was saying half the time, when I come to think about it.

''We'll go and see May,' she said. ''She lives in the village.' ''Yes, she still does.'

55

''It don't make sense.'

''Nothing'll make sense to you at first,' she says. 'Until you begin to learn a bit. May was always happy in the village. She always loved the little cottage she had. You know that little cottage she had at the end of the row?'

''Oh I remember that.'

''Well, you'll see it for yourself.'

'It was just as if I. was walking back into the past. There was that same little house. One of four it was, on the end. A little tiny low brick wall in the front. A little garden that my uncle used to take such a pride in. Oh it was nice. All the hollyhocks and the flowers - everything as he always liked it. And there he was, and my aunt, standing at the door.

'But oh he did look different. He was always a tall man, but he got very old and bent. There he was tall and straight as an arrow. And young and fresh looking.

'They made such a fuss of me. They took me inside, sat me down, and everything was spick and span, and clean and fresh, just as if it was on a summer's day.

'That suddenly reminded me. I thought, 'Well, I don't know. Don't feel the heat if it's a summer's day, yet it's like a summer's day. I don't see no sun, yet there's this lovely light.' And I made some talk about it.

''Oh well,' they said. 'Of course we don't have excesses of heat or cold. Its always mild and pleasant, and the light is always very nice ... Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Of course that just about floored me. 'Don't you come that lark,' I said. 'If I'm dead don't start telling me you can start making pots of tea.'

'My aunt laughed and says: 'Look, you'll understand like your mother's no doubt tried to tell you, that when you first come here, everything's made very much the same so that you'll be happy and familiar, and if you want something like that you can have it. But you'll soon realize those things aren't necessary. But if you'd like a cup of tea we'll soon have a cup of tea.'

''I never thought it was possible you could have tea when you were dead.'

''Oh well,' she says. 'I'm not going to argue with you.

56

I'll go and get it.'

'So she went out in the back, brought in this pot of tea. And the funny thing - it was the same teapot that I always remember. An old brown thing she'd had for years with the spout broken. And she'd got the same old cover on it that she was always so fond of, one that she'd knitted herself.

''Don't tell me you got that . . . You didn't bring that over with you when you pegged out?'

''No,' she says. 'But I was just as surprised as you are to find it was here. Evidently anything that really means a lot to you, if it's worth having, if it's important to you, you can have it, at least while you think about it. And if you stop thinking about it and stop thinking it's necessary, then it no longer exists for you. It only exists today because you've come, and because you're thinking of the past when you used to come to see us, and we used to make a cup o' tea. And remember that tray, that old tin tray that had them pictures, them flowers on?'

'There it was, just the same.

''Do you mean to say you've got all this stuff?'

''Only while we think about it. And since you were coming, we thought about it, and thought it would make you comfortable, and feel at home.

But as soon as we stop thinking it's important we don't need it any more.'

"I just don't get this at all,' I says.

'All this time, you know, there was my sister on Earth, bawling her eyes out. Crocodile tears really, I think. She hadn't got much time for me really. She just felt it was her duty. She wasn't a bad sort, but she got a bit fed up one way and ... mind you she had a basinful, I will say that. She'd had a so-and-so for a husband.

'Anyway, I thought well, what about this funeral. I suppose I ought to be there. Since I'm dead, I should put in an appearance.

'My mother laughed, and said: 'What do you want to go down there? You're finished with that lot. You don't want to go and see no funerals.'

"I dunno. It sounds crazy, but I'd like to see me own funeral.'

"Oh,' she says. 'If that's what you want to do, we'll go with you. In the meantime you ought to have a rest. Would you like to go to bed.'

"Oh, bed? Do you go here then?'

'Well,' she says, 'it's not necessary, but in your case it might be a good thing.'

'So to cut a long story short I went to bed.

'The next thing I knew when I woke up, I was standing in the local cemetery. And this is what annoyed me. It really did annoy me because I'd kept up my insurance and all the rest of it. There was I being put down in the grave and it was a pauper's grave. Now this really upset me something dreadful, because I'd made sure that there was enough money to have me decently buried. That's one reason, I suppose, why I wanted to go and see my own funeral.

'There was my sister, and two other people, one I recognized, the other I didn't. One was an old chap I used to know. We'd been to school together. And there was I being put down. Rain was coming down like mad. The old parson was hurrying through the service as if he'd got a train to catch. And I realized she hadn't bothered to buy a bit of ground. In a way it didn't matter, but it was the principle of the thing. I'd kept up my policies and that, and I'd left quite a nice little sum. And she did that on me! I thought, well, you wait, you bitch, till you come over here. I'll give you what for. Fancy doing that on me.

''Look,' says Mother. 'By the time she comes, you'll think different. After all ...'

''What a waste of money.'

''No, look,' she says. 'What does it matter where you're buried? It's where you are that matters, not where you're buried. And that little bit of money will tide her over now. I know the principle's wrong.'

''You're telling me the principle's wrong,' I said. 'She knew as how I was doing this to have a decent funeral.'

''What does it matter whether you have a decent funeral or not? Or whether that man stands over you and gabbles the service like an express train?'

''What does it matter?' I said.

''It makes no odds. You're here, aren't you? And you're all right aren't you?'

58

''Yes, I'm here and I'm all right.'

''Well then, stop worrying about it. After all, when they come here, whether it's the parson or your sister, they'll face up to life. They'll face up to the truth. They'll look back and have regrets. But you can't altogether blame them. They're both ignorant.

''Your sister's ignorant. She's my daughter, but she's as ignorant as they come in some ways. But she'll learn. So will the parson learn. You'll learn that it's not the body in the grave that matters, and the service and the getting it over as quick as possible, and drawing the seven and sixpence or whatever they get. Its what you are inside, what you've been yourself. Not what you pretend to be, or what you think you ought to be, or are, or what you don't believe. It's what you really are yourself that counts. And that's all that matters. Looking back, now, on your life, you never did no one any real harm, and your intentions were good. You weren't exactly an educated bloke. You weren't exactly a church-going fellow. But you weren't a bad bloke, and you did your best. You'll learn boy, you'll learn.''

59

EIGHT
So This Is Heaven

Shall we all arrive in Heaven like Mr Biggs - if our intentions are good and we never do no one real harm? Will it be hollyhocks in the garden and cosy family tea parties for us all?

Despite the volume of evidence, there are many worrying gaps in our knowledge of life in the next world. On some subjects the voices are strangely uninformative or vague. But thanks to Betty Greene's opening question and her insistence on getting an answer, one aspect of etheric life is reported as fully as a royal wedding or the World Cup - what happens when we arrive.

We left Ted Butler, killed by a lorry in Leeds, holding hands with his female guide in a tram.

'You hold my hand,' she ordered. 'Just close your eyes, and try not to think of anything in particular. Just make your mind a sort of blank.'

What happened next? Over to Ted Butler.

'So I did as she told me. I found it a bit hard. I don't know how long we must have been before we got off. I must have lost consciousness. The next thing I knew I was sitting in a very nice armchair opposite this lady in a very nice little parlour. Very nice, very pretty. Chintz curtains at the windows. There was a nice hearth rug on the floor, and a wonderful feeling of lightness and warmth, what I thought was the sun shining through the windows. Everything looked spick and span. The table was nicely laid out. It was just as if I had gone somewhere for afternoon tea. I thought, 'Where am I now?'

''I've brought you here,' she said. 'You've realized now you're in my little room.'

''Oh, that's very nice of you. I don't know what my wife would think of me for sitting in a strange woman's home!'

''Ah,' she laughed. 'You shouldn't think like that now. That's far away from you. Now we'll have a nice chat and a nice cup of tea, and I'll explain things to you.'

''That's very nice of you dear.'

''Oh, by the way,' she says, 'I'd like you to know that I've been here for many years. I came at the turn of the century.'

''Oh yes.'

''Yes,' she says. 'And I'm living with my mother.' ''Oh are you?' I says. 'Where's your mother now then?' ''She's out.'

''Does she go to work?'

'She laughed: 'I suppose you could call it work, but not work in the old way. My mother was a hard-working woman when on earth. She used to take in washing and was always doing something. Now she goes to a place where she looks after children, because she was always fond of children. Little children who died in infancy or when they were very young, and she helps to bring them up and look after them. She loves that work. She'll be back soon. So we'll have a cup of tea.'

'I thought, 'That's funny. I wonder if I'm going to taste it. When I used to go to my wife's place and they were having a cup of tea, I used to think I'd like a cup of tea, but of course I couldn't pick up the cups, and I suppose I wouldn't have tasted it.'

''Oh you will here,' she said, 'because you are in an entirely different atmosphere. You are in your natural conditions now, so everything around you will be natural and real. Now when you put out your hand you'll feel things is real, not like when you was going back to your wife. You have this cup of tea dear, and you'll taste it. It'll taste just the same as tea you have on Earth.'

'So I tasted it, and it was.

''Well, isn't that nice?'

''Yes,' I says, 'it's very nice. But who'd have thought' - I couldn't help laughing - 'who would think that people on Earth would think of us sitting up here having cups of tea .They'd think we were crazy.'

''People just don't understand,' she said. 'Here, according to how you get on, and as you progress, so you find things there for your needs. If, when you first come, you feel it's necessary to have this or that, it's provided for. But it's only a temporary thing until you've adjusted yourself to the fact that you don't need those things. I don't normally have tea or anything like that. But since you were a guest in my house and you're getting gradually accustomed to things, I thought it would help you.'

''That's very nice of you,' I said. 'You shouldn't have gone to the trouble.'

''Oh no,' she said. 'No trouble. It's part of my work.' ''Work?'

''Oh yes,' she says. 'I make a habit of going down to Earth if I can help someone like you who was earthbound.' ''What did you say?'

''Earthbound.'

''Earthbound?'

''Yes, that's what you was, poor dear. You was tied down to the Earth because of your state of mind and your thoughts. You couldn't release yourself. And that is part of my job, to help people release themselves from material things. I've traveled up and down that tram many a time with people because I used to live in that town many years ago. I'm doing my little bit. Thousands and thousands of people do that, you know, and I'm only one of them.''

Ted Butler was settling in. What happened to the others we left in the hands of the guides sent to meet them? Or just realizing that they were dead?

We left Rupert Brooke staring bewildered into a river, wondering why he could not see his reflection in the water.

'I was sitting,' he said, 'beside this river getting more and more puzzled, and not a little frightened, wondering what the next step was going to be when all of a sudden I was conscious of someone standing beside me.

'I looked. I could see no one. Yet I knew there was someone there. Then it was as if I distinctly heard a voice say: 'Come with me.'

'I thought, 'How the deuce can I go with someone when I can't see them? I don't know where they are going, and I don't know who they are.'

'Three times the voice said: 'Come with me. Close your eyes.' The next thing I knew was that I was in an entirely different place, what appeared to be a vast building, not unlike a concert hall. There were many seats, and many, many people. I was sitting and I could hear beautiful music. It seemed to have a message which I interpreted as being one of peace and quietude and rest, not to be unduly worried or concerned. I felt very much more calm.

'Gradually I began to perceive in the far distance what appeared to be an enormous panorama of changing light. All kinds of colors constantly changing from the palest shades to deep hues. Gradually the whole room seemed to be suffused with this.

'I wanted to speak to someone, and yet I was afraid almost to enunciate words. I became very conscious of someone near me saying: 'You can do it. Don't worry. You can do it.'

'I heard myself saying: 'What is this place?'

'In return I heard a voice saying: 'This is a place where you can be brought into a new being. Here the vibrations will make possible for you a new way of life. This is a cleansing station.'

'I realized there was a change coming over me. The people round and about me, I could feel, were changing in some subtle way. And yet I couldn't explain it. It seemed as if my whole body was becoming suffused with some charged power, some vitality, and everything seemed to become very much more solidified. After a short time one or two people began to move, get up and walk about and begin to speak.

'We had recently passed, and we had been brought to this place, and we were beginning to be shown how to experience the new life. I saw, as I suppose others must have seen too, what appeared to be figures, people who had not previously been there, or at least had not been apparent. Some were men and some were females. Some of the women went over to other women sitting in the auditorium and some of the men went to some of the men.

'I realized, of course much later, that these were people whose job it was to conduct these sort of initiations and to help people who, when they came over, had need for this gradual rehabilitation to a new life.

'After I had spoken to several people, I was taken to what appeared to be a park. I saw many people in many types of costume. We strolled around, and one felt that one's body was a reality. I realized that my body was functioning in harmony with my thoughts.

'I remember sitting under a tree and talking to one particular person who was my helper. I asked if it were possible to continue writing. He said, 'Of course you can if you wish. And you can, if you want, do other things. If you want to become a painter or musician there is nothing to stop you. That's the only way you can progress on this side. To go forward.'

'I felt that if only I could depict some of these experiences in such a way that I could send them back to earth, it would be a great help. I asked if it were possible. They said well, it would be possible, but not for some considerable time.

'The man smiled and said: 'Most people when they first come here are like that. They want to rush back to their friends and relations. They want to tell everyone in the world how wonderful it is in passing from your world to this. The most natural process. There is no need for all the terrible fear that people have about dying ... Don't worry about it. The time may come when you can go back and be of some service.''

The time did come. After a wait of forty-two years. It produced one of the few accounts of arriving in the next world from an intellect which tells us anything we want to know.

Any number of famous and gifted personalities queued up to talk to us through Flint, Woods and Betty Greene. From Oscar Wilde to Mahatma Gandhi and Cosmo Gordon Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury. But they had too much advice to give us on how to run our lives in this world and too much information on their academic progress in the

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next to tell us how they got there and where they put up. They left that sort of thing to the earthy, uneducated types like George Hopkins who we left with his wife waking up in a country cottage he had already glimpsed in a dream.

'It was exactly the same,' he said. 'There was my old dog racing about and wagging his tail and jumping up and down. I opened the door and went in, and there was a congregation - I should think there was about a dozen or more - people I had known. Another brother of mine and a sister, my wife's people - they were all there, pleased and welcoming me and making a fuss of me. In fact there was so much noise going on, chattering and talking all at the same time, the dog barking, it was a real home-coming. They'd got a nice old spread for me. You'd be surprised.

'That struck me as odd. I thought I shouldn't have thought they had cups of tea over here and sat down and ate things. They said, 'Oh yes, at first. Perhaps you don't expect it, but it's something you have been used to, and we like to make you feel at home. It helps you to get settled down. Anyway, you're going to be all right now. You've Poll and the dog and us. We'll keep in touch with you and come and see you now and again.'

'I suddenly realized I could see myself, not as I used to see myself in a mirror, but as myself for the first time. I said to everybody: 'It's so wonderful, I don't know what to say. I certainly don't know what to do.'

'They said: 'Well don't say anything, don't do anything for a time. Just relax, enjoy yourself and rest, and get over this shock of, well, passing over as you call it.'

''Well,' I said, 'I don't understand it. It's all so natural, all so real. Here you are, all the people I've loved, all the people that meant so much to me in Life, all here waiting to receive me, and make me happy. And there's all those people down there you would have thought would have at least known something, particularly the parson. I know I wasn't a church-goer. I didn't go regular. But he doesn't seem to know anything. He doesn't seem to be able to comfort anyone very much. What's wrong?'

'Well,' they said, 'you mustn't blame the poor old parson. He's doing the best he can, under perhaps difficult circumstances. But you see they just haven't got the right end of the stick.'

65

'Then they started to tell me he's got this weird idea that somehow only the so-called good are going to be caught up into Heaven, and eventually they will return to Earth to dwell on Earth in physical bodies.

''Of course,' they explained, 'there are a lot of them more broadminded than him. He's the old-fashioned sort. A lot of them are more advanced now, but very few know about communication, or life after death as such. They accept the fact, or the possibility of the fact, the realization as it were of life after death, but of course they won't have this communication lark at all. As a matter of fact, one or two of us have been to what you call meetings, or circles, or seances, and we've made touches, got messages over. But they're very few and far between. There are very few mediums that you can really make any contact with, or do much good. But as for the Church, well, it's a pity, but they've lost the reality of it all. To them it's something that happened two thousand years ago, and didn't ever happen since. They live in the past, and they don't realize the present and the future is all the same really.' There's no such thing as time, I was told. 'It's an illusion.'

A pattern is beginning to emerge. Biggs made the transition with his mother: Hopkins with his wife: Pritchett with a friend: Butler and Brooke with guides sent to meet them. In August 1966, a girl with a Scottish accent called Mary Ivan said she just lost consciousness and woke up in the next world.

'I woke up and found myself in a kind of place like a hospital. I thought, 'What's this?' Because I was in my own house, and you know I was sick-a-bed, and I had a sister who was looking after me. I remember waking up here and I was in a kind of ward, in hospital, but very nice and clean. Everything seemed so fresh and airy, and everyone seemed to be so efficient and quiet. The sun (at least I thought it was the sun then) was shining through the windows, and there were pictures hanging on the walls. I thought, 'This is strange.'

'Then a very sweet woman came to me. 'You know,' she said, 'you just have to rest a little while, and then you'll soon be all right. You sort yourself out and get to know things, and your people will be coming in to see you in a wee while.'

'I thought, 'This is strange. I'm sure I was at home in my own bed, and here I'm in hospital, so I must have been unconscious, and they must have brought me into hospital.' Then I could see, after a wee while, other souls lying around. There was a sweet little lass next to me in a bed, a little blonde girl. She was sitting up and chattering away, and then she showed me one or two things she had, a dolly and some books and things.

''Isn't it nice, being here,' she says. 'I'm so happy.' ''Aye, its very nice. But what's wrong with you?' ''Oh, I've got diphtheria.'

''Well you don't look as if you've got diphtheria. You look as fresh as a daisy, and your cheeks are bright and cheerful. How long have you been here?'

''Only just come,' she says. 'I'm very happy though.'

'Then I saw my sister coming towards me! She died very young, when I was about twelve. We called her Kate. I thought this is strange. Kate's not here, Kate's dead. And there she was.

'She came up to me and she'd got a great bunch of flowers in her arms, fresh flowers with the dew on. And she said: 'Here I've brought you this. We're so glad you've come. Mother's coming soon, and also Pa.'

''No,' I said. 'That's not possible. How are you getting in here? You're no here, you're dead.'

''Oh don't be silly,' she says. 'I'm dead all right and so are you.'

''What do you mean, I'm dead?'

''You're dead.'

''No, it's impossible,' I said. 'I'm very much alive. I'm in hospital, but how did you get in? Did anyone see you come through the door?'

''Aye, they all saw me come through the door, because they're all dead in here.'

''I don't get this at all.'

'The wee little one kept looking at me in the next bed. 'Is that right?' she says. 'Are we dead? And the lady, is she really dead too?'

''Well she's my sister, and she's dead, and if she's dead, then we must be dead, but we're alive. I don't understand this.'

''We've come to fetch you,' my sister said.

''What do you mean fetch me? You have to get permission from the hospital for me to leave. But I must say I feel so well, I never felt so good in my life.'

''Of course you're all right. There's nothing wrong with you at all. Get that out of your mind. You're no sick. Anyway I'll see the lady that's in charge of this ward.'

'After a while a confab went on between them and I was allowed to get up.

''What about my clothes?' I said.

'My sister laughed. 'You don't have to worry about those. You've got them on.'

''What do you mean, I've got them on?'

'I looked at myself, and there I was, dressed! I couldna get this at all, because I didna remember putting any clothes on, and I didna remember bringing any clothes. And there I was standing beside the bed in a beautiful gown. It was pale blue with a sash and lots of little lace things round the neck. I thought, 'I don't understand this at all.' And my hair was all combed and nice.

'My sister laughed and said: 'That's all right. I helped you to dress, but you didn't know that. I helped to do your hair too, by my thoughts.'

'How do you do that?' I said. 'Do you think I will be able to do things by thought ?'

''Yes of course you will. It'll take a little time to get accustomed to it. But once you realize that, by your thoughts you can achieve all the things you want to do.'

''Do you think that's so?'

''Aye,' she says. 'That's so. Anyway we'll go now. We'll go and see Mother and the others.'

''But I thought you said Mother was coming?'

''Oh, she'll probably be downstairs:'

'We went down a beautiful staircase, and it was just as if

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it were made of marble. There were all sorts of interesting people walking about, all looking so fit and well and healthy. And everywhere there seemed to be - I don't know - as if the whole place had been so well cared for.'

The voice paused.

'Go on Mary,' encouraged Betty Greene. 'This is awfully interesting.'

Mary Ivan continued:

'Aye. We went down these steps, and out of this sort of portico, down some more steps into a beautiful garden. I've never been to these posh places because I never was able to do that sort of thing, but I'm told it's not unlike what you'd see in France in some of these beautiful gardens with the fountains playing. And there were all sorts of people, children too, running and playing. Then I thought how odd, none of these people seem out of place, and yet I feel so out of place.

''I suppose they've been here a long time,' I said to my sister.

''No,' she said. 'Only just these last few days, as you term time. They're just becoming acclimatized to everything, and they're waiting for their friends and relations. This is what we call a reception place where people come quite often, not always, but quite a lot of people until they're acclimatized to the new conditions of life, and their friends begin to arrive. Eventually they go away. Usually they go to live with their wife, or their husband, or perhaps their mother and father if they were not married. At least the people they love most, they are the ones that invariably wait in the garden and wait for them to come out. Of course someone, like myself in your case, goes in to break the ice as you might say.'

'Do you know, no one need fear dying because it's the most wonderful thing, it's the most exciting thing that could ever happen to anyone. No one need ever worry about it.''

She began to rhapsodize about her new life. Betty Greene brought her back to the end of her story.

'Did you meet your people, Mary ?

'Eventually I did. Yes, and eventually I went to live with my mother, and eventually after that with my husband.'

69

NINE
Sudden Death

'The people they love most,' said Mary Ivan. 'They are the ones that invariably wait.'

If she'd lived a little later on Earth, she might have chanted, 'Everybody loves somebody, and somebody loves you.'

Alf Pritchett had a long lost sister, Mr Biggs a mother, George Hopkins a wife, and Mary Ivan parents, sister and husband. But who can be found to provide a heavenly home for a young chap who gets killed in a war before he has time to get married, leaving his parents and everyone he's ever been close to behind on Earth?

The answer came on 16 July 1966. A young male voice announced his identity as Terry Smith. Blown up, he said, and drowned when a shell from the Bismarck sank the British battlecruiser Hood in the cold green waters of the North Atlantic.

'It all happened so sudden,' he recollected. 'None of us really had a chance. It was hopeless.'

Betty Greene weighed in with her stock opening question: 'Terry, can you describe your reactions when you found yourself still alive? What happened to you?'

'The first thing I remember was going up a street. It was a street I'd never seen before. I couldn't realize at first that it wasn't a real street. It was all very attractive. Lovely trees on either side of the road, and lovely houses, ever such nice houses. There were little bungalows dotted about here and there, and there were bigger houses, and it was ever so attractive. I didn't recognize the place, and yet it seemed as if it could have been somewhere, perhaps in California. I'd seen pictures of wide sort of boulevards with trees, and sloping lawns and pretty little houses. I couldn't make head or tail of it.

70

'There was nobody else about. It was just as if I was all there on me own, you know. I thought this is odd. I thought I was probably dreaming, I suppose. The road was not a bit familiar, yet there was something about it that gave me some sort of inner confidence.

'Anyway I just walked along and all these pretty houses they seemed as dead as a dodo. Not a sound you know. Nothing. Then when I came further along I saw a very sweet lady, a very pretty woman I thought she was anyway. She didn't look more than about twenty-eight or thirty - standing at a little gate. It was the first house that I'd seen with a gate, by the way. All the others seemed to have no gates; you just walked up the little path to the front door. I thought well, it seems a bit odd after all the other houses being free of fences and that.

'Anyway this little old lady - funny thing about her was she looked young, yet I felt she was old - she was leaning over this gate, and as I came to her she sort of smiled. I stopped, and she said: 'You looking for something, sonny?'

'I said: 'Yes - well, sort of, you know. I don't know quite what's happening or where I am.'

''Oh,' she says, 'that's all right sonny, I've been waiting for you. Come in.'

'I thought, 'Well, I've got nothing to lose, so I'll go in.' At least it's someone to talk to.

'She took me into the front - I suppose you'd call it the parlour - nice little room it was, very nice chintzy curtains and chairs, and it all looked very homely. And there was a cat sitting in one chair. A beautiful black cat. I thought, 'Cats? Can't be dead with cats.'

'She says, 'Come on sonny, sit down.' So I sat down in the other chair with no cat in it, you see.

'She said, 'Would you like a drink?'

'I thought, Well, this is something like. Would I like a drink! I thought she was going to offer me a cup of tea, or something, so I said, 'Yes, I would please.'

''What would you like?'

'I thought, Well, I must go cagey here. I don't want to look as if I drink. So I said: 'I'd like a lemon.'

''Would you? All right.' So she goes out and comes back with a glass of lemon.

''You know you've got nothing to worry about sonny,' she says. 'I've been waiting for you.'

''Waiting for me?'

''Yes.'

'I didn't know what to say. I sort of sat there, and she says: 'You know you're dead?'

'What?'

''You're dead.'

'Come off it. I can't be dead sitting in a room with a cat over there, and drinking a glass of lemonade. And you're solid and real enough. How can I be dead? I admit it's all a bit strange.'

'At first I thought I was having a dream or something.

''It's no dream, sonny,' she says. 'You're dead.'

''Well if you say I'm dead, how did I get here?'

'Oh that's all right,' she says. 'I was thinking and praying for you, and I've been given charge of you.'

''What do you mean you've been given charge of me?'

'Well,' she says, 'When your ship went down . . .'

'And it suddenly came to me. When the ship went down. Last thing I remember was in the water holding on to a bar of wood. Sort of thought it might hold up, but of course I realize it was hopeless now.

''You were drowned,' she says.

''Oh.'

'There's hundreds and hundreds of lads,' she says, 'have come over.'

'0h ?'

''Yes, and everyone of those lads has got someone somewhere to look after them. Some have got their own people, relations or friends. Some

have got other souls, and I'm the one in charge of you,' she says. 'You don't realize, but you were directed. You thought you were walking on your own up the road. But you weren't. You were being helped by inspiration from a soul whose job it is to help people when they come over suddenly like you did.'

''Well I don't understand all this.'

'Don't you worry,' she says. 'You stay with me. I'll look after you. I'll be like your mum.'

72

'I thought, well that's something. And she started talking about my people. It rather shook me, because she seemed to know all about my mum and dad, and how they sort of separated, and about my sister, about us, so I says: 'Are you in any way related to us?'

''Not really,' she says. 'But it was part of my job to know something about your people, being as how I've to look after you.'

''Well, that's funny,' I says. 'Since you say as how I've only just come over, how do you know about my lot?'

''Oh well, that's not difficult. It's only a matter of tuning in.'

''Tuning in,' I says. 'Sounds like the wireless.'

''Oh well we can,' she says. 'If we have a special reason for wanting to know about a particular person or persons, and it's a special work that we have to do, and we've got some sort of connection there that's necessary for us to know things, then we tune in. A little later on, not yet, we'll go to see your people.'

''Oh that'll be nice.'

''Of course,' she says, 'you know they won't know you're dead. I mean they won't know that you're there. They'll know that you're dead, but they won't know that you're still alive - that you can sort of watch them or go and see them. You mustn't be too upset if no one takes any notice of you.'

''Oh well,' I says. 'I did have an aunt who's a Spiritualist.'

''Oh that's good,' she says. 'Perhaps we can get something through in that direction. You never know. We'll have to try her. For the time being, you must try and be content to be here. I've got a son on earth, and I'm hoping one day when he comes over here that we shall be together

again. I expect we shall. But in the meantime I'm going to look upon you as if you're my own son. I'm going to do all I can for you and try to make you happy. You're not to worry, and you're not to feel sort of alone or anything like that. A little later on, when you're rested - I think you should rest: this has all been a bit of a shock for you -

73

I'll take you out and you'll be introduced to all sorts of interesting people in our community.'

'A little later she took me out, and what appeared to be the sun - although she told me later there was no sun, that it was illumination from which all of us, all life was able to draw some power . . . Funny thing about the illumination - this may sound odd - but it didn't seem to cast shadows. It seemed to me as if everything was pleasantly bright without being harsh, and it didn't seem it was necessary to withdraw from the light, because the light was so pleasing and pleasant, and it wasn't what you'd say hot. You didn't feel as if it was burning you, yet it was a pleasant warmth.

'Anyway we went out, I went out with her. And she just pulled the door.

''Are you going to lock your door?' I says.

'Oh, there's no need for that here you know.'

'I told you when I came up the road in the first instance it seemed as if the place was empty. It was like a dead city, with no one at all, and yet everything looked trim and nice and clean and fresh as if everybody had gone off for an afternoon siesta. This time going up the road it was as if everyone was out, standing at the door, or was coming down the pathway. And goodness me I hadn't got very far up the road before I was surrounded by people. All sorts of people - mostly young people. One or two seemed to be elderly, and yet looking back on it I realize they weren't old, but there was something about them that suggested there was age, and yet didn't look old. I can't explain that.

'Anyway they were all sort of shaking me by the hand and calling me by name. I thought, well that's odd, everybody knows my name and everyone's calling me Terry as if they'd known me all their lives. I realized afterwards that there's very little that escapes them if a new person's coming into the community, or a number of new people coming from Earth. I found afterwards it was a special community whose task it was to help newcomers and to guide them. And with the war on there were loads of youngsters coming over. Anyway they were all around me and making me feel welcome, and I really felt as if I was among old friends.

'I thought, Well, this is extraordinary. Here was I arriving in a place where everybody seemed dead or away, and no one bothered. And now its as if they're all here, all coming out to greet me. So I asked my friend: 'Why is it that when I arrived, no one came to meet me?'

''Oh,' she says. 'That was deliberate.'

''But why deliberate?'

''That was very necessary, really. It was necessary for you to come direct to me as I was the one who was chosen to take care of you. The others knew, of course, of your arrival. And every house you passed, though you didn't see anyone, their love was so strong that it was helping you. They knew that the right moment would come when you'd adjusted yourself and you'd been helped by me to see and understand a little. Then you'd be more ready to be received by a lot of people. If we'd all been there it would have been too much for you.

''Now you're settling in,' she says, 'you're getting to know people, and the next thing will be to find you the kind of thing - work - you'd like to do. But before that it may be a good idea to go back to Earth and see how your people are and see if there's anything we can do.''

Terry Smith was no great problem. One day, presumably, he would in turn prepare a home for his mother or father or sister. But how does the system cope with the loners of life who never developed a successful human relationship on Earth, and look unlikely to do so, without a lot of reeducation, in heaven.

An answer to this came on 6 December 1965, when other folk were thinking of Christmas shopping. The silence was broken by the gruff voice of a real life Steptoe without a son who announced, 'My name is George Wilmot.'

'I've been around here several times,' he continued, 'listening to conversations. And I thought perhaps one day I might get a look in. You never know your luck.'

'Mr Wilmot,' replied Betty Greene, 'Can you tell us about yourself?'

'I was a rag-and-bone merchant,' he said. 'Yes. I used to go round the houses collecting up whatever they'd got making a bit on it. I sort of eked out an existence. I suppose you'd calling it a living!

'Occasionally I'd have a good day, and I'd get something really good and worthwhile, and get a fiver for it probably. But I never was that lucky as some of them reckon they are. Of course a lot of that's talk, I think. Anyway I'm quite happy to be out of your world. I had a pretty rough time taking it by and large, although in my own way I enjoyed myself. I had a bit of fun at times. I had two wives, none of them any bloody good. But still, perhaps it was as much me as them, who knows?'

'Mr Wilmot,' interrupted Betty Greene, 'How did you pass over? What happened?'

'Oh, I just caught pneumonia one winter,' he said, 'going around you know. Got a bit of a cough, and chest trouble started up. And before I knew I was in the local hospital you know. I wasn't there more than about a week. I was too far gone, you know. My chest was always a bit weak.'

After a week George Wilmot died. The first person he saw, he said was his old Jenny.

'No,' he chuckled. 'That's got you guessing. Jenny was neither of my wives, thank God. She was my horse.'

TEN
Animals

In a nation of animal lovers, the death of a favorite dog, cat or pony can cause as much distress as the loss of a human relation. The next world seems a bleak and lonely prospect without them.

The voices tell a different tale. Nothing surprised or delighted them more than being greeted in the next world by their favorite domestic animals or pets. Spouses and parents were sometimes expected. But Rover racing round in circles was a bonus.

George Wilmot, rag-and-bone merchant, a drop out from marriage, parted from two wives who were 'no bloody good', spent most of his visit recalling his astonishment at being greeted by his old horse.

'Old Jenny,' he said, 'she used to pull my cart in earlier years, in my thirties. I was real upset when poor old Jenny collapsed and died. She was as near to me as any woman could be, in fact more so. I had great

affection for old Jenny. She knew everything that I ever said to her, I'm sure she did. She was as cute as they come. A real beaut. She wasn't much to look at, I suppose, as horses go of course, but she was a real nice old nag.

'The first thing I remember when I woke up over here was being in a - well, I suppose you'd call it a field. I seemed to be sitting, lying, under a tree. I remember waking up. I could see this horse coming towards me, and there was my old Jenny! Cor!

'She looked younger of course, and she was so thrilled and so happy, you could sense and feel it. I can't say how. This is something I can't explain. But it was almost as if she was talking to me. It was extraordinary. I couldn't hear any voice, and you don't expect to hear a horse speak, but it was somehow mentally I suppose.

'Now I realize it must have been as if she was speaking to me and welcoming me. She came beside me and was licking my face. Goodness me, I'll never forget this as long as I live, I was so thrilled and excited, and patting and fussing her. And then it was as if I heard a voice behind me. I turned round, and there was a fine looking chap. I should think he was about six foot two, fair-haired, young. And he says: 'I've come to look after you.'

''Come to look after me?' I says. 'What are you talking about?'

'I was so taken aback what with Jenny and the rest of it.

''Yes, I'm going to look after you,' he says. 'I've been put in charge of you.'

''What do you mean in charge of me? I'm always capable of looking after myself. Always had to anyway.'

''You don't understand,' he says. 'You know you are dead.'

'Of course for a moment it struck me like a thunderbolt. And it suddenly came to me. Of course Jenny had been dead for years, and I'd had another little nag after her you see. A nice horse, but never like Jenny.

'So he says, 'You're dead,' and I thought, 'Well I don't know what to make of this lark.'

'Then it seemed to me as if he was able to show me something. I don't know whether he showed it to me but I suppose he did. I could see myself lying in a bed, stiff and stark, you know, and it was as if I was

looking at my own body. And yet I wasn't there. I saw them put this body on a trolley and wheel it away. And I was walking behind this body being wheeled out, and then it all disappeared and I was back where I was with this bloke.

''My name is Michael,' he said.

''Oh yes.'

''Do you realize you are dead?'

''Well. I don't know what to think.'

''You've just had that realization, didn't you, that vision of your body,' he says. 'You know you died in that hospital.'

'Well I recollect now I was very ill in can I be dead when I'm here and talking to you, and I've got Jenny?' hospital, but how?'

''Well isn't Jenny some evidence to you that you're dead?'

''Well, it seems very strange. Then again,' I said, 'if I'm in heaven if that's it, you don't expect to find horses there. They haven't got any souls, have they?'

''Ah, that's what they tell you when you're on Earth,' he says. 'That they haven't got any sort of other life, only just the old material sort of life as you call it. That horse, because of its nearness to you and the love and affection you showered on it, has given it something which helps it to extend its life span.'

'I didn't quite get all 'this lark 'extend its life span' and all the rest of it.

''But while you have love and affection for that horse,' he said, 'that horse will have an existence. Human beings don't know their responsibility to animals. Ever since I've been here, which is hundreds of years ...'

'Of course I looked at him when he said that. I thought, well, this is a bit much you know, looking so young and spruce and nice looking after hundreds of years. I thought well anyway it didn't do to interrupt this gentleman. After all I felt a bit lost and I thought I'll have to mind my ps and qs.

''Oh,' he says, 'time is nothing, you see. I've been here for hundreds of years, and part of my responsibility and my job is to see and care for animals. I often go down into the pits.'

'I wondered what the hell he meant when he said pits, and I thought he meant hell or something.

''No,' he said. 'Pits where they have animals down the mines. I tend to them and try to help them, but there's not a great deal you can do. Over here we have great plains where animals congregate and where there is love and affection, and they can be cared for. People have this stupid idea that because they are human beings they're the only ones that have got any right to a future existence, should there be one. Then you get the religious ones who think there must be. There is, but they haven't much of a conception of it either.'

79

'Of course he was talking a lot of stuff here, you know, and I was getting very intrigued. And all the time he was talking I was half listening and half thinking about myself. What I was going to do, you know, being dead and all the rest of it. It was as if he was illustrating things and I was trying to take it in. At the same time I couldn't stop thinking about myself and my own worries.

''You don't want to sit here,' he says. 'Let's walk.' 'So I says, 'All right.'

'I walked beside him and we walked through this field into what appeared to be a road through a little gate. It was just as if you were in the country on Earth you know. And I was walking along, the horse followed me.

'I thought well, I don't know. It seemed so strange this horse following me. Yet I was so fond of it, and there was no doubt. It was the same horse that I'd had before.'

Wilmot was one of many who were startled to find a domestic animal living the same sort of life in the next world as they did in this. When Terry Smith, drowned when the Hood was sunk, entered his first heavenly home, one of the first things that shook him was seeing a black cat sitting in a chintzy chair.

'All of a sudden,' he said, 'this cat did a most funny thing. He jumped off his chair and came up to me, sat on his hind legs looked up at me, sort of cocked his ears up and he didn't miaow, didn't make a noise like a cat, but it was just as if the thing spoke! Do you know I nearly dropped, I was so shaken.

''Oh don't worry,' she says, 'you'll get used to that. The animals over here have developed to a great extent their ability to make themselves understood. Of course on earth in a way they can do that, but we don't hear them) speak because they haven't language as we understand it. But over here their thoughts are such that they can vibrate the atmosphere and you can hear the sounds. It's merely their thoughts being transmitted to you so that you can hear them This cat says, 'How are you?''

'I thought by Christ, this is quite mad. Cats don't say 'How are you?' I didn't know what to do, what to say.

80

''Don't worry,' she says 'You'll get used to that. Animals are much more sensitive than people realize, and they have their own knowledge of things. They can transmit thoughts and pick up thoughts, and you'll get used to the fact that animals can convey a great deal more from this side than they can on earth.'

'I got sort of adjusted to the idea and said: 'Very well thanks.' And it seemed as if the cat said: 'I hope you'll be happy here.' Then he went back and sat on the chair, curled up and so far as I was concerned, went to sleep.'

A little later Terry's heavenly guardian took him for his first walk through the village to meet his new neighbors. They didn't go alone.

'As we walked out,' he said, 'the cat got up and walked out and followed us. It was walking along just as if it was - well, like you'd expect a dog more than a cat. 'All right,' she says, 'come along,' and kept calling it Nelly. I thought, 'Nelly's a funny name for a cat. I never heard of a cat called Nelly before.'

''You think it's an odd name for a cat, don't you?'

''I've never heard of a cat called Nelly. I suppose there's no reason why a cat shouldn't be called Nelly as well as Tiddles.'

''Well Nelly's the name my mother gave this cat.' ''Your mother?' I said. 'How old's that cat then?' ''This cat must be now, judging by material age, about sixty years old,' she replied.

George Hopkins, the Sussex farmer was as delighted as any of them, 'to see my old dog racing about and wagging his tail and jumping up and down.'

He had another surprise coming.

'What are you doing now?' asked Woods later in the sitting.

'Well,' he replied, 'I'm very interested in cattle.! 'You still have cattle over there?'

'Oh yes, and we've got horses. I was always very fond of animals and horses in particular. I love cattle and we have cattle here. Why not? We have lovely pasturelands, lovely fields and animals just the same as you do. Everyone lives near to nature.

81

There's no killing. I have my garden which I love very much. I have my cattle. I like to walk, and I like to ride a, horse which is a thing I didn't have much opportunity for strangely enough, though I worked on the land. I never seemed able to do some things, even like riding a horse. Walk en front of a horse, yes. But as to riding, well very seldom.'

'Do you find,' asked Betty Greene, 'the cattle, the animals, they've got a higher degree of consciousness, the ones you're dealing with? They understand you?'

'Yes. I would say definitely yes to that. Of course they have. And then again I think when one's on earth, one is inclined to underestimate the intelligence cattle have got.

'After all, they have their feelings, and emotions, and they are not an unintelligent lot of animals, you know. Of course I know in your world there is a great controversy as to whether one should kill animals for food. I don't know what to say en regard to that. I should have thought et was unnecessary, because there are so many other forms of food one can eat and live on, and in any case I don't think it's a good thing to eat putrefied flesh of animal. I don't see that et can be of any real good to a human being. And after all, I think an animal has its right to life as much as man. In fact more so in many cases I should think.'

82

ELEVEN
Marriages Are Made in Heaven

The most impossible ingredient of death is its finality. The finality of parting for ever from someone we love. The first step in accepting death is a belief that husbands and wives, parents and children, sweethearts and lifelong friends well be together again in a life beyond the grave.

Apart from denying the possibility of life after death at all, the first stage en rejecting et could be the prospect of a life everlasting teed for ever to a spouse or relation you detest. Not to worry, say the voices. Those you love well be with you. Those you dislike will never bother you again.

'Over here,' said Rose the flower-seller, 'people get together who are really mutually attracted, who have a great affection and love for each other ... A husband and wife on your side who hate one another, just aren't meant for one another - they wouldn't be together over here.'

Mr Biggs and Harry the pub crawler had devoted mothers waiting to greet and care for them. Biggs' mother lived with her favorite sister. Alf Pritchett was taken to a long lost sister: George Hopkins to his wife. Mary Ivan was smothered in love by a sister, parents and husband. No one seems to have been reunited with anyone they did not want to see again.

Harry's account of his reunion with his mother is good news for divorcees.

''Oh, by the way,' I asked her. 'Where's Dad?'

''Oh,' she says, 'I'm not with Dad.'

'Of course that struck me proper! Not that they were ever a sort of ideal couple or anything. But after all they were married and all the rest of et.

'So I said: 'That's funny, why aren't you with Dad?'

''Well you don't want to worry about that son,' she said. 'Dad and me, although we got on. after a style - we were good pals - we weren't really suited to one another. We weren't what you'd call an ideal couple really.

We gave the impression probably to some extent, you know, but we weren't really suited. I'm not with Dad.'

'Of course that really shook me a bit. I thought well, if there was anything in this lark about life after death, and going on and all this sort of thing, I thought you were bound to be with your old man.

''But,' she said, 'you are only with those people with whom you are really in tune. People that you are really sort of right with.''

Confirmation that incompatibility is recognized in Heaven as ground for divorce came in August 1960. From a voice which claimed to belong to a

woman whose face was once on the front page of every newspaper in Britain.

When a vivacious, attractive secretary from Hull called Amy Johnson flew solo to Australia in 1930, she became Britain's top woman aviator and the hero of the hour who even inspired a top pop song of the moment, 'Amy, wonderful Amy'.

In 1932 she was the bride of the year in a romantic wedding to a blue-eyed, heavy-drinking Scottish flier, Jim Mollison. The mixture was too explosive. The marriage was dissolved in 1938. Amy reverted to her maiden name.

On a cold, foggy day in January 1941, she took off as a wartime ferry pilot from Blackpool to fly an RAF twinengined Oxford trainer to an aerodrome near Oxford.

She never arrived.

As dusk fell over the Thames estuary, an Oxford trainer and a parachute were seen falling into the icy sea. Amy Johnson was never seen again.

On 6 August 1960, as Woods and Betty Greene waited in the dark, a female voice began to speak, announced her identity as Amy Johnson, and described her sensations when she realized she was dead.

Suddenly she broke off to say: 'By the way, Jim's with me.'

'Oh yes,' said Woods. 'Jim Mollison. Can he say anything?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'We get on but we're not together. But we meet. I'm afraid Jim and I didn't get on too well. I think we were both very strong characters. I think ... well, I won't go into my personal ...'

The sentence wasn't finished. But the meaning was clear.

Unshackled spouses who retain their freedom provide negative reassurance. But what of those who let the chance of happiness on Earth slip from them? The voices tell us that thwarted or faint-hearted lovers get a second chance of happiness in the next world and that matches can indeed be made in Heaven.

We left George Wilmot, rag-and-bone merchant, and a drop-out from marriage after two unsuccessful attempts, walking with his guide and rejoicing in the company of his favorite horse.

'We went along,' he said. 'We went through what seemed to be a side turning and then we beared to the right, past a lot of poplar trees, they remind me of something, I can't think what, you know. And then all of a sudden it came to me! Of course I remember. It was exactly the same as a road in France when I was there in the '14-18 war. These lovely big tall trees at the side. And I knew without - before I even reached there - that at the far end of this would be a very old house, and it would be full of people that I'd known. People that were so nice to me when I was in France, when I was billeted.

'It was. There was this mother and daughter there, and the father. They came and stood at the end of the road, at the edge of the gate, looking over, waving like mad at me.

'I thought to meself, Well, I don't know. These people, I believe they must have been killed, because I'd heard a little later that this place had been absolutely bombed, you know, during the war, and I couldn't get it out of my mind. I thought well - I'd got a feeling they were dead. And I thought well I'm dead and I'm supposed to be in a dead man's world, so these people must be dead.

'All this was going on in my mind. Then I looked at

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them hard, you know, and I could see that the husband and wife looked young. They were the same people but they looked younger. Then my mind went to a picture, two pictures they used to have over a sideboard. One was of her and one was of him when they were young. I suppose they would have been in their twenties, and they looked exactly like they looked in those two portraits. And the daughter, she looked as young as the mother - about the same age.

'This daughter I were very drawn and attached to, and actually if things had gone right, I would - well, given the opportunity I would have proposed to her. Of course I wasn't married then you see. And I always think - of course I know now - but I always used to think when I was on Earth - that's perhaps one of the reasons why my two marriages didn't work out - I always carried this girl's memory in my heart, you know. I always thought what a nice little thing she was, sweet and kind, and I always thought she was the right one for me though we could hardly speak a word of each other's lingo.'

An equally happy surprise awaited Harry Tucker, one time highwayman, who in 1968 described his rescue from an earthbound pub crawl.

A girl came forward and took him by the hand.

'I looked at her for the first time,' he said. 'It was a face that I'd never forgotten. It was the face of a girl that in my early years I was very fond of, very attached to. And as I looked at her and she looked at me, I realized that if my life could have taken a different path and I could have married her, I'm sure that I would have been a different person. I wouldn't have got into bad company and taken up the road and all that. I knew that if she hadn't died as she did when she was a young woman, we could probably have married, and I'd probably have been a different person. I'd have probably worked on the farm, or done something in the local way that would have got me enough to support us. But she died, and that's what really turned me against everything and everybody. As she took

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my hand she said: 'Now you can start all over again with me. I'm to help you and I'm to guide you and show you the way.'

'I walked with her out of this great castle place, and we came, so it seemed, to a small place. It was on the verge of a - town I suppose you'd call it. A small cottage as you'd call it, with a roof that was thatched, and a little low wall around it. And there was a beautiful feeling as if I'd come home and yet I'd never known this place before on earth.

'As we entered she looked different, and yet she was the same. But her clothes changed and instead of this beautiful elaborate dress, she'd got a very simple cotton.

I suppose it was cotton. But she still looked the same to me. She's been waiting for me all this time, been watching over me constantly, thinking about me, trying to get me on to the right path all those years. And now we're together.'

The most romantic of all heavenly love stories, as consoling as any fictional story in the make-believe world of women's magazines, was yet to come. On 20 January 1969, the silence in Flint's flat was broken by a female voice with a Scottish accent who announced: 'My name is Mary Ann Ross.'

'And what happened Mary,' asked Betty Greene, 'when you passed over? When you died?'

'It's a long time ago now,' she replied. 'I was sitting in the kitchen doing a bit of sewing with the lamp ...'

'Yes, go on.'

'And I don't remember getting up out of the chair.'

'What happened then Mary?'

'It's very odd. It was as if the whole room was full of light, and I could see all sorts of people around. There was my mother, and my father, and my brother who died many years before. And Nelly - she was a friend, one of my few friends, that had died only a few weeks.

'They were all in the room and I thought I was having a dream about my people, and it was Nelly that came and put her arms around me and kissed me on the face, and it was warm and real. And my mother came, she kissed me too.

87

They took my hands and the next thing I know it's as if I was floating through the window. And then everything went black.

'I didn't remember a thing until I woke up and I was in a bed in a very nice room with rafters and beams and things, like an old house. It was cosy and friendly, and the sun, as I thought, was shining through the window. And there was my mother but she did not look the same as when I saw her in my dream as I thought. She looked young as I'd seen her in a picture that used to hang in my bedroom, when she was married many years before. And I thought this is just a dream.

''No, it's not a dream,' she said. 'It's real. You're alive now. You're not to worry about anything. Soon, when you've recovered, we'll go out and meet all sorts of people that you used to know when you were a wee bairn.'

'I could not realize that I was dead. It was still like a beautiful dream. Then there was a dog that jumped on my bed, and this really gave me a fright. I was always fond of dogs, but this was a dog that we'd had many years ago that my father adored and that was killed by a cart. We called it Nipper, and to see Nipper jump on the bed startled me. I just couldn't realize this, and my mother said: 'Of course they're animals here too.'

'I just couldn't take to this at all. I couldn't believe - when you've been brought up as I was to a religious way of life, you did not automatically begin to think of animals being in Heaven. I thought this was too natural to be Heaven. I thought it would be quite different, and that it would be more like one sees in pictures and religious books, you know, angels and wings. This didn't seem right.

'The next thing I must have dozed off. At least I thought that's what I did, but it wasn't really quite dozing off. The next thing I knew was that I was walking down what appeared to be a lane, with trees either side, and beautiful fields, and I could see cattle. I remember walking and walking

on this road, and somehow no feeling of tiredness. I came to the end and there was a beautiful white house, and yet it wasn't painted white. It had sort of lustre about it like mother-of-pearl.

88

'As I came to this house, a man came out of the door, and my heart gave a jump - that's if I had a heart. But I felt just as if - oh I couldn't believe this. It was a young man that I was very fond of who I'd turned down.

'It wasn't because I didn't love him. It was because I realized that I could not marry him because it meant that I had to give up my parents who were getting old and in need of care and attention, and I didn't feel it was right to put a burden on a man of someone else's parents, no matter how fond he was of me. I turned him down and he never got married. He moved away from the district soon afterwards and I lost touch with him for many years.

'He came out of the house, and he looked just as he'd looked oh, many years before in his thirties, tall and dark. Though in those days he had a moustache - it's silly how things strike one - but he had not got a moustache any more. He came rushing down the garden path and met me. And he put his arms round me. And I felt as if for the first time that I was wanted.

'I suppose in a way I should not say that, because I was very much wanted by my parents, and I was very fond of my parents, but it was a different feeling.

''At last you have come back to me,' he said. 'This time you'll not turn me down.'

'And I did not know what to say to him.

Then all of a sudden it seemed as if in the garden all the flowers began to blossom. I don't know how to explain this without sounding silly, but all the flowers suddenly seemed to grow and it was as if the garden came alive. There were all kinds of flowers there, flowers that I remember from the earth, and flowers that I'd never seen before. And there was one clump of huge, tall orange flowers, like poppies, but they seemed to go on and on. And I thought if they don't stop growing they're going to be taller than the house. I thought how stupid this is, I'm so happy here with Rossi - Rossiter you know - and yet all the time in spite of my happiness and meeting him, and feeling at ease and feeling happy, I could see this group of poppies as I called them, growing taller and taller until they became like huge trees.

89

Then all of a sudden the petals began to open and they began to - like droop. When I say that I don't mean to say that they were dying, but it's as if they opened up and the petals folded down and made a kind of umbrella. And there were all these beautiful orange flowers like umbrellas. And we went and stood underneath, and it was as if through the petals of these enormous orange flowers there was a beautiful light, and it seemed to have warmth and seemed to have a glow. And he was smiling about this because I said: 'I've never seen such big flowers.'

"Ah,' he said, 'until you came, although I had planted many seeds in my thoughts, it wasn't until you came that I knew that I'd have a garden which I can be proud of. These poppies as you call them are my love that has been growing all these years I've been watching over you. And now we can be free. Come into the house.'

'I can't say if I walked, or if I floated, but it was as if my feet never touched the ground. And I remember going into the house and it was just as I'd always wished and dreamed. It was not a big house, but it was bigger than anything I'd been used to and everything seemed to be perfect, just as I would always wanted to have had myself. And the furniture and everything was solid and real.

"Now,' he said, 'we're together, and now we can make up for lost time.'

'I have never felt so happy. Then I thought about my mamma and father.

"That's all right,' he said. 'You've finished. Now you have your own life to be shared with me. But we can keep in touch, and we can go and see them whenever we wish, and they can come and see us. You have so much to learn."

Mary's last words were: 'whatever it is that makes it possible for me to talk to you is not so strong. The power or whatever they call it. But I am happy to have been here, and may I say I hope to come soon again.'

She never did. Is it because she is too busy living happily ever after?

TWELVE
Daily Life

You're dead. You know you're dead. You've got over the shock of finding you're still alive. You've got away from Earth, arrived in the next world, and settled down in your new home.

What do you do now?

Thanks to Woods' and Betty Greene's insistent questioning, the transition from this world to the next is an experience we feel we know from A to Z. The voices can remember it as though it happened yesterday. They seem to have total recall. But when it comes to describing what they've been doing ever since, they seem to have lost either their memory or their powers of description. Or it's all so different that they find it impossible to put into words that earthly mortals can understand.

In 1953, when Britain was still 'recovering' from the Coronation, and two years before the voice which claimed to be a disembodied Ellen Terry gave them their mission in life, Woods, accompanied by three friends, took Betty Greene up from Croydon for her first sitting with Leslie Flint. The voice that came through claimed to belong to a London flower-seller called Rose. They bombarded her with questions on the world she was living in and how she spent her time. They asked her anything that came in their heads. None of the voices who have come through since, however famous or clever they were on Earth, have given them so many practical answers or told them so much they wanted to know.

'What is it like over there?' asked Woods when the introductions were over.

'Oh, now you've asked me,' she replied. 'You've asked me to describe our world in a material language. I don't know which way to start. I suppose if you could think of

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all the beautiful things in your world, without all the things that aren't pleasant, you'd have some vague idea of what it's like. Beautiful natural surroundings, you know. Flowers, birds, trees, lakes ...'

'Sun always shining?'

'Yes, always shining. You might think that gets a bit monotonous, but it doesn't you know.'

'Is it easier to grow flowers over there than it is here?'

'Well, you plant them, and they come up, but you don't have seasons.'

'The technique's entirely different then? You don't have to water them for instance?'

'They don't need it. All I know is that they grow, sort of natural.'

'Is your world very much like this world,' asked Woods, 'only much more beautiful?'

'Well, I suppose from what I ... mind you, I can only speak about my own particular place where I am. I mean it's a vast place altogether. I mean there are many spheres and conditions of life, you know. But where I am it's very much like a beautiful English countryside. The nearest I can explain it. But I understand there's all other forms of nature, you know, as regards scenery and that.'

'Have you villages and towns?' he asked.

'Well, we haven't towns as you understand them. There are places where - I suppose you'd call them towns in a sense - where there's thousands of people congregate together, you know. But there's no buses and trams, and all that nonsense, you know.'

'How do you travel?'

'Walk, or if you've got any distance, well you just think of the place you want to be in, close your eyes, and well, in a split second I suppose you might say, you're there.' 'Do you live in a house, Rose?'

'Well, I do live in a house, but you don't have to. But I've never seen anyone who didn't.'

'What sort of houses are there? Like here?'

'All types of houses, dear. Some are small little cottages like you'd see in a little country hamlet, and some are quite big places where whole families live. The point is that it's a matter of your

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choice of archi ... architecture, and all that sort of thing. Of course the houses are very real. I mean they are built by people over here. They don't just happen you know. You don't just think of a country cottage and you've got it.'

'No, no,' murmured Woods.

'I mean over here you've got architects and designers and so on, and they create and they build. It isn't hard labour like it is on your side, but it's a real formation that goes on.'

'They don't use money over there, do they, or anything like that ?'

'Money! You can't buy nothing here with money, mate. The only thing you can get here is by character, and the way you've lived your life, and the way you think and act.'

'But I was wondering,' asked Woods, 'how they - you know - you say you've got architects to do your work?'

'Well, you don't pay him. He does it because he loves to do it. He loves to design houses. He loves to do that kind of work, and he does it. The same as the musician loves to play the violin. He's happy to entertain his friends and people, and people who like music they form orchestras and choirs.'

'They do everything for love?'

'Everything is done for love, and anyone, for instance, on your side who never had a chance in life, perhaps they wanted to be a musician or an artist, they can study over here, you see.'

'They are doing all the things they wanted to do?'

'That's right. I mean, after all, you think of the millions of people that go through life and who have to do a hard slaving day's work, and never have a chance to do anything they would really like to do - never get the time, or never had the background, or the money or education - over here they can take up something that really appeals to them, and can go right into it. It's a joy to them. It's work but it's a joy.'

'Do you eat anything?' asked Woods changing the subject.

'We have fruit and nuts,' she replied. 'We have trees, I mean we have fruit trees, and nuts and all the things that you'd associate with your world regarding food, but you don't kill animals and eat over here. You don't eat horse meat, or flesh or anything like that, you know.'

'What do you do with your flowers, Rose? Do you use them to beautify places?'

'Well, of course you can if you want to. You can cut the flowers, and you can use them in your homes but very few people do that after a time. It's usually people who haven't been here long. They see the flowers and think it would be nice to have a few indoors and so on. But the point is that you begin to realize it's not necessary, and it isn't perhaps a good thing. The flowers are natural. They have life. And it's not the right thing because you can have all the beauty of nature and the flowers without cutting them and taking them inside. And if you're sitting in your house

and you want to see the flowers outside, you don't necessarily have to go outside and see them. You can just sort of think about them, and you can see them. I don't know whether that makes sense to you?'

'Well, we would open doors or windows.'

'Well we don't even have to do that if we don't want to.

'I mean I can sit in my chair and I can think to myself that I would like to go to Flint's circle, so I just - er think and I close my eyes, and the next minute, you might say, I'm here with you. It may sound a bit farcical, a bit odd, but I can't help that. It's true. Time and space don't mean anything.'

'In the field of marriage, Rose ... ?'

'Oh, cripes, you're starting something, you are mate!

What do you want to know, anyway?'

'I want to know on what you do lavish affection on your side?'

'What do you mean?'

'I understand there is no marriage?'

'Well, what's marriage? Marriage is only man made law. It doesn't mean a damned thing.'

'You can have a very divine affection on this Earth, can't you?'

'Oh, blimey, you've got me all wrong. You don't quite follow what I'm talking about.'

'I thought I was following you. Well, I've apparently missed the turning.!

'Well, what I'm trying to say is, that when two people really love each other, and they are quite suited to each other, and they're sort of naturally happy with each other, it doesn't need a man-made law, or a ceremony, to make them man and wife ... We don't have marriage laws here.'

'But there are no children of course?'

'Well, there are children over here, but no children born of marriages you can say, born over here. It's not a physical thing in the same sense as you understand it.,

'Are the animals tame there?' asked Woods changing the subject again.

'Oh, tame dear, good heavens, yes. I expect first when you come here you might sort of think oh dear, I wouldn't like a lion to come on my doorstep, but you wouldn't think anything of it. Animals are as tame as your pet cat is.'

'Animals don't kill each other, do they, or anything like that ?'

'No, that's merely a material thing, desire for food, and hunger. Material desire in that respect drives them to killing each other, but that doesn't exist over here, because the desire for food is soon lost.'

'What a good thing,' put in Betty Greene. 'No cooking.'

'Oh it's all right from that point of view, dear. And there again, of course, you do get people who come here - when they first come here they feel a desire to have certain food. Well, they can have it. But they soon get out of the habit of wanting it, and after a time it all sort of passes away from them you might say.'

'Do you sleep?'

'Oh yes, you can sleep if you feel so inclined.' 'But it's not necessary?'

'It isn't necessary.'

'You don't feel tired?'

'Well, I haven't felt tired, no.'

'What happens when you feel mentally tired? Can you go away and ...?

'Well, if you're mentally tired, you just sort of mentally relax, close your eyes, and you rest and you re-open your eyes after a time. You don't feel tired any more.'

'You say you don't measure time and space. How do things go by? How do you measure at all?'

'Well, I don't know. There isn't any measurement of time as I understand it. We are not conscious of time. I know you can't realize - I mean you

think oh well, afternoon, evening and night. Well those things don't affect us. We don't have time as you have it, at all. Time after all is only man-made to a point, isn't it?'

'Do you have night and day over there?'

'No. Although you can have a fall of night, inasmuch that if you feel the need for rest, if you close your eyes, you can sort of go into a condition which, I suppose, you, can call a kind of twilight. I don't know how to put that.'

'Rose, have you ever visited any other planets?'

'I have been to some of the lower spheres dear, but I haven't been to any planets as you understand it. That is the planets like over the earth. Is that what you mean?'

'Mars and Venus.'

'No, I haven't been to any of them, my dear. I don't know anything about Mars and Venus, and all the rest. Some of the scientifically minded people might know. I don't.'

Another change of subject. 'Is there such a thing as law and order over there?' asked Woods.

'There's the natural law, dear,' said Rose, 'which we all begin to recognize soon after we arrive. There aren't any laws and rules and regulations like governments and so on but there are laws which are common laws, which we all recognize.'

'I see. And there are clouds, and the sun is shining?'

'The sun shines, yes. There are clouds in the sky from time to time, that's the trouble - beautiful effects in the sky, much more wonderful than anything you've ever dreamed of, and it isn't necessarily blue. Oh no, sometimes the sky can be green and red, or all kinds of magnificent colors.'

'The colors are very beautiful there?'

'Oh, you've got no idea. Some of the colors we have here - well, I've never seen any on Earth like it. We're not limited like you are, you see.'

'Clothes, Rose. Do you wear clothes?'

'Oh dear he's asking the right questions isn't he? Of course we wear clothes dear.'

'Anything like the clothes we wear?'

'Well, no. I don't wear clothes like I used to wear. I don't expect you'll wear a suit like that when you come here.'

'Will you describe the clothes you've got on now?'

'People clothe themselves in the type of thing they feel happy in. Of course in the early stages of coming over here, when a woman perhaps passes out in say this century, in this period like, they think that that particular type of dress is essential to them, and for a time they wear it. But after a time they realize that it's quite unimportant, that perhaps after all it doesn't really suit them. Perhaps they are not happy about it. And gradually they change their outlook, and then, in consequence, they change their wearing apparel.'

'Well, at this moment Rose, what have you got on?'

'Well, I don't know what it may sound like to you, dear, but I've got a very pretty white dress on, from top to toe. It's got a sort of border round the bottom. It's got longish sleeves, very wide sleeves, and I have a kind of belt round the middle, of gold, like a cord arrangement, and I've got a sort of design all round the edge of the dress like a pattern.'

'What is the material?'

'Well, I suppose the nearest I could explain it to you would be like a kind of silk. And my hair is not short now, like it was. It's quite long.'

'You don't have any problem of washing, and that sort of thing ?'

'No, but you can swim. You can go into the water if you want to, but you don't get dirty. There's no dust or dirt or mud or anything like that here, you see.'

'You have the sea just the same as we have here?'

'Well, I haven't seen any sea, but there are beautiful rivers, and lakes, I don't know. I've not seen sea.'

'You have boats on them, and all that?'

'Oh, good heavens, yes. Beautiful boats. I don't mean great liners, but very pretty boats, like - I suppose you might call - like they have in Venice.'

'Gondola type?'

'Yes, very pretty, all festooned with flowers. And sometimes we have sort of - I suppose you'd call them galas or something, you know, where we have a celebration - and sometimes on the water, all illuminated, not illuminated by electricity or gas, or anything like that, but illuminated by minds of people. It's the only way I can describe it.'

'How lovely,' exclaimed Woods. 'And do you have cities?'

'There are beautiful cities, yes, but there again they're not like your cities, dirty and grimy and all the rest of it. Some of the cities are absolutely wonderful. And we've got theatres and places' where we have what you'd call entertainment although they're plays. And we have musical things - all the things like you have in Earth in theatres, only of a much higher order. Everything has a purpose. There's nothing frivolous about it.'

'Yet, of course, we do laugh. We do have comedy things too you know. After all, we don't lose our sense of humour because we come here, you know. Oh, people have got no idea, you know! When I used to think of what I used to remember about the Sunday schools and all the rest of it, where they used to teach us things quite different. They used to tell us some stuff, didn't they, eh?'

'They still do, unfortunately,' said Betty Greene.

'Just imagine me,' continued Rose, 'Flying around, playing a harp! And sitting on a cloud, you know. They've got some funny ideas.'

'I understand there is a School of Learning there?' asked Woods.

'Oh, great schools, museums, places where you can go and turn up all history of nations and people. All sorts of marvelous places there are. Nothing is lost, you know.'

'Do you talk?'

'Pardon ?'

'Do you talk?'

'Well, it isn't necessary, but people do talk. But there again, it's like everything else in development. After you've been here a few years as Earth time, your time that is, invariably people advance and they realize there's no need to talk. They can send out their thoughts and be picked up. It's a kind of telepathy.'

'Very advanced telepathy?'

'Oh, I'll say so dear. Yes, I'm not very good at it yet. I hope to be one day.'

'I understand,' said Woods, 'that everything that people do on this earth passes on to the other side. Is this correct?'

Rose never answered. Another voice was heard asking 'What did you say?' Then silence as the sitters speculated whether she'd gone or been pushed out.

'Good night,' she said. 'I'd better come another time.' Another pause. Then: 'Oh, I forgot to say 'Happy Christmas to you all'.'

'Thank you Rose, the same to you.'

Nearly ten years later she kept her promise. And came back to give them another account of life in the same corner of her new world. But Rose was ten years older, ten years more advanced. And the new life was beginning to look just a little different.

Thirteen
Rose Again

September 9 1963. The silence was broken by a familiar, female cockney voice. 'Hullo, Mr Woods. Hullo, Mrs Greene.'

'Hullo, Rose,' replied Betty Greene.

'How did you know it was me? I didn't tell you.' 'I recognized you Rose.'

'Oh ! Well, I must have a very distinctive voice then, mustn't I. I didn't know you would remember me. It's a long, long time since I spoke, you know. I should have thought you might have forgotten.'

'We'd never forget you Rose,' replied Woods.

'All kinds of people come to talk to you,' she said, 'from week to week. You must get quite a conglomeration.' 'We've still got your ... We were only playing your...' 'Eh? How are you getting on?'

'Very well, Rose. We're always playing your tapes.'

'You always seem to attract a lot of people,' said Rose. 'Whenever you come here there's always crowds. I haven't had a chance to get anywhere near for ages, you know. I haven't forgot you.'

'What are you doing now,' asked Woods.

'Well,' she replied, 'I spend quite a bit of my time with the youngsters. I'm very fond of children. I do quite a bit with them. And I just like to - I don't know - do all sorts of odd bits and pieces. I know it sounds daft to some people, but you know I like little quiet hours when I sit and do a bit of needlework, and, oh, read and all that.'

'Are you living in the same house, Rose?'

'Yes, and I'm quite happy, I've no particular desire to move. Of course you do get these people who all the time are wanting to get further on, and all the rest of it. It doesn't appeal to me all that much. I suppose I'll get the urge one

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day to shift. But why should I? I'm all right. Got a nice little place of my own, all my own interests and friends.' 'What is your house like, Rose?'

'Oh, quite ordinary, quite a nice little place in a country place, what I always would have liked living in London all my life. I used to think it would be nice to have - you know - get down into the country, and retire and all that. Now I've just got what I wanted. I've no desire for anything else. I suppose in a way that's not a good thing. I don't know, people tell me you should always be ambitious. I'm quite happy with my own little place.'

'Have you got a garden, Rose?'

'I have, and it suits me down to the ground, and I grow my own flowers, and I never pick one.'

'You don't?'

'No, I let them stay in their own natural surroundings, and I get the greatest happiness and joy in just looking after them and watching them. They never seem to die.'

'They are life, aren't they?'

'Of course they are. They've got vitality and life of their own.'

'Do you visit many places, Rose?'

'Oh. occasionally I'm not one for gadding about. I don't mind going out occasionally, seeing friends of mine and having a natter. But I've no desire for all this gallivanting about that goes on with some of them. Some of them stay for a while and then next thing you know they're off. Never see 'em again. They've gone off somewhere, some other place. Not for me!'

'You're contented.'

'I am. Some people say it's a bad thing to be contented, but I can't see that. I think it's a bad thing to be discontented. And yet people say if you're not discontented, you never get on, you don't go anywhere, you know. Perhaps I'll get the urge to move on, and yet I don't see why I should give up what I've got already for something I don't know much about, know nothing about for that matter. People come and talk to me sometimes, you know, about different places and spheres as they call them. It all sounds very nice but I don't feel educated up to it yet. I'm happy where I am.'

101

'What's your bungalow like?' asked Woods to get her back to a practical theme and away from her preoccupation about moving on. 'Could you describe it?'

'Could I what?'

'Your bungalow. You said - is it a house or ...?'

'Well,' she replied, 'sort of small place. It's a country surrounding. It's got four rooms, quite enough for me to look after.

'Funny thing is, you don't ever get dirt. You know, you never get any dust. You don't have to go around swabbing the place all the time with a duster. It always seems to keep nice. But there again, do you know what people tell me? I can't get over this, I don't quite understand it. They say you only get dirt and dust in your place if your mind's wrong'

'I'm quite content to let everything grow and do what it wants to, and nothing seems to interfere with anything or anybody. The birds come into the garden. They are as tame as tame, and nobody feels they want to destroy anything. That's the marvellous part about it.'

'Yes, very nice, that is.'

'And then they talk about moving. But I suppose it's al! right for some highbrow people who want to get on in a different way, you know. But I'm happy as I am. Why should I move? They are always on to me about I should make - you know - sort of start thinking about making changes, but I can't get it myself.'

She was back to her old worry again. Woods steered her away again.

'Rose,' he said, 'in your last tape you said that you hadn't

seen any sea. Now, have you seen any since we've been .. . 'I haven't seen any sea, and I don't want to see any sea.' 'Do you still go to the lakes? You said. .. the lakes ...

and...'

'... With the boats on,' prompted Betty Greene.

'Oh yes, I've been to the lakes. I like that because it's calm and placid. There's none of the rough stuff you know. The sea was never one of my things.'

'Do you ever go to the cities? You said there were cities.! 'Oh, there are big towns as you would call them, or

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cities. Occasionally, yes. But it's all so different. I mean you don't see shops. There's nothing to go for unless you're really the city type. If you want to be among a lot of people, I suppose automatically you sort of feel it is necessary to be in a city.'

'Any neighbours around?'

'Oh, there are people naturally who live around and about, who're very much the same as myself in outlook. Probably that's why they're there and I'm there with them. We get together occasionally. We're happy in our own way. I'm quite happy to relax and be quiet. I've learnt to read, a thing I couldn't do much of when I was on your side. I've learnt my ABC and what have you, and now I can read and I get books. There are people who bring me books, and I sometimes am able to let them have some of mine. We sit, and we talk and we read. And I know this'll surprise you, but I've even been to the pictures. I didn't mind a basin-full of the pictures when I was on your side, and sometimes I go with a few friends.'

'Can you describe some of these pictures?'

'Oh yes. You can see things, for instance, that you saw on your side, pictures that you were very fond of. But a lot of them have a sort of moral I suppose you'd call it, and they're very interesting and very helpful.'

'What are the fields and things like there? Are they very beautiful ?'

'Oh yes, gorgeous. Very beautiful green grass we have, and I know it will surprise you if I tell you we have corn fields.'

'You do?'

'Yet the funny thing is, you know, we don't have any seasons. Not in the same sense that you do. For instance, I've never seen any of what I would call rain.'

'You haven't? No rain?'

'And I've never known it to be really dull. Neither have I known it to be over hot. It's always very pleasant. Nice, pleasant warm atmosphere. And yet I've never seen the sun. So I don't think our illumination and light can be from the sun because I've never seen it.'

'Rose, is the grass the same as ours, or is it a finer texture ?'

'Well, it's springy underfoot, and it's very, very nice. A beautiful green. And I have been to places where the flowers are so high that - oh, I should think they're a good seven or eight feet high. It's like walking through a forest of them.'

'Is it really? Rose, what do they do with the corn?

Do they cut it, or do they do anything with it at all?' 'Well no, it don't seem to be - I don't know, I've never seen it cut, and yet it always seems to be there.' 'Never seen bread made from it?'

'No, and that's another funny thing. Of course I don't feel the urge to eat. I did when I first came here, but it was mostly fruit and that sort of thing that one had, but I suppose it is that as you lose your desire for something, you realize it isn't so important, and then it ceases to exist for you. But I was one for my cup of tea, and I still like it and have it. Now I suppose people will say where do you get your tea from? Do you get it from some place on your side? Well, of course it must come from

some place on this side, so it must be grown and it must be sort of made, mustn't it?'

'How do you get it?' asked Woods. 'Do you sort of think you want a cup of tea, and you get it?'

'Well, it's a funny thing, you know. I'm not conscious ... I don't go into a kitchen and put a kettle on, and make myself a cup of tea in that sense. But if I feel the need for a cup of tea, now all I can say is that it's there.'

'Well, that's very nice.'

'Of course,' she went on., 'some people say, and even people over here, they've said that it's not a reality. It's only because I think it's necessary I have it, and that it's made possible. But when I lose the desire for a cup of tea which I've been used to having all my life, it will no longer exist for me. I'll tell you the honest truth. That's one of the reasons why I'm afraid of going far.'

Rose drifted off into yet another monologue on her fear of moving on. Woods listened patiently, waiting for a pause to change the subject. Then nipped in with, 'Do the trees and things, do they flower there?'

'Oh yes, the trees are beautiful, and the blossom or some of them is beautiful. And the perfume! The scent's marvelous.'

'And you have beautiful music that side, don't you?'

'Oh yes. And I've been to lots of concerts and things. Beautiful music Not highbrow, but nice, you know. Not jazzy muck, like you have down on your side, but pleasant stuff, you know. Real nice. Don't hear much religious music. It used to give me the pip sometimes.'

'Rose, you said you did needlework,' put in Betty Greene. 'Do you make any of your clothes?'

'Yes, I do. I've made quite a few things, and people bring me material. A very nice gentleman I've met over here, oh he is a nice man. He's a bit highly placed, but he visits, he visits some of my friends too. And he never comes empty-handed. Oh very generous he is. I always feel a bit embarrassed really, because I think what the devil can I give him? But he always seems to bring something. It's not so long ago he brought me a beautiful piece of stuff. A lovely shade of blue, it was, just the color I like. That's for you, Ma, he says. 'That will make you a nice outfit.'

'When you walk out in the country, do you see animals?'

'Oh, I've seen animals in the fields, of course I have. And I'm not scared of them. Over here they're as gentle ... And it's almost as if they can talk to you. Of course I could never stand crawly, creepy things like frogs. I haven't seen any of those, and I'm told they're on a very low vibration or whatever it is. I don't know what they mean, but they don't exist here. And I haven't seen anything like gnats and flies.

'I've seen butterflies though, that's strange.'

'I bet they're lovely ones too.'

'Oh, lovely, beautiful. I'm told they don't - there again they don't ever die. Funny business, you don't die you know. Nothing dies. When I first came here, once I settled in that was, I thought, well, how long is this going to last, you know? I wondered if it was another sort of life where you go on for so many years, you get antique again, and then you kick the bucket. I wondered if there was anything beyond that. But there is no dying here. It's most peculiar.

105

It seems as if you can go on and on and on, and then you get browned off, or fed up, or think you know all there is to know or all you want to know of where you are, then you can sort of just go off into a kind of sleep or something, and then you go on to a different ... of course I'm scared stiff of that in a way. I don't want to go, you know. A lot of my friends say I should, but I can't see any sense in it.'

'You said your hair was long, the last time,' said Woods, steering her back to the present.

'Oh yes, like it was before I had it cut. Not that I ever had it really bobbed or anything like that.'

'Have you met the Rev. Drayton Thomas?' asked Woods. 'He came through once.'

'Oh, him. Oh, I remember him. Yes, I saw a lot of him at one time. I haven't seen him lately. I think he's probably gone on, you know. On earth we used to say oh, poor old so-and-so, she's gone you know. Well over here, it's much the same because someone will come along and say, what do you think? So-and-so's gone on. Of course that means they've gone on a bit.'

'To another sphere?'

'Yes. I've lost a few of my friends like that. They've gone on. But I don't know, as I say I'm staying put.'

'Have you got horses there?' asked Woods before she could get on to her favourite theme.

'Yes, beautiful, lovely horses.'

'Can you ride, Rose?'

'Oh, not me. Get me on a horse! Oh, blimey mate. No you couldn't get me on one. I'm very fond of them at a distance. Bit scared of horses I am. Always was. Fancy - see me galloping on a horse!'

'What are the towns like?'

'Oh, beautiful, I must say. Not that I live in one. But they're beautifully laid out, I will say that. Beautiful gardens and all sorts of parks and places for the children especially.

'And all kinds of buildings, big places where they have lectures, and libraries for books and things. And places where you can be entertained. All very nice. Nothing common. Nothing cheap and nasty. All real nice, classy

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stuff, but entertaining you know. I've been to one or two of the theatres 'ere, seen plays. Seen lots of famous people that I used to read about, as I never went much to the theatre. Couldn't afford it. Occasionally I'd go up in the gallery and see one or two of the old stars. I've seen quite a few here. A lot of them still do the same kind of work.'

'Are the towns colorful?'

'Yes, beautiful - er - colorful yes, but it depends what you mean, colorful. I don't mean to say the houses or the buildings are all painted red, white and blue.'

'No, no. But the architecture?'

'Oh it's very nice and varied, you know. All kinds.' 'What does the stone look like?'

'Well, the stone looks - I don't know - like mother-of pearl to me.'

'Oh how gorgeous,' exclaimed Betty Greene.

'You would almost think it was made of mother-of pearl. You get all sorts of lovely shades.'

'What would you call the pavement? Made of the same kind of stone?'

'Well, it's kind of stone looking, but I don't know whether it is stone. Of course there's another thing. There's no traffic. You don't get any cars, no motorcycles and nothing like that. People are all content to walk. Nobody rides. No need for it. No effort in walking here.'

'No. But if you want to go a distance you go by thought do you, Rose?'

'I don't know whether you go by thought exactly. No, I suppose it is that you can sort of feel that you want to go to a certain place, and find yourself there. No effort.' 'Have you woods over there? You know, lovely woods?' 'I expect there are a lot of your relations here, yes?' 'I meant woods, trees .. '

'I know what you mean dear. I was just pulling your leg! Yes, of course, lovely woods. Oh it's a wonderful place. No one need fear dying. It's something everyone should look forward to, and realize that, unless they've got something terrible in their mind - on their mind - or in the background ... Of course I suppose everyone's got some skeleton in their cupboard. But the average person's got nothing to worry about coming over here.

I mean even the very wicked, from what I've heard of it, although it's very sad, and probably in a sense very bad for them, yet they don't get lost, poor dears. They're helped and guided, and eventually they come out of the dark.

'The average person's got nothing to worry about. I mean I wasn't particularly good and I wasn't particularly bad. But I must say I've done quite well for myself, and that's why I don't want to change.

'All this business of chopping and changing, people have a mania for it. Some people don't know when they're well off, do they?'

'Well now you are living a life, Rose,' said Woods, 'that you always wanted to live?'

'Yes, I am. And that's why I don't feel disposed to make any change.'

'You're very happy where you are?'

'Very happy. Well, I must go. Anyway, look after yourselves. And I'm glad to hear all the good work you're doing.'

'Do come and see us again,' urged Betty Greene.

'I certainly will, Betty dear. All the best to you George. Bye, bye.'

Once again she kept her promise. But when she came to see them the next time she was even happier. A great worry had been lifted. Chopping and changing seemed not so dreadful after all.

FOURTEEN
A Talk with Oscar Wilde

Rose is happy. But a life that brings contentment to an illiterate flower seller means boredom to an actor, writer or politician. As an advertisement for Heaven, she has her limitations. Is there nothing more to look forward to in the life everlasting than endless cups of tea and natters with the neighbors punctuated by occasional outings and visits to the pictures?

The voices suggest there is. But the educated spirits are sadly short on detail.

It is a curious and frustrating feature of the intellectual communicators that though many claimed to be famous and gifted personalities, successful and sometimes household names on Earth, they seemed to be too preoccupied with morals and problems of this world to be able to describe exactly how they spend their time in the next.

Two of them did say just enough to redress the balance a little. And suggest there might be more to the life that awaits us than sitting and chatting in dust free, labour saving ideal homes and gardens of our dreams.

On 9 February 1957 the silence was broken by a voice with a familiar American twang.

'I don't think I've had the pleasure of speaking to you before,' he began.

'Yes,' replied Betty Greene. 'You are Lionel Barrymore aren't you?'

'Yeah,' he said. 'How did you know that?'

Just over two years before in November 1954, Lionel Barrymore, crusty philosopher of the film world, was watching television in his Hollywood home when he collapsed with a heart attack.

He was taken to hospital, lapsed into a coma and died. The star of countless famous films of the thirties, and

the original Gillespie of Doctor Kildare fell silent. His last reported words, just before the attack struck him, were the last despairing condemnation of life which Shakespeare put into the mouth of Macbeth:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more.

Now Betty Greene was convinced she was hearing Barrymore's voice again.

Woods joined in with the usual question: 'When you first passed over, how did you find things? Did you find a world similar to this one?'

'Well, I wouldn't say similar,' replied Barrymore. 'In certain respects similar as far as nature was concerned But I certainly didn't see any street cars and automobiles, and all that kind of thing. But then again, I understand, on the lower spheres nearer the earth those things exist. Everything is a matter of the state of mind of the people who inhabit that particular place.

'When I first came here, I remember quite well waking up in a kind of - well, I can only describe it as a beautiful garden. Not unlike a garden I had been very fond of in my youth. And my father and mother were there. When I opened my eyes, there was my mother just as I had remembered her when she was a much younger woman. It was a wonderful experience.

'Then a crowd of other friends came and made themselves known to me. People that I had known in my earlier years.

'It seemed in my first experience that I was meeting people that I had known way back when I was quite a young lad. As you know when I began to get older I had a crochety leg, and trouble one way and another, and I often used to daydream back into my youth. I guess that as I passed over, my last earthly thoughts were to do with my earlier years.

'I have a dog here that I was very fond of. If anyone had told me years ago on earth that animals existed after death, I would not have believed it.

'I never really believed that dogs and cats and horses had a soul. I realize now that we are very much responsible for the animal kingdom and that they depend a great deal more on us than we realize.

'I do not know if you can hear me?'

'Yes,' said Woods. 'You are very plain. I have a tape recorder going so it is all going down.'

'Oh yeah, you have a recorder. Of course you know that I have my brother John with me? We did not always hit it off on Earth, but we get on very well here.'

'How do you spend your life on that side?' asked Woods. 'What do you do?'

'Well,' he replied. 'I'm still interested in the theatre. We do have entertainment I suppose you'd call it, although it is not exactly that. Everything we do here has a motive, has a purpose. Every play that is produced, and everything that is achieved and done here has a real purpose - not only just to give people pleasure and entertainment.

'For instance, we take down kinds of plays that you'd call morality plays into the lower spheres, and we reproduce the lives of certain individuals that we may perhaps see in the audience. It helps them to see themselves as they really are. In consequence they begin to think more deeply and it helps them to sort themselves out and desire a better existence.

'I have met Flo Ziegfield and a crowd of others here who still produce what you'd call a kind of extravaganza. At least that's the word we used to have for it in the States. By that I don't mean to say a kind of Folies Bergere - I don't mean that exactly.

'Here we treat nature in the true sense, and the right way. Here we are very conscious of the great gifts that have been bestowed on us in every sense and every way. All types of people here find all sort of interesting work to do. There are some that create beautiful clothes, others who design beautiful pictures, or perhaps scenery for our plays. There are others who compose great music.

'I've heard music here which is far removed from anything you have ever heard on Earth - orchestras numbering several hundreds of people, and each one an artist. Here some of the great composers have composed new works, so

magnificent that I couldn't begin to tell you. As they are playing you can see the atmosphere changing lights and colors. It is a most magnificent sight. Oh, I could go on telling you all kinds of things.'

'It is very interesting,' said Woods encouragingly. 'What sort of theatres are there? What are they like? Are they like theatres on Earth?'

'Yeah. Some are very like theatres on Earth, and some are far removed. We have a kind of theatre very much like what you see on Earth, with beautiful ceiling and carpeting, and auditorium beautifully appointed and all that sort of thing. Also we have great open air amphitheatres I suppose you would call them in natural surroundings. Here are produced all kinds of plays. Great plays from the earliest times, and by men and women here who have made an art of writing and producing and acting.

'All the great plays of Shakespeare are produced here, and what is more interesting still newer plays, greater plays, much greater plays than any you know on Earth. And he is still writing and producing - and acting too. So is Spencer, and so are all the great ones here.'

'Do they still write plays in the same style as they did?' asked Woods.

'No. As one gains more experience in a new existence, naturally your style changes. If Shakespeare were living today, he'd write great plays as he does on this side, but of course they would be in the modern idiom. He'd have written far greater stuff than any modern writer. Sometimes I come back to Earth and I go to your theatres, watch the acting and plays. With a few exceptions, most of it is pretty bad.'

'Have you met Shakespeare?' asked Woods.

'I have met Shakespeare, and I can settle the argument once and for all. There is no doubt about it. He wrote his own plays. It does not mean to say he didn't sometimes use old plays and refurbish them. But you can take it from me that when you have a Shakespeare play, it's Shakespeare's.

'Have you met any famous singers on that side?' 'Sure, I have met many a famous singer here.'

'Kathleen Farron. Have you met her?'

'Kathleen Ferrier you mean. The young English lady who passed over some years or so ago. Yeah, I sure met her. She's a magnificent soul and she has a wonderful voice. You know half her charm was not only

her voice, but her wonderful personality and character. It came out in her voice. I have listened to many a great artist on Earth, but I have known them to be like wild cats backstage - oh quite different to their voice. But this one you are talking about was quite different ...'

Did he mean 'has' or 'had' a wonderful voice? If you can communicate by thought, without speaking, do you still sing in Heaven? We shall have to wait. Barrymore paused. Then: 'Sorry to have to break away like that, but it is quite an effort to talk at length. I'll come and speak to you again some other time. One of the reasons I don't come back very often is that I get fed up with these people who are all the while asking to talk to Fanny and Charlie. I realize you have to have proof and evidence in the beginning, but some of these people go on and on and never seem to be satisfied.'

'That is what we call an Aunt Fanny session,' said Mrs Greene.

'Ah well, you don't want that.'

'We want something on these recordings,' Wood confirmed, 'that we can play back to people and teach them.'

'Well,' said Barrymore, 'you can play these recordings to your friends and to those who are interested, and I can say with all sincerity, that if they seek they shall truly find. I'll be with you. Goodbye.'

Barrymore's new world sounds a lot more satisfying and exciting than Rose's. But they have many basic similarities. It is the two characters and their interests which are different. Still recognizably the same as they were on Earth. Changed only by what they've learnt since they died.

People develop in their new world. But they seem to take a long time to change. Striking and unexpected confirmation of this came five and a half years later, on 20 August 1962.

A male voice began to speak. It was rich and fruity.

'I am delighted to be here,' he began. 'I'm so glad,' said Woods.

'I am not quite sure if you can hear me,' the voice continued.

'Come along friend,' encouraged Betty Greene. 'You are doing very well.'

'Since,' said the voice, in a slightly mocking tone, 'I am doing precisely nothing at the moment, I can't see how you can consider I'm doing extremely well.'

'We thought,' explained Betty Greene, 'you were saying something and thought we hadn't heard you.' 'I have never been known to say nothing.'

'Please, may we have your name ?'

If I couldn't say something of value,' the voice went on, 'then I would rather say nothing.'

'Who is it speaking please?'

Betty Greene was contemptuously ignored.

'This is most extraordinary! Then again, being dead is an extraordinary business, especially when you are talking to people on Earth who are supposed to be alive and are very much dull and dim in consequence! What an extraordinary business this is!'

A puzzled 'Yes' from Woods.

'There seems to have been a great deal of interest in my works, lately. ..'

Another short pause.

'Friend,' tried Betty Greene again, 'may we have your name please?'

'My name got me into a great deal of trouble when I was on your side.'

'When we play these tapes to other people,' explained Woods, 'they ask who it is.'

'You can tell them it is Colonel Bogey!'

'I don't think they'll relish that,' said Woods. 'Anyway, friend, we are very pleased to have you through.'

'I am sure you are much more pleased to have me through than I am to come. At least, it would perhaps be more correct to say that I am quite happy to come, but I certainly wish that it were much more congenial trying to converse, to pass through to you my thoughts through this particular method of communication. It's like using an actor on your side.'

'Ah,' said Betty Greene. 'You wrote plays.'

'Oh, you might as well know. My name is Wilde.' 'Oh,' said Woods. 'I've read your books.'

'How fortunate you are! I suppose I should be highly flattered. Not that I'm getting any royalties. No doubt you belong to a very good library.'

It was time for Betty Greene to get in one of her stock questions. 'Mr Wilde,' she said firmly, 'can you tell us something of your life on the other side? What are you doing ?'

'I must admit,' he replied. 'it's a relief to be asked to discuss one's life over here in preference to one's own life on Earth. Because in any case my life when on Earth is pretty well known among the gossipmongers. If I were to say to you that my life here is not unlike my life on Earth, you'd probably be horrified. But it happens to be perfectly true. And I've no regrets about it whatsoever! I'm perfectly happy and perfectly contented, and I live a life of delicious sin. But only as the world sees sin. It is no longer sin here to be human and to be natural. But on Earth to be natural is to be sinful. Over here one can be sinful because it is natural. The world has strange ideas of sin. I live a natural existence here, and I'm perfectly happy.'

'What are you doing?' persisted Woods.

'Why should I tell you what I'm doing?'

'Oh, we're interested,' said Betty Greene.

'Actually, seriously, I'm still writing, and I'm still having my plays performed, and I am often called on to go down into the lower spheres to help.

'Strange no doubt, you may think, that I should be called to lower spheres to help!'

'Not strange to me,' said Woods.

'Possibly you might even interpret it as - well - probably I'm more suitable to help people on lower spheres because I haven't progressed very much myself! But actually I'm very much in tune with all peoples. My mind, I trust, gives me the entre even if my reputation does not! My reputation does not worry me, but it seems to worry a hell of a lot of people on your side!

'More money has been made out of my reputation since my death than ever I was able to make out of my plays, which goes to say that sin is very successful.'

'You always had a very open mind, didn't you?' said Betty Greene.

'I was always ready to receive inspiration. Indeed I might say that my most successful works were due to the fact that I had an open mind, and in consequence much was poured through it of inspiration - which was highly successful. I feel sure that if it were not for the fact that I was high-minded, you wouldn't have had perhaps some of the successful works that I was able to perform. But of course all this is a matter of dispute among many people. One man's rat poison is another man's meat.'

'Oh no,' said Betty Greene. 'I think every writer is inspired from somewhere to a certain extent.'

'Oh don't take away our own personality and our own originality, my dear, please. But I'm quite prepared to admit I was inspired. I was always an inspiring figure. In fact now I've become almost awe-inspiring! Possibly because I'm dead.'

'Mr Wilde. ..' put in Betty Greene.

'You wish me to drop the flippancy and be serious? To be serious is often to be boring.'

'No, no!' said Woods quickly. 'That wouldn't be you. Don't drop it.'

'So many people when on Earth were so serious that they couldn't fail to be utterly boring. I refuse to join such a gathering. This I do deliberately because there will always be people who'll say, 'How do we know that this was Oscar Wilde?' And so I'm expected to come back very much the same - with the sort of things that would be expected of me. For your sakes I do this because I know, poor dears, you're struggling so desperately hard to convince. And if I can assist you to convince, then I shall be doing some good work, and it may wipe out some of my blots!'

'Mr Wilde,' asked Betty Greene, 'since you've been on the other side, have you learnt anything?'

'I'd be a strange person if I hadn't learnt something after being here so long. We all learn whether we like it or not. Whether we are apt pupils or not we all learn, no matter how bad the teacher.'

'Were you surprised when you found yourself on the other side?'

'Nothing ever surprised me. And certainly nothing could ever surprise me with regard to God, because HE was a person who was always doing surprising things, if one was to believe all that one read in the Bible.'

'Yes, but how actually did you find yourself when you passed over? Can you sort of describe the actual passing?'

'Oh, I died like everybody else.'

'Yes, but you must have found yourself somewhere. In a garden, or a room, or. ..'

'Why should I necessarily find myself in a garden? Or why, for that matter, should I necessarily find myself in a room? How embarrassing it would be, for instance, to wake up to find that you were in Lady Cynthia's boudoir at a very inconvenient moment!'

Betty Greene persisted. 'No. But I mean people met you, didn't they? Somebody must have met you and helped you over?'

'Actually, seriously, I was met by my mother.'

'And how did you find things there?' asked Woods.

'Well, naturally, you can't go to a strange country without finding it vastly different. But the extraordinary and interesting thing is, the people were the same. Situations may be different; the country may be different: habits may be different; one's attitude towards life and everything may be different. But the people, thank God, were the same.

'They still looked the same. They still are the same. And in consequence one felt at home. I met many people that I'd admired, and many that I didn't admire and have since learnt to admire for different reasons. And I have traveled a great deal - went to many places, many spheres, many countries if you like to call them such, because in a sense they are.. There are no barriers, only barriers of oneself within oneself, and one's own mind. The barriers between human relationships and peoples are within

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oneself. They are man-made. One learns to discard them.

'When one has been here even for a short time, one realizes very much we are all part of the other. All God's children eventually begin to merge, although they retain their individuality and separate personality. We all begin to merge until we are harmonious and in consequence we live in a condition of peace, and quietitude and harmony, where all and each can have his or her interest, such as it may be.

'Some feel the urge and need to work in various ways. Others do not. I prefer to continue to write, because writing was, to a great extent, my life.'

'Your trial,' said Betty Greene, 'has been enacted several times.'

'Yes, yes I know. It has been the most highly successful part of my career.'

'Mr Wilde, have you any. ..'

He interrupted before she could finish the question.

'I find it so complicated speaking to you. Most irritating in a way. It's as if I can't get my mind clear. All the time there are sundry blocks and hindrances. But no doubt I shall improve. Carry on. What is it you wished to ask me?'

'I expect,' she continued, 'everybody has regrets when they pass over. You had some regrets, perhaps something you didn't do while you were on Earth?'

'My first regret was that I didn't stay longer on your side!'

'Oh, was it?'

'Well, of course. I still had desires. I still wanted to write further. I still wanted to reinstate myself, strange as it may seem, in human society. Not that I ever felt completely outside it. But I was sufficiently vain to assume that I could recapture my old place in the world. Bu that's a long time ago. Since then I've changed.'

'Have you met Bernard Shaw on that side?'

'Oh, I have met Shaw. Of course I've met Shaw. What a man! Extraordinary character. Brilliant, if rather - well I'd better perhaps not say these things. I'm supposed to be to some extent developed!'

'What's it like on your side? The plane you are on.

Could you tell us something about that?'

'You mean pictorially?'

'Yes - your theatres and things like that. You've got theatres, haven't you? You still write plays on that side?'

'Oh, one still writes. One still continues. Our world, in some senses, as no doubt you've heard, is very similar to your Earth. We have all manner of scenery, which you are accustomed to - even more beautiful. As you know, nature exists here, but the more irritating aspects of nature are non-existent to us. For instance, we don't have the pests, such as flies, earwigs, and all the irritating things that nature concocts to annoy man. These things seem to have disappeared fortunately. We seem to have all the beauty and the loveliness of nature without all the petty irritants. No more swatting flies!'

'What are the buildings like on your side?' asked Woods. 'There are all manner of buildings, but on the sphere on which I live they are all elegant, of great beauty.'

'Are there towns, or cities, and ...'

'Yes, you could call them cities. They are cities in which untold thousands of people live and have their habitat, but so different, and yet, in some ways, so like the old.'

'But you don't have cars, or anything like that, do you?'

'No. Thank goodness we do not have those machines. Horses we still have. Animals, pets that meant so much to humanity, and humanity to some extent gave to in return, such as one's pet dog, one's pet horse.

'Animals are very near to humans. Unfortunately humans are very often near to animals! I sometimes think that the animals are more advanced than the humans. At least they follow their natural instincts and they are not, in consequence, considered to be doing anything or otherwise wrong. Human beings are always in trouble because they are trying desperately often to find their true selves. Man should be allowed to be his true self, because only by that can he hope to develop.'

Woods drew him back to factual information by asking, 'Do you have a house yourself where you can write?'

'Yes, I do. A very beautiful house. A house after my own heart. But then again in a sense I suppose it is because

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I myself created it. Without even realizing it, I was creating it before I ever came here by my thoughts - my better thoughts.'

'Have you a garden?'

'I have a garden. Not too large, but sufficient. I was never one for outdoor life. I appreciated nature, but I preferred to watch nature from a distance rather than to always be underneath her glaring light. One perceives often more clearly, more distinctly from a distance.'

Then suddenly it was all over.

'I must go,' said the voice. 'I will come and talk to you again, if I may.'

'It was very nice of you to come,' said Woods.

'Thank you, Mr Wilde,' added Betty Greene.

'It has been very nice speaking to you,' said the voice. 'And if sometimes I seemed - seemed a little acid - I've done it as much for your benefit, as it might in some measure be of help to others, because if I'm not to some extent my old self, people will say that cannot be. So for your sakes I do this. But I can, and will talk on things you wish me to speak about - er - in due course.

'May God bless you. That is the common thing to say, I believe, when you say good-bye at Spiritualist seances. May God bless you my friends. I'll say it with the best, be one of them. Good-bye.'

The voice which claimed to be Oscar Wilde fell silent.

120

Fifteen
House and Garden

Eventually, in any examination of the next world, you come to the inevitable question: 'Can you describe in simple terms a day in the life of a housewife in Heaven.'

After going through hundreds of recorded accounts, the honest answer is that I can't.

There is no day and no night; no typical housewife; no typical life. Everyone, we are told, goes to a state of consciousness they have created for themselves by the life they led on earth. George Harris couldn't imagine a life without laying bricks. He went on laying them in Heaven. Lionel Barrymore couldn't imagine a life without acting. He went on acting. Rose couldn't imagine a life without frequent cups of tea. She went on drinking tea.

No one, they tell us, stays still. Everyone develops and progresses. Life for everyone changes in Heaven as it does on Earth.

What questions can we answer? Describe a house in Heaven? What grows in heavenly gardens? Do they eat, sleep, work or entertain? How do they relax. What exactly do they do with themselves?

The operative word is exactly.

Woods and Betty Greene asked all the necessary questions. They got a lot of answers. But whether the voices are intentionally vague, or find it impossible to describe a timeless existence in a world of different dimensions in language we can understand on Earth, the answers are rarely exact.

All we can do is to piece together what they do say and see what we can make of it.

If you rely on conventional religious teaching for your, expectations of Heaven, you're in for a surprise.

'I thought it would be quite different,' said Mary Ann Ross. 'That it would be more like one sees in pictures and

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religious books. The angels and wings ...'

It was very different. No angels. No wings. No harps. First impressions are usually how closely Heaven resembles Earth.

'We've got the sort of replica,' said Mr Biggs' mother, 'of everything.'

'I'm talking,' said Alfred Higgins, the Brighton painter and decorator, 'about the conditions of a life which in some ways is very like Earth. The world in which we live is very, very, similar in some respects and very natural.'

Mary Ivan tells us they even breathe air. 'I don't know of oxygen,' she says, 'but I call it the air because one's conscious of breathing.'

A Mr George Ohlson, who had been a personal friend of Woods, told him: 'I think the reality of it was the thing that surprised me ... It's not a wishy washy affair. It's not some sort of vague something. It's a real existence.'

The first permanent reality to anyone who dies is usually their new home. Many of them describe it in terms of homes on Earth.

Alf Pritchett, you remember, was taken by his sister to 'a small cottage. The nearest thing I'd seen to cottages at home in England . . . Off a little

passage was a little room. All very cosy and comfortable. Nice chairs. No fireplace.'

Remember Mr Biggs going to visit his Aunt May in her cottage. 'There was that same little house. One of four it was, on the end ... A little garden ... They took me inside ... and everything was spick and span.'

Ted Butler woke up, 'in a very nice little parlour .. . chintz curtains at the window ... a nice hearth-rug on the floor.'

Terry Smith found his way to something very similar: 'I suppose you'd call it the parlour - nice little room it was, very chintzy curtains and chairs and it all looked very homely.'

Oscar Wilde was even less exact. 'A very beautiful house,' he said. 'A house after my own heart.' But no details.

In 1962 a voice claiming to be Elizabeth Fry, Quaker, philanthropist and prison reformer, came through to add a little more to our knowledge of heavenly housing.

'The house,' she said, 'could best be described as a low, timbered, thatch-roofed house . . . Home to me is as important as it is to you. Human beings love a place which they can make into a home, which will to some extent be a product of their own way of thinking. That is why there are so many types of houses. I am drawn to the type of house in which I live because it gives me a feeling of solidness, security, and it is something which to my way of thinking is beautiful in itself. It is sufficient for me. It is not great. It is not large. It is just as I desire it. And the furnishings are simple.'

It sounds beautiful to us too. But to a house agent trying to produce the particulars of a desirable residence for sale, her description is bafflingly vague.

It was Rose, ever practical, who gave us the first essential details about her house: 'It's got four rooms, quite enough for me to look after.'

What are the four rooms? She doesn't say. The only room that is ever described is the sitting-room. Do they have bedrooms, dining-rooms, kitchen, bathroom and lavatory? Or, if usual offices are unnecessary, library, billiards room or study?

No one ever says.

Almost every home the voices describe has a garden, and is set in a suburban countryside invariably like, but more beautiful than the countryside on Earth.

'The flowers are natural,' said Rose. 'They have life. You can cut the flowers, and you can use them in your house; but very few people do that after a time. If you're sitting in your house and you want to see the flowers outside, you don't necessarily have to go outside to see them. You can just sort of think about them and see them.'

They have grass too, she says. 'It's springy underfoot, and it's a very nice beautiful green ... I have been to places where the flowers are so high that - oh, I should think they're a good seven or eight feet high. It's like walking through a forest of them.'

Corn apparently grows in the fields. 'But I've never seen it cut,' says Rose, 'and yet it always seems to be there ...

The trees are beautiful and the blossom on some of the trees is beautiful. And the perfume !'

George Hopkins, the Sussex farmer, was equally ecstatic. 'We have the countryside. We have the lakes and rivers ... We have flowers, birds and all sorts of things that you associate with nature excepting perhaps what one might call the lesser forms. I've never seen things like ants, although again there is great intelligence on your side with ants, but I've never seen them here. I've never seen insects and suchlike ... There are certain aspects of nature as you understand it that don't seem to exist here.'

This happy omission is echoed by Oscar Wilde who tells us 'the more irritating aspects of nature are nonexistent to us. For instance we don't have the pests, such as flies, earwigs, and all the irritating things that nature concocts to annoy man. These things seem to have disappeared.'

The next thing they notice, in the words of Ted Butler, is a wonderful feeling of lightness and warmth, what I thought was the sun shining through the windows'; or as Mary Ivan put it: the sun, or I thought it was the sun then, was shining through the windows.'

But it was not.

Terry Smith explains : 'What appeared to be the sun, although she told me later there was no sun, that it was illumination from which all of us, all life, was able to draw some power ... Funny thing about the illumination - this may sound odd - but it didn't seem to cast shadows.'

'I've been told since,' added Ted Butler, 'it has nothing to do with the sun at all. It's an illumination that is of natural being, but what it's source is I've never discovered.'

One day, perhaps a celestial scientist will explain.

If there is no sun, does it ever get dark, and do you go to sleep?

The voices disagree.

'Do you have night and day there?' asked Woods.

'Yes,' said George Harris. 'The same as you do. Night and day. Of course we do. I go to sleep and go to bed, wake up the same as you do on earth.'

So, soon after his arrival, did Mr Biggs.

'You ought to have rest,' said his mother. 'Would you like to go to bed?'

'Oh, bed. Do you go to bed here then?'

'Well,' she says, 'it's not necessary, but in your case it might be a good thing.'

'So to cut a long story short, I went to bed.'

But Mr Biggs was newly arrived from Earth. And George Harris was at the stage where he still felt compelled to lay celestial bricks.

Rose, who had been in Heaven rather longer, replied differently: 'Oh yes, you can sleep if you feel so inclined.' 'But it's not necessary?'

'It isn't necessary . . . If you're mentally tired you just sort of mentally relax, close your eyes, and you rest. And you re-open your eyes after a time. You don't feel tired no more.'

Ellen Terry, a more advanced old inhabitant, explained: 'There is never darkness. There is a kind of what you might call perhaps a twilight, and yet this is something which is so unlike yours. There is a time for quietude with us, and rest. And yet there is never any need for rest, or sleep, but a peacefulness that comes upon us when we feel the need.'

Nor does it seem to rain.

'I've never seen any what I would call rain,' said Rose. And, 'we don't seem to have seasons, not in the same sense as you do.'

But again it seems to depend on your stage of development. For George Harris, still partly in earth vibrations, replied: 'Different seasons, rain, shine and all that .. . it's all very natural.'

'Have rain did you say?' asked a surprised Betty Greene.

'Yes,' he replied. 'Rain and all that. It's just the same. It's as if you have a replica - is that it? - of the earth. Oh, very nice.'

But for most there are no seasons, and, more difficult to grasp, no time.

'There isn't any measurement of time as I understand it,' said Rose. 'We are not conscious of time. I know you can't realize it - I mean you think oh well, afternoon, evening and night.

Well, those things don't affect us. We don't have time as you have it at all. Time, after all, is only man-made to a point, isn't it?'

The best explanation of this vital difference between the two worlds came from George Ohlson.

'Mr Ohlson,' asked Betty Greene, 'you said you were not doing anything. How do you spend your time?'

'Oh my goodness me, time!' he replied. 'You see that's a thing that doesn't exist for us. You see that's another thing that must become very puzzling to people. They say, 'Oh well, what on earth do they do with their time?' Time, time, time! Well, we're not conscious of time. Time doesn't mean anything to us. We may be from your point of view doing all sorts of things that interest us, and may find so many different forms of interest, but we're not conscious of time. We're not conscious of an hour, or a day, or a week, or a month or a year, and indeed our only consciousness of time is through you. By coming back to you we're conscious of time to some extent.

'People say, 'Oh well, I'm sure so-and-so will come back and speak because it's his birthday.' Well, we couldn't even care less in a sense about birthdays. In fact we probably wouldn't even remember it was our birthday if it were not for the fact we pick up the idea of the thought from the consciousness of the individual near and dear to us on Earth. The fact is that somebody says, 'Oh well, it's Fred's birthday on February the so-and-so, then we say oh, my birthday must be then, but otherwise we wouldn't even know about it.

'The same as birth. I mean it's quite obvious to me that consciousness of an individual was in existence before birth. I mean you only come into awareness of things as you gradually develop. As you become a little older on Earth you gradually take a conscious awareness of things going on around you - shapes and forms, and color and sound. And these gradually begin to mean something when you're an infant. But there's no getting away from the fact that life existed before birth.

'I don't think for instance, I was just born any more than I just died.

I mean I was obviously there before birth, not necessarily in quite the same sense. I developed and evolved my own personality, and people called me so-and-so Ohlson. But the point is that's infinitesimal in time itself. I mean it's pretty obvious to me that none of us are what we think we are. The whole thing is so complex I agree, but it's all so fascinating.'

No time. No mealtimes. Any meals? Do we eat in the next world? At first sight the evidence seems contradictory.

No one expects to eat or drink. When they're greeted with a cup of tea they can't believe it's real.

Remember Alf Pritchett. He arrived at his reception centre. What did he see? 'Some were talking and others were eating and that struck me. I thought, 'Well I've got him here.' He says as how this is some sort of part of Heaven. I should have thought they wouldn't eat. So I says: 'Look, they're eating over there."

Remember Mr Biggs, on a visit to his Aunt May.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' she asked.

And Ted Butler. 'So we'll have a cup of tea.'

And Terry Smith, welcomed to his new home with 'would you like a drink?' And replying: 'I'd like a lemon.'

And how George Wilmot was made to feel at home by the family of his French girlfriend: 'They put this big bowl of soup in front of me, and honestly, it was just as if I was on Earth again. They were having this soup, and I joined in. And I smoked too. The old boy had his pipe.'

Their heavenly hosts were quick to explain that these were exceptional occasions.

'What you don't realize,' said Pritchett's guide, 'is that when you come here, you feel it's essential to do certain things. If you feel it's essential to eat and drink you can.'

'When you first come here,' Aunt May explained to her nephew, 'everything's made very much the same so that you'll be happy and familiar, and if you want something like that you can have it. But you'll soon realize those things aren't necessary.'

'If when you first come here,' explained Ted Butler's guide, 'you feel it's necessary to have this or that, it's provided for. But it's only a temporary thing until you've

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adjusted yourself to the fact that you don't need those things. I don't normally have tea or anything like that. But since you're a guest in my house and you're getting gradually accustomed to things I thought it would help you.'

George Wilmot got almost the same explanation from his guide. 'That is only necessary because you think, and other people like you think those things are necessary. But you'll soon realize they're not. And when the desire goes, the thought form will disappear with it, and those things will cease to exist for you.'

For some the desire seems to take a long time to go.

'I was a one for my cup of tea,' said Rose, 'and I still like it, and I still have it.'

'How do you get it?' asked Woods.

'Well, it's a funny thing, you know,' she replied. 'I'm not conscious - for instance I don't go into a kitchen and put a kettle on, and make myself a cup of tea in that sense. If I feel the need for a cup of tea, now all I can say is that it's there.'

She was more explicit about food. 'We have fruit trees, and nuts, and all the things that you'd associate with your world in regarding food, but you don't kill animals and eat over 'ere. You don't eat horse meat or flesh or anything like that you know.'

And later: 'That's merely a material thing, desire for food, and hunger. Material desire in that respect drives them to killing each other, but that doesn't exist over here, because the desire for food is soon lost ... You do get people who come here - when they first come here they feel, desire to have certain foods. Well, they can have it. But they soon get

out of the habit of wanting it, or thinking that they want it, and after a time it all sort of passes away from them you might say.'

A voice claiming to be a Mr Martin who emigrated to Australia in the 'twenties and was killed in Sydney described the same experience at first hand.

'There was everything you could want to eat and drink,' he said, 'and I couldn't get the idea of this at all. I mean I did things automatically I suppose. But gradually it began

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to dawn on me that these things such as eating and drinking, they were just habits. They were things I'd got in the habit of thinking were necessary and wanted, and therefore they were there for me. But after a while I began to realize that these things weren't so important, and gradually I lost the desire to eat, and lost the desire to drink, and gradually those things didn't mean anything any more.' . There are times when the clatter of tea cups seems as loud in Heaven as at vicarage garden parties on Earth. What are the prospects for those who prefer a pint of bitter or a bottle of wine?

The voices are vague. A hint, dropped by John Brown, Queen Victoria's hard drinking confidential servant, is not encouraging. 'I had to learn to live without drink,' he said. 'Without whisky. And here, of course, it is not possible to have that.' But Woods' father, a regular whisky and wine drinker on Earth, told his son he could have both in Heaven.

There are compensations in Heaven. If the pleasures of eating and drinking fade, so do the penalties of over indulgence.

'There are no aches and pains,' said George Harris. 'No illness. I haven't seen any hospitals, nothing like that, although there again they do tell me there are places 'ike 'ospitals, they say, for mental cases.' And later: 'I don't have to go to the toilet even, isn't it funny? I mean you have a damn good meal, and you think well, later on you'll have to go the joey, you know, but you don't .. . It's different. It can't be the same old physical body, as they call it, and it hasn't got the same sort of construction.'

Thirst and appetite soon fade. But at least in the spheres from which the voices come, no one seems to have lost their interest in clothes.

Alf Pritchett, remember, arrived in Heaven, touched down on a long avenue with beautiful trees and noticed people 'going about in a most peculiar sort of dress up.' When he got to his reception centre, 'what

struck me as odd was that they were dressed much the same way as I used to dress myself in Civvie Street. Suits and all that sort of thing.'

Mary Ivan woke up in her hospital and was told by her sister she could get up.

129

'What about my clothes,' she asked?

'You don't have to worry about those,' replied her sister. 'You've got them on.'

She looked at herself. 'And there I was standing beside the bed in a beautiful gown.'

'That's all right,' said the sister. 'I helped you to dress, but you didn't know that.' By her thought.

Remember what Rose said when asked: 'Do you wear clothes ?'

'Of course we wear clothes dear.'

'Anything like the clothes we wear?'

'Well, no. I don't wear clothes like I used to wear. I don't expect you'll wear a suit like that when you come here.'

'Will you describe the clothes you've got on now?'

'People clothe themselves,' explained Rose, 'in the type of things that they feel happy in. Of course in the early stages of coming over here, when a woman passes out, in say this century, in this period like, they think that that particular type of dress is essential to them, and for a time they wear it.

'But after a time they realize that it's quite unimportant, that perhaps it doesn't really suit them. Perhaps they're not happy about it. And gradually they change their outlook, and then in consequence they change their wearing apparel.'

'Well,' she was asked, 'at this moment Rose, what have you got on?'

Her reply gave us one of the more detailed descriptions of a heavenly creation.

'I don't know what it may sound like to you dear,' she said, 'but I've got a very pretty white dress on, from top to toe. It's got a sort of border round

the bottom. It's got longish sleeves, and I have a kind of belt round the middle, of gold, like a cord arrangement, and I've got a sort of design all round the edge of the dress and the sleeve, like a key pattern.'

'What is the material?'

'Well, I suppose the nearest I could explain it to you would be like a kind of silk.'

That's fairly clear. But where did she get it from? Woods' friend George Ohlson tried to explain but was noticeably less clear.

'There are people who design clothes. If you find you want a particular dress, and you like a particular color, then the material can be created, and indeed there are thousands of places where you can obtain materials.

'I don't suggest there are shops in the same sense as you understand it. But there are places which are run by people who are interested in materials and that sort of thing who will supply material which you can, if you wish - or if you can't do it someone else will do it for you - create a dress or a suit even if you want to.

'There is this idea that persists among Spiritualists that you just think of a dress and you're clothed in it. Well, that, in a sense, is true. But it's only true from the point of view when one comes back to earth, and wants to re-create an impression of probably oneself as one was. One would be remembered by perhaps certain wearing apparel, and so on. And one has the ability to re-create, in a mental thought force or form, oneself in a particular, shall we say, dress. But only temporarily. It's only for a fleeting second or two of Earth time that we can hold on to that thought sufficiently for it to be impregnated and picked up by a sensitive or a medium.'

A little light on an apparently complex problem was shed by Rupert Brooke.

'What sort of clothes do you wear?' asked Woods.

'I feel the clothes I like best,' he replied, 'are something like the ancient Greeks wore. It's very, very comfortable, very attractive to look at, and the materials are very beautiful.'

'Very colorful?' asked Woods.

'Oh, very. Of course, there again it's not altogether a matter for yourself. One likes to feel ... I mean that one wears what one would like to wear, which is true in essence. But the point is that there are certain colors for instance which you couldn't possibly wear unless you yourself, by your very nature, and your very soul as it were, made it

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possible; because we are often known in temperament and in character by the colors of our wearing apparel. 'The point is that we know each other by the very illumination and light around and about us. For instance, if certain colors were in your aura, there may be other colors that you couldn't wear in your dress, or in your appearance, in your wearing apparel. Certain things just couldn't be. If, for instance, you had not progressed very far, you wouldn't be able to wear soft blue because it wouldn't be in your make-up and nature. You wouldn't have made it possible for yourself to have that color in your auric emanation, and, in consequence, you wouldn't wear it in your wearing apparel. For one thing you wouldn't be attracted to it because you weren't ready for it, shall we say, and secondly it just wouldn't be possible.

'I don't know how to explain why it wouldn't be possible. The whole thing is that somehow, automatically almost, you are what you are; and you cannot be beyond that or less than that. You see we all go forward. We all strive in some shape or form to act accordingly; and in consequence we are automatically as we are by our own very endeavour; and it would be most unnatural for one to assume over here a facade which you yourself would know would deceive no one.

'In other words, whereas a man may build up a facade, may build up something about himself which gives the wrong impression to others, but actually the person underneath may be a ghastly person, that sort of thing you can do on your side, but you can't do it here. Here there is no deceit of any description. Here you are known for what you are.'

What are you?

What you look like, what your home, garden, surroundings and clothes look like - all this can be built up, with difficulty into a picture of sorts.

But what you are, and what exactly you do is more difficult still.

SIXTEEN
Work

If it's difficult to describe what Heaven and its inhabitants look like, the problem intensifies when you try to describe what everyone does there. Here on Earth most of us work to earn the money, to provide ourselves with food, clothes and home. Or look after our breadwinner and family. We get up, dress, undress and go to bed; sleep, eat, travel, shop and watch television. And sometimes get rather bored.

In the next world sleeping and eating are unnecessary. Houses are free: dressing and travel instantaneous. And no one has to work for a living.

What on earth does everyone do?

The voices are fairly explicit on what they do not do.

'I didn't see any factories, I didn't see any street cars and automobiles and that sort of thing,' said Lionel Barrymore.

'You don't get vast factories for instance,' said George Ohlson. 'You don't get railways and stations.'

'I don't fly obviously,' said Amy Johnson, 'because there are no 'planes.'

'I haven't seen any bleedin' cars,' said George Harris. 'Oh blimey, who wants cars? We can get around here on our own two feet.'

'I can sit in my chair,' said Rose, 'and I can think to myself that I would like to go to Flint's circle, so I just - er - think, and I close my eyes, and the next minute, you might say, I'm here with you.'

'Money,' she exclaimed. 'You can't buy anything here with money, mate!'

'But,' said Woods, 'you say you've got architects to do your work?'

'Well you don't pay him,' said Rose. 'He does it because he' loves to do it. He loves to design houses. He loves to

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do that kind of work, and he does it. The same as the musician loves to play the violin. He's happy to entertain his friends.

'They do everything for love?'

'Everything is done for love, and everyone, for instance, on your side who never had a chance in life, perhaps they wanted to be a musician or artist - they can study over here.'

Even in his undeveloped state, George Harris had already realized that, 'we don't have to go out to work. Nothing like that. I don't save to try to earn a few bob. Money doesn't mean anything here. Money is of no consequence at all.'

No rent. No food bills. No taxes. So far so good. The difficulties begin when you ask them what latent talents they are developing to fill up the long, uncluttered timeless day. The aspirations of the man in the (heavenly) street seem limited.

Ted Butler's guide explained the absence of her mother by saying she was out.

'Does she go out to work?' asked Butler.

'Yes,' she replied. 'I suppose you could call it work. My mother was a hard working woman when on Earth. She used to take in washing and was always doing something. Now she goes to a place where she looks after children, because she was always fond of children. Little children who died in infancy or when they were very young; and she helps to bring them up and look after them. She loves that work.'

Mr Biggs' mother prepared her son for his new home by telling him she lived with her sister Florrie.

'Florrie and me,' she said, 'we get on, and we do hospital work.'

'Hospitals ?'

'Well they aren't hospitals in the same way as you know hospitals. But they're necessary for certain types of people who are mentally unsettled and need guidance and help. It's interesting work and I'm happy doing it.'

Mary Ivan was met by her sister. Her husband only turned up later.

'He was away,' she explained. 'He was doing some special work I found out afterwards. It was to do with some war that was going on somewhere in Africa ... and he was helping the wounded and dying.'

Alfred Higgins had a more practical job. Very like his job on Earth.

'I get a great deal of pleasure,' he said, 'in looking after other people's houses, and helping them get settled when they first come here, and doing little things for them ... I do little jobs and help generally. We do decorate.'

George Harris, ex-builder, was also following his old trade.

'I was in the building trade, and I'm very interested in building and I liked my job, but here it's rather different. You do build. You do build of materials and things that are real and solid and all that, but of course you don't do it for money. You don't do it because you've got to do it. You do it because you like doing it, because you get some pleasure and happiness out of it.

'Of course I've been told by some of the people where I am it's very sort of - well, I suppose you'd call it early stages you know - and that's why we have to build. But they do say, you know, on the higher planes as they call it, that everything's created by thought.

'Where I am it's real as can be. You have materials, and you work with materials. I've seen practically a replica of, oh so many things which were common on your side. People don't just sit and think about something and there it is. Wouldn't be much pleasure in that. I should think that's a lousy way of carrying on. I think unless you've to make some effort towards it, and build for it, work for it, that's the only real pleasure and happiness as far as I can see.'

'George,' asked Betty Greene, 'how do you get your bricks for building?'

'Oh, they're produced. Places where they supply them, and you can collect them and use them and build with them.'

'Do you build houses for special people,' asked Woods, 'or everybody, or who do you decide should have the houses ?'

'Well that depends on the individuals. I mean there's no business firms or anything like that. But everyone who comes over here - I'm talking about where I am - If they had a trade or something rather special, and they enjoyed it and it made them happy, they have the same thing here. You get carpenters, you get decorators and all that, and I suppose whatever you enjoyed doing on Earth, you can still carry on doing it here. They say as how over here that you can do whatever you want to do, until such time as you begin to think a different way.

'I'm quite happy building, helping others, who you know were also in the building trade when they were on Earth, and we build and work together, and our houses are as real and solid as yours, and some of them are really beautiful. Of course the people that we build for are people that we like, people we're fond of, people who are anxious for something of their own, and their own way of thinking and idea, and it's all worked out.

'There are people who create here. There are what you call architects and all that. They rough out things, you know, work out things. We follow it out.'

Confirmation of the continuing importance of creative work came unexpectedly from an advanced stage of development through the voice of Elizabeth Fry.

'You must not think we just think of a thing, and there it is,' she said. 'All kind and manner of work go on here. People make articles, create designs. Great artists paint great pictures still, because it is their joy to do it, but with a greater variety of hue and color. Great musicians compose great music ...'

Elizabeth Fry is still, by her own account, doing great social work, nearest she can get to prison reform in a world without prisons.

'I am doing,' she said, 'what you would probably term rescue work among those souls who, particularly through circumstances beyond their control when on Earth, and environment, were unable to adjust themselves and to find a way of life which would have helped them grow in stature.'

The great creative artists who spoke to Woods and Betty Greene, or were described by the voices, seem to be creating works of heavenly beauty.

Oscar Wilde is still writing.

'Some feel the urge and need to work in various ways,' he explained. 'Others do not. I prefer to continue to write because writing was, to a great extent, my life.'

Lionel Barrymore, you remember, is still interested in the theatre. More seriously than in Hollywood.

'I'm still interested in the theatre . . . All the great plays of Shakespeare are produced here; and what is more interesting still, newer plays, greater plays, much greater plays than any you know on Earth. And he is still writing and producing and acting. So is Spencer, and so are all the great ones here.'

'I've met Shakespeare,' said a voice claiming to be Lillian Baylis of the Old Vic.

'Does he still produce plays?' asked Woods. 'He does, he does.'

Frederic Chopin still claims to be playing the piano. 'My impression of a piano when I first played one on the other side was that I was at home, I suppose because without a piano I was a lost person. But when I found a piano here and I could play, I was happy.'

Rubert Brooke is still writing.

'I asked,' he said, 'if it were still possible here to continue writing and he said, 'Oh yes, you can do that if you wish. And you can, if you want to, do other things.'

'If you want to become a painter or musician there is nothing to stop you. In fact you can do exactly what you feel inclined to do. That's the only way one can progress on this side. You go forward in the manner which you yourself have made possible by your thinking and your action.'

Is it possible to draw up a list of heavenly careers? The openings seem more limited than on Earth. But the jobs and professions that do exist are open to all.

If you were a soldier, you will have to train for a peaceful calling. Soldiers, sailors and airmen appear to be in permanent retirement. Business is out. That means no salesmen, no accountants, bankers, shopkeepers or clerks.

No industry either. So no bosses, no assembly line workers, miners, dockers - or unions.

No drivers, conductors or pilots I think. And probably few mechanics.

If you want to work with your hands, the most promising trades seem to be building, decorating, painting and perhaps gardening.

The professions flourish. There are openings for architects, psychiatrists, nurses, designers, librarians and teachers. And the field for social workers is unlimited.

Anyone can embrace the arts. Potential or frustrated writers, musicians and painters can satisfy all the creative instincts they have had to suppress on Earth.

And if all forms of work seem a boring burden, you can spend the rest of your existence - or as long as you can endure doing nothing - as a gentleman or lady of leisure.

There seems to be no need to be bored. No one has stated definitely whether television has reached the next world. But almost every other worthwhile earthly entertainment is available free of charge. Books, plays and concerts. Probably films. And apparently even swimming and horse racing if it still seems to matter. Without money, and presumably bookmakers, the excitement may fade.

It was Rose who said, 'You can swim. You can go into the water if you want to, but you don't get dirty.' And revealed; 'I know this'll surprise you but I've even been to the pictures.'

Did she mean the movies? Alfred Higgins suggests she did.

'We have educational centres,' he said. 'We have great libraries where there are wonderful books you can read, and places where you can see wonderful . . . I suppose you'd call them films. They're not really films as you understand it, but that's the nearest way I can describe it, in which you see depicted all manner of things appertaining to man and his development, and life, and how people have evolved.'

Good news for racegoers comes from Elizabeth Fry Quaker.

138

'Do you have things that go on like we do on Earth?' asked Woods. 'Such as horse racing, or church bells ringing?'

'There are spheres where these things exist,' she replied. 'Because the mind of man considers they are vital and important to his happiness and welfare. In other words man creates by thought here as he does in your world, and on spheres near the earth these thoughts predominate.'

Plays are still considered indispensable entertainment in every sphere which the voices still inhabit.

'We do have entertainment,' said Lionel Barrymore, 'although it is not exactly that. Every play that is produced here has a real purpose - not only to give people pleasure and entertainment. For instance we take down a kind of play we call morality plays into the lower spheres, and we reproduce the lives of certain individuals that we see in the audience.'

Concerts seem to be as common as plays.

Mary Ann Ross describes how she was taken to her first concert by the boyfriend she'd turned down on Earth.

'He took me,' she said, 'to one place in particular which was in a - I suppose you'd call it a town because there were all sorts of houses and large buildings where people were living. And there was a huge place with many steps, and when I first looked at all those steps I thought, 'My what a lot of steps. You'd get so tired climbing up,' but the funny thing was I didna feel tired at all.

'We went into this great place, and it was so vast it must have held thousands of people. And there on the platform was a beautiful piano, the most beautiful thing that I'd ever seen in my life. It was enormous, much bigger than any other piano I'd ever seen or heard of, and I should imagine it had three tiers of keys. It was made of mother-of-pearl and had the most beautiful colors and tints.

'Then a beautiful creature came on. He was tall and nice looking, and his hair was long and he had fine features. He sat down and started to play. I'd never heard anything like it. The funny thing was it seemed as if it were the three of the keyboards being used at the same time, and yet there was only one pair of hands. I didna see his hands go

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to the top two keyboards, only the lower, but I could see the depression of notes on the other keyboards, and I can only assume that in some way they were all connected up together.

'It was extraordinary, the sound. It was as if you were carried away by it, and as if you were enveloped by it, and as if you lost all sense of place and time and everything. As if you were in a kind of a way with the music and part of the music, and you lost sight of the hall and the people, and even the pianist after a time. It was as if you were part of the music and as if it was talking to you, and helping you to understand.'

Even John Brown, when he got over his craving for whisky, seems to have developed a taste for music.

'You can sit with thousands of people,' he said, 'in a vast auditorium in the open air, and you can listen to the greatest music by the greatest composers. And not only do you hear but you see! The picturization, you might say, of their music is registered in the atmosphere. And you can see what is being conveyed in visual form as well as by sound.

'For instance, if a great musician was composing a piece of music that represented the evolution of man, then you would see in a picturization what was actually in his mind, and what was actually represented in the music. All this, of course, is extremely difficult to explain.'

From every account of the new life one thing that does emerge clearly is that people in the next world survive basically as the same characters who died in this.

'You can't go to a strange country,' said Oscar Wilde, 'Without finding it vastly different. But the extraordinary and interesting thing is, the people were the same.'

Even racial prejudice and color consciousness survive for a time. And are allowed for in the natural order of Heaven.

George Wilmot, the rag-and-bone merchant, described how he walked with his guide past people standing at their door and looking out of their windows.

'Sometimes they would wave,' he said, 'and sometimes people would call out, and they all seemed to be white

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people. I didn't see any colored people. And I thought to myself this must be, if it's what he says it is, Heaven and that, it must be a white peoples' Heaven.

'I started thinking about colored people. I thought well, I don't know, they all seem to be quite normal and natural here, but you don't see any other people, only white people. So I wondered to myself. Of course I didn't say anything to him, but he must have been able to read my thoughts.

' 'Ah,' he says. 'There are colored people too. All races, all nations. But of course it's natural that people want to live in a community, in a condition of life which is best suited to them. Perhaps a person likes a little cottage and they're quite happy to live in that way, and they have that; whereas perhaps a colored person, depending on his experience of life and so on, wouldn't be happy in what you call a white man's sort of atmosphere. You'll find there are people of all nations, all types, 'ere. And they live in a community or condition of life that's best suited to them, in which they'd be most happy. But gradually they change their thoughts, and their outlook, whether it's white or colored, and they find communities where they integr ... whatever it is, and get together.' '

John Brown takes this idea a stage further.

'Here death, you might say ' he explained, 'is a great leveler up of people. You realize it is unimportant what you were on Earth, as to what your station in life was. It's what you yourself were that counted. Whether you yourself were a real person inasmuch that you had real

values, and real appreciation of the things that mattered. Since I've been here, I've met many great personalities who had been, because of their position in life, sometimes indeed very cruel, and who had no sympathy or understanding of the poor, and indeed had never had to suffer at all. And here they've had to learn to appreciate the things that really were vital and important. Things which they were never able, because of their condition or station of life, to understand.

'It's easier for a poor person to understand truth often than a rich person.'

'It is easier,' he might have said, 'for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'

141

'A lot of people seem to think from your side,' said Alfred Higgins, 'that as soon as we cease to be human beings, we cease to be the same people. Of course we're the same people, but we're a little bit wiser, and a little bit more sensible, and a little bit more understanding, a little bit more tolerant. I would say a lot more tolerant. We just don't have the same old silly ideas that got taught year in and year out on your side. All this narrow creed and all the rest of it. That doesn't help God's children. It separates them. All God's children have the same opportunity of survival in the highest sense, spiritually and mentally.'

'Do not fear that passing from your world to this,' added Ellen Terry. 'For whatever condition of life you may enter, no matter how lowly it may be, it will be a reflection of your world. But according to its condition, and according to your condition of passing, and particularly according to your development, or lack of it, so you will find a condition that will apply to you and be best suited. And even though it may seem perhaps to some dark and drear according to their light, yet there is freedom to express and develop and evolve.

'Of course we know there are the lower spheres, the undeveloped spheres where the undeveloped souls go. But even so it is not hell as pictured by many who would have it so. There is no hell, only that which Man creates by his own thinking - and his own living. Here, that which man has created will change according to him, according to his striving and his uplifting himself from the darkness.

'Man dwells oftimes in darkness of his own creating. As soon as he begins to desire the spark of life eternal, as soon as he is endeavouring to strive and uplift himself from the lower sphere, so he will be helped and guided and given instruction and shown the path. All who come will be shown the path and the way.'

The path to where?

142

SEVENTEEN
Higher Spheres

'All who come will be shown the path and the way.' Where do they lead?

Up to now the life described by the voices has seemed to be a fairly stabilized way of life. Different from life on Earth, but with its own internal consistency and its recognized freedoms, limitations and natural laws.

Now and then they drop a hint of other worlds or spheres where accepted conditions may be different.

In 1953, when Rose described her life at the first sitting attended by Betty Greene, she was absorbed by and quite content with the new world in which she found herself. Like a hard working wage earner from the grey north on the first day of a package holiday, content to slump into a deck chair and soak up the Mediterranean sun..

In 1963 she was still content. But showing signs that the relief of not having to sell flowers in the forecourt of Charing Cross Station was beginning to wear off. That just sitting and chatting in the sun was not the only aim in life, would not satisfy her for ever. And that before the holiday was over she ought to make the effort to forgo her morning on the beach and the hotel lunch and board a bus to see something of the country behind the coast.

'They talk about moving,' she said. 'I suppose it's all right for some highbrow people who want to go in a different way, you know. But I'm happy as I am. Why should I move?

They're always on to me about I should make - you know sort of start thinking about making changes. But I can't do it myself.'

And a little later: 'When I first came here, once I settled that was, I thought well, how long is this going to last, you know? I wondered if it was sort of - another sort of where you go on for so many years, you get antique

143

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again, and then you kick the bucket. You've had it. I wondered if there was anything beyond that. But there's no dying here.

'It's most peculiar. It seems as if you can go on and on. And then when you get browned off, or fed up, or think you know all there is to know of where you are, then you can sort of -just sort of go into a kind of sleep or something, and then go into a different ... of course I'm scared stiff of that in a way. I don't want to go you know. A lot of my friends say that I should, but I can't see any sense in it. Why should you give up what you've got when you're happy in it, and take on something you don't know? I don't want to be la-di-da. I'm quite happy as I am.'

Soon after she said this she seems to have decided she was not.

Three years later, in 1965, she came through again. Woods noticed something different about her. She seemed to be losing her cockney accent. To be talking with a new authority.

'Rose,' he asked. 'Have you moved at all yet?'

'Oh dear,' she replied. 'What a funny question.' 'Well, you said you didn't want to move last time.' 'Well, I didn't want to, but I have.'

'You have!' exclaimed Betty Greene.

'Yes, but it sounds very odd really, when you say to us, 'Have you moved?' I suppose when you talk about moving on your side, you have all sorts of - well, a moving van, piling your stuff on it, unloading, and getting it put in and the linoleum down and all that lark. Of course, moving here doesn't mean that, thank God. None of that. Moving in a way is easier, and yet at the same time it's harder, because you can't move here till you've made it you know, sort of possible for yourself. Which means that you've got to knuckle down and get something done about yourself, you know.

'While on your side, if you've got the - well, the money you can move when you like. Money doesn't mean a thing here. You see, you can only move when you yourself by your very nature and your character have been able to

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do something about it. So you don't just move when you think you will.'

'How did you actually move?' asked Betty Greene. 'I mean what did you go through ? Did you have a sort of special experience?'

'Well, I suppose it really amounts to taking notice and listening to other people who are more experienced than yourself, and trying to follow out the things you're told.

'And then you reach a certain point and you realize that the environment you're in is all right for what it is, but it's not sufficient.'

'What's it like on your new plane of life?' This from Woods.

'Well, it's very beautiful, of course. I wouldn't say myself that it's necessarily any more beautiful than the place in which I was before. But - how can I put it ? I find that I'm happier because I'm working. I think it was that in the other place I didn't really have anything to do. I did take some interest in the children of course, but I wasn't what I would call active. Not in the same way that I am now.'

'What sort of work are you doing Rose?' from Betty Greene.

'Well, I know it sounds odd now, but well, I've been going to what you would call, I suppose, college, or if you like you can call it a school, in which we learn a tremendous amount about ourselves, and the potentiality within ourselves, and the creative power that is there dormant.

'Of course, when I used to be on your side, I wasn't creative or anything like that, and I hadn't got any background or education. And here I'm learning that every human being has a great sort of possibility within themselves to be not only creative, but also to be able to give their experience to others. Now I can go back to other spheres, and I can express myself better, and I can explain things, and I can talk to people. I could never express myself well. Now I can, and that to me is a wonderful thing.

'Now I'm able to go into the lower spheres and talk to the people to try to educate them a bit - to make them realize that the situation in which they find themselves is, to a great extent, their own fault.'

'What I wanted to ask you Rose,' put in Betty Greene, 'was when you went from your old plane to the one you're on now, did you fall asleep and find yourself on another plane, or was it gradual?'

Rose dodged the question again. 'I didn't start packing things up,' she said, 'and enquire if I could get a van. Because that's quite unnecessary here.

'You see, all your possessions, and all the things that you love here, are - although they're real, as real as anything YOU have - at the same time they're only real until such time as you think beyond them.'

'You think you can do without some of them?'

'Well you realize you can do without all of them. And I suppose that's the beginning of progress. You see, when you become possessive, whether it's about a person, or a thing, although it's only human, at the same time it's not a good thing. You see you must learn for instance to love something, or love somebody which is more important still, without any possessiveness. You must realize that those things, or those people which you love, in themselves are as individual as you are, and they have a right to their own individuality.

'With people in particular, as you love a person more and more, your love is less and less possessive. You're only concerned with their welfare and their good. But of course when there is true love, and true understanding, then it's as if you're working as one, not as an individual. But when you lose your individuality, that is you lose your possessiveness in the desire for someone else's good, you are really bringing yourself closer in harmony, and closer in touch with that person, and that person is growing closer to you. In helping and thinking of others, indirectly you are doing things for yourself, but you don't have that motive.

'Now on Earth, the vast majority of people, when they're thinking about someone else, and wanting to help that

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person, quite often they themselves are so sort of caught up in it that they are, in a sense, thinking of themselves. In the case of a wife, she's thinking, 'If I do everything I can to help Jack along sort of thing, and one way or other the business will improve, and then perhaps we'll have a nicer house, and then perhaps we'll have another car or a new car.'

'You see when you think of other people here, you don't think in a selfish way. All the time you're thinking of what you can do for others, how you can lift them out of the mire, how you can give them a new insight into things that matter. And help them to think on a different line so that they, in turn, will not only get a kind of peace which they haven't had before, but can help others.'

'Is your house different now, Rose?' asked Betty Greene trying to change the subject.

'That's another thing, isn't it,' replied Rose. 'People always seem to think that if you progress you must be better off, or you must have something better than you had before. But when you start really getting to know yourself, it isn't the size of the house or what you've got in the house, or anything like that at all.

'You see progress doesn't mean that you're going to have more. You may in the sense, from the point of view of, shall we say, possessions and so on, have much less. But what you have more of is love, more peace of mind, more tranquility as you call it, and more happiness, because all the time you feel that you are doing, and you're giving, and you're loving, and you're part of the rest of humanity. In other words it's only when you lose yourself that you find yourself.

'No one's content for long. You give them everything that they want. You give them all the things they thought they needed. And after a time it palls on them, and they want a bit more of something else. They find that it isn't what they thought it was going to be. I thought I'd be content with all the things that I had, but I soon began to realize that although in a way I was doing things for others I wasn't doing enough. I was finding that these things didn't mean as much to me as they did before, and that there was something else I had to strive for. I had to find out what it was.

'It's like in your world. You go through life. You possess things. You create things and conditions for yourself. You get yourself a nice little house, and you furnish it, and you're happy. But the point is, that if you lived for centuries, you'd soon get fed up with it.

'The things that really count of course are the things of the mind and the spirit.'

Rose had made the first move towards a life which none of the voices has described and which is probably so' far removed from ours that we would find it almost impossible to comprehend.

Terry Smith got an inkling of this almost as soon as he arrived. His guide had just told him that the cat he found in the sitting-room of his new home was sixty years old.

'Sixty years old!' I said. 'I don't know: I've heard of cats having nine lives ...'

'Well,' she says, 'actually of course everybody has many lives. You're having an extension of your life. But you'll find you have an extension of this life, and so on.

'You'll grasp it later,' she says. 'You mustn't think just because you're dead so called, that you won't have an extension of life to a degree whereby you'll eventually be able to extend it into another condition of life. For the time being don't let it worry you son. You'll find that all life is really an extension of previous life. In other words you go on and on ad infinitum.

'You'll exhaust this place or this sphere or this condition of life in which you are now. Eventually you'll realize that there is nothing more that you can learn here, or nothing more that's necessary to you here, and you'll find the urge and the need to extend your experience. And you'll pass into a different existence in a higher sphere or place where you'll be able to appreciate and learn and experience all sorts of things that you couldn't possibly experience on this. But that may be a long time yet.'

How long? John Brown, who has been dead a lot longer than Terry Smith, still seems to be thinking of the higher spheres in the distant future.

148

'You go through various planes of evolution,' he said. 'And on the plane of reception, or the plane of re-assessment, if I can use expressions for planes or give them names, you shed yourself of many thoughts and ideas that are no longer of any value, and never were of any true value to you.'

The Rev. Drayton Thomas, who introduced Woods to psychic investigations, and died in 1953, could only report what he'd been told.

'Have you visited any of the higher planes?' asked Woods.

'Well,' he replied, 'there are laws which no one can avoid. The point is, you are allowed to go on as far as you have merited within yourself by your life, by your development. But you cannot go into a higher sphere until you are ready to enter into that state.

'Of course one can go to many spheres below that particular sphere of life in which you find yourself. But you cannot enter into a higher condition until you yourself have merited it ...

'I would never dream of attempting to go to a condition or sphere of life to which I was unsuited, to which I was unfitted, for which I was not ready. I would go down into the lower spheres because I could give a service ... I could help those of a lesser development. It is not possible for me to go into a higher state of being. For one thing I would not be happy there. You probably think it would be wonderful to have the experience and one would actually be happy. But you wouldn't.

'In a sense I suppose it is comparable in your world too. A man can only be happy in an environment to which he is best fitted, and to go into one which is a much more developed state of being, although it may sound on the surface to be a wonderful experience, one knows instinctively it is the law. That you could not get peace or rest because you would not fit in. You would be unsettled. You can only reach a given point when you develop towards it.'

Advanced spirits in the really high spheres, it seems, are too far removed to describe them to us directly. Any reports that do reach us are based on rumors or snippets of information which reach the inhabitants of the spheres still in contact with Earth.

Like George Hopkins, the Sussex farmer still tending horses and cattle.

'I've come to the conclusion,' he said, 'that there are all these different spheres, or states of being. And as one progresses from one to another, things which once were vital or important gradually disappear according to your outlook and understanding . . . I think that it's feasible that on the higher spheres certain aspects of life change so considerably that it would hardly be recognizable to some as life in the same sense.

'I've been told - I don't know this - but I've been told that the very highly advanced souls - it is not necessary - in fact they don't feel the need to have bodies! Of course that's something I can't understand. But they say that when you become very highly advanced, you cease to have the need for a body, and you cease to exist in shape. Of course I don't understand that at all. It baffles me. But no doubt if I ever reach that stage it may be that I shall understand it.'

Other voices tell us that we can't expect to understand it now. Or expect anyone who communicates with Earth to describe it.

'It is impossible,' said Ellen Terry, 'for any soul to describe the spheres that are more advanced. The spheres that are near the earth can be depicted and described. But the souls who have gone into an atmosphere and condition far removed from Earth can never recapture in words to that which they inhabit.'

A voice claiming to be Holman Hunt added in 1962: 'We have, it is true, several aspects of nature ... but then again we have many other aspects which we cannot explain to you because quite frankly there are no ways in which we could do it. You cannot depict something for which there is no language.'

At this point the future becomes mainly a matter of faith. 'I always think,' explained Drayton Thomas, 'of what Jesus said to the woman who touched the hem of His garment: 'It is thy faith that has made thee whole.' I mean Jesus within Himself knew that it is the power within each of us, the realization of that in each one of us, that makes our salvation possible.

150

No one can save us, only ourselves. We can have faith which is good, and we should have, in higher powers, in higher forces. But until we have that faith to make it possible for us to see the path, then we cannot tread it.'

Faith involves religion. Is religion the path to Heaven? What does the religion we are taught on Earth look like in Heaven?

151

EIGHTEEN
The Problem of Religion

'You know what they used to tell us down there about Heaven and Hell, and the last trumpet and all that? They've got it all wrong.'

'Well, it seems like it, doesn't it?'

'Yeah. All that business about if you're very good you go to the top storey, and if you're not so good you go down to the old cellar. They've got that all wrong mate. Here we are just the same as we were, only better. Quite happy.'

Alf Prichett's rethink on establishment Christianity is an earthy example of what most of the voices tell us. We've got it wrong.

Take an educated voice. That of Michael Fearon, the university graduate public school master. Captain in the 1st Norfolks, killed three weeks after D-Day.

'The Church,' he declared, 'does still preach this ridiculous idea of Heaven and Hell. Heaven if you've been awfully good, and you've followed certain tenets and so on. And Hell if you haven't sort of followed what they think is right. Really, when one comes to analyze it, it doesn't hold water at all.'

Michael's mother, Mrs A. C. Fearon who was with Woods at this sitting in 1954, joined in the conversation.

'Last time I was there, you said, 'for Heaven's sake, whoever you bring, don't bring any parsons'. Do you mean that?'

'I don't want to sound prejudiced,' replied Fearon, 'but I'm afraid I haven't got very much time for the Church. Or for so many who adhere to it, because their minds are so narrowed that they cannot get beyond a certain point. They think they have all knowledge in a nutshell, They seem to think that what is contained in the Bible from cover to cover is all there is to know. They can't accept anything beyond that, and even then, although they say

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they accept all that they read in the Bible, very few people, if they're honest, do.'

'Then they don't interpret it correctly, do they ?' said Mrs Fearon.

'Well, the whole point is, that the Bible - well, obviously there's much truth, there's much goodness in the Bible -I mean in the simple teachings of Jesus. If one were to follow in the example that He set, then man could not go far wrong in his material life and the things that he did. And his outlook and his spiritual development would, in consequence, be great. But the point is that they try to narrow things down to such a degree, they try to make out of the simple truths of Jesus so much that is complex and involved, they try to tag on so much over the centuries that has nothing whatever to do with Jesus.'

'How would you get it,' asked Mrs Fearson, 'this religion . of Jesus, to the masses?'

'Every man can find Jesus within himself. If he reads his Bible and he uses wisdom and discretion, he can find truth therein. But he has to learn how to discard all the things which have been added to it, often by Churchmen over the centuries for their own ends.

'The Church wants to go its way, and if you accept and believe as the Church would have you believe, then you are all right when you come here. Well believe me that is a lot of hooey. Because a lot of people who had this narrow concept of life and religion found things vastly different when they came here. In fact they were hampered in their progress.

'Some people coming here believing they were really God's elect, that they were the chosen ones, still exist over here in a certain sphere' believing they are the only persons who still exist in this world. They are

so narrowed in their outlook that they really and genuinely think they are the only ones who have been reborn as they term it. And even they are waiting to come back on Earth in a physical shape - waiting for the resurrection of the body.'

'What happens, Mike,' asked Woods, 'to people who are so bound to creed and dogma when they first pass over?'

153

'Man immediately after death,' replied Fearon, 'is no different to what he was five minutes before. That is in regard to his outlook, and his character and his personality. And therefore a person who has very strong religious convictions still holds them very strong when he comes here. But he begins to realize that he's rather like a fish out of water, that a lot of his old ideas and teachings and creeds just don't apply.

'The first thing he realizes here is that everything here is normal; everything is natural. People are in themselves very much the same as they were on Earth, but without all the heaviness of the material life. He begins to realize that many of the old ideas he had were purely man's material conception of Heaven and God. He begins to realize that life here is a normal, natural thing, and he himself is exactly as he was. But much that he held fast to and which he thought would, shall we say make for himself a Heaven because of his beliefs, he finds is not necessarily so, and that he must adjust himself to his condition in which he finds himself.'

Did Fearon exaggerate? Nine years later, a voice came through claiming to be just such a person as Fearon had described.

'My name is Briggs,' he said. 'I was for many years, when on your side, a member of the Christadelphians.' This is an American sect believing that they, and hardly anyone else, will be raised from the dead and return to Earth when Christ returns to subdue' the world from Jerusalem.

'In my own narrow way, when I was on your side,' he went on, 'I sincerely believed at the time that only those who accepted and believed as I did would inherit the kingdom of God. I know this is a fallacy now - that all peoples inherit the Kingdom of God because it is a natural law. When a man dies his spirit inherits the spiritual realms which are all around and about your earth world. It is inescapable.

'There is no one left out, and man inherits according to his nature and his achievement, or lack of achievement going to a lesser condition or place. In other words man receives exactly what he himself has created in his life

his outlook, and his way of life. Religion in itself cannot save a man. Religion cannot necessarily make a man a better person. This is something that can only come when man realizes that he is already in embryo a spiritual being.'

He went on to tell the story of his arrival in Heaven.

'My mind was closed to truth. When I first came here, I found myself in an environment which for me was very satisfactory and very happy. I was in paradise. But I realize now I was in a fool's paradise. A condition of life which consisted entirely of people of like mind. People who had believed as I had believed, who had accepted as I had accepted what I thought was the complete and absolute truth. We were content with our meetings and our singing of hymns, and our prayers, and we would talk of the time when we should be brought back to Earth to be resurrected as we had been told, and we would enter into our physical bodies and becomes earthly people living in an earthly paradise.'

His re-education came slowly. It began when he started to feel uneasy. Then curious. Then aware that other people, not of his own sect, seemed to have got to Heaven too.

They started to talk to him. One of them, a man called Bernard, took him for a long walk and told him that he'd been a Roman Catholic priest. Briggs was horrified. Catholics and Spiritualists, he'd been taught, were equally damned. Not to worry, said Bernard. They had both held strong views. And they had both been wrong.

Their journey took them through a series of small, isolated communities still dressing and living as they'd done three or four hundred years ago on Earth. And it ended in a beautiful city where everyone seemed uninhibited and loving.

'And here,' he said, 'I found that peace which I feel I want to give to the whole world. I want to tell everyone there is no barrier at all to man once his mind is unshackled, once he is free to think for himself.'

His re-education was complete.

If Fearon and Briggs are right, have bishops and other religious leaders got it wrong? If they have, do they realize

the error of their ways when they arrive in Heaven and find it filled with folk they thought would never make it?

One of the most persistent of communicators was the voice claiming to be Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 'thirties whose unbending opposition to King Edward VIII marrying a divorcee made the Abdication inevitable.

It was 1959. Betty Greene plunged straight in with her usual question. What was his reaction when he died?

'I was surprised.' he replied. 'I suppose I had, in a sense, a narrow religious conviction. I realized many things, of course, which I thought were factual in truth are not necessarily so. I realize of course now that many of the things which I believed were not so in fact.

'One is inclined, over centuries of time possibly, to obscure truth - that is the simple truths that Jesus gave to the world. Dogma and creed which were, of course, so part of my life, I realized were non-existent and unimportant here, and a man is no more after death than he was before.'

A voice who announced himself in 1960 as Dean Inge, Dean of St Paul's and famous theologian of the 'thirties, had to learn the same lesson.

'Many of the things that I had preached,' he confessed, 'many things that I gave out as truth - and I sincerely believed for a long time they were true - these things held me back, and still do ... When a man leaves your world, as so often he does, with strong, fixed, prejudicial views, his task is difficult. He has to unlearn, as I did, many things, and has to become like the child with open mind, full of the desire for real truth.'

What is real truth? Does organized religion survive into the next world ? How long does it take to grow out of the opinions we learn from the Church into which we are born ?

'Have you got Churches on your side?' asked Woods when Elizabeth Fry came through in 1962.

'On certain spheres near the earth,' she replied, 'you will find many Churches of varying denominations and creeds carrying on much as they would have done when on Earth, happy in themselves and their beliefs. I suppose

one could say living in a state of ignorance. It has been said that ignorance is bliss. But there comes a time when all humanity thirsts for greater knowledge, wants to know a little more. This is advancement.'

The Christian voices tell us that different branches of Christianity have to learn that their particular view of Christ is no truer than their rivals'. Is Christianity itself more true than the beliefs of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other religions of Earth? Is there a universal truth?

The answer was given by a voice claiming to belong to one of the most saintly figures of the twentieth century, born a Hindu, but revered by many Christians and humanitarian agnostics, Mahatma Gandhi.

'In all religious organizations as you term them,' he said, 'there are here and there good souls who are sincere. But unfortunately many can only conceive truth from their own limited narrow aspect. They accept that only which they have for so long accepted and conceived. To them God's revelation is a closed book. What they know has been revealed to them and them only. They do not realize that all through time there have been great prophets. Their religion is something that gives them, perhaps in a narrow sense, a kind of peace.

'The first lesson one must learn is to forget one's-self, to give out in love all that it is possible from within yourself, and it shall be returned to you. These things that Christ spoke about - and all the great teachers - was that man himself should forget himself. That he, in return, might find himself. The first law is to love thy neighbour more than thyself, and in doing this you begin to live.'

In the end. after a few years in Heaven, Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, seems to be speaking much the same language as Gandhi, the Hindu, and not very different from Rose, the once ignorant flower seller in the forecourt of Charing Cross railway station.

'Jesus,' he, said, 'was concerned with human beings that they might find through love, and sacrifice if necessary, the path back to the divine parent, back to God. For, 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.

'That has been misinterpreted over the centuries, and has been the foundation of a lot of dogma. A lot of mistakes have been brought into being because of the misinterpretation of those words, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' What did He mean? He obviously meant that it was in following in His footsteps, in other words becoming like unto Him, sacrificing the physical aspects of things, realizing the spiritual power and grace that dwelt within all men, in developing that, and thinking of

the things of the spirit, and overcoming the flesh in consequence - that is 'the way the truth and the life.'

"No man cometh to the Father but by me.' In other words 'in me and following me and in following what I do and endeavouring to become like unto me, that is the way of salvation.'

'Jesus had no concern with material things as such. He was concerned with the spiritual aspect of man. The material aspect was of no consequence.

'When He gave his life on the Cross, it was done and was permitted because it was the only way obviously in which He could convince and bring into being the realization that the earthly things are of little consequence. It is of the spiritual that He was concerned, that to overcome the flesh and to give up all, to sacrifice all if necessary for the things that are of God. And so, as you know, He reappeared after death and gave conviction, and has founded, although I am convinced He did not come to found, a religion as the world now terms or understands it.

'If He had not returned from the dead there would be no Christian faith. But nevertheless as I see it and realize it now, I feel sure with a greater realization and wisdom, and a greater certainty of the reasons and the purpose of the life of Jesus. And I am convinced that when we strive to follow Him, irrespective of what religion we may or may not have, we can forget and discard all our creeds and dogmas, and make ourselves simple like unto Jesus. And in simplicity we shall find wisdom, and in wisdom we shall find the path, and the path shall bring us nearer to our divine Parent. our Creator - to follow Him, take upon ourselves His cross, and to realize that in love and in service we find our salvation.'

158

The Anglican Archbishop, the leader of the Hindus, and a once illiterate flower girl seem to speak a language they can all understand, and be within touching distance of a faith they can all share.

If the voice who claims to be Lang is genuine, the beliefs of orthodox Christians can be reconciled with the doubts and hopes of all creeds and none. The arguments can fade away.

But can we be sure it was Lang?

159

NINETEEN
Observations on Mediums

If Lang had preached the interpretation of Christ and Christianity he gave to Woods and Betty Greene from the pulpit as Archbishop of Canterbury, it might have caused a sensation in the Church. It would certainly have been given wide publicity and read by the thinking world with respect.

Unfortunately he did not get round to it till he was dead. His message came as a voice in the dark. Through a method of communication bearing the suspect label of Spiritualism.

Practising Christians have been taught to avoid it. Orthodox Anglicans who remember Lang will also remember that he rejected it when alive.

In the 'thirties, as Primate of the Church of England, Lang set up an Anglican committee under the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr Francis Underwood to examine the evidence for psychic phenomena. After two years they reported that certain psychic experiences of individuals made a strong prima facie case for survival and the possibility of spirit communication.

They added: 'We think it is probable that the hypothesis that they proceed in some cases from discarnate spirits is the true one.'

Archbishop Lang did not. He never allowed the report to be published. It is still officially secret today.

Is it possible that he of all people could now be using the medium of Spiritualism, which he rejected when he was Archbishop, to communicate his changed views on religion and immortality to us still alive in this world today?

If it is Lang, his religious opinions have changed and his views on the possibility of spirit communication have been completely reversed.

'Where Spiritualism is concerned,' he told Woods and Betty Greene, 'I was afraid of it. I was afraid it could undermine the Church and probably even destroy it, and I was not sure that it had very much to offer that was good.

'Of course many of those ideas I have now changed. I do feel very strongly that it is a thing that is so vital and so important that all peoples should be conscious and know about it.'

He still has reservations. 'I do feel,' he added, 'that it is dangerous if it is used in the wrong sense.

'If you go on to contact the highest forms, the good forces, those who can help the world, those who can uplift mankind. you must have instruments who are of like mind and like thought and it seems to me that many of these instruments are of a very, unfortunately, low order.

'While you are, as it were, only scratching the surface of the astral worlds which ninety per cent of your instruments are doing, then it is not only bad, but it can even be dangerous, because like can attract like. And also lower entities who are earthbound who cling to your Earth, can use instruments, and also through instruments speak to people, and tell people of things which are not true.

'I realize that out of this which you term Spiritualism there is much good to come. In fact it is obviously the essence of the early Church - the early Christians who gathered together and who were possessed of the power of the Lord.

'I realize the crying need of people in your world for comfort when they are saddened by loss, as they term it, of someone near and dear to them. It is natural they need proof, and I know only too well that proof is given, and will always be given when the need is great.'

Woods and Betty Greene have never been short of advice and warnings on the dangers inherent in Spiritualism. Even from those who had been the most successful mediums when on Earth. Including John Brown, personal medium to Queen Victoria.

The story of how this simple, low-born Scot established his strange hold over the bereaved Queen by putting her in couch with her beloved Albert is too well known to be retold in detail.

'You know that Victoria was very interested in this subject?' he said.

'Yes,' replied Betty Greene, 'you told us that before John.'

'It was a great desire to make contact with him,' Brown went on. 'You know the story. Of course her diaries, and everything, were destroyed, which was a great pity, because she kept meticulous diaries. In fact she had special little books that she kept with all her messages and things. We were very close in this work, although in her position she had to keep it very dark. We used to have these little séances from time to time at Osborne, and other places.

'I was a very earthy person in many senses, but endowed with a great gift. And that is, of course, what applies to many mediums unfortunately. They have great spiritual gifts, great spiritual qualities which can be used for good. They in themselves are not necessarily bad people, but they're inclined to be very materialistic and very earthy. And of course in my particular association with Her Majesty I had, from being an ordinary common man, been placed in a position where frankly my word was, in a strange sense as it may seem to say now, law.

'Sometimes I rather gloried in my power. I realize all these things are bad now. But at the time, I suppose with the regard and affection the Queen had for me, I was able to do such a great deal for her in her grief and help her too. And sometimes, I tell you this, that in our communications she would be given advice in regard to - er - things of importance to do with the state.

'Many suggestions and ideas that were put by Her Majesty to the Government at the time were things that came through. And then sometimes when she was puzzled or uncertain herself, she would ask advice. But perhaps I should not say all these things now.'

More reservations were given by a voice claiming to be Emma Hardinge Britten, one of the famous pioneer

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mediums of the nineteenth-century. She echoed the criticisms made by unconvinced sitters and critical investigators ever since.

'There is so much woolly talk among mediums and spiritualists,' she said m 1969. 'There are so many woolly mediums who, because they close their eyes, assume they're mediums. There's a great deal of vapouring going on; and so many things are accredited to the spirit which are merely the figments of fertile minds, and oftimes people who are anxious to be considered what they are not. We are having to battle against this.

'There are innumerable people in the Spiritualist movement who are not mediums, but who consider themselves as such, and who are accepted unfortunately as such, often by people who one would have given more credit for their intelligence. And the lack of it - the intelligence - in the Spiritualist movement - at times causes us great concern. We do not ask you to accept everything that comes as gospel. We ask you to use your common sense, but more important to use your uncommon sense.

'We ask you to realize that there must be, because of the very nature of communication, some discrepancies, because of the manifold difficulties.'

These criticisms apparently do not apply to Woods and Betty Greene. For the voice continued. 'But this method of communication which is so much more advanced, so much more reliable than the vapourings of so many of these foolish people who give forth so much that when analyzed means so little or nothing at all and can ofttimes be traced back to their own minds, subconscious or otherwise - we are giving you as best we can a direct communication which is by far and away superior to any other communication in your world.

'We will do all we can to help you. We shall bring from time to time all manner of people to help you. But there will be difficulties. These must be expected, and you know of them. But when you receive a good communication, when you record it and send it out, you can be well assured it will be seed sown on good ground. Here and there it will

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fall on the stony ground of minds opposed to truth. But I maintain that this method of communication properly used and applied, can do more for the spreading of truth than any other form or method.'

Why the discrepancies and vapourings? Why are some sittings and séances so disappointing?

The shortcomings of unsuccessful mediums have been exposed and ridiculed often enough by sceptical reporters, and their results dismissed as fraud. According to the voices, the frustrations of spirits trying to get a message through from the next world can be even worse.

No one suffered more at the hands of a woolly medium than Alfred Higgins, the Brighton painter and decorator who fell off a ladder, trying to get a message to his widow.

'I was taken,' he said, 'to a church - a Spiritualist church. And I thought if only I could get a message through to my wife. Of course the missis wasn't there. So I thought, 'Well the thing is to try and impress 'er to go'. So I started visiting the missus again, and started to impress her to go to this Spiritualist church.

'One night I was in the church. I knew I'd got her to decide to go because I'd been working all day on her. In fact I had been working on her several days before. She was sitting at the back, and a medium was on the platform. I took one look at her and I thought, 'Oh blimey, it would be my luck to get one like this.' She didn't strike me as much cop.

'I'd seen them good and bad you know, and this one seemed on the holy holy side. She talked about things which was all right for them as likes

it, but she wasn't so hot on the evidence, and she didn't seem to be able to describe very well.

'When she started to give the old message, I thought, 'Well, I've got to get in here somehow. I'll have to do something.' So I concentrated like mad on her. Eventually she picked it up.

'She got certain things that I was trying to get to her She kept getting a ladder. Of course she got it all mixed up. 'I don't know my dear,' she says, 'if you're going to

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have a bit of luck, but I see a ladder with you.' I thought, 'For crying out loud, this is getting on fine, this is!'

''Well,' says my missus, 'I do place the business of the ladder.'

'Of course the medium got it all confused. 'I think as how there's going to be something very good for you, my dear,' she said. 'I see you rising, going up this ladder towards success.'

'Of course this wasn't what I was telling the damn silly medium, but it's her interpretation. I thought, 'Oh blimey!' But eventually I was able to get a few bits over, and then I was able to get my name through. Then my wife says, 'I think I understand all this very well.' And then she says - of course I could have kicked her afterwards 'My husband was killed on a ladder, and his name was Alf.'

'I thought well, I did get that over after a style, but the medium mucked it up. Still, why worry. Then I thought, 'Well what can I say that will really clinch it? 'So I thought to myself how to act something really hot here.

'So I says - I impressed the medium to say: 'That ring that you have on, that is not the ring, not the same ring.'

'Now this didn't make any sense to anyone, I suppose, but it had a great deal of significance to my missus, because what actually happened was my wife lost her wedding ring, and she tried not to let me know she'd lost it knowing that I'd be upset about it, so she'd gone and bought herself another one which was to all intents and purposes identical, you see. I'd learnt that since I'd been over. So I thought that'll shake her.

'She went quite white, but she says, 'Well, how could my husband know that? I'd never told him, I'd kept it from him,' and all that.

'So of course the medium preened herself. You know how they do, some of them. 'Well,' she says, 'you know it's proof from your husband, isn't it

my dear?' She went all la la. She was getting all over posh, you see. She felt good that night!

'A lot of these people are very nice, very sincere. But

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half of them are half-baked, not really developed. And a lot of it is their imagination. Occasionally they do get something through - I mean we're able to get something through their skulls you know, and get it out. But often they do a lot of harm.'

Higgins explained why the message of Spiritualism has convinced so few, and so far done so little, to reinforce a fading religious trust in the 2000-year account of the Resurrection.

Would it be different if every sitting and seance produced such clear-cut, coherent evidence as those of Woods and Betty Greene?

Why can they hold intelligent, lucid conversations with the dead while other mortals at an ordinary average seance often have to be satisfied with the sort of statements given to Mrs Higgins?

One reason is that they go to an exceptional medium, endowed with the gift of being a vehicle for the most precise form of communication so far devised between this world and the next plane of existence. Another was given to Woods and Betty Greene by a voice who spoke with unusual authority on 1 September 1963, but refused to give his name and asked to be referred to by the pseudonym of 'Pierre'.

'The number of people who go to mediums,' he said, 'and think all they have to do is just sit and the rest will come automatically is so foolish. If only they would think about this seriously they would realize it is not always possible, and indeed very rarely possible, to achieve excellent results the first time.

'Only the very experienced guides and the very experienced communicators are in a position to be able to hold a long, intelligent conversation. That is why your sittings are unique, and why when people listen to your tapes they say, 'This is wonderful.'

'Here is a long conversation, full of personality and character. They immediately think that if they can be brought to this medium by you, or perhaps arrange it for themselves, they will sit down and have the same experience

as you. It is ridiculous because it could not be or would be most unlikely. These people don't know that it has taken years for you to have your experience, and for people on this side to become such excellent communicators.

'Good communication can only come when sitters sit regularly with the same instrument, where the guides and the people who come from this side can, over a long period, build up certain conditions to such an extent that there is a perfect union. There is perfect harmony. Their vibrations are all, as it were, completely in tune.

'The majority of people don't know these things. You bring someone here with all good faith, and what would happen? Maybe we would make a very big effort to help that person which we have done in the past, and that person will go away and say, 'yes, that was very interesting. But it did not seem so good as when Mr Woods and Mrs Greene play the tapes to me.'

'That is why when you two come it is different. I would not suggest that you enlarge your number no matter how much pressure is put on you, for it could be fatal from the point of view of success.

'We don't want other sitters. We don't want them to be allowed to disturb the instrument or the conditions which are good, and we can receive from you sufficient power to enable us to do this work.

'You have been brought into this for a purpose, and you know it. You are mediums inasmuch that you have been called to service and you are doing this work. You are enabling thousands of people to know something of life after death, and communication.

'There are far too many selfish people, even among the Spiritualists, who are only concerned with what they are going to get from it. They are not concerned with spiritual truths. That is why they ask such mundane, material questions appertaining to all sorts of things connected with their business and their love affairs, and what have you. More than seventy per cent of the people are concerned with the mundane aspect of whether they will receive a message from this particular person or that,

that will tell them what to do in some very material way.

'Why is it that the Spiritualist movement has not swept the whole world, and changed the face of life in your world? I can tell you. It is because

the Spiritualists are possibly, in many respects, the least spiritual people.

'There are many, many different religions in your world. There are many confusing, conflicting ideas and thoughts. But there is one truth, and it is the truth of everlasting life. That all who die, live.

'We are grateful because you have, like so few have, the true spirit, the true realization. Your minds are free and open to receive. There are no prejudices. There are no stumbling blocks that we find with so many who want to tie truth, which must always be free, to their own particular brand of religion. They want to try, if they can, to bring this great truth down to a certain level which only they can understand and appreciate, because it must be in the confines of their own particular religion or belief or dogma.

'We have no dogmas. We have no religion in the sense that you understand religion. We have a freedom of expression, and a freedom of thought, and a freedom of spirit which is far beyond the confines of Man and his pettiness and his foolishness. We are free to speak the truth and it is because of this that we are happy to come and be able to give it to you.

'Knock, it has been said, and it shall be opened unto you. But how few people in your world truly knock. There are some who gently tap the door and are surprised because no one hears them. There are those who strive to turn the handle, but it will not open. And there are those who put their whole weight against the door and it flies open.

'But because they have been brutal, or perhaps it is because they have been over-anxious, or they have put too much weight in the wrong sense, they have not seen the true vista of spirit through the open door.

'You, my friends, are good and kind and you do what you can with a good heart and an open mind. And therefore you receive. And you in return are able to serve truly those who seek.'

168

If Pierre is right, it seems to follow that the Woods-Greene tapes may be the most reliable account the world has yet received of life on another plane of existence, and our most detailed proof so far that man is immortal.

Can we prove he is right?

169

TWENTY
Voice Test

We end with the problem with which we began. Where do the voices come from?

Do they come from the medium? Are they a ventriloquist act?

Before Woods and Betty Greene began their long series of sittings, Leslie Flint had already undergone and passed the most stringent tests that objective psychic investigators could devise. He claims with some justice in his book to be 'the most tested medium this country has ever produced and, I will add, the medium most willing to be tested whenever I have felt truth would be served.'

One of his investigators was Dr Louis Young who had worked with Thomas Edison, American inventor of the incandescent electric lamp, microphone and phonograph, and had already exposed several doubtful mediums in the States. Flint was made to fill his mouth with colored water. The lights were turned on. Flint returned the water from his mouth to a glass.

In 1948 the Rev. Drayton Thomas, then a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research, carries out another test. He reported the result in Psychic News of 14 February.

'On 5 February I placed over his (Flint's) tightly closed lips a strip of Elastoplast. It was 5 inches long and 2 1/2 inches wide and very strongly adhesive. This I pressed firmly over and into the crevices of the closed lips. A scarf was then tied tightly over this and the medium's hands tied firmly to the arms of his chair: another cord was so tied that he would be unable to bend down his head. Thus, supposing he endeavored during trance to loosen the bandage, it would be quite impossible for him to reach it.

'Anyone can discover by tightly closing the lips and

trying to speak how muffled and unintelligible are the sounds then produced. My experiment was designed to show that under the above conditions clearly enunciated speech and plenty of it could be produced by the direct voice. The experiment was entirely successful. Voices were soon speaking with their usual clarity and Mickey (Flint's guide) emphasized his ability several times by shouting loudly. Some twelve persons were present and we all heard more than enough to convince

the most obdurate sceptic that the sealing of Mr Flint's mouth in no way prevented unseen speakers from saying anything they wished. At the close of the sitting I examined the cords and the plaster, finding all intact and undisturbed. The plaster was so strongly adhering that I had considerable difficulty in removing it without causing pain.'

In another series of tests a microphone wired to an amplifier was attached to Flint's throat to record any sound he might make. His hands were tied by observers sitting on either side of him and his investigators watched his movements through an infrared telescope.

The voices still spoke. And the investigators actually saw the ectoplasmic voice box forming two feet from his head.

If the voices aren't Flint's where do they come from? Can they be tested against the voices of the people they claim to be?

From the time he began his recordings, Woods has issued an open invitation to anyone who knew the people they claim to be when they were on Earth to listen to the tapes and tell him if they sounded genuine.

One of the first voices claimed to be Michael Fearon, who appears earlier in this book. Woods went to the sitting with Michael's mother, Mrs Fearon. The voice held a long and lively conversation with them both. Mrs Fearon was convinced she had been talking to her son.

From time to time friends and relations of the voices have taken up Wood's invitation to hear the tapes.

On 19 April 1962, a voice claiming to be F. E. Smith, Lord Birkenhead, one time Lord Chancellor, came through to announce that he had changed his mind about capital punishment, and gave his reasons for thinking it did more harm than good.

The tape was played to the late Charles Loseby, M.C., Q.C. who had been a student under Smith at Gray's Inn. He wrote to Woods on 21 November 1965 from his home in Guernsey in the Channel Islands:

I, CHARLES LOSEBY, M.C., Q.C., hereby affirm that I am satisfied that I have heard the voice of the late F. E. Smith, Lord Birkenhead, one-time Lord Chancellor of England, on a tape recording made by Mr S. G. Woods at a direct voice seance in London in the presence of Mr Leslie Flint, the well-known medium.

I am completely satisfied after careful scrutiny that every precaution had been taken to avoid the possibility of fraud, misunderstanding or error.

I listened to the voice of Lord Birkenhead, still living, anxious apparently only to assist humanity.

On 4 March 1963, and again on 25 April 1966, a voice came through claiming to be Sir Oliver Lodge, the most famous English physicist of his day and an equally famous psychic researcher. The tape was played to Mr J. Croft, a retired physics schoolmaster who had studied under Lodge and knew him well.

On 1 August 1966, Croft wrote to Woods from his home at Angmering-on-Sea, Sussex:

At the invitation of Mr S. G. Woods and Mrs Greene, my wife and I listened to a tape recording of statements which we were told had been made by the late Sir Oliver Lodge.

We felt that the voice had the qualities which we had associated with the voice of Sir Oliver Lodge, we having heard him speak on a number of occasions.

There was a characteristic sibilance, an easy fluency of expression, and a choice of the apt word and phrase which we remembered were a feature of Sir Oliver Lodge's speech.

On 17 June 1963, a voice claiming to be Lilian Baylis, founder of the Old Vic, came through. On 21 August that

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year Woods played an extract from her tape on Southern Television. This brought him a letter from Mrs Alys F. Watson, Lilian Baylis' goddaughter who had stayed with her at her home and worked with her at the Old Vic. She made the short journey from her home in Hove to visit Woods and hear the whole tape.

On 21 November she wrote to Woods, 'I shall be only too happy to confirm that it was Lilian Baylis' voice that I heard which I am sure it was.'

The most extensively tested tapes were those of the voice who claimed to be Cosmo Lang.

The first communication came on May 1959, when he told Woods and Betty Greene of his changed views on religion and Spiritualism quoted in the last two chapters.

In September 1960, the Rev. John Pearce-Higgins, then vicar of Putney and Chairman of the Research Committee of the Churches Fellowship

for Psychical Study, appeared on Associated Television's Sunday evening programme 'About Religion', in a discussion on the relationship between Christianity and Spiritualism. He mentioned the recording as evidence of a link between the two.

At the same time, as a feature writer on the Daily Sketch, I was briefed by my editor, Colin Valdar, to write a series of articles on the latest evidence for a life after death. Woods heard of my assignment and asked me down to his flat in Brighton to hear the tape for myself.

As an undergraduate I had heard Lang preach a sermon in my college chapel, St John's, Oxford, in either 1937 or 1938. But unwilling to rely on my memory of an event more than twenty years before, I tried, in the limited time available, to collect opinions from those who had known him well or heard him often.

Pearce-Higgins was fairly certain. 'Provided the seance was genuine,' he said, 'I think the probability is that it is Cosmo Lang. It bears all the signs of Lang. Those who have heard this tape and Lang say the voice is very similar. It's just the sort of thing he would say. When you take it in conjunction with a lot of other similar types of communications which can be more accurately corroborated, it seems probably true.'

An old family friend, the Hon. Mrs Herbert Lane, who lived near Wareham, Dorset, seemed equally convinced. Lang had often stayed with her and she with him.

'My first impression,' she said, 'was that it is genuine. As far as I could see it felt like him talking. I feel it's exactly what Archbishop Lang would say. It was just like him not to criticize without putting forward constructive ideas.'

Pearce-Higgins helped to arrange a test which we hoped would be decisive. At his suggestion I borrowed from the Director of Religious Broadcasts of the BBC a record of the living voice of Lang. The famous broadcast he made on the Abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936.

I took this and Woods' recording to the home of the Bishop of Southwark, Dr Mervyn Stockwood. I played them one after the other, then both at the same time to him, his Chaplain and the principal of St Stephen's Theological College, Oxford.

The test was not decisive. The voice of the living Lang was stronger and firmer than the voice from the dead.

'I assume,' said the Bishop, 'we can rule out any possibility of conscious fraud. Where the voice comes from one doesn't know. It might be Cosmo Lang. It might be anyone. I cannot prove or disprove.'

A point that worried the Bishop and the other two clergymen was that the discarnate Lang was less lucid in his arguments, less clear than they expected. Lang when alive was a brilliant speaker.

It did not worry Pearce-Higgins.

'It is impossible,' he said, 'to expect the voice of a discarnate person to be exactly the same as the living voice when you consider the difficulties with which it is produced. It seems the intelligence gets clouded in the descent from their high levels to our low ones.

'It is difficult for them to get through to us at all. They cannot express themselves as clearly as they can in their normal state - or even as well as they did on Earth. They do sometimes, therefore, seem to function on a lower level than they did when they were alive on Earth.'

Soon after Pearce-Higgins received support from an unexpected quarter.

174

Towards the end of September 1960, the Churches Fellowship held their annual conference. The Lang recording was played and discussed. On 1 October Woods and Betty Greene had a routine sitting with Flint. The voice claiming to be Lang came through again. And explained why.

'I was at your meeting,' he said, 'when you gathered together with the members of the Churches Fellowship, and I realize only too well the reaction that has been felt in certain quarters in regard to my talk which you played on this occasion. I have nothing to take back. In fact I have more to say on this subject.'

Another long lecture followed. Towards the end Betty Greene snatched a chance to pop in a question. 'Were you with us the other evening?' she asked. 'Yes, child,' he replied.

'Well, you know there was controversy over your voice?'

'There will always be controversy unfortunately.'

'A little surprise,' she said, 'was shown as to certain words you had used such as 'afeard' and 'stratas', and it was suggested that should you ever come through to us again, we should mention' these points to you.'

'The answer,' he replied, 'is simplicity itself. You must remember that all sound is created artificially. You in your world, using your natural human body, vibrating the atmosphere as you do using your own vocal organs, coupled with your background and education, create what you term your voice peculiar to yourself.

'What constitutes an ordinary voice in itself, after all, is only conveying the thoughts of an individual. When I, or others, come to speak to you, you must remember that we are speaking via an artificially reproduced box.

'Personally I do not think it matters whether one's voice is identical. I doubt very much if anyone coming from this side can identically reproduce their voice. After all, what is a voice? A reproduction of thought by sound waves. Do not forget, my friends, that we who are outside your world, no longer having the same physical body, no longer able to speak to you in a normal sense as you understand it, transmitting thought as we do by the power of an instrument or medium, can hardly be expected to reproduce identically, or even remember what-the sound of our voice would have been like.

175

'Time itself robs us of many things, but what it does not rob us of is truth. For we gain greater truth and knowledge by experience, and we are in a position to present you with truth if you will receive it.

'Do not be affected by the small things which so often people deliberately point out to try to destroy, because they are afeard - and afraid. After all it does not really matter whether my voice is the voice that I had when on Earth, or not. In any case my voice, like many other voices, no doubt changed from age to age. My voice at my latter years of life was not like my voice when I was twenty. And the change of word in itself here and there is of little import.

'I speak to you as I am - remember this. Not as I was. Remember that I have changed - thank God I have. And I am proud to be able to say, if pride were in my nature but it is not, that I have changed. My thoughts are not the thoughts that I once had, so what matters it if my voice be not the same?

'To those who doubt, I say the time shall surely come when you shall believe. But it is better if you believe while you are yet on Earth, for then you can do much that is good, than to wait until you come here. For many are they who look back and wish that they had known truth when on Earth. How different their lives would have been: how different their actions: and how much more could they have served their fellow men, and God in consequence.'

This recording was played to Mr Conan Shaw of Angmering, Sussex. He thought the voice was identical.

'As a chorister in York Minster 1908/1915,' he wrote, 'I had many opportunities of coming into direct contact with Dr Lang.

'On a number of special occasions I was chosen to carry the Archbishop's train. Dr Lang used to row us choristers in a boat on the River Ouse, from Bishopthorpe Place.

'His slow style of speech comes out very well in the tape, as do also his mannerisms. Both hands would clasp

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the top of his stole, then he would build up to a climax, to one word or one phrase as he does on the tape to the word 'Now' and the phrase '. . . then shall they stand up in the church and proclaim it.' (This refers to communication.)

'His head would turn (1) left to right (2) right to left (3) centre observantly getting his three points home to the whole congregation.

'Yes, I have every confidence that it is the communicator Dr Cosmo Lang whom he claims to be on the tape.'

Corroborations are encouraging. But are they essential? In view of what Lang says, probably not. The evidence from the other side supports his argument that no one in the next world can reproduce their voice identically in this.

'Many people from this side,' complained Oscar Wilde, 'try to say a great deal and in consequence say very little. For the simple reason we are having to utilize this extraordinary method of communication. Why they cannot invent something more congenial and more suitable and more successful than this I can't imagine!'

Ellen Terry explained the problem at length in 1965.

'It is not easy even for the most experienced communicator to always be able to come through and make a contact, and to hold a natural, normal so-called conversation. I think the fact that we are able to make any contact is, in itself, a miracle. And yet there are people in your world who, in spite of the evidence that they might have received in the past, in spite of the communications that have been highly successful, still have problems and still at times have doubts.

'All this of course we sympathize with, and we understand. But you see, I think it's so important to realize that all communication is fundamentally a mental process, a transmission of thought which in reaching you may have become perhaps to some extent altered, or distorted. And when one realizes that there are many, many words that convey very much the same thing, and sometimes a word will come through that has a similar meaning, and yet perhaps not exactly defines what we are trying to say.

'I wish I could explain to you that the 'voice box' itself must be by its very nature an artificial reproducer of the individual

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character, personality, sound, voice, impressions, ideas in fact everything that you receive. Although it may sound at times - and we hope it does of course - highly natural, very real, yet at the same time it is the 'voice box' that is doing for us what in the ordinary way if we were on Earth our vocal organs would be doing.

'When on Earth you have your own particular body, and your own vocal organs, and you are living under normal conditions and your vocal organs are responding automatically and naturally; you're vibrating the atmosphere creating sound under natural conditions. We are having to do all these things artificially.

'We stand in front of the voice box. We concentrate our whole personality as best we can, and our thoughts.

'You know how difficult it is to keep one's thoughts clear, and how to be accurate in what you are trying to suggest or to say in the normal way on Earth. How much more difficult it must be for us.'

Too difficult, if the voices are not just making excuses, for the voice test to be decisive one way or another.

Is there any other test we can apply? We cannot confirm what they say about their world from observation. What they tell us about our world we know already. Is there any neutral ground between them where for a moment the two worlds meet? And where accounts from the next world can be checked by anyone still alive in this? The meeting point of death?

TWENTY-ONE
The Final Proof

Soon after George Wilmot, the rag-and-bone merchant, had settled in with his French family, his guide returned to see how he was getting on. Wilmot confessed to a slight anxiety about his ex-wives still alive on Earth.

One of them, said the guide, was coming over shortly. It might help her if he went to see her. Reluctantly he went. To watch her die.

He found himself walking up a street. 'A very odd place it was, a lot of houses all much the same. And I found myself in a room, real old-fashioned Victorian house it was, and there was my old girl lying on an iron bedstead. Oh, she didn't half look a sight! I suppose I shouldn't have thought this. I thought, 'my God, I've been spared something. That's wrong to think like that, but she never was all that good looking.' But anyway, she looked ghastly. So this fellow Michael (the guide) says: 'You know she's coming over here soon?'

''You did tell me that,' I said.

''I don't think ' she'll recognize you,' he said, 'and I don't think she'll see you. Of course it's very rare that they do see us. But just stand at the foot of the bed, will you, and concentrate on her.'

''Well why should I do that? I'm not all that interested.'

''Look,' he says, 'you've got to learn that even though you don't get on with people, and you don't love people particularly, that in some circumstances you have a duty to perform, and it'll help her.'

'So I stood as he said. Then all of a sudden I could see her sort of change color. She seemed as if the color came back into her cheeks, and her eyes looked brighter and she looked quite different. And I heard her call out my name. It made me feel right funny inside, I tell you. I felt a real Charley, standing there like that.

'Anyway she put her hands out, and then all of a sudden I could see that she'd changed, you know. Something had happened. And there was a light round her. And then I saw other people were coming into the room and standing round. I recognized two of them as being her mother and father.

'She seemed to float. That's the only way I can put it, as if she floated above her body, as if she sort of lifted herself up straight like. It sounds

stupid now, but I backed out of the way, thought she was going to fall right on top of me.

'Michael whispered to me: 'She's coming out of her body now. She's going to be all right. They're going to take her away, you see. That's her mother and father, and those other people are friends that have come to help. I just wanted you to come because in a way you've helped her. You don't realize yet how much.'

''Well it's very odd,' I said. 'She's all alone here.'

''Yes,' he says, 'she's evidently been living alone for many years, and there's no one bothers much about her, and the other people in the house don't even know she's ill in bed. They'll find her dead in bed probably sometime during the day, or perhaps tomorrow. Well, that's not so important. It's to help her over a difficult time.''

All the voices' reports we've considered so far describe what happened to them at some stage after death. This one is different. It purports to give an account seen from the spirit world of what happens just before and at the moment of death itself.

Wilmot's description contains two statements:

1. That at the moment of death his wife recognized his presence in the room and that she was helped and met by her mother, father and friends.

2. That when she died, her psychic or etheric body detached itself from the physical body and floated above it.

Can we check the accuracy of these statements from accounts of death by people still alive?

My articles on life after death brought me a thousand letters. One of them was from a retired nurse, Vivien Keddie of Wells in Somerset.

'When I was very ill, and not expected to live,' she wrote, 'I felt as if I was leaving the bed to go to my mother who was at the end of the bed with a lovely smile on her face. Her hands were out as if she was waiting for me.

'She did not speak and a shadow seemed to come between us. I sensed that the time was not yet and I seemed to come back to bed.'

Mrs Marjorie Flint of Anlaby Road, Hull, sent me this description of the death of her mother:

'My mother had been unconscious for quite a while. Suddenly she sat bolt upright, held out her arms and said: '0 my mother! Isn't she pretty!'

'When I put my arms round her to lay her down, she tried to reach out further and said, 'let me go'.

'These were the last words she spoke. I'm sure my grandmother was there to guide and help her.'

In some cases it was claimed that spirit helpers from the next world were seen by fit people endowed with psychic vision in this.

Mrs W. Woodcock of Ringmead, Hampshire, told me: 'My mother had a stroke. We had a nurse to sit with her. Next morning the nurse said she had seen the figure of a girl come and stand at the foot of mother's bed at 3 a.m.

'She asked what was the matter. The figure replied: 'I've just come for my mother,' and disappeared.

'The next night mother died at 3 a.m. Later the nurse saw a photograph of my dead sister. 'That was the girl who was at the bedside,' she said.'

An even stranger story came from Mrs K. McLaughlin, of Northborough Road, Norbury, in south-east London:

'My mother was killed by a flying bomb in 1944. In 1948 my father was found to have cancer of the lung and I nursed him till his death in 1950.

'The afternoon before he passed on I was talking to him when he turned his head, smiled and said: 'I won't be long darling.'

'Next morning my father died. My three-year-old son, born after my mother died, was waiting downstairs hoping to go to see his grandfather. When I took him into the living-room, he suddenly said: 'Mummy, I don't like that lady. She's gone to my grandad and won't let me.'

'No one else had gone upstairs. He can only have seen the spiritual form of my dead mother.'

Dr Robert Crookall, once Principal Geologist to Her Majesty's Geological Survey, devoted a long retirement to examining the evidence for life after death. He came to an interesting conclusion.

'There seems,' he decided, 'to be no single case on record in which a dying person claimed to see a living friend whom he erroneously thought to be dead. On the other hand there are many recorded cases of dying people who see friends whom they supposed to be living and who were in fact dead.'

Can we find mortal evidence to support Wilmot's statement that at the moment of death the psychic body detaches itself from the physical body, floats above it, and then takes off for the next world? Has anyone in this world seen it happen?

Among the case histories collected by Crookall is an account by an American doctor, R. B. Hout of Indiana, who seems to have been endowed with a rare degree of psychic vision. At the death-bed of his aunt, he claimed to have seen, 'this astral body hanging suspended horizontally a few feet above the physical counterpart.

'It was serene and in repose. But the physical body was active in reflex movements and subconscious writhings of pain. I saw the features plainly. They were very similar to the physical face except that a glow of peace and vigour was expressed instead of age and pain.

'My uncle, the deceased husband of my aunt, stood there beside the bed. Also her son, passed away many years previously.'

By itself, this lone testimony may not amount to much. But as soon as I had published it, letters began to arrive

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from people who had been close to death or even been pronounced clinically dead - their hearts had stopped beating - and been revived and brought back to life.

They suggested that a natural process of transition from this world to another was automatically put into operation, and then reversed.

A Mrs C. M. Langridge of Poole, Dorset, wrote: 'I had a severe operation. Three days later, when my husband visited me, he asked how I felt. I replied that I didn't feel too well. Almost immediately I was unaware of any material things. I was outside my body, suspended in air, and looking down upon my body. Three or four people were reviving me.

'Later, when I returned to my body, I asked my husband what had happened and if anyone had been in my room. He replied that I had collapsed, that he had fetched sister who in turn had fetched the doctor and that for some minutes they thought I should die.'

A Mrs M. Veitch of Redcar, Yorkshire, wrote: 'I became very ill and was slowly slipping away. I was unconscious, yet suddenly I seemed to be awake. I felt no pain but knew I was dying. For I began to float. It was just like looking at yourself in a mirror. I knew it wasn't the real me.'

A Mrs C. A. Paton of Hove, Sussex, had her death certificate signed by the doctor. She found herself 'floating at will, easily and quickly'. Then drifted off to what she described as 'a lovely place'. A helper or guide appeared and they communicated without use of words. She said: 'I would rather go on, but I must go back,, to my husband.' He replied: 'It will be difficult, but I will help you.'

She traveled back, began to lose her sense of lightness and to feel pain. Eventually she arrived back in the bedroom and saw her own corpse.

The nurse was writing. Mrs Paton woke up in her physical body and spoke to her. The nurse dropped her pen and stifled a scream.

During the time she was 'dead' she noticed several things about the house that she couldn't have seen from the bed. After she had re-entered her body and regained consciousness, she described what she had seen. Her description was completely accurate.

In 1968 I wrote another short series quoting this and other similar cases. Another batch of letters provided me with several similar stories.

A Mrs Pat Cherry, then fifty-six, described how she had a severe operation on her stomach in the Northallerton General Hospital. 'There was a strange whirring. The next I knew I was floating over the bed looking down at my body lying there pale and drawn. I felt I was floating away.'

This happened three times. On the last occasion she saw the nurse fetch a doctor who gave her an injection in the arm. She floated back into her physical body and lost consciousness.

A Mrs Patricia Ariss of Daventry said she had had an operation in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, to remove a cancerous growth from her stomach. It took six hours.

She described how, 'I suddenly felt myself floating above the operating table, looking down on the team working on my body. All the pain I had felt before the operation was gone and I felt at peace.'

She saw her mother, who had had her left leg amputated just before she died, looking young with both her legs saying, 'not yet', and woke up next day in the hospital bed.

The nurse confirmed: 'Yes, you did die during the operation, and we had a job bringing you back.'

A set of likely tales? Did they really happen or were they just fevered dreams?

The strange experience of leaving and returning to your physical body is known as Astral Projection or an Out-of-body experience. There is a considerable body of evidence to show that people who claimed to have experienced it noticed events and scenes miles, sometimes hundreds of miles, from their physical bodies which were later confirmed by independent witnesses.

How common is it? Sample surveys suggest that it happens more often than we think. In one, limited to 200 English churchgoers in the late fifties, no fewer than 90 - forty-five per cent - admitted to at least one experience.

The inevitable deduction: If we can continue to exist as conscious beings outside our physical bodies when alive, why not when we die?

Beyond the moment of death the witnesses are dead too. All we can ask is do they sound reliable? Do they confirm or contradict one another?

All the voices who told their experiences to Woods and Betty Greene claim to have lived in this world, to have died, and found themselves in another. Do their descriptions of how they got there and what they found on arrival tally?

Try turning the question round. Suppose there was another world where people lived and died before they came to Earth. Suppose half a dozen of them made the transition to our world and sent back reports to the one they had left on what they found here. What would they say about us?

If they all came to Britain and settled down with relations here, their accounts would have a lot in common. But accounts of life in the

Highlands of Scotland and the East End of London might contain startling, and at first sight irreconcilable discrepancies.

But suppose they landed at places as far apart as Preston and Peking, Calgary and Calcutta, Toronto and Timbucktoo? Would anyone collating their reports really believe they had all gone to the same world or that it really existed?

The voices tell us there are many spheres in the next world and that everyone goes to a place or existence fashioned for himself by his character and life on Earth.

If, allowing for the differences this must cause, we can find some sort of internal consistency in their reports, can we compare what the voices who spoke to Woods and Betty Greene say with other accounts of an alleged life after death received through other, quite independent, methods of communication?

The most respected method, which dispenses with the popular conception of mediums and is often acceptable to

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those who reject a Spiritualist seance, is known as automatic writing. One of the most widely reported British automatic writers is Miss Grace Rosher.

When I visited her in a ground floor flat in Kensington, she insisted she was not a medium and had never considered going to a seance. She was a normal church-going Christian till one day in the late fifties she was sitting writing to her friends. Her pen was in her hand resting on the pad.

Suddenly she seemed to receive a mental message which said : 'Leave your hand there and see what happens.'

Almost immediately the pen began to write of its own accord: 'With love from Gordon.'

'Who is doing this?' she thought. The pen replied: 'I am. It is me. Gordon. Gordon.'

Four days later, when she plucked up courage to hold the pen in the same way again, it wrote for half an hour. The writing seemed to be similar to the hand of Gordon Burdick. Fifteen months earlier he was preparing to leave Vancouver in Canada to marry her. The night before he was due to sail he died.

The Churches Fellowship to whom she turned for help sent samples of the writing with letters written by Burdick when alive to a handwriting expert, Mr F. T. Hilliger of Woking, Surrey. Hilliger reported that both sets were written by the same person.

In 1961 she wrote a book containing an edited version of Burdick's account of what happened to him when he died. How does his account compare with the accounts of the voices?*

'I went to sleep,' he wrote, 'and then found myself in a lovely garden. I walked around and then saw my mother coming towards me. She said: 'Son, I have come to take you home!'

He went to her home and was greeted by his brother and sisters who had died before him. He couldn't realize what had happened, thought he must be dreaming. They told him he was dead. He was taken to a hospital, told to rest, then allowed to rejoin his family in the house.

What did he say about his new life?

** Beyond the Horizon, published by James Clarke.*

When we die we make our own heaven or hell, which are states of consciousness, conditioned by the way we lived on Earth. Houses and gardens are very like those on Earth. So are clothes. There are cities with colleges, art galleries and concert halls. The flowers are wonderful. There is no money. You can eat what you want but food is no longer necessary.

You can travel at will. You can study anything you want. There are lots of animals and birds. You look and feel much as you did on Earth. The only bond uniting people is love. Eventually you progress and move on to higher spheres.

It all sounds strangely familiar.

Can we extend the comparison to all accounts all over the world which claim to describe a life beyond the grave? The only person who has attempted to collate the lot is Robert Crookall. He spent four years collecting every communication he could lay his hands on alleged to have come from people who claimed to be dead describing what they experienced at and soon after the moment of death. He analysed the results in a book published in 1961.

It was impossible, he reasoned, that all the people who claimed to have received the messages could be in collusion. Even if all the mediums

were fraudulent, it was impossible that all their statements could be part of a co-ordinated global deception. If all the statements were received by telepathy from the minds of the sitters, could they all have had exactly similar imaginary ideas on the transition from death to another world?

They were not exactly similar. But from islands in the Pacific as well as Europe and America, the accounts had a broad internal consistency. A consistency very broadly shared by the voices who spoke to Woods and Betty Greene.

Why are they all so similar? A possible answer is that they all come from a similar source. From some of the spheres in another world where we find ourselves when we die.

If this is the true explanation - no one yet has proved

** The Supreme Adventure, published by James Clarks*

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that it is - could it be possible that the voices who spoke through the mediumship of Flint and independently of him to Woods and Betty Greene were giving us the fullest, most detailed account we have so far received of an experience we shall all share when our lives on this world come to their inevitable end?

END