

CONAN DOYLE'S LATEST DISCOVERY

(By EDWARD F. MURPHY, in America.)

Conan Doyle, the British novelist, descending to the level of one of our garish American magazines, very partial to literary pyrotechnics, there divests himself of opinions on Christianity which SS. Paul and John would doubtless find difficult to endorse. With the smoked spectacles of Spiritism set firmly on his nose, he naturally sees a Spiritistic hue even in the sacred story of Christ.

His article has a cheerfully brisk and business-like title: "Now That Religion is Dead." The suggestion is that Sir Arthur waxes impatient to have the obnoxious corpse removed to make more room for the message of Sir Oliver Lodge, Maeterlinck, and himself. But sub-consciously, perhaps, that Christianity like Christ, has a certain power to rise from the dead anyhow, he has compromised with his wishes by permitting the venerable bones to remain, on condition that they are clothed with the vivid offerings of the new dispensation. "It is still beyond all doubt," he sighs, "that Christianity has broken down, and that this break-down has been brought home to us by the terrible catastrophe which has befallen the world." We had thought that this "bromide" about Christianity was fairly well exhausted by now, because of its many servings. Besides, why is the Kaiser so strenuously condemned, if Christianity, and not he, was culpable? Where has the famous scrap-of-paper theory blown? What of the economic Cape-to-Cairo and Berlin-to-Bagdad railroad elucidation of the unleashing of the forces of battle? Some have traced the source of our sorrows directly to Immanuel Kant; others, more far-sighted, have detected it in Martin Luther. Those whose minds are capable of sliding so far, might easily indulge them further and finally arrive at Adam and Eve and the primal peccadillo in the shade of the old apple tree. Such a course would be just as judicious as Conan Doyle's measure of attributing to the failure of Christianity a situation which plainly was precipitated by a bullet which shot from an assassin's gun and pierced an Archduke's person.

But now that Christianity is dead, since Sir Arthur so alleges, let us call in Spiritism to reproduce for our edification the vision of Ezekiel.

A Spiritistic interpretation of the New Testament is at least a novelty. And that is what the jaded soul of to-day requires. Behold then the first séance in the Christian era, presenting the last word in Spiritistic requirement: the leaders of the Faith gathered together "with one accord" in the upper chamber. This harmony of minds and hearts "expresses admirably the sympathetic conditions which have always been found in psychic circles." Hence the second chapter of the Acts reveals a psychic grouping.

Such a nimble conclusion takes one's mental breath away. As well might a Sunday congregation, a family party, or even the Senate with regard to the League of Nations, be esteemed a séance.

But wait! There remains "a mighty rushing wind" to sweep away difficulty and the "tongues of fire" to burn up whatever remain. Sir Arthur reminds us that a great English scientist in 1873 experienced just such phenomena. He then proceeds to span the 19 centuries which separate Christ and Crookes, and supposes a law linking these respective manifestations. Francis Bacon, great father of induction, must indeed be frowning mightily from his abode of shade at this colossal instance of the abuse of his art. Never in the history of science have two such isolated examples been tortured by any imagination into an indication of a law.

From a consideration of the first séance, Sir Arthur glides to a contemplation of Christ's works, which were unmistakably mediumistic. There was that miracle of raising the dead to life, which the Englishman, quite oblivious of the Saviour's own resurrection, declares to have been "far the most wonderful of all."

No medium is on record as thus potent; which would again signify either that Christ was the greatest of mediums or that He was no medium at all. But once more Sir Arthur ignores the alternative. Triumphantly he notes that on the occasion of the raising of Lazarus Christ "groaned." Now why did He groan, if He were not a medium? That is exactly what a medium does before a great exhibition of power. But one might ask: Is the pupil a teacher because both teacher and pupil take off their coats before entering the classroom? or, even more pertinently: Is to-day yesterday because it snowed both days? Such logic would be tragic only for the saving smile which it inspires. Has Sir Arthur neglected the very elemental distinction between essence and accident? As for the "groaning," perchance the Saviour indulged it for the simple reason which animates most mourners, i.e. grief.

He is esteemed by the redoubtable Doyle to have selected His Apostles on the basis of their psychic endowments. They were attuned to their mediumistic master. If so, how mysteriously the contrary was manifested throughout the Divine public life in general and at Caesarea Philippi and on Calvary in particular!

Dr. Abraham Wallace is cited with approval as of the up-to-date opinion that the tabernacles which are mentioned in the Scriptural account of the Transfiguration should be understood "as three booths or cabinets, one for the medium and one for each materialised form." And Sir Arthur signalises the doctor's idea as "a remarkable example of a modern brain with modern knowledge throwing a clear search-light across all the centuries and illuminating an incident which has always been obscure." Rather it seems to be an ordinary example of modern temerity with modern assurance smearing an obscurity over an incident which is quite clear in itself. It is not at all known that the Jews were acquainted with Spiritistic cabinets or booths, which seems a very poor warrant for changing the tabernacles into such and a very good reason for not doing so. Without a care, Wallace and Doyle unload the paraphernalia of the Spiritism of the twentieth century onto the minds of men who, living almost 2000 years ago, in all reasonable assumption never dreamed of it. Such a method smacks of—shall we mildly say, madness?

The woman taken in sin is brought forth to furnish a frail link in Sir Arthur's frail chain of testimony. When questioned in her regard, Christ stooped and wrote on the sand. What and why? Sir Arthur hazards the opinion that He was exercising the power of automatic writing. Now why the Master should have to depend on spirits, over whom He had clearly shown His dominion, in such a simple matter as that of dealing with a scarlet sister, appears quite beyond our knight's purpose to examine or explain. Puzzling as is the question: What and why did the Saviour write on the ground? still more perplexing is the answer which Sir Arthur prefers. The difficulty increases when one realises what poor help the Light of the World would have received from the hinterland, at least if present-day "messages" are representative. In all probability a drivelling platitude or two would have been the reward of Christ's consultation. And certainly He who was love incarnate did not have to seek from spirits any advice in favor of "large-minded charity."

Several other Scriptural points are given a Spiritistic finish by the able novelist and would-be religionist. But the few herein described are sufficient to suggest the flimsiness and offensiveness of his theory as applied to the sacred text. He ends with an impressive burst of "musts" for the Church, which can be compressed into one great "must": the ecclesiastical ear and heart have to turn to this new revelation of which he, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is such an enthusiastic sponsor. To be deaf or indifferent is suicidal, though the nature of this illustrious gentleman's arguments would intimate that not to be so would be doubly so. For the new dispensation demolishes the consolation and beauty of the old, either by discrediting Christ