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POLITICS, RELIGION AND TEXT: W. E. GLADSTONE AND SPIRITUALISM¹

Introduction

The tag line of Cheiro's Language of the Hand, first published in 1894 with its showcase of living celebrities' palm prints, reads 'as is the mind, so is the form'.² Amongst the 'famous hands' reproduced in the 1897 edition was that of William Ewart Gladstone, four times Prime Minister of Great Britain [fig. 1]; an obvious choice for any commercially-minded author or publisher.³ Ostensibly there seems little reason to suppose that Gladstone's interest in such phenomena was anything other than transient. Historiographical tradition indicates that Gladstone's intellectual and spiritual concerns were of the most serious kind: the tenets of Anglicanism; the connection between Olympian and Judaic religions, and the nature of sin. But Gladstone's sphere of serious interest did extend into realms such as cheiromancy, as this exploration of his earnest investigation into psychical phenomena, particularly spiritualism, seeks to demonstrate.

The press reported Gladstone's occasional *séance* attendances and he recorded observing other amateur paranormal experiments in his diary. Based on these sources, Gladstone's biographers (when they have addressed the question at all)⁴ have suggested that his involvement was limited to mild, intermittent curiosity about the latest crazes preoccupying the élite circles in which he moved. However this evaluation does not sit well with the insights offered by other available evidence, particularly that presented by his library.

Gladstone's recorded reading and writings indicate a deep level of concern about occult practices. He accorded a prominent place to 'Magic and Spiritism' in his library classification scheme for St Deiniol's (the residential library which he established in the 1880s near his North-Wales home).⁵ He did not regard it as a minor collection; such were

listed in a memorandum as ‘Epitaphs &c. Books on marriage &c. Hymns. [and] Liturgies’: subjects more obviously in keeping with his better-publicized preoccupations.⁶ Moreover, the library preserves an impressive collection of arcane literature, the greater part of which Gladstone owned and annotated.

The following historical study aims, through a careful examination and integration of the St Deiniol’s evidence, to reassess Gladstone’s relationship with spiritualism, and, in the light of those findings, to review aspects of his broader thought and behaviour.

Spiritualism in context

Modern spiritualism is traditionally dated from 1848 when a spate of table-rappings swept New York State. The movement soon took hold in Britain and peaked in the 1870s and 1880s.⁷ To define who was or was not a spiritualist in Victorian Britain remains problematic. Victorian spiritualist belief centred on the possibility of contact between the living and the dead; beyond this it is impossible to cite a single creed embraced by its followers.⁸

Whether or not Gladstone was a spiritualist remains subordinate to questions of how and why he engaged with such beliefs, and what was its impact upon him. His involvement was not unusual, as Colin Matthew has shown:

Involvement with spiritualism in the 1880s was common enough in the professional classes and the aristocracy. As traditional beliefs about heaven, hell, and sacramental religion declined among the intelligentsia and ‘agnostic’ became a common self-description, attempts to communicate beyond immediate consciousness were seen as a natural form of progress.⁹

Matthew is right to acknowledge that spiritualists expressed many preoccupations common to the period. However his theory of secularization and diametrical opposition of Christian belief and spiritualism are questionable. Many spiritualists shared Christian

concerns over apparent threats from science and materialist philosophy; before 1914, the desire to discredit scientific materialism was a primary motivation for many British spiritualists.¹⁰ Some certainly preferred to fight science with science rather than with the defensive intransigence that characterized much Christian apologetic. But when investigating Gladstone's involvement it must be remembered that there were fervent Christian as well as anti-Christian spiritualists.

Gladstone's involvement with spiritualism

Psychical research

Gladstone's main public association with spiritualism was through his honorary membership of the Society for Psychical Research [SPR], which he joined in June 1885 and with which he remained affiliated until his death.¹¹ This was unlikely to excite comment; other honorary members included Tennyson, Ruskin and G. F. Watts. Gladstone's interest in questions on the margins of Christian belief was longstanding: he was a founder member of the Metaphysical Society, which aimed 'to collect, arrange, and diffuse knowledge (whether objective or subjective) of mental and moral phenomena.'¹² The SPR was similarly organized. Run by respected academics and intellectuals, it had a largely congruent membership.

What does Gladstone's membership of the SPR tell us about his relations with spiritualism? Spiritualists and psychical researchers were not always identical. The SPR adopted a rigorous approach to the study of phenomena, publishing their results in an academic journal. Founder members like Henry Sidgwick and Frederick Myers were committed to achieving certainty through their experiments in order to secure tangible proof of immortality. Some spiritualists interpreted such activities as hostile to their own. In 1885, the *Light* observed, 'The real *mot d'ordre* of the Psychical Society may be summed up in the well-known phrase, "the spirit is the last thing I will give in to", a position which involves some of the most wanton assumptions possible.'¹³ Gladstone, although happy to

be associated with the SPR, remained distant from its activities. He was friendly with the Sidgwick but his correspondence with Henry did not mention psychical research. His collection of the Society's transactions is preserved at St Deiniol's, but remains unbound and largely unannotated. The first two volumes, which predate membership, are the only ones so treated. In all likelihood these were given to Gladstone by the SPR, either as an encouragement to join or for information, explaining why they were read more carefully than subsequent editions.¹⁴

Dating

Central to understanding Gladstone's relationship with spiritualism is establishing its duration. Matthew dates Gladstone's experience of psychical phenomena from the 1880s, whilst Richard Shannon suggests the interest originated earlier, with a 'weakness for phrenology'.¹⁵ Matthew's earliest reference is June 1884, when Gladstone and about 50 other MPs attended a 'Thought-reading' by a Mr Cumberland at the House of Commons, which Gladstone described as 'curious'; adding 'to call it imposture is [...] nonsense. I was myself operated upon'.¹⁶ Immediately we see Gladstone both interested and open-minded. Many of his contemporaries denounced such things out of hand: Charles Dickens wrote in 1855, 'I have not the least belief in the awful unseen being available for evening parties at so much per night'.¹⁷ Gladstone admitted, 'to mix myself in these things would baffle & perplex', but, unlike Dickens, he felt, 'good advice is to be remembered come how it may'.¹⁸ And he had held such views for a significant period. In 1877 he wrote to J. T. Markley, who had sent a work on spiritualism, saying: 'I do not share the temper of simple contempt [...] I remain in what may be called contented reserve'.¹⁹

Matthew suggests that Gladstone was first drawn into spiritualism directly on 8 October 1884 at Laura Thistlethwayte's *salon* in Grosvenor Square.²⁰ Gladstone met and had been captivated by the recently-retired courtesan in the 1860s.²¹ By the 1880s her

circle included numerous socialites involved in spiritualism, who eagerly entertained Gladstone. However there is evidence that Gladstone was associating with society spiritualists before this date. In 1879 he visited Sir Charles Isham and recorded:

Sir C.I. touched on Spiritualism with me, and Mr Dasent on his favourite belief in Fairies. *Most curious* are the little low benches and stumps placed under his trees [...] said to be for their accommodation.²²

Shannon suggests that Gladstone's association with Thistlethwayte's circle was just 'one of his periodic spiritualist phases',²³ citing (inaccurately) a 'table-turning' experiment at Penrhyn Castle in 1861 for comparison.²⁴ But what Shannon does not mention is that, on his return to Hawarden, Gladstone made a point of reading H. Novra's Spirit Rapping, explained and exposed (1860).²⁵ This follow-up reading, about a phenomenon categorized as a popular diversion rather than a serious intellectual concern,²⁶ immediately attests a deeper interest. Such reading was to become a defining characteristic of Gladstone's response to spiritualism.

Séance attendance: society spirits and the vagaries of class

Gladstone attended his first *séance* on 29 October 1884.²⁷ It was conducted by William Eglinton mainly by slate writing. Gladstone participated by writing two questions,²⁸ and recorded the experience in his diary:

Dined at Mrs Hartmanns. Mr Elington [sic] came in evg. For the first time I was present at his operations of spiritism: quite inexplicable: not the smallest sign of imposture. I took down the particulars.²⁹

As with Mr. Cumberland, Gladstone perceived no reason to doubt the phenomena. But Eglinton was regarded by some as a charlatan. In the 1870s he had established a reputation as a sensational medium, whose *séances* included full-form spirit materializations, flying objects, levitation and slate writing. Following an SPR investigation into the latter in 1886, he was fiercely denounced as 'a clever conjuror' in

their journal. This ignited a rancorous controversy that damaged Eglinton's reputation and provoked a split between some spiritualists and the SPR.³⁰ It is unclear what Gladstone thought of Eglinton subsequently; he certainly made no marginal comment on reading the following account by J. N. Maskelyne:

Some few years ago a slight stir was made by one Eglinton [...] He was once invited by an old lady to meet Mr. Gladstone [...] On this occasion, upon a prepared slate, the property of the medium, some writing appeared, and, as a matter of course, the ex-Premier failed to discover the trick.³¹

Reports of the *séance* quickly appeared in the London newspapers to Gladstone's chagrin and Mrs Hartmann's embarrassment.³² Eglinton promised that the true story would appear in the following week's *Light* (8 November 1884), a publication which Gladstone tried unsuccessfully to prevent.³³ The British Library preserves a copy of the article with Gladstone's scant annotations. The title, 'Mr. Gladstone at a *séance*', and preamble show the evident media interest. The body consists of an interview with Eglinton who declared that Gladstone 'had no scepticism in regard to the possibility of psychical phenomena'.³⁴

Gladstone posed two questions: 'Which year do you remember to have been more dry than the present one?' To which the reply was: 'In the year 1857'. And on a locked slate: 'Is the Pope well or ill?' To which the response came back: 'He is ill in mind, not in body'. (The spirits declined to reply to another question - not from Gladstone - about the following year's Cesarwitch horse-race winner). Eglinton concluded that he thought Gladstone was 'satisfied' of 'the *bona fides* of the experiment'.³⁵

It is easy to see why Eglinton was so forthcoming. It was potentially a terrific boost to his career and to the spiritualist cause to claim that the prime minister, who was popularly known as a great advocate of truth, had been convinced.

Gladstone, engulfed in crisis over the reintroduction of the Franchise Bill, greeted the further press coverage with annoyance. He wrote to Emma Hartmann:

I am sorry to find an article in the Morning Post of today. The facts are I think pretty accurately stated, not so the conversation, though I have no doubt that the account is truthfully intended. But the serious matter is that the reporting it at all is a breach of trust & confidence; which Mr. Eglinton has properly respected in the case of yourself & the other ladies.³⁶

Several aspects of Gladstone's reaction are noteworthy. Firstly observe Gladstone's assertion that the report was 'truthfully intended'. This not only indicates positive feeling towards Eglinton but is also indicative of Gladstone's liberal approach to evaluating others' beliefs. For example, he could say, of Comte's 'Religion of Humanity', that the 'profession is one which I may be unable to distinguish from an hallucination, but I am far from presuming to pronounce or believe it an imposture.'³⁷ The importance of such an attitude will become explicit in the following investigation of Gladstone's Christianity. But it is worth remarking how Gladstone's collected response to the inexplicable both supports Peter Lamont's recent contention that validation could be given to phenomena by rigorous, open-minded non-believers but also that such responses did not always result in 'crisis' for the informed observer.³⁸

Gladstone's letter is also revelatory of his attitude to both press and public. Although by this stage Gladstone was adept at managing the media and the mass audience, he did not think either should know that the premier had attended a *séance*. This illuminates a dividing line between the public and the private aspects of his political life which is increasingly difficult to situate in the later decades. It also makes clear Gladstone's belief that such occasions should be governed by the same proprieties regulating other aspects of his social world. Ruth Brandon notes the importance of the

social setting of the Society *séance*, where politeness and etiquette outranked the demands of scientific experiment.³⁹ With this in mind, one observes the class-conscious quality of Gladstone's annoyance. He firstly notes that the ladies remain nameless. In the Light, his hostess is styled 'a lady of distinction in Grosvenor Square' and thus worthy of anonymity. Gladstone's annotated Light article also bears heavy underlining and an 'NB' by Eglinton's insistence that 'I am not at liberty to say anything about my relations with the Duke of Albany'.⁴⁰ The belittling implications of differently treating the fourth son of Victoria and Albert and the fourth son of a Liverpool merchant were clearly not lost on the annoyed premier.

The letter sheds light both on Gladstone's treatment of people and their gifts, and also on his attitude to the material culture of books. In his interview, Eglinton had highlighted Gladstone's acceptance of some books.

I asked him whether he would honour me by accepting a few books upon the subject, to which he very kindly replied that [...] he would most cheerfully undertake to read any book I might desire to send him, adding, 'And I shall keep them as a memento of this very interesting evening.'⁴¹

Gladstone's subsequently refused the gift, 'which under present circumstances I could not retain'.⁴² The rejection of communication with people who had offended him was undoubtedly a character trait. In 1878 a parcel containing gifts from his sister Helen remained unopened because of an outstanding debt: 'I can have no other concern with it', he informed her, 'while matters remain as they are'.⁴³ Secondly, Gladstone understood the exchange of books to both reflect and further intimacy between people, something private and courtly; not to be broadcast in order to increase the giver's status.

The Eglinton *exposé* neither long occupied the headlines nor deterred Gladstone's interest in spiritualism, but it did limit his public engagement with it to the fashionable society world. When he next attended a *séance* it was with guaranteed privacy at Lady

Sandhurst's (one of Laura Thistlethwayte's circle) on 18 November 1884, although the medium, Mrs Duncan, was still clearly of a lower class.⁴⁴ Gladstone, circumspect after the Eglinton débâcle, was determined to remain uninvolved. Nonetheless he gave a full résumé of Mrs Duncan's communications in his diary. Amongst other things she 'Spoke of great questions and great decisions immediately impending and promised help', 'Commended reception of the "Blessed Sacrament" but *rather as an act of obedience* than from any mystical virtue' and concluded by giving 'certain medical prescriptions'.⁴⁵ She sent a supplementary exhortation to Gladstone, via Lady Sandhurst, on 27 November 1884, in which she demanded that 'the Navy ought to be looked after, and that quickly',⁴⁶ as well as offering further reassuring words about Gladstone's political career.⁴⁷

It is unclear whether Gladstone was influenced by Mrs Duncan but Shannon suggests Lady Sandhurst's political influence on Gladstone was of a high order.⁴⁸ It is certain that her correspondence had a definite political agenda, articulated through a heavily-Christianized spiritualist discourse designed to appeal to him. Gladstone continued to attend her soirées and, although there is no explicit mention of further *séances*, he continued to associate with spiritualists there. In 1888 he recorded, 'Lady Sandhurst's party. All alive. Saw one who told me strange inventions.'⁴⁹

Gladstone and the spiritualist text

Surveying the St Deiniol's collection

Gladstone's spiritualist reading has neither featured in scholarly assessments of his involvement with the movement nor of his broader religious views. He began his reading in the 1840s and 50s,⁵⁰ activity predating both Matthew's and Shannon's narratives.

A survey of the St Deiniol's collection reveals illuminating evidence of Gladstone's reading practice. Of a sample of 125 nineteenth-century texts, 36% (45/125) were either listed as read or annotated by Gladstone, sent by authors, or both.⁵¹ 25% (31/125) were

definitely annotated by him. A small percentage (11% [14/125]) was sent by authors but the books bear no signs of his reading.

The collection's modal decade of publication was the 1880s [fig. 2]. Despite its incompleteness, information for Gladstone's reading mirrors this remarkably well. The pattern of the collection supports the view that Gladstone's interest and involvement in spiritualism heightened, but did not begin, during the 1880s.

The earliest annotated text is probably Gerald Massey's Concerning Spiritualism (1871), which Gladstone read the year after publication.⁵² What is of great interest, with reference to how Gladstone related spiritualism to Christianity, is when he read such texts. Gladstone had a lifelong practice of dedicated Sunday reading which, whilst not exclusive of secular works, displayed a religio-spiritual character that distinguished it from his more eclectic weekly diet.⁵³ He would certainly not have read anything intentionally hostile to Christianity on Sundays. But he recorded reading Massey's book on the fourth Sunday of Lent that year.⁵⁴ This was not an isolated incident. He read other spiritualist texts on Sundays and holy days. For example he read Life beyond the Grave, described by a spirit through a writing medium (1876) on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday 1879.⁵⁵ He also corresponded with spiritualists on Sundays. Thus on 8 April 1877 (the first Sunday after Easter) he wrote telling James Phillips of Dorking that 'I know of no rule which forbids a Christian to examine into the preternatural agency in the system called spiritualism'.⁵⁶

What is striking about Gladstone's collection is firstly its variety and secondly the attention he gave to it. William Eglinton had at least accurately recorded Gladstone's high level of familiarity with the literature: 'He said that he already knew that the movement was represented by excellent journals, and that many eminent men had written on the question'.⁵⁷ Gladstone's collection contained works both hostile and friendly to spiritualism and it incorporated various genres including general surveys, commission

reports, historical studies, poetry and direct spirit communications, which Gladstone read as closely as the critical works.

The variety of material he read indicates that his interest was not limited by a preoccupation with proving the authenticity of the supernatural phenomena discussed. Is there any evidence to suggest that he was personally moved by the material he read? He was certainly not averse to amateur divining. He was obviously intrigued by Louise Cotton's gift of her Palmistry, and its Practical Uses (London 1890); his annotations include direct references to his own star sign and palm. In Cotton's chapter on astral influences, Gladstone placed his precise tick next to the planets' influences on Capricorn. The sun apparently guaranteed 'small mean stature, thin and ill-proportioned, pale complexion, lank brown hair, long face, just and upright disposition, hasty, undaunted, benevolent, but sometimes indulgent in dissipation'. He did not acknowledge with any mark Jupiter's tendency to produce a 'mean-looking...peevish disposition, weak, irritable, indolent but harmless, not fortunate, nor respected by anyone'.⁵⁸

Gladstone's spiritualist correspondents

Gladstone was not only reading but also corresponding with ordinary practising spiritualists from the early 1870s; another important but previously-ignored aspect of his spiritualist involvement. Gladstone's correspondence was, like that of Sherlock Holmes, 'a varied one'⁵⁹ and his spiritualist correspondents went into significant detail about their activities and beliefs, and provided evidence for various phenomena. In 1878, John Francis Hunt wrote to Gladstone asking permission to send 'two prose communications'. He elaborated, as if to whet Gladstone's appetite, 'one [is] a direct communication [...] [from] the spirit of the late president Lincoln [...] in which *your* name incidentally occurs.'⁶⁰ In 1886 a Madame Du Guet sent Gladstone a collection of 'autographs' from the other world.⁶¹ But why did they take such pains to write to him? Letters that Gladstone received in July 1874 from Albert Snow of Leatherhead offer some indications.

Supposing you ignorant of such facts, and interested in you by your writings & speeches, I take the liberty of thus offering you evidence of the existence of methods of communication with our departed friends. The boys, the [automatic writing] instrument, & the writings, you can see privately and incognito, if you think the matter of sufficient importance.⁶²

Snow suggested that a relationship had been inaugurated between Gladstone and one portion of the people by means of his 'writings and speeches'. He had formed an opinion of Gladstone on the basis of these and now sought to develop the relationship by inviting face to face communication. Snow's high estimation of Gladstone's character, based on his public statements, is further demonstrated by a second letter in which he accepted Gladstone's decision not to investigate, because he had confidence in his 'love of truth [...] *wherever it might lead*.'⁶³ Gladstone's popular political and religious profile was obviously attractive to spiritualists, even at a point when was resolutely seeking retirement.

What has been thus far ascertained of Gladstone's interest in spiritualism? It might be said that he was unremarkable for his personal experience of the fashionable phenomena of the day. However his serious and sustained exploration of the subject, bolstered by extensive reading and a lively, socially-broad correspondence, was more unusual and has been somewhat belied by concentration merely on his non-committal relationship with the SPR and occasional *séance* attendance. Moreover St Deiniol's shows that Gladstone's arcane reading ranged well beyond the category of spiritualism and incorporated works on theosophy, demonology, witchcraft, magic, astrology, thought-reading, palmistry, mesmerism, ghosts and haunted houses. But what was the overall significance of this, both for Gladstone himself, and for our understanding of him as a Victorian politico-intellectual? There are three parts to the following explanation: the first deals with politics, the second with religion, and the third with bibliography.

Gladstone, politics and the spirits

Science and politics shared with spiritualism and psychical research a concern with questions about authority, influence and communication.⁶⁴ The spirits showed themselves to be deeply interested in politics. In Life beyond the Grave, a spirit announced ‘we read your newspapers’, which Gladstone underlined and marked with two exclamation marks. The entity continued to denounce ‘principal public men, from the Prime Minister [Disraeli] downwards’ as ‘shams’ and claimed spirits ‘attend your House of Commons [...] and make themselves personally acquainted with what goes on there’. At this Gladstone drew a line, or rather an ‘x’ [of disapprobation] indicating perhaps a parliamentarian’s disbelief that any unauthorized person should be witness to the House’s activities.⁶⁵ Neither did he accept the spirit’s suggestion that ‘Party feeling is only self-interest in another form’.⁶⁶

Gladstone’s annotation of these, often very radical, texts is a useful barometer of his own radicalism, just as the texts themselves are important evidence of the ways in which sections of the people conceptualized Gladstone as a political agent in relationship with them. Logie Barrow suggests that ‘Spiritualism [...] benefited from being strategically attractive to people of any reforming cast of mind.’⁶⁷ And there was enthusiastic vindication of Gladstonian Liberalism from the spirit world. In 1875 Life beyond the Grave’s disincarnate author predicted that ‘unless a healthy reaction takes place in public feeling, much mischief will ensue’, due to the Conservative government.⁶⁸ During an 1890 trance-address, a ‘veteran spiritualist lecturer and reformer’ designated Gladstone as the panacea for society’s ‘monstrous inequality’. He was described as ‘the agent of progressive ideas’ who merely awaited the moment when ‘the ideas of the people shall have progressed to the point of practical unanimity [...] to carry out the will of the people’.⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, spiritualists’ appropriation of Gladstone did not cease after his death. The Clapham Junction branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants

was told on Gladstone's death of the 'most striking coincidence that Mr. Gladstone should be called in to the Great Unknown on Ascension Day [...] [this being] a confirmation of his strong belief that this life is but the introduction to a higher life hereafter'.⁷⁰ On 1 November 1909, the Daily Chronicle carried an 'AMAZING SPIRIT "INTERVIEW." [WITH] THE LATE MR GLADSTONE ON THE BUDGET' obtained by W. T. Stead and conducted in the presence of two clairvoyants and a stenographer. A variety of spirits communicated, including Cardinal Manning. Gladstone, characteristically unwilling to return to the 'limited and melancholy arena of party politics', nevertheless expressed himself at length as to whether he would disband the House of Lords if it threw out the Budget. 'In my opinion the Upper Chamber will act most ill-advisedly if they reject this financial measure', his shade pronounced.⁷¹

It is unlikely Gladstone would have endorsed any of these characterizations of himself. For all his populist rhetoric he venerated an Aristotelian model of government by a knowledgeable hierarchy, and was wary of anything that might encourage anarchy. However a radical/conservative tension existed within Gladstone, which caused confusion not only to himself but to his contemporaries and later commentators. His radical instinct, intermittently restrained by cautious probity, is well illustrated by his exclamation both of alarm and interest ('lv | ') beside Hudson Tuttle's pronouncement 'Oh, that the bright day, fast dawning, may shine forth, when every one will be his own master, his own sovereign, his own ruler, and govern himself with the strength of his manhood!'⁷² Gladstone was also willing to use exchanges with practitioners of the paranormal as opportunities for self promotion. For example, when he entertained 'Cheiro' at Hawarden in 1897, Gladstone not only allowed the palmist to take impressions of his hands but, 'further to show his interest', gave his visitor his photograph.⁷³ It is small wonder that tension existed between Gladstone's complex and somewhat

contradictory radicalism and that of some of his spiritualist admirers, or that confusion was generated by his inconsistent levels of (dis)interest.

Alison Winter's book on mesmerism suggests a direct link between concepts of the mind, particularly the communal experience of phenomena central to psychical experimentation, and the growth of mass politics and charismatic leadership. She examines the way in which Gladstone was presented, by Walter Bagehot and others, as a political mesmerist subduing the collective will of the masses to his power. She quotes Bagehot's prediction, made on the basis of Gladstone's 1871 Greenwich speech (the first Prime Ministerial speech addressed directly to the public), that Gladstone would ever afterwards 'exert a control over the masses [...] *directly* by the vitality of his own mind.'⁷⁴ With reference to Gladstone's spiritualist correspondence, a useful extension can be made to Winter's discussion. The evidence of reception and response (albeit from one group) in the audience that Bagehot imagined suggests that political influences were deemed not just to flow one way; it indicates how some of 'the people' conceived of being actively involved in the political process (both individually and in communities) and sought to exert influence themselves. Winter notes (and Lamont argues similarly) the independent licence that educated Victorians exhibited (and were accorded by society) when it came to judging experiments and evidence.⁷⁵ Such independence clearly characterized Gladstone's approach. A constant preoccupation of his, well illustrated by diary examples and annotations, was describing and judging phenomena that he had witnessed personally. For example, the items in the JSPR in which he showed most interest concerned phenomena he had experienced. He especially noted experiments where number guessing was involved, undoubtedly comparing them to his experience with Mr Cumberland.⁷⁶ Likewise, having been convinced that the thought-reading and slate-writing he had witnessed were genuine, Gladstone was reluctant to accept J. N. Maskelyne's assaults on them.⁷⁷ And it is no surprise to find that he disagreed with Maskelyne's co-author Lionel

Wetherly in his rigid distinction between ‘those with whom the spirit world is an objective reality’ and ‘the ordinary-thinking public.’⁷⁸

Gladstone’s recognition of and belief in the validity of individual judgement adds weight to the arguments of both Winter and Lamont. The latter demonstrates the increasing levels of confidence observable amongst Victorian witnesses.⁷⁹ And Winter describes the community-building effects of mesmerism amongst the well-to-do.⁸⁰ There is no reason to suppose that this process was restricted only to élite groups who already occupied secure collective positions from which to ask questions and govern events. What about the validity of judgements of the ‘ordinary-thinking public’? The ability and fitness of those of a lower class to judge matters of political import were frequently questioned by their social superiors; those involved in spiritualism regularly faced charges of fraudulence. But there is evidence to show that the practice of independent questioning and evaluation, by spiritualists and others, was fostered and encouraged across a much broader social range. For example, note that in Cheiro’s Language of the Hand no definitive analysis was provided of the famous palms. They were to be interpreted by the individual reader, having learnt techniques from the book.⁸¹ One can also see evidence of analytical and investigative practice encouraging confidence and proactive behaviour amongst Gladstone’s ordinary spiritualist correspondents and book-givers. The combination of Gladstone’s open-minded approach to spiritualism and his political appeal to the masses was a heady mixture and was understandably made much of by the spiritualists who wrote to and about him. Not only did they feel vindicated by his sympathetic attitude to the experiments he witnessed, quoting his opinion as ‘the rational view of the subject’,⁸² but they also drew on their own experiences of investigation and experimentation, as well as on a positive sense of class status, to suggest political as well as spiritualist opinions to him. Thus Albert Snow concluded his first letter to Gladstone:

I was formerly the Master of a Church Grammar school; you may rely on my discretion, especially as if I succeed in satisfying you and thereby rendering you an important service, I shall then ask you kindly to do me a small service in return.⁸³

It is also questionable, *pace* Shannon, whether we should assume that Lady Sandhurst's role was automatically invested with more political importance than that of Mrs Duncan and her spiritual advisers. This tentative two-way communication is also evident in Gladstone's reading of spiritualist texts. Several volumes refer to Gladstone within the printed text. Remarkably, in the St Deiniol's copy of An Angel's Message: Being a series of Angelic and Holy Communications received by a Lady. (London, 1858), the sender, Francis Hobler, provided an extensive marginal commentary on the text for Gladstone's benefit, relating further testimony for the phenomena described from the spiritualist community of which he was a part. For example, he wrote, "Capt. Beasley RN. has told me he has seen & touched these spirit hands & they were perfectly in sensation as natural hands would be', and with reference to a spiritual wreath: 'This is true – Mr Coleman saw it and has the wreath'. At the end of one chapter Hobler noted that the medium, Miss Juliana Fawcett, 'is a very amiable and sensible young lady – who does not assume airs or assume on superior knowledge or abilities.'⁸⁴ All of which narrative was designed to convince Gladstone by a mixture of empirical evidence, assertion of respectability, and trustworthiness within a frame of reference which recognized class distinction.

Such texts illustrate that the exertion of confident, communal powers of influence was being seriously attempted (leaving aside the question of such projects' success or failure), not only from the top down, but also from the bottom up in spiritualist communities. This had immense political and cultural implications in an era of burgeoning mass politics, especially for Gladstone, both as 'the People's William' and as

private consumer of these texts. He was clearly confident about his own ability to judge the truth of both political and psychical phenomena. But the frequent assumption, by correspondents and mediums, of Gladstone's fellow-feeling (however deferential and resistible) had unsettling implications for the amount of control he could maintain over his own political identity. Versions of this identity were being acculturated into communal narratives, by ordinary spiritualists with often quite different political agendas. It was this uncomfortable situation which produced Gladstone's frequently uncertain comments and annotations, his sharp reluctance to see his spiritualist involvement become the business of the public as well as of the private sphere, but also his attempts to try and manipulate the way his image was seen and used.

Spiritualism, Christianity and the burden of proof

There is little doubt that the most important factors motivating Gladstone's decision to investigate spiritualism were his personal Christian faith and his understanding of the nature and development of religion. Spiritualism's relationship with Christianity was complex. London Spiritualism tended to be middle-class dominated and largely Christian in emphasis. Provincial Spiritualism was more lower-middle and upper-working class and was strong in anti-Christian sentiment.⁸⁵ Where agreement occurred between the two, it most frequently concerned the relationship between belief in the supernatural and materialistic science. This aspect greatly interested Gladstone. In 1876, he published an article detailing his own religious classification system: 'The Courses of Religious Thought'.⁸⁶ The bulk of spiritualist and theosophical material which Gladstone read most closely accorded with the 'Theistic' division outlined in this systematization. 'Materialism' belonged firmly in what he termed 'The Negative School': an aggregate of schemes which 'agree in denying [...] the reign of a moral Governor or Providence, and the existence of a state of discipline or probation.'⁸⁷ In his private reading he consistently annotated passages where spiritualism and materialism were defined in opposition. For example, he

placed double lines of notice both beside S. C. Hall's assertion that spiritualism's purpose was 'To CONFUTE AND DESTROY MATERIALISM, by supplying sure and certain and *palpable* evidence that to every human being God gives a soul which he ordains shall not perish when the body dies'.⁸⁸ Also by Dr. G. Sexton's claim that spiritualism 'is destined to crush the materialism of the age, and hurl the scepticism, now so prevalent, from the throne which it has usurped'.⁸⁹ ('Scepticism' was number one on Gladstone's 'Negative School' list).

Despite such sustained interest, it was difficult for Christians and spiritualists to agree on a basis of proof. Unlike mainstream Christian practice, spiritualism's prime object was to undertake practical communicative experiments with unseen beings, and to provide scientific evidence proving the veracity of both spiritualist and Christian claims. As Albert Snow explained, 'one of the main objects of this movement begun from on High, is to offer to materialists & men of science whom the Church cannot reach absolute proof of the existence of spirit and a future life'.⁹⁰

The central question for Christian-Spiritualist dialogue was whether or not this approach supported a Christian world-view, or whether it would erode traditional faith.⁹¹ Official Anglican disapproval was proffered by such figures as Archbishop Benson of Canterbury and B. F. Westcott, Bishop of Durham, but one should be careful not to exaggerate (as Lamont does) the difference between levels of serious scientific and Christian engagement with spiritualism.⁹² There was significant involvement amongst ordinary clergy and a working policy of coexistence developed. But how did Gladstone fit into this debate?

Gladstone had no time for outright attacks on Christianity and his readings indicate where he drew the line with regard to criticisms. He rejected the argument, employed by Gerard Massey and others, that 'it has almost become necessary not to be a Christian, to appreciate the beauty and significance of the life of Christ'.⁹³ His understanding of the

incarnation as the keystone of humanity's redemption meant that he balked at how even theistic believers could reject the 'aids, bounteous even if limited' of the incarnation 'and thus doom themselves to face with crippled resources the whole host of the enemy'.⁹⁴ With regard to criticism of the Church as an institution, he disagreed with one author ('x') who asserted 'the uselessness of modern religious teaching' and 'false teaching' by clergy.⁹⁵ Echoes of these judgements are to be found in his public writings. For example, his isolation of 'The Negative School' in 'The Courses of Religious Thought' was governed by his estimation of its purely destructive character. He was steadfast in his veneration for the teaching role of the church and the historical nature of its traditions. Matthew's description of Gladstone as an 'orthodox sacramentalist' is largely true.⁹⁶ He was surprised by Mrs. Duncan's advice to receive communion as duty rather than for its sacramental benefits and was repelled by spiritualists and theosophists who argued for divorce. For example in Life Beyond the Grave (1876) Gladstone placed an 'x' beside the assertion that people with opposing magnetisms should part,⁹⁷ and disagreed with much of this spirit's radical feminist discourse on women and marriage, including the suggestion that women who only occupy themselves with home and family on earth 'and cast no thought around them, are not qualified to enter the higher life'.⁹⁸

But Gladstone's undoubted moral conservatism should not blind us to the pragmatism of his overall approach to Christian belief and his understanding that change must operate upon its representative institutions. Doctrine was, for Gladstone, 'the very heart of the great Christian tradition' but he was extremely critical of those unwilling to countenance change, and in particular of evangelical interpolations, such as 'personal assurance, particular election, final perseverance, and peculiar conceptions respecting the atonement of Christ and the doctrine of justification'.⁹⁹ In his 1894 review of Annie Besant's autobiography, Gladstone admitted 'rash things' had been said in defence of such

doctrines, and recommended 'the application of a corrective and pruning process to retrench excesses unwittingly committed by believers'.¹⁰⁰

Gladstone's 'pruning process' not only involved moderating language but also a concentration on 'the central truth of the Gospel', namely the Trinity and the Incarnation.¹⁰¹ 'Everything besides', he wrote (also in 1894) 'is only developments which have been embodied in the historic Christianity of the past, as auxiliary to the great central purpose of Redemption'.¹⁰²

Gladstone's increasing broadness of religious outlook did not involve the complete repudiation of his previous positions, but one can see just how far he had moved by examining his reaction to extreme evangelical attacks on spiritualism. Over Christmas and New Year 1884-5 he read G. H. Pember's Earth's Earliest Ages; and their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy (London, 1884). Gladstone's verdict on the work, which was hostile to both theosophy and spiritualism, was that it was '*amful*'.¹⁰³ Pember asserted that 'Knowledge in this life is a gift fraught with peril: for our great task here is to learn the lesson of absolute dependence upon God, and entire submission to His will.' Gladstone disagreed with this immoderate statement.¹⁰⁴ Anti-intellectualism was something for which Gladstone soundly criticized both catholic and protestant Christians.¹⁰⁵ Pember, a member of the extremely-protestant Plymouth Brethren,¹⁰⁶ was also rabidly anti-catholic, which as a young man Gladstone was on occasion.¹⁰⁷ Here Gladstone reacted negatively to such outbursts.¹⁰⁸

If there was one area where Gladstone was considerably influenced by his early evangelicalism it was in his attitude to the Bible. This he defended at length in The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture.¹⁰⁹ However his annotations of spiritualist texts, and other later writings confirm that his position was not as intransigent as that title suggests. For example he consistently disagreed with William Carlisle who, in An Essay on Evil Spirits (1827) (which Gladstone read in 1885) asserted that the Bible was 'infallible truth',

written by ‘*full or complete* inspiration’ and that those who did not accept this had ‘no resting place for thought’.¹¹⁰ Such exclusive reliance on the Bible as ‘a self-attested volume’, resulting from ‘verbal inspiration’, left, to Gladstone’s mind, the late nineteenth-century protestant evangelical in a weak position in the face of ‘the recent assaults on the *corpus* of Scripture’. He clearly placed himself amongst those for whom the ‘question [...] has never offered so serious dilemma’ due to their recognition of a proliferated system of authority including, as well as scripture, ‘the ancient constitution of the Church, and [...] its witnessing and teaching office.’¹¹¹ ‘Scripture is not a stereotype projected into the world at a given time and place,’ Gladstone asserted, ‘but is a record of comprehensive and progressive teaching applicable to a nature set under providential discipline [...] which must vary with its growth.’¹¹²

There is an absence of dogmatic condemnation in Gladstone’s annotation of spiritualist writing, even when authors questioned common Christian beliefs. For example, An Angel’s Message (1858) instructs the reader to ‘relinquish all idea that the natural body will ever rise again from the tomb.’¹¹³ Belief in individual bodily resurrection from the dead was still a common expectation amongst devout Christians like Gladstone and yet his annotation of the instruction with a tick [‘v’], whilst not positively approbatory is not condemnatory. Elsewhere he questioned one writer’s literal belief in the Apostles’ Creed by placing his querying ‘ma’ beside ‘We believe that Christ descended into hell, and did not ascend into heaven until the *third day*.’¹¹⁴ Gladstone concomitantly noted criticisms of Christian denigrations of the human condition, a mark of his increasingly incarnation-centred faith. Thus he ticked Gerald Massey’s censure of those ‘who profess to believe in human nature’s total depravity’ and his impassioned plea ‘for God’s sake as well as for the sake of human progress, that the world should be rescued from beliefs such as these, and from that ossification of the letter which kills the spirit of Christ.’¹¹⁵

Gladstone bestowed his most auspicious mark, ‘+’, on the following passage from Light beyond the Grave, described by A SPIRIT (1876), which advocated living a Christian life in the present, as opposed to setting one’s sights on eternal glory.

Those who lead such a life feel the meaning of the expression, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.’ For them, no need to wait until the grave close on the body in order to appreciate the happiness in store for them in the spirit world.¹¹⁶

This passage, which quotes Luke’s Gospel (17:20-1), was radical, and reminiscent of major arguments made by F. D. Maurice in The Kingdom of Christ, which Gladstone had read in 1837 and 1843.¹¹⁷ Maurice is a prime example of a churchman whose beliefs combined sacramentalism and liberalism. We should not see the two as mutually exclusive in Gladstone’s case either and his endorsement of such views suggests his broad church tendencies were not reluctantly admitted.

Many spiritualists yearned to uncover universal truths about knowledge and faith.¹¹⁸ This understanding was not limited to spiritualism proper; ‘Cheiro’ defined ‘occultism’ in general as ‘the one [religion] in whose temple all religions may meet, where Catholic and Protestant, Mahometan or Hebrew may find something in common’.¹¹⁹ Gladstone’s own search for religious knowledge could not be described in these terms; he never wavered in his faith in the fundamental character of existence being explicable in Christian language. Nonetheless, his understanding of the historical development of religious thought incorporated a belief that the original divine revelation had been universal – a conviction expressed in his unfinished work on Olympian Religion – and also that the future life of the Church must have a universalist dimension – a belief that was embodied in his foundation of St Deiniol’s Library. The final section of this investigation will examine the links between Gladstone’s epistemology and spiritualism and go on to explain how and why ‘magic and spiritism’ formed part of his library scheme.

Gladstone, epistemology and St Deiniol's Library

Gladstone's advice to James Philips stressed that any investigation into spiritualism should be serious, exhaustive and that the inquirer should remain open-minded and not form exaggerated conclusions either way on the basis of inconclusive evidence. Although he reminded his correspondent, 'universal knowledge is not possible', Gladstone stressed that such investigation should have a 'useful object'. Gladstone was here arguing according to the precepts of the eighteenth-century Broad Churchman Joseph Butler (1692-1752). Butler was a crucial resource for late-Victorian religious apologists;¹²⁰ he was also one of the four thinkers to whom Gladstone openly acknowledged a lifelong debt.¹²¹ Butler had argued that by increasing in knowledge, humans do not advance towards absolute truth; rather they affirm the state of ignorance or partial knowledge in which they are bound to live. Consequently, both human knowledge and all actions based on it are only ever probably true and the only way to reach morally-credible decisions is to base one's judgements on as broad a range of evidence as possible. For, where no one piece of evidence can be said to carry conviction, the cumulative testimony of many can carry more probable truth and provide the individual with a basis for action. Such a methodology had obvious attractions for those seeking to counter the overreaching claims of scientific rationalism and reassert the value of religious knowledge: Christian as well as spiritualist.

There is no surviving evidence of James Philip's reaction to Gladstone's advice, but it is clear that some spiritualist writers recognized positive concurrences between Gladstone's intellectual priorities and their own. For example, the author of Where are the Dead? commended Gladstone's 'remarkable speech upon education and religion, delivered at the Liverpool College, in December, 1872'.¹²² This programmatic address, which questioned materialism and a secular approach to education, had constituted a remarkably controversial statement for a serving Prime Minister to make (as Gladstone

was aware) and provoked a public exchange with Herbert Spencer.¹²³ It questioned scientists' right to claim a superior level of authenticity for their work and queried assumptions that science was a pre-eminent system of knowledge. Gladstone's alternative vision defended the validity of reasoning and thinking theologically. He argued for a reconciliation between Christianity and modern life, which was to be achieved through liberal-minded ecumenical co-operation and the application of a Butlerian methodology.¹²⁴ Thus he counselled his Liverpool audience to

Be slow to stir inquiries, which you do not mean patiently to pursue to their proper end. Be not afraid oftentimes to suspend your judgement; or to feel and admit to yourselves how narrow are the bounds of knowledge. Do not too readily assume that to us have been opened royal roads to truth.¹²⁵

Gladstone envisaged that his Olympian Religion monograph and St Deiniol's Library would together represent 'the proper end' of his own investigation into the relationship between human and divine systems of knowledge. In 1893, when Gladstone propounded the spiritual rationale on which he justified the foundation of St Deiniol's, he argued for 'a Christianity which is to cover the whole ground of our complete existence'.¹²⁶ There is no denying Gladstone's privileging of the Christian system here; he did not claim authenticity for all spirituality and there were clear limits to his ecumenical vision. Nonetheless his recognition of 'comprehensiveness' points to an understanding that both the Christian and spiritualist systems were part of a unified whole, although how exactly they existed in relationship was a matter for thought and study. At the beginning of his 'Courses of Religious Thought', Gladstone expressed frustration at the 'multiform and confused' character of modern religious thought. 'It defies all attempts at reduction to an unity', he wrote, 'refusing not only to be governed, but even to be classified.'¹²⁷

Gladstone's urge to classify found its ultimate outlet in his lifelong collection and organization of his private library, and his particular desire to reduce knowledge, both religious and secular, to 'an unity' found concrete expression in his classification scheme for St Deiniol's. He at one stage intended to call the establishment the 'Monad',¹²⁸ or 'ultimate unity' and the institution brought together a remarkably broad literature of spirituality. A significant number of Gladstone's spiritualist texts survive in the present-day library and, as was stated clearly at the outset, they were accorded an important place in Gladstone's classification scheme. Gladstone divided St Deiniol's into two rooms: one named 'The Divinity Room' and one 'The Humanity Room'. His 'Divinity Room' contained not only theology but sections on non-Christian religions, philosophy of religion, man and nature as well as 'Magic and Spiritism'. This emphasis on comparative religion and spirituality within a theological library was both ahead of, but also clearly of its time. As well as designing this classification scheme, Gladstone left instructions about how the library should be used. The collection was not to be left as a memorializing testimony to one man's intellectual interests. It was to be put to practical use.

In his writings on religious thought Gladstone returned repeatedly to the subject of education and the need for a revitalization of religious intellectual life.¹²⁹ His priority in founding St Deiniol's was to foster a learned Christian clergy, but he insisted that their learning should involve engagement with other systems of religious thought, including spiritualism. He envisaged a non-sectarian institution, insisting that 'I by no means desire that the use of the institution should be confined to those who are in communion with that Church [Anglican], or be able to attend its services: provided only that they are set upon serious and solid studies of religion'.¹³⁰ Spiritualists and psychical researchers would thus not have been excluded for they also desired to function as reconcilers in nineteenth-century culture.¹³¹ Gladstone's desire to discover, classify and utilize new knowledge for the ultimate benefit of humanity, as he understood the concept, contributed significantly

to bolstering his attraction to spiritualism and sustained his solid, serious and open-minded engagement with it.

Conclusion

On the basis of this examination, it is certainly no longer possible to maintain that Gladstone's interest in spiritualism was mere curiosity. Gladstone shared a fundamental belief about the 'spirit of the age' with the spiritualists. He approved when they maintained their 'main object [...] is [...] to destroy materialism, to strengthen Bible-teaching, and lead to belief in Christ.'¹³² And yet Gladstone was not an adherent of spiritualism. He was an open minded and liberal Christian thinker who, like the 'rational person' described by the spiritualist-writer P. P. Alexander, 'would [...] neither rush into belief of the thing, nor yet, from his *à priori* ground of experience, dogmatically condemn [...] it.'¹³³ He was more than a detached psychical researcher however, principally because of the connection he sought to explore between his belief in God, the redemptive reality of the incarnation, and the Christian aspects of spiritualism. For his own departure point was not one of doubt, like many of his contemporaries at the SPR, but faith. And yet this was faith in an inclusive not exclusive revelation.

The evidence examined above adds weight to the growing understanding we have of the important and suggestive liberalising tendency present in Gladstone's religious thinking in his later years. During his life Gladstone moved through several religious phases. He was brought up a strict evangelical, flirted with anglo-catholicism in his middle years and ended up a liberal catholic. This transformation, including Gladstone's willingness to challenge extreme evangelical positions, has been well covered elsewhere; what this material adds is evidence of his serious engagement with and readiness to endorse, often positively, spiritual discourse outwith the bounds of mainstream Christian institutional structures. He was in private as well as in public 'not unmindful of the saying

of an eminent Presbyterian, Dr. Norman Macleod, that many an opponent of dogma is nearer to God than many an orthodox believer'.¹³⁴

This investigation has also revealed more of the tensions and contradictions which characterized this polymath. Gladstone's involvement entailed, like his other cross-class association with prostitutes, a significant degree of discomfort and uncertainty. These conflicts were both personal - relating to the battle between his radical and conservative leanings - and also public - inherent in his position as a political figure. His varied and thoughtful correspondence with spiritualists, for example, bespoke the complex mixture of negotiation, promotion, consumption and selective assimilation which characterized much nineteenth-century discourse between politicians and public. Not only does it indicate a deeper awareness of and growing interest in the significance of psychic and supernatural phenomena on Gladstone's part, but also provides important information on the nature of his politicized and at times tense relationship with the lower classes, particularly the lower middle class; a relationship that was both direct and personal. As Jon Lawrence has argued, there are significant difficulties but great potential benefits in any historical project which seeks to recover 'the relationship between the construction and the reception of political discourse' and, we might add, the construction and reception of political image and personality.¹³⁵ In Gladstone's spiritualist correspondence we have an opportunity to study creatively and sensitively a point of direct engagement between Gladstone and at least one part of his popular constituency and recover something of the two-way flow of political discourse.

The factor that ultimately links the three aspects of Gladstone's 'otherworldly' engagement discussed here – politics, religion and text – is Gladstone's insatiable intellectual curiosity. Throughout his life this characteristic, again and again, drew him into an unpredictable no man's land betwixt public and private domains, the orthodox and unorthodox, the moral and immoral. But once drawn into an investigation, whether

of sin or spirits, Gladstone's desire both to touch the numinous and also to impose a classificatory order on his findings could be relied upon to push him beyond the accepted bounds of his class, his church, and our expectations.

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- ¹ I would like to thank St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden; seminar audiences at Liverpool University, University College Chester and St Deiniol's; Graham Clayton, Alex Windscheffel and my JVC readers for providing feedback during the preparation of this article.
- ² "Cheiro", Cheiro's Language of the Hand: a complete practical work on the sciences of cheirognomy and cheiromancy, 14th ed. (London: Nichols & Co., 1910), title page.
- ³ 3rd August 1897. For a description of Gladstone's meeting with "Cheiro", cf. "Cheiro", Cheiro's Memoirs: The Reminiscences of a Society Palmist (London: William Rider and Son Ltd, 1912), Chapter 24.
- ⁴ John Morley recorded Bulwer Lytton sending Gladstone a horoscope but did not mention other psychic phenomena. John Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, New ed., 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1905), I, 196-7. More recently, only Colin Matthew and Richard Shannon have treated Gladstone's involvement with spiritualism at any length. H. C. G. Matthew, Gladstone 1809-1898 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 544-6, Richard Shannon, Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898 (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 118, 344-5, 345n, 423.
- ⁵ For information on the foundation cf. Ruth Clayton, "Enlarging the Text: A Cultural History of William Ewart Gladstone's Library and Reading," Unpublished PhD, Liverpool, 2003, Mary Drew and Stephen Liberty, In the Cause of Divine Learning (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), Hulda Friederichs, In the Evening of his Days: a study of Mr. Gladstone in retirement, with some account of St. Deiniol's Library and Hostel, Westminster Gazette Library (London: Westminster Gazette, 1896), Peter J. Jagger, "Gladstone and his Library" Gladstone, ed. Peter J. Jagger (London: Hambledon, 1998), 235-253, T. W. Pritchard, A History of St Deiniol's Library (Hawarden: Monad Press, 1999), Frederick W. Ratcliffe, "Mr Gladstone, the Librarian, and St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden" Gladstone, Politics and Religion: A Collection of Founder's Day Lectures delivered at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, 1967-83, ed. Peter J. Jagger (London: Macmillan, 1985).
- ⁶ 'Memorandum on St Deiniol's Library', n.d., St Deiniol's Library Uncatalogued MSS.
- ⁷ Janet Oppenheim, The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50.
- ⁸ Cf. Oppenheim, Other World, 59.
- ⁹ M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew, eds., The Gladstone Diaries: With Prime Ministerial Correspondence, 14 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968-96), X, clxxxix-cxc. Afterwards GD with date or volume.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Oppenheim, Other World, 2.
- ¹¹ Cf. "List of Honorary Members", Journal of the Society for Psychical Research 2 (1885).
- ¹² R. H. Hutton, "The Metaphysical Society: A Reminiscence", Nineteenth Century 18 (1885), 177-8. Quoted in Oppenheim, Other World, 127.
- ¹³ Quoted in Ruth Brandon, The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 87.
- ¹⁴ He recorded reading 'Psychical Transactions' whilst on a cruise in August 1885. GD 22/8/85.
- ¹⁵ Richard Shannon, Gladstone: Peel's Inheritor 1809-1865 (London: Penguin, 1982), 98.
- ¹⁶ The Times, 20 June 1884, 8c. Quoted at GD 19/6/84.
- ¹⁷ Charles Dickens to Mrs Trollope, 19 June 1855. Quoted in Brandon, The Spiritualists, 56.
- ¹⁸ GD 18/11/84.
- ¹⁹ The Times, 18 October 1878, 8f. Quoted at GD 16/10/78.
- ²⁰ GD 19/6/84.
- ²¹ Cf. J. Gilliland, Gladstone's Dear Spirit: Laura Thistlethwayte (London: The Author, 1994), 161-5.
- ²² GD 7/4/79.
- ²³ Shannon, Gladstone, II, 344.
- ²⁴ Shannon conflates two separate entries on table-turning on 13 and 14 September. Shannon, Gladstone, I, 448, GD 13-14/9/61. Cf. also GD 31/3/69 for a later example.
- ²⁵ GD 17/9/61.
- ²⁶ Peter Lamont, "Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence", Historical Journal 47.4 (2004), 897-920, 900.
- ²⁷ GD X, clxxxviii.
- ²⁸ Morning Post, 7 November 1884, 3f. Quoted at GD X, clxxxix.
- ²⁹ GD 29/10/84. Cf. (for correspondence with Mrs Hartmann) BL GP Add MS 44488, fol.44; (for Gladstone's notes) BL GP Add MS 44768, fol. 128.

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- ³⁰ Oppenheim, Other World, 139-40.
- ³¹ Lionel A. Weatherly and J. N. Maskelyne, The Supernatural? (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1891), 196. The copy preserved in St Deiniol's [K41/15] was presented by the author.
- ³² Cf. Eglinton to Mrs Hartmann, n.d., and Mrs Hartmann to Gladstone, n.d. (docketed 1 November 1884), BL, GP Add MS 44488, fol. 4.
- ³³ Cf. J. Farmer to Gladstone, 7 November 1884, BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 40.
- ³⁴ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 42.
- ³⁵ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 43.
- ³⁶ Gladstone to Mrs Hartmann, 7 November 1884, BL GP Add MS 44547, fol. 134. Quoted in GD at this date.
- ³⁷ W. E. Gladstone, "The Courses of Religious Thought" Gleanings of Past Years 1844-78, vol. III: Historical and Speculative (London: John Murray, 1879), 95-136, 126-7.
- ³⁸ Lamont, "Crisis of Evidence", 899.
- ³⁹ Brandon, The Spiritualists, 61-2.
- ⁴⁰ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 42.
- ⁴¹ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 42.
- ⁴² Gladstone to Mrs Hartmann, 7 November 1884, BL GP Add MS 44547, fol. 134. Quoted in GD at this date.
- ⁴³ Gladstone to Helen Gladstone (1814-80), 5 January 1878, Glynne-Gladstone Papers, quoted in Matthew, Gladstone, 329. I am grateful to one of my anonymous JVC readers for reminding me of this parallel.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. BL GP Add MS 44488, fol. 48 and GD 18/11/84.
- ⁴⁵ GD 18/11/84.
- ⁴⁶ Mrs Duncan/Lady Sandhurst to Gladstone, 27 November 1884, BL GP Add MS 44488, fol. 154.
- ⁴⁷ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 154-5.
- ⁴⁸ Shannon, Gladstone, II, 423.
- ⁴⁹ GD 6/3/88.
- ⁵⁰ GD 23/8/48; GD 2/9/58.
- ⁵¹ The Library has a number of pre-1800 books on demonology etc., which are not included in this survey, but the nineteenth-century texts span practically the whole century from 1807-1896.
- ⁵² St Deiniol's Library, K47/39.
- ⁵³ Cf. Roy Jenkins, Gladstone (London: Macmillan, 1995), 182. I am grateful to Christiane d'Haussey, Professor Emerita, Université de Paris XII, for showing me her unpublished paper on 'William Gladstone's Sundays', which contains reference to Gladstone's Sabbath reading.
- ⁵⁴ GD 10/3/72.
- ⁵⁵ GD 10-11/4/79. St Deiniol's, K47/74.
- ⁵⁶ Gladstone to J. Phillips, 8 April 1877, BL GP Add MS 44454, fol. 30, quoted in GD at this date.
- ⁵⁷ BL GP Add MS 44488 fol. 43.
- ⁵⁸ Louise Cotton, Palmistry, and its practical uses (London: G. Redway, 1890), 82, 91.
- ⁵⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Dying Detective" The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes (London: Penguin, 1981), 941.
- ⁶⁰ J. F. Hunt to Gladstone, 6 May 1878, BL GP Add MS 44456 fol. 289. Hunt wrote again in 1883 enclosing songs communicated by 'Sarcheon Homerus', which Gladstone annotated with his '+' of approbation. J. F. Hunt to Gladstone, 23 April 1883, BL GP Add MS 44480 fol. 232-5.
- ⁶¹ GD 18/11/86.
- ⁶² Albert Snow to Gladstone, 6 July 1874, BL GP Add MS 44444 fols 38-9.
- ⁶³ Albert Snow to Gladstone, 9 July 1874. BL GP Add MS 44444 fol. 40. Original emphasis.
- ⁶⁴ Alison Winter, Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 306, Lamont, "Crisis of Evidence".
- ⁶⁵ For further explanation of Gladstone's annotation system, cf. Ruth Clayton, "W. E. Gladstone: An Annotation Key", Notes & Queries 246.2 (2001), 140-43.
- ⁶⁶ Life beyond the Grave, described by A SPIRIT, through a writing medium, (London: E. W. Allen, 1876), 74, 122, 124.
- ⁶⁷ Logie Barrow, Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 110.
- ⁶⁸ Life beyond the grave, 122.
- ⁶⁹ Two Worlds, 3 (1890), 33ff, quoted in Barrow, Independent Spirits, 242-3.
- ⁷⁰ Railway Review, 27 May 1898, 2, quoted in Barrow, Independent Spirits, 239.
- ⁷¹ Brandon, The Spiritualists, 204-5.
- ⁷² Hudson Tuttle, Scenes in the spirit world (New York: Partridge & Brittan, 1866), 50.

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- ⁷³ "Cheiro", Cheiro's Memoirs, 169.
- ⁷⁴ Walter Bagehot quoted in Winter, Mesmerized, 333.
- ⁷⁵ Winter, Mesmerized, 292, Lamont, "Crisis of Evidence", 919.
- ⁷⁶ Malcolm Guthrie, "An Account of Some Experiments in Thought-Transference", Journal of the Society for Psychical Research 2 (1884-5), 24-42, 24.
- ⁷⁷ Weatherly and Maskelyne, The Supernatural?, 202, 209. Both pages annotated 'ma' (using the Italian for 'but' to express reservation).
- ⁷⁸ Weatherly and Maskelyne, The Supernatural?, 240. 'ma'.
- ⁷⁹ Lamont, "Crisis of Evidence", 919.
- ⁸⁰ Winter, Mesmerized, 304.
- ⁸¹ My thanks to Mark Nixon, University of Stirling, for this information. Readings were given in Cheiro's Memoirs, but not of Gladstone's palm.
- ⁸² Epes Sargent, The Scientific Basis of Spiritualism (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1881), 13. Gladstone marked with a single line.
- ⁸³ Albert Snow to Gladstone, 6 July 1874, BL GP Add MS 44444 fols 38-9.
- ⁸⁴ An Angel's Message. Being a series of Angelic and Holy Communications received by a Lady, (London: John Wesley & Co., 1858), 32-3, 107.
- ⁸⁵ Oppenheim, Other World, 67.
- ⁸⁶ First published in the Contemporary Review, 28 (June 1876) and reprinted in Gleanings (1879).
- ⁸⁷ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 101.
- ⁸⁸ S. C. Hall, The Use of Spiritualism (London: E. W. Allen, 1884), 6.
- ⁸⁹ F. G. Lee, More Glimpses of the World Unseen (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), 7.
- ⁹⁰ Albert Snow to Gladstone, 6 July 1874, BL GP Add MS 44444 fols 38-9.
- ⁹¹ Cf. Oppenheim, Other World, 66.
- ⁹² Lamont, "Crisis of Evidence", 918.
- ⁹³ Gerald Massey, Concerning Spiritualism (London: J. Burns, n.d. [1871]), 63. Gladstone marked with 'x'.
- ⁹⁴ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 125.
- ⁹⁵ Life beyond the grave, 36-7.
- ⁹⁶ GD X, cxc.
- ⁹⁷ Life beyond the grave, 27.
- ⁹⁸ Life beyond the grave, 129. Gladstone marked an 'x' by the text and in his endnotes.
- ⁹⁹ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 113, 116.
- ¹⁰⁰ W. E. Gladstone, "True and False Conceptions of the Atonement", Nineteenth Century 36.211 (1894), 317-331, 317-331, 330.
- ¹⁰¹ W. E. Gladstone, "The Place of Heresy and Schism in the Modern Church" Gleanings of Past Years, 1885-96, vol. VIII: Theological and Ecclesiastical (London: John Murray, 1894), 280-311, 300.
- ¹⁰² Gladstone, "Heresy and Schism", 308.
- ¹⁰³ GD 11/1/85.
- ¹⁰⁴ G. H. Pember, Earth's Earliest Ages: and their connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884), 28. Gladstone marked with 'ma'.
- ¹⁰⁵ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 105, 112-117.
- ¹⁰⁶ I would like to thank one of this paper's reviewers for drawing this to my attention.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cf. e.g. GD 1/2/32-28/7/32; GD 8/2/78.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cf. St Deiniol's copy of Pember, Earth's Earliest Ages, 292, 368.
- ¹⁰⁹ W. E. Gladstone, The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture, Revised ed. (London: Isbister, 1892).
- ¹¹⁰ William Carlisle, An Essay on Evil Spirits (London: The Author, 1827), ii, 25, 26.
- ¹¹¹ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 116.
- ¹¹² Gladstone, "Heresy and Schism", 294.
- ¹¹³ An Angel's Message, 183.
- ¹¹⁴ "Fritz", Where are the Dead? Or, Spiritualism Explained, 3rd ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1875), 5.
- ¹¹⁵ Massey, Spiritualism, 62-3.
- ¹¹⁶ Life beyond the grave, 86.
- ¹¹⁷ GD 5/3/37; GD 16/4/43.
- ¹¹⁸ Cf. Oppenheim, Other World, 109.

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- ¹¹⁹ "Cheiro", Cheiro's Memoirs, 210.
- ¹²⁰ Cf. Jane Garnett, "Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain" Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 63-96.
- ¹²¹ The others were Dante Alighieri, St Augustine and Aristotle.
- ¹²² "Fritz", Where are the Dead?, 3. Gladstone marked with '+'.
¹²³ Shannon, Gladstone, II, 118, Matthew, Gladstone, 238.
- ¹²⁴ W. E. Gladstone, Address delivered at the distribution of prizes in the Liverpool College, December 21, 1872, 5th ed. (London: John Murray, 1873), 11-12.
- ¹²⁵ Gladstone, Liverpool College, 29.
- ¹²⁶ Uncatalogued Memorandum in St Deiniol's Library. This exists in Gladstone's original (1893) and in a later copy by Mary Drew (1895).
- ¹²⁷ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 95-6.
- ¹²⁸ Cf. Matthew, Gladstone, 553.
- ¹²⁹ Cf. e.g. W. E. Gladstone, "The Evangelical Movement; its parentage, progress, and issue" Gleanings of Past Years, 1860-79, ed. W. E. Gladstone, vol. VII: Miscellaneous (London: John Murray, 1879), 201-241, pp. 240-1.
- ¹³⁰ Undated holograph preserved with BL GP Add MS 44773, fol. 75. Reproduced at GD 12/11/88.
- ¹³¹ Oppenheim, Other World, 391, 396.
- ¹³² Hall, Use of Spiritualism, 14.
- ¹³³ P. P. Alexander, Spiritualism: a narrative with a discussion (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1871), 46.
- ¹³⁴ Gladstone, "Religious Thought", 127.
- ¹³⁵ Jon Lawrence, Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867 - 1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 67-8.