

**R**ELIGION: ITS MODERN NEEDS  
AND PROBLEMS . . . No. 3

**PSYCHICAL RESEARCH  
AND RELIGION**

BY  
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B.A. (Liverpool), M.Sc. (Birmingham)

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PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND RELIGION

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Each writer is responsible for the views expressed in his contribution to the series. No attempt has been made to limit freedom in the effort to impose an artificial uniformity. Yet a certain unity of outlook does make itself evident, and this is all the more valuable because unforced.

RAYMOND V. HOLT

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## NOTE

THE term Psychological Research is unsatisfactory and ambiguous. It is used here only in conformity with common practice. The word 'psychical' is, strictly, descriptive of any mental process whatsoever, whether normal, abnormal or supernormal. Thus the adoption in our language of either the German term Parapsychology or the French term Metapsychology would help to dispel confusion and is much to be desired.

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## SYNOPSIS

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§ 1. Belief in Telepathy and Spiritualism is indicted as superstitious materialism, but Sir Oliver Lodge and others have shown that Psychical Research provides a field of investigation which cannot be ignored.—If we cannot speak of facts in this field we impugn either the honesty or critical judgment of men of acknowledged ability.—These facts are supernormal, *i. e.* inexplicable in the light of normal experience and knowledge.—But inquirers should discriminate between facts and their interpretation; first let the facts be isolated and examined.

§ 2. The Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, exists to investigate these phenomena impartially; it is a clearing-house for psychic ideas, though progress is not due to the S.P.R. alone.

§ 3. It has been claimed that fraud adequately accounts for so-called supernormal phenomena.—Trickery exists, but knowledge of the methods employed leads frequently to exposures.—Fraud, however, is often unconscious and varies in culpability.—While precautions must be enforced, it should be remembered that the medium too has his rights.

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§ 1. Physical phenomena may be spontaneous or experimental.—Of the former kind are 'raps' and the pranks of alleged poltergeists; of the latter kind telekinetic phenomena, including cases of human levitation, are of importance.

§ 2. Of recent years the most remarkable phenomena are those reported from Millesimo Castle, *e.g.* production of the Direct Voice and of Apports concluding with the dramatic disappearance of the medium.

§ 3. The most astounding of all phenomena is that of materialisation, especially as witnessed by Crookes and Wallace.—Ectoplasmic forms have been examined by Schrenck-Nötzing, Richet and Geley.—In Paris paraffin wax gloves of presumed spirit hands have been obtained.—Though ectoplasm has been photographed and analysed, its precise nature is unknown; it seems, however, to be malleable by thought.

### III. THE MENTAL PHENOMENA . . . . . 28

§ 1. Rejection of telepathy implies forfeiture of the only plausible alternative to the spiritistic hypothesis; but telepathy is proven, as witness, among others, the Gilbert Murray experiments.—Apparitions, too, may sometimes be due to telepathic influence.

§ 2. The term clairvoyance loosely covers many varieties of supernormal activity.—Most sensitives require a 'link,' *e.g.* handwriting, crystal, etc., which serves to arouse their capacity for supernormal activity.—Richet's theory of a sixth sense, like other physical theories, hardly covers the facts, and we are driven to the conclusion that in certain circumstances mind can act independently of the brain.

§ 3. The remarkable Pagenstecher experiments in psychometry are examined and found inexplicable along lines of current psychological theory; they and other similar phenomena point to the possibility of mind becoming partially released from the physical organism.—Nor is the theory of a 'subtle' body to be scorned.

§ 4. The alleged messages from 'the other side' provide the problem of problems, and various alternatives to the spiritistic explanation have to be considered, *e.g.* the theory which accounts for voice phenomena by mental dissociation.—The hypothesis of telepathy alone is insufficient to account for the supernormal knowledge obtained.—Noteworthy are the Dennis Bradley phenomena, especially those

obtained without the assistance of a professional medium.—That intelligences manifesting the same characteristics have spoken in different circles provides a plausible case for their identity.

§ 5. The case for spirit agency is, perhaps, best demonstrated in the cross-correspondences in which several mediums obtain part of a message. These and other tests said to originate from 'the other side,' *e.g.* the book tests of Drayton Thomas, are difficult to explain on any other hypothesis.—Judgment on these matters must be informed, *i.e.* based on the available facts.

#### IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH FOR RELIGION AND LIFE . . . . . 49

§ 1. That genuine phenomena of a supernormal nature occur there can be no doubt; their recognition profoundly affects every attitude towards life and necessitates the attempt to comprehend new factors inexplicable in terms of any closed system.

§ 2. Psychic science undermines materialism and invalidates any description of mind in terms of nerve stimulus and response.—Mind has or may have primacy over body, and the facts of clairvoyance, etc. render less secure the dogma that brain changes accompany *all* mental processes.—Likewise, psychic science affects religious belief: the commission of research requires the testing of a theory which implies human survival of bodily death.

§ 3. Proof of survival and of a supersensible world is not possible in an exact, mathematical sense.—But we can be reasonably and intuitively certain.—The question: Is communication possible between the supersensible world and this world? is for each to answer for himself after study of the evidence.

§ 4. The Old Testament contains warnings against necromancy; these in no way proscribe psychical research.—But psychic faculty may be prostituted to base ends.—The New Testament supplies many instances of psychic phenomena, notably in the life of Jesus.



§ 5. Spiritualism assumes diverse forms, and it is important to discriminate between persons who maintain that communication with a spirit world is possible and persons who accept communication as a new gospel.—Spiritualism challenges the churches: modern man asks for demonstration of survival, and whereas Spiritualism supplies an answer, the churches often fail to do so; their eschatology needs revision.—But Spiritualism is not a religion.—Supernormality is not to be confounded with spirituality.

# PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND RELIGION

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROVINCE OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

#### § I

“To the physiologist, who recognises the majestic unity of natural phenomena, belief in telepathy and spiritualism appears a form of materialism as gross as the ju-ju superstition of the Benin native.”<sup>1</sup> This pronouncement of Sir Leonard Hill represents as thorough a refutation of all that falls within the province of psychical research as could be found in the learned world of to-day.

Many persons would be readier to agree with the professor had he included only Spiritualism in his too sweeping indictment. But there are other persons who would violently disagree with him, and, among them, Fellows of the Royal Society whose claim to attention is at least as great as that of Sir Leonard Hill. The names of Sir William Crookes, Alfred Russel Wallace, Sir William Barrett, may be mentioned, and of Sir Oliver Lodge, whose interest in psychical research has extended over the greater part of his life, and whose championship of Spiritualism, while it has made some

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to M. Culpin: *Spiritualism and the New Psychology*.

suspect his intellectual poise, has caused others to throw their prejudices to the winds and face the issue with open minds.

In the year 1913 Sir Oliver delivered his famous presidential address on "Continuity" to the British Association. A passage in this address may usefully be contrasted with the statement of the younger professor already quoted. "I must risk annoying some of you, not only by leaving on record my conviction that occurrences now regarded as occult can be examined and reduced to order by the methods of science, carefully and consistently applied, but by going further and saying with the utmost brevity that already the facts so examined have convinced me that memory and affection are not limited to that association with matter by which alone they can manifest themselves here and now, and that personality persists beyond bodily death. The evidence—nothing new or sensational, but cumulative—to my mind goes to prove that discarnate intelligence, under certain conditions, may interact with us on the material side, and that gradually we may hope to attain some understanding of the nature of a larger existence and of the conditions regulating intercourse across the chasm."

No words could be clearer than these, and few could be more courageous. As recently as 1876 a delegate to the British Association who dared to speak to that assembly on psychic matters was openly derided and forced by ill-mannered incredulity to discontinue his speech.

Much good work was done during the years intervening between 1876 and 1913. In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research was founded, an event which signalled the tardy recognition of alleged phenomena which merited strict scientific investigation. Since the founding of this society, and other societies of similar nature in several countries, excellent research work has been carried out and men of noted ability have given their services to the study of this

important field—sometimes to the imperilling of their reputation.

Even to-day the feeling persists that it is scarcely respectable to dabble in psychic matters, and most psychologists find themselves able, or compelled by prevailing prejudice, to ignore certain supernormal facts which, once recognised (however they may be interpreted), would necessitate the abandonment or reconstruction of many of their theories concerning the psycho-physical nature of man. Supernormal Psychology has not yet become an acknowledged branch of scientific study.

The phrase "supernormal facts" was used. Is the phrase justifiable? Are there any facts in this debatable field? This is the first question which must be answered; for if there be no factual basis, if the occurrences deemed occult, and dismissed by serious investigators as coming within the province of pseudo-science, have no basis in fact, then is the ground removed from beneath our feet and this inquiry becomes merely one of ascertaining how the illusion of supernormal occurrences arose in the human mind and why the illusion has been perpetuated. The inquiry would become an inquiry into the psychology of deception to discover how it was that men of recognised ability, like Crookes, Wallace, Lodge, Lombroso, Hodgson, Richet, Bozzano and Tillyard were deceived by clever trickery. The question would be, how it comes about that scientists of repute, whose work in orthodox fields of research is generally acknowledged to be of the highest importance, lose their customary acumen as soon as they become psychical researchers, and fall an easy prey to mere charlatans and tricksters.

It seems easier and more reasonable to believe in the reality of these supernormal occurrences than to impugn either the honesty or critical judgment of these investigators. This is the alternative adopted here if only for the common-

sense reason that to disbelieve the testimony of, not spiritualists alone, but scores of serious investigators, is unwarrantably to strain credulity. These men are not simpletons; they are not desirous, most of them, of substantiating a preconceived theory, but of honestly and critically investigating the phenomena<sup>1</sup> commonly but not exclusively associated with Spiritualism. No person with any pretence to sane judgment can consult the weighty Proceedings of the S.P.R., the journals devoted to the subject, or monographs like Professor Richet's *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, and remain unconvinced that, despite instances of fraud, there is a mass of phenomena which cannot be scoffed out of existence. The evidence is cumulative and has now reached such proportions that none but the most foolish sceptic (a being as pitiable as his brother, the hyper-credulous) can deny its potency. Moreover, the nature of the phenomena to which the evidence points precludes their being adequately explained in terms of normal experience; hence our reference to *supernormal* phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Their *modus operandi* is inexplicable in the light of knowledge so far acquired and in some respects contradictory to it, or at least in opposition to the clear line of demarcation drawn by modern thinkers between that which is and that which is not possible. "Nothing is too wonderful to be true," said Faraday, and nothing, it may be added, is too apparently miraculous to be true. No man, however learned he may be, is justified in saying: thus far and no farther shall the tide of knowledge advance, or into this channel only shall it flow.

<sup>1</sup> For convenience we employ the commonly accepted term 'phenomena,' which simply means remarkable or strange occurrences.

<sup>2</sup> We reject the term supernatural in this connection for the following reason: we know only the natural order; of that which is *above* nature, *i.e.* outside nature, we know and can know nothing. We are aware of an order of events; and of this order of events we posit unity and continuity, which by their nature preclude supernatural agency. The term supernormal connotes that which is *so far* outside normal knowledge, but may be incorporated within that knowledge at some future time. It follows that an event may be supernormal but not supernatural.

On the assumption, then, that there do occur phenomena of a strange, baffling and remarkable nature to whose elucidation an increasing band of investigators are devoting their time and energy, it is worth while examining these phenomena to learn what progress has been made in the attempt to understand and classify them. But, first of all, it is necessary in an inquiry of this sort to discriminate between the facts adduced and examined by psychical researchers and the interpretation they and others put upon these same facts. When, in the address just quoted, Sir Oliver Lodge affirmed that personality persists after bodily death he was recording quite justifiably a personal conviction, one which in his view the evidence supported; he was expressing one of the hypotheses adduced to interpret some of these facts, that hypothesis which seemed to him to cover them better than others. Sooner or later a working hypothesis is necessary to research in any field, but, as far as possible, the facts themselves should first of all be isolated, examined, authenticated, analysed, correlated with other facts and classified. Interpretation comes afterwards. Above all things a calm, judicial attitude is needed, and is the more difficult to obtain inasmuch as one of the hypotheses—the spiritistic hypothesis—inevitably assumes an emotional coloration which comes of the deep-seated desire of most persons to know whether empirical proof of survival is or is not to be had. The will-to-believe has to be kept in abeyance. Investigators, amateur or professional, should be led by the facts alone and try to prevent their own wishes even unconsciously from co-ordinating or interpreting the material in the interest of a greatly-to-be-desired explanation.

It will be clear that the subject of discussion is not Spiritualism. Psychical Research is concerned with phenomena commonly associated with Spiritualism, but it also examines capacities of the human mind which we term super-normal, and these capacities are in no way exclusively related

to any one cult or method of explanation. The results of psychical research may or may not lend support to Spiritualism; opinions vary. The first step will be to become acquainted with the phenomena falling within this field; for without this knowledge, and familiarity with the conditions in which these phenomena are studied, no one has a right to express an opinion concerning the value to religion or science of either psychical research or Spiritualism.

## § 2

A few words about the Society for Psychical Research will show the nature of the field of inquiry with which psychic science—as some call it—is concerned.

The S.P.R. was founded “for the purpose of making an organised and systematic attempt to investigate various sorts of debatable phenomena which are *primâ facie* inexplicable on any generally recognised hypothesis.” Before the formation of the society investigations had been carried out sporadically and by individuals only. Now a scientific society was in being whose avowed objects were to investigate phenomena like telepathy,<sup>1</sup> clairvoyance,<sup>2</sup> apparitions and alleged communications from the dead.

Among those who took a prominent part in founding the society were Professor William Barrett, Professor Henry Sidgwick (who became the first president), Edmund Gurney and F. W. H. Myers, while among those who have held the presidential office are the Earl of Balfour, Professor William James, Sir William Crookes, Professor Charles Richet, Andrew Lang, Professor Henri Bergson, Professor Gilbert

<sup>1</sup> Telepathy, a term first used by F. W. H. Myers, is classically defined as “the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognised channels of sense.”

<sup>2</sup> Clairvoyance is the term employed rather widely for several kinds of supernatural activity. The following might serve as a rough general definition: the capacity evinced by certain persons to obtain visual impressions of a distant scene, or hidden object.

Murray, Dr. L. P. Jacks, Professor Hans Driesch and other men of renown.

Three years after the formation of the British society an American S.P.R. was formed with which is immemorially linked the name of Dr. Richard Hodgson, who became a supporter of the spiritistic hypothesis. Despite its chequered history the American society has made notable contributions to psychical research, chiefly through the work of such competent officers as the late Dr. James H. Hyslop, Dr. Walter F. Prince and Dr. Hereward Carrington.

Progress in this province of research has been due not to the work of the S.P.R. only. In Paris there stands the now famous Institut Métapsychique, founded in 1920 by M. Jean Meyer and associated with the work of Professor Charles Richet, the late Dr. G. Geley and Dr. Eugène Osty. And no summary can fail to mention the remarkable contribution to this research of the late Freiherr Dr. von Schrenck-Nötzing, who established his own laboratory in Munich. London possesses an excellent psychical laboratory under the able direction of Mr. Harry Price, whose investigation of the mediumship of Rudi Schneider is a first-class example of the strictly controlled experiments desired by scientific workers. In London also there is the British College of Psychic Science, whose attitude is noteworthy in that it associates an avowedly spiritistic point of view with scientific method.

Convinced and enthusiastic spiritualists like the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle have shown impatience at times with the, in their view, excessively cautious and suspicious methods adopted and persisted in by the S.P.R., but even he admitted that "the world has been the better for the existence of the S.P.R. It has been a clearing-house for psychic ideas, and a half-way house for those who were attracted to the subject and yet dreaded closer contact with so radical a philosophy as spiritualism."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of Spiritualism*, Vol. II. p. 88.



## § 3

It is customary to distinguish between two kinds of psychic phenomena, physical and mental. This distinction is not an arbitrary one—there are phenomena which are both mental and physical—but serves the purpose of making presentation easier.

Physical phenomena range from the production of mysterious raps to the rarer and remarkable instances of partial or complete materialisation. Under this head, too, are included slate-writing by alleged supernormal agency, levitations, the production of psychic lights, the phenomena of *apports*<sup>1</sup> and *asports*, and telekinesis, *i.e.* the movement of objects by supernormal means without the contact of living persons.

The question naturally arises, and should by no means be avoided, as to whether these apparent 'miracles' can be accounted for without recourse to belief in their supernormality. Can they be adequately explained on the theory of fraud? Are all mediums tricksters, hyenas (as Conan Doyle styled them) who gain their livelihood by preying upon the credulity of those who are so foolish as to resort to them?

Unfortunately there can be no avoiding the fact that trickery abounds. It is even said that a certain firm in New York issues a catalogue and price-list of appliances designed especially for pseudo-mediums. If trickery is less frequent now than it once was, the reason is to be sought, not in any increased sensitiveness of conscience, but in the expert knowledge which many psychical researchers now possess of the trick methods employed by fraudulent mediums

<sup>1</sup> *Apports* (French 'apporter,' to bring) are objects alleged to be brought into the séance room from without by some power unknown. Objects conveyed by supernormal agency from the room to a distant place are known as *asports*.

and clairvoyants.<sup>1</sup> It is this knowledge which has led to the exposures of recent years; and it is only fair to remember that none is a greater enemy of the fraudulent medium than the spiritualist himself; his own good name is implicated. Naturally, psychical researchers—whether favourable to the spiritistic hypothesis or not—are anxious, in accordance with the terms of their self-imposed commission, to expose any attempt at deception. It is even the custom of some of them when investigating these phenomena to assume the disposition of a sleuth-hound and to presume from the outset the falsity of the medium, until results obtained under test conditions make the hypothesis of fraud no longer tenable by reasonable men.

Fraud, it must be remembered, is not always as black as it appears to be. There are many cases on record of unconscious fraud, cases in which a medium who is patently honest resorts to trickery, or, rather, personal interposition, while in the trance state. Further, when a medium is detected in attempting to deceive those present, it by no means follows that this particular medium is always an impostor and therefore incapable of obtaining genuine phenomena. He may, as the saying is, try "to help himself out," to supplement his failing power, when the desired phenomena are not produced as readily as is wished. Nor should it be thought that all mediums resort to trickery. If some are black and some are grey, others are white. To besmudge the name of a person or to suspect him merely because he happens to be a medium is to display not only malice but ignorance.

The question of test conditions is an important one. Spiritualists maintain with some reason that too rigorous control and an attitude of suspicion on the part of the sitters combine to create an atmosphere which often makes the production of phenomena impossible. The medium becomes

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* H. Carrington, *Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*; D. P. Abbott, *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums*.

nervous and confidence is undermined. Most scientific researchers, however, maintain that the *sine qua non* of a successful sitting (from their point of view) lies in the imposition of certain conditions which shall both make attempts at trickery easily detectable and assure the evidential value of the phenomena obtained. In this matter each side should be prepared to yield. The spiritualist must admit, as he usually does, though not always with the best grace, that, if phenomena are to be of value for scientific purposes, precautions against fraud must be enforced. The scientific researcher should, for his part, conform to the conditions which spiritualists believe to govern the production of phenomena; his attitude should be one of sympathy rather than antagonism, and he should realise (he usually does; it is the armchair critic who does not) that, when spiritualists insist upon darkness, semi-darkness or a red light only, they do so from experience that these conditions are usually essential to the production of the desired phenomena. If subtle forces come into play it is reasonable to suppose that they too have their 'laws' and that strong light may exert a disruptive effect upon them. In general, it has been shown that even an attitude of suspicion is inimical to the best results, and that to seize the medium while in trance (even if he is unbound and moves from his place), or to seize uninvited any extrusion from the body of the medium, may cause him severe bodily harm.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

#### § I

INTO this class falls a variety of remarkable occurrences of great interest to all serious students, especially to physicists and biologists, though possibly of less interest to students who are primarily concerned with the presumed religious significance of supernormal phenomena. No one in his senses supposes that, as such, the levitation of a table or the antics of a poltergeist<sup>1</sup> are of any more importance to religion than a million and one normal incidents of daily life. But they are interesting in themselves, and cannot be omitted from this survey.

Phenomena of the physical kind may be spontaneous or experimental; that is, they may occur unexpectedly and involuntarily, or they may take place when conditions have been prepared in the hope of inducing them. Of the former kind is the production of raps. The famous case of the Fox sisters of Hydesville, N.Y., is a notable example. So is the case of 'Florrie' reported by Sir William Barrett. Dr. Carrington reports of the medium Eusapia Palladino that "extraordinary raps—or rather bangs—were heard, usually in the cabinet, when both hands and feet were carefully controlled." Rappings, sometimes on objects distant from the medium, who is not necessarily entranced, are in the first instance involuntary, though there is reason to believe that the medium may gain a measure of control over them and

<sup>1</sup> Poltergeist: a noisy and, frequently, mischievous spirit.

learn to produce them at will. But how are they produced? Ingenious theories have been devised to account for them on 'natural' grounds, and all fail to do so. The most satisfactory explanation is that they are caused by the extrusion from the body of the medium of some highly potent plasm in the form of rods which are able by impact on a distant object to result in the production of sound.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the sound comes from *within* an object. The only alternative to this theory, or some variant of it, is the less feasible one of spirit agency.

Many interesting and alarming tales are told of the pranks played by so-called poltergeists. In some cases homes have become untenable through their attentions. Stories of haunted houses are numerous. When due allowance is made for deception, hallucination, imagination, there are still ample grounds, in our view, for believing that in some as yet inexplicable manner certain houses and rooms are mysteriously associated with a presence, agency or energy which causes both the phenomena and that eerie feeling experienced by the most matter-of-fact persons and more vividly felt by sensitives. The interested reader should consult Flammarion's book on *Haunted Houses* and the numerous reports.

We must pass on to discuss at greater length the types of physical phenomena which come more or less within the compass of experimentation. Of these, perhaps the most important are those classed under the heading of telekinesis.

Through the introduction of Dr. W. J. Crawford, Sir William Barrett was enabled to make the acquaintance of the Goligher family—simple, uncritical, kindly people, convinced spiritualists, who, though subjected by Crawford to many annoyances, never accepted payment of any kind. Barrett describes<sup>2</sup> how he sat in this family circle in a light

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* W. J. Crawford, *Psychic Structures at the Goligher Circle*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 48.

which enabled the sitters clearly to see one another, and how, with a clear space separating the sitters from the table and with their clasped hands raised above their heads, the table rose some 18 inches from the floor and there remained suspended, resisting his efforts to move it, until at last, no one touching it, it turned completely upside down.

All this seems ludicrous and meaningless. Perhaps the investigator was fooled! But when we realise that occurrences similar to this happen repeatedly, and are confirmed by men whose integrity it would be folly to impugn, it behoves us to think, and cease from laughing this kind of performance out of court—or laboratory. The fact is startling but true: in some mysterious manner the law of gravity is overcome or suspended by some agency or force unknown!

So, too, in cases where human beings are levitated, we are obliged to recognise the presence of forces in nature so far beyond our comprehension. But is levitation a fact? In the absence of personal experience, recourse must be made to the reports of those persons who have witnessed it, but can these reports be rejected as unworthy of credence? When accounts of the levitation of St. Theresa or of Indian Yogi are met with, it is possible, in the absence of precise information, to withhold judgment; but when students are confronted with first-hand evidence supplied by competent investigators, it may be that more than suspension of judgment is asked for. Among other recorded cases, the following may be noted: Sir William Crookes declares that on three occasions he saw the medium D. D. Home completely levitated from the ground: the Rev. Stainton Moses ('M.A. Oxon.') claims to have been levitated no fewer than ten times, while Professor Lombroso tells in his *After Death—What?* of the levitation of Eusapia Palladino in the presence of himself, Professor Richet and others.

Many strange stories are told of D. D. Home. He is said

on good authority to have been able without injury to hold red-hot coals in his hand. And stranger still, as excluding the possibility of trickery, he was apparently able to transfer to others in his company the power to perform this feat. The sceptic will remain unconvinced, but Andrew Lang was not, nor were Lord Crawford, Sir William Crookes and a witness named Wilkinson.

There are stories, too, of the violent smashing of cabinets by supernatural agency. This phenomenon is said to have occurred in the famous experiments of Professor Zollner at Leipzig with the medium Slade, and, more recently, in Boston through the mediumship of the celebrated 'Margery,' the gifted wife of Dr. Crandon, who has suffered many indignities in the cause of psychic science. By supernatural power and in the presence of reliable witnesses, one of whom held the medium, a wing of a cabinet was torn off and screws and iron clamps were loosened.

## § 2

Still more remarkable from the standpoint of physical phenomena are the 'miracles' reported to have occurred at Millesimo Castle, Savona, Italy (and subsequently elsewhere), in the years 1927 and 1928.<sup>1</sup> The story of these proceedings reads like a fairy tale; yet, can we refuse to believe the testimony of those who took part in them—among others, the Marquis Centurioni Scotto, Professors Bozzano, Castellani, Passani and Mrs. Hack? The reader must decide for himself after studying the records in full. If a scientist, he may object that conditions of control were lax and that the evidence is thereby rendered devoid of scientific value, a view recently propounded by Professor Rudolf Lambert in *Die Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie*, and countered, with his customary vigour, by Professor Bozzano, who insists that

<sup>1</sup> Gwendolyn K. Hack, *Modern Psychic Mysteries at Millesimo Castle*. With preface and articles by Professor Ernesto Bozzano.

in certain circumstances valuable evidence may be obtained even when rigorous control of the medium is dispensed with. He maintains, too, that control which may well be imposed upon professional mediums cannot be exacted from a distinguished amateur like the Marquis Centurioni.

These phenomena are certainly extraordinary and range from the regular and repeated production of the Direct Voice<sup>1</sup> to the expert playing of a musical instrument, unfamiliar to those present, which floated 'miraculously' over the heads of the sitters. Apports of an unusual size and nature were obtained; on several occasions a living bird. Professor Bozzano reports that on a very hot day, "almost immediately we felt strong blasts of icy air which rapidly increased in force, giving one the impression of a powerful, supernormal electric fan which periodically wafted its pleasant, cooling currents of air over the sitters. . . . These currents were so strong that . . . the men's coats and the lace on the ladies' dresses were blown about."

These marvels culminated in what to the observer from afar looks like a grand climax. The marquis disappears from the circle! The light is turned up; the doors are found to be still locked—on the inside. But the marquis is gone! A thorough search for him proves useless. At last, after two and a half hours of anxiety, a message is obtained automatically through the hand of Mrs. Hack, which gives precise information as to where the missing marquis will be found. Acting on these instructions, they find him—asleep in a locked granary! Persons unfamiliar with psychic mysteries will hardly repress an incredulous smile. But ought we not at least to suspend judgment? Dramatic as this case is, it is not an isolated one. There are on record other cases of dematerialisation (for nothing less is involved in this 'miracle') and many reports of the passage of matter through matter. It may be that we shall

<sup>1</sup> See p. 42.



have drastically to revise our views, scatter prejudice to the winds, and learn that to possibility there is no limit.

### § 3

Of a similar 'miraculous' nature is the phenomenon of materialisation. The experiments of Sir William Crookes with the medium Florence Cook are classical. In the minds of psychical researchers his name will always be associated with that of Katie King—the living being or simulacrum of a living being who materialised in his presence, conversed with him, posed for photographs and acted in many ways as a carnate human being would act. According to the professor, the appearance, height and manner of Katie King were different from those of the medium. On one occasion they were both seen together in a bright light by eight persons. On another occasion Katie courageously agreed to a proposal that for test purposes a full light should be thrown upon her face. This was done, but Katie simply dissolved away in full view of the witnesses, proof positive that she was not a physical being! And Katie appeared to her earthly mentor some hundreds of times!<sup>1</sup> What is to be thought of a case like this one? It almost compels the belief that even physical phenomena may have a very direct bearing upon religious beliefs and disbeliefs. Was Katie a living person who assumed a corporeal, or, rather, a material frame for the express purpose of making herself visible to observers on this plane of existence? Or was she a thought-image projected from the medium's mind? Either alternative has its difficulties, though the former is the more plausible of the two. But for the moment the question is not *how* these phenomena occur.

Alfred Russel Wallace, another competent observer,

<sup>1</sup> Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*.

testifies to phenomena scarcely less sensational.<sup>1</sup> Let it be said in parenthesis, however, that these instances are not chosen because of their sensationalism, but with the intention of throwing into high relief certain occurrences which, if genuine, must profoundly influence men's view of life and life's possibilities. The following case of a partial materialisation witnessed and reported by Wallace is an interesting one, as having occurred in full daylight. The medium, known as Dr. Monck, "who was dressed in the usual clerical black, appeared to go into a trance; then stood up a few feet in front of us, and after a little while pointed to his side, saying, 'Look.' We saw there a faint white patch on his coat on the left side. This grew brighter, then seemed to flicker and extend both upwards and downwards, till very gradually it formed a cloudy pillar extending from his shoulder to his feet and close to his body." This substance (since Wallace's day, usually known as ectoplasm) then assumed the form of a draped woman, and after a few moments became reabsorbed in the medium's body. It is worth noting that a prize of £1000 was offered to Mr. J. L. Maskelyne if he could duplicate this phenomenon by means of his magical art. The challenge was accepted, but, according to Conan Doyle, "the evidence showed that the imitation bore no relation to the original," and, the case being brought to the law courts, the verdict was given against the magician.

Those whose business it is to understand and explain the nature and behaviour of the human body have 'fought shy' of the phenomenon of ectoplasm. A few scientists only have risked their reputation by treating it seriously, and have been rewarded with the courtesies usually accorded to pioneers—jeers and suspicion. Among these there stand out the names of Schrenck-Nötzing, Richet and Geley. The latter once summoned a hundred learned men to witness the

<sup>1</sup> See *My Life*, especially Chapter XXXVII.

production of ectoplasmic forms through the mediumship of Eva C. He it was who was chiefly responsible for obtaining, under strictly controlled conditions at the Institut Métapsychique, the famous paraffin wax 'gloves' of presumed spirit hands.<sup>1</sup> Besides these experiments, there are the prolonged and patient investigations of Schrenck-Nötzing and Mme. Bisson<sup>2</sup> whose work in this direction, following the pioneer experiments of Crawford with the Goligher circle, deserves the gratitude, not of psychical researchers only, but of all students of human nature.

What is ectoplasm? This is the definition of one specialist. "The ectoplasmic phenomenon is a physical extension of the medium. During trance, a portion of the organism is exteriorised. This portion is sometimes small, sometimes considerable. It is first observable as an amorphous substance which may be solid or vaporous; it then takes organic form (usually very quickly) and there appear forms which, when the phenomenon is complete, may have all the anatomical and physiological characteristics of living organs. The ectoplasm has become a Being, or fraction of a being, but always in close dependence on the body of the medium, of which it is a kind of prolongation and into which it is absorbed at the end of the experiment."<sup>3</sup> This eminently plastic substance (which as a conductor of psychic force may account for many kinds of physical phenomena, *e.g.* telekinesis) has been photographed, filmed, weighed and analysed. There are probably several kinds of plasm of various colours and degrees of visibility. Further research is likely to add greatly to our knowledge of this phenomenon. Whether, in certain cases of complete materialisation, the ectoplasm becomes, as

<sup>1</sup> See Geley, *Ectoplasmie et Clairvoyance*; Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, Vol. II.

<sup>2</sup> Schrenck-Nötzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation* and *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Parapsychologie*, pp. 74-113.

<sup>3</sup> Geley, Paper read before Metapsychic Congress, 1920. Quoted in De Brath, *Psychical Research, Science and Religion*.

it were, the temporary garment of a discarnate entity is a question that the future will have to decide.

Ample space has been devoted to a summary of some outstanding examples of physical phenomena examined under strict conditions by men whose good faith it would be more than discourteous to doubt. The bearing of these phenomena upon the wider issues of philosophy and religion may not be obvious. This much at least is implied: the fact, once substantiated, that there are present in, or able to act through the human organism energies hitherto unsuspected and still unrecognised by orthodox scientists will result in the total discrediting of all purely materialistic explanations of human nature. To take one example only: if the plasm exuded in certain conditions from the human body be malleable by thought, as it seems to be, then in very truth the primacy of mind is demonstrated in a very practical way, and we may say with Geley, "What we have seen kills materialism. There is no longer any room for it in the world." But before the implications involved in these facts are considered, the field covered by psychical research in its investigation of the so-called mental phenomena must be examined.

*Note.*—The revision of this MS. some months after its transcription provides the opportunity to draw attention to the reports which have come to hand of the recent eminently successful Sittings—one of them a solus séance—of Dr. R. J. Tillyard, F.R.S., with 'Margery' in Boston, during which excellent *thumb prints* of Walter, 'Margery's' deceased brother and 'control,' were obtained under strict test conditions. Of these phenomena and others Dr. Tillyard says, "Science can only ignore them at the deadly peril of its own future existence as a guiding force for the world." *Vide Psychic Research*, April 1931, and *Psychic Science*, July 1931.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MENTAL PHENOMENA

#### § I

WITHIN the compass of mental phenomena may be included the several varieties of motor automatism—automatic writing, drawing and painting—telepathy, trance mediumships of various degrees and kinds, crystal-gazing (scrying), the capacity for experiencing premonitory visions, psychometry, clairvoyance, clairaudience and the phenomena, among others, of apparitions, spontaneous and experimental. Clearly only a few of these can be touched upon.

In treating first, though briefly, of telepathy, it may be said that those who, like Professor Leonard Hill and Dr. Joseph Jastrow, refuse to accept the evidence of its reality are in an awkward predicament: either they must adopt telepathy as a means of explaining many of the acknowledged phenomena of Spiritualism, or they must confess themselves converts to the spiritistic hypothesis. Actually, of course, they escape from the dilemma by refusing to admit its reality, assuming that the evidence so laboriously garnered and studied for many years is of no account at all. In their view, presumably, deliberate fraud on the part of mediums and unconscious self-deception on the part of investigators adequately explain all that occurs! It can only be assumed—it is the more gracious course—that these sceptics are ignorant of the weight of evidence now amassed in favour of that which they deny. The most effective weapon with which to belabour spiritists—presuming the wish to belabour

them—is that provided by telepathy. To deny the possibility of telepathy is to deny the most elementary and, perhaps, most universal of all psychic occurrences, and one which is accepted as proven by all psychic researchers. Nor is telepathy necessarily inimical to belief in spirit-communication. The evidence is now conclusive and is provided in the results of a long series of experiments having their origin, so far as test experiments are concerned, in the excellent work of the S.P.R. in the earlier years of its existence.<sup>1</sup>

Experiments on a large scale have been neither numerous nor markedly successful. The recent 'wireless' experiments in telepathy are a case in point. The author's recent experiments with University students in Aberdeen were likewise inconclusive, though a number of students, about 15 per cent., registered positive results beyond those to be expected by chance, a fact which suggests, as we should expect, that sensitivity to telepathic messages is an endowment of some rather than of all individuals, or, at least, is more readily exercisable by some than by others.

The most striking evidence is found in cases where individuals or groups well known to each other, and to some extent *en rapport*, have succeeded in transmitting images sometimes over great distances. Contrary to what might be expected, distance seems to make little or no difference to the clearness or correctness of the images perceived. To exemplify this by a personal instance, a few years ago a friend of the writer, acting as agent, 'transmitted' from Birmingham the image of a chess-board which he held before him, while at the agreed time in Aberdeen the percipient sketched on paper a number of horizontal and vertical lines intersecting one another, a not unsatisfactory reproduction of the original. Instances could be multiplied.

<sup>1</sup> See *Phantasms of the Living*, especially Chapter III of the abridged edition.

Also Oliver Lodge, *The Survival of Man*, and W. F. Barrett, *Psychical Research*.

The interested reader would do well to consult Mr. Upton Sinclair's recent work, wherein details are given of numerous experiments carried out with great care by his psychically gifted wife.<sup>1</sup> What promises to be one of the most strikingly successful of all records of experimental telepathy was recently reported to the Congress on Parapsychology at Athens (1930). Positive results were obtained between groups in Athens, Warsaw and Paris, 80 per cent. of the reported cases being brilliantly successful.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of successes registered is probably due to the various 'groups' being constituted by individuals selected for their known capacities and likely to conduce to successful results.

Of a different nature are the experiments conducted by a group of distinguished persons in which Professor Gilbert Murray acted as the percipient. The usual procedure was for the persons in the room to select and concentrate upon an incident of historical or literary interest, whereupon Professor Murray, as soon as he entered the room, would allow the thoughts of those present to influence his own mind. The results were surprisingly successful, especially when we consider the recondite nature of some of the incidents selected. The following is one of the simpler examples. The agents thought of "Alistair and Malcolm MacDonald running along the platform at Liverpool Street, and trying to catch the train going out." The percipient spoke as follows: "Something to do with a railway station. I should say it was rather a crowd at a big railway station, and two little boys running along in the crowd. I should guess Basil."

Experience shows that emotionally saturated images or ideas are transmitted more easily than neutral images or ideas, or those of no emotional interest to the agent or percipient, a fact which may account for the relative inconclusiveness of many experiments in which simple objects

<sup>1</sup> *Mental Radio*.

<sup>2</sup> Summarised report by Karl Rothy, *Psychic Science* (October 1930).

like playing cards and diagrams are sought to be transmitted.

This view seems to be borne out by the enormous number of authenticated instances of apparitions—the so-called phantasms of the living, the dying and the dead. Ghost stories abound, and their elucidation is no easy matter. While the facts do not warrant the belief that when an apparition is seen a disembodied spirit is actually present in 'ghostly' form, this alternative should be held in abeyance as a possible explanation in certain cases. On the other hand, the theory that all apparitions are caused solely by an hallucination in the mind of the experient is equally unsatisfactory, and untenable in the light of ascertained facts. Hallucination may account for some cases, but not for all. The most adequate theory is the telepathic one: that in moments of emotional stress, and concurrent with the disruption of normal consciousness, the thought of the dying or suffering persons is in some unknown manner transmitted to the minds of other persons with whom they are in sympathetic relationship.

There are also on record a few cases of experimental apparition: A decides, perhaps on falling asleep, that he will appear to B at a distant place, and B actually perceives or thinks he perceives the person of A in his room. In some cases the apparition, experimentally induced, is seen by more than one person at the same time. This is a complex phenomenon and we touch upon it only for the reason that it provides conclusive evidence in favour of telepathy, though it may be that telepathy, as we understand it, is inadequate to account for some of the most striking instances. An alternative, or, rather, supplementary theory is this: that in certain circumstances some persons are able to project themselves from their physical bodies and to appear before others clothed in a subtle or etheric body. The question is a difficult one. This is not the place to propose *modus operandi* for telepathic phenomena or to indulge in speculation,



but the possibility of an explanation of some of these strange occurrences ought not to be dismissed merely because of its distastefulness to orthodox scientists. The theory that man possesses an etheric counterpart or double of his material body, which may at times (in the trance state, for example) disengage itself and manifest independently, is one to be treated seriously. The theory is plausible; cumulative, if indirect, evidence goes to support it. There are certain psychical facts which can be understood only on some supposition such as this.<sup>1</sup>

## § 2

Imagine a hard-headed business man content to believe the evidence of his senses and nothing more. Tell him that a friend of his is gifted with 'second sight,' and can read the contents of sealed envelopes. In biblical phrase, he will laugh you to scorn. Yet all through the ages there have been persons gifted in this way, able to perceive distant or concealed objects and scenes by the exercise of what is known as clairvoyance. Professor Richet has coined the word, *cryptesthesia* (= unknown, hidden sensibility), but it is merely a word. That which it represents is still a mystery.

There need be no doubt about the facts. Certain persons do possess a supernatural capacity—name it how we will—which enables them to act in an apparently suprasensible manner, to obtain knowledge of what, for example, lies hidden in a sealed package (*cryptoscopy*), to reconstruct a past event by means—*ex hypothesi*—of an object associated with that event, instantaneously to recognise the character and idiosyncrasies of a given individual, even to foretell future events in the lives of certain persons, the so-called faculty of precognition.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 39.

Of these manifestations of supernormal sensitiveness, Dr. Eugène Osty points out in his *Supernormal Faculties in Man*, "It is scientifically useless to undertake investigations into the nature of hypercognition by endeavouring to obtain a prearranged set of phenomena without previously ascertaining the type of human subject employed," meaning to suggest that there are several types of supernormal capacity. So far these have not been correlated. It is not known to what extent a sensitive who is able to recognise a distant scene by means of an intermediary link with that scene is also able, for instance, to inform us about the character of an individual by means of his handwriting, or to obtain premonitions. Again, some persons exhibit supernormal capacity spontaneously and in a condition of what appears to be normal waking consciousness. Other persons, however, manifest it only, or more successfully, while in a condition of slight trance which may be scarcely perceptible to onlookers. Still others evince this capacity only in a state of deep trance or hypnosis. When a sensitive dreams that a certain unknown visitor comes to him asking for advice on a matter of grave personal concern, and when on the morrow the visitor duly appears, as foreseen in the dream, and is handed in writing a prepared answer to the question occupying his mind, he is not unnaturally greatly surprised. Yet cases of this kind, duly authenticated, have been known to occur. There are many cases also of sensitives being able to assist in a very practical way in the discovery of missing persons and lost articles.

Professional clairvoyants usually employ some chosen 'medium' or 'link' which serves to awaken in them the capacity to obtain knowledge supernormally. Some use handwriting: while known as graphologists, they often pay little or no attention to the writing before them. A sensitive who practises with success the delineation of character from handwriting once assured the writer that she

paid practically no attention to the peculiarities of the writing itself. Raphael Schermann, perhaps the most celebrated of all graphologists, is able to make remarkably accurate diagnoses of character from writing enclosed in a sealed envelope; further, when a letter unseen by him is dictated, he is able to reproduce the writing in a manner closely resembling the original.

The same process is probably at work in crystal-gazing and in the telling of fortunes by means of playing cards and other objects. The sensitive may or may not understand the real significance of the object he employs (presuming, of course, that his gift is genuine and not mere charlatanry); but there seems little reason to doubt that the object, whatever it be, acts as a kind of conductor or link, whereby, in some fashion quite unknown to psychology, the sensitive is able to penetrate a region whence his metagemonic information comes.

There is much work to be done in this field of inquiry. Practically nothing is known of the processes involved in these cases of clairvoyance, and technical terms, necessary as they are, merely cloak our ignorance.

Richet cites many examples<sup>1</sup> of the exercise of supernormal faculty as evidence of a sixth sense, to the presence of which (in most persons latent, in others more or less active) he ascribes all cases of what he calls *lucidité*. It is not intended to examine with thoroughness any theory adduced to explain these cases of supernormal faculty, but the criticism must be made that Richet's theory is just the kind to be expected from a physiologist, and seems hardly to cover all the facts. The idea has become familiar in recent years of the presence in the ether of vibrations to which man is entirely insensitive, his sense organs being attuned to vibrations of a certain rate and intensity only. On Richet's theory, some persons are endowed with a sixth sense, more

<sup>1</sup> Richet, *Our Sixth Sense*.

or less developed, through which they become receptive to some of these 'finer' vibrations and thus become aware of items of reality undisclosed to persons who are not so endowed or whose 'sixth sense' lies dormant. The fruits of the professor's labours in psychical research may be gratefully accepted without compulsion to subscribe to his theoretical interpretation. And we would ask: if these capacities to foresee the future in dreams, to unravel past events, or to transmit telepathic messages from Athens to Warsaw be forms of hyper-sensibility, and, therefore, physical in origin, where lies the organ of reception which, by analogy with other sense-receptors, we should expect to find? Richet provides no answer. In the judgment of the writer, the phenomena of *lucidité* demand a psychical rather than a physical explanation.

Any theory which presumes that the transference of thought from one mind to another is caused by brain waves or vibrations is open to serious doubt. There appears to be no organ in the brain or nerve-centre adapted either to their transmission or reception. Moreover, how are we to suppose that physical vibrations originating in one brain are able, not merely to externalise themselves and affect another brain, but so to impress the other brain as to give rise to *the same thought*? How can a thought emanating from the brain of the agent occasion, on the wave theory, the precise reproduction of that thought in the brain of the percipient? Furthermore, how, on this theory, is selectivity possible: why is the vibration caught up and reproduced into thought in one particular brain and not in others? And the same difficulties arise, are intensified indeed, if the attempt is made to account in this way for other and rarer types of supernormal activity. So far as our limited knowledge allows, the facts seem definitely to point to the agency of mind, and of mind only, which is able, in some manner not known, to function independently

of the bodily organism. On the theory that the primary capacity of the brain is to transmit, but not to create thought, there is involved no insuperable difficulty in the further postulate, that mind is able in certain rare circumstances to act at its own level independently of cerebral activity. This, of course, is rank psychological heresy, but some of the acknowledged facts of supernormal faculty seem to demand a theory similar to this as their only rational explanation. There will be more to say under this head below. Meanwhile, other manifestations of psychical activity must be considered which tend to support the claim that mind has primacy over, and may be exercised independently of, the brain.

### § 3

Of all experiments in psychometry<sup>1</sup> perhaps those conducted by Dr. Gustav Pagenstecher of Mexico with the gifted, non-professional medium, Maria Reyes de Z., are the most remarkable. These experiments were closely examined by Dr. Walter Prince, research officer of the A.S.P.R., who confessed to Dr. Hans Driesch that, having travelled to Mexico a sceptic, he became convinced of the reality of the phenomena and returned to Boston with a strong inclination to believe in their spiritistic interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

The procedure was as follows : the medium in an hypnotic state induced by Dr. Pagenstecher, her family doctor, was handed an object carefully wrapped so that its nature was undetectable by normal means. Thereupon, the medium

<sup>1</sup> An ambiguous word meaning literally soul-measuring. Carrington provides the following definition : "The ability to tell the past history of an object merely by handling it, and also to receive various impressions at the same time, regarding the environment of the object in question, and perhaps incidents associated with the life of the person owning or handling the object."

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Introduction by Driesch to German edition (Pagenstecher, *Die Geheimnisse der Psychometrie und Hellsehen*) of *Past Events Seership*—A.S.P.R. Proceedings. Vol. XVI, 1922-3.

would give a remarkable description, not so much of the object itself, as of the conditions associated with it. In some instances the descriptions were manifestly correct, in others they were afterwards verified. With certain objects of great antiquity, precise verification being impossible, the descriptions bore every mark of truth and were corroborated by archæologists.

Consider this example. The object is a shell from the beach at Vera Cruz picked up by the wife of the experimenter. The medium exclaims: "I am under water and feel a great weight pressing upon my body. I am surrounded by fishes of all kinds, colours, shapes and sizes. I see white and pink coral . . . I am among the creatures but they do not seem to notice my presence, as they are not afraid of me in spite of touching me as they pass by." On another occasion, being handed a sacrificial knife, she describes with detail a great crowd of American Indians gathered for some festival. She sees four Indians creep towards and seize a man who defends himself vigorously. She sees them carrying him to a round stone, upon which they lay him, and a large, powerful man (whose appearance she minutely describes) approaching the stone. She sees the victim killed and the officiant holding up in his left hand something which quivers and streams with blood; it is the heart of the murdered man! Clearly here is a phenomenon of vast significance.

The medium grips tightly with the fingers of both hands the object given her, and, passing into a deep trance, immediately sees a vision associated with the object she holds. All the while she is able to answer the questions of Dr. Pagenstecher. But here comes the most remarkable part of the performance: though the visions are always sharply defined, they appear at a distance from her which, upon examination, is found to be in ratio to the antiquity of the vision which the object inspires. An Egyptian mosaic gives her a kine-

matographic vision of which all the details are minutely described; but, on her own confession, it is as though she were looking at the scene through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. Whatever is enacted in the vision the medium herself *lives through*, so that sometimes she cries out in horror and falls into convulsions. What can be said of such marvels as these? Are there stored up in these objects, some of them hundreds or thousands of years old, vibrations to which the medium becomes sensitive in her abnormal state? And how can these vibrations arouse memories of events which transpired so long ago? These and countless other questions rise to the mind. Those who are interested will do well to study this case in detail. A satisfactory hypothesis has not yet been formulated, and it may be long before a final solution is found.

This only need be said without venturing to speculate rashly: that phenomena of this nature, incomprehensible as they are, remain quite inexplicable along the lines of current psychological theory. It is almost as though we are compelled to recognise that in certain conditions the mind is partially released from its bondage to the body and becomes able to function at its own level in a manner which in normal, waking consciousness it seems quite unable to do. How else can such faculty as that possessed by Mme. Reyes de Z. be understood? She declares that she can see the human aura (she is, of course, not alone in this), and is convinced that in the deepest trance state she is almost entirely freed from her body.

In corroboration many experiences could be cited. Let one suffice. Dr. Frederick van Eeden made a study of his dream-life from a motive quite different from that of psychoanalysts. He reports: "I dreamt that I was lying in the garden . . . I was lying on my chest and observing the dog very keenly. At the same time, however, I knew with perfect certainty that I was dreaming and lying on my back

in my bed. And then I resolved to wake up slowly and carefully and observe how my sensation of lying on my chest would change into the sensation of lying on my back. And so I did, slowly and deliberately, and the transition . . . is most wonderful. It is like the feeling of slipping from one body into another, and there is distinctly a *double* recollection of the two bodies. . . . This observation of a double memory I have had many times since. It was so indubitable that it leads almost unavoidably to the conception of a *dream-body*.”<sup>1</sup> Or, say, the etheric ‘counterpart’ or ‘double’ of the physical body? There is a mass of evidence for the existence of a ‘body’ of this nature, which, however, is usually considered as quite other than the ‘subtle’ or ‘astral’ body through which the individual is said to manifest at a higher level of existence after the death of his physical body. (This idea of a subtle body must not be confused with the conception of soul, of which it also is presumably an instrument.) Some such theory as this accounts more satisfactorily than any other yet adduced for phenomena like travelling clairvoyance, ‘ghosts,’ and experiences like that of Dr. van Eeden. It may be remembered, too, for what it is worth, that dying persons sometimes testify to a feeling of withdrawal, as though some vital essence were leaving their bodies, an experience which seems to be shared by mystics in a state of ecstasy. Not proven may perhaps be our verdict as cautious psychical researchers; but there is no reason why that verdict should remain at that. If the contention of clairvoyants who affirm that they actually *see* the astral body disengage itself from the physical body at death is corroborated, if the Apostle’s teaching that there are bodies celestial and bodies earthly is proved to be true, if there is truth after all in the theosophical teaching in this matter, then, at least, the case for the survival of man has advanced one step.

<sup>1</sup> S.P.R. Proceedings, Vol. XXVI. Quoted by Carrington.



## § 4

In any attempt to prove human survival of bodily death there has to be considered another set of phenomena to which psychical researchers have devoted a great deal of attention—the alleged messages from communicators on “the other side.” This is the problem of problems so far as psychical research is concerned. It is almost unnecessary to remark that students are divided on this supreme question. Some, like Lodge and many others, are convinced that open sesame obtains between this world and the next, and that intercommunication between the living and those miscalled ‘dead’ is occasionally possible. Others, like Richet, equally informed as to the facts, find themselves unable to make the plunge into waters so deep; they take one or other of two courses: either they oppose the spiritistic hypothesis as inherently mischievous and unwarranted (though actually few earnest investigators take so strong a line), or, more prudently, they reserve judgment in the belief that the spiritistic hypothesis is not proven as yet.

The case against spirit communication finds its chief support in the contention that trance phenomena are sufficiently explained in terms of psychiatry and abnormal psychology, that the mediumistic control<sup>1</sup> is not the entity he purports to be, but a dissociated part of the medium himself, a secondary or co-conscious personality masquerading as a spirit. There is something to be said for this view, especially when it is realised how limited the knowledge of the human mind really is. On the other hand, as will be seen, phenomena do occur (the famous Piper sittings, for example, reported by Hodgson) which make it very improbable that any theory of mental dissociation covers all the facts.

<sup>1</sup> The ‘intelligence’ who assumes control of the medium’s body.

In cases of voice mediumship (the medium being supposedly controlled by a discarnate intelligence), when knowledge is displayed which cannot have come from the medium's mind, resort is had to the hypothesis of telepathy. The information, it is contended, must have been telepathically impressed upon the medium from the mind of one of the sitters. Or, if this be discounted owing to the information supplied being unknown and never having been known to any of the sitters, then, so the contention goes, it must have been derived telepathically from *some other* living mind. Thus is the theory of telepathy stretched almost to breaking point! Many critics would rather believe in an almost magically selective telepathy, able to cull items of knowledge from the ends of the earth, than believe that a spirit actually speaks through the medium. In many instances the spiritistic explanation is the simpler of the two.

Clearly, one of the chief aims of those who hold the spiritistic view is to obtain what are called evidential messages, and of these perhaps the best for their purpose are those which convey information of a comparatively trivial nature, but of a nature easily to be associated with the intelligence purporting to communicate. If he convey information relative to his own past life known to none of the sitters, and, better still, to no living person, and the information so given is afterwards verified, then the presumption that he is indeed the entity he claims to be becomes very strong.

Incidentally one answer is found here to those persistent critics who object, with some reason be it said, to the triviality of the greater number of messages received through trance-mediumship. If the alleged spirit is anxious to establish his identity it is likely that he will do so most successfully by referring to trivial incidents connected with his past life on the earth plane. Only so can he make himself known, though in some instances his voice and manner

may be recognised by the sitters, a fact which carries no weight save to those who knew him well. That the messages are often deplorably vapid and commonplace few will deny; but in most cases could anything else be reasonably expected? There are said to be lying spirits and spirits who use the names of notable personages; and, in any case, there is no reason to believe that the dear departed have been suddenly metamorphosed into radiant angels or seers. Everything points, rather, to their continuing in the next world to be substantially the kind of persons they were in this. Moreover, critics unacquainted with the technicalities of mediumistic phenomena ignore the extraordinary difficulties involved in the process of communication, not on this side only, but on the other side also. The process of communication is not to be compared with that of speaking to friends through the medium of telephone wires.

Records of trance phenomena abound and are of varying degrees of value. One of the best of the popular books on voice-phenomena is Mr. Dennis Bradley's *Wisdom of the Gods*, a work at once sensational and sane, written with the gloom-dispelling vigour characteristic of the author. Mr. Bradley is, of course, a convinced spiritualist, but of a type all his own. At Dorincourt amazing phenomena are said to have occurred: musical instruments have been played by unseen players, luminous trumpets have moved about the room, and, which is far more important, numerous spirits have spoken independently and from space by means of the 'direct voice.'<sup>1</sup> The communicators, that is, have spoken not in the customary manner *through* a medium, but *directly*, their voices, varying in tonal quality and power, emanating from different parts of the room. Moreover, and hereby their importance is enhanced, these voices were ultimately obtained without the presence of a professional medium, the necessary 'power' being developed by members of the

<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is sometimes classed as 'physical.'

circle themselves. These phenomena are said to have been witnessed at different times by over a hundred persons and are assuredly remarkable enough whether or no the conclusion of their instigator is accepted that their successful production "represents the outstanding miracle of this or any other age in history."

It is advisable perhaps to interpolate at this point that the writer has had highly successful sittings of unusual duration with Mr. Phœnix, one of the few good voice mediums in this country. This is not the place for a detailed report, but it is worth recording that the elevated tone of the proceedings, was extraordinarily impressive. When there are heard fourteen voices of differing quality, speaking each in its own manner and for its own purpose, it is difficult to believe that one is dealing only with strata of the medium's dissociated mind, more especially when the voices, except that of the control and one other, speak directly from space through the trumpets.

As to the mechanism involved in the production of the voices, little is known with any degree of certainty. All that can be said, and this is mainly conjectural, is that some substance (ectoplasm?) is drawn from the medium, and perhaps, to some extent, from the sitters also by the spirit-operators and used by them "to fashion something resembling a human larynx. This they use in the production of the voice."<sup>1</sup>

The direct voice phenomena obtained at Millesimo Castle were chiefly due to the impetus given by Mr. Bradley's home circle. There, as at Dorincourt, voices rapidly succeeded one another, varied greatly in their power of expression and spoke in several languages.

It is worth noting that in New York, through the mediumship of Mr. Valiantine, messages were transmitted in Ancient Chinese, a language foreign to the medium and

<sup>1</sup> Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, Vol. II. p. 152.

beyond the power of anyone to reproduce without years of patient practice. The linguistic construction of these messages was confirmed by Dr. Whymant, a noted Orientalist, as perfectly correct. Other languages spoken by direct voice were Persian, Portuguese and French. In London, through the same medium, voices were heard speaking in Chinese, Hindustani and the Sicilian dialect, and were also recorded by a gramophone company. Now—and here comes a significant point—the intelligence, Cristo d'Angelo by name, who had previously spoken in the Sicilian dialect through Valiantine in America, became afterwards the chief guide of the Marquis Centurioni at Millesimo Castle. A short extract from a published letter sent by Signor Rossi to Mr. Bradley will make this clear. “After a while I asked if he (d'Angelo) could send us some of the Guides of Mr. Valiantine, Dr. Barnett or Everett or the little girl . . . D'Angelo replied: ‘Sono impregnati con Valiantine.’ (They are engaged with Valiantine.) Then I asked, ‘Try the little girl,’ and then after a while we heard the peculiar voice of the little girl, the same as I have heard in London sittings, greeting us ‘Good-evening,’ sending us kisses and laughing in her childish way.” It is worth adding that the distinctive voice of Bert Everett was also heard at these Italian sittings.

The significance of all this lies just here: several alleged intelligences speak in their own characteristic way to *different* circles. D'Angelo and others make themselves known through the mediumship of both Valiantine and Centurioni. Other things being equal, have we not here a *prima facie* case for believing in their identity? And does not this fact at least disprove the contention of objectors that the ‘control’ is *always* a secondary personality of the medium? This objection is often made, and may be legitimate in certain cases. It is urged by critics that the control of Mrs. Osborne Leonard—the celebrated Feda—is really a secondary person-

ality of the medium herself; yet the evidence is that Feda spoke directly to the Bradley circle in the absence of Mrs. Leonard!<sup>1</sup> Evidence of a similar nature was supplied many years ago by Signor Damiani, a well-known investigator, in his evidence before the London Dialectical Society. He “declared that voices that had spoken to him in the presence of unpaid mediums had subsequently conversed with him at private séances with Mrs. Marshall, and had there exhibited the same peculiarities as to tone, expression, pitch, volume and pronunciation as upon the former occasions!”<sup>2</sup>

## § 5

Brief reference must be made to another variety of communication pointed to as evidence of spirit agency. Few more learned champions of Spiritualism have arisen than F. W. H. Myers, and it is he who, with others, is said to be responsible for the remarkable but wearisomely complicated cross-correspondences which have been a marked feature of psychical research in recent years. These cases have been examined by experts and reported voluminously in the Proceedings of the S.P.R. To examine them here, even in a summary fashion, is impossible. Briefly, to quote Dr. Carrington, “the idea is that a word given through one medium is also given through another, or an idea is partly conveyed in one case and extended or completed through a second or a third. Thus, several mediums obtain portions of a message—which portions, pieced together, are found to constitute a complete *whole*.”<sup>3</sup> The mediums employed were often hundreds of miles apart. On occasions, numbers, figures or sentences were given at séances in Boston which were completed by automatic writing elsewhere and verified by telephone. It is indeed difficult to study these corre-

<sup>1</sup> H. Dennis Bradley, *Wisdom of the Gods*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>2</sup> Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, Vol. II. p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *The Story of Psychic Science*, p. 307.

spondences even cursorily at second hand and not believe them to emanate from a master-intelligence who has sought to devise a series of tests with the express intention of eliminating telepathy as a means of explaining them and of providing incontestable proof of survival.

Another interesting variant of those 'tests' alleged to be manipulated from the 'other side' is the Book Test. Its chief exemplifiers are Lady Glenconner and the Rev. Drayton Thomas.<sup>1</sup> Through the mediumship of Mrs. Leonard, Mr. Thomas believes that he is in communication with his father, who speaks, sometimes through the agency of Feda (the control), and sometimes directly through the medium. The procedure is something like this: the communicator indicates that in a certain book on, say, the third shelf from the top in the second book-case from the door in Mr. Thomas' study, and on an indicated page about halfway down, will be found a sentence referring to some incident in the life of Mr. Thomas or his father. The nature of the message is briefly indicated. The following is one of the simplest instances, and has the added advantage of being amusing. Feda announces, speaking through Mrs. Leonard, that she visited Mr. Thomas' house and tried to make her presence known by knocking loudly and softly. The loud knocks only were heard. Three days later, when Mr. Thomas visited Mrs. Leonard, Feda greets him with the assertion that she had been to his house and had given the taps there. A few minutes later, a test, alleged to have been devised by Mr. Thomas' father, is transmitted, which would show "the unmistakable bearing of the words" upon Feda's visit. On returning home and following the precise directions, Mr. Thomas finds the book selected—a volume of Shakespeare; and at the place indicated he reads: "I will not answer thee with words but blows."

<sup>1</sup> Glenconner, *The Earthen Vessel*. Drayton Thomas, *Some New Evidence for Human Survival*.

Several interesting variations of the usual method were tried. On one occasion tests were given from books which had been selected and seen only by a bookseller, and made up into a parcel, securely sealed. The object, of course, was to obtain tests which should eliminate all possibility of telepathy from the sitter to the entranced medium. (There is, by the way, little doubt that a medium in trance or a person in a state of hypnosis is much more susceptible to telepathic impressions than when in a normal condition.) That knowledge not possessed by the medium, but distinctly relevant to some incident in the life either of the deceased or some member of his family, was frequently revealed in these ingenious tests does seem to point to their having been devised by a discarnate intelligence, in this case the author's father. The only satisfactory alternative is that the hypersensitiveness of the medium enabled her to come into contact telepathically with information unknown to herself, but known to some living person. But can we reasonably credit the medium with being able supernormally, by means of a travelling clairvoyance, to visit Mr. Thomas' library and select there from a page of one book among a multitude of books a passage bearing precisely upon some incident private to the life of Mr. Thomas or his father? To do so—to reject as inherently incredible the theory of spirit agency but to accept this equally incredible alternative, is surely to strain at a gnat (a big one, perhaps) and swallow a camel.

Another type of test involved the linking of the communicator's memories with items which were to appear on a given page of a newspaper *of the following morning!* Mr. Thomas was surely right when he wrote: "No physical or mental powers known to science could accomplish what has been repeatedly done." And there the matter must be left.

Everyone is given in some degree to the vicious if sometimes excusable habit of pronouncing judgment on matters



about which his knowledge is meagre or practically nil. There are issues concerning which only the expert has the right to exercise judgment. Is this not one of them? Clearly, each individual who desires to do so has the right to exercise his own judgment, or, at least, to form an opinion. He has full liberty to do so. But one opinion is not as good as another. He will abuse that liberty if, in the name of common-sense, religion or science, he voices an opinion without first informing himself of the facts; and his ignorance will not count against him in these days of specialisation. But if he promulgate his prejudices or pronounce judgment on the issue without first studying it in an unbiased way, then he is guilty of disservice to the cause of truth.

No subject of study at the present time finds more easily the weakest spot in the human armour than this one; prejudice often prevents its being given a fair hearing. Unreasoning dislike condemns Spiritualism as a mere recrudescence of primitive superstition, and even psychical research, which some hail as a new science, shares in the distrust. For this cause, if for no other, it has been worth while summarising some of the more important points with which psychical research is concerned. Interesting in themselves, quite apart from their implications, they are destructive—these facts—of many old ideas. But “it is better to be knocked down by a fact than picked up by a fallacy,” said one whose clarion became the trumpet of Spiritualism—Robert Blatchford.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHICAL PHENOMENA FOR RELIGION AND LIFE

#### § I

READERS who have carefully followed the description of the phenomena examined by psychical researchers and the comments thereon have the right to ask a question, which might be put something like this: Granted that these supernormal occurrences are genuine, and, in the main, inexplicable in terms of fraud or pathological states of mind, how do they affect human life?

In answering it must be recognised that it is impossible to say how far hallucination, fraud, deception or pathology enter into the matter; each reported case of supernormal activity must be carefully examined before judgment can be arrived at with regard to it. These factors may modify or nullify the supernormal element in a large percentage of cases. Every student knows the limits to which credulity can be strained, and the strong, inner drive of the wish-to-believe. The evidence adduced for the supernormal occurrences must be proportionate to the strangeness of the phenomena to be substantiated. For these obscure events it needs to be 'fool-proof' before it can be accepted as irrefutably established. The claim made here is simply this: while allowing for all those factors destructive of belief in the genuineness of the phenomena, the cumulative force of the evidence seems irresistible. That genuine phenomena of the kind considered do occur there can be no doubt.

And the writer's conviction of the reality of these phenomena rests upon a sound basis—personal experience, and the investigations and study of men whose good faith and intellectual integrity it would be folly to question. Nor is it possible to ignore tradition, stories from antiquity and from the Old and New Testaments, stories of the oracles, of the lives of the saints, of the Indian Yogi, witchcraft and occult societies. Who can read these accounts, these tales repeated from age to age, and fail to recognise that amid much that is legendary, mythical, fantastic, logically impossible and exaggerated, there is something which no cry of "Away with this necromancy" can altogether discount or destroy? It may be that in folk-lore there lies much buried truth.

Without more ado, then, the conclusion is accepted that these phenomena have, and always have had, a basis in fact. How, then, to return to our question, do they affect human life? How, if at all, is this 'new' knowledge to be related to the working philosophy of the ordinary man, or to the general tag-end outlook on life which sometimes does service for a philosophy? Perhaps the 'man in the street' is already sufficiently perplexed without being given anything more to think about. All that can be said is that if truth means anything to him, he will not wish to blind his eyes to anything which comes in her name, however perplexing it may seem to be. He who desires mental comfort at any cost is in a fair way to destroying his own mind. Room must surely be found for facts so important and far-reaching in their effects. And their recognition will profoundly influence his attitude to life, and, indirectly, his attitude towards his fellows. If the man who is confronted with these facts be an atheist, his atheism will go; if he be an agnostic, his agnosticism will be tempered with belief; a naturalist, he will have to forgo the attempt to describe reality in terms of natural law alone; a materialist, a mechanist or a behaviourist, he will be con-

fronted with facts which will render these sternly empirical creeds no longer tenable; a philosopher, he will have to evolve a theory of knowledge compatible with the exercise of supernormal faculty; a biologist, he will have to reconcile preconceived ideas with vital radiations and subtle energies of the human body inadmissible to orthodox science; a physicist, he will follow Sir Oliver Lodge and learn that modern physical theory is in no essential point inimical to, but rather corroborative of, the views regarding the nature of the universe to which psychic science points; if he be a psychologist, he will have to take into account evidence which will compel him to acknowledge individual capacity of a new and suprasensible kind; an anatomist—well, he will probably reject the evidence of psychical research, for it is destructive of all he holds most securely founded, and suggests a duality in human nature which he cannot admit. Be he layman or priest, plain man or philosopher, artist or scientist, his acceptance of these facts, in so far as he is honest with himself and capable of evaluating them, will profoundly influence his outlook on life and his relations with his fellow-men.

## § 2

As has been already suggested, the accredited results of psychical research sound the death-knell of the long-lingering materialistic interpretation of scientific facts; and they render current mechanistic theory—in its comprehensive sense as covering all forms of life activity—finally and absolutely untenable. For an endorsement of this contention we refer to the words of Professor William McDougall: “I regard the research as having established the occurrence of phenomena which cannot be reconciled with the mechanistic scheme of things.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Body and Mind*, p. 350.

From the strictly mechanistic standpoint, the phenomena under discussion are intrinsically absurd and 'unthinkable.' Hence, perhaps, the opposition, prejudice or indifference towards psychical research shown by many scientists. History in this respect repeats itself. "The history of Science," wrote Dr. Schrenck-Nötzing, "in the last few decades confirms . . . the justice of the words of the great mathematician that the word 'impossible' should be very sparingly used outside mathematics." Flying, colour-photography, hypnotic suggestion, wireless telegraphy and radio-activity have each in turn been 'impossible' to former generations. Not so many years ago Sir William Barrett was openly ridiculed for broaching the subject of telepathy to the British Association.

Caution is a scientific virtue. It is possible that a case could be made out which would show that the excessive caution evinced even by learned men in the presence of new facts has been beneficial in that it has guarded the scientific method from prostitution to new-fangled notions and superstitious fancies. But caution driven to excess becomes a vice.

It may be that there is a subtle defence-reaction involved in this rejection of new facts, that there is a savour of unpleasantness about them, for the reason that, once acknowledged, they will demand the recasting of so many entrenched ideas and the reformulation of many working hypotheses.

Certainly any theory remotely similar to that which describes mind in terms of nerve stimulus and response is invalidated by psychical research. If consciousness be a *product* of the brain, then these phenomena are mere phantasmagoria. There can be no reconciliation between the interpretation here given of the results of psychical research and the theory of those who can affirm with Sir Arthur Keith that "the human soul is but the manifestation of the living brain."

It is probable that the doctrine of the soul (whether this

time-honoured name be used or not) will return to favour, but with this difference: that it will become, not only theologically, but also scientifically admissible. The function of the brain will be conceived of as being primarily transmissive, even though it has the capacity *in part*, and in alliance with the entire nervous system, to act independently and automatically. Such facts as those adduced, as well as those of therapeutic and hypnotic suggestion, automatic writing and the large measure of mental control which may be exercised over the organic processes of the body (mind cure), all go to show that mind has or may have primacy over the body. Further, the axiom that changes in the brain accompany *all* mental processes is seen to be less secure than it was. How, on this assumption, can explanations be given of trance clairvoyance, or even telepathy, in which the subject's experience, compassing a dimension or level of reality unknown to the brain (which is dependent on sensory experience), comprises knowledge distant in space or time? How can there be a correlation between mental processes and cerebral processes in cases of this kind? Thus again psychical explanation is demanded. Some view similar to this—space does not allow to state it more precisely or to consider the various theories—is the only one compatible with the facts presented by psychical research.

It will be realised, too, that this view leaves the way open to belief in human survival, unless recourse be had to the belief (Gerald Heard) that individuality is a 'habit' to be outgrown, and that deep down as it were there lies a collective consciousness or super-individual mind in which all individual differences melt away. If mind has primacy over body and is able to function independently of the brain, the dissolution of the body at death in no way implies the destruction of mind also, or, in our view, of the controlling agent or soul.

The question must be asked whether psychical research is

itself a science? Here, if anywhere, is a field for fruitful experimentation. But the work is hardly begun; not yet is it treated as a valuable and legitimate branch of scientific activity. Most psychologists hold themselves suspiciously aloof. Universities, with very few exceptions, withhold from this province of study their official recognition. But the time will come when endowments will be provided for the active pursuit of psychical research in properly equipped laboratories, and progress in this field will no longer depend solely upon the labour of devoted individuals and groups. Meanwhile the work continues, and not Science only, but also Religion to an even greater extent, is finding in 'Psychics,' as some think, an ally, and others a foe.

How does psychical research affect religion? It might be maintained that psychical research affects religion, or Christianity, no more and no less than any other branch of human inquiry. Clearly, every field of scientific inquiry reacts upon religious thought, and, ultimately, to some extent upon religious practice. It is a truism that the efflorescence of Science during the last 200 years has profoundly affected theology (the intellectual formulation of religious faith), and this new science, if the term may be used, will likewise make its mark upon religious thinking.

Something more than mere general influence is involved here. However unimpassioned individual psychical researchers may be, however desirous of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the wider issues involved in these investigations cannot be avoided. And for this reason: the investigator, in dealing with some psychical phenomena, is obliged to adopt the spiritistic hypothesis as, at least, one of his working theories. He may or may not consider that the facts warrant his subscription to the theory as the only one satisfactorily accounting for them. That is another matter. The point is, that research in this realm demands the careful testing of a theory which implies human survival and com-

munication with departed spirits. Clearly, then, psychical research may affect religious belief very closely in this regard.

Questions pertinent to the issue obtrude themselves here. Is empirical evidence of survival possible? Does the present state of research warrant our believing that survival has been proved? And is it desirable that men should even try to penetrate 'the Unseen'? These questions will now be briefly considered before dealing with the most pressing question of all—what is the significance and value of modern Spiritualism?

### § 3

Is empirical evidence of survival possible? Now it must be admitted that conclusive proof in the mathematical sense seems unattainable. There can only be 'a balance of probability.' If there is only one hypothesis which adequately and illuminatingly covers the facts, it may be accepted, either with due reserve or with grateful enthusiasm. Much depends upon personal characteristics.

Any attempt to prove survival empirically has to recognise these difficulties. But they are not insurmountable. The reality of the external world or of other beings besides ourselves cannot be proved. Yet men are not solipsists. They surmount the absurdity of a logic whose conclusions are at variance with what we call common-sense. Even where absolute proof is not possible, reasonable certainty may be. The difficulty involved in proving the existence of a spiritual world and the presence therein of intelligences who once lived on earth is not intrinsically greater than the difficulty of proving a host of other postulates. Or is it? The X-rays are invisible, yet we believe in their existence. Why? Because instruments have been made to detect and direct them, and we rely upon the authority of experts whose work it is to discover these things. Is our attitude wholly different



when we come to consider the crucial questions of psychical research? We must admit a difference: to employ a phrase of Carrington, one half of the circle is missing.

*“On the earth the broken arc; in the heaven, a perfect round.”*

The evidence given tends to prove an order of existence so inapprehensible that no instrument yet devised, perhaps ever devisable, can detect it. On the other hand, once having admitted the genuineness of phenomena which transcend normal experience, the business of understanding and explaining them follows, and no world-view which fails to comprehend them within its synthesis can be accepted. Order has to be brought out of chaos. And one hypothesis seems to do this, one that is both corroborative of religious faith and explanatory of many phenomena which else remain unexplained: that there is a world (name it how we will) surrounding or interpenetrating this material world, a plane or level of existence to whose subtle vibrations men are normally, but not invariably, insensitive. It is not possible to prove the reality of this world to sceptics, but those who have had experience of it may reasonably conclude that they are not mistaken.

There is a further question—to spiritualists a crucial one: Is communication between this supra-terrestrial world and this world an established fact? To this question, a definite answer cannot and need not be given here. Each one who desires an answer must study the evidence for himself and reach his own conclusion. And this should be done without prejudice. Some there may be who will prefer to suspend judgment, and to them is honour due, for theirs is no easy task.

The writer feels, however, an obligation to state his own tentative conclusion, and believes that he would even be wanting in courtesy to his readers were he now to refrain from doing so. After examining the evidence as dispassionately as his nature allows and paying due regard to

alternative theories, he finds himself compelled—after years of wavering—to confess his own belief that communication between persons in this world and intelligences in ‘the next’ is a practical possibility. The spiritistic hypothesis seems to him the only one capable of offering a rational and comprehensive explanation of many of the facts adduced by investigators of psychical phenomena. But he also believes that there is much self-deception in this matter, and that very many cases of supposed communication are explicable on purely psychological grounds. While deploring that attitude which finds in signs and wonders a substitute for the Religion of the Spirit, he is convinced of the inestimable value of psychical research, not to Science only, but also to Religion.

In the last few paragraphs we have already provided a partial answer to the third question formulated above—Is it desirable that men should try to penetrate the ‘Unseen’? Let J. R. Lowell answer: “Is anything of God’s contriving endangered by inquiry? Was it the system of the Universe or the monks that trembled at the telescope of Galileo?” Who shall say, “Thus far and no farther; here is holy ground whereon thou mayest not tread”? The temper of this age is surely right here: nothing is profaned by research, nothing is too sacred to be understood. There can be no trespassers in God’s world. Where human insight leads, the human intellect may follow; that which intuition affirms, reason may try to prove or disprove if it can.

#### § 4

Fundamentalist objectors will tell us that we are expressly forbidden by Holy Scripture to meddle with these things. There is no doubt that the horror with which many good but usually old-fashioned Christians regard psychical phenomena is largely due to the oft-repeated warnings in the Old Testament against divination, sorcery and consorting with evil

spirits.<sup>1</sup> There was probably good reason for these warnings. A people given over to necromancy and magic arts was not likely to obey the commands of Jahveh, or to become a strong and stable community, especially when these practices were conducted for selfish or nefarious purposes. It is possible, as Sir William Barrett points out, that "with no knowledge of the great world-order such as we now possess, the intellectual and moral sense of the people would only have been confounded by these psychical phenomena."

In these days it is possible to read the Bible with intelligence and to assess the pronouncements and denunciations contained within it from the standpoint of reason and with due regard to their historical setting.

But, say our scripturalist friends, the practices denounced by the leaders of the Hebrews are essentially and for all time evil, satanic, dæmoniacal. The best treatment of this objection is perhaps to respond with the counter assertion that every gift of man, every avenue of inquiry open to man is permissible. At the same time, every human gift may be used for an evil or a good purpose. The motive and the end in view makes a whole world of difference. It is perfectly conceivable that necromancy as an end in itself may be undesirable. Psychic faculty may be prostituted to base ends; it often is. But that the Giver of Life has endowed human beings with capacities which are in themselves evil is a thought unthinkable. The moral for ourselves to be gleaned from these biblical warnings (which have no necessary significance for us) is that we should beware of relying upon divination in the stead of our own conscience and reason, or of making an interest in psychical phenomena a substitute for religion.

When reference is made to the Bible, it is sometimes forgotten that in the New Testament there are scores of incidents which, if the records be trustworthy, show that the phenomena

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xviii. 10-12, etc.

of the kind witnessed to-day were not unknown to the earliest Christians. Moreover, there is no hint of their being proscribed. On the contrary, cases are found of visions, clairvoyance and clairaudience, of automatisms, possessions, apparitions, indeed of almost every type of psychical phenomenon known and studied to-day.

Jesus perceived in spirit that the scribes reasoned within themselves.<sup>1</sup> He divined the history of the woman of Samaria.<sup>2</sup> He saw Nathaniel afar off—"when thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee."<sup>3</sup> When Jesus walked on the water the disciples thought they saw a spirit.<sup>4</sup> Again, the Fourth Gospel, in the account of Jesus' baptism, speaks of a voice from heaven, heard, in this instance, by a crowd of followers, so that some "said that it had thundered: others said, an angel hath spoken to him."<sup>5</sup> Whether apocryphal or not, these incidents show that the people of that place and time were familiar with what we now call psychical phenomena.

The above are a few of the simpler instances of this sort. But how else is it possible to understand the 'marvels' attendant upon Paul's journey to Damascus except by believing that there occurred some manifestation of psychic power? May not this be the explanation of the narrative of the Transfiguration, the events of the upper room in Jerusalem, or, most significant of all, the reported resurrection of Jesus? How else, indeed, can this be understood, than by believing that, after the crucifixion, Jesus did appear to the disciples and others, but in a celestial<sup>6</sup> or subtle body, which in some manner unknown to us (occultists have their theories) became visible to mortal sight? It is well known that the accounts of the resurrection appearances contain many conflicting elements; any interpretation of them has its difficulties. But, short of their total rejection as apocryphal, we can conceive of no theory so illuminating as this one, or more

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 3-12.

<sup>2</sup> John iv.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 47-50.

<sup>4</sup> Mark vi. 49.

<sup>5</sup> John xii. 28-30.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. 1 Corinthians xv. 40.

suggestive of an explanation of what has always been the outstanding miracle of Christian history. The early Christians believed in a Risen Lord, explain it how we will. More than this we cannot say, save to quote words of F. W. H. Myers which are right to the point: "I venture now on a bold saying; for I predict that, in consequence of the new evidence, all reasonable men, a century hence, will believe the Resurrection of Christ, whereas, in default of the new evidence, no reasonable man, a century hence, would have believed it."<sup>1</sup> Again the spiral ascends: that which was once rejected on the ground that "miracles do not happen" and because the modern world offers no parallels, need be rejected no longer, at least so we believe. Herein psychic science lends to modern Christianity a helping hand.

### § 5

There is one question which must inevitably be asked in any attempt to consider psychical phenomena in their relation to religion. What is the significance and value of Spiritualism?

It would be better, perhaps, to use the simpler, less ambiguous term 'spiritism'; but it is not worth while to dispute about a name, and, since it is spiritism in its religious significance which is now being dealt with, the point may be conceded to the spiritualists. And it has to be recognised that for any one person who associates the term Spiritualism with a philosophical attitude, ninety and nine will think of that increasing body of people all over the world, organised into societies and churches, whose chief affirmation is that a connection has been set up between this world and the next.

Spiritualism assumes diverse forms. In regarding this diversity it is first of all necessary to discriminate with perfect

<sup>1</sup> *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. Abridged edition, p. 297.

clarity between, on the one hand, those persons who accept the spiritualistic interpretation of many psychical phenomena and, on the other hand, those who find in Spiritualism a gospel and a philosophy. This distinction should be clearly realised. There are spiritualists—they may or may not like or own the name—who resent the cultification (if we may coin a useful but ugly word) of that which is to them primarily a scientific fact, however pregnant its significance for religion, just as there are others who find in Spiritualism tidings of great joy, a new revelation and an enrichment of faith.

That spiritualists of the latter type sometimes prove annoying by their obsession with trivialities and preoccupation with (supposedly) higher things, to the neglect sometimes of the duties of this world may be frankly admitted. But Spiritualism should not be ignored because individuals who take its name fail in grace or good sense any more than Christianity should be condemned because of the follies and sins of many Christians. Men and women, within and without the Christian Church, have found in Spiritualism a new inspiration and a new realisation of their responsibility as sons of God.

Spiritualism may be disliked *as a cult* even while the truth of its main position is recognised; but Christians should not decry it as though it were merely a competitor to be beaten and slain. Rather might they ponder with advantage these words of the Rev. G. Vale Owen: "Unless the Church accepts our standpoint, it will be disastrous for the Church. . . . Science has taught us that a fact can no longer, as in former times, be accepted on authority alone. A fact must be capable of demonstration. As it is claimed that life beyond the grave is a fact, the layman asks for proof. It is no proof to him to point to the authority of the Church or Bible. That no longer satisfies him."

These words constitute a challenge to the Christian Church, and there is in them a large measure of truth. Blind faith in

authority no longer suffices; man is thrown more and more upon himself. In so far as he has taken to heart the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance and the teaching of Martineau, he recognises an inward authority only—fallible yet compulsive: that of his conscience and reason. And if he feels no inner assurance of immortality; if his reason refuses to be satisfied with the Church's teaching of Immortal Hope, what then? If, furthermore, the conception of the goodness of God carries with it for him no belief that he, and, what may affect him more closely, his loved ones will survive death, what then? If he asks for demonstration, is it right to denounce his lack of faith, or is it not intelligible if he seeks to exercise his divine capacity to find out for himself whether this teaching be true?

“The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.” That may be wisdom and truth, and may satisfy many religious people; but does it help a stricken soul? And what of the *unrighteous*, the unregenerate souls? The Church has virtually abolished the doctrine of hell; the old dualistic solution of the problem of man's destiny has fallen into general disfavour; but what has the Church, the Protestant Church, to put in its place? Its teaching is vague in the extreme. The progressive Churches, especially, have failed to face the problem; and for suggestions their ministers turn to spiritualistic or theosophical books. However much the mapping out of the ‘highlands’ and ‘lowlands’ of heaven may be discountenanced, there is no resisting the fact that Spiritualism is rightly or wrongly supplying a particular need which the Churches ought to supply. And this they will not do until they revise an eschatology which, in its crudest form, is so totally discredited that it has become the butt of street-corner rationalists and music-hall comedians.

Universalism (belief in the final restoration or salvation of all), the “larger hope” of Tennyson, George Macdonald and the Brownings, of Whittier, Longfellow and Whitman,

has mellowed the harsh doctrines of Reformed Christianity. But how many questions remain unanswered! Men may respond to the poet's cry—

“There shall never be one lost good. What was shall live as before.”

But it is not enough. They see as through a glass darkly. Yet gleams of light are falling across their path, and these gleams they must make to shine forth as a gospel of knowledge as well as hope if the Church is to regain its lost radiance and ancient power.

In conclusion, there is one point needing emphasis. Spiritualism of itself is not and cannot be a religion. Though for many people it has religious value, and inspires in them reverence which else they were without, it is not a religion. The Kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation. That which is supernatural or extra-ordinary is ultimately of no greater spiritual significance than the commonest, most ordinary events of everyday life.

It is needful that this point be emphasised. One of the tendencies of our day is to confound progress in mechanisation with spiritual advance. As Hermann Keyserling has truly said: “Progress enlarges the sphere of that which may be transfused by soul; whether this transfusion really takes place is another question.”<sup>1</sup> This tendency finds its counterpart in personal life. A man may learn by Yogic practice how to control completely the forces of his body, how to become cataleptic at will, but has he thereby grown in grace and truth? A woman may attend a circle, and learn there, if she be so endowed, to develop her psychic gifts, but in virtue of those psychic gifts *alone* she comes no nearer the Kingdom of God. Our talents, such as they are, whether

<sup>1</sup> *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, p. 130.



they be psychic or not, become "transfused by soul" only when men learn how to live from the depths of their being as children of Eternity, and seek to obey the greatest of all commandments; for

"Love is God,  
And makes heaven"

in this world and in all worlds, now and evermore.

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