

Psychical Research

AND

Thought Transference:

THEIR MEANING AND RECENT HISTORY

BY

M. EDEN PAUL, M.D.

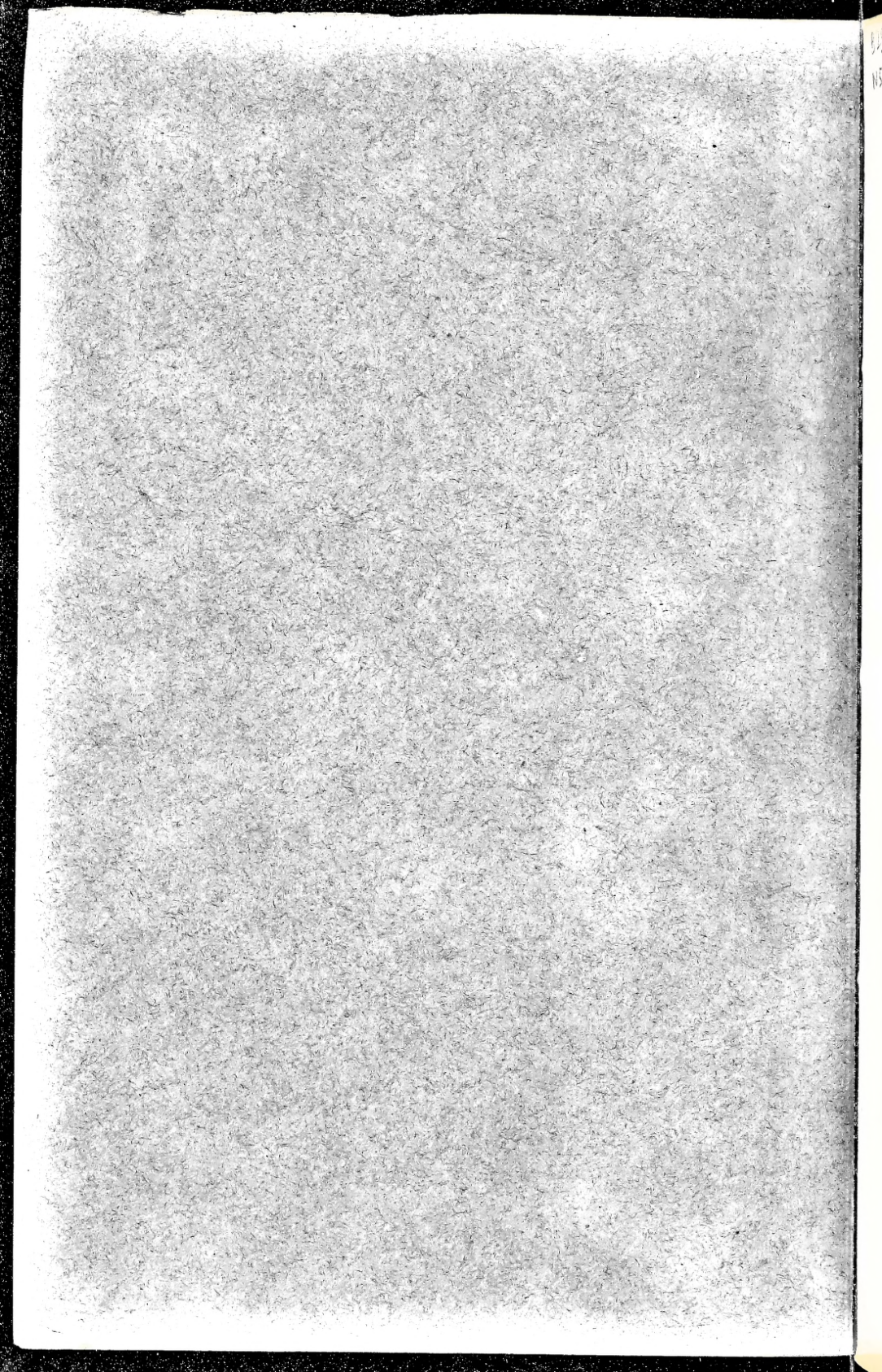
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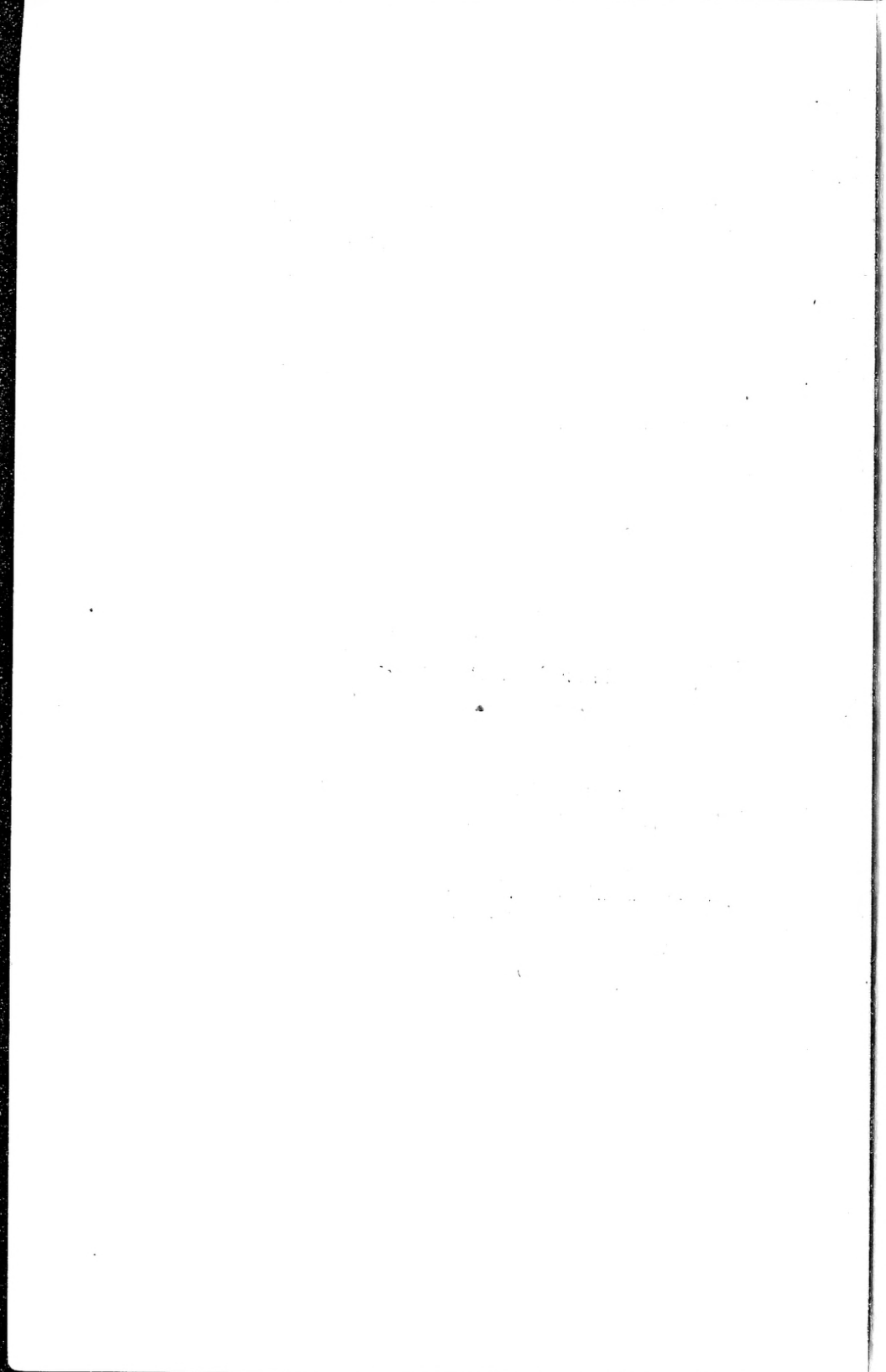
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1911



Psychical Research and Thought Transference

NEARLY thirty years have elapsed since the foundation, in 1882, of the Society for Psychical Research, whose purpose it was, as stated in its first manifesto, to make "an organised and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as 'mesmeric,' 'psychical,' and 'spiritualistic.'" Six committees were appointed to deal with different sections of the inquiry; the references to these committees will be given in the sequel. The "occult" phenomena for whose study the Society was founded exhibit a relationship and to some degree a historic continuity with three others that have played a great part in certain stages of human history—viz., magic, witchcraft, and miracle. The belief in all three of these latter still persists in many parts of the world; in Western Europe a belief in magic and miracle was dominant throughout the period known as the Dark Ages; the belief in witchcraft—which is but another form of the other beliefs—was widely prevalent in Europe during the two centuries that followed the Protestant Reformation, and will be found lingering in out-of-the-way corners even in our own day. (In the Island of Alderney, where I lived from 1903 to 1905, the belief in witchcraft was certainly still maintained among those belonging to the old island families, and occasionally gave rise to scandals; but the people were shy of exposing their credulity to strangers.) Among the half-educated peasantry of Southern Europe a belief in the power of the Evil Eye is said to be still almost universal.

With the spread of Rationalism, and the gradual growth of a reasoned belief, based on positive science, in a universe subject to invariable laws, the belief in the occult powers of magicians, witches, and miracle-mongers gradually declined.

Ghosts, frequently seen as long as people believed in their existence, seemed to wither and vanish before the chill blasts of incredulity. But, notwithstanding the general decay of belief in the occult, revivals have from time to time occurred, displaying all the vigour and expansive energy of new religious faiths. It will suffice to mention three of these. (1) Mesmer (1734-1815), an inspired charlatan, discovered or rediscovered certain obscure powers and peculiarities of the human mind; and his work, notwithstanding all the follies, delusions, and impostures with which "mesmerism" has been associated, was the starting-point of the science now known as hypnotism, and of the practical methods of healing which we shall subsequently consider under the name of "psychotherapeutics." (2) In 1848, at Rochester, New York State, were living certain girls named Fox, in whose presence there occurred curious rapping noises, widely known at the time as the "Rochester knockings." "From this small beginning," writes Mr. Podmore, in his *Studies in Psychical Research*, "the occurrence of mysterious raps betraying an intelligent source, and referred by some to the agency of spirits, by others to supernormal powers exercised unconsciously by the 'mediums,' and by a few scientific men who investigated the occurrences at the time to voluntary 'cracking' (*i.e.*, partial dislocation) of the knee-joints on the part of the girls concerned, arose the whole movement of modern Spiritualism." (3) Finally, the last twenty-five years have witnessed the origination, also in the United States of America, of the latest of that country's numerous new religious faiths, "Christian Science" (so called, apparently, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, because it attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable—Christianity and science—without having anything to do with either). The historical continuity with mesmerism of this strange creed—whose founder, Mrs. Eddy, died only a short time ago—has been lucidly traced by Mr. Podmore in his work on *Mesmerism and Christian Science*.

In an article on "Mysticism and the Reputed Reaction from Naturalism," published in the *Literary Guide* for March, 1911, the present writer endeavoured to show how

the very spread of Rationalism, which has led to the overthrow of the earlier forms of occultism—magic, witchcraft, and thaumaturgy, or miracle-mongering—and has at the same time undermined the faith of many in the older-established religious beliefs, is, in a sense, responsible for the appearance of the luxuriant crop of neo-occultisms and neo-religions for which the nineteenth century will be memorable in the history of human error. Their aim has been, either to restore the belief in immortality, which had been associated with a belief in the dogmas of one of the older religious creeds, but which had been shaken in consequence of a loss of faith in these dogmas; or else, to find some means of curing or preventing disease more speedy and certain than the methods of ordinary medical science. I shall hope to show that, while the primary object of search has in neither case been attained, yet, as often happens, a by-result of the search will prove of greater interest and perhaps of greater value to humanity than the original aim.

Now let us ask what was the general attitude of able men whose minds had been rigorously trained to a belief in what is called "the uniformity of nature" by means of the prolonged study of science, and especially of physical science, towards the phenomena which the Society for Psychical Research set itself to investigate. It was, as a rule, one of rather obstinate incredulity. And there was no small justification for such an attitude. Professional mediums, persons who gained a livelihood by means of the demonstration to the credulous of such phenomena as those exhibited by the above-mentioned Fox Sisters, of Rochester, U.S.A., had again and again been detected in gross frauds; and yet these proved cheats never failed to find ardent defenders and fresh victims. To the physicist, as to Robert Browning, they were all in the same class with "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." As regards the amateur experimentalists, playing at the fashionable game of "table-turning" in their drawing-rooms after dinner, when Faraday came with a cleverly-devised "indicator" and proved beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt that the motion of the table was solely due to the unconscious muscular action of the performers, many of the table-turners refused to accept the proof.

"Faraday may have proved," said A, "that B and his circle moved the table with their hands; but we *know* that we do *not*." Yet, when A was asked to test the value of his belief by the use of the same indicator, he declined to do so, for he would not be so "irreverent" as to show any "distrust" of the source of the wonderful "spirit-communications" his table had rapped out (see Carpenter's *Mental Physiology*, 4th ed., pp. 293-6). It is hardly surprising that such a man as Tyndall, after attending a spiritualistic sitting and detecting what to him was satisfactory evidence of conscious or unconscious fraud, should write (*Lectures and Essays— "Science and the 'Spirits' "*): "The victims like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind.....Surely no baser delusion ever obtained dominance over the weak mind of man."

A psychologist like Carpenter, one of the first scientific elucidators of the activity of the sub-conscious mind, having made a detailed study of the phenomena of mesmerism and spiritualism, naturally took a more cautious and less dogmatic view than a pure physicist such as Tyndall. Witness, for example, Carpenter's admirable summary of the various mental attitudes towards the phenomena in question (*Mental Physiology*, p. 611 *et seq.*):—

Some persist in the determination to disbelieve in the genuineness of *all* the asserted facts, designating them as "all humbug," and maintaining that none but fools or knaves could uphold such nonsense.....Others, again, admit such of the facts as seem to them the least repugnant to common-sense; but, without attempting to give any rational explanation of these, consider they have sufficiently disposed of them by characterising them as "all imagination.".....The members of the medical profession have too generally satisfied themselves with the phrase "all hysterical"—a reply which affords no real information.....Then there is a class of *partial* believers, who admit there is "something in it"—they cannot exactly tell what..... And the ascending series is terminated by that assemblage of *thorough-going* believers who find nothing too hard for "spiritual" agency, nothing improbable (much less impossible) in any of its reputed performances.....It is a phenomenon of no small interest to the student of human nature that from the *first* of these classes the transition should often be immediate and abrupt to the *last*. It is, in fact, from the very same disposition to jump at important conclusions without

due examination.....that a large proportion of mankind become utter sceptics on the one hand, or thoroughgoing believers on the other. A feather's weight will often turn the scale when it is vibrating between these two states.

Referring to the class of cases in which a number of more or less credible witnesses combine to testify to some apparently incredible occurrence—such as the “levitation” of the human body ; that is, the raising of a human being from the ground without any evident or adequate physical means—Carpenter shows that similar occurrences were reported in connection with witchcraft. “Thus” (p. 634), “in 1657, Richard Jones, a sprightly lad of twelve years old, living at Shepton Mallet, was bewitched by one Jane Brooks. He was seen to rise in the air, and pass over a garden wall some thirty yards ; and at other times was found in a room with his hands flat against a beam at the top of the room, and his body two or three feet from the ground, *nine people at a time seeing him in this position*. Jane Brooks was accordingly *condemned and executed* at Chard Assizes, in March, 1658.”

Before we dismiss this brilliant and original writer (Dr. Carpenter), let us study the canons he laid down for investigations in this obscure and debatable field of inquiry. He considered that reports of occult phenomena which appear to conflict with the generally accepted acquirements of positive science must all be rejected, “save those” (p. 626) “which shall have been carefully, sagaciously, and perseveringly investigated, by observers fully qualified for the task, by habits of philosophical discrimination, by *entire freedom from prejudice*, and by *a full acquaintance with the numerous and varied sources of fallacy which attend this particular department of inquiry*. These being the rules of other branches of scientific research, there is no reason why they should be departed from in one which so pre-eminently needs a constant reference to the canons of sound philosophy.”

Now, it must be noted that it is precisely on the lines thus wisely and carefully formulated that the Societies for Psychical Research in England and America have, during the last thirty years, conducted their investigations ; and it is

to this fact that they owe the attainment of certain results of enduring value. Let us consider some of these results. The first committee of the English S. P. R. was appointed to examine "the nature and extent of any influence which may be exerted by one mind upon another, apart from any generally recognised mode of perception." This has been one of the most fruitful branches of inquiry, and, in conjunction with several of the other lines of research, it has led, in the opinion of many of the most cautious and unprejudiced members of the Society, to the adequate proof of the existence of the faculty of thought-transference or "telepathy." This will be discussed in some detail presently.

The second committee was appointed for "the study of hypnotism, and the forms of the so-called mesmeric trance, with its alleged insensibility to pain; clairvoyance, and other allied phenomena." At the date of the foundation of the Society, notwithstanding the work of Elliotson, Esdaile, Braid (all Englishmen), and other early students of "animal magnetism," hypnotism was in England a neglected branch of psychic inquiry. On the Continent also, owing to the early association of "mesmerism" with charlatany, the subject had fallen into disrepute. But in the last thirty years the science of hypnotism has been placed on a sure foundation; its study has greatly increased our knowledge of the workings alike of the normal and of the abnormal mind; and psychotherapeutics has become an accredited branch of the healing art. The advance of knowledge has thus taken the study of hypnotic manifestations largely out of the hands of the Society for Psychical Research; and all that is necessary here is to detail briefly the historic lines of development of mesmerism or animal magnetism. "Trance," apart from hypnotism, will be considered later.

Through its appeal, on the one hand to the perennial interest in healing of a suffering humanity, and on the other hand to the love of the marvellous of a bored and inquisitive humanity, mesmerism became the historic parent of two divergent tendencies. The love of the marvellous and the development of the more occult aspect of mesmerism gave birth to modern spiritualism; the desire for a better means of

treatment of numerous chronic and apparently incurable diseases gave rise to "mental healing," "faith-healing," "Christian Science," and on the scientific side to psychotherapeutics. The mental healers, mind curers, etc., fastened from the first upon the psychical side of mesmerism. Had the medical profession not been so slow to adopt "suggestion" (always a large unconscious element in the physician's success) as a recognised part of the medical art, it is likely that such faith-healing shrines as Lourdes and such new quasi-religious cults as Christian Science might have been less successful. But the profession is slow to move out of its old grooves, and therefore deserves to suffer at the hands of its rivals. Whatever the causes of the success of Christian Science, that success is greatly to be regretted—more to be regretted than the growth of most other superstitions, evil as they all are. For the disciples of Mrs. Eddy are taught to believe in what is called "malicious animal magnetism"; and this involves, in effect, a revival of the belief in witchcraft, of which our race has rid itself with so much difficulty. In the second place, the Christian Scientists do much harm by the application of their doctrine that "disease is a delusion" to illnesses in which the psychic element is slight—as, for instance, to broken legs and typhoid fever. Finally, it is assuredly a distressing fact that in our day, and among a people claiming to lead the van of civilisation, a new creed should gain millions of adherents, when that creed is utterly devoid, as is Christian Science, of all humanist enthusiasm.

The third committee was appointed for the study of "sensitives," and to ascertain if they have any "powers of perception other than a highly exalted sensibility of the recognised sensory organs." Here, also, the work of the Society has tended to convince its members of the reality of thought-transference. The same is true of their study of what is called "clairvoyance," or "second-sight" (a subsection of the work of the second committee). In so far as alleged cases of clairvoyance, crystal-gazing, and the like, are not due to misrepresentation, illusion, or deliberate fraud, the results of this inquiry tend to strengthen the evidence in favour of a belief in the reality of thought-transference.

The fourth committee was to undertake "a careful investigation of.....reports.....regarding apparitions at the moment of death, or otherwise, or regarding disturbances in houses reputed to be haunted." As regards "haunted" houses, of which I shall write very briefly, the Society has examined a large mass of evidence, much of it of little true evidential value. Some of the residual evidence, after the most thorough sifting, would appear to demand for its explanation the existence of some hitherto unknown or "occult" force—if not "haunting" by a demon or disembodied spirit, at least the occurrence of telepathic hallucinations. "Rats" and "lies" will not explain all the evidence in this department!

As regards the accounts of "death-visions" or "phantasms of the dying," there are few who have not heard some such story, at least at third or fourth hand. I will give here an example of the kind of case of which an enormous number have been reported to the Society; choosing this case, not because it is what is called a "strong" one, but because it is rather typical, and because I have first-hand knowledge of the facts.

"On Friday, December 8, 1893, an English lady, living in Japan, woke with a start at 11.5 p.m., after a very brief sleep, saying she had seen her father fall dead in a shop. She thinks he had just gone in, but is not clear what gave her this impression; she saw him clutch the counter, stand in this position for a short time, and then fall dead. It was a very real image, a vision rather than an ordinary dream, and frightened her very much. But she admits that it is most likely all nonsense." (The above is a transcription of the actual note, written down thirty minutes after the awakening from the "vision" by someone who was present when it took place—not by the person who had the vision.)

Now at this time Mrs. X. had no definite knowledge that her father was dangerously ill; nor had she any knowledge of his death (other than that conveyed by the vision) until she received a letter towards the end of January, 1894, telling her that he had died in Glasgow at 4 a.m. on Saturday, December 9, 1893. This is the sort of material

out of which most of these "death-visions" are constructed. They are common enough; what is rather exceptional about this "vision" is that we have a precise record made at the time of the occurrence, and that the record is corroborated to some extent by further knowledge of the facts. In the absence of such a record, and in the hands of uncritical lovers of the marvellous, discrepancies would have been forgotten, and that there had been a highly dramatic vision of the actual death at the actual time of its occurrence would have become a legendary belief in the families of those concerned.* As a matter of fact, Mrs. X.'s vision occurred, by Greenwich time, about nine hours earlier than the time stated above. That is to say, when the vision occurred in Japan at 11.5 p.m., it was, in Glasgow, 1.45 p.m. on the same day, Friday, December 8. The father died at 4 a.m. on the Saturday morning, fourteen hours later. Moreover, as the hour suggests, he was not in a shop, but in bed, when he died, and he had been in bed, profoundly unconscious, since the previous Sunday. The vision may have been suggested by thought-transference from someone at the bedside of the dying man; but it is to be noted, first, that Mrs. X., before she had the vision, was aware that her father suffered from chronic heart-disease, and that she had had several recent letters indicating increasing anxiety about his health; secondly, that some years before, when Mrs. X. was in a hairdresser's shop in Glasgow, in a room off the main shop, a man came into the latter, and suddenly dropped dead while standing at the counter. It seems more probable that her vision was constructed out of a combination of her apprehensions for her father with memories of this earlier experience than that there was any telepathic communication.

In this way many of the stories of "death-visions" in which there is a precise and trustworthy record (and no others have any evidential value) prove, on close scrutiny, to be explicable without recourse to any "occult" influences

* Such was, in fact, the belief of the lady herself, when spoken to about the matter a few days ago, and the production of the contemporary record was necessary to convince her that her "mythopœic faculty" had been at work!

whatever. But there are others among the large number studied by the Society which, provided there is neither deliberate nor unconscious misrepresentation, can be explained only by thought-transference—either from the dying, or else (especially in those cases in which the vision occurs shortly after the death) from those who have stood beside the death-bed. Unless, indeed, to account for manifestations of the latter order, we prefer the hypothesis (which to me seems to involve far greater difficulties) of the influence—telepathic or other—of a disembodied spirit.

Besides dealing with visions of the dying, the S. P. R. undertook an investigation of the very numerous cases in which visions, simultaneous or deferred, of living persons at a distance were perceived; in some cases these are stated to have been experimentally produced—*i.e.*, the experimenter deliberately willed to appear in a vision before some absent friend, and succeeded in doing so. Evidentially, the most valuable cases of the last-named kind are, of course, those in which the vision is produced unexpectedly, in the entire absence of pre-arrangement. A number of these “telepathic hallucinations,” as they are termed, have been published in the well-known volumes by Gurney and others, *Phantasms of the Living*. It need hardly be said that telepathic hallucinations, when accurately recorded, and when the good faith of the experimenters and percipients is beyond question, afford the strongest possible evidence of the reality of the alleged faculty of telepathy.

The fifth committee of the S. P. R. was formed to undertake “an inquiry into the various physical phenomena commonly called spiritualistic, and to attempt to discover their causes and general laws.” In the introduction to the last work finished by Mr. Podmore before his death, *The Newer Spiritualism*, the author points out that prior to the days of Swedenborg the “spirits” with whom people believed themselves to hold converse were spirits sent by God or by the powers of darkness, and that Swedenborg appears to have been the first to claim that he held intercourse with ψύχαί in the sense of Homer—with the souls or spirits of the departed. This is a point of the first importance, for the following

reason. In his brilliant volume on *The Churches and Modern Thought*, Mr. Vivian quotes Mr. Lowes Dickinson upon the subject of religious "conversions," based upon direct personal revelation, as follows :—

The truth supposed to be revealed at the moment of conversion is commonly, if not invariably, the reflection of the doctrine or theory with which the subject, whether or no he has accepted it, has hitherto been most familiar. I have never heard, for example, of a case in which a Mohammedan or a Hindoo, without having ever heard of Christianity, has had a revelation of Christian truth. Conversion, in fact, it would seem, is not the communication of a *new* truth ; it is a presentation of ideas already familiar in such a way that they are accompanied by an irresistible certainty that they are true.

There is a strong analogy here with the supposed communications with extra-human intelligences. In the Middle Ages, when people had a vivid belief in the existence of angels and devils, it was with angels and devils that they held communion. Martin Luther not only saw the devil, but even threw an inkpot at him (perhaps a better use than he ordinarily made of his writing materials). Japanese and Chinese peasant girls, who have a firm belief in evil spirits in the form of foxes, will talk freely to hallucinatory demon foxes. Similarly, Swedenborg and his spiritualistic followers communicate with the spirits of the kind *they* believe in—the souls of the departed. Communications are occasionally made at spiritualistic sittings which appear at first sight to involve a præternatural knowledge on the part of the medium ; but of such communications few will bear strict criticism, and of those that do the great majority, if not all, find their readiest explanation by the hypothesis of thought-transference. The trance-personality (for the medium, when not a vulgar cheat, is commonly entranced when such communications are made) would appear at times to have an exceptionally powerful telepathic faculty. But most of the mysteries at the ordinary spiritualistic sitting would appear to be explicable by the extreme credulousness and by the unwitting self-deception of those who take part in them. Hodgson, of the American S. P. R., has laid especial stress on this fact, and has pointed out that the medium's art, like the conjurer's, consists in

diverting the sitter's attention at critical moments in such a manner that he himself remains unaware of the momentary lapse. This "dissociation of consciousness," or "unrealised break in attention," explains much that would otherwise be puzzling. It is often maintained that there must be a great deal more in spiritualism than is commonly admitted, because of the attention paid to spiritualistic phenomena by such leading men of science as Wallace, Lombroso, Richet, Crookes, and Lodge—men accustomed to precise observation. Those who take this line forget that neither in biological nor in physical experimentation is *unremitting* attention required, and that the men I have named can be as easily deceived by a clever conjurer as anyone else (as Sir Oliver Lodge himself would probably be the first to admit).

Of the mediums producing "the physical phenomena of spiritualism," the one who in recent years has attracted most attention is the Italian peasant woman, Eusapia Palladino. After an exhaustive study of the records of her sittings, Mr. Podmore comes to the conclusion that to explain her results it is only necessary to assume on the part of the sitters hallucination of the sense of touch and occasional lapses of attention. Apart altogether from the question of "spirit agency," these assumptions are surely simpler than the assumption of the quasi-spiritualists, that the "physical phenomena" of spiritualism are "manifestations of a new and unknown force of nature." As long ago as 1874 Crookes pointed out that, to establish the existence of such a hypothetical "new force," all that would be necessary would be (under test conditions) (1) to deposit no more than $\frac{1}{10000}$ of a grain of matter in the pan of a locked balance, or (2) to carry $\frac{1}{10000}$ of a grain of arsenic into the interior of a sealed tube. No such evidence has ever been obtained. Eusapia has actually been detected in deliberate trickery; and although this perhaps cannot be said of all "professional mediums,"* Mr. Podmore's conclusion is that, "as the case stands, it may fairly be claimed that the occurrence of physical phenomena is *prima facie* evidence—I had almost said of fraud, but the

* Daniel Dunglas Home appears to be the solitary exception.

word does not fit the facts—of the production of things which are other than they seem.”

Mr. Podmore makes this reservation (as to the use of the word “fraud”) for an important reason related to the peculiarities of the trance personality. Sometimes in connection with the production of physical phenomena, but above all in connection with automatic writing (by means of which the famous—non-professional—medium, Mrs. Piper, produces her often mysterious revelations), the medium is apt to pass into a trance state, allied to, but perhaps not identical with, the hypnotic trance. Now this is one of the cases in which the direct study of hypnotism has thrown much light on the phenomena. The medium in the waking state may be a person whose honesty is above suspicion; but the trance state is one of what is called “secondary consciousness,” which may be very different from the primary or waking consciousness; and “the presumption of honesty based on the character and conduct of waking life counts for nothing in the case of a medium who is liable to pass into spontaneous trances.” The secondary consciousness is generally a maimed and mutilated form of the primary consciousness which is our friend; it is commonly non-moral, so that it does not respect what is, and still less what ought to be. It has few scruples, and does not distinguish between fact and fiction; it has a strong dramatic faculty, being inclined to cultivate “art for art’s sake”; it cannot say “I don’t know”; it is very cunning, and at the same time it probably possesses exalted sensory and perceptive powers—powers altogether in excess of those possessed by the same person in the primary or waking state; and “in many cases we have *proof* of a faculty by which this uncanny monster can on occasion read secret thoughts.” To sum up, in addition to its increased sensory and perceptive powers and to its endowment with a mysterious telepathic faculty upon which no certain limits can be placed, the secondary personality is “an actor whose mimicry is as subtle as it is unscrupulous”; and at the same time it is *not a social being*, so that it cannot be relied upon to observe the ordinary social and moral conventions in respect of truth and honesty.

Before passing to the consideration of some of the latest evidence, and to the final discussion of the bearings of *all* the evidence, a few words may be given to the literature of the subject. Few will have access to, and only the enthusiast is likely to struggle through, the vast bulk of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. The most valuable summaries of the evidence and critical discussions of its interpretation are to be found in the writings of Mr. Podmore; and to read all even of these, interesting as they are, is no mean labour. Mr. Podmore, accidentally drowned last year, was a member of the Society from the early days; he approached the matter from the first in a scientific, dispassionate, and truly critical spirit; and it is most interesting to trace his growing conviction that, while many of the phenomena cannot be explained without invoking the power of thought-transference, the need for any really "occult" explanation (in the "spiritualistic" sense) does not exist. Most of his principal works have already been mentioned; they are, *Studies in Psychical Research*, *Apparitions and Thought-Transference*, *Mesmerism and Christian Science*, and *The Newer Spiritualism*. The works of Gurney, Myers, and Lodge are also of great value, and are all written in the scientific spirit, though the two last-mentioned authors incline rather to accept the view that the mundane activity of disembodied spirits has been established by the evidence. *Essays in Psychical Research*, by Miss Goodrich-Freer (the "Miss X" of the S. P. R.), is also useful. There are works by more fervent believers in the spiritist theory, too numerous to mention, which those who wish to make an exhaustive study of the subject will do well to read. Anyone with access to a good library of fiction will find in *The Tyranny of the Dark*, by Hamlin Garland, a talented American writer, a novel which presents the facts and problems of the newer spiritualism as fairly and picturesquely as Howell's *The Undiscovered Country* presented those of the spiritualism of an earlier day.

The main fruits of the work of the S. P. R. have been twofold. In the first place, the Society's study of abnormal psychic manifestations, in conjunction with the scientific

study of hypnotism altogether apart from the work of the S. P. R., has thrown much light upon the nature of human consciousness. To the newer experimental psychology, as Mr. Podmore says, the "unity of consciousness" is an illusion; like the elementary nature of air, fire, earth, and water, it is the fruit of youthful ignorance. The laboratory and the alienist's clinic show that consciousness, in the last analysis, is but the casual and transitory co-ordination of countless ill-defined and variable elements. And, he continues, "to found an argument for the survival of the soul on the supposed unity and indissolubility of this shifting aggregation must seem, indeed, the building of a house upon the sand." In the second place, we owe to the Society the rescue from the hands of charlatans of the mysterious faculty of telepathy.

But before passing to our final conclusions on the subject of thought-transference, let us consider some of the latest evidence, obtained largely from the automatic writings of Mrs. Piper, but also from several other automatic writers—Mrs. Holland, Mrs. Verrall, etc.—who have been engaged in a lengthy series of experiments. The most remarkable features of these experiments have been what are termed "cross correspondences." From November, 1906, to June, 1907, Mrs. Piper was in England, and gave a number of sittings, producing large quantities of automatic writings. During the same period Mrs. Holland was in India, knowing nothing then about the Piper sittings being held simultaneously in England, but conducting independent experiments in automatic writing. Mrs. Verrall, at the same time, was practising automatic writing. Now, when these various automatic scripts are collated, certain correspondences appear in their subject-matter; and, what is still more extraordinary, the different writings contain certain allusions which, when studied separately, seem unmeaning, but which become explicable by the light they throw each upon the others; just as if—as, indeed, the trance personality of Mrs. Piper maintains to be the case—some disembodied consciousness, independent of our limitations of space and time, were endeavouring to demonstrate its reality by this means. It is not possible here

to give details, but I have carefully studied Mr. Podmore's collation of the evidence. As he says, there are coincidences of thought and expression much too numerous to be accounted for by chance. There is something extraordinary to be explained. It may ultimately be proved that there is no indication of disembodied spiritual agency; but to prove that it is necessary to assume the action of living minds upon one another of an altogether unprecedented kind.

In the present state of the evidence it is not possible to dogmatise as to its bearing. Provisionally, those who examine it will accept a working hypothesis coincident with their general opinions regarding the existence or non-existence of disembodied intelligences, and the probable powers and occupations of these if they *do* exist. For example, the late William James, the great American psychologist, speaking of the whole record of spirit possession in human history, writes: "The notion that so many men and women, in all other respects honest enough, should have this preposterous monkeying self annexed to their personality seems to me so weird that the spirit theory takes on a more possible appearance."

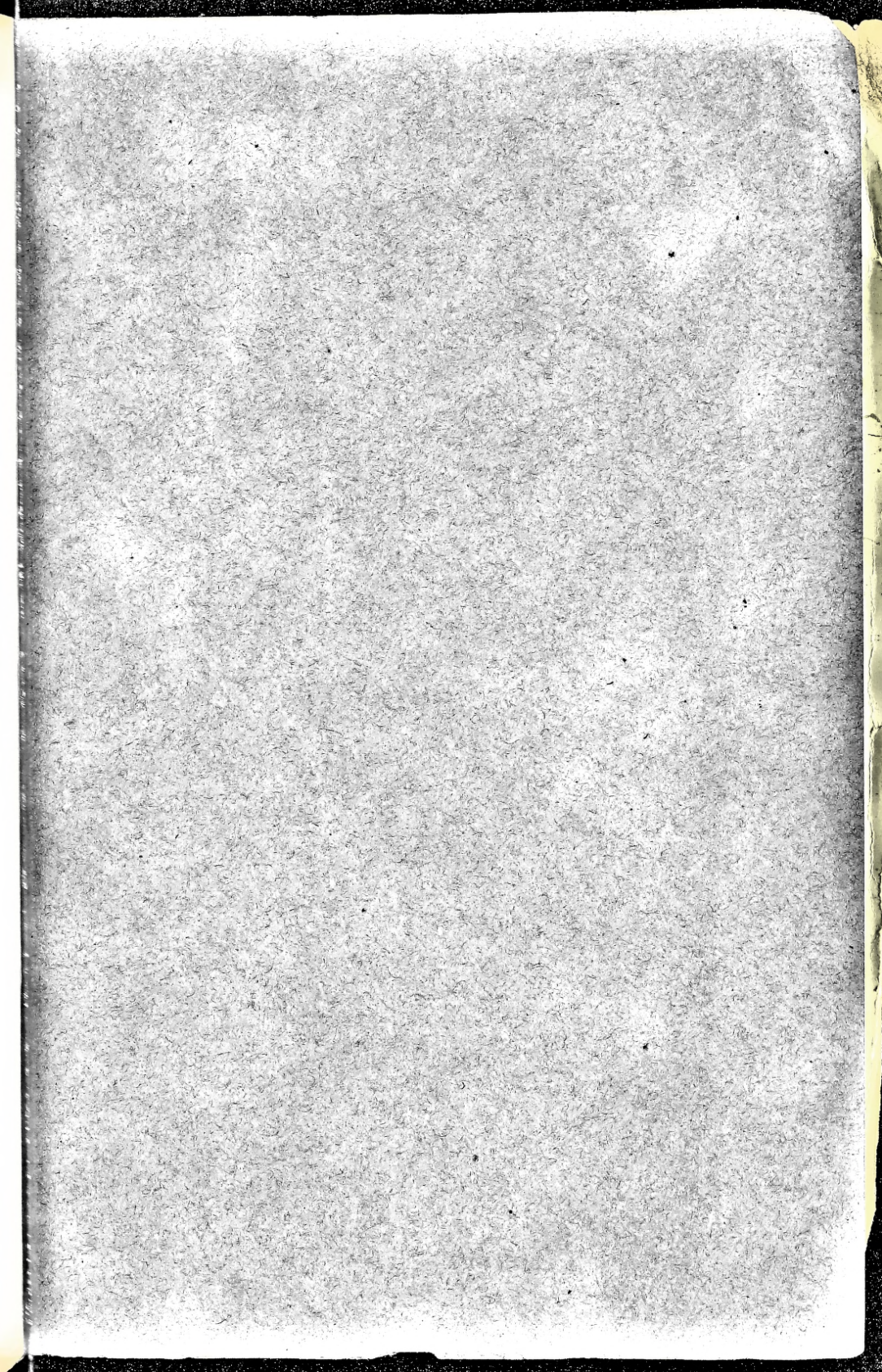
But, then, the existence of this "monkeying" secondary self is *proved* by hypnotic data; and the faculty of telepathy must apparently be assumed to exist in order to explain many of the obscurer manifestations of psychical activity. Is it not, then, better to accept the explanation which these two hypotheses afford, without superadding the enormous improbabilities involved in the claim that "spirit-control" is a reality? *Entia non sint multiplicanda præter necessitatem*. It must be remembered that the sympathies of the trance personality are usually on the side of the "occult"; that, in the search for "spirit communications," the history of the subject shows that demand creates supply; and that "distant telepathy" by a disembodied spirit is just as improbable as distant telepathy from the mind of a living person, with the superadded gross improbability that the disembodied spirit exists at all! I, at any rate, agree with the view taken by Mr. Podmore. He holds that the results of the "cross correspondence" experiments add considerably to the strength

of the case for the existence of supernormal faculty of some kind, more especially because the other experimental evidence indicates that telepathic influences act most freely in the sphere of the automatic or dream consciousness. These experiments furnish us, in fact, with yet another illustration of the readiness of our mysterious inner self to meet any demands that may be made on its dramatic powers. "So far," concludes Mr. Podmore, "as my analysis of the complex cases of cross correspondence has gone, there has been no coincidence of thought and expression not adequately explained by the natural association of ideas in minds occupied by the same themes, aided by occasional telepathic interaction among the automatists themselves."

Thus the work of the S. P. R. seems, in a sense, to have been justified by results. If it has not provided the scientific proof (for which some have hoped, though to me it appears extremely undesirable) of the reality of conscious life after death, it has thrown much light on the dark places of psychology, and it seems to render necessary at least a provisional belief in the reality of thought transference.

Of the physical or physiological basis of thought transference we know nothing at present; for to speak of "brain waves," or "etheric thought waves," is to speak of that of which we know absolutely nothing. But from another point of view it is permissible to ask what is the nature of the faculty. Is it, as some suppose, the germ of a developing faculty destined to play a great part in the future of the race? Or is it merely the decayed vestige of a primitive faculty of communication which has been superseded by the development of articulate speech? To me, indeed, the latter view seems far more probable. There is considerable evidence suggesting that a faculty of the nature of telepathy exists among some of the lower animals. Watch, for example, a flight of pigeons wheeling in the sunlight; do they not seem to turn, now in one direction, now in another—not as if following a leader, but rather as if in obedience to an impulse communicated simultaneously to the nervous systems of all the birds? In the present state of our knowledge the matter must be left open; and I will conclude by saying that, if

thought transference is a developing instead of a decaying faculty, there are obvious inconveniences, as George Eliot has shown, attached to this notion of "The Lifted Veil"! But in this matter our descendants will have to bear their own burden, if it should ultimately be placed upon their shoulders.



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