

AN EXPERIMENT IN "CLAIRVOYANCE" WITH M. STEFAN OSSOWIECKI.

BY THEODORE BESTERMAN.

DURING the course of a visit to Warsaw in the spring of 1933, in company with Dr Osty, I made the acquaintance of M. Ossowiecki, well known as an amateur clairvoyant who has obtained striking successes.¹ It was not at the time possible for me to arrange an experiment with M. Ossowiecki, as he was busy with one prepared by Dr Osty. M. Ossowiecki kindly promised, however, that he would attempt to "read" the contents of a sealed envelope if I cared to send him one on my return to England. Immediately on my return to London I accordingly, on 17 May, sent M. Ossowiecki a sealed envelope. Receiving no reply I caused inquiries to be made and finally, in July, I heard from M. Ossowiecki that the envelope I had sent him had been regarded as suspicious by the censorship, and had been opened by them. M. Ossowiecki suggested that I should prepare another envelope and send it to M. Gravier, the President of the Polskie Towarzystwo Badań Psychicznych, before which he would then carry out the experiment. This I did, despatching the second sealed envelope on 14 July to Madame Wodzinska, for passing on to M. Gravier, as I did not know the latter's address. There the matter rested so far as I knew until the end of September, when, knowing that Lord Charles Hope was going to Warsaw, with Miss A. Reutiner and Mr John Evelyn, both Members of the Society, I asked him to make an effort to get the experiment carried out. This he accordingly did, with the kind help of M. Gravier. Actually, however, as I afterwards learned, there had already been two preliminary and fairly successful sittings.

But before dealing with these preliminary sittings, I will describe the sealed packet, which, with its contents, was prepared at, and despatched from, my desk in the Society's rooms. Figure 1 is a photograph of the paper I had prepared. When folded it measured 93 mm. by a trifle over 107 mm. It was placed in a reddish orange "Ensign" light-tight envelope (that is, not transparent to white light), measuring 94 mm. by 119 mm. This envelope was in turn enclosed in a black "Ensign" light-tight envelope, measuring 106 mm. by 130 mm. This black envelope was finally enclosed in

¹ See, for instance, the report of the Warsaw Congress of 1923, pp. 201 ff.; Dr G. Geley, *L'Ectoplasme et la Clairvoyance* (1924), pp. 29 ff.; Stefan Ossowiecki, *Świat mego Ducha* (1933).

a large Manilla envelope doubled in two and thus measuring 114 mm. by 152 mm. Each of these envelopes was closed in a special way and bore private and invisible marks. The outer doubled envelope was in addition sealed with surgical tape arranged in a special way and signed by me. This packet was then further enclosed in a stout outer envelope and sent to Mme Wodzinska, who remitted it direct to M. Gravier. A statement from her to that effect follows in Appendix A i. M. Gravier retained the packet in his possession until the beginning of the sitting described below. A statement from M. Gravier follows in Appendix A ii.

I will now give an account of the two preliminary sittings, in the form of a statement by M. Gravier, who writes :

After receiving your sealed envelope the contents of which were to be detected by M. Ossowiecki, he and I had two sittings on 8 and 9 August 1933.

During these meetings the following was said.

On 8 August M. O. : Sees Mr Besterman,—he sees that it is between 6 and 8 o'clock in the evening and that Mr Besterman cuts a picture from an illustrated English paper. Picture of the size of 6 × 7 centimetres. He sees four envelopes one in the other.

This meeting took place in my home.

The following day, 9 August, meeting at M. O.'s, who says :

It is not an illustration cut from a paper.

It is a drawing made on a big piece of paper, this drawing is 5 × 6 centimetres.

There are three envelopes—one exterior, the next black, the third coloured,—it is neither yellow, nor blue, nor red, I think that it is rose, but I do not see very well.

Besides the drawing there is something written :

It represents something like a goblet, closed with a cork, and there is something written, not on the goblet, but around it—I see a W—I see a capital I,—I also see an S and something red and something blue. That makes me confuse it with the letters.

Since then M. O. was unwilling to give any further sitting, saying that he had thought it over and could not agree to continue if the envelope was not afterwards opened before him.

When Mile Reutiner, Lord Charles Hope and Mr Evelyn came we decided that they would take the responsibility of opening the envelope on your behalf and that it should be opened immediately after [the sitting].

You know the rest.—

[Literal translation.]

[Signed] A. GRAVIER.

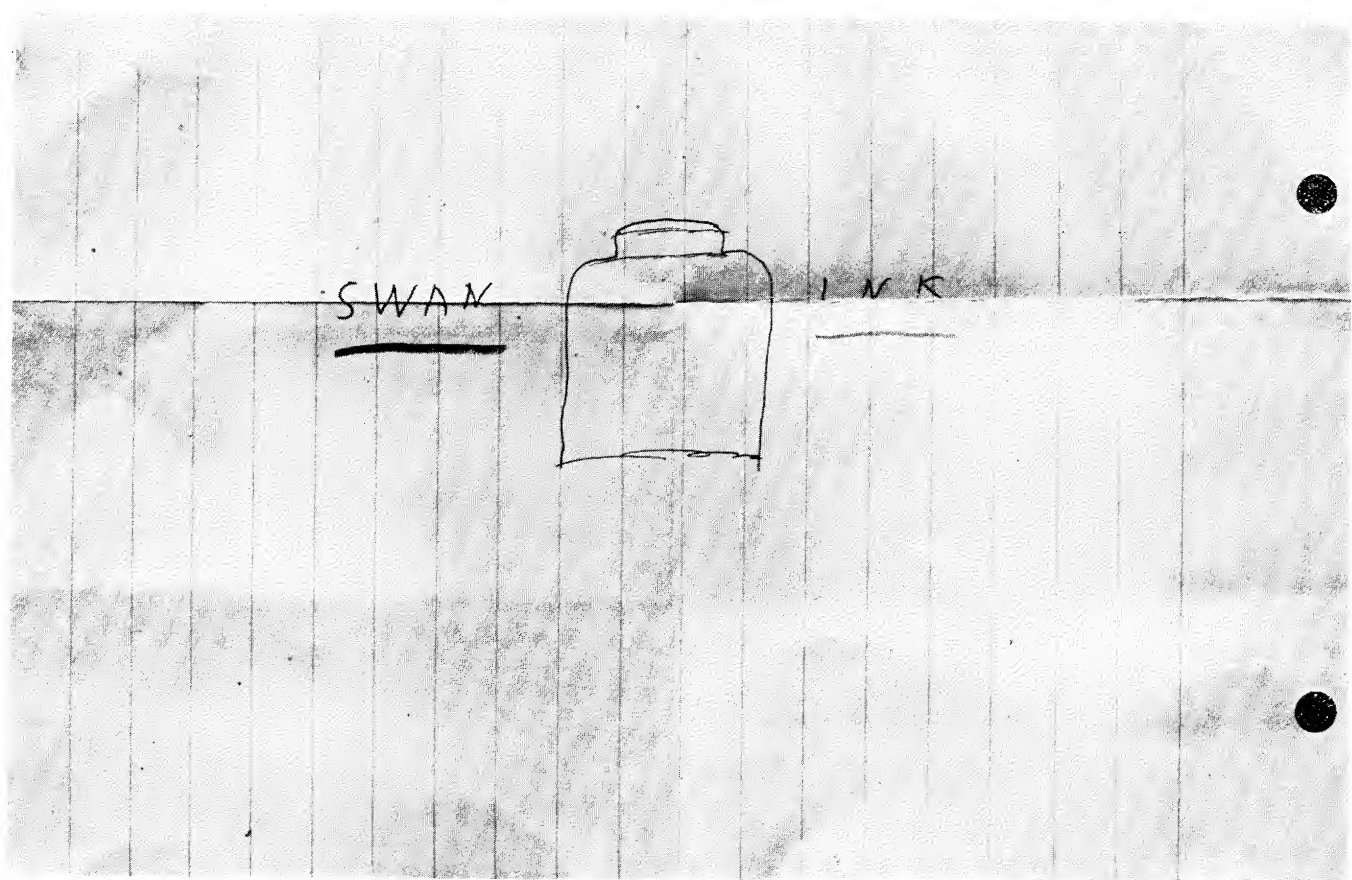


FIG. 1.—Slightly reduced photograph of the original drawing; the actual size of the paper is 219 mm. \times 139 mm. The line under "SWAN" is blue, and that under "INK" is red.

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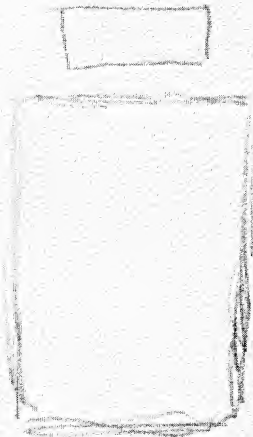


FIG. 2.—Slightly reduced photograph of M. Ossowiecki's first drawing; the actual size of the paper is 220 mm. × 159 mm.

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FIG. 4.—Slightly reduced photograph of M. Ossowiecki's final drawing; the actual size of the paper is 220 mm. x 142 mm.

On 29 September 1933 M. Ossowiecki invited a number of friends to his flat for the purpose of witnessing his attempt to "read" the contents of the envelope. Lord Charles Hope writes: "Soon after M. Gravier's arrival at M. Ossowiecki's flat he handed the envelope over to me and I kept it in my pocket. I watched the envelope the whole time during the experiment and myself opened it at the finish of M. Ossowiecki's 'reading' of the contents. The lighting of the room during the 'reading' was dim, the only light actually in the room being from two large candles near the medium, and electric light in the adjoining room."

During the course of the experiment M. Gravier made a record, in French, of what was said and done by M. Ossowiecki. I now give a literal translation of this record, only inserting inverted commas where necessary and reference figures within square brackets:

Warsaw, 29 September 1933.

Sitting at M. Ossowiecki's.

Lord Charles Hope hands to Mr O. a letter sent to M. Gravier from London by Mr Besterman, to be "read" by M. O.

Numerous persons [present]—we begin at 6 o'clock in the afternoon.

The piano is played:

[Notes by Th. B.]

[1] O. says: "I am already in England—in London—[2] it is a very big house, [3] in the centre of L.—Not altogether in the centre, but on the right side—[4] a grey house, [5] three or four floors. [6] He lives at the bottom. [7] I see Mr Besterman dressed in black.

[8] In the next room (*à côté*) a gentleman in black—he goes away.

[9] A lady dressed in a white sweater returns into the room.

[10] There are a lot of books about in the room.

[11] He approaches the table—not that in his room—but in the room adjoining. [12] It is a little *salon*.—

[1] Yes, but M. Ossowiecki knows that the Society's Rooms are in London. [2] Moderately large. [3] In the West Central District. [4] No, the house is in brick and stucco. [5] It has a basement and four floors. [6] I do not live at the S.P.R. [7] No.

[8] Possibly, as the adjoining room is open to members.

[9] Possibly, see [8].

[10] Yes, it is part of the Library.

[11] Yes, but in my own room, not that adjoining. [12] which is also part of the Library.

[13] I see a black envelope, [14] and some black paper on the table.

[15] Ditto a red envelope—no, rose (*rosâtre*).

[16] He intends to cut out a drawing from one of the English papers—something like an advertisement.

[17] It was between 4 and 5 o'clock.

[18] I see him again, he had changed his mind.

[19] He takes a piece of white paper and cuts it—[20] he has pencils of three colours, blue, red, black. [21] He takes the black pencil, [22] it is a drawing.

He draws—[23] and then he writes [24] in English,—unfortunately I do not know the language. I see some letters—[25] it is just 4 o'clock. [26] He is now alone.

[27] In the second room there is this gentleman and this lady.

What is he drawing?

Give me the pencil."

Ossowiecki takes the pencil. He draws. Ossowiecki draws a rectangle—above it a small rectangle. [Here follows a sketch by M. Gravier of M. Ossowiecki's drawing; this drawing is reproduced as figure 2. In his sketch M. Gravier indicates that M. Ossowiecki said, in regard to the lines at each side of the lower

[13] Yes. [14] No.

[15] Yes, but actually a reddish orange. The outer envelope sent to M. Ossowiecki on 17 May similarly contained black and orange envelopes; it must be assumed that this was known to M. Ossowiecki.

[16] No; but the envelope mentioned in [15] contained an illustrated advertisement cut from a newspaper. This no doubt was also known to M. Ossowiecki.

[17] Yes.

[18] No.

[19] No. [20] Yes, though the drawing was done in ink, not in pencil. [21] See [20]. [22] Yes.

[23] Yes. [24] Yes. [25] It was about 4.30. [26] I was alone throughout.

[27] See [8] and [9].

rectangle, [28] "There is something written," and of the single line lower down and to the left, [29] "Something red."

"He has drawn—[30] he puts into a yellow red (orange)¹ envelope—[31] he gums [it]—

[32] He puts into a black envelope

[33] the gentleman comes into the room.

[34] He gums the black envelope all round.

[35] The drawing is a bottle—no—it is like that. [Here M. Gravier gives a sketch of M. Ossowiecki's figure 2 (our figure 3), indicating that of the lower left line M. Ossowiecki said, [36] "A rose line."]

I see—[37] there are two words—[38] each letter is big and each letter is by itself—[24] it is English, there is [39] (on the left) S W A (each letter written apart) and also a fourth letter which I do not understand—an N, but I am not sure.

[40] Then there is (on the right) I N

No, the drawing is a little bit different." (O. again begins to draw.) [Here M. Gravier gives a sketch of M. Ossowiecki's (final) figure 3 (our figure 4), marking the line in the left hand bottom corner A—B].

"Yes, that's right—I see very well now—table, office, envelope, black, rose." (It is 6.25).

¹[Lord Charles Hope writes: "When medium was trying to describe the colour of the innermost envelope he had suggested 'rosâtre' when M. Gravier (the medium apparently not being satisfied with what he had himself said) suggested 'orange'. The medium seemed to accept this suggestion but did not repeat the word 'orange'".]

[28] Yes. [29] No, this line is blue, it is the opposite one which is red.

[30] Yes, but see [15]. [31] Yes, though actually I used paste.

[32] Yes.

[33] No.

[34] No, only at both ends.

[35] Yes. [36] No; see [29].

[37] Yes. [38] Yes. [39] Yes; all four letters are correct and in the right order.

[40] Yes; both letters are correct and in the right order, though the word is incomplete.

[41] There is something red at A.B.—I cannot understand.
[41] No ; see [29].
I have already finished ”—
6.26.

It was after this that Lord Charles Hope opened the envelopes, taking care of course not to destroy the sealing of the outer and inner envelopes. The above account was signed by M. A. Gravier, Miss Alice Reutiner, Lord Charles M. Hope, Mr John Evelyn, Prince J. Woroniecki, and seven others.

On 3 October 1933 Lord Charles Hope handed to me, in London, the original of the above account, M. Ossowiecki's drawings, and the opened envelopes. I minutely examined the envelopes and found that, with the exception of considerable wear and tear on the outer envelope, they were all intact. The private marks which I had made and which would have been inevitably disturbed on any attempt to open the envelopes, were all in order.¹ I have no hesitation in saying that none of the three envelopes was opened. I am also satisfied that no effort was made, an effort which would not in any case have been successful (because, among other reasons, of the special folding of the paper), to render the contents transparent by chemical means. The same is true of X-ray and similar methods. It will thus be seen that M. Ossowiecki's clairvoyant reading (as it may for convenience be called, though other supernormal theories are not excluded) was almost completely successful. It would of course have been more satisfactory if the envelope "read" had been the one I had with me in Warsaw, or, failing that, the first packet I sent. Still, the main point is clearly that the packet should not have been tampered with ; and of that I am satisfied. Cordial thanks are due not only to M. Ossowiecki himself for his brilliant performance, but also to M. Gravier and to Mme Wodzinska for their invaluable help.

A point of theoretical interest is this : the subject of the test was deliberately of such a kind (*e.g.* "Swan") as to be capable of being symbolically "perceived" ; also the drawing was so disposed that the folding of the paper completely destroyed the form of the bottle and of one word, leaving the other word intact. None of these things affected M. Ossowiecki's "reading," which is almost an enlarged facsimile, except that in his second drawing there are lines that might be taken to indicate the folding.

¹ For obvious reasons I do not describe these private marks ; they are known to Mr and Mrs Salter and to Lord Charles Hope.

APPENDIX A.

STATEMENTS.

i.

In accordance with your wish I certify having received your sealed envelope and having remitted it intact to M. A. Gravier.

[Signed] MARIE WODZINSKA.

[10 October 1933.]

ii.

The envelope was preserved intact by me until the sitting held in the presence of Lord Charles Hope, Mr Evelyn and Mlle Reutiner.

[Signed] A. GRAVIER.

10 October 1933.