The following were co-opted as Members of the Council for the year 1925: Mr. W. R. Bousfield, K.C., F.R.S., Dr. William Brown, Mr. G. W. Lambert, Mr. W. Whately Smith, and Dr. M. B. Wright.

The Monthly Accounts for January and February, 1925, were presented and taken as read.

PRIVATE MEETING FOR MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES

The 82nd Private Meeting for Members and Associates was held in the House of the Royal Historical Society, 22 Russell Square, London, W.C., on Wednesday, March 18th, 1925, at 5 p.m., The President in the chair.

A paper entitled "A Report on Physical Phenomena recently observed" was read by Mr. E. J. Dingwall. It is hoped that the Report will be published later in the *Proceedings*.

PROFESSOR MURRAY'S EXPERIMENTS IN TELEPATHY.

(*We print below a letter by Dr. Thouless, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Manchester, on the subject of Professor Gilbert Murray's experiments in telepathy, a report on which was recently published in Part XCII. of* "Proceedings." *Dr. Thouless's letter appeared originally in the* "Manchester Guardian." *We are glad to know that Dr. Thouless is prepared to consider the evidence in so fair and open-minded a way, and that he realises—as not all psychologists appear to do—that where the human mind is concerned some latitude must be allowed in regard to conditions of experiment.*

We hope that it may at some time be possible to carry out further experiments with Professor Murray with the object of determining more exactly the nature and limits of his remarkable powers.)

The newspaper correspondence which has resulted from the reports of experiments on thought-transference carried out by Lord Balfour and Professor Gilbert Murray brings out very clearly the difference between the assurance with which most people accept telepathy as an unquestionable fact, and the hesitation which psychologists show in admitting it as a scientific fact at

all. Thus Professor Titchener, the leading experimental psychologist of our time, says: "No scientifically-minded psychologist believes in telepathy." This seems to be rather an extreme statement when we bear in mind that Professor Bergson, Professor McDougall, and the late William James are all declared believers in telepathy. Titchener's statement, however, does indicate a point of view which is common amongst experimental psychologists, and Dr. Wohlgemuth's letter on the subject in Tuesday's *Times* echoes the same scepticism. This hesitation deserves more attention than it commonly receives from the upholders of telepathy, for it springs from a well-founded dissatisfaction with the methods by which experiments in telepathy are often carried out, and with the quality of evidence which is commonly regarded as sufficient for the support of the startling assertion that there are other modes of communication of knowledge than the sense-organs which our examination of the human body reveals to us.

It must be admitted that the contribution of laboratory psychologists to psychical research is not always very helpful. Too often it consists in prescribing arbitrary conditions under which the phenomena must take place if they are to be believed. What would we think of a physicist who said that he would not believe in photography unless the whole process of exposing and developing a plate could take place under his observation in full daylight or in ball-lightning unless it could be produced in his own back garden at a prescribed date? Yet psychologists often adopt an attitude not far removed from this in their criticisms of psychical research, and even as open-minded an observer as the late Professor Stanley Hall said: "Only when conditions can be so controlled that, *e.g.*, a teacher can announce beforehand that, on such a day, hour, and place he will demonstrate these things [telepathy and clairvoyance] can or will they be accepted by any sound scientific mind."

The central point of interest in these and all similar experiments is the question of whether the mode of communication between the reader and the receiver of his messages is of an unknown nature. It is clear that these particular experiments were successful a greater number of times than could be accounted for by chance alone. Two hypotheses are possible in order to account for their success, and these two hypotheses must be kept sharply distinct. First, the ideas received by Professor Murray

may have come to him through a channel entirely different from those of our ordinary sense organs. Secondly, his ears may have received sound-waves which, although too faint to give sensations of sound, were yet strong enough to start the train of thought which the words were intended to convey. The first is the hypothesis of telepathy, the second is the hypothesis that the results were due to hyperæsthesia.

A good deal of confusion of thought can be avoided if we resolve to use the word "telepathy" only for a supposed mode of communication independent of all known sense organs. If this was the kind of communication which took place, we can say nothing of its properties; these must be found out by experiment. If the hyperæsthesia explanation is the true one, the facts are of less revolutionary interest, and presumably hyperæsthetic hearing will follow much the same laws as ordinary hearing.

The correspondence which has already appeared in various papers on this subject has shown that most persons have already made up their minds as to which of these two explanations is the true one, and that they are prepared to defend the explanation they have chosen with some heat. Perhaps, therefore, it will be worth while to consider very shortly what lines of evidence could lead us to make a decision between the two alternative explanations.

It is no sufficient evidence against the theory that the results were due to sound-waves too faint to produce sensations of sound to say either that sounds could only be interpreted by a person who was conscious of hearing them or that this explanation is ruled out by the fact that there was a large room between the speaker and the person receiving his messages. It is certain that a stimulus may be the starting-point of a train of thought before it is strong enough to be perceptible, and if this is the case nothing but experiment can decide what limits this capacity has. It may indeed be impossible for thought to be affected by sound waves which have traversed two walls and a large room, but it may, on the other hand, be possible, even if the waves have travelled ten times that distance. This must be found out before we finally reject the hypothesis of hyperæsthesia.

It may be possible to find a conclusive test to decide between these hypotheses. Every physical vibration which can give rise to a sensation obeys the law of inverse squares—*i.e.*, if the

distance from the source of the vibrations is doubled, these are received at a quarter of their original strength; if it is trebled, their strength is reduced to a ninth. It is possible that communication by telepathy does not follow this law. There is some indication that it does not, for successful telepathy experiments have been reported between experimenters in different countries, although the percentage of successes in these experiments was so small that we must remain doubtful of their interpretation. In the experiments on Professor Gilbert Murray, however, we seem to have a subject who gives a high percentage of correct answers. It ought to be easy to find out whether increase in the distance between the reader and the subject does or does not cause a rapid increase in the percentage of error. If there were such an increase, this would, of course, be no final evidence against the telepathy theory, for the unknown source of telepathic communication may itself obey the law of inverse squares. If, however, it could be shown that increasing the distance even to a very great extent did not produce a great increase in the number of errors, this would be very strong evidence indeed in favour of the "telepathy" explanation.

It is to be hoped that these experiments will not stop at the point of demonstrating that communication of some sort exists. By the ordinary methods of scientific research—isolation and independent variation of all the conditions under which communication takes place—it should not be difficult to settle conclusively all the questions that are still in dispute. Such a research should show whether the results are to be explained by telepathy or by hyperæsthesia; and if by telepathy, it should provide material for formulating the laws of telepathic communication.—Yours, etc.,

R. H. THOULESS.

Department of Psychology,
The University,
Manchester, *December* 17*th*.

THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE DIVINING ROD QUESTION IN GERMANY [1]

BY COUNT CARL V. KLINCKOWSTROEM, OF MUNICH.

WHILST in England the phenomenon of the Divining Rod is looked upon generally, since Sir W. F. Barrett's comprehensive articles,

[1] Translated from the German.