

considerable therapeutic value, subjectively—but what of its objective implications?

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Mrs Fay's Mediumship

SIR,—I should like to make a comment concerning the electrical tests with Mrs Fay at the seances of the 5th, 6th, 19th and 20th February, 1875, as described by Crookes and quoted and discussed by Mr Medhurst and Mrs Goldney in their recent paper in *Proceedings*.¹

Mrs Fay would have had a very good idea of what was in store for her at these seances. Even if that of the 5th February were the first occasion on which the test was applied to Mrs Fay, she would have had to know only that some electrical test was intended to guess that it would probably be similar to that on Florence Cook reported by Varley in the previous year.

If Mrs Fay wanted to free herself from the constraint imposed by the galvanometer test, by substituting another resistance, the safest way would be to disturb the experimental conditions as little as possible. Suppose that she had previously prepared two contacts, fixed, for example, one on each of her arms, the contacts being connected to two small clips by loops or loose coils of wire secreted in her sleeves. On pretending to 'seize the terminals' she could, in a darkened room, connect the clips to the terminals or to the wires leading to them. She would then be relatively free to move about the room, and the galvanometer would show similar variations of current to those to be expected if she had remained holding the handles (terminals), and the various precautions of sealing the room and nailing the handles would be irrelevant. Possibly the alleged method described by Houdini (placing one electrode under the knee) was used on the 5th February and this had led to an improved method, such as that suggested above, by the time of the seance of the 19th February, which Crookes appears to have regarded as the most noteworthy of the series.

G. T. THOMPSON

SIR,—Mr Thompson's suggestion is an interesting variation on that of Podmore, and certainly seems more plausible. Podmore postulated, it will be recalled, that, while pretending to grasp the

¹ *Proc. S.P.R.*, 54, Part 195, Mar. 1964, pp. 95-103.

handles, Mrs Fay attached a resistance coil across them. Mr Thompson's proposition eliminates the resistance coil, Eva Fay's body still constituting the resistance though the lady has now given herself room to manoeuvre.

Something like this may well have happened, though the observed galvanometer variations still seem to us to present features that are difficult to explain. Podmore's hypothesis has always seemed hard to reconcile with *any* variation of the galvanometer during the course of the sitting. Mr Thompson's procedure, on the other hand, might perhaps have been expected to lead to much *more* variation than that observed.

The practical difficulty, in both the Crookes and the Varley variations of the electrical test, is in making a sufficiently good contact with the body. In the Crookes version, as used with Mrs Fay, the handles were tightly wrapped in linen soaked in brine, and Mrs Fay also soaked her hands in brine. This ensures a good contact, and the resulting small variations of the galvanometer reading would be quite compatible with what was observed. If these precautions are omitted, we have found that, with an arrangement similar to that used by Crookes, it is virtually impossible to get a good, constant contact, the apparent body resistance varying greatly with small changes of pressure of the hands. For this reason, incidentally, we find it hard to take seriously Houdini's story of the handle slipped under the knee. In the Varley form of the test, the contact is made not via the hands but through an area of skin on the arm, blotting paper soaked in a conducting solution being interposed between the electrode and the skin. Presumably in Mr Thompson's scheme a similar arrangement would be necessary. But it appears from the observations recorded during the Varley test (*Proceedings*, March 1964, p. 165) that, with such a method of fraud, the galvanometer variations as the medium wandered around the room and moved her arms would be expected to have been very much greater than those observed during the Eva Fay sittings.

This seems to be the critical point in Mr Thompson's very interesting suggestion. As Professor Broad remarked in connection with the Varley test, it is of the greatest importance to resolve the issue, so far as it can be, by direct experiment, and it is much to be hoped that this will be done.

There is another, though less critical, point that requires some explanation. It seems certain that if Eva Fay used metallic contacts attached to her arms, or other parts of her body, she would have to interpose some material soaked in electrolyte, even to begin to make adequate contact. The question is when could this

necessary step have been taken. Presumably not any long time before the sitting. Crookes records that for an hour before the sitting Mrs Fay was in the drawing-room upstairs, 'in the presence of several witnesses', she then being invited down into the library for the test. Thus, it would seem she could only have introduced the material soaked in electrolyte when she was in the library, and in the presence of the investigators (since, in one way or another, the circuit was closed before they left the room); this certainly seems to present a difficulty. Perhaps one might postulate that Mrs Fay requested 'to be excused' immediately before the sitting and Crookes omitted to record this, though if she made a habit of so doing before all the sittings one might imagine that he would have become suspicious.

We would not make much of a difficulty of the obvious requirement for a suitably skilled person to coach Eva Fay, since electrical skill was no rare thing at that time. In the immediate circle, one has only to point to Harrison. But we are impressed (though some experienced investigators, such as Dr Dingwall, would not support us here) by the failure of observers of the calibre of Galton and Rayleigh to notice anything suspicious. Trickery of the kind postulated *must* have involved carelessness on the part of the observers. It must always be borne in mind that some were suspicious of mediumship generally, and one, at least, of this particular medium and even of Crookes himself. And yet we are to suppose that they all failed, at the critical point of the experiment, to satisfy themselves that Mrs Fay had really grasped the handles. We find even more difficulty in supposing that a man of the penetrating intelligence of Lord Rayleigh, with many subsequent years to reflect on this experiment, should never have noticed the loophole, now so obvious to us, which would have been left if he had been guilty of such gross mal-observation. Nevertheless, one cannot but agree that the implications, if fraud were *not* practised, are so momentous that difficulties of this kind have less weight than they would in other circumstances.

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Harry Price and the 'Rosalie' case

SIR,—The serious nature of the complaints recently made in this Journal concerning the methods of criticism employed by Mr Trevor Hall in his book *The Spiritualists*, must surely call into question some of this writer's previous work, notably his share in