

THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH¹

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ITS HISTORY AND WORK ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOCIETY'S JUBILEE, 1932

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ON the occasion of the Jubilee of the Society for Psychical Research it seems fitting that some account of its foundation and history should be given, and in this paper I propose to describe these briefly mainly from what may be called the administrative point of view. There are very few living now besides myself who have been cognizant from the beginning of what was in the minds of the founders of the Society, or who have been from the earliest days in the inner circle of workers, and this makes it suitable for me to attempt this paper.²

The idea of founding a Society to investigate our subjects and the energy which brought it to fruition were Professor W. F. Barrett's³ (Professor of Physics at the Royal College of Science, Dublin, and afterwards Sir William Barrett, F.R.S.). After sounding those whom he knew to be interested in the questions to be investigated, among whom were Myers, Gurney and Sidgwick, he convened a meeting in London in January 1882 to discuss the formation of a Society, and got the Society finally established in February of that year. The number of members and associates was small to begin with. In the

¹ Read by Lord Balfour at a General Meeting of the Society, 1 July 1932.

² In the first list of Members and Associates of the Society published in September 1882, no name published in our last list 1930 appears except that of Mrs F. W. H. Myers. My own name does not appear till January 1884. I do not distinctly remember the cause of this delay, but I think it was due to my holding in 1882 a responsible position in another youthful institution—Newnham College (for Women) at Cambridge. It was probably not thought desirable to risk associating the College in the public mind with what was likely to be regarded as a cranky Society. If this recollection is right it gives some measure of the difference of the position of our subject of study then and now. Though not technically a Member I was entirely cognizant of the doings of the Society and its Council from the beginning.

³ He knew that there was no existing scientific society in the world willing to take the subject up, and the British Association had refused in 1876 to publish a paper of his concerning telepathy.

first printed list—September 1882—there are only one hundred names. But the number increased rather rapidly as our existence and work became known, and though later the increase became less in proportion to the total number it continued fairly regularly, though with some fluctuations, till we reached what I may call our peak number in 1920. We began that year with 403 Members and 902 Associates—together 1,305. But in that year because of the greatly increased cost of printing and other things after the war, the guinea a year paid by Associates did not cover their share of administrative expenses—printing, salaries, rent, etc.—and it was decided to discontinue, at least for a time, the election of new Associates. The number of Associates has therefore since then inevitably diminished, losses by deaths and resignations not being replaced. The number of full Members paying two guineas a year continued to increase but not so fast as that of Associates diminished, so that at the beginning of 1931, we had 586 Members and 368 Associates—in all 954, and unfortunately at the beginning of the present year, 1932, we found our numbers reduced to 501 Members and 308 Associates. This serious reduction, which we hope is temporary, is largely due to the prevailing financial stringency.

The usefulness of a Society, if it can get itself established and can secure sufficiently the confidence of the public, is obvious in work like ours. It provides a centre to which accounts of experiences and experiments can be sent and compared, where documents can be kept and referred to, where discussion can go on, information and advice can be sought and obtained. The existence of a Society also facilitates experiments, and inquiries of a statistical kind, of which several have been conducted from early days of the Society and recently. But perhaps the most important use of a Society is that it can publish in *Proceedings* material collected and the results of work done—and I do not think I shall be accused of boasting if I say that our forty volumes of *Proceedings* are a valuable mine of information and discussion on the subjects we deal with. And further, a Society provides a local habitation for a Library, which for serious students of the subject is, of course, important. We have had one from the beginning of the Society, but it was a very small affair at first, and its growth, depending as it largely did on gifts of books, was somewhat irregular; but now through the able management of our Librarian, Mr Theodore Besterman, and with the immense assistance of a much appreciated grant from the Carnegie Trustees, it is probably as complete a special Library for psychological research as can be found anywhere, and provides for students of the subject most of the special books that they may need.¹

¹ Members and Associates can read on the premises, and Members can also borrow books.

Another advantage of a Society suitably housed is that it can have a room or rooms for experiments, whether these experiments are organised by the Council or by private Members with the consent of the Council; and also for discussion by groups of Members.

In securing through the Society the material advantages indirectly aiding investigation of which I have been speaking, and also in meeting the actual expenses of investigation, finance has always been an important element. The membership subscriptions have never furnished sufficient funds to meet the expenses necessary, or at least desirable, in carrying on the Society's work. We have, however, had generous help in gifts and legacies from our supporters, and the Council has seldom appealed in vain when it felt that help was required. This help has come in money and in kind, as for example when our *séance*-room was built and fitted up for us. And in 1902 and 1903 two gifts from Members of £750 and £250 respectively were received towards an endowment fund which was duly established and placed in the hands of trustees in that year. Other gifts have been received, and in that same year (1903) Mr A. N. Aksakov, a Russian Member of the Society of long standing and a life-long investigator into psychical phenomena, died¹ and bequeathed to the S.P.R. a sum of (in English money) £3,805. This generous bequest was added to the endowment fund. The income from this fund was allowed to accumulate for many years, and the fund now produces nearly £400 a year.

While we are on the subject of finance it may be remarked that we have never paid for any cases we have received, or for literary contributions to *Proceedings* or *Journal*; we did, however, on at any rate one occasion pay for the drafting of an official report of one of our investigations. And also in rather recent years, the number of foreign periodicals devoted to psychical research having gradually greatly increased, and it appearing advisable to keep our Members more or less in touch with them and through them with what is going on elsewhere in connection with the subject, it was decided to pay a Member for supplying us regularly with short reviews of their contents for the *Journal*.

It should be mentioned that perhaps the most important thing that has enabled us to carry on our work without larger funds is the great amount of gratuitous work done for us not only by honorary officers and members of the Council, but by others, in investigations and collection of material, not to speak of administrative work.

The first Council—eighteen Members and President (Henry Sidgwick)—were all earnest inquirers, and many of them (including those who may be called the principal founders, Barrett, Myers,

¹ See memorial notice of him, *Journal*, xi. 85.

Gurney and Sidgwick¹) experienced investigators. But they differed widely in their views; some, *e.g.* Mr Stainton Moses, being ardent Spiritualists and others merely inquirers, sometimes tending to be very sceptical inquirers. This mixture, both in the Society and its Council, was deliberately planned, so as to keep the field available to investigators as wide and their minds as open as possible. But of course, it made it impossible for the Society to have any collective view as a Society, and accordingly, in a preliminary note to the Society's constitution it is "expressly stated that membership of this Society does not imply the acceptance of any particular explanation of the phenomena investigated, nor any belief as to the operation, in the physical world, of forces other than those recognised by Physical Science." This has continued to be the Society's attitude throughout its fifty years of life, though it is not, I think, always understood, even by Members, that it is of no use asking what does the S.P.R. think about this or that. Individual members or groups of members may, and do have views of course, but the only thing either the Society or its Council collectively agree about, is that the questions raised by psychical research are important and investigation desirable.

The Council began its work by dividing the subjects to be investigated roughly into five classes—Thought-reading (now included under telepathy); Mesmerism; Reichenbach's experiments; Apparitions, Haunted Houses, etc.; Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism;—and by appointing committees to undertake each. There was also a literary committee responsible for collecting existing evidence and spontaneous cases.

Work has been published in our *Proceedings* in all the above mentioned departments. The plan of having standing committees appointed by the Council to carry out investigations in each class did not, however, last very long. It was felt that the Council would almost necessarily to some indefinite extent, become saddled with responsibility for opinions or conclusions reached by its own committees, and that responsibility both for facts and reasonings in the papers and reports published should rest entirely with their authors.² It remained with the Council to decide before publishing a paper that it was, so far as they could judge, *bona fide*, and its contents worthy of consideration, and that it dealt with subjects within the range of the

¹ For some account of their investigations before 1882 see *Proceedings*, vol. iv, and Barrett's *Reminiscences*, *Proceedings*, vol. xxxiv. They were not of course the only pioneers. They had, for example at their disposal the published works on our subjects of Sir William Crookes, of Lord Adare (afterwards Lord Dunraven) concerning D.D. Home, of Mr Stainton Moses (himself a medium)—see Myers's account of him after his death in *Proceedings*, vol. ix; and the Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society.

² *Proceedings*, ii. 238; *Journal*, i. 223 n.

Society's work. In this it followed the practice of the Royal Society. The new arrangement did not and does not prevent the Council from making, when funds permit, grants in aid of what seem likely to be useful investigations, or even from undertaking such investigations itself in special cases. The Council still has a committee of reference by which all papers must be passed before they are admitted to *Proceedings*.

The only standing committee that survived for some time longer was the literary committee which was responsible for receiving and examining cases sent in to the Society. The number of accounts of spontaneous experiences that came in was a surprise to us,¹ and the labour involved in getting the evidence in these cases into a condition sufficiently complete for publication was considerable. It was calculated that over 10,000 letters were written during the year 1883 in the course of collection and verification of evidence.² And besides correspondence with informants they were as far as possible interviewed. In the early days it was less clear, even to the investigators, than it is now what further information was desirable or even necessary to complete a given case. And consequently more trouble was involved than now when our informants themselves understand better what is needed and are also, I think, less shy than they were at first of allowing their experiences, especially with their names, to appear in print. But I regret to say that for a good many years past the number of cases sent to us has been much less than it used to be at first. This is no doubt partly because the more remote cases in our informants' experience have already been sent to our Society or published elsewhere, and probably still more because our standard has risen. It is widely known now that the Council are very chary of publishing any but accounts at first hand of experiences, and those of experiences either of recent occurrence or recorded very near the time they happened. Still I think more would be sent to us if it were more generally realised that carefully recorded cases continue from a scientific point of view to be very important and that the trouble involved in getting them into an evidential form is well worth while. Each new case not only adds to the evidence for the occurrence of such experiences but may throw fresh light on their nature and causes—on why and how they occur.

It was in the year I referred to just now, 1883,—the second of the Society's existence—that it was decided to bring out a book on *Phantasms of the Living*, of which Gurney, Myers and F. Podmore were to be the authors. It was sanguinely supposed that this book would be ready in the following year, but the evidence kept growing

¹ It may be repeated that no pecuniary reward of any kind was ever offered or given for a case.

² *Proceedings*, ii. 45.

on our hands, and it was not till 1886 that the book appeared. Some of the meetings of the Literary Committee in the early days of work on *Phantasms of the Living* took place at the house of Henry Sidgwick and myself at Cambridge, and they were, as I well remember, always interesting and often amusing, as anyone who knew Gurney, Myers and Sidgwick will understand.

To facilitate study and comparison of the cases we received, they were printed on separate sheets (at the expense of a Member of the Committee) of which each Member could thus have a copy and make his own observations on it. Copies were also kept at the Society's office where other Members of the Society could, if they wished, examine and comment on them. The great majority of these cases were capable of explanation by telepathy between the living, meaning by that term the influence of one incarnate mind on another without the intervention of the senses, and so came under the head of what we have called Phantasms of the Living. But there were also cases of phantasms of the dead, premonitions, and other kinds which of course did not come into the book. All that seemed valuable among them have, however, been dealt with in articles in the *Proceedings* or otherwise.¹ At the end of 1884 the printing of cases on separate slips was superseded by a monthly *Journal* for private circulation among Members and Associates in which cases under consideration could be printed and studied more conveniently. The *Journal* was also intended to be a vehicle for communication from the Council to the Society, Reports of Meetings, etc., and, moreover, to enable Members to contribute, if they wished to do so, letters or brief articles, or otherwise to discuss matters bearing on the Society's work. In short, it was intended for private communication between Members, on matters not necessarily meant for the public. One im-

¹ Thus a paper on phantasms of the dead appeared in *Proceedings*, vol. iii; on premonitions in vol. v; on apparitions occurring soon after death in vol. v (begun by Gurney and after his death finished by Myers); "Recognised apparitions more than a year after death" by Myers; "Phantasms of the Dead from another point of view" by Podmore; "Defence of Phantasms of the Dead" by Myers. These last three papers, with discussion, are in *Proceedings*, vol. vi; "Telepathic Clairvoyance," vol. vii; "Alleged Movements of Objects without Contact," two papers by Myers, *Proceedings*, vol. vii, "Indications of continued Terrene Knowledge on the part of Phantasms of the Dead," by Myers, *Proceedings*, vol. viii. In *Proceedings*, vol. xi, is an article by Podmore quoting cases of poltergeists; and at a much later date, there is a paper in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxiii, in which are collected cases parallel to those in the book *Phantasms of the Living*, received after that was published. A few obviously important cases have been placed at once in *Proceedings* without waiting to be placed in groups e.g. "The Record of a Haunted House" in vol. viii; "Subconscious Reasoning" by Professor Romaine Newbold, vol. xii; a note on Fisher's ghost by H. Arthur Smith in vol. xiv; "Recent cases of Premonition and Telepathy" by the Rev. M. A. Bayfield, vol. xxix; and "The Will of James L. Chaffin" in vol. xxxvi.

portant reason for printing it for private circulation only was, and is, that informants sometimes send us cases which they are not willing should be published, at any rate immediately, though willing that they should be privately printed for the use of the Society. The *Journal* has been carried on in the same spirit ever since and has, I think, served its purpose well.

It may be seen, not only from the book *Phantasms of the Living*, but from a glance at the early volumes of *Proceedings* that telepathy or thought-transference, experimental and spontaneous, occupied more of the Society's attention at first than did other departments of investigation. Accounts of important experiments in various forms of telepathy are published in each of the first eight volumes of *Proceedings*, but after that similar papers will be found only in volumes xi, xxi, xxvii, xxix, xxxi and xxxiv. This concentration at first on telepathy was not, I think, the result of any deliberate plan on the part of the Council. Telepathy forced itself on the Society rather than was sought by it. In far the greater part of the spontaneous cases sent to us which seemed to afford evidence of some super-normal process, the process was apparently telepathic, or at least a telepathic explanation was consistent with the facts as reported; and opportunities of experimenting in telepathy presented themselves more than they have done in later years. When the Society was founded Professor Barrett had experiments with the Creary children actually in hand. Later came the experiments in which Mr G. A. Smith was concerned either as percipient or agent, and which went on in one form or another into the nineties; and the very important experiments conducted at Liverpool by Mr Guthrie and others with the young ladies employed in the drapery business which was under his management. Valuable accounts of experiments were also sent to us from France through Professor Richet, and also from Germany by Dr Dessoir and Dr von Schrenck-Notzing.

The idea of thought-transference was, as it were, in the air, in this country at least, in the early eighties, because of an amusement called the "willing game" which was in vogue both in private drawing-rooms and on public platforms. Some action, often very complicated, to be performed by one of the party, whom we may call the percipient, was decided on during his absence from the room. The willer then held his hand or put his hands on his shoulders or forehead, and if experimenting seriously, took pains to avoid giving any indications while willing him to perform the prescribed action, which he very often succeeded in doing. Then there was much discussion on the cause of success. Was it thought-reading, or was it "muscle-reading"—the conscious or unconscious interpretation of slight movements made by the willer.¹ Occasionally some percipients succeeded

¹ See note on muscle-reading by the Rev. E. H. Sugden, *Proceedings*, i. 291.

without contact at all, which gave strong support to the advocates of the thought-reading explanation. All this naturally stimulated interest in the subject, and led to general talk, and may have occasionally helped to reveal some percipients who really possessed a thought-reading faculty.

Even in the Society's earliest days telepathy was not of course the only subject to which the Society devoted attention. There were reports from its various standing committees already mentioned. Gurney, notwithstanding his preoccupation with *Phantasms of the Living*, almost from the first did excellent experimental work on the psychological side of hypnotism. Myers was already occupied with the subliminal self, automatism and kindred subjects. These subjects he discussed at intervals in papers in *Proceedings*, which were afterwards to be incorporated in his book *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*.

In 1884 Madame Blavatsky, the founder in 1875 (in the U.S.A) of the Theosophical Society, visited England, and the principal workers in the S.P.R. saw a good deal of her. Evidence which made a great impression on them was offered by her and her friends. This evidence included accounts of apparitions of themselves voluntarily produced at a distance¹ by persons in India, and of telekinetic phenomena such as are said to occur in the presence of physical mediums. The Council appointed a committee to examine into the matter, and a preliminary report by them, more or less favourable, was actually printed and distributed to Members of the S.P.R., though never published. It was felt, however, that before any final conclusion could be arrived at, a Member of the Committee must be sent to India to examine into the alleged phenomena and so far as possible cross-question the persons concerned on the spot. Mr Richard Hodgson, scholar of St John's College, Cambridge, and a graduate of Melbourne University, Australia, was selected for this work. He went out in November 1884, returning April 1885, having spent three months in India, and his report, published in *Proceedings*, vol. iii, would, I think, convince any impartial reader that the apparently marvellous phenomena were all produced by trickery by Mme Blavatsky and her confederates. Before Mr Hodgson started, two of these confederates at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Madras, Mr and Mrs Coulomb, had turned against that Society and its founders, and given a number of very incriminating letters, written to them by Madame Blavatsky, to the editors of the *Christian College Magazine* at Madras, who had published some of them. Mme Blavatsky declared that they, or at least the incriminating portions of them were forgeries.

¹ We have of course in *Phantasms of the Living* and *Proceedings* good evidence of such voluntary apparitions quite apart from the Theosophical Society.

The question of their genuineness had, of course, to be looked into by Mr Hodgson, which was very thoroughly done, and in the result the letters no doubt were of material assistance in helping him to many details of the conclusion he and, after him, our whole Committee arrived at—namely, that there was a very strong presumption that all the marvellous narratives put forward are to be explained as due either to deliberate deception carried out by, or at the instigation of, Mme Blavatsky, or to spontaneous illusion or hallucination, or unconscious misrepresentation or invention on the part of the witnesses. And the testimony to these marvels was in no case sufficient, taking amount and quality together, to resist the force of this general presumption.

I have dwelt on this investigation at perhaps undue length, because I think it had a great effect on our understanding of the difficulty of our work and of the care required not to arrive at conclusions prematurely.

From 1884 to 1887 much of the energy of the Society and a large proportion of its printed matter in *Proceedings* and *Journal* was for a time taken up by discussion and correspondence concerning the physical phenomena of Spiritualism and especially by the slate-writing (writing on slates by alleged occult means) of William Eglinton, who was probably (after the Dr Slade brought into notoriety by Professor Zöllner of Leipzig) the best known professional medium of his day—certainly the best known in England. The whole discussion may be said so far as the S.P.R. is concerned to have culminated in the demonstration by Mr S. J. Davey, an amateur conjurer, that he could produce by purely conjuring skill phenomena similar to Eglinton's and equally inexplicable to witnesses who described them. I think all unprejudiced persons who study the *Proceedings* and *Journal* of the time¹ will agree that the results of our inquiry were fatal to the idea that Eglinton's performance afforded any evidence of the use of supernormal power. And this conclusion is supported by the fact that he had on two previous occasions been detected in deliberate fraud; one when he was performing as medium and as materialised form at a materialisation *séance*; and another in conspiracy with Mme Blavatsky for the mysterious conveyance of a letter supposed to be sent by one of that lady's Mahatmas.

The publication of Mr Davey's "demonstration" is perhaps one

¹ See especially "Accounts of some so-called Spiritualist *Séances*" by Professor Carvill Lewis and others, *Proceedings*, iv. 338; "The Possibilities of Mal-observation and Lapse of Memory from a Practical Point of View," Introduction by Richard Hodgson, *Proceedings*, iv. 381; and "Experimental Investigation," by S. J. Davey, *Proceedings*, iv. 405; "Mr Davey's Imitations by Conjuring of Phenomena sometimes attributed to Spirit Agency," by Richard Hodgson, *Proceedings*, viii. 253. This last article was written after Mr Davey's death in 1890.

of the most useful and important works of our Society. There are two dangers to be guarded against in estimating any experimental or indeed spontaneous evidence we may obtain concerning the subjects we study. One is overestimating our powers of observation and memory and the other underrating what chance can do and the allowance to be made for it. The first danger occurs chiefly in the case of the physical phenomena of spiritualism, and Davey has proved the fact and given us a measure of it.

A similar demonstration as regards the physical phenomena occurring at sittings to-day, has been attempted on a somewhat different plan by Mr Besterman and described in a paper read to the Society this year.¹

Colonel Taylor's paper on an "Experimental Comparison between Chance and Thought-Transference in Correspondence of Diagrams" in *Proceedings*, vol. vi, is, I think, our first "control experiment" in judging the effect of chance coincidences, and the result was favourable to telepathy. We have had several similar comparisons of chance and supposed supernormal faculty as regards, e.g. cross-correspondences and book-tests.²

To go back to 1884, Professor Barrett in that year visited Canada and the U.S.A. in connection with the Meeting of the British Association at Montreal. With his usual enthusiasm and energy he succeeded in creating some interest in psychical research, and addressed meetings at Philadelphia, Boston and also Montreal. As a result an American Society was formed in January 1885, Professor William James being a leading member. In 1887 Dr Hodgson who had done so much in connection with the Blavatsky investigation, and with Mr Davey, became its secretary and continued in that position, when in the same year the American Society on its own proposal was merged with and became a Branch of the English Society. The combined societies worked harmoniously together till Dr Hodgson's sudden death in 1905, after which it was thought better that the American Society should resume an independent existence, which it did under the guidance of Professor Hyslop of Columbia University, New York.

When Dr Hodgson became secretary to the American S.P.R. at Boston he almost immediately became interested, under the inspiration of Professor William James, in the trance mediumship of Mrs Piper. The study of this became his predominant interest and work for

¹ Theodore Besterman, "The Psychology of Testimony in relation to Paraphysical Phenomena," *Proceedings*, vol. xl.

² See Miss H. de G. Verrall on "The Element of Chance in Cross-Correspondences" *Journal*, xv. 183, xvi. 34; Mrs Sidgwick, "A Note on Chance in Booktests" *Proceedings*, xxxi. 379; an article on "The Element of Chance in Book-tests" *Proceedings*, xxxiii. 606; Theodore Besterman "Further Inquiries into the Element of Chance in Book-tests" *Proceedings*, vol. xl. And W. H. Salter, "An Experiment in Pseudo-Scripts," *Proceedings*, xxxvi.

the rest of his life. Mrs Piper allowed him to a great extent to manage her sittings for her and arrange who her sitters should be, and he was thus able to keep her trance utterances and her development under more or less regular observation. A fuller record of trance mediumship has probably been published in the case of Mrs Piper than in that of any other trance medium. Beginning with *Proceedings*, vol. vi, there are ten papers, some of them very long, dealing primarily with the exhibition in Mrs Piper's trance of knowledge apparently supernormally acquired, and four papers discussing the published evidence. At the beginning of vol. xxviii is a descriptive list of these fourteen papers. A fifteenth paper occupying the whole of vol. xxviii is intended to throw light on the working of her trance consciousness from a psychological point of view. And in yet another paper in vol. xxxv Mr Trethewey carefully examines the question whether the claim of the Emperor Band of Mrs Piper's Controls to be the same as Mr Stainton Moses's Controls can be substantiated.

Hodgson died quite suddenly in December 1905, in the middle of a game of ball, and his unexpected removal from our sphere was not only a misfortune for our investigations generally, but especially so from the point of view of Mrs Piper's phenomena. For he is known to have had views about their interpretation which he intended to write about, but of which he left no record. We can only say that at the time of his death he held to the conviction, slowly come to and expressed in his second paper about her (vol. xiii), that there was through her, at times, communication with the dead.

We have been following Mrs Piper over many years of the Society's life, and I must now return to the earlier days. *Phantasms of the Living*, by Gurney, Myers and Podmore, and especially Gurney, which sums up the most important results of the Society's earliest work, was, as I have said, published in 1886. In July 1888—the Society's seventh year—an irreparable loss befell it in Gurney's death, causing, as Sidgwick said in a Presidential Address on 16 July 1888 (*Proceedings*, v. 271), a chasm between its past and its future work by "depriving us of the colleague and friend who had so large a part in shaping the lines of this past . . . I shall speak" he continues, "of 'our' work, but it will be present to your minds as to mine how largely this is the work of a vanished hand—a hand whose combined vigour and delicacy, and trained skill and indefatigable industry, we must miss at every turn of the further labour that lies before us. . . ." Gurney was really giving his life to psychical research, treating it as a whole time job. He was delightful to work with, keenly interested practically and theoretically, and he brought to the work, as Myers says in an essay on him and his work (*Proceedings*, v. 371), "a temper of which the leading notes were disinterestedness, precision, sympathy."

Gurney had been Honorary Secretary of the Society from 1883 onwards and also Editor. Myers and Podmore now jointly undertook the duties of the former position, and Sidgwick the Editorship.

The subject of mesmerism or hypnotism was, it will be remembered, one of those the Society set out to examine, and this, on the psychological side, Gurney had made his own. Some eight papers by him concerned with hypnotism will be found in *Proceedings*, vols. ii, iii, iv and v, and his work on the subject was original and much appreciated. I do not think Gurney hypnotised his subjects himself. Certainly he did not generally do so, but entrusted the actual hypnotising to Mr G. A. Smith (for some time his private secretary) while he himself directed and observed the experiments. Mr Smith, when we first knew him, used to give successful public entertainments as a mesmerist, obtaining subjects by simply inviting people in the audience to come on to the platform to assist. He thus got into touch with young men suitable both for Gurney's experiments in hypnotism, and for thought-transference experiments.

Entertainments such as Mr Smith's were not uncommon in those days, though now I think entirely abandoned, hypnotism being quite properly no longer regarded as a subject to play with. It is fortunate, however, that in the eighties and early nineties, it was more possible through these entertainments than now to find healthy people hypnotisable and available for telepathic experiments. Without them I do not think we could have done as much as was done for psychical research, though whether hypnosis is in itself a condition favourable to telepathic receptiveness, or whether it merely prevents boredom and inattention in a series of monotonous experiments, I do not know.

Before the end of the last century hypnotism had passed from the hands of the S.P.R. to those of the medical profession, and we as a Society have done little systematic work on it since then. It was of course, however, treated of by Myers in his book *Human Personality*, and we have published in *Proceedings* various interesting papers and reviews concerning it by, e.g. Dr Milne Bramwell in vol. xii and by Dr T. W. Mitchell in vol. xxiv.

I think the so-called *Census of Hallucinations* may be regarded as the next big piece of work undertaken under the auspices of the Society. The authors of *Phantasms of the Living* had felt it necessary in arguing against the theory of chance-coincidence as an explanation of apparitions *prima facie* veridical, to try to estimate the proportion of the population which has the experience of seeing a recognised apparition and the proportion of these cases in which the apparition was veridical. In order to arrive at this Gurney himself attempted a census and succeeded in obtaining answers from about 5700 persons as to whether they had ever seen an apparition. But since

veridical apparitions are rare and 5700 was too small a number of answers from which to draw inferences directly as to the proportion of apparitions which are veridical, Gurney had wished that a more extensive inquiry should be undertaken, and this was accordingly started in April 1889 (see *Journal* for April 1889). It was sanguinely hoped by the promoters of this effort that 50,000 answers might be obtained. But statistical investigations of this kind are more difficult and more laborious than the committee had realised, and in the end owing to the reluctance of some to undertake the trouble of collecting and of others to give information, they had to be content with 17,000 answers collected by 410 collectors.

In August 1889 there was an International Congress of Experimental Psychology at Paris, under the Presidency of Professor Ribot and with Professor Richet as secretary, in which Members of the S.P.R. took part. The Congress interested itself in the proposed census, and under its influence it was decided to widen the scope of the inquiry and bring out other facts which the investigation might reveal about hallucinations, besides the numerical relation between those that are veridical and those that are not. It was also decided that the inquiry should be international, and Sidgwick was charged by the Congress with the general superintendence of the investigation.

In 1892 there was again a Congress of Experimental Psychology, held this time in London, and to this Congress Sidgwick was able to present in an abridged form part of the report on the results of the census. But it was not till 1894 that the final and complete report could be published in *Proceedings*, where it occupied the greater part of vol. x. The cause of delay will be appreciated when it is remembered that among the 17,000 answers to the census question, 2,272 were in the affirmative, and that each of these affirmative answers had to be scrutinised as carefully as possible, and a large proportion of the informants and collectors corresponded with and interviewed concerning them. A good deal was also done in comparing census cases with experiences otherwise brought to our notice. I venture to think that any one interested in hallucinations, veridical or otherwise, will find the report well worth study. I need hardly add, that the conclusion already arrived at in *Phantasms of the Living*, "that between deaths and apparitions of the dying person a connection exists which is not due to chance alone" is fully confirmed.

It was in 1897 (*Proceedings*, vol. xiii) that Sir William Barrett published the first part of his study on the so-called divining-rod—the discovery of underground water and metals, etc., by dowsing. The second part followed in *Proceedings*, vol. xv. There had been interesting papers on the subject in volume ii by Professor W. J. Sollas (as a geologist) and by Mr E. R. Pease and Mr E. Vaughan

Jenkins, but Barrett's two papers give a comprehensive account of the subject historically, experimentally and practically. He does not profess to have as yet furnished a complete explanation of the process from a psychical point of view, though he inclines to think that the dowser acquires by clairvoyance his knowledge of the situation of the water sought. At the end of his life—he died in May 1925—he revised, with the assistance of Mr Theodore Besterman, the substance of these two papers, which, with additional matter, were published after his death in a book entitled *The Divining-Rod: an Experimental and Psychological Investigation*, London 1926. His interest in psychical research was widespread, and something from his pen may be found in our *Proceedings* concerning almost every class of subject that the Society has investigated, but it was dowsing to which he had, I think, devoted most time and attention, making the subject his own, and to the end he retained the view that clairvoyance of some sort was probably the explanation.

The turn of the century was a sad epoch for the Society owing to the death in August 1900 of Henry Sidgwick, its first President and constant leader and adviser, and the death in January 1901 of Frederic Myers, its honorary secretary and its President at the time of his death. Myers's zeal and energy, his remarkable powers of exposition and readiness in speech, had been an invaluable asset to the Society, never replaced. He had the subjects of our investigation so thoroughly in his mind, and I may say at his finger ends, that he could at a moment's notice give an interesting discourse on almost any department of our work. The main results of his studies have, of course, been published in his book *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, which fortunately he left in an advanced state for publication. There was, however, still a good deal to do in detail, and the book did not actually appear before 1903. When it did it made a greater impression on the public than probably anything hitherto published in our subject had done. The first edition of 1,000 copies was exhausted, I believe, within a week or two of publication, and it undoubtedly gave a great impetus to our work.¹

Myers's work as honorary secretary was carried on with energy and efficiency by his fellow honorary-secretary, Mr J. G. Piddington. Miss Alice Johnson had been Editor of *Proceedings* and *Journal* from June 1899, and with their help the Society passed safely through the crisis.

But it was most fortunate for us that Sir Oliver Lodge at that critical moment consented to accept the Presidency, which he re-

¹ Recently a Myers Memorial Lecture has been subscribed for and instituted in honour of Myers. Its endowment enables the Council to arrange for a lecture periodically, and from time to time to make grants for research work in connection with it (see *Journal*, xxvii. 21-2).

tained for three years. It is, I think, largely to his influence and the trouble he took at that time and since to keep us together, and stimulate, and himself contribute to, the Society's work, that we owe our continued prosperous existence to the present date.

In 1898 Myers had become acquainted with Mr and Mrs Edmond Thompson. She had psychic powers and was a trance medium, in some respects like Mrs Piper, but never a professional medium. Being interested, however, in spiritualism, she was willing to give sittings for investigation to suitable persons personally introduced to her, and some of their records are published in *Proceedings*, vol. xvii, where may be found papers by six different witnesses¹ with an introductory one by Sir Oliver Lodge. A further long and important paper by Mr Piddington "On the Types of Phenomena displayed in Mrs Thompson's Trance" will be found in *Proceedings*, vol. xviii. These papers are a valuable contribution to any study of trance-mediumship.

It was a few weeks after Myers's death that Mrs A. W. Verrall succeeded in cultivating in herself the power of automatic writing, in which she had previously failed. An account by herself of her development of automatism up to the end of 1904 and her relations to other automatists occupies the whole of *Proceedings*, vol. xx. Mrs Verrall's success was followed by that of others who with her formed, from the investigator's point of view, a sort of group. There was her daughter, now Mrs W. H. Salter; there was for a short time Mrs "Forbes" (pseudonym) a friend of hers and of Myers; Mrs Holland (pseudonym) who had not known Myers or his friends, but whose interest in the subject had been stirred by his book *Human Personality* and who put herself into communication with Miss Alice Johnson, then secretary of the Society; Mrs Willett (pseudonym), a very important member of the group, and also the "Macs" (pseudonym), strangers to us all, who had been obtaining automatic script on their own account and were drawn into the group in 1908 through reading Miss Johnson's first report on Mrs Holland's script in *Proceedings*, vol. xxi. This induced a change in the character of their own script, which then instructed them to send it to Mrs Verrall, whom they did not know. After a little hesitation they did so, with striking results (see *Proceedings*, vol. xxix). Mrs Wilson came into the group through trying telepathic experiments with Miss Verrall. Then in 1912 Mrs "King" (pseudonym for Dame Edith Lyttelton) developed automatism after the death of her husband, the Right Hon. Alfred Lyttelton, and a little later one or two others also joined. Joined, however, is hardly the right word, for the group has no cohesion. The members of it

¹ Myers, Dr F. van Eeden, Mr Piddington, Hodgson, Miss Alice Johnson, Mrs A. W. Verrall.

do not all know each other, nor have they met as a group. Nor are there any special arrangements about writing. As a rule each automatist writes as the inclination comes to her; sometimes with a friend present and recording, but more often alone. With a recorder present the automatic communication is sometimes spoken instead of written.

It was noticed very shortly by the investigators that a sort of telepathic connection seemed to exist between the scripts of the group—a tendency to refer independently to the same topic either literally or cryptically. This we speak of as cross-correspondence. Of course care was taken that members of the group should not see each other's scripts, or that when, for any reason they did, an exact record should as far as possible be kept of what each had seen. The general effect produced by study of these scripts is that some intelligence behind the communications is acting by design and to some extent inspires the scripts though not always able to avoid confusion. The supposed communicator when named, as he often is in the earlier years of these scripts, is usually Myers or Gurney, though other names appear.

Unfortunately much of the contents of these scripts is too private for present publication, but a good deal has been published and may be studied in one or more papers in each of the following volumes of *Proceedings*: xx, xxi, xxii, xxiv, xxv, xxvi, xxvii, xxix, xxxiii, xxxvi. Among these papers are to be found general reports on the scripts of some of the automatists in question, particular instances of cross-correspondence (including experimental attempts at cross-correspondence between the group and Mrs Piper), also reports on communication on special subjects, as "Some Recent Scripts affording Evidence of Personal Survival" in vol. xxvii; "The Ear of Dionysius" in vol. xxix; "Forecasts in Scripts concerning the War," vol. xxxiii; "One Crowded Hour of Glorious Life" and "The Master Builder," both these last in vol. xxxvi. These scripts are very full of literary allusions, the writers being cultivated persons with strong literary interests. All the members of the group make a practice of sending their scripts to Mr Gerald Balfour or Mr Piddington, by whom they are carefully studied and annotated and preserved.

Of late years the rate of reception and number received has much diminished. Mrs Verrall, from whom many scripts came, died in 1916, and other members of the group have ceased writing automatically. Others write but seldom, though the receipt of further scripts from them, even after long intervals, would not surprise the investigators. The evidence from the whole set of scripts of this group on the side of survival and of communication at times between the living and the dead, is certainly strong—I think the strongest we have published. I believe this is felt by all who have studied them

with care. But it would be stronger for the public if we could publish the whole.

We have another automatist among our workers—Mr S. G. Soal—whose script shows no connection with that of the group of whom I have been speaking. A report by himself and Mr W. H. Salter on his automatic scripts purporting to be inspired by Margaret Veley, a poet and novelist of some fifty years ago, which are to a considerable extent verifiable and true, is published in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxviii. Mr Soal had previously published elsewhere, under the name of Mr V, script purporting to come from Oscar Wilde. Of this a review entitled "The Oscar Wilde Scripts" will be found in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxiv.

To return to trance mediums. The last I spoke of at any length was Mrs Thompson. More recently much study has been given to the mediumship of Mrs Osborne Leonard and various papers on the subject have been published by the S.P.R. The first paper published was an important study and record of a series of sittings with her by Miss Radclyffe Hall and Una, Lady Troubridge, in *Proceedings*, vol. xxx. There have been further general reports on sittings with her in vols. xxxii and xxxvi by Mrs Salter. There have also been papers concerning her on "The *Modus Operandi* in Mediumistic Trance" by Una, Lady Troubridge in *Proceedings*, vols. xxxii and xxxiv and by Mr Drayton Thomas in vol. xxxviii, and on "Some Incidents at Sittings with Mrs Leonard which may throw light on the *modus operandi*" by Mrs Salter, *Proceedings*, vol. xxxix.

There has also been a good deal of investigation as to the evidence for book-tests, which are rather a speciality of Mrs Leonard's mediumship. In a typical book-test the Communicator will tell the sitter to look on a specified page of a book, in a particular place on a certain shelf in a room, perhaps unknown to either medium or sitter, and then to find a reference to some specified subject. If this turns out to be correct and the coincidence is not due to chance, it would seem to afford evidence of knowledge acquired neither through the senses nor telepathically, but clairvoyantly. This is important, as definite evidence of the reality of clairvoyance has hitherto been scanty. Unfortunately the book-tests given do not always turn out to be fully or even partially correct, and they are apt to exhibit a certain vagueness which makes it difficult to estimate their value, especially as the probability of success cannot be calculated with exactness as in the case of the guessing of cards or numbers. An examination of book-tests (by me) appears in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxi, and as already said (p. 10 footnote) two papers on the "Element of Chance in Book-tests" have appeared in vols. xxxiii and xl. The last of these, by Mr Theodore Besterman, is the more extensive and ambitious, but both bring out a result against chance-coincidence being a sufficient explanation of Mrs Leonard's book-tests.

In *Proceedings*, vol. xxxv, is an important report sent to us by Mr S. G. Soal, on a series of communications received by him through a professional medium, Mrs Blanche Cooper, with whom he had sittings at the British College for Psychic Science. An interesting feature in this series is that one of the alleged Communicators, an old schoolfellow of Mr Soal's, communicating as a dead man, proved afterwards to have been alive all the time, though entirely unconscious of any communication. Moreover at the *séances* veridical statements were made concerning this gentleman's past, his present, and even his future, e.g. the arrangement of a house not then in his possession. There are other interesting experiments and observations described by Mr Soal in the course of this paper.

A series of 142 sittings were held under arrangements made by the Society with another trance medium, Mrs Warren Elliott in 1926, and were reported on by Mr H. F. Saltmarsh in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxix. "The Primary object of the experiment was to attempt to throw light on the psychological mechanism of trance mediumship." The report is of great interest, and for the possibility of carrying the experiment through, the Society owes gratitude not only to a generous anonymous donor, but to Mrs Warren Elliott herself for her willing co-operation. In the course of the experiment sittings were held with a view to eliciting communications for various particular persons who were not however present and were not aware that the sitting was taking place. No one was present except the medium and a notetaker. To make a link with the absent sitter, an object belonging to him or her was brought by the notetaker, who, however, was unaware to whom it belonged. The possibility of direct thought-transference with anyone present was thus eliminated.

In this connection "The Tony Burman case" by Miss Nea Walker, also in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxix, should be considered.

Among the departments of psychical research which in 1882 our Society proposed to investigate, that of the physical phenomena of spiritualism is the one as to which, notwithstanding repeated efforts, least evidence of genuineness has, as it seems to me, been found in this or in any other country. But I must briefly refer to our experience in this department. I have already mentioned the evidence obtained in the early days of the Society concerning Eglinton, the slate-writing medium, and the conclusion that his performances were tricks.

In 1891 we became acquainted with a gentleman—a near relation of friends of some of us—who professed to be able to levitate tables without touching them except on the upper surface. We took a good deal of trouble about the case, which ultimately proved to be one of pure deception throughout. The supposed medium was a professional man in a good position and there was no pecuniary motive to deceive. I fancy it amused him at first. Sidgwick gave an account of the

case at a meeting of the Society in 1894 under the title "Disinterested Deception", which is printed in the *Journal*, vi. 275.

Deception by friends and acquaintances is of course peculiarly painful, but apart from cases of the "poltergeist" order where the performers are often children and sometimes not quite normal ones, we have not encountered much trickery¹ in the course of our investigations except with professional mediums for physical phenomena, among whom it is unfortunately common. Several cases of detection have been recorded in the *Journal*. See *Journal*, xii (1905-6), for exposures of Chambers, of Craddock and of Eldred; *Journal*, xiv, for exposure of Carancini—an Italian medium whom we invited to this country for investigation; and *Journal*, xv, for an exposure at our Rooms of Charles Bailey, an Australian medium. Mr Everard Feilding, in *Journal*, xii. 162, described under the title "The Haunted Solicitor, an unfinished comedy", a case which he carefully examined on the spot and spent considerable time over, and afterwards reported at a meeting of the Society. He classes it as a poltergeist case, but grown-up people were concerned and trickery and conspiracy there certainly were.

"A Report on Various Spiritualist Phenomena" by the late Lieut-Colonel Taylor, for long a Member of the S.P.R. Council, was contributed by him to *Proceedings*, vol. xix. It is an account of six incidents at sittings between 1884 and 1904 of which four include raps or movements of objects. They are selected from his own experiences and were regarded by him as genuine, and the account is based on notes written by him within a few hours of the incidents. Colonel Taylor, who died in 1911, was a good observer, and this report, like the first report by Mr Feilding and Mr Baggally on Eusapia Palladino to which I am about to refer, must weigh on the positive side for the genuineness of some physical phenomena of spiritualism.

In 1906 Miss Alice Johnson, then our Research Officer, visited Denver in the U.S.A. at the invitation of Dr Gower, a member of the Society, who resided there, in order to have a series of sittings in a private circle of friends of his, who received her most hospitably. The phenomena, movements of tables without apparent contact and raps, which she witnessed were interesting and striking, but less so, in Dr Gower's view, than what he had witnessed with the same friends in previous years. Miss Johnson unfortunately did not

¹ There was one case published in *Phantasms of the Living* later discovered to have been fictitious (see *Proceedings*, vol. xiv 14). There is also a rather heartless and elaborate case of fictitious messages in a private circle (see *Journal*, xxi 306) under the title "A Fictitious Communicator." The case was reported to us, and members of our staff were able to assist the victims to discover and expose the deception.

witness them under what seemed to her crucial conditions. She believed in the honest intentions of all concerned, but in conclusion could only say that it appeared to her "impossible to form any decided judgment on the facts . . . and unprofitable to speculate further about them till we can obtain more decisive evidence one way or the other". For her report on the whole case see *Proceedings*, vol. xxi. 94.

In 1894 Eusapia Palladino was a leading medium on the continent, especially for telekinesis. Professor Richet invited Sir Oliver Lodge and Myers to meet her at his house in the south of France, and Sir Oliver obtained phenomena (described in the *Journal*, vol. vi) in circumstances which convinced him they were genuine, and I think he has never wavered since. Professor Sidgwick and I joined the party later and what we witnessed was certainly remarkable, though there were suspicious circumstances. Myers invited Eusapia to Cambridge for a series of sittings in 1895, but practically all that happened at these was detected as trickery (see *Journal*, vol. vii), and for a time we experimented no more with her.

Sidgwick, all the time he had to do with the Society, took the view that if a medium were found consciously tricking no further investigation with him or her should take place, its continuance being a direct encouragement to fraud and a hindrance to progress in research. However, this view was not shared by all Members of the Council, and reports of Eusapia from abroad continuing favourable, a Committee consisting of Mr Everard Feilding and Mr Baggally (both Members of the S.P.R. Council), and Mr Carrington (officially connected with the American Society) was sent in 1908 to Naples, where Eusapia lived, to look into the matter again. They had a series of sittings under what they considered very satisfactory conditions. Their favourable and able report was published in *Proceedings*, vol. xxiii. Unfortunately for Eusapia's reputation, however, some further sittings conducted by Mr Feilding and others at Naples in 1910 were again apparently pure trickery (see *Proceedings*, vol. xxv).

In 1920 an attempt was made to get satisfactory evidence with the celebrated French materialising medium called Éva C. (otherwise Marthe Béraud). She and the lady with whom she lived, Mme Bisson, were invited to London by the Society, and she gave us a series of forty sittings, reported on in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxii. (An account of the previous history of Marthe Béraud based on the many published reports of her materialisations, etc., was compiled by Mrs Salter, then Miss Verrall, and published in *Proceedings*, vol. xxvii). The Society's own investigations were unfortunately inconclusive. The phenomena observed were, so the investigating committee reported, "few in number and poor in quality", and, they say, "If we had not been

acquainted with the work of previous investigators,¹ we might have felt inclined to draw negative conclusions from our own observations" (*Proceedings*, vol. xxxii 332).

In the *Journal*, xx, is the report received from Mr Harry Price of his well-known experiment with Mr Hope the "spirit-photographer" at a sitting held at the British College of Psychic Science. An outcome of this and of the discussion that followed, was the offer by Mr H. W. Pugh in June 1922, to contribute £100 towards an investigation by the Society of Mr Hope under conditions laid down by him (Mr Pugh). Mr Hope and his coadjutor, Mrs Buxton (called "the Crewe circle") consented. All seemed satisfactorily arranged. Mr Hope's representatives on the investigating committee had been selected and an agreement drawn up and signed by them, when the Crewe circle withdrew from the arrangements and the investigation therefore never took place (see *Journal*, xxi. 111.)

In 1924 the Austrian medium, Willy Schneider, was invited to London and gave twelve sittings for telekinetic phenomena, under the management of Dr Woolley and Mr Dingwall, in the S.P.R. *séance*-room. They were reported on by Mr Dingwall in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvi. Phenomena occurred at eight of the twelve sittings, some of which, though they were inferior in quality to those previously witnessed by Mr Dingwall in Dr von Schrenck-Notzing's laboratory at Munich (*Proceedings*, xxxvi. 33), impressed the experimenters as normally inexplicable.

Another investigation of physical phenomena carried out in our *séance*-room by Dr Woolley and Mr Dingwall was with Mr Janus Fronczek of Poland. The report on this is also published in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvi, and must be regarded as negative. I need not here go into details.

In the winter of 1924-25, Mr Dingwall went to Boston, U.S.A., for the purpose of having a series of sittings with Mrs Crandon (*Margery*). His going was generously facilitated by Mrs Augustus Hemenway of Boston. He had twenty-nine sittings, carefully described in his report in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvi. His failure, however, to obtain phenomena under conditions as good, in his opinion, as those obtained, e.g. in the case of Willy Schneider, evidently left him with grave doubts as to the genuineness of the performance (*Proceedings*, xxxvi. 153).²

¹ [Recent disclosures, it must be remarked, have made it appear that less weight can be attached to the work of these investigators than was thought at the time this report was published.]

² *A propos* of this it may be mentioned that in 1929 Dr Crandon borrowed our *séance*-room for purposes of demonstration of some of *Margery's* phenomena. Our honorary research officer, Dr Woolley, attended the demonstrations as an observer only. It was proposed to obtain finger prints in dental wax of

In 1928 Mr Besterman undertook a four months' tour chiefly in central Europe, largely financed by an anonymous donor, for the purpose of observing mediums and making acquaintance with investigators. His report will be found in *Proceedings*, xxxviii. 409-80. Among the fourteen mediums or psychics on whom he reported several professed to be mediums for physical phenomena, but of these he only had the opportunity of observing sufficiently to report in the case of three—two mediums at Budapest and the well-known Frau Maria Silbert of Graz—and unfortunately in each case what he observed seemed definitely to prove trickery.

I think this completes the list of investigations into the physical phenomena of spiritualism which have been described in our *Proceedings* or *Journal*. But of course there have been other attempts by members of the Council or officers of the Society, or others, too inconclusive or futile to be worth printing accounts of. I do not wish to give the impression that everything we hear about is published. I am afraid that as it is many will feel that the time, trouble and expense involved in examining this class of phenomena has left us very much in the same position regarding it as we were fifty years ago. There are now, as there were then, a few observations recorded where it is difficult to believe that the investigators were deceived, and many where deception or the attempt to deceive is practically certain. The methods now employed by mediums for physical phenomena are no doubt somewhat different from what they were in the early days of the Society, but any change is not, I think, in the direction of making satisfactory investigation easier.

A laborious line of investigation to which much time and trouble has recently been devoted, is what we may call mass-experiments—intended in the first place to discover whether such psychic faculties as telepathy and clairvoyance are at all widely distributed in however slight a degree, and in the second place possibly to reveal good percipients.

An experiment of this kind in telepathy was made by Dr Woolley with the kind assistance of the B.B.C. on 16 February 1927, and is described in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxviii under the title "The Broadcasting Experiment in Mass Telepathy". He assembled a small group of agents at the Society's office who endeavoured to transmit telepathically ideas and images selected by him, and listeners-in were asked to record what ideas came to them, and post the record to

deceased or absent persons. *Margery's* forearms were bound to her chair by a method carefully described, but Dr Woolley's observation, and subsequent experiments with Mrs Brackenbury acting the part of medium, showed that the method of controlling the arms used was less effective than it was supposed to be, and in fact would not have prevented the handling by the medium of objects on the table (*Proceedings*, xxxix. 359 ff.).

the Society. Sir Oliver Lodge acted from the B.B.C. office as announcer to inform the listeners when each attempt at transmission was beginning. The number of items which the agents endeavoured to transmit was five, looked at successively at intervals of five minutes. The number of listeners who sent in reports of their impressions was 24,650. Unfortunately the result must, on the whole, be regarded as negative—that is as not furnishing evidence of widespread telepathic faculty under the given conditions. It has, however, revealed some interesting results from a psychological point of view, *e.g.* as regards number habits.

What may be regarded as a continuation of the “broadcasting” experiment has been carried out by Mr S. G. Soal (see “Experiments in Supernormal Perception at a Distance”, *Proceedings*, vol. xl) assisted by Mr and Mrs Fernald, Professor and Mrs Mackenzie, Mr Odell, Miss Carruthers and others too numerous to be named here. To begin with, he selected those who seemed most promising as percipients among those who had sent in replies in the broadcasting experiment. For these experiments and a discussion of various previous experiments, see Part I of Mr Soal’s paper. After this first year of experiment he decided to widen the scope and succeeded in arranging to work with some 579 percipients. “No such body of percipients has ever in the history of psychical research taken part in experiments extending over such a prolonged period as six months,” Mr Soal tells us. The subjects to be transferred were now more-over limited to material adapted to statistical computation. Unfortunately, though in both parts of Mr Soal’s experiments there was a small residuum of results suggestive of supernormality, the coincidences obtained were not sufficiently striking or detailed to compel belief in the operation of a supernormal faculty. Investigations of this kind are very laborious and time-taking, and it is therefore the more disappointing that the result of the inquiry should be negative. It must not be supposed, however, that the work done is useless. The negative answer to the inquiry is itself of course of great importance, and Mr Soal’s careful study and analysis suggest various points of psychological interest.

Miss Ina Jephson has attempted similar mass experiments in clairvoyance and published an interesting paper on them in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxviii. There appeared to be some success, but as she is carrying the experiments further under different conditions I need not go into particulars now.

Reports of experiments such as these do not provide light reading or thrilling sensations; but they are obviously of great importance because of the light they throw, or may throw, on the problems before us—and much more light than we yet have is required before we can claim to understand, *e.g.* either telepathy or clairvoyance, and

the conditions under which they occur. If knowledge reaches an automatist (or shall we say more generally a sensitive ?) supernormally, how and whence does it come ? We have made some progress. We have, I think, convinced most of those who have really studied the evidence we have collected, that telepathy exists. That is a very big step. But it may be a long time before we can decisively take the next step, whatever that may be, and in the meanwhile we can only go on examining and analysing any facts and experiences, spontaneous or experimental, that come our way, and be cautious in adopting hasty assumptions to explain them. There is comparatively little of theory in our publications so far, and general philosophical speculation is, I think, almost confined to some of our Presidential Addresses.

We are proud of our Presidents and have been fortunate in the men who have honoured our Society by presiding over it. I will not give a complete list but may say that besides those I have already mentioned as founders, we have had Professor Balfour Stewart, F.R.S., the late Lord Rayleigh, O.M., F.R.S., Sir William Crookes, O.M., F.R.S., Sir Oliver Lodge, F.R.S.—all distinguished in physical science ; the late Earl of Balfour, K.G., O.M., Professor William James, Professor Henri Bergson, and Dr F. C. S. Schiller among philosophers ; Professor Charles Richet, and Professor Hans Driesch among biologists ; and Professor William James, Dr William McDougall and Dr T. W. Mitchell among psychologists. And as many others important in various ways and all helpful in our work and interested in the Society. All the Addresses they delivered will be found in our *Proceedings*.

It will be realised by anyone conversant with our *Proceedings* and *Journal* that in this brief account of the history and activities of the S.P.R. I have given a general sketch rather than any complete story. Thus I have omitted mention of many important workers and important papers.¹

¹ For instance I have said nothing about crystal-gazing—an important subject because it appears to be, with some people, a ready method of inducing hallucinatory visions which may turn out to be telepathic or clairvoyant (see a paper by Miss X, Miss Goodrich Freer, *Proceedings*, vol. v and other references, especially by Andrew Lang). Nor again have I referred to phenomena of Multiple Personality (see the Ansel Bourne case by Hodgson, *Proceedings*, vol. vii ; a paper by Dr Morton Prince, *Proceedings*, vol. xv and by Dr T. W. Mitchell, *Proceedings*, vol. xxvi). The subject of the "Appreciation of Time by Somnambules" experimented on by Professor Delboeuf and Dr T. W. Mitchell (*Proceedings*, vol. xxi) and others, is also interesting. And I have not mentioned Mr A. T. Fryer's account of the Welsh Revival (*Proceedings*, vol. xix) nor a study of dreams by Dr F. van Eeden (*Proceedings*, vol. xxvi) and papers by others on this subject, and by Mrs Leaning (*Proceedings*, vol. xxxv) on hypnagogic phenomena. And there are other important papers, long and short, in *Proceedings* and *Journal* which might have been mentioned. I have

My reason for such omissions is merely that one cannot within reasonable bounds call attention to everything, and my selection has been roughly guided by the list of subjects for investigation published in our early circulars. Nor do I profess even within that list of topics to have called attention to all that we have published. I shall feel that it has been worth while compiling this summary if it should lead any one interested in our subjects to explore the information and discussion concerning them to be found in our *Journal* and *Proceedings*, and especially if it should lead to any one pursuing any branch of investigation further. I think I may say without boasting that our *Proceedings* will stand examination. The reader will very seldom find that a statement or judgment has been published which afterwards has had to be withdrawn; for we have always tried to be careful and cautious both in accepting facts and drawing inferences, and have endeavoured to make each step secure as we go along. Of course similar care is wanted in all scientific work, but ours has special difficulties of its own. We are pioneers sailing as it were on an uncharted sea and liable at any moment to come on hidden difficulties and obstacles. And one of these is the apparent rarity of the human subjects who possess the psychic faculties we are trying to investigate. This makes it very difficult to repeat observations or experiments as much as is required to confirm them and to enable us to understand them better than we do.

My friends tell me that I ought not to end my tale without saying what impression this retrospective survey of the Society's fifty years of life and work—work in which I have shared—produces on my own mind. I may say at once without hesitation that I feel now as I felt when I first engaged in it, before the foundation of the Society, that ours is some of the most important work in which we can engage for the extension of knowledge and the benefit of mankind. And it is work in which the support and help of the Society has been and is of great value, for it acts as a centre through which interest in the subject may spread and knowledge of it accumulate. Some complain that our progress is slow. The term is relative and we can certainly imagine progress quicker, but whether we ever had reason to expect it to be quicker considering the obstacles that beset investigation is another question.

I think it is probable that if more people of sense and intelligence tried what they can do, more cases of psychic faculty, *e.g.* telepathy, might be observed, and more learnt about conditions favourable to it. There are indications, I think, that telepathy is, as it were, the also not mentioned a number of papers and reports relating to alleged supernatural phenomena among Eastern and uncivilized peoples; a list of these is given in *Proceedings*, xxxviii. 222.

key, or a key, to other branches of our research. If for instance there is, as I believe, occasional communication of an evidential kind between the living and the dead—and some good evidence supporting this has been published in our *Proceedings*—it is probably telepathic. Clairvoyance again—that is perception of material objects otherwise than through the senses—is thought by some to be probably akin to telepathy; and of the existence of clairvoyance evidence also seems to be accumulating. If I may be allowed to prophesy, I should say that with patience and perseverance—and little good work has been done in the world without these two qualities—we shall add to the evidence in at least these three departments, namely telepathy between the living (established in my opinion as a fact though there is still much to learn about it), communication with the dead, and clairvoyance, and probably in others.

And I look to our Society to continue this work with courage and hope, undismayed by the difficulties in the way of progress. If it is continued in the same spirit in which the S.P.R. has so far carried it on, valuable success will, I feel sure, be its reward.

After reading the above paper Lord Balfour added: “That concludes the Address of your President of Honour. May I be allowed, before we separate, to add one or two sentences of my own? Some of you may have felt that the note of caution and reserve has possibly been over-emphasised in Mrs Sidgwick’s paper. If so, they may be glad to hear what I am about to say. Conclusive proof of survival is notoriously difficult to obtain. But the evidence may be such as to produce *belief*, even though it fall short of conclusive *proof*. I have Mrs Sidgwick’s assurance—an assurance which I am permitted to convey to the meeting—that, upon the evidence before her, she herself is a firm believer both in survival and in the reality of communication between the living and the dead.”