

## TELEPATHY AND CLAIRVOYANCE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

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### I

THE group of studies which the English call "psychical research" and the Germans "Parapsychologie" has in this country an historical affiliation to classical learning. Among the pioneers who in 1882 founded the Society for Psychical Research the leading spirit was a classical scholar, Frederic Myers; and important contributions were made to the new studies by Andrew Lang, M. A. Bayfield, Mrs. A. W. Verrall, and Professor Gilbert Murray.<sup>2</sup> In these circumstances a question naturally presented itself: did the contemporary phenomena which were now for the first time subjected to serious examination reflect any fresh light upon the field of ancient religious beliefs and practices? The question was raised by Myers in his essay on Greek Oracles,<sup>3</sup> and by Lang in a paper on "Ancient Spiritualism";<sup>4</sup> both writers answered it with a confident—perhaps too confident—affirmative. But since their day there has been little serious attempt to approach the problems of ancient religion from this particular angle. Jeune and obviously second-hand ancient material, torn from its context of thought and interpreted in the light of the author's prepossessions, continues to figure in the various popular and semi-popular "histories of occultism" and the like. On the other hand serious students of ancient beliefs

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Murray was President of the Society in 1915-16; and he acted as percipient in two very remarkable series of telepathic experiments which are reported in its *Proceedings* (vols. xxix and xxxiv).

<sup>3</sup> In Abbott's *Hellenica* (1880).

<sup>4</sup> In *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894).

about the supernormal rarely<sup>5</sup> betray any knowledge of, or interest in, their modern counterparts.

Yet the Myers-Lang method may perhaps have a modest utility. Certainly no one who is familiar with ancient standards of evidence in such matters will expect to find in classical literature confirmation of the authenticity of any type of occurrence which he does not accept as already established by modern investigation. The scientific study of the preconceptions, illusions, false memories, and other factors which tend to vitiate testimony, and the insistence upon such documentation as shall minimize their influence, hardly began before the latter half of the nineteenth century. In antiquity the importance of first-hand documents in any branch of history was notoriously little appreciated; and first-hand ancient accounts of supernormal experiences are of extreme rarity. There is, however, another side to the matter. It may be argued that if a particular supernormal phenomenon, alleged to occur spontaneously among civilized people in recent times, is not attested at other times and places of which we have adequate knowledge, the presumption is thereby increased that it does not occur as alleged, unless it can be shown that its emergence is conditioned by an actual evolutionary change or by a shift in the focus of curiosity, such as might be produced by a new philosophical or religious outlook: thus if no case of telepathy had ever been recorded before, say, 1850, considerable doubt would be thrown on the actuality of its occurrence after that date, unless clear reason could be shown for its remaining so long unnoticed. This consideration has prompted me to attempt a summary examination of ancient beliefs about extrasensory perception.<sup>6</sup>

In attempting to apply to antiquity the critical canon suggested above, it is clear that two cautions must be observed. In the first place, although the surviving ancient literature on divination is in the sum total fairly considerable, we know that it is only a fraction of what once existed. The Stoic school, in particular, accumulated

<sup>5</sup> There are exceptions. Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés*, makes a legitimate and convincing use of modern experiments in "scrying" to elucidate certain features of the ancient mantic practice. An example of the misapplication of modern analogies may be seen in de Jong's interesting but wrong-headed book on the ancient mystery-religions.

<sup>6</sup> I use this term to cover telepathy and clairvoyance, but not precognition.

extensive case-books: Chrysippus wrote two books on divination, another on oracles—in which, says Cicero, he collected innumerable responses, “all with reliable authority and testimony”—and another on dreams, reporting “many detailed dreams”; Diogenes of Seleucia, Antipater, and Poseidonius all wrote on similar topics.<sup>7</sup> In these circumstances the argument from silence is more than usually perilous. And secondly, it is a commonplace of psychical research that supernormal or quasi-supernormal experiences, more than any other class of human happenings, have the chameleon quality: from the background of belief against which they emerge they take so deep a color, not only in tradition but in the experient consciousness itself, that their identity is hard to isolate. Consider, for example, the difficulty of making anything intelligible out of the seventeenth-century witch-trials, relatively recent and relatively well-documented as these are: seen through the medium of a universally accepted belief-pattern, the underlying psychological and objective data are consistently distorted, often beyond recognition. The ancient belief-patterns, though less blindingly uniform, carry similar possibilities of distortion; and their influence is the harder to allow for in proportion as they are less familiar to the modern imagination.

There is no ancient word for telepathy, for clairvoyance, or for extrasensory perception. So far as they were recognized at all, they were embraced in the comprehensive notion of “divination” (“mantikē”) along with retrocognition and precognition;<sup>8</sup> in practice the stress fell overwhelmingly on the last, since divination was popularly valued for its utility, not for its theoretical interest, and his own future usually concerned the inquirer more nearly than other people’s present or past.<sup>9</sup> The ancients subdivided divination, not according to the content supernormally apprehended, but according to the method of apprehension. They distinguished “technical”

<sup>7</sup> Cicero, *de Div.* i. 3. 6; 18. 37; 20. 39. Other references in Zeller, *Philosophie der Griechen*,<sup>5</sup> III. i. 345 sqq.

<sup>8</sup> The typical diviner is Homer’s Kalchas, “who knew things past, present and to come.” But “divination” is often used in a narrower sense, with exclusive reference to the future.

<sup>9</sup> The questions asked of Delphi in Plutarch’s day, “Should I marry?”, “Should I make the voyage?”, “Should I invest the money?”, are probably typical of the average inquirer at all periods, though Plutarch prefers not to think so (*Pyth. orac.* 28). Cf. *def. orac.* 7, Porph., *ad Aneb.* 48, *de Abst.* ii. 52, and the leaden tablets found at Dodona (Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination dans l’antiquité*, ii. 319).

or inductive from "natural" or intuitive divination.<sup>10</sup> Cicero quotes as examples of the former class divining from entrails, the interpretation of prodigies and of lightning, augury, astrology, and divination by lots; to the latter he assigns divination in dreams and in ecstatic states. Apart from certain borderline types, which may have brought visual hallucination or muscular automatism into play,<sup>11</sup> the inductive species of divination are of little concern to the psychical researcher. But he will examine with interest the doctrine of intuitive divination, since some of the best modern evidence for extrasensory perception has been obtained with percipients in abnormal states (hypnosis and "mediumistic" trance), and well-authenticated cases of coincidental dreams are abundant in modern records. What he will chiefly find, however, will be not a theory but a religious belief-pattern—or rather, one belief-pattern superimposed on the remains of another. Trance divination is a vestigial shamanism; and Halliday<sup>12</sup> is doubtless right in regarding the Greek diviner as a shrunken medicine-man, whose gift must at one time have been considered innate, as an element or aspect of his *mana*. But already by Homer's day inductive divination has passed under the control of religion. The diviner, in Halliday's phrase, "holds his gift from God": Kalchas practises an art "granted him by Apollo," and all the great diviners of legend have a comparable status. Later,<sup>13</sup> we find the two branches of intuitive divination similarly organized in the interests of the Olympians: in the main, Apollo takes over the patronage of trance mediumship and his son Asclepius that of the veridical dream, although older powers like Hecate and the Corybantes are still held responsible in popular belief for the more alarming and disorderly sort of manifestations. The supernormal, canalised and controlled, becomes the sensible evidence of the supernatural, and its authenticity is in turn guaran-

<sup>10</sup> Cicero, *de Div.* i. 6. 12. The distinction is as old as Plato (*Phaedrus* 244 B sqq.).

<sup>11</sup> Visual hallucination may have played a part in catoptromancy, lecanomancy, hydromancy (cf. Delatte, *op. cit.*); muscular automatism in the famous alphabetic divination described by Ammianus (xxix. 1 and others (cf. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 316; Halliday, *Greek Divination*, pp. 218-22).

<sup>12</sup> *Greek Divination*, chap. 5.

<sup>13</sup> The reason why intuitive divination figures so little in Homer is presumably that it was still associated with magic and had not yet been incorporated in the Olympian system.

teed by its divine patrons: the Stoics spoke for the mass of men when they proclaimed the mutual interdependence of belief in the gods and belief in divination.<sup>14</sup>

So close an association with religious orthodoxy was naturally unfavorable to the growth of anything like critical study: it explains in particular the paucity of attempts at experimental investigation—what was of God was felt to be better left alone. Nevertheless, it is hardly correct to say, as Edwyn Bevan does,<sup>15</sup> that “the theory of telepathy and thought transference had not occurred to antiquity.” At least one ancient account of divination—that of Democritus, about 400 B.C.—is founded on the notion of a physically mediated telepathy; and there are approaches to the idea in later writers.

Democritus' treatise *On Images*<sup>16</sup> is lost, but an outline of the doctrine which concerns us is preserved by Plutarch.<sup>17</sup> We learn that Democritus, like his successor Epicurus, explained dreams in general by the penetration through the pores of the dreamer's body of the “images” which are continually emitted by objects of all sorts and especially by living persons; he also held (and in this, says Plutarch, Epicurus did not follow him) that the images carry representations of the mental activities, the thoughts, characters, and emotions of the persons who originated them, “and thus charged, they have the effect of living agents: by their impact they communicate and transmit to the recipients the opinions, thoughts, and impulses of their senders, when they reach their goal with the images intact and undistorted.” The degree of distortion which the images suffer in transit depends partly on the weather, partly on the frequency of emission and on their initial velocity: “those which leap out from persons in an excited and inflamed condition yield, owing to their high frequency and rapid transit, especially vivid and significant representations.” This is definitely a theory of telepathy (and clairvoyance, if we extend it to inanimate “senders”), distinct from the complementary doctrine of *divine* images

<sup>14</sup> Cicero, *de Div.* i. 6. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Sibyls and Seers*, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> Diels, *Vors.* 55 B 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Q. Conv.* VIII. x. 2, 734 F (= Diels, *Vors.* 55 A 77). This passage has recently been discussed by Delatte, *Les Conceptions de l'Enthousiasme chez les philosophes présocratiques*, pp. 46 sqq.

which served to explain precognition.<sup>18</sup> The remark that people in a state of excitement make, to use the modern term, the best telepathic "agents" is deserving of notice, since it is confirmed by modern observations: a strikingly large proportion of telepathic dreams and hallucinations are reported as having occurred when the assumed agent was experiencing some physical or mental crisis.<sup>19</sup>—The theory as presented in this passage is concerned only with dreams, but it is probable that its scope was actually wider. Plutarch tells us elsewhere<sup>20</sup> that Democritus explained "the evil eye" on the same principle: the action at a distance is mediated by these same images, charged with a hostile mental content, which "remain persistently attached to the persons victimized, and thus disturb and injure both body and mind." These effects are apparently produced continuously, and not merely in sleep. It should be added that, if we are to believe Antisthenes,<sup>21</sup> Democritus undertook an experimental study of (divine or ghostly) images, sometimes isolating himself for the purpose in desert places and cemeteries: was his choice of desert places dictated by a realization of the difficulty which still confronts the student of "spirit" phenomena—the difficulty of *excluding* telepathy from the living?

An important further step towards the naturalization of the supernatural was taken by Aristotle, who rejected altogether inductive divination<sup>22</sup> and attributed the intuitive variety to an innate capacity of the soul.<sup>23</sup> In the treatment of veridical dreams<sup>24</sup> he is more cautious than Democritus. He begins by saying that it is difficult either to ignore the popular belief in mantic dreams or to accept it in the absence of any plausible explanation; for the traditional view that they are sent by the gods must be rejected—if the gods wished to communicate knowledge to men, they would do so in the daytime, and they would choose the recipients more carefully.<sup>25</sup> He accepts as intelligibly precognitive (*a*) dreams convey-

<sup>18</sup> Fragm. 166.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Phantasms of the Living*, i. 229.

<sup>20</sup> *Q. Conv.* v. vii. 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Diog. Laert.* ix. 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Plut. Plac. phil.* v. I; cf. Cicero, *de Div.* i. 3, 5, 33, 72.

<sup>23</sup> *On Philosophy*, fragm. 10 Rose. The passage is strongly Platonic in tone, and less explicitly skeptical than the later *de Div. p. somn.*

<sup>24</sup> *de Div. p. somn.*

<sup>25</sup> For the argument from the low intelligence of "mediums" cf. Cicero, *de Div.* ii. 63. 129 *fin.*; for the other, *ibid.* ii. 61. 126.

ing foreknowledge of the dreamer's state of health, which are reasonably explained by the penetration to consciousness of symptoms ignored in waking hours (cf. the Hippocratic *de victu* iv. 86); (b) dreams which bring about their own fulfilment by suggesting a course of action to the dreamer. There remain veridical dreams about matters too remote in space or time, or too complex,<sup>26</sup> to admit of explanation on these lines; and, in general, those whose fulfilment is independent of the dreamer. He rejects Democritus' view of such dreams, and inclines to fall back on coincidence ("if you shoot often enough, you will hit something sometimes"): failing this, he would prefer a non-atomist wave theory, based on the analogy of disturbances propagated in water or air.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the discussion he speaks as if he had in mind chiefly or exclusively precognition: even those events which are remote in space are not necessarily coincidental in time with the dream to which they correspond. But his wave hypothesis suits telepathy or clairvoyance much better than it does precognition: it is in fact a half-hearted adaptation of Democritus' telepathic theory with the atomist pre-suppositions left out.

The connection between divination and religion, which Aristotle had endeavored to dispense with, was reaffirmed by the Stoics. Poseidonius (about 135-50 B.C.) held that veridical dreams were due, if not to direct intercourse with the gods, then to the community of human with divine reason, or to reading the thoughts of the "daemons" who throng the air beneath the moon.<sup>28</sup> For the existence of a common reason in God and man the Stoics could claim the authority of Heraclitus (about 500 B.C.), and Chalcidius<sup>29</sup> seems to say that Heraclitus explained in this way "visions of unknown places and apparitions of the living and the dead"; but it is hard to tell how much of this passage is genuine Heraclitus and how much is Stoic amplification. Among such bold speculations

<sup>26</sup> 464 a I, 463 b I.

<sup>27</sup> 464 a 6.

<sup>28</sup> Poseidonius *apud* Cicero, *de Div.* i. 30. 64. In the first book of the *de Divinatione* this theory shares the field with the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of divination as an innate faculty of the soul, obscured by its association with the body.

<sup>29</sup> Diels, *Vors.* 12 A 20. Taken seriously by Delatte; but cf. Hamilton in *Classical Review* xlix (1935), p. 17. The theory of divination attributed to Heraclitus appears to be in fact that of Poseidonius (Reinhardt, *Kosmos u. Sympathie*, p. 401).

the humbler psycho-physical problem of extrasensory perception, which Democritus had stated and attempted to solve, naturally enough fell into the background. But there are some indications that Poseidonius' theory of divination (which has come down to us only in a confused and fragmentary form) included, along with much else, the notion of a physically mediated telepathy, if not between the living, at least between the living and the "souls in the air." Plutarch,<sup>30</sup> discussing the "daemonion" of Socrates, propounds the view that spiritual beings in the act of thinking set up vibrations in the air which enable other spiritual beings, and also certain abnormally sensitive men, to apprehend their thoughts. Such vibrations impinge upon us continually, but they can reach consciousness only when the mind is sufficiently calm to detect them, that is, as a rule only in sleep. Reinhardt<sup>31</sup> is probably right in thinking that Plutarch is here making use of Poseidonian ideas. A similar contrast between normal human perception on the one hand and daemonic and mediumistic intuition on the other was found by Cicero in Poseidonius: "as the minds of gods have community of feeling without eyes, ears or tongue . . . so human minds when set free by sleep, or in detached states of excited derangement, perceive things which minds involved with the body cannot see."<sup>32</sup>

Like the modern vibration theories of telepathy, the speculations we have been considering postulate a physical carrier for the mental content communicated. The plausible analogy of wireless telephony was not yet available; but experience offered other seeming analogues. In popular belief every kind of action at a distance was explained by occult emanations proceeding from persons or objects. The most striking and indisputable case of such action was the influence of the magnet upon iron,<sup>33</sup> which had impressed the imagination of Democritus<sup>34</sup> and had been used by Plato to illustrate the communication of poetic inspiration:<sup>35</sup> Quintus Cicero argues that it is no less mysterious and no less certain than divination.<sup>36</sup> And

<sup>30</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 20, 589 B.

<sup>31</sup> *Poseidonios*, pp. 464 sqq.; *Kosmos u. Sympathie*, p. 288 sq.

<sup>32</sup> *de Div.* i. 57. 129.

<sup>33</sup> Pliny, *N. H.* xxxvi. 126.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Delatte, *Conceptions de l'Enthousiasme*, pp. 59 sqq.

<sup>35</sup> *Ion* 533 D sqq.

<sup>36</sup> Cicero, *de Div.* i. 39. 86.



there were other generally accepted examples: do not the phases of the moon work tidal changes in our blood and affect the growth of all living things?<sup>37</sup> and does not "the evil eye" imply a secret emanation from the human eye?<sup>38</sup> Such reflections were generalized in the Stoic and Neoplatonic doctrine of occult "sympathies," which when combined with the notion of a world-soul issued in something like a reinstatement, on a higher philosophical level, of the primitive conception of the world as a magical unity.

For the Neoplatonist the linkage has become nonphysical.<sup>39</sup> The world, says Plotinus,<sup>40</sup> is like one great animal, and its "sympathy" abolishes distance; distant members may affect each other while the intervening portions of the organism are unaffected, "for like parts may be discontinuous yet have sympathy in virtue of their likeness, so that the action of an element spatially isolated cannot fail to reach its remote counterpart." This principle provides a rationale both of prayer and of telergic magic, as Plotinus did not fail to point out (*Enn.* iv. iv. 40-I; iv. ix. 3). It provides also a rationale of what we call telepathy; but to this, so far as I can see, Plotinus nowhere makes an explicit allusion, though certain passages have been interpreted in this sense: he gets no nearer than the remark that *discarnate* souls may be supposed to communicate mutually without speech.<sup>41</sup> Nor did his successors, for all their interest in occult phenomena and in the relationship between mind and body, bestow much attention on extrasensory perception. Outside of metaphysics, Neoplatonism created no new patterns of belief: its concern was to defend old ones by giving them a metaphysical justification.

## II

As the ancients had no name for extrasensory perception, so they practised no systematic observation of cases. The scattered examples which have come down to us are for the most part casually recorded and exceedingly ill evidenced. I propose briefly to review some of them, taking first those associated with oracles.

The most familiar of these is the famous story of the test

<sup>37</sup> Pliny, *N. H.* ii. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Plut. *Q. Conv.* V. vii. 2.

<sup>39</sup> On the difference between Poseidonian and Neoplatonic "sympathy" see Reinhardt, *Kosmos u. Sympathie*, pp. 248 sq., 252 sqq.

<sup>40</sup> *Enn.* iv. iv. 32.

<sup>41</sup> *iv.* iii. 18.

applied by Croesus to Delphi and six other oracles—the earliest example of what would to-day be called an experiment in long-distance telepathy. If Herodotus<sup>42</sup> is to be believed, Croesus had a shrewd appreciation of the conditions to be observed in such experiments: he took adequate precautions to exclude both normal leakage and the operation of chance. His test (as described) contrasts favorably with that attributed by Macrobius<sup>43</sup> to the Emperor Trajan, who sealed up a blank set of tablets and sent it to the oracle of Jupiter Heliopolitanus at Baalbek—an oracle which specialized in reading sealed letters without opening them. Trajan's missive was returned to him with the seal intact, accompanied by a second letter containing the god's answer. When the latter was opened, it in turn proved to contain a blank sheet of papyrus. The skeptic need not hesitate to believe this story; for the useful art of reading sealed letters appears to have been as closely studied in antiquity as in our own day. While Greco-Egyptian magic provided specialized spells for the purpose,<sup>44</sup> simpler ways of performing the feat were likewise known. Hippolytus includes in his curious collection of recipes for parlor tricks (derived, as Wellmann<sup>45</sup> has shown, from earlier pagan sources) several methods of taking a cast of a seal, which when set constitutes a duplicate die; and Alexander of Abonoteichus is accused by Lucian of "working an oracle" by duplicating seals in this fashion. Lucian also knows of the still simpler plan of removing the seal intact with hot needles and later replacing it; and he mentions that yet other devices to the same end have been described by his friend Celsus in his treatise against the magicians.<sup>46</sup> We have here the most obvious explanation both of the Baalbek performance and of the hocus-pocus with a sealed vessel (analogous to modern "slate-writing") which appears to have been practiced at the Apolline oracle of Korope in Thessaly.<sup>47</sup> Hence also, perhaps, if it ever took place, the successful experiment of that Governor of Cilicia who wrote privily on his tablets the question, "Shall I sacri-

<sup>42</sup> i. 47.

<sup>43</sup> *Saturn.* i. 23. 14 sq.

<sup>44</sup> *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, iii, 1. 371; v, 1. 301.

<sup>45</sup> *Die φυσικά des Bolos Demokritos* (Abh. Preuss. Akad. 1928), pp. 64 sqq.

<sup>46</sup> Lucian, *Alex.* 21.

<sup>47</sup> See the interesting inscription published in *Ath. Mitth.* 1882, p. 71, and quoted by Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, iv. 399.

fice to thee a white bull or a black?", sealed them, and sent them by a freedman to the oracle of Mopsus; the freedman, sleeping in the temple, heard in a dream the one word "black."<sup>48</sup>

The occasion of Croesus' test is apparently not the only one on which the Pythia succeeded in "understanding the dumb and hearing the unspoken word": Plutarch, whose evidence has special weight in relation to Delphi, says that "she is accustomed to deliver certain oracles instantly, even before the question is put."<sup>49</sup> A like claim is made by Tacitus for Claros: the priest on consultation days would merely inquire the names of the clients present and then, after retiring to a sacred grotto and there drinking the water of a certain fountain, would give appropriate replies in verse to their unspoken questions.<sup>50</sup> To assess the evidential value of such general statements is hardly possible, but it is unnecessary either to dismiss them as pure fabrications<sup>51</sup> or to assume that the managers of the oracles employed an army of private inquiry agents. If we may judge by the number of living persons who claim to have received relevant "messages" at anonymous sittings with "mediums" previously unknown to them, there is nothing impossible about the feat, whether we explain it by thought-reading, by the will to believe, or by some blend of the two. That the "enthusiasm" of the Pythia and similar personages was at bottom the same psychological condition (when we have allowed for the difference of the organizing belief-pattern) as the modern "mediumistic trance," seems to me reasonably certain: both states are auto-suggestively<sup>52</sup> induced, though not completely dependent on the subject's volition;<sup>53</sup> both are characterized by a temporary but profound disturbance of the sense of identity,<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Plut. *Def. orac.* 45. The story seems to be a temple legend: the speaker in Plutarch's dialogue claims to have heard it when he visited the oracle in question. Cf. Lucian, *Philopseud.* 38.

<sup>49</sup> *de Garrulitate* 20. The ordinary practice at Delphi was to submit written questions, according to a scholiast on Aristophanes (*Plut.* 39).

<sup>50</sup> *Ann.* ii. 54.

<sup>51</sup> This is what Farnell does (*Cults*, iv. 189, 225). But the passage which he quotes from Ovid does not disprove Tacitus' statement: it merely shows that consultation by letter was admissible in lieu of personal attendance.

<sup>52</sup> Since the excavations at Delphi and the publication of Oppé's article (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* xxiv. 214 sqq.), the legend of the Delphic "vapors" may be dismissed as a product of rationalizing theory.

<sup>53</sup> Plut., *Def. orac.* 51, says that "the inspiring force does not affect everybody alike, nor does it always affect the same people in the same way."

<sup>54</sup> The use of the first person in Delphic utterances, even if it became a matter of convention, is intelligible only on the supposition that the god was believed to control the Pythia's vocal organs and use them as his own.

together with strong mental excitement and a claim to supernormal knowledge; and both may be followed by amnesia.<sup>55</sup> Both, one must add, could easily be simulated: but Plutarch's grim story of the contemporary Pythia who began to speak with a hoarse voice and then rushed howling from the sanctuary, became insane, and died,<sup>56</sup> is good evidence that even in the days of the oracle's decadence the disturbance was sometimes genuine.

Oracles were occasionally consulted, as clairvoyants are to-day, concerning the whereabouts of missing objects: thus at Dodona one Agis "consults Zeus Naos and Dione about the rugs and pillows—did he lose them himself or did some outside person steal them?"<sup>57</sup> At oracles where "incubation" (sleeping in the temple) was practiced such questions might be answered in dreams.<sup>58</sup> Three narratives of clairvoyant dreams of this type are included in the Epidaurian temple record. In the first case (no. 24 Herzog) a boy named Aristocritus, from Haliëis, has dived (or fallen) into the sea from a cliff, failed to effect a landing, and disappeared. His father sleeps in the temple, and in a dream Asclepius leads him to a certain spot and shows him that his son is there. Returning home, he identifies the spot, cuts a passage through the rock, and finds the boy on the seventh day (presumably dead, though the record refrains from saying so). In the second story (no. 46) a woman is looking for a treasure concealed by her late husband: the god tells her in a dream that "the treasure will be lying within the lion at noon in the month of Thargelion," and the hoard is eventually found to be buried at the spot where the shadow of a certain stone lion falls at noon at the date mentioned. No. 63 also concerns a missing sum of money, a deposit at Leucas which there is difficulty in tracing: Asclepius in a dream introduces the depositor to the ghost of the deceased trustee, "who revealed the spot, and told him that if he came to Leucas he would get the gold from his (the trustee's)

<sup>55</sup> Amnesia is definitely ascribed by Aristides (xlv. II sq., vol. ii, p. 13 Dind.) to the priestesses at Dodona.

<sup>56</sup> *Def. orac.* 51. I have seen an amateur "medium" break down during trance in a similar way, though without the same fatal results. The change of voice is characteristic also of "mediumistic" possession. For cases of possession terminating in death, see Oesterreich, *Possession*, pp. 93, 118 sqq. (Eng. trans.).

<sup>57</sup> Inscription in Carapanos, *Dodone*, p. 75 (pl. xxxvi. 2).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the dream of Sophocles, in which Heracles revealed the name of the thief who had stolen some of the temple plate (Cicero, *de Div.* i. 25. 54).

sons." To these may be added a case of a different kind, no. 21, where the same (medical) dream is independently dreamt about the same time by a woman at Epidaurus and her daughter (the patient) at Sparta.

Probably few persons to-day would be satisfied with the crude view that the Epidaurian record is a wholesale forgery deliberately produced by the priests, or would assume with some of the earlier commentators that the patients were drugged, or hypnotized, or mistook waking for sleeping and a priest in fancy dress for the divine Healer: an explanation is to be sought rather in the analogy of medieval and modern religious faith-healing and the so-called "medical clairvoyance" of hysterical subjects.<sup>59</sup> But the record is not a first-hand document: Herzog has shown in an admirable study<sup>60</sup> that it is based partly on genuine votive tablets dedicated by patients—which might be elaborated and expanded in the process of incorporation<sup>61</sup>—partly on a temple tradition which had attracted to itself miracle-stories from many sources. Of the stories quoted in the previous paragraph, no. 46 is, as Blinkenberg and Herzog have pointed out, a widely diffused folk-tale which has attached itself to the tradition. On the other hand no. 24 looks like a genuine case: the names and local details are precise, and in fiction the boy would have been found alive. Herzog produces medieval German parallels, and one may add that the employment of clairvoyants to discover missing corpses is common to-day on the Continent. It is not necessary to regard the incident as supernormal: a subconscious inference from indications observed during the earlier search might well emerge in the symbolic form of the veridical dream. No. 21 has a parallel in Pap. Oxy. 1381<sup>62</sup> (second century A.D.), where the Egyptian healing god Imouthes appears simultaneously to the patient's mother in a waking vision and to the patient in a dream. In both stories the narrator's intention is evidently to exclude an inter-

<sup>59</sup> On medical clairvoyance see Myers, *Human Personality*, Appendix V. A. Augustine records an interesting and typical case, *de Gen. ad. litt.* xii. 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidaurus* (Philologus, Supplementband 22, Heft iii).

<sup>61</sup> No. I is a clear case of this (Herzog, p. 71).

<sup>62</sup> Re-edited by Manteuffel, *de Opusculis graecis Aegypti e papyris ostracis lapidibusque collectis* (Warsaw, 1930); translated and discussed in Nock, *Conversion*, pp. 86 sqq. For another story of a simultaneous dream, see Livy, viii. 6; for modern cases, *Journ. S. P. R.* iv. 220 sq.; vii. 104 sqq.; ix. 331 sq., etc.

pretation of the appearance as merely subjective; in both, if we take them as fact, the operation of a common will to healing in parent and child may provide a normal explanation. Finally, no. 63 is explained by Herzog as a folk-tale of the Honest Dead, which must originally have been associated with a necromantic dream-oracle, the mediation of Asclepius being a later addition. He brings it into connection with the story of Periander and Melissa (Hdt. v. 92); with a somewhat similar legend about the Christian Bishop Spyridon (Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 256, etc.); with Varro's<sup>63</sup> story of his uncle Corfidius, who when lying in a state of coma became aware supernormally of his brother's death, at or near the moment of its occurrence, and also of the place where the latter had secretly buried some gold; and lastly with Augustine's<sup>64</sup> story of the young man to whom his father revealed in a dream the whereabouts of a missing receipt. It may, I think, be doubted whether all these tales stand on the same footing. The story of Periander belongs unmistakably to folk-lore, and that of Spyridon to hagiology; but one's uncle is a less likely hero for a purely fictitious romance. We may suspect the "buried gold" as a secondary elaboration derived from a folk-motive, but the remainder of Varro's narrative belongs to a type for which abundant first-hand modern evidence exists, the dream or vision (usually of a near relative) coinciding with the death of the person seen. The experience of Corfidius is curiously like that attributed to the eighteenth-century American Quaker Thomas Say, who when lying comatose and supposedly dead had a clairvoyant apprehension of the deaths of no less than three other persons and of the circumstances attending the end of one of them.<sup>65</sup> In the Epidaurian case, too, secondary elaboration may have been at work on a real dream: that the depositor should dream of finding the trustee dead and recovering his money from the sons, is entirely natural; the only supernormal element lies in the vague words "he revealed the spot," and one must remember that the instability of dream-memories renders them peculiarly liable to unconscious dis-

<sup>63</sup> *Apud* Plin. *N. H.* vii. 177: reproduced in Granius Licinianus, xxviii, p. 7. Flemisch.

<sup>64</sup> *de Cura pro mortuis* II (13).

<sup>65</sup> *Journ. S. P. R.* xiii. 87 sqq. (The story was written down many years later by Say's son.) I am indebted for this and some other parallels to an unpublished thesis by Mr. F. T. Walton.

tortion in the light of waking belief. As for Augustine's story, it is second-hand and anonymous, though related to Augustine *pro certo*. It has, however, a striking recent parallel in the "Chaffin Will case" (*Proc. S. P. R.* xxxvi. 517 sqq.), which has figured in an American court of law and is certainly not a folk-tale. It may be added that Augustine, with characteristic caution and acumen, warns us against assuming too hastily that the source of the supernormal apprehension in such cases is necessarily the deceased person.

If the anecdotes which circulated in the waiting-rooms of oracles carry as a group no very strong conviction of authenticity, it would be futile to seek a possible basis of fact for the cases of extrasensory perception which figure in hagiological romances. We need not linger over the claim of Hermetimus of Clazomenae<sup>66</sup> to be regarded as the first practitioner of "traveling clairvoyance"; or over the sensational feats attributed to Apollonius of Tyana<sup>67</sup> and St. Benedict<sup>68</sup> by their respective biographers. When material of this character is excluded, the remaining evidence of extrasensory perception by private individuals is curiously scanty. Apart from the tradition about Democritus, there is very little trace, save at the crude level of the magical papyri, of any attempt at experiment. Aristotle, however, may have taken some interest in the clinical study of abnormal mental conditions: he is said to have examined for himself a case of catalepsy;<sup>69</sup> and a fragment of his pupil Clearchus<sup>70</sup> represents him as assisting at an experiment in psychic excursion induced during sleep<sup>71</sup> by means of a "magnetic wand." The subject's body appears to have been insensitive during the absence of the "soul," which on its return "relates the details." We are not told what these were, or whether they were subsequently verified; they were probably *not* visions of the other world, since Proclus quotes the

<sup>66</sup> Pliny, *N. H.* vii. 53 (52); Plut. *gen. Socr.* 22; Tert. *de Anima* 44, etc. Lucian, *Musc. Enc.* 7, calls his story a fable.

<sup>67</sup> Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* iv. 12; v. 24; viii. 26 sq.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II, *passim*.

<sup>69</sup> *Fragm.* 42 Rose: perhaps from Clearchus.

<sup>70</sup> *Apud* Procl. in *Remp.* ii. 122. 22 sqq. This story probably comes from Clearchus' dialogue *On Sleep*, where it may have served to introduce a myth: if so, we cannot take it as claiming to be historically true.

<sup>71</sup> Jeanne Croissant, *Aristote et les Mystères*, p. 22, refers to it as a "séance d'hypnotisme." But there is no evidence that the subject was put to sleep by the experimenter.

case not as a parallel to the myth of Er but merely as proving that the soul can leave the body and return to it.

The type of spontaneous case which is most abundant in modern times, viz. dreams or hallucinations coinciding with the death or physical peril of the person seen, is represented in antiquity, so far as my knowledge goes, only by the above-mentioned Corfidius story, by the vision of Sosipatra in Eunapius,<sup>72</sup> by Apollonius' highly questionable vision of the death of Domitian,<sup>73</sup> and by the well-known tale of the Megarian innkeeper.<sup>74</sup> This last hardly merits the attention which historians of psychical research have lavished on it:<sup>75</sup> it is one of those nameless and dateless incidents, painfully familiar to the modern investigator, which are copied, with improvements, from one text-book into another;<sup>76</sup> the version quoted by Suidas from Chrysippus differs widely from Cicero's, to which in turn Valerius Maximus adds a few finishing touches.

More impressive is the case of Sosipatra, a Neoplatonist blue-stocking, who in the midst of addressing a meeting of philosophers abruptly fell silent, and then proceeded to describe an accident which was happening somewhere in the country (we must assume, at the same moment) to a relative and admirer of hers. "What is this? My kinsman Philometor riding in a carriage! The carriage has been overturned in a rough place! His legs are in danger! Oh, the servants have got him out unharmed, except for cuts on the elbows and hands—not dangerous ones. And now he is being carried on a stretcher while he makes a lot of fuss.' That is what she said, and it was so. And so everybody knew that Sosipatra was omnipresent and, as the philosophers say about the gods, a witness of all that happens." It is a pity that this incident rests solely on the authority of Eunapius, a notorious amateur of the miraculous.

There are also a few cases where the issue of a battle is said to have been supernormally apprehended by a distant person before

<sup>72</sup> *Vitae Sophistarum* p. 470 Boiss.

<sup>73</sup> Dio Cassius, 67. 18; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* viii. 26 sqq. Suetonius knows nothing of the story.

<sup>74</sup> Chrysippus *apud* Suid. s.v. *τιμωποῦνται*; Cicero, *de Div.* i. 27. 57; Val. Max. I. 7, ext. 3.

<sup>75</sup> It is gravely discussed by de Boismont, *On Hallucinations*, p. 176 sq.; Flammarion, *Haunted Houses*, pp. 44 sqq.; de Vesme, *Hist. du Spiritualisme Experimentale*, i. 349 sq., etc.

<sup>76</sup> According to Cicero it was "continually quoted by the Stoics."



the news could travel by ordinary means: besides the rumor at Mycale of the victory at Plataea (Hdt. ix. 100), we have the augural divination reported by Livy<sup>77</sup> to have been performed by his friend Gaius Cornelius at Patavium on the day of the battle of Pharsalus (this is transformed by Aulus Gellius<sup>78</sup> into an impressive case of visual clairvoyance); and the auditory hallucination by which John Hyrcanus was apprised of his sons' victory over Antiochus Cyzicenus.<sup>79</sup> The type seems to have been a recognized one by Aristotle's day: his example of an external event apprehended in a veridical dream is a sea-fight.<sup>80</sup>

The most careful and sober descriptions of supernormal occurrences which have come down to us from antiquity are those furnished by Augustine, who deserves a more honorable place in the history of psychological research than any other thinker between Aristotle and Kant.<sup>81</sup> One of his cases has already been quoted. Extrasensory perception may be involved in the following also:<sup>82</sup>

1. A case of apparent telepathic "rapport" between an hysterical patient and a priest who was in the habit of visiting him, being the only person who could keep him quiet during his attacks and persuade him to take nourishment.<sup>83</sup> The priest's home was twelve miles distant from the patient's, and the latter would habitually recognize the moment at which the priest was setting out to visit him, and would describe exactly all the stages of his journey, saying "Now he has got so far! now he has reached the farm! now he is

<sup>77</sup> *Apud Plut. Caes.* 47.

<sup>78</sup> *Noct. Att.* xv. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Josephus, *Archaeol.* xiii. 10 (18), 3, 7 Dind.

<sup>80</sup> *de Div. p. somn.* 463 a 2.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. W. Montgomery, "St. Augustine's attitude to Psychic Phenomena," *Hibbert Journal* xxv. 92 sqq.

<sup>82</sup> I have not included the celebrated story of the two Curmas (*de Cura* 12. 15). Although Augustine obtained the percipient's own story in this case, as well as corroborative testimony from other people, he must have been hoaxed by his informants: for the same tale appears a couple of centuries earlier in Lucian's *Philopseudes*, 25 (and a couple of centuries later in Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, iv. 36). The names are different in the three versions, but the central incident is the same in all, and in all the victim is a smith. I can agree neither with Reitzenstein (*Hell. Wundererzählungen*, 6), who thinks that Augustine made the story contemporary by a "literary artifice"; nor with Rose (*Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* 1926, 13 sq.), who defends its genuineness.

<sup>83</sup> *de Genesi ad litteram* xii. 17 (Migne, xxxiv. 467 sqq.). Augustine calls the patient's malady "fever" as well as "insanity." But the special influence which the priest exercised over him during the attacks points to an illness of mental rather than physical character. For modern parallels see *Phantasms of the Living*, i. 251 sqq.

coming up to the house!" The hysteric was naturally supposed by his friends to be possessed by an unclean spirit, and the spirit got the credit for these "monitions of approach"; but Augustine prudently observes that "he may have been merely mad, and the possession an inference from the powers which he displayed." He eventually recovered, and his uncanny intuitions then ceased. The account has a genuine ring; but in Augustine's day it would not be easy to measure time-coincidences closely, and we do not know how far normal inference might enable the subject to forecast the priest's visits.

2. An unnamed person, whose truthfulness Augustine guarantees, told him that one night before going to rest he thought he saw a philosopher of his acquaintance come in and expound certain questions about Plato which on a previous occasion he had refused to answer. It appeared later that the philosopher had *dreamed* that night that he came to his friend's house and answered the questions.<sup>84</sup> A few well-authenticated cases of this "reciprocal" type have been recorded in modern times;<sup>85</sup> but modern phantasms are not reported as holding lengthy conversations with their hosts.

3. Finally, we have some interesting cases of extrasensory perception by a Carthaginian diviner named Albicerius which were witnessed by Augustine and his friends.<sup>86</sup> Augustine, while disapproving of Albicerius as a man of abandoned life, claims that he has demonstrated his supernormal powers in numberless instances extending over many years, though there have also been some failures. The following examples are given. (a) On an occasion when a spoon was missed, Augustine caused Albicerius to be informed simply that some one had lost something. The clairvoyant identified the missing object as a spoon, gave the owner's name, and correctly described the place where it would be found. It is not clear whether the spoon had been mislaid or stolen: on the former supposition the knowledge of its whereabouts might be in the sub-

<sup>84</sup> *Civ. Dei*, xviii. 18.

<sup>85</sup> *Phantasms of the Living*, chap. xvii; Podmore, *Apparitions and Thought-Transference*, pp. 298 sqq.

<sup>86</sup> *Contra Academicos* I. vi sq. (Migne, xxxii, 914 sq.).

conscious memory of its owner, and it would be possible to explain the whole incident by telepathy. The skeptic will doubtless assume collusion with servants. We may compare Varro's story<sup>87</sup> of Fabius' consultation of Nigidius Figulus on a similar occasion, when with the aid of certain boys placed under a spell ("carmine instincti") Nigidius was able to describe what had happened to a number of missing coins. The employment of professional clairvoyants to discover stolen money is referred to in a fragment of an Atellane by Pomponius.<sup>88</sup> (b) On an occasion when Augustine's friend Licentius was consulting him on another matter, the clairvoyant became mysteriously aware that part of his fee, which was being brought him by a slave, had been abstracted *en route*. The details given are hardly sufficient to establish the supernormal character of this incident. (c) Another friend of Augustine's, one Flaccianus, asked Albicerius as a test question what business he, Flaccianus, had been discussing lately. The clairvoyant told him correctly that he had been discussing the purchase of an estate, and to his great astonishment gave the name of the estate in question, "although," says Augustine, "the name was so out-of-the-way that Flaccianus could hardly remember it himself." The possibility of normal sources of information can scarcely be excluded here. (d) The fourth and last case is the strongest. A pupil of Augustine's asked Albicerius to tell him of what he (the pupil) was thinking. Albicerius replied correctly that he was thinking of a line of Vergil, and proceeded promptly and confidently, although he was a man of very slight education, to quote the verse. If this is accurately reported, the skeptic will, I suppose, fall back on the hypothesis of unconscious whispering. It does not appear what methods Albicerius used, or what explanation he himself gave of his remarkable powers. Flaccianus, we are told, used to put them down to the admonition of some "low-grade spirit," *abiectissima animula*.

The survey I have given does not pretend to be exhaustive. But it has I hope served to illustrate both the differences between the

<sup>87</sup> *Apud Apul. Apol.* 42.

<sup>88</sup> Ribbeck, *Com. Rom. fragm.*,<sup>3</sup> v. 109. Pomponius may be gibing at Nigidius (Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Mysterienreligionen*,<sup>3</sup> pp. 236 sqq.).

ancient and the modern evidence on these matters—differences largely conditioned by the dissimilarity of the theoretical approach—and the indications of a possible underlying identity in certain of the facts described. For the rest, I can only echo the words of Augustine—“if any one can trace the causes and modes of operation of these visions and divinations and really understand them, I had rather hear his views than be expected to discuss the subject myself.”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *de Genesi ad litteram*, xii. 18.

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