

## CONFESSIONS OF A "TELEPATHIST."

WE think that those of our members who do not regularly see the *Daily News* may be interested in reading the following articles and letters, concerning some early experiments of the Society, which appeared in that paper during September. We therefore, with the kind permission of the Editor of the *Daily News*, reproduce them here. It may be remarked that this is not the first time Mr. Blackburn has published his so-called "Confession." He wrote similar articles in *John Bull* in 1908-9 and now returns to the charge. He writes in the *Daily News* of Sept. 1st, 1911:

For nearly thirty years the telepathic experiments conducted by Mr. G. A. Smith and myself have been accepted and cited as the basic evidences of the truth of Thought Transference.

Your correspondent "Inquirer" is one of many who have pointed to them as a conclusive reply to modern sceptics. The weight attached to those experiments was given by their publication in the first volume of the proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, vouched for by Messrs. F. W. H. Myers, Edmund Gurney, Frank Podmore, and later and inferentially by Professor Henry Sidgwick, Professor Romanes, and others of equal intellectual eminence. They were the first scientifically conducted and attested experiments in Thought Transference, and later were imitated and reproduced by "sensitives" all the world over.

I am the sole survivor of that group of experimentalists, and as no harm can be done to anyone, but possible good to the cause of truth, I, with mingled feelings of regret and satisfaction, now declare that the whole of those alleged experiments were bogies, and originated in the honest desire of two youths to show how easily men of scientific mind and training could be deceived when seeking for evidence in support of a theory they were wishful to establish.

And here let me say that I make this avowal in no boastful spirit. Within three months of our acquaintance with the leading members of the Society for Psychical Research Mr. Smith and myself heartily regretted that these personally charming and scientifically distinguished men should have been victimised; but it was too late to recant. We did the next best thing. We stood aside and watched with amazement the astounding spread of the fire we had in a spirit of mischief lighted.

The genesis of the matter was in this wise. In the late seventies and early eighties a wave of so-called occultism passed over England. Public interest became absorbed in the varied alleged phenomena of Spiritualism, Mesmerism, and thought-reading; "professors" of the various branches abounded, and Brighton, where I was editing a weekly journal, became a happy hunting ground for mediums of every kind. I had started an exposure campaign, and had been rather successful. My great score was being the first to detect the secret of Irving Bishop's thought-reading. In 1882 I encountered Mr. G. A. Smith, a youth of 19, whom I found giving a mesmeric entertainment. Scenting a fraud, I proceeded to investigate, made his acquaintance, and very soon realised that I had discovered a genius in his line. He has since been well known as a powerful hypnotist. He was also the most ingenious conjurer I have met outside the profession. He had the versatility of an Edison in devising new tricks and improving on old ones. We entered into a compact to "show up" some of the then flourishing professors of occultism, and began by practising thought-reading. Within a month we were astonishing Brighton at bazaars and kindred charity entertainments, and enjoyed a great vogue. One of our exhibitions was described very fully and enthusiastically in *Light*, the spiritualistic paper, and on the strength of that the Messrs. Myers, Gurney, and Podmore called on us and asked for a private demonstration. As we had made a strict rule never to take payment for our exhibitions, we were accepted by the society as private unpaid demonstrators, and as such remained during the long series of séances.

It is but right to explain that at this period neither of us knew or realised the scientific standing and earnest motive of the gentlemen who had approached us. We saw in them only a superior type of the spiritualistic cranks by whom we were daily pestered. Our first private séance was accepted so unhesitatingly, and the lack of reasonable precautions on the part of the "investigators" was so marked, that Smith and I were genuinely amused, and felt it our duty to show how utterly incompetent were these "scientific investigators." Our plan was to bamboozle them thoroughly, then let the world know the value of scientific research. It was the vanity of the schoolboy who catches a master tripping.

A description of the codes and methods of communication invented and employed by us to establish telepathic rapport would need more space than could be spared. Suffice it that, thanks to

the ingenuity of Smith, they became marvellously complete. They grew with the demands upon them.

Starting with a crude set of signals produced by the jingling of pince-nez, sleeve-links, long and short breathings, and even blowing, they developed to a degree little short of marvellous. To this day no conjurer has succeeded in approaching our great feat, by which Smith, scientifically blindfolded, deafened, and muffled in two blankets, reproduced in detail an irregular figure drawn by Mr. Myers, and seen only by him and me.

The value of a contribution such as this should lie not so much in describing the machinery as in pointing out how and where these investigators failed, so that future investigators may avoid their mistakes.

I say boldly that Messrs. Myers and Gurney were too anxious to get corroboration of their theories to hold the balance impartially. Again and again they gave the benefit of the doubt to experiments that were failures. They allowed us to impose our own conditions, accepted without demur our explanations of failure, and, in short, exhibited a complaisance and confidence which, however complimentary to us, was scarcely consonant with a strict investigation on behalf of the public.

That this same slackness characterised their investigations with other sensitives I am satisfied, for I witnessed many, and the published reports confirmed the suspicion. It is also worthy of note that other sensitives broke down or showed weakness on exactly the same points that Smith and I failed—namely, in visualising an article difficult to describe in words signalled by a code. A regular figure or familiar object was nearly always seen by the percipient, but when a splotch of ink, or a grotesque irregular figure, had to be transferred from one brain to the other, the result was always failure. We, owing to a very ingenious diagram code, got nearer than anybody, but our limitations were great.

Smith and I, by constant practice, became so sympathetic that we frequently brought off startling hits, which were nothing but flukes. The part that fortuitous accident plays in this business can only be believed by those who have become expert in the art of watching for and seizing an opportunity. When these hits were made, the delight of the investigators caused them to throw off their caution and accept practically anything we offered.

I am aware it may be reasonably objected that the existence of a false coin does not prove the non-existence of a good one. My

suggestion as the result of years of observation is that the majority of investigators and reporters in psychical research lack that accurate observation and absence of bias which are essential to rigorous and reliable investigation. In fine, I gravely doubt not the bonafides, but the capacity, of the witnesses. I could fill columns telling how, in the course of my later investigations on behalf of the Society for Psychical Research, I have detected persons of otherwise unimpeachable rectitude touching up and redressing the weak points in their narratives of telepathic experiences.

Mr. Frank Podmore, perhaps the most level-headed of the researchers—and to the end a sceptic—aptly puts it: "It is not the friend whom we know whose eyes must be closed and his ears muffled, but the 'Mr. Hyde,' whose lurking presence in each of us we are only now beginning to suspect."

I am convinced that this propensity to deceive is more general among "persons of character" than is supposed. I have known the wife of a bishop, when faced with a discrepancy in time in a story of a death in India and the appearance of the wraith in England, deliberately amend her circumstantial story by many hours to fit the altered circumstances. This touching-up process in the telepathic stories I have met again and again, and I say, with full regard to the weight of words, that among the hundreds of stories I have investigated I have not met one that had not a weak link which should prevent its being accepted as scientifically established. Coincidences that at first sight appear good cases of telepathic rapport occur to many of us. I have experienced several, but I should hesitate to present them as perfect evidence.

At the risk of giving offence to some, I feel bound to say that in the vast majority of cases that I have investigated the principals are either biassed in favour of belief in the supernatural or not persons whom I should regard as accurate observers and capable of estimating the rigid mathematical form of evidence. What one desires to believe requires little corroboration. I shall doubtless raise a storm of protest when I assert that the principal cause of belief in psychic phenomena is the inability of the average man to observe accurately and estimate the value of evidence, plus a bias in favour of the phenomena being real. It is an amazing fact that I have never yet, after hundreds of tests, found a man who could accurately describe ten minutes afterwards a series of simple acts which I performed in his presence. The reports of those trained and conscientious observers, Messrs. Myers and Gurney, contain many

absolute inaccuracies. For example, in describing one of my "experiments," they say emphatically, "In no case did B. touch S., even in the slightest manner." I touched him eight times, that being the only way in which our code was then worked.

In conclusion, I ask thoughtful persons to consider this proposition: If two youths, with a week's preparation, could deceive trained and careful observers like Messrs. Myers, Gurney, Podmore, Sidgwick, and Romanes, under the most stringent conditions their ingenuity could devise, what are the chances of succeeding inquirers being more successful against "sensitives" who have had the advantage of more years' experience than Smith and I had weeks? Further, I would emphasise the fact that records of telepathic rapport in almost every instance depend upon the statement of one person, usually strongly predisposed to belief in the occult.

DOUGLAS BLACKBURN.

*August 30th, 1911.*

The Editor of *Light*, Mr. E. W. Wallis, replied in the issue of September 2nd:

(To the Editor of "The Daily News.")

Sir,—Mr. Douglas Blackburn has supplied you with a by no means modest though a very ingenious account of his past misdeeds. . . .

Mr. Blackburn now says: "One of our exhibitions was described very fully and enthusiastically in "*Light*," the spiritualistic paper, and on the strength of that the Messrs. Myers, Gurney, and Podmore called on us and asked for a private demonstration." But, Sir, the only description of the proceedings of Messrs. G. A. Smith and Douglas Blackburn which I can find in "*Light*" is one written and signed by Mr. Blackburn himself ("*Light*," August 26th, 1882). In this communication he says: "I have had the satisfaction of experiencing some demonstrations of mind-sympathy which are, I believe, almost without precedent." Describing Mr. Smith's experiment, Mr. Blackburn proceeds: "He places himself en rapport with myself by taking my hands; and a strong concentration of will and mental vision on my part has enabled him to read my thoughts with an accuracy that approaches the miraculous. . . . The sympathy between us has been developed to such a degree that he rarely fails to experience the taste of any liquid or solid I choose to imagine." There is more of the same kind of writing. The letter I have quoted finished with a statement that spiritualists and scientific inquirers would be welcomed at some private sésances that were about to be held.

In the "Proceedings" of the Society for Psychical Research, in which the results of the experiments made by Messrs. Smith and Blackburn were published, a note was appended to the report stating that Mr. Blackburn had written to the Society (of which he became an associate member), "to the effect that he had obtained remarkable results in thought-reading, or will-impression." After corresponding with Mr. Blackburn, who sent "a paper recording in detail his experiments with Mr. Smith," Messrs. Myers and Gurney decided to go to Brighton to investigate.

Mr. Blackburn at that time seemed honest, and was regarded as "a very painstaking observer." He claimed that by strongly concentrating his will and mental vision he established such mind-sympathy with Mr. Smith that the latter was able to read his thoughts with "an accuracy" that "approached the miraculous." To-day Mr. Blackburn assures us that his letter to "Light" was an enthusiastic way of misleading the public, that he and Mr. Smith only employed "codes," that there was no thought-reading about the business. . . . As for the rest of Mr. Blackburn's statements with reference to Messrs. Myers and Gurney, what can be thought of a man who waits until he is "the sole survivor" of the group of experimentalists before he—"in the cause of truth," forsooth—publicly charges them with incompetency and unreliability? In my opinion, by his own showing he surrenders every claim to respectful attention. And when he makes the claim that for nearly thirty years his experiments with Mr. Smith "have been accepted and cited as the basic evidences of the truth of thought-transference," one can only smile and pity. Fortunately telepathy does not rest upon any such flimsy basis.

E. W. WALLIS.

(Editor of "Light.")

On Sept. 4th, 1911, the Editor of the *Daily News* published the following interview with Mr. G. A. Smith:

"Let me say at once," he began, "that Mr. Blackburn's story is a tissue of errors from beginning to end. In the first place I most emphatically deny that I ever in any degree, in any way, when working thirty years ago with Mr. Blackburn, attempted to bamboozle Messrs. Myers, Gurney and Podmore. Had such a thing been possible I had too much admiration and respect for them and too much respect for myself to try. These gentlemen, long before they met us, had spent years in investigating psychic phenomena,

and were aware of every device and dodge for making sham phenomena. They were on the watch not only for premeditated trickery, but for unconscious trickery as well. You could not deceive them, and the quack mediums hated them in consequence. . . . . Were it not for the teaching of Myers and Gurney on the unreliability of human evidence Mr. Blackburn could not say what he has said. He is merely repeating what they taught him. The finest expositions of such unreliability are by Myers and Gurney. They were so highly equipped for this work that the best trick mediums could never do their tricks in their presence. I was most closely associated with both men, being private secretary to each in turn, and speak the things I know."

"Can you give me examples of the errors you allege in Mr. Blackburn's article?"

"Unfortunately it is only too easy. Let me detail a few. He says Myers, Gurney and Podmore called on us and asked for a private demonstration. This is not so; it was Blackburn who first approached the Psychical Research Society, and sent them an account of his experiments with me and offered a demonstration. He says his first score was his detection of the secret of Irving Bishop's thought-reading; where and when did he detect this and what record is there of his discovery? Prof. Barrett, whose judgment he is now deriding, was the first to do this.

"He says we formed a compact to 'show up' the professors. We did no such thing. Blackburn at that time was a serious investigator, and assuredly I was. . . .

"He says I was the most ingenious conjurer he ever met outside the profession, whereas I am the worst conjurer in the world. . . . He says we had a code of signals. We had not a single one; we never contemplated the possibility of coding until we learnt it from Mr. Myers and Mr. Gurney themselves. He says we practised together and brought off startling hits. We never did anything of the kind. He did once say what a journalistic sensation might be made by pretending the phenomena were done by trickery. He has waited, it appears, until he thought all were dead who took part in the experiments in order to pretend this."

"Do you recall, Mr. Smith, what Mr. Blackburn calls 'our great feat,' by which you, scientifically blindfolded, deafened, and muffled in two blankets, reproduced in detail an irregular figure drawn by Mr. Myers and seen only by him and Mr. Blackburn?"

"Yes, I recall it perfectly, and the discussion which followed,

when Mr. Gurney said the only possible way of doing it by trickery was to conceal the drawing in a pencil case and pass it into my hand. I was amused to read two years ago in a weekly paper containing some statements by Mr. Blackburn that he gave this very explanation of how the 'trick' was done!"

"It was no trick then, Mr. Smith?"

"No, it was a bona fide experiment, and the successful result was either due to chance or telepathy. I think it most unlikely it was due to chance; the drawing so closely resembled the original. The conditions under which the experiment was carried out were at once too stringent and too simple to admit of conjuring, and the best answer to those who deny it was telepathy is to ask them to repeat the experiment in the presence of equally qualified observers and under similar conditions."

Mr. Smith, when questioned as to the accuracy of Mr. Blackburn's statement that he had touched him (Mr. Smith) eight times, 'that being the only way our code was then worked,' denied that Mr. Blackburn had ever touched him.

". . . We had no code," he said. "The whole object of the experiment was to obtain thought transference, and all touchings were out of the question. Whenever there was any touching or contact of any description it is always minutely recorded by the observers—see the records of the Psychical Research Society.

"Further—and this is most important—none of the experiments in which Blackburn was concerned have been put forward by the Psychical Research Society in any authoritative work. So far from this being the case the journals of the society<sup>1</sup> contain the following statement made when Mr. Blackburn's 'confessions' first appeared:

*This so-called confession had no relation to the facts. It would be a mistake to suppose that these experiments were ever regarded, as Mr. Blackburn asserts, as the bed-rock foundation of all the later experiments which are said to prove the existence of telepathy. On the contrary the experiments in question were not reprinted (as others were) in "Phantasms of the Living" nor in any other standard work of the kind. Nor is it true that the conditions were thought ideal. In the first series contact was allowed, and as to the second the experimenters state that "it would no doubt be an exaggeration to affirm that the possibility of (auditory) signals was absolutely excluded. We shall endeavour so to vary the conditions of subsequent experiments as to exclude this hypothesis completely."*

<sup>1</sup>The statement which Mr. Smith quotes was, as a matter of fact, contained not in the *Journal*, but in a leaflet printed separately and issued to enquirers.



“. . . The council of the society discussed whether his articles should be replied to, but decided to treat him and his confessions with the contempt both merit. They thought it would be playing his game to treat him seriously.”

Mr. Blackburn wrote on the following day :

The fact that Mr. G. A. Smith is alive supplies another argument in support of my pet theory, that most human evidence is unreliable. I was informed of his death when I was in Africa, and since my return two persons who claimed to know him corroborated independently, while a letter I addressed to him was returned “not known.” Had I been aware of his existence I should not have opened up the subject, for I am aware that Mr. Smith, as he confirms in to-day’s interview, spent many of the years that have elapsed since our acquaintance in close association with leading members of the Society for Psychical Research in a fiduciary capacity. I am also aware that that position was the legitimate reward for his services in connection with our telepathic “experiments” and his undoubted power as a remarkable hypnotist.

While pleased to learn that the bright, amusing, and ingenious confrère of thirty years ago is in the prime of life, I am sorry that I should have unintentionally forced him into having to defend a position he has occupied so long. I have been reproached for postponing my confession until after the death of the principals. I am satisfied that in doing this I showed my regard for those gentlemen—Mr. Smith included—and my desire to avoid giving them pain. That Mr. Smith should have to bear the brunt of the attack is unfortunate, but quite accidental on my part.

But now to business. Mr. Smith gives a categorical denial to my story; declares that he was a genuine sensitive, and I also the possessor of psychic power. He could do no less, and I cannot blame him. He was a plucky controversialist in those younger days, and I am prepared to see him put up a tough fight now.

In most controversies there is a tendency to obscure the main issue by the introduction of minor details. Let us clear the decks of unnecessary lumber, such as the question whether I first approached the S.P.R., or they me. It is sufficient that we met. It is also agreed that Smith and I conducted many alleged telepathic experiments. It is a fact that those experiments were considered of sufficient importance then to be given first place in the official report. Mr. Smith also knows that they excited great interest,

and that he and I were made much of by many men of scientific eminence. To attempt to belittle the importance of those experiments now is childish. No doubt greater things have been brought off since, but we were the pioneers, and I am satisfied that we unintentionally gave scores of subsequent experimenters the cue how to become "telepathic sensitives."

Mr. Smith denies that we employed a code. My reply is that without one it would have been impossible for me to convey to him the figures drawn by the members of the committee for transference from my brain to that of the blindfolded, blanket-muffled, sensitive Smith. Let us dismiss all the other successful experiments—any one of which I will undertake to repeat to-day under identical conditions, with the aid of any intelligent confederate—and confine ourselves to "our great feat," which Mr. Smith tells your interviewer he recalls perfectly. That feat, if genuine, would establish telepathy beyond cavil. All others sink into insignificance in comparison. It was a master stroke, and so great was the impression produced by it, both upon the "best trained and best qualified observers in London" and ourselves, that we decided to retire upon our laurels, feeling certain we could never hope to repeat or equal it. It was the best and last thing I did. As Mr. Smith repudiates participation in the invention, I will take full credit or otherwise for it. I ask that readers will note very carefully every detail in the ensuing description of the trick, for it is they who will have to give the verdict.

The committee had realised the possibility of conveying by signals a description of a regular figure or any object capable of being described in words, and I would direct the attention of those who have access to the printed copies of the early figures Smith and I produced. It will be noticed that so long as the figures were describable in words they were fairly accurate reproductions; but the more irregular and indescribable they became the greater and wider were the discrepancies between the original seen by me and the copy produced by Smith. Now I put it as a fair question: If Smith could see what I saw, as he professed, why is it that he could see plainly an equilateral triangle, but fail to see it if one of the sides or angles was "wobbly" and out of shape? Again, if he could reproduce with reasonable accuracy the silhouette of a man's head, easily described by a code, why did he fail when that same head was touched up with black ink protuberances, with the nose under the chin, a big ear on the back of the head, and

so on? The reason was simple. Our code was confined to regular, or fairly regular, figures. It would have taken hours to spell out a full description of that figure by the sounds, movements, intervals of time, bogus mesmeric passes that stirred his hair, and the numerous, almost imperceptible, signals that formed perhaps the most complex and effective code ever used by conjurers. I doubt whether any person could write at leisure a description of such an object so accurately as to enable another one to reproduce the figure from that description.

This reasonable point of view occurred to the committee, and they abandoned regular figures for complex indescribables. Need I say that we failed again and again? In fact, we ceased any attempt to "transfer" them. I had a signal, which I gave Smith when the drawing was impossible. We made a pretence of trying hard, but, after a time, would give up on the stock explanation of "absence of rapport." Mr. Smith is angry with me for holding in light esteem the capacity of Messrs. Myers and Gurney for taking precautions against deception. I confess that their irregular drawings completely snuffed out the psychic power which, according to Mr. Smith, I possessed without knowing it. As a matter of fact, the committee were beginning to have grave doubts when the "great feat" I shall now describe saved our reputations and enabled me at least to carry out my bat.

These were the conditions: Smith sat in a chair at a large table. His eyes were padded with wool, and, I think, a pair of folded kid gloves, and bandaged with a thick dark cloth. His ears were filled with one layer of cotton-wool, then pellets of putty. His entire body and the chair on which he sat were enveloped in two very heavy blankets. I remember, when he emerged triumphant, he was wet with perspiration, and the paper on which he had successfully drawn the figure was so moist that it broke during the examination by the delighted observers. Beneath his feet and surrounding his chair were thick, soft rugs, rightly intended to deaden and prevent signals by feet shuffles—a wise precaution, for in our early experiments my feet did marvellous things. Smith being rendered contact proof and perfectly insulated, my part began.

At the farther side of the room—a very large dining-room—Mr. Myers showed me, with every precaution, the drawing that I was to transmit to the brain beneath the blankets. It was a tangle of heavy black lines, interlaced, some curved, some straight, the

sort of thing an infant playing with a pen or pencil might produce, and I am certain absolutely indescribable in words, let alone a code. I took it, fixed my gaze on it, pacing the room meanwhile and going through the usual process of impressing the figure upon my retina and brain, but always keeping out of touching distance with Smith. These preliminaries occupied perhaps ten or more minutes, for we made a point of never hurrying. I drew and redrew the figure many times openly in the presence of the observers, in order, as I explained and they allowed, to fix it on my brain. I also drew it, secretly, on a cigarette paper. By this time I was fairly expert at palming, and had no difficulty, while pacing the room collecting "rapport," in transferring the cigarette paper to the tube of the brass protector on the pencil I was using. I conveyed to Smith the agreed signal that I was ready by stumbling against the edge of the thick rug near his chair.

Next instant he exclaimed: "I have it." His right hand came from beneath the blanket, and he fumbled about the table, saying, according to arrangement: "Where's my pencil?"

Immediately I placed mine on the table. He took it and a long and anxious pause ensued.

This is what was going on under the blanket. Smith had concealed up his waistcoat one of those luminous painted slates which in the dense darkness gave sufficient light to show the figure when the almost transparent cigarette paper was laid flat on the slate. He pushed up the bandage from one eye, and copied the figure with extraordinary accuracy. It occupied over five minutes. During the time I was sitting exhausted with the mental effort quite ten feet away.

Presently Smith threw back the blanket and excitedly pushing back the eye bandage produced the drawing, which was done on a piece of notepaper, and very nearly on the same scale as the original. It was a splendid copy.

I ask a discriminating public to compare my explanation with Mr. Smith's. He says: "It was a bona fide experiment, and the successful result was either due to chance or telepathy. I think it most unlikely that it was due to chance, the drawing so closely resembled the original. The conditions under which the experiment was carried out were at once too stringent and too simple to admit of conjuring, and the best answer to those who deny it was telepathy is to ask them to repeat the experiment in the presence of equally qualified observers, and under similar conditions."

I do not wish to take advantage of an obvious slip, for Mr. Smith can hardly mean what he says in the last few lines quoted. How can those who doubt the experiment prove it? I will put it in the way Mr. Smith probably meant.

I challenge Mr. Smith or any other person to reproduce that experiment under the same conditions; I to draw the figure and insulate both the experimenters, also to examine their clothes, etc. I also stipulate that the experiment shall take place in an apartment not known to the experimenters till they enter it. If under those conditions an irregular figure can be produced bearing a reasonable resemblance to the original I will not only admit that our great feat was genuine, but will immediately proceed to cultivate that psychic power which Mr. Smith insists I must possess, but of which so far I am unconscious.

In conclusion, I wish to convey to Mr. Smith my sincere regret for having unintentionally forced him into his present position. I have always retained a pleasant recollection of our short association, and during a very variegated life have been more than once able to amuse and bewilder friends by practising some of the feats of legerdemain he taught me, but which he now so modestly repudiates.

DOUGLAS BLACKBURN.

A further interview with Mr. G. A. Smith was published in the *Daily News* on Sept. 6th, in which he denies Mr. Blackburn's statement:

"It is the most amazing piece of invention ever brought to my notice," [he] said. . . . "All the essential points of Mr. Blackburn's article are untrue, and I deny the whole story from beginning to end.

"There were in all 31 telepathic experiments in which Mr. Blackburn and I were concerned, and these are recorded in the 'Proceedings of the Psychical Research Society.' Mr. Blackburn has especially directed attention to the experiment which produced what in the 'Proceedings' referred to (Vol. I., Third Report on Thought Transference) is known as Figure 22. Let me quote from that report, which is signed by Mr. Gurney, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Mr. Podmore, and Professor Barrett.

*We have now to consider whether it was possible that any information of the character of the designs drawn could have reached Smith through the ordinary avenues of sense. Of the five recognised gateways of knowledge, four—tasting, smelling, touch, and sight—were excluded by the*

conditions of the experiment. There remains the sense of hearing, which was but partially interfered with by the bandage over the eyes and the ears. But the information can certainly not have been conveyed by speech; our ears were as near to Mr. Blackburn as Mr. Smith's, and our eyes would have caught the slightest movement of his lips.

Alluding to the hypothesis of a code of audible signals other than oral speech, the report continues:

*Let our readers, who may be familiar with the Morse or any other code of signals, try in some such way to convey a description of some of our drawings to a friend who is blindfolded, and has not seen the original; we venture to assert that, even if audible signs were allowed, several minutes at least would be required to convey the notion of the figures correctly. It is probably no exaggeration to say that several scores, if not hundreds, of precise signs would be required to convey an idea as exact as that implied in many of Mr. Smith's representations, . . . and since our attention, during this part of the experiment, was concentrated on the relation between Mr. Blackburn and Mr. Smith we are at a loss to conceive how any signalling, sufficient in amount to convey the required ideas, could have passed undetected. . . . However, with the view of removing all doubts that might arise as to possible auditory communications, we on one occasion stopped Mr. Smith's ears with putty, then tied a bandage round his eyes and ears, then fastened a bolster-case over the head, and over all threw a blanket which enveloped his entire head and trunk. Fig. 22 was now drawn by one of us and shown outside the room to Mr. Blackburn, who on his return sat behind Mr. Smith, and in no contact with him whatever, and as perfectly still as it is possible for a human being to sit who is not concentrating his attention on keeping motionless to the exclusion of every other object. In a few minutes Mr. Smith took up the pencil and gave the successive reproductions shown below.*

"Now," said Mr. Smith, "it is for the readers of the 'Daily News' to choose between the report of Messrs. Gurney, Myers, Podmore, and Professor Barrett, and that of Mr. Blackburn. He says he was shown the drawing inside the room; they say he was shown it outside; he says he took it and paced the room; they say 'on his return' he sat behind me, in no contact with me whatever, and as perfectly still as it is possible for a human being to sit.

"In view of the infinite precautions shown to have been taken, is it credible that Mr. Blackburn should have been able to copy the complicated design on a cigarette paper and conceal it in the end of a pencil case? Is it likely that the observers would have per-

mitted him to place that pencil on the table for me to take? He could not have copied the drawing, concealed it in the pencil-case, and placed the pencil on the table, and all the time remained 'as perfectly still as it is possible for a human being to sit.'

Questioned about the luminous slate which Mr. Blackburn says was used, Mr. Smith replied :

"That is a grotesque untruth; I absolutely deny it. Even had trickery, as Mr. Blackburn alleges, been involved, there was no necessity for a luminous slate. I had quite sufficient light to see to draw what I wanted to draw. No wonder Mr. Blackburn says that had he been aware of my existence he would never have opened up the subject! His excuse that he waited thirty years until he thought all those who knew the facts were dead hardly accords with his professed desire for the truth.

". . . He claims to possess 'the most complete and effective code ever used by conjurers.' Further, he undertakes to repeat to-day, with the aid of any intelligent confederate, any one of the thirty-one drawings of experiments in thought transference published in 1882 by the Psychical Research Society, in which he acted as agent. Let him substantiate his claims. . . . You have only to look at the drawings drawn by me and reproduced in Vol. I. of the Psychical Research Society's Proceedings to see that it is most difficult to describe them in speech or writing. It is for Mr. Blackburn to do what he claims he can do. He has appealed to demonstration; let demonstration decide."

In the same issue is published a brief interview with Professor Barrett, in which he gives "an emphatic verdict for Mr. Smith."

"Mr. Blackburn," he said, . . . "thought Mr. Smith was dead and apparently he thought I was dead too, for he described himself as the sole survivor of those who were present at the experiment. Now I was present at that experiment, and you may say that not only I, but Myers and Gurney, had the most absolute confidence in Mr. Smith. . . . After the experiment Mr. Smith visited me in Dublin, and I carried out there a series of extremely drastic tests with him."

Professor Barrett denied that the theory of thought-transference rested largely on the Smith-Blackburn case. His own experiments, he said, began years before, and in those experiments he was joined by many other researchers. He concluded

with a reference to the more recent "experiments of Miss Miles and Miss Ramsden, who established the fact of thought-transference at increasing distances—even when one was in Bristol and the other in the Highlands. All these and many other indisputable cases are fully recorded in the papers of the Society."

An interview with Mr. Feilding was published on Sept. 7th, in which he "endorsed the statement of Mr. Smith published in the "Daily News" on Monday [Sept. 4th], and paid a tribute to him as a careful, painstaking experimenter who was interested in telepathy, but was at the same time always slightly sceptical about experiments."

"How these experiments could be faked interested Gurney and Smith very much," said Mr. Feilding, "and they used to make experiments in faking and then, in testing an exposition, try every means to obviate the methods they had discovered. Gurney was extraordinarily ingenious in discovering means of communication, and some of the things which Mr. Blackburn says actually happened were only invented in order to prevent them being used. . . . ."

"I am perfectly satisfied with the possibility of [telepathy] taking place, and should like to say that in the event of any readers of this correspondence believing themselves able to show telepathic power, I should be grateful, on my return from abroad, to have the opportunity of conducting experiments with them."

In the issue of Sept. 8th, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick wrote:

(To the Editor of "The Daily News.")

Sept. 6th, 1911.

Sir, . . . As Mr. Smith has replied effectively to what he mildly characterises as Mr. Blackburn's "tissue of errors," I need add little except that all communication of the leading workers in psychical research with Mr. Blackburn ceased not long after the experiments in question, and that, on the other hand, the connection of Mr. G. A. Smith with the work of the society was long and intimate. He took part not only in experiments, but in inquiries, investigations, and clerical work, and acted for some considerable time as Mr. Gurney's valued private secretary and assistant.

Mr. Blackburn may have been, as he seems to imply, engaged in psychical research, whether honestly or dishonestly, for many years, but it has not been in connection with the Society for Psychological Research. I should doubt his having made any investigations for



the society, or having ever attended any experiments published in its "Proceedings" except those in which he now asserts that he played the part of fraudulent telepathic agent. What are we to think of a man who makes a virtue of withholding a confession till he believes (fortunately erroneously) that all who could contradict him are dead?

I may add that the experiments in which Mr. Blackburn was concerned form but a very small part of those on which the case for telepathy rests. Anyone may convince himself of this by studying the numerous volumes of the "Proceedings" of the Society for Psychical Research. There have been many experiments by different agents and percipients.

Still, as Mr. Smith points out, but little is yet known of the process or of the conditions that ensure success; and, in the opinion of myself and my colleagues, further experiments in transferring diagrams or other definite images or ideas are much to be desired. The Society for Psychical Research is always glad to hear of experiments being tried, and its officers are always willing to give any advice and assistance to would-be experimenters that they can.

E. M. SIDGWICK,

Hon. Sec., Society for Psychical Research.

20, Hanover-square, London, W.

In the *Daily News* of Sept. 6th Mrs. Verrall wrote:

Sept. 2nd, 1911.

(To the Editor of "The Daily News.")

Sir,—In a letter received by me this morning, you are good enough to ask my opinion on two points—(1) the series of experiments in thought-transference in which Mr. Douglas Blackburn took part some thirty years ago; and (2) the reliability of the criteria generally on which the believers in telepathic communication base their conviction.

As regards the first point, I have no first-hand knowledge of the experiments in question, and no opinion to give on the article by Mr. Blackburn.

As to the second point, the experiments in which I have been personally concerned are so complicated, and at present so tentative, that it is impossible within the limits of a newspaper article to present the evidence which they afford for telepathic communication,

and on a subject so novel and so little understood an opinion unsupported by evidence would be valueless. The full evidence for the phenomena known as "cross-correspondences"—correspondences, that is, between the automatic writings of persons at a distance from one another and with no means of normal communication—is set forth in the recent volumes of the "Proceedings" of the Society for Psychological Research, and is summarised by Mr. Frank Podmore in his last book, "The Newer Spiritualism," published in 1910.

Further experiment is much to be desired, and those of your readers who are interested in the subject can confer no greater benefit on psychical research than by themselves carrying out experiments on thought transference at a distance, and so adding to the reliable criteria for telepathic communication.

MARGARET DE G. VERRALL.

5 Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge.

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### CORRESPONDENCE.

ON PROFESSOR BARRETT'S "POLTERGEISTS: OLD AND NEW."

(*To the Editor of the S.P.R. JOURNAL.*)

August 15th, 1911.

May I be allowed to make a few observations on Professor Barrett's article, "Poltergeists Old and New," in this month's *Proceedings*?

I shall confine my remarks to the first two cases, viz. those alleged to have happened at Enniscorthy and Derrygonnelly respectively, as the first of these was specially reported for Prof. Barrett, and the second was personally observed by him. Let us take the Enniscorthy case first, as investigated by Mr. N. J. Murphy, whose report Prof. Barrett designates as "admirable." If this merely means that the report is that of an educated and conscientious eye-witness, who has given us his experiences in a temperate and convincing manner, I, for one, thoroughly agree with Prof. Barrett's description. I have no doubt whatever that Mr. Murphy saw what he describes. But if I am asked if Mr. Murphy's report helps us to account for the *causes* of what he saw, and particularly in the direction of the exclusion of human agency, I am afraid I shall have to say that it falls somewhat short of excellence in this respect. I submit that before we can call the "Poltergeist" to our aid in this particular