HOW TO GO TO A MEDIUM

A MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION

BY

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FOREWORD BY

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TO

THE FRIEND

WHOSE DEEP INTEREST IN PSYCHICAL
RESEARCH AND PERSONAL SYMPATHY HAVE
ENABLED ME TO PROSECUTE AND EXTEND
MY STUDIES OF THE SUBJECT WE HAVE
EQUALLY AT HEART

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FOREWORD

This short book should be widely read by all who are interested in the subject of Psychical Research, and it is especially to be commended to those who are thinking of taking up the study of mediumistic phenomena, whether mental mediumship, or the production of physical phenomena by those claiming supernormal faculties. Mr. Dingwall writes with authority; he has had many years of experience in investigating the claims of both physical and mental mediums, and, from my knowledge of him, I think he brings away from these years of investigation still an open mind, still a belief in the possibility of the existence of supernormal faculties. On the other hand, he has seen much of the sad, sordid side of the whole business-fraud, deceit, trickery, naked and unashamed if only the observer knows where to look for it, and a public willing and anxious to be gulled, and resenting bitterly any imputation against their favourite mediums, from whom they have received some solace,

some confirmation to them of their cherished beliefs and hopes. One of the saddest things that I know is the way in which men and women of the highest integrity, with well-balanced judgment, good critical faculties for all the ordinary affairs of life, will bring to a seance room the gullible mind of a child, ready to accept any marvel, any so-called evidence for survival. It is within my knowledge, within my almost daily experience, the harm that is being done by the uncritical, unscientific approach to the study of supernormal phenomena. It is harmful to be confirmed in any of our cherished beliefs by fraud and trickery: it is more harmful still when those beliefs, which may in themselves be perfectly valid and based upon truth, are shattered by the exposure of fraud.

Mr. Dingwall's book is written in order to try and obviate some of the dangers; to try and ensure that those who from any motive wish to investigate physical or mental mediumship should have some knowledge of the pitfalls which will surround them during their investigation. The book will render a very real service if it reaches the public it deserves. In these matters—as in all scientific inquiries - the difference between hypothesis and dogma

cannot be too strongly insisted upon. The serious investigator may start with the hypothesis that supernormal faculties exist, or even with the hypothesis that discarnate intelligences may communicate through mediums; but throughout the inquiry these must remain working hypotheses until or unless proof is obtained which will satisfy the canons of scientific evidence. To start the inquiry—however scientific the setting and the apparatus—with the dogmatic belief in supernormal faculties or discarnate intelligence, is to court disaster and to open the door to the abuses and cruel frauds which are now so rampant.

Maurice B. WRIGHT, M.D.

PREFACE

This little book is an attempt to fill a gap in the literature of spiritualism. During some years of experience in psychical research, first as Director of the Department of Physical Phenomena in the American Society for Psychical Research and then as Research Officer of the Society for Psychical Research in England, I have constantly been reminded of the fact that beginners have had no short text book which may be of assistance to them in their practical inquiries into spiritualism. I have therefore tried in this book to provide the novice with some useful hints which he may find of service when visiting mediums. The work is not intended for spiritualists or for experienced psychical researchers, although both classes may find something of interest in its pages. It has been written for the serious man and woman of to-day who wish to know how to approach the subject of spiritualism, and to avoid at least a few of the pitfalls which so plentifully bestrew the steps of the unwary. xiii

There are numbers of intelligent people who desire some personal experience and yet have no idea how to obtain it. They avoid the public medium because they do not know how to appraise the material, and have no idea what to expect and how to make the best of their opportunities. They have heard that fraud is common, and they do not know how to detect it or criticise the conditions which are imposed upon them. The present hints have been designed to help such inquirers and it is hoped that they will fulfil their purpose.

In conclusion, I must thank those of my friends, too numerous to mention, who have helped me both in criticisms and in the more mechanical side of the production of this book.

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HOW TO GO TO A MEDIUM

INTRODUCTION

Before a person goes to consult or experiment with a medium, it would be as well for him to know something of the elements of psychology, so that he may have some acquaintance with the processes at work. In order to give a very rough and ready definition of psychology one might say that it is that science which treats of the behaviour of living things. Thus it is the work of the psychologist to study the conduct of human beings and to endeavour to understand their mental processes both conscious and unconscious. Everybody knows more or less what is meant by a conscious process. Suppose I decide to get down a book from a high shelf in my library. In order to do this I can do a variety of things. I may get a chair or table, or better still some

steps and, after performing certain actions I find myself high enough to fetch the book and so fulfil my purpose. But even in doing so simple a thing as this, certain unconscious processes are bound to occur. Thus when fetching the steps I do not first of all think which foot to advance, but through an unconscious process move the one which happens to be stimulated first. Similarly when upon the step ladder, I may without thinking extend one arm to save myself from falling if the ladder slip, and indeed there are quite a number of things which one does “without thinking", as the phrase goes. A still better illustration is that of learning to ride a bicycle. At first one is conscious of every tendency of the machine to fall and of one's own endeavour to right it, but later these corrective movements become unconscious and we can enjoy a spin without having to keep on thinking how to prevent our bicycle from falling over.

It will be clear from these illustrations that in ordinary life we perform a great number of actions unconsciously and indeed in many instances, it would appear to the ordinary

man that we are, in a sense, split up, so that we are able to perform independent actions at the same time. Returning for a moment to our bicycle example, it is a common thing for a cyclist to talk, laugh and argue whilst cycling; and cases are known where a rider has fallen asleep and yet has propelled his machine in just the same way as when he was awake. Every one has heard of so called somnambulists or sleep walkers, who perform complicated actions when they are apparently asleep and indeed are sometimes more efficient in this state than they are when normally awake.

It is then clear that in many cases-we might say in every case-there is a certain amount of splitting up, or as the psychologist would say of dissociation, present and active in the lives of every ordinary being. This is particularly true of mediums as a class, since the majority of them are very easily dissociated in a much more pronounced way than is usual with normal people.

This dissociation takes a variety of forms. A simple example is seen in the so-called

“automatic writing", an accomplishment which can be acquired by a certain number of normal persons. The subject takes a pencil and holds it upon some paper and remains quiet, either looking at the paper or reading or engaging in quiet conversation. In some cases the hand soon begins to move and to write and draw without the subject being aware of what is being done, and generally being in ignorance of the matter which he is constructing. We need not be detained here in considering the material of these automatic efforts.

The same principle is at work in the planchette, ouija board, glass and letters, or in any similar mechanical device for the same purpose. The main point to remember is that in these automatic processes, the subject's own mind is at work and the results obtained can often be seen to be a product of his own subconscious mind, by which is meant simply that part of his mental processes which lies beneath the threshold of consciousness. Thus supposing that last night I dreamt that I was in a foreign country and saw something which interested me greatly, I might forget

the entire dream on waking, and yet the whole picture might be recovered through automatic writing or through one or other of the many methods of delving into the subconscious mind, that rich store house of forgotten memories and experiences.

From what has been said above it is sufficiently obvious that as a great deal of what mediums obtain through automatic writing, speaking, or drawing, comes from their own subconscious minds, or at least is largely coloured by them, it is always very difficult to determine exactly how far one is justified in ascribing the information given through them to a supernormal source, by which I mean merely a source which is normally out of reach of the medium. Taken quite simply the word “supernormal” as used by psychical researchers implies nothing more nor less than what one would mean by the expression “beyond the range of normal experience". Thus sitting here in London I can see across the room and outside to a certain distance. I cannot see beyond a certain range of “normal” vision. But supposing I could describe

accurately what was occurring in a stranger's house in Boston, the vision would be called supernormal, although no doubt it could be explained through natural processes if we were aware of them. There is nothing necessarily “supernatural” about it. The word supernatural means beyond and above the recognised forces of nature, and is unfortunate because it suggests miracles, which again is a term which has been much abused, since it merely means “something to wonder at". Both the terms supernatural and miracle are to be avoided, since they have come to mean something which the ordinary scientific man connects with elves and goblins and flying carpets, all of which he is quite sure have not happened or existed, and indeed are not likely to happen or exist. The word supernormal is not open to the above objection, although no doubt so-called scientific men will try to confuse it in an attempt to evade the facts which it describes.

It has been said above that it is always very difficult to determine exactly how far the information given through a medium can

be ascribed to a supernormal source. That difficulty is increased by the fact that different people are satisfied with different degrees of evidence, and what to one man is purely unevidential is to another something of real value. This difficulty is not so great as it seems, if people would be content in employing scientific methods and not investigate in a hazy and personal way which has practically no scientific value at all.

The purpose of this little book is to give a few hints to intending investigators and sitters in order to help them in making the most of their sittings both from their own point of view and also from that of the medium. It is as great a mistake to suppose that everyone can be a good “sitter", as it is to suppose that everyone can be a good surgeon or a good chemist. “Sitting” is an art which has to be learnt and many people fail altogether to learn it and then wonder that they fail to get any good results.

The first thing to understand is the medium with whom you expect to sit, remembering always that mediums are not always quite

normal, and this not in any derogatory sense, but simply as a fact. Indeed if they were quite normal, they could hardly be mediums, just as artists and musicians are often not normal in the generally understood sense of the term. Remember too that the medium is not a machine that can be turned on and off at will, but a human being with a highly complex emotional and mental apparatus, extremely suggestible and touchy, whilst at the same time capable of warm friendships and equally strong dislikes. Often of a childlike nature, a medium easily forgives and forgets, although at the same time a strong sense of justice is often found. Quick temper and waywardness are other characteristics of some mediums, who as a class are usually more apparently self-centred than normal people. Generally speaking each must be taken separately and the sitter will soon perceive those traits in a medium's character, which will act as signposts and warnings for his own conduct.

In going to a medium a sitter ought to make up his mind as to the precise object of his visit.

INTRODUCTION

As this book is intended mainly for members of the public who desire simply to test for themselves the theory of survival on the one hand, and the fact of supernormal physical phenomena on the other, it has been thought best to confine the hints given to those two objects only, and not to discuss the more experimental kind of work undertaken by professional psychical researchers. For our present purposes then it will suffice to deal with two classes of mediums; those presenting first what are called the mental phenomena, and secondly those presenting the physical phenomena.

By the mental phenomena are meant principally written or spoken communications, purporting to come from deceased persons, who are either seen, heard or in any other way sensed by the medium. Thus a medium, who from a platform describes various "spirits" amongst the audience and conveys messages from them, is called a mental medium, whilst another who professes to be able to produce materialised forms, or move objects without contact is said to be a physical medium.

Strictly speaking the two forms constantly overlap as in the case of so-called trumpet mediumship, in which the spirits are supposed to communicate through a trumpet. This involves a physical side, namely the production of physical sounds, and as such falls within both classes, since the messages given by the voices belong to the mental side.

Roughly speaking however, the two classes are distinct and it must always be remembered that the physical phenomena furnish no proof of survival themselves. Thus if a table rises into the air and apparently floats in space, it proves nothing concerning survival, but if it begins to move up and down according to a pre-arranged code, answering questions wholly out of the range of the knowledge of the sitters and which afterwards prove to be correct, then mental phenomena intervene and the hypothesis of survival might have to be considered. This is very important and is apt to be overlooked by inexperienced persons, especially by spiritualists, who look upon the physical phenomena as the work of spirits, oblivious of the fact that these occurrences, if

they occur at all, prove no more than any other ordinary phenomena of nature.

Before passing on to a more detailed consideration of specific cases, it may be as well to indicate a few of the mistakes that new sitters are prone to make in beginning their investigations. Go with an open mind. Prepare yourself for a serious undertaking and do not approach the subject in a spirit of levity or silly curiosity. Remember that the medium has his rights as well as the sitter and does not want to waste time pandering to idle seekers after sensation. Do not condemn any medium as fraudulent until you have sure proof of it, but on the other hand do not be put off from taking perfectly legitimate precautions. Remember that genuine mediums never object to tests if they understand what they are for and are sure of the sitters' own genuineness in applying them. Preserve your equanimity on all occasions, and do not argue with or flatly contradict a medium with whom you are working. Remember that if genuine all he says has some meaning even though you cannot understand it and in many cases cannot

be expected to, since the subject matter may refer to his own mental processes of which you are not aware. Do not imagine that if you cannot understand how information comes to a medium “it must be spirits". Preserve the scientific attitude, and remember that scientific methods simply consist in:

(a) Collecting your facts.
(b) Classifying them.
(c) Forming a theory that describes them.

Make up your mind before you go whether you want the nearest approach to truth that you can get. Many people attend mediums simply to obtain comfort in bereavement by an assurance that death does not end all. I have seen many people attain it if the medium merely dangles a piece of luminous veiling in front of them in the dark. Decide whether you want proof and what sort of proof. This book is designed to help those who want to obtain some acquaintance with supernormal phenomena through scientific methods. Proof to such as this book is intended would have to

come through evidence based on facts, and facts only. It may be that the proof for survival may never be surer than proof that other natural phenomena occur, even if we ever attain such evidence. After all our laws of nature are but theories that seem to be correct. The theory of survival may be wrong, but to some it seems the best theory which so far fits the facts.* This book is for those, who want to investigate the facts on which some have built that theory, and also for a few who desire to become acquainted with others which confront us in our study of those facts.

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* Whether the opinion is justified each reader must judge for himself.

CHAPTER I

MENTAL PHENOMENA

Clairvoyant Descriptions

Clairvoyant descriptions are presented most commonly in public on spiritualistic platforms, but they are sometimes given to private sitters upon request. The mediums vary in their accounts of how these phenomena are presented to them, but there is a general consensus of opinion that they are somehow "impressed" with the image of a person who gives them a message, either through an inner voice which they hear, or through some other means. This alleged faculty of "seeing" and "hearing" forms is called clairvoyance (meaning clear sight), and clairaudience (meaning, clear hearing).

The objects seen and heard are supposed by spiritualists to be the spirits of the dead, or at least representations of them pictorially presented and in many cases the descriptions of them furnished by the medium tally with their appearance in earth life. Thus a clairvoyant medium may pick out a lady in the audience and say: “Standing by you is a lady of medium height, with fair hair and fresh complexion. I should say she passed over about ten years ago with an affection of the throat, as I get that condition. I hear the name Sarah. Do you recognise her?” To this question the visitor may answer yes or no as the case may be. The incident is merely given as an illustration of what to expect, and is typical of such communications.

The reader will naturally ask at this point:

"How am I to go to such a meeting and what am I to say when addressed?” We must now try to reply to this question in as clear a way as possible. The first thing to ask yourself is whether the medium knows you or knows some one who does so. This is always possible in small provincial towns and

so it is better to attend seances; of this kind only when staying in large cities. Naturally if the medium is normally acquainted with you and your position in life any message given to you would be far less likely to be supernormal than one given by a medium who was a total stranger.

Go alone if possible, wearing nothing distinctive, such as clerical garb, mourning, nurse's uniform or livery. Take a pencil and pad to jot down anything that is said to you, together with your replies, in the identical language used as far as possible. Wait until the medium points to you directly. Do not give a sign of assent should, for example the medium say: "I hear the name John", that being your grandfather's first name. When the medium addresses you directly, answer frankly but give no information beyond acknowledging the truth of his statement. Thus when he says: “I see a gentleman standing by you and hear the name John. I think it is your father," do not say as many sitters do: "No it is my grandfather", as that is giving the medium wholly gratuitous

information which only confuses a genuine medium and assists a fraud to deceive you. Instead of answering in this manner say something like this: “Yes, go on, I should like to hear some more about the gentleman," an answer that might be given even if the name has absolutely no significance. In this way, the medium if genuine is encouraged and if fraudulent, will only involve himself in mistakes which will soon expose his true character. Do not betray exaggerated scepticism nor laugh and say that it is quite impossible. The description given may be wholly wrong, but you are not likely to get a correct one by laughing at the person who is working for you.

Remember that it is quite possible that the medium, if fraudulent, possesses private information about certain sitters, has confederates, and is good at guessing and at getting sitters to give information. Judge by what you get yourself and not by what others appear to be getting. After the meeting leave at once. Do not chat with other visitors on any account, and if you have got anything

that you think is good, write out a full account, being careful to note the time, date and medium's full name. Affix to your copy the notes made at the sitting. If you go again to the same meeting, remember that you are known by sight, and if you have a striking appearance do not forget the possibility that you may have been followed on the previous occasion. Be as calm and collected as possible, betraying no excitement should the medium speak of facts which you believed were known only to yourself. Do not speak to others of your experiences, but if you think them sufficiently interesting, send all the material to one of the Societies for Psychical Research, the officers of which will help you if you are a member of these organisations.

For a private sitting for clairvoyant descriptions the custom is usually to arrange a sitting by telephone in America and by letter in England. In either case take care that the request deals simply with the sitting in question and make a note of what was said in the call or keep a copy of the letter. In writing or telephoning for an appointment, it is always

as well to use an assumed name and address c/o some trustworthy friend who will act as intermediary by receiving your correspondence. No genuine medium objects to this, nor to notes being taken at the sitting which is both necessary and proper. After the seance, if results have been obtained write out a detailed account as before, giving the full circumstances of your visit. Preserve all together with the letter or telephone note for the appointment, as these small details are important and indicate that the sitter is earnest in his enquiry.

In conclusion it ought to be stated that it is a mistake, in England at any rate, to suppose that all mental mediums attempt to gain knowledge surreptitiously about their clients. It is well known that certain of the best mediums discourage gossip even on the part of their own sitters as calculated to spoil their results. Whatever may be the source of the correct information which is given through them, it is certainly not, in many cases derived from enquiries made by the mediums or on their behalf.

Automatic Writing

As has been said in the introduction, messages obtained automatically are received in various ways. The simplest is for the subject to write directly on paper in front of him, but everyone cannot do this and so different methods have been devised. One is called the Ouija Board*. a piece of wood on which are painted the letters of the alphabet, figures, and appropriate words such as Yes, No and Good-bye. A small piece of wood mounted on three legs is used with the board, one part of the upper portion being pointed. The operators put their fingers lightly on the surface of the latter, and after a time it begins to move across the board and points to the letters without the operators being aware that they are pushing it, which they are probably doing in reality, although in many cases without knowing it.

The Planchette is a slightly different contrivance. It consists of a heart-shaped piece

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* From the French *oui* and the German *ya* meaning Yes.

of wood, mounted on three supports, two of which are supplied with small wheels, whilst the third consists of a pencil with point downwards. The apparatus is placed on paper and the sitters put their hands on it as in the Ouija. The result is that the pencil proceeds to write out messages directly, instead of pointing to the letters in succession as in the previous case.

Both methods are clumsier than pure automatic writing and it is rarely that a medium uses them in preference to the simpler form. To see if a subject is deliberately pushing the board hold your own fingers so lightly that if the board moves at all your partner must be doing it himself. Note the colour of the nails of the hand and see if the blood is being forced up—a sure sign of pressure being applied. Movements of the arm also betray conscious guidance, although this is not always the case, and certainty could only be attained by special experiments.

As a general rule it is hardly worth while wasting much time over either the Ouija or Planchette, unless really remarkable

results are being obtained, and these, if received, should be sent to a competent psychologist for advice as to their value.

Pure automatic writing may be performed by a medium either normally or when in trance. By trance I mean a condition when the medium apparently loses his normal consciousness, and remains either in a sleeplike condition or appears to change personality whilst still awake. Usually good automatic writing mediums fall into trance. If serious experiments are contemplated it is as well to take a stenographer with you unless you are able to take notes yourself in shorthand. Your notes must be complete and accurate. Number your pages, say when and where the sitting took place, who was there and any special conditions that obtained at the time. Write down all that is said by the automatist, as well as your own remarks. Put what you say in round brackets and any notes thought necessary in square brackets. When copying out the record use some such form as this:

Automatic Writing

MEDIUM. Mrs. T. F. Jones. PLACE.

The medium's house, 35 King St. Bramgate. DATE & TIME. Nov. 3, 1927. 3 pm

PRESENT. Mrs. Jones and self. Mr. Sharp as note-taker.

[Begin] We are here now [Pause] and are glad to see you [Pause] Henry wants [written so badly that it is only just able to be deciphered] to say something (Yes, please; I am listening).

In making the copy keep strictly to the original. Do not add punctuation marks nor respell mis-spelled words. During the sitting refrain from asking too many questions, as this tends to interrupt the flow of the writing. If you think that a question ought to be asked, choose a convenient opportunity and then ask quietly for what you want. Never mind if you get no reply, as such answers often come later during the seance. There is no harm in reading aloud what is produced

and when a word cannot be read ask firmly that it be repeated. If the alleged communicator writes undesirable matter or causes the medium to become excited and violent do not be afraid, but insist calmly and firmly that if such behaviour continues the writing will have to be stopped. Normally the seance will end slowly and the medium will gradually awake from the trance. Between the ending of the trance and being fully awake, the medium will often say something as if continuing a conversation or giving fresh material, and this should always be carefully recorded, as important evidential matter may be found in it.

After the seance leave at once and on no account talk to the medium or to others in the household. Write out your sitting as soon as you can and make enquiries if any points seem as, if they could be verified or denied through enquiry outside. There is no reason why you should tell people why you ask certain questions if they are likely to be pained or shocked at your visiting a medium. Put it in such a way that they

give the information which you want without suspecting the origin or motive of your enquiry.

Remember that you have no proof that what the automatist is writing proceeds from spirits, and treat the records as material which has to be weighed, tested and examined, just as any other communication from an unknown source.

Inspirational Messages

By inspirational messages are meant messages purporting to come from spirits through a medium who speaks instead of writes as described in the previous section. Almost exactly the same procedure should be adopted as in the former case, but fewer questions should be put, as these, in my experience tend to break up the flow of speech and often stop the sitting altogether. These messages are most often religious in tone and show the working of the medium's own mind in strong relief. Evidential material is rarer than in automatic writing and the faculty

is usually employed by mediums in giving long winded religious discourses upon the public platform.

Crystal Gazing

When some people gaze into a crystal glass ball or glass sphere filled with water they sometimes see pictures or words which are apparently in the crystal. Looking into a ball in this way is called crystal gazing or "scrying" and there are some mediums who employ these balls in their experiments. The medium describes what he sees and the sitter takes notes as carefully and conscientiously as he would in any other experiment, noting the time, place etc. as usual.

The visions are usually ushered in by the crystal becoming cloudy or milky, and then these clouds roll away revealing a picture. In some cases mediums claim that others can see the picture at the same time. Such cases are rare and are probably usually fraudulent, a written message, photograph or coloured scene being introduced under the crystal as

the medium holds it. It must be understood that in ordinary crystal gazing the pictures are not really in the crystal but in the mind of the person who sees them, to whom it appears as if they were in the crystal. Thus if several persons saw the same picture in the crystal at the same time, it would mean that each had the same mental picture, which is unusual, and for certain reasons is of especial interest to psychical researchers: if therefore the reader knows of such cases being well authenticated, he would be doing a service by reporting it to one of the Societies for Psychical Research.

There are very few mediums nowadays who sit exclusively for crystal gazing. Those that remain belong rather to the strolling fortune-telling class, than to the regular mediums, but there are one or two who still practise it for evidential purposes and obtain excellent results. Such persons are usually under the strict surveillance of professional psychical researchers and it is very unlikely that members of the public will ever have access to them for experimental work.

Psychometry

The word psychometry is applied to a phase of mediumship in which the medium by merely taking some letter, object or other article is able to relate incidents and facts concerning it and its past history. Thus suppose I take a letter to a medium, written by a person whom I do not know and composed during some period of stress or suffering, and the medium after taking the letter, handles it but does not open it, and then relates certain incidents about the writer and the conditions under which the letter was written, that medium would be called a *psychometrist.* There is some excellent evidence for this power of psychometry, although at present no satisfactory explanation of it has been forthcoming.

When visiting a medium of this class, the same care for concealing identity should be employed as in former cases, although if the purpose of the visit is a purely experimental one such rigid precautions need not be observed. The articles taken can be of any

sort, provided that they are small enough to be handled by the medium. Letters should be enclosed in plain sealed envelopes chosen from an unopened packet before the sitting as if the medium sees the writing, style of envelope, post mark etc. of the original, clues might be given which it would be unwise to furnish. Articles may be either wrapped up in rubber or oiled silk, or presented uncovered as the needs and requirements of different mediums vary in this respect.

Some psychometrists add to the demonstration by giving messages from those persons to whom the articles belonged, if those persons are dead, but in purely scientific work this is rarely done. Full notes of every thing the medium says should be taken; the place, date and time given, and special conditions which appeared to affect the medium during the reading, such as shivering, fear, or complaint of feeling hot or cold. If articles have been brought, concerning which the sitter knows nothing, he need not and indeed cannot reply to the medium's questions, the correctness of the latter's impressions being confirmed

later by personal enquiries on the part of the sitter. If the sitter believes that remarkable results are being obtained a full report should be sent to one or other of the Societies for Psychical Research, as for various reasons experiments in this field are particularly interesting from certain points of view.

Sealed Letter Reading

By sealed letter reading I mean the acquisition of knowledge of a sealed letter or billet, sometimes said to be shown by a certain class of mediums. In England such phenomena are now rarely seen in public, although occasionally such performers hire parlours in fashionable thoroughfares, and advertise their powers on notice-boards which men carry through the streets. In Europe there are still some mediums who profess to be able to read sealed letters, and in America such phenomena are commonly shown at public circles and services.

Sealed letter reading, like slate writing, is nearly always fraudulent, and I have only once seen an example of it where I was unable

to discover any normal explanation. It was in connection with a Polish engineer, in whose case some evidence exists that he does possess a power of this kind, although systematic enquiry into his claims has never been granted. In America the most famous exponent of the art of sealed letter reading was the late Bert Reese, but when I saw him in New York I was able to detect the methods which he used at his performance. The corresponding medium in Europe was formerly associated with Reese in Memphis (U.S.A.). Styling himself Professor Akyldar he took a parlour in Regent Street in 1920. Some years later he reappeared in France under the name of Ludwig Kahn and was investigated by the Parisian enquirers at the Institut Metapsychique Internationale. He convinced them of his supernormal powers, but the reports themselves lent the strongest weight to the assumption that his methods were those of Reese.'

There are so many methods of producing these phenomena fraudulently, that it is

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* I have summarised the literature concerning Kahn in the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 1926, XXIII, 94-95.

hopeless even to attempt to make a resume of them. Very broadly speaking, the main point to remember is that the medium at some stage or other of the proceedings becomes acquainted with the contents of the sealed papers; and that in order to do this it is often necessary to substitute one paper for another of the same appearance. Before going, therefore, to such an exhibition provide yourself with slips of paper and envelopes of *bright* colours. Draw on the envelopes some odd designs in deep black ink, so that it will be impossible for the medium to exchange your envelopes for others. If you are asked to prepare your billets beforehand (and it is always good to have some of these prepared) buy some of those opaque black or red envelopes which photographers sell for enclosing plates, and place your slip of paper inside one of these and between two opaque black pieces of thick paper or thin cardboard. Paste down your flap, and seal it with wax of some unusual colour. Run a line from a copying-ink pencil along the outer edge of the two flaps at the back. This will prevent the envelope from

being steamed open, as water will affect the pencil lines if it is applied to them. Make a note precisely how you have put your billet inside the envelope: that is to say, notice whether the folded part of your slip when inside the envelope is at the bottom or top, right hand side or left, when looking at the envelope flap side away from you. When undoing the envelope to verify the statement of the medium regarding its contents carefully note all these particulars, as they may be of extreme importance in determining the true nature of the phenomena. Many a medium fails to remember the position of the billet when replacing it after having read it fraudulently. Spiritualists explain such changes in position both in the case of billets in sealed envelopes, and photographic plates in sealed packets by asserting that bad spirits have exercised the power of passing matter through matter in order to embarrass the medium. The sensible person will, no doubt, take a different view, and he may be glad of the preceding hints, which will enable him to detect some of the most ingenious tricks ever invented by mediums,

CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

The so-called physical phenomena are entirely different from those that we have been considering in the preceding section. They consist mainly of occurrences and manifestations which cannot apparently be explained on normal grounds, and so other “explanations” are resorted to, such as “spirits", “psychic force" or "psychic substance". A great deal of spiritualistic belief is based on these physical phenomena and it is important for the novice to understand the real facts before he begins to attend seances for these manifestations.

Now there are two main classes of persons who attend seances of this kind, with a serious purpose. Firstly there are those people who

have suffered bereavement and who want consolation, hoping to be able to see again their dear ones in materialized forms, and to recognise their well known hand writing on slates or paper. Secondly there are those persons who are interested in the material and mechanical side of the physical phenomena; that is to say they want to investigate the means whereby tables are lifted, raps are caused or lights are produced.

Let us take then as a beginning the people who go to obtain comfort and consolation in bereavement. Firstly, let it be quite clearly understood that the enormous majority of all physical phenomena by both public and private mediums is fraudulent; that is to say that the means of their accomplishment are purely normal and have nothing in them which demands any but a purely normal explanation. This is the first thing to remember; that the chances are that when you see a manifestation of this sort it is fraudulent and the medium is deceiving you. It does not matter if it is a public medium on a platform or a private medium at home.

The chances are that the phenomena are fraudulent.

When you go to a conjuring entertainment, do you expect to understand how everything is done? Of course you do not. Then why expect to understand how a medium performs his tricks? You say the conditions are different? They are: different tricks require different conditions, but that does not alter the fact that they are tricks all the same.

Now consider another point. Is it worth while to attend seances for physical phenomena in the hope of obtaining comfort, when the fact is that even if genuine phenomena occur, they have no bearing on survival without being accompanied by mental phenomena, which are extremely rare in the case of the same medium? It is presumed that the reader desires to know the truth and does not wish to be deceived. The truth is this: the physical manifestations are fraudulently produced by mediums for the express purpose of obtaining money from you by trading on your own sorrows and desires for consolation. If they invite "tests", they make sure that

they are applied by persons that know nothing about such matters and whom they can easily deceive. Remember that no genuine medium who gives sittings 'at all, ever refuses scientific conditions. He usually demands them and rightly so, for unless such conditions prevail, his work is certain to be discredited by all sensible people. If therefore a medium refuses such conditions on the ground of “injurious vibrations” “unsympathetic conditions” or similar excuses, you have a sure sign of a fraudulent trickster. Finally I would say to the sorrowing person: avoid the physical phenomena. If genuine they can offer you little; but they are almost certain to be fraudulent.

The second class of persons who attend sittings for physical phenomena are those who are interested in the material and mechanical side of the proceedings. It is generally of little interest to these if no tests of any kind are permitted; but if severe conditions are imposed then the phenomena become interesting from whatever standpoint one chooses to regard them. The same

warning is needed here as before, and it cannot be too forcibly pointed out that the chances are heavily against anything genuine being seen in circles where the public are admitted. Mediums presenting phenomena which are either genuine or difficult to explain almost immediately pass under the control of scientific men with whom they can obtain the best conditions and can be studied at leisure.

In the following sections no attempt has been made to deal in an exhaustive manner with any phase of physical mediumship. The hints given have been put together from my notes in the hope that they may prevent the mistakes an ill informed sitter invariably makes. They may also be found of service as signals for care and watchfulness by the more experienced sitters. Before passing on, it may be as well to say a few words on the conditions usually obtaining at seances for ordinary physical phenomena. Darkness or semi-darkness is usually the rule. This assists fraud to an enormous extent and is wholly unnecessary and indefensible except in a few rare cases. A dim light can nearly

always be used and should be insisted upon at the beginning. Music, praying and singing are often indulged in in public and private circles, which serve a double purpose in cases of fraud: (a) for drowning the sound of the medium preparing his apparatus, and (b) for Putting the sitters in a state of semi-religious anticipation favourable to suggestion and self-delusion.

In many cases a cabinet is provided which usually consists of a structure of black curtains with two curtains in front sliding on a rod; or occasionally merely a couple of curtains are hung on a rod placed diagonally across a corner of the room. Many of these observances spring from the idea that the “spirits” can only manifest in darkness and as “spirits” are connected with religion, so a religious atmosphere is desirable. Spiritualists are in this way largely responsible for the fraud that abounds in the “Movement", wholly forgetful of the fact that genuine physical phenomena seem to have occurred in a good light with the observers standing all round the medium. There are some people who

go to seances for physical phenomena for the express purpose of breaking up the proceedings by violence and of exposing the medium. It need hardly be said that no experienced and serious investigator ever does this, as if he cannot distinguish fraudulent from genuine phenomena he leaves the field open for those who can. A fraudulent medium is almost as interesting sometimes as a genuine one especially if the investigator is acquainted with the principles of deception.

In the section that follows a few hints will be given which may help sitters to distinguish fairly obvious cases of fraudulent practices on the part of mediums. He must not expect ever to be able to detect the more subtle devices used, as the knowledge of such is only acquired through long experience and training. If however, the ordinary layman is completely puzzled by phenomena he sees with a certain medium, he has a clear course open to him by which to discover whether his medium is genuine or fraudulent. All he has to do is to ask the medium whether he will consent to hold, say half a dozen test sittings

with an organisation devoted to serious Psychical research. A committee would then be approached to investigate the phenomena if sufficient funds were forthcoming, and if genuine a report would be published to that effect. On the other hand if the medium refuses sittings, talks about "sceptics' injurious mentality" etc. then the layman may as well put him down as a fraud, as no genuine medium who gives sittings at all to members of the public ever refused the honour of investigation by a scientific society.

Table Tipping

By table tipping is meant a common result obtained when several persons sit round a table with the fingers resting on the surface. The table begins to move and tip, and if the alphabet is repeated the table often tips at certain letters thus spelling out words and sentences. There are two main points of interest in table tipping. Firstly the fact that the table moves without the sitters *knowing*

that they are moving it; and secondly that it is possible that sometimes the table may spell out information provably correct which was wholly unknown to those engaged in the experiment. Generally speaking the table is always moved by the sitters themselves and there is no “psychic force” or “magnetism” about it. Such phrases mean nothing and the sooner the layman stops using them the better. In some cases the sitters move the table with unconscious muscular action and I have seen two well educated people, one a medical man, pushing a table all round a room, when I am pretty sure they were not conscious of the pressure they were exerting.

A good way to prevent muscular action of this sort is to ask the sitters when the table begins to move to allow their finger tips to slide over the moving surface, and when this is done it will be noticed how rapidly the table comes to a standstill.

The interesting thing in table tipping is not the physical movement but the messages and information spelt out by the tips irrespective

of the fact of whether these are produced by the sitters or not. This information should be treated exactly in the same way as that obtained through mental mediums and should be verified if possible. In many cases the information will be untrue, and indeed I have never been present at a table tipping circle where the messages were not wholly valueless. Such however is not always the case and care should be taken to have an accurate record made so that everything spelt out and also the questions put by the leader of the circle may be jotted down at the time for future reference. If good results are obtained and information is apparently given which is proved to be both correct and beyond the normal knowledge of the sitters, arrangements should be made to sit regularly. As public mediums for table tipping are almost unknown a private circle should be formed. Four persons are a good number, and a light, firm, plain, four-legged table should be chosen. Darkness is not necessary nor is ordinary conversation detrimental provided of course that there be no levity or silly giggling. Sit

regularly once a week on the same day and at the same hour and appoint one of the sitters as leader of the circle to ask any questions and to conduct conversation with the alleged 49 communicators". There is no harm in presupposing the existence of some communicating intelligence, provided that it is remembered that proof must come through evidence of personal identity and not through vapourings about the life in spirit land or semi-religious and long-winded messages. Insist on evidence of identity before receiving messages from the “intelligence". For instance demand the name of the communicator, approximate date of his death and particulars of his earth life. All these details might be given and might be correct, but if the facts were known, or had been known to the sitters they do not contribute any evidence for the supernormal. For good evidence the facts must be correct and unknown to any of the sitters; and it must be proved that the facts could not have been so known at any period of the sitters' lives.

Raps

By a rap is meant a sharp tap or knock heard upon or in any object and produced through some means *not recognised* at present.

Genuine raps are excessively rare even if they ever take place at all and I have never heard one in the course of years of investigation. As this book is confined to raps produced by mediums, it need merely be said that the first thing to make sure is that the medium is not producing them normally. Naturally raps produced in the medium's own house on his own table and chairs are useless as evidence and I assume that the medium has been invited to the house of the sitter.

Usually a small circle is made round a table and the raps sound on the chairs, on the table and sometimes as far as four or five feet away from the medium. A dim light is customary and deception is so easy that strict conditions have to be imposed. No attention need be paid to raps on the table if the medium is sitting near to it, nor indeed to any raps

which occur within a radius of about three feet from the medium. Raps nearer than this might be genuine but their verification would depend upon the use of apparatus out of the reach of the normal sitter. If raps occur at some considerable distance from the medium, and reply to questions by rapping the number of times required and by spelling out messages when the alphabet is repeated, then the case becomes important and full notes and observations should be made at each sitting, and a report sent to one of the Societies who will assist in the investigation if requested.

There are a dozen of ways of producing fake raps, some almost indetectable except by the expert. In one method the medium stands three feet from the table and stretches out one hand about two and a half feet from its surface. At request sharp raps take place on the under side of the table, yet everything can be examined a moment afterwards.

In the United States apparatus for producing raps is sold in certain stores, but I have never seen such contrivances used in England. Very often fraudulent mediums prefer the

simpler methods, and at one time I experimented with a private business man who claimed to produce genuine raps and who produced them with his hands and feet in a most ingenious manner. Generally speaking there are few mediums who sit exclusively for raps; these being usually combined with other phenomena such as lights, the movement of objects without apparent contact, etc. In sittings for table turning raps are said to be occasionally produced, but as the sitters usually have their hands on the table it is very difficult to discover whether the noises are really raps or merely creaks in the table. I have never heard what I consider to be a genuine rap at a sitting of this kind, although the other sitters were quite sure that the noises produced were in reality raps and not sounds due to the pressure of their hands on the table.

"Genuine" raps seem to be of two kinds. There are some which sound like short sharp taps sometimes increasing in sound until they resemble ordinary blows. It is as if objects were being struck by rods furnished with either padded or hard knobs

at their ends. The other class of raps are more similar to slight explosions, like the noise made by an electric spark or by the shattering of Rupert Drops. With genuine physical mediums they often take place at the beginning and end of seances, sometimes replying to questions once a suitable code has been established. Spiritualists are content to think that the "spirit friends" are rapping and have little interest in the methods used by psychical researchers to discover exactly how these sounds are produced.

Lights

By "Lights" are meant luminous points or cloudy masses of vapour which sometimes appear in the seance room flashing out suddenly or floating about. Sometimes they are single points of light but occasionally luminous globes appear of varying degrees of brilliancy. Generally speaking they are peculiar, inasmuch as they scarcely ever illumine the space around them and are usually violet in colour, although some have been seen of yellow

and salmon-pink shades. Like all physical phenomena they are constantly being produced fraudulently, and their appearance is of no evidential value unless the medium has been subjected to a strict control by competent observers. I have never yet seen what I consider to be genuine lights, although there is some evidence which might lead one to suppose that they occasionally occur. Like raps, they are often the accompaniment of other phenomena and are rarely presented alone by any medium. In public circles few precautions can be taken, as investigation is not usually permitted. Those sitting next the medium, however, can make certain observations which may be of assistance in judging the true nature of the phenomena. When the lights are visible and are floating about, try to ascertain whether the limbs of the medium are in movement and whether his arms are extended either in front or at the sides. Ask to be allowed to hold one hand of the medium and request the observer on the other side to do the same. Then notice whether the altitude of the lights has changed, as it is

possible that their manipulation, if fraudulent, is now being controlled by the medium's feet. One clever method is to affix an irregular patch of luminous paper to the sole of the boot, and when this is moved about as the medium raises his foot a very striking and novel effect is produced.

At an ordinary seance the casual visitor must not expect to know whether the lights presented are genuine or fraudulent. This can only be ascertained through the exercise of the most stringent precautions which ordinary public mediums never permit and which require expert knowledge for their successful execution. Lights have little significance, and although, if genuine, they are of great interest to the physicist and physiologist they have little meaning to the ordinary public and have but small relation to survival after death.

Movement of Objects without Contact

The technical term for the movement of objects without contact is *telekinesis*. This is derived from the Greek, and simply means

movement at a distance. Such phenomena are common at public circles where the physical phenomena are usually presented. Movements of objects are also said to occur at seances where the spirits are supposed to speak through a hollow cylinder or trumpet. In this case the trumpet is often said to float round the room, its motion being observed by means of a luminous band affixed to its larger end. I have never myself seen a movement of this sort, although I have often seen what other people describe as such a movement. It seems to be forgotten that mediums can stand up and move objects about after having escaped from the inefficient control exercised at public sittings.

Apart from fraud however, telekinesis is really one of the best attested of all psychic phenomena. Nor ought it to be considered so very curious. Everyone believes in telekinesis. I have only to demonstrate it to them with a magnet and a piece of iron and they are at once convinced. There seems to be no connection between the iron and the magnet. Nor is there of a material kind.

What that connection is is very mysterious; quite as mysterious as that which actually happens to a sensitive plate or film when light falls upon it. Because it is mysterious however, we do not deny its existence. There is a good deal of evidence for telekinesis with mediums, but as mediums are much rarer than magnets the phenomena cannot be demonstrated so easily. Indeed it is so difficult to see these phenomena under proper control that at the present moment I am unable to indicate a single medium with whom these occurrences can be observed under satisfactory conditions.

Usually in these cases phenomena of this sort occur without warning and are seldom repeated, so it is very difficult to investigate them thoroughly. There are some mediums who claim to be able to show these movements almost at any time, whilst there are others with whom it is necessary to wait hours before anything unusual occurs.

When investigating these movements the first consideration is naturally to determine whether there is anything material in the way of an ordinary connection between the medium

and the object. I say ordinary connection because there obviously must be some connection. Objects do not move or are lifted up unless some “force” or material link is operating upon them. If there were no link of any kind then we should have what might conveniently be termed a miracle, and miracles of this sort have never been scientifically demonstrated. It is only the disbelievers in all psychical phenomena who demand such miracles. If it could be shown that, proceeding from the medium there is some "force" or active principle which was responsible for the movement of an object at a distance, then it would no longer be considered to be miraculous but would become an abnormal but natural phenomenon.

Now as sittings for telekinesis are usually held in darkness it is often quite impossible to determine whether genuine phenomena have occurred or not. Of course if one were allowed to see that the medium did not move, then one could be certain that an object entirely out of the medium's reach could not be normally moved if one had eliminated confederates,

threads, and similar possibilities. It is the best plan for the inexperienced sitter to suspend judgment unless the movements take place in a good light and at such a distance from the medium that normal action by the latter is impossible. Phenomena occurring in darkness and in public circles are of no value to the ordinary sitter, and should the medium refuse better conditions, or appear to be insulted by such suggestions, it is better to leave him alone. Above all be suspicious of mediums who prefer to be bound with ropes rather than be held on either side by two of the observers. Such rope ties may appear to be striking and spectacular, yet in reality they are easy to escape from and are chosen with that purpose in view. Without a detailed knowledge of rope ties and the means to escape therefrom the ordinary sitter will have no chance of detecting the trick. Further remarks concerning this matter will be found in a later chapter. Should the reader find himself in serious perplexity regarding a particular case it is better to consult an expert rather than attempt an inefficient investigation. Such

phenomena are of great interest to science, but an enquiry inefficiently conducted may do harm to the medium concerned and seriously cripple any supernormal powers that he may possess.

Materialization

By the power of materialization is meant the faculty said to be possessed by certain mediums of extruding a certain kind of matter* which is able to form itself or be formed into various shapes and structures. Among spiritualists the term is more often thought of as denoting the power to produce forms resembling human limbs and occasionally complete human bodies which are then styled "full-form materializations". Among psychical researchers, however, the word is more generally used to denote any kind of extrusion of matter by the medium, and it is thought by some that the movement of objects without contact is in reality caused by such extrusions, although at times these formations are completely invisible. It will be

° Called ‘ectoplasm' by spiritualists and others.

convenient here to confine our attention to the kind of materialization the spiritualist thinks of when he uses the word.

What usually happens at a seance for materialization is something like this. In one corner of the room what is called a cabinet is erected. This is often a couple of curtains running on a rod or tape, placed diagonally across the corner. The sitters, having been arranged in a horseshoe formation await the entry of the medium, who will enter the cabinet and occupy a chair just behind the curtain. Before the sitting begins a cursory examination of the room, cabinet and medium may be permitted, but usually the inspection is not sufficient to discover the presence of trap-doors or similar devices. The medium, having entered the cabinet, goes into a trance, or is supposed to do so. Before the trance comes on the light is turned out and either the spectators are left in darkness, or a dim red light of no practical utility is allowed to remain. The medium is usually accompanied by his manager or employer, who arranges the conditions, collects the fees from the spectators and explains what

is about to happen in a general way. The sitters are usually asked to hold hands, and after a short time the phenomena begin. Heralded by the strains of a musical box or gramophone a voice makes itself heard from the cabinet. This voice is said to be that of the medium's “Control", or supposed spirit who speaks through the mouth of the medium. This voice will make an announcement regarding the phenomena, may change the conditions or order of the sitters or increase or decrease the light. Raps may be heard within the cabinet, and after a time luminous forms of varying heights are shown at the opening of the curtains. Occasionally these forms come out and glide about in front of the observers. Now and then these figures are life-like, shaking hands with the observers and showing warmth and vitality. More usually however, they hover around the curtains, and show no inclination to come forward. In disappearing, they either withdraw into the cabinet, or at times seem to sink through the floor itself. Very rarely, when the light is good it is occasionally possible to see both the medium and the figure

at the same time, but this has rarely, if ever, happened under conditions which now-a-days would be considered satisfactory.

The amount of fraud in materialization is enormous, and the beginner would do well to keep out of public circles, unless the medium concerned has a good reputation with serious, sensible, well-informed persons. If the phenomena however, are of such a nature that it is difficult to assume that fraud has been responsible for them it might be as well to take a little trouble to ascertain whether the medium will accept reasonable conditions. In this connexion the following hints may be of some service.

In the first place suggest that the seances should be held in your own house, or in the house of a trusted friend. If the sittings are held in the medium's house or in the residence of one of his acquaintances, deception is merely invited, as trap-doors and similar devices are cheap and easy to fix. If the medium consents to sit under your conditions with regard to place, choose a number of serious people for your sitters and arrange for the medium to

bring a friend with him if he wishes to do so. If he is genuine it is quite natural that he should wish to have a friend near him during the sittings, and if the seances continue and he realises that the circle is a serious one who will play no tricks upon him then he will, no doubt, consent to sit alone without any companion. Remember that no genuine medium objects to tests, so tell him that you expect he will consent to certain precautions being taken. It is only the fraud who is insulted by tests. The genuine medium will insist upon them because he knows that he is not responsible for what may happen in the trance state, and therefore he will ask for proper conditions during the sittings. The precautions to be taken depend upon the phenomena which each particular medium is said to produce. They vary with the different classes of manifestations and cannot be dealt with here. Generally speaking the best precaution of all is to have sittings conducted in such light that everything in the room is plainly visible. If the medium insists on red light (which is useful for photographic purposes) arrange

it so that a diffused light is shed over the area where materializations are expected. Never allow the lamp to be arranged so that the light is thrown into the faces of the observers. Arrange that the medium should have one hand held on one side by one of your friends, the other being similarly held on the opposite side. The medium's companion, should he bring one, should be placed so as to be between the sitter who holds one of the medium's hands and the next one in the semi-circle. In this way both his hands are under control. Distrust “full forms"; they are excessively rare, and should they occur under conditions outlined above the case should be reported to some competent authority.

As has been said above materializations vary in character. Vague hand and arm shapes may occasionally be seen; and sometimes the hands are fully formed being warm to the touch. In recent times materializations have been taking the form of white veil-like formations and waxy structures which seem to proceed from various parts of the medium's body. On no account should any materializations

ever be touched or seized without the permission of the medium, or of the personality which speaks through him in trance. If the medium is genuine such a proceeding might produce a shock and you will rightly be prevented from attending any more seances. If the medium is fraudulent it is true that you may expose the fraud in this manner, but it is a proceeding which is to be condemned. The leading English spiritualists have recently been praising a newspaper committee for exposing a medium by flashing a sudden light upon him. The result has been to show genuine mediums that they are not able to trust spiritualists when a crucial point is involved. It is difficult to see how mediums can protect themselves against these outrages, and probably the best plan for those persons who really possess supernormal powers is either only to sit for their personal friends or with scientific men of known probity and seriousness of purpose. Torches are valuable when used in co-operation with the medium. Without his consent they should be forbidden in the seance room.

A word of advice in conclusion. Avoid public circles where phenomena are exhibited on certain evenings at so much per head. The manifestations are almost certain to be fraudulent and are being presented either to make money or to advertise the medium's manager, who often poses as a serious scientific investigator, when he is in reality taking the place of a showman exhibiting a freak. If you still wish to attend these performances go simply to observe what takes place, using your eyes and cars to the uttermost and remembering that all is not gold that glitters. If you are impressed and feel satisfied that the medium is worth serious attention talk to him quietly and see what conditions he will accept. If he will give you a private sitting and will accept reasonable conditions try to arrange a second seance to which you can invite some impartial, unemotional and experienced observers. If the medium objects to proper control conditions, or appears to be insulted by your proposals, he is not worth serious attention and money should not be wasted over him.

Apports

By apports (Fr. apporter=to bring) are meant material objects which have been brought from outside the seance room into it when all normal openings, such as doors and windows have been closed. Apport mediums are not common and scientific evidence for their occurrence is very slight. Few mediums sit exclusively for apports, but these phenomena sometimes accompany other forms of mediumship. Naturally the only way to secure genuine apports is to hold the sittings in your own house and to see that the medium is either thoroughly searched, or sewn up in some gauze-like bag so that he is entirely enclosed from head to feet. If he is thus enclosed *before* being brought into the seance room, into which neither he, nor a confederate, has ever previously entered then apports may be seriously considered. If under such conditions large apports appear in the room it is worth while to report the case to an expert, but as far as my knowledge goes no

apport medium has ever succeeded in producing phenomena under control conditions. A medium claiming such phenomena resides in Germany, and has been seen in England. In this case there is often no control whatever, the hands of the medium not even being held. Yet small stones and similar objects are sometimes produced and sitters can be obtained to pay good money to be present at such a preposterous performance.

Trumpet Phenomena

By trumpet phenomena are meant those manifestations in which voices speak through a cylinder or trumpet to the sitters assembled to hear them. Thus at a seance with a trumpet medium the sitters are usually arranged in a semi-circle, the medium either occupying a place in the arc, or being seated at one end of it. A metal or cardboard tube, somewhat like an attenuated megaphone, is placed near the medium. Sometimes two or more trumpets are employed, and occasionally luminous bands or stars are affixed to the

trumpet. The room is made dark, and after a period of waiting one of the trumpets may move, rise into the air, tap a sitter on the knee; or a whispered voice may issue from its larger end. These voices are alleged by spiritualists to be the voices of spirits, and it is true that many of them purport to be the voices of deceased friends of the sitters giving names, addresses, and incidents as evidence of identity.

Trumpet mediums may be visited for two distinct purposes. One may go in order to enquire into what I may term the mechanics of the phenomena; that is to say the methods by which the trumpet is moved, and by which the voices are produced may be the chief points of interest. The second purpose is to determine the accuracy or otherwise of the information furnished by the voices as evidence of identity. Although the two interests are not mutually exclusive, people with the second are usually indifferent to the methods of producing the voices to which they are listening. In other words it does not really concern such sitters if the medium is really producing

the voices by whispering down the trumpet if the information given is such that it contains matter which could not have been acquired by the medium normally.

Like most modern physical mediums trumpet mediums usually work in the dark, and like all mediums who work in darkness they often have something to hide. The golden rule for all amateur investigators to remember is that mediums who sit in darkness are always suspect. Spiritualists will tell you that darkness is necessary; and the first thing a spiritualist does is to pull down the blinds. He does not tell you that D. D. Home, the most famous medium who ever lived, derided dark seances and called black cloth cabinets "Punch-and-judy boxes". Neither will he tell you that the greatest of all trumpet mediums (Mrs. Blake) sat in broad daylight, near the window. If therefore an enquiry into trumpet mediumship is proposed, the beginner had better concentrate upon the voices and the information they give. Do not be led away by elaborate apparatus for instituting so-called mechanical control. Such devices are often

constructed to advertise their inventors and not to render the task of investigating easy. The only apparatus necessary is the light of day, or at night an electric bulb burning throughout the sitting.

Now even if it be assumed that the medium is really producing the voices by whispering down the trumpet, there is no valid reason for supposing that the information given may not be supernormally acquired. It is certainly unlikely that it is, but we have no proof that it is not. In this case it would be merely an instance of an ordinary "mental" medium who uses the trumpet as an added attraction. If the medium consents to give private sittings, have a shorthand record of everything that is said by the medium, the sitter, and the voice. In inviting sitters, send to each a simple pseudonym, for use at the sitting, and permit no introductions either to the medium or to one another. Avoid giving away the slightest scrap of information, and follow the rules already given under the heading of mental mediumship. When a voice speaks give some encouragement, but give no facts which can

be later reproduced in a changed form. Do not act as interpreter to the voices. I have heard a sound like a cough interpreted by innocent sitters as half-a-dozen different names like Annie, Mary, Carrie, or Dannie. It was not surprising that, in half an hour when the incident had been forgotten, Daniel and Caroline both turned up, to be at once recognised by their delighted relatives. Remember that if the voices are those of your friends “on the other side" those same friends are as sensible as when they were on earth, and they will not object to test questions or similar attempts to obtain trustworthy information. Do not follow the common plan of treating the voices as if they belonged to children or idiots. Be self-contained and serious: prepare beforehand what you propose saying, if certain voices speak to you. If you have no note-taker remember the facts so that you may know the precise order in which those facts are given. Remember that to suppose that the voices are being produced by supernormal power implies that there is something akin to the human larynx which is causing the necessary

air waves. Such phenomena are inherently improbable, and should not be considered unless they occur under conditions of irreproachable control.

Spirit Photography

Spirit photography is much misunderstood. The man in the street when he first hears of it is apt to suppose that what is meant is that the portraits of deceased persons can be obtained through a medium upon a photographic plate; and that is exactly what the simple minded spiritualist believes really happens. Such people suppose that the spirits are around us although invisible, and that through some mysterious process the "eye of the camera" is able to register their presence when acted upon by the power of the medium.

Now this ingenuous theory is not that one held by the more intelligent believers in the authenticity of the phenomena included under the term spirit photography. It is true that the phenomenon consists essentially in the

production of recognised faces upon photographic plates; but it is thought that there may be other methods of obtaining such images than to suppose that the spirits are in the studio and reflecting light into the lens of the camera. Thus it is often believed that the surface of the photographic plate or film is in some manner influenced by the spirits, so that on development the image of the deceased person which has somehow been impressed is finally made visible. No clear idea of how these remarkable changes are caused has so far been published, and those who hold such views have usually so hazy and vague ideas on the subject that any lucid exposition of the problem is not to be expected.

The ordinary intelligent man and woman of to-day, however, do not care what may, or may not be the theories underlying spirit photography. They want to know whether the thing exists at all; whether the faces of the dead do in reality appear under irreproachable conditions when fraud has been absolutely eliminated.

Now this is a very difficult question to answer. Many people who have had a great deal of experience are willing to affirm that such phenomena do in fact occur under conditions which render their fraudulent production impossible. Such testimony is, in my judgment, considerably weakened by the fact that such persons are almost, if not always, found to be those who offer similar testimony regarding other phenomena which are almost certainly fraudulent. Moreover, in the course of a long professional experience I have had the opportunity of examining a great number of cases produced by such persons as specimens of what they consider their best cases, and I have found that in these cases the evidence is far from satisfactory.

Apart, however, from my own opinions, it may be stated broadly that there are no competent psychical researchers who will admit that any good evidence exists that spirit photographs have been produced under conditions which rendered their normal production impossible. Isolated cases may be difficult of explanation, but when a systematic series

of experiments is undertaken the phenomena fail to take place, which leads one to suppose that a series gives the observer the opportunity to appreciate and check the various fraudulent methods which may be used. Another fact which supports the theory that fraud is invariably responsible for spirit photographs is that the mediums refuse systematic series of experiments conducted by experts. They prefer the untrained witness, and invariably refuse conditions which prevent them from tampering with the plates. Moreover they often exact such preposterous conditions as that the sitters should use the plates provided by the mediums; and often insist that, if the sitter prefers his own plates, these should be given to the medium beforehand for the purpose of what is called "magnetization".* These conditions will, of course, be refused by the intelligent observer, who, if he is wise, will decline to sit with the medium except under conditions which I will now briefly outline.

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*This term is quite meaningless, and is simply used to denote an imaginary influence exercised by the medium on the plates before the sitting. There is no evidence whatever that any such influence exists.

Firstly, then, if you are not an experienced photographer take someone with you who is.* Take your own camera with a roll of newly bought film inserted beforehand. Take in addition a small quarter-plate camera with a slide ready loaded with two plates of medium speed or of the brand that the medium prefers. Keep both cameras and any additional plates or films in a locked attache case or grip. If the medium refuses the roll-film camera (a suspicious circumstance) then you will be able to use the one you have already brought loaded with plates. Fix firmly in your mind that the only part of your equipment that the medium must be allowed to handle at any time is the *outside* of your camera. Do not allow him to change the slide or anything of that sort. If it is proposed to develop the first two plates, do it yourself, and if the medium insists on accompanying you to the dark room insist that your friend may also accompany you. Do not forget to lock up

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* The following remarks are meant to apply to a sitter with some knowledge of photography. If an experienced friend accompanies him then they may refer to the latter.

your camera in your case and take it with you to the dark room. A brilliant trick depends on the sitter leaving his things to be tampered with by a confederate of the medium when the sitter is absent in the dark room. When developing, do not permit the medium to handle the plates or (and this is most important) to pour on the developer. Remember that no genuine medium will insist on doing any of these things, and would scarcely demand to be in the dark room at any time with the sitter. If, in spite of all your precautions faces or abnormal markings occur arrange if you can afford it for another six sittings to compare your results. If fraudulent the medium will probably refuse, but if genuine he will welcome a serious enquirer who understands the importance of systematic work. If he accepts, tell him that you propose consulting some experienced person concerning the proper procedure, and note closely how the medium receives the proposal. At all times remember that every genuine medium welcomes investigation. If the medium accepts all your proposals, approach some competent authority

and discuss the whole affair. In order to indicate what facts are necessary in cases of this kind, the following form which I myself have used for some years and which I have drawn up expressly for the purpose may be found useful. Nothing essential has been omitted, and although certain of the details might, to the uninitiated, be thought unnecessary, it may be said that, in this subject, what are seemingly the most trivial facts are often the most important.

In conclusion a few hints regarding certain features may not be out of place. Since the majority of alleged spirit photographs are out of focus, and present a blurred appearance, it is easy for the enthusiast to recognise features in vague markings and hazy outlines. Remember that the medium is not bound to present any particular portrait. He has the whole range of all your friends and relatives who have died, and for the matter of that, of all your living acquaintances also. Thus by presenting a vague face of, say, a middle-aged woman, it is possible that someone in the gallery of your friends or relatives may

bear a resemblance, which, with a little imagination, may develop into recognition. Do not be led away by emotional excitement to see likenesses where none really exist. Examine the portrait carefully. Notice how the features are really made up of vague patches of light and shade, and possess no true outline of their own. Remember that coincidences must always happen, and that it is not at all an odd coincidence for a vague face to resemble someone you know. Finally never be tempted to do what is so commonly done by thoughtless people. Do not have a sitting without test conditions in the hope that a recognised portrait will prove to you the genuineness of the phenomena. There are some people who will allow the medium repeatedly to use his own plates and willingly pay the fee required in the hope of getting a recognised portrait. Such mediums reveal their real nature in their methods, and their supporters are merely putting money into the pockets of mischievous swindlers, who trade upon the sorrows and hopes of a suffering humanity.

PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

Experiments in Photography

NUMBER PLACE DATE TIME
EXPERIMENTERSUBJECT[i.e. medium]

NAMES OF OTHERS PRESENT
PHYSICAL CONDITION OF SUBJECT
MENTAL CONDITION OF SUBJECT
WEATHER TEMPERATURE OF ROOM

CAMERA USED
SLIDE USED *
PLATES (FILMS)
WHEN WAS THE CAMERA LOADED? BY WHOM?

STOPS USED
TIMES OF EXPOSURE (or of HOLDING SLIDE)*
TIME AND PLACE OF DEVELOPMENT

BY WHOM DEVELOPED? DEVELOPER
METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT BY WHOM PRINTED?

REMARKS

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* This refers to certain experiments where the medium claims to produce markings on plates which are enclosed in the slides or even in unopened packets.

Slate Writing

By slate writing is meant the supposed direct writing by spirits upon ordinary school slates supplied either by the medium or by the sitter. This phenomenon used to be very common both in England and America, but it is now almost extinct in England, although still found to a considerable extent in the United States.

There is no good scientific evidence that any slate writing has ever been genuine, and although the tricks used by mediums have been repeatedly exposed there are still simple people who believe in the genuineness of the phenomena. A thorough training in the principles of deception is necessary before the average person can expect to understand how these very clever effects are produced. Many of the results obtained by skilful mediums appear almost miraculous, yet very often the more marvellous the effect, the simpler the trick. You must remember that the medium has been producing these tricks

for a great number of years, and his trade has led him to exploit just those very weaknesses in human observation which are the most difficult to avoid. Many people with no training in banking are often apt to think that the operations of the banker are almost astonishing in their intricate complexity. Yet it is only because the business has not been learnt: personal experience would soon clear up the difficulties, and all mystery would vanish. It is only when investigating spiritualism that ordinary people think that the business requires no training and no knowledge. It is on such people that the fraudulent medium preys, and in no department has he waxed so fat as in slate writing.

Although I cannot hope that my advice will be followed, yet I give it to those of my readers who prefer not to waste their money, for the best plan is to avoid slate writing mediums altogether. But on second thoughts perhaps there are those who would like to go to see what occurs in the same spirit as one visits a conjuring entertainment. After all, by spending a few dollars, one can become acquainted

with a class of phenomena which has deceived thousands, and among them men and women of no mean intellectual capacity. I propose therefore to give a few hints which may be found useful.

At slate writing performances the medium will generally use the slates provided by the sitter if the latter has provided himself with them. The medium's own slates are often used in addition, and the whole pile placed upon the table. The room is not usually darkened and everything takes place in a good light. The first step is usually to ask the sitter whether he wishes to get into communication with a deceased relative or friend, or would prefer to ask questions which the spirits can answer. Whatever may be the reply, the next step is often to request the sitter to write down on separate slips of paper a number of questions to which he wishes answers to be given. This having been done, the slips are mixed up on the table and the medium takes up one of the slips. Putting a piece of chalk upon a slate the medium then places it under the table at which he is usually

seated, opposite his visitor. He then requests the sitter to assist him in holding it. Sometimes scratching noises are soon heard upon it, and on looking at the surface, which may, or may not have been previously cleaned, a message is found thereon. Various manipulations of the slates then take place, and, if the sitting is successful (that is to say, if the sitter is easy to deceive) a number of vague answers to the sitter's questions will frequently be found scrawled in chalk on the surface of some of the slates.

When visiting a performer of this description, the beginner has but two things to bear in mind. If he wishes to see a performance he will accept the conditions the medium demands and await results. If on the other hand he wishes to impose conditions, he must be prepared to see no phenomena, but to pay the same fee as if he had seen a clever exhibition of legerdemain. Mediums are exceedingly clever in estimating the mental acuteness of their sitters, and if one wishes to see some good examples of slate writing an innocent and ingenuous air is a necessity.

There are some, however, who would prefer to see nothing and pay for it rather than to be shown tricks which they cannot discover, and it is to these that the following remarks are addressed. There is one very simple condition which you must ask. *It is to sit on the same side of the table as the medium.* It is in this way that you will be able to see where his hands are and what they are doing at the various stages of the seance. There can be no possible objection to the sitter being seated next to the medium *except* that if the medium be fraudulent he will not be able to execute seventy-five per cent. of his tricks. I have never heard of any slate writing medium who would grant this simple request, and thus it can hardly be considered unnatural to regard these "phenomena" with the gravest suspicion.

A word regarding the stories that you will be told concerning the marvels of slate writing. Discover whether your informants know anything of trickery, and ask them whether they sat on the same side of the table as the medium. In short, pay no attention to these descriptions and when you are told that a message was

obtained upon a slate “which never left the sitter's hands for an instant", remember that the probabilities are that the slate left his hands for several minutes whilst the message was being prepared upon it. Malobservation of this sort has been *proved* to occur in many cases with intelligent and experienced sitters, and it is unlikely that you will be an exception to the general rule.

CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing pages I have tried to give in short compass a few hints which may help serious people in a consideration of one of the most difficult and controversial subjects of our times. In conclusion let me advise the would-be psychical researcher to proceed slowly. Do not jump to conclusions on insufficient data. Cultivate the habit of making full notes, and do not deceive yourself into thinking that the work can be mastered in a day. Remember that there are very good reasons for the incredulity of the scientific world, and that often those who have had most experience are the most doubtful. Because you cannot understand how a medium has obtained certain information, do not rashly conclude that the spirits are responsible. Proceed cautiously, and remember that we

know very little about the mind and its relation to the body, and how memories are stored and brought to the conscious mind. Do not be led away by the endless repetition of the names of celebrated people who believe this and that. A longer list could probably be compiled of people who believe the opposite. Cultivate an independent judgment founded on observed facts. Do not be frightened of being called sceptical even though it may prevent you from obtaining access to certain mediums. You lose nothing, for by their refusal to receive a serious inquirer they show themselves as self-exposed frauds. Remember that the study of these subjects is apt to become so fascinating to some people, that their minds become enthralled and they become credulous without realising it. Do not acquire the fatal habit of supposing that supernormal phenomena are common, and are not recognised because of an unbelieving world. These occurrences are not at all common, but very rare. Do not attend seances if you find that they have an enervating effect upon you, and that you suffer from headaches afterwards. Keep an even

head and balanced judgment. Listen to the stories of the marvels which are told to you with an attitude of careful attention, but always remember that some simple normal explanation will probably account for all the facts. Notice the conditions of mentality in those you meet at seances. Observe how phenomena are accepted without any difficulty and remember that such credulity can readily be excused in people without any knowledge of the history and methods of science. In dark seances, notice how the sitters are only interested in obtaining phenomena; how conditions do not matter as long as their curiosity is satisfied; and how they would prefer no conditions at all rather than miss seeing some luminous muslin draped over the medium's fist which they will recognise as a deceased relative.*

Finally if you decide to study the subject seriously, read systematically and regularly. In Appendix II I have drawn up a list of books that will help you. Avoid uncritical spiritualistic literature, and especially highly

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* I have myself seen this occur on two separate occasions.

coloured descriptions of Life after Death. Such writings are of no evidential value, and are only interesting to students of comparative automatisms. Lastly, if you are in any serious difficulty and do not know where to obtain the information you require, the writer will do his best to reply, if a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed.

APPENDIX I

THE CONTROL OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMS

In a brief hand-book like the present it is impossible to deal in any detail with the control of physical mediums. By the control of a medium I mean the methods used to restrain him from using normal methods to produce the phenomena.* Precautions vary with every medium and only the expert can say just where the weakness in any given control may be said to lie. In the present position of psychical research any one can claim to be an "expert" after a few sittings. There are no courses in psychical research at our Universities, and no training can be obtained in it. The whole

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* The word control used in this sense must be carefully distinguished from the word when it is used in another sense, namely to denote the personality which speaks through the medium when in trance. In this sense it is better to write the word with a capital letter.

subject is held in such contempt by orthodox scientists that they have never understood that it is one of the most difficult and complicated subjects in the whole range of human studies. An ordinary scientist will go to half a dozen sittings; become convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena that he witnesses, and will then proceed to give his opinion concerning the value of the control conditions. The reader must understand that statements such as these have no value whatever, and would be impossible in any other science. Can it be imagined that after six months' experience of zoological or electrical work a man is capable of giving opinions on some obscure point in evolutionary history or in electrical measurement? In zoology and physics a long training is necessary and in our Universities both are accorded their proper place. But in psychical research there are not half a dozen professionals at work. The whole field is given up to amateurs, advertisers, and cranks who make the subject ridiculous, and prevent its proper recognition by the scientific world. The reader must not expect any certainty in

psychical. research. The surface of the subject has barely been scratched, and it is only the enthusiastic and easily convinced who are prepared to state that they have arrived at the truth concerning these momentous questions. All that the average person can expect to do, if he wishes to inquire at all into these matters, is so to arrange his study that, when making his experiments, a reasonable control of the medium is assured.

The best control condition is good light; not the usual miserable ruby glimmer, but daylight, or diffused white light. The stories of light dissolving the “forces” may have a modicum of truth in them, but the fact remains that the great mediums of the past, and especially D. D. Home, deplored dark seances just as much as the intelligent investigator. If darkness or dim light, however, is demanded, then it is a paramount necessity that the hands of the medium should be held by trustworthy persons on either side. Do not merely link thumbs or little fingers. Hold the medium's hands firmly and steadily, not exercising an iron grip, or just keeping contact with the

fingers, but holding his hands as if shaking hands. Some mediums prefer to be tied with rope, and to have their thumbs tied with either cotton or string. This refusal to be held by the hands is in itself a suspicious circumstance. But should tying be insisted upon remember that *one* length of rope or twine is useless. Use two lengths of soft, white rope, and not the hard, stiff, brown variety. See that the medium sits well back in his chair, which should be of the straight-backed kind, and on no account the sort fitted with curved rungs. Notice whether the medium hunches his shoulders, or performs any action which points to a desire on his part to loosen the rope with which he is being tied.* If his thumbs are to be secured, take two short lengths of the stoutest thread or twine you can buy. Tie each thumb at the base independently, and then join your two pieces in the centre with a tight knot. Some mediums prefer to be held in a rather different way. The controller sits in front of the medium, whose knees are placed

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° This is technically called cc taking in slack". Its successful execution is at the bottom of the vast majority of all rope-tying frauds.

between the knees of the controller. The medium's hands are firmly held by the controller opposite him, and in this way a fairly secure grip is maintained. In this position it is practically impossible for the medium himself to produce any of the more startling physical phenomena. On the other hand the controller (who is often the most experienced person present) is controlled as well as the medium, and thus if the sitting takes place at the medium's house, and a confederate is used to produce the phenomena, the "medium" merely acts as a decoy to occupy the attention of the controller, since the actual phenomena are being produced by a person whose very existence is unsuspected by the sitters.

Finally do not make the mistake of supposing that because the control seems sufficient to exclude fraud that it is really the case. It is only the rawest of amateurs who thinks that after a few months' experience he can decide what are "test conditions" and what are not. Conditions vary with every medium and with every changing circumstance. Not even the most experienced psychical researcher

could say what are test conditions without imposing certain tests which are almost universally refused by nearly every living medium. Remember that it is the medium who really makes the conditions and not the investigator. The investigator has to make the best of the medium's conditions, and try and alter their details so as to assist a scientific inquiry. It sometimes happens that mediums are reported who know nothing of spiritualism and have never taken part in sittings, yet in whose presence movements of objects and lights are said to occur. Unfortunately it often happens that these persons fall into the hands of untrained and ignorant people, who, scenting a sensation, persuade them to exhibit their powers in spiritualistic circles. As has already been said, the first thing that the ordinary spiritualist does is to pull down the blinds. Thus darkness is introduced to mediums with whom (if reports are to be believed) phenomena have always taken place in light. Thus the greatest hindrance to scientific investigation is deliberately caused, and persons whose gifts might have been a value to science, become

mere exhibits in the hands of ignorant and sensation-loving showmen.

The best control of a medium is the holding of his hands by experienced and reliable persons. Distrust elaborate mechanical controls. They may look very scientific to the uninitiated, but they are usually clumsy and inefficient, and far less sure than the human touch.

APPENDIX II

I am often asked to advise a beginner what books to read when he first decides to visit mediums. Now there are very few reliable books on the subject, because few unbiassed people have tried to discuss it seriously. The majority of the books are by spiritualists and it is unfortunately too often the case that the facts in these publications are dubious so that the novice had better avoid them. For the history of modern spiritualism down to the beginning of the twentieth century there is nothing better than Frank Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* (2 vols., London, 1902), a work which is continued by the same author's *The Newer Spiritualism* (London, 1910). For an account of such psychical. phenomena as apparitions and dreams which appear to have some relation to a current or future event the

abridged editions of *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London, *1919)* by the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers and of *Phantasms of the Living* by Gurney, Myers and Podmore (London, *1918) will* be found useful. It is just as well for the beginner to make himself acquainted with spontaneous phenomena of an apparently psychic nature before he visits mediums, and the two books above are the best there are on these occurrences.

For detailed accounts of trance mediumship the records of certain sittings with the American medium, Mrs. Piper *(Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, 1889-90, VI, 436-650; 1892, VIII, 1-167: 1897-98, XIII, 284-582) are good and may be supplemented by similar accounts in the American S.P.R. Proceedings.

For physical phenomena the best account of carefully controlled experiments is that describing the seances with the Italian medium, Eusapia Palladino *(Proceedings* of the S.P.R., 1909, XXIII, 306-569) with which may be compared my accounts of the phenomena observed with the Austrian medium, Willy Schneider *(Proceedings* of the S.P.R., *1926,*

XXXVI, 1-33) and of the American medium "Margery" (Ib., 79-155), where the reader will find the two opposing points of view-fraud or reality-discussed side by side.

A good general introduction to psychical research is the volume contributed to the Home University Library by the late Sir William Barrett under the title of *Psychical Research,* which may be continued by reading the much larger *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* (London, 1923) by Professor Charles Richet.

There are no serious periodicals in English devoted entirely to psychical research, their place being taken by the Proceedings of the various societies which are unequal in value and should be used with caution.