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Preface

There are books in which the author says so clearly and in such precise terms what he has to say that any commentary weakens their import; and a preface becomes superfluous, sometimes even prejudicial.

Dr. Maxwell’s work belongs to this category. The author, who has long given himself up to psychology, has had the opportunity of seeing many interesting things. He has observed everything with minute care; and having well thought out the method of observation, the consequences, and the nature itself of the phenomena, he lays bare his facts and deducts therefrom a few simple ideas, fearlessly, honestly, *sine ira nec studio*, before a public which he hopes to find impartial.

To this same public I address the short introduction, with which my friend Dr. Maxwell kindly asked me to head this excellent work.

My advice to the reader may be summed up in a few words. He must take up this book without prejudice. He must fear neither that which is new, nor that which is unexpected. In other words, while preserving the most scrupulous respect for the science of to-day, he must be thoroughly convinced that this science, whatever measure of truth it may contain, is nevertheless terribly incomplete.

Those imprudent people who busy themselves with ‘occult’ sciences are accused of overthrowing Science, of destroying that bulwark which thousands of toilers, at the cost of an immense universal effort, have been occupied in constructing during the last three or four centuries.

This reproach seems to me rather unjust. No one is able to destroy a scientific fact.

Remerciements

An electric current decomposes water into one volume of oxygen and two of hydrogen. This is a fact which will be true in the eternal future, just as it has been true in the eternal past. Ideas may perhaps change on what it is expedient to call electric current, oxygen, hydrogen, etc. It may be discovered that hydrogen is composed of fifty different bodies, that oxygen is transformed into hydrogen, that the electric current is a ponderable force or a luminous emission. No matter what is going to be discovered, we shall never, in any case, prevent what we call to-day an electric current from transforming, under certain conditions of combined pressure and temperature, what we call water into two gases, each having different properties, gases which are emitted in volumetrical proportions of 2 to 1.

Therefore, there need be no fear, that the invasion of a new science into the old will upset acquired data, and contradict what has been established by savants.

Consequently psychical phenomena, however complicated, unforeseen, or appalling we may now and then imagine them to be, will not subvert any of those facts which form part of to-day’s classical sciences.

Astronomy and physiology, physics and mathematics, chemistry and zoology, need not be afraid. They are intangible, and nothing will injure the imposing assemblage of incontestable facts which constitute them.

But notions, hitherto unknown, may be introduced, which, without casting doubts upon pristine truths, may cause new ones to enter their domain, and change, or even upset, our established notions of things.

The facts may be unforeseen, but they will never be contradictory.

The history of sciences teaches us, that their bulwarks have never been overthrown by the inroad of a new science.

At one time no notion of tubercular infection existed. We now know that it is transmitted by microbes. This is a new notion, teeming with important conclusions, but it does not invalidate the clinical table of pulmonary phthisis drawn up by physicians of other days. The discovery of Hertzian waves has in nowise shaken Ampère’s laws. Newton’s and Fresnel’s optics have not been changed into a tissue of errors because Rœntgen rays and luminous vibrations are able to penetrate opaque bodies. It appears that radium can throw out unremittingly, without any appreciable chemical molecular phenomena, great quantities of calorific energy; nevertheless, we may be quite sure, that the law of conservation of energy and thermo-dynamic principles will remain as true now as ever.

Likewise, if the facts called ‘occult’ become established, as seems more and more probable, we need not feel anxious as to the fate of classical science. New and unknown facts, however strange they may be, will not do away with old established facts.

To take an example from Dr. Maxwell’s work, let us admit that the phenomenon of raps—that is to say, sonorous vibrations in wood or other substances—is a real phenomenon, and that, in certain cases, there are sounds which no mechanical force known to us can explain, would the science of physics be overthrown? It would be a new force thrown out on to wood, etc., exercising its power on matter, but the old forces would none the less preserve their activity, and it is even likely that the transmission of vibrations by means of this new force would be found to be in obedience to the same laws as those governing the transmission of other vibrations;—the temperature, the pressure, the density of air or wood would continue to exercise their usual influence. There would be nothing new, save the existence of a force until then unknown.

Now, is there any savant worthy of the name who can affirm, that there are no forces, hitherto unknown, at work in the world?

However impregnable Science may be when establishing facts, it is miserably subject to error when claiming to establish negations.

Here is a dilemma, which appears to me to be very conclusive in that respect:—Either we know all Nature’s forces, or we do not. Now the first alternative is so ridiculous, that it is really not worth while refuting it. Our senses are so limited, so imperfect, that the world slips away from them almost entirely. We may say it is owing to an accident, that the magnet’s colossal force was discovered, and if hazard had not placed iron beside the loadstone, we might have always remained ignorant of the attraction which loadstone exercises upon iron. Ten years ago no one suspected the existence of the Rœntgen rays. Before photography, no one knew that light reduces salts of silver. It is not twenty years since the Hertzian waves were discovered. The property displayed by amber when rubbed was, until two hundred years ago, all that was known of that immense force called electricity.

Question a savage—nay a fellah or a moujik—upon the forces of Nature! He will not know even the tenth part of such forces as elementary treatises on physics in 1905 will enumerate. It appears to me that the savants of to-day, in respect to the savants of the future, stand in the same inferiority as the moujiks to the professors of the college of France.

Who then dare be so rash as to say that the treatises on physics in 2005 will but repeat what is to be found in the treatises of 1905? The probability—the certainty, one might say—is that new scientific data will shortly spring up out of the darkness, and that most powerful and altogether unknown forces will be revealed. Our great-grandchildren will be amazed at the blindness of our savants, who tacitly profess the immobility of science.

If science has made such progress of late, it is precisely because our predecessors were not afraid to make bold hypotheses, to suppose new forces, demonstrating their reality by dint of patience and perseverance. Our strict duty is to do likewise. The savant should be a revolutionist, and fortunately the time is over when truth had to be sought in a master’s book—*magister dixit*—be he Aristotle or Plato. In politics we may be conservative or progressive; it is a question of temperament. But when the research of truth is concerned we must be resolutely and unreservedly revolutionary, and must consider classical theories—even those which appear to be the most solid—as temporary hypotheses, which we must incessantly check and incessantly strive to overthrow. The Chinese believed that science had been fixed by their ancestors’ sapience; this example contains food for meditation.

Moreover—and why not proclaim it loudly—all that science of which we are so proud, is only knowledge of appearances. The real nature of things baffles us. The innermost nature of laws governing matter, whether living or inert, is inaccessible to our intelligence. A stone tossed up into the air falls back again to the earth. Why? Newton says through attraction proportional to bulk and distance. But this law is only the statement of a fact; who understands that attractive vibration, which makes the stone fall? The fall of a stone is such a commonplace phenomenon, that it does not astonish us: but in reality no human intelligence has ever understood it. It is usual, common, accepted; but like all Nature’s phenomena without exception it is not understood. After fecundation an egg becomes an embryon; we describe as well as we can the phases of this phenomenon; but, in spite of the most minute descriptions, have we understood the evolution of that cellular protoplasm, which is transformed into a huge, living being? What prodigy is at work in these segmentations? Why do these granulations crowd together there? Why do they decay here to form again elsewhere?

We live in the midst of phenomena and have no adequate knowledge of any one of them. Even the simplest phenomenon is most mysterious. What does the combination of hydrogen with oxygen mean? Who has even once been thoroughly able to understand that word combination, annihilation of the properties of two bodies by the creation of a third body differing from the two first. How are we to understand that an atom is indivisible; it is constituted of a particle of matter, yet—even in thought—it cannot be divided!

Therefore it behoves the true savant to be very modest, yet very bold at the same time: very modest, for our science is a mere trifle—Ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινος ἄξιά ἐστι, καί οὐδενός—very bold, for the vast regions of worlds unknown lie open before him.

Audacity and prudence: such are the two qualities, in no wise contradictory, of Dr. Maxwell’s book.

Whatever be the fate in store for his ideas—ideas based upon facts—we may rest assured that the facts, which he has well observed, will remain. I think I see here the lineaments of a new science—though only a crude sketch so far.

Who knows but that physiology and physics may find herein some precious elements of knowledge? Woe to the savants who think that the book of Nature is closed, and that we puny men have nothing more to learn.

Charles Richet.

Introduction

Asked by my friends in France to introduce the author, Dr. Maxwell, to English readers, I willingly consented, for I have reason to know that he is an earnest and indefatigable student of the phenomena for the investigation of which the Society for Psychical Research was constituted; and not only an earnest student, but a sane and competent observer, with rather special qualifications for the task. A gentleman of independent means, trained and practising as a lawyer at Bordeaux, Deputy Attorney-General, in fact, at the Court of Appeal, he supplemented his legal training by going through a full six years’ medical curriculum, and graduated M.D. in order to pursue psycho-physiological studies with more freedom, and to be able to form a sounder and more instructed judgment on the strange phenomena which came under his notice. Moreover, he was fortunate in enlisting the services of one who appears to be singularly gifted in the supernormal direction, an educated and interested friend, who is anxious to preserve his anonymity, but is otherwise willing to give every assistance in his power towards the production and elucidation of the unusual things which occur in his presence and apparently through his agency.

In all this they have been powerfully assisted by Professor Charles Richet, the distinguished physiologist of Paris, whose name and fame are almost as well known in this country as in his own, and who gave the special evening lecture to the British Association on the occasion of its semi-international meeting at Dover in 1899.

In France it so happens that these problems have been attacked chiefly by biologists and medical men, whereas in this country they have attracted the attention chiefly, though not exclusively, of physicists and chemists among men of science. This gives a desirable diversity to the point of view, and adds to the value of the work of the French investigators. Another advantage they possess is that they have no *arrière-pensée* towards religion or the spiritual world. Frankly, I expect they would confess themselves materialists, and would disclaim all sympathy with the view of a number of enthusiasts in this country, who have sought to make these ill-understood facts the basis for a kind of religious cult in which faith is regarded as more important than knowledge, and who contemn the attitude of scientific men, even of those few who really seek to observe and understand the phenomena.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ZONE | VENTES | % | BAUX | % |
| A | 255 | 12 | 158 | 23 |
| B | 220 | 10,4 | 119 | 17,3 |
| C | 125 | 6 | 70 | 10,2 |
| D | 1222 | 57,6 | 210 | 30,6 |
| E | 298 | 14 | 130 | 18,9 |
| TOTAL | 2120 | 100 | 687 | 100 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Tableau 1 : répartition des ventes

From Dr. Maxwell’s observations, so far, there arises no theory which he feels to be in the least satisfactory: the facts are recorded as observed, and though theoretical comments are sometimes attempted in the text, they are admittedly tentative and inadequate: we know nothing at present which will suffice to weld the whole together into a comprehensive and comprehensible scheme. But for the theoretical discussion of such phenomena the work of Mr. Myers on Human Personality is of course far more thorough and ambitious than the semi-popular treatment in the present book. And in the matter of history also, the English reader, familiar with the writings of Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. Podmore, will not attribute much importance to the few historical remarks of the present writer. He claims consideration as an observer of exceptional ability and scrupulous fairness, and his work is regarded with the greatest interest by workers in this field throughout the world.

There is one thing which Dr. Maxwell does not do. He does not record his facts according to the standard set up by the Society for Psychical Research in this country: that is to say, he does not give a minute account of all the details, nor does he relate the precautions taken, nor seek to convince hostile critics that he has overlooked no possibility, and made no mistakes. Discouraged by previous attempts and failures in this direction, he has regarded the task as impossible, and has not attempted it. He has satisfied himself with three things:—

1st. To train himself long and carefully as an observer;

2nd. To learn from, and be guided by, the phenomena as they occur, without seeking unduly to coerce them;

3rd. To give a general account of the impression made upon him by the facts as they appeared.

For the rest, he professes himself indifferent whether his assertions meet with credence or not. He has done his best to test the phenomena for himself, regarding them critically, and not at all in a spirit of credulity; and he has endangered his reputation by undertaking what he regards as a plain duty, that of setting down under his own name, for the world to accept or reject as it pleases, a statement of the experiences to which he has devoted so much time and attention, and of the actuality of which, though he in no way professes to understand them, he is profoundly convinced.

Equally convinced of their occurrence is Professor Richet, who has had an opportunity of observing many of them, and he too regards them from the same untheoretical and empirical point of view; but he has explained his own attitude in a Preface to the French edition, as Dr. Maxwell has explained his in ‘Preliminary Remarks,’—both of which are here translated—so there is no need to say more; beyond this:—

The particular series of occurrences detailed in these pages I myself have not witnessed. I may take an opportunity of seeing them before long; but though that will increase my experience, it will not increase my conviction that things like some of these can and do occur, and that any other patient explorer who had the same advantages and similar opportunity for observation, would undergo the same sort of experience, that is to say, would receive the same sensory impressions, however he might choose to interpret them.

That is what the scientific world has gradually to grow accustomed to. These things happen under certain conditions, in the same sense that more familiar things happen under ordinary conditions. What the conditions are that determine the happening is for future theory to say.

Dr. Maxwell is convinced that such things can happen without anything that can with any propriety whatever be called fraud; sometimes under conditions so favourable for observation as to preclude the possibility of deception of any kind. Some of them, as we know well, do also frequently happen under fraudulent and semi-fraudulent conditions; but those who take the easy line of assuming that hyper-ingenious fraud and extravagant self-deception are sufficient to account for the whole of the facts, will ultimately, I think, find themselves to have been deceived by their own *a priori* convictions. Nevertheless we may agree that at present the Territory under exploration is not yet a scientific State. We are in the pre-Newtonian, possibly the pre-Copernican, age of this nascent science; and it is our duty to accumulate facts and carefully record them, for a future Kepler to brood over.

What may be likened to the ‘Ptolemaic’ view of the phenomena seems on the whole to be favoured by the French observers, viz. that they all centre round living man, and represent an unexpected extension of human faculty, an extension, as it were, of the motor and sensory power of the body beyond its apparent boundary. That is undoubtedly the first adit to be explored, and it may turn out to lead us in the right direction; but it is premature even to guess what will be the ultimate outcome of this extra branch of psychological and physiological study. That sensory perception can extend to things out of contact with the body is familiar enough, though it has not been recognised for the senses of touch or taste. That motor activity should also extend into a region beyond the customary range of muscular action is, as yet, unrecognised by science. Nevertheless that is the appearance.

The phenomena which have most attracted the attention and maintained the interest of the French observers, have been just those which convey the above impression: that is to say, mechanical movements without contact, production of intelligent noises, and either visible, tangible, or luminous appearances which do not seem to be hallucinatory. These constantly-asserted, and in a sense well-known, and to some few people almost familiar, experiences, have with us been usually spoken of as ‘physical or psycho-physical phenomena.’ In France they have been called ‘psychical phenomena,’ but that name is evidently not satisfactory, since that should apply to purely mental experiences. To call them ‘occult phenomena’ is not distinctive, for everything is occult until it is explained; and the business of science is to contemplate the mixed mass of heterogeneous appearances, such as at one time formed all that was known of Chemistry, for instance, or Electricity, and evolve from them an ordered scheme of science.

To emphasise the fact that these occurrences are at present beyond the scheme of orthodox psychology or psycho-physiology, in somewhat the same way as the germ of what we now call Metaphysics was once placed after, or considered as extra to, the course of orthodox Natural Philosophy or Physics, Professor Richet has suggested that they be styled ‘meta-psychical phenomena,’ and that the nascent branch of science, which he and other pioneers are endeavouring to found, be called for the present ‘Metapsychics.’ Dr. Maxwell concurs in this comparatively novel term, and as there seems no serious objection to it, the English version of Dr. Maxwell’s record will appear under this title.

The book will be found for the most part eminently readable—rather an unusual circumstance for a record of this kind—and the scrupulous fairness with which the author has related everything he can think of which tells against the genuineness of the phenomena, is highly to be commended. Whatever may be thought of the evidence it is manifestly his earnest wish never to make it appear to others better than it appears to himself.

If critics attack the book, as they undoubtedly will, with the objection that though it may contain a mass of well-attested assertions by a competent and careful observer, yet his observations are set down without the necessary details on which an outside critic can judge how far the things really happened, and how far the observer was deceived—let it be remembered that this is admitted. Dr. Maxwell’s defence is, that to give such details as will satisfy a hostile critic who was not actually present is impossible—in that I am disposed to agree with him—he has therefore not attempted the task; and I admit, though I cannot commend, his discretion.

It may be said that the attempt to give every detail necessarily produces a dreary and overburdened narrative. So it does. Nevertheless I must urge—as both in accordance with my own judgment of what is fitting, and in loyalty to the high standard of evidence, and the more stringent rules of testimony, inaugurated by the wise founders of the Society for Psychical Research—that observers should always make an effort to record precisely every detail of the circumstances of some at least of these elusive and rare phenomena; so as to assist in enabling a fair judgment to be formed by people who are not too inexperienced in the conditions attending this class of observation, and at any rate to add to the clearness of their apprehension of the events recorded. The opportunities for research are not yet ended, however, and I may be allowed to express a hope that in the future something of this kind will yet be done, when the occasion is favourable, after a study of such a record as that of the Sidgwick-Hodgson-Davy experiments in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, vol. iv. Our gratitude to Dr. Maxwell would thus be still further increased.

And now, finally, I must not be understood as making myself responsible for the contents of the book, nor for the interjected remarks, nor for the translation. The author and translator must bear their own responsibility. My share in the work is limited to expressing my confidence in the good faith of Dr. Maxwell—in his impartiality and competence,—and while congratulating him on the favourable opportunities for investigation which have fallen to his lot, to thank him, on behalf of English investigators, for the single-minded pertinacity and strenuous devotion with which he has pursued this difficult and still nebulous quest.

Oliver Lodge.

Preliminary Remarks

I hesitated for a long time before deciding to publish the impressions which ten years of psychical research have left me. These impressions are so uncertain upon several points, that I wondered if it were worth while expressing in book form the few and sparse conclusions I am able to formulate. If, finally, I decide to publish my opinions, it is because it seems incumbent upon me to do so. I am not blind to the fact that my testimony is of very little importance; but however modest it may be, it seems to me that it is my duty to offer this testimony, such as it is, to those who have undertaken to submit to scientific discipline the study of those phenomena which are, in appearance at least, so rebellious to such discipline. It might have been more convenient and advantageous for myself had I continued my researches in peace and quiet. I do not try to proselytise, and it is really a matter of indifference to me, whether my contemporaries share or do not share my views. But the sight of a few brave men fighting the battle alone is by no means a matter of indifference to me. There is a certain cowardliness in believing their teachings, whilst allowing them to bear all the brunt of the fray for upholding opinions, which require so much courage to champion. To these brave spirits I dedicate my book.

I care naught for public opinion: not that I disdain[[1]](#footnote-1) it—on the contrary, I have the greatest respect for its judgment—but I am not addressing the public. The question I am studying is not ripe for the public; or the case may be the other way about.

I address those brave men of whom I have just spoken, to let them know I am of their mind, and that my observations confirm theirs on many points. I also address those who are seeking to establish the reality of the curious phenomena, treated of in this book. I have tried to fill a gap by showing them the best methods to adopt, in order to arrive at appreciable results,—such results being far less difficult to obtain than is commonly supposed.

A word about the method I have followed. I have purposely refrained from giving a purely scientific aspect to my book, though I might have done so had I chosen, for the usual scientific dressing is unsuitable to the subject in hand. It seemed preferable to relate what I have seen, leaving it to those for whom I write to believe me or not, as they think fit.

I might have accumulated not a little testimony and considerable external evidence, but to have done so would not have been the means of convincing a single extra reader. Those, whom my simple affirmation leaves sceptical, would not be convinced by reports signed by witnesses, whose sincerity and competence are frequently called into question. Neither did I wish to adopt the method followed by the Agnélas, Milan, and Carqueiranne experimenters, in giving a detailed report of all my sittings; this method too has its advantages and disadvantages. However exhaustive a report may be, it is difficult to indicate therein all the conditions of the experiment; oversights are inevitable. Moreover, it would be useless to say that every precaution had been taken against fraud, for in enumerating such precautions, the omission of a single one would suffice to expose oneself to most justifiable criticism. Probably that very precaution was elementary and had been taken, or was considered useless and put aside deliberately; nevertheless such circumstances would not escape criticism. We wish to convince by pointing out the exact conditions of the experiment; but those, whom we would most wish to convince, are the very persons least prepared to judge of the conditions in which psychical experiences are obtained. These are physicists and chemists; but living matter does not react like inorganic matter or chemical substances.

I do not seek to convince these savants; my book is unassuming and makes no pretence of having been written for them. If they in their turn should be tempted to try for those effects which I have obtained, the methods indicated will be easily accessible to them. It is in this way they can be indirectly convinced, though to convince them is not my present aim. Others are better qualified than I am to try their hand at this most desirable but, for the moment, most difficult task.

Difficult! Ay, and for a thousand reasons. First of all because it is the fashion of to-day to look upon these facts as unworthy of science. I acknowledge taking a delicate pleasure in comparing the different opinions which many young Savants (I beg the printer not to forget a very big capital S) bring to bear upon their contemporaries. Here is a man surrounded by deferential spectators: solemnly he hands a paper-knife to a sleeping hysterical subject, and gravely invites him to murder such or such an individual who is supposed to be where there is really only an empty chair. When the patient springs forward to carry out the suggestion, and strikes the chair with the paper-knife, the lookers-on behold a scientific fact, according to classical science. On the other hand, here is another man who, not a whit less solemnly, makes longitudinal passes upon his subject, puts him to sleep, and then tries to exteriorise the said subject’s sensibility; but the onlookers in this case are not recognised as witnessing a scientific fact! I have never been able to see wherein lies the difference between these two experimenters, the one experimenting with an hysterical subject more or less untrustworthy, the other examining a phenomenon which, if it be true, may be observed without the necessity of trusting oneself solely to the honesty of the individual asleep.

In fact there is a most intolerant clique among savants. Facts it seems are of no importance when pointed out by those who stand beyond the pale of official science. Unfortunately, psychical phenomena cannot be as easily and readily demonstrated as the X-rays or wireless telegraphy, incontestable facts which any one can prove to his entire satisfaction. Therefore young savants rejoice in making an onslaught on those who apply themselves to the study of these phenomena. It was the same thing in olden times when budding theologians made their *débuts* in the arena of theology against notorious arch-heretics, Arians, Manicheans, or gnostics. *Nil novi sub sole.*

I readily admit that many, who turn their attention to the curious phenomena of which I am going to speak, frequently lay themselves open to criticism. Sometimes they are not very strict concerning the conditions under which their experiments are conducted: they trust naïvely, and their conviction is quickly formed. I cannot too forcibly beg them to be on their guard against premature assertions: may they avoid justifying Montaigne’s saying,*‘*L’imagination crée le cas.*’*

My remark is more particularly addressed to occult, theosophical, and spiritistic groups. The first-named follow an undesirable method. Their manner of reasoning is not likely to bring them many adepts, from among those who are given to thinking deeply. In ordinary logic, analogy and correspondence have not the same importance as deduction and induction. On the other hand it does not seem to me prudent to consider the esoteric interpretation of the Hebrew writings as being necessarily truth’s last word. I do not see why I should transfer a belief in their exoteric assertions to a belief in their talmudistic or kabbalistic commentaries. I can hardly believe that the Rabbis of the middle ages, or their predecessors, Esdras’ contemporaries, had a more correct notion of human nature than we have. Their errors in physics are not valid security for their accuracy in metaphysics. Truth cannot be usefully sought in the analysis of a very fine but very old book: all occult speculations upon secret hebraic exegeses seem to me but intellectual sport, to the results of which the words of Ecclesiastes might well be applied:

Habel habalim vekol habel.

I may pass the same criticism upon theosophists. The curious mystical movement to which the teachings of Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott, and Mrs. Besant have given birth in Europe and in America has not yet been arrested. Many cultured minds and refined intelligences have allowed themselves to be led away by the neo-buddhistic evangile; doubtless they find what they look for in the ‘Secret Doctrine’ or in ‘Isis Unveiled.’

Trahit sua quemque voluptas.

I cannot help thinking that the Upanishads have no more a monopoly of truth than the Bible has, and that every philosophy ought to hold fast to the study of Nature if it wishes to live and progress. This is, moreover, the advice of a man whom theosophists and occultists alike respect—I mean Paracelsus—‘Man is here below to instruct himself in the light of Nature.’

That is what spiritists claim to do. Their philosophy, to use the term which they themselves employ to designate their doctrine, is founded, they say, upon fact and experience. It is not a revelation, contemporary with the splendour of Thebes or the pomp of Açoka’s court, which gives the foundation to their dogmas. It is an everyday revelation, a real, continuous, and permanent revelation. Their ideas concerning our origin and destiny, their certitude of immortality and the persistence of human individuality, are due to well-informed witnesses. These are no less than the spirits of the dead, who come to enlighten them and to tell them what is done in the hereafter.

I envy them their simple faith, but I do not altogether share it. I am persuaded that our individuality has an infinitely longer period given it for its evolution than one human existence. But it is not from spiritistic seances that I have derived my belief; no, my belief is of a philosophical kind, and is the result of pondering over what I know of life, of nature, and of the extremely slow development of the human species. It is true the knowledge I possess is limited, and my belief wavers; yet the probabilities seem to me favourable to the persistence of that mysterious centre of energy which we call individuality.

This opinion, however, has not been derived from spiritistic communications: I think these have an origin other than that given them by Allan Kardec’s disciples.

Naturally I am only speaking of my own personal experience; I do not permit myself to pronounce as erroneous those convictions based upon facts not seen by myself. Therefore I do not wish to say that spiritists are always the victims of delusion; I can only say that the messages, received by me and purporting to come from the other side of the grave, have seemed to me to emanate from a different source.

At the same time, to be exact and sincere I ought to add that, if my conviction has not been won, I have observed in one or two circumstances certain facts which have left me most perplexed.

Unfortunately for spiritism, an objection, which seems to me irrefutable, can be made to the spirits’ teaching. In all parts of Europe, the ‘spirits’ vouch for reincarnation. Often they indicate the moment they are going to reappear in a human body; and they relate still more readily the past avatars of their followers. On the contrary, in England the spirits assure us that there is no reincarnation. The contradiction is formal, positive, and irreconcilable. Those who are inclined to doubt the correctness of what I affirm have only to glance through and compare the writings of English and French spiritists; for example, those of Allan Kardec, Denys, Delanne, and those of Stainton-Moses. How are we to form an opinion worthy of acceptance? Who speak the truth? European spirits or Anglo-Saxon spirits? Probably spiritistic messages do not emanate from very well-informed witnesses. Such is the conclusion arrived at by Aksakoff, one of the cleverest and most enlightened of spiritists. He himself acknowledges that one is never certain of the identity of the communicating intelligence at a spiritistic sitting.

Although I do not share the views of occultists, theosophists, and spiritists, I can indeed say that their groups—at least those which I have frequented—are composed of people worthy, sincere, and convinced. Occultists and theosophists devote themselves perhaps more particularly to the development of those mysterious faculties which, according to them, exist in man, while spiritists are more inclined to call forth communications from their spirit friends, but the anxious care of one and all is the moral development of their groups.

Solicitude for the ethical culture of humanity is characteristic of these mystic groups. Occultism and theosophy draw their recruits more especially from intellectual centres; the circle of spiritism is much wider. The simplicity of its teachings and methods attracts those who shrink before the personal edification of a creed: for it is a painful undertaking and a heavy task for each individual to form his own philosophy. It is more convenient to accept indications which are already made, and to believe affirmations which are—in appearance—sincere and well informed. Long centuries of religious discipline have accustomed the human mind to certain acts of faith, and to shun all free discussion, as soon as there is any question of future destinies. It is difficult to shake off this atavism.

This is what makes the success of spiritism; it comes at its appointed time, and supplies a wide-felt need.

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The psychological condition of society to-day is of an extremely perturbed nature, as slight reflection will suffice to show. Much has been said of the conflict between science and religion, but the truth has not yet been sounded. It is no ordinary conflict which is now taking place between science and revelation: it is a life-and-death struggle. And it is easy to foresee which side will succumb.

It even seems as though the final death-struggles of Christian dogma had already set in. What man, sincere and unbiased in his opinions, could repeat to-day the famous *credo quia absurdum*? Are we not insulting the Divinity—if He exists—when we refuse to make use of His most precious gifts? when we abstain from applying the full force of our intelligence and reason to the examination of our destiny and our duties to ourselves and to others?

This abdication is nevertheless demanded of us—by Roman Catholicism for example, which exacts unqualified adhesion to its dogmas, blind belief in its Church’s teachings, blind belief in the affirmations of its infallible pope. It seems to me inadmissible that the God of Roman Catholics should approve of such indifference.

It is obvious that I do not wish to write a history of ecclesiastical controversy. I have too much respect for others to allow myself to attack what are still widely accepted creeds. My duty is but to study the general aspect of revelation, and to draw therefrom such conclusions as are necessary to my acquirements.

It is an easy study. The most enlightened intellects stand aloof from revealed religions. I mean the majority, for there is still a small minority which remains faithful to dying creeds.

Even the less cultivated intelligences are beginning to feel the insufficiency of revelation. The Divinity’s incarnation and death, in order to redeem a race so unworthy of such a sacrifice, begins to astound them; they wonder at such solicitude for the inhabitants of one of the least important spheres in the universe. They are also surprised at the inexorable severity of a God who, before granting pardon to mankind, demands his only son’s death; a God who, for the petty trespasses of beings far removed from himself, demands an eternity of suffering as chastisement for such ephemeral insults. All this fails to satisfy those souls who are enamoured of truth and justice. These dogmas give man a cosmical importance which he does not possess, and imputes to God a susceptibility and cruelty altogether unworthy of the Supreme Being.

We could easily find other examples; but I do not think it necessary to bring them to bear upon my conclusion; a conclusion, moreover, which is admitted by the clergy themselves, who complain unceasingly of society’s growing indifference.

But is society really so indifferent? I do not think so. We find indifference among the richer and more cultured classes, where some give themselves up to pleasure, others to science, in reality each one seeking only that which will amuse or interest him or herself; but those who are without resources, those whom life molests and wearies, those who are afraid at the idea of death and annihilation, those who have need of some consolation, of some hope, those people are not indifferent. If these forsake the churches and temples, it is because they do not find therein what they are seeking. The spiritual nourishment offered them has lost its savour; they ask for something more substantial and less contestable.

Besides, even in the most highly cultured classes, this need begins to make itself felt. Such men as Myers, Sidgwick, Gurney, to speak only of the dead, took up the study of psychical phenomena with the desire of finding therein the proof of a future life. Myers died after having found—or thought he had found—the sought-for demonstration.

Professor Haeckel of Jéna drew up a philosophy for himself! His materialistic monism is the outward expression of his belief: but this is also ill-adapted to satisfy that longing, the extent and force of which I have just touched upon.

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Now spiritism lays claim to satisfying these longings; and it does satisfy them, when only simple souls are concerned, simple souls who do not dream of life’s complexities. The phenomena of spiritistic seances—and these are real phenomena—are the miracles which come to confirm the spirits’ teachings. Why should they doubt?

Therefore the clients of spiritism are increasing in number with extraordinary rapidity. The extent to which this doctrine is spreading is one of the most curious things of the day. I believe we are beholding the dawn of a veritable religion; a religion without a ritual and without an organised clergy, and yet with assemblies and practices which make it a veritable cult. As for me, I take a great interest in these meetings; they give me the impression that I am assisting at the birth of a religious movement called to a great destiny.

Will my anticipations be realised? The future alone can tell. My opinion has been formed on impartial and disinterested observation. Notwithstanding the sympathy that I feel for those groups which have been kind enough to admit me into their midst, notwithstanding the friendship which binds me to many of their members, I have never wished to be of their propaganda, nor even to allow them to think that I shared their views. I have always plainly told them that I was by no means convinced of the constant intervention of spirits; I have not concealed from them that other and, as I thought, more probable explanations could be given to the phenomena they witnessed; perhaps they have appreciated my frankness. In any case, I am very grateful for the courtesy and kindliness with which they allowed me to observe the phenomena at their sittings, to listen to their mediums’ teachings, and to express my opinions, which are so unlike their own.

I am neither spiritist, nor theosophist, nor occultist. I do not believe in occult sciences, nor in the supernatural, nor in miracles. I believe we know as yet very little of the world we are living in, and that we still have everything to learn. The cleverest men in all epochs show an unconscious tendency to suppose that facts, which are incompatible with their ideas, are supernatural or false. More modest but also more cruel, our forefathers, the theologians and lawyers, burnt sorcerers and magicians without accusing them of fraud: to-day most of our savants, being more affirmative and less rigorous, accuse mediums and thaumaturgists of fraud, but without condemning them to the stake. In reality their state of mind is the same as that of the ancient exorcists; they have the same intolerance, and the different treatment meted out to their subjects is only due to the progressive improvement in manners and customs.

Even those savants who are the most interested in psychical research are afraid of confessing their curiosity. It requires the broad-mindedness of a Crookes or a Lodge, of a Duclaux or a Richet, of a Rochas or a Lombroso to dare to take a stand and openly show an interest in this field of research. Some day, however, these same suspicious researches will be their experimenters’ best claim to fame. The present attitude of official science towards medianic phenomena is to be regretted; its scientific ‘cant’ has grievous results. The history of the International Psychological Institute is instructive in this respect. What a pity that such learned, remarkable, and competent men, as Janet for example, should have shrunk from the epithet ‘psychic’! The need for a psychical institute existed, not a psychological one, of which there are already enough.

It is precisely the attitude of respectable scientific circles which appears to me a mistake, demanding rectification. I understand perfectly and excuse this attitude. For so many incorrect things have been affirmed, so many ridiculous practices have been recommended by the leaders of the occult movement, that official representatives of science must have felt indignant. Unfortunately no one except Richet has ventured to do for the phenomena vouched for by occultists and spiritists, what Charcot has done for the magnetisers’ allegations. No doubt, this other Charcot will come when the time is ripe.

The preparatory work will have been done, and he need only resume the experiments of Richet, Crookes, Lodge, Rochas, Ochorowicz, and many others.

I class myself with these experimenters. Many of them are my friends, and, if our manner of thinking be not quite the same, my ideas upon the method to be used are much the same as theirs. And thus I find myself quite naturally led to say what my ideas are.

I believe in the reality of certain phenomena which I have been able to verify over and over again. I see no need to attribute these phenomena to any supernatural intervention. I am inclined to think that they are produced by some force existing within ourselves.

I believe also that these facts can be subjected to scientific observation. I say observation and not experimentation, because I do not think that it is yet possible to proceed on veritable experimental lines. In order to experiment one must understand the conditions necessary to produce a given result; now, in our case, we have a most imperfect knowledge of the required conditions, which are, nevertheless, necessary antecedents to the sought-for phenomena. We are in the position of the astronomer who can put his eye to the telescope and observe the firmament, but who cannot provoke the production of a single celestial phenomenon.

My position is therefore very simple. It is that of an impartial observer. The occult sciences and spiritism never aroused my curiosity, and I was more than thirty years of age, when my attention was drawn towards psychical phenomena. I did not even try to turn a table before I was thirty-five, considering such facts as unworthy of serious examination. It is only since 1892 that I have become interested in these researches.

I cannot remember to-day how I was led to take up the study; it was not abruptly. I am certain that no striking incident was ever responsible for a sudden changing of my mind. As far as my recollection goes, I think it was the chance perusal of some theosophical works, which made me curious to know the extent of a mystical movement, whose existence I had not even suspected. My discoveries astonished me, for I never thought that mysticism could find adherents at the end of the nineteenth century. The opening address pronounced by me at the Court of Appeal at Limoges in 1893 was upon this subject.

This address brought me many correspondents, and I was led to experiment myself. My first results were negative, and except a few interesting experiments made at Limoges with a lady of that town—a remarkable medium—and her husband, the phenomena which I observed were not of a nature to convince me. In 1895 I went to l’Agnélas, and took part in the experiments of MM. de Rochas, Dariex, Sabatier, de Gramont and de Watteville. The report of these experiments has been published in the Annales des Sciences Psychiques.

Surprised at these manifestations, I became filled with the desire to investigate further; and soon afterwards curiosity prompted me to take advantage of a leisure moment to resume the l’Agnélas experiments. In 1896 Eusapia Paladino was kind enough to spend a fortnight at my house at Choisy, near Bordeaux. MM. de Rochas, Watteville, Gramont, Brincard, and General Thomassin were present at all or some of these experiments. The Attorney-General, M. Lefranc, my friend and chief, was also present at one of our sittings. M. Béchade and a Bordeaux medium, Madame Agullana, were also my guests. The results of these sittings have been noted down by M. de Rochas in a small volume which has not been made public. More and more interested, and desirous of investigating still further what I had seen with Eusapia, I begged her to pay me another visit. She consented, and returned in 1897, giving me another fortnight, this time in my home at Bordeaux. The phenomena which my friends and I obtained on that occasion were as demonstrative as before.

Eusapia is not the only medium with whom I have experimented. Madame Agullana of Bordeaux, with her customary disinterestedness, has given me many sittings: the results I obtained with her are of a different order. I also brought twice to Bordeaux the young mediums of Agen, where a previous opportunity had been given me of observing them; at Agen their phenomena had won for their home the reputation of being haunted. Lastly, I have found some remarkable mediums at Bordeaux, among those who did me the honour of admitting me to their sittings. I also came across a large number of mediums manifesting automatic phenomena only; these, too, were interesting in their way, for they enabled me to note and understand the difference between so-called supernatural phenomena and phenomena which are but the expression of an activity, which, in appearance at least, is extraneous to the ordinary personality.

Finally, I have frequently come across fraud. This was instructive, and I observed the fraudulent with patience and interest. The tricks of voluntary fraud deserve to be known and studied, as one is then better able to frustrate and checkmate them. Involuntary fraud—far more common than voluntary fraud—is no less instructive, for it throws a vivid light upon the curious phenomena of automatic activity.

It is not always becoming to entertain one’s readers with personalities, but I think I ought to infringe a little upon decorum, in order to specify the state of mind in which I have pursued my observations. From the very beginning I was struck by a fact which seems beyond doubt. I saw that certain manifestations—to all appearances supernormal—could only be studied with the assistance of nervous and mental pathology. Therefore I went to school again, and for six years I studied assiduously clinical medicine at the University of Bordeaux. It is not within my present scope to write the panegyric of the masters to whose teachings I listened, their names would seem out of place in a book like this. But I may say that the interest which I took in my medical studies became more lively, as I understood their importance better and better. Doubtless the notions which I have acquired are most rudimentary, but however unpretentious they may be, they have enabled me to understand the mechanism of certain manifestations, and to bring a more precise judgment to bear upon their psychological value.

I am, therefore, an interested but impartial onlooker. It matters little to me if a table or a chair moves of its own accord; I have no particular desire to see them accomplish these movements. The only interest, which I find in this fact, is its truth. Its reality alone is of value to me, and I have applied myself to establish this without any possible error. My unique preoccupation has been to make sure of the reality of the phenomena which I observed. The pursuit of truth has been my sole concern.

True, I sought it in my own way; for I preferred to build my conviction upon a basis which would satisfy my intelligence and my reason, rather than impose *a priori* conditions which the experiment ought to satisfy in order to convince me. I am ignorant of most of these conditions, and I think that every one else is also. Consequently, I consider it imprudent to establish beforehand the conditions under which the experiments are to be made, in order to merit being recorded. It might just happen, that one of the conditions thus laid down rendered the experiment impracticable. Therefore I have observed rather than experimented.

My manner of proceeding has been productive of many happy results; for the curious phenomena which I have been able to observe are capricious; they shun those who would force them, and offer themselves to those who wait for them patiently. This behaviour, this spontaneity, is not the least astonishing feature in this line of observation.

I have always thought that there was nothing of a supernatural order in these phenomena. My conclusions have not changed; but let us understand the meaning of this expression. I do not mean to say that these phenomena are always in accordance with nature’s laws such as we understand them to-day. I am certain that we are in the presence of an unknown force; its manifestations do not seem to obey the same laws, as those governing other forces more familiar to us; but I have no doubt they obey some law, and perhaps the study of these phenomena will lead us to the conception of laws more comprehensive than those already known. Some future Newton will discover a more complete formula than ours.

My position, therefore, seems to me to be well defined. I have held myself aloof from those who denied upon bias, and also from those who asserted too rashly. I have remained within the margin of science. I have endeavoured to bring to bear upon my experiments methods of scientific observation. I wish to go in neither for occultism, nor for spiritism, nor for anything mysterious or supernatural. Many who know me imperfectly may think that I have given reins to my imagination, that I am an adept in theosophy, neo-martinism, or spiritism. Such is not the case. I seek, and I have found-very little; others have been more fortunate than I. Some day perhaps I shall have the same good luck. But I shall not touch upon what others have done, save as an accessory; I shall only speak of what I myself have seen and what I myself think. My book is the statement of a witness—it has no other signification.

One word in conclusion. A great number of my experiments have been made with people who wish to preserve their incognito. I have never been wanting in discretion when this was asked of me, and have never disclosed the names of those who placed their confidence in me, permitting me to experiment with them whilst desirous of remaining unknown. I have sometimes found very remarkable mediums among these anonymous experimenters. Some of my sittings with them have been truly admirable on account of the clear, distinct nature of the phenomena obtained. I beg these trusting friends to accept my heartfelt thanks.

May my book have the good fortune to contribute, however feebly, towards removing the prejudices which keep away so many likely experimenters from these studies and researches. These prejudices are manifold: there is the fear of ridicule, the religious scruple, the delusive dread of nervous or mental disease, the terror of an unknown world peopled with strange, mysterious beings. But time will dispel all this, and I believe that a day will come, when these facts—well studied, well observed—will change our conceptions of things in a way little dreamt of to-day. The sphere of ‘Psychical Science’ is unmeasurable. A few pioneers only are exploring therein to-day; when the land has been tilled and cultivated it will yield, I am sure, a wonderful crop—the harvest will surpass the dreams of imagination.

But let those who, thanks to a scientific education, are particularly well qualified to undertake these studies, cease to consider them unworthy of their attention. In holding themselves aloof they commit a mistake which they will bitterly regret some day. Allowing even that the first experimenter may be guilty of mistakes, there will always remain something out of the facts which they have observed. Mistakes are unavoidable in the *début* of a new science: the methods are uncertain, and the novelty of the phenomena makes their analysis difficult; time, labour in common, and experience will remedy these inevitable inconveniences.

It would be very easy to give examples of the delay which scientific prejudice has brought to bear upon scientific progress. This criticism has already been very frequently and wittily made. Even those men, whose discoveries have placed them at the head of the intellectual movement of their generation, are not altogether free from blame, yielding too often to the deplorable tendency of converting natural laws into dogmas. They commit the same fault they object to in theologians. Man has a wonderful aptitude for laying hold of his neighbours’ faults and remaining blind to his own, and probably it will be so for a long time to come. I would like to see science rid itself for good and all of this theological habit of mind.

Science has only to think about facts. There should be no distinction made between the various phenomena observed: it is not beseeming to adopt certain facts, and refuse analysis to others, excluding them on the ground, for example, that their examination belongs to religion. Every natural fact ought to be studied, and, if it be real, incorporated with the patrimony of knowledge. What matters its apparent contradiction with the laws of nature, such as we understand them to-day? These laws are not principles superior to our experience; they are but the expression of our experience: our knowledge is very limited and our experience is still young—it will grow, and its development will bring the inevitable consequence of a corresponding modification in our conception of nature. Therefore, let us not be too positive of the accuracy of present ideas, and arbitrarily reject everything which we think runs counter to them. Do not dogmatise; let our only care be the impartial search for truth. Nothing will better enable us to understand the surroundings in the midst of which we are evolving than facts, which are apparently irreconcilable with current ideas: these facts betoken that the ideas are erroneous or incomplete; their attentive observation will reveal a more general formula which will explain at one and the same time the new and the old. And thus from antithesis to synthesis, more and more universal, our scientific ideas will tend towards absolute truth.

Alas! how far away from this ideal do we seem to be to-day! *Laboremus!*

# Method

A French proverb says, ‘we must have eggs to make an omelette’: in order to be able to study psychical phenomena we must have psychical phenomena. This seems an elementary proposition, and yet it is the very one we most readily overlook. I have already said why and wherefore.

Therefore, I deem it necessary to indicate at once the methods which have appeared to me to give the most favourable results. Those of my readers who may wish to verify the accuracy of my conclusions will, I am sure, have the opportunity of doing so, if they operate as I have done. First of all, I must warn them against caring for the world’s opinion. They must not be afraid of exposing themselves to ridicule. No doubt there is temptation to make a jest of the methods which I advise; but I strongly recommend them to think about the result, and not about the means used to obtain that result.

Psychical phenomena are of two orders: material and intellectual. The methods best suited to the study of the first are not, in my opinion, adapted to the study of the second. There is a distinction, therefore, to be made in the beginning between these two categories of facts.

Physical phenomena are the least frequently met with; they include:—

1. Knockings or ‘raps’ on furniture, walls, floors, or on the experimenters themselves.

2. Sundry noises other than raps.

3. Movements of objects without sufficient contact to explain the movement produced. There is here a distinction to be made between movements produced without any contact whatever—*telekinesis*: e.g. the rising or sliding of a table or chair, the swaying of scales, etc., without their being touched; and movements with contact, which is insufficient to explain them—*parakinesis*: e.g. the levitation of a table on which the experimenters lay their hands.

4. *Apports*: that is to say, the sudden appearance of objects—flowers, sweets, stones, etc.—which have not been brought by any of the assistants. This phenomenon—if it exists—supposes, in addition, the following:—

5. Penetrability, or the passage of matter through matter.

6. Visual phenomena, which are themselves subdivided into:—

 Vision of the odic effluvium.

 Amorphous lights.

 Forms, either luminous or non-luminous.

 Lastly, the most complete phenomenon of all—the materialisation of a form, human or otherwise, luminous or not.

7. Phenomena which leave permanent traces, such as imprints.

8. Alteration in the weight of material objects or of certain people: levitation.

9. Perceptible changes in the temperature: sensation of cold or heat; spontaneous combustion.

10. Cool breezes.

Such are the chief psychical phenomena of the material order, which have been pointed out by different experimenters. I have not verified all of them: raps, telekinetic, and a few luminous phenomena are all I have obtained in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

Intellectual phenomena are those which imply the expression of a thought. I will class them in the following manner:—

1. Typtology: the table, upon which the experimenters lay their hands, leans to one side and recovers equilibrium by striking the ground.

2. Grammatology or spelt-out sentences. Various methods may be used. The principal are:—

 Repeating the alphabet until a rap indicates the letter to be retained;

 Pointing out the letters of the alphabet by means of a pencil or stiletto, etc., until a rap indicates where to stop;

 Finally, the designation of the required letters by an index-hand on a pivot fixed in the middle of a circle composed of the alphabet, the index-hand moving with or without contact.

3. Automatic writing: immediate, when the subject writes without the intermedium of an instrument; mediate, when he uses an instrument, such as a planchette, a wooden ball with handles fastened to it, a basket, a hat, a stand, etc. In this case, several people can combine their action by laying their hands all together upon the object to which the pencil is attached.

4. Direct writing: i.e. writing which appears on slates, paper, etc., whether in or out of sight of the experimenters. If the letters seem to be formed without the aid of a pencil we have precipitated writing.

5. Incarnation or ‘control’: the subject, when asleep, speaks in the name of some entity or order, which possesses him.

6. Direct voices: when words are heard, appearing to emanate from vocal organs other than those of the persons present; some experimenters are supposed to have conversed in this way with materialised forms.

7. Certain automatisms other than writing are observable: e.g. crystal- and mirror-gazing; audition in conch-formed shells; sundry hallucinations, telepathy and telesthesia: ‘the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognised channels of sense’; perception at a distance of positive impressions. These phenomena bring in their train clairvoyance or voyance, and lucidity, expressions which are by no means identical. Lucidity designates more particularly the faculty which certain people have, in magnetic sleep or in somnambulism, of getting exact impressions in a supernormal manner; clairvoyants or voyants are those who see forms invisible to other people. Clairaudience denotes phenomena of the same kind in the auditory sphere.

I have paid scarcely any attention to these intellectual phenomena, with the exception of automatic writing, crystal-gazing, typtology, and ‘control.’ If I have taken greater interest in material than in intellectual phenomena, it is because they struck me as being more simple and easier to observe. This sentiment is not that of all experimenters, and my colleagues of the London Society for Psychical Research appear to be more affirmative in their conclusions, concerning survival after death and communication with the dead, than in their opinions on material phenomena. My personal experience has not led me to the same ideas.

Undoubtedly, experiments demonstrating the persistence of human personality after death would have an interest, in comparison with which all others would be blotted out. But the analysis of phenomena of this kind raises difficulties, which are much more complicated than is the simple observation of a physical fact. Intellectual phenomena always suppose some kind of motor automatism or other; of course, I am not speaking of manifestations where the will of the sensitive intervenes: this automatism is manifested by language, writing, or the less elevated motor phenomena, typtology for example; it may also be sensory and manifest itself in hallucinations of various kinds. To understand the infinite complication of intellectual phenomena it suffices to indicate the conditions under which they are observed. Before admitting that the cause of the apparent automatism is foreign to the sensitive, we must be able to eliminate with certitude the action of his personal or impersonal conscience. To what extent does the subliminal memory intervene?—a first difficulty which is scarcely solvable!

But supposing it to be solved, the problem still remains almost intact. If the knowledge of a positive fact, certainly unknown to the medium, appears in his automatic communications, we must not thereupon conclude that this knowledge is due to the intervention of a disincarnated spirit. Telepathy may be able to explain it. Telepathy is, as we know, the transmission of an idea, an impression, a psychical condition of some kind or other from one person to another. We are altogether ignorant of its laws, and nothing warrants the assertion, that if telepathy is a fact—as appears most probable—it is therefore necessary that any particular motive condition should exist in the agent. We may suppose with just as much reason, that the existence of a souvenir in one mind can be discovered and recognised by another, under conditions solely depending on the mental state of the percipient. This is, properly speaking, telesthesia. Now it is very difficult to prove that the fact, of which automatism marks the knowledge, is unknown to everybody. It is even impossible to prove it. But supposing this were done, there would always remain the possibility of attributing the communication to some being other than human: by admitting even the existence of spiritual or immaterial beings distinct from ourselves, nothing warrants us to affirm that such beings are our deceased relatives or friends and not some facetious Kobolds.

Prediction and precognition, of which I have had proof, raise just as complicated questions as the preceding ones. I confine myself to recording without trying to explain these facts.

Therefore, I have given my preferences to the study of physical phenomena, because in such I have not to consider the mental condition of the subject, nor have I any of those delicate analyses to make, the complexity of which I have just mentioned. I have to defend myself against only two enemies, the fraud of others and my own illusions. Now, I feel certain of never having been the victim of either. When, for example, in the refreshment-room of a railway-station, in a restaurant, in a tea-shop, I have observed, in broad daylight, a piece of furniture change place of its own accord, I have a right to think I am not in the presence of furniture especially arranged to produce such effects. When the unforeseen nature of the experiment excludes the hypothesis of preparation, when, by sight and touch, I make sure of the absence of contact between the experimenters and the article which is displaced, I have sufficient reasons for excluding the hypothesis of fraud. When I measure the distance between the objects before and after the displacement, I have also sufficient reason for excluding the hypothesis of the illusion of my senses. If this right be refused me, I should really like to know how any fact whatever can be observed. No one is more convinced than myself of the frailty of our impressions and the relativity of our perceptions; nevertheless, there must be some way of perceiving a phenomenon in order to submit it to impartial observation. Besides, the supposed reproach of illusion cannot be applied in a general sense; to admit its justice would be to do away with the very foundations of our sciences. It can only be applied to me as an individual, and I willingly admit that it is impossible for me to exculpate myself. In vain might I plead that I am persuaded of the regularity of my perceptions, in vain assert that I observe no tendency to illusion in myself, my testimony would remain none the less suspected.

Consequently, I have but one reply for those who mistrust my qualifications as an observer, and that is to invite them to take the trouble of experimenting on their own account, using the methods which I have adopted. If, *a priori*, they wish to lay down their own conditions, they run the risk of receiving no appreciable results. When they have obtained a few plain facts they will be able to vary the conditions of experimentation, and satisfy the legitimate exigencies of their own reason. That is what I did, and if I cannot solemnly affirm the reality of the phenomena which I have observed, I can at all events affirm my personal conviction of their existence. Maybe I am showing an exaggerated mistrust of myself by thus only affirming my subjective conviction, and in not venturing to affirm with a like energy the objective reality of the things I have seen. Yet I trust no one will blame me for my prudent reserve. What man can say he has never made a mistake?

Only those, who put themselves in the same conditions which enabled me to make my observations, have a right to criticise those observations.

To criticise without experience is unreasonable, and I recognise no competence in those judges whose decisions are made without preliminary information. For the rest, I have no wish to convert any one to my ideas, and am indifferent—respectfully indifferent, if you like—to the judgment which may be formed about me.

The methods recommended by diverse occult schools vary a great deal. Theosophists do not reveal to the profane the means they use to obtain supernormal facts. This discretion astonishes me, for the theosophical society is filled with a lively spirit of propagandism. It has its chief centre at Adyar, and lodges or branches everywhere. The theosophical reviews venture to discuss the most elevated problems of philosophy, and are not at all sparing of the most extraordinary revelations of esoteric teaching; but they are remarkably sparing of practical indications.

Theosophical phenomenonalism appears to derive inspiration from Hindu-Yogism. I do not know the rules of training to which Yogis submit themselves. The most severe abstinence seems to be recommended them. Adepts are generally initiated by their Gurus or masters, and I have not been fortunate enough to be the chela of an initiated.

The French occultists who are connected with Eliphas Levy by Papus (Dr. Encausse), Guaita, Haven, Barlet, Sédir, recommend the practice of magic. Descriptions of the necessary magical material will be found in treatises by Papus and Eliphas Levy. The results which the Magi relate having been obtained are so vague, that I have had no curiosity to put into practice the strange proceedings of magic ceremonial recommended by them. These have a serious inconvenience; namely, to strike the imagination of credulous folk, and to facilitate auto-suggestion, sensorial illusions, and hallucinations. To accomplish the rites, moreover, it is necessary to dispose of rooms arranged in a particular way, and to submit oneself to a severe diet for a certain time. This makes it a complicated matter. Well, I must admit I was ashamed to try these methods. I lacked the courage to don the cloak and the linen robe, to trace the circle, and with lighted lamp and sword in hand await visions about to appear in the smoke arising from the burning incense. I own I was perhaps wrong not to try what are apparently the less rational methods. Only caring for the result obtained, I certainly would not have hesitated to resort to white or even black magic, had I had any reason whatsoever to anticipate a positive result. In order to obtain an observable fact, I would not have hesitated laying myself open to ridicule. But the statements of experimenters of the occult school seemed to imply a poverty of practical results. If the magi of the present day had realised some operation easily accessible to observation, they would not have omitted acquainting us of the fact in one or other of their numerous reviews. Their silence struck me as significant.

Moreover, the very essence even of Hermetic doctrines, openly professed by occultists, is opposed to all such divulgence. The ancient doctrine exacted initiation. The Rosicrucians, if I am not mistaken, could only initiate an adept. Then again, they were allowed to use this privilege only upon attaining a certain age, and when convinced of having found a discreet and trustworthy pupil. All that publicity made to-day about Hermetic sciences is the actual negation of their first precepts. These indiscretions bring to my mind the words of one of my predecessors at the Bordeaux Court (successor of the ancient Parliament of Guyenne), the President Jean d’Espagnet, one of the three or four adepts who pass for having unriddled the great arcanum.

‘Facilia intellectu suspecta habeat,’ he says, speaking to the seeker, ‘maxime in mysticis nominibus et arcanis operationibus; **in obscuris enim veritas delitescit**; nec unquam dolosius quam quum aperte, nec verius quam quum obscure, scribunt philosophi.’

Then, again, I had a decisive reason for choosing spiritistic methods: they are not mysterious and they require no special subjective preparation. They are simple—in appearance, at least—and can be easily applied. Spiritists, and certain experimenters who have adopted their methods without sharing their theories, affirm having obtained surprising results. Therefore, I had nothing better to do than choose these same methods. Because of their simplicity, and the multiplicity of certified results, I considered it preferable to adopt the methods of spiritists. I will, therefore, indicate how I experiment when I am free to direct the sittings—which, unfortunately, is not always the case.

I shall divide my indications into three wide categories: 1. Material Conditions; 2. Composition of the Circle; 3. Methods of Operation.

I will add that these indications are not absolute.

## Material conditions

Results are generally better, when operations are carried on in a room whose dimensions do not exceed 15 to 20 square yards in area, and 12 to 15 feet in height. Smaller rooms may be used, but then the heat is sometimes trying.

The temperature of the room is an important factor. Heat, although it may inconvenience the experimenters and the medium, appears to exercise a favourable influence on the emission of the force. On the contrary, cold is an element of non-success. Of course, I am speaking of the temperature of the room. I would advise operating in a temperature of from 20 to 25 degrees centigrade. It is decidedly necessary to avoid having cold hands and feet.

In winter the seance-room should be thoroughly warmed and the fire allowed to go out before the sitting, in case luminous phenomena should be forthcoming.

I fancied I saw an advantage, especially for movements without contact, in operating in an uncarpeted room. The carpet not only seems to be a bad element generally, it also hinders the gliding movements of the table, which are often only very slight.

As for exterior meteorological conditions, I have noticed that a dry cold favours the production of psychical phenomena: it is, I believe, the temperature *optima*. In any case, the dryness of the air is a very good condition. I have noticed that the phenomena were more easily obtained, when outside conditions favoured the production of numerous sparks under the wheels of electric trams. I have often noticed this coincidence between good sittings and the abundance of electric sparks above-mentioned. I believe that the hygrometrical state of the atmosphere is an important factor in the production of these sparks. Rain and wind are, on the contrary, causes of failure.

The lighting of the seance-room is one of the most important considerations in experimentation. Lamps and candles have the inconvenience of taking some time to light, and they do not allow of easy and rapid modification in the illumination of the room. Electric lighting is the best system, because, disposing of several lamps, it suffices to press a hand-lever in order to vary the quantity and quality of the light.

## Other conditions

Much criticism has been passed on the particular kind of experiments I have undertaken to relate; one of the most frequently reiterated criticisms is the reproach of always operating in obscurity. Nothing can be more inexact. As far as I am concerned, I have never considered as convincing telekinetic and parakinetic experiments made in obscurity. Those movements without contact, which have brought about my conviction, were obtained in full light, and more often in broad daylight. Of course, it is evident that darkness is necessary for the observation of luminous phenomena. To insist upon proving, in broad daylight, the reality of the delicate phosphorescences which it has been given me to observe, is a glaring contradiction.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that darkness is particularly favourable to phenomena of a physical order. On several occasions I have had the opportunity of recognising this fact under conditions, which rendered the hypothesis of fraud extremely improbable. For example, I have frequently obtained raps in the light, the number and intensity of which increased when the light was extinguished. It is the same with movements of objects without contact; but, I repeat, obscurity is not necessary.

Tableau 2 :répartition des actes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Actes | Nombre | % |
| - de nature économique  | 5080 | 49,5 |
| - relatifs au crédit | 2756 | 26,9 |
| - de droit familial | 880 | 8,6 |
| - relatifs à la société |  |  |
| d'Ancien Régime | 42 | négligeable |
| - non classables | 1501 | 14,6 |
| Total | 10259 | 100 |

In a popular scientific review I once read a criticism of some experiments in which I took part—a criticism written by a medical man at Bruxelles, if my memory be correct. This doctor, a man of talent, imagined that our conclusions were founded upon experiments conducted solely in total obscurity. He committed an involuntary mistake.

Psychical phenomena can be obtained in broad daylight, and an endeavour should be made to obtain them in this way. There has been a general tendency to put out all lights in order to procure more marked phenomena. This is a wrong way of proceeding, if one seeks physical phenomena such as raps or movements without contact. We must avoid working without light, for the habit of only being able to emit the nervous force in obscurity is most easily acquired; and it is by no means easy to suppress acquired habits. Eusapia Paladino had the habit of demanding the gradual extinction of the light as her trance deepened. In 1897 I was able to get through her the same phenomena, with a certain amount of light and without the trance condition. I still remember her astonishment at obtaining, in her waking state, phenomena which, until then, she had obtained in the second state only. Sleep and darkness were the conditions this remarkable medium had become accustomed to, but they were not necessary. My first recommendation, then, is to operate with light, with as much light as possible.

I repeat, however, that sometimes the lessening of light is desirable—often the medium demands it—even its total extinction is sometimes necessary, as, for example, when sitting for luminous phenomena. It is therefore well to have a series of graduated electric lights more or less shaded. The simpler thing is to have a Pigeon lamp. These petroleum lamps do not give much light, but the graduation of the light is easily effected with them. Their great advantage is this, when the electricity is turned off, their feeble light—quite sufficient in certain cases—is capable of being gradually reduced until total obscurity is obtained.

Coloured lights are often useful: I have not tried blue; yellow, violet, and green are good; while red fatigues the eyes. For certain series of experiments, I arranged my light so as to obtain white, yellow, green, or red, according to wish: the first three give sufficient illumination; it is not at all the same with red.

I strongly recommend avoiding the concentration of the luminous source. To avoid that inconvenience, dull glass may be used, or the lamps and lantern-sides may be covered with transparent paper—the quantity of light is not sensibly diminished, and the sight is less tried.

The quality of the light employed did not seem to me to have any very noticeable influence on the phenomena, yet I think my best results have been obtained in the twilight hours, or in the afternoon between five and seven o’clock, when the hard light of day had been tempered by drawing the blinds together.

The most important question after that of illumination is the choice of apparatus. I do not hesitate to say that the table is the best thing to use. However, it must not be imagined this article is an indispensable tool. Movements without contact can be obtained just as well with chairs, baskets, hats, pieces of wood, linen, etc., but a table is more convenient.

I have obtained equally good results with round or rectangular tables; the latter have perhaps given me the finest experiences. Eusapia generally uses rectangular tables; at l’Agnélas the table we used weighed about 13 kilogrammes, at Choisy 6 or 7, at Bordeaux about 7 kg. 500 grs. When sitting for raps or movements without contact, I think it is better to use lighter tables; for psychical force is mensurable: some mediums incapable of moving a table weighing ten kilogrammes may be able to obtain the levitation of a lighter one.

Some of my recent results lead me to think, there might be an advantage in using tables made with a double top, a space of three or four inches separating the two shelves. I have not experimented sufficiently to be able to express an opinion on the advantages which, theoretically, the double top seems to hold out. My impression is that the table acts something like a condenser, in which case the purpose of a double top can be understood.

The legs of the table should be separated. One-legged tables should be discarded, and especially tripods, their supervision being so very difficult. When the legs are thin and apart, observation is untrammelled.

The colour of the table did not seem to me to exercise any influence over the phenomena. I have been equally successful with black, white, red, and brown tables. They may be polished or unpolished. I do not think it matters what kind of wood they are made of, though I have obtained my finest raps with an unpolished mahogany table.

Tableau 3

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
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|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

I have noticed there is an advantage in covering the table with some white material of light texture, which should not fall beyond the edges of the table more than one or two inches, as it would otherwise interfere with the experimenters’ reciprocal supervision. I do not know why the presence of a cloth should be favourable to raps and movements; at all events, it makes fraudulent raps and communicated movements much more difficult.

It is well to curtain off one corner of the room in order to form a cabinet. If the room be narrow enough, it is more convenient to stretch the curtains at the end opposite the window—an arrangement I adopted at Choisy.

The dimensions of the cabinet ought not to exceed 3 feet 9 inches to 4 feet 6 inches in width, 2 feet in depth, and 6 feet in height. I think there is an advantage in partially closing in the top.

The curtains should be made of some material of light thin texture. It is a mistake to think they should be of a dark colour; I have obtained just as good results with plain white sheets as with dark curtains.

When studying movement of objects without contact, it is useful to place in the cabinet light articles which produce a noise when shaken. The common tambourine is very appropriate for this purpose, as are also accordions, toy-pianos, harmonicas, hand-bells, etc.

The experimenters ought to sit upon wooden chairs with cane seats. Upholstered chairs are not to be recommended.

An easy-chair should be placed in the cabinet for the medium, in case he should wish to sit there. Mediums often express this wish, when in a state of ‘trance’ or somnambulism. I give the name of ‘trance’ to the sleep or torpor which is generally noticed in the sensitive, when the phenomena attain their maximum intensity. I prefer the word ‘trance’ to any other expression, because the condition of the entranced medium does not seem to me to be identical with that of the somnambulist; and for the particular experiments with which I am dealing, it is of interest to use terms which do not lead to confusion.

It is extremely useful to have a registering apparatus, which will allow of making graphical descriptions of certain movements. Sir William Crookes used this with success. I have not had the opportunity of using any; for I had no such apparatus at hand when I experimented with Eusapia Paladino. Later on, in a series of promising experiments, the health of the medium with whom I was operating obliged me to cease work, before I was able to make use of my registers.

I must, however, warn experimenters against the premature use of any kind of apparatus whatever. One of the most curious features of psychical phenomena is their apparent independence. The phenomena direct us; they do not allow themselves to be easily led. Often they seem to obey some will other than that of the sitters; and it is this which forms the basis of spiritistic belief; but, though I have not been able to grasp its laws, my impression is that this spontaneousness is only apparent.

Sensitives, as a rule, exhibit great repugnance to mechanical tests. This repugnance is one of the difficulties which repel the best predisposed minds, and quickly leads them to the conclusion of dishonesty, an unwarranted conclusion sometimes. I have come across many mediums, who themselves offered me every help in their power when devising test conditions. It is true these mediums are private individuals of position and education, and are extremely anxious that their psychic powers might not be made public in any way; for they do not wish to expose themselves to the criticism and abuse which is so lavishly bestowed upon mediums. This is particularly the case with ladies.

Certainly, the attacks made on Eusapia Paladino by a badly informed press and public are not encouraging to the more highly gifted mediums. I owe it to Eusapia to say that, in my experiments with her, she has always submitted to the exigencies of the most severe test conditions. If she has sometimes given me suspicious phenomena, she did so only under especial psychological conditions.

Though I have not employed any registering apparatus, I have used instruments of weight and measure—particularly a letter-balance—an article as convenient as it is easily employed. Each experimenter can and ought to vary the conditions of experimentation according to his wishes, within the limits which frequent experimentation will very quickly give him. The results obtained must be definite. To be satisfied with approximate results in such a matter would be absolute loss of time.

In concluding my remarks about the paraphernalia of the seance-room, I will give one more recommendation which may seem extraordinary, but which, I have reason to believe, is useful; this is that there should be no metal about the table: it is better to fasten it together with pegs rather than with nails. This is not an absolute condition, however, for I have obtained good results with nailed tables; yet my impression is that the absence of all metal is an element of success. Mediums are sometimes extremely sensitive to metals. Certain sensitives complain of their rings, which seem to make them feel uncomfortable, giving them, at times, a sensation of exaggerated heat. This brings to mind certain facts met with from time to time in our neurotic cliniques.

# Composition of the circle

The most important thing in the organisation of a series of experiments is the choice of persons with whom we intend to operate. First of all, it must be remembered that without a medium no phenomena will be forthcoming. The presence of some one, gifted with the power of producing psychical phenomena, is perhaps the only necessary and indispensable condition of their realisation. Therefore, experimentation ought only to be seriously thought of when in possession of that *rara avis*.

What, then, is a medium? By what distinguishing features can he be recognised? It is very difficult to answer these questions.

I will give the name of ‘medium’ to any person capable of producing any of the phenomena previously mentioned. I adopt the word ‘medium,’ because it is consecrated by custom and has received the precise signification I mention. Some philosophers criticise this definition. Their criticisms are, I think, misplaced. In metaphysics it is easy to give definitions which, though elegant, are founded upon nothing. In physics—I use this word in its etymological and primitive sense—a being can only be defined by its properties. Definitions of this kind state a fact, which is all we can require of them; they serve one purpose, which is to avoid a long periphrase. Any other definition would lead to the supposition, that the veritable knowledge of the cause of the phenomena observed or of the properties recorded, was known; now, it seems to me impossible to affirm the real cause of the facts I have observed. I confine myself to stating them without forming any hypotheses.

A medium is, therefore, a person in presence of whom ‘psychical’ phenomena can be observed. I use this word ‘psychical’ with regret, because it implies a hypothesis.

As a rule it is necessary to experiment with mediums in order to discover them. Their gifts are often latent, and only reveal themselves if conditions favourable to their manifestation are supplied. This is not always the case, and there is generally a chance of coming across a medium when experimenting with persons in whose presence certain irregular abnormal noises are heard, certain movements of furniture are spontaneously produced. Such things are far from being as uncommon as one would think. This assertion may seem paradoxical, but such is not the case.

I have met with good mediums who were ignorant of the existence of their faculties; yet, when I questioned them, I discovered that they frequently heard little ‘raps’ upon the wood of their bed or upon their night-table, without attaching any importance to it. Others have often noticed the displacement of ordinary articles. Sometimes, but more rarely, the facts observed are so intense that the house appears to be haunted. We are often tempted to attribute to fraud the phenomena of haunting. I believe accounts of this nature are not all false, and I shall perhaps try and show this in a future work. We must not reason like one of my friends, a man of vast erudition and superior intelligence, who one day said to me: ‘A little girl from thirteen to sixteen years old is always to be found in haunted houses—as soon as the little girl is taken away the phenomena cease!’ Granted! Things generally happen thus; only the little girl may not be the voluntary cause of the phenomena: she may be the involuntary cause of them, a medium in activity, producing supernormal phenomena of the nature of those observed at spiritistic seances.

However, it must be admitted that it is very seldom we have the opportunity of experimenting with these, so to speak, ready-made mediums. As a rule we must try on patiently, until the longed-for phœnix has been discovered.

At the same time, I ought to point out that the chances of encountering a medium will be greater if we look for him among nervous people. It seems to me that a certain impressionability—or nervous instability—is a favourable condition for the effervescence of medianity. I use the term ‘nervous instability’ for want of a better, but I do not use it in an ill sense. Hysterical people do not always give clear, decided phenomena; my best experiments have been made with those who were not in any way hysterical.

Neurasthenics generally give no result whatever.

The nervous instability of which I speak is, therefore, neither hysteria, nor neurasthenia, nor any nervous affection whatsoever. It is a state of the nervous system such as appears in hypertension. A lively impressionability, a delicate susceptibility, a certain unequalness of temper, establish analogy between mediums and certain neurotic patients; but they are to be distinguished from the latter by the integrity of their sensibilities, of their reflex movements, and of their visual range. As a rule, they have a lively intelligence, are susceptible to attention, and do not lack energy; their artistic sentiments are relatively developed; they are confiding and unreserved with those who show them sympathy; are distrustful and irritable if not treated gently. They pass easily from sadness to joy, and experience an irresistible need of physical agitation: these two characteristics are just the ones which made me choose the expression of nervous instability.

I say instability, I do not say want of equilibrium. Many mediums whom I have known have an extremely well-balanced mind, from a mental and nervous point of view. My impression is that their nervous system is even superior to that of the average.

This will, no doubt, surprise many well-informed people. Medical men and psychologists, ill-disposed, as a rule, to the study of so-called occult phenomena, have the habit of looking upon all mediums as hysterics. It suffices to read the works of these savants to perceive they have never been in the presence of veritable mediums. M. Paul Janet, for example—in L’Automatisme Psychologique—propounds general theories which cannot be applied to every case. It is a pity such an eminent thinker should not have taken the trouble to make himself better acquainted with the facts. Perhaps he has acted like the celebrated Abbot Vertot. According to M. Janet’s theories, all mediums are on the high road to psychological disintegration: the constituent parts of their personality are dissociated under the influence of the weakening of the normal, personal activity.

I am sure the individuals observed by M. Janet have been very carefully studied by him; but I regret that my learned colleague has not encountered a genuine medium. I share his opinion concerning most spiritistic mediums; I have only found two interesting ones among them; the hundred others which I have observed have only given me automatic phenomena, more or less conscious; nearly all were the puppets of their imagination. It is outside spiritistic circles that I have discovered the best mediums.

M. Janet’s criticisms are only erroneous because they are too sweeping. His conception of psychological disintegration is applicable to the greater number of cases; but it does not apply to all. It is a very different thing to study a crystal-vision, or an automatic writing revealing nothing beyond the tenor of the sensitive’s memory, or to observe a premonitory vision such as has been given me to do. The indication of a future event cannot be explained by Janet’s hypothesis. It reveals especial faculties that I can scarcely consider pathological, unless I consider them as such in the same way as one considers genius to be a sign of degeneration.

It is more reasonable to think that our nervous sensibility will become more and more refined. It is rash to believe that the present human type is the definite end of evolution. Our species is only one link in the series of beings; the causes, which have led up to the improvement of the human race, are still in activity, and it is logical to think there are some natures above as well as below the average. The latter represent ancestral types—a return to cast-off forms; the former are perhaps precursors, possessing faculties which are abnormal to-day, but which may become normal to-morrow.

I must pause, for I see I am forsaking the domain of facts for that of hypotheses; I hasten to return thither. I have pointed out the signs which permit us to suppose that a certain given person is a medium; although these signs are not certain, they seem to me probable. In reality, there is only one sure way of testing the faculties of a medium: that is to experiment with him.

It has been observed that certain people do not obtain phenomena when they operate alone, but obtain them, on the contrary, when with another person. I myself have not had occasion to remark this fact, but I have often noticed that the presence of certain people favoured the attainment of results, while the presence of others troubled or stopped it. I have no explanation to offer for this fact. Certainly credulity or incredulity has no influence whatever on the results of an experiment. I have seen people who were very little inclined to allow themselves to be convinced make excellent auxiliaries. At the same time, I have seen convinced spiritists make detestable co-operators.

It seems as if the faculty of giving forth this unknown force were unequally distributed, that it constitutes a physical property of the organism; that, in relation to it, some persons will be positive and others negative, some will emit and others absorb it.

Hence the importance of the choice of co-operators—of the composition of the circle. The number of experimenters is comparatively unimportant; in principle, the more numerous the circle the greater the force thrown out. But the presence of a large number of sitters is a bad condition for observation; it also enhances the difficulty of the realisation of, what spiritists call, the harmony of the circle. But I ought to say that the finest luminous phenomena, which I have seen, have been obtained when there were from fifteen to twenty people present. On the other hand, I have had the opportunity of experimenting several times alone with a non-professional medium, when I succeeded in seeing faces which I recognised. Unfortunately, this medium—the only one with whom I have obtained this phenomenon—wishes to retain his incognito.

I think the most favourable number is from four to eight. I would urge those who wish to try to experiment to compose their circle, as far as possible, of an equal number of each sex; it is preferable to alternate the masculine and feminine elements. These considerations lead us to the examination of methods of operation, properly speaking.

## Methods of operation

Before discussing in detail those methods which appear to me to be the surest, I think it well to make a few general recommendations. The first relates to the state of mind in which it is necessary to experiment. If interesting results are desired it is not advisable to laugh, joke, or mock at those practices—however ridiculous they may seem—with which I advise compliance. Act seriously, do not make light of experiments, the exact import of which we are so ignorant of. I think we should also avoid the other extreme, which we find in most spiritistic groups, and which impart to these seances all the solemnity of a religious service.

The foregoing might be considered a useless recommendation, which is not the case. Spiritists, whose experience in such matters is not to be disdained, insist on the necessity of harmony in the circle, which is, they say, an essential condition of success. My personal experience confirms their opinion on this point. I have often been present at sittings which promised well in the beginning, and became suddenly barren because of a futile discussion between the sitters. The harmony recommended by spiritists is a kind of equilibrium between the mental and emotional states of the sitters. Each sitter should be animated by the same spirit—I do not use this word in its spiritistic acceptation—and seek only the truth; for I take it for granted they will operate as I have done. This unity of views, this uniformity of desires, this harmony between brains and hearts ensures the synergy of the forces which each member of the circle develops.

For there is no doubt that some kind of force is emitted, and that if the medium throws off more than the other experimenters, an equilibrium between him and the other sitters is nevertheless fairly quickly established. The medium takes back from the latter the force he has expended. The result is that after a successful seance, the sitters are generally tired. I have noticed that certain persons give out this force more readily than others, and this perhaps explains a medium’s preference for certain experimenters as neighbours during the seance. We must not attribute this choice to the greater facility, which some people might offer for the execution of fraudulent phenomena. I have frequently been thus chosen, and I beg my readers to believe that I have a horror of fraud and imposture. I am also accustomed to experimenting; I feel no emotion whatever; I keep cool and observe with care. I am well acquainted with fraudulent methods, and I take good care not to be imposed upon.

I repeat, it is a mistake to attribute to fraudulent intentions the preference shown by the medium for such or such an experimenter. In reality, it seems as though the medium, possessing an organism much more sensitive than that of the majority, quickly recognises those persons who the more easily throw off the force which he requires to retrieve his losses. This more rapid emission may be the result of habit, or may even depend upon individual constitution. Eusapia quickly discerns people from whom she can easily draw the force she needs. In the course of my first experiments with this medium, I found out this vampirism to my cost. One evening, at the close of a sitting at l’Agnélas, she was raised from the floor and carried on to the table with her chair. I was not seated beside her, but, without releasing her neighbours’ hands, she caught hold of mine while the phenomenon was happening. I had a cramp in the stomach—I cannot better define my sensation—and was almost overcome by exhaustion.

This, for me, extraordinary incident astonished me greatly, and since then I have always carefully examined my sensations. This examination has the fault of being purely subjective, but certain objective realities have confirmed it. A special sensation accompanies the emission of this nervous force, and with custom the passage of the energy expended in a seance can be felt, just as the interruption of its flow can be discerned. I have questioned several experimenters about this, and their observations have often corroborated mine.

Therefore I think I may say that some kind of force is emitted by the sitters, which is elaborated by the medium; that the latter restores his losses at the expense of the experimenters, that certain people more readily than others furnish the medium with the force he requires; and that a certain sympathy of ideas, views, and sentiments between the experimenters is favourable to the emission of this force.

I have no decided opinion upon the nature and origin of this force. I think it is kindred to the energy which circulates in our nerves, and which provokes the contraction of our muscles. Further on I shall give the reasons which lead me to think so.

A second recommendation, no less important than the first, in my opinion, is to treat seriously, and note carefully all communications given through the table, through automatic writing or raps.

I now arrive at the examination of one of the most curious facts which so-called ‘psychical’ experiences reveal. To a certain extent the manifesting force appears to be intelligent. Nothing permits me to affirm or even to think, that the manifestations are due to an entity distinct from that of the sitters. It is not my province to discuss hypotheses: I confine myself to the relation of facts, and in the course of my recital, I will point out in detail the circumstances, which permit me to signalise the apparent individuality of the manifesting force. As in such matters I have always thought it better to preserve an expectant attitude, I have always been careful never to slight the communications received through the phenomena. I have imposed on myself the habit of treating these manifestations in the manner desired by them. Every time I acted otherwise, the results were indifferent.

Generally, the manifestations are attributed to a deceased person, known or unknown to the sitters. This is not absolute, for I have witnessed the table call itself the devil, or even pretend to be a man still alive. Automatic writing has been signed by a Mahatma; but, as a rule, it is the soul of a deceased person who claims to be manifesting. This usual attribution explains spiritistic belief. I have good reason for thinking, that the spirits of the dead have had nothing to do with my experiments; but as, in reality, I am ignorant of the cause of the phenomena which I have observed, I have politely accepted the explanation these have given of themselves. It is thus we address those whom we meet at table d’hôte, calling them by the name they give themselves without concerning ourselves as to who they really are.

Therefore, whatever the changeable personification of the phenomena may be, my advice is to accept it and to heed its observations. We must not suppose the ideas expressed are due to the operators’ unconscious movements; that may be true when the communications are obtained through automatic writing, through a table or articles with which the experimenters are in contact; but it is certainly not so when they are obtained by raps given without any contact whatsoever, as I have been able to prove many and many a time. As I confine myself to indicating the results of my personal experience, it is perhaps enough to say once more that the methods I recommend seem good to me. I have always noticed the unhappy consequences of my refusal to take into account the spontaneous advice of the personification.

The most frequently given advice concerns the placing of the experimenters.

However, at the beginning of the sitting, the experimenters may seat themselves as they please. I have already said it was generally necessary to place the medium’s chair against the curtains of the cabinet, and to alternate the sexes. The experimenters seated, the experiment begins. It is a good plan to choose a manager. Nothing is worse than the absence of direction. When every one wishes to direct the proceedings, confusion reigns in the circle, and results are bad. I have been present at seances where every one spoke at the same time, each one demanding a different phenomenon. As a rule, on such occasions nothing was received. Some one, therefore, ought to be appointed to conduct the experiment, especially to converse with the personification if it express a desire for conversation.

When the sitters wish to make a report of an experiment, it is indispensable to intrust one of the experimenters with the task of taking notes of the incidents as they occur. This experimenter ought to form one of the circle.

It must not be thought that the circle can be modified with impunity. My personal experience has shown me it is bad to frequently introduce strangers into the circle. It should be arranged that a series of at least six sittings will be held without modifying the group: that no new experimenter will be admitted: and that none of the original experimenters will miss even one seance. Then if at the end of six sittings nothing has been obtained, my advice is to change the circle, to eliminate certain elements, replacing them by others. It is preferable to change the sitters one by one, and to make a few experiments with the circle thus modified before making further changes.

If interesting results be forthcoming, and a desire be felt to show them to other people, the new sitters must be introduced one by one, and, I repeat, at intervals of three or four sittings. Otherwise there would be a risk of compromising the success of the experiments.

The personification sometimes asks for the addition to the circle of a certain person; it is then well to invite him to the sittings if circumstances allow of it.

I now return to the seance which, I suppose, has begun. The sitters put their hands on the table; it is not generally necessary to ‘form the chain,’ that is to say, to establish contact between the sitters by linking the little fingers. The hands in position, and the room well lighted up, we wait. Talking or singing may be indulged in. The emission of the voice, especially rythmical emission, is an excellent condition: it is a good thing to play some music, organ-playing is particularly effective. Why is the production of sonorous rythmical waves favourable to these phenomena? I have no explanation to offer for this fact, which I am not the only one to have observed.

At the end of a few minutes, the table often seems to be agitated. If we are experimenting with spiritists or with people accustomed to spiritistic proceedings, the table, raising itself, will be seen to strike the floor with one of its legs. I advise asking the table if it wishes to speak, and to arrange that two raps will mean ‘no,’ and three raps ‘yes.’ Of course any other numbers or signs will do equally well. The table, thus consulted, generally replies ‘yes.’ It can then be asked, if the sitters are well placed: if it indicates any other arrangement it is well to heed its advice.

We should then make known to the table what kind of results are desired, and point out, particularly, that movements with contact, failing to carry conviction, are undesirable. I have already said that the personification—it is thus I call the entity, whatever it may be, who claims to be manifesting—is generally very open to suggestion; and it suffices to indicate, at the beginning of the experiment, the objection that is made to movements with contact to be almost completely rid of them.

There is no need to point out the object of the above suggestion. From the special point of view of the observation of material facts, the movement of a table upon which the hand rests means nothing at all. I look upon these movements as loss of time; they are sufficiently explained by our own unconscious and involuntary muscular contractions. The phenomenon is only worthy of a serious man’s attention when it is produced without contact, or without sufficient contact; as, for example, when the table is completely raised from the ground, the sitters’ hands resting on top of the table all the time. It is better not to experiment than to lose one’s time in observing movements with contact, unless, of course, we are seeking to analyse the tenor of typtological messages.

I strongly recommend most carefully avoiding the production of automatic movements. I have excellent reasons for believing, that the agent which produces telekinetic phenomena only realises them, if it has accumulated sufficient force to have acquired a certain given tension. I have already pointed out the close connection—identity perhaps—between this agent and that which causes our muscles to contract; further on I shall indicate experiences which give weight to this impression; at present it suffices to mention it, to understand why I so earnestly recommend sitters to avoid yielding to more or less subconscious movements from the very outset. If, as I think, the energy which our nervous system elaborates is closely connected with that energy, whose effects are seen in telekinetic phenomena, it is probable that it will only produce these curious effects, in proportion as it is able to acquire a sufficient tension for its emission. My knowledge of physics is too rudimentary to allow me to draw precise comparisons between this force and electricity. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me to present some analogies with electricity, although the two are certainly not identical; but the analogies are, perhaps, sufficient to enable me by a comparison to make my meaning clearer.

An electrical conductor, charged with a given amount of electricity, will have an electrical density of σ; if the amount increases, this density will be σ´, and we will have σ´>σ; the tension in the first case will be T = 2πσ2, in the second T´ = 2πσ´2; T´ will be greater than T.

The conductor will remain charged, as long as the tension does not exceed the resistance which the surroundings offer to the emission of electricity; as soon as this resistance becomes inferior to the tension, there will be emission of electricity.

In the case of a medium, the charge of energy increases with time and relative immobility. If by making unconscious or voluntary movements, experimenters do not allow this energy to accumulate, it will never reach the tension necessary for exteriorisation. There are, however, some reservations to be made; for I have noticed, that when the tension is sufficient, simulated or executed movements determine the production of the motor phenomenon—just as if the execution of the movement appeared to liberate a quantity of energy superior to that which was utilised by the working of the muscle; the excess of force was then apparently employed in the realisation of the telekinetic movement.

I have noticed that, every time we allow voluntary or involuntary movements, telekinetic movements are difficult to obtain. One would think, that the energy which determines them can only accomplish them when it cannot find a normal outlet; it has a tendency to expend itself normally in ordinary muscular movements: this tendency is one of the most frequent causes of involuntary fraud, and the habitual occasion of voluntary fraud. We must see that this tendency be checked: this may call for some effort of attention at the beginning, but ‘habit is second nature.’

Things being thus regulated, we wait. A first seance is generally without apparent result, unless one has the good luck to meet with a medium straight away—which is not always the case. Those who seriously wish to understand these facts must have a great fund of indefatigable patience. I can guarantee them success sooner or later, but I cannot tell how many barren experiments may be made before that success comes. They must not grow weary; let them progressively modify the composition of the circle until the necessary element be met with. They will then be rewarded for their trouble. I strongly advise them to avoid professional mediums. Some of them are sincere, and I think that Eusapia Paladino is of that number. It is true that sometimes she produces suspicious phenomena, but it is puerile to conclude therefrom that she constantly cheats. The suspicious cases I have observed with Eusapia are interesting, if studied impartially. They show the rôle which the subliminal conscience—impersonal or bound to a second personality—plays in the phenomena, and give rise to attractive psychological problems.

Spiritistic mediums, whose number is legion, form another category with whom we should not experiment, except for purposes of especial research. Some of these mediums are trustworthy, and one of them, Madame Agullana of Bordeaux, has sometimes given me interesting sittings. The phenomena I have observed with this medium differ greatly from Eusapia’s; they are of an intellectual order, and raise a very complicated problem. Madame Agullana’s medianity must not be judged from seances with her groups. These seances have the religious character of nearly all truly spiritistic meetings. It is difficult there for an experimenter to observe at his ease; the curiosity of those who seek only the objective demonstration of a fact may appear impertinent and out of place at such meetings. The faithful have a right to look upon such people as intruders. Convinced of the truth of their doctrines, they ill brook the open discussion of them at meetings, where discussion is not wanted. They prefer the discourses of an entranced medium to the needless interference of the profane. Their meetings, nearly always consecrated to the acquiring of communications, have the serious defect of developing unconscious automatism in their medium. For me this is a conclusive reason.

Madame Agullana, at some seances where only a few experimentalists took part, gave proof of the possession of certain supernormal faculties, which I have not observed in the same degree of intensity at the usual sittings of her group. This medium is also entirely reliable, and of praiseworthy disinterestedness. She never receives any remuneration—an important consideration—for, mediums who take fees are more open to suspicion.

My most convincing results have been obtained with persons unacquainted with spiritism and ignorant of its practices. Once I discovered a medium most unexpectedly. He sat down with me at a table, invited to experiment for the first time in his life. He had scarcely seated himself when violent knockings resounded on the floor; this person, honourable, well-educated and intelligent, is one of the most remarkable sensitives I have met with. But as he fears ridicule, has no desire to be scoffed at in newspapers, and, moreover, dreads publicity of any kind, he does not wish his name to be mentioned. These are the results of the malevolent criticisms heaped upon experiments of this nature.

I am sure the number of mediums is much more considerable than we think; in a circle of from eight to ten people chosen under the condition I have mentioned, it is seldom we do not find a medium.

Of whatever sex, to whatever social status he may belong, the medium is a sensitive. This must never be forgotten; and we must never lose sight of the fact, that the phenomena will be clearer and better in proportion as the medium’s confidence and sympathy are won.

This statement will not surprise those who are familiar with hypnotic experimentation, for they know how easy it is to induce sleep in a person who lets himself go, and, on the contrary, how difficult it is in one who resists or who mistrusts the operator. I am persuaded that the impersonal strata of the consciousness play a rôle in psychical phenomena similar to what they play in the phenomena of hypnotism.

Therefore, I insist on the necessity for due regard being paid to the medium. I have had much practice, and in all mediums I have met with extreme sensitiveness. Those who have come under the refining influences of education, instruction, or rank, are the most sensitive—‘touchy’; but this sensitiveness ought not to be interpreted as a sign of degeneracy. Certain contemporary savants consider every deviation from the normal state as a blemish! Such a way of thinking implies a veritable *a priori* judgment, a begging of the question, which is detrimental to the true development of scientific thought. The normal man is only a mean term; there are individuals who are inferior to the mean, there are others who are superior to it. Nature knows not equality. She offers us, everywhere, inequalities, discrepancies, diversities. It is the illusory unity of our own personality, which leads us to unify and to codify natural phenomena and even humanity itself. It is one of the conditions of the organisation of our Sciences, that they become intelligible only on condition of adapting themselves to our particular form of understanding. Nothing authorises our supposing that this form of understanding has any metaphysical reality; it may only be a subjective condition of our perception.

It is by an analogous mental process, that we give reality to the intellectual or physical type of the average man. Degeneracy, which is often a sliding backwards, a relapse into inferior types, is a negative deviation from the average man: genius is a positive variation. In the same way, the nervous system of the imaginary average man is but an abstraction; in reality, the sensibility of the nervous system of the different human individualities varies immensely. A negative variation will give beings who are less sensitive, less delicate than those of the average type; a variation in the positive sense will give individuals of a more sensitive and more delicate type. To consider either as abnormal is only grammatically true: the former are *infra*-normal, the latter are *supra*-normal. The first have not reached the average level, the second have passed it.

Therefore, it is not astonishing that a more refined sensitivity of the nervous system should have a correspondingly greater emotivity: ‘touchiness’ in itself is a function of emotivity. This seems to me to explain a fact which appears certain—that the feelings of mediums are very easily hurt. A discontented, irritated medium is a bad instrument—as I have had occasion to prove with Eusapia and many other mediums.

I have always noticed that discontent and moral discomfort, as well as fatigue and physical discomfort in the medium brought about failure.

The advice I give is important to follow. Win the confidence and sympathy of the medium by your own sympathy, your own deference, your own loyalty. If you detect fraud, which seems voluntary to you, do not hesitate—after the sitting and at the first favourable opportunity—to tell him frankly your doubts and your impression. If you perceive an involuntary fraud, put the medium on guard against himself, always act toward him with sincerity, but at the same time with kindness and courtesy.

As already pointed out, fatigue and physical discomfort produce the same effects as moral discomfort. It is unwise therefore to experiment with a sick medium. The results would be bad from an experimental standpoint, and the medium’s health would suffer. Carefully avoid experimenting too frequently with the medium. Even three sittings a week are really more than is desirable. We may experiment three times a week when operating with a medium in good form, and when the experiments are not likely to last for more than two or three weeks. It would be bad to experiment so often or for a longer period with a young sensitive. Two sittings a week seem the safest number to me; while only one ought to be made if the medium follows a trying profession.

I have seen mediums become ill through experimenting too often. The abuse of experimentation rapidly brings on nervous breakdown, and may cause serious disorders, of which neurasthenia is the most frequent and the least serious. Therefore I have made it an invariable rule to experiment with non-professional mediums, only on condition that they bind themselves to experiment with no other than my own circle as long as our series of experiments lasts. I am as persuaded of the absolute innocuousness of experiments prudently conducted, as I am positive of the dangers of experimentation when frequent, prolonged, or conducted by incompetent persons. I have no fear of assuming the responsibility of the first, but for no consideration whatever would I endorse, even indirectly, the second, and I cannot too strongly recommend the same prudence to other experimenters.

A last recommendation remains to be made; experimentation with persons of doubtful morality must be avoided. I have no need to enlarge upon the many inconveniences to which such an imprudent collaboration may expose experimenters.

To sum up the indications I have just given in perhaps too complete a fashion, I will briefly recall to mind the conditions which have seemed the best to me: sufficient light first of all—the personification must not acquire the habit of operating in darkness, for the brighter the light, the more convincing the experiment; a small room; a light table with four legs, put together with wooden pegs rather than with nails; a cabinet of soft thin curtains; the experimenters not to exceed as a rule eight in number; the experimenters to agree to experiment seriously, without turning into ridicule the practices to which they submit themselves. It is a good plan to allow only one of their circle to direct the seance, to converse with the personification, to control the proceedings. They must try and keep up a spirit of good understanding, and refrain from reciprocally accusing each other of pushing the table—novices do this regularly. Discussion should be relegated to the end, and should never be provoked during the sitting. Finally, they should pay great attention to the susceptibility of the medium—whoever he may be.

The greatest patience will be required; the circle should be modified with prudence, and only after a certain number of sterile experiments.

## The personification

I think it will be useful to indicate what has seemed to me the best way of treating the personification—for this point is important.

I give the name of ‘personification’ to the manifesting intelligence, whatever this may be. As previously indicated, this intelligence, as a rule, claims to be the soul of a deceased person. This is not absolute, and the phenomena may personify God, the devil, angels, legendary personages, fairies, etc. I need not say how far I am from believing in the reality of the being thus manifesting, and I have, as I believe, excellent reasons for doubting. I have noticed that the rôle played by the personification varies with the composition of the circle. It will always be the spirit of a dead or living person with spiritists. But the rôles are more varied if the circle be composed of people who are not spiritists; it then sometimes happens that the communications claim to emanate from the sitters themselves. I am inclined to believe this is the real origin of the communications, and that a sort of collective consciousness is formed. I give my impression with the greatest reserve, for, I repeat, I have no decided opinion upon the subject; but the experiments I have made leave me that impression, in a general way. This forms part of an—as yet—undeciphered chapter on the psychology of crowds. I confess I have no explanation to give of the action which such a collective consciousness appears to have upon matter; but this difficulty seems to me less insurmountable than those attending the spirit hypothesis. If we attribute the phenomena to a being distinct from ourselves, having a will-power so much the more marked because it emanates from a spiritual being more enlightened than ourselves, I cannot understand the suggestibility of such a being. Now, I believe the personification is, as a rule, extremely suggestible. I say ‘as a rule,’ for there are occasions when it gives proof of remarkable obstinacy: this is the exception, and I ought to say that when the personification shows a decided will of its own, there is no struggling against it. It is absolutely necessary to follow the directions it gives, for, in such cases, there is a very good chance of obtaining happy results, while certainly nothing will be obtained by spurning those directions.

There are very few people among those unaccustomed to this kind of experimentation, who have the courage to treat the personification as it desires to be treated: this is a mistake. We must take a practical view of the proceedings; we must lay aside all pride and vanity. I am as well aware as any one of the comical aspect of a conversation between a grave experimenter and a being non-existent, and I had much difficulty in conquering the repugnance with which this manner of proceeding inspired me. I saw therein a kind of jugglery unworthy of a cultured intellect. Experience has clearly shown me I was wrong, without, however, demonstrating the reality of the being personified. Every time I looked upon the personification as something not to be reckoned with, I have had bad or indifferent sittings.

This does not mean, that the results have always been in proportion to the attention I have paid the personification. Far from it! The personification is generally lavish of promises—excellent things in their way, but it would be extremely naïve to put absolute faith in what it says: we must trust only in ourselves. I do not know if Socrates’ demon ever played him false: those of his species whom I have interviewed struck me as being of doubtful sincerity. It would be impossible to commit a greater imprudence than to put practical faith in the advice of the personification, however good it may seem to have always been.

My personal observations have generally brought me into connection with personifications possessing more imagination and good-will than respect for the truth. They have promised me marvellous demonstrations, which I am still expecting, particularly complete materialisations. Perhaps I am too hard to please, and ought to consider myself lucky to have seen what I have seen. But we are never content with our lot, and Horace’s time-honoured words are as true to-day as ever they were.[[2]](#footnote-2)

If I strongly recommend people not to abandon the conduct of their life or business affairs to the personification, I recommend just as strongly treating the latter with the greatest possible attention. We can only form hypotheses about its essence; and the scepticism which my observations, taken as a whole, have instilled into me, may be ill-founded; therefore it is better to treat it with the same courtesy we show our fellow-experimenters. This attitude is prudent; it is also the most profitable one. In practice, I have the same regard for the personification as for the medium. I do not call it ‘dear spirit’ as spiritists do, but I find I do well to make it clearly understand what I am seeking; whatever in reality the personification may be, its co-operation seems to me to be indispensable. The resemblance between the reaction of the personification and that of the subliminal consciousness is so obvious, that I have no need to enlarge upon it.

In practice, the first manifestation of this—probably fictitious—being will consist in a knocking on the floor with the leg of the table. It is well to agree upon a code of signals. The simplest is two raps for ‘no,’ three for ‘yes,’ five for the alphabet.

At the beginning, it will be difficult to avoid these knockings. I have already said it is desirable to discourage them and to induce the personification to manifest itself otherwise. It would be well to accept the typtological code of signals above mentioned for the first conversations, but to abandon it as soon as it has been clearly explained to the personification, that movements with contact are unacceptable. I am, of course, speaking under the supposition that telekinetic or parakinetic movements are desired. If the personification, at the end of five or six seances of an hour each, does not begin to produce the desired phenomena, the circle must be modified in the manner already pointed out. These modifications ought to be patiently continued, until a medium has been met with. The personification might be asked to name the sitter who is to be replaced, and, if possible, to designate his substitute. Such a designation is often very useful. Once or twice I have seen the table name persons whom, at the moment of the experiment, no one in our midst had thought of—at least consciously. Various reasons prevented the given indications from being followed, and the experiments were discontinued.

Movements with contact can be eliminated by the process I have mentioned; their elimination, made with the consent of the personification, presents no inconvenience, unless it be done too abruptly.

I have already said that the personification is generally very open to suggestion. We must remember that this is a special kind of suggestibility. In hypnotism a commanding tone of voice gives greater force to the suggestion; it is not the same with the personification in question, which shows itself rebellious to all imperative orders. On the contrary, it readily yields to suggestions made with gentleness and persistence. As a rule, I give the object I have in view, and my reasons for setting aside all phenomena which can be explained by unconscious muscular action. I repeat, I treat the personification as a co-experimenter. It is seldom that, thus exhorted, it does not willingly consent to abstain from phenomena devoid of interest, and promise more demonstrative ones. I have already said too much faith must not be put in such promises; at least nine out of ten experiments will come to nothing, and will have to be worked out again on fresh lines.

But the experimenter’s patience will not always be tried in vain. Sooner or later he will meet with the indispensable medium; and his observations will then be similar to mine.

The first supernormal phenomena are raps and oscillations without contact. Sometimes the phenomenon, from the very outset, will manifest itself with intensity; this is the exception; generally the noises and movements, feeble in the beginning, will grow in intensity. As soon as raps without contact have been obtained, certain signals must be agreed upon. The simplest way, then, is to adopt the typtological code of signals, i.e. two raps for ‘no,’ three for ‘yes,’ five for the alphabet. The phenomena then become very interesting, for when the raps are given without contact, the hypothesis of involuntary movements becomes insufficient to explain them.

I have recently received very intelligent communications in this way. We must not grow tired of having the words repeated. It often happens that letters are left out, or that one letter is given instead of another. This happens particularly with neighbouring letters. In carefully noting down the letters a very clear sense will often be found. For example, the raps will give Martjn for Martin, Heoriette for Henriette, etc. We must not give up as soon as the word seems to become unintelligible. Wait until the sentence is finished, when it will sometimes suddenly clear itself. It sometimes happens that the letters are dictated backwards. When the sentence is incomprehensible, we must begin all over again. Even in experiments whose aim is to obtain material phenomena, we must not refuse to listen to demands for the alphabet, for the personification will then often advise on the manner of operating.

Very often the personification complains of too much light, and during several sittings insists upon darkness. We must politely resist it, and make it understand that psychical phenomena lose much of their value, as soon as they cease to be visible. I never hesitate telling the personification, that experiments of this kind are not convincing when conducted in obscurity, since the good faith of the operators is then open to suspicion, and, moreover, that phenomena can be obtained in full light. These reasons often prevail on the personification not to persist in asking for darkness.

In some cases, it is the personification itself who refuses to operate in darkness. It is with personifications of this class that I have obtained the finest results.

When the pseudo-entity asks one or other of the experimenters to leave the circle, it is prudent to yield obedience to its behest, unless, for various reasons, the required elimination be unacceptable. In that case, it is as well to explain these reasons to the personification, and then it rarely happens they are not accepted.

Such are the general rules which a fairly long experience has caused me to adopt, and I have always had reason to be glad of having followed them. In experiments conducted by me, I have never received obscene or absurd communications of which certain people complain. Reflecting, perhaps, my own state of mind, I have generally encountered personifications with scientific and serious tendencies.

I have just exposed in detail, and perhaps too minutely, the conclusions arrived at concerning the method of operation. I now come to the indication of the results which I have obtained, and the ascertainments I have been able to make.

I will examine in succession raps, movements without contact, luminous phenomena, and finally, intellectual phenomena.

D’après MAXWELL, Joseph, *Metapsychical phenomena (methods and observations).* London : Duckworth, 1905, p.1-72.
Accessible à <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46942>

1. Vertot, an historian of the eighteenth century, failing to receive, when he was ready for them, the documents upon which he counted in order to write his Siege of Rhodes, finished his work for all that; and when the documents were handed to him, he contented himself with saying: ‘I am very sorry, but I have finished my siege.’ He preferred leaving his work imperfect to beginning it over again. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Qui fit, Mæcenas, ut nemo, quam sibi sortem Seu ratio dederit, seu fors objecerit, illa Contentus vivat, laudet diversa sequentes? Satyr, I. lib. i. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)