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WHY I DO NOT BELIEVE IN SURVIVAL

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THE composition of this paper was suggested to me by the following passage in the address delivered to the Society in 1932 by Dr Brown :

“ It seems to me that at the present day the evidence for survival which must have most weight with us is the evidence from philosophical and religious considerations, from the nature of the human mind, the nature of human values, and the extent to which survival itself would make life and the whole world process more rational. I do think that considerations such as these are sufficient to produce in our minds at any rate an active pragmatic conviction of survival.”

A little further on he adds :

“ It seems to me that the scientific researchers are concerned rather with getting sufficient evidence to *supplement* evidence that they all accept as really the fundamental groundwork in their religious and philosophical beliefs.”¹

On reading these remarks of Dr Brown's, the following reflections occurred to me. (1) If it is true, as Dr Brown says it is, that *all* the scientific researchers who are working on the interpretation of the supernatural evidence are from the start imbued with an antecedent conviction that survival is a fact, then it would be not only interesting but actually prudent to see how this evidence appears to less biased observers or, failing that, to observers whose bias is in the opposite direction. (2) There should be no difficulty in obtaining such observers : for, so far as I can judge, the view of the antecedent probability of survival which Dr Brown attributes to “ all the scientific researchers ” is not that which would be taken by the majority of working scientists outside this Society ; it is also in strong conflict with the views of distinguished philosophers

¹ *Proc.*, xli. 86.

of various schools like Dr Broad, Earl Russell, and the late F. H. Bradley; and it conflicts no less with the impression formed by a large number of educated people who are neither scientists nor professional philosophers. Taking myself as an average representative of this last class, it occurred to me further that it would be useful to me, and might possibly be of interest to others, if I attempted first to present a brief reasoned statement on the probability of survival as it appears to me, and then to formulate in the light of this statement an attitude towards the supernormal evidence with the problems of interpretation which it presents. This seemed to me preferable to the usual practice of either considering the supernormal evidence in isolation from the antecedent evidence, or taking for granted a particular view of the latter without attempting a reasoned defence of it.

I was, however, well aware that the view which any man takes of the antecedent probability, or otherwise, of human survival must itself depend to a great extent upon his general philosophical and religious outlook, and that in turn upon his individual temperament and history. Hence any attempt at discussing the antecedent probability of survival runs the risk of raising issues so vast, so vague and so insoluble as to swallow up the entire discussion in a futile exchange of unproved generalisations. If this were to be avoided, it seemed necessary to confine myself to a statement of the case as it might appear to a person sharing the same general presuppositions as myself, and to indicate explicitly what these presuppositions are. The argument claims validity only in so far as this framework is accepted. That is why in the title of my paper I have violated the esteemed precept, beloved of girls' schools, which forbids to the writer on general topics the introduction of the pronoun "I". This paper does not pretend to be a complete statement of the case against survival: it is merely a statement of my own reasons, not for regarding survival as impossible, but for thinking the hypothesis unproved (and in some at least of its forms definitely improbable), and in that sense disbelieving it.

The presuppositions I have referred to are two in number. The first is that our sole means of reaching a conclusion on this question consist of observation and experiment together with the exercise of reason. This excludes the view that we have divine authority for the belief in survival. A complete statement of the case against survival would have to take account of this view, and investigate its claim to historical truth. I do not share the curious opinion that such investigation is bad form, nor the alternative opinion that it has been rendered unnecessary by the conclusion of a treaty of peace between science in the person of Professor Jeans and

religion in the person of Bishop Barnes. But it is evident that to attempt in the present paper any statement of my reasons for rejecting this view would carry the discussion too far from the immediate question at issue.

My second presupposition is that the validity of our apparent experience of mind and matter as two distinct modes of reality is accepted as a working hypothesis on the empirical level, without excluding the possibility that either may prove in the last analysis to be a mere appearance of the other. Both idealism (or "mentalism") and materialism seem to me to be *possible* ways of interpreting our experience; neither seems to be *required* by the facts, and a survey of their history suggests that the influence of each has depended less on its inherent convincingness than on its political or religious utility, on the variations of social demand, and on the dialectical dexterity of its exponents. This being so, an argument which is valid only on the idealist or only on the materialist hypothesis carries, for me, less weight than one which is valid without this limitation.

Within this very wide framework, then, before approaching the evidence from psychical research I ask myself what are the antecedent probabilities for or against survival. In its favour I find two distinct types of argument advanced. The first, which Dr Broad calls metaphysical, and which Dr Brown intends (I think) when he speaks of "the evidence from the nature of the human mind", asserts under varying forms that our mind has a quality in common with the ultimate stuff of Reality, or with the creator of Reality, and that the possession of this quality assures its continuance: in theological language, it asserts man's immortality as a consequence from his divinity. On this argument, two reflections occur to me. In the first place, it rests on a proposition about Reality (or about its creator) which may be true, but which I do not certainly know to be true. I do not know of what ultimate stuff the universe is constituted, nor how it came into being; and certainly I find nothing in my experience which assures me that my continued existence is indispensable to it. But secondly, if this type of argument proves anything at all, it appears to me to prove too much. As the late Dr McTaggart put it,

"I do not see how existence in future time could be shown to be necessary in the case of any being whose existence in past time is admitted not to be necessary. If the universe got on without me a hundred years ago, what reason could be given for denying that it might get on without me a hundred years hence? Or if it is consistent with my eternal nature that its temporal manifestation should begin at some point in time, could we find any reason for supposing that the cessation of that manifestation at some point

in time would be inconsistent with that nature? I do not see of what kind such a reason could be, nor do I know of any attempt that has been made to establish one."¹

In other words, if we accept the metaphysical argument as a valid proof of survival, we must accept it also as a valid proof of pre-existence. This is, for me, unfortunate. For the doctrine of pre-existence is open to several objections² which I do not know how to meet. Until these have been resolved for me, I feel constrained to reject the theory of pre-existence, and with it the metaphysical argument for survival.

I think, however, that even if I could accept the metaphysical argument, with all its consequences, this would have but little logical bearing on the interpretation of mediumistic utterances. For the entity whose immortality and pre-existence the metaphysical argument has been held to certify is not, so far as we can judge, at all like the entities which converse with us at séances. It is a timeless, noumenal self, exempt from passion and withdrawn from change, and held to be imperishable either because of that very detachment or because of its capacity for pure impersonal thought. Now, whatever the "controls" and "communicators" of Mrs Piper or Mrs Leonard may be, it seems certain that they are not noumenal selves (if they were, they would give small satisfaction to the average sitter). Far from being exempt from passion, they are frequently emotional to the point of sentimentality; and pure impersonal thought is precisely what their communications conspicuously lack. Hence I do not think that the metaphysical argument, even if it were valid, could help us, at any rate directly, in the interpretation of these phenomena.

I turn to a brief consideration of the ethical arguments for survival (or, more exactly, for immortality), described by Dr Brown as "the evidence from the nature of human values, and the extent to which survival would make life and the whole world-process more rational." It is argued (i) that an apprehension of timeless values in some way

¹ *Some Dogmas of Religion*, chap. iv.

² I have been asked what these are. In answer, I should mention the following difficulties among others. (a) If the doctrine means anything, it means that in addition to the recognised factors of heredity and environment a third, presumably far stronger factor, is operative in the formation of human character: is it not strange that no certain trace of the activity of this factor has been detected by psychologists? (b) It means, again, that the new-born infant possesses, or rather is, a mature and experienced mind: is it not strange that all the manifestations of that mind are precisely what we should expect them to be if it were neither mature nor experienced, but were in fact, what it appears to be, an infant mind in an infant body? (c) The doctrine involves the assumption of an act of incarnation whose mechanism is exceedingly difficult to picture and which lacks even the remotest analogue in our biological knowledge.

constitutes a claim to a permanent existence in time ; (ii) that the non-survivalist view is in some way incompatible with the good life for man, and should therefore be rejected ; (iii) that the non-survivalist view is incompatible with the goodness and rationality of the universe, and should therefore be rejected. I confess that these arguments appear to me completely nugatory. The first, so far as it is not a restatement of the old metaphysical argument, seems to rest on a mere confusion. If values are really "timeless", their timeless nature may be as fully actualised in an experience lasting thirty seconds as in one which lasts thirty thousand years. And observation does not suggest that there is in nature any correlation whatever between valuableness and temporal permanence. As to the second argument, I discover little either in my personal experience or in my reading of history which tends to show that a belief in survival is morally necessary or even, for the average person, morally useful ; but were the reverse the case, I should still find it impossible to leap from an admission of the moral utility of the belief to Dr Brown's "active pragmatic conviction" of its objective truth. Finally, to consider the third argument, I find death no more irrational than copulation, birth, and a thousand other natural events ; while to the suggestion that our extinction amounts to a charge of immorality or insanity against the universe, I can only reply that the universe, so far as my limited knowledge of it extends, is like other fathers of families "capable de tout". Those who desire a more critical examination of this group of arguments may be referred to the eleventh chapter of *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, where Dr Broad breaks these butterflies upon the wheel of a remorseless and elegant logic. With his conclusion, that no valid philosophical grounds whatever have been produced for believing in human immortality (or in human survival either), I find myself regretfully obliged to agree.

My next question is, Are there any positive antecedent grounds for *rejecting* the belief in survival ? If this question means, "Can survival be shown on antecedent grounds to be impossible ?", the answer is, I think, that it cannot, save on the materialist pre-suppositions which, as I said at the outset, I do not feel constrained to accept although they may be correct. But secondly, Are there any valid grounds for considering survival *improbable* ? There are two considerations, each of which seems to me to raise a presumption, fairly strong though falling short of proof, not indeed against all forms of the survivalist hypothesis, but against the particular form of it which is required to account for the supernormal phenomena.

The first of these considerations is historical, and is in part an

argument from silence. Now arguments from silence are notoriously dangerous; and in this case Dr Broad holds that the absence of evidence for survival does not constitute evidence *against* it, since for all we know the conditions of existence after death may be such as to exclude the possibility of affirmative evidence being obtained.¹ This is a perfectly satisfactory answer from the point of view of the orthodox Christian, who believes the dead to be segregated in Heaven, Hell or Purgatory; it is also satisfactory from the point of view of the man who says "I believe that the dead survive, but I know nothing of their powers or their mode of existence or their location in space." It is less satisfactory from the point of view of the spiritualist. For if the spiritualist interpretation of the supernormal phenomena is correct, we know a good deal about the dead, and what we know is inconsistent with Dr Broad's defence. All spiritualists believe that the dead have both the will and the means to communicate with the living, either by controlling the hand or vocal organs of a medium or by influencing her mind telepathically. Most of them believe also that the dead can make their existence known by speaking to us directly, without the intervention of a human organism; by appearing in visible form; by the production of supernormal lights; by the supernormal movement of objects; and in various other ways. Now if the dead are really endowed with powers so varied and so remarkable; and if it is true, as they themselves tell us, that they are much occupied with the problem of comforting and assisting their surviving relatives; on these assumptions is it not matter for surprise that they refrained for so long from exercising their powers and making their existence known? During two and a half millenia of which we have fairly full written records—say from 650 B.C. to A.D. 1850—they failed so far as I know to produce satisfactory experimental evidence of their identity.² Why? During certain portions of this period they might have endangered their surviving friends by attempting to communicate with them; but there were long centuries during which action on their part would have been perfectly safe. Nor was there any lack of the necessary machinery or the necessary interest on the side of the living: the evidence collected in Oesterreich's book on Possession shows that the mediumistic trance is a fairly constant phenomenon in all ages and among all peoples; and curiosity about the state of

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 524.

² I do not, of course, deny either that necromancy was occasionally practised, especially in later antiquity and the Middle Ages, or that the belief in the power of the dead to return in certain circumstances was general in the latter period. But the "spirits" appear to have made little or no attempt to establish their identity; and the ordinary mediaeval belief was founded much less on contemporary experiment than on the biblical story of the witch of Endor.

the dead has left its mark on the literature alike of Greece and Rome, of the Middle Ages, and of the Renaissance. But there is something more singular still. The two groups of pre-nineteenth-century mediums about whom we have most information, the *κάτοχοι* of the late Graeco-Roman period¹ and the witches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while performing a number of the feats performed by modern mediums, perversely attributed them in the one case to the agency of non-human gods or demons, in the other to the agency of the devil. Once again, why? A satisfactory answer may one day be forthcoming; but until it is, I cannot but feel some doubt about the correctness of the spiritualist interpretation of the contemporary phenomena.

I come now to my second consideration, which is a very familiar one. It is drawn from certain apparent features of the relationship between the living mind and the living organism. Now it must be admitted that any attempt to interpret psycho-physical relations is in the present state of our knowledge fraught with danger and uncertainty, especially for the non-physiologist like myself. Keeping this warning before me, let me nevertheless consider the phenomena of old age. Anyone who has lived much in the society of the aged, and has observed them closely, will I think agree, whatever interpretation he may put upon the facts, that not only the human organism but the human mind, or that portion of it which expresses itself in thought, feeling and action, does appear to grow old. I am thinking here not merely of the grosser effects of time, those which a physician would classify as symptoms of senile decay; but also of the subtler psychological changes which come with advancing years, the gradually increasing imperviousness to new ideas, the gradually diminishing response to emotional stimuli, above all, the growing sense of finality, of fulfilment, of a destiny accomplished and accepted—in a word, the progressive encroachment upon the will to live of a new will to cease from living. Analogous changes appear, so far as we can judge, to attend the onset of old age in the higher animals, notably the dog and the horse.

Can these appearances—pathetic in some of their aspects, in others singularly beautiful—be interpreted in a manner consistent with survival? Many have thought so; but I cannot myself feel that the interpretations they have suggested are free from grave difficulty. It may be held that the old age of the mind is a temporary disease caused by the action of toxins produced by the ageing organism, and that on separation from the organism the mind will recover. But I find it hard to believe that growing old is really a reversible process—that mental changes so far-reaching as those associated with old age can be undone even when the supposed

¹ See *Journal*, xxvii. 216 ff.

originating cause is removed by death. Moreover, does not this line of argument assume a degree of dependence of mental states upon organic secretions which is sufficient in itself to create a strong presumption against the mind surviving after the dissolution of the organism? Another expedient is to assume that, besides the phenomenal self which experiences old age and its natural consummation in death, there is a remoter, ageless self which does not die because it does not grow old. But this hypothesis, apart from the total absence of any evidence in its favour, seems open to the same objection as the noumenal self of the metaphysical argument—for an ageless being can hardly be credited with an origin in time. In any case, like the noumenal self, it fails to throw much light on the supernormal phenomena: an element of the personality so remote from all ordinary observation and so strangely exempt from experience seems an unlikely carrier for the collection of small personal reminiscences which are the stock-in-trade of the average “communicator”.

The general situation as regards the connection between mind and body is I think reasonably and moderately stated by Dr Broad, who says: ¹

“The view that the mind is existentially dependent on the organism and on nothing else is compatible with all the normal facts, and is positively suggested by them, though they do not necessitate it. And it is the simplest possible view to take. The theory that the mind merely uses the body as an instrument is difficult to reconcile with the normal facts.”

Dr Broad's own theory is that the mind is a compound product of the organism *plus* what he calls a “psychic factor”, and that this psychic factor survives bodily death although the mind or personality does not. He claims that this hypothesis (*a*) covers all the observed facts, both normal and supernormal, and (*b*) is the minimum hypothesis which does so. Whether, if the first claim be granted, he is right in the second is a question to be discussed at a later stage. But I may venture to suggest here that the hypothesis in question does not seem to cover the supernormal facts very satisfactorily. Let us assume that when the late John Jones professes to communicate, and the communication is veridical, what has really happened is that a detached psychic factor, once an element in the mind of John Jones, has allied itself with the organism of the medium to form a new temporary mind, which is not the mind of John Jones but has one factor in common with that mind. Dr Broad supposes this alliance to result in the reinstatement of certain memories which were once present to the mind of John Jones, and the reproduction of certain modes of behaviour which were once

¹ *Op. cit.*, 549.

characteristic of that mind. So far, so good. But what if "John Jones" goes on to describe correctly some event which has occurred since John Jones's death, and is unknown to the medium and perhaps also to the sitter? There is nothing exceptional about such an occurrence at a good sitting. Mr Saltmarsh, in his valuable analysis of 142 sittings with Mrs Warren Elliott, found that in this series the total number of veridical statements about events subsequent to the death of the supposed communicator was actually *larger* than the total number of such statements about events prior to his death; and that the *percentage* of veridicality was also higher in the statements about events subsequent to death.¹ Now this is hardly what I should expect if the source of the communications were the surviving personality of John Jones; but still less is it what I should expect if the source were a psychic factor of the sort assumed by Dr Broad. "A psychic factor by itself", says Dr Broad, "is no more a mind than John Jones's corpse is a mind." What it is, or does, when it is "by itself" (*i.e.* unconnected with an organism), Dr Broad cannot tell us; but at any rate it is not a mind. From the day that John Jones's organism perished, his widowed psychic factor ceased to function as a mind, or element in a mind, until the day that it contracted an irregular union with the medium's organism. How, then, can it be a possible source of information about events which occurred in the intervening period? But if it is not a possible source, to what source shall we attribute such information? To the telepathic or clairvoyant powers of the medium, or to the agency of non-human spirits? I see no other alternative, since the agency of the dead is *ex hypothesi* excluded. Yet either step is surely fatal to the whole theory. For once we have granted that by the exercise of telepathic or clairvoyant powers, or by the agency of non-human spirits, the medium can supernormally apprehend an event which happened in 1916, the year after John Jones died, it appears wanton to invent a wholly different explanation for her supernormal apprehension of similar events in 1914 when he was still alive. The psychic factor has become, it seems to me, an entirely otiose hypothesis.²

But if I reject Dr Broad's interpretation of the evidence furnished by psychical research, what interpretation am I to adopt? In the first place, where a normal explanation appears possible I shall certainly accept it. I am, however, satisfied that neither chance nor cheating, nor any combination of the two, will suffice to account for the *whole* of the mental phenomena of mediumship. (About the physical phenomena I am less certain; but these do not in any case come much in question here, since the great majority of them do

¹ *Proc.*, xxxix. 91. A similar analysis of Leonard sittings is a *desideratum*.

² Cf. *ibid.* p. 173 ff.

not afford even *prima facie* evidence of survival.¹) As regards the mental phenomena, my choice is practically confined to three views :

(a) That which attributes them to the exercise by the living of supernormal faculties, viz. telepathy, or a combination of telepathy and clairvoyance.

(b) That which attributes them to the agency of non-human spirits.

(c) That which attributes them to the agency of the surviving dead. I will call these respectively the telepathic, the daemonist and the spiritualist hypothesis.

Now if my initial presuppositions are accepted, and my subsequent reasoning is valid, these three hypotheses vary widely in their antecedent probability. The telepathic hypothesis invokes no agency for whose existence there is not strong independent evidence : the independent evidence for regarding telepathy as a *vera causa* seems to me almost conclusive,² and that for clairvoyance very substantial. The daemonist hypothesis has the status of a bare unmotivated possibility : I know of no valid evidence against it, and I cannot agree with Mr Drayton Thomas in calling it "far-fetched and fanciful"³ ; but the only evidence in its favour is drawn from pre-scientific sources to which I can attach little weight. The spiritualist hypothesis seems to me, for the reasons I have given, to start under the heaviest handicap of the three ; not only is there no valid argument in its favour, but there is a definite antecedent presumption against it, although this does not amount to disproof. This being so, an elementary canon of scientific method requires me to give the preference to the telepathic theory, *provided that it adequately covers the phenomena to be explained*. But does it cover them adequately ? This is the crucial point of the whole enquiry, and to this I must now address myself.

I have made a list—doubtless not exhaustive—of ten objections which have been advanced against the telepathic hypothesis. Most of them were mentioned 12 years ago by Dr W. F. Prince in a paper which he read at the First International Congress of Psychological Research ;⁴ some of the others are taken from Dr Broad's book⁵

¹ Cf. Mr Saltmarsh in *Proc.*, xl. 106 ff. ; Prof. Richet, *ibid.* xxxiv. 111 f. For the same reason I have taken no account of "book-tests" or of prevision.

² The failure of recent experiments in "mass telepathy" in no way invalidates earlier evidence obtained under wholly different conditions : it merely proves (and the proof is valuable) that the conditions of these experiments are unsuitable for provoking the phenomenon.

³ *Proc.*, xli. 161.

⁴ *Compte Rendu Officiel*, Copenhagen 1922, p. 101 ff.

⁵ P. 546 ff.

and from a recent paper of Mr Drayton Thomas's.¹ I proceed to consider them *seriatim*.

(1) It is objected that the telepathic hypothesis does not account for the fact that communications invariably *claim* to come from the surviving dead.²

About this there are two things to be said. In the first place, the claim in question is by no means invariably made. Prior to the rise of the spiritualist movement in the nineteenth century the spirits of the dead were far from enjoying, if we can credit our documents, any monopoly of the control of mediums: the professed source of the communication was at least as often a non-human daemon or familiar, while in many cases no agency is alleged other than that of the "seeress" or "wise woman" herself. And even to-day the asserted monopoly is not without exceptions. Dr Osty, for example, has obtained numerous veridical communications both about the living and about the dead, comparable in range and accuracy with those of the best spirit mediums, from a subject, Mme Morel, who has no "controls" and no "communicators" and does not regard the dead as the source of her supernormal knowledge.³ It can hardly be doubted that were this lady imbued with the current spiritualist convictions her communications would emerge from the subconscious as orthodox "spirit messages".

For secondly, if we know anything about the working of the subconscious mind, we know (a) that it is addicted to dramatisation, and (b) that its dramas are usually if not always wish-fulfillments: both points are abundantly demonstrated by the study of dreams. Remembering further that the great majority of recent mediumships have been developed in a spiritualist environment, and that the great majority of sitters come to mediums not out of scientific curiosity but out of hunger for communion with the dead, I can find nothing in the facts here which I should not expect to find on the telepathic hypothesis.

(2) Dr Prince argued in 1921 that the wholesale ascription to mediums of telepathic powers was unjustified, since the experimental evidence suggested that only a very small minority of human beings possessed these powers in any recognisable degree, and there was no independent evidence that any medium possessed them.

The force of this argument has since been greatly weakened by the publication of a number of incidents which seem to have their origin in telepathy from sitter to medium. Perhaps the most striking of these is the John Ferguson case, published by Mr Soal

¹ *Proc.*, xli. 139 ff.

² Cf. e.g. Dr W. F. Prince in *Proc.*, xxxix. 299.

³ E. Osty, "Télépathie Spontanée et Transmission de Pensée Expérimentale," *Rev. Métapsychique*, 1932-3, pp. 80-3.

in *Proc.*, xxxv. The communicator, "John Ferguson", was eventually shown to be a fictitious personality; but before this happened Mr Soal (the sitter) had privately invented a number of hypotheses about "John Ferguson's" life and circumstances, which hypotheses were at subsequent sittings communicated to him as facts. This fictitious communicator also made a number of veridical references, the source of which could hardly have been any other than Mr Soal's mind. Mr Soal has himself mentioned the possibility¹ that the medium (Mrs Blanche Cooper) may have been assisted in her "mind-reading" by unconscious whispering on the sitter's part. The suggestion lacks proof and requires a deal of stretching to make it cover the facts²; yet if the case stood alone it might be not unreasonable to discount it on the ground of this suspicion. In fact, however, it by no means stands alone. Dr Osty has described numerous instances where different mediums have reproduced beliefs or hypotheses which were present in the minds of various sitters, but were subsequently proved to be erroneous.³ It is not easy to suppose that all these sitters (including Osty himself) gave themselves away by unconscious whispering or other means. Moreover, Osty finds that "quand on expérimente, en séances successives et périodiques, avec un même sujet sur un même être éloigné, il est aisé de se rendre compte que ce qu'on apprend sur cet être entre deux séances permet au sujet, dans la séance suivante, de préciser, de rectifier, de développer ses révélations antérieures."⁴ This agrees in principle with Mr Soal's experience; and it points clearly to telepathy from the sitter.

Nor are incidents of like import lacking in the records of Piper and Leonard sittings. Thus when Newbold was sitting for automatic writing with Mrs Piper, an irrelevant (and rare) name, which he had erroneously associated with the supposed communicator, was

¹ *Proc.*, xl. 177.

² It rests primarily on Mr Soal's statement that he possesses "an exceptional tendency to articulate words inaudibly" (*Proc.*, xxxv. 475). Did the tendency manifest itself at the Cooper sittings? Mr Soal thinks not, but it is hard to be certain (his *bona fides* is naturally not in question). Would his inaudible articulation convey anything to an experienced lip-reader? It seems quite possible. But what I cannot readily see is how on this hypothesis I am to explain such things as the very indirect yet quite convincing reference to the name "Paglesham" (p. 540). I can imagine Mr Soal unconsciously answering his own question by articulating "Paglesham": but would he articulate the ingeniously fantastic description "where cowslips grow in cockle beds", and the personal allusions which follow? I permit myself to doubt it.

³ *La Connaissance Supranormale*, p. 333 ff.; *Rev. Métapsychique*, 1932-3, p. 45 ff.

⁴ *La Conn. Sup.*, p. 206.

reproduced as a spirit utterance in Mrs Piper's script.¹ Again, when the experimenter (Hodgson) thinks about Sir Walter Scott, an obviously fictitious "Sir Walter Scott" communicates next day at the Piper sitting; when he thinks about D. D. Home, a similarly spurious "Home" presents himself next day.² In the same way Mrs Beadon (one of Mrs Leonard's sitters) meets in the street a lady whom she has not seen for twenty-four years, and is thus reminded of the lady's brother who died twenty-five years earlier; at Mrs Beadon's next Leonard sitting, a few days later, "Feda" refers to this man by name and gives identifying details. Mrs Beadon states that she has observed parallel occurrences at many sittings.³ Again, Mrs Salter heard one evening in conversation an anecdote about a man who wore several pairs of trousers simultaneously; next day at a Leonard sitting the control purporting to be Professor Verrall remarked to Mrs Salter "It isn't given to many men to wear two pairs of trousers. Well, I did once, I think you'll remember." Mrs Salter did not remember.⁴ Here it looks as if the control mistook an anecdote telepathically derived from the sitter's mind for an incident in Professor Verrall's life. Again, in the White case Miss Nea Walker's erroneous belief as to the circumstances of the death of the presumed communicator is reflected by "Feda."⁵

The evidence of such incidents is cumulative. If they are considered individually, possible alternative explanations can usually be devised. But collectively they seem to me to enforce the admission of telepathy from the sitter as a *vera causa*. The next step is to try to learn something of the conditions and limitations under which it operates; and for this purpose deliberate experiments in telepathically influencing the course of a sitting, on the lines of the Ferguson case, should in my view be undertaken.⁶

¹ *Proc.*, xiii. 24, 29 f. Cf. also p. 48 f.

² *Proc.*, xxviii. 85.

³ *Proc.*, xxxii. 69-72.

⁴ *Proc.*, xxxix. 320.

⁵ Nea Walker, *The Bridge*, p. 89. Cf. also Dr Jacks' Leonard sitting, *Proc.*, xxxii. 133 ff., where "Feda" seems to have built up a fantasy about an imaginary "spirit" out of scraps of information telepathically derived from the sitter. It is worth noting also that Mrs Leonard claims to have experienced in her normal personality at least one veridical hallucination of a type usually assumed to be of telepathic origin (*My Life in Two Worlds*, p. 23).

⁶ The examples I have collected suggest on the whole that the ideas most likely to be transmitted are those which occupy not the foreground but the background of the sitter's consciousness. Cf. the difficulty which even the best communicators find in replying to a direct question; and the remark of Flournoy that "les idées des assistants qui ont le plus de chance de se transmettre au médium sont celles qui se trouvent en quelque sorte à l'état naissant ou évanescent, je veux dire sur la limite entre la conscience et l'inconscience, en train de passer de l'une à l'autre" (*Esprits et Médiums*, p. 481). This need not preclude deliberate experiment, but it should be borne in mind by experimenters.

(3) It is objected that if the telepathic hypothesis is to cover the facts we must credit mediums with the power of drawing on the contents of the minds of living persons quite unknown to them, who are not present at a sitting, and to whom their attention has not been in any normal way directed. Such an assumption, it is urged, goes far beyond any telepathic feats of which we have independent evidence; and if the phenomenon occurs only in spiritistic conditions we must assume that spiritistic conditions are requisite for its production.¹

This objection is more formidable than the last; and it has been brought into special prominence by the striking successes achieved by Mrs Leonard in "proxy" sittings. But, like the last, it loses a good deal of its force when we consider some of the incidents published by Dr Osty. These seem to show (a) that correct information outside the normal knowledge of all present at the sitting, concerning private details of the life of absent persons, may be given by sensitives who do not profess to be assisted by "spirits"; (b) that incorrect information may be given which corresponds to the belief of a third party who is unknown to the sensitive. Of the first type a number of instances are given in *La Connaissance Supra-normale*: e.g. Mme Peyroutet, on being asked by Osty to describe the past life of the person of whom he was thinking, furnished numerous details of a highly individual character which were quite unknown to Osty but were subsequently attested as correct by intimate friends of the person in question.² The circumstances here are analogous to those of a "proxy" sitting with Mrs Leonard, save that the being whose past is disinterred is a living being and not a dead one. The second type is exemplified in the case of the pretended Grand-Duchess Anastasia. Here the sensitive (Mme Morel), on being presented by Osty with a letter written by the real Grand-Duchess and a flower which had been handled by the pretender, had a series of visions which corresponded neither with the objective facts as subsequently verified nor with the impressions in Osty's mind, but with the fictitious story told by the pretender—a story which we are assured was at the time unknown to Mme Morel and only partially known to Osty.³

Osty is not the only investigator who has obtained results of this sort without the professed aid of spirits. Andrew Lang pointed out many years ago, à propos of the Piper controversy,⁴ that Miss Angus's crystal-gazing experiments afford strong *prima facie* evidence of an independent character that "third-party" telepathy (to use a con-

¹ Cf. Mr Thomas in *Proc.*, xli. 161; and Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 112 ff.

² p. 148 ff.

³ *Rev. Métapsychique*, 1932-3, pp. 52-7.

⁴ *Proc.*, xv. 48 ff.

venient phrase) really is a *vera causa*. On one occasion, for example, "Miss Angus described doings from three weeks to a fortnight old, of people in India, people whom she has never seen or heard of, but who were known to her 'sitter'," in circumstances which appear to preclude explanation by collusion or coincidence or telepathy from the sitter. Yet neither in this nor in any other of Miss Angus's experiments is there any suggestion of the direct or indirect agency of the dead. A spiritualist interpretation might, I suppose, be *forced* upon these cases and upon Osty's: it is certainly not the natural one.

Still less is a spiritualist interpretation applicable to the messages which Mr Soal received through Mrs Cooper from a supposedly deceased Gordon Davis—who subsequently proved to be alive and well at Southend.¹ Apart from the apparent element of prevision which it contains, this puzzling case seems to be susceptible of two, and only two, rational explanations. One is that the source of the messages was the subconscious mind of Mr Soal: this requires us to assume a considerable, but perhaps not impossible, amount of cryptomnesia on Mr Soal's part. The other is that the source was the subconscious mind of Mr Davis—a person who was quite unknown to the medium,² who was a good many miles distant at the time of the sittings, and to whom the medium's attention had not been in any normal way directed.

On the whole, I feel obliged to conclude that third-party telepathy, if it cannot be regarded as an established phenomenon, has considerably more than the status of a bare hypothesis. The independent evidence in its support is not very abundant, but it is not negligible. Its paucity need surprise no one who remembers (a) that in everyday life instances of long-distance telepathy from complete strangers, if they occur, are very unlikely to be recognised; (b) that in this country at any rate a "sitting" practically always means an attempt to obtain communications not from the absent living but from the dead. The remedy for the latter circumstance lies in our own hands.

(4) It is objected that the vivid presentation in trance of a personality normally unknown to the medium is not adequately explained save on the spiritualist hypothesis. Mr Salter has recently mentioned this along with the last objection, as two of the three chief stumbling blocks in the way of the telepathic theory;³ and Mr Thomas lays great stress on it.

To this contention there are two possible rejoinders. In the first place, sceptics may doubt, and have in fact doubted, whether in

¹ *Proc.*, xxxv., 560 ff.

² If she had made secret inquiries about Mr Davis she could not have failed to learn that he was alive.

³ *Journ.*, xxvii. 331.

the circumstances of a sitting such "vivid presentation of a personality" ever has substantial value as evidence of identity. They point out that when the tones of the trance speech are recognised by the sitter as those of a familiar voice, or when certain mannerisms or *façons de parler* are felt by him to be characteristic of a certain person, it is very rarely possible to check the objectivity of the recognition, as can usually be done when a name, a date or an event is in question. The door is commonly left wide open to the insidious temptations of the will-to-believe—temptations whose potency in this context can be fully realised only by those who have either been sitters themselves or made an impartial study of the annotated records of sittings.

But secondly, whether evidence of this type has much or little value, there is some reason to think that certain mediums can on occasion "reproduce" the personalities of the unknown living with as much success as those of the unknown dead. At any rate, Dr Osty tells us that one of his sensitives, Mlle de Berly, is capable of "reproducing approximately the timbre and rhythm" of the voice of persons *living or dead* whom she has never heard speak, of "saying what they might say or might have said", and of "exhibiting their customary attitudes."¹ One would have liked more detailed evidence about these remarkable powers of Mlle de Berly—but in default thereof it is worth while to look again at the Davis case. The communicator in that case spoke, in Mr Soal's opinion, with a voice and accent closely resembling Davis's—so closely that early in the first sitting Mr Soal was impelled to cry out "By Jove, and it's like Gordon Davis!" Moreover, the communicator reproduced so successfully a number of Davis's mannerisms that Gordon Davis himself later agreed, when shown the record of the sittings, that it was very like Gordon Davis. Nevertheless it wasn't Gordon Davis. It wasn't Gordon Davis unless you are prepared to assume that he could simultaneously interview a client at Southend and converse with Soal in London through the lips of Mrs Cooper. Personally I find this assumption more staggering than any which is involved in the telepathic hypothesis; and I must therefore conclude that the latter hypothesis is *not* invalidated by the recognised reproduction of such personal characteristics as voice, accent and idiom.²

¹ *La Connaissance Supranormale*, 252.

² It is immaterial to the argument whether we suppose the impersonation to have been based on material telepathically derived, either from Mr Soal or from Mr Davis himself, or on the other hand simply assume that both Mr Soal and Mr Davis were victims of the will-to-believe. The point is that a vivid impression of Davis's personal presence was produced on a highly intelligent observer in circumstances which make it incredible that he was in any sense really present.

(5) A further objection to the telepathic hypothesis is that it appears to involve an otherwise unexampled *selective* action of the medium's mind, in supernormally deriving from other human minds precisely those remembered facts which are required for the building up of a particular trance personality. This was the spear-head of Hyslop's argument for the spiritualist interpretation of the Piper phenomena, and has often been urged since.

But I do not think that the available evidence in the least requires me to picture the subconscious mind of the medium hunting through the subconscious mind of the assumed agent, as through a lumber-room, until it finds precisely the bit of information which it needs in order to give verisimilitude to its impersonation of some deceased friend of the agent. I am equally free to imagine that when *rapport* is established between the medium's subconscious mind and that of the assumed agent, the nature of the material transmitted is determined by the relative emotive force of the agent's various complexes, or by the fact that the material belongs to an associative complex some elements of which are already in the medium's mind, or by any other cause that you like to suggest. Selection does undoubtedly operate at some stage before the material is presented in trance; but I see nothing to prevent its operating *after* the material has become part of the furniture of the medium's subconscious mind. I am free to imagine, in the first place, that the particular complex of feelings and images which underlies a particular trance personality attracts to itself only such elements of the newly acquired material as have some associative relevance to its existing content; and secondly, that the "control" who sits in the gateway of trance—Feda or Topsy, Phinuit or Rector—operates on occasion, like the Freudian "censor", to prevent the emergence of irrelevant or disturbing matter which might interrupt the illusion and break the continuity of the medium's dream.¹ These are no more than guesses, although they derive a certain amount of support from the known mechanism of the normal dream. I claim no more for them than that they cover the observed facts as well as any other hypothesis, and better in one important respect than the hypothesis of possession. The degree of relevance and continuity to be observed in most trance communications is, to say the least, extremely limited. In Mr Saltmarsh's words, "one of the most striking features of communications received through trance

¹ Cf. a remark of the acting "control" in one of Mr Thomas's Leonard sittings: "If she [a certain communicator] tells me anything that disagrees with what she told me previously, I shall have to inform her that, in this confusing condition of the sitting, she is not recollecting clearly", *Proc.*, xli. 175.

mediums is their disjointedness".¹ This is what I should expect from the sort of psychological machinery I have suggested; it is not what I should expect if the communicators are what they say they are.

(6) A further objection to the telepathic hypothesis is that it fails to account for certain cases of "object-reading" (popularly called "psychometry"). The cases in question are those where a relic is submitted to an entranced medium, its ownership and history being *unknown both to her and to the sitter*, and she nevertheless furnishes correct details about its present or former owner. These puzzling occurrences have been most fully studied by Osty in *La Connaissance Supranormale*, by Prince and Pagenstecher in *Proc. Amer. S.P.R.*, xv. and xvi., and by Mr Saltmarsh in his report on Mrs Warren Elliott.

They are, it seems to me, puzzling occurrences on any hypothesis. The notion that the relic in some unimaginable way carries a permanent record of its own history, which the medium is able to read, is definitely put out of court by the fact that much of the information supernormally obtained in such cases refers to scenes in which the relic played no part whatever.² It apparently functions not as a record but as a signpost pointing to some mind, living or dead, whence the information is then supernormally derived. How is this function exercised? On the telepathic theory, the source of the information will be a living mind, usually and perhaps always that of the contributor of the relic; but I do not know how the presence of a watch or a purse creates a rapport between the medium's mind and that of the contributor. Equally, on the spiritualist view, I do not know how the presence of a material object causes the particular spirit which once owned that object to present itself to two strangers at a particular time and place. Are we to imagine the spirit, in the Warren Elliott experiments, following its relic from the house of the contributor to 31 Tavistock Square, and vigilantly haunting the S.P.R. rooms from the day of the relic's arrival until the day when chance determined that this particular relic should be removed, still in its wrappings, and without the contributor's knowledge, from the locked cupboard and conveyed to the sitting? or if not this, what *are* we to imagine, short of crediting the dead with omniscience? I can only echo Driesch's remark that object-reading is "the most mysterious and inexplicable of all supernormal phenomena".

It seems worth while, however, to mention an analogous incident which occurred in the Sinclair telepathy experiments, and to which Mrs Sidgwick called attention in her review of *Mental Radio*. The

¹ On the whole question of the *modus operandi* in trance communications compare Mr Saltmarsh's suggestive discussion, *Proc.*, xxxix. 119 ff.

² *Proc.*, xxxix. 156; *La Conn. Sup.*, 211. Other objections to this fantastic theory are briefly indicated by Prince, *Proc. Amer. S.P.R.*, xv. 314.

drawings used in these experiments were prepared in advance in batches, either by Mr Sinclair or by his secretary, and were then wrapped in green paper and placed in sealed envelopes. Mrs Sinclair later picked up the envelopes in succession and tried to reproduce the contents without opening them. Now on one occasion the secretary included in his batch two drawings which were not by him but by a person unknown to Mrs Sinclair. On picking up the envelope containing the first of these drawings, Mrs Sinclair gave a description which did not apply to the drawing in question, but did very accurately apply to the stranger's other drawing, which came seven places further on in the series. It looks on the face of it as if the handling of the stranger's first envelope had somehow served to establish telepathic rapport between Mrs Sinclair's mind and the stranger's. If so, we have here another case of the directive influence of the relic; only here the "relic" has no association with the dead, and the dead do not profess to co-operate in the achievement of the result. No solid argument can be based on a single instance; but I suggest that it is desirable to carry out further experiments on these lines both with Mrs Sinclair and with Mrs Elliott.

Another parallel in a non-spiritist context is furnished by certain of the feats attributed to the Polish amateur clairvoyant M. Ossowiecki, who makes no claim to the assistance of "spirits".¹ Handling, for example, a sealed letter whose authorship and contents were not normally known either to him or to Geley (the only other person present), he stated correctly, among other things, the age of the writer and also that of the writer's wife (who was mentioned in the letter).² These facts were not given or implied in the letter; they were not (apparently) known to Geley, who in any case could not be normally aware of their relevance to the letter; and the experiment had no connection with any deceased person. We seem reduced here to a choice between two explanations—an unlikely coincidence, or "third-party" telepathy mediated by a material object.

(7) It is further objected that the amount and quality of the veridical information given varies not with changes of sitter but with changes of communicator—which is the contrary of what we should expect on the telepathic hypothesis.

The evidence on this point is not so abundant as one could wish, since most sitters always evoke the same communicator, and most

¹ For his interpretation of his own powers see G. Geley, *L'Ectoplasmie et la Clairvoyance*, 72 ff.

² Geley, *op. cit.*, 35 f. It is not clear from Geley's account how far the facts apprehended by Ossowiecki were within the knowledge of Richet, from whom Geley had obtained the letter.

communicators always manifest themselves in response to the appeal of the same sitter or group of closely associated sitters. Mr Thomas claims that in a set of "proxy" sittings recently studied by him this difficulty is removed, since the actual sitter (Mr Thomas) was the same throughout the series, while there were 24 different communicators: he thinks that "it may therefore be assumed with some confidence" that variations in the veridicality of the communications depend on variations in the ability of the communicators. I cannot myself feel any such confidence. In 20 of these 24 cases the experiment was originated by the relatives of the alleged communicator, who were in many instances not personally known to Mr Thomas; and I gather that the bulk of the facts correctly given at these sittings were unknown to Mr Thomas at the time when they were given. It follows that on the telepathic hypothesis the ultimate source of the information about these facts is to be sought in the minds of the surviving relatives; and each communicator had apparently a distinct set of relatives. We are thus landed back in our old difficulty: when the communicator changes, the possible telepathic sources of relevant information change too, and variations in the veridicality of the communications can be equally well ascribed to the variation of either factor.

It is, however, a fact, as Hodgson pointed out, that some communicators, such as Mrs Piper's "George Pelham", have been successful with a number of different sitters, while others have consistently failed with a variety of sitters. This is perhaps most easily explained on the spiritualist hypothesis. But other explanations are not impossible: *e.g.* that the dream figure called "George Pelham" emerged from a deeper stratum of Mrs Piper's subconscious mind than the dream figure called "Stainton Moses", and was therefore more accessible to impressions telepathically received. And there is on the other side a fact which tells, so far as it goes, in favour of the telepathic hypothesis, namely that while some *sitters* consistently fail, others receive veridical information from a number of different communicators: Mr Soal and Mr Thomas himself are cases in point. My general conclusion is that little weight can be attached to objection 7.

(8) In the paper already mentioned Mr Thomas advances a series of objections which may be summarised in the statement that in these 24 cases there was no observable correlation between the success or failure of a sitting and the presence or absence of conditions which Mr Thomas considers favourable to telepathy.

I am afraid that the answer to this is that we know next to nothing about the conditions favourable to telepathy. I do not know which of Mr Thomas's cases were "likely cases" for telepathy, though Mr Thomas apparently does. There are only two things that I can say

(and those not very confidently). (a) Other things being equal, telepathy is probably more likely to occur when agent and percipient are in the same room than when they are miles apart.¹ This test cannot be applied to Mr Thomas's cases, since in none of them was the presumed agent present at the sitting. But in the Warren Elliott series studied by Mr Saltmarsh, which included 53 ordinary sittings and 89 of the "Absent Sitter" type, the percentage of veridicality in the former class was found to be quite double what it was in the latter; and a number of individual communicators who were successful when their surviving relatives were present at the sitting were complete failures at sittings where they were absent.² (b) Other things being equal, an "absent sitter" who is personally known to the actual sitter is probably better situated as a telepathic agent than one who is unknown both to the actual sitter and to the medium. This personal link existed in 12 out of Mr Thomas's 24 cases. The basis is far too narrow for confident generalisation; but it is at least noteworthy that the three best cases are "personal link" cases. The fact that five of the remaining "personal link" cases were inconclusive or failures does *not*, *pace* Mr Thomas, logically invalidate the possible inference that the existence of such a link is a condition required for the attainment of the highest degree of success; it merely proves that it is not the *sole* condition.

(9) It is further objected that the telepathic hypothesis does not satisfactorily account for cross-correspondences, in so far as these exhibit evidence of conscious design. This is Mr Salter's third stumbling-block.

This objection leads me on to the most thorny and difficult ground in the whole field of psychical research—ground which I could not possibly attempt to traverse in detail at the end of a long paper even if I felt myself adequately equipped for the task. All that I can do is to state the general impression which the evidence produces upon me, without demanding that others should acquiesce in my conclusion—or rather, in my absence of conclusions. For there are to my mind two points in which the evidence of cross-correspondences is inconclusive. In the first place, I cannot quite convince myself that in demonstrating pattern or coherence Mr Piddington and other investigators have conclusively demonstrated design. The patterns are there, and I do not suggest that their occurrence is in all or even in most cases due to chance. But suppose we posit that an undesignated telepathic infiltration from time to time takes place between the subconscious minds of certain automatists. What chiefly then

¹ Cf. the Brighton experiments (*Proc.*, vi. 156 f., viii. 544) and the Usher-Burt series (*Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, xx. 14-21, 40-54).

² *Proc.*, xxxix. 90 ff., 106 f. It is to be hoped that a similar comparison of Leonard sittings will one day be undertaken.

remains to be explained is (a) why the same idea frequently emerges in two automatists' scripts not in identical but in complementary forms; (b) why the emergence of a common idea is occasionally accompanied in the script by some such note as "seek elsewhere for this". I cannot feel that either of these peculiarities affords really clear evidence of design.

(a) As Pigou pointed out in 1909, "complementariness" occurred without design in a famous telepathic experiment in which Mrs Verrall was the percipient.¹ And, to quote a more recent example, when the agent tried to make Professor Murray think of Sir Francis Drake drinking the health of the Elizabethan mutineer Doughty, what emerged was "a faint feeling of Arabia or desert."² In a cross-correspondence this would have been called a very neat example of disguised allusion. Again, Osty has recently pointed out that in the majority of cases of spontaneous telepathy (phantasms of the dying, etc.) "la représentation mentale de l'événement se fait par images symboliques, allégoriques, et souvent elle est fragmentaire. Les choses se passent comme si le plan cryptique d'intelligence qui prend paranormalement connaissance de l'événement lointain ne voulait pas le présenter à l'ordinaire conscience."³ Does not this observation adequately account for the much admired obscurity of our cross-correspondences? We should expect them, it seems to me, on the telepathic theory, to be just what they are—oblique, allusive, and couched in phrases and images which are linked not by logical coherence but by emotional associations. These are in fact the common characteristics of subconscious products, as exemplified in many normal dreams.

(b) It seems not impossible that the consciousness which produces the script can sometimes distinguish from the general mass of

¹ The "One-Horse Dawn" case (*Proc.*, xx. 156-67, 387-94; xxv. 109-11). Mr Piddington subsequently endeavoured to show that this case involved something more than telepathy between the living (*Proc.*, xxx. 175-229, 296-305; xxxiv. 159-65); but I find the attempt more ingenious than convincing. I cannot feel that he has proved, or come within measurable distance of proving, that a reference to Jebb's note on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 846, was intended by the intelligence responsible for the scripts. But secondly, if this were proved up to the hilt, there would be no reason, so far as I can see, for attributing the reference to any other source than the subconscious mind of Mrs Verrall. That she may have read, and probably had read, the note in question is not disputed (*Proc.*, xxx. 214). That upon subsequent study of her own scripts she failed to recognise the alleged reference does not surprise me at all; but it need not have surprised even Mr Piddington very much, in view of what psychoanalysis has taught us about the great strength and the apparent arbitrariness of subconscious resistances.

² *Proc.*, xxiv. 231.

³ *Rev. Métapsychique*, 1932-3, 96 f. Cf. Richet, *Traité de Métapsychique*, 323 ff.

endogenous material those impressions which have been telepathically received, and may even recognise the particular source of the latter. This is supported by the case of Miss Samuels, who could usually distinguish the undesigned telepathic impressions received from Mr Wales both from those she received from Mr Fuller and from her own endogenous dreams or day dreams.¹

I am not wholly satisfied, therefore, that the cross-correspondences are the result of design. But, secondly, even if they are, I know of no conclusive answer to the suggestion put forward by Mangin, Broad and others, that the design of most of those hitherto published may have originated in the subconscious mind of Mrs Verrall. It is certainly true that more difficult intellectual feats than the construction of these puzzles have before now been performed subconsciously; that Mrs Verrall possessed just the sort of literary and linguistic knowledge which would be required for their construction; and that in all the more learned and elaborate of the published cross-correspondences her script played a prominent part. We shall be in a better position, however, to estimate the value of this theory when fuller information is available about the later work of the S.P.R. group of automatists.

(10) It remains to say a word about an objection which though demonstrably invalid is more frequent than any other on the lips of the uncritical. The spiritualist hypothesis, people say, is "so simple"; the telepathic "so complicated".

If this means merely that the spiritualist explanation is more easily grasped by the unthinking, the statement is true, but irrelevant. We do not prefer Newton's picture of the physical world to Einstein's because it is more easily apprehended. If it is meant, on the other hand, that the spiritualist hypothesis is in the scientific sense simpler, the statement is relevant, but false. To a scientist, I take it, the simplest hypothesis is that which makes no assumption unsupported by independent evidence; the next simplest is that which makes the fewest and narrowest unsupported assumptions. Now the telepathic hypothesis assumes² that mediums possess a supernormal faculty for whose reality there is substantial independent evidence; and it assumes further that they possess it in a degree for which there is a *slight* amount of independent evidence. The spiritualist hypothesis assumes

- (1) that many, if not all, human personalities survive bodily death;
- (2) that they retain an accurate memory of many details in their past lives;

¹ *Proc.*, xxxi. 124 ff.

² In this comparison I have taken no account of the facts discussed in connection with objection 6, which seem equally obscure on either hypothesis.

- (3) that they have a detailed awareness of many physical events which have occurred among the living since their death ;
- (4) that they have in some cases access to the unspoken thoughts of the living ;
- (5) that they can at times communicate with the living, either by direct use of the organism of a medium or by telepathically influencing the medium's subconscious mind ;
- (6) that the unspoken wish of a living mind is in some cases sufficient to initiate this relationship between a particular deceased person and a particular medium.

These are I think the minimum assumptions which will cover the phenomena I have been considering. If the hypothesis is used, as most of its advocates use it, to explain also book tests, newspaper tests, and the whole range of physical phenomena, a large number of additional assumptions are involved. Thus, far from being simple, the spiritualist hypothesis is hydraheaded. It is in fact not one hypothesis at all, but a series of hypotheses, of such a character that no later member of the series is a necessary, or so far as our knowledge goes a probable, consequence of an earlier member. If the dead survive, there is no positive probability that they will remember details of their past lives ; if they survive and remember the past, there is no positive probability that they will be aware of terrestrial events after their death ; and so forth. Whatever advantages the spiritualist view possesses, simplicity in the scientific sense is not one of them.

I have now considered all the objections known to me which seem to me to have a *prima facie* claim to consideration. To sum up my conclusions, objections 1, 5, 7, 8 and 10 appear to me to have little or no cogency ; indeed, all of them are capable of being turned against their advocates. Objections, 2, 3 and 4 are to a considerable extent invalidated by evidence obtained under conditions which appear to exclude spirit agency. Objection 9 I am obliged to write off as inconclusive, for the reasons I have briefly mentioned. Finally, objection 6 calls attention to a set of phenomena which I cannot satisfactorily explain to myself on any theory.

Until, then, some stronger objection emerges, I must grant that the telepathic hypothesis covers the evidence as well on the whole as any other ; and since it is the minimum hypothesis which does so, it commands my provisional acceptance. Until this conclusion is upset, I must regard survival as unproved ; and I have stated my reasons for thinking that survival of the kind postulated by spiritualists, though not impossible, is antecedently improbable. It is in this sense that I do not believe in survival.

I must add that the two current forms of the spiritualist hypothesis—the theory of telepathy from the dead and the theory of

possession—seem to me to differ widely in their evidential status. Against the former no conclusive objection has been drawn, or is likely to be drawn, from the trance phenomena, for the excellent reason that we know nothing at all about the conditions which might govern this kind of telepathy. Against direct possession there is evidence which I find insuperable. It has been presented by Mrs Sidgwick in her two masterly papers on the Piper phenomena;¹ and it is not necessary here to do more than recall its general character. The main points are the shiftiness displayed even by highly veridical communicators like “George Pelham”;² their confident statements in cases where they can hardly fail to know that they are lying; the habitual lameness of their attempts to answer direct questions; and above all their acceptance of bogus personalities as genuine spirits (e.g. “George Pelham” guaranteed the authenticity of “Phinuit”, “Hodgson” upheld the objective reality of a “Bessie Beals” whom Hall had invented, “Frank Soal” described “John Ferguson” as a spirit, and none of Mrs Leonard’s communicators, so far as I know, has given “Feda” away). These facts are not incompatible with telepathy from the dead; but I do not know how to reconcile them with the theory of direct possession, although I have read many attempts to do so.

There are other considerations, of a sufficiently obvious kind, which *tend* to discredit all forms of the spiritualist hypothesis, but tell most definitely against the theory of possession. It is, I think, fair to say that the “spirits” have so far failed to convey to us any distinctive impression of their present mode of life, their occupations, or their state of mind; and that they have never explained this failure. How comes it that these countless Columbuses, returning to us (if but for an hour) from the supreme voyage of discovery, describe the life beyond the tomb in terms that are equally applicable to life in Putney, or alternatively, are borrowed from cheap theological literature?³ Can the vivid literary talent of a Verrall or the philosophic insight of a Myers do no more than this? And why, in general, do the “spirits” of intellectually gifted persons produce no evidence that they retain their gifts in the other world? No single valuable contribution to art or science has been made, so far as I know, by an artist or scientist liberated from the material body: on the contrary, to study spirit communications in bulk, and

¹ *Proc.*, xv. 16 ff.; xxviii. 1 ff.

² A like shiftiness has been noted in subliminal personalities which exhibit supernormal faculty but make no claim to separate personal identity. For a good example cf. *Proc.*, iii. 14 f.

³ Sudre points out that French “spirits” commonly affirm reincarnation (as taught by Allan Kardec), whereas English “spirits”, more Christian in their outlook, usually know nothing of this heresy. Not even death, it appears, can resolve our theological differences.

without *parti pris*, is to echo the cry of Flournoy—"on ne sait s'il faut rire ou pleurer devant la trivialité, la niaiserie, l'incohérence de la plupart de leurs messages."¹ If there is an after-life, it would appear on the evidence so far available to be a life which kills all interest in intellectual pursuits, as living men understand them. This may be indeed the case; yet I cannot but think it surprising, as well as extremely unfortunate from an evidential point of view.

¹ *Esprits et Médioms*, 501.