

PREFATORY AND EXPLANATORY
NOTE

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PREFATORY NOTE

I AM asked to tell the readers of this book how the curious phenomenon now known by the name of "Book-Tests" arose, and what is its probable significance.

It seems to be part of a scheme, devised by those who are communicating with us from "the other side," to get messages through in a way that cannot be attributed to any ordinarily recognised variety of subconscious activity on the part of the medium, nor to telepathy or mind-reading between the medium and the person who is receiving the messages. This is undoubtedly the appearance; and this is what I consider to be the truth.

After the death in 1901 of F. W. H. Myers—who was well aware of our difficulty in accepting spirit-communion, or the continued mental activity of the dead, as an authentic or probable explanation of the undoubted lucidity of an entranced medium—we gradually found that as a supplement to the more ordinary and simple domestic communications, which have long been

known and which still continue, certain special devices were being employed—most of them apparently initiated by Myers—whose object it clearly was to reduce the number of alternative explanations, and especially to eliminate telepathy from living people as a necessary element in interpreting the phenomenon.

The first success in this more elaborately evidential direction was met with in the system of Cross-Correspondence; that is, the obtaining of similar or corresponding messages, almost simultaneously, through three or four different amateur mediums or automatic writers, some of whom lived in different countries and were unacquainted with each other. These ladies wrote quite independently and spontaneously, and often did not understand the meaning of what they were writing; but their writing told them to send unintelligible script up to the Central Office of the S.P.R. in London, presumably for further study. An investigator, who had the advantage of being able to collate the manuscripts, then found that the disjointed sentences, the apparently stray literary quotations, exhibited unmistakable coherence and corre-

spondence one with another, and moreover were capable of significant and characteristic interpretation.

That is the system of Cross-Correspondence which, beginning simply, gradually grew very elaborate, and has been reported on at considerable length, though not even yet fully, in several recent volumes of the *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*

The next method adopted, by what is now considered the S.P.R. Group of Communicators on the other side, was the sending of more or less obscure literary allusions and the invention of classical problems of such intricacy and essential scholarship that they were beyond the scope of the transmitting medium, and were often unintelligible at first to the people receiving and studying them. Sometimes, indeed, they were recondite enough to puzzle living classical scholars, until some hint or clue was afforded by the ostensible framer of the problem, when the significance of the whole leaped to light.

The best known instances of this kind of problem are the two called respectively "The Baptism of Statius" and "The Ear of Dionysius," both skilfully reported on by the Rt. Hon. G. W.

Balfour. Another decidedly simpler one, of an earlier date, was contained in replies given automatically to a question about Lethe; this was reported on in its first stage by Mr. J. G. Piddington, and in its second stage by myself (*Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, Vols. XXIV. and XXV.).

A third method has now made its appearance, and has been employed at intervals during and since the War, consisting in the development of what are called "Book-Tests." Of these we now have a large number of independent records, which are being examined by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick and will in due time be critically reported on by her. The evident object of this third method is to send messages in such a form that they shall be unintelligible, not only to the medium of communication and to the person receiving them, but to everybody, until the clue is followed up and the message decoded, when the meaning ought to be unmistakable. If tests of this kind are successfully accomplished, it is plain that no simple kind of mind-reading can be appealed to or regarded as a rational explanation.

The method consists in specifying the number of a page in a book, itself indicated only by its

numbered place on a given shelf in a bookcase whose position is described, in a house to which the medium need have had no access, though a house presumably, or usually, well known to the ostensible communicator. The idea is that a sentence shall subsequently be found on that page by any one who follows the instructions and identifies the book, which sentence shall sufficiently convey an intended message, or shall show a similarity in thought to what has otherwise been said, or shall be appropriate to the actual circumstances or past connection of communicator and intended recipient.

Chance-coincidence suggests itself as the first obvious explanation; but though chance-coincidence may serve for a few instances, the number of such tests already received is by this time great enough to make that explanation extremely difficult—and in fact almost to put it out of court. Still it is one which must be seriously discussed, for it will inevitably be asked—indeed the question asks itself—how can such a power, the power of knowing or perceiving what is on a certain page of an unopened unseen and distant book, be possessed by any one, whether discarnate or not?

How can we suppose that such a power is possible? How can the feat be done otherwise than by prearranged and deceptive ingenuity?

I have no wish to anticipate the verdict now being prepared, based on a long and responsible examination of the facts; but to me the question is not one that can as yet be answered. Even the condition suggested above as naturally to be expected—that the book shall be one familiar to the communicator—even that seems not really essential. There is evidence that sometimes, by special effort, a prescribed sealed book, or a book in a stranger's house, can be partially read, or some details in it correctly given, by an expert communicator. And it is even stated, in a responsible manner, that some features about the first page of to-morrow's *Times* can be perceived, provided the material has already been set up in type. (See a series of articles by the Rev. C. Drayton Thomas in *Light* during the early half of 1920.)

What the bearing of this singular clairvoyante power may be, and how far it affects our evidence for survival, is a subject open to discussion; because it may be argued that if all sorts of records

can be read by means of a clairvoyante human faculty, then one proof of survival, based on the supposition that some kinds of information supernormally received must be traced to an extra-terrene source, becomes increasingly difficult or uncertain. With that argument, however, I have in the present connection nothing to do.

The existence of the power of reading in a closed book is not a new discovery; it had been already demonstrated very clearly by that well-known automatist of a past generation, Mr. Stainton Moses, a Master in University College School, London; the details of the test being reported in his book called *Spirit Teachings* (p. 33 of the Memorial Edition). This unexpected and curious power has been attributed sometimes to hyperæsthesia, sometimes to clairvoyance; but to call the power by either of these names is no explanation, any more than calling a faculty "telepathy" is an explanation.

If I am pressed to say what explanation, if any, begins to commend itself to me, I have to confess myself in a difficulty. I can only say, without prejudice and without expecting much agreement, that it seems to me probable that to

explain all these things we shall have to admit access to a set of mental phenomena hitherto ignored by science. It may even be found that a few of the things now, and on the whole wisely, relegated to the ash pit of superstition will have to be disinterred and reconsidered.

We appear to be on the threshold of a position somewhat analogous to that of an isolated savage tribe when they first come into superficial contact with visitors from countries more developed than their own—people who are possessed of strange and inexplicable powers.

Such incursion of higher or extraneous civilisation would be resented; assertions as to the existence of a white race would be derided; and intercourse might be forbidden by the priests; but ultimately, for better or for worse, the facts would have to be accepted and incorporated with ordinary knowledge.

Such enlargements of experience, if sudden, must be fraught with danger; and those who resist and oppose the incursion may be doing their form of service by making its acceptance slow and gradual. People in general are not yet called upon to face such a position; it is probably un-

desirable that they should. I have stated it as a hypothesis the discussion of which I see looming in the future—the by no means distant future—but it need not at present be regarded as a necessary outcome from the facts.

The first thing is to make sure of the facts, and to develop an explanation later. If we always refused to attend to or utilise a fact until we understood it, and had a theory of it, we should be in the absurd position of refusing to recognise the truth of the statement that unsupported objects move towards the centre of the earth; for in the present stage of our knowledge “weight” is not understood.

The simpler course is to reject the facts altogether as manifestly impossible, but the apparently simple is not necessarily the true; moreover, it is a stultifying attitude to set one’s face against facts, to refuse to learn from them, and to run the risk of denying reality merely because we will not take the trouble to investigate and understand it. The facts are reputably reported, and are worthy of critical examination; though critics will be wise not to make up their minds hastily, but to wait for the promised detailed and cautious

report. The result may be to enlarge experience in some ways at present unsuspected. It was thought impossible at one time chemically to analyse the stars, because no particles of them could be put into our test-tubes.

Truth is recognised as simple only when it is adequately and fully grasped. The phenomena of spectrum-analysis were a few years ago growing so astonishingly complex as to afflict some physicists with a kind of despair; the lines in a spectrum were so numerous, so oddly grouped, and so artificially variable; yet now we see that the outcome is going to be a beautiful simple theory of the structure of atoms—a theory which will unify every form of matter and exhibit its astounding variety as the result of the ordered combination of a few very simple ingredients. The multifarious notes of the orchestra are blending into a harmonious symphony.

So it will doubtless be with these psychic facts, when we understand them. We may make hypotheses, but to pretend to form any theory about Book-Tests at present would be premature; they evidently represent an effort at proof of the existence of unexpected powers, but to decide how

those powers are exerted, and to whom they belong, we must wait until by adequate study we can frame some reasonable theory which shall stand the test of time and the influx of further experience.

Pending that experience I pursue my own, and many people's, hypothesis as to the source, though not the method, of these Book-Tests.

Some of the young fellows killed in the War have been very energetic and successful in getting tests through of this rather difficult kind. Not all of them: Raymond has not proved himself skilful in this particular method, though he has occasionally attempted it, with a success, however, in my opinion, hardly beyond chance-coincidence. But many others have succeeded better, and a few careful people have taken the trouble to record and subsequently verify their messages in the stringent manner required by the standards of the S.P.R. These will no doubt be critically dealt with in the report expected in due time from Mrs. Sidgwick.

Meanwhile I am personally persuaded that Lord and Lady Glenconner, among others, have received a number of excellent tests of this kind,

chiefly through the agency of their eldest son; and the account of those with which they and their friends have been favoured is now incorporated in the narrative which follows.