

CLASSIC EXPERIMENTS IN TELEPATHY  
UNDER HYPNOSIS:  
A HISTORICAL SURVEY\*

J. FRASER NICOL

*Research and Library Consultant  
Parapsychology Foundation, Inc.  
New York, New York*

The great age during which the investigation of paranormal phenomena under hypnotic conditions flourished most remarkably and instructively was the nineteenth century. During that period, the output of published reports was so great that a mere summary of them will fill the monumental *Abnormal Hypnotic Phenomena*, of which only the fourth volume still awaits publication.<sup>2</sup> This is the historic work sponsored by the Parapsychology Foundation and edited by Dr. Eric J. Dingwall.

On the present occasion, space being necessarily limited, the most that can be done is to attempt to illustrate the various *types* of paranormal hypnotic phenomena by presenting fairly typical examples drawn from the literature. Though the cases presented below appear under different categories, it will be agreed, I believe, that most of them are explicable in terms of telepathy—assuming of course that the experimental conditions are such as to exclude normal causes.

It may be mentioned that in the most impressive cases the hypnotic subject was in the sleep-waking state; that is, he was in a hypnotic trance but behaved—with respect to the hypnotist—as if he were awake. In such cases, subsequent amnesia was a characteristic: ostensibly, the subject had no recollection of his sleep-waking paranormal experiences.

---

\*Mr. Nicol, as an eminent historian in the field, was asked to write this paper to provide a historical perspective for these *Proceedings*.

The phenomena to be described are: (1) community of sensation, (2) transposition of the senses, (3) clairvoyance and traveling clairvoyance, (4) hypnosis at a distance, and (5) laboratory-type experiments. So far as practicable, the accounts will be presented in the investigators' own words.

### Community of Sensation

The purpose of the investigation was to determine whether sensations experienced by the hypnotist (agent) were also felt by the subject. Edmund Gurney<sup>16</sup> of the Society for Psychical Research reported a series of such experiments which took place in Yorkshire in 1883. Professor and Mrs. Henry Sidgwick were also present, and the hypnotist was Mr. J. Kershaw. The sensation involved was taste. Gurney reported:

. . . The "subject," who had come to the place by the merest accident, was Mrs. King, the wife of a neighbouring clergyman. Mrs. King was in a light hypnotic trance, with closed eyes; and was questioned, as to what she tasted, by Mrs. Sidgwick, without the very slightest guidance—Mrs. Sidgwick not knowing herself what the substances were. Mr. Kershaw put the substances into his mouth, according to my directions, in another room. He then stood three or four yards behind Mrs. King, keeping absolutely still.

*Cayenne Pepper.*—"Dry." "Choking feeling." ". . . ; thirsty feeling. . . "Hot, dry."

Mrs. King was woke, and said that she had a burning feeling in her throat, and it was suffocating her. She took some water, and was then re-hypnotized.

*Bitter Aloes.*—"Something sour." "As if I'd been eating acid drops." . . .  
*Sugar.*—"Slightly sweet, I think," "Mixture; rather hot, but sweet." . . .  
*Alum.*—"Something like sour-bitter." . . . "Gives a watery feeling."<sup>16</sup> . . .

On two subsequent occasions Mrs. King underwent similar trials and completely failed. During taste trials with another subject Gurney suddenly pinched the upper part of [Kernshaw's] left arm. "The 'subject,' who was sitting in a trance about eight feet off, with her back to us . . . instantly started up, as if in great excitement, rubbed the *exactly* corresponding place on her own person, and complained of violent pain."

Though the trials with Mrs. King are impressive so far as they go, one would like nowadays to see experiments in community of sensation tried with agent and percipient in different rooms. As has been noted by Gurney, Frederic Myers, William James, and others, the ordinary senses are highly developed in the somnambulic state. Consequently, one must be wary of

accepting what looks like hallucinatory telepathy, but may be no more than hypnotic hyperesthesia.

### Transposition of the Senses

This phenomenon means the apparent use of one sense (say, touch) to perform the function of another (say, hearing or sight). So-called eyeless sight, if genuine, is an example; there are also others.

Dr. Pététin of Lyons<sup>5,11</sup> had a quaint experience with a cataleptic woman. Ostensibly, she could not hear him when he spoke loudly into her ear, but heard him very easily when he addressed his remarks very quietly to her stomach. A little later, when the doctor raised the bed cover and placed a playing card on her stomach, she said, "I see the queen of spades." When another card was applied she guessed it also, but pleaded that "this manner of seeing fatigues me greatly." Supposing this case was genuine, it can of course be explained by telepathy without resort to eyeless vision. Dr. James Esdaile<sup>5</sup> had a somewhat similar case.

### Clairvoyance and Traveling Clairvoyance

Of all the paranormal occurrences evinced under hypnosis, traveling clairvoyance is the most convincing as it is also the most dramatic. Dr. Joseph W. Haddock, physician and surgeon, described in his once famous book *Somnolism and Psycheism* the story of a stolen cashbox belonging to a grocer, Henry Wood, and of its recovery by means of the subject Emma's traveling clairvoyance. In trance, Dr. Haddock reported:

[Emma] began to talk with an imaginary personage, as if present in the room with us; but as it subsequently proved, although, invisible and imaginary to us, he was both *real* and *visible* to her; for she had discovered the thief, and was conversing with his mind on the robbery. She described, in the course of this apparent conversation, and afterwards to us, where the box was placed; what the general nature of its contents was, particularizing some documents it contained; how he took it, and that he did not take it away to his residence at once, but hid it up an entry [alley]; and her description of his person, dress, associations, &c., was so vivid, that Mr. W. immediately recognized the purloiner of his property in a person the last to be suspected. . . Mr. W. went directly to the house where he resided . . . and insisted on his accompanying him to my house; or, in case of refusal, to the police office. [Brought to the doctor's house and confronted and accused by Emma, he at first strenuously denied stealing the box but] at last, admitted, that he had taken it, and in the manner described by Emma; and the box and contents were found in the place where he had secreted it; broken open; but the property safe.<sup>3,6</sup>

Henry Wood on request sent a brief confirmatory account to the distinguished physician, Dr. John Elliotson.

One of the most famous of clairvoyant somnambules was Miss Ellen Dawson, patient of a London surgeon and mesmerist, Mr. W. Hands. Perhaps her most celebrated case was that of the missing brooch belonging to Mrs. M.<sup>1</sup> On first discovering her loss, Mrs. M. realized that she had last seen it some three months earlier. She sought the assistance of a well-known London mesmerist, Mr. E. H. Barth, who took her to see Mr. Hands and his remarkable patient. Mrs. M. afterward recalled the visit, saying:

Mr. Hands merely seemed to look at her, when her eyes closed and he said she was in a deep sleep, and after indulging in about ten minutes' repose would get into the sleep-waking state. This she did, and then came forward and spoke to Mr. Barth, appearing very lively and pleasant.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Dawson ventured the opinion that Mrs. M. had come "about a loss" and, incorrectly, that it was "money." Asked by Mr. Barth to go—"ideally"—to Mrs. M.'s residence, Miss Dawson did so, describing the house and Mrs. M.'s bedroom and furniture in detail:

She soon found out what I had lost. She first said jewellery; and when I asked her what kind, she answered a brooch . . . she said it looked like *amber* surrounded with white [correct]. . . . She then described, in words not to be mistaken, the person who had taken it out of its accustomed place: . . . and it was a servant whom I never suspected. She had left my service about a month before I discovered my loss. . . . [Ellen] said the brooch was sold for a very small sum of money. . . . She then said she saw a shop window, that the brooch was in a queer place like a cellar with lots of other property — silver spoons and other things. . . . She said the person who took it had the case in which it was kept with diamonds in it, at home in her clothes trunk. At first, I could not think what this was, but soon remembered that there were two diamond chains fastened to a small diamond ring, separate from the brooch.<sup>1</sup>

When traced and accused of the theft by Mrs. M., the servant burst into tears and bitterly denied the accusation. Concluding that the clairvoyant had erred, Mrs. M. the following day was about to question another servant whom she had originally suspected, when the ex-servant's aunt called and delivered up the case, still containing the missing diamonds, together with a pawnbroker's ticket for the brooch. Mr. Barth supplied a corroborative account of the experiment and its sequel. Many other cases of apparently successful traveling clairvoyance could be quoted if required, most importantly the experiences of the most famous of all somnambules, Alexis Didier.

### Hypnosis at a Distance

At short distances, as between two rooms of a house, a number of successful attempts were made through the years, in which the subject would be caused to fall into the sleep-waking state and to proceed to the hypnotist's room, where he would carry out the silent instructions of the hypnotist. A somewhat different type of experiment was reported by Esdaile:

I had been looking for a blind man on whom to test the imagination theory, and one at last presented himself. This man became so susceptible that, by making him the object of my attention, I could entrance him in whatever occupation he was engaged, and at any distance within the hospital enclosure. . . . My *first attempt* to influence the blind man was made by gazing at him silently over a wall, while he was engaged in the act of eating his solitary dinner, at the distance of twenty yards. He gradually ceased to eat, and in a quarter of an hour was profoundly entranced and cataleptic. This was repeated at the most untimely hours, when he could not possibly know of my being in his neighbourhood, and always with like results.<sup>4</sup>

The most notable case of distant hypnotization was that of the elderly peasant woman, Mme. Léonie B. of Le Havre. In the years 1885-86, she was the subject of some 25 experiments, of which 19 were accounted successful. Because on rare occasions Mme. B. had fallen spontaneously into the sleep-waking state, the times of the experimental trials were sometimes determined by drawing lots. The usual hypnotist was Dr. J. H. A. Gibert, and the distance between his house and Mme. B.'s was about half a mile. Frederic Myers, accompanied by his medical brother, was an observer at several experiments, one of which he reported as follows:

“ . . . in the evening M. Gibert made another attempt to put her to sleep at a distance from his house in the Rue Séry, — she being at the Pavillon, Rue de la Ferme, — and to bring her to his house by an effort of will. At 8.55 he retired to his study; and MM. Ochorowicz, Marillier, Janet, and A. T. Myers went to the Pavillon, and waited outside in the street, out of sight of the house. At 9.22 Dr. Myers observed Madame B. coming halfway out of the garden-gate, and again retreating. Those who saw her more closely observed that she was plainly in the somnambulant state, and was wandering about and muttering. At 9.25 she came out (with eyes persistently closed, so far as could be seen), walked quickly past MM. Janet and Marillier, without noticing them, and made for M. Gibert's house, though not by the usual or shortest route. (It appeared afterwards that the *bonne* had seen her go into the *salon* at 8.45, and issue thence asleep at

9.15: had not looked in between those times.) She avoided lamp-posts, vehicles, &c., but crossed and re-crossed the street repeatedly. No one went in front of her or spoke to her. After eight or ten minutes she grew much more uncertain in gait, and paused as though she would fall. Dr. Myers noted the moment in the Rue Faure; it was 9.35. At about 9.40 she grew bolder, and at 9.45 reached the street in front of M. Gibert's house. There she met him, but did not notice him, and walked into his house, where she rushed hurriedly from room to room on the ground-floor. M. Gibert had to take her hand before she recognised him. She then grew calm.

"M. Gibert said that from 8.55 to 9.20 he thought intently about her; from 9.20 to 9.35 He thought more feebly; at 9.35 he gave the experiment up, and began to play billiards; but in a few minutes began to will her again. It appeared that his visit to the billiard-room had coincided with her hesitation and stumbling in the street. But this coincidence may of course have been accidental."<sup>8</sup>

The case of Mme. B., her secondary personality Léontine and her varied gifts—including apparently successful card guessing—cultivated over a long period of years, will well repay study. Hers is one of the classic cases of psychical research.

### Laboratory-type Experiments

Many of the above investigations were spontaneously devised to meet some unexpected situation. What may be called laboratory researches are planned ahead in order to test specific hypotheses. A notable series of the kind was that carried out at Brighton in the years 1889-92 by Professor and Mrs. Sidgwick and Miss Alice Johnson. The hypnotist and telepathic agent was Mr. G. A. Smith, a well-known and highly respected member of the Society for Psychical Research.\*

In some of the experiments, the targets were the numbers 10 to 90 inscribed on Loto blocks.<sup>15</sup> Though many subjects were tested, only four were successful. It is instructive to note that though Smith was a successful agent when the subjects were under hypnosis, he failed when they were in their normal state. The Loto blocks trials I have described in summary elsewhere<sup>9</sup> and need not recapitulate here.

---

\*Smith has been the subject of controversy concerning an earlier experiment. But the sole witness against him was an impecunious journalist, Douglas Blackburn. Sir Oliver Lodge<sup>7</sup> spoke of Blackburn as a "scoundrel" and of his uncorroborated story as "lies." An extensive investigation of Blackburn's history, recently made, will be published later. The most penetrating critic the S.P.R. has ever had, Frank Podmore,<sup>12</sup> pronounced the present research to be "the classic experiments of the kind."

More interesting experiments from a psychological viewpoint involved induced hallucinations in the hypnotized percipients. For one series, in which only a young man named Parsons was successful, a set of diagrams consisting of 25 shapes representing familiar objects were cut out in gold or silver paper and pasted on black cards. To "educate" him with respect to the hallucinatory process, the subject was first told by Smith in a preliminary nonexperimental trial:

"I am looking at a star—a picture or diagram of a star—you'll see it presently.' P.: 'I don't see it.' (After an interval:) 'Yes, I do; a golden star' (right). Mr. Smith: 'How many points has it?' P.: 'It keeps coming and going—wait a minute'; presently he said—'Five' (right).

"He was then told to look out for another picture, no hint being given of what it was. A *golden cock* was drawn out of the pack and he gradually made the following statements, without any hints being given: 'An eagle with wings spread out—gold on a dark chocolate ground.' [The cock's wings were *not* spread out]. The next one drawn was a *golden basket*; as to this he had several shifting impressions, none right."<sup>14</sup>

In the course of several sessions, Parsons made 30 trials, in which he was right on his first guess on 9 occasions against an expected chance score of 1.2. His success is represented by a probability of  $4 \times 10^{-6}$  (odds about a quarter of a million to one).

Another type of experiment consisted of the transference of purely mental images from agent to percipient. The target images were chosen by Mrs. Sidgwick or Miss Johnson and communicated to Mr. Smith in writing, even when he was not in the same room with the percipient. The latter was provided with a white card on which to hallucinate the images. For anyone who wishes to get beyond the superficialities of our subject, these experiments in telepathic hallucination are worth close study. Here there is space to describe only one of the trials. It is specially interesting as showing how an idea "extremely familiar" to the percipient was apparently received correctly, but then interpreted as something quite different. The image for transmission was "A choir boy," an idea very well known to the percipient Parsons, who had been a chorister and was still connected with the choir of his church.

P. said: "Edge of card's going a dark colour. Somebody dressed up in white, eh? Can see something all white; edge all black, and like a figure in the middle. There's his hands up" (making a gesture to show the attitude) "like a ghost or something—you couldn't mistake it for anything but a ghost. It's not getting any better, it's fading—no, it's still there. It might frighten any one." He also made remarks about the difficulty of seeing a

white figure on a white card . . . which Mr. Smith afterwards said corresponded with his own ideas.<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing specimens of cases are no more than briefest indicators of the *variety* of experimental work done in paranormal cognition in the golden age of hypnotism. By comparison, the amount of research in the present century has been painfully small. A few cases are well remembered, such as the object reading demonstrations of Mrs. Zierold ("Maria Reyes de Z.") investigated in Mexico City by Prince<sup>13</sup> and Pagenstecher.<sup>10</sup> The recent card-guessing researches conducted by Dr. Milan Rýzl are helpfully reviewed by him in the present volume.

As for the older investigations, some of the reports are too lacking in detail to carry conviction; nor is it always clear that normal causes were altogether excluded. Fortunately, some of the reports are of so high an order that even a devil's advocate would have rather a hard time trying to talk them out of court. In any event, the question for us is not, "Do those experiments *prove* telepathy?" but rather, "Do they present a *prima facie* case for further investigation?" To that there is but one answer. And in the present welcome revival of hypnotism in our field, the curious parapsychologist who studies those old reports cannot fail to be richly rewarded and may well find himself recovering old, but living, ideas for the use and promotion of his future research.

#### REFERENCES

1. BARTH, E. H.: "Ellen Dawson's Clairvoyance," *The Zoist*, 7 (1849), 95-101.
2. DINGWALL, E. J. (ed.): *Abnormal Hypnotic Phenomena: A Survey of Nineteenth-Century Cases*. Vol. I: France; Vol. II: Belgium and The Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia; Vol. III: Russia and Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America; Vol. IV: United States of America and Great Britain (London: J. & A. Churchill; I and II, 1967; III, 1968; IV, to be published, 1968).
3. ELLIOTSON, J.: "The Clairvoyance of Mr. Haddock's Subject," *The Zoist*, 7 (1849), 318-323.
4. ESDAILE, J.: *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance* (London, 1852). Quoted in E. GURNEY, F. W. H. MYERS, and F. PODMORE: *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trübner, 1886), I, p. 88.
5. ESDAILE, J.: "Testimony to the Reality of Clairvoyance." In a letter to Dr. Elliotson, *The Zoist*, 7 (1849), 213-223.



6. HADDOCK, J. W.: *Somnolism and Psycheism* (London, 1849).
7. LODGE, SIR O. J.: "A Text-Book of Metapsychics," *Proc. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 34 (1923), 70-106.
8. MYERS, F. W. H.: "On Telepathic Hypnotism, and Its Relation to other Forms of Hypnotic Suggestion," *Proc. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 4 (1886), 127-188, esp., 133-134.
9. NICOL, F.: "The Silences of Mr. Trevor Hall," *Int. J. Parapsychol.*, 8 (1966), 5-60, esp., 45-52.
10. PAGENSTECHEER, G.: "Past Events Seership," *Proc. Amer. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 16 (1922), 1-136.
11. PÉTÉTIN, J. H. D.: *Électricité Animale* (Paris, 1808). Quoted in J. ESDAILE: "Testimony to the Reality of Clairvoyance," ref. 5.
12. PODMORE, F.: *The Newer Spiritualism* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1910).
13. PRINCE, W. F.: "Psychometric Experiments with Maria Reyes de Z.," *Proc. Amer. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 15 (1921), 189-314.
14. SIDGWICK, E. M. and A. JOHNSON: "Experiments in Thought-Transference," *Proc. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 8 (1892), 536-596.
15. SIDGWICK, H., E. M. SIDGWICK, and G. A. SMITH: "Experiments in Thought-Transference," *Proc. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 6 (1889), 128-170.
16. Third report of the Committee on Mesmerism, *Proc. Soc. Psychic. Res.*, 2 (1883), 12-19, esp., 18-19.