

## THE TRADITIONAL METHOD OF RESEARCH

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Systematic investigations of apparitions and kindred experiences had been pursued by the founders of the S.P.R. for several years prior to the birth of the society. Since then it has produced three classics of psychical literature: *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), the *Report on the Census of Hallucinations* (Proc. X, 1894) and Mrs. Sidgwick's long paper (Proc. XXXIII, 1923). Until that date, 1923, good cases were frequent, and their investigation a substantial part of our work. Since then they have been rare.

Mrs. Sidgwick and Alice Johnson, the main authors of the *Census* report, pursued a method of research resembling that of a historian investigating past events or a lawyer sifting the evidence for contemporary events. The numerous questions which an investigator should ask when an apparently paranormal event is reported should be grouped under three general heads: (1) What precisely was the nature of the experience? (2) What, in fact and in detail, was the event to which the experience is alleged to correspond? (3) Was there any normal reason why the percipient should have had that experience at that time? In any real investigation, satisfactory answers to these questions must be secured, whatever additional questions may also be asked. Only after that can cases be classified.

Hallucinations, if and when veridical (which most are not), need some paranormal faculty to initiate them. This, in the view of the authors of *Phantasms*, was telepathy—a bold hypothesis in view of the then sparse and mediocre evidence for it. Since then, experimental evidence for



ESP in some form is vastly greater and better, but has raised the further question whether it is possible to distinguish between telepathy and pre-cognitive clairvoyance. If, however, the only evidence for ESP were that derived from quantitative experiments, and if one's conception of telepathy were circumscribed by the results of such experiments, it would not be plausible to attribute to that faculty the part it is required to play in the hallucination theory of apparitions. The only way to bridge the gulf is to bring in qualitative material—experimental, automatic, mediumistic—all of which abounds in content as complex and emotional as can be found in spontaneous cases. The weakness of qualitative material does not lie in the supposed difficulty of assessing chance probability. In mediumistic and automatic material it lies in eliminating latent subconscious memories, as in Dr. Soal's Velej scripts. There, successes in detailed reference to unusual facts were so numerous as to make absurd an explanation on the basis of chance. In particular, the cases in which an agent has been able to manifest himself in bodily form to a percipient who knew nothing of his intention are too few. There is an opportunity here for more experiment.

I regard spontaneous phenomena, properly investigated, as making the best contribution to the understanding of human personality. Their study should be revived, preferably as a part of a general revival of qualitative research in all its branches—mediumship, automatism and experiment in ESP with "free" material.