

POLTERGEISTS: A PHYSICAL THEORY

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To date no progress has been made in the direction of solving the problem of the causation of poltergeist phenomena. In making a fresh attack on this refractory problem we must start from the position that there is no positive evidence that the phenomena in question are due to any kind of psychic agency. The fact that no ordinary physical cause suggests itself does not necessarily mean that the cause must be a psychic one.

Attribution of startling events to "spirits" merely because their causes are unknown, betrays an animistic habit of thought. The word "poltergeist" itself implies such agency, and goes back to an age in which man believed in witches and direct diabolic or demonic interference with the ordinary physical course of nature.

The volume of evidence about poltergeist phenomena is very considerable, and much of it is sufficiently detailed to enable reasonably certain conclusions to be reached as to the *kind* of agency at work.

An examination of the main features of over fifty cases and of the details of about eighteen, discloses patterns in the phenomena which indicate that an actual physical force is at work, not only in cases where living persons are present, but also in cases where no one is about, e. g., when coffins are disturbed in vaults.

The need is to find a force that is able to tilt a house enough to spill crockery off the kitchen dresser, to make sofas and chairs slide about it in the drawing room, to tilt beds so that the people in them think they are being

pushed out, to distort window-frames so that panes are broken, and wrench door frames so that locked doors fall open, and, generally, to strain the timbers of the house in a way that causes them to groan and creak at almost every joint. This force, moreover, judging from the statistics, must be more often available in winter than in summer, and, comparing one area with another, more likely to show itself near the coast than inland. So far as one can judge, the *only* force which answers to these specifications is flood water, and, as the water has never actually been seen "at work," it must be moving in unsuspected subterranean streams beneath the buildings that are affected.

To sum up, the general grounds for believing that physical forces *initiate* poltergeist phenomena are:

1) The geographical distribution of the occurrences which "favor" coastal regions, especially tidal estuaries;

2) The seasonal distribution of the occurrences, which very markedly "favor" the winter, compared with the summer;

3) The widespread correlations which are found between such occurrences and the meteorological conditions within the preceding twenty-four hours;

4) The striking correlations which are found in some cases, where the requisite information is available, between the local geological conditions and those required by the theory;

5) The correlations found in some cases near the sea between the incidence of the phenomena and the state of the tides.

It is, then, from water in movement as a primary agent that most of poltergeist phenomena must be regarded as arising. There may be a few occurrences classified as such in the past which do not yield to such an explanation. There are other causes of earth movements, and numerous causes of mysterious noises. The resources of Nature in this field cannot be covered by a single generalization.