

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

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In 1886, Edmund Gurney wrote in *Phantasms of the Living* that "the spontaneous phenomena must be far more intelligently watched for and recorded" than they had been in the case of most of the material he discussed in that book. In the great majority of the innumerable accounts of ostensibly paranormal phenomena on record, exercise of a little ingenuity is enough to bring to mind some normal explanation not definitely ruled out by any of the details actually mentioned in the record. Thus, probably little is to be gained by gathering merely more numerous but probably equally defective reports of spontaneous phenomena. What is needed is to prepare future observers of them to observe and record them more adequately. For this, however, we should need to know in advance who those observers will be; and, unfortunately, we do not know it.

Yet, persons who are "psychic" in the sense that they have had spontaneous ostensibly paranormal experiences from time to time in the past would be likely prospects for additional ones in the future. Again, persons *interested* now in paranormal phenomena would probably be interested also in fitting themselves to observe and to record properly such paranormal phenomena as might eventually present themselves to them unexpectedly, or in reputedly haunted houses, or spontaneously while associating with psychics or mediums whether professional or private.

The *recording* of phenomena will be adequate in proportion as it is (a) prompt, (b) precise, (c) corroborated, and

(d) is of details of the kinds that would establish the paranormality of a phenomenon; i.e., that would rule out the various imaginable normal explanations of it.

The *observing* will be expert in proportion to the diversity of normal possible explanations with which the observer not only is acquainted in the abstract, but actuality of which he is in addition able to identify in the concrete.

The observer should therefore have both theoretical and practical understanding of the psychological mechanism of illusions of perception; and he should be made alive to the difference between what he actually perceives and what he only infers, however plausibly, from what he actually perceives. How easy in practice it is to fail to distinguish the two will be best brought home to him by some demonstrations, and some personal practice, of tricks of conjuring.

He should also be equipped with some knowledge of hypnosis; especially of the manners in which, and the conditions under which, hypnosis can, and cannot, be induced; and thus with command of the ways in which one can avoid becoming hypnotized.

But possession of these safeguards against illusion, mal-observation, deception, or hypnotic hallucination, is not enough. For expert observation of paranormal phenomena, the observer needs in addition a psychological attitude that will not tend to inhibit automatically the occurrence of paranormal phenomena of the kinds he seeks to observe. Especially if he has had training in science, he needs to realize that whereas in physics, chemistry, or other natural sciences, the phenomena to be observed are not affected by the observer's skepticism or credulity, hostility or open-mindedness, suspiciousness or trust; on the contrary, where paranormal phenomena are concerned, there is some reason to believe that such independence of the observer's psychological attitude is not equally the fact. Even if this is the case, however, truly scientific observation of paranormal phenomena is not necessarily precluded, as most

scientists will be tempted to conclude hastily. It will only be made more difficult; just as when, in physics, proximity of the observer's body to the apparatus affects its behavior, remote or roundabout modes of observation then have to be resorted to; or the effects of the observer's proximity, once they are understood, can be allowed for.