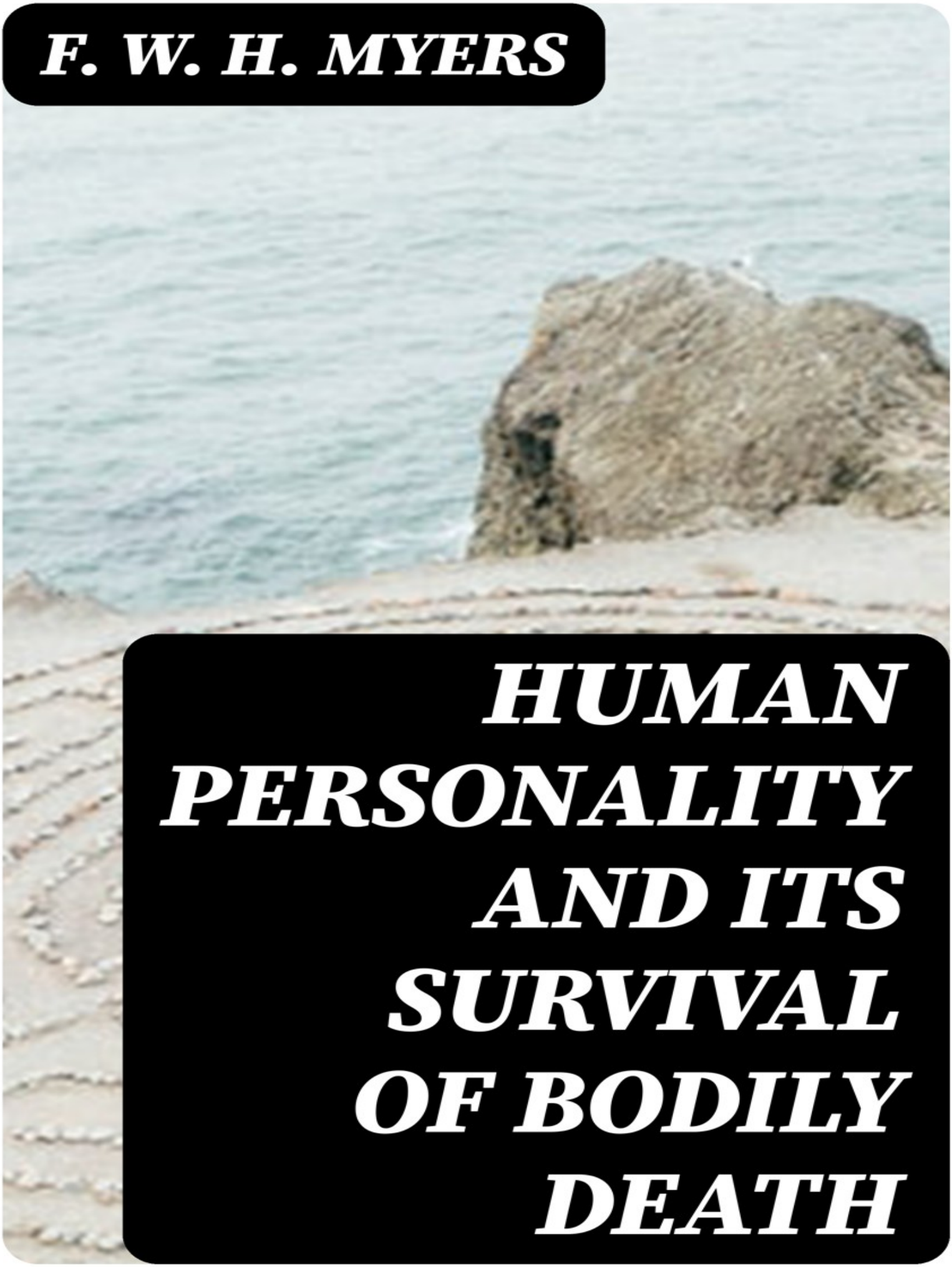
F. W. H. MYERS



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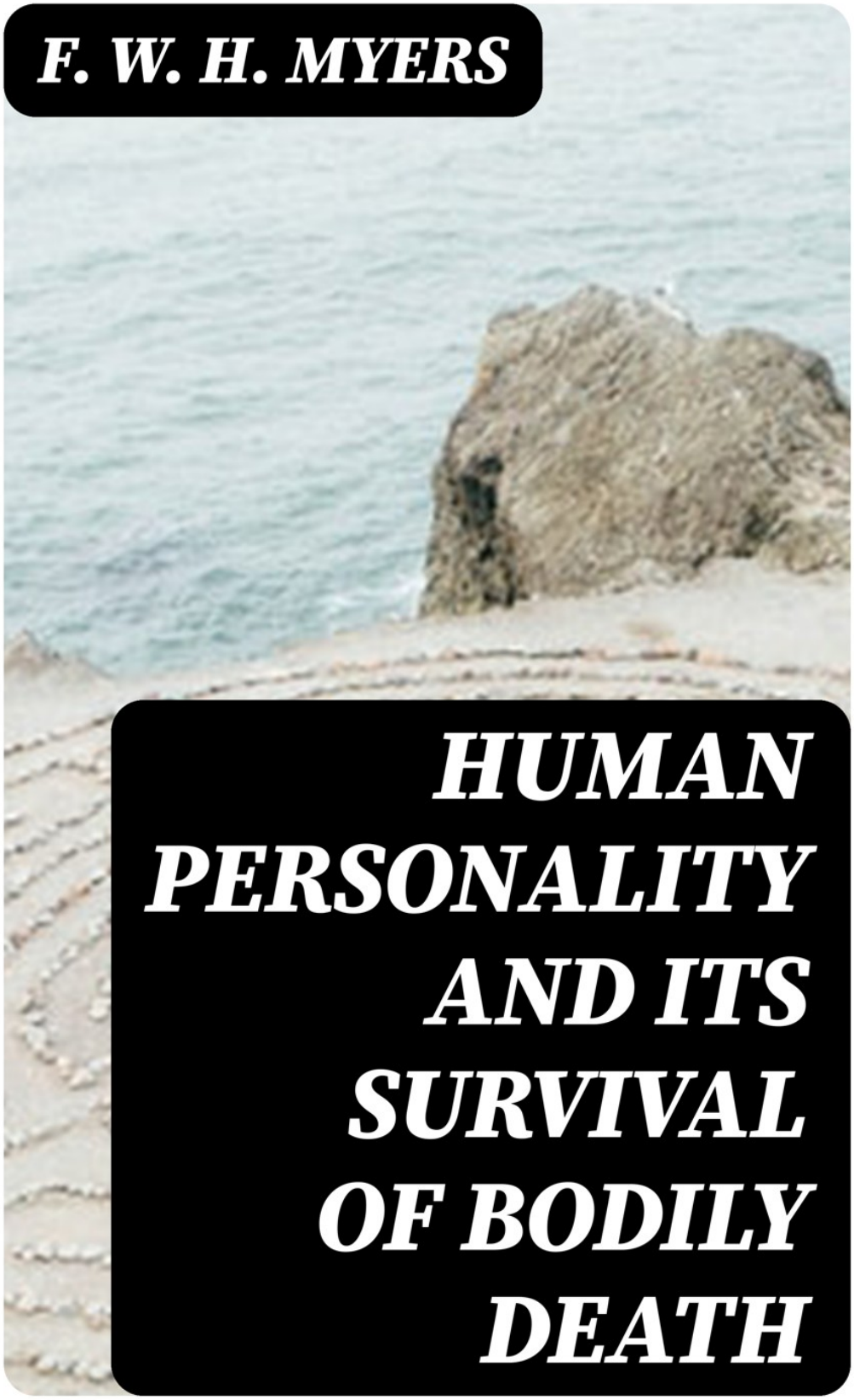

HUMAN PERSONALITY AND ITS SURVIVAL OF BODILY DEATH

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Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death

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PREFACE

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[This unfinished preface consists of several passages written at different times by the author, who died on January 17th, 1901. In 1896 he arranged that the completion of his book should be in the hands of Dr. Richard Hodgson in case of his death before its publication. In the meantime he had entrusted the general supervision of the press work and much of the detail in marshalling the Appendices to Miss Alice Johnson (now Secretary of the Society for Psychical Research), who was therefore associated with Dr. Hodgson also in the editorial work needed for the completion of the book, and much the greater part of the labour involved fell to her share.]

THE book which is now at last given to the world is but a partial presentation of an ever-growing subject which I have long hoped to become able to treat in more adequate fashion. But as knowledge increases life rolls by, and I have thought it well to bring out while I can even this most imperfect text-book to a branch of research whose novelty and strangeness call urgently for some provisional systematisation, which, by suggesting fresh inquiries and producing further accumulation of evidence, may tend as speedily as possible to its own supersession. Few critics of this book can, I think, be more fully conscious than its author of its defects and its lacunæ; but also few critics, I think, have yet realised the importance of the new facts which in some fashion the book does actually present.

Many of these facts have already appeared in *Phantasms of the Living*; many more in the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research; but they are far indeed from having yet entered into the scientific consciousness of the age. In future years the wonder, I think, will be that their announcement was so largely left to a writer with leisure so scanty, and with scientific equipment so incomplete.

Whatever value this book may possess is in great measure due to other minds than its actual author's. Its very existence, in the first place, probably depends upon the existence of the two beloved friends and invaluable coadjutors to whose memory I dedicate it now.

The help derived from these departed colleagues, Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney, although of a kind and quantity absolutely essential to the existence of this work, is not easy to define in all its fulness under the changed circumstances of to-day. There was indeed much which is measurable;—much of revision of previous work of my own, of collaborative experiments, of original thought and discovery. Large quotations purposely introduced from Edmund Gurney indicate, although imperfectly, how closely interwoven our work on all these subjects continued to be until his death. But the benefit which I drew from the association went deeper still. The conditions under which this inquiry was undertaken were such as to emphasise the need of some intimate moral support. A recluse, perhaps, or an eccentric,—or a man living mainly with his intellectual inferiors, may find it easy to work steadily and confidently at a task which he knows that the bulk of educated men will ignore or despise. But this is more difficult for a man who

feels manifold links with his kind, a man whose desire it is to live among minds equal or superior to his own. It is hard, I say, for such a man to disregard altogether the expressed or implied disapproval of those groups of weighty personages to whom in other matters he is accustomed to look up.

I need not say that the attitude of the scientific world—of all the intellectual world—then was very much more marked than now. Even now I write in full consciousness of the low value commonly attached to inquiries of the kind which I pursue. Even now a book on such a subject must still expect to evoke, not only legitimate criticism of many kinds, but also much of that disgust and resentment which novelty and heterodoxy naturally excite. But I have no wish to exalt into a deed of daring an enterprise which to the next generation must seem the most obvious thing in the world. *Nihil ausi nisi vana contemnere* will certainly be the highest compliment which what seemed to us our bold independence of men will receive. Yet gratitude bids me to say that however I might in the privacy of my own bosom have 'dared to contemn things contemptible,' I should never have ventured my amateurish acquirements on a publication of this scale were it not for that slow growth of confidence which my respect for the judgment of these two friends inspired. Their countenance and fellowship, which at once transformed my own share in the work into a delight, has made its presentation to the world appear as a duty.

My thanks are due also to another colleague who has passed away, my brother, Dr. A. T. Myers, F.R.C.P., who helped me for many years in all medical points arising in the work.

To the original furnishers of the evidence my obligations are great and manifest, and to the Council of the S.P.R. I also owe thanks for permission to use that evidence freely. But I must leave it to the book itself to indicate in fuller detail how much is owing to how many men and women:—how widely diffused are the work and the interest which have found in this book their temporary outcome and exposition.

The book, indeed, is an exposition rather than a proof. I cannot summarise within my modest limits the mass of evidence already gathered together in the sixteen volumes of *Proceedings* and the nine volumes of the *Journal* of the S.P.R., in *Phantasms of the Living* and other books hereafter referred to, and in MS. collections. The attempt indeed would be quite out of place. This branch of knowledge, like others, must be studied carefully and in detail by those who care to understand or to advance it.

What I have tried to do here is to render that knowledge more assimilable by co-ordinating it in a form as clear and intelligible as my own limited skill and the nature of the facts themselves have permitted. I have tried to give, in text and in Appendices, enough of actual evidence to illustrate each step in my argument:—and I have constantly referred the reader to places where further evidence will be found.

In minor matters I have aimed above all things at clearness and readiness in reference. The division of the book into sections, with Appendices bearing the same numbers, will, it is hoped, facilitate the use both of syllabus and of references in general. I have even risked the appearance of pedantry in adding a glossary. Where many unfamiliar facts and ideas have to be dealt with, time is

saved in the end if the writer explains precisely what his terms mean.

. . . . . .

F. W. H. MYERS.

GLOSSARY

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NOTE.—The words and phrases here included fall under three main heads:—

(1) Words common only in philosophical or medical use.

(2) Words or phrases used in psychical research with some special significance.

(3) A few words, distinguished by an asterisk, for which the author is himself responsible.

Aboulia.—Loss of power of willing.

After-image.—A retinal picture of an object seen after removing the gaze from the object.

Agent.—The person who seems to initiate a telepathic transmission.

Agraphia.—Lack of power to write words.

Alexia or *Word-blindness*.—Lack of power to understand words written.

Anæsthesia, or the loss of sensation generally, must be distinguished from *analgesia*, or the loss of the sense of pain alone.

Analgesia.—Insensibility to pain.

Aphasia.—Incapacity of coherent utterance, not caused by structural impairment of the vocal organs, but by lesion of the cerebral centres for speech.

Aphonia.—Incapacity of uttering sounds.

Automatic.—Used of mental images arising and movements made without the initiation, and generally without the concurrence, of conscious thought and will. *Sensory automatism* will thus include visual and auditory hallucinations. *Motor automatism* will include messages written and words uttered without intention (automatic script, trance-utterance, etc.).

Automnesia.—Spontaneous revival of memories of an earlier condition of life.

Autoscope.—Any instrument which reveals a subliminal motor impulse or sensory impression, *e.g.*, a divining rod, a tilting table, or a planchette.

Bilocation.—The sensation of being in two different places at once, namely where one's organism is, and in a place distant from it.

Catalepsy.—"An intermittent neurosis producing inability to change the position of a limb, while another person can place the muscles in a state of flexion or contraction as he will." (Tuke's *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*.)

Centre of Consciousness.—The place where a percipient imagines himself to be. The point of view from which he seems to himself to be surveying some phantasmal scene.

Chromatism.—See *Secondary Sensations*.

Clair-audience.—The sensation of hearing an internal (but in some way veridical) voice.

Clairvoyance (*Lucidité*).—The faculty or act of perceiving, as though visually, with some coincidental truth, some distant scene.

Cænesthesia.—That consensus or agreement of many organic sensations which is a fundamental element in our conception of personal identity.

Control.—This word is used of the intelligence which purports to communicate messages which are written or uttered by the *automatist*, *sensitive* or *medium*.

**Cosmopathic.*—Open to the access of supernormal knowledge or emotion.

Cryptomnesia.—Submerged or subliminal memory of events forgotten by the supraliminal self.

**Dextro-cerebral* (opposed to **Sinistro-cerebral*) of left-handed persons as employing preferentially the *right* hemisphere of the brain.

Diathesis.—Habit, capacity, constitutional disposition or tendency.

Dimorphism.—In crystals the property of assuming two incompatible forms: in plants and animals, difference of form between members of the same species. Used of a condition of alternating personalities, in which memory, character, etc., present themselves at different times in different forms in the same person.

Discarnate.—Disembodied, opposed to *incarnate*.

Disintegration of Personality.—Used of any condition where the sense of personality is not unitary and continuous: especially when secondary and transitory personalities intervene.

Dynamogeny.—The increase of nervous energy by appropriate stimuli, often opposed to *inhibition*.

Ecmnesia.—Loss of memory of a period of time.

**Entencephalic.*—On the analogy of *entoptic*: of sensations, etc., which have their origin within the brain, not in the external world.

Eugenics.—The science of improving the race.

Falsidical.—Of hallucinations *delusive*, *i.e.*, when there is nothing objective to which they correspond. The correlative term to *veridical*.

Glossolaly.—"Speaking with tongues," *i.e.*, automatic utterance of words not belonging to any real language.

Hallucination.—Any sensory perception which has no objective counterpart within the field of vision, hearing, etc., is termed a hallucination.

Heteræsthesia.—A form of sensibility decidedly different from any of those which can be referred to the action of the known senses.

Hyperboulia.—Increased power over the organism,—resembling the power which we call *will* when it is exercised over the voluntary muscles,—which is seen in the bodily changes effected by self-suggestion.

Hyperæsthesia.—Unusual acuteness of the senses.

Hypermnesia.—"Over-activity of the memory; a condition in which past acts, feelings, or ideas are brought vividly to the mind, which, in its normal condition, has wholly lost the remembrance of them." (Tuke's *Dict.*)

**Hyperpromethia.*—Supernormal power of foresight.

Hypnagogic.—Illusions hypnagogiques (Maury) are the vivid illusions of sight or sound—"faces in the dark," etc.—which sometimes accompany the oncoming of sleep. To similar illusions accompanying the *departure* of sleep, as

when a dream-figure persists for a few moments into waking life, I have given the name **hypnopompic*.

Hypnogenous zones.—Regions by pressure on which hypnosis is induced in some hysterical persons.

**Hypnopompic.*—See *Hypnagogic*.

Hysteria.—"A disordered condition of the nervous system, the anatomical seat and nature of which are unknown to medical science, but of which the symptoms consist in well-marked and very varied disturbances of nerve-function" (*Ency. Brit.*). Hysterical affections are not dependent on any discoverable lesion.

Hysterogenous zones.—Points or tracts on the skin of a hysterical person, pressure on which will induce a hysterical attack.

Ideational.—Used of impressions which display some distinct notion, but not of sensory nature.

Induced.—Of hallucinations, etc., intentionally produced.

Levitation.—A raising of objects from the ground by supposed supernormal means; especially of living persons.

Medium.—A person through whom communication is deemed to be carried on between living men and spirits of the departed. It is often better replaced by *automatist* or *sensitive*.

Message.—Used for any communication, not necessarily verbal, from one to another stratum of the automatist's personality, or from an external intelligence to the automatist's mind.

Metallæsthesia.—A form of sensibility alleged to exist which enables some hypnotised or hysterical subjects to discriminate between the contacts of various metals by

sensations not derived from their ordinary properties of weight, etc.

Metastasis.—Change of the seat of a bodily function from one place (*e.g.*, brain-centre) to another.

**Metetherial.*—That which appears to lie after or beyond the ether: the metetherial environment denotes the spiritual or transcendental world in which the soul may be supposed to exist.

**Methectic.*—Of communications between one stratum of a man's intelligence and another.

Mirror-writing (*écriture renversée, Spiegel-schrift*).—Writing so inverted, or, more exactly, *perverted*, as to resemble writing reflected in a mirror.

Mnemonic chain.—A continuous series of memories, especially when the continuity persists after an interruption.

Motor.—Used of an impulse to action not carrying with it any definite idea or sensory impression.

Negative hallucination or *systematised anæthesia*.—Signifies the condition of an entranced subject who, as the result of a suggestion, is unable to perceive some object or to hear some sound, etc.

Number forms.—See *Secondary sensations*.

Objectify.—To externalize a phantom as if it were a material object; to see it as a part of the waking world.

**Panmnesia.*—A potential recollection of all impressions.

Paræsthesia.—Erroneous or morbid sensation.

Paramnesia.—All forms of erroneous memory.

Paraphasia.—The erroneous and involuntary use of one word for another.

Percipient.—The correlative term to Agent; the person on whose mind the telepathic impact falls; or, more generally, the person who perceives any motor or sensory impression.

Phantasm and Phantom.—Phantasm and phantom are, of course, mere variants of the same word; but since phantom has become generally restricted to *visual* hallucinations, it is convenient to take phantasm to cover a wider range, and to signify any hallucinatory sensory impression, whatever sense—whether sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, or diffused sensibility—may happen to be affected.

Phantasmogenetic centre.—A point in space apparently modified by a spirit in such a way that persons present near it perceive a phantasm.

Phobies.—Irrational restricting or disabling preoccupations or fears; *e.g.*, *agoraphobia*, fear of open spaces.

Photism.—See *Secondary sensations*.

Point de repère.—Guiding mark. Used of some (generally inconspicuous) real object which a hallucinated subject sometimes sees as the nucleus of his hallucination, and the movements of which suggest corresponding movements of the hallucinatory object.

Polyzoism.—The property, in a complex organism, of being composed of minor and quasi-independent organisms. This is sometimes called "colonial constitution," from animal *colonies*.

Possession.—A developed form of motor automatism, in which the automatist's own personality disappears for a time, while there appears to be a more or less complete

substitution of personality, writing or speech being given by another spirit through the entranced organism.

Post-hypnotic.—Used of a suggestion given during the hypnotic trance, but intended to operate after that trance has ceased.

Precognition.—Knowledge of impending events supernormally acquired.

Premonition.—A supernormal indication of any kind of event still in the future.

**Preversion.*—A tendency to characteristics assumed to lie at a further point of the evolutionary progress of a species than has yet been reached; opposed to reversion.

**Promnesia.*—The paradoxical sensation of recollecting a scene which is only now occurring for the first time; the sense of the *déjà vu*.

**Psychorrhagy.*—A special idiosyncrasy which tends to make the phantasm of a person easily perceptible; the breaking loose of a psychical element, definable mainly by its power of producing a phantasm, perceptible by one or more persons, in some portion of space.

**Psychorrhagic diathesis.*—A habit or capacity of detaching some psychical element, involuntarily and without purpose, in such a manner as to produce a phantasm.

Psycho-therapeutics.—"Treatment of disease by the influence of the mind on the body." (Tuke's *Dict.*)

Reciprocal.—Used of cases where there is both agency and percipience at each end of the telepathic chain, so that A perceives P, and P perceives A also.

**Retrocognition.*—Knowledge of the past, supernormally acquired.

Secondary personality.—It sometimes happens, as the result of shock, disease, or unknown causes, that an individual experiences an alteration of memory and character, amounting to a change of personality, which generally seems to have come on during sleep. The new personality is in that case termed *secondary*, in distinction to the original, or *primary*, personality.

Secondary sensations (*Secunddrempfindungen*, *audition colorée*, *sound-seeing*, *synæsthesia*, *etc.*).—With some persons every sensation of one type is accompanied by a sensation of another type; as for instance, a special sound may be accompanied by a special sensation of colour or light (*chromatisms* or *photisms*). This phenomenon is analogous to that of *number-forms*,—a kind of diagrammatic mental picture which accompanies the conception of a progression of numbers. See Galton's *Inquiries into Human Faculty*.

Shell-hearing.—The induction of hallucinatory voices, etc., by listening to a shell. Analogous to crystal-gazing.

Stigmatisation.—The production of blisters or other cutaneous changes on the hands, feet, or elsewhere, by suggestion or self-suggestion.

Subliminal.—Of thoughts, feelings, etc., lying beneath the ordinary *threshold* (*limen*) of consciousness, as opposed to *supraliminal*, lying *above* the threshold.

Suggestion.—The process of effectively impressing upon the subliminal intelligence the wishes of some other person. *Self-suggestion* means a suggestion conveyed by the

subject himself from one stratum of his personality to another, without external intervention.

**Supernormal.*—Of a faculty or phenomenon which transcends ordinary experience. Used in preference to the word *supernatural*, as not assuming that there is anything outside nature or any arbitrary interference with natural law.

Supraliminal.—See *Subliminal*.

Synæsthesia.—See *Secondary Sensations*.

Synergy.—A number of actions correlated together, or combined into a group.

Telekinesis.—Used of alleged supernormal movements of objects, not due to any known force.

**Telepathy.*—The communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognised channels of sense.

**Telæsthesia.*—Any direct sensation or perception of objects or conditions independently of the recognised channels of sense, and also under such circumstances that no known mind external to the percipient's can be suggested as the source of the knowledge thus gained.

**Telergy.*—The force exercised by the mind of an agent in impressing a percipient,—involving a direct influence of the extraneous spirit on the brain or organism of the percipient.

Veridical.—Of hallucinations, when they correspond to real events happening elsewhere and unknown to the percipient.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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> Maior agit deus, atque opera la maiora remittit.
>
> —VIRGIL.

IN the long story of man's endeavours to understand his own environment and to govern his own fates, there is one gap or omission so singular that, however we may afterwards contrive to explain the fact, its simple statement has the air of a paradox. Yet it is strictly true to say that man has never yet applied to the problems which most profoundly concern him those methods of inquiry which in attacking all other problems he has found the most efficacious.

The question for man most momentous of all is whether or no he has an immortal soul; or—to avoid the word *immortal*, which belongs to the realm of infinities—whether or no his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death. In this direction have always lain the gravest fears, the farthest-reaching hopes, which could either oppress or stimulate mortal minds.

On the other hand, the method which our race has found most effective in acquiring knowledge is by this time familiar to all men. It is the method of modern Science—that process which consists in an interrogation of Nature entirely dispassionate, patient, systematic; such careful experiment

and cumulative record as can often elicit from her slightest indications her deepest truths. That method is now dominant throughout the civilised world; and although in many directions experiments may be difficult and dubious, facts rare and elusive, Science works slowly on and bides her time,—refusing to fall back upon tradition or to launch into speculation, merely because strait is the gate which leads to valid discovery, indisputable truth.

I say, then, that this method has never yet been applied to the all-important problem of the existence, the powers, the destiny of the human soul.

Nor is this strange omission due to any general belief that the problem is in its nature incapable of solution by any observation whatever which mankind could make. That resolutely agnostic view—I may almost say that scientific superstition—"*ignoramus et ignorabimus*"—is no doubt held at the present date by many learned minds. But it has never been the creed, nor is it now the creed, of the human race generally. In most civilised countries there has been for nearly two thousand years a distinct belief that survival has actually been proved by certain phenomena observed at a given date in Palestine. And beyond the Christian pale—whether through reason, instinct, or superstition—it has ever been commonly held that ghostly phenomena of one kind or another exist to testify to a life beyond the life we know.

But, nevertheless, neither those who believe on vague grounds nor those who believe on definite grounds that the question might possibly be solved, or has actually been solved, by human observation of objective facts, have

hitherto made any serious attempt to connect and correlate that belief with the general scheme of belief for which Science already vouches. They have not sought for fresh corroborative instances, for analogies, for explanations; rather they have kept their convictions on these fundamental matters in a separate and sealed compartment of their minds, a compartment consecrated to religion or to superstition, but not to observation or to experiment.

It is my object in the present work—as it has from the first been the object of the Society for Psychical Research, on whose behalf most of the evidence here set forth has been collected,—to do what can be done to break down that artificial wall of demarcation which has thus far excluded from scientific treatment precisely the problems which stand in most need of all the aids to discovery which such treatment can afford.

Yet let me first explain that by the word "scientific" I signify an authority to which I submit myself—not a standard which I claim to attain. Any science of which I can here speak as possible must be a *nascent* science—not such as one of those vast systems of connected knowledge which thousands of experts now steadily push forward in laboratories in every land—but such as each one of those great sciences was in its dim and poor beginning, when a few monks groped among the properties of "the noble metals," or a few Chaldean shepherds outwatched the setting stars.

What I am able to insist upon is the mere Socratic rudiment of these organisms of exact thought—the first axiomatic prerequisite of any valid progress. My one

contention is that in the discussion of the deeper problems of man's nature and destiny there ought to be exactly the same openness of mind, exactly the same diligence in the search for objective evidence of any kind, exactly the same critical analysis of results, as is habitually shown, for instance, in the discussion of the nature and destiny of the planet upon which man now moves.

Obvious truism although this statement may at first seem, it will presently be found, I think, that those who subscribe to it are in fact committing themselves to inquiries of a wider and stranger type than any to which they are accustomed;—are stepping outside certain narrow limits within which, by ancient convention, disputants on either side of these questions are commonly confined.

A brief recall to memory of certain familiar historical facts will serve to make my meaning clearer. Let us consider how it has come about that, whereas the problem of man's survival of death is by most persons regarded as a problem in its nature soluble by sufficient evidence, and whereas to many persons the traditional evidence commonly adduced appears insufficient,—nevertheless no serious effort has been made on either side to discover whether other and more recent evidence can or cannot be brought forward.

A certain broad answer to this inquiry, although it cannot be said to be at all points familiar, is not in reality far to seek. It is an answer which would seem strange indeed to some visitant from a planet peopled wholly by scientific minds. Yet among a race like our own, concerned first and primarily to live and work with thoughts undistracted from immediate needs, the answer is natural enough. For the fact

simply is that the intimate importance of this central problem has barred the way to its methodical, its scientific solution.

There are some beliefs for which mankind cannot afford to wait. "What must I do to be saved?" is a question quite otherwise urgent than the cause of the tides or the meaning of the marks on the moon. Men must settle roughly somehow what it is that from the Unseen World they have reason to fear or to hope. Beliefs grow up in direct response to this need of belief; in order to support themselves they claim unique sanction; and thus along with these specific beliefs grows also the general habit of regarding matters that concern that Unseen World as somehow tabooed or segregated from ordinary observation or inquiry.

Let us pass from generalities to the actual history of Western civilisation. In an age when scattered ritual, local faiths—tribal solutions of cosmic problems—were destroying each other by mere contact and fusion, an event occurred which in the brief record of man's still incipient civilisation may be regarded as unique. A life was lived in which the loftiest response which man's need of moral guidance had ever received was corroborated by phenomena which have been widely regarded as convincingly miraculous, and which are said to have culminated in a Resurrection from the dead. To those phenomena or to that Resurrection it would at this point be illegitimate for me to refer in defence of my argument. I have appealed to Science, and to Science I must go;—in the sense that it would be unfair for me to claim support from that which Science in her strictness can set aside as the tradition of a pre-scientific age. Yet this one

great tradition, as we know, has, as a fact, won the adhesion and reverence of the great majority of European minds. The complex results which followed from this triumph of Christianity have been discussed by many historians. But one result which here appears to us in a new light was this—that the Christian religion, the Christian Church, became for Europe the accredited representative and guardian of all phenomena bearing upon the World Unseen. So long as Christianity stood dominant, all phenomena which seemed to transcend experience were absorbed in her realm—were accounted as minor indications of the activity of her angels or of her fiends. And when Christianity was seriously attacked, these minor manifestations passed unconsidered. The priests thought it safest to defend their own traditions, their own intuitions, without going afield in search of independent evidence of a spiritual world. Their assailants kept their powder and shot for the orthodox ramparts, ignoring any isolated strongholds which formed no part of the main line of defence.

Meantime, indeed, the laws of Nature held their wonted way. As ever, that which the years had once brought they brought again; and every here and there some marvel, liker to the old stories than any one cared to assert, cropped up between superstition on the one hand and contemptuous indifference on the other. Witchcraft, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Spiritism—these especially, amid many minor phenomena, stood out in turn as precursory of the inevitable wider inquiry. A very few words on each of these four movements may suffice here to show their connection with my present theme.

Witchcraft.—The lesson which witchcraft teaches with regard to the validity of human testimony is the more remarkable because it was so long and so completely misunderstood. The belief in witches long passed—as well it might—as the culminant example of human ignorance and folly; and in so comparatively recent a book as Mr. Lecky's "History of Rationalism," the sudden decline of this popular conviction, without argument or disapproval, is used to illustrate the irresistible melting away of error and falsity in the "intellectual climate" of a wiser age. Since about 1880, however, when French experiments especially had afforded conspicuous examples of what a hysterical woman could come to believe under suggestion from others or from herself, it has begun to be felt that the phenomena of witchcraft were very much what the phenomena of the Salpêtrière would seem to be to the patients themselves, if left alone in the hospital without a medical staff. And in *Phantasms of the Living*, Edmund Gurney, after subjecting the literature of witchcraft to a more careful analysis than any one till then had thought it worth while to apply, was able to show that practically all recorded first-hand depositions (made apart from torture) in the long story of witchcraft may quite possibly have been *true*, to the best belief of the deponents; true, that is to say, as representing the conviction of sane (though often hysterical) persons, who merely made the almost inevitable mistake of confusing self-suggested hallucinations with waking fact. Nay, even the insensible spots on the witches were no doubt really anæsthetic—involved a first discovery of a now familiar clinical symptom—the *zones analgésiques* of the

patients of Pitres or Charcot. Witchcraft, in fact, was a gigantic, a cruel psychological and pathological experiment conducted by inquisitors upon hysteria; but it was conducted in the dark, and when the barbarous explanation dropped out of credence much of possible discovery was submerged as well.

Mesmer.—Again, the latent possibilities of "suggestion,"—though not yet under that name, and mingled with who knows what else?—broke forth into a blaze in the movement headed by Mesmer;—at once discoverer and charlatan. Again the age was unripe, and scientific opposition, although not so formidable as the religious opposition which had sent witches to the stake, was yet strong enough to check for the second time the struggling science. Hardly till our own generation—hardly even now—has a third effort found better acceptance, and hypnotism and psycho-therapeutics, in which every well-attested fact of witchcraft or of mesmerism finds, if not its explanation, at least its parallel, are establishing themselves as a recognised and advancing method of relieving human ills.

This brief sketch of the development as it were by successive impulses, under strong disbelief and discouragement, of a group of mental tendencies, faculties, or sensibilities now recognised as truly existing and as often salutary, is closely paralleled by the development, under similar difficulties, of another group of faculties or sensibilities, whose existence is still disputed, but which if firmly established may prove to be of even greater moment for mankind.

At no time known to us, whether before or since the Christian era, has the series of *trance-manifestations*,—of supposed communications with a supernal world,—entirely ceased. Sometimes, as in the days of St. Theresa, such trance or ecstasy has been, one may say, the central or culminant fact in the Christian world. Of these experiences I must not here treat. The evidence for them is largely of a subjective type, and they may belong more fitly to some future discussion as to the amount of confidence due to the interpretation given by entranced persons to their own phenomena.

But in the midst of this long series, and in full analogy to many minor cases, occurs the exceptional trance-history of Emmanuel Swedenborg. In this case, as is well known, there appears to have been excellent objective evidence both of clairvoyance or telæsthesia[1] and of communication with departed persons;—and we can only regret that the philosopher Kant, who satisfied himself of some part of Swedenborg's supernormal[2] gift, did not press further an inquiry surpassed in importance by none of those upon which his master-mind was engaged. Apart, however, from these objective evidences, the mere subject-matter of Swedenborg's trance-revelations was enough to claim respectful attention. I cannot here discuss the strange mixture which they present of slavish literalism with exalted speculation, of pedantic orthodoxy with physical and moral insight far beyond the level of that age. It is enough to say here that even as Socrates called down philosophy from heaven to earth, so in a somewhat different sense it was Swedenborg who called up philosophy again from earth to

heaven;—who originated the notion of science in the spiritual world, as earnestly, though not so persuasively, as Socrates originated the idea of science in this world which we seem to know. It was to Swedenborg first that that unseen world appeared before all things as a realm of law; a region not of mere emotional vagueness or stagnancy of adoration, but of definite progress according to definite relations of cause and effect, resulting from structural laws of spiritual existence and intercourse which we may in time learn partially to apprehend. For my own part I regard Swedenborg,—not, assuredly, as an inspired teacher, nor even as a trustworthy interpreter of his own experiences,—but yet as a true and early precursor of that great inquiry which it is our present object to advance.

The next pioneer—fortunately still amongst us—whom I must mention even in this summary notice, is the celebrated physicist and chemist, Sir W. Crookes. Just as Swedenborg was the first leading man of science who distinctly conceived of the spiritual world as a world of law, so was Sir W. Crookes the first leading man of science who seriously endeavoured to test the alleged mutual influence and interpenetration of the spiritual world and our own by experiments of scientific precision.[3] Beyond the establishment of certain supernormal facts Crookes declined to go. But a large group of persons have founded upon these and similar facts a scheme of belief known as Modern Spiritualism, or Spiritism. Later chapters in this book will show how much I owe to certain observations made by members of this group—how often my own conclusions concur with conclusions at which they have previously

arrived. And yet this work of mine is in large measure a critical attack upon the main Spiritist position, as held, say, by Mr. A. R. Wallace, its most eminent living supporter,—the belief, namely, that all or almost all supernormal phenomena are due to the action of spirits of the dead. By far the larger proportion, as I hold, are due to the action of the still embodied spirit of the agent or percipient himself. Apart from speculative differences, moreover, I altogether dissent from the conversion into a sectarian creed of what I hold should be a branch of scientific inquiry, growing naturally out of our existing knowledge. It is, I believe, largely to this temper of uncritical acceptance, degenerating often into blind credulity, that we must refer the lack of progress in Spiritualistic literature, and the encouragement which has often been bestowed upon manifest fraud,—so often, indeed, as to create among scientific men a strong indisposition to the study of phenomena recorded or advocated in a tone so alien from Science.

I know not how much of originality or importance may be attributed by subsequent students of the subject to the step next in order in this series of approximations. To those immediately concerned, the feeling of a new departure was inevitably given by the very smallness of the support which they for a long time received, and by the difficulty which they found in making their point of view intelligible to the scientific, to the religious, or even to the spiritualistic world. In about 1873—at the crest, as one may say, of perhaps the highest wave of materialism which has ever swept over these shores—it became the conviction of a small group of Cambridge friends that the deep questions thus at issue

must be fought out in a way more thorough than the champions either of religion or of materialism had yet suggested. Our attitudes of mind were in some ways different; but to myself, at least, it seemed that no adequate attempt had yet been made even to determine whether anything could be learnt as to an unseen world or no; for that if anything were knowable about such a world in such fashion that Science could adopt and maintain that knowledge, it must be discovered by no analysis of tradition, and by no manipulation of metaphysics, but simply by experiment and observation;—simply by the application to phenomena within us and around us of precisely the same methods of deliberate, dispassionate, exact inquiry which have built up our actual knowledge of the world which we can touch and see. I can hardly even now guess to how many of my readers this will seem a truism, and to how many a paradox. Truism or paradox, such a thought suggested a kind of effort, which, so far as we could discover, had never yet been made. For what seemed needful was an inquiry of quite other scope than the mere analysis of historical documents, or of the *origines* of any alleged revelation in the past. It must be an inquiry resting primarily, as all scientific inquiries in the stricter sense now must rest, upon objective facts actually observable, upon experiments which we can repeat to-day, and which we may hope to carry further to-morrow. It must be an inquiry based, to use an old term, on the uniformitarian hypothesis; on the presumption, that is to say, that *if a spiritual world exists, and if that world has at any epoch been manifest or*