

TELEPATHY—SCIENCE AND MYSTICISM

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WHATEVER may be thought and said concerning psychic research generally and the relations between the results of that effort and religious belief, it is certain that every truth-seeker will welcome the present attempt to separate the various phenomena called supernormal and psychic and to study them, severally, in a scientific way, by experiment and observation.

One of the phenomena now again challenging attention and undergoing experimental verification is *telepathy*. Naturally enough, the radio rage and the real wonders of national and even international broadcasting have stimulated interest in telepathy. At first sight, the connection between the two things is slight, if apparent at all, but here is what a recent scholarly and imaginative British writer said in a book on broadcasting:

“Wireless is in particular league with ether. . . . Thought is probably permanent, and a means may be found to ally thought with ether and to broadcast and communicate thought without the intervention of any mechanical device.” (J. C. W. Reith in *Broadcast Over Britain*.)

What vistas of interchange of thought—in addition to literature, music and serious discussion—this bold speculation opens up!

Of course, conjectures and hopes are not science. But they may encourage and guide science. They lead to the formation of provisional theories, while theories require testing and experimentation. In England, we learn from recent correspondence, men of science and lay members of the Society for Psychical Research have been holding seances for the purpose of ascertaining the actuality of telepathic communications. Some experiments seem particularly interesting, by reason of the standing and character of the men who participated in it—among others, Lord Balfour, the eminent philoso-

pher, metaphysician and statesman, and Prof. Gilbert Murray, one of the most open-minded, progressive and accomplished educators and essayists of Great Britain. We may reproduce here the details of one experiment, which has been discussed with keen interest and wonder.

The investigators met at a private house. Lord Balfour and other distinguished persons were in the drawing room, the doors of which were shut. Prof. Murray was in the dining room, which was not connected with the drawing room. Lord Balfour, in a whisper, said to his fellow-guests: "I am thinking of Robert Walpole talking Latin to George III." Prof. Murray then was asked to come into the drawing room. He promptly said to Balfour: "Something eighteenth century. The latter nodding assent, Prof. Murray continued: "I do not think I shall get it exactly. Dr. Johnson met George III in the king's library, but I am sure he is talking Latin, which he would not do. . . . Wait, I have nearly got it: somebody talking Latin to a king."

Now, indisputably, this is a most remarkable case—and probably of telepathy. Mere coincidence is practically ruled out by the theory of probability. Moreover, it seems that Prof. Murray had made other experiments and had achieved other results quite as striking, though he had failed on certain occasions. Lord Balfour is reported as commenting in this strain on the series of experiments:

"They seem to prove conclusively that there is a wholly unknown, unexplained, un conjectured method of traversing space between two conscious organisms, upon which neither the theory of sound nor of electricity can throw any light."

It would be too dogmatic to assert that physicists, physiologists and students of light, sound and touch can *never* hope to account for telepathy, and that investigations and experiments by them, from their respective points of view, as men of exact science, would be a waste of time. But perhaps for the present the need is rather for more empirical experiments by all sorts and conditions of men than for theorizing. If telepathy *be* a fact, it is a fact of tremendous significance. To demonstrate it beyond cavil or doubt is to necessitate the reconstruction of neurology, psychology and other sciences, including medicine. Again, if telepathy *be* a fact, it is important to ascertain what may be called its quantitative value as well as the conditions under which it is rendered possible and likely.

Are all human beings sensitive, responsive and delicate enough to be capable of registering and interpreting thoughts in the minds of

others under certain favorable circumstances? Or is this power possessed only by certain peculiar persons? Does education, does culture, does imagination play any part in telepathy, or are untutored and mediocre persons as susceptible and responsive as their intellectual and spiritual superiors? Such questions as these, and others, await answers. Progress will no doubt be slow, but it should be sure, especially if the problem is attacked simultaneously from many points of view.

It may be noted that the British Society for Psychical Research has been engaged for many years in such investigations, and that many cases of telepathy have been recorded in its proceedings and in special volumes. Many of those cases raised certain baffling questions and led some writers to the conclusion that telepathy proper cannot be entirely divorced from what F. W. H. Myers called *telescæsthesia*, which he defined as "any direct sensation or perception of objects or conditions independently of the recognized channels of sense, and also under circumstances that no known mind external to the percipient's can be suggested as the source of the knowledge thus gained." The last half of this sentence hints at supernormal forms of telepathy and at communications between human beings on this earth and disembodied spirits.

I may quote some of the observations of Mr. Myers in his important work on "Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death" on the subject of telepathy in its various aspects, obvious and obscure:

"Men have in most ages believed, and do still widely believe, in the reality of prayer; that is, in the possibility of telepathic communication between our human minds and minds above our own, which are supposed not only to understand our wish or aspiration, but to impress or influence us inwardly in return.

"So widely spread has been this belief in prayer that it is somewhat strange that men should not have more commonly made what seems the natural deduction—namely, that if our spirits can communicate with higher spirits in a way transcending sense, they may also perhaps be able in like manner to communicate with each other. The idea, indeed, has been thrown out at intervals by leading thinkers, from Augustine to Bacon, from Bacon to Goethe, from Goethe to Tennyson.

"Isolated experiments from time to time indicated its practical truth. . . . To make such experiments possible has indeed been no easy matter. It has been needful to elicit and to isolate from the

complex emotions and interactions of common life a certain psychological element of whose nature and working we have beforehand but a very obscure idea.

"If we possessed any certain method of detecting the action of telepathy, of distinguishing it from chance coincidence or from unconscious suggestion, we should probably find that its action was widely diffused and mingled with other more commonplace causes in many incidents of life. We should find, telepathy, perhaps, at the base of many sympathies and antipathies, of many wide communities of feeling, and operating, it may be, in cases as different as quasi-recognition of some friend in a stranger seen at a distance just before the friend himself unexpectedly appears, and the Phêrê or Rumor which in Hindostan or in ancient Greece is said to have often spread far an inexplicable knowledge of victory or disaster."

The foregoing quotation satisfactorily indicates the scope of telepathy as well as the snares and confusion to be guarded against by the scientific investigator. On the relation of prayer to telepathy, however, a word of qualification should be said. Despite high authority, it is safe to affirm that today no one really considers prayer to be a form of communication between the human being and a higher personality or super-personality. The rational modern advocates of prayer define it as *communion with one's own better and nobler self*, as a process of heart-searching and mind-purging. The efficacy of prayer thus understood is undeniable, even in our skeptical age, but the argument for telepathy must be dropped in this connection and sought elsewhere.

We may profitably recall what scholarly and keen thinkers have said about telepathy in the past. According to Sir William Crookes, telepathy is probably due to brain waves of small amplitude and great frequency. It is conceivable that such waves pass from one brain to another, perhaps to several others, and excite in those brains images similar to those in the first brain. This hypothesis is an interesting and useful one to bear in mind, for it harmonizes with modern physical and metaphysical ideas. But it soon encounters difficulties, as Mr. Myers pointed out. Brain waves may transmit images, but can images be changed and transformed during the process of transmission, and if so, how and under what influences? That images or pictures *are* modified in the minds of percipients is believed to have been well established; in fact, in some cases the likeness between the two pictures is quite symbolical and in need of much interpretation.

Mr. Myers, recognizing the difficulties in the way of the brain-wave hypothesis, limited himself to the proposition that "life has the power of manifesting itself to life," and ventured the suggestion that, since we do not know how life acts on matter, or how consciousness is connected with the brain, telepathy might prove of great aid in clearing up that mystery. "For," to quote him, "from the mode in which some element of one individual life, apart from material impact, gets hold of another organism, we may in time learn something of the way in which our own life gets hold of our own organism, and maintains, intermits or abandons its organic sway."

Since these hints were thrown out, it must be confessed, little advance has been made by students of telepathy. A new and vigorous attack on the problem, such as has been undertaken in England, is highly desirable.

In such an attack realists and mystics, scientists and theologians should co-operate effectively and harmoniously. To repeat, telepathy may bring fresh strength and aid to spiritualism, or it may not. It may help religious thought and speculation, or it may not. But it is bound to yield vital and important truths while stimulating research in various further directions. The United States, by the way, should not lag behind Europe in the fascinating field of telepathy.