

The Early History of the ASPR: Origins to 1907

ARTHUR S. BERGER

ABSTRACT: This is the first of a series of articles providing a history of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in recognition of its centenary. This paper chronicles the developments, beginning in 1850, which subsequently led to the formation, in 1885, of the ASPR, largely due to the efforts of Sir William Barrett (also a prime organizer of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882), and William James and Henry Bowditch of Harvard. It carries the history through the events which led the ASPR to become a branch of the Society for Psychical Research in 1889 and those, in turn, which led to its dissolution in 1906. The account closes in 1907 when James H. Hyslop formed the American Institute for Scientific Research.

This essay, one of several independent articles being written on the history of the American Society for Psychical Research, deals with its earliest period. The intention is to give as full and fair an account of it as space and access to source materials permit.

To understand the early period we must remember facts which the passage of time may have obscured: America was a new receptacle into which psychical research was poured, but the ingredients came from across the sea; the vessel that received them was not suited to them, and, in the end, had to be abandoned—yet abandoned in the hope of something better because of the efforts of one man. In this article, I intend to indicate why, when, and how this occurred and why the ASPR's contribution to psychical research, with one outstanding exception, was meager in comparison to its achievements in subsequent periods.

ORIGINS OF THE ASPR (1850–1882)

One night in 1848, in a farmhouse near Rochester, New York, young Kate Fox clapped her hands a number of times and told "Mr. Splitfoot" to do as she did. Whereupon an equal number of raps were heard. When the older child, Margaretta Fox, commanded the source of the rappings to count to four, it did.

So began the Spiritualist movement in America. In the last half of the nineteenth century, it attracted a large number of the American public, including such distinguished figures as Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Horace Greeley, editor of *The New York Tribune*. Its physical and mental phenomena and its

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glowing assertions about another world drew believers estimated to range from two to eleven million (Gauld, 1968, p. 29). Its phenomena were so impressive and its claims so great that, in 1854, 13,000 people signed a petition asking Congress to establish a scientific commission to examine the phenomena (Capron, 1855).

Congress took no steps but others did. John Worth Edmonds, who was a judge of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, originally thought the phenomena to be products of deceptions and investigated them with intent to expose them. In the end he became converted to Spiritualism. The controversy that stemmed from his conversion resulted in his resignation from the judiciary.

People formed circles to test the phenomena. Among them was Greeley, who investigated the Fox sisters and stated:

It would be the basest cowardice not to say that we are convinced beyond a doubt of the ladies' perfect integrity and good faith. Whatever may be the origin or cause of the rappings, the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them. We tested this thoroughly and to our entire satisfaction. (Doyle, n.d./1930, p. 171)

On the other hand, phenomena which thousands of respectable people like Greeley admitted as certain facts were "what tens of thousands of others equally respectable claim[ed] to be abject and contemptible delusion" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 21).

In the face of these conflicting testimonies it might be expected that American scientists would have been aroused to make vigorous efforts to give the Fox sisters and Spiritualist phenomena close, impartial, and orderly scrutiny. But during this period "practically none" (Gauld, 1968, p. 30) of these efforts were made. In a recent account of nineteenth century Spiritualism in America, the author, who is an historian, asserts that, in the 1850s, "a number of scientists" (Moore, 1977, p. 27) investigated the claims of Spiritualists. Of the two examples of investigations he gives, one is the work of Michael Faraday. Faraday, of course, was a British scientist who conducted some tableturning experiments in his own country. In this country, however, the number of scientists who gave Spiritualism any serious attention was absurdly small. In Coover's (1927) excellent summary of American investigations made of the Fox sisters in the 1850s, for example, after putting aside those made by preachers, only two serious investigations deserve mention. When the Fox sisters came to Buffalo in 1850 to demonstrate their phenomena, three medical professors from the University of Buffalo took the opportunity to investigate them.

In February 1851, the professors reported to the local paper, the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, that the girls made raps by dislocating bones in their knees, toes, or ankles. Louis Agassiz, on the

faculty of Harvard University, and a member of a committee appointed to investigate Kate Fox in 1857, surmised that the raps had been produced by the bones of the feet. A third scientist, not cited by Coover, who made an attempt to investigate mediumistic phenomena was Robert Hare, a chemist and emeritus professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, who had invented the oxyhydrogen blow-pipe. He started out to destroy the delusion of Spiritualism using spring balances and other equipment, and, to his surprise, like Judge Edmonds, became a supporter of Spiritualism (Doyle, n.d./1930, p. 172). In 1854, the American Association for the Advancement of Science "boycotted and bullied him" (Doyle, n.d./1930, p. 172).

Almost 20 years after the Rochester rappings, the scientific attitude in America still had not changed. In a review of a book on Spiritualist phenomena which William James wrote for the *Boston Daily Advertiser* in 1869, he described the Spiritualist reaction to this attitude as

a personal disdain for the "scientific man" who stands inertly aloof in his pretentious enlightenment. Scientific men seem to demand that spiritualists should *come* and demonstrate to them the truth of their doctrine, by something little short of a surgical operation upon their intellects. (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 20)

What was James's own feeling? "The present attitude of society on this whole question," he wrote, "is as extraordinary and anomalous as it is discreditable to the pretensions of an age which prides itself on enlightenment and the diffusion of knowledge" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 21). In addition to the thousands of people who favored the phenomena and the other thousands who condemned them, he referred to the "other tens of thousands [who] are content to stand passively in the dark between these two hosts and in doubt, the matter meanwhile being—rightfully considered—one of really transcendent interest." James urged "experiments in which everything should be protected from the possibility of deceit" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 21).

The impetus for serious collective psychical research in America was not to come from that country. Although Spiritualism was as native to America as its national emblem, the majestic bald eagle, and its phenomena demanded close scrutiny, the movement could not stimulate sufficient scholarly or scientific interest for a proper examination. Nor could the strange stories of ghosts and hauntings and precognitive dreams and visions which had been told and retold through the ages make American scholars and scientists less "inertly aloof"; the same could be said for the phenomenon of animal magnetism or mesmerism, now termed hypnotism, whose

techniques had been used by the Viennese doctor, Franz Mesmer, and which had aroused the attention of thinking people on the Continent. It seemed that scholarly and scientific people in nineteenth century America, like many of those in America in the twentieth, were determined to keep their doors and windows tightly closed to prevent the odor of puzzling and disturbing experiences and events from creeping into their sanctuaries.

In the land of castles and black and white half-timbered cottages where Victoria reigned as queen, Spiritualism had invaded from America to become king over the masses. But now, in opposition to America, its phenomena, along with other psychical phenomena and Mesmer's discovery, also caught the eyes and ears of the intelligentsia. The forerunners of the ASPR were about to evolve.

At first, individual efforts were made to investigate these phenomena. Edward White Benson, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury, and three clergyman friends diverted themselves of an evening by making some polite inquiries about psychic phenomena. In 1851, these little diversions resulted in Benson's founding a "Ghost Society" in Cambridge (Salter, 1970, pp. 5-6). The chief importance of this Society lay in its having interested one of its members, Henry Sidgwick, in psychical research.

The year 1869 stands out not only as the year a committee was authorized by the London Dialectical Society to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism (Salter, 1970, p. 9), but as the year of the "star-light walk" (Myers, 1900a, p. 454) which marked a turning point in the life of Frederic W. H. Myers. Having gone in 1860 to Cambridge, where Sidgwick taught philosophy, and become his pupil, Myers walked and talked with his professor one evening under the stars. Given some hope by Sidgwick that phenomena such as ghosts might lead to further knowledge of an unseen reality, Myers resolved to pursue with Sidgwick the quest of these phenomena. Without their close friendship, an organization for the collective investigation of psychical phenomena would not have come into being in England (Salter, 1970, p. 6) at that time, and the stage would not have been set for the eventual birth of the ASPR.

Nor would the (English) Society for Psychical Research have been formed in 1882 if it had not been for Sir William Barrett, a professor of physics at the Royal College of Science in Dublin. The "ever reliable" (Haynes, 1982, p. 5) Eleanor Sidgwick was persuaded that Barrett was not merely a founder of the SPR but, she wrote, "one may say the founder, for I believe the first idea of founding a society at all was his" (E. M. Sidgwick, 1925, p. 413). Later she repeated: "The idea of founding a Society to investigate our subjects . . . [was] Professor W. F. Barrett's" (1932, p. 1). Fraser Nicol (1972), however, challenged as a myth the notion that

it was Barrett's idea and argued the idea was actually that of Edmund Dawson Rogers—a Spiritualist, as was Barrett—and that Rogers should be recognized as the chief founder of the SPR. For his part, Barrett (1917, p. 18n) credited Rogers only with having "co-operated" in the formation of the organization. Whether or not the idea was Rogers', it was not he who took any action. As W. H. Salter described it: "The initiative was taken by Barrett" (Salter, 1970, p. 11). If Barrett was not the founder of the SPR, surely it was his energy that generated interest in it and stimulated the people who were to be its key figures. At the least, Barrett should be recognized as the moving force behind the formation of the SPR. After the British Association refused to publish a paper he had presented to it describing an experiment in telepathy he had conducted (E. M. Sidgwick, 1932, p. 1, note 3), Barrett became keenly aware that the hour had struck for removing the investigation of psychical phenomena from the hands of individuals and for placing it in those of a scientific society. It became apparent to him, as he wrote later, that there was an "urgent need for a Society which should preserve continuity of records of investigation and a high standard of experimental work" (Barrett, 1917, p. xi).

Barrett had all the qualities of a learned used car salesman. He "had in a remarkable degree a power of stirring up in others interest in subjects which interested himself," wrote Mrs. Sidgwick, and "considerable power of exposition, both as a lecturer and as a writer" (1925, p. 415). These powers were necessary if the need he saw was to be fulfilled. Although Henry Sidgwick, Myers, and Gurney all had been interested in investigating psychic phenomena and had done so in previous years, they had had "disappointing results" (E. M. Sidgwick, 1925, p. 413) and "had become somewhat discouraged" (Haynes, 1982, p. 5). It was the "stimulating effect of . . . [Barrett's] zeal and energy that largely influenced Sidgwick, Myers and Gurney to renewed interest" (E. M. Sidgwick, 1925, p. 413). So when Barrett began to sell to Sidgwick, Myers and Edmund Gurney the notion of forming a society, we should not be surprised to learn that, after a conference was convened in London on January 6, 1882, to take up founding the SPR, its actual foundation was accomplished on February 20 with Henry Sidgwick as its president and Barrett as one of its vice-presidents ("Objects of the Society," 1882, p. 3).

BIRTH AND SICKNESS (1884-1887)

Barrett's dynamism and unceasing desire to provoke interest in psychical research and the need for a society accompanied him when he visited the United States two years later. Speaking at

meetings in Philadelphia and Boston as energetically and convincingly as he had done in London, he succeeded in arousing the interest of scholars in Boston in the formation of a society. On September 23, 1884, a preliminary meeting was held to consider the proposal. Barrett did not fail to be present. He outlined the aims and work of the English Society and then said:

Out of alchemy came chemistry; and out of astrology, astronomy. There may be much in these extraordinary accounts of second-sight, thought-reading, apparitions, and so forth, fit only to ridicule; but if there are any facts at the bottom, we want to find them. ("Circular No. 1," 1885, p. 3)

Foremost among the scholars attending the meeting and giving close attention to what Barrett had to say was William James. But even before Barrett's American tour, psychical research was a subject toward which James gravitated, both as a psychologist hoping to discover new aspects of human personality, and as a philosopher concerned with the place of the human being in the cosmos. The first concrete evidence of his budding interest was presented in the aforementioned review, which he wrote in 1869 when still a student at Harvard Medical School. He was not impressed by the "Summerland" of the Spiritualists, where discarnate spirits play happily on floating harps and pianos, and was led to express sympathy with the comment: "If this is the spirit-world, it is much better to be a respectable pig and accept annihilation, than to be cursed with such an immortality" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 22). Nor was he impressed with vague descriptions of Spiritualist phenomena. He wanted controlled experiments, but, except for the research of the rare scientist like Hare, none were being conducted in America. James's visit to England in 1882, however, renewed his interest in psychical research as he met and became good friends with Edmund Gurney and even "co-operated" in the establishment of the SPR there (Haynes, 1982, p. 178). When Barrett came to Boston, therefore, he found at least one scholar in his audience already a strong supporter.

As a result of the meeting, a committee of nine, which included James, was established with full powers to weigh and dispose of the matter. Several meetings were held by the committee during October and November 1884, a constitution was agreed upon, and invitations sent to scientific people to join the contemplated society. Eighty indicated they would do so. By December 19, the formal organization of the American Society for Psychical Research was virtually completed and a Council partly elected. A Committee on Work composed of James and Henry Bowditch of Harvard issued circulars to members to invite volunteers for com-

mittees of investigation ("Circular No. 2," 1885, p. 5). At another meeting on January 8, 1885, the organization was complete. Barrett, accomplishing what the entire Spiritualist movement could not, had sold the idea in America as well as he had in England. The ASPR had been formed as an independent organization with purposes similar to those of the Society in London. The Council of the newly-born Society issued the following statement:

The Council of the American society feel that the evidence published by the English society is of a nature not to be ignored by scientific men, especially where the alleged facts would, if real, permit verification, and the conditions allow control.

In other branches of human experience, the publication of observations, made with as much apparent care, and under such distinguished auspices, immediately invites many careful students to the work of corroboration or disproof. The personal ability and character of the English investigators, and the accuracy of their methods, if they do not compel the doubter forthwith to believe their conclusions, seem at least to make it impossible for him dogmatically to deny them, without support from something more solid than general presumptions about the order of nature, and the fallibility of human testimony.

The Council of the American society therefore feels that the duty can be no longer postponed of systematically repeating observations similar to those made in England, with a view to confirming them if true, to definitely pointing out the sources of error in them if false. If true, they are of value, and the tracing of their limits becomes a scientific duty. If false, no time should be lost in publishing their refutation; for, if allowed long to stand uncontradicted, their only effect will be to re-enforce powerfully the popular drift toward superstition. ("Circular No. 1," 1885, pp. 3-4)

As a distinguished member of the faculty at Harvard, James may have attracted scholars and scientists to the fledgling organization. Its first officers, however, did not constitute any exclusive Harvard club. The ASPR's first President was Professor Simon Newcomb, head of the department of astronomy at Johns Hopkins University, whom James helped convince that he should take the office. With obvious satisfaction, James wrote in a letter of February 1, 1885, "I think Newcomb, for president, was an uncommon hit" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 64). Three vice-presidents, Professor Edward C. Pickering, Dr. Bowditch, and Dr. Charles S. Minot all came from Harvard, but two—Professor G. Stanley Hall, President of Clark University, and Professor George S. Fullerton of the University of Pennsylvania—did not.

Besides the birth of the ASPR during this period, another development of extreme importance occurred. In the autumn of 1885, Mrs. L. E. Piper, a Boston housewife of limited education, who was

to become the trance-medium most investigated by the English and American societies over the next thirty years, was discovered by William James. James's mother-in-law, Mrs. Gibbens, had visited Mrs. Piper and related how the medium had given facts and names which defied normal explanation. James's sister-in-law had gone to the medium the next day, and she, in turn, reported even more incomprehensible results. James could resist no longer. He went with his wife to find out for himself. His letter to Myers described his initial impression on that autumn day:

The names of none of us up to this meeting had been announced to Mrs. P. and Mrs. J. and I were, of course, careful to make no reference to our relatives who had preceded. The medium, however, when entranced, repeated most of the names of "spirits" whom she had announced on the two former occasions and added others. The names came with difficulty, and were only gradually made perfect. My wife's father's name of Gibbens was announced first as Niblin, then as Giblin. A child Herman (whom we had lost the previous year) had his name spelt out as Herrin. I think that in no case were both Christian and surnames given on this visit. But the facts predicated of the persons named made it in many instances impossible not to recognize the particular individuals who were talked about. . . .

My impression after this first visit was, that Mrs. P. was either possessed of supernatural powers, or knew the members of my wife's family by sight and had by some lucky coincidence become acquainted with such a multitude of their domestic circumstances as to produce the startling impression which she did. (1890, p. 652)

James witnessed 12 more of Mrs. Piper's trances and brought 24 sitters to her. Fifteen reported surprise at the communications they received. Of the 15, 7 were connected with the same family. In a report to the ASPR, James wrote:

The medium showed a most startling intimacy with this family's affairs, talking of many matters known to no one outside, and which gossip could not possibly have conveyed to her ears. The details would prove nothing to the reader, unless printed *in extenso*, with full notes by the sitters. It reverts, after all, to personal conviction. My own conviction is not evidence, but it seems fitting to record it. I am persuaded of the medium's honesty, and of the genuineness of her trance; and although at first disposed to think that the "hits" she made were either lucky coincidences, or the result of knowledge on her part of who the sitter was and of his or her family affairs, I now believe her to be in possession of a power as yet unexplained. (1886, pp. 103-104)

Dissonance Within the Society

But the period also bore witness to dissonant developments which can be made clearer by comparisons with the English Soci-

ety. Although Barrett was the moving force in the formation of the ASPR, he was only the midwife. The English SPR was the parent of the ASPR. Yet the child did not have the same spirit as the parent. The contrasting juxtaposition of the two is shown first by comparing Henry Sidgwick's inaugural address as president of the London organization with Simon Newcomb's as president of the one in Boston.

In 1882, H. Sidgwick had emphasized that the dispute concerning the reality of the phenomena the SPR had been established to investigate was nothing less than a scandal. The aim of the English society, he had said, was to make a systematic effort to remove this scandal by investigating the facts "without any foregone conclusion as to their nature" (1882, p. 8). But when Newcomb rose before the American group to present his invited address in 1886 on the subject of telepathy, he discouraged the investigation of this phenomenon. Newcomb had originally accepted membership in the ASPR, he said, because at first he had supposed that a case had been made for telepathy. But when he studied the work of the parent society in England, he found that the phenomenon was not what he had supposed and that "any ground which might have existed for believing thought-transference to be a reality" had been "almost entirely removed" (1886, p. 83). Thought was a bodily function and incapable of transfer over any distance. But granting that it could be transferred, Newcomb asked: "How is it that with such ample opportunities of experiment extending through [the] centuries, and such industry as has been devoted to the subject here and in England through the last two years, no living person knows any more about the conditions of transference to-day than men did a thousand years ago?" (1886, p. 84). He then placed the investigation of telepathy on the same level with looking for some different kind of gold: It would be a waste of time.

His address did not display Sidgwick's "fair and open-minded spirit" (Prince, 1930, p. 32), and revealed, at the very outset, certain ominous cracks in the receptacle into which psychical research had been poured from England.

There was another contrast as well. In a later presidential address, Sidgwick said: "There is not one of us who would not feel ten times more interest in proving the action of intelligences other than those of living men, than in proving communication of human minds in an abnormal way" (1889, p. 401). But the Americans felt ten times less interest in such proof. Complaints were made in 1885, in fact, that some of the prominent names in the ASPR had an "anti-spiritual" bias. Wrote one observer: "What? an orthodox college professor acknowledge the credentials of a spirit and still retain his job? A physician hobnob with the ghosts and keep hold

of even the ghost of a practice? Lor' bless us, what are we coming to?" (Bayley, 1920, p. 435).

In a letter written in 1885, James denied the charge of anti-spiritual bias. But, at the same time, he revealed a third difference between parent and child. A dualistic philosophy was behind the search for new facts which the founders of the SPR had undertaken. This philosophy seems evident in the just-quoted words of Sidgwick, and it shines through those of Myers, when the time came for him to deliver his presidential address in 1900. The weightiest service psychical research could render, he said, would be "to prove the preamble of all religions"—the existence of a spiritual world (1900b, p. 117). James's letter, on the other hand, shows that, while the efforts of the English group were driven by a theory it hoped to support, the Americans had no such rudder steering them and no theory either to defend or refute. "No theoretic basis, or bias of any sort whatever, so far as I can make out, exists in [the ASPR]," wrote James. "The one thing that has struck me all along in the men who have had to do with it is their complete colorlessness philosophically. They seem to have no preferences for any general *ism* whatever" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, pp. 63-64).

There was another difference between the two societies. The English organization consisted of workers, the most active and productive of whom lived in close proximity to one another. Distance presented no problem in their collaboration and in the conduct of the affairs of their Society. But it did for the Americans. Newcomb, for one, complained: "It has been my misfortune to reside so far from the seat of the society, that I have not been able to take that active part in [ASPR's] work which would have been appropriate to my office" (1886, p. 63). A further difference ran even deeper. The SPR was made up of a group of enthusiastic, extraordinary and dedicated people, many of whom, like Sidgwick, Myers, and Gurney, were wealthy enough to allow them to take the time to engage in the work of psychical research. Excluding James, men of such caliber and disposition did not exist in the American group. As James observed: "One cannot by mere outward organization make much progress in matters scientific. Societies can back men of genius, but can never take their place" (1897/1956, pp. 306-307).

In spite of these difficulties and differences, the ASPR pursued several avenues of inquiry as follows.

THE EARLY WORK OF THE ASPR

Telepathy

One of the first pursuits was thought-transference, for which process Myers coined the word "telepathy." Sensitives who might

be available for scientific experiments were sought, but none came forward in response to appeals by the Committee investigating this subject ("Report of the Committee on Thought-Transference," 1885). Tests with digits, dice, cards, and colors were conducted with volunteers. Returns from these tests were subjected to a mathematical analysis which did not support the existence of telepathy. Minot (1886) contributed an interesting analysis of unconscious number-habits agents and percipients might have followed in the digit tests so that the tests, while negative as to telepathy, could be regarded as a positive contribution made by the ASPR because they showed how habit is a factor in mental processes.

Hypnosis

Another line of inquiry included hypnotism, which was the subject of experiments conducted by James and Carnochan (1886) with students at Harvard University. They made some observations concerning the hypnotic trance, adding, "the comparatively small amount of time at our disposition" and other factors "make it impossible to report any thing definitive" (James and Carnochan, 1886, p. 95).

Mediumship

A committee of four was to have studied mediumship. But it had "no definitely concluded piece of work to offer" (James, 1886, p. 102). James, who had resigned from the committee, rejoined it and divided his time between two mediums. One was Helen Berry, a physical medium who was said to materialize spirit forms. But after attending 12 seances himself and sending friends to others, no spirit forms having appeared, James could offer no opinion regarding the phenomena. At his first sitting at which two forms did appear, he did not consider the experiment satisfactory. The most impressive work done by the ASPR in this period was James's discovery of the second medium, Mrs. Piper, on whom he tried experiments with hypnosis and with telepathy in which cards and diagrams were used.

Reichenbach's Phenomena

The researches of Baron Karl von Reichenbach are not very well known today. He noticed that many people reported peculiar sensations when a magnet was moved near their bodies. The possibility of the existence of a magnetic sense interested the Americans

as much as it had the English. Experiments were conducted by Joseph Jastrow and George F. H. Nuttall (1886) to test the magnetic sense. In their experiments, a subject placed his head between the poles of a massive electro-magnet. The results were negative and caused the experimenters to conclude that there was no basis for the belief that a sensitivity existed for a magnetic field. Reichenbach also observed that, in a dark room, some people were able to see flames coming from the poles of a magnet. W. H. Pickering, whose eyesight was unusually good in the dark, tested himself in a dark room with a powerful electro-magnet. He saw no flames and concluded that, if there were any flames, they produced no effect on the senses (Pickering, 1886, p. 127).

Apparitions and Haunted Houses

A committee to investigate apparitions and haunted houses circulated a request for information concerning such cases (Committee on Apparitions and Haunted Houses, 1886).

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

While the *ASPR Proceedings* for 1885 and 1886 show that the Society tried to make progress, it did not make "much progress," as James said. Some experiments were completed, but what was done consisted mainly of preliminary reports and preparations for research. Membership declined because, like James, others perceived little progress (Hyslop, 1919, p. 34). The gloomy situation led James to write on October 4, 1886 to G. Croom Robertson: "I mailed you t'other day Part II of the *Proceedings* of the American Society for Psychical Research, a rather sorry 'exhibit' from the 'President's' address down. There is no one in the Society who can give any time to it, and I suspect it will die by the new year" (Murphy and Ballou, 1960, p. 66).

THE FINAL STAGES

Richard Hodgson

The ASPR was indeed in a sickly condition and fast approaching its last stages. Radical and immediate surgery had to be performed. The "surgeon" came in the person of Richard Hodgson, who had served on the Council of the SPR and had been chosen to investigate Madame Blavatsky in 1884. R. Pearsall Smith, one of the ASPR's Council members, who had met Hodgson in 1886 when the two had sailed down the Thames from London and Oxford, saw in the mind of the Australian the "scalpel" needed by the ASPR.

Hodgson was to confess later that Smith "was 'taken' with my exposure of Mad. B. and was anxious to get me for the American Society" (Hodgson, 1887).

Proposed by Smith, Hodgson was offered the Secretaryship of the ASPR. At first, he refused, but at the urging of Sidgwick, he accepted the post at a salary of £300 a year. He left England in April 1887, stayed with Smith in Philadelphia for a few days, and then, after another visit, proceeded in May to Boston where he busied himself with correspondence, circulars, and other work. He did exactly what was needed. As he said, "I have practically to 'boss' the ASPR myself" (Hodgson, 1887).

But James had something else in mind for Hodgson. Almost immediately after Hodgson had arrived, James made an appointment for Hodgson to have a sitting with Mrs. Piper. It was to be the first sitting of many more which were to extend over eighteen years.

Merger and Dissolution (1889-1906)

The work of the ASPR, which had proceeded at the pace of the proverbial snail, now accelerated. The *ASPR Proceedings* issued in 1889 showed "a moderate progress" made in the investigation of mediumistic phenomena (Warren, 1889, p. 320) and experiments in telepathy (Brown and Brown, 1889, pp. 322-349). There were other interesting contributions. One was Minot's report (1889) on diagram-tests in which post cards had been distributed with the request that 10 diagrams be drawn on the card without receiving suggestions from other people. Over 500 cards were received with circles, squares, triangles, crosses, diamonds, faces, etc. The similarity of the visual images was so great that it led Minot to the conclusion that "even in trifles we differ but little. . . . [W]e are in mental matters all pure communists" (1889, p. 314). Outstanding, too, was the report of the Committee on Phantasms and Presentiments prepared by Josiah Royce (1889). It presented many reports of experiences illustrating subjective hallucinations, unconscious cerebration (for example, solving problems that could not be solved in the normal waking state), and pseudo-presentiments (such as dreams warning of a calamity or death), and coincidences. Such cases suggested that mental processes could not be explained either by telepathy or clairvoyance. The *Proceedings* also contained the final shot taken by Edmund Gurney (1889) at Charles S. Peirce, the American philosopher, who in an earlier *Proceedings* (1887) had assailed Gurney, Myers, and Podmore's two-volume *Phantasms of the Living*. Peirce had enumerated objections to the cases reported in *Phantasms* and attacked their validity as evidence and

the conclusions drawn. Gurney's paper criticized Peirce's arguments as fallacious and as mistaken concerning the facts.

In November 1889, at the request of James and Hodgson, Mrs. Piper went to England to give 83 sittings for Sir Oliver Lodge, Walter Leaf, and Myers which produced valuable evidence of survival. She provided Myers with what he believed was the evidence he had sought for so long to establish that survival after death was a reality. She returned to the U.S. in 1890 to receive an annual stipend from the ASPR as Hodgson continued to study her. His lengthy studies of Mrs. Piper resulted in two reports (1892, 1898) which, together with reports by James and Hyslop, constituted the main investigations of this medium in the United States and emerge as the only really notable achievement of the ASPR during this first period of its history. Hodgson began as a skeptic who considered the evidence of survival Mrs. Piper had furnished to be insufficient. But when messages from "G.P.," a young man who had died accidentally, began to appear through Mrs. Piper, Hodgson's second report expressed the belief that she had received genuine communications from "G.P." (Hodgson, 1898).

James had prophesied that the ASPR would die by 1887. It managed to survive 1887 under Hodgson's management but did not continue much longer. By the time Mrs. Piper had returned to America, the ASPR had been forced to abandon its independence and to ask in December 1889 to be converted into a branch of the London Society. The causes of its demise, which even Hodgson's scalpel could not root out, are not hard to discover. It died partly because it had achieved little except for the Piper mediumship and support fell away from it. It died partly because its workers lacked the animus of the English workers. It died, wrote Dr. Weston D. Bayley, "partly of fright when some of its illustrious members began to realize that after all there might be real spooks in Spiritualism; and heavens! it would not do for such as they to really find 'em out without the logical necessity of conceding to them official recognition" (Bayley, 1920, p. 435).

Part of the reason for Mrs. Piper's trip to England was the poverty of the ASPR, a further cause of its lost independence. There was not even enough money to prepare complete stenographic records of sittings with her. A time of economic depression in the United States had affected the finances of the ASPR adversely. It could not go on without monetary assistance. Although there may have been some resentment and friction because the American branch had wealthy members (Gauld, 1968, p. 148), Sidgwick and Myers sent money from England to subsidize it and sometimes to pay Hodgson's salary (Gauld, 1968, pp. 145-146, 258), and the Society in London advanced funds to it out of a

£2,700 legacy left by Myers' deceased brother, Dr. Arthur T. Myers, as well as £200 from Mrs. Myers, Sr. ("Annual Business Meeting," 1895, p. 18).

Then came Richard Hodgson's sudden death on December 20, 1905 (E. M. Sidgwick, 1907, p. 356)—a terrible blow. The problem of finding a competent successor to manage the ASPR caused many in England to think in terms of discontinuing the American branch. But, if it were discontinued, what would be done with its records? What of the future of the valued Mrs. Piper? What disposition would be made of the Piper material? Should the mass of records of sittings which Hodgson had collected be dispatched to the SPR in London to be reported in its *Proceedings* and *Journal* while the detailed records were kept in the SPR's files—or should they be left with the Americans?

This last question became a fiery issue between London and Boston which James, then ill in California, diplomatically described as "a state of strain" (1909, p. 31). The English believed the records were rightfully theirs and wanted them. From a legal point of view, they may have been entirely correct. They were the parent society, and Hodgson, the secretary of the American branch, had been their officer. But the Americans resisted. Some were sitters who objected vigorously that the removal of the records of their sittings would deprive them of what they regarded as private property, and they claimed that the records could not be published without their consent. Another person who resisted was familiar to the SPR because, in 1901, his monumental report on Mrs. Piper's trance communications had appeared in its *Proceedings* (Hyslop, 1901).

James H. Hyslop

It was James Hervey Hyslop. In 1889, then a professor of logic and ethics at Columbia University in New York City, Hyslop had become attracted to psychical research when he heard Hodgson present a paper in New York (Bayley, 1920, p. 343). By 1900, he had taken his stand on psychical research. Once, in bitterness, he told Professor William Romaine Newbold that, as a result, he had been made "an outcast from his profession and excluded . . . from every chair of philosophy in the country" (Newbold, 1920, p. 493).

Hyslop did all in his power to frustrate London's claim on the Piper records. In a letter to his friend, Dr. Bayley, he confided his plan:

It has occurred to me to get the option of publishing such records from all sitters I can in order to checkmate the English move. Will you give me that option on your records? I do not ask for the right,

but only the option at present that we may present a formidable front to any vandalism they may want to commit. . . . Don't waste any time in the matter. I know two other parties who have had almost hundreds of sittings and if we can secure this option we can negotiate with the English on equal terms. (Hyslop, 1906a)

Hyslop also proposed to send a circular letter to all members of the American branch to let them know of the intention of the London group with respect to the Piper material and to give them an opportunity to lodge a protest. Hyslop himself could not do so openly. "I shall not take any active part in this, but remain outside," he said. "As I am a candidate for the temporary Secretaryship I cannot act in the matter" (1906a). He had hoped to secure the appointment as Hodgson's successor in order to retain the Piper records and to carry out a drive to increase membership in, and obtain an endowment for, the American branch. But he was not sanguine about his chances of getting the appointment. As he wrote in another letter to Bayley: "I was a candidate for Secretary and I learned that the English Council will have nothing to do with me. They think me indiscreet, and if progressive and constructive work is indiscretion I plead guilty and proud of it" (Hyslop, 1906b).

The problem that confronted the English and Americans, however, was far more grave than the controversy over the Piper material, heated as it was. The fundamental problem was whether or not to dissolve the American branch. The most formidable objection to dissolution was that it might sound the death-knell for collective psychical research in America.

It was to confer with the representatives of its American branch that the London SPR dispatched J.G. Piddington to Boston in May, 1906 ("Report of the Council for the year 1906," 1907, p. 23). One of these representatives was the "indiscreet" man with whom the English wanted nothing to do: Hyslop.

Hyslop's feelings about meeting with anyone from the SPR were disclosed in a letter he had written Bayley a few weeks before. "My reasons for not encouraging a meeting at present are these," he said. "First the English [sic] Council is not amenable to reason on anything American. They have contempt for all Americans and will stick sternly for the legal aspects of the matter. Then Associates have no votes and this only strengthens the power which the Council will use" (Hyslop, 1906b).

But the English knew, and he knew, that his presence at any such meeting was essential if the problem of dissolution were to be solved. Years before, he had recognized the impoverished state of the American branch and the need for trying to gain financial support for its work. It had seemed to him that the study of two

fields should be undertaken: psychopathology and psychical research. In December 1900, he published an article which he hoped would produce an endowment of one million dollars, but it met only with indifference on the part of the scientific community and the general public (Hyslop, 1907, pp. 1-2). His appeals for funds to the Carnegie Institute were unsuccessful as well.

Two years later he resigned from Columbia. Stories had been circulated that the cause of his resignation had been his openly declared support of psychical research, but the real reason was given in a letter written to Hyslop by Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University:

The statement that your personal beliefs as to psychic research or your interest in that subject had anything to do with your resignation from the teaching staff of Columbia in 1902 is a grotesque absurdity. The facts are that your health was at that time seriously impaired. . . . It was for this reason, and in order to restore your health by leading an outdoor life, that you withdrew, of your own accord, from the Department of Philosophy here with the goodwill of everybody. (Butler, 1914)

Hyslop's withdrawal from Columbia because of tuberculosis and the necessity of a long rest gave him the opportunity to concentrate his efforts on the formation of an independent organization which would not compete with the SPR's American branch but which would ultimately merge with it if sufficient funds could be raised. His scheme received wide support. James wrote to tell Hyslop that he thought it to be a wise plan (Hyslop, 1907, pp. 33-34). Other letters in praise of the idea came to Hyslop from Charles Richet (Hyslop, 1907, p. 32) and Camille Flammarion (Hyslop, 1907, pp. 44-45) of France and Max Dessoir (Hyslop, 1907, pp. 32-33) of Germany as well as from influential Americans like Columbia University's Butler (Hyslop, 1907, p. 40). The publisher, Isaac K. Funk, also allied himself with Hyslop. "In a small book which I purpose to write during the summer, urging a deeper interest on the part of the public in psychic research," he wrote to Hyslop, "I want to give some of the strongest reasons I can think of for a comprehensive support of your Institute idea. I think I can turn over to you some hundreds of members" (Funk, 1906).

When Hyslop discussed his plan with Hodgson in 1904, the two had concurred. Indeed, Hodgson liked the idea very much. "Had Hodgson lived," said Bayley, "he undoubtedly would have entered into . . . [Hyslop's scheme] with all of his energy" (1920, pp. 435-436).

Later in that same year, Hyslop took the first active steps to implement his idea by organizing the American Institute for Scientific Research (Hyslop, 1907, p. 3) and by going out to try to find

funds for it. Numerous private meetings were held with interested persons in 1904. In 1905 larger meetings were held in the sumptuous Waldorf-Astoria Hotel as word of Hyslop's plan spread and interest in it increased. In consequence, a fund of \$25,000 was attained and the Institute was in readiness; Hyslop's plan was about to be fulfilled.

With Hodgson's unexpected death, Hyslop's entire scheme was severely threatened. Everything came to a standstill pending the determination of the fate of the American branch. In making that determination, the SPR had to deal with Hyslop whether they liked it or not. He was the man of the hour. "I am fighting for the Institute," declared Hyslop, and he gave the SPR a "choice between two policies. Either cooperation along the old lines or the abandonment of this country" (1906b). What if the SPR would not agree to this ultimatum? Hyslop had made up his mind. "I shall never touch psychics again if they do not come to terms. I shall return all the money I have gotten and abandon psychics forever. I cannot do it alone, and if others will not cooperate I shall neither cooperate nor go it alone" (1906b). But, of course, Hyslop knew exactly which choice he wanted the English Society to make:

What I must first do is to get them to decide to abandon the Branch, if they won't let me organize it for a large membership and more funds. When they have thus committed themselves we can take more active measures. . . . It is not the Branch that we want to save, but the work and the English policy will neither save the Branch nor the work. With them out of the way we can have a large Society here with live workers in case we can get money, and I am confident that I can get the money. (Hyslop, 1906b)

This was the situation confronting Piddington and the representatives of the American branch in May 1906. As a result of their deliberations and negotiations, a document dated May 16 was drawn up and signed by Piddington on behalf of the SPR and by James, Hyslop, and George B. Dorr as vice-presidents of the American branch, and duly issued. It stated: "After full and anxious consideration it has been decided to dissolve the American Branch of the Society for Psychical Research at the end of the current year" ("Dissolution of the American Branch," 1907, p. 1).

Hyslop had carried the day. But the English had surrendered their branch in America only because they were satisfied that dissolution would not mean the surrender of organized psychical research in this country.

The issue generated by the Piper material which had caused tempers to flare was "amicably disposed of" (Bayley, 1920, p. 436). The records would be delivered to London for study "under guarantee of suitable privacy" (Bayley, 1920, p. 436). New ar-

rangements were made for Mrs. Piper. "Nineteen heavy cases" containing all other records were given to Hyslop.

The fortunes and future of the ASPR were now to ride on the shoulders of a frail, tubercular professor who had a dream.

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Survival Research Foundation

P.O. Box 8565

Pembroke Pines, Florida 33024