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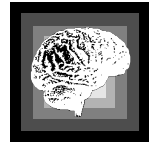
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‘Visions of the Dying’, by James H Hyslop (1907)

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With an introduction by

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Abstract

Deathbed visions have been of interest to psychical researchers and others since the nineteenth century. This Classic Text presents a reprint of an article on ‘Visions of the Dying’ published in 1907 in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* by philosopher and psychical researcher James H. Hyslop (1854–1920). The article was Hyslop’s attempt to define the topic as one belonging to the agenda of psychical research and to request additional cases for further study. An introduction to this Classic Text sets it in the context of previous writings on the subject, of Hyslop’s psychical research work, and of his writings about deathbed visions after 1907.

Keywords

Deathbed visions, hallucinations, James H. Hyslop, psychical research, survival of death, visions of the dying

Introduction

In his book, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, physicist and psychical researcher William F. Barrett (1844–1925) referred to ‘some remarkable instances where the dying person, before the moment of transition from earth, appears to see and recognise some of his deceased relatives or friends’ (Barrett, 1917: 158). He believed that ‘in some rare cases, just before death the veil is partly drawn aside and a glimpse of the loved ones who have passed over is given to the dying person’ (p. 160).

The purpose of the present Introduction and the Classic Text is to contribute to the history of the subject, and of hallucinations in general, by presenting the text of an article about deathbed visions by philosopher and psychical researcher James H. Hyslop (1907e). While this was by no means the first discussion of deathbed visions, Hyslop’s paper was influential in bringing the topic to the

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attention of psychical researchers, as well as psychologists and others. As such, the work contributed to the establishment of deathbed visions as a type of experience needing research, particularly for those interested in parapsychological and spiritual aspects of the phenomenon.

Deathbed visions

Writing in his 1858 autobiography, American Unitarian preacher Theodore Clapp (1792–1866) recollected the visions of a dying woman: ‘I was standing by the bed of a young lady in her last moments, when she called to me and her mother, saying, “Do you not see my sister (who had died of yellow fever a few weeks before) *there?*” pointing upwards. “There are angels with her. She has come to take me to heaven”.’ (Clapp, 1858: 124). Deathbed visions like this have been known from antiquity, as seen in Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* (1911/2010). My overview of the topic, however, will be limited to publications that appeared from the nineteenth century to parts of the twentieth, a topic reviewed by Rogo (1978). Although most of the nineteenth-century literature about dying and deathbed scenes had little about specific cases of visions (e.g. Clark, 1851; Thompson, 1851), others have acknowledged the existence of the phenomenon and presented various points of view. Similar to the large literature about apparitions which covered mainly apparitions of the dead, discussions on the topic fell into two main camps: authors who explained deathbed visions via conventional processes (hallucinations based on such processes as imagination and brain pathology) and those who were open to the potentially spiritual aspects of the experience (that is, the idea that when experiencers were close to death they actually perceived the deceased) (McCorristine, 2010).

Those who reduced deathbed visions to hallucinations were working within the nineteenth-century tendency to explain all sorts of visions as the function of human imagination or nervous pathology (e.g. Briere de Boismont, 1853; Esquirol, 1838: ch. 2; Hibbert, 1824; Parish, 1897; Tamburini, 1881).¹ This, in turn, was part of a nineteenth-century movement to medicalize, and explain away, old ideas about the soul and other unusual experiences. This tendency, as Goldstein (1987) has argued in the case of French psychiatry, involved the appropriation of old phenomena, among them accounts of possession. As another author stated, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–93) and many others ‘were evangelical in their atheism and intent on transforming the sacred – ... religious ecstasy, demonic possession, saintliness, stigmata, and faith cures ... – into the profane’ (Hecht, 2003: 254). Similar processes, but not so directly related to religion, were present in the many attempts to explain rationally all kinds of unusual, spiritualistic and psychic phenomena published in other countries (e.g. Hammond, 1876; Maudsley, 1897).

In the *Popular Science Monthly*, Spencer (1881: 398) wrote:

It is not an uncommon occurrence for the dying, after lying some hours in a semi-conscious condition, to start up suddenly, and, with glowing face, point eagerly to some object invisible to the bystanders, and with animated voice and gesture state that they behold the glories of heaven, or the familiar countenance of some friend long since dead.

This author, like several others (e.g. Hibbert, 1824: 110–11; Maudsley, 1897: 129–31; Newham, 1830: 426–7), believed that deathbed visions were hallucinations. The same may be said about American clergyman James Monroe Buckley (1836–1920), who emphasized the effects of beliefs and traditions on the content of the visions. In his view, ‘if the dying appear to see anything, it is in harmony with the traditions which they have received’ (Buckley, 1889: 463). Another example was English physician Samuel William Langston Parker (1803–71), who argued that deathbed visions, like many hallucinations, were produced by the imagination. In his view imagination was stimulated by many factors, among them closeness to death (Parker, 1836).

Others presented physiological arguments. An example was a writer who argued that an 'increase in the activity of the circulation through the brain ... may perhaps be ascribed the clairvoyance of the dying ...' (Anon., 1851: 106). This is consistent with the belief of others to the effect that: 'In the act of dying, the nervous energy is concentrated to a focus, and on this account the brain, the organ of the mind, acts with unusual vigour' (Winslow, 1841: 206).

Physiological arguments were further developed by US physician Edward Hammond Clarke (1820–77) in his book *Visions: A Study of False Sight (Pseudopia)*. In his view, during dying 'the ganglia of the brain, just before dissolution, sometimes show their automatic power by phenomena' (Clarke, 1878: 264), frequently hallucinations. There is an exaltation of emotion, memory and thought that, in Clarke's opinion, accounted for deathbed visions. Cerebral cell disintegration may affect visual and auditory centres, producing visions and sounds.²

However, other writers, influenced by the movement of spiritualism, took a more spiritual outlook. In an influential early book about spiritualistic phenomena published in England, *From Matter to Spirit*, writer Sophia de Morgan (1809–92) stated: 'The apparent recognition by the dying of those who have gone before is a common and notorious fact' (De Morgan, 1863: 176).

English poet and spiritualist Thomas Shorter (1823–99) opened his article 'Visions of the dying' with the following.

The closing scenes of earthly life are often among its most instructive and impressive experiences. Standing on the boundary of another world, they catch glimpses of the beautiful beyond. The countenance which had been marked with pain is sometimes suddenly irradiated as though it were already the face of an angel. The gates no longer ajar, seem to be thrown wide open. (Shorter, 1872: 502)

Similarly in her essay, 'The Peak in Darien: The Riddle of Death', Irish social reformer and writer Frances Power Cobbe (1822–1904) presented the visions as a spiritual experience. She speculated that:

it might be possible to ascertain by comparison of numerous instances, whether among those phenomena are any which seem to indicate that the Mind, Soul, or Self, of the expiring person is not undergoing a process of extinction, but exhibiting such tokens as might be anticipated were it entering upon a new phase of existence, and coming into possession of fresh faculties. (Cobbe, 1877: 374)

The essay became better known when it was presented as a final chapter in one of her books (Cobbe, 1882).

Although spiritualists did not give the same attention to deathbed visions as to other manifestations such as mediumship and apparitions of the dead, some of them saw these visions as an indication of a spiritual life and discussed the topic in the spiritualist literature. In addition to Cobbe (1877) and Shorter (1872), many others presented cases (e.g. Anon., 1878; J, 1887; S, 1880; Sherman, 1895: 392–3). Some of them appeared in psychical research papers about apparitions (Gurney and Myers, 1889: 459–60; Myers, 1889: 20–1; Sidgwick, 1885: 92). The topic was also mentioned in Frederic W.H. Myers' (1843–1901) influential *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903, Vol. 2: 31).

The author of the excerpt presented here called attention to reports of the experiences of the dying as a possible argument against materialism, an argument he admitted did not have much support. He mentioned instances of calmness and clearness of mind at death and speculated there may be cases 'in which the person says he has seemed to leave the body' (Hyslop, 1898: 255).³

Regardless of this background, detailed discussions of deathbed visions were rare, and with the exception of a few cases put on record, there was no systematic investigation of the topic during the nineteenth century. An interesting discussion of cases which appeared in the early twentieth

century was the work of Italian student of psychic phenomena, Ernesto Bozzano (1862–1943);⁴ he published a paper, the year before Hyslop's, that brought together many published cases which he arranged in different categories (Bozzano, 1906). He confined his discussion to published cases, making distinctions between those in which only the dying person saw something, those in which only a bystander perceived something, and a few seemingly collective cases. He also, like Cobbe (1877) before him, mentioned cases in which the apparition perceived was of a person not known to be dead by the perceiver. Interestingly, Bozzano's earlier work was not mentioned by Hyslop (1907e) in the paper reprinted here.

Psychical research

Hyslop's (1907e) discussion of visions of the dying took place in the context of a great interest in the study of phenomena referred to during the nineteenth century as spiritualistic, supernormal, psychic, and what William James (1842–1910) called the unclassified residuum in science (James, 1890), namely accounts of apparitions, premonitions, thought transference, unexplained healings and other experiences. The movements of mesmerism – which flourished between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries – and the nineteenth-century development of spiritualism did much to document the existence of these occurrences and to publicize them (for overviews, see: Inglis, 1992; Podmore, 1902). Both movements brought empirical attention to the manifestations, and attempts were made to document them. While these movements contain much that can be called psychical research, the field itself is generally considered to have developed in the late nineteenth century. In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded, and during the next decade it both sponsored and published influential studies of such phenomena as apparitions of the living and the dead, mediumship and thought-transference, as well as articles about hypnosis and dissociation in general (Alvarado, 2002; Gauld, 1968). Many developments took place in other countries, leading to the creation of groups such as the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), organized in the USA at meetings held in Boston in 1884 and 1885 (Anon., 1885).⁵

Some of this work inherited an interest in the issue of survival of death from spiritualism. This interest was expressed in studies of such phenomena as mental mediumship and apparitions of the dead (Hodgson, 1892; Myers, 1889). This, in fact, was a driving force in psychical research up to the first few decades of the twentieth century and influenced the field in more ways than one (Alvarado, 2003).

In addition, psychical research, the context in which Hyslop laboured, presented work to redefine the concept of hallucinations (Le Maléfan, 2008; McCorristine, 2010). That is, some psychical researchers argued that hallucinations could have aspects that could not be reduced to imagination or pathology because the apparitions perceived included verifiable information not known to the perceiver (Gurney, Myers and Podmore, 1886; Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, Podmore and Sidgwick, 1894). To some extent the article by Hyslop reprinted here was an extension of this regarding some deathbed vision cases, and it was a protest against the acceptance by physicians and others of a purely intrapsychic model of visionary experience.

James H. Hyslop

James Herve Hyslop was one of the first Americans to devote his life to psychical research.⁶ Born in 1854 in Xenia, Ohio, Hyslop graduated from Wooster University in 1877, was a student at the University of Leipzig (1882–4), and later obtained degrees from Johns Hopkins University (1887, PhD), and the University of Wooster (1902, LLD). Between 1880 and 1902 he taught philosophy

and psychology at various American universities. His last academic affiliation was with Columbia University.

Among Hyslop's early non-psychical research works in the areas of philosophy and psychology were such books as *Elements of Logic* (1892), *Elements of Ethics* (1895a), *Elements of Psychology* (1895b), *Logic and Argument* (1899a), *Syllabus of Psychology* (1899b) and *Problems of Philosophy* (1905a). He also published in scholarly journals, some examples being articles about aspects of perception (Hyslop, 1903a, 1903b).

Hyslop resigned his position at Columbia University in 1902 due to health problems. Before this he had been engaged in psychical research, had been elected Vice-President of the SPR (Anon., 1900: 162), had published on the subject (e.g. Hyslop, 1900, 1901) and had been discussed in the press for his interest in the topic of survival of death (Anon., 1899). The last of these was related to his study of famous mental medium Leonora E. Piper (1857–1950), with whom he had sittings in the 1890s (Hyslop, 1901).⁷

Earlier in life he had accepted materialism (Hyslop, 1908: 407) after a period of doubt. He reached this decision because he thought he had the support of science, but he later found in psychical research 'the dawn of another day for an idealism that will last as long as scientific method can claim respect' (Hyslop, 1908: 408). He believed that psychical research had provided clear evidence for survival of bodily death (e.g. Hyslop, 1918b, 1919).

Most of Hyslop's psychical research career was conducted within the ASPR, a society which he directed until his death in 1920, and which he attempted, unsuccessfully, to reorganize to include psychopathology in its agenda as well (Hyslop, 1907c). Hyslop also wrote extensively, as seen in several books about psychic phenomena: *Science and a Future Life* (1905b), *Borderland of Psychic Research* (1906a), *Enigmas of Psychic Research* (1906b), *Psychical Research and the Resurrection* (1908), *Psychical Research and Survival* (1913), *Life After Death* (1918b) and *Contact with the Other World* (1919). He also had a track record in magazines and newspapers (e.g. Hyslop, 1900, 1907b, 1907d), but his detailed work as a psychical researcher was published in the journals of the discipline. While he wrote about many topics – spirit obsession cases (Hyslop, 1909), imagery in mental mediumship (Hyslop, 1914a), telepathy experiments (Hyslop, 1914b), clairvoyant experiments (Hyslop, 1916), table levitation studies (Hyslop, 1917) and raps (Hyslop, 1920) – his main contributions were his detailed reports of seances with mental mediums (e.g. Hyslop, 1901, 1910, 1912), some of which remain to this day the most detailed records of their kind. Among other mediums, Hyslop studied the above-mentioned Leonora E. Piper and Minnie Soule (referred to by Hyslop as Mrs Chenoweth, 1867–1936).

Hyslop's interest in the visions of dying persons was consistent with previous psychical research in which attempts were made to redefine the meaning of apparent hallucinatory experiences and to explore phenomena considered to be suggestive of survival of death. His article 'Visions of the Dying' was published in the January 1907 issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, of which Hyslop was editor. The inside cover of the issue includes visions of the dying as one of the phenomena about which the ASPR wished to receive case reports. Other phenomena in which the ASPR was interested were telepathy, clairvoyance, premonitions and mediumistic phenomena (Anon., 1907).

For Hyslop, this article was the beginning of a possible line of investigation. He evidently wanted to put on record the existence of these cases as a particular type of apparition, and then to call for cases. Interestingly, and unfortunately in that it limited the article's influence in establishing the existence of a neglected visionary experience, Hyslop did not present any discussions of the topic in previous publications except to mention a few previously published cases. This is strange, considering that Hyslop was generally well-read in psychical research and related topics. Citation

of this work would have assisted him to establish the type, and would have provided him with more cases, some of them with veridical features.

From the paper it is clear that Hyslop was aware that a larger number of cases were needed for analyses. Consequently, he asked members to send in cases. He also mentioned the importance of the assistance of physicians in this task. Interestingly, he commented on the importance of getting cases in which the dying person recovered, so as to have their testimony.

Hyslop was aware that many cases could be hallucinations with no discarnate agency. Perhaps for this reason he emphasized the importance of veridical cases, such as those cases in which the moribund saw someone he or she did not know had died (Greyson, 2010). But he also mentioned a couple of cases suggesting that a spirit communicating through a medium had appeared to the dying person, cases that were also mentioned by Bozzano (1906).

Perhaps because he did not receive many cases of deathbed visions, Hyslop never followed up the topic systematically. In his book *Psychical Research and the Resurrection* (1908: ch. 4), he reprinted parts of his paper and added new cases, including some he had previously neglected from SPR sources, but his basic message was the same as in the paper and there were no further analyses. Hyslop (1918a) also reprinted the account of deathbed visions of a girl named Daisy Dryden (Dryden, 1909) and presented other cases (Hyslop, 1918c, 1919: 140–8). But he did not advance the topic either conceptually or methodologically. Nonetheless, the paper was cited by later writers and researchers, such as Barrett in his influential *Death-Bed Visions* (1926), and in recent times (Muthumana, Kumari, Kellehear, Kumar and Moosa, 2010–2011).

The Classic Text below is a reprint of Hyslop's (1907e) article.

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Notes

1. On ideas about hallucinations, see: Berrios, 1996: ch. 3; T. James, 1995: Part 2; McCorristine, 2010. Discussions of nineteenth-century attempts to reduce spiritual or supernatural phenomena to conventional physiological and psychological processes include those of: Alvarado and Zingrone, 2012; Gonçalves and Ortega, 2013; Le Maléfan, 1999.
2. Clarke is better known for his controversial book *Sex in Education* (1873), in which he argued that education was a detriment to women's health in general, and especially dangerous for their childbearing potential; see Rosenberg, 1982: ch. 1.
3. Interestingly Hyslop did not write about what today is referred to as the near-death experience (Holden, Greyson and James, 2009), even though there was some literature on the topic around the time when Hyslop was active, e.g. Wiltse, 1889; see Alvarado, 2011.
4. On Bozzano, see: Gasperini, 2012; Ravaladini, 1993. Bozzano (1923, 1947) continued to publish about deathbed visions in later years.
5. See also studies of psychical research in Italy (Biondi, 1988), France (Lachapelle, 2011), the USA (Moore, 1977), the UK (Oppenheim, 1985) and Germany (Wolffram, 2009).
6. On Hyslop, see: Anderson, 1985; Berger, 1988: ch. 2; GH Hyslop, 1950; Moore, 1977: 156–66.
7. Mrs Piper was a figure of great importance for psychical research, and consequently to the SPR and ASPR as well. On Piper, see: Piper, 1929; Sage, 1902/1904; Tynn, 2013.

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Classic Text No. 98

'Visions of the Dying', by James H Hyslop (1907)

There is a group of psychic phenomena which are well worthy of a most searching investigation. I refer to the alleged visions which many dying persons are said to have had of friends who have passed away before them. In some cases they seem to have a coincidental importance that may give them some scientific value, if well enough attested as facts.

It would be natural to suppose that the crisis of death would often be attended by all sorts of hallucinations. We know how disease and accident lead to deliria in which all sorts of hallucinatory experiences occur; and narcotics and anaesthetics evoke similar phenomena in various degrees. They are but illustrations of influences which disturb the normal activity and functions of the organism, so that the non-co[ordination] of central functions results in the simulation of realities by all sorts of phantasmal forms. Death is a particularly disintegrating process and we should expect similar mental disturbances in its progress. Usually the motor functions are so paralyzed by it that we should expect little evidences of sensory phantasms. One way of indicating what dying experiences are in any clear manner seems possible and that is by speech. When this occurs the subject must retain enough of his normal motor activity to give expression to his mental experiences.

Indistinct indications may be given by motor action in the eyes. But what we should discover from ocular movements of a dying person would be doubtful and possibly capable of various interpretations. It would be the same with hearing. But when speech is retained enough may be uttered for us to ascertain the nature of the experience of the dying person, and occasionally dying persons utter intelligible sentences which convey unusual information. It is such that ought to be the subject of a very careful investigation. I propose here to suggest that a census of them might easily be collected and made the subject of statistical study and psychological analysis.⁸

The interest which such phenomena may have for science will depend upon a variety of considerations. The first is that we shall be able to attest their existence and their nature. The second is that we shall have some reason to believe that they have a selective character pertinent to their apparent significance. The third is that we shall have some means of distinguishing them from those capricious and kaleidoscope phenomena that are classifiable as ordinary hallucinations. The fourth is that their characteristics shall suggest some coincidental incidents not referable to chance and at the same time distinguishable from others possibly due to subjective causes. It will not be an easy task to conduct such an investigation, but it is possible by long efforts and perseverance to accumulate facts enough for some sort of study and analysis. The method of effecting this object will be the subject of discussion later in this article. We must first describe the phenomena to which attention needs to be called.

The phenomena which I have in mind are a type of apparition. Whatever their explanation they have one characteristic which distinguishes them from ordinary deliria. They represent the appearance of deceased persons to the vision, imagination, or other source of sensory representation, of the dying person. If we should find that they bear evidences in any case of supernormal information they would become especially significant. But one of the most important things to study in them would be their relation to instances of hallucination under the same circumstances that had no coincidental value. That is, we need to study their statistical aspects which would require a comparison of the really or apparently coincidental cases with those which are unmistakably hallucinatory and subjective in their origin. For this a large collection is necessary and this can be made without any presumptions regarding their explanation. I shall illustrate the kind which are particularly interesting and suggestive. They are as described above, instances in which dying persons seem to see previously deceased friends claiming in cases to be present for the purpose of aiding in the passage of death. When this claim of assistance in the crisis of death is made it is through mediums and it is sometimes or generally made when there has been no evidence at the death scene that such a presence was remarked. I shall give a few illustrations of both kinds.⁹

The following instance I received from a correspondent whose testimony I have no reason to question:

“I called this afternoon (May 14th, 1906) upon a lady who buried a nine-year-old boy two weeks ago. The child had been operated upon for appendicitis some two or three years ago, and had had peritonitis at the same time. He recovered, and was apparently quite well for a time. Again he was taken sick, and from the first the doctor thinks he did not expect to get well. He was taken to the hospital, and operated upon. He was perfectly rational, recognizing his parents, the doctor, and the nurse, after coming out from under the influence of the anaesthetic. Feeling that he was going, he asked his mother to hold his hands, until he should be gone. He had, I forgot to say, been given strong stimulants after the operation, which, I suppose, made his mind very active.

Soon he looked up and said, “Mother, dear, don’t you see little sister over there?”

“No, where is she?”

“Right over there. She is looking at me.”

Then the mother, to pacify him, said she saw the child. In a few minutes, his face lighted up full of smiles, and he said:—

“There comes Mrs. C— (a lady of whom he was very fond who had died nearly two years before), and she is smiling just as she used to. She is smiling and wants me to come.” In a few moments:—

“There is Roy! I’m going to them. I don’t want to leave you, but you’ll come to me soon, won’t you? Open the door and let them in. They are waiting for me outside,” and he was gone.

“No, I forgot to tell about his grandmother. I gathered the impression that he did not know his maternal grandmother, but may be wrong.

“As his mother held his hands, he said: ‘How small you are growing. Are you still holding my hands? Grandma is larger than you, isn’t she? There she is. She is larger, isn’t she? Her hand is larger than yours. She is holding one hand and her hand is larger than yours.’

“Remember that the boy was but nine years old. Did he really see spirits and recognize them? Or was it the result of the highly sensitive condition of the brain caused by the medicine?”

The mother confirms this narrative and inquiry brings out the following facts. The boy had never known his grandmother who had died twenty years ago. His sister had died four years before his own birth. Roy is the name of a friend of the child and he had died about a year previous.

It will be apparent that the instance is not in any respect an evidential one. There is no way to displace the assumption that the phenomena were hallucinations until better indications of their real nature can be obtained by further investigations, if that can ever be done. It is natural to suppose that the critical condition of the mind and body would give rise to these and similar phantasms, especially in certain kinds of natures. The natural assumption may not be the right one, but it is the only one that science can tolerate until its credentials are better satisfied by evidences of the supernormal. There is nothing in this instance that can be verified as not a natural and subjective effect of the conditions associated with dissolution, unless it be the systematic group of deceased persons involved. For the physiologist and the psychologist this goes without saying, and the mention of it here is only to emphasize for the general reader the confident opinion which science would entertain regarding such incidents. Science might not have better evidence that this special case is hallucination than the believer in its reality has for this character, but the mass of facts in human experience connected with abnormal mental and physical conditions associated with disease and death would predispose any cautious person in favor of the scientific interpretation as either more probable or more safe an assumption than the one in favor of the other.

Other cases of a similar nature have come to my attention, but I have not yet been able to have a first hand account made for me. I remember that my step-mother told me that her mother, while dying, saw an apparition of her husband who had died many years before. Such incidents are probably relatively numerous, but as they are not recorded or examined carefully they can only be subjects of sceptical consideration.

But I have a group of incidents which are much more suggestive of something unusual and possibly quite significant. Some of them involve a record and confirmatory support that gives them importance. The first of this group is one dictated to me and taken down verbatim by the two persons who knew the facts. They are both intelligent and trustworthy witnesses, not more liable to errors in such things than all of us. It involved circumstances which give peculiar value to the incident as the story will vouch for itself. I quote the narrative as I took it down.

“Four or five weeks before my son’s death Mrs. S— was with me – she was my friend and a psychic – and a message was given me that little Bright Eyes (control) would be with my son who was then ill with cancer. The night before his death he complained that there was a little girl about his bed and asked who it was. This was at Muskoka, 160 miles north of Toronto.

He had not known what Mrs. S had told me. Just before his death, about five minutes, he roused, called his nurse for a drink of water, and said clearly: “I think they are taking me.” Afterward seeing the possible significance of this I wrote to Miss A and asked her to see Mrs. S and try to find why the word “they” was used, underscoring it in the letter, as I always supposed the boy’s father would be with him at death.

Miss A went to see Mrs. S, and did not mention the letter. When I saw Mrs. S more than a week later we were having a sitting and Guthrie, my son, came and told me how he died. He said he was lying on the bed and felt he was being lifted out of his body and at that point all pain left. His first impulse was to get back into his body, but he was being drawn away. He was taken up into a cloud and he seemed to be a part of it. His feeling was that he was being taken by invisible hands into rarified air that was so delightful. He spoke of his freedom from pain and said that he saw his father beyond."

The intimate friendship of Mrs. S with Mrs. G the mother of the boy, makes it possible to suppose that hints or suggestions may have been unconsciously conveyed to the boy before his death or that something was said at the experiment which might deprive the incidents of that importance which they superficially seem to have. I have, however, observed that the two ladies are as careful in their account as we should expect, and while I cannot give the narrative as much scientific weight as may be desirable I think there is reason to believe that the main incidents are correct. The boy's experience of a strange girl at his bedside, and the allusion to the plural of the pronoun are quite possibly correct accounts of the facts. A record of the later sitting would be necessary to be assured that the allusion to the father was not in response to a suggestion. But in any case the incident is better than, or at least appears to be, superior evidentially to the first one quoted, and it indicates what may be done to assure ourselves of significance in such phenomena.

I quote next a well authenticated instance on the authority of Dr. Minot J. Savage.¹⁰ He records it in his *Psychic Facts and Theories* [not italicized in the original]. He also told me personally of the facts and gave me the names and addresses of the persons on whose authority he tells the incidents. I am not permitted to mention them. But the story is as follows:

"In a neighboring city were two little girls, Jennie and Edith, one about eight years of age, and the other but a little older. They were schoolmates and intimate friends. In June, 1889, both were taken ill of diphtheria. At noon on Wednesday, Jennie died. Then the parents of Edith, and her physician as well, took particular pains to keep from her the fact that her little playmate was gone. They feared the effect of the knowledge on her own condition. To prove that they succeeded and that she did not know, it may be mentioned that on Saturday, June 8th, at noon, just before she became unconscious of all that was passing about her, she selected two of her photographs to be sent to Jennie, and also told her attendants to bid her goodbye.

She died at half-past six o'clock on the evening of Saturday, June 8th. She had roused and bidden her friends goodbye, and was talking of dying, and seemed to have no fear. She appeared to see one and another of the friends she knew were dead. So far it was like the common cases. But now suddenly, and with every appearance of surprise, she turned to her father, and exclaimed, 'Why, papa, I am going to take Jennie with me!' Then she added, 'Why, papa! Why, papa! You did not tell me that Jennie was here!' And immediately she reached out her arms as if in welcome, and said, 'O, Jennie, I'm so glad you are here.'"

As Dr. Savage remarks in connection with the story, it is not so easy to account for this incident by the ordinary theory of hallucination. We have to suppose a casual coincidence at the same time, and while we should have to suppose this for any isolated case like the present one the multiplication of them, with proper credentials, would suggest some other explanation, whatever it might be.

I shall turn next to two instances which are associated with the experiments and records of Mrs. Piper. They both represent the allegation of death-bed apparitions, and statements through Mrs. Piper purporting to represent communications from the deceased showing a coincidence with what was otherwise known or alleged to have taken place at the crisis of death. The records in these cases are unusually good, having been made by Dr. Richard Hodgson.¹¹ I quote his reports. The

first instance is the experience of a man who gives only initials for his name, but was well known to Dr. Hodgson. It occurred at a sitting with Mrs. Piper.

“About the end of March of last year (1888) I made her (Mrs. Piper) a visit – having been in the habit of doing so, since early in February, about once a fortnight. She told me that a death of a near relative of mine would occur in about six weeks, from which I should realize some pecuniary advantages. I naturally thought of my father, who was in advanced years, and whose description Mrs. Piper had given me very accurately some week or two previously. She had not spoken of him as my father, but merely as a person nearly connected with me. I asked her at this sitting whether this person was the one who would die, but she declined to state anything more clearly to me. My wife, to whom I was then engaged, went to see Mrs. Piper a few days afterward, and she told her (my wife) that my father would die in a few weeks.

About the middle of May my father died very suddenly in London from heart failure, when he was recovering from a very slight attack of bronchitis, and the very day that his doctor had pronounced him out of danger. Previous to this Mrs. Piper (as Dr. Phinuit)¹² had told me that she would endeavor to influence my father about certain matters connected with his will before he died. Two days after I received the cable announcing his death my wife and I went to see Mrs. Piper, and she (Phinuit) spoke of his presence, and his sudden arrival in the spirit world, and said that he (Dr. Phinuit) had endeavored to persuade him in these matters while my father was sick. Dr. Phinuit told me the state of the will, and described the principal executor, and said that he (the executor) would make a certain disposition in my favor, subject to the consent of the other two executors when I got to London, England. Three weeks afterward I arrived in London; found the principal executor to be the man Dr. Phinuit had described. The will went materially as he (Dr. Phinuit) had stated. The disposition was made in my favor, and my sister, who was chiefly at my father’s bedside the last three days of his life, told me had repeatedly complained of the presence of an old man at the foot of his bed, who annoyed him by discussing his private affairs.”¹³

The reader will remark that the incident is associated with a prediction, but it is not the subject of important observation at present. The chief point of interest is that the prediction is connected with a reference to a will affecting private business matters, that the sister reported a number of visions or apparitions on the man’s death-bed, and that subsequent to his death, not known apparently to Mrs. Piper, the statement was made by Phinuit that he had influenced or tried to persuade the man in reference to these matters. The coincidence is unmistakable and the cause is suggested by the very nature of the phenomena and the conditions under which they occurred. But we should have a large mass of such incidents to give the hypothesis something like scientific proof.

The next case is a most important one. It is connected with an experiment by Dr. Hodgson with Mrs. Piper, as was the previous one, and came out as an accidental feature of the sitting. The account is associated in his report with incidents quoted by him in explanation of the difficulty and confusion accompanying real or alleged communications from the dead. It will be useful to quote the Report on that point before narrating the incident itself as the circumstances associated with the facts are important in the understanding of the case, while they also suggest a view of the phenomena which may explain the rarity of them.

“That persons ‘just deceased,’” says Dr. Hodgson, “should be extremely confused and unable to communicate directly, or even at all, seems perfectly natural after the shock and wrench of death. Thus in the case of Hart, he was unable to write the second day after death. In another case a friend of mine, whom I may call D., wrote, with what appeared to be much difficulty, his name and the words, ‘I am all right now. Adieu,’ within two or three days of his death. In another case, F., a near relative of Madame Elisa, was unable to write on the morning after his death. On the second day after, when a stranger was present with me for a sitting, he wrote two or three sentences, saying, ‘I am too weak to articulate clearly,’ and not many

days later he wrote fairly well and clearly, and dictated to Madame Elisa (deceased), as amanuensis, an account of his feelings at finding himself in his new surroundings.”

In a footnote Dr. Hodgson adds an account of what this Madame Elisa communicated regarding the man. I quote this in full. Referring to this F. and Madame Elisa, he says:—

“The notice of his death was in a Boston paper, and I happened to see it on my way to the sitting. The first writing of the sitting came from Madame Elisa, without my expecting it. She wrote clearly and strongly, explaining that F. was there with her, but unable to speak directly, that she wished to give me an account of how she had helped F. to reach her. She said that she had been present at his death-bed, and had spoken to him, and she repeated what she had said, an unusual form of expression, and indicated that he had heard and recognized her. This was confirmed in detail in the only way possible at the time, by a very intimate friend of Madame Elisa and myself, and also of the nearest surviving relative of F. I showed my friend the account of the sitting, and to this friend a day or two later, the relative, who was present at the death-bed, stated spontaneously that F., when dying said that he saw Madame Elisa, who was speaking to him, and he repeated what she was saying. The expression so repeated, which the relative quoted to my friend, was that which I had received from Madame Elisa through Mrs. Piper’s trance, when the death-bed incident was of course entirely unknown to me.”¹⁴

The apparent significance of such a coincidence is evident and though the entire number which I have quoted are not sufficient to afford alone the proof of survival after death they are indicative of events which demand a most careful investigation. If there be such a thing as a transcendental spiritual world and if we actually survive in our personality after death we might naturally expect some connection between the two sets of cosmic conditions, at least occasionally, supposing, of course, that the chasm between them is not too great to be spanned. The existence of a large mass of facts alleging such a connection, though these facts are relatively few in comparison with the cases of silence regarding the beyond, is a circumstance which would suggest searching for incidents during the passage of death that might represent a rare connection between the two worlds in this critical period. We could not expect them to be frequent a priori but we should not expect two worlds, closely enough related for the individual to retain his identity, to wholly exclude communications in *articulo mortis* [not italicized in the original]. If anything like it actually appeared to occur we should endeavor to ascertain how much evidence exists for the credibility of the occurrence in sufficiently numerous cases to establish the truth of the actual connection, or to confirm other types of incident pointing toward the same conclusion. The phenomena are too suggestive in many ways to leave their occurrence unnoticed and uninvestigated.

The object, therefore, in calling attention to the incidents which I think impressive enough to urge an organized effort to certify a larger number of them, if this be possible. What is urged, therefore, is that efforts be made to report for record all the death-bed visions and utterances that may possibly bear upon the issue suggested in such as we have quoted. I would propose that all members of the Society report or ask to have reported all such experiences as have come under their notice. In this way a census of them can at least be initiated. To this method I hope to add some means of inducing physicians in their private practice to be on the watch for them and to report them to the proper persons. We may ultimately induce physicians in the hospitals to instruct nurses and officers to make observations and to record all experiences of an hallucinatory character or otherwise. In any case they will be rare, but on one side or the other of the issue there is no other way to give our convictions a scientific character.

The cases which I have mentioned show interesting coincidences and are too suggestive to disregard the opportunity to collect similar instances with a view to their study in detail. We must expect the largest number of them to be non-evidential, that is, to represent facts which are not

verifiable in respect of the other side. But if they can be obtained in sufficient numbers to exclude chance in respect of the persons said to appear in such apparitions we may have a scientific product. To exclude chance we need to compare them with visions that do not represent the discarnate as thus appearing, but that may be treated as casual hallucinations. Hence we shall want to take account of all types of dying experiences as observed by the living. It will be especially important to have records from those who were thought to be very ill or dying and recovered who may describe peculiar experiences in conditions bordering on death. It is therefore hoped that members and readers will call attention to any such cases that may have come within their knowledge and to aid in securing a record of them. The extension of the inquiry to hospitals and asylums will require time and such interest as physicians may be induced to take in collecting data for study. But a good beginning can be made independently of the more organized effort to obtain records. The present article is simply an appeal for assistance in an important investigation. The interesting incidents quoted seem to be inexplicable by chance and a large number of similar cases would more certainly exclude it from consideration.

Editorial notes [references are given on pp. 242-6]

8. Hyslop was probably thinking about a study along the lines of the SPR's Census of Hallucinations; Sidgwick et al., 1894. But there were also other studies that could have provided a model for the research in which he was interested, e.g. Calkins, 1895.
9. Several of the ideas presented in this paragraph are similar to issues discussed before by Gurney et al. (1886) as regards visions and other experiences related to distant individuals who were dying or going through some crisis.
10. Minot J. Savage (1841–1918) was an American Unitarian minister who wrote about psychic phenomena, e.g. Savage, 1899a, 1899b.
11. Richard Hodgson LL.D (1855–1905) was a well-known psychical researcher and the Secretary of the old ASPR. He studied Mrs Piper and other mediums and was known for exposing mediumistic fraud; Berger, 1988: ch. 1. Hyslop (1907a: 14–15) stated that he met Hodgson in 1899 and became his friend. He worked with Hodgson to develop psychical research in the USA.
12. Phinuit was one of Mrs Piper's spirit controls; Sage, 1902/1904: ch. 6.
13. This was published by Hodgson, 1892: 120–1.
14. Reported by Hodgson, 1898: 377–8.