

VARIETIES OF PSYCHISM

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FOREWORD

Mr. Wedgwood has performed a very useful public service by writing this thoughtful and careful manual on psychism. There is so much ignorance and so much loose thought and loose writing on the subject, that a sober and considered statement thereon is very welcome, and the late General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in England and Wales here gives us such a statement. Psychism is too often the subject of sweeping generalisations, all-approving or all-condemning; it is either divine or demoniacal. In this little book it is treated with common sense, as an evolutionary extension of our present faculties, with nothing supernatural about it, but an inevitable result of the evolutionary progress of the human race, carried on under inviolable laws.

We hope the booklet will have a very wide circulation, both inside and outside the Theosophical Society.

ANNIE BESANT

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As to the nature of spirits and angels, this is neither unsearchable nor morbid; but in a great part level to the human mind, on account of their affinity. The knowledge of their nature, powers and illusions, appears from Scripture, reason and experience, to be no small part of spiritual wisdom.

Francis Bacon

PREFACE

A great need is arising for persons able in some measure to cope with what has well been called "the rising psychic tide," so remarkable a feature of the life around us. The Theosophical Society ought not to be behind hand in helping to meet this need, for by its work during the past two score years the Society has largely helped to create it, and consequently shares the karmic responsibility for its existence.

This little book is an attempt to classify the various phases of psychism, and to explain their *modus operandi*. It is the result of my own study and, to some extent, experience. The whole is intended to be quite tentative, for

there are many points upon which I have no personal experience, and even the wisest among our few psychic experts are learning merely the alphabet of a vast science. I have ventured to put pen to paper, partly because of an irresistible interest in the subject, and partly on the principle that "half a loaf is better than no bread," by which I mean that this little attempt may prove really useful to students until some more authoritative writer does them the service of superseding it. Also, it sometimes happens that the tyro sees more of the difficulties of his fellow-learners than those who have long outgrown these particular difficulties.

The book is written for students, and as it is difficult to imagine any student of psychic phenomena who is not familiar with at least the A. B. C. of Theosophy, I have throughout taken a knowledge of that for granted. Also I have purposely not exceeded the scope indicated by the title; the book, therefore, deals with the varieties of psychic faculty rather than with the rationale of psychism in general, and does not profess to give instruction in either the development or use of psychic faculty.

I am much indebted for theory and detail to the perennial sources of Theosophical learning -- Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater. The whole of the section dealing with the distinction between the Lower and Higher Psychism is really elaborated from Mrs. Besant's '*A Study in Consciousness*', whilst everyone who writes about psychism from the Theosophical point of view must necessarily be indebted to Mr. Leadbeater's monumental researches. Mr. Sinnett, Mr. Robert King and Mrs. Russak especially, have also contributed by their experience to the framing of theories. It is only fair to add that none of these is to be held responsible for what is herein set forth.

Adyar - J. I. Wedgwood

VARIETIES OF PSYCHISM

Occult development consists in the gradual opening up of new phases of consciousness, and the extension of the faculties of sense-observation. Putting aside the sense of pleasure which results in a marked degree from this process of self-expansion or opening out into "moreness," there is no other feeling which stands out so strongly as the utter unexpectedness of each new experience. In trying to picture to oneself what will be the nature of any new power of consciousness, one is apt always to build up from past experience, to regard the anticipated phase of experience as strictly [Page 2] sequential with the old, as, to put it colloquially, merely a glorified version of that already enjoyed. Experience shows us that in reality this is a mistake. The fresh power of consciousness is in the nature of an altogether new dimension of experience, rather than a mere extension of the old. It is profoundly true to assert: "As above, so below," but in practice it is false to rejoin: "As below, so above." We can perhaps make the point clear by a concrete illustration. The student who is trying to develop clairvoyance, accustomed by years of previous experience to associate the power of vision with the physical eyes, expects to continue in the use of his eyes when exercising his new faculty; it never occurs to him to think otherwise, and one of his first surprises will be to find [Page 3] that the eyes play no part in clairvoyance. [Except in a variety of the etheric sight] Hence it is clear that in dealing with this kind of development the old adage is peculiarly applicable: "An ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory." [Page 4]

CHAPTER 1

LOWER AND HIGHER PSYCHISM

We can most profitably embark upon our voyage of psychic investigation, perhaps, by setting ourselves to deal with one problem which perplexes not only the outside world but many thoughtful students also.

"Why is it," the question is often asked, "that psychics are usually uneducated people, devoid of critical ability, ignorant and untutored?" We must admit the impeachment. In fact we may go rather further and say that it is not so much that such people are uneducated - for that is often a man's [Page 5] misfortune and does not

necessarily imply stupidity on his part - but that a great many seem incapable of making much use of the mind. Into the psychism of these people there enters not infrequently a considerable element of fortune-telling, and even fraud and chicanery; so that much prejudice is created against the whole subject. On the other hand, there are other psychics, quite a minority, whose work entitles them to a position in the forefront of progressive thought.

Now the Theosophical scheme of evolution not only explains this well-defined phenomenon, but shows how perfectly natural it is in the sequence of evolution. At the outset, we must distinguish between a lower psychism and a higher psychism. The one is a relic of the earlier evolution of man, [Page 6] the other an anticipation of the future development of the race.

We may picture man's pilgrimage in matter as differentiating itself into three main stages - they correspond perhaps to those of which Paracelsus spoke when he referred to the three ages of man. There is first the gradual descent from spirit into matter, from the subtle to the gross. Secondly, the period of deepest immersion in matter, the turning point, the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Thirdly, the stage of the re-ascent from matter to spirit. In Hindu Philosophy the first stage is called the Pravritti Marga, the Path of Forth-going, and the last the Nivritti Marga, the Path of Return. This three-fold scheme of progress runs throughout the whole of nature. We see it in the large cycle of a Scheme of [Page 7] Evolution, where the first three Chains constitute a downward arc of progressive densification, the fourth the turning-point, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh an upward arc. Similarly in the smaller cycle of the passage of the Life-Wave round the seven globes of a Chain. And the same process is repeated in the seven successive Root-Races which inhabit a globe, and within those in the sub-races again. Thus, in studying the development of mankind, we naturally expect to see these three phases of progress faithfully reproduced. And it is so.

In the earlier stages, man's consciousness is focussed more in the higher worlds, and there is little effective touch with the physical. In a limited sense only would it be true to say that man was more "spiritual" [Page 8] than now. True, the consciousness was more centred in the higher bodies, but it was comparatively inward-turned, as that of a man in a "brown study" - and we may suppose that this also is very much the state of those out of the body at night, or in the post-mortem life, who are not "awake" to the plane which they are temporarily inhabiting. Presumably it is this which Dr. Steiner means, when he says, in his curiously indirect fashion, that in the earlier stage man was truly an inhabitant of the higher worlds but did not belong to them. He does not fully belong to them till he masters them on the upward arc. Only then does he become a Freeman in those worlds.

During this primitive stage, while the Higher Man was, so to speak, [Page 9] merely anchored to a physical body, there was an involuntary interplay between the physical and higher worlds - a natural involuntary clairvoyance.

Animals not infrequently show a similar primitive clairvoyance. It is well known that a dog will growl at a presence in a room imperceptible to his master, and sometimes cower with fear: a cat under similar conditions will arch its back and ruffle its fur, spit and hiss; and a horse will shy at an object invisible to his rider. [There is a clever story turning upon this psychic sensitiveness of animals in Mr. Algernon Blackwood's *John Silence*] Horses will sometimes show great uneasiness at passing a roadside spot where an accident, or a scene of violence, has occurred, showing that they are sensitive to the akashic impression. [Page 10]

There is nothing dignified about these phases of clairvoyance, whether found in animals or as a survival in some present-day people. Their rationale has been admirably described by Mrs. Besant in '*A Study in Consciousness*':

"The impacts on the astral sheath from the astral plane produce vibratory waves over the whole astral sheath . . . The aggregations of astral matter, connected with the physical nervous systems, naturally share in the general surgings of the astral sheath, and the vibrations caused by these surgings mingle with those coming from the physical body. . ." [page 185]

A distinguishing feature of this type of clairvoyance (easily explicable in the light of the above statement) is that [Page 11] the possessor is seldom able to distinguish with entire clearness between astral and physical objects. Hence the horse, seeing an astral figure on the road before him, endows him with physical objectivity. The savage shows some advance upon the animal, in that he displays more ability to distinguish the subjective from the objective.

Dr. Steiner speaks of an early phase of consciousness, which he calls picture-consciousness, because its workings presented themselves to the mind as a series of pictures. This may mean nothing more than that the psychism, natural to that stage and exercised involuntarily, caused the man to read the record of what took place in the akasha, either on the etheric or higher planes. [Page 12]

We have been told by those able to read the records of the past that man formerly possessed a "third eye," located in the centre of the retreating forehead of those days. It was the organ - or one of the organs, for possibly there were others [Reference is sometimes made to an organ at the back of the head, by which heat and cold were differentiated. Whether in these cases it was the pineal gland that was observed - or not - is not certain. Some scientific authorities have held that the pineal gland was the organ of a primitive thermal sense] - of the higher perception, comprising the etheric and part of the dense physical within its range of observation. Perhaps it would be more accurate to name it "the first eye," since it surely preceded the two eyes we now possess; as man entered more into the physical body the two eyes, positive and negative, developed, adapted more for observation at the dense physical levels. [Page 13]

In speaking of the "first eye," we are reminded of the Homeric legend of Ulysses - how he wrestled with the Cyclops, the Giant with only one eye in the middle of his forehead. It has well been said that the legends and sagas of antiquity contain many truths, and scientists will presently begin to realise the existence in them of much embryonic science. The central eye retreated and became the pineal gland. Even now there are cases where something similar to a third eye is found in animals. A lizard was recently discovered in Australia at the top of whose head was a third eye, intact though covered over with scales. And vertebrates of the lamprey class have a pineal development resembling an eye. [Page 14]

It is not until the second stage is entered that in any real sense man begins to master the world about him. Here, where spirit is "cribbed, cabined and confined" in matter, the powers of the consciousness must be outward-turned in the course of the struggle. In the earlier stage Devic forces played upon him from without, swinging him along the general drift of evolution; now he must learn that the power is within him, and work from within outwards. In Masonic phraseology, he must learn to work from the centre to the circumference of the circle. Gradually he must realise that within him is an inexhaustible reservoir of power, the all-sustaining Life; that he must no longer be tossed about by the ceaseless play of the outer universe, but remain firm as a rock, steady and [Page 15] unmoved, amid the fleeting and impermanent.

We have only to consider for a moment the wonders of science to realise to what an extent man has gained the mastery over the world around him. Recall the wonders of the telescope and the microscope, giving man the mastery over space; see how he has harnessed the forces of nature, such as steam and electricity, in his service. There are balances so sensitive in their construction that they turn to the weight of a single hair. Science deals with almost unthinkable exactitudes. We might expatiate at length upon this subject, but the point is clear; that man by the turning outward of the powers of consciousness has gradually gained an almost incredible mastery over the forces of nature around him. [Page 16]

Wherein lies the secret of this accomplishment? Precisely in the fact of this deeper immersion in matter, whereby the working of the consciousness is narrowed down to greater precision, just as the rays of the sun are focussed and concentrated by a burning-glass. The deeper the descent of consciousness into matter, the greater the power of precision in its working. Herein, in truth, is to be found the reason for physical incarnation itself. We are told that on the astral plane sensations are massive, general and vague, outlines more indistinct

and blurred. It is only by super-imposing the limitations of the physical vehicle that sharpness, definiteness and precision can be arrived at; that is why it has been stated that accurate visualisation of forms can only be gained on the [Page 17] physical plane in a physical body. Gradual descent (or exteriorisation) through the planes narrows down the dimensions, and hence resolves the unity of the general and universal into the plurality of the particular.

We can well understand that with this further descent into matter came the occlusion of the knowledge of the higher worlds, the psychic touch with the super-physical, which had been the natural condition of the earlier races. In order that man may concentrate his attention on the mastery of the exterior physical world, the memory of all else is for the time being mercifully wiped off the tablets of the mind.

Herein we see the essential difference between what we have called the first and second stages in the pilgrimage of man. And we can trace this gradual [Page 18] change by study of the smaller cycle of the sub-races. In the first sub-race, the Hindu, of our Aryan Root-race, there is a closer relation with the super-physical than in the case of the later western nations. The Hindu is not so firmly in touch with his body; he is easily raised to ecstasy by thoughts of religion; his consciousness is apt to be in-turned, and a Westerner using a bicycle or motor has often to adopt a different standard of giving warning of his approach than that of western countries - he must sound his bell or horn more in advance. In one sense there is a greater spirituality amongst the general people, than in the West, but it is the spirituality of an earlier stage of evolution - in fact it might more accurately be spoken of as a more general pre-disposition to spiritual [Page 19] things. I speak generally, of course and do not refer to cases of special Egoes incarnated either in East or West. The same statement applies in a lesser degree to the difference between the Keltic and Teutonic- peoples.

Lastly, we come to the third stage that of the re-ascent from matter to spirit. It is in this third stage that the higher psychism has its place, for as the lessons of the physical plane are learned and faculties developed, there is a gradual extension of the consciousness until it begins to work self-determinedly in the super-physical worlds.

The significant feature of the higher psychism is that it only succeeds upon, and does not precede, the growth of intelligence, and this is where it is differentiated from the lowest psychism. We may again turn to Mrs. Besant's [Page 20] '*A Study in Consciousness*' for the explanation of this fact.

"It may be well to add here, to prevent misconception, that the higher clairvoyance follows, instead of preceding, the growth of mind, and cannot appear until the organisation of the astral *body*, in contradistinction to the astral *sheath*, has been carried to a considerable height. When this is effected by the play of intellect and the perfecting of the intellectual apparatus, then true astral senses before-mentioned, called the chakras, or wheels, from their whirling appearance, are gradually evolved. These develop on the astral plane, as astral senses and organs, and are built and controlled from the mental plane, as were the brain-centres from the astral." [pages 191-192.] [Page 21]

There have been people with psychic faculty who have joined the Theosophical Society, attracted by its literature and hoping in the light of its teaching to develop and turn to useful account their own incipient powers. Having applied themselves diligently to study in these unfamiliar and difficult regions of thought, to their surprise and chagrin their psychism has faded away! It was the lower psychism, and the strenuous intellectual effort involved has brought the cerebro-spinal nervous system into predominance over the sympathetic, and so caused the abeyance of the psychic faculty.

Centuries of evolution separate the lower psychism from the higher; [The lower psychism, when present in a body of refined and superior type may sometimes be carried over into the higher psychism by effort of self-purification and in a comparatively short space of time] the [Page 22] former, we see, is a relic of the past development of humanity, the latter is the promise of the future for the race.

Having this outline of human progress in mind, it is easier to see where the different classes of psychics fit in, and we may not pass on to examine more in detail the different varieties of psychic faculty. [Page 23]

CHAPTER 2

THE LOWER PSYCHISM

Natural Involuntary Psychism. - We have already dealt with the rationale of this. But it is important to note that under this heading come those forms of psychic activity wherein the psychic influence is very objectively expressed in, terms of physical plane senses, sight and smell being perhaps the commonest. As already described, a figure is seen as though it were an objective reality. Sometimes an astral presence affects the psychic through the sense of smell - pleasant or unpleasant. [This must be distinguished from another class of phenomena in which the scent would appear to become perceptible by a process of partial materialisation. For instance, it sometimes happens that an entity visiting a Spiritualistic séance makes his presence perceptible to all the sitters through smell. I know of a case where a séance was repeatedly broken up through the attentions of one such visitant, who brought an utterly intolerable odour of decaying fish. We read of a similar smell in St. Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*; St. Anthony traced it to the possession of a youth by an evil spirit and banished it by exorcism of the spirit. Where the scent is perceived by all present, it obviously has become sufficiently manifest on the physical plane to affect the physical sense of smell, and has therefore passed out of the region of psychic perception. An agreeable odour often accompanies the presence - physical or super-physical - of a member of the White Brotherhood. This would seem sometimes to be physically objective, and sometimes to be perceived psychically] [Page 24]

The quotation from '*A Study in Consciousness*' on page 10 explains the rationale of this particular form of psychism. It is due to the stimulation of the astral matter related to the physical senses, as distinct from the astral sense-organs or chakrams proper. Taste is occasionally affected in the same way: [Page 25] some forms of clairaudience [As, for example, when a new sense of hearing suddenly seems to be opened up, and a voice perhaps rings out with startling suddenness and clearness, without the preliminary preparation which usually accompanies the mediumistic process. Some theorists, with what authority I do not know, advance the idea that the *corpora quadra-gemina* is the organ of clairaudience in the brain] may also belong to this category; as regards touch I do not feel competent to speak.

Artificially Induced. - There are methods - usually undesirable - by which the lower psychism may be stimulated. One set of such methods aims at throwing the cerebro-spinal system into a state of suspense for the time being, so that the sympathetic once more assumes the predominance. The use of the magic-mirror, [Magic-mirrors are made in various ways, and some are quite elaborate. One type is made of copper, highly burnished. A simple one can be fashioned out of a piece of glass, about 9 in. in length, slightly curved and the concave side being evenly coated with bitumen. This gives a smooth black surface on which the gaze may be concentrated. The more erudite professors of these arts make their mirrors under carefully chosen astrological aspects.] the crystal, the dark spot on a white ground; the various [Page 26] devices for inducing self-hypnosis, [Where a mesmerist induces the psychic faculty in a "lucid" subject, results of a much higher order often accrue; the principle is some-what the same, but other factors are present. This method is peculiarly effective in some cases where the subject has in past lives been a Temple sybil.] such as the disc or the revolving mirror - all have this end in view. The effect of the crystal, for instance, is to fatigue the optic nerve and so to cause temporary slight paralysis in the adjoining region of the brain, stimulating at the same time the aggregations of astral matter connected with the physical visual apparatus.

Another set of methods calculated to induce the lower psychism have to do [Page 27] with the excitation of the physical mechanism in various ways, e.g., by the taking of alcohol. The underlying principle seems to be that if the vibratory rate of the body can be heightened, it is easier for the physical vehicle to make relation with the higher. Now this, in fact, is one of the uses of art. It is well known that music often causes psychic interplay between the bodies; it works by harmonising them and so to speak synchronising their vibrations, and was extensively used in the Pythagorean schools for that purpose. But there is this difference: art calls into play the finer side of the nature, working, on the physical plane, through the higher ethers, and so tends to produce the

higher psychism; furthermore it calls the consciousness, the aesthetic and synthetic faculties, directly into [Page 28] play; whereas the methods we are now discussing affect the physical body at not so high a level. The effect of alcohol is to quicken the circulation of the blood; the vapours act also on the brain, and probably there is a slight loosening or dislocation of the etheric body. The net result, in some cases, is that the body is rendered more receptive of super-physical impressions - cases such as those of well-known geniuses in literature or music, whose greatest work was produced under alcoholic stimulation. The lower forms of sexual magic, designed to force a back-door entrance into the astral world, work also on this principle; sometimes, too, there is use, deliberate or otherwise, of elemental aid.

Side by side with these methods may be placed another type of psychism, [Page 29] though belonging to a far more innocuous class of phenomena. It is classed under the present category because it is not the product of an inner development of soul but of abnormal outer environment. It is well known that psychic powers are prevalent among: mountain folk, in Switzerland, for instance, and among the Highlanders of Scotland. [The Celtic origin of the Scottish Highlanders is also responsible, in all probability, for much of their psychism.] One possible explanation of this fact may be summed up in the following chain of sequences. The great altitude at which they live entails corresponding rarity of the atmosphere; this in its turn entails abnormal activity of the heart and rapidity of circulation; and this on the principle enunciated above, offers greater opportunity for psychic interplay between the bodies. [Page 30]

Mediumship. - Under this heading we shall have to consider those forms of psychic activity appertaining rather to mediumship than to psychism. The placing of these two words in antithesis denotes a distinction which has grown up in Theosophical terminology, but one difficult to define with precision. The general principle is that a medium yields himself to excarnate (or even incarnate) entities and is subject to their control, whereas a psychic is one able to establish communication with the invisible worlds in virtue of his own faculties. As is usual in dealing with these questions of psychology, no hard and fast line of demarcation can be drawn between the two states - *Natura non facit saltus*. A medium represents the extreme left-hand wing of negativity; still, the lower involuntary [Page 31] psychism is also a negative state; according to some authorities the chakrams of both turn predominantly to the left, whereas, those related to the higher - positive - psychism turn in a dextro-rotary direction. The lower psychism resembles mediumship in that it is not fully under the control of the will, and often comes into play independently of the volition or desire of the person concerned - in fact, it is rather more prone to this than mediumship, for the average medium does yield himself to his control with full consent, and it is only after this surrender that he ceases to be a fully responsible agent. The higher psychism occupies the extreme right-hand wing of positivity, and may be said to consist in the power self-determinedly to modify the consciousness [Page 32] and matter of the bodies so that they are in tune with the object under observation, and further to transmit information thus acquired into the waking consciousness. Thus mediumship and the lower psychism, though distinct, have it in common that they are forms of negative psychism.

Mediumship implies a loose and fluidic etheric double, capable more or less readily of extrusion, so as to give scope for the action of the controlling entity. We may go so far as to say that for all psychic faculty some peculiar organisation of the etheric double is necessitated; and there obviously remains much concerning the constitution and function of the etheric double to be elucidated in future Theosophical literature. It is difficult to decide how far the term mediumship [Page 33] is applicable to some of the higher phases of occult phenomena; as, for instance, where a Master uses the body of a disciple. This may take place to any degree varying from inspiration to complete occupation. In the latter event the disciple may be regarded, in one sense, as a medium in this connection, though assuredly it is the higher mediumship, and in other respects the disciple may be capable of exercising the higher psychic powers voluntarily and in fullest consciousness of what he is doing. At the same time, there are various factors to be taken into consideration: e.g., Does the occupation take place with the consent of the disciple? Does he merely allow himself to be passively extruded, or does he step out by his own power? Is he fully conscious afterwards of what has [Page 34] taken place? Does the occupation take place at the etheric, astral or mental level? Similar questions apply to the case of any person who can become receptive to the influence of a Master, and so receive what is called inspiration.

If there is one moral to be drawn from these reflections, it is the undesirability of condemning mediumship indiscriminately. And if this lesson had been taken to heart in the past, we might have avoided much senseless quarrelling with the more high-minded and philosophical among the Spiritualists. The Founder of our movement, herself, Madame Blavatsky, was undoubtedly a medium, and on that account capable of being used as she was, though her mediumship was of a higher kind. She tells us that, whereas [Page 35] in her childhood she was a passive medium, she later learned to control the faculty and bring it under the guidance of the will. We may recognise the value of some of the higher phases of mediumship, without committing ourselves to any endorsement of the lower phases. And one of the best ways of dealing with the Spiritualist movement would be, instead of quarrelling with a number of earnest-minded people, to use all our influence to raise the level of mediumship and to improve the conditions under which it is to be exercised. There should be institutions like the temples of olden time, where the mediums can be trained and assisted; where they can pursue their calling free from that financial anxiety which is responsible for so much of the fraud that is prevalent, conscious and unconscious; [Page 36] where their surroundings can be made conducive in every way to moral and spiritual elevation; where their health can be carefully tended and their efforts regulated, so that the too common resort to physical plane "spirits" to restore depleted vitality may be obviated. In this way we should gradually abolish the lower conditions and forms of mediumship, where the helpless medium resembles a sink-pipe down which astral refuse pours into the physical plane. I was told by a friend that after the Messina disaster of a few years back, the astral conditions around the Italian mediums were terrible beyond description; there were literally crowds of entities, wild with the terror and suddenness of the catastrophe, who swarmed around the mediums, clutching each other away in [Page 37] their anxiety to resume touch with earth-life or to communicate with their relatives.

Mediumship is sometimes spoken of as an abnormal and unnatural condition. It is obvious that both these terms are relative. Psychism of any sort is abnormal at the present stage of evolution, in the sense that it belongs only to a minority of the race, and the same may be said of really high intellectual development. "Unnatural" is a word which ought in every case to be used with guarded reserve; nothing that *does* happen can possibly be unnatural in the true meaning of the term, for nothing can take place outside of the laws of nature: it might be more accurate sometimes to use the word artificial, implying that what happens is not, so to speak, a product of the normal [Page 38] design of nature, but is brought about artificially by the exercise of human intelligence. In using terms of this description we must also remember that humanity develops through various epochs, and that what is natural to one epoch is not "in the way of progress" in another. Abnormalities, even, have their periods of rise, decline and recrudescence. It is possible that in Fourth Race times mediumship was the normal course of higher development; it is possible also that from the beginning it was an artificial state brought about by magical arts. What seems certain is that it is not a desirable way of progress for the present time - remembering always that there are usually exceptions to such generalisations as this. Mediums are evidently those who bring over [Page 39] certain tendencies as a heritage from past lives, and in dealing with psychics as a whole it is well to bear in mind that faculties which are an endowment from birth spring from the region of the subconscious, and are seldom as perfectly understood as those powers which are cultivated in fullest self-consciousness. Hence it is not wise to judge psychics by ordinary standards, for they, more than most people, are prone to be impelled to action by forces welling up from within their own nature.

The phenomena of mediumship range from those which involve complete control or possession of the medium's body to those where the entity in charge only influences the mentality of the medium. In trance there is more or less complete possession; [Page 40] in most cases the medium loses consciousness entirely, though on rare occasions there is a remnant of physical "awareness". Materialisation phenomena usually involve trance, but not always. There is a classic case of materialisation with the medium Monk, where physical consciousness was to all appearances fully retained. A party of well-known investigators, consisting of Alfred Russell Wallace, the well-known scientist, Stainton Moses, the famous Spiritualist writer and medium, the present writer's grandfather, Hensleigh Wedgwood, and the Rev. (later Archdeacon) Colley, held a séance with Dr. Monk in an upper floor of a Bloomsbury house, in full daylight, with the sun shining outside. A mist appeared to be extruded from the left-hand side of [Page 41] the medium; presently this formed itself into a figure, having an independent existence, the medium being in full view and apparently conscious. [The record of this was

substantiated by Dr. A. R. Wallace, when giving witness a few years ago in the famous law-suit, "Maskelyne versus Colley". Mr. Maskelyne was shown not to have been able to reproduce the phenomenon by mechanical means under the conditions of the challenge thrown out by Archdeacon Colley, which merely stipulated surroundings and circumstances similar to those of the original occasion.]

In another variety of materialisation, technically called "transfiguration," the medium is usually entranced, though again not invariably. In ordinary materialisation the figure is external to the medium, often showing itself at a distance of some feet or even yards from his person, and being capable of locomotion. In transfiguration the medium's face, and perhaps person, [Page 42] undergoes alteration, and assumes the appearance of the entity who is materialising. I have been told of a case of transfiguration which was again different in character, in that it was a combination of materialisation and transfiguration: A materialised form passed round a circle of sitters, changing appearance as it came to each sitter and the features being in several cases recognisable as those of dead relatives and friends. [Unfortunately, having forgotten who gave me this information, I cannot substantiate the case with further evidential data.]

A form of transfiguration which is scarcely analogous to the foregoing is sometimes observable when a speaker is addressing an audience. The face undergoes alteration, the height sometimes changes, and even a change of sex may be indicated in the figure [Page 43] and general appearance. Now this may be due to one of various causes, in all of which clairvoyance on the part of the spectator is involved. It may be a case of ordinary possession of the speaker's body, such as we have already dealt with; and a partial densification on the part of the controlling entity brings him just within the border line of visibility. Or it may be the occupation of the body at the astral level by a higher being, whose more powerful magnetism stimulates clairvoyance in the spectator. Secondly, it may be a case of overshadowing, rather than occupation. A Master may be influencing the speaker, and again the strong sweep of His magnetism stimulates clairvoyance. Or there may be some temporary accession of clairvoyance, caused perhaps by the speaker's magnetism, [Page 44] which causes the spectator to see some being who happens to be in the vicinity of the speaker - with or without influencing him. In both these cases there is a confusion of the speaker and the other being, due to imperfect observation.

Thirdly - and this often happens at Theosophical lectures - what is observed may not be another entity at all, but the speaker under another aspect of his own nature. In trying to understand this, it must be remembered that we are all composite beings, the product of many incarnations in the past, in which we have learned certain lessons and developed certain qualities and tendencies. Some people show this composite nature more than others, revealing one phase of their nature on one day, another on the following day. A man [Page 45] may display certain habits of mind, of outlook on life, of speech, of gesture, when discussing science, and altogether others when dealing with art. This is a characteristic of people called versatile, and one which is developed to abnormality in some instances of multiple personality. Naturally all this is intensified in the more advanced student of Occultism, whose experience has been deeper and richer than that of the generality of mankind, because of the greater potency of the forces dealt with. If in a past life such an one has been connected with the Mysteries and taken part in wonderful pageants of ceremonial under one of the great Masters, such a life must needs leave a very marked and definite imprint upon his nature. In speaking upon the subject of the [Page 46] Mysteries, or in performing ritual, such a person might be placed so strongly in touch with that past as to carry the consciousness of others present along the line of magnetic relationship, so that they see him as he was in that life. The ancient thought-forms are re-vivified. This not infrequently happens when our President is lecturing; one student saw her as a man in Egypt in a life in which he also had taken part; others have seen her in Neo-Platonic and mediaeval lives. A variation of the same phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that when the person is dealing with certain subjects of fundamental interest the Ego is interested and plays through the personality; the listener whose psychic faculties are for the time being enhanced by the outflow of power, glimpses the [Page 47] Augoeides or a reflection thereof on a lower plane, which differs in appearance somewhat from the physical features. [Or, even if there be no great difference of features, the observer receives the impression of a different face, owing to the sudden opening up of the higher vision with the rush of power which always attends upon such an experience and which interrupts the sequentiality of normal vision.]

But let us return to our subject. It will be remembered we were discussing the various forms of mediumistic phenomena, from those which involve complete possession of the medium's body on the one hand, to those in which only the mentality of the medium is influenced. We may deal next with the "direct voice". For the production of this, again, the medium is usually, though not necessarily, entranced. A particularly happy form of [Page 48] this phenomenon is when the voice proceeds from another part of the room than that in which the medium is seated and under conditions which preclude ventriloquism; and a still more perfect variety was occasionally to be heard some years ago at a certain private circle in London, when a quartette of voices would sing, and sing beautifully. In these cases, those in charge of the operations would have to materialise vocal organs. In other cases, to which the name of "direct voice" can hardly be given, the operators modify the vocal mechanism of the medium. Occasionally, the sex will alter, a male medium will speak in a high-pitched voice, or a female medium in a deep-toned voice. These cases are seldom convincing, for even if they are genuine, the controlling entities are making [Page 49] use of the apparatus to hand, and if a lady spirit does not feel happy in using a male voice, the effect she produces is exactly the same as if the medium were under normal conditions trying to talk in a squeaky voice. There was a lady medium frequently to be heard at Spiritualistic services a few years ago in England, who claimed to be controlled by the spirit of Spurgeon. Her voice would, perhaps, normally be that of a high mezzo-soprano, but when she was under control it would alter and become deep and full; at the same time it was not quite a man's voice, and I could judge that the medium who had a full chest development was quite capable of producing such notes herself - though in all likelihood she was quite honest and correct in her claim to be under male control. [Page 50]

At one time I had considerable experience with phenomena of this sort through a psychic, quite of the higher type, who was capable either of transmitting with perfect fluency communications made to her from the astral plane while still in the physical body and conscious, or of voluntarily stepping out of her body. A higher plane Teacher, who had been in male incarnation, frequently gave instruction, and sometimes, for various occult purposes, took possession of the body. Even when she retained complete physical consciousness, her voice would every now and again deepen in pitch and timbre, as the Teacher became emphatic and earnest, and thus tended to impress himself more on the intermediary; and this deepening took place to the fullest extent, of course, on those [Page 51] occasions when the body was occupied.

Returning, however, to cases of ordinary mediumship, what is more convincing in these demonstrations is when the medium assumes idiosyncrasies of speech and pronunciation which are recognisably those of a dead person unknown to him during life.

When we come to consider the familiar phenomenon of automatic writing, again different methods of working are in evidence. There is a phenomenon called "direct writing," analogous to the "direct voice," where writing takes place between slates or on paper, without contact on the part of the medium. The latter is usually entranced, as in most cases of detached materialisation, where greater power is needed for the production of [Page 52] the phenomena, and is withdrawn from his body. But in ordinary automatic writing - where it is really automatic, a distinction we shall note in a moment - trance is rare, for the simple reason that if a spirit fully occupies a body (which is what trance implies), it is simpler to communicate through the latter by speech rather than by writing. In automatic writing the controlling spirit contrives to make relationship with the fingers, and sometimes the arm also, of the medium, producing the result quite independently of the medium's mentality. One well-known person, who possessed the faculty, used to read a book while the writing was taking place, in order to ensure that his thoughts did not influence the proceedings. Sometimes, too, paintings or sketches have been accomplished in [Page 53] this way, through mediums who normally had no artistic ability. In some cases the spirit may elect to make connection with the medium's brain also.

We may take it that in relation to the total number of cases of so-called automatic writing, this variety is rare; what is much more widespread is a power which should be called inspirational rather than automatic writing. The process consists in impressing ideas on the brain of the writer, who then, in *propria persona*, writes them down. The medium is in a thoroughly negative and receptive state, and while it is true that his hand is responding more or less automatically to the dictates of his brain, so that there is little awareness of the

mechanical process of transcribing the ideas. Nevertheless this is merely [Page 54] evidence of the fact that habit renders such processes subject to the bodily automatism in a high degree, and it would probably be found that in the majority of such cases there was no direct control of the muscles of the hand or arm by the spirit. The script is either the medium's own, or has dwindled off into such a scrawl as results if a man gradually falls asleep in writing a letter, thus relaxing the vigilance of the attention.

The late Mr. W. T. Stead - or rather "Julia" - in '*Letters from Julia*', discussing the rationale of this writing and the fact that these communications are usually so largely coloured by the medium's personality, brought forward an exceedingly interesting and illuminating simile. The medium's brain, she said, resembled the keyboard of a [Page 55] typewriter. In using a typewriter, one shape of letter alone was available in the alphabet, a specific form of script was imposed on the operator by the machine. So with a medium: the spirit impressed an idea on the brain, but that reproduced itself in whatever form of expression was germane to the medium. We may take, as an instance, an illiterate medium who is used as an inspirational speaker; the defects of grammar and a certain errancy of the h's would not necessarily be the spirit's fault; these things would appertain to the limitations of the instrument employed, just as with a sheet of typed manuscript a faint impression, due to a dried ribbon, would not necessarily imply any lack of digital force on the part of the operator. Mr. Stead was wont in conversation to allude [Page 56] to this imposition of the medium's idiosyncrasies on spirit communications as so much "stained glass". It is probable, we may note in passing, that even in those cases of deepest trance which appear to exemplify the most complete control of medium by spirit, whatever communications are obtained are coloured to some extent by the human intermediary; for, though the spirit uses his own mental body, he is limited by the medium's brain to a degree only less than if he were influencing from the astral without direct occupation of the body.

In the above remarks we have already largely covered the ground allotted to the phenomenon of inspirational speaking. This also does not imply trance, *i.e.*, possession of the vocal organs, but results from the [Page 57] impression of ideas on the brain. Most of the speakers who figure at Spiritualistic Churches, when they do not speak under trance conditions, speak under the influence of their guides.

A higher form of inspiration - the real inspiration - not within the category of this kind of mediumship, is involved when a Master or advanced disciple sends a concept to the causal body of a person, to be worked out in speaking or writing "down here". The great geniuses of art are often inspired in the sense that they come into active relation with the world of archetypal ideas.

There remains one other phase of mediumship to be considered, namely that which can be called mediumistic clairvoyance. This is distinguished from ordinary psychism merely by the [Page 58] fact that it is stimulated and assisted by the spirit "guides," who help the medium to bridge over from the astral to the etheric plane. They are thus helped to a sort of voluntary clairvoyance. More often, however, it would seem that the guides project explanatory pictures or symbols into such a level of etheric matter as is accessible to the medium's clairvoyance - or directly into his brain. There is one point, which it is very important to notice in connection with all this, as it gives us a touchstone whereby it is possible to distinguish one type of clairvoyance from another. A medium, using his unaided powers of observation, sees certain things, but is usually quite at sea as regards their meaning. He must needs use his own ratiocinative faculties to puzzle out their significance. [Page 59] We may take a typical case. The clairvoyant sees above one's head, say, a yellow star with a blue centre and a name inscribed within a scroll; then perhaps the star changes and has a circle around it, and so on. But the clairvoyant is no wiser than his client as to what it all means, though usually he is infinitely impressed with the importance of the vision. Not until a far higher development is reached is his psychism of that type which works in unison with the intuitive mind - when not only is there the vision, but, more significant, the understanding of the vision too. If the medium is assisted by his guide, then, of course, his efforts may be more successful, although often the guide also is no wiser regarding some peculiarity noticeable in the subject's aura. If the [Page 60] medium describes words traced in letters of fire, that usually implies the work of a more or less competent guide. Still, much good work is done by psychics of this class who identify dead relatives or friends for enquirers, and so bring comfort and assurance in what has been a sorrowful bereavement.

For the sake of comprehensiveness, we may mention that mediumistic clairaudience also exists and is a not uncommon gift. Information from the guides is then obtained through the sense of hearing. It is often linked with clairvoyance of the same order.

Before quitting the subject of mediumship an interesting statement made by Mr. A. P. Sinnett to the present writer maybe placed on record; namely, that just as there are physical plane [Page 61] mediums who are much sought after, so also on the astral plane there exist mediums or psychics who are greatly in demand for information about the mental plane! The statement throws an interesting sidelight on astral plane life. [Page 62]

CHAPTER 3

THE HIGHER PSYCHISM

We have already seen wherein the higher psychism differs from the lower - how that it follows upon intellectual development, depends upon the development of the chakrams of the higher bodies, and is capable of being exercised at will, just like the power to see or hear physically.

A Distinction: Clairvoyance and Psychic Sensitiveness. - It is found by experience that the higher psychic faculty presents itself under two forms, which can conveniently be distinguished in the manner indicated by the above [Page 63] heading. Clairvoyance may be defined as the ability to see outwards on the higher planes and transmit the knowledge thus acquired into the waking consciousness. It implies the power to see objectively such things as atoms, the aura, astral forms - whether of living or dead people - nature-spirits, etc. When properly developed it permits of minute and careful scrutiny of the object under observation, so that it can be described as accurately as a physical object. Psychic sensitiveness, on the other hand, seems to relate to a somewhat different order of experience, less definite but often more essential. It does not bestow the power of direct vision, but more that of sensitiveness to impressions or "sensing," of intuitive perception, of knowing with conviction. [Page 64]

The distinction between these two phases of psychism is well marked in actual experience, but when we try to analyse the causes thereof we are treading upon difficult ground, and, at our present pioneer stage of knowledge, are bordering upon the realm of hypothesis rather than carefully ascertained fact. The following suggestions may, however, be put forward with some degree of confidence, and certainly will help to an understanding of the problem.

Both clairvoyance and psychic sensitiveness are manifestations of psychic faculty, *i.e.*, of the power of the man to look around him on the higher planes, and to transmit the knowledge thus acquired into the waking consciousness; and psychic sensitiveness is really a rudimentary form of clairvoyance. Where the power to see [Page 65] outwards or to transmit the knowledge is still very partial and limited, the impression upon the waking consciousness is vague, general and massive, rather than precise and definite, and belongs to the order rather of subjective experience than objective. With the gradual perfecting of the apparatus the element of greater objectivity will enter into the experience and there will come ability to examine external objects in detail. [The student will be able to grasp this point better if he will read carefully the chapter on "Consciousness and Self-Consciousness" (Chapter IX) in 'A Study in Consciousness', where the gradual awakening of self-consciousness and of the recognition of an outside world is very lucidly explained.]

Such would be the broadest application of the two terms. But we are using them here in a more technical and special sense, to indicate [Page 66] a distinction in psychic faculty arising from difference in the order and method of its unfoldment.

In this technical sense: Clairvoyance represents the development of psychism "from below upwards" and is more specially associated with the pituitary body; Psychic Sensitiveness represents the development of

psychism "from above downwards" with the vivification of the pineal gland.

Each will be distinguished by certain characteristics, which we have already to some extent noted. This clairvoyance will be nearer the sphere of the waking consciousness, and therefore more definite and explicit in its working: this psychic sensitiveness will be that of one of the higher of the vehicles, with the result that the knowledge thus acquired will in the [Page 67] earlier stages be less completely reproduced in the waking consciousness, but will be more intuitive in character and more attested by spiritual certitude.

The contrasted characteristics of the two will be better understood if we try to show how each would deal with, say, the diagnosis of disease. The clairvoyant would examine the body, and locating the seat of disease, would carefully note the appearance of the diseased organ; ascertaining the nature of the ravages, he would prescribe accordingly. The person psychically sensitive, on the other hand, would place himself into sympathetic touch with the patient and sense more or less vaguely where the disease was prevalent. He might be guided intuitively to prescribe a suitable remedy, but that [Page 68] would depend on his knowledge and development. Obviously, the clairvoyant has the advantage here.

But on the other hand, the clairvoyant, unless he be also psychically sensitive, may observe a phenomenon objectively, but be lacking altogether in the intuitive understanding of what he sees. For example, he may see certain colours in the astral body, but he does not necessarily know what they signify: he judges by the result of his past experiences or the tabulated researches of others, using his lower manas, not his spiritual faculties, as the arbiter. The sensitive may not see the colours, but by placing himself in relation with the other person feels the presence of certain qualities of character, certain weaknesses or difficulties, certain ideals and aspirations. Again, if a [Page 69] Master came to a place astrally, the clairvoyant would be able to see and describe Him; the sensitive would feel His influence and identify Him thereby (if he have past experience enough to guide him) without discerning the form or features. But the clairvoyant who was only a clairvoyant and lacked the intuitional psychism, would be liable to be deceived by an impersonation, whereas we may assume that our sensitive would at once discern the difference of magnetism, for we are told that whilst an entity bent on deception can simulate the facial appearance, he can never simulate the magnetism of one so great.

There is a hint which goes to support the distinction we have here drawn between clairvoyance and psychic sensitiveness in Mrs. Besant's '*Initiation [Page 70] or the Perfecting of Man*'. [p.82] The passage runs: "... the Spirit comes down, the Spirit of Intuition, and before he can go further, to the third Initiation, he must learn to bring it down, through his enlarged causal and mental bodies, to his physical consciousness, so that it may 'abide on him' and guide him." To which is appended a footnote: "This process is usually called the development of psychic faculties, and it is so in the full meaning of the word 'psychic.' But it does not mean the development of clairvoyance and clairaudience, which depend on a different process."

We may note that psychic sensitiveness constantly develops in those who have practised meditation systematically; *i.e.*, who have learned the art of [Page 71] stilling the lower mind and emotions, and thus rendering the mental and astral bodies receptive to the intuitive prompting of the higher nature. Numbers of people who obviously possess this faculty will maintain, when questioned, that they are "not at all psychic," because they limit the word to objective clairvoyance. Yet they may be almost acutely sensitive to the influence of persons or places, feel strongly instinctive likes and dislikes, and so on.

Psychic sensitiveness (using the expression in its broadest sense) may work predominantly through the astral or the mental vehicle. In the one case the information is expressed more in terms of feeling, in the other, of knowledge. For instance, in the endeavour to "sense" an aura by these methods, under the former method certain [Page 72] qualities would be felt sympathetically; [Some psychics have an inconvenient aptitude for reproducing sympathetically in themselves that with which they make relation in others. Thus, in trying to locate, and perhaps remove, a pain in the body of another, they find themselves suffering from pain in the same region of their own body. Evidently the interest and sympathy awakened cause a transference of some of the bad magnetism. An unskilled magnetic healer will often suffer similarly, through not disposing properly of the impure

magnetism he is withdrawing from his patient.

Again, a psychic coming into contact with a person in a state of violent emotion, such as grief, will often become infected with, and will experience difficulty in freeing himself from, the influence in proportion as he is himself prone to the same emotion. This difficulty arises through not being sufficiently positive.

The present writer knew a man who was psychic, who when his wife suffered from morning sickness during pregnancy, reproduced the same symptoms in himself, although he was over a hundred miles away from her.] under the latter the information would come as a flash of knowledge concerning the aura: the experience would be one not of seeing or feeling [Page 73] but of direct mental perception, often instantaneous in action.

We may say of clairvoyance and psychic sensitiveness what the Scotchman said when offered a choice of two very desirable alternatives: "baith's best"! Indeed, if the two powers can be harnessed together in sympathetic relationship, a very sublime form of psychism results, competent to undertake detailed scientific investigation and at the same time to perceive general principles.

Kundalini. - We now come to the last subdivision in our analytical study of psychism. It would not be profitable to collect here the various scraps of information given in Indian scriptures [Vide the *Ananda Lahari*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Sivaswarodya*, *Shatchakra Nirupana*, *Garuda Purana* (chap. xv)] and hinted at in alchemical and [Page 74] other writings, relating to Kundalini, for a great deal more information is given in the second volume of Mr. Leadbeater's '*The Inner Life*', and the student cannot do better than apply himself to the study of that, based as it is on practical first-hand knowledge of the subject and its grave dangers. Suffice it to say, that the Kundalini or Serpent-Fire is described by Madame Blavatsky in '[The Voice of the Silence](#)' [Pages 23, 27 - 5th edition] as an "electro-spiritual force"; it is latent in all men, and its effect when fully aroused is, first of all, to unify the consciousness of the astral and physical planes, so that the astral consciousness is henceforward included within the sphere of the waking consciousness, and astral clairvoyance is capable of being exercised at will. By "fully aroused" is meant [Page 75] the carrying of the fire in all seven layers through the spinal passage and the circuit of the seven chakrams.

The peculiarity of this very dangerous process, which we are told should only be carried out under the direct instruction of one of the Masters, is that it confers clairvoyance upon one who may not previously have possessed psychic powers in the slightest degree or shown indications of a psychic "make-up" of body. Hence it is the most effective of all methods of inducing clairvoyance. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the awakening of the Kundalini is necessary in order that a person may be normally clairvoyant. It is possible to possess a high degree of clairvoyance - of voluntary clairvoyance - without having awakened the Kundalini at all. Probably the [Page 76] Kundalini also conveys certain possibilities in practical magic, powers which involve a mastery over the matter of the planes. [Page 77]

CHAPTER 4

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PSYCHICS

It is almost proverbial among students of occultism that psychic people, as a class, are "difficult" and not easily understood. Their moods and actions are often strange and unaccountable, and this arises, of course, from the fact that they are an abnormal element among mankind. It may not be out of place here to set down a few notes directed towards the elucidation of this very interesting subject. To deal at all exhaustively with the psychology of psychism - and still more practically important, its pathology - would demand a lifetime of study. [Page 78]

The first point to be observed is that, in this study, science is treading upon what is to it virgin soil: as the study of occult psychology advances and psychism itself becomes more prevalent and more generally recognised - as it will do and is doing - there will follow, no doubt, a better understanding of those subtler elements in the working of human consciousness which now either escape, or are denied, attention. The point scarcely needs illustration, but it is interesting as well as illustrative to note how longer experience has given to Spiritualistic

investigators a far deeper and wiser understanding of the complicated phases of mediumship. They have been led to suspect, for instance, that the occurrence of fraud at séances is not invariably to be attributed to simple depravity on the part of [Page 79] the medium, as at first seemed the obvious assumption. They have begun to suspect that the medium is sometimes the unconscious agent of "controls" who either cannot produce genuine phenomena under the particular conditions prevailing and so guide the medium to simulate them by trickery, or who adopt the latter course as the less troublesome of the two to themselves. Further, investigators have reason to think that a medium in the negative trance state is sometimes unconsciously influenced and dominated by any strong thought of fraud framed by the sitters, and becomes in fact like a hypnotised subject. [cf. some of the experiments with Eusapia Palladino] There is a good deal to be said in favour of this theory, for the borderland condition of trance, [Page 80] in which the subconscious assumes predominance over the conscious and voluntary, is very apt to be a non-moral condition. In Theosophical phraseology, the "elemental" of the body is in charge of the vacant tenement. From the standpoint of Theosophy the theory becomes invested with even greater plausibility. The subconscious represents the past in evolution, whereas the conscious represents more the present - and our ideals may be said to foreshadow the future. We have an interesting illustration of a state akin to that of the subconscious trance in watching the behaviour of a person whom it is difficult to wake in the morning. We may attribute the difficulty, say, to sluggish circulation of the blood, which prevents the voluntary [Page 81] side of the nature gaining rapid control over the involuntary; the result is, of course, that we get the subject in a state where it is easy to examine the sub-consciousness, for it is recognised by modern psychologists that the workings of the mind in the dream state, and therefore also in semi-sleep, appertain to the subconscious region. A man in this condition, then, frequently shows the barest regard for truth, and will say anything, make any promise, to one who is trying to arouse him, with the sole object of getting rid of the interrupter - in fact, in that state of semi-responsibility he is shamelessly untruthful, and often, too, extremely irritable and selfish: characteristics which would seldom obtrude themselves during the normal activity of consciousness. [Page 82]

Now, I do not wish to imply that the ordinary psychic is subject to these particular characteristics, but he is apt to be abnormal in conduct, and to judge him by ordinary standards implies a want of understanding. He, too, is frequently the victim of his own imperfectly understood nature, and his defects require exceptional treatment. His psychism is in many cases the result of training and practice in past lives, so that while it exists as a potent factor in determining action or outlook on life, it is one operating more from the sub-consciousness or subliminal mind than from that "above the threshold". The *skandhas* from the past, whether in the way of psychic tendency or instinctive knowledge upon occult matters, impel him to various lines of action, which he is sometimes unable fully to justify [Page 83] from the standpoint of ordinary reasoning.

One notable characteristic of the psychic is his changeability of mood and outlook, which may even vary from day to day in the most contradictory manner. Now, whilst this is more frequent in the psychic, it is not in itself an uncommon feature of human nature. A man who changes his religion - who, for instance, converts to Roman Catholicism - or who suddenly loses faith in the Theosophical Society, finds himself in an incredibly short time quite honestly and conscientiously negating many of his previously most cherished convictions. What has happened is a deep-reaching change of outlook. So the psychic, more susceptible to the ever-alternating currents of emotion and thought - changes of [Page 84] *tattva*, as they are sometimes called - adopts a certain standpoint on one day, and if he examines himself critically is astonished to find himself thinking quite differently on the following day. An intelligent psychic is quite likely to be his own severest critic upon the question of these *voltes-face*. Now this change is usually not due to himself at all, for he is merely a victim of his own psychism. It is due to an external thought-influence, cast upon him by some person near to him, or perhaps by some astral being in the vicinity, or it may be caused by his coming into relation with large thought-forms created by "public opinion" or collectively by bodies of people. Frequently the very act of self-examination, on the part of the more critical psychic, dispels the influence; the mind becomes [Page 85] positive in the process of analysis, and there takes place, in fact, "discrimination between the self and the not-self" - he separates himself in thought from the external influence, and so, becoming positive towards it, cuts it adrift. In other cases contact with a more advanced person will wipe the mind and feelings clear of the illusion the more powerful magnetism strengthening the weaker. A few simple experiences, such as these, will explain the meaning of the words

"illusion" and "glamour," so constantly used in occultism.

This liability to extreme changeableness is only a transitory stage in psychic unfoldment, and gradually disappears as the psychism becomes more controlled. It is necessary that the bodies should become sensitive to [Page 86] impressions - acutely sensitive, indeed - and one result of this is that at a certain stage the student is painfully affected by his surroundings; *e.g.*, he finds life in a large town impossible or at the least very difficult to endure, and shrinks from contact with certain people whose astral bodies are too powerfully vibrant on sub-planes which are not the most exalted, or whose mental bodies tear his own as they express a strongly vitalised form of crude destructive criticism. The psychic always has a tendency to group around him a few congenial friends and to withdraw somewhat from the society of others; often, also, he is averse to meeting fresh people: this is because it is an effort to him to adjust his bodies to those not altogether in tune with his own, and because those of congenial [Page 87] temperament often assist in calling his psychism into activity. The resulting touch with the higher worlds causes him to experience a sense of completeness which is in welcome contrast to the lonely separateness of ordinary physical experience, and naturally serves greatly to improve the quality of, and therefore satisfaction in, his work.

But this ultra-sensitiveness passes away - or rather passes under his control - as he progresses to the stage where the atmic forces, those of the will, can descend and automatically strengthen and render positive the aura.

Some other unprepossessing and not uncommon characteristics of psychics are vanity and conceit, and a firm belief in their own infallibility. The former qualities are not peculiar to psychics; they become a [Page 88] temptation to anybody who gains a position of influence and ascendancy over others before arriving at that level of evolution where the lessons of humility and self-restraint are learned. It is a familiar spectacle, for instance, amongst church workers, wives of the clergy, heads of nursing institutions, etc.

Belief in the infallibility of psychic communications springs from ignorance and mental haziness; there is the confusion of abnormal derivation with abnormal wisdom. This is often found among those people who develop the power of automatic writing. They do not stop to realise that the death of the physical body is only an incident in a man's career and does not bestow upon him omniscience and infallibility, or transform him suddenly into an angel [Page 89] of light; he is much the same man as he was previously and is living only under somewhat different conditions of consciousness.

Obviously this superstition will be found among unthinking people only, but there is another element in the psychic's nature, which is very deep-seated - I mean the authoritativeness with which he invests his communications. This is widespread among psychics because there is a strong element of truth underlying the phenomenon. Such communications are possessed of superior authority for the recipient; the mistake comes in when he applies this to other people. Let us look more closely into the rationale of this. So long as man is living in the separated consciousness of the personality, there lurks in the depths of his being a sense [Page 90] of incompleteness - it is the voice of nature bearing witness to his pilgrimage in a land of exile. There are moments when this is to a considerable extent made good to him, moments of great exaltation caused by music or art or by a surge of deep affection or patriotism, whose effect is to link him up with his higher consciousness. A similar self-completion occurs through the psychic interrelation of the bodies, which enables the consciousness to leap over from the one to the other. It is a sense of self-realisation, a feeling of added life and power. We know that experience on the higher planes is more vivid than on the physical, in virtue of the greater subtlety of the matter of those planes. Consequently, any genuine psychic touch with the higher worlds implies a down-rush [Page 91] of power into the physical organism, and this augmented descent of the life-power is naturally most impressive from the standpoint of the physical plane consciousness. Knowledge which reaches the man with these accompaniments is naturally more highly esteemed than that reaching him through the ordinary channels of communication: in point of actual fact such knowledge may or may not be of importance; the method of gaining it is of importance, for it represents for the man the opening up of the faculties of the future, and in many instances, the Ego may take advantage of the newly-developed channels of

communication to impress upon the waking consciousness matters of importance for his progress. The higher the source of the psychic impression, the greater the [Page 92] sense of conviction and authoritativeness. If the knowledge proceeds from the depths of one's own being it carries its own credentials, and bears the marks of all genuine inner experience. But let us suppose that the information is distorted in the process of transmission; what then? A "twist" in transmission means that obstruction is offered by aggregations of matter which are not flexible and therefore cause friction. Friction diminishes energy. Consequently there is less power and less conviction, when the knowledge reaches its physical destination. In terms of consciousness, the intuition is "clouded," and message does not ring thoroughly true.

Further, if the communication proceed through mediumistic methods from no very high level, there will be a [Page 93] certain access of power, it is true, but none of that compelling force which is perceptible when the message originates from the depths of one's own consciousness, unless, indeed, it be a communication to which the intuition gives strong assent.

Thus the valuation of all these phenomena is a matter of inner perception, demanding an organism well sensitised to the play of the intuition and synthetic judgment. The reader may be prone to object, at the first thought, that we are here dealing with niceties of perception altogether beyond the range, so to say, of practical politics. A little reflection, however, will show that we are accustomed to dealing with similar niceties in our everyday life. Consider, for a moment, the sense of taste; how [Page 94] our memory registers scores of taste impressions and how the sense of taste distinguishes with marvelous fidelity and subtlety one impression from another. The fact is, the human organism is designed and constructed to deal with an illimitable range of ever-increasing subtlety, and the intuition in the higher reaches of psychic perception works with astonishing clarity and definiteness. But it is vitally important that the organism shall be made sensitive to the play of intuition.

This brings us to another point which is often a problem to those who are not psychic. How, it is asked, is it possible to distinguish between a psychic impression and imagination? The explanation is simple. If a man sets himself to imagine a log of wood or [Page 95] the figure of a person standing before him, the experience is one of ordinary everyday value; it may be a cold intellectual process, or it may evoke a certain interest and warmth of feeling, according to the temperament of the person: it is sequential with ordinary thinking, and whatever vividness or reality result come only as the cumulative effect of steady thinking and feeling. A psychical experience is quite different: It is not usually a constructive process but a sudden opening up of a new sense, the irruption of something into the waking consciousness. Moreover, as we have just been seeing, it brings with it a down-flow of force, which is quite unmistakable. The process of imagination is a normal, slowly unfolding process, the psychic experience is the opening up of a new [Page 96] dimension of consciousness, so to speak, and is quite unlike any ordinary mental process. We spoke of it as an irruption. A psychic may be concentrated most intently upon writing a letter or adding figures, and then be suddenly made aware of an impact from without, caused by the arrival of some astral being or thought-form. Now, imagination does not act in this way; it never violently interrupts and diverts the attention from work on which it is firmly concentrated - at least the imagination of the average Teuton does not.

It may be conceded as a matter of experience that it is often difficult in the earliest stages to distinguish between imagination and psychic activity; but as the perceptions grow clearer, they become more definite and forceful and altogether distinct. [Page 97]

This difference between imagination and psychic perception will, perhaps, be made additionally clear by reference to a line of experiment which may be pursued. In the experience of the developing psychic there are days when it is very difficult to bring the psychic sense into activity. [This depends largely upon the health and harmonious activity of the body; at times, also, upon planetary aspects, climatic conditions and the general influence of surroundings] On such occasions it may be stimulated by a careful use of the imagination. Suppose the psychic were trying to see the colours of an aura, but fell just short of success. Having placed himself in sympathetic relation with the subject, he may decide deliberately to imagine one colour after another

into the aura, keeping at the same time his psychic and intuitive judgment at the utmost [Page 98] vigilance. He will perhaps distinctly notice that certain colours "fit" better than others. The relation is established by a flow of force made possible by sympathetic vibration; it may quite possibly happen that just the necessary impulse to bring the psychism into play has been given, and that suddenly he perceives the colour clairvoyantly, but with an effect quite different to that produced by the use of the imaginative power. Of course, this is a somewhat risky and difficult experiment, inasmuch as it is courting self-deception, and it therefore demands a nice discrimination, but it is often quite justified by its results. It serves to illustrate our point. [Page 99]

CHAPTER 5

THE VALUE OF PSYCHISM

It is scarcely within the scope of this book to enter upon any defence of psychism in relation to occult and spiritual progress, but a few general observations upon the subject may form a fitting conclusion to our present study.

This problem has often come up for discussion among Theosophists, and has been very ably treated by Mrs. Besant in her 'London Lectures of 1907' [*Lecture on "Psychism and Spirituality"*] and elsewhere. It is well known that in certain Hindu and Buddhist scriptures psychism appears to be discouraged. The attitude of Buddhism was well put by [Page 100] Bhikkhu Ananda Metteya in a conversation with the present writer, who had questioned him on the point. The objection was not that there was anything essentially wrong in the cultivation of psychism, but that all such experiences were regarded as so many "sideshow" which delayed one by the roadside and diverted attention from the real goal. But then the real exponents of this view are logical and consistent; music and art and all phenomenal manifestations will be grouped under the same heading, and to single out the *Siddhis* for condemnation and remain silent about the others is characteristic only of amateur metaphysicians who like to make their metaphysics a cloak for their personal prejudices. The question is also discussed in Mrs. Besant's '[An Introduction to Yoga](#)'; [pages 71-78] [Page 101] she there treats of the Occult and Mystic Paths to Union with God, showing that in the one case progress is made by the careful study of the phenomena of the various planes, by the mastery of which powers are unfolded, whereas in the other an external phenomena are to be disregarded in the inward-turned aspiration towards the One.

Further, it is well to remember that injunctions given in one age, when certain conditions are widely prevalent, may not be applicable to another age, when quite other conditions obtain; the warning in the said scriptures may quite well refer to the lower psychism induced by *hatha yoga* practices, common at the time of their writing. Says '[The Voice of the Silence](#)': "These [Page 102] instructions are for those ignorant of the dangers of the *lower Iddhi*." [Page 13, 5th edition] Note the phrase "lower Iddhi," and further that there is no condemnation here of the Iddhis (Siddhis) or occult powers themselves, but merely a warning given against the insidious dangers of their lower phases of working. In fact, what the student is obviously warned against is the ordinary lower clairvoyance, etc., naturally much more prevalent in that age than in the present; and the whole confusion is cleared up if we recognise that what we have in this essay called psychic sensitiveness is really an activity in the psychic nature due to the direct working of the Spirit, and is therefore primarily a spiritual, not a psychic, power. It is, [Page 103] after all, a great deal better in these matters to use one's common sense and not to quote scriptures without pausing to weigh carefully their real bearing. Psychism misapplied is a hindrance to spiritual progress; if rightly used it is of enormous assistance to humanity and therefore conducive to the progress of him who rightly uses it. It is true that it is liable to abuse and becomes then a dangerous possession, but we do not shun electricity because it is dangerous if wrongly handled. It is a great principle in Nature that those forces which are most potent for good, are also the most potent for evil if abused. *Demon est Deus inversus*. Nature is no respecter of persons, and the world is not a Sunday school wherein all evil is carefully hidden away from the babes and sucklings. [Page 104]

Those who descant against psychism apparently forget that we are indebted to it for nearly the whole of our Theosophical literature with all the illumination it sheds upon life, as well as for the greater part of whatever touch there has been with the Occult Hierarchy. It is evident, therefore, that our attitude towards psychism

should be one of very careful discrimination.

In regard to the many people whose psychism is quite untrained and of the lower order, our attitude should be one of sympathy, but every effort should be made to lead such people to divest their experiences of the infallible element and to examine them in the clear light of the intelligence. They should be given to understand the place of the different varieties of psychism in evolution, and the too common **[Page 105]** tendency to rank their own communications from super-physical "guides" on a level with the teaching given out by the accredited disciples of the Masters should be firmly discountenanced. From time to time mediums and psychics are encountered whose inspiration comes from beings versed in Hermetic or alchemical lore; such people speak of their "Master," and because of the superiority of these teachings to the average Spiritualistic communications students are apt to be misled. It may quite well be that such Teachers are pupils of the Masters, even occasionally Masters Themselves; on the other hand it may not be so. The student can only exercise his discrimination and be cautious, and he may do well to remember that because some application of symbolism or some **[Page 106]** Biblical interpretation is ingenious and clever, that does not prove that its author is even an Initiate. In mediaeval and later times there were probably hundreds of monks who occupied their time in tracing types and antitypes and correspondences between the Old and New Testaments, and with other schemes of occult and generally Christian philosophy; and it is only natural that some of these should either return to birth and continue their speculations, or impress their teachings from the other side.

On the other hand, if a psychic show that his work is governed by intelligence and that he is loyally striving to make himself a channel for the Masters, he is surely deserving of encouragement, rather than the criticism and jealousy which are too often his lot. For every **[Page 107]** channel of communication between the Masters and the world is a source of blessing and help to hundreds and even thousands.

Psychic observation is no substitute for spiritual experience, for that which gives conviction is the testimony of the Eternal Spirit which is man: yet the senses are our avenue to the Spirit, and a more extended power of sense perception constitutes a wider, not a narrower, channel for spiritual apprehension.

Psychic faculty bestows upon its possessor a greater power of usefulness to mankind, dealing, as it does, with the ills of humanity from a standpoint rather nearer to the realm of causes. It gives first-hand knowledge of the principles underlying human evolution, and creates therefore the man of **[Page 108]** knowledge whose outlook on life is full of purpose. It reveals, for instance, the nature of life after death, and substitutes the possibility of direct observation for speculation in the realm of philosophy and religion. It unlocks the door to a more extensive control over the forces of Nature, which may be used for the helping of man; and medicine and surgery, for example, would be revolutionised by its aid. And, above all, it leads us to a better understanding of one another, breaking down the barriers of our limitations, and so bringing us to realise the Unity of all Life.

To be a Master of Life perfect knowledge and perfect understanding are necessary. The path which gives ascent to the mountain of Truth lies ever open for our treading. The **[Page 109]** mastery of himself and of all Nature by the Immortal Spirit is part of man's great homeward journey, and the higher we ascend on that path the more magnificent and far-reaching becomes our outlook on the panorama of life.