

Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940)

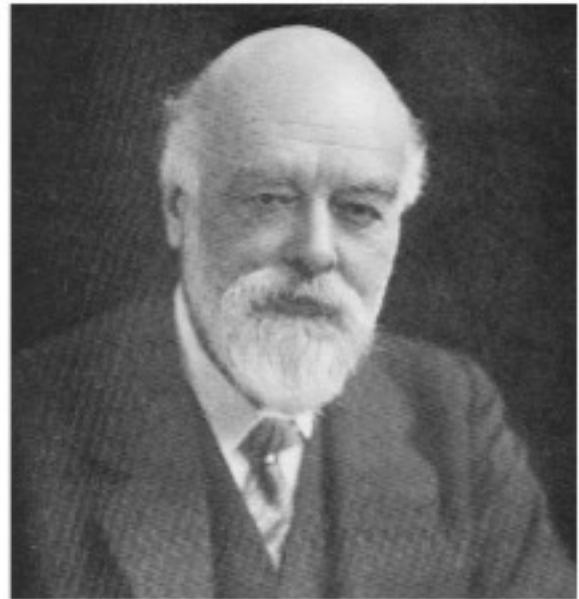
After joining the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) soon after its formation in 1882, Oliver Joseph Lodge (June 12, 1851-August 22, 1940) investigated many cases of mediumship, including those of Leonora Piper of Boston, Mass., USA, Gladys Osborne Leonard of England, and Eusapia Paladino of Italy. Through his investigations, he came to accept the reality of mediumship and to believe in the survival of consciousness at death. Much to the dismay of many of his materialistic colleagues in science, Lodge made his beliefs public.

Born in Staffordshire, England, Lodge received his doctorate from University College, London, in 1877, going on to teach physics and mathematics at University College in both London and Liverpool. In 1900, he became principal of Birmingham University, remaining there until his retirement in 1919. Knighted in 1902 for his scientific work, Lodge was known primarily as a physicist, especially for his work in electricity, thermo-electricity, and thermal-conductivity. He perfected a radio wave detector known as a “coherer” and was the first person to transmit a radio signal, a year before Marconi. He later developed the Lodge spark plug.

Lodge became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1887, was awarded the Rumford Medal in 1898 for his researches in radiation, and the Albert Medal of the Royal Society of Arts as a pioneer in wireless telegraphy in 1919. He served as president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1913, and as president for the SPR from 1901-1903 and again in 1932.

Like so many other scientists caught up in the wake of Darwinism, Lodge had become a materialist, not believing in anything spiritual. However, he remained open-minded on the sub-

ject and was intrigued by the idea that one person could read another’s mind, something he had observed around 1883 in a stage performer called Irving Bishop. “The verification of the fact of telepathy, indicating obscurely a kind of dislocation between mind and body, was undoubtedly impressive, so that it began to seem probable, especially under [Frederic] Myers’s tuition, that the two – mind and body – were not inseparably connected, as I had been led by my previous studies under Clifford, Tyndall, and Huxley to believe they were,” Lodge explained his change of mind. “I began to feel that there was a possibility of the survival of personality.”¹



During the winter of 1889, Lodge and Myers closely studied Leonora Piper, the American medium who had been brought to England by the SPR. In one sitting, Lodge handed the entranced medium an old gold watch that had belonged to his deceased Uncle Jerry and which had been sent to him by his Uncle Robert, Jerry’s twin brother, that very morning. He asked Dr. Phinuit,

Mrs Piper's spirit control who took over her body while she was in trance, if he could tell him anything about the watch. Phinuit immediately said it had belonged to one of Lodge's uncles. Shortly thereafter, Phinuit said, as if impersonating Uncle Jerry, "This is my watch, and Robert is my brother, and I am here. Uncle Jerry, my watch."²

Even though Mrs. Piper was in a trance and all those who had observed her were certain she was a legitimate medium, Lodge still considered telepathy as an explanation for this, i.e., Piper (or Phinuit) was reading his mind, so he asked "Uncle Jerry" if he could recall some trivial details about his (Jerry's) boyhood – something unknown to him (Oliver) but known to his Uncle Robert. Uncle Jerry then recalled episodes of swimming a creek together and running a risk of getting drowned, killing a cat in Smith's field, the possession of a small rifle and of a long peculiar skin, like a snake-skin, which he thought was now in the possession of Uncle Robert.

Lodge then checked with his Uncle Robert to determine if he recalled such boyhood incidents. Robert confirmed all but the killing of the cat, but he admitted that his memory was failing him. However, another brother, Frank, clearly recalled the cat-killing incident in Smith's field in Barking, Essex, where they lived and played.

Lodge further reported that Phinuit recognized a ring being worn by his wife, Mary, as having been given to her by a specified aunt. Phinuit accurately described how the aunt had died. Phinuit also told Lodge that the pocket watch he had on him once belonged to his father and pointed out that it was missing something. Lodge did not know what was missing, but Mary reminded him that a certain appendage belonging to his grandfather had once been attached to the watch.

Phinuit further told Mary Lodge that the chair she was sitting in had once belonged to her Aunt Anne, which was true. Phinuit accurately described how Mary Lodge's father had died by falling down the hold of a ship and also accurately reported on the death of her stepfather.

It was that study that convinced Lodge of survival and spirit communication. "The proof that they retained their individuality, their memory, and their affection, forced itself upon me, as it had done upon many others," Lodge wrote. "So my eyes began to open to the fact that there really was a spiritual world, as well as a material world which hitherto had seemed all sufficient, that the things which appealed to the senses were by no means the whole of existence."³

Further studies of Gladys Osborne Leonard and other British mediums reinforced Lodge's belief and provided the basis for his popular 1916 book, *Raymond, or Life After Death*, which involved communication from his son, Raymond, killed on the battlefield on September 11, 1915. On September 24, Raymond began communicating with Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge through Leonard and Alfred Vout Peters, another London medium. He communicated that Myers, who had died in 1901, was helping him adjust to his new environment. Much in the way of evidential information was communicated by Raymond, including information about a photograph taken just before his death with his military unit. Raymond mentioned that he was in a sitting position with a walking stick and a fellow officer standing behind him was leaning on him. Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge had never seen the photo, but made arrangements to obtain it. When they did acquire a copy, they found it to be exactly as Raymond had described – Raymond sitting with a walking stick across his folded legs and the arm of an officer behind him resting on his shoulder. By the end of April 1916, a preponderance of evidence that Raymond had been communicating with them had been accumulated by the Lodge family. "The number of more or less convincing proofs which we have obtained is by this time very great," Sir Oliver wrote. "Some of them appeal more to one person, some to another; but taking them all together every possible ground of suspicion or doubt seems to the family to be now removed."⁴

As for Eusapia Paladino, Lodge, like most other scientific men who studied her, witnessed

what appeared to be trickery, whether conscious or unconscious, but the things accomplished by such trickery “were of a feeble kind, easily explicable by a loose hand.”⁵ However, he concluded that the greater phenomena produced by her were genuine. “Any person without invincible prejudice who had had the same experience would come to the same broad conclusion, viz. that things hitherto held impossible do actually occur,” he wrote, referring to table levitations, ectoplasmic formations, a piano playing without visible fingers, and extraordinary feats of strength.⁶

Lodge saw no conflict between mainstream science and psychical research. “For myself, I do not believe that physics and psychics are entirely detached,” he wrote. “I think there is a link between them; neither is complete without the other. A study of the material world alone may be a narrowing influence. It leaves untouched the whole ‘universe of discourse’ apprehended by artist, philosopher, and theologian. To emphasize the importance of one part of the universe we need not decry or deny the remainder.”⁷

Besides *Raymond, or Life After Death*, Lodge authored many books, both on mainstream scientific subjects and psychical research. They included *Man and the Universe* (1908), *The Survival of Man* (1909), *Science and Religion* (1914), *Ether and Reality* (1925), *Evolution and Creation* (1926) and *My Philosophy* (1933).

“I tell you with all the strength of conviction which I can muster, that we do persist, that people still continue to take an interest in what is going on, that they know far more about things on this earth than we do, and are able from time to time to communicate with us,” Lodge stated in one of his many speeches. “Communication is possible, but one must obey the laws, first finding out the conditions. I do not say it is easy, but it is possible, and I have conversed with my friends just as I can converse with anyone in the audience now.”⁸

Lodge went on to say that he had tried all sorts of other explanations and had eliminated

them one by one. “The conclusion is,” he said, “that survival of existence is scientifically proved by scientific investigation.”⁹

In spite of his high standing in the scientific community, Lodge continually suffered from attacks by scientists grounded in materialism. “I am not going to be unfaithful or to shrink from the responsibility put upon me by being entrusted with knowledge that is now regarded as strange and unprofitable,” he responded to his attackers. “No knowledge is really unprofitable, nor is anything in the natural world common or unclean, though it is true that unwise people may make some things appear so...If I can be used by Higher Powers to bear testimony to truth, then, whether palatable or not, that is all I ask. Whatever happens to me, I rejoice in the opportunity of service, and am thankful for the kindly help and guidance forthcoming, though not always recognized at the time. Forward, then, into the Unknown!”



¹ Lodge, Oliver, *Past Years*, Charles Scribner’s Son, 1932, p. 346.

² Lodge, Oliver, *The Survival of Man*, Yard and Co., 1909, p. 181.

³ Lodge, *Past Years*, p. 346

⁴ Lodge, Oliver, *Raymond or Life and Death*, George H. Doran Co., 1916, p. 279.

⁵ Lodge, *Past Years*, p. 308.

⁶ _____, p. 306.

⁷ _____, p. 345.

⁸ Tweedale, Charles L., *Man’s Survival After Death*, The Psychic Book Club. (no publication date), p. 471.

⁹ _____, p. 472.