



The Case for the Return of Richard Hodgson

By Michael E. Tymn

"Well if I am not Hodgson, he never lived."
– the discarnate Richard Hodgson

To better understand why the conclusions of the majority of the pioneers of psychical research relative to the survival hypothesis are not more widely accepted today, we might begin with the resistance to the spiritistic hypothesis, or concomitantly to the weight given to subliminal theories, by Professor William James, one of the leaders among the early researchers. Though James clearly wanted to believe in survival, he struggled to accept the evidence and gave greater weight to subliminal theories than did other researchers, such as Frederic Myers, Oliver Lodge, William Barrett, Richard Hodgson, and James Hyslop, all of whom came to accept the survival hypothesis without reservation.

The resistance by James is clearly evident in his analysis of the communication purportedly coming from Hodgson through the mediumship of Leonora Piper after Hodgson's death in 1905. James vacillates considerably in his discussion of the Hodgson messages – at times seemingly ready to accept it and at other times dismissing it. It appears that his need to be "scientific" kept him cautiously perched on the fence. He had earlier written that, tactically, it is better to believe much too little than too much and had further stated that he preferred to willfully take the point of view of the so-called "rigorously scientific" disbeliever. This approach likely influenced many others, thereby diminishing the impact of the research and leading to it being filed away in dust-covered cabinets.

It was James who "discovered" Piper and who petitioned the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in London to send Dr. Richard Hodgson to the United States to manage the newly organized American branch of the Society (ASPR) and to study the mediumship of Piper.

During his 18 years of studying Piper, from 1887 until his death in 1905, Hodgson moved from being a skeptic and debunker to a staunch believer in psychic phenomena and the survival of consciousness at death.

"I had but one object, to discover fraud and trickery...of unmasking her," Hodgson explained about seven years into his investigation of Piper. "Today, I am prepared to say that I believe in the possibility of receiving messages from what is called the world of spirits. I entered the house profoundly materialistic, not believing in the continuance of life after death; today I say I believe. The truth has been given to me in such a way as to remove from me the possibility of a doubt."¹

After concluding that Piper was not a charlatan or conjurer, Hodgson still resisted the spiritistic hypothesis, believing that the "spirit" calling himself Dr. Phinuit who communicated through the entranced organism of Piper and relayed messages from other spirits was a "secondary personality" hidden in Piper's subconscious and that this secondary personality, unbeknownst to Piper's primary consciousness, was telepathically receiving information from the sitters and feeding it back to them.

When facts unknown to the sitter were communicated, Hodgson subscribed to the telerothy, or telepathy at a distance, hypothesis. This forerunner of what today is known as Su-

per ESP held that the medium's secondary personality had the ability to instantly tap into minds anywhere in the world and feed it back to the sitter. Somewhat akin to the teloteropathy hypothesis, also later incorporated into the Super ESP hypothesis, was that of the "cosmic reservoir," apparently James's idea, which held that all thoughts and utterances from the beginning of time were stored in a universal depository of some kind and could be accessed by the medium.



Richard Hodgson

It was the death of George Pellew (G.P.), a member of the ASPR, in 1892, that moved Hodgson away from the secondary personality and both the narrow and broad telepathic hypotheses, as well as the cosmic reservoir theory. Not long after his death, G.P. began communicating through Piper and eventually replaced Phinuit as her primary control. "The continual manifestation of this personality – so different from Phinuit or other communicators – with its own reservoir of memories, with its swift appreciation of any references to friends of G.P., with its 'give and take' in little incidental con-

versations with myself, has helped largely in producing a conviction of the actual presence of the G.P. personality, which it would be quite impossible to impart by any enumeration of verifiable statements," Hodgson explained. "It will hardly, however, be regarded as surprising that the most impressive manifestations are at the same time the most subtle and the least communicable."²

But Professor James was not as accepting of the new evidence as Hodgson and others. "Our rule of presumption should lead us then to deny spirits and to explain the Piper phenomena by a mixture of fraud, subconscious personation, lucky accident, and telepathy, whenever such an explanation remains possible," he wrote.³

In analyzing the communication coming through Piper, James often leaned toward accepting the spirit hypothesis, but always with much reservation. "One who takes part in a good sitting has usually a far livelier sense, both of the reality and of the importance of the communication, than one who merely reads the records," he stated. "I am able, while still holding to all the lower principles of interpretation, to imagine the process as more complex, and to share the feelings with which Hodgson came at last to regard it after his many years of familiarity, the feeling which Professor Hyslop shares, and which most of those who have good sittings are promptly inspired with [i.e., the spirit hypothesis]."⁴

Like Hodgson, James fully accepted the honesty and integrity of Piper. "...I should be willing now to stake as much money on Piper's honesty as on that of anyone I know, and am quite satisfied to leave my reputation for wisdom or folly, so far as human nature is concerned, to stand or fall by this declaration," he wrote.⁵ But James clearly struggled with the idea that Piper's "controls" were spirits. He preferred to believe that they were secondary personalities.

Hodgson died on December 20, 1905, at age 50, while playing handball. Although he apparently did not anticipate a premature death, he jokingly told friends that if he were to die he would communicate through Piper much more effectively than others had because of his familiarity with the *modus operandi*.

Eight days after his death, Miss Theodate Pope, who had known Hodgson, was having a sitting with Piper. A spirit named Rector, who had succeeded Phinuit and G.P. as her spirit control, was using her organism and writing something when the hand dropped the pencil and started shaking. When the hand steadied itself, it wrote the letter "H," after which the point of the pencil was broken. When a new pencil was placed in Piper's hand, it wrote "Hodgson." It started to write something else, but only rapid scrawls followed.

Rector then took back control of the medium and explained that Hodgson was there, but that he was too "choked" to write. It wasn't until another sitting by Pope five days later that Hodgson communicated again, beginning with a poem. However, he added that he felt confused and could write no more. At a third sitting, on January 8, 1906, Hodgson came again and explained that it was extremely difficult for him to communicate, suggesting that he had not yet awakened enough or that he had not yet learned how to handle the "mechanism" (Piper's body).

As Hodgson grew stronger in his new environment and learned how to "use the light" (the medium), he communicated with Professor James, other members of the ASPR and SPR, and several friends. A number of his messages were very evidential, but James remained skeptical as to whether it was really Hodgson communicating.

To better appreciate the "Hodgson" messages, one needs to read the transcripts. Space does not permit a complete recitation of them

here, but some of the most interesting dialogue has been extracted and abridged below.



William James

Professor Newbold's Sittings

Professor James pointed out that some persons make for better "sitters" than others and said that William R. Newbold appeared to be one of the best. Newbold, a professor of philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, was a member of the advisory board of the ASPR and a good friend of Hodgson's. He sat with Piper on June 27, and July 3, 1906. George Dorr, another ASPR member and also a good friend of Hodgson's, was present. After Piper went into trance, Rector communicated briefly and turned it over to Hodgson.

HODGSON: "Well, well, of all things! Are you really here! I am Hodgson.

NEWBOLD: "Hallo, Dick!

HODGSON: "Hello, Billy, God bless you.

NEWBOLD: "And you, too, though you do not need to have me say it."

HODGSON: "I wonder if you remember the last talk we had together --"

NEWBOLD: "I do remember it, Dick."

HODGSON: "I can recall very well all I said to you that glorious day when we were watching the waves."

NEWBOLD: "Yes, Dick, I remember it well." (Newbold documented that it was on a splendid afternoon of July 1905 at Nantasket Beach.)

HODGSON: "I told you of many, many predictions which had been made for me. I told you I hoped to realize them but I would not consent to give up my work."

NEWBOLD: "First rate, Dick, you told me just that."

HODGSON: "I would give up almost anything else but my work – my work and my pipe."

NEWBOLD: "Dick, that sounds like you...Do you remember something I told you on the boat going to Nantasket?"

HODGSON: "Yes, of course. Long ago you wrote me of your happiness and I wrote back and asked you if you were trying to make me discontented." (This was not what Newbold had in mind, but he confirmed that Hodgson often spoke to him about his happiness.)

Hodgson then began speaking with George Dorr. Dorr asked for clarification as to whether Hodgson was communicating directly or Rector was relaying messages from him.

HODGSON: "It is wholly done by Rector and it will continue to be. I shall take no part in that."

Dorr: "Then it is he who is speaking?"

HODGSON: "It is Rector who is speaking and he speaks for me. I have no desire to take Rector's place. I trust him implicitly and absolutely."

Dorr: "And he constantly reports for everyone?"

HODGSON: "Everyone. There is no question about that. In the first place he is more competent to do it, he understands the

conditions better than any individual spirit; he is fully capable and is under the constant direction of Imperator..." (Imperator was said to have been a more advanced spirit than Rector and others who reported to him.)

On July 3, Newbold and "Hodgson" again dialogued.

HODGSON: "I am Hodgson."

NEWBOLD: "Hallo, Dick!"

HODGSON: "I am glad to meet you, Billy, old chap! How are you? First rate?"

NEWBOLD: "Yes, I am, Dick!"

HODGSON: "Capital. Good. So am I. I come to assure you of my continued existence....Do you remember the case of the clergyman?"

NEWBOLD: "Yes, certainly. I remember a clergyman who lived in Pennsylvania and thought he had supernormal experiences, and I told you about them."



Leonora Piper

(Some confusing remarks by Hodgson followed and Newbold was not sure that they were talking about the same clergyman. Hodgson then

mentioned a very personal matter, which Newbold deemed as veridical but which he preferred to omit from the record. The discussion changed to general comments about Newbold's teaching career. Newbold preferred to again omit several comments by Hodgson, but said that they were "important veridically." The discussion turned to psychical research.)

HODGSON: "You said you could not understand why so many mistakes were made, and I talked you blind, trying to explain my ideas of it."

NEWBOLD: "Dick, this sounds like your own self. Just the way you used to talk to me."

HODGSON: "Well if I am not Hodgson, he never lived."

NEWBOLD: "But you are so clear."

HODGSON: "Of course I am. I am drawing on all the forces possible for strength to tell you these things. You laughed about the ungrammatical expressions and said, why in the world do they use bad grammar?"

NEWBOLD: "Yes, Dick, I said that."

HODGSON: "I went into a long explanation and attributed it to the registration of the machine. You were rather amused but were inclined to leave it on my better understanding." (machine = medium's brain)

NEWBOLD: "You mean, I think, that you understood the subject better than I and I took your explanation? You mean that therefore I was inclined to accept your explanation?"

HODGSON: "I think I do. I find now difficulties such as a blind man would experience in trying to find his hat. And I am not wholly conscious to my own utterances because they come out automatically, impressed upon the machine."

NEWBOLD: "Perfectly clear."

HODGSON: "Yes, I am standing beside you."
(This may have been in response to New-

bold mentally wondering if Hodgson was actually there in the room.)

NEWBOLD: "Can you see me, Dick?"

HODGSON: "Yes, but I feel your presence better. I impress my thoughts on the machine which registers them at random, and which are at times difficult to understand. I understand so much better the *modus operandi* than I did when I was in your world...I remember when you were with me I got very much interested in some letters you wrote me after your return home - your saying some things puzzled you very much."

NEWBOLD: "By jingo! That is true, Dick. It was ten years ago." (Newbold mentioned that due to its personal nature a first-rate veridical statement by Hodgson had to be omitted here. However, the statement had been mentioned at sittings in 1895 with Piper.)

Hodgson then asked Newbold if he remembered a woman named Wright. Newbold did not remember the name. Hodgson makes other statements about the woman, but Newbold still did not remember her.

NEWBOLD: "Do you remember telling me that when you got on the other side you would make it hot for me?"

HODGSON: "I do remember it well. I said I would shake you up - shake you up."

NEWBOLD: "That is just the word you used, Dick." (Newbold later said he was not certain that it was "shake you up," but it was some such colloquial expression.)

HODGSON: "Yes, I did. Oh - I said, won't I shake you up when I get over there if I go before you do! And here I am, but I find my memory no worse than yours in spite of the fact that I have passed through the transition stage - state. You would be a pretty poor philosopher if you were to forget your subject as you seem to forget

some of those little memories which I recall, Billy. Let me ask if you remember anything about a lady in [Chicago] to whom I referred."

NEWBOLD: "Oh, Dick, I begin to remember. About eight or nine years ago, was it, Dick?"

Newbold recalled a woman from Chicago that Hodgson wanted to marry, but could not recall her name and wasn't sure Hodgson ever told him the name. Hodgson gave the last name as "Densmore" (a pseudonym for privacy purposes), which Newbold still didn't recall.

HODGSON: "Do you remember my little talk about the satellites?"

NEWBOLD: "Yes, I do."

HODGSON: "And about the inhabitants of Mars?"

NEWBOLD: "I do indeed, I remember very well." (Newbold later noted that these discussions took place in 1895.)

HODGSON: "That is what I am reminding you of. I heard you and William – William discussing me, and I stood not one inch behind you."

NEWBOLD: "William who?"

HODGSON: "James."

NEWBOLD: "What did William James say?" (Newbold recalled this talk with James the prior week.)

HODGSON: "He said he was baffled but he felt it was I talking – at one moment – then at another he did not know what to think." (James confirmed this as "perfectly true.")

NEWBOLD: "Did you hear anything else?"

HODGSON: "Yes, he said I was very secretive and careful."

NEWBOLD: "Did you hear him say that?"

HODGSON: "He did. He said I was – I am afraid I am."

NEWBOLD: "I don't remember his saying so."

HODGSON: "I tell you Billy, he said so." (James remembered it.)

NEWBOLD: "Did he say anything else?"

HODGSON: "He paid me a great compliment. I fear I did not deserve it. However, I am here to prove or disprove through life. Amen. (Newbold remembered the compliment.)..."Good-by. God bless you and your good wife. Remember me to her. Adieu. R.H."

Newbold wrote his impression to JAMES: "The evidence for H's identity, as for that of other communicators, seems to me very strong indeed. It is not absolutely conclusive; but the only alternative theory, the telepathic, seem to me to explain the facts not as well as the spiritistic. I find it, however, absolutely impossible to accept the necessary corollaries of the spiritistic theory, especially those connected with the Emperor group, and therefore am compelled to suspend judgment."⁶ (One wonders if Newbold's reservations were prompted by his knowing James's feelings about them.)

James noted that the two sittings with Newbold contained less waste matter than other sittings and that the two omitted communications would have greatly increased the veridical effect.

William James's Sitting

William James and his wife Alice sat with Piper on May 21, 1906. After Hodgson greeted them, he asked William James if he had solved the problems yet.

JAMES: "Which problems do you refer to?"

HODGSON: "Did you get my messages?"

JAMES: "I got some messages about your going to convert me."

HODGSON: Did you hear about the argument that I had? You asked me what I had been doing all those years, and what it amounted to...Well, it has amounted to this – that I have learned by experience that there is more truth than error in what I have been studying."

JAMES: "Good!"

HODGSON: "I am so delighted to see you today that words fail me."

JAMES: "Well, Hodgson, take your time and don't be nervous."

HODGSON: "No. Well, I think I should ask the same of you! Well, now, tell me – I am very much interested in what is going on in the Society, and Myers and I are also interested in the Society over here. You understand that we have to have a medium on this side while you have a medium on your side, and through the two we communicate with you."

JAMES: "And your medium is who?"

HODGSON: "We have a medium on this side. It is a lady. I don't think she is known to you."

JAMES: "You don't mean Rector?"

HODGSON: "No, not at all. It is...do you remember a medium whom we called Prudens?" (Prudens is apparently another spirit reporting to Imperator. Exactly why Prudens was assisting and not Rector is not made clear.)

JAMES: "Yes."

HODGSON: "Prudens is a great help. Through Prudens we accomplish a great deal. Speak to me, William. Ask me anything. What I want to know first of all is about the Society. I am sorry that it could not go on."

JAMES: "There was nobody to take your place."

HODGSON: "If it can't go on then it must be –"

JAMES: "Be dissolved. That is what we have concluded. There is nobody competent to take your place. Hyslop is going to – well, perhaps you can find out for yourself what he is going to do."

HODGSON: "I know what he is going to do, and we are all trying to help Hyslop, and trying to make him more conservative, and keener in understanding the necessity of

being secretive...William, can't you see, don't you understand, and don't you remember how I used to walk up and down before that open fireplace trying to convince you of my experiments?"

JAMES: "Certainly, certainly."

HODGSON: "And you would stand with your hands in your trousers pockets. You got very impatient with me sometimes, and you would wonder if I was correct. I think you are very skeptical."

JAMES: "Since you have been returning I am much more near to feeling as you felt than ever before."

HODGSON: "Good! Well, that is capital."

JAMES: "Your personality is beginning to make me feel as you felt."

HODGSON: "If you can give up to it, William, and feel the influence of it and the reality of it, it will take away the sting of death."

The two continued to discuss Society business and mediums. At one point Hodgson had to excuse himself. Rector then communicated that Hodgson had to go out and get his breath. They talk about passwords which Hodgson claims he left behind for James, Lodge, and others, but James said he had not been able to find any such password. James then asked Hodgson if he recalled an incident in which he was playing with his children at the Putnam Camp in the Adirondacks.

HODGSON: "Do you remember – what is that name, Elizabeth Putnam? She came in and I was sitting in a chair before the fire, reading, and she came in and put her hands, crept up behind me, put her hands over my eyes, and said, 'Who is it?' And do you remember what my answer was?"

JAMES: "Let me see if you remember it as I do."

HODGSON: "Well, it feels like Elizabeth Putnam, but it sounds like –"

JAMES: "I know what you mean."

As James recalled the incident, her name was Martha Putnam, not Elizabeth. One day after breakfast, little Martha climbed on Hodgson's back and sat on his shoulders, clasping her hands over his eyes, saying, "Who am I?" Hodgson laughing, responded "It sounds like Martha, but it feels like Henry Bowditch (who weighed around 200 pounds). James considered this very evidential as he doubted that anyone but himself remembered the incident.

James pointed out the error in the name to Hodgson and asked if he could remember the correct name of the girl. Hodgson could not remember.

HODGSON: "I have got it now in my mind. I could not think of it at first. Well it has gone from me at the moment. Never mind. That is less important than the thing itself."

JAMES: "Do you remember another thing? We played a rather peculiar game. Possibly you may recall it. Had great fun."

HODGSON: "I remember playing leap-frog with the boys. Do you remember that?"

JAMES: "Yes, that was frequent."

HODGSON: "Yes, that is a very – and then do you remember how I played bear."

JAMES: "Yes, bear is first rate. I was not there, but I heard them talking about your playing bear...."

The conversation went back to the passwords and Hodgson was unable to remember exactly where he left it. They then discussed her personal effects that were to be sent to his sister in Australia and James assured him that Piddington was taking care of it. Hodgson lamented the fact that James was unable to completely "get hold of the spiritual side of this thing and not only the physical side." James complained that Hodgson was too fragmentary in his messages and hoped he could grow more continuous.

HODGSON: "Yes, but you must not expect too much from me, that I could talk over the lines talk as coherently as in the body. You must not expect too much, but take things little by little as they come and make the best of it, and then you must put the pieces together and make a whole out of it. Before I lose my breath, is there any other question you want to ask me?"

James asks him to recall a particular conversation they had about a clergyman, but Hodgson could not remember it.

HODGSON: "I want you to understand one thing, that in the act of communicating it like trying to give a conversation over the telephone, that the things that you want to say the most slip from you, but when you have ceased to talk they all come back to you. You can understand that."

Alice James tells Hodgson that she is so glad that he can come at all.

HODGSON: "Well, you were always a great help to me, you always did see me, but poor William was blind. But we shall wholly straighten him out and put him on the right track...I am sorry to be off so soon, but I know there are difficulties in remaining too long. They often told me that frequent communication was not good for anyone. I understand what they mean now better than ever..."

In analyzing the sitting, James states that the only evidential point is the anecdote about the Putnam child as he doesn't think anyone else knew about the playful incident. While having concluded that the conscious Piper was not trying to put one over him, James still saw the possibility that someone told her about the incident and that her subconscious memory was now reproducing it.

Selected Dialogue from Sitting with Mrs. R. Bergman

Mrs. R. Bergman sat with Piper on December 31, 1907, and again on January 1, 1908. In the first sitting, the communications were in writing and there was difficulty in reading them. In the second sitting, the voice was used and things went more smoothly. The below extracts are from the second sitting.

HODGSON: "Do you remember my description of luminiferous ether, and of my conception of what this life was like? I have found it was not an erroneous imagination."

Mrs. Bergman recalled the discussion with Hodgson.

HODGSON: "I remember telling you about my dismounting and sitting and drinking in the beauty of the morning."

BERGMAN: "Tell me any experiences that befell you while riding."

HODGSON: "Oh, I told you about the experience with the fiery horse. You remember he dismounted me. It was the first experience I had in seeing stars. I lost consciousness. I experienced passing into this life. I remember my being unconscious and recovering consciousness. I remember telling you about this at the hotel."

Mrs. Bergman recalled how Hodgson had related this very experience to her at the Parker House in Boston in 1904. She remembered that Hodgson spoke of being in a "spiritual universe" during the time he was unconscious.

HODGSON: "When I found the light (Piper), it looked like a tremendous window, open window. The canopy – do you remember how they used to talk about the canopy? It is an ethereal veil. If your spiritual eyes were open you could see through this veil and see me talking to you perfectly."

Mrs. Bergman also recalled Hodgson discussing the "canopy" with her when he was alive.

James concluded that this was a very evidential sitting. "It is improbable that such unimportant conversations should have been reported by the living R.H. to Mrs. Piper, either awake or when in trance with other sitters; and to my mind the only plausible explanation is supernatural. Either it spells 'spirit return,' or telepathic reading of the sitter's mind by the medium in trance."⁷

Examining the Alternatives

Basically, there are six alternatives here:

1. Leonora Piper was a master fraud with an exceptional memory and great dramatic ability.
2. The so-called "controls" were just secondary personalities who were devious tricksters with highly developed telepathic abilities.
3. The medium or her "controls" were telepathically accessing the information from different minds anywhere in the world or from some cosmic reservoir, *i.e.*, Super ESP.
4. A devious earthbound spirit was pretending to be Richard Hodgson.
5. The discarnate Richard Hodgson was in fact communicating.
6. Some component of the Hodgson personality was communicating, but it is for the most part beyond human comprehension.

Conscious Fraud: Considering the fact that Hodgson had known Piper for 18 years and had met with her an average three times a week, the Hodgson communication does not present an ideal test situation, as there is always the possibility that Hodgson discussed things about his personal life with her. However, James knew Hodgson to be "professionally schooled to secretiveness" and not one given to chit-chat with

Piper. In fact, he was criticized by one journalist as being too brusquerie with her. James deemed it highly unlikely that Hodgson would have discussed things like “playing bear” with children or would have mentioned private conversations with other people about such things as luminiferous ether and the internal problems of the Society. “It may be that Mrs. Piper had heard one little incident or another from his living lips, but that any large mass of these incidents are to be traced to this origin, I find incredible,” James offered.⁸

Other researchers who studied Piper, including Sir Oliver Lodge and Dr. James H. Hyslop, further attested to her character and integrity, while also observing her repeatedly under test conditions. Author Henry Holt, an ASPR member who sat with Piper, pointed out in his critique of James’s analysis of the “Hodgson” communications that she did just as well with many other alleged communicators whom she did not know. He added that her vocabularies, sometimes including foreign languages which she did not know, were those of the communicators or the controls, not hers. In effect, conscious fraud seems ruled out.

Unconscious Fraud/Secondary Personalities: James clearly had a difficult time accepting Phinuit and Rector as the spirits of deceased persons, but strangely he does not really discuss George Pellew, who was Piper’s primary control between the Phinuit and Rector regimes. As indicated earlier, it was this G.P. control who convinced Hodgson that there was more than a secondary personality at work here. Thus, it is unclear how James was able to write off Phinuit and Rector as secondary personalities without also claiming that G.P. was a secondary personality. Further, James often referred to Hodgson as a “control,” even though Hodgson had told Dorr that he was not communicating directly. Holt was puzzled by James’s discussion of these controls. “What does James mean by ‘her con-

trols’?” he asked. “Is not one control as good as another, and the Hodgson control good enough? This is apparently the second time in [his report] where, so far as I can see, James uses ‘control’ to disprove a control, a sort of thing, however, which nobody with his reserve could avoid without much borous circumlocution, and which illustrates the almost inescapable verisimilitude of these communications.”⁹

As researcher Minot Savage once asked: “How does it happen that this subconscious self is such an unconscionable, persistent, consistent, and abnormal liar about itself? Why does it not now and then by some sort of accident tell the truth? Has there ever been a case on record in which this subconscious self, which is so wise, so wonderful; which is able to travel the earth over in pursuit of facts and select the particular one which is needed; which can build up no end of distinct and consistent personalities, and put into their lips words and expressions and statements of fact and memories which shall come very near to establishing their identity with people who used to live here – is there, I say, a case on record where this subconscious self has owned up to being a subconscious self?”¹⁰

Holt wondered why the secondary personality would be intent on deceiving. Whether Piper was acting consciously or one of her “secondary personalities” was acting without the knowledge of her primary personality, why were they claiming to be spirits of the deceased? Why was some material consciousness representing itself as the spirit of a deceased person? “Why should, and how could, Mrs. Piper fake out her memories into this lifelike dramatic form?” Holt asked. “That’s a consideration whose weight has been unfelt by many whose interest was concentrated in ‘tests.’ Yet it is perhaps the strongest test of all.”¹¹ James does not appear to have addressed this concern?

Moreover, James admitted that “most of us felt during the sittings that we were in some

way, more or less remote, conversing with a real Rector or a real Hodgson."¹² He noted that Hodgson's "saucy" and "teasing" attitude toward Miss Pope was "absolutely characteristic" of Hodgson and that his expressions and phrases with a Dr. Bayley "were quaintly characteristic of R.H. in the body, as they appear, often rapidly and spontaneously, they give the almost irresistible impression that it is really the Hodgson personality, presiding with its own characteristics."¹³

But even if we assume secondary personalities, rather than spirits of the dead, the question then turns to how the secondary personality telepathically accesses the information it feeds back to the sitter and more than that how it organizes all the facts and feeds them back in a conversational manner. Thus, calling the "control" a secondary personality does not rule out the communicators, i.e., those for whom the control is relaying messages, being spirits of the dead.

Telepathy/Super ESP: It is one thing to telepathically determine the number and suit of a card in a deck held by a person in another room, quite another to instantly organize facts and make lengthy coherent statements in a give-and-take manner.

Simple telepathy, i.e., reading the mind of the sitter, is clearly ruled out in those many cases in which the sitter was unaware of the fact communicated. That leaves the much more complex form of telepathy, now known as Super ESP. Dr. Savage further comments: "If anyone chooses to assume that the subliminal consciousness of somebody can do any conceivable thing; travel over the world and find out any conceivable item of knowledge; tell of things that nobody in the world knows; resurrect facts from a long-distant past, and move physical objects without contact – if, I say, anyone chooses to assume a theory like this, why there is nobody who can prevent his doing it. But if he

claims that it is scientific, or that there are any known facts or adequate reasons for such an assumption, then I submit that he will be likely to place under suspicion his reputation as a sane, fair-minded, and careful investigator."¹⁴

Holt wondered why, if the medium was telepathically obtaining the information, there was so much information, including names, that she did not pick up – facts which were known to the sitters. Why telepathically pick up certain facts and not others? And why, when Newbold asked Hodgson if he remembered a particular conversation, would Hodgson have referred to a different conversation? If Piper had been reading Newbold's mind, he would have mentioned the one Newbold was thinking about.

And if there is some cosmic computer in the ethers into which the medium or secondary personality can tap for information and then offer it up in a give-and-take conversational manner, why claim spirits? It would seem that the medium could gain even more fame and fortune if she were to credit it to her own brain power rather than to spirits of the dead.

Weighing all the factors here, both simple and the more complex telepathy seem highly unlikely.

Impostor Spirits: Many psychical researchers have reported the existence of impostor spirits – low level or earthbound spirits pretending to be someone else. "False personation is a ubiquitous feature in this total mass," James stated. "It certainly exists [in other Piper sittings]; and the great question there is as to its limits."¹⁵

But can impostor spirits access detailed facts known only to Hodgson? If so, we go back to the arguments against Super ESP. Are they all then impostors? If Rector was in fact a benevolent control, why didn't he communicate the fact to James and the other sitters that it wasn't really Hodgson? He stepped in at times to say that Hodgson was struggling and needed a break. Was Rector also an impostor? If so, who

was he impersonating? Rector? Why should Rector have to impersonate someone who was unknown to any living person and whose existence could not be verified?

Calling it an impostor spirit does not, however, defeat the spiritistic hypothesis. It was either the spirit of Richard Hodgson or an impostor spirit. Considering the comments about Hodgson's character coming through as well as very personal information, one finds it much easier to accept the likelihood that it was Hodgson.

Spirits: With all of the foregoing hypotheses ruled out, or at least highly unlikely, it would seem that it was the real Hodgson communicating and that the spiritistic hypothesis holds up. James did not totally disagree. "The records are fully compatible with this explanation, however explicable they may be without it...I myself can perfectly well imagine spirit-agency, and I find my mind vacillating about it curiously," James went on, but adding that he can still see the possibility that Piper's "dream life" which was not

unlike those of hypnotized subjects, could have impersonated spirits.¹⁶

Holt said that he was "staggered" by the latter comment, wondering when there had ever been a case of hypnotism producing the trance phenomena of Piper. He saw James's resistance to the spirit hypothesis as being a result of his "habitual allegiance" to science.¹⁷

Holt saw this uncertainty as possibly a good thing. "If there be a future life vastly more important than the present one, a comprehension of it might easily reach a point where the tantalizing opportunities of that life, visible but not available, would make this life appear so contemptible in comparison as to paralyze effort and even interest," he offered.¹⁸

Of course, there is always the possibility that there is an explanation beyond human comprehension.

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¹ Holt, Henry, *On the Cosmic Relations*, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914, p. 474.

² _____, p. 514.

³ _____, p. 709.

⁴ _____, p. 708.

⁵ Murphy, Gardner, and Robert Ballou, *William James on Psychological Research*, The Viking Press, 1960, pp. 104-105.

⁶ _____, p. 174.

⁷ _____, p. 194.

⁸ _____, p. 120.

⁹ Holt, p. 706.

¹⁰ Savage, Minot J., *Can Telepathy Explain?*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902, p. 103.

¹¹ Holt, p. 704.

¹² _____, p. 708.

¹³ _____, p. 711.

¹⁴ Savage, pp. 104-105.

¹⁵ Holt, p. 707.

¹⁶ _____, p. 710.

¹⁷ _____, p. 710.

¹⁸ _____, p. 724.