Ridgway Collection

Madison, Wis., February 19, 1920.

Dear Sir:

In view of the strong interest in the findings of what is commonly called "Psychical Research", it is important that the public should know how men of science view such matters. Will you kindly send me a brief statement of your opinions on the following points:

1. What is your view of the statements made by Sir Oliver Lodge and other men of distinction in regard to the alleged proofs of communication with the spirits of the dead?
2. How do you regard the using of his prestige as a physicist in behalf of a propaganda for belief in spirits?
3. How do you view the evidence in favor of telepathy?
4. Do you care to express yourself in regard to the effect of such beliefs on the habits of mind, regarded as a matter of social sanity?
5. Will you add to your answers any other considerations which you think important in their bearing upon the general problem presented

In addition I should be glad to know whether the following expresses your views with sufficient accuracy to enable you to give it your endorsement.

"The present revival in the belief in spirits proceeds largely upon the ancient and natural tendency to favor such beliefs. It is a striking example of the "will to believe", in which an emotional prejudice obscures the weakness of the evidence. So far as concerns the physical phenomena, they have been uniformly shown to be the result of fraud. They are generally practiced by mediums of doubtful reputation, and the performances have been duplicated by ingenious tricks. There is little connection between the inability of the observer to determine how the effects are produced and the inference that they are due to the control of supernatural forces. The psychical phenomena are more complex. Most of them are of the nature of the revelation of the private details apparently unknown to the medium. There is reason to conclude that such revelations may be ascribed to the accredited formulae of psychology, including subconscious indications, automatisms of a disassociated personality, as well as to shrewd "fishing" and reading of slight indications furnished by the sitters. The common tendency to herald the results of "Psychical Research" as of like status with the accepted principles of science is pernicious and should be checked In the interest of such a movement a clear statement of views of representative men of science is desirable."

It is my intention to use the results of this inquiry in order to make a clear to the public the actual state of opinion among men of science in general and among psychologists in particular. I urgently request that you send me a reply with the utmost promptness. Will you indicate what portions of this reply you <u>do not care to have cited in print</u>. In addition to a general summary of the statistics of my replies, I intend to print a selected set of answers to show the several types of opinion that prevail.

Trusting that I may count on your support in this movement, I am

Very truly yours,

JOSEPH JASTROW.

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