

# FOREKNOWLEDGE

by

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THIS book is one of a series on the subject of Psychical Experiences. The Society for Psychical Research, it should be stated at once, is in no way responsible for any of the deductions made, or theories advanced. All it has done as a Society is to allow members of the various groups who have been preparing the books to have access to unpublished records in its possession, and to grant permission to reprint records published in its *Proceedings*, and, in special cases, records privately printed in its *Journal*.

The stories of Psychic Experiences that appear in this series are on a completely different level from the majority of such stories published in most papers and magazines. Few people realize the meticulous care which the Society's investigators have always taken to test the good faith and the accuracy of those whose experiences have appeared in the *Proceedings* and *Journal*, as also the good faith and the accuracy of those who contribute corroborative evidence.

The object of this series is to put before the ordinary reading public examples of the evidence for various super-normal occurrences and faculties which the Society has been collecting for over half a century, and is still collecting.

The lack of interest shown by ordinary readers in this body of carefully tested evidence may be due to its bulk and complexity, and partly, perhaps, to their

awareness of the fact that the majority of men of science fight shy of it. One reason for the aloofness of most men of science is probably the absence of any theory which successfully attempts to bring the various phenomena into even a semblance of unity.

In the present series no attempt can, of course, be made to supply such a theory. Nevertheless, it is much to be desired that someone with a thorough knowledge of the evidence should try, as Frederic Myers did nearly forty years ago in his *Scheme of Vital Faculty* (*Human Personality*, Vol. II, pp. 505-54,) to construct 'a connected schedule or rational index of phenomena so disparate that the very possibility of their interdependence is even now constantly denied.' And that such an attempt should be made afresh is all the more to be desired because since Myers's death phenomena of a new type have been observed.

While, then, the authors of these small books recognize the need for some unifying theory, they have confined themselves to the less ambitious and less arduous task of marshalling a quantity of well-attested evidence for phenomena of many different kinds. For such views and comments as may be found in any of the books the individual writer, as has been stated above, is alone responsible.



THE author desires to make acknowledgement of his debt to the Council of the Society for Psychical Research for permission to print summaries of cases from *Proceedings* and *Journal*, also to the Hon. Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, G.B.E., for similar facilities in regard to her book, *Some Cases of Prediction. A Study*.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is a common saying that 'Coming events cast their shadows before.'<sup>1</sup> I am inclined to treat such sayings with some respect; the words of a poet may embody, in a concentrated form, the accumulated experience of generations of mankind and, even though they be not strictly true, they can hardly be completely at variance with the truth or they would not survive. Of course, one does not accept them without question, but they can claim to set up a *prima facie* case for inquiry.

What I propose to discuss in this book is the question whether there is any evidence that coming events ever do 'cast their shadows before' in the sense that people sometimes have knowledge, fugitive and fragmentary glimpses it may be, of the future. Do we ever hear the vague rumour of approaching disaster as we hear the rumble of the oncoming train while it is still out of sight in the distance? Are all the stories of prophecies and warnings mere fables, the outcome of the child-like imagination of mankind?

History and legend are full of such stories, but they are also full of marvels of many different sorts—marvels which we have no hesitation in rejecting as entirely mythical.

It is true, of course, that much prediction of the

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Campbell. 'Lochiel's Warning.'



future is not only possible but commonplace. We make all our plans for the morrow on the strength of such knowledge of the future. I can arrange an appointment at a distant place for a certain time knowing that it will take me so long to get there. More specific and definite examples of prediction may be taken from the tide tables which give the hour of high-water for any day of the coming year, or from the calculated dates of eclipses and other astronomical phenomena. In these predictions, as well as in many others made by scientific men, a high degree of accuracy and certainty is attained. In our dealings with other people we rely, to a great extent, on prediction, or rather on estimates, very often unconsciously formed, of the future behaviour of those with whom we are concerned. Knowing something of the character of a man, and having had many experiences of how character reacts to environment, we are able to forecast how he will behave in certain circumstances. In politics, business and general social intercourse we rely on such estimates of future behaviour and, although we may make mistakes now and then, due to imperfect knowledge, faulty calculation or unforeseen factors in the coming situation, we are, for the most part, substantially correct in our forecasts; in fact, were this not so, an ordered society would hardly be possible.

There is, however, one common feature in all these diverse examples of forecasting, viz., they are all based upon inference from knowledge of the present and past, together with the assumption that causes which have produced a certain effect in the past will do so again in the future.

They are so commonplace that we accept them without questioning and see nothing mysterious about them at all, though, when examined by philosophers and metaphysicians, difficulties and obscurities crop up by the dozen. These difficulties need not worry us, however, for it is not with predictions based upon inference from present and past knowledge that we are now concerned; the subject with which we have to deal is the evidence for non-inferential prediction, or, to use the usual and more accurate term, precognition.

What we want to discover is whether there are any cases where knowledge of the future, which is not based upon inference from knowledge of the past and present, is ever given to man. Do coming events cast their shadows before so that we have glimpses of what the future will bring to us?

The philosophical implications of non-inferential precognition are very far-reaching and even revolutionary in character. Ideas which would ordinarily be scouted as fantastic and ridiculous claim serious attention, and, unless one rests content with the extreme agnostic position, any attempt at explanation seems to involve the entertainment of hypotheses which appear, on the surface, to be wildly improbable.

Apart, however, from the embarrassment caused to professional philosophers, the reality of precognition<sup>1</sup> raises points of difficulty for that everyday working philosophy of life which is possessed, in some degree, by nearly everybody. For example, if events can be

<sup>1</sup> I shall in future usually use the single word 'precognition' for all cases of apparently supernormal, or non-inferential foreknowledge; it will not be used to mean normal prediction based on inference.



known before they happen, does not this imply that the future is completely fixed and determined? If so, what about our freewill and moral responsibility? Can we save freewill and morality by adopting the fatalist theory, that is to say, the theory that 'every man's fate is written on his forehead' and do what he will, he cannot avoid it? Whether such a theory be logically tenable I will not here discuss, but seeing that it is held by a large section of the human race, it would mean discounting human intelligence too profoundly to sweep it contemptuously to one side as being unworthy of serious attention.

If we fail in salvaging morality by adopting the fatalist theory, must we accept whole-heartedly the extreme determinist position and hold that the future is completely and inexorably fixed? On this view, whatever happens, all human action, thoughts, emotions and volitions included, is the inevitable outcome of what has already happened. The laws governing phenomena admit of no exception, our apparent freewill is nothing but a subjective illusion, we are all parts of an immense mechanism which goes on its way regardless of our desires and sufferings.

A dismal theory, perhaps, but one which has been firmly held by some of the greatest thinkers of ancient and modern times. To embrace it whole-heartedly seems to entail the relinquishment of much which we hold to be of the highest value, viz., our inalienable right to decide for ourselves in the final issue, and to behave as morally responsible agents. For if the future be completely predetermined and unchangeable, we are not free to make moral decisions. The choices



which we make, though apparently autonomous, are really the inevitable outcome of the past, and we could not, in fact, have chosen otherwise than we did. Yet, if this be so, can we be morally responsible?

I do not say that fatalism or determinism are the only possible theories which can be held consistently with the reality of precognition, in fact, as I shall hope to show later on, there is a third alternative which permits, though it does not necessarily entail, the existence of freewill and, thereby, our status of morally responsible agents.

It is clear that this matter of precognition is one which touches us very nearly and has a bearing on the most important aspect of human life. It is, therefore, of interest, not only from the standpoint of psychical research, but also from that of ethics and the ordinary everyday conduct of life, to determine, first of all, whether precognition be a reality, and secondly, if it be so, what implications flow from it.

## CHAPTER II

### SOURCES OF EVIDENCE AND CLASSIFICATION

THE records of antiquity are full of accounts of precognition; soothsayers and prophets were more or less respectable practitioners in olden days. The Old Testament provides several examples, Grecian Mythology others. Belief in witches and magicians, who were sometimes able to foresee the future, was commonly held until quite recent times. I imagine that Shakespeare did not consider that he was writing mere nonsense when he introduced the three Weird Sisters into Macbeth. Had we any adequate supporting evidence, that incident would be a good and, in some respects, a rather typical case of precognition. But supporting evidence is necessarily lacking in all ancient cases; they show, however, that the idea that precognition is possible is not of recent growth but has been present in the minds of humanity for as long as we have any record. Since the beginning of serious scientific interest in supernormal phenomena, roughly, that is to say, from the date of the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research some fifty odd years ago, investigators have taken the trouble to collect supporting evidence and thus establish a sounder foundation on which to build a reasonable belief – or the reverse – in the reality of odd and unusual happenings.

The records of the Society contain an immense mass



of valuable material, of cases which have been carefully investigated and examined from the evidential standpoint.

A few years ago I searched the printed records of the Society, i.e., the *Proceedings* and *Journal*, for the first fifty years of their existence and extracted therefrom all the cases of apparent precognition which I could find; a report on the results of this search was published in *Proceedings* of the Society, Volume XLII, February 1934, and it is from this report that I shall draw much of the matter to be contained in this book. I may find it desirable to quote from other sources in order to illustrate some particular point, but I shall confine myself to the S.P.R. cases as far as possible. I think that it is a convenience to the reader who wishes to verify references if the field from which they are drawn is made as narrow as possible.

During the first fifty years of its life the Society published, according to my count, 349 cases of apparent precognition. One must not take these figures too exactly, as some of the cases are multiple, that is to say, more than one instance of precognition is given in the same account. I studied the records of all these cases and came to the conclusion that some twenty of them were not really precognitive at all, they were either clearly chance coincidences, or else cognitions, whether supernormal or not, of contemporary, rather than future, events. I therefore rejected them from my collection.

In addition to these rejected cases, I found others, numbering forty-eight in all, which were so vague that it was doubtful whether a precognition had occurred. As an example of the kind of vagueness which I mean,

suppose a person were to hear the ticking of the death watch beetle and then, within the next week or so, learn of the death of a relative or friend, I should consider such a case to be far too vague to be of the slightest value. I admit that few of the cases which I have put into this class are so crude and naive, in fact, I do not think that the Society would have accepted for publication a narrative so obviously worthless. Another example, more characteristic of the type of case which I have in mind, would be where someone has a vague feeling of depression or of approaching calamity, and subsequently experiences some misfortune to which there had been no obvious reference in the impression. An unidentified hallucination, followed by the death of a friend or relative, would be classified as too vague to be worth considering.

Some of these cases may, of course, have been genuine instances of precognition, but it is safer to reject them all.

In a few instances the evidential value of a case was not sufficiently good for it to be included among those retained, but, owing to the strict rules laid down by the Society in this matter, I had to reject very few on these grounds.

Deducting these 68 rejected cases, we still have the respectable total of 281. Since the publication of my report in 1934 there have been further cases published. I, personally, have come across quite a considerable number of others which, although I have been satisfied as to their genuineness, have not been such as to be capable of formal verification and thus, under the rules of evidence of the S.P.R., have not been published.



I first made a rough classification of the remaining cases into 'Good' and 'Ordinary'. A 'Good' case is one in which the precognition is particularly definite and full of detail, and where the evidence is satisfactory. There were 134 of these. An 'Ordinary' case is one which, although it may not attain to the standard of the Good cases, is sufficiently evidential of precognition to be significant when it is taken along with a mass of other evidence. Standing by themselves these Ordinary cases would not afford a sufficient basis for belief in precognition, but when they are considered as a part of the whole evidence, they certainly lend collateral support, besides sometimes being useful as illustrating some particular point. It was, of course, a matter of personal opinion as to the class to which any particular case should be assigned, although in many instances there was little room for doubt. However, it may be said with considerable certainty that roughly one half, or slightly more, belong to the 'Good' class.

In making the classification I adopted a system of marking, allotting marks for evidential value, also for the amount and kind of detail foreseen and the completeness or otherwise of the fulfilment.

I also drew up a specification of the ideal case; needless to say, I have not yet found one.

The ideal case of non-inferential precognition must comply with the following conditions:

(1) The precognition must have been told or recorded before fulfilment, or else acted upon in such a manner as to afford objective evidence of foreknowledge.

(2) Details must be given in the precognition, and

fulfilled in the event, sufficient to render it unlikely that it was a mere chance coincidence.

(3) If the precognition be of a relatively simple event, it must indicate fairly narrow limits of time for fulfilment, or else contain details which fix the occasion of fulfilment; e.g., visiting a certain place, or meeting a certain person.

(4) It must be of such a nature that inference from knowledge considerably wider than that normally possessed by the subject, and by means of a considerably enhanced power of inference, could not reasonably be held to have afforded the foreknowledge. The bearing of this condition will be made clear when we discuss cases in which hyperaesthesia, that is to say, abnormal acuity of the senses, or where subliminal, or, as some call it, subconscious, knowledge, might have accounted for the precognition.

(5) It must be of such a nature that suggestion, whether auto-suggestion or otherwise, whether conscious or subconscious, could not have brought about the fulfilment. Some cases of precognition of the course of an illness come under this head.

(6) It must be of such a nature that telepathy from another person could not have produced it. An example of what is here meant would be where another person had formed the intention to do so-and-so, and the precognition consists in the subject foreseeing the performance of that action. We assume, in such a case, that knowledge of the intention was conveyed telepathically to the subject.

(7) The time interval between the occurrence of the precognition and the fulfilment must be sufficiently



long to make it certain that they were not really simultaneous, yet sufficiently short to reduce the probability of chance fulfilment to negligible proportions. This latter limit is dependent on the circumstances of the precognition, such as the nature and amount of detail foreseen.

I made the following notes to this specification :

*Note A.* The interval of time which elapsed between the occurrence of the case and its being reported must be taken into account, both as regards the precognition and the fulfilling event. If documentary evidence is not available – and it very rarely is – the evidence depends entirely on memory, so that it is obvious that the sooner it is reported the better. Confirmation of the subject's statements by other people must be independent. Action inspired by the precognition and taken before fulfilment is, in some respects, as good evidence as confirmatory accounts.

*Note B.* Details are more readily given in visual precognitions, hence dreams, visual hallucinations and crystal visions are likely to afford the best cases. Auditory hallucinations may approximate to these where actual words are given. The number of details is important as the probability of the fulfilment being due to chance is far less where there are several than where they are few.

Trivial details are evidentially more valuable than broad general features. Incorrect details do not necessarily detract much from evidential value.

This seems a formidable list of conditions to be fulfilled and, naturally, one does not expect to find the perfect case. But we have some which comply very

nearly with most of the conditions, failing, partially, in only one or two, while we have other cases which are satisfactory as regards those conditions in which the first set failed, yet failing themselves where those succeeded.

A single case, even if ideally perfect, could not, by itself, establish the reality of precognition. However minute the details foreseen, and however accurate the fulfilment, the possibility of chance coincidence would have to be allowed. We know that the queerest coincidences do occur and a single ideal case might be just one of these. Even if two or three more such cases were to be found, we might, though shaken, still cling to the chance hypothesis. When, however, the numbers mount up and we go from twos and threes to tens, twenties and even hundreds, then the conviction that precognitions occur is almost impossible to resist, even if none of the cases be ideally perfect.

There are, in addition, several published collections, for example, a book by Prof. Charles Richet, entitled *L'Avenir et la Prémonition*, which, while it includes several of the S.P.R. cases, contains a number of others; also a short work recently published by the Hon. Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, called *Some Cases of Prediction: A Study*; giving full accounts of cases reported to her as a result of her broadcast address on the subject. These have all been carefully investigated and commented upon by her and constitute a valuable addition to the evidence. Dr. Osty of L'Institut Métapsychique of Paris has also made a thorough and searching examination of the subject and has given some excellent examples of precognition in his various books, and in the *Revue Métapsychique*.



There are, moreover, in the literature of Spiritualism and Psychical Research, other than that of the S.P.R., numerous examples of the phenomenon.

I cannot, obviously, give all the evidence in full, it would fill several volumes, but I propose to summarize a number of representative cases, drawn mainly from those of the S.P.R., which can be taken as a sample of the whole.

Before starting to quote actual cases it will be convenient to adopt a system of classification for the purpose of introducing some order into the heterogeneous mass of material, and I shall follow the system which I used in my report, giving the figures for that collection only. I first divided the cases into classes according to the kind of impression by means of which the cognition was received. I drew up the following table:

CLASSIFICATION

|          | <i>Dream</i> | <i>Border-land</i> | <i>Impres-<br/>sion</i> | <i>Hallucin-<br/>ation</i> | <i>Medium-<br/>istic</i> | <i>Crystal<br/>Vision</i> |
|----------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Good     | 76           | 4                  | 14                      | 17                         | 20                       | 3                         |
| Ordinary | 40           | 3                  | 25                      | 45                         | 31                       | 3                         |
| Totals   | 116          | 7                  | 39                      | 62                         | 51                       | 6                         |

I ought, perhaps, to explain that by borderland cases I mean those which occur between sleep and waking. By impression I mean those cases where the precognition comes as a generalized feeling, such as intense depression or elation, a feeling of someone's presence or that some disaster is impending over the head of some person; sometimes it comes in the form of words

heard mentally, sentences running through the head. Impression may reach such an intensity that it becomes hallucination, and there might, conceivably, be borderland cases between the two types; I do not, however, know of any. The meanings of the other headings are, I think, clear; crystal vision would, of course, include any form of 'scrying', whether a crystal or some other means were used.

It will be observed that dream is the largest of these classes by a long way, but I do not think that we are entitled to draw from this fact the conclusion that precognition is more likely to occur in dreams than in any other state. I would rather explain it as follows. First compare dream with impression. Dreams which are remembered on waking, or thought sufficiently interesting to be told, are likely to have been particularly vivid. On the other hand we are so constantly getting impressions of one sort or another, such as feelings of mild depression, changes of mood, that we pay no particular attention to them. Moreover we can frequently assign a cause to an impression, whereas we can rarely do so for a dream. Finally dreams are likely to contain more detail than impressions. It is clear, therefore, that whether precognitions occur more frequently or not in dreams than in impressions, those which do occur are more likely to be noticed.

As regards hallucinations, while they are much more striking experiences than dreams, and are also capable of containing much detail, they are so much less frequent in occurrence that we should normally expect the number of cases to be fewer.

Concerning mediumistic predictions, I must confess



that I consider my figures to be quite unreliable. I am inclined to believe that precognitions, mostly of a trivial nature, occur fairly frequently in the utterances of the best trance mediums, but it was obviously too large a task to search through all the available records and pick out the apparent cases of prediction. Even if this had been done it would have been impossible, in the majority of cases, to discover whether or not the prediction had been fulfilled.

There is one point which I might mention here, viz., that, in my opinion, precognitions occur only when the subject is in a state of dissociation, that is to say, they are affairs of the subliminal, or as some people prefer to call it, the subconscious mind.

I then made a further classification based on the kind of event foreseen. It is as follows:

|                                                           | <i>Dream</i> | <i>Borderland</i> | <i>Impression</i> | <i>Hallucination</i> | <i>Mediumistic</i> | <i>Crystal Vision</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Death from natural causes ..                              | 28           | 2                 | 3                 | 29                   | 10                 | —                     | 72           |
| Death from accident .. ..                                 | 9            | —                 | 4                 | 5                    | 6                  | 3                     | 27           |
| Course of illness .. ..                                   | 6            | —                 | 4                 | 3                    | 5                  | —                     | 18           |
| Accident not involving death ..                           | 11           | 1                 | 3                 | 3                    | 2                  | —                     | 20           |
| Accident to material things, such<br>as fires, etc. .. .. | 17           | 1                 | 11                | 6                    | 2                  | —                     | 37           |
| Trivial incidents .. ..                                   | 35           | —                 | 6                 | 5                    | 21                 | 3                     | 70           |
| Incidents not trivial .. ..                               | 3            | 1                 | 4                 | 3                    | 1                  | —                     | 12           |
| Arrival cases .. ..                                       | 5            | 1                 | 2                 | 8                    | 2                  | —                     | 18           |
| Winning numbers, winners of<br>races, etc. .. ..          | 6            | 1                 | 2                 | 1                    | 6                  | —                     | 16           |
|                                                           | 120          | 7                 | 39                | 63                   | 55                 | 6                     | 290          |

The reader will notice that the total number of cases exceeds that in the previous table; this is because some cases exhibit precognitions of more than one type of event.

Two or three significant facts emerge from a study of this table. First: Death is the event which provides the highest number of precognitions, being 72 for natural causes and 27 for accidental. Running this very close, however, are incidents, trivial and not trivial, being 70 and 12 respectively. I should perhaps say here that the distinction between trivial and not trivial incidents is not one which can be very sharply drawn. I do not know that it is of much importance, but I felt that one could not properly put under the same heading so trivial an event as the finding of a brooch, and an incident such as the failure of a bank in which the subject had all her money. The important point to notice is that most of the incidents foreseen were quite trivial and unimportant.

Under the heading of arrival cases, I have included the arrival of persons and messages, letters and telegrams. These might, of course, have been classed as incidents, but there is a theoretical reason for keeping them separate, as will appear later.

Another point to be noticed is that in the case of death, the precognitions by hallucination are nearly equal in number to those by dream, viz., 34 and 37 respectively, while for incidents, dream, at 38 cases, far outnumbers hallucination, which stands at 8.

I think that we can suggest a possible explanation for this. The emotional excitement attendant on death is far greater than that caused by a trivial incident.



There are some grounds for holding that emotional excitement may be connected in some way with the generation of hallucinations. In the census of hallucinations carried out by the S.P.R. in the early days, it was found that phantasms, i.e., hallucinatory appearances, sounds and so on, reached their greatest frequency round about the actual time of death, tailing off rapidly in numbers as the interval between the occurrence of the hallucination and the death increased.

Emotional excitement would naturally tend to be greater when the death was near at hand than when it was some distance away in time.

There are two or three special types of case which require mention. First: Collective, that is to say, where the precognition has been experienced by more than one person. There are only two instances of this in dreams, neither of which is in the 'Good' class.

In the first, to be found in *Proc.*, XIV, 253, Dr. Howard and another student of Columbia University both dreamed on the night before the boat race that Columbia would win. Presumably everybody at the University was more or less excited about the coming race, so there is nothing remarkable in two people there dreaming about it on the night before, nor that they should dream of their own crew being victorious. Had it not been for the fact of being collective I should not have mentioned the case.

The second case, *Journal*, XIII, 118, is of a Mr. E. J. and his wife having apparently simultaneous dreams of his mother. In Mrs. E. J.'s dream she was told that the mother would not live for another three months. This prediction was fulfilled. However, as the mother

was eighty-two years of age, and expected to die at any moment, the prediction was not striking. Here again I should have rejected the case as worthless, and probably due to chance, except for the curious fact of collectivity.

Collective hallucinations are more common; I found nine of them in my collection. The following is a summary of one such case. It is taken from *Proc.*, XI, 448-51.

The family of Mme. Isnard were seated at dinner with a friend, while their mother was lying ill in an adjoining room. A sudden and inexplicable gust of wind arose, blowing together with a crash, and then open again, the folding doors between the dining-room and Mme. Isnard's bedroom. Mlle. Isnard then saw an hallucinatory figure of a woman pass into the corridor. The head and shoulders were covered with a veil and the face was hidden. The figure was like that of a nun. She felt an immense sadness and thought, 'My mother will die.' Looking at the others seated at the table she perceived that they, too, had seen the apparition. She spoke of it and the visitor tried to comfort her by saying that it was only a play of shadows. Mme. Isnard, who had been dozing, and had seen and heard nothing, was somewhat worse on waking. The following week the son, Dr. Isnard, was alone with his mother, when the doctor called and she rose to let him in. As she went slowly to the door, Dr. Isnard was struck with the likeness between her and the apparition which he had seen. Mme. Isnard died that month. The story is well attested and is confirmed by the independent account of the visitor.



In this case precognition was not only collective but, for the daughter, the visual hallucination was combined with an impression; in fact, had it not been for the reinforcement given to the hallucination by this means, I should have counted the case as being too vague to be of much value, seeing that there was no certain indication that the appearance of the figure symbolized death, nor that it was in any way concerned with Mme. Isnard. It is not clear from the account whether the rest of the family and the visitor shared the impression with Mlle. Isnard, or whether they took it from her that the apparition was a portent of the death of the mother.

Besides these collective hallucinations I found two cases of collective impressions.

In all these collective cases, while it is possible that the several subjects received the precognition independently from an external source, it seems a more reasonable hypothesis to suppose that one only of the percipients experienced a precognition and that he or she passed on the knowledge to the others by telepathy.

Collective cases are not of any special importance in contributing towards an understanding of the problems of precognition, but they are instructive and interesting in other respects; and the fact of being collective certainly lends an added impressiveness to the evidence.

The next type to which I now refer is that of Recurrent cases. I have 6 instances of recurrent precognitive dreams, 5 of hallucination, 1 of impression and 2 mediumistic.

These cases certainly give the impression that there must have been some persistent cause, either internal

or external. It might be that the knowledge has somehow been acquired by the subliminal mind and that more than one attempt has been made to transmit it to the normal consciousness. On the other hand the external source from which the knowledge has been derived might have been tapped on several occasions.

The evidential value of these cases is high; not only is it less likely that mere chance coincidence could account for the phenomena, but, in the case of dreams, repetition adds so much to the impressiveness that one would be more inclined than usual to pay attention to and remember a recurrent dream, also, possibly, to tell other people about the experience.

It is true that where the dream is reported as having occurred twice during the same night, it is always plausible to suggest that the second occurrence did not really happen, and that the dreamer was subject to an illusion of memory. It is particularly difficult, as a rule, for most people to remember dreams, although with a little practice the habit can be acquired, when it often becomes clear that dreams are a great deal more numerous than is usually thought; that is to say, the dreams which we should normally remember are only a small percentage of those which can be remembered after practice, and even these latter are probably only a few out of a far larger number. Dreams which contain a supernormal element, whether precognitive or telepathic, are likely to be more vivid and easier to remember, but it does not follow that all vivid dreams consist of anything beyond normal ingredients.

Where the dream has been told, noted either in writing or by a special act of memory, or somehow or



other acted upon before it recurs, the suggestion of illusion of memory is not so plausible; nor when a comparatively long interval occurs between the original and its repetition.

I now will give a short summary of one of these cases as a sample.

From *Proc.*, V, 319: Mrs. Smith dreamed on three nights running that her mother would soon die. On the last occasion she jumped up and said to her husband, 'Oh, that horrid dream again, and someone has just whispered in my ear, "She will last but five weeks."' In each dream Mrs. Smith tried to get to her mother but could not do so.

At the time her mother, who lived in Ireland, was very well and, in fact, wrote at the time of the dream that 'she had taken a new lease of life.' Four days later she was stricken by paralysis. She asked for Mrs. Smith to come to her, but, owing to smallpox then raging in Dublin, Major Smith refused to allow his wife to go. Mrs. Smith's mother died exactly five weeks to the very hour after the time of the last dream. The account is confirmed by Major Smith.

Another more impressive example is that of Lady Q, of which I give an account on page 47. Here the dream was three times repeated and the fulfilling event took place six years after the first dream.

Further instances of recurrent precognitions will be found among the other types of case of which I give summaries.

The remaining special class to which I wish to call attention is that in which a warning is conveyed by the precognition. I found 12 of these among dreams,

2 in the borderland cases, 9 impressions, 10 hallucinations, and 1 mediumistic.

These cases are particularly interesting for several reasons. First, evidential. From this point of view, if, in consequence of the warning, the subject makes some change in his course of action, this fact may constitute very good confirmatory evidence. Consider an actual case. *Proc.*, VIII, 400: Mr. Brighten, sleeping on board a yacht at anchor, dreamed of a voice warning him of being in danger of being run down by another vessel. He woke and went on deck, but finding everything quiet and in order, although fog had come on, turned in again and went to sleep. The dream was repeated and he again woke and went up on deck. He was rendered so anxious by the dream, and by the fog, that this time he went aloft, just in time to see, above the fog, another vessel bearing down on him. He shouted to the captain of this vessel who put his helm over and thus avoided a collision.

There is independent confirmatory evidence, but, even without this, the case is strong. It was in consequence of the warning conveyed by the dream that Mr. Brighten twice went on deck during the night and, on the second occasion, actually went aloft. Actions speak louder than words, and it is hard to doubt that he did actually receive some sort of warning. In this particular case I could, however, find an alternative explanation to that of supernormal precognition. Anyone used to the sea is liable to develop unusually acute sensitivity to sounds or other indications of changes of weather and other matters affecting the safety of his craft. It is quite common for a very slight



and, to a landsman, almost imperceptible alteration of the sounds of the ship to cause a seaman to wake up from sleep and turn out to see that all is right. The coming on of fog frequently causes such an alteration in sound: it might have been a steamer blowing, or a lighthouse in the vicinity commencing to sound its fog signal, which was the cause of Mr. Brighten's first waking, and that his dreaming mind dramatized this into the form of a warning voice. Having gone on deck and found fog, he would naturally be somewhat anxious on going to sleep again and his senses would have been subconsciously alert; thus he might have caught some sound from the oncoming vessel, sufficient to cause the warning to recur.

I am aware that this may sound rather far-fetched, and against it may be put the fact that, although Mr. Brighten found that fog had come on, he did not consider that the situation was sufficiently dangerous to make it prudent for him to remain on watch after his first waking.

The next case to this, in *Proc.*, XIII, 401, is one in which Mr. Brighten is again concerned. He was sleeping on board a moored pleasure vessel with a companion. He dreamed that the mooring ropes parted and that the vessel was carried out to sea by the current and swamped on the bar. He woke and went on deck in time to see the bow rope part. His companion also woke and followed him on deck, arriving just as the stern rope parted. They managed to hold on with boathooks until help arrived and the vessel was re-moored.

Here again the warning was successful and the

disaster was averted by action taken in consequence of it. The fact that he went on deck to inspect the moorings during the night is strong confirmation of the story of the dream. He may, of course, have deliberately invented the whole thing, simply desiring to spin a yarn, but there is no reason whatsoever to doubt his veracity; the fact remains that something or other did cause him to go on deck just at the critical moment.

The second point of interest in warning cases is that they appear to exhibit purpose. The majority of the cases of precognition of which I have any knowledge seem to be completely meaningless and devoid of any practical utility. While it may be of great interest to know beforehand when someone is going to die, there is, as a rule, little that can be done about it, nor any practical advantage to be gained, while the precognition of a trivial incident cannot possibly benefit anybody. I merely mention this point here: we may have to return to it later when we come to discuss the theoretical side of the matter.

Some of these warning cases also illustrate very clearly another important distinction which is to be found among precognitions. In them the precognition is recognized as a *prediction* or *premonition*, it has about it the flavour of futurity. When we remember something which has happened to us in the past we get a mental image which bears on it the mark of pastness, there is an inherent reference backwards in time; similarly in warning, and some other types of precognitions, the mental image has a reference forwards in time and bears the mark of futurity. But



this is by no means so in all, or even in most, cases of precognition. The image is received by the mind, but it has no special temporal reference, it is recognized as having been a precognition afterwards, that is to say, when the fulfilment is learnt. There is a parallel to this in ordinary memory; for instance, when we get a mental image of a place and afterwards recognize it as having been an image of somewhere we once visited, or when we catch a glimpse of some person who, somehow, seems familiar but cannot be placed, and later on we remember who it was.

This point is of considerable importance, and it must be remembered that most precognitions are not immediately known to be such, they are not predictions in the sense that they are, at the time of their occurrence, consciously recognized as having a reference to the future.

The last feature of warning cases to which I now wish to call attention is very curious and, for theoretical purposes, rather puzzling. In some, but not in all, of these cases the warning is acted upon and, as a consequence of this action, the complete fulfilment of the precognition is averted. In the first of the two cases just cited, there seems little doubt that, had not Mr. Brighten gone aloft and hailed the oncoming vessel, there would have been a collision, but it is not clear that the precognition was of the actual fact, it looks rather more like a precognition of a possibility, viz., the danger of being run down. In the second case, had not the two men gone on deck when they did, the vessel would undoubtedly have been swept away as foreseen in the dream, though whether she would then have been

vulcanizer, happened only a few seconds after the hallucinatory warning voice had been heard, sufficient only for Mr. Smith to run to the window.

Simultaneous and precognitive cases may be arranged in an unbroken series, the first type shading off into the second by imperceptible degrees; moreover it is interesting to note that similar means of conveying the warning are employed in both types.

These facts tend to suggest that the same faculty is at work in both types of case.



## CHAPTER III

### ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

WE can now consider the bulk of the 281 cases in the collection drawn from the S.P.R. records and see whether any of them can be eliminated as being susceptible to an explanation other than that of super-normal precognition.

In my view there are four possible special alternative explanations which are applicable in certain cases, besides the general alternatives, such as chance, etc.

These four are: (1) Telepathy, (2) Auto-suggestion, (3) Subliminal knowledge and inference therefrom, (4) Hyperaesthesia (i.e., abnormal acuity of the senses). There may, of course, be others, but I have not been able to discover any, nor have I come across any suggested by other investigators. I will deal with them in order and illustrate with examples.

(1) *Telepathy*. Cases where the alternative explanation of telepathy can be put forward are those in which some person, other than the subject, had normal knowledge that the event foreseen would happen, or else had formed the intention to act in a certain manner. The most numerous of the first sort are those called 'Arrival' cases, in which the arrival of a letter or telegram is foreseen. The sender of the letter possesses normal knowledge that it is on its way and will, in due course, arrive; on this hypothesis, it is sup-

posed that this knowledge is conveyed telepathically to the subject. The telepathic message<sup>1</sup> is, of course, sent subliminally.

A variation of this hypothesis which might possibly be applicable in some cases is to suppose that the subject happens to become aware by clairvoyance of the fact that a letter is being written or posted, and that this knowledge is transmitted to the normal consciousness, either in a dream or hallucination, etc., as a precognition. I am not inclined to regard this possibility very seriously, as the element of chance is so large. In the case of telepathy there already exists a conscious link between the writer of the letter and the subject, while for clairvoyance that link is absent, and we have to rely on chance to supply it. However, whichever hypothesis we adopt, such cases may be lifted out of the category of true precognition.

The following cases are illustrations. The first is from *Journal*, X, 27: Mr. J. G. Keulemans dreamed of receiving a postcard in German with two words erased and Latin names substituted. One was the name of a bird 'Zosterops.' The card was delivered two hours later.

The second, from *Proc.*, XI, 461: Mrs. Venn coming down to breakfast, asked A., who was seated at the table, if there were any letters for her. He replied that there was one. Mrs. Venn then asked him to see from whom it came and he replied, 'It has the Deal

<sup>1</sup> I speak of a telepathic message being sent. We do not know that anything which could be called sending, or even anything which could be called a message, is involved in the phenomenon of telepathy, but such language is sometimes convenient and does no harm provided that it is not taken to be exact.



postmark, it is from Frances, for you or me.' Mrs. Venn, whose back was towards the table all this time, turned and saw that there was no letter. It was evident that A had had a visual hallucination as he was confident that he had seen the letter, read the postmark and identified the writer by the handwriting. This was at 9 o'clock in the morning. An hour later a letter arrived by the second post. It was for A from Frances and bore the Deal postmark. Frances had been away from Deal and neither Mrs. Venn nor A knew that she had returned there.

From *Proc.*, XI, 503: Professor J. Thoulet was sharing rooms with a friend at Rivanazzaro, in Piedmont. The wife of this friend was then living at Toulon and was shortly expecting a baby. Professor Thoulet woke one night thinking that he had a telegram in his hand. He entered the room of his friend and woke him, crying out, 'You have just got a little girl, the telegram says,' and then began to read the telegram. Before he had completed doing so, it appeared to vanish from his hand and he realized that he had been dreaming. His friend made him write down the words which he had seemed to read and he made a sort of plan of the remainder, although he could not then remember any of the words in spite of the fact that he had read them in his dream. Professor Thoulet left Rivanazzaro after two or three days and went to Turin; eight or ten days later he received a telegram from his friend as follows, 'Come directly, you were right.' He returned to Rivanazzaro and was shown a telegram which his friend had received; the beginning was exactly what he had written down and



when he read the remaining words he remembered them as the same as those which he had seemed to read in the dream telegram. The confinement had taken place ten days after the night of the dream. Professor Thoulet was personally known to Professor Charles Richet who vouches for the story.

It will be seen from a consideration of these cases that while the simpler instances can be fairly adequately accounted for by telepathy, in the more complex the telepathic hypothesis requires a good deal of stretching to make it cover the facts. In Professor Thoulet's case, for example, we have to assume that the sex of the child to be born was correctly guessed beforehand, also that the actual wording of the telegram was decided upon ten days before the event took place. Where we have to make additional unsupported assumptions in order to enable any hypothesis to cover the facts, the probability that that hypothesis is applicable rapidly diminishes as the number and intrinsic improbability of the assumptions increase.

We know, or at any rate we are pretty certain, that there is such a thing as telepathy, although we do not know much about it, or how and under what conditions it works; if, therefore we can explain a phenomenon by postulating telepathy we are bound, provisionally, to accept that explanation rather than one which necessitates the operation of a less well established cause, such as supernormal precognition.

But if we have, as here, a graduated series of cases wherein the explanation by telepathy becomes progressively more difficult and the supplementary assumptions more numerous and less likely, the tailing off of



applicability tends rather to discredit the hypothesis as a whole. However, supernormal precognition is so extraordinary and intrinsically unbelievable that one feels disposed to grasp at any alternative, even if only barely possible. It seems to me that the safer course to pursue is provisionally to class all these cases as non-precognitive, but to bear in mind that the classification may have to be modified. We can bracket together the two rival hypotheses, but put telepathy first.

The second type of case which may possibly be explained by telepathy is that in which the intention to perform some action has been formed by someone and the subject somehow obtains knowledge of it by means of telepathy or mind-reading. I would remind readers that a large number of what we call precognitions contain no definite reference to the future: it is only after they have subsequently been found to be veridical, i.e., truth-telling, of a future event that they are recognized as precognitive.

Suppose that B forms the intention of visiting A and A dreams of that visit before it actually happens, we should explain the case as being due to telepathy from B, even though A's dream showed the event as being present and not future. B, for example, might be thinking of his proposed visit and picturing himself as being with A, this picture might then be transmitted to A by telepathy.

Of course the action intended may not be a visit, it may be anything whatsoever and not in any way connected with the person who experiences the precognition. In such a case the telepathic message would, as it were, strike at random.

The first case which I cite is one of arrival of visitors ; it is taken from *Proc.*, VI, 374. It will be observed that the person who had the precognition was herself a visitor at the house and would, on the face of it, seem to have been the most unlikely one to receive the telepathic message, if such there were. It may have been, however, that she was in some way peculiarly sensitive to such things and thus picked it up while the others missed it.

Here is the story. Miss X, driving in a wagonette with the friends with whom she was staying, when nearing the house remarked, 'You have very early visitors.' None of the others could see anything, but Miss X described a dogcart, with a white horse and two men in it, standing at the door. She saw one of the men get down and commence playing with a fox terrier. She described their appearance and commented on their dress, although the distance was so great that she could hardly have seen them normally. As they reached the house and drove up the drive, Miss X called attention to fresh wheel marks in the gravel ; no one else, however, could see them. On entering the house they learned that no visitors had called. Shortly afterwards, a dogcart with a white horse, in which were two men, drove up and the scene was enacted exactly as Miss X had described it. Their appearance, clothes, etc., were as she had described, and one of the men alighted and played with the dog.

Here the hypothesis of telepathy requires a good deal of stretching, although it might be made to cover the facts. We should have to suppose that not only the



appearance of the dogcart, horse and the men themselves, was transmitted telepathically, but also that the intention of one of them to alight and play with the dog had already been formed. The hallucinatory wheel marks in the gravel might have been simply the effect of suggestion on Miss X.

In the next case the intention is not of a visit but of a far more sinister action. That the subject received the precognition can be accounted for, if at all, only by the fact that she was on the spot and happened to be peculiarly sensitive. Whether she was always sensitive to such influences is not known. The case is reported in *Proc.*, X, 332. Mrs. McAlpine was sitting by the side of a lake and was absorbed in the beauty of the scene; presently she felt a cold chill creeping over her and a curious numbness, as though she could not move. She felt frightened, yet impelled to stare at the water. Gradually a black cloud seemed to rise and in the midst she saw a tall man in a suit of tweeds jump into the water and sink. Then the blackness passed and the scene became normal again. Mrs. McAlpine told her brother and sister of her experience, but they only laughed at it.

About a week later, Mr. Espie, a bank clerk, who was unknown to Mrs. McAlpine, committed suicide by drowning himself at that place. There was evidence to show that he had been contemplating taking his life for some time.

Mrs. McAlpine's account is confirmed by her sister.

It may be that the man, in contemplating suicide, had decided on the spot where he would do it. The chill and numbness felt by Mrs. McAlpine, also the

black cloud, could be accounted for as being symbolic.

In my collection of cases I have found 9 of dreams, 9 impressions, 9 hallucinations, 2 mediumistic and 1 crystal vision, which might possibly be explained by telepathy.

The next alternative to be discussed is that of *auto-suggestion*. The way in which this would work is somewhat as follows. The subject gets an idea that something is going to happen and this idea acts as an auto-suggestion and operates so as actually to bring about the very thing which was anticipated. It is clear that this is possible only where such things as are capable of being produced by suggestion are concerned; these are mainly to do with the state of health of the subject. If it were a case of performing some specific action, we should not consider it necessary to invoke any unusual cause whatsoever. It might conceivably be that the subject unconsciously influenced another person to act in a certain way and thus fulfil the apparent precognition, but this assumes the existence of telepathic suggestion. I do not say that telepathic suggestion is impossible, or even unknown, but I do not know of any cases which could plausibly be referred to this cause. Dr. Tanagras, of Athens, has elaborated a theory on these lines by means of which he seeks to explain many cases of precognition, even those involving accidents to material things, such as railway disasters, but I am not disposed to regard it very seriously.

We know, however, that auto-suggestion is potent to produce effects on the body and mind, and where the



apparent precognition is of such an event, it seems reasonable to adopt the hypothesis that the fulfilment was due to the operation of that cause.

The following case is an illustration. It is taken from *Proc.*, V, 291. The youngest son of Professor Brooks had been ill, but had recovered and was apparently quite well. He told his mother, who had just returned from abroad, that a friend of his, who had died some months previously, had appeared to him and told him that he would die from heart trouble on 5th December at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Everyone, including the doctor, laughed at him; but the boy remained convinced that he would die as foretold. On 4th December he took leave of his friends, giving them flowers and parting presents. He rose as customary on the 5th, ate an unusually hearty breakfast and was, to all appearances, quite well. At lunch he complained of faintness and died of paralysis of the heart at 3.10 p.m. He was aged 17 years and 5 months at the time of his death.

The number of cases which might plausibly be explained by auto-suggestion I found to be 3 dreams, 2 impressions, 7 hallucinations and 1 mediumistic. It may possibly be significant that there are more of them to be found among hallucinations than in all the other classes put together. It seems reasonable to explain this on the grounds that hallucinations, being much rarer and more exciting events than dreams, impressions, etc., would thereby tend to be more likely to produce an effective auto-suggestion.

The next class to be discussed is that in which the knowledge shown in the precognition might possibly



have been derived from inference from *subliminal knowledge*. It is known that our subliminal knowledge may sometimes be wider and fuller than that of our normal consciousness. We frequently notice things which never come into the focus of our ordinary attention; for example, we may be reading in a room in which a clock is ticking and be quite unconscious of the sound until something brings it to our notice, when we recognize that we have been hearing it all the time.

It is clear that this type of alternative explanation is one which is capable of almost indefinite expansion. We cannot set any precise limit to our subliminal knowledge, especially if we are prepared to admit the possibility of acquiring it by telepathy or clairvoyance. Moreover, it is abstractly possible that our powers of subliminal inference may greatly exceed our normal capacity in that respect. We must not, however, push the explanation too far. In many cases the requisite amount of knowledge would be so great, and the powers of inference therefrom so fantastically acute, that the hypothesis is quite untenable.

The cases which may plausibly be held to come under this heading are mainly those which are concerned with the state of health or the course of illness. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the subliminal mind may possess a wider and deeper knowledge of the state of the organism, and become aware of developments in the course of a disease some time before the effects of these are apparent to the supraliminal.

It is further possible that this cause of apparent precognition may be supplemented by auto-suggestion; thus the subject may become subliminally aware of the



development of his illness, and infer therefrom the probability of a change in his bodily state; auto-suggestion may then step in and operate to bring about the exact fulfilment of the inference.

The following is an example of this, though, as a case, it is rather defective, as the prediction was only partially fulfilled. It is taken from *Journal*, IV, 292-3. Mrs. Edwards had an auditory hallucination predicting her death at a certain hour. At the exact time she had a severe haemorrhage and very nearly died. The clock was actually striking when the haemorrhage started.

Other instances of cases which might possibly be attributed to inference from subliminally acquired knowledge are:

*Proc.*, XI, 432, Dr. Suddick, with his wife and two friends, was sitting for table-tilting. One of the sitters, Mr. Cottnam, inquired concerning his friend, Mr. Chris Varis, then lying ill in another town and expected to die at any moment. Mr. Varis's doctor had told Mr. Cottnam that he would probably live only a few days at most. In answer to the inquiry, the table rapped forty times. Taking this to mean that forty days would elapse before the date of the death, which would bring it to 8th October, Mr. Cottnam asked, 'Will he pass out on 8th October?' The table replied, 'Yes.' Asked if he would pass in the forenoon, it again answered 'Yes.' Mr. Cottnam then asked whether a telegram would be sent to him on the morning of the 8th, giving the information. The table replied 'Yes.' A night or so later, Mr. Cottnam, sitting at another house with different sitters, had a message purporting to come from a friend, recently deceased but of whose

death he was unaware. This message confirmed that Mr. Varis would die on 8th October.

The prediction was fulfilled: Mr. Varis died at 6 a.m. on 8th October, and a telegram was sent to Mr. Cottnam that morning.

Fourteen people signed a statement to the effect that they knew of the prediction before the event.

Mrs. Varis, the widow, stated that neither she nor her husband knew anything about the prediction having been made.

*Proc.*, XI, 446. A lady staying with a relative in Paris, saw, while she was in bed, a hallucinatory figure resembling him, but shrunken, partially paralysed and apparently imbecile, crossing the room. He was asleep at the time. Some time later he was attacked by softening of the brain, and became nearly as she had seen him in the hallucinatory vision.

Counting all those cases which, without undue stretching of the hypothesis, might be accounted for as being due to inference from subliminal knowledge, I found 10 among dreams, 2 borderland, 5 impressions, 19 hallucinations, and 1 crystal vision.

It must be remembered, however, that there was no independent evidence in any of these cases that the subject actually did possess the requisite subliminal knowledge: all we can say is that it might possibly have been so, and thus an alternative to supernormal precognition must be allowed.

The last of the possible alternatives is explanation by *hyperaesthesia*, that is to say, unusual or supernormal acuity of the senses. There is excellent independent evidence that hyperaesthesia occurs, sometimes to an



extent which appears almost miraculous. It is, as a rule, a sporadic occurrence, not the kind of thing which can be called up at will; although there are grounds for believing that in certain cases it can sometimes be induced by hypnosis.

It is quite possible that the hyperaesthetic sensation may not be consciously received as such, but may reach only the subliminal mind, in which case the knowledge acquired might rise in symbolic form to the supraliminal, or might be transmitted as a vague feeling of uneasiness, an hallucinatory warning, and so on.

Here are some cases. The first is from *Proc.*, XI, 418. A lady, living in a wooden house in the Rockies, while sitting one evening in the porch, had an hallucinatory vision of a fire in the distance. After watching for about ten minutes, she heard a faint crackling sound and, being disturbed by the hallucination which, at the time, she took to be real, she went to investigate and found her own house on fire. She was just in time to save her child. There was no other fire in the vicinity.

As lending support to the hypothesis of hyperaesthesia, it is interesting that the same subject experienced a second somewhat similar occurrence. While in England, she was wakened one night from sleep by the impression of hearing her name called. On waking she found the nightlight blazing.

The second is from *Proc.*, XI, 421. M. H. Gray had an hallucinatory vision of flames. On investigation she found that the clothes in the laundry were on fire. This might have been hyperaesthesia of smell or of hearing, although two closed doors intervened.

The following, though possibly due to hyperaesthesia,

requires a considerable stretching of that hypothesis to make it fit. It is from *Proc.*, XI, 424. Mr. F. O. Smith, a dentist, was working at his bench on a set of false teeth using a copper vulcanizer, when he heard a quick, imperative voice call twice, 'Run to the window, quick.' Without stopping to think where the voice came from, he obeyed, and at that instant the vulcanizer exploded, partially wrecking the room. He thus escaped death or serious injury. It was found later that the safety valve of the vulcanizer had become inoperative. Mr. Smith may have had a hyper-aesthetic indication of this, or of the undue pressure in the vessel; for example, there may have been some slight alteration in the sound emitted by the boiling.

I did not find many cases where this explanation could fairly be applied: there were 1 borderland, 6 impressions and 4 hallucinations.

In making all these selections I have stretched the various hypotheses as far as they could reasonably stand it, on the principle that explanation by an independently known cause was to be preferred to postulating anything so antecedently unbelievable as non-inferential knowledge of the future. However, if subsequent investigation should provide grounds for accepting supernormal precognition as actually happening at all frequently, it may be that the stretching in which I have indulged will have to be considered as having been too liberal, and that some of the cases assigned to the alternative categories could more plausibly be reckoned as instances of true precognition.

It is better, nevertheless, to be on the safe side and



disallow all cases where an alternative is even remotely probable. We are then left with the following cases of precognition: 94 dreams, 4 borderland, 17 impressions, 23 hallucinations, 41 mediumistic and 4 crystal vision, making 183 in all. This is a sufficiently formidable array of evidence to challenge us to find an explanation—we cannot lightly set it aside.

Besides these cases collected from the first fifty years of the records of the S.P.R., there are a few which have been published since I made my report. There is also the collection made by the Hon. Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, contained in the book already referred to; these number thirty-two. The general standard of evidential value of these cases is high, in none has an unsupported narrative been accepted, confirmation of some sort has always been obtained. They are classified under four headings, viz., (1) those which may be attributed to coincidence, (2) those which could be accounted for by telepathy, but which cannot be dismissed as examples of coincidence, (3) those in which the foreknowledge shown could conceivably have been derived from telepathy, but telepathy of a very complex kind, (4) true precognition. There are 7 cases in the first class, 5 in the second, 4 in the third and 16 in the last. The types of incident precognized range from winning horses to accidental death, trivial incidents to serious disasters, including the loss of the Airship R101. There are dreams, hallucinations, impressions, etc.

I need not enter into any discussion of the individual cases: this has already been so well done by the author that anything further would be redundant. For those who desire fuller acquaintance with the evidence for

precognition I would recommend reading the book itself.

In the other work to which I have referred, viz., Professor Richet's *L'Avenir et la Prémonition* there is a collection of some 140 or 150 cases; some, however, have been drawn from the records of the S.P.R. and have thus already been counted in my collection. Roughly one may say that there are some 100 cases in this book additional to those which are reported in *Proceedings* and *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research. Here the average evidential value is, perhaps, not quite so high as in the other collections, but there is quite a number of cases which appear to be satisfactory in this respect.

Besides these authorities, numerous examples of precognition are to be found scattered about in the literature of psychical research and spiritualism. It is, of course, out of the question to make a comprehensive collection from all sources, nor would the result repay the labour. The total mass of evidence is so great that it would be impracticable to attempt to classify and analyse it all: the only method is to take a large, and fairly representative, sample and confine investigation to that, assuming that what is found to be true therein will apply roughly and generally to the whole mass.

I would, however, just mention one other authority, Dr. Osty of the Institut Métapsychique of Paris. In the publications of that institute, viz., the *Revue Métapsychique*, as well as in his various books, may be found many examples of precognition, investigated and analysed with care. Dr. Osty arrives at the conclusion that it is sometimes possible for a suitably sensitive



subject to obtain supernormal knowledge of the future (*le déroulement*) of his own life, or of that of another human being.

Were all the reported cases of apparent precognition collected from all these various sources and subjected to analysis, I am sure that, after the rejection of doubtful cases and those which could reasonably be ascribed to chance coincidence or other normal causes, as well as those which can be accounted for on the basis of the four alternative hypotheses which I have discussed, there would remain a very considerable mass of evidence to be reckoned with, that is to say, cases of true precognition or non-inferential foreknowledge.

If, in discussing cases of this kind I confine myself to those drawn from the *Proceedings* and *Journal* of the S.P.R., it is not because I think that they are in any way superior in value, it is because I am more familiar with them, and also for the reason that it is more convenient for those readers who may wish to verify my summaries by turning to the original reports, if the field from which they are drawn is made as narrow as possible. *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research are available to the public and can always be obtained from the Society itself; the *Journal* is printed for private circulation among members of the Society.

## CHAPTER IV

### CASES OF PRECOGNITION

IN this chapter I propose to give summarized accounts of a selection of cases illustrating the various types of incident which form the subject of precognitions. I shall draw them mainly from those remaining over from my original collection, after deduction of all those which can be assigned to alternative causes.

I will start with a few cases where the event foreseen was natural death.

From *Journal*, IV, 222: A girl, sixteen years old, dreamed that she was walking with her cousin, having been to a musical entertainment. Suddenly the cousin, B, appeared to faint and leaned for support against some railings. She tried to support her, but gradually B sank to the ground and died.

About a week later B, who had been to an operatic performance, fainted in the street on her way home and died. Subsequent inquiries showed that she had leaned for support against some railings and gradually subsided dead. The account is confirmed by the mother and sister of the dreamer, who had been told of the dream before the event.

In this case the dream was not an exact representation of the actual event, as the dreamer herself played a part therein, whereas she was not present when B



died. This discrepancy may be taken as mere dramatization by the dreaming mind.

*Proc.*, XI, 577: Lady Q, living with her uncle, who was like a father to her, dreamed that she was sitting in the drawing-room of his house with her sister. It was a brilliant spring day and there were many flowers showing in the garden, over which, however, there was a thin coating of snow. In her dream she knew that her uncle had been found dead by the side of a certain bridle path about three miles from the house and that he was wearing a dark homespun suit; his horse was standing by him. She also knew that the body was being brought home in a two-horse farm waggon with hay in the bottom. They were waiting for the waggon with the body to arrive at the house. Then, in the dream, she saw the waggon come to the door and two men, well known to the dreamer, carry the body upstairs with considerable difficulty as the uncle was a very tall and heavy man. During this proceeding the body's left hand hung down and struck against the banisters as the men ascended the stairs. This detail gave her unreasonable horror and she woke.

In the morning, feeling much upset, she told her uncle and begged him to promise that he would never ride that particular road alone. He promised that he would always make an excuse to have a groom with him when he rode that way in the future.

Gradually the memory of the dream grew fainter until, two years later, it was repeated in every detail. Lady Q taxed her uncle with having broken his promise, and he admitted that he had occasionally done so. Four years after this, Lady Q, having married and

left her uncle's house, was living in London and was expecting her first baby. On the night before she was taken ill she dreamed the dream again with the variation that she seemed to be in her bedroom in London and not in her uncle's drawing-room as previously. She was, however, able to perceive the whole scene as in the former dreams. Then came another fresh point; a gentleman, dressed all in black, whose face she could not see, stood beside her bed and told her that her uncle was dead. She awoke in great distress but, being then so ill, ceased to dwell on the dream.

After a few days she was allowed to write a few lines in pencil to her uncle. This note reached him two days before his death.

During her convalescence, she wondered at not hearing from him, until, one morning, she was told that her step-father wished to see her. He entered the room dressed in black and stood beside her bed. Lady Q cried out, 'The Colonel is dead. I know all about it. I have dreamed it often.'

Subsequent inquiries showed that the dream was fulfilled in every detail, including that of the left hand striking against the banisters. The men who carried the body upstairs were those seen in the dream. The only detail which was not correct was that of the flowers and snow, but Lady Q discovered that dreams of flowers and snow were considered as symbolic of death by members of her family.

I have summarized this case rather fully as it seems to me that it is a particularly interesting one. Not only are the details of the precognition very full and numerous, but the fact of recurrence makes it specially



impressive. Also it is an example of long-distance precognition, the first dream having occurred six years before the event.

There is another point to which I should like to call attention as I shall discuss it later. It will be noticed that the precognition falls into two distinct parts; in one the dreamer knows certain facts without there having been any imagery of the events, in the other the events are actually seen in the dream.

Lady Q's account is confirmed by her husband and her step-father.

The next is from *Journal*, XVII, 145: Madame Bouscarlet, of Geneva, dreamed of seeing a friend of hers in Russia driving in a carriage. The details of the scene were symbolic to her of death. The friend said, 'Madame Nitchinof leaves the Institute on the 17th.' Mme. Bouscarlet wrote an account of her dream to another friend in Russia, and the letter with post-mark was examined by the investigator, who was convinced that it had been written and posted before the event. Mme. Nitchinof, who was head of the Institute, died, quite unexpectedly, on the 17th, having been first taken ill some five or six days *after* the date of the dream. Thus she did leave the Institute as foretold.

This is a simple case though the prediction of the actual date of the death gives it value. It is interesting, however, as being one of the few in which documentary evidence was available.

I will now pass to cases of accidental death.

The first is from *Proc.*, V, 322: Mrs. Schweitzer dreamed that she saw her younger son, F, with a

stranger, on some cliffs. Her son suddenly slipped down the side of the cliff. She turned to the stranger and said, 'May I ask who you are and what is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Henry Irvin.' Mrs. Schweitzer then said, 'Do you mean Irving the actor?' and the stranger replied, 'No, not exactly, but something after that style.' On waking she was very worried by the dream and told her elder son, begging him to recall his brother, who was away travelling for the firm on business. He ridiculed the matter, saying that F was quite safe as he was in Manchester.

About eight days later F was killed on the cliffs at Scarborough, where he had gone for a week's holiday after completing his business in Manchester. Mrs. Schweitzer, on visiting the place, met the man who had accompanied him on the fatal occasion and recognized him as the stranger of her dream. She inquired if his name were Henry and being told that it was, recounted her dream. He then said that he used to recite at concerts, etc., and was always introduced on such occasions as Henry Irvin, Jr. His real name was Deverell.

This case is very interesting, not only as being quite a good precognition covering a considerable amount of detail, viz., the site of the accident, the presence and appearance of the dead man's companion, but also the very curious matter of the companion's name. This seems an odd and irrelevant fact to be included in the dream; granted the possibility of precognition, one can understand, more or less, that knowledge of the approaching death of her son might be transmitted to, or acquired by, his mother, but one can conceive no



reason whatsoever why a fancy name of a chance acquaintance should have been included. It was knowledge which was, presumably, in the possession of Mr. Deverell alone, out of all the actors in the affair, and we can only assume that it was somehow derived from his mind. Yet at the time of the dream the dead man and Mr. Deverell were not acquainted. The strange allusive manner, also, in which the fact is conveyed in the dream is noteworthy.

This detail appears to me to be utterly inexplicable unless we adopt the rather unlikely hypothesis that the precognition occurred in the first place to Mr. Deverell and never reached his normal consciousness, but was transmitted telepathically to Mrs. Schweitzer, and that the detail of the name, 'Henry Irvin,' was added as a sort of extra identification.

Next from *Proc.*, XI, 517. At the end of February, or the beginning of March, 1883, Thomas Carbert, porter at Escrick Station, Yorks, dreamed that he saw Mr. Thompson, the stationmaster, lying with his legs cut off, close to a heap of coal and against a small cabin at the back of the station. The accident had been caused by what was called a 'pick-up' goods train, and, in his dream, Carbert knew that it occurred in the month of May. He told his dream to Mr. Thompson the next day, who laughed at it, though it made him uneasy. The same morning Mr. Thompson told of the dream to a Mr. Hartas Foxton, who confirms the account.

On 18th May of the same year, Mr. Thompson was run over by a 'pick-up' goods train and both his legs were cut off. The accident happened at the back of

the station exactly in the place seen by Carbert in his dream.

Mrs. Sidgwick, commenting on this case, appeared to think that accidents of this kind to railway officials were not rare enough to raise the incident above chance. While I hesitate to differ from so great an authority, I cannot help thinking that the number of stationmasters killed every year on the railways of this country is a relatively small percentage of the whole, and when the details of the precognition are taken into account, viz., the cutting off of both legs, the exact place of the accident, the month when it was to occur, and the fact that it was caused by a certain type of train, it appears to me that chance is a very improbable explanation.

I now turn to accidents not involving death.

The first case which I shall cite is interesting as it exemplifies the recurrent dream and a warning which was acted upon. It is that of Mrs. Reay, *Proc.*, V, 313. Mrs. Reay dreamed that the carriage which was sent to meet her at Mortlake Station to take her to her sister's house at Roehampton was upset in the road close to the house. The dream caused her to wake, but she went off to sleep again, when it was repeated. She again woke feeling very nervous, but eventually went to sleep for the third time. On waking in the morning she had forgotten the dream.

As had been arranged, she went to Mortlake and was driven from the station in a pony carriage. On nearing her sister's house, the horse became restive and the groom got down but could find nothing wrong, this happened three times; while he was examining the



horse on the third occasion, the memory of the dream came back to Mrs. Reay and she decided to get out and walk the remaining distance to the house. The groom then drove off by himself; in a short distance the horse became unmanageable and the carriage was upset and smashed. The groom managed to extricate himself, but said that he was thankful that Mrs. Reay had alighted as he could not otherwise have saved her from a serious accident.

Mr. Reay, who heard of the dream on the evening after the accident, confirms. Although this dream was not told beforehand, Gurney, a widely experienced psychical researcher, who investigated the case, stated that, after a personal interview, he felt quite convinced that the account was correct.

The following is a relatively simple case. It is taken from *Proc.*, V, 340. Mrs. Donaldson, on Sunday morning, 29th September, 1878, roused her husband by moaning and speaking in her sleep. She said, 'Oh, B! What is the matter with your face?' and then began to sob. She told her husband that she had dreamed of seeing B, her nurse, standing in the nursery with her back turned to her; on being spoken to, B had half turned round, when she saw that her face was terribly cut and bruised.

The following evening B did not appear as usual at family prayers and Mrs. Donaldson was informed that she had met with an accident. She went upstairs to the nursery and saw B precisely as she had appeared in the dream with her face cut and bruised.

Mrs. Donaldson's account is confirmed by her husband.

I will now give one case of accident to material things. Here the dream, which was itself quite vague, was reinforced by an impression on waking, which focussed and made definite the reference of the precognition. It is another instance of a recurrent dream. I take the account from *Proc.*, V, 335. Frau K dreamed of an outbreak of fire and, on waking, thought that her securities, which were kept in the fireproof safe at a brewery, were in danger. She could not remember dreaming anything about the securities but felt that they were somehow connected with the fire. She told her dream to several people. Three days later it was repeated with even greater distinctness, and her anxiety for her securities increased. She begged her husband to have them removed and he, after much objection, finally consented. As soon as they were deposited in a bank her anxiety ceased. About six weeks later she again dreamed of a fire, but this time with no feelings of anxiety, rather with relief. Simultaneously with the dream the brewery was burnt down and the safe so exposed to the fire that all papers therein were destroyed.

The account is confirmed by five witnesses.

Turning now to trivial incidents, in the first case which I give the lady to whom it occurred might have been inclined to dispute my judgment in treating holes burnt in her new carpet as trivial. However, here it is. It comes from *Proc.*, V, 343. Mrs. Mackensie dreamed that she was in her drawing-room with several people, including a Mr. J. She left the room to see whether supper was ready; on returning to the drawing-room she found the carpet, a new one, covered with black



spots. She was very angry and, when Mr. J said that they were inkstains, replied, 'I know it has been burnt and I counted five patches.' She told the dream at breakfast. It being Sunday, the party went to church; afterwards Mr. J joined them for lunch, a thing which he had never done before. Mrs. Mackensie went into the dining-room to see if lunch were ready. On returning to the drawing-room, she noticed a spot on the carpet. Mr. J said that it was surely ink and then pointed to some more spots. Mrs. Mackensie cried out, 'Oh, my dream! My new carpet burnt!' This proved to be correct; it was afterwards discovered that the housemaid, having allowed the fire to go out, had carried live coals from another room to relight it and had spilled some on the carpet. Five holes were burnt. This account was confirmed by Miss Mackensie. It was investigated by Gurney, who knew the family and vouched for the accuracy of their story after having personally interrogated them.

There is one discrepancy: the meal was lunch and not supper as in the dream.

The following case is taken from *Proc.*, XI, 491: Mr. Haggard, British Consul at Trieste, had a vivid dream in which he was invited to dine with the German Consul-General. He was ushered into a large room on the walls of which were hung trophies of arms from East Africa. (He, himself, had been much in East Africa.) After dinner he went to inspect the arms and noticed a beautiful gold-mounted sword which he pointed out to the French Vice-Consul, who at that moment joined him. As they were talking the Russian Consul came up and joined in the conversation, remark-

ing on the small size of the hilt of the sword. He became very excited while talking and waved his arm above his head as though wielding a sword.

Mr. Haggard was much impressed with the vividness of this dream and recounted it to his wife on waking.

Some six weeks later he was invited to dine with the German Consul-General when the events of the dream were repeated in every detail. While the Russian Consul was talking and waving his arm about, Mr. Haggard withdrew quietly from the group, walked to where his wife was standing and called her attention to the scene. She remembered the dream perfectly and was able to witness its fulfilment.

Mr. Haggard's account is confirmed by his wife and two other witnesses.

The next case is that of Mrs. Atlay, *Proc.*, XI, 487. She dreamed that her husband, the Bishop of Hereford, was away from home and that she read morning prayers in the hall of the palace. After doing so, on entering the dining-room, she saw an enormous pig standing between the dining table and the sideboard. This dream amused her and she told it to the governess, who confirms the account, and to her children, before reading prayers. After prayers, she opened the dining-room door and saw the pig standing between the dining table and the sideboard in the exact spot in which she had seen it in the dream.

The pig had escaped from its sty while prayers were being read.

On page 488, *Proc.*, XI, there is reported another case of a very unusual, though trivial, incident having been foreseen in a dream. It is shortly as follows:



Mrs. C dreamed that she was being persistently followed by a monkey, which terrified her extremely as she had an intense horror of monkeys. She mentioned the dream to her husband and family at breakfast, and Mr. C suggested that she should go for a short walk to throw off the unpleasant impression caused by the dream. Quite contrary to her custom, she went out for a walk with her children. After a short while she saw, to her horror, 'the very monkey of her dream.' The monkey commenced to follow her, causing her great distress.

Her account is confirmed by Mr. C and by Mrs. C's nurse.

This case is queer in that it was due to the dream that Mr. C suggested that Mrs. C should go for a walk, a thing which she would not otherwise have done. Thus the dream itself brought about circumstances which rendered the fulfilment possible. It need hardly be stated that it is a most unusual event to be followed by a monkey in the streets of London, where the incident happened.

The last of these cases is perhaps the most important of them all. I said earlier that I had not found a perfect case. The one which I am now about to cite, however, runs perfection very close. I can find very little fault with it. It is from *Proc.*, XX, 331. Mrs. Verrall, writing automatically on 11th December, 1901, had the following in her script: 'Frost and a candle in the dim light. Marmontel. He was reading on a sofa or in bed - there was only a candle's light. She will surely remember this. The book was lent, not his own - he talked about it.' On 17th December she again wrote: 'Marmontel is right. It was a French book, a memoir,

I think. Passy may help, Souvenirs de Passy or Fleury. Marmontel was not on the cover – the book was bound and was lent – two volumes in old-fashioned binding and print. It is not in any papers – it is an attempt to make someone remember – an incident.’

On 1st March, 1902, a Mr. Marsh mentioned to Mrs. Verrall at dinner that he had been reading *Marmontel's Memoirs*. Being interested on account of the references in the script, she asked him for particulars about his reading. He said that he had borrowed the books from the London Library and had taken the first volume with him to Paris, where he had read it on the evening of 20th February and again on 21st. On each occasion he read by the light of a candle, on the 20th he was in bed, on the 21st he was lying on two chairs. The weather was very cold but there was no frost. The books were bound, as are most of the books in the London Library, not in modern binding, but the name Marmontel was on the back. The edition is in three volumes but at the time of his visit to Mrs. Verrall he had read only two.

Asked whether ‘Passy’ or ‘Fleury’ would help, he replied that Fleury’s name certainly occurred in the book, but was not sure about Passy. On returning to town Mr. Marsh wrote to Mrs. Verrall saying that on 21st February, while lying on the two chairs, he had read in the first volume of *Marmontel's Memoirs* a chapter describing the finding at Passy of a panel, etc., connected with a story in which Fleury plays an important part. It will be seen that the description given in the script was in the main accurate. The only errors were that there was no frost, though the weather



was cold, that the book was in three volumes, though Mr. Marsh had read only two, and that the name Marmontel was on the back.

In spite of these discrepancies it seems to me that the coincidences between the statement in the script and the account given by Mr. Marsh are far too many and too detailed to be ascribable to chance. It is only on account of these errors that I have hesitated to claim perfection for this case. I do not think that any attention need be paid to the fact that the concluding words of the scripts seemed to imply that an incident in the past was being described.

From the evidential point of view the case is unassailable. The actual scripts were sent by Mrs. Verrall before the 1st March, when she met Mr. Marsh, to one of the investigators of the Cross Correspondences,<sup>1</sup> which were occurring about this time. There is, therefore, completely satisfactory documentary evidence for the precognition, while, as for the truth of Mr. Marsh's account of the event, no one in their senses would venture to question it. The only alternative is the obviously absurd one of collusion between Mrs. Verrall and Mr. Marsh.

I will now leave these trivial incidents and give a case which cannot be classed with them, although it is an incident. As I have already mentioned, the distinction between the two classes is quite arbitrary. I made it, in the first instance, because I wanted to emphasize the fact that so many of the events foreseen are com-

<sup>1</sup> The first volume of this series, *Evidence of Personal Survival from Cross Correspondences*, gives a brief and simple account of this branch of psychical research.

pletely unimportant and meaningless. I consider that this fact is of primary importance in trying to understand the problem.

The first of these cases is to be found on page 505, *Proc.*, XI: it is a borderland case.

Mr. Alfred Cooper, a medical man, who was attending professionally the late Earl of L, called on the Duke of Hamilton, whom he was also attending. After the consultation they both went into the drawing-room where the Duchess was. The Duke said, 'Oh, Cooper, how is the Earl?' 'What Earl?' asked the Duchess. Mr. Cooper replied, 'Lord L.' The Duchess then said, 'That is very odd,' and then recounted a vision which she had had between sleeping and waking in which she saw Lord L in a chair as if in a fit; there was a man with a red beard standing by his side. Lord L appeared to be by the side of a bath over which there was a red lamp. Mr. Cooper said that there was very little the matter with Lord L and that he would soon be all right.

Lord L did get better and was very nearly well, when, after six or seven days, he contracted inflammation of both lungs and became very ill. He had two male nurses. When Mr. Cooper called to see him, he found him as in the vision of the Duchess, in a chair by the side of a bath over which was a red lamp; the male nurse with him had a red beard.

The account is signed by both the Duchess of Hamilton and Mr. Cooper.

There seems to be no reason whatsoever why this scene should have been foreseen by the Duchess. It looks like a perfectly meaningless and sporadic happening.

In the next case there is a warning which is acted



upon. On the face of them such cases are easier to understand than the meaningless trivialities reported above; that is to say, if we assume that the motives to which we are accustomed somehow hold good in the environment from which precognitions come. They do not, however, lead us any nearer to a satisfactory explanation of the origin of the foreknowledge.

It is another borderland case and is reported in *Proc.*, XI, 481.

Miss Graham, between sleep and waking, heard a voice saying, 'Miss Graham, take your money out of the bank.' She had all her money in a bank in Boston. She paid no attention to the warning and went that morning to her dressmaker. On arrival she was obliged to wait, and another lady, also waiting, seemed determined to talk to her. Miss Graham was not socially inclined and did not respond freely, until the stranger asked, "Do you know anything of Howe's Bank?" Miss Graham replied that she had her account there. The lady then proceeded to tell her that the bank was unsafe, and said that she had felt impelled, against her will, to tell her this. Miss Graham succeeded in withdrawing her money; the bank stopped payment the next day.

This is confirmed by Dr. Caroline E. Hastings, who was with Miss Graham when she went to the bank.

This case is interesting as, if we can accept the statement of the strange lady who spoke to Miss Graham, that she had felt impelled against her will to tell her about the bank, it looks as though some external agency were involved – as if two persons, mutually unacquainted, had come under the influence of what-

ever it was that was trying to convey the warning. The whole set of circumstances is worthy of note. Had Miss Graham and the other lady not decided to go to the dressmaker on that particular morning, and had they not been compelled to wait, it seems probable that the original warning would have failed of its purpose. How so complicated a set of coincidences could have been brought about I cannot imagine.

It is possible that this was only an instance of illusion of memory and that Miss Graham falsely imagined that she had had the dream; alternatively, the dream warning may have been a telepathic communication from some one who actually knew that the bank was unsafe, and that she had her account there.

The next case might have been classed as an accident. It is given in *Proc.*, XI, 489. I give only a very condensed account. Colonel Coghill received a letter from a friend, telling of a dream in which she saw him lying under his horse with several people trying to assist him. The dream was fulfilled exactly two days later. The letter written by the lady telling her dream was unfortunately lost, but had been seen by Sir Joseph Coghill, who confirms it. However, a letter from Colonel Coghill referring to the dream, written before the event, is preserved; there is, therefore, some documentary evidence.

I have already given instances of 'Arrival' cases and need add no more here. I will now give two examples of cases of precognition of 'Winners.' The first is from *Proc.*, XIV, 251. Professor Haslam, between sleeping and waking, was thinking of a forthcoming horse-race, and saw a jockey in scarlet pass before him; he appeared



to be pulling his horse in hard, and finally won the race. He thought, 'Scarlet is a common colour,' then the vision of the jockey passed before his eyes again. Next day he told various friends. He attended the meeting, and went to the saddling paddock to find a jockey who was in scarlet. He found his man and put a little money on the horse. The jockey pulled in his horse hard during the race and finally won. The case has good independent confirmation.

I think that the most impressive of these 'Winners' cases is that of Mr. John H. Williams, reported in *Journal*, XXVIII, 216.

Mr. Williams, a quaker, aged eighty or more, was an ardent opponent of betting. He awoke from sleep at 8.35 am. on 31st May, 1933, from a dream in which he had listened to a detailed account by radio of the Derby, which was to be run that day at 2 p.m. He heard the names of the first four horses, Hyperion, King Salmon, and two others which he failed to remember. He listened to the whole running commentary from start to finish. At 11 o'clock that morning he had to go out on business, and related to a neighbour, whom he met in a bus, his morning's experience. He also told it to another person whom he met on business matters.

Though so opposed to betting and entirely uninterested in horse-racing he decided to listen to the running commentary on the radio, when he heard the identical expressions and names as in the dream.

I corresponded personally with Mr. Williams and the two gentlemen to whom he had told his dream that morning; they very kindly answered my questions and gave ample confirmation of the account.

It seems most inappropriate that precognition of a horse-race should have come to one who was so strongly opposed to racing and betting, and we can assign no reasonable explanation of the occurrence.

It is curious that another case of foretelling the winner should have to do with the same horse and the same race. The case will be found on page 46 of Mrs. Lyttelton's book, *Some Cases of Prediction*, to which I have already referred. The prediction, which was made some time before the race, gave, however, only the first three letters of the horse's name, as P Y H (not necessarily in that order). Mrs. Barrett, who made the prediction, knew nothing about racing.<sup>1</sup>

I will conclude with another case from Mrs. Lyttelton's book. It is given there in full on page 106 *et seq.* I will give only a very brief summary.

Mr. Calder, the Headmaster of the Grammar School at Goole, wrote to Mrs. Lyttelton, after her broadcast talk on precognition, giving a full account of two precognitive dreams experienced by his wife.

In 1928 he was appointed headmaster of Holmfirth Secondary School in Yorkshire. Before leaving Middlesex, where they then resided, Mrs. Calder, who had never been to Yorkshire, dreamed of an old greystone house, set in a lovely valley through which ran a stream of clear but black-looking water. In their house-hunting near Holmfirth they came across the very house which Mrs. Calder had seen in her dream; they took it, or rather one half of it, and moved in in August

<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Research Officer of the S.P.R. studied the racing calendar for the year and was unable to find any other horse whose name began with the three letters P Y H in any order.



1928. They found that the water of the stream was frequently discoloured by indigo from a near-by dye-works. In her dream Mrs. Calder had seen that only one half of the house was occupied and that outside the door of that half was a barrel which was used as a dog kennel. When they went to live there, though the other half was occupied, there was no barrel. A year or so later, there was a change of tenants of the other half of the house. When the new people arrived they brought with them a dog and placed a barrel outside the door for its kennel. So much for the first dream.

In December 1930 Mr. Calder was appointed headmaster of Goole Grammar School, which, of course, meant another move. On 28th December Mrs. Calder dreamed of a dark red house standing on a corner of two streets. She described it to Mr. Calder next day and said that she felt convinced that they would have to live in it, though she was depressed at the prospect. Her precognition was fulfilled in every respect.<sup>1</sup>

The confirmatory evidence of this case is excellent.

Although there are several instances of persons having dreams of places they have never seen, but subsequently visit, this case is specially interesting in

<sup>1</sup> Since the publication of Mrs. Lyttelton's book, Mrs. Calder has experienced another dream of a similar nature, in which she saw details of a house and grounds unknown to her. A few days later, she visited the house of the parents of one of the scholars and recognized it as identical with the one seen in her dream. Circumstances arose which led to her and Mr. Calder occupying half of the house. Though there is no doubt that the dream itself had an influence in determining their decision to take part of the house, it is also true that some of the circumstances were quite independent and that the dream was precognitive. The case is fully reported in the *Journal*, Vol. XXX, 198, April 1938.

One can only comment on this remarkable case by saying that Mrs. Calder seems to be endowed with the power to precognize the houses in which she will live in the near future.

several respects. It is particularly detailed, and the two experiences are exactly similar in character in so far as they both refer to a house in which the dreamer is going to live. In the second dream, it might have been contemporary clairvoyance, but if so, why should Mrs. Calder have had an image of that particular house? That in itself constitutes a precognition. The detail of the colour of the stream in the first case is good.

But perhaps the most interesting point about the case is that of the dog kennel. It really looks as though the prevision were dated. It was not an image of the appearance of the house as it was at the time of the dream, or when Mr. and Mrs. Calder first went to live there, as one would have imagined it would be, but it was of its appearance at a later date. Why these queer details should be given is most puzzling; I cannot help feeling that if we could understand them, and be able to account for the trivialities which we so often find, we should be a long way towards solving the problem of precognition itself.

This, then, is the representative sample of the kind of evidence which we have for precognition. I submit that it is of such quality and of such amount that it cannot lightly be set aside as mere coincidence or imaginative nonsense.



## CHAPTER V

### NORMAL EXPLANATIONS

IN this chapter I propose to discuss those theories which seek to explain away true precognition and to account for the phenomena by normal causes. I fear that it may prove to be somewhat dull, tiresome and perhaps difficult to read, but, if we are to form an opinion as to the reality or otherwise of true precognition, the matter must be faced.

Many people overcome the difficulties involved in the problem by the simple expedient of ignoring the whole thing: they refuse to listen to the evidence and behave as though it did not exist. But, I submit, it is not reasonable, it is grossly unscientific, to adopt this attitude. Even if the evidence were confined to one single case, it should not be ignored; a single fact may upset a generalization just as thoroughly as a whole host. Where the volume of evidence is so large, and so impressive in regard to quality, as is here the case, though its right to be considered may, in strict theory, be no greater than that of a single case, the task of finding an explanation is obviously more urgent.

For a single case could reasonably be ascribed to chance coincidence, illusion of memory or some other normal cause, and need, therefore, create no disturbance in any philosophic system. A multitude of cases, however, cannot thus lightly be waved aside; the pros

and cons of all available alternatives must be carefully weighed and their consequences for our general outlook on life worked out. I have already briefly indicated what some of these consequences may be if the hypothesis of supernormal, that is to say, non-inferential precognition be forced upon us. They are far-reaching and revolutionary in a high degree; there is scarcely a system of philosophy which would not be profoundly affected, and, in saying this, I include among systems of philosophy the inchoate and usually almost unconscious systems which are held by the ordinary man as distinguished from the professional philosopher.

If we admit the possibility of foreknowledge of the kind now under discussion, and face up to the implications of that admission, I think that we shall find that our outlook on life and our attitude towards the universe is profoundly modified.

It behoves us, therefore, to give the matter our most careful consideration; for any system, whether it be the closely reasoned, logical structure of the professional philosopher or the vaguer general outlook of the ordinary man, must take into account all relevant facts. I do not, of course, suggest that complete and adequate explanations must be found for all such facts – that is impossible – there are bound to be loose ends in any system; but the implications of unexplained, or even of apparently inexplicable, facts cannot be evaded, particularly if these facts appear to be in contradiction with general principles.

The implications of precognition are so strange that we shall be justified in straining to the utmost any normal hypothesis which can be put forward in explana-



tion. But this straining must not be overdone, or we may find ourselves in the position of postulating greater miracles to explain away lesser.

Quite obviously, the most plausible hypothesis based on normal causes is that of chance coincidence. There can be no question that it is quite within the bounds of *possibility* that all cases of apparent precognition are nothing more than chance coincidence; but mere possibility is not sufficient unless it can be shown that all alternatives are impossible. Where there are other possible explanations, what we are concerned with is the relative probabilities of the various alternatives.

I will state the argument for chance coincidence as strongly as I can, and will take the type, viz., dreams, most favourable for that hypothesis. Now it cannot be denied that many millions of people dream every night. It is not necessary for our present purpose to go into the theory of dreams, it is sufficient to note that they consist of mental images, made up for the most part of material drawn from ordinary experience of daily life. This material is woven into more or less coherent patterns, sometimes fantastic and absurd, but very often reproducing, fairly closely, scenes and events such as might normally happen.

Now it is argued that if, out of the enormous number of dreams which are dreamed, a good proportion are images of the kind of event which may be expected to happen in ordinary life, it is not surprising that some of them should apparently be precognitive.

There is a further point, viz., that we tend to count the hits and ignore the misses. If we have a dream which turns out to be apparently precognitive, we are

likely to be struck by the coincidence and remember the experience, while the thousands of dreams which might just as well have been fulfilled, but have not been so, are completely forgotten.

I think that it is probable that a dream which contains some supernormal element, whether telepathic, clairvoyant or precognitive, is, as a rule, more than usually vivid, or else is characterized by some quality which distinguishes it from the normal. I do not say, of course, that all vivid or disturbing dreams contain a supernormal element: many may be due simply to indigestion.

In all the cases of apparently precognitive dreams with which we have been concerned, the dreamer has either told someone of the dream or acted upon it in such a manner as to show that it had made an unusual impression. We do not, as a general rule, allow our conduct to be influenced by any dream which we happen to remember, and as to telling others about them, while there are those who habitually bore the breakfast table with accounts of their dreams, to the credit of humanity it must be admitted that the number of such public enemies is comparatively small.

It has been argued that before we can arrive at any conclusion as to the probability that all apparently precognitive dreams are due solely to chance coincidence, we must know how many of such vivid and striking dreams have been fulfilled, and how many have failed of fulfilment.

Were a widespread census of dreams to be taken, I have no doubt that we should find quite a number of apparent precognitions. Something of this sort was



done on a small scale by members of the S.P.R. A number of people, among whom I was included, were asked to write down on waking as much as they could remember of their dreams. I, personally, found that, with a little practice, I was able to remember two or three separate dreams for each night. During the period in which I recorded my dreams they were all of a commonplace nature; many of them were of the kind of event which might very well happen, such as driving a car. None of them, however, was apparently precognitive, that is to say, no event such as had been dreamed of happened in the immediate future. I do not, of course, mean that if I dreamed of driving a car, I did not actually do so during the next few days. No one would suggest that so simple a coincidence was anything out of the ordinary.

The same negative result was obtained from all the other experimenters. But there seems little doubt that had the experiment been continued long enough, we should have found a dream, here and there, which might possibly have been considered precognitive.

However, in the ordinary course of events people do not make special efforts to remember their dreams and, as I have pointed out, it is only the more vivid or disturbing ones which are likely to be recorded, told to others, or acted upon.

There is one further point which must be borne in mind, viz., that only a very small proportion of apparently precognitive dreams would be reported to the S.P.R. or other organization interested in psychical research, and that, of those reported, many would not reach an evidential standard sufficiently high to merit

publication. In the case of the S.P.R., at any rate, this standard is set very high and no case is published which does not conform thereto. Thus it happens that many of the reported cases have to be rejected for the sole reason that confirmatory evidence is lacking. This does not imply that such cases are worthless;<sup>1</sup> I have myself come across many instances which I have had no reasonable doubt were genuine precognitions, but the circumstances have been such that I could not obtain any confirmation; I could not, therefore, put them forward for publication, although, knowing the narrators, and being completely satisfied as to their honesty and general powers of observation, I have accepted their accounts as substantially correct.

It follows from what I have said that the number of cases actually published is only a very small fraction of those which occur. The result of all this is that we have whittled down very considerably the number of dreams available for the chance theory, though that number undoubtedly still remains very large.

Let us now consider the other factor in the matter, viz., the possible number of the incidents which can be dreamed about. The advocate of the chance theory, while he requires the number of dreams to be as large as possible, must reduce the number of incidents capable of being dreamed about to the lowest extent in order to make his argument plausible. I will try to make this statement clearer by an example. Suppose that I am looking at a collection of photographs, say a

<sup>1</sup> Many cases collected by the S.P.R. which are not deemed sufficiently evidential for publication are nevertheless preserved in the files of the Society, where they are available for study.



family album. Now, if I know that these are all portraits of one particular family and that there are two hundred relatives in that family, I can put my finger on any photograph without looking at it, and say, 'That is your Uncle John,' and the chance that I shall be right is one in two hundred. If the family consisted of only twenty relatives, the chance would be one in twenty. But, if, instead of being photographs of relatives, the album contained photographs of a much larger group, say, the inhabitants of the British Isles, then the chance that I should be right in naming any particular portrait without looking at it would be one in forty-five millions, or thereabouts.

Now, although it is true that most dreams are made up of material drawn from ordinary experience, this material is immensely varied; moreover, the separate elements therein are capable of being combined in so many different ways that the possible number of different patterns is almost infinite. We should not count as a precognitive dream one of a simple ordinary event; for example, suppose that I dream of meeting some friend whom I am accustomed to see every now and then, and that during the next week I actually do meet him. Such a dream might, of course, be truly precognitive, but the fulfilment was so likely to be due to chance that it could not be considered significant. But if the simple event be combined with others, such as meeting my friend in some particular place, or in some special circumstances, or if, in my dream, he says certain words which he actually does say when I meet him, then the probability of chance fulfilment is very much less. The greater the number of details in the

dream and the fulfilling event the less is the plausibility of the chance hypothesis.

Consider one or two actual examples. In Mrs. Atlay's case, she dreamed of seeing a pig in a certain position in the dining-room after she had read prayers. Now such a dream as this cannot be very common, still less usual is it to find a pig in the dining-room; and when this event is combined with the other circumstances, such as the time, i.e., after reading prayers, and the particular place, between the table and the sideboard, the chance of such a combined event occurring to any particular person within any reasonably short period after it has been dreamed about is almost infinitely small. I venture to think that very few people have ever experienced such a combination of events, or have known anyone who has.

Or consider the case of Lady Q summarized on page 47. She dreamed of her uncle lying dead by the side of the road. This, taken by itself, might be considered as being only a rather curious coincidence, though the fact that the dream occurred three times goes against that view. But when the details are added, details such as the body being brought home in a farm waggon, the identity of the two men who carried it upstairs and the very unusual feature of the left hand striking against the banisters, I think that no one could reasonably suggest that the fulfilment was due to chance. Such a combination of circumstances must be unique, in fact, if one takes into account that three particular individuals were involved, viz., the dead man and the two who carried the body, it is clear that it can have happened only once in the whole history of the world.



Finally, consider the case of Mrs. C, page 57, who dreamed of being followed by a monkey while walking in the London streets. How often does one see a monkey roaming free in London, and how many people have had the experience of being followed by one while walking there?

I think that I need labour this point no further. Impartial consideration of the details of the evidence is sufficient to destroy any superficial plausibility which the chance hypothesis may have, and I submit that it may be confidently rejected as an explanation of the many well-evidenced cases of precognition which we possess.

Were it a matter of only one or two such cases, we might, perhaps, say that curious coincidences do sometimes occur, but where there are hundreds to be accounted for, it would be to strain the chance hypothesis beyond all reasonable limits to ascribe them all to that cause.

I have purposely considered only dreams in connection with this argument as it applies to them with much greater force than to the relatively far less frequent experiences, such as hallucinations. In the matter of impressions, though it is true that these are of common occurrence, they comparatively rarely reach an intensity sufficient to call for a special notice.

If the chance hypothesis fails for dreams, *a fortiori* it fails for the other types.

Another possible alternative explanation which must be considered is that of illusion of memory. We all know from personal experience how easily false memories may arise and how convincing they may be.

If I may intrude another personal experience, I give the following illustration. I promised to post a book to a friend and after a month or so, not having had any acknowledgment, I wrote to inquire whether it had been received, and was told that it had not arrived. I had a perfectly clear and definite memory of wrapping it up and addressing it, yet it was entirely false for I found the book on my shelves.

Now it may be said that if false memories such as this may arise, it is possible that the reported cases of precognition are of a similar nature. It may be that the dream, impression or whatever it was never happened at all, or else that it occurred after, and not before, the event, or it may be that the degree of fulfilment was much exaggerated. Where independent corroboration is forthcoming, however, we should have to suppose that two or more persons happened to have been similarly affected, and this seems highly improbable. In cases where documentary evidence exists the explanation is clearly inapplicable.

Where the precognition is taken as a warning and acted upon in some way, illusion of memory can hardly be suggested, unless we make the very far-fetched assumption that the action was taken for some other reason, and that, later, by a false memory, it was ascribed to a fictitious precognition.

To anyone who has actually experienced a precognitive dream or hallucination, this hypothesis of illusion of memory must seem quite untenable. I have myself had one such experience; it is fully reported in the book by Mrs. Lyttelton (pp. 94 *et seq.*) to which I have already referred, but I will summarize it here.



Some two or three years ago I dreamed that I was passing by a field in which were some ewes and lambs, also two dogs. There was a great noise going on and the dogs kept running up to the lambs, some of which were bleeding at the throat. In my dream I took it to be a case of sheep-worrying. It was a very vivid dream and the shock of it woke me and prevented me from going to sleep for some time. In the morning I told my wife what I had dreamed, and all that day I could not get rid of the unpleasant memory of the scene. Some ten days later I was driving in my car along a country road some few miles from my home, when my wife called my attention to two dogs in a field alongside the road in which were a lot of ewes and lambs. As in my dream, there was a great deal of noise and the dogs kept running up to the lambs; it looked as though they were biting them. Many of the lambs were bleeding, but, unlike the scene in my dream, it was their tails and not their throats which were bloody, though I did not recognize the difference at once. I immediately remembered my dream but, taking it to be a case of sheep-worrying, I thought of practical matters first. I could find no one about, so drove on to a village about a mile away and found a policeman, whom I brought back in the car. On returning to the spot, we found that the farmer had arrived. He explained that the lambs had been having their tails docked in the field and that the dogs belonged to him.

Now, although the fulfilling event contained one discrepancy from the dream, I have no doubt that it was a genuine precognition. The suggestion that I suffered from an illusion of memory, and either never

had the dream at all, or else dreamed it after having seen the dogs and lambs, seems to me to be simply nonsensical. Had it been so, how did it come about that on seeing the dogs and lambs, I immediately thought of my dream? Did the illusion of memory suddenly spring fully fledged into being at that moment? I am perfectly sure that I had the dream before the event, but, it might be said, 'You were perfectly sure that you had wrapped up and posted the book. It is just that false sense of complete confidence which constitutes an illusion of memory.'

I submit, however, in answer to this, that there is all the difference in the world between a false memory of so simple and commonplace an incident as posting a book and one of so highly complex, unusual and striking an occurrence as my dream. The difference between the two is analogous to that between a mere visual illusion and an hallucination; in fact, if my memory of the dream were false, it would amount to a kind of non-externalized hallucination.

Of course, the fact that independent corroboration was forthcoming renders the hypothesis of illusion of memory practically untenable; but I have thought it desirable to discuss the matter apart from that consideration as it is frequently brought forward as an explanation of those cases where independent confirmatory evidence is not obtainable, but which are otherwise acceptable on the strength of our confidence in the good faith and accuracy of the narrator. Though I have not included any such cases in the evidence cited in this book, I have, as I have already said, personally come across a considerable number.



The only other normal explanation of which I can think—normal, that is to say, in the sense that it is based upon ordinary, well-known causes such as are accepted by everyone—is that of fraud. It is, of course, theoretically possible that all the reported cases of apparent precognition are mere fabrications, but I submit that such a suggestion is too fantastic to merit serious consideration. Though we know that some people occasionally lie, as a general rule, they have some motive for doing so, and it seems impossible to discover any adequate motive which could have operated in all these cases.

This brings us to the end of our discussion of normal explanations, and the failure to find an adequate hypothesis based upon well-known, generally accepted causes, leaves us up against the problem of accounting for the phenomena by some other means. I confess that I face the task with considerable trepidation, and I admit that I have no completely satisfactory hypothesis to offer. Other writers on the subject, notably Mrs. Lyttelton, Professor Richet and Dr. Osty, have frankly accepted the position of complete agnosticism; it may be that they have been wise in so doing.

When subjected to searching analysis, it is found that most, if not all, of our mental activities have their foundations shrouded in mystery. Philosophers are not agreed on any theory of perception, of memory, or the body-mind relation. Many of those put forward are so complex, and involve subtleties so difficult to grasp, that they cannot be appreciated by the ordinary man. In fact, owing to his familiarity with the phenomena, he does not, as a rule, understand what all the

fuss is about—he cannot see the difficulties. Familiarity, it is said, breeds contempt, it also obscures the understanding. We accept the commonplace without question just because it is commonplace, and we rarely stop to analyse it; thus we are blind to the mysteries which enshroud our being. Now, it may justly be said that if we cannot understand fully our normal mental processes, such as perception and memory, it is no great matter that we are unable to render a plausible account of so odd and sporadic a phenomenon as precognition. Let us first of all tackle the major questions, and get a plan of the general foundations mapped out, then it will be time enough to fill in the details.

This attitude sounds reasonable enough, but there is another side to the question. It frequently happens in scientific research that the examination of apparent anomalies has thrown a light upon general theory which could not have been obtained from any amount of study of the normal phenomena. For example, our knowledge of normal psychology has been greatly advanced by the study of mental abnormalities, or, to cite the usual instance, our understanding of health has been brought about, to a large extent, by the study of disease.

It may be that a study of the queer abnormality called precognition may throw a light upon some of the dark places of general philosophy and lead to a better understanding of our nature and destiny.

I think that it is clear that the crux of the whole problem is Time. Now, time is, *par excellence*, one of those mysteries which are generally accepted without question by reason of their familiarity. It is true that



the nature of time has been discussed by professional philosophers for many hundreds of years, but we are very little nearer to a clear understanding. Kant reduced it to a mere *a priori* form, McTaggart denied its existence altogether, and accounted for its fictitious appearance of reality by holding that it was due to a misperception of an entirely non-temporal series.

With these and similar metaphysical theories we have no need to concern ourselves here, unless we may say that, if time be not a reality, that, whatever it is, which we normally take for time, is so good an imitation that it does just as well for all practical purposes as real time, if there be such a thing as real time.

Any explanatory theory of precognition must, I consider, be somehow or other based upon time. What we have to explain is how an event which, being still in the future, does not, apparently, exist, can enter into a relation of cognition, that is to say, a relation of known to knower. There have been a few hypotheses put forward and, in the next chapter, I shall try to give a simple non-technical account of some of them, though, owing to their rather abstruse metaphysical nature, it may well prove beyond my powers to render them intelligible.

I will first dispose of one explanation which is sometimes suggested. Those who accept the reality of spiritual beings, whether the surviving spirits of deceased human beings, or whether belonging to a different order altogether, sometimes attempt to account for precognition by saying that such beings have a wider knowledge of the future than is possible for embodied man, and that precognitions are due to their influence.

Now I, personally, am not prepared to accept as *proved* that any such disembodied spirits exist—they may do so, or they may not—I prefer to suspend judgment. But even if they do exist, and do possess a wider knowledge of the future than is possible for us, the problem of precognition is simply shifted from the earthly to the spiritual sphere. We are still faced with the difficulty of seeing how a mind can know something which has not yet happened, and it does not make it any easier if we postulate a discarnate mode of existence for that mind. We have to give a plausible account of the temporal conditions which would permit of precognition, whether those conditions govern the mind of a ghost or a living man.



## CHAPTER VI

### METAPHYSICAL THEORIES

THE theories which I shall briefly discuss in this chapter all involve some rather subtle metaphysical arguments, and many people, in fact, I imagine that I might reasonably say, most people, have no taste for metaphysics.

It is difficult, probably impossible, to render the concepts of metaphysics into language which will be easily understood by those who have had no previous acquaintance with, or training in, that subject. I am fully aware that the accounts which I shall give of the various theories are woefully deficient in clearness and intelligibility. Moreover, in my attempt at simplification I have had, perforce, to omit much of the argument, so that my summaries are not only inadequate, but also partially distorted.

I would recommend, therefore, that readers who are not particularly interested in metaphysics should omit this chapter, the more so as, in my opinion, none of the suggested hypotheses can be regarded as being even provisionally acceptable.

The first theory with which I must deal is that put forward by Mr. J. W. Dunne in his well-known book, *An Experiment with Time*. I cannot possibly go into all the details of his theory of Serialism, but must content myself with a very brief and inadequate indication

of how he proposes to use it to account for precognition.

He starts with the proposition that time has length. For example, it is roughly 872 years since William the Conqueror landed, it is four hours since I had breakfast, in another twelve hours it will be midnight, and so on. All these statements involve lengths of time.

On this view the events of history are spaced out in a single dimension, along a line as it were.

But, he says, this is not all: time flows; we experience events in succession. It is as though the observer travels over the length of time and thus comes to one event after another.

Now, if time flows, it must flow at some particular rate: when we specify a rate of flow or other motion, we find that we require two factors, viz., length travelled over and time occupied in doing so. For example, my rate of walking is four miles per hour, or fifteen minutes per mile.

Thus if time flows over the 'length of time' there must be a second kind of time by which to rate the flow. This is what Mr. Dunne calls Time 2. But we cannot stop here: Time 2 also flows at a certain rate, which, of course, involves a Time 3, and so on to infinity.

Mr. Dunne further argues that this infinite series of times would involve an infinite series of observers. He also draws many other conclusions and endeavours to show, with great ingenuity, and some plausibility, how this theory of serialism may be made to account for some odd and little understood phenomena; he even applies it to advanced physics and claims that it throws light in obscure places.



However, that is not our present concern, all that we are interested in is to see how serialism can account for precognition. The world of Observer 1 has three dimensions of space, i.e., length, breadth and depth, and one of time, i.e., Time 1. In the world of Observer 2 Time 1 becomes transformed into a spatial dimension, so he has four dimensions of space and one of time, viz., Time 2, similarly for Observer 3. The number of spatial dimensions increases with each Observer, while the temporal dimension remains single.

Now, what is contained in space is there all the time as space is not successive; the milestones along the road do not spring into being as I walk. I can go from one to the other as often as I please, and in any direction.

As I have said, Time 1 of Observer 1, which contained the series of events presented to him in succession, is changed for Observer 2 into a space dimension and the events, therefore, are no longer successive. As a general rule the focus of attention of Observer 2 is concentrated on the same point as that of Observer 1, so that, although anything in the Time 1 dimension *could* be presented to him, seeing that it is all co-existent and not successive, in actual fact only that part which is in the focus of attention of Observer 1, that is to say, Observer 1's present moment, is usually so presented. In certain circumstances, however, such as during sleep, Observer 1's attention is withdrawn, so the attention of Observer 2 is free to roam at will over the whole spatial field, viz., the three spatial dimensions proper and the one temporal dimension which has become spatial for him. He cannot, of course, wander about in his own temporal dimension, Time 2; for that

is successive, just as Time 1 is successive for Observer 1. But he can fix his attention on any part of Time 1, and thus acquire knowledge of what Observer 1 would call the future. Should he transmit this knowledge to Observer 1, the latter would call it a precognition. Observer 1, Observer 2 and the rest are not different persons but the same: they might be thought of as different levels of one mind. The true man is the observer at infinity.

I might, perhaps, make this a little clearer by an illustration. The time dimension can be looked upon as being like a cinematograph film rolled up on its reel. As it passes through the projector, the individual pictures are presented in succession. There is past, i.e., that part which has already been shown, present, i.e., the part now showing on the screen, and future, i.e., that which has not yet been unrolled.

Now Observer 2 transforms Observer 1's time into a spatial dimension, that is to say, he unrolls the film off its reel and stretches it out in a straight line on a table. If Observer 1 can hold Observer 2's attention focussed on the same spot as his own, viz., the picture which is actually being shown on the screen, i.e., his present moment, all well and good. But let Observer 1 relax his vigilance by going to sleep, Observer 2 can take a peep at any part of the film which he pleases, and thus get a glimpse of what Observer 1 would call the future.

What are we to think about all this? It does, I admit, afford some sort of explanation for precognition, but I cannot feel happy with all these observers, each with his own particular time. I do not like series which extend to infinity, except in certain rather special cases.



One can sometimes deal with an infinite series, for instance when it is what the mathematician calls convergent, that is to say when each succeeding term is less than the one before in a particular manner, but this is because they are finite in at least one respect; but Mr. Dunne's series are not of this kind, the succeeding terms do not grow less. I do not want to argue this point out fully; if the analysis made by Mr. Dunne were inescapable, we should have to accept, provisionally, some sort of infinite series, however much we disliked doing so. But until we are satisfied that there is no alternative to his analysis, we can put that aspect of the matter on one side.

I, personally, do not accept his analysis of the nature of time. I would go even further and submit that it is demonstrably incorrect.

It seems obvious to me that the proper starting place for any theorizing is Change, and not Time at all. Change may be change of place, as in physical motion, change in characterizing attributes, as when an object changes colour or a mind changes in mood, or it may be simply the passage of thought, sensations, etc., through our minds. But change of some sort is the fundamental phenomenon from which arises the idea of time. A world in which there was no change whatsoever would be a timeless world.

Mr. Dunne starts off with such a changeless world; in his time, as length, there is no change; event A is so many units of time before event B, which in its turn, is so many units of time before event C. This is just as static and changeless as the marks on a footrule, it is not real time at all. He introduces real time in his

conception of an observer who observes events in succession. Here we get change, i.e., in the presentations to the observer's mind, which follow one another in succession. It is simply due to the fact that he takes something static and non-temporal to be real time that all his difficulties about the speed of time arise. We can intelligibly speak of speed, or rate of change, when one of the factors is non-temporal, e.g., so many feet per second, or the change from optimistic self-satisfaction to pessimistic depression during the course of a day; but to speak of a speed of so many hours per hour seems, on the face of it, to be absurd.

I submit that the proper way to look at it is as follows. Time does not flow; events or changes occur in succession, and it is just this which constitutes time. You can measure the rate at which one particular change occurs by comparing it with another particular change, but to seek to measure change in general is simply nonsense, for there is nothing with which to compare it—nothing to measure it by.

I do not want to go into the metaphysics of Time, even were I competent to do so—it would be quite unsuitable in a book of this sort, but I submit that Mr. Dunne's theory of serialism may be rejected on three general and easily understood grounds. Firstly, an infinite series of observers, even though those observers be only different levels of the consciousness of one person, and an infinite series of times are unacceptable. Secondly, a time dimension cannot be changed into a space dimension, time and space being totally different in essential nature. Thirdly, the fundamental analysis is incorrect. Time does not flow over a static history



at a certain rate. History is that which is left behind by the onward surge of change. All rates or speeds are relativities, and time or change is the essential factor in them all.

Another possible explanatory hypothesis was put forward and discussed at the meeting of the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association at Bristol in 1937. The speakers were Professor C. D. Broad and Professor H. H. Price, and the subject was, 'The Philosophical Implications of Precognition.' Now the fact that this subject should be seriously discussed at a meeting such as this is itself noteworthy. The Aristotelian Society and Mind Association hold these meetings for the purpose of hearing discussions of topics of current interest in philosophy, and they are attended by many of the leading authorities in philosophy.

Though neither Professor Broad nor Professor Price committed himself to an opinion as to the reality of the phenomenon of precognition, the fact that they deemed it worth their while to devote their time and thought to the consideration of its philosophical implications shows that the evidence must have made some considerable impression on their minds. Two men of such outstanding position in the world of philosophy would not have thus discussed a mere triviality, an unsupported belief due to the credulity of the superstitious, nor would the other philosophers present at the meeting have listened to them with patience.

I do not desire to make any appeal to authority, I regard such as inadmissible and out of place, and prefer to allow the evidence to speak for itself; but an appeal to authority may have its uses in gaining a hearing for

that evidence. People are too fond of simply ignoring an inconvenient problem, and brushing aside as 'all rubbish' that which will not fit in with their preconceived ideas. However, when they discover that men of weight and learning have thought the matter worth their serious attention, they may possibly change their attitude.

I do not propose to attempt to give any summary of this most important symposium, but would recommend those who are interested in the matter from the metaphysical and philosophic standpoint to study thoroughly the three papers contained in the Bulletin issued by the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association. They will find therein the most authoritative exposition of the subject yet available.

I should like, if I can, to give a simple account of the hypothesis discussed by the two Professors. The difficulty to be overcome is how a relation, i.e., the relation of cognition or known to knower, can exist if one of its terms is an event which has not yet happened. Professor Broad pointed out that the true analogue of precognition is not perception, but rather memory. In a precognition there is a present mental image which is perceived,<sup>1</sup> just as is the case with normal memory, but while, in the latter phenomenon, the image refers to, or is somehow derived from, an event in the past, that is to say, an event which has actually existed, in the former the reference is to the future which does not yet exist.

We can conceive means by which the memory

<sup>1</sup> I use the word 'perceive' instead of the more correct term 'prehend' because of the unfamiliarity of the latter.



image may be derived from the original event, for we know that any event may set in motion trains of causes and effects, which trains may persist for an indefinite length of time; for example, one commonly held theory of normal memory is based upon the supposition that the experience of perceiving an event leaves a permanent trace in the brain cells and that, if at some subsequent moment these cells are stimulated, a more or less accurate image of the original will be revived.

The difficulty with precognition is that the normal order of cause and effect has to be reversed, that is to say, the effects in the brain – they are called ‘traces’ – have to be there before the event which causes them has happened. Such a reversal of the normal order appears to be quite inconceivable, yet, unless we dismiss the evidence altogether, precognitive images do occasionally arise in the mind.

One possible method of meeting this difficulty is, according to Professor Broad, to have a two-dimensional time. I shall not attempt to summarize the highly metaphysical arguments which were employed, but I think that I might be able to illustrate, by an analogy, one way in which a two-dimensional time would make precognition logically and causally possible.

When we want to fix the position of an event in a uni-dimensional time, we require a point of reference, say, noon to-day, a distance, say, four hours, and a direction, viz., before or after noon.

If time were two-dimensional, we should still be able to do with one point of reference, but we should want two distances and two directions, just as, when fixing a position on a chart, we need so many degrees of

latitude, north or south, and so many degrees of longitude, east or west.

There would be a further consequence of having two dimensions of time. With one dimension we must think of an event as a line, having length but no breadth; with two dimensions, we may picture it as an area, having both length and breadth.

I will now try to explain how two-dimensional time might be made to account for precognition.

Let us, for the sake of simplicity, think of our ordinary time as a road running from south to north. At the point, O, where we now are, that is, at the present moment, all that lies to the south is past, all to the north is future. We can remember the country to the south, as we have already passed over it, but the country to the north is unknown. Let us say that we are standing facing south, so that we cannot see what is behind our backs on the road northwards.

Now add a second dimension, that is east and west, and let us suppose that what lies to the east is future, and to the west, past, in that dimension. Remember that an event is now an area and not a line. Any area which lies in the sector from north to east will then be absolute future, i.e., future in both dimensions; an area in the sector from south to west will be absolute past; but in the sectors from south to east and from north to west, an area lying therein will be past in one dimension and future in another. In our normal consciousness, however, we know of only one dimension, viz., south and north, so that knowledge of any area with south in it will appear to us as due to memory. But should we gain subliminal knowledge of the westerly



part of an area, lying in the north-west, it would appear to our normal consciousness as a precognition, because the northerly dimension in it is our normal future.

I will try to make this difficult conception clearer by an illustration, although I do not know that Messrs. Broad and Price would approve of it.

Consider a train of causes and effects, for example, a number of billiard balls lying on the table being set in motion by a player striking one of them with his cue. The ball which he has played strikes another and imparts motion to it, the second, in its turn, collides with a third and so on until all the balls are set in motion. Here we have a series of causes and effects arising from the single initial cause. But the striking of the first ball by the player is not the whole of the initial cause; for it to produce its effect there must have been a set of static conditions, gravitation, inertia, the shape, surface and coefficient of elasticity of the balls, the condition of the table, etc. Were any of these static conditions altered, the series of events, viz., the movements of the balls, would also be changed. The static conditions are contemporaneous, not successive; they do not constitute a series of events in time.

Suppose, now, that time has two dimensions; we may regard the series of events as lying along one of them, that is to say, along the dimension which we are facing, while the static conditions, or some of them, lie along the second dimension, i.e., to right and left. If we can imagine ourselves making a right-angled turn in time, it would appear that what had previously seemed to us to be a series of events would now be in the position

and take on the appearance of a set of static conditions, while the former static conditions, or some of them, might – I do not say, would – be presented to us as a series of events.

Before making this turn, for me to have knowledge of the movement of one of the balls before it had been struck by one of the others, would have been a precognition (I am purposely leaving out knowledge due to inference). But after making the turn such knowledge would not be precognitive, because what had been a series of causes and effects would have now become a set of static conditions, and be thus contemporaneous throughout.

Whether the conception of a two-dimensional time is anything but sheer nonsense is a matter on which it is very hard to form an opinion. It is not logically impossible; there is nothing inherently necessary about uni-dimensionality of time, even though it may seem absurd to talk of going sideways in time.

But, as both Professor Broad and Professor Price agreed, the phenomenon of precognition is itself so odd and so out of parallel with all our normal experience, that we must not be surprised if any hypothesis to account for it be bizarre and fantastic.

There is a third hypothesis for precognition for which I, myself, am responsible. I first suggested it in a 'Report on cases of apparent Precognition,' published in *Proceedings, S.P.R.*, Vol. XLII, February 1934. I should say here that I am not, and never have been, by any means in love with my hypothesis. I put it forward as a means of thinking about the phenomena rather than as an explanation of them. I do not



suggest that it is an even approximately correct account of what actually happens.

It is a commonly accepted principle that the present moment, of which we have experience, occupies a certain length of duration; it is not a point which has position and no magnitude. A little reflection will make this quite clear. In the first place, there can be no doubt that we do experience duration – we see things actually moving, and a movement must occupy some duration, however short. In a point-instant, that is to say, an instant of time which had no length, movement would be impossible, for it would stop the very moment it started.

No number of point-instants could, by addition one to another, make up a duration.

The fact is, of course, that points, lines and so on, are simply abstractions from reality having no actual existence: they are primarily made for the convenience of mathematical reasoning.

But what we have to deal with here is reality as it is presented to us in experience; we can therefore say that the only present moment of which we have any knowledge, or for the existence of which we have any grounds for belief, is one which has a definite length. This present moment is usually called the 'specious present'; in what follows I will use that term.

It is an unquestionable fact that a relation of cognition can be set up between a mind and an event which is present to it, or, in ordinary language, I can know what is going on now. A present event is one which is contemporaneous with a part of my specious present.

Now, as my specious present has a definite length,

it may be that more than one event is contemporaneous with it, and that those events are not contemporaneous with each other, but successive.

The average length of the specious present of the normal individual has not been ascertained with any degree of certainty, various estimates have been made, though none can be considered reliable.

To avoid the appearance of accepting any such estimate, let us suppose that the normal specious present endures for three units of duration, the length of the units being left quite undetermined. Thus, my specious present runs from  $T_1$  to  $T_3$ . All events which are contemporaneous with any of these  $T$ 's are present to me. Now it may be that there is a series of successive events,  $E_1$ ,  $E_2$ ,  $E_3$ , such that  $E_1$  is contemporaneous with  $T_1$ ,  $E_2$  with  $T_2$ , and  $E_3$  with  $T_3$ . As they are all within the span of my specious present they will all be present for me, in spite of the fact that  $E_1$  precedes  $E_2$ , and  $E_2$  precedes  $E_3$ .

But if  $E_1$  precedes  $E_2$ ,  $E_2$  and  $E_3$  are in the future from the point of view of  $E_1$ ; from the point of view of  $E_3$ ,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are in the past.

Now let us suppose that there is another observer besides myself, and that his specious present is somewhat longer than mine, let us say that it covers five units of duration, viz.,  $T_0$ ,  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ ,  $T_3$  and  $T_4$ . The three events,  $E_1$ ,  $E_2$  and  $E_3$ , will all be present to him, but so also will an event,  $E_0$ , which is contemporaneous with  $T_0$ , and an event  $E_4$ , which is contemporaneous with  $T_4$ .

From my point of view,  $E_0$  is in the absolute past because my specious present no longer covers  $T_0$ ,



with which  $E_0$  is contemporaneous, while  $E_4$  is in the absolute future because my specious present has not yet reached so far. Thus, what may be present to one observer may be either past or future to another, if there should be any difference in the lengths of their respective specious presents.

Suppose now that we substitute for the second observer a stratum of my own subliminal mind. It follows that if the specious present of my subliminal mind be longer than that of my normal consciousness, events which are present to the former may be future to the latter.

There is some ground for supposing that the length of the normal specious present may vary in certain circumstances, such as concentration of attention, fatigue, hypnosis and the influence of drugs, e.g., *cannabis indica*; there is, therefore, no *a priori* objection to holding that the length of the subliminal specious present may be greater than that of the normal consciousness.

We know that knowledge acquired by the subliminal may occasionally be transmitted to the normal mind, so that, supposing that the specious present of the former were to extend to  $T_4$ , and that knowledge of  $E_4$ , an event which is contemporaneous with that moment, were acquired, such knowledge might be transmitted to the normal mind and would then constitute a precognition for it.

I will endeavour to make this rather obscure argument clearer by a fictitious example. Suppose, that my normal specious present extends from noon until one second after noon, and that my subliminal specious

present stretches as far as one o'clock. All events happening up to one o'clock are present events for my subliminal mind and might, therefore, be known to it.

Suppose that some such event occurs at 12.45 p.m., and that knowledge of it is acquired by my subliminal mind. If that knowledge be transmitted to my normal mind while its specious present extends from noon until one second after noon, it would appear to it as a precognition.

In order to cover all our cases of precognition we should have to suppose that there is a level of the subliminal mind of which the specious present extends over a period of many years; for example, in the case of Lady Q (page 47), the first dream occurred some six years before the fulfilling event. This may seem, on the face of it, to be highly fanciful and far-fetched, although there is, so far as I know, no principle by which any limits can be set to the extension which can be allowed to the specious present, once the possibility of variation in length is admitted.

This theory, therefore, explains precognition by denying it, that is to say, it suggests that what appears as a case of supernormal, non-inferential foreknowledge, is only a fragment of the knowledge of the present of the subliminal mind, or of some stratum thereof, which is thrust up into the surface consciousness.

I will venture on another pictorial illustration or parable in the hope of making the theory more intelligible. Suppose that I am looking at a line of printed words through a narrow slit which passes over it. The width of the slit permits me to see only three letters at a time. As the slit moves along the line, I am able to



read what is printed, but cannot see anything which lies ahead of the position of the slit. This represents the normal specious present. Suppose, now, that my subliminal mind is also reading the words, but that its slit is much wider and covers a space of several more letters, both forward and behind. If then, the subliminal mind reads a word which lies ahead of the position of the normal slit and transmits the knowledge thereby acquired to the normal mind, it would appear to it as a precognition.

This theory involves what appears, at first sight, to be a rather queer conception of time, or perhaps I should rather say, of past, present and future. But if it be true that our present moment has a definite length – a view that is generally accepted nowadays – this conception is forced upon us by actual experience. Moreover, it is the only kind of present moment of which we have any knowledge; mathematical time, consisting of point-instants having no length, is an abstraction having no real existence. Are we not, therefore, justified in holding, subject, of course, to correction if further knowledge inconsistent with the view be acquired, that the nature of time is such that the only present moment possible for us is one which covers a span of duration?

The extra assumptions required by the theory, viz., variations in the length of the span of duration covered, and transmission of subliminal knowledge to the normal consciousness, are comparatively small and have, moreover, some backing in experience.

If one tries to think of a timeless consciousness, such as must be ascribed to a personal Creator, one can only

do so in terms of an 'everlasting now,' that is to say, of a specious present of infinite length. I must repeat that I am by no means enamoured of this suggestion and that I put it forward more as a mode of looking at the phenomena than as an explanation of them.

The last hypothesis to be mentioned is one which was, I believe, originally suggested by Du Prel; it may be called the 'extra sense' theory. Suppose a man born blind and having no knowledge of the possibility and nature of sight. This man is standing on the platform of a railway station, he can hear the sound of an approaching train. He infers from past experience that such a sound means that a train will shortly pass through the station. This is ordinary inferential knowledge of the future. He has a companion with him who is able to see as well as to hear. Long before the sound of the approaching train is audible, he can see it in the distance coming towards the station. If he then tells the blind man that a train is coming, it will appear to the latter as a non-inferential precognition. The suggestion is, therefore, that there is some stratum of the subliminal mind which possesses an extra sense whereby it is able to obtain sensory knowledge of events that fall outside the range of normal consciousness.

It seems to me that this theory does not carry us very far towards understanding precognition; all that it amounts to is to say that the subliminal mind possesses an unknown faculty of precognition. It explains one mystery by postulating another. If there be, in reality, such an extra sense, we are still faced with the difficulty of explaining the time conditions under which it operates.



I must confess that I do not find any of these four theories at all satisfactory, yet I cannot suggest any alternative. I am, therefore, disposed to adopt the attitude of complete agnosticism as regards explanation of the phenomenon. I do not say, dogmatically, that no adequate theory can be found, but I cannot conceive on what lines it can run.

What we can say, with some confidence, is that our ordinary idea of the nature of time is clearly inaccurate, and that the odd and bizarre phenomenon of precognition must make us prepared to accept radical, and possibly fantastic-seeming, modifications of it.

Recent advances in physical science have clearly demonstrated that the nature of time is more complex than was formerly supposed and that the absolute physical present and absolute physical simultaneity are illusory. Beyond that, however, I cannot see that any of the conclusions of mathematical physics and the theory of relativity help us at all in understanding precognition.

There is one point upon which I must briefly touch. It might be said that if it can be shown that precognition is metaphysically impossible, no evidence, however apparently compelling, should induce us to believe in its reality. Now I cannot accept this view; it implies that metaphysics has reached a position of absolute certainty, an implication which I do not think that even the most enthusiastic metaphysician would claim. No human knowledge can be absolutely certain. In the last resort all logical reasoning rests upon assumption: we can force back all arguments until we arrive at one or more axiomatic principles, principles,

that is to say, which derive their validity from self-evidence. To perceive that a proposition is self-evident is a mental experience, and from experience we cannot derive certainty. There are numerous examples of propositions which are held to be self-evident by one philosopher, yet doubted by others. How are we to choose between them? Until, therefore, metaphysics can prove its own infallibility, and a sort of divine right to pronounce on what is possible and what is not possible, the prohibition of belief in precognition may be neglected. I think that the following principle may be laid down. While it is absurd to affirm the existence of the impossible, it is idle to deny the possibility of the actual. It does not, however, help us very much.

I conclude this discussion with a quotation from the novel, *Aylwin*, by Theodore Watts-Dunton. 'Quoth Ja'afar, bowing low his head: "Bold is the donkey-driver, O Ka'dee! and bold the ka'dee who dares say what he will believe, what disbelieve – not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah – not knowing in any wise his own heart, and what it shall some day suffer." '

In this unsatisfactory position, then, we must leave the attempt to find an explanatory hypothesis, and pass to the final task of trying to deduce some of the implications of the evidence.



## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLICATIONS

IN the previous chapter I have discussed four suggested explanations for the phenomenon of precognition, but have been compelled to confess that none of them seems to me to be even provisionally acceptable. However, inability to explain a fact does not justify us in ignoring it. If we are satisfied, on the evidence before us, that it is really a fact, we must take it into account and accept its plain implications, even if we cannot understand how it comes to be.

Now, the evidence before us is several hundreds of stories of people obtaining what is, apparently, knowledge of future events. We have discussed theories which would explain this fact away, viz., chance and illusion of memory. For my part, I cannot accept either of these as an adequate explanation of the whole mass of evidence.

We cannot simply ignore the evidence, for the stories are there in print for anyone to read. It can hardly be suggested that they are all nothing but a tissue of lies and fabrications; independent confirmation has been obtained in almost every case which I have cited, as well as in the majority of the others of which I have not given details; it is surely absurd to suppose that so many people would have independently entered upon conspiracies to perpetrate silly and

senseless deceptions, with no imaginable motive save that of spinning yarns. In many instances the manifest integrity and sincerity of the narrators and witnesses puts this suggestion quite out of court.

We are left, therefore, in the position of being faced with a fact which we are unable, for the present at any rate, to explain. I do not see, however, that this need worry us unduly, for it is by no means the only inexplicable fact in our world. It might be that, could we find adequate explanations for the many unsolved problems of philosophy and psychology, could we fully understand the nature of time and causation, we should find that the phenomenon of precognition would drop neatly into its appointed place in the scheme of things. I only say that it might be so, our ignorance is far too great for us to *know*.

It is clear, I think, that the crux of the whole problem is Time and the nature of Time. Were it not for the abnormality of the time relation in cases of precognition, there would be nothing particularly striking about them: it is true that some, in fact most, of them exhibit certain features which appear to be supernatural, such as telepathy and clairvoyance, but, apart from the fact that the reference is to the future, and not to the present or past, they would all fit comfortably into already existing categories.

Glancing over the whole mass of evidence, and leaving aside those cases which can be explained on some alternative hypothesis, there seem to be two distinct types of precognition. In one type what we get is foreknowledge of a future event, and this knowledge may come in a large variety of ways, and be couched



in many different forms of symbolism. Many warning cases show this very well, also precognitions of the approaching death, either of the subject or someone else. Where the precognition occurs in a dream, the scene dreamed of may not represent at all accurately the fulfilling event, but conveys knowledge of that event symbolically, or else the dreamer simply knows that so-and-so is going to happen. I suppose that everyone has had the experience of knowing something in a dream without being able to account for that knowledge.

In cases of precognitive impressions, this absence of sensory imagery is usually well-marked, though there are cases where the impression takes the form of words mentally heard, or 'ringing through the head.' Hallucinations, whether visual or otherwise, are rarely representations of coming events, but convey the knowledge by means of symbols.

The other general type is of those cases where the precognition appears, on the surface, to be an actual glimpse of the future. It is as though a rent suddenly appeared in the veil which covers the future, and then closed again after permitting the subject to take a fleeting glance at what lies ahead.

Precognitions of trivial events, which, as I have noted, form quite a large proportion of the whole, are very often of this type; there is, as a rule, no mark of futurity about them, they are recognized as having been precognitive only after the fulfilling event has been experienced.

Consider such a case as that of Mrs. Atlay (page 56). Her dream was not manifestly prophetic, it was simply

a more or less accurate representation of a future event. It was as though she had stepped forward a few hours in time and taken a peep at her dining-room.

Or consider the case of Mrs. Calder (page 64). In this case the first dream was, except for one detail, of a scene probably actually existing at the time; the only reason for classing it as precognitive at all, apart from that detail, is that it was a dream of a house which the dreamer would at some time occupy. It might have been simple clairvoyance, though the fact of future occupation gives a sort of precognitive motive for its occurrence. But the detail to which I refer, viz., the barrel used as a dog kennel by the door, seems to date it as a precognition. This feature did not exist until over a year after the dream. Had it been contemporaneous clairvoyance, motivated, perhaps, by foreknowledge of the fact of future occupation, the barrel would not have been seen in the dream, as it was not, in fact, there at the time.

This case, also, looks very much like a glimpse through a rent in the veil which hides the future.

In some cases we get the two features combined, for example, in that of Mrs. Schweitzer (page 49), where the dream conveys a more or less accurate pictorial representation, sufficiently accurate, at any rate, to enable her to recognize the stranger, Mr. Deverell, when she subsequently met him; yet the knowledge of the appositeness of the name, 'Henry Irvin,' was conveyed in a symbolic and indirect form, viz., in a conversation which did not actually happen, yet which gave a very clear account of real facts.

Now I do not think that we can lay it down, dog-



matically, that there is only one type of precognition; there may be, for all we know, two or more different modes in which the faculty is manifested, or there may be two or more different faculties by means of which precognition is gained.

However, if we can see a means of bringing these two types under one head, we shall gain, at least, in simplification.

I think that it is pretty certain that precognition is an affair of the subliminal mind; and we know that in transmission between the different levels of consciousness some form of symbolism is frequently employed. It may be, therefore, that in instances of the first type, i.e., where a sort of non-pictorial knowledge of a coming event is received, the subliminal mind actually gets a glimpse of the future, but is unable to transmit it in all its details to the surface consciousness, and can only get through a symbolic message, or a condensed account of the knowledge gained.

If we accept at their face value those cases where more or less complete and accurate pre-representations of future events are given, and regard them as fugitive glimpses through the veil, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that those events already exist in some sense, for we cannot have glimpses of the non-existent. If we reject this view, and class all precognitions together as instances of some unknown faculty of acquiring foreknowledge, we are still faced with the difficulty that a future event is somehow known before it happens; the mind comes into cognitive contact with it, yet how could this be if the event were non-existent – simply nothing?

It seems to me that, unless the entire body of evidence for non-inferential precognition be swept aside or explained away, we are bound to admit that the future does exist in some sense *now* – at the present moment. I have already given my reasons for holding that this evidence cannot be swept aside or explained away. If my readers are in agreement with me in this matter, we must face the implications of it.

Let us first dispose of one misconception which is commonly held. Because certain future events have been foreseen in a supernormal fashion, it has been assumed that *all* future events could, in principle, be the objects of precognition.

Some people have argued from this assumption that the fact of precognition proves that the future is completely determined. This is clearly inadmissible, for the existence of occasional precognitions could, at the very most, prove only that the particular events which were foreknown were determined. To prove by this means that the whole of the future is determined, one would have to show that all future events whatsoever could, in principle, be foreknown, and this, I am quite sure, cannot be done. We know nothing of the conditions which make precognition possible, and it may well be that it occurs only in circumstances of a very rare and special kind. We know that the future is to some extent predetermined by the present and the past, and I suggest that it is only that part of it which is so determined that is a possible object of precognition. There is nothing in the evidence to show that *all* future events could be precognized, in fact, there are some cases which suggest, even if they do not prove, the reverse.



For example, refer to the case mentioned on page 23. The precognition ran as follows: Mooring ropes part – vessel swept away by the tide – swamped on the bar. The fulfilment reached only as far as the first item, when an action by the subject, taken as a consequence of the warning conveyed to him in the dream, intervened and changed the course of events. He went on deck and, assisted by his companion, held on to the bank with boat-hooks, and thus prevented the second item, viz., being swept away by the tide, from occurring. It seems pretty certain that, apart from this action of his, this second item would have been fulfilled; we cannot, of course, say definitely about the third, but it seems quite likely that, had the vessel been swept away, it also might have been fulfilled.

To take another example, that of Lady Z (page 26). Had she not called to the policeman to catch the coachman as he fell from the box, it seems probable that the detail of his hat being smashed in would have occurred.

The view which I am inclined to take on the strength of these and similar cases is that there is a *future* which is now determined by the present and the past, but that it is not inexorably fixed and unalterable – it is, to some extent at least, plastic, and can be modified by actions which we, as beings possessed of some degree of freedom of choice, initiate in the present. Thus, at noon to-day, the events which will occur at noon to-morrow are determined by the total state of affairs now existing. But, into this total state of affairs, I, by my freewill action, thrust an entirely new factor which plays its part in determining the future: so that the events which are determined to happen at noon

a disquisition, that, even were I competent to undertake the task, it would be quite out of place in a book such as this. The controversy over freewill and determinism has raged for so long, and has been carried on by philosophers of such outstanding merit, that it is unlikely that anything new in the way of argument can be brought forward. It is possible, nevertheless, that fresh facts might contribute something valuable towards arriving at a solution of the problem, and I suggest that the possibility of non-inferential precognition is such a fact. Though it has been popularly recognized for many years, it is only comparatively recently that serious attention has been given to the evidence, while, so far as I know, it has been taken into account by very few indeed of the professional philosophers.

The utmost that the psychical researcher can, or should, hope to do is to bring the facts to the notice of the experts, that is to say, the professional philosophers and moralists, and leave it to them to bring to bear on those facts the full weight of logical and metaphysical analysis.

I have ventured, it is true, to attempt to work out some of the implications, but my attempt is only that of a layman and amateur. Laymen, that is to say, those not trained in the study of philosophy, are liable, in fact almost certain, to overlook relevant considerations, and to underestimate the logical difficulties in the way of their arguments. But it sometimes happens that the professional is stimulated to action by witnessing the blunders of the layman; I can only hope that this may be the case in this matter of precognition. I could wish that some competent philosopher would take my argu-



ments and, after rending them in pieces, show the world what should properly be deduced from the facts.

As regards the facts themselves, I by no means adopt this humble, I might almost say cringing, attitude in the face of the professional philosopher. The evidence was collected and examined by experts in that line of business, my part has been only to select suitable parts thereof. Unless human testimony be rejected altogether as incapable of establishing matters of fact, that evidence cannot, in scientific honesty, be ignored, however inconvenient it may be to those whose philosophic systems it upsets.

After this humble confession, it may seem inappropriate to go further in my attempt to work out the implications of precognition, yet I will make one further venture in that direction, pleading only that it concerns a matter which is more specifically within the boundaries of psychical research.

It seems to me that the occurrence of precognitions indicates that there is something amiss with our ordinary ideas of time.

We commonly think of past events as those which have happened and now no longer exist; of present events as those which are happening now and are, therefore, existent; and of the future as that which has not yet happened and does not yet exist.

Reality extends up to the present and is there cut off sharply. History is continually being made by the events which happen in the present, and may be represented in imagination as a record being written. The pen is always moving onward, but ahead of it is simply a blank page. The difficulties for this view of the

nature of time to which the occurrence of precognition gives rise have already been referred to in the chapter wherein I tried to give a brief account of some of the explanatory theories which have been suggested; I will not, therefore, repeat them here. As a matter of personal opinion, and as a result of prolonged and careful study of the evidence, I am forced to the conclusion that non-inferential precognitions do occur, that is to say, that chance, illusion of memory or any other normal cause, cannot account for all the cases of foreknowledge which have been investigated and published. This being so, I hold that the future does, in some sense, exist now, though, as I have tried to show, it is not all immutably fixed but is capable of being altered in some respects.

One implication of this seems to be that at some level of our consciousness we are subject to conditions of what might be called a wider or more elastic time than that which governs our ordinary everyday life.

All that this means for us is, perhaps, impossible to say, but I think that it shows that some of the questions which we ask about life and destiny have been couched in over-simplified terms. Take, for example, the question of the survival of physical death. This, as it is usually formulated, assumes the simple ordinary idea of time, that is of events which follow one another as it were in a straight line. But if time be *not* a simple uni-dimensional affair with an absolutely non-existent future, as seems to be implied by the facts of precognition, the question is ambiguous until the temporal conditions are more precisely specified.

If, as has been suggested, precognition implies a



second dimension of time, so that one could travel in time sideways, so to speak, as well as forwards, it seems possible that a man might die and cease to exist in one temporal direction, yet survive in another.

Or, to take another suggestion, if the present moment of some stratum of the subliminal self covers a considerably longer span of duration than does that of the normal self, when a man reaches the point of death his subliminal self may already be existing in a present which extends beyond that point.

Until we understand more clearly the nature of time, it seems to me that we cannot properly frame our questions about survival so as to be sure of avoiding ambiguities and hidden assumptions. If this be so it looks as though we ought to rest content with opinions much less definite and clear-cut than those which we usually entertain, and which most of us demand.

In conclusion I will enlarge a little on this point.

I think that what most of us mean when we ask about survival may be stated somewhat as follows. After my physical death, will there exist in the continuation of the time stream in which I now seem to myself to live, a personality which is identical or historically continuous with the personality which I now recognize as myself?

This question seems to me to bristle with ambiguities, such as the meaning of identity, the degree of historical continuity, and whether the personality which I now recognize as myself is, in fact, my true and complete self. I will not, however, do more than enumerate these now, but will confine myself to those connected with time.

There are at least five questions which must be settled before the time clause can be made unambiguous.

(1) Is the time stream in which I now appear to live a real time stream?

(2) Is it only a partial, subjective aspect of real time?

(3) Is there another kind or dimension of time?

(4) Can I assume that all parts, or strata, of my personality are subject to the temporal conditions with which I am ordinarily familiar?

(5) Can I assume that a disembodied state of being, if such exist, is subject to time at all?

There are probably other questions which could be raised, and ambiguities which require to be cleared up, but I think that this list is sufficient to show that the formulation of the question is by no means so simple as appears on the surface. If we encounter so many difficulties in asking our questions intelligibly, it cannot be wondered at that the answers are hard to find.

The conclusions, then, to which I have arrived after a prolonged and careful study of the matter are: (a) that I believe that non-inferential precognition does sometimes occur; (b) that I cannot explain it; (c) that it is not inconsistent with regarding man as a morally responsible being; and (d) that we must revise our ordinary ideas about the nature of time. Some of these conclusions may be distasteful to those who demand clear-cut answers to their questions, but until we can attain to a clearer understanding of the problems involved, we must admit a large element of agnosticism in many of our opinions.

Before we can reach such an understanding we must



solve at least two riddles, viz., the nature of normal memory and of precognition.

I fear that this book will have done little towards the solution of the latter problem – I have not touched upon the former – but I believe that the two are somehow bound up together. I hope, however, that, by giving some idea of the evidence for precognition, I may have succeeded in rendering the problem clearer, or, at least, in bringing it into the light of day.

## GLOSSARY

Of terms, and special uses of words, commonly found in the literature of psychical research.

*Agent.* One who takes the part of transmitter in telepathic communication.

*Automatic writing.* Writing executed without the conscious use of thought or muscular control by the writer. The term is also applied when the act of writing is consciously directed but the origin of the words or ideas is unknown to the writer.

*Automatist.* One who writes, speaks, or performs other significant action, without conscious volition. The term is somewhat widely applied, so as to include cases in which only the mental action involved is involuntary.

*Auto-suggestion.* Suggestion applied to oneself. (See *Suggestion.*)

*Clairaudience.* Perception as sound of an impression in some way true to fact, and not perceptible to the ordinary senses.

*Clairvoyance.* Perception of real objects or facts not within range of the ordinary senses. (Strictly used of perception in visual form; but the word often denotes paranormal perception of other kinds.)

*Communicator.* A personality seeming to be that of a deceased person or other discarnate being.

*Control.* (1) A personality regularly represented as using and taking charge of a medium during trance; (2) The direction of a medium's speech or action by another personality.

*Discarnate.* Disembodied, opposed to incarnate.



- Dissociation.* Independent activity of a part of the mind, which behaves in some way like a separate individual.
- Externalized.* This word is used of an impression, arising within the mind, which is perceived as though coming from without.
- Extra-Sensory Perception.* (Abbreviated, E.S.P.) Perception without use of the known senses. A general term, used to include such conceptions as telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition.
- Hallucination.* A supposed sensory perception which has no objective cause within the range of the sense concerned. (An hallucination may or may not represent a fact underlying the impression received.)
- Illusion.* The misinterpretation by the mind of something actually perceived.
- Influenced Writing.* Writing in which the flow of ideas is affected as though by unspoken suggestion from another mind.
- Medium.* One able to respond to and give expression to paranormal influences, especially those appearing to be personal influences.
- Metagnome.* An alternative and less question-begging term for 'Medium', introduced by Boirac. Driesch defines it as 'a person from whom supernormal phenomena originate or in express relation to whom these phenomena occur.'
- Paragnosis.* Equivalent to extra-sensory perception.
- Paranormal.* Outside accepted experience of cause and effect.
- Percipient.* One who takes the part of receiver in telepathic communication.
- Phantasm.* The appearance of a person (in less common usage, also of a thing or event) as conveyed to the mind in hallucination.
- Precognition.* Perception or awareness of future event, apart from information or inference.

- Psychic.* This word is applied in general science to all action that has a mental as distinct from a physical basis. In popular speech it has a wide usage denoting anything paranormal. In psychical research the word is largely avoided as ambiguous, but it can occur in either the scientific or in the popular sense.
- Purporting.* Professing or seeming. It is said that a phenomenon 'purports' to be due to some paranormal cause when the evidence for such a cause is intended to be taken without prejudice for or against.
- Retrocognition.* Perception or awareness of past event not known to or within the memory of the perceiver.
- Script.* A piece of automatic writing: the record of an automatist's utterance.
- Subliminal.* Lying beneath the 'threshold' of consciousness. Practically equivalent to subconscious, or to 'unconscious' as a psychological term.
- Suggestion.* The impressing of ideas or feelings upon the mind, one's own or another's, so that they become effective without conscious volition on the part of the mind impressed.
- Supernormal.* See paranormal. The word does not necessarily imply a superior level of action or being.
- Supraliminal.* Lying above the 'threshold' of consciousness. The contents of the mind which are within the range of, or capable of being reached by normal conscious process.
- Telekinesis.* The causing of material objects to move without touching them or subjecting them to any known physical force.
- Telepathy.* Transmission of an image, idea or impulse from one mind to another by paranormal action of the minds concerned.
- Veridical.* Conveying facts, or ideas that can be shown to have basis in fact.