

CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF DECEPTION IN
SITTINGS WITH EVA C.¹

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In *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. LXXXIV., Mr. E. J. Dingwall has criticised the author's experiments with the medium Eva C. in terms which in several particulars are neither fair nor accurate. Since the publication of this report (June, 1922), Mr. Dingwall has become acquainted with the present writer's manner of working and his experimental method by taking part in three sittings with the medium Willy Sch. at his laboratory in Munich. Probably, therefore, Mr. Dingwall might now view my conduct in another light than he did before we were personally acquainted.

Mr. Dingwall asks what is the extent of my knowledge of methods of deception and how far I am in a position to discover fraudulent manipulations before or after the sittings. To this I may reply that in my experiences with physical mediums, which have extended over a period of more than thirty-five years, I have never yet met with "conjuring proper." In this respect conditions upon the continent are different from those in the Anglo-Saxon countries England and America, where, in consequence of the extraordinarily widespread belief in spiritualism, mediumship has been quite shamelessly put to professional uses.

Moreover, a fraudulent appearance in the phenomena is often extremely marked where we have to do with a genuine mediumistic performance. I will mention here only the improbable appearance of many teleplastic productions observed at Madame Bisson's sittings with Eva C., at my own, and at Dr. Geley's, and also at the

¹ Translated from the German.

sittings of the English Committee. It needs but a little in such cases to confound these rare, and in appearance fraudulent sports of Nature with the conjurer's sleight of hand, in spite of their supernormal origin. In particular, the range of so-called "mediumistic apports" is marked by a particularly close analogy with the deceptions of the "magician" which depend upon speed and misdirection. Towards that particular branch of mediumistic phenomena, at all events, a very sceptical attitude is appropriate. The psychological foundations of the conjurer's art are well known both to myself and to the other continental investigators into the physical branch of parapsychic phenomena. I do not think that upon this point we have anything new to learn from Mr. Dingwall.

It should be noted that famous conjurers such as Bosko, Houdin, Hermann, Bellachini, Jakolis, Hamilton, etc., have acquitted the mediums whom they have observed of any suspicion of conjuring tricks, just as Mr. Dingwall would now hardly venture to assert that the phenomena of Eva C. and Willy Sch. are founded upon conjuring. For nothing is easier than to deprive a medium of the use of his limbs by observation and by holding the extremities. Subjects who are not able to endure such controlled experiments should be ignored by scientific enquirers. An accomplice or abettor, such as a conjurer needs, can only be in question where the persons included in the circle are not reliable. But if the circle consists solely of doctors or well-known men of science, and if, moreover, the grouping of the circle is changed between one sitting and another, this objection also falls to the ground.

All things considered, the physical phenomena of mediumship cannot be counterfeited, if such experimental conditions as will exclude fraud are rigorously maintained at the sittings.

On the other hand, I can corroborate Mr. Dingwall's statement that when Eva C.'s hands are given the necessary freedom, she sometimes uses them to increase the tendency of the phenomena to deceive the observers' senses, because she seizes the teleplasma in her hands, works upon it,

and sets out her picture-like productions so that they can be easily seen by the circle of onlookers. But this arrangement for optical effect has nothing whatever to do with the source of the psychoplastic objects. But I must at this point emphasise the fact that during the latter part of the period covered by my experiments, 1913-1914, the possibility of the hands being brought into play was ruled out by the conditions under which these experiments took place.

Mr. Dingwall goes on to express his surprise that at a sitting held with Eva C. during the period of experimenting at Munich (August, 1912), I did not myself discover some unquestionable pin-holes in the curtain, but that these were observed by Dr. A. That there were, in fact, a few pinholes in the curtain just before this unjustifiably exaggerated discovery does not depend, as Mr. Dingwall suggests, upon the author's "assertion," but upon the written testimony of the photographer who took part in the arrangement of the apparatus (see *Kampf um die Materialisations-phänomene*, p. 26). Before judging this matter readers should take into account the following letter received from my photographer :

DEAR BARON,

In reply to your enquiry I gladly inform you that on one occasion certainly (when I had no assistance at hand) I fixed a piece of newspaper with a pin to the curtain of the cabinet with a view to setting up the cameras correctly. It is probable that I may have fixed a similar sheet with the same pin to the back wall of the cabinet also, and to the stool, but my recollection is not clear on this point owing to the long interval of time.

I remain,

Yours very truly,

GEORG HAUBERRISSER, Dr.

(Head of the Hauberrisser Photographic
Institute.)

11/11/1914.

We are therefore concerned in this case neither with an "assertion" on the part of the author, nor with the

discovery of an entirely new fact by Dr. A., since the existence of several pin-holes was already known to the experimenters. As Mr. Dingwall saw when he took part in the Munich experiments, it is my habit to give my scientific guests a *free hand* in examining the laboratory, with a view to the attainment of objective conclusions. Moreover, I was myself present when the pin-holes were found. The examination of the cabinet which had been moved from its position was carried out *jointly* by Dr. A. and myself. There was therefore no question of anything having been previously overlooked, and equally no reason for Dr. A. to claim the special merit of having discovered some omission on my part, or of having opened my eyes.

Undoubtedly the existence of a row of pin-holes remains a riddle, and so does the English Committee's discovery of fragments of paper at four separate sittings. But these observations, pointing to a negative conclusion, do not afford us any complete explanation; they do not, for example, explain the passing of the teleplastic substance through the veil which was observed by the English Committee, as well as by others. The value of our positive observations cannot, therefore, be destroyed by a few mysterious occurrences of an apparently suspicious nature for which up to the present we have no explanation.

For time and again the mysterious world of mediumship puts forward phenomena which come as a shock to our accustomed trains of thought. May we not find in this employment of pins an instance of an apport, the more that it has been demonstrated in the case of the medium Frau Silbert that the engraved marks upon articles of jewelry have been produced by means of pins supernormally introduced. Moreover, in the case of three mediums, between whom there was no connexion, the writer has been able to observe the fixing up of teleplastic products by means of pins which were probably introduced in supernormal ways, and the observations were to some extent corroborated by the camera. This occurrence, therefore, in the case of Eva C. is not isolated, but is typical of a certain phase of mediumship.

Eva C.'s stockinette costume and her clothing were regularly held up to the light of a hand-lamp before the sittings and especially searched for defective places. During the many years covered by the period of experimentation only once, at the sitting of the 29th May, 1912, were holes found in the stockinette, and these were noted in the record.

In spite of the monotonous repetition year after year of the same process of examination, our attention never flagged; for we were convinced of the value and necessity of examining the séance-costume. Had it not been for this careful control, those minute paper particles could not have been discovered on August 30th, 1912.

Rectal and vaginal examinations have repeatedly been carried out, many of them during the later period by the present writer himself.

With regard to the pieces of paper found in Paris and in London, we have no occasion to doubt that even paper-like substances can be materialised, as can substances of the nature of gauze veiling and cotton, including the morphological structure of the weft, folds sewn in, etc.

Just as traces have repeatedly been left of the pure, organic-teleplastic substance, so may similar fragments of the materialised products, textile or cellular, have been left behind.

We have far too little knowledge at the present time of the way in which these teleplastic creative processes work, and we do not know that this materialising process is not capable of including in its scope all the objects of our sensory world, and tricking us with representations of them. In any case it appears inadmissible according to our present experience to found a suspicion of fraud upon the improbability in the appearance of these teleplastic products and upon their material characteristics, merely because these phenomena are inconsistent with our preconceived ideas. The habitual trend of our associative thought compels us, whenever a medium produces phenomena such as those described above, to think at once of similar appearances in the world of our experience. Clearly

the creative efforts of this unknown psychic force, when it embodies itself for our senses, expresses itself in the shape of appearances known to us in the world of our experience, in order to be generally intelligible to us.

If the working of an unknown law of nature consisted in presenting to our vision appearances at one time in two dimensions, at another plastic, at one time in the rough, at another finished in every detail, at one time with all the characteristics of life, at another without them, we should have to conform our ideas to these phenomena, however strange each of them might individually seem. So long as we continue to be wholly ignorant of the process at work, as we are to-day, we have no right to repudiate a phenomenon because, for example, its two-dimensional appearance is not consistent with the hypothesis upon which our presentation of the case rests, in other words, with our preconceived ideas.

The teleplastic reproduction of a portrait from the 'Miroir' by a combination of ideoplastic force and cryptomnesia is not in itself more wonderful and also not more suspicious than the appearance of the letters 'Miro.' In judging the suspicions expressed by Mr. Dingwall, suspicions which it is not easy to dispel, the decisive factor can only be the experimental conditions of control imposed at the sittings under consideration; it can in no wise be the mere appearance of objects seen. Now, the experimental conditions were such as to be absolutely free from any objection, and, moreover, the mysterious emergence of these objects and their sudden disappearance, leaving no trace, supports in this instance the hypothesis of materialisation.

When in conclusion Mr. Dingwall asserts that at the sitting of August 11, 1911, it was by a photograph developed after the sitting that the writer was first made aware of Eva C.'s manipulating of the phenomena with her right hand, while in place of the real hand three lay a flat, glove-like form, in open imitation of the hand supposedly under control, in this case the present writer's statement has been misunderstood and wrongly quoted.

The exact wording of the passage is as follows (*Material-*

isazions-phänomene, p. 172, Eng. trans., p. 108): "After a photograph had been taken (Exposure No. 1 at this sitting) the sitting continued. Out of the elemental substance which was changing its position, there was built up in her lap a third flat hand. At the same time I also observed about thirty centimetres above her head another better formed hand. Since the phenomenon was repeated several times and again manifested itself over her head, I made another exposure (No. 2 flashlight photograph at this sitting)."

Mr. Dingwall's incorrect citation, arising out of a mistake on his part, was given in the course of a correspondence otherwise private, but it must nevertheless be published in this present connection, lest the reader should deduce from an inaccurate reference a defect in the writer's powers of observation. The flaws and imperfections referred to by Mr. Dingwall in the experiments with Eva C. have been discussed in detail in the present writer's works, so that what Mr. Dingwall has put forward does not introduce any new objections. But it should not be forgotten that against these isolated observations of a negative character we have to set an altogether compelling mass of evidence drawn from hundreds of successful experiments, so that these negative observations possess in reality but little force.

As to the question of the part played by regurgitation in the experiments with Eva C., an explanation which, so far as the English experiments are concerned, is dismissed by every member of the Committee, the second German edition of *Materialisazions-phänomene*, now in print, enters into an exhaustive discussion of this matter, which once and for all makes a clean sweep of this "old wives' tale." The layman has no justification for his tendency to regard the stomach of mediums of this type as a kind of conjurer's property-bag, out of which he can at his pleasure select any article he happens at the moment to require.

Moreover, Mr. Dingwall himself admits that his only reason for going so thoroughly into the possibility of fraud in the experiments with Eva C., is in order to set

clearly before the reader's eyes the impossibility and absurdity of this hypothesis.

Now, as regards the technique of investigation, experience shows that better results are obtained if, in spite of the most rigorous system of control in regard to observation of the medium, one tries to establish good psychological relations with her, and at the same time to attain a sympathetic understanding of her mentality, and if during the actual sittings one does not concern oneself either in thought or in conversation with possibilities of deception and methods of control.

For these phenomena have their origin in the life of the unconscious mind and arise from an instinctive impulse in the medium, who for her part can yield herself up completely to this impulse only upon condition that her conscious attention is not brought into play by psychological resistances, or by doubt of her honesty on the part of the observers. The frequent ignoring of this most important consideration, especially in scientific investigations, is a cause of negative sittings even in the case of mediums who in other circumstances give good results.

Belief in the actuality of parapsycho-physical phenomena gains new adherents in Germany every day. The remarkable occurrences observed with Eva C. have opened the way and are gaining an ever-increasing recognition as a result of the observation of similar occurrences in experiments with other subjects.