

## Professor Hyslop Is Converted

By Michael E. Tymn

After reading Dr. Richard Hodgson's reports concerning his study of medium Leonora Piper, Dr. James H. Hyslop, professor of ethics and logic at Columbia University, was inclined to accept the spiritistic hypothesis. "But there were certain difficulties connected with the mistakes and confusions and with the dramatic play of personality, as I afterward called it, that made me still suspend judgment," Hyslop wrote in his 1905 book, *Science and a Future Life*.

Upon receiving his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1887 and his LL.D. from University of Wooster, Hyslop taught philosophy at Lake Forest University, Smith College, and Bucknell University before joining the faculty of Columbia in 1895. He authored three textbooks, *Elements of Logic* (1892), *Elements of Ethics* (1895), and *Problems of Philosophy* (1905). His interest in psychical research was a result of his friendship with Professor William James of Harvard.

Hyslop contacted Hodgson to arrange for some sittings with Mrs Piper. "When I entered the house with Dr Hodgson he introduced me as 'Mr Smith,'" Hyslop recorded. "I bowed in silence, did not shake hands, nor utter a word, and during the seventeen sittings published in my report Mrs Piper did not hear my voice in her normal state, except twice when I changed it into an unnatural tone to utter a sentence, in one case only four words. My object was to conceal my identity, because I had been present at a sitting in 1892 for fifteen minutes, and met Mrs Piper after the sitting. The present occasion was in 1898, and I had grown a full beard in the meantime."

By that time, Mrs Piper had changed from primarily a trance speaking medium to an automatic writing medium, while Rector had replaced Dr Phinuit as her primary spirit control. After Mrs Piper went into the trance state, Hyslop took his place behind and to the right of her, from where he could see the automatic writing. Hodgson sat nearby and recorded the session.

The first part of the first sitting was full of confusion, Hyslop wrote. While several names and relationships were correctly given, he then received a series of names which meant nothing to him. Some days later, however, he discovered that all of the names and facts were pertinent to an acquaintance of his. Toward the end of the session the name Charles was spelled out with the claim that it was his brother who had died of typhoid fever after suffering a very bad throat. He further communicated that he had died in the winter when snow was covering the ground and then changed the cause of his death to scarlet fever, although it was initially diagnosed as typhoid. He also reported seeing their mother, who had died after him.

"My brother Charles died at four and a half years in 1864 of scarlet fever and measles, so diagnosed, with a very putrid sore throat of a diphtheritic character," Hyslop recorded. "It was in March and a heavy snow fell on the day before and on the morning of his death, a fact which I remember because I was sent on an errand that morning. My mother died five years after my brother Charles."

In an attempt to trick Mrs Piper (or Rector), Hyslop asked Charles if he had seen their brother George. The fact was that George was

still alive. The reply came through Mrs Piper's hand that George would not be over there "for a while yet."

At his second sitting with Mrs Piper, Hyslop was immediately addressed with "James, James, speak to me," by someone claiming to be his father. But the communicator was not able to write anything else before Charles communicated again confirming that it was their father, who had died some two years earlier. At the end of the sitting, as Mrs Piper was coming out of trance, she uttered "Hyslop" and then "Tell him I am his father."

At the third sitting, Hyslop's father came through more strongly, stating that he remembered the talks he had with his son about the afterlife and its conditions, including the ability of a spirit on that side to communicate. Hyslop clearly remembered the discussion.

At the next sitting, the senior Hyslop wrote through Mrs Piper: "What do you remember, James, of our talks about Swedenborg? Do you remember of our talking one evening in the library about his description of the Bible?" The son also recalled that discussion.

The father further communicated: "Shut out the thought theory and do not let it trouble you." Hyslop interpreted this as a reference to a discussion he had had with his father about the possibility of thought transference, or mental telepathy, accounting for mediumistic communication.

Many other evidential facts were communicated by the father. He mentioned that his son's voice was the last he heard on his deathbed. He asked what happened to his old horse, giving the horse's name, Tom. He said that his old friend, Steele Perry, had moved west. He referred to another friend, Harper Crawford, being involved in a dispute over putting an organ in their church. The latter two facts were outside the scope of mental telepathy as Hyslop knew nothing about them, although he later checked with relatives and found them to be true.

Professor Hyslop continued to sit with Mrs Piper periodically over several years. There was much more in the way of evidence coming to him from deceased relatives. At one sitting, his uncle, James McClellan, communicated and mentioned that Hyslop was named after him, which Hyslop confirmed as correct. The uncle also said that he "despised the (nick) name Jim," which Hyslop knew nothing about. However, when Hyslop checked with his cousin, one of the uncle's daughters, he was informed that his uncle did, in fact, dislike being called Jim.

There was confusion and difficulty with names at times, but Hyslop eventually came to accept the "spiritistic" hypothesis, ruling out fraud, telepathy and teleteropathy, which was the name then given to what is today called Super Psi or Super ESP.

As Hyslop concluded, fraud was clearly excluded. Even if Mrs Piper knew he was coming to sit with her, which she didn't, she would have had to employ a private investigator to dig up obscure facts in a town nearly a thousand miles from where she lived, this at a time when travel and communications were slow and relatively expensive. And she would have had to assume that none of Hyslop's relatives would mention that a private investigator was there asking about the names of horses, nicknames, church disputes, etc. And the investigator would have had to somehow have found out about private conversations Hyslop had with his father.

The fact that information unknown to Hyslop but later verified as true was communicated seemed to rule out simple person to person telepathy. As for a more cosmic telepathy – one in which the medium taps into minds and memories anywhere in the world or in some cosmic computer and then relays the information back to the sitter in a conversational manner – Hyslop felt that there was no adequate scientific evidence for such a theory and that it represented "a process far more incredible than spirits."

Hyslop saw three positive arguments for the spiritistic hypothesis: 1) the selective unity of consciousness exhibited; 2) the dramatic display of personality, and 3) the character of the mistakes and confusion. In connection with the latter, he opined that "on the telepathic hypothesis there is no reason for expecting any characteristics in the 'communications' that suggests defects of memory.

"Personally I regard the fact of survival after death as scientifically proved," he wrote in a later book. "I agree that this opinion is not upheld in scientific quarters. But this is neither our fault nor the fault of the facts. Evolution was not believed until long after it was proved. The fault lay with those who were too ignorant or too stubborn to accept the facts. History shows that every intelligent man who has gone into this investigation, if he gave it adequate examination at all, has come out believing in spirits; this circumstance places the burden or proof on the shoulders of the skeptic."

When Hyslop was criticized for his interest in psychical research, he asked "Why is it so noble and respectable to find whence man came, and so suspicious and dishonorable to ask and ascertain whither he goes?"