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TO MY HELPMATE

PREFACE

A GROUP of problems that appears conspicuously in the present volume, and in so far contributes to the fitness of its title, has obtained a considerable interest on the part of the public at large. Such interest seems prone to take its clue from the activity of those who herald startling revelations on the basis of unusual psychic experiences, and who give promise of disclosing other worlds than the one with which common sense and common sensation acquaint us, rather than from the cautious and consistent results of serious and professional students in study or in laboratory. The fascination of the unusual over the popular mind is familiar and intelligible, and seems in no direction more pronounced than in matters psychological. So long as this interest is properly subordinated to a comprehensive and illuminating general view of the phenomena in question, it is not likely to be harmful and may prove to be helpful. But when the conception of the nature of our mental endowment and the interest in the understanding thereof are derived from the unusual, the abnormal, and the obscure, instead of from the normal, law-abiding observations systematized and illuminated by long and successful research, there is danger that the interest will become unwholesome and the conception misleading. It is quite natural that the

plain man should be interested in the experiences of the world of mind which form an intrinsic part of his common humanity ; and it is equally natural that he should find attraction in less commonplace and seemingly anomalous mental phenomena. If thunderstorms were as rare as total eclipses of the sun, it is likely that they would attract equal attention, be looked upon as terrifying and portentous by superstitious humanity, and be invested by tradition with mysterious significance, under the influence of the interest in the unusual. The existence of this interest is itself a distinctive trait meriting a psychological interpretation, and one not likely to be overlooked. Its direction and regulation become the care of the several departments of science that deal with the respective subject-matters involved. And yet in a special way, as expressions of the popular *esprit*, such interests claim the psychologist's attention as they do not claim the attention of representatives of other sciences. It may happen that the astronomer finds an interest in noting popular conceptions in regard to comets and life on other planets and beliefs about meteors and eclipses, but such interest forms no essential part of his occupation. He knows very well that the intelligent layman who wishes to be informed on astronomical matters will turn with confidence and respect to the accounts of the solar system, which represent the result of generations of scientific research under the guidance of exceptional ability and devotion. The psychologist is in a less fortunate position. His topic has neither that exclusive definiteness of content nor that position of hereditary prestige nor the general acknowledgment of its essentially

technical character, which belong to astronomy. All men have their own psychological experiences and notions about mental phenomena, but opinions concerning astronomy are admitted to belong to those who have specially fitted themselves for such pursuits.

There is thus a natural reason why it should be particularly difficult in psychology to bring about a wholesome and right-minded and helpful interest on the part of the layman, — a difficulty further aggravated by the encouragement of well-meaning but logically defective publications claiming to substantiate by quasi-scientific methods the popular belief in the peculiar personal and mysterious significance of events. In the face of this situation, the professional psychologist cannot but take heed of the dangers which imperil the true appreciation of his labors and his purpose, on the part of the sympathetic layman. It is a matter of serious concern that the methods of genuine psychological study, that the conditions of advance in psychology, that the scope and nature of its problems should be properly understood. It is matter of importance that the dominant interest in psychology should centre about the normal use and development of functions with respect to which psychology bears a significant message for the regulation of life. The restoration of a more desirable and progressive point of view requires some examination of the false and misleading conceptions and alleged data, which threaten to divert the sound and progressive interest from its proper channels. It is not to be expected, when many who engage public attention speak in favor of the importance of the unknown and the mystic in psychology, when the twilight phenomena of

mental life are dwelt upon — and professionally as well as by amateurs — to the neglect of the luminous daylight actualities, that the layman will always correctly distinguish between what is authentically scientific and in accordance with the advancing ideals of psychology, and what is but the embodiment of unfortunate traditions, or the misguided effort of the dilettante, or the perverse fallacy of the prepossessed mystic. Fact and fable in psychology can only be separated by the logical sifting of evidence, by the exercise of the prerogative of a scientific point of view substantiated and fortified by the lessons embodied in the history of rational opinion. The cause of truth and the overthrow of error must sometimes be fought in drawn battle and with the clash of arms, but are more frequently served by the inauguration of an adherence to one side and the consequent desertion of the other. Both procedures may be made necessary by the current status of psychological discussion.

The present collection of essays is offered as a contribution towards the realization of a sounder interest in and a more intimate appreciation of certain problems upon which psychology has an authoritative charge to make to the public jury. These essays take their stand distinctively upon one side of certain issues, and as determinately as the situation seems to warrant, antagonize contrary positions; they aim to oppose certain tendencies and to support others; to show that the sound and profitable interest in mental life is in the usual and normal, and that the resolute pursuit of this interest necessarily results in bringing the apparently irregular phenomena of the mental world within

the field of illumination of the more familiar and the law-abiding. They further aim to illustrate that misconceptions in psychology, as in other realms, are as often the result of bad logic as of defective observation, and that both are apt to be called into being by inherent mental prepossessions. Some of the essays are more especially occupied with an analysis of the defective logic which lends plausibility to and induces credence in certain beliefs; others bring forward contributions to an understanding of phenomena about which misconception is likely to arise; still others are presented as psychological investigations which, it is believed, command a somewhat general interest. The prominence of the discussion of unfortunate and misleading tendencies in psychological opinion should not be allowed to obscure the more intrinsically important problems which in the main are of a different, though possibly not of an unrelated character. I should be defeating one of the purposes of these essays if, by the discussion of mooted positions, I conveyed the notion that the problems thus presented were naturally the fundamental ones about which advance in psychology may be most promisingly centred. I deeply regret that the dispossession of fable requires more resolute and more elaborate exposition than the unfoldment of fact; but such is part of the condition confronting the critical student of psychological opinion. I must depend upon the reader to make due allowances for this foreshortening of a portion of the composition, and so to bring away a truer impression of the whole than the apparent perspective suggests.

It would not be proper to claim for this budget of

psychological studies a pre-arranged unity of design or a serial unfoldment of argument. They represent the unity of interest of a worker in a special field, who has his favorite excursions and vistas, who at times ventures away from the beaten paths and as frequently returns along those already traversed, but with varying purposes, and reaches the outlook from a different approach. There seems enough of singleness of purpose in the several presentations to warrant their inclusion in a single volume with a common name. There is enough also to make it pertinent to explain that the occasional repetitions of the same line of thought seemed less objectionable than frequent reference from one essay to another.

All of the essays have been previously printed in the pages of various scientific and popular magazines; and I have accordingly to acknowledge the courtesy of the several publishers, which makes possible their appearance in their present form. The essays have, however, been subjected to a critical revision, in the hope of increasing their acceptability in regard to form and material, and of giving them a setting appropriate to the interests of the present-day readers of psychological literature. Both in the selection of the essays from a larger group of published studies, and in their arrangement and elaboration, I have attempted to bear in mind the several current interests in questions of this type, and to direct these interests formatively along lines which seem to me fertile in promise and sterling in value. In the recasting thus made necessary it has come about (markedly in two cases, *The Problems of Psychical Research* and *The Logic of Mental Tele-*

graphy) that some of the essays have been entirely rewritten and bear only a generic resemblance to their former appearance.

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JOSEPH JASTROW.

MADISON, WISCONSIN, November, 1900.

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