CHAPTER THREE

Pathologies of the Supernatural

The city of Lyon was in danger, Dr. Philibert Burlet warned in a lecture at the Société des sciences médicales at the end of 1862 in which he reported on the cases of six patients at the Antiquaille hospital who he thought were exhibiting signs of mental illness directly related to the practice of spiritism. Moreover, this situation was not unique, Burlet told his audience—every physician in the region dealing with mental illness had already encountered similar cases. If this was true of the rest of France as well—and there was no reason to think otherwise—spiritism was well on its way to becoming one of the chief causes of mental alienation in the country.[1] While more religiously concerned thinkers had focused on the dangers that spiritism represented for the soul, physicians often diagnosed séances as pathological. Spiritism drove the mind to focus obsessively on certain thoughts and rendered the subject unable to function in normal, everyday life. From a medical perspective, Burlet stressed that the practice of spiritism had to be considered a mental illness, caused by the exaggeration of religious ideas, an intense belief in the supernatural, and an unhealthy love of the mysterious.[2]

Even as groups of spiritists were organizing themselves around the county, the human sciences were developing, professionalizing, and creating their own internal division of labor and specializations. Psychiatry and psychology were becoming increasingly influential in hospitals, universities, other establishments of research and higher education, and even the legal system. By the mid nineteenth century, psychiatry had become a recognized medical discipline. Psychology took somewhat longer to develop. Like psychiatrists, psychologists were interested in human experiences and behaviors, but, unlike psychiatrists, they were neither physicians nor necessarily affiliated with a hospital or an asylum. Rather, psychologists operated within the university system and the establishments of research and higher education. Officially, French psychology began with the creation of a chair of experimental and comparative psychology at the Collège de France in 1888. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had become part of the academic landscape.[3]

Psychology differed from psychiatry in more than just its structural organization. Whereas psychiatrists focused on pathologies and cures, psychologists were interested in formulating

explanations of human behaviors in more general terms. No matter what their approach, however, the two groups were never fully independent of each other. With the common aim of explaining human experiences and behaviors rationally, both disciplines were destined to intrude on a domain that had traditionally been the purview of the Church. Not only were physical manifestations of religiosity—possession, visions, cures, and stigmata, amongst others—of interest to them, but they were potentially problematic for sciences constructed on the assumption that the human mind and its productions could be explained physiologically. The success of psychiatrists and psychologists depended in part, not only on their abilities to account for these seemingly supernatural phenomena, experienced by a small portion of the population, but to have their explanations accepted in scientific circles.[4]

In their race to devise a master explanation of what was really happening at séances, medicine, psychiatry, and psychology each attempted to appropriate the supernatural and, in particular, mediumistic abilities. Each provided a way to accept the phenomena witnessed while rejecting the mystical interpretations usually assigned to them by subjects, audiences, priests, and spiritists. By presenting supernatural experiences as pathological in nature, medical doctors and psychologists legitimized them more than any other group, but they did so by reducing them to the physiological expressions of mental disorder. It was a disease of a few, but provided a window into the condition of all. Observing mediums and their ectoplasmic productions (spirit substances supposedly emerging out of a medium's body) would bring about a better understanding of the potential of the human mind in some of its most mystifying pathological manifestations. In particular, the psychologists Théodore Flournoy and Pierre Janet and the physician Joseph Grasset each formulated their own theories of the personality based on the experiences of mediums and reported cases of haunting. Then, between 1905 and 1908, the Institut général psychologique organized a series of séances with the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino, indicating an openness on the part of psychologists to consider mediumistic phenomena, as well as a willingness among mediums to be studied. On the whole, however, in their considerations of séances and other supernatural manifestations, scientists remained skeptical and often hostile. Even the most sympathetic of psychologists could not escape the patronizing attitude of their colleagues. In their eyes, mediums, stigmatics, and visionaries were patients, and spiritism joined possession, visions, and spiritual delusions as the latest expression of a dangerous delirium.

BETWEEN RELIGION AND PATHOLOGY

In Europe, the second half of the nineteenth century was a period filled with instances of the supernatural made concrete. Marian apparitions, miraculous cures, demonic possessions, stigmatics, and visionaries were frequently reported on in the press, as were mediums and somnambulists. Starting with

Catherine Labouré's visions of the Virgin Mary in Paris in 1830 and those of Mélanie Mathieu and Maxim Giraud at La Salette in 1846, Marian apparitions increased in frequency throughout the century. In 1858, Bernadette Soubirous witnessed a series of apparitions in Lourdes that were among the most famous sightings of the period. Her visions led to the building of a shrine and launched an important pilgrimage tradition, coupled with frequent claims of miracle cures that continue to this day.[5]

These developments did not escape the notice of physicians, who showed a growing interest in such religious experiences. At La Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot adopted the old term "hysteria" and redefined it as a newly documented physiological condition associated with a multitude of behavioral symptoms, including religious delusions. This interest in religious manifestations on the part of the medical establishment was not new, but it was intensifying. In the early nineteenth century, the founders of psychiatry, Philippe Pinel and Jean-Étienne-Dominique Esquirol, had mentioned religious melancholy, but had predicted that it would disappear as science progressed. By the 1840s, however, the emergence of a more open and social Roman Catholicism began to threaten anticlerical medical officers, leading the latter, in turn, to develop a more sustained interest in demonology. In 1843, Maurice Macario thus described *démonomanie* as a dangerous inherited form of melancholia, or lypemania, spread by mental contagion or imitation, and more common outside of Paris than in the capital. This view continued to gain popularity in medicine, and, by the 1880s, the group around Charcot had become convinced of the pathological character of any form of religious devotion. In an attempt to widen the scope of their research, physicians at La Salpêtrière began to explain not only contemporary but also past cases of possession, stigmata, and other tangible manifestations of faith by invoking Charcot's characterization of hysteria.

The practice of reinterpreting past religious occurrences in scientific terms had first been launched by the ardent positivist Émile Littré, best remembered today for his *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1863–73), in an 1869 article on early modern accounts of miraculous cures associated with the bones of Saint Louis (King Louis XI of France).[6] Retrospective medicine, as he called to it, was later taken up by one of Charcot's disciples, Désiré-Magloire Bourneville. Between 1882 and 1902, Bourneville published a series of ten volumes, collectively titled La bibliothèque diabolique, providing various reinterpretations of classic cases of witchcraft, demonic possession, and other mystical experiences. Noted for his attacks on mysticism and supernatural beliefs, Bourneville would also become famous for his anticlerical stance and his defense of both cremation and the laicization of nursing.[7] The Bibliothèque diabolique consisted of republished accounts of past events, as well as contemporary reports of religious manifestations, each explained in terms of hysteria. In most cases, prefaces and commentaries were added to centuries-old manuscripts. In them, Bourneville and other physicians rejected the earlier claims of possession in favor

of pathological explanations of *hystéro-démonopathie* or *hystéro-épilepsie*. In *Procès-verbal fait pour délivrer une fille possédée par le malin esprit à Louviers*, an old manuscript from the Bibliothèque nationale, edited by Armand Bénet and supplied with a new introduction, a case of possession and exorcism was reinterpreted in clinical terms: "The supernatural in pathology and therapeutics is a myth, or, rather, a scientific heresy," it was proclaimed. "The facts are real, the conclusion is false: nonexistent extra-natural intervertion—necessary at the time as an explanatory hypothesis—was deduced from the physiological and pathological phenomena."[8]

By the 1890s, the tone had changed slightly. Charcot himself wrote an article on faith healing, "La foi qui guérit," originally published in both English and French. It allowed for the possibility of faith healing or miracle cures that eluded medical or scientific explanation. For Charcot, however, such miracles were always hysterical in origin. They developed during a long, intense pilgrimage to a sanctuary, filled with powerful, suggestive thoughts on healing. As such, faith healing might work on certain diseases, but only in highly suggestible subjects.[9] Pierre Janet, a student of Charcot's, agreed with his teacher that many of those who made claims to tangible religious experiences such as miracle cures or stigmata were in fact suffering from nervous conditions. For physicians, the thoughts and experiences of such patients could be useful in revealing hidden pathologies of the mind. In the last years of the nineteenth century, Janet developed a close working relation with one such patient: Madeleine, a devout Christian who exhibited a profound sense of mysticism, a deep devotion to Christ, and occasional stigmata. In *De l'angoisse à l'extase*, published in two volumes in the 1920s, Janet related his encounters with Madeleine during her stay at La Salpêtrière and beyond. He described her case as psychopathological in nature, but recognized and respected her profound religious faith. By then, psychiatry had moved a long way from Bourneville and his Bibliothèque diabolique's portrayal of all mystics as deeply disturbed individuals under the power of their outdated convictions.[10]

Not all physicians rejected the potential power of fervent faith and the possibility of miracles as easily as those at La Salpêtrière did. Some even accepted them readily. Often holding regional positions, and in contrast with the rampant anti-clericalism prevailing in Paris, these physicians were devout Catholics and often monarchists hoping for the restoration of the crown and the authority of the Church. As such, visions and prophesies proclaiming the eminent return of the monarchy and the ascent of the legitimist pretender to the French throne were of particular interest to those natural scientists in search of tangible evidence of their faith.[11] The 1880s and 1890s saw an effort on their part to construct a Catholic science to oppose the secular medicine developing in Paris, particularly around Charcot. In 1888, the first of five Congrès scientifiques des catholiques sanctioned by Pope Leo XIII was held in an attempt to answer the

biological and medical sciences. At the same time, Church officials began to ask the help of scientists with some of the more extreme cases of mystical phenomena. In the 1860s, for example, L.-J.-J. Constans, *inspecteur-général* of the French national asylums, and the alienist L.-F. Calmeil were sent to the small town of Morzine in the Alps to deal with an asserted outbreak of demonic possession; and in 1883, a medical consultation office was instituted at Lourdes, making the collaboration of physicians in certifying miracles there official.[12]

Catholic physicians did not dismiss the possibility of miracles and wrestled with ways to understand the teachings of the Church in light of the latest scientific theories. The physician Félix de Backer wrote that his visit to Lourdes had convinced him that healings could occur outside of science. Such miracles had to be accepted by physicians.[13] In his study on stigmatization, the physician and professor at the preparatory school of medicine of Clermont-Ferrand Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, struggled to reconcile his faith and his belief in miracles with his scientific training. If the Church declared a phenomenon to be miraculous, he argued, scientists had to accept the verdict and renounce their own authority on these matters; whereas false cases of stigmata could be explained by science, miracles could not. The power of imagination could not act on blood in such a remarkable way; it could never account for the appearance of wounds at specific and religiously significant sites on the body.[14]

In recognizing the supremacy of the Church on matters of faith, ImbertGoubeyre illustrates the conflict experienced by Catholic physicians.[15] For some of them, faith ruled over science. Alexandre Jenniard du Dot, for example, believed that only theologians had the right to explain spiritism. He also warned of the dangers of suggestion, as some physicians practiced it, because it substituted the subject's will for that of the physician: "it is *doctoral possession* substituted for the old *diabolical possession*."[16] The physician Charles Hélot, medical expert for the Rouen diocese in cases of possession since the 1870s, also cautioned fellow scientists against the dangers of natural theories invented by an atheistic science hoping to negate the will of God and all manifestations of the supernatural. He argued that the phenomena of somnambulism, hypnotism, and haunting should not be discussed in scientific terms when religion could sufficiently account for the manifestations. Like du Dot, Hélot believed that hypnotism and suggestion were dangerous. They constituted the implicit invocation of the devil brought about by a physician with a desire to provoke a state only the devil would wish to induce.[17]

Aside from Catholic mysticism, physicians and psychiatrists were also interested in séances and their mediums. Whereas the more faith-based physicians were placed in an awkward and contradictory position regarding such manifestations, the vast majority of them saw nothing more than physiology and dangerous pathology in such phenomena. In 1904, Paul Duhem warned: "Spiritism must not be seen as a

simple and innocent societal game but rather as a danger that we, as physicians, should attempt to destroy."[18] By then, spiritism had already been associated with mental illness for a few decades. Physicians like Duhem and Burlet argued that to practice spiritism, to take part in séances, would put the more susceptible subjects at great risk. If, for most participants, spiritism did no more than console and dazzle, it could have devastating effects on the sanity of more impressionable observers.

Where Catholic thinkers like Jules-Eudes Mirville, André Pezzani, and Henri Carion had stressed the perils of spiritism for the soul, many physicians stressed the potential dangers to the mind and described the types of deliriums that could be caused by such a practice. Two types of pathologies tended to be associated with spiritism: first, for those subjects already predisposed to crisis, spiritism could provoke a delirious episode that would not necessarily have arisen under different circumstances; and second, for the more unstable subjects, spiritism provided the outlet for a madness to which they had been predestined.[19] Some patients experienced crisis brought on by their newly discovered mediumistic abilities. Others incorporated elements of the spiritist doctrine into their delirium. For physicians, the frequent practice of spiritism could lead to a doubling or even what they called a *déségrégation* (disaggregation) of the personality, a pathological state in which the conscious and the subconscious separated themselves to evolve separately. This was often described as the greatest danger for the participants at a séance. In cases of complete *déségrégation*, unconscious acts would appear to be conscious, but would take place without the awareness of the person performing them. For many physicians, this became the key explanation of spiritist productions.[20] Mediumship was thus a disease of the mind. The phenomena observed at séances were sometimes real, but they were never supernatural; they were the product of patients, not of spirits.

Not all participants at séances would experience such florid symptom of mental illness, of course. Healthy ones would be relatively safe. But it was argued that spiritists had a moral obligation to refuse initiation to those who were susceptible to pathological crises. If spiritism wanted to be seen as a serious practice, it would have to limit itself to sane, skeptical subjects who came to learn or for amusement and prevent those who turned séances into delirious, hallucinatory circuses from attending.[21] Of course, such warnings angered spiritists, who conceded that, just like anywhere else, there were mentally ill people in their ranks, but denied that spiritism caused mental illness. If they had any responsibility, it was to soothe perhaps already diseased imaginations and nothing more.[22]

THÉODORE FLOURNOY AND HÉLÈNE SMITH

In 1899, the internationally known Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920) presented the results of his five years of observation of the medium Hélène Smith in his book *Des Indes à la planète Mars: Étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie*, one of the most important studies of mediumship ever published. Flournoy had been a student of experimental psychology under Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig before obtaining a professorship in psychophysiology at the University of Geneva in 1891. Throughout his career, he wrote numerous books and articles on religious psychology and came to be considered an expert on the topic.

Des Indes à la planète Mars sold well both in French and in the English translation, which came out in 1900.[23] "Upon my word, dear Flournoy, you have done a bigger thing here than you know; and I think that your volume has probably made the decisive step in converting psychical research into a respectable science," his friend the American psychologist William James wrote to him that year.[24] Flournoy had provided a scientific account of séances that, while remaining respectful of Smith and her beliefs, had presented her in clear pathological terms. At the turn of the century, *Des Indes à la planète Mars* became a landmark for mediumistic theories outside spiritist and occultist circles.[25]

Flournoy was neither the first psychologist to develop an interest in mediumship nor the only one to discuss the phenomena from a physiological perspective. By the time *Des Indes à la planète Mars* came out, participation at séances had already been considered a trigger for mental illness for decades. In his focus on a single medium and his efforts to develop a caring relationship with her, however, Flournoy differed from most of his colleagues. In this, he had more in common with psychical researchers who treated their subjects with respect and admiration than with those who treated them as patients.[26] If he did not share Smith's views on the cause of her visions, he never doubted her sincerity. "It is clear that I would not have considered such an enterprise with just anybody," he confided to James:

> For one thing, there could be no question of surrendering my freedom to think and write in accordance with my ideas; but how many mediums would agree to see their phenomena exposed and explained in a more or less scientific way, that is to say, in a very different manner than the one prevailing in the spiritist circles in which their abilities are developed? In this particular case, fortunately, the difficulty appeared less significant thanks to the strong and distinguished character of the medium with whom I was dealing. Miss Smith appeared in fact to be a remarkably intelligent and gifted person, much above ordinary prejudices, very open and independent of thought, and consequently capable of accepting, simply for the love of truth and progress in research, that we turn her mediumship into a psychological study, at the risk of obtaining results that are not in keeping with her personal impressions and the opinion of her circle.[27]

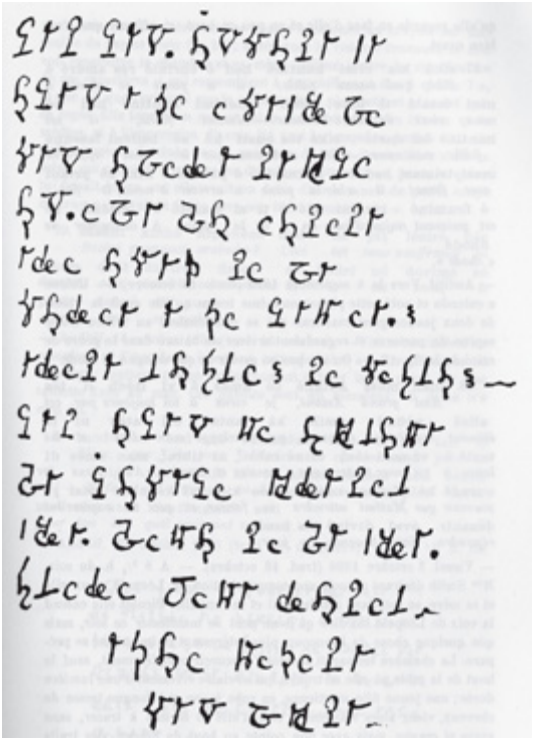
By the time Flournoy met Smith in 1894, he had already been trying to gain access to spiritist circles in Geneva for some time. Intrigued by mediumistic phenomena, he had hoped to observe a séance and verify the spiritists' claims for himself. "I try to penetrate into the spiritualistic world of our city, but it is rather difficult," he wrote James in December 1893.[28] A few months later, he met Hélène Smith (the pseudonym of Elise Catherine Müller), a worker in a silk shop in Geneva. In September 1895, writing to James once again, Flournoy recounted his first impressions:

> I was forgetting to tell you what has interested me most during the last six months: it is a certain medium (nonprofessional, unpaid) of a spiritualist group, into which they have agreed to accept me in spite of my neutral position; I have attended about twenty of the séances of which a third were here at my home; psychologically, it is very interesting, because this woman is a veritable museum of all possible phenomena and has a repertoire of illimitable variety: she makes the table talk,—she hears voices,—she has visions, hallucinations, tactile and olfactory,—automatic writing—sometimes complete somnambulism, catalepsy, trances, etc.[29]

At their first séance together, Smith impressed the psychologist by revealing her knowledge of deceased members of his family. As they were both from the same city, Flournoy suspected these must have come from conversations overheard by Smith in her childhood and unconsciously remembered: "The great majority of the phenomena were evidently the automatic reproduction of forgotten memories—or memories registered unconsciously. There is actually in the nature of this medium a second personality who perceives and recall instances which escape ordinary awareness," he wrote to James. "What is irritating in this kind of observation is the difficulty of making it precise, the medium and the members of the group having a holy terror of everything which resembles an 'experiment.'"[30] Fortunately, the problem soon disappeared, because Flournoy was able to persuade Smith to perform for him privately.

For five years, Flournoy investigated Smith's trance-state visions. Unlike other scientists interested in mediums, he did not focus on physical phenomena or communication with another realm. Instead, he decided to follow the traces of Smith's unconscious as they leaked out during trances in which she revealed information about two of her supposed previous lives. Smith believed herself to have been the daughter of an Arab sheik who under the name of Simandini became the favorite wife of a Hindu prince, Sivrouka Nayaka, who had reigned over a region called Kanara and built a fortress called Tchandraguiri in the year 1401. Later, she was reincarnated as Marie-Antoinette, and now, as a punishment for her past sins and to perfect her character, she had come back in the humble form of Hélène Smith.[31] While in a

state of somnambulism, Smith also revealed the existence of her spirit guide, Léopold, who was none other than the illustrious Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, who, after a long search, had again found the object of his affections in the reincarnation of his dear Marie-Antoinette. Flournoy described Léopold as a dominating spirit guide, witnessing and controlling most of Smith's trances.[32]



A sample of Hélène Smith's writings in Martian. From Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars. Étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1900), fig. 27.

Smith had only recently been initiated into spiritism, but, although her mediumistic abilities officially dated from 1892, Flournoy believed that she had been showing signs of her potential since childhood. Smith herself claimed to have experienced her first visions at the age of ten, when Léopold had originally revealed himself to her. It was only once she discovered spiritism, however, that she came to understand fully these previous experiences. Based on her recollections, Flournoy suggested that during puberty, Smith had developed a tendency toward mental *déségrégation*, from which she had progressively recovered. In fact, if she had never been initiated to spiritism, he maintained, her personality would have gradually reconsolidated, and with time her visions would have disappeared. In spiritism, unfortunately, Smith's tendencies had found a fertile space for expression. He feared that her participation at séances had pushed her toward increased mental *déségrégation*. Eventually, it had led her personality to split between an awake and a trancelike self.[33]

Aside from past existences, Smith's visions had also taken her out into the solar system, where she witnessed life on the planet Mars: "Mlle Smith, by virtue of the mediumistic faculties, which are the appendage and the consolation of her present life, has been able to enter into relation with the people and affairs of the planet Mars, and unveil their mysteries to us," Flournoy wrote.[34] He devoted most of his book to what he called the "Martian romance" and attempted to show such a story to be the product of his medium's imagination. Smith had described life on Mars in detail, providing him with drawings of the landscapes and cities, and even speaking and writing in what she claimed was the Martian language. Glossolalia, the ability to speak and understand a language that one has not been taught, has been claimed by mystics since the early days of the Church. In the case of Smith's Martian, however, Flournoy was confronted with an unknown language, whose phonetics, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and style he studied: "It's a typical case of 'glosso-poetry,' of complete fabrication of all the parts of a new language by a subconscious activity," he concluded.[35] He described Smith's Martian as a natural language, one that had been created unconsciously by her second personality.[36] It turned out to be very similar to French: each Martian letter had its equivalent in the Latin alphabet; Martian was composed of articulate sounds, all of which, consonants as well as vowels, existed in French. Moreover, word order in Martian was identical to French.[37]

Smith's construction of a new language and her seeming knowledge of Sanskrit even attracted the attention of linguists.[38] Already at the time of his observations, Flournoy had asked the eminent linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to shed some light on the curious phenomena. In 1901, intrigued by Smith's claims, the linguist Victor Henry also worked on her Martian and published his analysis of the language. The similarities between French and Martian were not always obvious, he wrote. The different vocabularies made them hard to discern at times, but they were undoubtedly there. In fact, Henry claimed that the two languages were completely grammatically identical, down to the use of the auxiliary verbs "to have" and "to be."[39]

The publication of *Des Indes à la planète Mars* in 1899 created some controversy. The spiritists of Geneva were not very happy with Flournoy's presentation of his medium, nor were they pleased with their newly found notoriety across Europe and America.[40] They quickly published a reply to Flournoy's study, *Autour «Des Indes à la planète Mars»*, in which they accused him of failing to see the authenticity of Smith's production. A series of heated exchanges in which each side attacked and ridiculed the other followed.[41] As for Smith, although Flournoy had thanked her in his book for her openness to his account of her cycles, she now understood the extent to which she had allowed him to

interpret her trances. Their relationship began to turn sour when, soon after the publication, a dispute over the revenues of the book exploded. According to Olivier Flournoy, grandson of the author, Flournoy had promised to give all of the profits to Smith. When her new fame led an enthusiastic widow to donate some money to her, allowing her to live a comfortable life, however, Flournoy decided to split the earnings between his medium and the newly founded *Archives de psychologie*, which he was then running with his cousin, Édouard Claparède.[42] The question of the revenues caused a ten-year feud between Smith and Flournoy. By 1909, tired of all of it, the psychologist wrote Smith one last letter in which he ended the relationship definitely by giving her all the profits from the fourth edition of *Des Indes à la planète Mars*.[43] He appears to have had no further contact with Smith.

Flournoy's final letter to her seems to have caused Smith to have a nervous breakdown. In a séance with her psychiatrist at the time, the sexual undertone once implied by her spirit guide Léopold now became overt. In a letter to Flournoy, the psychiatrist who witnessed Smith's deterioration recalled one session in particular: "getting more and more excited during her story, the medium takes a lascivious attitude; the eyes are languishing, the bust tilted back, the hands *active* and finally … H. S. is taken by an erotic spasm that leaves no doubt on the illusion of a sexual connection."[44] Smith's sexual confessions would continue, becoming even more explicit four days later, her psychiatrist reported. These final sessions would mark a turn in the medium's life. Afterward, she distanced herself from spiritists, claiming she found them too dominating. She began a second mediumistic life, as it came to be called, devoting herself to painting the mysterious worlds she had once so vividly experienced in séances.[45] She died in 1929, isolated in her own world of mysticism.

As for Flournoy, he continued to pursue his interest in mediumistic abilities even after his break with Smith. In the following years, he attempted to generalize the conclusions he had reached with her. During séances, he concluded, mediums entered a psycho-physiological state that encouraged mental dissociation and a regression to an inferior state ruled by their imaginations. Many of the phenomena witnessed could be explained as latent memories, instinctive tendencies, and other resources of the subconscious. Mediumistic phenomena had nothing to do with the dead, but in fact consisted in a set of mental processes and "still-mysterious laws."[46] Flournoy recognized that the religious sentiment fulfilled a need in many people. Mostly harmless and destined to disappear and be replaced by rational explanations, it could, for the time being, turn pathological in some cases. "Religious life has everything to gain by no longer being confused with these orchestral manifestations that come with it in the more or less pathological temperaments," he wrote.[47]

Although *Des Indes à la planète Mars* aroused considerable interest at the turn of the century, it was rapidly forgotten. Flournoy's journey into the unconscious of Hélène Smith was ultimately eclipsed by the theories of his contemporary Sigmund Freud, whose work went beyond theorizing about the unconscious to offer a potential cure for psychopathological disorders.[48] Moreover, Flournoy's work was difficult to reproduce. In Smith, he had found a rare medium, one that was willing to be observed over a prolonged period of time and whose psychical manifestations were intellectual rather than physical. Others proposed studies on mediumship, but took a very different approach, focusing on the more spectacular physical phenomena produced. Among them, Pierre Janet and Joseph Grasset both considered the productions of mediums in formulating more complete theories of personality.

PIERRE JANET, JOSEPH GRASSET, AND THE MEDIUMISTIC PERSONALITY

In 1889, Pierre Janet wrote his doctoral thesis based on observations of female patients suffering from nervous pathologies, mostly hysteria. Janet was interested in automatisms that manifested themselves in catalepsy, somnambulism, suggestion, alternating memories, unconscious acts, and psychological *déségrégation*. In *L'automatisme psychologique*, he attributed mediumship to the *déségrégation* of the mind, whereby a set of thoughts formed outside of perception and unrelated to it. As such, mediumistic phenomena were produced by unconscious involuntary actions.[49] Janet saw striking similarities between mediums and patients exhibiting double personalities. Some forty years earlier, Eugène Azam, a professor at the medical faculty of Bordeaux, had first observed a case of double or alternate personalities. Since the age of sixteen, his patient Félida had been experiencing strange episodes of a kind of somnambulism in which her personality was altered; she was happier and more carefree, even agreeing to sexual relations that had led to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. In 1876, Azam had published his observations of Félida.[50] Janet's subsequent views on mediumship owed a great deal to this work. He argued that the most successful mediums exhibited clear signs of such psychological *déségrégation*, behaving as if they had two separate and independent personalities. More than simple curiosities, mediums were, for Janet, evidence of extreme importance in the study of the human mind.[51]

Inspired by this work, Joseph Grasset, a professor at the reputable medical clinic of the Université de Montpellier, developed a theory of personality based on the concept of *déségrégation* using his own observations of mediums. In 1903, the *Annales des sciences psychiques* published his article "Le spiritisme devant la science," in which he discussed the case of Jeanne, a fifteen-year-old girl around whom phenomena associated with a haunting had already been occurring for some time. He described the teenager as a hysteric, and the phenomena as the manifestations of her pathology. For Grasset,

Jeanne's condition belonged to a group of phenomena yet to be understood by science. He believed, however, that mental suggestion, clairvoyance, telepathy, and, in Jeanne's cases, moving objects without contact with them (called telekinesis today) would soon be provided with a scientific explanation.[52]

By the time Grasset became interested in Jeanne, news of her feats had already stirred some interest. The hairdresser in her village had even written to the occultist magazine *Le messager de l'occulte* informing the readers of the peculiar occurrences:

> For eighty days now, there have been very extraordinary things happening in this house; as soon as these people heads are turned, the blankets, the sheets, and the mattresses are thrown into the center of the room, the chairs and tables overturned, the blankets carried out to the middle of the yard. … The dog, which was locked up, was found outside without anyone having opened the door; three days ago, the 15-year-old girl had her hair cut while she was in bed. The chrysanthemums, lilies, gillyflowers, and shallots have been devastated. The children, aged fifteen, six, and four, attest to having seen plants being destroyed with no one around; they have also seen a closet open up and clothes fall at their feet; at night, the walls and the furniture produce knocks.[53]

Commenting on the case, the editor of *Le messager de l'occulte* replied that, like this one, most cases of haunting took place in houses inhabited by young teenage females unconsciously acting as mediums and provoking these phenomena. To stop the haunting, he recommended that an iron sword be used to pierce the air around the house. This would destroy the electric clouds that had been created by the teenage medium and were responsible for the various phenomena. Grasset did not reveal whether or not the method was used in this particular case, but it was certainly a contemporary remedy for hauntings.[54]

For Grasset, hauntings were neither manifestations of the dead—or of Kardec's *périsprit*—nor invariably deceitful. In fact, they could often be explained through available concepts of physiology. Observing Jeanne, the physician was able to develop a theory of two psychisms associated with two different modes of intellectual activity, superior and inferior. The superior center constituted "the true and complete conscience" from which free will emanated. It was the center of personality, intellectuality, and the superior psyche. The inferior center was a polygon formed by six centers, each responsible for a specific activity: audition, vision, general sensitivity, movement, speech, and writing.[55] It was the site of automatism, inferior psyche, and sensations.[56] With this holistic theory, Grasset elaborated a controversial assertion that explained human behavior in its entirety. For Grasset, human

behavior was governed by a superior center, responsible for superior thinking, and a polygon, the site of lower thinking, from which instincts, acts of passion, and acts of habit all emanated. For each action, a corresponding set of centers, or neurons, would every time be involved.[57]

Grasset's theory could potentially provide an explanation for the paralysis caused by organic lesions. He classified the various types of aphasias as lesions situated in different sites in his system: in the polygonal centers of speech, between the polygon and the superior center, on the fibers that united the various polygonal centers, or below the polygon.[58] Both the superior center and the polygon were physiological systems, which functioned together in the healthy body. However, they could temporarily or permanently separate. This separation of the superior center from the inferior polygon did not imply a complete cessation of psychical activity but only of that of a higher level. As consciousness resided in the superior center, awareness always depended on whether or not it was active. Acts involving only the polygon were labeled automatism. They were always spontaneous and never voluntary.[59]

Déségrégation of the personality could be partially experienced during sleep or in moments of distraction, during which the polygon took over behavior but not all functions. Whereas in such situations, the superior center continued to work properly, certain pathologies were characterized by its deterioration. In such instances, it became sick and ceased to function adequately. Only in such states—hysteria, somnambulism, and ambulatory automatism, for example—did the separation of the superior center from the polygon become observable.[60] In the states of hypnotism and suggestibility, the subject's superior center completely separated from his or her polygon, to be replaced by the magnetizer's own superior center. Thus, contrary to persuasion, in which one's superior center was being convinced by someone else, in suggestion, the subject's superior center became disconnected, inasmuch as consciousness was taken over by the magnetizer.[61]

Aside from explaining sleep, dreams, hypnotism, and suggestibility, Grasset aimed to provide explanations for occurrences of the supernatural in general and spiritist phenomena in particular. Cases of moving tables were easily explained by Grasset in terms of unconscious and involuntary movements, because the polygon was put in a state in which it provoked movement without being given a voluntary order from the superior center.[62] The addition of the production of each of those small involuntary movements would, when superimposed, produce the significant effect by which the table would move.[63] The theory could also be used to account for phenomena associated with the pendulum and the divining rod: through intense concentration, the subject was able to direct his or her thoughts to the action and execute the movement without the knowledge of the superior center. The same mechanism could explain contact mind reading.[64] In the case of mediums, the phenomena were produced through a combination

of the separation of the two centers and increased polygonal activity. The trance the medium entered consisted in the momentary splitting of the polygon from the superior center, or a *déségrégation* of the personality, and an increase in the activities of the six centers of the polygon. The greater the polygonal activity; the greater the medium.[65] Mediumship was thus a form of provoked and temporary neurosis, similar to spontaneous or provoked somnambulism. Although the superior center remained constant, the medium's polygonal personalities would vary according to momentary inspiration and suggestion, external or internal. For Grasset this constituted a clear pathology.[66]

Of course, spiritists themselves did not associate mediumship with pathology. In fact, they often defended themselves against such attacks. Kardec had addressed his own concerns with this in his *Livre des médiums*. Mediumship required energy and could cause fatigue, but the practice of spiritism did not lead to madness. If there was madness, however, spiritism could provide a context in which to express it. Thus, children, idiots, and anyone experiencing symptoms of eccentricity or a predisposition to insanity should be discouraged from the practice.[67] Some physicians, more sympathetic to spiritism, refused to discuss mediums in the context of pathology. The physician and psychical researcher Gustave Geley warned against confusing abnormality with pathology. For him, a serious study of mediumship would contribute to the development of an abnormal psychology. Hysterics and mediums were very different, but not sick.[68] Geley's criticism of Grasset's theory was that it provided only half of an explanation and failed to account for all of spiritism. While Geley did appreciate the strength of theories of automatism in explaining certain phenomena—the moving tables and the divining rod among others—he did not believe they could provide an explanation for the most complex phenomena of telepathy, suggestion, clairvoyance, lucidity, exteriorization, and materialization, to name a few. Moreover, Geley felt that Grasset had failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the separation of the polygon from its superior center.[69] It was his contention that such a problem could disappear if one conceived of the polygon and its centers as associated with different parts of the body and separable. The polygon could be related to the physiological brain and the superior center to the superior principal of the being, independent of the organism. In this way, the superior center could have an action outside the senses, muscles, and brain, which could possibly explain higher mediumship adequately.[70]

Flournoy, Janet, Grasset, and Geley were not the only physicians and psychologists writing on the leveling of the different activities of the mind. In Britain, the psychical researcher and poet Frederic Myers sought to explain mediumship by appealing to a theory of the subliminal self with multiple levels of selfhood. For Myers, such multiple selves could lead an individual to great creativity. If mediumship did not inspire a plethora of works in the human and the medical sciences, however, the few works

available on the subject were well received. Most notably, the work of the Institut général psychologique in Paris emerged as one of the most elaborate attempts to legitimize mediumistic phenomena within the field of psychology.

EUSAPIA PALLADINO AT THE INSTITUT GÉNÉRAL PSYCHOLOGIQUE

The idea of creating an institute in Paris dedicated to using a psychological approach to the study of psychical phenomena was first mentioned in the early months of 1900. On June 30 of that year, the Institut psychique international held its first meeting. Twenty-two members were present, among them the philosopher Henri Bergson; the physiologists Charles Richet and Étienne-Jules Marey; the physicist Louis-Paul Cailletet; the chemist Émile Duclaux; the editor of *Annales des sciences psychiques,* Xavier Dariex; the president of the Société universelle d'études psychiques, Paul Joire; and the canon of Notre Dame, Ferdinand Brettes. The participants all accepted the program set forth for the new institute by the psychologist Pierre Janet. Unlike the physical sciences, which had been progressing for centuries, the sciences of the mind were fairly young, Janet observed, but dealing as they did with the human psyche and the connections between the corporeal body and morality, they were even more important than the physical sciences. They would one day contribute to the fields of criminology, education, and pathology by providing us with an understanding of social relations and human behavior. More than this, the sciences of the mind were key to the most fundamental questions about our nature.[71] Telepathy, telekinesis, lucidity, split consciousnesses, suggestion, and mediumship, as well as other, similar phenomena appeared to be associated with the deeper powers of the mind. Their study would bring scientists closer to an understanding of human nature. The Institut psychique international sought to help bring this about.[72] It would be devoted to the study of psychical phenomena without any preconceptions. All schools of thought on these manifestations would be admitted.[73] Above all, men of impeccable scientific credentials would finally study animal magnetism, telepathy, lucidity, and mediumship using proper resources and experimental methods.[74]

The newly formed institute was discussed at the Quatrième congrès international de psychologie, held in Paris in August 1900, in the two sessions at the congress that had been designated to address psychical research at least indirectly ("Studies Relative to the Phenomena of Somnambulism" and "Psychology of Hypnotism, Suggestion, and Closely Related Questions.") Even spiritists and occultists were granted a voice in these sessions, inasmuch as Gabriel Delanne, Léon Denis, Papus, and Hippolyte Baraduc all participated in the proceedings. The reception of their presentations by other participants, however, remained cold, even hostile at times. The psychologist Nicolas Vaschide declared that Delanne and

Denis's presentations lacked any trace of scientific research. "These are literary impressions, confessions, and some professions of faith, entangled with a regrettable ignorance of scientific documents recorded by psychology in the past few years," Vaschide said.[75] On such studies in general, the German psychiatrist Oskar Vogt declared: "I protest first in the name of science and of psychology in general. I protest then especially in the name of suggestion and hypnotism. No sooner have we succeeded in having the reality of suggestion and hypnotism recognized, no sooner have we succeeded in launching, starting with these phenomena, a psycho-pathogeny, a psychotherapy, and a psycho-hygiene in a greater sense, than the spiritists invade our session and compromise it with anti-scientific communications."[76] These outbursts were followed by other comments of disapproval regarding the place of such presentations at the congress.

Whereas the participation of spiritists and occultists at the congress was not well received, news of the new Institut psychique international fared much better. The psychologist and spiritist sympathizer Julien Ochorowicz discussed the mandate of the institute and proposed a less controversial name for it. The Institut psychologique, he suggested, would be a more appropriate name for a permanent international center for all psychological research, whether accepted or as yet unverified.[77] Questions on human nature, Ochorowicz explained, had been brought back to the forefront of scientific research with the development of hypnotism and the appearance of a new category of peculiar phenomena. The new institute was meant to unify individual efforts in the study of these new phenomena.[78]

Discussion at the congress revealed a receptive audience in psychologists. In a presentation of his observations on spiritist phenomena, Flournoy described his enthusiasm for an institute devoted to the study of psychical phenomena:

> Far from fearing that the institute will be preoccupied with spiritism and occultism, I believe that it is exactly this domain, loved by some and despised by others, that should be the archetypal object of these impartial investigations and the main aim of all these efforts. As I understand it, the idea of the founders of the institute is to introduce rigorous experimental methods into the study of these allegedly *supranormal* (to sum them up with one word) phenomena, and eventually to shine on them the full light of a science that is as yet hopelessly chaotic and murky; and it is to a project understood in these terms that I have given my support, in the conviction that such an enterprise answers a general and pressing need of our time.[79]

Officially founded on March 29, 1901, the newly renamed Institut général psychologique (IGP) now defined its purpose in a very broad manner: "to bring together in a monthly assembly the men of science

who are occupied with the mind, its conditions, its own laws, its diseases, and its history."[80] Although no longer dedicated solely to the study of psychical phenomena, the members of the IGP would continue to include them as an important part of their broader interests. In its December meeting of that year, it was decided that study groups should be formed to address the different interests of the members. Four groups were initially created: collective psychology, moral and criminal psychology, psychical phenomena, and zoological psychology. Members of the group for the study of psychical phenomena were Arsène d'Arsonval, Henri Bergson, Édouard Branly, François Brissaud, Émile Duclaux, Étienne-Jules Marey, and Georges Weiss, all members of reputable academies and holders of respected academic positions. Their section of the IGP was to be dedicated to the study of the unknown and, more specifically, to the exploration of the "still undefined forces" at the frontiers of psychology, biology, and physics.[81]

The first meeting of the section on psychical phenomena was held at Duclaux's home in January 1902, when it was decided to set up a laboratory to pursue observational and experimental studies. An appeal was made for all to report any psychical phenomena and the men or women who could produce them to the group. But, in its first few years of existence, very little was made of the section, something that dampened the spirits of psychical researchers.[82] News that the IGP had been rapidly transformed from an institute dedicated to the study of psychical phenomena alone to an institute of psychology had not gone unnoticed in psychical research circles. The creation of the IGP had been received with enthusiasm. Many had even contributed financially to it and were angered by the change of direction of the institute.[83] By 1902, psychical researchers had bitterly come to accept the nature of the new institute. The *Revue des études psychiques* reported: "So this is where we are. A *psychical* Institute has been created, mostly to study *psychical* phenomena; for this purpose, millions and millions of francs have been gathered and have been used to create a magazine open to all branches of psychology, but where psychical phenomena will be mentioned only when Monsieur P. Janet sees fit to ridicule them."[84]

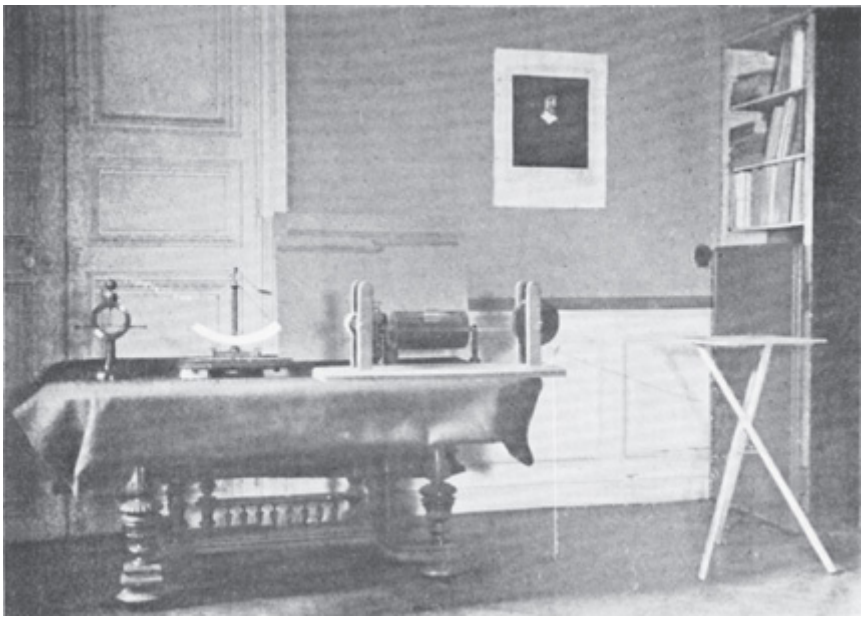
Just a few years later, however, the IGP's section dedicated to the study of psychical phenomena began its most famous project: a three-year experiment with a single medium. In a meeting of the institute in March 1906, d'Arsonval, president of the institute and the section dedicated to psychical phenomena, for the first time officially discussed the experiments being performed by the section with the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. The results were encouraging, he declared. At the same meeting, d'Arsonval also announced that the financial situation of the IGP was beginning to improve. The French government had agreed to grant the institute four million francs to build well-equipped laboratories, a library, and a museum.[85]

The séances with Eusapia were to be the institute's most ambitious project. From 1905 to 1907, she participated in forty-three séances with members of the IGP. In 1908, a report written by Jules Courtier was published in the bulletin of the institute. It detailed the conditions in which the séances had occurred, the results, and the conclusions of the observers. In agreeing to observe Eusapia, members of the section were hoping to verify the authenticity of the phenomena and to associate them with natural laws: "Scholars have ceased to look down on this research," he wrote. "They bring to it, on the contrary, an increasingly serious and passionate curiosity in every country. But with them, the problem has changed its face. The supernatural has been banished from it. If we immerse ourselves in the study of these phenomena, it is to check them with the rigor of experimental methods, it is to discover determinism, it is in the hope of one day associating them—if they are real—with phenomena already known and classifying them in a system of natural laws."[86] Describing the observable procedure of the experiment, he emphasized the importance of the section recording as many as possible of the phenomena produced under rigorous control and relating them to known laws.[87]

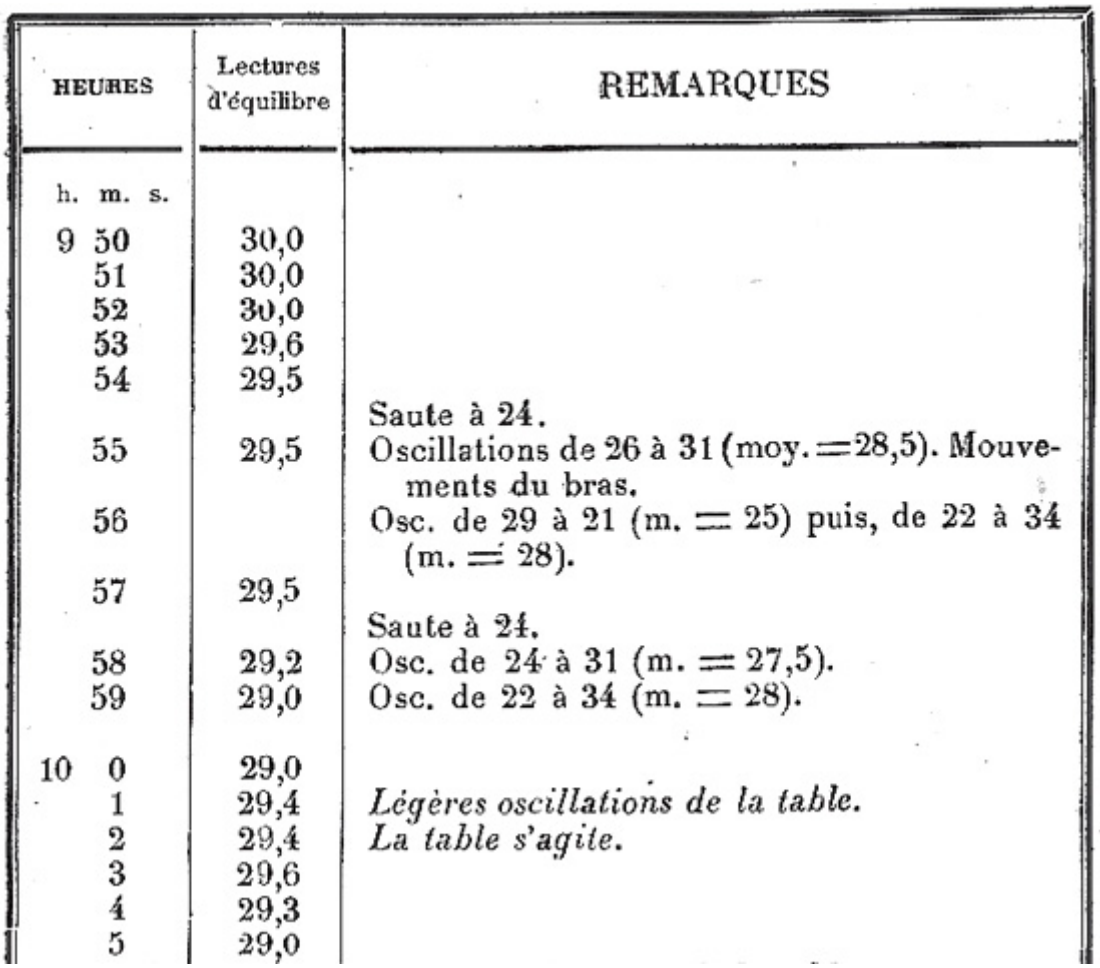
It was Courtier and Serge Youriévitch of the Russian embassy in Paris who first proposed the séances and prepared for them. With a letter of introduction from Charles Richet, both men set out for Naples, Italy, in May 1905 to meet the already famous Eusapia. In their presence, she performed eight séances in which Courtier and Youriévitch were able to observe the range of phenomena she could produce. Impressed by her abilities, the two men returned to Paris to establish a research plan for the section devoted to the study of psychical phenomena. Five different types of phenomena would be monitored and controlled: movements of objects with or without contact while recording the muscular contractions of the medium; movements of measuring instruments, such as dynamographs, or objects requiring intelligent action, such as musical instruments; action at a distance on physical instruments, such as compasses or electroscopes; action on living matter (plants or animals); and apparitions of dark or luminous forms, to be checked by means of photography and molding. To control the phenomena, instruments would be used to measure the medium's muscular movements and weight, data on the environmental conditions of the room would be recorded, and photography would provide visual proof. For example, during the experiments, observers noted meteorological conditions, electric and magnetic fields, acoustic vibrations, and x-rays, and gathered information on Eusapia's physiological state: her temperature, blood pressure, electric potential, and reflexes.[88]

The séances began on June 8, 1905. Given the fame of the medium and the prestige of the observers, they were highly publicized. Participating in the proceedings were Pierre and Marie Curie, Henri Bergson, and Arsène d'Arsonval, president of the IGP's psychical section and future president of the Académie des sciences (in 1917). Proceedings at the séances were standard: Eusapia entered the room

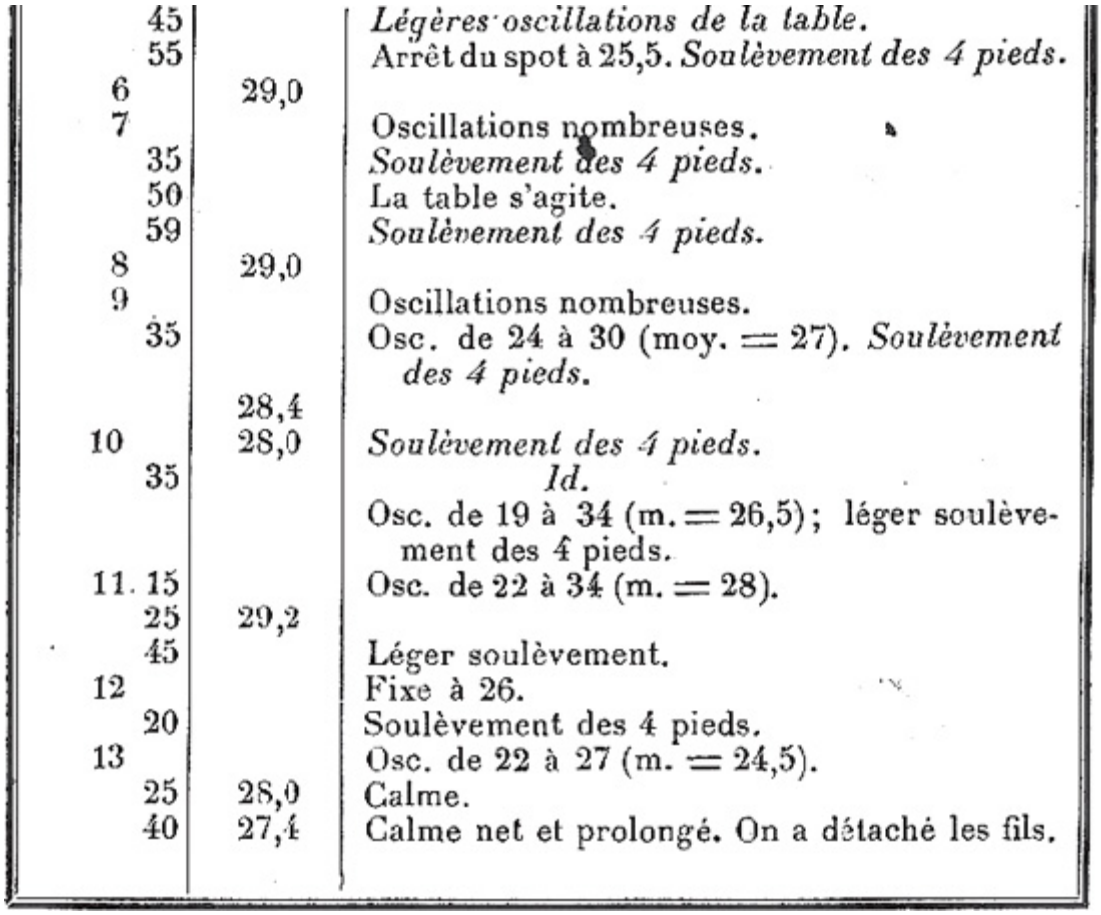
and sat down at one of the small ends of a table inside a cabin, behind closed curtains. Her hands and feet were left visible to the participants at all times, held by two individuals sitting on each side of her. Most of the time, Eusapia rested her feet on those of her neighbors. At each séance, about five or six individuals formed a chain around the table with their hands touching those of their neighbors.[89] At some point, Eusapia's production would begin. At first, with maximum lighting, various noises in the table would be heard. With reduced lighting, the table's feet would be raised. With still further reduced lighting, the curtain of the cabin would inflate and move. With even less lighting, objects would begin to move around the cabin. Once it was almost dark, the participants could begin to see shapeless luminescent forms moving outside but close to the cabin. At times, luminous dots and sparks also became visible.[90]



The room in which the séances with Eusapia Palladino were held, showing some of the instruments used to monitor the phenomena. While the upper photo conveys a sense of scientific observation, the lower one gives the impression of a more private setting. From Jules Courtier, "Rapport sur les séances d' Eusapia Palladino à l'Institut général psychologique en 1905, 1906, 1907 et 1908," *Bulletin de l'Institut général psychologique* 8 (1908), photos XVI and XVII.



HEURES	Lectures d'équilibre	REMARQUES
h. m. s.		
9 50	30,0	
51	30,0	
52	30,0	
53	29,6	
54	29,5	
		Saute à 24.
55	29,5	Oscillations de 26 à 31 (moy. = 28,5). Mouvements du bras.
56		Osc. de 29 à 21 (m. = 25) puis, de 22 à 34 (m. = 28).
57	29,5	
		Saute à 24.
58	29,2	Osc. de 24 à 31 (m. = 27,5).
59	29,0	Osc. de 22 à 34 (m. = 28).
10 0	29,0	
1	29,4	*Légères oscillations de la table.*
2	29,4	*La table s'agite.*
3	29,6	
4	29,3	
5	29,0	



45		*Légères oscillations de la table.*
55		Arrêt du spot à 25,5. *Soulèvement des 4 pieds.*
6	29,0	
7		Oscillations nombreuses.
35		*Soulèvement des 4 pieds.*
50		La table s'agite.
59		*Soulèvement des 4 pieds.*
8	29,0	
9		Oscillations nombreuses.
35		Osc. de 24 à 30 (moy. = 27). *Soulèvement des 4 pieds.*
	28,4	
10	28,0	*Soulèvement des 4 pieds.*
35		*Id.*
		Osc. de 19 à 34 (m. = 26,5); léger soulèvement des 4 pieds.
11. 15		Osc. de 22 à 34 (m. = 28).
25	29,2	
45		Léger soulèvement.
12		Fixe à 26.
20		Soulèvement des 4 pieds.
13		Osc. de 22 à 27 (m. = 24,5).
25	28,0	Calme.
40	27,4	Calme net et prolongé. On a détaché les fils.

Observations made with a galvanometer during one of the séances with Eusapia Palladino. The changes in electric current are associated with the movements of both the medium and the table. From Jules Courtier, "Rapport sur les séances d'Eusapia Palladino à l'Institut général psychologique en 1905, 1906, 1907 et 1908," *Bulletin de l'Institut général psychologique* 8 (1908), table I.

According to their reporter, Courtier, the participants never doubted that certain phenomena had been observed. The causes of such manifestations, however, had been more difficult to establish and were vigorously disputed. Through the numerous data collected with measuring instruments, the hypothesis of collective hallucination was rejected.[91] As for fraud, Courtier's report made it clear that although participants tried to impose serious monitoring, the nature of the phenomena made this difficult. Eusapia's productions often required minimal lighting, and her trances sometimes made it difficult for her to accept physical control. Moreover, controllers on either side of the medium had been asked to monitor her hand, arm, knee, and foot on that side, all with only one hand and little lighting. As the participants were both controllers and observers, they had been left in a perpetual state of divided attention and expectancy. Phenomena were never produced at the same place. They were often fleeting in character, and as a result of the long wait, the participants' attention had flagged.[92] Still other factors made serious observation difficult. Participants had been encouraged to carry on light conversation to facilitate the production. This was apparently necessary for the success of a séance, but it unfortunately created a

diversion from the attempt to monitor what was happening. Also noted were other problems, including suggestibility and emotions, which could enhance the perception of the phenomena.[93]

The observers' difficulty in accepting the observed phenomena was increased by the fact that Eusapia had been caught committing fraud on a few previous occasions. At some point in 1907, for example, it was discovered that she was using a strand of her hair to move a light object toward herself. Other suspicions were formed in the cases of lifted tables. Moreover, objects moving without contact were never outside the easy reach of Eusapia; and it had been complicated to keep adequate control of her hands at all moments, Eusapia being adept at substituting her hands for those of her neighbor controller. In addition, she had refused to allow participants to take photographs without her explicit consent each time, thus rendering any attempts at monitoring in this way useless.[94]

The question of sleight of hand and fraud in mediums was never a simple one. Should Eusapia have been rejected at the first sign of it, or should it be kept in mind that, in her trances, she might lose some control over herself? In his report of the IGP séances, Courtier opted for the second course, with some reserve:

> Without going so far as to clear them [mediums]—blaming their subconscious or unconscious for their cheating would be too much, because sometimes we notice obvious premeditation to their deceptions—it should be considered that they often have a propensity to hysteria and abnormal temperaments. At séances, they lose control of themselves in their second state; in moments of hyperexcitability and tiredness, wishing to bring about the phenomena the audience is waiting for, they probably allow themselves to commit fraud, rather than produce nothing.[95]

Although participants at the IGP séances decided not to dismiss Eusapia's productions at the first indication of fraud, they did not attempt to formulate a specific explanation of the phenomena they had witnessed. Too many doubts lingered as to their origins. Here, the first step in the study of the phenomena had been accomplished, but "even had we been certain of all our observations, we would have attempted theorizing only if we could in one way or another, directly or indirectly, have tied the new facts to previously known facts, including them in the system of natural laws, because it is of this that, in the end, explaining and understanding consists."[96] Instead of an endorsement or a set of proposed explanations, the participants chose to call for further experiments with other subjects who would accept the need for control demanded by rigorous observations: "subjects who will not make us

waste our time and render our efforts sterile by regrettable simulations. If these subjects exist, let them come to us, [and be] assured at the same time of finding the necessary rigor of the controls and the kindness and respect they are due."[97]

On November 30, 1908, a lengthy and lively discussion followed the reading of Courtier's report at the IGP. The idea of the institute dispatching two researchers to Naples a few months every year to experiment with Eusapia away from the crowds was considered. The medium was getting old, and her powers were declining with each passing year. It was suggested that scientists should take advantage of the remaining time during which Eusapia could perform. Funds, however, would have to be obtained in order to accomplish this. If the idea attracted some interest during the discussion, it does not appear to have been implemented.[98] Mention was also made of the possibility of young mediums being trained to work at the IGP's laboratories for a fixed annual salary. Again, the proposition was well received, but does not appear to have been implemented in the following months or years.

News of the IGP's experiment had been received with great hopes in the larger community of researchers interested in psychical phenomena. At last, a French group of distinguished scientists had agreed to take the phenomena seriously enough to observe them for some time under favorable conditions. The *Annales des sciences psychiques* showed continued interest in the proceedings and outcome of the experiments. Articles were devoted to the subject in the journal at the time, including a summary of Courtier's report in February 1909.[99] On Courtier's restrained conclusions, contributors to *Annales des sciences psychiques* could not hide their disappointment:

> In the circumstances, readers of the report are naturally disappointed for the most part. Everyone is asking whether it was worthwhile keeping Eusapia at the Institut psychologique for many months, holding a respectable number of séances, inventing all sorts of recording apparatus, measuring the subject with subtle physiological instruments, photographing her from the front, from the side, and in three-quarter shots, recording her pulse and breathing, analyzing her urine daily—and spending 25,000 francs into the bargain—to arrive at such meager results.[100]

It was recognized, however, that the IGP's experiments had been useful, if only in establishing the validity of the phenomena in an objective way. At least the hypothesis of collective hallucination had been refuted once and for all, it was claimed. From the point of view of psychology, what now remained to be done was to uncover the origins of the manifestations in no uncertain terms. This would have to be accomplished through rigorous scientific control in a favorable medical or laboratory setting. Thus, although more had been hoped for, if anything, the experiments performed with Eusapia had provided

scientists with a proper framework on which to build, or so many psychologists and psychical researchers thought.[101]

Whereas Courtier had remained fairly restrained in his report of 1908, writing in the name of a group of scientists, he did commit himself further in a postscript written in 1928. Although he confirmed his conviction that the experiments with Eusapia were to be understood as the foundations for further observations of the phenomena and could not be taken, by themselves, as sufficient proof of the authenticity of such manifestations, he did make explicit his own personal conviction that he had not been deceived, and that some of the phenomena he had witnessed had, in fact, been real. If his report in 1908 had been meant as a collection of facts that required the reader to form his or her own conclusions, he was able, twenty years later, to look back on the séances with Eusapia and affirm his belief that what he had witnessed at the time had been authentic mediumistic phenomena, especially those involving moving tables without action. For Courtier, the IGP's 1908 report gave probable cause for even skeptics to accept the existence of such phenomena.[102]

Although conceived initially as an institute dedicated to the study of the supernatural, the IGP quickly evolved into a more general organization. The Section des recherches psychiques et physiologiques remained an important group in the institute throughout the 1910s and the 1920s. On occasions, the control of mediumistic phenomena, divining rod experiments and observations, telepathy, and clairvoyance continued to be discussed.[103] No considerable project witnessed by distinguished physicians and scientists like the one with Eusapia was ever organized again, however. The last published bulletin of the IGP appeared in 1929. Little remained by then of the initial agenda of the institute as a scientific institution dedicated to the study of mediumistic phenomena and other occurrences of the kind. Over the years, the initial curiosity about séances had died down. It was not that members had succeeded in explaining mediumistic phenomena to their own and one another's satisfaction, but rather that they had lost interest in or given up on a set of manifestations that could not be easily incorporated into psychology.

The gradual dismissal of the supernatural by the IGP reflects a general attitude in the medical and the human sciences in the first decades of the twentieth century. By the nature of their work on the human mind, both in its normal and its pathological manifestations, physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists had come to consider mediumistic and similar phenomena. They had attempted to explain them using the concepts and theories of their fields. More than any other groups, they had been able to bring a certain degree of respectability to claims of supernatural occurrences, but they had done so at a high cost

in the eyes of all those who believed in them. In hospitals wards and psychological laboratories, mediums, stigmatics, and visionaries had become patients and subjects of research. Those who believed otherwise—séance-goers and other followers—were apparently deluding themselves. If physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists claimed to have sufficiently explained the causes of supernatural occurrences of these kinds, however, their success was never complete. Outside a few works in the context of personality studies and some vague mention of pathological conditions, no clear and definite theory was ever formally accepted. Members of each group who had shown an interest in the phenomena had often felt discouraged by their lack of control over the proceedings and deterred from pursuing this line of research further. For those who persisted, the outcome was more often than not perplexing, and the conclusions were rarely definitive. In the end, physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists were poorly equipped to deal with the fleeting and elusive manifestations of the supernatural. Their conception of mediums and others who experienced the supernatural as subjects of research or patients limited their work. In contrast, psychical researchers accepted that the investigation of supernatural phenomena demanded a more flexible approach—assuming they were real—and would attempt to develop methods of observation and control in collaboration with mediums and other subjects.