

To Members and Associates of the Society for Psychological Research.

CIRCULAR No. 2.

(THIRD EDITION).

ON DREAMING AND ALLIED STATES.

14, DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, S.W.,

December, 1883.

It is increasingly recognised that the phenomena of dream, somnambulism, and hallucination, form an important and promising branch of physiological and psychological inquiry. Much has been already done to trace the genesis of dreams, to classify the stages of subjective illusion, and to discriminate the various sorts of abnormal consciousness. But nothing like the necessary completeness of generalisation can be obtained without a very much wider basis of observed fact. There are obvious difficulties in collecting a large mass of exact statistics on these vague and multiform phenomena by the process of private inquiry. The Council of the S. P. R., however, are encouraged, by the abundant response which previous appeals of theirs have met with, to hope that in this department also they may be able to draw information from a wider area than is easily accessible to individual effort. As a beginning, they hope that *all* the Members and Associates of their own Society will be kind enough to give replies to the accompanying list of questions. In the second place it is earnestly requested that this Circular may be given to as many persons as possible who will undertake to answer it, without any *selection* of those persons only who have unusual facts to relate. One of the main objects in view is to ascertain the *relative* frequency of certain phenomena, among persons in ordinary health; and that object would be defeated if replies were received only from those who have experienced the phenomena. Should any of the information supplied ever be published, names will be suppressed, unless their publication be specially authorised.

I. DREAMS.—(1) *Can you recall that you have ever, in the course of the last ten years, when in good health, had a dream of the death of some person known to you (about whom you were not anxious at the time), which dream you marked as an exceptionally vivid one, and of which the distressing impression lasted for as long as an hour after you rose in the morning?*

(2) In your experience does the same dream ever repeat itself on the same night? If so, how many times does it repeat itself?

(3) Have you, ever or frequently, dream-images which persist for an appreciable time after your eyes are open and you believe yourself to be fully awake?

(4) Have you any experience of *sudden* dreams, so vivid that you have afterwards confused them with waking impressions?

II. HALLUCINATIONS.—*Have you ever, when in good health and completely awake, had a distinct impression of seeing or being touched by a human being, or of hearing a voice or sound which suggested a human presence, when no one was there?*

III. SOMNAMBULISM.—Are you, or have you ever been, subject to somnambulism, or has that condition in others ever fallen under your notice?

IV. FAINTING, TRANCE, COMA, DELIRIUM, ANÆSTHESIA.—Have you any distinct recollection of visions or any other mental impressions, experienced in any of these states?

The two italicised questions require some explanation.

The Literary Committee of the Society for Psychical Research have collected a very large number of cases where some marked event—usually either death or serious danger—happening to a person at a distance, has coincided either with the apparent perception, by some friend or relative, of that person's bodily presence, or with an exceptionally vivid and haunting dream of him. The reality of these coincidences is beyond dispute; and their number also is far greater than any one can be at all aware of who has not taken special pains to procure first-hand evidence of them. It may, however, be argued that the coincidence, though real, is in every case due to *chance*. Now, the force of this argument must clearly depend on the *frequency* of hallucinations of the senses, or of this particular sort of haunting dream, among sane and healthy persons. If they fall to the lot of every one or nearly every one, then their total number must be enormous, and according to the law of chances it might naturally happen that one of them here and there would fall on the same day or night as the actual event. If, on the other hand, such experiences are comparatively rare, then the cases which have been simultaneous with the actual event form too large a proportion of the whole number for the coincidence to be attributable to chance. For the decision of this point, it is of fundamental importance to ascertain how far the number of those who have *not* had these experiences exceeds the number of those who *have* had them. An accurate result is far from easy to obtain, however wide the range of

inquiry be made, for the reason above suggested—that those who have nothing of positive interest to relate are naturally less communicative than those whose experience has been to some extent remarkable. For our purpose it is, of course, essential to obtain a due proportion of *negative* answers; and with this object we have framed the two questions printed above in italics in such a manner as to require no answer but “*yes*” or “*no*”; and we are desirous of obtaining a *very large number* of such monosyllabic replies.

If any reader of this circular in the course of the next six months will repeat the two italicised questions *verbatim* to 20, 50, 100, or more, trustworthy persons, *from whom he does not know which answer to expect, and who have not already been interrogated by someone else*, and if he will communicate the results, he will render us most valuable assistance: and he would add to our obligation by inducing others to do the same. In any case where a vivid impression or dream *has coincided* with the real event, it is particularly requested that the person who has had this experience will send an independent account of it. In every other case where the answer is *affirmative*, a simple “*yes*” will be sufficient; but we should desire to have (not for publication) the *name and address* of any person who answers “*yes*,” as well as of the collector. In case of *negative* answers, it will be sufficient if the collector will send (not for publication) his own name and address, with the words, “*Hallucinations, 20 noes*,” “*Dreams, 100 noes*,” or whatever it may be, on a post-card.

All communications should be addressed to the Honorary Secretary, at 14, Dean's Yard, S.W.

