

Is there a Case for Retrocognition?

W. H. W. SABINE

Retrocognition has been defined in S.P.R. literature as "Perception or awareness of past event not known to or within the memory of the perceiver."¹ The word is not given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or its Supplement, and so far as I can ascertain, its first use was by F. W. H. Myers in 1892.² The case is very different, it may be noted, with the word "precognition," in illustration of which the *O.E.D.* cites several passages from seventeenth-century writers who used the word to denote the absolute foreknowledge of God.

Though the name is new, the general idea of retrocognition is ancient. The opening passage of the *Book of Genesis* can, by its nature, be based on nothing but a claim to retrocognition; and Socrates, at the beginning of the ninth book of Plato's *Republic*, stresses the power of the soul of the dreamer "to apprehend what it knoweth not, either *something of what hath existed*, or of what now exists, or what will exist hereafter."

It is obvious that telepathic awareness of the kind now almost universally accepted as proved must be regarded as applicable to cases of apparent retrocognition of events whenever the actors concerned in those events are still living; and therefore retrocognition, if it can be established at all, must be established in relation to historical events—events outside living memory.

It is equally obvious that if retrocognition is a fact, no such limitation of its application has to be assumed: it could, in its turn, have bearings of fundamental importance on the real nature of "telepathy." But until we know more about extrasensory perception in general we are bound to tread very gingerly in dealing with apparent retrocognition.

The conception of historical retrocognition, as it has existed during the past sixty years or so, cannot be properly evaluated merely by consideration of the very interesting but few cases that have been published during that period. Just as our ideas about precognition have been confused by traditional beliefs or disbeliefs in "prophecy," so is the conception of retrocognition largely the product of a traditional background. To determine what retrocognition really is—if reality it has—requires attention to the background. There is a certain type of visionary experience which seems to have particular

¹ E.g., *Foreknowledge*, by H. F. Saltmarsh. G. Bell & Sons, London, 1938.

² *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. VIII, 1892, p. 501.

relevance to the current view of retrocognition, and I will quote two curious instances.

The first is preserved in Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), and is introduced and followed by the humorous remarks with which the great and beloved novelist unfortunately deemed it necessary to sustain his character as a man of "common-sense" when dealing with the supernatural. Scott ascribes the account to "Peter" Walker, who appears to be identical with Patrick Walker.³ The following is the account in Walker's words:

"In the year 1686, in the months of June and July, many yet alive can witness that about the Crossford Boat, two miles beneath Lanark, especially at the Mains, on the water of Clyde, many people gathered together for several afternoons, where there were showers of bonnets, hats, guns, and swords, which covered the trees and ground; companies of men in arms marching in order upon the waterside; companies meeting companies, going all through other, and then all falling to the ground and disappearing; other companies immediately appeared, marching the same way. I went there three afternoons together, and, as I observed, there were two-thirds of the people that were together saw, and a third that saw not; and, though I could see nothing, there was such a fright and trembling on those that did see, that was discernible to all from those that saw not. There was a gentleman standing next to me who spoke as too many gentlemen and others speak, who said, 'A pack of damned witches and warlocks that have second sight! the devil ha't do I see'; and immediately there was a discernible change in his countenance. With as much fear and trembling as any woman I saw there, he called out, 'All you that do not see, say nothing; for I persuade you it is matter of fact, and discernible to all that is not stone-blind.' And those who did see told what works (i.e. locks) the guns had, and their length and wideness, and what handles the swords had, whether small or three-barr'd, or Highland guards, and the closing knots of the bonnets, black or blue; and those who did see them there, whenever they went abroad, saw a bonnet and a sword drop in the way."

There was not necessarily any relation to the past in this instance of mass-hallucination as it may be termed. The marching men, the guns, bonnets, etc., are not described as being other than contemporary with the spectators. If the phenomena had not continued on "several afternoons" one would conclude that some event distant in space had

³ Scott's reference is "Walker's *Lives*, Edinburgh, 1827, Vol. I, p. xxxvi." Patrick Walker published lives of Peden, Cargill, and other Presbyterian martyrs between 1727 and 1732. These were collected and republished at Edinburgh in 1827 as *Biographia Presbyteriana*. The B. M. Catalogue shows an 1800 chapbook edition of a life of Cargill by Peter Walker; this may indicate that the same Walker was known by both Christian names.

been seen in mirage form. The importance of a case like this to the development of ideas about retrocognition lies mainly in its suggestive character: it inevitably suggests to the modern reader the idea of seeing historic objects, and in reprinting the story Scott ensured its universal dissemination.

The second incident I wish to quote occurred on June 28, 1812, and the scene was a piece of wild moorland in a part of Yorkshire well known to me. The percipients concerned were two farmers named Anthony Jackson and Martin Turner, and their experience was recorded at the time in the county press. The following is a summary of the account, as given by a local historian :

"They saw at some distance what appeared to be a large body of armed men in white uniform; in the centre of which was a person of commanding aspect, dressed in scarlet. After performing various evolutions, the whole body began to move forward in perfect order towards the summit of the hill, passing the two terrified spectators, crouched among the heather at a distance of one hundred yards. No sooner had this first body, which extended four deep over an enclosure of thirty acres, attained the hill, than a second body, far more numerous than the former, dressed in a uniform of a dark color, appeared and marched after the first to the top of the hill, where they both joined, and passing down the opposite slope, disappeared; when a column of thick mist overspread the ground where they had been seen. The time from the first appearance of this strange phenomenon to the clearing away of the mist was about five minutes, as near as the spectators could judge, though they were not in a 'proper mood of mind' for forming correct estimates of time or numbers. They were men of undoubted veracity, and utterly incapable of fabricating such a story."⁴

It will be noticed that there is a similarity between this experience and the Scottish one, in so far as bodies of marching men were again involved. Moreover, the time of year, June 28th, approximates to Walker's "June and July." The mist may suggest an atmospheric condition in which some unusual type of mirage occurred. But it is very difficult to say what body of men in white uniform, commanded by a man in scarlet, could have been miraged in the England of 1812. On the site of this affair (which is now covered by the waters of a reservoir) three ancient tumuli then existed, but it is doubtful whether the farmers would have the slightest idea of the nature of these mounds, nor is there anything in local tradition that could have suggested to them the particular kind of impressions described above. The story of the two men was widely circulated through being in-

⁴ *History of Harrogate and the Forest of Knaresborough*, by William Grainge, 1871, p. 348.

cluded in Catherine Crowe's *Night Side of Nature*, the first edition of which appeared in 1848.

Such (irrespective of their validity) are records of a type which, perused by several generations, have affected the modern idea of historical retrocognition.

Important, too, have been the numerous accounts of individual "ghosts" in historical costume, such as apparitions of monks seen in ruined abbeys, or of highwaymen at the scene of their crimes. But in considering the real value of such accounts to the evidence of retrocognition, it is necessary to distinguish between the appearance of an historic figure which acts *in the present*, and one which is seen acting *in the past*.

Thus when the long-deceased father of the Duke of Buckingham, clad in outmoded garments, appeared in a dream on three successive nights to the officer of the king's wardrobe in Windsor Castle, commanding him to warn the Duke that his life was in danger,⁵ retrocognition was not involved as it might have been had the Duke's father been seen engaged in some action of his own life.

Following these traditional stories has appeared the type of historical romance, serious or humorous, in which the hero is transported back into an earlier age. Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889) is a familiar example. The impression produced on the minds of numerous readers of such works of fiction has no small bearing on the development of recent ideas about retrocognition.

By far the most important work of imagination bearing on retrocognition was Camille Flammarion's *Lumen*, originally published at Paris in 1873. The first English edition appeared in 1897, when it was stated that 52,000 copies of the French original had then been sold.

Lumen is a man who died in 1864, but in pursuance of a promise returns to inform his friend Quacrens of his experiences, and in particular relates how he witnessed the past. "I beheld in 1864 events actually present before me which had taken place at the end of the last century." He has the thrilling experience of seeing some incidents of the French Revolution taking place, including the scene in the Place de la Concorde just after the execution of Louis XVI. Expressed very briefly, the explanation is that *Lumen* has arrived at a star so distant from the earth that the light reflected from the earth in 1793 is only reaching the star seventy years later. Nothing magical, but a telescopic instrument of immense power enables the star inhabitants to see the earth events of seventy years earlier.

⁵ *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, by Edward, Earl of Clarendon. 1674. Book 1.

Flammarion's beautiful blending of imagination with science never fails to hold its readers. Whereas a mere romance makes its time-transported hero actually participate in historic events (ignoring the physical effects he thus produces) *Lumen* falls into no such fantasy. The past events are viewed, but in no sense participated in or altered by the viewer. The importance of *Lumen* to later theories about retrocognition and precognition is evident to its reader.

We now arrive at the first case of apparent historical retrocognition of which modern psychical research has taken notice, namely, the case of "Miss A."

The identity of Miss A does not seem ever to have been revealed to the public.⁶ At the time when her published experiences took place she was described as being "a young lady." It appears from the narratives that she was closely associated with the Countess of Radnor, who attested most of her experiences; and the identity of Miss A was certainly known to F. W. H. Myers and probably to other contemporary members of the S.P.R.

It was Myers who, at p. 498 of Vol. VIII of the *Proceedings*, published "Case III—Miss A," and in the course of his commentary used the word "retrocognition" for, apparently, the first time. Certainly retrocognition seems a very appropriate word to apply to this account by Miss A (p. 499):

"I saw a large modern room change into the likeness (as shown afterwards by independent record) of what it was 200 years ago; and I saw persons in it who apparently belonged to that date." Lady Radnor, in attesting the above, noted that the room in question was the Long Parlour at Longford, which in 1670 was used as a chapel. Longford Castle, near Salisbury, was the home of Lord and Lady Radnor.

On August 17, 1889, Miss A had an experience in Salisbury Cathedral which some months later was recounted by Lady Radnor to Sir Joseph Barnby, the musician. This is what Sir Joseph told Myers (p. 504):

"Miss A's statement was to the effect that she had seen vast processions of gorgeously appavelled Catholic ecclesiastics with jewelled crosses carried before them, gorgeous canopies and baldachinos held over them and clouds of incense filling the place. Amongst the dignitaries was one who came near them and

⁶ Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell informs me that his identification of Miss A with Miss A. Goodrich-Freer (*Science and Psychical Phenomena*, p. 51) was a slip resulting from the confusing use of initials, and that Miss A was not Miss Goodrich-Freer. The latter's pseudonym was "Miss X." In Vol. VIII of the S.P.R. *Proc.* Myers refers (p. 484) to "Case II—Miss X," and later (p. 498) to "Case III—Miss A." In Vol. VI of the *Journal* of the S.P.R., p. 3, he names Miss X and Miss A in the same sentence as separate individuals.

gazed at them with a singularly sad expression of countenance. On being asked why he looked so sad, he said [the reply, it appears later, was obtained by automatic mirror-writing]: 'I have been a great sinner. I was greatly responsible for the beheading of Anne Boleyn. What adds to the sadness of it, her father and I were boys together, and our homes were in close proximity to each other.' On being asked his name, he said: 'My name is John Longland.' On being further questioned he replied: 'Mr. Barnby's music brought me here. I often hear it in Eton Chapel.'

Investigation showed that John Longland had been Dean of Salisbury in Henry VIII's reign, and also that his body had been buried in Eton College Chapel, though this fact was not locally known because the brass which covered the tomb had been destroyed by an act of vandalism in the seventeenth century.

Miss A also saw in the Cathedral a monk in a brown gown, and on a third occasion the ceremony of the induction of a seventeenth-century bishop, Brian Duppa. At Longford Castle, this time in the crystal, she saw a carved fireplace, secret passage, etc. By the aid of the crystal Miss A was able to obtain many other apparently retrocognitive scenes. In all the cases mentioned above, the details were subsequently verified in books or documents which it is most improbable that Miss A could have seen previously. The full details will be found in the volume already named.

In the case of Miss A, therefore, it will be recognized that the idea of historical retrocognition had come to full flower.

In Vol. XI, p. 338 of *Proceedings* Myers again took up the subject of retrocognition, contrasting it with precognition in the following words: "On the one side there is *retrocognition*, or knowledge of the past, extending back beyond the reach of our ordinary memory; on the other side there is *precognition*, or knowledge of the future, extending onwards beyond the scope of our ordinary inference."

As was logical, Myers sought to apply the idea of retrocognition to cases of extra-normal knowledge of events in the recent past, participants in which were still living. He cannot be said to have been successful, for all the cases in Vol. XI are capable of being attributed to telepathy/clairvoyance. Myers was evidently aware of this, and near the end of his chapter he speaks of "true retrocognitions involving scenes and histories in which men long departed have played their part."

In his *Human Personality* (1903), Myers repeated several of the Miss A cases, but added no new matter, and it was not until the publication in 1911 of *An Adventure* that visionary retrocognition again came to the fore. This book made an enormous sensation at the time of its publication, not only because of its contents, but because

the integrity of the authors was guaranteed by the publishers, Macmillan and Company, London.

The authors of *An Adventure* were given in 1911 as "Elizabeth Morison" and "Frances Lamont," acknowledged pseudonyms which were abandoned in the fourth edition, published in 1931.⁷ The real names of the authors, with important particulars respecting them, were:

Miss Charlotte Anne Elizabeth Moberly. Born 1846. Died 1937. 7th daughter of Dr. George Moberly, Head Master of Winchester, later Bishop of Salisbury (1869-85). Among her brothers and brothers-in-law were 4 heads of schools or colleges, and 2 Bishops. In 1886 she became Principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

Miss Eleanor F. Jourdain. Born ? Died 1924. Daughter of the Rev. Francis Jourdain. Head of a girls' school at Watford. Later an M.A. of Oxford, and a Doctor of the University of Paris. Distinguished for learning, music, and knowledge of the French language. Became Vice-Principal to Miss Moberly at St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

On the afternoon of Saturday, August 10, 1901, these two ladies were visiting Versailles as part of a sight-seeing holiday in Paris and environs. The retrocognitive experiences which apparently befell them in the grounds of the Petit Trianon fitted into their surroundings in such a way that neither lady passed any comment at the time, and it was only a week later that they suddenly spoke of the matter and came to realize that something very mysterious indeed had happened to them. Their entire book, *An Adventure*, needs to be read to evaluate their story, and to appreciate their scholarly and able commentary. The following extract from Miss Jourdain's contribution gives an idea of the nature of the experiences themselves:

"We went on in the direction of the Petit Trianon, but just before reaching what we knew afterwards to be the main entrance I saw a gate leading to a path cut deep below the level of the ground above, and as the way was open and had the look of an entrance that was used, I said: 'Shall we try this path? it must lead to the house,' and we followed it.⁸ To our right we saw some

⁷ With a Preface by Edith Olivier and a Note by J. W. Dunne. Published by Faber & Faber, London, 1931 and by Coward-McCann, New York, 1935.

⁸ It is worth noting that the plan of Versailles in the then current Baedeker's *Paris and Environs* (14th ed., 1900) is lettered in a highly misleading manner, one which gives the impression that the Petit Trianon lies in a direction quite different from the true one. The word "Château" would seem to a stranger to apply to buildings far to the left of the house. It was towards these buildings on the left that the two women turned. That they were using Baedeker's map is expressly stated by Miss Moberly (p. 2). Whichever edition they had, the plan was the same, for it appears in all preceding editions (1898, 1896, etc.).

farm-buildings looking empty and deserted; implements (among others a plough) were lying about; we looked in, but saw no one. The impression was saddening, but it was not until we reached the crest of the rising ground where there was a garden that I began to feel as if we had lost our way, and as if something were wrong. There were two men there in official dress (greenish in colour), with something in their hands; it might have been a staff. A wheelbarrow and some other gardening tools were near them. They told us, in answer to my enquiry, to go straight on. I remember repeating my question, because they answered in a seemingly casual and mechanical way, but only got the same answer in the same manner. As we were standing there I saw to the right of us a detached solidly-built cottage, with stone steps at the door. A woman and a girl were standing at the doorway, and I particularly noticed their unusual dress; both wore white kerchiefs tucked into the bodice, and the girl's dress, though she looked 13 or 14 only, was down to her ankles. The woman was passing a jug to the girl, who wore a close white cap."⁹

Now neither the plough, nor the two men in official dress, nor the solidly built cottage, nor the woman and girl had any physical existence in 1901; and the same comment applies to many other persons and objects seen in the grounds of the Petit Trianon while the two women were walking slowly through them, talking of friends in England and similar matters, each noticing but concealing from the other a feeling of depression, even of "heavy dreaminess."

Prolonged research in the French national archives proved to the satisfaction of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain that the people and things they saw, and which had no physical existence in 1901, had all existed in or about the year 1789. Their case is supported not only by evidence drawn from rare printed books, engravings, and charts, but from MS records and account books, sometimes covered with dust and apparently unopened for a century. The minutest details were investigated, extending even to the personal appearance and pronunciation of the persons spoken to.¹⁰

The experiences in the grounds of the Petit Trianon culminated when one of the visitors, Miss Moberly, saw a fair-haired lady sitting close to the house in a dress which, as subsequent researches showed, corresponded exactly to a dress belonging to the Queen, which her modiste repaired in 1789. Miss Jourdain, though walking at Miss Moberly's side, did not see this lady. Similarly Miss Moberly had not seen several things noted by Miss Jourdain.

⁹ *An Adventure*, 1911 Ed., pp. 16 f.

¹⁰ The evidence collected, published and unpublished, together with the original letters exchanged between Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain from the beginning of their enquiries, has been deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The hallucinatory period (as I think it must be termed) concluded when a young man, who looked "inquisitively amused," showed the two visitors out of the garden through what was in 1901, and for long before, a solid stone wall. An old chart, however, reveals that in the Revolutionary period a roadway had existed at that point.

An Adventure was reviewed at length in the *Proceedings* of the S.P.R. (Vol. XXV, pp. 353-360). The review was entirely unfavorable to the authors' claims.¹¹ Whether the review was written by Professor F. C. S. Schiller, whose name appears at the foot of the immediately following review, or by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, as has been stated elsewhere, I have not been able to determine. Much irony was directed at the authors' theory of an "act of memory," or survival of Marie Antoinette's thoughts, a theory which they later discarded. Of course, the implied passing through the stone wall was indicated as conclusive evidence of delusion (see Footnote 27).

The replies made to the two ladies by various officials, and especially the "inquisitive smiles" and "peculiar smiles" directed at them, were cited as proving that they were not witnesses of true historical scenes, which ought to have re-enacted themselves without taking any notice of the seers; nor could these circumstances be reconciled with participation in the mind of the Queen.

These adverse criticisms, together with many others, were repeatedly made without causing the authors to modify any statement which they had put forward as factual. Finally, in 1938, just after the death of Miss Moberly at over ninety years of age, J. R. Sturge-Whiting published *The Mystery of Versailles*, a critical examination of the whole account, largely based upon a close study of the locale made by Mr. Sturge-Whiting in person. His conclusion was that *An Adventure*, so far as concerned its supernatural claims, was throughout a "pathetic illusion." But Mr. Sturge-Whiting treated his subject from a purely external point of view. He seems to have assumed that if he could find any grounds for saying that what the claimants believed to have been objective may not have been objective, they must be convicted of illusion; but he showed little or no awareness of those subjective experiences which are classified under the general head

¹¹ ". . . it does not seem to us that, on the evidence before us, there is sufficient ground for supposing anything supernatural to have occurred at all. The persons and things seen were, we should judge, the real persons and things the seers supposed them to be at the time, probably decked out by tricks of memory (and after the idea of haunting had occurred to them, pp. 11, 20), with some additional details of costume suitable to the times of Marie Antoinette (p. 24). No detailed account of the experiences was apparently written down till three months later, Nov., 1901, and it is unusual to be able to rely on one's memory for details of things seen after even a much shorter interval of time," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXV, 1911, pp. 353 f.

of "extrasensory perception," and which psychological researches have shown to be no illusions but mental processes as real as they are inexplicable.

Most of that which Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain recounted is in accord with their having had visions, hallucinations, or waking dreams of the type generally associated with the Highlanders and some other northern peoples, but which have been recorded in the annals of every nation under the sun.¹² That these visual experiences are purely subjective is highly probable, and the records of the psychological research societies show that in many cases they have been proved to be one of the forms under which telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition manifest to the conscious mind. Readers of this JOURNAL are familiar with the extent of the evidence to that effect, and it is hardly necessary to stress the point here.

Because of its possible bearing on retrocognition, however, and because the experience, like that claimed by Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, befell more than one person at the same time, I may briefly cite an interesting case from the records of the S.P.R. In W. H. Salter's *Ghosts and Apparitions*¹³ we read that on a sunny afternoon in December, 1897, three sisters aged 21, 18, and 12 saw an apparition near the old manor house in which they lived, and six and a half years later the eldest and the youngest wrote independent accounts of it, while their mother wrote a third account based on what the second sister had told her. The girls had seen a man by an oak tree in a fence, but their dog growled and refused to approach the spot.

"Walking closer," recorded the youngest sister, "I saw that it was a man, hanging apparently from an oak tree in front of some railings over a ditch. He was dressed in brown, rather brighter than the colour of brown holland; he did not seem to have a regular coat, but more of a loose blouse. One thing I most distinctly recall is his heavy clumsy boots. His head hung forward, and the arms dropped forward too. Coming within about 15 yards I saw the shadow of the railings through him, one bar across the shoulders, one bar about his waist, and one almost at his knees, quite distinct but faint. I have a remembrance of a big, very black shadow in the background. At about 15 yards the whole thing disappeared suddenly. We went to the railing and looked over a clear field beyond, which would give no possible cover to anyone trying to hide. Walking back by where we had first seen it we saw nothing but an oak tree by railings in a

¹² "I [Miss Jourdain] began to feel as if I were walking in my sleep." *An Adventure*, 1911 Ed., p. 18.

"He saw him . . . by a waking dream, which I take to be the best definition of second sight." William MacLeod, *A Treatise on the Second Sight*, Edinburgh, 1763, p. 47.

¹³ G. Bell & Sons, London, 1938, pp. 104 f.

fence. When I saw it my only feeling, I remember, was intense curiosity to see what it was—one seemed impelled to go forward; afterwards, sickening terror.”

Now this experience may or may not have been precisely of the same character as that of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, but the fact that it was shared by three young girls walking across familiar fields near their own home may well suggest to the critic that he had better shift his ground from kindly pity for the “pathetic illusion” of two middle-aged spinsters sightseeing in Paris!

The Trianon couple were as subject to occasional illusion as other people. In the matter of the position of rocks, etc., they may have been misled by their recollections of a complicated terrain. But unless we are going to allege (which no one ever has done) that they published, not a mere literary hoax, but an untrue record sustained to their last days, then their testimony cannot be disposed of by reiterating that at every point they substituted imagination for fact; that, for example, despite their learning, they were so stupid as to transmute two ordinary gardeners of 1901 into officials of the eighteenth century wearing uniforms and three-cornered hats.

Did not the behavior of these officials indicate their dream-like character? In dreams visual images are more frequent than auditory; and dream people, if not silent, may speak briefly, sometimes evasively. So the minds that created the two officials could put into their mouths only mechanical responses of little utility. Had *normal* invention been at work, Miss Jourdain’s fluent French could have supplied appropriate “evidential” answers.

Moreover, the circumstances in which *An Adventure* came to be written do not require the dream theory to be confined to the possibility of an extraordinarily prolonged “waking dream” of the kind to which allusion has been made. Since the two women exchanged no comment on the experience until a week later,¹⁴ a week which was fully occupied with other matters, the possibility arises that the recollection of the visit to the Petit Trianon had become insidiously blended with the recollection of a telepathic dream while asleep, one embodying clairvoyant and/or precognitive images. This dream may have taken place the night before the visit, and something of its hidden springs may perhaps be gathered from the Baedeker guide to which reference was made in footnote 8, p. 49. The description of the Petit Trianon in the guide is very brief. Only ten lines are in large type, including this passage:

“A visit should be paid to the Jardin du Petit Trianon, which is laid out in the English style and contains some fine exotic

¹⁴ *An Adventure*, 1911 Ed., pp. 11 and 20.

trees, an artificial lake, a 'Temple of Love', and a 'Hamlet' of nine or ten rustic cottages, where the court ladies played at rustic life."

When the eye of the English-speaking reader lights on the word 'Hamlet' (so printed), it suggests to him the tragedy, although a moment later he realizes that the celebrated *Hameau* is intended. But an image of Hamlet has been called up, a picture of the solitary and melancholy man in conjunction with the "Temple of Love." Does this account for the sinister cloaked figure, seen by the two women, sitting close to the pillared "kiosk"? All who have had personal experience of the precognitive dream know that such images may arise before the physical sense experience as well as after. The physical sense experience here concerned was the reading of the above-quoted passage, and it makes little difference to the argument whether the women read that part of the guide the previous evening or during the visit itself.

What follows in their account is surely very significant to any dream theory. This definitely "bad man" who is awaiting the women in a lonely spot has to be escaped from. So—as though in response to the wish—on the scene runs the young and handsome page, quite an incipient story-book hero, and the two ladies are saved from a most disagreeable encounter. Nothing unusual in that if it was all a dream! What is unusual—perhaps unique so far as accurate reporting goes—is that these dream figures and their surroundings should be clothed with characteristics built from the results of future historical research.

Now let us look at what Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain said of themselves in the course of their commentary:

"One of us [Miss Jourdain] has to own to having powers of second sight, etc., deliberately undeveloped, and there are psychical gifts in her family. She comes of a Huguenot stock. The other [Miss Moberly] is one of a large and cheerful party, being the seventh daughter and of a seventh son; her mother and grandmother were entirely Scotch, and both possessed powers of premonition accompanied by vision. Her family has always been sensitive to ghost stories in general, but mercilessly critical of particular ones of a certain type."¹⁵

Add to this self-revelation that Miss Moberly's father was Bishop of Salisbury till 1885, and that it was only a few years later that Miss A had, in Salisbury Cathedral and near it, those vivid and apparently retrocognitive visions which Myers recorded and published in 1892. Miss Moberly can scarcely have been ignorant of the fact that such remarkable claims had been made publicly and associated with a Cathedral so familiar to her.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

A further circumstance which may be no less significant is that it was in 1897, just four years before the experiences at the Petit Trianon, that the English translation appeared of Flammarion's *Lumen*. It will be recalled that the initial episode in this work is one in which Lumen sees the French Revolution in progress seventy years after it has happened. So far as concerns Miss Jourdain, who was fluent in the French language, she may have read the French original long before 1897.

It seems, therefore, a reasonable conclusion that the women were not unacquainted, when the Trianon experience occurred, with the idea that seeing the past might be possible.

A very important statement bearing on this subject has been made public since Miss Moberly died in 1937. It is to be found in *Four Victorian Ladies of Wiltshire*¹⁶ by Edith Olivier, a close friend of Miss Moberly, and an advocate of her cause in the Trianon case. "There exist," states Miss Olivier, "several other stories of Anne Moberly's second sight which are less generally known." For the good reason that there would be little evidential value in stories written down some years after the subject's death, Miss Olivier confines herself to two cases. The first she heard from Miss Moberly's lips, but bases it also on "a written account of it from a member of her [Miss Moberly's] family." This merits a brief outline.

When visiting the picture gallery of the Paris Louvre in 1913, Miss Moberly saw "a tall, commanding, yet graceful man. He must have been of unusual height, for he equalled the height of a child sitting on its father's shoulder close by in the crowd. The man had a small golden coronal on his head, and wore a loose toga-like dress of some bright colour. I looked at him and he looked at me. Our eyes literally seemed to meet. It was not a face or a figure to forget; for his whole bearing was one of unusual nobility, and gracefulness. He looked from side to side, as though taking it for granted that he was being noticed."

None of the officials had seen the man, despite his height, etc., and Miss Moberly inferred he must have been an apparition. First she thought of Charlemagne, but discovered "that the pattern of the toga, the shape of the coronal, and the rather unusual way in which the straps of the sandals were wound round the leg, all indicated a Roman emperor of the fourth century." Her researches seem to have been as thorough as those in the Trianon case. Medallions, etc., of Constantine the Great were found to resemble the man. Moreover, a ceremonial Roman road had passed over the site of that part of the Louvre, and Constantine is said to have used it in procession on two known occasions.

¹⁶ Faber & Faber, London, 1945.

56 *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*

The second account is more important because it is transcribed from Miss Moberly's own record, written immediately after the initial experience, which took place, as she particularly notes, "between sleeping and waking." The entire record is too long to be quoted in full, but the following gives an adequate idea of its nature.

"As I have never seen Cambridge," wrote Miss Moberly, "I mean to go there this week. We¹⁷ planned this on Saturday, June 21st, and yesterday, June 23rd, between sleeping and waking in the early morning, I saw a vivid picture of an open space with some buildings, which I called King's College, though I have no doubt that it was entirely unlike the real King's College . . . We went to this chapel (which was small) and at the door was a man in some sort of dark cassock, who told us that we could go in. A funeral service in Latin was just coming to an end, and I noticed among the congregation of dark-gowned men, scarlet and purple robes, as well as white surplices. As the service was nearly over we went outside to see the procession pass . . . first, some acolytes and censer boys came out, then a few clerics, followed by two cardinals (?) in scarlet; one was tall, and had white lace on the skirt and the undress cap. He was pompous and seemed important. The other suggested a university professor . . . The coffin was more square and seemed more ornamented than one sees to-day. There was some coloured painting on it, and on the end where the feet would be was the name: ARNOLPHUS M — I could see no more. Behind it came some men in dark gowns, and last of all a group of tall thin women in white woolly cassock-like skirts, with dark pointed hoods over their heads. I thought one of them (who had an old face) might have been the mother. The procession wound from the chapel . . . towards the little churchyard, which sloped considerably away . . . Afterwards I heard someone say that the second word on the coffin was 'Magister.' Written June 24, 1913."

When Miss Moberly arrived in Cambridge she found that the present buildings of King's College in no way suggested those in her vision. Enquiries about a graveyard, however, elicited the fact that one belonging to the church of Saint John the Baptist (long disappeared) had extended from the centre of the nave of the present King's College Chapel to Clare College on sloping ground. An old map showed buildings in the position of those seen in the dream. Miss Moberly thought these may have been in connection with a Carmelite monastery established nearby towards the end of the thirteenth century, and wondered whether her dream "women" were not really white friars. The heads of national groups of this Order were termed "Magister," and were under the General of the Order. One who died a General after having been Magister "was named

¹⁷ It is not explained to whom "we" refers.

Radulphus which is another version of Arnolphus.¹⁸ He was renowned as a very holy man. Celestial lights were seen over his head. His body was sent to England for burial in 1277, but it was not known where it was laid. The Carmelites' habit, regularly black with a white hood, was changed for a time in the latter part of the thirteenth century to be white with a black hood, like the figures in the procession."

The foregoing account by Miss Moberly, even in the abbreviated form in which I have had to quote it, will probably be deemed a very careful one, devoid of exaggerated claims or suppositions. It differs from the Trianon experience in several important respects: it did not take place on the actual historic scene assigned to it; it was not shared; and the percipient was aware of the unusual nature of her experience. Whether the fact that it occurred "between sleeping and waking" is also a point of difference it would be very enlightening to know for certain.

In considering all the cases¹⁹ it is hard to see any indication that other than purely subjective creations of the mind are involved, images built up not only from unconscious knowledge acquired since infancy in environments impregnated with historical associations, but also from extra-normal awareness of the sources of additional knowledge. These apparently retrocognitive visions or dreams seem to owe their general character and direction to the normally acquired contents of the percipients' minds, but at the same time they precognize the results of future research, *which research would not have been undertaken but for the visions*. That they contain also, or alternatively, a truly retrocognitive element must, I think, remain an open question.

Besides the comparatively rare visual form there is the much more frequent form of apparent extra-normal knowledge of the historic past occurring in automatic writings or oral statements which purport to be inspired by discarnate personalities. One of the best known cases of this kind, that of "Patience Worth," was discussed recently in the *JOURNAL* of the A.S.P.R.²⁰ by Mr. C. W. Clowe, who propounded a theory of hereditary memory to explain the character of

¹⁸ Miss Moberly's early friend, Charlotte M. Yonge, in *A History of Christian Names*, 1863 (Vol. II, pp. 281, 414), explained Arnulf as "eagle-wolf," and Radulf or Randulf as "house-wolf." This does not support Miss Moberly's identification of the names, but it does indicate how Radulphus could be transformed into Arnolphus in her mind.

¹⁹ Since we have only a second-hand account of the Constantine the Great case, it should not be stressed. However, the addition of an alleged experience involving a famous Roman emperor to one involving a beautiful and ill-fated queen must be remarked on. We learn from Miss Olivier that Miss Moberly was descended from a natural son of Peter the Great. The associative connections between the Russian Emperor Peter the Great, and the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great will be noticed.

²⁰ Vol. XLIII, 1949, pp. 70-81.

the writings produced. In the course of his discussion Mr. Clowe put this very important question: "Excepting those who were known in this life and who purport to be communicating with us through mediums, has any *soi-disant* control in the history of psychic research furnished details of his or her earthly life which could be or have been investigated and found correct?"

As some measure of reply to that question I would mention the records contained in a book called *Voices From Another World*,²¹ by F. Curtis, a German writer whose real name was Willibald Franke. Several of the sixty-four communications which he recorded as purporting to come from historical characters, mostly obscure or forgotten, were proved correct in names and dates when the public records were searched. It is interesting to note in this connection that, despite the title of his book (probably not his own choice), Franke was not a spiritualist, and indeed emphatically asserted that "intercourse with the spirit world does *not* take place."

Franke obtained the writings by means of the psychograph, an arrangement having some general resemblance to the ouija board, and controlled by several sitters at the same time. The following is a fair specimen of the results obtained, the words written by the psychograph being in italics:

"At this sitting, in addition to one of our artist friends who frequently joined us in our experiments, we had with us a poet, Tyrolese by birth, and at that time resident in the Rhine district.

"Will you tell us a good deal to-day?"

Yes.

"Who is it?"

Prosper von Langendorf.

"From what part?"

Wied, Neuwied.

"When did you live?"

1584, the year of grace 1584.

"Can you talk to us in verse?"

*From the serpent I was forced to escape,
Both the camp and the court left behind;
Then my ermine and silk were exchanged,
Through the world in monk's habit I ranged,
But God's peace nowhere did I find.
Through the fields and the meadows I wandered,
(Oh maiden, so lovely and dear!)
At last now mine eyes God hath opened,
He has ta'en me to dwell with Him here.*

²¹ Translated by Lilian A. Clare, and published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1923

"The poet above mentioned, whose first experience of the psychograph it was, desiring to test how far the communications might be influenced by his own subconscious (which the announcement of Neuwied as the place of origin seemed to render likely), now left the instrument and went to a distant corner of the room, asking what it was that he was writing at the moment. The answer came:

"Light still is light, e'en when thou art blind.

"The astonished questioner admitted that although he had left the psychograph, there was indeed still some connection, for the book he had begun (which, however, was not published after all), was to be called "The Light of the Seas." To none of those present was this title, or even the intention of the writer, known. He now took his place at the table again, and the following statement appeared:

"Martinus said. Be not a fool; write German and love English.

"Where did you live?

Erdfurth (the old spelling of Erfurt), Wittenberg, Worms, Wartburg are celebrated, where Martinus Lutherus rested, God honours him.

"We imagined that Prosper von Langendorf had finished speaking, and asked for further information about him.

"Hang the washing in the sun and don't . . . it!

"Why are you so coarse?

Remember my disastrous life and forgive me!

"How was it disastrous?

Thirty years of war and misfortune.

"When did you die?

I died in February 1584. Frederick built the town of Neuwied, God gave me life in 1584 and granted me rest in 1654. Agnes my lovely lass, the sweet maid of Cologne seduced me with her charms. Oh pretty one, thy crimson gown.—God bless thee! Prosper is putting on his armour.

"What do you mean by that?

The evening glow and the roses shine like her crimson gown.

"The contradiction in the date of birth must be regarded rather as the correction of a slip in speaking. Since our friend living at that time in the Rhine province was not sure when Neuwied was founded, we looked the matter up and discovered that in 1653 Count Friedrich von Wied founded the town in place of Langendorf which had been laid waste. This fact (hitherto unknown to any of the participants in the sitting) imparted by Prosper von Langendorf therefore proved to be correct, and his name too was interesting from the information that on the site

of the present Neuwied there had formerly been a place called Langendorf, which was then in ruins. Whether a race of nobles had existed, and this Prosper Langendorf was a scion thereof, or whether we are meant to read the name as Prosper from Langendorf, we have no means of ascertaining."²²

Franke came to the conclusion that the supposed communications originated in the subconscious minds of the sitters, with the important addition (here agreeing in general with Mr. Clowe's theory in the case of Patience Worth) that the subconsciousness (*Unterbewusstsein*) must include some kind of inherited memory. He held that the historical knowledge, linguistic endowments, and poetic capabilities displayed in the productions of the psychograph hardly admitted of any other explanation. Such a theory of inherited memory, besides its disregard of current biological teaching, must take into account the memories of deceased ancestors from the remotest times. During only the past 400 years each person now living may be able to count some 8,000 deceased ancestors (less according to the extent of common ancestry shared by the couples), and this figure swells to millions when several more centuries are added. It is hardly logical to contend that hereditary transmission of this vast field of memory is proved by historical statements which, despite Franke's opinion, do admit of other explanations. Remarkable as they are, they yet do not display that degree of knowledge of foreign and ancient languages, of dialects, customs, and so forth, which the theory of the hereditary transmission of memory requires.

The intervention of a discarnate personality might be thought to be a preferable theory if really satisfactory evidence were given of historical knowledge not contained in books, records, or living minds. One kind of such evidence might be in this order. Some years ago I knew an archaeologist who had made a special study of "Roman Triple Vases." He published a monograph discussing the possible uses to which the Romans may have put these three-necked vases, but he could come to no definite conclusion on that point. Yet in the days of ancient Rome the vases were so common that everyone must have known their use. If spirit communicators were to clear up even small problems of this kind we should have excellent evidence of their authenticity. It is true that the evidence would not be final, since there are hardly any circumstances to cover which some aspect of extrasensory perception cannot be brought in. For example, in the above hypothetical case it could be said that some other archaeologist may have solved the problem, and though he may have written nothing down, his mind would be open to the telepathic perception of the seer or medium. None the less, if the solution of historic

²² *Ibid.*, p. 109. Both the verses and the prose, it may be as well to point out, are part of Miss Clare's excellent translation.

problems was repeatedly due to communications ascribed to spirits, if *gaps* in the archives were filled (instead of the archives merely being confirmed), the case for that ascription would be immensely stronger than it now is.

But when we contrast the psychographic writings, writings which do not evade any aspect of life, with the rather school-story-book type of visions of the English ladies mentioned above, both the spirit hypothesis and that of inherited memory seem equally unsatisfactory. Do not the beheaded queens, Anne Boleyn and Marie Antoinette, perhaps represent a lingering schoolgirl sentimentality, and the sweet maid of Cologne the more masculine outlook? If the mind of a Prosper von Langendorf could reveal itself through artists and poets, why not through schoolmistresses on vacation, or young lady guests in ancient castles? One may fairly assume that everyone has a wide assortment as well as a vast number of ancestors. As against this criticism it may reasonably be contended that the mind will, consciously or unconsciously, act as a filter of the contents of the subconscious, rejecting whatever the individual's ideas of the *bienséances* may judge unfitting.

The further suggestion may be made that what is involved is not memory in the form of physically transmitted effects on the brain cells, but *telepathy* from one generation to another. The mental impressions of a couple living in 1584 telepathically transmitted to (or perceived by) their children, and by those children to their children, etc., would explain knowledge of the past existing in the subconscious of a living person without assumptions which orthodox biological science denies. Indeed, such a telepathic theory might, in its turn, have a vital bearing on the evolution of species.

Besides the possibilities of (1) communication from the spirits of deceased people, (2) the possession of memories inherited from ancestors, and (3) parent-child telepathy, there are several other theories which may be considered to account for knowledge of the past, including apparent retrocognition. They are: (4) Memory of previous lives (i.e., through reincarnation, not inherited memory); (5) Telepathic awareness of historical knowledge in the minds of living people (apart from parents); (6) Clairvoyant awareness of documents and books; (7) Precognition of the experience of acquiring the information when the search comes to be undertaken; (8) Observation from another dimension.

It is not necessary to comment here on theories 4 to 7, because, like the preceding three, in purporting to account for extra-normal knowledge of the past they dispense with any need for such a word as "retrocognition." Proof of theory 8 would alone sustain retrocognition in the sense in which Myers used the word in 1892. Retrocogni-

tion means that the percipient, at the present time, and not through his own or anyone else's memory, or by means of any existing record has extra-normal awareness of the past, whether it takes the vivid visual form attributed to Miss A or some other form. Retrocognition, in fact, is proposed as the opposite of precognition.

The existing view of precognition is that it is extra-normal awareness of a future *event*. On the hypothesis that, relatively, all future events exist as present events to other-dimensional observers, it is logical to make the same assumption about past events. Indeed, the acceptance of precognition in such a sense may be said absolutely to entail a corresponding theory of retrocognition.

Of the greatest importance, therefore, to the problem of retrocognition is the true nature of precognition. In *Second Sight in Daily Life*²³ I have advanced reasons for the view that precognition is "Perception or awareness, not attributable to information or rational inference, which corresponds to the future sense perception of the subject, or of another person." It is the coming individual experience which is precognized, and not the event. Has not this elementary truth been overlooked in the fascination of attempts to link the problems of the mind with the problems of astrophysics?

Individual experience of an event may consist of personal participation in it, hearing news of it, seeing a film or photograph of it, and so on. The impressions made on two persons by the same event are never the same. This is true even when both are direct witnesses of the event, but for the present purpose it is only necessary to envisage a case in which A is a direct witness of an event, and B hears of it by a verbal message. The two sets of mental images thus arising will obviously be entirely different from each other, even though embodying some common general idea such as, "a car has collided with a wall."

The important point here is that any precognition which each man may have had of his coming experience corresponds to that experience, not to the experience of the other man, nor to any "event." An analysis of each man's dream, or other precognitive experience, will show that it relates to *his* coming physical sense perception, and to concepts arising therefrom peculiar to his mind, and including his errors and misunderstandings. No evidence will be found of extra-normal perception unrelated to physical sense perception, nothing that betokens a "reaching out" to cognize a "future event."

Precognition thus appears to be a "memory beforehand," as strictly individual as ordinary memory. Its individuality is not lessened by the almost certain fact of telepathic awareness of the precognition in other minds.

²³ Coward-McCann, New York, 1950, pp. 39-43.

If this view is correct,²⁴ if precognition is "memory beforehand," the place which was allotted to retrocognition is one that is already occupied by ordinary memory, conscious and unconscious. There is our memory of the past, and our "memory" of the future—our individual past and our individual future.

Though the word "retrocognition" is not applicable to the individual memory of the past, it would be possible to apply it to individual access to a universal memory, one in which are stored all the mental impressions of all the minds of all time. Such a collective memory would amount to the permanent existence of all past events that had been known to any mind, and access to such a memory would be as effective retrocognition as perception of the event itself. The existence of an "akashic record" of past events is asserted by modern occultism, but evidence such as psychical research requires has not, so far as I am aware, been made public.

As was remarked at the outset of this article we are not justified in classifying as retrocognitive, cases of the possession or acquisition of normally inexplicable knowledge of the past so long as any person is living who has the knowledge by normal means. Nor can we regard as conclusive any cases of apparent historic retrocognition when the information concerned exists in books, manuscripts, hidden articles, buried foundations of buildings, and so on. Such instances are attributable to forms or aspects of extra-normal cognition which have been accepted as conclusively proven by many qualified investigators.

Thus the hallucinatory visions of Miss A. and of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, did not contain any information not ascribable to clairvoyant awareness of documents and books, and/or precognition of the coming experience of looking them up. Miss A saw in Salisbury Cathedral "a monk, dressed in dull sort of muddy brown." An engraving of a Franciscan which she and Lady Radnor found afterwards in Steven's *Continuation of Dugdale's Monasticon* corresponded exactly with what Miss A had seen.²⁵ Likewise, Miss Moberly saw Marie

²⁴ The view is based on personal experience. Laboratory experiments in precognition have not only been of the greatest value in demonstrating that precognition is a fact, but have borne out views derived from a study of the more complex sphere of spontaneous precognition. An examination of the accounts of the many valuable series of experiments which have been conducted on the basis of cards bearing simple designs, does not yield proof that the percipient precognizes a "future event" (in this case the card to be chosen). He precognizes his future experience in seeing the card or being told the result; or, where that is ruled out—as now it generally is—he precognizes the future perception of the agent or of someone else who will know the card to be chosen. Thus Dr. S. G. Soal, in his report of his 1941-1943 series of experiments, defined precognitive telepathy as, "The prehension by a Sensitive, by means of his psi faculty, of the future contents of the Agent's mind," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XI.VII, p. 22.

²⁵ *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. VIII, p. 507.

Antoinette in a green silk bodice, and seven years later she and Miss Jourdain found a colored illustration of the bodice in De Reiset's *Modes et Usages*, accompanied by the Queen's measurements.²⁶ Effectively, therefore, the content of the visions was existing in a normal sense at the time of the visions.

It is evident that the difficulty which confronts us in the case of apparent retrocognition is similar to and even greater than that presented by apparent spirit communications. Precisely what information of the past could we accept as satisfactory?

If we were told that a retrocognitive vision revealed that the crew of the *Marie Céleste* had been carried off by pirates and murdered, how should we know whether it was true? And if we arrived at proofs as a result of the vision, could it not be said that those proofs had already been discovered by extrasensory perception which then manifested itself in the form of the vision? Again, if some lost art of manufacture were recovered, or if some mysterious hieroglyphics were explained by seeming retrocognition, it might be held that the explanation would rather be found in extrasensory awareness of the minds of living persons who had been engrossed by the problems in question, and whose unconscious minds had arrived at the solutions.

These difficulties serve to reinforce the need to consider anew whether there is a *prima-facie* case for retrocognition. It was propounded as a supposed necessary corollary of the existence of precognition. But, as indicated above, the necessity depends upon the view taken of the nature of precognition.

Since the present writer believes that the real nature of precognition gives no support to the view that it arises from perception of a physical future event existing at the time of the precognition, he is bound to conclude that the place assigned to the corresponding theory of retrocognition is already occupied by the individual memory.

²⁶ *An Adventure*, 1911 Ed., pp. 75 f.

²⁷ After this paper was ready to go to press I learned from Mr. W. H. Salter's article, "An Adventure: A Note on the Evidence" (*S.P.R. Journal*, January-February, 1950, pp. 178-187), that it was Mrs. Henry Sidgwick who reviewed the book when it first appeared in 1911.