

ARTICLES



Hornell Hart

(1888-1967) Received his Ph.D. degree from the State University of Iowa in 1921, and for nineteen years he was Professor of Sociology at Duke University, North Carolina. During this period he also served on the Advisory Board of *The Journal of Parapsychology*, and in this capacity worked in close association with Dr. J. B. Rhine. Held a number of other important university posts, and wrote several major books on social and psychological problems. Coined the term "super-ESP" in 1959. Also coined the term "ESP projection" and contributed articles for several leading parapsychological journals.

Apparitions and Survival

- Hornell Hart -

THE CASE for survival rests on two main kinds of evidence. The first consists in communications received through mediums. Arguments both for and against survival, based on that type of evidence, have been summarized in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

The second kind of evidence consists in apparitions of the dead, the dying, and the living. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 will be devoted to the pros and cons of the apparitional evidence. Then Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 will seek to achieve a creative reconciliation of the case against with the case for survival, taking account of both the mediumistic and the apparitional evidence.

What is an Apparition?

If you were to see what appeared to be the living form of someone whom you had dearly loved, but who had recently died, you would be greatly moved. If you saw that form standing close to your bed, smiling at you with tender love, and speaking words of comfort and courage, that experience of yours might well make it easy for you to believe in life beyond death. In any case, what you had seen would be what psychical researchers call 'an apparition of the dead'.

But apparitions do not always represent persons who have died. Apparitions of those who are still alive physically are seen more frequently than of those whose physical bodies are dead. In between those of the living and those of the dead are apparitions seen at or very close to the time of death.

Apparitions are Facts

For more than seventy years, psychical researchers have been collecting and studying case reports of apparitions. As far back as 1886, the SPR questioned over 5,700 persons about whether they had ever perceived an apparition. The results were published in the classic work, *Phantasms of the Living*. Three years later, a committee of the SPR followed up this inquiry on a larger scale, in what was called 'The Census of Hallucinations.' Seventeen thousand persons were canvassed. They reported having seen 352 apparitions of living persons and 163 of dead persons.

From that time forward, study after study of apparitions has been published, in England, in France, in Italy, in Germany, in the United States and in other countries. Out of this long series of scientific studies there emerged, in 1956, a report entitled 'Six Theories About Apparitions.' It developed out of papers which I presented at international conferences at the University of Utrecht in 1953 and at Cambridge University in 1955. Between these conferences, this investigation was promoted by forty-eight collaborators from twelve countries. The 165 cases used in this study include reports of apparitions of persons who had been dead for days, weeks, or even years, apparitions of persons who were at or near the point of death, and apparitions of persons who were still living. Let us look briefly at some samples, taken from this collection.

Some Examples

A collectively perceived apparition of a dead man

As a carefully verified case in which a number of people, at the same time, perceived the apparition of a man known to be dead, let us consider the following:

In June 1931, Samuel Bull, by occupation a chimney-sweep, died in his cottage in Ramsbury, Wilts., England. His aged widow continued to live in the same cottage with a grandson, James Bull, twenty-one years of age. In August 1931, a daughter, Mrs. Edwards, gave up her own home and came with her husband and five children to live with the widow for the purpose of looking after her.

Some time in or after February 1932, Mrs. Edwards saw the deceased man ascend the stairs and pass through a closed door into the room, then unused, in which he had died. Almost immediately after Mrs. Edwards saw the apparition, James Bull also saw it. Later all the members of the family together observed it. Even the five-year-old girl recognized it as 'Grandpa Bull.' The appearances continued at frequent intervals until about 9 April. Whenever the apparition was seen, all the persons present were able to see it.

The Chaffin apparition gave information not known to any living person

The evidence in this famous case was tested in court, and the judge accepted it as the basis for his verdict:

James L. Chaffin, a farmer in North Carolina, had a wife and four sons. In 1905 he made a will leaving his property to his third son, Marshall, but leaving nothing to his widow and the three other sons. In September 1921, the old man died, and the will was probated. In 1925, the second son, James, made the following sworn statement:

'On a night during the latter part of June 1925, my father appeared at my bedside, dressed as I had often seen him in life, wearing a black overcoat which I knew to be his own.

My father's spirit took hold of his overcoat, pulled it back and said, "You will find my will in my overcoat pocket," and then disappeared.'

James made inquiries, and finally in July found his father's overcoat at the home of his brother John. He cut the stitches of the inner pocket, and found inside, not the will itself but a roll of paper with the words, 'Read the 27th Chapter of Genesis in my daddie's old Bible.' (This chapter tells how Esau was supplanted by his younger brother Jacob.)

Taking his daughter and two neighbours with him as witnesses, James Chaffin, Junior, then went to his mother's house, found the dilapidated Bible, and in the presence of the testator's widow and two other witnesses looked up the 27th Chapter of Genesis. Folded into the pages there they found a will dated 16 January, 1919, which had been made without witnesses, but which was valid by the laws of North Carolina as being in his own handwriting. This newer will divided the property equally among all the four sons, adding: 'You must all take care of your Mammy.'

At first the heirs under the old will contested the new one. But when they were shown the actual document at the trial they admitted it to be genuine, and they withdrew their opposition. Ten witnesses were prepared to swear it was in the testator's handwriting. In December, 1925, the second will was admitted to probate, and probate of the earlier will was cancelled.

So far as can be learned, James Chaffin, Senior, before his death spoken to anyone about his second will. His apparition, after death, would seem to have been the vehicle of his surviving personality, seeking to complete the righting of a wrong which he had done while still in his mortal body.

The authenticated apparition of a dying captain

The cases which have just been cited were apparitions of persons who had been dead for months or years. Let us now consider a representative case of an apparition at the moment of death:

On 3 January, 1856, Joseph Collyer was in command of the steamer *Alice*, which was moored alongside the levee on the Mississippi River just above New Orleans. Joseph had retired to his berth for the night. Another steamer bore down upon the moored ship, and Joseph was called. He ran on to the deck, clothed only in his nightgown. The other steamer collided with the *Alice*. The concussion caused the flagstaff to fall, striking Joseph's head and actually dividing the skull. This, of course, caused instant death.

On that same night, Joseph's mother, Anne E. Collyer, at her home in Camden, New Jersey, had a remarkable experience which she reported to another son in a letter dated 27 March, 1861.

'On the 3rd of January, 1856, I did not feel well, and retired to bed early. Some time after, I felt uneasy and sat up in bed; I looked around the room, and, to my utter amazement, saw Joseph standing at the door, looking at me with great earnestness, his head bandaged up, a dirty night-cap on, and a dirty white garment on, something like a surplice. He was much disfigured about the eyes and face. It made me quite uncomfortable the rest of the night. The next morning, Mary came into my room early. I told her that I was sure I was going to have bad news from Joseph. I told all the family at the breakfast table; they replied: "It was only a dream, and all nonsense," but that did not change my opinion.'

Joseph's brother, Robert H. Collyer, M.D., who lived in London, reported in a letter dated 15 April, 1861, that he had obtained the details about Joseph's death from another brother, William, 'who was on the spot at the time of the accident.' In October 1857, Robert visited the United States, and learned from his mother about her experience. Her account was corroborated to him at that time by his father and his four sisters. On 12 May, 1884, one of the surviving sisters wrote a letter of corroboration.

Dr. Collyer stated that his father, who was a scientific man, calculated the difference of longitude between Camden and New Orleans, and found that the apparition occurred at the exact time of Joseph's death.

His mother had never seen Joseph attired as his apparition appeared to be. One curious fact is that the bandaging of the head did not take place until hours after the accident. William told Robert that Joseph's head was nearly cut in two by the blow, and that his face was dreadfully disfigured, and the nightdress much soiled.

A conscious apparition of a living person

For comparison with the samples given above, of apparitions of dead men, and an apparition of a man at the moment of death, consider the following example of an apparition of a man who was still very much alive. The experience was reported by a bachelor farmer named Walter E. McBride, who lived near Indian Springs, Indiana.

On 23 December, 1935, McBride had been concerned during the entire day about his father. He was under the impression that his father might be ill. Shortly after retiring, at about eight o'clock that evening, he felt himself to be floating in the room, in a whitish light which cast no shadows. He said that he was wide awake at the time. After moving upward to a certain height, he felt himself to be turning vertical, and looking downward he saw his physical body lying on the bed.

He then found that he was floating upward through the building. The ceiling and floor failed to stop him. Almost at once he realized that he was moving through the air towards the north, and he seemed to know he was going to his old home several miles away. Passing through the walls of his father's house, he stood at the foot of the bed in which he saw his father reclining. His father's eyes were fixed upon him and he seemed to be surprised, but he did not seem to hear when McBride spoke to him. The knowledge came to McBride that his father was well, whereupon he found himself travelling back to his bedroom. He again saw his own body, still lying on the bed where he had left it. Re-entering his physical self, he was instantly alert, with no feeling of drowsiness. Throughout this excursion, McBride was aware of a *presence*, which he was unable to identify, but which he subsequently came to regard as a guide.

Upon recovering possession of his physical body, McBride got up, made a light, and wrote down the time and the account of what he had experienced. Two days later, on Christmas Day, 1935, he visited his father, who verified his experience by saying he had seen McBride, just as he had stood at the foot of the bed. The father, moreover, had written down the time of his vision, and it tallied with the time put down previously by the projectionist. Mrs. J. E. Wires and her son, Earl, of Shoals, Indiana, were also visiting the senior McBride at the time. On 25 February, 1938, they each signed the following statement: 'I can vouch that the above-described meeting and discussion did take place.'

Do they prove Survival?

If we believe what Walter McBride has told us, the apparition which his father saw was actually the psychic body which McBride was occupying at that time, and from which he saw his father looking at him from the bed. Now suppose that we can quote a whole series of such cases, would that not mean that apparitions of the living can be the active, purposeful vehicles of conscious, living selves?

Grant (for the moment) that this is true. Then how about apparitions of the dead? Suppose that these are found to be identical in character with the apparitions of the living, would it not then follow that apparitions of the dead can also be active, purposeful vehicles of conscious *surviving* selves?

Cases which support the above argument will be given in Chapter 12, after arguments on the other side have been outlined in Chapter 11. But first another kind of apparition needs to be considered.

Death-bed Visions

In addition to the types which are sampled above, there is a special type of apparitions of the dead, reports of which have roused controversy. A good many cases have been published in which persons, during the last stages of their fatal illness, have said that they were seeing and communicating with loved ones who had previously died. Among such cases a few stand out in which apparitions of persons not known to have died have been recognized - with surprise - by the one who was dying.

Two examples

The following is taken from Sir William Barrett's book, *Death-Bed Visions*:

On January 12, 1924, a Mrs. B. was dying in the Mother's Hospital, at Clapton, England. Her sister Vida had died on December 25, 1923, but her illness and death had been carefully kept from Mrs. B. because of her own serious illness. As Mrs. B. was sinking, she said: "It is all so dark; I cannot see." A moment later her face brightened, and she exclaimed: "Oh, it is lovely and bright; you cannot see as I can." A little later she said: "I can see Father; he wants me, he is so lonely." Then, with a rather puzzled expression: "He has Vida with him," turning to her mother - "Vida is with him!" A few moments later she died.

The case was first reported to Sir William Barrett by Lady Florence E. Barrett, who as obstetric surgeon of the Mother's Hospital, was summoned to attend Mrs. B. Independent signed statements were secured from Miriam Castle, Matron of the hospital, and from Mrs. B.'s mother, Mrs. Mary C. Clark, both of whom heard Mrs. B. make the statement about Vida.

James Hyslop obtained the following example from Dr. Minot J. Savage, who gave him confidentially the names and addresses of the persons on whose authority he told it:

Two little girls, Jennie and Edith, both aged about eight or ten years, were schoolmates and intimate friends. In June 1889, both were taken ill with diphtheria. On June 5, Jennie died. The parents of Edith succeeded in keeping this fact from her. On the afternoon of June 8, Edith realized that she was about to die. She selected two of her photographs to be sent to Jennie, and asked her attendants to bid her good-bye. She appeared to see various friends who she knew were dead. Then suddenly, and with every appearance of surprise, she turned to her father and exclaimed: 'Why, papa! You did not tell me that Jennie was here.' And she reached out her arms as if in welcome, saying, 'Oh, Jennie, I'm so glad you are here!'

The fact that only apparitions of the dead, not of living persons, are seen by the dying, at their bedsides, has been held, by Barrett and others, to be consistent with the survival hypothesis but not with any other plausible interpretation. In addition to the case cited above, Barrett has presented accounts of six other more or less similar cases, in three of which the death of the person whose presence was seen by the dying was not known normally to anyone present.

It is worth remembering, as Barrett pointed out, that apparitions of the living occur usually when the thoughts of the one who appears are concentrated on the percipient who sees the apparition, rather than when the thoughts of the percipient are concentrated on the appearer. If this should be true in the present cases, it would indicate that the thoughts of the one who had gone before were directed towards his friend at the crisis of the latter's death.

The Negative Arguments come next

In the current chapter some basic facts about apparitions have been stated and illustrated, and the bare outline of the argument for survival, as based on apparitions, has been sketched. Before developing the case more fully, a candid examination of the anti-survivalist position on this subject is needed. For that, we turn to Chapter 11.

Source:

Hornell Hart's "The Enigma of Survival. The Case For and Against an After Life" (London: Rider & Co., 1959).

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