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"Sir Oliver Lodge"

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SIR OLIVER LODGE

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IT is not always easy to appraise the influence of a man of science who has achieved eminence in his chosen field. To do so becomes an almost impossible task when the scientist lays science aside as his major interest and turns to the realm of psychic phenomena. Thereafter many scientists look upon him with a feeling of distrust, the average man is incredulous and makes disparaging comments, while people least qualified to judge of the value and significance of psychic research are loudest in their scorn and ridicule. A scientific reputation built up by long years of arduous labour and genuine achievement can suffer almost complete eclipse in this way. Only a relatively few sober scholars will not be misled: they will judge the scientific work at its true worth, undisturbed by the subsequent or overlapping activities of the same man in the psychic field. They will acknowledge his greatness even though they may have little or no sympathy with investigation into occult phenomena.

Among other names, those of Emanuel Swedenborg, William Crooks and Oliver Lodge come to mind in this connection. How far has the scientific reputation of each suffered because his name is associated in the general mind with visions and revelations, with mediums and seances? It is the influence of Lodge that particularly interests me. I have heard some of the greatest scientists in the University of Cambridge laugh at his preoccupation with psychic phenomena and deride *Raymond's* heavenly cigars, yet acknowledge the greatness of Lodge the physicist. I have heard many people who have never read *Raymond*, scoff at it as nonsense, and not one of them when asked about the legitimate scientific work of its author, even knew that he was an experimental physicist by training and the leading pioneer worker in wireless telegraphy.

I have never read *Raymond* myself (being one of those who find problems enough in the physical world), and I am no judge whatever of the value of his contributions in that sphere of thought and experience. But if Lodge the spiritualist has had no marked influence upon me, Lodge the man, and Lodge the man of science, have influenced me considerably. It is for this reason that I have attempted to recapture events of the past in order to present for any

who may read what are apparently little known aspects of this remarkable man.

Twenty-seven years ago an undergraduate paused to look at the titles of the books displayed in a shop window. *Man and the Universe* by Sir Oliver Lodge—what a title! And the name of the author was a name to conjure with, because the student knew in a vague way that this was the principal of a university, a physicist and an educationalist, an active member of the Society for Psychical Research, knighted while he was its president. The small book, one of an English shilling series, was purchased and carried away with a feeling of high expectancy and proud possession. Delving into Section I, entitled "Science and Faith," of which Chapter I was headed "The Outstanding Controversy," the undergraduate was enthralled by the challenge with which contradictory points of view were set forth and the unflinching courage of the man who in those pages was seeking for the truth. Picking up a pencil, the student marked certain passages; and then and there some of the ideas of Sir Oliver Lodge made a lasting impression upon the mind of one of his readers.

Today I hold in my hand this little volume and re-read some of the marked passages:

This is the standing controversy. . . . Is the world controlled by a living Person, accessible to prayer, influenced by love, able and willing to foresee, to intervene, to guide, and wistfully to lead without compulsion spirits that are in some sort akin to Himself?

Or is the world a self-generated, self-controlling machine, complete and fully organized for movement, either up or down, for progress or degeneration, according to the chances of heredity and the influence of environment? . . .

Do we live in a universe permeated with life and mind: life and mind independent of matter and unlimited in individual duration? Or is life limited, in space to the surface of planetary masses, and in time to the duration of the material envelope essential to its manifestation? . . .

We are rising to the conviction that we are a part of nature and so a part of God; that the whole creation . . . is working together towards some great end; and that now, after ages of development, we have at length become conscious portions of the great scheme and can cooperate in it with knowledge and with joy.

My thoughts go back along the years to the first time I read these passages, and then forward again ten years to Cambridge on a Sunday in February, 1923. Between King's Parade and the Market Place, is the historic gray church of St Edward the King, a church of royal foundation, independent of the bishop of the diocese and therefore free to invite whom it will to occupy its pulpit.

Here it was that I first saw and heard Sir Oliver Lodge. And what a man he was—like a commanding prophet of Israel he stood in the pulpit, tall far beyond the average, magnificent in frame, massive head, white hair and beard. From the text "I and the Father are one; . . . the Father is greater than I," out of what he termed "the central chapter of the New Testament," he preached a sermon of stimulating interest and spiritual depth.

The following Monday night was as wild and wet, as dark and dank, as a winter night in the fenland can be. A large college hall was crowded with students. The chairman, Sir Ernest Rutherford, and the Electrical Club's guest speaker, Sir Oliver Lodge, were on the platform. A brief introduction over, Sir Oliver rose to speak on the subject, "The Foundations of Wireless." He told of the vision opened before the minds of physicists by the mathematical work of James Clerk Maxwell in his electromagnetic theory. He himself was fired with the ambition to produce and to detect an electromagnetic radiation of wave length so great that it could be used for signalling. He stirred up the enthusiasm of scientific men at every meeting where they gathered together, notably at the British Association. Men in Great Britain, Ireland, France, Italy and Germany were becoming interested. He himself was at that time a hard-working schoolmaster, his laboratory a shed, his equipment meagre. He described his apparatus and experiments, and paid his tribute to Hertz, who was the man to succeed first among so many other experimenters who were working towards the same end. He then discussed the stages by which these first successes were followed up by one modification after another until the genius of Marconi achieved transatlantic wireless telegraphy.

At the close of the address Sir Ernest Rutherford arose and paid a glowing tribute to Oliver Lodge, the man of science, a great teacher and a research physicist who had pioneered in an untrodden region. He called it one of the chance tricks of fortune that it was Hertz rather than Lodge to whom had fallen the honour of first producing and detecting radio waves. Sir Oliver acknowledged the chairman's words and the storm of applause that had followed them, and then, compelled by some inner urge, he spoke of those things which, in his later years, were closest to his heart. It was a small and perfect gem of a sermon to natural philosophers: with the analogy of the spectrum providing a continuity in the relationships of all the diverse radiations, he confidently hoped that there would

be achieved a linking up of man's experiences in the realms of fact and of faith, a continuity of knowledge in the realms of the physical, the psychical, and the spiritual.

A year later Sir Oliver happened to read an article in *Discovery*¹ dealing with a recent investigation by Dr L. Silberstein on the cosmological constant, R , the radius of curvature of space time. He wrote to the author a letter which lies before me now. He was then seventy-three years of age and for about twenty years his main line of research had been no longer physics but psychical phenomena; yet his lively appreciation of strictly physical science is obvious in these pages, though his outlook as a physicist had not gone much beyond the Kelvin epoch. The letter is reproduced almost in full because of the light it throws upon the man who wrote it. It is written from Normanton House, Lake, Salisbury, and is dated October 13, 1924:

I too have been much interested in the new estimate of R , and cannot refrain from thinking that it is much too small. But what interests me is not its magnitude, but the method of arriving at it, and the idea that it has possibly, not only a real, but a calculable existence. I need hardly say that even as to its reality I feel doubtful: it still has to make good its claim. I had seen some correspondence in *NATURE* about it; but it was your Article in *DISCOVERY* which caused me to give more special attention to that correspondence, and to the Papers in the *PHIL. MAG.* So that ultimately I wrote to S. about it, and have recently received quite an interesting reply. He sticks to his guns, and awaits further astronomical data for confirmation.

These Relativity changes in time, apart from any gravitational cause, are very curious: and it is difficult to discriminate between Appearance and Reality. So far as our experiments and observations are concerned, appearance is what we have to deal with: but philosophically we must deal with reality, if we can.

I don't exactly envy, but I congratulate, you young Physicists on the prospect before you. Physics has entered on a difficult but very interesting stage. And what the outcome may be, no one, I suppose, is as yet able to predict. The mathematical physicists who are now active are very brilliant: and though they indulge in speculations alien to the old school of dynamics, and though I expect Lord Kelvin would have been severely critical and perhaps contemptuous about their work, I cannot but feel a strong interest in it, and wish that I had the time and opportunity to go into these new matters more fully.

Meanwhile my business is to cling to the Ether as a sheet-anchor, and to urge the younger men to try to work out the dynamics of the Ether. I have been writing to Horace Lamb about it; not that he is a younger man, but because I conjecture that some day a glorified hydrodynamics will solve the problem, and that meanwhile efforts in that direction constitute a seed-plot containing within itself the promise of future fruit.

¹"Measuring the Universe" (*Discovery*, LVII, Sept., 1924).

Six years later, when only a few months short of his eightieth year, Sir Oliver was still keenly following advances in astrophysics and cosmology. He wrote to the author again, this time listing the topics which had particularly interested him in a current magazine article²—"several remarkable doctrines, the scattered matter throughout space, the rotation of the galaxy, the question of an Ether, the finiteness of the Universe, and the still more difficult notion of the expanding Universe."

Since the outbreak of war, at the age of eighty-nine years, Sir Oliver Lodge went forth upon the new adventure to which it was his firm belief that death is the portal. It was with a deep sadness that I read the Canadian Press cablegram from London. It stated that the misuse and abuse of scientific discovery whereby death, destruction and agony have stalked the earth, the sea and the air, as never before, had so oppressed the spirit of the aged scientist that four years ago he had said "we know things that we should never have known—things of the devil . . .," and he had felt that further scientific research should cease until man had learned wisdom in using what is already known. This is the attitude of an old, tired workman, whose tools are now laid by, whose strength is almost gone, who sees what he has helped to fashion put to utterly wrong uses—and himself without the energy to rise up and attack the evil forces around him. W. B. Yeats spoke very truly in lines written when he too was scanning the world anguished and torn once more by the brutal folly of fiendish men:

All things fall and are built again
And they who build them again are gay.

But Oliver Lodge had lived his life; he was old; rebuilding the world was not for him, and faith in the ability of anyone to rebuild it was at low ebb—he could not be gay.

A far happier picture, an inspiring picture, and a later one, is given by an associate and friend of many years, who obviously understood him and holds his memory in admiration and affection. This picture is drawn by the sure and sympathetic pen of the Editor of the *Hibbert Journal*. He quotes the very passage which I had marked twenty-seven years ago and which is set forth near the beginning of this article—but Dr L. P. Jacks knew, as I did not, that it had originally appeared in 1902, in the first issue of the *Hibbert Journal*.

²"Between the Stars" (*Atlantic Monthly*, Jan., 1931).

The opinion of the late Lord Rutherford is corroborated: "Before all else and to the end of his life Lodge was a man of science" and "temperamentally a seeker for positive proof." Lodge investigated psychic evidence for the survival of human personality with earnestness and patience, convincing himself finally that this was "a scientifically attested fact." But it was more than this, it was a basic belief, that found utterance in his remark when drawing towards the close of his life, "I shall soon be going upstairs." Phrases that are used by Dr Jacks in describing Lodge round out the portrait: "the greatness of his heart . . . , the elemental simplicity of his character . . . , strength that is made stronger by gentleness . . . , a playfulness, a gaiety, a warmth of affection, . . . at home, even in old age, among the dances and delights of the young." Finally there is this testimony: "In my last conversations with him I found him closely attentive to the course of events in these great and terrible days, but inwardly serene. The last phase had the quality of an unclouded sunset . . . his figure was that of an ancient prophet illumined by an inner radiance" And Dr Jacks closes his tribute with the words *Sit mea anima cum illo*.

Inwardly serene—even though enemy bombs were falling upon the cities, towns and countryside, and around his own home. The questioning, the despair, and the hopelessness of four years earlier were gone, and faith in the ultimate upward trend of mankind had reasserted itself. The conquests of science may be abused, but the search for truth must not—and cannot by man's very nature—be discontinued. And so the old man could look out upon the conflict, dream his dreams, and remain inwardly serene, content to leave to the younger men the task of fighting to translate his dreams and their visions into realities.