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## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE.

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# PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

## Society for Psychical Research

PART XLVI.

JUNE, 1903.



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

*Delivered on January 30th, 1903.*

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE, F.R.S.

IN taking the Chair of this Society for one more year and giving a third Presidential Address, I think it desirable to treat the subject from a business point of view, and to consider on what lines the Society may profitably work in the future. It must be remembered that our primary aim is to be a Scientific Society, to conduct our researches and to record our results in an accurate and scientific manner, so as to set an example of careful work in regions where it has been the exception rather than the rule, and to be a trustworthy guide to the generation of workers who shall follow.

To be scientific does not mean to be infallible, but it means being clear and honest, and as exact as we know how to be. In difficult investigations pioneers have always made some mistakes, they have no immediate criterion or infallible touchstone to distinguish the more true from the less true, but if they record their results with anxious care and scrupulous honesty and painstaking precision, their mistakes are only less valuable to the next generation than their partially true generalisations; and sometimes it turns out, after a century or

so, that mistakes made by early pioneers were no such thorough errors as had been thought, that they had an element of truth in them all the time, as if discoverers were endowed with a kind of prophetic insight whereby they dimly glimpsed theories and truths which it would take several generations of workers to disencumber and bring clearly to light.

Suppose, however, that their errors were real ones, the record of their work is just as important to future navigators as it is to have the rocks and shoals of a channel mapped out and buoyed. It is work which must be done. The great ship passing straight to its destination is enabled to attain this directness and speed by the combined labours of a multitude of workers, some obscure and forgotten, some distinguished and remembered, but none of whom were able to realise the stately passage of the great ship through the channels marked out for it, and by aid of mechanism which they had taken a part in designing or constructing. So it is with every great erection; and the Forth Bridge stands upon piers sunk below the water-mark by the painful and long continued labours of Italian workmen in "caissons" full of compressed and heated air.

The study of specifically Natural knowledge was fostered and promoted by the recognition in the reign of Charles II. of a body of enthusiasts who, during the disturbed but hopeful era of the Commonwealth, had met together to discuss problems of scientific interest; and to-day the Royal Society is among the dignified institutions of our land, taking all branches of Natural Philosophy and Natural History—the Physical Sciences and the Biological Sciences—under its wing.

Us it does not recognise, but then neither does it recognise Mental and Moral Philosophy, or Ethics, or Psychology, or History, or any part of a great region of knowledge which has hitherto been regarded as outside the pale of the Natural Sciences.

It is for us to introduce our subjects within that pale, if it turns out that there they properly belong; and if not, it is for us to do pioneer work and begin the establishment of another Society or group of Societies for recognition and promotion of work in the mental, the psychological, the psychical direction, until the day for unification shall arrive.