

BROOKLYN HECKLES HYSLOP'S "SPIRITS"

Philosophical Association Refuses to Take Stock in Phenomena He Presents.

WHAT'S A SPIRIT, ANYWAY

Hearer Demands to Know, and Others Ask Questions—A Socialist to the Front.

Prof. James H. Hyslop had a hard time of it yesterday afternoon at a meeting of the Brooklyn Philosophical Association in the auditorium of the Long Island Business College, where he lectured on the subject "Are the Dead Alive?"

It was the difference between his answer to the question and the one the Brooklyn philosophers evidently would have made, judging by the applause with which they favored certain expressions of opinion from speakers out of the audience, that caused the lecturer's difficulties. Apparently Brooklyn was not ready to believe in the voice from beyond the grave.

While in beginning he was careful to say that the facts he was about to present were not intended as an argument for his hearers' belief in spiritism, Prof. Hyslop said that he had come across enough evidence to convince him that "personal consciousness survived death."

The speakers who took advantage of the rule allowing them ten minutes on the platform after the regular lecture were all outspoken in denunciation of the claims of spiritism. Moreover, they were unsuccessful, also without exception, in eliminating the personal note. Their remarks were ornamented with such phrases in criticism of the lecturer as "juggling with words," "lugs in," and "tries to tell you."

"What's a spirit, anyway?" demanded one man. "You must show us the goods."

The audience applauded, while a girl in the back row murmured:

"What do you know about that? He's got him on the run."

Prof. Hyslop's address lasted nearly an hour. In the beginning he acquainted his hearers with the conditions which govern psychical research and the necessity for the right attitude of mind. He referred to the difficulty in understanding manifestations from the spirit world and translating them so that they could be thought of in terms of the physical world. He said that reality itself was impossible to prove, and that, although each man knew he himself was conscious, he could only infer consciousness in other people by their acts.

Then he gave some account of his own investigation and the evidence he had obtained. He said at the outset that these facts were not given as proving anything in themselves, but were simply valuable as types of phenomena observed since the beginning of the world. He said that if they stood by themselves he would have no hesitation in disregarding them, since they might have been the result of error. Then he recounted his investigations over several years in which he had used Mrs. Piper, the well-known medium.

"Scientific men in this country don't pretend to understand just what is going on in these spirit manifestations," he said; "they simply say, 'Here is something we do not comprehend.' We believe pretty well in the powers of Mrs. Piper, and I think the members of the English branch of our association do, too, but they are too aristocratic to say so."

He then went on to tell of his experiments with her and the means used to prevent fraud, explaining that his first sances were arranged for by the late Dr. Hodgson and that in seventeen sittings she did not see his face, which was masked, and never heard his voice. He told of tests to which he had subjected her. Then he explained another set of phenomena called "cross references," in which corroborating facts were given at different places through mediums who could not know another medium had substantiated them.

"There are two ways of explaining these things," he said. "You can say they are either the result of telepathy on the part of the medium, or are really messages from the spirit world. To my mind there is nothing that telepathy really explains. It is simply a name for something to be explained. To be successful with these cross references through telepathy a medium would have to reach all the way around the world in an instant and grasp the mind of the one person necessary among all its people. Telepathy has respectability only because it is not considered respectable to believe in spirits."

"It is often objected that the facts which the mediums mention are trivial in their nature. But you should remember that our experience in the civil courts teaches us that when you are seeking to establish personal identity the trivial facts are the most important and characteristic."

When Prof. Hyslop had ended, Joseph F. Rinn, who presided, said the platform was open for free discussion. The first speaker was suspected of being a Socialist before he had begun to talk—and it didn't take him long to justify the suspicion. He said that spiritism was merely a toy and it served well enough to amuse ourselves with while we were forgetting our sad lot in this vale of tears. Then he asked why we might not better take up some more worthy toy, such as a study to alleviate the unfortunate condition of labor all over the world. The audience was visibly annoyed at his wandering away from the subject, and this seemed to cheer the speaker up.

"We may call ourselves Socialists, or Spiritists, or many other things in our efforts to alleviate the pain of living. What you call yourself, I don't care. What I am concerned with is, what is the use of it all?" Then he proceeded to discuss in a foreign accent such things as matter, motive, electrons, psychical phenomena, atoms and molecules, and entities, closing with a demand to be shown how science had ever proved anything more than mere physical matter as making up the body.

The next speaker was introduced as Mr. Duffy. He said that Prof. Hyslop had

played fast and loose with words and that the phenomena noticed by psychical investigators were not the kind that proved anything about the soul. When Henry Rowley arose to speak he was greeted with applause. He attacked the triviality of all spirit evidence, mentioning particularly two incidents the lecturer had used.

"If I am troubled in the next world with consciousness," he said, "and am forced to come around telling people about how Bill Brown bought the organ, or about the mortgage on the old farm, it will add a new terror to dying. We have heard a great deal about the work done by the investigators, and they should be complimented. They go about collecting evidence and interviewing impressionable ladies. And the amount of faith that scientists have exhibited is really charming. But I would ask Prof. Hyslop to tell us, of all the billions of souls which have passed over, what one has ever said one word that will prove spirits have intelligence. And if they are not intelligent, what is the use bothering anything at all about them?"

The last speaker was the Chairman. He said he had worked with Prof. Hyslop for many years and that most of the latter's material was available to him. He said that he had used it to come to a different conclusion. Then he said that he had a letter written to him by Dr. Hodgson two days before the latter's death and that he would offer a prize of \$500 to any medium who could disclose its nature or contents to him.