

PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

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Psychical research by W. F. Barrett

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W. F. BARRETT

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BY

W. F. BARRETT, F.R.S.

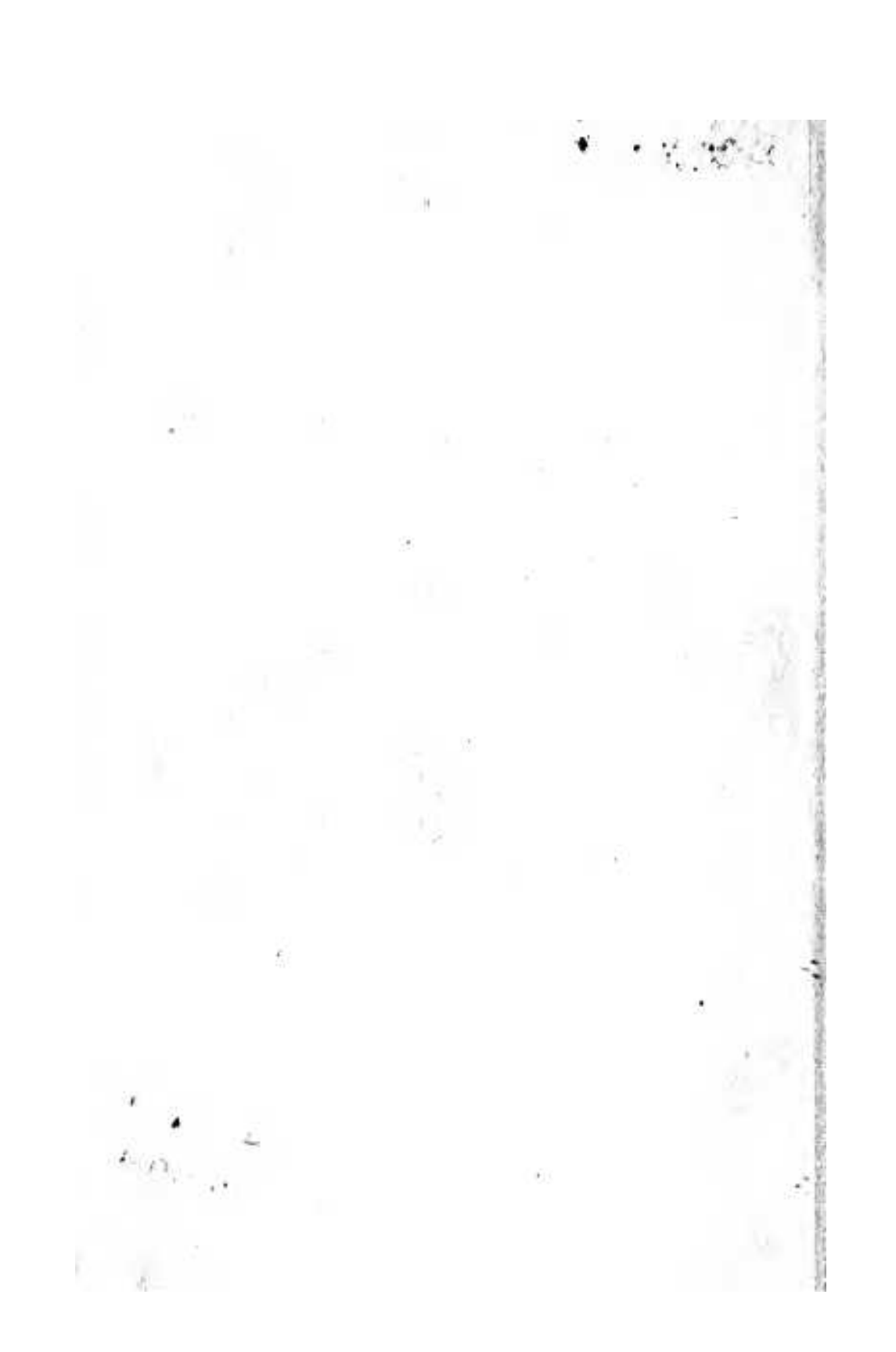
PROFESSOR OF EXPERIMENTAL PHYSICS IN THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE FOR
IRELAND, 1873-1910



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PREFACE

To compress into a small volume such as the present an outline of psychical research has proved a more formidable task than I anticipated when the Editors asked me to undertake this work. The problems are so new and entangled and the results so startling that it is very difficult to present them in a brief yet readable and convincing form. A superficial sketch of the subject might have been given, but that seemed hardly worthy of the aim which the Editors have in view. I have therefore endeavoured to give a brief survey in separate chapters of the principal lines of work and of the results so far achieved by the Society for Psychical Research. One of the most difficult tasks was to compress into a chapter or two an intelligible view of the laborious work of the Society during recent years in the investigation of automatic writing and the evidence this may afford for survival of bodily death: a critical inquiry that extends over several bulky volumes of the Society's *Proceedings*. Happily my friend, Miss Jane Barlow, D.Litt., who has made a careful study of this subject and is one of

the Committee of Reference and Publication of the S.P.R., generously came to my aid. Her literary skill is seen in the two last chapters, wherein she has helped me to outline the salient features of this evidence and the general conclusions to which we have been led. I have also to thank Miss Barlow for much other kind assistance in the preparation of this volume. Mrs. H. Sidgwick, D.Litt., Hon. Secretary and a former President of the S.P.R., has also very kindly read the proof sheets and made some valuable suggestions which I have adopted. It must, however, be understood that neither Mrs. Sidgwick nor the Council of the Society for Psychological Research are in any way responsible for the conclusions stated and the opinions expressed in the following pages.

W. F. BARRETT.

*Kingstown, Co. Dublin,
August 1911*

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CHAPTER I

SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

THE phenomena we are about to discuss in the present volume are characterized by many sceptics as a "recrudescence of superstition" (see *Nature*, vol. 51, p. 122), and on the other hand by many believers as "evidence of the supernatural." The average busy man, who has no time for critical inquiry, probably thinks that there is a good deal of truth in both these statements, and therefore prefers to give the whole subject a wide berth. But the scornful disdain of the *savant* and the credulous belief of the ignorant are now giving way to a more rational attitude of mind. A widespread desire exists to know something about that debatable borderland between the territory already conquered by science and the dark realms of ignorance and superstition; and to learn what trustworthy evidence exists on behalf of a large class of obscure psychical phenomena, the importance of which it is impossible to exaggerate if the