

CHAPTER I

WHAT CLAIRVOYANCE IS

CLAIRVOYANCE means literally nothing more than “clear-seeing,” and it is a word which has been sorely misused, and even degraded so far as to be employed to describe the trickery of a mountebank in a variety show. Even in its more restricted sense it covers a wide range of phenomena, differing so greatly in character that it is not easy to give a definition of the word which shall be at once succinct and accurate. It has been called “spiritual vision,” but no rendering could well be more misleading than that, for in the vast majority of cases there is no faculty connected with it which has the slightest claim to be honoured by so lofty a name.

For the purpose of this treatise we may, perhaps, define it as the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight. It will be as well to premise that it is very frequently (though by no means always)

accompanied by what is called clairaudience, or the power to hear what would be inaudible to the ordinary physical ear; and we will for the nonce take our title as covering this faculty also, in order to avoid the clumsiness of perpetually using two long words where one will suffice.

Let me make two points clear before I begin. First, I am not writing for those who do not believe that there is such a thing as clairvoyance, nor am I seeking to convince those who are in doubt about the matter. In so small a work as this I have no space for that; such people must study the many books containing lists of cases, or make experiments for themselves along mesmeric lines. I am addressing myself to the better-instructed class who know that clairvoyance exists, and are sufficiently interested in the subject to be glad of information as to its methods and possibilities; and I would assure them that what I write is the result of much careful study and experiment, and that though some of the powers which I shall have to describe may seem new and wonderful to them, I mention no single one of which I have not myself seen examples.

Secondly, though I shall endeavour to avoid technicalities as far as possible, yet as I am

WHAT CLAIRVOYANCE IS

3

writing in the main for students of Theosophy, I shall feel myself at liberty sometimes to use, for brevity's sake and without detailed explanation, the ordinary Theosophical terms with which I may safely assume them to be familiar.

Should this little book fall into the hands of any to whom the occasional use of such terms constitutes a difficulty, I can only apologize to them and refer them for these preliminary explanations to any elementary Theosophical work, such as Mrs. Besant's *Ancient Wisdom* or *Man and His Bodies*. The truth is that the whole Theosophical system hangs together so closely, and its various parts are so interdependent, that to give a full explanation of every term used would necessitate an exhaustive treatise on Theosophy as a preface even to this short account of clairvoyance.

Before a detailed explanation of clairvoyance can usefully be attempted, however, it will be necessary for us to devote a little time to some preliminary considerations, in order that we may have clearly in mind a few broad facts as to the different planes on which clairvoyant vision may be exercised, and the conditions which render its exercise possible.

We are constantly assured in Theosophical literature that all these higher faculties are

presently to be the heritage of mankind in general—that the capacity of clairvoyance, for example, lies latent in every one, and that those in whom it already manifests itself are simply in that one particular a little in advance of the rest of us. Now this statement is a true one, and yet it seems quite vague and unreal to the majority of people, simply because they regard such a faculty as something absolutely different from anything they have yet experienced, and feel fairly confident that they themselves, at any rate, are not within measurable distance of its development.

It may help to dispel this sense of unreality if we try to understand that clairvoyance, like so many other things in nature, is mainly a question of vibrations, and is in fact nothing but an extension of powers which we are all using every day of our lives. We are living all the while surrounded by a vast sea of mingled air and ether, the latter interpenetrating the former, as it does all physical matter; and it is chiefly by means of vibrations in that vast sea of matter that impressions reach us from the outside. This much we all know, but it may perhaps never have occurred to many of us that the number of these vibrations to which we are capable of responding is in reality quite infinitesimal.

WHAT CLAIRVOYANCE IS

5

Up among the exceedingly rapid vibrations which affect the ether there is a certain small section—a *very* small section—to which the retina of the human eye is capable of responding, and these particular vibrations produce in us the sensation which we call light. That is to say, we are capable of seeing only those objects from which light of that particular kind can either issue or be reflected.

In exactly the same way the tympanum of the human ear is capable of responding to a certain very small range of comparatively slow vibrations—slow enough to affect the air which surrounds us; and so the only sounds which we can hear are those made by objects which are able to vibrate at some rate within that particular range.

In both cases it is a matter perfectly well known to science that there are large numbers of vibrations both above and below these two sections, and that consequently there is much light that we cannot see, and there are many sounds to which our ears are deaf. In the case of light the action of these higher and lower vibrations is easily perceptible in the effects produced by the actinic rays at one end of the spectrum and the heat rays at the other.

As a matter of fact there exist vibrations of every conceivable degree of rapidity, filling the whole vast space intervening between the slow sound waves and the swift light waves; nor is even that all, for there are undoubtedly vibrations slower than those of sound, and a whole infinity of them which are swifter than those known to us as light. So we begin to understand that the vibrations by which we see and hear are only like two tiny groups of a few strings selected from an enormous harp of practically infinite extent, and when we think how much we have been able to learn and infer from the use of those minute fragments, we see vaguely what possibilities might lie before us if we were enabled to utilize the vast and wonderful whole.

Another fact which needs to be considered in this connection is that different human beings vary considerably, though within relatively narrow limits, in their capacity of response even to the very few vibrations which are within reach of our physical senses. I am not referring to the keenness of sight or of hearing that enables one man to see a fainter object or hear a slighter sound than another; it is not in the least a question of strength of vision, but of extent of susceptibility.

WHAT CLAIRVOYANCE IS

7

For example, if anyone will take a good bisulphide of carbon prism, and by its means throw a clear spectrum on a sheet of white paper, and then get a number of people to mark upon the paper the extreme limits of the spectrum as it appears to them, he is fairly certain to find that their powers of vision differ appreciably. Some will see the violet extending much farther than the majority do; others will perhaps see rather less violet than most, while gaining a corresponding extension of vision at the red end. Some few there will perhaps be who can see farther than ordinary at both ends, and these will almost certainly be what we call sensitive people—susceptible in fact to a greater range of vibrations than are most men of the present day.

In hearing, the same difference can be tested by taking some sound which is just not too high to be audible—on the very verge of audibility as it were—and discovering how many among a given number of people are able to hear it. The squeak of a bat is a familiar instance of such a sound, and experiment will show that on a summer evening, when the whole air is full of the shrill, needle-like cries of these little animals, quite a large number of men will be absolutely

unconscious of them, and unable to hear anything at all.

Now these examples clearly show that there is no hard-and-fast limit to man's power of response to either etheric or aerial vibrations, but that some among us already have that power to a wider extent than others; and it will even be found that the same man's capacity varies on different occasions. It is therefore not difficult for us to imagine that it might be possible for a man to develop this power, and thus in time to learn to see much that is invisible to his fellow-men, and hear much that is inaudible to them, since we know perfectly well that enormous numbers of these additional vibrations do exist, and are simply, as it were, awaiting recognition.

The experiments with the Röntgen rays give us an example of the startling results which are produced when even a very few of these additional vibrations are brought within human ken, and the transparency to these rays of many substances hitherto considered opaque at once shows us one way at least in which we may explain such elementary clairvoyance as is involved in reading a letter inside a closed box, or describing those present in an adjoining apartment. To learn

WHAT CLAIRVOYANCE IS

9

to see by means of the Röntgen rays in addition to those ordinarily employed would be quite sufficient to enable anyone to perform a feat of magic of this order.

So far we have thought only of an extension of the purely physical senses of man; and when we remember that a man's etheric body is in reality merely the finer part of his physical frame, and that therefore all his sense-organs contain a large amount of etheric matter of various degrees of density, the capacities of which are still practically latent in most of us, we shall see that even if we confine ourselves to this line of development alone there are enormous possibilities of all kinds already opening out before us.

But besides and beyond all this we know that man possesses an astral and a mental body, each of which can in process of time be aroused into activity, and will respond in turn to the vibrations of the matter of its own plane, thus opening up before the Ego, as he learns to function through these vehicles, two entirely new and far wider worlds of knowledge and power. Now these new worlds, though they are all around us and freely interpenetrate one another, are not to be thought of as distinct and entirely unconnected in substance, but rather as melting

the one into the other, the lowest astral forming a direct series with the highest physical, just as the lowest mental in its turn forms a direct series with the highest astral. We are not called upon in thinking of them to imagine some new and strange kind of matter, but simply to think of the ordinary physical kind as subdivided so very much more finely and vibrating so very much more rapidly as to introduce us to what are practically entirely new conditions and qualities.

It is not then difficult for us to grasp the possibility of a steady and progressive extension of our senses, so that both by sight and by hearing we may be able to appreciate vibrations far higher and far lower than those which are ordinarily recognised. A large section of these additional vibrations will still belong to the physical plane, and will merely enable us to obtain impressions from the etheric part of that plane, which is at present as a closed book to us. Such impressions will still be received through the retina of the eye; of course they will affect its etheric rather than its solid matter, but we may nevertheless regard them as still appealing only to an organ specialized to receive them, and not to the whole surface of the etheric body.