



The Strange Case of a New "Svengali"

Reality of Thought Transference Apparently Proved by a Scientific Investigation of Mercedes, Who Wills His Partner to Play the Music in His Own Brain



Miss Stanton, Sitting Blindfolded at the Piano, Plays the Musical Piece Whose Title Unseen by Her Has Been Communicated to Mercedes.

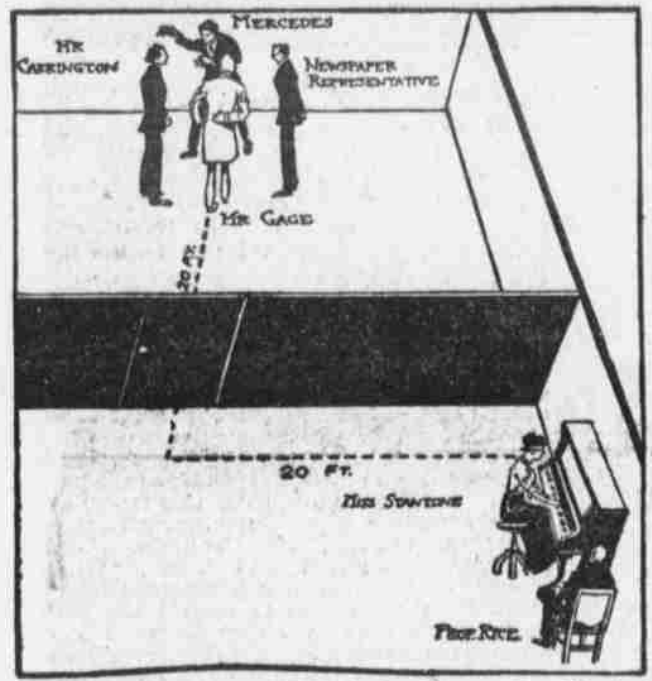


Diagram of a Test in Which the Name of a Musical Selection Was Given to Mercedes and Played by Miss Stanton in Another Room with a Closed Door. Three of the Investigators Remained with Mercedes While Professor Rice Went Into the Other Room to Hear the Selection She Played.

"TRILBY," the most widely read novel of a generation, owed its popularity largely to its presentation of the mystery of thought-transference. The beautiful and ill-fated Trilby, it will be recalled, had a perfectly formed mouth and vocal cords but absolutely no musical sense that would enable her to use them in singing. The villainous Svengali, a gifted musician, would hypnotize her and then make her sing with perfect art. The sense of musical tone passed from his brain to hers by some process that can only be called thought-transference.

The possibility of such a supernormal proceeding excited much discussion in the scientific world when the novel was published and has done so ever since. Many supposed cases of thought-transference or telepathy have been accumulated by students of psychic research, but no definite conclusion has been reached.

A remarkable exhibition that may be compared with the case of Trilby and Svengali is given by Joseph Mercedes and Miss Nellie Stanton, who have been appearing at Keith's Palace Theatre in New York. In this case there is no hypnotism, but the music is said to pass from the brain of Mercedes to that of his companion.

"No Explanation Except Thought Transference,"

By Professor DAVID EDGAR RICE, Ph.D.
The writer was one of a small party that attended a recent performance by Joseph Mercedes and Miss Stanton at Keith's Palace Theatre with the avowed purpose of looking for some form of deception. The selections suggested by members of this party were given as promptly and as successfully as any others called for throughout the performance. While fully realizing the possibilities of code communication and the high degree of success with which it is frequently used in performances of similar character, the writer is fully convinced that it could not possibly afford an adequate explanation in this instance. Equally unsatisfactory and untenable is the assumption that there are in the audience a number of confederates who are called upon to call for selections in a predetermined sequence. More than this, our party was not restricted to the observations made in the public performance. In order to afford an opportunity for a more searching test than was possible in the theatre, Mer-

cedes then walks through the theatre and asks anybody to whisper the name of a piece of music he wishes played. The person asking for the music then calls aloud to the pianist: "Please play my selection." She does so. Sometimes she makes a mistake, but in the great majority of cases she plays the right piece the first time, and always she does so after two or three attempts. She has played 5,000 different pieces of music.

The success of this couple has astonished and mystified all who have seen them. In the four years they have been giving their exhibition no one has been able to detect any trickery. Mercedes can send his thought messages to Miss Stanton from any distance. The Mayor of Syracuse asked for "The Star Spangled Banner" while Mercedes was in his office and Miss Stanton in the office of the Mayor of Utica, fifty miles away, and she immediately played it.

In order to throw light on the mystery, this newspaper arranged for a private test of Mercedes and Miss Stanton by a body of experts in psychology and physical research. The Hon. Lyman J. Gage, formerly Secretary of the United States Treasury, who is greatly interested in psychical research, was one of those present. The others were Professor David Edgar Rice, Ph. D., (Columbia) the well-known teacher of psychology, Mr. Hereward Carrington, the psychic research investigator and a representative of this newspaper. Mr. Carrington expressed his opinion that this was a genuine case of thought transference and will devote further study to it. Professor Rice's interesting report is printed herewith.

Previously Dr. James H. Hyslop, secretary and founder of the Society for Psychical Research, had examined the pair at the request of Mr. Gage. Dr. Hyslop said:

"I gave Mercedes the names of a number of classical pieces of music I wished played, and Miss Stanton, whose back was turned to us and who was blindfolded, played them. She was equally successful when I went out of the room with Mercedes. She made some mistakes, but that is no evidence of fraud. I could detect no trickery. I must say, however, that I should need to watch them very closely for probably two months before I could form an opinion whether there was any element of the supernormal in this case."

Mercedes and his assistant very readily agreed to give a private demonstration in a place selected by this party.

While the conditions of this test were not as rigorous as might be required for "scientific certainty," the members of the party were all convinced that opportunities for fraud or deception were completely excluded.

Miss Stanton was seated blindfolded at the piano in one corner of a large dining hall, while Mercedes remained surrounded by the members of the party in the diagonally opposite corner at a distance of thirty or forty feet. In order to avoid the possibility of the performer overhearing the whispers of the party, the names of the selections desired were written on pieces of paper and quietly passed to Mercedes. The individual who made the selection would then approach the piano and request that his piece be played, while the rest of the party remained with Mercedes.

The beginning of the test was marked by a number of failures, much to the chagrin of Mercedes. In the opinion of the writer, however, these initial failures afforded the strongest proof of the

"This Is Genuine Thought Transference,"

By the Hon. LYMAN J. GAGE, ex-Secretary of the U. S. Treasury (In an interview.)

I AM entirely satisfied that this is a genuine case of thought-transference. I have been convinced by other cases that thoughts are transmitted from mind to mind by other than the known physical channels of communication. No one has been able to detect any evidence of trickery which no one can explain rather than by a psychical process, which has been shown on good evidence to be a reality. Indeed, it requires more credulity to believe in trickery than in the psychical phenomenon.

The fact that Miss Stanton sometimes makes mistakes is in my opinion no indication of a trick, but rather evidence that this is an unquestionable case of thought-transference. In investigations of this subject we have found that while thoughts are undoubtedly conveyed in this manner they are not conveyed with the definiteness of spoken and written messages.



Photograph of the "Anger Waves" by Dr. Baraduc, the Psychic Research Expert, of Paris. It is suggested that the Thought Waves Are Another Manifestation of This Phenomenon.



Mercedes Conveying a New Piece of Music Unfamiliar to Both by Thought Transference.

absence of deception, and the strongest argument in favor of the telepathic character of the communication between the performers. The selections first called for were well known to Mercedes and had, in fact, been successfully reproduced in the preceding public performance. If a pre-arranged code had been in use these selections would have been communicated as easily under the conditions of the test as at any other time.

If, on the other hand, we have to do here with a genuine case of thought transference, then it seems quite easy to explain these initial failures. For the successful practice of thought transference it is quite important that both agent and percipient, the sender and receiver, be in a comparatively tranquil state of mind, this necessity being particularly urgent in the case of the percipient. Now, in this instance, conditions were by no means favorable to this tranquility of mind. After the public performance more than half an hour had been spent scouring the vicinity of Broadway and Forty-second street for a quiet and convenient place in which to hold the tests.

As soon as a suitable place was found the tests were begun promptly—much too soon to allow the percipient to achieve the composure necessary for successful thought transference. After the first few failures, however, conditions evidently became more favorable, for the selections called for were reproduced with approximately the same degree of success as in the public performance.

Several incidents in connection with Copyright, 1914, by the Star Company. Great Britain Rights Reserved.

this test are apparently of special interest. The "Miserere" from "Il Trovatore" was the first selection called for, but was not reproduced. After an interval of perhaps ten minutes it was requested again, but again without success. Somewhat later Mercedes, evidently unwilling to accept failure on this selection, asked Miss Stanton to play whatever came to her mind, without attempting to name it in advance. At the same time he himself gave indications of a special effort of concentration. Within a minute the pianist began to play the opening bars of the "Miserere." The selection was obviously well known to both performers, and if a system of signals were in use, it hardly seems probable that the performers would have allowed two failures to be scored against them in the early part of the test on a selection which later offered no special difficulty.

It appeared from these tests that different members of the party had varying degrees of success in securing responses from Miss Stanton, and also that if two individuals united in requesting the same selection, a more ready response was given. These facts would both seem to count against the use of a code of signals and in favor of the telepathic explanation. They also indicate that the function of the percipient is relatively more important than that of the agent, and that she was influenced to some extent by the mental suggestions of others than Mercedes.

The following incident is given as an especially interesting fact, although the reader will be left to supply his own explanation. It seems to serve equally

well as an argument for pure coincidence, spontaneous mental suggestion, or willed thought-transference. One member of the party had written "Marching Through Georgia" as the selection next to be played. He handed this to Mercedes and then approached the piano to inform the pianist of his desire. The response was not immediate, and in the meantime another investigator, not knowing what had been called for, wrote a request for the same selection and passed it to Mercedes. He also asked to approach the piano, and immediately the selection was played. Was it a mere coincidence that one individual should thus call for the very selection that another was trying at the time to get, or was it a case of unconscious suggestion? Again, did the third mind help to reinforce the thought of the other two, and thus secure a more ready response from the percipient?

At the final test of this private demonstration Mercedes was asked to step from the room with the members of the party and the communicating door was closed. A selection was then decided upon and two individuals went in to the piano, while the others remained with Mercedes. The first two of these trials were unsuccessful, but the third selection called for was played without a moment's hesitation.

So much for the facts. What of their interpretation? Adopting first the attitude of the skeptic, it must be admitted that in performances involving hypnotism, spiritualistic seances, thought transference and other psychic phenomena there has been much more of fraud and deception than of honesty and sincerity. This is especially true where they are engaged in with a view to financial advantage. Any one, therefore, who enters this field as a "professional," no matter how honest his purpose or how real his power may be, is pretty certain to find that in his case there is a reversal of the fundamental principle of law that a man is presumed to be innocent until he is proved guilty. In judging a performance of this char-

acter, therefore, the first requisite is to preclude, as far as possible, the likelihood of deception. While the writer does not set himself up to be an expert investigator of psychic phenomena, it is a comparatively easy matter for anyone to familiarize himself with the possible sources of error in demonstrations of this sort. After a careful observation of Mercedes and his performance, it is only fair to him and his assistant to assert that not only in their performance but in private conversation as well they create in one a strong impression of absolute honesty and sincerity.

On the positive side, the possibility of thought transference under certain conditions, by certain individuals, must be regarded as fully established. Not only have hundreds of well authenticated cases of spontaneous communication been recorded, but it has been demonstrated by experiment after experiment carefully made by competent persons that it is possible to transfer sensations, information and ideas from one mind to another without aid of any of the ordinary means of communication.

It must be admitted that as yet no satisfactory explanation is offered as to how this is done, but this does not invalidate the fact itself, any more than the fact of gravitation is invalidated by the failure of physicists to show the mode of its action. The proof of the existence of telepathy rests mainly on the hundreds of cases that have been gathered and investigated by the Society for Psychical Research within the past thirty years. The reader who is interested must be referred to the published reports of the proceedings of this society, or to the publications of the prominent scientists who have been active in its work, as for example: "The Survival of Man," by Sir Oliver Lodge; "Human Personality," by F. W. H. Myers; "Apparitions and Thought Transference," by Frank Podmore; and "Phantasms of the Living," by Edmund Gurney. An hour's reading of any one of these books will convince the skeptic not only that the performance of Mercedes, marvelous as it may seem, is well within the realm of possibility, but also that, as compared with the really wonderful things in the field of psychic phenomena, he has scarcely done more than scratch the surface.

"As Svengali willed Trilby to sing songs she did not know, so Mercedes makes Miss Stanton play pieces of music by merely thinking over the first few bars in silence."