

Raymond Lodge

In 1916, the physicist Oliver Lodge published *Raymond or Life and Death*, a best-selling account of messages transmitted through a medium that Lodge believed came from his son Raymond, a recent casualty of World War I. The narrative appealed to many readers who had lost loved ones during the war, although its apparently fanciful descriptions of the afterlife state made it a subject of controversy.

Background

The physicist [Oliver Joseph Lodge](#) (1851-1940) was known for his work in electricity, thermo-electricity, and thermal-conductivity. He joined the Society for Psychical Research shortly after it was founded in 1882, and seven years later was closely involved in an investigation of the American medium [Leonora Piper](#). Over the course of eighty-three sittings he became convinced that Piper's ability was genuinely paranormal, although not necessarily indicative of survival of death. Over the next decade he gradually came to accept the survival hypothesis, his views being made public in a 1909 book, *The Survival of Man*.

Raymond Lodge, attached to the South Lancashire Regiment, was killed near Ypres on 14 September, 1915, having been struck by a shell fragment in the attack on Hooge Hill.

The 'Faunus' Message

On 8 August, 1915, cryptic statements addressed to Lodge appeared in the automatic writings of Leonora Piper. One, which appeared to have originated with the surviving spirit of [Frederic Myers](#) and to have been relayed by [Richard Hodgson](#) (both leading SPR investigators until their decease), read:

Now Lodge, while we are not here as of old, i.e., not quite, we are here enough to take and give messages. Myers says you take the part of the poet, and he will act as Faunus.

A classics scholar referred Lodge to a passage in the writing of the Roman poet Horace, which describes Horace being saved from a falling tree by the intervention of the poet Faunus.

A statement written some days earlier read:

Yes. For the moment, Lodge, have faith and wisdom in all that is highest and best. Have you all not been profoundly guided and cared for? Can you answer, "No"? It is by your faith that all is well and has been.¹

This arrived by separate post on the same day as the 'Faunus' message.

Knowing that a fallen or falling tree is a frequent symbol for death (because of a misinterpretation of Eccl. xi. 3 in the Old Testament), Lodge wondered if his old

friend Myers wanted to prepare him for a death in the family, or perhaps some financial disaster. Having received the telegram informing him of Raymond's death, he then interpreted the message to mean that Myers wanted to lighten the blow, by letting him know that his son still lived.

Evidential Messages

Lodge and his wife subsequently held sittings with the medium Alfred Vout Peters and [Gladys Leonard](#), a London-based trance-voice medium similar to Piper. In both cases the couple believed themselves to be in communication with Raymond's surviving spirit. In an apparent effort to provide evidence of this, 'Raymond' told them of a regimental group photograph in which he had appeared, taken twenty-one days before his death. This was first mentioned in a sitting his mother held with Peters, and again when his father sat with Leonard. 'Raymond' told them the photograph would show him holding a walking stick, and someone behind him leaning on his shoulder. The Lodges were not aware of this photograph, and it was not among his effects. However two months later the mother of one of Raymond's fellow officers sent them just such a photograph, in which Raymond was seen sitting on the ground with a walking stick over his legs and the officer behind him was resting his arm on his shoulder.

Lodge was struck by the detail and accuracy of this veridical statement, and could see no plausible explanation for it in terms of fraud on the part of mediums and/or others. The level of detail argued against coincidence. Nor could it reasonably be explained in terms of telepathy between sitter and medium - an explanation favored by many psychical researchers of the time - since even if the Lodges had guessed at the existence of the photograph they could not have known about the details the mediums described. Lodge was also impressed by the fact of the same message being transmitted through two different mediums.²

Leonard also sometimes facilitated communications by table tilting, in which a table touched by medium and sitters makes movements that can be counted to indicate letters of the alphabet. In one such sitting on September 28 'Raymond' identified himself by his nickname 'Pat'. As a further test, Lodge asked him to name one of his five brothers. The table spelled out N-O-R-M-A- before Lodge interrupted, suggesting that he was confused, and told him to begin again. The name N-O-E-L was then spelled out, which was one of Raymond's brothers. Discussing this with his other sons Lodge learned for the first time that 'Norman' was a jocular nickname that Raymond used when the boys played hockey together, shouting 'Now then, Norman' or other words of encouragement to any of his older brothers whom he wished to stimulate.³

Lodge considered this to count against telepathy between the living, since neither he nor his wife had known of Raymond's use of the name 'Norman'. He also saw it as an indication that Raymond, who had discussed psychical research with him when he was alive, was attempting to provide veridical information by giving a name unknown to his parents.

On 21 December, Raymond's older brother Alec sat with Leonard and carried out a test of his own. Alec asked 'Raymond' about his favorite music. He then heard Feda,

Leonard's 'spirit control', appearing to question Raymond and then whisper 'An orange lady?' Apparently confused, Feda said: 'He says something about an orange lady.' Alec considered this to be evidential, as 'My Orange Girl' was a phonograph record Raymond had bought, the last before he died. 'Raymond' also mentioned 'Irish Eyes,' another of Raymond's favorites. An attempt at a third song produced only the letters 'M' and 'A.' At a later sitting 'Raymond' was asked what was meant by the letters M and A, and was then able to clearly give the name 'Maggie Magee,' a song unknown to anyone in the family except his sister Norah, who had not been present at the sitting (another possible indication against telepathy).[4](#)

Although by the time Lodge sat with Leonard on 3 March he was convinced that she was not a charlatan, he still felt a need to test her. On that occasion he asked 'Raymond' if he knew about 'Mr. Jackson'. Feda struggled to understand the response, but eventually communicated: 'Fine bird ... put him on a pedestal.' Lodge was certain Leonard could not know that Mr. Jackson was the name of his wife's pet peacock, nor that the bird had died a week earlier and was in the process of being stuffed and mounted on a wooden pedestal. [5](#)

Lodge concluded:

The number of more or less convincing proofs which we have obtained is by this time very great. Some of them appeal more to one person, some to another; but taking them all together every possible ground of suspicion or doubt seems to the family to be now removed.[6](#)

Non-Evidential Messages

Unusually for mediumistic communicators, 'Raymond' had a lot to say about the conditions he found himself in. He explained he could find no word to describe them, except that it was solid and wonderfully real: he lived in a house built of bricks, and there were trees and flowers growing on solid ground. At first he assumed that it was all created by thought, but he had come to realize that it is much more than that, though he didn't understand it. He said his body was similar to the one he had before, although the internal organs did not seem constituted on the same lines as his old physical body. He added that he had eyes and ears, even eyelashes, and that he had a new tooth in place of the one he had lost while alive on earth. Also, he had never seen anyone bleed. He knew a man who had lost his arm in his earthly life, but had seen it gradually grow back.

'Raymond' mentioned that at first there was a desire for food, but this passed after time. Even cigars and whisky sodas were available to those who desired them. He further said he had visited a library where could be found books that would eventually be 'impressed' on the brain of some person on earth and published.

'Raymond' said he was confused at first, and could not get his bearings, but he adapted quickly. He later said he was helping other souls who were passing over in the war, and that some, unaware of having died, had kept on fighting. It was his job to explain to them that they had left the physical body behind and that they were now in a different reality.

Lodge wrote that much of this seemed absurd and that he hesitated to include it in his book, but felt he should not withhold anything merely on the grounds that it seemed nonsensical.

Praise and Criticism

A short review of *Raymond* that appeared in the SPR Journal of January 1917 concluded:

Opinions will differ widely as to the degree of acceptance which is to be accorded to the revelations of another sphere of life here set forth. Obdurate sceptics and perhaps rigidly orthodox believers will have none of it ... the least that can be said is that an exposition so comprehensive, so lucid and so candid will be of great assistance to all who devote serious thought to the subject.

A fuller review by [Eleanor Sidgwick](#) appeared in the SPR Proceedings of 1917. She noted that the book had gone through seven editions, and credited its success to Lodge's 'gift of simple, popular exposition' at a time when so many were mourning the loss of loved ones. She wrote:

And there is no doubt that the stick this book adds to the bundle is a solid and valuable contribution. To anyone who may feel disappointed that the mass of evidence here presented is not greater, or more overwhelming, I may point out that good evidence of survival and communication is more difficult to devise—quite apart from the difficulties there clearly are in producing it—than persons new to the subject are apt to think.

Sidgwick was especially impressed with the group photograph case, since it seemingly went beyond the normal telepathy or unconscious mind-reading theories to which she had subscribed. Nevertheless, Sidgwick opined that much of the communication could have come by such means, and, after noting Lodge's own warnings about various aspects of mediumship, concluded her review by suggesting that the risks of the reader encountering devious professional mediums may very well outweigh the comfort to be derived from genuine mediums.⁷

In a 1917 book, *Reflections on 'Raymond': An Appreciation and Analysis*, Walter Cook attacked the book, speculating at length on methods by which Lodge might have been duped. He argued that Mrs Kennedy, the person who introduced Lady Lodge to Leonard, might have provided the medium with information about the Lodge family. Cook also attempted to discount the group photograph by pointing out that it was not uncommon for soldiers to be photographed in their groups, nor for officers to possess walking sticks, but chose to overlook the evidential detail of the officer behind Raymond leaning on his shoulder. Cook further speculated that the photo had made its way to England before the Lodges were given a copy of it, and that they might have seen another copy of it, or been told about it. He noted that Mrs. Kennedy and a Mr JA Hill, who confirmed the group photograph story, were both members of the SPR and 'ardent inquirers in spiritualistic matters,' implying that their testimonies should not be taken seriously.⁸

Also in 1917, Charles Arthur Mercier, a British psychiatrist, published an attack titled *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, in which he questioned Lodge's qualifications for investigating mediums, arguing that this is best left to the professional conjurer.⁹ Mercier critically examined a case in Lodge's earlier 1909 book, but made little attempt to explain the cases described in Raymond.

James Hyslop wrote caustic reviews of both of those texts.¹⁰

Other critics suggested that Lodge's judgement was biased by a 'will to believe' that his son had survived death in battle, although this tragic event would not account for Lodge's declaration of his belief in survival in his 1909 book, which preceded it by six years.

In a review in the *New York Times* Van Buren Thorne stated that there was nothing to indicate that Oliver Lodge might not have been deceived as regards his claim that mediums gave evidential communications at a time when they were unaware of his identity or the identities of his family members. However, Thorne conceded that the mediums could have not seen the group photograph at any time before it was described to Lodge.¹¹

The Book *Raymond or Life and Death*

The 404-page book is divided into three parts. Part One gives biographical information about Raymond Lodge and includes extracts from letters received from him prior to his death. Part Two covers communications from 'Raymond' and others through mediums. Part Three offers a philosophical treatise on life and death.

A sequel, *Raymond Revised*, was published in 1922, summarizing the key evidence in the 1916 book and adding new evidence and commentary.

Michael Tymn

Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Lodge (1916), 90-91.

- [2.](#) Lodge (1916), 105-16 & *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (1916), vol. 29, 132-49.
- [3.](#) Lodge (1916), 139-40.
- [4.](#) Lodge (1916), 208-13.
- [5.](#) Lodge (1916), 256-57, 278.
- [6.](#) Lodge (1916), 279.
- [7.](#) Sidgwick (1917), 404-9.
- [8.](#) Cook (1917), 88.
- [9.](#) Mercier (1917), 13.
- [10.](#) Hyslop (1909a).
- [11.](#) Thorne (1917).

Attachments

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