

## Notes & Comment

### *Case Study of a Quezon City Poltergeist*

In Warren's *Dictionary of Psychology* (1934), a poltergeist is defined thus: "a reputed roistering spirit to whom is attributed the commission of miscellaneous petty mischief in the household (p. 205)." The phenomenon seems to have been known from very ancient times. The English Jesuit, Herbert Thurston, compiled a survey of such happenings in his book, *Ghosts and Poltergeists* (1954). He gives the earliest recorded instance as occurring in the year 350 A.D. to the deacon, Helpidius, physician to King Theodoric, the son of Clovis, who complained of a "fiend who assailed him, and that in particular he was frequently bombarded by showers of stones within his own house (p. 330)." Recent psychological literature, including the recent convention of the American Parapsychological Society (1966), has reported mysterious outcroppings of the poltergeist phenomenon (e.g. Hastings, 1966; Chicago Sun-Times, Oct. 11, 1966; Chicago American, Oct. 12, 1966; Chicago Daily News, Oct. 13, 1966).

Most such accounts anthropomorphize the poltergeist and speak of it as a "he." He is conceived as a playful ghost (*polter*, prankster; *geist*, spirit), who seems capable of understanding human conversation and is therefore an intelligent being. From among the personages of Philippine animistic mythology, the *dwende* seems to fit best into the description, being small, playful, and harmless. While the more imaginative accounts of such *dwende* or poltergeists answer to the existence of such an anthropomorphic being who is sometimes "seen" by individuals, the better documented accounts fail to show that such a being has actually and unmistakably been seen. Accordingly the poltergeist remains a postulate, a "something" to be reasoned to from external phenomena but not directly experienced.

The validity of the poltergeist postulate thus will depend upon factual verification of external events that have now come to be linked with poltergeists. Until such events can be reproduced at will in the

psychological laboratory, one has to wait for the events to occur and to gather as much objective data as possible. The present account is an attempt at such observation of events that occurred on March 29-30, 1966, in Quezon City, in the Cubao area.

### **The House and Its People**

The house where these events occurred is a two-story house with a basement in the rear at a slightly lower level than the rest of the first floor. The back door opens from the basement to a yard the edge of which drops abruptly to a large creek. The creek at this point flows rather swiftly and its bed is composed of pebbles, rocks and scoured adobe stone. On the other side of the creek are shanties occupied by squatters. All day and all night there is the sound of falling water.

The occupants of the house were a normal, well-educated family, the master being an accountant by training, the wife a school teacher. The oldest daughter had married and left. Two sons remained, one studying in high school and the other in grade school. All the members of the family had received high honors in school and were clearly in the top range of intelligence.

The main human characters of this account were the maids. The youngest was Virginia, a pretty girl of fifteen. Aling was her aunt, a widow of thirty-five. A third maid, Ester, about twenty, did not enter much into the story except later as an eye-witness.

The following narration is the composite account of eighteen eye-witnesses in substantial agreement on the main events. Not one fact has been knowingly added to their explicit testimony.

### **The First Day**

The main "happening" began about noon, Tuesday, March 29. The two maids, Aling and Virginia, with a third maid, Ester, were alone in the house when Ester heard footsteps upstairs as of someone angrily stomping around the room and hitting the floor with a cane. Seeing no one, they proceeded to serve lunch to the son of the house who had returned from school, and to take lunch themselves. After lunch, Aling went to the basement to do her ironing when she felt sand thrown at her apparently through a window. She was certain there was no wind at the time and thought some children were playing pranks on her. Then small stones began to fall all over the basement and to hit her but without causing pain. As she ran into her own room, a round stone about eight inches in diameter crashed down with great force beside her feet.

Everyone ran outside. Anyone coming inside the house was met by a rain of stones. When the son of the house came back from his afternoon classes he saw the people gathered behind the house. He

went in together with them and saw pieces of wood, the *kalso* for wedging the window, thrown at the maids. One of the neighbors then telephoned the police. The son accompanied by a certain carpenter, went upstairs. The carpenter climbed to the roof of the house but saw nothing. Two policemen came in a police car, went through the house looking for the stone-thrower, but likewise saw nothing.

Meanwhile the master of the house had been summoned from his office by a neighbor who told him about the mysterious stoning. Over the phone he asked if it was by hoodlums, juvenile delinquents from across the creek, the squatter area, but he was told that it was more mysterious than that and that the stoning was coming from inside the house. When he arrived home he found the police car parked in front of the gate, the front of the house all closed, and a crowd gathered behind. He entered the house through the basement door and noticed the basement strewn about with seven big stones and many broken pieces of adobe-like stones such as those found in the creek bed behind the house. The scene was as if a truck had unloaded a truckload of gravel and children had then played in it. Some of the stones were still covered with *lumot* (moss), such as those found on the river bank.

The policemen, unable to find the stone-throwers, left. The master then asked someone to go to the church nearby to call a priest and sent the son to call the mother, who was teaching school. While he was interviewing the maids on the steps leading to the basement, machine bolts started flying, one of these swishing by Aling's skirt and falling at her feet. "*Nan diyang na naman sila,*" they shouted. As Aling entered her room to take something from the medicine cabinet, the master at the doorway saw a plastic basin fly at her, as if thrown, and strike her in the back. Virginia also shouted, "*Uy,*" and they saw her shoulder gripping wet where a cup of water had been poured on her.

The master told Virginia to change into dry clothes. Afraid to go into her room alone, she asked two of the boys to go into the room ahead of her. But as the two boys entered the room they were hit with two coat-hangers. They ran right out again.

The mistress of the house arrived, followed shortly by a priest from the neighboring church, an elderly Belgian. He started the blessings, prayed before the Sacred Heart, blessed the house with holy water room by room. He left at about seven that evening.

The maids were preparing supper when a glass fell and broke at Aling's feet. Virginia and Ester set the coffee pot to boil, but the coffee pot overturned, without falling off the stove. Virginia jumped off the path of the hot water. Then a cup unhooked itself from the dish-rack and fell. Unable to prepare supper, the family telephoned the mother-in-law who arrived at about 10:30 bringing cooked food.

About midnight, another policeman came while there were still many people around. Aling had to go to the bathroom but was still so scared that she brought Ester and Virginia to the bathroom with her and left the door ajar. Once more the *tabo* partly filled with water and standing on top of a waterdrum (it was the time of the water shortage) was thrown out through the bathroom door. Shrieks arose again. The policeman left in a hurry saying, "*Baka mapahamak pa rin ako.*"

The mother-in-law also took her departure, leaving behind two young men to help guard the house. The family then went upstairs (where things had remained completely undisturbed) and spent a peaceful night. The two young men prepared to sleep in the parlor while the maids retired to their room. As they spread their sleeping mats, the *sungkaan* (a solid piece of wood with hollowed saucer-like holes for playing *sungka*) which had been lying on a cabinet near the wall flew off its stand, sailed over Virginia's head and dumped its *sigay* (sea shells) on the sleeping-mat. The maids ran out of their room to the parlor where the young men were lying on tables. The maids tried to sleep on the sofa, but were kept awake all night by loud tappings and by the sofa's being violently shaken. Aling felt her ankle being pulled and saw chairs moving.

### The Second Day

Around six-fifteen the next morning the master of the house woke up and went out the kitchen door to the mailbox. Aling was in the kitchen and Virginia in the bathroom fixing herself. As the master came in, he saw a stone strike the kitchen door with such force that the neighbors heard it and said to him, "*Mayroon na naman ba?*" He picked up the stone and recognized it as the *panghilod* stone from the bathroom. He then observed that the source of the thrown object seemed to be where Virginia was. But it was clearly not Virginia who was doing the throwing.

It was then decided to separate the two maids. At about ten o'clock Aling brought Virginia to her cousin's house and left her there while she went on to market. On her return she dropped in again and saw Virginia busy at some embroidery. While facing her, she saw a beer bottle come at her from Virginia's shoulder while Virginia herself never moved. The beer bottle was followed by a flower vase likewise thrown at her from Virginia's direction. When she tried to light the kerosene stove to heat herself some water, the flame suddenly jumped up and burned the tablecloth. Scared, they then returned to the original house.

The married daughter of the house came for lunch at two o'clock. As it started to rain and the maids had finished washing the dishes and had gone to the basement, several bottlecaps were thrown from the kitchen to the dining room corner. The daughter picked up the

bottlecaps and threw them in the garbage can saying, "You would be more useful if you threw money instead." About ten minutes later the telephone rang, and expecting it to be her husband, she went up to the landing to answer it. Barely had she said "hello", when she felt something brush her shoulder from above, hit the balustrade and land on the second step of the basement stairs. She saw it was a fifty-centavo piece. Saying, "*Hindi man kayo mabiro* (Can't you take a joke?)," she ran out into the rain with the maids.

Finding the rain very strong, they went around to the kitchen side of the house, and as they peeped in, they saw the curtains on the other side of the room being lifted by someone, first one edge being picked up, and then the curtain itself bunched together in the middle and raised. The rain nevertheless drove them to reenter the house and take refuge in the kitchen, from which they heard footsteps descending the staircase and a low voice making a grumbling sound. They telephoned the master of the house at his office to tell him that there were voices inside the house.

The mistress of the house came back from school and was met at the gate by the daughter and the maids. She walked toward the house making a large sign of the cross and saying, "Please don't do us any harm. After all this is my house too." On going up the stairs she saw the fifty-centavo piece but did not touch it. They said the rosary together aloud and at its end the mistress said, "With your permission. I will give the fifty centavos you dropped as part of our contribution to the Virgin of the Rosary." But when they went downstairs to pick up the fifty-centavo piece, it was gone. Aling later said that she was missing fifty centavos from her purse.

That evening the master of the house brought home an office mate. While they were in the dining room eating *gulaman* and talking over the events of the last two days, a stone struck the table with great force and bounced against the wall. The stone was smooth and wet, apparently having come from the creek behind the house. There was no agreement about the precise direction from which it came. The office mate without touching the stone wrapped it up in a handkerchief and brought it the next day to the National Bureau of Investigation for possible fingerprints. The NBI said that the texture of the stone as well as its original wetness precluded the possibility of fingerprints and they made him the butt of jokes.

From this point on, the eruption subsided. Virginia went to live at the cousin's place and it was only when Virginia came to visit Aling that minor manifestations occurred. The writer of this paper witnessed a couple of such minor events. Once when Virginia was preparing to say goodbye for the evening, the writer saw a glass fall by itself on its side and also saw a table knife after it had jumped up from its rack

on the sink and fallen on the floor. On another occasion he saw barbecue sticks being thrown out of a cabinet as though by mice, even though there were no mice there.

Frightened and discouraged, Virginia decided to go home to Antique. She could not be dissuaded, not even by the mistress of the house who had grown very fond of her.<sup>1</sup> One evening after one of her visits at the house as she was saying goodbye, all the lights of the house went on by themselves. It was goodbye.

#### ATTEMPTS TO DEAL WITH CAUSES

##### **The Laundrywoman**

Besides the aforementioned attempt of the Belgian priest to deal with all the upset as coming from the devil, there were several other hypotheses as to causes, with corresponding technologies for dealing with them. The first was to place the blame on "witchcraft" performed by a certain laundrywoman who even before the event used to be heard "talking to the spirits of the trees".

This laundrywoman had had some ill feeling toward the youngest son of the house who teased her because of her peculiar Tagalog. The boy contracted a fever of 40.3 C at noon of March 28, the day before the big fall of stones, and had to be brought to the hospital. That evening, by coincidence, the laundrywoman had to be dismissed because there was very little work for her to do. She left unwillingly.

When things started happening the next day, without accusing her of anything, the master of the house summoned her and asked her to tell the spirits of the trees not to harm the occupants of the house. She agreed to do so and in her own strange tongue shouted to the trees how well the family had treated her. Then together with the other maids she sat down to iron out personal differences with the family. Nothing further came from the laundrywoman's intervention.

##### **The Manggagamot**

Two local faith healers (*manggagamot*) were brought into the case by relatives of the family or of the maids. The first came about noon of the second day and held a conference with the three maids. He had brought with him a stone (somehow linked with Good Friday ceremonies) which he now touched to each finger of the three maids to see which of them was associated with the unseen. He concluded that it was Virginia who had brought a "spirit" to the house, but that if the family learned to live with it, it would bring them good luck.

The second faith healer said that the house itself had been built on the dwelling place of spirits of the land and of the river, who had now gotten interested in the two maids, Aling and Virginia. He even pointed out a tree which he claimed to be the spirits' kitchen. To

protect the house, he recited incantations and planted twenty-four stakes around it. To protect the two maids he gave them an *anting-anting* each, a piece of paper on which were written Latin-sounding phrases. He told them that if they kept these papers on their persons there would be no need for them to separate. A few days later claiming that the spirits were now haunting him, he returned and asked for ₱600.00 which the family refused.

#### The Psychologist and Aling

A week after the main eruption, a clinical psychologist was brought into the case, who interviewed Aling and Virginia and gave them simple tests. According to Aling, she had a brother who had subdued a spirit by fighting it with a *tingting* (coconut leaf ribs used for brooms). At 15, she had seen three boys playing at noontime and who were about to ride a bus when all of a sudden they disappeared. At 26 she saw a woman with golden hair walking away from her, who likewise suddenly disappeared. Aling carried in her back a dark blotch on the skin (fungus growth) which she attributed to spirits. She reported hearing footsteps at night, which she attributed to her dead husband.

On the Rorschach test she rejected seven cards. However, such ambivalent behavior was benignly interpreted by the psychologist in the light of the extreme anxiety of the testing situation for a woman who had had practically no education and who was still laboring under a stress situation that would have shaken many a college professor. The answers she did give on the Rorschach showed a great deal of deep anxiety ("grey shock"), and while not eliminating the possibility of autism nevertheless showed a woman of a very simple cultural background in fair contact with day to day reality.

#### The Psychologist and Virginia

Virginia was also interviewed and tested. From the interview, the psychologist came to the conclusion that she was the center of the "stone-throwing" phenomena, either as their occasion or cause. Her past history showed that she had had a similar experience previously.

Virginia came from Antique to Manila in August 1964, staying for a while at her cousin's. In October 1965, she entered as a maid with a family living in a rented house in Vito Cruz. According to her story, on Saturday, December 11, she and the grandmother saw a *tingting* walking. Plates and cups were broken. The priest was called but he too was hit with a thrown slipper. All these events, however, lasted two hours. On the following day, the frightened family left her with her aunt, Aling, who was then in San Juan. She entered the service of the Quezon City family just about a week before the stones fell.

On the Saturday which was three days before the day of stones, Virginia happened to break a decorative plate. Aling, sensitive to what

her mistress might say, scolded Virginia severely. Even though the mistress later showed Virginia the mended plate, Virginia nevertheless felt bad both about the broken plate and the scolding she received. Accordingly, then, there seemed to be some basis for hostility against Aling. Thus, Virginia's previous history plus the dynamics of the interpersonal situation plus the fact that the majority of phenomena occurred in her presence seemed to pinpoint Virginia as the main character in this drama.

Her Rorschach was judged by the psychologist to be well within the normal range. She gave 38 responses of good and accurate form. She was outgoing and responsive (5C) with a normally active imagination (3M). There was some poverty of conceptual organization (2W, low Z) as might be expected in a girl coming from a rural background. All in all she was a mentally healthy girl, with psychosis clearly eliminated and, at the worst, with slight tendencies towards the hysteric personality.

Not wholly congruent with these test results was an experience which she was bursting to talk about as having occurred apparently on the second night after the rain of stones. She was in bed with Aling when she saw a bright light as small as a needle passing over her face in the air under the mosquito net. She screamed, waking up Aling, and ran out of the room. Later she returned, and again under the mosquito net she saw a hand, very hairy, which passed over her face and grazed her forehead.

The perplexed psychologist, in an experimental attempt to gain more projective data of the object-moving variety, set Virginia's hand on an Ouija board, asking her to "concentrate on your fingertips and let the board carry your fingers wherever they want to go." Using her own explanation for the events, namely *ang mga dwende* (fairies), and directing the questions to them in the second person, the following dialogue ensued:

(Where are you now?) PHILIPPINES  
 (Where did you come from?) GERMANY  
 (What part of Germany?) AMIRCA  
 (How many are you?) 4  
 (What are your names?) SUXOAN, RI  
 (What do you want?) YOU GO TO PARIS  
 (Will you still bother me?) NO  
 (Is there anything you want to tell me?) ONLY LOVE YOU

The answers were spelled out very slowly with the subject completely absorbed in the task. The test was stopped when she said she was tired. Asked later to spell "America", she spelled "A-M-I-R-C-A", the same way she had spelled it on the board. The answers them-



selves were judged by the psychologist to be typical examples of secondary-process, automatic writing, such as are produced under hypnosis when "the right hand is asked to write something the mind does not know (Weitzenhofer, 1962)." Her facility at the Ouija board while wide-awake (a fairly common Filipino talent) seemed to indicate a milder hysterical personality, there being hypothetically a short-circuiting of nerve impulses to the voluntary muscle system while bypassing awareness.

#### CONCLUSION

How does a scientific psychologist react to such reports? Thouless (1963) suggests that one should not balance an uncritical acceptance of some kinds of paranormal phenomena by a tough-minded but equally uncritical rejection of others. Rather,

What makes a man a sound judge in matters of psychical research is not whether he believes or disbelieves particular statements, but whether the degree of his belief is as completely as possible determined by the evidence and not by his prejudices or by his wishes or by his sensitiveness to current fashions of thought (p.14).

Undoubtedly, spiritualistic phenomena at the moment do not belong to the current fashion of behavioral thinking nor is the poltergeist phenomenon capable of being subjected with current instruments to the experimental approach. Nevertheless, science has to begin at the first stage of accurate observation. It may well be at this point that apart from a passion for faith and a willingness to suspend judgment temporarily, the psychologist is not too far superior to the *manggagamoto* in what he really knows about causes.

Nevertheless, in the scientific spirit of openness to believe anything while at the same time suspending judgment until it is proven, the following opinion may be ventured. Many events in the above narrative may be explained away as hallucinations and illusions. Thus Virginia's "light as small as a needle under the mosquito net" may have been a stray firefly, and the hairy arm, a hysterical hallucination. Nevertheless the stoning and other movement of inanimate things on March 28th and 29th were far too public and objective to be so explained.

Two hypotheses present themselves. The first is the poltergeist theory which postulates the presence of some playful spirit who likes to frighten people but does not harm them. From his behavior in the present instance one would further postulate that he resembles a child who likes to appear tougher than he really is. He is somewhat of an exhibitionist. He is quite strong, capable of carrying large stones (40

kilos) and throwing them with great force. He understands people's language, in this case, Tagalog. He is not necessarily frightened away by a priest's blessing. He likes Virginia and follows her from place to place. He seems best characterized as a "he" rather than as a "she" or an "it".

The second hypothesis is that of psycho-kinesis (Hastings, 1966). Here one postulates a power of the human mind to move inanimate objects directly. Such power is exercised without the awareness of the person using it and he cannot control its coming or going. It seems to come while the person is in a highly emotional state.

If indeed such a power came into action in the events here narrated, the most likely source was Virginia. The external events could have been, as it were, the acting out of her inner needs. She was a young, attractive person in the position of a maid. Hence, she would want attention. Being gentle she would not want to hurt anyone, nevertheless would want to "make a lot of noise." Her resentments would be reserved for Aling, who represented family restraints, and who actually scolded her for breaking the decorative plate a few days before.

It is most unsatisfactory to end a paper with hypotheses. But given the above facts, is there any way of ending other than with a question?

JAIME C. BULATAO, S.J.

### TO VIRGINIA, THE GENTLE WITCH

The ancient, knowing look you gave me last  
 Will haunt all my starless midnights hence...  
 Your accents young and soft and sad will thunder through  
 The echoing labyrinths of thought.

Suddenly, you and the magic moonlight fill  
 The ghostly stillness of my room—  
 I grope for you in vain, and in th'ensuing dark  
 My ears are strained to catch faint, eerie, piping  
 Sounds of fairy serenades.

What sorcery is this and who are you, enchantress...  
 That came to change disturbingly  
 The quiet tenor of my ways?  
 And left to send my senses reeling and confused?  
 What mystic power gave you leave to take  
 My peace of mind and equanimity?

<sup>1</sup> At Virginia's departure, the mistress wrote a poem which says much about Virginia and the relationships she had established during her short stay at the house. The poem is reproduced at the end of this article.

My home is empty of your presence now, and yet,  
Your naiad spirit freely roams  
And moves, and stirs the air about.

I watched you walk away and disappear at dusk  
Mid gnomelike shadows past the gnarled trees  
Dwarf dances trailing at your skirt and feet  
Unseen toads croak with bat wings flapping near  
Weird mocking elfin laughter rides the wind...

Somehow, in some sweet, strange, mysterious way, I ween—  
That in your brief sojourn with me,  
Our souls have touched as once before...  
I, as Merlin and you—Le Fay,  
Whisp'ring both an age-old incantation  
Over a boiling cauldron  
In some deep and hidden, half-forgotten cavern—  
Or some lost, unknown, and nameless castle  
In feudal dreams of yore...

## REFERENCES

- Brown, R. *The mystery of the wizard clip*. Richmond: Catholic Historical Society, 1949.
- Flying furniture and leaping food: poltergeists? hogwash, it's just... *Chicago Sun-Times*, Oct. 11, 1966.
- Hastings, The Oakland poltergeist. Paper read at the annual convention of the American Parapsychological Society, New York, Sept., 1966.
- Indiana deputies sit up with IFO's. *Chicago Sun-Times*, Oct. 11, 1966.
- O boy, things are jumping at Walter's house. *Chicago American*, Oct. 12, 1966.
- Smith, J. Hark—the spook speaks. *Chicago Daily News*, Oct. 13, 1966.
- Thouless, R. *Experimental psychological research*. Middleburg: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1963.
- Thurston, H. *Ghosts and poltergeists*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co. 1954.
- Warren, H. (Ed.) *Dictionary of psychology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934.
- Weitzenhoffer, A. *General techniques of hypnotism*. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1957.