

INTERNATIONAL PARAPSYCHOLOGY

*From the Opening Address by DR. GARDNER MURPHY,
July 30, 1953*

I would emphasize five words: *scientific, international, democratic, informal; courageous.*

The world of today is being transformed by science; by the discipline, the imagination, the patience, the care, the objectivity, the sharing of responsibility that mark the work of the scientist. Though we may differ from one another in countless things, I believe we speak to one another in the terms of science.

By the word "international" I mean more than the transcending of national boundaries; I mean the common human universality of the problems with which we deal and of the efforts to cope with them. We think today of Richet, of Driesch, and of Myers not as of a Frenchman, a German, and an Englishman alone, but of prophetic men of genius who spoke to all humanity. In the background of our labors today how much we owe to the Swiss Flournoy, to the Dane Vett, to the Mexican Pagenstecher. It is my deep regret also that these national delegations cannot represent the national effort of each land; and I will express especially my deep regret that Dr. Rhine could not be with us, though I rejoice that Dr. Hart is here to represent the Parapsychology Laboratory, and that Mrs. Pope, Managing Editor of the *Journal of Parapsychology*, is with us. Each delegation will similarly think of those whom we wish we could have with us. But I would especially express, at least for myself personally, the regret that whole nations and cultures, such as those of India, of Japan,

and of China, capable of a great contribution to our subject, cannot be with us now; and to voice the hope that another international meeting will include more of humanity than is comprised in the Western European culture.

My third word was "democratic." Here in the Netherlands my thought turns to the great struggle for democracy and great movement of the people towards science and the arts which have characterized the Dutch in recent centuries. Believing that science can become the property of all the people, and that technical experts and intellectuals have a responsibility to simpler folk who have no technical education but nevertheless have an interest in understanding what science is trying to achieve, I hope that somehow we can not only treat one another as brothers, equal and at one in our quest for truth, but that somehow we can convey to the public which supports our enterprise the essential gist of our efforts, with scientific caution but also with simplicity, directness, and candor.

My fourth word was "informal." As a necessary part of democracy, I suggest the values of a conversational spirit, a humility, a freedom from fuss and honorifics, a willingness to let ideas speak to us through whosoever's mouth is at the time uttering a message. Dr. Pobers, beautifully sensing the need for much ultra-informal and intimate personal exchange of views, has provided much time free of formal meetings; but I would beg to go further and suggest that all our deliberations, avoiding hyper-dignity and the authoritarian spirit, take essentially the form of conversations.

My fifth and last word was "courageous." I suggest that the primary reason why parapsychology has failed to receive the intellectual and moral support which its importance requires is timidity, fear of ridicule; at a deeper level, fear of getting out of touch with our neighbors. Frequently our data call for boldness both in announcing facts and especially in setting up hypotheses bold enough to do justice to the extraordinary nature of the facts. As Kirtley Mather has reminded us, we frequently have need of "outrageous hypotheses," hypotheses

which outrage the common sense of today. There is, I think, a very fundamental difference between a fanciful speculation and an outrageous hypothesis from which new directions in experimental research may take their start.

How much shall we attempt to accomplish this week?

Breadth we shall certainly seek, but if this is to be the historic occasion which I hope it may become it certainly cannot attempt to survey all the facts, or even all the classes of facts, known to our subject. Rather, for the sake of perspective, it will, I think, have to attempt clarity, order, good sense, and a respect for sound method, and beyond it all, a sense of understanding one another, a spirit of intellectual comradeship in which true communication is possible. In terms of what was said earlier about informality, move about from one working group to another, and outside of the scheduled meetings introduce yourself to anyone with whom you wish to talk, or organize a little group to pursue your own interests at a time convenient for all concerned.

We shall attempt first of all to set up the organizational structure of the week's work; then establish the four working groups announced on the program which you have received, using the working group on the "Personality of the Sensitive" as an occasion for plenary meetings in which every approach, biographical, cultural, clinical, experimental, quantitative, philosophical, integrative, can be attempted. Towards the end of our meetings we shall have several plenary sessions, devoted to the tasks of surveying and understanding what we have done, determining the form of our contact with the public, defining our relations to other sciences and to the universities, finding and cultivating gifted subjects and likewise finding and cultivating research workers, and looking forward to questions regarding the future of parapsychology and its contribution to civilization.

I believe these last problems of our future are of the gravest possible importance. We need fuller understanding from the scientific public; fuller support for long and strenuous investigations; a much more effective way of finding the young

men and women who will be the parapsychologists of the decades ahead. In the English-speaking world, at least, a very fundamental problem is the decline in the number and power of the great sensitives whose work has taught us such a large part of what we know. If cultural circumstances make the spiritist medium of great powers harder to find, we shall have to face the responsibility of discovering, and of training, others to take their place, or to present us with gifts of some other type equally important in teaching us the realities of those paranormal powers which it is our hope to understand.

As scientists we shall neither attack nor indorse spiritualism as a religion, but we shall continue to pursue with energy and with personal gratitude the study of those whose special sensitivity has taught us so much. And while the problem of the survival of human personality is one which many of us believe is not capable of adequate solution by the methods and concepts which are now available to us, it seems to me, and I hope to you, that we must continue to give our eager attention to every fact which bears upon this problem, and look forward to an era when we shall have suitable methods and suitable facts to warrant cautious yet scientifically solid statements about the relations of human personality to that world which appears to transcend description in terms of the concepts of time and space now known to us.

Personally, I doubt whether parapsychology will be able to bring us this larger understanding of human nature by its own efforts alone. Rather, it seems to me that the scientific spirit working through the methods of history and the social sciences, through the insights of the physical sciences, the biological sciences, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and catching the spirit of the Rembrandts, the Beethovens, the da Vincis who have described man not in sober prose alone, but in color, in tone, and in eternal principles of form, can lead us to an integrated conception of the nature of man more satisfying than that which we now possess. But in this integrative effort of all the modes of understanding man, parapsychology will, if our work be well done, play a vital role.