

CONFERENCE ON
SPONTANEOUS PHENOMENA
JULY 11 to 17, 1955

INTRODUCTION

Psychical researchers from ten countries of Europe and the Western Hemisphere pledged themselves to organized international cooperation at the conclusion of a Conference on Spontaneous Phenomena, held at Newnham College Cambridge, England, from July 11 to 17, 1956.

The Conference was organized by the Society for Psychical Research, London, in cooperation between Mr. W. H. Salter, Honorary Secretary of the S.P.R. and Dr. Gardner Murphy, General Research Consultant of the Parapsychology Foundation. The Conference endorsed the "preparation of an international plan looking towards better studies of spontaneous cases." Among the phenomena considered were hauntings, poltergeist phenomena, telepathic dreams, apparitions, and similar happenings in various parts of the world.

The delegates also resolved that "discovery, careful sifting, authentication and intense study of a large number of cases, including recent cases," should be undertaken on a world-wide scale. The Conference laid tentative plans for the establishment of a world center that would serve as a depository of well-documented cases; no specific center was selected by the Conference, as such a decision is expected to be made at a later date.

Delegates appointed a committee to study "traditional methods of collecting, evaluating and interpreting material," in order to determine whether such methods "have a dependable parapsychological aim and a good psychological, logical, and heuristic basis." The Conference approved continuance of programs carried out by international correspondence on such matters as "E.S.P. Projec-

tion," also known as out-of-the-body experience. The Conference also decided to create an international "follow-up" committee to maintain international communications in the field of research into spontaneous phenomena.

Delegates and observers to the Cambridge Conference came from Denmark, France, Germany, Haiti, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As both the Conference site and the living quarters of the delegates were at Old Hall, Newnham College, the meeting provided a unique opportunity for personal contact and the exchange of information and views.

Possibly the greatest interest was aroused by a paper delivered at the very close of the Conference by Dr. Louisa Rhine on "Some Results of the Case Studies at Duke University." The discussion which preceded the Conference's resolution on methods reflected lively concern with the problem of satisfactory selection, authentication and evaluation of cases in the field of spontaneous phenomena.

The Conference began on Monday, July 11, with a short reception, at which Mr. G. W. Lambert and Dr. Murphy welcomed the delegates. On Tuesday Prof. H. H. Price, reading a brief paper of his own, introduced Dr. Murphy who spoke on "What Contribution to Psychological Research Can be Made Through the Investigation of Spontaneous Cases?" He urged delegates to concern themselves with the need to obtain fresh cases, to recruit and train field researchers, to systematize and organize material, and to obtain effective world-wide collaboration. Mr. W. H. Salter spoke on "Phantasms of the Living and the Dead: The Traditional Method of Research." He described spontaneous phenomena as, of all psychic phenomena, providing "the most valuable contribution to the understanding of the human personality."

On Wednesday delegates heard Prof. Hornell Hart's paper, "The Experimental Approach, With Special Reference to Traveling Clairvoyance"; the speaker described

phenomena of "ESP Projection," within the framework of his own intensive studies. Prof. F. J. M. Stratton, speaking on "Haunts and Other Localized and Iterative Phenomena," provided a variety of illustrative case history material.

"The Psychology of Spontaneous Cases" was discussed on Thursday by Dr. C. A. Meier and Dr. Emilio Servadio. Dr. Meier provided psychological background to spontaneous phenomena, using techniques of evaluation based on the concepts of Dr. C. G. Jung; Dr. Servadio examined phenomena with a view toward individual "submersion into a less or a non-individualized unconscious psychic world." Prof. C. J. Ducasse examined "Method in the Investigation of Spontaneous Paranormal Phenomena," including the possible significance of phenomena "concerning the structure and latent capacities of the human personality and of the paranormal forces or agencies which impinge upon it."

On Friday Mrs. K. M. Goldney, speaking on "The Practical Investigation of Poltergeist Cases," related her experiences in efforts to follow up individual cases that had come to the attention of the Society for Psychical Research. Mrs. L. W. Allison, within the framework of a paper on "Some Poltergeist Cases in America," gave a historical survey of such cases in the United States. Mr. Lambert then gave delegates an opportunity to acquaint themselves with his hydro-geological hypothesis regarding poltergeist phenomena, submitting the view that many of these phenomena may be attributed to the tides and other fluctuations in the movement of underground waters.

The evening of Friday was devoted to a lecture by Dr. J. B. Rhine on the question "What Use Can Parapsychology make of Spontaneous Case Material?" and to Mrs. Rhine's lecture, already noted above. Dr. Rhine delineated spontaneous and experimental material; he noted that "just as the general public has been sustained in its interest in the rather technical investigations of the laboratory largely by its familiarity with spontaneous happenings,

so the laboratory worker himself can gain a certain supporting effect from firsthand knowledge of these far-ranging human experiences, evidently closely bound up with the findings of his investigations."

Mrs. Rhine, in discussing case study results at the Parapsychology Laboratory, Duke University, stated that her collection and classification of a very great number of cases permitted, in many instances, an insight into "a truth about human nature." She observed that "factors which determine the form of a given case must be those inherent in the individual personality."

Thus, she suggested, "the percipient creates his own experience," as for instance, within a telepathic pattern, "based on the distant event, but created to fit his own assumptions, and therefore the relationship between experience and event in extrasensory perception bears little resemblance to the analogous one of sense perception."

Saturday was devoted to business meetings, the drafting of resolutions and farewell addresses. The Conference officially closed on Sunday, July 17, with the departure of the delegates from the city of Cambridge.