

OPENING REMARKS

EMILIO SERVADIO

Mrs. Garrett, Mrs. Bolton, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The general title of this Conference is "A Century of Psychical Research." Of course this is a conventional expression. The year of 1870 was not particularly significant for this research which has much more or much less than a hundred years behind it, according to the meaning one gives to the term "psychical research." However, the expression is adequate insofar as it points out an important fact; that is, for quite a long time a certain line of approach, that which we nowadays call parapsychological, has been adopted by cultivated men vis-à-vis certain presumptive, intriguing phenomena.

It has always been a feature of this approach that people belonging to very different disciplines have found somehow that they could get together in spite of the variety of their backgrounds, qualifications and expectations. In this conference the special fields of qualification of the several participants exhibit a particularly varied richness. In fact, they comprise electronics, psychiatry, communications, physics, philosophy, biochemistry, religion, journalism and psychoanalysis. I wonder if there exists another subject of scholarly research that could appeal to the representatives of so many different branches of knowledge.

To evaluate or at least to agree upon the scope and the limits of parapsychology will be, I hope, one of the issues of our conference. We are all aware of the differences existing between the content index, say, of the *Traité de Métapsychique*, by Charles Richet, which is little less than fifty years old and that of *Experimental Parapsychology* by Ramakrishna Rao which was published four years ago. We all know that several topics included in some old books on psychical research cannot find their place in modern works of parapsychology for at least two reasons; that is, some of them have become part and parcel of other disciplines (for instance, hypnosis as such), while others were simply pseudo-concepts (for instance, the "Odic Force" purportedly discov-

ered by Baron von Reichenbach). The strictest among modern parapsychologists have a tendency, as we know, to reduce considerably the field of psi phenomena and there are also some people of learning who would extend this shrinking up to the limits of total annihilation. I do not think that in this conference we will reach a final agreement regarding the validation of parapsychology or its essential outline, but we all certainly expect some clarification thereabout. Also there are among us goats as well as sheep, which should pave the way to lively and useful discussions if not actually to "frontal" clashes.

Without anticipating the views that will be expressed by this or that participant in this conference, it is difficult to avoid the impression right at the start that the very fact that we are assembled here and are prepared to discuss parapsychology for three days, gives a certain aura of respectability to the object of our meetings. It is hard to think that one may accept the discussion of something whose very existence he flatly and irrevocably denies. Nobody would start or attend a debate regarding the Bandersnatch or the Jabberwock, and nobody (to quote Freud's witty repartee) would stop to consider whether in the center of our earth there could be, or not, a certain amount of canned marmalade.

We are all familiar with the pros and cons regarding the parapsychological field or some particular problem in parapsychology and one can hardly avoid being struck by the fact that for at least thirty or forty years (I wouldn't say for a hundred years, out of respect for those who do not think that a hundred years ago anything serious was done in parapsychology), so many learned people all over the world have maintained that parapsychological research was "interesting," and have given the subject time, energy and money.

One more point: it seems to me that if parapsychology can have its own philosophy, it should receive some benefit from the fact that in modern philosophical thought we see a constant decline of the Aristotelian position of pure rationalism, of positivism, in favor of conceptions, so to speak, non-Euclidean, relativistic and "lateral" in all fields of knowledge as well as in our very representation of man and of his situation in the universe. It seems impossible to me that parapsychology of all disciplines should not be encouraged and favorably conditioned by such an extraordinary revolution in our basic philosophical views and epistemological instruments. Also in this respect, I think that we may expect quite a lot from this Nineteenth Conference on psychical research that we owe to the tireless enthusiasm of our gracious hostess, Mrs. Eileen J. Garrett, to the generosity of the Parapsychology Foundation so powerfully supported and encouraged by

the Honorable Mrs. Frances Bolton, and to the alert organizing spirit of Allan Angoff, and all their collaborators.

We also wish to thank them for making it possible for us to meet in this delightful spot in France where we all, old and new co-workers, will now start our debates. Thank you.