

REAPPRAISING THE LITERATURE OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

C. J. DUCASSE (*U.S.A.*)

The literature of psychical research contains a vast collection of reports of paranormal occurrences. Many, together with the circumstances under which they occurred, are inadequately described; often, even the assertion that the phenomena actually occurred is inadequately supported. In the great majority of cases some normal explanation is imaginable, and not definitely excluded by any of the precautions or circumstances mentioned.

If, however, one is to argue that paranormal phenomena show that there are forces in the universe—or human capacities—of kinds radically different from those now recognized by the natural sciences, and therefore that the conception of the universe and of man which these sciences today entertain is after all parochial, then the paranormality of the phenomena one offers as instances needs to be unassailable. That is, they and their attending circumstances need to be described in such precise detail, and the testimony that the occurrence and its circumstances *were* as described so clear, that the evidence is incontrovertible.

A few reports of paranormal phenomena meet these requirements. What is much needed is a carefully sifted collection of such reports (covering each of the chief types of phenomena represented), and their publication with all details and relevant information. These reports should be so well-attested that rejection of them would patently amount to intellectual irresponsibility.

In the literature of yoga, of theosophy, of anthroposophy

and of other "occultisms" there are occasional hints or statements as to methods by which such development allegedly can be brought about. Collating and comparing this material might result in the emergence of a definite and clearly describable method. I believe that little scientific progress will be made in parapsychology, or in exploration of such dimensions of nature as may be accessible only to parapsychological faculties, until persons trained in scientific modes of thinking develop in themselves these parapsychological faculties. They would then exercise these faculties in a systematically scientific manner, instead of in the more or less haphazard manner in which they manifest themselves in persons in whom they are native and function spontaneously.

Unfortunately, the persons who claim that those faculties can be developed and made to function consciously at will (and who claim that they themselves have so developed them and are exercising them) seem never to be willing to submit themselves to the elementary tests which would prove that they really do possess such faculties. One who had so developed them and in addition possessed scientific habits of mind would of course see that submission to such tests is indispensable. It would be the first step in conferring scientific status upon the assertion that these faculties exist and can be made voluntary.