

RESPONSIBILITY IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY*

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Since I gave up nearly all active work in psychical research in 1969 I have often been asked why, after more than sixty years' work in the field, I have finally lost most of my interest in it. There are two answers to the question. Firstly, I have come to the conclusion that the present immense interest in occultism and in the grosser forms of superstition is due, to a certain extent at least, to the persistent and far-reaching propaganda put out by the parapsychologists. In this they have, I think, a very grave responsibility. With the gradual decline in the West of belief in Christianity has come, not, as one might have hoped, a leaning towards the rational way of looking at the world, but a decided tendency to adopt the magical way. Thus Christianity, unbelievable as it may be to the rational mind, has been supported by the occult superstitions of darker ages. One reason, therefore, for my ceasing work is that I do not wish to be associated with persons who actively support such superstitions as are today everywhere apparent. I cannot accept such responsibility.

The second reason is that, even if I wished, with increasing age I have neither the energy nor the capacity to check, substantiate and attempt to verify the reports of cases I receive which are either already printed or are submitted to me with a view to publication. For example, some ten years ago certain experiments were undertaken in England under the auspices of the S.P.R. into an alleged telepathic communication between a mother and her child. Year after year I pressed for a report on the results. Finally a paper was published by the Society in 1968 giving an account of the work and its results. The record started with a trial at guessing seven letters. It stated that at the first trial there were four successes; but the table showed that there were five. These learned parapsychologists could not even take the trouble to count the success or failure of seven guesses. Presumably all must have read the proofs and the editor, a professional psychologist,

* In Dr. Dingwall's absence, his paper was read by Allan Angoff.

had let it pass as it stood. If this kind of material, where the simplest calculations are erroneous and can be checked in five minutes, is passed by all concerned, what becomes of the mass of elaborate statistical work submitted by parapsychologists in paper after paper in their journals? To speak bluntly, I no longer believe the stories I read or which are reported to me. They may or may not be true, but I have no longer any inclination to test their accuracy myself. You may well ask me why this is so. You will not, I think, much like the answer, but I intend giving it.

After sixty years' experience and personal acquaintance with most of the leading parapsychologists of that period I do not think I could name half a dozen whom I could call objective students who honestly wished to discover the truth. The great majority wanted to prove something or other: they wanted the phenomena into which they were inquiring to serve some purpose in supporting preconceived theories of their own.

Let me give an example, such as thought-transference, which is as good as any. When the British S.P.R. was founded the public were led to believe that at last a scientific survey was to be made, and I have no doubt that even some of those closely associated with the early days thought so too. But Myers, among others, had no such intention and cherished no such illusion. He knew that the primary aim of the Society was not objective experiment but the establishment of telepathy. To understand why this was so it is necessary to realize the position in which so many educated and intelligent people found themselves during the 1870s and later in Victorian England. With the emergence of new scientific concepts touching the origin of man and his place in the Universe the very foundations of their religious beliefs began to give way. I myself am a Victorian and I saw it happen in my own family. Swept hither and thither in the eddying currents of increasing unbelief they looked about for straws to clutch at, straws that would do violence neither to their intelligence nor to their integrity.

It was then some years since the Hydesville knockings had promised a new revelation, but the dancing tables and miracles of materialization were hardly spiritual enough for the founders of the S.P.R. What was wanted was proof that mind could communicate with mind apart from the normal avenues, for if mental sharing was a fact when the persons concerned were incarnate it could plausibly be suggested that the same mechanism might operate when death had occurred. Thus the supernatural might be proved by science and psychical research might become, in the words of Sir William Barrett, a handmaid to religion.

In the ears of every thinking rationalist the alarm bell was clearly

audible. Occultism was to be brought back from the limbo into which it had been cast and, nicely arranged in a pseudo-scientific setting, it was to be employed to buttress the mass of crude superstitions from which man, during so many centuries, had been struggling to free himself. The two ways of looking at the world were again to be brought face to face. The magical and the rational again confronted each other, but the magical had taken on a new appearance. No longer were its adherents cardinals in red hats or ignorant priests driving devils out of sick people, but ladies and gentlemen in white coats performing what they called experiments in what they called their laboratories. Following their lead, the rest soon followed, and the sight of bishops supporting the latest occult nonsense became as familiar as the viewing by thousands on television of bad spirits being exorcised. We are drifting back into the Dark Ages and it is to those times that I now propose to direct your attention. Perhaps from a brief survey it may be possible to draw some conclusions from the past and present state of occultism and parapsychology in Europe and America.

It now seems almost impossible to realize the extent of human suffering that had to be endured before man was able partially to free himself from the mass of crude occult teaching carried out by the Christians and others in their endeavor to stifle all independent thought which did not conform to their point of view. Rivers of blood flowed. Market places were lighted up by the burning bodies of the hapless victims of these ruthless superstitious savages. Let me take a few examples of how the belief in the unseen world permeated society.

Consider the weather. From pagan times the gods were thought to be responsible for storms and tempests, and Christians, as in so many other matters, continued to hold many of these gross superstitions and made them articles of faith. The Fathers of the Church thought that demons caused meteorological phenomena and this was not confined to the few or to the ignorant. St. Thomas Aquinas believed it and so did St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor who died in 1274. In literature and art the idea was common and in Bordone's picture of Venice you can see the demons bringing a storm to the city. Century after century passed but the idea was still kept alive and it is said that Luther believed that if a stone was thrown into a certain pond a frightful storm would develop since the stone would release the devils sitting under the water. A somewhat similar idea seems to have been held in Tibet before the Chinese entered the country and began to influence the people to forsake their magical and occult beliefs and look at the world from a rational standpoint. Here devils were supposed, it was thought, to live underground and mining operations might release them. Few countries illustrate better the unfortunate influence of occultism in re-

straining human progress. But even in Tibet the lamas would, I think, have hesitated before admitting beliefs which modern parapsychologists have no compunction in publishing in their pseudo-scientific journals.

These harmful operations on the weather could be dealt with by exorcism and as late as 1628 Locatelli gave a list of exorcisms which had been found most useful in this respect. Sometimes methods were simpler. The great German Jesuit, Jakob Gretser who died in 1628, stated that sometimes all that had to be done was to make the sign of the cross, speak a few words and the storm would pass away. If exorcism failed then other means were adopted. The Agnus Dei, a lump of wax blessed by the Pope, proved very valuable and lucrative, since in Paul II's Papal Bull of 1470 Paul II reserved to himself the distribution of the miraculous piece of wax.

The power of the demons in influencing the weather was questioned by a few bold men who were gradually beginning to see the enormity of the witchcraft persecutions. Such were Pomponazzi and Agrippa, but their suggestions were soon disposed of by writers of the caliber of Jean Bodin who relied on the supposed authority of the Bible and the pronouncements of the Popes. In this connection we are reminded that one of the critics of Jean Bodin and of the others with such views was Reginald Scot, whose great book *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was first published in 1584.

Scot, who had little patience with the occultists and demonologists, was, as might be expected, bitterly assailed by the believers, among whom was numbered King James I, who described his views as damnable. It was Scot who tried to show that conjurers were able to demonstrate what seemed to be examples of the paranormal whereas, when explained, they were clearly simple tricks. Neither the occultists of the 16th century nor modern parapsychologists of the 20th have ever been able to grasp the fact that because they did not then and do not now understand how these tricks were and are done, this does not mean that the effects are paranormal. Our modern occultists have apparently learned nothing since the 16th century since they are still assuming that because they do not understand how certain tricks are done, these must be paranormal. I need hardly mention such examples as Sir Oliver Lodge and the Zancigs and Sir Conan Doyle and Houdini. Even as I write these words I have received a leading journal dealing with parapsychology which is largely devoted to the amazing paranormal phenomena exhibited by a performer who, from the accounts, would seem to be an ordinary playing card manipulator and card location expert.

It might have been thought by some that influencing the weather by

psychic means was an idea common in the Middle Ages but hardly one likely to be practiced in the 20th century. Far from it. I could refer you to a number of so-called parapsychologists who have claimed to do just this and whose performances have been thought worthy of being discussed at length in the publications of the British S.P.R. and shown on television. Instead of priests commanding spirits to depart we have learned scientists and technicians exercising their powers of PK, mental concentration and so forth. Such nonsense is always news and provides a sensation for a public whose mental faculties have been dulled by the ceaseless propaganda of the parapsychologists and who are perhaps even more credulous than their predecessors in the Dark Ages.

It would be too tedious and indeed too painful to continue to describe the ghastly history of the witch delusions, based as they were on the pathetic view of occult influences on human life. Very gradually the belief that demons controlled the weather faded. God took their place and thus the lightning conductor was bitterly assailed, although some thought it a little strange that God permitted so many church spires to be struck and destroyed. However, in the 18th century a church in Brescia, in the vaults of which explosive mixtures had been stored, was struck and portions of the city were destroyed and thousands lost their lives. This event may have been responsible for the believers in demonic and divine influences at last consenting to the use of the conductor, since when attacks on ecclesiastical buildings appear largely to have ceased. Occult meteorology, as we have seen, only reappeared in force in the 20th century.

From occult influence on the weather I pass to similar influences on disease. Just as the early Christians carried over Pagan beliefs in demonic influences and incorporated them into their own peculiar ideas, so similar views on the nature of health and disease prevailed among them. Sometimes the unfortunate patient was being punished by God; at other times he was possessed by spirits. In the same way as the study of meteorology was stifled so was medical work condemned unless it conformed with the crazy notions of these early occultists. Disease had to be dealt with by supernatural not natural means. This was a part of the magical way of looking at the world and until Europe freed itself from its poisonous influence no advance was possible. Thus spiritual healing through relics, candles and holy bones was widespread and it made no difference if some of the bones, as was said to be the case with the relics of the holy Saint Rosalia of Palermo (+ c. 1160), were found to be those of a goat. Such details have never worried the believers in occult matters, then as now.

The struggle to free medicine from occult superstition was intensified by the objection to the study of anatomy. Had it not been through

the courageous work of men like Vesalius progress would have been even slower since the extraordinary idea of the resurrection of the body hindered the dissection of corpses.

Not only did the magical way of looking at the world hinder anatomical and medical research. It continued right up to modern times to oppose inoculation, the use of anaesthetics and even ordinary standards of bodily hygiene and simple sanitation. To believers in spirits and demons such measures were useless, irreverent and to be condemned. Thus thousands died who might have survived, and to be filthy and unwashed was a sign of sanctity. St. Abraham is said never to have washed his hands or feet for fifty years, while as to St. Simeon Stylites, the less said the better. His close association with the spiritual world was such that when the worms fell off his stinking ulcers he put them back to enjoy the food with which God had provided them.

The admiration that dirt inspired was not conducive to good health, but since diseases were thought by Christians to be due to demonic and occult influences so those who remained fairly healthy through their better regard for sanitation immediately became suspect, and many of these unfortunate people were burnt alive as a result of the magical way of looking at society. Similar events accompanied the treatment of lunacy. In the early centuries in Greece and Rome madness was regarded as a disease of the brain and it was only after the emergence of deep-seated occult ideas regarding demons that insanity was regarded in the same way as other complaints. For example, one day a nun ate some lettuce, became ill and was regarded as possessed. When ordered to leave the patient the evil spirit declared that it was not his fault as he was sitting on the lettuce and the nun, not having made the sign of the cross which would have been sufficient to make him jump off, swallowed him along with the lettuce. This rubbish, directly due to the belief in occult influences on human life, is credited to Pope St. Gregory the Great, who flourished about A.D. 590 and who was one of the four doctors of the Western Church. Indeed, it was thought that the demons often got into the body through eating, sometimes perhaps disguised as flies, and when the mouth was shut they found less guarded entrances. One priest when attempting to drive a devil out was so kind as to offer the demon asylum in his own body and when that night he had a stomach ache he firmly believed the demon was running amok in his intestines.

Now and then persons who had not succumbed completely to the occult theories of the Church ventured to make a few experiments. For example, in the famous late 16th century case of the possessed woman Marthe Brossier, Bishop Miron submitted her to a few simple tests such as deceiving her in various ways and thus testing her reactions. Very

gradually with the gathering strength of a growing rational outlook the occult delusion weakened, although it was still active in Europe until 1853 when the Morzine epidemic broke out. Tests similar to those to which Marthe Brossier was subjected were applied and the same results followed. Little was heard of demonic possession until parapsychology began to flourish and the age-long occult superstitions were revived in modern dress. This refers not only, be it said, to the simple belief in the occult influences on human life, the weather and the crops, but even to the more fantastic phenomena of the Holy Roman Church such as the translation of the Holy House at Nazareth or the odd performances of the Holy Bambino of Bari.

As I have said, occultism or psychical research, as it was then called in its modern form, began in the 19th century. As early as 1875 a commission was appointed by the University of St. Petersburg and Mendeleev wrote a long account of his experiences. It was this commission which dealt with the phenomena of Spiritualism generally and did not confine itself to the alleged paranormal phenomena of mesmerism as did the much earlier French commissions, whose work and conclusions I described in my volume on France in the recently published four-volume work *Abnormal Hypnotic Phenomena* which was sponsored and issued under the auspices of the Parapsychology Foundation.

It seems clear that Mendeleev was not at all impressed by what he had seen and came to the conclusion that these practices made people lose their attitude of commonsense, spread mystical ideas and reinforced superstition. Thus as early as 1876 one eminent European scientific man realized the danger of occultism and issued a warning. It was in vain. The British S.P.R. was founded in 1882 in order to establish telepathy, and from that date to the present day has issued thousands of cases and reports, some of very great interest and psychological value. Gradually its standards began to decline until today its publications contain material which would not have been considered during the first twenty-five years of its existence. From the first its activities were regarded with suspicion by the Spiritualists, whose propaganda was every year becoming more shrill and more persuasive. The S.P.R. in its early days was anxious to obtain good evidence since its aim to establish thought-transference was in order to convince the Victorian intellectuals that their religious beliefs could be supported by scientifically proven facts. They were generally careful to avoid accusations of sensationalism which might make people think they were of the same way of thinking as the little group of eminent and thoroughly respectable persons who, before the foundation of the Society, described the miracles of the séance room and the extraordinary behavior of Sir William Crookes when confronted by such Spiritualist stars as Florence

Cook and Mary Showers. An attitude of aloofness was adopted, although in later years they did not hesitate to elect Crookes as their President, while apparently never taking the opportunity to ask him to explain his attempt to hush up the alleged fraud of Mary Showers so as not to damage the Cause. Indeed, the Society had already begun its policy of suppressing evidence which might damage the work they had set their hearts on. In the 1870s occultism was flourishing in Europe and only a few saw the dangers inherent in its progress. As the years went by Spiritualism made rapid progress, and the various societies and institutions began to attract persons who did not really understand what was involved. The S.P.R. was busy with its renowned cross-correspondences which have proved impossible to investigate since we are not yet permitted to examine the original documents. In France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere the attention of parapsychologists was directed rather towards the physical than the mental phenomena and the enigma of Eusapia Palladino seemed as difficult to solve as that of D. D. Home.

The First World War caused renewed interest in the question of survival and Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became the chief propagandists of the New Revelation. The interest in occultism rapidly increased: thousands of séances were held and Spiritualism began to be popular with persons who previously had been unmoved by its claims. Spirit photography became a subject of so-called "scientific" examination and a society was founded with an extremely intelligent secretary in charge. I knew him well and year after year I tried to point out the weakness of his case. It was as useless as to argue with a Capuchin about the devils on the lettuce. He was firmly convinced that occult action had been demonstrated. It was to me at least a striking example of what a deadly effect occultism could have on the mind of the parapsychologist. However at long last and as sometimes happens when all the critical faculty has not been lost, the rational prevailed over the magical, and he realized that all his work had been in vain, that the evidence he had so stoutly defended was worthless and all the results he had had were probably fraudulent. At his death the whole of his vast collection passed into my possession, eventually when catalogued and arranged to add to the fine occult section of the Department of Printed Books in the British Museum.

As the years went by interest increased and the years between the two World Wars provided abundant material for the student. The magical way of looking at the world was getting stronger and the kind of crazy beliefs I have described again emerged. Fairies and the little people were believed in and I once attended a lecture where they were described and where photographs were shown of them sitting on a cab-

bage. But it was left until 1954 for a book to describe how a lady was possessed by a devil who apparently had forced her to swallow a piece of pork some time previously. Exorcisms proved of little help, but after a final attempt she vomited up what seemed to be the offending morsel, horns complete.

As long as occultism was of a type that consisted mainly of anecdotal evidence and ghost stories generally there was little hope of attracting the attention of scientific men working in other fields. What was wanted, the parapsychologists clearly saw, was something which seemed learned, profound and preferably something that the general public would not understand but which at the same time would attract the attention of more serious people. Statistics were the answer. Theories of probability were aired. The guessing of cards could be used and the results shown to be above chance. As all sources of error were excluded what remained was clearly extrasensory perception. Thus in 1934 ESP in its modern fashionable attire was born, and tens of thousands of people started guessing cards and getting extraordinary results. Indeed the American universities seemed to become full of sensitives and ESP private circles began to be formed and they too provided excellent evidence for the new occultism.

I was, I admit, wholly unmoved by the flood of propaganda put out by the parapsychologists in support of these claims. I did not believe in their stories since the conditions seemed to me to be far from adequate and allowed plenty of scope for normal methods to operate. However, I was hardly prepared for what I found one day lying on a table in New York. It was, it appeared, one of the famous cards used in certain card-guessing experiments which were supposed to suggest ESP. This card was so crudely made that a mere glance at the back was sufficient to determine what was on the front. Although I knew that the cards used in the early experiments at Duke were so badly made that they were not in some cases even of the same shape, it was an additional shock to discover that some of the cards were almost transparent. Evidently some, at least, of the astonishing beyond chance successes could easily be explained.

On my return to England I made known my findings and, as was to be expected, I met the usual attacks by those who sincerely believed that another Revelation was being born in the United States. In reply to my critics, I pointed out that they need not take my word for it since all they had to do was to go to the rooms of the S.P.R. in London and look at the latest patented set of cards as used at the parapsychology laboratory at Duke and see for themselves the kind of cards which were thought to be suitable for demonstrating ESP. Please note that this was seven years after the experiments had begun.

In parapsychology, when exposures of this kind are made, the defense usually follows a familiar pattern, just as it did when a few bold people in the Middle Ages ventured to question the believers' findings. In medieval times such objections were dangerous; it meant probably prison, torture or even the stake. Today, thanks to the rational way of looking at life being a little stronger and more widespread, I could not be threatened with such dire penalties. All that the faithful could be promised by a leading British parapsychologist was a champagne dinner "after that man has died." Alas, he has predeceased me, but others will doubtless subscribe to the happy event which cannot now be much longer delayed. I hope I am there to see them enjoy it, but (may I venture to say it?) I doubt it.

It might have been thought that after an exposure of this sort the ESP propagandists would have quietly repaired the damage, and seen to it that no such scandal again arose. The officials of the S.P.R. in London were, it is true, somewhat disconcerted by these discoveries and succeeded in having cards made which could not be read from the back, which at least removed one source of error. Later, however, the Society, having apparently sold their stock of the opaque cards, began selling again the packs patented by Dr. Rhine in 1937. During tests in 1960 by a S.P.R. working group remarkable hits in clairvoyance runs were obtained, but it soon emerged that the transparent nature of the cards offered an easy solution. The handbook supplied with the cards in 1937, which was arranged and edited by members of the Duke University Parapsychology Laboratory, is quite clear as to how the cards were to be used and in the single card calling test the amateur is instructed to test his ESP by having the pack in front of him and calling the cards one after another.

After the lapse of thirty years the transparent cards are still being sold and the instructions clearly state that all handling of the cards should be screened from the subject. But on the card of instructions provided with the deck of cards it is said that in the BT (Before Touching) clairvoyance card tests the experimenter can see the cards and thus clues might unwittingly be given to the subject during a series of tests of this kind.

In 1969 Dr. R. A. McConnell (*Amer. Psychologist*, 1969, XXIV, p. 533) stated that he now regarded these cards as "a museum piece," yet thinks that they can be "a lot of fun and can be used in preliminary testing." It may seem to be a lot of fun to test extrasensory perception by guessing what is on the front of a card when it is visible from the back, but it is certainly not a scientific experiment and must have led many interested people astray, as it did in the S.P.R. 1960s group ex-

periments. And yet Dr. McConnell still wonders why psychologists are not interested in ESP. In my view the experimental work of many modern psychologists is poor enough, but it can hardly compete with the early Duke experiments in which one of the grossest sources of error is still being perpetuated thirty years after it was pointed out.

I have now mentioned one indubitable fact in regard to ESP which may provide a warning to beginners as to the kind of confidence to be placed in parapsychologists working in this field. Now I have to give another warning. It is common practice among parapsychologists to offer the most fantastic tales of the occult and then refuse to permit any adequate investigation by other people. The British S.P.R. carried out this policy with relation to the cross-correspondences. Even the identity of some of the mediums was secret and the public was only permitted to know who Mrs. Willett was after she was dead. It was then too late to ask her a few questions. The student will find that every kind of obstruction, evasion and refusal will meet his request to be allowed to verify the details of the stories in question. Here is an example.

In 1959 the British S.P.R. published an extraordinary tale of a luminous apparition containing a number of extremely unusual and interesting details. It was written by a member of the Council and was said to have been experienced by a distinguished scientist and his wife, who was a member of the S.P.R. It was also stated that they only consented to have their experience reported on condition that their identity could not be traced. One reason they gave for this was that they feared "curious friends." Does this not sound very odd? Curiosity about nature had, I thought, a place in science, and as Mrs. X was a member of the S.P.R. one might be pardoned for supposing that she had some curiosity about apparitions and would understand that others felt the same. Suspecting that there was something very odd indeed about this case and the profound secrecy surrounding the persons involved, I did all I could to discover the facts, but was met as usual by a wall of evasion and obstruction. No independent inquiry was to be allowed. The distinguished scientist and his S.P.R. wife were said to be adamant in their refusal. In parapsychology you are constantly treated in this way if you seriously want to discover the truth. What the truth was in this case may never be known. It is, I think, possible that the whole story was a hoax designed to test the credulity of those willing to publish such tales in a supposedly scientific journal. Such seems to have been the case with the reports of two marvelous telepathic subjects in Czechoslovakia which were featured in a journal called *The New Scientist* in England. The editor had apparently accepted the tales as coming from a reliable source, but finally I had to explain to him that

the whole case was a hoax and that nothing coming from parapsychological sources could be believed without the most rigorous and searching corroboration from impeccable sources.

An example of what is necessary can be seen in the recently published scripts of the late Miss Geraldine Cummins purporting to emanate from the famous S.P.R. automatist Mrs. Willett. This book was supported by at least three ex-Presidents of the S.P.R., one of whom wrote a long preface to it of over 70 pages. In the course of the communications two odd and startlingly evidential items of information, involving a word and a phrase, were given by the medium, and the editor of the book assured us that both these were actually in the diaries left by the deceased communicator. Fortunately, in this case the original diaries had been preserved. They were examined and their owner stated that neither the word nor the phrase was to be found in them.

One additional recent example will suffice. It illustrates the attempts made by well-known and highly respected parapsychologists to suppress the truth when this is likely to harm what they call the Cause. This was an inquiry into what was described as a watertight case for survival, the pamphlet in question being placed on the bookstall of the Churches' Fellowship, with which the Bishop of Southwark is associated. The investigator, a prominent member of the Council of the S.P.R., made a thorough inquiry, assisted by myself and others, into the case. After the most laborious investigation it emerged that the data were based on a highly organized and complex fraud. It was considered desirable, therefore, to suppress it and the Churches' Fellowship quietly withdrew the pamphlet from their bookstall. The chief investigator concerned has just died and I was not surprised to hear that instructions had been given to destroy the whole of the dossier which had been built up over five years. I raised this matter at the Annual General Meeting of the British S.P.R. One member of Council rose to defend the suppression of the case and the destruction of the documents. Only one ordinary member of the Society rose to express her surprise and disapproval. The other members preferred to remain silent.

I have chosen these recent cases simply as examples of what is going on today. During the last sixty years I have noted similar incidents in which leading parapsychologists and their propagandists have been shown to be barefaced liars. After but a few years in psychical research Frank Podmore, who was one of the few senior members of the British S.P.R. who almost consistently rejected the magical way of looking at the world, became gradually more and more disillusioned. As early as 1880 he expressed his unbelief in many of the phenomena reported, including the alleged materialized form of Katie King. Although he spoke of the extravagance, grotesqueness and absurdity of Spiritualism

he at that time remained convinced that he had personally witnessed phenomena which he could not explain and which he regarded as paranormal. Hoping, doubtless, to be in a position to meet more mediums, he joined the National Association of Spiritualists and, suprisingly enough, was accepted and became a member of their Council. Some twenty years later his attitude had hardened. "Is it credible," he asked, "that there is anything of value behind this fifty years' record of quibbling and chicanery?" Perhaps Andrew Lang who, although always near to credulity, yet managed to retain his sanity, was right when he was reported as saying that sometimes it looked as if psychical research does somehow change and pervert the logical faculty of scientific minds. It may be he was right. How otherwise can be explained the blind belief of Mrs. Sidgwick who, after years of experience of the subject, accepted almost without question the alleged telepathic phenomena demonstrated by the late Gilbert Murray? With such credulity nothing can be done. As a seventeenth century author was said to have written: "When men have once acquiesced in untrue opinions and registered them as authentic records in their minds, it is no less impossible to speak intelligently to such men as to write legibly on a paper already scribbled over."

I am often told by my critics that the progress of parapsychological studies is hindered by the skepticism with which the alleged discoveries are regarded by so many scientific men. So long as the methods of research and presentation adopted by modern parapsychologists continue, this is bound to be so. A glance at the stories published quarter by quarter by the British Society for Psychical Research and the mode of presentation there adopted would amply suffice to make any sane man approaching the subject for the first time take second thoughts. I am in complete agreement with Dr. Henry Margenau when he said that the field of parapsychology is "largely avoided by scientists because of the loose treatment of serious matters that prevails in it." It is clear that he, at least, has not been deceived by the tale so frequently told by the parapsychologists that orthodox scientists refuse to consider their results because they are afraid that, were they to do so, their whole picture of the world as they see it would be upset. What is perhaps the most damaging aspect is that few protests are made by serious officers of the Society. Year by year the same kind of tales and experiments are published and money urgently required for other work is frittered away on articles of not the smallest scientific value. Little is done to show disapproval or publish criticism of the more extreme vagaries of the Spiritualist press which, week by week, publishes stories of the miraculous which would hardly have found support in medieval times. For example, in a single issue of one of these papers with a wide circu-

lation I read that a carved wooden African head caused any amount of misfortune to those who possessed it, and that it was finally sent to a Cabinet Minister. Within a week the Profumo scandal broke, presumably caused by the head. In the same issue I learn that apports used to come tinkling down from the small end of Mrs. Estelle Roberts's trumpet; that a gentleman in Puerto Rico, a deaf-mute since birth, speaks and sings in perfect English; that a full-form materialization of a person just dead appeared before twenty witnesses; and that in England a rector stated that two pigs had been reduced to skeletons through the evil eye. Nothing from the 1870s could really approach this miscellany of marvels.

Again, organizations are functioning in England which have the support of large numbers of bishops and other presumably sane individuals who have so fully adopted the magical way of looking at the world that they easily accept the tales sponsored by these bodies and think nothing of senior members going round exorcising alleged haunted houses, driving demons out of mentally disturbed persons and advertising themselves and their performances on television. Some years ago one of the occult magazines published a fantastic tale. I mention it merely as an example of the kind of story put out by so-called parapsychologists and the difficulty experienced by any critic anxious to discover the facts. In an English quarterly magazine, *Beyond*, edited by a prominent member of the Churches' Fellowship, occurs an article in 1961 said to be a translation of a paper originally published in a French journal. It was considered of such interest that it was also published in the Fellowship's quarterly review. This story purported to show that the power of prayer had been scientifically proved. It stated that a Mr. N. J. Stewel, an atomic scientist, tried with his colleagues to discover what happened in a human brain when its owner was at the point of death. A lady who was an earnest Christian was chosen for the experiment. It was thought that she had but a short time to live. Measuring apparatus was installed in her room in order to record movements and oscillations of her brain. Five well-known scientists conducted the experiment. At the moment of death the needle moved violently as the cerebral waves affected the instruments. There was apparently no contact between the apparatus and the dying woman.

I determined to look into this case as I suspected that it was fiction being circulated by the parapsychologists to assist their propaganda. I started by inquiries which included a lengthy correspondence with the Chairman of the Churches' Fellowship early in 1962. As I expected, no kind of corroboration of the story was available. I discovered that the French journal in which it seemed originally to have appeared was a French version of an American paper called *Herald of His Coming*,

published in California. The editor of the French paper refused to answer any letters and the editor of *Herald of His Coming* did likewise. The inquiry, after hours of wasted time, had to be abandoned. So I returned to where I started.

I do not intend to waste any more time over the hoaxes and fictional reports put out by parapsychologists. The Churches' Fellowship is one of the leading Christian occult organizations in England today and has an impressive list of Bishops and distinguished clerics supporting it. It is abundantly clear that before publishing these tales those responsible made no attempt whatever to obtain any kind or sort of corroboration. The revival of occultism under the name of psychical research has been accompanied by nearly all the follies which were so striking a feature in medieval times, and, masquerading as science, has succeeded in attracting the attention of many who have little idea of what lies below the surface. Most of Europe appears to be infected and it is, in my view, one of the signs of the disintegration of Western culture. Horoscopes appear in most newspapers every day, and the state of the public mind in England at least can be measured by a statement made to me by a well-known worker in the B.B.C. He told me that today if a man was shown falling off a chair and the viewers were told that he was in a trance they would be thrilled. In Germany a society has been formed to try to combat the growing superstitious attitudes which are so common in the population, and throughout Europe charms and amulets are on open sale and, as far as I can see, leaders of European and American parapsychology do little or nothing to show their disapproval. In my view such silence on their part is almost tantamount to approval but it has nearly always been a feature of the parapsychological scene.

In the issue of the *American Psychologist* for May 1969, already mentioned, Dr. R. A. McConnell, in an admirable summary of some difficult questions, asks why psychologists are not interested in ESP. Has it ever struck him that their lack of interest is because they do not want to be associated with the parapsychologists whose reputation for the pursuit of truth is not of the highest and who are linked with a crowd of dubious and half-baked seekers after marvels. Were it to rid itself of these people instead of suffering them and appointing them to positions of prestige and authority it might have a great future. But I doubt if the purge will come in my time.

In my view parapsychologists have a grave responsibility in these matters. Modern mass means of communication pick up these tales of the occult world and the general public is led to believe that the paranormal can be observed almost anywhere at any time. Children in England are holding ouija board séances, believing that they can get in touch with the spirits, and on several occasions the results have not

been happy. An attitude of skepticism is deplored and the public is led to believe that anybody who throws doubts on the alleged discoveries of the parapsychologists is sunk in a morass of outdated materialism. Little do they know what lies beneath the surface of the new occultism and the new witchcraft. Anyway, I have finished with it.

OPEN DISCUSSION

SERVADIO: Dr. Dingwall is perfectly right, of course, when he condemns current superstitions and when he says that they are as absurd and intolerable as those of the darkest ages. His inexorable crack of the whip should be accepted as a warning to parapsychologists and as an appeal to watch their steps, their methods and most of all the needs of their own obligations. But where it is difficult to agree with Dingwall is in his bitter generalizations. He speaks every now and then of parapsychologists in general as if they were all guilty of carelessness, if not of outright dishonesty. He believes that, but I don't believe it. It sounds to me, let's say, like condemning all engineers or physicians after a series of mistakes, misjudgments, etc. on the part of several engineers or medical doctors. One can quite understand psychologically what he says, but one cannot adopt it as an inordinate conclusion regarding medicine or the medical profession. This is what seems to me to be the weak part in Dingwall's brilliant presentation. He is a disappointed man. We can see that.

GREENBANK: I think it's very important when we are studying something like this to recognize (if I may use the word) that people may make a religion out of anything and attack it on that basis. Now I think the best illustration comes in nutrition. I think that you can certainly find people who are food faddists (on the lunatic fringe if I may use the term) who insist that if you eat this one particular thing or don't eat that particular thing, your life is thereby protected or destroyed. Now because there are many people like this, and they have organizations and stores that are very busy propagandizing, does not mean there is no such thing as nutrition or that you can eat anything you want in whatever quantity you want without concern. And so I think it's very important to separate what is known from how what is known is used by people who have an ax to grind.

SERVADIO: If I may make a suggestion, there are here quite a few members of the SPR which has been so thoroughly attacked by Dingwall. Would anyone of them say something?

HARDY: Dingwall has made a remark which I would agree with very thoroughly. I think the SPR has published a lot of rubbish. Plenty of papers have been published, as far as I could discover, where there has been no attempt at verification—just anecdotal stories that have been published, and with that, I will agree. On the other hand, Dingwall says in his final paragraph "he is now finished with parapsychology." He has been saying that, to my knowledge, for at least the last ten years. He comes to the annual general meetings regularly and says this is the last annual general meeting he is going to attend and then he turns up at the next one regularly.

HERBERT: I just want to say that I'm a mystic myself but I have spent many years deploring horoscopes and occultism, etc. Many people come to me with claims of various kinds and I spend nearly all my time explaining these data away for suspected known causes.

SERVADIO: On the other hand, I wonder if the parapsychological attitude would be so encouraging for people who like horoscopes, palmistry and things like that. I think they get immediately discouraged as soon as they go to one of our meetings or lectures.

COHEN: I agree with you. I think that as a matter of fact with the current interest, Dr. Dingwall was a little too hard. The current interest in the occult is genuine. Any attempt at verification does not immediately, as they say, turn people off. It is resented and the occult today is openly promulgated as what it is and accepted for what it is and deliberately so. You know, you're not trying to get an occult idea through by quoting it in rational and scientific terminology. You are getting to an occult idea with occult terminology and throwing out rationalism and science very deliberately.

SERVADIO: Well, I think it would be a good thing if the transcription of the few words we said could be sent to Dr. Dingwall, and, of course, any one of us could write him a letter and say what he thinks of his paper, which as we hope and we know will be published so he will have a chance to read it over and over again and have reflections about it.

MUNDLE: He ought to be relieved to know that in general we don't mind his criticism.

ROLL: I think nevertheless there's a certain danger inherent in this type of presentation for those who are easily swayed. We tend to be-

come scientific and rational, and we turn our backs right from the outset against this very rich literature and these extremely interesting practices associated, shall we say, with witchcraft beliefs, both in Europe and present day in the African bush. I think, on the contrary, these practices and these beliefs are things that ought to be explored very thoroughly because for so many years people have been living in a parapsychological world and believe in these things. They have developed procedures for going into trance and developed certain other methods which Plato referred to as "contagious magic," which is another word for psychometry, and he thinks that by becoming very scientific and very rational we tend to turn our backs on these things, whereas on the contrary we are in a situation where we ought to review or repeat these explanations or data of the phenomena which we are confronted with, so this is really what made me somewhat unhappy about this kind of paper in that it may tend to discourage us from exploring a very rich literature.

SERVADIO: May I point out to Mr. Roll that the Parapsychology Foundation has many times encouraged this kind of investigation.