

who washes and cleanses us, and puts out of mind our failings ; he who makes us partakers of his death, destroys the kingdom of Satan and breaks the power of sin ; he who, moreover, makes us one with himself, so that, clothed with him, we are accounted children of God. We should be as certain, I say, that he brings these benefits to our souls, as we are that we see our bodies washed, immersed, and surrounded by water . . . it is a most certain rule concerning sacraments, that in the material objects we should discern spiritual benefits, just as if they were actually set before our eyes. . . . Not that these gracious gifts are so bound up with and tied to the sacrament as to be conferred upon us by its own efficacy ; the fact is simply that by this token the Lord declares to us that it is his will and pleasure to bestow them all upon us. Nor is it with an empty spectacle that he feeds our gaze ; but he leads us to the actual object signified, and effectively fulfils in us that which he represents before us " (*Inst.* IV. xv. 14).

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## Making Sense of Parapsychology

BY J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.

**I**N June 1953 at the conclusion of an article in *The Churchman* on Parapsychology and the Christian, I wrote, " It will be thrilling to see where we go from here ". Others also have been asking the question, " Where do we go ? " and it is the purpose of this article to review some recent attempts to give an answer. It is a pity that so few Christians have taken the subject seriously ; two notable exceptions are Dr. W. R. Matthews and Dr. Karl Heim.

Parapsychology is concerned with the psychic powers of man, referred to, for convenience, as psi. Psi has no necessary connection with spiritualism, although such powers as clairvoyance and telepathy are manifested by mediums. Most of the modern work has been done under laboratory conditions, and has been expressed statistically. For the newcomer to the subject the simplest book is J. B. Rhine, *The Reach of the Mind*, which has now been republished by Penguin Books. This describes the card-guessing and other experiments which have established the facts of extrasensory perception, precognition, and (probably) psycho-kinesis. An even fuller book, which is likely to be a standard work for some time, is *Modern Experiments in Telepathy*, by S. G. Soal and F. Bateman. The very excellence of this book will undoubtedly militate against its popularity, for its detailed accounts of experiments and its setting out of statistical results can necessarily appeal fully only to those who can follow the scientific method and its assessment. But the ordinary reader, who has some knowledge of the subject, will here find many gaps filled. The authors describe not only the experiments of Dr. Soal, which are extensive, but also other experiments from various parts of the world. Only occasionally, however, are there references to non-repeatable occurrences ; though two pages are devoted to the interesting " Gordon Davis " case, where Dr. Soal received through a medium alleged communications from a

deceased friend, who later proved to be still alive. The queer factor in this case was that the control spirit gave a detailed description of Davis's house, and, when Davis was found to be alive three years later, he was actually living in this house, although at the time of the communications he had not yet gone to live there.

This book deals with all the chief criticisms that have been levelled against the experiments and their results. Criticisms on the ground of lack of proper precautions are completely out of date. The more recent criticism by Mr. Spencer Brown is given fair consideration. Some readers may have heard Mr. Brown on the radio. He challenges the commonly accepted idea of randomness. The experiments have apparently demonstrated that attempts to prove the existence of a psi faculty in man have given results that are significantly above chance. Mr. Spencer Brown has maintained that the significant results in card guessing can be paralleled by pairing off random sets of numbers. Dr. Soal gives good reasons for disputing this in the light of actual results.

From the tabulation of facts, we turn to attempts to assess them. The book *Physical and Psychological Research: An Analysis of Belief*, by G. G. L. Gregory and Anita Kohsen, is a serious attempt to construct a world-view that makes sense, in the light of the discipline of science, and the somewhat undisciplined systems of psycho-analysis and parapsychology. It would not be easy to find a reviewer who could give a critical estimate of the whole ground that is covered, for the book ranges through the fields of cybernetics, relativity, animal ethology, Freudianism, and psychical research. The authors are serious students of these and other subjects, and are not cranks, but, inasmuch as they take seriously such things as telepathy and precognition, their work will naturally be viewed with suspicion by orthodox scientists. But they endeavour to hammer out a reasonable belief, based upon four methods of arriving at the type of knowledge that satisfies. (1) The logico-deductive synthesis of images and ideas. (2) Inductive synthesis: often employing the statistical method. (3) Operational method, with the description of an experiment. (4) Intuiting.

The problem of parapsychology, with which this review is concerned, is that it is extremely weak in the first type of function. Until fairly recent times all of its phenomena fell under the heading of 4, where it was possible to ascribe all that was abnormal to the subjective reactions of the observer or retainer of the story. One may add that this explanation has been used to rule out many of the Biblical miracles. The difficulty from the standpoint of the physical sciences has been that the phenomena of ghosts, spontaneous telepathy, or prevision, have not been repeatable at will in a way that would bring them under the heading of 3. In recent times the emphasis has shifted, and Dr. Rhine, Dr. Soal, and others, have accumulated masses of experiments that can be both repeated and assessed statistically. But the further back the frontiers are thrown, the harder it becomes to obtain a logico-deductive synthesis, an hypothesis that makes sense.

Our two authors postulate "image centres" which are linked "often somatically or, more generally, materially linked by means of 'information loops'". The word 'loops' is chosen so as to be descriptive of the two-way process we envisage, i.e. the informational and

the operational, as in cybernetic theory" (p. 114). These image centres may be regarded as having a life of their own. In the animal world they appear as reflexes, drives, and learned behaviour patterns, and they are hierarchically controlled in the interest of the animal or the group as a whole.

There is much in this that reminds us of McDougall's views, especially when the authors postulate telepathy as an additional means of communication between the image centres and the group of centres. The lives of the social insects make such communication a likely postulate, and also suggest something like a group mind. Our authors attach great significance to a group of people who have come together for a common interest. In fact they use group telepathy to give a reasonable explanation of precognition, of which they quote some fascinating examples from their own experience. X has a "hunch" about the future. Perhaps he mentions it to others who are interested. Their interest in the fulfilment of the "hunch" leads to their influencing of other minds who can help to bring the prevision to pass.

Moreover, one individual or group may be able to "haunt" others, and influence their feelings and reactions. Healers may be positive "haunters" who can at a deep level cause the reintegration of disrupted image centres in the sick person.

Here we may conveniently turn to another book, *I Who Am: A Study of the Self*, by Lawrence Hyde. Here again the author has a respect for scientific method, philosophy, psychology and parapsychology, but he is more concerned than are the authors of the previous book with the spiritual side of man's being. He tries to find the scope and range of the human Psyche, and to discover how far there are objective realities behind the subjective experiences. For this "it is not only the theologians of whose help we are in need; we must call also upon the services of expert students, orthodox and unorthodox, of the 'paranormal'" (p. 55).

The Christian will find that too little attention is paid to the theologians. The doctrine of the Incarnation is dismissed summarily because it "involves us with a Christo-centric theology that raises serious difficulties for the modern mind" (p. 205, 108). Thus, if the **New Testament** is the one true revelation of God, Mr. Hyde has slammed the door on his one hope of finding the synthesis that he is looking for. Once we do this, we are unlikely to rise higher than man himself, with experiences that are purely human. The fact is that these experiences are often so strange and exciting, and appear so much better than materialism, that they are accepted as ultimate for man. Mr. Hyde turns to the East for further light, but does not swallow Eastern religion whole, as some others do. In particular he offers an alternative to the theory of reincarnation, which in his view gives an adequate explanation of the alleged facts. Mr. Hyde's theory is that of Life Rays, which link the individual to associates in this world and in the spiritual world. These Rays are expressions of the primal energy of the Absolute. Spirit beings on the same Ray are collaborating in the work of the spiritual liberation of mankind, though there are also destructive forces at work.

There is much more to the book than this, and in particular there is a

critical assessment of some of the concepts of psycho-analysis. The writer finds that lack of integration in man arises particularly from failure to correlate thought and feeling, reason and emotion. But it is the idea of our link with higher and lower spirit beings that forms a bridge to the next book. This is *The Psychic Message of the Scriptures* by T. Rowland Powel. It is a book of lesser calibre than the two previously mentioned, though it has a definitely Christian slant. It is, in fact, an attempt to combine Christianity with spiritualism, and to offer psychic "facts" as an aid to faith. "All the great men and women of the Old Testament, from Abraham downwards, were mediumistic, and could communicate with messengers from the Unseen. The same is true of the New Testament; all the leading figures were psychics, Jesus Christ being the greatest" (page 18). The casual reader is intended to gather from the book that there is no difference in kind between the vital religious experiences of the Bible and those of spiritualism to-day, except that this book has no time for those spirit messages that deny the fundamentals of the Christian Faith, as so many do.

What is not pointed out, either by this writer, or by the Rev. G. Maurice Elliott, who writes the foreword, and whose book on *Spiritualism in the Old Testament* is quoted, is that the inspired men of the Bible never regard themselves as inspired by the spirit of some departed person, but by the Spirit of God; with mediums the reverse is true. It is rather ironical that Mr. Powel on page 7, where he is concerned to show that spiritualism can give a certainty about the after life that is lacking in orthodox Christianity, reminds the reader of the origins of modern spiritualism with the Fox sisters in 1848. Not everyone realizes that Maggie and Kate Fox died as chronic alcoholics, after a confession (later retracted) that they had faked the mysterious rappings; while Leah, who acted as "publicity agent" for her two sisters, died of a stroke that seized her during a fit of temper. Compared with the prophets and apostles, they seem strange agents for God to use to be the vehicles of a supplementary revelation to the Bible.

Although Mr. Powel keeps closely to the Biblical records, he is strangely allergic to all accounts of bodily resurrection. This is because he adopts the occultist theory of etheric and other bodies that are attached to the physical body by an etheric umbilical cord; if once this cord is severed, there can be no return to the physical body. Therefore, whenever the dead are restored, they cannot really have been dead. Even Lazarus was only in a state of catalepsy, in spite of Christ's clear words, "Lazarus is dead". There must have been an abnormal number of cataleptics in Gospel times! Christ truly died, but returned to dematerialize His body (p. 53). One wonders how this squares with John ii. 19-22. ("Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . .") Incidentally, does the author know that Miss Geraldine Cummins has supposedly received from the spirit world quite a different theory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

One does not wish to be unfair to this book, which is written in all sincerity, but it would be much better if spiritualists would admit that all attempts to contact the dead are forbidden in the Bible: that

angels are not men and women who have lived on this earth (N.B. Job xxxviii. 4-7, before the creation of man. Mark xii. 25, where "as angels" indicates that they are not turned into angels; two classes with certain resemblances must be involved): and that clairvoyance and apparent miracles and spiritual manifestations can come through the direct working of God and from other sources (e.g. Matthew xxiv. 24). If this were recognized, we should not have such confusion of thought as one finds, for example, on page 63, referring to Pentecost: "When the Holy Spirit came upon the company, they were all 'controlled' by their Guides and other spirits, who burst into ecstatic speech in many different tongues".

A booklet, *The Communion of Saints*, by W. S. Pakenham-Walsh, identifies this communion with the higher spiritualism, and gives several examples of how messengers from the beyond and gifts of clairvoyance have been used for the benefit of mankind. The author is clear about the supremacy and the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and warns against any non-Christian approach to spiritualism. But again there seems to be a confusion. Evangelicals firmly believe in angels, and know from Scripture that God uses their ministry, and can, if He so desires, send some human spirit back to earth for a particular purpose. Similarly many of us accept the fact of clairvoyance as a natural gift that some possess. But we find no warrant in Scripture, but rather the reverse, for trying on our own initiative to make contact with angels, or with the spirits of the departed.

The final book is chiefly intended to ask sensible questions, and to suggest lines of answer that might well be followed up. In *New World of the Mind* Dr. J. B. Rhine assumes the facts of psi, and tries to see their relevance for various branches of knowledge and thought. What is to be the new world picture of physics in the light of psi's apparent independence of many of the accepted categories of space and time? To what extent does psi function in the biological realm, in the growth of the cell, in the linkage of groups, in homing capacity and migration? What light do experiments throw upon the still unsolved mind-body relationship? And upon the old problem of free will and determinism? All the time Dr. Rhine is setting up pointers that are of the greatest significance for the thinking man, but he leaves us with the realization that as yet virtually none of the questions have been answered.

Naturally he devotes considerable space to religion, for he believes that religion needs all the help that it can obtain against the philosophy of materialism. Properly conducted experiments might also, he holds, provide proof of spirit-survival; although the more that one knows about the range of the living mind in time and space, the harder it becomes to devise experiments that would eliminate the influence of living minds in favour of the mind of some departed personality. Psi findings are also relevant to prayer, for, as Dr. Rhine says, "if, originating in any personal agency anywhere, celestial or mundane, there is an effect produced upon the physical world in answer to prayer, it would have to be a psychokinetic effect, a psi phenomenon" (p. 197). There is also a section on healing; and obviously the influence of mind on matter, if this is proved, must throw some light upon sudden and apparently miraculous healings.

It is obvious that we cannot claim too much for the study of parapsychology, but the Christian certainly cannot afford to neglect it. It can be used to remove certain initial prejudices that lead to a sceptical and materialistic approach to the Bible. It can show that Christians are not being unscientific in their attitude to prayer and its effects. It can show that strange "spiritual" happenings are not necessarily direct from God, or, one may add, from the Devil. It can warn us against generating mass telepathic force in order to obtain our desires, without submitting those desires to God in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, when all is said and done, it cannot prove the existence of God, nor can it form the basis of a Gospel of regeneration. It has merely opened the gate to a whole realm of the human psyche that is very exciting, but that still belongs to what the New Testament calls "the natural man". This natural man has many unusual powers that can be cultivated, and that lead him to experience at a certain level a unity of life with all creation. This unifying experience may be given a religious connotation, and identified with the highest possible union with the Absolute. But the heart of the New Testament revelation is new birth through the Holy Spirit of God, so that we can say from our heart, "Abba, Father!" and enjoy the personal fellowship with the Personal God.

The following are the particulars of the books noted above :

- Modern Experiments in Telepathy.* S. G. Soal and F. Bateman. Faber. pp. 425. 30/-.
- Physical and Psychological Research.* G. G. L. Gregory and Anita Kohsen. Omega Press. pp. 213. 15/-.
- I Who Am.* Lawrence Hyde. Omega Press. pp. 222. 15/-.
- The Psychic Message of the Scriptures.* T. Rowland Powel, M.A. Omega Press. pp. 84. 7/6.
- The Communion of Saints.* W. S. Pakenham-Walsh, M.A. pp. 47 (paper). Obtainable from the author, Badgers, Fawley Court, Henley. 2/8 post free.
- New World of the Mind.* J. B. Rhine. Faber. pp. 291. 18/-.