

The fiftieth anniversary of the English Society for Psychical Research gave the British Broadcasting Corporation an opportunity to present this summary of authenticated revelations.

Spiritualism *Put to Proof*

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JUST lately there have been signs that psychical research may be about to reach the stage in which definite records can be made, under control conditions, of 'supernormal phenomena'—or what many researchers now prefer to call, I think wisely, by the noncommittal name of paranormal phenomena. Science is measurement, and when instruments of precision can be used to make records of paranormal occurrences then at last we are approaching the stage when the facts may be ordered into laws and we may begin to have a general idea as to what they mean. Let me try to tell you quite briefly how this state of affairs has come about.

I had better tell the story from the beginning because it is probably known only to very few people. It starts as far back as the war years and as far away as Austria. During the

War a printer had his curiosity aroused by the fact that the officers of a regiment that was quartered near by came in regularly to his works to buy large sheets of white paper. Finally, they told him why they bought the paper. They wanted it for automatic writing with a planchette. This interested him, and after some time he persuaded the officers to hold a sitting in his house. The sitting led to his two young sons' becoming, in turn, mediums who aroused considerable interest.

Some of the sitters were so convinced that when they sat with the younger brother, Rudi Schneider, something of a paranormal kind took place that they persuaded the medium to undergo considerable control in the hopes of being able to obtain a record. Many sittings have now been held with Rudi Schneider, and several observers of scientific standing have

been greatly impressed. I need only refer you to a letter in the *Times* a short time ago from Dr. William Brown, the reader in mental philosophy at Oxford, and that of Professor Fraser-Harris. These observers are convinced that things happened in their presence at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research which they could not explain either by fraud or by hallucination.

But of course that again does not take us further along this difficult path of exploration. For the last twenty years there have been eminent scientists who have told us that at seances they have witnessed the most remarkable paranormal phenomena. The fact remained that they brought back no tabulated record. But in the case of Rudi Schneider at last an advance beyond this position has been made.

You probably know that one of the greatest obstacles to the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena is that the medium nearly always insists that the phenomena can take place only in the dark or in a subdued red light. The extraordinary awkwardness of judging phenomena—which, after all, means the appearances of things—when the conditions are such that things cannot be apparent needs no stressing. To get over the difficulty, objects that are to be moved, as evidence of the presence of a paranormal force, are touched with luminous paint. But this means only that you can see that the object is being moved, not that you can see what it is that is moving it, and after all that is the point at issue. The red-light illumination seems to offer a better chance of obtaining evidence, but, as Sir William Bragg pointed out when

we were discussing the question some time ago, the red light may be even more unsatisfactory than the glimmer of luminous paint; for one of the queer things about a red light, he said, is that these lower rays are peculiarly bad in giving to the eye power of definition. In red light you see an object, as you think, comparatively clearly, but tests will show that the object under such a light lacks detail. And the worst is that unless you know about this unsatisfactory illuminating power of red light you think you are seeing the object almost as well as if it was lit by normal light. So it is clear that if mediums can produce phenomena in no brighter illumination than a red light there is a grave obstacle in the way of accepting the evidence of witnesses whose power of observation is so seriously limited.

II

Now Rudi Schneider is no exception to this unfortunate rule of mediums. He claims that he can produce his full phenomena only in these unsatisfactory conditions of illumination. But here science has lately come to the help of what seemed an almost impossibly difficult line of research.

You will probably remember that when the Shah of Persia's jewels were on show at the Persian Exhibition eighteen months ago they were guarded by an invisible ray. If anyone put his hand toward the jewels an alarm bell rang out. Though the intruder could neither see nor feel it, he had put his hand through the ray and so disturbed an electric contact and rung the bell. This device is now being used in many shop windows, and the other day I was shown an improve-

ment made by the inventor to prevent smash-and-grab raids. As the thief puts his arm through the broken window he interferes with the invisible ray that is playing just behind the glass and the disturbed ray operates a snap shutter, which, with rubber grips, closes on the intruding arm and holds it fast. At this rate it will soon be easier and safer to try to rob a giant clam of its own pearl than to pluck jewels from a jeweler's show case.

Now it has occurred to psychical researchers that here in this ray is a means of getting over the obstacle that seemed to block the way to any scientific advance in the subject; and certainly there is now to hand a series of reports on the use of this ray in sittings with Rudi Schneider which demand the most careful attention. Among other researchers to whom Schneider has given regular sittings over a considerable time has been Dr. Osty of the Metapsychical Institute of Paris. Dr. Osty has a record as a researcher who has consistently aimed at obtaining objective records of paranormal phenomena. He persuaded Schneider to sit controlled by being securely held, and in this position to attempt to cause the movement of an object that was placed on a table well out of bodily reach. But—and here came in the value of the invisible infra-red ray—the object was surrounded by infra-red radiation, so that though it appeared to be in the dark and unguarded, the ray would be interfered with and a bell would sound should anything approach it. I can give you only the briefest outline here of what happened, but if you wish you can consult the illustrated account published in the last three bi-

monthly issues of the *Metapsychical Review* published by Librairie Félix Alcan, Paris, or the book giving the complete history of this important investigation, issued by the same publishing firm.

Not only did the bell ring, but, when it rang, automatically four flashlight photos were taken which show quite clearly the medium seated at some distance from the table with his back to it and with his arms and legs held. It is also clear that there is nothing near the table that could have caused the bell to ring. In subsequent experiments the taking of the flashlight photograph was delayed in order to see how long the bell would continue to ring. The purpose of this was to see whether there was a connection between the intensely rapid breathing of the medium and the sending out of whatever force it is that disturbs the infra-red ray.

The breathing itself has to be heard to be believed. When I sat with this medium it was just like listening to someone pumping up a bicycle at top speed, and it went on without a break for more than an hour. There are records of his breathing at no less than 350 times a minute.

Now the connection between this frantic breathing and the emission of the paranormal force has been established. You will find, in the report of the sittings, recording graphs showing the relation between the breathing and the interference with the ray. They show that the substance that is touching the infra-red ray is always vibrating at just twice the medium's rate of breathing. Several other graphs showing the intensity of the force and its direction are also given. So at last we may say that the first records of

paranormal phenomena have been made. At last we are on the threshold of a science whereby we may trace connections between known and unknown phenomena—as, for example, in this case between the breathing and the emanation—and so find out what are the limitations of these new phenomena and in this way finally arrive at the laws that govern them.

III

It is very apposite that this year should see this remarkable advance in psychical research because the English Society for Psychical Research has just celebrated its jubilee, after fifty years of patient work. This, then, is an occasion on which I think we may ask: After these fifty years what has the society to show for the work of so many distinguished men, many of them scientists of high standing?

It can, I think, point to a record of very valuable work. Of course, until science gave these new ways of recording in the dark it was not possible to make much scientific advance in the study of phenomena about which it is postulated that they can take place only in the dark. But there are other lines of research that psychical investigation can pursue; there are other paranormal faculties that do not necessarily demand a seance room and a medium before they can manifest themselves, though unfortunately they are rare and sporadic.

Undoubtedly the most important of these is telepathy. The word has become quite a commonplace one. You will usually hear people say when an occurrence of thought transference seems to have taken place; 'Oh, it's only telepathy.' But surely telepathy is one of the most upsetting

notions that our minds, with their present outlook, can possibly entertain. The thought that part of my mind may at any moment be receiving from other, perhaps unknown, people news and views and notions and moods without my being aware of the leakage is surely extremely upsetting to all our notions of privacy and personal independence. And if, as the evidence seems to suggest, we most of us manage to give as good as we get, and are nearly all of us, on this mysterious wave length, not merely silent listeners but each a transmitting station also, well, that only adds to our sense of responsibility without giving us back our cherished sense of privacy.

I do not mean to suggest that most of us have the capacity to eavesdrop on each other to an unlimited extent. Telepathic connection, it seems, takes place through the subconscious mind, and for the vast majority of us connection between our conscious and subconscious minds is hardly more easy than looking directly into someone else's mind. But I think it grows extremely likely that, though matters of fact can be got through telepathically in comparatively few cases, we may all of us both radiate and pick up moods and states of mind.

Of course there is no doubt that we have found ourselves inclined to accept such notions of direct mental communication because of the wireless. The thought that waves that can be transformed into speech and music are all the while passing through our ears, though we can hear them only if we tune in, has undoubtedly made us able to accept telepathy in a way the pre-radio world would have thought utterly credulous. I am not myself at all certain that that analogy is sound.

I am inclined to believe that those who care to investigate telepathy carefully not only will come to the conclusion that it exists, but will come to a conclusion quite as remarkable, that telepathy is only the first uncovered step toward a vast and buried knowledge.

But this easy familiarity with the word 'telepathy,' this sense that when you have so described any abnormal mental event you have settled the matter and laid the question, is a tribute, if rather an unhelpful one, to the solid work of the society. The mass of careful evidence it has collected, the patient use of confirmatory contemporary witnesses, statistical tests to rule out chance and coincidence, and the classification of material, can now leave no reasonable doubt in the mind of anyone who is industrious enough to read the immense accumulation and candid enough to admit a strange conclusion that this odd faculty does exist.

IV

Another subject on which the society has reported and the existence of which it is difficult in the face of the evidence to resist, though the laws governing it need elucidation, is water divining or dowsing. There again science has made it possible for us to accept the possibility to a degree impossible a generation ago. Geophysical surveying has already made electric, magnetic, and gravimetric instruments of such delicacy that not only can the presence of underground waters be recorded but also deposits of ores at a distance or depth of thousands of feet. And yet here, too, the analogy, though it

helps us not to reject out of hand such a possibility as water divining, may not point to the true explanation. I mean the faculty may not be due to the water diviner's having a finer sensitiveness to electric currents than have ordinary people.

This is M. Henri Mager's hypothesis in his interesting book lately published over here on water divining. But there is good reason to believe that water divining has as little to do with electricity as telepathy has to do with radio. Water divining, like telepathy, may point to completely new faculties that apprehend conditions as completely beyond the world of waves and electrons, on which science to-day bases its work, as is that scientific world beyond the world of common sense, of trees and houses and solid earth and flowing water which is the world that ordinary people until a couple of generations ago always thought to be the whole world.

If then I may give you in conclusion my opinion as to where these investigations are pointing, I am inclined to say that they suggest we are approaching a completely new threshold of knowledge. Up till now whole generations lived out their lives under one system of ideas. Now several such systems pass during the lifetime of one generation. We were born into one world, our youth was spent in another, the next lasts perhaps just long enough to cover our middle age, and we may quite likely see several more before it is our turn to go. There is one compensation in such an unfamiliar way of living: when we come to die we shall have gone through so many complete changes that death itself will be only another move.

BOOKS ABROAD

LE BONHOMME LÉNINE. By *Curzio Malaparte*. Paris: Bernard Grasset. 1932.

(Louis Joxe in *L'Europe Nouvelle*, Paris)

LENIN, *THE GOOD FELLOW* is a life of Lenin written from a special point of view, and it undoubtedly conflicts with the conventional picture we have formed of this great revolutionist. Malaparte endeavors to reveal in Lenin a petty bourgeois who was infinitely more dangerous to his bourgeois colleagues than the exotic monster with which people tried to frighten them. Many chapters are written with brilliant talent, and the author's powers of evocation and his dramatic art are not his only qualities. Life circulates everywhere. Why do we remember the descriptions of Lenin in London and Paris? Not merely because they analyze the hero but because they reveal the London and Paris of that time with charm and power. The author knows how to visualize things and how to make others see them. We have only to remember the impressive pictures he drew of the Russo-Polish war and the Russian revolution in his remarkable *Technique of the Coup d'État*.

What about the thesis of this book? We might as well admit that it often seems forced and artificial. Nevertheless, it is not the author's least merit that he provokes lively reactions against his talent, which threatens to carry the reader away and force him to come to biased conclusions despite himself. Why does Malaparte

compare Lenin with the average Frenchman? Is it because Lenin led a petty-bourgeois life in London and Paris, because he liked to go bicycle riding, to pick flowers in the woods, and to busy himself with household tasks? Because he was never a man of action and regulated his life like an earnest bureaucrat of the revolution? Because he never stole, as Stalin did, and never directed factories while financing riots, as Krassin did? Because he was a simple fellow, as one of his Paris companions saw, who, nevertheless, simplified him to excess, seeing him only from the outside? Was Lenin a good fellow and a petty bourgeois at heart because all his life he remained fanatical, theoretic, bookish, calculating, scientific, and would, according to Gambarov, have made an excellent professor?

Of course, there were all these elements in Lenin, but the bias of Malaparte and his limited canvas force us to imagine all the rest for ourselves. It is like imagining what Bonaparte would have been without his battles and what Julius Cæsar was before ambition seized him. We are reminded of a criticism directed at André Maurois when he wrote his admirable life of Shelley entitled *Ariel*. The book possessed the finest qualities; it was essentially poetic; but it described the man's life without giving us any reason to suspect that he had written some of the most beautiful poems in the English language. In this case, I know that the author may reply, 'That was not my object,' but, in spite of everything, one cannot ignore