

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH  
PUBLISHED BY THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC., EDITED BY W. G. ROLL

## FOUNDATION BEGINS "MEDIUMISTIC" PROJECT

The Foundation's "mediumistic" project, initiated with a planning conference at Duke University in June, 1965 (THETA 10), got under way in October when two well-known "mediums," Mrs. Irene Hughes of Chicago, Illinois, and Mr. Herbert Beyer of Cleveland, Ohio, arrived in Durham to participate in a testing program. The research covered parapsychological and psychological studies, including psychiatric and neurophysiological ones. Several of the suggestions that were made at the June conference were incorporated into the plan.

### PARASYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAM

Attempts were made to relate the experimental procedures to the mediums' normal working conditions so far as these could be adapted to controlled testing. Fourteen persons from the Duke and Durham community participated as "sitters" or target persons (TPs). During an experiment the TP was seated in a room adjacent to the subject's. There was no sensory contact between them and the experimental assistant who was in the medium's room was ignorant of the TP's identity. Three types of tests were done.

*Free Verbal Responses:* The main part of the research consisted of tests in which the mediums made free verbal responses giving their impressions about the TP or surviving personalities connected with him. The statements were tape-recorded. A token ("psychometric") object belonging to the TP was placed in a box fastened to the medium's chair. To prevent the TP from overhearing anything from the medium's room, the TP wore earphones which transmitted constant noise and, over these, a pair of "Straightaway" ear protectors. The noise generator was designed by Dr. C. T. Tart and built by Dr. John Artley. A mechanical noise generator also was operated.

At the conclusion of the experiments, the mediums' statements were transcribed and copies circulated to the TPs with the

request that they annotate the statements according to whether or not they applied to their circumstances. The TPs did not know which statements were in fact intended for them. When all the statements have been annotated, the results are to be analysed by an adaptation of the Pratt-Birge method.

*"Identikit" Tests:* Among the mental images mediums often see are the faces of a TP or deceased persons connected with him. Since a face is difficult to reproduce by verbal description alone, a technique used by the police for tracing "wanted persons" was adopted. This is the "Identikit." It consists of about six hundred transparencies of facial features (eyes, noses, etc.) which, when superimposed on each other, make up different faces. An Identikit was loaned to the Foundation by the Durham Police Department. With the help of it, Mrs. Hughes and Mr. Beyer constructed faces to resemble those of the TPs. These composite pictures, as well as the individual features making up each face, were reproduced by the Xerox process and the copies were distributed to the TPs. Each TP was asked to identify the face and individual features that seemed most closely to resemble his own.

*Token Object Matching Tests:* Objects submitted by the TPs were used for token object matching tests according to the procedure described in THETA 11 (page 1). This part of the research is intended to shed light on the nature of the psychometric objects often employed by mediums to establish contact with the deceased owners of the objects. It is also hoped that the results of the tests will provide predictive guides for determining whether a medium who succeeds with a TP in matching tests will also succeed in free verbal tests with that person. In a previous investigation by the Foundation of a sensitive, Mrs. Marie Hazen, it was found that the subject gave

the best set of verbal statements about a TP whose objects stimulated her highest scoring in the matching tests.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAM

It is part of the purpose of this program to try to gain some insight into the psychological makeup of mediums. Mrs. Hughes and Mr. Beyer were given the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Rorschach, and a psychiatric interview. Dr. O. Lee Trick conducted the interview; Dr. John Altrocchi interpreted the MMPIs and Dr. Carl Eisendorfer, the Rorschachs. All three are affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry at Duke. A graduate student at the University, Mr. John Heider, who is studying the neurophysiological characteristics of the trance state, cooperated by investigating the electroencephalograms ("brain waves") of the two mediums.

## RSPK STUDIES

Two investigations of ostensible "haunting" phenomena did not support parapsychological explanations. In one case the phenomena appeared to have a physical cause and in the other, a psychological one.

In the "Talk of the Town" section of *The New Yorker* (September 18, 1965) it was reported that for several months, members of the construction crew employed on the rebuilding of Pennsylvania Station in New York City, heard musical sounds coming from the station's public address system. According to the article, attempts to trace the sounds to a physical source were unsuccessful and the music continued to mystify the workmen and staff of the Pennsylvania Railroad. On the possibility that it was a parapsychological phenomenon, the

Foundation asked Mr. Daniel Bythewood, an electronics engineer at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, to study the case. In October, Bythewood interviewed a number of persons who had heard the sounds, including one of the project's engineers. From him he learned that a defective amplifier had recently been found in the public address system and that the sounds had ceased when this was repaired.

In November, W. G. Roll conducted an investigation of supposed haunting occurrences in a house in Detroit, Michigan. The members of the family, which consisted of a mother, her teen-age daughter, and two younger sons, were convinced that they had seen apparitional forms in the house. Several neighbors also claimed to have seen the phenomena. An exploratory study was made for the Foundation by Mr. John Buta, a design engineer at General Motors. Mr. Buta reported that he thought he had observed an unexplained shadow in the hallway of the house. When Roll arrived the family was highly disturbed and anxious. Throughout his stay, they repeatedly claimed to be disturbed by the apparitions. Roll, however, observed nothing unusual. The apparitions were mainly seen on the hall wall. Roll noticed that the lights from the other rooms produced unusual shadow effects on this wall and that when they were turned off, the family no longer saw the apparitions. Since there were also wide contradictions between the descriptions of several persons who simultaneously watched the same apparition, Roll concluded that the experiences probably were subjective. This impression was strengthened when the mother remarked that the spirits were most active "when we have whiskey in the house."

## "SWAN ON A BLACK SEA"

Reviewed by J. G. Pratt

GERALDINE CUMMINS. *Swan on a Black Sea*. Edited by Signe Toksvig (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965. pp. lxii + 168. 35 shillings, \$4.95.) This is a very important book—one that can, in particular, be strongly recommended to readers of THETA as being especially relevant to the question of whether any aspect of human personality survives death. The efforts of a number of people have contributed to it. The editor, Signe Toksvig, a Danish writer

and the author of a biography of Swedenborg, has contributed a brief introduction and has closely supervised the transcription and annotation (primarily by the individuals personally concerned) of the automatic writings that comprise the core of the book. These scripts are produced through the hand of the Irish sensitive, Geraldine Cummins. There are, in addition, three chapters that were written by Miss Cummins as her own conscious pro-

ductions: one is an introductory account of how she came to do these automatic-writing scripts; another is autobiographical and deals largely with her life as a sensitive; and the third gives her personal impressions regarding her automatic writings and the process of communication that seems to take place through them.

A long Foreword by Professor C. D. Broad greatly enhances the value of the book. He says that he agreed to undertake this task only after considerable hesitation and after seeing the manuscript and, later, the proofs of the book. As one might expect from his decision taken under these circumstances, his contribution speaks strongly in support of the scientific and philosophical importance of the work. But it does a great deal more than this, because Professor Broad was able to give the details of the interesting personal and historical background of the scripts that make them so unusual as a new and significant contribution to the serious study of the survival problem.

The way in which this study in automatic writing came about and the ensuing development of the project have much of the quality of a mystery thriller. The request to Miss Cummins to participate was made by letter by Mr. W. H. Salter of the Society for Psychical Research. He told her only that a Major Tennant (unknown to Miss Cummins) would like to have her try for communications from his mother, recently deceased. The first few scripts were obtained in response to this unrevealing request. On the basis of the specific information her automatic writings contained Miss Cummins became virtually certain by the end of the sixth script that Major Tennant's mother was "Mrs. Willett," the pseudonym used by a gifted sensitive who was intensively studied by some of the leading members of the S.P.R. over the quarter-century following 1910. Mrs. Willett's identity was a closely-guarded secret until some months after those first six scripts had been produced.

As described in detail by Professor Broad in his Foreword, Mrs. Willett was, in real life, Mrs. Winifred Coombe-Tennant. Even had Miss Cummins been told at the outset that Mrs. Willett was Major Tennant's mother (or had surmised this fact in some way or obtained the knowledge through ESP), she could not have known in any

ordinary way (that is, by conscious or unconscious memory) many of the specific and correct details that the first scripts contained. Many of these details were highly personal facts that were verifiable only from an unpublished diary kept by Mrs. Coombe-Tennant.

Although Miss Cummins had learned from the contents of her first scripts that the sittings were for the purpose of getting "communications" from Mrs. Willett, the style and contents of the remaining records make them difficult to attribute wholly to the sensitive's own powers. Highly personal information from unpublished sources and appropriate discussions of Mrs. Willett's earlier work as a medium from sources Miss Cummins had not read were obtained in abundance. While it is never possible to exclude absolutely the explanation of "omniscient ESP," this hypothesis is strained very seriously by the facts of this case. Yet it is one of the escape hatches available to those readers who simply must find *some way out* rather than face the survival question as a live issue. (The other possible escape routes are fraud (conscious or unconscious) by Miss Cummins alone or in collusion with others or some kind of retrocognitive ESP (or its equivalent, involving some residual effect of Mrs. Willett's memory or feelings as they existed when she was still living). Prof. Broad has presented these alternatives to the survival hypothesis quite fairly and effectively, and I must agree with his judgment that the facts, when squarely faced, retain their relevancy for the survival hypothesis.

Prof. Broad also emphasizes another evidential aspect of the scripts that emerged as the record grew over the course of the two and one-half years. This is the degree to which the "communicator" reflected a personality that was accepted by her sons (and others qualified to judge) as being true to the living Mrs. Coombe-Tennant. This script personality, recognizable in several ways from the scripts, was strikingly different in literary style and personal manner from Miss Cummins and was, in the opinion of qualified judges, beyond her creative capabilities. The force of such literary evidence will differ for different readers, but it will rarely (if ever) be zero, so it must enter into the overall assessment of the case.

A number of investigators, including

myself, have urged the importance of making objective assessments of the verbal records produced by freely-responding sensitives. Without abandoning this objective as desirable and even necessary in most instances, I must confess that I did not feel the need for a statistical test in this instance. The accuracy of the scripts in giving names of persons and places and details regarding circumstances and events needs no probability value to be believed.

The production of such a record at this time, three decades after anything at all comparable has been done, suggests that some of the more evidential literature of the earlier, "golden age" of mediumistic studies should be re-examined today. (Is this not a good time to make the best of that literature available in a collection of readings on the survival question?) Even more important, however, is the prospect that other opportunities comparable to the one that led to this book may exist today, and that similarly striking developments in survival research depend upon our finding and taking advantage of favorable situations that are waiting to be used. We must not expect, of course, that there will be a breakthrough that will lead to a quick and easy solution to the survival problem. But this book has at least presented a challenge to those who are inclined toward the view that the survival hypothesis is a pseudo-problem insofar as science is concerned. Its appearance at this time should help to turn the tide of scientific opinion toward a renewed and more favorable interest in whether any aspects of individual personality continue to exist and function beyond death.

### PSYCHICAL ODDS AND ENDS

RUPERT T. GOULD. *Oddities; A Book of Unexplained Facts* (New York: University Books, 1965. pp. viii + 228. \$5). *Enigmas; Another Book of Unexplained Facts* (same publisher and year. pp. 248. \$5).

The purpose of these volumes, first published in the twenties, is "to collect

and digest the facts relating to a number of incidents which have not, at present, been satisfactorily explained." Gould always gives the original sources and, in general, treats his far-out topics with caution. Only some are of parapsychological interest and still fewer touch on the theta problem. It is not always possible to decide in which area of human knowledge, or ignorance, they belong. "The Devil's Hoof Marks," which were seen in Devonshire in 1855, and are described in *Oddities*, were more likely, Gould thinks, to have been produced by an animal than a non-terrestrial entity.

The next account concerns the disturbances of coffins in a burial vault in Barbados. Since this vault was the only one affected in the cemetery and no signs of entry were found, there is no easy physical explanation. Gould discusses the theory that the phenomena had something to do with the fact that two of the deceased were suicides. One of them, Dorcas Chase, was buried in 1812. At that time there were two (undisturbed) coffins in the vault. When her father, Thomas Chase, who also committed suicide, was buried later that year, the other coffins were found displaced, one almost on end, head down. There were three additional burials, the last in 1819. Each time the vault was opened the coffins were in disarray. At the last burial the vault was examined in the presence of the Governor of Barbados, Lord Combermere. The entrance was then cemented and the Governor placed his seal on it. Eight months later when the vault was reopened in his presence, the coffins again lay about in confusion. The Chase family then had them buried elsewhere.

*Enigmas* has an account of "Bealing Bells," an apparent case of RSPK, where the pull-type bells in the home of a Major Edward Moor rang on and off for seven weeks in 1834 without visible cause. Sometimes several bells rang simultaneously and forcefully while Major Moor and others watched. There are no hints as to who or what the agency might have been.

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