

LIMITS OF EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION

Paranormal Cognition

Its Place in Human Psychology. By Dr. Laurence J. Bendit. Pp. 79. (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1944.) 5s. net.

THIS short essay contains the substance of a thesis recently submitted to the Department of Medicine of the University of Cambridge, and approved for the degree of doctor of medicine. Although it contains little from the medical point of view and would seem more suitable as a thesis submitted to some psychological faculty, the book is of interest as it directs attention to a question which is bound to excite greater attention as time goes on.

For the purpose of his work, Dr. Bendit takes it for granted that what he calls "psychic" modes of perception exist apart altogether from the ordinary channels of sense. Indeed, he maintains that "science to-day accepts as fact that man has channels for obtaining knowledge of the world about him which are not those of the ordinary senses". Although he does not say what he means by "science" in this connexion, it is clear that the statement does not apply to scientific men taken as a body, although the opinions of the chemist on questions of parapsychology are no more valuable than those of the parapsychologist on chemistry unless both parties have studied each other's interests.

In the present volume Dr. Bendit assumes that what he calls paranormal cognition is a fact, and under this name he includes a number of forms of perception which do not fall within the range of abnormal hyperacuity of the senses but beyond them into a region where normal perception, however acute, no longer operates. Thus the 'paranormal cognition' of Dr. Bendit includes what the American school calls 'extra-sensory perception', although he seems to extend the scope somewhat to include other phenomena the precise nature of which is still a subject of controversy.

In the course of his discussion the author mentions the possible emergence of such material in the statements and dreams of patients undergoing psychological treatment; and he appears to think that the reports of psycho-analysts who state that they have found such instances among their patients constitute "an important class of literature" in this connexion. This brings us to the most important part of Dr. Bendit's thesis, in which the author seems to have fallen (or appears about to fall) into what might be grave sources of error of a type which have vitiated so much serious work in the past. Having become convinced that paranormal cognition is a fact, he goes on to assume that it can be suspected in cases contributed by persons, some of whom he names, whose work can only be regarded with much scepticism as to its reliability. Indeed, Dr. Bendit is so anxious to suggest that such cognition is widely distributed that he uses the work of E. N. Marais on termites as an example, although few entomologists would regard the theory of this author as proved, and indeed it has been characterized by one critic as "a poetical invention which gets us nowhere". It is the growth of this tendency to see something 'psychic' in phenomena hitherto not fully described or adequately studied that so many psychical researchers feared might be the result of an

acceptance of some form of paranormal cognition on the basis of properly controlled and statistically analysed experimental data. One of Dr. Bendit's own collaborators in his thesis, to whose "specialized knowledge and experience of psychic matters" he owes a good deal, has published some of the results of using her alleged power of paranormal cognition, and it appears that she accepts many of the so-called physical phenomena of mediumship, including such almost wholly discredited manifestations as apports and slate-writing, and even claiming through her paranormal 'vision' to see the so-called ectoplasmic rods used in levitating tables! How far Dr. Bendit is right in believing that these remarkable results are justified is for himself to judge. Others may be tempted to accept paranormal cognition just as far as the results of scientific experiment may compel them to do so, leaving the vast inchoate mass of borderland psychological phenomena to be included or rejected as our knowledge increases and as the range of our experiments becomes extended.

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A RUSSIAN TRIBUTE TO NEWTON

Isaac Newton, 1643-1943

(In Russian.) Pp. 82+4 plates. (Kazan: Kazan Aviation Institute, 1943.) 10 roubles.

THIS booklet contains four addresses read at the celebration of Newton's tercentenary on April 9, 1943, in the Institute of Aviation in Kazan. The plain fact of such a celebration when a vital part of the U.S.S.R. was still under the German yoke is noteworthy, especially when it is realized that the man thus honoured was, after all, for Russians, a foreigner. In the general introduction and also in two of the addresses the same comment recurs—the U.S.S.R. celebrates Newton's memory amidst all her war-time occupations and worries, since she is fighting for "freedom of scientific, artistic, and philosophical creation".

In the first address, Prof. M. M. Kusakov reviews Newton's life and work, including his theological publications. Kusakov considers Newton to be the founder of the prevalent philosophy of the men of science of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which "represents a combination of primitive mechanical materialism with deism".

The fourth paper, by L. F. Bakusheva, deals specially with Newton's philosophy. Apparently, Newton did not bother to formulate his philosophy, if he had any; and the clarity and precision of his physical and mathematical passages contrast with his timid and contradictory pronouncements on philosophical problems. But Newton's scientific discoveries had a decisive effect on later philosophers. Quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin show the relation between Newton's point of view and that of the dialectical materialism.

P. M. Dulski spoke on Newton's iconography. Unfortunately, the material expected from the Royal Society did not arrive, and the lecturer had to use only well-known published sources.

B. Stolbov gives an interesting account of Newton's optical work. He states that, contrary to the usual belief, Newton was just as much inclined to the wave theory as to the corpuscular theory of light.

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