GHOST AND DIVINING ROD. By T. G. Lethbridge. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.

LE SIGNAL DU SOURCIER. By Y. Rocard. Dunod, Paris, 1962.

It is all very well for an author to write a light-hearted account of his recreational experiments with pendulum and divining rod, but a publisher who light-heartedly puts it out as 'a scientific study' (see blurb) is doing a public disservice. (Proof that this publisher does not employ a competent reader in the subject is provided by the fact that F. W. H. Myers is spelt 'Myres' throughout *Ghost and Divining Rod* and throughout the author's previous book— *Ghost and Ghoul.)*

The book ranges in the pleasantly discursive manner of reminiscences over the author's subjective experiences and those of his wife of ghostly presences on lonely beaches in the Hebrides and elsewhere, larded with speculations about animal ghosts, survival, psychokinesis, and radionics. The first 29 pages concern dowsing, and the author claims to be able to divine almost any substance by using a pendulum of the correct length.

The author provokes us in the first paragraph of his Preface: 'Since I have deliberately avoided reading the results of other people's work on this subject, in order that I might be able to form my own opinions from my own observations, I do not know whether others have reached the same conclusions.' Mr Lethbridge is an archaeologist by profession. What would be his advice to a pub-Usher who had asked him to express an opinion on another author's manuscript, if he read the following: 'I have deliberately read no books on archaeology, but I have been able to make my own observations at the Parthenon. Although the Parthenon is badly damaged, a comparison with the British Museum leads me to the hypothesis that both were designed by the same architect.'

Ludicrous of course, but the anology is not so far-fetched since Mr Lethbridge's experiments in dowsing are invalid through ignorance of the background to the subject and of how to design an experiment. The diviner can always score 100% success, even in the presence of hostile observers, whenever he 'knows the answer'. If he does not know the answer the indications of pendulum or rod will be in accordance with chance and the dowser will be all at sea. Psychical researchers know this; dowsers learn it too but apparently cannot digest the fact. Thus Mr Lethbridge (pp. 17-19), having set the pendulum length to the 'rate' for silver and then the rate for gold, seems unabashed—even elated that he was led to dig up respectively a piece of German stoneware and the larva of a carnivorous beetle.

On page 21 the author gives a table for the appropriate lengths of pendulum cord for different animal, vegetable and mineral substances, ranging from 7 inches for sulphur, through 20 inches for all animals, plants, rubber, coal, paper, bread and potatoes, to 32 inches for iron. Now Mr Lethbridge is not one of those dowsers who claims he cannot operate under test conditions—he describes how he was able to locate silver coins hidden under caps without his knowledge. Let him then invite a friend to prepare for him a series of 50 identical sealed pill boxes. Mr Lethbridge is to name four substances: *A, B,* C, *D,* to which his pendulum will react strongly and unequivocally, and the friend is to introduce small samples of *A* into ten of the boxes, of *B,* C, *D,* into another ten; the fifth batch of ten is to remain empty. The packing should be such that no indication of the contents can be gleaned from shaking or weighing. The friend should shuffle the boxes but must not be present during the divining session.

If under these conditions Mr Lethbridge can report to the S.P.R. that he has scored 18 hits or more out of 50, the reviewer will undertake to mobilize half the S.P.R. Council Members the following weekend to witness a repeat.

In one sense it is unfair to castigate Mr Lethbridge, for had he sought out books on water divining he would nowhere have gleaned instructions on how to perform a simple valid scientific experiment—least of all from Professor Rocard's book.

Le Signal du Sourcier presents various aspects of the author's theory that diviners are responsive to the rate of change of magnetic flux; a rapid progress, e.g. in an aircraft, through a magnetic field enables weaker field strengths to be detected because the rate of change is greater. Water filtering through a porous medium generates small electric currents and the dowser can, it is claimed, detect the associated magnetic fields. Likewise he can detect leaks from reservoirs and the presence of motorcars, lifts, trains and aircraft. Twenty pages are devoted to a historical review of dowsing.

Professor Rocard is Director of the Physics Laboratory at the École Normale Supérieure, France's leading teachers' training college, and his approach to the subject leaves everything to be desired. The first paragraph of the final chapter may be translated as follows: 'All through these pages our exposition has been intentionally weighted by a regard for experimental justification, most necessary in a matter so controversial till now. Without doubt it will be less so in the future if, as we hope, we bring about the conviction of the scientific world.' That is a fair statement if the experiments are sound, but they are not.

to wear, having been told that these would *enhance* the dowsing reaction?

It would be tedious to recite all the experiments where the main point was missed. Some spectacular claims are presented with outrageous brevity: '... a flight across the Atlantic in calm weather gave no kind of divining signal. On the other hand, crossing the mediterranean in a Caravelle at 800 km/h, one detects the Balearics on passing over them.'

Anyhow, says Professor Rocard, the reader can readily convince himself, since few people fail to obtain a dowsing reaction on approaching, twig at the ready, the magnetic field which surrounds a motorcar, or better, a lorry or bulldozer; moreover 'tout le monde se découvre sourcier dans une gare de triage'—everybody discovers himself to be a dowser in a marshalling yard. So they will in a sweet factory if assured with sufficient authority by a university professor that sugar is magnetic.

The publisher has seen fit to provide, for what purports to be a scientific work, a dozen humorous illustrations, not eschewing even the little dog with raised leg—who may perhaps be allowed to speak for us all.

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