22O *Journal of Society for Psychical Research* MAY 1948

SOME EXPERIMENTS IN DIVINING
BY D. J. WEST

THERE are two main theories of dowsing, the physical and the psychical. Exponents of the former point of view maintain that thé process is a mechanical one. Water, metals and other things are detected by virtue of their physical properties. Emanations of one kind or another, which are given off by these substances, are supposed to affect the neuro-muscular mechanism of the diviner and result in the twitching of a rod held in the hand.

According to the psychical theory, the process is a mental one. Movements of the divining rod are produced by subconscious muscular action, exactly as in the case of a planchette. When the responses occur at the right places, and the dowser had no normal knowledge of the whereabouts of what he was searching for, this is accounted for by paranormal cognition. A point strongly favouring the psychical theory is the fact that movements of the rod or pendulum often follow the ideas and impressions of the diviner, rather than the true location of the object. The following experiments illustrate this principle :

" On November z8th, 1946, Mr John Higgins, a professional dowser, attended at the Society's rooms to demonstrate his powers. He claimed that by using the appropriate twigs, he could successfully locate minerals, coins, buried human remains and the site Of disease as well as underground water.

Eighteen similar wooden pill-boxes were provided. In one of them there had been placed, prior to the experiment, a small piece of copper. No one present knew which box had contained the metal. The boxes were spread over a large table, and Mr Higgins held his twig over each in turn. Over one particular box there was a marked response. This box was opened but it did not contain the copper. A further attempt was also wrong. The boxes were then all opened and the copper located. They were taken to another room, shuffled in the dark, and one of them was loaded with a farthing. The boxes were again spread on the table, Mr Higgins made his choice as before but was wrong once again. The boxes were reshuffled and one was again loaded with a farthing. They were taken outside into the road, as Mr Higgins said he was much more successful when standing on damp ground. However, for the fourth time his choice was wrong.

Mr Higgins then put a coin under one of the boxes and held his twig over it. There was no movement. He said that this showed that it was the wood of the boxes which was causing his failures. He did not explain why, if this were so, definite movements were obtained over some of the boxes.

Mr Higgins then asked D. J. W. to hold out in front of him both fists clenched, with a copper coin in one. In these circumstances he was able to locate the coin successfully. He did this about five times in succession. D. J. W. then went out of the room, returning with his hands in his pockets, one hand containing a coin. While Mr Higgins was moving

2O4 *Journal of Society for Psychical Research* MAR.-APR. 1948

found that at almost the exact time when Miss Johnson had her visual impression, the hostess was putting her bracelet on.

In October, 1944, while helping Mrs Heywood to stock her house in London with domestic amenities, Miss Johnson tried to obtain a pail and sink-strainer. These articles were very scarce at that date, and she had tried for them in vain. In particular, Peter Jones said they had none and were not expecting any. Next morning Miss Johnson woke up seeing a visual image " in the back of her mind " of a *green* pail and sink-strainer, accompanied by a feeling that they were to be had at Peter Jones. She went there a» early as possible and said to the assistant that she believed they had some *green* pails and sink-strainers now in stock. There were none on view, and the shop-assistant asked her how she knew. They were, he said, at the time being unpacked behind the scenes, having arrived unexpectedly the previous evening. I am told that ladies will appreciate the importance of the fact that these articles, were green ; for green pails and strainers were at that time extremely rare, those that were available being usually white.

With Miss Johnson, incidents of this kind happen regularly. That they should be largely concerned with shopping and food during austerity times is probably due to the fact that the faculty responds to interest or necessity. Few of these cases could be made formally evidential because the experience, when it occurs, is " at the back of the mind ", and Miss Johnson finds it extremely difficult to put it into words, either orally or in writing, before the event which verifies it has taken place or become known. The verification of the event, by supplying corroboration through the senses and the brain, appears to remove this inhibition, but of course too late. She does not find the same difficulty, however, in acting on the experience that she does in putting it into words.

The situation with regard to these cases is in one way ironical. Although most of them do not constitute formal evidence for telepathy, many of them are veiy useful. The above examples show that most of Mrs Heywood's are ; Miss Johnson's certainly are, as I can personally testify ; Miss M. A.'s experience was, and so was Mrs Tickell's case beside the Windrush. It used to be said by some critics that the acid test of the paranormal is the pragmatic one. Show that you can *make use* of the evidence, said this school of critics, and you need not be quite so fussy about evidential standards.

What form will criticism take now? We have a steady flow of minor cases which are unquestionably useful. Will the former argument of the critics be reversed? Will it now be said that utility is no criterion of the validity of evidence ; that all these minor cases are evidentially faulty because some normal explanation or other could be fitted to each, and that therefore all the cases are disposed of.

Well, in any case, I know of one family at least which will continue to make use of Family Telepathy—whether it exists or not!