

AN EXAMINATION OF MR J. C. MABY'S STATEMENT CONCERNING A REVIEW IN
THE JOURNAL OF " THE PHYSICS OF THE DIVINING ROD " *J*

WITH much surprise and some regret I have read Mr Maby's *Statement* which was printed in the last number of the *Journal*. This resulted apparently from the Society's Review (*Journal*, Vol.

XXXI, p. 215) of *The Physics of the Divining Rod*, by Mr Franklin and himself which I was asked to write. My first reaction was to ignore Mr Maby's *Statement* which seemed to me to savour of abuse : e.g. he accuses the reviewer of subversive innuendoes, which he must encounter for the sake of modern dowsing, and says he may properly protest against mis-statements, innuendoes and insinuations, and more particularly so when a critic is not apparently in a position of authority with respect to the subject in hand.

Since, however, the Society has thought fit to devote some eight pages of the *Journal* to Mr Maby's disparagement of my Review (doubtless on account of the interesting light which it throws on his views regarding what he considers he has accomplished in the direction of establishing a rational and scientific basis for some of the phenomena of dowsing) I consider it is in the interests of the Society that I should take a little time and trouble in examining Mr Maby's conclusions, and ignore the abuse.

The Society invited a physicist, and not a dowser, to do the reviewing because the chief novelty in the book is a claim that physical apparatus in the vicinity of electrically conducting bodies (including flowing water) is affected by them through certain rays or radiations, and that it is these which are responsible for some, at least, of the " dowsing reactions."

The importance of such a discovery, if true, can hardly be overestimated. On p. 421 of *The Physics of the Divining Rod* it is stated : " Every conductor in air appears to be surrounded by a very local field of ionising particles " ; and again on the same page : "In the conductors themselves points of reaction can be found at certain positions which also change at intervals ; these points of reaction and their changes of position correspond to standing waves upon the conductors." These assertions are opposed to those of physicists based on ordinary laboratory experience with conductors in air, and, if true, would require some explanation of why no such effects are being noticed in the laboratory every day, especially when one considers that " conductors in air " are a part of the apparatus used in every single electrical measurement.

Can a reviewer be blamed, when he is presented with reiterated claims made in technical language, of whose meaning he can have no doubt, and which are opposed to common experience, for pointing out the fact that no single record of any observation which might justify such claims is either given in the text or specifically referred to in print elsewhere? One gathers, on reading pages 19 and 20 of Mr Maby's *Statement*, that his reply is " yes," and he proceeds to

show how in seven numbered paragraphs which contain many unsupported assertions requiring careful consideration.

(1) Of all the "astonishing" discoveries which have been made in Physics during the last (say) ten years, I wonder whether Mr Maby, or indeed anyone else, could mention three which were "made with the aid of simple instruments backed by careful observation and logical reasoning." Surely it is true that, where ionising particles and electromagnetic radiation are the subjects of novel experiments, the apparatus required is, in general, both expensive and complicated.

(2) and (3) (I quote) "With regard to the graphs in our book, be it noted that only two out of twenty-eight, and these two are not true graphs, lack the numerical scales about which our reviewer complains that only 'a few show scales of numbers at the bottom and at the left-hand edge.' His statement is therefore demonstrably untrue." I have the book before me and note that there are 28 graphs of which not more than 18 are described as referring to physical measurements in the accepted meaning of this expression. Of these eighteen, no less than fourteen show but one numbered scale—the time scale at the bottom. The four remaining graphs have indeed two numbered scales, but no -actual readings are shown, the ordinate being in every case a mean or "smoothed" value. It seems unfortunate, to say the least, that the only example of a direct observation which Mr Maby has put forward in support of his views, an observation undoubtedly made by himself on his own book, should be entirely erroneous, the only fortunate feature being the ease with which, in this case, the observation may be repeated at any time by any of our members who have the good fortune to possess a copy of "The Physics of the Divining Rod."

(4) In this paragraph Mr Maby tells us that he and his collaborator Mr Franklin were compelled to compromise as regards the detail and technicality of the work because readers of diverse occupations and mentality must all be catered for at the same time.

But why must they? Most of the great scientific discoveries in our times were first published in technical form; monographs and popular expositions came later when general acceptance of the new material, as a consistent part of our knowledge of the subject, was attained.

(5) I am not aware that any accounts of discoveries in Physics, other than those of the authors of *The Physics of the Divining Rod*, have first appeared in connection with investigations of subjects usually considered to be in the field of Psychical Research. There

have, however, been some experiments, such as those of Lord B.ayleigh on luminous effects from magnets, which gave results in agreement with what might have been expected from well established theory. { 1 }

(6) I find this paragraph rather obscure. Mr Maby writes :
" Can a ... field of Hertzian radiation ... in the neighbourhood of a subterranean water vein, for instance, be recorded clearly by such and such a radio receiver, operating at such and such a frequency? And we have found the answer to this and many similar questions was undoubtedly in the affirmative." If this means that an underground stream is the cause of a radio-set's picking up radiation of a definite frequency which it would not have done but for the presence of the stream, then, if confirmed, a novel feature of the physical world has been disclosed. If, on the other hand, the radiation in question was first produced by means of a radio transmission set, and reception on another set was considered to be different in the vicinity of the stream from what it would have been had no stream been there, then the conclusions may be very different. Many factors would have to be considered, and it would be wise to adopt a sceptical attitude regarding any novel concepts until one is in possession of all the relevant facts, and thus able correctly to assess " the sum total of the evidence available."

(7) A considerable part of the skill of the trained research worker lies in his ability to give a clear and concise account of such details of his experiments as are necessary to ensure their successful repetition. He does not say " come up and see me some time, and I shall be very glad to answer any inquiries direct or to arrange for suitable demonstrations of the phenomena." Nor does he reach his conclusions, even though they are tentative, through a host of irrelevancies and a plethora of *non sequitur*.

I do not claim to be an authority on Dowsing, but I have had some twenty years' experience of the supervision of Scientific Research in a University. I submit that, in reviewing *The Physics of the Divining Rod*, I confined my remarks to certain aspects of the work upon which I was well qualified to remark, and I am glad that Mr Maby has now had the opportunity of giving members of our Society a fuller account of the very wide scope of his book.

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{1} *Proceedings*, Vol. XLV, p. 19.