

THE ELEMENTS OF DOWSING. By Le Vicomte Henry de France. Trans..  
A. H. Bell. London, Bell, 1948. xi, 83 pp. 6s.

In recent decades the powers claimed by a good number of dowzers, particularly in France, have included many more faculties than the location of underground water and minerals. At the same time a certain systématisation of these claims has occurred, and the general tendency has been to interpret the phenomena in physical rather than psychical terms. The late Vicomte Henry de France, a notable French diviner, gives in this book a somewhat uncritical practical guide to dowzers who may wish to investigate with a rod or pendulum such matters as the location, depth, and yield of underground water ; the nature of electric currents ; the location of underground coal, oil, minerals and treasure ; elementary chemical analysis ; the examination of the suitability of foods and methods of cooking ; and medical diagnosis and choice of remedies. In addition to dealing with all these matters on a basis which is stated to be purely physical, the dowser, it is said, may also, in some cases, use his rod or pendulum to display psychic powers.

In considering this impressive array of claims, one may note that whereas weighty evidence of the success of dowzers in locating underground water has been advanced by Sir William Barrett and others, the additional powers claimed do not seem to have been subjected to any extended systematic investigation by proper authorities, and, indeed, the evidence advanced to support them seems at present to be given little credence outside dowsing circles. Many of the powers claimed, such as that of conducting chemical analysis, would be very suitable for laboratory investigation, but, as several eminent dowzers have observed, the examinations of the claims of dowzers under laboratory conditions have usually failed to reveal any basis to them. The physical theories of dowsing depend on physical experiments which are outlined in the publications of dowzers with some frequency, but unfortunately one rarely finds any proper account containing the necessary experimental details (such as the magnitudes of physical quantities) required for a serious consideration or repetition of these experiments. In fact, an observation of some quantity is usually made, the ordinary chance fluctuations of which are of the same order as the change in this quantity which a dowser is alleged to detect.

As many dowzers have observed, instruments such as divining rods and pendula are eminently suitable for self-deception, and it thus seems possible that a completely artificial scheme of dowsing reactions could be built up with no foundation in reality. The German authority, Graf Carl von Klinckowstroem, although writing as a supporter of dowsing, has nevertheless characterised the viewpoint of Vicomte Henry and particularly that of H. Mager, who preceded Henry in similar views, as fundamentally erroneous, and their claims and hypotheses as fantastic. One notes in the Vicomte's book a lack of reference to the viewpoint of Klinckowstroem, and even more so to the sceptical views advanced by A. J. Ellis in the United States Geological Survey paper of 1917 on the divining rod, where the claims of Mager are dismissed as extravagant and absurd. Thus some writers would probably regard the Vicomte's manual of practical dowsing as one example of an artificial system based largely on self-deception.

The investigation of dowzers for water-finding ability under field conditions is complicated by the uncertainty of the detailed geological conditions in many cases. One may note, for example, the criticisms of the strongest cases published by Barrett advanced, from a geological viewpoint, by J. W. Gregory in the Smithsonian Institution Annual Report of 1928. Theoretical consideration of water-finding ability is complicated by the considerable number of ways in which underground water can theoretically be detected. Since dowzers are now claiming to detect electric and magnetic fields and radio-activity, and to conduct chemical analysis, their claims in these respects should be susceptible to examination under well-defined conditions. In this way a proper study of these claims could be made. Without some such objective evaluation it is difficult to take seriously the numerous assertions of dowzers found in this book.

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