

changes in the brain of A can produce conscious experiences not only in the mind of A but also in the mind of B, then we are driven to the conclusion that the two minds are not entirely distinct. Since no psychologist has been able to explain how a physical event or events in A's brain can give rise to a conscious experience in A's mind, then psychologists who swallow this miracle without any fuss ought to be prepared to accept the further miracle that occasionally physical activity in A's brain may give rise to a conscious experience in B's mind. And why not, if mental experiences are not spatial events?

The author suggests that ESP does not mark a new stage in evolution but may be the vestige of a primitive faculty derived from the lower animals and which is best observed in the behaviour of birds and social insects. Whether we agree or not with the author's views, they are expressed with scrupulous fairness and it is surely significant that a professional psychologist should endorse the opinion of another distinguished psychologist, Dr Thouless, that ESP has now been established beyond reasonable doubt and that it is a waste of time to conduct experiments merely to demonstrate the existence of the faculty. Our efforts should now be directed towards an understanding of the conditions under which it occurs and the practical control of its functioning.

S. G. SOAL

SIXTY YEARS OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH : Houdini and I among the Spiritualists. By Joseph F. Rinn. New York, Truth Seeker Company, 1950. xviii, 618 pp. \$5.00.

Mr Rinn is a business man who, according to the Introduction to his book, 'began his long public career [i.e. as investigator] in an earnest endeavour to discover scientific evidence of a future life. He realised that once communication was established with the dead and we beheld the spirits of the departed, all doubts would be dispelled concerning a life after death . . .' It was not unnatural that his endeavour to behold the spirits of the departed should have led him into the shady bypaths of the psychic underworld, or that there he should have met nothing but fraud. This, as was also natural, if regrettable, produced a violent reaction against all forms of mediumship, and a bias against all psychic phenomena, mediumistic or not.

To quote the Introduction once more: 'A member of the British Society for Psychical Research, Mr Rinn withdrew from the organisation when he painfully realised that it was more concerned in protecting and pampering mediums, and in covering their tracks, than in exposing them'. Mr Rinn's sole connection with the S.P.R. was that he was an associate of the American

Branch of it for about four years, from 1897, during the period when the Society strictly adhered to its policy of refusing to investigate mediums previously detected in deliberate trickery, a strange way of 'protecting and pampering' them! This was not a very long time in which to form a considered judgment on a subject as complex and obscure as we all know psychical research to be. But then for Mr Rinn there are no complexities, nothing more than fraudulent mediums, a gullible public, and gullible or dishonest investigators. What need for psychological subtleties? Is not Mr Rinn a trained conjurer, and cannot he at a pinch consult Houdini?

How magnificently that oracle disposed of hypnotism as 'a big fake'! Even Mr Rinn was inclined at first to jib at this sweeping pronouncement, but all his doubts were dispelled when Houdini introduced him to a man who claimed to have been a paid confederate of Charcot. Whether or not there is any truth in the story to which this self-accused confederate confessed, I do not know, but it would in any event have little bearing on the status of hypnotic research. Hypnotism, it is well to remember, was put on a scientific basis as the result of the long labours of many scientists in different countries. For a time the French took the lead, and among the various French schools of the Salpêtrière, Nancy, etc. there was vigorous mutual criticism. Any taking of results on a large scale by one school would quite certainly have been denounced by the others.

But Mr Rinn has a tenderness for the 'confessions' of self-confessed scoundrels implicating alleged confederates who are not in a position to reply, as is shown by his keenness to swallow the 'confession' of Blackburn, who, however, was careless enough not to ascertain that the man against whom he 'confessed' was not dead, as he supposed, but very much alive and kicking: see *S.P.R. Journal*, XV.

Mr Rinn is much too fond of charges of dishonesty against other investigators, which he scatters as freely as he does challenges of thousands of dollars to anyone who will produce genuine psychic phenomena, under conditions, of course, that he approves. The failure to take up these challenges he regards as proof that no genuine phenomena occur, but his own controversial manners have to be taken into account, as in his attack on our former President, Walter Prince (pp. 469-70). It appears from the *New York American* of 19 August 1924, which he quotes, that Prince and Houdini were debating the reality of psychic phenomena in a New York church when 'Joseph F. Rinn entered the discussion with a direct attack on Dr Prince's sincerity'. The meeting broke up in disorder and as the crowd pressed to the doors Mr Rinn

declared, 'That man is a liar because he makes his living out of that nonsense'.

Prince was at that time risking his livelihood by the firm line he was taking as a member of the Committee appointed by the *Scientific American* in criticising 'Margery'. Her supporters at that time dominated the American S.P.R., and Prince lost his position as Research Officer of that Society in consequence, as well as incurring much personal abuse. Houdini, Prince's colleague on the Committee, testifies warmly to his integrity, and so would many still living in America and this country who remember him with honour and affection. But without compunction or apology Mr Rinn twenty-six years later repeats the calumny.

Just what are Mr Rinn's qualifications to pose as a judge of psychical researchers? What sort of investigations has he conducted and with what subjects? The Introduction says, 'The pageant of seance deceptionists passes before the eye in colourful succession', and about two dozen names are given. If the list be analysed, it would appear that in his unregenerate days, while he still had an open mind, he had contacts with two of the Fox sisters and Slade; that later he had a single sitting with Mrs Piper, and another with Eusapia Palladino; and that the rest of the list consists either of mediums with whom he never sat or persons whose importance in psychical research was not equal to their local and transient notoriety. I have not noticed in the book any mention of investigations by Mr Rinn of poltergeists, haunted houses, apparitions, or other spontaneous phenomena, or any experiments by him in telepathy or clairvoyance, apart from the exposure of sundry public performers.

Let us consider whether in his two sittings with Mrs Piper and Eusapia respectively he did anything to advance knowledge of their mediumships. In 1896 Mr Rinn visited a 'temple' in Boston where a medium, Concannon, and his wife produced materializations which he recognized as fraudulent. Shortly after his visit some of his friends made a thorough exposure, grabbing a 'spirit' robe, wig, etc. and leaving a nearly naked Concannon. After quoting a newspaper account of the incident, Mr Rinn continues:

This exposure should have shaken my belief that a genuine medium existed, but the manifestations in Mr Ayer's temple [where the exposure had taken place] continued to be regarded by Spiritualists as undoubtedly genuine, and the members of the Society for Psychical Research did not lose faith. We had been fed with stories of the wonderful performances and psychic power of Mrs Leonora Piper, although a preliminary report had not yet been issued by Dr Richard Hodgson, who had her in charge.

This short paragraph is replete with absurdities. Why should the exposure of Concannon, whose fraud was of a very gross kind, cast doubt on mediumship in general? If the members of the S.P.R. did not 'lose faith' in Concannon, as Mr Rinn's sentence suggests, it was because the majority had never heard of him and had no faith in him to lose. Why bracket him with Mrs Piper, whose phenomena were of quite a different type? As for Dr Hodgson not having produced a preliminary report on her, two long reports on her had already been published in S.P.R. *Proceedings*, one (vol. VI, 436-659) by Myers, Lodge, Leaf, and James, and the other (vol. VIII 1-167) by Hodgson himself.

These reports had established several points concerning the Piper mediumship, such as (a) that it was difficult to take the Controls, e.g. Phinuit, unreservedly at their face value; (b) that sometimes they made incorrect statements and were unable to answer questions correctly; (c) that the medium, when in trance, could and probably did pick up information from the sitters by muscle-reading (see *Proceedings* VI; Lodge's remarks on p. 451, and Leaf's on p. 562),¹ but also (d) that there was no ground for supposing that in her normal state she obtained information as to the sitters, their friends etc. and (e) that, when all allowances had been made for (a), (b) and (c), she had genuine psychic powers. When, therefore, in an interview with Hodgson after his sitting in 1896, Mr Rinn brought up muscle-reading, etc., etc., as a sufficient explanation of Mrs Piper's phenomena, it was not unnatural that Hodgson, with his much longer experience of mediumistic trickery, should have shown impatience. Mr Rinn suggests that this was because Hodgson was 'of the English gentleman type' and unduly touchy. Hodgson was in fact a very unconventional, plain-spoken Australian, well accustomed to the rough and tumble of controversy.

At the time of Mr Rinn's sitting the principal Control and one of the principal Communicators at the Piper sittings was George Pellew, who had died in 1892 and is called in the printed records 'George Pelham' or 'G.P.'. In 1921 Mr Rinn learnt to his 'amazement' (p. 175) 'that documentary evidence existed from the family of "G.P." that a fictitious story was built about the life of his former friend by Dr Hodgson to justify his change to the spiritistic hypothesis, and that most of the statements made about "G.P." in Dr Hodgson's report [in S.P.R. *Proceedings*, XIII] were *absolute falsehoods*'. (The italics are Mr Rinn's). On p. 180 he says, 'Dr Hodgson lied outrageously on many important points in relation to "G.P." and his family.'

The only evidence Mr Rinn puts forward in support of these

¹ In the later stages of the mediumship this could not occur.

sweeping statements is a letter written in 1918, more than twelve years after Hodgson's death, by 'G.P.'s' brother, Professor Pellew, to Clodd, the Rationalist author. It is a long letter, taking up nearly four pages of print. The first half of the letter is to the effect that the Pellew family refused to accept the 'G.P.' communications as coming from the real George Pellew, mainly because they did not reflect his intellectual standards. This was a matter of opinion, and there is no suggestion of any false statement by Hodgson. The latter part of the letter does accuse him of having in one instance misrepresented the facts, not about 'G.P.', but about a sitter, John Fiske's, opinion of his sitting. Professor Pellew had been shown by his parents 'a curious letter from Hodgson. It was somewhat to this effect'. The substance of the letter, as so recollected, was that after a Piper sitting Fiske had told Hodgson that he was *absolutely convinced* that he had been talking to his old friend, George Pellew. A few weeks later Professor Pellew, as he says in his letter to Clodd, met Fiske, who stigmatised Mrs Piper as 'that old fraud', and denied that he had ever thought that through her he had conversed with George Pellew.

The Fiske story is, of course, the loosest hearsay, depending on Professor Pellew's admittedly vague recollection ('somewhat to this effect') of a letter he had seen at some unspecified previous date and of his memory of a conversation, also of uncertain date, with Fiske. It would not begin to be evidence without having the exact terms of Hodgson's letter, and a first-hand statement by Fiske as to exactly what his comments on the letter were. He should also state when the sitting in question occurred and what report on it, if any, he gave to Hodgson at the time. This might enable some contemporary written record of the sitting and of annotations by Fiske to be traced, and these would of course be evidence worth attention.

The story given in the letter is not a plausible one. By the testimony of all who worked with him in this country or America, whether or not they agreed with his views, Hodgson was a man of honour. But even if they had all been mistaken on this point, he could not have risked misrepresenting things that happened at or in connexion with sittings which he was supervising. If any of the Pellew family, or Fiske, or anyone else had during Hodgson's life reported a single case of misrepresentation by him to any member of the S.P.R. Council in England or to any of his American colleagues, and had been able to substantiate the charges, that would have been the end of Hodgson's career in psychical research.

'Mrs Piper's Confession. Disclaims Contact with the Spirit World.' So runs the heading of one of Mr Rinn's chapters

(p. 195). By this time it will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that Mrs Piper never made a 'Confession' at all. In the summer of 1901 Mrs Piper gave an interview to a journalist, and on 20 October of that year the *New York Herald* published a long statement purporting to be made by her, and in fact based on the interview. The statement contains the following passages: 'I have always maintained that these [psychic] phenomena could be explained in other ways than by the intervention of disembodied spirit forces. The theory of telepathy strongly appeals to me as the most plausible and genuine scientific solution of the problem.' And later on, Mrs Piper says, or at any rate, the journalist reports her as saying: 'I do not believe that spirits of the dead have spoken through me when I have been in a trance state.' On Mrs Piper's attention being drawn to the *New York Herald* article she promptly dictated a statement which appeared in the *Boston Advertiser* of 25 October 1901: 'I did not make any such statement as that published in the *New York Herald* to the effect that spirits of the departed do not control me. . . . Spirits of the departed may have controlled me and they may not. I confess that I do not know.' This latter statement Mr Rinn does not quote. But whether or not the *New York Herald* was justified in reporting Mrs Piper as saying she did not believe the spirits of the dead had spoken through her, the use of the word 'Confession' by Mr Rinn was quite unjustified. For many years prior to this interview two views of the Piper communications had been discussed by psychical researchers. One was that they came from spirits of the departed; and the other was that Mrs Piper's subconscious mind received the substance of them by telepathy, the Controls and Communicators who manifested in the trance being subconscious dramatisations somewhat akin to secondary personalities. The second hypothesis, which Mrs Piper according to the interview preferred, no more implies dishonesty, as the word 'Confession' does, than the first. It appears from the report on the episodes in S.P.R. *Journal X*, pp. 142-3, 150-2, that the *New York Herald* had by way of 'advertising smartness' made an advance announcement of her 'Confession', and that in response to a protest by her, the paper assured her that word would not appear in the actual article, as in fact it did not.

Eusapia was more up Mr Rinn's street than Mrs Piper, and one might have hoped for some new light on her from Mr Rinn's sitting. This took place on 17 April 1910, and is described, together with the preparations for it, on pp. 278-81 of the book. It had at this time been long known and was generally accepted that Eusapia would use whatever trickery the conditions of control permitted. The question was whether she could produce her

phenomena under conditions effectively excluding trickery. The group of highly competent investigators who sat with her at Naples in 1908 believed she could and did: see their report in S.P.R. *Proceedings* XXIII.

In 1909 she came to America and in 1910 gave a series of sittings to a group connected with Columbia University. A member of the group invited Mr Rinn and some friends of his, who were experts in trickery, to attend a sitting. Before this sitting Mr Rinn and his friends arranged an elaborate plan to trap the medium, some, but not all, of the members of the University group being privy to it. Part of the plan was that at a particular point in the sitting and for a prearranged time Mr Rinn's friends, who were acting as controllers of the medium, should deliberately release their control. This plan was put into action, and during the prearranged relaxation of control Eusapia produced phenomena, which she could not do during the part of the sitting when the control was strictly maintained. The result did no more than confirm what had already been established as to her mediumship fifteen years earlier at the Cambridge sittings. The S.P.R. has always maintained that it is possible to test a medium without laying traps, and that complete candour between fellow-investigators is imperative. Departures, such as Mr Rinn's, from the code of mutual confidence between investigators merely open the door to the bogus investigator, who is as much a hindrance to serious research as the bogus medium.

It would be tedious to correct all Mr Rinn's minor inaccuracies: here are a few jotted down as I read the book. Barrett was not 'head of the British S.P.R.' at the time of his American visit in 1885, or anywhere near it (p. 15). J. H. Hyslop is made (p. 294) to speak in 1910 of 'the English branch of our association', which he would certainly not have done, as he had negotiated on the American side the complete separation of the British and American Societies in 1906. Ivor Tuckett was not at any time a 'prominent member' of the S.P.R. (p. 309): in 1911 he was not a member at all. It is correctly stated (p. 599) that in 1938 the ESP cards used by Professor Rhine were unsuited for experimental purposes: see S.P.R. *Journal* for May 1938. Professor Rhine was by that time quite aware of the defect, and was arranging for the use of a better type of card in his later experiments: Mr Rinn does not mention this. Nor does he, after mentioning (pp. 596-7) the negative results of Dr Soal's earlier experiments as tending to disprove Professor Rhine's claims, anywhere refer to the positive results that Dr Soal and Mrs Goldney later obtained through Shackleton (S.P.R. *Proceedings* XLVII). It is not true, as suggested on pp. 291-2 of Mr Rinn's book, that luminous paint is only used by

'crooked mediums'. Until the development of infra-red technique it was the standard method of indicating the situation of persons and objects at sittings held in poor light, and has often in that way been used in our seance-room. Mis-spellings of names familiar in psychical research are common; 'Phenuit', 'Mrs Sedgwick', 'G. B. Door', 'Rev. Charles Tweedle', 'Valentine'. On p. 444 the names of ten members of a Committee to investigate spirit photography are given: five are mis-spelt.

A large part of the book is taken up with one-sided accounts of conversations in which Mr Rinn scores off the other fellow. One's confidence in the accuracy of these accounts is shaken by Mr Rinn's exaggerated bias, and the prevalence of blunders large and small destroys it entirely, beyond hope of restoration by the most copious extracts from the American press, to which he freely resorts.

The pity is that Mr Rinn, whose knowledge and experience of mediumistic trickery would have qualified him to write an interesting book of value to psychical research, if he had confined himself to matters that he understood and that had come under his own observation, has been so unwise as to go outside these limits. Knowledge of methods of deception is needed in psychical research, and the S.P.R. has always been fortunate enough to include members well versed in them. But such knowledge does not by itself make a psychical researcher, without more accuracy, a better idea of evidence, and a greater understanding of human nature, whether in its normal or abnormal states, than Mr Rinn shows in this book. To succeed in business he must have had a fair share of these qualities, but when it comes to psychical research they fail him. No doubt this is because for him the subject has never been one of impartial enquiry. He began with a desire to obtain evidence of a future life, proceeded to take the worst kind of route to that objective, found that it led nowhere, and went violently into reverse for the rest of his life with no better results. Let the sad fate of Mr Rinn stir us all to examine our consciences to see whether we are ourselves free, to quote our Society's inaugural manifesto, 'from prejudice or prepossession of any kind'!

W. H. S.

PSYCHOTIC ART. By Francis Reitman, M.D., D.P.M. London Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950. x, 180 pp. 17 plates. 16s.

Although the artistic products of the mentally unbalanced have long been known, little serious attention was given to them until the nineteenth century when such students as Marcé and Simon in France (1864 and 1876), Lombroso in Italy (1880), and Kiernan