

BOOK REVIEWS

IN HONOUR OF G. A. M. ZORAB edited by F. W. J. J. Snel. Nederlandse Vereniging voor Parapsychologie, Den Haag, 1986. 163 pp.

This collection of essays, published in a limited edition of 200 copies by the Dutch Society for Parapsychology, is to honour their 'oldest living parapsychologist', who was born January 1898 and has been an Honorary Member of our own Society since 1977. He has been a prolific contributor to parapsychological literature for more than 50 years, as the 360 item bibliography at the end of the book amply illustrates. His particular interest and expertise lies in the early history of psychical research and in the spiritualistic phenomena of famous 19th century mediums, such as D. D. Home, whose biography he has written in Italian.

The longest contribution to this collection is an excellent summary by John Beloff of the puzzling case of Florence Cook's materializations for William Crookes, which Trevor Hall has contended were produced by fraudulent collusion between the scientist and the medium, motivated by sexual infatuation. Beloff pinpoints the central enigma of this and similar episodes, namely that none of the possible explanations is at all plausible. He shows the near impossibility that Crookes could have remained unaware of the fact if Florence had been impersonating the spirit form of Katie King. If he knew her to be a fraud why did he go to so much trouble and expense to take numerous photographs, some of them stereoscopic, and why did he expose her friend and collaborator Rosina Showers as a fraud? On the other hand, Florence was a cheat. She was later caught in her underwear masquerading as a spirit (although not when she was under proper control), and the materialized forms produced by herself and the fraudulent Showers had paraded arm in arm. Nevertheless the detailed accounts by apparently responsible witnesses of the appearance and subsequent melting away of full form figures, while the medium was completely immobilized, provides impressive testimony to her powers quite independently of her contact with Crookes. Zorab believes that, like other mediums, Florence produced genuine as well as fraudulent effects. Beloff wisely comments that the question whether some materializations were paranormal must remain open, but likely to remain so given the absence of comparable cases today.

Dr. Kappers provides some striking anecdotes about sudden, if temporary, bodily changes induced by paranormal healers. He suggests that perhaps the reason why a variety of schools of alternative healing have similar limited success is that they all depend upon rare individuals possessed of paranormal abilities.

Dr. Servadio contributes some scholarly speculations in which he compares the processes of sublimation (the psychoanalyst's term for harnessing the energy associated with biological urges into the service of higher aspirations) with the process of sudden creative inspiration. He concludes that there are forces belonging to a metaphysical level of being, to which individuals respond to varying intensities, driving them towards greater spiritual awareness.

Professor Chari discusses a 'Non-Boolean' approach to psi in a learned essay which this reviewer is totally incompetent to assess. He seems to be arguing that the mathematical axioms and fundamental logical propositions by which we have so far tried to make sense of the physical world will need to be radically

revised to accommodate psi phenomena. We cannot expect psi to behave in accordance with the kind of laws applicable to most macro physical events. For example, the occurrence of psi in one place may affect its manifestation elsewhere, and individual intentionality may be only one factor in producing psi events.

Gerd Hövelmann, in a chapter which comes closest to Zorab's own concerns, deplores the modern tendency to ignore outstanding work of the past. He cites Besterman, Feilding and Podmore as examples of parapsychologists whose outstanding contributions to critical analysis have been neglected because their healthy scepticism did not suit their successors. Frans Snel sets out some brief particulars of Zorab's life. Brian Inglis and Eric Dingwall each give some personal reminiscences. Dingwall, popularly thought of as the arch sceptic, here describes Zorab, a man several years his junior and more overtly accepting of phenomena, as 'one of my greatest and dearest friends'.

It is good to have the opportunity to offer one's own good wishes to someone who has given so much to our subject for so long.

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FLIGHT OF MIND: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE by  
H. J. Irwin. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey, 1985. 374 pp. £27.50.

There seem to be more and more books about the out-of-body experience (or OBE) published in the past few years. This experience, once the sole province of psychical research, and considered to be strange, mystical or even paranormal, is now receiving the serious treatment it deserves, and Irwin's book contributes much to the growing sophistication of approach.

Irwin, an Australian psychologist, manages to combine a primarily psychological approach with a fair treatment of paranormal claims and even the most extraordinary of theories.

He begins by redefining the OBE. Like others before, he argues for an atheoretical definition; one which does not presuppose that anything leaves the body or that any particular kind of explanation is required. He proposes to define it as an experience in which 'the center of consciousness appears to the experient to occupy temporarily a position which is spatially remote from his/her body'. I found this a very helpful definition which I shall use myself. It is better than my own previous definitions in that it does not assume that the experience has to include visual perceptual-like qualities. Of course it must be realized, and Irwin makes this clear, that the notion of a center of consciousness is purely phenomenological. One cannot expect objectively to find a 'center of consciousness'.

In the first of eight chapters Irwin gives examples of OBEs and compares the experience with other phenomena such as bilocation, apparitions, dreams and lucid dreams, autoscapy and depersonalization.

Next he proceeds to the methods of research, reviewing what has been learned from case collections, surveys, self observations by adepts, and finally