

## IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND TO CELIA GREEN'S ANALYSIS OF SPONTANEOUS CASES

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UNFORTUNATELY the questionnaire elicited only about 300 cases, of which few approached the high standard of corroboration that had been hoped for. Mrs Goldney followed up these cases until pressure of work connected with the move of S.P.R. headquarters made it impossible for her to give further time to them. At this point an unexpected windfall of over 1,300 cases, which had been sent to the *Daily Express* in response to an article written by its scientific correspondent, Mr Chapman Pincher, was handed by him to the S.P.R. In spite of a flood of work occasioned by the move of premises, the Honorary Secretary, Mr W. H. Salter, very generously undertook the long and exacting task of the follow-up and registration of these cases, and, with the help of Professor F. J. Stratton, Mrs Kenneth Richmond and others, he spent much time and energy upon it. Eventually, however, unexpected difficulties connected with the move forced him to hand over the collection, only partially registered and followed up, to Mrs Gay, who put in several months more hard and detailed work upon it.

After registration of all the cases, but before it was possible to complete the follow-up, some sort of general picture of the situation began to emerge. It was not the one hoped for by the planners of the enquiry, of a reasonable number of well authenticated cases from educated percipients. Indeed, from that angle it was disappointing, and so we were left with the question: What can be learnt from the cases we have? The answer appeared to be that something could be learnt about improving procedure in future enquiries, and that detailed analysis of the cases themselves, even if they were not of the highest evidential quality, might provide hints and clues about psychological conditions, etc. which could be useful when framing designs for future experiments.

Cases reported by apparently reasonable persons were therefore not excluded from the final analysis simply because their corroboration had been inadequate or impossible, although cases were, of course, graded A, B or C, according to the extent that they appeared to approach the S.P.R. standard. Incidentally, casual conversation with members, gave the impression that repeated emphasis on the highest standards of corroboration had perhaps to

some extent defeated its own end, for there seemed to be a feeling that no spontaneous case would ever be considered watertight enough to be of any interest. Possibly more material for analysis on the lines reported below might be received from educated persons, if it were made clear that, while ideal cases were by far our most valued quarry, all reasonably presented apparent cases were of interest if studied as *experiences* rather than simply as evidence for the existence of ESP.

### *Teams of Evaluators*

We found that the approaches of the original followers-up had differed markedly from each other. In future enquiries it would be an advantage to have cases followed up by a team which had worked together, and which shared, as far as possible, a common standard.

### *Sources of Cases and Duration of Enquiry*

In view of the large and probably, therefore, less closely knit team which would be needed to deal with great numbers of cases at the same time, there might be some advantage in an enquiry being spread over a number of years, so that various sources could be tapped successively by the same team. Among such sources might be the readership of daily and weekly papers at various intellectual levels. On this occasion only one paper responded to the formal letter sent by the S.P.R., which suggests that editors should, if possible, be approached through personal introductions.

### *Psychological Motivation of Percipients*

The original plan had been, where practicable, to study the cases for psychological motivation. This turned out to be feasible only to a minor extent, as personal interviews were impossible except in a very few cases. This was unfortunate because far more information as to the background, etc., of a case can be gained in conversation than by letter. At the same time it is perhaps well to remember that to study a case for psychological motivation can be a very long task. Mr Edward Osborn, for example, told me that his investigation of *The Woman in Brown*, a visual hallucination which he ultimately traced to psychological causes only, took him about 200 hours.

## INFORMATION TO BE GAINED FROM ANALYSIS OF PRESENT CASES

As most of our cases had come from more or less unsophisticated percipients, had only been followed up by letter, and did not reach the high standard we had hoped for, the best course seemed to be

to analyse them under as many headings as possible, so that any trends or patterns which emerged could be compared with those in other collections.

At this stage we enlisted the invaluable help of Sir George Joy for the follow-up, and when Mrs Gay had finished the registration and could no longer carry on on account of ill-health, we handed the whole collection over to him and to Miss Celia Green, a mathematical scholar who had recently been appointed research secretary of the S.P.R. The long and complicated task of mathematical assessment was devised by Miss Green and carried out by her and Sir George with assistance from undergraduates. They fully realize the shortcomings of the analysis as regards material, randomness of sources and so on, but it may perhaps lead to further development of technique. It is flexible, and both past and future cases could be added indefinitely, so that changing trends and patterns could be watched. This might provide clues towards further hypotheses and new forms of controlled experiments. It is perhaps worth adding, as an example of the amount of work entailed in such enquiries, that Miss Green and Sir George's share in this one works out very roughly as seventy man-hours per case, quite apart from the large amount of work done before they took over.