



"Some noted scientists are personally convinced"

going about in any country either begging or using subtle craft, or faying themselves to have knowledge in Physiognomie, Palmesry, or other like crafty science, or pretending that they can tell destinies, fortunes or such other like fantastical imaginations" were to be "striped naked from the middle upwards, and openly whipped until his or her body be bloody, and be forthwith sent from Parish to Parish, by the officers of every the same, the next straight way to the Parish where hee was borne. . . . After which whipping the said person to have a testimonial subscribed with the hand, and sealed . . . mentioning day and place of his or her punishment, and the place whereunto such person is limited to go, and by what time the said person is limited to passe thither at his peril."

"Furthermore, should the fortune-teller or 'Egyptian' appear to be dangerous to the inferior sort of people where they shall be taken, or otherwise be such as would not be reformed of their roghish kind of life, they were to be banished out of this Realme . . . and conveyed into such parts beyond the seas . . . or otherwise judged perpetually to the Gallies of the Realme."

#### Not Children Under Seven

For some long forgotten reason that Act excepted "the poore people in S. Thomas Hospital, in the Borough of Southwarke," one "John Dutton of Dutton," and, rather unnecessarily but compassionately nevertheless, children under seven.

But the two acts which an attempt has been made to remedy are the Vagrancy Act of 1824 and the Witchcraft Act of 1735. The 1824 Act made pretenders to fortune-telling or anyone using "subtle Craft, Means or Device to deceive and impose on any of His Majesty's subjects" liable to hard labour for three months. And incidentally under this Act, which is still in force, fortune-tellers, palmists, or mediums may be arrested by "any person whatsoever" who can "deliver him or her to any Constable or other Peace officer." It is not known whether anyone ever accepted the invitation. Presumably the genuine fortune-tellers would be forewarned anyway. Or would they?

The Act of 1735 objects to persons being on speaking terms with the spirits. The penalty for pretending to be a

medium was one year's imprisonment "without Bail or Mainprize" and an hour in the pillory every quarter-day!

Court cases involving mediums make entertaining reading. Thus, in one summing-up, a magistrate strongly advised the medium "to get rid of a disembodied spirit who wants to know the time when the hour of lunch or tea approaches!" During another trial the Judge chanced to point to the medium who, lost in a trance, said in deep tones "Hearken to my voice, Brother Judge." On the other hand, in Europe the police have achieved some remarkable results with the assistance of mediums and on one occasion Scotland Yard toyed with the idea.

This is not the first time an attempt has been made to modernise the law affecting mediums. In 1930 a similar but unsuccessful Bill was introduced in the British Parliament. The object of the attempt now reported will be to repeal the Witchcraft Act of 1735 and parts of the Vagrancy Act, 1824, thereby giving official sanction to tested mediums and the scientific study of psychic phenomena. No one can doubt that the public has been duped and fleeced by, as the well-known investigator Harry Price put it, "a large army of charlatans who prey on credulity and make a fat living out of the bereaved, the diseased, the ignorant and the morbidly curious."

Yet there is left a collection of evidence, of claims and counter-claims, stories of odd happenings which "seem" to be authentic, and the results of the few trained investigators who have studied these matters. This evidence should, one way or another, be sifted out, so that the cheap fraud which thrives on the present doubt may be cut to a minimum.

The great body of scientists do not accept any psychic phenomena, for none of them has been investigated with the rigour which scientists demand. But, on the basis of their own experience, some noted scientists are personally convinced, and certainly many famous persons such as Dr. Joad, Julian and Aldous Huxley, William McDougall, Dr. Tillyard, and E. N. da C. Andrade, have been interested enough to take part in seances. During one of these seances Julian Huxley, it is said, very nearly passed into a trance state himself.

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