

GHOSTS and FAKERS

Will Fool You if You DON'T WATCH OUT!

Harry Price, Psychic "Pioneer" Can Put 'Em in Their Place

HAVE you ever been fooled without knowing that it was done? Not by stage conjurers and magicians—you pay for that and expect only tricks. Nor by confidence tricksters—for which you pay all the same. Hundreds of people are gulling the public in private every day with what they claim to be psychic powers of clairvoyance, mediumship, spirit photography and the like. They do it intentionally, and there is so much chaff among the "psychic" wheat that it is only the expert investigator who can detect the grain. And the expert investigator will probably tell you that he can count the instances he has encountered of genuine super-normal phenomena on the fingers of one hand—ghosts, mediums and all.

At any rate, that is the experience of Mr. Harry Price, head of the Psychological Research Department of the University of London, and he has spent practically his lifetime in the investigation of claims of supernormal powers or happenings.

Since "psychical research" and "spiritualism" emerged as distinct and contrasting forms of the scientific and emotional attitude respectively toward supernormal phenomena which have worried the world for centuries, the progress of investigation has been slow. It has been retarded by personal jealousies and by the reluctance of established scientific fields to admit into their circle of fact and matter an order of less tangible experimentation. At least, the investigation of allegedly psychic experience and power was decidedly intangible until Harry Price set out about 30 years ago to lay the ghosts of supernormal happenings or to prove claims partially or fully justified by painstaking and often arduous tests. He has carried out his self-imposed task to such effect that he eventually brought his accumulated evidence and methods to official recognition by the University of London.

The second of Harry Price's books, "Confessions of a Ghost Hunter," has just been published by Putnam's London House, giving the public readable and accurate reports of the most important and interesting pieces of investigation he has undertaken since the beginning of this century. An absorbing variety of material is dealt with here—haunted houses, a poltergeist, "ordinary" ghosts, claims of many mediums, telepathy, hyperaesthesia, clairvoyance, hypnotism, the Indian Rope Trick, fire-walking, ingenious spirit photography and an assortment of vaudeville tricks which the public is freely gulled into accepting as psychic.

Of the hundreds of cases and claims investigated by Harry Price and related in "Confessions of a Ghost Hunter," only four are considered to be beyond the likelihood of human cause. One is an English haunted manor, another is the poltergeist phenomenon of recent discovery in a London suburb. The two people whom Mr. Price admits as probably possessed of pronounced supernormal powers are Kuda Bux, fire-walker, and Mlle. Laplace, a Frenchwoman

with clairvoyant ability.

Incidentally, the test to which the Frenchwoman was subjected was to tell Mr. Price, by handling a letter, particulars of Dr. R. J. Tillyard, well known in New Zealand for his work as director of the entomological section of the Cawthron Institute, in Nelson. Dr. Tillyard had written the letter to Mr. Price, whom he knows personally. The analysis of statements made about Dr. Tillyard by Mlle. Laplace are set out in detail, with a corresponding check as to accuracy. Her response was the most favourable of all those who had made similar claims to supernormal capacity.

Two other New Zealanders are mentioned in the book. One is Claude McLauchlan, formerly of Auckland, and better known as Claude Dolores. He had a large following of people in the northern city who believed in his "psychic" powers. He had the temerity to submit himself to Harry Price for a test sitting shortly after arriving in England a few years ago, only to be told that dozens of good books have

been written on slate-writing. Both his tests were entirely negative as far as mediumship or other psychic powers were concerned, and Dolores was shown a couple of tricks by Harry Price "which are doubtless puzzling him to this day."

The other New Zealander is Mr. Aldrich, from Takapau, who first encountered the researcher in a London street. Mr. Price records the keen interest he attached to this brief acquaintanceship, and trusts that Mr. Aldrich will recall the occasion.

Some of the most interesting pages are those dealing with "spirit photography," a department of endeavour which has been exploited by charlatans, fakers and even plain crooks, thousands of times. In every single instance investigated by the author he is frankly sceptical. Nor is that any wonder when one reads the recipes for faking which have come under his notice—methods so cunning that only the most expert could be certain that they are not deceived. He exposes almost every known method from the most elementary to the incredibly ingenious, leaving one with the impression that next time one sees a "spirit" photograph one will just say, "Tut, tut!" and wonder just how that one was arranged.

This and other methods of fooling some of the public some of the time—or all of the time—are well illustrated. Perhaps the most amazing photograph is one of the famous or notorious Indian Rope Trick, a photograph taken when it was performed in England before Harry Price and a committee. This trick was cinematographed at the time, and is carefully described in the book, although one is not told just how it was done!

After thirty years of patient and open-minded investigation from a scientific viewpoint, Mr. Price lacks the solution of the eternal problem as to what happens after death. Some of the phenomena. (Continued on next page.)

