Does Mind Survive Death?

– J G Pratt –

J Gaither Pratt
Dr. J. Gaither Pratt (1908-1994) was a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia Medical School. He was a member of the scientific staff of Duke University for seven years, and was associate editor of the Journal of Parapsychology for seven years. He was President of the Parapsychological Association in 1957, and President of the Society for Psychical Research in 1970-1971. He was also a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research for 10 years. Dr. J. G. Pratt was responsible for some of the most exciting experiments ever in the field of parapsychology.

Lake Samuel was up his opinion of Mrs. Piper's abilities as follows:

> My impression after this and many other visits that Mrs. P. was either possessed of supernormal powers, or knew the members of my family fairly by sight and had by some lucky coincidence become acquainted with such a multitude of their domestic affairs and peculiarities as to be able to personate them with marvellous skill. I was at first inclined to the latter explanation, but the accumulated evidence finally became too overwhelming to admit of any other explanation than that of supernormal powers.

Being of a truly scientific mind and recognizing the importance of the view of the matter which he had reluctantly come to hold, James did not let the case drop. With his friend, the famous physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, he helped to form the Society for Psychical Research in London and the American Society for Research in England, and took an active part in arranging to have her sent from the purposes of making further, more formal investigations of her remarkable powers. Lodge, James, and many other people who were in a position to do so, made a thorough study of the phenomena of spiritualism.

The spiritualistic movement, indeed, had been the start of the SPR appeared to the members of the society to deserve scientific attention. The religious movement, which had developed during the latter part of the nineteenth century, was a reaction against the fact that the Church was keeping their minds open to all possible per effects, had set up a committee for the investigation of spiritualistic phenomena. The popular interest in the phenomena was so great that the committee was soon flooded with more work than it could handle. The members of the committee felt the study of hypnotism, which was being pursued by the French, was of more importance than that of spiritualism, but the members of the committee were all in the other affairs of men. This was soon established by the fact that, following the discovery of Mrs. Piper, other professional investigators in the United States and Europe began to turn their attention to the phenomena of spiritualism.

As a result there was no lack of opportunity to pursue their investigations as far as the research workers might wish and were able to carry them. Unfortunately, however, the results of the work of the early investigators of spiritualism were not encouraging. The results of the investigations which were made in the SPR itself, Myers and Gurney, the investigators who felt that they had found a set-down case, from which the pot yield seemed to be very high and which, unlike the experimental tests they had already tried, had unfamiliar reasons. There seemed to be no reason that the first investigations should not be successful in producing results of considerable value to science.

But the attraction to the investigation of mediumship was not merely a practical one. The information coming out of the sittings had promise of leading to advances in knowledge of the nature of the mind, of the nature of man, and of the nature of the universe. The study of the phenomena of objective research the investigation of these factors in man that most already challenge interpretation in terms of physical law. It was felt that the study of the phenomena of spiritualism might lead to the discovery of new laws of nature, or to the modification of existing laws. They had left behind them that there must be something about the phenomena of spiritualism which would be of great importance to the physical in terms of physics as we know it today and we are able to convince of its bewildering. Proof of survival would therefore constitute a major change in our view of the world. It would be a major change in our view of the world. It would be a major change in our view of the world. Work work on survival.

Furthermore, of the evidence of the after death should be established beyond any point of doubt, this scientific discovery seen as a revolutionary science of metaphysical and religious thought. Science would be the ally of the Church, and the Church would be the ally of science. Science a universal truth and ethics.

There are scientists who have seen no evidence in parapsychology, who consider that it is improper to raise this question as one for serious research consideration. For example, an esteemed scientific colleague with whom I discussed our field in my visit to the new laboratories for the study of parapsychology at the Institute for Research in Psychiatry, Neurology, and Neurosurgery in Villejuif, near Paris, stated that he was satisfying with parapsychology for its special field of study, but that it was improper for us to raise the question of survival of the mind after the legitimate branch of research. I helped his right to his opinion, as I hope he respects my right to raise, which is that science, and particularly parapsychology, is not the place for the suppression of ideas. Science is the place for the free and open discussion of ideas, and I believe that the first question to be raised in parapsychology is the question of survival. Although I have spent most of my time in research on other questions, particular question may be mistaken in thinking that it is a meaningful one. But I believe one cannot be sure that that should be charged against the field of parapsychology as a whole. Some of us who are in the field do feel that the question of survival is a meaningful question, and that it should be raised and investigated