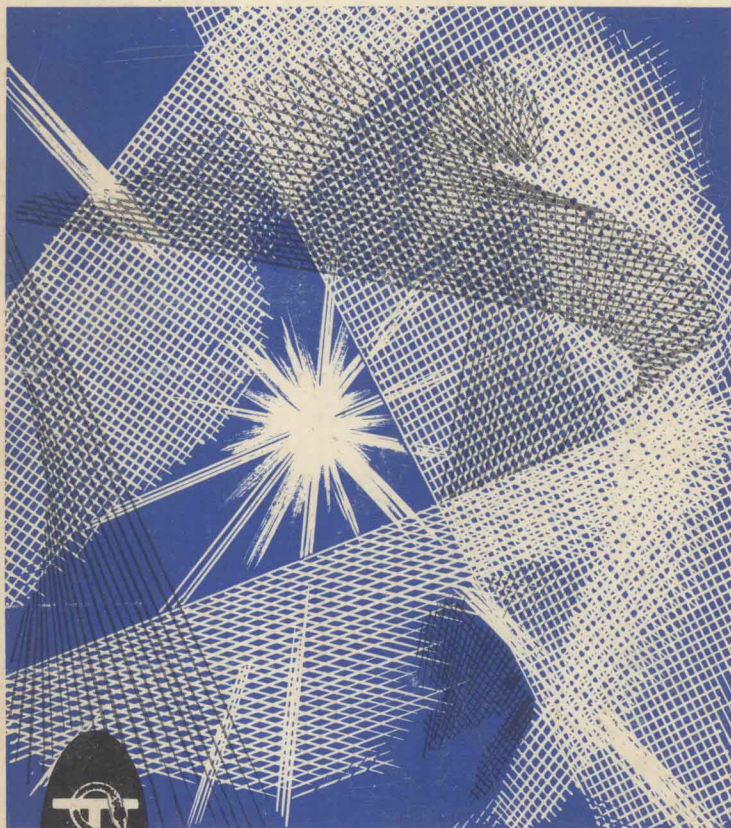


# THE IMPRISONED SPLENDOUR

An approach to Reality, based upon the significance of data  
drawn from the fields of Natural Science, Psychical Research  
and Mystical Experience

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RAYNOR C. JOHNSON



A QUEST BOOK . . . . . 2.95

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An approach to Reality, based upon  
the significance of data drawn from  
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Research and Mystical Experience

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TO  
MY WIFE  
*best of fellow-seekers,  
in gratitude*



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## FOREWORD

By the Rev. LESLIE D. WEATHERHEAD, M.A., Ph.D., D.D.

IT is a joy and a privilege to me to introduce to a new type of reader my friend of nearly a quarter of a century, Dr. Raynor C. Johnson. Dr. Johnson is, of course, well known already as a physicist in his own branch of science, and has two books to his credit.

In this book he breaks ground that will be new to many readers, but is not new to him. For years he has been a deep student of psychology, psychical research and mysticism, and here, in the clear form we expect from a scientist, and in a fascinating literary style, he presents some conclusions at which he has arrived : conclusions as thrilling as they are timely.

It is a strange and significant thing that the physicist, who works in the realm of physical matter, is more and more interpreting the universe in terms of mind. The psychologist—with some outstanding exceptions—is tending to interpret the phenomena of mind in terms of matter.

Here is a book in which a competent scientist, without dogmatism, hints at an interpretation of the nature of Man which seems to me to be in harmony with, and in some ways to carry forward, Christian faith, Oriental philosophy and psychical research. Concerning the last named, I have long felt that the interpretation given by even the best spiritualists was far too crude and shallow. Dr. Johnson not only sees far greater significance in the findings of serious psychical research, but advances some original interpretations which commend themselves to me as the most reasonable and likely of those yet put forward.

It was my privilege, during my three months as guest in the home of my old friend at Queen's College, Melbourne University, of which he is the Master, to sit by the fire with his wife, members of his family, and my own daughter, while Dr. Johnson read to us the manuscript of this enthralling and stimulating book. He was generous in allowing us to criticise, and we took advantage of his generosity, often sitting up into the late hours while he expounded and clarified the views which follow.

I trust that many as they read will get the intellectual stimulation, enjoyment and enlightenment which we got as we listened. For



myself, the book offers just the help I needed in this most difficult field of human enquiry—a field which is more and more engaging the attention of thoughtful men and women. With immense enthusiasm and without reserve, I commend the book to the public.

LESLIE D. WEATHERHEAD.

*The City Temple,*  
*London, 1953.*

## INTRODUCTION TO THE QUEST BOOK EDITION

It is almost twenty years since I wrote this book, and it was first published in London in 1953. In a sense, I wrote it to make as clear as I could to myself what I felt and thought about the world and life. If I were writing it again, I should not wish to make any significant changes. I find that I wrote at that time "The field of Mysticism is one which deeply interests me, although my temperament has so far excluded me from any impressive first-hand experience."

Much has happened since then! As the years have passed I have found myself less and less interested in the realm of psychic and more and more interested in the spiritual path and the way of the mystics. Of the basic data of psychic research I am amply satisfied that the evidence is good. Of our survival of death I am completely satisfied. But each generation will probably wish to make its own explorations and discoveries, and there is no reason to deplore this, as long as they realize they are paddling about in the shallows. About the beginning of 1963 there came to me some experience of Reality — of heights which are beyond the power of language to describe, and of which one would not wish to speak, even if one could, because they are sacred. They were a grace granted to me, and in the light of such experience one can only feel the most utter humility.

I hope the reader will keep in mind that this book was the fruit of strenuous intellectual questing, illumined a little on the side of theorizing by some flashes of intuition. This has its place: it will always have its place. The intellect is a fine instrument, as long as its limitations are recognized, and it is applied in the right directions. As the reader knows, the title of the book came from Robert Browning's *Paracelsus*. I shall conclude with two lines from Browning's *Saul*:

Now I lay down the judgeship He lent me. Each faculty  
tasked

To perceive Him, has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop  
was asked.

R. C. Johnson

Ferny Creek, Victoria,  
Australia,  
1971



## PREFACE

THE author of a book in his preface is traditionally allowed a freedom which would be a personal intrusion if included in his subject-matter. I am going to take advantage of this to say that for some years I have wanted to write this book. I am glad to have had the discipline of Physics as a background to my thinking and the familiarity which comes from having lectured to students in this field for about thirty years. In other sciences and in philosophy I have no professional qualifications, but can claim the interest of an ordinarily intelligent person in the developing thought of his colleagues in these fields. Psychical research has seemed to me an important, vast and much-neglected field of enquiry, to large tracts of which the scientific method is applicable, and to other tracts of which apply the methods of analysis of testimony used in disciplines such as Law and History. I can claim to have read fairly widely and investigated a little in this field. The field of Mysticism is one which deeply interests me, although my temperament has so far excluded me from any impressive first-hand experience. It is in this domain that we may hope to find the answers to those problems about which we are most hungry to have real knowledge and certainty.

I have endeavoured to take selected and representative scientific data, and to say in effect to my reader : if these things are accepted as true, what can we then infer about the nature of the world we live in and the nature of human life ? My survey of the data of psychical research and the data of mysticism has been undertaken with a similar end in view. If these data also have to be accepted, what more can we infer about our environment, our nature and our destiny ? These three fields of enquiry seem to me to take us into regions of deepening significance. The questions I have tried to illuminate—it would seem almost a presumption to say “tried to answer”—are the age-old questions which return to haunt every generation, in spite of all the volumes of philosophers and all the sermons of divines. These questions revolve around the nature of Man, his origin and his destiny, and the nature of the cosmic drama of which he seems so small a part.

I have endeavoured constantly to find reliable data and to make reasonable deductions therefrom ; but I hope I have made clear my sense of the limitations of reason, and of the existence of a deeper intuitive faculty perhaps most markedly developed in the poet and the religious genius.

An author should, I think, say for whom he has written. I have had several types of people in mind. One cannot be responsible for a residential university college for many years without knowing a little of the questing minds of university students, the questions they constantly ask, and in particular the materialistic tendencies created in their thinking by the disciplines of Medicine and Science. These students have often little time to correct them by wider reading and study. I have lectured also for some years under the auspices of the Adult Education Movement. Here, again, many people from all sections of the community—thoughtful people, though not university educated—have posed their questions and problems, and I have had them also in mind. Not all my readers will be interested equally in the different sections of the book. May I suggest that, in first reading, if a chapter is found too difficult, it should be passed over and the thread picked up at the next chapter.

What I have written must necessarily be a personal philosophy of life: it can be no other. One may aim at detachment: one knows that one has failed. I think the only safe claim is of sincerity, within the limits of one's present understanding.

I have many acknowledgments to make. Where poems or lengthy passages have been quoted I have sought and received permission from the publishers or authors. My indebtedness to those who have contributed to my thinking cannot easily be stated, for it is very wide, but I think the quotations and references made in footnotes will clearly indicate these persons. I would particularly like to mention, however, Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell's book *Grades of Significance*. In a more immediate way I am here, as always, indebted most of all to my wife for her frequent helpful discussions of these subjects and for reading through the whole manuscript. My friends Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead of London and Mr. Arthur W. Osborn of Melbourne have also placed me in their debt, the former by his generous foreword and by valuable suggestions when reading through the manuscript and proofs, and the latter by his book *The Super-physical*, and also through many friendly chats we have enjoyed together on these subjects of mutual interest.

R. C. JOHNSON.

*Queen's College,  
University of Melbourne,  
1953.*

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## Chapter

### 1

## INTRODUCTION

“ In the great matters it is now common knowledge that we have no knowledge, unless it be sufficient to advise us of the utter folly of all dogmatism. Reason, for all the flourishing of her trumpets, has had no greater success in illuminating the grand problems than the imagination. From the central keep of the world's mystery its arrows fall idly back, as from the walls of the medieval castle the bolts of the archers. . . . Our business is not to solve problems beyond mortal powers, but to see to it that our thoughts are not unworthy of the great theme.”

W. MACNEILE DIXON.

“ By wonder are we saved.”

. PLATO.

“ Jesus, on Whom be peace, has said : wonder at the things before you, for wonder is the beginning of knowledge.”

THE OXYRHYNCHUS PAPYRI.

### I. ADAPTATION TO ENVIRONMENT

IN the Darwinian picture of the evolution of living things no aspect is more impressive than the variety and ingenuity of the methods by which these have adapted themselves to their environment. Living things have conquered the air, the dry land, fresh water and the sea from its shallow fringe to its six-mile depths, and in every case they have modified their structure to suit the conditions of their habitat. In the deep sea, conditions differ enormously from those on other parts of the Earth's surface. The pressure for each mile descended is over one ton to the square inch—the equivalent of about 160 atmospheres—a pressure which would certainly crush and destroy any of our own tissues. The deep-sea creatures adapted themselves to this situation by developing very permeable, spongy structures in order to equalise the pressure within and without. No sunlight can penetrate to depths of the sea greater than half a mile, but many of these creatures contrive to manufacture their own light by intricate chemical processes. Furthermore, they have their own distinct luminescent patterns (dare we suggest for purposes of mutual recognition !). In this cold, dark and almost silent world the sense of touch has naturally been greatly exploited.

The success of the amphibians in emerging from the water some



300 million years ago and establishing themselves on dry land presents as remarkable a group of new adaptations as can be found anywhere. The water was a medium of approximately the same density as they were themselves: it supported them without effort. The air was eight hundred times less dense; the problem of self-support and balance became acute, and had to be met by special muscular development and great elaboration of the balancing mechanism of the brain. Fins became legs to make movement possible with the minimum of friction, and lungs had to be devised to deal with respiration in the new environment. The new range of temperatures to which these creatures were subject made it necessary to alter the whole outer surface of their bodies—hence the devices of thickened skin, fat layers, fur and hair, and the seasonal variations of which these devices are capable.

From time to time some great challenge seems to surge out of the vast Unconscious of Nature, "Capture a new area for Life". As though in response, we see experiments taking place and novelties constantly arising. Some seem to last a few million years and then fail. Others succeed, and from these, again, new experiments arise always to achieve greater adaptation to, and sometimes to provide greater awareness of, the environment. As we look at the evolutionary picture, our attention is naturally attracted to these aspects of change; but we must remind ourselves of the vast time-scale involved. Far from there being anything dramatic about the change, we can affirm that from the viewpoint of hundreds of generations of creatures all must have seemed sunk in the complacency and stagnation of complete adaptation to their own world.

When we come to Man we see the apotheosis of adaptive mechanisms.\* His body has innumerable devices the functioning of which is largely below the level of consciousness, to ensure that, however stormy and changeable his environment, his physical body shall adapt itself and remain at peace. It is the exceptional event for these adaptive functions to be unequal to their task and for a state of disease to supervene. Even when it does, and the first line of defence has broken down, the body is not without its resources, and, given a reasonable chance, will marshal its reserves and throw them skilfully into action. If it were not so, neither medicine nor surgery would exist within the respectable aura which our civilised society accords to them. The human body has achieved to a superb degree the ability to adapt itself automatically to a changing environment, and thereby has freed the psyche to a large extent to devote itself to its own proper field of exploration and development.

\* Alexis Carrel: *Man the Unknown*, Chapter VI.