

Bernard J.F. Laubscher (1897-1984)

Dr. Bernard J. F. Laubscher was a South African psychiatrist, anthropologist, and psychical researcher. The results of his psychical research and studies are set forth in *Sex, Custom, and Psychopathology: a Study of South African Natives* (1937), *The Philosophy of the Evolution of Spirit* (1947), *Where Mystery Dwells* (1963), *Beyond Life's Curtain* (1967), *In Quest of the Unseen* (1969), *The Pagan Soul* (1975), *Man's Private God* (1979) and *Out of the Unseen* (1980)



"It appears that psychic phenomena, which we find creeping into our lives on earth, are the most rudimentary object lessons for an awareness of the inner self," he wrote in his 1969 book. "Even our extrasensory faculties, which have at present a partial employment in our sense world, do require a consciousness to think of them, and thereby assist in their germination for future use."¹

As a child, Laubscher was fascinated by the mystical ways of the Hottentots and Bushmen

with whom he frequently interacted. "...the world of the dead played the most prominent part in the minds of old Cape coloured folk of those farm days," he recalled. "To them the next world was populated as this one by a variety of different personalities with different tastes, propensities and temperaments. There was the criminal, the mischievous, the pious and simple kingly natural spirit."² His 1937 book discusses the ESP faculties of the diviners and so-called witch doctors.

During his second year of medicine at Glasgow University, Laubscher had an experience that significantly added to his interest in psychical matters. He and two friends attended a séance by the landlady of one of their mutual friends, a direct-voice medium. Although darkness was required, there was enough light coming in from outside that the three men could still discern objects and movements. The medium initially sensed negativity, which Laubscher was certain was the antagonistic skepticism of one of his friends, and said she needed complete harmony in order to achieve the proper trance state. After some moments of silence, Laubscher felt a current of cold air and then heard a voice with a fairly broad Scottish accent coming through a floating trumpet with luminous paint strips on it. The entity gave his name as Duguid and said that he had studied medicine in Edinburgh and had passed over in 1900, during his fifth year of studies. "Then the voice took on a serious tone and gave us a homely lecture about this new world of knowledge which we were seeking," Laubscher related, adding that the voice was "masterful" and much different than that of the medium.³

When Duguid requested another record on the gramophone, they complied and then observed the trumpet behave like a baton conducting an orchestra. They were then startled, however, as the skeptical friend, suspecting a trick, switched on the lights. "My eyes were on the trumpet and as the light flooded the room the trumpet did not drop straight down but slid down an invisible incline," Laubscher noted. "That is, it came down at an angle to the floor, and hit the small table with photographs of men in uniform and shell ornaments, scattering them clattering to the floor."⁴ He also observed a flimsy cob-web like sort of (ectoplasmic) strand stretching from the medium to the trumpet.

He saw that the medium was doubled up in her chair with a deathly pale while moaning. The men carried her to her bed, where she retched and complained of intense stomach pains. Laubscher was informed the following day by the medium's boarder that she had a distinct discolored bruise all over her stomach up to the solar plexus. He concluded that the concentrated force, being sensitive to light, was driven back into the plexus of nerves and ganglia and in the process caused a dilation of blood vessels in the area while overstimulating and unbalancing the autonomic nervous system.

"I felt sure that we had come across a deeper stratum of human energy and that science had no knowledge of the laws operating in this sphere," he concluded. "In fact it represented a world of energy of a higher order to the grossly physical."⁵

After completing his medical training at Glasgow University, Laubscher served as a general practitioner in the Tulbagh District of South Africa and, in 1935, studied in the United States on a Carnegie grant. He then spent some time in England before returning to South Africa.

While in England, Laubscher arranged a sitting at the British Spiritualist Alliance with medium Lily Thomas. After a prayer was said, Thomas said she had a message from Laubscher's

deceased brother. The brother told him that he had been stillborn two years before Laubscher's birth and attributed his death to strangulation by means of the umbilical cord. As Laubscher knew of no deceased brother, stillborn or otherwise, he immediately questioned Thomas' credibility. The brother went on to say that he had grown up in the spiritual world and that they were not only physical but also spiritual brothers. He further said that he was often the source of Laubscher's inspiration and intuitive conceptions. As a final note, the deceased brother told Laubscher to ask their mother what she prayed for after his death.

When Laubscher returned home he confirmed the fact of his stillborn brother with his mother, who said she thought he knew about it, although she could not recall ever having told him about it. As for the prayer, she remembered praying that she might have another son.

"The evidence about this stillborn child leads one to conclude that there is a continued existence of the fundamental human Ego," Laubscher wrote, adding that it certainly was not normal telepathy, since he was unaware of the brother.⁶ The only known theory he could think of that might explain it is that of the Universal Mind, but he wonder why a Universal Mind, if there is such a thing, would want to communicate an untruth about the survival of his brother's spirit.

Back in South Africa, Laubscher studied the mediumship of Bessie Shearer for over 14 years. It involved a variety of manifestations, including poltergeist type phenomena. He recalled one instance in which he attended a birthday party for Bessie's mother. When their glasses were filled with red wine, they were about to raise their goblets to toast the mother when each of five people discovered a full-size hen's egg in his or her glass. As they had all witnessed their glasses being filled with wine and the medium was sitting 10 feet away from them in a lighted room, they were all bewildered. "A lively discussion ensued as to the ways and means employed to introduce these eggs in our wine glasses," Laub-

scher recalled. "They could not have been placed there after the glasses were filled, as displacement must have spilled the wine, and this was not the case."⁷ Bessie denied any knowledge of how it happened. They then heard a "squashy" sound at the other end of the room and observed two eggs and two tomatoes squashed against the wall, near the ceiling, and dripping down. There was no doubt in Laubscher's mind that no one in the room was responsible, as all parties were easily visible to him.

"These [poltergeist phenomena] were too numerous to mention," Laubscher continued, "but all of them left one impression – that there was a field of force which radiated from and surrounded the medium. The intensity of this field of force varied with her physical state and mood or the influence of the people and the emotional atmosphere."⁸

Sitting with the famous physical medium Alec Harris of Wales during 1965, Laubscher witnessed a number of full materializations. Nine people, including one other physician, an engineer, and some businessmen, and their wives, sat in a half-moon circle in a room with only one door, which was locked. Harris sat in a corner in a curtained-off "cabinet" in which there was nothing but a chair. The séance was held under red lights. "After a while the curtains opened and we could see the medium in his chair apparently in a deep trance and unconscious of all around,"

Laubscher described the event. "Then a white cloudlike column formed within the opening of the curtains and began to assume the outline and figure of a person. It occurred to my mind that unseen hands were covering an unseen personality with some doughlike substance, namely ectoplasm, drawn from the medium as well as ourselves."⁹ [See the *ÆCES* biography of Alec Harris for details of this séance. – *ed.*]

Laubscher stressed that fraud, self-deception, or any other illusionary explanation was out of the question. As he understood the materialization phenomenon, the invisible astral or soul body would reduce his or her rates of vibration to attract to them sufficient of the matter energy to produce ectoplasm. The thought forms of their former selves would then mold the ectoplasm to give the replica of the former body.

"The real things and the real feelings of man have been overshadowed by sham and perishable values and the aims of materialistic power," Laubscher lamented in 1969. "The intellect has not disciplined or modified the instinctive level of the mind, rather has it in most instances become subordinate to instinctive impulses."¹⁰

Laubscher put much of the blame for the world's imbalance on academia's resistance to spiritual truths.

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¹ Laubscher, B. J. F., *In Quest of the Unseen*, Vantage Press, 1969, p. 23.

² Laubscher, B. J. F., *Where Mystery Dwells*, James Clarke & Co., 1972, p. 11.

³ _____, p. 16.

⁴ _____, p. 17.

⁵ _____, p. 18.

⁶ _____, p. 249.

⁷ *Quest*, p. 52.

⁸ *Where Mystery Dwells*, p. 48.

⁹ Laubscher, B. J. F., *Beyond Life's Curtain*, Neville Spearman, 1967, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Quest*, p. 210.