

SCIENCE

VOL. 73

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1931

No. 1887

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SCIENCE: A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science, edited by J. MCKEEN CATTELL and published every Friday by

THE SCIENCE PRESS

New York City: Grand Central Terminal
Lancaster, Pa. Garrison, N. Y.

Annual Subscription, \$6.00 Single Copies, 15 Cts.

SCIENCE is the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Information regarding membership in the Association may be secured from the office of the permanent secretary, in the Smithsonian Institution Building, Washington, D. C.

SCIENCE AND THE SUPERNATURAL¹

By Dr. A. J. CARLSON

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

I INTEND to make this discourse more modest than the title, and I trust you will find it so. Science is one, at least in its essential element, the method of reaching approximate truths. But scientists are many. On the topic before us it is preposterous for any man to speak for science as a whole and, by inference, for all scientists. We have scientists who still pray to the gods, scientists who laugh at the gods, and some who neither pray nor laugh, because they think they understand. I am sure all you expect of me this evening, and certainly all I intend to do, is to discuss the supernatural in the light that years of service in the science of physiology have given me. The topic of this discussion is not of my own selection. The views are my own. But they are neither unique nor original, except in the sense of

¹ William Vaughan Moody Lecture, University of Chicago.

being derived from cogitation on the common life, cogitations disciplined by years of research. I am not foolish enough to pretend that I am about to present to you anything that is both new and true. There are able tomes on the nature of science; and literature, *ad infinitum*, on the supernatural, especially in religions. There are able works on the conflicts between science and the supernatural. There are attempts at reconciliation of the supernatural with science. We have, in print, confessions of faith in traditional religions by otherwise competent scientists. We have, also in print, rejections of the supernatural by preachers and teachers of religion. I assume you are familiar with some, if not all, of this literature. Everything I am going to say has already been said, perhaps better, by other people. Nevertheless, here is the confession of a physiologist of lack of faith in the supernatural, and his reasons.

Science

73 (1887)

Science **73** (1887), 10-244.

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