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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

ALFRED R. LINDESMITH [Ed.]

THE LIE DETECTOR TEST. By William Moulton Marston. New York: Richard R. Smith. 1938. Pp. 179. \$2.00.

In the opening chapter of this book the author makes a favorable comparison between himself and God. To God he gives credit for detecting the first lie ever told—that related by Adam in the Garden of Eden; to himself he pays full respect for “discovering” in 1915 the world’s first blood-pressure test for detecting deception. The reader is then whisked away on an Alice-in-Wonderland journey through the fields of lies, liars, and lie-detectors.

Hardly before the reader knows what a “lie-detector” might be, he is informed (on pages 15, 16, and 17) that it will “cure crime itself when properly administered,” that it can “change criminals into honest men,” and that “there is no reason why 90 per cent of society’s crime bill cannot be written off by the Lie Detector when it is properly used and universally accepted.” Wonderful!—if true. It seems, however, that in making such sweeping statements Marston forgets that in his book he is supposed to play the role of a scientist and not that of a popular magazine writer, or newspaper reporter, or special guest on some advertiser’s radio program. Apparently the author has repeated such exaggerations so often in *Esquire*, in *This Week*, and over

the *Nash* and other radio programs that he really believes them himself.

For the past five years your reviewer has devoted a considerable portion of his time to conducting “lie-detector” tests, as an associate of Leonarde Keeler at the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory of Northwestern University, from 1932 to 1938, and neither he nor Keeler is so optimistic of the future of the “lie-detector” as Marston purports to be. Although we have found the device to be very valuable in diagnosing deception, our experience (Keeler’s for sixteen years, at the Laboratory and elsewhere) in several thousands of actual cases, criminal and otherwise, does not in any way indicate that the “lie-detector” can reduce society’s crime bill by 90 per cent or that any such instrument operates with an accuracy of 97 per cent as stated by Marston. Keeler’s instrument records blood pressure and pulse beat changes—while Marston has relied upon an ordinary sphygmomanometer and stethoscope—and it also records respiratory changes not a part of Marston’s technique. Moreover, we have had available, for the past few years, a unit for recording the psycho-galvanic reflex. And the entire technique of instrument operation, of interrogation, and of the interpretation of such recordings has as its basis the collective experience of previous

research workers in this field, both prior to Marston's "discovery" and since that time. Consequently, on the basis of our experience with the method claimed by Marston as his "discovery" and with other techniques as well, we seriously question the validity of his claims both as to the ultimate value of his "discovery" and also its alleged accuracy.

Marston devotes many pages of this book to vituperative remarks about many other workers in the field who have at some time or other been labelled (by newspapers, popular magazines, etc.) "inventors of the lie-detector." According to the author these persons usually avail themselves of the "Marston test" with "an assemblage of standard apparatus." In other words, all that followed Marston's observations in 1915 is only of incidental value as compared with his "discovery."

Although the author exhibits great concern about others wearing his crown of "discoverer" (or "inventor")—so much so that some of his attacks come close to being libelous—he neglects to adequately mention the contributions of his predecessors who might well have thought they had as much right to the crown as Marston himself.

Years before Marston's "discovery," Cesare Lombroso used a plethysmograph for the purpose of detecting deception. Accounts of his experimentation with it are given in his "L'uomo Delinquente" (1876) and the details of its use in an actual criminal case are described by Lombroso in an article he published in 1902 in the "Archivio di Antropologia Criminale" (Volume 23, pp. 539-546), which also contained an illustration of various plethysmograph recordings

of the accused person. The same case is mentioned in Lombroso's "Crime: Its Causes and Remedies" (English translation in Modern Criminal Science Series, 1911, at p. 254):

"We have already seen how the plethysmograph of Mosso is able, without affecting the health and without any pain, to penetrate into the most secret recesses of the mind of the criminal. (The plethysmograph is a device for testing variations in the circulation of the blood, and rests for its usefulness upon the way the circulation responds to what is passing in the mind.) I have myself made use of this instrument in a complicated case, proving that a certain well known criminal was not guilty of the crime with which he was accused . . ." This account was published in the United States four years before the date of Marston's "discovery." Yet in Marston's book he makes only one reference to Lombroso—as the famous Italian criminologist who "evoked some rather fantastic theories."

In Chapter 3 Marston reproduces a dialogue which he and his former teacher, Hugo Munsterberg, were supposed to have had together. The reader is given the impression that Marston astonished his professor when he informed Munsterberg about his "discovery." Yet, in 1908 Munsterberg, in his book, "On the Witness Stand," discusses the effects of emotional changes upon blood pressure, pulse, respiration, psychogalvanic reflex, etc., and the possibility of utilizing such reactions in detecting deception. After reading Munsterberg's chapter "The Traces of Emotion" one wonders whether the professor himself should not receive a little credit for Marston's "discovery."

To avoid any misinterpretation of the foregoing criticisms of Marston and his book the reviewer wishes it to be distinctly understood that *while the facts of history tend to contradict Marston's claims of "discoverer," he is deserving of much credit for his experiments and early research in the detection of deception.* And a number of other workers in the field have accorded him such recognition, even one of those—Keeler—who bears the brunt of many of Marston's derogatory remarks concerning "inventors" and "discoverers" of the "lie-detector." (See 1 American Journal of Police Science 38 (1930) and 24 Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 1140 (1934).) As a matter of fact, there is no discoverer or inventor of the "lie-detector." The theory of detecting deception by means of observations and recordings of physiological changes developed by slow degrees from many and varied sources which extend back several centuries. No one person has contributed anything sufficiently new or revolutionary to merit the acclaim of the world as "discoverer" or "inventor." He may have perfected a more suitable instrument or devised a more desirable technique than that used by his predecessors, but the variation between the new and the old has not been sufficiently important to warrant the title of "discoverer" or "inventors."

When Marston states in Chapter 5 (entitled "The Lie Detector Goes to Court") that the "lie-detector" is legal and that its results are admitted as evidence in the courts of four states, and "probably in three or four others" he is in error. Although a few trial court judges have permitted its use, no *appellate*

court in this country has upheld such evidence. On the other hand, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin has held the "lie-detector" and its results inadmissible, and a Federal Circuit court of appeals denied its admissibility in one of Marston's own cases. (See *State v. Bohner*, 210 Wis. 651, 246 N. W. 314 (1933) and *Frye v. United States*, 293 Fed. 1013 (1923).)

In a chapter entitled "Love and the Lie Detector" the author explains its utility to the lovelorn. Married men, beware!

Marston offers some "Practical Suggestions on Lie Detector Technique." He recommends the tools he used in 1915—an ordinary sphygmomanometer and a stethoscope, the same equipment a family physician carries around with him from day to day. He also mentions the fact that other instruments are available for recording blood pressure changes and other physiological changes. But whatever apparatus may be used, Marston's instructions are not sufficiently well stated to be of much practical value. In the entire book there are only four illustrations of "lie-detector" charts or records (one of Marston's "discontinuous" or non-recording method, and three of the "continuous" or recording methods of others). Only one of these, that appearing between pages 98 and 99, gives any indication whatsoever of the criteria used in diagnosing deception by means of blood pressure and respiratory recordings.

This book is practically useless as a guide to a person who seeks to detect deception by means of a "lie-detector." It is not possessed of sufficient interest to warrant the attention of the average reader who seeks an insight into the cata-

combs of "science." And because of the manner in which it is written—with its self praise unconcealed beneath a guise of bashful modesty, with its unjustifiable attempts to discredit the efforts of

other workers, and a denial of proper credit to the author's predecessors—it can only bring ridicule upon the subject matter and disrespect for its author.

FRED E. INBAU.