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Edited by  
Paul J. Gaunt

Founded by Leslie Price

Archived by  
Garth Willey



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# CATHARINE ELIZABETH WOOD & ANNIE FAIRLAMB – CORRECTING THE RECORD



CATHERINE ELIZABETH WOOD.

In 1877 Thomas Pallister Barkas wrote an article published in *The Medium and Daybreak* about Miss C. E. Wood, the Newcastle-on-Tyne materialisation medium.<sup>1</sup> Part of the article indicated:

*In July 1872, a society was formed in Newcastle-on-Tyne, under the presidency of a very old worker in the Cause – Mr. W. Armstrong – for the investigation of the alleged phenomena of Modern Spiritualism, and the result was that in the course of a few months several members of the society were developed as mediums for various forms of manifestation. It was not, however, until the phenomena had taken the form of materialisation of human forms that great interest was excited by them. The society met twice a week for the purpose of developing mediumship and observing the phenomena.*

*In the year 1873 it was discovered that two young ladies, who were then mere girls, had very great mediumistic power. The one (Miss Wood) was at that time eighteen years of age, and the other (Miss Fairlamb) was about a year younger.*

*The society felt, and justly felt, that they could not claim the services of these young women without in some way compensating them for the services they rendered, as it was impossible for them to follow the occupations in which they were engaged, and from which Miss Wood derived a livelihood, and devote a large portion of their time to the interests of the society.*

*In consequence of this feeling, the society arranged to give the young women some trifling remuneration for their services, and under those conditions the manifestations very rapidly developed . . . Miss Wood was born in October, 1854; she is the second daughter of Thomas Wood, of this town, and lost her elder sister, Maggie, when she was young. She remained with her parents until she was fourteen*

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<sup>1</sup> T. P. Barkas, 'Miss Wood's Mediumship,' *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 370 Vol. VIII, May 4, 1877, pp. 273-74. The information was subsequently reproduced by W. P. Adshead, in *Miss Wood in Derbyshire: A Series of Experimental Séances*, London: James Burns, 1879, pp. xi-xii.

*years of age, and at that time went to a situation, which she occupied until November, 1873, when she was engaged as a medium by the Newcastle Society. Her father, who is a working mechanic, and an investigator into Spiritualism, took her to a meeting of the society, in 1872, which speedily led to her development as a medium.*

This background information regarding Wood, when she was born, her and Fairlamb's ages in 1873, and that it was in November of that year they were first employed as 'in-house' mediums by the Newcastle Society, has until now been assumed an accurate record. It has certainly been relied upon by academics that in recent decades have, from a variety of scholarly perspectives, written about these young women who became well-known materialisation mediums in the late-Victorian era. Research recently undertaken, however, involving an extensive examination of reports in Spiritualist newspapers coupled with a review of UK Census material and genealogical records, suggests that the Barkas material contains significant errors.

For example, Wood was born much earlier than Barkas claimed. Catharine Elizabeth Wood, the daughter of Thomas Wood and his wife Mary Patterson, was born at 3 Prudhoe Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne on February 5, 1852,<sup>2</sup> over two and a half years earlier than suggested, and her father was a coach painter by profession rather than a mechanic.<sup>3</sup> Although an elder sister, named Margaret Catharine, had been born in 1847, she died two years before Catharine Wood was born.<sup>4</sup> Wood was actually twenty when she first attended the Newcastle Society in 1872, and twenty-one in 1873, when it is alleged she became employed by the Society. She was, however, in domestic service prior to this; the 1871 Census shows her in Gateshead, Durham, employed as a general servant in the household of Jane Ildertson, a retired licensed victualler.<sup>5</sup>

Nor was Wood just one year older than Fairlamb. Born in Newcastle-on-Tyne on August 12, 1856, Ann Fairlam, the daughter of Mark Fairlam, a forgerman, and his wife Isabella Miller,<sup>6</sup> was four years younger than Wood. In 1872, when Fairlamb

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<sup>2</sup> GRO Births March Quarter 1852 Newcastle-on-Tyne.

<sup>3</sup> The U.K. Census records between 1851 and 1881, record Thomas Wood as a Coach Painter. See C1851: HO107 Piece 2405 Folio 401 Page 14 HSN 71 ED 9: Rudhoe Street, St. Andrew, Newcastle; C1861: RG9 Piece 3827 Folio 66 Page 15 HSN 70 ED 9e, 2 Temperance Row, All Saints, Newcastle; C1871: RG10 Piece 5085 Folio 68 Page 18 HSN 119 ED 8, 3 Halls Court, Leazes Lane, St. Andrew, Newcastle; C1881: RG11 Piece 5050 Folio 28 Page 11 HSN 59 ED 14a.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Catharine Wood (GRO Births June Quarter 1847 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 25 Page 354) died in 1850 (GRO Deaths September Quarter Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 25 Page 216). Catharine Elizabeth Wood had older brothers: Thomas Hawkins b. 1843; Matthew Henry b. 1845 and Charles George A. b. 1849, and younger siblings Joseph Edmund b. 1854, and Emma Isabella b. 1858.

<sup>5</sup> UK 1871 Census: RG10 Piece 5055 Folio 69 Page 1ED 17 HSN 4 52 West Street, Gateshead, Durham.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Fairlam (GRO Births September Quarter Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 80); All Saints Church, Newcastle, Baptismal Records: Ann Fairlam was baptized on September 21, 1856. Earlier parish records show that for generations the family surname had been recorded as Fairlam rather than Fairlamb, however, by the late 1860s, the name being recorded as Fairlamb became more common, and it was as Fairlamb that Annie was known in the Spiritualist press during the 1870s. Although born in Newcastle, her early childhood years were spent in Tweedmouth and Spittal where her father worked in an iron foundry. By 1871, however, the family

first attended the newly set up Society she was fifteen years old, and only a few months into her sixteenth year in November 1873, the date Barkas suggested she also became employed by the Newcastle Society. According to Fairlamb, her 'initiation' into the Spiritualist movement occurred a year earlier in 1871, when she was fourteen years old.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after her father's death<sup>8</sup> in the autumn of 1871 she attended a séance with the professional mediums Frank Herne and Charles Williams who were visiting Newcastle at that time. Fascinated by what she described were "the marvellous manifestations which occurred on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion"<sup>9</sup> her family began holding a home circle, where Fairlamb soon showed signs of mediumship, and on joining the development circles held at the Newcastle Society her abilities quickly advanced.

Her mediumistic talents were, she claimed, an inherited gift, as her mother "had the power of physical mediumship," as had her grandmother and great-grandmother, while other members of her family, and later her own children also had "this faculty, some being clairvoyant and others physical mediums."<sup>10</sup> Certainly Fairlamb's mother, Isabella, did share a keen interest in the Spiritualist movement, regularly attending séances, and participating in the many other activities put on by the Newcastle Society.<sup>11</sup> Before moving away from Newcastle after her daughter's marriage in 1878,<sup>12</sup> Mrs Fairlamb was acknowledged as one of the group of most "active workers in Spiritualism"<sup>13</sup> in that part of the country.

It is also hardly surprising Fairlamb, and, indeed Wood, might attend the activities of the Newcastle Society from its inception when it is realised that Wood's father, and Fairlamb's uncle, John Miller,<sup>14</sup> along with William Armstrong, were instrumental in

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were again living in Newcastle, the census records showing them residing at 17 Brunswick Place, St Andrews, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Northumberland.

<sup>7</sup> Mrs Mellon, 'A Meeting of the London Spiritualists,' *Light*, May 8, 1904, pp. 225-6. Article kindly supplied by Paul Gaunt.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Fairlam [b] in 1871 (GRO Deaths Newcastle-on-Tyne June Quarter 1871 Vol. 10b Page 64).

<sup>9</sup> Mrs Mellon, 'A Meeting of the London Spiritualists,' *Light*, May 8, 1904, pp. 225.

<sup>10</sup> Annie Mellon, 'Strange Experiences of a Sensitive,' in *A Counterblast to 'Spookland or Glimpses of the Marvellous,'* by 'Psyche,' Sydney: W. M. Maclardy & Co., Printers, 1895, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> 'Newcastle-on-Tyne,' *The Spiritualist Newspaper* Vol. 8 No. 12 March 24, 1876, p. 137; 'Spirit Manifestations,' *The Spiritualist Newspaper*, Vol. 8 No. 19 May 12, 1876, p. 221 both note Mrs Fairlamb's attendance at séances held in the Freemason's Old Hall, Newcastle.

<sup>12</sup> Annie Fairlamb married James Barr Mellon on July 18, 1878, at St Andrew's Church, Newcastle, by special license (GRO Marriages Sep Q 1878 Newcastle Vol. 10, Page 54); 'Marriage' *The Medium and Daybreak*, No. 434 Vol. IX July 26, 1878, p. 471.

<sup>13</sup> *The Spiritualist Newspaper*, Vol. 9 No. 3 August 18, 1876, p. 36. The "committee group" photographed at that time included Annie Fairlamb, her mother, Mrs Petty, another physical medium, J. J. Morse, and William Armstrong, the president of the Newcastle Psychological Society.

<sup>14</sup> An article titled 'Marriage of Mrs. B. Mellon,' *Light*, December 5, 1903, p. 581, noted that John Miller was Annie's uncle, and genealogical research confirms he was her mother's brother. He was born in 1814 in Alnwick, Northumberland, and died age 77 in 1891 (GRO Deaths June Quarter 1891 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 61).

the setting up of the Newcastle Society.<sup>15</sup> Miller was the Society's inaugural treasurer, remaining in that position for many years.<sup>16</sup> Miller, and Armstrong, the Society's first president, had been active Spiritualists prior to the setting up of the Society, and in 1877 were formally recognised for their contribution to the Spiritualist Cause.<sup>17</sup>

A number of modern scholars have referred to this association as the "Newcastle Society for the Investigation of Spiritualism,"<sup>18</sup> and suggest it was led by "Mr. Mould, a corn merchant, Mr. Armstrong, a florist and seedman, and T. P. Barkas."<sup>19</sup> Barkas has been variously described as a dentist,<sup>20</sup> "an old Chartist and civic dignitary,"<sup>21</sup> and as "a well-known geologist and naturalist,"<sup>22</sup> In reality, when formed in July 1872, it was named the 'Newcastle Psychological Society,' and operated under that title for seven years when it was reconvened as the Newcastle Spiritual Evidence Society.

William Armstrong, a master block and mast maker,<sup>23</sup> rather than a florist and seedman, was the Society's president for the first five years, until in March 1877, he declined to again stand at the Society's Annual General Meeting, as he no longer had

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<sup>15</sup> William Armstrong, 'Newcastle: The Fund in Trust, for Building a Hall,' *The Medium and Daybreak*, No. 843. Vol. XVII. May 28, 1886, p. 343. Letter dated May 21, 1886, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

<sup>16</sup> Various Annual Reports of the Newcastle Psychological Society, published in *The Medium and Daybreak* between 1874 and 1880, record John Miller as the society's Treasurer. He was born in 1814, and died in 1891 (GRO Deaths June Quarter 1891 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 61).

<sup>17</sup> 'Presentation at Newcastle-on-Tyne,' *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 386 Vol. VIII August 24, 1877 p. 539. On August 15, 1877, Armstrong and Miller, "two of the oldest workers in the Cause in Newcastle," were "presented with walnut writing desks mounted with a plate engraved with a suitable inscription. Testimonial: in the name of the Members of the Newcastle Psychological Society, for valuable services rendered to Modern Spiritualism."

<sup>18</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, London: Virago Press, 1989, p. 56; Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 100; Corinne Montenenon, *Materialisation Phenomena in British and French Spiritualism and Psychical Research C. 1870-1920*, A PhD Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, February 2004, p. 53. See also *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, J. Gordon Melton, Editor, Farmington Hills, M.I.: Gale Group Inc., 2001, p. 1021.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 107; Owen, p. 56; Nontenenon, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Gauld, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Owen, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Montenenon, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> William Armstrong was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1816 and died age 78 in 1893 (GRO Deaths December Quarter 1893 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 10). Census records between 1841 and 1891 confirm his occupation. He was married to Isabella Gilroy and had seven children.

“so much time as formerly to devote to the Cause,”<sup>24</sup> though he remained a committee member.<sup>25</sup> Confusion about his occupation may have arisen due to there being another member of the Society, a much younger man by the name of William Robert Armstrong, who was a florist and fruiterer.<sup>26</sup> In the early years of the Society’s operation the latter Armstrong offered free use of his property, ‘High Cross Lodge,’ in Benwell, Northumberland, for the society’s annual picnic.

It was not until 1877 that John Mould, a corn factor,<sup>27</sup> was elected president of the Newcastle Society.<sup>28</sup> He and his wife Sarah<sup>29</sup> had their “first initiation into the mysteries of Spiritualism”<sup>30</sup> when they attended some dark séances in the Hall at Weir’s Court, in 1872, and in April 1873 had commenced holding séances in their home with Miss Wood as the medium. As for T. P. Barkas,<sup>31</sup> though a member, and a regular speaker at the public meetings, he did not play a major role in the running of the Society, and was never on its elected committee. He was, however, a member of a group set up by the Newcastle Society to test the genuineness or otherwise of the phenomena occurring in Wood and Fairlamb’s séances in the latter part of 1874,<sup>32</sup> and between October 22, 1874, and March 20, 1877, Barkas kept what he described as full records of their séances he attended.<sup>33</sup> Barkas was not by occupation ever a dentist; UK census records between 1851 and 1891 show he was a bookseller and printer, a Lessee of an art gallery, and of a news room.<sup>34</sup> He did, however, in later

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Newcastle-on-Tyne Psychological Society,’ *The Medium and Daybreak*, No. 368 Vol. VIII April 20, 1877, pp. 245-6.

<sup>25</sup> This decision was evidently related to Miss Fairlamb’s resignation from the Society at that time, and his taking on the role of her manager.

<sup>26</sup> William Robert Armstrong was born in 1840 (GRO Births June Quarter 1840 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 25 Page 329, and died at age 73 in 1915 (GRO Deaths March Quarter 1915 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 21). Census records show him residing High Cross Lodge or High Cross Nurseries in the town of Benwell, High Cross, Northumberland between 1871 and 1901. He was married to Jessie Ann Straughan and had four children.

<sup>27</sup> John Mould was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1836 (baptised 25 December 1836, All Saints Church, Newcastle), and died in 1908 (GRO Deaths December Quarter 1908 Castle Ward Vol. 10b Page 232). In Census records between 1871 and 1901 show him as a Corn Merchant or Corn Factor.

<sup>28</sup> Mould was elected president when William Armstrong declined to stand in March 1877.

<sup>29</sup> John Mould married Sarah Brown Mann Hopper in 1861 (GRO Marriages June Quarter 1861 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 62).

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Mould, ‘Facts from the History of Miss Wood’s Development as a Medium,’ *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 395 Vol. VIII pp. 674-6; p. 674.

<sup>31</sup> Barkas was born March 5, 1819 (baptised May 6, 1819 Groat Market NC, Newcastle-on-Tyne, son of William and Barabara), and died aged 72 in 1891 (GRO Deaths September Quarter 1891 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 10b Page 48). He married Isabella Gow in 1846 (GRO Marriages March Quarter 1846 Newcastle-on-Tyne Vol. 25 Page 410).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Spiritualism in Newcastle,’ *The Spiritualist Newspaper*, Vol. 5 No. 5 August 28, 1874, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> T. P. Barkas, ‘Spiritualism Attested by Science,’ *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 820 Vol. XVI December 18, 1885, pp. 801-807; p. 803.

<sup>34</sup> 1851 Census: Thomas P. Barkas, Bookseller and Printer, residing 15 Lovaine Terrace, Newcastle; 1861 Census: Thomas P. Barkas, Bookseller, 15 Lovaine Terrace, Newcastle; 1871 Census: Thomas P. Barkas, Agent,

years, become an Alderman of Newcastle, and had an enthusiastic interest in geology and natural history.

Whether Wood and Fairlamb first became employed by the Newcastle Society in November 1873 must also be questioned. While it is certain that during that year both began holding regular séances on behalf of the Society at its rooms in the Old Freemason's Hall, Weir's Court, Newgate Street, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, there is evidence to suggest it may not have been until 1875 when this arrangement was put on a financial footing.

Only at that time, and after the Newcastle Society had entered "into a contract with some gentlemen of position in the world of letters and science, who [were] anxious to investigate the phenomena through Misses Wood and Fairlamb,"<sup>35</sup> was an arrangement made to pay them a weekly income. The "gentlemen" referred to were F.W.H. Myers, Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney, who in various combinations, had sittings with the two mediums at the Newcastle home of T. P. Barkas between January and March 1875. Subsequently, Wood and Fairlamb were paid by the men for a series of séances held at Myer's lodgings in Mayfair commencing in April 1875, and a further series of sittings carried out at Arthur Balfour's house shortly after.

On their return to Newcastle, at a social outing organised by the Newcastle Society held on Whit Monday, May 17, 1875, and attended by over two hundred members and friends, an opportunity was taken to acknowledge the great respect and esteem held for the two mediums, when the president of the society gave a speech and presented Wood with an ornate dressing case, bound album and a gold guard, while to Fairlamb he presented a gold watch and chain, in recognition of their work in London. A report of the event in *The Spiritualist Newspaper*<sup>36</sup> noted,

For a considerable time their services to the Newcastle Society has been literally entirely voluntary; and though they can no longer be so described, we can aver that the relationship is only nominally changed as their services are still as unremitting as ever they were, and their remuneration just adequate to justify us to ask them to take that care of themselves which favours the production of the best phenomena.

It also seems that the "trifling remuneration" referred to by Barkas may not always have been received in return for their services. In June 1878, after a visit to Newcastle, James Burns, the editor of *The Medium and Daybreak* remarked, to offset the views of those who would treat the genuineness of the manifestations exhibited at the séances of Wood and Fairlamb as suspect,<sup>37</sup> I would remind such of the history of the Newcastle phenomena from the beginning. The circles are not public in the usual

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21 Elswick Villa, Elswick, Newcastle; 1881 Census: Thomas P. Barkas, Lessee of Art Gallery, 26 Archbold Terrace, Jesmond; 1891 Census: Thomas Barkass, Retired Lessee of News Room, 28 Lovaine Place, Newcastle.

<sup>35</sup> J. Hare, 'Spiritual Manifestations in Newcastle,' *The Spiritualist Newspaper* Vol. 6 No. 8 February 19, 1875, p. 92. John Hare was at the time the vice-president of the Newcastle Society.

<sup>36</sup> 'Spiritualism in Newcastle,' *The Spiritualist Newspaper* Vol. 6 No. 23 June 4, 1875, p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> James Burns, 'Interviews with Physicalised Spirits at Newcastle-on-Tyne,' *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 428 Vol. IX June 14, 1878, p. 372.

sense of the term, and there is no interest in deception as it is not a particularly money-making pursuit for the mediums. The members of the society are supposed to attend, and strangers alone by special favour. The fee paid is 1s., on some occasions less, and taking the whole year round the medium, I suppose, does not realise £1 a week for several sittings.

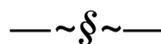
The same year William Armstrong, advised the readers of *The Medium and Daybreak* “the £2 a week that Miss Fairlamb was said to receive from the Society was only a myth, and the many guineas have not reached her pocket yet.”<sup>38</sup> Armstrong was referring to the period between 1875 and March 1877, at which time Fairlamb had tendered her resignation, and ceased to be employed by the Society. Wood had left the employ of the Society a year earlier. If the information Armstrong outlined is correct, and there is no reason to doubt it is, in the time between March 1877 and July 1878 Fairlamb, under an arrangement negotiated by Armstrong with the committee of the Society, gave one hundred-and-fifteen séances at the Newcastle Society’s premises, fifty-seven night séances for the members, receiving an payment on average less than six shillings and six pence a séance, fifty-eight Sunday séances, open to members and non-members, averaging less than twelve shillings and four pence per séance, resulting in an income of £54 3s. 3<sup>1/2</sup>d.<sup>39</sup> This amounts on average to about £1 11s. 6d per week.



Annie Fairlamb

While it is true that in the same period a further twenty-six séances were held while Fairlamb was visiting Scotland, resulting in additional income of £15 10s. 6d, Armstrong made clear that the total income of £69 13s.9d<sup>40</sup> from all séances held, after payment of expenses, gave an average of less than ten shillings per séance. Based on such figures, and bearing in mind that before Wood’s departure in March 1876 the two women shared most of the séances, it is possible neither medium often obtained, if ever, £2 each on a weekly basis from their séances for the Society.

Lis Warwood © September 2014.



<sup>38</sup> William Armstrong, ‘Mrs. Mellon and the Newcastle Society,’ *The Medium and Daybreak* No. 447 Vo. IV October 25, 1878, p. 678.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Owen’s suggestion that the income quoted by Armstrong excluded Fairlamb’s “lucrative private work” (p. 59) is clearly incorrect. Armstrong is quite specific that it was a total of 141 séances Fairlamb had held over the sixteen month period.

# NEW LIGHT ON S.P.R. ORIGINS?

When a project is successful, there may be rival claims to have started it. In the first issue of *Psypioneer*, we noted how the name of Edmund Dawson Rogers, a Spiritualist and mere journalist, had been omitted from the Society for Psychological Research web site – still the case today.<sup>41</sup>

We are currently told only “The SPR, the first learned society of its kind, was founded in London in 1882.”<sup>42</sup>

The argument over origins was already in progress in 1893 – with a surprise contender, as these letters in the leading London weekly Spiritualist newspaper show.

*LIGHT* September 2nd 1893 front page & 410:

## Notes by the Way

In the “Theosophist,” for August, referring to “Borderland,” “H.S.O.,” having occasion to mention the Society for Psychological Research, calls that Society “an offspring of our Society projected by our own members, although a child of matricidal impulses.” Now, unless the story usually told about the foundation of the Society for Psychological Research is utterly false, the Theosophical Society had about as much to do with its foundation as with the dome of St. Paul’s, unless, indeed, Messrs. Sidgwick, Myers, and Podmore were members of that Society, which seems unlikely.

If these remarks were written by the editor of *LIGHT*, that would be William Paice.<sup>43</sup> They brought forth as clarification from a well-informed source.

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*LIGHT* September 9th 1893 pages 429-430:

## Letters to the Editor:

### Origin of the Society for Psychological Research.

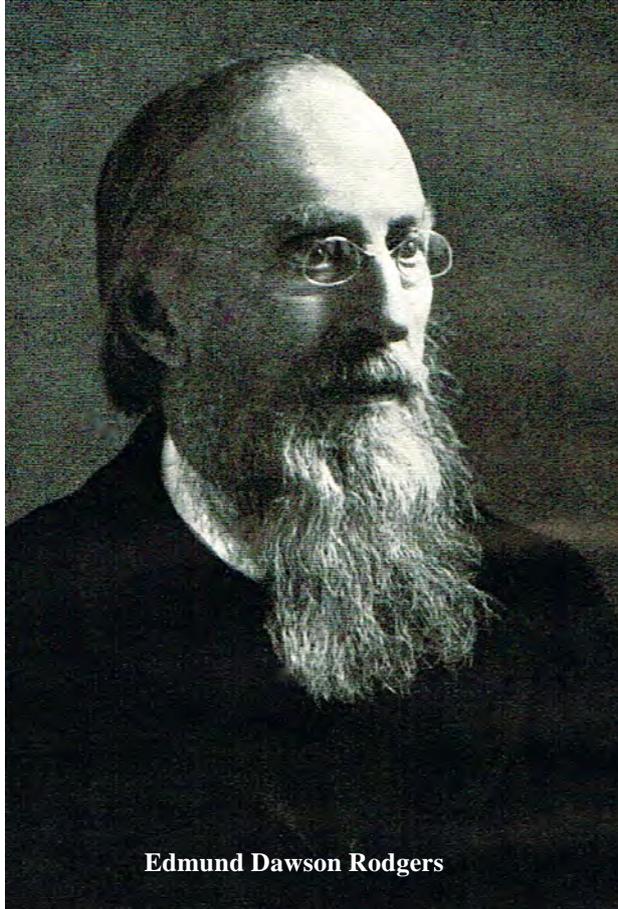
Sir,—I have seen the promotion of the Society for Psychological Research attributed to Professor Barrett; I have seen it attributed to Mr. Stainton Moses; and now I learn from a “Note by the Way” in last week’s “*LIGHT*” that “H. S. O.” (Colonel H. S. Olcott, I presume) has described the Society for Psychological Research as an “offspring” of the Theosophical Society, promoted by that Society’s “own members.”

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<sup>41</sup> *Psypioneer*: Vol 1. No 1. May 2004: *SPR was conceived by Spiritualist – Leslie Price*:—  
[http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP1.pdf](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP1.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> History of The Society for Psychological Research: <http://www.spr.ac.uk/page/history-society-psychical-research-parapsychology>

<sup>43</sup> *Psypioneer*: Volume 5. No 10. October 2009: *The editorship of LIGHT – Paul J. Gaunt*:—  
<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.10.October09.pdf>



Edmund Dawson Rodgers

As I had some share in the promotion of the Society for Psychical Research, perhaps I may be able the more effectually to show the purely mythical character of Colonel Olcott's statement by a brief narrative of the circumstances which led to the formation of that Society. *So far as I know* I was myself the first to suggest it. It occurred to me that—while the Spiritualists continued their work in their own way by means of their own societies—a new Society might be started—to be called Psychical or Psychological—for the sake of the many persons of culture and of good social position who, while really interested in Spiritualism, held themselves aloof from all active association with the movement because of the odium which at that time was supposed to attach to the name. In the autumn of 1881, in conversation with Professor Barrett, I suggested that the experiment should be made. He cordially concurred, and it was agreed that we should each invite friends to a

Conference with the view of giving effect to the proposal.

Being in constant personal intercourse with Mr. Stainton Moses, I naturally desired his co-operation; and he gave it—though he did so with great reluctance. The Conference was held at the rooms of the British National Association of Spiritualists, 38, Great Russell-street, on January 5th. 1882, Professor Barrett in the chair—when Mr. Stainton Moses drafted and moved the first resolution:—

That it is desirable to organise a Society for the purpose of associating together those who are interested in Psychological Research.

The following resolution was also passed:—

That the meeting nominate a Committee for the purpose of reporting on the best means of carrying this resolution into effect, and that the Committee consist of the following, with power to add to their number: Professor W. F. Barrett, George Wyld, M.D., Walter H. Coffin, Edmund Gurney, E. Dawson Rogers, Morell Theobald, Alexander Calder, W. Stainton Moses, F. W. H. Myers. Mary Boole, H. Wedgwood, Walter R. Browne, Desmond G. FitzGerald, Henry Sidgwick, H. J. Hood, C. C. Massey.

The Committee met several times and presented a Report to an adjourned Conference in the following month (February 20th). The Report was adopted, and the first meeting of the Council thereby appointed was held on March 3rd, 1882.

Such is a brief history of the formation of the Society for Psychical Research, and I submit that it sufficiently disposes of Colonel Olcott's suggestion that the Society for Psychical Research is an "offspring" of the Theosophical Society, promoted by that Society's "own members."

Mr. F. W. H. Myers writing in the "Proceedings" of the Society for Psychical Research for December last, said that "When Professor Barrett consulted Mr. Stainton Moses as to the possibility of founding a new society he warmly welcomed the plan." This statement is at variance with what I have said above—that he gave his co-operation with great reluctance; and I think that Mr. Myers must have written under a misapprehension. When Mr. Stainton Moses had moved the resolution at the first meeting of the Conference and consented to be placed on the Committee then appointed, there is no doubt that he threw himself heart and soul into the work; that was his custom in regard to anything he undertook. But when I first asked him to attend the Conference he resolutely refused, because, as he said, he had a shrewd guess that the men who were likely to come to the front in the new Society were not the men to bring impartial minds to the investigation of the phenomena of Spiritualism. This attitude he maintained up to the very day on which the Conference first met, when, yielding to my repeated solicitations, he came up from Bedford for the special purpose of attending the meeting.

Heartily as he worked—or endeavoured to work—with the Society after he had once committed himself, he never found reason to doubt that his original judgment was correct, and he frequently, in conversing with me on the subject, blamed himself for having been so weak as to yield to my importunities. The end was that having become increasingly dissatisfied with the Society's attitude towards Spiritualism he withdrew from membership in 1886. I endeavoured to dissuade him from doing so, but this time my "importunities" were of no avail.

E. DAWSON ROGERS.

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What is surprising here is the scepticism which Moses entertained from the first about the likely results of forming the S.P.R. It is certainly true that Moses resigned in 1886. His letter read as below. It will be recalled that JSPR was at that time a private publication for members. This letter marks the beginning of a cold war between Spiritualists and psychical researchers which was to last for a century, until it was ended by such bridge builders as David Fontana, Archie Roy and Arthur Ellison.

From Journal of Society for Psychical Research Dec 1886:

### **CORRESPONDENCE.**

*To the Editor of the* JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

SIR,—Permit me in very few words to state that I have resigned my membership of the Society for Psychical Research, with the offices which I have the honour to hold as Vice-President and Member of Council.

I have conceived that as a representative Spiritualist I could not do otherwise, considering, as I do, that the evidence for phenomena of the genuine character of which I and many others have satisfied ourselves beyond doubt, is not being properly entertained or fairly treated by the Society for Psychical Research.

I believe it is not the practice of the Society to announce the names of those who retire from its ranks, and I therefore venture to ask permission to make this statement myself.—I am, &c.,

W. STANTON MOSES,

Late Vice-president and Member of Council, S.P.R.  
21, Birchington-road, London, N.W.  
November 18th.

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To return to the letter in *LIGHT* from Rogers, this produced a response from William Barrett about what he modestly calls a very small matter, yet about which he writes at some length.

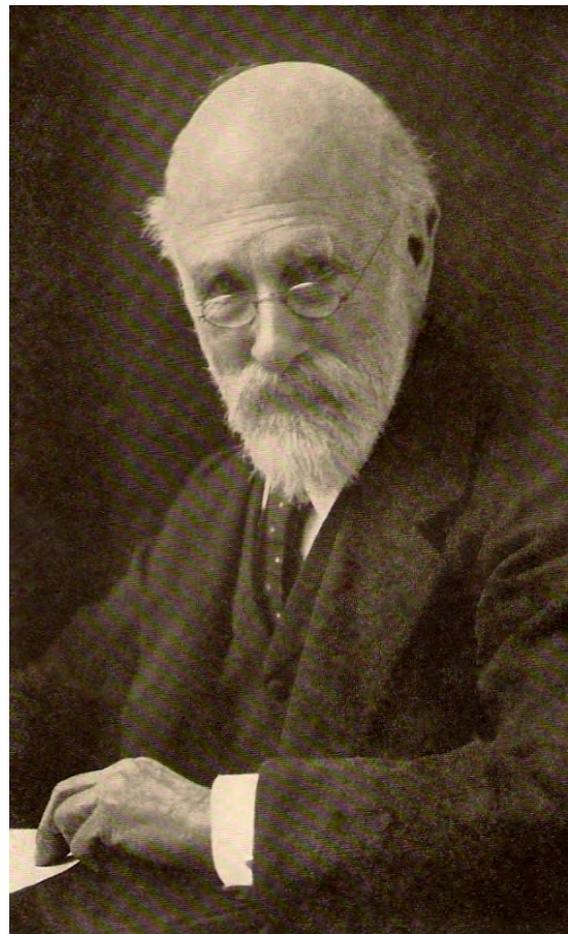
*LIGHT* September 23rd 1893 pages 453-454:

**Letters to the Editor:**

### **The Origin of the Society for Psychical Research.**

SIR,—Owing to absence from home I have only just read the letter from Mr. Dawson Rogerson the origin of the S. P. R., which appears in your issue of September 9th. Like Mr. Dawson Rogers, I have often been amused with the various mythical accounts of the origin of this Society which have appeared in the Press, none more mythical than that given in what purports to be an “historical summary” in the current number of “Borderland.” I am glad, therefore, that Mr. Dawson Rogers has put on record his recollection of the matter, for unquestionably a share in whatever credit may attach to the foundation and early history of the Society belongs to him. His statement is, however, not quite correct as it stands, and it may, perhaps, be of interest if I briefly narrate the circumstances which led up to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research early in January, 1882.

For some years before this date, partly alone, and partly in common with those who have since taken the most active part in



SIR WILLIAM F. BARRETT, F.R.S.

the S. P. R., I had repeatedly witnessed and taken part in the investigation of various psychical phenomena, which appeared to be inexplicable upon any known hypothesis, and which, if incontestably established, promised a wide extension of our existing knowledge. Accordingly, in 1876, I ventured to bring the subject before the British Association, mainly with the object of obtaining the appointment of a committee of scientific men to investigate and report on these phenomena. The paper itself, though the Association refused to publish even an abstract, dealt chiefly with the occurrence of what appeared to be a direct action of mind upon mind, or thought-transference, in the mesmeric state.

In the animated discussion that followed, several distinguished men took part, and in spite of the fact that Lord Rayleigh, General Pitt-Rivers (then Colonel Lane Fox), Mr. A. R. Wallace, Mr. Crookes, Dr. Carpenter, Mr. Hyde Clark, and Dr. Heaton, among others, supported the plea for further scientific inquiry, nothing came of the resolution I moved to that effect. In subsequent correspondence with other learned societies it was urged—reasonably enough on their part—that phenomena which implied an agency transcending the recognised channels of sense were beyond their proper scope, and hence they could neither publish nor promote investigation on what they were bound to regard as a wholly illusory inquiry.

Meanwhile, a letter addressed to the “Times,” together with the publicity given to the British Association paper, brought into my possession a large amount of additional evidence. One case in particular, after careful investigation, early in 1881, afforded so strong a presumption of thought-transference existing in the normal state that a brief account of it was admitted to the columns of the scientific periodical “Nature,” in June of that year. Writing to me on June 23rd, 1881, in reference to this case, Mr. G. J. Romanes said:—“It seems to me most desirable, if you are satisfied that the facts are facts, and admit of being repeated, that they should be witnessed and attested by a committee of known men, for they are of a kind which it would be unreasonable to expect the public to receive on the testimony of a single observer, however competent.” This suggestion was carried out, but there still remained the difficulty of publication in the Proceedings of any scientific society; moreover, others, notably Mr. and Mrs. Sidgwick and Mr. F. W. H. Myers, had been conducting inquiries for many years into spiritualistic phenomena, and a general feeling existed that some method of recording the evidence on behalf of psychical phenomena in general, less fugitive than the columns of a newspaper, should be created.

The Spiritualists, it is true, had their own societies, and their own organs, but, whilst gratefully acknowledging much of the pioneer work which they have done, these societies and organs could hardly be termed strictly scientific. At the same time it was felt desirable to get into closer touch with the leading Spiritualists, so as not to let slip any opportunity for investigation which our spiritualistic friends might be willing to submit. Talking over the possibility of such co-operation with my friend Mr. Dawson Rogers, the project of a conference between a few leading Spiritualists, and those who were interested in a more scientific investigation of the phenomena, took definite shape in the course of our discussion. Mr. Rogers offered to obtain the loan of the rooms at Great Russell-street for the purpose of the conference, and also on his part to endeavour to obtain the presence of a few well-known Spiritualists to meet those whom I should invite. So far as my recollection serves me, Mr. Dawson Rogers was at first rather opposed to the formation of a new society, upon which I

had previously been in correspondence with Professor Balfour Stewart and some other scientific friends.<sup>44</sup> However that may be, I have no doubt he is perfectly right in what he says about the objection Mr. Stainton Moses at first entertained towards the conference. Mr. Myers's remark I had not seen, but his misapprehension in confounding the name of Mr. Stainton Moses with that of Mr. Dawson Rogers was very natural, as the former played a prominent part in the conference, accurately shown in Mr. Dawson Rogers's letter in your columns.

There was, I believe, a shorthand note taken of the two days' conference (January 5th and 6th, 1882), in which I was in the chair, but I can find no record of it, and the first public notice appears to be in "LIGHT" for February 25th, 1882. Here it is stated that "many of our readers are aware that early in January a conference of persons interested in Psychological Research met in London at the invitation of Professor Barrett, of Dublin. At that conference a committee was appointed, which made a report to an adjourned meeting of the conference held on Monday last. As the result of these conferences, and of the work of the committee, an association is now established under the designation of the 'Society for Psychical Research.' " The objects of the society and the names of the first president, Professor Sidgwick, vice-presidents, and council, are then given. The original council I quote as follows:—"W. F. Barrett, E. Gurney, W. Stainton Moses, F. W. H. Myers, C. C. Massey, W. R. Browne, H. Wedgwood, E. Dawson Rogers, Mrs. Boole, Dr. Wyld, W. H. Coffin, A. Calder, Desmond FitzGerald, F. W. Percival, Dr. Lockhart Robertson, and E. T. Bennett."<sup>45</sup> I have still in my possession a sheaf of letters sent to me in reply to my letter of invitation; some of these letters are of considerable interest and are worth printing, if the writers do not object to their publication.

In conclusion, permit me to say that the mere accident of giving an initial impulse to the Society for Psychical Research, which fell to my lot, is a very small matter, and only has some importance from what the Society has achieved. The chief honour belongs to the indefatigable and brilliant labours of Mr. F. W. H. Myers and of the late Mr. Edmund Gurney.

—Yours truly,

Kingstown, Dublin.

W. F. BARRETT.

September 15th, 1893.

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<sup>44</sup> In a private note, accompanying the proof of this letter, Mr. Dawson Rogers informs me that I am mistaken; he was always heartily in favour of a new society.

<sup>45</sup> Mr. E. J. Romanes, though present at the conference and willing to take part in the work of the investigating committees, did not wish to be included in the Council. The name of Mr. Morell Theobald is not, I see, in the first Council, but a record of the foundation of the S. P.R. would be incomplete without a reference to the valuable aid he rendered at the outset in drafting the business part of its constitution and supervising its finances.

There was a brief response from Dawson Rogers. (One does wonder if in fact Mr Rogers had a clearer recollection of events, but did not wish to antagonise Professor Barrett by further disputing his version. Barrett was partly in sympathy with *LIGHT*, in whose columns he set out his Christian perspective on Spiritualism as early as 1881.)

*LIGHT* September 30th 1893 page 466:

**Letters to the Editor:**

### **The Origin of the Society for Psychical Research.**

SIR,—I desire to thank Professor Barrett for his very courteous reply. Clearly we both had the same project in view, but whereas he had thought that he was the first to mention it to *me*, I had thought that I was the first to mention it to *him*. Which it was is of little consequence. It is sufficient that Professor Barrett fully justifies the contention expressed in my letter of the 9th inst., that Colonel Olcott was altogether wrong in describing the S.P.R. as an “offspring” of the Theosophical Society, promoted by that Society’s “own members.”

E. DAWSON ROGERS.

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A letter then came in from India, where Col.Olcott, the president of the Theosophical Society, resided.

*LIGHT* October 21<sup>st</sup> 1893 page 506:

**Letters to the Editor:**

### **The Origin of the Society for Psychical Research.**

Sir,—You took exception, in your issue of September 2nd, to my remark in an Editorial Notice of “Borderland” (“Theosophist ” for August last), that the Society for Psychical Research was an offspring of the Theosophical Society, projected by our own members. You said that “unless the story usually told about the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research is utterly false, the Theosophical Society had about as much to do with its foundation as with the dome of St. Paul’s—unless, indeed, Messrs. Sidwick, Myers, and Podmore were members of that Society, which seems unlikely.”



Colonel Olcott

Under correction, I beg to reply that I have always understood that the idea of the Society in question originated with the late Mr. Stainton Moses, was shared with our common friend Mr. C. C. Massey, and that both those gentlemen took an active part in its foundation. Mr. Stainton Moses was one of its first Vice-presidents, and both he and Mr. Massey members of its first Council. Another respected colleague of mine, Dr. George Wyld, was also on the first Council. The project of the Society was discussed between Mr. Stainton Moses and myself in our correspondence, and until you made my innocent remark the subject of your sarcasm I had never had the least reason for doubting that the acorn from which this now sturdy oak had sprung was the brain of that noblest of men and truest of friends, your immediate predecessor.

I have only to add that not only Messrs. Stainton Moses and Massey, but also Dr. Wyld and Mr. Myers, were formerly members of the Theosophical Society; and that the whole field of research since so ably occupied by the Society for Psychical Research is included in the third of the declared objects of the older body, whose President I have the honour to be.

Madras, September 2nd, 1893. H. S. OLCOTT.

[Colonel Olcott apparently does not see that, because certain gentlemen who “were formerly members of the Theosophical Society” helped to start the Society for Psychical Research, the latter was not, therefore, the offspring of the former. The part taken by Mr. Stainton Moses in the formation of the Psychical Research Society will by this time be known to Colonel Olcott from the letters of Mr. E. Dawson Rogers and Professor Barrett. That Mr. Myers was at one time a member of the Theosophical Society does not help matters much, for it did not hinder his taking part in the Coulomb investigation. Mr. Gurney was also an exceedingly active member of the new Society, so has been Professor Sidgwick, but neither of these appears to have been a member of the Theosophical Society. Anyway, the “sturdy oak” seems to have thriven rather “in spite of” than “because of” the “older” society. Ed. “LIGHT.”]<sup>46</sup>

After this the controversy died down, but it continues to this day. It is a question which every person writing of S.P.R. origins has to face.

LP.

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<sup>46</sup> Footnote by LP. When the Mahatma letters to A.P. Sinnett were published in 1923, it was found that Madame Blavatsky’s teachers had been anxious when the S.P.R. was formed, that it might impinge on the position to which the T.S. aspired as offering the true explanation of the phenomena.

# OCCULTISM AND SPIRITUALISM

Note by LP. This is a book review by Stainton Moses, originally published under the pseudonym M.A.Oxon. The review appeared in *Psychological Review* July 1881, and was reprinted as booklet by *Psychic Pioneer* Publication as in October 1999. For this reprint, the review was scanned and reset, and several minor typing errors corrected. The review is prefaced by the 1999 introduction.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Modern Spiritualism and Occultism became increasingly heated after the formation of the Theosophical Society in 1875. The English Spiritualist leader Stainton Moses, a recent personal friend of the T.S. founders Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, was one of the first English recruits to the New York-based society. After the arrival of the founders in India in 1879 they visited A. P. Sinnett, the editor of the *Allahabad Pioneer*, in December 1879, and on their later visit to the Sinnetts in September 1880, the editor began a correspondence with some of the brothers (or Mahatmas) who inspired Blavatsky.

The first account of these letters was given by Sinnett in *The Occult World* – he was on a visit to London when it appeared and he favourably impressed leading Spiritualists there. Although Stainton Moses had to some extent lost faith in Theosophy by this time (not least because he disagreed with their strictures on spirit communication), he reviewed Sinnett's book with considerable reverence. Moses used a pseudonym, M.A. (Oxon.), because by day he was a master at University College School, London. He described a meeting with Mr Sinnett in his notebook for 6 November 1881 (*see* Trethewy, p. 271).

Undoubtedly the claim by Sinnett to be in touch with advanced occultists caused an immense sensation, and the book went through several editions (it was I believe the first Theosophical book to acquire successive appendices). But on 1 September 1883 the New York Spiritualist Henry Kiddle (in a letter published in the London Spiritualist weekly *Light*, with which Moses was associated) charged that the main correspondent Koot Hoomi had without acknowledgement taken a passage from an address of his published in the American Spiritualist newspaper *Banner of Light*. In 1884 two helpers at the Theosophical headquarters in India (the Coulombs) accused Madame Blavatsky of faking Mahatmic phenomena and in 1885 Richard Hodgson of the Society for Psychical Research in London, after a visit to India, accused her also of being a Russian agent.

The controversies about the Kiddle incident, the Coulomb charges, the SPR report and the Mahatma Letters continue to this day, but in the April 1986 *SPR Journal* Dr Vernon Harrison, who had special knowledge of forgery, argued that the Mahatma Letters are not in the handwriting of Blavatsky, and that there were grave procedural errors in the 1885 SPR report.

Although Sinnett came to believe that Madame Blavatsky had played some tricks on him, he not only retained belief in her teachers but thought that he had soon established more direct communication with them via other sensitives, material from whom appeared in many of his works down to the posthumous *Superphysical Science*

(1924). The immediate sequel to *The Occult World*, which did use letters received via Blavatsky was his *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883).

Stainton Moses was not totally convinced by the SPR exposure of Madame Blavatsky, as he made clear when she died in 1891, and he remained friendly with Col. Olcott without accepting Theosophical metaphysics or Mahatmic claims. The phenomena around her, as he stresses in his review, had much in common with his own experience.

Moses was guarded in print about his occult (as distinct from psychic) experiences, and the allusions here to the harm he suffered are therefore unusual. There is a need for a full biography of Stainton Moses which will reassess the work of the leading English Spiritualist of his time.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

The life of Alfred Percy Sinnett is found in his *Autobiography*, published in full for the first time by the Theosophical History Centre, London 1986.

The original literature of Modern Theosophy is organised in a masterly survey by Michael Gomes *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century—An Annotated Bibliography* (New York, Garland 1994). His shorter work *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (TPH Quest 1987) deals reliably with the early years of the T. S.

A. W. Trethewy *The Controls of Stainton Moses* (London, Hurst & Blackett, 1923) made public information about his mediumship which F. W. H. Myers in his discussion of “The Experiences of W. Stainton Moses” (*Proceedings SPR Vols. 9 and 11*) was not able to disclose.

Dr Vernon Harrison updated his investigations in *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: an Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885* (Pasadena, California, Theosophical University Press, 1997).

Stainton Moses is placed in his occult context by Joscelyn Godwin’s classic exposition *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York, SUNY Press, 1994).

Uncensored information about *Theosophical History* is published in the quarterly academic journal of that title edited by Dr James Santucci, Department of Comparative Religion, California State University, P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834-6868, USA. See also the Theosophical History web site.

LESLIE PRICE

# OCCULTISM AND SPIRITUALISM

By M.A. (OXON.)



THIS little book<sup>47</sup>—the importance of which is by no means to be measured by its size—sets forth the points of contact between the Occult World and the author, who is at once a cultured man of letters and a cognate person in the best Anglo-Indian society, through the intermediary agency—I dare not say mediumship, lest I be misunderstood—of Madame H. P. Blavatsky. It is characterised by simplicity and sincerity of purpose throughout: written in a charmingly clear style, with directness and thoroughness of aim, and with much force. It is impossible for the candid reader to doubt that, whatever may be the portentous nature of the claims made by the Occult Brotherhood, Mr. Sinnett, in himself and for his own mental qualities, no less than for the sake of his social and literary position, is a man eminently worth convincing, and that he has been thoroughly convinced.

I. The book is concerned with a record of certain phenomena, some of which are familiar to students of this subject from their previous publication in the *Pioneer of India*, and subsequently in various other journals. These are detailed with a fulness that leaves nothing to be desired, and the testimony adduced seems to be complete. The names attached to the record of one of the most remarkable displays of occult power must, indeed, command in India such respect as would the names of eminent politicians—say Lord Hartington and Mr. Bright—attached to a similar document in England. For the study of the evidence the reader must be referred to the book itself (p.60 sq.), no summary compatible with a due regard to space being possible. A very remarkable instance of the transmission of a solid object from one place to another by occult agency, and of its introduction, in defiance of the accepted laws of matter, to the inside of a cushion belonging to and regularly used by Mrs. Sinnett is worth noting (p. 108 sq.), as being an exact parallel to a group of phenomena which are well known to Spiritualists. To this question I shall have occasion to recur, and content myself here with noting the exact and conclusive character of most of the experiments recorded—of all, indeed, on which any reliance is placed in the way of evidence. I have more important work to do than to amuse or astonish my readers by quoting these narratives. They must be read, if at all, *in extenso* and with the author's analysis of objections as their pendent.

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<sup>47</sup> *The Occult World*: by A. P. Sinnett. London, Trübner & Co., 1881. 5s.

II. Another part of the book is concerned with various letters from Koot Hoomi, an Adept, and one of the members of the Occult Brotherhood, of whom Madame Blavatsky is the outward and visible representative, addressed to Mr. Sinnett in reply to questions propounded by him. Koot Hoomi, to whom Mr. Sinnett dedicates his volume, is a native of the Punjab who was attracted to occult studies from earliest boyhood. He was sent to Europe, received a course of Western training, and since then has been fully initiated in the secrets of Eastern Science. The tone of his letters is extremely striking, but they, like the records to which I have referred, must be studied at length. In no other way can the reader gain any sort of appreciation of the mental attitude they reveal, or estimate the arguments which they contain. They would seem to emanate from some far distant Kashmere valley, or from the slopes of one of the Thibetan mountains, where, though not “the world forgetting” yet “by the world forgot,” the Adepts breathe a purer air, and lead the higher life which soon unfits them for long contact with our lower world. “I had come down,” says Koot Hoomi in one of his letters, “emerging from a seclusion of many years, . . . but I find that I myself cannot endure for any length of time the stifling magnetism even of my own countrymen. . . . I turn my face homewards tomorrow.”

The letters are characterised by that same sort of elevation and simple disregard for ordinary worldly motives that I have observed as pervading the communications which have been made to me from a very different source. There is the air of one who enters with difficulty into the thought—atmosphere of a lower world; the same sublime disregard for the standards of worldly opinion, and the ideas of orthodox science except within its own legitimate sphere; the same setting forth of the difficulties that must beset the upward path; the same desire that the postulant should know that it rests with himself whether he pass safely through the grade of neophyte till, in orderly process of eventual development, he blossoms into the Adept—“the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers.”

In the midst of all this impressive superiority to the ordinary man there are the same little human touches which remind us that we are dealing with one who at any rate has been, if he is not wholly still, a man of like passions with ourselves. We none of us wish to be classed with well-preserved specimens of an age that is past, even though we be made thereby more venerable. It is quite refreshing therefore to find Koot Hoomi protesting against being considered one of “the heartless, morally dried-up mummies some would fancy us to be.” “Believe me,” he says with refreshing vigour, “few of us would care to play the part in life of a desiccated pansy between the leaves of a volume of solemn poetry . . . Few of us (except such as have attained the final negation of Moksha) can so far enfranchise ourselves from the influence of our earthly connection as to be unsusceptible in various degrees to the higher pleasures, emotions, and interests of the common run of humanity.” Let us be thankful that Koot Hoomi at any rate has not “attained the final negation of Moksha,” whatever awful pinnacle that may imply.

III. That part of the work on which it chiefly concerns me to dwell is occupied with the author’s own comments and explanations: These strike me as of high value, especially as throwing a light on what Occultism claims to be, and on its relations to Spiritualism. I am anxious to put the former in a brief compass, so that my readers may know what is meant when Occultism and Adeptship are mentioned. And I find so close a parallel between the phenomena recorded as Occult, and those known as

Spiritual, that I am impelled to draw it out, and to take up once more the not unfamiliar role of defender of my faith. In using this expression I do not for a moment imply that Mr. Sinnett has attacked Spiritualism. He has indeed protested against being identified with that vulgar Spiritualism known chiefly through the police reports, and by various exposures of fraud. With these he and we have nothing to do here and now. When I speak of Spiritualism I have in my mind that higher development of it which is concerned with the training of the Soul, its education and instruction. Perhaps I shall think more of *instruction*, while he will have *education* rather in mind. But we shall both of us view the phenomenal evidences of spirit—power not in themselves but as proofs of what underlies and is behind them. It is of this Higher Spiritualism that I venture to come forward as a very humble exponent. But first let us see what Occultism and Adeptship are.

1. What, then, are the claims that Mr. Sinnett makes for Occultism and Adeptship?

The question may best be answered by a series of quotations gathered from various parts of the book. While “modern Metaphysics, and, to a great extent, modern Physical Science have been groping for centuries blindly after knowledge, Occult Philosophy has enjoyed it in full measure all the while” (p.1). It is of extreme antiquity, this Occult Philosophy. “It is impossible to form a conjecture as to the date or time at which it began to take the shape in which we find it now. The proficiency of initiates, belonging to the earliest periods with which history deals, appears to have been already so far advanced . . . that we must assign a very great antiquity to the earliest beginnings of occult knowledge on this earth” (p. 157).

This knowledge has been handed down from remote ages, and enshrines the accumulated wisdom of the past. “The wisdom of the ancient world—science and religion combined, physics and metaphysics combined—has a reality, and it still survives. . . . It was already a complete system of knowledge that had been cultivated in secret, and handed down to initiates for ages, before its professors performed experiments in public to impress the popular mind in Egypt and Greece. . . . Adepts inherit from their great predecessors a science that deals not merely with physics, but with the constitution and capacities of the human soul and spirit. Modern Science has discovered the circulation of the blood: Occult Science understands the circulation of the life-principle. Modern physiology deals with the body only: Occultism with the soul as well—not as the subject of vague, religious rhapsodies, but as an actual entity with properties that can be examined in combination with, or apart from those of the body” (p.4).

This being so, the further claim follows as of course—From it “at different times and places very different mythological efflorescences have been thrown off for the service of the populace; but, underlying each popular religion, the religious knowledge of the initiated majority has been identical” (p. 164). “If there can really be a Science of Religion, it must necessarily be Occultism” (p. 17). “It is an illumination cast over all previous speculation worth anything, of a kind which knits together some apparently divergent systems. It is to spiritual philosophy much what Sanscrit was found to be to comparative philology: it is a common stock of philosophical roots. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and the Egyptian theology are thus brought into one family of ideas” (p.6).

The author, further, makes it clear that he claims for the Magi skilled in this august science, a power that almost paralyses imagination. "Secluded Orientals," he says, "may understand more about electricity than Faraday, more about physics than Tyndall," though their "main study has been devoted to metaphysical inquiry, and to the latent psychological faculties in man; faculties which, in their development, enable the Occultist to obtain actual experimental knowledge concerning the soul's condition of extra-corporeal existence" (p.5). Shades of the mighty ones of the Royal Society! A secluded Oriental in the intervals of the scrutiny and development of his own inner self finds time to eclipse in actual experimental knowledge your Faradays and Tyndalls!

But this is nothing to what comes after. The Adept has "control over various forces in Nature which ordinary science knows nothing about, and by means of which he can hold conversation with any other Adept, whatever intervals on the earth's surface may lie between them" (p. 15).

Moreover, his "clairvoyant faculties are so perfect and complete that they amount to a species of omniscience in mundane affairs. The body is the prison of the soul for ordinary mortals; the Adept can project his soul out of his body to any place he pleases, with the rapidity of thought" (p. 15).

With these powers, it may be conceded that the Adept need not resort to hypothesis for the purpose of demonstrating the existence of the soul. "Occult philosophy has ascertained that the inner ethereal self, which is the man, as distinguished from his body, is itself the envelope of something more ethereal still." Whereas the majority of civilised people believe in Soul, though the most highly civilised of all have grave doubts on the subject, "Occult philosophy does not speculate about the matter at all; it knows the state of the facts" (p.18). The Adept "knows that he has a soul just as another man knows he has a great-coat. He can put it from him, and render it manifest as something separate from himself. But. . . he is the soul, and the thing put off is the body; and this is to attain nothing less than absolute certainty about the great problem of survival after death" (p.20).

If it be asked how are these tremendous powers to be attained, the answer is not of a kind to encourage presumption. "The Adept is not *made*, *he becomes*; and the process of becoming is mainly in his own hands" (p.25). Seven years of probation is the smallest time before he is admitted to the very first of the ordeals that bar his entrance, and there is no security that the seven years may not be extended *ad libitum*. "He has no security that he will ever be admitted to any initiation whatever." "The trials through which the Neophyte has to pass are no fantastic mockeries or mimicries of awful peril. . . . It is inherent in the nature of the science that has to be explored, that its revelations shall stagger the reason and try the most resolute courage." He must lead a life of absolute physical purity, "be perfectly chaste, perfectly abstemious, and indifferent to physical luxury of every kind." There is no fantastic discipline, no necessary withdrawal from the world; only steadfastness of purpose, fixity of aim, perfect purity of life. And even then his courage must be tried before the irrevocable step is taken, so that failure may be impossible. He is not admitted into the penetralia till he has been tried and proven as by fire.

Few, I take it, will deny that this is a stupendous picture of what the author has satisfied himself to be really and actually true. Few will refuse to recognise the moral beauty of the aims: to marvel at the results said to be arrived at. I shall have occasion to show presently how that which is true of the Adept is also true of him who aspires to relations with the higher spirits who visit this earth. Meantime, the claims put forward for Occultism and its Adepts, must, for most of us, be matter of faith; as the power of Spirit is to the vast mass of mankind. Those who are familiar with the higher aspects of Spiritualism know that the power that spirits have to interfere with the recognised laws of nature (i.e., such laws of nature as are imperfectly understood by physicists) is very great. Perhaps they have learned to fear such a power when unrestrained and untempered by a high moral consciousness. Such, no doubt, have found their consolation in reflecting that there is order in God's universe, and that above the irresponsible company who rush in helter-skelter when the gates are set ajar—the counterparts of those spirits in the body who have acquired the lower occult arts by “the loathsome asceticism of the ordinary fakeer”—there are the pure and progressed spirits who guide, and warn, and teach—the counterparts, these, of the unselfish, pure, and wise souls who have developed their inner faculties by that “discipline of the mind which leads to the higher altitudes of Occultism.” Whether in the body or out of the body, there is little distinction. Spirit may be in prison, but it is spirit still, and its inherent powers are susceptible of good or evil development.

2. It remains to draw out the instructive parallel between the phenomena which our author describes as Occult and those known as Spiritual. It is important to remember that the former are claimed as the product of knowledge gathered by a still incarnated Spirit; the latter are alleged to be produced by disembodied spirit-agency. If in elaborating my argument I draw upon my own experience, I trust I may be pardoned. “I speak that I do know, and testify that which I have seen,” and I can at least vouch for my facts, be the interpretation of them what it may. Ten years of intimate and uninterrupted experience, of day and night communion with Spirit, such as constitutes a mass of knowledge which might well have been spread over a lifetime, enables me to speak with no uncertainty. While I fully recognise the value of the facts collected by Mr. Sinnett, while I bow in simple reverence before the ideal that he has depicted, I should be false to my deepest convictions if I did not point out that Spiritualism has its unimpeachable facts too, and its aspects of moral beauty that deserve more recognition than Theosophists—probably because they are unfamiliar with them in their best form—are usually willing to accord them.

Let me not be understood as one who complains. They are generally acquainted only with the outer aspects of Spiritualism and these are mean and unlovely. There are others which are perhaps not so difficult of attainment as the heights of Adeptship, but which present to the medium who would reach up to them no slight difficulty, no short probation, and no unworthy aim. Such results, when obtained, are jealously guarded; revealed, if at all, to the esoteric few, and usually locked within the breast of the aspirant who knows and can communicate of his knowledge only to such as have been disciplined to share it. There is Spiritualism and Spiritualism, as there is the Adept who, by the higher discipline of *Ragi Yog*, has reached his goal, and the “*Yogi* of the woods and wilds, disciplined by the physical development of *Hatti Yog*,<sup>48</sup> whose dirt accumulates with his sanctity,” and who earns a precarious

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<sup>48</sup> Nowadays we speak of ‘raja yoga’ and ‘hatha yoga’ — LP.

living by astonishing his gaping fellow-creatures by displays of psychic conjuring. All are not of the same order. "One star differeth from another star in glory," and one spirit, in or out of the body, may be more earthly than its mate. It is not safe to include in one sweeping condemnation any large class. *Distinguendum est!*

"Occult Phenomena," says our author, "must not be confused with the phenomena of Spiritualism. The latter, whatever they may be, are manifestations which mediums can neither control nor understand. The former are achievements of a conscious, living operator comprehending the laws with which he works" (p. 12).

This statement requires some modification. It is true that the Medium does not understand all the laws (or any law perfectly) that govern the phenomena with which he is familiar. Passivity being a necessity in his case, as active energising is in the Adept, he obviously cannot "control" phenomena. But he can tell under what conditions they are likely to be procured; he can tell what causes will surely prevent their manifestation, and with certain surroundings he can almost certainly be the "medium" for their evolution. What of the Occultist? Mr. Sinnett details the circumstances under which raps were produced by Madame Blavatsky: circumstances precisely similar to those familiar to myself in such experiments. But how was it done? "It was out of Madame Blavatsky's power to give an exact explanation as to how these raps were produced" (p.45).

We have details of the power of the Adept to be "present in spirit" in distant places, a power with which I am not unfamiliar. What is the *modus operandi*? Mr. Sinnett says frankly, "I am not pretending to give an explanation of how he produces this or that result, nor for a moment hinting that I know" (p.53). That may well be, for he is no initiate; but *these things cannot be explained*, unless to those on a similar plane of intelligence. The pearls must be reserved for those who can appreciate them; and even these are scattered with a sparseness that seems often as curious as it is depressing. Mr. Sinnett points out a further difficulty: "It must be remembered that one can never have any exact knowledge as to how far her [Madame Blavatsky's] own powers may have been employed, or how far she may have been 'helped,' or whether she had not been quite uninfluential in the production of the result" (p.53). Precisely so. I never know when my own powers are supplemented, or when they are superseded—unless I take pains to ascertain, *which I can do*. The external aid is often given only by way of drawing out my own faculties, though at times it supersedes them altogether. A person "quite uninfluential in the production of" a given result is what Spiritualists call a Medium. But Madame B. boasts that she is *not*, denies almost fiercely that she is, a medium. The distinction, I presume, is intended to be drawn between the embodied spirit who uses her, and the disembodied one who uses a medium. The distinction is very fine.

It is obvious, therefore, that so far the instructed Spiritualist and the Occultist are very much on a par. The Occultist can indeed produce certain phenomena, as he claims, by his own powers, though these are aided, and, it seems, at times superseded. The Medium, who receives from progressed spirits what the Adept evolves from his own, can equally aid in the production of phenomena which modern Science cannot explain. The Occultist has his "Akaz," "a force for which we have no name" (p.23). The Spiritualist, his Psychic Force, which seems to be indistinguishable in effects from its Hindu parallel. Both Adept and Medium are

wisely enjoined to abstain from mere displays of psychic tricks. If the Medium do so, he sinks surely to be the vehicle of spirits who perform them. Mr. Sinnett tells us that “as a general rule, the display of any occult phenomena for the purpose of exciting the wonder and admiration of beholders is strictly forbidden” (p. 28).

It has been one of the annoyances of my life since I became familiar with these psychic phenomena that they have been so fenced round that I have found myself unable to demonstrate their reality to some whom I would willingly have sacrificed much to convince or gratify. Most complaisant and courteous in other respects, those with whom I have had to do are inflexible in this. They know their own business, and will brook no interference with it, though they are always ready to bow to my better knowledge of the world. Of that they know little and for its opinion they care less. In this respect, too, they bear, as I should expect, a resemblance to the Brothers. Mr. Sinnett says, “If the picture of the Brothers that I have endeavoured to present has been appreciated rightly, it will shew them less accurately qualified, in spite of their powers, than persons of lesser occult development, to carry on any undertaking which involves direct relations with a multiplicity of ordinary people in this commonplace world” (p.29). Precisely. It must needs be so. Whether the human spirit has gained its progress in or out of a body, it seems to be conditioned similarly in respect of those who live in this lower world of ours.

“Broadly speaking,” says Mr. Sinnett, “there is scarcely one of the phenomena of Spiritualism that Adepts can not reproduce by the force of their own will, supplemented by a comprehension of the resources of nature” (p. 12). He instances the production of raps under what he appears to consider circumstances not favourable to a medium, *i.e.* without a circle, without a table, on a window-pane, or on a glass clock-shade set on the hearth-rug. These are ordinary experiments familiar to me. I have heard sounds suggestive of a carpenter’s shop in full work proceed from a table which no one was touching. I have heard knocks, that caused the wood to vibrate violently beneath my hand, produced on a half-open door. I have heard the tiny sounds on a sheet of paper suspended from a pin and held in mid air. I have heard them on floor, walls, ceiling, chandelier, in the open air, in church in public meetings, anywhere and everywhere, and each one characteristic of the Intelligence who made it, so that we never had the least doubt as to who was present when a certain knock was heard.

Mr. Sinnett further describes how at Simla Madame Blavatsky produced raps on a little table without contact. “After charging it with some influence, she would hold one hand about a foot above it and make mesmeric passes at it, at each of which the table would yield the familiar sound” (p.46). I have repeatedly conducted a similar experiment. It was, indeed, habitual with us, after the table was “charged” to remove all hands from it, when the sonorous raps, some of them like blows from a fist, would continue with equal vigour. Serjeant Cox, in his work on the Mechanism of Man, details how a large and very heavy dining table, capable of seating a dozen or more people (twenty would be nearer the mark), rose up to the hand held above it, creaking and groaning as though in pain. I have over and over again caused a large table to rise and follow the passes of my hands at a height of a couple of feet from its surface. These are experiments, many of them detailed in my *Researches in the Phenomena of*

*Spiritualism*,<sup>49</sup> which were to us eight years ago matters of daily constant experience. But we never thought of attributing them to the exercise of any unaided powers of our own. We knew well enough that such was not the case. This is the interesting point in comparing Mr. Sinnett's experiences with my own.

I pass over the production of flowers within a closed room, the transmission of solid objects from one spot to another in spite of material obstacles—the passage of matter through matter (as it is crudely called) is, the author well says, for “thousands of people who have had personal experience of it in Spiritualism, as certain a fact of nature as the rising of the sun” (p. 141)—and I go on to notice a very beautiful manifestation of occult power which is frequent with Madame Blavatsky, and of which I have had large experience also. It is the sound in mid air of a bell, sometimes striking a single note, at others a succession, and (in my experience) sometimes ringing violently. To Madame B. it is the signal that attracts her attention to some one of the Brothers who desires to converse with her. To me it was the signal of the presence of a spirit who used the generic name of MAGUS. I believe there were several of these, and I know less about them than I do about any other spirits who regularly communicated with me. The spirit who originally used the name came to me when I first became interested in the study of Occultism, and he was extremely skilful in producing manifestations of occult power. Under his guidance I made a long series of experiments which satisfied me of three things. First, that the powers claimed by the Occultists are real, *e.g.*, the projection of the soul, the effect of an energizing will, and the like. Secondly, that they are of another order from Mediumship, though the results are very similar. Thirdly, that their exercise is incompatible with ordinary life in the world. I therefore abandoned the experiments, but not before they had done me a certain amount of physical mischief from which I believe that I have never fully recovered.

Magus of those days yielded to a different Intelligence, and he (I suspect) to others; but the bell was always the distinctive Magus-sound. And its sound, when I was alone, usually precluded a conversation which conveyed to me some information, or request, or warning. The voice, clairaudiently heard, seemed to be borne on a breeze as though from a distance. It was always clear, never loud, and was (with very rare exceptions indeed) impassive, calm, and quite passionless. It gave me the idea of coming from a peaceful retreat which the gusts of human passion, and waves of earth's turmoil could not reach. I never, however, satisfied myself as to the exact identity of this Magus-group of spirits.

I could fill many pages with examples of parallelism between what I have seen and known in my communion with the world of Spirit, and what Mr. Sinnett records of his communications with the Occult Thibetan Brotherhood through Madame Blavatsky. Even in little things this is very manifest. One of the common orders to us when “power” was weak, was to warm our hands by friction and so generate force. Incidentally Mr. Sinnett says, in detailing a remarkable instance of occult power, “Madame Blavatsky was absently warming her hands. Now, the production of raps and bell-sounds we had noticed sometimes seemed easier and the effects better when her hands had been warmed in this way” (p. 78).

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<sup>49</sup> Published in *Human Nature*, and soon, I hope, to be re-published, with additions, in a small volume.

There is, I think I may submit, an exact parallelism externally in these experiences which is very suggestive. When I come to the teaching given there is a divergence, though perhaps not greater than may be reconciled or explained by my difficulty in comprehending some things told to me; by my studious adherence to my own methods; or by my own carefully preserved individuality; or, last not least, by the circumstances of my daily life. Had I been secluded from the world, I do not doubt that much would have been clear that is now dark and perplexing. But all divergences admitted, the curious parallelism remains, and is worth more than a passing thought.

Even in the methods of preparation there is much similarity between what I have found required of me before intromission into a higher state, and the preparations enjoined on the candidate for initiation. "The trials through which the Neophyte has to pass are no fantastic mockeries, or mimicries of awful peril." The Dweller on the Threshold is no figment of Lord Lytton's brain. No one, so far as I learn, can venture to cross the boundary between the world of sense and of spirit without encountering trials which will prove his courage as well as purge away the dross that is in him. What proportion our asylums contain of those who, under the nameless, formless horrors of spiritual conflict, have found Reason waver and fall, I do not know. I should not be surprised to find it large. But when the ordeal is past, a new state is entered, and what the Mystics call Regeneration has taken place. (I am less familiar with English Mysticism than I ought to be, but I find, as might be expected, a parallelism there too.) Even when ordeal after ordeal has been passed, leading up to higher spiritual development—I do not speak now of objective physical mediumship: that has been left behind—the words of Mr. Sinnett are as true in my experience as in his own: "The candidate for initiation accepted as a probationer has no security that the seven years [probation time] may not be indefinitely extended. He has no security that he will ever be admitted to any initiation whatever" (p.24). I would even go further, and say that such may retrogress and fall into the merely objective physical mediumship which he ought to have left behind. He may be assaulted and succumb. He may be obsessed, and become the vehicle of earth-bound spirits. He may be the victim of fleshly lusts and unconquered passions that war against his soul, and be unfit for use by any advanced spirit.

But of these things I must say no more. Enough has been written to show the singular parallelism that exists between the higher spiritual training that unquestionably proceeds from disembodied spirit, and that which our author describes as proceeding from adepts still in the body. Students of English Mysticism may be able to supply another parallel: and some who peruse what I have been impelled to write may find a niche in their own experience into which my words will fit.

What is the explanation? Is it that Spirit acts in diverse ways, and adapts its means to the desired end in ways astonishing to us? Is the human soul developed by kindred methods, whether the development comes from a lonely teacher on a mountain-side in Thibet, from a Spirit that has spurned the earth in heavenward progress, and returns only on a mission of love, or from silent and solitary meditation whereby the germ within is nurtured till it fructify? Is it true that at the close of an epoch when Faith is dull, Religion dead, and the Creed "outworn," Spirit energises among men, and stirs them to sow the seed that a coming age shall reap? Who knows? Who shall presume to say? He is wisest who says least, thinks most, and strives hardest to

gather up the crumbs of knowledge from every likely source. To such a student this book will be a valuable aid, for it will open out to him a vista of possibility that most probably has not presented itself before; and, if he be really wise, it may lead him to ponder deeply on the godlike powers of that Divine Spirit, a portion of which is enshrined within him.

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## BOOKS WE HAVE REVIEWED

*If you have any problems locating a copy we can contact the author*

**An Extraordinary Journey:—The Memoirs of a Physical Medium**, by Stewart Alexander, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England, 2010. Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9557050-6-9, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 294-296:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.11November2010.pdf>

**Helen Duncan the Mystery Show Trial**, by Robert Hartley published by H Pr (Publishing), London 2007. Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9553420-8-0. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 244-247:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.11November07..pdf>

**Aquarian Evangelist: The Age of Aquarius as It Dawned in the Mind of Levi Dowling**, by John Benedict Buescher Theosophical History Volume XI available at:—then—Occasional Papers. Psypioneer references by Leslie Price page 7:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08.pdf>

**Dead Men's Embers**, by Gerald O'Hara, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England 2006. Large Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9514534-6-9, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 1-2:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

**Mrs Miller's Gift' – a Celebration of 75 Years of the Edinburgh College of Parapsychology formerly Edinburgh Psychic College & Library**, by Gerald O'Hara & Ann Harrison, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England 2007. Paperback ISBN: 978-0-951-4534-9-0, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 1-4:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08..pdf>

**Mrs Miller's Gift CD:—Helen Duncan Séance, Ernest Oaten and Harry Edwards**, Written and produced by Gerald O'Hara B.Sc. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 106-107:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.4April09.pdf>

**The Indescribable Phenomena – The Life and Mysteries of Anna Eva Fay**, by Barry H. Wiley published by Hermetic Press, Inc., Seattle Washington 2005. ISBN: 0-945296-50-9, available at:—[http://www.hermeticpress.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=45](http://www.hermeticpress.com/product_info.php?products_id=45) Psypioneer references by Leslie Price pages 39-42:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.2February09.pdf>

**Immortal Longings – FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death**, by Trevor Hamilton published by Imprint Academic in Exeter, U.K (also VA, U.S.A) 2009. ISBN: 9-781845- 401238 H.B, 9-781845-402488 PB, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 157-148:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.6June09.pdf>

**Talking to the Dead – Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism**, by Barbara Weisberg published by HarperSanFrancisco New York 2004. Hardback ISBN: 0-06-056667-1, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 9-10:—[http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP2.pdf](http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP2.pdf)

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