

# PSYPIONEER JOURNAL

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**Introductory Note by LP:** Our readers require no introduction to the website [www.ehbritten.org](http://www.ehbritten.org), at which Marc Demarest presents archives, and reports new discoveries, not only about Mrs Britten but many other pioneers. On its blog in March 2015 two postings changed our understanding of how spirit photography developed. Marc has kindly given permission for these to be shared in edited form with Psypioneer readers. They show that spirit photographs were being reported before Mumler, but that Mumler's own work was cautiously received by the Movement.

## The Hands Of The Fair Daguerreotypist: Spirit Photography Before Mumler

The Cheroux et alia production, *The Perfect Medium [:] Photography and the Occult* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2004; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), is a standard survey work on Spiritualist and occult photography.

This text, which is perhaps beyond the budget of most readers, has this to say about the early history of spirit photography (p. 15 of the Yale edition):

There are several accounts from the 1850s describing the unexplained appearance in photographs of translucent figures representing the departed. It was the American William Mumler, however, who truly established the practice of spirit photography when he started a trade in such photographs in the 1860s. Keen interest in spiritualist doctrines in the United States contributed to Mumler's success and helped increase the number of photographer-mediums. The first in Europe, Frederick Hudson in London and Eduard Isidore Buguet in Paris, emerged in the early 1870s.

This is the conventional Boys-Own-Narrative about spirit photography, and it's one most people (and places) recapitulate and operate with.

The authors, here, are careful to identify a pre-Mumler history of the manifestations that they themselves have no intention of characterizing, and they correctly identify Mumler's contribution to spirit photography as **his demonstration that spirit photography was a viable business -- that consumer demand existed, or could be generated, for photographs of dead souls.**

**SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS !**  
**P**ERSONS residing at any distance from Boston, desirous to obtain Photographs of their departed friends, by Mr. W. H. Mumler, will please send for Circular, which gives all particulars. Address, Mrs. STUART, No. 29. St. No. 258 Washington street, Boston.

(Actually, the commercial acumen was probably that of Mrs. Stuart, who owned the photograph saloon Mumler used -- just down the street from Mumler's engraving and

copperplate printing shop -- and who was Mumler's promoter and handler from 1862 until 1865 or so. Mrs. Stuart's formative role in spirit photography is one of many obscured aspects of the narrative. But more of that, later).

Most folks are not as careful as Cheroux at alia, and commit (unconsciously, to be sure) the "William Mumler invented spirit photography" error.

I expected, honestly, that my observation that Mumler invented nothing to be non-controversial, as the primary record is unambiguous in this regard. But the assertion is controversial.

Ex-Judge O W Edmonds was the next witness placed upon the stand, where he remained with apparent ease, yet evidently anxious to unburden himself of some important scientific points regarding the subject at issue. There was evidently great interest manifested in his appearance, and the lady Spiritualists who were crouched together, stretched forward their necks with unmistakable earnestness. The witness was examined by Mr Day.

Q How long are you acquainted with Mr. Mumler?  
A. About two or three weeks.

Q Have you sat in his gallery for pictures? A Yes, sir.

Q Please state the circumstances in connection with your visit. A. A few weeks ago I was invited by some gentlemen friends—Dr. J. H. Geary and Mr. Hunt—to go to Mumler's gallery to have our pictures taken, I went accordingly and we had our pictures; there were two for me, three for Geary and two for Hunt, upon each of the seven pictures there was apparent a shadowy, ghost-like and particular form, as I will show you, there was nothing between me and the wall, nor any picture on the wall which could have been taken, I did not recognize the spiritual likeness as any one whom I had ever seen or known, on one of the pictures I think I recognize the face, about twelve years ago I received from somewhere West of the Mississippi about a dozen daguerrotypes, which purported to be spiritual pictures; afterward I heard of Mumler's process, which was then in vogue in Boston; many of my friends believed implicitly in the process; I remembered particularly the case of a merchant who died in Hong Kong twenty-five years ago, without ever having a picture taken, his photograph was taken; I went to Appleton, of this city, who told me that no photograph of a person so long dead could be taken—(the Judge here showed a photograph which contained the spectral picture of a lady, standing behind the chair of the sitter, with her hand on his shoulder)—I know a great many persons who have visited Mumler, Mr. Livermore had some extraordinary pictures taken; we Spiritualists reason that these pictures are spirit pictures, but we do not know it; I am myself not yet ready to pronounce a judgment on the matter, I believe that in time its truth or falsity will be fully demonstrated, as spiritual intercourse has been demonstrated, the art is only in its infancy, intelligent Spiritualists have been watching for the last ten or twelve years to see the progress of it.

Cross examined by Mr Geary—Q What did they charge you? A. Ten dollars for the first sitting and five dollars for the next.

Q. Who was in the room at the time these pictures were taken? A. Dr. Geary, Hunt, Mumler and myself.

So, let's play the conjuration game, and begin by conjuring with Judge Edmonds himself. Twice, in the public record [1] during the first, controversial period of Mumler's mediumship in the early 1860s (on which see below) and [2] during Mumler's trial in April of 1869, Edmonds stated, clearly, that **he himself had seen multiple spirit photographs, taken years before Mumler began his work**, and that he had had direct contact with the photographer.

He was unable to say precisely where these photographs had come from; in the early 1860s, he suggested they came from "the far West" by which he meant today's Midwest, and at Mumler's trial, he said "west of the Mississippi" and "twelve years ago." That would date the phenomena with which Edmonds was familiar to c. 1857, in the Midwest, or South.

(As I suggested in a prior post, an even-earlier discussion, in the May 12, 1855 issue of *The Spiritual Telegraph*, discusses a probably-fake spirit photograph produced in New Orleans, and at one time in the hands of the editors of the *Telegraph*, the which Edmonds could well have associated with the Mississippi...)

Here is a candidate for Edmond's memory, taken from the pages of *The Spiritual Telegraph* -- which, until very recently, it was virtually impossible for anyone to read, if they were so inclined. Now that virtually the entire

run of *The Spiritual Telegraph* is available on IAPSOP,<sup>1</sup> we have an antidote to the *Banner of Light*-centric potted histories of Spiritualism, and in this case, that antidote is powerful.

Keep in mind that Mumler claimed his “discovery” took place in **October of 1862**, and that “discovery” was introduced to readers of Spiritualist periodicals in early November of 1862, and to readers of the secular press in the Northeast almost immediately thereafter.

*Spiritual Telegraph*, February 6, 1858, p. 334

#### A New and Wonderful Manifestation

A gentleman, writing from Beloit, Wisconsin, informs us that a married lady of that place, who is a spiritual medium, and is often used for healing purposes, recently visited a picture gallery for the purpose of having her likeness taken. The artist, in removing the plate from the instrument, discovered, to his utter confusion, that he had taken an impression of another face, differing entirely from that of the lady before him. In his momentary fright at the astonishing mistake, he very imprudently rubbed out the impression, and thus destroyed what would have provided a lasting proof of the actuality of the phenomenon.

The lady soon after went on to a second artist, who succeeded in taking her likeness, together with that of *another person*, who appeared to be looking over her shoulder. This second figure not being discernable [sic in newspaper - *Psypioneer*] to the external eye of the operator, had the effect to frighten him from his propriety, and he too hastily cleaned the offending plate, as if the fact could be annihilated by simply destroying all evidence of it.

Our correspondent asks, if these were not portraits of the medium’s “familiar spirits?” We should say yes, decidedly “familiar,” to usurp her place in one case, and to lean so closely over her shoulder in the other!

We would suggest to the lady medium, that if either of the above-mentioned phenomena should again occur, she should endeavor to have the plates finished in the usual manner, and preserve them as invaluable evidences of Spirit-manifestation.

Any farther [sic in newspaper - *Psypioneer*] information upon this subject, either from our correspondent, the lady, or the artist, will be very thankfully received at this office.

*Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher* August 13, 1859, p. 190

#### Angels Daguerretyped

A physician in this city, for whose integrity we can vouch, recently received the following communication from one of his friends living in Indiana. We have solicited it from him for publication, and he has gladly granted us the privilege, on condition that the names shall be withholden from the public. We are permitted, however, to give the names and address of the writer, and other parties knowing the fact, privately to individuals who may wish to test the truth of the statement.

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<sup>1</sup> The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals (IAPSOP): <http://www.iapsop.com/>

Dear \_\_\_\_\_. The main purpose of my saying a word here is, to state a fact which looks spiritual. An aged man died here the other day, after eight years prostration by paralytic affections. He was sound in the orthodox faith, New School Presbyterian -- counted, and undoubtedly was, a holy, good man. After his death his kindred obtained an artist to take a daguerreotype of him. The corpse was placed as seated in a chair, and the plate on examination contained not only the picture (rather dim) of the deceased, but to the astonishment of all, *two* figures, one a female and the other a male, were painted on the plate, standing the one on one side of the corpse and the other on the other side. There was no person in the room beside or near the corpse. The dress of the female figure was wholly unlike that of the artist (the artist was a female), and no other females were in the room. All the figures, corpse and all, were very dim. Now the spiritual phase is, that two Spirits standing beside the corpse were reflected, etc. These are facts; perhaps Partridge would like to get them. I would like Spiritualists to know these facts, as like facts may have happened elsewhere. H. S.

*Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher* September 10, 1859, p. 237

#### Angels Daguerreotyped

In the Telegraph of August 13 we published an article under the above title, of the mystery related in which the following communication suggests a natural explanation. We have no desire to attribute to a spiritual cause anything that may be otherwise explained, and we publish this communication in the hope that it may fall into the hands of the fair daguerreotypist, and that she may be induced to drop us a line stating whether, in the case referred to, she had used the plate for a previous picture in any way resembling the impression then given.

Mr. Partridge: Dear Sir -- In the Telegraph of August 13, I find an article under the above head, and I feel called upon to give my experience by way of explanation of what your correspondent seems to think is a spiritual phenomenon.

I have been a daguerreotypist from the commencement of the art, and I have been troubled with all sorts and colors of dim Spirit-looking shadows, which, in fact, (in all of my experience, at least), were only the old or former images which were not cleaned off from the plate before a second trial was made upon it. Now I have no doubt that the lady artist, if she were interrogated, would recollect having made a group previous to being called to make a likeness of the corpse, and that she used the same plate, thinking it well prepared for another trial, when it was not perfectly cleansed of the quicksilver which, when exposed a second time to the hot mercury bath, would cause the old impression to re-appear, and all to look dim, as has been stated. I am a full-grown Spiritualist, and rejoice in the shedding of light and the spread of truth. S. L. Walker Poughkeepsie, August 17, 1859

*Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher* Nov 12, 1859, p. 343.

#### “Angels Daguerreotyped”

Many of our readers will remember the communication we published under the above title in our issue of August 13, in which was related the incident of the mysterious impression of two human figures on a daguerreotype plate, beside the figure of the subject whose picture was

intended to be taken -- these figures being different from any persons in the room at the time. In the Telegraph of September 10, we published a communication from S. L. Walker, of Poughkeepsie, proposing as a rational solution of this phenomenon, the supposition that the daguerreotype plate employed on that occasion had been previously used, and not sufficiently cleansed, and that the strange figures which in this case appeared on it, and which were said to be dim, were only pictures which were previously taken with it, again faintly reappearing as the plate was subjected to the mercurial vapor. Prefixed to the communication of Mr. Walker, we inserted a request that the artist (who is a lady) or some one acquainted with the circumstance, would drop us a note informing us whether the plate had been previously used or not. This has called out the following note from the author of the statement first published, and whose veracity is fully vouched for by his personal acquaintance and friend, an eminent physician of this city, through whom his first note came to us:

Lagrange County, Indiana

Mr. Partridge -- Dear Sir: I see by the Telegraph that in the matter "Angels Daguerreotyped," you wish to know if the plate had been previously used. I am able to say, from the artist, that it had not; and, moreover, that the fashion of the dress of the female figure on the plate was not one of the present day, but in use some sixteen years ago. It is a fact that deceased had lost sons and daughters of adult age. I can not, however, learn that any of the kindred (who are all sturdy anti-Spiritualists) recognize the figures on the plate as bearing any resemblance to their deceased friends.

Yours truly, H. S.

We do not see why this note of H. S. ought not remove the doubt previously connected with the matter referred to, and give it the character of a veritable spiritual manifestation -- *unless* some other and more rational solution can still be conceived, and to conceive of such, we think would be impossible. It is well known and thoroughly established that Spirits, under proper conditions, can act upon far grosser substances than light; and if so, where is the unreasonableness of supposing that they may so dispose of the rays of light as to make an impression on the sensitive daguerreotype plate?

*Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher*, Feb 11, 1860, p. 495

Spiritual Lyceum and Conference  
Held Every Thursday Even'g in Clinton Hall, Eighth St., Near B'Way  
Eighty-Third Session

[MD: R. T. Hallock is the traditional reporter of Conference proceedings, and is the reporter here]

[An attendee exhibits a Wella Anderson spirit picture of a dead child]

Mr. Partridge: .... As said, this is a minor point; the great thing is, that they [MD: spirits] are able to give us pictures of themselves at all. That they can do so, however, is in proof before us; and from some early intimations on the part of Spirits of the practicality of daguerreotyping their likenesses, he [MD: Partridge] thinks we shall yet succeed in procuring the pictures of our Spirit friends with as much accuracy as we now do the portraits of those in

the body. This is not mere speculation; it has a basis of fact. It will be remembered that there was published in the Telegraph, under date Aug. 18 [sic], p. 190, a statement that, on taking a daguerreotype of the earthly features of a departed relative, another picture was found on the same plate standing beside the one designed to be taken. Subsequently, a correspondent accounted for the miracle by assuming the plate used on that occasion was an old one -- that it had been used before -- and the previous picture not being thoroughly obliterated, re-appeared on being subjected to the chemical action which first produced it. This presumptive explanation was also published, which brought a reply from the original narrator, that the theory explanatory was against fact, inasmuch as the plate used by the artist was a *new* one. Moreover, that the dress of the figure thus strangely produced was antique, more ancient, in fact, than the art even of daguerreotyping. He thought this interesting statement had not received the consideration justly its due. If the fact is as published, it suggests an additional class of tests, as interesting as they are conclusive, of the reality, genius, power and affection of that world heretofore known only to faith and hope, and of latter years, fading rapidly away from the feeble grasp of these.

It's fitting, given the movement's particular shape and structure, that the possibly-first spirit photographer is a female Midwestern medium.





## The Actual Likeness of Spirits: The Early Career of William H Mumler

The *Banner of Light* has exerted, after its demise, a strange distorting effect on Spiritualist historiography. Its relative availability has made it the paper-of-choice for scholars interested in digging into the primary record. Its editorial policy -- broadly, to take no stands on any issue that might be likely to alienate its readership -- infuriated both the crusading editors of *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* and, less frequently, the rabid apologists at *Mind and Matter*. That policy -- say nothing if you can't say anything nice -- probably accounts for the Banner's longevity, in some sense, but it

certainly makes the early period of Spiritualism.... uncomplicated, when viewed exclusively through the Banner's pages.

We've tried, over at *IAPSOP*, to bring back into circulation *at least some issues of all of the Banner's competitors*, and the reference options are far better, for everyone, than they ever have been.

Still, there's something....I don't know.... fun about pretending that the Banner represents Spiritualism in some as-in-microcosm-so-in-macrocosm occult way, and mining it on that basis. Not to mention convenient. So let's mine *The Banner of Light*, for Mumler.

Here, for the period 1862 through 1875 inclusive, are the number of mentions of "Mumler" (keeping in mind that he and his wife were both mediums) in *The Banner of Light*:

Year	Mentions	Milestone
1862	25	Inauguration
1863	38	Exposure
1864	0	
1865	0	
1866	0	
1867	0	
1868	0	
1869	205	Trial
1870	13	
1871	7	
1872	1	
1873	0	
1874	1	Re-establishment of public mediumship
1875	14	Publication of "Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photograph"

We can't make too much of this, as the indexing of the Banner on IAPSOP isn't Grade-A. But the shape of the data is not as one would expect, for that period from 1864-1869. We know Mumler is active during that period; we have photographs, attributed to him, to prove it, although a disproportionate number of them are "late" – 1868 and 1869.

I confess I was not particularly interested in spirit photography, or William H Mumler. I ignored the phenomenon in the US, and looked at it in the UK only when I crossed paths with Frederick Hudson or Georgiana Houghton. I looked at spirit photographs as you, possibly, look at spirit photographs: with curiosity, and bafflement. But the data set above made me curious, so I spent a lot of time reading *The Banner of Light* for 1862 and 1863, with an eye to understanding how Mumler's phenomena were received by the Banner and its readership.

Here, for what they're worth, are my notes, which might be labeled "Reticence, with a Shot of Enthusiasm."

Mumler's "discovery" (not) occurs in mid-to-late October of 1862. The *Herald of Progress* for November 1, 1862 has, I think, a most interesting description of the event.

Mumler, though not by name, is introduced to Spiritualist readers of the BofL in its November 1, 1862 issue, with a short paragraph over the signature "A. B. C." -- Dr. A. B. Child, the Spiritualist promoter, and Boston dentist.

Three photographs have just been exhibited to me with a distinct likeness of well-known Spiritualist friends in the form on each, and the shadowy likeness, entirely different from the others, in the background of each. It is affirmed that neither the sitters nor the artist saw or knew of any object whose reflection could have produced the second likeness on each photograph, but that both are fully convinced that they were the actually likenesses of spirits. We shall take pains to examine this very interesting phenomena, [sic-Psypioneer] and speak further on the subject next week.

The editorial comment on Child's note reads:

We, also, have had the matter under consideration during the past week, as have hundreds of others in this city. We have been assured for months by our spirit friends that in due time the mundane world would be startled by this new phase of spirit power, but we were not prepared to receive it so soon, and are yet in doubt that the manifestation is entirely legitimate. We shall investigate further ere we give a decided opinion in the matter. Be it understood, when we say this, we would do no injustice to any parties interested. We merely caution but to scrutinize thoroughly the *modus operandi* by which these three photographs are produced. In the meantime we shall keep our readers duly informed of what transpires in this direction hereafter.

Shortly thereafter, Mumler is named in the BofL as "the medium and the artist who makes photographs of spirits. His business has heretofore been ornamental engraving," and the story of his "discovery" of his mediumship in "the photograph saloon of Mrs. Stuart" at 258 Washington Street with which we are all familiar, appears in the November 8, 1862 issue, again over A. B. Child's signature. A half-dozen Boston Spiritualists are cited as vouching for the genuineness of Mumler's phenomena, even though none are photographers, and no one has an explanation for how the images of spirits are transferred to the negatives. A single debunking theory -- involving a stack of two negatives -- is undone by Mumler who exhibits

a glass plate with two images on it. The editorial writer of the BofL says on Nov. 16 that “we must admit that we cannot perceive any deception whatever on the part of the artist....The price for six spirit pictures, we understand, is five dollars.”

William Guay, a photographer formerly from New Orleans, writes to the *Herald of Progress* for November 29, 1863 that he’s followed Mumler through the entire development process and can detect no fraud. The Herald also reports that Mumler has taken Guay on at Mrs. Stuart’s photography saloon, where he has made various “improvements.” Mumler will, in a few months, use Guay’s vetting of his process as evidence of his rectitude, without noting that Guay is his employee/co-worker.

W. M. Fernauld writes in the Nov. 29, 1862 issue that in his view “the present new phenomenon of ‘Spiritual Photographs’” is nothing new. He cites his views on the spiritual origins of fine art, and says, referencing spirit art, that “If the spirits themselves could come and sit for their own portraits, while the artist sketched them, why not come into a photographer’s machine box?” - which is an indication of the average Spiritualist’s understanding of what a camera actually was.

It’s the issue of spirit photography’s standing as a class of manifestation, and not Mumler *per se*, that brings spirit photography to the fore, for Spiritualists, as the BofL publishes a long letter from one “Onward,” reminding readers of the relentless assault on Spiritualism by the secular culture, and the need for deep investigation and caution -- while simultaneously embracing uncritically the spirit photography phenomena. Spirit photography, one feels, reading “Onward,” is at last the evidence that will silence Spiritualism’s critics.

Several letter-writers from as far away as Portland, Maine and Cleveland, Ohio provide more evidence for the manifestations, and there is an announcement that a second spirit photographer is operating -- “a member of the church” who “feels conscientious scruples about taking such pictures, for he thinks Spiritualism is the work of the Devil.” The second photographer -- never named -- is nonetheless taking such pictures, and Robert Dale Owen and Dr. H. F. Gardner have sat with this second photographer.

But most importantly, among the advertisements of this issue appears the following:

#### SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS!

Persons residing at any distance from Boston, desirous to obtain Photographs of their departed friends, by Mr. W. H. Mumler, will please send for circular, which gives all particulars. Address, MRS. STUART, No. 238 Washington street, Boston.

I imagine we’d find that’s a J. V. Mansfield/psychometry-style circular, if we could get our hands on it, offering to produce photographs of spirits, without sitters, if a psychometric object of some kind are received, but that’s just speculation. There are hints that Mumler is doing “remote” spirit photographs at this time, but nothing unambiguous.

The first direct testimonial letter on Mumler’s mediumship, written by a Philadelphian and a self-described photographic amateur with two years’ prior experience, appears in the December 6, 1862 issue.

And the first extended explanation of how spirit photography operates, as a phenomenon, is received by the Message Department of the BofL from a spirit named Abel Bell, through Mrs. Conant the BofL house medium, on December 6:

The spirits presenting themselves before the camera must draw their covering from the individuals they come in contact with. Those individuals must be rendered negative, and from them spirits receive their clothing, and if they are placed before the camera at just the right moment, they will be able to present to their friends shadowy pictures of themselves, as spirits.

Whether “negative” refers to magnetic polarity or the photographic process, I do not know -- but the explanation is generally in line with the explanations for [a] materialization of spirits and [b] mediums found out of the cabinet during dark seances, at the locus of manifestations. In all cases, spirits drawing material from the medium (and the redounding of that material, abruptly, to the medium, when spirits depart) are the mechanism by which things are effected.

The trance medium Laura DeForce Gordon writes to the Banner in the December 9 issue, saying in part:

The spirit photographs taken in Boston have awakened considerable inquiry in the minds of both Spiritualists and sceptics, and all ask earnestly to know its truth, yet wait patiently; for if it is a fact, we can afford to wait; if a *delusion*, as many seem inclined to believe, it is better not to decide hastily.

Precisely what Gordon is committing to, in the passage, escapes me. She seems to echo the BofL’s position, which is: no position at all, or all positions at once.

In the December 13 issue, Mrs. Isaac Babbitt writes that she has arranged for Mumler to be tested by J. W. Black, a Boston professional photographer, and that the test results are inconclusive. This does not stop Mrs. Babbitt from endorsing Mumler wholeheartedly -- via a letter written not to Mumler, but to Mrs. Stuart. In fact, several pieces at this time refer to Mumler’s work as “the pictures taken at Mrs. Stuart’s” -- with no mention of Mumler whatsoever. It’s clear Mrs. Stuart’s role as the orchestrator of the affair has been entirely effaced from the modern history of spirit photography, and there’s sure to be a reason for that, if we can only dig it out.

In the January 3 issue, Henry T. Child, Philadelphia’s most prominent Spiritualist propagandist (and a man who tends to embrace the new and the marvelous with alacrity), records his session with Mumler, and provides us with a theory of spirit photography, provided to him by spirits:

There are three forms of matter. First, tangible matter; second, the imponderables, well known to science as heat, light, electricity, magnetism, the od force and the life principle. These become more refined in the order in which I have named them, and this approximate toward the third realm of matter, which constitutes spirits, and the home they dwell in, in the spiritual world. Photography, or the art of printing by light, is the most spiritual of all the arts, and by it any substance that is sufficiently dense to set in motion the rays of light, may have its form and character printed on the plate, being received there by the delicate and perceptive chemicals which are used. But spirit forms

are so much more refined than light, that they cannot set in motion or reflect its rays. To do this, they require the aid of the life principle -- the od force -- magnetism and electricity. These may be obtained from certain mediums, and the atmosphere around them; and when thus obtained and properly placed, either around a spirit form, or combined and formed into such a model as to represent the form itself, either of which will be enabled to set in motion the next form of matter, which is light, and print an image upon the glass. It does not require as much light to print this as it does to make an image on the retina of the human eye, and hence these forms are not visible. This model process is the one which will be first introduced, and hence the forms of spirits and objects will not be very perfect.

This is an improvement on Abel Bell's theory, with which it shares its fundamental mechanism; Child's spirits' theory explains [a] why sitters cannot see the spirits and [b] why so many spirit photographs, at this stage, resemble either a crude human form without much in the way of distinguishing features, or splotches of light.

(In passing: Casual readers may miss the significance of this theorizing. The elaboration of theory to explain manifestations is, in Spiritualist discourse, an incorporation ritual -- the way in which the essentially syncretic discipline of Spiritualism binds the unlike-itself into its core belief system. A history of phenomena tells us something, for sure. But a history of theories about the phenomena gets us closer to the heart of the matter, as well as to one of the fundamental flaws of Spiritualism as a belief system; its lack of doctrinal control, and consequent wild and compounding inconsistencies.)

Child, usually one to rush in, declines to state emphatically that spirit photographs are of the spirits, contenting himself with a slightly more aggressive commitment than Gordon, and saying that he can't readily detect any fraud, and therefore accepts them provisionally.

Few people, at this juncture, are willing to commit to Mumler's phenomena -- in large measure, I think, because the phenomena are confined to a single public medium.

(By this time, spirit photography in the US is being covered, by *The Spiritual Magazine* in London, in non-committal language remarkably similar to that employed in the US. That may be why it is that no significant spirit photography industry develops in the UK at this time -- particularly when so many people skilled in the making of optics (lens and mirrors) count themselves English Spiritualists, the which is, otherwise, a mystery worth looking into.)

Well into the spring of 1863, the language in the BofL is the language of lack-of-commitment. A correspondent from Providence RI in the February 21 issue remarks that

[S]cores of new faces meet me at the hall at each [MD: Spiritualist] meeting, and many ask how it is about those spirit photographs, and I reply I *believe* but do not know. Others have been to examine the process, I have not; on their testimony I *believe*, on mine I shall *know*. I have seen the pictures, but not the artist; but let no one suppose for a moment that Spiritualism depends upon its success. Scores of such experiments may start and fall or succeed, and we go on the same, only accelerated or retarded by them.

Experienced readers in the literature will recognize this rhetorical stance.

Mumler's first public scandal breaks in February of 1863. Dr. H. F. Gardner, a stalwart in the movement and an early promoter of Mumler, publishes this statement in the *BofL* for February 28, 1863:

Mr. Editor -- Please allow me a small space in your columns to say to the many friends who have written me upon the subject of spirit photographs as produced by Mr. W. H. Mumler, that while I am fully of the belief that genuine spirit likenesses have been produced through his mediumship, evidence of deception in two cases, at least, have been furnished me, which is perfectly conclusive. I have, during all my investigations of the subject of spirit photography, been forced by the accumulating evidence into the belief that genuine spirit likenesses were produced, and have frankly and openly so stated at all times and under all circumstances, and I deeply regret the necessity that compels me, through irrefragible [sic] evidence, to state with equal frankness that I am satisfied, beyond a doubt, that in the instances above referred to, Mr. Mumler, or some person connected with Mrs. Stuart's rooms, have been guilty of deception in palming off as genuine spirit likenesses, pictures of a person who is now living in this city. Yours for the truth, H. F. Gardner, M. D., Boston, Feb. 20, 1863.

The person in question was Elizabeth Peabody, who was unveiled as the original of a spirit in several persons' photographs through direct comparison of different photographs, taken for different sitters, at different times, the spirits appearing in the photograph being taken for different deceased relatives.

John Latham, another prominent Spiritualist and the man who names Peabody as the confederate of Stuart, Mumler and Guay, closes his letter to the *Banner* by remarking that "Dr. Gardner, Dr. Childs and about one hundred others, have seen them [MD: the spirit photographs featuring Peabody], including some of the best photographers of Boston, and they all agree in saying that deception has unquestionably been practiced in these two cases."

The owner of at least one of the suspect photographs, Mrs. Eliza Blossom, declines to subscribe to Latham's analysis, and publicly proclaims her Peabody photograph a genuine spirit photograph of her mother (in the March 21, 1863 issue).

In an interesting turn, the exposure was triggered by a decision by Rich (of Colby & Rich) to publish one of the Peabody photographs in an issue of the *Banner*; Latham became involved at Rich's request, and detected the fabrication because he had, already, seen Peabody's visage in other of Mumler's photographs, as a spirit. The Mumler photograph is consequently pulled from the *Banner* prior to publication.

(The gist of the controversy turns on a technicality: enlargement. Mumler and his associate Guay maintained that the Peabody spirit photographs were genuine because, although they had a Peabody negative in their library and therefore could have used it to fake spirit photographs, the head of Mrs. Peabody was differently sized than the head of the spirit in either of the two suspect photographs, and resizing from negatives was not within the scope of photographic art at that time. C. B. Boyle, a Boston photographer, proved that it was not only possible, but routinely accomplished by commercial and amateur photographers, and noted that "the man who would make such misrepresentations must either be profoundly ignorant of the resources of photography, or else intend to mislead." Boyles' criticisms of Mumler, in the *Banner* in March and April of 1863, are to my reading devastating.)

Now, one might attribute the specificity of the allegations against Mumler -- fraud “in these two cases” -- to a legalistic desire not to stray from the cases into any generalities for which there is no evidence. Or, one might attribute that specificity to a desire not to contaminate the phenomena as a class, at this delicate moment when it is produced only through one medium, and when it plainly is drawing “scores of new faces” to Spiritualist meetings. I incline to the latter.

The March 7, 1863 issue of the *Herald of Progress* leads with an unsigned attack on spirit photography, under the headline “How the Pseudo-Spirit Photographs Are Produced,” which is unambiguous:

I am sorry that this is a fraud. I had hoped that it was a new phase of spirit manifestation. Nevertheless it does not shake my belief in the existence of spirits, based on manifestations that cannot be shown to be trickery.

(This is redolent of the position J. Enmore Jones, the prominent English Spiritualist will take, immediately after the rise of Frederick Hudson in England in 1872-3. Initially a vocal advocate, Jones dives into photography, figures out how spirit photographs might be faked, concludes they are being faked, and becomes a vocal critic of English spirit photography as distracting from other, better evidence.)

Mumler finally writes to the *Banner* in late March of 1863, responding to Boyle’s open-letter promise to expose Mumler’s methods in Mumler’s own shop. In his defense, Mumler [a] recites his non-Boston testimonials (prominently, H. T. Child), [b] describes and defends his process for developing his negatives, and [c] cites his largely-perceived-as-genuine record as evidence of the validity of his phenomena. The letter, on page 4 of the March 21, 1863 issue of the *Banner*, is worth reading entirely as a snapshot of Mumler’s style of argumentation.

D. J. Mandell’s strange and wonderful circumlocutions in his “Mediumistic Failures and Deceits, With A Special Application to Spirit-Photography” in the April 4, 1863 issue of the *Banner* are worth looking at, as it illustrates just where the edges of this discussion actually are. Other than claiming precedence -- for a spirit photograph produced on the canvas surface of a washtub (I swear) -- I am not entirely sure what bearing Mandell’s article has on the topic at hand, except that it promises further more wonderful photographic manifestations, when the current spirits engaged in the phenomenon -- “comparatively, but experimenters” -- are replaced by other more mature spirits.

(Mandell is not the only writer to propose a “tricksy spirits” explanation for Mumler’s fakes.)

The *Banner*, as per usual, declines to take either side of the Mumler fraud issue, or, rather, takes both sides of the issue: “We would inform our English friends, and the public generally, that it is our decided opinion that real spirit photographs have been made in this city, and also that there is strong circumstantial evidence that counterfeits have also been made by the same parties.”

In late April, the *Banner*’s editorial staff notes that “We have just received a letter from Germany, giving us the information that the Baron [Reichenbach, promoter of odylic force] had recently produced on negative plates what he considers an approximation to spirit forms, and he is sanguine that he shall, ultimately, fully succeed in his experiments.”

In May 2 issue, John Latham publishes “The Spirit Photograph Controversy,” which is as damning as any of C. B. Boyle’s attacks. Other Spiritualists object; B. A. Richards, writing from Springfield, Illinois, remarks that:

On what a frail tenure must such Spiritualists have suspended their faith; and of what use is their theorizings [sic] without his basic rock [MD: of physical manifestations] to rest upon. Spiritualism simply falls back upon the same level with all other *faiths*, when we deny the truthfulness of the external manifestations, and will die a more rapid death than has been its growth, when we disprove, absolutely, physical phases of its fabric. It was these manifestations which gave it its hold on the minds and affections of the thousands who have adopted the truths of Spiritualism, and, once proven beyond a doubt that these were all humbuggery, you destroy the whole edifice with the foundation. It is for the reason that I see these doubts raised and advocated by Spiritualists of long standing that I am surprised. From the other side we must expect such opposition.

In this same issue, the BofL silently reproduces a short piece from *The Spiritual Magazine* citing the production of spirit photographs “on the Boulevard des Italiens” in Paris, in 1861.

After mid-1863, Mumler largely disappears from the pages of the BofL.

In August of 1863, J. M. Peebles observes, in his notes from field work, that “I here [Chicopee, MA] formed the acquaintance of Mr. Herbert Knox, a superior daguerreian artist, with strong mediumistic tendencies. He is being developed to take spirit photographs, and it will prove a success.” The BofL editorial staff responds that “Friend Peebles, in a letter published in the Banner recently, alludes to a photograph artist in Chicopee who is said to produce spirit pictures. We have seen several specimens, which resemble those made in Boston. We do not wish our friends to be too sanguine that these *cartes de visite* are genuine.”<sup>2</sup>



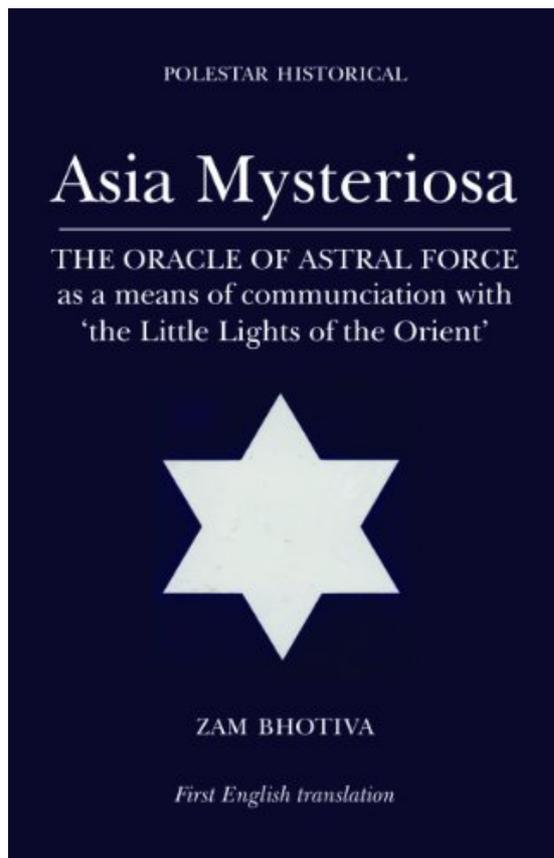
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<sup>2</sup> Marc Demarest told *Psypioneer* “Some of the Mumler material from the BofL was published in Louis Kaplan’s *The Strange Case of William Mumler Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis & London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008).

For some reason known only to Kaplan, he did not publish any of the material discussing Mumler’s exposure. His final excerpt is H. F Gardner’s statement of February 20, 1863 (in the BofL for Feb. 28) — in other words, the initial notice of fraud. Why he chose not to publish the material that clearly shows the Boston area Spiritualist community self-policing, I don’t know.”

**Introductory Note by LP:** Most readers will know of the White Eagle Lodge which derives from the work of Ivan and Grace Cooke. They had come into contact with a French occult group, the Polaires, which used an unusual form of divination. The Polaires feature in the story of the communications which Mrs Cooke and a home circle received from Conan Doyle.<sup>3</sup> Zam Bhotiva, a leading Polaire wrote in French an account of their divination, which has now been translated, and is reviewed below.<sup>4</sup>

## *Asia Mysteriosa:* The Oracle of Astral Force (2012)



*Asia Mysteriosa* is a record of communications received by an early twentieth century Paris-based esoteric group known as Groupe des Polaires transmitted by an oracle identified as the 'Oracle of Astral Force'. Included also is a section from the first edition of the *Bulletin*, or manifesto, of the Polaire group which provides commentary on these communications and on the enlightened beings responsible for producing them.

The doctrine set out in *Asia Mysteriosa* is said to be a fragment from the "Book of the Science of Life and of Death", a manuscript aged by the passage of time given by Father Julian, an elderly Italian gentleman with a dual-identity of a monkish Rosicrucian and Tibetan Sage, to his spiritual son. Julian's spiritual son was to become guardian of the Oracle's secret Method, after he had made a close friendship with one who wrote under the nom de plume Zam Bhotiva, the author of *Asia Mysteriosa*. In his historical preface, Colum Hayward explores the mysterious background to the text which

contains the Method of the Oracle along with the origins of the Polaire group and its members on whom the Oracle impacted. The introduction is long but justified by the historical detail and context it provides. Hayward is the grandson of the medium Grace Cooke who had affiliation with members of the Polaires and who went on to form the London-based White Eagle Lodge, which has since spread internationally, after the former changed shape from its late 1930s orientation.

Several noted individuals of esoteric Orientalism had connection with the Polaires and dealings with its Oracle of Astral Force, such as Traditionalists René Guénon and Julius Evola, author on occultism, freemasonry and Tibetan Buddhism, Jean Marquès-Rivière; and

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle's Book Of The Beyond: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Arthur-Conan-Doyles-Book-Beyond/dp/0854871470>

<sup>4</sup> Polair Publishing <http://www.polairpublishing.co.uk/asia-mysteriosa.html>

the playwright and historic novelist, Maurice Magre. Although at one point set to provide the foreword to *Asia Mysterosa*, Guénon's involvement with the group was not lasting; he appears to have departed after receiving a wry answer to a question he asked pertaining to the authenticity of the Oracle's Oriental messengers. Evola's involvement, too, was short-lived, after posing the Oracle a thorny question of what was written on a certain page of a book he had tucked away in a drawer. Magre, Marquès-Rivière and others, on the other hand, left impassioned testimonials of the Oracle's efficacy and their transactions with it. Guénon, at one stage at least, had clearly seen something behind it.

While the Oracle of Astral Force in response to questions declares its lineage was known in ancient Egypt and Babylon under the guise of those historical settings, it is distinct from other divinatory methods used in western esotericism at the time of its Polaire reception and before, such as, for example, Tarot and I-Ching. The Oracle of Astral Force therefore presented itself as something new. The Oracle in fact even states itself as separate to 'Cabala' and although its methodology appears to resonate with forms of gematria, the crucial element we lack in decoding the Oracle of Astral Force more fully is the 'arithmetical key' which is not provided in the *Bulletin*.

What we do learn is that the Method of consulting the Oracle involved an arduous days-to-weeks duration in order to produce the right mental attitude to frame the right type of question to pose. Only by acquiring the desirable condition of mind in the sharpening of subtle sensibility would the Oracle speak meaningfully; normally through a broad set of enigmatic answers. The type of mental training needed to approach it was necessary to align oneself to the spiritually evolved beings (a Rosicrucian brotherhood in the Himalayas) that used the Oracle as a telegraphic device, since it was these beings, rather than the apparatus of the Oracle itself, with whom one was communicating. Ultimately, the Oracle was interim, since it presupposed an astral plane through which psychic vibrations could pass. We learn, for instance, that replies may not even take the shape of written answers but could manifest through inspiration. To this degree, it is pointed out that the system was immune to psychic transference or telepathic suggestion from the Method's operator of the answers they instrumentally received. There was yet an admission to this, since we learn the Oracle is susceptible to hijack from the dark brotherhood of the Kala-Nag, those who respond to calls made without faith in the Method, presumably those who hadn't already been countered by the Oracle.

The mysterious *modus operandi* of the Oracle astonished its users and grew on them. The idea that one was communicating directly with spirits, holding séance with a hidden Rosicrucian brotherhood, or working with a device that facilitated encounter with a living voice above two dimensional 'yes' or 'no' answers – although how different individuals may interpret more accessible responses from Tarot cards, I-Ching, or an Ouija board without aid of an intermediary, remains a largely subjective affair – clearly provided an exciting source of curiosity besides the wider spiritual ambition being echoed. It is perhaps interesting in the above respect that a communication received by the Polaires in 1929, suggested they reconstitute the group in order to shed new light on spiritualism.

In its commitment to nurturing an evolved, open-minded Socratic-type of inquisitiveness, the voice of the Oracle can seem vague, cliché, and obfuscating over not too run-of-the-mill questions which makes us wonder, at times, on what side of the water the communications derive. On pp.89-92 we hear the Oracle giving out instruction on treatment of disease such as malaria by recommending a root named 'Acputus'. After nobody could find out what

Acutus was, we discover that Acputus is irreplaceable but there is a small quantity of it in grapes. We then learn that all remedies exist in nature, only the Inconceivable does not let humanity find them due to karma, that only those with a spiritual mission can discover them. Despite ambiguity over the substance and term Acputus, we discover elsewhere the brotherhood to be familiar enough with the names and properties of worldly matters to suggest Krishnamurti (presumably, Jiddu) was not a good teacher. Agartha, of course, features prominently too. The juxtaposition of Agartha with Tibet, along with a hidden adept brotherhood of western hue, evokes the type of New Age myth which scholars, until recently, were fond of exposing as invented and by extension, irrelevant, when compared to ‘traditional’ and authentic Tibetan Buddhism. This, rather than identifying a contemporary form of the Shambhala myth in western Buddhist terms, one that possessed dimensions beyond the scope of romanticism, and a strain of which *Asia Mysteriosa* chronicles a good example.

While the Oracle of Astral Force is an example of practical occultism it provokes mystery rather than method, the cultivation of questioning rather than practical solution. Being geared to questions about its own doctrine, it could be seen to override the spontaneity and metaphorical appeal encountered in other divining systems. Without the missing key and its equally inscrutable operator, however, we are prevented from further revelations, although the very small fragment we possess is sufficiently potent, and cryptic enough, to pique the curiosity. Whatever wider appeal this book may have to those interested in divination, cryptography and alternative spiritualities, it contributes to studies of Traditionalism, Theosophy, and the body of ideas and literature spawned by the Agartha current.

Alistair Coombs



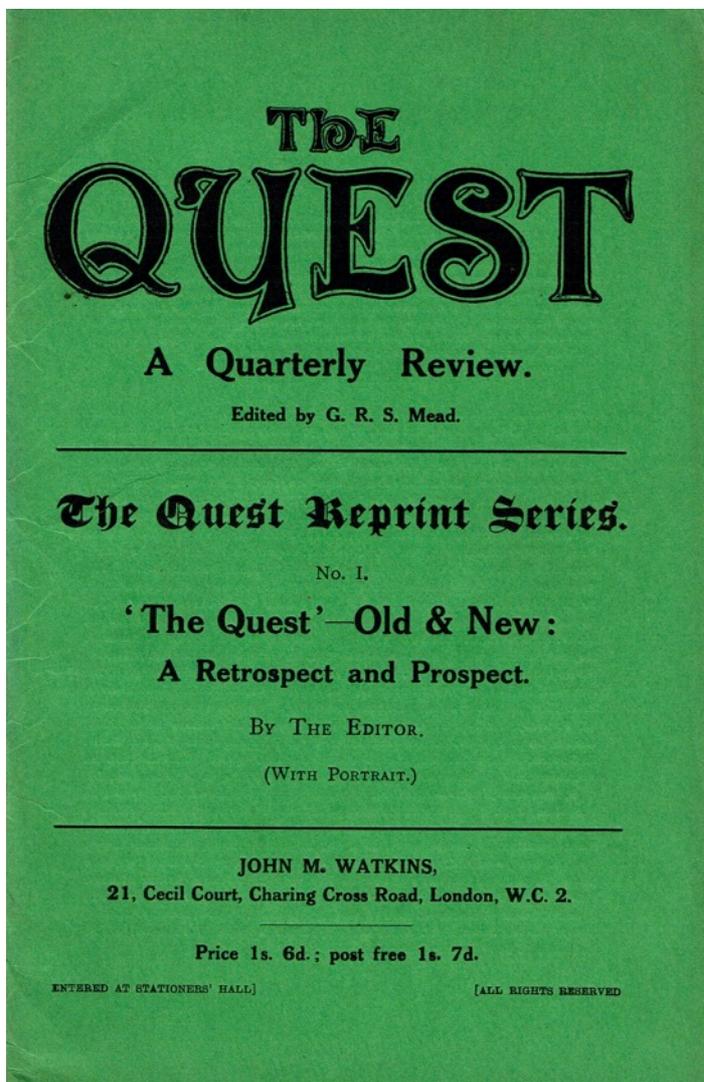
**Introductory Note by LP:** G.R. Mead (1863-1933) was a respected senior member of the London Spiritualist Alliance, who sat with the young medium Eileen Garrett. But in his youth, he had been a Theosophist, and later the editor of a high-quality journal *The Quest*, and its associated Quest Society. We reprint below Mead's somewhat vehement account of those events. Mead's memory of his Theosophical days was imperfect. This article, and another he contributed to *The Occult Review* in May 1927,<sup>5</sup> brought forth criticism, even from Dr Stokes who shared his distaste for later Theosophical developments.

*The Quest* ceased publication in 1930.

## THE QUEST

**'THE QUEST'—OLD AND NEW: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.**

**RETROSPECT.**



THE present number ends the Old Series of THE QUEST. To mark distinctly the interval, or break, between the Old and the New Series, which will begin with the October number of this year, the first issue of Vol. XVIII., the July number will not appear. Further reference to this will be made later on.

As this April number synchronizes with an important moment, or critical turning-point, in the fortunes both of The Quest Society and of The Quest Quarterly, it will not be inopportune very briefly to review the past and to say a word or two about the future.

**MY ONE-TIME MEMBERSHIP  
OF THE THEOSOPHICAL  
SOCIETY.**

IT is well-known by my old friends that for twenty-five years I was a member of the Theosophical Society. For a score of those years I was at the very centre of the movement, and acquainted from within with its two founders, its history and fortunes, better perhaps

<sup>5</sup> Facts about "The Secret Doctrine" By G.R.S. Mead, M.A.: <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/mead1.htm>

than anyone now living. I joined the Society in 1884, immediately on coming down from Cambridge. In 1889 I gave up my profession of teaching, and went to work with Yelena Petrovna Blavatskaia (generally known as Mme. Blavatsky). For the last three years of her life I was her private secretary, and in closest intimacy with her. I was sub-editor of her monthly magazine, which with her habitual *taquinerie*, and the better *pour épater les bourgeois*, she had christened *Lucifer*. After her departure from this troubled scene of her labours, and when I became editor, I abandoned this eccentric pose, and renamed the monthly *The Theosophical Review*. This publication ceased when I left the Society in Feb., 1909. Moreover I edited or re-edited many of H. P. Blavatsky's writings, and I was also among other things General Secretary for Europe, and did no little to start or nurse the beginnings of the Theosophical movement on the Continent.

I have to be very skeleton-like in this bare recital, even though I am not engaged in writing the memoirs of the 'Theosophical' quarter-century of my life, but dealing with one episode only. Were I to write those memoirs, which I have no present intention of doing, there would be many surprises for the later and ignorant composition of the Neo-theosophical movement; and those surprises, I fear, would often be anything but pleasant reading for them. This much, however, I would say about H. P. B., as we called her; and it is an opinion based upon five years of friendship and on three years of daily personal intercourse with her. Whatever else Yelena Petrovna was (and God knows her imperfections were many, though at the same time some few of the features of her very complex and mixed character were without prejudice 'great'), H. P. Blavatsky was not, within my experience at any rate, the vulgar trickster and charlatan of hostile popular legend. I do not of course know what happened when I was not there; but then nearly all her accusers are equally in the same boat.

When I first went to her to work permanently, I was a young man of whom she practically knew nothing, except that from May, 1887, when she returned to England for the last time, I spent no little of my holidays in visits to Maycot, Upper Norwood and to 17, Lansdowne Road, Bayswater. Nevertheless, with childlike confidence, and with one of those large and eccentric gestures of hers, she handed over to me at once the keys of her desk and bookcases and tossed over, unopened, her voluminous correspondence, bidding me answer it as best I might (and 'be d—d'), as she wanted all her time for writing her articles and books. It was all very foolish and imprudent; but at any rate it was assuredly not the act of one who was popularly supposed to be carrying on an elaborate fraud with numerous confederates.

This does not mean to say that I approve otherwise of her and her ways by any means. I retain a great personal affection for her bohemian and racy personality; but much she wrote I know to be very inaccurate, to say the least of it; while her whole outlook on life was that of an 'occultist'—a view I now hold most firmly to be fundamentally false. She was the very last person to found a religious movement; and let us not forget that the name first chosen for what became afterwards known as 'The Theosophical Society,' was 'The Miracle Club.' The first choice was assuredly the more appropriate, as history has shown. The chief cause of this was that H. P. Blavatsky was undoubtedly a powerful medium.

But to hurry on, and be as brief as possible.

## A MISERABLE EPISODE.

I NOW come to the main episode to which I am constrained to refer, though with very great repugnance,—a matter on which I have kept silence now for 18 years. But it is necessary to put on honest record for historical purposes the bare facts of the matter; for the truth will never be elicited from the present officials of the Neo-theosophical movement.

Charles W. Leadbeater had been a curate in the Church of England. In 1884 he went out to Adyar, Madras, the General Headquarters of the Theosophical Society, to devote himself to the 'cause.' Shortly after, he left for Ceylon, and there publicly professed himself a Buddhist, taking '*pansil*,' or the 'five vows' of the layman. Leadbeater returned to England in 1890, and for a time took up tutoring. After the death of Mme. Blavatsky in 1891, and when, later on, Mrs. Besant fell a willing victim to Leadbeater's insidious influence (for he was somewhat of a psychic—and that in Neo-theosophic circles spells 'adept' instead of simply 'medium' as elsewhere), he gradually began to acquire among the rank and file of the Theosophical faithful the position of the most exalted 'seer' of the movement; though as a matter of fact all his notions of things spiritual were, and have remained, very material. Of genuine mysticism and spiritual exaltation he knew not the first word. He travelled extensively in Europe and the U.S.A., and gained great influence over many.

At the beginning of 1906 grave charges were brought against Leadbeater by several scandalized mothers in the U.S.A., whose young sons had been taught a certain practice by this 'arhat.'

(I refrain from details, as this sketch is a bare historical out-line of generalities. But as a matter of fact, the whole case, in spite of its unsuitability for public discussion, was ventilated *ad nauseam* at the time in all the Theosophical publications. It has also, owing to a number of other later developments, appeared from time to time in thousands of newspapers throughout the world. In certain libel actions, moreover, brought by the Theosophical community at Adyar against *The Hindu*, the most prominent native English newspaper in the south of India, the whole documents of the case were brought into court, and Leadbeater himself had to appear. The plaintiffs lost all their cases, and the strictures of the court on Leadbeater were severe. The Indian press for weeks and months was agog with it. In brief, there is no necessity to give precision to what is so notorious.)

The scandal was great, the subject was unsavoury, and naturally the mothers shrank from publicity. They, therefore, appealed to Mrs. Besant, who was then the autocratic head of a secret organization in the Theosophical Society, known as 'The Esoteric Section' or 'Eastern School.'

This had been started by Mme. Blavatsky in about 1890. She, however, had not done this willingly, but had been over-persuaded by some of her most enthusiastic and credulous followers. She herself really disliked the idea. And in this her intuition had been right; for this Section speedily developed into a great danger and became the inner rot to the whole movement, seeing that it was based on blind obedience to (so-called) 'esoteric orders.' In the hands of Annie Besant, later on, this 'Esoteric' cabal became a camouflaged political caucus, 'pulling' every crisis in the Society from within to suit A. B.'s own views and purposes.

When this grave plaint against Leadbeater arrived in India, Mrs. Besant was at Benares, where, as ill chance would have it, Leadbeater himself also happened to be. With him at her elbow, Mrs. Besant failed conspicuously and egregiously in her plain duty: utterly ignoring the facts, she rejected the bitter cry of the mothers, treating them with great harshness and upbraiding them, as though it was they who had committed a grave offence by indicting her 'brother-initiate,' instead of the offence being his.

Failing thus to get any redress privately, the aggrieved mothers, at the beginning of May, 1906, brought their plaint publicly before Colonel H. S. Olcott, the President-Founder of the Society, who happened to be then in London. A Judicial Committee was at once convened; and Leadbeater, who was staying at Taormina (of all places in the world!) was summoned to appear. The evidence was clear and incontrovertible, and Leadbeater's resignation from the Theosophical Society was accepted to close the matter.

THE TRUE REASON FOR THE EXODUS OR UPWARDS OF  
SEVEN HUNDRED MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH SECTION  
FROM THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

LEADBEATER was now out of the Society, and common sense and decent feeling might well have allowed this very unpalatable episode to sink into oblivion. But this was not to be. Leadbeater's 'seership' was too valuable an asset to the 'occultists,' who sought in devious ways to excuse his sex-teachings. They could not afford to let him disappear.

On Feb. 17, 1907, the President-Founder, Colonel H. S. Olcott, died. In considering previously this some-time necessary future event, those of us who were chiefly interested in the fortunes of the Society, had always agreed that in no case could the private Headship of the Esoteric Section, which was founded entirely on a purely dogmatic basis, and the public Presidential office of a Society with a professedly entirely open and undogmatic platform be combined in the same person. This ruled out Mrs. Besant from the future presidency. The difficulty was to find a fit candidate to succeed Olcott. The post was offered to myself; but I refused. I did not care for a life of continual travelling and organization, and for the task of trying to follow in the footsteps of the somewhat American Barnum-like activities of my old friend H. S. O. I much preferred continuing my studies, editing, writing books and lecturing; and I said so. Mrs. Besant, whose memory was always conveniently short when there was any opportunity of extending her position and exalting herself, allowed herself to be nominated by some vociferous followers. By the team-work of the E.S. under her orders throughout the Theosophical world she was duly elected. I opposed her election publicly.

In May of 1908 an entirely new phase of the Leadbeater scandal cropped up. A certain amazing Dr. Weller van Hook, the General Secretary of the American Section (U.S.A), wrote an Open Letter to his Section. In it he defended Leadbeater's 'theories' as to boys; said he (L.) was a pioneer of great insight in such matters, and the only man who had so far had the courage really to tackle the sex-problem! Privately, the said Weller van Hook let it be understood far and wide that this egregious and pernicious Epistle had been dictated to him by a Theosophical Master or Mahatma!

The soberer, saner and more decent members of the British Section, on reading this shocking effusion, were naturally highly scandalized at such a public outrage on the good name of the Society. At the Annual British Convention in July, accordingly, we carried a resolution, in the face of the fanatical opposition of the Besant-Leadbeaterites, requesting the

President and General Council of the Theosophical Society, the highest court of official appeal, to put an end once for all to this intolerable scandal in our midst,—namely, the *public advocacy* of Leadbeater's wrong teachings to young boys. The amazing answer we received in due course to our appeal was that the President and Council, after full deliberation, "saw no reason why Mr. Leadbeater should not be restored to membership." Whereupon upwards of 700 of us shook off the dust of our feet against these bemused 'occultists,' and left the Neo-theosophic Society. Let it be here stated deliberately, that by this unmoral answer of the most authoritative official body of the International Theosophical Society, the Council stood condemned publicly out of its own mouth as being tainted to the core, untrue to its professions and principles, and unworthy of the confidence of all self-respecting, clean-minded and honest men and women.

#### THE FOUNDING OF 'THE QUEST' AND OF 'THE QUEST SOCIETY.'

IT might have been expected that these 700 odd *révoltés* would have at once united together on their exodus for some common course of action. But it fell out otherwise. Personally, I was now utterly disgusted with the Theosophical Society, its innumerable dogmatic assertions, its crooked methods and reprehensible proceedings. I had never, even while a member, preached the Mahātmā-gospel of H. P. Blavatsky, or propagandized Neo-theosophy and its revelations. I had believed that 'theosophy' proper meant the wisdom-element<sup>6</sup> in the great religions and philosophies of the world. This far-flung and varied 'wisdom' I had intensively studied wherever I could find it, and had by now written no little on the subject.

When, then, in utter disgust I left a movement I had striven for years, within my small measure of ability, to keep straight and clean, if it were in any way possible,—though, as far as the Society was concerned, I had to admit complete failure, I still loved the thing I sought. I had thus, on leaving, practically nothing to change, as far as my own studies and deepest spiritual interests were concerned. The old great things were true, in their proper measures and degrees, and sweet and clean, though Neo-theosophy had striven hard to exploit some of them for its own purposes, and in so doing had largely denatured or done violence to no little that was good in them.

I was determined, then, to try to do everything possible to found a clean society, an association that should be genuinely undogmatic, unpretentious, claiming no pseudo-revelations, and truly honest inside and out,—to gather together a group of seekers who desired greatly and earnestly to be instructed by any who had competent knowledge of the many subjects which could enter into the wide programme of our Spiritual Quest. 'Esotericism' and 'occultism' were to be eschewed as corrupting rather than helpful. As far as I was personally concerned, I had bidden a long farewell to the lures of pretence and charlatanism of all kinds. But this was not the idea of the 700 as a body. Most of them expected and desired that I should set up a new dissident Neo-theosophic tabernacle in the desert of errancy, and carry on what they had grown used to, and what still enslaved them from within.

The consequence was that only some 150 of the dissidents, and not all of these heart-wholely, with some 100 others who approved, but who had never had anything to do with Neo-theosophy or Mahātmā -ism, joined together to found the Quest Society. The title of our new undertaking gave us at first much heart-searching; dozens of names were suggested. One

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<sup>6</sup> That profound *sapientia subcontrariis abscondita*—or 'wisdom hidden beneath the opposites.'

day I said to my most intimate colleagues: "I don't know what we are going to call the Society; but I shall call the Quarterly THE QUEST." That settled it; and so we christened ourselves 'The Quest Society.'

I hate to have to be so personal in all this; but I do not see how I can avoid it in the present historical recital. I, therefore, add here the reflection, that a man who has given 25 of the most vigorous and best years of his life in working strenuously for a movement, does not abandon it except for the strongest possible and most carefully considered reasons. Nor was its abandonment without considerable personal economic loss. I gave up an assured income, the certainty of getting published any books I might write, whatever their size, and a world-spread *clientèle* for them. I had a dear wife, the faithful sharer of all my struggles, ever most courageous in spite of continual ill-health, absolutely devoted and straight as a die. We married, not for personal satisfaction, though our marriage was a perfect one, but to make possible the maintaining of a nucleus of an unexceptionable nature in succession to the Avenue Road household, when the latter was broken up on Mrs. Besant's abandoning it to indulge her Indian craze. To do this my wife sacrificed a pension of £150 a year. So she and I went out into the unknown, burning our boats behind us, because we no longer had any confidence in what we had hitherto slaved for.

#### THE FIRST PERIOD OF 'THE QUEST SOCIETY' AND OF 'THE QUEST.'

IN March, 1909, The Quest Society was inaugurated. It was not really then born; it was conceived at that date and thus began its inter-uterine life. At first it was practically ancillary to the Review, designed to support it; for outside the Quarterly its activities consisted solely in giving some half-a-dozen public lectures a term at Kensington Town Hall. The Council met at my rooms, where also the work of the office was done and the 'archives' were stored. Though we always had an Honorary Secretary, more or less for window-dressing purposes, the real secretarial work was done by Mrs. Mead, who was kindly helped by some personal friends.

At the beginning and up to the first two years of the War (1909-1916) THE QUEST contained 200pp. and cost only 2/6. The four numbers formed a fat volume for the year. We managed also somehow to cover expenses for these first years. When the devastating War came, however,—as with many other societies and similar undertakings to our own,—we had a terribly hard struggle to carry on. It was for years touch and go. Still, with the blessing of Providence, we did just manage to survive, though battered and bleeding and a veritable hospital case. THE QUEST had to be reduced to 144pp., and the price had to be raised to the still inadequate one of 3/-. For printing had gone up 200 per cent. and paper at one time 700 per cent.! Money in it there was none. But there was something far better than £. s. d. There were numbers of excellent articles and first-class contributions,—and all for love. We could not afford to pay our contributors a penny. That is the real virtue of THE QUEST; and I, as editor, am legitimately proud, very proud indeed, on looking back at the list of my most valued and esteemed contributors,—a list hard to beat by any periodical with anything like similar aims to our own.

#### THE FINANCIAL SIDE OF THE UNDERTAKING.

THE financial responsibility for the publication of THE QUEST has been from the start borne by 'The Quest Publishing Co., Ltd.,'—an imposing title, but in reality a very small concern. The initial capital of this Limited Liability Company consisted of the derisory sum

of £42. My dear friend, and late faithful colleague, W. H. Thomas, Managing Director of Jordison's well-known Printing Works, Middlesbrough, took 20 £1 shares, I took 20, and Miss Thomas, his sister, and my late wife each had 1 share. That was all the 'Company,' and that was all the 'capital' we had for some 15 to 16 years of trading. Thomas was strongly averse from spending a halfpenny on advertising. So the only advertisement possible was what could be casually procured by small sums of money, which were given me from time to time by friends for that purpose. Still Thomas was always there as a stand-by. He had from the beginning promised substantial financial support, if necessary; and did in fact later on advance certain loans to the Company to cover quarterly deficits. On his decease and that of my wife, the Company was slightly reorganized, and £100 new capital was raised. Our trading loss as at the date of the last balance-sheet (Mar. 1925) has amounted to £170 17s. 6d. and the loans to meet it to £183.

Such are the plain facts of this somewhat quixotic undertaking. Experienced men of business, engaged in similar work, have refused to believe it possible for a quarterly of the size and status of THE QUEST to have been maintained on so ridiculous a capital, and that too during the paralyzing years of the War. The whole adventure indeed may well be said to constitute a veritably 'unique' romance of periodical publication.

#### THE ACQUIRING A HOME FOR THE SOCIETY.

IN 1919, when the Armistice came, though personally I did not approve, on the ground that we could not afford it, my colleagues courageously determined to take two large Studios, one for a Lecture Room and the other for a Library and Reading Room, at 27, Clareville Grove, S.W.7, so that we might have at last a home of our own. This meant a new financial responsibility of at least £150 per annum. This extra expense was met, first, by means of a three-years' Guarantee Fund, and then by donations. The seven years' lease of the Studios will come to an end on June 24, 1926; but, fortunately, there is every expectation of our being able to renew the lease on very similar terms. On Feb. 4 of this year the Society determined in view of this situation on a drastic change. It was resolved that the system of donations (by which practically the few pay for the many) had better be done away with. To make this possible, it was proposed and carried, on the motion of myself, that the old relationship of the Society to the Review, should be no longer continued.

The social side of the Society has grown gradually into a sphere of much usefulness. Owing to the possession of a home of our own, we have developed numerous new activities, and have collected a very decent library, now numbering upwards of 4,000 items. This more personal social side of our joint undertaking is evidently the most necessary first to set on a sound financial basis; and so it has now been made the first call on our subscription-income. It has been accordingly decided that the hitherto obligatory subscription of members to THE QUEST, and the yearly small subsidy, be discontinued. (For non-resident members, however, no change will be made.) In lieu of this non-receipt of THE QUEST by resident members, the Editor's offer of his three paid yearly lecture-courses being made free to all members has been accepted,—a small honorarium being guaranteed by the Society to recoup part of the loss to the lecturer (the yearly fees for these lectures amounting to £3 for those who attend regularly).

In connection with this brief history of the Rooms, it must be recalled that at the beginning a considerable sum of money was given by one of the members, who modestly desires to remain anonymous, for decorating very artistically the Studios, and putting them into

thoroughly sound repair and equipping them in every way. The debt of gratitude due from the Society for this most generous gift should never be forgotten.

#### PROSPECT.

#### THE NEW SERIES OF 'THE QUEST.'

ON the question of advertisement, to which reference has been made above, I was always in friendly disagreement with my old colleague Thomas. And by advertisement I do not mean any wild placarding or vulgar booming of goods, but some sober form of making our existence known. THE QUEST has now a deservedly high and well-established reputation both here and on the Continent. But it is a *success d'estime*; for its subscription-list is small and sales do not balance expenses. I am myself, however, confident that with a little judicious advertising the at present small but steady quarterly deficit could be more than wiped out. By judicious advertising I mean, for instance, some such scheme as supplying clubs, libraries and reading-rooms (especially those at the universities and educational centres) and also ocean-going liners with gratis copies,—say, for one or two years, when their librarians might be asked to subscribe, if they find the Review of interest to their readers.

I am emboldened so to think by the expert opinion of a well-known organizer and publicist, a man well-acquainted with the thought and needs of the day. On examining carefully the last January number of THE QUEST, he said: "You have the goods: what you want is the means of distribution. A large intelligent public is hungering for what you can supply: they want only to be told of THE QUEST'S existence."

#### RAISING OF CAPITAL FOR THE NEW VENTURE.

To finance this sober advertising, and also to be in a position to pay for at least occasional articles from scholars and writers, who belong to that class of society which is being relentlessly crushed and starved out of existence, it is proposed to put the New Series of THE QUEST, beginning with the next October number, at last on a business-like footing. To do this, arrangements are being made to issue privately 1,000 £1 Non-cumulative 5 per cent. Preference Shares of The Quest Publishing Company, Limited. With the help of this new capital the financial position of THE QUEST should certainly in a year or two be securely stabilized. Nor should the money be so difficult to raise among one's well-wishers; for I have good reason to believe that, apart from known old friends, THE QUEST has many others, whom I do not know personally, but who will perhaps be prepared to help, once they know the financial difficulties which have had to be contended with all these years. *Anyone wishing to support the new venture should communicate with me personally.*

#### 'THE QUEST' REPRINT SERIES.

IN the back numbers of the seventeen volumes of THE QUEST there are hidden away many valuable articles and some of prime distinction and importance. It is therefore proposed to inaugurate 'The Quest Reprint Series' as part of the business of The Quest Publishing Co. These articles will be reproduced photographically, bound in THE QUEST cover and sold at a cheap rate,— say 1/- for an article, and so on if there are two or more on the same subject.

## THE NEW 'QUEST.'

THE new QUEST will contain a somewhat smaller number of pages, so that it may be sold at 2/6 a number with an annual subscription of 10/-, post free. The quality of the contents will of course not be lowered. But every effort will be made to induce learned and distinguished contributors to make what they have to say accessible to intelligent laymen and laywomen, who have had no previous special training. The main papers will be shorter than heretofore,—say 4,000 words as the limit, save in very exceptional cases. A summary of the chief points of the substantive articles will be added for the benefit, not only of the general reader, but also of reviewers, who are generally hopelessly at sea with no little of QUEST-matter. The balance of subscriptions to the Old Series will of course be credited towards the New.

## AN INTERVAL BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW SERIES.

To mark clearly the distinction and break between the Old and New Series, the July number will, as already indicated, be dropped. And this will be done, not only for the above reason, but also because the Editor would like to enjoy for once in his life three months' entire freedom from editing,—a privilege he has not been able to compass since 1889. The Index of the three Nos. of Vol. XVII.is, therefore, added to the April issue, and the volume will be accordingly shortened by a quarter of the usual length.

## CONTRIBUTORS, REVIEWS AND EXCHANGES.

I WOULD, however, beg my many contributors not to regard this dropping of a number as making any real break in the gathering of material. MSS. will be considered as usual, and if accepted, they will be allocated to some future issue of the New Series.

The most serious shortage will be in respect to Reviews and Notices, which will have to be dropped for a quarter. This, I am afraid, cannot be helped. Indeed, as regards books for review, I would much prefer having a standing arrangement with publishers, not to send me review-copies promiscuously, but to wait till I ask for them. A number of books that come in are unsuitable for notice in so distinctive a publication as THE QUEST.

As to our numerous Exchanges, I would beg publishers kindly not to break the sequence because of the non-publication of the July number. These Exchanges are all put on the tables of the Quest Society's Library for the use of readers, and it would be a great loss and pity if the sets were broken.

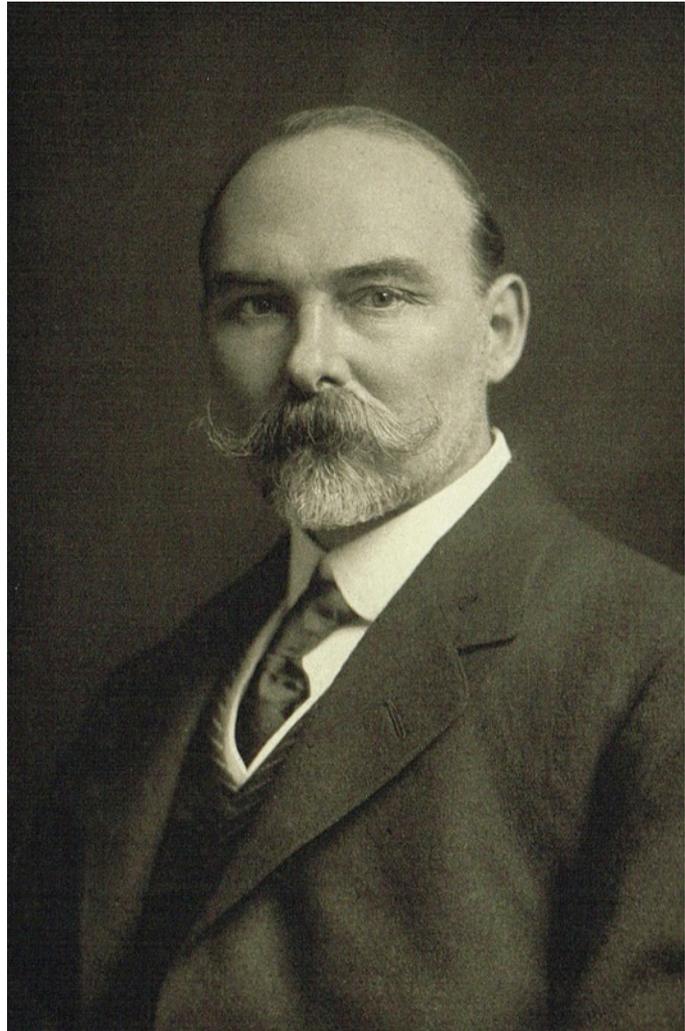
## PORTRAIT.

IT is only after very great hesitation that I have finally decided to add a photographic reproduction of my bodily appearance to this last number of the Old Series, which is of a somewhat memorial nature. I have never done such a thing before in my life, and have indeed hardly ever given away a photograph privately. But it has been represented that distant readers may be curious to see what the Editor of this Review looks like, and that contributors would like to know more of the impersonal functionary who accepts or rejects or revises the work of so frequently better men than himself. Of the numerous photographs for which firms of photographers in the past have worried me to sit, I select the best,—or, let us say, the most flattering,—taken some ten years ago.

## THE PROGRAMME AND POLICY OF 'THE QUEST.'

THE programme of THE QUEST is set forth with sufficient brevity and clarity on the inside cover of every issue. The policy of THE QUEST, as far as the Editor is concerned, is very simple. It is to secure the most competent expositions of the innumerable themes that fall within the wide compass of its programme, which is throughout distinctive, and in all its aspects tends towards the clarification of the only genuinely practical object of a life lived in moral and spiritual wakefulness and awareness.

THE QUEST has no motto; but The Quest Society at its birth chose the great saying: "Seek and ye shall find." If the Review would express tersely the spirit which animates its best efforts, no better phrase perhaps could be found to indicate this than "*Esse, non Habere*"—"To Be, not to Have," or "Possess." It is the ideal of the life of mystical heroism or spiritual realization. It was the motto of that great astronomical and philosophical genius, the Dane Tycho Brahe. It means in expansion: "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven"—the Divine Rulership within; with the promise that then "all things shall be added to you." It is fundamentally a religious and spiritual exhortation, entailing a life of service. It is the very antipodes, poles asunder from all 'magical' and 'occult' pretensions, which ever seek the 'will to power,' and are always essentially anti-social. The Divine Authority behind the two greatest spiritual teachers of the East and the West respectively,—the Buddha and the Christ,—passed judgment once for all on this old bad



way, which for so long tyrannized over our ignorant and long-suffering humanity. THE QUEST will deal with the history and criticism of such 'occult' subjects, but never with their advocacy. It takes its stand unhesitatingly on the side of moral and spiritual values.

G. R. S. MEAD.

## THE QUEST REPRINT SERIES.

### EDITORIAL NOTE.

‘The Quest Reprint Series’ is designed to rescue articles of exceptional interest from the oblivion of the back-numbers of the Review.

The numbers of the Series will contain either single papers or two or more by the same writer, or groups of studies treating a common subject.

The reprints will appear at no fixed date, and the price will vary according to the number of pages. The rapidity of publication will depend of course on sales.

Though out of the normal course in the early date of its republication, it is thought opportune to inaugurate the Series with the reprint of the leading article of the last number (April, 1926) of the Old Series of ‘The Quest.’

‘The Quest—Old and New: A Retrospect and Prospect’ gives a brief history of the past and casts a glance at the probable future of the Quarterly.

This historical past, it is hoped, will not be without interest for the general reader, giving as it does the story of an exceptional undertaking, devoted to the highest aims, and being at the same time somewhat of a unique adventure in periodical publication.

Chelsea

April, 1926.



## Notes by the way

# A CHRISTIAN PARAPSYCHOLOGIST PASSES

Unfortunately there is no one like Michael Perry,<sup>7</sup> who passed away on 22 January 2015. No one in a senior church position who is so au fait with the main parapsychology journals. Who could bring such theological expertise to the pastoral work of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies,<sup>8</sup> of which he was a former president. Who each quarter for thirty years edited *The Christian Parapsychologist* recruiting archbishops, parapsychology academics and mystics to its pages.

Perhaps he did more than anyone to defuse the historic tensions between the Churches and Spiritualism. I am not sure he ever sat with a medium, but he always gave a fair and warm hearing to psychic experiences and to psychic people of whom there have always been many at all levels in CFPSS. We will never know the full extent to which he used his insider position within the church hierarchy to add knowledge to faith. I recall an example, when efforts were being made to get the Church of England to release its secret Report on Spiritualism. He worked out an arrangement with the Archbishop's Chaplain, designed to open the relevant archive. It worked. Or the problem when SPCK was publishing under a sub-imprint a series of books by a shady guru; he had a chat with the relevant Northern bishop on the train for Synod.

Last September, I attended in London the annual general meeting of CFPSS. A friendly, godly and diligent group, whose chair has a special interest in Dr Robert Crookall's work. It was good to meet in leadership there more than one Psypioneer contributor. It was revealed that for the first time the Fellowship was (later in 2015) to have a woman president. She is a diocesan adviser on exorcism, with an expert knowledge of medieval mysticism. The highs and the lows of the inner world! We may pray that continued renewal lies ahead for CFPSS.

LESLIE PRICE

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<sup>7</sup> For Michael Perry search our webpage: [http://www.woodlandway.org/Psypioneer\\_Journal.htm](http://www.woodlandway.org/Psypioneer_Journal.htm)

<sup>8</sup> The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies (CFPSS): <http://www.churchesfellowship.co.uk/>

## 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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Paul J. Gaunt

