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Introductory Note by LP: It is not usual for a former SPR president to be accepted by another SPR president as fraudulent. But this happened recently when Dr Donald West published his entry about Samuel Soal in the new online SPR encyclopedia.¹

Although the charge related to ESP experiments, it does cast doubt over Soal's work with mediums, including his supposed case of a living communicator, Gordon Davis. The reputation of the medium Blanche Cooper, a friend of Mrs Leonard incidentally, suffered because of Soal's claims.

There are more details of his life and of his work with mediums in the long obituary written by Mrs Goldney for *Parapsychology Review*, which is reproduced below by permission of Lisette Coly, president of the Parapsychology Foundation.²

S. G. SOAL – A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

By K. M. Goldney

On February 21, 1975, Dr. S. G. Soal died at his home in North Wales, aged 85. Dr. Soal was President of the Society for Psychological Research, London, for the two years 1950-1951 and over the preceding years he had become Britain's leading psychical researcher.

I first met Mr. Soal (as he then was) in the early 1930's, when we were both taking part in investigations at Harry Price's private laboratory in London.

The subject of the investigation was a Czech known as "Marion" (his real name was Josef Kraus), who seemed to show telepathic powers. The report on these experiments was published by Soal in a Bulletin entitled *Preliminary Studies of a Vaudeville Telepathist*. In carrying out these experiments Soal had displayed his gift for devising varying experimental procedures to establish whether or not telepathy or some other hypothesis accounted for Marion's successes. I was much impressed with Soal's ingenuity, patience and absorbed interest in the subject. So when, some years later, he

asked me to partner him in what became his best known experimental investigation, that of the sensitive Basil Shackleton, I was more than pleased to accept his invitation.



¹ Samuel Soal: <http://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/samuel-soal>

² Taken from: *Parapsychology Review* Volume 6, No 4. August 1975 pages 21-24

There was a very interesting prelude to these experiments with Shackleton.

After J. B. Rhine, in his laboratory at Duke University, had published the results of his successful telepathy experiments with cards, Soal decided to carry out similar experiments to see whether he could repeat Rhine's success. To this end he tested 160 people and recorded 128,350 card guesses over a period of five years, only to report that "There seemed indeed little evidence of a direct kind that the persons tested, whether considered as individuals or in the mass, possessed any faculty for either clairvoyance or telepathy." As a result Soal became very skeptical regarding the validity of such experimental results elsewhere. But this skepticism "received a shock," as Soal described the sequel. Another leading SPR investigator, Whately Carington, had been conducting experiments that consisted of showing different drawings on each day of the week in his rooms in Cambridge and asking his group of absent percipients to send back to him their day by day telepathic impressions of what those drawings had been over the preceding week. Carington noticed that not only did some of these percipients show signs of successful telepathic perception of the drawing on the day of the week on which it had been displayed, but they were also recording it (more often than chance allowed for) a day later than it had been shown (by which time another drawing altogether was being displayed), and, still more curiously, on the day before it was to be displayed. Carington wrote to Soal in London telling him what he had observed and asking Soal to look through his own voluminous 128,000 guesses to see whether this postcognitive and precognitive effect had been present, although Soal, failing to find significant *direct* guesses on the card being displayed "now," had counted the whole five years' experiments a failure. Soal was reluctant to spend time looking for what seemed to him so improbable, for precognitive guessing had not been looked for in those early days of guessing experiments in England. Luckily Carington persisted in his request and Soal finally complied and found two subjects who seemed to guess precognitively and postcognitively (with time displacement)—Basil Shackleton and Mrs. Gloria Stewart. He proceeded to carry out over two years' experiments with Shackleton (1941-1943) and another four and a half years' experiments thereafter with Gloria Stewart. The history of these experiments with persistent significant scoring in both cases is reported in detail in the book by Soal and Bateman (a fellow-worker of Soal's at London University) entitled *Modern Experiments in Telepathy* (1954).

Whately Carington wrote as follows in his book *Telepathy* (1945):

Mr. Soal is a most remarkable man, for whose work I have the highest possible admiration. Possessed of a more than Jobian patience, and a conscientious thoroughness which I can only describe as almost pathological, he worked in various branches of the subject for many years with nothing but a succession of null results to show for it. So markedly was this the case, and so sceptical had Mr. Soal become, that when at last in 1939 he announced a highly significant positive result, we all felt, as Professor Broad put it at the time, "Is Soal also among the prophets?". . . . Later, hoping to repeat Rhine's results in England, he tested 160 persons collecting 128,350 Zener card guesses single-handed, and using the most elaborate precautions against every possible source of error; but all he got out of this was one poor little result, of fifty to one anti-chance odds, showing a tendency to score below chance on ostensible "pure clairvoyance," a reward hardly commensurate with the labour involved.

None the less, paradoxical as it may appear, if I had to choose one single investigation on which to pin my whole faith in the reality of paranormal phenomena, or with which to convince a hardened sceptic (if this be not a contradiction in terms), I should unhesitatingly choose this series of experiments, which is the most cast-iron piece of work I know, as well as having yielded the most remarkable results.

The Shackleton experiments took place in London during the war years 1941-1943. Soal's college had been evacuated from London to Cambridge and he had to come up by train, at the end of a day's work, for each experiment. I was working full-time in London at war-work and during this period we were experiencing heavy bombing raids from German planes, which made it difficult to get together the minimum of four persons we needed for each experiment and five people, at times six, for the occasions on which we had one or other of our twenty-one independent observers present. Shackleton was in poor health (he had just been invalided out of the army) and in a tense state with personal worries; readers can therefore appreciate that it seems to me now, looking back, almost a miracle that, in such conditions, Soal was able to conduct his most famous series of experiments with such remarkable results. As we reported:

Statistically the [precognitive] results on the whole series [were] highly significant. Including every single experiment . . . at which an Agent was present, we have a total of 11,378 [precognitive] trials. This total includes tests in both "telepathy" and "clairvoyance" and tests at all rates of calling and with all Agents; i.e., we include those conditions which consistently led to negative results as well as conditions which conducted to success.

The number of [precognitive] successes on this grand total is 2,890 compared with an expectation of 2,308.17 by Stevens' method. We thus have an excess of [precognitive] hits amounting to 581.83 and equivalent to 13.6 Standard Deviations, with odds of more than 10^{35} to 1 against chance.

From that time onward, until his death, Soal and I were in correspondence, year after year, and I have a dozen or more large files filled with the letters we have exchanged and with material connected with the Shackleton experiments, our joint report on which was entitled *Experiments in Precognitive Telepathy* (SPR *Proceedings*, vol. 47, pp. 22-150).

A few years ago, at my request, Soal sent me some biographical notes about his life and it is from these notes that I give, for those interested, the following details. Soal was born on April 29, 1889, at Kirby Moorside, a small town on the edge of the North Yorkshire moors. In 1895 his parents and his Uncle George moved to Essex where they bought a small property consisting of a house with two or three fields, near the town of Rochford, about forty miles from London. He attended Rochford School from 1895 to 1902, but then had an illness which kept him at home for a year. As a result he almost missed the chance of competing for a minor county scholarship to a secondary school, for he had just passed his 13th birthday and the regulations made him too old by a few days to send in an entry. However, his headmaster saw the educational authorities concerned and pleaded with them to allow Soal to take the examination and they agreed. There were 564 candidates from schools all over Essex and only ten scholarships. Soal was fourth on the list and, with a scholarship achieved, then attended the "Technical School" (as it was then called) at nearby Southend-on-Sea. He was top of the 120 boys and girls at the end of his first year there and was told that he could therefore skip the second year's course and proceed at once to the third year course. He has since regretted this, for he was well aware, he says, that he owed his success to an excellent memory rather than to real ability in such subjects as chemistry, French, English literature, etc. His chemistry master used to say, "Except for Harold Page, Soal is my best student—*on paper!*" (his fellow-student Harold Page became a most distinguished agricultural chemist). In 1905 Soal matriculated at London University and became a part-time student-teacher at Rochford School, while still working at Southend Technical College for his intermediate science examinations as an external student of London University. He passed this examination in 1906, taking pure and applied mathematics, physics and chemistry. Throughout 1906-07 he still worked half-time teaching small boys (a task he hated) at

Rochford School, but all his energies were directed towards getting a scholarship at one of the Schools of London University. The two subjects he offered were chemistry and pure mathematics, his interest steadily growing in the latter. He knew that in chemistry there would be no practical examination (at which he would not shine!) so felt safe in taking this subject. Afterwards he heard from one of the examiners that he had been awarded full marks in chemistry, with the comment from the examiner that he could not understand why Soal had not become a chemist. (He could have enlightened him, but did not, said Soal!)

Soal had chosen East London College (now Queen Mary College) to study for his degree. Having been awarded the desired scholarship, he started work there in October, 1907, traveling up from Rochford five days a week. He joined a small honors class of six young men. In 1910 he was one of the only two in the whole university to obtain first class honors in mathematics. He spent the year 1910-1911 at the Institute of Education and in November, 1911, was given the junior post in the Mathematical Department of his own college.

After the outbreak of war, in the autumn of 1915, he joined the Siege Artillery, where he felt elementary mathematics would be of use and went to France with a 9.2 howitzer battery of four guns in August, 1916. Here he found himself in the middle of the Battle of the Somme and was fully occupied calculating ranges and corrections for the guns. On the morning after the mines went up on Messines Ridge in the summer of 1917, he went up to the old front line which was being shelled by the Germans. Here he was wounded in the head and sent down the line to Rouen and ultimately back to England. When fully recovered he was posted to the Isle of Wight to instruct cadets in the mathematics of gunnery, a task which he enjoyed immensely, especially as nobody else in the camp knew anything about it!

When the war ended, Soal was appointed chief instructor in mathematics at the Army School of Education, Oxford. There were large numbers of young officers who were getting restive having nothing much to do. So it was decided to “educate” them! Soal realized it was also necessary to amuse them at the same time. So he took a few practical problems of everyday life and showed the men how to apply simple trigonometry or simple statistical methods to their solution. This idea was a great success. Just before Christmas 1918, however, he received an urgent letter from Queen Mary College saying they were extremely short of staff and could he return as soon as possible. Soal showed this letter to the head of the army school who said, “We are extremely pleased at the way you have been doing this job but it is only right that you should go back to your university. I will arrange for you to be demobilized at once.” So Soal returned to Q.M.C. in January, 1919, and found to his amusement that on two mornings a week he had to arrive at the college at 8 A.M. in order to teach mechanics to a class of young officers awaiting demobilization.

After a few years he was made a senior lecturer and was on the staff of Queen Mary College until his retirement in 1958—a total period of 47 years, so that he was actually associated with this college, either as student or teacher, for 51 years. This included the war years during which he was still a member of the staff though away on active service.

We come now to Soal’s early work with mediums. When he was wounded at the front, sent back to England and posted to the Isle of Wight, Sir Oliver Lodge had recently published his famous book “Raymond,” following the death of his son Raymond in the war and Lodge’s belief that Raymond survived death and had demonstrated this by veridical communications through mediums to members of his family. A copy of this book was given to Soal as a present by the cadets he was training and led to his first becoming interested in psychical research. Soal comments, “I found it difficult to understand how [the medium] Mrs. Leonard, in view of the precautions taken, could know in any normal way that the Lodge family possessed a peacock called Mr. Jackson and similar out of the way facts.” Some

weeks after reading the book, Soal received a telegram saying that his youngest brother, Frank Soal, had been killed on the war front near the Somme. He decided that as soon as he was out of the army he, too, would contact Mrs. Leonard and other mediums in the hope of receiving similar communications from his brother. He later joined a well-known spiritualist society in London, the London Spiritualist Alliance (now called The College of Psychic Studies), attended their meetings for "platform clairvoyance" and after some weeks himself received a "communication" from the medium Mrs. Annie Brittain which impressed him. He thereafter had some anonymous sittings with her and got interesting "communications" from his Uncle George, delivered in the broad Yorkshire dialect which this uncle spoke during his lifetime. This uncle was, of course, unknown to Mrs. Brittain. He also had two sittings with Mrs. Leonard in 1922 and 1924, respectively, but neither was of any great interest.

Soal also developed automatic writing himself and the best-known reports resulting from his automatism are the "Oscar Wilde Scripts" produced in conjunction with the medium Hester Travers Smith (Hester Dowden), reviewed by Mrs. Sidgwick in the *SPR Proceedings* (vol. 34, pp. 186-196). Another interesting paper in the *SPR Proceedings* (Vol. 38) is entitled "Some Automatic Scripts Purporting to be Inspired, by Margaret Veley, Poet and Novelist, 1845-1887." Mr. V., the automatist of these scripts, is Mr. Soal, as this was the pseudonym he used for his automatic writings. At that time he feared his college authorities might look askance at such activities!

The most interesting material of this period came through a so-called "direct-voice" medium, Mrs. Blanche Cooper, on the staff of The British College of Psychic Science (since disbanded). Soal's report on these 1921-1922 sittings with Mrs. Cooper was published in the *SPR Proceedings*, vol. 35, pp. 471-594. It is, I think, one of the most curious and interesting records in existence. He obtained, in the first place, much veridical information purporting to come from his deceased brother, Frank Soal; then several other "communicators" followed including one that Soal considered to be a fictitious communicator, giving back to Soal details which Soal was making up in his own mind. But the "communicator" of outstanding interest was Gordon Davis, a former schoolmate of Soal's. He suddenly appeared with the greeting, "Well, Soal, I never expected to speak to you in this fashion. . . . The dead to the living. Queer world, what?" He spoke in a voice particularly like his own pedantic way of speaking and gave many accurate reminiscences of their school days together. But he was unable to give the address of his wife, merely indicating that it had two E's and that he was anxious to send news to her. At the next sitting much detail was given by Gordon Davis via "Nada," Mrs. Cooper's control, about the house in the address with two E's, its surroundings, the pictures in the house and other contents of it. Thereafter he was spoken of by Nada only once more, when she said he was "too far away now" to come again.

Soal had heard a rumor some time before that Gordon Davis had been killed in the war, but lacking an address he was of course unable to contact Mrs. Davis. The typescripts of all that Gordon Davis had said were therefore merely filed away, though shown to another brother of Soal's, C. W. Soal, who adds his testimony to this effect in the report.

Some three years later Soal heard indirectly that Gordon Davis was alive and practicing as an estate agent in Southend-on-Sea, where he had been living for about two years on Eastern Esplanade (note the two E's given by him in his "communication"). Soal visited him at this address, typescripts of the sittings in his hand. Mr. Davis told him that he had never been to a medium in his life; indeed, he said he had always tried to "steer clear" of such things. He always kept a most meticulous diary of his daily doings, times of interviews of clients, etc., and a check with this diary showed that he had never even seen the house in Eastern Esplanade at the time the two E's were first mentioned and was at that date living in London. He inspected the house *for the first time* with a client two days afterwards, but did not himself

move into the house until eleven months later. The pictures he had described as being in the house were practically all obtained after the dates of his “communications”; two of them were obtained in 1924, two and a half years after the description of them had been given at his first appearance in 1922.

Mr. Davis testified as follows: “This matter is extremely surprising to me, as I have never dabbled in anything to do with psychic science. . . .” He further testified that, “Previous to the evening of Mr. Soal’s [visit], he had never been in my house. He had never met my wife and child until the same evening. No letters have ever been exchanged between Mr. Soal and myself. The description of the house and its interior would not apply to any house in which I have ever lived except the house in Eastern Esplanade, but this house fits the description admirably.” Mr. Salter, the SPR Honorary Secretary, also visited Mr. Davis, studied his diaries and checked for himself the details given in the “communications” to Soal at his sittings with Mrs. Blanche Cooper. Readers will surely agree with me that this is an extraordinary and unique record, and those who have not read Soal’s report in the *SPR Proceedings*, vol. 35, should do so, as I have only been able in this short description to touch on the many interesting details.

Soal soon gave up his interest in mediumistic work and dropped his own automatic writing. He joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1922, shortly after the Blanche Cooper sittings and thereafter devoted himself entirely to experimental parapsychology with statistical evaluation. In 1945 he was awarded the D.Sc. by London University for his work in parapsychology—the first time, Soal thinks, that this distinction was awarded in Britain for this subject.

It is sad that I should have to end by saying that in recent months Soal’s integrity has been called in question in a paper by Dr. C. Scott and Dr. P. Haskell in the current *S.P.R. Proceeding*: (vol. 56, October, 1974), alleging fraud on Soal’s part during the Shackleton experiments. Although they have argued to this effect in respect of only 3 out of the 40 sittings, they consider (rightly) that it would have been quite pointless for Soal to cheat in those three sittings alone, since in all the rest there would remain an enormously high degree of significance. They therefore conclude that Soal must have also cheated in the other sittings by various undetected methods. Presumably he would then have also had to cheat in the following years of experiments with Gloria Stewart, since his Shackleton and Gloria Stewart experiments belong together. Eight papers in Soal’s defense follow the Scott/Haskell attack, including those by myself, Dr. J. G. Pratt, Professor Ian Stevenson, Dr. John Beloff (SPR President) and Professor Mundle (previous SPR President). It is the more unfortunate that this attack on Soal came when both physically and mentally his condition did not admit of a reply by himself—indeed, he probably was not aware of it, since his wife asked that the reports in question and any correspondence on them should not be sent to him. Dr. Scott has been a friend of mine for many years and I am sure there is no trace of malice or carelessness in his attack. I think I am right in saying his attitude is one of almost complete skepticism on all aspects of parapsychology. But I would agree that if he strongly believes there has been fraud in Soal’s experiments, then it is his duty to the subject to say so.

It must be admitted that Soal has always been psychologically a strange and “difficult” character. He was normally silent and withdrawn (his letters brought me far nearer to him than did his company). Again, he stood almost alone in repeatedly obtaining such high scoring subjects and such curious results as those described above in the Blanche Cooper sitting; and some might question such extraordinary and repeated “luck” as a satisfactory explanation. But if he *was* cheating, as Scott and Haskell maintain, he was asking to be exposed, for no previous experimenter in Britain had gone to such lengths as Soal did in inviting so many observers to his experiments and in seeking partners to share the

responsibility of devising the best experimental conditions. But one must also remember that all Soal's experiments ended as long as twenty years ago and that improved experimental conditions have become possible since then. I find it difficult to believe that Scott and Haskell could hold their views had they worked at his side and for so long as I did. Soal "lived" psychical research throughout most of his waking hours. I was fortunate to have worked with someone so single-minded and, I cannot but feel, so passionately and sincerely devoted to his subject.

After Soal's retirement, he and his wife, Rita, settled in North Wales and he took up with enthusiasm the hobby of botany. He had always been a keen walker and climber of his beloved Welsh mountains during holiday periods and could still walk many miles at a stretch collecting botanical specimens almost up to the age of 80. But in the last few years of his life his health deteriorated, he suffered from a strained heart, and his doctor ordered complete rest. In the last year he could do little for himself and was devotedly nursed by his wife. Rita has written to me two or three times since his death and told me that after a normal evening supper he went to bed and the following morning she went into his room to offer him a cup of tea and found him lying across the top of his bed, dead from a fatal heart attack.

Footnote: Lis Warwood adds:

" I can confirm that the birth and death dates are correct for Samuel George Soal. He was the son of Samuel Philip Soal (a watchmaker & repairer) and his wife Ellen Yoward (they had married in North Yorkshire in 1887). In 1891 they and young Samuel G were living in Kirkby Moorside in the home of George Yoward 56 a Baker & Confectioner. This was the 'uncle' that with Samuel G's parents moved to a property called 'The Apiary' in Stambridge, Rochford, Essex, where S. G's father became for a time at least, a Poultry and Bee Farmer, but by 1911, now living at 'Old Rectory,' Little Stambridge, Rochford, Essex, Samuel Philip Soal is again working as a watchmaker. S. G. was still living at home, or at least was for part of the time, although K. M. Goldney's coverage would suggest otherwise by 1911. S. G. enlisted in 1915, and did suffer a gunshot wound to his head. His brother Frank (Francis) was killed September 5, 1918. S. G. Soal married Beatrice Annie Potter in Battersea in 1942. She was significantly younger than him, and died aged 92 in August 1996. It is unclear why K. M. Goldney would call her "Rita" in the piece."



MY APPROACH TO PSYCHICAL RESEARCH



Introductory Note by LP: In 1939, Ernest Oaten secured a coup for Spiritualism. He secured permission to publish in the UK an assessment of survival evidence by a senior psychical researcher, Hereward Carrington. In this, the author gave a brief account of his own evolution.

Below is taken from: *Psychic Science and Survival: An Essay in Psychical Research* by Hereward Carrington – Two Worlds Publishing Company Ltd, Manchester 1939 pages 27-33:

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Inasmuch as it has so often been contended, by those ignorant of the facts, that the majority of psychical researchers are emotionally interested in proving survival—usually for some personal motive and that they possess a strong “will to believe” the spiritualistic theory, a brief account should perhaps be given of the manner of my own entry into this peculiar field of activity, and my subsequent reactions and attitude toward it—even if by so

doing a certain amount of autobiographical material must inevitably be introduced. In view of the circumstances, however, I trust that this will be excused, inasmuch as it is rendered inevitable by the very nature of the case, and the necessity of furnishing the psychological data essential for estimating my own mental background, qualifications, motives and reactions. With this necessary apology, therefore, I proceed to give these data as briefly as possible.

All my life, as long as I can remember, I have been interested in conjuring and magic. My father had likewise been interested for some years before my birth, and had spent ten years in India. When I was a boy he gave me a quantity of magical apparatus, together with several books dealing with the subject. One or two of these dealt with fraudulent spiritualistic tricks, so that I might say that I have really been indirectly in touch with the subject as long as I can remember. However, at the age of eighteen, I became seriously interested, as the result of reading **The Revelations of a Spirit Medium**, Robinson’s **Spirit Slate Writing**, and other books of a like nature. The result was that I delved deeply into the fraudulent aspect of the subject, and for many months thought that anyone who believed in this “stuff” simply did not

know how the tricks were done, and that I was particularly clever and did. Many magicians today hold the same view!

Then, I happened to pick up a book by Miss X.³—**Essays in Psychological Research**. Herein were narrated a number of striking instances which had occurred, as personal experiences of the author. Nevertheless they were told in a calm, objective tone, by one who did not in any way stress the spiritualistic viewpoint, but on the contrary seemed rather to avoid it. At all events, the book made a deep impression upon me at the time. I thought to myself, “If anyone seemingly as sane and sensible as this can vouch for the genuineness of psychic phenomena, and state that she herself has experienced them, there may be something in the subject after all. I shall join the Society for Psychological Research, read, experiment and see!”

I accordingly joined that Society when I was nineteen, plunged into the **Proceedings and Journals**, and metaphorically did not remove my nose from them for six months. I read every available book upon the subject I could lay my hands on— **pro** and **con**—attended séances, experimented with amateur mediums; and in short began that intensive investigation of the subject which has continued without intermission ever since—a period of more than thirty-nine years.

Looking back on this period of my life, I cannot but be struck by its apparent incongruities, as well as by the promiscuous collection of books read by me at the time—some of them, one might think, of no applicable value, but every one of them (I believe) serving a useful purpose in the foundation of the edifice of psychic knowledge which I was attempting to build. Here was I, living for weeks at a time on five and ten cents a day, in order that I might have free time to spend all day and all night in the library,⁴ reading such books as **Chaldean Magic, Isis Unveiled, The Gypsies, Rope Ties and Knots, Swedenborg’s Arcana, Cælestia, The History of Imposture and Credulity, Spirit Teachings, Juggling Secrets, How to Take Good Photographs, The Dynamics of Magnetism, Psychotherapy, How to Train Animals, Life and Death**, and a thousand-and-one seemingly unrelated topics—every one of which, however, proved of interest and value, as subsequent history showed.

My intensive reading of that period forced me to several tentative conclusions. These were: (a) The earnestness, sincerity, candor and caution of the S.P.R. workers; (b) The importance of the investigation, from any standpoint whatsoever; (c) the virtual certitude of telepathy, and one or two related phenomena, and (d) the very unsettled and unconvincing state of spiritualistic phenomena, taken as a whole.

My somewhat negative reaction to Spiritualism and spiritistic manifestations was, I think, quite justified and quite natural, in view of my early training and my initiation into this subject. A number of the mediums I investigated during that time were palpably fraudulent, while the credulity of many of the devout followers disgusted me. Even an amateur training in science makes one critical, and the trend of science at that time was, as we know, strongly mechanistic.

Again, the character of one’s early religious training doubtless plays an important part—probably largely subconscious—in one’s viewpoint and degree of receptiveness toward the

³ Miss X was Ada Goodrich Freer. She may have been less objective than she appeared. See the discussion of her work in Trevor Hamilton’s *Immortal Longings* <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.6June09.pdf>; and F.W. H. Myers’ *Victorian Search for Life after Death*, 2009.

⁴ Minneapolis, Minn.—by strange fatality remarkably well stocked with psychic and occult books, at that time (1899).

idea of survival and the general doctrine of “immortality.” The majority of persons of the last generation probably had had a more or less orthodox training in traditional Christian dogma. They therefore tended to accept, as a matter of course, the general idea of the soul and its survival; and if, in later life, they felt compelled to give this up, it was at the cost of much inner suffering—necessitating emotional turmoil and inner wrenches of no mean order. Any objection such individuals might have to the doctrine of Spiritualism probably rested, for the most part, on Biblical utterances and religious bigotry.

In my own case, I am thankful to say, such inner turmoils had never been necessitated. Both my parents were (I believe) Agnostics, and at all events no dogmatic Christianity had ever been “forced down my throat,” during my early years. My father had spent some ten years in India (in the service of the British Admiralty), and both he and my mother were, I am inclined to think, more Buddhistic than anything else. At all events, they took the stand that, just because I happened to be born in a “Christian” country, I need not necessarily be a Christian when I grew up. I might become a Buddhist, or a Confucian, or a Mohammedan, or anything else for that matter. The result was that I grew up quite detached from any religion, seeing some good and much bad in all of them; more or less a rationalist at heart, with little confidence in the reality of any spiritual world. Moreover, perhaps on that account, I did not feel, and have never felt, that deep longing for personal survival which so many experience. To me it has always been merely a question of **evidence**, whether survival be a fact or not, and I personally regard it from what I believe to be an entirely detached and impersonal viewpoint—much as I should regard any problem in physics or chemistry.

It is merely a question of whether the facts **prove** survival or whether they do not. This being so, I have perhaps an advantage over certain psychic investigators, whose subconscious bent inclines them either in one direction or the other.

As a result of my investigations, however, I have become quite convinced that psychic phenomena are for the most part **real**—that is, they are genuinely supernormal in character—and that there is a superphysical world of some sort in which we are all immersed, and of which we constitute a part. And this conviction is, I believe, shared by all those who have investigated this subject at first hand, and for a considerable period of time.

Our critics are, for the most part, men who have read little or nothing upon the subject, and who have not attended a single séance with a reputable medium. In this subject, one must have infinite patience. It is useless to attend a trumpery séance or two, and conclude that the whole thing is not worthwhile. Personally, I sat with mediums producing “physical phenomena” for eight years before seeing what I considered to be the first genuine case. I cite this merely to show the amount of perseverance necessary; however, that first genuine case was worth all the years of waiting and fruitless experimenting—just as a chemist may work a life-time before discovering some correct formula. No one would contend, in his case, that the years of work had been “wasted,” or that he was a “fool” for devoting so much time to fruitless toil. I believe it is the same here; and that this field also yields scientific results of enormous importance, once they have been unearthed and discovered.

Many of our most eminent scientists have devoted a considerable part of their time to the investigation of these phenomena, and the long list of ex-presidents of the parent Society is an imposing one. Among these we may mention: Prof. Henry Sidgwick, Prof. Balfour Stewart, The Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, Prof. William James, Sir William Crookes, Sir William Barrett, Prof. Charles Richet, Mr. Andrew Lang, Prof. Henri Bergson, Prof. F. C. S. Schiller, Prof. Gilbert Murray, Dr. L. P. Jacks, Prof. William McDougall, Lord Rayleigh, M. Camille Flammarion, Prof. Hans Driesch, Dr. Walter F. Prince, Bishop Boyd Carpenter, Sir Oliver Lodge, and many others known for their work in this special field.

It is, I think, safe to say that all these men were quite convinced of the actuality of genuine psychic phenomena—though there are naturally quite differing opinions as to the ultimate **interpretations** of these phenomena. That, however, is a matter of secondary importance. Membership in the Society does not imply any particular attitude toward the facts, and widely differing opinions are often expressed concerning them. This is also true of our American Psychical Institute, the first one of its “Declaration of Principles” reading: “Membership in the A.P.I. shall not be held to indicate any particular belief in or interpretation of psychical phenomena.” It is greatly to be regretted that this spirit does not at present seem to pervade the American S.P.R., where facts and opinions contrary to the beliefs of its officers are sometimes debarred from publication in the documents of that Society.

The standard of evidence maintained by most Societies is, however, exceptionally high, and is invariably subjected to the fullest analysis and criticism—largely from members.



MERCY PHILLIMORE

Introductory Note by LP: Mercy Phillimore has been a great help to students of the pioneers, because as a typist she made many notes of séance and other events in the psychic field, some of which are preserved in the CPS archives. Her younger colleague Ruby Yeatman, who had also been librarian and principal, similarly took care of the CPS library, deliberately collecting for example, fugitive pamphlets. It was Ruby who welcomed me to the College staff in 1968 as a receptionist /clerk earning £750 pounds a year! I carried out the day-to-day of the library and archives; and minded the Reception desk on two evenings a week.

Below is taken from *Light* Autumn 1975 Vol. 95 No. 3 pages 135-138:

Obituary

On Tuesday, April 23rd⁵, there passed from this world's scene one of the most brilliant women workers in the field of Psychical Research and Spiritualism—Mercy Phillimore—at one time Librarian and subsequently Secretary of the London Spiritualist Alliance—now re-named the College of Psychic Studies.

She came to the L.S.A. (as it was popularly known) in 1913 at the request of the late Dawson Rogers, a well-known London journalist who, with the Rev. William Stainton Moses (M.A., Oxon), was one of the Founders of the Alliance. She came, she told me, as a joke intending to stay only six months. She remained thirty-nine years until she retired in 1952. During those years the L.S.A. expanded steadily and became recognised as the leading Spiritualist society, although at no time did the society regard Spiritualism as a religion but rather, in the words of F. W. H. Myers, “as the preamble to all religions.”

“M. P.,” as she was affectionately known, succeeded Mr. Henry Withall as Secretary, but only the older members amongst those who are left will remember the golden haired dynamic personality of the young “M.P.” Others will remember her as the very dignified Queen Victoria figure of the thirties and forties; indeed, many members openly called her “Queen Victoria.” The writer worked with her for nineteen years and knew her well, not only in her official capacity but socially when together we enjoyed the many gay functions to which we were invited.

Whilst moving with the times, “M.P.” steadfastly upheld the traditions of the Founders and under her aegis the L.S.A. was recognised as a reliable organisation to which the Authorities could turn with confidence for information on all matters connected with psychic phenomena. Her articles in *Light*, the journal of the L.S.A., were eagerly read by members and enquirers alike. They dealt with many aspects of Psychical Research and Spiritualism since her experience, as well as detailed knowledge of both physical and mental mediumship was unsurpassed. Furthermore, she had the gift of being able to express her views easily and lucidly. It was due to her foresight and acumen that *Light*, which had at one period been taken over by the publishers, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., became once more the property of the Alliance.

⁵ Lis Warwood notes: Nat. Probate Cal. Index of Wills and Administrations records Mercy Phillimore of Mount Alvernia, Bramshott Chase, Hindhead died 22 April 1975 – not April 23.

“M.P.’s” very deep understanding of the psychology of mediumship, coupled with natural wisdom, stood her in good stead in handling all types of mediumistic problems, and many a budding medium had cause to remember her with gratitude, whilst those fully trained and qualified benefited more than once from her wise advice.

The world famous medium, Eileen Garrett, was first introduced to Miss Phillimore by Mrs. F. R. Maude (whose husband was at one time a President of the College), and Mrs. Garrett attended her first Spiritualist meeting at the Alliance, becoming a member of the Society. Miss Phillimore introduced her to Huhnli, the magician, so that he might help her in the development of her psychic power. He gave her free development and training for a year. Mrs. Garrett had regular sittings at the L.S.A., but Huhnli was the true discoverer and developer of her mediumship before she finally went to Mr. Hewat McKenzie for further development and training.

The lecture room was always filled to capacity when Mercy Phillimore was the speaker and her prowess in argument and discussion was a source of delight and some amusement for she had a great sense of humour. Mrs. F. E. Leaning, at one time a member of the Council (and author of an outstanding paper on hypnagogic vision) told me that on one occasion when she was present listening to Miss Phillimore in discussion with noted scientists arguing on the Survival question, not only did she cap all their arguments but she succeeded in completely silencing them!

She was one of those attending the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Committee on Spiritualism. It was possibly largely due to her quiet but emphatic statements of facts, and her wise answers to questions (in accordance with the Terms of Reference), which resulted in a majority verdict in favour. In an article in *Light* of July 11th, 1940, Miss Phillimore comments on the Bishops’ Decision Against Publication of the Committee’s Report.

During the course of her work she met many well-known people, amongst whom were: A. E. Waite, W. B. Yeats, Mrs. Bernard Shaw, Stanley de Brath, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Lawrence Jones, Bart., Clifford Bax, Lord Charles Hope, Algernon Blackwood, Sir Cyril Atkinson, K.C., Sir Wemyss Grant Wilson, Paul Brunton and one for whom she had the greatest admiration and veneration, Sir Oliver Lodge, O.M.

Possessed of a fine intellect and great personal charm, which drew many people to her who became life-long friends, she nevertheless did not suffer fools gladly and had no patience with the muddleheaded and over-sentimental. She was an indefatigable worker and never spared herself to help those in need, or to promote the best interests of the Alliance in one way or another. One particular instance springs to mind when she, and the Hon. Treasurer, Captain Arthur Carnell, gave unstintingly of their free time—after a full day’s work—to organise the wonderful, unique bazaar held in the Caxton Hall. In addition to the many colourful stalls, competitions and usual attractions of such an affair, a room was set aside for exhibits associated with psychic work and psychic phenomena, many of these exhibits having been searched for and brought from abroad. The bazaar attracted large crowds of people and the months of hard work resulted in a great success realising the large sum, for those days, of £1,000.

It should also be added that she firmly held to the truth of Survival and the possibility, in certain conditions, of communication with the departed.

After her retirement as Secretary, Miss Phillimore was co-opted a member of the Council on which she served for a time.

“M.P.” was indeed a bright and brilliantly shining star in the psychic firmament. In her day she was without equal.

As one of her closest friends recently wrote me:—

“And all the trumpets shall sound for her on the Other Side.”

RUBY YEATMAN.



Introductory Note by LP: Between the world wars, psychical research flourished in Europe, but as the 1930s went on, the sky darkened. [Note the early reference to “non-Aryan” descent on p.194 Dr Gerda Walther survived the Nazi regime, and was active in post-war research.⁶ This article is also notable for its attention to higher education.

Below is taken from: American Society for Psychical Research Journal Vol. 28 March 1934 pages 61-66. Readers will note that some countries are not given their English names.

PROGRESS OF PSYCHIC RESEARCH IN EUROPE

By DR. GERDA WALTHER

It was a very great honour and pleasure to me when Dr. *Dietz* of Leyden University asked me to repeat my lecture on the development of Rudi Schneider’s mediumship and my experiences with him (which I had delivered (in German) to the Dutch S. P. R. in the Hague for his students at that university. He ceded an hour of his college time on physical phenomena to me for that purpose. The college is held in the great auditory of the botanical institute of Leyden, and Prof. *Baes Becking*, the director of that institute, kindly welcomed me. He told me in fluent English, that he was quite ready to accept psychical phenomena if they were really established, and that he had even given an alleged magnetopath an opportunity to show the influence of his “fluids” on the growth of plants. Unfortunately the result of these experiments was entirely negative, but he was quite ready to try again with the same or another—perhaps better gifted person. Although I spoke in German about 80-85 students attended my lecture, among whom I noticed several Japanese, and their questions afterwards showed me, how deeply they were interested, especially also in the theoretical explanation of psychical phenomena, not only in their reality and the methods of control by which they are established.

Now Dr. *Tenhaeff*, who has already been assistant of Prof. *Roels* at the psychological institute of Utrecht University for some years, has been appointed as second official lecturer on psychical research at the University of Utrecht, where he had already before delivered some lectures on psychics. (Dr. *Tenhaeff* is also well-known as lecturer on psychical research in the Dutch radio and Dutch People’s Universities.) On December 4th 1933 he delivered his inaugural lecture on “the apparition of ghosts.” (I will review this in detail in my *Continental Notes*.) So now *Holland* as the first country in Europe, nay, in the world, has already got two official readerships on psychical research!

Besides some other professors at Dutch Universities are more or less interested in psychical research, and—the same as in other countries—mention it in their lectures on other things connected with psychics (theology, psychology, psychotherapy etc.). I have already mentioned the benevolent attitude of Prof. *Baes Becking*. Another Dutch scientist, Dr. M. C. *van Mourik Broekman*, professor of theology at the University of Utrecht, president of the Dutch S. P. R., has often lectured on the importance of this new science, the same is the case with Dr. A. H. *de Hartog*, professor of theology at Amsterdam University. Both regard psychical research as an auxiliary science for theology.

⁶ Dr. Gerda Walther: <http://womenandphilosophyproject.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/gerda-walther-1897-1977.html>

One of the founders of the Dutch S. P. R., late Prof. G. *Heymans*, the well-known philosopher and psychologist of Groningen University, conducted some very interesting telepathic experiments together with Dr. H. J.W. F. W. *Brugmans* in the psychological laboratory of Groningen University already in 1920 with a psychically gifted student Mr. *van Dam* as medium (published as communication No. 1 of the Dutch S. P. R. In 1921). Also Dr. G. *van Rijnberk*, professor of physiology at the University of Amsterdam, who had the kindness to invite me to his home in order to discuss psychics with me, is greatly interested in psychical research, though very critical. In his "Nederl. Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde" (a well-known medical journal in Holland) he has published a series of articles on modern investigations of mediums.

Thus Holland still is the only country in Europe possessing officially appointed lecturers on psychical research. In all other countries however there are also official scientists interested in it. The development of occultism into scientific psychical research in *Germany* has already been published in this journal in the articles of late Baron v. *Schrenck-Notzing*. As will be remembered, Prof. A. *Ludwig* of the Catholic High-School in Freising near Munich was the first to lecture on psychics in spring 1919, in the same year Prof. *Osterreich* of Tübingen University also lectured on psychical research. Dr. *Engert*, professor of theology at the Catholic High-school in Dillingen on the Danube followed this example in 1920, professors at other Catholic High-schools or theologians (mostly catholic) at universities are also interested in psychics (thus e.g. Prof. *Scherer* at the Catholic High-school in Passau, Prof. *Eberle* at the Catholic High-school in Dillingen, Prof. *theol. Walter* at the University of Munich, Prof. A. *Mager*, Benedictine, of Salzburg, Prof. A. *Gatterer*, S. J. of Innsbruck etc.). As can be seen from the articles of Dr. v. *Schrenck-Notzing* there were also many non-theological German professors, mostly philosophers, who interested themselves for psychics and partly lectured on it. The present situation however is, that now Prof. *Verweyen* of Bonn is the only professor who lectures on psychics in Germany. In 1933 his pupil Dr. *Bender* took his degree as doctor at Bonn University with a psychic investigation. (It will be published in the Dutch Tijdschrift and I will review it then.) All the other professors in Germany, who treated on psychical research in their colleges have resigned their lectureships or been dismissed last year out of various reasons, e.g. age, non-Aryan descent, "pacifist" views etc. (thus Prof. *Driesch*, Prof. *Osterreich*, Prof. *Dessoir*, Prof. *Messer*).

In *Switzerland*, as far as I could find out, there is no official lecturer-ship in psychics either. But famous scientists, as the psychiatrist Prof. *Bleuler* of Zurich and the renowned psychoanalyst *Jung* are deeply interested in psychical research and have themselves investigated some mediums. The co-editor of the German "Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie" Dr. *Bernoulli*, is lecturer at the polytechnical school in Zurich.

In *Austria* the protestant theologians Prof. R. *Hoffman* and Prof. *Entz*, both at Vienna University, deal with psychical research as an auxiliary science of theology. Prof. *Karl Camillo Schneider* (biologist, Vienna) lectured on psychical research in special colleges. Recently he has been dismissed because he shot at a colleague of his at a funeral, whom he thought to be his enemy (he was exculpated as not being quite sane). Other Austrian scientists, as especially Prof. *Thirring* (physicist at Vienna University) are greatly interested in psychics and have also investigated mediums without however lecturing on psychical research.

In *Czecho-Slovakia* Dr. O. *Fischer*, professor of psychiatry at Prague University, well-known through his investigations of the clairvoyant graphologers R. *Scherman* and O. *Reimann*, is the only scientist who lectures on psychics in special colleges. Other scientists, such as *Mikuska*, Dr. P. *fleger*, Dr. K. *Kuchynka* also occupy themselves with this domain there.

In *Yugoslavia* there is a psychical research society of the Russian students of Belgrade University, which also arranges non-official lectures and courses on psychics, and investigates mediums. It intends to hold an exhibition this spring, which is to show the progress of psychical research in the world.

In *Hungaria* the theologian Prof. *Jos. Triklal*, in 1930 dean of the theological faculty of Budapest University, is deeply interested in psychical research and has recently published a very good and objective book on “occultism and philosophy.”

In *Greece* three years ago Dr. *Th. Voreas*, professor of psychology at the University of Athens, introduced experiments of thought transference into that university. The Greek S. P. R. was asked to help him to find some adequate mediums for this purpose and Dr. *Tanagra*, president of the Greek S. P. R., brought him four of the best mediums of the society, so that the telepathic experiments conducted in the psychological laboratory of the university were very successful. Besides Prof. Voreas three other renowned Greek scientists and professors of the University of Athens are members of the Council of the Greek S. P. R.: Prof. *Katsaras* (neurology), Prof. *Livieratos* (pathology) and Prof. *Bensis* (pathology).

In *Italy* the late Prof. *Santoliquido*, successor of Prof. Pagliani as general director of Italian public hygiene, president of the international hygienical office in Paris, technical counsellor of the international Red Cross, for several years president of the Institut Métapsychique in Paris, proposed officially to introduce psychical research into the Italian universities. Unfortunately this was prevented by his premature death in November 1930. Strange enough Sig. M. A. *Marzorati*, the late editor of the Italian psychical journal “Luce e ombra” (now “Revista psichica”) was against this project, because he feared that a lecturer on psychical research would be in danger of putting forth things in a too one sided manner, be it only from the spiritualist, or only from the animistical point of view. (Cp. C.de Vesme “L’enseignement officiel de la Métapsychie” in “Psychica” of Nov. 15th 1933.) As the case of Dr. Dietz and Dr. Tenhaeff and other scientists lecturing on psychics shows, this danger seems to have been very much exaggerated by Sig. Marzorati. The project of Prof. Santoliquido has not been taken up again since his death, though, as in other countries, there are some official scientists who personally interest themselves in psychical research in a more or less positive way, (e.g. Prof. E. *Sorge* from the University of Naples) but they do not seem to have the influence and energy of Prof. Santoliquido. Mussolini himself is supposed to have some sympathies for psychics, so perhaps in some near future one may hope Italy will follow the example of the Netherlands. Already now Prof. *Cazzamalli*, teacher of neurology and psychiatry in Milan and Rome, with a special laboratory for the investigation of cerebral radiations of his own in Como, also deals with psychical research in his colleges.

It is well known, that, with regard to *France*, Prof. *Richet* dealt with psychics in his lectures, in fact his last lecture before his discharge was on psychics. Besides of course many scientists are interested in the work of Dr. *Osty* and the Institut Métapsychique and assist at its investigations, yet there is no official psychical readership in France. However a number of well-known French scientists are members of the council of the Institut Métapsychique, e.g. Dr. *Calmetter*, Prof. *Leclainche* (from the Institut de France, chief of the sanitary services at the Agricultural Office), Dr. *Cuneo* (professor of surgery, member of the Medical Academy), Dr. Fr. *Moutier* (chief of the Laboratoire la Faculté de Médecine, Paris) Dr. I (or J). *Ch. Roux* and others.

In *Belgium* there is no official readership on psychics either but some scientists are interested in them, e.g. Prof. *Bessemans*, the present rector of the University of Ghent, who however holds rather negative views concerning the reality of psychical phenomena.

In *Poland*, as I hear, the political leaders of that nation are sympathically interested in psychical research, but here official scientists are against it, so that their prejudices would have to be overcome even if the authorities would be inclined to establish readerships on psychical research there.

In *Lettonia* Prof. Blacker (experimental chemist) of Riga University has investigated psychical phenomena (especially apport mediums) for many years and also lectured on psychical questions occasionally.

In *Russia*, as will be known, psychical research is strictly forbidden officially by the government. When a renowned Russian scientist, a pre-war friend of Dr. Osty, wrote to him and asked how psychical research was developing, Dr. Osty sent him his report of his investigations of Rudi Schneider in the "Revue Métapsychique." The parcel came back with an official remark, saying that "such literature" was forbidden in Russia!

In *Finland* there exists a psychical research society, which was founded already in 1907. Its first president was A. *Grottenfeldt*, professor of philosophy at Helsingfors University. His successor was the Rector *Uno Stadius*. This society is collecting important material on cases of spontaneous psychical phenomena in Finland, which is to be published in book-form some day.

In the Scandinavian Countries also many scientists are interested in psychical research, but there too no official readerships exist at present. At the University of Copenhagen Prof. *Rosin*, director of the laboratory for experimental psychology, has often expressed himself against psychics publicly. His (non-official, I believe) assistant Mr. *Faustinus* has lectured and written a great deal on psychics, mostly against them. He played a great part in the exposure of the medium *Einer Nielsen* in Oslo in 1922. Prof. *Chr. Winther* of the polytechnical school of Copenhagen on the other hand has investigated several mediums in his own laboratory. His interesting experiments with the medium Mrs. *Anna Rasmussen* have been published in this Journal. He has founded a Danish S. P. R. in 1905. In *Iceland* the protestant theologian Prof. *Haraldur Nielsson* of Reykjavik University was greatly interested in psychical research. He investigated some mediums (especially late Mr. *Indri Indridason*) and published some treatises on psychical problems (partly in connection with religious questions). I have not been able to find out whether other scientists in Iceland have followed his example after his death.

In *Norway* one of the founders and for many years the president of the Norwegian S. P. R. was Dr. *O. Jaeger*, professor of national economy at Oslo University, who died last autumn. Owing to his activity the library and the rooms of the Norwegian S. P. R. are in the building of Oslo university and several Norwegian scientists are members of its council, e.g. Dr. *Wereide* (physicist at Oslo University), who is also the editor of the journal of the society.

In *Sweden* late Prof. *Sidney Alrutz* of *Upsala* of University was actively interested in psychical research. After his death there was no professor who investigated psychical phenomena as he did, though some of them are interested in them in a more platonic way. However there has just been founded an international university-circle for the investigation of psychical phenomena by members of "Svenska Centralen for Psykisk Forskning." It is called "Internationella Universitets-Kretsen" and *Selma Lagerlof*, the famous Swedish novelist, is its honorary president. The international secretary of this new foundation is Mrs. *Eira Hellberg*, the editor of the new journal "Ur det okandas varld" (cp. Journal Am. S. P. R., December issue 1933, p. 360). The purpose of this society is to spread psychical information in all countries, and communicate with scientists interested in psychics there, who perhaps don't want their names to be published in connection with psychical research. Another

organisation, mostly consisting of academical graduates, called "*Fritt Forum*" is closely connected with "Universitets Kretsen." It has paying members and representatives in all countries (e.g. Prof. Richet in Paris, Mr. Harry Price in London, Dr. R. *Tischner* in Munich, Prof. R. *Hoffman* in Vienna) and a special fund—called "Schrenck-Notzing fond"—for the investigation of mediums. It will also publish interesting reports on psychical experiments now and then. (Nr. 1 by Mrs. Eira Hellberg has already come out with the title "Thought engravings." It deals with Dr. Osty's experiments with Rudi Schneider and Mme. Kahl Toucholka, Upton Sinclair's experiments with his wife, Mrs. Silbert, Kluski, Prof. Fukurai's experiments with some Japanese mediums and contains many illustrations.) Members of "Fritt Forum" are to be admitted to sittings with mediums in every country where there are other representatives of this organisation. The future will have to show how much this new organisation can achieve. Some continental researchers and societies did not join it, because they say the Swedish group has elected itself as international representative on its own account and because they regard Mrs. Hellberg as being over-active, very ambitious and unreliable. (I don't know her personally. G. W.) Such groups and persons standing aloof are amongst others: the S. P. R. in London, the Dutch S. P. R., the Norwegian S. P. R., Prof. Blacher of Riga, Dr. Sunner (editor of the "*Zeitschrift fur Parapsychologie*"), and myself.—

Concerning other countries not situated on the European Continent I am not well informed. Only regarding *South-America* the September-October-issue 1933 of the *Revue Métapsychique* contains a short note saying that two renowned scientists of the University of Buenos Aires, Prof. *Joseph S. Fernandez* (physicist) and Dr. *E. del Ponte* (biologist) have founded a society called "Atman" there, which is to investigate psychical phenomena. Prof. del Pote also deals with psychical research in his official lecture at the University of Buenos Aires. It is to be hoped that other savants in South-America—and indeed, in the entire world,—will do the same, so that in some near future there will also be appointed official readerships on psychical research all over the world.



Introductory Note by LP: Spiritual experiences can alter the course of history. Spiritualists will recall Joan of Arc, whom Conan Doyle regarded as second only to Jesus. But Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical society whose headquarters are at Adyar, India, also had a major impact – on India a century ago, a result of paranormal experiences, as can be seen from the account below.

Taken from: The Theosophist 1929 vol. 51 pages 148-151.

FROM PEACE TO POWER

BY ANNIE BESANT, D.L.

LIFTING THE VEIL



THERE is a story in the Hebrew Bible that when a servant of the Prophet Elisha who fled with his master from his enemies—two against a host—cried out to him of their defencelessness, the calm Prophet prayed that the man's eyes might be opened. The prayer was heard, and the servant saw, with joyous amazement, that their place of refuge was surrounded by horses and chariots of fire. So is it to-day with disarmed and therefore apparently helpless India. She seems to be in the grip of an iron grasp: but while she only sees and feels the grip, were the eyes but opened, she would see the Devas round her, would hear the Gandharvas' joyous chant of victory, for the rule of the Empire of Force is crumbling, and the Day of the Federation of Free Nations has dawned.

When the Great Messenger from the White Lodge landed in India, she brought in her strong hand the Charter of India's Freedom. Russian by birth, she had become naturalized in the Republic of the West, which had, a century before, broken the chains that Britain strove to fasten on her mighty limbs. Her colleague was American-born, and the constitution of the Society which was to become world-wide, was framed by him on the model of that created by the Fathers of the Republic, aided by Hands which had become liberated and immortal.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky quickly began the great task assigned to her—the destruction of triumphant materialism. Alone she stood in her unbreakable knowledge, a knowledge of the Laws of Nature belonging to the subtler worlds. With these she fought her giant foe, and slew him.

But a stronger enemy barred her onward way—the apathy of the people she came to enlighten, and through them to enlighten the world. They admired her, they became proud of their past, they held up their heads. But even she, aided by her Guru and His Brothers, could not stir them to united action. In vain was the effort made to found a paper through which the clarion note of Freedom might ring over India. Even one of her patriots said: “India is dead; you cannot wake her.” At last, H. P. B.’s Guru, who in the past had ruled over India, recognized the hopelessness of the task, and, as she wrote, “retired in deep displeasure.”

H. P. B. was practically driven from India, and went to Europe, seeking a colleague whom she knew. She wrote her great work, *The Secret Doctrine*, and found her colleague, Annie Besant, who became her pupil in their new bodies, and led her to the Guru who was also her own. This colleague brought to the service of India trained political methods, guided by experience and by fighting side by side with that great warrior for freedom, Charles Bradlaugh. A little later she went Home, leaving her pupil to carry on the work of thoroughly arousing the Indian spirit. Colonel Olcott had revived Buddhism and Zoroastrianism; he encouraged his new colleague in the revival of Hinduism and passed away. His Guru materialized by his bedside, ere he passed, and bade him name Annie Besant as his successor in the Presidency of the Theosophical Society. She was loath to leave her educational work, the Central Hindu School and College, for which she hoped to obtain a Royal Charter from John Morley, the then Secretary of State for India, with whom she had discussed the subject, but her Guru bade her accept the duty; and she, of course, obeyed, and was duly elected as President in 1907.

A very important step forward is now being taken in the struggle for India’s liberty. India cannot deliver her message to the world while she continues in subjection to a foreign rule, and is looked down upon by all free peoples as a “dependency” of Britain. The preparation was begun in 1875, when the great Messenger of the White Lodge, H. P. B., was sent out into our world to perform her splendid work, the destruction of materialism as a philosophy of life. With her brave colleague, Colonel H. S. Olcott, she the Teacher, he the organizer, the work was carried on. In the Theosophical Society, color ceased to be a badge of inferiority, and Universal Brotherhood was recognized as the Law of Life. The two colleagues associated with Indians on an equal footing, and constantly taught that the World-Teachers were Easterns. The men who planned the Indian National Congress were members of the Theosophical Society. In 1891, I was sent by H. P. B. to America to meet W. Q. Judge there, one of her best disciples, and he and I carried on the occult tradition in the E. S., the Heart of the Society. Very soon I entered into the political life of India, working for her Freedom, and in 1913 opened my part of the campaign with lectures on Social Reform.

It was in 1913 that I first came into direct conscious touch with the Rshi Agastya, the Regent of India in the Inner Government. He desired me to form a small band of people who were brave enough to defy wrong social customs such as premature betrothal and marriage. This was done, and carrying out His wishes, I gave some lectures that autumn on Social Reform, published under the title of “Wake Up, India”. These prepared the way for the desired political reform, and this was started in that same year by the resolve to begin a weekly newspaper, *The Commonweal*, in January, 1914. To guide me in its conduct, I was summoned to Shamballa,⁷ where still abide the King and His three Pupils, the “four

⁷ This city is in the Gobi Desert. Its outskirts have been partially uncovered by an American expedition. But I do not think they will find the White Island, with its great white marble Temple where abide “The Four”. It is there the great gathering takes place every seven years that H.P.B. speaks of in *Isis Unveiled*, and which I have attended.

Kumāras” of the Indian Scriptures, He the Eldest. There I was given what I always call “my marching orders”:

You will have a time of trouble and danger. I need not say: have no fear; but have no anxiety. Do not let opposition become angry. Be firm but not provocative. Press steadily the preparation for the coming changes, and claim India’s place in the Empire. The end will be a great triumph. Do not let it be stained by excess. Remember that you represent in the outer world the Regent, who is My Agent. My Hand will be over you, and My Peace with you.

These words necessarily mark out the policy I follow. India to be within the Empire, but free. This is only possible by winning Dominion Status. To win it means that India becomes free within her own territory, but in a Federation, not in isolation, as C. R. Das put it. It means the avoidance of a War of Color, of Asia against Europe. It means the Peace of the World, the necessary addition to Mr. MacDonald’s splendid efforts to make a lasting pact with the United States. The two countries will be as the two pillars of Solomon’s Temple, Boaz and Jachin. At present Britain’s Rule over colored peoples is an increasing menace to the Peace of the World. In twelve years the “Awakening of Asia,” of which I spoke, in my Presidential Speech in the Indian National Congress, has become “The Revolt of Asia,” the significant title of a traveller’s book, recording what he saw as he visited Asiatic countries.

(To be continued)

[No continuation of this fragment was published. When this first part of it appeared Annie Besant was very old and (some claim) already broken up by the defection of Krishnamurti from his role as vehicle for the World Teacher. It can readily be seen however that she had been guided in her political activities by some inner experiences (possibly mediated at times through a third party.) Her hopes for India were not entirely fulfilled, as a more militant Indian nationalism came to the fore.

For another account by her of how she was led to espouse Indian political work, see http://www.anandgholap.net/AP/Work_Of_Ruler_And_Teacher-AB.htm

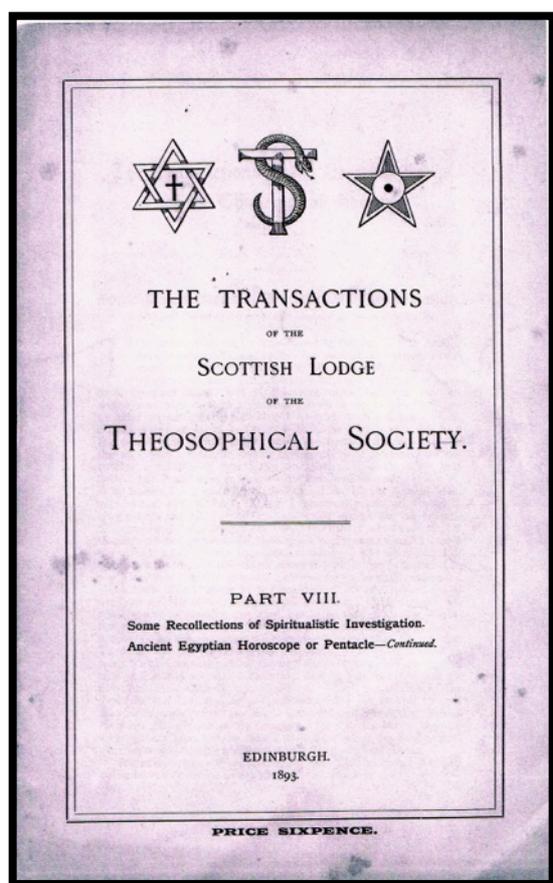
LP.



Introductory Note by LP: The reminiscence below was written by the painter Isabelle De Steiger.⁸ She later included another version of her psychic experiences in her *Memorabilia* (1927). Isabelle was a typical example of a Spiritualist who was drawn into the Theosophical Society. We have already published in *Psypioneer* an account by Francesca Arundale of the same era.⁹

Below is taken from: The Transactions of the Scottish Lodge of the Theosophical Society
Part VIII pages 115-122:

Some Recollections of Spiritualistic Investigation



IT is rather difficult to know how to begin. I was such a complete outsider, so horribly ignorant of all transcendental matters, so utterly unread in all philosophical or metaphysical matter. I don't think any one could have been more ignorant than I was of literature otherwise than that all *ordinary* authorities were somewhat known to me, and so I did not consider myself ignorant at all. I however *was*, and being of an inquiring turn of mind, and having no respect for authorities, as *I* had found none then, I fell an easy prey to the surface writers of the day, and I thought myself sufficiently well informed by becoming a materialist, practically an atheist. I don't regret that period, but I see now it was a very low level indeed. However, as by nature I was endowed with some of the higher gifts of man, art, poetry, and so forth, though I practically *was* an atheist, I always kept my mind in an open receptive manner for all crumbs of knowledge, and I fancy I was more fed than I was aware of just through art and poetry. Of theology I was ignorant, and I had a horror of the evangelistic exposition thereof. I was much afraid of death, but I did not think much about it.

However, at a period in my life, when one's intellectual faculties begin to fully expand, I was left absolutely alone in the world—a death had robbed me of the only real friend and companion I ever had. But still I did not *think* much.

However, one day I was in that charming world-known library in Florence, “Vieussieux,” and I took up, *by chance*, a copy of, to me, an unknown “journal” called *The Spiritualist*. There my eye lighted on a letter purporting to be an account of “a spirit” who had just passed through the process called death, and how it felt, and so on. I can't say how it was, but it struck me as being extraordinarily true somehow. I took the address of the paper in London,

⁸ Isabel De Steiger: <http://www.wrightanddavis.co.uk/GD/ISABEL3678.htm>

⁹ “From Spiritualism to Theosophy”:
<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/2.3%20PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

and in a few weeks after my arrival there I became a member of the Society in Great Russell Street, the “British National Association of Spiritualists,” then in its palmy days of investigating zeal, and, moreover, at a time when, no doubt, there were some remarkable mediums and a flood of phenomena.

It certainly was a most interesting and exciting time. Nothing either before or since has equalled that excitement.

Among the investigators I found many most interesting, intellectual, and cultured people. That in itself was a great charm, and I think, here I may as well say, that from the beginning of my investigations to the end, covering a space of about ten years, I came in contact with but little that I now regret. Providentially, moreover, as far as myself was concerned, I was encased in a body which was too concrete to admit of injury from the astral world. I neither could escape from my body, nor could any invasive spirit easily enter. I was not at all mediumistic; in other words, exceedingly sane. This fact, however, distressed me much then. I eagerly longed to be a medium, and enter behind the veil. Happily I did not, as my supreme ignorance at that time would have led me into much of the abounding error truthfully promulgated among the Spiritualists.

There were regular meetings held at Great Russell Street, and, oh! how wildly interesting they were. Mr Stainton Moses was chairman usually, and he was an able and interesting one. Of course “phenomena” was the sole idea, and mediums were cherished and sought for.

The first phase I came in contact with was the trance medium, a Mr Colville¹⁰; and on Saturday afternoons a chosen assembly listened in rapt awe and silence to his orations. He was a pale, pretty, innocent-faced young man about twenty, with a huge forehead, all ideality and no action; in other words, a medium. I don’t think he said anything in the least new (I did then think it remarkable), but it was a well-delivered oration, a mixture of Platonism, Emersonism, I scarcely know what, certainly thoroughly admirable philosophy; but in later years, when I read some of these addresses in cooler blood, I found they were really so absolutely subjective as to be practically valueless. Like all astral teaching, it was involved and formless.

Mr Colville still continues his career in America, but he has varied his “output” from time to time, and now, I believe, ranks among the Christian scientists. He was a harmless, steady young fellow, and it was touching to see how his brain was used by other “selves” than his own.

Then came the Fletchers, of course amongst others, but as the Fletchers were extraordinary mediums, I will pass over the others.

Mr and Mrs Fletcher were a young couple from America, with important credentials from the American Spiritualists and their great organ *The Banner of Light*.

At first they began mildly with duly arranged *séances* at the rooms of the Association, and I attended those.

Their specialty consisted in phenomena called materialisations when together, and when apart they, chiefly Mr Fletcher, gave private *séances* to any one who wanted information

¹⁰ Marc Demarest has recently investigated the background of Colville.

<http://ehbritten.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/stories-within-stories-childhoods-of-w.html#!/2013/02/stories-within-stories-childhoods-of-w.html>

from their “loved and lost” as the phrase is. I went to my first *séance* of this kind to Mr Fletcher, and I paid a guinea, and I felt then ten guineas, if I had had them, would not have been too much.

To a person who really had the vaguest, if any, understanding at all, of any plane of existence but this, the first rush of feeling that there *is* a real one outside the senses, is very violent, and I remember shaking with emotion as Mr Fletcher, with a death-like face and convulsive twists of his body, gave a great sigh, and then in an entirely different voice to his own, began to talk to me, and in a few moments this voice told me a great deal of startling news, and seemed *au courant* with my private affairs.

I feel assured now that this was a genuine performance. Mr Fletcher was quite as ignorant of my private affairs as any one to whom this paper was written. He was a stranger to London, I ditto. We had never met except “in a crowd,” the crowd all strangers, and in London it is *not* easy to get to know about other people unless one is a private detective. The “spirit” gave me good advice, but flattered me exceedingly about my profession, saying the letter R wreathed itself about my head, by which was meant, I was told, that my presiding genius was Raphael; also, oddly enough, the initial letter of my husband’s name. He had died in Egypt three or four years before, and *certainly* his Christian name was utterly unknown to Mr Fletcher or any other of the stray Bohemians I then was meeting. We knew absolutely *nothing* about each other but names and profession—not always that,—and I had the sense, as I considered it, to be very careful and chary of ever talking about my own concerns and relations, but, in fact, there was no need, and the Fletchers were then honest mediums.

On Sunday evenings Mr Fletcher used to give what was called “communications.” These were highly interesting and curious. The meetings were in the “Cavendish Rooms,” well-known public ones of a good class in the West End, and they were crowded with high and low—by *no* means a riff-raff company.

Mrs Fletcher used first to give a lecture, which was listened to with as much admiration as are now those by Mrs Besant. Indeed, excepting Mrs Besant, I have never heard any woman with a greater power of oratory. She was supposed, like Mr Colville, to be speaking under spirit control. He probably did, as his native intelligence was below the average somewhat, I should think; but Mrs Fletcher’s was not, and I have little doubt now that she was naturally a gifted orator, and she held her audience spell-bound by her flow of really powerful language. Then she kept *her* eyes open, his were always shut, and she was a very handsome woman indeed, with a fine classical dark face. After her address was ended, Mr Fletcher, who was on the platform with her, would then go into a trance, or be “controlled” as the phrase was, and standing up, he would proceed to give “communications” such as this:—“I see a young man dressed as a sailor—yes, a sailor. He looks very pale. Oh! I see, he says he has recently passed away, and he wants to say something to a lady who is here. He is standing by her. She is, let me see, oh, a lady in mourning on the fifth bench” (every eye would be turned to the lady in question, who, with bowed head, would listen intently). “Oh! he says he is her—her nephew, but she was like a mother, and he would go to sea, and he ran away, and he sailed in a ship, the City of L—L—oh, London, and it went down; and he is come to say that she must not grieve. He is very happy; he often comes to see her; he loves her very much; his name is George.”

The poor lady would sob and be much moved, and then in a faint voice get up and just gasp out, “Yes, yes, it is my George.”

Then again, Mr Fletcher would say, “Oh! I see another, oh! So beautiful a girl, she has a wreath of—oh—such lovely flowers, and she says her name is Annie—Annie something, I

don't know what. Oh, W-o, W-o-o-d—Wood. Yes! Annie Wood. And she says she is come to tell some lady here she is quite well. All her pain is gone, and she is so happy, and she is so beautiful; and—oh, she is gone; she says the air here is so dark, so heavy. No! I can't see her. Does any lady know? And then there would be a faint cry and sound from some other bent lady, but the rule was that every one who recognised the description of a friend must waive private feeling and acknowledge the relation.

While thinking of some one else's feelings, and wondering if it were true, I all at once upon one occasion awoke to the fact that a relation of mine claimed me—a brother. It came about this way. It was the custom somewhat for any visitor so inclined, as the whole thing was gratis, the hall being hired by the Fletchers, to bring in flowers, and one Sunday evening I brought in two pot plants and I put them on the platform, and eventually they were put on the table where the glass and water stood. Suddenly Mr Fletcher said, "There is a gentleman here, he says his name is 'Willie,' and he wants to speak to the lady who brought these plants."

The Fletchers were not in the hall when I brought them, though some one might have told them. However, at the time I saw no one at all but the one or two friends with me. "Willie says he is now much happier than when in earth-life. He is very sorry he did not understand you better, but he says his other sister went the wrong way with him. His earth-life was sad, and he was weak under temptation," and so on. Generalities, but which to me exactly explained the matter. Then he went on, "He says his brother—oh, it is a curious name—I can't hear it, it is Vernon" (it was not Vernon, it was Verney) "is here too, and he is much happier than he was on earth. They both love you very much, and will watch over you."

Now this was certainly vague and rambling enough, but at the time I felt sure that my two brothers, Verney and Willie, were both there. They both died as young men, and it was true somehow in its sadness, It is possible that Mr Fletcher saw their astral lives in "Devachan" somehow.¹¹

I often think most of the "communications" were true. They were nearly all from young people who had died prematurely. They left a sense of comfort behind them. Perhaps one felt the spirit-world very near, only it was *not* the spirit-world we then thought it, but we knew no other, and it seemed a new kind of heaven; and yet if it were not heaven, we said, what was it? And besides, the spirits constantly said, "Oh, I shall not be able to come much oftener, for I am going up higher soon," but I won't here philosophise or give any later light on the question, as I want chiefly to narrate facts.

Well, the Fletchers for some time flourished exceedingly. They were both good-looking, and Mr Fletcher willingly agreed to come to me to sit for his portrait, which I wanted to give them.

He was a strange person. A young man about twenty-five, with a most beautiful, poetical, pale Italian face, large limpid dark eyes, and silky wavy hair. I was not then much of a physiognomist, or I would have noticed the weakness and self-indulgence in it. Anyway he was a tender, shrinking creature, and he certainly was less in this plane of existence than the next. He was fastidious about his clothes, and he used to arrive in a hansom in a wonderful long coat trimmed with fur, and gauntlet gloves and diamond studs, and my studio maid used to ask with awe, "Is the prince coming to-day? If I said "Yes," there was no need to give further orders for being ready.

¹¹ Not in Devachan, but in the writer's own aura. —P. [editorial comment by Transactions!]

I looked forward to these sittings expecting to get some private revelations, and, in fact, to hear a good deal about “Spirit land,” but I was disappointed. Mr Fletcher seemed to forget all about Spirit land; he was absolutely vacuous, told me trifling gossip, and also betrayed his excessive personal vanity, such as he intended to have a long violet velvet coat, and a large house in Portland Place, so like a child’s prattle, that I was fairly amazed, and then the portrait was complete. I realised that the man, when in this plane of consciousness, was really a silly, almost unlettered young man—refined, gentle and amiable, the oddest compound. I was utterly puzzled. He was pleased with his portrait, and so was Mrs Fletcher. I had a strong liking for both, and I really felt sorry, when after a long career of success, the sad inevitable end came!¹²

Then there were *séances* at other mediums’, when the “materialisations” occurred. “John King” was the spirit best known to me. Upon one occasion I was asked by a Captain J—, an old naval officer, who lived alone and spent his life in the *séance* room, to come to a very select one at his house—or rather rooms. He had lost a son, and this son had recently materialised, and he wanted me to see if the nose in the materialised form was not the same as his. He knew it well, but he would like me as an artist to judge. I did not think this much advantage; but as I then liked a good *séance* and I knew Captain J— had rigid test conditions, and that I should know the other sitters, so I went. Besides it was considered a compliment, and spiritualists had their social ambitions like other people, and Captain J—’s circles ranked high. You were presumably an authority if you were invited.

We had the usual darkened room—the medium, a young man called “Rita,” and three or four chosen sitters and myself round a round table, which was lighted up, so to say, by a phosphoric slate. And we commenced singing, in the usual lamentably poor manner, “By the River,” or some sentimental four part song, usually in unison, for tenors and contralti, &c., were mere accidents, as well as having any voices at all; but singing was necessary, and sing we did. Captain J— used to quaver industriously all by himself. Then all at once—I am speaking of one special *séance*—we all saw a sort of mist in the middle of the table, and out of it a form grew, and Captain J—said, “Oh, there he is—John—John (I think it was John), I am glad to see you—come to me,” and the form unquestionably turned into a man from the centre of the table—half a man that is, well enveloped in a cloudy kind of drapery, with a dark bearded face. Captain J—said, “Now, *do* look well, Madame S—. Do, John, go close to her and let her look at you—at your nose, if it is not like mine.” Will it be believed, though really I shrank with a queer distorted sense of awe that was not awe, and yet it was a sort of dread, yet I laughed? it was such an odd mixture, and John did put his face near me, and I honestly tried to look at his nose, but it evaded me somehow. I am not quite sure if I did look as much as Captain J—wished, for it was eerie beyond words; however, John waved off his head from near me, and I did catch a vague sight of a large nose, and I said, “Oh, yes, Captain J—, your nose,” and John turned into a mist and sank into the table. That is all I know.

Captain J—was assured he saw his son. I saw the strange “simulacrum,” and so did every one by the light of the phosphorescent slate, and also the figure itself was somehow self-illuminated.¹³

I saw at another *séance* also the well-known “Katie Cook.” I can’t answer for the test conditions then. We all sat in the Fletchers’ drawing-room, and all at once, she appeared, just

¹² The end was a scandalous trial, though it may not have been what it seemed. See the recent discussion by Marc Demarest, on his blog “Chasing Down Emma”: <http://ehbritten.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/twelve-hours-in-mrs-fletchers-hands.html#!/2013/06/twelve-hours-in-mrs-fletchers-hands.html>

¹³ The medium Rita was found (with Williams) in apparent in fraud in Amsterdam.

a white mass of airy drapery, a white face not dead at all, with soft, dark eyes, and she just flashed through us, as it were, and went. They all called her “Katie Cook.” She was the spirit belonging to a Miss Corner, who, as the medium, was lying in a trance on a sofa behind a curtain, not in white drapery, however.¹⁴

Then came a series of *séances* which were the most interesting of all, as one certainly got a good deal more mental food than was usual. I must say, all along a certain amount of spiritual education was going on. We heard of old authors, new ideas, strange theories, bold speculations, fresh light on old ideas, that by degrees were not without effect.

Well, at that time I was the friend of Mr and Mrs Fletcher, and as public mediums were extraordinarily jealous of each other, I felt if I wished to see the celebrated new medium, Mrs Billing, I must not tell the Fletchers.

However, that course did not recommend itself to my mind, and I resolved I would be open and tell the Fletchers I was going to see Mrs Billing.

It did *not* do. Mrs Fletcher was offended, and I felt I could not keep up both ladies as mediums and friends, and decided I would not see much of Mrs Billing. However, one day I had a letter from a friend, not a medium, but a fellow-sitter, if I may say so. She said that orders had come to me from the spirit “Ski” to join their Monday evenings.

Now, I may as well say a spirit’s orders were never disputed, and I agreed, and wrote to Miss A—, to tell Mrs Billing I would.

The terms were simple, a guinea for the course of six Mondays—or twelve, I forget. I shall not easily forget those evenings.

Certainly the spirit “dear old Ski” was not worldly. The circle he had chosen were not remarkable for any worldly advantages, and we were drawn from all the corners of London, but by degrees we got to know each other very well indeed, and life-long friendships ensued from it. Complete personal respect and good fellowship began and remained throughout.¹⁵

Mrs Billing was a friend of Madame Blavatsky, and the Theosophical Society was just forming.

The spirit Ski purported to be a North American Indian, and the “control” of Mrs Billing.

The circle then formed used to sit in her back drawing-room in her lodgings, and we were all very happy. Mrs Billing was never entranced. She sat like the rest of us. Fortunately, in this circle we had a Mr Wade who had a nice tenor voice, and he most patiently went over his limited repertoire with endless good-nature, and when at one point we all chimed in the chorus, “Hark, ’tis the Moorish drum,” or something to that effect, the air would be full of fairy voices, whispers, and the song would cease, and then a faint whisper, “It’s me, Elsie. I am so glad to see you, good-bye; ” or, “John, John, I am come;” “ Do you know me, Aunt Mary?” and so on. People held their little airy conversations. No one interrupted, but let them have their say, until the last good-night floated in the air. Then would come a loud, strong guttural “ Squaw—Squaw Stigum”—that was what he made of my name—or “Chief Way,” and so forth, and the much beloved and respected Ski was known to be present, and intensely

¹⁴ This is a reference to the medium Florence Cook, married name Corner, and her guide Katie King.

¹⁵ For more about Ski, see *Psypioneer* October 2010: <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.10October2010.pdf>

interesting conversations ensued—all in the dark, the voice seeming at the top of the chandelier.

We all discussed the probability at other times of Mrs Billing being a ventriloquist, and the voice being hers; but, as by degrees we knew more of her and of each other, we were never able to form any idea at all, and came to believe it really to be a materialised voice.

“Ski” became a sort of friend. He told us much that really has come to pass. He said he waited upon Madame Blavatsky; he said he was preparing some of us for the Theosophical Society. It proved true, I joined the next year. It was then in its infancy, a poor little band.

He told us all about re-incarnation, and moreover, that was fascinatingly interesting, our past lives, and he related incidents to each.

Curiously enough, I have always a horror of being shut up or locked in, and did not enjoy going inside the Pyramids or Catacombs, &c.; indeed I have always had an exaggerated liking for open rooms—freedom of that kind. He told me I had been a nun, and been once shut up to die in a vault, and so forth. Somehow it seemed true to me, for I recollected the horror of being shut up as particularly vivid in childhood, but I had almost forgotten it of late years. He did not flatter us. Some of us he said had been very bad!

Our *séances* were finished by a memorable one. Hitherto we had never seen anything, but on this occasion we did. We sat in a half-faint light and the curtains were drawn. They were dark; all at once a sort of magic-lantern effect was seen on them in front of one of the sitters, and he and “Ski” had a little colloquy. Then the half darkness again, and our singer gallantly to the fore with his tenor voice, and the chorus, “Hark, ’tis the Moorish evening drum.” No! that was not quite it, I forget the exact words, but I shall never forget the soft state of delicious exaltation and the silence, except a cab rolling outside, and the “Moorish drum” inside. Then, “Squaw—Squaw Stigum—look!” and lo! just in front of me on the curtain, a sort of oval of illuminated light, a face in it like a magnified photograph, but coloured, alive. I saw a smile, and in a second I said, “Rudolph,” my husband’s name, and the oval faded into the dark of the curtain. Others had similar experiences, some more or less satisfactory. “Ski” informed us it was the photography of the future, and that he had a present for us all. First he told us what our colours and flowers were. I forget the others. I naturally only remember mine (for it is now nearly ten years ago), and the colour was “yellow,” and I was to wear “amber,” and my flower was the lotus. I felt disappointed; I would have liked sky blue, which was called the mediumistic colour and I did not like an ancient old Egyptian flower, but I have often thought it was more apt than I then knew. He then apportioned us each our presents—chiefly, I think, Mrs Billing’s own drawing-room ornaments, which she faithfully bereft herself of and gave. I was considered to have the best, namely, the teapot, said to be materialised by Madame Blavatsky. “Ski” said he brought it through the air. I have the teapot still. Its story was authenticated.

“Ski” then said, “Good-bye, chiefs; good-bye, squaws. God bless you,” and I never heard of “Ski” again.

Mrs Billing went to America. Miss A—, a fellow-sitter, kept a faithful record of all the *séances*, and last year we re-read them together. After that, some of us joined the Theosophical Society, others left, and our circle broke up. We remained friendly to the last. I ceased to attend *séances* by degrees; fresh light appeared to me on many subjects, and that part of my investigation came to an end.

This is of course only a sketch of phenomena. I saw much more. I did not lay claim to any remarkable acumen, but I *felt* that things were not always right, and I stopped going to some circles; but in others, I feel somehow quite certain, whatever the real explanation might be, that of vulgar imposture, common trickery, and fraud were absolutely wide of the mark.



Mrs Billing

*Mrs. Mary J. (née Kerns) Hollis – Mary had married a
Captain E.J. Hollis, of Louisville, Kentucky.*

*At some time it appears post 1873, and before circa 1879 she became Mrs.
Billing, often then referred to as Hollis-Billing.*



Change of editorship



After eleven years as editor of the online journal, *Psypioneer*, I have decided to pass it back to the journal's founder editor, Leslie Price. The change will take effect from January 1st 2017.

Psypioneer has been a great joy for me over the last decade, presenting our readers with original reliable information on psychic pioneers and spiritualistic history. Our readership has grown internationally over the years, however, none of this would have been possible without the help and the continuous support of the editorial team.

Leslie has been sub-editor since I took over from him in July 2005; Garth Willey has also acted as proof reader during this period. Garth has hosted *Psypioneer* since May 2004 when Leslie started the publication, and he will continue to archive the journal on his Woodlands Sanctuary Foundation website in Melbourne, Australia, where Peter Hui provides technical help. Over the last five years Lis Warwood has given *Psypioneer* substantial support as proof reader, and her invaluable research has gone far beyond the important births and death dates.

My wife Cindy has often had to type out material which was too poor to scan, and she has checked every issue before the draft is passed to the editorial team. Over the years *Psypioneer* has been financially supported by donations, namely from the JV Trust, Spiritual Truth Foundation, and the Survival Joint Research Committee Trust.

Our material has often been sourced from the College for Psychic Studies library and archives, with their full support. Support has also been given by the Society for Psychical Research, and from the Spiritualists' National Union Presidents Duncan Gascoyne and David Bruton who arranged free accommodation and full use of the Arthur Findlay library during periods when the college was closed for a number of years. Support has been given from Sue Farrow and Roy Stemman, editors of *Psychic News*.

Finally thanks are due to all who have contributed articles, book reviews etc. and all the feedback and continuing support from our readers.

I will continue my support to Leslie for the future growth of *Psypioneer*.

Please note: I will continue to edit the Spiritualists' National Union *Pioneer*, which is available on their website.¹⁶

Thank you all.

Paul J. Gaunt.

¹⁶ *The Pioneer Journal*: <http://www.snu.org.uk/spiritualism/pioneer> to subscribe free please contact me at: pioneer@snu.org.uk

How to obtain this free Journal

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Leslie Price.

