

# PSYPIONEER

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## A SURPRISING JESUIT

The English Jesuit Herbert Thurston (1856-1939) wrote many articles critical of Spiritualism from 1917. Four of these were immediately republished as "Modern Spiritualism" (London, Sheed & Ward, 1928 – The Tweldepenny Series) and so displeased Arthur Conan Doyle that he published "The Roman Catholic Church, a Rejoinder" (London, Psychic Press, 1929). Two of Thurston's final articles, written from his death bed, emphasised the disarray caused by the failure of the No War Prophecies. (prior to World War II)

It comes as rather a surprise then to meet the claim that Herbert Thurston SJ was actually a Spiritualist. This can be found in the front page story of Psychic News 11 November 1939, and is reprinted below.

### ***THIS JESUIT PRIEST ACCEPTED THE SPIRITUALIST CASE***

*FATHER HERBERT THURSTON, the 82-year-old Jesuit priest who passed on last week, was a Spiritualist at heart. He accepted the case, but naturally could not make a public avowal of his beliefs.*

*He enjoyed a great friendship with Bertha Hirst, the well-known medium. [a captioned photograph of her in PN states "She and the priest became friends"] They met in a London nursing home, where she was a patient. The Jesuit priest had conducted Mass there and learned of her presence. They met, and it was the beginning of a friendship which lasted for some years.*

*Spiritualism was the basis of nearly all their conversations. The priest told Mrs. Hirst that while he considered it was dangerous for all and sundry to dabble in Spiritualism he accepted its basic facts. He spoke of the seances he had attended and the public meetings at which he had seen clairvoyance demonstrated.*

*He was, during the past few weeks, a patient in the same nursing home where they met and during his illness constantly sent her messages. Recently he asked her, "Is your opinion of Spiritualism affected by the failure of the 'No War' prophecies?"*

*"Not a bit," she replied.*

*"Neither is mine," was the priest's surprising comment.*

*On Monday morning, Bertha Hirst told a friend about a clairvoyant vision she had three days earlier. He said he had just come from the Requiem Mass for Father Thurston at Farm Street Church, and her vision described the coffin and its surroundings in the chapel.*

*Roman Catholics are forbidden to attend seances, unless they obtain indulgences from a priest. Father Thurston frequently gave these indulgences.*

*He was fascinated and dazzled by Spiritualism and undoubtedly possessed the finest index on it. He could quote psychic happenings of 50, 60 and 70 years ago, giving dates and details proving the efficiency of his filing index.*

*Naturally, in his writings in Roman Catholic journals, his loyalty to Rome made it necessary for him to utter warnings to the "faithful."*

*He was reluctant to take part in foolish attacks on Spiritualism and reproved Roman Catholics who did so.*

*When Father Knapp, one of his colleagues, toured the country giving exhibitions of childish conjuring tricks, which he claimed "exposed" Spiritualism, he was reproved by Father Thurston in the "Universe," Rome's leading paper in this country.*

*Father Knapp's lectures, he wrote, "undoubtedly leave the impression that mediums are all impostors and the Spiritualists who consult them merely their dupes. Is this true?"*

*Then he quoted the view of priest, a Professor of Natural Science, who after attending seances with Rudi Schneider and Maria Silbert said that "The rejection of all the physical phenomena of mediumship as fraudulent is unwarranted in fact and is dangerous to sound apologetic."*

*Two years ago, when the Confraternity, which seeks to unite Spiritualism and the Churches, held a meeting at the People's Palace, East London, Father Thurston sent a letter regretting his absence and expressing his "sympathy for the general cause which you represent." He added, "I believe in Survival and should be glad to take a part in any movement which aim at resisting the materialism which prevails around us."*

*Once he was reproved by the "Catholic Herald" because of an article he wrote in the "Daily Mail." The journal objected to his use of the word, "Spiritualism," said he should have called it "Spiritism," and added, "We do not think that Father Thurston has sufficiently emphasised the very determined attitude of Catholic Authority on the matter."*

*He was a lovable opponent, courteous in his replies and without malice in keen controversy.*

*Father Thurston would never defend the vulgar crudities of his own religion. When Psychic News asked him to express his opinion on some blatant advertisements in the Roman Catholic Press, he said he disliked the suggestion that there was any magical charm in "miraculous" relics. And he disagreed with the 17th century teachings of his own church which frightened naughty children with lurid pictures of their fate in Hell!*

*Still, he was a Jesuit priest, bound, out of loyalty, to expound the teachings of Rome. Though it required great mental agility to reconcile his own knowledge with his Church's views, Father Thurston, who was undoubtedly the best-informed Jesuit on psychic matters, managed to present both aspects.*

*When you read his writings in Roman Catholic publications you concluded he was anti-Spiritualist. When you read his writings in Spiritualist publications you had to assume he was almost a whole-hearted Spiritualist.*

*Now he has gone to the spirit world about which he wrote half his life.*

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Some of this article probably derives from what Bertha Hirst told Maurice Barbanell about her conversations with Thurston. It is alleged that Thurston gave many dispensations, that he wrote pro-Spiritualist articles in psychic publications (such as LIGHT), and that his views were not affected by the No War prophecies.

If Thurston was really a Spiritualist, what was he doing in his many critical articles?. A possible explanation may come from the work for which he was best known in the Roman Church - the critical study of the lives of saints (hagiography). In his day, before anyone could be recognised as a saint in that Church, a long process was necessary, during which a person popularly called the Devil's Advocate would attempt to refute the evidence of holiness. Thurston played a similar role in Spiritualism. His especial target was the weakness in evidence of identity, but he also pointed out how grandiose claims made at the beginning of the Movement in 1848 had not been fulfilled, and analysed the reasons for the failure.

He was very persistent. Many of his papers were worked up into a book "The Church and Spiritualism" (Milwaukee, 1933- revised second printing 1935 390 pages). He was back in "The Month", the Jesuit journal in a four part series in 1938 "Some knotty points for Spiritualists.", which recycled some of this material. As already mentioned, he continued writing to the end.

His artillery was extensive. An American Professor, Henry Ford of Princeton, had sent him some early Spiritualist books. He had access to the SPR of which he was a member (his obituary in "The Times" wrongly said he was not) and to the British Museum Library. No Spiritualist in his time knew so well the early journals like "Medium and Daybreak"- except possibly A. Campbell Holms. (author of "Facts of Psychic Science and Philosophy" 1925; University Books 1969). If Thurston had a criticism to make of Spiritualism, he could usually find several representative Spiritualists to cite in support.

In his writings for Church publications, Thurston was of course subject to the official censorship, of which he had experience since he joined "The Month" in 1891. He would therefore point out that the Church had not pronounced on the essential nature of psychic phenomena, though it had warned the faithful to keep off because of the dangers. The human testimony to phenomena was like that to events in biblical days. It would not do to be too sceptical of one as this would undermine the other. Thurston ran into trouble with articles in "The Month" in 1917 which held open the possibility of communication with the dead. This is revealed in Joseph Crehan's biography "Father Thurston" (Sheed and Ward, 1952) which was itself censored in the usual way.

Thurston's paper on Katie King and Florence Cook in "The Church and Spiritualism" is the fullest available discussion before 1960. His paper in the same place on the accordion playing of Home is still the standard reference. He was clearly sympathetic to the two younger Fox sisters. But of course his religion was that of his Church, and he naturally pointed out the weaknesses of spirit teachings.

Any student of the psychic pioneers will profit from his writings. In his review of Crehan, Thurston's friend Dr Dingwall suggested a possible weakness in Thurston's analysis.

*Towards the end of his life Fr Thurston became more and more prone to believe the stories of spiritualistic phenomena printed in presumably reputable journals, and my oft-repeated words of caution merely seemed to him to be the product of an unreasoning scepticism.*

This review in JSPR November 1952 is (with Crehan's biography itself) an essential resource in the study of Thurston. It was undoubtedly a problem that Thurston was not in general able to witness mediumship and to compare personal experience with published accounts, though privately he may well have witnessed more than he wrote about.

Although Thurston's basic views may have been unchanged by the No-War prophecies debacle, I suggest that he was shaken. His first prompt response was in the Catholic weekly "The Tablet." For September 16th, 1939) p. 357).

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## ***SPIRITUALISTS AND THEIR "NO WAR" PREDICTIONS***

***By HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.***

*THE TABLET*, it will be readily understood, would not be likely under normal circumstances to recommend to its readers the perusal of a journal which describes itself as "the Spiritualist Newspaper with the world's largest net sale." But I venture to suggest that an exception may be made for the issue of *Psychic News*, which bears the date, September 9th, 1939. That organ of the cult, which for many months past has been assuring believers in communication with the other world that despite all political forebodings the people of England would not be involved in war, is now confronted by the hostilities which have actually begun. *Psychic News* has at least the honesty to admit the irreconcilable contradiction between the conditions definitely existing and its previous utterances. In a large-type article on its front page, the Editor, Mr. Maurice Barbanell, addresses his readers thus:-

*"Spiritualists are facing their blackest week. This is a time when their faith, founded on personal experience, is being strained to the uttermost limits of human endurance.*

*"For many months, nearly all the great guides made two definite prophecies: 'There will be no major war in Europe. England will not be involved in war.'*

*"The second prediction has been shattered. It would be possible to equivocate by saying that this land of ours has not been invaded or bombed at the time these words are written. That is not our intention. Neither do we think the prophecy could be so distorted."*

*The Editor goes on under the heading: They all agreed. "This forecast was not made by one isolated, obscure spirit guide. It was repeated again and again by all those in whom Spiritualists had placed their faith for guidance.*

*"Even as recently as last week-end, and after the Prime Minister's declaration that a 'state of war' existed, the spirit messages continued to affirm that peace would prevail, at that late hour. And the messages came from three mediums whose integrity has never been disputed."*

*Mr. Barbanell can only take refuge in the admission that "spirit guides are not infallible . . . they are human beings who, in spite of their evolution, are still liable to error." What is more he adds: "It may be that in the days to come many of us will have to remould part of our philosophy. The belief in the spirit world's ability to forecast may have to be abandoned."*

*On the other hand, Mr. Shaw Desmond, a prominent Spiritualist whose literary gifts are widely recognized, addressing an audience of his fellow believers at the Queen's Hall on the Sunday evening after the declaration of war, was so unshaken in his convictions as to declare:-*

*"I say to every woman and man listening to me tonight that the great spirit guides have not failed. If there is any failure, it is not in the world of spirit- it is in the world of man. "*

*And he went on:-*

*"Is there a man or woman here so base as to believe that the guides who have led us year by year, who have given us the message of faith and truth and goodness, would deceive us now. Even though the sword fell I would still say the fulfilment of God is not our fulfilment. There is more than one way of fulfilment of prophecy."*

*As the title of his discourse (i.e., "The Last Days of Adolf Hitler") would seem to suggest, Mr. Desmond's solution, if it can be called a solution, is that Hitler, although he may not pass from the scene at once, "already knows that his doom approaches." The war will therefore be short. On quite different lines a medium of note, Mrs. Helen Hughes, is cited as offering this explanation. Only twenty-four hours before the declaration of war her spirit guide came to tell her that the efforts of the spirit people had failed. "The forces of light and good had contacted forces of material darkness which they could not penetrate, and for the moment their hearts, "she reported, "were as sad as ours."*

*There is not much consolation to be found in this, and I fancy that the reaction of the more thoughtful and reasonable adherent of the movement will be similar to that of a correspondent whose letter is printed in the same issue of Psychic News.*

*"With a heart full of despair, I feel I must write and tell you how bitterly disappointed I am with the apparently inevitable failure of your 'No War' prophecies.*

*"I had just become interested in the subject of Spiritualism, and thought I was on the verge of something very wonderful; but if the spirit guides are not to be trusted on such a major issue, then it seems that the bottom is knocked out of the whole subject."*

*It is an ill wind that brings nobody any good, and it may be that this awful tragedy of a European war has after all its minor compensations. No one can doubt that the war of 1914 gave new life to the spiritualistic movement, then steadily losing ground. There was much excuse at that time for parents, wives and sweethearts, for the most part people ill-prepared to accept their bereavement with Christian resignation, if they consulted mediums and soothsayers. It was impossible to sit still, and this was the only source of comfort which seemed to offer possible relief. Then came Sir Oliver Lodge's book, Raymond, which made such dabbling with the occult respectable, and even lent it a scientific complexion. Finally this was followed by an endless stream of private revelations from the beyond, obtained through automatic writing, and this in spite of the endless contradictions of its messages, has increased, rather than diminished, down to the present day.*

*Let us then be glad, in spite of the uncertain future which lies before us, that the opening of the present war has been marked by the astounding set-back which our spiritualist journals are unable to dispute or ignore. They recognize the outbreak of hostilities as the nullification of a very positive, and practically unanimous, prediction of NO WAR, voiced by communicators in the other world.*

*The one or two exceptions mentioned in last week's number of Light certainly cannot be recognized as coming from mediums who are held by their fellow Spiritualists to speak with authority. It is to be hoped that this catastrophic bankruptcy of the guarantors of the bureau des informations in the beyond will be widely taken to heart.*

*It is perhaps, in fairness, well to add that the shattering exposure of the fallibility of mediums now under discussion does not of course mean that the mediums themselves, especially those of the better class, are all impostors, or are practising their trade in bad faith. There are endless examples on record of information imparted through such channels which has been verified and proved absolutely exact, though no explanation even by the widest extension of the telepathic faculty can be adduced to account for it. Neither does it seem, speaking for myself at least, that diabolic intervention can reasonably be invoked, in the majority of the cases I am thinking of, to explain the extraordinary knowledge exhibited. There are even seemingly well-attested cases of precision in a form which, according to the most reliable theological opinion, would exceed the natural powers of any diabolic intelligence. What seems to be certain is that we know nothing of the process by which knowledge is conveyed to the mind of the psychic, and that we have no possibility of making sure of the identity of the communicator, supposing that there is any communicator, which after all still remains one of the great problems of the whole question. On the other hand it may be confidently asserted that the information communicated in this way is always liable to error. Even after a long series of successes communications are apt to fail egregiously just at the moment when some point of particular interest presents itself for solution.*

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The skill of this article by an author in the closing days of his life was expanded with equal elegance in a longer paper for his own Jesuit journal "The Month." October 1939.

## ***SPIRITUALISM AND THE WAR***

*MORE than once in past years, when speaking or writing of Spiritualism, I have made reference to the Tichborne case as an illustration of the unreliability of the information which professes to come through mediums or automatists from denizens in the world beyond. In those spacious Victorian days when nothing more agitating than a cause celebre was available to fill the newspapers and become the topic of universal discussion, the identity of the Claimant provided a grand opportunity for the spirits to prove their superior knowledge of things about which ordinary mortals were baffled owing to the lack of adequate evidence. If it were not Roger Tichborne who was pleading his cause in the court of Mr. Justice Cockburn at Westminster, the true*

*Roger ought to have been in the next world and easily identifiable by the discarnate intelligences he lived amongst. Moreover, there was Arthur Orton, concerning whom many dead people must have known a good deal. At that date the most widely circulated among the Spiritualist newspapers was *The Medium and Daybreak*, and many letters were addressed to the editor by correspondents who claimed to have received direct information about the topic of the hour from their controls or communicators in the spheres. Unfortunately, opinions were divided. One party declared quite positively that the Claimant was the man, but the rest, upon equally sound discarnate authority, denied it. The editor published some of the letters, but in the end, as they multiplied and remained evenly balanced pro and con, he frankly admitted the disagreement and refused to print anything more upon the subject. It will be noticed that the disputed point in this case was one of past historical fact, a fact by no means so remote in date as to be beyond the memory of Roger's contemporaries, many of them still living. One would have said that if the spirits in the other world were capable of conveying exact information about anything, they would have been able to speak with certainty here.*

*The problem which, during the last twelve months, has claimed a good deal of notice in all the Spiritualist journals is of a very different character. It concerned what was then the future, i.e., the question whether, in the course of 1939, open hostilities would break out between England and Germany. In the opinion of practically all the leaders of so-called occult science, Spiritualists, astrologers and such like, the more trusted controls who brought messages from the etheric possessed the gift of prevision, or at any rate handed on the inspired thought of those who did possess that gift. In the previous crisis of September, 1938, the majority of mediums proclaimed that war would be avoided; and so, in fact, it proved, but only at the last moment, owing to Mr. Chamberlain's splendid effort, which resulted in the Munich agreement.*

*No doubt this success encouraged persistence in the same line of thought. Without in the least accusing the mediums concerned of conscious insincerity, for after sixty years of investigation we still know little or nothing of the process by which such impressions are received and find utterance, there was an even stronger consensus of opinion, in what we may call the psychic world, when we were faced with the crisis which confronted us in the autumn of the present year. War, it was declared by a large number of the most gifted and reliable mediums, was not to be feared for the present, and, indeed, many of them assured us that it would not come at all. It was, perhaps, natural that devoted adherents of the cult should trust this prediction implicitly.*

*What cannot, I think, be denied by anyone who makes an impartial examination of the evidence, is that in the case of the better class of psychics a multitude of facts, mostly trivial or personal in their nature, are habitually disclosed by them, with regard to their knowledge, of which no acceptable explanation- trickery, telepathy, cryptesthesia, a cosmic reservoir of memory, etc. -seems to be available. It is natural also that the many contradictions, errors and failures, especially when some question of importance (e.g., reincarnation) is raised, should be ignored or forgotten. But however we explain or excuse it, there can be no doubt that down to the end of last August the Spiritualistic journals and many individuals who believed themselves to be in communication with unseen powers, were persuaded that the political clouds,*



which, as day succeeded day, grew continually more threatening, would be dispersed and that no war would eventuate. That Spiritualists as a body identified themselves with this prediction is beyond dispute. In *Light*, the most sober of the organs of the cult, Mr. W. H. Evans, a prominent contributor, writing in the week after the outbreak of hostilities, declares:

“There will be many heart-searchings amongst Spiritualists at the failure of the prophecies that there would be no war. The unanimity of the controls has been such that one felt war would be impossible. With a few exceptions we were assured that there would be no war. [He adds] I have heard some say: "If war comes I will never believe in Spiritualism again." That is an entirely illogical attitude. We do not condemn the science of mathematics because a mathematician makes a mistake. We allow for the possibility of error.”

I must confess that logic does not seem to me here to be on the side of Mr. Evans. It is not a question of one mathematician making a mistake, but of a score or more of mathematicians all independently making the same mistake. Consideration also must be had for the gravity of the issue. We are not inquiring here whether somebody's grandfather was called Dick or Tom, wore Wellington boots or patent leathers, or whether his portrait was hung over the fireplace or on the opposite wall- this is the type of question which is often successfully answered by our best mediums. The anxiety which has filled the hearts of all Englishmen, and of the peoples of countless other nations, was to know whether the world would be plunged into a war in which millions of human lives were bound to be sacrificed. And to assuage that anguish of doubt, the marvellously gifted spirits, if we are to believe mediums of the highest credit, reply in concert: "There is no cause for fear; war will not come." Neither was there any suggestion that they themselves were in doubt or were capable of being deceived.

The editor of *Light*, Mr. G. H. Lethem, speaks rather more guardedly than his colleague, but he says in the same issue:

“During the past year, *Light* has published many messages, purporting to come from observers on the Other Side, in which assurances were given, more or less emphatic, that there would be "no European War," or that there would be "no Great War," or that there would be "no war for England." We have also, from time to time, quoted predictions based on astrological calculations, most of which seemed to confirm the mediumistic messages. We told our readers that these messages and predictions gave grounds for hoping and even believing, that Peace would be preserved... As events have proved, our hopes have been disappointed. War has come to Europe; there is war for England, and all the signs point to its being a Great War. It is a bitter disappointment, this cannot be denied. But there is no reason to doubt the veracity, or even the existence of the various Communicators from whom the Peace messages purported to come.”

Mr. Lethem is also able to refer to one medium, Mrs. Helen Spiers, "who has for months predicted that war would come," and also to an astrologer, Mr. Charles E. Mitchell of Halifax, who, in his book "Foretold by the Stars," declared that war would break out between August, 1939, and March, 1940, though this pronouncement was firmly discredited by a reviewer in another Spiritualist organ, *The Two Worlds*.

*Certain it is that Spiritualists as a body were definitely committed to the belief, founded on a great number of supposed communications from the Beyond, that the war which threatened would be averted. Even in America a well-known English adherent of the cause broadcast, about a month ago, the announcement that: "The Spiritualists in England, who are about one and a half million in number, all believe that there will be no more war. Spirit friends on the Other Side are constantly bringing us this message." I very much doubt the statement that there are anything like a million and a half Spiritualists in this country,(1) and the fact that. the number is limited of those who are active supporters of the movement (as opposed to mere dabblers who occasionally visit a medium or attend a platform demonstration out of curiosity) is, for more than one reason, a source of satisfaction.*

*Prominent leaders like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, quite a long time ago, used to be assured by communicators from the Beyond that in ten years or so all the population would be professing Spiritualism. The prediction has certainly not been fulfilled. If it had, the Spiritualist persuasion that no war was imminent would surely have frustrated the unanimous action of all political parties in spending vast sums over our preparations to meet the emergency. We should have been left as naked victims for Hitler to work his will upon. It is lucky indeed that the Spiritualists are neither numerous nor influential among us.*

*Psychic News, which claims the largest circulation of any Spiritualist newspaper, has spoken with extraordinary frankness of the dismay caused by the shattering of beliefs so widely held. I have dealt with these utterances elsewhere,(2) but I cannot omit to quote a sentence or two from an article on the front page of the journal just named, signed by the editor, Mr. Maurice Barbanell. He begins with the statement: "Spiritualists are facing their blackest week. This is a time when their faith, founded on personal experience, is being strained to the uttermost limits of human endurance. For many months, nearly all the great guides made two definite prophecies.*

*'There will be no major war in Europe. England will not be involved in war.'" He goes on to point out that "this forecast was not made by one isolated, obscure spirit guide. It was repeated again and again by all those in whom Spiritualists had placed their faith for guidance." In conclusion Mr. Barbanell even says: "It may be that in days to come many of us will have to re-mould part of our philosophy. The belief in the spirit world's ability to forecast may have to be abandoned." Those who know anything of the tone of Mr. Barbanell's contributions for several years past to the periodical which he conducts, or those who have at any time listened to his speeches, will be surprised- indeed, I might say, edified - by the courage with which he admits the magnitude of the set-back to the cause he has so ardently espoused.*

*To provide yet one further illustration of the tone prevalent in Spiritualist circles in almost the last days of the crisis, I quote from *The Two Worlds*, a Manchester organ of the cult. In the issue for August 18th, we find printed in the most conspicuous type, with a heading in proportionate capitals, the following announcement:*

## “WORLD PEACE NOT TO BE BROKEN

### *Will there be a World Peace Pact?*

*While a state of preparedness for war is necessary, and Spiritualists in the main fully endorse the policy of the Government in their armament programme, yet Spiritualists are in a large measure fully convinced there will be no Great World War. This fact has been given from our platforms during the last twelve months by scores of mediums: but there are still the fearful, not only around us but among us, and this being so (writes the "Londoner"), I make no apology for giving readers of *The Two Worlds* three most assuring messages which I have heard given from our platforms during the last month."*

*I may note that in the next issue of the same journal two strong protests were made, by no means approving endorsement of the Government policy in their arms programme, but I proceed to quote, by way of specimen, one of the "three most assuring messages" just spoken of. The two others are of the same character and not a whit more convincing. Anyway, one medium, speaking to a small circle in London, stated:*

*"I am in a large hall. There is a long table in the centre, and seated round are representatives of all nations. I see our Prime Minister (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) in the chair; a large Golden Cross is above his head. A document lies on the table in front of him, and one by one each member present comes forward and signs. It is a Peace Pact. The Prime Minister fades away and in his seat appears the radiant form of Jesus, a golden crown upon his head. On either side appear the spirit forms of Buddha and Confucius representing the East. Then Jesus, followed by Buddha and Confucius, walked through the lines of the representatives of the nations, while high up in the hall appeared an angelic choir singing the Hallelujah Chorus.*

*Interpretation: World Peace Pact, signed with Love for the whole world."*

*It must be confessed that the acceptance of this and similar communications as if they were evidential and "most reassuring," does not give a high impression of the critical intelligence of the readers of *The Two Worlds*. Neither is there anything very satisfactory in the account printed on the front page of the same paper in its next issue (August 28th), of a message from the late Lord Northcliffe. It is stated that through "Bert," the control of Mrs. Winifred Ellis, a medium whose name is quite unknown to me, an assurance came in this form: "Northcliffe says: 'tell the people on your side there will be no great war. It gives the spirit world great joy to give you earth people this good news.'"*

*But my main purpose in the present article is to say something of the communications recorded by a lady, whom a well-known authority in these circles, Dr. F. W. Wood, describes as "the greatest writing medium in our generation." This is Miss Geraldine Cummins, an Irishwoman whose reputation has been mainly achieved by the narratives she has published concerning early Christian history, mostly belonging to the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. There can be no question that upon those readers who are unfamiliar with the problems of automatic writing*

*these "Scripts of Cleophas," and the supplementary volumes, are likely to make a considerable impression.*

*Miss Cummins tells us herself that it was contrary to all her tastes and inclinations to produce a narrative dealing with the religious history of the first century. She says, for example: "My ignorance is considerable concerning that period. I know neither Greek, Hebrew nor Latin; and my reading is confined to literature of a modern character." In particular she affirms that she has never read a word of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and that the very name of the Clementines was unknown to her until after her first Cleophas book was in type. (3) There can, I think, be no possible reason to doubt these statements, for Miss Cummins had done other literary work before the Cleophas scripts began, and her friends are familiar with her personal history.*

*Moreover, there is something abnormal about the production of these scripts. The automatist goes into a slight trance and her hand begins to write with a speed which is quite bewildering. Little short of 2,000 words (that is the equivalent of more than four pages of THE MONTH) are sometimes written in an hour. Moreover, the literary style maintained in these narratives is excellent and seems altogether superior to anything produced by Miss Cummins in her conscious attempts at original composition. As she herself says:*

*"In the interests of psychology and psychical research. I have to admit that the production of these Scripts is quite outside the compass of my conscious creative powers. Day after day, in the presence of witnesses, I have sat for over a month in a country house, far from books, with not even a Bible near me, getting this detailed chronicle with the same abnormal rapidity; the MS. each day being taken away and not read out to me, to avoid the possibility that my subconscious mind might be considered to be building in advance upon it. Yet those who have read the first published instalment will perceive that the narrative maintains an episodic unity." (4)*

*My own impression, derived from a perusal of a good deal of these texts, is that they do not afford much positive material for sceptical criticism. They do not directly conflict with the narrative or the implications of the New Testament. They introduce many new episodes and many new names of which nothing is elsewhere on record. Some of the matter is occasionally extravagant, but not more extravagant than what we find in the apocryphal Acts of St. Thomas, St. Andrew or St. John, not to speak of the Clementines. A small committee of divines, mostly, it seems, Presbyterians, were invited to examine the "Scripts of Cleophas," and we learn that, under the leadership of the late Dr. Lamond, they arrived at the conclusion that: "If the present record be in any wise authentic, it is undoubtedly to be regarded as a most momentous contribution to our knowledge of Apostolic times. It contains much which, on consideration of the life and mentality of the intermediary, Miss Cummins, seems quite inexplicable on the supposition of human authorship."*

*It may be presumed that these divines knew little or nothing of the supposed "Patience Worth" who, through the lips of the late Mrs. Curran in the United States, dictated whole novels, one at least of them of a scriptural character, and even with a rapidity which exceeds that recorded in Miss Cummins's case. Mrs. Curran was a woman who had no education but what was of a most elementary kind, yet from her*

lips, or through her hands, flowed correct descriptions of many things which she could not normally have known anything about. The same is probably true of Dr. Wood's "Rosemary"; and, to take an example of a quite different character, Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, who read nothing, and, according to the testimony of her amanuensis Clement Brentano, knew extraordinarily little even about the contents of the Gospels, quoted texts with perfect accuracy in her "Revelations," and was never betrayed into any direct contradiction with the New Testament narrative. Thus, in view of the 500,000 words or more recorded in the Cleophas script and its continuations, it is impossible to deny Miss Cummins's claim to be accounted a genuine psychic.

Now this lady, besides these amplifications of New Testament history which have excited so much attention, has also displayed her mediumistic powers in other directions. She professes, in the first place, to have received a number of messages from the late F. W. H. Myers, the famous psychic researcher, author of "Human Personality," and two collections of these have been printed; but, still more recently, other spirits in the Beyond seem to have sought her out in order to impart messages to mankind through her hand. One of these is referred to as "the Politician," whose real name is known to Miss Cummins but not made public. Myers, on March 13, 1938, declared that he had been talking with "the Politician" who told him that "there will be no European war, but bloodshed in Austria," a prediction regarding bloodshed which does not seem to have been justified by any very notable happening occasioned by the Anschluss. Again, on May 1, 1938, "the Politician," communicating in person, announced:

"Now, through recent diplomacy, Germany has become isolated and in consequence there will be no war. Chamberlain has, I think, saved Europe."

Again, at a sitting on October 10, 1938, another communicator, who is referred to as "the Financier," declared:

"By delaying and delaying the apparently inevitable war, she [England] gives the revolting party in Germany a chance to become strong - so strong that, eventually, they turn on the present regime and attack it openly. I think, therefore, that a great war can and will be averted. But you go dangerously near it, and only the strength of your armaments will prevent its outbreak."

On October 16, 1938, "the Financier" came again and spoke more positively:

"Now as to the future. At the present time, if Germany fought the Allies she would not be able to maintain a war for more than a month. The reason for this is that she is nearly bankrupt. . . No, during the next eighteen months, Germany is in no position to go to war - only the madness of a greater fear, fear of a revolution within, would goad her rulers into starting a European war. . . Peace for the next eighteen months. Let that be your motto. I cannot see further than that period."

The same guide, "the Financier," reiterated his forecast in rather more positive terms on January 25, 1939.

*"I have told you before and I repeat it again, there is to be no war during the next few years. I cannot see further. There is to be no European war in which many countries will be involved. You will hear of riots and you will hear of horrible deeds committed in Spain, and in March nations will be faced with a serious crisis. The majority of people will believe that war is inevitable. This belief is entirely mistaken."*

*Later on that same day (January 25th) another communicator gave this encouraging message:*

*"Be of good cheer! In this year ye pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death but come through unscathed. Peace, hardly retained, will be retained in the coming year and the year after this one."*

*On July 23, 1939, "the Financier" committed himself still more positively in the following terms:*

*"Hitler and Mussolini have been making very complete preparations for war in connexion with the Mediterranean and Danzig. But it is the greatest bluff of all. They won't fight, but most people will believe they are going to fight in September - possibly. Remember, no war."*

*The italics appear in the script; but the same communicator certainly seemed to weaken when, on August 22nd, the day of the surprise announcement concerning the Russo-German pact, he wrote again: "England, France and Poland do not fight the Axis Powers... I think the tide is turning."*

*All these messages were collected, about mid-August, in a booklet called "The European Crises," for which Miss E. B. Gibbes, Miss Cummins's friend and secretary, furnished a commentary. (5) Miss Gibbes is apparently much impressed by the intuition shown by the communicators in respect of the events which have occurred during the two years previous to the declaration of war. I confess I find many mistakes in the record, and no more trace of a gift of prevision than I should expect to meet with in any journalist who kept abreast of contemporary developments. What is certain is that the war has come in spite of the mass of Spiritualistic predictions to the contrary.*

*Further, with this fact before our eyes, I find it impossible to put any faith in those retrospective visions of early Christian history recorded by Miss Cummins which purport to come from Cleophas and other disciples of the period. I admit that they do seem to reflect the spirit of the times. It is even possible that some incidents recorded are veridical, but we do not know how they came into Miss Cummins's subconscious mind. Anne Catherine Emmerich described in great detail a six weeks' visit of our Lord to Cyprus during the period of His public life. It is beyond question that a great deal of what this ignorant Westphalian girl tells us regarding the geography, industries and mythology of the island in the first century is perfectly correct. No explanation seems possible of the source of her information, but few will venture to say that her disclosures are a revelation of heavenly origin and, consequently, have a claim upon anyone's serious belief.*

*Perhaps one final word may not be out of place. I am not writing hastily or in ignorance. During the past twenty years and more, I have spent, possibly wasted, a great deal of time in examining and comparing the messages which purport to emanate from the other world, but nothing has occurred to alter or relieve my profound distrust of the information so obtained. The accounts furnished of life in the spheres by such communicators as Raymond, Pheneas, Ballou, Claude Bamber, and scores of others, contradict each other at every turn. It is rare enough to find them agreeing about any feature whatsoever. There could be no stronger warning against putting faith in their guidance than the fact that on the one occasion on which they seemed to be unanimous in the information they gave, their conclusions have proved to be definitely wrong.*

HERBERT THURSTON.

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(1) *What seems to me conclusive proof of the numerical weakness of Spiritualists in England is a study of their weekly newspapers. Not an advertisement appears in their attenuated pages but of mediumistic services, instruction courses, the paraphernalia used on such occasions, and other things which, practically speaking, concern Spiritualists only. Grocers, furniture dealers, haberdashers, etc., send their advertisements to journals which they know have at least a moderately large circulation. They extend such patronage to papers like the Anglican Church Times or the Catholic Universe, but not to Psychic News. Moreover, from time to time, two at least of these Spiritualist journals make an appeal for contributions to a "sustentation fund."*

(2) *See The Tablet for September 16, 1939.  
VOL. CLXXIV.*

(3) *See "Concerning the Cleophas Scripts," by Geraldine Cummins, PP. 4 and 7.*

(4) *"Concerning the Cleophas Scripts," p.6.*

(5) *The last message only appears in a second and later edition of the "Crises."*

.....

The closing remarks of this article in particular seem to me to show that although Thurston believed in survival, and in some communication, he was more sceptical than nearly all Spiritualists in his beliefs about the phenomena, while his religious beliefs generally were those of an educated English Jesuit. But because his numerous papers on psychic matters are scholarly and sympathetic, they can still today be read with profit by students of whatever views. LP

## ROGUES AND VAGABONDS

Modern Spiritualism since its onset and its growing popularity in England in the early-mid 1850's was potentially at risk from its mediums being arrested for simply being a medium; an offence which carried little or no defence under the 1824 Vagrancy Act.

In 1876, Henry Slade and Francis Monck were arrested and charged under this same Vagrancy Act, Slade's trial began on October 1<sup>st</sup>, venued at Bow Street Police Court, London, with Monck being charged on the 11<sup>th</sup> November, at Huddersfield, York; both were sentenced to three months hard labour; Slade escaped his sentence on a technicality and duly left England.

Slade and Monck were possibly the first Spiritualist mediums to be charged under this vagrancy act, Francis Ward Monck being the first to serve a prison sentence as a Spiritualist medium in 1877.( see John L. Randall " Francis Ward Monck and the problem of physical mediumship " JSPR October 2003, p.243-259 " with reply by Michael Coleman in JSPR April 2004. )

I have printed below, only the conviction portion of the Judgment against Monck due to space: *This is taken from the 'Report of Deputation from The Spiritualist National Union to the Home Office 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1943'. Published by the S.N.U. 1944. The Monck Judgement was originally printed in 'The Spiritualist' Jan. 26, 1877.*

*Judgment in case of*  
**MONCK v. HILTON,**  
*6th February, 1877.*

*High Court of Justice. Exchequer Division*  
*(Before Barons Cleasby & Pollock).*

*Rogue and Vagabond-Spiritualism-Palmistry or otherwise,*  
*5 Geo. 4, C. 83, S. 4.*

*The appellant was convicted by justices under 5 Geo. 4, C.83, S.4., which makes punishable as a rogue and vagabond "every person . . . . using any subtle craft, means, or devices by Palmistry or otherwise to deceive and impose on any of His Majesty's subjects." In a case stated for this Court, the justices found as a fact that the appellant attempted to deceive and impose upon certain persons by falsely pretending to have the supernatural faculty of obtaining from invisible agents and the spirits of the dead answers, messages and manifestations of power, namely, noises, raps, and the winding up of a musical box:-*

*Held that the means used by the appellant came within the words "by palmistry or otherwise," and that the conviction was right.*

*Case stated by justices under 20 and 21 Vict. C.43.*



*1. At a Petty Sessions for the Borough of Huddersfield, in the County of York, on the 11th November, 1876, Francis Ward Monck, the appellant, was charged by the Respondent, under s .4. Of 5 Geo. 4, C.83, with having, on the 23rd October, 1876, at Huddersfield, unlawfully used certain subtle craft, means, and devices, by palmistry and otherwise, to deceive and impose on certain of Her Majesty's subjects, to wit', Hepplestone, Bedford, Lodge, and others, contrary to the statute. The charge was heard, and the appellant was convicted of the said offence and adjudged as a rogue and vagabond, to be committed to the House of Correction at Wakefield to hard labour for three calendar months....*

It may appear that rebellion by spiritualists against this Vagrancy Act, and a need to petition against it to protect their mediums may have started with the Matthews case in 1880, some three years after Monck's imprisonment.

Mr. F.O. Matthews a clairvoyant and trance test medium was jailed at Wakefield prison under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. A statement appeared in *Spiritual Notes*. May, 1880. p. 292-3. Vol.1.-no. XXIII.

### **"ROGUES AND VAGABONDS"**

*WHILE we write Mr. F. O. Matthews is lying in common jail at Wakefield, whither he has been committed by the magistrates assembled at the Keighley petty sessions for three months' hard labour as a Rogue and a Vagabond, having, because he exercised his gifts as a clairvoyant, been charged under 5 Geo. IV., cap. 83, sec. 4, with using "subtle means or device, by palmistry or otherwise, to deceive or impose on" Her Majesty's subjects. Mr. Matthews has fallen a victim to the iniquitous law from the vengeance of which-or rather of his ignorant prosecutors-Dr. Slade so narrowly but happily escaped. Mr. Matthews has our hearty sympathy; the cruel and unjust law, and the cruel and unjust men who set it in motion against him, have at once our pity and our indignation.*

*A "Rogue" and a "Vagabond" forsooth! A medium who professes to have clairvoyant powers, of an abnormal condition, may possibly be a rogue, of course. There are, we are sorry to know, dishonest and dishonourable mediums; but there are also dishonest and dishonourable men in every grade of life. The iniquity lies here - that, while bigoted men refuse to believe because they have refused to inquire, every medium, whether he be honest or not, is accounted a rogue and an impostor without proof. If a man only professes to exercise a gift, of the existence of which prejudiced men know nothing, it is assumed at once that he is necessarily guilty of imposition and deception; he is branded as a rogue and a vagabond; and is committed to jail without mercy. And all this injustice is perpetrated under the shadow of a law which was enacted before modern Spiritualism was heard of; in which, therefore, it was never intended that Spiritualist mediums should be of necessity included; and the main purpose of which was, obviously enough, the suppression of the swindling of dishonest and disorderly vagrants, by whom, when the law was passed, the country was notoriously infested. Had this act been intended from the first to include every assumption of spiritual gifts, and the exercise of every "subtle means or device" which was beyond the comprehension of average humanity, how is it that the Church has escaped the consequence of pretending to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost by the*

*laying on of hands? The Church escapes because it is assumed that the Church is honest, and that, even if it has not the power which it professes, it sincerely believes that it has, and therefore is guiltless of any intentional deception or imposture. But in the case of a Spiritualist medium, who can offer better proof of his gifts than any priest or bishop has ever done, the law has no leniency whatever; establish the fact of his profession and that suffices; away with him; three months hard labour; the fellow is a Rogue and a Vagabond beyond a doubt!*

*What, then, is to be done? Are we to fold our hands quietly and submit? Plainly not. There was a time when Spiritualists would have had no choice but to meekly endure- not scourgings and revilings merely- but any pains and penalties which ignorance and bigotry might inflict. Once they were a "feeble folk," and had to suffer for the sin of weakness, as many men now suffer for the crime of being poor. But times have changed since then. Year by year Spiritualists have been growing to be a power in the land - they are now strong enough to protest; and if the protest is not listened to they will soon be strong enough to fight. Within their ranks are now included men of the highest culture and the greatest learning ; men of eminence for their scientific attainments; men whose good sense, and whose honour and probity cannot be doubted; men whose voice - when once they are constrained to speak out - it will be impossible to disregard. And they will be expected to speak out; nay, more, not to speak only, but to unite in one solid phalanx in doing battle for the right.*

*We are pleased to learn that already many memorials have been very numerously signed calling upon the Home Secretary to release Mr. Matthews from his imprisonment without delay. As a matter of fact, so far as we have the means of judging, the Home Secretary will have no power, as he will have no ground, to grant the prayer of the memorialists. The prisoner has been convicted according to law, and has accepted his conviction without notice of appeal; but the memorials will at least serve the very excellent purpose of a protest against the law itself, and against the interpretation that has been placed upon it. It is the law, however, that must be attacked; and that, too, with vigour and persistency, till honest mediums are relieved from its operation. The whole question, we are glad to see, has been promptly taken in hand by the British National Association; and we have no doubt that the Association will do its work wisely and well. Of course we do not know at present what steps it will be deemed best to adopt; but we have reason to believe that it will take legal advice on the subject, and shape its course accordingly. To ourselves it seems obvious that -whatever else may be done - the method of procedure should include an influential deputation to a leading member of the new ministry, the presentation of petitions to both Houses of Parliament, and the forwarding of copies of these petitions to every member of the legislature, to all the judges, and to the chairmen of quarter sessions throughout the country. And this should be done again and again, if necessary, till public opinion has been enlightened, and the importunity has been rewarded by the desired success.*

*No body of men in the kingdom can do this work so efficiently as the B.N.A.S., because there is none which has so much influence at its command. But in the pursuit of its purpose it must be well sustained. The object cannot be achieved without a considerable expenditure of money, and friends everywhere should join the Association at once, and thus increase its power, and replenish its funds. Some provincial Spiritualists have occasionally questioned the value of a central*

association like the B.N.A.S.; but they have now a proof of its real worth, and we trust that they will give abundant evidence of their own sympathy and sincerity by a prompt and generous assistance.

.....

The British National Association of Spiritualists, meeting of council on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1880 under the presidency of Alexander Calder recorded in their proceedings:

**THE LAW AS AFFECTING MEDIUMS.**

*Mr. Dawson Rogers called attention to the recent conviction of a medium at Keighley, in Yorkshire, and his sentence to three months imprisonment, under a charge of having used "subtle means or device to deceive and impose" on Her Majesty's subjects. It was useless, he said, to discuss the question whether the medium was honestly and conscientiously exercising the gift of clairvoyance, because it was manifest, under the existing state of the law, and of ignorant prejudice against Spiritualism, that he would have been equally convicted whether he was honest or not. Something must be done to remedy such an obvious injustice to conscientious mediums, and he would therefore move the following resolution:-*

*That whereas by 5 Geo. IV., cap. 83, sec. 4, it is enacted that every person using any "subtle means or device, by palmistry or otherwise, to deceive and impose on" any of Her Majesty's subjects, shall, on conviction, be deemed a rogue and vagabond, and may be committed to the House of Correction, there to be kept to hard labour for any time not exceeding three months; and whereas this enactment has been held to be applicable to Spiritualist mediums without evidence that they have intentionally resorted to deception and imposture; this Council is strongly of opinion that immediate steps should be taken to secure to honest and conscientious mediums a relief from the said penalties, and requests the General Purposes Committee to adopt such measures as they may deem best calculated for the accomplishment of this purpose.*

*Miss HOUGHTON seconded the resolution.*

*Mr. STANTON MOSES supported the proposal. While it was extremely desirable that the Association should in no way, directly or indirectly, commit itself to the defence of anything that was not perfectly straightforward and bona fide, and so that it should move with caution, there could be no doubt that it was its bounden duty to defend mediums from unjust persecution. This it had always been foremost in doing. Witness its action in Dr. Slade's case. This it would do when ever opportunity offered. He was the more glad that this resolution had been brought forward because an American paper, remarkable only for the scurrilous language in which it phrased its criticisms, and for the frequent absurdity of its suggestions, had lately charged the Association with a desire to persecute medium s- (Laughter) and had printed some most abusive articles on the subject. These were beneath notice save by the practical reply which this resolution afforded. The Association desired at all times to defend honest mediumship, and would do that the more effectually by declining to support any medium who was not willing to sit under circumstances that precluded suspicion.*

*The motion was then put and carried unanimously.*

Mr. F. O. Matthews was well supported by various Spiritualist societies, well known speakers and mediums like J.J. Morse: as was published below in Spiritual Notes for June 1880:

### ***SPIRITUALISM IN THE PROVINCES.***

*THE most noticeable fact in the events of the past month has been the condemnation of Mr. F. O. Matthews to three months' hard labour by the magistrates of the Keighley Petty Sessions. Mr. Matthews was prosecuted at the instance of Mr. Ireland, a superintendent of police, for exercising his mediumship as a clairvoyant. That Mr. Matthews is a clairvoyant of striking powers there is abundant testimony, and that his mediumship is true and genuine plenty of evidence is forthcoming. Hence it can only be understood that the convicting justices must either be ignorant of the facts of clairvoyance, or have ignored their existence.*

*In either case it is the duty of Spiritualists to move in such cases as these, and strive to get either all such convictions quashed, or the law so amended that the just and honest exercise of psychological talents shall be as legitimate as the exercise of any other "gift" or "genius" of our natures.*

*It is with feelings of no little pleasure I record the fact that the Newcastle-on-Tyne Spiritual Evidence Society has issued a petition which has been extensively circulated throughout the kingdom praying the authorities to remit the remainder of Mr. Matthews's sentence. The Newcastle Society has thus earned the gratitude of all mediums and workers, who have the satisfaction of knowing that the local friends are neither afraid nor ashamed to stand by those who have served the cause when persecuting bigotry endeavours to overthrow them. It is another evidence of the value of the "consolidation of co-operation," as a petition from a representative body is an evidence that we exist as a power, and demand that our rights shall be respected.*

*But some of our would-be "men of light and leading" have unwisely attempted to reflect discourteously upon Mr. Matthews, and by the aid of cheap sentiment and masked attack not only cast reflections upon him personally but upon all professional mediums and speakers as well, who are termed "hirelings," "hangers on," &c. Well, that no mediums means no Spiritualism is pretty evident. Then, of course, no papers, editors, institutions, associations, or ought else. I Sincerely hope Mr. Matthews may obtain the remission of the rest of his sentence, and that our people will set on foot an agitation that will result in the law being so far amended that honest mediums may be as free to exercise their gifts for pay as are writers, singers, lecturers, and the rest.*

*J.J. MORSE.*

The medium Mr. F.O. Matthews was liberated from Wakefield prison on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1880, where a grand reception awaited him.

Although we know of petitioning to legalise mediumship being made to parliament and the then home secretary on behalf of Matthews and other mediums, it was not

successful. Indeed not until July 1930, some fifty years later, did a formal deputation, led by Arthur Conan Doyle, provided 'progress' with its initial stages. It was yet another twenty one years until the amendment of the Vagrancy Act was completed, giving mediums freedom to work legally.  
P.J.G.

.....

*[We continue with the letters of J. J. Morse's Australia / New Zealand trip between the periods of September 1902 to June 1903. This 5th letter is sent from Dunedin, New Zealand as published in 'Light' March 7<sup>th</sup> 1903]*

## **LETTERS FROM MR. J. J. MORSE.**

V.

### **SOME REMARKABLE SEANCES.**

Since my previous communication I have voyaged 1,400 miles across the Southern Pacific Ocean, and am now, for the first time, upon New Zealand soil. I reached Dunedin on January 7th. The local work is in the hands of the Dunedin Psychological Society, and it is fortunate in being directed by two gentlemen, brothers, the Messrs. Stables, as secretary and president respectively, both of them exceedingly capable men. On the 9th the society tendered me a public reception, which was a very enjoyable and pleasant occasion, nearly all the members of the body being present. On Sunday, January 11th, I commenced the public lectures, in the handsome Victoria Hall, which was completely filled. The opening meeting was most successful. Each meeting was fully reported on the following day by the two papers 'The Otago Daily Times' and 'The Evening Star'; indeed, the Press, so far, here has been very considerate of my work—quite different from the way in which the Cause was treated thirty years ago. The society has been fortunate in the past in having the assistance of an excellent trance speaker, a Mr. Rough, and that, combined with the visits of Dr. Peebles, and Mrs. Brigham lately, has no doubt done much to educate public opinion in our direction. I remain in this city until the first week in February, then going on to Christchurch and Wellington, and possibly to New Plymouth, the two latter places being on the North Island; this city is on the South Island. I have now had the honour of representing our Cause in the two cities furthest down in the Southern Hemisphere, for the South Pole is the next point! So far, my impressions of New Zealand are decidedly agreeable. Dunedin was originally a Scotch settlement, and is still largely Gaelic as to its inhabitants, and, evidently, the sturdy Scots' character has played an important and successful part in establishing a sound commercial and social community. The city is well built, and bears all the outward indications of prosperity.

Now allow me a brief mention of the seances to which I referred in the closing lines of my previous letter.

Through a mutual friend I was introduced to Mr. T. W. Stanford, a wealthy citizen of Melbourne, and the brother of the late Servitor Leland Stanford, of California, the

millionaire, and founder of the Columbia University in that State. The seances are held twice weekly, on the evenings of Monday and Friday, in Mr. Stanford's office, in the centre of the city. The incidents are so remarkable, the mediumship so singular, that I will simply state the case as I found it, and, while I have my own convictions, I will leave my readers to form theirs from a simple statement of my own observations.

The medium is a Mr. Charles Bailey, who, Mr. Stanford assures me, has never been outside Australia, in which country he was born. He is apparently about thirty years of age, a quite ordinary man, somewhat like a decent mechanic in manner and appearance. His private conversation does not display any marks of education or culture. The phenomena occurring in his presence are two-fold, physical and mental. First let me describe the phenomenal portions of the manifestations. Occasionally luminous 'hands' appear, and these write short messages to various sitters. The *apports* include the bringing to the circle of 'tablets'-clay and terra cotta-bearing 'Assyrian' inscriptions, figures, and portraits, the inscriptions being in the cuneiform characters; also Arabic manuscripts, and Egyptian papyri, copies of Greek MSS. of remote periods, and by ancient copyists; numerous ancient coins, 'Assyrian, Arabic, Egyptian, Roman and Grecian.' There have also been brought 'African fetish' articles; live snakes, and birds, and flowers, and flower-seeds from India; large bunches of dripping wet sea-weed from the adjacent bay; and quantities of sand from the shore and the mines in the interior of Australia. All the articles that I have described I have seen, for Mr. Stanford possesses an extensive collection obtained at the séances. As to the genuine nature of the articles there is no question.

Regarding the mental phenomena the controls are remarkable. These include 'Dr. E. Robinson,' who passed away in 1864, and who during his life filled the chair of Syro Chaldaic literature in the Theological Seminary of New York, and was well known as the discoverer of what was named, in his honour, 'Robinson's Arch,' at Jerusalem; 'Dr. Whitcombe,' a former resident of Melbourne; also the 'Rev. Mr. White,' of the same city, and 'Rev. Professor Julian Woods,' of Adelaide, S. A. There are also an Italian, Signor Valletti, and a Londoner, of the coster type, calling himself 'Mr. Brooks'; while two Hindoos, 'Abdul' and 'Selim,' and a Persian, whose name I do not now recall (with others occasionally), are the controls usually in evidence.

I was able to attend four of the meetings, and also had a private interview with one of the controls, at his special request-'Dr. Robinson,' who is a most striking personality. He talks fluently, and in a most cultured fashion, concerning ancient history; and his familiarity with Assyria, Persia, and Egypt is no superficial chatter, but rests, to all appearance, upon actual knowledge, and is accompanied with a wealth of detail most remarkable in itself. Indeed, under the control of these influences the medium changes into a man of culture, with the manners of a gentleman, and the inflections of education. The broken English of the 'Italian' sounds exactly as it would if used by such a native, and the peculiarities of the 'Hindoos' are all equally marked and vivid; while 'Mr. Brooks' is just a vulgar cockney, who I found, on questioning him, was quite familiar with London and its shady side of life. Indeed, he was one of the old-time bird fanciers of Seven Dials, which he knew quite well, and he had 'done time,' as he expressed it. In no case was there any mixing of identities, and each control was at all times perfectly distinct from any other. Two actors also control, 'Mr. C. Creswick' and 'Mr. G. V. Brookes,' but it was not my fortune to hear them.

In my possession are two of the `tablets,' one with a portrait upon it, which is said to be that of `Tiglath Pilesir,' the other, `Nimrod' in the act of slaying an Assyrian bull. A third `tablet' has been brought for me since I left Melbourne. I also have a sprig cut from a plant grown in the circle-from a mango seed, I think it was. This plant was manipulated by 'Abdul,' the `Hindoo' control, whom I heard hold a conversation in Hindustani with a linguist who was present on the occasion.

Now a few words as to the conditions under which the seances are held and the phenomena produced. In the first place, all present are there in every case by Mr. Stanford's sole invitation, and no one pays anything; indeed, money will not under any circumstances secure admission, while the medium is not permitted to invite anyone, nor bring any friend or acquaintance with him, under any pretext whatever. The medium is entirely paid for his attendance by Mr. Stanford. Each evening Mr. Stanford thoroughly searches Mr. Bailey, as I know from personal observation; so it is impossible that the articles brought are concealed on the person of the medium. Prior to the commencement of the sitting Mr. Bailey rarely speaks to anyone present; as a rule he simply comes in and takes his seat at the table immediately before the proceedings commence. The *apports* come in the dark, but the facts of the searching must be set against the darkness, as well as the nature of the articles which come. The alternatives are, collusion among the sitters, or with Mr. Stanford. As the medium does not know who will be present, the first issue can be dismissed; while Mr. Stanford's position in society, and the fact that he is the sole support of the seances, disposes of the second suggestion. And, most important, the nature of the apports is such that they could not be bought anywhere in the Colonies, nor could the `tablets' be forged therein. Such, briefly put, are the facts as they have come under my own personal observation. The large number of articles which Mr. Stanford has accumulated is testimony to either the most remarkable fraud, or to the most wonderful evidences of spirit power that the annals of mediumship record. My opinion is that the phenomena are genuine.

During my visits I found the company included many notable people. I met there, for instance, Ex-Judge Casey, a retired Melbourne judge; Mrs. Millar, president of the Woman's Suffrage League; Mr. Clement Wragge, the Government astronomer, besides other professional and commercial risen of standing in the city. The popular minister, the Rev. Dr. Strong, has also attended, and all testify to the remarkable character of the mediumship of Mr. Bailey. I dined at the house of a well-known Melbourne lawyer, and there met at dinner Mr. James Smith, one of the oldest and ablest journalist *litterateurs* in the Colonies, who has written on these phenomena, and he is profoundly convinced of their genuineness. However, I have said enough and must now leave the matter to the judgment of my readers.

Dunedin, New Zealand.  
January 20th, 1903.

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For more information on Charles Bailey and apports in Australia: see *Psyioneer-Newsletter* Volume 1. No 4. August 2004.  
[http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP4.pdf](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP4.pdf)

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Paul J. Gaunt