

PSYPIONEER JOURNAL

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HOW RAY TAYLOR CHANGED OUR LIVES

*[Ray Taylor, editor of *Psychic World*, passed on 20 December.]*

In autumn 1969, after I had left the CPS library, Ray arranged for me to go down to Stansted and spend several days sorting out the library of Arthur Findlay, on behalf of Dr Winning. Much of this was in the room there known as the Library, and it included psychic and non-psychic books. I did a basic alphabetical arrangement of the psychic books, with a separate collection of Findlay translations (these are seldom mentioned but must have been influential in their time.) He also had some early volumes of PN. At the back of Stansted Hall was a room containing the library of R.J. Lees. It was here that I first read the diary reference to Jack the Ripper, as well old press cuttings about the People's League in Peckham, and litigation in Ilfracombe.

As I stood on a ladder in the library, I chatted with an American visitor. Later I received a postcard from him, written over the North Pole, and was invited to assist him in his literary research as a sort of London-based factotum. He was George Meek, chiefly remembered today for Spiricom, but at that time, mainly just starting with healing research, after professional engineering work in refrigeration. Through George, I met a number of pioneer healing researchers in the early 1970s, especially at the NFSH healing committee.

I returned to Stansted library in 1971 during Ray's annual "London Week"—this was an alarming experience for the audience, as I leaned back on a fragile table while discoursing about the books.

When Ray took over *Psychic World* from Simon Forsyth, the monthly newspaper played a significant role as an alternative voice, sometimes printing stories that for one reason or another, did not appear in PN. A disturbing example arose after Peggy Mason, a *Two Worlds* columnist, became a Sai Baba devotee, and PN printed splash page stories about SB's phenomena and how he had put Jesus in his place. I wrote to Peggy about Tal Brooke's experiences at the hands of SB, but she brushed these aside—had not Brooke since become a Christian? But later her successors Faye and David Bailey accepted the truth of the charges and issued "The Findings". The resultant exposure was reported all over the world in national newspapers. PN however did not warn its readers, some of whom had children, in any way - the nearest allusion being when a columnist noted that SB had allegedly received a bad press. In contrast, Ray Taylor printed a warning note.

Ray carried several series by me. The first, "Theosophical Comment" emphasised the continuities between research into Theosophical and Spiritualist pioneers, like Mrs Britten. "Unorthodox View" was a play upon words. There was Christian orthodoxy (like the 39 articles of the C of E) but a Spiritualist orthodoxy had also developed, especially around Findlay's synthesis.

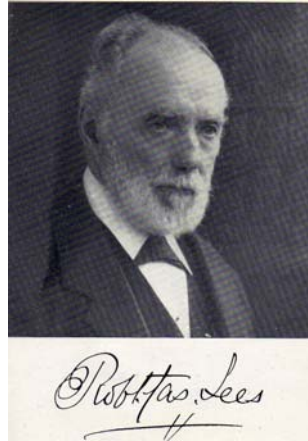
Ray received some criticism in the movement for printing these pieces, as I was not an approved person in various quarters. Eventually, his pages became hospitable to me only at long intervals (except to letters), while PN was then being largely written by a handful of people. The solution - in 2004 — was to relaunch the Psypioneer project as a monthly newsletter, which would promptly report historical findings in detail. Paul Gaunt, who was also getting a limited response from PW and PN, happily climbed aboard.

Ray remained a friendly voice on the telephone, quite recently after the passing of Don Galloway. Now he has gone where there is no monthly deadline, and no more puzzling behaviour by fellow denizens of the psychic world. We extend our sympathy to his daughter Candy, who will continue his work.

LP.

ROBERT JAMES LEES AND THE REVD THOMAS ASHCROFT

By Stephen Butt



[**Note by Psypioneer:** - Stephen Butt will be recalled by Psypioneer readers for his discovery of the background of Georgiana Eagle, clairvoyant to Queen Victoria. ¹ Through his web site, ² he has already published much valuable archival material, including the Chicago article mentioned below. This new paper by Stephen Butt is followed by reprints of the two items about Lees referred to in Stephen's paper from LIGHT 1886.]

On 12 August 1948, Eva Lees, the eldest daughter of the medium Robert James Lees, wrote a statement 'to whom it may concern.' The date is significant in that it reveals Eva's thoughts about her respected father who had died in January 1931. He had been born on 12 August 1849, and it is evident that his devoted daughter was already considering then how she would mark the centenary of his birth.

In her statement, Eva refers to a letter which her father had written to 'LIGHT', published in that journal on 22 May 1886. Eva's statement is in the form of an outline biography of her father:

“(He) was a born clairvoyant and at the age of fourteen became a trance medium. In 1868, known as a boy medium in Birmingham, he was given a shock by two women mediums that he came out of the movement altogether, and would have nothing whatever to do with Spiritualism.”

A subsequent sentence of Eva's statement has been crossed out:

¹ *Georgina Eagle – Queen Victoria's Clairvoyant Revealed* by Stephen Butt. Psypioneer Volume 1, No. 15/16 pages 174-196: - <http://woodlandway.org/PDF/15-16.PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

² Robert James Lees; - www.rjlees.co.uk

“He was told that things were “arranged” when he was in a deep trance.”

Eva continued:

“From then for some years he studied all forms of tricks and conjuring and while living in Manchester, 1875-1878, went through Lancashire with the Revd Thomas Ashcroft who was an opponent of Spiritualism.

My father on every platform always made a statement that, if and when he had reason by sheer weight of evidence to change his mind, he would return to the same platform and say why he had changed his mind. This he did in the course of Truth and when Ashcroft attacked him, my father gave a letter to LIGHT.”

The editor of LIGHT made the most of the Lees letter and of his decision to return to his previous beliefs. As a result, in its issue of 15 May 1886, the journal had promised dramatic discourse in the next edition:

“Our country friends – especially those amongst whom Mr Ashcroft has pushed himself – will do well to widely circulate that number of “LIGHT”. We will supply the next number of “LIGHT”, which will also be a serviceable one for general circulation amongst our country friends, on special terms. Applications for these special parcels must reach us *not later than Wednesday morning’s post.*”

The scene was set. All those ‘country friends’ – spiritualists in the north of England – were being ordered to prepare for battle. [The full text of this note in LIGHT follows this article.]

As promised, Lees’ statement appeared in LIGHT on 22 May 1886. It was a well-crafted and reasoned article, and Lees drew back from openly criticising his opponent in the north. Remarkably, it was an article that later formed the basis of a spurious claim about its author and Jack the Ripper, which was published eight years later by a journalist in Chicago.³ The fall-out would ruin Lees’ health and his work as a philanthropist, and was possibly the cause of a bitter family rift.

The Revd Thomas Ashcroft was a preacher in the United Methodist Church, in Lancashire. He began his preaching service in 1863 and died in 1910. He is listed as one of eighteen people who purchased a one pound brick for the building of the Mere Brow Methodist Church which opened in November 1902. Mere Brow is a hamlet which lies near the villages of Tarleton and Rufford, between Ormskirk and Preston in the west of the county.

Ashcroft is listed as a minister at the Brunswick Church in Bury in 1871, and there are newspaper reports of his evangelistic work in Chorley and Blackburn. Thomas Pointon Dale in his history of Brunswick church, published in 1896, describes Ashcroft as:

³ The full Chicago text is available on Stephen Butt’s website at:
<http://www.rjlees.co.uk/chicago.htm>

“A man of more than average ability, richly endowed with popular gifts, and possessed with an ambition to become a useful minister of Jesus Christ. Mr. Ashcroft was well received in the circuit, and soon became celebrated both as an able preacher and popular lecturer. His sermons are highly spoken of, and his ministry was fruitful in conversions.”

Pointon Dale also provides some clues as to Ashcroft’s character and personality:

“...of strong individuality, young, enterprising, and aggressive. It is well-known that during a portion of that time there were differences of opinion, and that matters did not run quite smoothly in the circuit. Doubtless the blame did not lie wholly with the ministers, and both proved themselves sufficiently strong in the sympathies of the members to break, for the first time, the tenacious Methodistic rule of a three years’ Itinerancy, and to secure an invitation to continue their labours for four successive years.”

Lees, just 26 years of age when he first apparently joined up with Ashcroft was also an impetuous young man and, according to his own later writings, a man who could easily be led by a stronger personality. Together, Lees and Ashcroft would have been a formidable team; as antagonists, they were well-matched.

Lees and his young family had left Lancashire in 1878, forsaking the security of a job with the expanding *Manchester Guardian* for a post as advertising manager of a new popular journal in London which folded after just a few issues. As a result of losing his job and of then, rather naively, accepting the ‘help’ of a money lender, Lees became bankrupt.

As a consequence, he and his wife and children suffered much hardship. In April 1885 their daughter Viola died at just eighteen months of Bronchitis and convulsions. One month later, their youngest child, Marmion, died of Marasmus, a form of malnutrition. The boy was just eight months old.

But the article in *LIGHT* related not to these personal and family crises, but to an event which took place in November 1884 when, as a result of a lively debate on the subject of mediumship, Lees agreed to take part in a series of séances with two American gentlemen whom he referred to as ‘Mr S and ‘Mr B’:

“Of the first three séances I have nothing particular to record ... At the fourth the name of Samuel B was given.... In answer to further inquiries, Mr B was told to re-open the workings of a certain mine which he had closed”

Lees explains in the article that later correspondence from the States confirmed the accuracy of the spirit’s claims and information. It was this and further seemingly irrevocable proofs which led Lees to reaffirm his belief in Spiritualism.

LIGHT in its editorial suggested that their article would finally silence Ashcroft. The editor’s closing comments were chosen to sting:

“The matter, now that Mr Ashcroft’s bubble has been pricked, may, we think, be allowed to drop. We advise him before he again enters the field of opposition to Spiritualism to seek the truth in the spirit of truth, to pray earnestly over the matter. To read his Bible carefully with singleness of purpose, and there to learn to distinguish “between things that differ”.”

The young man who had loyally accompanied Ashcroft across Lancashire, demonstrating that all the claims of the Spiritualist mediums could be matched by a conjuror’s trickery, had turned against him. Nevertheless, the zealous Ashcroft continued his in anti-spiritualist campaigning, but a later report from Colne indicates that there was a renewed interested in Spiritualism in the very areas where Ashcroft had campaigned:

“The effects of the recent visit of Mr. Ashcroft are manifest in the determination of the local friends to form a society (the meetings hitherto have been managed by Burnley workers), and everywhere there is a strong desire to obtain information and investigate. Mr. Ashcroft retired discredited. The people were disgusted with his tactics, and would have broken his lantern but for the generous interference of Mr. Lees...”

Nevertheless, if the article in LIGHT failed to end the antagonism between Lees and Ashcroft, it is certain that the details within it had a much longer life and effect. Less than two years after its publication, journalists reporting on the series of murders in the Whitechapel area of London, gave the perpetrator a name, Jack the Ripper. Seven years after that ‘autumn of terror’, Lees’ name was to be forever associated with those events because of the publication of an article in a Chicago newspaper which drew heavily on the 1886 article in LIGHT.

The article was published by the Chicago Sunday Times-Herald on 28th April, 1895. At the heart of this story is the claim that over a number of years, Lees was seized by visions of the Ripper and his murders. They each came true.

Lees, it was said, went abroad and briefly was not troubled by such visions. He returned to London and when on an omnibus with his wife, saw a man get on the bus at Notting Hill. Lees told his wife that he believed the man to be the Ripper. Lees’ wife laughed at him. When the man alighted at Marble Arch, Lees followed him, informing a constable *en route* about his fears. The constable laughed at Lees. The next day, and after another vision, Lees went to Scotland Yard. Lees remembered a postcard from his vision, and the police received one that morning which read as Lees stated. They then took him seriously.

Eventually, after more murders, Lees was able to lead the police to the house of the Ripper. The Ripper was a doctor who lived in a fashionable house in London. The Ripper was placed in an asylum under the name Thomas Mason No.124 in place of a pauper, and a mock funeral held. It claims that a Dr Howard recounted the tale whilst drunk to a man who then informed the newspaper.

The newspaper report describes a séance in detail involving Lees and two American visitors to London. It is obvious that the Chicago journalist is drawing upon Lees' own words as published in LIGHT in 1886, not the least the re-appearance of Mr S and Mr B:

“Mr Lees returned to England where he made the acquaintance of Roland B. Shaw, a mining stockbroker, of New York and Fred C. Beckwith, of Broadhead, Wisconsin who was then the financial promoter of an American syndicate in London.

These three gentlemen were dining one day in the Criterion when Mr Lees turned to his two companions suddenly and exclaimed: ‘Great God! Jack the Ripper has committed another murder.’ Mr Shaw looked at his watch and found it was eleven minutes to eight. At ten minutes past eight a policeman discovered the body of a woman in Crown court, in the Whitechapel district, with her throat cut from ear to ear and her body bearing all the marks of the Ripper’s handiwork. Mr Lees and his companions at once went to Scotland Yard. The news of the murder had not yet reached the inspector, but while Mr Lees was relating his story, a telegram arrived giving full details of the outrage.”

Many other details in the Chicago article indicate that the writer or writers had access to a source of personal information about Lees. American journalists would have seen the daily wires from London about the Ripper Murders and were as informed about them as their counterparts in London, but specific family details about Lees and of his work, and his address in the London suburbs also found their way into the spurious article.

In 1895, Lees was busy with his latest enterprise, the People’s League which supported many hundreds of needy families in the Peckham area of London. A ‘glorious mission’ was how Lees described it in his diary, and with its many self-help Socialist-based policies and projects, it was having a real effect on the people of that area. Within a few months of the publication of the Chicago article in several English newspapers, he had suffered a breakdown. Lees left London for the peace and relative anonymity of the fishing port of St Ives in Cornwall, taking his large family with him. The People’s League closed its doors, never to re-open. Lees ever eschewed the limelight and a role of leadership.

Who was the source in Chicago of so much personal family information about Lees? How did a copy of LIGHT published in 1886 reach the Chicago journalists?

Present research identifies two possible candidates. One is the newspaper editor and fellow-spiritualist W.T. Stead, and the other, more likely candidate, is Lees’ eldest son, Norman Albert Lees.

Stead and Lees had corresponded regularly for a number of years on spiritualist matters. Both were journalists working in London, and both held strong non-conformist Christian philanthropic views. Stead visited Chicago in 1891, and visited the Whitechapel Club – the society of Chicago journalists who had a specific interest in the Whitechapel Murders.

The young Norman Lees, who had been born in Birmingham in 1873, was styling himself as a ‘crime reporter’. During the height of the Ripper murders, he would have been a teenager in London. He too had been in Chicago in 1891/2 with his younger brother Douglas. A letter from Stead to Dr Albert Shaw, the editor of the American edition of ‘The Review of Reviews’ in New York dated 27 July 1894 confirms that Norman had been with Stead in Chicago:

“Norman Lees, the young English Police Reporter, who helped me in my Chicago Detective work, is leaving by the ‘Etruria’ with his brother for New York. He is returning to Chicago. He came round to ask me whether I thought you could get him a free pass to Chicago from New York. I told him that I doubted it in as much as we had to pay for our own tickets when we were in America, but that I would mention it to you.”

Hence we know that Norman was in Chicago only months before the notorious article was published.

There is evidence in the Lees family papers of a rift between Norman and his father. He settled in New York where, after being involved in a society scandal, and, allegedly, setting fire to his family home, he was for some time incarcerated in an institution for the insane. Newspaper reports record that he attended his mother’s funeral in Ilfracombe, Devon in 1912, but soon after he settled in Australia, enrolling in the Australian army in 1916 – giving his status as ‘single’ - and served in the Medical Corp.

Norman died on 13 October 1942 at the Salvation Army Home in Bellevue Street, St Peters, Sydney NSW, with ‘no known next of kin’. He had abandoned his family, or they had abandoned him. Such was the legacy of his father’s article of 1886 in LIGHT.

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<http://www.lancashirevillages.com>

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The Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (ROLLR) catalogued as DE 4481/1 and following.

Stephen Butt

Below is the first of the two LIGHT ⁴ articles referred to: -

THE REV. T. ASHCROFT AND SPIRITUALISM

The Rev. T. Ashcroft, of Chorley, has, at various times, sought notoriety by his lectures in opposition to Spiritualism. These utterances have no more distinguishing characteristic than the utter want of knowledge which they display with regard to the subject. Mr. Ashcroft has issued what he calls a “challenge.” As our readers are well aware, we are utterly opposed to this method of settling any question, much less such an intricate and serious problem as Spiritualism. Mr. Ashcroft makes two challenges; the first is to the amount of £1,000. It is not needful for us to enter into particulars; we simply advise our country friends who are being troubled by his pretensions, to ask Ashcroft whether he will consent, in the event of the challenge being accepted, to deposit the money with some bank, or with some gentleman of repute. Until he consents to do this, we advise our friends to have nothing whatever to do with the matter.

In another challenge, Mr. Ashcroft offers “to forfeit £5 each night that he fails to produce, through the assistance of a non-Spiritualist, superior phenomena to those obtained by Spiritualists.” Our readers will see the utterly clap-trap and shallow nature of these so called challenges, and the whole matter would be utterly beneath contempt were it not for the sequel.

The facts are these. Mr. Ashcroft has pursued this business of exposé for many years. During a portion of that period he was dependent upon the services of a gentleman who possessed considerable “mediumistic” powers, but who for a long period could not obtain any evidence that disembodied spirits had anything to do with the phenomena obtained through his mediumship. This gentleman’s name is Mr. James Lees, and, honestly enough, he associated himself with the Rev. T. Ashcroft to expose what he thought were unwarrantable pretensions on the part of Spiritualists. Now for the sequel. This gentleman has continued his investigations, and the result which we a few hours since learnt from his own lips is, that he now confesses himself a Spiritualist, and informs us that he has received abundant evidence to convince him that a portion at least of the phenomena are produced by the agencies to which Spiritualists mainly attribute these phenomena. His position is somewhat akin to our own. He by no means receives as the work of disembodied spiritual intelligences *all the* phenomena which occur. He recognises the fact that *we are spirits here and now*, and that there is no hard and fast line to be drawn between the action of mind embodied and mind disembodied—both possess the same powers, though in the majority of cases they are latent in the former.

⁴ LIGHT Saturday May 15th 1886.

Mr. Lees has promised us a statement for publication in next week's "LIGHT," in which he will briefly record the circumstances which have led to an advance in his position with regard to the matter, and our country friends—especially those amongst whom Mr. Ashcroft has pushed himself—will do well to widely circulate that number of "LIGHT." We will supply the next number of "LIGHT," which will also be a serviceable one for general circulation amongst our country friends, on special terms. Application for those special parcels must reach us *not later than Wednesday morning post.*

This theme was duly continued in the next issue: - ⁵

SPIRITUALISM AND ITS OPPONENTS

Last week (p226) we alluded to some challenges to Spiritualists made by the Rev. T. Ashcroft, of Chorley, and, while expressing our total disapproval of making Spiritualism the subject of betting in any form or shape, we announced that some information in our possession would enable our country friends effectually to deal with the pretensions of the reverend gentleman in question. In one of these, "challenges," the Rev. T. Ashcroft offers "to forfeit £5 each night that he fails to produce, through the assistance of a non-Spiritualist, superior phenomena to those obtained by Spiritualists." We pointed out the utterly clap-trap and shallow nature of these so-called challenges, and then went on to narrate that the gentleman upon whom Mr. Ashcroft had been dependent for the production of these "non-Spiritualistic" phenomena has been a medium himself throughout, who had, however, at that time been unable to satisfy himself that the phenomena which occurred in his presence were attributable to the agency of disembodied spirits.

Since then Mr. Lees, the gentleman referred to, has continued his investigations, and it is with profound pleasure that we now fulfil our promise of last week and communicate to our readers his statement with reference to the causes which have led to a change of opinion on his part. Mr. Lees' statement is explicit and speaks for itself. It completely cuts the ground from underneath Mr. Ashcroft's present position, and renders nugatory the latter's "challenges," inasmuch as the "non-Spiritualistic friend" there spoken of is Mr. Lees himself, who, it will be seen, has, by the sheer force of evidence, been convinced of the untenability of his former position. Thus the work goes on; those who come to scoff ultimately remain to pray. One by one *truth-seeking* inquirers,

⁵ LIGHT Saturday, May 22nd 1886.

alike on the scientific as on the religious side, are confounded in their scepticism. It is no exaggeration to say that no one who has ever given Spiritualism a careful and patient investigation, being actuated in the inquiry for truth by the spirit of truth, has ever failed, sooner or later, to recognise the innate truth and beneficial influence of what, in its many varied and complex phases, is generically called Spiritualism.

Mr. Lees strikes a true and potent keynote in the concluding portion of his statement. With him, in his pleading for more spirituality in connection with Spiritualism, we are in thorough accord. We have always, to the best of our ability, insisted upon the necessity of approaching Spiritualism from another and a higher side than that of mere phenomenalism. Scientific attainments are something, and intellectual capacities are not to be despised, in an inquiry into the things of spirit; they are, without doubt, valuable aids to the investigator, but they are not all. Beyond science, beyond intellect, there is something which, if not possessed by the seeker, will prove an insuperable barrier in the path. It is not altogether sincerity of purpose, or an earnest desire to know the truth, though it partakes of both of these. What, then, is it? Let us answer in the words of the Christ—"Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

We now append Mr. Lees' statement: –

"One person has already asked me a question, which I have no doubt others will repeat: What necessity is there to make any statement at all? Let me explain at once. I am not by any means vain enough to suppose that I am of sufficient importance to throw any great light upon the complex question of Spiritualism, or that my declaration of faith will be followed by its acceptance by all who read it; but I wish to make a simple statement as an act of common justice, by which I shall redeem a promise made at a time when I used my utmost endeavours to explain away that which I have discovered to be a demonstrated truth.

Those who have known me longest will be able to bear witness to the interest with which I have always regarded Spiritualism; and being possessed of some slight mediumistic ability, have studied and tested the subject in every form, patiently stopping at every new step to critically examine each test, statement, and communication. After several years of careful investigation, I was led to the conclusion that the whole of the phenomena could be satisfactorily explained upon a scientific basis without any interference on part of disembodied spirits. Try as I would, I found no communication which would warrant me going to a greater extent than this; and in this belief I determined to oppose the more advanced theory. At the same time I never claimed to have exhausted the subject, and declared my intention of continuing its investigation, avowing my readiness to advance my position at any time when sufficient evidence could be adduced.

Many in the North of England who were acquainted with Spiritualism ten or twelve years ago, will remember my promise that, if I should ever find myself to be wrong, I would not shrink from making it known. It is in fulfilment of this promise that I make this statement.

Since my residence in London, business has prevented me giving such active attention to the subject as formerly, but I have never ceased to follow up the inquiry, without any change of opinion until November, 1884. During that month the question was introduced by a gentleman in

a company where I was present, and a somewhat lively debate resulted. I advanced my theory, and offered to prove it, which was immediately accepted by a Mr. S., a gentleman of some scientific standing, who was also a Spiritualist. Another of the company, Mr. B., wished to join us, the latter being an Atheist. An arrangement was made to sit a certain number of times, under conditions to which we all agreed, and at the termination of our investigation we were to compare notes. The sittings took place in the rooms of Mr. B., and commenced with table movements, but were, after the fourth sitting, principally devoted to the trance, I myself being the medium.

Of the first three séances I have nothing particular to record except that I was perfectly satisfied. At the fourth the name of Samuel B. was given, and claimed to be an uncle of Mr. B., who laughed at the idea, as, he said, he never had an uncle of that name. Still, the correctness of the statement was maintained and additional details given by which to identify the spirit if Mr. B. would write home. Let me here say both these gentlemen were Americans. In answer to further inquiries, Mr. B. was told to re-open the workings of a certain mine which he had closed, as it contained valuable mineral, further details of which were promised at the next sitting. This promise was redeemed by my drawing, when in the trance state, a diagram of the mine, appending very detailed measurements and instructions as to where a new opening was to be made. The particular attention given even to the smallest matters considerably interested and surprised me, although I still anticipated having a laugh at the confidence Mr. S. expressed in its correctness.

In the meantime, inquiries had been set on foot respecting Samuel B., and shortly afterwards a letter was received confirming the communication as far as possible, but it appeared he went West with some early settlers and had not afterwards been heard of, so that his death remained an open question. With respect to the mine, I may say that some months later, when it was too late for the tidings to have any weight in influencing my opinions, I learned from Mr. B. that he had found, so far as he had been able to investigate the truth of the statement, that the information was quite correct.

I will only refer to one of the many other matters I could relate of these sittings. Mr. S. had obtained (to himself) satisfactory evidence of the communicating intelligences being acquainted with some of his friends in America, but it was no evidence to me. At one sitting he expressed a wish to learn the exact address where a cablegram would reach Judge T. the next day, as that gentleman was travelling at the time, and it was most important to communicate with him at once. After a slight pause, an address was given where the judge was to arrive at a certain hour the following day, corresponding with eight p.m. English time. Mr. S. despatched a cablegram to the address given, but ordered it to be repeated to the New York address of the judge. At my suggestion we arranged to sit that same night, and about twenty minutes past eight Mr. S. was told his cable had been received, and a reply had been sent: consisting of three code words, which were given. The receipt of the message next day confirmed the communication in every detail.

Of course such evidence was far beyond anything I had [anticipated] but I did not by any means accept it as conclusive, and I began to look into the question again at home; but here I speedily found the results far more startling. Let me give one case, which I received at this time,

that did more than anything else to convince me that it was spirit agency at work. I was returning home one night by bus, about 7.30, and had reached the Marble Arch, when a voice, speaking quite distinctly, told me to return to a certain hotel and see a Mr. R., who was stopping there. I returned, thinking this time I should find my spirit friend at fault, but was considerably astonished to find Mr. R. was there, and occupying the room which had been mentioned. Determined to follow it out, I sent up my card, and shortly afterwards was explaining the reason of my visit to the smiling stranger. He had heard of Spiritualism, but knew little about it; still, having a short time to spare before his departure for the Continent, he acceded to my request to sit for a short time.

In less than twenty minutes he was told of the sudden death of his sister in America; that a cable calling him home had missed him; that if he would wait the arrival of the mail that night he would find letters from home confirming the statement, and the notice of her death in a paper, which was mentioned. At half-past eight we went together to the American Exchange, where his letters were directed, and ten minutes later the mail was delivered, and the strange communication verified in every particular.

These are a few instances which I have received since November, 1884. I could give fifty if needs be, none of which can be explained by the theory I previously held, and therefore by the weight of evidence I have been compelled to advance my position and accept the demonstrated fact that disembodied friends can and do return to converse with us. By this I do not mean to say that *all* the phenomena of Spiritualism have such an origin—far from it. I believe that a very great part of that attributed to the other world has nothing whatever to do with the departed, and is altogether the result of the psychological forces developed by the sitters.

I have no desire to extend the limits of this statement, but there is one question which I feel bound to anticipate. Why should not our spirit friends have given me this evidence earlier? I have learned much during this last twelve months, and am enabled to see now that it was because I would not give them an opportunity, precisely as a great many others are still doing. I was seeking for the grand truths of Spiritualism, but I was looking for them in the wrong place and in the wrong spirit. I was looking for them in testism, wonderism, and criticism, demanding to be convinced in my own way, and upon my own lines; seeking to conform the laws of the Infinite to my puny understanding, rather than allow the infinite to lift me up to Himself; and this is where the subject stands to-day. One has to search a long time to find any Spiritualism in it—all the inquiry is for “signs and wonders,” test first and test last, while the teachings of the other life are lost in the greed for some more sensational wonder, and that medium is accounted the greatest who can most successfully out-distance such men as Maskelyne and Verbeck.

Whatever is desired may be obtained, and the desire for such legerdemainic performances attracts only those spirits who are *au fait* in these marvels, but they are not the friends who are capable of demonstrating the highest and most ennobling truths of spiritual life; on the other hand, these welcome wonder-workers crowd back the holier influences which are just as much at our service, and the consequence is that Spiritualism has had a downward tendency in its morals which it is quite time was checked, and this rampant curiosity succeeded by an earnest and prayerful cultivation of the acquaintance of those spirits who are capable of leading in an

opposite direction; who use what we now call tests as mere illustrations of their teachings, and being selected at their own time and in their own way, come upon us with additional force, and carry conviction in their unanswerable truth. Hitherto we have been content with the companionship, to a very great extent, of those spirits who know very little more than ourselves; and these in their desire to appear learned have spoken of that upon which they were equally ignorant, and hence the contradiction and confusion which exists to-day. It is time such things came to an end, for I have learned in my recent communications at home that there are greater and purer revelations awaiting those who are ready to receive them, and I hope the time is not far distant when, by a united effort and determination, Spiritualism will purge itself of the morbid tendency with which it is at present surrounded, and realising its true position and possibilities, take wing to a higher altitude, where it will be able to manifest its Divine appointment to aid mankind to live a life more in harmony with the teachings of the despised Nazarene, who must ever stand as the central point of spiritual truth.”— (Signed)

ROBERT JAMES LEES.

[**Note by Pyspioneer:** - Early Spiritualist mediums often saw fairies, as did for example the sister of Alfred Kitson- see Pyspioneer February 2005. ⁶ We are reprinting the account below as further testimony to this widespread phenomenon. There is however a mystery associated with this account - when did Emma make the Continental visit to which she refers?

Moreover, in this true ghost story, is there not some similarity to the acknowledged fictional narratives Emma sometimes composed.]

SPIRITS OF THE MINES

Mrs. Hardinge, the authoress of this extraordinary narrative, has clairvoyant powers, and is well known to English Spiritualists

BY EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN

From the "Banner of Light" (Boston, U.S.), Oct. 9th, 1875. ⁷

I FIRMLY, emphatically believe that we have ample demonstration of a human origin in every manifestation where human forms are presented or human intelligence rendered. I cannot say I know this, but I believe it, and I think an immense array of the testimony our experiences in Spiritualism furnish us with, all tends to confirm this belief up to the point of absolute certainty. At the same time I not only believe in, but I *know* the fact of the existence of other than human spirits. I have seen them, held some kind of intercourse with them, and confidently believe they can *measurably* intervene in human affairs. I have never seen any in human form except in such a caricature, miniature, or distorted resemblance of that divine image, that I should not have been liable to mistake them for human beings.

Commencing with the old but never out of fashion saying of Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth than we dream of in our philosophy, Horatio," I shall give my experience in one instance, at least, with the so-called "gnomes," "kobolds," or spirits of the mines.

It is well known in certain mining districts, especially in Bohemia and Hungary, that many of the miners cherish faith in the existence of an order of beings who take especial interest in their labours, and help them to find rich leads of minerals, knock, or as they call it, "hammer" away lustily when they are at fault, and sometimes by these sounds, sometimes by lights, and occasionally by the apparition of *little figures*, point the way to the richest leads of the metals. I have visited the mines in Germany and the Bohemar Wold, where I have heard those knockings, seen the lights, and should have unhesitatingly attributed such phenomena to the spirits of deceased friends of the miners had I not also,

⁶ *Alfred Kitson and progressive Lyceums* – Pyspioneer Volume 1, No. 10 pages 123-125: - http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP10.pdf

⁷ THE *SPIRITUALIST* - OCT. 29, 1875. pages 209-210.

not once or twice, but many times, seen little stocky-looking things in the shape of men, very small, and either black, red, or metallic in colour—little chunks of creatures, whom the miners were accustomed to see and call by a name which, translated, signifies “earth spirits.” They said they were kind and good; never meddled with them, though they sometimes in sport threw their tools about. These miners told me they often saw lights, and all could hear the knockings, *but few could see the figures*, and in some of the mines I visited, the poor workmen thought more highly of me than ordinary, because I could see their “well beloved little earth spirits.”

With the light of modern Spiritualism to guide me, I easily understood that I, as a medium, could see spiritual apparitions invisible to the eyes of those who were not mediums. I also comprehended why certain of the workmen, their wives or children, being spiritually unfolded, could perceive the forms of those whom their less gifted companions only knew by their knockings or flashing lights.

DERBYSHIRE GNOMES

In William Howitt’s charming sketch, called *Berg-Geister*, he alludes to these popular beliefs amongst miners, but he does more, he gives a very graphic account of a certain *Clamps in the wood*, where veritable gnomes figured as the principal personages. Mr. Howitt’s narrative is supported by names, witnesses, and sundry details which confirm his own undoubted testimony. As I happened to be one of the privileged few who visited the haunted region which Mr. Howitt writes of, I shall cite my own experiences in the matter, with what I trust my readers will allow to be the honest purpose of making myself responsible for the story.

It is now some few years since, being in the neighbourhood of a lovely valley called Dovedale, in the County of Derbyshire, England, I heard my kind host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Hart, expatiating upon the singular phenomena they had witnessed in the cottage of an old labourer (then passed away to the better world), called Clamps; I think, if I recollect right, he had worked for Mr. Hart, who was interested in the mines adjacent to Dovedale. My friends informed me that Clamps had resided for over fifty years in a ruinous old farmhouse, only a small part of which was habitable. The place was on the edge of the mines, where the old man in his youth and prime had worked, and where, as I believe, he died. During his long residence of half a century in this place, old Clamps and his associates were accustomed to see strange globular lights, which year in and year out would come and go with all the familiarity of household ghosts.

Mr. Hart, who was somewhat of a sceptic on the subject of my “spirits,” as he termed it, declared that if Clamps’s lights were spirits of “humans,” they must have been those of deceased lamplighters or gas men—for they never appeared by day, and generally chose the long winter nights, or particularly dark evenings, for the periods of their visitations. Old Clamps called them his “glorious Lights,” and was very particular about returning to his shanty early every night, so that he should not miss seeing them. They came out, or seemed to come, as my friends alleged, from a firm wall, fashioned of rock, and the blocks so solidly cemented together that not a crack or cranny could be discovered. They generally

came from two or three to seven or eight in number. Mrs. Hart said that one very cold winter's night she saw as many as ten of these lights. They seemed to fill the little room, and hovered about the fire as if gratified with its pleasant warmth. "They came," said my informant, "out of the wall, some about two feet from the ground, others as high as three feet, but none more than four, and all remained the same height during the time of their stay." They shook, trembled, or *fickered* the whole time, as if they were quivering with fear or cold. They had been seen for years and years, longer, indeed, than the memory of the "oldest inhabitants" of that region could trace them, except the venerable octogenarian Clamps, who affirmed they had always been there as long as he could remember. Their coming was generally preceded by crackling sounds, or direct knockings, and many of the neighbours declared they saw the figures of *little men* just as Mr. Howitt's narrative describes them—namely, "black as a coal, and polished as a boot." One of the neighbours, a woman who had often visited the cottage of Clamps with her children, described the appearance of the little men as being short, chunky, destitute of hair, polished all over, and bearing about the region where the heart lies in human beings a large globular light about the size of an ostrich's egg. It was this light, she said, "which the folks saw," and it was by this light that she and her children saw them. She added, they did not walk, but jumped about, and their incessant restless motions caused the flickerings which the lights always exhibited. My friend Mrs. Hart always beheld the dim outline of little figures accompanying the lights, but the distinctness with which these creatures were seen seemed to depend upon what in our philosophy we term mediumistic endowments. Other forms had been seen at Clamps's, such as dogs, horses, and even wild beasts, but as the cottage was inaccessible to horses, and no other animals of any kind were kept or known to frequent that neighbourhood, these accounts were set down to superstitious exaggerations.

A NIGHT IN A HAUNTED HUT

I might fill a volume with the stories related to me of this region, and the matter-of-fact narratives which many of the most intelligent of the miners and their families furnished me with seemed beyond gainsay or denial. Shortly before my visit to that section of country terminated, my friends the Harts proposed to give me an opportunity of witnessing for myself some of the marvels they had discoursed about. They told me old Clamps had passed away; that the cottage he had inhabited had been tenanted for some years by a very decent family of poor peasants, but as the children grew up the elder members of the family, fearing the continual manifestation of preternatural sights and sounds would make them "skeary" and superstitious, had at length moved away, and the place had been abandoned. It was the opinion of the few labourers who had been accustomed to see and had grown familiar with Clamps's "glorious lights," that they would never come out except a fire was lighted there; and as the place was deserted and very far remote from other inhabitants, my friends proposed to take me to a still more distant neighbourhood, and one where, as they knew by experience, my curiosity might have a good chance to be gratified.

Starting early one fine October morning we drove about ten miles from home, intending to visit the mines, which commenced about the end of Dovedale Valley, but terminated in the direction my friends pursued. Arrived at a wild and most romantic glen, we left our horses and carriage at a poor tavern called "The Miner's Rest." perched on the very top of

the mass of rocks which reared up their craggy heights like sentinels guarding the entrance to the charmed region. Our path was continued for more than two miles aping a rough road broken out of fallen trees and crumbling rocks by the wheels of the heavy wagons used for conveying the mineral from the mines. A more wild, weird, and toilsome journey I never in my life undertook, and in truth I became so fatigued during its progress that we had some doubts whether I should be able to muster strength enough to accomplish our pilgrimage. It was twilight before we gained our point of destination, and glad enough I was to see the glowing fires of what looked more like a little encampment of gipsies than a village, although it was really dignified with that title. My friends guided me at once to a hut more pretentious than the rest, and introduced me to a family who had formerly been servants in their household. It consisted of a man, his wife, mother, and two fine lads, all of whom were employed in different ways in the adjacent mines. As we stated that we had only come to inspect these mines, and that the lateness of our visit was occasioned by the difficulties which attended our journey, the good, hospitable people were at once apprised of the necessity of providing us with some accommodation for passing the night. The women, after busying themselves to provide us with some boiling water for our tea—for we had carried provisions with us—agreed to retire to a neighbour's hut with their boys, whilst the father, who was on duty in the mines, left us soon after we arrived. The shanty was to be at our disposal, then, during the night.

IMPISH PRANKS

Mr. Hart was to be “stowed away” in a cave at the back of the house, hewn out of the rock, and filled with sweet, fresh hay, for the use of the horses employed by the miners, whilst a rude but clean bed was assigned to Mrs. Hart and myself. When all was done the women piled up the logs on the hearth, where a cheerful fire was burning, and prepared to quit us. Just as they were bidding us good night, the logs, which they had arranged with some care, suddenly tumbled down and rolled over and over on the floor. Deeming this a mere accident I took no notice of it until I observed, whilst Maria the miner's wife, was in the act of replacing them, several small, glimmering lights flickering over the wall against which the logs were piled. This might have been the phosphorescent light occasioned by the decay of the wood, I thought; but lo! the logs were no sooner piled up again than down they toppled, and that apparently without any cause. I then observed significant looks passing between the mother and daughter, and an evident disposition to linger and make some explanation as yet unspoken. At this moment a succession of loud knockings was heard on the wall at the back of the room, which I should say, by-the-by, was of stone, and little more than a cave, having been partly formed out of the solid rock.

“Is not that some one knocking?” I inquired; “perhaps it is Mr. Hart. We had better see what is the matter.”

“No, ladies,” said our hostess, with some hesitation, “it isn't anybody—that is, no one in particular; it's the way of this place.”

“But what, then, is the way of the place?” asked Mrs. Hart, merrily, and with an evident wish to encourage the poor woman. But before they could answer, down came the brushes on

the wall, the frying-pan, and sundry other things that had been hung up on shelves and hooks. The rude door shook violently, and knockings now resounded from every side of us in quick and irregular showers.

“The wind is rising,” said my friend; “I fear we shall have a stormy night.”

“Don’t be skeary, ladies,” said our good hostess, encouragingly, “but I s’poose as how I’d just bett say them’s not the wind, but just the little hammerers; you *knows who*, marm,” she added, nodding mysteriously to Mrs. Hart.

“Oh, yes! I know all about them, Betty,” said my friend, addressing the mother; “they won’t hurt us, but they seem rather rough to-night. Don’t they like our being here?”

“Lord love ye, marm,” replied the old woman; “it’s all along of they’s joy to see ye that they’re making this to-do. I think they be mortal glad to see the young lady. Only look’ee there, marm!”

WHAT THE LITTLE GOBLINS DID

I did look, and there, to my astonishment, and I must confess with a thrill of deeper awe than I could account for or control, I saw a row of four lights as large as the veritable ostrich’s egg which adorned the mantle shelf of the humble shanty. These lights were directly behind me, and I did not see them till, attracted by the woman’s explanation, I turned round and faced them. They were bright, globular in form, vapoury in substance, and nebulous, thickening towards the centre, and deepening in colour almost to a dull red. The faint outline of a miniature human form appeared in connection with each light. They were of different sizes; none of them, however, were higher than four feet. They jumped up and down, and threw out something which resembled hands toward me, and as they moved the lights danced and shimmered. These wonderful *things* at length retreated into the solid wall behind them, and the place where they had been was illuminated only by the light of the wood fire. For two hours the women (who stayed with us at our earnest request.), Mrs. Hart and myself, watched for the reappearance of these spectral lights in vain. In the interim the knockings continued, and a few stray gleams like stars shone out from the other side of the apartment, but immediately vanished. A kitten which was attempting to sleep in the warmth of the cheerful fire, would raise its head at the sounds of the knockings, and occasionally make a dart at the shimmering lights, which, as if perceiving the animal, would retreat quickly back into the wall. I repeatedly passed my hand over these walls to ascertain if they were damp, or whether any chinks were there from which phosphorescent emanations could proceed. The walls were dry, solid, and smooth, and whilst I was pursuing my examination the knockings would thrill the solid stone beneath my very hand. At the expiration of two hours an exclamation of the elder woman called my attention to the hearth, where two large globular lights were hovering midway between the floor and the table, and just above the little kitten, who, with back and tail erect and eyes gleaming fiery red, manifested the most pitiable signs of terror and amazement.

Once again, and this time far more distinctly, I saw the little men I had before but imperfectly beheld. They were grotesque in shape, with round, shining heads, destitute of hair,

perfectly black, and more human about the head than the body. I saw their faces, and recognised a sort of good-humoured expression in them, and saw them throw somersaults several times as if for my amusement. A strange duck with each little head ended the performance, and then they sank into the ground made of planks laid down upon the rock of which the house was built.

“There,” cried the younger woman, “they won’t mislest ye again, ladies. When they goes down, they never comes again the night. It’s the end of their game to sink down like that.”

The woman was right. Though at our entreaty both mother and daughter remained with us all night, sleeping soundly, curled up on shawls and garments, and though we, lying awake, and—must I confess it?—shivering and trembling from head to foot, kept our eyes open, straining them in every direction, and with bated breath and ears sharpened by fearful anticipation, listened until we could hear the deep silence of that long, long night—we neither heard nor saw any more of the “little hammerers.”

The morning came at length. Oh! what an age it was coming! Mr. Hart joined us as we were waiting for the morning meal. He had heard knockings, he said, but concluded it might be the re-echo of the labourers’ hammers from the mines so close to us. The miners were not at work, and no hammering came from them, our host told us, with a significant smile at the rest of his family. The adventures of the night were now recounted and talked over. They were not strange, nor even alarming to the miners. The two lads declared they had “fine fun with the hammerers’ lanterns,” though they acknowledged they had never seen the little men, but plenty of others had, they said, and “they wouldn’t part company with them for nothing.” for they were famous guides to the spots where the richest lodes of metal lay. The women, too, spoke of their appearance with indifference. “They came often,” they said; “and though they cut up now and then, throwing things around like, they were only in fun, and never did any harm, except to the animals they had.” They thought somehow they did not like dogs or cats, for they couldn’t keep any; they either ran away or died suddenly. They didn’t expect, they added, to keep this kitten long.” I agreed in this opinion, for, judging of the terror the poor little thing displayed on the previous night, I was not surprised to find it moping in the morning, and averse to touch the food the boys prepared for it. I found, although these lights and knockings were common enough in the mines *at times*, they only seemed to come at special periods, and did not frequent or haunt any other house than the one we visited, and that of old Clamps, many miles distant. There seemed to be many evidences that these apparitions, be they what they might, either attached themselves to or made themselves manifest only in the presence of mediumistic persons. The family we visited were far too ignorant to understand anything of mediumship, although they were not unacquainted with the idea and theory of “ghost-seeing.” They were not afraid of their well-beloved “little hammerers,” but they were all “terribly scared” by the occasional manifestations of a spiritual character, which they narrated to me with a simplicity which impressed me with a conviction of their veracity.

I have never seen this family and never visited that region since. My experiences, however, in this connection, do not begin nor end here.

THE DANGERS OF AN SPR STUDY DAY, AND OF A CPS LIBRARY BOOK

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The surprising dangers of psychical research are dramatically illustrated by a new book about Conan Doyle. The author, Roger Straughan will be recalled by Psypioneer readers for his review in December 2004 <sup>8</sup> of “Out of the Shadows” Georgina Doyle’s biography of Conan Doyle’s forgotten family from his first marriage.

While receiving over some years a series of book tests connected with Conan Doyle, Dr Straughan narrowly escaped death in a train crash as he sat reading, in a carriage, “Thy Kingdom Come”, a book from the CPS library, of critical importance in the emergence of the White Eagle Lodge.

Moreover, he was returning from a Saturday study day organised by the Society for Psychical Research.

It was after the crash that he decided to put his book test experiences into consecutive form. The result is a highly original and entertaining mystery book that can be read with profit by all interested in the paranormal. <sup>9</sup>

But was Dr Straughan’s railway experience in any way influenced by his psychic involvements, or is it to be explained, like the remarkable evidence in the book, as a concentration of coincidences of a kind that have happened before around psychical and ufological investigators?

LP.

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<sup>8</sup> *New light on Arthur Conan Doyle* – Psypioneer Volume 1, No. 8 pages 66-67: - [http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP8.pdf](http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP8.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Study in Survival, A Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem* by Roger Straughan: - <http://www.o-books.com/obookssite/book/detail/496>

## Book Review

# A STUDY IN SURVIVAL Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem

By Roger Straughan  
O Books, 2009

*A Study in Survival* mimics the title of the very first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*; and the sub-title, *Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem* reflects not only the title of the 26<sup>th</sup>, and intended last, Holmes story, *The Final Problem*, wherein Conan Doyle ‘bumped Holmes off’ Reichenbach Falls, but also the ability of Holmes’s creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to prove his personal survival of the death of his physical body – which occurred on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1930.

Conan Doyle, in the last 15 years of his physical life, became a propagandist for spiritualism’s vital message – the message behind any genuine message given via a psychic medium: that every human personality survives the death of the physical body. And, furthermore, that the conscious mind continues to function in a different dimension of a much finer vibratory state of being.

Dr Roger Straughan, sometime in the mid 1990’s, became an unsuspecting target for ACD’s attention (as Roger and I both affectionately refer to the ongoing personality of Sir Arthur). And Roger, with a philosopher’s enquiring mind, soon realised that “readings” brought evidence that not only had ACD survived but that ACD was aware of all Roger’s thoughts, activities and everyday problems – AND was available to help him!

A “reading” for Roger was not the normal reading obtained by consulting a psychic medium but was obtained by randomly selecting and opening one of Conan Doyle’s books. This he discovered through the death of his dog, Sgott: that whatever matter was on his mind he could pick up a book written by Conan Doyle, open it at random, and whatever his eyes first lighted upon was an answer to his thoughts! Far more often than not, the passage made sense! Just as if he had discussed the matter or question with Sir Arthur in person.

So many of Roger Straughan’s experiences in delving into the ACD mystery parallel my own pathway with the spirit entity of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that it gave me an uncanny sense of ACD’s hidden amusement and satisfaction when I was introduced to Roger and read his draft manuscript. That early manuscript of *A Study in Survival*, now dedicated *For Sir Arthur – and all the Dogs*, was ‘unleashed’ on me nearly a year ago now, and I have keenly awaited it’s finalisation and publication.

Now, with a review copy of the book in my hands, I relive the thrill of discovering that amazing confirmation of the capacity of those who have passed through the veil before us to interact in our lives: to lead us, to tease us, to prove their continuing existence, and to serve us in the fulfilment of our physical lives.

Although Straughan does not give a calendar of the progression of his experiences, with a little bit of Holmesian sleuthing, it is relatively easy to appraise the approximate timeframe.

- He had built a modest collection of Conan Doyle's books long before I was first introduced to ACD in 1992, but I believe I leapfrogged him in rapidly building my collection of the same range of virtually all of Conan Doyle's books: the ...*noble, silent comrades, waiting in their ranks...* (*Through the Magic Door*, p1) – all the books Roger quotes from I have at my own finger tips;
- I had contacted ACD's daughter in the 1990's before her passing in 1997, by mail and then by telephone – but never got to meet her: just as Roger had corresponded with her – but not had the satisfaction of meeting her face to face;
- Roger had been introduced to ACD via his concern over his dog's passing, and that had been a catalyst in seeking to find out more about Sir Arthur's interest in dogs (a prominent point in his life and in his books – but never a cat!) – and I had had a 13 year experience with a wonderful Airedale which, with hindsight, I attributed as being ACD's 'gift from Spirit' (Sir Arthur had had an Airedale);
- And we both – hard headed, analytical and fundamentally agnostic people – had come to believe in life after death through our incredible experiences with ACD.

Roger's means of communication with ACD has been different to mine. Mine has been more the conventional type of communication with 'the dead' – via mediums. Nevertheless, I do feel that ACD frequently puts thoughts into my head or things in my path to influence (bend) my so called 'freewill'. He doesn't always get his way though – I've not yet yielded to his persistent encouragement to "write your own book". And, in common with Roger, he has set conundrums for me to solve relative to finding secondhand copies of his books for sale. Yes, and as Roger and I found in reading his biographical material, he certainly did like playing mind games and practical jokes with his family and friends in physical life.

*A Study in Survival* puts forward a very coherent account of Roger Straughan's experiences and contains several chapters of selected examples of evidential "readings". But for me, a real gem came as the last chapter *The Wider Picture: Survival and Beyond*. As a retired university teacher of philosophy, Roger sketches his superb views on Conan Doyle's "vital message". From his original position of skepticism, he clearly states that the evidences presented to him convinced him that death is not the end. Having established this, he then considers the question "So what?" Is survival good news? And if it doesn't look so rosey, how might it change one's outlook – so that one may nurture one's own soul-being in preparedness for the transition from a material world into the world of spirit. He introduces thought provoking matters such as the nature of reality and the Ultimate Reality – and leaves the reader to ponder their own religious and philosophical views.

Thank you, Roger Straughan.

Garth Willey,  
Editor, *WOODLAND WAY, A Path to Spiritual Enlightenment*  
Melbourne

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[**Note by Psypioneer:** - Would readers agree that the case below is the most significant survival case to come from Australia? Though much discussed by older writers,<sup>10</sup> it is surely overdue for a new analysis, using the resources of the Net: -]

Taken from *LIGHT*, September 16, 1943

# THE GREAT SHARK CASE

An analysis of the original documents

By LOUIS F FERGUSSON, C.V. O.

IN December, 1884, certain occurrences in Port Phillip Bay were revealed by discarnate communicators; no living person could have witnessed them; and within a few days by what seemed pure chance came overwhelming proof that they had occurred exactly as stated.

The case has often been cited in the literature of Spiritualism, but for some strange reason the references have usually been incomplete, confused and inaccurate.

Professor Hans Driesch, for instance, in a deprecatory reference (*Psychical Research*, pp. 78-79) went hopelessly astray. He spoke of the vision of an accident in Sydney Harbour and of a young man falling into the water from a boat and being mutilated by a shark, and of a Medium, making a statement to this effect while she held in her hand an object which had been the property of the dead man. In point of fact the accident happened in Melbourne Bay; *two* young men were mutilated; no female Medium was concerned; and no Medium mentioned either mutilation or a shark while holding any object belonging to either of the young men. In the face of these misrepresentations it is difficult to attach any value to the Professor's comment that the case is "not of good evidential standing."

## PUBLISHED REFERENCES

References may also be found in the Rev. Charles Tweedale's *Man's Survival After Death*, Mr. Ernest Hunt's *Do We Survive Death?*, James Robertson's *Spiritualism: The Open Door to the Unseen Universe*, and in two of the books of Professor Bozzano which have been translated into English; *Animism and Spiritism* and *Discarnate Influence in Human Life*. The astonishing thing is that of these authors Robertson was the only one to mention that the case is, so to speak, double-barrelled; there were two brothers who each suffered the loss of an arm, and that messages about the accident came not from one Medium only but from two. And even Robertson did not adduce what is surely the high light of the case; the elder brother's communication to a medium in Melbourne about his brother's mutilation as well as his communication to a Medium in Adelaide (six hundred miles away) about his own mutilation.

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<sup>10</sup> See also: - *Experiences of Mr George Spriggs – Spirits bring Tidings of tragedy* (page 209) Psypioneer Volume 3, No. 9 pages 207-213: - <http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.9September07..pdf>

At this juncture, in order to make what follows as clear as possible, an attempt must be made to summarize the incidents, so as to show their importance from the point of view of their subsequent verification.

Three young men set out on a cruise off Melbourne on the night of 13th December, 1884, or early morning of the following day. As they had not returned by the 16th the father of two of them held several sittings with a Medium in Melbourne in the hope of enlightenment. The medium said that the occupants of the yacht had been drowned and the arm of the younger son bitten off by a shark. The armless body of this son was found afloat about ten miles from Melbourne on the 21st December. A few days later the father received a letter from a friend in Adelaide saying that the elder son had communicated with him clairaudiently and had announced the seizure of his own arm and his waistcoat by a large fish unlike any shark which he had ever seen. On the 27th December a huge shark of an unusual kind was caught at Frankston, 27 miles from Melbourne. Inside its belly were found the arm and waistcoat of the elder son. I should add that the third young man, Murray, who was also drowned, has no connection with the evidential side of the case, although his presence was clairvoyantly observed by the Medium in Melbourne.

The statements thus summarized are taken from two letters of, respectively, the 20th December, 1884; and the 21st March, 1885, published in the Australian spiritualistic periodical, *The Harbinger of Light*, and written, by Mr. Hugh Junor Browne, the father of the two young men. Mr. Browne also issued the letters in pamphlet form, and in 1892 reprinted them in *A Rational Faith*, published by George Robertson and Company, of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Incidentally, it is mentioned in this book that a tombstone in the Melbourne General Cemetery commemorates, among others, Hugh Mackenzie Browne, aged 20 years, and William Macdonald Browne, aged 18 years, "who were drowned in Port Phillip Bay through the foundering of the yacht *Iolanthe* on the 15th December, 1884."

## **ANALYSIS NEEDED**

It must be admitted that Mr. Browne was not a very lucid writer, and the statements in the two newspaper; letters and in a subsequent résumé (also given in *A Rational Faith*) require a somewhat close analysis in order to reconcile them and to obtain a clear picture of the sequence of events and the evidential importance of the supernatural manifestations.

It seems possible by such analysis to establish the following conclusions:-

(1) Two Mediums gave messages about the disaster. The first was George Spriggs, in Melbourne. He employed two methods, (a) trance clairvoyance, improved at an early stage by the creation of psychic rapport through psychometrizable articles - namely, two pocket-books which had belonged to the brothers, and (b) control in trance by each of the two discarnate young men. The second Medium was a friend of Mr. Browne in Adelaide. He was clairaudient and received a message from the spirit of one brother only - Hugh the elder.

(2) No less than four precise and important references to the facts that no living person could have known were made through the two Mediums and were subsequently verified. First, William Browne's statement, while controlling Spriggs on 18th December, 1884, that the yacht

foundered at nine o'clock, was verified by the discovery of Hugh Browne's watch inside a shark on the 27th December with the hands stopped at that hour. Secondly, Hugh Browne's statement, while controlling Spriggs at one of the sittings held by Mr. and Mrs. Browne before the 20th December, that William Browne's body had been mutilated by a shark, was verified by the discovery of William's armless body on the 21st December. Thirdly, Hugh Browne's statement to the clairaudient in Adelaide on the 26th December, that a large fish had taken part of one of his arms and torn off his waistcoat, was verified when the fish was caught and opened on the 27th December. Fourthly, Hugh Browne's further statement, in reply to a question asked by the clairaudient on the 26th December, that if the large fish was a shark he had never seen one like it before, was also corroborated on the 27th December when the fish in question proved to be a shark of the white deep-sea species and not the blue variety common to those waters.

### **OMISSION EXPLAINED**

It will be noticed that Mr. Browne's first letter to *The Harbinger of Light* was dated the 20th December and that the verifications of the supernormal messages did not occur until the 21st and 27th December. It will naturally be asked, with every expectation of an affirmative answer, whether Mr. Browne mentioned the mutilations for which the sharks were responsible. As a matter of fact he did not do so: and at first sight this omission seems indeed to impair what Professor Driesch called the evidential standing of the case. But does it really have that effect? It is known that Mr. Browne was a convinced and ardent Spiritualist whose own daughters possessed - one of them in notable degree - the gift of automatic writing: and, judging from the style of his published works, one would hardly expect him to be concerned with the strict evidential standards which any Psychical Research Society would very properly demand before it would deign to consider a story of this kind. Furthermore, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that it could scarcely have occurred to Mr. Browne as within the bounds of natural possibility that the mutilations would or could ever be substantiated. So why make public mention of what he no doubt felt to be an essentially unverifiable mediumistic communication of an extremely painful character?

However that may be, Mr. Browne begins his second letter (written about twelve weeks *after* the capture of the shark) with the remark that he had refrained up till then from allowing his wife to know about the injuries on account of her state of health. He then proceeds to introduce the subject of the supernormal messages about the sharks in the following words, which I quote in full: "I may however, observe that one critic asks why my sons when communicating did not tell us about their bodies having been attacked by sharks instead of merely stating, when asked regarding their physical bodies, that they were greatly decomposed through having been several days in the water. This I consider to be a reasonable question and in reply, though I may not be credited by those who do not know me, I have to state that my son Hugh, when communicating, called his elder brother aside out of hearing of his mother, and informed him, through the Medium, regarding the mutilation of his brother William's body by a shark. This I did not mention in my letter to you for obvious reasons. Hugh also, the day previous to the shark being caught at Frankston, told a friend who was in Adelaide at the time, and who is a clairaudient, that a large fish had got part of one of his arms and had torn his waistcoat off his body." A little further on Mr. Browne adds that he received a letter from another friend in Adelaide to whom the clairaudient had mentioned at the time the fact of this message. And he then describes the finding

of Hugh's watch "with the hands pointing to nine o'clock, the very hour at which we had been informed through the Medium on the 18th, or nine days previously that the catastrophe had occurred."

### **THE LATENCY HYPOTHESIS**

The question must be answered as conclusively as possible whether telepathy *in articulo mortis* from any of the three yachtsmen can explain away the spiritistic interpretation of the messages. Apart from the fact that no psychic rapport seems in the slightest degree probable between the third young man Murray and the two Mediums, there remains the hypothesis of latency. According to the theory of latency a telepathic message from a dying person may lie submerged for a period in the unconscious mind of the percipient. The authors of *Phantasms of the Living* allowed twelve hours as the maximum, within reason, for such period. It would hardly then be reasonable to discredit the post-mortem interpretation of the Shark Case by postulating latency, when the period for the Melbourne Medium was at least eighty and for the Adelaide Medium at least two hundred and sixty hours.

### **THE QUESTION OF RELIABILITY**

There is also the consideration whether it is possible so long after the event to feel any assurance of the reliability of the persons concerned. Now Mr Hugh Junor Browne was found on personal acquaintance by Frederic Myers to be "a man of high standing" both in character and capacity (*Human Personality, vol.2 p. 172*). And Mr. George Spriggs is known to have had a long and honourable career as clairvoyant, materializing Medium and especially as psychic healer, in Cardiff, Melbourne and London. In the last period of his life he was a member of the Council of the London Spiritualist Alliance. In *LIGHT* for 24th September, 1942, Mr. W.H. Evans made him the tenth subject of his "Famous Mediums." Mr. Evans did not fail to refer to the message from Adelaide, but followed the example of other writers in ignoring any communication through Spriggs about an injury due to a shark. Regarding the gentleman in Adelaide, we have only Mr. Browne's statement that he was a friend and a grand clairvoyant and clairaudient Medium." His name is not given.

An independent corroboration was provided during Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Australian tour. He related the story, and at the close of the lecture a member of the audience announced himself as the fisherman who had actually captured the large shark.

It only remains to clear up some confusion in two of the works of Professor Bozzano. Readers - one can but hope that they are very many - of his extremely important *Discarnate Influence in Human Life*, may be disconcerted to find that his account of the shark case does not altogether square with the facts as Mr. Browne stated them; and the same remark applies to the earlier work *Animism and Spiritism*. Incidentally, after having had to comment somewhat acidly on the late Professor Driesch's evaluation of the affair, it is a pleasure to quote his tribute to his Italian colleague as "the best theoretician in our field." Such discrepancy as exists between Bozzano's account and the original documents can, I think, be both explained and to a large extent justified.

It seems advisable to try to do so as the Shark Case is one of the twenty-six links in the chain of evidence by which Bozzano supports his momentous thesis that the existence and survival of the human spirit can be amply proved quite independently of the subliminal faculties of living communicators - which faculties are endowed with virtual omniscience by our opponents in the hope of establishing the purely animistic character of apparent proofs of Survival.

### **PROFESSOR BOZZANO'S ACCOUNT**

The references to the Case will be found on pages 219-221 of *Discarnate Influence*, and the following considerations should be borne in mind:

(1) Professor Bozzano explains that he is giving a résumé of a case which he cited in full in an earlier monograph. This monograph was published in 1921 under the title *Gli Enigmi Della Psicometria*. It does not seem to have been translated into English. It must not therefore be assumed that there was any failure at that date to give facts fully and without confusion.

(2) The clairaudient message is not mentioned. At first sight the omission of any reference to this striking cross-correspondence is most surprising. It must, however, be realized that the writer's sole concern in this section of his Summary of Evidence is with theoretically important point that psychometry, usually regarded as a purely animistic faculty (i.e., a faculty residing in a living sensitive for reading traces of the past mysteriously inherent in material objects), clearly serves in certain instances to establish rapport with a discarnate personality and acquires therefore spiritualistic significance. For Bozzano's purposes at that stage of his admirable argument the clairaudient message is irrelevant. All that he wishes to bring out is the fact that the handling of two pocket-books enabled Spriggs to contact one of the young men and furnish details of events which occurred after the last occasion when the books had been used by their owners. In Adelaide there can presumably be no question of any psychometric prelude to the clairaudient message.

(3) The Professor stresses the fact that his book is a synthesis of his numerous earlier publications made in response to a request of the Committee of the International Spiritualist Congress of Glasgow in 1937. In a possibly hurried synthesizing of the material contained in his monograph on psychometry he has not escaped a danger to which such a process is especially liable, the danger of telescoping. He states on p. 220 that the discovery of the contents of the shark's stomach confirmed the tragic particulars furnished by one of Mr. Browne's sons through the mouth of Spriggs.

### **UNFORTUNATE CONFUSION**

This is an unfortunate confusion between Hugh Browne's bodiless arm and William Browne's armless body. As will be clear from the précis of verified communications given above, it was the discovery of William Browne's body floating in the Bay and not the opening of the shark's belly which confirmed the message about mutilation given by Spriggs while he was entranced and controlled by Hugh.

It would be interesting to know whether readers are aware of any other considerations which might help to clear this unique and dramatic case from aspersions on its evidential standing.

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## LESLIE'S SEASONAL QUIZ

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When we read elsewhere a wild historical assertion, we sometimes say "I bet they are not Psypioneer readers". This is because all our readers, to be sure, never confuse names or dates, (unlike the editors) or repeat unsubstantiated myths. To help sharpen memories, in our usual seasonal quiz, we have posed one question for each issue in sequence from January 2009. (Answers in the January 2010 issue.)

1. What was Percy Wilson told at lunch by Maurice Barbanell in 1941?
2. Who started the newspaper "Harbinger of Light"?
3. What journal did Allan Kardec found?
4. Why was William Crookes obliged to repudiate a claim by Florence Marryat?
5. Who may have first mentioned Ectoplasm on the wireless?
6. Who was Mr Splitfoot?
7. How did Minnie Parsons go down in history?
8. Who was the guide of the Conan Doyle home circle?
9. How did Mr. Henry Diedrich Jencken take an irrevocable step?
10. Why is a certain Curator's blog of such importance?
11. Who was the chief survival researcher of early American Spiritualism?
12. Who is the chief suspect for the Chicago account of the psychic discovery of Jack the Ripper?

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