

communication of so many facts unknown to Miss Cummins and her "sitters", that the genuineness of her gift of automatic writing cannot be questioned by any unprejudiced investigator'. It is also claimed that 'one record of a sitting, the results of which proved capable of complete authentication, was published in *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, by Sir William Barrett, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, an organisation which demands the fulfilment of the most stringent conditions before accepting as authentic any communication or other psychic phenomena' (page 146).

The last sentence could easily mislead. It rather implies that the S.P.R., as a body, does accept *some* communications or other psychic phenomena as authentic, and some may infer from it that Miss Cummins's scripts have been so accepted.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

I found these correspondences in a search through Fawcett's articles published in the *Occult Review*, made at the suggestion of Mr F. Clive-Ross, editor of *Tomorrow* magazine. It is only fair to state, however, that a similar discovery was made by Mr J. R. Henderson in 1963. His report was not published, and I did not learn of his work until after my own research had been carried out.  
S.E.

#### REVIEWS

SWAN ON A BLACK SEA: A STUDY IN AUTOMATIC WRITING. By Geraldine Cummins. Edited by Signe Toksvig, with a Foreword by C. D. Broad. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965. lxii + 168 pp. 35s.

This is a series of scripts of outstanding interest. They were obtained between 1957 and 1960 through Geraldine Cummins by means of automatic writing. The ostensible communicator was Mrs Coombe-Tennant who died in 1956 at the age of 82. She is best known to psychical researchers as 'Mrs Willett', her pseudonym when she was obtaining (by automatic writing) scripts which formed part of the system of cross-correspondences in the early part of this century. The identity of Mrs Tennant with the automatic writer Mrs Willett was known to only a few people, not to her own family.

Professor Broad contributes a 46-page foreword which is written with his customary clarity and acumen. It includes a chronological table of the main events connected with the life of Mrs Tennant

and gives some account of the various people mentioned in or relevant to the scripts, from the birth of Henry Sidgwick in 1838 to the obituary notice of Mrs Tennant in 1957. He has also made a careful analysis of the dates and main contents of the scripts, and of the relevant outside circumstances. This is a considerable help towards getting a bird's eye view of the scripts. Professor Broad suggests that the reader must draw his own conclusions; he does also indicate his own. He thinks it obvious that the survival of Mrs Tennant is the simplest and most plausible hypothesis for explaining the scripts, but also points out the inconceivability to most contemporary Westerners of a person continuing to exist after his earthly body has died and disintegrated.

The work of editing these scripts has been done by Signe Toksvig who has also contributed a brief Introduction. The automatist Miss Geraldine Cummins has contributed an interesting account of herself and of her methods of work.

The scripts themselves range widely over Mrs Coombe-Tennant's life and interests. We learn that she was a magistrate, an admirer of Lloyd George, and a friend of many of the leading figures in psychical research. There are references to her work with Sir Oliver Lodge and Lord Gerald Balfour. Of particular interest is an account in script 18 of her meeting with Arthur J. Balfour which led to the automatic writings described in 'The "Palm Sunday" Case' (*Proc. S.P.R.*, Feb. 1960).

If Mrs Willett was, in reality, the communicator in these scripts, it is of particular interest to note how she deals with the problems of communication and what she says about these problems, since she would also have known them from the other end when she was an automatic writer. She refers to the communications as a 'mixed grill' composed of memories of the medium and of the communicator. She speaks of being in a sense compelled to select from the memories of the automatist. That seems to be a reasonable expectation if she is utilizing the nervous system of the medium. One of the difficulties in mediumistic communication appears to be the communication of proper names; it is interesting to notice how skilfully the rather difficult place name *Morganwg* is here communicated (p. 17).

One naturally asks how strong is the evidence that the content of these scripts came, at least in part, from the surviving personality of Mrs Tennant. If they are a 'mixed grill' it is not to be supposed that the whole of their content is to be attributed to her; misinformation and uncharacteristic utterances may be the unwitting contributions of the medium's own mind. The question is as to whether there is also information which could not reasonably be at-

tributed to any other source than Mrs Tennant. There is, in fact, remarkably little misinformation and an impressive amount of detailed information that could have come only from somebody with more knowledge of Mrs Tennant's life and circumstances than appears to be wittingly possessed by the medium. This includes the fact that she was a magistrate, that her political sympathies were radical and included admiration for Lloyd George, references to Cherryhinton and to Morganwg which were places with which she had been associated, etc.

Sometimes the information is as to matters of which it is claimed that Miss Cummins could have had no information, as, for example, in the description of the meeting with A. J. Balfour and his love for a Lyttleton who died. The details of this matter were known to few people and were not published until after this script was received. Such evidence, however, becomes less convincing in the light of Penfield's experiments on electrical stimulation of the human cerebral cortex which demonstrate that past experiences may be revived in great detail although they are, in the ordinary sense of the word, forgotten. It may be that automatic writing is also a way of recovering such forgotten material from the cerebral store, and we cannot be sure that the story was not at some time mentioned in her presence, and forgotten by her. The few people who knew the story are likely to have included some who were friends of Miss Cummins. The same considerations apply to the identity of Mrs Willett with Mrs Coombe-Tennant. This must have been known to more people, and it seems more likely to have been mentioned and forgotten. Can any of us be sure that this fact was not mentioned in our presence before it was published in 1957? If mentioned, it may have been cerebrally recorded although consciously forgotten.

It would be wrong, I think, to attach too much importance to such striking productions of particular pieces of information of which one would not suppose that the medium could have any normal knowledge. What is evidentially impressive is rather the wide range of information given about Mrs Tennant's life and interests. Evidence as to whether the communications come, at least in part, from the ostensible communicator does not, however, depend only on information being given which would have been known to that communicator and not to the medium. One may also have evidence based on recognition; it may seem that what is communicated is so characteristic of the ostensible communicator that it seems that it must have come from her and from nobody else.

Only those who knew Mrs Coombe-Tennant in life can judge

whether the personality portrayed in the scripts is recognizably her. The rest of us must be content to note that the portrayal is of a very vivid and individual person. Signe Toksvig's husband, himself a dramatist, and sceptical about the possibility of receiving communications from the other side of the grave, is reported to have said to his wife after reading these scripts: 'That settles it. . . . I've read Geraldine's fiction. She could not possibly have invented Mrs Willett.' Her sons are perhaps best qualified to say how closely the personality of the scripts corresponds to that of their mother. They report that some of the communications are typical of what she would say, although they also note some uncharacteristic features. This is, of course, what would be expected if the communications are a 'mixed grill' to which she contributes only some part.

This is a book which should be read by all those who are interested in the question of human survival. It would, I think be a mistake to judge it as if its importance lay in providing conclusive proof of the survival of Mrs Coombe-Tennant; no set of scripts could do that. Evidence from information can always in principle be explained by the unconscious memory of the medium or by her paranormal capacities for ESP and pre-cognition. Evidence from recognition can also never be coercive since we can never be sure that we know the limits of the medium's capacity for unconscious dramatic construction. The best that we can expect from a set of scripts is that such explanations may become very unlikely ones.

If then we ask a different question and enquire whether this book adds to the weight of evidence for post-mortem communication from a surviving personality, I think that the answer should be that it certainly does. The scripts can be most easily explained if we suppose that Mrs Tennant has survived and that she played at least a part in their production.

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THE COCK LANE GHOST. By Douglas Grant. Macmillan, London: St Martin's Press, New York, 1965. ix + 117 pp. 21s.

The author of this book, Professor Grant, who holds the Chair of American Literature at the University of Leeds, has collected the material available on the famous case in 1762 and here presents the story in lively narrative form. The history of 'Scratching Fanny' is well known and, in short, it relates to a child in whose

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**SWAN ON A BLACK SEA:  
HOW MUCH  
COULD]MISS CUMMINS HAVE KNOWN?**

by **M. R. BARRINGTON**

ON hearing that some recently published automatic scripts provide strong evidence of survival, there cannot be many people who read the scripts hoping to find that reports of the communicator's continued existence have been much exaggerated. Most of us would prefer to survive, and one suspects that those who do not admit to such a preference have merely indoctrinated themselves into accepting their ultimate extinction with the best possible grace. One's natural predisposition towards a survival interpretation of hopeful looking evidence must constantly be kept in check by a superimposed leaning in favour of almost any other hypothesis.

The Cummins-Willett scripts make compulsive reading, and a debt of gratitude is due to Miss Cummins for a remarkable feat of mediumship. It takes a considerable effort of will to bear in mind the possibly fictitious nature of the purported communicator 'Winifred' (Mrs Willett/Coombe-Tennant), for she seems very real indeed. She communicates a coherent and almost wholly accurate body of reminiscence, correctly naming persons, places and events, and her sons have found the communicator's personality in many ways typical of their mother. But detaching oneself, with difficulty, from the initially convincing character of the scripts as a whole, and turning to a closer examination of the particular points that appear most striking, certain loopholes appear through which a great part of the impressive seeming

evidence may be thought to slip away. Alternative explanations that have to be considered when a survival hypothesis is to be tested must include the possibility that the knowledge displayed by the communicator could have been gained by ESP on the part of the medium, or gained by normal processes of which the medium is unaware, or gained by normal processes of which the medium is aware. This article will deal only with the second of these alternatives, and consider how far material which is presented to the reader in a light favourable to survival could have been known to Miss Cummins, at some level of her mind, without her necessarily being aware of it.

Before turning to this principal consideration, it would be as well to advise the reader that if he wishes to study the scripts in a critical spirit, the notes provided by the editor, while of interest inasmuch as they supply a certain amount of information, will be of little assistance as a guide to the evaluation of evidence. In most cases the annotations are undated and anonymous, and we are left to guess at the authorship. The presumption that such notes are made by the editor, Miss Signe Toksvig,<sup>1</sup> is undermined by the occasional note that specifically bears the description 'Ed'. We are told on page lxi that the scripts 'began in 1957 and ended in 1959. Not until they were far along was Miss Cummins told whether the facts stated in them were correct or not'. The vagueness that leaves us to judge for ourselves how far 'far along' is will be found in many of the annotations. On page 133, for example, the script reads: 'I have had the great joy of greeting and welcoming Helen [Salter]. Besides her father and mother a brother of hers was present. (5).' Note (5) reads: 'A brother (?)' If this means that the editor has made proper inquiries and ascertained that Mrs Salter did not have a brother (which Mr Salter says is the case) surely this is what the note should say.<sup>2</sup> Even when a note does convey information from which a particularly alert reader (not myself) could conclude that Winifred has made one of her rare errors, the presentation sometimes masks the fact rather than bringing it to the reader's attention. Thus on page 87 of script 23 (7 June 1958) we read: 'It was only in old age that I became static, contented to reside through the years in Wales, my body anchoring me there (3).' Note (3) reads: '... Until the death of her husband she did live in Wales.' The persuasive 'did' strongly

<sup>1</sup> Miss Toksvig will perhaps throw light on this question when she visits this country in the spring.

<sup>2</sup> It almost looks as if we are being invited to speculate on the possibility of one of those stillborn children unknown to the sitter and so popular with less interesting mediums.

implies that the annotation is confirming the script; but reference to page xxxii of Professor Broad's synopsis shows that Charles Coombe-Tennant died in 1928, when Winifred was only 54! Winifred lived on to her 83rd year, and on pages 123/4 of script 33 (11 April 1959) there is a description of her last days and death in a location described five times as 'West Kensington'. Note (1) on page 124 inadequately informs us that 'Winifred's last residence was in Kensington . . .'. It is, perhaps, only fair to bear in mind that to the Danish Miss Toksvig, the considerable geographical and social distinction between Cottessmore Gardens, W.8, the very desirable location of Mrs Coombe-Tennant's last residence, and the vastly less desirable district of West Kensington may not be so obvious as it is to a Londoner; it contributes however to the impression that the editor has on occasion remained silent or uninformative rather than pass unfavourable comment.

It must also be said that anyone who troubles to check details will have little confidence in the standard of care with which the book has been compiled.<sup>1</sup> On page 1, and again on page 4, Miss Cummins tells us that the only information given to her by Mr Salter about the sitter was 'his initials and surname'. This slip<sup>2</sup> is allowed to pass twice, even though on the next page Miss Cummins quotes Mr Salter's letter in full, and we see that the absent sitter was in fact described as 'Major Henry Coombe-Tennant'. On page 32 the editor, referring to the suicide of a person described as 'L' in the script says: 'It does not seem right to mention the full names of the persons. . .'. But on page liii of the foreword Professor Broad has already named L. as Leo Myers, the son of F. W. H. Myers. In note (1) on page 25 of script 5 (24 September 1957) Miss Cummins, referring to the name 'Mrs Willett', tells us that 'Revelation of her identity was first made in the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research for December, 1957, of which I was not told till January, 1958, but this script made me suspect it'. The editor makes a similar statement on page 35. But on page xxx of the synopsis Professor Broad tells us: 'At the end of October, 1957, W.H.S. called on G.C. and informed her that "Mrs Willett" had been Mrs C.T.' Again, the synopsis makes it clear on page xxxv that 'the relevant facts about F.W.H.M. and "Phyllis" (Mrs Annie Marshall) were first made public in Oct., 1958, in W.H.S.'s paper "F. W. H. Myers'

<sup>1</sup> Miss Toksvig has told Mrs Goldney that her task of editing was carried out under difficult conditions; even so I think we are entitled to complain about the absence of an index.

<sup>2</sup> We are given to understand that this error was in no way the fault of Miss Cummins.

Posthumous Message' (*S.P.R. Proceedings*);' but the writer of note (5) on page 78 of script 20 (4 May 1958) asserts that 'Myers' secret love' was 'Not made public till a couple of years later than this script'. Nothing in fact turns on whether Miss Cummins was told about Mrs Willett in October 1957 or in January 1958, or whether the facts about Myers were made public five months or two years after the writing of script 20, but discrepancies of this sort must make one apprehensive about a possible lack of precision in other matters of timing and dating.

The question of exactly when certain facts were made known to Miss Cummins gives cause for concern when one comes to realise that she appears over the years to have been the recipient of a lot of gratuitous information. It now seems a pity that she knew the name of the sitter from the start, and that no attempt was made to make contact in the first instance by means of a psychometric object. From the exiguous annotations we know that Miss Cummins received a letter dated 25 January 1958 from Mr Salter, in which he wrote to her apropos Mrs Eveleen Myers: 'When she [Winifred] began to get communications from Myers, Eveleen behaved very badly to her, as to other automatists of the S.P.R. Group.' This information is given on page 78 in note (6) to script 20 (4 May 1958), a script in which 'evidential' observations are made by the automatist regarding Mrs Myers. The editor does not draw our attention to the fact that this letter would have been received by Miss Cummins some months before the script to which the annotation relates (indeed, on a casual, or merely ordinary, reading the note appears to be confirming the veridical nature of the communication), and one cannot help wondering if fuller annotations would show that Miss Cummins did in fact receive other letters relating to material appearing in subsequent scripts.

To turn now to the main subject of inquiry, there appear to be four questions that merit particular consideration:

1. Could Miss Cummins have known that Mrs Willett was Mrs Coombe-Tennant?
  2. Could she have been aware of expressions used in the Balfour paper: 'Study of the Psychological Aspects of Mrs Willett's Mediumship' (*Proceedings* May 1935)?
  3. Could she have known details of the A. J. Balfour-May Lyttelton love story (Palm Sunday case, *Proceedings* February 1960)?
  4. How much could Miss Cummins have known about Mrs Coombe-Tennant's personality and private life?
1. The secret identity of Mrs Willett is dealt with by Professor



Broad on page x of his foreword, where he names a small number of persons who knew about it, all (with the exception of Dame Edith Lyttleton, who is mentioned in another paragraph) said to be 'by nature or training eminently reticent'. He does not, however, mention the very real possibility that Winifred's sister-in-law Eveleen Myers, came to know, though no discreet person would have told her. On page 92 the editor quotes an extract from Winifred's diary (dated 13 February 1909) in which she writes of 'the great difficulty of Eveleen's attitude to the S.P.R. and its effect on the whole Coombe-Tennant family'. Professor Broad describes Mrs Myers on page xix as 'a singularly egotistic and rather unscrupulous person', and one may well doubt if she would have been reticent if she had happened upon her sister-in-law's secret.

Among the correspondence of Sir Oliver Lodge, now being sorted for filing at the society, in a letter dated 13 February 1911, Lady Betty Balfour writes to Lodge explaining how Mrs Alfred Lyttleton (Dame Edith) had come to know the secret. She had heard Lodge talk about a 'new automatist', and she had learned that Winifred had been down to visit Lord Balfour and his family at Woking; she put two and two together, and correctly equated Mrs Willett with Mrs Coombe-Tennant. It is not difficult to imagine that if, instead of two and two, scattered halves, quarters and eighths are presented to the mind, the conscious cerebral processes may not be able to make four (or even realise that four exists) but the trance-consciousness, which appears to function in some ways with vastly greater efficiency, might well assemble the assorted fractions and add them up. If in the recesses of Miss Cummins's mind the necessary information were present though in scattered fragments, then possibly the fleeting memory of a recent meeting with a Mrs Wills (see pages 4 and 25) might have triggered off a subliminal calculation.<sup>1</sup>

This may seem far-fetched, and there is a more straightforward way in which the identity of Mrs Willett may have been revealed to Miss Cummins, whether directly or obliquely. We know that Sir Oliver Lodge was one of the persons who was aware of Mrs Willett's identity; we also know that when he communicated with the deceased 'Raymond' or 'Myers' he believed implicitly in their objectivity, and did not regard them as parts of the medium's mind. Is it not easily conceivable that if Lodge spoke to 'Myers' through Miss Cummins's mediumship, he might say things to 'Myers' that were not intended for the ear of Miss Cummins, but

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Wills is not actually mentioned however until script 5 (24 Sept. 1957).

which would certainly become part of 'Astor's' stock of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> In his foreword to Miss Cummins's 'The Road to Immortality,' Lodge says on page 9 that he had found the Myers scripts transmitted by Miss Cummins 'in many respects characteristic of F. W. H. Myers;' he continues: "To clinch matters, I took an opportunity, when having a private sitting with Mrs Osborn Leonard, to ask my old friend Myers, who was in touch with me through Raymond, whether he knew anything about Miss Cummins's writing. . . ." The reply was satisfactory, and this presumably clinched matters! Further, an S.P.R. member has a letter from Miss Cummins's friend Miss E. B. Gibbes, dated 8 August 1949, in which Miss Gibbes recollects Lodge coming to a sitting with Miss Cummins in the early 1930's to *consult* 'Myers' about a matter of council policy—and the advice appears to have been taken! In this frame of mind it would not be very surprising if Lodge were to have 'confidential' talks with 'Myers' from which it might be readily deducible by 'Astor' that 'Myers' was also communicating through his sister-in-law, Mrs Coombe-Tennant.

2. In the Balfour 'Study' published in *Proceedings* in 1935, some very characteristic phrases, among them 'mutual selection' and 'walking in celestial places' occur which also appear in the Cummins-Willett scripts, 'mutual selection' being mentioned as early as page 14 of script 3 (10 Sept. 1957). If there were no reasonable possibility of Miss Cummins having had the slightest acquaintance with the use of these expressions in the study, then their occurrence in the scripts would be of very great significance. We are told by Miss Cummins on pages 4 and 164, and by the editor on pages lviii, 16 and 60, that though Miss Cummins has read about Mrs Willett in Tyrrell's 'The Personality of Man' and Saltmarsh's 'Evidence of Personal Survival from Cross-Correspondences', (publications in which these expressions are not quoted) she has never read the Balfour study. Miss Cummins also tells us, on page 1, that she has never been a member of the S.P.R.; one tends to infer from non-membership of the S.P.R. that she would not have had ready access to the *Proceedings*. But in a short article by Miss Cummins at the end of the book headed 'Personal Background' we learn that she shared a London house with Miss E. B. Gibbes, who was a member of the S.P.R. from 1923 until her death in 1951, and an active psychical researcher. Is it not possible, and even probable, that from time to time Miss Gibbes would have mentioned features of interest in the *Proceedings*, and even read out striking passages? It is hard to credit that a keen

<sup>1</sup> 'Astor' is Miss Cummins's control.

psychical researcher sharing house with a very intelligent medium would not have referred to outstanding reports of mediumship. If Miss Cummins has no recollection of Miss Gibbes ever talking to her about the Balfour study, which was published thirty years ago, or of browsing in the *Proceedings* herself from time to time, this would seem entirely natural to anyone (like myself) who hardly remembers conversations that took place three years ago! It would not be surprising if Miss Cummins's memory of these distant times were fallible.

3. If Miss Gibbes was not a source of divers information, she must have been taciturn in comparison with some of Miss Cummins's other friends who appear to have regaled her with gossip about subjects material to these scripts. We are assured by the editor on page 60, note (4), that the story of A. J. Balfour and May Lyttelton (the Palm Sunday case) was known only to 'three or four people'; but what do we read on page 61? On 30 March 1958, eight days after the writing of script 14 (22 March 1958)<sup>1</sup> in which detailed references had been made to the Palm Sunday case, Mrs Constance Sitwell, by an extraordinary coincidence, told Miss Cummins about an episode in the life of A. J. Balfour which Miss Cummins recognized as the same story. The editor says three times (on pages 35, 38 and 60) that the story was not known to the public until the *Proceedings* publication in February 1960; but no one asks the very pertinent questions: (a) How did Mrs Sitwell know the story? (b) How many persons were told the story besides Mrs Sitwell? (c) To how many persons besides Miss Cummins did Mrs Sitwell tell the story? One answer to these questions was given by an S.P.R. member, who said that her mother had known all about the Balfour-Lyttelton love story two generations ago—including details about the ring and the casket—and that it was no secret.

4. If it is reluctantly conceded that Miss Cummins could (at some level) have known or deduced the identity of Mrs Willett, and been acquainted with some details of the Balfour study and the Palm Sunday case, there remains the question of how much, in the course of a life-time of intelligent reading, observation, mediumship and social intercourse, could Miss Cummins have learned about the private affairs of Mrs Coombe-Tennant, who was not a friend of hers. On one hand it is evident that Miss Cummins is on friendly terms with a circle of people who are capable of giving her information about Mrs Coombe-Tennant.

<sup>1</sup> And, unfortunately, before the script was posted.

She has had a certain amount of social contact with Sir Oliver Lodge and Dame Edith Lyttelton, and on page 3 of 'Swan on a Black Sea' we are told that in 1939, together with Miss Gibbes, she visited the Balfours and gave them a sitting.<sup>1</sup> From page 85, note (4) to script 22 (27 May 1958) we learn that Mrs Sitwell was able to tell her, after completion of the scripts, of Winifred's early worries about being 'stout', and on page 75, note (3) to script 19 (3 May 1954), Mrs Douglas Fawcett is reported as also having been able, in June 1964, to throw light on Winifred's younger days. If these friends and acquaintances were able to impart information of this sort after the scripts were written, presumably they, and perhaps others as well, would have been in an equally good position to have talked about Mrs Coombe-Tennant for many years before. We cannot even rule out the possibility that Miss Cummins has actually met Mrs Coombe-Tennant. A casual meeting totally forgotten is a commonplace of most people's experience, though if we went on to postulate a forgotten acquaintanceship of a degree that would have enabled Miss Cummins to absorb the essence of Mrs Coombe-Tennant's personality and cast of mind, this would be envisaging a highly extraordinary state of affairs.

On another hand one must bear in mind the great quantity of information that could be acquired from written sources. To take one example, the obituary notice of Mrs Coombe-Tennant published in *The Times* of 1 September 1956 mentions the following items of script material (*inter alia*): Winifred Margaret, Cadoxton Lodge, Glamorgan County Bench, Swansea prison, Liberal contestant, League of Nations, Welsh education and culture, art and craft section of the National Eisteddfod, Welsh painting, Swansea Borough Council, and dates of marriage and widowhood. It must be difficult for anyone to be certain that no eye has ever been cast on *The Times*, or other newspapers likely to carry obituary columns, and indeed no one could be expected to make a reliable statement about the fund of knowledge that must be presumed to lie dormant in the subconscious. The impersonal facts available from documents such as newspapers are, of course, dwarfed by the revelation of personality, ideas and style, as well as facts, open to anyone who has read *Christopher*, the book written and edited by Lodge about Christopher Coombe-Tennant, Mrs Coombe-Tennant's son who was killed in the 1914 war. Miss Cummins says she has not read *Christopher*, and again we must

<sup>1</sup> Miss Cummins assured the audience at an S.P.R. lecture given in November 1965 that during the sitting the Balfours had been quite silent, and that for the rest of the time conversation was about Ireland, and other neutral matters.

ask the question, could she have forgotten? A book skimmed through, perhaps because it was written by Lodge, nearly fifty years ago, might very well have vanished from the memory, leaving 'Astor' with an excellent impression of Mrs Coombe-Tennant awaiting recall at a suitable moment. This hypothesis seems to me unlikely for the following reasons. Assume that some of the many references in the scripts to places, names, and other details have come into the medium's mind from written sources; if so, then 'Astor', in constructing his hypothetical pseudo-Winifred, does not guard rigorously against using expressions that will make researchers point an accusing finger at documents theoretically available to the medium. How then do we explain the surprising dearth of characteristically *Christopher* material from the scripts? Either we abandon the hypothesis of 'Astor' building up a character from all sources available to him, or we stick to the hypothesis and conclude that Miss Cummins has not read or even glanced through *Christopher*. Then if Miss Cummins has not read *Christopher*, we return to the question, how has the very convincing, three dimensional Winifred been built up from glimpses of newspapers and reference books, and from casual gossip? Quantity must surely count for something, and the sheer amount of fact, the effortless flow of background knowledge, and the apparent consistency of characterisation must make one pause and wonder how much of Miss Cummins's life could have been spent in listening to idle talk about Mrs Coombe-Tennant, in whom she had no particular interest. Assuming any normal source of information, how could Miss Cummins have come to know that when she was young Winifred 'used to think the prayer in our prayer-book to deliver us from sudden death an odd and mistaken supplication. It was one in which I never joined'.<sup>1</sup> Has Miss Cummins read this somewhere in a newspaper or magazine? Or has some friend happened to say to her 'Mrs Coombe-Tennant, who's a friend of mine (but not of yours) once told me that until the death of her daughter she never used to join in the prayer for delivery from sudden death etc. etc.' If unamusing anecdotes of this sort were told about Mrs Coombe-Tennant, she must have been one of England's most thoroughly talked about women. One quite cogent reason for thinking that she was not talked about to this extent is that Mrs Goldney, who might be expected to have heard as much as Miss Cummins about the S.P.R. Cambridge group, and who has an exceptionally retentive memory, says that she (albeit confined to drawing on her conscious recollections) would not have known

<sup>1</sup> In note (2) on page 78, Mr Alexander Coombe-Tennant says that he remembers his mother telling him this.

one quarter of the information about Winifred that appears in the scripts.

There are a number of particular details that would be highly indicative of a genuine communicator if further investigation showed them to be as evidential as they appear at first sight. Mr Alexander Coombe-Tennant has agreed to check the relevant details in the scripts and diaries, but as it will be some time before the answers are known, it may be of interest for these points to be noted pending their very possible collapse on closer inspection.

1. In script 26 (13 June 1958) on page 96 the script reads: 'I continued to make remarks to my communicators at my first sittings with Sir Oliver, which took place when the Mayflower was out (1).' Note (1) on page 100 reads as follows: 'In her diary for May, 1910, she mentions that the Mayflower is out.' The first question that arises is whether 'Mayflower' is in fact spelled with a capital M both in the script and in the diaries. Printers are notorious for bringing discrepancies into line, and even adding capitals if they think it right and proper, as it would be if the good ship *Mayflower* were in question. If the capitals are authentic, this would tend to suggest that the reference is to a mayflower tree, the American azalea nudiflora, or to the trailing arbutus, two equally rare plants; if there were really a mayflower in the garden, it seems quite inconceivable that this could have been known to Miss Cummins.<sup>2</sup> If, on the other hand, Mrs Coombe-Tennant and Miss Cummins both share the idiosyncrasy of saying 'mayflower' when most people say 'blossom', or of using the word to describe the may of the hawthorn, then the coincidence is still of moderate interest; if they actually combine using the word in a general sense but spelling it with a capital M, the coincidence would be very striking.

2. A similar oddity occurs in script 23 (7 June 1958), where on page 86 the script reads: 'Now I am travelling a road beyond Dollygelly (1)'. Note (1) on page 88 reads: "'Dollygelly" is mentioned in a diary. A.T. says the view is marvellous beyond it.' Taken at face value, it looks as if both communicator and medium have made the same mistake in spelling Dolgelly (or Dolgelly) as Dollygelly. But face value fades rapidly from reasonable contemplation when one bears in mind that Miss Cummins, not knowing Wales, might well make a mistake about a Welsh name; for Mrs Coombe-Tennant to make the same mistake seems very improbable, all the more so since a letter to Lodge shows her referring to 'Dolgelly'. Unlikely as it seems that the annotation is correct, it seems worth pursuing in the slim chance that 'Dollygelly' might be a pet name for a favourite spot. If the diary did reveal such a

spelling, then it would certainly come near to proving that Mrs Coombe-Tennant was indeed the author of the Cummins-Willetts scripts.

3. The subject of West Kensington has already been mentioned, and it may have occurred to the reader that this is a point of some interest. At first sight it looks as if the communicator has simply made a small but glaring error. If she were in a muddle about things generally, this could be passed off as an insignificant part of the muddle, but with so much background information wholly correct, this faulty reference is reminiscent of a science fiction episode in which a pseudo-human being shows by a fatal slip that he is not really human at all. Reacting for a second time, it occurs to me that a society lady of the pre-war years might possibly look on Mayfair as the part of London where people reside when in town, Belgravia as slightly out of the centre, and Kensington (*any* part of it) as decidedly west—and West Kensington might even not have been known to exist. Miss Cummins, on the other hand, dividing her time between Ireland and Chelsea, would not be likely to have had this attitude of 'West starts at Kensington'. I have therefore asked Mr Alexander Coombe-Tennant if his mother was known to refer to the W.8 district as West Kensington; if this were the case, it would be a personal eccentricity most unlikely to have been known to the medium or shared by her<sup>1</sup>.

Frequent references to improbability and unlikelihood in the last few pages prompt a short consideration of what meaning can reasonably be attributed to such words in the context of psychical research. On one view, *anything* is more likely than survival (or indeed any other paranormal process), and it matters little whether the event taken into comparison amounts to fraud by men thought to be honest, stupidity by men thought to be clever, malobservation by experienced observers, unaccountable results obtained using reliable apparatus and materials, multiple coincidence, gross misreporting, or all these improbabilities occurring together. On this view we should be bound to reject the evidence of several dozen reputable scientists who all declared that jointly and severally they had seen apples falling upwards; so long as the phenomenon remained unpredictable and unrepeatably, their observations would always have to be deemed delusions, conspiracies, jokes, or whatever, because these natural eccentricities were more probable than behaviour contrary to the known laws of gravitation. It

<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Mr Coombe-Tennant has been asked to scrutinise the scripts for any signs of 'across' spelled 'accross', this being one of Mrs Coombe-Tennant's human foibles apparent from correspondence in the S.P.R. archives.

seems to me that the flaw in this way of thinking is the attempt to assess the likelihood of paranormal states and events, and I would argue that a classification in terms of likelihood is meaningless except when applied to familiar situations. Thus it is meaningful to say that if Winifred is Miss Cummins's fiction, then some of the Winifred material must have reached the medium's mind by some very improbable ways and means;<sup>1</sup> but to say that however improbable the ways and means, survival must be considered even more improbable is not meaningful. The conclusion to be drawn from this discourse is that the existence of *possible* sources of normally acquired information does not necessarily require a researcher to regard them as the true sources.

Ideally, of course, Miss Cummins would have remained in Ireland for the duration of the scripts,<sup>2</sup> and preferably under lock and key. The fact that she would physically have been able to ransack all manner of sources over the next two years for information about Winifred is a misfortune for those of us who are personally unacquainted with Miss Cummins and have to draw comfort from the protestations of those who know her that this would be incompatible with her obvious honesty. If one is determined to narrow the evidential material down to matters that Miss Cummins could not on any reasonable hypothesis have known about, then one is bound to exclude from this category the broadly based wonders of the identification, the family history, the place names, the quarrel with Mrs R., the Balfour study phraseology and the Palm Sunday case. This does not, however, dispose of 'Swan on a Black Sea'. There remain the personality of Winifred, the mass of background knowledge, and a handful of details some of which are noted here; others may well occur to other readers. There also remains a puzzle: why does Winifred call her son Christopher by his first name, George? It is difficult to think of any plausible answer. If Winifred could communicate again through Miss Cummins, and give a really convincing explanation, this might perhaps, in the words of Sir Oliver Lodge, 'clinch matters'.

<sup>1</sup> The force of this observation may be somewhat diminished when the results of Mr Coombe-Tennant's inquiries are known.

<sup>2</sup> She returned to London after script 6.



Dr Schwarz's approach is sympathetic and constructive and many of his comments are illuminating, but to the layman he seems at times to build a rather high tower of analysis on a relatively modest base of information. And his book, perhaps, is not very well served by its title.

ROSALIND HEYWOOD.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### *Swan on a Black Sea—some Questions Answered*

SIR,—Certain questions of fact have been submitted to me, as possessor of the diaries of the late Mrs Winifred Coombe-Tennant, by readers of Geraldine Cummins's *Swan on a Black Sea* (Routledge, London, 1965). The questions are principally concerned with the reproduction in two places in Miss Cummins's scripts of wording to be found in Mrs Coombe-Tennant's private diaries. The relevant passages are these:

(a) *Script 23, June 7th, 1958, p. 86.* 'Now I am travelling a road beyond Dollygelly, up through wooded glens. One emerges from them into the warm sunlight. And here come the wide spaces; far below the climbing road lies a great sweep of lowland country, placid and silent. In the distance the mountains stand massive and aloof, a blue wall stretching along the west.'

*Annotation to Script 23, p. 88.* "'Dollygelly" is mentioned in a diary. A[lexander] T[ennant] says the view is marvellous beyond it.'

(b) *Script 26, June 13th, 1958, p. 96.* 'I think that my son's question refers to a number of sittings I gave to Sir Oliver Lodge in 1910. I wrote scripts dictated to me at them, but I also repeated messages aloud.

'I must mention that I took part in my D.D.I. ("Daylight Impression") talks with my communicators. I continued to make remarks to my communicators at my first sittings with Sir Oliver, which took place when the Mayflower was out.'

*Annotation to Script 26, p. 100.* 'In her diary for May, 1910, she mentions that the Mayflower is out. Page 55 in the Balfour Study mentions that she gave three sittings to Lodge in May, 1910.'

I will now take in turn each of the questions which have been raised, and answer them to the best of my ability.

1. *When were Mrs Coombe-Tennant's diaries first seen by anyone?*

My wife and I, who lived at 18 Cottesmore Gardens, London, W.8., from October 1956 to August 1962, opened the many tin boxes and safes after my Mother's death at about the time of Suez in 1956. We merely saw that a small safe was filled with diaries, but we did not open any or read them at that time.

I first read some of the diaries in the early months of 1958. My brother sent comments on a number of scripts to Mr Salter on 5th April 1958, and these incorporated some of my observations. I checked that there were many references in the diaries to a row with Mrs R. with whom my mother stayed during the war at Y. (*Swan*, p. 52).

2. *Has Miss Cummins ever seen the diaries?*

I first met Miss Cummins in February 1960. On 23rd January 1960 she wrote to 'Alexander Tennant' at an address in Albert Court S.W.7., and the letter was sent on to me by a Mrs Tennant of that address.

When Miss Cummins came to see me at Cottesmore Gardens I showed her some of the diaries and the book *Christopher*, which she told me she had never read.

3. *At what date did Signe Toksvig first see the diaries?*

Miss Toksvig first saw the diaries in the autumn of 1962. She came to London in September, and at my invitation subsequently stayed with my wife and myself. It was then that she had free access to the diaries, and discovered the correspondences between the diaries and the scripts.

4. *Can we be quite certain that at the times when (a) Miss Cummins first saw the diaries, and (b) Miss Toksvig discovered the correspondences between the scripts and the diaries, the scripts had been written and were out of Miss Cummins's possession?*

The early scripts (Nos. 1-9, August 28th 1957 to February 16th 1958) were sent by Miss Cummins to Mr W. H. Salter, but after my brother (Major Henry Coombe-Tennant) had written to Miss Cummins on 20th January 1958 saying that the scripts were of interest and suggesting that she should try and continue the experiment, she began to send the originals of further scripts to H.C.T. direct. This is confirmed by a letter from Mr Salter to Mrs Gay written on 4th March 1958.

Miss Cummins sent script 23 (June 7th 1958), together with scripts 22 and 24, to my brother at the Hague, and he forwarded them to me on June 15th. Miss Cummins enclosed script 26 (June 13th 1958) with a letter which she sent to my brother on

June 15th; and my brother sent this script, together with scripts 25 and 27, which he had also received, to Mr Salter on July 14th 1958.<sup>1</sup>

The originals of all the scripts have been in the possession of my brother or myself ever since they left Miss Cummins's hands, apart from times when they were being examined by Mr Salter, or being copied under his direction.

Miss Cummins did not in fact see the diaries until February 1960, and the series of 39 scripts was completed on November 23rd 1959 (as is stated on p. 140 of *Swan*). I think that she will have received from Mr Salter typed copies of the originals of the scripts from February 1959 onwards.

Miss Toksvig did not see the diaries until the autumn of 1962 (see above).

Some further questions are raised in Miss M. R. Barrington's article *Swan on a Black Sea: How Much Could Miss Cummins Have Known?* (*Journal S.P.R.*, June 1966, 289-300).

1. *Is 'Dolgelly', which is spelled 'Dollygelly' in script 23 (see (a) above), spelled in the same unusual way in the diaries?*

'Dolgelly' is indeed misspelt in this way in the original of script 23; but I can find no evidence in the diaries or elsewhere that my mother ever misspelt it so. The annotation on p. 88 of *Swan* is therefore inaccurate.

2. *Is 'Mayflower', which is spelled with a capital 'M' in script 26, spelled with one in the diaries? (cp. (b) above).*

The relevant extracts from the diary are as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Mr A. Coombe-Tennant has kindly shown me the correspondence concerned. Relevant extracts are these. H.C.T. to A.C.T. 15th June 1958: 'I enclose three scripts from Miss Cummins . . . The second script [script 23] contains some descriptive writing about Wales . . . There is another bit of childhood reminiscence about George Washington, which I cannot confirm.' H.C.T. to W.H.S. 14th July 1958: 'I have received 6 scripts from Miss Cummins since I met you in London. The first two [22 and 23] are mainly about childhood memories, and the other four [24-27] are in response to a request that 'Winifred' should say something about her sittings with Lodge . . . So much for the first of the Lodge scripts [24]. The next three are enclosed . . . One point of interest is that Winifred corrects a misstatement in an earlier script about Christopher's education. In the script of April 20th Winifred states, writing about the "Lob" who was a headmaster of Eton, "I was in awe of him but did not like him on the occasion my husband and I deposited our son in the educational establishment over which he reigned". She now says that because she did not like him, she and my father decided to send Christopher to Winchester.' This clearly refers to the contents of script 26.—Ed.

*Wed. 25th May 1910.* 'Long to have time to rest and feel. Laburnum and pink May out in blossom, divine birds, scents, clouds!'

*Thur. 26th May 1910.* 'Glorious weather, enchantment of the song of birds, the budding of the May, the scents and sounds of summer—contrasts—wrote to schoolmistress whose daughter at 7 died last week, God help her.'

These entries were written at Cadoxton Lodge, Neath, to which Mrs Coombe-Tennant had travelled on 24th from London. Oliver Lodge came to see her on May 6th, and the diary notes 'Second D.I.' On 21st Diary notes 'Oliver Lodge 3rd D.I.'

There is no reference to 'the Mayflower' in the diaries, but only to 'the May' and 'pink May'. The annotation on p. 100 of *Swan* is therefore not strictly accurate. It is impossible to say definitely if 'May' is written with a capital letter in the diaries, but my wife and I think that it is.

3. *Was Mrs Coombe-Tennant known to refer to the W.8. district as 'West Kensington' (as in Script 33)?*

Not so far as I know. I think that the reference to 'West Kensington' was an error.

4. *From correspondence in the S.P.R. archives it appears that Mrs Coombe-Tennant was liable to spell 'across' as 'accross'. Are there any signs of the same mistake occurring in the scripts?*

My wife and I can confirm that in some of the diaries before 1913 the word 'across' is spelt 'accross'; but we have not found instances of this mistake in the scripts.

ALEXANDER COOMBE-TENNANT

### *The Fawcett Scripts*

SIR,—When I first read Mr Simeon Edmunds's article *An Automatism's Scripts Compared with some Original Writings by the Alleged Communicator* (*Journal S.P.R.* March 1966), I felt certain (as I stated in *Psychic News* for April 23rd 1966) that I could not have read the article by P. H. Fawcett in the *Occult Review* for August 1923. I had (and still have) no recollection of so doing; moreover in August 1923 I was in Ireland, and did not return to London until late December.

However since making the statements quoted in *Psychic News* I have consulted files of the *Occult Review*. I discover that the August 1923 issue of the *Occult Review* contains an article by Mrs Travers Smith on the Oscar Wilde scripts. I acted as amanuensis for some of the scripts and in the following year wrote an article on them in the *Occult Review*. I did not myself subscribe

to the *Occult Review*, but in late December 1923 I did go to live with Mrs Travers Smith, who would no doubt have received complimentary copies of the August number. I have therefore to agree that it is *possible* that I looked at it, and also that I would have had some reason for so doing.

None the less I do not myself think it likely that I looked at Fawcett's actual article. My father, Prof. Ashley Cummins, died in mid-October 1923, and in consequence I was in Ireland from July to December 1923. After my return to London I was fully occupied with literary Journalism, and I continued my consciously written Irish, literary work when I had the time for it. So until some date after Miss Gibbes's death in 1951 I deliberately avoided reading about psychical research or the occult for fear that it would injure with its somewhat ponderous verbiage my prose style in my Irish literary work.

I never to my knowledge read the passage in the *Occult Review* published in it in 1923 by the living Colonel Fawcett. But Miss Gibbes was a very keen investigator and therefore read all she could find about him. It is quite probable that in 1948 Miss Gibbes conveyed telepathically to myself the passage from the 1923 Fawcett article, when I was writing automatically. For this there may even be a special reason. In the Fawcett article there is a passage about obtaining extra vitality from trees. When I was a weak and delicate girl of eleven I wanted to join in the lively games of my four elder brothers, all strong. I used often, when alone, to clasp the most ancient of the trees, imploring each 'Mr Tree, please make me strong!' This memory might have served the discarnate Col. Fawcett as a 'link' for knitting into his post-mortem account of Brazil some of what he had written in that article; at any rate the passages quoted fitted in well with what came both before and after, for the insertion is a sequence and not scattered as Mr Edmunds seems to imply by speaking of 'scripts' in the plural.

On the hypothesis of telepathy as the explanation, I remember that many years ago I gave a sitting to the poet W. B. Yeats. I obtained almost word for word an outline of a dramatic plot he was working on, though he said that at the sitting he was not consciously thinking of it. (See page 203 of my book *Mind in Life and Death*).

GERALDINE CUMMINS

#### *Harry Price and 'Rosalie'*

SIR,—At the risk of being tedious, perhaps I might comment very briefly on two matters of fact, questioned by Mr Cohen in

found it impossible to do so. At the end of our first sitting the table rose completely off the floor and was suspended there for some seconds, creaking and tossing to such an extent that I thought the table would fall to pieces, and requiring it for our lunch the next day I got down underneath the table and pulled it back to the floor. By this time everyone was standing up in order to keep their hands on top of the table.

Two advantages which we seem to have had over the sitters described in the *Journal* are that we always sat in candlelight with either one or two candles burning all the time on the sideboard. Everybody in the room could be seen quite clearly all the time and we laughed and joked and carried on some conversation during the sittings, although of course this was all relevant to what was happening.

The second thing was that we sat round a gateleg table, of quite heavy oak, and if you put any pressure underneath the leaf of the table, then the leg would swing inwards and the leaf would fall down. The only possible way you could lift a table of this type without the leaves folding in would be to get right down on the floor and pick the table up by holding the very base of the legs, quite impossible for one person to do, probably even for two because I feel sure the table would fall sideways. When the table rose off the floor at this first sitting it rose in one piece as we had been sitting at it for dinner. The legs were still in place after I had pulled it back to the floor. Afterwards we all tried to lift the table from underneath, but every time the supporting legs folded inwards and if we had let go the leaf would have fallen down.

My husband and I would very much have liked to continue with these sittings (we had about four or five) but one member of the group decided that she didn't want to do it any more, and we felt over a matter such as this it would be wrong to try and persuade her. That meant we could hardly invite her husband to continue without her, and we were therefore rather inclined to let the sittings drop. Maybe one of these days we can collect a different group and try again.

In reply to questions Mrs Fewell stated (a) that in her opinion the table rose 6" to 8" off the floor, and (b) that she is quite sure that *all* the legs were off the floor together—she saw the light quite clearly under them all.

ROSALIND HEYWOOD

### *Swan on a Black Sea*

SIR,—In Miss Barrington's study of *The Swan on the Black Sea* scripts in the *Journal* for June, 1966, she considers various theoretically possible sensory means by which I might have obtained information about Mrs Coombe-Tennant. There seems no point in asking for space to repeat my own unsupported recollections about myself: here, like the experimental researchers, I shall be believed

or not according to the outlook of the enquirer. But I should like to give my recollections of the 'social contacts' which Miss Barrington fears might have enabled me to obtain such information, through lack of discretion in persons who knew us both. I would not wish what I believe to be unjustified doubts as to their discretion to arise as a result of scripts written by me.

#### *Sir Oliver Lodge*

I saw him twice. In 1932 he visited me for about half an hour to offer to write a foreword for a forth-coming book of mine, which, he said, he liked very much. We talked about the book. In 1933 he asked me for a sitting. He arrived looking very ill indeed and was with great difficulty helped up my stairs. His object was to ask 'Myers's' views about a matter connected with Harry Price and the S.P.R. Having answered, 'Myers' began to describe his present situation, but Miss Gibbes noticed that Sir Oliver was looking so much worse that she cut short the sitting. He was helped downstairs and into his car and, I believe, driven straight to his doctor. I never saw him again.

#### *Dame Edith Lyttelton*

She first came to see me in 1938, because she was interested in a book I had written called *The Childhood of Jesus*, which she reviewed very kindly in the *Spectator*. We talked about the book. On a second occasion she came to ask me to give a lecture about 'Influenced Books'. She also had two sittings in connection with her late husband, Alfred Lyttelton. At one of these a niece of Lord Balfour's, who had recently died, appeared to communicate. This led to the one and only sitting I gave Lord and Lady Balfour at Fisher's Hill in June 1939. Their alleged communicators were his niece and a sister of Lady Balfour, Lady Constance Lytton.

#### *The Balfour Sitting*

Miss Gibbes and I were met in the hall by Mrs Lyttelton and at once taken into the room where the sitting was to be held. Lord and Lady Balfour came in straight away, looking very old, and sat down without speaking. They did not speak a single word during the sitting and silently left the room when my automatic writing ceased. It was concerned with the manner of death of the young relative. At once afterwards we had a hasty luncheon, as I had urgently to return to London. We spoke a little about Ireland, which I was glad to do as I felt a great veneration for both Lord Balfour and his elder brother, Arthur for the wonderful work they had done to prevent a second Irish Famine. There was neither

time nor inclination to discuss personalities about whom I knew nothing. I left for my home in Ireland two days later. The War broke out in September. The Balfours died during the War, and I never saw them again.

### *Miss Gibbes*

It is suggested that I might have looked through Lord Balfour's report on Mrs Willett's mediumship. Obviously I cannot prove that I did not. But it should perhaps be remembered that in those days it was a well known ruling by the S.P.R. that no medium could be a member, for fear that information gleaned, even in all honesty, from its literature might invalidate subsequent 'communications' through him or her. Miss Gibbes was an upright woman a careful investigator and a member of the S.P.R., and certainly would have known this. Moreover, she always took particular care to keep from me *any* information she thought might reduce the value of my scripts.

Perhaps I should add that I do not take *The Times*. Indeed, I seldom read more than an occasional evening paper in London, or *The Cork Examiner* in Eire. But in many of these matters one can only get probabilities, not certainties, but, of course, I can not rule out that I did not subconsciously study the details of Mrs Coombe-Tennant's obituary in somebody else's paper opposite me in a bus. I was at home in Co. Cork in Ireland during August, September and part of October when *The Times* obituary appeared, so I could only have read it clairvoyantly. There are two more suggested possibilities which I cannot rule out for other people, though I can for myself. One is that my path, or indeed orbit, ever crossed with those of Mrs Myers, and that she discovered and spread abroad that Mrs Willett and Mrs Coombe-Tennant were one. But if she did, it seems very curious that this never reached the ears of Mr and Mrs Salter who were in contact with her relatives. The second possibility is that I might actually have met Mrs Coombe-Tennant. I can only say that I am quite sure I did not, and enquiry will confirm that we lived in entirely different worlds.

My home was in Ireland and I was by profession an Irish Author and had published novels, short stories and articles about Irish country folk mostly talking in their picturesque dialect. Also at intervals I had Irish Plays of mine performed, three of them first produced in Dublin or Cork and a fourth at the Court Theatre, London.

Because of my Irish literary work, experiments in psychical research took a very secondary place in my life.

GERALDINE CUMMINS



SIR,—On reading Mr Alexander Coombe-Tennant's replies (*Journal*, September 1966) to some of the crucial questions put to him regarding statements made in *Swan on a Black Sea* I confess to experiencing one of the biggest shocks that I have ever had in fifty years of psychical research. The scripts with which this book deals were investigated by Mr Salter and the book was introduced by Professor Broad in a 62 page article and praised by Dr Thouless. All three are Past Presidents of the Society. I should like to stress two points. In script 23 the word 'Dollygelly' is mentioned. It is stated that this word is mentioned in a diary. Mr Coombe-Tennant's comment is that he cannot find it in any diary. In Script 26 the words 'when the Mayflower was out' occur. Obviously if Mrs Willett in her diaries used the word 'Mayflower' it would be of extreme interest. It is also stated that in her diary for May 1910 'she mentions that the Mayflower is out'. Mr Coombe-Tennant now assures us that 'there is no reference to "the Mayflower" in the diaries'.

Is it surprising that scientific men working in other fields remain quite unimpressed by parapsychological productions? Their alleged resistance to accepting our findings is not due to the unworthy motives often imputed to them but simply to their suspicion that what we say cannot be believed. Are they really to blame?

E. J. DINGWALL

#### *A Case of Xenoglossy*

SIR,—I wonder if anyone can help with the following problem, to throw light on the automatic writing of a lady in Liverpool. She writes each letter separately in capitals, vocalising the sound at the same time. The hand appears to be moving automatically, and she says that the sounds come from her stomach. She writes partly in English, in a high-flown, sometimes ungrammatical style, but has also produced, over several years, a number of short pieces of which the appended specimen is typical. Features of them are: (1) the presence of groups of isolated letters, as in the first two lines here. They are not found only at the beginning; (2) the poetic layout; (3) the absence of the letter F, though PH appears occasionally; (4) the presence of the name MOSES.

She claims that the writings are about Moses, the biblical figure, of whom however she says she knows extremely little, and she thinks they may be in a code, perhaps from a Hebrew original. She has referred me to various works on the Cabbala, and although these have not helped to decode her writing they probably give a clue to its origins.

PAMELA M. HUBY

Mr Buxton's heart attack. He replied, 'There was nothing particularly important going on between us at the time, but we were in communication over finances, because he was a fellow director of the companies which I direct. I had told my wife about James Buxton's heart attack.'

I then wrote for permission to submit the case for publication in the *Journal*. Mr and Mrs Hartford gave it, but asked for pseudonyms to be used for the names of his business colleagues as he did not think Mr Buxton would like his name to appear in print, and he himself would prefer not to approach Mr Benton's wife, whom he did not know, so soon after his death. The names Benton and Buxton are therefore pseudonyms, but I have given the originals in confidence to the Editor, who confirms that the error of one letter in the dream name is correctly indicated.

I have myself, on occasion, had ESP-type impressions of events which concerned my husband rather than me. Is it permissible to speculate whether, if for some reason an ESP-type impression cannot emerge to consciousness in the person whom it concerns, it may do so in a companion?

ROSALIND HEYWOOD

#### *Swan on a Black Sea*

SIR,—Further to my letter published in the September *Journal* for 1966 concerning the description of the absent sitter given by Mr W. H. Salter in his letter of 22 August 1957 to Miss Geraldine Cummins, the second impression of *Swan on a Black Sea* has substituted 'Major A. H. S. Coombe Tennant, M.C.' for the 'Major Henry Tennant' of the first impression. The corrected version accords with a copy made from the original letter by Mrs K. M. Goldney, and accords also with Miss Cummins's recollection that she was told the sitter's initials, not his Christian name.

Miss Cummins's own comments (*Journal*, March 1967) on matters raised in my article in the *Journal* for June 1966 are to be welcomed. Here, as elsewhere, she unfortunately assumes rather too readily that people who may have been responsible for script material coming within her knowledge must necessarily stand accused of some breach of duty. I can see no reason why Miss E. B. Gibbes, for example, should have considered herself obliged not to mention the Balfour study to Miss Cummins, bearing in mind that once material is *published* no medium can with any sense of confidence be credited with acquiring knowledge of it paranormally.

If meetings with Lodge were limited to the two mentioned by Miss Cummins, then this defines the scope Lodge may be thought to have had for the possible dropping of innocently inadvertent remarks. Lodge's diary shows on the day before the tea party on 11 March 1932 an entry (probably indicating a meeting) relating to Mrs Coombe Tennant, and she may have been in his mind around this time. Miss Cummins's account of her meetings with Lodge must be taken as amplifying a statement on page 192 of *Light*, Winter, 1966, where the words appear: 'In actual fact, said Miss Cummins, Lodge saw her once only, in 1933' and no indication is given of a social meeting in the previous year.

Dr Dingwall's letter in the same issue of the *Journal* would give the impression to anyone who has not followed the *Swan* studies in detail that a number of researchers have been party to a total misrepresentation of data. It should in fairness be made clear that though no reference has been found in the diaries to 'Mayflower' references have been found, in the correct context, to 'May', and though 'Dollygelly' is not mentioned in the diaries 'Dolgelly' is mentioned. 'Mayflower' and 'Dollygelly' must both be accounted palpable hits, though not the bulls' eyes that appeared to be the case. Scientific men would probably be the first to agree that such errors of precision are not peculiar to psychical research.

M. R. BARRINGTON

## OBITUARY

### PROFESSOR HORNELL HART

Professor Hornell Norris Hart whose death occurred at Washington, D.C. in March, at the age of 78, was renowned in his own country and abroad as a sociologist of distinction, a subject in which he won high awards.

In psychical research his almost life-long interest was largely devoted to encyclopaedic studies of spontaneous cases. In collaboration with his wife he published in the Society's *Proceedings*, 41, 1933, a long paper, 'Visions and Apparitions Collectively and Reciprocally Perceived.' Here the authors found themselves confronted by the thorny problem of estimating the reliability of the evidence. At an earlier time Mrs Sidgwick had pointed out that *well-authenticated* cases of apparitions seen simultaneously by two or more persons are extremely rare. Hart tried to meet this difficulty by using cases of any quality, good or poor, and then applying a scale of numerical values to each.

After the second world war, and particularly after retiring from