

To the Editor,

I am puzzled as to the reasonableness — and the possibility — of Michael Thalbourne arriving at a negative conclusion about “The Evidence for Survival from Sir Oliver Lodge’s *Raymond*” (October *Journal*) in four pages, including a photograph. The published book is of four hundred pages; exactly half a detailed account of the numerous sittings with the most capable of mediums undertaken by Sir Oliver and his wife, with a stenographer present or Lodge taking verbatim notes. Nevertheless, after an uncertain note from p.386, Thalbourne claims to “bring forward this book’s most evidential material and re-evaluate it in the light of modern thinking”. It is earlier said to be “modern parapsychological thinking” but apart from the almost required negation of survival evidence I see no evidence of it.

Three ‘exhibits’ are looked at. The Faunus Message is a classical allusion believed to come from F. W. H. Myers. It could be read as prevision (Lodge) or precognition (Thalbourne) but it has nothing to say about Raymond’s coming death that is in any hard sense evidential. It is of interest but no more. The second exhibit is said to be “Sittings with ‘Raymond’”. Three very brief quotations from six pages of verbatim dialogue (130–135) from a lengthy sitting Lady Lodge had with Vout Peters are said to “point at the very least to clairvoyance or telepathy between the living”, without a word in support of that view.

Greatest emphasis is properly placed on “The Group Photograph Incident” as Exhibit C. This is remarkable evidence by any standard, as the Lodges knew nothing of it until it was mentioned in Lady Lodge’s sitting. Lodge devotes a whole chapter to it (105–116), yet this is not referred to by Thalbourne. I cannot re-examine it here but in the terms of reasonable doubt — which is all we have in human affairs — it is an outstanding example of survival evidence. And that is to ignore the whole book.

The survival question, it seems, is now back on the Society’s agenda and it deserves to be after forty and more years of neglect. Archie Roy makes the case for it well in the current *Proceedings*. If, however, it is to be examined objectively and outside of a fog of confusion and rancour — for, like it or not, it is a sensitive subject — we would do well to avoid broad-brush dismissals (and anecdotal trips into Wonderland) and treat a serious subject with the seriousness it deserves.

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TOM CROSS

To the Editor,

In a recent Note (Fontana, 1998) David Fontana argues that Gustave Geley “clearly recognized that human hands could produce convincing wax moulds”. He bases his argument on a partial quotation from Geley’s book (1927, p. 231):—

Any reader can verify for himself that it is possible to withdraw a partially immersed hand from a paraffin glove.

But Fontana’s argument ignores the word ‘partially’ in this quotation.

Reference to photographs of two casts illustrated in Figures 72, 73 and 74 of his book shows what Geley means by 'partial immersion' is that the hand is not immersed in the molten wax below its widest point. Of these casts Geley writes (p. 231):-

The straight position of these hands and their partial immersion might suggest the fraudulent substitution of a living hand.

Geley is clearly indicating that to permit withdrawal, a living hand has to be both straight and only partially immersed. It is obvious that Geley distinguishes between these partial moulds, which can be modelled around a living hand, and the more complete moulds which he emphasises cannot be so modelled. Of the latter he writes (p. 251):-

The position (intentional) of the fingers in many of our moulds is such as to make the withdrawal of a living hand impossible, whatever the thickness of the moulds . . .

Fontana repeats Geley's claim (p.230) that the Kluski moulds "were extremely thin, everywhere less than a millimetre". But this refers only to moulds produced in Kluski's own rooms in Warsaw. Of the moulds produced in Paris, the dorsal and lateral areas were a millimetre thick, and the palm areas were two or three millimetres in thickness (p.226). It is suggestive that, away from home, Kluski produced more robust moulds than the fragile ones that he could produce on his own premises.

If, as Fontana argues, Geley really believed that wax moulds could be modelled around human hands, why does his fellow-experimenter, Charles Richet, write (Richet, 1923, p. 543) of their joint work with Kluski:-

By reason of the narrowness at the wrist these moulds could not be obtained from living hands, for the whole hand would have to be withdrawn through the narrow opening at the wrist. In the moulds here considered . . . they were produced by a materialization followed by a dematerialization, for this latter was necessary to disengage the hand from the paraffin 'glove'.

From the foregoing I think it is obvious that Geley, like a number of earlier and later observers (Coleman, 1994), considered that the Kluski wax moulds themselves constituted evidence of their paranormal origins, based on the supposition that they were impossible to obtain from normal human hands. This supposition was shown to be unfounded as long ago as 1928 by Robin Tillyard, F.R.S. (Tillyard, 1928), and this has been confirmed by Polidoro and Garlaschelli in this *Journal* recently (Polidoro & Garlaschelli, 1997).

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