

founded some 40 years ago—is the premier organization in Britain.) The book is a more popular version of the recently published *UFOs 1947–1987*, edited by the same people.

*Phenomenon* comes at times close to involving and evoking psychic phenomena without ever actually coming to grips with them: all the more the pity as the two subjects are so closely related as to be at times almost indistinguishable in substance and problem-posing techniques, but as a general introduction it leaves on the whole little to be desired, allowing you to make up your own mind. It is essential reading for serious students of psychical research, and can be warmly recommended as a guide to this intriguing field.

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KATIE KING, EEN GEEST IN MENSELIJKE GEDAANTE. By G. Zorba, Leopold, Amsterdam, 1988.

Reviewed by J. Michels.

After a long delay, due to dubious manipulations by the publisher, George Zorab's 19th book finally saw daylight last summer.

The book, the title of which may be translated as 'Katie King, a spirit in human form', presents to the reader a historical overview of the Katie King phenomenon. Katie King was the name assumed by a supposed spirit who manifested through the mediumship of Florence Cook. The case is a most controversial one in the history of parapsychology. The late Eric Dingwall, one of Zorab's best friends, warned the author that writing a book about Katie King would be a great mistake. When I visited him a few years ago and we came to talk about Zorab's plans, he spoke of no less than 'a disaster for my good friend George'.

Florence Cook was born in 1856 and died in 1904. The peak of her mediumistic activities took place between 1870 and 1875. She was introduced to spiritualism in her early youth. During a seance, a spirit ordered her to get in touch with the Dalston Association of Inquirers into Spiritualism. There, she was strongly influenced by the phenomena that took place at sessions organized by Frank Herne and Charles Williams. These two were later debunked when it was found out that they themselves played the role of the spirits.

From 1872 FC was financed by Charles Blackburn, thus avoiding the necessity to become a professional medium. From then on FC was available for scientific research and held seances only for invited sitters. However, she had the right to refuse control measures.

Gradually Florence ('Florrie') developed from producing the voice of Katie King to materializing a face and later on a whole body, walking around in the seance room, performing physical activities, being touched by sitters and even resisting a physical attack by a non-believer.

Quite early in his book Zorab suggests two possible hypotheses for the Katie King (KK) phenomena:

—Fraud. The assumed spirit KK might be a girl smuggled into the seance room.

—Complex paranormal phenomenon.

If the phenomenon were really paranormal, then two additional questions need to be answered:

—was KK the spirit of a deceased human being?

—was the materialized form of KK produced by Florence Cook via PK?

The author notes that Florence Cook (FC) gradually developed the direct voice phenomenon, letting KK speak directly to those present. This direct voice may have been fraudulently produced or the paranormal skills may have been learnt by FC. Zorab considers that the fact that FC developed the voice gradually over a long period is in favour of the paranormal hypothesis. If she had the intention to perform it fraudulently, she could have done it much faster, he argues. One can, however, also consider the possibility that the extended period of development was a camouflage technique.

In later sessions FC started to produce the partly covered and later complete face of KK. FC was situated inside a cabinet, with a hole where the face was to appear. This phenomenon had first been exhibited by mediums in New York and of course FC, as a recognized medium, was expected to perform the same feat. On several occasions, a strong resemblance between the faces of FC and KK was reported.

A rather strange aspect of many of these sessions is that while FC's legs, arms and neck were secured inside the cabinet, this was not done by an 'experimenter': on the contrary, FC was given a rope or a kind of (black!) tape with which the *spirit* could tie FC in a fixed position inside the cabinet! In most cases KK gave instructions to the participants on conditions such as lighting, the distance they were to keep from the cabinet, etc.

There was one particular 'face-session' in which several sceptics were present. They drilled a hole in the cabinet, wound a wire around FC's body and sealed the connection to another wire, the end of which was kept in their hands while sitting in the seance room. Every movement of FC, made out of her chair in the cabinet, whereby she could reach high enough to let her own face appear in the window, could be detected by the man who held the wire. During this session no face appeared. On a later occasion, the connection between the wire round FC's body and the wire to the seance room was not sealed. In this case KK's face did appear. Zorab sees this as a strong indication of fraud. The wire later became a more or less standard precaution against one method of fraud.

From 1873 on an increasingly number of successful sessions took place, sometimes in cooperation with other mediums. FC succeeded more frequently in materialising hands and later on even the whole body of KK, always dressed in white. The cabinet was provided with two doors, allowing KK to walk into the seance room. It is reported that in 1873 KK and FC were both seen at the same time.

On many occasions one of the 'researchers' present went into the cabinet immediately after KK's face had disappeared. FC was found where she should be, while the ropes were undamaged and the seals were still intact. There were other occasions, however, in which the ropes or the tape had been cut.

A certain W. Volckmann once attacked KK when she was walking through the seance room. KK defended herself fiercely and quickly retreated into the

cabinet. Volckmann was the husband of a less successful medium, Mrs. Guppy, who claimed that the Katie King in her own sessions was the only real one. Thus, she reasoned, FC must be fraudulent. This attack led to a decision by FC's sponsor Blackburn to ask the well known chemist/physicist William Crookes to resolve the question of fraud once and for all. We shall discuss this aspect later.

A. Russell reported that he found a strong resemblance between the faces of KK and FC, that he was not allowed to open the doors of the cabinet during a session and that he later found a wire round FC's body had been cut through and repaired. Zorab's response to these critical remarks is rather weak. He argues that Russell should have been aware of the possibility that spirit hands untied FC and then fastened her up again. In personal communication George regularly declares that he does not believe in spirits and attributes most of the phenomena to PK exerted by the subject. This seems in contradiction to his reply to Russell. Should we conclude that FC released herself and later retied herself by PK?

At the end of the book the author returns to the question of possible explanations for the KK phenomenon.

Zorab states explicitly that it is almost impossible to prove that KK was the spirit of a deceased person. Science has never succeeded in proving the existence of spirits; we should forget about them and attribute the phenomena to living human beings. A second hypothesis considers KK to be the double of a living person: this is reasonable on the assumption that man is a dual being. Zorab, however, considers a 'human double' to be unrealistic. He is in favour of a third explanation: KK was a materialized split personality of FC.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Katie King phenomenon is that William Crookes investigated it. Crookes became increasingly convinced of the reality of KK, during the course of a number of sessions.

His research gave rise to heated discussion, which has continued until the present day: it has been alleged (by Trevor Hall) that he 'investigated' the attractive young Florence instead of the Katie King phenomenon.

Zorab cites (p. 125) the statements of Francis Anderson, who told representatives of the SPR that Florence and he had an affair, that FC told him that she had had an affair with Crookes and that the experiments of Crookes were no more than camouflage, to enable FC and Crookes to get together without Crookes' wife becoming suspicious. Zorab believes that Anderson accurately reported what FC had told him; but she was by then an old and frustrated alcoholic woman, not to be taken seriously.

The questions about Crookes and FC will probably never be definitively resolved. Beloff (1986) has dealt with these problems at length. His deliberations include the dubious role of Trevor Hall.

From the many reports Zorab has read he concludes FC was a real medium. My own impression after reading this book is: it does not resolve any of the questions about the reality of the Katie King phenomenon but leaves all possibilities just as open as they were.

#### REFERENCE

Beloff, John (1986). George Zorab and 'Katie King'. In: F. Snel (Ed.). In honour of G. A. M. Zorab. NVP.

### CORRESPONDENCE

May I congratulate Mr. Barham on reviving the memory of Dr. Crawford's work which has fallen into undeserved oblivion? It is now 21 years ago that I had occasion to protest against a contributor who described Fournier d'Albe's criticism of Crawford's research as 'devastating'. I then pointed out that Rayleigh, in his Presidential Address, had completely exonerated Miss Goligher, and had in fact commented most unfavourably on Fournier's follow-up. (1)

Fair though he was in his assessment of the evidence, he may not have been aware of the often disastrous suggestive results on the medium of even innocuous (and often unconscious) suspicion of fraud. Kathleen's own latter-day attitude of obstruction is also quite typical, and is of the kind which habitually thwarts our efforts at serious study of spontaneous cases. Witnesses are traditionally given every 'protection' to the point of seriously denuding the data, yet they themselves prevent in-depth research to an often alarming extent.

Mr. Barham could have drawn attention to Dingwall's all but forgotten seances with Willy Schneider, which that great sceptic had to admit were strikingly positive. (2) Strange to tell, this is the same 'Ding' who regaled Sue Blackmore with a fictitious tale of Crawford's 'confession'. This, of course, well accords with my own experience of his slander of Willy (whom he paradoxically called 'a good boy'), as well as the saintly and impeccable Elizabeth d'Espérance.

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### REFERENCES

1. *JSPR*. 44, no. 731, p. 50.
2. *Proc. SPR.*, 1926, 36, part 97.

To the Editor,

#### A phantom bench?

On reading Brian Inglis' review of Andrew MacKenzie's *The Seen and the Unseen* in the April issue, I first thought he must be joking when he accused the author of being too rational for refusing to believe that one could actually sit on a spectral or hallucinated bench. However, it then dawned on me that Inglis was perfectly serious in suggesting that the bench which the couple sat on was a materialization!

The authenticity of materialization, he pleaded, had been clearly proven by,

among others, the famous French physiologist, Charles Richet on the basis of his study of the medium, Marthe Beraud. He does not mention, however, that most present day parapsychologists regard her as a highly suspect medium who was often accused of fraud and consider that the case for materialization remains unproven to say the least. Besides, what would such a materialized bench be made of? Wood? Plastic? Or some slimy elastic substance such as ectoplasm is often described?

Parapsychology, as a scientific discipline, is not served by an attitude of uncritical acceptance of wild and uncorroborated claims but by applying scientific and rational principles. This is precisely what Andrew MacKenzie was doing in refusing to accept the idea of a materialized bench.

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Brian Inglis replies:

It is an interesting point which could, perhaps, be discussed at some future study-day, whether a clear distinction can be made between hallucinations and materializations in theory. In practice, though, if you tried to sit down on an hallucinated bench you might find yourself grounded whereas it would be safe to sit on a materialized bench—unless, of course, it dematerialized!

Seriously, though, I continue to be disturbed by the readiness of some SPR members to follow Podmore and attribute physical mediumship to fraud. Of course Marthe Beraud was accused of fraud—what medium has ever escaped such accusations? But she was never *detected* in fraud and, as I hope I have shown (Inglis 1984), the two specific charges that have blackened her reputation cannot in the light of the evidence, be sustained. In any case there is abundant evidence for materializations in connection with other mediums—D. D. Home, Palladino, the Schneider brothers—and with poltergeist infestations.

May I also take this opportunity—a little belatedly—of replying to Adrian Parker's comments on Marthe Beraud (Eva C.)? He makes no attempt (see April issue p. 91) to rebut my criticism of Lambert's 'exposure' and he appears to assume that the fact of the photographs of Eva's materializations *looking* bogus means that they must have been faked. On the contrary, they reveal the honesty of the investigators who felt compelled to publish them *in spite of* the ridicule they invited.

I would beg Parker and those members of the SPR who share his incredulity to go back to the accounts of the work with Eva, in particular that of Schrenk-Notzing and Geley, and then try to explain, not whether but *how* the findings and photographs were faked, in view of the precautions taken and attested by dozens of well-known scientists and sceptics. If Parker can provide an explanation, fine; but, unless he does, I suggest that his scepticism is unwarranted.

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#### REFERENCE

Inglis, B. (1984) *Science and Parascience*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 27–28 & 239–242.