

'G.P.'s' YOUNGER BROTHER: A NOTE

by J. MUNVES

'George Pelham', whose post-mortem communications as the 'G.P.' control comprised Richard Hodgson's principal evidence for personal survival (see *Proc SPR* 13, pp.284, *et sqq.*), was George Pellew, born on the Isle of Wight in 1859 to Henry Pellew and Eliza Jay. The bulk of the 'G.P.' communications took place during the three years following George's death in New York in February 1892.

As the 'G.P.' control was central to Hodgson's argument for the reality of spirit communications, it became the focus of sceptics. In 1917, twenty years after Hodgson's report on 'G.P.', Edwin Clodd wrote an anti-personal-survival book in which he derided 'G.P.' and Hodgson (Clodd, 1917). Clodd was a prominent member of the Rationalist Society.

Henry Pellew, George's father, was an English solicitor, a son of a younger son of Lord Exmouth who had married a daughter of Lord Sidmouth. Lord Exmouth, as Admiral Edward Pellew, had, among other things, been the terror of the American colonies during the War of Independence, ravaging ports from Maine to the Carolinas. However, on a business trip to New York, Henry met and wed Eliza Jay, a granddaughter of that staunch American patriot John Jay. When Eliza died and Henry wed her sister Augusta, he had to flee the U.K. because before the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act of 1907 such a union was not regarded as valid. It was this forbidden matrimony that caused Henry to settle in the U.S. and his sons by Eliza, George and Charles, to be brought up as Americans, and, ultimately, brought George and his avatar, 'G.P.', within the orbit of Hodgson, who had transferred to Boston to devote himself to the medium Mrs Leonore Piper.

Clodd's book inspired a British cousin of George Pellew's, Miss Marion Arkwright, to urge the rationalist to further discredit the 'G.P.' matter, which, it appeared, the family had found embarrassing. "To George's relations," she wrote, "the idea of a cynical and very fastidious scholar communicating uneducated banalities through a medium seems so absurd as to be beneath contempt."

At the lady's suggestion, Clodd got in touch with George Pellew's younger brother Charles, a professor of chemistry at Columbia University in New York, who responded in a letter published in 1921 as "A Further Exposure of Mrs Piper" (*EPA Annual of 1921*, p.40). One senses, from the length and tone of the letter, that Charles had been waiting for years to right the record on his older brother, as well as to clear himself and his parents from any imputation of involvement in such a discreditable fringe activity as psychical research. Indeed, his vehemence was such that, in allowing his name to be used, he made public 'G.P.'s' true name, a fact that the SPR had, up to then, and following Hodgson, adamantly concealed, even from most of its members, under the 'Pelham' disguise.

In 1922, Henry Pellew, thanks to his cousins' bachelor habits and unfruitful unions, achieved his dearest wish, accession to the Exmouth seat in the House

of Lords. On his death-bed, in 1923, he extracted a pledge from Charles to renounce his U.S. citizenship and succeed him. Thus, in 1931, Charles Pellew became Lord Exmouth. He sat in the House of Lords until his death in 1945.¹

Now for what Charles told Mr Clodd:—

... My brother G.P. died very suddenly, by accident, some twenty-five years ago. He was an exceedingly clever fellow, of remarkable literary ability, and had written one or two good books, had taken the prize at Harvard for an essay which, together with his Class Ode, is still passed down by the staff of their English department as indicating the 'high-water mark' of student ability.

At his funeral, one friend, a famous novelist, begged father and myself to have his poems collected and published, saying that he considered two of them among the very finest sonnets in the English language. A very well-known historian and essayist told me to be sure and print some essays of his on philosophy, which he assured me were well worth preserving in permanent form.

The poems were gradually sorted out from various papers and scrapbooks, and a collection of them was published a few months later. We could not, however, put our hands on his philosophical papers, though we heard from various friends who believed they must still be in existence.

A few weeks after George's death, word came to us from some very excitable friends of his in Boston that they had been in communication with his spirit through the medium Mrs. Piper. One of the first questions asked of him, so we were told, was, "Where are those philosophical notes of yours?" Back came the answer, "At Katonah," this being the name of our country place, not far from New York City. "Whereabouts in Katonah?" "In a tin box, in the corner cupboards of my bedroom," came the reply.

As I remember the story, it was one of his friends, possibly a cousin, who immediately started for Katonah and went to the bedroom, in the corner cupboard, and found the tin dispatch box—*empty*.

The papers themselves, as I only found some twenty years later, when of course their value was entirely gone, were at the time in possession of one of G.P.'s friends to whom he had given them before his death.

This was the closest Mrs. Piper ever came, so far as I know, to saying anything that might conceivably have come from my brother, although for weeks and months and even years, we were continually bombarded with reports of his interviews of all sorts and conditions of people under auspices of the Psychical Research Society.

After this had been going on for at least fifteen years, my people showed me, one New Year's Day, a letter they had just received from Hodgson. He reminded them that ever since G.P.'s death his society had been sending them, repeatedly, the bulletins and reports of the Piper sittings where G.P. was involved and that, undoubtedly, my parents had long been convinced, as was every other intelligent and unprejudiced reader, that they had at last been able to prove, without question, the existence of G.P.'s own self in the other kingdom, etc., and that, while of course the mere question of a few dollars was not of any importance to them, he did hope that my father and mother would become regular members of the Psychical Research Society, and have their names published as such, to show their acceptance of the accuracy of the conversations with my brother.

To which Mrs. Pellew, George's mother, replied briefly, and, it seems to me, not without a very considerable amount of intelligence and good, sound, common sense. It was to the effect that they had been receiving, for years past, numerous communications from the society concerning supposed interviews of various people

¹ *New York Times*, June 11, 1945, p.15, col.2.

with my brother, and some of these they had read more or less carefully. Everybody who had ever met G.P. in life had always been impressed by the fact that his keen, clear, brilliant intellect was unfortunately kept down by a weak body. And that nothing could possibly convince her, who knew G.P. so well, that when that wonderful mind and spirit of his was freed from the trammels of the flesh, it could, under any conceivable circumstances, have given vent to such utter drivel and inanity as purported, in these communications, to have been uttered by him, and they did not join the society.

Charles went on to tell how he checked a report, relayed by Hodgson, that John Fiske, the pop-American historian and Darwinist, was convinced of George's return:—

Within a week or two, happening to be at the Century Club at one of their monthly gatherings, I saw big, jolly, burly John Fiske walk into the reading room. I at once hailed him (I had met him only a few times): "How are you, Mr. Fiske? Do you remember me, Charles Pellew? By the way, I hear you've been having a talk recently with my brother George." Fiske stopped—gaspd. "Good heavens—your brother George—why he's been dead for twenty years!" "That's all right," said I, "through Mrs. Piper I mean." "Oh," and he paused—relaxed—and his whole voice changed, "*That old fraud!*" and he sat down and began to laugh. "Why," I said, "I heard that you said there was no doubt about his being George himself, just as if he were at the other end of a rather poor telephone connection." "*That's a lie,*" he said, "nothing of the sort. I was finally persuaded to see Mrs. Piper, and found her a bright, shrewd, ill-educated commonplace woman who answered glibly enough questions where guessing was easy, or wherever she might have obtained previous information. But whenever I asked anything that would be known only to George himself, she was either silent or entirely wrong. For instance, I asked as follows, 'Is that you, George?' 'Yes.' 'You know who I am?'—'Yes, my old friend John Fiske.'—'When did you see me last?'—'In Cambridge, at your house. A few months before I passed over.'—'What sort of house is mine?'—'A wooden house, two stories, hall in the middle, dining room on one side, and study on the other.' *And so it was, but almost all other Cambridge houses are just that style.*

"'Now, George, you remember seeing me at my house, at that time?'—'Yes.'—'What was it you came to see me about?' *Perfect blankness.*

"Now," said Fiske, "that winter I had just published my book on philosophy, and George had amused himself by writing some very clever, very remarkable papers, in which he criticized my views quite severely. And before publishing them, he was so afraid of hurting my feelings that the dear old boy wrote to me to say he was coming to Cambridge to talk it over with me. He sent me his manuscript, which I read carefully, and then he came on by night from New York, and was at my house soon after breakfast. We talked philosophy all morning and all afternoon. We went to the library after dinner and talked philosophy until nearly twelve o'clock, when I started him home. Now I think if he remembered the date of the visit, and the house and the arrangement of the rooms, he might have had some slight remembrance of what we were talking about."

How do Charles' recollections stack up against the 'G.P.' record as published by Hodgson in the *SPR Proceedings* and as found in the *SPR* archives?

A *Charles*: George claimed the 'philosophical notes' were in the tin box at Katonah.

Record: G.P. did not say that. He said the tin box contained letters from friends.²

² transcripts of sittings: May 14, 1892, p.3; April 11, 1892, p.4.

- B *Charles*: I only learned twenty years later that the philosophical notes were "in possession of G.P.'s friend . . ." This is irrelevant in view of the fact that 'G.P.' never said the notes were in the tin box. However, *Record*: Henry Pellew knew in 1892 that the papers were in the hands of George's friend Leonard Opdyke.³
- C *Charles*: Henry and Augusta Pellew never joined the Psychical Research Society.
Record: Mrs Pellew was a member from 1892 until the American Branch of the SPR disbanded after Hodgson's death.⁴ In addition, and this is a significant omission on Charles' part, his parents made a trip from their home in Washington, D.C. to New York for the express purpose of attending a sitting with Mrs Piper, bringing with them a favourite cap and bracelet of George's to facilitate communication with their dead son. At the sitting, they conversed at length with 'G.P.'⁵
- D *Charles*: Augusta wrote Hodgson a letter denying belief in the 'G.P.' communications.
Record: Hodgson's report publishes letters from the Pelles showing belief, or at least genuine bewilderment.⁶
- E *Charles*: The soliciting letter from Hodgson to the senior Pelles that inspired Augusta's letter of disavowal came when "this had been going on for at least fifteen years". This would date it in 1907 at the earliest.
Record: Hodgson died in 1905. (We can speculate that, if Charles is right about the date, he has confused Hodgson with James Hyslop, who, following Hodgson's demise, reconstituted the American SPR, and whose importuning for funds could have annoyed the Pelles.)
- F *Charles*: The conversation at the Century Club with Fiske occurred twenty years after George's death; that is, in 1912.
Record: Fiske died on July 4, 1901, so their talk must have occurred years earlier than Charles remembered.
- G *Charles*: Hodgson claimed that Fiske was convinced of George's return.
Record: Hodgson stated that "Mr. Marte [Fiske] formed an opinion entirely unfavourable to Mrs. Piper".⁷ Charles' account of the conversation between Fiske and G.P. does not resemble that given in the transcript of the sitting.⁸

One of Hodgson's most impressive accomplishments was the papers on malobservation he wrote with Samuel Davey.⁹ They reveal an astonishing and widespread capacity for self-delusion, coupled with an incapacity for sustained exact observation. Clearly these fictionalizing or story-telling talents can serve sceptics as well as believers in mediumistic phenomena.

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Reference: Clodd, E. (1917) *The Question: If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again?* London.

³ transcript of sitting, May 14, 1892, p.4.

⁴ *Proc SPR* 8, p.651, and lists of members in following years.

⁵ *Proc SPR* 13, p.312; transcript of sitting, May 14, 1892.

⁶ *Proc SPR* 13, pp.304, 320.

⁷ *Proc SPR* 13, p.429.

⁸ *Proc SPR* 13, p.428; transcript of sitting December 9, 1892.

⁹ *Proc SPR* 4, p.381; also *JSPR* 2 & 3.

BOOK REVIEWS

ACTAS PRIMER ENCUENTRO PSI: NUEVAS DIMENSIONES EN PARAPSICOLOGIA
(Proceedings of the First Psi Encounter: New Dimensions in Parapsychology) edited by Alejandro Parra. Instituto de Psicología Paranormal, Buenos Aires, 1994. 70 pp.

In recent years Alejandro Parra has been working hard to develop and organize Argentinian parapsychologists. He lectures frequently on the subject, publishes a journal, the *Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal* (Argentinian Journal of Paranormal Psychology), and has developed a bibliographical computer database of parapsychological publications. More recently, he co-ordinated a conference in Buenos Aires held in November 1994 to bring together Argentinians engaged in different aspects of parapsychology. The book reviewed here is the proceedings of this conference.

The papers in the proceedings cover a variety of areas, including research, concepts and reviews of particular topics. The research-oriented papers cover topics such as dermo-optic perception of colour (by Angel Zarza and Oscar M. Barros Barbeiro), ESP in flies (Ivan T. Lépes), and an analysis of aspects involved in an ESP reading (Marcelo Oliva Moyano). The latter is an interesting analysis in which it is concluded that many of the statements made by the psychic showed different levels of communication, mostly through sensory cues processed without the subject's awareness, and perhaps some ESP as well.

Juan Carlos Russo has an interesting paper on hyperaesthesia and dowsing, but unfortunately only an abstract is presented. One hopes that future proceedings will include full papers, since this is not the only research paper that lacks details necessary for the evaluation of the results.

Other reports include Walter Gardini's discussion of ESP and yoga, especially the classic writings of Patanjali. Although this is interesting, it is difficult to see how these writings can lead to the conclusion that: "The powers really exist [psi phenomena]. They are valid, efficient and important" (p.12). It is one thing to review philosophical and classical writings on the subject, quite another to reach evidential conclusions from this material.

Another abstract difficult to evaluate because of its lack of details is Samuel Tarnopolsky's discussion of healing. Contrary to what the author affirms, ideas including the concept of placebos have been discussed frequently in the literature of unorthodox healing.

Two papers discuss historical topics. Hector B. I. de Valle discusses parapsychology from the point of view of the history of psychology, while Jorge Villanueva discusses the career of Argentinian engineer and parapsychologist José S. Fernández (1893-1967). Fernández was one of the first Latin-American parapsychologists (if not the first) to use statistical methods to evaluate ESP performance.

There are also two papers about survival-related topics. In one of these, Daniel E. Gómez Montanelli discusses reincarnation cases. He argues that the reincarnation hypothesis is a valid hypothesis and one that can best explain the characteristics of the cases investigated by Stevenson and others. The