

get in touch with O. J. L., (b) then to give O. J. L. a stimulus-hint from the next envelope in the series when he asks for it, (c) then to tell O. J. L. what he (the experimenter) has gathered from what O. J. L. has told him, (d) then to wait until O. J. L. says he is satisfied before he opens the next envelope in the series. For example, one of the instructions left by O. J. L. reads: 'I want to be told hereafter what I have written in each envelope as a reminder.' And again: 'If anyone thinks they have got a complete statement they should read it over to me slowly, so that I could correct it where necessary.'

No such clear and unambiguous conditions of communication with O. J. L. have been reached by the committee. Consequently, when at the third envelope we read the instruction that we were not to proceed further until we had had an opportunity of putting O. J. L. on the right lines for remembering the message, we were in an *impasse*.

The only course now open to the committee is to wait until conditions are realised in which question and answer between the sitter and the O. J. L. communicator can freely and clearly take place: or else until a message, which claims to give the contents of envelope A vi, and which agrees with the six items of information given by Sir Oliver Lodge during his lifetime, is received. No such message has so far been obtained in the course of the sittings which the committee has organised or through private sources.

The committee wishes to thank those who have assisted by taking part in the research.

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## THE FOX SISTERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUALISM

BY J. FRASER NICOL

*Have you not learned, I asked, that our soul is immortal,  
and never dies?*

*He looked at me, and said in amazement: No, really, I  
have not; but can you maintain this doctrine?*

*Yes, as I am an honest man, I replied; and I think you  
could also. It is quite easy to do it.*

*The Republic, Book X*

Belief in immortality or in some form of survival of the mind or spirit after the crisis of bodily death has characterized the writings and beliefs of many religious leaders, philosophers, and ordinary people through all history. Quotations like the above, though from less distinguished sources, can readily be cited from all succeeding centuries. Strange occurrences of apparently psychical nature have been reported in all ages, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that extensive claims were made to the establishment of reciprocal communications between the living and the dead.

The suddenness of Spiritualism's appearance upon an unexpected world

is a circumstance that invariably surprises the new inquirer into the history of that remarkable movement. Frank Podmore (1) held the view that Spiritualism was the natural outgrowth of Animal Magnetism and its concomitant the induced trance, which grew and developed out of the work of Franz Mesmer from 1773 onwards.

Podmore's view is no doubt sound so far as it goes ; but something more should be said. To have professed powers of mediumship in any age after the Reformation would have been a confession of Witchcraft. In England the last attempt of Parliament to suppress ' conjuration, witchcraft, and dealings with evil and wicked spirits ' was represented by the Act of 1604 (I Jac. I., c. 12). All spirits were presumably assumed to be evil. That statute remained in active use until well on in the eighteenth century when the legislators of that enlightened age repealed it (1736), and thus, in the words of an historian ' a stop was put to . . . ignorant cruelty, and the statute book relieved of a portion of its load of trumpery ' (2).

In England the last judicial execution for witchcraft was carried out at Huntingdon in 1716, when a woman and her daughter, aged nine years, were hanged for selling their souls to Satan. In Scotland the last such execution took place in 1722. Notwithstanding the repeal of the Act, the practice of communion with the Unseen (as was supposed) remained a dangerous occupation, and in 1751 a reputed witch named Ruth Osborne and her husband were ducked and murdered by a mob at Tring in Hertfordshire. Judicial executions of witches continued on the Continent long after they were abolished in England. In Poland two women were burned as late as 1793 (3).

Mesmerism is important in the history of Spiritualism for two reasons. First, there is the similarity of the magnetic sleep and the mediumistic trance ; but this is so evident as to require no emphasis, and it need not detain us. Second, in the year 1843, the mystic Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910) of Poughkeepsie, New York, was successfully thrown into a magnetic sleep. The experiment was repeated on many subsequent occasions in the course of which the entranced seer expounded the long and complex body of doctrine known as the *Harmonial Philosophy*. Davis's teaching was written down for him by an amanuensis and published in a long series of massive volumes. The ' philosophy ' professes to give an account of the origin and nature of the universe, of the solar system in particular and of man's place and purpose in it. More important, he gave a description of the separation of the ' spirit ' from the body at the time of death, of the arrival of the discarnate being in the Other World, and of life thereafter through all eternity.

The fundamental writings of Davis were produced before 1848, and as might be surmised he is regarded by Spiritualists to-day as the John the Baptist of their Movement. Insofar as Spiritualism has been guided in its beliefs by any one teacher, that teacher is A. J. Davis. Before the Fox Sisters were heard of he predicted the coming of the day when the ' truth ' (of spiritual communion) ' will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration '. He foretold that the new era in which ' spiritual communion will be established ' would be hailed by the world ' with delight ', a prediction which has not been literally fulfilled, as will be seen in the sequel. Believers speak and write of Davis with words of reverence, a

feeling that is made all the stronger and certain to them by reason of a celebrated entry in his 'notes', under the memorable date March 31st, 1848:

About daylight this morning a warm breathing passed over my face and I heard a voice, tender and strong, saying: 'Brother, the good work has begun—behold, a living demonstration is born'. I was left wondering what could be meant by such a message.

Not at daylight (when the 'voice' spoke to Davis) but some hours after dusk the same day, Modern Spiritualism as we now know it, was born. The birthplace, as is well known, was the hamlet of Hydesville, which lies beyond the Catskill Mountains some 200 miles to the north-northwest of Davis's Poughkeepsie.

The early history of the Fox family is lost in mystery. A new account<sup>1</sup> of the lives of the three Fox sisters has been published in this the centenary year of Spiritualism. The writer, is Mrs Mariam Pond whose first husband was a grandson of David Fox, the only brother of the three mediums. Mrs Pond says she is the only remaining member of the Fox family who retains an interest in Spiritualism. For thirty years she has been collecting information about the Foxes and has been given 'access to papers and letters' not hitherto published. Unfortunately, she hardly ever gives a clue to the sources of her information, and so far as it can be traced it does not appear that the new material adds substantially to our knowledge. On the other hand, Mrs Pond writes with a measure of impartiality that is wholly admirable, coming as it does from one who is so intimately connected with the Fox family. 'The story,' she says, 'is told without reservation. There is no one left to be hurt.' The book lacks an index, and occasional references to it in this article will be indicated by (P) followed by the page number.

The Fox parents, John David Fox and Margaret Smith, were both born in 1787, were married in 1812 and in the first eight years of their married life had five children, of whom only Leah is of interest to us. Fox was a blacksmith and intermittently a drunkard. The psychological effect of his weakness upon the lives of his children is hard to estimate—except that at least two of them followed in his steps many years later. For about ten years Fox seems to have been separated from his family. When the last two children Margaretta (usually known as Maggie) and Catherine (Kate) were born, most of the other members of the family were already grown up. Leah was about 23 and had been married at the age of 14. There is some uncertainty as to the age of the two youngest children. According to the earliest writer (4) Kate, the younger by two years, was 12 when the disturbances broke out. According to other authorities (5, 6, 7, 8) her age was variously 6½, 9 and 11. Mrs Pond does not help matters by giving Kate's age on page 21 as 12, and on page 420 as 11; she also provides two ages for Margaret.

Whilst the father of the famous girls remains a shadowy, silent figure, the mother stands out bold, purposeful, and alive. It is disclosed that 'the capacity for adventure lay within her' (P. 19). Though by nature

<sup>1</sup> *The Unwilling Martyrs: The Story of the Fox Family.* By Mariam Buckner Pond. (London: Spiritualist Press. 1947. 424 pp. 15s.)

reticent and cautious, once she had conceived a course of action in her mind she never looked over her shoulder. For years she was the impressario of her two younger daughters, travelling with them everywhere through the eastern States.

In large measure Mrs Fox's character was inherited by her eldest daughter Leah. This volatile young woman possessed powers of leadership and a relentless will that were wholly absent in her younger sisters. If the younger children were the originators of Spiritualism, Leah it was who wrought it into a Movement that swept across the United States and round the world. Had the affair been left in the hands of the younger children and their mother it is doubtful if it would have become (at that time) any more than a local nine days' wonder. But in some singular way Leah possessed the vision to see the possibilities of the rappings. To this sense of the long view she added gifts as an organiser which were completely lacking in her sisters, even had they been old enough to exercise them. Opposition to her proposals and wishes she at all times crushed with a relentless vigour. The explorer Elisha Kane, himself a man of fiery will, who became the husband of Margaret, described Leah as 'The Tigress'.

The usefulness of Margaret and Kate rested entirely in their supposed gifts of mediumship—in the demonstration of which they far surpassed their elder sister—and a certain physical grace and loveliness, to which their elder sister could lay no claim. At a séance in Washington, in the heyday of their mediumistic glory, 'One very fine-looking man stood up before the crowd and addressed them thus: ". . . This is all humbug, but it is worth a dollar to sit in the sunlight of Miss Kate's eyes." (P.182). Kate had large grey eyes, and 'soft brown hair'. So much for her external attractiveness; on the other hand, Lord Rayleigh, who had her as a visitor to his house at a much later date, said that she seldom or never made an intelligent remark (15).

The rappings which are said to have distressed the Fox household for months, came to a head on March 31st, 1848. The time seems to have been late evening and the family had retired to bed. It should be noted that Leah, at this period a music teacher, was living many miles away at Rochester and heard nothing of the commotions for more than a month.

Whatever the cause of the knocks, the important matter is that on this night the child Kate spoke back to the alleged operator and got an intelligent reply. 'Do as I do, Mr Splitfoot!' she cried and clapped her hands. The sounds were echoed in raps (P. 23). Then Mrs Fox asked, 'Are you a spirit? If you are, rap twice.' Two knocks, and the World of Spirit, and the gates of Andrew Jackson Davis's Summerland lay open. So the knockings and the messages went on during that memorable night, right on into the following morning which, as the child Kate remarked, was the first of April. Knock by knock there emerged the story of the murdered pedlar and his complaint that his bones were buried under the house. Neighbours were summoned and the village was agog.

The Foxes forsook their wooden house, but the restless spirit pursued them. It demanded digging operations in the cellar, a request to which the dismayed family demurred. Then in the month of May Leah unexpectedly arrived, and grasping the situation and most of its implications, took charge of the affair with a strong hand. When all others were

opposed to the ghost's demands, Leah was his ardent friend. As Mrs Pond observes—with characteristic moderation—'Leah was alone in her expression of interest.' Lack of sleep had exhausted all the other members of the family, but Leah was inexhaustible. The cellar was dug up, and the diggers unearthed 'a few wisps of reddish hair and two human teeth in a portion of jawbone,' (P. 41). It may be noted here that in 1904 a larger quantity of bones was unearthed at the house. This cache comprised vertebrae, rib, arm and leg bones, a shoulder blade, and collar bone. Presumably neither the missing part of the jaw nor any of the skull were found.

Quite soon the knocks began to be heard in the presence of Leah when her sisters were not in the house. And wherever the family lived, there the manifestations were always experienced. For a time the occurrences assumed a poltergeist form (4). Books and wood blocks were thrown, cold touches were felt, beds and furniture were pulled about. The raps continued. The method of communication by calling the alphabet was invented by the brother David. One evening (P. 47), after a day of exceptional disturbances, the spirit knocked out a message which in its sequel is clearly of great significance to the Spiritualist movement.

Dear Friends, you must proclaim these truths to the world. This is the dawning of a new era, and you must not try to conceal it any longer. When you do your duty, God will protect you and good spirits will watch over you.

This statement was received in the presence of Leah and Margaret—Kate was absent. Thus it came about that the first Spiritualist meeting ever held took place in the Corinthian Hall, Rochester, on November 14th, 1848. Four hundred people crowded into the hall to hear the sounds produced in the presence of Leah and Margaret. An address was given by one E. W. Capron, the first historian of Spiritualism (4), and a committee of investigation was appointed. This group reported non-committally. Another committee reported in the mediums' favour, and when this was announced at a public demonstration the meeting broke up in disorder, the mediums being saved by the intervention of the Chief of Police (P. 65).

Leah was now kept extremely busy. She organised more public meetings, and (not less important) arranged séances in private houses. Believers were soon being counted in hundreds and many who came to condemn remained to cheer. The case of Duncan McNaughton is perhaps not untypical of many experiences that have happened in séance rooms in the succeeding hundred years. McNaughton, being a Scotsman, had to be either a Theologian or a Sceptic. Mrs Pond describes him as 'a man of high mental attainments who was an avowed atheist.' To him the raps spelled out: 'My dear son, hae ye forgotten your puir auld mother? O, my son, repeat the Lord's Prayer.' McNaughton 'pushed back his chair angrily, with a muffled oath.' Nevertheless he responded to the sitters' persuasions and repeated the prayer. Presently he became still more impressed and exclaimed 'Extraordinary! Extraordinary!' and before the sitting was over he was 'converted to the truth.' To the reader this may sound a little ludicrous, but in fact conversions to new religious sects appear to be nearly always rapid.

It was at this sitting that the first payment was made for the services of a medium. On leaving the room, one William Haskell pressed some coins into Leah's hand. Leah drew back 'flushed and hurt' but after some hasty assurances from the sitters she 'hesitatingly . . . accepted it' (P. 68).

Spiritualism had been launched, and already it had 'become a religion to its followers'. Even so, it could not yet move on of its own volition; all Leah's zeal and her unflagging energies were needed, and when the two young sisters might have turned back to their village Leah was always there to keep their feet moving in the right direction. She made 'rapid plans' for extending the good work, her earlier dislike of professionalism was overcome and hereafter the charge for attendance at séances was one dollar per person.

From Rochester they travelled to Troy, then to Albany, and at length arrived in New York on June 4th, 1850. The news of the wonders had long preceded the mediums and their mother, they were mobbed by excited crowds, the newspapers carried regular news of their demonstrations, and most welcome of all they secured the support and personal friendship of Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Tribune*. Sittings were held six hours a day and as a rule all three mediums sat together. Greeley estimated that 'fully three-fourths of those who had proper opportunities for a full investigation' were convinced that the percussions were not produced by the sisters or their mother.

The success of the movement and their own prosperity seemed unending. Nevertheless, in the course of a few years, two significant changes came over the scene. First, the theory that the phenomena were caused by normal means—*i.e.* that the ladies were no more than fraudulent conjurors—instead of dying down with the successful passing of the Rochester 'test', tended if anything to increase. An early allegation was that the knocks were due to 'ventriloquism'. A doctor gravely applied a stethoscope to the ladies' chests and found no sign of abnormal breathing or the production of sounds. Another and more serious assertion was that the noises were produced by joint-cracking. More will be heard of this presently.

The second change was simply that in a year or two the Foxes were no longer alone in their glory. Rapping mediums sprang up and began to practice all over the occupied regions of the United States. In a few years it could be said that in New York alone there were one thousand mediums. It is not too much to say that had the Fox girls retired from the scene in 1853 (in which year the movement reached and rapidly overflowed Europe) their disappearance would have made no difference to the spread of the new religion. Indeed, as early as 1850 a more notable demonstrator was already beginning to see visions and hear sounds—D. D. Home, then aged 17 and living with an aunt in Connecticut.

Still, for a time the girls had a monopoly of phenomena for which the demand was unlimited, and they were 'the Lions of New York'. New and more surprising things happened to astonish the inquirers. Automatic writing, spirit lights, spirit hands, levitations were all reported. On one occasions a table was completely levitated with Governor Talmadge sitting on top of it. Podmore's judgements on things psychical must be read with caution and circumspection—for the opinions of one who was at

first a lively Spiritualist and later a withering sceptic cannot readily be taken at their face-value. Nevertheless, his well-known remark about 'naughty little girls' who amused themselves by mystifying their elders is not without circumstantial evidence in its support. In the literature there are many instances of their capacity for practical joking. On one occasion when a return visit was paid to the wooden-frame house at Hydesville, the younger girls were mediums for the evening (P. 97). Outside in the moonlight Leah threw gravel against the wall. No notice was taken. Becoming bolder Leah threw a stone, and when it passed noisily through a window, old Mrs Fox, within, knew well that this was no spiritual visitation. But she was contradicted by one Aaron Coddington—'Mrs Fox, I think you are mistaken. For several minutes before the stone was thrown there were little electric explosions near the window. . . . A spirit made this demonstration.'

The Aaron Coddings were probably not typical of the Spiritualist movement, which, then as now, drew its adherents from every class of the community. The diplomat Robert Dale Owen, the physicist Cromwell Varley, Sir William Crookes, and innumerable medical men and lawyers were all convinced by what they witnessed in the presence of one or other of the Fox sisters. Varley, F.R.S., described the knocks heard by him in the presence of Kate as 'a chorus of raps such as fifty hammers all striking rapidly could hardly produce' (20).

On the other side there were doubters who, with increasing voice, expressed their suspicion that the knocks were produced by the ladies cracking their joints—especially the toe and knee joints. An investigation by three medical professors of Buffalo showed that no sounds could be produced when the mediums' knee-joints were firmly immobilised. A group of Harvard professors also carried out some experiments, but their promised report was never published (19).

At a much later time Margaret (Mrs Kane) was investigated by the Seybert Commission (9, 10, 5). The acting chairman of the Commission, H. H. Furness, described the raps as a 'vibratory sound—tr-rut—tr-rut—tr-rut.' Margaret replied: 'Sometimes they vary. . . . Every rap has a different sound.' She was asked to stand on four inverted tumblers, two under each foot. After a long wait some sounds were heard, and—

Mr Furness, with the 'medium's' permission, places his hand on one of her feet.

The 'Medium'—'There are the raps now, strong—yes, I hear them.'

Mr Furness (to the 'Medium')—'This is the most wonderful thing of all, Mrs Kane; I distinctly feel them in your foot. There is not a particle of motion in your foot, but there is an unusual pulsation.'

Frederic Myers reviewed this Report, but all that he had to say about Mrs Kane was—'Raps heard close to the medium; could easily have been produced.' The Commission investigated some other mediums, and of their report in general Myers said that it should have a powerful effect on Spiritualists; there were 'several revelations of vulgar, unblushing fraud, such as must make the ears of honest believers to tingle.' He urged

Spiritualists to purge their 'faith' of 'all complicity with this base and crawling imposture.'

The combined mediumship of the Foxes was broken up by their marriages, and from that time Leah could not exert her controlling will to guide the more wayward—and ultimately tragic—impulses of her younger sisters. Margaret met Dr Elisha Kane, the explorer, in her Philadelphia séance room. He immediately fell in love with her; from time to time he expressed the most scornful scepticism of the mediumship, extracted a promise that she would 'never rap again', and married her. But in a few years he was dead. Margaret thereupon disavowed Spiritualism 'for ever' (as she then supposed) and was received into the Catholic Church, of which she was a faithful adherent for several years.

Leah's second marriage—to Calvin Brown—ended with his death two years later. She then married a Spiritualist, Daniel Underhill, the President of the New York Fire Insurance Co. Purely as a medium, Leah is of no great moment. At times she found herself in embarrassing, indeed alarming, situations. Thus, once at a dark séance in Jersey City, 'lights' of dazzling brilliance floated about the room. Suddenly, complaining that her hands were burning, the medium fumbled her way across the room to a basin of water, but getting no relief hastened from the room to the garden where she plunged her hands into the wet earth. The séance broke up. The sequel was both curious and unexpected. On the following evening, Mr Simeon Post, having his attention called to 'lights' glowing on the earth, found they were emitted by particles of solid phosphorous. On being informed of this discovery the investigating group took at first a sceptical view of Leah's performances. Happily for the feelings of all concerned they were soon reassured, for Leah at a sitting held under more rigorous conditions (as the sitters supposed them to be) was able to show that the phosphorous was produced by the Spirit beings themselves—'from the atmosphere' and other sources. To Leah the sitters offered their abject apologies for ever having doubted her, and (as Mrs Pond remarks, with a fine sense of the fitness of things), 'Leah held her head high—her eyes bright with the assurance of accomplishment.'

But of the three sisters it was Kate who was the most notable exponent of mediumship. Whereas the other sisters retired into the background for periods of years, Kate was almost continually in action. She was also the only one who was repeatedly investigated by competent psychical researchers. On at least one occasion she held a sitting in conjunction with D. D. Home; and lastly, there was manifested in her presence almost every effect known in mediumistic circles. Automatic writing, mirror-writing with both hands, direct-writing and drawing (portraits), lights, levitations, materializations of hands, heads and complete bodies—all these happened at one time or another in Kate's presence.

Of her American sittings, the most surprising, as well as the most secret, were those with Charles Livermore, a New York banker, who became a client of Kate soon after the death of his wife. At the forty-third sitting a figure appeared out of the darkness veiled in gauze. In tense emotion Livermore claimed to recognize the entity as his wife. She came again and again at many sittings and one night had the company of 'Benjamin Franklin'. Livermore and his friend Dr Gray were allowed to cut off a



piece of Franklin's brown coat, but the clipping 'disintegrated and disappeared in their hands'. Livermore had nearly 400 sances with this one medium (11; 7; P. 263).

By this time Kate had begun to trace the footsteps of her father, into alcoholism—as also had Margaret—and in the hope of restoring her health Livermore sent her on a visit to London with an agreeable companion, Miss Ogden, as watchdog. For many years her old weakness did not affect her, a transformation that was probably largely due to the happiness of her marriage with H. D. Jencken, a barrister who was also a leading Spiritualist. Knocks, bangs, and raps seem to have proclaimed Kate's presence at almost every notable occasion in her career. At her wedding ceremony in Marylebone Parish Church (December 16th, 1872) raps were heard near the altar and in the vestry. At the wedding breakfast held at nearby York Place, now part of Baker Street, old Mrs Fox, dead seven years, sent by raps a message of congratulation, and the heavily laden festive board was 'suspended in mid-air for some seconds'. All this is repeated in the Press of the day in the most matter-of-fact form, so accustomed had the world become to 'spiritual manifestations'.

Some of the accounts read very oddly. When Kate had given birth to her first child the doctor (no Spiritualist) stumbled out of the room and gulping down two glasses of brandy swore to Jencken that he had heard the raps, that there were hands besides his own working about the bed, and that he had seen a figure leaning over the mother. But how much of this has any basis in fact it is quite impossible to say. So far as one's reading goes in the vast literature of the Fox sisters, the doctor's name is unknown, he seems never to have written any statement on the subject, and the whole story seems to rest on Jencken's unsupported testimony.

Kate's child Ferdinand was the youngest medium of whom we have any record. At the age of nine days a pencil was put into his hand and (according to his father and mother) he wrote a message from the other world. Before he was half a year old he was writing in Greek. One of these messages was reproduced in facsimile (21).

The importance of Kate's life in London—so far as psychical research is concerned—rests in the investigations made into her work by three competent observers. Mrs Henry Sidgwick's opinion was negative; Sir William Crookes was positive; Lord Rayleigh spoke rather non-committally but he was evidently disappointed.

Crooke's experiments were conducted some time between 1871 and 1873. Of 'percussive and allied sounds' he wrote (12):

These sounds . . . are more varied with Mr Home, but for power and certainty I have met no one who at all approached Miss Kate Fox. For several months I enjoyed almost unlimited opportunity of testing the various phenomena occurring in the presence of this lady . . . it seems only necessary for her to place her hand on any substance for loud thuds to be heard in it, like a triple pulsation, sometimes loud enough to be heard several rooms off. In this manner I have heard them in a living tree—on a sheet of glass—on a stretched iron wire—on a stretched membrane—a tambourine—on the roof of a cab—and on the floor of a theatre. Moreover, actual contact is not always necessary; I have had

these sounds proceeding from the floor, walls, etc., when the medium's hands and feet were held—when she was standing on a chair—when she was suspended on a swing from the ceiling—when she was enclosed in a wire cage—and when she had fallen fainting on a sofa. . . . With a full knowledge of the various theories which have been started, chiefly in America, to explain these sounds, I have tested them in every way that I could devise, until there has been no escape from the conviction that they were true objective occurrences not produced by trickery or mechanical means.

Crookes describes direct writing procured at a dark séance :

I was sitting next to the medium, Miss Fox, the only other persons present being my wife and a lady relative, and I was holding the medium's two hands in one of mine, whilst her feet were resting on my feet. Paper was on the table before us, and my disengaged hand was holding a pencil. A luminous hand came down from the upper part of the room, and after hovering near me for a few seconds, took the pencil from my hand, rapidly wrote on a sheet of paper, threw the pencil down, and then rose up over our heads, gradually fading into darkness.

Of Kate Fox's automatic writing Crookes wrote :

I have been with Miss Fox when she has been writing a message automatically to one person present, whilst a message to another person on another subject was being given alphabetically by means of ' raps ', and the whole time she was conversing freely with a third person on a subject totally different from either.

Mrs Sidgwick's earliest sittings appear to have been in 1874 or soon afterwards (13) :

The most striking séance I had with her was the fourth of a series held at my own residence, when we obtained a word written on a sheet of our own paper, under the table, in a light which I believe would have been good enough to read ordinary print by. We thought that both Mr and Mrs Jencken had their hands above the table, and we could not detect any movement of their legs. But we were not well placed for observing this, as we were continually instructed by the ' spirits ' to lean over the table. . . . It impressed me a good deal, though even at the time . . . we thought that Mrs Jencken might have written the word with her foot, and the writing is just of the quality which can be so written without much difficulty.

Ten or more years later (13), Mrs Sidgwick had

two short series of sittings with Mrs Jencken ; but again with no conclusive results, except the discovery that she or her ' spirits ' are willing to claim, as Spiritualistic phenomena, accidental occurrences quite unconnected with her presence, and that she endeavours, as far as possible, to obtain from oneself the information required to answer one's question. The raps that occur with Mrs Jencken are . . . peculiar—quite unlike what one can produce oneself by rapping with the foot.

They are loud double knocks, acquiring a special sound from the table, floor, door or other object on which they appear to be made . . . they are distinctly puzzling. . . . [but] no raps occurred when Mrs Jencken sat with her feet in my lap, nor while she stood on a hassock with her hand on the door on which the raps were to be made.

Challenged on the point about the 'accidental occurrences', Mrs Sidgwick replied that the séance took place on April 22nd, 1885, at 14 Dean's Yard, and there were eight persons present besides the medium. Mrs Sidgwick wrote her account eight days after the séance (17):

Seance at first in the dark . . . two single raps occurred on the drum which lay on the table. After a time, Mrs Jencken, with Miss B. and Mr W., withdrew to the door, and while they were there the same rap on the drum was heard again. The 'spirits' claimed to have produced them, but unfortunately we afterwards ascertained that they were caused by water dropping from the gas lamp. [The lamp was one of those in which water was present in the outer tube to prevent escape of gas.]

Lord Rayleigh had Mrs Jencken on several visits to his country house, accompanied by the baby and a nurse and sometimes the husband. He said (15) that 'the results were upon the whole disappointing, and certainly far short of those described by Sir W. Crookes. Nevertheless there was a good deal not easy to explain away'.

The customary knocks were obtained on a door, by Kate merely placing her fingers upon it. But

perhaps what struck us most were lights which on one or two occasions floated about. They were real enough, but rather difficult to locate, though I do not think they were ever more than six or eight feet away from us. Like some of those described by Sir W. Crookes, they might be imitated by phosphorous enclosed in cotton wool, but how Mrs Jencken could manipulate them with her hands and feet held, and it would seem with only her mouth at liberty, is a difficulty.

Lord Rayleigh mentions that after writing had once appeared, he arranged pencils and paper inside a large glass retort, of which the neck was then hermitically sealed.

For safety this was placed in a wooden box, and stood under the table during several séances. . . . Though scribbling appeared on the box, there was nothing inside the retort. Possibly this was too much to expect. I may add that on recently inspecting the retort [1919] I find that the opportunity has remained neglected for forty-five years.

Lord Rayleigh felt that the incidents and the conditions were not good enough to establish occult influences; but yet he had 'always felt difficulty in accepting the only alternative explanation'. He added that, unlike some other mediums he had known, 'Mrs Jencken never tried to divert one's attention, nor did she herself seem to be observant or watching for opportunities. I have often said that on the unfavourable hypothesis her acting was as wonderful as her conjuring'.

Jencken died in 1881, and Kate returned to her native land—and to alcohol—in 1885. Margaret, too, was only intermittently sober. They were in fact slipping steadily down, and their end was squalid. Quarrels broke out between them and Leah; and about the same time 'persons closely connected with the organised Spiritualists in New York caused Kate's arrest, charging cruelty and neglect for her children', (P. 373). The action appears to have had Leah's sanction, but it came to nothing. Margaret had now resorted to drugs in an attempt, probably, to escape from alcohol. She suddenly left New York for London, and from an address in Gower Street wrote her notorious letter to a New York newspaper. She characterized Spiritualism as 'a curse', denounced all and sundry connected with it, and asserted that the 'rappings' were the only phenomena worthy of notice. Returning to New York she demonstrated to journalists how her raps were produced by joint-cracking (16). Kate was persuaded to give verbal approval to her sister's story; Margaret gave lectures and demonstrations in New York and elsewhere, and at one meeting Kate accompanied her on the platform but took no active part in her sister's display. Within a month Kate had recanted (18), and Leah followed suit a year later (P. 405). Forty years had elapsed since they first launched Spiritualism upon the world.

Both of them were near their end, but Leah in fact was the first to go. She fell dead, upbraiding a maidservant. This was on November 1st, 1890. Leah was 76 years of age. On July 2nd, 1892, Kate died alone and apparently in great distress. It was said (19), that during her last illness, when she was apparently quite helpless, the knocks continued to be heard about her room. Margaret died peacefully on March 8th, 1893, and thus the three founders of Spiritualism passed from the scene within a period of three years.

Something may now be said, however briefly, of the course of Spiritualism in this country since the foundation of the movement. The date of the first formal Spiritualist séance in Britain seems to be quite unknown. It may be presumed that the accounts of the strange goings-on in New York State reached this country in 1848 or soon afterwards; and it is not unlikely that groups of interested people may have 'tried the experiment' for themselves.

The first American medium to set foot in England was Mrs W. R. Hayden, who arrived from Boston in October, 1852. She was the first of a steady stream of American mediums. Their reception was mixed. Thus, on being invited to attend a sitting with D. D. Home, Michael Faraday asked: 'If the effects are miracles, or the work of spirits, does he [Home] admit the utterly contemptible character, both of them and their results, up to the present time, in respect either of yielding information or instruction or supplying any force or action of the least value to mankind?' Podmore has characterised this emotional release as 'a parody of scientific methods'. Another professional scientist, Sir David Brewster, accused Home of 'insulting religion, common sense, etc., by ascribing his power to the sacred dead'.

The anachronism of Spiritualistic belief lay in the novelty that, whilst professedly a religion, it claimed to be susceptible of scientific proof. Many people flew into its fold because they believed it had been scientifi-

cally proved, many others recoiled because they believed the converse. If to such considerations there be added humanity's age-old sentiments concerning death, it is clear that there was ample opportunity for emotional outbursts on the part of all sections of the community. The point is well illustrated by a story told of Myers (perhaps apocryphally). At a dinner table he asked a fellow-guest what he thought would happen to him after death. No reply being forthcoming he repeated the question, and got the response: 'Well, I suppose I shall dwell in eternal bliss, but I wish you wouldn't ask such unpleasant questions.'

Mrs Hayden had to endure all the emotional outbursts that were roused; fortunately for her, some of the feeling was favourable to her practices and though she was a medium of feeble powers she appears to have been sincere, and she made many converts. She remained in the country for only one year, and during that time her husband launched the first Spiritualist journal, *The Spirit World*. It lasted for only one issue. The first successful Spiritualist paper, *The Yorkshire Spiritualist Telegraph*, began publication in April 1855. *Light*, the oldest surviving journal was founded in 1881.

Professional mediumship was of slower growth in this country than in the United States. In 1869 the American medium Emma Hardinge Britten, who lived for many years in England, said that she knew of only two professional mediums in London but in the United States, the mediums 'might be reckoned in thousands'. About the same time, Varley estimated the number of mediums in the United Kingdom to be 'not more than 100' (20).

Spiritualism made its progress in this country (though at a much slower pace than in the United States) by virtue of two factors: (i) The extensive publicity given to such celebrities as Home, Mrs Guppy, the Davenport brothers, Dr Monck, Dr Slade (who had to flee the country), J. J. Morse, and Mrs Britten herself; and (ii) the initiation of 'home circles', consisting of groups of people sitting in their own homes for table-tilting, planchette (which was invented by a French Spiritualist in 1853), and the ouija board. Even to-day it appears to be common ground amongst Spiritualists that the main strength of the religion is to be found in the home circles.

In the first twenty years after 1848 many small societies sprang up for the holding of public séances and listening to trance addresses. Some of these societies were misnamed 'Psychological Societies', and a writer of the period (23), said that the largest 'spiritual societies' in the country were the Psychological Society of Edinburgh, the Glasgow Psychological Society, the Psychological Society of Liverpool, and the Dalston Association of Enquirers into Spiritualism. Not until 1873 was a national organisation of spiritualists founded. In that year a meeting of local organizations and of individuals was held in Liverpool for 'a friendly union among Spiritualists' (21). 'Fierce attempts,' it was said, 'were made to kill the organization, especially in the press, but the workers . . . succeeded in planting a central establishment in London.' This society was called The British National Association of Spiritualists. In 1882 the name was changed to The Central Association of Spiritualists, and two years later underwent reorganization and was again renamed, becoming The London

Spiritualist Alliance. Its position in the Spiritualist movement is somewhat exceptional, for whilst most societies are avowedly church organizations, the L.S.A., 'accepts psychic phenomena not as a new religion but as the basis of all religions.'

Another independent society is the Marylebone Spiritualist Association which was founded in 1872 and has a membership of over five thousand. Before the Second World War it engaged and regularly filled the Queen's Hall for its Sunday evening meetings.

There are many other societies which lead independent existences, some of them reputable, but many others are only curious examples of mediumistic private enterprise. They exist for as long as the medium is popular and able to provide satisfactory messages.

The most significant union of Spiritualists in this country is the Spiritualists' National Union which took shape in 1902 out of an earlier federation. The S.N.U. embraces some 500 churches with about 18,500 members. The Union grants certificates to mediums who have satisfied the Exponents Committee of their 'ability to demonstrate survival of the human spirit after bodily death and show a reasonable knowledge of the Seven Principles and their implications'. The Seven Principles are a statement of belief to which all members of the S.N.U. adhere. The Principles are :

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.
4. The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul.
5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation and Retribution Hereafter for all Good and Evil Deeds done on Earth.
7. Eternal Progress Open to Every Human Soul.

Sir A. Conan Doyle and some other members wished to add an eighth principle, The Leadership of Jesus. Members are free to accept this, but it has never been officially adopted. Though no originality is claimed for the Principles, their actual wording was received through the mediumship of Mrs Emma Hardinge Britten.

The Greater World Christian Spiritualist League is almost the only other large-scale federation. It accepts the leadership and believes in the 'redemptive power' of Jesus Christ. The League has its own 'spirit teacher', a guide who passes under the name of Zodiac and is alleged to be the unnamed scribe who asked Jesus, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' (Mark 12, 28-34).

The total number of Spiritualists attached to churches and societies in this country has been estimated at 50,000 to 100,000. After 100 years of effort this figure seems surprising in its modesty, representing only one or two persons in every thousand of the population. To this comment, Spiritualists offer the ready reply that the importance and power of their movement must not be measured by the numbers of the flock but by the influence of Spiritualism on contemporary thought and belief. There is no means of estimating this influence (whatever it may be), but the reader may nevertheless be interested in two questions relative to the problem of post-

mortem survival which were obtained by the British Institute of Public Opinion (The Gallup Poll) from a cross-section of the public on December 15th, 1947. The two questions, with the replies given in percentages, were as follows :

## (A) 'Do you believe in any form of life after death?'

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
	%	%	%
TOTAL	49	27	24
Men	44	32	24
Women	54	22	24
AGES			
21-29	46	26	28
30-49	48	28	24
50 and over	52	26	22
ECONOMIC			
Higher	55	25	20
Middle	56	24	20
Lower	46	28	26
Group D	45	27	28
RELIGIOUS			
Church of England	49	28	23
Non-Conformist	61	16	23
Roman Catholic	66	15	19
Scottish Church	52	24	24
Other religions	46	25	29
None	13	56	31

## (B) 'If YES : What form do you think it takes?' (Life after death)

Spiritual form ; the spirit does not die	19
Heaven or Hell, according to life led on earth	4
Reincarnation in one form or another	3
Paradise ; heaven	3
Mind and spirit on a higher plane	2
Similar to life on earth ; meet again those we have known before	2
Same as now, only in a higher form	1
Don't know ; no idea	13
Miscellaneous	2
	49%

The reader will try perhaps to draw from these figures his own conclusions, and the pleasure or dismay he will thus receive will vary according to the views he happens to hold on the subject of life beyond the tomb. What would be of far livelier interest—if we could but learn it—would no doubt be the opinion now held on the subject of Spiritualism by the three ladies who began it all a hundred years ago.

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## REVIEWS

THE CURSE OF IGNORANCE : A HISTORY OF MANKIND. By Arthur Findlay. (London : Psychic Press. 1948. Vol. I, 1166 pp. ; Vol. II, 1199 pp. 15s. per volume.)

In 1939 Mr Findlay brought out *The Psychic Stream, or The Source and Growth of the Christian Faith*, a book of about 1200 pages which was reviewed in the *Journal* for November-December, 1939. Now, with vigour unimpaired by the lapse of nine difficult years, and uncurbed by the paper shortage which has afflicted so many authors, he has brought out a sequel of almost double the length. For the first attempt 'to write world history from the psychic angle of thought', as the publishers describe the book under review, two large volumes may not be excessive, but a reviewer for the *S.P.R. Journal*, who cannot indulge a commensurate indifference as to printing space, is in some difficulty.

The present reviewer proposes to overcome this by resisting a strong inclination to summarise and comment on those large portions of the book which deal with aspects of world history having only a slight connection with psychic phenomena, or with the beliefs concerning them held by men at different times and places. The reader of these portions of the book,