

Cora L. V. (Scott) Richmond (1840-1923)

Beginning at age 11, Cora Scott would go into a trance and lecture on subjects far beyond her education, experience, exposure, and maturity. The subjects of her lectures included social, political, economic, and religious matters, even extending to the emancipation of slaves. Or rather, one or more advanced spirits gave the discourses through her. The words coming through her were not simple utterances of a trivial nature, but profound teachings. Her words – or those of spirit – have been recorded in a number of books.

According to Harrison D. Barrett, her biographer, Cora L. V. (Scott, Hatch, Tappan) Richmond was one of the most famous women in the world during the late 1800s.

Married at age 16 to Dr. B. F. Hatch, 34 years her senior, she was later divorced and married to Colonel Samuel Tappan. After his death, she married William Richmond.

Cora's first "visitation" took place during the fall of 1851, when she fell "asleep" and wrote out a message from a deceased aunt for her mother. A few days later, when Cora was seated at the feet of her mother, who was sewing, she again fell "asleep" and her right arm began trembling. Remembering what had happened a few days earlier, her mother placed a pencil and slate in her hand. "She rapidly wrote one message after another signed by different members of the family who had departed to the spirit life, all of whom united in saying, 'We are not dead,'" wrote Harrison D. Barrett in his 1895 biography of Mrs. Richmond. "They also assured the anxious mother that they would not harm the child, for they had found through her a means of consciousness with those on earth, and wished her to aid them in carrying out this work."¹

Although, during the first four years of her mediumship, Cora was sometimes controlled by a deceased German physician to do healing work, it was made clear at the beginning that her mission was to be a platform speaker and to provide teachings relative to the meaning of life along with an understanding of the spirit world.



Scientists, scholars, ministers, and journalists were befuddled by young Cora. One theory offered to explain it was called "psychological absorption," which held that by merely putting her hand on a book or passing through a well-stocked library, Cora could absorb all knowledge stored in the book or in the library. At the same time, she would have had to discern it, organize it in her mind, and deliver it in a coherent and persuasive manner. The skeptics were prepared to buy into anything but spirits.

In 1854, Professor James J. Mapes traveled to Buffalo, New York, to observe and study the then 14-year-old girl. In addition to subjects selected by her spirit guides, Cora (or her guides) invited questions or subjects from the audience. Mapes asked her to speak on "primary rocks," to which she (or the spirits) replied with a discourse on geology that left Mapes awestruck. "I am a college educated man, and have been all my long life an investigator of scientific subjects and associated

¹ Barrett, H.D., *Life Work of Cora L. V. Richmond*, InterFarFacing Publishing, Oakland, CA., 2010, p. 5 (originally published in 1895) (For reproductions, see <http://www.InterfarFacing.com>)

with scientific men," he reacted, "but I stand here this afternoon *dumb* before this young girl."²

In a later writing, Mapes stated: "She renders the most abstruse points perfectly understandable to the most common auditor. In close analysis of words she is not surpassed, and her knowledge of natural law seems to be an intuition amounting to almost a certainty. Her high-toned moral character has at all times defied the tongue of calumny. In metaphysics she shows a degree of erudition hitherto among the greatest scholars of the world."³

Some of the spirit communication came through in foreign languages, occasionally an ancient language, but Ouina, one of Cora's key spirit guides, who often acted as intermediaries between the advanced spirits and the medium, was able to interpret all of them. At one lecture, Cora relayed a message in an Indian sign language to a member of the audience. The man rose from his seat, said that the sign language given through her was perfect, and though he had been a skeptic he was now a convert.

At the urging of Mrs. Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln and several congressmen were said to have attended Cora's lectures in Washington, D.C. when she was still in her early 20s, and to have been much impressed with her. The abolition of slavery was one of the key themes in her lectures during those early years.

In 1874, when she was 34, Cora toured the United Kingdom. It was reported that there were standing-room only crowds and that many were turned away. *The Telegraph*, a London daily, reported: "For upwards of an hour the lady poured forth an uninterrupted flow of language, without hesitating for a single instance, sentences of the most involved character and abounding in parentheses, being evolved without apparent effort, and every word fitting into the place as in a child's puz-

zle. Though somewhat devoid of elocutionary emphasis, her delivery was clear and telling, and her diction of a very high order. If, as stated, she is merely a mouthpiece of the Spirits, the condition of *belles lettres* (beautiful writing) in the Spiritual world is decidedly encouraging. If, on the other hand, her lecture is a mere effort of memory, its recital is a feat rarely excelled."⁴

The *Liverpool Courier* reported: "Although it might be assumed by the advertisements that the lady is an American, she spoke with an unmistakable Scotch accent. The lady has a fine presence and much grace of manner, a clear and somewhat impressive delivery..."⁵

The *Newcastle Critic* story noted that she had given more than 3,000 public discourses before the age of 30 and went on to say that "her lectures are extraordinarily clever, no matter whether they are the result of spiritual inspiration or that inspiration which is common to thoughtful, intelligent minds. There is an eloquence which we deem natural to this lady; her articulation is clear and deliberate, her figure is commanding and graceful and she possesses those qualities which are necessary to successful public speaking. Her knowledge is something marvelous, and that is shown by her ability in lecturing intelligently on any subject that may be chosen by the audience."⁶

A report in the August 15, 1874 issue of *The Bury Times* of Bury, England read: "She is unlike many lady lecturers, having nothing of the masculine about her, either in appearance or style of delivery, but is quiet and ladylike. She has nothing of the strong-minded woman, which characterizes some of our American female cousins. Her voice is sweet and clear, but somewhat low in pitch. She spoke for perhaps three quarters of an hour on the abstruse subject, given in a very logical style, unusual certainly to a lady, apparently unaware of the subject to be chosen, as she must have in this case have been....She was never at a loss for a word, and

² _____ p. 70

³ _____ p. 90

⁴ _____ p.162

⁵ _____ p.158

⁶ _____ p.157

spoke easily and confidently throughout in what Spiritualists would call the trance state, but in this instance with the eyes open.”⁷

By the 1870s and 1880s, the educated world, had adopted Darwinism and had for the most part totally dismissed religion and spirituality, failing to distinguish between religious dogma and spiritual truths. As a result, much of the press didn’t know what to make of Cora, but Wilbur F. Storey, editor of the *Chicago Times*, was very much impressed with her and published many of her lectures verbatim.

While touring California, Cora filled a hall with a capacity of 3,000 in San Francisco in successive weeks. The teachings were almost always prefaced with “we,” referring to the group of 12 spirits speaking through her, e.g., “We can only say, study your souls as you do your bodies, pursue the science as you do any other. Make the lamp of the human spirit the subject of your inquiries and investigations, and, like the happy astronomer who triumphed in the exercise of mathematical faith, you too shall triumph in the certainty of spiritual knowledge.”⁸

Here are some other excerpts from Cora’s discourses:

God: “It is often said that an Infinite Deity is inconceivable. An Infinite Deity is incomprehensible, we admit, but not inconceivable. The mind may conceive of that which cannot be comprehended. All that relates to Eternity is not comprehended except in Eternity; but you do conceive both of the heretofore and the hereafter while in your present state. The *conceptions* of the mind are prophecies, and the *comprehensions* of the mind are limitations.”⁹

The Soul: “The Soul in its pure and primal nature has nothing to do with time, nor space, nor

matter, but only with eternity and that which belongs to eternity. Whatever hereinafter shall be expressed concerning what the Soul *does* must not be mistaken for what the Soul *is*. The Soul is a revelation unto outward nature. No external thing can reveal God. The Soul alone, being of the nature of God, perceives God. Nothing can teach that there is God. All things may illustrate it; teaching comes from knowledge, possession; and that which recognizes God is from the Soul. As consciousness is in the Soul, so every attribute expressed by consciousness is in the Soul. As you must go to the Soul for the source of all intelligence, so you must go to the Soul ultimately for all that promises expression.”¹⁰

Overcoming Adversity: “The strength of spirit is attained through struggles that may encompass all conditions of life. Not gigantic to the extent of over-weening physical strength, but for the purpose of usefulness as much strength as needed; not gigantic to the extent of worshipping the intellect at the expense of the heart, but to succeed in all and to fail in all, until one can forward the work of the spirit, until it has conquered all states, not only sin, but the greatest of all sins, self-righteousness, and stands in sublime and exalted humility as the typical illustration of conquest over the earth. All states between that and the lowest condition which you can picture are states of human experience that every Soul must pass through. Meanwhile there infiltrates into these experiences a religious or spiritual element, a suggestion that that which the body, or the mind, only accomplishes is no accomplishment at all.”¹¹

Morality: “When the mental force is taking possession it is often veiled before recognition; the antitheses are the stepping from heights that are false; as the physical height has its downfall in order that a better height may be attained, so in the intellectual world there is the recession. Let no one

⁷ _____ p.156

⁸ _____ p. 292

⁹ Richmond, Cora L. V., *The Soul: Its Nature, Relations, and Expressions n Human Embodiment*, fourth edition, 1888, (a collection of lectures), p. 9 (For reproductions, see <http://www.InterfarFacing.com>)

¹⁰ _____ p. 13

¹¹ _____ p. 16

suppose that, when placed in the spiritual balance, the human intellect without Soul weighs any more than the dust which expresses no intellect; let no one suppose that simply intellectual expression, unaccompanied by moral force or intention, can weigh any more in the great scale of real life, that that life whose intellect is veiled, and yet, in all appearances, wears a fair face, with features that are delicately chiseled, but under some law has come into the world with no intellectual outlook, with no face for earthly victory. These illustrations are extremes, but there is no more extreme depth, or fictitious height, than that of the pride of intellect, of which this extreme is the necessary and natural antithesis.”¹²

Genius: “We would name Mozart as a genius, because, untaught, in childhood he knew the principles of harmony. He did not know because he had never had experience, but he knew because he had experience in previous lives; he had taken all the steps because that life was the culmination. This enabled Mozart to know music at three years of age, not because his Soul, or spirit was any more tuneful than any other, but because he had taken the preceding steps in preceding lives to that culmination.”¹³

Reincarnation: “The human mind takes alarm at once at these teachings, and declares a loss of identity if one embodiment is followed by another, and one spirit after another has expression. There is no reincarnation; there is another expression, and another, until all that is possible is expressed here and in spirit life. Another embodiment is not a loss of identity, but an added expression of identity. As each form only expresses a portion of the spirit that pervades it, so each spirit (of a Soul) only expresses a portion of the Soul. Do not mistake the spirit of embodiment for the Soul; it is as fatal as to mistake the body for the spirit.”¹⁴

Meeting Friends in the Afterlife: “People say: ‘I would not like to go into the spirit life and not find my friends.’ If they are your friends, you

will find them; if they are not you would not wish to. All real ties are found to last in spiritual existence, and form a portion of the Soul’s possessions. The larger sphere includes the smaller one.”¹⁵

Although the near-death experience (NDE) was not so named until the 1970s, by Dr. Raymond Moody, Cora, as Cora L. V. Richmond, might have authored the first book about such out-of-body experiences, a 1923 publication entitled *My Experiences While Out of My Body*. It is not entirely clear from her book, but the primary experience reported on appears to have come during a serious illness, when she was near death for a number of days several years before her actual death at age 82.

She begins the book by stating that it is impossible to adequately convey in human language what she actually experienced, especially in the higher states of the afterlife environment, and that the best she could do was make an attempt at offering some glimpses of her experience. She recalled a great sense of relief – of being set free from the limitations of the body and did not expect to return to it as she had previously done. “There was a perception of great Light, a consciousness of Illumination, an awakening to the vastness, the unlimitation of this Realm of Spirit,” she explained. “All else was swallowed up – eclipsed by the wonderful experiences that came – the Beloved Presences – the vistas of luminous Spirits! This was a state of Super-Consciousness; the awakening of faculties and perceptions before unknown, of being aware, almost without limitation; of KNOWING! Whatever is the nature and state of the real Ego this seemed as near to the Absolute as one could well conceive! There was so much of me! There was so little of me! There were so many and such surpassing spirits! How one shrinks in

¹² _____ p. 22

¹³ _____ p. 41

¹⁴ _____ p. 66-67

¹⁵ _____ p. 66

the presences of the mighty ones! How one expands in the Knowledge of the Infinite: His Image!”¹⁶

She went on to write about deceased loved ones meeting her, a guide taking her on a tour of the spirit world, witnessing scenes in which spirits were attempting to minister to humans under their guidance, seeing her physical body from above, and not wanting to return to it. In concluding the book, she mentioned that some eminent men of science had made headway in helping humans understand the future life. She named Hare, Mapes, Denton, Wallace, Crookes, Varley, Zollner, and Flammarion, but she placed Sir Oliver Lodge, an esteemed British physicist, at the top of the list, as one whose mind was best prepared to receive spiritual truths.



¹⁶ Richmond, Cora L. V. *My Experiences While Out of My Body*, Modern American Spiritualism Publishing, St. Louis (original publishing 1923, reprinted 2002)