

Heroes & Highlights of Psychological Research Before 1882

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The formation of the Society for Psychological Research (SPR) in England during 1882 is often cited as the birth of modern psychological research. Under other names, however, psychological research is much older. If we include the inquisitions carried out by the Catholic Church when “miracles” were alleged, we can date the field back to at least the 11th Century.

In the broadest sense of the word, Emanuel Swedenborg, the 18th Century Swedish scientist and inventor turned mystic and seer, was a “psychical researcher” in that he personally investigated the spirit world by means of altered states of consciousness, and then reported on his findings. However, Swedenborg’s research did not involve investigating the experiences of others.

The seminal event giving rise to the advent of “modern” psychological research occurred on March 31, 1848 just outside Rochester, New York, in the hamlet of Hydesville. Shortly after moving into a small house there on December 11, 1847, the family of John D. Fox, including daughters Margaret, 14, and Kate, 8, began hearing strange raps in the house, but it wasn’t until March 31 that the two daughters realized that they could communicate with the “raps” by snapping their fingers. Upon learning of this, Mrs. Fox asked the “raps” to respond to questions by giving two raps for a “yes” and silence for “no.” She asked if a human being was making the raps. There was no response. When she asked if it was a spirit, there were two raps. Neighbors were called in and dozens of questions put to the “spirit.” It was determined that the spirit had been murdered in the house about five years earlier, well before the Fox family moved in, and that he had been buried beneath the house. Subsequent digging discovered

a few human bones but no corpse. Many years later, however, a crumbling wall in the cellar revealed most of a human skeleton accompanied by a tin peddler’s box.

It was soon realized that the Fox sisters were mediums and were able to bring through other spirits. Some amazing phenomena produced by their spirit controls were witnessed by a number of eminent men and women, including Horace Greeley, J. Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullen Bryant.

In spite of limited mass communications in those days, the story of the “Rochester knockings” spread rapidly and turned into an epidemic of spirit communication. Mediums began developing in all parts of the United States as well as in Europe. The phenomena progressed from rappings and tappings to table tilting and turning and table levitations. The table phenomena usually involved sitters placing their hands on the table and the table lifting off the floor, although there were many observations of the table tilting, turning, or lifting independently of any hands. The spirit communicator would then respond to the questions by tilts of the table. In addition to the simple “yes” and “no” method employed in the Fox case, spirits would tap out letters of the alphabet (one tap for “A,” five taps for “E,” etc.) or would respond with a tap when the alphabet was recited by someone present, thereby slowly spelling out words and sentences. The madness came to be called “spiritualism.”

If the spirits who communicated in the years immediately following the Hydesville event are to be believed, there was a plan behind it all – a plan that resulted from a growing loss of faith and spiritual values in an increasingly materialis-

tic world. A few years before the Rochester knockings, Andrew Jackson Davis, a young New York man, began receiving profound messages purportedly coming from high spirits, but few paid any attention to him until the epidemic was underway. Numerous books of wisdom flowed from the pen of this uneducated man, who came to be known as “the Poughkeepsie seer.” Some years passed before an entry was discovered in Davis’ journal for March 31. It read: “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.”¹

According to spirit messages received by the Rev. William Stainton Moses during the 1870s, the rapping method was invented by Swedenborg and Benjamin Franklin working together in the spirit world. Moses was told that in the old days spirits communicated with men in ways less material, but as men grew more corporeal it became necessary for a material system of telegraphy to be invented. It also became increasingly clear that the communicating spirits have as many obstacles to overcome in communicating with us and we have in communicating with them.

The spiritualism epidemic gave rise to much fraud. Even the Fox sisters, apparently under pressure to produce results on every occasion after coming under the management of showman P. T. Barnum, are said to have used tricks when the spirits were silent. However, it became clear to serious investigators that much of the phenomena could not have been faked.

The first psychical researcher

While many educated men and women observed the Fox sisters and other mediums during 1848 and 1849, the first person to conduct a serious and long-term investigation of mediumistic phenomena seems to have been John W. Ed-

monds, Chief Justice of the New York State Supreme Court. During January 1851, Edmonds, who had served as president of the Senate before being elevated to the Supreme Court, was persuaded by friends to attend a séance. In a letter to the *New York Herald* on August 6, 1853, Edmonds wrote that he attended thinking it fraud and had intended to expose it as such. But, after witnessing phenomena that puzzled him in that first séance, Edmonds decided to further investigate. He wrote that over a period of 23 months, he witnessed several hundred manifestations in various forms, keeping detailed records of them, and collecting some 1,600 pages of manuscript. “I resorted to every expedient I could devise to detect imposture and to guard against delusion,” he wrote. “I felt in myself, and saw in others, how exciting was the idea that we were actually communing with the dead, and I labored to prevent any undue bias of my judgment. I was at times critical and captious to an unreasonable extreme.”² Edmonds said that the manifestations were of almost every known form, both physical and mental. He observed a mahogany table with a lamp burning on it levitated at least a foot off the floor. He also observed a heavy chair move about the floor with no one touching it. It repeatedly stopped within a few inches of him. The chief communicators were Swedenborg and Bacon.

Edmonds’ daughter, Laura, developed into a trance medium. According to Edmonds, she knew only English and a smattering of French in her awakened state, but was able to speak Spanish, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, Hungarian, and Indian dialects fluently when entranced (or rather the spirits spoke the languages using her voice mechanism).

In the latter part of 1851, an association of prominent men and women, including Judge Edmonds, was formed to observe and report on spiritualist phenomena. They called themselves the New York Circle. After writing a book on his experiences with mediums and making known

¹ Doyle, Arthur Conan, M.D., LL.D., *The History of Spiritualism*, George H. Doran Company, 1926, p. 57.

² Wallace, Alfred Russel, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, George Redway, 1896, p.173.

his beliefs, Edmonds came under attack by politicians and the press, and was forced to resign his position on the Supreme Court and return to the practice of law.

Governor Tallmadge becomes a convert

Among those standing to defend the judgment and integrity of Judge Edmonds was Territory of Wisconsin Governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, a former New York lawyer and senator. Tallmadge said that before he became aware of Edmonds' interest in spiritualistic phenomena he had heard of the "Rochester knockings," but he had considered them a delusion that would soon pass away. However, after Edmonds made his beliefs known, Tallmadge decided it was a subject worthy of investigation.

At sittings with a number of mediums, Tallmadge received communications purporting to come from the spirit of his old friend, John C. Calhoun, a former vice-president of the United States who had died in 1850. "They have been received through rapping, writing, and speaking mediums, and are of the most extraordinary character," Tallmadge wrote.³ After a message came through direct-writing (a pencil held by an invisible hand), Tallmadge found it to be a perfect facsimile of Calhoun's handwriting. He took the message to General and Mrs. Hamilton, who had many private letters from Calhoun. They too pronounced it to be Calhoun's handwriting and observed that the terse style was very much Calhoun's, including the fact that he always used the contraction "I'm" rather than writing "I am," as was more common then.

Tallmadge asked Calhoun about the purpose of the communication. "It is draw mankind together in harmony, and convince skeptics of the immortality of the soul," Calhoun responded.⁴

In 1854, Tallmadge became president of a group calling itself The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, the objective of which

was to disseminate information on the phenomena and principles of spiritualism as well as to defend and protect believers against all opposition and oppression. "We believe that spirituality is a heaven-born truth," Tallmadge said in his first address to the society on June 10, 1854. "We profess to know that angels from heaven – that the spirits of good men progressing toward perfection have come here upon the earth we stand on, and talked with us face to face, and uttered words to us bearing the impress of divine origin."⁵ Among the organization's officers were Judge Edmonds, Chief Justice Joseph Williams of Iowa, Judge Willie P. Fowler of Kentucky, Judge R. P. Spaulding of Ohio, Judge Charles Larrabee of Wisconsin, The Honorable Warren Chase of Wisconsin, Dr. George Dexter of New York, Dr. David Cory of Illinois, and General Edward Bullard of New York.

The conversion of Professor Hare

In a letter of July 27, 1853 to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dr. Robert Hare, emeritus professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, denounced the "popular madness" being called "spiritualism" by the American press. He claimed that the phenomena of raps, taps, tilting, turning, and levitating of tables purportedly bringing messages from the dead were either unconscious muscular actions on the part of persons with whom the phenomena were associated or hallucinations.

The author of more than 150 papers on scientific subjects, Hare was also a world renowned inventor, his best known invention being the oxy-hydrogen blowpipe, a forerunner of the modern welding torch. He considered it his moral duty as a scientist to expose spiritualism as just so much flimflam.

Shortly after Hare's letter appeared in the *Inquirer*, he was challenged to make a scientific investigation and not just assume that it was all fraudulent. Hare agreed it was the proper thing to do. It didn't take him long to change his mind. "I sincerely believe that I have communicated

³ Harding, Emma, *Modern American Spiritualism*, University Books, originally published in 1869, p. 89.

⁴ _____, p.90.

⁵ <http://www.spirithistory.com>

with the spirits of my parents, sister, brother, and dearest friends, and likewise with the spirits of the illustrious Washington and other worthies of the spirit world; that I am by them commissioned, under their auspices, to teach truth and to expose error," Hare wrote, as he completely recanted his earlier statements, admitting that he had not properly investigated the phenomena and had simply assumed they could not be true as they were contrary – or at least seemed so – to the laws of science.⁶

"In common with almost all educated persons of the nineteenth century, I had been brought up deaf to any testimony which claimed assistance from supernatural causes, such as ghosts, magic, or witchcraft," Hare explained his earlier position.⁷

During one of his early sittings, Hare observed a table levitate and move about the room. He fully examined it to rule out any kind of invisible wires. One of the communicators was Hare's deceased father, also named Robert, an English emigrant who established a large brewery in Philadelphia. "Oh, my son, listen to reason!" the father told his then still-skeptical son.⁸ Many others, including his deceased mother and sister answered questions and provided evidence – all outside the scope of research by the medium – to eventually win Hare over to a belief in the reality of spirit existence.

According to the senior Hare, the phenomena of spiritualism was "a deliberate effort on the part of inhabitants of the higher spheres to break through the partition which has interfered with the attainment, by mortals, of a correct idea of their destiny after death."⁹ He further explained to his son that a delegation of advanced spirits had been appointed for the project, the ultimate goal being to replace blind faith with a positive philosophy. "It will expand and liberalize the

mind far beyond your present conceptions," the senior Hare communicated. "...It will show that so many of the so-called religious teachings are but impositions on the credulity of mankind, being founded on the grossest absurdities and palpable ignorance of the nature of things. It will give man higher and infinitely more exalted views of God, and bring him into closer communion with the Author of his being. It will do away completely with the sting of death, and rob the grave of its terrors."¹⁰

The incarnate Hare asked his father why low spirits were allowed to interfere in the undertaking, mentioning a case where there was a mischievous displacement of furniture by the spirits. The father explained that the spirits in the lower spheres are better able to make mechanical movements and loud rappings, and thus their assistance was required. The raps, he further explained, were produced by voluntary discharges of the vitalized spiritual electricity from the spirit coming in contact with the animal electricity emanating from the medium. The spirits were able to direct these discharges at will to any particular locality, thereby producing sounds or concussions. It was also mentioned that things such as levitation of tables, which did not involve communication, were simply to get attention and create interest.

As for using the hand of the medium, as in automatic writing, it was explained that the spirits direct currents of vitalized spiritual electricity on the particular muscles which they desire to control. It is not necessary for the medium to be a person of good moral character or have a well-balanced mind, but an advanced spirit would not be able to control the organs or mind of a medium unless in affinity with the medium, Hare was informed. When spirits wish to impress the mind of the medium, the spirits can dispose and arrange the magnetic currents of the brain so as to form or fashion them into ideas of their own. They can instantly determine the sphere of the spirit, in or out of body, by the particular brillian-

⁶ Hare, Robert, M.D., *Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations*, Partridge & Brittan, 1855, Preface.

⁷ _____, 38.

⁸ _____, 41.

⁹ _____, 97.

¹⁰ _____.

cy and character of the light in which he or she is enveloped, as well as by the peculiar sensation which his or her presence creates.

Hare asked his father why Hydesville was selected as the place to launch this project. His father replied that the spirit of a murdered man would excite more interest and that it was necessary to use a community where spiritual agency would be more readily credited than one where the more-educated would dismiss it as delusion.

The scientific community which had previously embraced Hare now scoffed at his reports and made every attempt to distance itself from him.

Professor Mapes receives convincing evidence

Another distinguished scientist converted to a belief in spirits after setting out to rescue his friends who were “running to mental seed and imbecility” over the mediumistic phenomena was James J. Mapes, a professor of chemistry and natural philosophy at the National Academy of Design in New York as well as a renowned inventor of agricultural products. After Mapes’ daughter informed him that she had become a writing medium, he asked her to demonstrate her powers to him. She took a pen and wrote a message that appeared to come from Mapes’ father. When Mapes asked for proof of identity, his daughter’s hand wrote: “You may recollect that I gave you, among other books, an encyclopedia; look at page 120 of that book, and you will find my name written there, which you have seen.”¹¹

Mapes had not seen the book for 27 years as it had been stored in a warehouse. He retrieved it and found his father’s name written on page 120. After sitting with various other mediums, Mapes wrote: “The manifestations which are pertinent to the ends required are so conclusive in their character as to establish in my mind certain cardinal points. These are: First, there is a future state of existence, which is but a continuation of our present state of being...Second, that the great aim of nature, as shown through a great variety of

spiritual existences is progression, extending beyond the limits of this mundane sphere...Third, that spirits can and do communicate with mortals, and in all cases evince a desire to elevate and advance those they commune with.”¹²

The epidemic in France

The mediumship craze reached France in 1850. According to French philosopher and historian Ernest Bersot, it quickly became a passion. People sat around tables for hours in anxious expectation of hearing from the spirits. During the winter, there was no other social occupation or topic. The Catholic Church condemned it, but few paid attention.

Intrigued by the interest in spirit communication, French educator and author Hippolyte Léon Dénizarth Rivail, who later adopted the pseudonym Allan Kardec (hereinafter “Kardec”), began a careful investigation after attending a séance in 1854 at the home of a friend, Emile Charles Baudin, whose daughters, Caroline, 16, and Julie, 13, were mediums. Most of the communication coming through the two teenagers was frivolous or mundane, but when Kardec was present the messages became serious and profound. When Kardec inquired as to the cause of the change of disposition, he was informed that “spirits of a much higher order than those who habitually communicated through the two young mediums came expressly for him, and would continue to do so, in order to enable him to fulfill an important religious mission.”¹³

Born in Lyons to a distinguished family, Kardec was educated at the Institute of Pestalozzi at Yverdum. He had intended to enter the legal profession, as had his father and grandfather, but, in 1828, he purchased a school for boys and devoted himself to education. In 1830, at age 25, he began giving gratuitous lectures to the public on chemistry, physics, comparative anatomy, and astronomy. Under his given name, he authored a

¹² Harding, 199.

¹³ Kardec, Allan, *The Spirits’ Book*, Amapse Society, reprint from 1857, p. 11.

¹¹ Doyle, p. 134.

number of books aimed at improving education in the public schools of France.

The spirits told him to adopt the Kardec pseudonym for the books he would write “in the fulfillment of the mission which, as we have already told you, has been confided to you by Providence, and which will gradually open before you as you proceed in it under our guidance.”¹⁴

Kardec met with one or both of the mediums a couple of evening every week and put questions to the spirits. He approached his investigation scientifically, searching for mechanistic explanations. The earliest manifestations of intelligence were made by table tipping, with the legs of table moving up and down a given number of times to reply “yes” or “no” to questions asked. As this method of communication was slow and inconvenient, the communicating agent suggested that Kardec fit a pencil to a small basket (a planchette) and place it on a sheet of paper. The basket “was then set in motion by the same occult power that moved the tables; but instead of obeying a simple and regular movement of rotation, the pencil traced letters that formed words, sentences, and entire discourses, filling many pages, treating of the deepest questions of philosophy, morality, metaphysics, psychology, etc., and as rapidly as though written by hand.”¹⁵ Kardec explained that the medium would merely lay her fingers on the edges of the planchette in such a way that it would be impossible for her to guide it in any direction whatever. A further observation lending credibility to the process had to do with the fact that the handwriting changed completely with each spirit who communicated and that when a spirit reappeared the same writing resumed.

As the planchette writing was also slow, further experimentation by Kardec resulted in a change to trance mediumship, in which answers were orally transmitted, and automatic writing in which the medium held a pencil and “was made to write under an impulsion independent of his

will, and often with an almost feverish rapidity.” There was no doubt in Kardec’s mind that the nature of the communication was far beyond the comprehension of the young sisters. “The replies thus given, and the messages thus transmitted, are sometimes marked by such sagacity, profundity, and appropriateness, and convey thoughts so elevated, so sublime, that they can only emanate from a superior intelligence imbued with the purest morality,” Kardec wrote, going on to mention that at other times the communication was so frivolous and trivial that it could not have come from the same source.¹⁶ It became clear to Kardec that both “higher spirits” and “foolish and lying spirits” were communicating through the mediums. He likened it to a dinner party in which the discussion might have to do with the nature of the soul or death. While some members at the table might take the discussion very seriously, others, perhaps the materialists, would treat it cynically and sarcastically.

Kardec pointed out that even the higher spirits would tell him that they do not have all the answers, that there is disagreement among them, and that we should not accept everything said by them as literal truth. While these higher spirits may be more advanced than we are, they have not yet achieved perfection and are not all-knowing, Kardec was informed. They are attempting to assist us to the best of their ability, but they are certainly not infallible. Further, Kardec was told that human languages are too limited when it comes to describing spirit matters. “...even spirits who are really enlightened may express themselves in terms which appear to be different, but which, at bottom, mean the same thing, especially in regard to matters which your language is incapable of expressing clearly, and which can only be spoken to you by means of figures and comparisons that you mistake for literal statements of fact,” was an explanation recorded by Kardec.¹⁷

¹⁴ _____, p. 12.

¹⁵ _____, p. 29.

¹⁶ _____, p. 31.

¹⁷ _____, p. 32.

Sir William Crookes leads British investigators

In 1851, The Ghost Society was formed at Cambridge to look into stories of the paranormal. One of the founders was Edward White Benson, later Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1853, Henry Sidgwick, who would become first president of the SPR in 1882, joined the group. Seven years later, Professor Sidgwick became a tutor at Cambridge to Frederic W. H. Myers, a co-founder of the SPR and the man some call the "Father of Psychological Research."

Professor Augustus De Morgan, chairman of the mathematics department at the University College in London and a reformer in mathematical logic, began sitting with mediums in 1853. "I have seen in my house frequently, various persons presenting themselves [as mediums]," De Morgan wrote in his memoirs. "The answers are given mostly by the table, on which a hand or two is gently placed, tilting up at the letters...I have no theory about it, but in a year or two something may turn up. I am, however, satisfied of the reality of the phenomenon. A great many other persons are as cognizant of these phenomena in their own houses as myself. Make what you can of it if you are a philosopher."¹⁸

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, co-originator with Charles Darwin of the natural selection theory of evolution, also had a number of sittings with mediums beginning in 1865 and satisfied himself that much of the phenomena he witnessed were real. Wallace said that he was a confirmed philosophical skeptic and so thorough a materialist that he simply refused to accept the conception of spiritual existence before he began his sittings with a Mrs. Marshall of London. He later stated that he felt that the evidence for the genuineness of mediumship was as strong as it was for any other branch of science. In 1869, the Dialectical Society of London appointed a committee, including Wallace, to investigate mediumship. The committee returned a report that genuine phenomena exist, a decision not well received by the society. It is believed to have been that report that

prompted Professor William Crookes to begin investigating the mediumship of Daniel Dunglas Home and Florence Cook.

Many years earlier, during the early 1850s, Home, then living in America, was observed by Judge Edmonds, Professor Hare, and Professor Mapes, and was instrumental in their conversions to a belief in spirits. In 1852, a Harvard University delegation studied Home and concluded that he was "a modern wonder." Crookes undertook his investigation of Home and other mediums with the intent of demonstrating that the alleged phenomena of spiritualism were all fraudulent. He opined that the increased employment of scientific methods would drive the "worthless residuum of spiritualism" into the unknown limbo of magic and necromancy.

A Fellow of the Royal Society, Crookes studied and taught at the Royal College of Chemistry before becoming a meteorologist at the Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford. In 1861, he discovered the element thallium, and later invented the radiometer, the spintharoscope, and the Crookes tube, a high-vacuum tube which contributed to the discovery of the X-ray. Knighted in 1897 for his scientific work, he was not someone to be easily duped or to fabricate strange stories.

But like Edmonds, Hare, Mapes, and many others, Crookes changed his views. During 28 sittings with Home, Crookes and his guests observed all kinds of phenomena, including levitations, materialized hands, spirit messages, a floating accordion giving out music, and objects floating around the lighted room from one person to another. In one sitting, Crookes' wife was levitated while sitting in a chair. As Crookes came to understand it, the levitations were a result of invisible spirits lifting people or objects. When he asked the spirits why so much tomfoolery, he was told that they were just learning on their side how to manipulate matter and were carrying out experiments of their own.

A séance on April 12, 1871, Crookes recorded, was the most exciting and satisfactory he experienced, probably because two other mediums were present and added to Home's psychic

¹⁸ Doyle, 58.

force. At first, they had very rough manifestations, chairs knocking about, a table floating above the floor and then being slammed down, loud and unpleasant noises, what Crookes termed “phenomena of a low class.” It was well known by this time that harmony among the sitters was necessary for good results and this harmony could often be achieved by singing. Thus, they began singing in hopes of improving conditions. After the group song, Home sang solo, what Crookes referred to as “a sacred piece,” after which one of the other mediums “was carried right up, floated across the table and dropped with a crash of pictures and ornaments at the other end of the room.” When Home sang again, both of the other mediums were lifted up by the invisible spirits and placed on the table. Crookes surmised that the other two mediums brought low-class influences with them and Home’s singing drove them away, allowing his good ones to enter. Crookes wrote that it was impossible to describe all the striking things that took place that night or to convey the intense feeling of genuineness and reality.

All of the sittings were in the Crookes home or at the homes of friends, never at Home’s residence. When Home was being levitated by the spirits, Crookes ran his hands under Home’s feet and over his head to rule out any kind of invisible wires, as had been suggested by skeptics.

“To reject the recorded evidence on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever; for no fact in sacred or profane history is supported by a stronger array of proofs,”¹⁹ Crookes, who took every possible precaution to rule out fraud, wrote. After many of his scientific colleagues began attacking him, Crookes responded, “I never said it was possible, I only said it was true.”²⁰

¹⁹ Crookes, Sir William, *Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*, Austin Publishing Co., 1922 (fourth edition of 1906 book), p. 39.

²⁰ _____, p. 14.

Evolution of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR)

One of those initially scoffing at the reports on the mediumship of D.D. Home was the Rev. William Stainton Moses, an Anglican minister as well as English Master at University College, London. He called the reports the “dreariest twaddle” he had ever come across. Yet, not long after making that statement, Moses found himself being levitated by spirits and producing other phenomena similar to that of Home. Moses struggled to accept it as some of it was contrary to his Christian beliefs and he feared that it was demonic. However, he gradually came to believe that advanced spirits were communicating through him and controlling him.

On May 9, 1874, Myers and Edmund Gurney, two Cambridge scholars, visited Moses and were so impressed by the phenomena that they were motivated to further explore the subject. Their interest, along with that of Professor Sidgwick, apparently resulted in the formation of The Cambridge Society for Psychical Research in 1879, a forerunner of the SPR.

Moses’ mediumship was also observed by a number of other distinguished people, including Crookes and Serjeant Cox, a prominent lawyer. In 1875, Cox organized the Psychological Society of Great Britain. It was dissolved upon his death in 1879.

Meanwhile, Crookes’ reports on Home and Cook so impressed Professor William Barrett (later Sir William) that he decided to conduct his own investigation. A physicist at the Royal College of Science at Dublin, Barrett began observing various phenomena, including materializations, levitations, and spirit communication. In one case, he observed a table being levitated about 18 inches off the floor. It remained suspended long enough for him to see that no one was touching it. He tried to force the table down, but was unable to move it. “Then I climbed up on the table and sat on it, my feet off the floor,” he reported, “when I was swayed to and fro and finally tipped off. The table on its own accord now turned upside down, no one touching it, and I tried to lift it off the

ground, but it could not be stirred. It appeared screwed down to the floor." When Barrett stopped trying to lift the inverted table from the floor, it righted itself on its own accord, everyone else in the room standing well clear of it. "Numerous sounds displaying an amused intelligence then came, and after each individual present had been greeted with some farewell raps the sitting ended."²¹

In 1876, Barrett submitted a paper to the British Association for the Advancement of Science on the subject of mental telepathy and mediumship. The Association rejected it until Dr. Wallace protested the rejection. Barrett was then allowed to deliver his paper but not publish it.

It was Barrett who encouraged Myers, Gurney and Sidgwick to form the SPR in 1882. Apparently because he was living in Dublin, Barrett was unable to take an active part in the early leadership of the organization.

Many years later, in 1924, Barrett addressed the SPR and said, "I am personally convinced that the evidence we have published decidedly demonstrates (1) the existence of a spiritual world, (2) survival after death, and (3) of occasional communication from those who have passed over."²²

²¹ Barrett, Sir William, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, E.F. Dutton & Co., 1917, p. 48.

²² Barrett, Sir William, *Death-Bed Visions*, third edition, The Aquarian Press, 1986 (originally published in 1926), p. 162.