

## Scientist Discovers Secret Of Table Levitations

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Following the outbreak of the phenomena called spiritualism in 1848, there were many reports of tables being levitated through mediums and spelling out messages. Typically, the table would hover off the floor and tilt or turn one time for each letter of the alphabet, e.g. five tilts meant an E, or the sitters would recite the alphabet and the table would tilt or turn at the desired letter. Occasionally, however, there were reports of table levitations not involving spirit communication; rather, it appeared that the spirits were simply trying to offer some kind of evidence that they were present and could manipulate matter.

In 1914, Dr. William J. Crawford, a lecturer in mechanical engineering at Queen's University of Belfast, Ireland, began investigating the mediumship of 16-year-old Kathleen Goligher. The phenomena surrounding the young girl included communicating raps, trance voice, and table levitations.

In his 1918 book, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, Sir William Barrett, professor of physics at Royal College in Dublin, tells of joining Crawford in one of Crawford's many sittings with the Goligher circle. At first, they heard knocks, and messages were spelled out as one of the sitters recited the alphabet. Barrett then observed a floating trumpet, which he tried unsuccessfully to catch. "Then the table began to rise from the floor some 18 inches and remained suspended and quite level," Barrett wrote. "I was allowed to go up to the table and saw clearly no one was touching it, a clear space separating the sitters from the table."

Barrett put pressure on the table to try to force it back to the floor. He exerted all his

strength but was unable to budge it. "Then I climbed on the table and sat on it, my feet off the floor, when I was swayed to and fro and finally tipped off," Barrett continued the story. "The table of 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."



Kathleen Goligher

When Barrett stopped trying to right the table, it righted itself on its own accord. Apparently, the spirits were having a bit of fun with Barrett as he then heard "numerous sounds displaying an amused intelligence."

Somewhat similar folly had been observed by Professor William Crookes on April 12, 1871, during a sitting with Daniel Dunglas Home, when sitter Frank Herne was carried out of his chair, floated across the room, and then dropped at the other end of the room. When Crookes asked the spirits why such foolishness,

it was explained that they were experimenting on their side just as Crookes was on his side.

Crookes and other researchers had recognized that mediums were exuding a strange foamy substance from various orifices of the body that seemed to be responsible for producing different physical phenomena. With some mediums, it was very apparent and could even be photographed. With others, however, it was more of a vapory aura around the medium's body. This substance came to be called ectoplasm. Through much experimentation Crawford discovered that "psychic rods" emanating from the medium and made up of this ectoplasm were responsible for the levitations.

During his experiments with the Goligher circle, Crawford began communicating with spirit entities, one of whom said he was a medical man when on earth and that his primary function was to look after the health of the young medium. This spirit explained to Crawford that two types of substances were used in the production of the phenomena. One was taken in large quantities from both the medium and the sitters, then returned to them at the close of the séance. The other substance, apparently the ectoplasm, called "psychic force" by Crawford, was taken exclusively from the medium in minute quantities and could not be returned to her as its structure was broken up. It was pointed out that it came from the interior of the medium's nerve cells and if too much were taken she could suffer serious injury.

Some of the communication took place through Goligher's voice mechanism while she was in trance while much of it came through raps and table tilting. Crawford came to see the experimentation as a joint venture with the spirit "operators." He soon realized that these "operators" didn't understand much about the scientific aspects of the phenomena. "I am convinced that the operators know next to nothing of force magnitudes and reactions," Crawford wrote in his 1918 book, *The Reality of Psychic*

*Phenomena*. "Their idea as to the prime cause of the phenomena is 'power.'"

On one occasion, a clairvoyant joined in the circle and told Crawford that she could see "a whitish vapory substance, somewhat like smoke," forming under the surface of the table and increasing in density as it was levitated. She could see it flowing from the medium in sort of a rotary motion. From other sitters, she could see thin bands joining into the much larger amount coming from the medium. She also saw various spirit forms and spirit hands manipulating the "psychic stuff."

Crawford brought in a scale large enough to hold the medium while she was sitting in her chair. He discovered that when a table was being levitated, the weight of the table, usually around 16 pounds, was transferred to the medium through the "psychic rods." Most of the time, the transfer of weight would be a few ounces short of the weight of the table. Further experimentation revealed that the extra weight was being transferred to the sitters in the room, who might have had furnished small amounts of the "psychic force."

Crookes had used a spring balance to record the variations in weight of the levitating tables, but apparently did not have the equipment to weigh the medium. At one sitting, Crookes and Darwin collaborator Alfred Russel Wallace, two of the world's foremost scientists, were crawling around under a levitating table searching for some kind of explanation.

Crawford pointed out that he continually worked under the levitated table and between the levitated table and the medium and conducted many of his experiments in adequate light, although it became obvious to him that light affected the rigidity of the rapping rods, i.e., the rods could not be made stiff if strong light was playing upon them.

During his 87 sittings with Kathleen Goligher and the Goligher circle, Crawford made a number of other observations, including

that the psychic rods could extend only about five feet from the medium's body and that it often took a half hour for the psychic energy to build up. He further observed that the psychic energy often caused the medium to make slight involuntary motions with her feet – motions which might suggest fraud to a careless observer.

"I have come to the general conclusion from the results of my experimental work, and from observations of the circle extending over two and a half years, that all the phenomena produced are caused by flexible rod-like projections from the body of the medium; that these rods are the prime cause of the phenomena, whether they consist of levitations, movements of the table about the floor, rappings, touchings, or other variations," Crawford wrote.

Some of Crawford's findings, such as the weighing of the medium, were objective and scientific. However, other aspects of it were based on things that were purportedly communicated by spirits or seen by a clairvoyant.

"I have seen and heard sufficient at the Goligher and other circles to convince me that man does not really die at physical death, but passes on to another state of existence, and that, for the most part, the entities who demonstrate at good séances are really human beings who have so passed on," Crawford said.

On July 30, 1920, Crawford committed suicide. Skeptics immediately concluded that Crawford must have realized he had been duped. However, Crawford's suicide note, in part, read: "I have been struck down mentally. I was perfectly all right up to a few weeks ago. It is not the psychic work. I enjoyed it too well. I am thankful to say that the work will stand. It is too thoroughly done for any material loopholes to be left."

In 1922, Dr. E. E. Fournier d'Albe had 20 sittings with the Goligher circle and observed no phenomena similar to that reported by Crawford. Crookes and other researchers had

come to realize that too much skepticism causes a negative environment or a disharmony that defeats the production of phenomena. That may very well have been the case with d'Albe, as other researchers later reported phenomena involving the Goligher circle similar to what both Crawford and Barrett had witnessed. However, debunkers accepted d'Albe's report as evidence that Goligher was a charlatan.

Barrett described Kathleen Goligher and her small family group as "uncritical, simple, honest, kind-hearted people," and he was certain that what he had experienced was beyond any conjuring. "That there is an unseen intelligence behind these manifestations is all we can say," Barrett concluded his discussion of the case, "but that is a tremendous assertion, and if admitted destroys the whole basis of materialism."

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