

The Book and Newspaper Tests

A combination of two articles by Michael E. Tymn

The book tests conducted by the Rev. Charles Drayton Thomas, a member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), are considered some of the very best evidence for spirit communication. "The primary purpose of these efforts was said [by my father] to be a demonstration that spirit people were able to do that for which telepathy from human minds could not account, a demonstration calculated to clarify the evidence already existing for the authorship of their communication," Thomas wrote in 1922.

A Wesleyan minister, Thomas was especially interested in the popular theory that the medium was reading the mind of the sitter in providing information. He said that it was his father, the Rev. John Thomas, also a Wesleyan minister, who, posthumously, gave him the idea of the book and newspaper tests. It was during a sitting with Gladys Osborne Leonard, the renowned British medium, early in 1917, that the father and son on different sides of the veil began collaborating in the experiments.

The senior Thomas, who died in 1903, told his son that the tests had been devised by others in a more advanced sphere than his and the idea passed on to him. At the time, Drayton Thomas (he went by his middle name) had had over 100 sittings with Mrs. Leonard, although later in his career that number exceeded 500. He mentions that the tests were secondary to other business which he and his father discussed and that his father continually gave other evidence of his own identity.

Drayton Thomas would arrange a notebook on a table with a lighted lamp. Leonard would take a seat several feet from him and after two or

three minutes of silence she would go into a trance. Suddenly, in a clear and distinct voice, Fedra, Leonard's spirit control, would take over Leonard's body and begin using her speech mechanism while relaying messages from the senior Thomas and others in the spirit world. There was no similarity between Leonard's voice and that of Fedra, who spoke like a young girl. Moreover, Fedra spoke with an accent and had frequent lapses of grammar.

Occasionally, just after Leonard went into the trance state, Thomas would hear whispering of which he could catch fragments, such as, "Yes, Mr. John, Fedra will tell him...Yes, all right..." Fedra often referred to herself in the third person, e.g., "Fedra says she is having trouble understanding Mr. John."

The idea behind the book tests was to communicate information gleaned by the father from a book in the son's extensive library. For example, in one of the earliest experiments, the father told the son to go to the lowest shelf and take the sixth book from the left. On page 149, three-quarters down, he would find a word conveying the meaning of falling back or stumbling. When the younger Thomas arrived home that evening after his sitting with Mrs. Leonard, he went to the book and place on the page, where he found the words, "...to whom a crucified Messiah was an insuperable stumbling-block."

The father explained to the son, through Fedra, that he was able to get the "appropriate spirit of the passage" much easier than he could the actual words. However, over a period of 18 months experimentation, he found himself able to pick up more and more words and numbers,

gradually shifting from “sensing” to “clairvoyance.” It was made abundantly clear by the father that he was experimenting on his side as much as his son was on the material side.

It was certain that Mrs. Leonard had never visited Thomas’ house and knew nothing of the library of books in it. Realizing, however, that his subconscious might somehow have recorded such detailed information in the book when he read it years before as well as the exact location of the book in his library, Thomas decided to experiment with books in a friend’s house. He informed his father of the plan so that the father knew where to search. In one of the tests there, Fedra told Thomas that on page 2 of the second book from the right on a particular shelf, he would find a reference to sea or ocean. She added that the discarnate Thomas was not sure which, because he got the idea and not the words. When Drayton Thomas pulled the book from the shelf of his friend’s house, he read, “A first-rate seaman, grown old between sky and ocean.”

In another experiment, Drayton Thomas was told to look at page 9 where he would find a reference to changing of colors. Upon opening this book, Thomas found, “Along the northern horizon the sky suddenly changes from light blue to a dark lead colour.” In still another test at his home, Fedra told Drayton Thomas to go to a book at a certain point on a shelf and he would find words looking like “A-sh-ill-ee” on the cover. Fedra explained that she was giving the sound but not the correct spelling. When Thomas arrived home, he went to the exact spot indicated by Fedra and found a book authored by Mrs. Ashley Carus-Wilson.

Over a period of about two years, the father and son researchers carried out 348 tests. Of those, 242 were deemed good, 46 indefinite, and 60 failures. The discarnate Thomas explained the failures as his inability to get the idea through the mind of the medium or the medium’s mind somehow distorting the message.

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After conducting a number of book tests, it was suggested to the Rev. Charles Drayton Thomas ... that he experiment in a different way – what Thomas came to call the “newspaper tests.” The suggestion was made by Thomas’ father, the Rev. John Thomas, like his son a Wesleyan minister when he was alive.

The newspaper tests, which also involved the medium Gladys Osborne Leonard, began in 1919, some two years after the book tests. In the newspaper tests, the discarnate Thomas, who had died in 1903, would provide information to be found in newspapers and magazines not yet printed. Thus, he would exercise a sort of precognition and clairvoyance. This would seemingly rule out what was being called Super ESP, the ability of the medium to go beyond reading the mind of the sitter and tap into the mind of anyone having a particular knowledge of a subject.

In a test on January 16, 1920, the junior Thomas was told to examine the *Daily Telegraph* for the following day and to notice that near the top of the second column of the first page the name of the place he was born. Thomas was born in Victoria Terrace on Victoria Street in Taunton. When Thomas checked the paper the following day, he found the word “Victoria” exactly where his father said it would be.

In a test on February 13, 1920, Thomas was told to go to the *London Times* of the following day and near the top of column two of the first page he would find the name of a minister with whom he (the father) had been friendly when living in Leek. Lower in the column, he would find his (Drayton’s) name, his mother’s name, and an aunt’s name, all within a space of two inches. When the paper appeared the morning after the sitting, Thomas saw no familiar names relative to the minister friend. He then consulted

with his mother who immediately called his attention to the name "Perks," informing her son that the Rev. George T. Perks was a friend of his father's and had visited him while they were living in Leek. Looking lower in the column, Thomas found his name, a slight variation of his mother's name, and an aunt's name, all within a space of 1 ¼ by 1 ½ inches.

In the same test, Thomas was told that two-thirds of the way down column one, he would find a word suggesting ammunition, and between that and the name of a former teacher of his he would find a French place name, looking like three words hyphenated into one. While Thomas found the name of a former teacher, "Watts," it was in the column next to the one indicated by his father. As for the ammunition reference, the word "canon" appeared twice, apparently taken by the discarnate Thomas as "cannon." The Belgian town of Braine-le-Château was also found in the column indicated.

Drayton Thomas checked with the *London Times* and concluded that the page from which his father took the information had not yet been typeset at the time the information was given to him through Leonard and Fedra.

Many other newspaper tests were carried out by Drayton Thomas. In each case, he would immediately write down the information and file it in a sealed envelope with the Society for Psychical Research at a time before the type was set at the newspaper office. Further, Thomas would check papers from at least 10 other days, being sure that the same names did not appear in those editions, thereby ruling out coincidence. Some of the tests were inconclusive and a few were failures, but there were many more positive results.

When Thomas asked his father how he was able to obtain information from newspapers not yet typeset, the father replied that he didn't quite understand it himself. He referred to it as some kind of "etheric foreshadowing." He likened it to seeing the shadow of a man around the corner before actually seeing the man. "Now the things

I see are frequently but the spiritual counterparts of things which are about to take form; some of my tests from the *Times* might be called shadows of a substance," the discarnate Thomas explained. "When you see a shadow it is but an outline, and you do not look for detail, and that explains the difficulty of these tests; we cannot always sufficiently observe detail." He further explained that as he had moved from sensing to seeing, he could not always see the word clearly, as in one case he gave the word "rain" for what proved to be "raisin."

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