

Case #40 — The Pearl Tie-Pin

Of all the diviner's devices, the talking board (or spirit board, or Ouija¹ board) is the most infamous. Perhaps this is because its low cost and ease of use made it popular with many who wouldn't think of buying a crystal ball or learning to read tarot cards. Also, using the board is a social thing requiring at least one person and usually two people to touch the planchette (or "traveler") and another to copy down the messages being spelled out. Before the advent of horror movies on late-night television, many young folks sought answers to burning questions ("Will I marry a handsome man?" "Does Frankie love me?") from the board. This proved especially thrilling on dark and stormy nights amid flickering candles.

Unfortunately, not all encounters with the powers behind the board have been so innocent or harmless. Many people claim that "playing" with a talking board can open portals to other dimensions, letting in immoral or amoral spirits who revel in encouraging nasty deeds and may even try to possess the naive planchette pusher. The recommendations made for dealing with such interlopers range from prayer to envisioning white auras to trashing the board altogether.

Skeptics are quick to claim that the only thing coming through talking boards is the inner self of the user and that the results are either fantasy or repressed memories. These critics are often correct; but, as demonstrated by the following case, sometimes they are wrong. Sometimes the communicator really is a departed soul.

In 1912, in Dublin, Ireland, a small circle of friends devised a special board consisting of letters on individual cards that could be arranged in any order. This display was then covered with a sheet of glass 22-inches square. The various arrangements had no effect on the rapid movements of the "traveler" (a triangle of wood with one-quarter-inch felt-tipped legs) or on the precision with which it spelled out meaningful messages. Neither did blindfolding the operators have any deleterious effect; nor did placing opaque screens between the blindfolded operators and the board. In other words, there was absolutely no way that either person touching the traveler could have any idea _ via their normal senses _ of what letters were being pointed to or what messages were being spelled out. Often, in fact, the operators distracted themselves with light talk and laughter even when serious messages of disaster or despair were being communicated through their darting fingertips.

In December of 1915, a session was held at 61 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, in which the operators were a Mrs. Hester Smith (daughter of a well-known Dublin physician and wife of a university professor) and Miss Geraldine Cummins (who would later become a celebrated medium, but who at the time was a complete novice at this sort of thing). The note-taker was the Reverend Savill Hicks, a Presbyterian minister of some renown in the city. Also present, as an observer, was the prominent psychic investigator, Sir William Barrett.²

During the session in question,³ the name of a cousin of Cummins was unexpectedly

spelled out. Cummins was aware that he was a soldier who had been killed in battle a month before. When asked if he had any message, the reply was: "Tell my mother to give my pearl tie-pin to the girl I was going to marry. I think she ought to have it." When asked for the name and address of his fiancé, the communicator spelled out a full name (withheld for privacy purposes, but we are told it was an uncommon last name) and an address in London. And then the soldier said good-bye.

No one at the session knew of an engagement or recognized the woman's name that was given. Communications with the deceased officer's family revealed that they knew nothing of any pearl tie-pin nor of any marriage plans and had never heard of such a woman. When the post office returned a letter written to the address given, the group assumed that the message was a subconscious fiction or dream and let the matter drop.

But that, of course, is not the end of the story. Six months later, in a chance conversation,

it was discovered that the officer *had* been engaged, shortly before he left for the front, to the very lady whose name was given. This was verified when the War Office sent over the deceased officer's effects. Then it was discovered that the soldier had put the woman's name in his will, both first and last names being precisely the same as given through the board. Furthermore, among the young man's meager possessions was found a pearl tie-pin.

For Further Information See:

"Evidence of Super-Normal Communications Through Motor Automatism," by Sir William Barrett, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 30, 1920, pages 230-250.

"Experiments In Automatic Writing," by Geraldine Cummins, *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, May 1939, pages 73-76.

On the Threshold of the Unseen, Sir William F. Barrett, 1918, pages 184-186.



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¹ Boards covered with letters and numbers that could be pointed to with a small triangular table or "planchette" (French for "little plank") were often used by spirit seekers during the early 1880s. On February 10, 1891, Elijah J. Bond was granted the first patent on such a board. His business partner, Charles Kennard gave their version the name "Ouija," which he falsely believed was Egyptian for "luck." Parker Brothers bought the rights to the name in 1966. Writing in 1918, Barrett refers to all versions of talking boards as "ouija boards."

² Barrett, a professor of physics at the Royal College of Science for Dublin, was a key founder of the Society for Psychological Research.

³ By the time of this session, it was clear that the blindfolds had served their purpose and were no longer employed.