

Biography of Kathleen Goligher (1898 - ?)

Kathleen Goligher (later Lady G. Donaldson,) a Belfast, Ireland medium, was studied extensively by Dr. William Crawford. Crawford, who taught mechanical engineering at Queen's University in Belfast, began his investigation in 1914 when Goligher was 16 years old. The phenomena surrounding her included communicating raps, trance voice, and table levitations. Other members of the family, called the Goligher Circle, including Mr. Goligher, three daughters, a son, and a son-in-law, sat regularly. Kathleen's three sisters were all considered mediumistic to some degree and were thought to have contributed "psychic force" to the phenomena.

Most of Crawford's 87 sittings with the Goligher Circle over a two-and-a-half year period, were conducted in the Goligher's attic, but some were in Crawford's home. "No dark séances are held," Crawford recorded. "The light is usually strong enough – after the eyes get accustomed to its red colour – to see quite plainly all the sitters."¹

Crawford referred to the medium and her family as "upright, religious-minded people, who keep to a high moral standard in their daily lives."² He said that Kathleen was the least enthusiastic member of the circle and seemed to care little about the phenomena. "I think she sits more as an obligation to the others than for any innate satisfaction to herself," he continued. "Whether phenomena are obtained at the séances does not affect her in the least."³

During December 1915, Crawford invited Sir William Barrett, professor of physics at Royal College in Dublin, to join him. At first, they heard knocks, and messages were spelled out as one of the sitters recited the alphabet. Barrett then reported observing a floating trumpet, which he tried unsuccessfully to catch. "Then the table be-

gan 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."⁴



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."⁵

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."

During his experiments with Goligher, Crawford began communicating with spirit enti-

ties, 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, 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 but most of it came through raps and table tilting when she was not in trance. Apparently, Goligher went into trance only when prolonged discussions were required. 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 and said he was convinced that the operators know next to nothing of force magnitudes and reactions.

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 the table 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 apparently furnished small amounts of the "psychic force."

Crawford pointed out that he continually worked under the levitated table and between the levitated table and the medium, but 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.

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.⁶

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.

On July 30, 1920, Crawford committed suicide. Skeptics immediately concluded that Crawford must have realized he had been duped. However, Crawford's suicide note said it had nothing to do with his psychic work and expected his work to stand. He concluded that his work was thorough and left no loopholes. He said that he had been struck down mentally.

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. However, other researchers reported phenomena similar to that observed by Crawford and Barrett. Nevertheless, debunkers accepted d'Albe's report as evidence that Goligher was a charlatan. (*Note: Many researchers have reported that a negative investigator – one intent on showing fraud – can create disharmony and defeat the phenomena.*)

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.”⁷

When discussing mediumship in general, not necessarily Kathleen Goligher, Crawford ad-

ressed the fraud issue. “While recognizing that both varieties (conscious and unconscious) of fraud exist, I am confident that they have been much overrated,” he said. “Even at séances, such as the Golighers’, where everything is above suspicion, where all phenomena can be demonstrated with the greatest ease to be genuine to the last detail, things happen which to a superficial observer might appear fraudulent. For instance, sometimes the medium’s body, or portions of her body, make spasmodic kinds of movements when heavy raps or impacts are being experienced far out in the circle. These are simply the reactions due to the raps and are what we might expect. The seeker after fraud (who, by the way, is usually a person with no knowledge of science) immediately puts them down as imposture.”⁸



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¹ Crawford, W.J., *The Reality of Psychic Phenomena*, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1918, p. 12.

² _____, p. 11.

³ _____, p. 12.

⁴ Barrett, Sir William, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1917, p. 47.

⁵ _____, pp. 47-48.

⁶ Crawford, *Reality*, p. 191.

⁷ Barrett, p. 49.

⁸ Crawford, W. J., *Experiments in Psychical Science*, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1919, pp. 141-142.