

# SPIRIT MESSAGES OR VAGARIES OF SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

## Harvey O'Higgins Relates Startling Experiences With Ouija Board.

Millions of empty chairs in the homes in countries recently at war, and great war have sent humanity groping to the mystery of the ages—the ways and means of communication with the dead. In this article Harvey J. O'Higgins tells some of his experiences in the realm of the supernatural. His article is rated "neutral" in the spiritualist series which The Oregonian is presenting, but he explains away some of the objections voiced last week in relation to the contradictions of spirit messages. Without committing himself by saying whether such communications came from the dead or from the subconscious mind, O'Higgins says that "the subconscious mind will lie and cheat and mislead the conscious mind like a dual personality."

If you have ever used a ouija board experiment, this article will interest you.

Next week Ollah Toph, a friend of Booth Tarlington's, will contribute to the series an article called "The Psychic Gift."

### MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

BY HARVEY O'HIGGINS.

IF YOU are sitting at the dinner table, beside a man who is talking interestedly with another neighbor and you say to him, in a low tone, "The salt, please," he will reach out for the salt cellar and pass it to you while he talks, without being aware of what you have said or what he has done. He has heard and responded, "subconsciously," as the psychologists say.

If you put him at a writing-desk, with his arm through a screen and a pencil in that hand, and then interest him in conversation, his hand will write words and phrases that he will not be conscious of writing; and this "automatic writing," too, is "subconscious."

If you hypnotize him and take him back over his past, you will find that he remembers accurately a thousand things that he could not recall by any effort of his conscious memory. And scientific investigation shows that this subconscious memory contains a record of all his experiences; that it is a perfect record; and that what we ordinarily call our "memory" is really a "getter," a guard at the door, a censor who chooses what shall be permitted to enter our present from our past.

Experiments have been performed with persons who have developed the faculty of automatic writing and with trance-mediums who are, so to speak, self-hypnotized; and these experiments have proved that the subconscious mind is apparently able to read unuttered thoughts, to transmit thought, and to communicate freely with other subconscious minds, without being hindered by any of our ordinary limitations of time and space. In many of the records of such experiments, there are instances of communicated thoughts that seem to be messages not from living persons, but from the dead. It is upon such instances that men like Sir Oliver Lodge and James H. Hinton have based their belief in spiritualism, in the survival of conscious intelligence after death and its ability to communicate with the living.

Now it seems that this subconscious mind is uncontrollably tricky. It is as irresponsible as dreaming. It will lie and cheat and mislead the conscious mind like a dual personality. And consequently all study of it and all experiments with it are beset with peculiar difficulties, with many liabilities of error, and with real danger to the individual who attempts it. For example, if you experiment with it on your own mind, it is apt to "split the consciousness," to weaken the control exercised by the conscious mind, and to develop a tendency to what is professionally called "hysteria." It is probably for this reason that the recorded history of the phenomena of automatic writing is so clouded with proofs of imposture, with exposures of trickery and fake mediums and procured "manifestations." On account of such deceits, the whole subject has been discredited for many people. There remains the fact, however, that skilled investigators, guarding expertly against deception, have been convinced that the spirits of the dead can send messages to us through the subconscious mind, in spite of the various tricks of that untrustworthy messenger.

The matter is vital and important. The theory of the subconscious mind and the evidences of its power are themselves as weird as any ghost story. You are at liberty either to believe in spiritualism or in a sort of "consciousness" through which we can receive and send messages unknown to ourselves, about matters of which we are otherwise ignorant, under conditions which we do not understand. We may either believe in the power of the dead to return without their bodies or in the power of the living to see and hear and communicate with each other without their bodies. Either conclusion is sufficiently miraculous. The editors of this paper do not wish to make the choice for you, but to present some of the evidence and arguments upon which the choice has to be made.

In the young days of spiritualism in America, it was by means of table-rapping and table-tipping that messages were received "from the dead." That is to say, a circle of persons sat around a table with their hands upon it; one of them called out the letters of the alphabet; and when the proper letter had been reached, "the spirits" rapped or tipped the table. The form of the ouija board and its method of operation are relics of such early seances. A sort of doll's table, triangular, with three legs that are felt-tipped, stands on a board on which are printed the letters of the alphabet, figures from one to ten, and the words "yes," "no," and "good-bye." Two or three persons sit around the board with their finger-tips resting lightly on the letters. Consequently, messages from the dead" are spelled out as the triangular table moves about on the lettered board, pointing out the letters with the table leg at its apex.

Automatic writing and the messages of trance-mediums are now more often used than the called out letters of those professionally interested in spiritualism. Amateurs have been warned against experimenting with automatic writing. The trance-medium is, of course, not easily accessible. But no occult power is needed to operate the ouija board; there is no dividing of consciousness consequent upon its use; the operator need not have any faith in spiritualism necessarily; and there are few people who cannot make it spell out messages even when they approach it merely for amusement.

The causes of the movements of the ouija table and the origin of the messages that it spells out are still as much in dispute as all the other phenomena of spiritualism. Sir W. F.



Harvey J. O'Higgins



Drawing by George Wright.

Barrett has found that the messages can be obtained even when the operators at the table are blindfolded and the letters on the board have been changed in the order after the blindfolding. But apparently very little scientific investigation of the ouija board has been attempted. It has been left as a parlor amusement for amateurs. Of the published records of its use, the most notable is the recent column in which collected the messages, poems, etc., obtained under the apparent "control" of a woman of colonial days who called herself "Patience Worth."

It was with the ouija board that we obtained our "messages from the dead."

### The Author's Experiences.

The excitement began for us with a message from a man who gave his name as "John Lafayette," and gave it so authoritatively that none could doubt him. One of us said: "It must be a French soldier. We asked him if he were a French soldier, and he replied: 'Bureau of statistics.' To a question about what he had done in the bureau of statistics, he answered: 'Clerk of census.' And the little three-legged table on the ouija board circled from letter to letter of the alphabet in convincingly clerical flourishes as the clerk of the census spelled out his replies.

It was a Sunday afternoon. There was a November storm outdoors. We were all tired of reading, and no visitor had come in to share the blazing coal fire of the grate. Consequently, every one applauded the arrival of John Lafayette. None of us believed in spiritualism. None of us believe that the ouija board would bring us messages from the dead. The board had been bought as an entertaining toy—in a toy shop by a member of the household who had read "Patience Worth"; and it was vaguely supposed to operate according to laws of "subconscious suggestion," of which none of us professed to know anything. Two young women had sat down, in a mood of skeptical curiosity, to not doing it. Really, I thought you were." And then the other: "That would be stupid. I'm playing fair. Look, my finger tips are just touching it lightly. I couldn't move it. See?" And so forth.

### John Lafayette of Omaha.

When these preliminary doubts and accusations had subsided they were succeeded by an atmosphere of amusement. Some one asked where John Lafayette had lived. He answered: "Omaha." Some one else asked if he had been married. The little table slid up to the word "No." A bachelor asked facetiously: "Were you engaged?" The table moved across the board to point to the word "Yes." They asked: "To whom?" And the pointer leg of the table spelled out "Alma Atkinson."

There was something convincing about that name, and a number of questions were asked more soberly. In reply to these John Lafayette said that he had been 36 years old when he died of "necrosis" at a "sanitarium" on November 3, 1915.

None of us knew what "necrosis" was, and while we were still discussing it, one of us asked, amused: "Well, John, have you a message for any one?" He answered: "Yes." "What?" "Wait. Listen," he said. "He has a message. Well, what is it?"

Letter by letter—and not in easy circles and sliding flourishes, but with agitation and eager haste—he spelled out: "Kiss our baby."

Our amusement passed. It was as if we had stumbled, smiling, into a scene of private grief. It struck us with a chill.

We asked: "What is the baby's name?" He replied: "Allie." A diminutive of "Alma," evidently.

"How old?" "Six months." A posthumous child, then—since Lafayette had died in November, 1915, and this was November, 1916—unless he meant that the baby

### DOES THE OUIJA BOARD FAKE?—O'HIGGINS FRANKLY DOESN'T KNOW.

"I do not know whether or not these extraordinary messages are factual. I do not know whether there ever lived a John Lafayette in Omaha, an Arthur Cage in Providence, Texas, or a Cane Varley in Georgetown, N. Y. I do not know whether any of the persons exist to whom the messages were to be delivered. I am entirely outside of any controversy that can arise about the matter. So are the others who received the messages; and that is a point which I wish particularly to guard. We do not offer these messages as evidence either for or against spiritualism, telepathy, or any sort of occultism. We know nothing about it. The messages came without any volition on our part, without any conscious assistance from us, and without any credulity to influence us toward an unconscious assistance. We received them skeptically, irresponsibly, with curiosity, but with no convictions about their origin or their accuracy."

### Another Sitting With the Board.

I offer it as evidence of the incurable levity of mankind that, with such a weird enigma still unsolved, we allowed more than a month to pass before we returned to the ouija board. A second seance was held on the night of December 24, 1916—last Christmas eve—from 9 to 11. We were at a Christmas house-party in the country, and we went to the ouija board as part of the holiday gaiety, as we might have taken to consulting the mirror on Halloween. There were no spiritualists among us. Of the two women who sat at the board, only one had assisted at the previous sitting; the other was a stranger to the practice and the theory of the whole affair.

Almost at once the little table began to move, but with difficulty, squeaking as it slid about from letter to letter. When we oiled the surface of the board the movements became more free, but it did not at any time approach the choreographic fluency of John Lafayette. It moved abruptly, impatiently, and with an irascible jerk to the "No" whenever we misread the message.

At first we got only "Cage down south," repeated like an S. O. S. call you have forgotten. And then again "Cage down south Memphis." Finally we asked: "What is your name?" The reply was "Cage." We asked: "What is your first name?" "Arthur." Arthur Cage then was sending the message? We asked: "For whom is this message?" He answered: "Anna Frank." We asked: "Where is Anna Frank?" He answered, impatiently: "I told you—referring, apparently, to the Memphis in a previous message. We insisted: 'What address?' He replied: 'Niagara.' "Is that Niagara street?" "No." "Niagara Avenue?" "No." "Niagara what, then?"

### Another Sitting With the Board.

"What does she do?" "Uranium." "Federal Mining Co." "Where is it?" And the final answer—unfinished—was "88 Yet—Halifax."

It had taken us some hours to spell out these replies, letter by letter. One of the young women was tired and cramped, from sitting with her unsupported arms outstretched to the moving table. She withdrew her hands, and John Lafayette returned to what summoned from.

Subsequently, when we got an Omaha directory in the New York public library, we could find no Alma Atkinson in it, no Frank X. Wagner, no Federal Mining company, no Budd street and no Halben avenue. It seemed plain that we had been the victims of one of those hoaxes that the human mind plays upon itself. But on consulting my notes of questions and answers, I found that in our excitement we had taken it for granted that these were Omaha names and addresses because Lafayette said he had lived in Omaha. They might be anywhere else in the United States. We could be sure only that they were not in Omaha. This was disappointing, but it was not conclusive.

The next time we were more careful.

### "Niagara place?"

"What number?" "35." An impatient spirit. His impatience was manifestly increasing. Where had he lived? "Providence, Texas." "What street?" "Alamo street." "Number?" "Thirty-three." Who was the "Helen" to whom he referred? "Helen Frank." "Who was Helen Frank?" He replied: "Sister." And then came this message: "Break neck on horse Anna evening of December 22, 1916."

In reply to our questions, he explained that it was "Anna Frank" who had been killed on horseback; that he, Arthur Cage, had died "Anno domini 1908" (as if reading it from his tombstone), "November 3" at "Sandusky, Ohio," of failure of blood supply; and that Anna Frank was Helen Frank's sister.

His next message was about another family. It read: "Anna Frank requests Mary Rose hide money from Benny so he won't"—and then, after a pause, quickly—"hide Mary's gold."

In reply to our questions, he said that Mary Rose lived at "1236 Stanton street, Remington, Texas," that Benny was her husband, that Anna Frank was her cousin, and that he, Arthur Cage, was her brother.

We asked: "Why hide money from Benny?" He answered snappishly: "Benny wastes life on fool's desires." We continued: "Any other message?" "Yes. Unload stocks."

Ever mystery of silence he had been "What stocks?" "KAND—"

"Is that Kand?" "No. KANDMT"—apparently intended for K. M. & T., Kansas, Missouri & Texas.

"Who owns this stock?" "Anna. For Helen." "We asked: 'To whom should we write?'" He replied, again impatiently: "The Helen I told you of."

"What is Helen's address?" "16 Franklin street, Memphis, Tenn."

Well, that was all clear enough. Anna Frank, killed only two days previous, was using her cousin Arthur Cage—who had been dead eight years—to send messages to her sister, Helen Frank, about various family matters.

We invited Arthur Cage to continue. He began: "Risingles—"

That did not spell anything. We he answered, "No." "What is it 'Risingles?'" "Spell it again."

He repeated: "Risingles." Someone suggested: "Perhaps it's R. S. Ingles." He replied: "Yes." "Well, go ahead." "Ought to marry Helen." We asked: "Why?"

### "Helen" Wanted Money.

He answered: "To save Anna's mind on this side. Wants Helen have her money." And in reply to our questions, he explained that "R. S. Ingles" was a "broker," whose address was "246 Rutter street, Memphis, Tenn."

We asked: "Any more messages?" He replied: "Have Helen bury Anna in vault." We asked: "Any more?" He replied: "Worried Helen gives shocked death Anna." "This was not clear, and it was given with an effort of irritable haste. When we asked "Anything else?" he replied "No." Some one put a question to him and he shoved the table off the board abruptly—and departed.

Here were three addresses that could be verified: R. S. Ingles of 246 Rutter street, Memphis, Tenn.; Helen Frank of 16 Franklin street, Memphis, Tenn., and Mary Rose of 1236 Stanton street, Remington, Tex. Did these people really exist? Did they know anything of an Anna Frank, 25 Niagara Place, Memphis, Tenn., who had been killed horseback riding on the evening of December 22? Did they know an Arthur Cage, of 43 Alamo street, Providence, Tex., who had died in Sandusky, Ohio,

### in 1907? If they really existed—if

these names and addresses were not merely the product of some "subconscious fictionist" among us—then it was as easy, apparently, to get messages from the dead, on the ouija board, as to get messages from the living on the telephone; the mystery of survival after death had been solved; the sphinx had spoken.

There was only one flaw in the proof. It was this: None of the information given us by Arthur Cage—accepting it at its face, value—was unknown to the living. The skeptical might argue that it was not the mind of the dead Arthur Cage that we had tapped, but the mind of the living Helen Frank, or Mary Rose, or R. S. Ingles. From that point of view we had not proved anything but thought-transference—a thing sufficiently mysterious but not perhaps supernatural.

Well, that objection was somewhat overcome by a message which we obtained, at another sitting, on the night of January 12, 1917. The two young women who had been in communication with John Lafayette were at the board again. The table began to move at once. One of them asked: "Are you a man or a woman?" It replied: "I am a man." And this is what followed:

"What is your name?" "Cane." "What is your first name?" "Cane." "What is your last name?" "Varley." "Where did you die?" "FR—" a pause, and then "Sanford."

"Where?" "Georgetown." "Where is Georgetown?" "New York." "What is 'Sanford?'" "A friend." "What is his first name?" "Tedrow." "What street?" "Durland." "What number?" "4." "Have you any message to give?" "Yes." "What is it?"

Neither of the young women was watching the board. They had been asked not to. And as Cane Varley spelled out his message they listened to a conversation, aside, that was going on among the others in the room. They took down on paper the letters of the message as the pointer-leg of the table indicated them, and no one else knew that the message was. It began: "COMBUPONTRUCK—"

I asked: "Is that word 'Truck?'" One of the young women said: "Truck? What do we care about his truck? Let's get something more exciting."

The table repeated "TRUCK," and continued: "RUININSTOREHEAROFSA FEGETMONYHIDIDENTHER."

I asked: "What's that last word?" The table repeated, "THERE."

They asked: "What is it? What does he say?" He had evidently said: "Come up on truck run in store, rear of safe. Get money hidden there."

In reply to our questions, he explained that the store was "Marion Brothers" store on "Howell street" in Georgetown. We asked: "What number in Howell street?" and he replied: "No number." We asked whose money it was and he said "Sanford."

"Who is this money?" "Jake Sanford." "Why did he hide it?" "For ed—"

"For Ed?" "No. For devilment." "How much is it?" "A thousand shares." "Goodrich Rubber. United States Gum Prf—"

"It that 'Gum preferred?'" "No. Gum Preparations." So, behind the safe in Marion Brothers' store on Howell street, in Georgetown, N. Y., there were hidden 7000 shares of stock of the Goodrich Rubber company and the United States Gum Preparations company. (None of us had ever heard of the latter company.) Here was a fact that was obviously unknown to the living—except Jake Sanford, and he was apparently

concealing it. In order to prove, beyond any reasonable doubt, the survival of identity after death it was only necessary to go to Marion Brothers' store and take these stocks from their hiding place. (None of us knew Georgetown. None of us had ever heard the names of any of these streets before.)

We continued with Cane Varley: "What happened to you?"—meaning to ask him how he had died. He replied: "Tired." "Tired?" "No. Tried to come back." "Where did you die?" "Easter week." "What year?" "A year ago." "What did you die of?" "Uremic poisoning." "How old were you?" "Fifty." "Where did you live?" "Georgetown." "What street?" "Howell street." "What number?" "No number." "For whom is this message?" "Ralph Ph—" "Ralph who?" "I—" "Ralph I?" "No. Phippa." "Where does he live?" "Georgetown." "What street?" "Varley street." "Give us your name again." "Cane Varley." "Have you any other message?" "Knock ought to destroy willa." "Who is Kn—" "Jake's brother." "Whose willa?" "Sanford."

That ended the sitting. It was midnight and the operators at the table were exhausted. There was no probability that we could get a message more determinative of the whole mystery than this one about the hidden money. We decided to rest on it.

Now, on the previous day, I had been talking to an editor about a series of articles of spiritualism. He had invited me to prepare an article for the series. It was a subject of which I knew practically nothing. I explained that our recent adventures with the ouija board were my only experience in occultism. I related what had happened, and he invited me to write it up.

This confronted me with a peculiar dilemma as I laid out and reconsidered the material in my notes. If I investigated Arthur Cage's names and addresses—if I investigated a search for Cane Varley's hidden stocks—and succeeded in proving the accuracy of our messages from the dead, we might incur the suspicion that we had obtained the information in advance and then pretended to discover it through the medium of the ouija board. The only result would be a general question of our good faith. Equally so, if I investigated and found that the names and addresses—and the stocks—were purely imaginary. Then the believers in spiritualism might argue that we had invented false messages purposely in order to cast ridicule upon the phenomena of their faith. And it occurred to me that if I published the messages, as they stood, without knowing whether they were true or not, I could escape the charge of having "planted" them, if they were true, and the odium of appearing to ridicule any honest religious conviction, if they were not true. And the curiosity of humanity in Memphis and Georgetown and Annapolis and Sandusky and Providence and Remington would undertake an investigation of it. It would be all much more thorough than any I could instigate.

That is the situation, then. I do not know whether or not these extraordinary messages are factual. I do not know whether there ever lived a John Lafayette in Omaha, an Arthur Cage in Providence, Texas, or a Cane Varley in Georgetown, N. Y. I do not know whether any of the persons exist to whom the messages were to be delivered. I am entirely outside of any controversy that can arise about the matter. So are the others who received the messages; and that is a point which I wish particularly to guard. We do not offer these messages as evidence either for or against spiritualism, telepathy, or any sort of occultism. We know nothing about it. The messages came without any volition on our part, without any conscious assistance from us, and without any credulity to influence us toward an unconscious assistance. We received them skeptically, irresponsibly, with curiosity, but with no convictions about their origin or their accuracy.

I am publishing them in that spirit. They are evidence of what? I do not know. I do not wish to offer evidence and at the same time act as the judge and jury on that evidence. I merely offer the evidence.

But it seems to me that this evidence is important; that these messages offer a crucial test of much that has been published about communications from the dead. If they are true messages to living people it seems difficult to doubt the reality of conscious existence after death. If they are untrue, then it is possible for any person innocently to invent names, addresses, personalities, involved stories and convincing details of all sorts from his subconscious imagination, and to impose upon his own conscious mind and the conscious minds of others by unconsciously reproducing these inventions as messages from another world. Either the messages are true messages, or the human mind is so tricky that no merely colorable evidence of immortality—such as that offered in "Patience Worth," for instance—can be accepted as proof of existence after death. If we, in complete innocence, could deceive ourselves by producing these elaborate fabrications, it must be a simple matter for others, in equal innocence, to produce such messages as the newspapers have recently been printing from William James and Hugo Munsterberg; and the only difference being that the messages from James and Munsterberg contain nothing that can be either proved or disproved, whereas our messages from Arthur Cage and Cane Varley will be known, within a day of their publication, either as illusions of the subconscious mind or as veritable communications from the dead.

Will anyone who can either prove or disprove any detail of them write about it to the editor of this paper? (Copyright, 1919, The Metropolitan Newspaper Service.)

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