

Intriguing Evidence from the Past

DROP-INS OFFER GOOD EVIDENCE OF SURVIVAL

by Michael E. Tynn

When a spirit identified himself as “Abraham Florentine,” none of the three men present recognized his name. The spirit told them that he had lived in Brooklyn, New York, USA and had died earlier that month, on August 5, 1874, at the age of 83 years, one month, and 17 days. The only other factual information related was that he had fought in the War of 1812.

Those receiving the message were the Rev. William Stainton Moses, an Anglican minister and the medium, Dr. Stanhope Templeman Speer, at whose house on the Isle of Wight the sitting was taking place, and a third man, unidentified.

Florentine was what is referred to as a “drop-in” communicator. He apparently saw the medium’s “light” and simply “dropped in,” even though he didn’t know anyone there. The three men were seated around a heavy dining table while receiving messages by the rap method, i.e., the sitters would recite the alphabet and a rap would be heard at the desired letter. However, instead of raps, the table began to rise and tilt as Florentine communicated. The sitters then received messages by reciting the alphabet and observing a tilt at the desired letter. According to the report of the sitting, the table would rise and then begin to quiver several letters before the desired letter. When the desired letter was reached, the table descended with a thump that shook the floor.

In the December 12, 1874 issue of the *Banner of Light*, a Spiritualist publication, the editor requested that if any readers happened to know anything about Mr. Florentine to contact him. When Wilson Millar, an American lawyer living in Washington, D.C., saw the story, he wrote to the editor and informed him that his job involved auditing the claims of the soldiers from the War of 1812 and that the name Abraham Florentine appeared in the records as number 11,518. Millar suggested that the editor write to the Office of the Adjutant General of the State of New York for additional information.

On January 25, 1875, Franklin Townsend, the adjutant-general, replied to the editor’s request and informed him that Abraham Florentine was a private in Captain Nicole’s company, 1st Regiment, New York Militia, and that he had volunteered on or about September 2, 1814 and was honorably discharged after three months service. For his service, he received land grant warrant No. 63,365.

Upon reading the follow-up report in the *Banner* about the verification of Florentine’s existence, Dr. Eugene Crowell, a Brooklyn physician, checked the Brooklyn directory and found the name Abraham Florentine listed at 119 Kosciusco St.. Curious, Crowell then went to the address and was greeted by Florentine’s widow. She informed Crowell that her husband had died the prior August 5 at age 83. Crowell asked for his birth date and was told that it was June 8. That would have made Florentine 10 days older than he had stated, a discrepancy that could not be accounted for, except for by a simple mistake or possibly by Florentine actually leaving his body 10 days before his physical death. His wife reported that he was confined to bed for more than a year before his death.

The 10-day discrepancy aside, the case offers excellent evidence for the survival of consciousness at death. Certainly, Moses's character cannot be impugned. "With the even tenor of this straightforward and reputable life was inwoven a chain of mysteries which, in whatever way they may be explained, make that life one of the most extraordinary which our century has seen," wrote Frederic W. H. Myers, the Cambridge scholar who co-founded the Society for Psychical Research.

Like most members of the orthodox clergy, Moses had frowned upon mediumship until he and Dr. Speer were persuaded to attend a séance on April 2, 1872. During that sitting, Moses received some very evidential information about a friend who had died. His curiosity aroused, Moses attended other séances, including some with D. D. Home, the renowned Scottish-American physical medium. Moses had earlier referred to Lord Adare's book on Home as the "dreariest twaddle" he had ever come across. Dr. Speer, who had shared Moses' early view, calling it all "stuff and nonsense," then joined Moses in the investigation of Spiritualism. Before long, Moses discovered he had mediumistic abilities.

In an earlier "drop-in" case, on March 25, 1874, a spirit communicated through the table and identified herself as Charlotte Buckworth. Rector, Moses's spirit control, explained that she had no special connection with anyone there but was permitted to speak because she chanced to be present. "The conditions were unfavourable for our work," Rector explained. "We were not able to harmonise the conditions, which were disturbed."

Rector then explained that Charlotte Buckworth had passed into the spirit life in the year 1773. "She passed away at the house of a friend in Jermyn Street, whither she had gone on a party of pleasure," he offered. "She will probably be able to say more to you, but we have no control over her." Rector added that the woman had been occupied in her special sphere of work after awakening from a long sleep, and had not been brought within the earth's atmosphere until lately. "She is attracted to circles where harmony prevails, being herself of a loving nature."

Moses asked Rector the cause of death. "Weakness of the heart, increased by violent dancing," Rector replied through the table. "She was but a thoughtless girl, though of a gentle and loving disposition."

Moses later checked the *Annual Register* for the year 1773 and found that a woman named Charlotte Buckworth had indeed died that year "at a festivity in a fashionable house."

Shipwreck victim communicates

In his book *Heaven and Hell*, Allan Kardec, the famous French researcher, told of a message received through a Le Havre medium on December 8, 1863. A friend came through first, but said he had to step aside in order to let unhappy and suffering spirits come through. "I'm in a horrible abyss! Help me!...O my God! Who will take me out of this whirlpool?" one such vanquished spirit communicated, going on to say that he could see his body. "...I see my body; and what I felt a moment ago was only the remembrance of the frightful anguish of the separation..."

The vanquished spirit, a "drop-in," identified himself as Ferdinand Bertin. It was subsequently determined that Bertin was the victim of a shipwreck off the coast of France on December 2, six days before the message was received. It was reported that Bertin had perished in making superhuman efforts to save the crew of the lost vessel.

“Although his death had taken place several days before, the spirit was still undergoing all its anguish,” Kardec analyzed the communication. “It is evident that he did not understand his own situation. “He fancies himself to be still alive and struggling with the waves, and, at the same time, he speaks of his body as though he were separated from it; he shouts for help, and, a moment afterwards, he speaks of the cause of his death, which he recognizes as having been a punishment; all this denotes the confusion of ideas which usually follow violent death.”

Kardec wrote that Bertin again communicated two months later, on February 2, 1864. “The pity you showed for my horrible suffering has given me relief,” Bertin communicated. “I begin to hope; I look forward to forgiveness, but after the punishment of my crime. I still suffer, and if I am permitted, for a few moments, to foresee the end of my affliction, it is only to the prayers of charitable hearts, who feel for my misery, that I owe this consolation.”

Bertin then said that he felt calmer when able to communicate through the medium. “Your prayers do me good; do not refuse them to me! I would fain not fall back into the hideous dream that becomes a reality when I see it.”

Several days later, Bertin communicated through another medium. Kardec asked what prompted him to manifest through the first medium. “...I think I must have been led to the medium by a will superior to my own,” he replied, adding that he did not understand it. He further said the he had no conception of time.

As the late Professor David Fontana, a psychologist and physical researcher, saw it, such “drop-in” communicators provide strong support for the survival hypothesis, since they are unknown to the medium or sitters and the evidence cannot be derived telepathically from any of them. “What would have prompted the medium’s unconscious mind to identify each of these sources, and how would that same unconscious mind know how to assemble the fragments concerned into a coherent persuasive whole?” Fontana asked.