

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Resurrecting Leonora Piper: How Science Discovered the Afterlife**

by Michael Tymn. Guildford, United Kingdom: White Crow Press, 2013. 232 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-1908733726.

This is a book that offers many of the recorded transcripts of Leonora Piper's mediumship experiences with various sitters starting in 1885 when William James began taking an interest in her. According to the author, it is an

attempt to explain the dynamics of her mediumship, including the difficulties associated with it, and to offer some of the best evidence for survival of consciousness after death that came from her mediumship. (p. xv)

The sessions with Mrs. Piper took place in both England and the United States over a period of 25 years. They numbered in the hundreds and were observed and recorded by many of the most distinguished scientists and academicians of the day, including Richard Hodgson, William James, Sir Oliver Lodge, Frederic Myers, and Professor James Hyslop. The intent was to offer as much evidence as possible to either support or refute the nature of mediumistic communications and whether they truly come from discarnate entities.

The vigor and amount of time and energy that went into examining Mrs. Piper was unprecedented. Many of the most distinguished scholars, most of them initially intent on exposing Mrs. Piper as a fraud, took their research very seriously and subjected Piper to the highest standards of vigorous scrutiny. In addition to determining whether conscious fraud was involved, the researchers were also interested in determining whether Piper got her results through telepathy or "super-psi."

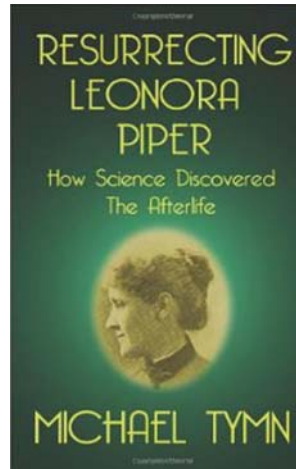
Chapter 1 provides a brief review of Mrs. Piper's early life and how she came to be a trance medium. After providing some startlingly accurate information about the son of a certain Judge Frost, word soon got out about her abilities and she began doing sittings for friends and relatives with some success. Soon William James heard about her and had a number of sittings with her in addition to arranging others with friends, relatives, and associates. He ended up so impressed that he labeled Mrs. Piper his "white crow" (p. 14), reflecting his often repeated quote that "in order to disprove the assertion that all crows are black, one white crow is sufficient."

Chapters 2 and 3 describe Richard Hodgson's beginning involvement with observing and recording Mrs. Piper's sessions and her evolution in becoming a much sought after research subject by some of the world's most esteemed scientists at that time. Hodgson, one of the main researchers, continued sitting with her on the average of three times a week for 18 years between 1887 and 1905 (p. 196). His initial skepticism, like all the others', turned into a firm belief that she was not a fraud, and he suggested that leaders of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) invite her to England for further observation and testing. It was at that time that a Dr. Phinuit became her spirit entity "control," which involves the taking over of the body of an entranced medium. Much of the rest of the book consists of recorded transcripts of her sessions with various sitters and evidence which attempts to substantiate the existence of survivalism.

As one reads the transcripts of sitting after sitting, the question of how Mrs. Piper could have known so many detailed and accurate facts becomes more and more compelling. With the possibility of fraud removed, how could Mrs. Piper receive such intimately detailed and largely accurate information from deceased friends and relatives of the sitters? That is why much of the evidential offerings directly or indirectly deal with whether Mrs. Piper received her information through some form of telepathy, either personal or cosmic. There are many sittings that seem to refute those possibilities. They include details the sitter did not or could not have known about. Here are just a few:

— George Pellew, one of Mrs. Piper's other deceased controls, provided information to a sitter, John Hart, about a conversation Pellew had had with the 15-year-old daughter of some friends of Hart about "God, space, and eternity" that Hart did not know about but which was later verified. (p. 66)

— James Hyslop's deceased father asked him what he remembered in a conversation they had one evening in a library about the father's description of the Bible including a discussion they had about hypnotism, apparitions near the point of death, and Swedenborg. Hyslop remembered all of it but could not recall discussing Swedenborg. However, when he talked to his stepmother about it, she remembered it well because she did not know about Swedenborg and discussed the latter with her then-still-living husband after Hyslop left for the day. (p. 100)



— Another sitting also involved Hyslop's deceased father asking about his old horse, giving the horse's name, Tom. The father indicated that an old friend had moved west and that he had had a dispute over putting an organ in their church with a second friend. As Tymn states, "the latter two facts were outside the scope of mental telepathy as Hyslop knew nothing about them, although he later checked with relatives and found them to be true." (p. 101)

More evidential sittings:

— A deceased brother said that he could hear his sister playing the piano. Hodgson, who was alone with Mrs. Piper and taking notes, recorded the time as 11:26 a.m. and sent a telegram to the parents after the sitting, asking if the daughter had been playing the piano that morning. The mother replied by telegram that her daughter had been playing between 11:15 and 11:30. Normally, she would have been in school at that time but bad weather kept her at home. (p. 113)

— A sitter named Robbins heard from a control named Rector. He introduced her to a deceased physician who gave her some advice on her health. The latter told her that he formerly lived in Boston, but had died in Paris a year or two earlier. Robbins later confirmed that a physician by the name given her had lived on Beacon St. in Boston and had died in Paris the preceding September. (p. 133)

— One especially evidential message came through another medium. Mr. Lodge's son Raymond had been killed on the battlefield in Ypres on September 14. Approximately two weeks later, Lodge and his wife saw a medium named Mr. A. Vout Peters. At that time, the deceased Raymond came through and referred to a group photograph in which he was holding a walking stick. Neither Lodge nor his wife could recall any such photograph. Then, during a later sitting with another medium, a Mrs. Leonard, they asked Raymond about the photograph. Raymond communicated that it was a group photo of his army unit, that he was sitting down while others were standing, and the person behind him was leaning on him. Four days after that sitting, Lodge and his wife received a letter and photograph from the mother of one of Raymond's fellow officers. Raymond was sitting, with a walking stick across his legs and the arm of the man behind him resting on his shoulder. The photo had been taken three weeks before Raymond's death. (p. 190)

An important evidential source at the time called cross correspondences involved automatic writing mediums receiving messages in the privacy of their homes. There were no sitters or researchers present. Basically, cross-correspondences involved fragmentary messages coming through two or three mediums, which when joined together formed a coherent message. It was a scheme devised by the not-yet-discarnate Frederic Myers before his death but to take place after his death (p. 174).

One of the more simple cross correspondence experiments involved SPR researcher John Piddington communicating with Myers through Mrs. Piper asking Myers to attach a sign to any message he might send through another medium, suggesting a circle with a triangle in it. Such a sign came through the automatic writing of a medium 12 days after Piddington's request. Then the same sign came through another medium although the triangle was not in the circle. (p. 176)

In summarizing, Tymn states that

the fact that information unknown to (people like) Hyslop but later verified as true was communicated seemed to rule out simple person-to-person telepathy. As for a more cosmic telepathy—one in which the medium taps into minds and memories anywhere in the world or into some cosmic computer and then relays the information back to the sitter in a conversational manner—Hyslop felt that there was no adequate scientific evidence for such a theory and that it represented a process far more incredible than spirits. (p. 104)

Tymn concludes that many of the facts communicated were not recorded anywhere, and at times the sitters were unaware of things told to them and had to verify them as facts through others. In addition, Mrs. Piper also spoke or wrote in foreign languages she did not know. She also did trance writing as well as trance voice, and Hodgson observed that a sitter's deceased sister communicated by having Piper write with one hand with George Pellow communicating through the other while Phinuit was talking—all simultaneously on different subjects (p. 75). Tymn concludes by saying that

with all of the foregoing hypotheses ruled out, at least highly unlikely, it would seem that the spirit, or spiritistic, hypothesis makes the most sense. (p. 200)

He also notes that it is unfortunate that people today remain largely unaware of the extraordinary sessions of Mrs. Piper and the unparalleled research of people such as Hodgson, Lodge, Hyslop, and James in examining them. As with diamonds waiting to be unearthed, the world will gain immeasurably from the eventual sparkle of so much brilliant and profound evidence regarding the survival of consciousness after death.

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