

Transcription, January 2015:

The Times (London) No. 28736 (16 Sept. 1876): 7e.

[p. 7e]

‘A Spirit-Medium.’

To the Editor of the *Times*. Sir,—I trust that you will find space for a brief account of an interview with “Dr.” Slade from which I have just returned. In consequence of the more than questionable action of Mr. Alfred Wallace, the discussions of the British Association have been degraded by the introduction of the subject of spiritualism, and the public has learnt—perhaps it is time they should—that “men of science” are not exempt as a body from the astounding credulity which prevails in this country and in America. It is, therefore, incumbent upon those who consider such credulity deplorable to do all in their power to arrest its development.

My friend Mr. Serjeant Cox having begged me to go and see the medium Slade, and having informed me that so distinguished a man of science as Dr. Carpenter had confessed himself “very much shaken” by what he had witnessed in Slade’s presence, I wrote to that person and obtained an appointment for last Monday morning. Slade’s chief “manifestation” is of this kind:—The witness and Slade being alone in an ordinary well-lit sitting room, Slade produces a common slate and a small piece of slate pencil, which are laid on the simple four-legged table, at one corner of which the witness and Slade are seated. Slade then shows the witness that there is no writing on either side of the slate. He then places the slate horizontally close against the table and below it, pressing the slate against the table, the little piece of slate pencil being supposed to be between the slate and the flat under surface of the table. The slate is so closely applied to the table that no hand or finger could possibly get between them in order to write. A noise as of writing is now heard proceeding from the slate, which is held by Slade or by the witness—the spirit is supposed to be at work. The slate is then removed, and a message is found written either on the under surface of the slate or on the surface which was facing the lower surface of the table. I watched Slade very closely during these proceedings, which were repeated several times during my interview last Monday, paying no attention to the raps, gentle kicks, and movements of the table, of which I will say nothing further than that they were all such as could be readily produced by the medium’s legs and feet. I simulated considerable agitation and an ardent belief in the mysterious nature of what I saw and heard. At the same time I was utterly astounded to find the strongest reason to believe that, with the exception of the first message, which was written by Slade underneath the slate with (I believe) one finger of the hand which was holding the slate, the rest of the messages, which were longer and better written, were coolly indited on the slate by Slade while it was resting on his knee, concealed from my view by the edge of the table, and that the slate was subsequently placed by him in the position where the spirit-writing was to take place with the message already written upon it. I was led to form this hypothesis by noting the delay which always occurred between my being shown the slate with both sides clean and the placing of the slate against the table or over my head for the purpose of receiving the spirit-writing, which was then heard proceeding with the usual sound of scratching on a slate. This delay did not occur when Slade wrote with the finger of the hand by which he held the slate. During the delay Slade made various excuses; took up the little piece of pencil and bit it, and also invariably made a peculiar grating noise by clearing his throat. At the same time I heard distinctly on three occasions a low but perfectly recognizable sound of a pencil traversing a slate, and twice on looking quickly at Slade’s right arm, the elbow of which was

visible, while the rest was hidden by the table and purporting to be holding the slate, I saw movement from right to left and left to right which accorded with my hypothesis that he was using his hand in writing.

I left Slade with a promise to return to-day (Friday), and at once wrote to Mr. Serjeant Cox to tell him my explanation of the manner in which the thing was accomplished, and offering to put my hypothesis to the test by seizing the slate from Slade's hand when he professed it to be devoid of writing, and at the moment when the "spirit writing" was about to commence.

This morning I went with my friend Dr. H. B. Donkin, of Queen's College, Oxford, to test my hypothesis by this crucial experiment:—I had determined to seize the slate at the critical moment—at the moment when Slade professed that it was entirely untouched—and if the writing were already on the slate before the spirits were supposed to have begun their work I considered that I should have a demonstration of the truth of my hypothesis, which would be convincing to persons not already lost to reason. I explained to Dr. Donkin my hypothesis and my intention, and the result has completely justified my anticipation. As on last Monday, so to-day, Slade allowed me to hold the slate against the table in order to receive the spirit writing, saying that the spirit would probably write more distinctly for me than for him. The slate had been cleaned and was now declared by Slade to be devoid of writing, but writing was to appear in the usual way, accompanied by the scratching noise of the pencil. There had been the usual delay and fumbling on Slade's part when I put out my hand and immediately seized the slate away, saying, "You have already written on the slate. I have watched you doing it each time." And there, sure enough, was the message already written, as I had anticipated. My friend, Dr. Donkin, will give you a more detailed account of the events which occurred in his presence.

I am, Sir, faithfully yours,

E. Ray Lankester, F.R.S.,

Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, and Professor of Zoology in University College, London

Sept. 15.

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.