

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM**

### **BC Saul**

In the Bible, Saul consulted mediums and was condemned for it. (1 Samuel 28)

### **1st Century Jesus Christ**

The various Christian sects have been opposed to Spiritualism in varying degrees. Yet Jesus Christ is regarded by Spiritualists as a great master. He displayed many of the qualities and performed many acts, which they accept as an essential part of Spiritualism. He healed the sick, heard voices; he was transfigured on the mount. He told the robber beside him on the cross that "today you will be with me in paradise", and he appeared to his disciples after his death.

### **1st Century St. Paul**

St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians speaks of matters that Spiritualists can easily identify with.

1 Corinthians 12 (Good News Bible version) verses 4-11

'There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way to each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom while to another the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person; he gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles, to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts, which come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. But is the one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person.'

### **1744 Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)**

Swedenborg was one of the earliest forerunners of Spiritualism. He was a Swedish philosopher and scientist who was knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects including metallurgy zoology, anatomy, physics and the Bible. In 1744, at the age of 56 he started to write about the spirit world, telling of his experiences during dreams whilst asleep and during visions whilst awake. He claimed he was in contact with biblical characters, kings, popes and saints and that they described the next life as very similar to this, and that communication was possible between the two worlds.

### **1844 Andrew Jackson Davies (1826-1910)**

Exactly one hundred years after Swedenborg had started writing about Spiritualism, Andrew Jackson Davis, an 18-year-old apprentice shoemaker in Poughkeepsie, New York, went into a semi trance and wandered into the mountains, 40 miles from his home in New York. He claims to have met the spirits of Swedenborg, and the 2nd Century Greek physician Claudius Galen. Although he had no education, from that time he started to teach and write about the body's supernatural powers. He dictated, in trance, a book entitled The Principles of Mankind, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind which took 15 months to write, and was written down by a minister. In the book he predicted the following:-

## **1844 Andrew Jackson Davies (1826-1910) - continued**

"It is a truth that spirits commune with one another while one is in the body, and the other in the higher spheres, and this, to when the person in the body is unconscious of the influx, and hence cannot be convinced of the fact: and this truth will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration. And the world will hail with delight the ushering in of that era when the interiors of men will be opened, and the spiritual communion will be established...."

On the 3 1st March 1848 the following words were dictated:-

About daylight this morning a warm breath passed over my face and I heard a voice, tender and strong, saying "Brother, the good work has begun - behold a living demonstration is born."

## **1848 The Fox Sisters**

The living demonstration that Andrew Jackson Davis referred to, turned out to be an event that is considered as the birth of modern Spiritualism. On the actual day that he dictated those words, two sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, who lived in Hydesville, New York started to communicate with spirit. Their father, John Fox, tried to find out what the strange noises were in their small wooden cottage. He rattled the windows and a rattle came back in reply. The sisters started asking questions by tapping and getting replies with a simple code of one rap for "yes" and two raps for "no". They established that the communicator was a peddler who had been killed by previous occupants and buried in the cellar.

The news quickly spread through the community and a few months later John Fox started digging in the cellar and found hair and bones that were believed to be human. (It was not until 56 years later in 1904 that it was reported that, following the collapse of a wall close to the cellar, a complete human skeleton was found).

The noises in the cottage got louder and the family could stand it no longer. The two sisters were sent away by their parents, Kate to stay with a brother David and Margaret to stay with another sister, Leah who lived in Rochester. The raps and noises continued in both houses.

Margaret was later to confess twice, in 1851 and in 1888 and Kate in 1888, that the rappings were a fraud, yet they also retracted the confessions, saying that they had only done so to help them out of financial difficulties.

## **1849 First Spiritualist meeting**

This was the first public meeting of a group of people who called themselves "Spiritualists". They met on November 14th in the Corinthian Hall, Rochester, where the Fox sisters gave a public demonstration. They had now been joined by their older sister Leah who went on to become the first professional medium.

## **1854 Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge**

The Society was the first Spiritualist organization in the USA and was founded in New York by a wealthy merchant.

## **Emma Hardinge Britten**

Emma was born in England and became a talented musician. She went to work in America for a theatrical company. She traveled with her mother on the steamship 'Pacific'. She became very friendly with the ship's officers and returned to the docks each time the 'Pacific' was due to arrive. In February 1856 she went to the docks to see the ship as she was also expecting a parcel. The ship was delayed by storms however. That night Emma felt a spirit presence and she told her mother, who had already become interested in Spiritualism having followed stories of the Fox sisters who had first heard the rappings in their family home in Hydesville, New York in 1848. She was also friendly with a medium, Mrs Kellogg. On her mother's instruction Emma laid out the letters of the alphabet on a table and her hand spelt out the following message, 'Philip Smith, Pacific. My dear Emma, I am come to tell you that I am dead. The ship 'Pacific' is lost, and all on board have perished; she and her crew will never be heard from anymore.'" She couldn't sleep that night, although she doubted what she had been given. In the morning she went to house of the medium, Mrs Kellogg. As she climbed the stairs to the apartment the medium came out in a trance and spoke exactly the same words as the message Emma had received. The news was later confirmed as true.

Emma was converted to Spiritualism and went on to meet Kate Fox who was giving sittings in a rented room in New York. She toured all over the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Britain giving trance lectures on Spiritualism. These meetings brought increasing hostility from the Church and skeptics and people who attended were the subject of verbal and physical abuse: in a southern state of America there was even a threat that anyone attending would be lynched. Emma, persuaded by her mother, eventually returned to England where Spiritualism had already become established.

## **1861 Spiritism**

A French astronomer, Camille Flammarion started a study of Spiritualism having read Allan Kardec's, The Book of Spirits, which had a central belief that reincarnation was essential for spiritual progress, an idea which is not normally held by Spiritualists. 'Spiritism' became the French version of Spiritualism and was later to become firmly rooted in South America.

## **1868 Daniel Dunlas Home (1833-1886)**

D. D. Home was born in Scotland and inherited psychic abilities from his mother and after her death had several visions of her. He went on to become the most famous physical medium of his day. He held joint sittings in London with Kate Fox. He is perhaps best remembered for his demonstrations of levitation. On the 13th December 1868 he went into a trance at a Spiritualist séance in London. He levitated and floated out of a top floor window. He was seen hovering over the street for a short time then returned to the house through another window.

## **1873 British National Association of Spiritualists**

The Association was established in 1873 and ten years later in 1883 became the Central Association of Spiritualists.

## **1876 Spiritualism comes to the American Heartland**

Spiritualism came to Ottawa County, Kansas in 1873. The movement gained momentum when, in 1876, a group of people came to Delphos from a Wisconsin community where Spiritualism had flourished. The first meetings were held in local homes. Due to the lack of space in the home meeting place they continued to hold meetings on Lindsey Creek in a picnic grove. They became known as the Universal Church, which is said to be the earliest religious organization in the area at this time. The Methodist, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches also came to this area in the 1870's.

## **1879 Lily Dale Assembly**

New York spiritualists come together to form the Lily Dale Assembly outside the town of Cassadaga NY.

## **1881 First Association of Spiritualists is formally organized**

In 1877 the group went to Delphos, Kansas with 13 members, which grew to 92 in a few years. The original charter was issued by the State of Kansas in 1881, to this group of Spiritualists. The first charter states, "This Corporation shall be The First Association of Spiritualists of Delphos, Ottawa County, Kansas." "The purposes for which this corporation is formed are the attainment and promulgation of knowledge, religious, scientific, and educational." An amended charter was issued in 1891.

## **1882 Society for Psychical Research**

Sir William Barrett, a professor of physics in Dublin called a conference in January 1882 out of which was created the SPR with the aims of examining telepathy, hypnotism, apparitions and physical phenomena of Spiritualism.

## **1887 Two Worlds**

Emma Hardinge Britten founded the magazine Two Worlds and was, for 5 years, its first editor.

## **1890 Spiritualist's National Union (originally called the Spiritualists' National Federation)**

The SNU was set up by Emma Hardinge Britten to bring together the many different churches under one banner. It's main function is to "promote the advancement and diffusion of the religious philosophy of Spiritualism, on the basis of the Seven Principles."

## **1890's Infighting between Spiritualist organizations**

In the last few years of the 19th century there was great infighting between the various Spiritualist organizations. Some were opposed to the Christian idea of heaven and hell. Eventually, the Central Association of Spiritualists joined the SNU.

## **1891 Camp Chesterfield**

John Westerfield and the Indiana Association of Spiritualists opened Camp Chesterfield along the banks of the White river in east central Indiana.

## **1900's Growth of Spiritualism**

After a period of infighting, from the latter part of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century were times for growth and consolidation. Famous Spiritualists and people interested in promoting spiritualism were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, Dr Alfred Russel Wallace, Lord Dowding

## **1931 Greater World Christian Spiritualists Association (GWSCA)**

Spiritualists, in general, accept that Jesus Christ existed and gave valuable doctrines and a code to live by. They do not however, place a great deal of importance on his divinity as the Son of God.

In the 1920's a series of trance addresses received through the mediumship of Winifred Moyes, expressed the belief that Jesus Christ was indeed the son of God and as such had a great part to play in the spiritualist movement. They also believed that communication with the spirit world was possible and that this was a lost aspect of the Christian Religion. By amalgamating Spiritualism and Christianity they achieved a halfway position between the two beliefs. The GWSCA was formed in 1931.

## **1930's Mediums of the time**

Apart from Maurice Barbanell, other famous mediums of the period were Hannen Swaffer, Estelle Roberts, Helen Duncan, Mrs Lyons, Ethel Post Parish, Frank Decker, Louisa Ashdown and Hester Dowding.

## **1932 Psychic News**

The Psychic News is a weekly newspaper was founded by Maurice Barbanell, a trance medium who gave some of Spiritualism's most inspirational works from his spirit guide, Silver Birch.

## **1934 First Association of Spiritualists moves to Wells, Kansas**

Due to the death of many and the fact many had moved away from the Delphos area, the camp was dismantled and moved to Wells, in 1934. A local resident had dug a basement on his land in Wells, Kansas and planned to build a house over it. Finances being short, he sold the lot to the Spiritualists.

## **1936 White Dove Lodge**

The White Dove Lodge was founded by Mineseta and Brother Faithful and went on to have lodges worldwide. They redefined Spiritualism and do not place any importance on the actual communication of spirit, more on the importance of living a spiritualistic life.

## **1939 The Church of England Report on Spiritualism**

The Church has, for a long time, denounced spiritualism as evil, saying that is forbidden in the Bible, the work of the Devil, and that it does not allow the dead to rest.

In 1937, as a result possibly of the growth of the Greater World Christian Spiritualist Association, a Committee was formed by the Church of England to carry out an investigation into Spiritualism. The Committee was led by Archbishop Lang, Archbishop Temple and comprised of ten others including a Bishop, a Dean, a professor, Psychologist and a Barrister.

## **1939 The Church of England Report on Spiritualism – continued**

The Committee produced its report in 1939, which was favorable to Spiritualism. It concluded that,

"If Spiritualism, with all aberrations set aside and with every care taken to present it humbly and accurately, contains a truth. It is important to see that truth not as a new religion, but only as filling up certain gaps in our knowledge, so that where we already walked in faith, we may now have some measure of sight as well. It is, in our opinion, important that representatives of the Church should keep in touch with groups of intelligent persons who believe in Spiritualism. We must leave practical guidance in this matter to the Church itself."

The Report was published in the Psychic News and other newspapers throughout the world, and apart from one protest from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church of England preserved a stony silence and did nothing to incorporate the beliefs of Spiritualism into Christianity.

## **1944 Helen Duncan**

Helen Duncan was probably the most prominent medium of her time. Though her career was dogged by the authorities. This persecution often detracted from the true work Helen carried out for spirit. The London Psychical Laboratory, in 1931, claimed her mediumship was flawed, and Helen was also convicted of fraud in 1933. In 1944 she gave a series of séances in Portsmouth. A naval officer felt her information inaccurate; he left, returning with a policeman, who arrested Helen under the 1735 Witchcraft Act. After being released from prison, Helen continued her work. In 1956, at one of her séances, Helen was conducting materialization. Unfortunately, the police made a raid; the shock, and the possible withdrawal of ectoplasm back into her body, may have accelerated her death, which happened five weeks later.

## **1950's Spiritualism**

Spiritualism was widely accepted as a religion.

## **1966 Sunset Camp sets corner stone of present day Church building**

After being a spiritual center in the Midwest for over 90 years, on July 24, 1966 saw the culmination of their dream when the corner stone was set and the dedication held for the current Sunset Church building.

## **Today**

Sunset Spiritualist Church and Camp is seeing a virtual rebirth as interest in Spiritualism grows in popularity. Today there are over 1000 Spiritualist Churches and teaching centers throughout the United States.

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