

## A PUZZLING CASE.

A STATEMENT OF DR. O. O. BURGESS, COMMENTED UPON BY  
DAVID P. ABBOTT.

[We have received the description of a curious seance from Dr. O. O. Burgess who suggested that this "Puzzling Case" be submitted to Mr. David P. Abbott. While Mr. Abbott abstains from touching upon mediumistic manifestations which he has not witnessed himself, the comments which he has to make throw light on all performances of the same class. ED.]

### THE STATEMENT OF DR. BURGESS.

ONE would hardly expect any proof of the future life to reach his ear in the dark through an aluminum horn. But if it was not what it purported to be, the puzzle is to know what else it could have been. Like your valued contributor, Mr. Abbott, I have usually had little trouble in arriving at a solution of such puzzles. But this one stumps me, and I should be glad to have him help me out, if he will kindly do so. For I am satisfied that the "spirit" in this exceptional case did not inhabit the medium's body, and Mr. Abbott seems as anxious as I am to be convinced that the spirits of departed friends may really live without any bodies whatever. It is a plain proposition that there can be no life without wear and tear upon the means of its production. To believe in the future life, therefore, one must confess that he believes in something that utterly passes his comprehension. But we not only believe in many uncomprehended things but know them to be true. Just as we will believe in this trumpet affair—that it was done by spirit agency—unless some one can point out how else it could be done. There will be doubting Thomases in any event; but the writer, with seventy-five years of life behind him, cannot help feeling that he will soon be in a position to know the truth of the matter—or else to be lost in the depths of utter know-nothingness.

The puzzling occurrence alluded to took place at a trumpet

seance which, for precautionary reasons, was held at my own house; and the medium and members of my own household were the only persons present. None of those present except myself had ever seen the medium before, and I had simply met her once to make arrangements for her coming. She was an intelligent, middle-aged woman of somewhat reserved but agreeable manners, and she came alone to the seance bringing no paraphernalia with her except the trumpet. She never to my knowledge advertised herself or gave public seances.

She readily consented to be bound to her chair in such a way as to effectually prevent any movement of her hands or body, and the tapes she was bound with were finally tacked to the floor so that the chair itself could not be moved without detection. In fact, in the stillness of the room it would have been impossible for any person to move about without attracting attention. Having taken these precautions, it seemed a foregone conclusion that any trickery or collusion with confederates on the part of the medium was simply out of the question.

The trumpet occupied a position several feet in front of the medium, and after a tedious wait in the dark, we were finally startled by hearing it move. Shortly afterward faint whispers were heard through it which soon became so strong as to be partly or wholly understood. And now jocularity gave place to intense interest, and the anomalous character of the proceedings was lost sight of as the names of friend after friend were feebly given. No one could help sympathizing with them in their heroic efforts to be heard and understood. And not all of these efforts were made through the trumpet. Clearly some of the whisperings were outside and independent of it.

Not much of details will be necessary to my present purpose. Suffice it to say that, one after another, the trumpet came close to every one of us, giving the names of departed friends and relations most of whom had never been within thousands of miles of San Francisco. But the marvel was how the trumpet could move about so rapidly and unerringly in the dark, caressing us gently on the hands, cheeks, top of the head and elsewhere, and occasionally dropping to the floor with a thud as though the force which sustained it was well nigh exhausted. Once, indeed, it fell near me with sufficient force to drive the two sections of it together so that I had to pull them apart again before the performance could be proceeded with. As a further illustration of the mysterious forces employed, raps, some of them loud and jarring, were occasionally heard upon

the doors and walls of the room in various places, and once the tall doors of my bookcases were rapidly swung back and forth a number of times as if to make sure that it had attracted attention. No person in the room was in a position to have swung the doors or made the raps without leaving their seats, and thus attracting attention. Many remarkable things were said by the trumpet voices, but I pass them by as merely cumulative evidence.

The puzzle is to account for the remarkable doings of the trumpet which were as much or more mystifying than its sayings.

It is needless to add that when the lights were turned on the medium was found securely bound in her place as we had left her when the lights were turned out.

#### MR. ABBOTT'S REPLY.

I have read the communication of Doctor Burgess, and it is evident that he is quite critical, and that this case is worthy of attention. I have attended trumpet seances quite recently; also rope- and tape-tying seances, but have not attended a seance where the two were combined.

I take it for granted that the persons present were all so nearly related to the Doctor, that the possibility of confederates being employed was entirely out of the question.

As the Doctor says, I should be glad to prove personal immortality in any manner if possible to do so, yet I should want to be quite certain that there was no resort to trickery in the case. I have investigated so many cases and found so much fraud that naturally I always expect to find it.

It would be no reflection on the Doctor, if he were deceived by a clever trick, for the most intelligent are easily deceived by an art with which they are not familiar.

It would be impossible for me to explain the exact method this medium used, unless I could see her work. I can only describe work of a similar nature with which I am familiar, and explain how it is done. I am aware that this does not prove the present case to have been clever trickery; yet if this work is duplicated frequently by trickery, it is strong evidence that the medium resorted to the same means in this case.

In regard to rope- and tape-tying, I will not enter into a detailed explanation of the various tricks of the kind used by professional mediums and conjurers, as this would require altogether too much space. Suffice it to say that the Davenport Brothers originated the first rope-tying experiments. They were bound in

the most thorough manner, and left in their cabinet; when the most marvelous manifestations would take place as soon as the curtains were drawn. It was supposed that spirits appeared in the cabinet through the occult powers of the Davenports, and performed these maneuvers in order to convince unbelieving mortals. It was many years before the secret of their original tie was discovered. I will refer the reader to the work, *The Spirit World Unmasked*, by Henry Ridgely Evans, for a full account of this.

Soon after the appearance of the Davenports, other mediums experimented and invented many different ties. Finally the conjurers took the subject up, and the secrets of such ties became common property. One has but to witness Kellar, the magician, on the stage using his best spirit tie, to realize the possibilities of this art. The committee tie his hands together behind him very tightly; yet he will instantly bring either hand forward and exhibit it, place it behind himself, and turn his back; when his hands will be seen to be tied together as tightly as ever. The committee think that they tie his hands in their own way.

Yost & Co. of Philadelphia, dealers in magical apparatus, spiritualistic secrets, etc., advertise for sale the secret of a tie which they call "Kellar's Best Tie."

It is doubtful if any rope-tying experiments ever performed were equal to that of the Davenports. Their work was surely the greatest mystery of the kind ever exhibited before the public. The following passages I quote in full from *The Spirit World Unmasked*.

"In the dark seance, flour was sometimes placed in the pinioned hands of the Davenports. On being released from their bonds, the flour was found undisturbed.

"This was considered a convincing test; for how could the brothers possibly manipulate the musical instruments with their hands full of flour. One day a wag substituted a handfull of snuff for flour, and when the mediums were examined, the snuff had disappeared and flour taken its place. As will be understood, in the above test the Davenports emptied the flour from their hands into secret pockets, and at the proper moment took out cornucopias of flour and filled their hands again before securing themselves in the famous slip-knots.

"Among the exposés of the Brothers Davenport, Hermann the conjurer, gives the following in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*: 'The Davenports, for thirteen years, in Europe and America, augmented the faith in Spiritualism. Unfortunately for the Davenports they appeared at Ithaca, New York, where is situated Cornell Uni-

versity. The students having a scientific trend of mind, provided themselves before attending the performance with pyrotechnic balls containing phosphorus, so made as to ignite suddenly with a bright light. During the dark seance when the Davenports were supposed to be bound hand and foot within the closet and when guitars were apparently floating in the air, the students struck their lights, whereupon the spirits were found to be no other than the Davenports themselves, dodging about the stage brandishing guitars and playing tunes and waving at the same time tall poles surmounted by phosphorescent spook pictures.’”

Tape-tying was not originated until after rope-tying had become quite common. Annie Eva Fay used a tie called “The Cotton Bandage Test.” She was seated on a stool which was placed against a wooden post, the latter being screwed tightly to the floor. Her wrists were bound tightly with cotton bandages, and the spectators were allowed to sew the knots thoroughly and place court-plaster over them. These bandages were tied tightly together behind her and fastened securely to the post, the knots being sealed. She bewildered a committee of English scientists, yet the secret of her tie is well known to conjurers at the present time.

The reader can find a full explanation of this tie in *Shaw's Magical Instructor*, or in the above-mentioned work by Mr. Evans from which I quote the following:

“One of Annie Eva's most convincing tests is the accordion which plays, after it has been bound fast with tapes and the tapes carefully sealed at every note, so as to prevent its being performed on in the regular manner. Her method of operating, though simple, is decidedly ingenious. She places a small tube in the valve-hole of the instrument, breathes and blows alternately into it, and then by fingering the keys, executes an air with excellent effect.”

There is a celebrated medium in Kansas City who submits to a tie allowing the tapes sewed to the carpet, and corn meal is placed in his palms, where either it or other meal will be found after the performance. The manifestations are very convincing, yet recently a “spirit” was “grabbed” at one of his seances, and it proved to be the medium. This was written up in a daily paper there, as among those who grabbed him was a reporter.

I have an acquaintance, an ex-medium, who is quite expert at the tying tricks. He permits himself to be tied to his chair, yet he can instantly release, and replace himself in the ties. It is very instructive to watch him do this. There is no doubt but that a clever

artist, in the art of rope- and tape-tying, can instantly release himself from almost any tie, and as quickly replace himself.

Such being the case, the fact that the medium was well tied in the Doctor's case can hardly be regarded as evidential. While this lady may not have done so, yet the probabilities are that she either escaped bodily from the ties, later replacing herself; or, that she secured the free use of her hands, so that she was enabled to perform the necessary maneuvers.

In case the lady escaped, she probably slipped around the circle handling the trumpet. She could thus drop the trumpet, recover it, whisper through it, etc. She could also make the raps with it, or with a "telescopic reaching rod." This latter is made of aluminum and when closed is but little larger than a lead pencil. Such appliances frequently extend six feet or more when fully drawn out. Being of aluminum they are very light. They have a hook on the end for hooking into the handle of the trumpet or other objects to be floated.

Sometimes the rod is made as a tube. The medium can then insert a small mouthpiece and whisper or speak in the end of it. The voices will appear to be at whatever location the farther end of the tube occupies at this time. Sometimes this tube is inserted into the small end of the trumpet; and in such cases the trumpet can go very high in the room, even to the distant corners, and at the same time have a voice in it.

The reader will readily see that it would only be necessary for the medium to get the free use of her hands to manipulate this tube; and that she would be able to produce the raps with the end of it, swing the book-case doors, etc. As the tube is but little larger than a lead pencil when closed, it would be very easy for her to conceal such an appliance in her clothing, and as soon as her hands were free, proceed to conduct the manifestations.

It would not be necessary to leave her chair at all. The aluminum trumpets are very light, and for this reason they can be manipulated so that the touches on the sitter's heads are but little more than a caress, and it is very easy to manipulate them. They and the telescopic tubes can be purchased at the mediums' supply depots for a nominal sum.

The mediums who perform the most marvelous appearing work use the telescopic tubes very frequently. They do not all submit to being tied but quite frequently allow a sitter to hold their hands and feet. This is regarded as more convincing than if the medium be trusted beyond the sitter's reach, although he may be securely tied.

In some of my articles I have described these holding tests, and the little deception by which the medium gains the free use of one arm with perfect safety.

In some cases the medium has a cage of iron tubing, or heavy wire large enough to cover his person. He is seated on a stool, and the cage is placed over him and securely screwed to the floor. Wax is then placed on the screw heads and sealed. The trumpet and other articles are placed near the cage and all of the manifestations take place when the lights are put out. He reaches the telescopic tube through the open-work of the cage and manipulates the articles.

I had an acquaintance with a medium who talked through a trumpet very often. She informed me that it requires considerable practice to talk well through a trumpet and let no sound escape near the mouth. It is an art of its own, as it were.

In some trumpet seances the lights are not put out but merely lowered until quite dim. The trumpet is laid on the floor in front of a cabinet, and voices issue from it. This usually occurs at the medium's own home. In such cases a concealed rubber tube lies under a loose rug; and when the trumpet is laid on the floor, this tube is secretly slipped into the small end of it. This tube runs into the cabinet where sits the medium, who inserts a mouthpiece and does the talking. In case of the medium hearing any sudden movement among the spectators, she quickly draws the tube into the cabinet, and conceals it in a pocket under her clothing.

In some cases the trumpet is laid on a chair in front of the cabinet and voices seem to issue from it. In this case there is no connection, but the medium in the cabinet has a second *telescopic* trumpet concealed under her clothing. When the curtain is dropped, she secures this trumpet and extends it, holding it near the curtain directly behind the other one. The sounds seem to listeners outside to issue from the trumpet on the chair. This illusion is perfect, as the sounds have the tone of the trumpet, are in line behind the one in view, and the attention is directed to the trumpet on the chair just as a ventriloquist directs the attention of the spectators to his "figure."

I am digressing some, as these last methods could not have been used in the case the Doctor describes; but I believe the reader will pardon this digression, for the sake of this additional information. While I am dealing with the subject of trumpet seances, independent voices and dark seances, I shall take the liberty of describing some more work of this kind.

When a medium works in his own home, it is an easy matter

to have speaking tubes whose openings are masked by picture moulding or other objects. These lead to the confederate who can, by a system of switches, send the voices into the room through any or all of the tubes at will. Such sound appears to come out of the very air and is difficult to locate. The origin of sound is difficult to locate anyway, and in such cases it is much more so.

At one time I heard a report of a case where independent voices followed a young girl out in the open air, and would on occasions converse with her. A certain party accompanied her to a well, and heard a voice speak out in the open air and address her. I do not know if such report were entirely true or not, as the opportunity to investigate the case was lost when I heard of it; but the idea occurred to me that it would be very easy to lay a small iron pipe under ground from a house, and have it terminate in a well near the surface. Its termination could easily be masked and a confederate in the house could send voices into the top of the well at will. To one unacquainted with the secret, the voice would be extremely difficult to locate. Of this I am certain, from some experiments I once conducted, wherein I sent voices through some hundreds of feet of pipe which ran through a public hitching rack. Passers-by at the farther end would think themselves addressed by some one near them, and would look around in a very foolish manner in search of the speaker. We boys thought this great sport.

By this means, voices can be made to appear on a lawn in the open and will seem very mysterious to a small party. A small half-inch pipe can be laid under the ground near the surface and terminate under an urn, the roots of a tree, or even in the grass just below the level of the earth. It can be kept corked to prevent moisture from entering when not in use, and if the grass be a trifle long and the entrance of the tube a trifle below the surface of the ground, it would escape discovery. Of course it should only be used in the evening, in a dim light, *and then used but sparingly*. If two or three of these were located in different positions, and used sparingly, marvelous reports would go abroad, of the mysterious voices heard in the open air by persons when there. After using, the cork should be re-inserted, a little moist earth placed over it, and the grass rearranged and sprinkled.

I have a letter from a gentleman in Oldtown, Kentucky, who reports to me a seance where in the twilight he saw a trumpet move across the floor, out into the yard and up into the branches of the trees. I have the name of the medium who produced this manifestation. I do not know the means she used, but I know a means by



which I have caused other articles to move across the floor. The secret was a thread pulled by a concealed assistant, and which of course was invisible. If I were producing this manifestation, I should lay a strong black linen or silk thread on the floor, out of the door, on the lawn, and then up over a limb in a tree. From there I should lead it to a concealed assistant, who at the proper time should draw it in. I would have a soft copper-wire hook on the end of the thread, which I should secretly bend around the handle of the trumpet when laying it on the floor. When the trumpet should catch in the branches of the tree, the assistant could, by pulling on the thread, straighten out the wire hook, drawing it in, while the trumpet would drop to the ground. In case the trumpet had no handle, a small hole near the rim would attract no notice. The wire hook could be passed through this hole. I have no doubt that this was the means employed.

At one time I fitted up my home with a number of mechanical rappers under the floor in different positions. The threads that operated them all entered the room through some tiny holes in the floor back of a couch. My wife lay on this couch, apparently resting, and secretly manipulating the threads. I had most marvelous raps which would seem to move to any position asked for by the spectators, and would answer questions intelligently. The effect was very great, although I always afterwards informed my spectators that it was not spirits. I had one set of strings which caused a piano to voluntarily strike chords when I should desire. I have seen nervous ladies greatly frightened by these manifestations.

Mediums claim that spirits have a horror of light-waves and that certain manifestations can only occur in the dark. It is true that the *manipulating spirit has a horror of the light*, and that certain manifestations can only take place in darkness. If any one will have the courage at such times, to suddenly flash a pocket electric light on the trumpet, it will not be necessary for him to be a performer in order to discover the secret of the manifestations. There is not a reliable report in the country, where at any time any one suddenly flashed one of these lights on a trumpet seance, that he did not find the medium or the confederates at work producing the manifestations in a very simple manner. It seems to me that if in any instance such a phenomenon were genuine, there would some time be a case where these exposers would find something not a trick.

A lady medium from Lincoln, Nebr., recently informed me, that the dark seance is rapidly losing prestige since the manufacture of the pocket electric light. She said that these were being used

on the trumpet mediums all over the country with disastrous results, and that the profession would soon have to drift into other channels of trickery. She also told me of a medium who uses his chandelier to bring voices secretly into his room; and that he hangs the trumpet on the chandelier and the voices appear to issue from it, while in reality they issue from a number of tiny holes in different parts of the chandelier.

I look at the question of spirit communion somewhat in this manner: We all have a spirit while we live. This spirit cannot perform a physical miracle. For it to talk, nature has found it necessary to develop vocal organs. Without these no living spirit can talk. To move objects, physical contact and force are necessary. Without these, no living spirit can move objects. Why should any disembodied spirit, (if such exist), be able to execute any act which it could not execute if in the body; or, in other words, why should it be able to perform a miracle?

The theory of certain psychical researchers whom I know seems to be something like this: Spirits of the dead can only manifest themselves through the organism of some person fitted for their control. Such organism is what they term a medium; and they are very doubtful about any physical manifestations being genuine.

As to the information which the voices gave the Doctor, I am not in a position to judge; for I do not know what opportunity the medium may have had secretly to learn the history of those present. However, many tricks are used successfully, even in this feature of the work.

#### EDITORIAL CONCLUSION.

Dr. Burgess having read the proofs of Mr. Abbott's reply writes:

"I like the tone of Mr. Abbott's reply. He is certainly master of the subject in hand. But the puzzle still remains unsolved for none of the tricky methods he speaks of will apply in this particular case. This is not to say that, had he been present, his wide experience and special aptitude might not have uncovered some other fraud. But I doubt it."

On behalf of Mr. Abbott, who cannot see this comment of Dr. Burgess before the present number goes to press, we will repeat that he expressly refrains from explaining any particular seance which he has not himself witnessed, yet he discusses enough parallel cases to indicate that the one in question is no more mysterious than others.