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Alec Harris physical

medium

The Mediumship of Alec Harris

The true nature and excellent account of Alec Harris's mediumship is provided in his wife's book, "They Walked Among Us," from which much of the following information is taken. Although originally out of print, it is once again available, thanks to a final gesture of the Noah's Ark Society shortly after they finished.

Alexander Frederick Harris was born in Treherbert, in the Rhondda Valley, in 1897. After his family moved to Cardiff, he left school when he was fourteen and was employed at a local cinema; he then spent four years in the Royal Engineers during the First World War. He later recounted to Louie, his wife, the terrible experiences of those years.

Louie met Alec after a friend, related to the Harris family, took her to meet the Harris household, but it was not until 1923 when she met Alec again; this led to their marriage in 1928. Living in Whitchurch, a son, Bradley, was born in 1932. Louie reported how two years later, 'a

dreadful thing' happened, this being Ted, her brother, becoming a Spiritualist. He had not only become an adherent, but was preaching and working as a medium. According to Louie, the family 'fell silent as we contemplated the terrible fate which had overtaken Ted'. Despite family remonstrations, Ted refused to jettison his beliefs and Louie recalled how his behavior prompted her to develop some interest towards the subject. In fact, Louie had some knowledge concerning survival before her marriage to Alec: her father claimed to hear voices, but this was greeted with amusement by other family members. As he lay dying, he confirmed his conviction in survival and promised Louie that he would make his continuing existence known to her: his mannerism changed, he called out the names of two of his dead brothers, smiled and then died. From thereafter, Louie kept her dying father's promise in mind.

The next event leading to Alec realizing his mediumistic abilities was when he had to call on business on a Mr. Hewitt and took up conversation with Mary, his wife. She then said something that 'caused Alec to beat a hasty retreat'. This being that she was a Spiritualist and furthermore, he possessed mediumistic qualities. Notwithstanding Alec's initial reaction, he and Louie had occasion to meet the Hewitt's again, and the subject of Spiritualism was often discussed in considerable detail. Louie was persuaded to attend a Spiritualist church and was impressed by what she saw: in stark contrast, Alec 'would have no part of it'. Despite this, shortly afterwards, Louie and Mary decided to attempt table-tipping in the house. When this happened, Alec erupted and demanded that they stop, so Louie and Mary therefore left the house and went elsewhere to do this; and on doing so, they duly received evidence. However, when Louie returned home, Alec could only tell her that she would end up in an asylum, and warned that he would participate on the next occasion to show it up for the nonsense that he believed it was. On the next attempt, with Alec present, it was discovered that there was intelligent communication when Alec pressed his hands on the table, e.g. from Connie, his beloved sister who had died in 1923. Alec was still sceptical and asked the communicator personal questions and these were correctly answered. As Louie recalled about Alec's stance: 'Up to that point he believed all spirit communication was a well- handled hoax. Contact with his "dead" sister moved him greatly'. Further events occurred that indicated Alec's mediumistic abilities, and aware of the situation and unable to combat it any longer, he began healing work. During this activity, he went into trance and not long afterwards, Louie saw Alec undergo transfiguration when a communicator became apparent and advised Louie that he was Alec's principal guide. In view of what was taking place, a circle was held regularly.

One frequent communicator was Jolkim, a young Russian who had died in the First World War. He always re-enacted the events that led to his death that caused trauma to both Alec and the circle, and he often complained about 'being sent' to work with the circle. There was understandable relief when he no longer attended the circle for some months and that when he returned, he behaved in a more acceptable fashion. In fact, Louie said that he 'became one of our band of trusted guides'. In time, other controls made themselves known and they provided direction and protection to Alec as he sought to develop his mediumship, at this time being mainly concerned with healing.

The next stage in Alec's story was the multiple-bereavement in the family of Maggie, one of Louie's cousins. She was a Pentecostal Christian whose three daughters had died, one after the other, of tuberculosis. Despite being overcome with grief she had no desire to seek evidence of their survival, viewing such practices as devilish. She loudly condemned Ted when he tried to comfort her and suggested that she might be helped if she communicated with the girls. Later, one of the three daughters communicated at one of Alec's circles and asked that Maggie, her mother, be visited as she was ill. Louie traveled to her home and was met by Ted who had also received the same request from one of the other daughters at his own circle. They found Maggie seriously ill and in this state, her attitude towards her daughters was more open by virtue of the visitors knowing of her ill health and receiving this news almost simultaneously: Louie and Ted told Maggie (who died a month later), 'They want you to know they're not asleep in their graves awaiting a trumpet call of Christ's second coming. They are alive and with you now'. Further confirmation of the survival of family members was supplied to Alec when Helen Duncan demonstrated at the local church and Connie materialized. When Ted had a sitting with Mrs. Duncan, Maggie materialized and confirmed that what her Spiritualist family members had told her was correct. Louie was becoming a little anxious as she was expecting to hear from her father, but there was continuing silence. This was until a further visit by Mrs. Duncan to the church and Albert her guide announced there was a man who wanted to be there for someone in particular. Louie recorded: 'With that the curtains parted - and my beloved father stepped from the cabinet. He came forward, his arms outstretched to Mother', and a conversation between them ensued. The masking of the red light was removed and Louie recalls how, 'We looked closely at Dad...Every feature was clear'.

Impressed by what had been seen, one of Alec's controls was asked at the next circle about obtaining direct voice. The reply was immediate: they should acquire a trumpet and wait. In the meantime, a new control made him self known and one of the instructions that he gave was, 'to

sift and question all that purports to come from the Other Side. Never accept anything if your better judgment indicates that it is unacceptable'. Louie related that, 'this warning made us cautious of any manifestations we encountered'.

About this time, Louie and Alec began to experience physical phenomena in their own home, even in a lighted environment. With these occurring, Alec attempted automatic writing, which was successful. In the case of meditation to produce the phenomena, Louie objected to sitting in the darkness and when both she and Alec meditated, they used a red light: however, the controls invariably extinguished the light even to the point of destroying the light filament. Louie said of this: 'Time and again this happened. I felt a growing annoyance as the pile of broken globes increased'. As it was clear that the controls required darkness, Louie and Alec reluctantly complied; initially, no phenomena occurred, but in time, the trumpet moved: 'It rose, and glided silently across the mantelpiece, coming to rest on the opposite side. The trumpet avoided two vases which stood in its pathway'. Alec was delighted to learn shortly afterwards that it was not necessary for him to become entranced during séances for the phenomena to occur and was 'only too happy to be able to witness the proceedings himself for a change'. However, Alec far from happy with the instructions that followed, i.e. that to obtain the best results, he not only had to enter a trance, but use a cabinet. The idea behind this was to try and blend Louie's own voice mediumship: Louie recorded that Alec complained: "Why do I have to go into a trance? And why in a cabinet for Heaven's sake?". Nonetheless, Alec complied. With this new stage, Christopher, another guide joined the company and Louie noted that, 'One by one, these cogs, in the shape of friendly guides, began to operate smoothly in our circle'. Further modifications continued to be made, e.g. Alec being securely bound, and the benefits of these were witnessed at the Christmas séance when the usual extras were added to the room. Louie recorded her delight: 'The balloons were super normally removed...the spirit children...pulled down all the decorations. Tambourines were played with gusto. Little hands excitedly wound up toy cars, popped guns, played mouth organs and beat drums. It was all so unexpected.'

Louie detailed the continuing development of Alec's mediumship, e.g. how Alec demonstrated his abilities at locations other than his own home; nonetheless, Alec was beginning to feel the strain of what was entailed in his employment and mediumship, and both he and Louie decided to discontinue the physical sittings and concentrate on healing, which he preferred. Connie then communicated by direct writing saying that the circles should continue, but with Alec still registering his doubts, she consequently appeared before him: 'After that wonderful

experience, which convinced him that his dear sister was alive and near him, Alec was only too happy to sit again. The work went on'.

On Christmas night, 1939, a séance was held and after Alec had become entranced, one of his controls announced that an experiment was to be conducted. Alec was to be securely tied up and the speaker, 'with a note of amusement', told Louie to have her coat ready. The circle could hear different voices, including those of children, and in the moonlight that streamed into the room, the cabinet curtains could be seen billowing. This was followed by various items of Alec's clothing being passed out of the cabinet by materialized hands. Alec then came out of trance, and left the cabinet and noticing that he was no longer wearing his trousers exclaimed, 'What's going on around here?'; Louie quickly came to his assistance and draped her coat around him.

The landmark in Alec's mediumship was in 1940 when it became clear that the circle would soon enjoy the company of materializations. The members decided to meet for this purpose and on the first occasion: 'To their amazement a luminous ball began forming in the centre of the cabinet curtain. A face could be seen'. This was followed by similar occurrences. It was apparent that having obtained the initial stages of materializations, much more work needed to be done. Louie recorded how, 'As the weeks went by the figures grew stronger and stronger', and the sitters were delighted to see Connie materializing. Eventually, the coming of the 'dead' in material form was a common feature and Louie noted, 'Now I began to understand about the "great work" it was said we had to perform. I envisaged the enormous possibilities this type of mediumship would provide for helping the bereaved'.

As had occurred in the First World War, many mediums were able to bring comfort to the bereaved by demonstrating the survival of those slaughtered in the 1939-1945 War: Alec was one such medium. During these years, one woman was noticed at the local Spiritualist church and Louie became aware of a young soldier doing his utmost, albeit unsuccessfully, to make himself known to her. It was therefore suggested that she attend the next meeting of Alec's circle. She did so, and shortly after the séance began, a young man left the cabinet and, 'He held out his arms to the woman, saying, "Mum, it's Derry". She gave an anguished cry, jumped from her seat and went to the boy. He put his arms around her. The mother broke down and wept unrestrainedly in her "dead" son's arms'. Of further significance, the son materialized with the same physical deformity from which he had suffered before his death. Later, one person materialized and after calmly walking to the end of the room, he sat down and spoke, but in a foreign language (Alec could only speak English). One of the sitters, a Belgian and a linguist, was able to converse with him and discovered

that he was a Austrian Jew and one of the many victims of the Nazi extermination program at Belson. Other materializations came to the circle, and one sitter later told Louie that he was a police officer who had come to witness the events as the police knew about Alec's 'activities'. He added that he had been 'amazed' at what he had seen and heard, i.e. six different languages being spoken (one being Hindi); also, 'all those spirit forms who were recognized by people in the circle', adding 'this is the genuine thing all right'. When Prof. T. J. Haarhoff, a professor of classics, attended a séance, he spoke with a person who not only materialized, but spoke to him in ancient Greek and alluded to an earlier manifestation through another medium in Johannesburg, about which Alec knew nothing. Another example of communicators speaking in their native tongue was when Sir Alexander Cannon attended a séance and conversed with two Tibetans in their ancient, native tongue.

Reports of Alec's remarkable mediumship began to be published, e.g. in 'Two Worlds', Ernest Thompson reported how at the very first séance attended, fifteen different next-world visitors came to the circle, 'tall and short, fat and thin, male and female...some were visitors from other lands'. Another such report appeared in *Psychic News* (August 1946), provided by Maurice Barbanell: he wrote that in Alec's séances, 'spirit forms not only show themselves in good red light, but hold sustained conversations - after having walked about ten feet from the cabinet'. In the sitting that he attended, he stated that thirty different materializations made themselves present. Barbanell, always the one to notice the humorous aspect in such matters, also noted that a number of the figures made themselves comfortable in chairs and held long conversations but would suddenly get up saying that they needed more power. Then, 'they walked back [to the cabinet] and a few minutes later came out, moved across to the corner of the room, sat down and continued where they had left off'. He also commented on how the visitors did their utmost to demonstrate they were real, material people: one even stopped to straighten the carpet that had been rucked by another.

Earlier Noah's Ark Society Newsletters have included eye-witness accounts of Alec's mediumship. One, relating to a séance before the end of the War, detailed how the writer attended a séance on 13 June, 1945; all but one of the sitters on this occasion were not known to Alec or Louie. After the room was checked, including Alec's chair, that 'made a terrible squeaking' when the person seated upon it moved about, the séance commenced. Following the singing of some hymns and the sitters having become accustomed to the dark, a fifteen watt red bulb was switched on. A white form appeared but then disappeared; this was followed by a tall, thin man with a beard,

'dressed in a flowing robe...which must have had some luminosity of its own' who walked in front of the sitters, and in the case of the writer, was situated only four feet away. The man explained that attempts were being made to produce the materializations and he then returned to the cabinet; as he went back inside, Alec could be seen entranced in his chair.

Following this, twelve next-world visitors joined the sitters that night and demonstrated the tangibility of their forms. One of these was an elderly woman who was recognized by one of the sitters and also gave evidence of her identity. The writer recorded how the dematerializations were sometimes even more spectacular than the materializations: 'Sometimes, the forms lifted the cabinet curtains and walked in...At other times, evidently when they were almost dematerialized or the power was weak, they seemed to walk straight through the cabinet curtains and vanish. On yet other occasions...they seemed to melt and sink into the floor.

Alec's séances were also attended by avowed sceptics, one being A. Fletcher-Desborough, a stage illusionist. He was so convinced by the genuineness of the phenomena that he went as far as writing to the Liverpool Evening Express to describe what he had witnessed. In his letter he described how he had meticulously checked the séance room and cabinet, and was confident that: 'There was no chance for deception'. During the séance, he was reunited with his father, brother and young son, who were recognised and addressed him by the family pet-name that was used for him.

One example of the impression made by Alec is how even modern non-Spiritualist writings make favorable reference to his mediumship: in 1995, a detailed philosophical survey of the subject of survival, by R. W. K. Patterson, formerly a senior university lecturer in philosophy, was published. In this work, he refers to the physical evidence of survival and how certain mediums have been able to facilitate 'the production of full-form materializations'. Of those mediums whom he mentions as falling into this category, Alec Harris is one. One report in *Psychic News* detailed how a number of people attended one of Alec's séances, and one 'wore his gold cross as protection against anything malefic!' On arriving at the Harris's, they commented that 'you could not imagine a more warm and cosy couple, full of friendliness, plying us with cups of tea and generally exuding a kindly, simple goodness'. The visitors were asked to search the séance room, and they confirmed it was constructed of brick and the floor and ceiling had no exit.

After examining Alec, they took their seats in the front row. The room was lit by a single red bulb and the séance began in earnest with some

rousing singing. After half an hour passed, and the visitors wondered if they would witness anything, they recount: 'Suddenly the curtain opened. Out stomped a figure wrapped in white bath towels...Apparently he didn't find us too inspiring. He stomped back into the cabinet where we glimpsed Harris sound asleep...The effect was as if this entity had marched straight up to Harris and into him'. This was followed by another visitor who appeared to be recognized by some of the sitters. After this, 'a mysterious greenish light blazed out over the top of the black curtain...Then the curtain opened and the light blazed from the cupped palms of a tall figure swathed in white'. This figure reappeared several times and he was, according to the writer, 'intelligent, enthusiastic,, with a nice sense of humor, occasionally making a joke'. The visitors also witnessed some of the problems which can sometimes occur: 'I saw the face of one collapse and run away like melted ice cream'. Others began to fade after some time and had to move back to the cabinet very quickly. The writer at the end of the article, not surprisingly, confirmed that his scepticism had turned to an acceptance of the phenomena's reality.

In 1957, Alec emigrated with Louie to South Africa and there, Alec demonstrated his mediumship in private and public circles. Only the private ones involved a charge and this was solely for living costs: 'The rest were free'. In 1961, warnings began to be received from Alec's guides that danger lay ahead. At one séance, unusual phenomena occurred and were followed by a guide speaking who only materialized when there was something important to be done. In an authoritative tone, he referred to those who attended séances but refused to accept the genuineness of what they saw, simply because it conflicted with what they believed possible. He then stated, 'I come to warn you that you are continually jeopardizing the medium's safety by letting such people into your circles'. He further warned that while Alec's controls could preserve his safety to some degree, part of the responsibility nevertheless fell upon Louie. The guide departed and Louie remarked on how, 'his warning greatly alarmed me'.

There was discussion about the possibility of canceling the next sitting, but after Louie was told that those who wanted to attend would be disappointed and had been vetted, it was decided to proceed. However, the secretary of a Spiritualist church, whom Louie described as a 'A Judas [who] came among us', had decided to allow the two places which he had booked to be given to two journalists. Although Alec and Louie were unaware of who the two men were, or the purpose of their visit, Louie gained the impression when they arrived that they were not to be trusted; she therefore placed them in the second row aside a relative who was also attending. Portents of the situation were present at the beginning of the séance: after much

singing, nothing occurred and there seemed to be something seriously wrong. At last, a guide appeared at the curtain, but instead of coming out to greet the sitters, he stood almost motionless and 'surveyed the two semi-circular rows of sitters before him, searching the faces intently'. Nonetheless, he came forward and greeted the sitters in the front row and then returned to the cabinet and lifted the curtain to show that Alec was there, still seated and entranced; the guide came back to the open area of the room and one of the two journalists suddenly grabbed him. The guide dematerialized and groans from Alec in the cabinet were heard. Louie recorded how the journalist 'looked up at me, his eyes wide, terrified'. The second journalist ran to the window and pulled down the curtain to expose a gathering of journalists who immediately started taking pictures with bright flash lights; Alec's guides had somehow moved the cabinet curtains around him to protect him from the light. The two journalists made a bid for freedom but were stopped by Louie's relatives together with an obliging dog. Clearly shocked by the events, and unable to answer the angry challenges made about their behaviour, the journalists promptly left the area. When Alec came out of trance he was clearly very unwell and needed medical treatment for many months following. After this time, the same guide who was present in the fracas spoke through Alec and warned that far greater care needed to be taken. Louie noticed the deterioration in Alec's health and it was decided to return to Cardiff in 1962 although it became evident that Alec's health was now in rapid decline.

He returned to South Africa and things improved, and one description of a materialization séance after this time is supplied by Joe Cooper. He relates the description supplied by a sitter, referred to as 'George', who attended a séance in 1963. He explained how a friend, who knew that he wanted to witness a materialisation, invited him to a séance conducted by Alec. On traveling to Johannesburg and going to Alec's home, there were about eight sitters present, and the séance was held in the bedroom, with a good red light. It began with a lengthy period of hymn-singing, and was followed by a voice being heard from behind the cabinet curtain, and a figure appearing; he summoned George, who observed that while the upper part of the figure was solid, 'the lower half of his body was just draped in ectoplasm', and he was invited to touch the figure and then 'slap' him. On doing so, the figure 'stood there and almost like a smile crossed his face as if he was saying, "Now make something of that"'. After the figure departed, he was followed by some fourteen materializations, one of whom was being recognized as an uncle by two girls also present. Another figure emerged and George was once again called. The figure stated that he was one of his guides and George described how the guide 'was of Mediterranean origin...but he had on the most beautiful robes, and they

billowed out', and he took hold of the guide's hand and the two conversed for about a quarter of an hour. The guide then said that he had to leave and George recalled: 'Something made me look down at his feet and as I looked down I saw the bottom half of his body dissolving away, but his hand was still solid, and then his hand melted away between my fingers'. After one of Alec's guides announced that no further power was left, George referred to how, 'from the medium's solar plexus two great balls of ectoplasm came out to the left and to the right and in the ectoplasm, hundreds of miniature faces...probably all the people present who would have liked to have got through'. Another similar incident in which a sitter was able to meet his guide was reported in 1965. Douglas Johnson, a medium himself, referred to the encounter as 'the unforgettable climax of his South African tour', and 'it was worth coming all these thousands of miles for this evening alone'. Douglas spoke about how the séance had included 'at least a dozen materialisations - some materialised twice'. He then went on to say: 'I sat in the center of the circle, within three feet of the medium. He could be seen entranced in the cabinet as each spirit walked out of it to greet members of the circle in the small room well-lit by red light. They held up their faces toward the light to allow us to see them clearly'.

After the séance begun, Douglas saw how 'one materialisation followed almost on the heels of the previous one'; these included men over six feet tall, women and a small boy. Many of these were recognized by the sitters: some were husbands returning to their wives, and sons doing likewise with their parents. The high point of the séance was Douglas's guide materializing and speaking with him. After this, another materialisation 'vanished through the floor before our eyes'. The last visitor was a child. In this case, 'sitters watched the materialisation...who built up outside the cabinet, emerging from a cloud of ectoplasm'. The substantial nature of those next-world visitors was confirmed by Dr Douglas Baker. Speaking at the SAGB, Baker stated: 'I have attended Alec Harris materialisation séances with fellow doctors armed with stethoscopes and other medical gadgets. I have seen 20 fully materialised figures at one séance, ranging from a six-foot man to babes-in-arms'. He added that the physicians 'took their pulse and respiration rates. We even lifted them to measure their weight'. In time it became obvious that the quality of Alec's mediumship was far less than it had been and it was decided that it would be best if he concentrated on direct voice rather than materializations. This led to an amusing conflict between Alec and the communicators who sought to materialise. On the first occasion of holding a séance for direct voice, a regular visitor materialized and turned on the red light; Louie therefore politely explained that the circle was not for materializations. The visitor then replied 'Oh, if that is what you

want...', and returned inside the cabinet - also thoughtfully switching off the light again as he walked back.

A form of compromise was worked out with the visitors materializing in one place but speaking through the trumpet some distance away. Louie, fearful of the effect on Alec's health, tried to stop them materialising, by removing all the lights but she noted, 'the communicators defeated me by bringing their own psychic blue-white lights with them'. In fact, one of the leading guides said that Alec's declining health was apparent, but he would be protected, although there had to be a strict rule about the type of sitters allowed to attend.

By 1968, Alec was holding séances purely for direct voice: Isa Gray gives a detailed account of attending such a séance in that year, having already witnessed materializations through Alec's mediumship at an earlier date that she also describes. In the materialization séance, after numerous next-world persons had joined the circle, Mrs. Gray reports: 'The curtains then parted, and we saw Mr. Harris in deep trance. Big amorphous shapes of ectoplasm were coming out of each side of him...Gradually the ectoplasm dispersed. A few moments after this we were given transfiguration with a bright light on the medium's face, revealing in turn four faces, one after the other'. By 1974, Alec's health was clearly frail and at the end of January he told Louie that his time to remain there was short. On 12 February, his health reached a crisis and he died holding Louie. Louie made the important point that the sting of death is still present even with an awareness of survival, and 'the shock of Alec's passing was almost unbearable. I missed him, just as much as all the bereaved souls who had attended our remarkable circles over the years must have missed their loved ones'. Nonetheless, her grief was lessened when Alec made his presence known to her within twenty-four hours of his passing; a short time later, she saw Alec: 'He appeared so much younger than when I had last seen him'.

Louie concludes her account of her husband's marvelous mediumship with the words: 'Alec held sacred his gift of mediumship. Never once did he abuse it in 40 years...Alec was a selfless man. Because of his great love for humanity, he dedicated his life to the service of his fellows, performing his demanding, and often difficult, work...I sincerely pray that our psychic experiences, shared with countless others along the way, will convince many that truly there is no death'.

Credits:

They Walk Among Us - Louie Harris

Noah's Ark Website