



William T. Stead

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The Spirit Return of William Thomas Stead

July 5, 1849 – April 15, 1912

There are numerous references to William Stead's early spirit return after his untimely death on board the Titanic, April 15, 1912. One record has never been made generally available, and can be found at the Spiritualists' National Union's, Britten Memorial Museum, housed at the Arthur Findlay College, Stansted Hall.

It is in the form of the old physical phenomenon of direct or independent writing, by 'Slate Writing,' popularised in the 1870's by the likes of Henry Slade (Dr. Slade), Francis W. Monck (Dr. Monck) and later, by William Eglinton..

On a slate (ref BMT 337) dated February 3rd, 1920 is a written communication from William T. Stead to Dr. Abraham Wallace (1). The writing reads (as far as can be interpreted):—

"To Abraham Wallace

My fine Wallace The old time scientists are surely startling the entire world to at least investigate what is positively true I refer to the continuity of life after death. Am glad you came to America which did you much good with the group I am going to give to Mr. ?? some wonderful facts God be with you Sincerely William T Stead"

The photograph which heads the article is also a museum exhibit (ref BMT 321), note the similarity of Stead's signature.

As stated at the head of this article, there are numerous references to early accounts of Stead's spirit return. One of the most well-known is a series of messages given by Stead through the mediumship of Madame Hyver in 1914. These were recorded in a text book: *Communication with the next world. The Right and the Wrong Methods* (2).

A lesser known record is by Stead's daughter Estelle, later published in the "Psychic Booklet" series edited by Maurice Barbanell and dated 1947 by the British Library catalogue.

Below is quoted the opening chapter:

SPIRIT RETURN OF W. T. STEAD

My Father's Return

IN April, 1912, when I was on tour with my Shakespearean company, I received a telegram from my brother saying the Titanic had struck an iceberg; that boats were standing by and all passengers were safe and that there was no need to worry. The next morning I left my rooms early to buy a newspaper. The first thing that met my eyes was a poster with these words in large black letters, "1600 drowned in Titanic Disaster." After the first shock of horror, I knew—although for a time I would not admit it—that my father must be amongst those 1600 and that I should never see his physical body again. My greatest and grandest pal, for he was that, had passed from my sight, to what?

How often we had discussed and wondered about that next world. It was not to us "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns," for many had returned to us and given definite proof of their continued existence and of the active lives they were leading. We had no doubt about life after death, but was it as we pictured? To quote my father, "Had the spirit world a formula of its own which was quite different from our earth mentality and that, therefore, many points were transmitted to us in such a form and in such expression as we on earth would be able to grasp and appreciate, and were not in themselves the precise descriptions owing to the limitations of earth word expression?"

How I longed for a sign; a message to assure me that he was alive and well; but none came. All was blank around me, I couldn't feel or sense his presence . . . And then, just a fortnight after the Titanic sank, I saw his face and spoke with him for twenty minutes. To some who read these words, this may be hard to believe, but, reader, it is true. There were others present who saw his face as clearly as I did and heard his voice ring through the room greeting us all. I shall never forget the thrill and joy in his voice as he said, "I have come back and I tell you it is true, all true, all they have told us is true."

Then I talked with him for over twenty minutes, no, not about the wonders of the spirit world; that came later. His thoughts were all for those he had left, their sadness, their confusion. He was terribly distressed that, though near them still, he was incapable of making his presence known, unable to help in a material way—so many things he had left undone. Sadness for those who would not give him the opportunity I had to speak to them. It was so like him, and before the twenty minutes was up I was comforting him. Then his voice died away and my brother who passed on in 1907 spoke to us.

I remember so well saying, "Will, this is too sad, I thought father would be happy." My brother replied: "Now, Estelle, be sensible. Can you imagine that father could be happy when he comes into the condition of sadness that surrounds all those he loves on earth, and feels he can do so little to remove it? When he gets more and more in touch with life on this side he will see more clearly and learn how he can help. The best way to help him is to throw off this sadness, for his sake try to carry on cheerfully, realising all the time his nearness and love and so help to break up this grief cloud that envelopes you."

While talking with father I asked him if he knew how my brother Jack received the news of his passing. Jack was in Johannesburg and did not even know father was on the Titanic. He said: "Will tells me Jack bought a paper and took it into a cafe to read while he had a cup of tea. He opened the paper and saw my name amongst the list of passengers, left everything and rushed to the nearest newspaper office to get further news." We received later a letter from Jack stating that this was exactly what happened.

During those first weeks I spoke with my father many times. Gradually the acute sadness died away and he became full of enthusiasm about the wonders of the spirit world. "I feel like a boy exploring a grand new country," he said.

How did I come to hear my father's voice and see his face so clearly? To tell you this I must go back a few weeks. When the Titanic sank, a direct-voice medium named Mrs. Wriedt was staying in New York awaiting father's arrival. On the evening of Tuesday, April 16th, she held a séance at the house of some friends. Dr. Sharp, her control, spoke at the séance, and assured them that father had passed over. He also gave the names of many other persons who had gone down with the ship. The following night father himself spoke, just three days after his passing. His utterance was very weak, but he managed to make himself understood. The next night,

Thursday, April 18th, he came again. He was much stronger and went into details of his passing over. These details were forwarded to us by the friend with whom Mrs. Wriedt was staying.

Mrs. Wriedt left for England at once and we met in that upper room where we had gathered so often during her former visits. Father was there with us, but this time without his physical body—he had lost that in the Atlantic. But oh the joy of it! He was with us still and through her wonderful power was able to give definite proof of his presence by showing his face clearly, speaking with that voice we knew so well and mentioning intimate matters unknown to Mrs. Wriedt. To add to the evidence we could at times hear Mrs. Wriedt's voice as she made comments to people present. Mrs. Wriedt never went into trance. She sat in the circle, apparently as normal as the others present, yet without her my father could not have spoken. She opened the way. How often in those early days he would say, "If only I could get back for one hour, what headlines I should have for the papers and what wonders I could tell the world."

During those early sittings, my father was so eager to talk and so impetuous that he would often use up the power and have to stop and rest. Then my brother Will would carry on. I would ask him questions about father, "Had he met so-and-so?" Sometimes Will would say, "I don't know, I will ask him." Then we would hear distinctly the two voices speaking in the distance. We couldn't catch the

words, but could distinguish the two voices, father speaking rapidly with much emphasis in a deep voice and Will's much more restrained and quiet manner of speaking.

One evening after the usual weekly circle sitting, we were sitting round the big dining-room table having supper. On the chair in father's place at the head of the table Mrs. Wriedt had put a large flower-pot in which was planted a marguerite in full bloom. Glancing at this I noticed the flowers moving, called the attention of the others to this and said, "Keep on talking or you will break the vibration." We continued talking and watching. Some of the flowers bobbed in one direction and some in another and then we watched the heavy dining-room chair as it moved slowly round until it stood at right angles to the table. We all felt the floor, walls and windows vibrating. One present cried, "That's right, Chief, keep your word," (3) after we noticed its movement. We all sat away from the table to be sure no involuntary action was shaking the plant after we first noticed its movement. Someone suggested the lowering of lights. The electric light switch was turned off, leaving us in darkness except for the light from outside. Three violent shocks caused the windows to rattle. The crockery clattered, and the walls and floor were shaken by a deep-seated vibratory movement; this movement was accompanied by the sound of heavy footfalls as of someone stamping round the room.

Then we remembered that two or three weeks before father left England for America we were sitting at supper and talking about the raps that some said they had heard. Father, who had not heard them clearly said, very scornfully, in his joking way: "Call that a rap! When I go to the Other Side, I'll let you know what a rap is like, I'll stamp my feet and shake the whole floor!" Asked about it at a later sitting, father said he had not been able to do it himself; others more proficient and with more power had helped him.

Later, a friend booked a sitting for me with Mrs. Osborne Leonard. She did not give my name and Mrs. Leonard had no idea who I was. At this sitting father was able to give me good proofs of his identity. Fedra, her spirit control, was very quaint. As soon as she took control she said, "I know you, I am sure I know you." Then she said: "I see a W. and T. and an S. Oh, and there is a great wopping big T and that big T had something to do with a birthday into the spirit world."

As father gave names of people he and I knew and spoke of his office and other matters of a private nature, Fedra kept on saying, "He won't show himself to Fedra, he is playing hide and seek with Fedra." Then he mentioned my name and evidently showed himself to Fedra, because she called out, "Why, it's Mr. Stead." At this sitting he spoke of a shilling he had always carried about with him since 1885. He said that the one (a poor girl dying of disease contracted through being on the streets) who sent it him to help in his purity campaign was one of the first to meet him on the Other Side.

Since then I have had several sittings with Mrs. Leonard. After the first few father felt there was no need to give further tests, and he went straight on to the special matters he wished to discuss or tell me about. I think it is only natural, and it happens with most people when convincing proof has been given and received, that those on the Other Side and on this do not feel the necessity of continuing it. Those on the Other Side know they have succeeded in proving that they are alive and are living full lives, keeping in closer touch with those they love here than many who go to other lands on earth.

References:

1). – In 1931 a valuable addition to the Britten Memorial was gifted by the well known physical medium Mr. Evan Powell (Paignton) of the late Dr. Abraham Wallace's library which also included some of his papers now held in Britten Memorial Museum "The Wallace Collection" (ref Box files 4-5 BMT 704-5).

Dr. Abraham Wallace, M.D., passed away at Paignton, Devon, at the ripe age of 80 years. His wife predeceased him only a year before. He leaves a son and two daughters. In 1889, he came to London and settled in Harley Street as a specialist in Gynaecology. He was on the staff of the "Lancet," and a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research. He had at his death been a student of psychic facts for sixty years, and had personal friendships with Miss Florence Cook, Mrs. Mellon, Cecil Husk, Mrs. Emma H. Britten, Florence Marryat, Stainton Moses, J. J. Morse, Boursnell, and many other workers, including F. W. H. Myers. The mortal remains were cremated at Golders Green, January 27th, [1930] the service being conducted by Mr. E. W. Oaten, whose personal friendship had extended over twenty years. Taken from: The Quarterly Transactions (Psychic Science) B.C.P.S., April 1930 Vol. IX. No. 1, page 70.

2). – Communication with the next world. The Right and the Wrong Methods. A Text Book given by William T. Stead From "Beyond the Veil" Through Madame Hyver. Edited by Estelle W. Stead. This is an interesting read, and is freely available to read or download in pdf:—
<http://www.spiritwritings.com/CmtnNextWorld.pdf>