

## The Singing Spirit

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Mr. J. Cuming Walters, M.A., was a journalist who used to scoff at psychic phenomena. He “regarded it as a ridiculous illusion and a relic of superstition.” “My chief desire,” he states, “was to expose trickery and fraud, and it was solely in the hope of doing this that I first attended a séance.” But at that session, which was held in broad daylight, he got “the surprise of my life.” He received messages, purportedly from a deceased friend, giving information that no one else at the table could possibly have known. Furthermore, he received information that even he did not know, but that he confirmed later as being true. Finally, he was given information that he thought was incorrect, but later proved to be correct. Because of this experience, Walters attended other séances with a more open mind and was soon convinced that the spirits of deceased people actually could, at times, communicate with the living. The following is excerpted from a transcript<sup>1</sup> of a lecture given by Walters in 1923, in Manchester, England.

“Six of us were in a private room one summer evening when we were amused by a message beginning with the chorus of a humorous song.<sup>2</sup> On enquiring we were told that the communicator’s name was Frank Collins, and that years before he had been a member of a Society to which I belonged. Asked to give the names of other members whom he knew at that period, he at once gave six, all of them well known to me by repute. But the strange circumstance was that I did not know Collins himself, and had never heard there was a member of that name. I therefore asked him for further particulars concerning himself, and what he told me — which I put briefly now — was this: He was a vocalist, and as such he had taken a prominent part in musical evenings and at Christmas reunions. His favourite songs, he said, were old English ballads, and the lyrics out of Shakespeare’s plays, such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind*. He told me the name of his accompanist on these occasions, a well-known Manchester musician of years ago.

“Then he proceeded to relate that he was extremely fond of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and on one occasion had read a paper to the Society on that subject, with vocal illustrations by himself. His chief successes, he added, were *Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes* and *A Wandering Minstrel, I*. He was also fond of old Lancashire songs in the dialect, and he liked choruses in which the rest of the company could join. When he had volunteered all this information I asked him whether he was a singer by profession, whereupon he said that the great disappointment of his life was that he had not been able to join an opera company. I enquired why not, since he seemed to be so well qualified. After some hesitation he gave the answer: ‘I was lame,’ he said, ‘and so I could not appear upon the stage.’

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<sup>1</sup> Walters, J. Cuming, *Some Proofs of Personal Identity*, The Two Worlds Publishing Co., Ltd., Manchester, 1924, pp. 11-14.

<sup>2</sup> Although Walters identifies neither the medium nor the method by which the information was conveyed, it was obviously via voice of some type.

“All this interested me, and it seemed so definite that I thought it worth while to pursue enquiries. I asked a number of members of the Society if they remembered Frank Collins, but none of them did. I then searched the registers, but there was no record of him.

“At a second séance he came again, once more introducing himself, as before, by a line from a chorus. This time he added that his special friend at the Society was a man named Lawson. I knew there had been a member named Harry Lawson, so this seemed a good clue; but I was balked when he said, ‘No, not Harry. His name was Richard.’ I enquired and I searched all the available records, but I could find no Richard Lawson.

“It now seemed as if the whole matter would come to an end and remain a mystery. Six months passed by, and I could not get a word anywhere to prove that such a person as Frank Collins had ever existed. I almost dismissed the subject from my mind.

“And now I will ask you to note particularly what happened.

“I went out of town with some friends. We lunched together some twenty miles away from Manchester. During an interval a lady among the company was asked if she remembered a certain Lancashire song written by Edwin Waugh. She said she did, and she sang it. When she had finished, a gentleman seated next to me remarked, ‘I haven't heard that since Frank Collins sang it.’

“He was a very old gentleman, eighty years of age, and I turned to him and said, ‘Did you ever know anybody, then, named Frank Collins?’

“‘Of course, I did,’ he replied. ‘He was a great singer, the life and soul of our Christmas parties.’”

“I pretended to know nothing, and said, ‘Can you tell me what he used to sing?’

“‘Oh, yes,’ said the old gentleman, ‘always the same sort of thing, old Lancashire songs, Shakespeare songs, such as *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind*, and later in his life, Gilbert and Sullivan.’

“At this point the old gentleman called out to a friend on the other side of the table, ‘Do you remember that Gilbert and Sullivan night that Frank Collins gave us?’

“‘Yes,’ replied the other, ‘I remember how he sang *Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes*. I never heard it sung better.’ ‘Aye,’ remarked the old gentleman next to me, ‘he ought to have gone on the stage.’

“‘Why didn't he go on the stage?’ I asked, still pretending to know nothing.

“‘Because he was lame,’ he answered. ‘It was the disappointment of his life. He was very sensitive, and anything like ridicule killed him. I remember he told me that he applied for a place in an Opera Company and the manager very cruelly said to him that if he came he could only dance on one leg. Poor Collins never got over it, and he tried no more. But he was a rare singer, and he loved a rousing chorus.’”

“All this seemed to me like a set drama. Here was I, out of town, in company some of which was strange to me. I had never mentioned Collins' name to anyone there. The subject had arisen unexpectedly, owing to a lady being asked to sing, and by the merest chance a man of eighty had had an old recollection awakened and had mentioned it. What was more, he had given me exactly all the details I needed to verify the communication that had been made months previously. The moment the conversation was over I went outside, made a note of it, and asked a gentleman (a member of our City Council) who had heard it, to bear witness to the truth of what had occurred.

“Nor was this quite the end of the matter. Some time later I was able to procure one of the earliest numbers of the Society's journals, long ago out of print. I purchased it simply out of

curiosity. What was my amazement to find in that volume a reference to Frank Collins and his singing of some Shakespeare songs at a Christmas supper, accompanied on the piano by the very musician he had mentioned; and secondly, the name of Richard Lawson (not Harry), who had joined the Society the same year as himself. The whole case was now complete from beginning to end, and I have the written and the printed records, together with all the living witnesses, to testify to the truth of the story.”

### Discussion

Most of the information received was confirmed coincidentally and unwittingly by two elderly gentlemen. Whether these gentlemen were ever asked if they recalled a “Richard Lawson” is not known. Nor do we know if they were asked about the six names that Collins gave at the start of the session, but they likely would have recognized them. It must be assumed, therefore, that all of the information did exist in the mind of some living, but non-involved, person(s). There were two occurrences reported that are most unusual and convincing, namely the heralding of Collins’ visits with a bit of song and the hesitation and shame exhibited regarding his lameness.

END CASE 31

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