

Case #46 — The Rationalist Spirit

Dr. Alan Gauld is a highly respected and widely published researcher into paranormal matters. In 1959, Gauld participated in seven meetings of a “home circle” in Cambridgeshire, England. This group consisted of a few core people and assorted visitors who gathered in a private home to attempt contact with the spirit world, mostly via the talking board.¹ The group met, with various participants, on and off from 1937 to 1964. Careful records were kept of the majority of the circle’s sessions. Based on these records and a great deal of personal investigative work, Gauld produced a 67-page report titled “A Series of ‘Drop In’ Communicators.”² The term “drop-in” refers to spirits who are strangers to anyone in the circle and who arrive uninvited. Such intrusions are thought to be especially evidential because of the presumed difficulty of any participant reading the information from the mind of a person whose identity and whereabouts are unknown.

This case is taken from Gauld’s report. It is of special interest because it reveals a rude and belligerent spirit; it is of even more interest because it shows a rude and belligerent spirit transforming into a polite and friendly one. To best demonstrate these characteristics, the dialogue is given verbatim as quoted by Gauld. Comments [in brackets] are Gauld’s – attempts at clarification {in braces} are mine.

A note on voice and formatting: In keeping with the style of the original paper, the

messages spelled out on the board are printed here in capital letters. “Peter” was a frequent spirit presence who served as a kind of control or astral traffic manager for the circle. Comments in normal typeface generally come from a male observer referred to as “R.W.” but occasionally other members interject a comment. In the opening lines, Peter is referring to a session held by some of the participants in another home a few days previously.

January 4th, 1943

[Operators: Mrs W.G. and Mrs G.J. Recorder: L.G. Also present: R.W., Mrs D., Miss E.]

[‘Peter’ writes:] A LITTLE LATER I AM GOING TO LET THE EEL SLIP THROUGH. HE SLIPPED ALONG ON THURSDAY [*i.e.*, at the previous sitting] SO I KEPT CONTROL. STANLEY [R.W.’s deceased brother] AND SON WILL HELP ME. STAN WILL HELP YOU SON. TALK TO HIM.

Is it a man, then?

YES. HUMOUR HIM. GET TO KNOW HIM. WE CAN THEN DEAL WITH HIM FROM HERE – BIG JOB. WE DO NOT KNOW HIM SO I AM WANTING TO MAKE CONTACT THROUGH YOU. HUMOUR HIM. THANK YOU ALL – I AM LEAVING NOW. NO WORRY. NO HARM.

{At this point, the new spirit is allowed to take control.}

M.P.M.P. {meaningless?} I KNOW ALL THE LADIES. {The spirit recognizes women in the group from the previous session.}

What is your name?

LADY I AM MOLLY.

How can we help you?

I AM HELPING YOU. YOU LIKE ME TO TALK. I HELP THE LADIES BUT KIND NELL [Mrs D.] DOES NOT LIKE ME. SHE SAYS I AM ELSIE [*i.e.*, Miss E., Mrs D.'s customary partner on the ouija board].

You are helping both ladies?

YES. I DO AND I BRING THEM LOTS OF PEOPLE.

What makes you come to them? What is your job?

TALKING.

You know you are on the spirit plane?

YES. I AM.

Why do you come to these ladies?

THEY WANTED PEOPLE FROM HERE. I AM ALL THE PEOPLE REALLY.

Don't you find that difficult?

NO.

Are you R.L.? [a *soi-disant* Raymond Lodge had written through Miss E. and Mrs D.'s ouija board.]

RAYMOND AND A DOCTOR JAMES.

It must be hard to be all those people at once?

I AM ONLY ONE AT A TIME.

Then you find you change from one to another?

YES. DO NOT REALLY CHANGE.

What is your real name, do you remember.

YES. I WILL NOT SAY.

We want to help you.

I DO NOT WANT YOUR HELP.

But we would like to help you.

WHY?

Because we are taught to help those who need it.

WRONG TEACHING.

I have a feeling you are a man.

I WAS HAPPY WITH THE LADIES AND I AM NOT GOING TO BE BLOODY WELL PALLY WITH YOU. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. I DID NOT COME TO TALK TO YOU. SHUT UP.

[Mrs. W.G.] What is your name?

MOLLIE.

You spelt it differently a little while ago.

RATS. MY FRIENDS TALK TO ME.

[R.W.] I'm going to talk to you.

MIND YOUR BLOODY BUSINESS.

You must take your business elsewhere and not worry these dear people. Surely you don't use language like that to your lady friends.

MEN FRIENDS.

What sex are you?

MOLLIE.

Can you see anyone standing near you?

YES. MAN.

Well, that is my brother and he is a good chap. He will help you.

NO. I CANNOT PRETEND HERE.

Isn't it better not to pretend, but to be yourself?

YOU KNOW A HELL OF A LOT.

Do you remember your earth life?

YES.

What was your business?

NOT YOURS. I WAS A MAN WHO ALWAYS KEPT TO HIMSELF.

Oh, so you are a man?

DAMN. LIKE LADY. DO YOU LIKE RELIGION?

Yes, but not over fond of it. Do you?

BLOODY ROT.

That's only your opinion. You will be happier if you will be yourself and stop all this nonsense.

DON'T YOU TALK. LET THE LADIES. I DON'T DAMN WELL LIKE YOU.

I don't mind that, we want to stop you worrying our friends.

GO NOW.

You will not go.

I GO.

Be reasonable.

SHUT UP, BUGGAR YOU.

There are people who will help you.

ONLY HITLER CAN HELP. HE IS THE MASTER MIND.

What is your real name?

WHAT HAS THAT TO DO WITH YOU? SHUT UP BLAST YOU. I AM GOING.

There is only one master mind, God, and you cannot alter that.

YOU MAKE ME SAD. GO AWAY.

I'd rather make you pleased.

KEEP QUIET.

I want you to promise to stop worrying our friends here.

SORRY.

That's better. That's the reply of an intelligent man, which I am sure you are.

I GO NOW.

Go with the thought of friendship from us.

SHUT UP.

Go where you will, but be intelligent.

I COME WITH MY HEART FULL OF LOVE.

You certainly do not, what do you take us for? What you are doing is a cad's trick.

WHO ARE YOU INTERFERING WITH?

I thought you were going to be reasonable.

I AM. I AM OLIVER LODGE. THEY LIKE ME.

You are not.

DON'T BE A FOOL.

I'm not a fool.

YOU ARE. I KNEW DOCTOR ALEX WOOD

[A well-known Cambridge personality, much admired by Miss E.].

I KNEW HITLER.

Don't make me laugh.

THAT IS ? WELL TRUE. SHUT UP. LET ME TALK TO LADIES. THEY LIKE ME.

They do not.

I BRING ALL YOUR FRIENDS.

That is untrue.

HITLER.

What is your nationality?

GERMAN

Give us a phrase in German.

NO.

That's because you don't know any. Have you suffered on earth?

RELIGION. GERMAN.

You can't speak German.

I CAN. DO YOU REMEMBER HABEN SIE DIE UHR AUFGEZOGEN? ["Have you wound the clock?" This phrase had been slipped in at the previous sitting. A translation followed the phrase, though the sitters do not appear to have recognized it as such. Miss E. and Mrs. D. were not present.] I PUT THAT THROUGH.

You did not.

YES I DID. PETER KNEW AND THAT SHOWS YOU HOW CLEVER I AM AT PRETENCE.

You are not to worry our friends any more with your pretence. There is a Power which will stop you. You are afraid of it. That Power protects them.

PRAY UNTIL YOUR HEAD FALLS OFF. I AM GERMAN AND MY NAME IS GUSTAV.

That's a French name.

LIAR. YOU ARE MAD. GUSTAV GERMAN.

What is your surname?

YOU SAY YOU HELP. I AM GUSTAV ADOLF BIEDEMBURG. IF I COME AND SAY GUSTAV WOULD YOU LIKE ME BETTER?

Not until you are sincere. Go with my brother, he will help you.

WILL HE LIKE ME?

He will help you.

I AM NOT PRETENDING ABOUT GERMAN.

What made you come to us? Why not to a German circle?

I LIVED IN LONDON. IT IS BETTER AS MYSELF. YOU WELCOME ME.

You may come again if you first ask permission of the greater power, Peter or Bob.

I MUST ASK GREATER POWER FIRST.

Yes, that's the idea.

YES. I AM MYSELF NOW.

Did you pass in air raid?

NO. MY HOUSE WAS CHARNWOOD LODGE.

What address?

LET ME THINK FOR NEXT TIME I COME.

Ask Bob and Peter to help you.

I AM GOING NOW WITH A KIND FRIEND WHO WILL LISTEN AND TALK.

Give that friend my kind regards.

['Peter' writes:] MANY THANKS SON.

Was he really sorry?

YES AND HE IS GERMAN.

January 7, 1943

[Operators: Mrs W.G. and Mrs G.J. Recorder: L.G. Also present: R.W.]

['Peter' writes:]

NOW ABOUT GUSTAV. WAIT. TO YOU (Glass to R.W.). {The drinking glass used as a pointer is moved toward an observer, indicating that the following message is addressed to him.}

I OFFER MY HUMBLE APOLOGIES AND ADD TO THEM MY GRATEFUL THANKS.

We are only too glad to have been of help. Come when you like, you will find friends here, and Mrs D. and Miss E. will welcome you too.

I WANT TO HELP. I AM NOT LONELY NOW. I WILL TELL YOU MY CORRECT NAME. ADOLF BIEDEBMANN. I ALWAYS WAS KNOWN AND CALLED GUSTAV.

Shall we call you Gustav?

PLEASE. I WAS A RATIONALIST.

What exactly is that?

A TYPE OF RELIGION TO FOLLOW ONLY THE REASONING OF ONE'S OWN MIND. IT PUTS A BARRIER AROUND.

That is why you have been so lonely and found no companions?

YES. PARTLY.

Is there anything more we can do to help you?

PETER WILL HELP ME. YOUR STAN SHOWED ME HOW TO REACH HIM. I AM SO GRATEFUL. I WAS TURNED SEVENTY WHEN I PASSED AWAY.

We had an idea you were much younger than that.

I KNOW. THAT IS WHY I TELL YOU

I think it was because of your reference to Hitler.

I DID THAT TO HURT. I AM SORRY. I AM FORGIVEN AND WE ARE FRIENDS, YES?

Of course.

THANK YOU. GOODNIGHT.

['Peter' writes:] NOT SO FEROCIOUS. HE IS VERY GOOD AT HEART. A NEW FRIEND FOR PETER.

February 4, 1943

[Operators: Mrs W.G. and Mrs G.J. Recorder: L.G. Also present: R.W.]

I HOPE YOU WILL WELCOME ME AS FRIEND.
GUSTAV

Yes, of course, Gus. How are you?

I AM HAPPY AND THAT MEANS MORE THAN
I CAN EXPRESS

What are you doing?

I AM WORKING ON MYSELF. I TRY TO REMEM-
BER MY EARTH LIFE. I DID ONCE WHEN I REMEM-
BERED MY NAME.

You still know your name?

YES. I TOLD YOU.

Do you remember saying you lived at
Charnwood Lodge ?

YES. I HAD FORGOTTEN. I HAD MY OWN
BUSINESS.

What was it, do you remember?

NO. IN SOME REMOTE WAY I AM ASSOCI-
ATED WITH THE LOND[ON] UNIVERSITY.

When did you pass over?

YEAR AGO

Was your business a bookshop?

NO.

Publishers?

RATIONALIST PRESS.

Do you want to remember your earth
life?

YES. I AM HAPPY THOUGH. I AM FORGIVEN
FOR MY LAPSE?

Yes, of course, it was no fault of yours.

THANK YOU ALL. GOODNIGHT.

In investigating this case, Gauld discov-
ered no “Biedenburg” or “Biedebmann” but
changing only one letter gives “Biedermann”
and there can be no doubt that is the name the

spirit attempted to communicate. Dr. Adolf
Gustav Biedermann was a German-born, nat-
uralized citizen of England who lived at
Charnwood Lodge on the outskirts of London
until he died at the age of 73. He was a fairly
wealthy businessman who also worked in the
Psychology Department at London Univer-
sity.

Those who knew Biedermann described
him to Gauld as an arrogant, obstinate, and
aggressive man who, nevertheless, could be a
pleasant companion when one got to know
him. He seemed to revel in his German herit-
age and never dropped his accent. One ac-
quaintance portrayed him as “an out-and-out
rationalist” who may well have been attracted
to the idea of Aryan superiority. Biedermann
once wrote a sarcastic letter to the *London
Times* about experiments on telepathy. His
disdain for religion is demonstrated by his
will, which instructed that his children be
brought up without any religious instruction
whatsoever, and that he himself should be
cremated without any religious ceremony.
Also in this will, Biedermann bequeathed
money to the Rationalist Press Association.

A spirit using crude and aggressive lan-
guage is not unheard of, but it is rare and does
not seem to have occurred at any of the other
sessions held by this home circle. Thus, it can-
not reasonably be attributed to either of the
operators.



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¹ See case #40 for more on the talking board.

² *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 55, July, 1971, pages 273-340.