

Biography of Robert Crookall (1890-1981)

As a botanist and geologist with the Geological Survey of Great Britain, Robert Crookall, D.Sc., Ph.D., specialized in coal-forming plants until his retirement in 1952. He then devoted the rest of his life to the study of psychical matters, authoring at least 14 books, the best known of which are *The Supreme Adventure* (1961) and *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection* (1960).

Educated at Westminster College, London, and Bristol University, he lectured in botany after taking his Ph.D. and before joining Her Majesty's Geological Survey in the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. He authored three books in the field, the last, *Fossil Plants of the Carboniferous Rocks of Great Britain*, in five volumes.

Crookall's contributions were not as a researcher, *per se*, but rather as someone who collected the most credible experiences, looked for common threads, categorized them, discerned them, and collated them. The evidence he offered is based on cumulative consistency in the experiences reported. "Although survival may not be 'scientifically proved' – and may not be capable of this – it is, we maintain, so highly probable as to be practically certain," he wrote in one his later books. "In *The Supreme Adventure*, we showed that there is a good reason to accept as genuine certain 'communications' that describe death and the immediate hereafter, since they exhibit (a) internal concordance, or essential similarity, (b) external concordance, or agreement with facts of psychic science, and (c) general concordance, or coherence in a reasonable system."¹

In *The Supreme Adventure*, he explained that many of the communications he had analyzed were from "popular" books which were rejected by psychical researchers as having no value, but

the experiences reported were identical or very similar to those reported by first-class mediums, such as Leonora Piper, Gladys Osborne Leonard, and Geraldine Cummins. "The concordances that occur in numerous independent accounts seem to be explicable only if those accounts did, in fact, emanate from the 'dead,'" he wrote in the Preface of that book.²



Although the near-death experience (NDE) was named and popularized by Dr. Raymond Moody in his 1975 book, *Life After Life*, Crookall was collecting stories of the phenomenon some two decades before Moody. He summarized the experiences:

The release (or birth) of the Soul Body from the physical body caused various sensations, namely, (a) a "click", (b) a mental "blackout" (or the feeling of passing through a dark tunnel) or (c) other sensations. We suggest that,

while the two bodies are in the course of separating, neither is available as an instrument of consciousness (much as we change gears in a motor car there is a brief period during which there is no transmission of power). In those cases in which the separation was very rapid it might not be noticed; where fairly rapid, a simple "blackout" resulted; when the process took a little longer it seemed like passing through a tunnel. (2) Many reviewed their past lives. (3) Many saw their own physical bodies from the released "double". The latter outwardly resembled the physical body but differed from it in being unseen and unheard by mortals and in being able to pass through walls, etc. (4) The release of the double took place without pain or fear. (5) The physical body was observed to be distinct from and inferior to the Soul Body; hence the indifference as to the fate of the physical body. (6) The attitude taken by a number of people to "the silver cord" showed that it was not a mere symbol, or a fantasy, but had great importance. (7) Consciousness expanded once the "double" was free from the physical body. (8) Many saw "dead" friends, etc. (9) Many expressed reluctance to re-enter the physical body and so return to earth-life. (10) The re-entrance of the "double" into the body caused various sensations, namely, (a) "click" or (b) mental "blackout" (or the feeling of passing through a tunnel) or (c) other sensations...(11) This "seeing" resulted in belief in an after-life.³

Crookall referred to what is now known as the NDE as "pseudo-death," and stated that pseudo-death, astral projection, trance and other altered states of consciousness suggest that mind, consciousness, or spirit is quite distinct from the physical body. "Communicators, via mediums, and clairvoyants, astral projectors, etc., independently of mediums say that our (super-physical) minds contact our physical bodies via the

semi-physical vehicle of vitality," he explained, going on to the state that there is a considerable body of evidence to support the view that the immediate next world, Hades, is objective and includes etheric doubles of physical objects, while beyond that the Paradise environment is less objective and the true heavens predominantly subjective.⁴ He dealt more extensively with the NDE phenomenon in five books on the out-of-body experience (OBE), or astral projection, *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection*, (1963), *More Astral Projection* (1964), *The Techniques of Astral Projection* (1964), *Out-of-the-body Experiences* (1970), and *A Case Book of Astral Projection* (1972). "There can be no reasonable doubt that genuine out-of-the-body experiences occur," he wrote, further declaring that claims that they are mere hallucinations do not hold up when considering that "many of the 'doubles' that have been described by people who had out-of-the-body experiences were not subjective – were neither mere mental images nor 'archetypes' in the 'unconscious' – but were objective (though ultra-physical, not, of course, physical)."⁵

Drawing from hundreds of references, Crookall examined everything from "quitting the physical body" through "shedding the body" and the "life review," to the "awakening," the "judgment," the "second death," and the "assignment." Of the severance of the "silver cord," he cites many reports. "I saw myself lying stretched out on the bed, and from my mouth came, as it were, a cord of light," he quoted one mediumistic communication. "It vibrated for a moment, then snapped. At that moment someone said, 'I think he has gone' ...Then the room seemed to fade away. I was in the most exquisite scenery imaginable..."⁶

Although different witnesses had different names for it, there was much consistency in their reports. "Many of those who quitted their bodies temporarily said they saw 'the silver cord,' some likening it to the umbilical cords of childbirth," Crookall wrote. "Among those who made obser-

vations at death-beds, this feature was also commonly seen: Miss Marryat saw it “ruptured,’ Pole “broken” and Elliott “severed” by discarnate helpers (“deliverers”). In the cases observed by Dr. Hout, Oaten, and Mr. ‘G’ the ‘silver cord’ snapped without help.”⁷ Crookall asked on what hypothesis other than that the accounts are genuine can such similarities be explained.

One of the biggest difficulties in accepting the world of spirits has to do with spirit clothing. Crookall devoted many pages to this subject in his 1966 book, *The Next World – and The Next*, offering three hypotheses. “On our hypotheses the replicas of the clothes may be due either to the etheric doubles of actual garments or the ideo-plastic aura of the vehicle of vitality (man’s etheric double) becoming impressed by a mental image,” he explained. “...Since they actually either consisted of, or at least, were impregnated with, the aura, these clothes varied in hue according to the mental, moral, and spiritual development of the wearer: they were dark (grey, brown, etc.) if his self-seeking tendencies were strong, lightening towards white as such tendencies were replaced by self-giving ones...All these clothes were objective in nature. Some were objective etheric doubles of physical clothes, others were impressions on ectoplasmic substance, and still others (where a definite image was lacking) were ghost clothes. These all belonged to the near-death, semi-physical, i.e., Hades, condition. The dazzling white robes of the saints and angels are worn by the super-physical soul body (the environment corresponding to

which is Paradise, in the aura of, but not close to the earth).”⁸

Crookall summarized his findings:

Our study indicates several important matters. First, we all, here and now, live in a hierarchy of three bodies – (1) physical body plus its vehicle of vitality, (2) soul body and (3) spiritual body – and consequently in a hierarchy of environments or worlds – (1) physical world with its Hades belt, (2) Paradise belt and (3) the true heavens of the Scriptures. Secondly, our observations take us naturally and logically, beyond physical life, which unthinking people suppose to be the only life, into a hereafter the nature of which, to each individual, is largely determined by the activities in which he engaged through the physical body. This conception is quite lacking in sentimentality, quite free from any idea of “pie in the sky.” Thirdly, we cannot escape the conclusion that, physical body apart, there is far less difference between the “living” and the “dead” than most people suppose, that a constant mental and emotional interaction takes place between them. Fourthly, the importance of the semi-physical vehicle of vitality or etheric double in these matters has usually been underrated if not entirely overlooked.⁹



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¹ Crookall, Robert, *Intimations of Immortality*, James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1965, p. 63.

² _____, *The Supreme Adventure: Analyses of Psychic Communications*, James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1961, xxiii.

³ _____, *Intimations*, p. 17.

⁴ _____, *The Next World – and the Next*, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966, pp. 136-137.

⁵ _____, *Out-of-the-Body Experiences*, A Citadel Press Book, 1970, pp. 22-23.

⁶ _____, *The Supreme Adventure*, p. 18.

⁷ _____, *Intimations*, p. 27.

⁸ _____, *The Next World – and the Next*, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966.

⁹ _____, *The Next World*, xxi.