

Biography of W. Usborne Moore (*circa* 1850-1918)

Vice-Admiral William Usborne Moore (*circa* 1850 to 1918) was a retired British naval commander when he became a devoted psychical researcher in 1904. His books *Glimpses of the Next State*, published in 1911, and *The Voices*, published in 1913 detail his investigation of a number of mediums in both Great Britain and the United States.

Moore's 35-year navy career was a surveyor. When he retired, he was in command of six surveying vessels. He concluded that as a surveyor, interested in exactness, he was as qualified as anyone to investigate mediumship.

When he wrote a small book titled *The Cosmos and the Creeds*, Moore, who went by his middle name, attacked the teachings of the churches and expressed doubt as to the reality of a future life. "At the time I thought that such immortality as man possessed lay in the influence his actions, words, or writings had upon those who were his contemporaries, or who came after him; but that he himself, as an individual conscious entity, disappeared forever, not to be recognized again," he wrote eight years later in his *Glimpses of the Next State*. But soon after the first book was published, Moore began to have misgivings about his agnosticism, as he had not investigated sources of evidence outside the narrow confines of the churches.

Once Moore began investigating mediums during 1904, his views changed. "To be brief, I found that the deeper I went into the study of spiritism the more apparent it became that, whether he wished it or not, man's individuality was not extinguished at death," Moore explained. "I read books, visited clairvoyants, and attended séances for materialization. Through all I was constantly reminded of the existence of a near and dear relative, older than myself, who passed away thirty-

seven years ago in the prime of her life. Her continued reappearances could only lead me to one conclusion: I was being guided to a reconsideration of the problem of immortality."



Moore referred to the deceased relative as "Tola," explaining that she herself adopted the spirit name to avoid any unpleasant complications among friends and relatives who were not educated in spiritism. He pointed out that his investigation into spiritism was not prompted by any desire for consolation as he had not lost anyone other than his father many years before and was certainly not grieving and wanting to believe. His desire was simply to get at the truth.

Moore explored mediumship in England and made three trips to the United States to sit with various mediums there. He experienced both physical and mental mediumship. Sitting with Joseph B. Jonson of Toledo, Ohio, he witnessed many materializations, including his father and mother. "In these there was no possibility of error," he wrote, mentioning that his father's characteristic "Iron Duke" nose stood out and that he saw him in

good light. At one séance, he observed as many as 25 spirit forms emerge from the materialization cabinet and was certain that there were no trap doors of any kind in which confederates in costumes could have been admitted. They came in all sizes and shapes. While some of the materialized spirits returned to the cabinet, some did not have the power to make it back and Moore watched them seemingly evaporate or dissolve into the floor.

Although Moore encountered fraud among mediums, he concluded that much of it was unconscious fraud while the medium is in a trance state. "Suspicion and hostility impress [the medium] instantly; and I think it is not too much to say that, if more than half the circle are suspecting fraud, the company as a whole will get it in some form or another," he wrote. "Personally, I will never again sit in a circle with any pseudo-scientific investigator or avowed materialist."

Because he felt that the Society for Psychical Research was too quick to dismiss some mediums as complete frauds or to have anything more to do with them once there was some indication of fraud, Moore divorced himself from the organization and referred to the SPR as the "Society for the Prevention of Research."

While Moore sat with dozens of gifted mediums, Etta Wriedt of Detroit, Michigan may have been the most gifted. Moore's third book, *The Voices*, dealt solely with her mediumship. He visited her in the United States during 1911 and then further observed her during 1912 and 1913 when she visited England. "For my part I can only say that, in her presence, I obtained evidence of the next state of consciousness so clear and so pronounced that the slightest doubt was no longer possible," he offered. "I left her house in February 1911 in the condition of mind of a man who no longer fosters 'belief,' but who *knows* what is his destiny when the tomb closes over him and his spirit leaves the earth plane."

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Primary References

Moore, W. Osborne, *Glimpses of the Next State*, Watts & Co., London, 1911.

Moore, W. Osborne *The Voices*, Watts & Co., London, 1913.