

Biography of G. Vale Owen (1869-1931)

A clergyman of the Church of England and later a convert to Spiritualism, G(eorge) Vale Owen is most remembered today for his four volume work titled *The Life Beyond the Veil* (*The Lowlands of Heaven, The Highlands of Heaven, The Ministry of Heaven, and The Battalions of Heaven*), the first volume of which was published in 1921. He authored a number of other books, including *Facts and the Future Life* (1922), *The Kingdom of God* (1925), *Problems which Perplex* (1928), and *Body, Soul, and Spirit* (1928).

Born in Birmingham, England, Owen was educated at Midland Institute and Queen's College, and ordained in 1893, serving in Seaforth, Fairfield, and Liverpool, before being appointed curate-in-charge of Orford, Warrington in 1900, where he served for 20 years. After some of his early automatic writing scripts came to the attention of renowned publisher Lord Northcliffe, they were printed as a series in the *Weekly Dispatch*, the result being that Owen was forced to resign from the Church of England. He was persuaded to put the scripts into book form, *The Life Beyond the Veil* going through many reprintings in the English-speaking world and translated into French, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and Portuguese. After a lecture tour in the United States, Owen became the pastor of a Spiritualist church in London.

In the Preface to the first volume of *The Life Beyond the Veil*, H. W. Engholm describes Owen as a tall, spare, and "little bent" man. "One might at first judge him to be the shy recluse. But his deeply-lined face lights up readily with a smile and, most unassuming and approachable of men, he has a genius for friendship. There is no trace of the aloofness of the dreamer in his relations with

anyone with whom he comes in contact. He is above all practical."¹

Owen explained that his wife first developed the power of automatic writing and through her he received requests that he sit quietly, pencil in hand, and take down any thoughts which came into his mind, projected there by some external personality and not from his own brain. "Reluctance lasted a long time, but at last I felt that friends were at hand who wished very earnestly to speak with me," he continued. "They did not overrule or compel my will in any way – that would have settled the matter at once, so far as I was concerned – but their wishes were made ever plain."



Feeling that the influence was a good one, Owen decided to sit in the vestry each evening. "The first four or five messages wandered aimlessly from one subject to another," he further explained. "But gradually the sentences began to take consecutive form, and at last I got some which were understandable. From that time, development kept pace with practice."

On only two occasions did Owen have any idea as to what the subject was to be. That was when the previous messages had been unfinished. "At other times I had fully expected a certain subject to be taken, but on taking up my pencil the

stream of thought went off in an altogether different direction.”²

The messages began in 1913. Initially, the primary communicator was Owen’s mother, who had died in 1909, at age 63. She was assisted by someone named Kathleen, who acted as an amanuensis on the spirit side. Kathleen had been a seamstress who had died in 1893 at age 28, and was said to be in closer vibration to Owen than his mother, thus better able to communicate with him than his mother. A frequent communicator was an entity named Astriel, who was said to have been headmaster at a school in Warwick during the mid-eighteenth century, while two other apparently advanced entities, named Zabdiel and Arnel, also delivered messages dealing with the nature of the Afterlife.

It was further explained, however, that all of them belonged to a “band” of 36 and that there was usually a “detachment” of seven, more or less, who spoke as one individual. “We have already broadly settled what we will say to you, but leave the precise wording till we sight you and sense your disposition of mind,” it was explained to Owen in one message. “Then, we take our stand a little distance away lest our influence, the emanations of our several minds, reach you in detail, and not as one stream but as many, and so confuse you. But from the little distance at which we stand they merge and mingle, and are focused into one, so that by the time our thoughts reach you there is unity and not multiplicity of diction.”³

It was further explained that when Owen found himself hesitating over a word or phrase, it is the group searching for a word that will properly convey their thoughts. After some blending together, their thoughts assume some unity and Owen’s brain then gets the idea. “We think our thoughts to you, and sometimes they are in such words as are too antique, as you say, for you to grasp them readily,” the communication went on. “This is remedied by filtering them through a more modern instrument, and it is of

this we now would speak. That instrument is your little friend Kathleen, who is good enough to come between you and us, and so render our thoughts available for you.”⁴

Owen was told that because they were more removed from earth than Kathleen, she could “still think her old tongue of earth” and because “the presence of us combined should overmatch you. You could not write down what we would give, and our purpose in coming is to give you such narrative of words as you and others may read with intelligence.”⁵

The message continued: “We find sometimes, when we read what message we have given, that much which we tried to impress is not apparent there, and some lesser quantity of what we had not in mind appears. This is but a natural consequence of the intervention of so thick a veil between the sphere from which we speak and that in which the recorder [i.e., Mr. Vale Owen]. lives his life. The atmosphere of the two spheres is so diverse in quality that, in passing from one to the other, there is always a diminution of speed, so sudden and so marked that a shock is given to the stream of our thoughts, and there is produced, just on the border-line, some inevitable confusion. This is one of the many difficulties we find.”⁶

There were many other obstacles to communication, Owen recorded. “The human brain is a very wonderful instrument, but it is of material substance, and, even when the stream of our thoughts reaches and impinges upon it, yet, because of its density, the penetration is impeded and sometimes altogether brought to a stop. For the vibrations, as they leave us, are of high intensity, and the fineness of their quality is a hindrance to their effecting a correspondence in the human brain, which is gross by comparison.”⁷

The crux of the messages is that the spirit world is made up of many spheres, planes, or levels in which souls strive to progress. “Each sphere as you progress is blended into the next by a kind of borderland,” one message came through. “So

there is no shock to those who pass from one to another. Albeit, you will mark that each sphere is distinct in itself. Nor is the borderland between two spheres a neutral land. It partakes a very real and continuous graduation all the way..."⁸.

Other teachings or truths penned by Owen:

On God: "Not everyone who comes over here is able to understand that one of the elementary truths which is necessary to assimilate in order to progress is that God is no more visibly present here than He is in the earth life."⁹

On transitioning: "Now let us see if we can impress you to write a few words of the conditions which we found when we arrived here – the conditions, that is, of those who pass over when they first arrive. They are not all of an equal degree of spiritual development, of course, and therefore require different treatment. Many, as you know, do not realize for some time the fact that they are what they would call dead, because they find themselves alive and with a body, and their previous vague notions of the after-death state are not, by any means, lightly thrown away."¹⁰

On preparation: "Now, it is no small matter that men should so live their lives on earth that when they step over the threshold into the larger, freer sphere they should take up and continue their service in the Kingdom without a more or less protracted hiatus in their progress. We have seen the effect of the career of so many, as it is viewed in extension into this land, that we feel we cannot too much emphasize the importance of preparation and self-training while opportunity offers. For so many do put off the serious consideration of this, with the idea of starting afresh here, and when they come over they find that they had very little realized what that starting afresh really implied."¹¹

On the afterlife environment: "Things here when first we arrive are certainly different from those of the old life, but not so different as to make us feel dumbfounded by their strangeness. In-

deed, those who come over after living an unprogressive life on earth, find themselves in spheres of so gross a character as to be, to them, indistinguishable from earth itself. That is one of the reasons they are not able to realize that they have changed their state. As you progress through the lower spheres into the higher, this grossness gradually gives place to more rare conditions, and the higher you go the more sublimated is the environment. But few, if any, pass into those spheres where no trace of earth is seen, or no likeness to the earth life. I doubt it, as a rule, any do. But of this I must not speak dogmatically, for I have not myself reached, or even visited, a sphere where there is absolutely no likeness to God's beautiful earth."¹²

On self-judgment: "You see, everything is considered here, even the things which seem so casual and transitory in the earth life. They are all registered in their relation to one another, all the seemingly casual talks or chance meetings, a book read, a hand shaken in the street for the first time and never again, a few friends meeting in the same way, at a mutual friend's house and never meeting again – everything and every item is registered, considered, co-ordinated and used when, and if occasion offers...Be therefore, not remiss to weigh well all you do and every word you say; not in anxiety, but rather by cultivating a habit of will to do good; always and everywhere to radiate kindness of heart, for in the Kingdom these are not of small account, but go to make robes bright and bodies radiant...As for the Judge, well, she is here; for you yourself are judge, and will mete out to yourself your punishment. You will do this of your own free will by reviewing all the life you have lived and, as you bravely own up one sin after another, so you will progress."¹³

On prayer: "Prayer is not merely the asking for something you wish to attain. It is much more than that, and, because it is so, it should receive more careful consideration than it has yet received. What you have to do in order to make

prayer a power is to cast aside the temporal and fix your mind and spirit on the eternal. When you do that you find that many items you would have included in your prayer drop out from the very incongruity of their presence, and the greater and wider issues become to you the focus of your creative powers.”¹⁴

On religion: “We tell you, with this same fearlessness, and with great reverence also that what goes by the name of Orthodoxy among Christians in the Church on earth is not a fair and true presentation, in many ways, of the Truth as we have come to know it here.”¹⁵

On travel between spheres: “As we go higher in the spheres this responsive action between the spirits and their environment is also maintained, and that which we may call the external light becomes more and more perfect and intense the higher we go. So it is that those who dwell in, as we will say, the Fourth Sphere may not penetrate into the Fifth, to remain there, until they

have become so developed as to sustain with ease the degree of intensity of light there obtaining. Having attained to that Fifth Sphere they soon become used to its light. And if they return to the Fourth, as they do from time to time, that Fourth Sphere seems dimmer to them, while still they are able to see with comparative ease. But if they should descend straight to the Second or First Sphere, they would only with difficulty be able to use those denser vibrations of light and, in order to do so, are obliged to train themselves to see in that same sphere which once was but their normal abode. When we come down to your earth sphere, we see by reason of the spiritual light which men have in themselves. And those who are of higher spiritual grade than others we see so much the more clearly.”¹⁶



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¹ Owen, G. Vale, *The Life Beyond the Veil*, Volume I, George H. Doran Co., New York, 1921, pp. 16-17

² _____, pp. 19-20

³ _____, p. 21

⁴ _____, pp. 21-24

⁵ _____, pp. 24-25

⁶ _____, p. 25

⁷ _____, p. 25

⁸ Owen, G. Vale, *Ministry of Heaven*, The Greater World Assoc., Holland Park, UK, 1982 (first published 1922, p. 69)

⁹ Volume I, p. 59

¹⁰ _____, p. 90

¹¹ _____, p. 128

¹² _____, p. 150

¹³ _____, p. 166-167, 178

¹⁴ _____, p. 200

¹⁵ _____, p. 211

¹⁶ Volume II, pp. 31-32