

Biography of Charles Drayton Thomas (1868-1953)

A Wesleyan minister, Charles Drayton Thomas (1868 – July 14, 1953) was one of the lead investigators for the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) in the study of the mediumship of Gladys Osborne Leonard, with whom he had more than 500 sittings. He is most remembered for the “book tests” and “newspaper tests” conducted with Mrs. Leonard, as well as the “Bobbie Newlove” case. His books include *Some New Evidence for Human Survival* (1922), *Life Beyond Death with Evidence* (1928), *The Mental Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1930), *Beyond Life’s Sunset* (1931), *An Amazing Experiment* (1936), and *From Life to Life* (year unknown).

A graduate of Richmond Theological College, Thomas joined the SPR during the early 1900s and served on its council for 19 years. He was especially interested in the popular theory that the medium was reading the mind of the sitter in providing information. He said that it was his father, the Rev. John Thomas, also a Wesleyan minister, who, posthumously, gave him the idea of the book tests. It was during a sitting with Mrs. Leonard, early in 1917, that the father and son on different sides of the veil began collaborating in the experiments.

The senior Thomas, who died in 1903, told his son that the tests had been devised by others in a more advanced sphere than his and the idea passed on to him. At the time, Drayton Thomas (he went by his middle name) had had over 100 sittings with Mrs. Leonard. He mentioned that the tests were secondary to other business which he and his father discussed and that his father continually gave other evidence of his own identity. Drayton Thomas would arrange a notebook on a table with a lighted lamp. Leonard would take a seat several feet from him and after two or three

minutes of silence she would go into a trance. Suddenly, in a clear and distinct voice, Feda, Leonard’s spirit control, would take over Leonard’s body and begin using her speech mechanism while relaying messages from the senior Thomas and others in the spirit world. There was no similarity between Leonard’s voice and that of Feda, who spoke like a young girl. Moreover, Feda spoke with an accent and had frequent lapses of grammar.



Occasionally, just after Leonard went into the trance state, Thomas would hear whispering of which he could catch fragments, such as, “Yes, Mr. John, Feda will tell him...Yes, all right...” Feda often referred to herself in the third person, e.g., “Feda says she is having trouble understanding Mr. John.”¹

The idea behind the book tests was to communicate information gleaned by the father from a book in the son’s extensive library. For example, in one of the earliest experiments, the father told the son to go to the lowest shelf and take the sixth book from the left. On page 149, three-quarters

down, he would find a word conveying the meaning of falling back or stumbling. When the younger Thomas arrived home that evening after his sitting with Mrs. Leonard, he went to the book and place on the page, where he found the words, "...to whom a crucified Messiah was an insuperable stumbling-block."²

The father explained to the son, through Feda, that he was able to get the "appropriate spirit of the passage" much easier than he could the actual words. However, over a period of 18 months experimentation, he found himself able to pick up more and more words and numbers, gradually shifting from "sensing" to "clairvoyance." It was made abundantly clear by the father that he was experimenting on his side as much as his son was on the material side.

It was certain that Mrs. Leonard had never visited Thomas' house and knew nothing of the library of books in it. Realizing, however, that his subconscious might somehow have recorded such detailed information in the book when he read it years before as well as the exact location of the book in his library, Thomas decided to experiment with books in a friend's house. He informed his father of the plan so that the father knew where to search. In one of the tests there, Feda told Thomas that on page 2 of the second book from the right on a particular shelf, he would find a reference to sea or ocean. She added that the discarnate Thomas was not sure which, because he got the idea and not the words. When Drayton Thomas pulled the book from the shelf of his friend's house, he read, "A first-rate seaman, grown old between sky and ocean."³

In another experiment, Drayton Thomas was told to look at page 9 where he would find a reference to changing of colors. Upon opening this book, Thomas found, "Along the northern horizon the sky suddenly changes from light blue to a dark lead colour."⁴

Over a period of about two years, the father and son researchers carried out 348 tests. Of those,

242 were deemed good, 46 indefinite, and 60 failures. The discarnate Thomas explained the failures as his inability to get the idea through the mind of the medium or the medium's mind somehow distorting the message.

After the "book tests," Thomas was told by his discarnate father to experiment in a different way – what came to be called the "newspaper tests." These began late in 1919, some two years after the book tests, also with Mrs. Leonard. In the newspaper tests, the discarnate Thomas would provide information to be found in newspapers and magazines not yet printed. Thus, he would exercise a sort of precognition and clairvoyance. This would seemingly rule out what was being called Super ESP, the ability of the medium to go beyond reading the mind of the sitter and tap into the mind of anyone having a particular knowledge of a subject.

In a test on February 13, 1920, Thomas was told to go to the *London Times* of the following day and near the top of column two of the first page he would find the name of a minister with whom he (the father) had been friendly when living in Leek. Lower in the column, he would find his (Drayton's) name, his mother's name, and an aunt's name, all within a space of two inches. When the paper appeared the morning after the sitting, Thomas saw no familiar names relative to the minister friend. He then consulted with his mother who immediately called his attention to the name "Perks," informing her son that the Rev. George T. Perks was a friend of his father's and had visited him while they were living in Leek. Looking lower in the column, Thomas found his name, a slight variation of his mother's name, and an aunt's name, all within a space of 1¼ by 1½ inches.

In the same test, Thomas was told that two-thirds of the way down column one, he would find a word suggesting ammunition, and between that and the name of a former teacher of his he would find a French place name, looking like three words hyphenated into one. While Thomas found the name of a former teacher, "Watts," it was in the

column next to the one indicated by his father. As for the ammunition reference, the word "canon" appeared twice, apparently taken by the discarnate Thomas as "cannon." The Belgian town of Braine-le-Château was also found in the column indicated.⁵

Drayton Thomas checked with the *London Times* and concluded that the page from which his father took the information had not yet been typeset at the time the information was given to him through Leonard and Fedá.

On April 23, 1920, Drayton Thomas was unable to keep his appointment with Mrs Leonard and sent a friend, a Dr. Dyson, unknown to Mrs. Leonard. Dyson was told that he would find his name about half way down the first column of the first page of the *Times* of the following day. This proved to be correct, the name "Dyson" appearing as predicted.

About 2½ inches below Dyson, he would find his spirit friend's name. There, Dyson found "St. Andrew's." Except for the apostrophe, this was correct.

"A little below, say three-quarters down, is the name of a place which they have visited and much enjoyed," Fedá relayed from John Thomas who was apparently passing on information from Andrews. In this place, Dyson found "Filey," a place where he and Andrews had frequently spent holidays together.

"A little above is the name of a mutual friend of theirs," John Thomas communicated. There, Dyson found "Jones" and "Davies," both mutual friends.⁶

Many other newspaper tests were carried out by Drayton Thomas, not all of them in the *Times* or *Daily Telegraph*. In each case, he would immediately write down the information and file it in a sealed envelope with the Society for Psychical Research at a time before the type was set at the newspaper office. Further, Thomas would check papers from at least 10 other days, being sure that the same names did not appear in those editions, thereby ruling out coincidence. Some of the tests

were inconclusive and a few were failures, but the positive results far outnumbered the failures.

When Thomas asked his father how he was able to obtain information from newspapers not yet typeset, the father replied that he didn't quite understand it himself. He referred to it as some kind of "etheric foreshadowing." He likened it to seeing the shadow of a man around the corner before actually seeing the man.

When Drayton Thomas asked his father what produces the "shadow" of the object, the father replied that he had not figured it out. "I suspect, but I am not sure, that whatever is about to materialise on earth has its spiritual counterpart, which is reflected, say on the atmosphere or ether, but not visible to all," was the response. "Admitting that each *object* may have such counterpart, you will ask how an *event* yet to happen can have its spiritual counterpart? I think in the same way that an intention may be sensed by a sensitive before it is put into action by the sitter. Sometimes when a man proposes to commit murder his intended victim feels a sense of impending danger. Animals feel this even more than do human beings, seeing what is about to happen.

"Now the things I see are frequently but the spiritual counterparts of things which are about to take form; some of my tests from the *Times* might be called shadows of a substance. When you see a shadow it is but an outline, and you do not look for detail, and that explains the difficulty of these tests; we cannot always sufficiently observe detail." He further explained that as he had moved from sensing to seeing, he could not always see the word clearly, as in one case he gave the word "rain" for what proved to be "raisin."⁷

At another sitting, the discarnate Thomas explained that although the words may not be in type, someone's thoughts are on them and someone has formulated the wording. However, he added that for the most part the process is beyond human comprehension.

"I regard book and newspaper tests as a further addition to the 'signs and wonders' by

which many in the next life are endeavouring to attract the attention of mortals to the reality of their life and to the true meaning of our temporary existence on earth," Drayton Thomas ended. "Extended knowledge would surely transform the conventional ideas about death, and inspire greater desire to live in harmony with the wise purposes of the Infinite One who, father-like, watches over each and all in this world and the next."⁸

In September 1932, Thomas received a letter from a stranger, a Mr. Hatch, who said that his step-grandson, Bobbie Newlove, had died a few weeks earlier of diphtheria at the age of 10. Having read Thomas' book, *Life Beyond Death*, he wondered if it were possible for Thomas to contact the boy. While not optimistic, Thomas decided to do a proxy sitting with Mrs. Leonard. After she went

into trance, he handed her the folder letter, hoping that her psychometric ability would facilitate contact with the boy. Contact was made and over 11 sittings there was much in the way of evidential information that came through. Some of it was unknown to his family but verified as factual.

"Perhaps it will be asked what benefit may be expected from a general acceptance of this evidence for survival," Thomas wrote. "I think it will do for others what it has done for me. It has supplemented and reinforced my faith, both in times of bereavement and in the prospect of old age and death. Also, it has further emphasized the value of personal religion."⁹



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¹ Thomas, Charles Drayton, *Some New Evidence for Human Survival*, Spiritualist Press Ltd., 1922, p. 23

² _____, p. 30

³ _____, p. 54

⁴ _____, pp. 54-55

⁵ _____, pp. 86-88

⁶ _____, pp. 102-104

⁷ _____, pp. 117-118

⁸ _____, p. 141

⁹ Thomas, Charles Drayton, *Life Beyond Death with Evidence*, W. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1928, p. 291