

The Judge Testifies On Behalf Of Many Languages

Compiled and introduced by Miles Edward Allen, 2014

On the 27th of October, 1857, a Mr. A.D. Byles wrote a letter to the Honorable John W. Edmonds, asking for a description of a case of xenoglossy. Byles explained that a professor he knew claimed that the mediums who exhibited the ability to speak in tongues foreign to them could do so only because they had previously heard those languages read or spoken. Even so, the professor avowed that he would indorse the spiritistic explanation if Byles could present him with "a case well authenticated (by three or more reliable witnesses) of any person or medium speaking in a language of which they were entirely ignorant, never having read, heard read, or heard spoken such language" previously.

Edmonds, who had been a state senator and a justice on the New York State Supreme Court, in addition to being one of the first psychic researchers of the modern era, responded by first casting doubt on the likelihood of the professor changing his mind, even if it were to be "authenticated by fifty reliable witnesses. I have heard this assertion made so often, and seen its results," Edmonds states, "that I feel authorized to anticipate what would be the result in your Professor's case. I said the same thing myself several times in the early stages of my inquiries, and when the fact came on which I had promised or hoped to found a belief, I was surprised to find myself still a doubter." Simple acknowledgement of the reality of such marvels

was not sufficient, he felt, without the "rock of reason and philosophy" necessary to sustain belief.

Nevertheless, Edmonds then proceeds to cite a portion of his published writings mentioning an incident in which a medium named Laura had conversed in Greek with a Greek sitter. Being as the medium was his own daughter, whom he was certain had never been exposed to the Greek language, and, furthermore, being as the session took place in his own home with numerous prominent witnesses present, Judge Edmonds felt that the skeptical professor's criteria for proof had already been met.

Here is the previously published¹ description of the session:

"She was next developed to speak different languages. She knows no language but her own, and a little smattering of boarding-school French; yet she has spoken in nine or ten different tongues, sometimes for an hour at a time, with the ease and fluency of a native. It is not unfrequent that foreigners converse with their Spirit-friends through her, in their own language. A recent instance occurred, where a Greek gentleman had several interviews, and for several hours at a time carried on the conversation on his part in Greek, and received his answers sometimes in that language, and sometimes in English. Yet, until then, she had never heard a word of modern Greek spoken."

The year following the exchange of letters

¹ Edmonds, John W., *Spiritualism*, Vol. 2, p. 45.

with Byles, Edmonds published a tract titled: *Speaking in Many Tongues*. In it, he considerably expands on the evidence for xenoglossy. The remainder of this section consists of direct quotes from this tract.²

The foregoing is my account, in very general terms, of my daughter's mediumship. Let me here specify some of the instances more particularly:

One evening there came to my house a young girl from one of the Eastern States. She had come to New York to seek her fortune. Her education was that which can be obtained at a common country school. She was a medium, and was accompanied by the Spirit of a Frenchman, who was very troublesome to her. He could speak through her, but only in French. For more than an hour a conversation went on between my daughter and the Spirit, speaking through Miss Dowd. They both conducted the conversation entirely in French, and both spoke with the rapidity and fluency of native Frenchmen. Miss Dowd's French was a wretched patois of some of the Southern provinces of France, while Laura's was pure Parisian. This occurred in my library, where some five or six persons were present; and Miss Dowd is still living in this city.

On another occasion, some Polish gentlemen, entire strangers to her, sought an interview with Laura, and during it, she several times spoke in their language words and sentences which she did not understand, but they did, and a good deal of the conversation on their part was in Polish, and they received answers, sometimes in English, and sometimes in Polish. The English she understood, but the other she did not, though they seemed to understand it perfectly.

This can be verified only by Laura's statement, for no one was present but her and the two gentlemen, and they did not give their names.

The incident with the Greek gentleman was this: One evening, when some twelve or fifteen persons were in my parlor, Mr. E. D. Green, an artist of this city, was shown in, accompanied by a gentleman whom he introduced as Mr. Evangelides, of Greece. He spoke broken English, but Greek fluently. Ere long, a Spirit spoke to him through Laura, in English, and said many things to him, that he identified him as a friend who had died at his house a few years before, but of whom none of us had ever heard.

Occasionally, through Laura, the Spirit would speak a word or a sentence in Greek, until Mr. E. inquired if he could be understood if he spoke in Greek? The residue of the conversation for more than an hour, was, on his part, entirely in Greek, and in hers, sometimes in Greek, and sometimes in English. At times, Laura would not understand what was the idea conveyed either by her or him. At other times she would understand him, though he spoke in Greek, and herself when uttering Greek words.

He was sometimes very much affected, so much so as to attract the attention of the company, some of whom begged to know what it was that caused so much emotion. He declined to tell, but after the conversation ended, he told us that he had never before witnessed any Spirit-manifestations, and that he had, during the conversation, tried experiments to test that which was so novel to him. Those experiments were in speaking of subjects which he knew Laura must be ignorant of, and in frequently and suddenly changing the topic from domestic to political affairs, from philosophy to theology, and so on. In answer to our inquiries—for

² _____, *Spiritual Tracts Number 6, Speaking in Many Tongues*, New York, 1858.

none of us knew Greek—he assured us that his Greek must have been understood, and her Greek was correct. He afterward had many other interviews, in which Greek conversations occurred.

At this interview, which I have described, there were present Mr. Green, Mr. Evangelides, Mr. Allen, President of a Boston bank, and two gentlemen whose names I forget, but can easily ascertain, who were large railroad contractors in one of the Western States, my daughter Laura, my niece Jennie Keyes, myself, and several others whom I do not remember.

My niece, of whom I have spoken, has often sung Italian, improvising both words and tune, yet she is entirely unacquainted with the language. Of this, I suppose, there are a hundred instances. One day, my daughter and niece came into my library and began a conversation with me in Spanish, one speaking a part of a sentence and the other the residue. They were influenced, as I found, by the Spirit of a person whom I had known when in Central America, and reference was made to many things which had occurred to me there, of which I knew they were as ignorant as they were of Spanish. To this only we three can testify.

Laura has spoken to me in Indian, in the Chippewa and Menomonie tongues. I knew the language, because I had been two years in the Indian country. I have thus enumerated Indian, Spanish, French, Greek and English, that she has spoken. I have also heard her in Italian, Portuguese, Latin and Hungarian, and in some that I did not know. The instances are too numerous for me to recall the names of the persons present.

I will now mention instances through others than her. A man by the name of Finney, a carpenter, of very limited education, living near Cleveland, Ohio, was once giving me a communication, for he was a speaking medium.

The subject was Self-knowledge, and while I was writing it down, I spoke (*sotto voce*): Gnothi seaulon. He paused, repeated the Greek, and added, "Yes, know thyself." Mrs. Helen Leeds, of 45 Carver Street, Boston, a medium of some note in those parts, has very often spoken Chinese. She is of very limited education, and never heard a word of that language spoken. This occurred so often with her in a former stage of her mediumship, that I suppose I may say that there are thousands who have witnessed it. I have myself witnessed it at least a hundred times. In the early stages of my investigations I kept very full minutes of all that occurred. From my records I make this extract:

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHTH INTERVIEW.

Nov. 3, 1852. There was a special meeting of the Circle of Hope last evening, to meet some of our friends from Albany. Beside the members of the circle (the circle consisted of Mr. Sweet and wife, Mr. Wood and wife, Mr. Ira Hutchinson, Mr. Comes and myself) there were present Mrs. Shepherd and Mrs. Haight of Albany; Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Mettler, of Hartford, Conn.; Mrs. J. B. Mettler, of New York, and Mrs. Heath, sister of Mrs. Ambler. "Mr. Ambler was soon thrown into the magnetic state, etc. After he came out of the trance-state, Mrs. Shepherd was affected, and spoke in several languages. She occasionally spoke English.

And she continued for an hour or two thus to speak in some foreign languages. It seemed to us to be Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Mrs. Mettler was then thrown into a trance-state, and she was developed for the first time in her life to speak in diverse tongues. She spoke in German, and what seemed to be Indian. And they, two, [*i.e.* Mrs. Shepherd and Mrs. Mettler] then for some time conversed together in these foreign languages. Occasionally they spoke in English, and sometimes in broken English.

I have looked in my records, but do not find it, though I very well remember the fact, that Mrs. Sweet, of this city, another of our mediums, of very little education, has often spoken French. [Since writing the above, I learn that she has also spoken Italian and Hebrew.] I have, a number of times, witnessed a cognate manifestation, when the communication was through the Tappings,³ and was given in a foreign language, though the medium knew only the English. And I have heard Gov. Tallmadge's daughter, at my house, speak in German, several persons being present.

I have thus gathered together my own experience on this topic. I have never done so before, and confess myself somewhat surprised to behold how large the sum total is. And yet my experience embraces a very small part of that which has been given, and less, if I remember right, than what has been actually published to the world. I had hoped that in our country, where general information is so wide-spread, where this subject of spiritual intercourse has been a matter of investigation for at least ten years, and where the witnesses to its existence are numbered by hundreds of thousands, the time had gone by when it was necessary to pause in our progress to prove that existence. I had hoped that the time had arrived when the intelligent minds of our country were prepared to use the instrumentalities, whose existence cannot be ignored by any well-informed mind, for the purpose of inquiring whether there is not something in its philosophy and its revelations worthy of the attention of the loftiest intellect. It seems, however, that I am mistaken, and that we must yet awhile trudge along in our infant school. So be it. The time will come, however, when better things will be, and the Truth make its own way, even to the educated mind.

P. S. I now add to the foregoing: November 1. Today, at our Conference, I mentioned this subject, and asked if any of those present could give me any further information?

The attendance was unusually small, there not being over a hundred present, but I received the following reply to my inquiry:

Dr. John F. Gray mentioned having had communications through the rappings and table tippings in the Malay, Hebrew, and Spanish languages. The communications were spelled out, letter by letter, and written down. He obtained translations of all these from persons versed in the different languages. He has records of it all, specifying where it occurred, and who were present.... He mentioned one instance, where Professor Bush, who is a Hebrew scholar, was present, and he called the Hebrew alphabet, and wrote the communication down at the time, and afterward translated it, no one present but himself being acquainted with that alphabet.

Dr. Abraham D. Wilson, another physician of high standing stated that the late Mr. Henry Inman, the artist, told him that when his daughter was developed as a medium, she repeatedly spoke Spanish, of which she had no knowledge.

Mr. David Bryson stated that at a recent circle, where Mrs. Tucker was the medium, and Mr. and Mrs. Daniel G. Taylor and others were present, the medium spoke fluently an unknown tongue, and conversed with a Dane, who was present, in the Danish language. Mr. Taylor was at the Conference, and confirmed Mr. Bryson's account.

And Mrs. French, the medium, well known here, and at Pittsburgh, stated that through her the Spirits had spoken nine different languages. She relates a recent instance,

³ That is, knocks or rappings that seem to come from the interior of tables, walls, etc. and spell-out intelligent responses to queries.

where Mr. Henry C. Vail being present, she was addressed by an Italian female and led by her to a part of the town where some fourteen Italians were huddled together in one room, in a great state of destitution and sickness, and where Italian was spoken through her to them with entire ease. And she mentioned an occasion at Washington, where in the presence of Governor Tallmadge and Mr. Giddings, M. C., from Ohio, she spoke French fluently.

All these are cases where the parties speaking knew only one language—the English.

This is the gathering of one afternoon only. I can form no idea of the extent of the evidence that might be gathered by a more extended inquiry. But is it not enough for all, except those who would not believe, though one arose from the dead?

[End of quotes from Edmonds.]

More on Xenoglossy and Edmonds

Further information about the life and psychic research of Judge Edmonds may be found in aisle L-2 (Biographies of Researchers) of the ASCS on-line library.

A most impressive case of Xenoglossy is detailed in the article titled: *14 Languages Spoken Through Medium*, which is accessible from aisle E-8.