

Biography of Geraldine Cummins (1890-1969)

A native of Cork Ireland, Geraldine Cummins (January 24, 1890 to August 24, 1969) was a gifted automatic-writing medium. She authored 22 books, 15 of them received by automatic writing, including several now considered classics in the field, viz., *The Spirits of Cleophas* (1928), *Beyond Human Personality* (1932), *The Road to Immortality* (1933), *Mind in Life and Death* (1956), and *Swan on a Black Sea* (1965). She also had abilities in the areas of psychometry and precognition.



The daughter of Professor Ashley Cummins, M.D., Cummins played international hockey for Ireland and worked, during her younger years as a librarian, playwright, short-story writer, and novelist. She was also involved in the suffragette movement. Her first book, *The Land They Loved*, published by Macmillan in 1919, was a novel.

Cummins' introduction to mediumship came during June 1914, when she met Hester

(Dowden) Travers Smith in Paris and observed her receive messages from "alleged deceased persons" by means of the talking board.¹ With Dowden and Cummins working the board together at a later date, the oft-cited "Pearl Tie-Pin Case" unfolded in which Cummins' cousin, who had been killed on the battlefield, asked Cummins to make sure his pearl-tie was given to his fiancée. At the time, no one knew of the fiancée or the pearl tie-pin, but both were later verified. (See biography of Hester Travers Smith for more details.)

At the time, Cummins, although only 17, had already subscribed to the theory that it was all coming from her subconscious by a means of what was then referred to as cryptesthesia and would now be called superpsi. "Proud of my agnosticism I firmly believed that the subconsciousness, with its capacity for fantasy-weaving, accounted for all the communications," Cummins wrote in her autobiography. "My slow, conscious mind could not have invented these impersonations. So [I] became all the more interested and conceitedly pleased with [my] subconscious powers."²

Cummins' dedication to mediumship actually began in 1923, after she met Beatrice Gibbes, a London resident and member of the Society for Psychical Research. Gibbes took her under wing and helped her develop as a medium. Over the next 25 years, Gibbes acted as Cummins' manager, arranging for sitters, keeping records, removing pages during the sittings, and checking on evidence. Cummins spent eight months of every year living with Gibbes in London, while the other four months of the year were spent in Dublin.

Gibbes described Cummins' condition during the automatic writing as "semi-trance or light dream-state or sometimes in a deeper condition of trance. Her hand is assumed to be controlled by some outside entity or influence, quite separate from her own personality. The method adopted by her is as follows: she sits at a table, with her left hand covering her eyes and her right hand resting on a block of foolscap paper. After a pause during which she endeavours to make her mind a blank, her hand begins to write and the name of her guide or control 'Astor' is written. He announces the presence of some 'communicator' who then, after a few seconds of introduction by Astor, writes his or her name."³

The handwriting almost always resembled that of the communicating entity when alive. Much was offered in the way of evidence during personal sittings, but much of Cummins' writings were historical scripts. *The Scripts of Cleophas* were purportedly communicated by one Cleophas, a Christian convert of the first century, through seven scribes collectively called the "messengers." As these messengers explained it, Cleophas, was too elevated to communicate directly, and so "plucks from the tree of memory all these matters that had been within his knowledge, gives them to the Scribe, who gives them to the 'messenger,' who enters into the thought of the writer."⁴ The book discusses the lives of the apostles after the death of Jesus. Biblical scholars endorsed their intrinsic merit and said that the writings gave new meanings to several obscure passages in the New Testament.

"During that time of writing I was wholly unaware of flashes of lighting and of rumbling thunder," Cummins explained. "My own consciousness was seeing, in little pictures, the people that were playing their part in the narrative, and I was a spectator, who, gripped by a play in a theatre, is lost to himself and sensible only of the characters in the drama."⁵

Beyond Human Personality and *The Road to Immortality* were purportedly dictated by Frederic W. H. Myers, the pioneering psychical researcher who died in 1901. They contain much about the nature of the afterlife. Sir Oliver Lodge, another pioneering psychical researcher and a good friend of Myers, reviewed the scripts and found them to be very characteristic of the Myers he knew. While sitting with Gladys Osborne Leonard, another medium, Lodge communicated with Myers and asked him if he knew anything about Miss Cummins. "His reply was to the effect that he had communicated through her," Lodge wrote, "and that in a general way he had managed to get through what he wanted, though he admitted it was difficult, and he couldn't be sure that it was always exact, but still on the whole he was willing to pass it as fairly representing what he intended to say."⁶

One of the more interesting evidential cases was that of Molly Ross, who had several sittings with Cummins beginning in late 1928. Molly's sister Audrey had died in 1894 and another sister, Margaret, had died in 1925. When a third sister, Alice, died on October 11, 1928, Molly wired Cummins in Dublin, requesting that Astor find Audrey to let her know that Alice was now on her side and probably in need of help.

Four days later, on October 15, Molly received a letter from Cummins, postmarked October 12, saying that Margaret had communicated and said that "Alice was not alone when she was slipping out of her body...that Audrey and Mater (their mother) came to her."

Margaret explained that Audrey presented herself to Alice as Alice remembered her in 1894, not as she was in 1925. Because Alice was so restless, Audrey put a dream of old days about her soul. When Alice saw these old memories, her fear left her.

Margaret also communicated that she had not yet approached Alice because she was not yet fit to draw near the newly dead. Besides, Marga-

ret added, she would not have been received kindly by Alice as they constantly quarreled when they were alive. This point was particularly evidential to Molly, since it was true that there was much friction between Margaret and Alice.

On November 10, 1928, Molly sat with Cummins and heard from both Margaret and Alice. Although Alice struggled to communicate, she mentioned Molly being at her deathbed and said she regretted that her husband, John, and her son, Ronald, were not there when she left the body. Molly confirmed the deathbed scene as accurate and pointed out that John and Ronald arrived several hours after the death. These were facts also unknown to Cummins.

Alice said that she regretted not having treated her second son, who was living in East Africa, as an equal to Ronald. Molly confirmed that Ronald was the favorite son and noted that Ronald was favored in Alice's will, another fact which Cummins could not have known.

As the writing became fainter, Margaret took the pencil and explained that Alice found it hard to write at the end as she didn't understand how to manage the words. However, she got through most of what she wanted to say. Margaret added that Alice also regretted treating her husband badly. Molly noted that this was also very evidential as Alice "bullied her husband dreadfully."

Margaret then mentioned that Alice still resented the fact that Margaret cut her out of her will and left her share to Charles, their brother, who had no need of the money. This was another very evidential fact to Molly.

There was much phraseology that Molly identified with her sisters. In one sitting, Margaret said that Alice was "blossoming out," a term she frequently used when alive. Margaret also said that she and Alice had had a "fusillade," a word Margaret often used to describe their arguments when alive. When Alice took the pencil, she referred to Charles as an "odious man." Mol-

ly clearly recalled Alice referring to their brother as an "odious man" on numerous occasions when in the earth life.

Alice mentioned having talked with their father (Pater) and his making reference to some "numbskull" relatives. This was a word that Alice sometimes used when alive, Molly noted, while Beatrice Gibbes could not recall Cummins ever having used the word before. At another sitting, Alice informed Mollie that Margaret was giving her a hard time, saying "she is just as mulish as ever," Molly recalled Alice using that word many times in describing Margaret.

Alice also told Molly that Audrey had taken her on a trip (in spirit) to the south of France. Molly noted that Alice, when alive, had longed to get away from England and spoke of getting away to the South of France.

There was much more in the way of evidence, not only with regard to phraseology but with the characters of the communicators. "It would be difficult to attribute the production of the Ross scripts to the 'subconscious activity' of Miss Cummins," Gibbes offered in concluding the case. "Her mind contained no reminiscences or associations upon which it could draw in order to successfully dramatize these very original ladies. That language employed is purely colloquial and there is no attempt to emulate the style of a particular author known to us. But there is the precise building up of curious and mundane personalities which were characteristic of certain deceased persons unknown to the automatist, but definitely claimed to be recognized by their surviving relatives."⁷

Gibbes added that the writing did not bear any resemblance to Cummins' normal script and the phraseology was much different than that she used in her conscious state. Moreover, she concluded that the individuality of the spirit communicators made such theories as telepathy and Universal Memory highly unlikely.

At some point during the 1920s, Cummins came to agree with Gibbes, thus abandoning her subconscious theory. "...these investigations presented to me a vision of the latent powers of the individual self and also a belief in the immortality of the soul," she wrote.⁸ "Better still, they gave me a philosophy with which to withstand the buffets of the world – best of all, an understanding of many of the mysterious sayings of Christ, and they cast for me a certain illumination on His recorded life...."

In concluding her 1951 book, Cummins wrote: "I am inclined to accept with reservations the unrefined spiritualistic view – humdrum bodies as the outward expression of the soul, existence in a non-physical world, but in a world of substance. Why not? It seems that we human beings see each other because we are all traveling on the same wavelength, at the same rate of speed...Death may perhaps be defined as simply a change of speed. Our souls cast off our material bodies and occupy bodies of another more rapidly vibrating substance."⁹



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⁴ Cummins, Geraldine, *The Scripts of Cleophas*, Psychic Press Ltd., 1928, p. xii (Intro).

⁵ Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, p. 80.

⁶ Cummins, *The Road to Immortality*, The Aquarian Press, 1932, p. 10.

⁷ Cummins, *They Survive*, Psychic Book Club, 1946, p. 130.

⁸ Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, p. 39

⁹ _____, p. 164.

¹ "Although popularly known as a Ouija Board, "Ouija" is now a registered trademark of Parker Brothers.

² Cummins, Geraldine, *Unseen Adventures*, Rider & Co., 1951, p. 27.

³ Cummins, Geraldine, *They Survive*, Psychic Book Club., 1946, p. 11.