

Biography of Etta Wriedt (1859-1942)

A resident of Detroit, Michigan, Henrietta “Etta” Wriedt was called by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle the best direct-voice medium in the world. In addition to Doyle, her mediumship was witnessed and validated by Sir William Barrett, Sir Oliver Lodge, Dr. John S. King, Admiral W. Osborne Moore, and the Rev. Charles Tweedale. According to author and medium Geraldine Cummins, Lady Florence Barrett, a medical doctor and Sir William’s wife, was skeptical of mediumship until she met Mrs. Wriedt. “Conviction was primarily due, she said, to the fact that, when her relatives purported to communicate through this medium, the rather peculiar intonations of their voices were unmistakably produced,” Cummins wrote. “This fact weighed more with her medically trained mind than any evidential facts, of which there were many, uttered by the ‘spirit voices’ at these experiments.”¹

Wriedt was not a trance medium and was often witnessed talking to other sitters as voices came through a floating trumpet. It was reported that as many as four spirit voices would be talking simultaneously to different sitters and, although Wriedt knew only English, spirits communicated in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Dutch, Arabic and other languages.

“The reality of her powers may best be judged by a short description of results,” Doyle wrote. “On the occasion of a visit to the author’s (Doyle’s) house in the country she sat with the author, his wife, and his secretary in a well-lighted room. A hymn was sung, and before the first verse was ended a fifth voice of excellent quality joined in and continued to the end. All three observers were ready to depose that Mrs. Wriedt herself was singing all the time. At the evening sitting a succession of friends came through with every possible sign of their identity.

One sitter was approached by her father, recently dead, who began by the hard, dry cough which had appeared in his last illness. He discussed the question of some legacy in a perfectly rational manner. A friend of the author’s, a rather irritable Anglo-Indian, manifested, so far as a voice could do so, reproducing exactly the fashion of speech, giving the name, and alluding to facts of his lifetime. Another sitter had a visit from one who claimed to be his grand-aunt. The relationship was denied, but on inquiry at home it was found that he had actually had an aunt of that name who died in his childhood. Telepathy has to be strained very far to cover such cases.”²



Moore, who had investigated a number of mediums in England, first visited Wriedt in Detroit in 1909 and then again in 1910 and 1911. During his 1910 trip, he spent 20 days as a house guest of Mr. and Mrs. Wriedt, during which time he closely observed her during a number of sésances. He was so impressed that he arranged for her to visit England in 1912 and 1913. He noted that voices came through the trumpet in broad daylight or gaslight, but they were louder in the

dark. Moreover, Wriedt was open to sitting anywhere in the room so that the investigator could watch her and rule out fraud. Her primary control was Dr. John Sharp, who was born in Glasgow during the 18th Century, but was taken to the United States as an infant and died in Evansville, Indiana. "Dr. Sharp" sometimes spoke through the trumpet and at other times without the trumpet. He would usually open the séance in a loud, clear voice and then close it. Moore further observed that Mrs. Wriedt spoke "Yankee," yet the voices of his English relatives and friends came through in "pure English," while discussing very personal and family matters. However, Moore was never able to identify his visitors by their voices as he likened it to hearing a voice through a long-distance telephone, which was quite antiquated in those days. Occasionally, phantom forms would appear. At a sitting on January 2, 1911, one such form appeared to be that of William E. Gladstone, former prime minister of England, who had died in 1898. "I could never identify any spirit by its face, but I could see that there were features," Moore explained. "I very nearly recognized the face of Mr. Gladstone; his was a tall form, and remained some two minutes. After he had disappeared, he spoke through the trumpet. I need not say how surprised I was at this apparition and voice."³

Gladstone talked with Moore for about 20 minutes, discussing political matters in England, subjects of which Moore was reasonably certain that Mrs. Wriedt knew nothing. Professor William James of Harvard, who had died the year before, also spoke and discussed an experiment that Professor James Hyslop was to undertake in a few days. Moore also heard from Sir Richard Burton, but then something strange happened. He heard from a friend in England, who was still alive. He concluded that it was 2 a.m. in England and that she was traveling out-of-body during sleep.

One of the victims of the *Titanic* disaster was William T. Stead, a British journalist and social advocate who was on his way to the United States to accompany Mrs. Wriedt to England.

Thus, Mrs. Wriedt sailed alone, arriving in England on May 5, 1912. That same evening, a séance was conducted with Admiral Moore in attendance. "Stead manifested, and gave three admirable tests of his identity – two to Mr. Harper and one to me," Moore wrote. "...The test he gave to me was unmistakable; he alluded to the conversation we had at the bank buildings the last time I saw him. This conversation had lasted half an hour, and ranged over a variety of subjects, but the chief topic was the approaching visit of Mrs. Wriedt to his house. He desired that certain conditions should be observed, and it was to one of these that his spirit referred, with emphasis, on this evening."⁴

Moore recorded the firsthand account of Count Chedo Miyatovich, a diplomat from Serbia, who sat with Mrs. Wriedt on May 16, 1912. He was accompanied by his friend, Dr. Hinkovitch. Mrs. Wriedt began by telling Miyatovich that a young woman, a spirit friend of his, stood in front of them and wondered if he could see her. "I did not," Miyatovich wrote, "but my friend saw an oblong piece of illuminated mist." Mrs. Wriedt then said that the woman whispers to her that her name is Adela or Ada Mayell. "I was astounded," Miyatovich continued. "Only three weeks before died Miss Ada Mayell, a very dear friend of mine, to whom I was deeply attached. The next moment a light appeared behind Mrs. Wriedt and moved from left to right. There in that slowly moving light was, not the spirit, but the very person of my friend William T. Stead, not wrapped in white, but in his usual walking costume. Both I and Mrs. Wriedt exclaimed loudly for joy. Hinkovitch, who knew Stead only from photos, said: 'Yes, that is Mr. Stead.' Mr. Stead nodded to me and disappeared. Half-a-minute later he appeared again, looking at me and bowing; again he appeared, and was seen by all three of us more clearly than before. Then we all three distinctly heard these words: 'Yes, I am Stead. William T. Stead. My dear friend Miyatovich, I came here expressly to give you fresh proof that there is life

after death. You always hesitated to accept that truth.”

After Stead disappeared, Ada Mayell began speaking. “She then spoke to me in her affectionate and generous manner, trying to reassure me on certain questions which had sadly preoccupied my mind since her death,” Miyatovich continued, further mentioning that she knew that her sisters and niece had sent letters to him since her death. “Mrs. Wriedt and Hinkovitch heard every word. Then, to my own and my Croatian friend’s astonishment, a loud voice began to talk to him in the Croatian language. It was an old friend, a physician by profession, who died suddenly from heart disease. They continued for some time the conversation in their native tongue, of which I heard and understood every word. Mrs. Wriedt, for the first time in her life, heard how the Croatian language sounds. I and my Croatian friend were deeply impressed by what we witnessed that day, May 16th. I spoke of it to my friends as the most wonderful experience of my life.”⁵

Miyatovich then arranged for Professor Margarette Selenka, a friend of Stead’s who happened to be in London at the time, to sit with Mrs. Wriedt on May 24. He accompanied her, while two others were present. “After a short time from the beginning of the séance, we all saw Mr. Stead appear, but hardly for more than ten seconds,” Miyatovich recounted. “He disappeared, to reappear again somewhat more distinctly, but not so clearly as he appeared to me on May 16.”⁶ Stead then had a long conversation through the trumpet with Selenka and a short one with Miyatovich, reminding him of an incident two years earlier in his office Mowbray House. Then, Ada Mayell again spoke, followed by Miyatovich’s mother, who spoke in her own Serbian language. Selenka then heard from her deceased husband, Professor Lorentz Selenka, and her mother, who died a year earlier, both speaking in German. A friend of Selenka’s came singing a German song, and asked her to join him, as they used to sing together in

the old days, after which a number of spirits came for the other two sitters.

Moore further sets forth the testimony of one J. Maybank, who, along with his wife, sat with Wriedt on May 20. After being greeted by Tommy Mahone, a former shipmate, the Maybanks’ deceased son, Harold, spoke to them. “We did not see him, but we knew his dear voice again; it was our loved one returned and speaking to us,” Maybank related. “He greeted us with, ‘Hulloa, mum! Hulloa, dad! How are you? I am so pleased you are here tonight through the kindness of Admiral Moore.’ He then told us he was perfectly sound now, and was very happy, and was with his mother’s grandmother.” At a sitting several days later, the son again communicated and Maybank decided to put a test question to him. “Harold, do you remember poor old Cyril?” Maybank asked. “Of course I do dad; didn’t I tease him? And didn’t he growl?” Harold then let out a loud “meow” imitating Cyril, their old cat.⁷

At a third sitting, a voice identified herself as “Flossie.” Mrs. Maybank cried out, “What, my little sister?” when the voice replied, “Little sister indeed! I’m a woman now.” Mr. Maybank asked Flossie if she remembered what he said to her the last time he saw her. “Yes,” Flossie replied, “you said, ‘Good-bye, dear, “I’m off to China, and when I return you will be quite well.””⁸

While in England, Wriedt was occasionally controlled by John King (Sir Henry Morgan when alive, not to be confused with Dr. John S, King mentioned above and below) as it was explained that he was better acquainted with English people than Dr. Sharp. Grayfeather, a North American Indian, also controlled at times.

Sir William Barrett, professor of physics at the Royal College in Dublin, also set forth his testimonial in Moore’s book. After hearing from a number of others, Barrett heard “Sidgwick.” He then asked for the man’s Christian name and the voice responded with “Henry Sidgwick.” Henry Sidgwick was a personal friend of Barrett’s and the first president of the Society for Psychical Research. Barrett asked Sidgwick if he was all right

now, not referring to a particular problem he had. "You mean the impediment in my speech, but I do not stutter now," Sidgwick, who had a stuttering problem when alive, replied.⁹

"I went to Mrs. Wriedt's séances in a somewhat skeptical spirit, but I came to the conclusion that she is a genuine and remarkable medium, and has given abundant proof to others beside myself that the voices and the contents of the messages given are wholly beyond the range of trickery or collusion," Barrett offered.¹⁰

Among dozens of other testimonials offered to Moore was one by Major General Sir Alfred Turner. "We had hardly commenced when a voice, which came apparently from behind my right shoulder, exclaimed, 'I am happy to be with you again!' The voice was unmistakably that of Stead, who immediately commenced to tell us of the events of the dire moments when the huge leviathan settled down to her doom, and slowly sank to her grave two miles below the surface of the sea. For himself, he felt no fear whatsoever...When the Titanic sank, there was as regards himself, a short, sharp struggle to gain his breath, and immediately afterwards he came to his senses in another state of existence. He was surrounded by hundreds of beings who, like himself, had passed over the bourne, but who were utterly dazed, and being, at all events for the most part, totally ignorant of the next stage of life to come, were groping about as in the dark, asking for light, and entirely unconscious that they were not still in the flesh. He set himself at once to do missionary work by enlightening these poor and unprepared creatures, and in such work, he told, he was still employed."¹¹

Turner asked Stead if he could show himself and Stead replied that he could not do so then, but that Turner should go to Cambridge House on another day. "On the day in question, I went to Cambridge House, where I found a large and incongruous circle," Turner continued the story. "As he had promised, Stead appeared twice in rapid succession. He was dressed in his usual attire, so familiar to all his friends, and

looked supremely happy. He remained only a few moments in each case, and said nothing. Mrs. Wriedt was the medium."¹²

The Rev. Charles Tweedale told of his sitting with Mrs. Wriedt on June 3, 1912. "We had a marvelous experience," he wrote. "The sitting commenced with our singing 'Lead Kindly Light,' then a deep and solemn voice, which we were informed was that of Cardinal Newman, gave me his benediction, and water was sprinkled over us. Now ensued a marvelously evidential series of happening which most profoundly impressed and convinced Mr. W. W. Baggally, one of the chief investigators for the Society for Psychical Research, who was present and which dealt with intimately private affairs concerning his deceased father and fiancée. During the course of this wonderful experience a voice announced itself as Frank Woodward and enquired for my wife, and spoke to her. This astounded her, for Frank Woodward was her former music master, of whom she had not heard for seventeen years, and who lived in the extreme north of England. Enquiry afterwards revealed the fact that he had died a year previously."¹³

Moore recorded that there were days when no phenomenon occurred with Wriedt. He blamed fatigue on her part, lack of harmony within the sitting circle, and also adverse weather conditions, but he concluded that he had never met anyone whose mediumship had brought him so close to the next state as Mrs. Wriedt.



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See biography of John S. King, M.D. for more about Etta Wriedt.

¹ Cummins, Geraldine, *Unseen Adventure*, Rider and Co., 1951, p. 90

² Doyle, Arthur Conan, *The History of Spiritualism*, Cassell & Co., Ltd., Vol. II, 1926, p. 202

³ Moore, W. Osborne, *Glimpses of the Next State*, Watts & Co., 1911, Chapter X (149)

⁴ Moore, W. Osborne, *The Voices*, Watts & Co., 1913, Intro.

⁵ _____, pp. 3-4

⁶ _____, p. 7

⁷ _____, p. 26

⁸ _____, p. 27

⁹ _____, p. 60

¹⁰ _____, p. 60

¹¹ _____, p. 114

¹² _____, p. 115

¹³ Tweedale, Charles L., *News from the Next World*, Spiritualist Press Ltd., 1940, p. 260