

The Mediumship of the Bangs Sisters and an examination of their precipitated Spirit Portraits. Part III. By N. Riley Heagerty

Report by Admiral W. Usborne Moore:'

10 to 12 (noon). 19 January 1909. Atmospheric conditions good. I took to the Bangs Sisters a letter containing two sheets (four pages) of questions. In the envelope I put in four blank sheets of hotel paper marked with a private mark. The envelope which contained these six sheets was gummed and sealed with my signet-ring. I had written twenty-three questions to my guide. I was received by May Bangs in the same small room, and, as before, the room was flooded with light. I put the letter between her two slates, which are covered with wool at the edges to exclude the faintest ray of light. She took hold of the double slate ends with one hand while I put four rubber bands round the slates, as I had done two days previously. The slates were then put on the table, the same little vessel of ink was placed on top, and over all, was placed Bristol-board. From this moment May Bangs had nothing to do with the slates; they were in my own possession under my hands. The psychic and I sat opposite to one another, she leaning back in her chair, writing on a pad of paper.

After we had been sitting, talking for a quarter of an hour, May Bangs began telling me what my questions were, and answering some of them. Presently she said: "Tear off the corner of one your visiting cards, so that you can identify it again; put it on the slates, and we will see what happens to it". About fifteen minutes later she said: "Why do you write to your relative in such a formal style? Write a postscript on a piece of paper, naming your wife in the same familiar way as you would if writing to this spirit in life". This I did without her seeing what I had written, and put the piece of paper, doubled up, also on the slates. She then went on as before, repeating my questions within the sealed envelope. At 11.10 the psychic said: "Your card has gone into the letter". When an hour and three-quarters had elapsed from the time we began the sitting, three knocks on the table announced that the writing was finished.



I now opened the slates. Inside I found my packet intact, with seal untouched. On the outside of the envelope was written: 'The little slip [my postscript] has been arranged to your hat in the other room'. This was signed by an initial (-) the Christian name of my guide. I slit open the envelope at the top, and found inside it (a) my questions, contained in four pages; (b) eight pages of reply from the spirit, in ink, as if written with a steel pen; (c) my visiting card. I then went into the drawing room, where I had left my hat, found that it had been moved, and that inside the lining was my postscript. Before I left, May Bangs read out to me the questions in my letter, which she had written on her pad as she saw them in the astral light. They were all correct in sense, though not in actual phrasing; and the

curious thing was that she read them out in precisely the proper consecutive order - (1), (2) up to (23). With some reluctance, she later eventually surrendered the pages of the pad to me; it is one of the most curious documents in my possession. (One that I would trade my car for to have in my personal archives. - NRH).

Testing The Ink. Sir William Crookes and Lithium Citrate.

To test whether the ink brought to the sittings by W Usborne Moore with the Bangs Sisters was the same ink that was precipitated on to the blank pages by the spirits, Sir William Crookes (1832-1919), one of the greatest physicists of that century, suggested to Moore that he add the chemical lithium citrate to his ink beforehand, go through with two or three sittings with May Bangs for independent writing, and then send to him the pages containing the spirit writing; Crookes could then, under spectrum analysis, prove whether or not this was the ink used by the spirit writers. Under these exact conditions of control; the sitter bringing blank pages of paper sealed into an envelope, the envelope tightly secured by him between two slates, the ink pot, filled with his own ink, placed on top of the slates, and the medium, for the duration of the sitting, not even touching the slates or the table, there is no human being on the face

of this earth who could accomplish the feat of having replies, let alone ones of a personal nature, precipitated through the envelope and on to the blank pages without the aid of the Spirit World.

By later spectrum analysis, lithium citrate was discovered in the ink used by the spirits. This conclusively proved that in some extraordinary and mysterious way, Moore's own ink was used to write the messages in the sealed envelope between his own slates. Moore had also laid his visiting card on top of the slates and tore off one corner for identification; he also had written a postscript to his questions on a separate piece of paper and placed it alongside the visiting card. The former found its way into the envelope, while the latter, in accordance with a message on the outside of the envelope, was discovered in the other room in Admiral Moore's hat.

I will leave it up to the readers to decide what they believe. This is testimony based on the observations of Admiral W Usborne Moore, who was a distinguished Naval Officer for Great Britain, in command of warships specially fitted out for scientific research, and Sir William Crookes, one of the most famous physicists of that age. (We will be hearing more from Usborne Moore in this article - NRH).

The gift of precipitated spirit portraits by the Bangs Sisters did not begin until the autumn of 1894. During the early periods of their development, it was necessary to curtain the canvas, or place it in a dark chamber, and several sittings were required to complete the picture. As the gift developed, Elizabeth and May were able to demonstrate the phenomena in full light.

Initially, the portraits were produced as follows: two identical paper mounted canvases in wooden frames were placed together, face to face, and then leaned up against a window with the lower half resting upon a table. Each sister would sit on one side of the table and pinch the canvases together with one hand. The window curtains would be drawn up close to the frames on either side and an opaque blind drawn over the canvases. This procedure was arranged so that the only light coming into the room itself was through the canvases, which were translucent. The sitter(s), in most cases, would sit right at the end of the table, directly facing the canvases, and by doing so, watch the entire process unfold right before their very eyes. After a quarter of an hour the outline of shadows would begin to appear and disappear, the artist usually making his preliminary sketches, and then, at a rapid pace the portrait would come into full view. When the frames were separated, the spirit portrait would be found on the surface of one of the canvases, usually the one closest to the sitter. In the earlier days, though the paint was greasy to the touch, it left no stain whatsoever on the other paper which covered closely the other canvas. Later on, the portraits were precipitated as if by an airbrush, and only one canvas was needed; some took as little as five minutes to complete, and some were precipitated in full sunlight right on the front porch of the Bangs Sisters' house.

Art experts have examined the portraits and they cannot explain the media used by the spirit artists; the pictures are not charcoal, oils, crayon, pastels, ink, water colours, or any other known substance. The material has been compared to the fine dust on a butterfly's wings. Admiral Moore, in *Glimpses of The Next State* said about the material, 'The stuff of which the picture is composed is damp, and rubs off at the slightest touch, like soot, it comes off on the finger, a smutty, oily substance'.

Miss May Bangs, wrote in a letter to Mr James Coates, 17 September, 1910:

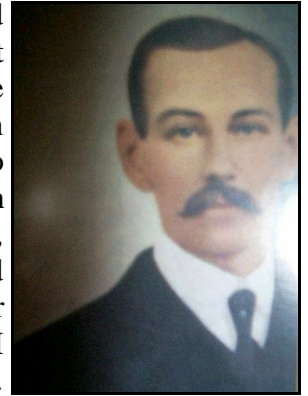
'The room is shaded sufficiently to cause all the light from the window to pass through the canvas, thus enabling the sitter to witness the development and detect the least change in the shadows. No two sittings are exactly alike. Usually in the development of a portrait the outer edges of the canvas becomes shadowed, showing different delicately coloured lines, until the full outline of the head and shoulders is seen. When the likeness is sufficiently distinct to be recognised, the hair, drapery and other decorations appear. In many cases, after the entire portrait is finished, the eyes gradually open, giving a life-like appearance to the whole face'.

People who sat with the Bangs for portraits were requested to bring a photograph of the departed if one existed, but were never requested to produce it. The spirit portraits were not copies of the concealed photograph. When completed, the subject would have a different facial expression, clothes, or even the

age of the person would be slightly altered; the colour tones of the face always rich, deep and lifelike. Many of the portraits changed when taken home.

The hair on some would be altered or changed to look as it had when the subject was on the earth. Blouses and dresses for instance, would change to seem more familiar, and in several wondrous cases, the eyes would open and then close.

Mr John W Payne, Director of The Citizens Bank in New Castle, Indiana, speaking in September, 1905, of the portrait he obtained of his father who had died 14 years previously: 'It was made in the daytime in an ordinary room that was not darkened. The frame containing the canvas set on a stand before the window. Mrs Charles Payne and Mrs John Weesner, who do not believe in Spiritualism were with me, and we sat within five feet of the picture. The two Bangs Sisters, the mediums through whom the likeness was produced, sat on either side of the table and supported the frame, each with one hand. No brushes, paint, crayon, or other substance of any kind was used as far as we could tell, and it was light enough to have seen a pin on the table. The sisters had never seen or heard of my father, nor a photograph or likeness of him. All they asked was that I fix his features in my mind. The picture was not made in spots or a little at a time.



At first it was a faint shadow, then a wave appeared to sweep across the canvas, and the likeness became plainer. It was a good deal like a sunrise I got brighter until it was perfectly plain and every feature visible. Until the picture was completed, the eyes were closed and then they opened all at once, like a person awakening. It did not take more than half an hour and is the best picture of my father we ever had'.

Mrs Gertrude Breslan Hunt, Economic and Social Lecturer from Norwood Park, Illinois, said in 1909: 'I did not remove my eyes from the canvas, and would stake everything I possess that no hand touched the canvas after I placed it in the bright light of the window, until the picture was finished. The background appeared first then in a few moments the whole face appeared, with the colours of life. I criticised the pose, and asked for a full face view. The whole face faded out and was rapidly sketched again; I remarked that the hair was too light, and there, where I sat, I saw the shadows creep into the waves of hair and it darkened. I asked that more colour be put into the cheeks and the canvas blushed to the tint it now bears; the sleeves of the robe were corrected also, and in a few hours the picture was completed, and a competent artist has stated that he could not finish such a picture in less than three days, working eight hours each'.

Dr Daughtery who attended the Science Church of Spiritualism in Richmond, Indiana in the early 1920s, sat for a portrait of his deceased wife, Lizzie, and she then precipitated on to the canvas. He then asked the spirit operators why the twins, Mary and Christina, their little daughters in spirit, could not come, and they then appeared on to the canvas in front of their mother. Dr Daughtery himself, then appeared on to the canvas standing behind them all. A family group portrait; he, in earth-life, his wife and daughters in Spirit.