

Pioneer of the Month

Emma Hardinge Britten



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History of Mediums

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This article gives us an early look at one of our most famous pioneers*

—Sharon DeBartolo Carmack DSNU

Number V.

Miss Emma Hardinge

Miss Hardinge was born in London. At a very early age she exhibited wonderful proficiency in music and singing. In consequence of family misfortunes, she was induced to yield her musical abilities for the support of her widowed mother and herself, as a public singer and pianist. Being very successful, and very ambitious, she practised too hard, and, before her voice or strength was matured, her-over-done efforts caused the loss of her voice. Being a child-phenomenon in music, and connected with some of the most noble families, her case excited great interest, and some of the first physicians of Europe were resorted to for treatment. Their efforts in re-storing her voice proved of no avail. And, being compelled to use her efforts for the support of her mother and herself, she continued her public career as an actress....

It may be said of Miss H.'s life, to this time, without entering into details, that she has endured, in a short life, many of the bitterest and most cruel afflictions - domestic wretchedness, suffering and wrong-much physical ill-health -overwhelming sorrow and grief, from sources unknown to the public, though some are known in the circle of friends. Suffice it to say, that she has drank the cup of affliction to its very dregs....

Miss H. lived in the house with two Spiritualists; but to this time had never heard or known anything of Spiritualism, and did not know what it meant. When she learned that it implied communication with the dead, she was so horrified that she half resolved to leave the house. She inquired the character of these people, and found it excellent. She then concluded they were mad; but, on conversing with them, found them shrewd and singularly intelligent. This amused her curiosity, and she was at last persuaded to go with them to Conklin's. And as she sat looking on, was quite convinced that the table tipped by their chicanery.

So heard these words spelled out to a person who was communicating: "*Immortality in the light of Gospel teaching is a fiction.*" This was a direct attack on the Bible, and this was so

shocking to her that she would not sit at the table, and left the room at once; and it was a long time before she could be again persuaded to visit another medium. This, however, at length she did, and two years ago last April she called with Mr. Augustus Fenno upon Mrs. Coan.[1] This lady did not make real her ideas of a medium between celestial beings and earth, and she was scarcely induced to sit at her table, which she did with serious misgivings, lest the roof should fall on her for her dreadful wickedness. The usual tests were given with great promptitude, to which was added the gratuitous information that she was a medium, - at which she was most indignant. She then proceeded to examine Mrs. Coan's hands and the table, and whilst doing so the raps came on the floor; and while she was inspecting the floor to find the cause of the raps, they again came on the table, and so on - defying the strictest search.

Her curiosity at this exhibition was piqued. She had gone believing in her shrewdness, that she could detect some Yankee humbug, and write some good articles on the gullibility of the Americans. She was fairly puzzled, and from that moment continued her investigations with unwearied diligence, resolving that she would know what it meant. At morning, noon and night she devoted herself to the search. She visited every circle and every medium, and at each she was told that *she was herself to be a great medium, with grand promise for her future!* At length she became so intensely interested in the subject that she declared that she could not but believe, and thought if she could only become a medium, that she would return to England and make her fortune; as she had never heard of Spiritualism there, she concluded it to be an entire novelty.[2] The very day she made this speech, she visited Mrs. Kellogg's for the first time, at 625 Broadway. Mrs. K. had never seen Miss H., and there were several strangers present. Mrs. K. singled out Miss H. from the rest, and declared that she was a good medium, and she at once sat down with her and after Mrs. K. had rubbed Miss H's hand, it was seized by some unknown power, and controlled to write, and point out letter on a card, which spelt out varieties of tests faster than she - astonished at her own performances - could follow the alphabet. The first word written was her father's name upside down. The company could read it, but idle could not. Then followed from her spirit-father a strict charge that she should never take money or reward for communications. The tests can hardly be enumerated that were given through her hand that night. From this time Miss Hardinge has been a most powerful test medium - writing, personating and trance - and finally every phase of mediumship, one after another, came crowding upon her day after day. Every bone and muscle seemed to be charged with electricity, and used by the spirits for the purpose of developing her.

[1] Possibly Ada Coan, a rapping and writing medium, who rented rooms in Boston in 1855 from Maria B. Hayden. Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *In Search of Maria B. Hayden: The American Medium Who Brought Spiritualism to the U.K.* (Salt Lake City, UT: Scattered Leaves Press, 2020), 207.

[2] While certainly Maria B. Hayden and her husband William R. Hayden needed to earn a living as well, their primary goal was to spread Spiritualism to England.

She suffered many severe trials, and again and again was nearly turned back, after all she had gained. She was often surrounded by undeveloped spirits, and at circles, after giving wonderful tests, would be made to tell atrocious lies, and to give communications from people who love to tell falsehoods, and perform many miserable antics. These spirits would haunt her for weeks, and break her rest by chattering to her night and day, saying all manner of false things, threatening, teasing [sic], and almost plaguing her to death. For a time, every person that approached her would affect her so strangely, that for weeks she acted every one's complaints that she met - their lives, habits, and most secret thoughts.

At this time the spirits insisted that she should leave the stage....She was never allowed by the spirits to take the smallest fee for this [mediumship];^[3] and for ten months she sat for hundreds of persons, with very marked success, as a test medium. Her desire to support herself and mother by her musical abilities, however, became seriously damaged by this procedure. She became very well known and highly commended as a test medium....

Her mother and herself were in a foreign land, without friends, and nearly penniless, while friends at home were entreating their return, where comfort, luxury and a good income, awaited her; plenty of employment, fame, friends and protection. Still the spirits begged her to be true to the directions, and she did not yield to the temptation of returning home. At last, affairs began to look hopeless. Her money was gone, and her pupils reduced to two; and she protested that she would go upon the stage. The spirits implored and promised aid, and though reduced to nothing, they would bid her wait till the next day, or sometimes the next hour, and the next day and the next hour invariably brought her a new pupil, or some little musical employment, which satisfied her immediate wants until another time of need. More promises, and their immediate fulfillment at last convinced her that the spirits knew what they were about, and both would and could sustain her, if she would trust them...

At last they proposed that she should become a spiritual lecturer, declaring that all her experiences, trials, and various phases of mediumship, were exercises to prepare her for this point. Her English notions of propriety were greatly shocked at the idea of a female preacher; and for a long time she steadily resisted this. The spirits seemed to have made a dead-set at her. Every medium that came near her re-echoed the story that she must go out and lecture, until she was fairly baited into consent.

[3] Despite Emma's idea that mediumship would be a money-maker, the spirit world had other ideas.

An unsolicited invitation was sent her from Troy, at the instance of a friend; and though she was an untried speaker, she was invited so cordially, and was so 'tormented' by the spirits – both in and out the form—that she was compelled to accept.

The next difficulty was to know how she was to be influenced. She had been entranced constantly at circles, and in an unconscious state had spoken with great effect; but this, she was informed, would not continue. She was to be conscious; but how this was to be, she had not the least idea. In her bewilderment she sat down and wrote a lecture, and after spending great pains upon it, the spirits deliberately told her that she should not read it, and if she attempted, they would take away her sight. She knew by experience that they could do what they intimated, and did not venture against their well-tried strength.

Her efforts to commit her lecture to memory were equally unsuccessful, for the spirits chattered to her all the time, and finally threatened to decapitate her memory the same as her sight. Added to this, her experience as an actress had shown her the utter impossibility of committing such a speech to memory, for an occasion on which she could receive no help from others. What should she do? "Go to Troy," replied the spirits. She did go, in a miserable frame of mind enough—uncertainty, doubt and hopelessness were before her. Just previous to the time of the lecture, without having the least idea what was to be the result, she was directed by the spirits to take the Bible, turn to certain passages, and mark them with a pencil; because her vision, the spirits said, would be too dim, under the strong influence of magnetism, to read with ease.

Thus she was directed, and did appear upon the platform, with the promise that, after reading the marked passages from the Bible, words should be given her. She read her required texts, and the first word of her speech was given, followed by a lecture one hour long, uttered without a moment's hesitation, pause or difficulty.

Since this lecture, Miss H. has never felt the least misgiving of the ability of her steadfast, unseen friends, to supply her with all that was necessary to say in every lecture.

She is often, like one of her own audience, more a listener than a participator in her lectures. Sometimes she is in a tranquil, quiet frame of mind—perfectly conscious and indescribably happy, far away from the lecture-room—thinking of old scenes, or taking part in the far-off homes of the spirits, by whom her organism is used to speak. Sometimes her mind seems to become puerile; she can take notes of windows, ornaments on the ceiling, and anything but the words flowing from her lips. Sometimes her mind is with the lecture, and she

is as much interested as any one of the audience; but in this case her own mind interferes too much with the intelligence speaking. At these times she is very susceptible of every person's sphere around her, and she involuntarily knows what the audience is thinking about, especially those who are near her. She is often surprised, and a little frightened, at the statements made in her lectures; but she has found by experience that the spirits controlling her never made assertions which are not at the time, or subsequently, proven....

We present the following in Miss Hardinge's own words, in regard to her conversion from Orthodoxy to Spiritualism, and the present condition of her mediumship: —

“I was brought up strictly Orthodox, in the Church of England, and considered the name of Christ a panacea for all sin, and homage to him as the whole duty of man. After I became a medium, my friends, both in and out of the form, tried to reason me out of my belief in Christ's divinity in vain. When arguments failed with me—which, by-the-by, they always did—I would indignantly leave the room, and pray to God through Christ to forgive me the sin of having listened to such blasphemy....”

The following letter, giving an account of Miss Hardinge's early life and education, we give in her own words :—

“I find, upon reviewing the circumstances of my early history, that I was a medium from a child. I was a most incorrigible sleep-walker, and do not question that what were deemed the brain-sick-fancies of a delicate child, with a very morbid, unhappy temperament, were, in reality, spirit manifestations, and the fancied voices, forms and imaginings, with which my childhood was marked, were the realities, not the visions, of my surroundings. Early sorrows had rendered my naturally melancholy temperament highly sensitive and devotional. I spent all my leisure time in wandering through old cathedrals, grey ruins, and deserted places—in talking to, and fancying responses from, the starts; and I loved to steal away from my gay companions and aristocratic visitors, and flit through busy cities at twilight, where the tall columns, lofty domes, and gothic cathedrals, dimly visible through the gloom of the evening, suggested to me a phantom world, in which myself was a flitting spirit.... By the directions of the spirits, I have lately studied dates and times, and certain historical facts; but consecutive study in books, or writing of any kind, I never could, and cannot now, adhere to. To sum up all, I owe all I at present am, or ever shall be, to the hard knocks of fortune, the bitter lessons of adversity, and the schoolings of deep suffering. My cup has been often deep and bitter; but had I never drank of it, I should never have been the happy and grateful creature who lives only to declare true life to be again enacted. I could not afford to part with one single sorrow, or lose a tear, conscious that in so doing I should rob myself of the seeds from which the many blossoms of blessing I now enjoy have sprung.”