

The "Margery" Affair

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The "Margery" case is by now far enough in the past to allow us to look at it with greater objectivity than perhaps we could have done a generation ago. Now we are more likely to think of the case, if we think of it at all, as an episode in the history of parapsychology which occurred during the transitional period when research was moving out of the seance room and into the laboratory. Some of us first heard of the case in survey texts, blistering with accusations of fraud; others heard of it from spiritualistic literature, in which "Margery" remains a venerated figure; some lucky few heard of it from people who had known the woman herself; fewer still remain whose memories include evenings spent in the darkness of the fourth floor at 10 Lime Street while a harsh, ghostly voice gibed and chuckled from the impenetrable obscurity. It is likely that all of these sources for our modern impressions of the case are, in one degree or another, unreliable. No debate regarding the genuineness of the phenomena can be fruitful at this date, I believe; it appears to have been virtually Margery's last wish, in fact, that that question remain forever a subject of wrangling unenlightened by absolute certainty. But the facts of the case need to be more widely known than they are, in part because, as I wish to argue, there is a causal connection between the mediumship and the transition to modern parapsychology.

It is therefore not the medium's elusive personality, nor the truth or falsity of the claims made on behalf of her seance-room effects, that interest me here. Instead, I want to look at the case as a backdrop to the controversy itself. What people came to believe—and what they were willing to assert—after their experiences with "Margery" is a complex and highly textured intellectual terrain.

Between the death in 1920 of James H. Hyslop and the death of "Margery" in 1941, American psychical research endured a troubled period that William Roll has not hesitated to compare to Watergate (Roll, 1974, p. 417). Ambitions of breakthroughs into unknown frontiers of rational knowledge blended with idealistic hopes of scientific endorsement of religion; stern intentions of

Some of the material and opinions in this paper have appeared and are more fully discussed in my book, *Margery* (Tietze, 1973).

procedural rigor clashed with flamboyant personalities and outrageous "conditions" under which remarkable phenomena were said to be studied; and events as they actually occurred filtered down to the interested public in an undifferentiated mass of reports by writers whose attitudes varied from enthusiastic naïveté to cautious skepticism. Word from Europe had reached American psychical researchers of an outbreak of physical phenomena in the seance room; Hyslop's reservations with regard to the study of such events as telekinesis and materialization had been in part responsible for forestalling American involvement in their investigation. In 1920, however, influential members of the ASPR Board of Trustees, chafing at what they perceived as a backwardness in this country, urged that the inquiry be made a priority.

The ASPR's choice of the brilliantly unorthodox psychologist, William McDougall, to preside after Hyslop's death intensified divisiveness on the Board. Several members supported McDougall's philosophical collaboration with the research officer Hyslop had groomed to succeed him—the former clergyman, Walter Franklin Prince (Tietze, 1976). These people felt that Hyslop's standards, which they regarded as rigorously cautious, needed to be maintained. The more powerful Board members, however, encouraged a number of changes in the Society's goals and public appearance. Motivated apparently by a belief that supernormal psychical events—including survival—had by now been adequately demonstrated, the Board encouraged publication in the *Journal* of reports from the continent relating to the wonders of physical mediumship. Meanwhile, the Society was to pursue every lead in an effort to find home-grown performers whose exploits could be recorded. Finally, and perhaps most outrageously, the *Journal* itself was to be transformed into a more "accessible" format—a transformation that was finally completed in the mid-1930s, when it began to bear an embarrassing resemblance in content and appearance to a popular occult magazine.

Under the incredible pressure of a monthly publication schedule, but now lacking the indefatigable Hyslop's endless output, during the 1920s the job of research was increasingly overshadowed by that of getting new material for the *Journal*, regardless of its merit. Most of the offerings were modelled on Hyslop's original format: research reports (usually seance notes with commentary), accounts of spontaneous cases, philosophical ruminations, theoretical speculations, and reviews of recent books and foreign journals. While McDougall, Prince, and the young Gardner Murphy were still contributing their work, the *Journal* maintained its sense of balance and reserve, but already in 1924, most of the research reports were contributed by amateur inquirers whose credentials

were not provided, and 9 out of the 15 "experimental reports" were by European authors detailing foreign investigations. In 1926, the *Journal* reported no American research (though a much-delayed volume of the *Proceedings* dated for that year but copyrighted 1928 [Bird, 1928] dealt exclusively with the Margery case). This pattern was briefly reversed in the *Journal* for 1927, which contained a variety of mediumistic studies. The 1928 *Journal* began with an article by the Chair of the Publications Committee, Mary Derieux, frankly apologizing for the lack of productive work during the last several years "after the death of our great founder" (Derieux, 1928, p. 1). She felt that now the ASPR was ready "to erect the structure of a greater usefulness" (Derieux, 1928, p. 1). The ASPR had just purchased a large building at 15 Lexington Avenue, which was now called "Hyslop House," and thus had plenty of room and a solid library—only lacking money to expand its research activities. The *Journal*, too, in 1928, seems to have taken on fresh life: A variety of case studies of apparitions and apparent obsessions were printed, as well as an intriguing and lengthy account by Christian Winther of experimental attempts to elicit telekinesis on command (Winther, 1928). Still, however, about 20% of the articles and papers were composed by Frenchman René Sudre and Englishman Harry Price, and even several anonymous pieces appeared—including an ambitious two-page essay entitled simply "The Universe: What Is It All About?" (1928).

At the beginning of this downward spiral, McDougall resigned as president, and, on April 6, 1923, the Board of Trustees appointed someone of a radically different background. The Reverend Frederick Edwards proved to be a very congenial agent for the spiritualistic faction in the ASPR. He had spent "almost the whole of his professional life as a clergyman in large cities" (Edwards, 1923a, p. 564). For the past three and a half years, Edwards had been exclusively engaged in the painstaking collection and analysis of mediumistic data, primarily communications which he believed to have originated in the surviving personality of his only son, who had died in the war. His only other qualification to serve as head of the leading psychical research organization in the United States was that he led a Florida group formed to study the supernormal through the discussion of Richet's (1923) *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* (Edwards, 1923b, p. 332). (In a letter, Prince located these sessions in Cassadega, but he may have been speaking in jest.)

Edwards was only too glad to pressure Prince against "destructive" research, i.e., analyses that pointed up procedural errors in affirmative reports, particularly those recording physical phenomena (Prince, 1919a, 1919b, 1921). Prince chafed under these pres-

tures, but with a wife in the last phases of cancer and a daughter to support on his \$3,000 a year salary, he was loath to resign (Tietze, 1976, pp. 9-10). He published no more "destructive" research in the *ASPR Journal* or *Proceedings*.

Meanwhile, in Prince's own words, "in May, 1923, there blazed out the most brilliant star in the firmament of alleged physical mediumship that America had seen in fifty years" (Prince, 1926/1927, p. 199). He was speaking, of course, of the woman whose unique position in the history of American psychical research is only rivalled by her uniquely mysterious psychology: Mina Crandon, soon to be known to the world as "Margery," the medium.

The start of this most spectacular mediumship was really very little different from the ordinary spiritualistic dabbling that was so common in the 1890s. Born in 1888, Mina Stinson's first acquaintance with Spiritualism came in her own home near Princeton, Ontario, when her older brother, a dashing and lighthearted chap named Walter, related his experiences in a Boston seance. The mythology surrounding Mina's early knowledge of Spiritualism is complex and dubious (Tietze, 1973, pp. 3-4), but Mina herself recalled, with her typically careless occasional candor, that Walter teased the younger children with imitations of big-city spook-show tricks. The kids were all taken in (Flynn, 1926, p. 7).

Walter moved away from his sternly fundamentalist family in search of adventure. At the age of 16, Mina, too, broke free from the family bonds and secured a position as secretary of the Boston Union Congregational Church, where her talents on the cello earned her a chair in the church orchestra. In 1910, she married a Boston grocer, Earl P. Rand, and in 1913, she bore her only child, John. These years of growth and excitement during which she developed the piquant and vivacious personality that would become a kind of trademark, were darkened, however, by the accidental death of her brother. Walter, employed in an adventurous and romantic job with the railroad, was crushed beneath an overturned boxcar in 1911.

No one can really know the personal or psychological effect that this event had on Mina. The objective and undeniable effect, however, is certain: Walter's personality became a permanent part of her mental landscape until the day of her death. He was waggish, rakish, and iconoclastic; no woman was allowed such expression—certainly not the daughter of a fundamentalist—certainly not in the Boston of those days. Perhaps Walter became her dream self-extension, a personality with whom she felt somehow identified, but she never underwent psychoanalysis—an experience that would only become fashionable some decades too late.

Certainly, however, the urges to assert her special gifts were there, fighting to emerge.

Early in 1917, an outlet for at least some of her personal needs opened up in a perhaps not-so-unexpected way: Admitted to the hospital in Dorchester for an operation (the details of which remain unknown), Mina met the distinguished and attractive surgeon, Dr. LeRoi Goddard Crandon. She fell in love with him and decided to end her marriage. Mina's divorce was final in 1918 (Crandon had completed his second divorce in 1917).

Crandon, by all accounts, was an avid materialist for whom the claims of religion were absurdities. Through a lecture by Sir Oliver Lodge and a subsequent reading of a number of works on psychical research, Crandon's public stance altered. Now he professed an interest in exploring these boundary-lines between materialistic science and supernaturalistic religion. The works of W. J. Crawford were particularly suggestive to him. Indeed, Crawford's work in the investigation of physical mediumship was a landmark study, representing both the possibilities and the pitfalls of such an inquiry.

In four important books, Crawford, a Belfast engineer, recounted his own efforts and provided helpful suggestions to others who sought to verify the dramatic telekinetic and ectoplasmic phenomena produced in the Goligher circle (Crawford, 1918a, 1918b, 1919, 1921). The seven members of the Goligher family worked together to create raps, levitations, and ectoplasmic materializations. For a number of reasons, the Crawford research seems weak today (Tietze, 1974, pp. 30-33). But to Dr. LeRoi Goddard Crandon these reports were (whatever view one might take toward the subsequent developments in the Margery mediumship) inspirational. Within days of reading Crawford's accounts, Crandon decided to try a home circle of his own. Whether the tall, sardonic, enigmatic surgeon had at this point a genuine research interest is not now knowable; he may as well have been motivated, as William McDougall would suggest, by a desire to expose the foolishness of psychical research. In any case, Mina cooperated in her new husband's interests, and in 1923, a number of remarkable events took place in their home near Beacon Hill at 10 Lime Street—an address that would soon become a kind of spiritualistic Mecca.

According to the account of Dr. Crandon and a circle of close friends, a table tilted at the first seance, and, in subsequent sessions, the room was enlivened further by spectral raps, bell-ringing, and tones from both an invisible harmonica and an intangible piano. A table was said to run down the hallway, propelled by an

invisible force. Finally, Mina herself went into a trance and "Walter" manifested himself. During a seance on June 9, 1923, he spoke his first words, this time through Mina's mouth: "I said I could put this through!" "Walter" soon proved himself a witty, charming, and imaginative spectral personality. Within the decade and a half to follow, he established and maintained his position as America's most famous ghost.

The minions of science made their first acquaintance with "Walter" only a few weeks after his first appearance. William McDougall, then the head of the department of psychology at Harvard, was willing to approve theses in psychical research, and Gardner Murphy and Harry Helson were interested. The first official inquiry began on July 1, 1923.

Entranced, Mina produced xenoglossy in Italian (allegedly unprintable), French, German, Swedish, Dutch, Greek, and even Chinese, each in separate sessions. The Harvard inquirers felt that a day's research in each language ought to have been adequate for a bright person to master brief phrases and sentences. What they really wanted to examine was soon supplied: The table levitated in the dark, and, in an incident that still puzzles even the most critical, the materialization "cabinet"—a three-piece wooden screen in which the medium sat in order to "gather the psychic forces"—suddenly flew apart while McDougall himself held Mina's hands and feet. Still unconvinced that collusion was impossible, the investigators bent every effort to seal off the seance room on the fourth floor of the Crandon house! The only possible accomplice was Crandon himself. Nevertheless, phenomena occurred. The table moved; a whistle seemed to come from the lower floors; "Walter's" voice managed to speak through Mina's mouth; a room filled with water while McDougall and Helson held her hands; from a remote corner of the house, "Taps" was played on chimes; and all the clocks in the house stopped during the sitting. Afterwards, the investigating team found their seals intact on the seance-room doors.

Though no clearly identifiable confederate presented himself for the committee's consideration, they retained nagging doubts about the possibility of outside collusion. The house itself was almost constructed to nurture such suspicions: Nooks, crannies, and alcoves abounded, but no thorough architectural search was ever undertaken by this committee or any other. (I understand that the house has, since the Crandon occupancy, undergone extensive internal remodeling, so that speculations about trap doors and sliding panels must, unfortunately, remain unverifiable.)

The closest thing to a clue the team discovered was a piece of yarn that may or may not have played a part in the fraudulent

moving of a piano stool. According to the Crandon camp in this unresolved controversy, McDougall tried to extract a confession from Mina based on this piece of string, while Mina strove to restrain an impulse to giggle (Bird, 1925b, pp. 110-111). People who knew McDougall found this version of the interview hard to accept.

While this investigation was proceeding, the seeds were being sown for a more public exposure of the Crandon case. James Malcolm Bird was an editor on the staff of the *Scientific American*. His curiosity about such then-current controversies as Einsteinian physics had brought him to prominence on the magazine, and now he became interested in psychical research. Soon a black-bordered notice appeared in the *Scientific American* ("Announcing \$5000," 1922, p. 389), announcing a remarkable prize of \$5,000 to be awarded to anyone able to convince a committee of the genuineness of supernormal physical events. Bird was charged by the publisher, Orson Munn, with creating a committee to judge the entrants. Composed of some of the leading figures on the American scene, Bird's committee represents a perfect cross-section of the personalities, purposes, and styles of people drawn to psychical research during this period. From psychology, he obtained William McDougall; from mainstream psychical research, Walter Franklin Prince; from engineering, the inventor of the cinema's technicolor process, Daniel Frost Comstock; from legerdemain, Harry Houdini; and from a region of public awareness very difficult to classify, the scholar-turned-popularizer, Hereward Carrington.

Despite a discouragingly sparse response to this offer, a generous and irresistible proposition came from England. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the world's leading prophet of Spiritualism, offered the *Scientific American* his considerable expertise and acquaintance with Europe's most productive mediums. Bird was invited to travel to Europe and see what might be seen of the cream of European mediumship. This trip opened Bird's mind with regard to the possibility of paranormal events; as well, it gave him rapidly a wide personal experience with the range of physical phenomena that were fashionable at this stage in the history of Spiritualism. On his return, the committee found few applicants willing to be so carefully scrutinized, and all who were examined were quickly exposed as frauds (Bird, 1923, 1924a, 1924b). Finally, taking a suggestion from Conan Doyle, Bird contacted Dr. Crandon in Boston.

Crandon readily agreed to allow the *Scientific American* committee to meet his wife, graciously offered his home for their convenience during the course of the investigation, and generously promised, should they win the prize, to donate the money to further research with other mediums. Bird, wishing to preserve the

anonymity of the Crandons, invested Mina with the *nom du seance*, "Margery." The resulting investigation was a fiasco of mock-epic proportions. Bird, who had no official voice in the committee, and who was to serve merely as its secretary, began to publish alleged accounts of the research that were in fact glowing encomiums of the medium's wit, charm, and unparalleled psychic talent. Carrington, who, with Bird, stayed at 10 Lime Street, was accused of having an affair with "Margery" and accepting a bribe from Crandon. McDougall was charged with being prejudiced against the case and Prince with being too old and deaf to function in a seance-room inquiry. Houdini publicly charged the others with incompetence, naiveté, or collusion with the medium. "Walter" called Houdini a "God-damned bastard" and accused him of planting a reaching-rod in the materializing cabinet. Bird, stunned by Houdini's straightforward remarks impugning his good faith, resigned as secretary to the committee, and, not long afterward, he was fired from the magazine. The committee dissolved in mixed annoyance and embarrassment.

The only individual who emerged substantially unscathed was Mina Crandon herself. She had a new and popularly recognized name (because enterprising newspapermen had followed the *Scientific American* team's cab to 10 Lime Street and had put two and two together). Moreover, she had managed to make a majority decision of fraud look very much like a statement of incompetence or persecution. Houdini's efforts on the public stage and in the publication of a pamphlet—"Houdini Exposes the Tricks of the Boston Medium Margery" (cf. Gibson & Young, 1953, pp. 134-161)—seemed by their very excesses to indicate a flaw, not in Margery, but in the magician himself. Skill in polemics seemed to overbalance the accumulated credentials of controversialists involved in the dispute. This peculiarly American approach—appealing as it did to the nation's instinctive sympathy for the underdog as well as to an inherent suspicion of "specialists"—was to strike the template for all the subsequent controversy about the Margery mediumship. Added to this was—it cannot be ignored—a doubly reinforcing awareness: from the conventional assumptions of the nineteenth century, women were imagined to be "intuitive," protected, innocent, and psychically gifted; from the twentieth century, women were seen to be emerging as individuals capable of directing their own lives. "Margery" perfectly provided the transition in the public mind, and her subsequent struggles with scientific recognition were seen alternatively as those of an innocent female imposed upon by university-trained snobs, or as those of a gifted individual whose special gifts were stifled by males who resented all creative feminine expression. In either case, there was no stop-

ping her. Despite the committee's reservations and Houdini's public performances accusing her of blatant fraud, through the newspapers she had won the hearts of the American public. Perhaps more sinisterly, she had also won the interest of some of the members of the American Society for Psychical Research.

Before the ASPR was to become officially involved, however, two different investigations were undertaken by independent inquirers that served both to increase the confusion and to set the seal of the respectability of research on the case. Moreover, despite all the stresses placed upon it, the mediumship continued to grow more and more versatile.

Before the *Scientific American* investigation took place, Margery and her husband had taken a jaunt to England, where her work had attracted the attention of Conan Doyle, Oliver Lodge, and other inquirers. The case seemed to be, despite the controversy surrounding it, one of paramount significance. One of the most gifted young men on either side of the Atlantic to be drawn to psychical research was Eric J. Dingwall, research officer of the Society for Psychical Research and, beginning in 1921, special director of the department of physical phenomena for the ASPR. On the basis of his personal experience and the available literature, he wrote: "To say that the Margery mediumship is one of the most important of its kind would be an understatement: it is, I think, the most remarkable hitherto recorded" (Dingwall, 1926, p. 84).

With the financial support of an anonymous Boston member of the SPR, Dingwall was enabled to come to America to study the case. His subsequent report is one of the literature's most interesting and detailed studies of alleged mediumship. It is also, perhaps, the most frustratingly inconclusive. Allowing Crandon to retain his customary position as controller of the medium's right hand, Dingwall was privileged to observe, among the usual display of spiritualistic phenomena, the brand-new appearance of ectoplasm. Hitherto, psychical researchers had reported ectoplasm in various forms, from fogs out of which paper faces emerged (Geley, 1920, pp. 51-63), to ragged cheese-cloth-like draperies, to various amorphous masses resembling cauliflowers (Feilding, Baggally, & Carrington, 1909, p. 445). Margery's efforts were (and remain) unparalleled. These materializations, as they flopped onto the table in the nimbus of red light, were revealed to be weirdly organic substances. On one occasion a hand appeared, silhouetted against a luminous cardboard plaque; a sinuously moving black mass squirmed, and, in Dingwall's words, from the central pulp, "one, two, three, four or five fingers of all shapes were made to suddenly grow out from the mass, some quickly, some slowly. Then a short coarse thumb, and finally one long projection with a hook in it, in

all twelve inches long" (Dingwall, 1926, pp. 116-117). Despite this and other manifestations, Dingwall was unable to verify absolutely that the ectoplasm had not been an illusion created by the Crandons out of reshaped animal tissues manipulated and worked by hands in the dark, or even animated with tubes connected to rubber bulbs, like a child's toy jumping frog. William McDougall thought that slides of the ectoplasm gave clear evidence that the substance was, specifically, animal lung tissue, shaped into hands; two Harvard specialists agreed when shown the slides. Dingwall was also the first to observe, during a magnesium photographic flash, that Margery's mouth moved during the production of the "direct voice" (Dingwall, 1926, p. 124). In his final report, Dingwall was unable to make a firm decision either for or against the genuineness of the Margery phenomena, and, in the intervening years, he has continued to maintain that he has no further light to shed on the case. Dr. Crandon himself reviewed the report in a letter appended to Dingwall's (1926) paper. He listed the cartload of objects Dingwall had hypothesized could have been used to simulate all the effects he had seen; without denying that Dingwall's suspicions were valid, Crandon merely ridiculed the improbable assumption that all this material could have been smuggled into the room without detection. "The author," concluded Crandon, "is a nut" (Crandon, 1926, p. 158).

The case was entering a new phase! Seance-room effects were branching out in very creative directions, and the Crandons were becoming increasingly skillful at imputations of hostility, closed-mindedness, or incompetence on the part of any investigator who was unable to endorse the mediumship.

At the same time, political divisions within the ASPR were becoming more and more sharply defined. Ostensibly because of Prince's worsening hearing problem, the Board determined to divide the responsibilities of the research officership and to add one more specialist to the staff. Prince would be in charge of inquiries into mental phenomena, and the new man would head up a vigorous investigative program into physical phenomena. Prince was already piqued by this move, but when he learned who it was that the Board intended to hire, Prince thought they had taken leave of their senses. In January of 1925, he resigned and began a new position with the recently formed Boston Society for Psychic Research (Tietze, 1976, pp. 13-15).

J. Malcolm Bird—former editor for the *Scientific American*, sometime secretary to the first major investigation into the Crandon case, personal friend and publicist of the medium, creator of her nom du seance, and, most recently, the author of a lengthy tome entitled "*Margery the Medium*" (Bird, 1925b)—was pre-

pared to offer his services to the ASPR as specialist in physical phenomena. To fully grasp Prince's stupefaction, one really must read Bird's book. It could be used as a textbook for the study of the precise use of what Prince called "language that squints." Prince wrote a balanced review of "*Margery the Medium*," providing "documentary evidence . . . that Mr. Bird twisted and distorted facts in his possession, including some plainly recorded in the official notes of the sittings" (Feilding, Hoagland, & Code, 1927, p. 416). (There is evidence in Prince's correspondence that, for the next several years, he would occasionally take Bird's book from the shelf, peruse it for a few minutes, until he found a mistake or distortion he had not noted before, and then jot it down on a list. He seems to have enjoyed this mental exercise in the same way others might enjoy crossword puzzles.)

Instead of publishing an objective review, however, the ASPR afforded Mr. Bird an opportunity that few of us have had: He reviewed his own book in the *Journal*. Though Prince's reasoned critique of Bird was too controversial for publication in the *Journal*, the Board was less diffident when, in July, 1925, they published a virulent attack on McDougall's role in the Margery investigation by Dr. LeRoi Goddard Crandon himself.

The ASPR assumed almost a concerted, official position in response to the next full-scale investigation of the Margery mediumship. For the second time, Harvard University (via William McDougall) offered to grant credit for work in psychical research, and a committee of professional staff and graduate students was formed for the purpose of studying the Crandon case in May, 1925. The Crandons consented to participate and cooperate fully with all reasonable requests. The committee held its sittings away from Lime Street, in order to improve control of the environmental factors that were always disquieting when investigating a medium in her own home. As she had for Dingwall, Margery wore only a robe and slippers, and she was searched before each sitting to minimize the potential for smuggling in props. Moreover, in order to keep track of her movements in the dark, the committee asked Margery to wear luminous elastic bands on forehead, wrists, and ankles. Crandon, who also attended the sittings, also wore luminous markings. Hudson Hoagland, who had instigated the second Harvard investigation, controlled the hands of Crandon and his wife. Grant Code, another graduate student, whose hobby was legerdemain, controlled Margery's left hand, and another committee member lay on the floor at Margery's feet to keep track of the luminous anklets.

Nevertheless, despite these precautions, the committee witnessed telekinesis and materialization, as well as the familiar

"Walter" independent voice. "Teleplasmic terminals" touched sitters in the darkness, and the men tried to learn more about the substance that felt like "the fleshy part of a hand, rather rough" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 673). Hoagland managed to maneuver the luminous plaque in such a way as to silhouette "a human right foot. . . . ankle and leg" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 675). On checking the luminous anklets, Code noticed that a complete ring shone on the floor, suggesting that one of the bands was off Margery's leg. He read this observation into the notes, and the ring suddenly became a semi-circle again. After the seance, the luminous band was inspected: It had slipped down (or back up?) so that it was now stretched across her foot from instep to heel instead of her ankle (Hoagland, 1925, p. 673). For the first time someone had the idea to obtain an impression of the teleplasm in modelling clay. (Walter said he thought Hoagland's tactile description of the teleplasm as similar to a "soft leatherlike object" was very good, and Walter added that he expected the clay impression to look like coarse skin [Hoagland, 1925, p. 673].) The "Walter" impression was later compared to an impression made of Margery's foot, but identification of the prints was not possible due to the blurring of the teleplasmic impression. However, the teleplasm deposited into the clay traces of lint and microscopic substances identical to those found inside one of Margery's slippers, so the circumstantial case was becoming stronger.

The hypothesis of fraud was given further support when Grant Code showed his fellow committee members that he could duplicate all the telekinesis they had seen simply by the adroit use of a freed right leg. Determined to put their doubts to rest, the Harvard group increased the stringency of control, anticipating either change or cessation of the phenomena.

However, on the night they planned to close in on a wily trickster—June 30, 1925—Margery was confident, "Walter" was caustic, and the phenomena went on as usual, despite the increased—seemingly insurmountable—controls. "Walter" even knew all about Code's duplication of the previous seance; Hoagland felt the display of knowledge was "uncanny" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 678). But something was different: The teleplasmic terminal had by this evening become a partially articulated hand which Margery let the sitters touch. It felt, said Hoagland, "cold, moist, and flabby" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 678). There were, to be sure, several indications of fraud, e.g., Margery's arm band seemed to twitch at the same time that the "hand" moved, and a plasticine impression of the teleplasm revealed the print of "a small, chainlike structure, presumably used to aid in the mechanical manipulation of the artificial hand" (Hoagland, 1925, pp. 678–679). But with the control

in place that night, Hoagland and the others were unable to explain how fraud could have been accomplished.

The explanation was soon forthcoming. Two days after the seance in question, Grant Code informed the committee that he had, in collaboration with the medium, produced the dazzling effects they had seen. Code, in charge of the medium's right hand, had slipped her luminous arm band up to her elbow, thus effectively releasing her. "She then proceeded to remove various objects from the region of her lap with her right hand, the bathrobe being thrown open in the dark, and to manipulate them on the table" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 679). Code believed that Dr. Crandon's "profound religious faith" in the phenomena was sincere and "that a sudden exposure on the part of a group of observers in which he had placed so much trust would give him a shock that might be dangerous" (Feilding, Hoagland, & Code, 1927, p. 427). He therefore took it upon himself to meet privately with Margery—their relationship was, at that time, quite close (Tietze, 1973, pp. 83–84)—and persuade her to confess and give up the game. According to Code, the two had a private seance in the afternoon at which "Walter" manifested through the independent voice, an effect the entranced Margery managed by throwing her voice against the materializing cabinet. "Walter" asked for Code's help, and Code consented. Margery herself was, according to this first psychological theory of her motivation, highly susceptible to suggestion; her seance effects were produced fraudulently while in an altered mental state that left her unaware of what she was doing and unable to remember anything she did while entranced. Dr. Crandon, Code felt, had emphasized his interest in psychical matters to such an extent that he had apparently hypnotized his wife into a belief in the necessity of creating the phenomena. Thus, both the doctor and his wife were morally innocent.

This theory, though widely accepted at the time and apparently still believed by some of her friends and family, has a number of weaknesses, especially considering the involved preparation necessary in order to create teleplasm from lung tissue, rubber, and leather. Further, the story of the private seance seems unbelievable (cf. Feilding, 1926, p. 168), and Margery recorded an affidavit denying that it took place (Tietze, 1973, p. 87). In any event, Code's story rests on his word alone.

As to Crandon's sincerity, there is now no way to judge—but, as some were able to point out, if the teleplasm were manipulated lung tissue, where did the tissue come from, if not from the surgeon-husband of the medium? Other body parts would appear during later seances (Tietze, 1973, pp. 166–167), and the possibility of Crandon's having procured such items from a hospital must at

least remain a lingering and disquieting question. Finally, the defenders of the mediumship resorted to *ad hominem* attacks on Code's personality, suggesting that his emotional dependence on Margery had grown to unmanageable proportions. He was even indiscreet enough to commit his feelings to a letter which, in due course, fell into Mr. Bird's hands. Bird, apparently on ASPR stationery, wrote Code a letter in which he threatened him with making the contents of Code's letter public. As a further persuasive factor, a rumor was set afoot, crediting Dr. Crandon with the intention of bringing suit against Code for having made an amorous approach to Margery. By 1927, two years later, the charge had escalated to attempted rape (Tietze, 1973, pp. 87-89).

The second Harvard investigation thus came to an end as murky as any previous inquiry. Despite the fact that (if the story related by the committee were true) the circumstantial case for fraud seemed persuasively supported, nevertheless, the techniques employed by the Crandons and their supporters managed once again to bolster the mediumship through a campaign that impugned the investigators' sincerity, integrity, honesty, and morality. Furthermore, this episode demonstrated that there was, increasingly, underlying the mediumship, a powerfully ambiguous image of eroticism. For some, Margery was a beleaguered saint, whereas for others, she was "The Witch of Lime Street." Code was not the first, nor would he be the last, to be (as the newspapers say) "romantically linked" with Mina Crandon.

Whether or not this investigator and the medium ever in fact had an affair, the erotic undercurrent of the Margery case surfaced here most clearly. It is a complicated element in the polemical side of the story, and though much of the medium's alleged sexual activity may never have happened, it remains today a major part of the "common knowledge" about the case. Some of this erotic subtext is supplied by the charged environment of the spiritualistic seance, some by the special conditions peculiar to this mediumship, some by the medium's attractiveness, and some by her own rather suggestive—or free-spirited—behavior.

Eroticism in connection with the seance as a social activity goes back to the very beginnings of Spiritualism, from Mr. Livermore's account of the lingering kisses of his materialized wife (Sargent, 1875, pp. 16-17), to William Crookes' embracing of Katie King (Crookes, 1874/1972), and all the way through to the orgasmic trances of Eusapia Palladino (Lombroso, 1909, pp. 112-113). The darkness, the hand-holding, and the closeness almost inevitably lend any seance, as the sociologist George Lawton observes, "an excitement of a sexual character more or less disguised" (Lawton, 1932, p. 263).

Doubling this effect are the speculations concerning the anatomical concealment of "props" to aid in the simulation of phenomena; nowhere else in the literature of psychical research has a medium's vagina been so frequently thought about. It was obvious from the first appearance of teleplasm that a logical possibility was that Margery had prepared the tissue, stored it in her body, removed it in the dark, and replaced it in her vagina before the seance ended. "There is good evidence," wrote William McDougall in the *Boston Evening Transcript* for February 18, 1925, "that 'ectoplasm' does issue, or did issue on some, and probably on all, occasions from one particular opening in the anatomy." The more interesting question is—How did it come to be within 'the anatomy'?" (McDougall, 1925, p. 3). Code's euphemistic reference to the artificial hand of June 30, 1925, being withdrawn from "the region of her lap" (Hoagland, 1925, p. 679) was wryly ridiculed by J. Malcolm Bird: "Mr. Hoagland and his collaborators from the Department of English are under an obvious and severe misunderstanding as to the size, shape, and other dominant characteristics of . . . [this] anatomical storehouse" (Bird, 1925a, p. 727). Though in this case these dimensions are unknown, something odd does seem to have been going on, because on those occasions when Mina Crandon did allow an examination by a female doctor, she was wearing sanitary napkins and so naturally demurred from an internal inspection. Clearly Dingwall had fixed early on this question, because, as Mina cheerfully told Grant Code, "The first thing he told me . . . was to take off my clothes" (Tietze, 1973, p. 67). By eliminating possible hiding places in the medium's garments, Dingwall had narrowed the focus considerably. Dingwall asked a gynecologist whether or not such speculation was worth the effort. She replied by indicating that the space in question might contain "a considerable portion of such substance" (Dingwall, 1926, p. 135n).

That Margery's sexual center should also be the center of research interest was only intensified by the medium's personal attractiveness. Even women were irresistibly drawn to her. Despite the fact that in the 1930s Margery phoned a number of influential psychical researchers to tell them that she had just been filling in the then newly arrived psychic, Eileen Garrett, with detailed information she might use in her readings, Mrs. Garrett told me in April of 1967: "She was probably the most utterly charming woman I have ever known." Margery's circle of female friends was large and intensely warm. The warmth was felt by the men as well. The generation was still trying to cope with the values and assumptions of Victorians as it met the new freedoms (and tensions) of the Jazz Age; so it is perhaps not surprising that erotic attachments often still took the form of male protectiveness of female honor. J. Mal-

colm Bird virtually admitted in his book that he was smitten by her effervescence (Bird, 1925b, pp. 114-115), and in his later years, Hereward Carrington often reminisced about his love affair with her (Tietze, 1973, pp. 58-59). Whether sex was ever actualized as frequently as rumor indicated, the stance taken by her partisans in print very strongly resembled that of outraged lovers leaping to the defense of a woman sullied by unjust accusations. Here, for instance, are the gallant, if unrestrained, words written by lawyer Daniel Day Walton, a trustee of the ASPR, published in the Society's official *Proceedings*, offered as a response to the report of a committee that found itself unable to accept Margery's phenomena:

After a year and a half's cogitation on the events of this tragic occasion when the pledged covenant of a man was so brutally broken, the three investigators, to protect the reputation of their confrère, united in an explanation of the matter that belies their own contemporaneous record made in the course of their professional duty, and if true, would indicate deliberate simulation of illness by Margery to evade detection of a fraud in which Crandon was necessarily an accomplice. The frequent defense of a criminal is an alibi supported by manufactured evidence. It has remained for an attempted investigation of psychic phenomena to disclose that even men of academic repute may resort to an analogous technique to support a theory previously held and published and escape condemnation for inexcusable conduct. (cited in [Dudley], 1933, p. 747)

Finally, the eroticism implicit in the case was scarcely minimized by Mina herself. She tended to embrace and kiss male sitters (Tietze, 1973, pp. 58-59; J. B. Rhine & L. E. Rhine, 1927, p. 417). Houdini apparently kept some sort of photographic evidence of Margery's fruitless attempt to "vamp" him, and both Prince and McDougall appear to have had to resist her charming blandishments. Not all men were so strong. She apparently had no qualms about sitting in the nude for her investigators. On such occasions, she might, through Walter, tease a sitter into touching the ectoplasm—which in the darkness seemed indistinguishable from one of her naked breasts (Bird, 1928, pp. 229-230). Today this frank light-heartedness about sexuality is commonplace and widely regarded as delightfully healthy. In the 1920s, however, her behavior was daring and even open to the sinister interpretation of an intentional effort to go "fly-catching" (J. B. Rhine & L. E. Rhine, 1927, p. 417) in order to enlist male support that would make denunciation socially awkward. By 1926, R. J. Tillyard, speaking of himself in the third person, reported:

when he mentioned 10 Lime Street, . . . [Bostonians] begged him not to go to that place. One professor of Harvard told him that it was a

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thoroughly bad place, that his honor would be stained for ever if he went, that no decent man or woman should set foot inside that door, and they even insinuated that Margery was a descendant of Mary Magdalene. . . . [T]hey said . . . that the woman was a vampire. (Tillyard, 1926, pp. 706-707)

For all her public life and after her death, the stigma of her sexual charms would haunt her reputation to at least as great an extent as her mysterious motivations and the controversy over her alleged powers.

Caught up in the spirited defense of Mina Crandon, the powers within the ASPR nevertheless recognized the need to settle the question, which had so long been a matter of opinion, in a thorough manner, unhampered by amateur intrusions. Walter Franklin Prince's resignation left a vacancy that was temporarily filled by the prominent psychologist, Henry Clay McComas, then on leave of absence from Princeton. The ASPR charged him with the responsibility of forming a committee to verify the genuineness of the Margery case. Two distinguished colleagues agreed to investigate the mediumship with McComas, but found their experiences unconvincing. After their investigation was completed, they composed a report, which was duly submitted. A year later, the report was still unpublished, so McComas took a remarkable step: He decided to "produce" a seance of his own. Obtaining a fraudulent medium, he contrived to invite several members of the Society to two "test sittings." While the sitters controlled the "medium," McComas performed all the tricks. "I have fished in many waters," he wrote, "and have shot different sorts of game, but I have never known a thrill to match that of saving your medium from an exposure just in the nick of time" (McComas, 1935, pp. 147-148). Several of the standard Margery effects were accomplished, and fifteen of the pro-Margery ASPR members signed a statement indicating their endorsement of the phenomena produced. It was only then that McComas revealed that the performance was fraudulent. McComas finally closed his report in April of 1927 by suggesting that further study of the mediumship was pointless. The ASPR refused to publish the report it had financed, arguing that one of the investigators drank too much and the rest were biased and incapable of finding evidence in favor of psychical phenomena (Tietze, 1973, pp. 97-99).

J. B. Rhine and Louisa Rhine were, in 1926, at the beginning of their careers in psychical research. Intrigued by Bird's extravagant praise of Margery's work, they managed to obtain a Lime Street sitting. Also present were two trustees of the ASPR. The phenomena were standardized telekinetic effects—the tipping of a scale,

the levitation of a basket, and so on—accomplished while Mina sat inside a special cabinet, carefully designed by Dr. Crandon to assure observers that the medium remained immobile and under strict control at all times during the production of phenomena (cf. Crandon, 1927, p. 82). The Rhines noticed that the scales had been tampered with, that the control cabinet allowed the medium plenty of opportunity to levitate objects by picking them up with her teeth, that another device (used to assure the independence of the Walter voice) was easily adjustable and provided no control at all. Rhine also saw the medium's foot, silhouetted against a luminous plaque, as it kicked over a trumpet.

The ASPR trustees were apparently pleased by the performance, however, and Bird, the research officer of the Society, had been enthusiastic in his endorsement of these effects. How, then, could the Rhines stroll onto the scene and, in one evening's observation, manage to notice such elementary trickery? Is it possible that Bird and the leading lights of the ASPR could have been so dim as to miss these obvious areas of concern? The Rhines (at least in print) supposed that Margery's votaries were duped, caught up by the excitement of the discovery of the unknown and overwhelmed by her feminine allure.

For Bird, in fact, the situation was much more complicated than that: "If I succeed in reducing [the reader] . . . to the plea that I am the confederate or the fraudulent reporter, I regard myself as having done my full duty by him, and as having carried him as far along the road of ultimate education in the facts as it is possible to carry him" (Bird, 1928, p. 5). The plain fact is that all the while Bird continued to assure the readers of the ASPR's publications, as well as the audiences of his lectures and press interviews, that he regarded the Margery mediumship as "valid," he nevertheless knew that fraud had taken place under his direct observation on several occasions.

This knowledge and his records of such observations Bird kept to himself, as he had kept a blank check once given him by Dr. Crandon. He intended to use both these records and the check to offer in evidence against the mediumship, should the circumstances ever warrant their release. (The check he finally cashed, for what he deemed the "customary amount"—whatever that might mean!) That he knew of the fraudulent element almost from the beginning was never made public in Margery's lifetime, due to a series of events to be discussed later. How many of the case's other advocates were similarly aware of occasional fraud, but kept it to themselves in the interest of continued Lime Street privileges or emotional perquisites, is now unknowable. The unfortunate aspect of this reservation of damaging information is that of course it

vitiates whatever Bird, at least, testified to as genuine in the voluminous accounts he did choose to publish.

The Crandon case thus became an ASPR "family affair" in which only the trusted initiates were involved. They were to be amazed and moved by the usual telekinetic and teleplasmic demonstrations, but something new and really quite remarkable was to be added: "Walter" announced that he would produce the ultimate proof of postmortem survival—his own fingerprints. In the darkness of the seance room, a plate of heated dental wax and a plate of water were placed before Margery. Walter materialized his hand, made an impression of his thumb in the wax, cooled it in the water, and left the specimen for the examination of the Lime Street guests.

The most frequent visitors, besides Mr. Bird, were Mr. E. E. Dudley, a spiritualistic journalist whose search for a story had led him to a deep conviction in the reality of Margery's phenomena; Mr. Daniel Day Walton, the almost stereotypically melodramatic lawyer who had, as we have observed earlier, espoused the case with an extraordinary emotionality; and, most significantly, Mr. William H. Button, a "patron" of the ASPR since the early twenties (so named due to his contribution of a thousand dollars to the Society's research fund). Button earned his considerable wealth as an excellent and even well-known corporation lawyer in New York City.

All of these men (and several others less important) became polemicists in the incredible defense of Margery and her phenomena. Dudley's somewhat limited abilities were involved in a lengthy and fatiguing study of the Walter thumbprints, which the Crandon circle had been producing since the summer of 1926. With the assistance of Malcolm Bird, Dudley would publish complex and intricate analyses of this unique spiritualistic phenomenon for the next three years. Already, Walter's thumbs were talked about all over the world as though they were the most conclusive of all demonstrations of human immortality. They did not seem to think of this new phase as it might actually have been intended, that is, as a satirical comment on the continual attempts of psychical researchers to provide material proofs of a nonmaterial reality. What could more point out the essentially materialistic basis of Spiritualism than the production of a ghost's fingerprints? It even may be suggested that the whole matter of spiritual dermatoglyphics can hardly be appreciated without reflecting first upon this satirical significance. Whether the satire was that of Walter or the Crandons, the point is much the same.

But more extraordinary than any spiritualistic phenomenon connected with the Margery case was the unique character of the

published defenses of the Crandons. In no other case in modern history have such vituperative and personal attacks been used to vindicate any single medium. Bird, Dudley, Walton, and then Button would satirize, threaten, cajole, and bully all opponents; and no attack was considered too dangerous to be used. Mr. Bird, as we have seen, in his discussion of the Harvard investigation, suggested that Grant Code was mentally irresponsible and in love with Mina. He darkly hinted that there was a letter (which he would rather not make public) in which Code had declared his devotion to her in the most effusive manner. This is what the public saw, and it was indeed incredible enough that an investigator's personal life should be relevant to his denunciation of a medium and that such material should be used to discredit his findings. But this was what the membership of the ASPR and a great many newspapers were treated to, both in the Society's *Journal* and *Proceedings* as well as in a privately published pamphlet entitled *Margery-Harvard-Veritas: A Study in Psychics*, issued above the names of Mark W. Richardson, Charles S. Hill, Alfred Martin, S. Ralph Harlow, Joseph DeWyckoff, and (of course) L. R. G. Crandon. Printed by a small Boston company in 1925, this singular pamphlet was composed of extravagant claims of "improved conditions" in the Margery sittings, of virulent personal attacks upon the mental and emotional competency of all adverse investigators, two articles reprinted from the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, and the seance notes of the Harvard sittings. These notes were prefaced by the comments that "they appear absolutely as written and signed," and that "the mediumship can well afford to stand or fall by these signed records" (Richardson et al., 1925, p. 37).

This was indeed an extravagant measure, in view of the fact that the notes were most certainly *not* printed "absolutely as written and signed" by the Harvard group. Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, whose Boston Society for Psychic Research had the irrevocable policy never to publicly deal with the Margery affair in any way, nevertheless received the complaints of his newly made friends, Hudson Hoagland and Grant Code. Neither Hoagland nor Code had been very pleased by their treatment at the hands of Mr. Bird in his hot-headed attacks in several *Journal* articles published since the issue of the Harvard report. Prince, who was perhaps the best known of Margery's critics, had solicited their comments on this pamphlet and was interested to learn—or, rather, to confirm his suspicions—that many key statements in the notes had been deleted, as well as several essential paragraphs in the correspondence allegedly printed as originally written by Hoagland and Code. Prince added these items to the mounting number of such

purposeful omissions, errors of fact, and actual lies currently in print beneath the names of Crandon, Dudley, Walton, and Bird. Already armed with over a hundred samples of such errors and distortions which he had gleaned from a casual reading of less than a third of Bird's book on "Margery" the Medium (Bird, 1925b), Dr. Prince felt himself prepared to criticize the quality of the research that had then been published. His single article on the case until the early thirties appeared in the *American Journal of Psychology* under the title "A Review of the Margery Case." It was later reprinted in *The Case For and Against Psychical Belief* (Prince, 1926/1927), along with the text of several other Clark University lectures intended to survey the field of psychical research. The "Review" was not originally given as a lecture, for Prince had preferred to talk about some positive side of his researches, but as soon as he learned that Crandon's talk was to be published for an even wider audience, Prince insisted that his own article appear in the same volume. It was, of course, imperative to the interests of psychical research that the reader of these lectures understand that Dr. Crandon's long discussion of the case was not the last word that needed saying.

Thus it came to be said by the Crandon advocates that Walter Franklin Prince was an active and open enemy of the case. So much was at least partly true: He was opposed to the continuation of the fruitless and even embarrassing investigation by the ASPR, and he had published his opinions in one article. But from this tenuous position, it came to be actually believed and publicly suggested that all the adverse comment on the case proceeded from the writing desk of Dr. Prince. In a letter dated March 16, 1927, E. E. Dudley asked Prince if there was any truth to the rumor that Prince had written both the Harvard report and the Rhine report. He goes on:

As for the parentage of the Rhine literary offspring—from the records it would seem to be a seven-months baby; that is, if it was actually conceived at the sitting in July. But if, on the other hand, its date of conception was somewhat earlier then explanations are in order. I can understand why you might not wish to be involved in such a matter. These cases of illegitimate children are often most embarrassing. . . . Just on the side, as it were, does Rhine know that he wrote that thing? . . . As you say, it has nothing to do with the B.S.P.R. and he wrote the whole of it—except for some help from his friends! . . . As an impartial (?) observer you must admit that most anyone would be suspicious of those Hoagland, Rhine articles. They look as though someone must have written them. (Dudley, 1927)

And on he goes, giving further evidence of his rather severely misguided convictions and of his less than impressive intellect.

The controversy had been constructed in such a way as to leave the mediumship forever ambiguous, a question of whose word to believe. If one believed the rumors and the published material appearing from the Crandon camp, one would suppose that Margery was (as Dr. Mark Richardson [n.d.] would later suggest in his unpublished manuscript) a "saint," and that she was a martyr to the vindictive and inexplicable hatred of a group of fools, villains, and even atheists. If one believed, on the other hand, the criticisms of Hoagland, Rhine, and Prince—criticisms that were accompanied by precise descriptions of observed fraud and of distortions in print—then a perfectly respectable Boston lady and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons were indulging in one of the most complex and perverse schemes ever seen in the history of psychical research. It would, indeed, seem like a fair enough choice to an open-minded but uninformed student of the published material of the day: It would be reasonable to suppose that there could be people who entertained a particular animosity for Margery or perhaps for the whole area of supernormal physical phenomena, and that such people might never believe in her, no matter how conclusive the evidence became. If the partisans of Margery could get that wedge firmly entered, the rest would be simple. All that had to be done was effectively to cast doubt upon the intellectual honesty or the mental competency of any person who attacked the case. This was the program systematically carried out by the Margery propagandists from 1925 to 1938.

Prince (1926/1927) had nonetheless submitted his "Review" to the ASPR *Journal* before sending it to E. G. Boring for publication in the *American Journal of Psychology*. It was refused by the ASPR, of course, in spite of the advocacy given the paper by some of the members of the Board of Trustees, including Dr. George H. Hyslop, the son of the Society's founder. It appears that Hyslop's sentimental attachment to the organization led him to act as a sort of spy in the Crandon camp, attempting wherever possible to sway the trustees from taking too extravagant a course. His pleas for balance and fair play fell on deaf ears, however, and the decision of the Committee of Publications forced Prince to make use of his friend E. G. Boring's influence with the *American Journal of Psychology*.

Shortly before the appearance of Prince's article, things began to assume very remarkable proportions, and Margery seems to have behaved as audaciously as she had when she threatened to send some of her friends to beat up Houdini (Gibson & Young, 1953, pp. 542-543). These actions moved the whimsical psychic researcher to write to Dr. Hyslop:

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Margery says that if my forthcoming article . . . is horrid, she will "crucify" me. Isn't that awful? And Dudley, of *The Banner of Life* [a Boston Spiritualist newspaper], says I will come to a bad end. I shall have to put on my pistol belt. I fancy that Margery fears that I will tell some things that have never been told—but no I am going to be a perfect gentleman. It is all very funny. And if I should call on Margery today, she would receive me just as sweetly as ever. (Prince, 1926a)

Following the Rhines' single—but illuminating—seance at Lime Street, the question arose between Prince and J. B. Rhine as to whether the ASPR would publish a report of the trickery and wholesale fraud they encountered. Neither of them thought the prospect likely, and their supposition was accurate; for, a few months later, after a considerable delay, Rhine's paper was informally refused by Mr. John Gordon of the ASPR Publications Committee. As things stood at that time, with the three most significant articles of a critical nature now denied publication, the Society seemed really to have turned its back upon its reputation and its own purpose. Prince, in a letter to George H. Hyslop, indicated his appreciation of Hyslop's continued behind-the-scenes efforts to save the organization from self-destruction:

The late Dr. Hyslop would have regarded the present state of your Society as that of scientific damnation. Your own position, as his son, respecter of his principles, is an extraordinarily difficult one. I can imagine that you are tempted to leave the sinking ship, and yet the only hope of possibly bringing it back into safe waters may seem to be that of sticking by it. Heaven knows that I would like to see it return to its former state, when it had the respect of those whose learning and sympathy with its purported aims make their respect immeasurably more valuable than that of the uninstructed and indiscriminating mob. I would like to see the two Societies amalgamated, but that can never be until the principles of James H. Hyslop are again triumphant. (Prince, 1926b)

But the worst had not yet come. In the winter of 1926-1927, Frederick Bligh Bond, whose spirit-assisted excavations at Glastonbury Abbey had earned him considerable press in psychic circles, arrived in America, eager to see the wonders of Lime Street. Bond swiftly fell under Margery's spell and accepted the dogma that Walter Franklin Prince was persecuting the Crandons with printed attacks and rumor campaigns. (The Crandon advocates referred to the BSPR as "The SSMM"—the Society for the Suppression of the Margery Mediumship!) On a visit to the BSPR offices, Bond was left alone for about twenty minutes. With remarkable audacity, he went right to the file cabinet, opened it, and

began to check through Prince's correspondence. He found a letter from Grant Code to Prince, written the previous April, in which Code indulged in the common pastime of speculating on Margery's vagina—he was wondering if it might not have been surgically enlarged. Bond apparently copied out the offending paragraph and went immediately to the Crandons with it. At first, the Crandons were furious and Margery told everyone the terrible things that Prince was saying about her, while Crandon threatened him with a legal suit. Bond began to see rumor-tracing as a kind of quest, and so he continued to keep his ear to the ground.

Before long Bond learned of another rumor, connecting Dr. Crandon with an alleged financial scandal at Boston City Hospital. This rumor was investigated and found to be groundless—but Bond unwittingly discovered that Crandon's "loss of position and prestige" mentioned in the Rhines' paper (J. B. Rhine & L. E. Rhine, 1927, p. 419) was not related to financial misappropriation, but to the doctor's reputed treatment of nurses. Bond's efforts to "pull 'psychics' out of this very malodorous cesspool" were having a reverse effect, and were beginning to make more difficulties for the Crandons than for the "enemy." Bond was too filled with righteous indignation to be easily called off, however; on his own he began to write letters to Elwood Worcester, president of the BSPR. Here is a section from one of my personal favorites:

A speedy Nemesis now awaits the author of the worst of these accusations and innuendos and nothing can save him. You will discover that you have been grossly deceived.

Margery is about the finest medium God ever gave and her subjective work so marvellous that it will suffice to vindicate her absolutely. This work shall be preserved and she shall now be protected from any further mischief. (in Tietze, 1973, pp. 118–119)

A man who can write in this style might be capable of anything. The ASPR appointed him editor of the *Journal*. This appointment should explain a great deal about the conduct of the Society in the late 1920s.

The Crandon group managed somehow to stop Bond from actually publishing his correspondence with Worcester and Prince, and narrowly averted a full-scale investigation into the personal and professional background of the Crandons. Meanwhile, J. Malcolm Bird found himself edged out of the Margery affair. From 1927 until 1930, though he was still nominally the editor of the *Journal*, he wrote very little relating to Margery. He was, however, working on a lengthy volume of the *Proceedings* which was to be the second book-length treatment of the case the ASPR would bring out. This book, he let it be known to his employers, would deal in part with

the evidence of occasional fraud that he had detected. This completed manuscript was lost, and the second Margery *Proceedings* (labelled 1926–1927, but actually published in 1933) was rushed out of E. E. Dudley's typewriter instead. Selections from Bird's book were not published until 1973 in my own book on the case (Tietze, 1973, pp. 137–139). Bird's defection was kept a secret from the public, and his work was limited to other matters.

There were other upheavals behind the scenes. Dr. George Hyslop, one of the few trustees of the Society to be embarrassed by the depths to which it had sunk, grew restless. Dr. Hyslop—who had once, in 1925, written (Hyslop, 1925) to Prince his optimistic opinion that the Margery case would be settled once and for all within six months—was now faced with the choice of "playing the game," as he put it, or getting out. He decided that it was best for all concerned if he stayed with the Society his father had founded twenty years before, resolving that whenever possible he should attempt to alter the Society's course. On the first of March, 1927, Hyslop drew up a formal statement to be considered at the meeting of the Board of Trustees called for March 3rd, in which he voiced the following criticisms:

For two years now it has been the hope of various members of the Board that the Crandon case could be submitted to a proper investigation. Through no deliberate or intentional policy, the Society has become publicly associated with this case, which regardless of its merits has been the center of frequent and violent controversy. We have attempted to document the case and, as it so happens, our publications have devoted much space to the case. Most of the articles have happened to represent one side of the controversy. To an undetermined degree our Society is regarded as inclined to favor the genuineness of the phenomena. The most recent illustrations can be found in the *Boston American* for February 7, 1927. In this paper it was stated that the A.S.P.R. did the following things:

- 1st—Rejected the Rhine manuscript.
- 2nd—Made an investigation after his sitting and reported his charges to be without foundation.
- 3rd—The A.S.P.R. Committee was satisfied that the phenomena in their sittings were legitimate and honest.

So much for the position of the Society before the public. From the standpoint of the Society, it is to be regretted that any case which is subject to controversy can place the organization in a position which cannot be maintained and supported by facts beyond criticism.

It has been the official position of the Society to attempt a scientific study of the case. Certain members of the Board, in their enthusiastic acceptance of the Crandon case, have in effect compromised the Society.

Mr. Bond and Mrs. Crandon submitted a prepared statement and

demanding that the newspaper in question publish it as a defense and apology. A threat of libel proceedings was made. In this statement it is implied that the A.S.P.R. stands in favor of the case, and the names of Drs. McComas and Overstreet are used quite out of context, and in a manner which seems to make them to some extent sponsors and vouchers for the validity of the phenomena. I believe that Dr. Crandon denies attempting to force publicity of his prepared statement.

As long ago as October, 1925 the Research Committee considered dropping the case as far as the Society is concerned, but two members insisted upon further efforts. I believe that some members of the Board still feel the desirability of further efforts on the part of the Society to investigate this case.

All of the above represents a skeleton outline of the history of the case as far as it is officially related to the A.S.P.R.

I cannot state too strongly my opinion as follows:

1st—We should close our columns to further consideration of this case.

2nd—We should state in our columns that we have been unable to submit the case to further investigation under proper conditions; that we have no verdict to render and that the Society cannot afford to interest itself further in the case.

3rd—If any members of the Society are sufficiently interested in the case to continue contact with it, it should be understood that they do so as private individuals and that the Society itself in no way sponsors their activities.

Even with the prestige by association which Dr. Hyslop enjoyed, his suggestions went unheeded. The majority of the Board of Trustees seem to have been in favor of continuing work on the case. No substantial concession was made to Hyslop's recommendations, save for an introduction to the May, 1927, *Journal* which said, in effect, that the Society as an organization could not give its support to the individual conclusions of the contributors to its publications, even when such contributors were employed by, or officers in, the Society (Derieux, 1927). Nevertheless, work seemed to continue as usual; the standards of the *Journal* seemed to maintain their mediocre level, not descending noticeably, but at the same time failing to make adjustments to the apparent unlikelihood of ever succeeding in reaching a satisfactory conclusion in the Margery case.

In February, 1927, the ASPR faced this issue in typical fashion when they appointed Hamlin Garland, the prominent American novelist who had a lifelong interest in psychical matters, to the Board of Trustees. It was their intention that Garland would settle the controversy once and for all. He found in favor of the case, and his account was sympathetic. He was awarded with a Walter print in wax, but his endorsement of the case only revealed his extreme

open-mindedness. This issue of Walter's fingerprints had become of considerable significance, not only in proving that the prints obtained in the softened dental wax were not those of anyone present in the room, but also because of a recent and most remarkable discovery, apparently on the part of Mr. Bird. It seems that the sitters were casting about for ideas as to ways of proving that it was Walter and no other who left his prints in the dark. The elderly Mrs. Stinson, now staying with her daughter in Lime Street, recalled that a razor Walter had used was stored in a trunk in the attic. A search through Mrs. Stinson's apparently considerable cache of belongings led to the discovery of a straight edge razor with its tantalizingly smooth handle. When the handle was dusted, only a portion of a thumb print was found.

On comparing the partial print on the razor handle with the finely detailed prints from the seances, a mysterious Crandon advocate named Captain Fife (whose qualifications as a "Finger Print Expert" were apparently attested by the presence of "F.P.E." following his signature) declared that the identification was certain: For the first time in all history, a human spirit had proved that it had survived death unchanged in mind and body.

This highly revolutionary announcement was greeted with mixed emotions by those whose familiarity with the Margery case had conditioned them to be wary in such matters. Members of the Boston Society, of course, could only throw up their arms in despair—what more incredible fantasy could be envisioned and enacted than that a ghost should leave fingerprints? In England, the reaction was as lukewarm and reserved as was customary in all cases of controversial physical phenomena. In France—the nation noted for the unheard-of success it had attained in finding genuine mediums who could produce, in test conditions, everything from a pithecanthropus to a condor out of thin air—the famous plasticine molds of Franek Kluski (Richet, 1923, pp. 542–543) established a somewhat more respectable background for Walter's incredible revelation.

But at the American Society for Psychical Research, there was much intellectual jubilation. The Margery mediumship was continuing to branch out, too: In 1928 she began to succeed in so-called "cross-correspondences" with other mediums, such as the dubious "Dr." Henry Hardwicke and the "thoroughly discredited" George Valantine (Salter, 1932, p. 389; see also Richardson, 1928), and in the same year she began the practice of giving "solus sittings." In these seances, the medium and her investigator would enter the seance room and seal the doors, ostensibly to exclude outside confederates. Reports of these sittings did little towards removing serious doubts about fraud (Tietze, 1973, pp. 133–135).

In the midst of all this dubious "progress," J. Malcolm Bird dropped out of sight of the psychical research world. The ASPR, in a dazzling display of consistency, rejected Bird's *Proceedings* and fired him in 1930. He was replaced by the enthusiastic Frederick Bligh Bond. Since 1930, Bird's whereabouts and occupations have remained unknown, despite the concerted efforts of Canon William Rauscher and myself to find even a trace of him. Bird's defection was the first of several.

The internal changes within the Society—including the resignation from the Board of G. H. Hyslop—were reflected by noteworthy changes in the *Journal*. Aside from discussions of astrology and cabalistic rites, readers were also treated to some of Hereward Carrington's stranger theories by way of the space he filled after the loss of the prolific Mr. Bird. Carrington's thoughts on the Margery case were acceptable to the Board, as he still retained the opinion that "a number of seemingly genuine, super-normal manifestations" (Carrington, 1930, p. 203) had been observed by him. It is not surprising that so skillful a magician as Carrington should continue to accept some of Margery's phenomena, for he had, in fact, been denied entrance to the Lime Street seance room since the *Scientific American* sittings had ended. Thus, his opportunities to investigate the case had been severely restricted—why it is not known.

Even the title of the *Journal* underwent change: From 1928 to 1931 it was rechristened *Psychic Research*, and shifts in paper size were tried, possibly with the notion of making the publication appear to be more an accessible magazine than a scientific journal. Certainly the content followed form. The articles were uncritical and the analyses shallow. Much space was now devoted to enthusiastic discussions of metaphysics and religion. For several months, articles composed by "William James and the S.P.R. Group," under the heading of "Discarnate Knowledge," had been communicating facts about the spirit world to *Journal* readers. These incredible documents were included without editorial comment, and only those readers who had taken care to follow the series would be aware that the authors were the *spirits* of James, Myers, and other figures of psychic fame who had been dead for years. There was even a postmortem contribution by Charles Darwin (Glover, 1931)!

Then, some time in February, 1931, Mr. William H. Button was elected president of the American Society for Psychical Research. His sole object of study was the Margery mediumship.

Mr. Dudley, meanwhile, poured laboriously over the collected thumbprints of all those who had ever attended a Margery seance, comparing them carefully with the prints Walter proclaimed as his

own. While he was engaged in this work, Mr. Dudley was financed by the generous Dr. Crandon, as it had "developed that he was somewhat needy financially" (Thorogood, 1933, p. x). Articles from his energetic pen were to be seen frequently in the *Journal*.

However, a schism began once again to very slowly and insidiously develop within the already badly torn Society whose officials had so obligingly taken the Margery case under their wing. It seems that Mr. Dudley himself was growing disenchanted.

We know that Dudley was introduced to the Crandons through his journalistic associations. He took an active part in the low-level defense of Margery's honor which appeared in *The Banner of Life* after the Rhine report was published, and his superficially critical writings were so warmly appreciated that he was actually pursuing his "investigation" of the case under the beneficent employ of Dr. Crandon himself. Mr. Dudley was a Spiritualist, a propagandist, and a man who was paid to discredit the adverse report of J. Malcolm Bird. This last task was his at the express wish of the Society, the leaders of which saw no other course of safety than to actually attack the character and undermine the reputation of the man who, more than any other, was responsible for Margery's even being under the drooping gaze of the current regime. By this typical, but nonetheless reprehensible activity, Mr. Dudley came into his own. Mr. Bird had been shown to have been unworthy of public confidence in his observational abilities; and this curious victory at once disarmed an attack and cut off much of the previous defense of the case. If that were not enough, a rumor was somehow set afoot suggesting that Bird's "frequent Boston trips were the cloak for a series of illicit amours" (Tietze, 1973, p. 141).

The appointment of Mr. Brackett K. Thorogood in June of 1931 to the specially created post of research consultant completes the transition begun by the forced resignation of Dr. Prince in 1925—a transition that brought psychical research out from the cloistered domain of the specialist and placed it in the hands of the masses. Thus it was that, admirable though these democratic intentions may have been, the critical standards of this important science came to be determined by those for whom the study of such phenomena was an avocation. This is not to totally disparage Mr. Thorogood's critical faculties. He was, in many ways, the most careful of the fervid crew now steering the course of the Society's researches.

Nonetheless, the post given Thorogood should, by squatter's rights, have been given to Mr. Dudley. He had, after all, studied the prints in greater detail than anyone else had; he had been there longer than most of the current believers (excepting Richardson, of course); and he had devoted considerable effort to rewriting the

enormous mass of material left behind by Mr. Bird. Somewhere along the line, however, Dr. Crandon had decided that Mr. Dudley did not suit his needs quite so exactly as Mr. Thorogood. Accordingly, with his characteristic abruptness, Crandon had, in the last half of 1930, determined to place Thorogood in complete control of Margery's seances. The Society's officials were thus more or less forced to appoint Thorogood to this new position, although circumstances indicate that they were not displeased by the new man's work.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dudley had become understandably piqued. Dudley (who had enjoyed the privilege, shared by nearly all Margery's investigators since the *Scientific American* adventure, of entering the house on Lime Street whenever he should find the door open) now began to find himself less welcome. The climax of the situation came when Dudley found a lock on the door to the seance room, placed there by Crandon to protect the apparatus set up by Thorogood. As Dudley later complained, "I found myself forced out" (Thorogood, 1933, p. xi).

Why this became necessary is difficult to imagine. The most likely explanation (from the skeptical point of view) may be that Crandon knew that Dudley was on a dangerous track which would one day lead him to make uncomfortable discoveries about Walter and his invisible thumb. From the beginning, Dudley had provided some superficial assurance of the supernormality of the wax impressions by comparing Walter's prints (all clearly made from the same thumb) with those of every sitter present at the seances. What he thought he had established—and what the Society wished others to believe—was that this last fact proved the presence of "someone" else in the seance room. Now, however, Mr. Dudley embarked upon the somewhat more ambitious course of comparing Walter's prints with those of every sitter who had attended a Lime Street seance before his arrival on the scene. He therefore consulted Mr. Bird's list of sitters for 1923–1924 and began to get in touch with them wherever possible. It was about the time that this activity began that Dudley found himself less welcome than before. He nonetheless continued his efforts.

Other problems were developing within the Society as well. In 1929, after observing Margery perform at a private seance in London, Harry Price, the "Foreign Research Officer" of the ASPR, wrote the following to Theron Pierce of the Board of Trustees:

It is obvious to every psychist in this country, that the policy of the American S.P.R. is rapidly changing. When, in 1925, I consented to represent the Society in Europe, I felt that under its new Research Officer, experiments of a scientific nature would be carried out and that its reports would attract the attention of official science.

But what has happened is this: the American Society for Psychical Research is now in the grip of the spiritualists, and the stranglehold of the Crandon-party—on both sides of the Atlantic—is slowly but surely throttling the life out of it. . . . Were it not for its fine journal . . . with its important foreign contributors, the American S.P.R. would have no particular reason for continuing its existence. . . . I am thoroughly sympathetic with the tenets and philosophy of the spiritualistic religion, but "faith" has no connection whatever with scientific research. . . . My sincere and disinterested advice to the American S.P.R. is: get clear of the "Margery" case before the crash comes. (Cited in Tabori, 1950, pp. 163–164)

In 1930, Price felt compelled to resign the office; and, by 1931, his featured "International Notes"—tidbits of psychic interest which had graced the last seventy-one months of the *Journal*—were now terminated.

The crucial eruption in the case, however, occurred in March of 1932: The indefatigable E. E. Dudley, in the process of routinely comparing the Walter prints with those of the people on the list of 1923–1924 Lime Street sitters, found that Walter's thumb was identical to the thumb of Mina Crandon's dentist, Dr. Frederick Caldwell. Things began to happen fairly quickly now. Fortified by his personal knowledge of what had happened to Bird when he found evidence of fraud, Dudley's first plan was to get back his *Proceedings* rewrite from William Button and make "certain textual changes" in it. Button was suspicious, so Dudley had to tell him what he had found. In a letter written on March 18, 1932, Dudley explained that he had identified the Walter prints

with the thumb prints of a living person, one of the early sitters. . . . After these had been enlarged and analyzed I took them to competent experts who agreed that the identification was unusually complete. . . . Two things are proved: Three-dimensional prints of normal form can be successfully duplicated; and the "Walter" prints are not those of Walter Stinson, deceased. (Dudley, 1932b)

Button didn't understand, so he went to "Walter" and asked him. Walter simply "ridiculed the idea." Button's sagacity may be demonstrated by his response to Dudley: "Why," he wondered, "should Walter select the print of a living man to produce all these years?" No attempt to make the importance of his discovery clear to Button met with any success. Finally, Dudley produced a separate paper dealing with the issue. The ASPR, of course, rejected it.

Dudley informed Prince of his findings and offered his paper for publication by the BSPR. Fearing with good cause that the ASPR would suppress this report as it had suppressed those of Hoagland, Code, McComas, the Rhines, Bird, and even Dr. Prince's own review of the case, Prince accordingly decided to sponsor Dudley's

article for publication as a *Bulletin* of the BSPR. The members of the Boston Council agreed with Prince in believing this to be even more conclusive than Mr. Bird's long paper, and it was therefore published as the *Bulletin of the Boston Society for Psychic Research*, Volume XVIII, October, 1932 (Dudley, 1932a). Dudley had been the man who had refused even to see the cogency of Bird's evidence of fraud. He had been employed as an apologist for the ASPR for the special purpose of discrediting Bird as an observer. Until this discovery was made, Dudley had been one of Margery's most energetic supporters. Now he had produced an article that created near pandemonium when it was at last published. Thorogood was instructed by the Research Committee to do what he could to combat the charges; meanwhile, Button submitted the enlargements of the prints to Dr. Harold Cummins of the department of anatomy at Tulane University for his opinion.

Thorogood and Button at last voiced the conclusion, expanded in Thorogood's "The Margery Mediumship" (Thorogood, 1933), that Dudley, either through neglect, or for more conscious reasons known best to him, had substituted the real Walter prints for those made from dies of Caldwell's prints. Although this is a simplification of the argument—an argument replete with many intricate convolutions and many unanswerable pieces of evidence—the gist of the report was far from complimentary on the question of Mr. Dudley's integrity. It accused him of harboring deep-seated resentments towards Crandon and the Society for their exclusion of him from any controlling position. It intimated that Mr. Dudley sought any means possible to discredit the case, due to this thwarted ambition. But beyond this, Thorogood attempted to fight the charge with new evidence—an unusual method for the Society in those years.

He analyzed the early paraffin gloves and found that the thumbprints in them did not match in any way with those of Caldwell. Going back through the records, Thorogood suggested that these were so incompletely documented as to afford little assurance that the prints really were Walter's and that the print Dudley called the "standard" Walter print was by no means standard. A new series of experiments was therefore conducted with the view towards obtaining a standard set of prints which would be certainly established as Walter's. These new prints were found to differ significantly from the Caldwell prints when subjected to a microscopic comparison. Such, in summary, was the text of Thorogood's defense.

The opinion requested from Dr. Cummins had come in good time to be included in Thorogood's report. Cummins, who knew nothing of the controversy, but who was merely consulted on a question of

expertise on fingerprint identification, was of the opinion that the "Walter" print and that of Dr. Caldwell were absolutely identical. Perhaps it is uncharitable to suggest that Mr. Button and his friends saw no alternative to publishing Cummins' adverse report in the *Journal*, except to endure the constant worry that word would leak out that the expert consulted by the Society had, with complete independence of interests, found against the mediumship. Cummins' conclusions were therefore printed, surrounded, however, by the criticisms of Mr. Thorogood, mechanical engineer and amateur abnormal psychologist. Thorogood had made a crash study of fingerprint science and had concluded that Cummins was mistaken and biased against psychic phenomena.

A few months after the *Proceedings* came out, the Boston Society for Psychic Research published its *Bulletin* XXII (April, 1934), entitled: *The "Walter"-Kerwin Thumb Prints*. In this volume, Dr. Cummins (1934) analyzed the attack made upon his competency, not by engaging in personal abuse (such as had been leveled against him), but by once again going over the specific items of identification which led him to three conclusions: (1) The right and left thumbs of "Walter" were identical with those of Frederick Caldwell; (2) those prints which included both the palms and the prints of "Walter" were composites: The thumbs were Caldwell's, whereas the palms were those of an unknown individual; and (3) it is a "simple process" to make dies precisely suitable for the fraudulent production of any subject's fingerprint.

Even Mr. Frederick Bligh Bond was shaken by Cummins' first report. On December 31, 1933, when Thorogood's work of defense had just appeared, Mr. Bond wrote in a private letter:

Things at Hyslop House are going more crazily than ever and now I am called upon as Editor to publish an article by our President on the old "Margery" business of the thumb prints [*sic*], and I cannot refuse to do so, though I am ashamed to have to sponsor its appearance even to this extent. It is sheer nonsense—not in any sense a scientific document but a piece of special pleading and to my mind very weak and lacking in any feeling of sincerity. But I hear that our Board are determined to pursue their course of "vindicating" this mediumship and have arranged for another year's investigation and retained the services of their research man for the whole of 1934 for this purpose, making his fee a first charge on the fund for our endowment. Meanwhile our home resources at Hyslop House are strained, our salaries cut, and all clerical help denied. We have not even an office boy to answer the door. (Kenawell, 1965, p. 102)

But even the pathetic loss of faith we thus see bowing the shoulders of the exuberant Mr. Bond was yet to worsen into open

animosity. The issue around which this final crisis in the Margery case grew was the publication of a third report from Dr. Cummins, early in 1935. It was printed by the Society for Psychical Research, that bastion of conservative silence regarding the Margery case during the half-decade of most heated debate. It was in this report that the most conclusive evidence was revealed.

It seems that Margery had not exercised sufficient care about the distribution of her brother's thumbprints. On the 7th, 8th, and 9th of December, 1929, the seance room of the (London) Society was used for demonstration sittings by the visiting Dr. and Mrs. Crandon (Cummins, 1935). Present, among others, were Dr. V. J. Woolley (then Research Officer of the SPR), Mrs. Eve Brackenbury (also of the SPR), and the persistent Harry Price, who had insisted on being given a Margery seance in spite of Dr. Crandon's suspicious reluctance to allow the renowned ghost-breaker a place in any previous sitting. Dr. Woolley and Mr. Price were each rewarded with a Walter thumbprint, and it was this indiscretion on Walter's part that now came back to haunt him.

Dr. Harold Cummins happened to be in London in the summer of 1934, where he met with Mr. W. H. Salter. Salter mentioned to Cummins that the Society's secretary had recently come into possession of a key, previously kept by Dr. Woolley until his resignation. The key opened a box in which Woolley had stored the ghost's thumbprint after the sitting of December 7th, five years before—a sitting which occurred more than three years earlier than the start of the present controversy. Salter and Cummins were equally eager to have another look at this print. If it could be shown to be a Caldwell print, then there could be no doubt that Dudley had not substituted any prints out of a spirit of vindictiveness toward Margery and the ASPR, as the American Society's *Proceedings* had accused—nor could there then be any doubt that "Walter" had, for eight years, been using Frederick Caldwell's print for his own.

Accordingly, on August 1, 1934, in the rooms of the Society for Psychical Research, Dr. Cummins opened the box and examined the wax impression in the presence of Miss Newton, W. H. Salter, and Stanley de Brath (a Margery believer who had been invited to bring along a Walter print in the possession of the British College of Psychic Science). In addition to the prints supplied to Cummins by Woolley and Mr. de Brath, he was availed of the opportunity to similarly inspect two Walter thumbprints sent for the purpose by Lord Charles Hope. Later, he was able to examine three prints owned by Professor F. C. S. Schiller, dated September 9, 10 and 11, 1929. All these impressions had been untouched for five years.

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And all of them, unquestionably, were the thumbprints of Dr. Frederick Caldwell of Boston.

The Crandon party never adequately replied to this evidence. There was, indeed, little purpose in doing so. Here was no case of an investigator saying he saw one thing, whereas a Margery advocate claimed to have seen quite another. The evidence was clear and permanent, and no rebuttal of these facts could have been of the least use. However, when Bligh Bond, bitter and disillusioned, published a summary of Cummins' findings in the *Journal*, the ASPR summarily fired him and published a special supplement disclaiming Bond's right to have circumvented the Publication Committee (Tietze, 1973, pp. 171-176).

Within a few days of Cummins' discovery, Dr. Walter Franklin Prince died at the age of seventy-one. Through his efforts to acquaint the public with facts that might otherwise have been suppressed, he helped to clear the way of the impediments of progress so perfectly exemplified in the Margery mediumship. He provided a forum not only for the most significant criticism of this particular case, but also for the many positive studies which culminated in 1934 with the publication of the book that would reshape the future of psychical research—Dr. J. B. Rhine's *Extra-Sensory Perception* (J. B. Rhine, 1934). Prince's most succinct estimate of the affair was written in a letter to Joe Rinn on February 1, 1934, only seven months before his death: "Now, in my judgment, the Margery case will, in time, come to be considered the most ingenious, persistent, and fantastic complex of fraud in the history of psychic research."

The ASPR languished in the grip of the Crandon group until 1941, when Mina died at the age of 54. The Margery affair had dominated the blackest era in the history of the ASPR and psychical research in general. It was responsible for nearly irreparable harm to the cause of progress in that field, and, because of the importance of the subjects studied in psychical research, it was therefore a blow as well to scientific understanding of human psychology. Even if there were some elements of genuineness in the case, these can now never be confidently established. The most convinced believer in the mediumship will admit, I think, that the whole affair could not have been more badly handled for the purposes of scientific assessment. Truly critical observers, one after the other, were banished from the seance room by Dr. Crandon. The few psychical researchers with training and experience were gradually replaced from 1925 on with occult dilettante who managed to bring the problems presented by psychic phenomena to the attention of the man on the street.

This effort to change the investigation of such problems from an embryonic science to a kind of popular presentation of some very fuzzy metaphysics may be more properly appreciated if one thinks (as I do) that psychical research involves questions which are best studied by specialists trained in such matters. There was clearly evident a kind of anti-intellectualism prevalent in the mood of the leaders of the ASPR, particularly after the publication of Rhine's early Duke work. There was the implied suggestion, for instance, that statistical evaluations may be all right in their way, but anyone can see that, if Margery scores 52 hits in a deck of playing cards (as she once, in fact, did), no such evaluation seems necessary. Modern parapsychologists may wince to read these words from President William Button's report "To the Voting Members of the A.S.P.R." in January of 1936:

In conclusion, I wish to state, somewhat didactically, from investigations which I have conducted myself and from investigations in which I have participated, that the following are facts. 1. The transference of thought and conception from one mind to another without the intervention of ordinary sensory channels. 2. Clairvoyance. 3. Telekinesis. 4. The passage of matter through matter as we understand the terms. 5. The transportation of matter over comparatively great distances. 6. The production of music without instruments.

I do not propose to elaborate on these things. I state them to be facts and the time is not far distant when they will be recognized as such. (Button, 1936, p. 54)

Even in the light of the remarkable findings of modern parapsychology, Mr. Button's prediction was quite visionary. No one would try to say that these things are a priori impossible. It is merely a question of how good the evidence is for them. Mr. Button's background in physics may have been extensive, but no trace of it may be found in his writings. He was an amateur indulging in that most exhilarating activity, the baiting of professional orthodoxy.

In short, the feature of psychical research at that time which is of most interest to us here is the amazing lack of even the first notion of scientific reserve. These people were, in the main, lawyers, businessmen, physicians, and their respective spouses; and yet they were endlessly vouching for phenomena which, if true, would alter the basic conceptions of the scientific order, and they vouched for them as though these things were the plainest of facts which only the bigotry and bias of established science kept from general recognition. With this kind of mood pervading the psychical research of the day, it was no wonder that those open-minded scientists who did read the *Journal* were aghast at the

extravagance of the assertions that filled that publication from cover to cover. Perhaps today's parapsychologists, who may often feel that their findings are not given a fair hearing by the scientific establishment, will now look upon the problem with a new sympathy. The fact must simply be faced: The established organization of American psychical research was devoted, from 1925 until 1941, to little more than what is generally called "occult science." Despite the continuing plea for dialogue between psychology and psychical research, despite the care and rigor behind recent experimentation in the paranormal, despite the affirmative findings of many such studies, there still lingers at this late date the belief that the whole matter is imbued with a vague kind of occultism that is understandably distasteful to modern scientists.

This belief may be attributed in great measure to the fervent group which was in charge of the Margery mediumship. Reason and restraint went out the window when the Cause seemed endangered: Critics were charged with physical inadequacies, moral turpitude, unbalanced minds, and even (in the thumbprint controversy) deliberate forgery and substitution. If the Margery mediumship did nothing else—if it established no case for survival and no unambiguous evidence for the physical phenomena of Spiritualism—it did at least perform one enduring, signal achievement in pointing up, better than any previous case, the need for rethinking parapsychological methodology. This became the ironic legacy to modern science of the enigmatic woman whose peculiar abilities and inscrutable motivations led her to rock the foundations of psychical research.

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