

The Margery Séance Thumb Prints

By ARTHUR GOADBY

MR. E. E. DUDLEY, a former member of the group investigating the Margery mediumship, desiring in the interests of scientific research to test out the hypothesis of animism, early last March secured, amongst others, the thumb prints of a certain Dr. "Kerwin" now living near Boston, who had attended many Margery séances previous to 1925, the year before the series of "Walter" thumb prints began, but had not been present at any since then. On comparing these "Kerwin" prints with certain authorized wax impressions of "Walter's" thumbs he discovered an obvious likeness between them, whereupon he submitted photographs of both the "Walter" and "Kerwin" prints, enlarged and indexed, to recognized experts in Boston, who certified that the identity was complete.

Thereupon Mr. Dudley notified both the President of the A. S. P. R. and the Chairman of its Research Committee of his discovery, and on April 4th in Boston he submitted to them the said photographs, which, together with the relevant data previously communicated to them by him, constituted the essentials of a full report, and requested them to take the then available opportunity to verify for themselves the genuineness of the "Kerwin" prints and in other respects also to confirm his evidence. Two months later, having received no intimation from these officials as to whether such verification had been made or attempted, and hearing that rather unpleasant insinuations were being circulated in New York in respect to his sincerity and veracity, he communicated with certain members of the Publication Committee of the Society, who, quietly proceeding to investi-

gate, soon were forced to admit the truth of Mr. Dudley's unhappy discovery, one of them succeeding in interviewing Dr. "Kerwin" in Boston and in verifying the genuineness of his prints. Whereupon Mr. Dudley released his long-prepared report on the subject to the Society for publication in its *Journal*. The Research Committee, however, having taken over three months to decide a matter which could easily have been disposed of in a few hours, inserted in the retarded July issue of the *Journal*, an article entitled "A Statement on behalf of the Research Committee," wherein they gave their reasons for declining to publish Mr. Dudley's certified and well-documented report and for dissenting from his facts and conclusions.

In their statement the Committee do not deny the genuineness of the "Kerwin" prints obtained by Mr. Dudley nor the obvious identity in pattern between these and the wax imprints alleged by Mr. Dudley to be "Walter's" and used by him for comparison. But they do deny the validity of the latter, offering the following alleged reasons for their denial. In respect to the right thumb, they deny its absolute identity with "Kerwin's" on the specious claim that the "Walter" wax is a positive not negative print, without committing themselves to any explanation as to what that alleged fact would signify. To quote their own words: "It is quite apparent from the evidence that instead of being a negative, as Dudley maintains, the print is a positive print. If this be true, the supposed identity of the print with the right thumb of the living man Mr. X [Dr. "Kerwin"] falls entirely."

The Committee do well to express caution

on this subject, for the print is a negative, as the internal evidence afforded by the modeling of the joint lines and the details of the papillary ridges reveals, and Mr. Dudley's original classification of it as a negative was endorsed by the Committee's own "Research Department," including its finger-print expert. So that the present Committee's sudden reversal of attitude not only imputes incompetence to them but also discredits and puts a stigma upon the record in their own official organ, the A. S. P. R. *Journal*.

But the Committee's assertion, even if it were true, would be inconsequential, for in the last six years more than one hundred prints have been produced which "Walter" acknowledged as of his own thumb and all have displayed consistent patterns. Any one of these prints could have been equally well used by Mr. Dudley in demonstrating the absolute identity of the "Walter" right thumb print with the pattern on "Kerwin's" right thumb, since finger-print science bases proof of identity on the relationship of the internal characteristics of the prints without regard to their contour or orientation (*i.e.*, whether they are concave, convex, positive, negative, normal or mirror-reversed) or any concern for the material upon which such prints are made.

As the Committee's own Research Officer has declared (*Journal A. S. P. R.* April 1928, p. 208), "With respect to the proposition that all the prints recognized by us as 'Walter' prints are really of the same line pattern and therefore of the same thumb, we believe there will be no serious dissent." For instance, when an individual prints his inked thumb upon paper and then into plastic wax, these two distinct impressions will display identical patterns. An example of this relationship between ink and wax prints of the same patterns will be found in Figures 8 and 13 *Journal A. S. P. R.* March 1932, where prints of Sir Oliver Lodge's thumbs are identified by W. T. Bell. Hence the same analytical

processes prove the identity of the "Walter" prints in wax with the "Kerwin" prints in ink.

Furthermore, the Committee have cited (in the *Journal* of 1928 and subsequently) the persistence of the "Walter" pattern in all its forms and categories as conclusive evidence of an identical origin. Therefore, their rejection of the validity of the identification of a typical right thumb print on the alleged ground that it is a positive is, in legal phraseology, irrelevant and impertinent.

Now, in regard to "Walter's" left thumb, the facts are that there have been recorded in the *Journal* altogether four separate wax imprints of it as having been made by "Walter," three of them on August 23, 1927, and described in the *Journal* of October 1928 as being "all identical in pattern" and a fourth made on December 3, 1927, and certified by Mr. Fife in the *Journal* of November 1929 as being "a duplicate of the other three." The three contemporaneous and identical prints were registered in the Margery finger-print series as numbers 55, 56 and 57, and it was the second of these which Mr. Dudley photographed and used for his comparison.

The Committee, however, contend that this tablet which Mr. Dudley used, alleging it to be one of those three, was not authentic. "The left print of 'Walter' used by Mr. Dudley," they claim, "seems to be unique in the series of left thumb prints produced by 'Walter,' the other contemporaneous left thumb prints of 'Walter' bearing no resemblance to Mr. X's [Dr. "Kerwin's"] left thumb print. The authenticity of the wax print of the left thumb shown in the photograph used by Dudley is, therefore, open to question." Nevertheless, a photograph of this very print appears in the *Journal* of October 1928 (p. 564), where it is captioned as "presented by 'Walter' as of his left thumb," and, moreover, it exhibits precisely the same pattern as the print photographed on page 577 of the *Journal* of November 1929, which in the text is