

# Westcott and the Ghostly Guild

by James May<sup>[1]</sup>

Many years ago I had occasion to investigate “spiritualistic” phenomena with some care, and I came to a clear conclusion, which I feel bound to express in answer to your circular. It appears to me that in this, as in all spiritual questions, Holy Scripture is our supreme guide. I observe, then, that while spiritual ministries are constantly recorded in the Bible, there is not the faintest encouragement to seek them. The case, indeed, is far otherwise. I cannot, therefore, but regard every voluntary approach to beings such as those who are supposed to hold communication with men through mediums as unlawful and perilous. I find in the fact of the Incarnation all that man (so far as I can see) requires for life and hope. ~ B.F. Westcott<sup>[2]</sup>

Brooke Foss Westcott was a 19<sup>th</sup> century conservative Anglican New Testament scholar who, because of his efforts in producing a revised version of the Greek New Testament, has become the object of many false and vicious attacks by those who consider the King James Bible to be the only perfect Word of God. This author has, in several previous monographs, established beyond all dispute that Westcott was generally conservative in his theology, as witnessed by his belief in the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth and full deity of Jesus Christ, and the physical resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ from the dead.<sup>[3]</sup> He was also an important defender of the integrity of the New Testament against the assaults of F.C. Baur and the Tubingen school of Germany, particularly in regard to the Johannan authorship and first century dating of the Gospel of John. Leaders of the King James Only movement have, in spite of the clarity and volume of evidence to the contrary, attributed to Westcott beliefs which he never advocated. They have also, in what would seem to be every possible case, interpreted both actions and words of Westcott in the worst possible light, and have made far more out of those actions and words than a sober analysis of the facts would warrant. In no case is this more evident than in Westcott’s alleged participation in spiritualism.

## Background

The genesis of modern spiritualism is to be found in rather strange happenings that allegedly occurred in the upper New York State town of Hydesville in March of 1848. The home of a humble Methodist farmer, J.D. Fox, became the locus of mysterious rappings, rappings which could not be accounted for, and which, according to many witnesses, were anything but random. It was soon discovered that the source of the noises would respond with intelligent patterns when appropriate questions were asked. The news spread rapidly, and interest was intense. Many believed that the dead were speaking, and it appeared that the living were more than willing to listen. The two daughters of Mr. Fox, Kate and Maggie, who seemed to be intimately connected with the sounds, were soon joined in what had become their new careers by others who professed contact with another world.

The number of Spiritualists grew and grew. By 1853 ten Spiritualist periodicals were established in the United States. In 1855 an enthusiast claimed that there were 2,500,000 Spiritualists in the country; in 1859 a Catholic Convention put the number at 11,000,000. These figures must be greatly exaggerated; but even so there can be no doubt about the astonishing success of early Spiritualism.<sup>[4]</sup>

As would be expected, the new interest provoked responses by people with a wide variety of outlooks and motives. While many were attracted by hopes of contacting departed friends and

loved ones, others saw the movement as a ready source of cash, and still others sought to expose what they believed to be obvious chicanery and self deception. Interest in, and investigation of, spiritualist phenomenon soon crossed the Atlantic to find fertile soil in Great Britain as well.

Edward White Benson, a future Archbishop of Canterbury, developed an early penchant for the investigation of spiritualist happenings. His particular motives are not clear, but in 1851, while still a student at Cambridge University, he formed a campus society which came to be known as the Ghostlie Guild. He invited several of his friends to join, including Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Westcott accepted the invitation and for a period of perhaps one year aided in the investigation of paranormal phenomena.

### Westcott's Involvement

The club members were interested in collecting firsthand accounts of incidents which might be considered encounters with the supernatural. Westcott took a leading role. In addition to collecting the accounts, he also prepared a circular in which others were asked to supply any information that they might have. The circular was never used, and beyond the collection of some number of accounts, there is no record of Westcott's activities. This was his last year as a student at Cambridge, and we have no record of further interest in any form of spiritualism after he left the university to begin seventeen years of work at Harrow School for Boys.

### Observations

The scant information which has been preserved from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in regard to the Ghostly Guild warrants a few comments. First, no information has been produced indicating that any club members, certainly during Westcott's tenure, themselves participated in any occult activities. The word that stands out in the descriptions of the club, both in Westcott's biography as well as in Hort's, is *investigation*. To take this a step farther, there is no evidence that Westcott ever at any time anywhere *participated* in spiritualism. Those who say otherwise have offered only accusations, not historical documentation.

There is no information suggesting that Westcott sought or obtained contact with spirits, nor is there any indication as to his motives in his investigations. He lived in an age when skeptics, and in particular those who were denying miracles in the Bible, did not believe in any supernatural intervention in history. Westcott may have felt that clear examples of contact with the spirit world, while not to be condoned, would at least vindicate the existence of the supernatural. Such a motive would be consistent with his doctrinal orthodoxy and his clear and consistent defense of biblical supernaturalism against rationalist thinking.

It also appears that Westcott's interest in investigating spiritualism was rather short lived. He had joined the Ghost Club during his final year as a student at Cambridge. The following year he was appointed a school master at Harrow in the northeast of London. His busy life there appears to have left him little time for his former interests. Before leaving Cambridge, Westcott had prepared a questionnaire for the purpose of gathering information from those who had experienced unexplained phenomena. The questionnaire is reproduced in Westcott's biography and is neither complex nor lengthy. After the conclusion was reached that the topic of spiritualism would be the cause of alarm, the questionnaire was "unceremoniously set aside," never to be resurrected. This appears to be Westcott's last dabbling in the investigation of spiritualism. At least two King James Only writers have alleged that Westcott's involvement continued no less than ten more years. There is no evidence to support their claim.

Regardless of his early thinking, Westcott reached the conclusion that investigations into spiritualism lead to no good, and for this reason ceased any further involvement. The words of Arthur Westcott, as recorded in his father's biography, are instructive:

What happened to this Guild in the end I have not discovered. My father ceased to interest himself in these matters, not altogether, I believe, from want of faith in what, for lack of a better name, one must call Spiritualism, but because he was seriously convinced that such investigations led to no good.[\[5\]](#)

This observation, which so greatly diminishes whatever guilt may be imputed to Westcott for his activity, causes his false accusers serious difficulty, and for this reason, they grossly pervert the words in the biography. We will examine this material in more detail shortly.

As shown at the head of this paper, we possess Westcott's own explanation and conclusion concerning the time that he spent investigating spiritualism. In the early 1890's William Stead had sent an appeal for support for his new spiritualist magazine Borderland to all of the bishops of the Anglican Church, including Westcott. To each recipient, Stead offered the following purpose for his endeavor:

As the enclosed circular will inform you, I have decided to bring out a new Quarterly Review and Index, entitled BORDERLAND, which is to be exclusively devoted to the study of the phenomena which lie on the borderland which Science has hitherto, for the most part, contemptuously relegated to Superstition.[\[6\]](#)

In the first edition, he reproduced several replies, including Westcott's, which we display for the second time:

Many years ago I had occasion to investigate "spiritualistic" phenomena with some care, and I came to a clear conclusion, which I feel bound to express in answer to your circular. It appears to me that in this, as in all spiritual questions, Holy Scripture is our supreme guide. I observe, then, that while spiritual ministries are constantly recorded in the Bible, there is not the faintest encouragement to seek them. The case, indeed, is far otherwise. I cannot, therefore, but regard every voluntary approach to beings such as those who are supposed to hold communication with men through mediums as unlawful and perilous. I find in the fact of the Incarnation all that man (so far as I can see) requires for life and hope.[\[7\]](#)

This quotation, in combination with other evidence, suggests that for a brief period, as a young man of twenty-six years old, Brooke Foss Westcott spent some time investigating, but not participating in, spiritualism. He soon concluded that such investigations led to no good and abandoned them. There is no evidence that he ever in anyway participated in spiritualism. There is no evidence that his investigations extended much beyond one year. I invite the reader to examine the materials produced by King James Only accusers, notably Gail Riplinger,[\[8\]](#) James Sightler,[\[9\]](#) and David Sorenson,[\[10\]](#) as well as the biographies of Westcott and of Hort to find any documentation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that contradicts this conclusion. The KJVers allege that Westcott participated in spiritualism and did so throughout his adult life; ---the facts do not.

### **King James Only Bias and Misinformation**

King James Only proponents disagree among themselves regarding Westcott's alleged participation in séances. While Riplinger and Sorenson both assert that he did participate, Sightler

tells his readers that there is no evidence to support such a claim. Riplinger's position is made clear in the following four quotations:

The Greek text used to translate the NIV, NASB and others was an edition drastically altered by a Spiritualist (one who seeks contact with the dead through séances), who believed he was in the "new age," (Riplinger, p. 2).

New versions (and the 'new' church they are producing) owe their occult bend to their underlying Greek text, a novelty produced in the 1870's by B.F. Westcott, a London Spiritualist. Secular historians and numerous occult books see him as 'the Father' of the current channeling phenomenon, a major source of the "doctrines of devils" driving the New Age movement, (Riplinger, p. 25).

In tracing the recent revival of channeling, scores of history books, as we shall see, point to one origin: Westcott and Hort. These new version authors did not stop with their 'Hermes' Club, but went on to engage in spiritualism and to organize a society called the Ghostly Guild, (Riplinger, p. 402, underlining added).

Toppling over the heap of secular histories which identify Westcott and Hort among the seeds of the present New Age thicket is *The Founders of Psychical Research*, by Alan Gauld. He lists their 'Guild' among the 'Founders,' (Riplinger, p. 407, underlining added).

While these statements accuse Westcott of participating in spiritualism, they produce no documentation that he actually did so. Mrs. Riplinger claims that she will produce "scores of history books" (quotation #3) which will document that Westcott and Hort were not only involved in séances, but were indeed, the originators of the modern channeling movement. I have taken the time to very carefully examine Riplinger's material and to count the "history books." By the time she gets to page 407, she believes that she has a "heap" of them. In reality, there are only three "history books"<sup>[11]</sup> from which Gail has even tried to prove that Westcott and Hort were the originators of the modern channeling movement. The three books are The Occult Underground by James Webb, The Founders of Psychical Research by Alan Gauld, and The Society for Psychical Research: An Outline of Its History by W.H. Salter. I have examined at length and read substantial portions of these books. The Occult Underground does not even list Westcott, "the father of the modern channeling movement," in its index, and his name is nowhere mentioned in the book.<sup>[12]</sup> The Founders of Psychical Research has in its index one reference to Westcott, a reference which has nothing to do with the occult. This reference directs the reader's attention to page 64 where Gauld contrasts the orthodoxy of the intellectuals present at Cambridge during Westcott's time there in the 1840's with the "agnosticism or hesitant Deism" of those who came in the 1870's. This is not exactly the kind of material that Riplinger wants us to read. The index also fails to note a reference to Westcott on page 51. This material likewise has no connection to spiritualism, and will be passed over for the sake of time and topic. Salter's book tells us that Westcott was a member of the Ghostly Guild, which is not in dispute. Riplinger has not produced any quotation from any of these books indicating that Westcott participated in any séance or any other occult activity, and in fact, the books contain no such information. When she says that "secular histories and numerous occult books see him [Westcott] as 'the Father' of the current channeling phenomenon," and when she promises to produce "scores of history books" that point to Westcott and Hort as the one origin of the recent revival of channeling, she simply is not telling the truth.

David Sorenson also claims that Westcott participated in the occult. He uses material which he appears to have copied from page 416 of Riplinger's book:

In 1872, Westcott then organized the Eranus Club which included not only Hort, but also Sidgwick, J.B. Lightfoot (of the English Bible Revision Committee), Arthur Balfour (later prime minister of England), and others. The club met to conduct séances in the homes of its members, including the home of Hort, (Sorenson, p. 176).

Sorenson “supports” this statement with footnote #42, which refers his readers to the biography of Hort written by his son Arthur. Volume 2, pages 184-85 are supposed to document séances in the home of Hort. I have these pages before me as I write and have just finished reading them again (I have read them numerous times in the past). There is not one word present that has anything to do with spiritualism and the occult. Any ordinary reader would suppose that Sorenson is documenting a séance in the home of Fenton John Anthony Hort. The pages simply tell us that the Eranus Club had *meetings* in the home of Hort, not séances. I am tempted to reproduce the pages in their entirety to demonstrate once again the true nature of King James Only “documentation.” I will not waste the space. Hort’s biography here describes the Eranus Club as a faculty discussion group where papers were read and topics were discussed that included those related to “education, politics, and the mutual duties of social classes.” I can well imagine some young ministerial student at Pensacola Christian College reading Sorenson’s book (as such students are required to do) and supposing that it is a documented fact that séances were conducted in the home of F.J.A. Hort. Any such student has been sadly deceived.

James Sightler’s book contains the following statement, that while true, contains a shameful innuendo:

There is **so far no known** record of Westcott’s **personal** participation in séances or mesmerism, (Sightler, p. 263).

We note the words which Sightler has offset in bold. It obviously pains him greatly to make such a confession, and he apparently wants us to imagine that we are no doubt just on the verge of finding material that will surely prove what we all know anyway, namely that Westcott was indeed a spiritualist. How would Dr. Sightler respond if we were to say that so far we have found no record of his membership in Alcoholics Anonymous? Such innuendo would be no different than what he has done with Westcott. If Sightler is correct in his observation concerning the lack of documentation (and he is), we must wonder why he does not condemn Riplinger and Sorenson for making such unfounded and irresponsible accusations. Perhaps it is because false information and irresponsible reporting are perfectly acceptable when presented in support of the King James Bible.

This writer has exchanged a few e-mails with King James supporter David Sorenson. While it appears that he no longer intends to respond to my questions, I have still sought on a couple of occasions to give him the opportunity to defend his positions. I recently asked him to defend his statement that Westcott was involved with the Ghostly Guild for a period of ten years. I told him that I could find no documentation for this assertion and would like to know where he got the information. No, he has not responded. While this is only a supposition on my part, I believe that he most likely came to his conclusion after reading the following in Gail Riplinger’s book:

Their subversive and clandestine approach continued, as seen ten years later when Westcott writes, “. . . strike blindly . . . much evil would result from the public discussion.” Westcott’s son alludes to the shroud of mystery surrounding the continuation of the ‘Ghostly Guild’. “[M]y father laboured under the imputation of being ‘unsafe’. . . What happened to this Guild in the end I have not discovered,” (Riplinger, p. 408).

If there was ever a hodgepodge quotation, it is before us. This material occurs right in the

heart of Riplinger's discussion of Westcott and the occult, and anyone reading it would naturally assume that both "their subversive and clandestine approach" and "the imputation of being 'unsafe'" were in connection with spiritualist activity. The first hint as to the true nature of this documentation comes when we examine the footnotes which Riplinger has attached to it (#39 & #40) and discover that Gail has strung together material from three different, and widely separated, pages in the first volume of Westcott's biography. The pages are 229, 235, and 119. Any reader who has not fallen asleep will suspect that there might be something not entirely kosher about this. The simple fact is that the three passages are discussing three entirely different subjects. We have reproduced Westcott's material in full with Riplinger's clippings underlined:

[To J.F. Wickenden, November 14, 1854]: Have you entered into the Maurice controversy? I only hope it may pass away quietly. At the first onset we always strike blindly; and much evil would result from the public discussion of the moot points just now. It is well, I believe, that they have been named; and it will be well for men to get familiarized with them. Then at length they may debate if they please. This is a strange symptom of belief or disbelief--that Mr. Maurice's views of the Atonement seem to have called forth comparatively little criticism.[\[13\]](#)

The following letter to Mr. Wickenden refers to the index to the *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, prepared by him, and to an adverse criticism of *The Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles*, which had appeared in the *Literary Churchman*. It may be remarked in passing that these Cambridge sermons were somewhat severely handled by too orthodox critics, and did not obtain a wide circulation. It was mainly on their account, I believe, that my father laboured under the imputation of being "unsafe," (Ibid., p. 235).

What happened to this Guild in the end I have not discovered. My father ceased to interest himself in these matters, not altogether, I believe, from want of faith in what, for lack of a better name, one must call Spiritualism, but because he was seriously convinced that such investigations led to no good, (Ibid., p. 119).

There are so many problems with this information that it is hard to know where to begin and how far to continue. This is again the only material that I have found that might explain Sorenson's statement, "They continued to participate in the Ghostly Guild until 1861, a period of ten years," (Sorenson, p. 172). While the Guild did begin in 1851, the alert reader will note that the letter from which Riplinger misquotes the words "strike blindly" and from which she gives a time period of "ten years later" was written in 1854, a period of only three years. We suspect sloppy research here by Sorenson, but he has actually done better than Riplinger. The "ten years later" in Riplinger's book is ten years later than a quotation which she introduces on the prior page with the words, "In 1860 and 1861, Hort wrote to Westcott of their mutual concern in this regard," (Riplinger, p. 407). Following the quotation, she introduces the second quotation (actually a compound quotation), which she says was written ten years later, which would be in 1871. The words which were supposed to be ten years later, however, were instead six or seven years earlier, or to beat the point to death, according to Riplinger, 1854 is ten years later than 1861. As tedious and ridiculous as this is, it is important to document that Westcott was only involved in the investigation of occult activity for a short period of time, at least so far as can be determined by the evidence at hand, and that Riplinger and Sorenson are quite careless in their research. Sorenson's claim, and the material in Riplinger from which he evidently derives it, is entirely fraudulent.

Mrs. Gail Riplinger claims that "Westcott's son alludes to the shroud of mystery surrounding the continuation of the 'Ghostly Guild'," (Riplinger, p. 408). He actually said, "What happened to this Guild in the end I have not discovered." He is not discussing the continuation of the Guild, but its

end. She twists the words to make it sound as if the Guild continued clandestinely. Indeed, she wants us to believe that Westcott continued throughout his life to participate in the occult, and to this end she tells us:

Westcott's son writes of his father's lifelong "faith in what for lack of a better name, one must call Spiritualism . . .," (Riplinger, p. 407).

The actual words of Westcott's son, in their true context, paint a much different picture:

What happened to this Guild in the end I have not discovered. My father ceased to interest himself in these matters, not altogether, I believe, from want of faith in what, for lack of a better name, one must call Spiritualism, but because he was seriously convinced that such investigations led to no good.

Arthur Westcott says just the opposite of that which Riplinger claims. His second sentence is somewhat difficult to follow because of its complexity, and we offer a simplified version:

My father ceased to interest himself in these matters, not entirely from a lack of faith in Spiritualism, but because he was seriously convinced that such investigations led to no good.

A most crucial word in the analysis of Arthur Westcott's comment is the word "altogether". This word tells us that it was not only because of his lack of faith in spiritualism that B.F. Westcott ceased his investigation of it, but also because he had concluded that such investigations led to no good. If Westcott's son had not used the word "altogether," he would have been saying that even though Westcott may have believed that spiritualism did indeed produce genuine results, the investigation of such results led to no good. Notice the effect of removing "altogether" from the sentence:

My father ceased to interest himself in these matters, not, I believe, from want of faith in what, for lack of a better name, one must call Spiritualism, but because he was seriously convinced that such investigations led to no good.

The biography says nothing about a "lifelong" anything. Riplinger's accusation of a "lifelong faith in spiritualism" is nothing short of nonsense and the exact opposite of Arthur's point.

In the third passage from which Riplinger fabricated her quotation, Arthur Westcott speaks of his father being labeled as "unsafe" as a result of criticism by certain "too orthodox critics." This has nothing to do with the occult, but rather is in connection with two books by Westcott, Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles and Introduction to the Study of the Gospels. I have read carefully and collected notes from both of these books. I have no idea why they were found objectionable, and without some knowledge of the particular criticisms that were offered, I cannot respond intelligently to those criticisms. I can, however, supply some interesting information from the two books under question. It is surely most surprising that Gail Riplinger has failed to investigate the books so that she might supply her readers with the following from Westcott's Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles:

The narratives of the Gospels admit of the most manifold combinations, not because they are constructed artificially, but because they are true records of the Truth. Everything tends to show that the intricate relations which exist between them were not the result of any conscious purpose, but of that Inspiration which led the Evangelists to preserve only such

details as have a lasting and representative interest. This they did from different points of sight; and each special aspect of truth admits of a perfect combination with the others both in its parts and as a whole.[\[14\]](#)

Of higher blessings which the Spirit of God still gives through the words which He inspired, I will not speak, (Ibid., p. ix, underlining added).

The student may [examine any minute aspect of the Gospels] and his feeling will be, a wonder, which increases with time, at the fullness and subtlety of the connections by which each part of the Holy Scripture is bound to all others; and this feeling is the noblest homage to its Inspiration, (Ibid., pp. xi-xii, underlining added).

Riplinger also failed to inform her readers that Westcott wrote Introduction to the Study of the Gospels specifically to refute David Strauss and other radical German biblical critics:

It is an important feature of the work, that, though it is intended specially to refute the form of skepticism represented, for example, by Strauss in Germany, and by Theodore Parker in this country, it is not directly polemic in its character, but treats of facts and discusses principles which render the argument appropriate to all times and places.[\[15\]](#)

My obligations to the leaders of the extreme German schools are very considerable, though I can rarely accept any of their conclusions, (Ibid., p. xiii, underlining added).

It [the Bible] is authoritative, for it is the voice of God; it is intelligible, for it is in the language of men. The possibility of such a combination seems to follow directly from a consideration of the nature and form of Inspiration; and the same reflections which establish a necessary connection between inspired thoughts and inspired words, point out the natural transition from the notion of an inspired teacher to that of an inspired book, and justify the application of the epithet at once to the impulse and the result, an ambiguity which at first sight creates only confusion and embarrassment, (Ibid., pp. 33-34, underlining added).

It [Inspiration] presupposes that the same providential Power which gave the message selected the messenger; and implies that the traits of individual character, and the peculiarities of manner and purpose, which are displayed in the composition and language of the sacred writings, are essential to the perfect exhibition of their meaning. It combines harmoniously the two terms in that relation of the finite to the infinite which is involved in the very idea of revelation. It preserves absolute truthfulness with perfect humanity, so that the nature of man is not neutralized, if we may thus speak, by the divine agency, and the truth of God is not impaired, but exactly expressed in one of its several aspects by the individual mind, (Ibid., p. 41, underlining added).

The statement by Westcott's son and biographer that after a period of investigation Westcott came to the conclusion that investigations into spiritualism led to no good cannot be answered by his detractors, and for that reason they must pervert the statement so as to make it mean something entirely foreign to its context:

In response to public disfavor regarding his esotericism and liberalism and in light of his position in the 'religious' community, Westcott determined that public involvement in the Ghostly Guild "led to no good," (Riplinger, p. 407).

They continued to participate in the Ghostly Guild until 1861, a period of ten years. However, they were clever enough to realize that being connected with such an organization could impair their greater goals in life--the publishing and acceptance of their new Greek Text. They thus determined that their involvement in the Ghostly Guild would lead to no good, (Sorenson, p. 172).

Arthur Westcott said nothing indicating that his father's conclusion about spiritualism had anything to do with "public disfavor," nor that it was "public involvement" that led to no good. This is just more twisting of words by one who claims to follow the truth. The same is true of what Sorenson says Westcott and Hort were "clever enough to realize." Westcott's accusers have made up such material because the facts do not support their case. James Sightler has a different take here; his idea is that Westcott came to his conclusion after Edmund Gurney's suicide in 1888, (Sightler, p. 251). This is the product of his imagination, not of historical documentation. The death of his three sisters in a boating accident is the more likely cause of Gurney's depression and suicide than his investigations into psychical phenomena.<sup>[16]</sup> For Riplinger, Sorenson, and Sightler, it is quite impossible to imagine that Westcott may have had good motives when he ceased his investigation of spiritualism. They can, of course, believe whatever they choose, but they once again have manufactured what they want to believe without any historical documentation whatsoever.

The only bit of material suggesting that Westcott's investigations extended much beyond 1851 is found in Salter's history of the Society for Psychical Research. He says:

He [Henry Sidgwick] joined the "Ghost Society" before he took his degree in 1859; Westcott was then the secretary, and on his leaving Cambridge Sidgwick appears to have succeeded him.<sup>[17]</sup>

Salter indicates a bit of uncertainty (and with good reason) when he says that "Sidgwick appears to have succeeded him." Since Westcott left Cambridge in 1852, and Sidgwick did not arrive until 1855 (Gauld, p. 47), Salter's hesitancy with this claim is well founded. His statement simply does not coincide with the facts.

The paragraph that begins this paper presents a serious problem for the unfounded charges that James Sightler brings against Westcott. For this reason he cannot allow the words to have their obvious force, but must instead imagine some hidden agenda on the part of the Bishop:

. . . this *apparent* rejection of spiritualism, which is much more a rejection of W.T. Stead's new journal, a lower level competitor of the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, than of spiritualism, (Sightler, p. 266).

In spite of the fact that Westcott had no ties to the Society for Psychical Research, we are supposed to imagine that his real concern here was to guard its journal against competition from Borderland. Once again, Sightler's imagination and uncontrolled bias have gotten the best of him. Once again, he has imputed the worst possible motives to Westcott with no historical documentation. Dr. Sightler can obviously see that Westcott's words, in this reply and if taken at face value, represent a rejection of spiritualism. There is no historical documentation to suggest that Westcott did not reject the investigation of spiritualism after a brief period of investigation. Why can the KJV accusers not allow him to mean what he says? The real reason is that the King James Only position is wrong, completely wrong, and that false positions can only be defended with falsehood. The truth about B.F. Westcott destroys a very significant portion of the KJV myth.

Riplinger, Sightler, and Sorenson all seem obsessed with the Society for Psychical Research and with linking Westcott to the group. Even though Westcott is never listed as a member, they imply that he may have been one anyway because he knew people who were members and because every member's participation was not made public. This kind of argument can be used to assert any absurd position and is even less worthy of discussion than what I have already covered in this paper. Unable to produce any indication that Westcott was in any way tied to the SPR, Sightler offers these lame words for our consumption:

It is at least possible that Westcott or Hort were at some point members [of the SPR] whose names were withheld from public lists, (Sightler, p. 263).

Yes, and they may have also been secret child molesters who managed never to be caught. While I have no intention in this paper of devoting the considerable space that would be necessary to discuss the SPR and the relationship of the organization to spiritualism, I will supply two quotations which may prove suggestive:

There is a sharp line of distinction between the S.P.R. and the Central Association of Spiritualists. The Spiritualists have a settled faith---nay, more, a certain knowledge---in regard to facts about which the S.P.R. would not profess to have any knowledge whatever. The S.P.R. are busy with phenomena only, seeking evidence of their existence, but not yet hazarding even a hint of their spiritual origin. To them the idea of spirit-communion, of sweet converse with dear departed friends---so precious to Spiritualists---has no present interest, (Cerullo, p. 71, quoting E. Dawson Rodgers).

It is worthy of note that the Society's manifesto nowhere suggests any intention to institute an enquiry into the problem of survival, since the word "spiritualistic" is simply used to indicate a type of phenomenon already generally known by that name. The popular notion that psychical research is merely a refined and more intellectualized form of spiritualism derives no support from this document, nor from the early work of the Society, little of which had any direct bearing on survival, (Salter, p. 14).

The SPR, as led by Henry Sidgwick, while hardly an organization to be commended, was not devoted to that which is commonly described as spiritualism, that is, to contacting the dead through séances. Many spiritualists, unaware of the true direction of the organization, had joined its ranks. The continued lack of interest in the subject led to a mass exodus of them from the SPR in 1885, (Cerullo, pp. 70-84). Even if his detractors could link Westcott to the SPR, it would not prove that he had participated in necromancy. Neither Riplinger, Sightler, nor Sorenson manifest any interest in making this clear to their readers. The reason is obvious.

Sightler, evidently imagining that spiritualism is a corollary of mysticism, misquotes from Westcott's biography the following words:

"from Cambridge days I have read the writings of many who are called mystics with much profit. Everyone [sic: every one] who believes that phenomena are signs [sic: "signs"] of the spiritual and external [sic: eternal] receives the name; [sic: name,] and to believe in the Incarnation involves this belief, does it not? After all, the first chapter of Genesis is the Protoevangelium [sic: Protevangelium]," (Sightler, p. 242, quoting Westcott).

Sightler manages to commit five errors in two short sentences ("Everyone" for Westcott's "Every one," "signs" for Westcott's "'signs'," "name;" for Westcott's "name," "external" for Westcott's

“eternal,” and “Protoevangelium” for Westcott’s “Protevangeliu[m].” Are we supposed to imagine that the doctor is a careful researcher? I have found many such errors throughout his book. According to Sightler’s analysis, “This quote is an admission of his [Westcott’s] own mysticism and spiritualism.” Well, maybe not. In the first place, there is no linkage between mysticism and spiritualism. In the second place, Sightler gives us no definition of mysticism, a word notoriously hard to define, and one which when undefined is practically devoid of information.<sup>[18]</sup> A rather tepid definition is “a belief in and consciousness of a greater reality than that which presents itself to the senses.” In this sense a person could be a mystic and also be anything from a Buddhist to an orthodox Christian. There is yet a further problem here with Sightler’s attempt to use this quotation to prove Westcott’s mysticism and spiritualism: He neglects to include the immediately preceding sentence. We must keep in mind that according to Sightler, this is Westcott’s “admission of his own mysticism”:

I don’t think that I have even used the word “mystics”: it is so hopelessly vague, and it suggests an esoteric teaching which is wholly foreign to the Christian. But from Cambridge days I have read the writings of many who are called mystics with much profit. Every one who believes that phenomena are “signs” of the spiritual and eternal receives the name, and to believe in the Incarnation involves this belief, does it not? After all, the first chapter of Genesis is the Protevangeliu[m], (Westcott, Life and Letters, Vol. II, p. 309, underlining added).

So we see that in reality, instead of Westcott admitting that he was a mystic, he was instead denying that he was one, but was confessing that he had read the writings of many so-called mystics with profit. In particular, the Bishop of Durham says that esoteric teaching common to mysticism is foreign to Christianity. This is quite revealing in light of the fact that over and over Sightler has implied in his book that Westcott was esoteric.<sup>[19]</sup> Apparently he does not expect anyone to ever check his quotations.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of all claims to the contrary, the leaders of the King James Only movement have produced no evidence that Brooke Foss Westcott personally participated in spiritualism. They have not even discussed the important difference between *investigation* and *participation*. They have produced no evidence that his investigations into spiritualism lasted more than approximately one year. They have not demonstrated that his motives in his investigations were sinister. They have not shown us that his conclusion that investigations into spiritualism lead to no good was anything but genuine. They have demonstrated that they are willing to twist words and falsify quotations in order to support their position. They have shown that they are willing to snip quotations out of context in order to manufacture support that the quotations would not otherwise provide. They have shown that they are willing to state something as fact for which they have no documentation and then to supply a footnote to material difficult to obtain that does not say that which they indicate that it says. We can be assured that they did not develop these tactics by reading the King James Bible, and we can also be assured that Brooke Foss Westcott was a far different sort of man than his accusers would have us believe.

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<sup>[2]</sup> B.F. Westcott in “The Response to the Appeal”, Borderland, Vol. I, No. 1 (July 1893) p. 11.

[3] See my articles at [www.KJVOnly.org](http://www.KJVOnly.org).

[4] Alan Gauld, The Founders of Psychological Research (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 29.

[5] Arthur Westcott, Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), Vol. I, p. 119.

[6] W.T. Stead, "Seeking Counsel of the Wise", Borderland, Vol. I, No. 1 (July 1893) p. 7.

[7] B.F. Westcott in "The Response to the Appeal," Borderland Vol. I, No. 1, July, 1893, p. 11.

[8] Gail Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions (Ararat, VA: A.V. Publications, 1993, eleventh printing 2000) pp. 397-442.

[9] James Sightler, A Testimony Founded For Ever (Greenville, SC: Sightler Publications, 1999), pp. 96-116, 241-70.

[10] David H. Sorenson, Touch Not The Unclean Thing (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001), pp. 171-79.

[11] If we consider the biographies of Westcott and of Hort to be "history books," the number rises to five.

[12] There is a mention that two members of the Ghostly Guild became bishops on page 36.

[13] Arthur Westcott, Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), Vol. I, p. 229.

[14] B.F. Westcott, Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles (London: Macmillan and Co., 1859), pp. viii-ix, underlining added.

[15] B.F. Westcott, Introduction to the Study of the Gospels (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), p. viii, underlining added.

[16] John Cerullo, The Secularization of the Soul (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982), p. 52.

[17] W.H. Salter, The Society for Psychological Research: An Outline of Its History. (London: The Society for Psychological Research, 1948), p. 6.

[18] See, for example, "Mysticism," An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions, John Ferguson (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 126.

[19] Occultism is by definition esoteric.