

Back From Jerusalem:
The Life and Times of
Emma Hardinge Britten,
Spiritualist Propagandist

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The Emma Hardinge Britten Archive

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“The dead came back from Jerusalem,
where they found not what they
sought. They prayed me let them in,
and besought my word, and thus I
began my teaching.”

C. G. Jung, VII Sermones ad Mortuos,
Sermo I

Module 1: The Genesis of the EHB Project

Psychogenesis (n): The psychological cause to which a mental disturbance may be attributed (as distinct from a physical cause).

Genesis

- Dime Museums, leading to
- Evatima Tardo, leading to
- Harry Houdini, leading to
- Mina Crandon, leading to
- Modern American Spiritualism, leading to
- Emma Hardinge Britten, leading to
- **Corruption**



“ A Most Remarkable Woman.”

On October 13 last an article was printed under the above heading from the New York World. A circumstantial account was then given of how a woman, named Evatima Tardo, had been exhibiting herself in the United States, and it was stated she laughed at death; that bullets through the arm gave her no pain; that snake-bites produced no ill effects; that she ate glass freely, and did other equally unnatural things.

Corruption

What did she do,
where and when?

Emma Hardinge-Britten

Emma Hardinge (1823–1899) was born in England but came to the United States in 1855, where she performed as a singer for ten years and also became active in the new Spiritualist religion. She returned to her homeland at the end of the Civil War but was back in America in 1869 and married an American Universalist minister, **William Britten**, in 1870, the same year her famous rules for a spiritual circle were published in Dunedin. She was a founding member of the Theosophical Society in 1875, but Spiritualism remained her main commitment and her relations with Helena Blavatsky were not always smooth. (Both of these determined women, however, dramatized the power of the new faiths to liberate persons of their sex for careers in the realms of the spirit on a global scale, a possibility scarcely then imaginable in the conventional churches.)

Emma Hardinge was born in England in 1823. Her father was a Sea Captain, Floyd Hardinge. She quickly took to the arts, teaching music by age eleven and later earning a living as a music instructor. She made something of a name for herself in theater early in life, taking up the study of the occult in an Orphic

Who were her
parents?

Who were her
associates?

old Reverend Samuel Bryon **Britten**, a former Universalist minister and co-publisher of Andrew Jackson Davis's short-lived *Univer-*
coleur led the meeting. **Britten** would later wed medium-histo-
rian **Emma Hardinge**. Individually and together they would
become leading spokesmen for the spiritualist movement.

My Biases

- Material culture - real lives of real people
- Ideology -- belief systems, in competition with one another
- The **persistence** of the occult throughout human history
- Fact, probability and informed judgment
- History-as-narrative
- Raiding the inarticulate

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres
Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, **a raid on the inarticulate**
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate—but there is no competition—
There is only **the fight to recover what has been lost**
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," from *Four Quartets*

History, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms **documents into monuments**. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities...**in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology**, to the intrinsic description of the monument.

Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*

Caveats

- This is social history...
- About non-canonical figures...
- Where previous work is filled with claims of allegiance and affiliation, but little evidence of care...
- Where papers and effects are lost or sequestered...
- And much secondary research is unreliable.
- This is archeology, not criticism.

"Miss Hardinge is the more striking, but not the more convincing speaker [when compared to Cora Hatch]. Her discourses manifest a prompting intelligence of no common character, and her prelections [sic] are in consequence, to our belief, much in advance of the range of even the best human intelligences. They constitute a garland of beautifully expressed truths so mathematically interwoven as to make the abstraction of one vitiate the character of the whole. This feature in her discourses hinders us from giving more than a mere notice of them. She is very beautiful and attractive in form and general appearance."

Anonymous reviewer, in The Banner of Light, May of 1858

"[I] will prove to the Christian community from THE WRITINGS of the said Emma Britten that she is a blasphemer of the name of THE GOD of the Christian Scriptures...and a contumelious derider, scoffer or sneerer of the Prophets, and that even the mendicant itinerants the Faquirs... are better in their religious beliefs than the said Emma Britten."

Advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald, October 1878

"Confidentially let me say that I fear the young man [Wallis] is more or less psychologized and his opinions colored of late by that able, but awfully ambitious and selfish woman, Emma Hardinge Britten, whose regard for the truth, when in conflict with her prejudices, you can size up as well as I."

Colonel Bundy to Stainton Moses, December 1887

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Modules

- Module 2: Emma's Pre-History
- Module 3: 1823-1838: The Dark Period
- Module 4: 1838-1856: Emma Floyd & Emma Harding, Performer
- Module 5: 1856-1865: Opening America
- Intermission 1: Traveling-as-Network
- Module 6: 1865-1872: Transatlantic Notoriety
- Module 7: 1872-1875: The Electric Physician
- Module 8: 1875-1877: Emma Hardinge Britten, Occultist
- Module 9: 1877-1881: Itinerant Propagandist
- Intermission 2: The Universe as Occult Object
- Module 10: 1881-1892: Queen of the Midlands
- Module 11: 1892-1899: Rewriting A Life
- Module 12: What EHB Believed, and What She Left Us