

*A congenital preponderance of  
fire elementals makes a man  
impervious to fire.*



## An unusual proportion of Salamandrine properties permits a man to walk through beds of blazing fire unscathed.

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, (No. 11 (47), August 1883, pp. 279-80. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A HUMAN STORAGE BATTERY) V pp. 101-3.<sup>1</sup>

C.H. Hughes, M.D., Editor of the *Alienist and Neurologist*, gives in the April number of the periodical the following:

In a recent number of the *Michigan Medical News*, Dr. S.C. Woodman has made the following singular statement. We append thereto Dr. Woodman's letter on the subject in reply to our [Dr. Hughes'] inquiries.

"I have a singular phenomenon in the shape of a young man living here that I have studied with much interest, and I am satisfied that his peculiar power demonstrates that electricity is the nerve force beyond dispute. His name is William Underwood, age 27 years, and his gift is that of generating fire through the medium of his breath, assisted by manipulations with his hands. He will take anybody's handkerchief and hold it to his mouth, rub it vigorously with his hands while breathing on it, and immediately it bursts into flames and burns until consumed. He will strip, and rinse out his mouth thoroughly, wash his hands, and submit to the most rigid examination to preclude the possibility of any humbug, and then by his breath blown upon any paper or cloth envelope it in flame. He will, when out gunning and without matches, desirous of a fire, lie down after collecting dry leaves, and by breathing on them start the fire and then coolly take off his wet stockings and dry them. It is impossible to persuade him to do it more than twice a day, and the effort is attended with the most extreme exhaustion. He will sink into a chair after doing it, and on one occasion, after he had a newspaper on fire, as I narrated, I placed my hand on his head and discovered his scalp to be violently twitching, as if under intense excitement. He will do it at any time, no matter where he is, under any circumstances, and I have repeatedly known of his sitting back from the dinner table, taking a swallow of water, and by blowing on his napkin at once set it on fire. He is ignorant, and says that he first discovered his strange power by inhaling and exhaling on a perfumed hand-

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<sup>1</sup> Title page illustration by Camilla d'Errico.

kerchief that suddenly burnt while in his hands. It is certainly no humbug, but what is it?"

PAW PAW, MICHIGAN,  
December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1882.

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Dear Sirs:

Yours in regard to [William] Underwood at hand. The article referred to is no joke, but *strictly true*, as can be attested by any resident here, as he has been in the habit and indeed now will do it at any time for a small fee. It is a very singular thing, and in the light of it, although I might not be willing to take as a thesis that electricity is the nerve [102] force, I would be glad to combat the negative. I am wholly unable to understand it unless, as it now seems to me, he generates from his lungs or stomach gas, and then after filling the handkerchief with it sets the gas on fire by a spark of electricity, and this burns the paper or cloth. Either of the editors of our local papers, the *True Northerner* or *Free Press*, will substantiate all.

Very respectfully,

S.C. WOODMAN

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To C.H. Hughes, M.D.

To the Editor, *The Theosophist*.

The above has been copied by me from the *Scientific American* of April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1883, page 264, and I forward it with the hope that it will, if published, be of interest to your readers, and if some further explanation is given by you concerning the nature of the phenomenon from an esoteric point of view, it would perhaps become still more interesting and instructive.

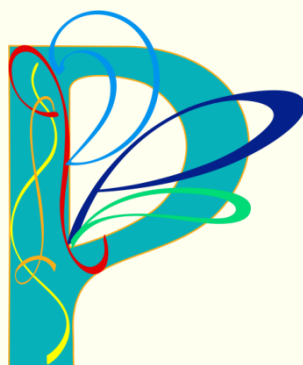
W.D. TILDEN, F.T.S.



## Editorial Note by Madame Blavatsky.

The exhalation of fire from the mouth is one of the stock illusions of the itinerant jugglers of various countries. In their case the dried powder of *Lycopodium* is employed, we believe, and the same substance is used in theatrical performances when it is desired to simulate either fire or lightning flashes. It may be that the American human volcano in question employs some such agent to impose upon his spectators, and we are always bound to exhaust the theories of the possible before venturing upon those of the seemingly impossible. Yet, personal character being a prime factor always, we must take it for granted that Mr. Underwood is above such trickery, since

his phenomenon has such respectable endorsement. If then we turn to occult science to seek for an explanation, we will find that there are cases on record of individuals who emit from their persons a luminous vapour or aura, under high states of nervous exaltation. Sometimes it appears as a wild radiance, sometimes as a lambent flame, and in others as an electric or rather odic coruscation.<sup>1</sup> Rarely it is observed by day, but most frequently by night, and still oftener while the subject is deeply engaged in his devotions. A noted example is that of [103] the fasting Peter of Alcantara,<sup>2</sup> a Catholic devotee. The halo, or nimbus which painters depict about the heads and bodies of saints, yogis, gods and goddesses, is familiar to everyone, and is a memento of this natural phenomenon. But the light in these instances is of an odic character, and though flaming and flickering like fire, has none of its combustive property. Writers upon sorcery and mediumship have frequently recorded anecdotes of the bursting forth of flames from the doors, windows, chimneys or roofs of buildings without apparent cause, and in fact at times when there was no fire in any part of the house, nor any articles stored within, such as cotton, cotton-waste, greased rags, or other substances liable to spontaneous combustion. These mysterious burnings have been sometimes attended with stone-showers or throwings, equally unaccountable. The Spiritualists affirm that the agents in all these cases have been spirits; but unless they be the fire-elementals or Salamanders of the Rosicrucians, they must be queer "Spirits." Among modern Western mediums, equally with Hindus of the same class, are many who can handle burning coals, red-hot iron, and molten metal with perfect impunity, and walk through beds of blazing fire unscathed. In America there is a female medium named Mrs. Suydam, who has this gift, and in Europe a late, and the most noted of male mediums, has not only exhibited the feat of handling hot coals without receiving harm, but even laid them upon the heads of non-mediums in the company present or upon newspapers or books, without injury to person or property. The explanation in both classes of cases is that the fire-proof individual is a medium for these fire elementals, and contains in himself an unusual proportion of Salamandrine properties, the result of an abnormal combination of elemental forces in his foetal development. Normally, a human being contains the elementals of all the four kingdoms in almost equal proportions, any slight preponderance of one or the other determining the so-called "temperament."



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<sup>1</sup> See J.W. Jackson's *Lectures on Mesmerism*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>2</sup> [San Pedro de Alcantara, 1499–1562, Spanish Franciscan friar, canonized in 1669.]

## Suggested reading for students.



### **On the soul of the spiritual man lit by its own light.**

Insights to our divine ancestry and human nature may be gleaned from the following titles in the same series:

- ANCIENT BELIEFS IN THE IMMORTALITY OF SOUL
- ANCIENT OPINIONS UPON PSYCHIC BODIES
- APOLLONIUS COMFORTS A BEREAVED FATHER
- ASTRAL BODIES OR DOPPELGÄNGERS
- ATMAN IS A RAY FROM A SPARK OF UNCREATED RAY
- BLAVATSKY ON AETHROBACY AND FAKIRS
- BLAVATSKY ON OCCULT DEVELOPMENT
- BLAVATSKY ON THE DUAL ASPECT OF WISDOM
- BLAVATSKY ON THREE ESSAYS BY É. LÉVI
- BLOOD IS THE FIRST INCARNATION OF UNIVERSAL FLUID
- CHINESE BELIEFS ABOUT THE HUMAN SOUL
- CICERO'S DREAM OF SCIPIO AND MACROBIUS' COMMENT
- CLASSIFICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES IN MAN
- COMMON-MISCONCEPTIONS-OF-THEOSOPHICAL-DOCTRINES
- CONCERNING THE DOCTRINES OF THE THEOSOPHISTS
- CONSTITUTION OF MAN - DRAWING
- CONSTITUTION OF MAN - ESOTERIC
- CONSTITUTION OF MAN - OVERVIEW
- COSMOS AND DEITY IN MAN - DRAWING
- DAS' SCIENCE OF THE EMOTIONS (1908)
- DEATH AND IMMORTALITY
- DEATH AND POST-MORTEM STATES
- DEATH HAS NO TERRORS
- DEVACHAN, DREAM REALM WHERE PURE SOULS ARE REWARDED

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**SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS**

- DREAMLESS SLEEP
- ELIPHAS LEVI ON DEATH AND SATAN
- EMOTIONS' TRIUNE NATURE
- EVOLUTIONARY TRANSMIGRATION OF MATERIAL PARTICLES IN NATURE
- FACING SEVEN VIRGINS IN THE HALL OF JUDGMENT
- FROM THE STRONGHOLD OF YOUR SOUL, CHASE ALL YOUR FOES AWAY
- HAIR IS THE RETAINER OF PRANA
- IN DEEP SLEEP WE DREAM NO MORE AND CONFABULATE WITH THE STARS
- IS SUICIDE A CRIME
- JUDGE ON THE INNER CONSTITUTION OF MAN
- JUDGE ON THE OCCULT NATURE OF MAN
- LÉVI ON DEATH BEING THE BIRTH-PANG OF LIFE
- LIFE IS AN INDESTRUCTIBLE UNIVERSAL FORCE
- LOW BUFFOONERY AND MOCKING LAUGHS
- LYMPH IS A MASQUE FOR NYMPH
- NEED OF A SPIRITUAL VOCABULARY
- NO NEED FOR EXPENSIVE FUNERALS
- NOUS AUGOEIDES OF THE NEOPLATONISTS
- NOUS MOVES MAN
- OEDIPUS AND SPHINX UNRIDDED
- OSIRIS AND TYPHON, HIGHER TRIAD AND LOWER TETRAD
- PLATO ON THE APPLE OF THE EYE
- PLATO'S TWO HORSES
- PLUTARCH COMFORTS APOLLONIUS
- PLUTARCH COMPARING PASSIONS AND DISEASES – TR. WHITE
- PLUTARCH ON BOASTED WISDOM, FORTITUDE, MAGNANIMITY, AND TEMPERANCE
- PLUTARCH ON EXERCISES PROPER FOR A SCHOLAR
- PLUTARCH ON PLATO'S PROCREATION OF THE SOUL
- POST-MORTEM WANDERINGS OF THE WICKED SOUL
- PREMATURE AND PHENOMENAL GROWTHS
- PSYCHOLOGY LACKS ENTIRELY KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOUL
- PSYCHOMETRY IS THE NATURAL BUT LATENT FACULTY IN US
- REAL DREAMS ARE ACTIONS OF THE TRUE SELF

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- RELEASING THE ASTRAL SOUL FROM ONE'S ASHES
- SEPTENARY IS THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN
- SIXTH SENSE IS REASON OVER INSTINCT
- SPECULATIONS ABOUT REINCARNATION AND MATERIALIZED SPIRITS
- SPIRIT AND PERISPIRIT
- SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS ARE OBJECTIVE COPIES FROM SUBJECTIVE IMAGES
- SUBBA ROW ON KAMA-LOKA
- SUBBA ROW ON THE SEVENFOLD PRINCIPLE IN MAN
- SUBBA ROW ON THOUGHT TRANSFERENCE
- SYNESIUS CONCERNING DREAMS
- THE AQUILINE NOSE IS ROYAL AND NOBLE
- THE DEVOTIONAL LOVE AND NOBLE ASPIRATIONS OF LOWER MANAS
- THE ESOTERIC PHYSIOLOGY OF MAN
- THE HEART IS THE ORGAN OF SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS
- THE IMAGE-MAKING POWER
- THE KARMIC EFFECTS OF INVASION, CIVILIZATION, AND VULGAR SPECULATION
- THE LIFE PRINCIPLE
- THE MOON REGULATES THE PRANA OF NATURE AND MAN
- THE OCCULT INFLUENCE OF MAN'S ACTIVE WILL
- THE PERISPIRIT OF ALLAN KARDEC
- THE PROPHECY OF GENERAL YERMOLOV
- THE SUTRATMAN OF THE UPANISHADS
- THE TWO VOICES OF LORD TENNYSON
- THE VOICE OF THE WILL IS THE ATOMIC POINT
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - MAN, THE JEWEL OF THE UNIVERSE
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - SEPTENARY ANTHROPOS
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE CYCLE OF LIFE
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE PATH OF ACTION
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE PATH OF RENUNCIATION
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE SUTRATMAN OF THE UPANISHADS
- THREE CUBITS OF THE EAR, FOUR OF THE STALK
- TIBETAN TEACHINGS ON AFTER-DEATH STATES
- TROUBLES FROM UNDISSOLVED EX-DOUBLES

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- TWO SPIRITS UNITED IN THE ELYSIAN FIELDS
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- WHEN THE GREEN IS OVERCOME WITH AZURE
- WHEN THE SERPENT SLOUGHS OFF HIS SKIN
- WHY SECLUDING WOMEN DURING THEIR MENSTRUAL PERIOD
- WOE FOR THE LIVING DEAD

