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HOUDINI UNMASKED

BY

WILLIAM ELLIOTT HAMMOND



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DEDICATED TO THE LATE

Dr. GEORGE B. WARNE

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TO THE LATE

Dr. George B. Warne, President of the American Spiritualists for Seventeen Years

His personality will stand out through the ages to come while the charlatans and tricksters will disappear, fade and be forgotten. He was true to his task, and never considered the petty sum of gold. He leaves no stain upon the ship which he piloted for 17 years. Edgar A. Guest says—

Let cynics scoff and point the cleverer ways,
Let weak men for the base temptation fall;
Tricksters and sharpers have their little day,
But men with high ideals outlive them all.

Dr. Warne had a pride that purse could not supply; he had a high ideal to which he clung, a goal ahead. He battled and sacrificed not for the Spiritualism and mediumship "that is", but for what "it should be." He had not only the vision, the blue print, but all his energy was spent in building the temple and making it a reality.

Never, in all the 17 years that I knew him, did he rise to such heights as were his during the national convention last fall in Los Angeles. He was the hub in the great banquet room, with the Mayor, and representative of the Chamber of Commerce seated near him. J. P. Whitwell, vice president of the N. S. A., a thirty-second degree Mason; Otto von Bourg, internationally-known Swiss psychic and myself just a few weeks before, during the Minnesota convention, had seen the beloved giant all but collapse—we were silent, we feared—all our fears vanished like mist before the rising sun; our Dr. Warne was at his best. He amazed all with his singularly effective brilliance and eloquence. The convention with its usual strain must have burned all the sacred oil. Our last dinner together was in an impromptu midnight lunch in a dreamy, Chinese court—Mr. and Mrs. Harold Courtney were the hosts. Dr. Warne sat at the head of the table, and he never looked more happy. The strain of the week was over, why shouldn't he be happy?

DR. WARNE, AS AN ORATOR

As an orator Dr. George B. Warne had no equal in Spiritualism. When you looked upon him for the first time in a great assembly, your attention and interest became fixed on a tall figure, with clear-cut, ascetic face, scholarly in bearing, sober, dry-eyed, didactic personality. When he arose, that straight, level, self-contained look made no appeal, and the thin, flexible lips seemed made to set inferior folk right in no very gentle terms. After he was well launched in his subject, his clear, carrying voice—rather rasping at times, owing, no doubt, to some throat trouble—seemed to grip every listener and weave a vast audience into one man. He had a fiery oratory, at times he was cyclonic, and at times he was master of assemblies.

Those who did not hear him when he was deeply stirred, and dealing with a great theme before an expectant throng do not know him at his highest and best. There were the sweep and grandeur of his thought aglow with virility, sympathy, and abounding hope, and shot through with color, fire and beauty of a poet, a thing of splendor.

He had a dangerous gift of humor, which sometimes sharpened into satire, but he used it as a whip of cords to drive sham and unreality, charlatans and tricksters out of the temple of truth.

He had a high command of great assemblies; his sympathies for suffering humanity ran deep; I shall never forget his witchery of personality; his knowledge of life from bottom to top was rare; his speech was magnetic; he loved babies, dogs and cats; his mind was full of color, a heart confident of God, and joyously loyal to his friends.

W. E. H.

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The well-known hand-cuff king, Houdini, is making great merri-ment over the humbug in which so many mediums have been detected, talking as if the whole thing were either deliberate fraud or crass stupidity, and judiciously slurring over any inconvenient evidence that is not quite so easy to explain away.

Sometimes it looks as if Houdini's idea in talking about psychic phenomena is seldom to arrive at the truth, but most often to get the better of his opponent, and when he fails to do this, instead of thanking the other man for putting him right, he loses his temper with him and tries to carry his point by violence. After hearing him many times and reading all that he has to say to the public about psychic phenomena, one is profoundly convinced that Houdini is thinking in a passion.

We spiritualists accuse Houdini of giving the public a false aspect of Spiritualism as a religion. We realize that human nature and the human mind are frail. This is illustrated by the fact that England accuses American movies of giving a false aspect of British life and manners. The House of Commons, recently heard a version of the complaint often raised by the English papers that our pictures give an entirely false impression.

But whether the grounds on which we Spiritualists base our knowledge are actually false, or merely part of the truth, the fact remains that hardly ever, in ordinary life, does any one attempt, in the noble phrase of Matthew Arnold (who was far from living up to it) to see life steadily and see it whole.

As a proof of the foregoing, take up any newspaper or magazine, the latest book, a novel, a story of American Indian life—examine a carefully edited biography, a political or social treatise, history of the World War, Darwin, evolution, Einstein, and you will not be long in discovering that the average human mind does not even attempt to see or think about reality, that its opinions are dictated by its passions; so says no less an authority than Dr. Stratford, and the truth has to accomodate itself thereto.

The first thing that Houdini does with any information that his

senses give him while in a spiritualistic seance room is to distort it to suit his own wishes, and then acts as if the distorted version were the true one. If he is to achieve the supreme task of putting himself right with reality, he must address himself to the reformation of his own mind.

Houdini reminds one of Dr. Johnson, the "grand Cham" of English letters; for all his uprightness and lucidity, he possessed a mind wholly incapable of realizing the difference between "what is", and what he "wanted to be."

When he reported the debates in Parliament he confessed, not without a certain humorous satisfaction, that he did not allow the Whig dogs to have the best of it. It would never have occurred to him to say, "Sir, so addicted is the heart of man to the practice of falsehood, that I will neither endure to perceive, nor suffer others to become acquainted with, any particle of truth or reason tending to the detriment of those opinions that my prejudices and passions have imposed upon me." And yet this would have been no less than true, according to that splendid writer, Esme Wingfield—Stratford, C .SC., ex-fellow King's, Cambridge, author of "The Reconstruction of Mind."

With Houdini "truth" is what he "wants it to be", and anybody who thinks differently is an object of passionate hatred. He calls the former president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (probably the most learned body of men in the world), Sir Oliver Lodge, an "imbecile" and publicly insinuates a mental weakness with a world-war surgeon, man of letters, Sir. Conan Doyle, and in the next breath congratulates himself on having a "normal" mind. Some of us fear Houdini will never be able to eliminate the personal element, to think, as we say, dispassionately.

We are all groping in the dark for truth, in Heaven's name let us sit down and see what help any one of us can give to the others. It is probable that none of us is quite correctly informed about the management of this universe around us.

The reasoning by which Houdini is confirming his convictions is based upon the process of allowing his desires to select the facts. An old-fashioned abolitionist and an anti-abolitionist can reason themselves each into a fury of non-compromise by selecting from the early history of the Civil War only those facts that suit him. One side sees one set of facts and the opposite side another, and these are the only facts allowed to be dwelt upon in their respective minds.

A psychologist of note says, "A tremendous power has the human

mind of distorting the truth, once its desires or fears are engaged." Passion not only picks and chooses among the facts, but actually falsifies and invents. We shall present the facts in the following incident and allow the reader to form his own impression; but to some of us, it looks as if Houdini deliberately attempted to fan hatred against Spiritualists by referring to the murderer, Frank McDowell, Clearwater, Florida. Houdini in his syndicated articles attacking Spiritualism, articles which have been published all over the States, reads:

**"GHOST OF CRIME AND POVERTY STALK IN WAKE
OF SPIRITUALISM"**

"A boy in Clearwater, Florida, named Frank McDowell, heard voices telling him to kill his two sisters, and a year afterward to the very day, told him to kill his father and mother, which he did. You never hear the Spiritualists tell you of crimes committed by these people. This is the sad part of it."

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH ROY BOOTH, SHERIFF
PINELLAS COUNTY**

A recent inquiry brought the information from the sheriff of Pinellas County, Roy Booth, that this crime took place in Clearwater, Florida, February, 1924. After exhausting bundle after bundle of "The Evening Independent", St. Petersburg's leading paper, and consulting friends of the McDowell family we find that the lad is in the Insane Asylum, Chattahoochee, Florida. We would like Houdini to take notice that the local paper, giving all details of the crime and trial do not once mention the words; medium, spirits, spirit voices, spiritism or spiritualism. Further let it be known to the public that this lad was referred to all through the trial as a "religious fanatic." He himself said, "I do not believe in a hereafter." Yet Houdini says, "You never hear the Spiritualists tell you of crimes committed by these people. This is the sad part of it." Well, here is one time when a Spiritualist will tell about this kind of crime.

**"THE EVENING INDEPENDENT", St. Petersburg, Florida,
Thursday, February 21, 1924.**

"That Frank McDowell, confessed slayer of four members of his family to atone for a sin he says he committed against the Holy Ghost planned to kill by drowning a girl he knew years ago in Georgia who was his childhood sweetheart.

"In his letter that was found on the bed between his murdered

father and mother, placed there after he shot them, according to his confession, he spoke of three sacrifices that were to be made by him and said that one was by fire, one by blood and one by water. The first sacrifice was by fire, when he burned to death his two sisters. The second was by blood when he shot his parents in their home, and the third was by water, the drowning of his childhood sweetheart.

"Frank McDowell's loss of faith in the religion of his father and his mother, who were consistent members of the Baptist church, was due, it was stated today by friends, to the teaching of an infidel professor in Emory college, who is now dead. This man, friends of McDowell's stated, was an infidel and taught infidelity in his classes until the college authorities learned of it. Frank was an intimate friend and follower of this professor.

* * * It was only when he talked on religion that he showed traces of the odd streak that developed into actual insanity.

* * * When he was 10 years old he met a young girl, whom he loved very dearly. Today there is no one in the world whom he loves more. When he was 12 years old, on the 19th of February, he became very angry and committed an unpardonable sin, the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, according to what he then believed, but which he claims he looks now upon with another light. The little girl, who lived at the big hotel in his home town, was to visit him on that day. She came, it was a great day in his life. He almost forgot the blasphemy, but two years later, while at school in a Methodist college, he learned how great his crime was.

TALKED ATONEMENT

"My teachers talked about atonement for sin. They told me I must clean myself by fire, by blood and by water, to break any chains which bound me to sin. From that day on, I have always had an idea of cleaning my soul by fire, by blood, by water.

* * * Any professor at any of the best colleges will tell you that the entire social system is wrong. Read the works of Prof. John Dewey or any other professor at Columbia. Columbia college today is the most advanced radical institution in the world. I have learned from these great minds, but I have learned more from my inner self. I may appear egotistical, but I skipped two classes at school, I took my college examinations when in the last year at high school and entered Emory college at Decatur, Ga., at 14. Later I went to

George Washington college, at Washington, D. C. The first was a Methodist, the second a Baptist."

It is most shocking to learn that this boy's religious training—Methodist and Baptist—combined with a college education would turn out such a one, but those who are acquainted with the study of insanity know that it is not the training, but the mind or lack of mind, that is the real cause of insanity.

After the foregoing, is it not just to ask: "Why, Mister Houdini, did you wish to give the public the false impression that this crime was in any way connected with Spiritualism?"

Letters from Florida inform me of the fact that there is a Spiritualist church in St. Petersburg connected with the National Spiritualist Association, but this lad never attended, never consulted a medium and knew nothing about Spiritualism and as he says himself, did not believe in a hereafter.

Rev. Charles L. Tweedale, F. R. A. S., vicar of Weston, England, author of a voluminous and impressive work, "Man's Survival After Death," and a clergyman of the Baptist faith says:

"The statements so often made that spiritualists are especially liable to insanity is entirely false. What are the facts? According to the 'British Medical Journal' out of 14,500 cases of insanity examined in the United States in 1878, only four were attributed to Spiritualism—a proportion of one in 3,837—but there were many cases put down to "religious mania," among the Orthodox, including a number of ministers of religion. In England, between 1878 and 1887, there were attributed to "religious mania," among the Orthodox a proportion of one in 37, just a hundred times as many!

"Much the same state of affairs exists at the present day, and there are scores of insane Orthodox for every insane Spiritualist."

Of course, all sections of the community are liable to insanity. Even clergy and ministers, are no exception. On this head I could give statistics from recent reports of the lunacy commissioners which would astonish those who glibly talk about lunatic Spiritualists. Enquiries recently directed to the board of lunacy control elicited the reply that "they were unable to refer to any statistics which would be applicable to the allegation that devotion to Spiritualism is a frequent source of lunacy."

One would readily suppose from the attacks of Houdini that the spiritualistic message was something blasphemous and obscene, which

was put forward by unprincipled teachers with some ulterior and selfish motive. It is met by the most unscientific technique, the most wild denials, the most grotesque explanations, the most desperate and occasionally unprincipled efforts to discredit everyone concerned. Why this furious antagonism, which unites for once inveterate enemies: the believer in ritual, the Protestant sectarian and the rationalist agnostic? Have we brought ill news to the world? When we have carried our point, and it is universally accepted, will the world be the worse for it? It is the obscurity of death, the cold uncertainty of it, which casts a shadow on life. There is nothing in the teaching of spiritualism to arouse frenzied opposition.

The greatest problem that confronts spiritualism as an organization is the "sifting of the wheat from the chaff." We don't need Houdini to tell us who are the fakers, we know them and their names are on file at national headquarters, Washington, D. C. The lady exposed by him in her famous "card trick" was exposed by our National Association twenty years ago in St. Louis, Mo.; the lady from Indiana, whom he called the "queen of mediums," has never had the endorsement of the National, has never appeared on their programs; P. L. O. A. Keeler did not hold any papers of any kind from the National Association endorsing his "slate-writing."

Human nature is weak; as long as we continue to have men who will claim to be "Rabbis", who will wear the robes of priests without the endorsement of the authorized body; as long as we have in our midst "quack" doctors, "swindling" lawyers, "fake" stock salesmen, "Tea Pot Domes", M. D. and Ph.D. "diploma" mills—all human vultures, just so long will we have mercenary, unscrupulous individuals who will pose as mediums for the sake of making a few dollars, as did Harry Weiss (Houdini) when he traveled with the Davenport brothers and did thricks before large audiences for money. Honest mediums are retiring folks and do not care to have their names appear on Broadway in white lights.

It would be a mistake to suppose that spiritualism is altogether a bad thing because it has many errors, it is not necessarily all fraud because it is profitable to some mediums. Every religion under the sun has had to contend with and solve innumerable errors, and every doctor in the world practices pious frauds daily, seldom solely for his personally private ends.

Sincere seekers after the truth and honest believers in spiritualism

who would find consolation in communication with departed friends are entitled to all respect and sympathy, but no language is sufficiently severe to condemn those who would capitalize these noble feelings of the human heart and cruelly deceive those who mourn.

Houdini is helping the world to get rid of its fake mediums, but spiritualists are the ones who are doing the actual and efficient work to protect the public. Houdini exposes them, and quits there. The exposed medium continues on with his bogus phenomena and satisfies his faithful following. Houdini receives a little publicity and then it ends there. The late president of American spiritualism, George B. Warne, M. D., gave up a medical practice and devoted his life to piloting the National Spiritualist Association; He served seventeen years, and died in the harness. His salary was small. We laid him down like a banner torn in battle. Death found him as he faced his-foes, clear-eyed and unafraid.

Upon the subject of "Fraud" we find the following in his last PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT TO 32nd SPIRITUALISTIC CONVENTION.

Greetings of the Official Board of the N. S. A. to the Officers, Delegates and Visitors at the Gathering in Los Angeles, Sept. 23rd., 1924.

(Section 2)

Since our convention of 1923 Scientific American's Commission has patiently pursued its assigned task. At first some noxious weeds were found growing in the field of mediumship. Presumptuous purveyors of psychic powers have deceived themselves at times, and then their fellows, until trained experts have made plain their unfortunate unreliability. Again brazen simulators have been made to stand forth in the repulsive nakedness of their actual character and the pathway to truth has been thereby cleared of some accumulated debris of barfaced trickery.

He, or she, is indeed a thoughtless Spiritualist and an unworthy medium who dares to whine that any exposure of deception in our name is doing an injury to Spiritualism. Growth of sympathetic sentiment and development of personal mediumship are primarily dependent upon the highest possible degree of honesty and accuracy in every single manifestation of it.

Phrophetic were Abraham Lincoln's words that our nation could not endure half slave and half free, for it would eventually become either all one or the other. Just as true is the parallel deduction that

H O U D I N I U N M A S K E D

Spiritualism cannot increase its prestige if deliberate deception is allowed to thrive beside reputable mediumship, for it will of necessity be dominated by one or the other of those qualities.

We will face a credible future only by heroic excision of every method that is hollow pretense under its seemingly candid exterior.

As a people we know that one nugget of gold is proof of the existence of many other mediums like in kind. Let us also keep in mind that Iron Pyrites, or "Fool's Gold", may often appear to be the real thing and change the eager prospector's anticipation of fabulous wealth into an abject despair.

In Fraternal Fellowship,

George B. Warne, President
National Spiritualist Association
Of the United States of America.

Houdini says, "I have no desire to spread false propaganda and if wrong, will be delighted to be corrected." After receiving letters from him (which were published by him in local papers), challenges, etc., I mailed him the following letter (extracts are given), and hold at this time a registered return slip proving that he received same:
My Dear Mr. Houdini:

After all the mean things you say about Spiritualism—which to me is my life—as Magic is yours—I want to be friendly with you. I hold nothing against you, personally, but I ruthlessly condemn your acts, the things you do, your unethical and unscientific method of attacking another man's religion.

You do not seem to take into consideration that some of us have been born in Spiritualism—not duped into it when old men—we have been reared in its schools for religious education, trained in its national institute for religious leadership (located in Wisconsin) and have devoted and consecrated our lives to the religious aspect of this movement.

You thanked me for being so courteous as to answer your letter when you were in Wheeling, W. Va., last September and for my personal appearance at the Court Theatre—now it is my turn to expect this same courtesy from you.

May I ask you to explain the following inconsistency?

When you appeared at the Alvin Theatre, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, you emphasized in your talk and had published in your program which I have before me, these words, "That there is no mistake

in Houdini's attitude, he wishes it to be thoroughly and clearly understood that he is not attacking any religion in any way. He is not a skeptic and respects genuine believers. He is simply exposing the fraudulent mediums.

Then you give out this statement which I defy you to deny having said: "Tell the people that all I am trying to do is to save them from being tricked in their griefs and sorrows; and to persuade them to LEAVE SPIRITUALISM ALONE, AND TO TAKE UP SOME GENUINE RELIGION."

The best chess players sometimes make the wrong move. Did you by so many words expose your insincerity? Am I and the reading public to understand that it was a "slip" that has exposed your plot against a religious organization that is chartered and protected by the Constitution of the United States of America? Do you know that Father Conway, a Roman Catholic authority, gives on page 145 of his book "The Question Box" this information: "There are in this country alone some ten million adherents (to Spiritualism)." Spiritualism is the only religious organization in all the world that is free from the slavery of authority. We have no Pope, no Book, no Person, no House of Bishops, no (enslaving) Board of Directors, no Synod, no Church Council to enslave our thinking and tell us what to believe and what not to believe. We are not bound and confined like the liberals to the New Testament, like Unitarian's theological students to the interpretation of immortality, as it was given 100 years ago by Channing, nor to the aged conception of God as it was given by Theo. Parker.

Thanks to Old Glory! We Spiritualists are free to think and use our reason on all of these questions. You would legislate and take this freedom away from us.

You speak of a "genuine religion." Will you be as courteous, as you said I was to you, and write me your definition of a "genuine religion?"

We, Spiritualists, know that our religion will live on into the far future in spite of all opposition and the organized effort headed by you because it has within it the following immortal principles:

(1) The free spirit, (2) seeking through scientific truth, (3) to enlarge and perfect life, (4) in terms of universal fellowship, (5) we believe in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, (6) the Golden Rule.

Mr. Houdini, what criticism do you have to make of the foregoing principles for which many a one is giving his life's blood and all his energy? We expect nothing in return and are hardly making living expenses. How much are you making?

As a national lecturer, I am speaking to thousands all over this country and leave next fall for a European lecture tour. It would be well for you to take advantage of the opportunity to make your position clear to one who is naturally called upon to express himself upon such famous American personages as yourself.

Yours truly,

A seeker of Light and Truth,

(Signed)

WILLIAM E. HAMMOND

The above letter remains at the present unanswered.

HOUDINI'S CHALLENGES

Houdini is famous for his challenges which have so many strings, ifs, ands, and buts, to them that they do not mean much when they have been carefully analyzed. At the Day of Judgment Houdini will challenge Gabriel for \$10,000 to blow the trumpet by magic better than the Archangel can blow it.

HOUDINI'S INCONSISTENCIES

To many of us, Houdini is so inconsistent with his inconsistencies that he does not know that he is inconsistent. One of these inconsistencies and the most grotesque explanation of the phenomena of the seance room is given in "Liberty," November 28th, 1925.

He tells of a spirit, John Meeker, coming in a seance room and leaving his finger prints. No doubt, the lampblack was placed on the trumpet by Houdini to catch the medium, to trick her into registering her finger prints, in case she handled the trumpet. When the lights were turned on, human finger prints, their every ridge and whirl distinct, were found upon it. The medium claimed they had been left by John Meeker, the drowned son.

John had had finger prints taken: once when he entered the Army and once when he applied for the bonus. The father made a special trip to Washington to compare finger prints with the governmental digital records. He found the two sets of finger prints identical.

To this unusually strong and evidential message, Houdini insults intelligence by giving this absurd and ridiculous explanation:

"A medium, or a medium's assistant, obtains a position in an undertaking establishment and eventually finds an opportunity to make plaster of Paris molds of the fingers of one or several of the dead there. These molds are filled with a rubberlike substance which hardens into exact replicas of the dead hands, even to the tiniest scrolls on the finger tips. Of course, mediums choose only those among the dead whose finger prints are on file. In the darkness of the seance the rubber duplicate is pressed upon the lamplighted trumpet."

The foregoing is a fair example of all the explanations given by Houdini. Could anything be more absurd? We cite it as proof of our assertion that he is thinking in a passion; therefore, unable and incapable of straight-thinking.

In regard to the future of Spiritualism, we turn to the great Channing, who preached the year before his death a sermon on "The Church." With prophetic words, he closed that sermon in these words:

"My friends, I know that I am addressing those who hold various opinions as to the controverted points of theology. We have grown up under different influences. We bear different names. But if we purpose solemnly to do God's will - - - we are one church and let nothing divide us - - - For varieties are not schisms - - - We may still honor, and love and rejoice in one another's spiritual life and progress as truly as if we were cast into one and the same unyielding form - - - In many great truths, in those which are most quickening, purifying and consoling, we all, I hope, agree. There is, too, a common ground of practice on which we may all meet. We may all unite hearts and hands in doing good, in toiling and suffering for the cause of humanity, in spreading intelligence, freedom and virtue - - - in exploring and drying up the sources of poverty, - - - in breaking the yoke of the oppressed and enslaved, in exposing and withstanding the horrors of war. THE ANGELS AND PURE SPIRITS WHO VISIT OUR EARTH COME NOT TO JOIN A SECT, BUT TO DO GOOD TO ALL. MAY THIS UNIVERSAL CHARITY DESCEND ON US, AND POSSESS OUR HEARTS!"

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION
FREEDOM OF SPEECH
FREEDOM OF PRESS**

The Spiritualists of America—ten million strong—reaffirm their adherence and devotion to those cardinal principles contained in the Constitution and the precepts upon which our Government is founded;

H O U D I N I U N M A S K E D

Our enemies seem to say, "Be ready, gods, with all your thunderbolts; Dash (them) to pieces." Or again, "Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stewed in brine, smarting in ling'ring pickle!"

The Crusaders and Houdini will live to learn that we Spiritualists are in this contest, struggle, war or fight—what ever one wishes to call it—and we intend to stay in it until the end. We will go down if we must, but we shall do so with our colors flying!!

America is a cosmopolitan democracy in which we find Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Gentiles, Mohammedans and Buddhists, blacks and whites, materialists and spiritualists—we like to feel that there are some who still breathe the Yankee spirit of the men who went down to the sea in ships, held their course against the fiercest storms and returned with the full hatches.

We say to our professional enemies, "let slip the dogs of war" and give battle. You shall find the leaders of Spiritualism inspired by the words of Roosevelt—Aggressive fighting for the Right is the noblest sport the world affords.

"Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on?"

VICTORY IS OURS FOR THE FIGHTING !



