

PSYPIONEER

Founded by Leslie Price

Editor Paul J. Gaunt

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A SITTING AT SCOLE

[**Note by Psypioneer:** - Scole is a village in Norfolk, England famous for a home circle which met there in the 1990s, the subject of “The Scole Report” a 1999 part of the SPR Proceedings in which a number of researchers discussed the phenomena around the circle. Two questions in particular arose – did paranormal phenomena occur, and if they did, were conditions such as to merit scientific attention?

The séance report which Dr Alan Gauld has kindly made available to Psypioneer is intended to be a straightforward and relatively neutral account of what he witnessed at one sitting, from which others could reach their own conclusions. It is published here in full for the first time.

Students of the case will be aware that Dr Gauld’s colleague, Tony Cornell experimented with LEDs attached to remotely activated mini-batteries and suspended by conjurer’s thread. Because of the informal nature of the Scole sittings, Dr Gauld concluded that (in strict scientific terms) the paranormality of the séance lights could not be considered to be demonstrated. Some other senior researchers gave greater weight to the evidence.

What is certain that so detailed an investigation by SPR members into a physical circle had not been known for sixty years - since the time of Rudi Schneider, perhaps not since Eusapia. The patient and friendly cooperation of the Scole sitters also contributed greatly. The result was a landmark case.]

Sitting at Scole 24^h Jan 1997

Monty Keen, Donald West, Alan Gauld, Robin and Sandra Foy, Alan and Diana

Monty, Donald and I travelled over from Pentlow to Scole in Monty's car, bringing with us two Kodachrome 200 films that Monty had arranged for Richard Wiseman to send directly to Donald. Alan and Diana arrived somewhat later. After some general introductory conversation, Robin produced two small more or less cubical wooden boxes, one of which had been made by Alan's son for the Scole group, and the other had been made by Monty's local carpenter to Monty's specifications. We looked closely at these boxes and placed one of our films in each of the boxes. The Scole box was then padlocked with an ordinary padlock, the key to which Monty kept (I gathered afterwards that he locked it in his car during the sitting). Monty's box was locked by me with a new combination padlock, brought by Monty. I set the combination and did not reveal it to anyone or write it down. I set it from the printed instructions, holding it in such a way that the numbers were not visible to others present until I had closed it and dispersed the setting. (NB in future the combination lock should be set before arrival at Scole; but I am satisfied that it was well hidden during setting and that the setting could not have been inferred from sounds or movements.)

The three of us then went down to the cellar/seance room on our own, bringing the padlocked boxes. We were left to examine everything down there as we wished. The cellar, I understand, is about 17 x 12 feet. The walls are of bare bricks, painted brown, which arch over into a ceiling, 7 feet nine inches at its highest point (according to Monty). The floor is completely carpeted with a green carpet. In the centre of the room is a round table, about five feet in diameter, made of chip board, again painted brown. It has a roughish surface and is supported on solid boards (presumably also chipboard) at right angles to each other, extending to the edge or very nearly, and dividing the underneath of the table into four compartments. There are two small tables in each corner of the wall opposite the door. On each of these is a glass dome or bell jar (possibly 15 inches high) on a round wooden base with a small hole in the middle. They look of Edwardian or late Victorian vintage and could have covered clocks, stuffed animals, dried flowers, or whatever. They are placed on glass shelves, which in turn are supported on six or so glass cylinders. The little table opposite the door also has a large number of crystals on it (I can't remember about the other one). Round the table there were seven chairs ready for the sitters. They were ordinary metal-framed stacking chairs without arms, but supplied with a flat seat-cushion. Under each of the chairs destined for members of the Scole group was a glass of water. Beside and a little behind Robin Foy's seat was a trolley or table with a cassette player and a selection of cassettes laid out ready to hand. Spare chairs were pushed back against the wall containing the door, with a couple against the end wall. Electric fittings were at the door end of the cellar, and a ducted electric cable runs across the ceiling, I think a little bit clear of the west side of the table. Round this were looped at intervals four india rubber bands, which, I was given to understand, had been used to hold microphones.

The table top had north, south, east and west indicators at the edge, in the shape of luminous patches roughly the size of postage stamps. We were asked to place one of the wooden boxes in a central position as determined by alignment with these direction indicators, and to trace round it on a piece of paper which was placed there. We did this, Donald doing the tracing, and then, again following instructions, placed the other box close up against the first one.

Also on the table top were a number of crystals placed near the indicator spots and on a line between them and the centre of the table; an ordinary pyrex dish, about eight inches in diameter and two and a half to three inches deep, slightly patterned on the outside, plain white on the inside, without cover, placed between Monty and myself, and perhaps six inches from the edge of the table; and a drinking glass with about an inch of water in the bottom (we had been asked to taste the water and reduce its depth to half an inch - Donald tasted it, but did not substantially reduce its depth). Hanging from the ceiling was a piece of rope or thickish cord on which were strung a number of bells at intervals. It was suspended a little to my left, whether or not above Donald I could not say, but certainly close to him. At the bottom (which would have been about head height I think) was a luminous marker. Also somewhat to my left, but over the table, was a ceiling rose with bulb.

We examined and looked under the various pieces of furniture, including all the chairs round the table, the table itself, under the top of which I felt as well as looked, the two corner tables, Robin Foy's cassette layout, etc. The walls and floor are hardly conducive to trapdoors and hidden entrances (besides which the cellar is of course underground - and rather damp). A digital thermometer was standing in a wall recess at the door end of the room

After we had finished examining the room, we asked the others down. I was requested to check that the door at the top of the cellar stairs, and the door into the room opposite the cellar were securely bolted (which they were). We all took our seats - anticlockwise from me the sitters were Monty, Robin, Diana, Alan, Sandra and Donald - and the light was put out. The various luminous patches, which had been previously irradiated, glowed fairly strongly at first. Each of the four members of the Scole group wore a velcro band with four luminous buttons round each wrist.

Proceedings began with quiet and relaxing music on the cassette player. Then we were invited to visualize a bridge between this world and the next and to try to orient ourselves towards the inhabitants of the latter (to the music of Sleepy Shores). There followed the Clockwork Classics, and later a diversity of other music, more or less continuous, all of which, it should be said, was played very quietly, and was hardly loud enough to cover up the sounds of fraudulent activity, had there been any (not even when the sitters hummed along with the music, as they occasionally did).

Before very long there broke in a loud and slightly brassy voice from Diana (now presumably in trance), welcoming us, and the new sitters in particular. I thought at first that this communicator was a woman, but subsequently came to the conclusion that it was Manu (a man). Soon afterwards another female voice came from Diana, this time a rather authoritative upper-middle class one. I presumed this was Emily Bradshaw. She remained around for most of the rest of the sitting, intervening or

conversing from time to time, generally filling in and encouraging sitters to keep conversation going. We also had some words, through Alan, from Edwin, a rather slower and more serious character, who seems to be involved in the literary puzzles that are part of the communications, and spoke again later from time to time, but not so frequently as Emily. We were told, by Emily as I recall, that we should be on the look out for lights above the table. However the first phenomenon was a pronounced, rapid and fairly strong vibration of the table, which made the objects on it rattle. It must have lasted for approaching a minute. We were told afterwards that we could feel the edge of the table to check such vibrations. I did so when it happened again somewhat later, rather less strongly, and more briefly. The table was shaking with a rapid vibration of no more than a quarter of an inch amplitude.

Lights then began to appear above the table. At first they were brief (a second or so), fast-moving and high up, and quickly went out. They became longer in time and trajectory, began to come lower, and eventually to approach the sitters, especially the new ones (they still tended to shoot high up very quickly and disappear towards the ceiling). When not shooting rapidly around, but coming nearer the sitters, the movement of these lights tended to be tentative and erratic, a bit like that of a moth or a fruit-fly. There was a small round central nucleus to these lights, surrounded by or merging into a small luminous coma. I should guess the nucleus might have been $\frac{3}{32}$ of an inch in diameter. One of the lights, which lasted a minute or so, had a coma that looked a bit like the tail of a comet, broadish and pointing upwards. Later the lights became more defined, with clearer nucleus and less coma. In colour they were a bluish-white, and they were bright enough to illuminate most of the palmar surface of one's hand if they came down to within an inch or two of it, or a sitter's mouth, chin nose and eyes under similar circumstances (as I had a chance to observe in the case of my neighbour, Donald West), or most of the interior of the pyrex dish if they descended into it. They did not throw any kind of beam, but a diffuse general illumination.

It should be noted that during the earlier part of the sitting, and indeed up to about half way through, the luminous points on the velcro strips round the wrists of the members of the Scole group were easy to pick out, and I was several times able to look at them all in quick succession, counting all eight, while I had one of the lights moving around elsewhere in my field of view. There were no indications that the sitters were making suspect movements. I tried, by moving my head, to make the lights appear to pass above or below various of the luminous spots on or around the table, so that one of them might be occluded by any rod holding up the lights; but I saw nothing.

I never with certainty saw two lights in the air at the same time, though I did once fancy I for a moment saw one round the bell rope while another was moving in the air the other side of the table.

Within ten minutes or so the lights seemed, as it were, confident enough to stick around for up to a minute or two at a time, and would usually reappear pretty quickly after disappearing. They then began to perform various party pieces. These party pieces would generally be repeated several, sometimes a good many, times, in no special order, and were interspersed with other kinds of phenomena. However I cannot precisely recall the order of either the party tricks or the interspersed other

phenomena, so it will be simplest if I next list the various kinds of party trick that the tiny lights performed, without claiming to have them in temporal order.

1. On a good many occasions a light in mid-flight would drop very swiftly a foot or two onto the table top, making the sort of clunk a small but solid and hardish object might make. The light would go out as it made the sound (or as the sound was made). Occasionally the clunk was quite loud - much louder than one would think such small objects would make. Sometimes a light would shortly afterwards emerge from under the table, as though it had passed through the table and come out the other side. These lights mostly re-emerged in the vicinity of Robin, but a couple seemed to come out from Monty's segment of the table (NB the fact that the area under the table was divided into four segments by the solid boards which support the table would make it difficult to push rods around underneath it). Several times a light dropped with a clunk into the pyrex dish and then re-emerged from under the table, as though it had gone through both dish and table.

2. Lights would begin to perform remarkable gyrations in the air, mostly in front of the visitors at around face level, and sometimes very close to them (one gyrating light came so close to my face that I could no longer keep it in focus and was probably going cross-eyed). The lights would move very rapidly in circles, usually five or six inches across, but with considerable variations - at one time there were circles barely an inch across just in front of Donald's face. To make these aerial shapes a light had to move very rapidly round the path it was pursuing - rapidly enough to pass the critical fusion frequency (whatever it may be in such circumstances) because quite often the circles etc. appeared sensibly continuous. The circles were generally speaking only approximations to circles, being elongated, flattened, etc., but were sometimes pretty good. We would also get banana shapes, rapid toing and froing, and once we had a light which doubled back on itself to make a sustained semi-circle of remarkable accuracy. The circles would revolve in different planes, horizontal, vertical, in front of different sitters, etc., a point which needs to be considered when asking what might be sustaining or suspending the lights. Once, a series of somewhat flattened circles were made in the air to my right and slightly above my face level. These circles showed gaps in them, as though the light were passing through areas of blackness or were transiently extinguished and re-ignited at particular points in their orbits. This effect could have been produced, perhaps, by twirling a light on a thread whilst holding the spread fingers of a hand encased in matt black gloves in front of it. But how one of the sitters, especially the group wearing Velcro strips, could have managed this is a question indeed. NB even when the gyrating lights were close to my face I could not detect any sound from them, or detect any air movement.

3. Sometimes a light would descend into the pyrex dish and move around inside it, usually not as fast as the gyrations we have just been considering, sometimes relatively slowly. These lights were quite sufficient to enable one to see the interior of the bowl, and I never observed any sign of any attachment to them, even though they were well inside the bowl. On one occasion a light sat still for several seconds in the middle of the dish, and I was able to get a careful look at it. The light was at the bottom of a dark solid object, curving inwards a little at top and bottom, perhaps three eighths of an inch long and three sixteenths wide. The general shape and effect was rather like that of an insect's abdomen with a glowing light at the end. Again I could not pick out any attachment by which it might have been manipulated. Anything of the kind would

have had to be pretty thin for me to fail to see it. Perhaps a LED light cocooned in some way might have produced the appearance, but where were the leads or the rod or stiff wire by which it was manipulated? It was certainly not a beta light (too big, too dim and too green). What other possible sorts of light are there?

4. After overcoming initial shyness, the lights proved willing to touch the hands of the visitors. A light came onto Donald's hand which he held out, and shortly afterwards, one came down to my left hand and touched it three times. It was not hot, if anything cool, and felt hard, but how hard it would be difficult to say. The touching was repeated on both of us, but only on the hands. Robin said several times that a light had gone inside him, and Monty once said that there was something inside his shirt. When a light descended on Donald's cupped hands on one occasion, he gently began to close his fingers round it until he touched something roughish and hardish quite close to the actual light but still clearly behind it. At this point the light was withdrawn (I learned about this from him after the sitting). I think that this must have been the occasion on which I could see Donald's cupped fingers partially encircling a light, which I could see through the gap between his thumb and forefinger. The inside of his fingers and hand were clearly visible, but I could see no attachment to the light (neither could Donald, he said afterwards). Once, the light descended on the palm of my left hand, when I had both hands palm upwards, side by side. I said that my left hand been touched. The light immediately jumped to my right hand, and back to my left, and so on, quite quickly (a jump every second or probably less), while I called out left, right, etc. After a while the light ceased to touch my hands, but continued to go to and fro just above them. The light illuminated my hands quite well, and had there been any attachment to the light I would have expected to have seen it, especially when one bears in mind the sensitivity of the eye to moving objects. Too late I thought that I should hold an open hand upright in front of my face to see if a light would pass through it before my very eyes. That would have been impressive! But there is no real answer except a video film using an image intensifier or a thermal imaging camera, preferable several such cameras together!

5. On a number of occasions the light appeared to move the rope, ringing the bells. It appeared also to circle round the rope on several occasions, which would have required the wielder of a putative rod to be pretty well under the rope, close to where Donald was sitting.

6. Once a light descended a couple of feet onto the table top, and, landing surprisingly heavily, proceeded to travel over the surface of the table starting to my left and fairly well in, and curving away round to my right, presumably behind where the boxes were placed. As it did this we heard a scraping noise, which reminded me of the sound a screwdriver might have made on the table top if scraped fairly firmly along, and appeared out of proportion to the size of the light which was apparently making it. While the light was moving along I had the sense that the glowing bit was the leading edge of a tiny object the rear part of which was dark.

7. Once a light dropped swiftly down into the glass of water in front of Donald. It immediately went out, but for some while we could hear noises as of a small hard object hitting the sides of the glass. After the sitting the water appeared quite clear, and Monty drank it, saying there was no abnormality of taste.

8. Two or three times a light descended on one of the crystals, at least once on the west crystal and once on the north crystal in front of me. The effect of this was to make the whole crystal glow with a pretty even light, against which I would again have expected to spot an attachment to the light had there been one; but I did not. On several occasions a light was carried up behind the bulb on the ceiling rose above the table somewhat to my left, and this too was illuminated with an even light.

9. For a considerable period in the middle of the sitting work was ostensibly being carried on on the films inside the boxes. Several times lights descended on the boxes and disappeared as if entering them. Sustained series of taps and noises of movements then came from the boxes as if things were going on inside them.

10. Sometimes a rapidly if erratically moving light would disappear high up, say near the rope, and then within a fraction of second another light would shoot up at the other end of the table. (Movements of the lights were, I think, more often towards us visitors, but they certainly moved in the opposite direction also.)

11. Once a light went up very high, somewhere near the ceiling rose, and remained there quite stationary for several seconds.

As for the other phenomena that were interspersed among the various appearances and activities of the tiny lights, again I cannot pretend to remember the precise order in the absence of a transcript of the tape-recording, but we can list them as follows:

1. For a relatively long period around the beginning of the second half, perhaps five to ten minutes, there were sounds - tappings, chinks, noises of objects being moved - from the table top. Some of these, as mentioned above, were taps apparently from within the boxes, as though the films were being worked on. But there were other sounds that indicated that the crystals and/or pyrex dish were being moved. While these sustained sounds were going on I was able to look around and check on the velcro bands to see that all eight were still visible, which they were, though now a good deal fainter. During these sounds the lights were in relative, though not complete, abeyance. At least twice I saw a light high up at the bell rope while the noises continued from the middle of the table. Eventually a light descended into the bowl a couple of times, and by its light we could see that one of the crystals had been put into the middle of the pyrex bowl. At one point I incorrectly thought from the reflection of the light there was now water in the bottom of the bowl. After a few more minutes, and further sounds, another light showed that the crystal had gone from the bowl.

2. Some particularly loud sounds suggested that the pyrex dish had been moved or perhaps overturned. It had in fact been overturned, and had been pushed somewhat further away from Monty and myself, although still in our half of the table. It then glowed for a few seconds with a uniform illumination. I could not detect one of the lights underneath; illumination was pretty uniform, and seemed rather brighter than one would expect from one of the lights, but it is hard to be sure. After a second or two a small left hand could be seen on top of the upturned dish, appearing dark against the background illumination. It appeared to be a child-sized hand, with short stumpy fingers (whether this was an effect produced by the fingers being curled up I would hesitate to say). The hand had an ordinary wrist and was not 'cut off' The

wrist was roughly towards Robin. The hand lasted only a few seconds and quickly went, how I could not be sure - the light went off, but whether this was simultaneous with the disappearance of the hand I am not sure. The light came on again after a few seconds and one could see a rather larger right hand in the same spot and orientation. Light and hand went, and then the light came on for a third and final time, and I could see just the side of another hand which was on the side of the upturned bowl towards Sandra and Alan. The light shortly went out again. After the sitting we found the Pyrex dish the right way up. I was not able to check the luminous spots on the velcro bands while the hands were visible. By the time I had looked at the hands and moved my eyes to find the now dimming luminous spots the hands had gone.

3. A good three-quarters of the way through the sitting I observed a small, fuzzy luminous area just above the table top and slightly to my right, probably a couple of feet away. It would have been nearly in front of Monty. It suddenly developed or resolved into a very small (an inch or so in height) but quite sharp more or less equilateral triangle of blue-green light. This was upright, but leaning back at a slight angle as though it were one face of a small pyramid presented towards Monty or towards the space between Monty and Robin. It was quickly replaced by another larger triangle of perhaps three inches in height, in the same orientation, and also sloping back like one face of a pyramid. The whole thing was then as it were pulled upwards twelve or eighteen inches; at the same time becoming extended to a length of maybe six or nine inches. It developed the appearance of a roughly human shaped figurine made up of fine gauzy material (tulle?), illuminated from within (but evenly), and somewhat greenish in colour. From the comments of the group it was clear that it was supposed to be a miniature human figure or sprite, but I could see no face or limbs, only the gauzy material which, once displayed, did not change shape. This sprite drifted leftwards in front of me, rising slightly, and disappeared. The sprite rose up from the same spot twice more in succession and repeated the performance. On the third occasion, having heard that it was permissible to hold out a hand to see if the sprite would brush its drapery across it, I did so, holding my left hand over the table as the figure began to drift left. However it passed just in front of my hand without touching it. It was then said that a similar figure was building on the table to my left, about in front of Sandra; I thought I could see a faint glow there, but it did not develop very far.

4. At one point we heard a sibilant whispering coming from above the table, somewhere in front of Sandra I should say. It lasted perhaps thirty seconds, but I could not make out any words.

5. At some point fairly well on into the second half I felt what could have been a light tap on the right side of the knee of my right leg. I was not sure that this was not the result of my trouser leg slipping slightly under some ordinary mechanical tension, and said nothing. However the tap was repeated, and there then came a series of unmistakable light taps on the right side of the lower part of my right leg, moving about a little between knee and ankle. There were perhaps a dozen taps in all, which I felt through the trouser leg which no doubt attenuated them slightly. No member of the Scole group could have made these taps without leaving their seat and making their way round to kneel behind the back of my chair. There was not the slightest indication that anyone had left, or could have left, their seat,, or any sound of anyone

creeping round behind the sitters, unless you count the fact that we once heard a clunk apparently from one of the chairs standing against the end wall (the end away from the door). Monty could have made the taps if he had leaned over a little towards me, but I did not sense him doing so.

Eventually the communicators announced that proceedings were coming to an end, and began their farewells. Edwin said that he thought there had been success with the films, and gave us to understand that there might be a message from a Frenchman, and something to do with the moon. Emily hinted that his name might begin with R.

The lights were put on. We found that the crystals had been scattered round the table. The boxes were still in the centre of the table at or close to the spot where we had placed them before the sitting. The box of which Donald had traced the outline on the paper had shifted perhaps one tenth of an inch in relation to the tracing, but Donald can be more precise about that. The pyrex dish was now the right way up again. There was no sign of any deposit inside it. The glass was still not far from its original position, and the water still in it.

Donald took the boxes containing the films upstairs. There Monty produced the key to the padlock on the Scole box. Donald unlocked the padlock and took out the film. He and I between us then placed the film in a jiffy bag, supplied by Robin, stuck down the jiffy bag, and sealed it with two blobs of sealing wax, on which I tried, not very successfully, to impress the omega from the metal strap of my Omega watch. We both signed our names across the junction between flap and jiffy bag. We took away the jiffy bag and Monty's box, still locked with the combination lock. They were not handled at any time by any member of the Scole group, unless in the darkness of the seance room, and were never left alone with the group.

This account was typed up by me on 25th -27th Jan 1997, from notes made in the small hours of 25th Jan. At 9.10 am. on Monday 27th, a man from Kodak's in Wimbledon rang me to ask for the combination of the combination padlock, which I told him (I had not written it down).

(Signed) Alan Gauld

27th Jan 1997

A VERY ELDERLY MAN?

Madame Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875, needs no introduction.

She was born in 1831 on 31 July (old style) or 12 August (new style Russian calendar), and died on 8 May 1891. How old was she when she died? She was 59, or as we might say, in her sixtieth year. Books that say she was 60 are not quite right.

At the age of 17, she married a vice-governor called Blavatsky. He was "a very elderly man".

So it says on the web site of the TS Adyar. Not just elderly but very elderly!

<http://www.ts-adyar.org/founders.html>

And it says the same on the web sites of the TS in Cardiff (Wales) and the site of the TS in England. But the web site of Blavatsky Trust merely describes him as "elderly".

How old then was this elderly or very elderly person? He was either 39 or 40. Blavatsky habitually exaggerated his age. Perhaps this was to minimise any criticism of her desertion of him, and also to reject any suggestion that the marriage had been consummated. The implications of this were rather unsympathetically discussed in E.M. Butler's work "The Myth of the Magus" (1948)

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=nJSXnBd78FYC&pg=PA249&lpg=PA249&dq=em+butler+myth+of+the+magus+blavatsky+virginity&source=web&ots=PCHq_9NVbv&sig=hA68LyVaIu1yW4NzHsF3JBPCcjI&hl=en#PPA251,M1

A more positive recent treatment of the marriage can also be found

<http://www.katinkahesselink.net/his/hishpb1.htm>

Dr John Algeo is editor of Madame Blavatsky's letters.

<http://www.questbooks.net/title.cfm?bookid=1399>

He kindly commented to Psypioneer:

Perhaps HPB's own variable statements might be acknowledged. Here are a few:

At the age of 44, HPB referred to herself as "an old woman" (Letters, p. 254) and later the same year, at the age of 45, as "a poor, old, helpless creature" (Letters, p. 275). In correcting some errors in the Banner of Light, she wrote of Nikifor, "M. Blavatsky was not seventy-three when he capped the climax of my terrestrial felicity by placing his valetudinarian hand in mine. He might have been older, and he might have been younger; some men are" (Letters, p. 296; she may not have actually known his age). At the age of 45 she also writes, ". . . toward my old age, I have become . . ." (Letters, p. 301). At the same time she refers to herself as "about to reach old age" (Letters, p. 309). At the age of 46, she writes, "Devils have controlled me quite long enough, until my old age! Now I am rid of them, for Master is on my side!" (Letters, p. 389).

Note also the following (*Letters*, pp. 406-7, the top sentence a quotation from the *Journal*):

She would pass easily for a lady of but fifty¹ or so, while she differs from most people of fifty, in being still an earnest student of life and literature, taking up and pursuing new subjects with vigor and success.

NOTE:

1. *The biographical sketch in the Phrenological Journal refers to "Mme. Blavatsky's long life--for she is upward of eighty years old, yet wonderfully young in body and fresh in mind." At the time of the article's publication, HPB was 46 years old. Olcott (ODL 1:265) comments:*
2. *So as to her age, she told all sorts of stories, making herself twenty, forty, even sixty and seventy years older than she really was. We have in our scrap-books certain of these tales, reported by successive interviewers and correspondents to their journals, after personal interviews with her, and on sundry occasions when I was present myself. She said to me in excuse that the Somebodies inside her body at these various times were of these various ages, and hence no real falsehood was told, although the auditor saw only the H.P.B. shell and thought what was said referred only to that!*

Thus our readers will see that organisations founded by psychic pioneers, and even the pioneers themselves, may sometimes not provide correct biographical details. Unless our readers consider that being 40 is elderly or even very elderly!

LP.

MODERN AMERICAN SPIRITUALISM 1870

“Leaves of Retrospection and Acknowledgment”

By

Emma Hardinge

[**Note by Psypioneer:** - There has, and is today an ongoing confusion with some book sellers and reference works as to what date Emma Hardinge actually published her first major historical work; the origin, history, and progress of the first twenty years of Spirit Communication in America, under the title of “Modern American Spiritualism”. This work was written in England between 1867 - 1868 when Emma Hardinge,¹ her mother², sister³ and brother-in-law⁴ set up home together in London. Emma Hardinge’s brother-in-law, Gilbert Wilkinson had at this time been appointed manager of St. George’s Hall, Langham Palace, London, and according to her autobiography this family group⁵, at this time in history, were the entirety of Emma Harding’s living family⁶.

Emma Hardinge returned alone to America on the ill-fated ship *City of Boston* (see following article) in the autumn of 1869 with a view to publishing her voluminous history of “*Modern American Spiritualism*” (MAS). In 1870 she published this large volume, and although a couple of the first editions are dated 1869, we will note from the statement published below that the actual publication date is 1870. The statement printed below, “*Leaves of Retrospection and Acknowledgment*” is to be found in the first three American editions *only* of MAS; the first by American News Co, New York⁷ 1869 followed by two editions issued by The Author⁸, New York 1870 containing 565 pages.

Other early publications of this volume without the below statement were published by James Burns in London in 1869, [559 pages] and 1870 [560 pages]. Later American editions by the Author, dated 1870 [4th edition 560 pages] and 1872 [560 pages] do not contain “*Leaves of Retrospection and Acknowledgment*”, so lack p. 559/60 – 565.

However, University Books, New York reprint of 1970 [565 pages] is taken from one of the first American editions with an additional introduction by Eric J. Dingwall. Later the ‘Spiritualists’ National Union’ in 1999 [560 pages], also produced a two volume paperback, which incidentally incorrectly states the book was written in 1870. The SNU reprint is taken from a later edition (not stated) so does not contain the extra pages as printed below. These extra pages give us an insight into some of the contributors to Spiritualism’s first detailed history book]

¹ Emma Hardinge Britten died October 2nd 1899 aged 76.

² Anne Sophia Floyd died 31st March 1886 aged 93

³ Margaret Floyd Wilkinson died October 24th 1912 aged 82.

⁴ Gilbert Robinson Wilkinson died May 17th 1906 in his 81st year.

⁵ All of these people including EHB’s husband are buried together in the same grave (No. 2111). See: - Grave News -<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/18.PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

⁶ See EHB Autobiography page 215.

⁷ American News Co., 117 – 121 Nassau Street, N. York

⁸ Emma Hardinge, 229 East Sixtieth Street, N. York

LEAVES OF RETROSPECTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE work of the preceding pages, commenced in 1867 and completed in 1868, was written in England, far removed from the scene of the marvellous events therein recorded, its appearance in published form, having been, by the force of unavoidable circumstances, delayed until the opening of the year 1870. The three years intervening between the dates of its commencement and final publication, may appear to the actors in the ever-shifting scenes of American life, a period too long to be passed over without notice. True it is, that the author has spent one twelvemonth of this period in America, and maintained, during her absence in Europe, an uninterrupted correspondence with those observers who were best able to keep her informed of the march of events on the American continent; but although many changes have swept over the aspect of modern American Spiritualism since 1867, nothing has occurred to alter her conviction that the "twenty yeas record" now presented, forms a concrete and fully completed epoch, the circumstances and spirit of which will not again be repeated, or even in a similar form, be carried forward during this present generation.

Despite the imperishable germs of influence which the Spiritualism of the last twenty years has planted, and the magnificent fruitage which its astounding revelations must eventually produce, the calm and dispassionate observer cannot fail to perceive that its status in the world, and its effect upon the enormous masses of its advocates is no longer that of a great marvel, nor a new revelation. The wonder and novelty of modern Spiritualism are alike passing away; and although its phenomena are steadily, but quietly on the increase, and its doctrines noiselessly, but irresistibly permeating all ranks and classes, all forms of literature or religious teaching, yet its public demonstrations, whether in circles or Sabbath-day gatherings, are giving more evidence of the steady faith and devoted adherence of *true Spiritualists*, than of the clamorous enthusiasm of numerous wonder-seeking "spiritists."

Multitudes of the idle and unthinking are giving place to select bodies of earnest and capable thinkers. Circles abound more in the sacred seclusion of the home than in the noisy gatherings of the public hall, and the doctrinal part of Spiritualism is making such rapid strides throughout the intellectual realm of the American mind, that it no longer seems to require special assemblies convened for its exposition.

The spiritual doctrines which were branded as "infidel heresy" some twenty years ago, are now openly preached from every popular pulpit, and the direct agency and immediate presence of bright ministering spirits, denounced in 1848, as blasphemous assumptions, or affirmations only credible to "old wives" or "idiots," become in 1870 the accepted belief of that majority which piques itself upon the possession of common sense and sound philosophy.

Whilst the effects of such a revolution in public sentiment must be fraught with incalculable good for the future of mankind, the changes which they produce upon the external aspect of Spiritualism are liable to great misconception. The enthusiast mourns to find the feverish excitement of the great unfolding dying away. The

antagonistic flatter themselves that the obnoxious idea has evaporated with the novelty of its first expression.

The phenomenal "spiritist" wonders how it is that the spirits are still with us, but cease to astonish us, and the bigot trusts that the belief which is silently leavening the whole lump of society is no more, because the giddy multitude no longer herald its approach with the cry of astonishment.

Meantime, whilst we have the most direct evidence that Spiritualism is even now doing a mightier work for the religious faith of humanity, than it has ever yet effected, its external phenomenal history appears for the present to be closing up, and the record that we herewith present could not receive such additional facts of interest, as would warrant our attempting to write the history of the last twelvemonth's experiences in American Spiritualism.

Even in New York, once the very heart and focus of marvellous phenomena, steady growth and deepening faith in Spiritualistic doctrines, are working too silently to challenge the usual ribald notices of the press.

Multitudes of circles are held nightly in families of all ranks and conditions. An unostentatious, but well supported meeting takes place every Sabbath morning and evening in the Everett Rooms, under the able conduct of Mr. Farnsworth, but the once celebrated Sunday services conducted for so many years at Dodworth's Hall have been gradually abandoned by one popular spiritual leader after another until their entire burden fell upon Mr. Albert Day, a noble and well-tried champion of the cause in New York whose zeal and devotion induced him to make heavy sacrifices for the maintenance of these favorite meetings, until the necessity for their existence was no longer felt. Mr. Albert Day is no less a zealous Spiritualist in private than when his good service was given, even at the risk of his legal professional standing, to the public maintenance of the Dodworth's Hall lectures; and Spiritualism, is even more rife and more influential throughout the religious communities of New York than when it was simply represented in one or two Sabbath meetings of Spiritualists only.

Meantime, phenomenal manifestations of spirit presence have neither diminished in force nor number at the New York circles, although, as above stated, their recurrence is more limited to the sphere of private families than formerly. Amongst the most accepted and popular of the public test mediums, the two youngest daughters of the celebrated Fox family, Margaret and Catherine, still hold a distinguished place.*

This condition of things forms no inapt representation of Spiritualism in its public status throughout the country. A transition period for the "cause" has come, and all who can and will look beneath the surface of its changing form, perceive the foundation stones of an edifice being laid for the future, as much more permanent and practical than the past, as the manifestation of law are more imperishable than the flitting lights of phenomena.

One of the progressive elements of Spiritualism which has neither waned nor receded from public observation, has been the production of spiritual literature,

which, in point of both quantity and quality, has taken the palm during the last three years, over that of, at least, all the ten which have precede them.

It would be both needless and wearisome to sum up all the excellent contributions to the literature of Spiritualism, the titles of which now crowd the columns of the *Banner of Light*, *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, *The Ohio Spiritualist*, *Present Age*, etc. Suffice it to say, whilst the brave, devoted and well-trying editorial staff of the *Banner of Light* have endured sacrifices and even martyrdom in the maintenance of their paper from which thousands of other reformers would have shrunk back or sunk beneath, they are length rewarded, and the status of their cause defined by the fact that their journal is now recognized as one of the permanent and honored literary "institutions" of the country. A wide circulation, and equally just recognition of their respective merits, is fast accruing to the other periodicals named above, whilst their increasing popularity seems to add to, rather than to take from, the ever-widening influence of the veteran *Banner of Light*.

Without finding space to name over the many contributions to the sum of spiritual literature which the past few years have furnished, we may, with propriety, notice the last three works of the inspired "Poughkeepsie Seer," A. Davis, whose "Stellar Key," "The Arabula," and "The Tale of a Physician," are amongst the grandest and most inspired pieces of writing that have issued from Mr. Davis's prolific pen. The fact that these works are of such recent production is the evidence that the sources of inspiration are still in process of progressive unfoldment, rather than closing up, in proportion to the subsidence of phenomenal interest in the public mind.

An admirable work from the pen of the accomplished scientist and scholar, Epes Sargent, entitled "Planchette," or "The Despair of Science," has just issued from the press simultaneously with the Rev. J. M. Peebles's magnificent and exhaustive prose epic, "The Seer of the Ages." Either of these works, alone, would be sufficient to stamp any cause which they specially advocated, with the genius and literary excellence of their inspired authors.

A no less remarkable, but far more startling work in breadth of design and theological influence, is Hudson Tuttle's last book, "The God idea in History." This astounding exposition of all the theological myths and mysteries which have distracted and deluded mankind for over a thousand years, will be hailed by every scholar, candid investigator, and profound thinker, as *the book* of the age, and one whose inevitable mission is to revolutionize the realm of opinion, which has been for centuries drifting about amidst the fogs of sectarian mystery, to find the clue to the problems of theology.

So long as the once feverish spirit of popular excitement which misrepresented rather than defined the status of modern Spiritualism, culminates in literary productions of this character, even the enthusiasts of "the cause" need have no fear for its perpetuation on the most solid and enduring foundations.

It now simply remains for the author to offer a few words of grateful acknowledgment to those faithful allies, through whose instrumentality chiefly, these pages have been given to the world.

The indifferent reader can form very little idea of the multitude of agencies that must have been called into operation before a record so vast in its scope, including such multitudes of figures, immense surfaces of country, and numbers of incidents, could have been brought to the knowledge of one individual, verified with an exactness which leaves no room for honest scepticism, and collected from so many remote sources; to effect all this, the numbers of kind friends who have aided the author could only find mention were an United States directory appended to the closing chapter. All that our space will permit, is to acknowledge, through the persons of the few, the obligations conferred by the many.

Chief amongst these generous allies, we must rank Mr. Charles Partridge, whose munificent gift of a complete file of the grand old *Spiritual Telegraph*, and the loan of several of the steel plates from which some of the finest illustrations in the work are printed, constitute services, the full value of which, no words can express.

Most earnest acknowledgments are due to Dr. R. Hallock, the honored veteran Spiritualist, to whose admirable MSS. minutes of the first spiritual conferences held in New York City, we are indebted for a store of invaluable information concerning the initiatory workings of Spiritualism in its earliest developments.

To the Rev. J. S. Loveland, for a copy of the Boston *New Era*; to Dr. Abel Underhill, for many valuable printed and MSS. records, rare pamphlets and other sources of information on the progress of Spiritualism in the West; as to those noble and faithful friends in St. Louis, Mr. A. Miltenberger and Mr. Charles Levy, who were indefatigable in collecting matter, now unattainable from any source, - the author acknowledges a deep and lasting debt of gratitude.

Amongst the many loving hearts and willing hands that have helped to build up the structure of this spiritual record, we may not omit to note two highly esteemed laborers, who, by the most untiring efforts, collected facts, obtained evidence, visited distant places and persons in search of obscure but significant records, and in a thousand ways, by acts of personal kindness to the author in her own laborious undertaking; or through patient research and effort on their own parts, have aided the work and lightened the burden of the compilation, with a generous zeal that none but the angels can bear witness of.

These ladies are already well known in the spiritual ranks as Mrs. Jane M. Jackson, of New York, and Miss Caroline A. Grimes, of Philadelphia, to both of whom this feeble acknowledgment of invaluable service is imperatively demanded.

To Mr. Andrew Jackson Davis, who, in response to the author's solicitation for the loan of a steel-plate portrait, nobly contributed, at his own expense, the splendid prints of himself which adorn the volume; to the good and generous Dr. Newton, for a similar act of munificence; to Mr. Brittan, for the loan of some fine plates; and to many another liberal and faithful spirit, from whom favors of a like kind have been received; to the munificent act of the noble *Banner of Light* editorial staff in contributing the use of their columns for *gratuitous* notices and advertisements, - to all and each, the author tenders acknowledgments of the deepest gratitude.

There are still two records to enter, which, however startling and unlooked for they may appear to the eyes of the gentlemen who form their subjects, justice to that posterity for which this volume is chiefly compiled, compels to make.

When the authorship of this book was completed, and the trying question arose as to how so expensive and voluminous an undertaking was to be launched upon the ocean of public opinion, every effort was made to induce some suitable publishing house to assume the heavy responsibility of its production.

When failures to accomplish this purpose had multiplied, until discouragement deepened into despair, the author received the unsolicited offer of a noble English gentleman to bear the financial burden of the publication, and to risk the heavy outlay required without any other certain prospect of repayment than that derived from his unselfish devotion to Spiritualism, and his belief that the publication of this history was but a simple act of justice to the wise, beneficent, and wonderful beings, whose labors for humanity it is designed to bear witness of. If the name of this gentleman is withheld from this public acknowledgment of his munificent act, it is simply in deference to his sense of delicacy, which might be wounded by its open enunciation, although its identity will be readily divined by every English Spiritualist, and cherished in the grateful appreciation of the angels whose completed labors in their twenty years' mission upon earth, the noble publisher has thus generously outwrought.

The last name in this category of warm-hearted and faithful soldiers of the spiritual cause which can now be mentioned, will indeed shine forth as not *the least*, either in efficiency or unparalleled devotion to the whole undertaking. It is that of Mr. Charles Edwards Lester, of New York, already celebrated as the author of the "Glory and Shame of England," "The Napoleon Dynasty," and many other works which afforded Mr. Lester all the experience necessary to the complete and sole superintendence of this publication. To write hundreds of letters, notices, and advertisements; spend many hours of each day during several months in negotiating with publishers, printers, engravers, agents, and artisans of every kind that the work required; to endure without a murmur, all the fatigues, disappointments, harassing *contretemps*, and unceasing labors that have beset such an undertaking; to economize the funds with the most scrupulous fidelity on the one hand, and organize the work for the public with beauty and precision on the other—has been but a tithe of the self-imposed task which Mr. Lester has performed for the last six months without money and without price.

If the multitude and extent of the services rendered in connection with this book; above all, if the noble disinterestedness of the English publisher, and the magnificent labors of Mr. Lester appear to the unspiritual reader as extravagant as many of the strange narratives it contains, they at least testify that the final acts of the "twenty years' record" are every way worthy of the angelic love and kindness which shine through the whole great spiritual outpouring. When were so many and such heavy debts of kindness and disinterestedness ever crowded upon the acceptance of one obscure author before?

When were such acts of pure unselfish generosity brought to bear upon the labors of one individual as are recorded in the last two examples?

Who can question that every step in this undertaking has been prompted by deep devotion to a wonderful cause, and brought to a climax unparalleled deeds of supra-mundane love, by unprecedented deeds of mundane kindness.

If this "labor of love" should fail in securing appreciation from the great body of Spiritualists in America, then will it be the first and only failure which the history of the movement or the work of its scribe has encountered; but even then, all who have contributed such noble effort to the completion of the record, will feel with the author, that their names, deeds, and services, will be remembered when "He numbers up his jewels," and find undying record in the Scriptures of eternity.

** Since the earlier chapters of this volume were in type, the author has been requested to correct the statements made by the witnesses at Hydesville, respecting the ages of Catherine and Margaretta Fox at the time of the first disturbances. The mother of the ladies, Mrs. Fox, addressed a letter to the President of the anniversary meeting held in New York City in 1868, in which she stated that, at the time of the first "Rochester knockings," her daughter Kate was seven years old, and Margaretta ten. The ages of the children being as the family allege, "incorrectly rendered in the first printed report, have been erroneously represented in all subsequent accounts."*

[Note by Pspioneer: - The first printed report of Hydesville is published in full in Pspioneer see: - 1.12⁹. The E.E. Lewis report does not mention Mrs. Fox' daughters by name only by age *The youngest girl is about 12...the other is in her 15th year.* It is interesting to note that Mrs. Margaret Fox died¹⁰ of typhoid fever in August 1865! (Her husband John Fox also died in the January of this year) This does contradict the above date of 1868.

There has always been controversy over the ages of Catherine and Margaretta and different agendas as to why. A good reference to the ages of the two Fox sisters is Barbara Weisberg's book 'Talking to the Dead' (HarperSanFrancisco, hardback 2004 and paperback 2005.)]

“HE GATHERS UP THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVER.”

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP12.pdf](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP12.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Weisberg 'Talking to the Dead' see page 209.

## *City of Boston*

*Taken from the 'Autobiography of EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN' Edited and Published by Mrs. Margaret Wilkinson printed by John Heywood, Manchester 1900 pages 220 – 223.*

I embarked on the *City of Boston* in the fall of 1869. On the voyage I thus made, Captain Halcro, the commander, had just returned to the post of duty after a suspension of his engagement with the Inman Line company of six months, for causes of which I was not informed.

The passage was a very stormy one, and I, in company with all other passengers, received the kindest and most courteous attention from the captain and all his officers. When we were within twenty-four hours' sail of New York the storms that had beset our entire voyage increased so violently that we were informed our good captain was *on the bridge* - the look-out point of all large steamships - and had declared he would not quit it until we got within sight of New York. Then it was that some of the passengers, whom I knew to be friends and partisans of poor Captain Halcro, asked me, as a journalist and ready writer, to pen down a testimonial to the worth and kindness of the captain. I readily agreed to do so, but, the writing was executed under stupendous difficulties amidst the raging of the storm. However, we managed its completion, and it was at once signed by all the passengers. This done, the paper had to be carried and presented to the good captain as he stood, like the very genius of the storm, on the bridge, which he refused to leave for a single instant.

For the purpose of conveying this cheering document to our brave commander I and Dr. Brandreth - known throughout the States as the inventor and dispenser of "Brandreth's celebrated pills" - were chosen as a delegation to carry the aforesaid testimonial and present it to the captain. After the doctor's hat, coat, and all movable parts of his garments had been bound up by strings, and mine ditto by scarfs, we struggled up to the deck, and, arm in arm, staggered along, on the night, before; our expected landing, guided by a lantern tied on to its pole carried in my hand, until we reached the bridge.

The captain had been apprised of our coming, and crowds of such of the crew as were able to be spared stood around us.

The storm howled, and our lantern rocked in rhythm with the tossing ship. Reacting was impossible, but I gave the substance of the paper I had to present in a hoarse shout, chorused by the bellowing of the winds, after which, and when about a dozen strong arms had pushed me half way up the steps of the bridge, there was a sudden and temporary lull, and a great glare of white moonlight came out and shone full in the face of the captain, over which big tears were running. He took the paper from my hands, put it in his breast, and said a few words of deep and pathetic thankfulness, ending with this well remembered sentence - "To you and our friends all, Mrs. Hardinge, I say, this paper shall never leave me more, whether I am drifting on to my next, station in Heaven or in hell." "Captain," I replied, "wherever

your *next* station may be, you and I will yet talk over this scene and that paper together in the ports of Heaven when our several courses on earth are ended."

I never spoke with Captain Halcro more, and, after landing the next day in New York, never saw him again.

I heard that some of the experts of the company to which the *City of Boston* belonged, declared, when she was about to proceed on her return voyage, that the vessel was unseaworthy. In reply to this statement, report alleges that Captain Halcro had said, in his unceremonious phraseology, he "would take that ship into Liverpool or hell." A few days later I saw a vision of a large broken-up dismantled hulk of a ship far out at sea. The evening sun seemed to be sinking red and angrily amidst banks of piled-up black clouds, broken from time to time into massy rifts by flashes of forked lightning. In the midst of the bare black hulk I saw the form of Captain Halcro standing alone, with folded arms, and a despair as black as the pitiless scene around him on his ashy face. He seemed, in vision, to see me, and made as if speaking, but his words were lost, amidst terrific peals of thunder until the awful scene faded from my eyes.

*"The City of Boston* is lost; she will never be heard from more.

Those were the ominous words that constantly burst from my lips when the fate of this doomed ship was mentioned in my presence. All too surely have those unpremeditated words been realised, *"The City of Boston" has never been heard from more*, and never will be except in the archives of eternity. And yet in the ages that shall be I still anticipate that Captain Halcro and I will meet again when both of us are found good enough to enter and greet each other in the ports of Heaven.

My "Modern American Spiritualism" was published amidst the same struggles and trials that have ever beset my onerous way. ....

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The loss of the Inman Line *"The City of Boston"*, Captain J.J. Halcrow, from New York January 25th 1870, Halifax January 28th 1870, for Liverpool Halifax to Liverpool.<sup>11</sup>

Photograph of the "*City of Boston*" (Inman Line), launched in 1864 at Glasgow, disappeared at sea January of 1870.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See: - <http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/Wrecks/cityofboston1870.htm>

<sup>12</sup> See:-

<http://www.norwayheritage.com/gallery/gallery.asp?action=viewimage&imageid=1237&text=&categoryid=23&box=&shownew>

Psypioneer has also brought attention to other Emma Hardinge Britten books, for example her last major work in two volumes ‘*The Spiritualist Encyclopaedia or the World’s Pioneers of the New Spiritual Reformation*’<sup>13</sup>

In February 1894 this work was *Finished and Ready* for the printers – July 1894 *Mrs Britten decided to bequeath her book to the future* – Since lost and never published!

It may appear that this substantial *lost* work has not been recorded in any other modern literature.

See also “Problems with the Publication of *NINETEENTH CENTURY MIRACLES*”<sup>14</sup>

Paul J. Gaunt

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## WILLIAM CROOKES: A MAJOR RECONSIDERATION

The life and work of the chemist William Crookes (1832-1919) is the subject of a new 500 page biography by Professor William H. Brock, a very experienced scientific biographer<sup>15</sup>.

“William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science” (Ashgate, 2008) includes chapters on Spiritualism, D.D. Home, Florence Cook, Annie Eva Fay and Rosina Showers. The author has been studying Crookes since 1967 and is well acquainted with the dispute which has flowed around his psychic work. However no reference is made to recent biographies of D.D. Home (by Peter Lamont) or of Fay (by Barry Wiley) and even so prominent a figure as Myers is sometimes called Frederick instead of Frederic.

Brock finds the Home experiments lacking detail on certain points and concludes “At the end of the day, in the absence of clear historical evidence, the historian has to assume an agnostic position.” (p.139)

It is suggested that the materialisations of Florence Cook were produced with the aid of a confederate. Brock reveals “In his correspondence with me in the 1970s, the late Mostyn Gilbert always suspected that Gimingham was the confederate concerned” (footnote. p.188 – Gimingham was assistant to Crookes.)

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<sup>13</sup> See page 9: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP2.11November06.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See: - <http://www2.le.ac.uk/ebulletin/features/2000-2009/2008/06/nparticle.2008-06-18.1585660992>

Brock regrets “While we cannot deny the sincerity of Victorian spiritualists, or Crookes’ scrupulous honesty, it is impossible for the historian not to conclude that Crookes was hoodwinked.” (p.188)

Brock shows how Crookes suffered in his scientific reputation because of his psychic involvement. His election as president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science only in 1898 may well have been caused by doubts about his intellectual honesty. (p.375).

The size and cost of the new biography (£65) is likely to limit its circulation. It is a worthy successor to the Fournier D’Albe biography of 1923, and will be indispensable reading for historians of psychical research. But any biographer of Crookes encounters a serious difficulty - his family destroyed much of his Spiritualist correspondence after his death.

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## JOHN TYNDALL

1820 – 1893

[**Note by Psypioneer:** - In the last issue (p. 45) “Newton Crosland” (1819-1899) it was noted: *Michael Faraday was invited to the Crosland circle to test his unconscious muscular action theory, but instead he sent John Tyndall (1820 – 1893) later to be Faraday’s successor. In ‘Fragments of Science for Unscientific People’ 1871 New York D Appleton and Company, Tyndall published a derisive account of his sitting.*

John Tyndall’s<sup>16</sup> account, is to be found in Chapter XXII Science and the ‘Spirits’<sup>17</sup> which is printed below from a photocopy of the first edition]

### Chapter XXII SCIENCE AND THE 'SPIRITS'

THEIR refusal to investigate “spiritual phenomena” is often urged as a reproach against scientific men. I here propose to give a sketch of an attempt to apply to the “phenomena” those methods of enquiry which are found available in dealing with natural truth.

Some years ago, when the spirits were particularly active in this country, Faraday was invited, or rather entreated, by one of his friends to meet and question them. He had, however, already made their acquaintance, and did not wish to renew it. I had not been so privileged, and he therefore kindly arranged a transfer of the invitation to me.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/TUM\\_VAN/TYNDALL\\_JOHN\\_182o\\_1893\\_.html](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/TUM_VAN/TYNDALL_JOHN_182o_1893_.html)

<sup>17</sup> ‘*Fragments of Science for Unscientific People: A Series of Detached Essays, Lectures, and Reviews*’ By John Tyndall, Published D. Appleton and Company, New York. 1871

The spirits themselves named the time of meeting, and I was conducted to the place at the day and hour appointed.

Absolute unbelief in the facts was by no means my condition of mind. On the contrary, I thought it probable that some physical principle, not evident to the spiritualists themselves, might underlie their manifestations. Extraordinary effects are produced by the accumulation of small impulses. Galileo set a heavy pendulum in motion by the well-timed puffs of his breath. Ellicot set one clock going by the ticks of another, even when the two clocks were separated by a wall. Preconceived notions, can, moreover, vitiate, to an extraordinary degree, the testimony of even veracious persons. Hence my desire to witness those extraordinary phenomena, the existence of which seemed placed beyond a doubt by the known veracity of those who had witnessed and described them. The meeting took place at a private residence in the neighbourhood of London. My host, his intelligent wife, and a gentleman who may be called X<sup>18</sup>, were in the house when I arrived. I was informed that the “medium” had not yet made her appearance; that she was sensitive, and might resent suspicion. It was therefore requested that the tables and chairs should be examined before her arrival, in order to be assured that there was no trickery in the furniture. This was done; and I then first learned that my hospitable host had arranged that the *séance* should be a dinner-party. This was to me an unusual form of investigation; but I accepted it, as one of the accidents of the occasion.

The “medium” arrived — a delicate-looking young lady, who appeared to have suffered much from ill health. I took her to dinner and sat close beside her. Facts were absent for a considerable time, a series of very wonderful narratives supplying their place. The duty of belief on the testimony of witnesses was frequently insisted on. X. appeared to be a chosen spiritual agent, and told us many surprising things. He affirmed that, when he took a pen in his hand, an influence ran from his shoulder downwards, and impelled him to write oracular sentences. I listened for a time, offering no observation. “And now,” continued X., “this power has so risen as to reveal to me the thoughts of others. Only this morning I told a friend what he was thinking of, and what he intended to do during the day.” Here, I thought, is something that can be at once tested. I said immediately to X: “If you wish to win to your cause an apostle, who will proclaim your principles to the world from the housetop, tell me what I am now thinking of.” X. reddened, and did *not* tell me my thought.

Some time previously I had visited Baron Reichenbach, in Vienna, and I now asked the young lady who sat beside me, whether she could see any of the curious things which he describes — the light emitted by crystals, for example? Here is the conversation which followed, as extracted from my notes, written on the day following the *séance*:

*Medium.* — “Oh, yes; but I see light around all bodies.”

*I* — “Even in perfect darkness?”

*Medium.* — “Yes; I see luminous atmospheres round all people. The atmosphere which surrounds Mr. R. C. would fill this room with light.”

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<sup>18</sup> Mr. Mrs. Newton Crosland

I. — “You are aware of the effects ascribed by Baron Reichenbach to magnets?”

Medium. — “Yes; but a magnet makes me terribly ill.”

I. — “Am I to understand that, if this room were perfectly dark, you could tell whether it contained a magnet, without being informed of the fact?”

Medium. — “I should know of its presence on entering the room.”

I. — “How?”

Medium. — “I should be rendered instantly ill.”

I. — “How do you feel to-day?”

Medium. — “Particularly well; I have not been so well for months.”

I. — “Then, may I ask you whether there is, at the present moment, a magnet in my possession?”

The young lady looked at me, blushed, and stammered, 'No; I am not *en rapport* with you.’”

*I sat at her right hand, and a left-hand pocket, within six inches of her person, contained a magnet.*

Our host here deprecated discussion, as it “exhausted the medium.” The wonderful narratives were resumed; but I had narratives of my own quite as wonderful. These spirits, indeed, seemed clumsy creations, compared with those with which my own work had made me familiar. I therefore began to match the wonders related to me by other wonders. A lady present discoursed on spiritual atmospheres, which she could see as beautiful colours when she closed her eyes. I professed myself able to see similar colours, and, more than that, to be able to see the interior of my own eyes. The medium affirmed that she could see actual waves of light coming from the sun. I retorted that men of science could tell the exact number of waves emitted in a second, and also their exact length. The medium spoke of the performances of the spirits on musical instruments. I said that such performance was gross, in comparison with a kind of music which had been discovered some time previously by a scientific man. Standing at a distance of twenty feet from a jet of gas, he could command the flame to emit a melodious note; it would obey, and continue its song for hours. So loud was the music emitted by the gas-flame, that it might be heard by an assembly of a thousand people. These were acknowledged to be as great marvels as any of those of spiritdom. The spirits were then consulted, and I was pronounced to be a first-class medium.

During this conversation a low knocking was heard from time to time under the table. These, I was told, were the spirits’ knocks. I was informed that one knock, in answer to a question, meant “No;” that two knocks meant “Not yet;” and that three knocks meant “Yes.” In answer to a question whether I was a medium, the response was three brisk and vigorous knocks. I noticed that the knocks issued from a particular locality, and therefore requested the spirits to be good enough to answer from another corner of the table. They did not comply; but I was assured that they would do it, and much more, by-and-by. The knocks continuing, I turned a wine-glass upside down, and placed my ear upon it, as upon a stethoscope. The spirits seemed



disconcerted by the act; they lost their playfulness, and did not recover it for a considerable time.

Somewhat weary of the proceedings, I once threw myself back against my chair and gazed listlessly out of the window. While thus engaged, the table was rudely pushed. Attention was drawn to the wine, still oscillating in the glasses, and I was asked whether that was not convincing. I readily granted the fact of motion, and began to feel the delicacy of my position. There were several pairs of arms upon the table, and several pairs of legs under it; but how was I, without offence, to express the conviction which I really entertained? To ward off the difficulty, I again turned a wine-glass upside down and rested my ear upon it. The rim of the glass was not level, and my hair, on touching it, caused it to vibrate, and produce a peculiar buzzing sound. A perfectly candid and warm-hearted old gentleman at the opposite side of the table, whom I may call A., drew attention to the sound, and expressed his entire belief that it was spiritual. I, however, informed him that it was the moving hair acting on the glass. The explanation was not well received; and X., in a tone of severe pleasantry, demanded whether it was the hair that had moved the table. The promptness of my negative probably satisfied him that my notion was a very different one.

The superhuman power of the spirits was next dwelt upon. The strength of man, it was stated, was unavailing in opposition to theirs. No human power could prevent the table from moving when they pulled it. During the evening this pulling of the table occurred, or rather was attempted, three times. Twice the table moved when my attention was withdrawn from it; on a third occasion, I tried whether the act could be provoked by an assumed air of inattention. Grasping the table firmly between my knees, I threw myself back in the chair, and waited, with eyes fixed on vacancy, for the pull. It came. For some seconds it was pull spirit, hold muscle; the muscle, however, prevailed, and the table remained at rest. Up to the present moment, this interesting fact is known only to the particular spirit in question and myself.

A species of mental scene-painting, with which my own pursuits had long rendered me familiar, was employed to figure the changes and distribution of spiritual power. The spirits, it was alleged, were provided with atmospheres, which combined with and interpenetrated each other, and considerable ingenuity was shown in demonstrating the necessity of time in effecting the adjustment of the atmospheres. In fact, just as in science, the senses, time, and space, constituted the conditions of the phenomena. A rearrangement of our positions was proposed and carried out; and soon afterwards my attention was drawn to a scarcely sensible vibration on the part of the table. Several persons were leaning on the table at the time, and I asked permission to touch the medium's hand. "Oh! I know I tremble," was her reply. Throwing one leg across the other, I accidentally nipped a muscle, and produced thereby an involuntary vibration of the free leg. This vibration, I knew, must be communicated to the floor, and thence to the chairs of all present. I therefore intentionally promoted it. My attention was promptly drawn to the motion; and a gentleman beside me, whose value as a witness I was particularly desirous to test, expressed his belief that it was out of the compass of human power to produce so strange a tremor. "I believe," he added, earnestly, "that it is entirely the spirits' work." "So do I," added, with heat, the candid and warm-hearted old gentleman A. "Why, sir," he continued, "I feel them at this moment shaking my chair." I stopped the motion of the leg. "Now, sir," A. exclaimed,

“they are gone.” I began again, and A. once ejaculated. I could, however, notice that there were doubters present, who did not quite know what to think of the manifestations. I saw their perplexity; and, as there was sufficient reason to believe that the disclosure of the secret would simply provoke anger, I kept it to myself.

Again a period of conversation intervened, during which the spirits became animated. The evening was confessedly a dull one, but matters appeared to brighten towards its close. The spirits were requested to spell the name by which I was known in the heavenly world. Our host commenced repeating the alphabet, and when he reached the letter “P” a knock was heard. He began again, and the spirits knocked at the letter “O.” I was puzzled, but waited for the end. The next letter knocked down was “E.” I laughed, and remarked that the spirits were going to make a poet of me. Admonished for my levity, I was informed that the frame of mind proper for the occasion ought to have been superinduced by a perusal of the Bible immediately before the séance. The spelling, however, went on, and sure enough I came out a poet. But matters did not end here. Our host continued his repetition of the alphabet, and the next letter of the name proved to be “O.” Here was manifestly an unfinished word; and the spirits were apparently in their most communicative mood. The knocks came from under the table, but no person present evinced the slightest desire to look under it. I asked whether I might go underneath; the permission was granted; so I crept under the table. Some tittered; but the candid old A. exclaimed, “He has a right to look into the very dregs of it, to convince himself.” Having pretty well assured myself that no sound could be produced under the table without its origin being revealed, I requested our host to continue his questions. He did so, but in vain. He adopted a tone of tender entreaty; but the “dear spirits” had become dumb dogs, and refused to be entreated. I continued under that table for at least a quarter of an hour, after which, with a feeling of despair as regards the prospects of humanity never before experienced, I regained my chair. Once there, the spirits resumed their loquacity, and dubbed me “Poet of Science.”

This, then, is the result of an attempt made by a scientific man to look into these spiritual phenomena. It is not encouraging; and for this reason. The present promoters of spiritual phenomena divide themselves into two classes, one of which needs no demonstration, while the other is beyond the reach of proof. The victims like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind. It is, moreover, a state perfectly compatible with extreme intellectual subtlety and a capacity for devising hypotheses which only require the hardihood engendered by strong conviction, or by callous mendacity, to render them impregnable. The logical feebleness of science is not sufficiently borne in mind. It keeps down the weed of superstition, not by logic but by, slowly rendering the mental soil unfit for its cultivation. When science appeals to uniform experience, the spiritualist will retort, “How do you know that a uniform experience will continue uniform? You tell me that the sun has risen for six thousand years: that is no proof that it will rise tomorrow; within the next twelve hours it may be puffed out by the Almighty.” Taking this ground, a man may maintain the story of “Jack and the Beanstalk” in the face of all the science in the world. You urge, in vain, that science has given us all the knowledge of the universe which we now possess, while spiritualism has added nothing to that knowledge. The drugged soul is beyond the reach of reason. It is in vain that impostors are exposed, and the special demon cast

out. He has but slightly to change his shape, return to his house, and find it “empty, swept, and garnished.”

December 10, 1864.

Tyndall made this remark in the 6<sup>th</sup> re-print 1879: -

*Since the time when the foregoing remarks were written I have been more than once among the spirits, at their own invitation. They do not improve on acquaintance. Surely no baser delusion ever obtained dominance over the weak mind of man.*

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[**Note by Psypioneer:** -Horace Leaf<sup>19</sup> brings our attention to a somewhat unknown Australian pioneer Mr. J. T. McLeod Craig. This is printed below and is taken from *LIGHT* April 21, 1923 page 243.

Previously in the May<sup>20</sup> issue of Psypioneer we also published ‘Experiences of an Old Australian Spiritualist’ by Horace Leaf.]

## **AN AUSTRALIAN PIONEER**

### **MR. J. T. MCLEOD CRAIG AND HIS WORK**

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**BY HORACE LEAF**

Few persons have done more for Spiritualism under the “Southern Cross” than Mr. J. T. McLeod Craig. Long before we met him, we heard of his high qualities as a speaker, medium, and organiser. In Melbourne he was referred to as a most capable business man, in whose hands we should leave, as much as possible, certain of the arrangements connected with our Mission in Sydney; a very important factor, as success could be achieved only by such unselfish co-operation.

The advice proved excellent. A more whole-hearted, able man we never met. No one knows the conditions and requirements of Spiritualism in Australasia better than he, as for many years he and his wife toured throughout the Commonwealth and Dominions lecturing, healing, and demonstrating clairvoyance. His present office as President of the Spiritualist Council of New

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<sup>19</sup> Horace Leaf 1886c – 1971: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.5May2008.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.5May2008.pdf>

South Wales keeps him in constant touch with the various churches in that State, especially those, in the magnificent city of Sydney. His jovial, diplomatic, sympathetic nature admirably fits him to hold that responsible position; and it has been during his Presidency that Sydney has most deserved the appellation: “the Mecca of Spiritualism.”

It is difficult to give a pen-picture of Mr. Craig as he is so vital: but imagine a middle-aged, clean-shaven man of a little less than medium height, broadly built and well set, and you have a simple outline of him. Now add a merry eye, withal alert and penetrating, and a rather quiet, reliant manner, stimulating confidence, and you have an idea of his inner personality. His excellent psychic diagnosing and healing ability is attested by his large and flourishing business right in the heart of the city. I often met people who voluntarily testified to their indebtedness to him for their good health. As one man said, “He snatched me like a brand from the burning.”

Worcester-street Church, Christchurch, one of the most flourishing Spiritualist Societies in New Zealand, owes its inauguration to Mr. Craig during his sojourn there for several years. Notwithstanding the harassing necessities of commercial business, he found time to form around himself a circle of admirers convinced of spirit-return through his mediumship, and in time they formed themselves into a society, which has flourished ever since. It was delightful to hear the high expressions of praise the Worcester-street Spiritualists showered upon him, testifying to his good life and ministerial powers. He is one of the sound bulwarks of Spiritualism, against which its enemies must hurl themselves in vain. So long as the Cause has workers of his calibre under the Southern Cross it will win the appreciation it so richly deserves.

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Paul J. Gaunt