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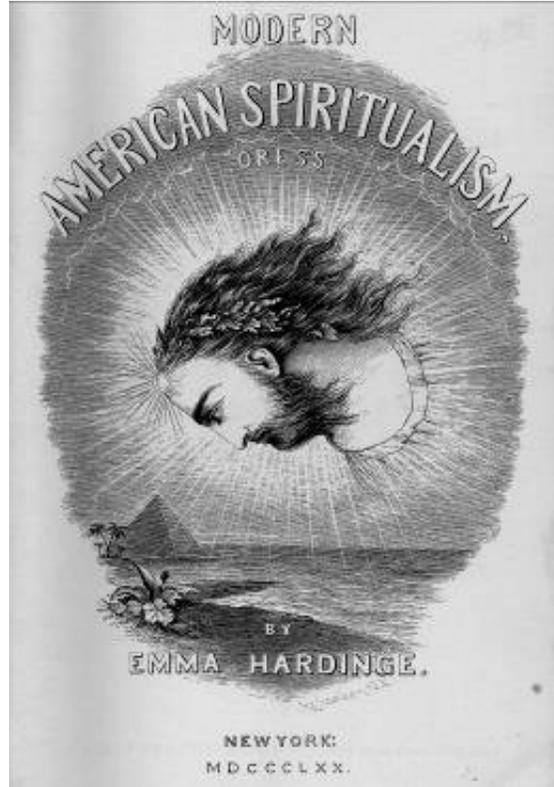
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HENRY BIELFELD

June 1802—15th October 1892

Psypioneer this year is running several articles on early pioneers in Britain who will not be known for their mediumistic abilities or as public speakers or even authors, but for what they, as individuals contributed unusually to the Spiritualist Movement.

I became aware of the name Henry Bielfeld when looking into the first publicised case of a researcher seizing a spirit form. This is the well known incident when William Volckman grabbed the alleged spirit form of Katie King in December 1873 – and it turned out to be the medium Florence Cook. Bielfeld was present at this séance and witnessed the incident; he was one of those who signed a document about what took place. I have been able to trace that Bielfeld was an active Spiritualist in the late 1850s and was well acquainted with the leading Spiritualists of the day.

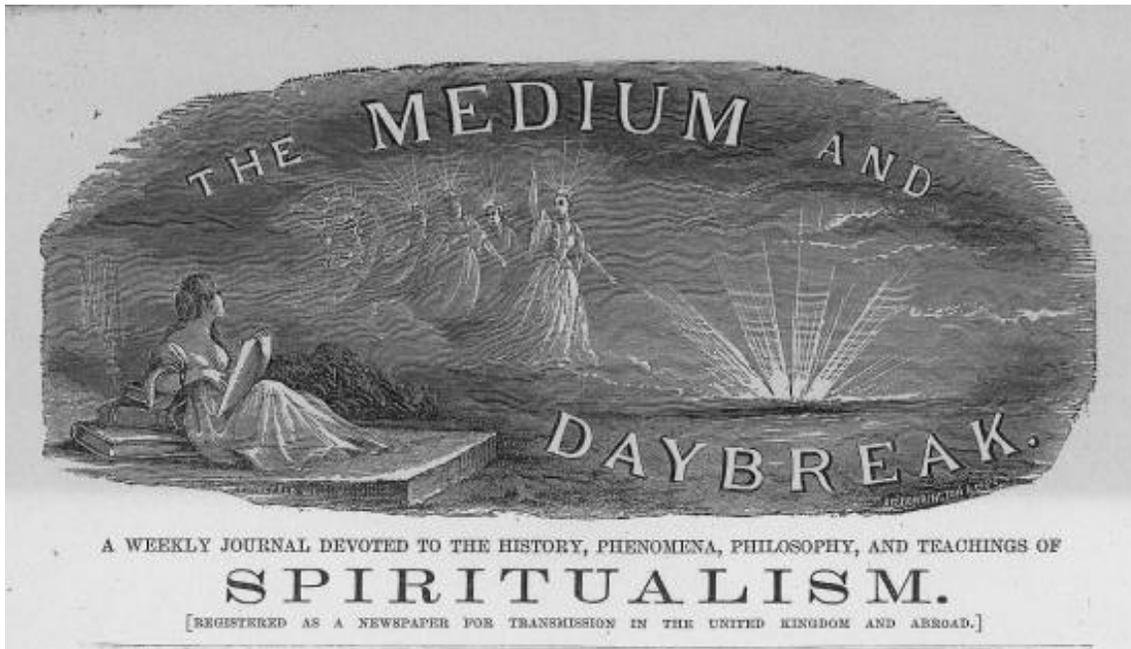


Bielfeld's contribution to Spiritualism or "the Cause," as it was commonly called, were his skills as an artist and illustrator.

The portrait of the ancient spirit, "Oress," prefixed to Emma Hardinge's *Modern American Spiritualism*, 1870, was from a painting executed by Bielfeld for the purpose. Emma Hardinge informs us on p.309 in chapter XXX - Koons's and Tippie's Spirit Rooms – that "Oress" was the name of an ancient angel who professed to give instruction to the circle.

The vignette title (as above) sits opposite the portrait of the author; and, unfortunately, Emma Hardinge credits only the engraver—Richardson, N.Y. Information regarding the ultimate origin of this rather interesting portrait is contained in Bielfeld's obituary and is published below in this article.

Bielfeld's talents were later used by James Burns. Burns' weekly journal, *The Medium and Daybreak*,¹ was well known for its beautiful elaborate headings; and during the life of the paper (1870-1895), there were three designs.² In 1872, the first issue of the *Medium and Daybreak* saw the second design, printed on fine toned paper by Henry Bielfeld.



Designed by Henry Bielfeld

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Psypioneer has previously made much reference to Emma Hardinge Britten's speech "The Creed of the Spirits, and the Influence of Spiritualism" given at Cleveland Hall, London, on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April 1871. As a supplement to her speech, Emma Hardinge Britten read her inspired Ten Spiritual Commandments, giving the manuscript and copyright to James Burns which he soon published in his Seed Corn series, number 5, under the title "The Creed of the Spirits."<sup>3</sup> For the full Cleveland Hall, speech and "The "Ten Commandments" see Psypioneer June 2009.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See—*Spiritual origin of The Spiritual Institution & The Medium and Daybreak*, Psypioneer Volume 6, No.1 pages 3-10:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.1January2010..pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Independent Spirits—Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910*, by Logie Barrow: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Page 59 gives the other two designs of *Medium and Daybreak*, the third image (top in the book) started circa 1874 Barrow has nicely adapted this for his book cover using the main two characters.

<sup>3</sup> *Medium and Daybreak* announced on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1871 that:—"The "Ten Commandments" communicated by the spirits through Mrs. Hardinge will be ready for delivery in a few days." This was part of the hand out series under the title "The Creed of the Spirits."

<sup>4</sup> See Psypioneer Volume 5, No.6 pages 170-184—*The Creed of the Spirits, and the Influence of Spiritualism*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.6June09.pdf>

In July 1871 Burns makes this announcement: <sup>5</sup>

## **THE TEN SPIRITUAL COMMANDMENTS**

Spiritualists will be pleased to know that an eminent artist (H. Bielfeld, Esq.) is engaged on a beautiful work to illustrate the Ten Commandments given by the spirits through Mrs. Hardinge. It is to be reproduced by lithography, and when carefully coloured, will have all the effect of the original. On a scroll in the centre of the picture will be inscribed the Ten Commandments, Ten Rules of Right, and the Creed of the Spirits. It will be exhibited at the forthcoming *conversazione*.

In August 1871 James Burns announced it was ready: <sup>6</sup>

*Just Published, price 2s. 6d.*

**A BEAUTIFUL ARTISTIC DESIGN,**

**BY H. BIELFELD, ESQ.,**

ON WHICH ARE PRINTED

**THE TEN SPIRITUAL COMMANDMENTS,  
THE TEN RULES OF RIGHT,**

AND

**THE CREED OF THE SPIRITS,**

AS GIVEN BY THE SPIRITS THROUGH

**EMMA HARDINGE**

~~~~~

⁵ The *Medium and Daybreak* July 21, 1871 p 233

⁶ The *Medium and Daybreak* August 21, 1871 p 254

Mr. BIELFELD has, in a very beautiful manner, embodied into his design the most appropriate symbols of Spirit-communication. At the top of the picture, amidst the radiant effulgence of spirit-light, stands a powerful winged spirit of the highest order, his face beaming with intelligence and goodness, seemingly directing two spirits of a lower grade, who hold a large scroll, on which are inscribed the three articles named above. At the bottom of the picture is an early landscape of mountain, lake, and plain. The church, the symbol of the religious sentiment and buildings indicative of Home and Industry, are visible. On the right hand corner is a mother directing the attention of her little boy to the scroll above, and on the left side is a father with his daughter in the same attitude. All round the margin, ornamental work is introduced in the vignette style. On the top of the scroll, just under the spirits is a beautiful and truthful miniature portrait of Mrs. Emma Hardinge, with rays of light streaming down upon her head.

This exquisite work has been reproduced by lithography in several tints, and is worthy of a place on the walls of every Spiritualist, be he peer or peasant. The price is such as to place it within the reach of all. It may also be had in an elegant mount or framed in various styles; also carefully coloured by hand in imitation of the original painting.

I know that this went into three editions, maybe more, but cannot find a copy of it; and Marc Demarest on his website “Chasing Down Emma”⁷ is offering—“A *hundred dollar bounty for a copy of this lost gem...*”!⁸

Burns was true to his word when he stated—“It will be exhibited at the forthcoming *conversazione*.”

Mr. and Mrs. William Britten sailed for England in the Cunard steamship “Abyssinia,” on 3rd of November 1870 arriving at their destination (London) on the 15th November. Just prior to Emma and her mother’s return⁹ to America, a large farewell *conversazione* was held for her at St. George’s Hall, July 28th 1871.¹⁰

⁷ <http://www.ehbritten.org/>

⁸ http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2009_10_01_archive.html

⁹ Dr. Britten had already returned some time earlier.

¹⁰ This is recorded in the *Medium and Daybreak* August 4th 1871, which runs into five pages. Emma was given money “A *purse, containing one hundred and thirty guineas, was then presented to Mrs. Hardinge by Mr. N.F. Daw*” The attendance list contains many well known mediums and speakers including a Cabinet Minister and Members of Parliament, also Emma’s mother and sister were present. The published quote is taken from the front page.

“In the place of honour, in the centre of the platform, was a beautiful and truthful oil painting of Mrs. Hardinge by Mr. Evans.¹¹ On one side of it was the newly-painted design to illustrate the “Ten Spiritual Commandments,” by Mr. Bielfeld; on the other, the same subject neatly written and ornamented by Mr. Robson.”

Bielfeld himself was a portrait artist. Below is taken from *The Spiritualist* (1869-1882) December 12, 1873 from an article called “Mr. Coleman on Spirit Forms” p. 453. The artist’s name is misspelled. It would be interesting to find any other Spiritualistic or other associated works that Bielfeld had a hand in!

Mr. Bielfield [sic], who was present, brought with him a very nicely painted picture in oil of Katie, taken from a photograph, which seemed to give much pleasure to Miss Cook, who thanked him several times. This picture was lying on the table, and Katie asked if she might look at it, and at once took it up with both hands, and after gazing on it for a moment, exclaimed, “Why, this is me?” and, pressing it to her breast, she said, “I am so much obliged to you! I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Bielfield, I am so much obliged to you!” (Precisely the same expressions used in my hearing by Miss Cook to Mr. Bielfield, with the portrait in her hands.)

Psypioneer readers may have noticed that many of the pioneering Spiritualists, notably those working towards organised Spiritualism that resulted in the Spiritualists’ National Union (SNU), had Unitarian connections/backgrounds. Bielfeld was another example.

I have published two obituaries below, both covering different aspects of his long life:

¹¹ *Medium and Daybreak*, July 21, 1871 p 233:—An artist, well known for his faithful delineations of portraiture, has just finished a beautiful and truthful portrait in oil of Mrs. Hardinge. It has often been observed that photography fails to catch the fleeting and ever-varying expression of Mrs. Hardinge’s countenance; but we think the same remark cannot be made in respect to Mr. Evans’s carefully executed, painting, It will be exhibited at the St. George’s Hall on the 28th instant, and we understand it is destined to adorn the Walls of the seance-room at the Progressive Library. Our readers in the north of London will recognise in Mr. Evans, the artist, a neighbour and an earnest Spiritualist

OBITUARIES

HENRY BIELFELD, LONDON.

From—*Medium and Daybreak*¹²

Dear Mr. Burns,—Our dear old friend Henry Bielfeld has just gone over to the great majority, on Saturday last, the 15th inst., in his ninety-first year. He was one of that now scanty band of pioneers who have done so much to make the pathway of Spiritualism comparatively smooth and easy for their successors. In those early days many availed themselves of the facilities he supplied for its investigation, through the mediumship of the late Mrs. Bielfeld, among them the celebrated Robert Owen and the late Dr. Jacob Dixon.

His skill as an artist was ever at the service of the Cause he loved so well. The portrait of the ancient spirit, "Oress," prefixed to Mrs. Britten's able and voluminous work, "Modern American Spiritualism," was from a painting executed by him for the purpose. He also illustrated the "Ten Spiritual Commandments" which some years ago had an extensive circulation. The frontispiece to the *MEDIUM AND DAYBREAK* was engraved from his design, and he painted a fine picture illustrating the communion between the Two Worlds, and which he generously presented to his old friend Mr. W. Wallace, the pioneer medium.

His interest in Spiritualism was unabated to the close of his earthly life; he continued to hold regular weekly séances at his house, Alma Street, till a few weeks of his decease.

His end like his life was quiet and peaceful; he had no fear of death, his only desire was to be released from the suffering body. The ripe age he attained was, no doubt, largely due to his simple habits and temperate life.

He was always a consistent and generous friend to genuine mediums and the Cause they represented, but he had a rooted antipathy to dark séances, as he also had to that fungus growth of extravagant and fantastic theories which of late years has clung around Spiritualism, and done so much to discredit it and to perplex inquirers. He was by religious conviction a Unitarian, but was wholly free from sectarian bigotry, which he despised and abhorred.

Spiritualism has of late lost many valuable friends and supporters, and among these, by those who knew him, as the present writer has done for the last forty years, he will be long and kindly remembered.

T. S.

¹² *Medium and Daybreak*, October 21, 1892 page 683.

MR. HENRY BIELFIELD.

From—*The Two Worlds*¹³

DEAR SIR,—Several notices have appeared of late in the newspapers relative to my late friend, Mr. Henry Bielfield, written by those who knew and esteemed him when in the country as well as in town, eulogising his many noble qualities, his sincerity as a Spiritualist, his skill as an artist and man of science, his unswerving integrity and generosity as a man. Most of these writers appear to have known him a little more perhaps than the latter half of his long life, but as my acquaintance with my late friend dates back to sixty-five years since, I will add a few facts with which I believe other writers were not acquainted, and which in my opinion tend to show how much the independent and inquiring spirit, so fearless and so strongly marked in his case, was influenced by the friends and social intercourse of his early life.

Mr. Henry Bielfield was born at Heavitree, a suburb of Exeter, in June, 1802, his father Mr. Diedrick Bielfield, a native of Stettin, in Germany, having come over in early life to enter the house established in that city some time before by Mr. John Baring, the son of a Lutheran minister at Bremen, in connection with the woollen manufactory, first established in that city by some of the Flemings, driven out of their own country by the cruel persecutions of Alva, whilst others introduced lace-making at Honiton, and another party established the weaving of a thick cloth called swanskin, on the banks of the Stour in Dorsetshire. The growth of commerce with the spirit of those who had fled from religious tyranny in their own country was favourable to the growth of civil and religious liberty, which had a stronghold in the Unitarian congregation of wealthy and independent thinkers, amongst whom Mr. Henry Bielfield was reared and spent his early life, so that with him the religion of gratitude had from the first superseded the superstition of fear. His father was successful in his commercial transactions, and at his death left his son sufficient to feel himself independent of his profession as an artist, although he was of that active disposition that he never could be idle, and was always to be found having some subject in hand, if not for himself for the benefit of some friend or cause he wished to serve.

Other friends have spoken of him as a painter, but having been blind nearly forty-seven years, I have but little to say on that head, except that when I wished any of his work to help on the cause of the blind, or a subscription to any society, I was sure of his aid. Others have spoken of his Spiritualism. I, however, not a believer in Spiritualist, can speak with confidence of his sincerity in those views, often at the cost of myself being styled “a hard-shelled materialist”; but none will feel or regret his death more sincerely than those many blind who are indebted to his constant exertions for those pensions in the home, the result of his generous assistance, which contributed, in the words of a late blind poet, “To smooth the road, and make endurable their dark abode.”—I remain, yours truly, —

JOHN BIRD.

36, Osnaburgh Street, N.W

¹³ *The Two Worlds* November 18, 1892 again his name has been misspelled.

1892

As the first obituary points out, 1892 was a year that Spiritualism lost some fine workers, for the Cause, including:

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**Mrs. De Morgan:**—Died circa January (born 1808) Wife (Sophia Elizabeth) of Prof. August De Morgan early Spiritualists / investigators at the time of Mrs. Maria Hayden's visit to England. In 1863 they published:—*From Matter to Spirit. The Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations*, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, Green. London. Mrs. D first experience was with Mrs. Hayden

**Mrs. E Dawson Rogers:**—Died 9<sup>th</sup> May 1892, Active Spiritualist, wife of Edmund Dawson Rogers

**Mr. Alexander Calder:**—Died 19<sup>th</sup> June 1892, Past President of the—British National Association (BNAS). Calder was also an original Council member of the Society for Psychical research in 1882 see *Psypioneer* Volume 4, No.10 pages 234-238:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.10October08..pdf>

**Mrs. Kate Fox Jencken:**—Died 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1892, Youngest of the Fox sisters.

**Colonel John C. Bundy:**—Died 6<sup>th</sup> August 1892, Editor of—*Religio-Philosophical journal*. See *Psypioneer* Volume 3, No.2 pages 34-42:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.2February07..pdf>

**Mr. William Stainton Moses:**—Died 5<sup>th</sup> September 1892, Editor of *Light*. See:—The grave of William Stainton Moses *Psypioneer* Volume 4, No.10 pages 231-139:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.10October08..pdf> also see Rev. William Stainton Moses, M.A – Canon William V. Rauscher pages 71-79 Volume 5, no.3:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.3March09..pdf>

Paul J. Gaunt

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# 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the passing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

## Introductory Notes by Psypioneer:

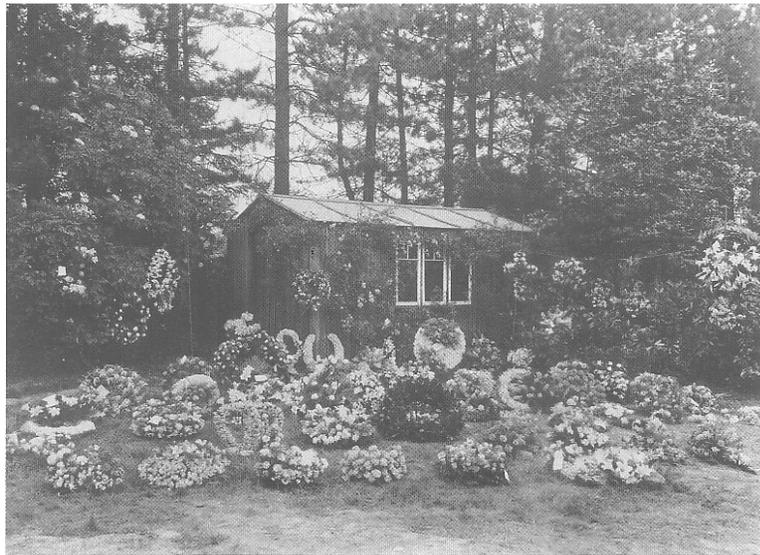
On July 7<sup>th</sup> 2010, it was 80 years since the passing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. To mark this occasion we are reprinting two tributes from the British College of Psychic Science (BCPS) journal *Psychic Science*. Interestingly, both tributes note ACD's Unitarian sympathies.

L. P.

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was “Promoted”—as *The Two Worlds* ¹⁴ headline described it—around 8:30am on 7th July, 1930. He was, at his own request an hour earlier, helped out of bed and seated looking out of the windows of his home, ‘Windlesham’, with his immediate family around him: Jean and Adrian holding his hands and Lena Jean and Denis on either side of them. Unable to speak, he looked at each of them in turn, and then passed on to his next great adventure.

Four days later, he was buried in the Windlesham grounds close to the little garden hut where he had so often sat writing.¹⁵ It was a simple ceremony conducted by the Rev C Drayton Thomas, even though he had expressed a wish for there to be no “clerical interference”. Some 300 were in attendance, the scene being more like a garden party than a funeral. A grave-board made of solid British oak bore his name, date of birth, and the epitaph: “Steel true, blade straight”. Deliberately, significantly, and subtly, there was no date of death on the grave-board.



¹⁴ *The Two Worlds* July, 18th 1930, page 449 in the bound volume. That whole edition was dedicated to A.C.D., as was the July 25th issue – which headlined “Sir Arthur's Return! A remarkable photograph” (P478). In evidence of this, there were 4 plates, dated as being received on July 14th by Hope and Tweedale, 2 of which clearly showed ACD's spirit form whilst in the other 2 he was not so clearly recognisable. And those editions had followed the July 11th edition where the stop press headline had been “Gone Home!” (P441), immediately after a report regarding the calls for a new Act to replace the Witchcraft Act (PP440, 441).

¹⁵ Photograph from Garth Willey's library collection.

On Sunday 13th July, a Spiritualist memorial service was held at the Albert Hall with a reported attendance of 8,000—even though the seating capacity was only around 5,000, meaning standing room only for some 3,000. A chair had been left vacant for ACD on the stage; and the presiding medium, Estelle Roberts, said she saw his spirit form enter the auditorium and not only sit in the chair but provide her with a private message for Lady Conan Doyle.

Lady Conan Doyle passed on in 1940 and was buried next to ACD. But in 1955, the family sold Windlesham and their bodies were exhumed and taken for burial in the churchyard of the 13th century Norman church at Minstead, in the New Forest, not far from ACD's former country home, Bignell House. His headstone there bears the additional words "Knight, patriot, physician and man of letters".

A 'man of letters' indeed he was: not only a writer of fiction and a prolific writer on all manner and kinds of factual and spiritual matters but also he was a poet and song writer (he even finished an operetta – *Jane Annie: or The Good Conduct Prize*, 1893 – for James Barrie who had suffered a nervous breakdown). One of ACD's poems, *The Farewell*, seems particularly poignant here:

The Poems of Arthur Conan Doyle Collected Edition (1922)

The Farewell

THE SOUL TO THE BODY:

SO SORRY, dear old friend, you have to die,
We've been such goodly partners, you and I,
Such comrades in our work, and mates at play,
We've lived together many a happy day.
It's only lately that you disappoint,
Sluggish in limb and clogged in every joint;
But that is not your fault, for grim old Time
Has blocked your tiny arteries with lime,
And cut your sap and left its withering trace
In every wrinkle of your dear old face.
No, faithful comrade, I have nought but praise;
If there were fault, 'twas mine. You walked the ways
On which I led you, be they low or high,
Thanks for all services! And so good-bye!

THE BODY TO THE SOUL:

GOOD-BYE, old friend! You've used me many a year,
And, as you say, I'm rather out of gear,
And quite disposed to rest. No doubt you'll find
Some other form congenial to your mind,
And moulded on this wreck you leave behind,
For that, they say, persists. May it be one
That serves you faithfully, as I have done.
Of course its right our partnership to sever
Since I am old and you as young as ever.
I'll find some cancer cell or handy germ
To bring my waning forces to a term
And break the framework of the old machine.
Then down at Woking or at Golder's Green
They'll do the trick. And you, friend, from afar,
Will see the oaken chest or cinder jar,
And know that I have gone without a pang
Back to the elements from which I sprang.

G.W.

~~~~~

## A. C. D. AS I KNEW HIM

From *Psychic Science* <sup>16</sup>

If brevity be the soul of wit, I can accord the palm to our friend and comrade, Arthur Conan Doyle, whose ability to put in a few words and in clear, choice language, the very essence of the situation, was both a pleasure and an instruction to those who were favoured to receive letters from him. I noticed this also at the College Council table during the years when he was Hon. President; he would listen carefully to a discussion, giving a guiding word now and again, and then by the time all had had their say, he had ready a clear, brief minute dealing with the situation, which seldom needed alteration. To be both brief and comprehensive was one of his many remarkable gifts.

Sir Arthur and Lady Doyle were two of the very earliest members of the College, and later became Life Members. I have a note dated February, 1920, three months before the opening of the College, in which he asks for membership, wishes the great venture success, and promises to interest others. This he loyally did to the very end, for he found the College method of experiment particularly suited to the many who continually came to him for help.

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<sup>16</sup> *Psychic Science*—Quarterly Transactions, British College Psychic Science Vol. IX.—No.3. October 1930 pages 214-16

I remember well, how delighted he was that he was able to introduce Mr. J. Malcolm Bird, now Research Officer of the S.P.R.,<sup>17</sup> but at the time one of the editors of the “Scientific American,” anonymously to the College as an “enquirer who may be useful.” He saw him get more and more interested through sittings with John Sloan, Evan Powell, the Crewe Circle, Mrs. Osborne Leonard, and others. The results then obtained made a case for investigation, such a case, that Mr. Bird, finding “Margery” on his return to the States, continued his quest to the present day with the most far-reaching effects to his nation.

On another occasion, a lady arrived with a letter from Sir Arthur, simply saying that if I could help the bearer it might be of service to the cause. A sitting was available with Mrs. Leonard, which bore unexpected fruits, for the bearer of the missive returned later to tell me she was Miss Louise Owen, Lord Northcliffe’s secretary, and through her came Hannen Swaffer, and all the help which has come to the movement through his association. Books might be written of the results of the unwearied efforts Sir Arthur made to introduce people to a reliable centre, so that they too might get first-hand evidence of the facts in which lay “the hope and future of the race.”

But he had many sorrows as well as joys in his labours. No one strove harder than he for a just settlement in any dispute, and there were many in such a movement; he never provoked a storm, but no one was more prepared to fight to the bitter end if injustice was shown and had to be put right. Want of loyalty and gratitude among workers hit him hardly. “Most of the internal troubles come my way” he says in one note, “I love Spiritualism but I often loathe some spiritualists. “Well one can but slog on, but I wish sometimes I could avoid all personal intercourse save with a few chosen ones, and do my work with my pen from my study.”

All engaged in public work can echo his words, and we honour him the more that to the very end he made himself available for everything good and bad that affected the Movement.

Was there ever a stouter champion of the “Margery” mediumship than he? In 1925, he felt while Dr. and Mrs. Crandon were in the throes of the contest with Houdini, the “renegade psychic,” as he called the latter, that we ought to do something to show the brave couple in Boston that we were following and sympathising closely with their struggles. A few members of the College gladly collaborated with him in choosing and sending a silver loving cup “as a sign of sympathy with their long struggle for truth from a few friends in the British College of Psychic Science.” But his was the quick sympathy to see the cheer that might come to them, as it did, from such a token.

I often had cause as Hon. Sec. to the College, to appreciate his direct friendship and loyalty. He was not one to listen to slanders without seeking to find the truth. He wrote on one occasion, “I am worried about something: ..... came to see me and said that three mediums (mentioning their names) had all given as a reason for being no longer connected

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<sup>17</sup> Re:—“*Mr. J. Malcolm Bird, now Research Officer of the S.P.R., ...*” Malcolm Bird was Research Officer of the American S.P.R. (ASPR) not the London based S.P.R as it may suggest. Psypioneer Ed

with the College, that they were turned down because they used the name of Christ or associated Christ with their powers.”

“Of course, I am myself Unitarian, though with every reverence for the great Teacher, but I would naturally resent any penalising of a medium for his views or for his method of interpreting his own powers. But knowing your good sense, it is inconceivable to me that such a thing could occur. I am sure there has been some misunderstanding.”

This is the letter of a real friend, and I had no difficulty in refuting the slanderous charge, two of the mediums involved sending me personal letters for Sir Arthur as to their respect for the College, and the help that had been given them; as to the other it was news to me that she had any particular religious views. He was fully satisfied, and replied that he had dealt severely with the person who had made the allegations. As I look over his many letters during the years I see many instances of the same noble loyalty, and realise that what I experienced was being shared out to hundreds of other leaders to assist them in their fight. “It is team work with all of us, and each has his place,” he remarks again. Some of his critics, friendly and unfriendly, thought he was over loyal to the Cause, for he did not believe in bringing before the public every occasion for scandal, but that he was aware of it and deeply regretted it, was obvious. “I think our Movement needs a Sherlock Holmes quite as much as a propagandist at present,” was his comment in discussing one incident.

His loyalty was accompanied by an open-handed generosity. He realised, more than most, that societies needed financial help, and the College shared liberally with other centres out of the funds available from his lectures. “I send you a cheque for 50 guineas for the Fund. I wish it were more, but the need and poverty is great everywhere. For some years past I have never paid out less than £2,000 for the Cause, here or in America or abroad. The College will live in history, as will a good deal which is happening now.” What might our work not be if more, out of their abundance, saw the need and offered such help?

The influence of his two visits to the U.S.A. with Lady Doyle and his family was very deep. It is not too much to say that these gave a new standing to psychic study which is still felt. In my own visit, I met so many whose interest and effort had been notably quickened by a word from, or even by a look at, the great pioneers, as if a Pentecostal blessing had accompanied them.

A mass of correspondence from Sir Arthur to one who collaborated with him in preparing his two vol. “History of Spiritualism” came at one period into my hands, and bears witness again to an outstanding genius for friendship and loyalty and true comradeship, and is a witness also to the assiduity and labours he devoted to finding out the facts dealing with early Spiritualism in U.S.A. and in Britain. For two years the history was never out of his mind, in addition to his many other labours, public and private, for, as he says in notes embodied later in a letter to *The Times*:—

*“Spiritualism has been the butt of the wits and the scorn of the highbrow, as its great prototype was before it, but even its warmest opponents must now admit after two generations of effort, that ridicule and misrepresentation are not going to put it down, and that it is destined not only to live but to grow. At present it is known to most men by its weaknesses, real or alleged, even as early Christianity was to the Romans, who saw nothing of the great realities behind, for man is always weaker than the truth which he may champion, but we who know what the effects of the facts have been upon our own minds and souls, know beyond all doubt that a very great thing has come into the world and that it is our duty, in season or out of season, to call the attention of our fellow mortals that they may share our knowledge.”*

Here is the key of the labours put into the “History of Spiritualism” as well as to all the gigantic efforts our leader, in conjunction with many others, put into a glorious ten years. 1920-30 will indeed live in the history of Spiritualism, and the names of Arthur and Jean Conan Doyle are emblazoned at the very head in the very heart of the Sacred Scroll which tells the story to those who will follow and bear the burden and heat of the coming days.

B. McK.  
[Barbara McKenzie]

And on page 217 is this valuable insight by Stanley De Brath<sup>18</sup>:—

## **A.C.D., AS I KNEW HIM**

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s secretary in psychic matters, I know what an enormous mail he received from all over the world. A few of these letters were abusive and libellous, marked by him with a single note of exclamation (!), and not a few came from individuals who regarded their own trifling and commonplace experiences as heaven-sent mediumship, but there were, now and again, real human cries for help, or of gratitude for guidance received. They were passed on to me with perhaps a single word—“Help,” “Foolish,” “Yes,” or “No.” In every important case I sent him a copy of my answer, so that he might be fully conversant with my continued correspondence.

Personally we were excellent friends, and I greatly valued the trust he had in me not to let him down in any way. In face of his Unitarian views (which I myself fully share) it seemed to me a notable instance of his breadth of outlook that he should have perceived the supreme import to all human history of the three facts on which he laid stress (1) Hebrew Monotheism; (2) the Mission of Jesus; and (3) Modern Spiritualism. He rightly said that the rise and fall of Empires is nothing in comparison with these as causes of human history.

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<sup>18</sup> De Brath was editor of *Psychic Science* from October 1926, until he resigned in April 1936.

If anyone will consider calmly and without prejudice what the world must have been without the influence of the Bible and even the mutilated and institutional Christianity of Europe and America, he will see that the perception of facts so large that they mostly escape notice, is the chief characteristic of a really great mind. Most of us fasten on some little portion, such as the wars of the 16th century, or the character of some outstanding leader, and base our estimates on that. To see events in perspective and proportion is one of the elements of greatness.

STANLEY DE BRATH.

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## WILLIAM VOLCKMAN

Victorian Spiritualists were outraged when one of their early materialisation mediums was seized during a séance at Hackney, London. News of this reckless act was published by William Harrison in his newspaper *The Spiritualist* on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1873 p. 461—“Gross Outrage at a Spirit Circle”.<sup>19</sup>

The culprit was Mr. William Volckman. His name is still remembered today and regarded as the type of irresponsible sitter that should be avoided at all costs in physical circles. Volckman was the first in Britain to take such action during a séance, in a bid to try and show that the masquerading *spirit form* was indeed the medium. Many of the later materialisation mediums would suffer similar attacks; some more than once.

Volckman breached the circle conditions of Mr. Henry Cook’s séances. He felt that the circle itself was in breach, because he claimed the medium, Cook’s eldest daughter Florence, was in fact acting as the *spirit form*—“Katie King”—and that the whole affair was a fraud. Mr. William Volckman claimed to take the ‘*responsible*’ position to show this!



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<sup>19</sup> This will be published in the next issue, Volckman’s side of the events was published by James Burns in the *Medium and Daybreak*—“My Ghost Experiences” which includes —“Gross Outrage at a Spirit Circle”

## But who was William Volckman, and what were his views or motives?

Modern reports, of what actually took place at Mr. Henry Cook's residence on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1873, and before, are often contradictory, sensationalised and incomplete.

The website:—Mysterious Britain & Ireland Mysteries, Legends & The Paranormal,<sup>20</sup> gives a nice overview of:—The Strange Story of Florence Cook and Katie King, but unfortunately it is flawed with many errors.<sup>21</sup>

Some incorrect points are:—“... Florence was holding a séance for the Earl and the Countess of Caithness ...”—“... William Volckman jumped to his feet declaring Florence to be a fraud and he seized an “apparition” by the wrist.”—“Volckman tried to drag the apparition towards a source of light ...”—“The Earl of Caithness and other guests rushed to seize Volckman, allowing the “spirit” to make his escape.”—“Volckman managed to free himself, rushed to the spirit cabinet and opened it ...”—“Mr Volckman was at the time engaged to Mrs Samuel Guppy.”

Ruth Brandon<sup>22</sup> states that *The Spiritualist* newspaper would not publish Volckman's letter in response to the incident, which is incorrect. Alex Owen<sup>23</sup> makes the same error as did Trevor H. Hall.<sup>24</sup> Actually Volckman's letter was published in *The Spiritualist* newspaper on December 26<sup>th</sup> 1873 p. 491.<sup>25</sup>

However, a fairly consistent part of the story is that, I quote:—“Volckmann told in the London press how he obtained permission to attend Florence's sitting by making a present of jewellery ...”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See:— <http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/occult/the-strange-story-of-florence-cook-and-katie-king.html>

<sup>21</sup> The site does hold a disclaimer for in-accurate information: —  
<http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/disclaimer.html>

<sup>22</sup> *The Spiritualists* - by Ruth Brandon, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1983 pages 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> *The Darkened Room* - by Alex Owen Virago Press 1989 page 257 notes no 66.

<sup>24</sup> *The Spiritualists* – by Trevor H. Hall, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. First U.K. edition 1962. Helix Press first American edition 1963 page 28.

<sup>25</sup> This will also be published in the next issue, in Volckman's “My Ghost Experiences”.

<sup>26</sup> *Spiritualism a Popular History from 1847* - by Joseph McCabe Dodd, Mead and Company 1920 page 146. The spelling Volckmann is the authors.

Some writers *suggest* that behind Volckman's attack, was the early physical medium Mrs. Agnes Guppy.<sup>27</sup> Barry Wiley,<sup>28</sup> states:—

“Volckman, a former member of the London Dialectical Society, was implicated in a plan of Mrs. Samuel Guppy, a notorious London medium, to disrupt Florence Cook's seances and, if possible, to expose the young medium. Guppy's hatred for Cook was such that in one version of the plan, Guppy offered to pay someone to throw acid in the face of Katie King, thereby destroying Cook's “doll face”. Volckman had gained entry to the December séance through a bribe of jewelry ...”

Volckman claimed, in his letter to *The Spiritualist*:—

“I may add that no third parties had any knowledge of my invitation to, or presence at, the séance in question”

Some references claim that Volckman was a respected Spiritualist, a psychical researcher, an experienced séance sitter, etc. He did sit on the committee of the London Dialectical Society created ‘to investigate the Phenomena alleged to be Spiritual Manifestations and to report thereon’, appointed on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1869.<sup>29</sup>

Some writers like Alex Owen, have referenced Volckman to the Dalston Association,<sup>30</sup> as does Trevor Hall. Volckman was certainly a member of the Association in the later part of 1873. This would suggest, depending on how active he was and the length of time he was *actually* a member, he might have come into close contact with the Cook family and with the majority of the circle members of Mr. Henry Cook's private circle.

### **Some points of observation:**

As said, depending on the length of time Volckman was a member of the Dalston Association he would at the least, have been acquainted with the core members of the Cook séances. One member of the *inner* circle of the Cook séances was Harrison, the editor of *The Spiritualist* newspaper. Moreover, one reason as to why Harrison took a back seat in the Volckman affair may have been because of Charles Blackburn who was present at the seizure of the *apparition*. The article that appeared in *The Spiritualist*—“Gross Outrage at a

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<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Volckman, as she then was, died at Brighton on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1917.

<sup>28</sup> *The Indescribable Phenomena* - by Barry H. Wiley Hermetic Press, Inc. Washington 2005 note on p. 148.

<sup>29</sup> Appointment of the Committee (iV): *Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society* – J. Burns, London 1873.

<sup>30</sup> *Thomas Blyton 1847c – 1933 And the Dalston Association of Inquirers into Spiritualism 1870-1880s*. Psypioneer Volume 3, No.7, pages 149-158:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.7July07..pdf>

Spirit Circle” was un-signed, Harrison<sup>31</sup> was at the séance in question, I would suspect that Harrison wrote it. He reluctantly published the reply by Volckman, and then appeared to more or less close the story.

Harrison was known for not holding back with his pen on alleged fraudulent mediums, as was Volckman’s claim about Florence Cook. However, at this time, the success of *The Spiritualist* was primarily due to Charles Blackburn for his generous financial support. Blackburn also strongly supported the mediumship, and financially aided the young medium here in question, Florence Cook. Harrison, I suggest, could not afford to come into conflict or upset Blackburn and potentially risk losing his financial help.

Just over a week before Volckman seized the *apparition* W. H. Harrison read a paper at the ordinary weekly meeting of the Dalston Association<sup>32</sup> “*Certain Problems connected with Mediumship.*”<sup>33</sup> This paper contained three headings so it was divided and discussed seriatim. Volckman was one of the speakers at this meeting commenting on some of the papers. On the first part “*To what extent are powerful physical mediums responsible for their actions?*” Volckman said:—

“... that in the paper just read, no distinction appeared to have been drawn between the influence of a spirit over a sensitive medium, and the influence of a powerful over a weak-minded person. There were many men and women—weak-minded persons—who were led to do evil by others possessing stronger wills. Were they, or those persons who led them astray, to be blamed.”

Later during the discussion Mr. Harrison, in the course of his reply, said:—

“... that in the case put by Mr. Volckman, the weak-minded person had the power of applying his own reasoning faculties to the arguments of the stronger minded individual, but in mediumship the reasoning powers of the sensitive were not consulted. The medium was a passive instrument in the hands of another. If mediums were irritated or went into a passion, unpleasant manifestations were sure to follow; he had seen such cases often ...”

Under the last section of Harrison’s paper “*What is the best method of protecting mediums from undeveloped influences?*” Mr. Luxmoore spoke; it was Luxmoore who was to sustain the public attack on Volckman’s actions. William Volckman did not speak during this section; other speakers were Harrison and Blyton:—

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<sup>31</sup> Psypioneer is presently compiling an article on William Harrison and his newspaper *The Spiritualist* (1869-1882)

<sup>32</sup> November 27<sup>th</sup> 1873.

<sup>33</sup> The basis of Harrison’s paper was, that the phenomena of mesmerism were so closely allied to many of those of Spiritualism, that the study of the one subject threw a considerable amount of light upon the other. At the end of the meeting Blyton suggested the formation of a committee of inquiry into such matters.

“Mr. Luxmoore said, I would say, by surrounding them with none but kindly and affectionate sitters—by such as attend *seances*, not with minds full of ideas of trickery and deception, but with minds desirous of searching for truth. It is invariable in all spiritual experience, that when we go out honestly in search of truth we find truth, but if we go out in search of falsehood, with mind, predisposed against the acceptance of facts, we often find falsehood. The influence of any minds in a circle that suspect the medium is bad and hurtful alike to the medium and the manifestations, Indeed, the influence of suspicion is most detrimental, and enables adverse spirits to come and produce manifestations that have all the appearance of trickery on the part of the unfortunate medium. I would not admit for instance, to circles where the more advanced physical phenomena are obtained, those who were strangers to the elementary phenomena of tilts and raps. Nay, I will go further, and say that there are many Spiritualists—of some experience too—whom I would not admit to such circles for fear of breaking down the manifestations and injuring the medium. All who inquire into the marvellous phenomena of Spiritualism should begin at the beginning, and form circles at their own homes, in their families, and with trustworthy friends, for the elementary manifestations, without a proper knowledge of which the wonderful higher developments could neither be understood nor appreciated. He was very careful not to invite to his house persons who had not full confidence both in his own honesty and that of the medium. (Applause)

Was Volckman motivated in any way by this meeting and the concluding discussions! Or was he indeed, motivated simply by this own belief that Florence Cook was a fraud and should be exposed. A similar alleged exposure later befell Cook (then Mrs. Corner) when Sir George Sitwell seized the full-form materialization under the auspices of BNAS in 1880.<sup>34</sup>

Most reports suggest that Mrs. Agnes Guppy was behind the attack on Cook carried out by William Volckman, whom she was later to marry after the death of Samuel Guppy.

There are other references that allegedly involve Mrs. Guppy’s attacks on mediums motivated by jealous hatred, which were directed towards Mrs. Jennie Holmes and Florence Cook; we will not directly concern ourselves with the disruptions encountered by the Holmes.<sup>35</sup> But from a letter sent to D.D. Home from Nelson Holmes dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 1876,<sup>36</sup> I will quote part:—

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<sup>34</sup> *The seizure of Mrs. Elgie Corner* - Psypioneer Volume 2, No.8 page 164, see: —  
<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP2.8August06..pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Description from a séance held on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 1873 is recorded in Stainton Moses notebooks. See:—Stainton Moses and Contemporary Physical Mediums, *LIGHT*, Autumn 1963, page 138. Disruptions at the séance did not involve Volckman but a James Clarke (J.C.).

<sup>36</sup> Taken from the:—*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* - Vol. 54, part 195, 1964 pages 58-59.

In January 1873, Mrs. Guppy called at our residence, 16 Old Quebec St., London, W. and endeavoured to enlist our co-operation in a plot whereby a certain Mr. Clark, Mr. Henderson, and one Vlockman (sic) were to be hired to attend a seance at Miss Cook's, and watching their opportunity, at a favourable moment, while the manifestations were in progress *to throw vitrol (sic) in the face of the spirit*, hoping thereby to destroy for ever the handsome features of Miss Florrie Cook, and thus at one fell stroke to effectually remove from further use a medium who, Mrs. Guppy claimed, had and was taking all her, Mrs. Guppy's, friends away from her and upon whose patronage Mrs. G. had long depended.

While reciting this horrible scheme to us, she seemed fairly possessed by a legion of fiends, and her rage at Miss Cook and 'her doll face', as she termed it, was fearful to behold. When I realised the full import of this loathing (sic) affair, I immediately ordered her from the house, and the next day wrote to Mr. Samuel Guppy, her husband, and gave him notice that his wife could never again enter our house.

The day following, the poor old man called and tried to reconcile the matter and with tears in his eyes earnestly pleaded that the affair should go no further. This I could not promise, as I felt it my sacred duty, let the consequences be what they might, to notify Miss Cook and her friends. This we, Mrs. H. and myself, did at Mr. Luxmoore's immediately following the interview with Mr. Guppy.

To many, whom we thought it our duty to inform, the story seemed to (sic) horrible for belief, and a general desire prevailed on all sides to hush the matter up.

From Miss Cook, Mrs. Guppy now turned her rage against us,<sup>37</sup> and soon after sent a party headed by Henderson, the photographer, to tear down our cabinet and otherwise break up our seances in London, in which scheme, however, they were signally foiled.

This is an extraordinary letter, and causes more questions while it gives a motive to place all the blame, *entirely* on Agnes Guppy.

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<sup>37</sup> William Harrison in *The Spiritualist* (April 1<sup>st</sup> 1873) published that the Holmes's were subjected to much planned disruptions, attempting to break down the manifestations; e.g., lights put on during dark séances, and an unnamed person tore down the screen to a cabinet for face materialisations. There is a distinction between the Holmes and Cook séances, Holmes were public séances whereas Cook was by invitation only. Face manifestations at this time were comparatively new; the history of *Spirit Faces* will be published by Psypioneer in a future issue.

- 1) Mr. Mrs. Nelson Holmes could not be called entirely credible Spiritualists. When they came to England (from Philadelphia) they were charged with dishonorable attempts to raise money.<sup>38</sup>
- 2) Mrs. Holmes later (1874) claimed to materialise “Katie King.”
- 3) It appears that the charges against Mrs. Guppy’s were founded simply on the authority of the Holmes, but as we note they were dishonorable and also had a possible motive with regard to “Katie King”!
- 4) In the letter it said that when Mrs. Guppy called at the London residence of the Holmes in January 1873, and revealed her *alleged* plot to hire (amongst others) Volckman:—“to attend a seance at Miss Cook’s, and watching their opportunity, at a favourable moment, while the manifestations were in progress *to throw vitrol (sic) in the face o f the spirit*”—“...as I felt it my sacred duty, let the consequences be what they might, to notify Miss Cook and her friends. This we, Mrs. H. and myself, did at Mr. Luxmoore’s immediately following the interview with Mr. Guppy.”

But if this is actually true, how did Volckman obtain an invite to the Cook residence? Mr. Luxmoore<sup>39</sup> certainly knew William Volckman; they were debating together at the Dalston Association just days prior to his seizure. Cook, the Corners,<sup>40</sup> and Mr G. R. Tapp all belonged to the Dalston Association as did many of the Cook’s friends.

How could such a warning be given to a Justice of the Peace, and to the family of a young girl and their friends; and then the *named* assailant to be admitted to the séance?

- 5) The plot as stated by Nelson Holmes was:—“*whereby a certain Mr. Clark, Mr. Henderson, and one Volckman (sic) were to be hired to attend a seance at Miss Cook’s.*” I have already noted a Holmes séance on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 1873 “J.C.” disputed the séance, see footnote 35. Who then were Mr. Clark (J.C.), and Mr. Henderson?

Clark was associated with the Guppy’s and their friends e.g., the famous physical medium Charles Williams. Clark was a developing physical medium but being held back by health problems, and within these circles at this time he was going under the name J.C.

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<sup>38</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* – Third edition edited by Leslie A. Shepard, Gale Research Inc 1991 volume 1 p. 771.

<sup>39</sup> John Chave Luxmoore was a wealthy spiritualist, prior to moving to London he was a country magistrate at Alphington, Devon. It was at this time he discovered mesmerism, and in the mid 1840s Luxmoore was recorded in *Zoist* as healing through mesmerism.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Elgie Corner married Florence four months later.

Henderson (Mr. A. L. Henderson, of 49, King William Street, London Bridge), was noted among Spiritualists for his intense scepticism, but was very friendly. It is interesting to note that Henderson and Mr. Guppy attended a Florence Cook séance on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 1872.<sup>41</sup> Henderson with the medium's permission introduced a new tying method to secure the medium; he also was given permission for him alone to examine the room and cabinet for as long as he pleased.

Florence Cook had also attended Agnes Guppy's séances<sup>42</sup> when Henderson was present

- 6) There are no indications in any of the reports that Volckman intended to harm Florence Cook!
- 7) So did Nelson Holmes add the names:—Volckman, Clark and Henderson later; that is, after the events. Or are there earlier references of Mrs Guppy's alleged intentions pre-dating the 1876 letter to D.D. Home?

There is no question that Volckman had previously met Agnes Guppy before his actions, on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1873. Volckman was one of the speakers at a debate at a Spiritualist Society in Finsbury.<sup>43</sup> Under the heading of "Dark Seances" was a report of a séance where the medium was Mrs. Guppy, of which I quote an edited version:—

## DARK SEANCES

Mr. Moncure D. Conway then rose and read a report of a *seance* at which he and others had been present. He said that after the last meeting of the society, he told Mr. Shorter that, notwithstanding all his previous failures in Spiritualism, he was willing to try again, consequently was asked to go to a dark *seance* at Mr. Guppy's house. He (Mr. Conway) expressed a wish that as it was to be in the dark, anything that spirits might be supposed to bring into the room might be too large to have been concealed in the room previously. He requested also to be allowed to bring a friend with him, and the permission being wanted, he took with him Mr. W. K. Clifford, Professor of Applied Mathematics at University College.

The *seance* took place on the 6th of November, 1873. Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. Guppy, Miss Houghton, Mr. Crawford, Mrs. Fisher, Mr. Tebb, Mr. Volckman, and Mr. T. Shorter. The room was completely examined by Professor Clifford, Mr. Crawford, and himself. They also examined the table.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Spiritualist* December 15<sup>th</sup> 1872 page 40.

<sup>42</sup> *The Spiritualist* December 1<sup>st</sup> 1872 pages 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> Spiritualism in Finsbury—*The Spiritualist* November 21<sup>st</sup> 1873 pages 408-411.

Mrs. Guppy sat between Professor Clifford and himself. They were satisfied that her hands and feet did not move all through the *seance*. The door was locked by Mr. Crawford, and the key given to Mr. Conway. All present joined hands, and the lights were put out. They were then asked to wish that spirits would bring certain things into the room. Mr. Conway wished for a band-box, Mrs. Fisher wished for sausages, and Mrs. Guppy for a roast potato. (Laughter) After a time things were heard falling on the table. When a light was struck, a herring, an onion, a carrot, a nail, a string of sausages, and other things—(Laughter)—were found upon the table. The lights were again put out, and Mrs. Fisher complained that her chair was being drawn from under her. Soon afterwards it was thrown on the table. Afterwards raps told them to go to tea. After tea the company re-assembled, but before that Miss Houghton and Mrs. Fisher were compelled to return home. The rest of the company sat around the table as before, holding each other's hands, but nothing occurred. After reading his report, Mr. Conway added that both Mr. and Mrs. Guppy seemed to think very little of the *seance*, and he (Mr. Conway) thought it to be absolutely worthless. There was nothing on the table which could not have been thrown there by any designing person, and although he had no reason to suppose anybody present to be designing, it was absolutely worthless for any purposes connected with that meeting.

His band-box was not thrown on the table. Only those things which had been asked for by Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Guppy were thrown upon the table. At other times he had met most of the other persons spoken of as good mediums. He had met Forster who, it was said, could reveal writing enclosed in sealed envelopes, but who could not read any for him. Once he was chaffed in company by many mediums, where about ten or twenty of them were present. He took out his purse and said to them, "If you will tell me how much money is in that purse I will spend the rest of my life in investigating Spiritualism." After a time a lady said spirits impressed her to inform him that there were "seventeen" pieces of money in the purse. He took them out and there were twenty-nine. Did Mr. Noyes know that the late Archbishop Whately was a Spiritualist? Was he certain that the medium of whom he had spoken did not know that Dr. Whately was called the White Bear?

Mr. Noyes said he was sure she did not know it. He knew her. She was the wife of an eminent physician.

The Chairman asked how he (Mr. Tebb) knew that his colleague could tie the Davenport Brothers better than himself, his colleague being a stranger to him?

Mr. Tebb replied that he himself was a poor hand at tying knots. His colleague did it well, and was a man not chosen by the Davenports, but elected by the audience, who were satisfied with him.

Mr. W. Volckman asked Mr. Conway if any of the articles mentioned by him could have been thrown upon the table by persons who had their hands held?

Mr. Conway replied that they could not have thrown them at the moment their hands were held, but he must remind those present that evidence taken in the dark was not evidence at all. (No, No!) He did not wish to affix any stigma upon anybody present at the *seance*; he should be sorry to say anything to wound the feelings of anybody; he would merely say there was nothing which could in the slightest degree be accepted as evidence.

Mr. Volckman said that the holding of hands was one of those points which should be cleared up. Accordingly, he had endeavoured to supply an omission in the report. He held in his hand two depositions made by the two ladies who left after the first part of the *seance*. Mrs. Fisher deposed that during the time that the manifestations occurred, her hands were held by Mr. Guppy on one side and Miss Houghton on the other, and were so held while her chair was placed on the table. Miss Houghton deposed that her hands were held by Mrs. Fisher on one side and Mr. Conway on the other. Mr. Volckman added that these depositions supplied the missing links which he thought ought to have been supplied in the report. Mr. Conway had said that he wished something large to be brought. He (Mr. Volckman) had recently had a curious experience in that respect, which he would not attempt to explain, but would merely state the fact. He was requested to wish something to be brought into the room, and the moment before he asked for it, he himself did not know what he should ask for. But he suddenly decided upon a sunflower, and in less than ten seconds a great sunflower plant, with about a bushel of dirt about its roots, was placed upon the table. He would not go into this matter theoretically, he would simply state the fact.

Mr. Conway said it was painful for him to pursue the matter, but during one of the *seances* Mrs. Fisher mentioned she had only taken her hand away to get her handkerchief.

Mr. Volckman replied, that her deposition said that “during the time the manifestations occurred” her hands were held. It was true at another time her hands were disjoined for one moment, after asking permission.

Mr. Percy Hickson said, that after practice for a week, he would undertake to place sausages on the table with his feet, but he would say nothing further on that point, as he did not wish to talk about a *seance* at which he was not present.

Whether Volckman was actually a puppet of Agnes Guppy, a skeptic—psychical researcher—or simply a Spiritualist believing in the truth we do not know. Certainly Mrs. Guppy was a pioneer Spiritualist and at one time a respected medium with many testimonials; in many ways she prepared the way for Florence Cook and the Holmes’s.

To conclude this part, we can also note that even those who witnessed Volckman's seizure tell stories that contradict what is otherwise known. One of the sitters present was the barrister—Henry Dunphy, who later makes this claim in *The Spiritualist*, Feb., 1874, page 66.

Quoting from the account <sup>44</sup> of Mr. Henry Dunphy:

“I was seated between Lady Caithness and Mr. Blackburn, holding a hand of each.” . . . “The apparition then advanced to the portion of the room farthest from the cabinet, when a person jumped up, caught the figure round the waist, and held it, exclaiming ‘It is the medium!’ Two or three gentlemen present rushed forward and caught him, and a struggle ensued. I watched the result with considerable interest, and observed that the figure appeared to lose its feet and legs, and to elude the grasp, making for that purpose a movement somewhat similar to that of a seal in the water. Although the person who made the attempt was apparently well able to hold on to anything he might happen to clutch, the apparition glided out of his grip, leaving no trace of corporeal existence or surroundings in the shape of clothing.”

Given the *consistency* of the reports, there is little or no question that when the apparition was seized by Volckman the lights (gas) were extinguished!

How did Dunphy see the de-materialisation of the apparition?

William Harrison after publishing Volckman's initial letter, in his newspaper *The Spiritualist*, refused to publish more. Volckman turned to James Burns for help in publishing his side of the events. Burns agreed, and covered the story in two issues, starting in the *Medium and Daybreak* on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1874 under the heading “My Ghost Experiences”—Part 1, The Struggling “Ghost” and concluding in the next issue.

In the next issue of *Psypioneer* we will start to publish William Volckman's response in full.

Paul J. Gaunt

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<sup>44</sup> This is published in the *Facts of Psychic Science* – by A. Campbell Holms University Books, Inc 1969 page 400 originally, published in 1925. Campbell Holms also makes a historical error by stating:—“... a Mr. Volckman broke the rules and seized it at a séance in the house of Mr. Luxmoore on December 9th, 1873.” The séance was not at Luxmoore's but at the Cook residence in Hackney, London.

Notes by the Way:

## GORDON HIGGINSON AND THE HISTORIAN

The historical significance of Gordon Higginson (1918-1993) need not be argued. He was president of the SNU for 23 years, which is more than twice anyone else. Had he not passed away, he could have continued to be re-elected into the new millennium.

His leadership would be described by sociologists as charismatic, that is, he owed his position in part to exceptional gifts. As with a number of theosophical leaders, his popularity was impervious to accusations of fraud. His hard work and generous nature endeared him to thousands.

There has been little discussion of how successful his leadership was. We can suggest two conflicting views for readers to choose, or modify.

1) His efforts saved the SNU from collapse and led to a more effective system of administration based on a streamlined executive committee and a large Council.

2) His lack of interest in the detail of administration (famously, he was reluctant to reply to letters) led to a permanent state of disruption.

And then there is the question of fraud. Having inherited Stansted Hall, though without an endowment, the SNU built up a college; but had always given the job of principal to their SNU president, *ex officio*. Thus it came about that a centre intended to raise standards of mediumship was nominally directed for two decades by a man who for forty years was the centre of charges of fraud.

To the outsider, it may seem strange that GH could survive all such charges without, say, stepping aside at least temporarily; and indeed that, if there was fraud, more people did not speak out. But apart from the natural tendency to keep criticism internal in minority movements which are unpopular among society as a whole (“for the good of the Movement”) there were good reasons why those high and low mostly remained silent.

English libel laws are notorious throughout the world for favouring the person who claims libel. Any psychic publication must therefore think very carefully about printing evidence about living mediums. Consider what happened to “Two Worlds” when it accused William Roy of fraud. He sued, and dropped the case only when he sold his story to the Sunday Pictorial.

Or recall “London Spiritualist”, a monthly which attacked the SNU when GH was president (see also note at end]. The SNU sued the editor and the author of the article; they also sued the printer, who settled out of court, and the editor’s wife who was involved in the business. The LS did not survive.

A Spiritualist who gives negative testimony must expect negative consequences. Thus a member of a distinguished Spiritualist family in London recently commented in a Spiritualist Chatroom:

“As you may know, at the time of Gordon’s presidency, my dad was vice president - and my mum was very involved with the Lyceum nationally. She was at Stansted, and Gordon was to hold a seance there. Somehow, she noticed that in the “medium’s chair” there was some gauze type of material stuffed into the cushion. She was very suspicious of its presence, but had no evidence that he had placed it there or was going to use it. I well remember her concern as to what to do about it, possibly she told Charles Coulston, I don’t know, but she was very troubled by this.”

A friend of GH responded:

“What utter nonsense! Anyone who attended as many materialisation seances at Stansted as I did knows that there was no special ‘medium’s chair’ neither did it have a cushion. The chair used was any one of the many in the library available for students and attendees. To impugn the integrity of Gordon Higginson after all these years is quite disgraceful. I might add that I knew [names deleted] and they never suggested any impropriety to me.”

Which caused the gentleman to add:

“No, my mum didn’t know who to tell or what to do about it—she was quite shocked. She did say that this particular chair had been placed specifically for Gordon's use.”

Or on the mental mediumship side, an experienced Spiritualist wrote privately in 2010:

“I arranged for Gordon to come to ....., the church was very angry that he gained access to the church records prior to his demonstration which was evident in the demonstration, complete with an error! I was linked with Stansted, so an exposure would place me in a difficult situation so the whole affair was covered up.”

A Spiritualist publication may also lose readers if it prints accusations of fraud. In May 2008 we reprinted the 1960 infra red exposure in “Psychic Observer”<sup>45</sup> of some physical mediums. Some American Spiritualists in 1960 cancelled their subscriptions, and quite soon the “Psychic Observer” was observing no more; it folded...

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<sup>45</sup> Psypioneer Volume 4, No.5 pages 105-118—*Fraud uncovered at Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp – Psychic Observer*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.5May2008.pdf>

Psychical research journals are also likely to be circumspect. Naturally, material published by them is checked for libel. Individual researchers are cautious too. When the late Tony Cornell published some case files on mediums, initials were resorted to where the medium was still with us. (see *Psypioneer* June 2008.<sup>46</sup>) Moreover mediums may be understandably reluctant to sit with a psychical researcher who has been linked, especially in the Spiritualist press, with an accusation against a medium.

There is however a new factor: and that is the Net. Generally the public has a limited memory. What happened to GH in the 1950s at the MSA or CPS is forgotten, as is the Sunday People story, the Bristol case, and many more. But the Net now remembers, justly or otherwise. Thus Noah's Ark Society, if one does a Google search, is always linked with a disputed incident involving a medium and a trumpet, even though it was not one percent of their many conferences, or valuable publications.

Brand names such as "Spiritualism", "SNU" or "Arthur Findlay College" were able in the 1970s to emerge with limited damage from temporarily high profile problems involving GH. Today the possibility of permanent image damage from a mediumship malfunction is much greater, and if anything the media are more voracious.

LP.

## Note:

### **The 1982 libel case at the Royal Courts of Justice.**

In the London Spiritualist, Walter Earrey (editor) and G. Fleming alleged financial malpractice at Stansted, and also reprinted an offensive nickname for the AF College there. (I suspect that before doing this they consulted nobody.) The SNU and three leading officers sued, and would probably have settled for an apology, but the pride of WE prevented this. Neither side would back down, costs mounted to over £9000, but when the trial took place, GF was reported to have withdrawn to Ireland.

In the trial, there was some tedious wrangling about inventories and what had gone missing and how, that would not surprise anyone familiar with the problems of hotels. W. Earrey subpoenaed a number of Spiritualists to give evidence, a distressing business at times, as it involved very personal matters. Although homosexuality had been legalised in England in 1967, some witnesses felt obliged to deny it in court. After the case, there was a meeting at Scotland Yard to discuss perjury, at which a police officer pointed out that since in many court cases, two versions of events were presented, there was likely to be a good deal of this around, but not much could be done.

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<sup>46</sup> *Psypioneer* Volume 4, No.6 pages 140-141—*Last minute halt to infra red tests:* — <http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.6June08..pdf> . This article makes reference to: "*They Walked Among Us*" by Louie Harris (wife) *Psychic Press* 1980, much shortened from the original manuscript. The original manuscript has now been published see *Psypioneer* volume 6, No.4 pages 89-93—*Book Review-Alec Harris* — Paul J. Gaunt:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.4.April2010..pdf>

In England, newspapers can report court proceedings without fear of libel. As a result, the offensive nickname was read by a million people in the Daily Telegraph, rather than a thousand in the London Spiritualist! Walter Earrey's defence had been justification, but the jury inevitably found that he had not justified his statements. They awarded total damages of £225. This tiny sum reflected their distaste for the goings on which had been described to them, some of which had not even been at Stansted. Mrs Earrey was found not guilty, the jury exercising common sense and clemency.

The sting lay not in the damages but in the costs; however Earrey had arranged his affairs in advance to avoid paying them. Thus ended a typical libel case which caused much distraction and worry over several years to the innocent, and benefitted only the lawyers. Almost nothing has been written on the case since (readers are invited to correct any errors) but it was historically significant.

LP.

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Paul J. Gaunt
