

PSYPIONEER

Founded by Leslie Price

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[Letter sent to Psypioneer from Malcolm Gaskill author of 'Hellish Nell' in response to an article in 'Psychic World', April, 2007 issue]

Dear Sir,

Readers following the saga about whether or not Helen Duncan was visited in Holloway Prison by Winston Churchill may have seen the recent contributions by Michael Colmer and Ray Taylor in *Psychic World*.

Here Colmer asserts that the claim made by Duncan's granddaughter, Mary Martin, that Churchill did indeed pay her a visit must make doubting 'armchair historians' (of which I am one) change their opinions. No chance. Historians, armchair-bound or otherwise, rely on empirical evidence to determine truth. The fact that Mrs Martin swears the veracity of this episode because, as she is quoted, 'my grandmother told me so' is neither here nor there. Duncan was not a reliable witness. Taylor adds that 'people who don't believe it, only rely on documents'. Quite so.

There seems to be no end to this beguiling rubbish. It is true that there is no evidence to prove that Churchill did not visit Duncan in Holloway, but is it really very likely? Unlike the editors of *Psychic World*, I have read the Cabinet minutes and state papers involving Churchill from this time, and he was quite unbelievably busy with prosecuting the war. Furthermore, the only oral historical source for this ever having happened was Duncan herself. It's strange that no civil servant, bodyguard, governor, warder, prisoner, or anyone else remembers the occasion.

Psychic World now would have its readers believe that 10 Downing Street 'has launched its own public opinion poll' to seek the nation's opinion as to whether Duncan should be pardoned. This is plainly ridiculous. The petition was set up online by a Duncan supporter, 'Gordon of Downing', as it has been any UK citizen's right to do since November 2006. At the time of writing - 2 April - there were 397 signatures.

Yours faithfully,

Malcolm Gaskill

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**Book Review by Leslie Price: -**

## **HARRY PRICE REASSESSED**

In the twentieth century, the most famous UK psychical researcher was Harry Price. So everyone interested in the pioneers must consider him. He placed us all in his debt by bequeathing his library to the University of London.

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/historic/hpl.shtml>

Recently students of Harry Price's work have been greatly helped by the web site <http://www.harryprice.co.uk/> which has presented much valuable source material.. The site explains that there have been conflicting biographical assessments of Price, ranging from a person of basic integrity, to an out and out rogue.

In a new readable biography "Harry Price- The Psychic Detective" (2006, Sutton Publishing, £18.99 ISBN 0-7509-4271-1) by Richard Morris, the author is decidedly negative about Price. Morris has used not only the archives of the HPL, now fully catalogued, but also those of CPS among many other sources. Morris, like Trevor Hall before him, is sceptical of everything that Price wrote, not least basic autobiographical details.

A typical example is the Stella C case (on which see the comment "Light on Stella C." *Psypioneer*, November 2004). Morris suggests that Price did not meet her on a train (p.66) but more likely though Mercy Phillimore of the LSA... Stella and Harry probably began an affair (p.67), she became pregnant maybe (p.68) and perhaps had an abortion (p.69). (Those who recall the more speculative pages of Trevor Hall's work may experience a sense of déjà vu here.) The Stella C séances were poorly controlled (p.70) and Price himself may have been involved in faking them.

Morris does demonstrate that Price was often guilty of sharp practice in his manoeuvrings in and out of the séance room. He was not to be trusted. So when he affirms his belief or disbelief in something, we cannot take it at face value.

This presented a problem for Spiritualists, most of whom had no experience of someone as devious. Price found it expedient at various times, to present himself as alternatively hostile or sympathetic to Spiritualism, to play off the British College of Psychic Science against the LSA , the London SPR or the American SPR, and to make use of Spiritualist and non-Spiritualist editors who found him a good source of copy.

However, Morris does not always draw the obvious conclusion that when Price “exposed” someone, that too could not be relied on. He would accept that Price framed the medium Rudi (p.170), but not that the spirit photographer William Hope was also framed, though he admits “Many questions about this experiment remain unanswered.” (p.53). In fact the Hope case, (discussed in *Psypioneer* February 2006) evokes strong language from Morris. “Then one man [i.e. Price] exposed the movement for what it was” (p.xiii). Hope’s Crewe Circle “brought about a radical shift in spiritualism, convincing ordinary people that a gifted observer could peer into another dimension.” (p.48) but surely spirit photography already had a long history.

Harry Price was involved in so many cases that any student of psychical research will want to have this ground-breaking biography to hand. Indeed, there is a good case for a further edition, with even fuller notes and expanded index.

Where next for Harry Price studies? Absent from this biography is PN editor Maurice Barbanell, another consummate publicist of the 1930s. The files of *Psychic News*, not least his inimitable diary column “All Worlds are One” would make a good source for their relationship. At Stansted, the papers of Ernest Oaten, editor of *Two Worlds*, though published in Manchester, also illuminate further Price’s relationship with Spiritualism.

## LESLIE PRICE

(No relation to Harry Price.)

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Note by Psypioneer: We continue our four part series which began last month, Modern Spiritualism, 1928 by Herbert Thurston, pages 22 – 43:

MODERN SPIRITUALISM

CHAPTER II

THE CAUSES OF PAST FAILURE

FROM the data furnished above it is clear that the Spiritualistic movement in the United States, which started with such tremendous energy, had worked itself out in a quarter of a century, and that, regarded as a serious menace to orthodox Christian belief, it was in 1875 practically speaking moribund. From that time forth Spiritualism in the land of its birth has been no more than an undistinguished unit in a crowd of fantastic rival cults. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Theosophy, Christian Science, and eventually New Thought, were founded upon its ruins. I have already quoted an editorial in *The Spiritualist* newspaper for February 12, 1875, which made frank avowal of the lamentable set back which the adherents of the cause had sustained. Ten months later another leading article in the same journal reverted to the subject in the following terms.

Strange changes have taken place in Spiritualism in America; there was a time when two or three thousand Spiritualists attended the Sunday services in the Boston Music-hall, whereas now only a hundred or two are to be seen there. Mrs. Hardinge (1) has withdrawn from the rostrum, because she does not like the way in which the business of Spiritualism is transacted in that country; and altogether a temporary reaction has set in. We attribute this to the circumstance that little or no deep research or scientific observation of phenomena has been carried on there, so that little real knowledge has been acquired; but mediums have been multiplying faster than the dangers and advantages of mediumship have been unravelled, and half-educated talkers have uttered much nonsense, mixed with a little intelligence, from public platforms, and, with no standard of excellence imposed upon them by the body at large, have imperfectly and illadvisedly mooted many wild social problems in the name of Spiritualism. (2)

Naturally the editor, having consideration for the feelings of his fellow Spiritualists, speaks in guarded language. He talks of "a temporary reaction," but he goes on in the same article to deprecate indiscriminate proselytism. It is more important, he urges, to make a careful study of mediumship and to investigate the laws and facts of Spiritualism. "*Those who in their haste wish to rise like a rocket, must expect to fall like its stick,*" – which is a not inapt description of what had actually happened – and he ends with the aphorism that "*vertical growth is more required than lateral extension in the present state of the Spiritual movement.*" Practically speaking, this amounts to an admission that promiscuous dabbling in the occult was bound to prove harmful to the man in the street whose dominant motive is an unhealthy curiosity and who is devoid of the education or guidance which could enable him to exercise his critical faculties. In any case the set back to American Spiritualism in the 'seventies is a fact beyond dispute, and we may very well follow

the English editor's example in asking ourselves what were the causes which brought it about.

There can be little doubt that for one thing the devotees of the cult had wearied and found that there was nothing in it. Though thousands of people tried to develop as mediums, the mysterious faculty, whatever be its nature, is possessed by only a small proportion of mankind. First-class mediums are extraordinarily scarce and still more rare is the good medium who has the strength of character to maintain his or her moral integrity. With indifferent and decadent mediums, inane, worthless or lying communications predominate. When the first wonder has worn off that any sort of intelligent answers should be returned at all, people discover that they really learn nothing. Mr. Horace Greeley, a man of exceptionally well balanced judgment, was deeply interested in the early manifestations of Spiritualism. He investigated it conscientiously, was in touch with the best mediums, and remained to the end convinced of the reality of many of its physical as well as its mental phenomena. Writing in 1868, the lady mentioned above, Emma Hardinge, in her book, "Modern American Spiritualism," states that, as editor of *The Tribune*, Mr. Greeley's "generous and manly treatment of the matter through its columns had already exposed him to the calumnious sneers, which are everywhere directed against those who without avowed partisanship for the subject, ventured even to treat it with candid impartiality." (3) But, without invoking any sort of religious motive, Greeley, at a later date, pronounced definitely against Spiritualism.

The so-called spirit communications [he wrote] are vague, unreal, shadowy, trivial. They have added little or nothing to our knowledge. . . . I do not know that they proceed from those who are said to be their authors, nor from the spirits of the departed at all. Certain developments indicate that they do, others that they do not. (4)

It would be easy to show that much disappointment was already experienced by enthusiastic devotees themselves. At first it was hoped that the spirits from the plenitude of their superior knowledge would lend invaluable aid in the solution of the problems of science, history, archaeology, etc. But soon all such anticipations were abandoned. M. Flammarion, throughout his life an ardent Spiritualist, proclaimed at an early date that the communications obtained through mediums and automatic writing "have not led science forward one single step; nor has any obscure, mysterious or illusive point in history been cleared up by the spirits."

Horace Greeley's non-committal attitude was also shared by Lloyd Garrison of *The Liberator* (5) and by a number of other prominent Americans who, being contemporaries of the movement from its earliest stages, were large-minded enough to make it the subject of serious inquiry. On this side of the Atlantic the conclusions of the late Earl of Dunraven were precisely similar. No man ever had better opportunities for investigation. For a year or more he lived in almost daily contact with D. D. Home, the greatest of mediums, when he was at the height of his powers. Lord Dunraven was always convinced of the genuineness of the physical phenomena, but he writes:

My own experiences took place more than fifty years ago and since then I have taken no active interest in the subject. I abandoned it for several reasons.

Phenomena were all of the same character. I "got no forrader." I found that I made no progress, or at any rate not sufficient progress to warrant further investigation that was not very congenial to me, and was for some reason or other physically exhausting. I observed that some devotees were inclined to dangerous extremes, and became so much possessed by the idea of spiritual guidance in the everyday affairs of life as to undermine their self-dependence and to weaken their will-power. (6)

In the same context Lord Dunraven goes on to declare that he could never satisfy himself as to the identity of the spirits which purported to communicate through Home when entranced. There were times when the medium seemed to reproduce perfectly the habits of thought, the tricks of speech and the very accent of those whom Lord Dunraven himself had known well before they passed into another world. On other occasions, however, the impersonation was quite unconvincing, and the communicators appeared ignorant of many things which it was inconceivable that they should have forgotten.

Not less remarkable is the testimony of the English barrister, Mr. H. D. Jencken, who as the husband of Katie Fox, one of the two foundresses of modern Spiritualism, must have had endless opportunities of investigating the subject. On November 22, 1875, Mr. Jencken, presiding in London over a meeting of the National Association of Spiritualists, delivered an address on the unreliability of communications received through mediums. At the expense of a rather long quotation, it seems worth while to reproduce the exact terms in which *The Spiritualist* reported the most significant passage in his speech.

So far as he (Mr. Jencken) had seen, an objectless waste of power in telling lies characterized a large proportion of spiritual communications. Why was this? Was it that the messages came from very inferior beings who surrounded particular individuals? Circumstances such as these very much opposed the progress of Spiritualism. Once spirit messages were firmly believed in in America, so that trading companies, and even banks, had been founded in consequence of the contents of such messages, the result being that the mortals who so acted soon discovered that they had been woefully deceived. Through the mediumship of his own wife - who was better known to many present by the name of Kate Fox - he sometimes had wonderfully reliable messages, but he found that when she went to other seances the messages became unreliable, and continued to be untruthful for several days afterwards; the influences seemed to cling to her. The persons present at circles influenced the communications very much. . . . If pure communications were wanted, the medium must be purified and kept away from all worldly influences; until this was done, he believed that no reliable messages would be obtained, save under exceptional circumstances. This might seem a harsh judgment on his part, but it was brought home to his own mind by hard experience, and he believed that those who had most experience in the subject would give the same testimony.

The discussion which followed among these Spiritualists in conclave is extremely interesting. Nearly all who spoke were men whose names were prominently connected with the movement. One or two of them were themselves mediums, and all had had considerable personal experience in attempts to communicate with the departed. A Mr. Charles Hunt, with entertaining *naïveté*, remarked that "if others than

Spiritualists had been present at that meeting they would have thought that all, from the chairman downwards, were a pretty lot of people," but Miss Kislingbury, a very energetic advocate of the cause, replied that this (i.e. frank discussion) "was one of the objects of the meeting. Only members were admitted; they were therefore not in the attitude of believers against disbelievers, and consequently interior questions connected with the movement could be discussed which could not with advantage be published to the outside world." Finally, Mr. Jencken, the chairman, in replying, protested "that he and others, who were largely experienced in the actual facts of Spiritualism, did not want utterly to overturn the faith of those who had less; they only contended that a large proportion of the communications were unreliable, and that in one case at least home conditions had tended to make them more reliable." (7)

Let me only remark, by the way, that if this was the experience of those who owing to their financial position and their prominence in the movement had the very best available mediums at their command, what was and is likely to be the fate of the common herd of inquirers who possess neither money nor influence and who have perforce to be content with such mediumistic assistance as is locally within reach?

Another cause of the collapse of the Spiritualistic movement was undoubtedly the strong prejudice created by the multitudinous exposures of mediumistic trickery which at this period were exceptionally numerous. D. D. Home himself was one of the few physical mediums who was never convicted of fraudulent phenomena. He is honoured by Sir Arthur C. Doyle not only as a man of the highest principle but as one "*of so sweet a nature and so charitable a disposition that the union of all qualities would seem almost to justify those who to Home's great embarrassment were prepared to place him on a pedestal above humanity.*" (8) Nevertheless this god-like and charitable personage expressed the opinion that the Spiritualism of his day was honeycombed with every kind of imposture and moral obliquity.

As early as 1865 Home, to the huge scandal and disgust of his fellow-Spiritualists, denounced the famous Davenport brothers as "unmitigated humbugs"; (9) and in 1877 he published his book "Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism," which from beginning to end is little more than an indictment of the gross trickery practised by contemporary mediums. Of course this out spoken volume was severely criticised by many journals devoted to the cause, but some of the leading Spiritualistic organs in the United States were candid enough to own that such plain-speaking was called for. For example, *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* of Chicago remarks:

The true medium will thank Mr. Home for his urgent demand for light instead of darkness, and test conditions at every seance. But there is a large class of them, who play the confidence game with their gifts or live by foulest imposture, who will cry persecution . . . We are standing at the dawn of a new era in Spiritualism. The day of the wonder-worker, of credulity and rascality, is fast closing . . . The wandering medium, who insists on his own conditions, and those of fraud, who objects to anything having the least value as a test, will be discarded. The cause has been dragged down to the dust by these, and their gross impositions have made even the name of Spiritualism a reproach. (10)

In January, 1876, Dr. G. Sexton, the editor of the (English) *Spiritual Magazine*, had written:

The detection of mediums playing tricks is becoming so common that unless Spiritualists as a body take some steps to prevent it the movement will be simply ruined. It is no wonder that the public is sceptical of the whole thing when one after another of the recognised mediums is caught cheating. (11)

In the same journal a few months later we may read that "*trickery in connection with Spiritualism is so rife that it threatens to swamp the entire movement,*" and this is followed by a letter from "*one of the oldest and best-known Spiritualists*"- it is so the editor describes him- "*a man who has done noble service in the cause during the last twenty years and more.*" In this the writer observes:

Mrs. Hardinge-Britten says the cheating of mediums in the United States is most notorious and scandalous, and I must confess that when I look down the long column of advertisements in The Medium and Daybreak of all sorts of announcements of seances, cures, materializations, etc., grave doubts of the bona fides of many of these pretences assail me. . . . In any case I am persuaded that there is an enormous amount of trading on poor Spiritualism which if not looked to and exposed by Spiritualists themselves, will soon bring awful disgrace on the cause. (12)

Similarly, Mr. Samuel Carter Hall, one of the kindest of men, writing to Home the same year to say that "*Spiritualism is now in a sad state of disorder and is producing frightfully evil work,*" expressed a hope that by Home's forthcoming book "*it will be released and relieved from the burden of filth that weighs it down.*" (13) In a letter to Dr. Sexton, the editor of "The Spiritual Magazine," in 1875, Home himself says:

I could give you details concerning the dark seances of the present day which would thrill you with horror. I have my information from persons who were present and detecting the imposture were honest enough to expose it and of course were roundly abused. These dark seances . . . are the hot-beds of imposture. (14)

And the writer goes on to explain with indignation that people at such seances, even when they have detected the fraud, allow it to continue because it amuses them "*to hear Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So having their faces touched and caressed by a hand perfectly incarnate,* but they, thinking it was a spirit, saying "Oh! dear, dear spirit, do touch me again'." So again a little later we find in "Spiritual Notes," the organ of the British National Association of Spiritualists, a communication in the following terms:

Well, the present state of public Spiritualism in England, is to my mind really disgusting. On the one hand we have numerous tricking mediums assisted by tricking spirits. Exposure after exposure occurs; sometimes the whole paraphernalia of spirit-show, drapery, beards and lamps, in the shape of phosphoric oil bottles, have been taken from the medium. A few weeks ago a well-known public medium was caught by his best friends. That medium confessed his guilt, apologized, etc., and not one of the organs of our movement, except yours, spoke a word about it! Is this love of truth? . . . No impartial Spiritualist will deny the truth of the facts I have pointed out. (15)

Let me emphasize the fact that the testimony I have quoted - and much to the same effect might be added - does not come from the assailants of the movement or from

pulpit orators, but proceeds from those who were not only sympathisers but Spiritualists of long standing, men of recognized authority and wide experience. No wonder that confidence was forfeited and that a creedless public, craving for sensations of a certain quasi-religious flavour, turned their backs upon Spiritualism and paid court to Mme. Blavatsky, Mrs. Eddy, Messrs. Moody and Sankey, and at a somewhat later date to John Alexander Dowie, "Pastor" Russell, Billy Sunday, and countless other charlatans. So far as the bulk of the population were concerned, the glorious era of illumination which spirit intercourse was to introduce before the end of the century was quite forgotten. Spiritualism indeed remained, but it took its place with half-a-dozen other competing cults and henceforth it could never again make any pretence of dominating the public eye.

One other cause which beyond question had much to do with the failure of Spiritualism as a movement was the acute contradiction in the theological outlook of some of its most energetic representatives. One has only to read the reports of the various Conferences which discussed the question of organization, to see that year after year every effort to frame some satisfactory "Declaration of Principles and Purposes" was invariably wrecked over the profound divergence in the religious views of those who took part in the discussions.

Writing in September, 1873, the editor of the *Spiritual Magazine* points out that "*hitherto all attempts at national organization, whether in America or England, have met little or no success, generally indeed leading to a more complete disorganization, by bringing out more conspicuously the wide and fundamental differences on important subjects which divide Spiritualists, and which vitally affect their conceptions of Spiritualism, and of the spirit and objects that should be aimed at in any movement for its more general diffusion.*"

In the beginning what we may call "Christian Spiritualism" was in the ascendant, and though the Christianity was of a very vague description, respect for the Bible and its teachings was generally inculcated. But soon a party arose which was avowedly opposed to the creeds and to any belief in revelation. Such doctrines as those of eternal punishment, the virgin-birth, the Incarnation and the atonement, were treated as degrading to man's intelligence, and many leading Spiritualists who belonged to the "progressive" faction grew impatient at the idea of making any compromise in the interests of peace. The difficulty arose again and again, but a good idea of the situation may be obtained from the report in *The Spiritualist* of the 1875 Conference (see that journal for Dec. 3rd of the same year).

For example, Mr. Herbert Noyes declared that "*Spiritualism was destined to do away with the foundationless faith of the Church; he did not think it was right to be diplomatic in dealing with the subject, or to use words which concealed their real meaning; it was best to speak out, for sooner or later Spiritualism would have to fight with tremendous ecclesiastical prejudices.*" Dr. Sexton, on the other hand, himself a convert from materialism, considered that "*the Christian Church had been in all ages the stronghold of the belief in the reality of a spirit world. . . . He had been told that Spiritualism was about to do all kinds of impossibilities; it was to overturn everything and to establish a new order of things upon earth, but as a matter of fact it was only the power of communicating with the spirit world; beyond that it gave very little knowledge at present. The teachings of spirits were as varied as those of men in the*

flesh." He went on to illustrate his point by referring to the question of Reincarnation, and he added that while "*some spirits taught as true all the commonly received ethics of Christianity, others again taught the belief of Dr. Clark (there present) and of some persons in America, that there was no God.*"

The same Dr. Sexton also remarked at a later stage that "*he had friends who had become Roman Catholics in consequence of the spirit messages which they had received; those friends believed that the spirits who taught the doctrine were true and reliable in their utterances.*" In our own day the anti-Christian faction have almost everywhere gained the upper hand. Christ is indeed spoken of, but only as a sage or *guru*, like Buddha, Mahomet or Confucius, and some Spiritualistic journals, *e.g.*, *The Two Worlds*, seem to make it a formal part of their programme to run a tilt against religious dogmas of every kind and description.

Finally, there was another element in the situation which was also of considerable importance, and it is that element which, coming again to the surface in some of the communications received in this country in quite recent years, affords perhaps the most serious reason for disquietude as to the future. From the very beginning of the movement people had been scandalized by the fact that a number of the most successful mediums were notoriously identified with a very low standard of moral conduct. When a critic in 1852 expressed his misgivings on the point in a letter to the (American) *Spiritual Telegraph*, the editor did not attempt to deny the allegation, but contented himself with saying that a man who wants to send a message does not consider the moral character of the bearer, but selects the instrument best qualified to convey his despatch to its destination. (16)

In E. W. Capron's book, "Modern Spiritualism, its Facts and Fanaticisms" (Boston, 1855), we already find reference to "a class of Spiritualists - or more properly speaking, a few individuals - who seek to make Spiritualism responsible for what is known as Free Love." Further he adds: "*just now an attempt is being made to identify Spiritualism with this theory of religious libertinism, and many of the editors of the country are horrified at it.*" (17) Still Mr. Capron, though not wholly uncritical, was an ardent advocate of spirit intercourse. Notwithstanding his disclaimer, there can be little doubt that even then the trouble had struck deeper than he was willing to admit. The Rev. Adin Ballou, whose enthusiastic anticipations of the new era of enlightenment ushered in by the rappings were quoted last month, subsequently proclaimed in his Autobiography that he was compelled to withdraw from any connection with Spiritualism because of its moral laxity. (18) Certain it is that when Mr. Algernon Joy, who was the Honorary Secretary of the British National Association of Spiritualists, paid a visit to the United States in 1875, he reported to the Association on his return:

Because of the doctrine of Free Love being so much mixed up with spiritualism, there are many spiritualists who never mention their belief, because they do not wish to be mixed up with the disputed question. I was introduced to one lady in San Francisco, and was afterwards shocked by discovering that she had had four husbands, one of whom cut his throat because she left him, and the other three are still living. . . . I was told that probably one-third of the acknowledged spiritualists in the United States are Free Lovers, and that is a reason why many who are spiritualists in faith do not avow it. The other two-

thirds of the spiritualists are perhaps the most violent opponents of Free Love that exist anywhere. (19)

The same Mr. Algernon Joy, whose official position in connection with English Spiritualism authorizes us in believing him to be a trustworthy witness, had previously written a long letter from the States dealing with the Free Lovers (or as they styled themselves, the "Apostles of Social Freedom"), in the course of which he says:

It is monstrous that Free Love, which had not the remotest connection with Spiritualism, should play the cuckoo and shelter itself under our wing, thereby damaging our reputation; and I cannot understand the position assumed . . . by the editor of The Banner of Light and of the Chicago Spiritualist at Work [these were two of the most influential journals of the cult] when they say that they are bound to afford a free platform and therefore must admit Free Love articles and letters. (20)

On another occasion Mr. Joy also stated that "*probably at least half of the avowed Spiritualists in San Francisco are Free Lovers,*" and he added, "*I understood that there were no Free Lovers who were not avowed Spiritualists.*" Similarly we find him remarking that "*when in Boston, I heard Moses Hull preach there; his address was an admirable one, and although he is said to be a great Free Lover, he made no allusion to that subject; his remarks were an explanation of a few chapters of the New Testament containing some rather striking ideas in relation thereto.*" Mr. Moses Hull was, of course, a professed Spiritualist and the majority of his audience are stated to have been Free Lovers as well as Spiritualists. (21)

An English medium, J. J. Morse, visited America earlier in the same year, and speaks in similar terms:

I am sorry to say [he writes], but nevertheless it is true, that our brethren are sadly divided over here, the cause being the much-vexed question of Free Love, or, as it is called by the opposite side, "free lust." Public sentiment outside our ranks and the sentiments of all true souls within them, my own included, join in condemning this - to put it mildly - most peculiar doctrine. . . . (22)

It is impossible within reasonable limits to give any adequate idea of the shiftiness and insincerity which marked the attitude of many Spiritualists and in particular of some prominent mediums towards the Free Love movement. The same Mr. Morse, who professed to be shocked at these teachings, is definitely stated in the (Boston) *Banner of Light* to have "*moved a Free Love resolution*" at a Camp Meeting on Aug. 28th, 1875. When taxed with the fact; he simply evaded the challenge. It was only then, when public attention had been directed to these scandals, that it occurred to Mr. Burns, the editor, to denounce Mrs. Woodhull, "*the president of that contemptible bubble, the American National Society of Spiritualists,*" and to speak of "*the filthy correspondence which used to exhibit the practical aspect of Free Love teachings in Mrs. Woodhull's Weekly.*" The worst feature in the case was that these immoral doctrines professed to emanate from archangelic spirits who communicated through the mediums. I may note that in *The Sunday Express* for March 4, 1928, Sir A. C. Doyle speaks with marked respect of the trance addresses of Mr. J. J. Morse. (23)

It was all very well for Mr. Burns, the editor of *The Medium*, to declare in his journal in October 22, 1875, that "*the Free Love movement is dead in America,*" and that "*Mrs. Woodhull's paper has abandoned the advocacy of Free Love doctrines months ago,*" adding satirical comments on the fact that "*the filthy thing Free Love has all at once become a saint*" and that now "*Mrs. Woodhull's lugubrious harangues are plentifully interlarded with Scripture texts.*" But Mrs. Woodhull was still a highly popular person with her fellow Spiritualists, and the Mr. Morse, whose words were quoted above, wrote on March 20, 1875, in enthusiastic terms of "*Mrs. Victoria C. Woodhull, the great champion of 'woman's rights' and 'social freedom.'*" He visited her and she is described by him as "*amiable and intelligent, with a certain womanly grace and most evident earnestness . . . she is an entertaining and intelligent speaker and draws large audiences to hear her.*" It is also a curious fact that *The Spiritual Magazine* in November, 1876, ⁽²⁴⁾ treated Mrs. Victoria Woodhull's repudiation of Free Love principles as an event of quite recent date. She has "*at last discovered that these doctrines would be sure to be taken advantage of by persons whose only object in adopting them would be to furnish excuses for the gratification of their own depraved appetites.*"

Be this as it may, the freedom of discussion tolerated in the most respectable of the American Spiritualistic organs must have been extraordinary. Mr. Joy commends the *ReligioPhilosophical Journal* of Chicago, but it appears that even in that paper absolute licence prevailed. A writer contributed an article to it which attempted "*to show the fallacy and nonsense of the Sermon on the Mount. He defined the Golden Rule as Free Love doctrine. He called the whole Sermon 'a batch of nonsense' and 'clear as mud.'*" ⁽²⁵⁾

These were, I think, the causes which half a century ago discredited Spiritualism among the more upright and intelligent of the American people. The cult was not, of course, eradicated, but in the United States it has never recovered the ground then lost, it has never won general respect, it has never been recognized as an elevating influence. It is because the same unsavoury tendencies are making themselves manifest in English Spiritualism now, that I judge all the new prophecies of world change, of unfettered communication, of guidance from on high, to be a mere *ignis fatuus* of mocking spirits destined to fade into nothingness as ignominiously as the promises made long ago to the Fox sisters and their contemporaries.

1) Mrs. Hardinge, afterwards known as Emma Hardinge Britten, was an Englishwoman by birth, who became in the U.S.A. a famous medium lecturer, and writer on Spiritualism.

2) *The Spiritualist*, Nov. 5, 1875, p. 217. This journal had also previously referred to the matter on Aug. 13th (p. 82), citing as the source of its information "the American spiritual newspapers which came to hand a few days ago."

3) Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism* (4th Ed., New York, 1870), P. 71.

4) Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York, 1869), pp. 234-241.

- 5) *Life of Lloyd Garrison*, Vol. III., pp. 375-376, and *The Liberator*, April 11, 1851 and 1852, *passim*.
- 6) Dunraven, "Past-times and Pastimes" (1922), Vol. I., p. 11.
- 7) *The Spiritualist*, Nov. 26, 1875, pp. 259-261.
- 8) "The Vital Message," pp. 54-56.
- 9) See *The Spiritual Times*, 1865, July 1, p. 206, and July 15, p. 222. Sir A. C. Doyle apparently does not agree with Home's verdict. He is strenuous in his defence of the honesty of the Davenportes.
- 10) Quoted in *The Spiritual Magazine*, Aug., 1877, p. 364.
- 11) *The Spiritual Magazine*, Feb., 1876, p. 71.
- 12) *The Spiritual Magazine*, Dec., 1876, p. 558.
- 13) "Lights and Shadows," p. 181. A lengthy notice of Samuel Carter Hall, who was a well known literary man, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and the editor for many years of "The Art journal," will be found in the "Dictionary of National Biography."
- 14) *The Spiritual Magazine*, Jan., 1876, p. 26.
- 15) "Spiritual Notes," Nov., 1880, p. 87.
- 16) See the Editor's laboured rejoinder in the *Spiritual Telegraph* for June 12 and June 19, 1852.
- 17) Capron, "Modern Spiritualism," p. 380. Anyone who reads Mrs. Hardinge's 23rd chapter, on the "Kiantone Movement," will see that as early as 1854 Free Love doctrines were working infinite mischief among the Spiritualist ranks, "Modem American Spiritualism," pp. 229-239 and pp. 362-364.
- 18) I have not been able to secure a copy of Ballou's Autobiography, but I had this quite definite statement in writing from the late Prof. Henry Ford of Princeton University.
- 19) *The Spiritualist*, Dec. 10, 1875, p. 279. Mr. Joy also gives the names of two Spiritualist papers advocating Free Love, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, and another paper edited by Moses Hull. This was *Hull's New Monthly Clarion*.
- 20) *The Spiritualist*, Sept. 17, 1875, p. 136.
- 21) See *The Spiritualist*, 1875, Dec. 10, and Dec. 17.
- 22) *The Spiritualist*, Jan. 8, 1875, p. 19.
- 23) For Mr. Morse, see the correspondence in "The Medium and Daybreak," beginning Oct. 15, 1875, pp. 666, 680, 684, 701, 744: and cf. Hardinge, "Modem American Spiritualism," P.P. 322-233.
- 24) *The Spiritual Magazine*, Nov. 1876, p. 520. Only a few months before the same journal had commented in feeling terms upon "the Free Love abomination which has fixed itself like a parasite upon American Spiritualism." *Ib.*, p. 81.
- 25) *Ib.*, April, p. 180.

..... End of chapter II.

A STUDY OF STAINTON MOSES

ADDRESS BY MR. A. W. TRETHERY

[**Note by Pyspioneer.** Although Anthony William Trethewy's name is unknown to the public today, he is one of the handful of persons ever to have read the entire surviving Stainton Moses material. His rare study "The Controls of Stainton Moses" (Hurst & Blackett, 1923) is indispensable reading for anyone seriously interested in that medium. He was a familiar figure at SPR meetings, and his own lecture "Personalities of Controls and Communicators bearing Ancient or Unknown names" (JSPR 27 1931-2 p.178-182) was followed by a discussion in which G.R.S. Mead and Charles Drayton Thomas took part. His critical assessment of "Mrs Piper and the Emperor Band of Controls" (PSPR 35 1926 pp.445-465) is also important. His death was reported in the annual report printed in JSPR Jan-Feb. 1946. The LSA meeting described in LIGHT below was possibly the first time the identity of the Moses controls was revealed in public.]

The outstanding feature of Mr. A. W. Trethewy's, address in the hall at 6, Queen Square, on the evening of the 1st inst., was the evidence it afforded of its author's painstaking care in mastering an immense amount of material and subjecting it to every possible test which investigation and research could apply in order to arrive, as far as possible, at a sound judgment. Not every subject could deserve the expenditure of so much time and effort, but in the case of William Stainton Moses we have a man who, as Mr. George E. Wright, the Chairman of the meeting, pointed out, is held by many of us in the very highest regard, not only because he was in effect the founder of the London Spiritualist Alliance and is still one of its presidents in spirit life, but because he was one of the greatest Spiritualists and most remarkable mediums this age has known. It was not without reason, therefore, that Mr. Wright congratulated the meeting on the fact that Mr. Trethewy, who had been making a special study of Stainton Moses' life and work with a view to producing, a monograph, was present to give them some of the results of that study.

Mr. TRETHERY began by acknowledging his indebtedness to the Alliance for having placed the manuscript books of Stainton Moses - "that great sensitive and champion of Spiritualism" - at his disposal. Others had worked before him in this field of study, notably F. W. H. Myers, whose articles on Stainton Moses in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, especially Nos. II. and III. in Volumes IX. and XI., covered much ground, and who apparently had had a further publication in view. He (the speaker) had tried to take up the inquiry where Myers' published investigations ended. His original intention was to publish the whole body of the automatic writing contained in the twenty-four manuscript books, with explanatory notes; on the text, and to show the results of his enquiries into evidential statements; but this plan had to be relinquished as too costly. Much of the script had already seen the light in "Spirit Teachings" or "Spirit Identity," or in the Proceedings of the S. P. R. or in "The Spiritualist" and LIGHT. The most important part of what had hitherto been withheld related to the identity of communicating spirits. This would now be published with the results of his investigations and a short précis of the twenty-four books, which would show the subjects of the portions not yet printed. Typed copies of all the books except No. III., which was lost many years ago, were in

the L. S. A. Library. It was on the question of identity that he wished to speak that evening.

Here Mr. Trethewy remarked, in passing, on the extra-ordinary degree of versatility which characterised Mr. Moses' psychic powers. Other mediums no doubt surpassed him in the particular lines in which they specialised, e.g., the direct voice-but none had a wider range of powers so notably exercised. There was never any scandal of suspected trickery, and there was no reason now to doubt his good faith.

The lecturer then proceeded to mention the classes into which the manifesting spirits might be arranged. The list began with eight Bible characters. In July, 1873, yielding to pressure on the part of Stainton Moses, "Imperator", the leader of the band of spirits, disclosed his earthly personality as Malachias, "the Messenger of Jehovah," who spoke in the days of Nehemiah, the author of the prophecies ascribed to Malachi in the Bible. He referred to Elijah, his "great master," as still guiding him, and to St. John the Baptist as having been controlled by him on earth. Both of these personages gave messages in the automatic script.

Of philosophers and sages "Doctor," who started the automatic writing and seemed to be second only in importance to "Imperator," had been an instructor of the Emperor Tiberius in the latter's youth, while "Rector" identified himself with an early Christian bishop who was banished from Tortus, near Rome, to Sardinia. The statements made by "Rector" about his earth life had been verified as far as possible, and though it could not be asserted that they were true, in no case did they seem to be false. One feature of his part in the manifestations was his power of reading books. The experiment recounted in "Spirit Teachings" was an extraordinarily successful book test under difficult conditions. "Prudens" gave some account of his life as Plotinus, which agreed with the authorities consulted without any serious discrepancy. He was responsible for the experiments when the spirit of Stainton Moses was taken from his body in London and photographed at Paris. Mentor was an Arabian philosopher who lived in the eleventh century. His account of his earth life was correct except for a mistake in a date. His main duty was the management of physical phenomena; he was very successful with lights and scent, did wonders with apports, and frequently helped in photography.

Commenting on the fact that Mentor displayed a sense of humour which one would not have expected from the records of his earthly career, Mr. Trethewy remarked: -

"After all, very little is known of the characters of these ancient personages, and if on the `other side' they have acquired a taste for working phenomena which they regard as scientific experiments one is hardly justified in rejecting their claims on the ground that they do not play their parts properly. If communication were established between the earth and Mars it is conceivable that in the early stages of the intercourse the inhabitants of that planet would regard with tolerant amusement the results of the experiments which interested our men of science and would refuse to believe that they were, in touch with the finest intellects of the earth."

Among the English historical characters the most important control was Grocyn, a man of letters who lived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He gave information about his earth life which agreed in the main with the authorities, but included some

statements which were certainly incorrect. He made musical sounds at seances and on one occasion, described by Mrs. Speer, he became so engrossed in producing musical notes of a special kind that he forgot to watch the medium's condition and drew too much power, with bad results to Stainton Moses' health.

Then there were the spirits of musical composers, attracted by the musical tastes of the Speer family; American spirits (the resemblance of whose handwriting in the script to their autographs on earth was in some cases striking); modern members of the band; and lastly modern spirits admitted for evidential purposes. This last class included the case of Blanche Abercromby, which had been exhaustively discussed by Myers and from the evidential value of which Mr. Trethewy had found nothing to detract.

Regarding the leader of the band, "Imperator," Mr. Trethewy remarked: -

"As Stainton Moses has said, the whole tone of Imperator', thought was different from his own. He has admitted, and the internal evidence of his writings shows, that his mind was inaccurate in matters of detail. On the other hand, Imperator was scrupulously exact. I can add nothing to the opinion implied by the statement of Myers that, though there is no proof of identity with Malachi, Imperator's communications are not out of harmony with his alleged personality."

On the question whether we were to regard the "controls" as secondary personalities created by Stainton Moses' subliminal mind, Mr. Trethewy observe that it was very hard to believe that the medium's personality, however deeply bidden, could of itself without his conscious knowledge show lights, make sounds, produce scents, move tables, and exercise other powers beyond his supraliminal ability. If it really had that power unaided, why was it that, as with many other mediums, some external agency professed to be the originator of every manifestation? Speaking generally and not with reference to Stainton Moses alone, Mr. Trethewy argued that sceptics in regard to the spiritistic theory who were now forced to admit the reality of alleged phenomena should be prepared with an explanation of this side of the question. He had seen no attempt to deal with it. Professor Richet appeared to ignore it. We were justified in asking this school of non-committal sceptics to state their case more precisely before we proceed to consider it seriously as an alternative hypothesis.

Having gone through the whole of Stainton Moses' story testing the development of the plot and the various situations by the subliminal as well as the spiritistic theory, Mr. Trethewy could only say that to ascribe everything to the unaided subliminal self appeared to him an incredible explanation. If this view of his was correct they must recognise the controls as external entities. Were they the persons they professed to be or were they false spirits? Imperator argued that it was inconceivable that spirits entrusted with so high a mission would start with lies in their mouths about their own credentials. To put this argument in the opposite form: If they were not the persons they professed to be, who were they, and why should false spirits come with such a message? And why did they not avail themselves of the loophole afforded by Stainton Moses' suggestion of a symbolical meaning in their claims when they found that to insist on their claims was, owing to his attitude of scepticism, an obstacle to the acceptance of their teachings? No theory could be proved true, and there were grave

objections to every one of them. No doubt the easiest course was to suspend opinion and to attack the views of others but if a choice had to be made there seemed to him less difficulty in supporting the claims of the "controls" to be truthful discarnate entities than in trying to make any other explanation fit the facts. (Applause.)

MR. HENRY WITHALL, in seconding the vote of thanks moved by the CHAIRMAN, spoke of the affection and esteem in which Stainton Moses was held by all who knew him. Boys educated under Mr. Moses at University College said they went to him because they could trust him. Ever since his passing his influence had been with him (Mr. Withall) and every change made in connection with the L.S.A. had been made at his inspiration or request.

MR. F. W. PERCIVAL, another intimate friend of Mr. Moses, described a wonderful sitting he had with him and the Speers in 1893 ⁽¹⁾ when from behind the curtained recess in which the medium sat entranced, solid globes of soft phosphorescent light, like full moons, came out one after another into the darkened room, rose and knocked against the ceiling, glided in and out among each other in rhythmic movement, and then returned in succession to the cabinet.

(1) This date of 1893 would be incorrect, William Stainton Moses died at Bedford on Monday 5th September 1892.

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## **Spiritualist Support between Wars**

By

**Gerald O'Hara**

There is today a lot of speculation among historians as to the extent of support for Spiritualism in the 1930s. I am able here to quantify from the lists given in "The Manual and Who's Who of Spiritualism and Psychic Research for 1936" the extent of that support. Jenny Hazelgrove quotes in "Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars" (Manchester University Press 2000) the following ( but adds that the Spiritualist press was prone to exaggeration): - in 1914 there were 145 churches affiliated to the S.N.U., 309 by 1919 and 500 were declared by Maurice Barbanell's Psychic News in 1932 to be affiliated. 520 were claimed to be in affiliation in 1937 by the S.N.U Secretary; the same Secretary claimed that there were twice as many not affiliated to the Union.

The Manual for 1936 definitively lists in the manner of the current S.N.U yearbook, 527 churches and temples affiliated to the S.N.U, (not including Barbados). 30 independent churches are also listed. The exact number of independent churches and societies can only be guessed at. 14 Psychical Research Societies are listed, headed by the London based British College of Psychic Science and 16 "Large Independent Societies" are mentioned.

Noticeably missing from the Manual are the lists of Greater World Christian Spiritualist League (G.W.C.S.L) churches which by the mid-1930's were set to rival that of the S.N.U. The stated aim of the central G.W.C.S.L organisation was "not to interfere with management of the churches and centres" The piece continues, "These may adopt such constitutions as they think best". The aim of the central organisation was to "bring about unity of effort in the Christian Spiritualist movement". Efforts to assess the strength of the Greater World at this time are hazardous. However, the Manual on p. 123 says, "Already to date (September 1935) 580 Churches are affiliated to the League". It continues that "there are C.S. centres in G.B. Portugal, Madeira etc" It boasted of 5 journals in as many languages. What is not clear is whether or not the 580 are all within the U.K. It also mentions that there were 20,000 individual members in this country and overseas.

In July 1949, the S.N.U President W. Lorraine Haig<sup>1</sup> speaking at the Music Hall Edinburgh at the A.G.M of the Union had this to say about the nature of support for Spiritualism.

"We have been accused of trying to found a new religious sect...but Spiritualism does not seek to do that". Its purposes, the President went on, were more educative. He continued that "scattered throughout the country were 500 churches with a membership of nearly 20,000." It is not clear if Haig is speaking of Class B [individual] membership of the Union or whether he is speaking overall of church membership. The chair of the A.G.M at the opening of the meeting gave the following figures specifically for church membership. "17,188 this year and 17,768 last year but returns had still to come in from 100 churches and an increase was expected". It is possible that when he gave his figures, Haig was generalising.

To date, speculative figures for the number of churches and their memberships for the period have varied. The above gives a firmer base for further research. Another anomaly of the era (1936) was the British Spiritualist Lyceum Union's lyceums are not listed. They were by and large housed within the same buildings as the churches they served. The B.S.L.U. was independent and did not formally merge with the S.N.U until 1948<sup>2</sup>. In 1936 only the district B.S.L.U. secretaries were listed - some 17 in all.

Support for the Spiritualist movement fell into different categories such as church member, the enquirer (or the curious), the researcher, the student, the bereaved and the séance goer who sometimes did not go to any other event. One form of tacit support that Jenny Hazelgrove does mention is the attendee at the large public meeting. These were a common feature of the day and many were held on all manner of topics. The big names Hannen Swaffer, Bertha Harris, William Redmond, Harry Edwards, Estelle Roberts and Helen Hughes held large meetings from the 1930's onwards. The medium Helen Hughes regularly addressed crowds of 2,000 to 3,000 while Estelle Roberts addressed 9,000 at the Royal Albert Hall. "Names" could be made on the circuits of national halls. The S.N.U Vice-President claimed in 1937 that applications to attend future demonstrations by Estelle Roberts had reached 60,000.

Nor were these meetings confined to the Metropolis. The Edinburgh Psychic College and library (now known as the Edinburgh College of Parapsychology) regularly held

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<sup>1</sup> See: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/2.5%20PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1948, the British Spiritualists' Lyceum Union became one with the Spiritualists' National Union. This had been approved unanimously by the annual conferences of both Unions last summer. *'The Two Worlds'* Friday Jan 9<sup>th</sup> 1948 page 11

public meetings at large halls around Scotland's capital that could attract 3000 people and big name speakers from all over the U.K. These events could be thought of as analogous to the T.V. mediums of today such as Colin Fry and Tony Stockwell. These modern mediums draw packed houses in theatres and halls around the country whose audience can be thought of as the "fellow travellers" of Spiritualism.

The above figures giving definitive numbers of the extent of Spiritualist support in the 1930's, supplement those in G.K. Nelson "Spiritualism and Society". This period has been called a golden era of British Spiritualism and these additional figures can now be used to quantify that era and provide a tool for analysis for comparing other periods (perhaps less robust) in Spiritualist history.

[Leslie Price has reviewed Gerald's recent book 'Dead Men's Embers'<sup>3</sup> incidentally this is now also available at 'Psychic News'.<sup>4</sup> Gerald is currently working on another book on the history of the 'Edinburgh College of Parapsychology', to be called "Mrs Miller's gift"]

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Psypioneer Note on the 'The Yorkshire Fairies': -

In the January⁵ issue of Psypioneer we published an article taken from 'Light' March 25 1922, p.186 'The Yorkshire Fairies'. Garth Willey, in Australia, who hosts this Psypioneer Newsletter and archives at his 'Woodlands Sanctuary Foundation' web site⁶ is an authority on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and noted in Mr. E. L. Gardner's *Light* article that he stated: - *It appeared that in 1917 two girl cousins, Alice and Iris, aged sixteen and ten, living in a Yorkshire village situated close to meadow-land and a glen in which they had often seen fairies,.....*. Garth pointed out that the girls' names were in fact: Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths.

Further research showed that in fact this was not an error in the 'Light' article. Garth continues: - In Arthur Conan Doyle's article in Strand, Dec 1920 he, also, calls them Alice and Iris and refers to the surname as the Carpenter family. He writes: "*We are compelled to use a pseudonym and to withhold the exact address, for it is clear that their lives would be much interrupted by correspondence and callers if their identity were too clearly indicated. At the same time, there would no doubt be no objection to any small committee of inquiry verifying the facts for themselves if this anonymity were respected. For the present, however, we shall simply call them the Carpenter family in the village of Dalesby, West Riding.*"

However, the 1920 article did include pictures of the girls and the purported fairies. Conan Doyle's later book "*The Coming of the Fairies*", published in March 1922, makes full disclosure of the actual names and location and includes the same photos of the girls contained in his Dec 1920 Strand article.

³ <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

⁴ <http://www.psychicnewsbookshop.co.uk/search.php>

⁵ <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

⁶ <http://www.woodlandway.org/>

I have noted an additional piece by the editor of *Light* September 23 1922 page 600: -

THE RETURN OF THE FAIRIES

To have done something to remove the "faerie legend" from the realm of fantasy to the region of fact is no slight achievement, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's new book may well justify such a claim. For here he has given us in his own graphic way the full story of the "fairy photographs" of Cottingley, fully illustrated not only with the fairy pictures but other photographs, all with a direct bearing on the central theme.*

With the impartiality of the true historian, he gives the testimony of those who believe in fairies and those who do not. In short, all sides of the case are presented, and the verdict is left to the readers of the book.

It will be remembered that Sir Arthur's first account of the matter appeared in the Christmas number of the "Strand Magazine," 1920, and that this was followed by a torrent of allusions in the Press generally and by a newspaper discussion that, but for the controlling hands of pitiless editors, might have raged interminably. Thousands of people were keenly interested, and the interest has continued although the Press has for the time ceased to reflect it.

The book puts into concise form all the essential material - at first widely scattered - of the story of the fairy photographs, deserved prominence being given to the part played by Mr. E. L. Gardner in investigating the case on the spot, and to his theory of fairies which we found both clear and reasonable, and by no means so disenchanting as might be supposed by those who think that a wonderful thing necessarily suffers by analysis. On the contrary, the wonder of the thing - if it be a true thing - is only deepened, "its loveliness increases." It is only the sham wonder that will not endure close scrutiny.

Not the least interesting part of the book for us was that which is devoted to the accounts of those who have seen (and who in some cases can still see) the elfin folk. There are many persons who lay claim to the gift; some of them are known to us personally as credible witnesses.

The book handles skilfully the objections and difficulties raised not only in regard to the photographs but the general question of fairies, and although this takes us at times into metaphysical regions the theories broached are very much in line with the discoveries made of late years in psychical investigation, which (pace several noisy and uninstructed objectors) has gained a secure place in the best thought of the time. It really seems as if the fairy legend, like the ghost legend, is in course of rationalisation and that the many elfin stories from the past had really a much better basis than the errant fancies of our forefathers. The "sub-man," that is to say the elf, may prove an ever more profitable object of study than the "superman," especially when it is found that he embodies so much of the poetry of Nature and the unsullied imaginings of the child mind.

However it be, let us welcome the fairies. As fancies, they did much to sweeten life and lend it grace, colour and romance. As facts, they may do even more towards restoring the old dulcitudes of soul - the serene and salutary things that belong to the life of Nature. So, looking from our window in Queen Square we may see visions that will make us less forlorn - a world to which the "little people" have visibly returned, no longer driven to the remote places by a distaste for human society, in which, as Mr. Gardner tells us (and we can easily believe it), they find at present little that is inviting and much that is obnoxious. Sylphs, undines, gnomes and salamanders - who shall say they are not amongst the millions of spiritual creatures which, as Milton tells us, walk the earth unseen both when we sleep and when we wake? It is something to have the poet's vision of fairies corroborated by modern research, especially when the creator of Sherlock Holmes has a share in it. We may hold with Browning that "a scientific faith's absurd," but a faith confirmed by science is another matter. Already we can hear the horns of Elfland faintly blowing.

"The Coming of the Fairies," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Hodder and Stoughton. (12s. 6d.)

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## **John Tyerman 1838-1880**

**[Note by Psypioneer.** *Readers will know how much space we give to primary documents, and the biographical sketch below is a readable example. It is taken from a monthly journal "Freethought" which was issued in Sydney in 1880. At that time, there was a closeness of association between Spiritualism and Freethought which was not found elsewhere. We are greatly indebted to the Australian psychic historian Bruce Williams<sup>7</sup> who included it in a valuable published compilation of pioneer material which he is hoping to make available on line shortly (and which we will announce).*

*This sketch however, informative though it is, is a good example of a problem sometimes found in psychic pioneer literature – unpleasantness is glossed over. For a truer picture, we may turn to Dr Alfred Gabay's "Messages from Beyond – Spiritualism and Spiritualists in Melbourne's Golden Age." (2001 Melbourne). This makes it clear that Tyerman had quarrelled with the Melbourne Spiritualists over the visit of the popular James Peebles from America, and that before his Anglican phase, he had been a Methodist minister in New Zealand. Tyerman is an important example of a clergyman who become not a mere fellow traveller with Spiritualism, but a militant campaigner against his former faith. We hope to publish more information about his sudden passing shortly.]*

Mr John Tyerman who is so well known to our readers as a painstaking, conscientious, and able lecturer of the subject of Freethought and Spiritualism, was, in the year 1871, and for some years previously, a minister of the Church of England, following his calling with that solidity of purpose and earnestness that is so apparent

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Williams 'The Power Beyond' Printed in Australia by Fast Books 1996.

in all his undertakings. He was located at Kangaroo Flat, Victoria, and was much respected by his parishioners. During the latter end of 1870, or the beginning of 1871, various of his congregation left the Church to follow the then rising knowledge of Spiritualism. A deputation of the Church Committee waited on him to urge him to preach against it from the pulpit. His reply was thoroughly consistent with the whole tenor of his life and works; and it would be well for society at large were it re-echoed more often that it is, either from pulpit, pen or platform:-

“I cannot consistently preach against a thing of which I am ignorant,” he said; “for were I to do so, I would only be exposing my own ignorance and presumption, and not Spiritualism. I will investigate it for myself, and if I find it is a fraud, or a delusion, or a mixture of both, as is supposed, then I will not spare it; but if I discover it is the truth (which I don’t for a moment expect), I must be equally candid - say so, and take the consequence.”

He kept his word, and soon made arrangements to attend a séance at the house of Mr John Allen, of Crusoe Gully, and put many test questions, that were answered immediately and without hesitation. This meeting, as though ordained by a higher will, was so forcible and conclusive, that he could but admit that it was wonderful and super-human power. “I gathered round me a trusted few,” he says, speaking of himself, “and went in for earnest investigation; and shortly I no longer doubted, but was a Spiritualist.”

His Bishop (Perry) was urged to interfere. Mr Tyerman concealed nothing, but told his belief openly and simply. His license was withdrawn, and he was suspended from the Church. He then determined to devote himself to the public advocacy of the new, but unpopular movement.

The first public meeting he gave upon the subject was in the Sandhurst Theatre, to an immense audience. A handsome testimonial was raised for him, to in some way compensate for the pecuniary sacrifice he had made. He was then invited by Dr Richardson and other influential residents of Melbourne to lecture in that city, and accordingly commenced a series of lectures in St George’s Hall (then the largest hall in Melbourne); for three years and a half he laboured there. By lecturing, writing, and other means, he managed ably to spread a knowledge of the truth among the people. During his stay he had three nights’ public discussion on the subject of Spiritualism with Mr David Blair, formerly a Presbyterian minister, and then a member of parliament, who had previously said he intended to stump the country to stamp out the new heresy. Since the discussion, which will forcibly tell of the able arguments used by Mr Tyerman, he has never been known to open his mouth publicly against the cause.

Mr Tyerman shortly after started a weekly paper, entitled *The Progressive Spiritualist*; but, unfortunately, he was enabled only to issue twenty-three numbers of it.

He was then invited by a committee of gentlemen to come over to Sydney and introduce the subject publicly amongst us. He made all necessary arrangements, and accordingly did so, creating- as our readers will remember- a great deal of interest. On the third and fourth Sundays he lectured to fully 2000 people. His stay was only for a month, and after his departure the Rev. John Graham came out forcibly in

opposition to the movement; so, being unable to meet Mr Graham as he would wish - openly, and before the world - he replied to him and all other opponents in the spirited and clever pamphlet entitled "Spiritualism Vindicated." Within a year after this he came over and adopted our city as his home. For three years he stayed with us, and almost without interruption gave his popular and interesting lectures to large and appreciative audiences.

He also visited Brisbane two winters, and was what we may term the pioneer of Freethought and Spiritualism there, and was met with flattering appreciation. During his stay in Sydney he has taken several journeys to both inland and seaport towns, and delivered lectures on various subjects, all of which have been marked with success.

He is also the author of several small works on the subject, the principal of which being, "A Guide to Spiritualism."

Unfortunately, Mr Tyerman's arduous and unremitting attention to the cause he held so close at heart began to tell upon his health, and by the advice of well-wishers and friends he determined to make a tour round the world, which he accordingly did.

On his trip through America he was enabled to see a great deal of the movement, and to add new testimony to its force, use and truth. He then visited England, and was met by all those numerous friends of the cause prolific on its shore with outstretched arms; and on February 20th, 1879, was accorded a hearty welcome at Claremont Hall, Penton Street, London, by a large Spiritualistic meeting, comprising many noble and influential names, the meeting being especially enrolled to do him honour. He lectured at Doughty Hall on several occasions, and was well and heartily received. He also delivered lectures at Newcastle-on-Tyne and various other places, and at each place met with most flattering receptions and success.

Mr Tyerman returned to the colonies by way of Cape Town, where he was requested by the Spiritualistic body there to remain and lecture; but arrangements would not permit.

A meeting was convened in Melbourne by the Victorian Association of Spiritualists, and gave him a most hearty reception and welcome back to Australia. On reaching Sydney - his home - a complimentary picnic was tendered to him, which was largely attended, and passed off most satisfactorily. His friends also presented him with a testimonial in recognition of his past services in the cause of Spiritualism and Freethought. After giving two lectures on the subject of his travels, he visited Adelaide, and met with a better reception than was anticipated, the inhabitants there being erroneously stigmatised as blindly orthodox; but his lectures were well received. The Very Rev. Dean Russel was drawn out into oral discussion on Freethought with Mr Tyerman.

From thence Mr Tyerman went to Dunedin, New Zealand, and fulfilled a three months' engagement with the Freethought Association of that city; then revisiting Melbourne, he gave a course of lectures under the auspices of the Victorian Association of Spiritualists. He returned to Sydney last Christmas, and at the beginning of the year re-commenced lecturing at the Victorian Theatre, which place he still fills every Sunday evening with an admiring audience; and we are sure our

subscribers and readers will united with us to wish him every success in the good work he so ably advocated. (1)

Mr Tyerman wrote A Guide to Spiritualism in 1874

1) P. H. Bridson article in Freethought - refer also Freethought article Dec 15, 1880.

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