

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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VOL. XXXIV (No. 5)

MAY, 1920

NO. 768

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## The Open Court Publishing Company

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MARRIAGE OF HERACLES AND HEBE IN OLYMPUS.

(From Gerhard, *Apolische Vasenbilder*, Pl. XV.)



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## THE KING OF THE MEDIUMS.

BY ROBERT P. RICHARDSON.

SPIRITUALISM, like other forms of the occult and mysterious, seems to have a perennial interest for the public mind. Ghost-stories and tales of messages from the dead are coeval with the human race, and spiritualistic "phenomena" far antedate the spiritualistic cult which only came into being toward the middle of the nineteenth century.

Our modern spiritualism took its rise in the "Rochester knockings" of the Fox sisters in 1848. These mediums soon found imitators, spiritualism became fashionable, and for a while mediumship and prosperity went hand in hand. Some years later the movement suffered a temporary eclipse, the priesthood having been too often detected in deception and fraud, while the inconstant public had found other fads more diverting.

The collapse was not complete; the faith of many believers never wavered, and the movement survived, though on a much diminished scale. Of recent years it has gained some ground and appears to be again approaching an apogee. The feats of their favorite mediums are brought well into view by certain eminent devotees of the day, but a discreet oblivion is decreed to the strange fact that the phenomena ascribed to the seers of the twentieth century are child's play in comparison with the prodigies of the palmy days of spiritualism. The doings of these older mediums can lay as much claim to authenticity as those of their successors, and it may not be unprofitable to recall some of the marvels of bygone days.

By far the most wonderful of the wondrous mediums of the nineteenth century was Daniel Dunglas Home. Born near Edinburgh in 1833, he had as father the illegitimate son of the tenth Earl of Home, while on his mother's side he was descended from

a Highland family in which the traditionary Scottish gift of the second sight had been preserved. Scotland did not long hold the heir to these powers, for, adopted by his aunt, Mrs. Cook, he was taken to the United States at the age of nine. His early youth was marked by one or two visions of the departed, but the first sign of real mediumship came at the age of eighteen.

At this time Daniel was not in the good graces of his aunt, a staunch member of the Kirk of Scotland, who resented her adopted son's espousal first of the Wesleyan and then of the Congregational heresy. One morning at breakfast, while the good lady was finding fault with Daniel and the prayer-meetings he attended, her ears were assailed by a perfect shower of raps all over the table. Young Home knew, he tells us, of the spiritualistic "Rochester knockings," but only in a casual way, and was as much surprised as his aunt. The latter ascribed these raps to the Evil One, but none the less became for some strange reason exceedingly angry at Daniel, accused him of bringing the Devil into her house, and seizing one of the chairs threw it at him. As the tale runs (told by Home himself), the only cause for connecting the phenomena with her nephew would seem to be his attendance at the wrong church, but with a glorious inconsistency the old lady next proceeded to send for the heretical village ministers, Baptist, Wesleyan and Congregationalist, and begged them to pray over Daniel.

The ministrations of these clergymen were of no avail. The rappings continued to occur, and furniture began to be moved about without any visible cause. Upon one occasion, as the table was running around the room, Mrs. Cook endeavored to drive the Devil away and stop the performance by placing the family Bible upon it. But the table jogged on at an even livelier gait, and when, determined to stop the motion, she threw her whole weight upon it, she was actually lifted up bodily from the floor.

A week of these performances, aggravated by the curiosity of the neighbors who almost besieged the house, exhausted the patience of his aunt, and Daniel was suddenly turned out of doors. Mrs. Cook, it would seem, acted as she might have been expected to behave had she believed herself the victim of the incorrigible pranks of an overgrown boy. That, however, she took no such view but believed the phenomena to be of supernatural origin we know from Home's own account, and this is all we have to go by.

On leaving the house of his aunt at Greenville, Connecticut, Home found temporary refuge with a friend in the neighboring town of Willimantic where he exhibited to the excited townspeople



the phenomena brought about by his mediumship. After a stay of some weeks he passed on to another place, Lebanon, as the guest of the Ely family. Here one of his first exploits was the recovery, under spirit guidance, of certain valuable title-deeds through which a lady in straightened circumstances came into her inheritance that had been withheld her for want of these missing papers.

Home was now fairly launched on his career as a medium. Solicited to take payment for his seances he constantly refused, and laid down the rule, to which he adhered for life, never to traffic in his mysterious gift. Henceforth he led the life of a man practising no trade or profession and with no visible means of support save the donations of his admirers. As a guest, exercising his mediumistic powers for the benefit of his hosts and their friends, he found welcome in one home after another; transportation to a new abode being provided, if not by those who would welcome the coming, by those who would speed the parting guest. Of suitable clothing he seems to have had no lack, and when he reached the higher circles of the European nobility and royalty itself summoned the great medium, it became customary to reward his exertions by a parting gift of valuable jewels. Thus abnegation went not unrewarded, and many a medium who eked out a miserable existence by seances at so much a sitter must have envied the lot of Home the unpaid.

The American audiences of Home soon included visitors from the extreme Southern and Western states who came from these remote quarters to observe his phenomena. And such men as Prof. David A. Wells of Harvard and William Cullen Bryant were so impressed that they drew up and signed a declaration describing the wonderful manifestations they had witnessed, winding up, somewhat dogmatically, with the statement: "We know that we were not imposed upon nor deceived." Dr. Hare of the University of Pennsylvania, Professor Mapes of agricultural chemistry fame, and Judge J. W. Edmonds of the New York Court of Appeals likewise investigated the phenomena, and though approaching the subject "as utter skeptics" all three became fully satisfied. Some years later Judge Edmonds wrote an introduction to Home's autobiography endorsing spiritualism in general and Home in particular.

The spiritualistic movement was now getting into full swing in the United States, and mediums were springing up everywhere. How far this competition affected Home's livelihood we do not know, but it appears he ceased to confine his ministrations to circles "consisting of gentlemen of education and means," and went

"amongst the poorer classes" in order to impart to them the cheering truth of spirit communion. At one time, he tells us, he was on the verge of studying for the Swedenborgian ministry, but was admonished by the spirits that his mission was a more extended one than pulpit preaching. Later he purposed taking up medicine, and was supplied by his friends with the means to pursue the preliminary studies necessary for entrance to a medical school. But, though the spirits interposed no veto, this project never materialized. Indeed Home already possessed, it would seem, greater control over disease than the physicians. Early in his career he had healed Mrs. Bill of Lebanon of a dangerous illness by going into a trance and making passes over her, prescribing, however, further treatment with simple herb remedies. "In Springfield, also," he tells us, "there were many instances of the sick being healed. I was so sensitive to any one who came near me in a diseased state, that I not only myself felt but accurately described their symptoms, and the seat and causes of the disease." None the less, the healer seems to have been unable to heal himself and to have mistrusted mediumistic diagnosis in his own case: his left lung became affected, the symptoms grew more and more alarming, and "Dr. Gray of New York and other eminent medical friends whom he now consulted" united in declaring his life in danger and in recommending a trip across the Atlantic. "This recommendation," says his wife, "was the sole and sufficient reason why Home quitted America." Financed by his friends for missionary work in the cause of spiritualism, he sailed from Boston in the spring of 1855, and taking up quarters at a London hotel in Jermyu Street, soon found a firm friend and ally in Mr. Cox, the proprietor.

Europe at this time was an almost virgin field for the exhibition of spiritualistic phenomena. In England Home had, in fact, no predecessor worth mentioning aside from Mrs. Haydon, a medium far below him in power. Successful seances were held in the rooms of his hotel, and his fame began to spread. Lord Brougham and Sir David Brewster were among the early sitters at Cox's hotel, and when a little later Home held seances at Ealing, as guest of a London solicitor, the circle had as members Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Trollope and T. Adolphus Trollope, the first of these being admonished by the spirits to believe on the cross. The Brownings likewise attended a seance here, and from this arose the poem "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." Home's enemies claimed this to be the result of his detection in fraud, while his friends contended that Browning's vanity had been deeply wounded by the spirits placing a wreath of

clemantis on Mrs. Browning's head instead of upon his own, and that in revenge he unjustly attacked Home in these verses.

At all events, the Ealing seances resulted in an invitation being extended to Home to become the guest of Mrs. Trollope at her Florence villa. Home went to Italy in the early autumn, and passed several months in Florence. Requested to give his attention to a haunted house occupied by an English resident he held several seances there, and succeeded in laying the ghost whose noises disturbed the repose of Mrs. Baker. Equal success attended the evocation of new and more desirable spirits, the manifestations at Florence being especially strong. Upon one occasion, while the Countess Orsini was playing upon a grand piano, the latter "rose and balanced itself in the air during the whole time she was playing." Investigation showed that the spirit of the Countess's father had taken this quaint way of announcing its presence.

Favored though he was by the spirits Home did not find Florence a bed of roses. Scandal mongers accused him of "leading a most dissolute life," and his friends in England, believing the report, refused, he says, "to even send me money of my own which had been entrusted to their care." Whatever may have been the life he led in Florence, he seems to have made enemies as well as friends, since an attempt was made to assassinate him. One evening, as he entered his doorway, an Italian gave him three blows with a poignard and then ran away. No serious wound resulted from this assault, and following it attempts were made to arouse animosity among the superstitious lower classes by spreading rumors that Home administered the sacraments of the Catholic Church to toads as a means of raising the dead. Warned by the Tuscan authorities that it was unsafe to show himself on the public streets, Home decided to leave Florence. After announcing that his spirit guides had informed him his powers would leave him for a year, Home accepted an invitation to visit Naples and Rome as the guest of Count Branicka, and in February, 1856, again set out on his travels.

Notwithstanding his loss of power, Home's presence aided in developing mediumship in others. At Naples he found a medium in Prince Luigi, brother of the King, and met Robert Dale Owen who was converted to spiritualism in the presence of the Prince. The latter was so taken with Home as to present him with a ring set with a ruby in the form of a horseshoe. After six weeks' stay in Naples the Branickas and Home proceeded on to Rome.

This city was now to be the scene of Home's adoption of the Catholic faith. It would naturally be supposed that spirit advice

would be paramount in so momentous an issue, but it did not even enter into consideration. In fact, the weighty question as to which of the Christian sects is right seems to be left quite unsettled by spirit communications, though on one occasion a departed friend assured Home that on the other side he "had seen no personal God." T. A. Trollope remarks that in his experience with Home the spirit messages given a sitter impartially favored the sect to which he already belonged, strengthening his particular form of Protestantism or confirming his Catholicism as the case might be. In Home's conversion the failure of supplies from his Protestant English friends seems to have played some part, and the kind attentions of the Catholic Branicka family may be presumed to have had its influence. Received into the bosom of the Church, he was favored by Pius IX with an audience, and the Pope is said to have subsequently sent "his special blessing guaranteeing to Home and to his relatives an entry into Paradise."

For a time Home contemplated entrance into some monastic order, but the attractions of the world proved too strong, and he accompanied Count Branicka to Paris in June, 1856. Here he vegetated for the next eight months, breaking the monotony by frequent conferences with his confessor, who forbade him to have anything again to do with spirit intercourse—an admonition he felt himself unable to obey.

The date of the predicted return of Home's power, the tenth of February, 1857, was known at the French court, and on the eleventh the chamberlain of Napoleon III presented himself to inquire if the expectation had been realized. An affirmative reply brought Home an Imperial invitation to exhibit his phenomena, and on the thirteenth he was presented to the Emperor and Empress, and held a seance at the Tuileries. The spirits replied by their raps to the mental as well as the spoken queries of the Emperor, and for the Empress was materialized the hand of her father which she identified by a defect in one of his fingers. At a second seance a table was levitated several feet, and a handkerchief that the Empress held in her hand was softly taken from her by invisible means, and seen to rise and float in the air, while the small hand of a child was materialized to the great terror of the Duchess of Montebello. At a third seance the hand of Napoleon I was materialized; this, after writing a beautiful Napoleon autograph, allowed itself to be kissed by the Emperor and Empress.

Home's reputation was now firmly established, and the fashionable world flocked to his seances. So pleased was the Empress



Eugenie with him that she engaged to care for the education of his sister Christine, who was for this purpose brought over to France and placed in an aristocratic convent. Home himself was summoned again and again to hold seances at the court. In one of these, it is noted, the spirits kindly reminded the assembly that it was time to attend mass which all had forgotten in their excitement. Some especially striking manifestations took place in the presence of the King of Bavaria who was badly frightened at what he saw. It was not long before the Duchess of Hamilton took Home to Baden-Baden where the King of Württemberg and the Prince Regent of Prussia investigated his phenomena. Invited to the Hague he held successful seances before the Queen of the Netherlands who at his departure drew one of her rings from her fingers and insisted upon his acceptance of this memento.

The frequent seances held by Home proved a tremendous strain upon his vitality and ill health again overcame him. Ordered by his physicians to Italy he visited Rome in the early part of 1858 and there made the acquaintance of Count Koucheleff-Besboroda, reputed one of the richest of Russian noblemen. Home was presented to the Countess and to her sister, Alexandrina de Kroll, youngest daughter of Count de Kroll, a Russian general. Within twelve days he was engaged to this girl, an heiress and the god-daughter of the Czar, and their marriage took place in St. Petersburg in August. Alexander Dumas made a special trip to Russia to be present at the wedding of his friends, who had as groomsman Count Bobrinsky, Chamberlain of the Imperial Court. A few days after Home's arrival in Russia he was invited to hold a seance at Peterhof, but, for the time being, his power had left him, and it was a full month before he was able to obey the command of the Czar. Finally however, finding himself in fit condition, he presented himself at court, and spent a week holding seances with the Russian monarch. Alexander II presented him a diamond ring, and on Home's subsequent visits to Russia repeatedly summoned him to hold seances anew. Later gifts of the Czar included an emerald ring set with diamonds, bestowed upon the birth of a son to Home, and a ring set with a sapphire of great size surrounded by diamonds, on the occasion of his second marriage in 1871 to another Russian lady of the Aksakoff family.

During Home's honeymoon he was granted a holiday by the spirits, except when it was necessary to oblige royalty. Indeed, it was not until November, 1858, that his full power returned. Mrs. Home, who had originally been a doubter, now became a convinced



spiritualist and assisted at her husband's seances. One night, we are told, the spirit of Cagliostro appeared to Mr. and Mrs. Home in their bedroom and accepted the position of guardian angel to the overjoyed couple. Notwithstanding this protection and the miraculous gift of healing, which Home still enjoyed and continued to exercise from time to time, Mrs. Home developed tuberculosis at the early age of twenty-one, and after eighteen months' suffering died in 1862. And the disconsolate widower found a lawsuit on his hands when he attempted to realize on her estate which was under the control of his brother-in-law.

The sixties and early seventies were the years in which Home's mediumistic power was most strongly shown. Beings from the other world watched over him with special solicitude. At Cerçay his life was miraculously preserved from a falling tree limb of monstrous size, the spirits taking him by the collar of his coat, lifting him from the ground and drawing him six or seven feet aside out of the path of danger. As a memento Home sawed off and preserved a segment of the branch, and on subsequent occasions some very marvelous manifestations took place with it. At this height of his renown Home had in England such sitters as Sir Edwin Arnold, Thackeray, Bright, Buckle, De Morgan, the Master of Lindsay, Lord Adare and his father (the Earl of Dunraven), Lord Dufferin, Lord Lyndhurst and Lord Houghton. Nassau Senior attended a seance and used his influence with Longmans to induce this firm to stand sponsor for the first volume of Home's *Incidents in My Life*, published in 1863. It is claimed that many observers were convinced of the genuineness of the manifestations but were too fearful of public opinion to avow their convictions openly and permit their names to be published. Crookes, introduced to Home by Lady Burton (infamous for the destruction of the manuscript of her husband's *Perfumed Garden* under the combined influence of priests and spirit apparitions), began his celebrated investigations into the phenomena in 1871, and attained perfect conviction that they were all Home claimed them to be. And it is noteworthy that, after Home ceased to hold seances, Crookes found he could not get along with his experiments because the other mediums of London were such cheats. "I am so much disgusted with the whole thing," he wrote to Home in 1875, "that were it not for the regard we bear to you, I would cut out the whole spiritual connection, and never read, speak or think of the subject again."

Fertile as these years were in phenomena, they did not leave Home free from care as regards his finances. We find him in 1863

deciding to take up the study of art and become a sculptor, but on going to Rome for this purpose, after a stay of six weeks, he was expelled by the papal authorities as a sorcerer. Some time later he decided to eke out his livelihood, while awaiting a legal decision in the matter of his wife's estate, by giving readings and lectures, and appeared on the public platform a number of times. In 1866 he obtained the position of secretary to the newly founded and shortlived *Spiritual Atheneum* and in this capacity met Mrs. Lyon.

Mrs. Jane Lyon was a wealthy widow, elderly and somewhat vulgar, and interested in spiritualism. Her life was a lonely one, and the fact that she had few friends, and none of any social standing, seems to have weighed upon her. She had read Home's *Incidents* and been much impressed by the aristocratic circles in which the great medium moved. Hearing of the opening of the *Atheneum* she called to inquire about it and was received by Home. She at once took a fancy to him, and seems to have conceived the project of advancing her social position, and mingling with the aristocracy by a matrimonial alliance. Just how far she was influenced in her subsequent actions by spirit messages from her departed husband, delivered through Home, we do not know, as his version of the matter and hers are materially different. But at all events, finding that her hints on the subject of marriage met with a cool reception, she decided to content herself for the present with proposing to adopt Home as a son, and have him shed part of his luster on her by the addition of Lyon to his surname. Ten days' acquaintance sufficed to bring her to the point of making this proposal, sweetened by an offer to transfer to him £24,000 of her money. Mrs. Lyon claimed that spirit communications purporting to be from her husband were what brought her to take this step, while Home denied it. He, however, admitted that spirit messages from the departed Mr. Lyon were given through him. It was only after much urging, according to Home, that he consented to Mrs. Lyon's proposal and accepted the money. A little later an additional amount of £6000 was bestowed upon him, followed by the making of a will bequeathing him Mrs. Lyon's entire fortune, and, to avoid legacy duty, there was immediately transferred to him £30,000 with the understanding that during her lifetime Mrs. Lyon was to receive the income from this last amount.

The arrangement thus made did not long remain satisfactory to Mrs. Lyon. If she did not still have lingering hope of ultimate marriage, she at least expected to gain in social relations, and Home, who found her a difficult person to get along with, does not appear

to have introduced her to his fashionable friends. Friction arose, and she gave her ear to another medium whose messages were hostile to Home. The upshot was, after a few months, a demand on her part for the return of the £60,000 she had transferred to her adopted son. Home replied by offering to cancel the deed by which the last £30,000 had been settled upon him, provided she would leave him in undisputed possession of the first £30,000, and make written acknowledgment of the personal honesty of himself and his friends. A suit at law for the recovery of the whole was then brought by Mrs. Lyon. While this litigation was in progress, a man, one evening, waylaid and attempted to stab Home as the latter was returning to his hotel. After inflicting a wound on the back of the hand of his victim, which the latter threw up in self-defense, the would-be assassin ran away. This outrage aroused some sympathy for Home, but had no influence upon the lawsuit. The decision was in favor of Mrs. Lyon, it being ruled that Home had been proved to exercise dominion and influence over the plaintiff, and that upon him hence rested the burden of proof that the gifts made him were the pure, voluntary, well-ordered acts of the giver.

The Franco-Prussian War brought to Home the new role of war correspondent. It is not recorded that spirit communication helped him either in gathering news for his paper or in transmitting it to London, and his experiences during the war do not seem to be differentiated from those of his colleagues, except that his former seances at Baden-Baden won him recognition and a greeting from William I at Versailles. Home's marriage in the following year, and the death in 1872 of the daughter resulting from this union marked the end of his intensive activities. He now settled down into domesticity, holding only occasional seances, over-exertion on his part being carefully guarded against by the spirits and by his wife.

In 1877 he published his *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, a large portion of which is devoted to attacks upon other spiritualists. He here fell foul of Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky of theosophical fame. Some of Home's animus in this case can be attributed to the desertion of the cause of spiritualism for that of theosophy, by the founders of the latter movement, at a time when the former appeared to be a rapidly sinking ship, but personal reasons may also have played a part, as Olcott had taken occasion to remark that "a well-known artist in Hartford" had stated that he detected Home "in acts of deception, both before his departure for Europe, and during a subsequent visit to this country." What-

ever may have been the motive, it is interesting to compare the account given by Olcott of the seances held by the Eddy brothers, in his *People from the Other World* (written when he was a spiritualist), with the same events as described by other witnesses ferreted out by Home, and see how the wonders described by Olcott fade away.

Home's criticism of theosophy and its supporters were drastic, and Mrs. Home ascribed to theosophists the statement that as result her husband had been solemnly cursed by H. P. B. "whose curses, it was added, always slew." But the reputed theosophical curse does not seem to have weighed heavily upon Home, who quietly passed the remaining years of his life, free from financial cares, in the company of his adoring wife. His death took place in France in 1886, and the unwavering admiration of his widow is evinced by her essay in biography published in 1888, *D. D. Home, His Life and Mission*.

What, it may well be asked, were the phenomena by which Home gained so high a reputation? What was it that hopelessly puzzled men of high scientific attainments and even brought about their conversion? What were the marvels which brought literary and social leaders to beg the privilege of sitting in Home's circles and which made emperors summon him to hold seances with them again and again? We may pass over the rappings, ringing of bells, playing of accordions and guitars, assumption of apparently new personality in a trance state, and the conveyance of spirit messages as to the whereabouts of pins and of pussy cats—these feats are the common stock performances of most mediums. Far more than this was shown by Home to the favored among his sitters. Often, when the spirits deigned to make known their presence in a room, the very walls would shake and the floor vibrate like the deck of a moving steamer. Tables waltzed around, rocked to and fro in time to the various tunes and tipped themselves over at an angle of forty-five degrees without any of the objects on top falling off. Under these trying circumstances everything from a lead-pencil to a lamp retained its position, until at a word from the medium the law of gravitation would again come into force, and the objects on the inclined surface glide gently down to the very edge to be once more safely arrested at that point. Such tipping took place even when a spectator jumped upon the table, he being retained on the polished surface while it remained at the angle



of forty-five degrees, but being thrown off when it finally cantered to an almost perpendicular inclination.

Upward movements of the furniture were also observed. Upon one occasion, when Lucas, editor of the *London Star*, and John Bright were present, a table with a stout gentleman sitting on top of it was "not only raised but tossed up as you would toss a baby in your arms." Sir William Crookes testified that "on five separate occasions a heavy dining-table rose between a few inches and one and a half feet off the floor, under special circumstances, which rendered trickery impossible." And at the house of Mrs. Milner Gibson a large table rose in the air and floated away from the company high above their heads, passing over sofas and chairs on its way. Sometimes Home himself would be levitated and float around the room writing upon the walls and ceiling with a crayon. In one such case the Count de Beaumont, to convince himself of the reality of what he saw, seized the boots of the medium, and pulling them off left Home floating around in the air in his stocking feet. And Lord Adare and the Earl of Crawford testified that in 1866 Home in their presence walked out of an open window into the bare air eighty-five feet above the ground, and then floated back through another window into the next room.

Not content with levitating Home the spirits would sometimes make him undergo elongation and compression. His height would be increased some six or eight inches, and he would then shrink below his normal stature to a like amount. As can readily be imagined, this and other phenomena were a great strain upon Home's vitality, but his spirit controls were not without care for his health, and would at times tell the host of the evening (through the vocal organs of the medium) that after the seance he must "give Daniel some bottled porter." It may be remarked that the spirits themselves at one seance consumed, or at least disposed of part of a glass of brandy and water, taking the glass under the table, and returning it with its contents in an apparently much diluted state.

Materialization of spirit hands was a great feature of Home's seances. These might appear in any part of the room, far above the heads of the spectators or in one's immediate vicinity. Of all shapes and sizes, they were sometimes deathly cold, sometimes warm like flesh and blood, and it was observed that they terminated at the wrist. Most remarkable was the fact that they could be clasped in one's own hand and be held for a moment, but would then melt away. Sir William Crookes tells us that he took hold of such a hand, firmly resolved not to let it get loose, but it gradually



seemed to resolve itself into vapor, and faded in that manner from his grasp.

Most wonderful of all, perhaps, was the power shown by Home to handle, and let his sitters handle, hot bodies with impunity. Home would go to a glowing fire, stir the red-hot coals about with his hands, and, placing his face in contact with the burning mass, move it about as if he were merely bathing his head with water. He would take out a lump of red-hot coal with his naked hands, and throw it on the white muslin dress of a lady, or place it on the head of a white-haired old gentleman, or lay it in the naked hand of a sitter without harm to cloth or hair or skin. Held in the hands of a lady, such a glowing mass would feel merely warm to her, while when she bent down to examine it more closely the heat radiated to her face would be so intense as to be unbearable. But woe to the sitter who did not have full faith or whom the spirits selected as a witness that the body was really hot. When such a sitter even touched the coal his finger would be burnt and blistered in a most painful way. These fire phenomena and other higher manifestations, were not, to be sure, exhibited to every one, but they were testified to by a number of witnesses, and the character of these favored sitters, their social position or scientific standing, was such that their accounts of Home's phenomena could not be dismissed with a laugh.

One's own view of nature and the supernatural will inevitably color any judgment delivered on Home and the marvels reputed to have taken place at his seances. The accounts of his phenomena may be looked upon as authentic by a supernaturalist, while a rationalist will be inclined to discount these tales and to characterize Home as a wonderfully clever adventurer. Taking for granted, however, the rationalistic interpretation of nature, can we go over the accounts of Home's exploits and reconstruct an approximation to the real scene in a seance? Serviceable material for this is none too plentiful, but we can read between the lines in the enthusiastic stories of Home's admirers, while side statements here and there give some inkling of the actual facts.

First of all, we may note that the social and intellectual status of those whom Home admitted to his circles by no means militated against trickery. Among people of culture and refinement the elements of good faith are taken for granted in social intercourse, and Home would have had far more to dread from the prying curiosity of a vulgar boor than from the decorous precautions against decep-

tion taken by an aristocratic host. We note, in fact, that Sir David Brewster and Lord Brougham, when asked by Home to search him before a seance declined to do so, that on other occasions the searcher merely put his hand into each of Home's pockets, that one witness tells us he searched the medium "as far as was compatible with decency," and that Dr. Wilkinson contented himself with watching his guest walk up the path to his house, believing that Home's manner of walking precluded the presence upon his person of "any machinery or apparatus of any kind whatever."

Obviously there might be found, even in the best society, persons whose curiosity outran their courtesy, but Home had means of guarding against this menace. The members of his circles were carefully selected, and it was not uncommon for several successive seances to be held before any phenomena of consequence took place. So we may presume that a sitter was merely taken on trial and that the sight of manifestations vouchsafed him varied in the measure that he showed himself to be not too prying an investigator. This view would be confirmed by a failure to produce results when no weeding-out of the observers was possible, and, in fact, we know that blank seances were not infrequent, and that when in 1869 the London Dialectical Society endeavored to investigate Home's phenomena by having him hold sittings with a committee containing some of the most incredulous members of the society (Bradlaugh among others), the result of four successive seances did not extend beyond slight rappings and movements of the table, further seances being precluded by the illness of Home.

Taking further precautions against inconvenient curiosity, Home, we find, would sometimes actually admonish the sitters not to pay too much attention to the manifestation that was being produced for their benefit. When about to be levitated he would say: "My chair is moving, I am off the ground. Don't notice me; talk of something else." And a sitter records that when he put out his hand, and touched (as he thought) the levitated medium, he was told: "Don't touch me or I shall come down." This prohibition would not seem consistent with the fact that at another seance a sitter could not merely touch Home but even pull off his boots, without the medium being brought down from his suspension in mid-air. Some accounts of Home's levitations make it quite clear that in these particular cases his movement toward the ceiling was known, not by observation, but by the statement of the medium himself as to what was taking place in the darkness. The only confirmation afforded was the passage of a vague shadow before

the open window, and the varying sound of Home's voice, which seemed to come from different distances and directions. Home, to be sure, claims that he never held "dark seances," the light being at its worst dim, but darkness would appear to be a good description of a "dimness" in which the medium was not visible.

Failure to discriminate between what is observed to take place and what a medium says is happening, and inability to distinguish between what is directly observed and what is inferred from observation will be admitted to vitiate the testimony of any witness. Yet these sources of error, particularly the last, are by no means uncommon, in ordinary life as well as at spiritualistic seances. To take merely one familiar case, conjuring, which is liable to deceive us all, is largely the art of making the spectators imagine they see what really they do not see, and preventing them from seeing what is actually before their eyes. We would have more confidence in the witnesses of Home's seances if they had explicitly recognized the distinction, and shown some signs of drawing it in their reports. We find quite the contrary: the lack of the details most relevant in this connection showing that consideration of this possible source of error had never entered their heads. Again and again will a witness state that deception "was impossible" or that he "knew he was not deceived," without giving any reason for this positiveness, but with an emphasis that defeats its own purpose. For the implication is that it is easy to know whether one is or is not deceived, and to take this stand is really an indication of gullibility.

Deception by sleight of hand and mechanical tricks, combined with common fallacies of observation on the part of the audience and the tendency of witnesses to gross exaggeration—will this account for Home's wonders? We would certainly not so contend. For the higher manifestations—materialized hands that could be clasped and melted away in the grasp, fire ordeals in which not only Home but also sitters took part—for these the every-day methods of the commonplace medium would not suffice. We must bear in mind that the facilities of the professional medium holding seances in his own rooms were lacking to Home, who could not have brought very elaborate paraphernalia into the houses of his hosts. The single alternative to admitting Home's claims is to hold that in certain cases he was able to put sitters in an abnormal state, where suggestion ruled their minds, and where they saw and heard and felt precisely what Home pleased to tell them was taking place. And the circumstances under which the higher manifestations occurred tend to confirm this view. They did not occur in the beginning of

a seance, the sitters being first treated to an hour or two of rappings and other minor manifestations. Given a circle of sufficiently susceptible sitters (and the higher manifestations were not for the common herd), it was in Home's power to so arrange his preliminary work as to bring about a mental state verging on hypnosis. This is no far-fetched supposition; the hypnotic state may be induced by a continued concentration of the gaze on an object so placed that the muscles of the eyelids undergo severe strain while it is kept in view, and with sufficiently susceptible subjects a sudden sensation, such as a flash of light in a dark room, the sound of a gong, the ring of a bell or even the vibration of a tuning-fork may bring about hypnosis. Protracted exposure to the odor of musk has also been found effective with the more susceptible, and it is significant that at Home's seances the spirits frequently favored the sitters with the scent of sweet perfumes.

Beginning with rappings, ringing of bells and other trivial phenomena Home could soon bring a picked group of sitters to the point where they were awaiting with bated breath what the spirits would do next, and it would be easy to produce in each of the party a fixed gaze and a highly concentrated attention on whatever object the medium cared to designate. The results obtained would doubtless vary: one sitter might be only very slightly affected, another might undergo a complete hypnosis. To the latter Home's most extreme suggestions would have all the reality of actual happenings, while the mind of the former would not be so easily led. We know that Home gave intimations of what was to be seen, and that these did not always lead to the desired result. Thus at one seance Count Alexis Tolstoi was told that Home and Mrs. Home "constantly saw a star on one of the chairs," but he himself was unable to see it. And we know also that some sitters perceived manifestations that others could not perceive. Count Tolstoi tells us that at another seance Lord Clarence Paget "feeling his knee clasped wished me to touch the hand that was holding it; and when I placed my hand on his knee without finding anything, he still felt beside my hand, another that was touching his." And both Lord Dunraven and Sir William Crookes repeatedly record cases in which apparitions were not visible to all the persons present.

If complete hypnosis were produced Home could not only go as far as he liked, with the full assurance that whatever he chose to impress upon the mind of the sitter would be retained in the memory of the latter as an actual occurrence, but it would even be possible to make the subject see and hear at a future time, away



from the medium, whatever Home had suggested should be seen and heard. The suggestion would be obeyed without there remaining any recollection that it had been made. And this may explain the fact that a sitter sometimes experienced manifestations in his own rooms after returning from a seance, and the next morning would receive a letter from Home giving an accurate account of these phenomena. But such perfect control over a sitter was probably very rare. It is noteworthy that great care had to be taken to avoid interrupting a higher manifestation, or, in other words, distracting the attention of the enthralled sitters from Home's suggestions. Crookes records a case in which, while Home was in full view, a phantom form came from the corner of the room, took up an accordion, and then glided about the room playing it, only to vanish when a frightened lady in the audience gave a slight cry. Similarly when, in a seance at Nice, Home was undergoing a fearful fire ordeal which left his hands and face unscathed, and the Count de Komar called out in fright "Daniel! Daniel!" the performance was stopped, Home reproaching the Count for his want of faith, and saying "Now we can do no more."

Explaining away the phenomena of the mediums will naturally not convince the spiritualist. He may indeed ask with some show of reason why we should seek to explain them away, instead of accepting these "manifestations at their face value as we do the marvels of modern science?" Surely, the alleged spiritualistic phenomena are no more wonderful than what we accept as scientific matter of fact, and if we accredit the one on the testimony of scientists why should we not likewise accept the other when numerous witnesses, including such men of science as Crookes and Lodge, here too give their testimony?

The answer to this question is that in rejecting the accounts of spirit manifestations we are not rejecting the marvelous as such, but are acting upon a principle which can and often does lead to the rejection of very commonplace statements made by scientific investigators. It is a great mistake to suppose that the touchstone for a scientific fact is the testimony of eminent authorities to having observed it: in modern science there are no Aristotles of observation whose *ipse dixit* must be accepted as conclusive. Any alleged fact must stand the test of repeated investigation, and the statement that a specified phenomenon has been observed is invalidated if subsequent workers in the same field cannot obtain like results.

Now the phenomena of spiritualism obviously do not stand this test. Manifested fitfully and to but a favored few, they elude



systematic investigation. The searching inquisition of too skeptical an inquirer leads either to the detection of fraud or to the subsidence of the manifestations. More amenable to examination is the subject of deception and illusion, and turning here we find results produced that absolutely duplicate many of the so-called spirit manifestations, and enable us to understand the rest when we discount the inevitable inaccuracy in the testimony of witnesses.

Spiritualists admit the prevalence of fraud, and take the stand that even the best mediums are prone to intermingle spurious phenomena with the genuine. Notwithstanding this, they accept at par what they regard as the residuum of true spirit manifestations. And perhaps, stripped of minor matters of dispute, the controversy between believers and unbelievers may be narrowed down to an assertion sometimes put forth by spiritualists. This is that the detection of fraud or illusion in ninety-nine cases is no presumption that detection is also present in the hundredth case, where a like result has been produced but no deception detected. We might well call this the Primary Postulate—the Fundamental Error—of spiritualism, and upon it the spiritualists and their opponents must agree to disagree.