

# PSYPIONEER

Founded by Leslie Price

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## The Seizure of Mrs. Elgie Corner

[Nee Florence (Florrie) Eliza Cook: - June 3rd 1856 – April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1904]

During a séance with Mrs. Corner on Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 1880, and under the protection of Edmund Dawson Rogers, Chairman of the Séance Committee of the British National Association of Spiritualists (B.N.A.S) London, Sir George Sitwell seized the full-form materialization of 'Marie' who appeared attired in white robes. The seized, 'Marie' was found to be that of the medium herself, Mrs. Elgie Corner.

The 'seizure,' raised the question - was Mrs. Corner actively and consciously producing fraudulent mediumship or could she have been unconscious of the fact, and under the influence of a controlling spirit, in a state of somnambulism?

Reprinted below is the full published account of this crisis from the B.N.A.S council meeting on Tuesday January 13<sup>th</sup> 1880 under the presidency of Alexander Calder Esq. The B.N.A.S reported these proceedings in Vol. 1.- No. XIX. February 1880 issue (p.251-255) of their official monthly publication, 'Spiritual Notes' (1878 – 1881).

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## THE SEANCES WITH MRS. CORNER.

### SEIZURE OF THE MEDIUM.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS said he had now to approach a very disagreeable subject - namely, the recent seizure of a "form" which turned out to be the "form" of the medium, as narrated in a letter addressed to the public journals by Sir George Sitwell and Mr. Carl von Buch, and as he had just seen those gentlemen in the adjoining room he proposed that they be admitted to the Council Chamber. He should have to report

all the facts to the Council, and also to review the statements which these gentlemen had published, and he thought that it would be very desirable that they should be present in the room to hear all that he had to say.

Several of the members of the Council expressed a very decided opinion that to accede to Mr. Dawson Roger's proposal would be to set a very inconvenient precedent, and the motion was accordingly withdrawn.

The following is the letter to which Mr. Dawson Rogers alluded:-

**THE CAPTURE OF "A Spirit."  
To the Editor of the Times.**

*Sir,-We think the following facts will be interesting to the readers of The Times. Some time ago, being desirous of investigating the truths of so-called Spiritualism, we were advised by an eminent Spiritualist to attend the seances held at 38, Great Russell-street (British National Association of Spiritualists). We were assured that the seances conducted at that association were the most genuine in England and under strict test conditions. On our first visit, the medium being tied by one of us with great care, no manifestations followed.*

*At the second visit (January 2) one of us again tied the medium, but under the directions of the chairman, who is officially connected with the institution. a "Spirit" soon appeared; which we were told was "Marie," and was represented to be that of a dead child 12 years of age. She was dressed in white, her face covered with a veil, and her arms and feet bare. We were surprised to distinguish the appearance of a corset under the white robes, and her voice and general appearance gave us the idea that it was the medium herself - Mrs. Corner (nee Florrie Cook).*

*On the third visit, January 9, we were accompanied by a friend, Mr. John C. Fell, engineer, and editor of a scientific journal, of 23, Rood-lane, E.C., with his wife. The spirit "Marie" again appeared, and rendered our former suspicions almost certain by the audible sound of undressing within the curtain and by the "unspiritual" levity of her behaviour and conversation. One of us by a sudden rush intercepted and gently held "the spirit," while another dashed into the curtains, and drawing them aside, displayed the medium's empty chair with the knot slipped, her dress, stockings and boots, and other discarded garments. There was sufficient light from a half-obscured candle for the captured "spirit" and all the above objects to be plainly seen, which latter were handed round for inspection and examined by those present. After a few minute s- to cover the confusion, we presume - the candle was extinguished by the official present, and we adjourned to the lower room. All present, except the officials, one of whom took refuge in abuse, entirely agreed with us and thanked us for exposing the deception.*

*Now, Sir, we leave general conclusions on Spiritualism to others, but what we do claim to have proved is that in the first society of Spiritualists in England, one of its best mediums has been detected in personating the spirit herself. Not wishing to*

*further occupy your valuable space, we shall be happy to give fuller information to any one interested in the cause of truth.*

*GEORGE R. SITWELL.  
CARL VON BUCH.*

*Witness to the signatures of Sir George R. Sitwell and Carl von Buch, F.C.S.: - John C. Fell, M.I.M.E., Professor of Mechanics.  
23, Rood-lane, E.C., Jan. 10.*

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS then proceeded. This letter, he said, stated that at a séance held at the rooms of the Association, on the evening of Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> - and at which he (Mr. Dawson Rogers) was present in his capacity of Chairman of the Séance Committee - a form appeared attired in white robes, that the form was seized by one of the circle, and was found to be the person of the medium (Mrs. Corner), and that the chair to which the medium had been bound was found to be vacant, while several articles of the medium's dress were scattered about the floor behind the curtains which were used as a cabinet. He was sorry to be obliged to admit that all this was true. He would also take this opportunity of stating that, in the act of seizure, Sir George Sitwell was as gentle and considerate towards the medium as the successful accomplishment of his purpose would permit, and that he (Mr. Dawson Rogers) was sorry that in the heat of the moment he applied to Sir George an epithet which he freely confessed he ought not to have used. Having made a mistake he had done all he could to remedy it, and had personally conveyed the expression of his regret to Sir George, who had kindly accepted it.

He would now briefly state all the circumstances connected with this unfortunate affair, prefacing what he had to say by the assurance that he had no word of censure for Mrs. Corner, that he believed her to be totally unconscious, and therefore totally guiltless of any deception, and that he was satisfied the Council, after hearing his report, would arrive at the same opinion. Naturally enough, perhaps, some persons would hastily conclude, after what had occurred, that notwithstanding all that had been heard of Mrs. Corner, she was not a genuine medium for physical manifestations, and that the Séance Committee ought to have taken more care before they accepted her services in that capacity. But as a matter of fact great care had been taken. At some of the preceding seances she had not only been well secured by tying, but her dress had been so sewn together that it was simply impossible that it could be removed and replaced without detection; and he himself had also, when sitting near the curtains, put his hands behind them and felt the medium's head, shoulder, arm, and hand at the same time that the "form" was out and visible to all the company; and he had reported the fact to another member of the committee. He had also had recourse to other tests which left no room for doubt as to the genuineness of Mrs. Corner's mediumship.

Then came the question of the proposed attendance of Mr. von Buch. The rule was, as they were aware, that friends of a member were admissible on the member's introduction. Mr. von Buch's mother was a Spiritualist, and a highly respectable member of the Association, and she had asked that her son and his friends should be allowed to attend some seances, and especially that Mr. von Buch might be permitted to bind the medium, as he had great confidence in his ability to tie securely. Mr. von

Buch and Sir George Sitwell attended accordingly. In their published letter they said, in reference to their first visit, "The medium being tied by one of us with great care no manifestations followed." This was not correct. Mr. von Buch tied Mrs. Corner with so much care that he spent nearly a quarter of an hour in the operation, and yet some little while after the curtains had been closed raps were heard spelling "Tying not satisfactory, look to your knots," and on examination it was found that Mrs. Corner was free from all her bonds, the knots and the loops which had encircled her waist and wrists being all, as far as could be discovered, perfectly intact. Mr. von Buch himself examined them, and did not even suggest that the knots had in any way been tampered with. Mr. von Buch bound the medium again, but after sitting an hour without any result the séance was closed however, without an opportunity being afforded to Mrs. Corner to play tricks if she had chosen, for at the termination of the sitting she called the attention of the members of the committee who were present to the fact that the knots this time were slip knots, and that she could easily have got out of them if she pleased.

And yet these gentlemen had in their letter suggested that at the following sitting the medium was able to get out because she had been on that occasion tied "under the direction of the chairman!" This statement was not a correct representation of the case. Knowing that the second tying at the preceding séance was altogether insecure, he (Mr. Dawson Rogers) told Mr. von Buch so, and suggested another method. This method Mr. von Buch adopted at the second séance, but he did so freely, and could have employed any other mode if he had thought it better.

But how about the third sitting - that at which the capture was made? Mr. von Buch did exactly as he pleased without a single suggestion being offered by any other person. Did he then tie the medium securely, and, if not, why not? Be this as it might, a "form," after a little while, came out from curtains at the side, and stood with the back to the wall. It was covered with white drapery over head, face, and shoulders, and had a long white robe reaching to the heels, so that the naked feet could not be seen except when they were put slightly forward from beneath the skirt. While in this position Sir George Sitwell made a sudden rush, captured the "form," and, gently holding her, exclaimed, "It is the medium; I knew it was."

He (Mr. Dawson Rogers) at once stepped up, and taking the "form" out of Sir George's hands, threw up the veil to see whether it really was Mrs. Corner or not. For the moment he could scarcely recognise her, as the eyes had a vacant gaze as though there was no consciousness of what had occurred. He had been told that at the same moment Mr. von Buch rushed forward, and from the front of the curtains drew out the empty chair and various articles of Mrs. Corner's apparel; but of this, as he was then standing at the side curtains, he knew nothing. It should be borne in mind that when he took Mrs. Corner in this apparently unconscious state from Sir George's hands she was covered with white drapery as mentioned. He at once put his arms round her, and led her behind the curtains. There, for a few seconds, she remained perfectly quiet and silent, then trembled violently, and presently exclaimed, "Where am I? Where am I? What is it? Tell me, what is it?" He endeavoured to soothe her, but finding that she was getting heavy in his arms, and fearing that he should be unable to prevent her from falling, he proposed to lead her out into the adjoining room. She replied, "Yes, do!" and he was about to remove her, when she suddenly exclaimed, "Why, I am undressed; get away, get away " He did not, however, feel that he could leave her

without letting her fall, and he therefore called Mrs. Maltby, who received her from his hands behind the curtain, and removed her into another room. Mrs. Maltby would tell them in what condition she was at the time.

Mrs: MALTBY: She had nothing on but her corset and flannel petticoat, and no white drapery whatever.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS: What then had become of the drapery? It was impossible that Mrs. Corner could have removed and secreted it, for he had his arms round her from the moment he received her from Sir George Sitwell's hands to the moment he placed her in the hands of Mrs. Maltby behind the curtains. The published letter already alluded to said that to cover the confusion he had put the light out. This was altogether untrue. The light was at one end of the room, and he at the other, and he was engaged all the time as he had said in attending to Mrs. Corner. Moreover, in another part of the letter, the writers themselves admitted that there was sufficient light for the discarded garments to be handed round for inspection.

Mrs. MALTBY said that when she thought the candle was no longer needed she put it out herself.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS had since heard, on very good authority, that later the same evening, at a séance at Mr. Fletcher's, with the same medium, both the medium and a second "form" were seen two or three times at the same moment. At their own séance, however, there could be no doubt that the draped "form" was Mrs. Corner herself. As he had already intimated he was firmly convinced that Mrs. Corner knew nothing about the fraud, and that it was perpetrated by the controlling spirit who had used her without her own volition. All experienced Spiritualists knew that this was a difficulty in which they were occasionally liable to be placed at what were termed `materialising seances.'" It was a perplexing position, and a very disagreeable one; but it was one that must be faced, except they were disposed to discontinue the investigation of this branch of physical phenomena altogether. He hoped that the Council would freely acknowledge the perplexity, and not seek to avoid it by leaving it to be inferred that there was any guilt on the part of the medium. Having attended nearly all her seances in these rooms he had the most complete faith in Mrs. Corner yet, and he hoped there would be no disposition on the part of the Council to save themselves from a difficulty at her expense.

Mr. DESMOND FITZ-GERALD thought that there was no fault to be found with these young gentlemen, and that they had acted not only in a proper but even in a gentlemanly way. No doubt we had sometimes misinterpreted the scenes which had been brought before us at such séances, and had thought that these imitations were less frequent than they really were. Still he was perfectly certain that Mrs. Corner was an excellent medium, and he was also satisfied that she was altogether guiltless of such deceptions. Their present position was one in which their behaviour would be very carefully observed by all genuine truth seekers, but they had three things plainly before them to do. First, they must fully exonerate these young gentlemen from blame, and must even admit that they had taught them a lesson, though they had not taught them anything they did not know before. Secondly, they must clearly and distinctly express their confidence in the medium, even at the expense of throwing well-deserved reflections on some of the "guides" on the other side. And in the third

place, they were bound to show a bold but honest front is the face of this difficulty, and to exercise more caution in the class of phenomena presented to investigators in the future.

Mr. MARCH said that if these gentlemen had brought the matter before the Council first, perhaps they would not have thought it wise to rush into print at all: at the same time he did not think that phenomena of this kind should be presented to people who knew nothing whatever of the various phases of mediumship, unless we could absolutely prove by some occult power - which of course we could not do - that in such a case as this the medium was certainly "possessed." Moreover, the Council ought to have a written report from the Séance Committee, and not merely the speech of an advocate entirely in favour of the medium.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS said it was manifestly impossible; in the short time that had elapsed, for the committee to have met and agreed to a written report. A report would be entered on the minutes of the committee as soon as possible, but in the meantime it had been necessary to explain all the circumstances to the Council at their first meeting after the occurrence.

The Rev. STANTON-MOSES remarked, in reference to the method these gentlemen had adopted in order to arrive at the result which they had accomplished that it could not be denied that such methods of enquiry would often land a man in a fallacy, and that there were powers and phenomena which were not amenable to such rude and ready methods of investigation. Unfortunately, however, they answered Sir George Sitwell's purpose, and it would be impossible to convince the world that he was wrong. It was to the last degree deplorable that anything of the kind should have taken place, and an answer must be made to the damaging statements which these gentlemen had published.

Mr. DESMOND FITZ-GERALD said he would move that Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch be invited into the room, that they might make any statement they desired, and hear a brief explanation of the theory which was compatible both with the facts alleged and with the complete innocence of the medium.

The Rev. W. MIALL seconded the motion.

Mr. COFFIN said he understood that the gentlemen were in attendance for the purpose of giving some information or suggestion as to the disappearance of the drapery, and he would move as an amendment that they be admitted simply for that purpose.

This amendment having been adopted, Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch were invited into the Council Room, and took their seats by the side of the President.

Mr. VON BUCH said he desired to thank the Council for allowing him to say a few words in reference to the unfortunate occurrence which had taken place. It was due to the Council, as well as to himself and Sir George Sitwell, that he should say that in the letter which they had addressed to the papers they had endeavoured to write fairly and impartially. They had come to the séance, not as believers it was true, but also certainly not as sceptics, for they had been ready to accept any evidence which

could be offered of the truth of Spiritualism, and nothing would have given them greater pleasure than to find that they had been wrong in their suspicions of the medium. He had been asked, what became of the spirit's drapery? and in reply to this he would read an extract from Mr. Home's book, "Lights and Shadows in Modern Spiritualism," which might throw some light on the subject. [The extract was to the effect that lady mediums secreted the drapery, which was light and could easily be packed into a small compass, inside their drawers, which, even when mediums were searched, were most likely to escape scrutiny]

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS said that in this case, under the circumstances which he had already explained to the Council, such an hypothesis was quite untenable.

Mr. VON BUCH proceeded to state the occurrences which, in his mind and that of his friend, had excited suspicion. The movements and slight noises behind the curtains after they were closed resembled, he thought, the act of undressing, while the time which elapsed, after the form was last seen, till permission was obtained to examine the medium, sufficed to enable her to dress and tie herself again. It had been suggested that, in doing what they had done, they had broken the conditions on which they gained admission, and thus acted dishonorably. He did not think so; but at the same time he was not quite sure that, in such a case, even if they had used some little artifice, they would not have been fully justified. It was admitted that the form seized was Mrs. Corner, but she had been excused on the ground that she was in a state of trance; but he knew something of cases of somnambulism and catalepsy, and did not think that this was one of them.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS: Do you know that there is such a thing as lucid somnambulism?

Mr. VON BUCH said he did.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS: I have had considerable experience of such cases, extending over many years, and I have no doubt whatever that this was such a case.

Mr. VON BUCH added that he had heard that Mrs. Corner had had a successful séance afterwards, the same night, but he had been told by a Spiritualist of experience that no medium could obtain manifestations twice the same evening. Anyhow it was curious that the medium should be dragged off to give another sitting after what had occurred. From what he and his friend had done genuine Spiritualism, if there was such a thing, would never suffer. Mixed up with fraud it could never be placed on a strong basis; but if it were true, and the experiments honestly conducted, it would sooner or later come to the front in spite of all opposition.

Mr. COFFIN asked Mr. von Buch whether on the last occasion he took care to tie the medium as securely as he could.

Mr. VON BUCH said he left the knots loose enough to be slipped.

Mr. COFFIN: Did you do that purposely, in order that the medium might the more easily get out?

Mr. VON BUCH: Not exactly that. I thought that if it were a case of genuine Spiritualism the tying would make no difference, and if it were not the sooner we had the manifestations the better.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS: How is it you stated that I put out the light?

Mr. VON BUCH: I was told so by one of the persons present.

Mrs. MALTBY: It was put out by me as the people were leaving.

Mr. VON BUCH said he was sorry that he made the mistake.

Sir GEORGE SITWELL said that when he seized Mrs. Corner he did so as gently as possible, and when she was taken out of his hands the drapery remained upon her. He believed the medium was on the floor afterwards, and had thus an opportunity of secreting it.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS replied that the medium was not on the floor at all. He held her till Mrs. Maltby took her away at his request, and then the drapery had disappeared.

Mr. FLETCHER, in allusion to a remark which had been made by Mr. Von Buch, said that Mrs. Corner had not been "dragged off" to his house to give another sitting, but having an engagement for a séance there had come to excuse herself, but had been prevailed upon to try. The result was a very successful sitting, at which both the medium and the spirit were seen at the same time.

Mr. VON BUCH said they should be willing to have another test séance with Mrs. Corner, and to publish the results if satisfactory.

Mr. von Buch and Sir George Sitwell then left the room.

Mr. DAWSON ROGERS remarked that after the statement he had already made to the Council he did not think it necessary to offer any further explanation.

Mr. STAINTON-MOSES then moved, and Mr. DAWSON ROGERS seconded, the adoption of a letter to be addressed to the *Times* and other daily papers, and which, after some emendations, was passed unanimously in the following form :-

***THE CAPTURE OF "A SPIRIT."***  
***To the Editor.***

*SIR,-I am directed by the Council of the British National Association of Spiritualists to address you in reference to a letter which has appeared in the public journals from Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch respecting a seance held on the 9th inst. at the rooms of the Association.*



*The letter of these gentlemen presents a substantial accurate account of what took place, except in the passages which attribute to members of the Council of the Association officially present a desire to cloak the truth and to afford facilities for deception.*

*The Association, in seeking to fulfill the objects for which it was established, viz., to assist inquirers in the truths of Spiritualism, had thought that they would be rendering a public service by affording to members and their friends, unable or unwilling to devote the time needful for individual experiment, an opportunity of witnessing under favourable circumstances some of these phenomena; and they hoped that they had secured the best and most trustworthy means of so doing in engaging the services of Mrs. Corner, who, as Miss Florence Cook, was so completely and exhaustively tested by Mr. Crookes, F.R.S., and by many other competent investigators, including committees of this Association in recent experiments*

*Mr. Crookes's experiments extended over a series of years, and were conducted in his own house in the presence of his own family, under conditions that seemed to preclude deception. His precautions against error were, indeed, most elaborate, and his testimony as to what he proved is public property.*

*The Association was not unaware of the fact that most intricate bonds do not prevent the liberation, by some means, of the medium. They knew, moreover - strange as the fact may appear to many of your readers - that perfectly unconscious persons can be, and frequently are, made to personate and act a part wholly irrespective of their own volition, just as the mesmeric sensitive obeys the suggestions of the mesmeriser. And they did not under-estimate the extreme difficulty of presenting to uninstructed persons satisfactory results. They, however, deemed it their duty to make the attempt.*

*They can but regret that their well-intentioned efforts to this end should, in this case, have had results so unsatisfactory as those disclosed by the letter of Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch. I am directed to add the expression of extreme concern on the part of the Council of the Association if, in the heat of the moment, any expression should have been used of which those gentlemen consider that they have a right to complain.*

*- I am, yours respectfully,*

*C. A. BURKE, Secretary.*

*38, Great Russell-street, Jan. 13.*

Mr. E. T. BENNETT said there was one proposition he should like to make, as to which he felt very strongly that it would assist in placing the Council in a proper and good position before both Spiritualists and the public. He hoped the motion would be adopted by the Council quite independent of the question as to whether it could be carried out, or whether any results were likely to be obtained. He moved that, if Mrs. Corner's consent can be obtained, the Séance Committee be requested to accede to the wish of Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch, and to arrange for a séance with Mrs. Corner on these premises; Sir George Sitwell and Mr. von Buch to be at full liberty to

make such arrangements as may be satisfactory to themselves, to test the nature of any manifestations or phenomena which may appear.

Mr. D. G. FITZ-GERALD seconded the motion. Mr. STANTON-MOSES and Mr. DAWSON ROGERS strongly objected to the proposal as likely to lead to difficulties and to be productive of no good.

On being put to the Council the motion was lost by a large majority. This brought the proceedings to a close.

(End of BNAS Council proceedings.)

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There has always been some dispute as to whether Florence Cook indeed *was so completely and exhaustively tested by Mr. Crookes, F.R.S.*, as the draft second letter to "The Times" claimed.

One respected researcher of the day was Serjeant-at-Law, Edward William Cox (1809-1879). He was sceptical of Florence Cook at the time of the Crookes investigations into her materializations in 1873-4. Cox had worked with Crookes in his early investigations of May 1871 with Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886). Cox incidentally was convinced of the genuineness of Home, although he did not accept the spirit hypothesis. He had first used the term 'Psychic Force', publishing a booklet to this effect in 1872 '*Spiritualism Scientifically Examined with Proofs of the Existence of a Psychic Force*'.

Cox had been one of the investigating committee members of the London Dialectical Society which published its report on Spiritualism in 1871. As a point of interest, on this same committee was William Volckman who, just prior to Crookes' investigations in December 1873 seized Florence Cook or 'Katie King' on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Edward William Cox is the researcher to whom Mr. Von Buch in his opening statement of the British National Association of Spiritualists council room referred: *He had been asked, what became of the spirit's drapery? and in reply to this he would read an extract from Mr. Home's book, "Lights and Shadows in Modern Spiritualism,"*

Cox's letter to Home is reprinted in full from the book below, [published by Virtue & Co., London, in 1877, pages 326 – 329.] Home wrote:

*The form of fraud at present most in vogue is the simulation of a spirit form or forms. To be successful such simulation usually requires the aid of a room so ill-lighted as practically not to be lighted at all, a "cabinet" into which the medium withdraws from the view of the sitters, and various other "conditions" of the sort. When the rules of such seances are broken, awkward discoveries occur. Sometimes the light is turned up suddenly, and the medium revealed in his or her "spirit-dress." Sometimes the "spirit-form" is grasped, and found to be none other than the medium. But should all go well, the credulous are often highly gratified. Figures appear, clad in flowing and parti-coloured robes. The display of drapery seems most extensive. Yet when the medium is*

*searched at the conclusion of the séance no trace of this drapery can be found. Whence has it vanished? The believers present reply that "the spirits have dematerialized it." The sceptics probably examine the cabinet, and are astonished that they find nothing. Perhaps the evidence I have to offer may throw a little light on the concealments sometimes practised. Let me commence with the narrative of an unimpeachable witness, my friend Serjeant Cox:-*

*"DEAR HOME,*

*"I am satisfied that a large amount of fraud has been and still is practised. Some of it is, doubtless, deliberately planned and executed. But some is, I think, done while the medium is in a state of somnambulism, and therefore unconscious. As all familiar with the phenomena of somnambulism are aware, the patient acts to perfection any part suggested to his mind, but wholly without self-perception at the time, or memory afterwards. But such an explanation serves only to acquit the medium of deliberate imposture; it does not affect the fact that the apparent manifestation is not genuine.*

*"The great field for fraud has been offered by the production and presentation of alleged spirit-forms. All the conditions imposed are as if carefully designed to favour fraud if contemplated, and even to tempt to imposture. The curtain is guarded at either end by some friend. The light is so dim that the features cannot be distinctly seen. A white veil thrown over the body from head to foot is put on and off in a moment, and gives the necessary aspect of spirituality. A white band round head and chin at once conceals the hair, and disguises the face. A considerable interval precedes the appearance-just such as would be necessary for the preparations. A like interval succeeds the retirement of the form before the cabinet is permitted to be opened for inspection. This just enables the ordinary dress to be restored. While the preparation is going on behind the curtain the company are always vehemently exhorted to sing. This would conveniently conceal any sounds of motion in the act of preparation. The spectators are made to promise not to peep behind the curtain, and not to grasp the form. They are solemnly told that if they were to seize the spirit they would kill the medium. This is an obvious contrivance to deter the onlookers from doing anything that might cause detection. It is not true. Several spirits have been grasped, and no medium has died of it; although in each case the supposed spirit was found to be the medium. That the detected medium was somewhat disturbed in health after such a public detection and exposure is not at all surprising. Every one of the five\* mediums who have been actually seized in the act of personating a spirit is now alive and well. There need be no fear for the consequences in putting them to the proof.*

*"But I have learned how the trick is done. I have seen the description of it given by a medium to another medium who desired instruction. The letter was in her own handwriting, and the whole style of it showed it to be genuine.*

*"She informs her friend that she comes to the séance prepared with a dress that is easily taken off with a little practice. She says it may be done in two or three minutes. She wears two shifts (probably for warmth). She brings a muslin veil of thin material (she gives its name, which I forget). It is carried in her drawers! It can be compressed into a small space, although when spread it covers the whole person. A pocket-*

*handkerchief pinned round the head keeps back the hair. She states that she takes off all her clothes except the two shifts, and is covered by the veil. The gown is spread carefully upon the sofa over the pillows. In this array she comes out. She makes very merry with the spiritualists whom she thus gulls, and her language about them is anything but complimentary.*

*"This explains the whole business. The question so often asked before was - where the robe could be carried? It could not be contained in the bosom or in a sleeve. Nobody seems to have thought of the drawers.*

*"But it will be asked how we can explain the fact that some persons have been permitted to go behind the curtain when the form was before it, and have asserted that they saw or felt the medium. I am sorry to say the confession to which I have referred states without reserve that these persons knew that it was a trick, and lent themselves to it. I am, of course, reluctant to adopt such a formidable conclusion, although the so-called 'confession' was it confidential communication from one medium to another medium who had asked to be instructed how the trick was done. I prefer to adopt the more charitable conclusion that they were imposed upon, and it is easy to find how this was likely to be. The same suspicious precautions against detection were always adopted. The favoured visitor was an assured friend; one who, if detecting trickery, would shrink from proclaiming the cheat. But one was permitted to enter. A light was not allowed. There was nothing but the 'darkness visible' of the lowered gas rays struggling through the curtain. I have noted that no one of them ever was permitted to see the face of the medium. It was always 'wrapped in a shawl.' The hands felt a dress, and imagination did the rest. The revealer of the secret above referred to says that, when she took off her gown to put on the white veil, she spread it upon the sofa or chair with pillows or something under it, and this is what they felt and took for her body!*

*"The lesson to be learned from all this is, that no phenomena should be accepted as genuine that are not produced under strict test conditions. Investigators should be satisfied with no evidence short of the very best that the circumstances will permit. Why accept the doubtful testimony of one person groping in the dark when the question can be decided beyond dispute once and for ever by the simple process of drawing back the curtain while the alleged spirit is outside, and showing the medium inside to the eyes of all present? Where absolute tests are refused upon any pretence whatever, and where the conditions imposed are just such as are calculated to prevent detection if trickery is designed, we are bound to look with the utmost suspicion upon all that is done, and, indeed, we should refuse to take part in any such unsatisfactory experiment.*

*"In the investigations in which you so kindly assisted me there was nothing of this precaution and mystery. You sat with me anywhere, at any time; in my garden, and in my house; by day and by night; but always, with one memorable exception, in full light. You objected to no tests; on the contrary you invited them I was permitted the full use of all my senses. The experiments were made in every form ingenuity could devise, and you were as desirous to learn the truth and the meaning of it as I was. You sat alone with me, and things were done which, if four confederates had been present, their united efforts could not have accomplished. Sometimes there were phenomena, some times there were none. When they occurred they were often such as no human*

*hand could have produced without the machinery of the Egyptian Hall. But these were in my own drawing-room, and library, and garden, where no mechanism was possible. In this manner it was that I arrived at the conviction-opposed to all my prejudices and preconceptions-that there are forces about us of some kind, having both power and intelligence, but imperceptible to our senses, except under some imperfectly-known conditions. I did not, and with subsequent extended inquiry I cannot now arrive at the conclusion you have come to, that these invisible agents are spirits of the dead. On the contrary, the more I see of their operations the more I am satisfied that they are not such. The solution that most presses upon my mind is that this earth is inhabited by another race of beings, imperceptible to us in normal conditions, probably our inferiors in intelligence, by whom what we witness is done. If it be not this the agent is the spirit of the medium more or less separated from the body. But whosoever that agent may be, the medium through which it is enabled to manifest its presence, and to operate upon molecular matter is the Psychic (that is to say, the soul) force of the assembled sitters. But now that the phenomena themselves, or some of them, have received general acceptance as facts in nature, it may be hoped that many observant minds will investigate them with a view to learn their precise nature and extent, as produced under absolute tests. Then we shall be in a position to inquire what they are, whence they come, and to what they point.*

*"It is a great misfortune to the cause of truth that your state of health prevents you from contributing to this great work. But I hope still that your recovery may enable you to do something more to promote honest investigation into the greatest and the grandest mystery that could engage the human mind.*

*"Yours most truly,  
"EDWARD W.m. COX.*

*"March 8th, 1876."*

*The narrative above given bears a peculiar value from the circumstances attending the confession of imposture to which it refers. The exposure meets even the conditions demanded by those enthusiasts who would rather libel a hundred spirits than believe one medium guilty of trickery. " ' The only conclusive proof that a medium has perpetrated fraud," a philosopher of this class writes, "is proof that the physical organs of the medium acted in obedience to his or her own will and purposes at the time when the seemingly fraudulent acts were performed." This proof the "medium" in question herself affords.*

*\*Since this was written by Serjeant Cox the numbers have greatly increased. I doubt if there remain now five "materializing mediums" who have not been seized in the act of personating a spirit-form.*

.....

A new cycle of research into Crookes' investigations into the physical mediumship of Florence Cook/Corner began with Trevor H. Hall's, 'The Spiritualists the Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes'. (1962). Hall gives a biased account with much

speculation often using *parts* of quotes to discredit Crookes and Cook, which is unfortunate as his books offer good background knowledge

A valuable source of information on Crookes' investigations into Florence Cook can be found in the 'Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research' Volume 54, Part 195 March 1964. 'William Crookes and the Physical Phenomena of Mediumship' by R.G. Medhurst and K.M. Goldney, Members of the S.P.R., can access this on line at: <http://www.spr.ac.uk>

This is a well balanced report, often referring to Trevor Hall's book and clearing up much of Hall's speculation.

Consider the "medium to medium" instruction letter mentioned by Cox. Hall speculates that this was written by Florence Cook/Corner to Mary Showers and claims. *'This letter is one of the most significant documents in the history of the materializing mediums of the 1870s.'* However, without notation, Hall prints only an edited version, omitting the first, penultimate and last paragraphs; those paragraphs which contain important information as to Edward Cox's deliberations on physical mediumship and fraudulent practices.

R.G. Medhurst and K.M. Goldney suggest that the medium, Miss. Showers (who had produced a written confession of her own fraudulent mediumship as given to the medium Mrs. Anna Eva Fay (1851-1927) of which William Crookes was made fully aware) was the likeliest candidate as the authoress of the letter. (Numerous Journals and reference books refer simply to Miss. Showers, some to Mary Showers as did Trevor Hall. Thomas Blyton used the name Rosina. Eric J. Dingwall, Mary Rosina Showers, and Stainton Moses referred to her in his first sitting as Rosey.).

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In the February issue of Spiritual Notes 1880, on pages 246-7 Vol. 1-No.XX. The British National Association of Spiritualists gives a statement completely exonerating Mrs. Corner of any conscious deception.

The full statement is as follows:

## **THE SEIZURE OF A MEDIUM.**

IN our report of the proceedings of the Council of the B.N.A.S., our readers will find a full and particular account of the recent capture of a medium by Sir George Sitwell. The circumstance has of course been greedily seized by the public press as an opportunity for a vast amount of ridicule and abuse. Men who know nothing of Spiritualism, and have probably never witnessed a single séance in their lives, have daringly written as though they had the whole subject at their fingers' ends.

They disbelieve and scoff because they do not know, and have never sought to learn; and they stigmatise as fools those who do believe because conviction has come to them as the result of years of intelligent and careful research. But we can afford to bear the reproaches of the ignorant, for the time has happily gone by when any man need hesitate boldly to avow his faith in phenomena the existence of which is

admitted by all who have entered upon the investigation without prejudice and pursued it without impatience. When the sceptics desire the truth they will be able to find it, and their conversion is but a work of time.

With our long and ample experience we have no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that on the occasion of the recent seizure Mrs. Corner was completely guiltless of deception. To the uninitiated, appearances were admittedly unfavourable to this construction. But that we cannot help, and we are by no means disposed to cry over the fact, however disagreeable it may be for the moment. Unfortunately we know but too well that mediums in the hands of a spirit, like a sensitive in the hands of a mesmerist, are sometimes made to act a part of which they themselves are totally unconscious. Of course there are men who would much rather believe that a lady, whose conduct had been regarded as irreproachable, had in truth lent herself to the basest artifices, than admit the possibility of her being controlled by an occult or abnormal power. But Spiritualists have long since recognised that such a power is sometimes exercised. It is a fact the presence of which has been openly acknowledged and anxiously discussed in Spiritualistic circles and in Spiritualistic journals.

The recent episode, therefore, has brought to us no new discovery, and no experienced Spiritualist will find in it the slightest occasion for disheartenment, sure as he is that his faith is based on the solid ground of well ascertained facts. But it must be freely admitted, nevertheless, that the event has once more reopened the whole question of the value of what are known as "materialisation" seances, or, if they have any value, of the prudence of presenting the phenomena to the uninitiated. The question undoubtedly is one of supreme importance; and deserves the renewed and earnest consideration, not only of the B.N.A.S., but of all Spiritualists everywhere. None can more completely realise than we do the vastly superior value of the higher manifestations; but these are not always to be had, and there are, confessedly, some minds to which, on their first introduction to Spiritualism, they are not adapted. There are men so absorbed in materialism that they can believe in nothing which they cannot see and handle; so that we must be cautious lest, in our laudable desire to present to inquirers none but the best pleases of our faith, we sweep away the only evidence which such men require. If the "materialisation" of spirits be a fact, as Spiritualists generally acknowledge, the fact must have its value, and that value cannot be disregarded.

Whether "materialisation" seances can be surrounded by improved conditions, and conducted under better guarantees for genuineness, is another question. One thing at least is certain, that we must discountenance deceiving spirits as firmly and as fearlessly as we would discountenance deceiving mediums. Spirits must be told that, if they cannot manifest themselves, they must be content with failure, and that they must not attempt to delude the sitters by compelling the mediums to act the part of personation. The mediums, too, must be secured in such a way that they cannot be removed from the screen or cabinet without instant detection; and even screens and cabinets must be abolished as soon as we have a single medium through whom materialisations can be produced without their use. But till then we must be content with the best safeguards which experience and ingenuity can devise.

.....

As a result of what took place at the B.N.A.S. with Mrs. Corner, and under the guidance of the séance committee, more action was needed. At a further Council meeting at the B.N.A.S., on February 10<sup>th</sup>, Stainton Moses suggested regulation of Séances. (This is printed in full below and is taken from the B.N.A.S., Proceedings in March 1880 pages 263 – 265. Vol. 1.-No. XX. ‘Spiritual Notes’)

### **British National Association. - Meeting of Council.**

*Mr. E. DAWSON ROGERS, on the part of the Séance Committee, reported the arrangements for a series of seances with Mrs. Fletcher. He also stated that the Committee, subject to the confirmation of the Council, had acceded to a request of Mr. E. T. Bennett for leave to hold a series of seances with Mrs. Corner, on the premises of the Association, open to members only, with the condition that two members of the Séance Committee should be present at each séance. In a communication to Mr. Bennett Mrs. Corner had not only consented to attend these seances, but had voluntarily expressed her readiness to submit to any tests that the circle could devise. The Committee had also had under consideration the motions of which Mr. Stainton-Moses had given notice for the regulation of seances, and had agreed that they would offer no opposition to motions I. and III. The motions were as under:-*

- 1. That under no circumstances shall a cabinet or other contrivance for secluding the medium from view be used at any séance held in the rooms of the B.N.A.S. to which inquirers or strangers are admitted.*
- 2. That light reasonably sufficient for exact observation, in the judgment of the member of Committee in charge of the séance, shall in all cases be maintained.*
- 3. That these Resolutions shall be conspicuously posted in the Séance Room, and shall be brought to the notice of all who are admitted to the seances.*

*The report of the Séance Committee having been accepted,*

*Mr. STAINTON-MOSES said it had been suggested to him that in proposing such sweeping changes as these resolutions covered he was indirectly reflecting upon the past management of the seances of this Association. In reply to such suggestions he should like at once to say with the utmost possible distinctness that it was not his habit to make indirect reflections upon anybody, but that whatever he had to say he always said so directly that none but the most perverse minds could misunderstand his meaning. What he had said already, and what he now said, contained no reflection, either expressed or implied, upon the management of the seances, or upon any committee of this Council. He considered the question to be one of such absolute importance as to touch the well-being of the Association, and of the movement at large. We were the most representative body of cultured Spiritualists in England, and upon the action which we took very much depended the action of other people, not only in this country but in other countries as well. He had found the late event acting and re-acting in a way which could not be exaggerated, and he had therefore felt it impossible to allow a single meeting of this Council to pass without taking its sense upon what he considered to be a question of such vital importance. He might say, indeed, that he could not have satisfied his conscience to remain in overt connection with Spiritualism in England without attempting to induce the Association to purge*



*itself of all complicity with what he regarded as a fatal system of investigation. He was glad to find that there was a general consensus of opinion that what he had put upon paper was both wise and good; but he admitted that there was some difference of opinion as to whether it was practicable.*

*Taking the thing, however, to be right and true in its essence, the question whether it was practicable or not at the present moment should not, he thought, enter into our consideration. He felt strongly that the holding of cabinet seances, giving as they did facilities for fraud, whether by the mediums or the spirits, had been productive of nearly everything which had brought discredit on the movement, and that fact alone should, he thought, induce us to pause before we gave encouragement to the continuance of such methods of investigation. Some people said, "But without cabinet seances there are phenomena which we cannot get;" and to these people he would reply, "Then let us do without the phenomena." He begged the Council, however, to understand that he was dealing with those seances only to which inquirers were admitted. He had nothing to say against cabinet seances conducted privately, except that they were oftentimes very fruitful sources of bewilderment; but he objected to them as a means of showing phenomena to people who knew nothing whatever of Spiritualism, and who simply came to such seances to see what they could see. He regarded it therefore as most essential that the Council should say definitely that no cabinet seances should be held upon these premises, to which inquirers should be admitted. His second resolution, to exclude darkness, he did not desire to press, as he readily admitted that there were some very desirable phenomena which could not be obtained without it, and dark seances might be made perfectly satisfactory to any reasonable investigators. As to the first and third resolutions he was glad to hear that the Séance Committee did not object to them, and he would therefore now move their adoption. He disclaimed any attempt to bind the committee by hard and fast rules, and the committee might still, by the leave of the Council, have the liberty, in an exceptional case, to use the methods of investigation which had hitherto prevailed. But what he desired was the affirmation of a principle, and the ability hereafter to point to the fact that immediately after the recent event the Council resolved that cabinet seances should be abolished. He moved the adoption of resolutions I. and III.*

*Mrs. FITZ-GERALD seconded the motion.*

*Mr. THEOBALD said that since this unfortunate occurrence he had been in communication with Mr. A. R. Wallace, who attributed all the blame to the Association for having permitted promiscuous circles. There were mediums in this country who could obtain the same manifestations without cabinets, and this was notably the case with Dr. Monck. He was glad to say that the testimonial which he was promoting for Dr. Monck now amounted to nearly £200, and that his "spiritual inventions," so far from being mere chimeras, promised to be very valuable indeed. When the doctor's health was restored he would again exercise his mediumship without charge, and the first offer of his services would be to the Council of this Association.*

*Mr. DAWSON ROGERS suggested an alteration in the first resolution. By withdrawing the second resolution it was intended that the use of dark seances for inquirers should still be permitted, but the words in the first resolution, "cabinet or other contrivance for secluding the medium from view" would have the same effect as*

*the passing of the second resolution would have had, for darkness was certainly a "contrivance for secluding the medium from view." If Mr. Stainton-Moses would substitute the words "or other contrivance for separating the medium from the circle," he should be happy to support his motion, which it was desirable should be carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Stainton-Moses assented, and the first resolution having been altered accordingly, his motion was unanimously adopted.*

*Mr. C. REIMERS said that if we accommodated ourselves completely to mishaps the effect which this would have on the public mind would, he thought be injurious, and he suggested therefore that we should try again to have seances with Mrs. Corner.*

*Mr. Dawson Rogers said that arrangements with this in view were already under consideration.*

(End of B.N.A.S Council proceedings.)

Although Mrs Corner did give séances in other places in later life, she did not return to the B.N.A.S or to its successor organisations.

PJG  
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## **SECOND THOUGHTS ON THE FIRST PSYCHIC**

Most readers will know of the medium D.D. Home (1833 - 1886). Endorsed by scientist William Crookes, friend of Emperors, levitator, never detected in fraud, he features in the standard histories of Spiritualism and psychical research, and is the subject of more biographies than any other medium. But do we really take seriously his significance? It is timely to ask some serious questions, as the paperback edition appears in the UK on 3 August 2006 of "The First Psychic" (Abacus) by Dr Peter Lamont, a research fellow at the Koestler Parapsychology Unit, University of Edinburgh. (hardback, Little, Brown, August.2005)

Most books by or about Home are hard to come by, and Dr Lamont's book is a convenient and lively starting point for students, deserving a place in every psychic library, large or small. The title derives from the discovery in his tests of Home by William Crookes in 1871 of what he called a psychic force, an expression previously coined by his fellow investigator Edward Cox. Home was the first psychic because, suggests Lamont, he was the first person in whom the force was experimentally verified, though whether it really existed would of course be disputed.

Few mediums did as much for Spiritualism as Home, and all the while threatened with death from consumption, diagnosed as early as 1854 when he was about 21.

But consider the following:

- 1) Home was not a Real Spiritualist. These are people who accept the philosophy and religion of Spiritualism neat, and reject trappings. Trappings are found in orthodox religions. When his rappings began, Home had contact with Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans before finding a degree of understanding with Spiritualists. In 1856 he became a Roman Catholic and was granted an audience with the Pope. Because both his wives were Russian Orthodox (his first wife tragically died from consumption) he also had some participation in the rites of that church. If Home were alive today, he would not be allowed to join the SNU.
- 2) Who were the spirits who assisted Home in his extraordinary phenomena? Spiritualists would generally assume they were the dead. But consider the words of Cox mentioned above in a letter to Home published in Home's book "Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism" ( 1877)

*I did not, and with subsequent extended inquiry I cannot now arrive at the conclusion you have come to, that these invisible agents are spirits of the dead. On the contrary, the more I see of their operations the more I am satisfied that they are not such. The solution that most presses upon my mind is that this earth is inhabited by another race of beings, imperceptible to us in normal conditions, probably our inferiors in intelligence, by whom what we witness is done. If it be not this the agent is the spirit of the medium more or less separated from the body. But whosoever that agent may be, the medium through which it is enabled to manifest its presence, and to operate upon molecular matter is the Psychic (that is to say, the soul) force of the assembled sitters. But now that the phenomena themselves, or some of them, have received general acceptance as facts in nature, it may be hoped that many observant minds will investigate them with a view to learn their precise nature and extent, as produced under absolute tests. Then we shall be in a position to inquire what they are, whence they come, and to what they point. (The full Cox letter appears in this issue of Pyspioneer.)*

Another race of beings! But were these angels, demons, fairies, ufonauts?

Here is an extract by a witness of one of his séances from Home's book "Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism" p.392:

*In the course of the evening an accordion lying upon the floor began discoursing beautiful music: in the midst of which a railroad train rushed screaming by, winding up its salute with three piercing shrieks. The music ceased abruptly, the accordion took up the long demoniac cry of the engine, with its three wild notes of warning, in such a manner that one would have declared it an actual echo; then the quiet, soothing melody was resumed....*

Worrying word, demoniac! This capacity for imitation was noted by Thurston, who had also found it in poltergeist cases. His argument with the Spiritualists was – if these entities can imitate sounds so well, perhaps they can and do imitate the human voice?

And then there is Crookes- surely Crookes was convinced that these were the spirits of the dead? In fact, he was not. Spiritualists in general do not realise this. They think that Crookes affirmed that the entity Katie King for example, was who she said she was. Crookes' view was well expressed in an 1874 letter which first appeared in LIGHT on May 12 1900.

*I have had almost unlimited opportunities of investigation, more so than perhaps any other man in Europe. Mr Home has scarcely given a seance in England during his recent visits without my presence at it, and most of his seances have been at my house or at my brother's. For six months Kate Fox was giving seances at my house once or twice a week, and since Christmas last Miss Cook has been almost like one of our family, being here more than at her parents' house, and giving tests and seances several times a week. In addition to these highly-gifted mediums I have had frequent seances with all the other good mediums whose names are familiar to Spiritualists.*

*During this whole time I have most earnestly desired to get the one proof you seek — the proof that the dead can return and communicate. I have never once had satisfactory proof that this is the case. I have had hundreds of communications professing to come from deceased friends, but whenever I try to get proof that they are really the individuals they profess to be, they break down. Not one has been able to answer the necessary questions to prove identity; and the great problem of the future is to me as impenetrable a mystery as ever it was.*

- 3) Then there is the matter of Home's attitude to mediumship as practised by others. He called the Davenport brothers "colossal humbugs" even though many Spiritualists regarded them as mediums. He published in "Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism" breathtaking details of fraudulent professional mediumship methods involving apports, spirit photography and materialisation. He was against dark séances, although the light was not always so good at his own. Stainton Moses also protested against dark séances. Despite the eminence of these workers, no attention has been paid to their protests over the decades.

D.D. Home believed he had a mission to spread Spiritualism, entrusted to him by his late mother (also gifted with second sight) who was first to communicate with him.

*"Daniel, fear not my child, God is with you, and who shall be against you. Seek to do good. Be truthful and truth-loving and you will prosper my child. Yours is a glorious mission- you will convince the infidel, cure the sick and console the weeping. "*

Sceptics may doubt this report, but his remembrance of this charge may be the clue to the mystery of D.D. Home. L.P.

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*[We continue with the letters of J. J. Morse's Australia / New Zealand trip between the periods of September 1902 to June 1903. This 4th letter is sent from Melbourne as published in 'Light' February 21<sup>st</sup> 1903]*

## LETTERS FROM MR. J. J. MORSE.

### IV.

*December 24th, 1902.*

According to the calendar this day is Christmas Eve, otherwise it would require some effort of the imagination to realise the imminence of the historic 'festive' season. As I pen these lines the sky is filled with leaden clouds, a stiff north-west wind is blowing, and a 'dust' storm is in full progress! Occasional splutters of rain drops are falling, and trees, shrubs, and vines are frantically waving in the rushing blast. Yet, bleak and wintry as the weather looks from my windows, the thermometer is calmly registering 76deg. In the shade! Curious to say, nevertheless, the proverbial 'oldest' resident assures me that this weather is quite exceptional for Christmastide; that it is usually fine, bright and cloudless, and the glass at about a 160deg. In the sun! He considerably added, 'Wait until to-morrow, and then you may have a scorcher from the north!'

In other respects the season appeals to the spirit of the times, for tradesmen do their best to simulate the usual state of affairs at home. Windows are specially dressed, evergreens are used for decorations, and even holly is to be seen. Toys and fancy goods abound, the customary greeting cards are in the stationers' windows, and trade seems fairly brisk, considering the prevailing hard times. Family gatherings take place, but mostly in the form of country picnics rather than assemblies at home. But, as wanderers afar, our hearts and thoughts turn towards ours and our friends, while deep down in our hearts is the feeling that we would prefer dear foggy old London town, grim and frowning though it be at this time of the year, to the smiles of Nature down here under the glitter of the Southern Cross. This, not because we are either unhappy or ungrateful, but because we love our homeland, and our lifelong friends therein. Our prayer is: May none be less happy to-day in merrie England than we are in 'sunny Australia,' as those who dwell in this Commonwealth delight to describe the land in which they live! How true it is that sentiment plays a larger part in our lives than many are, often, willing to acknowledge.

*December 25th, 1902.*

It is now Christmas Day, and contrary to the prognostications of my previously-mentioned friend, the temperature is not what he foretold, for the glass in my dining-room is only indicating 66deg. The wind is still coming in squalls, clouds are numerous, and the sun is making brave, but not very successful, efforts to favour us with his presence. I am assured the weather is quite exceptional for this time of the year, which is, of course, midsummer here. But so many times have we been told that this or that state of the weather is exceptional, that the conclusion is being forced upon us that the Melbourne climate is every whit as mixed and uncertain as is the climate of our native city.

We are spending a quiet Christmas- our three selves and Miss May Robertson, of Glasgow, constituting our family gathering. Miss Robertson has been in Australia for almost a year for the benefit of her health, and when she reached us a few days ago we were simply astonished at the very great improvement she manifested since we parted with her at Tilbury Docks in January last.

In response to a pressing desire my work in Melbourne was carried forward an additional Sunday, and did not terminate until the first Sunday of this month. A very numerous audience attended, and the utmost good feeling was manifested. Much regret was expressed that my work was closed, but the announcement of my return for a further course in the autumn was enthusiastically applauded when made by Mr. Terry, the president of the association. On the two succeeding Sundays I lectured in Geelong and Ballarat, respectively. The first named city is a charming place, and the centre of a very large trade in wool and agricultural produce. It has a population of about 15,000, and is about forty-five miles by rail from this city. By steamer, which is largely used, for the city is on an arm of the bay, the distance is a trifle more. The trip takes about four hours, and is very enjoyable and cheap, three shillings and sixpence for the return, as against eleven shillings by rail. A small circle has been in existence for a considerable time, at which a very promising trance speaker, Mr. H. Hobson, has been developed. The meeting was held in the Hibernian Hall, and we had a most satisfactory attendance. But prejudice runs hard against the subject, and ministers frequently warn their flocks from dealing in any form with so dangerous (?) a topic!

At Ballarat the state of affairs can only be described as deplorable. That city, with East Ballarat, has a population of about 44,000, and at one time (1878) had a flourishing Psychological Society, which body secured the services of Dr. Slade and Mr. Jesse Shepard for a series of seances, the results of which were recorded in a work issued by the late Mr. James Curtis, called 'Rustlings in the Golden City,' an English edition of which was lately issued by the publishers of 'LIGHT'; and, so far as Mr. Shepard's mediumship was concerned, the results were published in a pamphlet compiled by Mr. R. Lorrimer and issued by the society. Mr. Curtis was an old and respected citizen of Ballarat, owning one of the large printing establishments there. His business is now conducted by his niece. The society died, and in place of it an 'Eclectic Association' was formed, the latter body being in reality a Freethought association, and its principles being far too much in advance of the time, it fell into disrepute and soon became defunct. Most of the members were Spiritualists, so they, and the subject, shared in the common odium cast on the Freethought effort, and since then only two or three people have dared to say they are Spiritualists; The Mr. Lorrimer mentioned above was the only person who would undertake to promote my visit. The rest of the few avowed Spiritualists promised to attend the lecture, but emphatically refused to identify themselves openly with my presence, or take any active share therein! As a matter of fact, I was only introduced to three other Spiritualists, the rest being literally afraid to compromise themselves by being seen with a Spiritualist lecturer! The three local papers positively refused to name the matter for fear of being boycotted by their advertisers or supporters; while the advertisements of the meeting said not a word about Spiritualism! In the worst days at home I never encountered such timidity on the part of our people or our local Press. So far as mental freedom goes in regard to religious questions, I regret to say that I find a very different condition of affairs from what I had been led to believe was the case. Sectarian intolerance prevails in no small degree. My meeting was held in the

Trades Hall, a neat hall capable of seating some three hundred people, and as there was an audience of nearly two hundred, Mr. Lorrimer said the attendance 'exceeded his most sanguine expectations.'

Ballarat is one of the original gold mining; centres, and that industry is still flourishing, but it is all 'scientific' mining now. The pick, pan, and cradle have given place to the shaft, the stamp, and the mercury and cyanide processes. The 'digger' is displaced by the company, the camp by offices. Surface mining is a thing of the past, deep sinking is now the rule. I was introduced to the president of the mining Exchange, Mr. W.F. Emery, who is also the manager of the South Star Quartz Mining Company and by his courtesy was enabled, in his company, to make a descent to the 1,400 feet level. Imagine a North country coal pit, without the dirt and grime, with the usual heading and winding gear, engines and pumping machinery, and you have a modern gold mine. Below ground the tunnels are about six feet high, with plenty of water running down the 'roads,' and at that depth the air is quite warm. One has to quite change one's clothes and put on canvas suits with thick boots, and he emerges into the daylight looking most disreputable, covered with mud, and partially soaked with water. Absolutely no romance is left, and getting gold is as prosaic nowadays as is winning coal. Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York, when on their late visit, visited the mine in question, and the company spent £250 in preparing for their visit, providing expensive decorations, dresses for their use, and so arranging matters that not the least inconvenience should be experienced. The visit was to be to the 2,000 feet level, which is perfectly dry, but the distinguished visitors refused to fulfil their intention of descending, so the money was wasted, and a not pleasant recollection is now retained. It is said, how truly I cannot say, that Lord Hopetoun, who was then Governor General, laid an embargo on the descent, yet there was not the slightest danger, while naturally every precaution was taken to prevent any mishap. Personally I enjoyed the visit to the mine, but feel no temptation to become a miner!

On the last day of this month I sail in the ss. 'Warrimoo' for New Zealand, my first point being Invercargill, where I give a lantern lecture. The next day I proceed to Dunedin for six Sundays, some few of which will be devoted to Christchurch. Then I go on to Wellington for a month, returning to Melbourne, *via* Sydney, and possibly giving the latter city one or two Sundays. In April I hold my closing meetings here, and then go on to Brisbane for a month. After that we sail for the United States. Miss Morse has just returned from a most successful five weeks' work in Wellington, New Zealand, and will commence work in Melbourne for the association in January. But during my absence she and Mrs. Morse will remain here. I hope in my next to be able to say something regarding a series of very interesting seances I have been attending. But my space is gone, so, for this time, I must lay aside my pen.

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