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THE FLOWER MEDIUM

[**Note by LP:**—During the 1930s, an apport medium produced what Nandor Fodor later called “tremendous excitement” among Spiritualists. The case of Hilda (sometimes spelt Hylda) Lewis left a mass of documentation that is worthy of re-assessment. Perhaps the longest reports were in “Psychic Science”, but the briefer accounts in *LIGHT* as the argument raged, occupied over 11,000 words. Readers who wish to follow this can obtain an electronic copy of the *LIGHT* reports from the editor of *Psypioneer*. We reproduce below what must have been a very difficult report for Mrs McKenzie to write for “Psychic Science” readers.]



*The accompanying photograph was taken by Mrs. Edwards at her home in Highgate. The Flower Medium—Hilda Lewis is the lady standing. At the time this photograph was taken the medium was publicly known only as Miss X. The picture is taken from *Psychic Science* Vol. XIII No. 3 October 1934.*

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## BY MRS. HEWAT MCKENZIE—*PSYCHIC SCIENCE*<sup>1</sup>

In view of the confession of the Flower Medium, it seems necessary to put on record in “Psychic Science” some facts relating to this mediumship, as articles which honestly supported its complete genuineness appeared in the October, 1934 and January, 1935 issues, dealing with seances held on the College premises.

When in June 1934 Mrs. Champion de Crespigny was invited to examine the manifestations, she arranged for the sittings to be held at the College; no money was given to the medium, nor was any money taken from sitters amongst whom were members and non-members of the College invited personally by Mrs. de Crespigny. The matter was not brought before the College Council, Mrs. de Crespigny preferring to keep it entirely in her own hands at this stage, though members of the Council attended various sittings and discussed these with her. She also invited various researchers to assist her, Professor Fraser-Harris, Lord Charles Hope, and others. The sittings continued almost up to the time of Mrs. de Crespigny’s passing, and on my temporary

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<sup>1</sup> *Psychic Science*— Quarterly Transactions of the British College of Psychic Science (BCPS) Vol. XIV No.3 October 1935 pages 201-207.

assumption of the duties of Hon. Principal in March, 1935, the continuance of investigation by the Council was raised for the first time.

I had before me data as to suspicious incidents observed during the investigation, of some of which Mrs. de Crespigny was aware, and with which she would have dealt had she survived, which seemed to indicate that on some occasions at least the work of Miss Lewis was not genuine.

Flowers were found in her attaché case at the College by three witnesses—an hour previously she had refused proper examination of this case. Petals were found on various occasions in the cloakroom where she had gone without a witness, corresponding with those of flowers produced at current séances, and withered stems and leaves and fresh petals were found on the window-sill of the same cloakroom. A reliable detective agency was employed, with Mrs. De Crespigny's cognizance, to follow Miss Lewis for a whole day previous to a séance at the College. After her business hours, she was seen to visit four different flower shops in West End and to buy flowers, the colours of which were noted. She was seen manipulating these outside one shop, placing some under her coat and in her case, and the débris left on pavement was examined. She was followed to the College door and seen to enter. Unfortunately on this occasion she was not taken charge of immediately, her case secured and coat examined. The flowers produced at this séance corresponded with those described in the detective's report.

An infra-red film was exposed on her on several occasions by a College group; she wore no coat at these times, as she usually did. The light was insufficient for close personal observation and full examination of her person was hindered. The film reveals constant movement of her right hand, as if pushing something from behind. The flowers appear on the left as if oozing out of her skirt band or from the split which had been observed in her bathing costume; an unexplained loop of some kind of material was also noticed in the film and aroused suspicion.

The clairvoyance given by the medium at séances, from "Robin," evoked much interest; the details, names, etc. were amazingly accurate. Some sitters, who had an opportunity of comparing notes on this, observed that these communications had almost invariably reference to telephonic conversations which they had had in their own homes about the date of the séances which they attended; the medium was often aware as to who would be present at séances. An enquiry began as to Miss Lewis's opportunities for acquiring such knowledge. She was known to be in the employment of a City Firm, but what her job was, was not known. The authorities were informed of the suspicions, and observation was made upon her, and on the telephone lines of various persons. She suddenly lost her job, and made much capital out of the story that the Pepper Scandal was responsible for her firm's reduction of staff. She applied to one of the College Council for assistance in securing a job, and told him she was on switch-board work. When he proceeded to make inquiries, her late manager informed him personally of the reasons for her instant dismissal at the request of authoritative persons.

At the request of the Council I interviewed Miss Lewis in March and told her of the various allegations and of our knowledge of the above, and invited her, in order to re-verify her mediumship, and for Mrs. de Crespigny's sake, to give the College a series of six seances with a friendly group, under conditions made by the Council. She was told that if she required flowers

at her séances they would be amply provided, but they must be marked College flowers. She attempted some inadequate excuses in reply to the charges.

I saw her on a second occasion in the presence of Miss Evans, her friend, and Mrs. Hankey, the College Secretary, and again asked her to consider the above proposal. Miss Evans wrote some days later that Miss Lewis would give one séance at the College. This I refused. Meanwhile she was visiting other Societies offering her services. She undertook a contract with the Marylebone Spiritualist Association, and after two exhaustive test sittings, which appeared to satisfy her examiners, broke her contract. Mr. T. Dudley Parsons, the Hon. Principal of the Reading S.P.R. and an experienced lawyer, also states that he has seen the production of flowers, under test conditions. Dr. Fodor says that his searchers found no flowers on the medium, but that nevertheless flowers appeared at the sittings. His full report of the sittings has yet to appear. I have also a full report of a sitting in a private house on April 13th from Mr. De Brath and Miss Hyde in which they state positively, giving full details, as to the production of 12 roses and 6 sprays of lily-of-the-valley, after the medium had been stripped to the skin and re-clothed in examined garments. All the flowers, produced together, were fresh and unbruised. They certify that the medium never left the room, nor was for one moment out of sight.<sup>2</sup> I think it well to mention these facts, having no desire to suppress anything. She began to sit here, there and everywhere, often twice a day, and to take money for her services. I have in my possession all the data re above, and much more as to the early history of the medium, and have offered examination of this to persons who are now making themselves responsible for further examination of her mediumship but my offer has not been accepted. I may say that much information has been supplied spontaneously by persons who have suffered through Miss Lewis. I have letters from a dozen people, heads of Societies and private persons, who have discovered flowers in her attaché case on their premises; on one occasion a pineapple was seen by three responsible persons; this was produced afterwards as an “apport.”

She has seemingly always been gifted with a romantic imagination, to put it mildly, and some of her imaginative ventures have had sorry outcomes both for herself and others. She apparently came to a knowledge of spiritualism in 1931, and this gave her new ground to work upon. It will be remembered that no one, unless Miss Evans, knew anything about her when she was introduced to the College. She had boasted, however, to one of her hosts, that she belonged to some occult society, and that sleight-of-hand was prominent in the instruction received in order that the “members might protect themselves.” From what? This may only be another fairy tale like so much else that issues from her lips and has been accepted at face-value by her friends. In any case what has anyone working amongst spiritualists, and postulating a saint as a guide, to do with sleight-of-hand?

Her “doctor” father guiding from the other side, is a myth; her father is alive. I have evidence as to the origin of “Robin” in a very simple story, and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is little likely, if she wishes an earth contact, to use an instrument of this calibre. Some of the statements accepted about the mediumship are likely to pass into legends and to prevent this, a

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<sup>2</sup> *Psychic Science*—A later addition to this positive report reveals that two roses were found before the séance hidden in an armchair in which the medium was to be seated. She and Miss Evans had been in the room. (Mr. De Brath was not made aware of this discovery).

few plain words may be of use to our readers. We may all be mistaken at times in the investigation of the delicate forces of mediumship, but we must seek and find the truth regarding these at all cost.

*Marks of burning.* Professor Fraser-Harris was accused of producing such marks on her skin by touching her when in trance. This accusation has been repeated against the Professor *ad nauseam* wherever Miss Lewis has held sittings, causing him much annoyance. In a letter to "Light" of August 29th, he has made it clear on what slender foundation this rests, and suggests how such marks could be artificially produced. It made a good story to tell, however, to prevent other people from touching her.

*Flowers out of season.* A Colchicum, (autumn crocus) and forget-me-nots were produced on one occasion and claimed to be impossible to find at that season. Both were found growing freely in private gardens and public parks at the time.

*Other Plane Flowers, or Heavenly Creations.* "Sister Thérèse" claimed that the roses were from spirit planes, and not apports. They have been duplicated on many occasions by flowers bought in the open street. The usual rose was the well-known "Butterfly" which is largely grown for commercial purposes. On one occasion a green fly was found on a rose examined by a sitter, and shown to others. On other occasions "rust" has been found on the flowers. If apports had been suggested these features might have been accepted.

*Dew* has been claimed as the origin of the moisture so frequently found on the roses. It has been pointed out that dew is not only caught on outside leaves but within the rose; this moisture was superficial, and on occasions had an unpleasant odour.

The *sealing* of the stem-ends was described as a non-mundane peculiarity. It is a common commercial practice, to preserve the freshness of flowers!

*Thornless roses.* There are thornless roses on the market, and their suitability for concealment is evident; it is also easy to remove thorns if necessary.

To give Miss Lewis the benefit of anything that can be said in favour of her mediumship, I would note that she sat in good light with persons close to her on either hand, scrutinizing her closely, and that she submitted to a degree of previous search of her person. The latter was usually vitiated by the alleged on-coming of trance, by nausea and sickness, and by the use of a towel which became an object of grave suspicion. The room in which she was examined and to which she had free access was not always subject to the strict observation necessary. She often escaped out of the hands of her examiners to the cloakroom without being kept under observation, when otherwise the search was said to be satisfactory, so defeating the aims of her examiners.

One investigator supplies me with data of occurrences which need further explanation. On July 19, 1934, he sat in a group at the College, on her left side. "The medium lent forward and her hands disappeared from view for a time. She then sat upright and placed her hands on her knees, when I noticed a rough, greyish convex mass in which there was movement, suggesting a heaving rubber sponge, in the midst of which I could see leaves and flowers which seemed to

form as the mass vanished. I did not speak of what I saw at the moment, but several other sitters, among them Mrs. de Crespigny on her right, mentioned the appearance independently; others did not see this.

“On July 28<sup>th</sup>, I saw the ‘greyness’ again; my note read:- ‘The greyish mass was visible as before.’ My recollection is that it was more mist-like and did not seem to be in movement.

“I thought I heard rustling as of leaves in a faint breeze and I saw leaves and rose buds in the mist. I spoke of this after the séance, and Dr. Coulthard and Miss Tom-Gallon said they too had seen it.

“On August 27<sup>th</sup>, I saw this appearance again, and it was the least distinct of the three occasions. One sitter said he saw ‘points of light’ in the greyness as the flowers were ‘coming.’

“On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, I have an independent report from a person who sat next her that he saw the ‘greyness.’ I did not on this occasion as I was not so near her.”

If anyone can add to these observations of such an appearance I shall be glad to hear from them.

*Lights* have been observed during some dark seances. These when examined by experts, by the spectroscop, corresponded with the spectrum of the light given by a small electric torch. At the source of the light was observed what appeared to be the filament of an ordinary pocket lamp electric bulb, and that Miss Lewis carried such an article is confirmed from another source. Does this provide an explanation of the above ‘points of light?’

It would have been a great pleasure if we could have endorsed genuine mediumship of so remarkable a nature, but instead we find ourselves faced with prevarication and deceit, of a peculiarly distasteful kind, against devoted friends, who, accepting Miss Lewis’s story of her wonders, gave her the utmost trust.

A new group of workers have now taken her in charge, and it is said that she will submit to tests by an Oxford Society: this remains to be seen. A promise had been given to the Institute for Psychical Research to continue the examination begun there by Dr. Nandor Fodor. It has now been intimated to him that further sittings under ‘dangerous test conditions’ will not be given until Hilda Lewis proves herself a bona-fide medium!

Some hazard that this girl is a pathological case, and deserving of our pity; that she really has genuine psychic powers, but “provides” in case of failure. But this does not explain why she had any need to “provide,” not only since last March as suggested when she began to take money for seances, but while she was in a job, and receiving the devoted and loving interest of our late Hon. Principal. It is my considered opinion, in view of all the facts I have before me, that psychic students waste their time on such uncertain cases.

**End Note by LP:**—For the experiments in Oxford, the flower medium stayed at the home of J. Cecil Maby. A report was published in *Journal Society for Psychical Research (JSPR)* 29 December 1936 p. 303-4. Maby was a trained botanist and he was not favourably impressed.

What eventually became of the medium? Just before the 1939 war there were reports of a materialisation medium in Reading. Her name was Hilda Lewis.

Finally, and to return to the BCPS, the late Denise Iredell,<sup>3</sup> daughter of Muriel Hankey the secretary at the BCPS, wrote to *Psypioneer*:—

I cannot find any notes about what Muriel told me on several occasions and others of what also happened at the examination of the Flower Medium. I should explain that Mrs. de Crespigny was a woman of such probity herself that she could never entertain the possibility that anyone could cheat. In this respect she was not a sound investigator. She thought that an intimate physical examination (p.v., for instance) would be highly indecorous. In the printed records there is no reference that Miss Lewis always went to the w.c. immediately before the I. Mrs. de Crespigny would not allow Muriel to accompany the medium even into the lavatory area. However, after the said visit to w.c Muriel stood on the lid, put her hand up and into the cistern and withdrew it clutching flowers—I think roses!!

I'm quite happy to come in on this matter if you write about the Flower Medium. I consider it is quite important that Muriel's finding of the flowers in the flushing cistern should be mentioned, if any assessment is now being made. Forty years ago Muriel was anxious that the matter should not be brought up to stir up trouble again, but maybe now, forty years on, the matter can be written about with the safety of distance in time.

Denise also stated that in tracing the phone activity of Miss Lewis, it was necessary to enlist the aid of the authorities. Mrs Hankey's husband was quite well connected, and a sympathetic former Home Secretary put in a word. He was Mr Churchill M.P.

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<sup>3</sup> *Psypioneer* Vol. 5, No. 11 page 351 *Great loss to survival research*  
<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.11November09.pdf>

# THOMAS SHORTER—*THE MEDIUM AND DAYBREAK*<sup>4</sup>

[**Note by LP:**— We are privileged to reprint this biographical sketch of an eminent working class Spiritualist, editor and reformer, which reminds us once more of the industriousness of the first pioneers. Mr. Shorter fell into undeserved obscurity, considering that he was once, as the author here notes “perhaps, the most voluminous writer on Spiritualism in this country.”]



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The subject of our present sketch was born in London, in that busy hive of watchmaking industry, the parish of Clerkenwell, in the year 1823, on the first day of November, the month in which—according to the French novelists—Englishmen generally hang and drown themselves. Losing his father at an early age, and the mother being left with a family of young children, he had little opportunity of school education, but soon manifested a passion for reading, eagerly devouring whatever books came in his way, for he had no judicious Mentor to guide his choice, and, indeed, little chance of picking and choosing.

At eleven years of age he began the battle of life as an errand boy with Southgate, the book-auctioneer, in Fleet Street. At thirteen he was apprenticed to the business of a watch-case joint finisher, his regular hours of work being in summer from six in the morning till eight at night, and in the winter from seven till nine. At that time there was no working-men’s college, and the only means of mental cultivation free to him, besides such few books as his scanty means could buy, was by what were known as “mutual improvement societies,” and by attendance at public meetings and lectures, and at coffee-houses, where discussions were held on public affairs and on questions social, political, and theological. He took a keen interest in these subjects, and when only about fifteen years of age, occasionally joined in these coffee-house debates and began to receive invitations to deliver public lectures, with which he complied whenever it was possible to do so. His sympathies were especially enlisted in favour of the socialist movement, to which the impulse was given by Robert Owen, and to the political movement for the enfranchisement of the working-classes.

When about eighteen he became honorary secretary to a branch society of the friends of the former movement in Finsbury; and was one of a committee of five who drew up the rules of the first Bowket Building Society in London, and remained on its board of management till other

⁴ *The Medium and Daybreak* February 4, 1876 page 66.

avocations compelled him to withdraw from it. He also joined the committee of the People's Charter Union, and took an active part in forming a small local society in Finsbury, which was its immediate precursor. His political action at one time very nearly brought him into serious trouble. He had been the leading speaker at a public meeting at Farringdon Hall; a grossly false report of his speech appeared the following day in the *Morning Chronicle*, in which sentiments and language of the most violent and outrageous character were imputed to him; and on this scurrilous report a leading article was based, calling on the Government to prosecute the speaker. That this recommendation was not adopted was probably due to the circumstance that a Government reporter was present, and made a verbatim report of the proceedings. An indignant letter from Mr. Shorter appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, but the editor declined to withdraw the false and offensive imputations that had been made.

The great political events of 1848 and the letters on "London Labour and the London Poor," which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, and at the time attracted such wide attention, gave a new impulse to inquiries into the condition of the working classes, and to efforts for its amelioration. One of these may be here referred to. The late Professor Maurice and Professor Kingsley, with Mr. Thomas Hughes, Mr. J. M. Ludlow, and other professional gentlemen, invited certain working men, among whom were Mr. Walter Cooper, Mr. Joseph Milbank, and Mr. Thomas Shorter, to meet them in order to learn the views and feelings of those working men, and to confer with them as to any practical measures which it might be considered advisable in consequence to adopt. The outcome of these conferences was the establishment in 1850 of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations, afterwards called the Association for Promoting Industrial and Provident Societies, and to which Mr. Shorter was appointed secretary.

Several industrial co-operative societies were formed in London—tailors, shoemakers, engineers, printers, bakers, pianoforte-makers, &c., and a central co-operative agency was established in London (chiefly through the generous aid of Mr. Edward Vansittart Neale) for supplying co-operative stores throughout the country with groceries of unadulterated quality and at wholesale prices, and a correspondence was entered into with these and all co-operative societies in Great Britain, of which information could be obtained, in order to promote greater unity of action among them and mutual support. A register was also kept, giving the date of formation of each society, the number of its members, the amount of business done by it, and such other particulars as it was deemed useful to learn, and which these societies were willing to communicate.

Mr. Shorter attended as Secretary the Annual Co-operative Conferences convened by the Society and held in London, Manchester, and Leeds, and took part in the public meetings which followed. It would be out of place, and would occupy too much space to enter here into the causes which led to the failure of this movement in London. It may be sufficient to say that co-operation can only be successfully carried out by co-operators, and that most of the members of these industrial co-operative societies had no previous knowledge of co-operation, and were only interested in it for what they hoped individually to get out of it; and the few who really cared for co-operation as a principle, had little of the practical knowledge and business experience on which success in business is so largely dependent.

The movement of "Christian Socialism," as it was termed, however, bore some valuable fruit. Its publications, lectures, meetings, and conferences did much to spread a knowledge of the principles of co-operation throughout the country, to elevate; the moral tone of the movement, to diffuse a higher spirit among its workers, and to smooth the road for co-operators in the future. Mainly owing to the indefatigable exertions of Messrs. Hughes and Ludlow, the Industrial and Provident Societies Act was passed, by which legal protection to these societies was first obtained. The Working-Men's College in Great Ormond Street, founded in 1854, was the direct outgrowth of the Christian Socialist movement, and Mr. Shorter was appointed its secretary, a position which he held till 1867, when ill-health and failing sight led him to resign the responsible office, whose duties he could not efficiently discharge, and which he left not without substantial evidence of the good-will of those with whom he had so long been working.

Mr. Shorter's investigations into Spiritualism began in 1854, and his experiences were published in a series of papers in the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* in 1856 and 1857. This was the first extended narrative of the kind in England. It was subsequently published in a volume (now out of print), entitled "Confessions of a Truth-seeker." Besides being a constant contributor to the *Yorkshire* (subsequently the *British*) *Spiritual Telegraph*, he contributed to other journals more or less devoted to the advocacy of Spiritualism. Among these were *The Two Worlds*, a weekly journal, edited by Dr. Dixon, advocating Spiritualism, homœopathy, and total abstinence; the *Spiritual Times*, the first weekly journal in London exclusively devoted to Spiritualism; and the *Biological Review*. In connection with Mr. W. M. Wilkinson he established in 1860 the *Spiritual Magazine*, to which he has ever been a constant contributor; though, from loss of sight at the commencement of last year, he resigned its editorship to Dr. Sexton. Besides numerous contributions, in prose and verse, to spiritual journals, several volumes and pamphlets on subjects connected with Spiritualism have been written by him. These include the volume already named; "The Two Worlds," a work of some 500 closely-printed pages, the fruit of much careful reading and research; an essay on "What is Religion?" in which the bearings of Spiritualism in its relation to religion are considered and defined; a "Reply to a Sermon by the Rev. John Jones Zones, entitled 'Spiritualism the Work of Demons;'" a "Sketch of the Life of John Murray Spear;" an essay, entitled "Concerning Miracles;" a treatise on "Immortality in Harmony with Man's Nature and Experience;" and a small volume of poems, entitled "Wayside Verses," chiefly in illustration of spirit-communion and kindred themes. It may not be out of place to mention here that the plan of a spiritual Institute, as it appeared on the cover of one of the early numbers of *Human Nature*, was drawn up by Mr. Shorter, as were also the addresses severally presented to Emma Hardinge, William Howitt, and Judge Edmonds; and he has recently contributed the article on "Modern Spiritualism" to the new edition of *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, by invitation of its editor, at the special recommendation of Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace.

Mr. Shorter has never been a professional lecturer, but he has freely given himself to the advocacy of the spiritual philosophy from the platform, as well as in the press. He was one of the promoters of the Conferences on Spiritualism in 1869, held in Lawson's Rooms, Gower Street, in which Emma Hardinge took the lead—one of the most useful series of meetings in connection with the movement ever held in the metropolis. Mr. Shorter, by request of the committee, acted as vice-president, and delivered the opening address, and, next to Emma Hardinge, he was the most frequent speaker at these meetings.

On his retirement from the post of secretary to the Working-Men's College in 1867, a number of friends who appreciated his services to Spiritualism presented him with a testimonial as an expression of their sympathy and regard. His address in acknowledgement of this mark of kindness and good-will towards him, published in the *Spiritual Magazine* for April, 1868, is an example of his public oratory.

In addition to his writings on Spiritualism, Mr. Shorter has been a contributor to other branches of journalism and literature. Among these journals we may mention *Cooper's, Journal, Christian Socialist, Journal of Association, Weldon's Register, Working-Men's College Magazine,* and *Quarterly Journal of Education*, of which latter journal he was for three years the editor; he was also for some time sub-editor of the *London American*, a weekly newspaper devoted to the cause of the American Union during the great civil war in the United States. Several reading-books of general interest, though most of them primarily intended for scholastic use, have been compiled and edited by him. These are, "Poetry for School and Home" "A Book of English Poetry," "A Book o' English Prose," "Shakespeare for Schools and Families," "Love: a Selection of Poems from the best Poets."

It will be seen from this brief sketch that Mr. Shorter's life has not been an idle one. He has been, perhaps, the most voluminous writer on Spiritualism in this country. When the committee of the Dialectical Society began its investigation, Mr. Shorter was one of the first persons to whom they applied for information and advice, and his letter to the committee and the evidence given by him appear in its Report. Though failing sight and ill-health now cripple his efforts, and prevent the execution of some important works on Spiritualism he has long contemplated, his interest in all questions affecting human improvement, and especially in a broad catholic Spiritualism, is unabated, and to its advocacy the best powers of his mind are still devoted.

Our portrait is taken from a photograph by Mr. F. Hudson, of 2, Kensington Park Road, Notting-Hill Gate, and the earlier part of this memoir from the *Bee-Hive* newspaper of Nov. 20th last.

THE PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP of GORDON HIGGINSON



[**Note by LP:**—In our April issue,⁵ we printed an inside account by Dr Barrie Colvin about the 1977 Sunday People story attack on Gordon Higginson., which explained how Dr Colvin, who did not instigate it, came to check it before publication by meeting the reporter (the year of this meeting was 1977, and not 1974 as wrongly printed by us). Higginson commented on the People story in his autobiography:—*On the side of Angels* (1993) which was compiled by Jean Bassett.]

[**Note by Psypioneer:**—Brigadier Frank Spedding’s report is published after “Gordon Higginson replies.” Spedding mentions in his report three guides/controls during the séance he attended: Paddy—Kuku—and an older man who welcomed the sitters. The last is probably Choo Chow, his primary guide during his trance work and teaching. Paddy generally took charge at Higginson’s physical circles. As to Kuku—Cuckoo, Higginson had said this young black girl was with him during his early schooldays. Gordon Higginson’s autobiography referred to— *On the side of Angels*—is still available at Psychic News Bookshop Online.⁶

The photograph was taken at a Bedford Corn Exchange demonstration circa 1974.]

Gordon Higginson replies: — *On the Side of Angels*⁷

I, along with other mediums, have often been accused by sceptics of secreting muslin or such about our persons or even swallowing the stuff only to regurgitate or produce it during the seance. If so, how then is it dry to the touch? How then can the material be soft at one moment and hard the next? These sceptics ignore the variety of textures, the density and the speed with which it moves from one location to the next.

What vast quantities of material would have to be used and manipulated in the dark to produce the results of just one successful sitting, one where normally people are sitting so close that they could, with little difficulty, reach out and touch me as at Barbie’s flat. There, two sitters were one on either side of me, holding my hands.

⁵ Volume 6, No.4 pages 109-114:— <http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.4.April2010..pdf>

⁶ <http://www.psychicnewsbookshop.co.uk/product/112>

⁷ Chapter10: *Spirit Promise Kept*:—pages 67-70.

One person, a scientist called Dr Colvin, instigated a most dreadful story in the national papers. He and a brigadier, who also belonged to the Society for Psychological Research, said one of my seances was a cheat. Dr Colvin stated that he searched the library at Stansted Hall before a seance and found yards of material hidden in my chair.

Neither he nor the paper in question offered any explanation of why he had not complained at the time and waited four years before releasing this accusation. If he had discovered material secreted in my chair, why did he not draw the attention of the people present to this fact at the time?

Dr Colvin did not offer an explanation of how the material was manipulated. The materialised forms often move yards away from where I am seated; they float above the head and sometimes seem to just disappear, as if into a hole in the floor. He did not mention any equipment which would, presumably, have to be used in order to produce shapes and movement.

Anyone who knows Stansted Hall also knows that the floors are solid and that any such hole for ectoplasm to disappear into would be immediately obvious. It is not only my integrity in question when these accusations are made, but also the integrity of the people who organise and those who witness the event. During the seance, Dr Colvin was invited to feel the ectoplasm and had declared to all present that it had a gauze-like texture. If he was going to make a statement four years later to national papers, then it would have been better had he said so at the time. Well-known Spiritualist Peter Parnham was present at this session and made a statement in my defence. It was his mother's materialised form that was one of those "bits of cloth." Peter resented the implications that first I was a cheat, and then that he and all those present were so gullible as to be fooled by such methods.

He pointed out that his mother had given intimate personal evidence of her identity, and that as she came away from the cabinet he and his sister remarked how tall she was. The control said that was because they had not materialised her legs. Once this was done, she assumed her normal proportions of some four feet ten inches. The form did not come back into the cabinet for this adjustment, but it was made there and then.

Incidentally, the seance was taped. Peter ordered a copy after the seance as Dr Colvin was offering them for sale. When he received it some time afterwards his mother's speech was not on the tape. You can imagine that when all this came out I felt quite sick. Spirit have been so good to me over the years, but they are powerless to protect me from the venom in this sort of affair. Incidentally, after a lengthy investigation, the verdict of a tribunal to investigate allegations after I demonstrated in Bristol was "Not proven."

I was so very upset at Dr Colvin's claims. They came when the union was holding its annual general meeting. Distraught, I just could not attend the Sunday of conference after reading of the accusations in a Sunday paper. It had surely been timed just for this! I was ashamed that my name should be so used; I was ashamed that Spiritualism should be so smeared. I was actually frightened of the support that I knew I should get from our members. I didn't want to risk breaking down. And I truly felt that I might.

I cannot say how it hurts me when I read of such things. I do not gain materially. Such events as materialisation seances do not even enhance my ego for I know nothing of them other than that which is relayed to me afterwards. Even photographs are not proof for the sceptic.

The Spiritualist papers picked up the story and printed it. I was cross at the time, but then I was going through a very bad patch. I had been threatened physically. Bomb threats were sent to my church and my home. I was ready to give up altogether. Good friends defended me, Spirit stayed close, but it was a difficult time and I cannot forget these sort of things.

Spirit forms who are both larger and smaller than me have materialised over the years, sometimes more than one at the same time! I am trying to be honest here. Not all have been recognised by their features, but many have. This is something that cannot be done by trickery. Above all is the evidence that they present, the personal information, the little matters like a father's braces which were always falling down help in their recognition.

All these are part of the signs and wonders permitted to us from the spirit world not just to show us that we go on, but that our love links do not die: they are always there for us. It is some time now since I have sat just for materialisation. My health does not permit this these days.

I don't believe anything is right for those who are determined not to believe; they will believe what they want to believe. I have risked my health and strength over the years. Materialisation mediumship does produce changes in the body during the production of ectoplasm. This can—and often does—have an effect on the biological balance of the body and can be detrimental to the medium.

The sceptic cries "Fraud!" They produce magicians who by trickery can produce "phenomena." They risk nothing for if they do not prove fraud they merely state that the medium is "too clever." Their world is flat: they do not see the wonder of the Master. Their minds are closed: they do not accept the glorious diversity and splendour of the works of God. I would not change the work I have done except perhaps to make it better. I have been very privileged to be the instrument through which many have found comfort, hope and strength."

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# SITTING WITH GORDON HIGGINSON AT STANSTED HALL

By Frank Spedding, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1974

[**Note by LP:**—We are printing below Brigadier Spedding's report on the séance – which report it is doubtful the medium ever saw. It will be apparent that there are several problems with the Spedding report.

- 1) He concludes with some general remarks about the supposed credulity of Spiritualists which are not really called for in a description of a séance. Whether or not Spiritualists (or for that matter psychical researchers) are credulous is a wider question requiring much more evidence—certainly the investigation of the flower medium, reported elsewhere in this issue, involving several Spiritualist societies working together {British College of Psychic Science (BCPS), London Spiritualist Alliance (LSA), International Institute for Psychical Research (IIPR) etc } showed considerable acuity.
- 2) The Brigadier witnessed one séance. Crookes wrote about Florence Cook after numerous séances. This does remind us that when a person sees a single séance with a particular medium, he is perhaps as likely to be repelled as convinced, a disadvantage of séances for rather disparate groups.
- 3) Inevitably Spedding was confined to the séance room, and therefore did not see the precautions taken before the séance began. The normal sequence was events was:
  - a) GH searched
  - b) GH visits gents at Stansted.
  - c) GH enters séance room.

It was once pointed out to GH that evidentially, it would be better if (b) came before (a) but he adhered to his custom, and in any case, no muslin or the like was ever found in the Stansted gents. Nevertheless, to anyone who recalled the flower medium, and her use of the ladies lavatory at BCPS as a hiding place, this was unfortunate.]

## **Spedding's report:**

Since a cassette record of the sitting, made by Dr. B. G. Colvin, will be available, the following notes give my general impressions and do not contain any verbatim statements by those present.

The sitting was specially arranged for members of the Eltham Spiritualist Church and rather over sixty of these arrived by coach at about 3pm and returned after the sitting. Also present at

the sitting were a few members of the staff of Stansted Hall and four 'outsiders', these being Dr. Barrie Colvin, an SPR member, a Mr. Joe Mckie from Newcastle, my wife and myself. Dr. Colvin and Mr. Mckie are interested in carrying out research into materialisation phenomena with Gordon Higginson and had a discussion with him before the meeting at which he said he would like to co-operate, but I gathered that this would be very much on his own terms—for example, photographs could be taken only when the 'guides' give permission. He allowed Dr. Colvin to bring a camera to the meeting, but just before it started he told him that some of the Eltham group had complained that, as they had been told that no photographing would be allowed, it would be unfair for Dr. Colvin to use his camera and asked him to remove the camera which he had mounted on a tripod. I very much doubt if anyone had complained, and I think it was just an excuse to prevent Dr. Colvin taking photographs.

The seating arrangements and the position of the cabinet seemed to be in exactly the same format as the sitting attended by Dr. Alan Gauld on the 26th May 1972; so was the general pattern of events. The main difference was in the lighting. It was a dull evening and practically no light came through the gaps between the window curtains and the ceiling. A 60w red light controlled by a rheostat was used throughout the meeting. It was mounted on the top of the cabinet at the front and was controlled by Dr. Colvin. Even with the red light on, the front interior of the cabinet was in complete darkness and I found it difficult to see whether the curtains were drawn. During the sitting, 'figures' appeared from time to time a foot or so in front of the cabinet. All I could see was the top of the figure's head, which looked remarkably like that of the medium covered in some sort of material and dimly illuminated by the red light; then what might have been a face, but it was too dark to distinguish any features; then a quantity of 'ectoplasm' starting from where the figure's mouth might have been and trailing down into darkness. The 'ectoplasm' seemed to be an inch or two wide at the top, broadening out to eight or nine inches when it became no longer visible. On two occasions the 'guide' announced that the medium AND a materialised figure or figures would be seen together. What I saw was the vague outline of the medium and at his side an object (and on accession two objects) about the size of melons with 'ectoplasm' coming down from them. It must be emphasised that the light was very dim indeed.

The proceedings started with a short talk from Higginson which included a request for Dr. Colvin to remove his camera. He explained that a meeting would be arranged in the future at which photographs may be taken. It was emphasised that no-one should get up in order to touch their 'loved-ones' and that it is possible that nothing will happen at all. After the singing of the 23rd Psalm, Higginson said a prayer. He then entered the cabinet and the only form of lighting was the small red light on the top of it. After several minutes we heard heavy breathing followed by the appearance of what purported to be a much older man who welcomed the sitters with the words 'Bless you! He continued:—"We greet you in the name of the spirit and ask that you put aside all that may come between us. And to know that as we gain life from the same God, we are? in love, we have the same opportunities ....."

He asked that his chair be placed in the cabinet and he followed it. After sitting down we heard some heavy breathing followed by the voice of 'Kuku' saying "We won't be long now". Heavier breathing followed and then we heard 'Paddy' who was well known to the sitters. He asked us to sing something Irish in order to break the ice. This was accordingly followed by a

verse of 'If you're Irish'. After further heavy breathing, a whitish form appeared at the join of the curtains which prompted the sitters to coax the entity a little further out of the cabinet. Paddy then asked that the gentleman controlling the light should make it a little brighter, which was done at once. The medium was clearly seen standing up in the cabinet and a length of 'ectoplasm' was apparent. It appeared to come from the mouth of the medium and almost reached the floor. He then returned to the interior of the cabinet and there followed a period of clairvoyance, still with the voice of Paddy. The dialogue was as follows:—

“Hey, I want to say first of all that I have a gentleman that's going to try and manifest, who says that there is a lady here that has the initials of N and F”.

(Yes, Daddy!)

“Can you hear all right?” (Yes)

“Is there someone with the initials of N and F?”

After some difficulty in finding the relevant recipient, Paddy says:—

“Hey, this gentleman is talking about Rochester Way”

(Yes, that's right)

“He says that he knows something about it”

(Oh, I suppose he does)

“Can you follow now”

(Yes)

“He says that he's got something here to do with the name of Flower”. “Can you follow now?”

(Yes, that's the lady's name - Mrs. Flower)

Paddy then explains that he would like us to sing in order that the entity may build more easily. The dialogue continues:—

“The gentleman that's here is a relation to you through marriage that wants to come to you. The lady, will she speak to us? ..... it's a gentleman named Flower, is this your father-in-law?”

(Oh, my father-in-law ... bless his heart)

“Hey, he wants to be remembered to you. Can you follow now?”

(Yes, I can follow .....)

“Can you follow now?”

(Yes)

At this stage a white figure appeared at the entrance of the cabinet and the sitters tried to coax him out saying ‘Come along .....’ Paddy stated that the form was quite separate from the medium and the sitters tended to agree with this. Personally, I was quite unable to verify this from my seat which was on the front row (but a little to the side) He then asked that the light be turned down a little. This was done. After some general discussions, Paddy said that the ‘gentleman’ was giving him the number ‘375’. The recipient replied that she lived at this number. Paddy then said that he would try to get the gentleman out and emphasised that the light should stay as it is. The sitters then began to sing ‘When Irish Eyes Are Smiling’. At the end of the song, the materialised form could be clearly seen although no definite features could be distinguished. It approached the recipient (a lady in the front of the meeting) and began to speak in a whispery, almost inaudible voice:—

“Bless You”

(Bless You)

“How are you?”

(Oh, I’m fine)

“It’s so nice to see you”

The form returned to the cabinet and we then heard Kuku’s voice again. A number of similar ‘materialisations’ followed, the dialogue between sitters, Paddy, Kuku and spirit form being recorded on the tape.

Sometimes Paddy would call out a name and several sitters would answer ‘Yes, we know him’. In such cases, Paddy would ask for a message to be delivered to the absent member. Exact addresses were nearly always given and, as far as I remember, there was only one mistake; 827 instead of 837, as a house number. I could see no difference between any of the materialised forms except when the form and the medium appeared together and then the head was smaller.

Before Higginson went into trance he said he had asked two ladies to sit close to the cabinet on either side to restrain any sitters who were carried away by emotion and might try to clasp the materialised form of their loved one. In the event, their services as guard-dogs were not required.

When the child ‘Kuku’ spoke, several sitters who seemed to have had previous acquaintance with her tried to cajole her out of the cabinet in the sort of tones one would use to entice a small dog from under a table:—‘Come on Kuku, come on dear, don’t be shy—come on, there’s nothing to be afraid of’.

Afterwards, my wife was in the cloakroom with about a dozen of the Eltham group and they were all eulogistic about the sitting; not a word of criticism or disappointment.

Our opinion was that the materialisations were crude fakes which should not have deceived anyone of normal intelligence. Higginson said he only gives four materialisation sittings a year, but I believe he gives a lot of platform demonstrations and his speciality is the production of accurate names and addresses. In the present instance, it would have been easy to memorise a few names and addresses of members of the Eltham Spiritualist Church who were likely to be present. It didn't matter if they were there or not; someone could always pass on a message from a 'deceased' relative. The accuracy with which he was able to give a few family details was puzzling at first hearing, but analysis of the tape recording might throw further light on this.

Whether it was significant or not, Higginson changed from his fairly light-grey suit he was wearing in the afternoon to a pair of dark trousers and a dark blue pullover which made it even more difficult to see him in the cabinet. He also made no secret about removing his shoes before he went into trance.

At the sitting at which Dr. Gauld was present, a number of sitters actually touched the 'ectoplasm'. Nothing like this happened on the present occasion and Higginson made it very clear that touching was not going to be allowed.

Incidentally, Higginson announced that he had been searched by one of the Eltham visitors. I had, by chance, spoken to this man beforehand and he struck me as a simple and sincere sort of person, unlikely to have been an accomplice. As Higginson was never stripped completely to be searched, it would have been relatively easy for him to conceal a length of nylon gauze or some such material.

Dr. Gauld mentioned an incident when a lady close to the cabinet was told by Higginson that some threads of her white underskirt had been taken and used (presumably by Paddy to build up materialisations—I can't see what else they could have been wanted for). The same thing happened on this occasion but I didn't see the significance of it.

To sum up, the platform clairvoyance gave a number of accurate names and addresses and some family details, but I noticed that on a few occasions when a direct question was asked, it was not answered. The materialisations were so obviously fraudulent that one is left wondering how so many people who presumably conduct their lives in a reasonable way can accept such rubbish with apparent enthusiasm. Is it because they dare not let one thought of doubt or criticism enter their minds, for if they did this whole balloon of self-deception would be punctured and what they now believe is a life-line to the next world would just disappear.

Frank Spedding

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We are grateful to Dr Alan Gauld for the following comments in June 2010:—

Yes, I did indeed attend a Higginson materialisation session at Stansted, and remember it rather well. So far as I can recall I did not write any ‘Report’ on it for anyone, though I did make some notes on it (probably buried somewhere in the mass of files in my garage!) and I may have mentioned it to Frank Spedding. I went with the members of a home circle I sat in in Leicester for some years. My experiences were very much the same as those of Frank Spedding and Barrie Colvin, except that the light was unusually good. A bright evening sun filtered through the blinds and we had quite a good view of the ‘phenomena’. The materialisations appeared to me to be egregiously fraudulent. I could quite clearly discern the plump figure of the perambulating Higginson through what appeared to be a sheet of fine nylon net curtaining that served as ‘ectoplasm’. When, as the piece de resistance, ‘the medium and the materialisation came out together’ the materialisation was manifestly Higginson holding up his hand in front of him to let the nylon hang down from it. In fact the minor phenomena that took place at the above—mentioned home circle were far more puzzling and interesting than the Higginson materialisations. I could not understand the gasps of amazement from the sitters in the front row (I suppose we were about three rows back) as the materialized figures passed them. But then who am I to say that they rather than I were victims of ‘motivated seeing’?

The incident at the end of the sitting was as follows. The materialisations had ceased and Higginson came out of the cabinet to address us. He turned to the lady who was sitting outside and just to the right of the cabinet (from our point of view—i.e. to Higginson’s left) and asked her if she was wearing a nylon underskirt. She seemed rather taken aback by this question, but said that she was (as I recall she was a Mrs. Betty Wakeling, a medium from Blackpool). He then warned her not to be surprised if she found a few threads were missing from this underskirt, because ‘they’ (the spirits) had run out of ectoplasm and had had to make up the deficiency. Words fail one!

Discussing the sitting afterwards with the lady who had sat next to me (another circle member who was also a member of the SPR) we both agreed that there was nothing in the sitting that needed explaining except how he got the nylon netting into the cabinet (she had her own theories about that). As for the matter of the nylon underskirt, she remarked that what had happened was probably this (which is the only way I can think of to make sense of Higginson’s absurd question). The centre of the library floor was covered with some rather rough matting (coconut?) and Higginson, walking along under cover of his ‘ectoplasm’, must have felt the nylon sheet catch on the matting. He was afraid that some captured threads from it might have remained behind for unspiritual persons to detect and wonder about, and therefore invented this ready—made excuse.

Before this I had been to a couple of his demonstrations of clairvoyant mediumship and was quite impressed. I had heard some of the pieces of circulating scuttlebutt about his methods of obtaining advance information concerning sitters, but didn’t take them seriously. However one of them was to the effect that he was in the habit of himself taking the mail from the Stansted Hall post box to the post office in town and examining it en route. This too I dismissed as scuttlebutt until later when some friends and neighbours of ours (a husband and wife, keen spiritualists)

went there for a weekend. When they got back she was enthusing to my wife and myself about the correct information they had received from Higginson about their private concerns. But her husband suddenly interjected ‘you know that was all on the card you sent to Paul (her son in Germany) and posted from the Hall.’

[**End Note by LP:**—As with our previous article, we do not claim to have explained the GH physical mediumship. From some other seances, conducted in a different way, there are reports of impressive ectoplasm from experienced witnesses. The sinking of materialisations into the floor, though simulated by other mediums in various ways, also puzzled observers on occasion.]

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