

D. D. HOME AND THE PHYSICAL WORLD

This article is a sequel to the book *Crookes and the Spirit World* by G. Medhurst, M. Goldney and R. Barrington (Souvenir Press 1972). That volume furnishes a valuable collection of material about the sittings William Crookes had with DDH in the years 1870-73. It illustrates the gradual emergence in Crookes' mind of a belief in the existence of a "psychic" force which could override ordinary physical laws. Crookes undoubtedly saw heavy dining-room tables lifted and other articles moved around or behaving in a manner that seemed to defy the laws of gravity. He and his fellow sitters were not victims of collective hallucination, an explanation which is more difficult to accept than the original evidence.

In the climate of belief prevailing at the time the belief was that the "great power", as DDH called it, required for its manifestation a human medium, through whom it could be channelled from the spirit world into the physical world. DDH through no merit of his own claimed to be such a medium, and disclaimed any control over the coming and going of the power. If a sitting was "blank", it was through no fault of his.

Curiously enough, the fact that in many cases the great power manifested itself before DDH appeared on the scene and continued to do so after he had left, does not seem to have alerted sitters to the possibility that perhaps DDH had nothing to do with its manifestation at all.

There are reliable records of the operation of the great power in many places other than London, and in countries other than England. It was usually disturbances caused by the great power which led to DDH being invited to the house affected so that he could parley with "the spirits" and discourage further interference. In his day there was evidence of it in France, Germany, Holland, Italy and U.S.A., in all of which countries DDH held sittings, sometimes with astonishing "success", in the sense that the disturbances occurred in his presence at sittings. Whatever view one takes of the part played by DDH in the matter, it will be convenient to deal with the subject under two heads, (1) DDH the man and (2) the great power.

(1) DANIEL DUNGLASS HOME, THE MAN

Most of our information about his birth and childhood is derived from his own reminiscences in his book *Incidents in the Life of a Medium* 1863. He had a disturbed childhood and youth, much of

the time away from his parents, brothers and sisters. Apart from a mistake in a date which in the circumstances can be excused, his recollections, so far as they can be checked, appear to be reliable. His family was one which emigrated from Scotland to New England (U.S.A.) in the middle of the XIXth Century, not all in one party. There is some independent evidence on both sides of the Atlantic, notably in the Parish Register of Currie, near Edinburgh, which is still extant, and in New England sources quoted by Jean Burton in her *Heyday of a Wizard*, p.44, note (Harrap, 1948). In what follows I refer to the Scottish source as (S) and to the New England source as (NE). In the subjoined Table I have aligned the first names to show the close correspondence there is between the two lists. Clearly we are dealing with one and the same family.

COMPARATIVE TABLE

<i>SCOTLAND</i> (Currie Register) (S)	<i>New England</i> (U.S.A.) (NE)
William Home=Elizabeth McNeil	William Humes=(not shown)
	John i/c papermill, Philadelphia
Alexander, b. 1830	Alexander, farmer, Mich.
Daniel, b. 1833	Daniel Dunglass
William, b. 1835	William of Montville, millwright
Adam Penycuick, b. 1839	Adam, lost at sea 1856, aged 17
Mary Ann, b. 1841	Colin, life insurance agent, N.J.
Colin, b. 1843	Christine } twins
Christina } twins, b. 1845	Mary Betsy } twins
Elizabeth }	

John, the eldest son in the NE list, was presumably born about a year after the marriage of his parents in 1825, and before they moved into the parish of Currie. We do not hear of him on the Scottish side, and he probably emigrated to the U.S.A. as a young man, where he ended up in charge of a papermill in Philadelphia.

Daniel at the age of nine followed to America in 1842, in the care of a maternal aunt, Mrs. Cook, and remained in her care in New England till 1850, when he was turned out for causing mysterious disturbances in her house.

Meanwhile, the parents and their growing family remained in the parish of Currie, where children went on arriving until the twins were born in 1845. Soon after that, at some date before 1850, the parents and remaining children (Mary Ann had died in 1846)

emigrated to New England and settled in Connecticut. The voyage seems to have taken place during the rush to America caused by the Irish Famine, and the hardships were too much for Mrs. Home, who died at Waterford, Conn. soon after arrival, in 1850. (Inc. 4.)

Daniel by this time was already deeply involved with the Spiritualist Movement, at the age of 17, and on being turned out by his aunt, was lucky to find kind friends in that movement, notably the Haydens of Boston and the Elys of Lebanon (HW 50), who seem to have kept him alive. It was doubtless such friends as these who made it possible for him to go to England in 1855, and live in a hotel just off Piccadilly. It is noticeable that in the Table above, in the New England column, the occupation of all the brothers is shown, except in the case of Daniel, after whose name there is an ominous blank. In short, it looks as if by 1850 DDH was thrown upon the world, and had to shift for himself. Considering the treatment to which he was subjected as a boy and young man, he can hardly be blamed for following what was practically the only course open to him.

SECTION II THE GREAT POWER

D. D. Home, on arriving in London from the U.S.A. in 1855, went by arrangement to Cox's Hotel in Jermyn Street, and held sittings there in a top floor room where unaccountable disturbances took place. In a short time he had a considerable clientele of householders who suffered in their own homes from similar disturbances, and his fame rapidly spread.

Although it was generally supposed that a visit from DDH and a colloquy with "the spirits" would improve matters, we do not hear of any amelioration of the conditions, and in many cases the mischief continued as before. Taking by way of example the two longest and best reported series of sittings in DDH's mediumship, namely those in the house of Sir William Crookes at 20 Mornington Road NW from 1870-3, and those in the house of Lord Dunraven at 5 Buckingham Gate SW from 1867-9, the visits from DDH do not seem to have resulted in any improvement in the situation. He always disclaimed any power to control the disturbances, and sometimes hours were spent in vain at sittings, when nothing happened. There is ample evidence that the disturbing power often manifested itself before any medium was called in to deal with it, and went on doing so after he had left. In short, the "great power" behaved like a natural force of unknown origin. The translation of its raps and knocks into "messages from spirits" was a human contrivance of questionable validity.

Addresses at which there is reason to suppose that disturbances had occurred before DDH was called in were Cox's Hotel in Jermyn Street, Mrs. Parkes' house in Cornwall Terrace and Lady Poulett's house in Hanover Square. In short, it was not D.D.H. who by his presence caused the disturbances, but the disturbances which caused him to be sent for by agitated householders, who hoped he would be able to put a stop to them.

In considering the nature of the great power, it must be borne in mind that the mechanisms used differ from those which would be used by human engineers to produce comparable effects. Nature, working slowly by underground erosion of soil, thereby creates unbalanced situations under buildings nearby; the time comes when a sudden collapse, or a strong wind using a neighbouring tree as a lever, gives rise to those strange movements which have been described as like those of a ship at sea, or being on a rocking horse. It is only when the movement is very suddenly checked that loose objects are sent flying, and heavy objects in locked cupboards have been found afterwards to have been thrown into disorder. On such occasions human observers are taken by surprise, and their accounts of what happened are not always very reliable.

In order to discover more about the "great power" we must examine the various addresses at which it manifested itself in London and the dates and times of day which seem to have suited it. The addresses, without exception, are houses which are on (not just near) underground streams, which can be traced by surface signs, where not shown on maps of London's underground rivers. There are, of course, other towns and countries in which the "great power" manifested itself, but London is the classic example, and the amount of evidence available is large enough to support a confident conclusion.

Central London is crossed from north to south by three main rivers the Fleet, the Tyburn and the Westbourne, each of which has a number of affluents. Their general direction is from north to south, to reach the Thames. They flow for the most part out of sight in sewers, their natural beds being on top of the London Clay, and beneath the surface layer of gravel or soil. They are not shown on ordinary street maps of London. On the Geological Survey Maps they are shown by blue lines so far as their courses were known at the time the maps were made. They are admittedly incomplete, and cannot be used to disprove the existence of a stream of which there are signs on the spot. The sign in a given case may be a ventilated sewer plate in the roadway just outside the house, or visible effects of erosion underground on the building in question,

or a gap in the building line left for no reason obvious on the surface. In a few cases the house in which a D.D.H. sitting was held about a hundred years ago has disappeared altogether. If it was in an area where site values are very high, the avoidance of the site by later builders is significant.

The argument which follows is an attempt to show that there was a marked correlation between the sittings of D.D.H. in central London, both in time and place, with the successive stages of the making of the Circle Railway, which intersects twice, once north and once south of centre, the three above-mentioned underground rivers. To render the argument more easy to follow, I have assembled the relevant data in a Table (annexed) which shows the London addresses in question, with years in which sittings were held, in relation to the three rivers and their affluents: and in relation to the northern and southern arcs of the Circle Railway. The addresses are arranged geographically, so far as the layout allows, and the lines of main streets are indicated to enable the reader to get his bearings. It should also be borne in mind that the northern arc of the Circle Railway was made about five years before the southern arc.

Judging from the Table, the "great power", as shown by its manifestations in London, moved slowly southwards, from 1860 till 1873, and then faded out. D.D.H.'s health began to fail, and he retired to the Continent, dying in Paris in 1886.

We must now consider, in greater detail, why the great power behaved as it did in relation to the addresses shown in the Table.

1. *20 Mornington Road NW*

This was the home of Sir William Crookes, F.R.S. from 1858-80. The road outside runs downhill from the north, and the house was at the corner of Mornington Street, which runs downhill to the southeast, i.e. towards the Fleet river. On the other side of Mornington Road is a high wall, protecting a deep cutting, in which the then London and Northwestern Railway ran down to Euston Station, its terminus. I hasten to add that Crookes satisfied himself that trains in the cutting had nothing to do with the activity of the great force. But the existence of the cutting tended to increase considerably the volume of storm water flowing down Mornington Road from the north-west, compared with that expected when the sewer under the road was laid down before the railway came. Moreover, at some date after 1851, Mornington Street was carried over the railway on an upward sloping bridge with a sewer under it, a feature which tended to increase erosion on the lower side, where No. 20 Mornington Road stood.

At some date in the 1860s a new dining room was added to the house, on a foundation of concrete, to ensure stability. Crookes worked with delicate measuring instruments, and needed a firm floor. The new room was invariably used for the sittings with D.D.H. and/or other mediums under investigation at that house.

It must also be noted that all sittings took place at night, between about 6 p.m. and midnight. Clearly the force was not inhibited by daylight, as in the years 1870, 1871 and 1872 nearly all the sittings listed on p. 146 of CSW took place in April to July, i.e. when there was daylight outdoors till a late hour. This peculiarity suggests that the force was subject to some sort of "clock-time" periodicity, imposed by human agency. I have been unable to find any natural cycle to which it can be attributed. Moreover, the force was available at that time not only at 20 Mornington Road.

2. 36 Russell Square WC (see Table)

It is not surprising that Crookes and his friends thought that the force was in some way linked with a person and not with a particular place. Fortunately a letter has survived from Crookes to Sir William Huggins, dated 12 April 1871, in which Crookes gives an enthusiastic account of the happenings at 36 Russell Square the night before. On the afternoon of the 11th (a Tuesday) Crookes had had D.D.H. to see him, and the latter stayed to dinner at 20 Mornington Road. Then says Crookes, "I took him with us to Russell Square, knowing he would be very welcome". One infers that nothing unusual happened at Mornington Road during that afternoon. But when the party from Mornington Road joined the sitters at 36 Russell Square, probably about 8.30 p.m., pandemonium was let loose. It was a dark seance. Crookes wrote "At first we had very rough manifestations, chairs knocked about, the table floated about six inches from the ground and then dashed down, loud and unpleasant noises bawling in our ears and altogether phenomena of a low class". (CSW 158) . . . "As the evening got on the power increased . . . Home was in wonderful power last night" (ibid. 159 and 160).

Another remarkable outbreak of phenomena occurred at 36 Russell Square, beginning at "just 6 p.m." on 2nd June 1873. Sergeant Cox had with him in the dining room Stainton Moses, the medium, with no intention of holding a sitting there. They were on the point of going upstairs to dress, before going out to dine somewhere else. Then, in full daylight, the dining room table "quivered as if with an ague fit, and swayed violently", and loud blows were heard upon it. (P.S.P.R.IX, 259-60, quoted by A. Gauld in *The Founders of Psychical Research* 219-20). This disturbance

seems to have been attributed at the time to the presence of Stainton Moses, but it seems to me much more likely that it was due to someone at a distance having opened at 6 p.m. precisely a sluice which had let down a flood of water in the sewer under the house, which had been previously held up to enable work to proceed near the mouth of the Fleet river at Blackfriars. The supposed sluice could have been above or below the site of the house, the mischief being due to the sudden movement of the water when released in considerable volume.

Thus, in neither of the cases at 36 Russell Square is there good reason for attributing the phenomena to the presence of a medium at the time. Nor is it surprising that the house was frequented at the time by such mediums as Herne and Williams. I have been unable to find any reports of phenomena of comparable violence in the neighbourhood after 1875, the year in which the work at Blackfriars was completed (see below). It is true that in the case of Stainton Moses physical phenomena attributed to him continued with lessening frequency till 1881 (H.P. ii, 586), but it must not be supposed that the year 1875 marked the end of all disturbances of the kind so common before that year. Each case must be separately examined.

Many other cases could be cited to show that the great power was most often available between about 6 p.m. and midnight, even when the houses disturbed were some distance away from one another. To explain this odd feature of the case it is necessary to go back a few years.

In 1862 a little way east of King's Cross Station, the northern arc of the Metropolitan (Underground) Railway, then under construction, was being carried across the Fleet river. The measures taken by the contractors to keep the water out of the workings failed, and water flooded the newly made cutting for the railway, drowning several workmen. That disaster no doubt led to steps being taken to lessen the risk to workmen on the railway by reducing the amount of water allowed to flow down the Fleet in daytime working hours, and letting down more than the usual amount after working hours. The night flooding put strains on the storm water sewers draining into their respective rivers, a hazard not anticipated when the sewers were originally laid down. Once the work at the intersection of railway and river had been completed, the normal flow of the river could be restored, and the risk of disturbance to buildings overhead reduced or removed. In the case of the Fleet river the disturbances at Mornington Road and Russell Square occurred in the course of some very intricate engineering work taking place at Blackfriars, on the Thames Embankment, where

the Fleet river intersected the southern arc of the Circle Railway just west of Blackfriars Station, and the south facing wall of the newly constructed Victoria Embankment, where accommodation had to be found also for Sir Joseph Bazalgette's Lower Outfall sewer. The railway had reached Blackfriars in 1870, but the connected sewer works were not complete till 1875. During that period there must have been severe restraints on the Fleet river during working hours, and heavy flooding at night as high up as Mornington Road and Russell Square, in the period 1870-73. (See Table.)

I must now give reasons for believing that 36 Eussell Square was on top of an underground stream draining into the Fleet, and so exposed to the same risks as Mornington Road. A. S. Foord in *Springs, Streams and Spas of London* (p. 45) mentions a tributary of the Fleet river "rising near Russell Square" and there are local indications that it came from the west, crossing the Square in the middle from west to east. There are still fountains playing in the garden. No. 36 was on the west of the Square, and must have been very close to the stream. The house was still there in 1939, but its site is now vacant. The map in *The Lost Rivers of London* (N. J. Barton, 1962), shows the stream up to the east side of Russell Square in Southampton Row, but not beyond. It doubtless served the old Bedford House, demolished when Russell Square was built.

The same kind of "mechanism" was at work on the Tyburn and the Westbourne. The intersection of each river first by the northern arc of the Underground Railway, opened 1863, and about five years later, when the southern arc was opened in 1868, set up disturbances both below and above the points of intersection. The houses in Mayfair seem to have got the worst of both worlds, and D.D.H. took great advantage of the situation.

It will be seen that most of the sittings on the Westbourne and Tyburn, and their tributaries, were in the earlier period (1860-3) and seem to be associated with the northern arc of the Underground Railway, while the later ones in 1865-73 seem to be attributable to the work on the southern arc of the Circle. The Mayfair layout in the Table assumes the generally recognised course of the Tyburn down Marylebone Lane, then crossing Oxford Street at Stratford Place and going round by Berkeley Square; then west to Piccadilly and so across the Green Park to Buckingham Palace; and that there was also a more direct stream going down from near Marble Arch along a line slightly east of Park Lane (originally Tyburn Lane) to near the west end of Hertford Street, where the line of the stream is "picked up" by the Geological Survey Map, and carried

down to Buckingham Gate and beyond. (For detail, see Foord, p. 287.)

It is a curious fact that 24 Motcomb Street SW, a house still standing on a site precisely over the Westbourne River was the home of Walter Crookes and his wife. He was a brother of William, and had a good many D.D.H. sittings in his house. The odds are against this being a *mere* coincidence. "Disturbed" houses, then as now, are apt to lose their tenants, and are sometimes offered on terms which look attractive.

It is also noteworthy that six of the houses mentioned in the Table have been demolished.

The impression I get is that D.D.H. and his fellow mediums became very adept at concentrating on houses where disturbances frequently occurred, and used the distracting effects of the phenomena to palm off tricks of parlour magic on the sitters, whose powers of observation were at a disadvantage. If challenged, the medium could usually point to some other happening at the same sitting which could not possibly have been brought about by the agency of any person present at the sitting.

At the beginning of this article I remarked that the "great power" operated at places other than London, such as Holland, France, Germany and Italy, where the geophysical conditions were different. The reason was presumably the same in most cases, namely the proximity of some civil engineering work, such as the construction of a railway or canal, which involved the holding up and release of river or storm water in considerable volume for limited periods. Take for instance Amsterdam. At the invitation of some very sceptical Dutch inquirers, D.D.H. went there in February 1858, and was lodged by his hosts at a hotel of their choosing, at which the sittings took place (*Journal of Parapsychology*, vol. 34, 47-63). According to D.D.H. the hotel was dingy and unattractive, which probably means that it was chosen because it was liable to "disturbances". The address of it is not stated. There were three sittings, two in the evening, and one at noon. They were a success, in that a heavy table "rose and descended to the floor smoothly, without any abrupt movement", and there occurred a "rocking movement of the ceiling, so violent that together with the chairs on which we sat, we felt ourselves going up and down as if on a rocking horse". A sitter looked in vain under the table to see if any mechanical device was being used and found none. That is not surprising because he could not possibly see the point underground where the great power was being applied. In Amsterdam there must have been frequent occasions when water was held up to

enable work to go on in connexion with canals, and then let down in volume during periods of low tide.

It is also possible that the hotel room was liable to be shaken by a large neighbouring tree, which had thrust its roots underground as far as the foundations would allow. In such an event a strong wind blowing the tree away from the building can lever up the roots on the near side with tremendous force, lifting the internal timber framing and straining it, so as to cause raps and creaks and to open doors by bending jambs enough to release the catches. In Amsterdam there were many tree-lined roads with buildings on one side and a canal on the other. A feature like that is to be found in old pictures of Cheyne Walk in Chelsea, London, which, according to tradition, is the most haunted part of Chelsea. In the case of Chelsea it is interesting to note that the demolition of some of the houses at the lower end of Old Church Street by a land mine in 1941 has not put an end to the kind of disturbances which earned them the reputation of being haunted. From that one infers that once a "set-up" conducive to disturbances has been created underground, changes in the buildings overhead do not necessarily affect the site. For a view of Cheyne Walk in 1871, see the illustration in the collection facing p. 148 in *Two Villages, the Story of Chelsea and Kensington* by M. C. Borer (W. H. Allen, London and New York, 1973). It shows the houses facing tall trees, many with trunks out of the perpendicular, across a narrow roadway. The trees, being poorly supported on the river side, must have pulled very hard on their shoreward roots, when a strong north wind was blowing. As there were trees of about the same age along the Walk, it is not surprising that it got the reputation of being haunted. For information as to the effects of root spread of trees, which may extend up to a distance of 80 feet, and as to the damage to nearby buildings which may result, see *Building Research Station Digest No. 3* (p. 4 and illustration) (H.M.S.O., London) 1959, *Subject: House Foundations on Shrinkable Clays*.

Returning to D.D.H. in London, we must note that sometimes he knew beforehand that the great power was or was not going to manifest itself. That seems hardly consistent with the idea that it was entirely independent of him. It seems to me likely that by the time he had reached London in 1855 he had got to know the small preliminary signs, in the way of slight creaks and taps, unnoticed by his sitters, which heralded the coming of the great power. The eroding effect of underground water is usually slow, and it is often not the water itself which is the immediate cause of the disturbance which sometimes occurs. That is usually due to a sudden collapse or vibration, due to a variety of causes, such as heavy traffic, or a

gale of wind straining a neighbouring tree, or an excessively high tide depressing the shore or bank of a tidal river. Unfortunately one seldom finds in the record of the mysterious event details as to the surrounding circumstances at the time. Where, as in this case, the events took place about a century ago, contemporary paintings and photographs may disclose features which have long since disappeared, such as trees dangerously near the house, or building which have been later demolished or replaced.

It may be thought that if spontaneous disturbances of a mysterious kind were so common in mid-Victorian times that D.D.H. could use them, as I have supposed, to build up his reputation as a wizard, one would have found references to them in contemporary literature, or, more probably, in collections of letters. In the literature of poltergeists there are stories of disturbances, including unaccountable movements of furniture, in houses where no identifiable medium was found. See, e.g. *The Naturalisation of the Supernatural* by F. Podmore, 1907, Ch. 7, and *Essays in Psychical Research* by "Miss X" (London, 1899), Ch. 1, Haunted Houses. In the context of this paper, it is also interesting to note that E. O'Donnell, in *Haunted Houses of London* (1909), p. 129, mentions as haunted "several houses in Jermyn Street". It was in Cox's Hotel in that street that D.D.H. started his London career as a medium, and it looks as if there had been disturbances in that quarter before D.D.H. arrived on the scene.

The disturbances there cannot be attributed to work on the Metropolitan Railway, the construction of which did not begin till 1860. They were probably due to occasional overloading of the Ayre (Air) Street sewer, an affluent of the Tyburn, flowing along the line of Jermyn Street from the direction of Piccadilly Circus to join the Tyburn under St. James' Park. (Barton: *Lost Rivers of London, Map 3*). Cox's Hotel was particularly vulnerable because it was at the corner where a stream (not shown on the above-quoted map) came down from the north along the line of the Burlington and Piccadilly Arcades to Jermyn Street. These waterways, no longer visible, were probably subjected to intermittent flooding, with results like those which were caused by the making of the Circle Railway a few years later. From 1847 onwards the Commissioners of the sewers carried out a great deal of work on London sewers, no doubt with some unlooked for side effects.

The stream just mentioned, which flowed down Burlington Arcade appears to have had an extra outlet to the west underneath what is now Stafford Street, to relieve the sewer going south to Jermyn Street. Stafford Street is short, and serves no obvious purpose, crossing first Albemarle Street and secondly Dover Street,

where it comes to a stop. It almost certainly covers the above-mentioned extra outlet, and was originally one of Lord Stafford's ditches, which in 1668 required "Enlarging and Cleansing" (see Barton, 57). In crossing under Albemarle Street it probably disturbed one or more of some private hotels which favoured that street, including the "Grafton" Hotel, where on 26th May 1869 the Countesse de Pomar held a sitting with D.D.H. (Proc. S.P.R., xxxv 264-6), at which Lord Adare was present. Some tolerably strong physical manifestations occurred, probably of the same kind as those previously felt in Jermyn Street. There was no Grafton Hotel in Albemarle Street at the time, and the actual name was no doubt altered to avoid trouble with the management.

For a picture showing the stream which flowed from Cork Street southwards, dated 1816, shortly before the Burlington Arcade was built, see *The Survey of London*, vol. xxxii, Pl. 52(a). It was clearly an old waterway as it was used as a parish boundary for a good deal of its course.

We must now discuss the question "Did D.D.H. know what the 'great power' was, or did he, like many of his contemporaries, accept the view that it was a psychic force?" D.D.H. was associated with several American mediums practising in London at the time. He was not a professional, in the sense that he did not take fees for his services, but we may assume that he shared their professional secrets. There is circumstantial evidence that the "fraternity" knew that certain localities were better than others for demonstrations of the "power". One such place was the area round Marble Arch, at the west end of Oxford Street. At a house in Hyde Park place (no longer standing), between the Edgware Road and Great Cumberland Place turnings, lived the Milner-Gibsons, a distinguished family, whose house, facing the Park, was badly "disturbed". In the period 1860-63 D.D.H. attended more sittings in that house than in any other in London during that period. At No. 1 Hyde Park lived Mrs. Guppy, with Miss Barry, and round the corner, in Great Cumberland Street (now Place) lived the Hernes. Up the Old Quebec Street turning, a block further east, lived the Nelson Holmes, at No. 16. It is clear that the fraternity knew that the "going was good" in that area, and D.D.H. was one of them. D.D.H. also admitted that in some places the "power" left him, which was tantamount to an admission that it was subject to a "locality" factor.

His skill in making use of the "power" when it was available makes me believe that he knew more about it than he admitted. Taught by the Fox sisters of Hydesville, he translated "knocks" into messages from the "Spirits" at such speed that no one could keep

pace with him. It is possible that some of the "messages" were automatism on his part, involving all the problems which such communications bring in their train, and here, again, each case has to be treated on its merits.

D.D.H., following the southward drift of the great power, moved from his earlier northern field of operation to an address in Sloane Street, SW, where he had founded a "Spiritual Athenaeum". In 1867 he re-established contact with an acquaintance he had met several years before in Paris, young Lord Adare, then 24 years old. The encounter, which took place at Malvern while Lord Adare was having a cure, was fortuitous so far as he was concerned, but as it was the "spirits" who suggested some sittings in London when they both returned there, it may well be that it was not accidental so far as D.D.H. was concerned. For Lord Adare London meant his father's house at 5 Buckingham Gate, an address at which several sittings were held during which remarkable physical disturbances occurred. The disturbances were not confined to No. 5, as they extended to No. 7, where the Gore-Booths lived when in London. It looks like Jermyn Street all over again. (See above.)

In the front wall of No. 5 Buckingham Gate, where it adjoins No. 6, the passer-by today can see at street level a boundary mark "St. G.H. Sq." and a corresponding mark beside it on No. 6 showing "S.M.W.", indicating the boundary between the ancient parishes of St. George's Hanover Square and St. Margaret's, Westminster. The boundary there was the river Tyburn, now in a sewer under the street and out of sight. In the middle 1860s the southern arc of the Circle Railway was being excavated between Victoria (Underground) and St. James' Park Stations. A little way east of Victoria the Tyburn river had to be carried below street level and over the railway, a very ticklish operation for the engineers. Judging from the 6-in. Geological Survey Map (Sheet N.V.S.W.) as much water as possible was diverted from a point near the stables of Buckingham Palace into an eastern outfall which ran towards Westminster Abbey. Even so, keeping water out of the workings at the crossing of the railway under the west end of Victoria Street presented a tremendous problem. Steam pumps, discharging 4,000 gallons a minute, worked night and day for some time. (*The Underground Story*, by H. Douglas Hale, London, 1963, p. 85.)

Many of the phenomena reported in the Dunraven Memoir sound very like the sort of disturbances which would have been caused by the engineering work going on at the time, including the thudding of the steam pumps. Vibrations of chairs on which

persons were seated and movements of tables, etc., were frequently noticed, at 5 Buckingham Gate, at No. 7 next door but one, and at Ashley House, Victoria Street, all of which were within range of the engineering works. In one sitting at Ashley House on 29th March 1869 (Proc. S.P.R. xxxv, 237) the sitters felt a strong vibratory motion, accompanied by a sound resembling that of a railway train. Lord Adare, asked if these peculiar movements had any definite meaning, and the answer given by the "spirits" was "Yes". It does not seem to have occurred to the sitters that by the end of March 1869 trains were running on the newly constructed underground railway which crossed under Victoria Street below the windows of Ashley House. It is only too easy to read messages into meaningless noises, especially if there is an adept present, like D.D.H., to do the decoding.

It must be remembered that by this time (March 1869) D.D.H.'s sitters had been brought into a state of mind which made them believe implicitly in his miraculous powers. Shortly before, on Sunday, 13th December 1868, he had brought off what many consider the most astonishing feat of his career, namely floating out of a third floor window, some 85 feet above street level, and re-entering by another window, with no apparent means of support. It is hailed by many as a classical case of levitation. (*loc. cit.*, 155-7).

No one attempting to deal with D.D.H.'s London sittings can pass over that case. My own view is that on that occasion he did not rely upon the "great power", but performed the feat by the use of a simple trick, in the working of which he was helped by the state of affairs in Victoria Street just outside Ashley House at the time. A photograph of the west end of Victoria Street, where it joins the Vauxhall Bridge Road, and was overlooked by Ashley House, taken in 1867 or 1868, when the work on the Underground Railway was still going on, shows a state of disorder and confusion which must have been very inconvenient to nearby residents, and have deterred persons on foot from walking about there at night.

It would have been easy for D.D.H. to enlist the help of one or two labourers on the site, to bring along, after work one night, some lengths of dirty rope, which no one would have missed. Given access to the roof of the house over the two windows facing Victoria Street to be used for the "levitation", a loop could have been made fast, and a double rope let down to the level of the two windows on the third floor. With the help of such a contrivance, slung from above above, D.D.H. could have travelled safely in the dark from one window to the next, and by next day all trace of the device could have been removed. Two considerations point to some such solution of the problem.

First, two of the witnesses knew beforehand what was going to happen, and that points to the event having been prepared.

Secondly, Lord Adare, who admitted that it was so dark that he could not see clearly how he (D.D.H.) was supported outside, said he did not appear to grasp or rest upon the balustrade, but rather to be "swung out and in". The word "swung" definitely suggests suspension from above. Compare the device used by Royal Marine Commandos at the top of the Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, in July 1975, as shown with illustration in *The Times* of 11th July 1975, p. 5.

Having performed the feat once, D.D.H. went back into the room from which he started, and in the presence of witnesses he went out again under a partly opened sash window, returning to the same room. That was the occasion of Lord Adare's remark quoted above that D.D.H. appeared to be "swung out and in". It may be thought unlikely that D.D.H. would have risked this second exit, if he was cheating his friends. It may also seem a rash assumption that D.D.H. would have known about the double rope device known as an "abseiling" to alpinists. As to this last point, it was only three years since F. Whymper made the first ascent of the Matterhorn, and there were probably articles and illustrations in the papers at the time, describing the abseiling, and its use, in the descent of precipices.

As to the first point, the risk of detection in the dark conditions prevailing was very slight. Above D.D.H.'s body the double rope would have been beyond the two halves of the window, to the extent to which they overlapped. We are not told whether the glass in them was transparent or translucent. In either case, all eyes were on D.D.H. Lord Adare, as I have remarked, said he could not see clearly how D.D.H. was supported outside. The witnesses, moreover, had been told to stand back from the window. Conditions for close observation could hardly have been worse.

It was a dangerous experiment, but it came off, and did much to re-establish D.D.H.'s reputation as a wizard, which had been recently somewhat tarnished by the evidence, much publicised, in the case "Lyon v. Home". As to that case, see *Fodor*, p. 173 and the *Annual Register* 1868 (pp. 187-206).

It is an instructive fact that in the 1870s "the cheats of Mayfair" were swindling, among others, the scientist William Crookes and the lawyer Sergeant Cox, and that today, a century later, the cheats of Mayfair have been swindling with the help of devices (sunglasses) pioneered by Crookes himself. In the report of the Marsaglia trial (*Times*, 10th June 1975, p. 4) the police evidence included the following passage describing the secret marking of playing-cards,

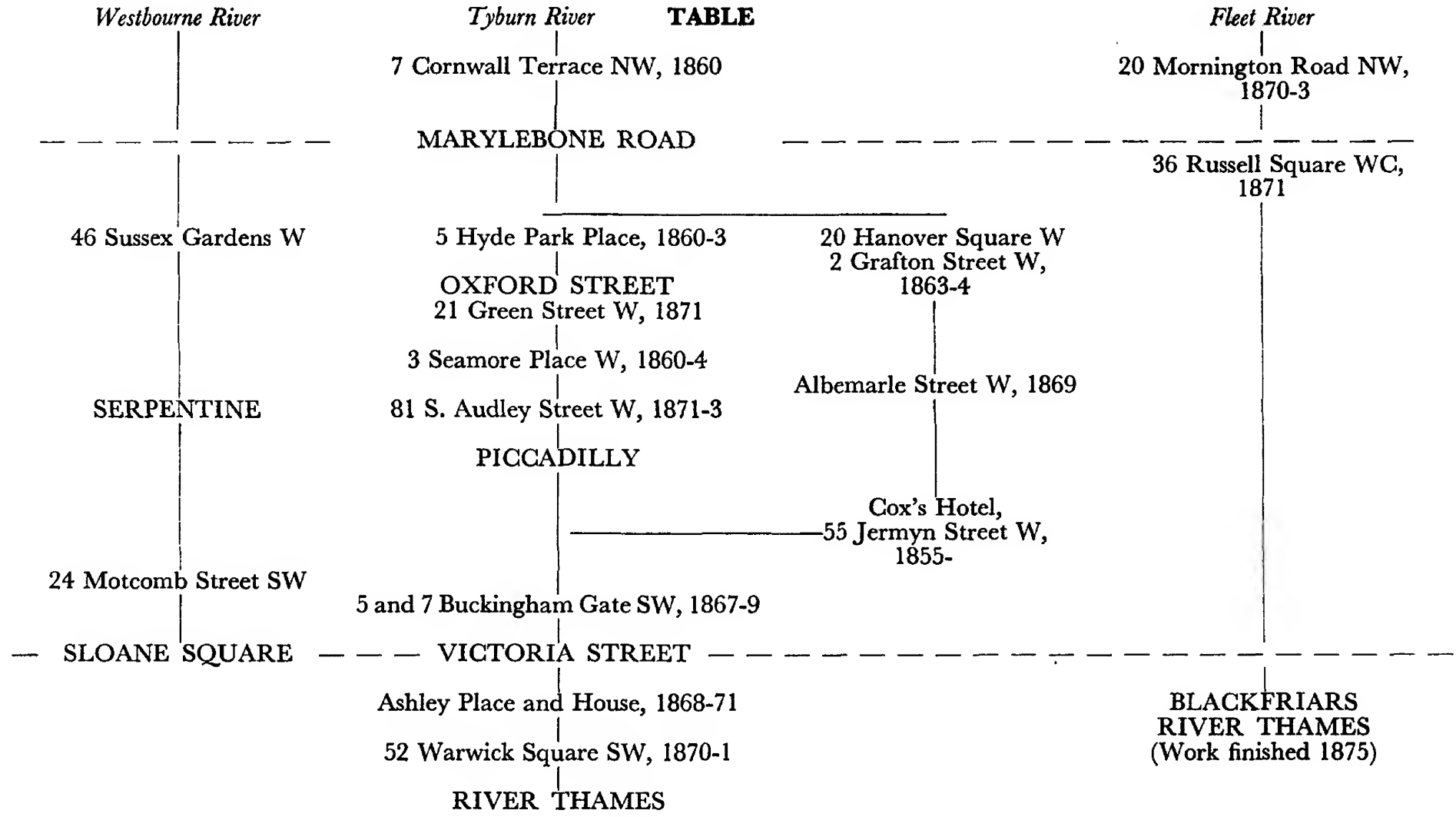
“cards from sevens up to kings were marked in a way that could be detected only by a swindler who wore contact lenses and sunglasses, which acted as a filter for markings on the backs of the cards”.

In the field of Psychical Research observation and experiment are not enough. Where physical phenomena are concerned, it is usually what the observer does not see which matters. In the field of experiment, where specially devised measuring instruments are called in aid, the readings and recordings may prove beyond doubt that such and such phenomena occurred and were not due to collective hallucination on the part of observers, but the experiments do not necessarily disclose the cause of the phenomena. If the experiments are not rightly interpreted, they may actually mislead the experimenter by drawing his attention away from the solution he is seeking.

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- Note.* No. 6 above, often referred to as the Dunraven Memoir, was published in 1926 as Part xciii of *Proceedings*, S.P.R., Vol. 35.



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Note. The northern and southern "arcs" of the Circle Railway are indicated by broken lines.