

## FRANCIS WARD MONCK AND THE PROBLEMS OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

Most of the once-famous physical mediums of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been forgotten; few are known even to parapsychologists. This paper examines the life and work of one such, F. W. Monck, traces the influences which helped to shape his career, and discusses the accusations of fraud made against him. Some of Monck's phenomena were obtained under conditions which seem to preclude deception, and several eminent researchers were impressed by them. Assuming the phenomena to be genuine, the author speculates on the possible implications for our knowledge of human nature and the future development of our subject.

### THE MAKING OF A MEDIUM

Well, I have written some, and seen much, and pondered more, and yet I am  
puzzled still!

*Archdeacon Colley*

Although his name is seldom mentioned nowadays, Francis Ward Monck<sup>1</sup> was one of the major figures in the spiritualist movement of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, information about his early life is scanty. A document in his own handwriting, found among his belongings at Huddersfield, tells us that he was born in Portsmouth in 1842, and was "the seventh son of an independent gentleman, and descended from a noble English family". However, a later newspaper report suggests that he was the son of a butcher. Monck's own account informs us that during childhood he had a number of paranormal experiences, some of which were terrifying. His family misunderstood the nature of these experiences, to such an extent that "he was first treated for extreme nervousness, and then for mental disease, so that for years he was secluded on the paternal estate in the country." There, "communing with his own heart, and the pure and beautiful in nature, his clairvoyance, clair-audience, and other remarkable powers became greatly developed" (Monck, 1876).

During the late 1850s the popular evangelist C. H. Spurgeon was busy organising his 'Pastor's College' for young preachers. The first intake consisted of eight young men, and F. W. Monck was number eight on the admissions register. He is said to have been a favourite pupil of Spurgeon (Anon., 1906). The College had no building in those days; the students were accommodated and taught in the home of the Revd George Rogers, a Congregationalist minister who had been appointed Principal of the College. Monck was sixteen or seventeen when he was admitted to the College, and had already made something of a name for himself as a boy preacher. Spurgeon, who had preached his own first sermon at the age of fifteen, usually expected his

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<sup>1</sup> The document mentioned in this paragraph names him as *Thomas Francis Ward Monck*, but I have not seen this anywhere else.

students to have had at least two years of 'hands on' experience of Christian evangelism before attending the College (Dallimore, 1985).

Having completed his training, Monck went on to occupy a string of Baptist pulpits around the country, never staying long in any one place. Again, the records are incomplete, but he is known to have held pastorates at Earls Barton, Northamptonshire (1859-60), Driffield, Yorkshire (1862), Hanley, Staffordshire (1863), Milford-on-Sea, Hampshire (1865-7) and, finally, Totterdown, near Bristol (1873). The fact that he made so many changes suggests that he was none too popular as a minister, although some of his ministerial colleagues evidently thought highly of him. A history of the Baptist church at Milford-on-Sea says bluntly: "This ministry was highly recommended by several ministerial friends, was short in duration, with no notable impact on the fellowship."<sup>2</sup>

It would be interesting to know how, and when, Monck became converted to a belief in spiritualism. British spiritualism is generally said to have begun in 1852, with the arrival on these shores of the American medium Mrs W. R. Hayden. By the end of that decade it was seen as a serious threat to the established forms of religion, and would almost certainly have been a topic of lively conversation among the young men gathered at Spurgeon's College. An article written by the Principal of the College, George Rogers, while not approving of spiritualistic practices, nevertheless takes a surprisingly tolerant view of the phenomena themselves:-

That there are agencies far more subtle than those of electricity and magnetism we are ready to admit . . . the chain of causes and effects between the spirit world and the natural world may be of every possible variety and gradation. [Rogers, 1867]

Monck's final conversion, like many others, probably came at the end of a long period of subconscious and semi-conscious rumination. One possible influence was his friendship with the Revd F. R. Young, minister of the Baptist church in Swindon, who had himself become a convert to the spiritualist cause (Anon., 1906). In the handwritten document mentioned earlier, Monck says that the final step was taken at the end of a long period of frustration and opposition from fellow Christians:-

The spirits would never allow him to prepare a sermon before delivering it, but always gave him his text the moment he stood up to speak, and then controlling his vocal organ, caused him to discourse logically and eloquently on it. While preaching at Bristol this fact became notorious, and loud raps were heard on the floor of his church during divine service and especially while he was preaching. His ministerial brethren, who had been on most friendly terms with him, now withdrew from him, and refused to acknowledge him in any way. He boldly challenged them to meet him publicly in his own church, and state their objections to him before the audience, promising to reply and justify himself in their presence. This challenge was declined. Soon after a few of his congregation commenced to persecute him because of his faith in spiritualism, but although assaulted and beaten in the streets, and threatened, he never flinched, but courageously proclaimed his opinions. Eventually some of the more fanatical among the religious people burnt his church to the ground. The doctor now openly avowed his conviction, declared spiritualism to be a great truth, and began to hold séances, at which the most marvellous expressions of spirit power were given. [Monck, 1876]

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<sup>2</sup> Information kindly provided by the present Secretary of the Church, Mr Leslie Reeves.

One local newspaper, commenting sarcastically on this account, suggested that the raps on the floor of the church came from the walking-sticks of lame elderly gentlemen, frustrated and bored by his sermons!

#### THE HAPPY MEDIUM

Having his chapel burnt down seems to have been the turning point in Monck's career; from then on he resolved to dedicate his life to spiritualism. On July 3rd, 1872, there occurred a curious event which is not mentioned in Monck's later self-congratulatory description of his own career. In the early hours of the morning he arrived on the doorstep of the Revd F. R. Young in Swindon. There would have been nothing surprising in this but for the fact that he had slept overnight in the same room as his brother-in-law in Bristol, some 36 miles away, and witnesses were able to prove that he had not boarded the early morning train. News of this event soon spread among the spiritualist community, who hailed it as another example of spirit-assisted transportation, similar to the famous 'aerial flight' of Mrs Guppy which took place on 3rd June in the previous year. Mrs Guppy was supposed to have travelled some three miles across London in her night attire and bedroom slippers (Fodor, 1966, p.392). Curiously enough Monck, who was certainly not averse to a bit of self-glorification, seems never to have boasted about his strange transportation. A year after the event Dr George Sexton and the Revd F. R. Young found great difficulty in persuading him to talk about it at all (Sexton, 1874).

The following year, 1873, was Monck's *annus mirabilis*. He resigned from the ministry of the Baptist Church and formally announced his adhesion to spiritualism. Throughout the year he gave séances, lectures and demonstrations, becoming acquainted with some of the leading figures in the spiritualist movement. It was during this time that he met the Revd Thomas Colley, later to become an archdeacon and one of Monck's staunchest supporters (Randall, 2002). Another important addition to the circle of Monck's admirers was George Sexton, M.D., M.A., LL.D., a former coadjutor of the radical freethinker Charles Bradlaugh. Sexton was originally contemptuous of spiritualism and lectured against it, but after carrying out a careful investigation of the Davenport brothers he had become convinced that the phenomena were real and were caused by some sort of natural energy unknown to physical science. He maintained this position for about another ten years, during which he carried out further experiments with various mediums. Eventually, he came to accept the spiritualist interpretation in its entirety (Wallace, 1955, pp.166-169). Sexton met Monck in the summer of 1873, and was later enabled to observe some striking phenomena in his own home. He summed up his conclusions succinctly: "that Dr Monck<sup>3</sup> is one of the most wonderful mediums that have up to the present time appeared amongst us, I have no doubt" (Sexton, 1874). On 24th August, 1873, Monck gave a lecture in the Cavendish Rooms, London, and was hailed as "an important acquisition to the Spiritualist platform" (Anon.,

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<sup>3</sup> There is some disagreement among the sources on the origin and validity of the title "Doctor" which Monck began applying to himself about November 1873. Doyle and Fodor suggest that it was an honorary title applied as a result of his healing activities in Ireland, but these did not take place until 1876. Other sources suggest that he received it from an institution in Philadelphia, USA.

1906). He had certainly 'arrived' on the spiritualist scene, but he probably did not realise that he had also entered upon a dangerous profession.

Popular accounts sometimes suggest that the spiritualism of the nineteenth century was little more than an amusing pastime of the rich and famous. Much is made of D. D. Home's performances before the crowned heads of Europe. But there was another kind of spiritualism which flourished amid the great industrial towns and cities of northern England. In the early 1870s this 'plebeian' spiritualism was spreading rapidly, and was often associated with political and social ideas which later came to be categorised as 'left-wing': socialism, pacifism, women's liberation, free love, secularism, vegetarianism. The establishment looked with jaundiced eye upon the thousands who flocked to the mechanics' institutes to hear lectures and see demonstrations of spiritualistic phenomena. The Church of England, long accustomed to its near-monopoly of religious matters, viewed with some alarm the defection of children from its Sunday schools to the 'lyceums' of the spiritualists (Barrow, 1986)

When spiritualists were hauled up before the courts, as they often were, they were unlikely to get a fair trial. Judges and magistrates almost invariably took the view that, since the phenomena were clearly impossible, the medium who purported to produce them must be a cheat and a liar. In such a situation evidence was irrelevant. This was made quite explicit in the statement of Vice-Chancellor Sir George Gifford during the 1868 trial of *Lyon v. Home*: "I decide against him [Home]; for as I hold Spiritualism to be a delusion, I must necessarily hold the plaintiff to be the victim of delusion, and no amount of evidence will convince me to the contrary." (Burton, 1948, p.185). A similar attitude was displayed during the Slade trial of 1876.

Spiritualists were, therefore, engaged in a kind of battle against establishment forces, and the battle could sometimes turn violent. During the Davenport brothers' tour of England in 1865 violence broke out in Leeds, Huddersfield and Liverpool, and in the last of these the boys were so roughly treated that they refused to continue (Doyle, 1926, Vol. 1, p.229). Among the various groups who felt threatened by the growth of spiritualism were the stage magicians, who saw their livelihoods at stake. People were hardly likely to pay good money to see fake miracles when they could go to a spiritualist meeting and see the real thing! Some magicians therefore toured the country making impassioned speeches against spiritualism and demonstrating what they claimed were the fraudulent methods used by the mediums. The spiritualists responded to this challenge by putting on their own lecture tours in which they, too, demonstrated methods of fraud, but tried to explain to their hearers how to tell the difference between these and the genuine article. The recently-converted Dr George Sexton was particularly effective in this kind of propaganda, and Monck soon attempted to emulate him. One of Monck's targets was a conjurer called Herr Dobler who had been giving demonstrations of bogus phenomena. Unfortunately, Monck's exposure of this man was later to rebound on his own shoulders.

For the first three years after the formal announcement of his conversion to spiritualism Monck led a charmed life. In October 1873 he took part in séances with the famous medium Stainton Moses, who wrote under the pseudonym of "M.A. Oxon". These were held at the home of Mrs Makdougall Gregory (widow of Professor Gregory of Edinburgh) in Green Street, Mayfair, in London. In

1874 and 1875 Monck lectured in various places, making what he called his "exposé of the conjurers" and, no doubt, making enemies in the process. He also gave numerous séances, some of which took place under apparently rigorous test conditions in a good light. During a séance in Southsea heavy furniture was moved around and piled up "in a way that two strong men would have had difficulty in doing". A journalist who was present at this séance was "convinced that there was no trickery on the part of the medium", and that "the existence of some subtle and unknown energy" had been proved (Anon., 1906). Monck was also one of the first mediums to produce wax moulds of 'spirit' hands and feet,<sup>4</sup> a phenomenon which was later to become a feature of the mediumship of the Polish medium Kluski (Coleman, 1994). In 1876 Monck toured Lancashire and Ireland on healing missions, and in the second half of the year gave a series of séances in Derbyshire. These took place in various locations in and around Derby, Belper and Ripley. Detailed accounts of them were written by Mr William Adshead of Belper and published in *The Medium and Daybreak*. Four of the accounts were subsequently reissued in booklet form and, together with the reports of Stainton Moses, constitute the best surviving evidence of Monck's phenomena.

#### MARTYR FOR THE CAUSE

On 15th October, 1876, Monck was in Halifax giving a lecture in the County Court when he was approached by a man called George Henry Heppleston, described in the reports as a 'general dealer'. Heppleston said he was a spiritualist, and invited Monck to give séances in his home in Huddersfield. Monck was offered £4 for two séances or, if there were more than eight people present, five shillings per person. He accepted the offer, and arrived at Heppleston's house on the afternoon of Saturday, 21st October. The séances were scheduled to take place on the two following evenings.

Nothing much happened during the first séance. For the second, held on the Monday evening, Heppleston brought in an additional sitter: Henry Bedford Lodge, a commission agent from Kirkheaton. Lodge was a mesmerist and an amateur conjurer; he was also (unknown to Monck) a friend of Herr Dobler, whose fraudulent activities had been exposed by Monck on a previous occasion. Before the séance began Lodge mesmerised one of the other sitters who, in the trance state, gave an apparently accurate description of Monck's spirit guide, 'Samuel', whom he saw looking over Monck's shoulder. The séance that followed began with raps, followed by movements of a tambourine and fairy bells. A musical box played without anyone touching it, isolated notes sounded on the piano, and messages appeared on a previously-cleaned slate. At one stage the sitters saw a luminous hand which Mr Lodge thought was made of wax. He became convinced that the hand was secreted somewhere on Monck's person, and that a duplicate musical box was situated between Monck's knees. As soon as the séance was over he demanded to be allowed to search Monck. Monck refused. Lodge then grabbed the medium, who struck out, hitting Lodge on the cheek. Eluding the conjurer's grasp, Monck ran upstairs and locked himself in his room.

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<sup>4</sup> In experiments conducted by Messrs Christian Reimers and William Oxley, both of Manchester.

For an hour or so various members of the household argued with Monck from outside the locked door, but he refused to come out. Knowing what had happened to the Davenports, he was probably afraid of being beaten up. Eventually the door was forced and it was found that Monck had escaped from the window by means of a knotted sheet. Lodge then took possession of three boxes which belonged to Monck. On forcing these open, he found that they contained various items of conjuring equipment, including three stuffed gloves of various sizes, a telescopic reaching-rod, masks, a face painted on cheesecloth and a device for producing raps on a table. There were also several hundred letters and other documents. Lodge took all this stuff away with him. The following day Monck turned up at Heppleston's house to demand the return of his property. On being told that it was now in Lodge's possession, he took out a warrant to have a search made of the conjurer's house. However, Lodge handed all the material over to the chief constable, who then proceeded to arrest Monck under the provisions of the Vagrancy Act.

On Saturday, 11th November, Monck was found guilty as a common vagabond of obtaining money under false pretences. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour in the Wakefield House of Correction. After sentencing he asked if he could address the court and, after thanking the Bench "for the courtesy and attention they have shown to this case" and accepting that they had given what they believed to be a righteous verdict, he added: "when a man has an easy conscience he may be happy in a gaol . . . I have not ever seen or touched a wax hand in my life, and I did not on that occasion for which I am convicted produce a single trick . . . I rejoice that I am the first person in England accounted worthy to suffer for the glorious truths of spiritualism." This speech was greeted with cries of "Oh!", hooting, and hisses.

The accounts of Monck's trial run to many pages, and it is impossible to give even a condensed version of them here. Suffice it to say that, after reading them through several times, I feel that there is much to be said for those who, like Archdeacon Colley, claimed that this was a miscarriage of justice. Monck may have been a cheat, but the prosecution produced no evidence that he had cheated in that particular séance. The principal witness, Lodge, was clearly biased, in that he was a friend of Herr Dobler. Furthermore, he had already published an account of his alleged unmasking of Monck, together with some sarcastic comments about spiritualism, in two of the local papers.<sup>5</sup>

Nowadays this fact alone would probably be sufficient to invalidate his testimony, if not the whole trial. Lodge explained to the court how the phenomena he had seen *might* have been produced by conjuring, but he failed to prove that they had been so caused. The various moving objects, he said, *could* have been pulled by thin strands of black Japanese silk, but he had to admit that he had not found any such strands. The playing of the musical box *could* have been simulated by a duplicate box held between Monck's knees, but neither Lodge nor anyone else saw or found such a box during the séance. The conjuring items found in Monck's room were stowed away in trunks; there was not a

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<sup>5</sup> Lodge actually sent his account to three papers, but the *Huddersfield Chronicle*, to its credit, refused to print it.



shred of evidence to show that they had been used during the séance. Witnesses testified that they had seen Monck using these items on previous occasions in his demonstration lectures against the conjurers; their existence was no secret, and Monck had made no effort to conceal them. Admittedly, his refusal to allow himself to be searched by Lodge looks suspicious, but it is clear that tempers were frayed and he may have feared violence. There were other occasions on which he *did* allow himself to be searched very thoroughly.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, 15th November, Monck left Huddersfield, having been released on bail pending an appeal. On the station platform he met Lodge, to whom he "bowed in a most courteous manner"; it is said that Mr Lodge "returned his bow with equal politeness" (*Huddersfield Examiner*, 15th November 1876).

The trial produced mixed reactions among the spiritualists. The British National Association of Spiritualists (BNAS) decided not to support Monck, although they were supporting Henry Slade, whose trial was taking place at about the same time. The Minute Books of the Association,<sup>6</sup> together with reports of their meetings in the Huddersfield press, indicate that this decision was not the result of any misgivings about the validity of Monck's phenomena. The BNAS had sent letters to Monck inviting him to give séances for them, but had received no replies (probably because he was travelling around the country at the time); they had therefore had no opportunity to evaluate his mediumship. He had not asked them for help. However, the Spiritual Institution founded by James Burns was very supportive. In December *The Medium and Daybreak* reported that Monck had been busy at the Institution (which was situated in Bloomsbury, London) "from morning to night, receiving friends, holding séances, developing mediums, and replying to the hosts of friends whose expressions of unshaken confidence and sympathy have come upon him like a flood." In fact, the notoriety and stress caused by the prosecution seems to have enhanced his mediumship. Mindful of the fiasco at Huddersfield, he now invited sitters to search him carefully before each séance, and the séances were held in full light. Under these conditions spirit hands were seen to materialise in the air, musical instruments played when no one was near them, and pencils rose from the table and wrote in a hand quite unlike that of the medium. Detailed descriptions were published in *The Medium and Daybreak*, and spiritualists from around the country sent in donations for the Monck Defence Fund.

Monck's appeal against his sentence was heard before Barons Cleasby and Pollock on 19th and 26th January, 1877, and turned on the question of whether or not the Vagrancy Act was applicable in a case such as his. Their lordships ruled that it was, and upheld the decision of the Huddersfield magistrates. Monck therefore served his sentence. By the June of that year he was back at the Spiritual Institution, where he gave séances for Hensleigh Wedgwood, Stainton Moses, Alfred Russel Wallace, Thomas Colley and other eminent investigators. Medhurst has discussed the reports of these séances at some length, and makes the point that it is unlikely that men such as these would

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<sup>6</sup> These books are preserved at the College of Psychic Studies, London. The relevant entries are in the Council meetings of 14th November and 12th December, 1876, sections 670 and 678.

have continued to work with Monck if they had believed that he was guilty of the offences for which he was imprisoned (Medhurst, 1966).

From this point onwards the sources available to me are rather scant. It seems that in January 1878 Monck began taking services in the Ladbroke Hall, Notting Hill, but within a very short time his health broke down. In the Spring of that year he went to Switzerland at the invitation of a kind friend and supporter, Mr Cranstoun, and there he stayed for two years, with the exception of a winter spent in Naples. It is probable that, like D. D. Home, he was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, the great scourge of Victorian England. On 24th July, 1881, he reappeared at a meeting in the Ladbroke Hall, and was described by a *Light* reporter as "looking sadly out of health . . . the shadow of his former portly self" (30th July 1881). A testimonial fund was subscribed for him, but shortly after this he emigrated to the United States and settled himself in Brooklyn, New York. There he continued his healing ministry, founding what he called 'The Apostolic Church of the Divine Gifts' in Brooklyn (*Christian Advocate*, 4th January 1883). As in England, Monck's activities in New York generated both enthusiastic support and virulent opposition. The *Religio-Philosophical Journal* described him as "an unprincipled, vain, dangerous adventurer", but it also admitted that he had been "received with open arms by leading Spiritualists". According to Fodor (1966) it was in New York that Monck eventually died, but the exact date of his death is not given. However, the evidence given by his old friend Archdeacon Colley in the famous 'Ghost Trial' of 1907 seems to imply that Monck was dead by that time (Randall, 2002).

Before discussing the phenomena produced by Monck during his years as a medium, I would like to scotch a particularly nasty rumour which has been put around by anti-spiritualist writers since his death, and which still appears in popular accounts from time to time. Horace Wyndham (1937) says that when Monck's boxes were searched in Huddersfield "disgusting letters were discovered, showing that he had carried on intrigues with married women, under the cloak of spiritualism and the convenience of the dark séance". Medhurst (1965) traced the origin of this story to a pamphlet issued by the conjurer J. N. Maskelyne in 1906,<sup>7</sup> and later cited by Tuckett (1911). In fact, only two documents were presented at the trial, and neither contained anything obscene, or referred to any affairs with women. I have read all the reports of the trial I could obtain from Huddersfield, and there is no mention of any such thing. If such evidence had existed, I have no doubt that the prosecution would have made full use of it, for they were trying to prove that Monck was "a rogue and a vagabond". The press would also have had a field-day. The absence of any evidence earlier than 1906 (some 30 years after the event) leads me to conclude that the story is nothing more than malicious gossip, probably put around in a deliberate attempt at character assassination.

#### THE PHENOMENA EXAMINED

I am quite satisfied the thing is as I have stated it, and I am equally satisfied that very few persons will believe this statement . . .

*William Adshead*

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<sup>7</sup> Medhurst wrongly dates the pamphlet to 1916.



Anyone who wishes to make a careful study of the phenomena produced by Monck will soon encounter problems. The surviving accounts are scattered throughout a dozen or more periodicals and books, of which few copies survive. Those that do survive are held in archives which are not easily accessible. Furthermore, the archives are slowly deteriorating, and some important evidential material has already disappeared. It should not be assumed that archives will last for ever; I know of at least two valuable collections which have lost documents through theft in recent years, and there are others where important documents are falling to pieces through neglect. If we are not to lose a vital part of our heritage, steps need to be taken to preserve and, ideally, copy these records before it is too late.

Almost all the studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century mediums which have been published in recent years have been bedevilled by the polarization into 'believers' and 'sceptics' which now exists in our subject. The records have been scrutinized with the sole purpose of determining whether or not the medium cheated. In other words, the *only* hypothesis being tested against the reported facts is the fraud hypothesis. Thus, many pages of print have been consumed in discussing whether or not Palladino could have cheated during the Naples séances, whether or not the Kluski wax moulds could have been faked, and so on. Now I am not suggesting that the fraud hypothesis should *never* be discussed. Possible methods of cheating need to be taken into account when deciding how much weight to put on any particular report. However, I cannot help wondering whether, in this 'us-versus-them' approach to phenomena, we may not be missing vital clues which could lead to a deeper understanding of what is happening.

Obviously, if a medium is caught *in flagrante delicto*, the phenomena occurring in that séance (but not necessarily in others) must be rejected. But in many cases it is a matter of mere suspicion, personal opinion, and speculation on *possible* methods of fraud. In such cases I suggest we adopt a policy of *provisional acceptance of the data*.<sup>8</sup> This will enable us to look for patterns and correlations which might help to throw some light on the nature of the processes involved.

Considering the fraud hypothesis first, I can find only two occasions on which Monck was accused of fraud. The first was the séance of 23rd October, 1876, which led to his trial and imprisonment. I have already given my reasons for thinking that this was a miscarriage of justice. The second occurs in a paper by Sir William Barrett (1886). Barrett was widely respected as a man of honesty and integrity, and his evidence convinced even Doyle, who was reluctant to think ill of any medium (Doyle, 1926). Yet Barrett's information is maddeningly short. In a brief footnote to his paper he says:—

... subsequently I caught the 'Dr' [i.e. Monck] in a gross bit of fraud, a piece of white muslin on a wire frame with a black thread attached, being used by the medium to simulate a *partially* materialized spirit'.

Barrett does not tell us where, or when, this took place, nor does he mention any other witnesses. We do not even know whether it occurred during an actual

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Bronowski, in his famous television lectures *The Ascent of Man*, reminded viewers that all scientific knowledge is essentially provisional.

séance. Since we know that Monck possessed conjuring equipment which he used in his lectures, it is *possible* that there was a misunderstanding, on Barrett's part, of what Monck was trying to show him. In the absence of any further information I prefer to give Monck the benefit of the doubt.

Monck's phenomena seem to have evolved over a period of time (sceptics will say he was learning new tricks!). During his childhood and early manhood he saw apparitions, which sometimes terrified him, and experienced occasional raps. After his initiation into spiritualism in the early 1870s he began to reproduce most of the phenomena attributed to the more famous D. D. Home: levitations, elongations, the movement of heavy furniture, spirit hands, the playing of musical instruments. He also practised slate-writing and clairvoyance. The most dramatic phenomena of all, the full-form materializations which so impressed Wallace and Archdeacon Colley, came later; I have found no references to them which pre-date the trial of 1876.

The twelve séances held in Derbyshire in 1876 illustrate this progressive development. William Adshead, who attended all but three of them, tells us that "each [séance] was held under the strictest test conditions, and . . . at each succeeding séance the manifestations were given in greater variety and with increased power". He also tells us that "some of the most beautiful and marvellous manifestations were given in the light" (Adshead, 1876). The following description illustrates the level of control achieved:—

On the evenings of Tuesday and Wednesday, 20th and 21st June, the third and fourth [séances] were held in a room on my premises. In that room there is a large wooden cabinet; fixed inside the cabinet is a seat, in front of which, securely fastened to the floor and seat, stands a piece of mechanism we call the 'stocks'; by it the feet, legs and hands of the medium are rendered powerless to act in any way so as to produce the phenomena which usually occur. Dr Monck was impressed to have himself fixed in the stocks. I placed him there, and, owing to the thickness of his wrists, I had great difficulty in bringing the top and bottom parts of the stocks together for the purpose of locking them; however, it was done, and so tightly was he held he could not use his hands to the extent of an inch in any direction. The upper portion of his body was then drawn back by strong bandages, passed through two iron staples fixed in the wall, so that he could not do anything with his mouth. [Adshead, 1876]

Under these conditions of control a musical box, placed out of reach of the medium, wound itself up and played, a tambourine floated in the air above the medium's head, and a pasteboard tube was thrown about "with a swiftness and force which could only be done by a human being having the free and full use of his hands and arms". The type of physical restraint used here is reminiscent of the wooden box constructed by Houdini to control the medium 'Margery'; however, unlike Monck, she performed in the dark (Inglis, 1984).

Like most mediums, Monck had his 'spirit guides', who delivered messages and were ostensibly responsible for producing the physical phenomena. The chief of these was Samuel Wheeler, who, according to Adshead, displayed a mischievous sense of humour. At a séance held in a public hall in Ripley, where neither Monck nor any other medium had previously set foot, he provoked a violent outburst of typical poltergeist phenomena. "Objects were moved in the light without human contact; the heavy table round which we sat, weighing more than two hundredweight,<sup>9</sup> rose from the floor while our

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<sup>9</sup> 224 lbs, or about 102 kgs.

hands rested upon it, and with great precision and grace of motion beat an accompaniment to the tune we were singing. Two musical boxes and two bells rose above our heads, and played and were rung in different parts of the room . . . and then . . . there began a most unusual commotion immediately behind the medium's chair.

The fire-irons were lifted and rattled, the tongs being thrown to a distance from the fire-place, the handle of the bell fixed in the room was vigorously pulled, the ringing of the bell being heard all over the house . . . some of the articles on the mantelpiece were thrown down, amongst the rest a fragile-looking Bohemian glass vase, falling on the floor, the impression of all being that it was smashed to pieces; and then . . . a very heavy easy chair, which the lessee of the hall, who was present, said would require two men to place it in the position in which it was found, was lifted overhead and placed on the table, this being followed by the levitation of Dr Monck, he being found on the table when the gas was relighted." The Bohemian glass vase, which they had all supposed smashed, was later found to be intact. Unfortunately from the evidential point of view, it is not entirely clear from Adshead's account of this sitting which events took place in the light and which in darkness. Nevertheless it is difficult to see how such effects could have been fraudulently produced without the use of heavy and elaborate equipment, which Monck had had no opportunity of installing.

The spirit guide Samuel Wheeler was, in fact, a real person. Like Monck, he had come from Portsmouth to London in 1859 to enrol at Spurgeon's College (Wheeler was No.7 on the enrolment register, while Monck was No.8). The two were almost certainly boyhood friends. Wheeler's first pastorate was at Sharnbrook, about nine miles from Monck's first pastorate at Earls Barton, and the two young ministers probably discussed their respective ministries and exchanged pulpits on occasion. Wheeler died in 1869, in his late twenties, and his death must have come as a severe blow to Monck. It may well have been one of the events which impelled Monck towards spiritualism.

On one occasion the spirit 'Samuel' is said to have written 39 words on a slate which Mr Adshead had cleaned on both sides and then held on top of Monck's head. Adshead reproduces this script in his article and discusses various ways in which it might have been faked. Unfortunately, it does not seem to have occurred to him to try to obtain a sample of the living Samuel's writing for comparison. However on the evening of Sunday, 25th June, 1876, a group of sitters actually watched a pencil writing by itself on a sheet of paper. The group had just been singing the hymn *Dare to be a Daniel*. The pencil wrote: "My dear friends, I would like you all to be Daniels, but you do not stand alone. Angel-bands are ever near to bless and help you. Samuel." Commenting on this remarkable phenomenon Adshead writes as follows:—

On what conceivable theory would any professor opposed to spiritualism account for such a phenomenon as this? It certainly cannot be brought under the head either of delusion or imposture. Ten pairs of keen eyes were watching the work as it was being done, and the testimony of those who saw it done could not be shaken, while the fact that what was written had direct reference to what had previously been sung, without concert or premeditation, clearly proves that the writing could not have been prepared before the séance commenced.

[Adshead, 1876, p. 11]

It is clear from these accounts that Monck's phenomena were at least as remarkable as those of D. D. Home. Unfortunately, Monck lacked the patronage of the rich and famous, and was never investigated by a scientist of the calibre of Sir William Crookes, which probably explains why he has been largely forgotten.<sup>10</sup> However, he did succeed in convincing some highly sceptical observers, including the rationalist Dr George Sexton. In August 1873 a séance was held in the home of the Revd F. R. Young in Swindon, with Sexton in charge of the proceedings. He took Monck into an adjoining room, where "he divested himself of all his clothing in my presence. I carefully examined every article of apparel that he had worn, and removed from his pockets their entire contents, not leaving behind a single thing of the most insignificant character, such as a key or a piece of paper. This done, he again dressed himself and walked before me into the séance room." The séance that followed took place in semi-darkness, but the medium was seen walking up and down clutching an accordion which was playing, despite the fact that Sexton had previously tied it with cords to prevent it from doing so:—

Thinking that possibly the cords might have been removed or loosened by some means, I said, "Sam, will you kindly pass that accordion to me as soon after it has ceased playing as possible; I do not stipulate the time, but do it as quickly as you can?" The reply was, "Certainly, Doctor." More musical sounds were heard, and, the very instant they ceased, the instrument was thrust into my hands. I inspected it very carefully and found that the cord was still there, knots and seals all intact.

The obvious possibility — that Monck was using some sort of miniature mouth organ to make sounds that only *appeared* to come from the accordion was eliminated by the next stage in the experiment. Sexton himself held the instrument, still tied so that the bellows could not function, and with his finger stopping up the air-intake valve. Under these conditions it continued to play, and he was able to feel the vibrations it made. When he pressed down a key with his free hand, the instrument, still tied up and with the air intake blocked, emitted the appropriate note. He concluded his description of this experiment with the words: "I must say that I look upon this as so extraordinary a manifestation that it has been seldom equalled, and perhaps never excelled." (Sexton, 1874).

#### MATERIALISATIONS

I have described elsewhere the full-form materializations which greatly impressed several distinguished observers (Randall, 2000). Not all of these witnesses can be regarded as equally reliable. Thomas Colley was a deeply religious, emotional and somewhat eccentric man, and although I believe he was quite sincere in his attempts to describe what he saw during séances, he was no scientist. I am not convinced that either his observations or his memory should be trusted. Alfred Russel Wallace, however, was a very different person. He was renowned for the detailed precision which went into his observations on natural history, and he had no religious axe to grind, having rejected orthodox religion from an early age. In his autobiography he describes a séance at which he, Stainton Moses and Hensleigh Wedgwood were present with Monck (whose name he misspells):—

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<sup>10</sup> I am grateful to John Beloff for pointing this out.

It was a bright summer afternoon and everything happened in the full light of day. After a little conversation Monk, who was dressed in the usual clerical black, appeared to go into a trance; then stood up a few feet in front of us, and after a little while pointed to his side, saying, "Look." We saw there a faint white patch on his coat on the left side. This grew brighter, then seemed to flicker, and extend both upwards and downwards, till very gradually it formed a cloudy pillar extending from his shoulder to his feet and close to his body. Then he shifted himself a little sideways, the cloudy figure standing still, but appearing joined to him by a cloudy band at the height at which it had first begun to form. Then, after a few minutes more, Monk again said "Look," and passed his hand through the connecting band, severing it. He and the figure then moved away from each other till they were about five or six feet apart. The figure had now assumed the appearance of a thickly draped female form, with arms and hands just visible. Monk looked towards it and again said to us "Look," and then clapped his hands. On which the figure put out her hands, clapped them as he had done, and we all distinctly heard her clap following his, but fainter. The figure then moved slowly back to him, grew fainter and shorter, and was apparently absorbed into his body as it had grown out of it. [Wallace, 1905, p. 330]

Wallace is fully aware that such a description will appear to most people as mere 'midsummer madness', but he insists that "to those who have for years obtained knowledge of a great variety of facts equally strange, this is only the culminating point of a long series of phenomena, all antecedently incredible to the people who talk so confidently of the laws of nature". From Wallace's careful account it appears certain that, if Monck obtained his effects by conjuring, he must have used a confederate to play the part of the 'spirit'. To the best of my knowledge, no such confederate was ever found.

Monck continued to produce full-form materializations after his emigration to the United States. The following account is by Judge Abram H. Dailey (born 1831), a judge of the Surrogate Court<sup>11</sup> in Brooklyn and lawyer to the editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* of Chicago:—

Glancing at Dr Monck's side we observed what looked like an opalescent mass of compact steam emerging from just below his heart on the left side. It increased in volume, rising up and extending downward, the upper portions taking the form of a child's head, the face being distinguished as that of a little child I had lost some twenty years previously. It only remained in this form for a moment, and then suddenly disappeared, seeming to be instantly absorbed into the Doctor's side. This remarkable phenomenon was repeated four or five times, in each instance the materialisation being more distinct than the preceding one. This was witnessed by all in the room with gas burning sufficiently bright for every object in the room to be plainly visible. [Banner of Light, 15th December 1881; quoted by Doyle, 1926]

It should be noticed that these effects were produced in well-lit ordinary living-rooms, not upon a stage. In 1906 Archdeacon Colley challenged the eminent conjurer J. N. Maskelyne to replicate them in his village rectory, but he was unable, or unwilling, to do so. However, Maskelyne did produce something similar on the stage of St George's Hall, London, where he presumably had access to plenty of 'props'. In Maskelyne's performance the emergent 'spirit' was not reabsorbed into the body of the 'medium', but simply walked off the stage. Wallace, who saw the performance, described it as "an absurd travesty".

<sup>11</sup> The Surrogate Court handles trusts and estates.

The phenomenon of alleged materialisation is virtually unknown today, but was surprisingly common in Victorian times. Large numbers of 'spirits' materialized in gas-lit drawing-rooms, walked around, moved heavy pieces of furniture and embraced sitters (Marryat,<sup>12</sup> 1891). Present-day 'anomalies' are tame compared with those that confronted our ancestors!

#### CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS, SPECULATIONS

Remarkable things were happening in the second half of the nineteenth century, on one level or another. Either they constitute an extension, having far-reaching implications, of the field of phenomena recognized by physical science, or they represent an astonishing failure of human testimony. [Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, p.28]

The dogmatic sceptic will, of course, have no difficulty in explaining Monck's phenomena. He knows, beyond all possibility of argument, that such things are impossible; therefore the observed effects must have been fraudulent, even though no direct proof of fraud was ever obtained. Those of us whose approach to reality is less dogmatic have a more difficult task. If we adopt the principle of provisional acceptance of the data, we have to find some sort of explanatory framework within which they will make sense. In my view, it is the absence of such a framework which prevents parapsychology from gaining the academic status it deserves.

The first problem we have to confront is one of *frequency*. Why, if these phenomena were so common in Victorian days, are they seldom, or never, reported today? Stephen Braude, who has argued strongly in favour of the acceptance of large-scale PK phenomena, gives several possible reasons (Braude, 1997, pp.53–58). One possibility which he does not consider is that the phenomena may be intermittent, occurring more strongly in some time periods than in others. In general, science tends to be uniformitarian in its assumptions; that is, it assumes that the same kinds of principles operate today as operated yesterday and will operate tomorrow. It finds it difficult to deal with events which do not display this kind of time-symmetry. It seems, however, that ancient peoples were well aware that there are periods in history when paranormal phenomena do not occur, or occur very rarely (see, for example, the comment in I Samuel ch.3, v.1). We may have to put up with the present paucity of phenomena for some time to come.

The antipathy of the founding fathers of the SPR towards the physical phenomena of the séance-room is well known (Beloff, 1993; Inglis, 1984), and sometimes over-stated. The same antipathy seems to have existed in the minds of William James and some other American researchers (Murphy & Ballou, 1969, p.61). On the continent of Europe, however, phenomena similar to those produced by Home and Monck were investigated well into the twentieth century by a range of distinguished scientists, such as Zöllner, Richet, Geley, Schrenck-Notzing and Osty. A few Britons also contributed to this work, most notably Lodge, Crawford, Dingwall and Harry Price. During the early years of the twentieth century some of these workers—which, for convenience, we may call the 'continental school'—developed a theoretical framework for understanding the phenomena based on the notion of 'ideoplasty'. The unseen operators, who

<sup>12</sup> For a penetrating analysis of Florence Marryat and her evidence, see Eisenbud (1975).



might be spirits of the dead, denizens of some other dimension of reality, or fragments of the unconscious minds of the sitters, were said to operate on a peculiar substance called 'ectoplasm' drawn from the body of the medium. This substance, which could vary in texture from a thin mist to a sticky fluid, was shaped by the operators into temporary fingers, arms, faces, or whole bodies before being reabsorbed into the body of the medium. Telekinetic effects such as the movement of objects at a distance were supposed to be effected by 'ectoplasmic rods' linking the medium's body to the distant object. Experiments by Crawford (1916) and others showed that the medium did indeed lose weight while the physical phenomena were occurring, exactly as would be expected on this theory.

Unfortunately, the ectoplasm theory has not stood up well to the passage of time. We now know a great deal more about the internal structure of living cells than was known in Crawford's time. So far from being a more or less formless mass of protoplasm, the interior of the cell contains highly ordered and elaborate structures which are essential to the continuance of its life. It is inconceivable that large quantities of ordinary matter could be removed from inside the cells of a living body without destroying them. If the misty substance which emerged from Monck's side during a materialisation séance had really come from inside the cells of his physical body the result would have been the rapid demise of the medium. I do not know of any examples of séances which terminated in this tragic manner.

Nevertheless, the ectoplasm theory does fit a sufficiently large number of apparently carefully observed facts to make me wonder whether it cannot be saved in a modified form. There is no reason at all to assume that the matter which can be seen under our microscopes is the *only* kind of matter in the universe. Cosmologists have been aware for a long time of the 'dark matter' whose nature is unknown, but which must make up a considerable part of the matter of the cosmos. Millions of neutrinos pass through our bodies every second, but we are not aware of them because they seldom interact with the atoms of which our bodies are composed. It is not impossible, therefore, that there is more to a living organism than just the material body studied by physiologists and anatomists. There may be a 'subtle body' or 'astral body' composed of matter which interacts only weakly with the matter of our visible bodies. The ectoplasm of the séance-room could then be drawn from this subtle body. In order to account for Crawford's findings the subtle body would need to be responsible for a proportion of the total mass of the organism.

The problem of materialisation is not, of course, fully solved merely by discovering the origin of the materials used. We also have to account for the organization of that material into apparently living forms. In short, we need to search for a source of *information*. A colossal amount of information is needed to turn an inchoate mass of vapoury ectoplasm into a living, moving, breathing simulacrum of a human being, and this information must be stored somewhere. In recent years several writers have speculated about the possibility of information being stored in structures outside the physical brain, such as 'morphic fields' (Sheldrake, 1988) or 'archives of the mind' (Roy, 1996). Similar notions can be traced in the 'Akashic Records' of the theosophists, and the teaching of some Christian theologians that a memory of every human being is

held in the mind of God, and will be used to resurrect him or her on the Last Day (Polkinghorne, 1992).

Bizarre as these speculations may seem, we should not reject them out of hand. If the astonishing advances made by physics during the twentieth century have taught us anything, it is surely that reality is weirder than anything we can imagine. Recent discoveries have shown that physical laws become simplified when expressed in terms of a hyperspace of many dimensions (Kaku, 1994; Carr, 2001), and there is no logical reason why information—including our memories—should not be stored in dimensions inaccessible to our normal physical senses. The projection of part of this informational content into the space-time of everyday experience would then produce phenomena which we regard as anomalous or paranormal.<sup>13</sup>

For many years now parapsychologists have concentrated their efforts on the less controversial phenomena (i.e. those most likely to be acceptable to orthodoxy) and have avoided outlandish topics such as materialization. This rather timid approach is understandable, but may be misguided. Those working in the physical sciences know very well that fundamental advances usually come when matter is studied under extreme conditions, such as in high-energy particle collisions. By concentrating on relatively tame laboratory manifestations of psi we may be missing out on the data which would lead us towards a plausible theory for the whole range of phenomena. It is only when such a theory has been formulated and shown to be consistent with other aspects of reality that we can expect to achieve a degree of recognition in the academic world. The suggestions in this paper are intended only as hints as to where we might begin to look for such a theory; the field of parapsychology still awaits its Einstein.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,

John Randall's attempt (Randall, 2003) at rehabilitating Francis Monck as an honest medium seems to me misguided, where it is not actually misleading. He attributes Monck's problems to prejudice on the part of all sections of society, including judges and magistrates, conjurors, the Church of England, and even theatre-goers. But I think that the prejudice which Randall attributes to anyone critical of Monck's phenomena is often well founded, as Mrs Sidgwick observed (Sidgwick, 1886).

Thus Randall attributes Monck's conviction at Huddersfield to the prejudice of the amateur conjuror, Lodge, stemming from his friendship with the conjuror 'Herr Dobler' (i.e. G. W. Smith-Buck), who had offended Monck on an earlier occasion. But if Randall had consulted Lewis's account in this journal (Lewis, 1889) he would have found that Monck had every opportunity to justify his performance. And at his appeal, neither Lodge nor his host, Hepplestone, wished to give evidence against him, but were required to do so by the Chief Constable (Harrison, 1877). Again, at this appeal, even Monck's barrister, Mr Matthews, Q.C., admitted that in the Huddersfield séance:—

There had, it is true, been conjuring tricks.

[*Daily Telegraph*, 3rd February 1877]

Randall illustrates judicial prejudice with a quotation from Vice-Chancellor Giffard's summing-up in the *Lyon v Home* case:—

I hold Spiritualism to be a delusion.

But Randall is here quoting from Burton's biography of Home (Burton, 1948) and Giffard did not say this. What he actually said was:—

As regards the so-called spiritual manifestations and communications . . . they were brought about by some means or other, and in consequence of the defendant's presence—how, there is no proof to show . . . [Anon., 1868, p. 58]

It is of interest to note that the false quotation apparently derives from Mme Home's biography of her husband, but which she there prefaces with the statement:—

What Sir George Giffard should have said.

[Home, 1888]

However, I think Sir George might have entertained some doubts about Home when he heard the details of Home's dealings with Mrs Lyon. Home met Mrs Lyon on Monday, 3rd October 1866, and a week later had persuaded her, by raps ostensibly emanating from her deceased husband, to give him some £30,000 (Anon., 1868, p.5), the equivalent in today's money of £1.8 million (Richards, 2002).

A little later that month she was requested to write a new will, making Home her sole beneficiary, and on 9th November she instructed her solicitor, Wilkinson, to draw up this will. On 10th December she transferred £6,700 to Home, on 19th January (1867) she transferred £30,000, followed by £2,290 on 21st February. Home drafted the instructions for all these monetary transfers: Mrs Lyon copied them, and then, acting on Home's instructions, she destroyed his drafts. In the light of this sequence of events, would any reasonable person

not entertain some doubts about Home's motives? And would such doubts be the result of prejudice?

Again, Randall claims that it was prejudice which led to the riots against the Davenport brothers in three Northern towns. But this is untrue: the brothers appeared as paid performers, and did not claim spirit intervention in what was essentially an escapology act. When two members of the Liverpool audience tied them with the so-called Tom Fool's Knot, from which they could not escape, the Davenports refused to perform. The audience, deprived of the performance which they had paid to see, not surprisingly created a riot. The knot and the rioting followed them to Huddersfield and Leeds (Podmore, 1902, p. 60). I think that Randall's suggestion that conjurors were prejudiced against Spiritualist mediums because people would prefer viewing Spiritualist miracles for nothing, rather than having to pay to witness conjuring performances, is both patronizing and wrong-headed. I do not believe that many people would regard attending a Spiritualist séance as an alternative to visiting a conjuring performance; and, in any case, few were admitted to Spiritualist séances without making some monetary contribution.

I do not think Randall's assertion concerning the "Church of England's near-monopoly of religious matters" would bear examination. Is he not aware of the extensive Roman Catholic community, or of the innumerable Non-Conformist sects in 19th-century England? In any case virtually all Christians had accepted Scriptural proscription against dealings with spirits from earliest times, as had other major religious groups; so this could hardly be regarded as a prejudice peculiar to the Anglican church.

Randall says that he has found only two accusations of fraud against Monck, namely the Huddersfield case, which he attributes to the prejudice of the conjuror, Lodge; and an accusation by Sir William Barrett (Barrett, 1886), to whom even Randall cannot attribute prejudice—he thinks Barrett's accusation may be the result of a misunderstanding. Since Randall requires that a medium should be caught *'in flagrante delicto'* before an accusation of fraud can be regarded as substantiated, this places an almost impossible task on the investigator, who is not likely to be admitted to a second séance after having caught the medium out once. Coupled with Randall's contention that fraud demonstrated on one occasion has no bearing on others, this would seem to encourage mediumistic fraud. Since Randall dismisses circumstantial evidence, he ignores the many indications of Monck's fraudulence. Thus even the editor of *The Spiritualist* observed that the only materialisations at Monck's séances which showed any facial animation resembled Monck himself; others retained a rigid, mask-like countenance throughout (Harrison, 1878).

When Archdeacon Colley seized the supposed materialization of the white-clad Egyptian 'Mahedi', he found himself holding Monck, who was covered in a piece of white muslin (Colley, 1905). Again, Monck gave two séances in Blackburn, on 9th and 10th December 1873, which were described by the editor of the local paper (Walker, 1873). The sitters were tied together with twine; only Monck was free to walk about. After the lights were extinguished, tables started to tip, but not where Walker was sitting. Monck described spirit lights, spirit hands and a beautiful female spirit which he could see, but which no one else could see. The spirits supposedly played various musical instruments,

including a child's trumpet, a whistle, a horn and a tambourine. An accordion was tied up with string, and sounds resembling those of an accordion were heard: but when a half-note was requested (available from an accordion, but not from an easily-concealed one-octave mouth-organ), no sound was heard. Monck then blew the trumpet, and a similar sound was heard from the other side of the table, where a young man was sitting. The horn was dropped on the floor, where a sitter secretly put his foot across it, but the spirits apparently continued to play it.

The young man then said that the spirits had pulled his chair from under him, and this was confirmed by raising the lights. When darkness was restored, Monck announced that he was to be levitated. A foot was heard to slip from a chair, after which Monck said the spirits had lifted him on to the table. He then stepped down, and this concluded the phenomena. Several sitters said that in the dim light they saw Monck mount the table where the young man was sitting; and the man sitting next to him said he felt Monck's hand touch his shoulder. When Monck suggested that the sitters should search him, one sitter suggested that they should search the young man. But at this point they found that the young man had already left.

At the second séance only eight sitters, but no young man, were present. Again Monck, after the light was extinguished, described various spirit forms that only he could see. Then Monck's guardian spirit, Samuel, directed him to write various communications from recently deceased locals. All of these, except for occasional errors, could be traced to obituaries appearing in the local press. The light was then extinguished, and the trumpet was blown, but only from the area where Monck was standing. This was attributed by the sitters to the absence of the young man. The accordion was then tied up, and a note was heard. A light resembling that of phosphorus was seen near Monck, who was then tied up. The sitters expected him to be released quickly, but he was heard struggling for some five minutes, until a string was heard to snap. Monck said the spirits had tied him too tightly.

Walker subsequently sent reporters to investigate the young man. At first he refused to give his name, but then said he was Reuben Walters, a commercial traveller for the London tea merchants, Philips & Co. He said he had no connection with Monck, but had been in Blackburn for four days soliciting orders. However he had no list of potential customers, and could not name any he had supposedly called upon. Enquiries showed he had not called upon any local tea-dealers; and Philips denied all knowledge of him, saying they sent no travellers into the country. The hotelier, Duxbury, said he had stayed at his hotel, giving his name as Alfred Rollings, and was a lecturer for the London Lodge of Good Templars. Walker found there was no mission of the Good Templars to Lancashire, and he found that the young man had told another hotelier that he had come to Blackburn to see and hear Dr Monck. He later found that Alfred Rollings was Monck's brother-in-law, who had supposedly witnessed Monck's spirit-flight from Bristol to Swindon.

Now even Podmore was prepared to concede (Podmore, 1902, p.270) that mediumistic fraud might be performed in a dissociated state, when the medium could not be held responsible for his actions. But to prearrange actions beforehand with an accomplice must be regarded as deliberate fraud.



Circumstantial evidence may not be conclusive, but it is cumulative, and each item increases the probability towards virtual certainty. This is illustrated by elements observed at Monck's séances, the music-box performance, the mask-like appearance of materializations which did not resemble Monck, the muslin left behind by 'Mahedi', Mrs Sidgwick's reproduction of Monck's slate-writing, Monck's supposed levitation and 'spirit-messages' at Blackburn, not to mention Barrett's accusation. Even Hereward Carrington (1907) gives an account of how Monck was able to produce a child's hand in a dark séance. In all the accounts of Monck's materialization séances I have read, there is always access to the cabinet from an inner room, or hall-way (e.g. Bennett, 1877). Taken together, I think these items illustrate how Monck achieved his 'spirit marvels'. When he deserted his wife (Waite, 1938) to emigrate to the United States, I do not think this represented any loss to psychical research in this country — a view which Comte Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo (1911) would probably have endorsed.

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To the Editor,

Michael Coleman has provided some additional information about Francis Ward Monck, and to that extent I welcome his letter (Coleman, 2004). However, he has completely misunderstood the purpose of my paper (Randall, 2003). It was *not* "an attempt at rehabilitating Monck as an honest medium"; what would be the point of that? Most, if not all, of the famous mediums of the nineteenth century were accused of cheating at some time or another. By careful selection of quotations it is possible to make out a plausible case for, or against, the honesty of any one of them. One's conclusion depends entirely upon one's predisposition ('sceptic' or 'believer') and the evidence one chooses to accept. For the psychical researcher the question is not whether Monck was honest, but whether he *ever* produced any paranormal phenomena. I think there is reasonably good evidence that he did.

Dr Coleman seems to be trying to argue that there was no prejudice against spiritualists in the later nineteenth century, and that the judicial treatment of mediums such as Monck, Slade and Home was always fair and above board. I think the facts show otherwise. Once again, we see selective quotation at work. Coleman prefers to quote from an anonymous document rather than accept the account given by a biographer who, presumably, researched her subject in advance. I confess that I do not know who is correct, but it is a matter of small importance. The cumulative evidence for widespread hostility directed against the spiritualist movement is overwhelming; that some of it came from professional conjurers is clear from the careers of successive members of the Maskelyne family. There is also abundant evidence that all the major churches, especially the Church of England (the majority church, despite Dr Coleman's comments) were seriously worried by the growth of spiritualism, and tried to dissuade their ministers from having anything to do with it. The loss of children from the Sunday Schools to the spiritualist 'Lyceums' was particularly resented.

Dr Coleman quotes from Archdeacon Colley's address to the Church Congress at Weymouth (p.126, last paragraph). I have been unable to obtain a copy of this address, but since Colley was trying desperately hard to convince his co-religionists of the validity of his spiritualistic experiences I doubt whether it could have contained anything to discredit Monck. In my paper I refrained from quoting Colley, partly for reasons of space (the paper was far too long already!) and partly because his convoluted language falls awkwardly on the modern ear. Also, I thought *Journal* readers would be more likely to be impressed by the careful experiments and detailed evidence provided by such people as William Adshead, Dr George Sexton, Alfred Russel Wallace and Judge Dailey (Randall, 2003, pp.252–255). It is noticeable that Dr Coleman makes *no attempt whatsoever* to deal with the evidence given by these people. Instead, he devotes a whole page of his letter to describing the investigation of a journalist into two séances held at Blackburn, which apparently produced little in the way of phenomena. He stresses the journalist's attempts to discover the identity of a mysterious young man who may, or may not, have had something to do with the alleged phenomena. If this is what Dr Coleman means by "circumstantial evidence", then I am sorry to say that I am not impressed.

In later years Monck produced many alleged materialisations, including figures of children, a female called 'Lily', and his spirit-guide 'Samuel Weaver'. The latter was sufficiently realistic to be recognised by a former member of the living Samuel Weaver's congregation. Monck was often observed at some distance from these creations, which were seen to emerge from, and melt back into, his physical organism.<sup>1</sup> Whatever else he was, the famous 'Mahedi', mentioned by Dr Coleman, could not possibly have been Monck dressed in a sheet: "This phantom was a giant. His physical strength was so enormous that he could lift the Archdeacon from his chair to the level of his shoulders apparently without effort. He reminded the Archdeacon of a mummy of gigantic proportions he once saw in some museum" (Fodor, 1966, p.219). On 18th February 1878, during a séance held in daylight, "it was arranged, as a most dangerous experiment, that I [Colley] should grasp the white-attired Egyptian and try to keep him from getting back to invisibility through the body of the medium. I was, by an invisible force, levitated, as it seemed instantly some eighteen or twenty feet from my drawing room door right up to where the medium stood, whom, strangely and suddenly, wearing white muslin over his black coat, I found in my arms just as I had held The Mahedi. The materialised form had gone, and the psychic clothing that he evolved with him from the left side of my friend must also have gone the same way with the speed of thought back to invisibility through the medium. But whence its substituted drapers' stuff now on the body of our friend not wearing it an instant before?" (loc. cit.). This is presumably the incident mentioned by Dr Coleman, but by omitting all reference to the levitation and aerial flight he manages to remove its paranormal implications. On another occasion the materialised 'Samuel' was persuaded to drink a glass of water; "the water so consumed was, in quantity corresponding to what the materialised spirit swallowed, instantly ejected from the medium's mouth, demonstrating . . . that there is at times . . . great community of taste and feeling between the psychic forms and the mediums from whom they take birth" (Colley, 1877, p.20).

Impossible? Of course. The great psychical researchers of the past were fully aware that they were reporting events which were absurd and impossible by normal standards, but they insisted that what they reported was real. "Yes, it is absurd," said Richet; "but no matter—it is true" (Richet, 1923, p.544). There are several possible attitudes one can take towards such testimony. One can reject it out of hand, attributing all anomalous observations to a combination of fraud and error. This is the stance of the dogmatic sceptic, and it effectively closes the matter. There is nothing to investigate, and psychical research becomes a futile exercise. Such an attitude constitutes what Tyrrell (1947) called "a premature closing of our account with reality". Or, one can keep an open mind, as I advocated in my paper, and grant provisional acceptance of the observations, in the hope that a careful study of the alleged phenomena will one day lead to a deeper understanding. In the light of modern

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Coleman says that in all the accounts of Monck's materialisation séances he has read, there was always access to the cabinet from an inner room, or hall-way (p.128). But it is clear from the descriptions of Wallace and others that materialisations often took place *without* any cabinet being used, and in a good light.

physics we can no longer rule out everything that seems to run counter to our commonsense view of the world. Serious physicists now discuss the possibility that points remote from one another in space and time may nevertheless be intimately connected; that there may be hidden dimensions and undiscovered forms of matter; that time travel and teleportation may one day be practical possibilities. In the light of all this I, for one, cannot dismiss the testimony of people of high intelligence and integrity, simply because they described events which I cannot understand.

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