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**THE SORCERER OF KINGS: THE CASE OF DANIEL DUNGLAS HOME AND WILLIAM CROOKES** by Gordon Stein. Prometheus Books, 1993. 140 pp. £19.50.

According to the cover notes Dr Gordon Stein reaches "startling new conclusions" about Home and Crookes, and in an enthusiastic foreword James Randi commends this "effective weapon in the battle against irrationality and nonsense". Randi apparently diverges from Stein's views in considering Sir William Crookes to be the dupe of all mediums, whereas the theme argued by Stein is more complex (and less economical), namely that while Crookes was a fool in his researches with Home he was a brazen knave *vis-à-vis* Annie Eva Fay and Florence Cook.

The book is set out in three sections, the first summarizing the career of Florence Cook, the second dealing with Crookes, and the third, the most substantial section, examining various aspects of Home and his relationship with Crookes. Conclusions are reviewed briefly in a fourth part. The references disclose considerable background reading, and Stein draws extensively on "William Crookes and the Physical Phenomena of Mediumship" (Medhurst & Goldney, 1964), written largely in response to Trevor Hall's *The Spiritualists* (Hall, 1962). There is a satisfactory combined index.

At no time does Stein pretend that he is not *parti pris*, and when quoting from Crookes's "Notes of an Enquiry Into the Phenomena Called Spiritual" (Crookes, 1874) he cannot resist inserting "[!]" after every mention by Crookes of the word "genuine" (as in "genuine phenomena"). In some ways he plays conspicuously fair; for instance, by supporting the findings of Myers (who sometimes appears quaintly as "Meyers") that testimonials to Home's mediumship quoted in books by Home and by his widow are accurate transcripts. What is neither fair nor accurate is his claim that he has "been able to explain how all of his effects were produced". He has not.

In reviewing this book it is difficult not to jump around from one subject to another, for that is the way the book is written. We rather suddenly come to what the author regards as a "smoking gun" found in the hand of Crookes; the incriminating weapon is the basis of Stein's deduction that Crookes *must* have been Mrs Fay's accomplice. He then works backwards, arguing that if Crookes collaborated with Mrs Fay, then he obviously performed the same service for Florence Cook.

It is not at all difficult to make a convincing case against the genuineness of Florence Cook's full-form materializations, creatures apparently composed of all-too-solid flesh and blood, one of which walked around arm-in-arm with the equally solid creation of Rosina Showers, a medium whose fraudulent methods became known to Crookes. It is easy in the light of so many indications of

fraud to overlook the testimonial to her mediumship provided by Cromwell Varley's test. Varley attached electrodes to Florence's arms in a way that would make escape from an electrical circuit very difficult if not impossible (Stephenson, 1966), and still a materialized figure presented herself, a rather convincing one in that, according to Varley's report in *The Spiritualist* of 20th March 1874, she appeared not only in full form but also "half materialised from her waist upwards, the lower extremities being absent". Phantom forms with parts missing are much more persuasive than those that are indistinguishable from fleshly humans.

Varley was a Fellow of the Royal Society specializing in electrical engineering, and he was using his own apparatus, but Stein sees no difficulty in positing that it was Crookes (described in the reports as "also present" and as one of the "observers") who would have taken over from Varley the task of attaching electrodes to Florence's arms, and would have come equipped with resistors to insert into the circuit in place of the medium so that she would be free to impersonate a materialization. This all seems highly unlikely in view of Varley's observation about the state in which he found Florence at the end of the sitting: "The sovereigns, blotting paper, and wires were exactly as I [not Crookes] had left them, viz. attached to her arms by pieces of elastic." No statement could be clearer.

Stein rejects Hall's contention that Crookes was motivated to assist Florence in fraud because he had (allegedly) embarked on an affair with her, and one can see that this would introduce a motivation presumably absent in the case of Mrs Fay. It is this test, where Crookes was master of ceremonies, that is pivotal to Stein's 'smoking gun' argument. Mrs Fay was a stage artiste, and anyone who undertakes to perform acts of quasi-mediumship on stage to order must be presumed to have a fraudulent repertoire. That such a person may sporadically have genuine powers of mediumship is not a possibility Stein is willing to entertain; he "would rather deal only with those who have never been caught in fraud". (So would we all, but we must take phenomena as they present themselves, not as we should prefer them to be.) Stein argues that if Crookes had properly supervised Mrs Fay while she grasped the terminals that were to lock her into the current, then she could not have released herself; but she did release herself, and at one of the sittings Serjeant Cox glimpsed her at large. So, the argument goes, Crookes must have collaborated with her to enable her to escape.

There were four such test sittings with Mrs Fay, and the only one for which we have Crookes's account of his procedure tells us that he made a point of inviting his scientific colleagues (two of them specified to be FRS) to go ahead of him into the library to inspect the apparatus, and they played around with it to see if there was any way in which they could defeat it. They were therefore as familiar with the terminal end of the apparatus as was Crookes, who appears to have busied himself monitoring and adjusting the deflections on the galvanometer in the other room. The fixing of the terminals was much simpler than in the Varley test with Florence Cook, the medium simply being required to take hold of the terminals. It is eminently conceivable that one of his colleagues stayed with Mrs Fay while Crookes continued to adjust the controls. That Crookes, like Varley, did not think it necessary to say exactly

who did what to ensure that Mrs Fay's hands were where they should have been is indeed lamentable, but it is also perfectly credible. Evidently none of these scientific gentlemen imagined it possible that a woman could have acquired the skill and specialized knowledge to substitute suitable resistors, so when the reading indicated a human body in the circuit this was considered conclusive proof that Mrs Fay had taken the terminals as directed. In no way is one driven to conclude that Crookes must have been Mrs Fay's accomplice.

To justify such an enormous impropriety on the part of a researcher some powerful motivation must be proposed. This is Stein's explanation: "Crookes was a convinced spiritualist, and he wanted to dignify spiritualism with a scientific imprimatur: A scientist had investigated spiritualism and had pronounced it genuine. It boggles the mind to think that Crookes was so imbued with this desire that he would spend several years faking his results in order to deceive his fellow scientists and the public, but it is the only conclusion that seems to make sense given the facts that we have."

It does indeed boggle the mind, not only that Crookes should have been prepared to compromise his own integrity but that he should also put himself at considerable risk of blackmail. Stein hangs this theory of the fanatical crusader for spiritualism on the death of Crookes's brother Philip. Crookes was certainly a very affectionate family man, and it appears he felt the loss deeply; but there were few Victorians who did not suffer similar bereavements. He may indeed have had a strong motivation to believe in survival (a motivation shared by most people) but there is no shred of evidence that he became unhinged—unless perhaps Stein takes the view that anyone researching into the paranormal and being convinced by some of his findings is *ipso facto* unhinged.

Crookes was in fact never, as Stein declares him to be, "a convinced spiritualist", having continuous reservations about the authenticity of communications. He was fairly convinced about the existence of spirit entities, but that, if anything, made human survival more difficult to establish, not easier. His sittings and experiments with D. D. Home in the 1870s had indeed convinced him that 'psychic force' was a reality, but its relationship to survival and spirit entities was, and remains, oblique. Stein seems to be entirely confused about the meaning and scope of spiritualism; thus he says: "Either spiritualism is true, and Home's manifestations genuine, or spiritualism is false, and Home's manifestations also false." The experiments with Home that Crookes tried to bring to the attention of his fellow scientists can in fact be wholly dissociated from spiritualism, and they could be genuine while the claims of spiritualism (survival, communication, etc.) could be well-founded, illusory or false. Some of Stein's simplifications are distressingly simple.

Reasoning backwards in time from the 'smoking gun' rather than moving forwards from Crookes's researches with Home has a disturbing effect on the historical perspective. The work with Home must with reason have predisposed Crookes to believe that other mediums might be able to display spectacular powers. Florence Cook may well have been fraudulent much of the time, and if Crookes failed to catch her out this suggests that he refrained from using the sort of strong-arm tactics needed in such cases. In his own mind this might have been viewed as gentlemanly behaviour rather than lax controls. Judging

from the emotional way he writes about Katie he sounds as if he is under a spell, and when he saw what was supposed to be the entranced Florence in the cabinet while Katie walked around the room he may well have shrunk from disrespectful probing of the recumbent body. Perhaps in some unacknowledged corner of his mind he was afraid of what he might find if he pushed too hard. His retirement from active psychical research may have been due to his realization, on recovering from the Katie enchantment, that his researches with Florence had not been up to the standard of those with Home. This is a very different matter from embarking on deliberate and unprincipled deception.

We finally come to Home, and we can start with the phantom seen by Crookes, his wife, Stainton Moses and Serjeant Cox. Stein writes off this incident by placing it under the general heading of "Malobservation", on the ground that the three witnesses who gave independent accounts did not all mention all the features. Crookes, writing in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* for January 1874, included it among his summaries of phenomena he had observed. He described how during a sitting with Home a phantom form came from a corner of the room, took up the accordion, and glided about playing it for a few minutes, until it came close to a lady, who uttered a cry, whereupon it vanished. Mrs Crookes, twenty years later (and obviously the nearest person to it at the time) added the indelible detail that it sank through the floor still playing the accordion, and that Serjeant Cox complained to her that she had "spoiled the finest manifestation we have ever had". Why then, asks Stein, accusingly, did Stainton Moses in his own report not mention the accordion?

We are obviously supposed to understand from this question that the incident can be dismissed as unreal. But people viewing an incident from different angles cannot be expected to have identical experiences nor can they ever be expected to write identical reports. The phantom was facing and bearing down on Mrs Crookes, who was seated apart from the others; Home, who was standing by the door opening, may have interfered with Moses's view of the phantom, and the accordion could well have been obscured by the torso of the phantom itself. In the excitement generated by Mrs Crookes' panic and Cox's reproach Moses may never have appreciated the role of the accordion. This is not a far-fetched apologia: such divergent (but not contradictory) accounts are typical of reliable witness statements to indisputably real events. As to Cox's reputed comment, whereas in other contexts Stein commends Cox for his common sense and sceptical approach, he is now very ready to dismiss the finest manifestation they had ever had. If so-called malobservation is a catch-all explanation, this could account for Stein's belief that he has explained away *all* of Home's effects.

Other things 'explained' include the celebrated experiments with the board and with the accordion. The first board experiment, witnessed by William Huggins, among others, and probably the most clearly designed experiment of the series, is described quite fairly, but is disposed of in two lines: "Crookes's experiment has been criticized by Professor C.G. Stokes of the Royal Society." That will sound to the innocent reader as if a highly qualified expert showed that there was an error in the experimental method, whereas in fact Stokes's observations were entirely absurd, indeed scientific nonsense, and shown to be so by Crookes in a published reply to which Stokes made no response. No

mention is made of later variants in which the board tilted down at the far end while Home sat at the table with his hands held, or with his hands on the table, or with a hand held over the near end of the board but without touching it. Finally we are told that it must all in any event have been done by black threads, a crudely obvious conjuring method that Crookes, who says he "took every care to exclude . . . trickery", must surely have considered.

We are treated to some amusing explanations of the self-playing accordion, but again they stop short of dealing with the reported phenomena. Not surprisingly, Stein tells us that Home, while holding the accordion under the table, could make it move up and down by some discreet jerking; but we are not told what trick he used when he took his hand away and the accordion continued to play, or how he made the accordion move around and play in the hands of other sitters; still less is any suggestion made as to how it could have been induced to float around the room playing the while.

We are told that the sound of an accordion can be made by someone holding in his mouth a tiny harmonica and playing tunes on this. It would be good to have some details. A tiny flute sounds like a piccolo, and a tiny cello sounds like a violin; for the same reasons one would expect a tiny harmonica to sound like a consort of tin whistles. If on the other hand it is a short section of a full-size instrument, I wonder how it is possible to hold it unobtrusively in the mouth, altering note values (somehow), while drawing breath in and out to sound the instrument and, occasionally, singing as well. It seems we are expected to swallow camels of amazing size and quality so long as they come from the stable of a magician. And though open to the idea that Home's fire tests might be illusory I should definitely want to know more than we are blandly told about fire-resistant handkerchiefs.

When it comes to charges of fraud made against Home, the sceptic suddenly sheds all restraint, and, while Crookes, Cox, Moses et al. must have been victims of malobservation, the word of anyone at all is considered good enough to establish that Home was seen to perform tricks with his foot. Of all the alleged frauds the most uncritical concerns a third-hand rigmarole about a vial of phosphorus oil (useful for spirit lights). It appears that someone, somewhere, saw Home examining this vial, which was on a mantelpiece, and that Home moved away on being observed, whereupon the anonymous observer pocketed the vial and had it analysed. We do not know, and Stein evidently does not care, whether this took place in Home's own rooms or elsewhere. If Home was in his own rooms, he would hardly need to make an examination and could perfectly well have pocketed the vial himself if he thought it incriminating. If the incident took place in someone else's rooms, how does that incriminate Home, and what entitled the observer to take the vial away or to attribute ownership to Home? Stein does not hesitate to refer to this incident as an example of Home being "caught".

A critic who wanted to make it his mission in life to discredit the phenomena of Home would have a large task on his hands, and would have to produce a very substantial tome. What can be done quite successfully in a few thousand plausible words is to give the impression to people who know little or nothing about the matter that a lucid explanation in terms of manipulation has been given for all the reported manifestations, and that this, neatly packaged in 45

pages of easy reading, is all that they need to know about Home. For busy people seeking to narrow their lists of essential reading a message of this sort comes as deceptively good news. Crookes has had his name blackened more than once, and it is a pity that George Medhurst is not here to perform a new work of scholarly rehabilitation. I can only hope that readers of this *Journal* will not look on this attractively-presented digest as the ultimate authority on anything or anyone.

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**FROM MESMER TO FREUD: MAGNETIC SLEEP AND THE ROOTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING** by Adam Crabtree. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994. x + 413 pp. £30.00.

Adam Crabtree is the author of the most comprehensive bibliography to date of animal magnetism and early hypnotism (Crabtree, 1988). He has now deployed his materials to give us a detailed account of the discovery of the 'magnetic sleep', and of its evolution into what he calls "the alternate-consciousness paradigm" for "understanding the nature of the human psyche and mental disturbance". He clearly favours this paradigm, and sees hopeful signs that, in the shape of current 'neodissociationism', it has finally emerged from the relative oblivion to which psychoanalysis had consigned it during a good part of this century.

The story is told in four parts. Part I (Chapters 1 to 6) deals with the career and ideas of Mesmer, and with Puységur's discovery in 1784 of the 'magnetic sleep' and the 'rapport' between magnetizer and subject which might develop therein. It explores the therapeutic possibilities which the sleep and the rapport opened up, and describes in some detail the speculations and activities of such leading figures as Tardy de Montravel and J. F. Fournel. This account of the early days of animal magnetism has been very well done. It is not easy to write a clear and comprehensive resumé of so complex a story.

Part II (Chapters 7 and 8) goes further into the medical aspects of the animal magnetic movement. It outlines the therapeutic practices and theoretical assumptions of several leading figures, and briefly describes the upsurge in the 1830s and 1840s of the use of mesmeric methods to procure anaesthesia for surgical operations, a fascinating development which was almost brought to a halt by the discovery of chemical anaesthetics. It then traces the transformation