

War could, it seems to me, be seen as applying to the Second World War if interpreted with very moderate ingenuity. Surely Nostradamus's prediction that 'in a new league Italy will bring war' to Britain could be hailed as a successful prediction that England would find herself opposed to Italy as she did in the last war. It is true that the rest of the verse is a little off the point but it is vague enough to be explained away. Also, it is not clear why Nostradamus's prophecy of the evacuation of the children 'in the islands' should be regarded as referring to the next war when indeed it happened in the last. However, Dr Retlaw seems very keen on the part of this verse which runs: 'The shovel is no longer gripped', because this can be taken to mean that in the next war people will give up trying to build radiation-proof subterranean shelters, when they realise there is too little time.

To do the author justice, he does not claim more than a certain probability for the fulfilment of such prophecies being fulfilled. His principal aim seems to be social—in his eyes Germany is insufficiently prepared for the next war and he hopes his book will alert her to the need for underground shelters and for stores of food. Perhaps, since his aim is so evidently hortatory and since the next war (if it happens) will be at least as horrid as his prophecies imply, one should not be too critical of his lack of scientific reasoning. Some people, too, may be interested in the difficult task of developing matching procedures for prophecies of this nature and the various events which could be said to fulfil them.

CELIA GREEN

*The Psychophysical Research Unit,  
Oxford*

THE SPIRITUALISTS: THE STORY OF FLORENCE COOK AND WILLIAM CROOKES. By Trevor H. Hall. Duckworth. London, 1962. pp. xix + 188. 21s.

In the long history, and pre-history, of psychical research there is no single episode of more crucial importance than the series of sittings held by Crookes with Florence Cook as medium between some date in December 1873 and 21 May 1874. Under conditions which Crookes asserted to be satisfactory a 'spirit' calling herself Katie King appeared in human form, walking about among the sitters, who were permitted, and indeed encouraged, to touch her. At the last sitting she spoke a few words to each in private before taking leave of them all.

If it was really a materialized spirit that did all this, as has been

long accepted by many psychical researchers of distinction, a completely different view of the body-mind relationship is forced upon us, whether the phenomenon be regarded as an instance of 'ideoplasm', or, as some divines have held, conclusive proof of the resurrection of the body.

But the episode has not always enjoyed such fame. While from the first arousing intense interest among spiritualists, several of whom were not at all favourably impressed, it seems to me doubtful whether it was known at all outside spiritualist circles for more than twenty years. It looks in fact as if Crookes was not anxious that the affair should receive wide attention, and this in itself is curious having regard to the publicity he had, very properly, courted for his experiments with D. D. Home shortly before.

In view of the important bearing of the episode, and the very divergent views on it that have been expressed by spiritualists as well as psychical researchers, a reconsideration of the whole evidence has long been desirable. This has been undertaken by Mr Trevor Hall, whose skill and pertinacity in research of this kind is well-known. He has a solution to offer, based in part on established fact, and in part on inference.

Some of the facts have long been known, and it will be well to set these out first, before referring to other less well-known facts and to the inferences that Mr Hall draws from facts of both classes.

In the *Quarterly Journal of Science* for July 1871 Crookes claimed to have demonstrated and measured a hitherto unknown force, in a series of experiments conducted with D. D. Home in his own laboratory, and in the presence of competent observers, including Dr (later Sir William) Huggins, the astronomer. The principal phenomenon was the depression by this unknown force, it was claimed, of a board supported at one end by a spring balance to which a self-registering device was fitted. Crookes, an F.R.S. of several years standing, was disappointed that his results, while accepted by a few of his fellow-scientists, were received with indifference by most, and bitter hostility by some.

In 1872 Florence Cook, a girl of marked personal attractions, in her teens, but whose exact age is uncertain, became prominent as a materializing medium. Katie King was the name claimed by the materialized spirit. Among her sitters was a rich Manchester man, Charles Blackburn, who supported her generously.

Sittings were held at the house of Florence's parents. No fees were charged, but gifts from invited sitters were not refused. At a sitting on 9 December 1873, a sitter named Volckman, after observing carefully for forty minutes Katie King's appearance and manner of speech, came to the conclusion that she was Florence.

He seized Katie's hand and waist and found himself holding Florence, until forcibly detached by her friends. Blackburn was present at this sitting.

'Immediately after the unpleasant incident of Mr Volckman', to quote Florence's words, she sought out Crookes, who 'a few days later', as he says, attended a sitting at which he saw Katie while hearing what he thought was Florence sobbing behind a curtain. Writing to *The Spiritualist* on 6 February 1874, he said, 'Miss Cook is now devoting herself exclusively to a series of private *séances* with me and one or two friends.'

These *séances* took place partly in Crookes's house in Mornington Road, where Florence stayed sometimes a week at a time, and where during the week before Katie's departure on 21 May 1874, she gave sittings almost nightly, and partly at the Cooks' house, which was the scene of Katie's most dramatic appearance. This was at the sitting of 21 May 1874, when Katie took her farewell, as already described. It was the first and only occasion when both Katie and Florence were seen at the same time, with no possibility, as in previous sittings, that a bundle of clothes lying behind the curtains was doing duty for Florence while Katie was moving about. (Possibly, but not certainly, at the sitting of 9 May both were seen at the same time.)

These sittings were reported by Crookes in *The Spiritualist*, in letters which the Editor, without, Crookes says, his knowledge or consent, re-published in 1874 in a book, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*.

There were, however, some other events of interest that took place during the period of Crookes's sittings. First there was a test sitting, at some date in late February or early March, at which Cromwell F. Varley, F.R.S., an electrical expert, applied a form of electrical control devised by himself to prevent the medium leaving her seat without the fact being registered on a galvanometer visible to the sitters. At the sitting there were some suspicious changes in the galvanometer reading but no actual break of circuit, even when Katie emerged from the cabinet. Varley, while noting the close resemblance of Katie to Florence, considered that the test showed that while Katie was in sight, Florence was in the cabinet. Crookes had borrowed and examined the apparatus before the sitting, at which he was present. This was the only occasion during the period December 1873 to May 1874 when any kind of scientific apparatus was used at sittings with Florence Cook.

At some time, dates here again are vague, in April 1874 Blackburn took Florence with him to Paris for the restoration of her health. On 29 April she secretly married E. E. Corner,

captain of a merchant ship. She kept her marriage secret from Blackburn for a time.

The facts of Crookes's sittings do not seem to have been known for many years outside spiritualist circles, and even there unfavourable comment was aroused by the absence of effective measures to prevent either Florence or a confederate impersonating Katie, and by Crookes's own unscientific and unduly affectionate manner to Katie. For a wider public the sittings, and their evidential deficiencies, were, so far as I know, first described in Podmore's *Studies in Psychical Research* (1897). Podmore went into the matter again, in more detail, in his *Modern Spiritualism* (1902). In the next year Crookes himself re-issued *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*.

Mr Hall is not, I think, fair in criticizing the 'disingenuousness' of Henry Sidgwick, who, in his first Presidential Address to the S.P.R., made complimentary reference to the earlier researches of Crookes, and others. Sidgwick had been impressed by Crookes's sittings with D. D. Home. Is there any reason to suppose that he had even heard of Florence Cook? How much about her did the Council know when electing Crookes President for the years 1896-9? A curious problem arises from the absence of any mention of her in the Society's *Proceedings* or *Journal* before 1906, and particularly from the language of the section of the Appendix to Chapter IX of *Human Personality* headed 'Ectoplasmy or Materialisation' (vol. II, pp. 544-9). After reference to some of the phenomena of D. D. Home and Stainton Moses, the section mentions (p. 549) 'the most advanced type of ectoplasmy;—when an apparently complete form seems to live for a time an independent life. This never occurred through Mr Moses. Something like it occurred through D. D. Home several times; though the solidity of the form was not tested. . . . On the frequent fraudulent simulations of this phenomenon, there is no need here to dwell.'

This passage occurs in a part of the book which would appear from the Editorial Note to have been left unfinished when, in 1896, Myers handed the book over to Alice Johnson and Hodgson to edit. They would hardly have dared, when piecing together what came to their hands, to have inserted a statement like this which, if written by anyone who knew the Crookes-Florence sittings, implies by what it says and leaves unsaid, that they were 'fraudulent simulations'. They must have found this passage already written, and as Myers was friendly to Crookes, the inference is that as late as 1896 at any rate Myers did not know of the sittings.

To return to Mr Hall's narrative, he sets out facts which will be new to many of his readers as to the relations between Blackburn

and the Cook family. Florence lost favour with him, and he transferred his patronage to her younger sister, Kate, whose phenomena followed closely the pattern set by Florence. With more fortunate results, however, as Kate succeeded in lulling Blackburn's suspicions of her genuineness. In fact the whole Cook family, except Florence, sponged on Blackburn during his life, and at his death in 1891 benefited very substantially from his will and ten codicils, Florence again excepted.

Mention must now be made of what Florence in later life said about these sittings. In 1922 a Mr F. G. H. Anderson called at the S.P.R. offices and said that he thought it his duty in the strictest confidence to reveal a statement made to him many years before by Florence, then Mrs Corner. It was to the effect that when a young man he had had an affair with her, during which she had told him that her mediumship was fraudulent and that the sittings with Crookes had been used as cover for an affair she was then having with Crookes. In 1949 Anderson, who had had a distinguished career under the Government of India, called again at the S.P.R. rooms and made a more detailed statement to the same effect to Mrs Goldney, an old friend. He called again a few days later and dictated and signed a statement in the presence of her, Dr Dingwall and myself. I have not the slightest doubt that his mind and memory were quite clear, and that he was telling the truth. He was indeed then seventy-nine years old, but what after all is that? A French author, Jules Bois told Mrs Garrett several years ago that he too, as a young man, had had an affair with Mrs Corner, who had told him that the Crookes sittings were fraudulent and had been used to cover up a liaison between her and Crookes.

What Florence Corner said to Anderson and Bois would not by itself be conclusive. She had however nothing to gain by these statements to men who were already her lovers, and they do fit into the pattern suggested by the rest of the evidence. Mr Hall's reconstruction of the affair is this. The Cook family were determined to trade on Blackburn's credulity for their financial profit. This end was to be attained through Florence's mediumship. The Volckman episode was a blow to the project, which could be countered only by the rehabilitation of Florence through sittings declared genuine by a man whose word carried weight. Florence therefore approached Crookes, who became infatuated with her to such an extent that he not only overlooked suspicious circumstances but became an active accomplice, even providing her with a piece of apparatus to beat the precautions against fraud being taken by Varley.

This reconstruction explains many of the curious facts of the

case, including the very restricted publicity Crookes gave to it until the republication in 1903 of the *Researches into the Phenomena of Spiritualism*. By that date Crookes had received a knighthood and been President of the Royal Society, so that his social and scientific position was well assured. There were already strong reasons for regarding the Katie King materializations as fraudulent, and for holding that Crookes was more involved emotionally than a careful scientific inquirer should be. No limits can be set to the follies of which a man in love is capable. But if Crookes were not deceived but an accomplice, he was guilty of more than folly.

Helping Florence to swindle Blackburn was perhaps venial, as Blackburn was almost asking to be swindled by somebody, and Kate Cook succeeded where Florence failed. But for Crookes to use his scientific knowledge to enable Florence to render nugatory a test to which a fellow-scientist, Varley, attached importance implies a degree of moral obliquity which could only be imputed on very strong evidence. Still more difficult to accept is the suggestion that any man of decent feeling would carry on an intrigue with a girl in her teens in his house shortly before and shortly after his wife gave birth to a child. Decent feelings apart, could a man do that without raising an unholy scandal? Mr Hall advances formidable arguments in support of his view, but on one or two points he has left me with some lingering doubts.

W. H. SALTER

DEATHBED OBSERVATIONS BY PHYSICIANS AND NURSES. By Karlis Osis. Parapsychological Monographs No. 3. New York, 1961. pp. 113.

In this study of experiences of the dying Dr Osis redirects attention to an almost forgotten line of investigation. The observations he makes have important implications on the question of the genesis of different types of hallucination as well as having clear relevance to the survival hypothesis.

Dr Osis presents some challenging conclusions. He finds a predominance of visions of recognizable human figures—apparitions, but, in sharp contrast to similar experiences reported by the healthy, he finds an overwhelming preponderance of apparitions of dead persons, usually relatives of the dying patient. Most typically, the experience has a calming effect and the apparition is interpreted as a spirit come to help the dying patient's transition into the next world. The great majority of such experiences occur in conscious, lucid patients who are not confused