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**Magic and Miracles
in
Victorian Britain**

Framing the phenomena of D. D. Home

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2001



Declaration

I declare that this thesis, submitted for a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, is my own work.

P. K. Lamont

Dedication

To my parents,
who will never read it

Abstract

This thesis is a study of Victorian views about seance phenomena, focussing on the phenomena associated with D. D. Home, by far the best-known and most impressive of Victorian mediums. The study is based primarily on the debate within the periodical press from Home's arrival in Britain in 1855 to the publication of his last book in 1877, and is in eight chapters. Chapter one locates Victorian views about seance phenomena within a broader Victorian worldview, by outlining how historians have discussed not only Victorian spiritualism but broader aspects of Victorian science and religion, and aspects of Orientalism. It then describes the sources to be used in the study, and discusses how they have been approached by the author. In the light of questions concerning historical methodology, and of certain non-historical literature on anomalous beliefs, it argues that the most appropriate question to ask is: how did Victorians *frame* Home's phenomena? Chapter two provides background information on Home, his witnesses and critics, and the metropolitan environment within which discussion about his phenomena primarily took place. It then sets up the themes of the next four chapters by arguing that, from the beginning, Home's phenomena were framed in relation to four questions: were they the result of trickery?; were they objectively real?; were they the result of a new natural force?; were they due to supernatural agency? The next four chapters discuss these themes in depth, and in relation to broader Victorian concerns. In doing so, they stress the inadequacies of the arguments that framed Home's phenomena either as trickery or as the result of purely subjective experiences, and argue that any contemporary considering the question would have been aware of these inadequacies. They also consider how seance phenomena that lacked an adequate alternative explanation challenged orthodox science, and had implications for debates about Biblical miracles. Chapter seven then considers the link between such phenomena and views of Indian magic. It outlines how Victorians viewed Indian magic, noting an increasing tendency from the 1870's to view it as something other than trickery, then argues such a shift is best explained by mid-Victorian comparisons between seance phenomena and Indian magic. The final chapter provides conclusions on the relevance of the thesis, in terms of our understanding of Victorian spiritualist beliefs, of Victorian science and religion, of the Orientalist discourse, and of aspects of modernity.

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1. Preliminaries

“The historian in the archive, like the anthropologist in the field, finds the greatest value in exploring that which is *least* comprehensible [original italics].”¹

1.1. Introduction

In 1860, a journalist reported that he had attended a seance in a private drawing room in London. According to his account, there were eight or nine individuals present, including the medium, D. D. Home. During the seance, the medium began to rise in the air and, for several minutes, he floated horizontally around the room. The journalist ruled out trickery or imagination, and his honesty was vouched for by the journal’s editor, William Makepeace Thackeray.²

Few people today can read such an account without doubting its reliability. For most readers, the point at which doubt emerges is that part of the narrative in which the medium begins to float in the air. Details concerning when and where the seance took place present no such problem initially, though once the medium begins to rise, so do suspicions about such details. It would be easy to dismiss such an account as a hoax, perhaps, or some form of hallucination, but to do so raises serious questions about how one assesses evidence that does not fit with one’s own worldview.³ Perhaps the problematic nature of such evidence is one reason why it has been largely ignored by historians. While there have been studies of Victorian spiritualism, very little attention has been paid to the phenomena reported, despite the fact that these are what

¹ Hankins & Silverman (1995), citing Robert Darnton’s anthropological approach to history (222).

² *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 211-24.

³ Problems of understanding worldviews different from our own are discussed below.

spiritualists endlessly appealed to themselves as the primary reason for their beliefs. Psychical researchers and parapsychologists, on the other hand, have focussed almost exclusively on the question of whether the phenomena reported were genuinely paranormal or supernatural.⁴ Yet this question was of enormous importance to the Victorians themselves, and by no means only Victorian spiritualists. At a time when Science was increasingly being seen as at odds with Religion, spiritualists were claiming to provide scientific support for religious beliefs. As Victorians debated the authenticity of Biblical miracles, contemporary miraculous phenomena were being reported by credible witnesses. At the same time, the rise of the modern scientific worldview, and of the authority of scientists, were being challenged by reports of phenomena that appeared to contradict natural law. The debate over seance phenomena and their possible causes involved the most eminent scientists of the period, including Faraday, Darwin, and Huxley, and attracted the attention of the scientific press.

The topic, however, was also of more general interest. One reason for such interest was the medium, Daniel Dunglas Home (pronounced Hume), who arrived in Britain in 1855, and became by far the most famous medium of the period. His seances were attended by British aristocracy and Continental monarchs, and by many of the most famous and influential individuals of the period. Witnesses ranged from writers (such as the Brownings and the Trollopes) to politicians (such as John Bright and Lord Brougham) to intellectuals (such as Robert Owen and John Ruskin). Home married a god-daughter of the Czar of Russia, his best man being the writer Alexandre Dumas, and the preface to his biography was written by his friend, the publisher Robert Chambers. Such connections ensured he received more press coverage than other mediums, and the phenomena reportedly produced at his seances were discussed in most of the major contemporary periodicals. Contemporaries read of seances in which, according to witnesses, heavy tables floated in the air, spirit hands materialised, instruments played music without being touched and, on occasion, the medium levitated. Despite accusations of trickery, and tests by scientists, Home was never caught cheating at any point in his 25-year mediumship, and his phenomena have never been adequately explained to this day. While the debate over his phenomena has

⁴ For example: Barrett & Myers, 1889; Hall, 1984; Braude, 1997.

remained within psychical research since, discussion at the time was far more widespread. This begs the question, largely ignored so far by both psychical researchers and historians, what did the Victorians think about Home's phenomena? This thesis attempts to answer that question.

The thesis is a study of Victorian views about seance phenomena, focussing on those associated with the medium, D. D. Home. There were, of course, many other mediums, but Home was easily the best-known and most-often discussed. He was also the most impressive by far. While many lesser mediums were easily dismissed as charlatans, Home increasingly made it more difficult for those who wished to dismiss him as such. As the following chapters will show, that is of particular importance to this thesis. In addition, Home is particularly useful as a focus because of the nature of the phenomena associated with him. Many other mediums produced 'mental' phenomena, analogous to what we now call extrasensory perception. For example, a sitter might think of a question, and this would be answered by the medium (on behalf of the spirits). Whether such phenomena are anomalous, i.e. contrary to one's understanding of how the world works, depends upon one's understanding of mental processes, and the mid-Victorians were by no means agreed upon such processes. Home, on the other hand, was famous for 'physical' phenomena, such as the levitation of objects. While mental phenomena could be interpreted in relation to a number of emerging theories in early psychology, physical phenomena were visibly anomalous and contradicted human experience (and the laws of nature) more obviously than mental phenomena. In short, one did not need to be a psychologist to realise that a table was not supposed to float in the air.

Home's mediumship in Britain began when he first arrived in 1855, and ended in 1872 due to ill health. He wrote his last book in 1877. By that time, other mediums had attracted the public eye, often producing striking physical phenomena such as full-form spirit materialisations, but their records did not survive very long. Indeed, there seems little doubt that exposure of fraudulent mediums grew rapidly after Home's retirement. The spiritualist periodicals reluctantly recorded how Herne and Williams had faked

spirit photographs in 1872, how Florence Cook was grabbed and unmasked while dressed as a spirit in 1873, how Rosina Showers was caught cheating in 1874, and confessed to William Crookes in 1875, and both Henry Slade and Dr Monck were convicted of fraud in 1876.⁵ That same year, the *Spiritual Magazine* wrote of “these days ... when trickery in connection with Spiritualism is so rife that it threatens to swamp the entire movement”.⁶ The following year, Home published *Lights and Shadows* in which he explained methods of fraud and denounced fake mediums and dark seances, and the year after that, Charles Williams and his new colleague were caught by spiritualists dressed up as spirits complete with fake beards. According to Podmore (1902), the first comprehensive historian of Modern Spiritualism, “from this episode may be said to date the decline of spiritualism in this country. Its later history is little else, indeed, than a history of similar exposures”.⁷ Yet Home was never caught cheating, and his record, as the following chapters will show, impressed some of the most famous intellectuals of the day. The thesis will be concerned with the period of his mediumship and until 1877 when he wrote *Lights and Shadows*. After that date, his influence waned and the increase in reported fraud seems to have shifted public opinion significantly against serious consideration of such phenomena. Indeed, no psychic claimant would achieve a comparable level of recognition until Uri Geller began to bend spoons in the 1970’s.

The study is based primarily on the debate within the periodical press from Home’s arrival in Britain in 1855 to the publication of his last book in 1877, and is in eight chapters. The next section locates Victorian views about seance phenomena within a broader Victorian worldview, by outlining how historians have discussed not only Victorian spiritualism but broader aspects of Victorian science and religion. As Home’s

⁵ *The Spiritualist*, 34, 1872, 40; *Spiritual Magazine*, 15, 1874, 280-1; Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 113; *Human Nature*, 10, 1876, 525. The details of these exposures are complicated, and some in the history of psychical research have questioned whether they were legitimate exposures. However, they were reported in the press as straightforward exposures of trickery, and many spiritualists accepted them as such. Unlike Home, who was never caught cheating, and never seriously accused, these mediums contributed to an increasingly sceptical view of spiritualist phenomena.

⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 17, 1876, 556-7.

⁷ Podmore, 1902, ii, 111-2. Spiritualism, of course, continued to attract adherents in the early twentieth century, particularly during and immediately after the Great War, and still does. However, public interest in spiritualist phenomena has never since reached the levels of the mid-Victorian period.

phenomena were compared to Indian magic, it also considers the relevance of literature on Orientalism. It then describes the sources to be used in the study, and discusses how they have been approached by the author. In the light of questions concerning historical methodology, and of certain non-historical literature on anomalous beliefs, it argues that the most appropriate question to ask is: how did Victorians frame Home's phenomena? Chapter two provides background information on Home, his witnesses and critics, and the metropolitan environment within which discussion about his phenomena primarily took place. It then sets up the themes of the next four chapters by describing the earliest seances and arguing that, from the beginning, Home's phenomena were framed in relation to four questions: were they the result of trickery?; were they objectively real?; were they the result of a new natural force?; were they due to supernatural agency? The next four chapters discuss these themes in depth. Chapter three considers how Victorians framed Home's phenomena in relation to conjuring. It begins by discussing the broader social and cultural role played by conjuring in the Victorian period as a debunker of the supernatural, linking this to sociological narratives of modernity, then considers how Home's phenomena were framed in relation to conjuring. In doing so, it stresses the inadequacies of the support for the regular claim in the periodical press that Home's phenomena were the product of trickery, and notes that some scientists attempted to explain the phenomena in terms of subjective experience. Chapter four considers this question of subjective experience as an explanation for Home's phenomena in relation to Victorian concerns about observation in science, mesmerism, insanity, and the problem of testimony. The chapter concludes by noting that there was no easy way to dismiss Home's phenomena as the result of subjective experience. Chapter five considers the question of an anomalous natural force being the explanation for Home's phenomena, and discusses the challenge posed to orthodox science by phenomena that lacked an adequate scientific explanation. It begins by considering how Victorians viewed other anomalous phenomena, argues that experimental support for Home's phenomena set up a conflict between the scientific method and the scientific worldview, and describes the response of orthodox scientists to this 'crisis of evidence'. Chapter six considers the question of supernatural agency in relation to Home's phenomena. It begins by

considering Victorian views about religious miracles, particularly those reported in the Bible, then discusses how they were compared to Home's phenomena, noting an increasing awareness that the latter were better supported by evidence than the former. Chapter seven considers the link between Home's phenomena and Indian magic. It begins by providing a background to how Victorians viewed Indian magic then discusses the comparisons made between Indian juggling and seance phenomena, particularly those associated with Home, linking these to the emergence of the Theosophical Society and the roots of the legendary Indian rope trick. The final sections of each chapter, and the final chapter itself, provide conclusions on the relevance of the thesis in terms of our understanding of Victorian spiritualist beliefs, of Victorian science and religion, of the Orientalist discourse, and of aspects of modernity.

1.2. Historiographical context

Several biographies have been written on D. D. Home and these have tended to argue either for or against the authenticity of his phenomena.⁸ However, this thesis is not concerned particularly with the individual or with the authenticity of his phenomena; it is an attempt to understand how Victorians viewed his phenomena, a quite different question of wider relevance to social and cultural historians. Neither is this a study of Victorian spiritualism; though it certainly examines the views of spiritualists, it is equally concerned with non-spiritualist views. The question of how Victorians viewed Home's phenomena is felt to be of relevance to a number of historiographical themes, though it does not fall neatly into one specific body of literature. Some of these themes will be discussed in those chapters where they are felt to be of particular relevance, and the final chapter will summarise the main conclusions in relation to these themes.

⁸ All of Home's biographies place his phenomena centre-stage. In addition to his own writings (Home, 1863; Home, 1872), and those of his widow (Home, 1888; Home 1890), the authenticity of his phenomena are argued for in: Wyndham, 1937; Burton, 1948; Jenkins, 1982; ; Zorab, unpub'd. A sceptical view is taken in: Edmonds, 1978; Hall, 1984; Stein, 1993.

However, this section provides a general introduction to some of those themes that will be of significant or recurring relevance throughout the thesis.

1.2.1. Victorian science and religion

At its most general level, this study might be seen as part of the attempt by historians to understand the Victorian worldview better. A few writers have courageously attempted to provide an overview of the Victorian (essentially middle class) outlook, though in doing so have clearly only been able to offer broad generalisations.⁹ Such generalisations are not always useful. When one historian, attempting to provide a similar overview of the Edwardian mind, states of several 'radical' organisations that "[t]hese movements, ranging from socialism to spiritualism, had one thing and only one thing in common - they were opposed to conventional Victorian ideals", the precise meaning of such a statement is not immediately clear.¹⁰ More insightful writers have, of course, admitted problems of representativeness, and one is left with the common dilemma of choosing between depth and breadth. A common theme in these general texts, however, is the prominence of both science and religion in Victorian society and the relationship between them. Historians have long stressed the antagonistic nature of this relationship, reflected in such events as the Huxley-Wilberforce debate about Darwinian theory at the British Association meeting in Oxford in 1860, and one theme to emerge has been the so-called 'crises of faith'. According to this narrative, aspects of the Christian faith were increasingly challenged by scientific enquiry. Biblical history was confronted by Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), which provided evidence that the earth was much older than the Bible had suggested.¹¹ A further attack on traditional Christian faith came with the German historical criticism associated with Schleiermacher and the Tubingen school which stressed the errors and contradictions in the Bible, and the theological controversy that

⁹ For example: Houghton, 1957; Gilmour, 1993; Newsome, 1997. The latter briefly mentions spiritualism but only in so far as it was dismissed as trickery by a few well-known intellectuals.

¹⁰ Hynes, 1968, 135.

¹¹ According to Archbishop Ussher, calculations made from the genealogy of the Old Testament showed that the world had been created in 4004 BC.

followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), in which some liberal Anglicans attempted to take these problems on board.¹² At about the same time, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) provided a theory of evolution that provided a scientific explanation for the multiplicity of species, based on an absence of interference by the Creator, and pointed to a ruthlessness that many found incompatible with their notion of a God that cared for all living things. The result of these challenges to faith, it is argued, was an emotional and intellectual crisis for many individuals that was reflected in personal diaries and in contemporary poetry.¹³

While some individuals no doubt suffered from such a crisis of faith, it is difficult to assess how widespread and how deeply felt the impact of these scientific theories was.¹⁴ Moreover, historians have sought to qualify the simplistic picture of antagonism between science and religion, pointing to overlaps and similarities between the two areas. Early Victorian science and religion have been viewed as complementary to each other, natural theology presenting the two areas as in harmony by seeing the complexity of nature as evidence of God's design.¹⁵ The mid-Victorian debate over Darwinian theory, it has been argued, was primarily a scientific debate rather than one between science and religion. Darwin's sin, as it were, was to threaten this harmony.¹⁶ Most individual scientists accommodated Christian faith within their worldview, and even that minority group who have been termed 'scientific naturalists' could be

¹² Chadwick, 1990, 215-16; Newsome, 1999, 202.

¹³ Draper (1864; 1904), Huxley (1889) and White (1896) first described the conflict thesis between science and religion, though a number of historians have pointed out that this conflict might be better seen as a one within science, between 'religious' and 'irreligious' scientists (Ellegard, 1958, 337; Moore, 1979, 84; Cosslett, 1984, 12). Eisen & Lightman (1984) provide a bibliography of writings since on the topic of Victorian science and religion. On the Victorian 'crises of faith' see, for example: Appelman et al, 1959; Brett, 1965; Symondson, 1970; Wolff, 1977; Jay, 1986; Kella, 1989; Helmstadter & Lightman, 1990; Wheeler, 1990.

¹⁴ Budd (1977) has pointed out that such an approach has focussed on the intelligentsia and, in doing so, has exaggerated the influence on loss of faith of intellectual concerns over moral and social ones. Newsome (1997) points out that the theological debate was too technical for the majority of readers to understand.

¹⁵ See, for example: Richards, 1997.

¹⁶ Ellegard, 1958; Cosslett, 1984.

described as evangelical in their outlook.¹⁷ In recent years, links between spiritualism and contemporary developments in telegraphy, have been stressed.¹⁸ By stressing the scientific rather than the religious significance of spiritualism, such an approach further points up the complexity of the relationship between Victorian science and religion. This thesis will also stress the scientific significance of an ostensibly religious viewpoint and, in doing so, seek to contribute to a fuller understanding of how the Victorians viewed their world.

The thesis, therefore, has links with areas in the history of science. The early nineteenth century witnessed the increasing specialisation of scientific knowledge, with new societies, such as the Geological (founded 1807) and the Astronomical (founded 1820), reflecting the emergence of new specialised disciplines. Increased specialisation led to a greater reliance on intellectual authorities, and the emergence of new colleges for teaching science and medicine provided opportunities to individuals beyond the Anglican Oxbridge elite.¹⁹ Such individuals were able to establish their authority as experts by diffusing specialist knowledge in a more general form to a wider audience in new halls of popular science, such as London's Polytechnic Institute, and through popular science journals, such as the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. By the mid-Victorian period, science was no longer the property of the Anglican Oxbridge elite but was something that was taught, demonstrated, and exhibited to a large cross-section of society, most famously in the form of the Great Exhibition of 1851, which symbolised the social, cultural, economic, and political importance of science and technology.

As an increasingly specialist and professional body of scientific experts diffused their scientific knowledge, they sought to distinguish between expert and general scientific knowledge, and between science and those areas of enquiry they saw as pseudo-

¹⁷ Cantor (1991), for example, discusses in depth Faraday's Sandemanian and scientific views. Turner (1974) describes the dogmatic and evangelical nature of 'scientific naturalism', Budd (1877) writes of the 'religion of science'. See also Hyman (1980) on W. B. Carpenter's sense of mission, or John Tyndall's Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874, where he claimed for science "the entire domain of cosmological theory" (Oppenheim, 1988, 329).

¹⁸ Moore, 1972; Sollors, 1983; Noakes, 1999.

¹⁹ T. H. Huxley, for example, was able to learn practical skills and earn from teaching at the Royal Society of Chemistry (Noakes, unpub'd thesis, 26).

sciences.²⁰ Their success can be seen in later histories that focussed on the 'progress of science', but this teleological approach to history has been challenged more recently. These more recent historians point out that by focussing on 'successful' science, and ignoring areas that subsequently fell outside what was considered to be orthodox science - such as mesmerism, phrenology, and spiritualism - we miss the contemporary view of what were clearly considered to be appropriate areas of study by those scientists who studied them.²¹ Similarly, we are reminded that what subsequently became orthodox scientific knowledge was not necessarily considered orthodox at the time of investigation.²² As Richard Noakes points out, many Victorians considered electrical telegraphs and spiritual telegraphs to be equally plausible.²³ A similar point is made of mesmerism by Alison Winter, who has stressed that, rather than being merely a fringe science, mesmerism played a prominent role in the construction of scientific orthodoxy in the early Victorian period by challenging the very nature of scientific enquiry.²⁴ Seance phenomena, particularly those associated with Home, played a similar role in the mid-Victorian period, and this thesis will argue that they did so to a greater extent than historians have so far suggested.²⁵

While the thesis is not a study of Victorian spiritualism per se, it nevertheless seeks to point up an aspect of spiritualism that has been virtually ignored. So far as historians have discussed Victorian spiritualism, little has been said about the role of seance

²⁰ Yeo, 1984, 7-9.

²¹ As Hankins & Silverman (1995) point out, Victorian scientists could view Vaucanson's mechanical figures of the previous century as a 'mere trifle', but they were certainly not regarded that way by Vaucanson himself. As modern scientists, we might agree that a mechanical duck is not central to science, but as historians we need to understand why it was important to Vaucanson (223).

²² See, for example: Wallis, 1979; Cooter, 1984; Lightman, 1997; Winter, 1998; Noakes, 1999. Sociologists have also challenged the dichotomy between science and pseudo-science, arguing that recent debates about the paranormal are not debates between science and pseudo-science, but between two groups each claiming to be more scientific than the other (Collins and Pinch, 1982).

²³ Noakes, unpub'd thesis, 9.

²⁴ Winter, 1994; Winter, 1999.

²⁵ The reluctance of scientists to take the phenomena seriously, despite entreaties by individuals such as William Crookes and A. R. Wallace has been discussed by Palfreman (1979), who argues that issues related to the professionalisation of scientists contributed to hostility towards those involved with investigations into spiritualism. Oppenheim (1988) discusses the relationship between spiritualism and contemporary debates within some areas of science. Noakes (1999) stresses the overlaps between Varley's endeavours in telegraphy and spiritualism. However, the broader discourse about seance phenomena has never been studied in any depth.

phenomena in shaping contemporary views. While Podmore (1902) was concerned with how one might explain the phenomena reported, more recent historians have tended to ignore this topic altogether, focussing on such aspects of the movement as class and gender, and spiritualists' beliefs have tended to be viewed in relation to the general decline in the authority of orthodox Christianity and the associated loss of faith.²⁶ This is, perhaps, not surprising, since presumably few historians would take such phenomena seriously. However, Victorian spiritualists endlessly appealed to the phenomena as the primary reason for their beliefs, and to dismiss their reasons on the basis that one holds a different worldview is not necessarily the most useful way to approach historical evidence. After all, historians of science point out that we cannot fully understand Victorian science if we ignore contemporary areas of scientific investigation because they are now deemed 'pseudo-scientific'. Similarly, we cannot understand spiritualist beliefs if we ignore the reasons they gave for their own beliefs simply because we do not accept the evidence for such phenomena. In any case, it is not necessary to accept the reality of such phenomena in order to consider how they were viewed. This thesis will give proper consideration to the arguments the spiritualists made in defence of their own beliefs.

That said, the thesis is not merely concerned with spiritualist beliefs. It is concerned with beliefs *about* rather than with beliefs *in* seance phenomena, and seeks to investigate more general views of the phenomena. The thesis is concerned not only with how spiritualists defended their beliefs in the phenomena, but with how sceptics rejected them. The debate among scientists and in the periodical press reflected non-spiritualist views as well as (indeed more often than) spiritualist ones, and so reflects a

²⁶ On class and gender, see respectively: Barrow, 1986; Owen, 1989. The relationship between spiritualism and the loss of faith in orthodox Christianity is suggested by those writers who, in brief notes, have lumped spiritualism together with a diverse range of unorthodox religious groups (Hynes, 1968; Harris, 1993), or have argued that it provided a more acceptable eschatology than Christianity (Rowell, 1974; Budd, 1977). Oppenheim (1988) is more explicit in describing Victorian spiritualism as a response to the crises of faith, and discusses in greater depth the relationship between spiritualism and mainstream science and religion, though with little attention to the evidence for the phenomena. Nelson (1967) does briefly discuss contemporary interpretations of the phenomena, but argues that they were "accepted very much at their face value" as they appeared in a culture undergoing a transition between religious and materialistic orientation (258-9). Tucker (1997) has discussed evidence of spirit photographs in relation to late Victorian visual representation.

broader Victorian middle class worldview.²⁷ The widespread scepticism about seance phenomena is also one that has not been discussed by historians.²⁸ Again, one might suspect that historians have felt little need to examine how or why Victorians dismissed evidence for phenomena that they themselves would not take seriously. Yet, as this thesis will argue, explaining away such evidence was significantly more problematic than one might imagine, and the challenge posed by the potential reality of such phenomena is directly relevant to certain sociological narratives of modernity. Weber's notion of modernity as a 'disenchantment of the world' has been taken up more recently by Zygmunt Bauman, who has written of modernity's quest for order as a war against ambivalence, an ambivalence fed by 'mystery and magic'.²⁹ This will be discussed more fully in chapter three, where it is of most relevance, and again in the concluding chapter. For the purposes of this introduction, however, it is worth stressing that the debate about Home's phenomena was of significance well beyond the world of spiritualists.

1.2.2. Orientalism

A further area of relevance is the growing body of literature relating to Orientalism and, as this topic might be considered outside the conventional body of literature on Victorian social and cultural history, it is felt that some introductory remarks would be useful. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was concerned with how the West constructed an image of the East, an image that has been one of the West's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other", an Other that was "mysterious, duplicitous and dark". According to Said, the Orient increasingly came to be presented as irrational and primitive in opposition to the West's self-image as rational and modern. Said suggests that the Orientalist discourse was an articulation of Western superiority

²⁷ Spiritualism was by no means a monopoly of the middle class (Barrow, 1986). However, Home's witnesses and critics were mainly professionals, writers, and individuals of independent means, and the press being considered in this study would have had a predominantly middle class readership.

²⁸ As note 20 pointed out, Palfreman (1979) argues that issues related to the professionalisation of scientists contributed to hostility towards those involved with investigations into spiritualism, but the broader debate has not been studied in any depth.

²⁹ Bauman, 1991; Bauman, 1992, x-xvi.

intended to justify colonial rule. However, as Clarke (1997) has pointed out, this is only one part of the story of how the Occident has viewed the Orient. The fascination of the former for the latter can be understood at least in part in terms of *romanticisation*. Concerning the notion of 'Oriental enchantment', Clarke notes that "much of the literature concerning the East has had, and continues to have, an exaggerated, inflated tendency, a sublimated quality which offers the European an image of magic and mystery". He suggests that this romantic picture of the Orient, the image of magic and mystery that has purveyed both popular and more serious writings, might be seen as a reaction to the spiritual poverty of post-Enlightenment Christianity.³⁰ Said was primarily concerned with the Middle East, while Clarke was referring to Asia in general, but other writers have recognised the relevance of such themes to South Asia in particular.³¹ Inden has pointed to the portrayal of Hinduism as non-rational, arguing that "Hinduism has been constituted as exemplifying a mentality which privileges the 'imagination' and the 'passions' rather than 'reason' and the 'will', the two inevitable components of world-ordering rationality".³² Most recently, the image of India as mystical has been studied by King, who suggests that the 'mystic East' was for some representative of a primitive outdated culture, but for others was representative of what was lacking in the West.³³

While the mystical image of India has been attributed to general Orientalist and romantic representations, the form of such representations has tended to be studied with reference to certain reported practices in India, such as Thugee, sati and human sacrifice.³⁴ Not only were such practices represented by the Victorians as primitive and barbaric, but those who reported their occurrence appear to have exaggerated their frequency in the process. In doing so, they no doubt contributed to the Western perception of India as essentially irrational and, following Said's line, helped justify British intervention. However, the mystical image of India involved more than representations of practices related to murder and suicide, and historians have paid

³⁰ Clarke, 1997, 19, 57.

³¹ For example: Inden, 1990; Breckenridge & Van der Veer, 1992; Chatterjee, 1998; King, 1999.

³² Inden, 1990, 89.

³³ King, 1999, 97.

³⁴ Chatterjee, 1998; Mani, 1989; Bates, 2000.

very little attention to a central aspect of the image of the mystic East, Indian magic. Indians were generally presented as superstitious, not least in their belief in all sorts of miraculous phenomena. More importantly for this thesis, reports of seemingly miraculous phenomena were not limited to native sources. Many Western visitors to India reported anomalous phenomena, such as human levitation. Sometimes such phenomena were described as the result of trickery, but often trickery was dismissed as an explanation. India's growing image as a land of 'magic and mystery' rested not only on the existence of magic beliefs but on evidence that such phenomena actually occurred there. Indian magic might be viewed as evidence of primitive superstition, but it could also be seen as an alternative to an increasingly rigid Western scientific worldview. Seance phenomena could be viewed in precisely the same way, and were often compared to Indian magic. Chapter seven will examine both general views about Indian magic and their specific connection to seance phenomena.

1.3. Sources

The focus of the thesis is the contemporary debate about Home's phenomena and is based primarily on the debate that appeared in the spiritualist and mainstream periodical press from 1855 (when Home arrived in Britain) to 1877 (when he published his last book). The initial source of data was the contemporary spiritualist press. This consisted of a few main publications during the period in question. The earliest, the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* ran from 1855 to 1859, changing its name to the *British Spiritual Telegraph* in 1857. Later, the main publications were: the *Spiritual Magazine* (monthly 1860-77); *Human Nature* (monthly 1867-78); *Medium and Daybreak* (weekly 1870-95); and the *Spiritualist Newspaper* (weekly 1869; monthly 1870-82). All issues of these journals were searched for the period in question for relevant material.

One of the most useful aspects of spiritualist journals, from the historian's point of

view, is the extent to which they cited references, and often included abstracts, from the popular press on the subject of spiritualism. A bibliography of press articles pertaining to seance phenomena was compiled through collating all references made in the contemporary spiritualist press, as well as those found in the secondary literature. In addition, relevant journals available in the Edinburgh University Library were searched throughout the period in question. Those journals were: *Academy*; *All The Year Round*; *The Athenaeum*; *Blackwood's Magazine*; *British Quarterly Review*; *Chambers' Journal*; *Contemporary Review*; *Cornhill Magazine*; *Edinburgh Review*; *Fortnightly Review*; *Fraser's Magazine*; *North British Review*; *Punch*; *Quarterly Review*; *The Times (Palmer's Index)* and the *Westminster Review*. All references found relating to other publications were followed up through visits to the National Library of Scotland and the British Library (London). Further relevant sources were identified through searches of scrapbooks and files from the Harry Price Collection, University of London, the Magic Circle library, and the private collection of Peter Lane, librarian of the Magic Circle.³⁵ In all, 147 relevant articles from 37 mainstream periodicals were found over the period 1853-78 which related to views about anomalous phenomena. Additional references from the periodical press over the general Victorian period were also found through searches in the above archives. The complete bibliography of articles from the Victorian periodical press can be found in Appendix C.

A wide range of contemporary texts relating to anomalous phenomena was also used. Many books and pamphlets were written on seance phenomena which attributed them to a variety of sources from mesmerism to Satan. Conjurors wrote books for the public that explained how certain tricks worked and popular writers on science wrote books on natural magic that provided scientific explanations for various illusions. In doing so, these texts often offered explanations for seance phenomena. Several other texts on a wide range of topics from mental illness to miracles also commented on seance phenomena. Despite the diversity of these publications, they shared at least one

³⁵ Following consultation of the Dingwall files, located in the Harry Price Collection (University of London), it was felt that further search of contemporary periodicals would be of limited value. This collection includes a file devoted to Home that contains numerous references to contemporary press articles, yet no additional references were found at this point.

common intention - to offer a potential explanation for seance phenomena - and it is that attempt which concerns this thesis. The list of these contemporary sources is provided in the reference section, along with a list of references to the secondary literature cited in the thesis.

Given the range of sources used, some consideration needs to be given to their diversity. The editors and contributors to spiritualist journals did not approach spiritualism and its associated phenomena from exactly the same position. William Wilkinson and Thomas Shorter, co-editors of the *Spiritual Magazine*, and William Howitt (its main contributor) shared a Christian view of spiritualism, while James Burns, editor of the *Medium and Daybreak*, was an outspoken critic of Christianity, and William Harrison, editor of *The Spiritualist Newspaper*, was a writer on scientific subjects. It should not be surprising, then, that the attitude taken towards certain aspects of spiritualism differed among the journals. The *Spiritual Magazine* represented a respectable Christian line on spiritualism, while Burns' *Medium and Daybreak* offered a non-Christian perspective, and Harrison's *Spiritual Newspaper* attempted to be particularly scientific and critical. While all the journals presented seance phenomena as genuine, assumptions about what the reader might find convincing could differ from one journal to another, and journals did not always agree on the authenticity of particular mediums, such as Frank Herne, or particular phenomena, such as spirit photographs. However, so far as Home and his phenomena were concerned, the spiritualist press was unanimous. Home was never caught cheating, and was regularly hailed as the most impressive of mediums.³⁶

Readership obviously differed among the journals, partly because different approaches attracted different audiences, partly for more down-to-earth reasons. For example, the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* and, later, the *British Spiritual Telegraph*, were published in Keighley, Yorkshire, reflecting and helping maintain a particular interest in spiritualism in that area. From the 1860's, however, the main spiritualist journals were based in London, though *Medium and Daybreak* was particularly successful in

³⁶ Indeed, the only sign of disapproval appeared when Home published *Lights and Shadows* (1877), which accused many mediums of trickery, and this attracted some criticism from spiritualists (*The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 76; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1876, 556-7).

the provinces.³⁷ With the emergence of substantial spiritualist organisations in the 1870s, journals could reflect allegiance to a particular association. The *Spiritual Newspaper*, for example, was for a few years the official organ of the British National Association of Spiritualists. As readership varied among journals for a number of reasons, one needs to bear in mind the potential influence of the perceived audience on any individual writing in a given journal. That said, such influences are hardly likely to have been significant when it came to arguing for the genuineness of Home's phenomena, a point that all spiritualists consistently agreed upon.

No doubt these journals provided a forum in which spiritualists could express views about seance phenomena before a limited audience, and one considerably more sympathetic to such views than the readerships of other contemporary journals.³⁸ However, what is perhaps more significant is that all of these journals were written with a view to reaching a wider audience. The object of the *Spiritual Magazine*, its first issue stated, was "to establish, if possible, a Periodical which shall be in every way worthy of the respectful consideration of the public at large". Similarly, the opening address of the first issue of the *Spiritualist* stated its aim was to supply evidence of seance phenomena, "written for the benefit of non-Spiritualists". That they were not as successful as they had hoped in reaching the wider audience they sought does not remove the fact that they stated their intention to do so, and contributors to these journals would have been aware that their potential audience was much larger (and more mainstream) than their actual audience. This would have been reinforced by notes in the spiritualist press that they had been cited (invariably negatively) in the popular press. The arguments made in the spiritualist press, therefore, were intended to convince the general reading public.

This general reading public was growing, an increasing demand for affordable literature being reflected in the abolition of the 'newspaper tax' in the same year as

³⁷ Podmore, 1902, ii., 165.

³⁸ Circulation of the *British Spiritual Telegraph* dropped to below three hundred in 1858, a time associated with a decline in interest in Spiritualism, but the *Spiritual Magazine* would have sold considerably more in the 1860's. Numbers of Spiritualists in Britain are extremely vague, Barrow estimating that they never exceeded 10,000 over the Victorian period, and presumably varied significantly over the first few decades of the movement (Barrow, 1986, 39).

Home arrived in Britain, and the range and circulation of popular periodicals was expanding, particularly at the inexpensive end of the market. The readership of journals naturally varied, influenced by content and price, the popularity of Dickens' publications no doubt as much a result of their affordability as their literary quality. The Sunday press outsold the London dailies, and respectable family papers such as *Family Herald* significantly outsold more intellectual journals such as *Fraser's* and the *Fortnightly Review*. The sources upon which this study is based include many of the 'heavyweight' journals, and these were by no means representative of the periodical press as a whole. However, it is also based on more popular publications such as the *Times*, *All The Year Round* and *Punch*, and includes references from several less highbrow periodicals.³⁹ At the same time, the relationship between circulation and readership is not straightforward, as non-subscribers had access to copies in private clubs, circulating libraries and Mechanics' Institutes.⁴⁰ Readership would also have varied with differences in political and religious affiliation and between highbrow and middlebrow periodicals. However, such classifications do not appear to have correlated with any significant difference in views about seance phenomena. As the following chapters will show, the sceptical attitude that all these periodicals showed towards Home's phenomena, albeit in different language, suggests at least some degree of consistency among such diverse publications. *Punch* might take a more sarcastic line, *The Athenaeum* a more scientific one, but they were making the same point to their readers.

Attitudes to the phenomena varied, of course, among editors and journalists. Charles Dickens, for example, was consistently dismissive of Home and other mediums, while Robert Chambers, though initially dismissive, became a close friend and supporter of Home. However, Dickens was considerably more representative of press opinion than Chambers, and the latter only publicly admitted his allegiance to the medium in 1868 at the time of the Lyon versus Home trial. *Chambers' Journal* adopted a sceptical position in the 1850's, prior to Chambers' conversion, after which it remained silent on the

³⁹ Ellegard (1958, 369-83) estimates circulation figures for the above-named periodicals over this period as follows: *All the Year Round* (50-80,000); *Family Herald* (200,000); *Fraser's* (6-8,000); *Fortnightly Review* (3,000); *Punch* (40,000); *Times* (55-65,000).

⁴⁰ Houghton, 1957, 7.

topic. Given Home's connections, it is hardly surprising that journalists and editors sometimes attended his seances, and this seems to have influenced which periodicals initially gave space to discussion of his phenomena. Indeed, this was the case with the *Cornhill Magazine* account referred to in the opening paragraph of chapter one.⁴¹ However, as Home's fame grew his phenomena attracted press attention independently of such connections, and there does not appear to be any significant correlation between particular periodicals and particular views about Home's phenomena. The exception to that rule, as has been noted, was between a spiritualist press that sought a more general readership and a range of mainstream periodicals that shared a sceptical attitude supported by a number of themes to be described in the following chapters. Certainly, there could be different views expressed in different periodicals, and the location of these views will of course be identified, but the thesis is concerned primarily with the form rather than with the location of the debate.

It has been said that the periodical press provides the historian with probably the most useful reflection of middle class opinion available.⁴² Periodicals not only reflected public opinion (for obvious commercial reasons), but actively attempted to influence it, and the growth and specialisation in many areas of knowledge made this all the more practical and necessary. The opportunity to keep abreast of contemporary developments attracted a readership well beyond circulation figures. As Walter Houghton put it, "anyone who was a person of importance, or professed to be (that is, any member of the middle class) ought to know what he thought about the Oxford Movement, or Mesmerism"⁴³, and for 'Mesmerism' one could read 'Spiritualism'. Nevertheless, the correlation between the views expressed in the periodical press and those held more generally will not be assumed. The thesis will, for the most part, merely seek to describe the main themes expressed in the periodical press. Subsequent

⁴¹ Thackeray is reported to have defended publication of the seance account on the grounds that he had witnessed such phenomena himself (Weld, 1865, 179-81). However, no other relevant articles appeared in the *Cornhill* under his editorship, and those that did subsequently were dismissive of seance phenomena.

⁴² Ellegard (1958) discusses the advantages of the periodical press as a source, concluding "the projection from publication to public can obviously be made much more successfully for periodicals than for other publications" (p. 22).

⁴³ Houghton, 1957, 7-8.

arguments about more general views and their significance will be limited to specific sections at the end of each chapter and the final chapter.

1.4. Approaching the evidence

As was outlined above, historians have studied functional aspects of Victorian spiritualism, such as class and gender, but so far as they have written on the beliefs of Victorian spiritualists, they have been seen in relation to the so-called 'crises of faith'. Spiritualist phenomena, however, have been largely ignored, despite these being the primary focus of the Victorians, and by far the dominant reason spiritualists themselves gave for their beliefs. The reason for this might, on the surface, seem obvious - most historians would probably not take accounts of seance phenomena very seriously. Yet surely this is only relevant if one is concerned with the authenticity of the phenomena. After all, one can examine accounts of seance phenomena without having to accept the reported phenomena as genuine. Perhaps the problem with such evidence is that it points up more fundamental problems in how one writes history. This section considers such problems and, in the light of non-historical literature, will describe the approach the author has taken towards the evidence.

1.4.1. Questions concerning historical methodology

There are some basic themes that have tended to be associated with the umbrella term 'postmodernism', and which are central to the question of historical methodology. For example, it has been argued (following Derrida) that the notion of a past existing beyond the historical sources available, and independent of the historian's interpretation, is a realist illusion. That is to say that we in the present do not have access to the past except through sources that may or may not represent what 'actually

happened', and which only become meaningful after interpretation. Related to this point has been the stress placed upon the subjective nature of historical enquiry. History, it has been argued, is interpretation rather than facts. Historians do not provide a true representation of the past, they invent it according to their own moral, political or aesthetic preferences. Closely related to this point is the stress placed upon relativism, which has been part of a general criticism of much of traditional history. It has been pointed out that the version of history that has been dominated by white middle-class men is only one truth among many, and the validity of other versions of history has been stressed. Beyond the political attempt to redress the class, gender and ethnic imbalance of the discipline is the broader implication that seems to suggest that all we are doing is telling our individual stories, and this argument has been thrown back at the 'postmodernists' as a criticism of their own position. These admittedly simplified themes recur in a considerably more sophisticated debate about the nature of history.⁴⁴ It is felt that the relevance of many points raised in this debate depends upon the topic in hand and the question being asked by the individual historian. The simplified themes outlined above, however, concern any historical enquiry, and are fundamental both to the way in which the historian uses the sources, and to the extent to which he can regard the sources as a guide to the past.

Historians have been traditionally concerned with the reliability of sources as a guide to the past. How reliable, then, are the sources in this study? Consider an account of a seance in which some people sit down round a table, place their hands on the table, and then the table begins to float in the air, spirit hands are seen, and finally the medium himself begins to levitate. Is this an accurate representation of past events? It is easy to see how the reader might have difficulty in believing that the events described actually happened, and therefore view the source as an unreliable representation of past reality. This matters to the thesis because while it is concerned with views about the phenomena rather than the phenomena themselves, historical evidence for the former comes from the same sources as for the latter. It is not simply that the source may be dismissed as unreliable. As the opening of this chapter pointed

⁴⁴ See, for example: White, 1978; Foucault, 1980; White, 1987; Novick, 1988; Joyce, 1991; Jenkins, 1995; Jenkins, 1997.

out, what happens during the reading is that the source appears to be reliable up to the point in the narrative at which a table begins to float in the air. At this point (i.e., when the events described conflict with the reader's view of the world), the reliability of the source is called into question. It is difficult to read accounts of such phenomena without periodically questioning the reliability of the source. Yet this scepticism arises only at certain points in the narrative where the only grounds for being sceptical is that the narrative conflicts with the reader's own worldview. If we are concerned with the influence of the historian's viewpoint on how the sources are presented as representations of past reality, surely this is a problem. To complicate matters further, part of the contemporary debate about seance phenomena was on the reliability of human testimony, and sceptics then and now question the worth of human testimony as evidence of such events. How does the historian study contemporary beliefs about phenomena he does not believe in when his own views lead him regularly to question the accuracy of some of the sources he is using, and when contemporaries not only disagreed about whether the phenomena were real but also questioned the reliability of the sources themselves?

So far as this study is concerned, then, there are real problems using these sources as a reliable representation of the past. This may be a problem particular to this study, or it may be that the nature of the phenomena involved simply points up the problematic process of how the historian uses the historical text as a guide to past reality. In either case, the nature of this study makes it difficult to avoid 'postmodern' doubt about whether one can go beyond the text in order to access an independent reality. In addition to these issues of historical methodology, there are also issues concerning attempts to understand beliefs about anomalous phenomena which relate to the questions of subjectivity and relativism raised initially. Anthropologists and psychologists have written about beliefs in anomalous phenomena, and the issues raised are worth considering.

1.4.2. The study of anomalous beliefs in anthropology and psychology

Anthropologists have debated the most appropriate way to understand non-Western magic beliefs. At the centre of this debate has been the question of rationality, and the extent to which we can understand African magic beliefs in our own terms. One tendency in the anthropology literature has been to regard beliefs in magic as erroneous, and to attempt to explain why people hold such beliefs. The early anthropologists, such as Tylor and Frazer, regarded magic beliefs as an attempt to explain the world in an irrational way. While later anthropologists have regarded magic beliefs as rational within their own context, they have nevertheless continued to regard them as based on false premises.⁴⁵ While individual writers vary in their specific views about the nature and function of magic beliefs, they nevertheless share a common assumption that magic does not exist, and that beliefs in magic are erroneous. The purpose of the social scientist here seems to be to explain why people hold beliefs in extraordinary phenomena which we know to be false.

Another tendency in this body of literature has been to recognise more fully the context-dependent nature of such beliefs, and stress that they can only be understood properly in terms of the culture in which they appear. This theme has appeared throughout the literature in varying degrees, and is by no means independent of the view that magic beliefs are erroneous. Some anthropologists, for example, have played down the importance of the factual accuracy of magic beliefs in non-Western societies by stressing their symbolic and functional role within the society being studied.⁴⁶ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pointed out that our acceptance of the scientific explanation is based not on personal observation and inference but on assimilation of the cultural norm. We, like the Azande, are simply adopting the cultural heritage of the society into which we are born.⁴⁷ However, some writers have argued that the culture-dependent nature of magic beliefs is such that to attempt to understand them in our own terms is meaningless. Winch (1979), for example, argues that to see magic as less 'real' than

⁴⁵ Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Horton, 1967.

⁴⁶ Leach, 1954.

⁴⁷ Winch, 1979, 80.

our own scientific view is to commit an ethnocentric error similar to that of the early anthropologists. We cannot “distinguish the real from the unreal without understanding the way this distinction operates in the language”.⁴⁸ Rationality, he argues, is context-dependent, different cultures have different criteria for rationality, and sociologists can do no more than understand a culture in terms that it would describe itself. In the attempt to understand another culture in its own terms, some have advocated the use of ‘epoche’ (i.e., a suspension or holding back of one’s views), though such an approach is more an attempt to highlight the problem than one which claims to remove it.⁴⁹ In reaction to this view, it has been argued that we can and should go beyond the society’s description of itself, in an attempt to describe meaningfully another culture in our own terms.⁵⁰ Taylor (1990) argues that making sense of another society requires not only an understanding of how they see things, but also an adequate language “in which we can understand their practices in relation to ours”.⁵¹

The relevance of such literature is limited, of course, since African magic beliefs are not the subject of study. Even if one was to regard Victorian Britain as a different society, Victorian spiritualist beliefs were not the norm within that society, and this thesis is concerned with both spiritualist and non-spiritualist beliefs. Nevertheless, the debate within anthropology stresses the difficulties involved in any attempt to understand beliefs that seem extraordinary to us and that conflict with our own, and argues that understanding is hindered by any approach that assumes the beliefs of those studied to be erroneous or inferior to the beliefs of the social scientist.

A second related area of literature is in psychology, where psychologists have studied beliefs in paranormal phenomena, and two general approaches may be identified. One approach has been to seek to identify factors that correlate with such beliefs and, therefore, possible causal factors that underlie them. A number of correlates - demographic, attitudinal, cognitive and personality - have been identified as potentially significant, and a number of hypotheses have been put forward to explain paranormal

⁴⁸ Winch, 1979, 82.

⁴⁹ Cox, 1992.

⁵⁰ MacIntyre, 1979; Taylor, 1990.

⁵¹ Taylor, 1990, 129.

beliefs based on such correlations.⁵² Another approach has been to seek to explain not only paranormal beliefs but extraordinary experiences that regularly lead to such beliefs.⁵³ Various cognitive and social determinants have been identified which may produce an apparent paranormal experience or lead to paranormal beliefs. As with some of the anthropology literature, both these approaches tend to assume that the beliefs are factually wrong, and that such beliefs require a 'natural' explanation (i.e. one consistent with the worldview of the author). Wooffitt (1992) makes this point, and has taken the approach of examining the form of accounts of paranormal experiences rather than trying to explain them. He is one of a growing number of discourse analysts in psychology who are concerned with the construction and function of spoken and written discourse. While there is no specific agreed method of discourse analysis, generally it involves the search for pattern in the data followed by the forming of hypotheses about functions and effects of discourse, with support via linguistic evidence.⁵⁴

Wooffitt avoids the assumption that such beliefs are erroneous, which was raised earlier as a disadvantage in understanding such beliefs. However, his study focuses solely on a minority group within society. This thesis is concerned neither with a social norm (as in the case of African magic beliefs), nor with individual deviants from the norm (as in the psychology literature above), but with differences in interpretation of events within society. This project is concerned with beliefs *about* rather than with beliefs *in* anomalous phenomena (i.e., with rejection as well as with acceptance of the authenticity of the phenomena). The appropriate theoretical approach to this study should encompass a range of beliefs in a way that accepts their validity. While textual analysis of the sort Wooffitt applies could be used to analyse a range of views, the method involves lengthy coding and interpretation of individual texts, and the quantity and diversity of the sources in this study would make such a methodology completely impractical.

⁵² Irwin, 1997.

⁵³ Alcock, 1980; Neher, 1980; Gilovich, 1991; Vyse 1997.

⁵⁴ Potter & Wetherell, 1982.

1.4.3. *Framing* as an alternative to beliefs

Rather than focus on what contemporaries believed about psychic phenomena (and why), the thesis focusses on how contemporaries *framed* psychic phenomena (and how they supported their frames). ‘Framing’ refers to the process through which individuals define experience. Goffmann (1974) points out that ambiguities can arise about how to define a particular situation, and notes “what is ambiguous is the meaning of the event, but what is at stake is the question of what framework of understanding to apply and, once selected, to go on applying, and the potential frameworks available often differ quite radically one from the other”.⁵⁵ Individuals can easily make errors of framing, and frame disputes can arise from differences among individuals on how to frame an event. These disputes, Goffmann notes, may arise within a particular cosmology or as a result of different cosmologies. The relevance of frame analysis to the observation of anomalous phenomena has been recognised by Nardi (1984), who compares the dynamics of a magic (i.e. conjuring, trickery) performance to everyday life in terms of a dialectic. This dialectic is based on the expectations constructed from the social organisation of experiences that the audience brings to the magic performance. He points out that framing shapes how a performance of magic is interpreted. “Depending on time, age, and place, [an anomalous event] can be variously described as a miracle, a religious sign, an omen, a con game, science, or a magic trick”. How such an event is interpreted depends on “[d]efinitions which evolve from social and cultural characteristics of the time and the place, as well as from the age-related cognitive development and knowledge of the spectator [that] are brought to an event by the spectators”.⁵⁶ It has also been pointed out that, if a magic trick can be misframed as a psychic demonstration, it follows that a genuine psychic feat could be misframed as a conjuring trick, and there is experimental evidence to suggest that the *prior set* of the observer (for example, whether he believes he is watching a psychic demonstration or a magic performance) affects the ability to recall details of the event, which in turn might influence the framing of that event.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Goffmann, 1974, 304.

⁵⁶ Nardi, 1984, 27-28.

⁵⁷ Wiseman & Morris, 1995; Smith, 1993.

That Victorians framed extraordinary phenomena in various ways seems clear enough. In mid- nineteenth century Britain, most men and women would have accepted the historicity of Jesus' miracles, while very few would have believed similar stories of the Buddha. Meanwhile, conjurors produced similar feats which, while inexplicable to the observer, were rarely regarded as psychic or supernatural. The debate over reported phenomena in the seance room took place in a society within which conceptually similar phenomena were framed in radically different ways, and beliefs in the possibility or reality of such phenomena would have been influenced accordingly. Framing, then, is a term applicable to a range of views about anomalous phenomena, and does not assume the superiority of any particular view. Since the framing process is shaped both by social and cultural characteristics of the time and the place in which the event takes place, and by the beliefs held by the individual concerning such phenomena, it is felt that by studying the way in which contemporaries framed extraordinary phenomena in different contexts, we can gain an insight into both individual beliefs about such phenomena and broader contemporary social and cultural influences on such beliefs. It should be pointed out, however, that there is no intention of adopting the model of frame analysis laid out by Goffmann. Rather, it is the worth of the term that is felt to be most useful here as an alternative to beliefs.

Perhaps we can not know what actually happened in the seance room, or what people truly believed, but we do know how they framed the phenomena in the sources and we do know what they wrote in support of these frames. We do not have to make assumptions about the extent to which what they said represents their actual beliefs (though, as some of the conclusions will illustrate, we can if we want to). We can bracket the past (beliefs about extraordinary phenomena), and focus on the sources (framing of extraordinary phenomena). By asking how contemporaries framed seance phenomena, rather than what contemporaries believed, the problems involved in the relationship between historical text and independent past are removed because the text contains the past reality being sought. The written sources are not used to access the past, they *are* the past being discussed. In addition, as framing does not make assumptions about the genuineness or not of the phenomena being discussed, and

allows past views (as expressed in the sources) to be understood both in their own terms and in relation to present ones, it avoids the problems highlighted above associated with trying to understand beliefs which conflict with our own.

1.4.4. The question of subjectivity

A final point is worth making about how the historian approaches historical evidence. Assuming that we accept that historians cannot be entirely objective and that history cannot be absolute truth, which does not seem such a radical idea, does it then follow that anything goes and all histories are equally valid? Are we simply projecting our own views onto the sources we use or is there anything intrinsic to them that can be identified? At one level, that may depend on the question being asked. If, for example, the question is about the extent of population growth in the 18th century then, if the question is to be answered, there must be information available within the sources and independent of our views (though possibly dormant prior to our inquiry). In most cases, however, historical facts that are independent of the historian's interpretation (which includes the selection of 'facts' from among an infinite number of 'facts') seem more difficult to find. In terms of how the sources in this thesis are used, the study is of all available views of known witnesses of Home's phenomena in a range of publications, and the published reactions of others in those and other publications. The study seeks to identify the main themes of the contemporary debate in terms of how such phenomena were framed and how these frames were justified. Certainly, a number of major themes *seem* to emerge from the historical texts being studied, but do they not really emerge from *my reading of* the sources rather than from the sources themselves? Assuming this is the case, and once realised it seems difficult to refute, can this be avoided? So far as we do invent history according to our own moral, political or aesthetic preferences, can we limit the extent to which we do this? Psychologists writing on paranormal beliefs describe certain cognitive biases that influence individual perception. 'Confirmation bias' refers to the tendency of an individual to notice information that supports his beliefs more readily than information

that does not. Seeing is not believing, it is argued, believing is seeing.⁵⁸ If historians are not above such biases, and we wish to limit the influence of our personal views on the history we write, then the natural tendency to find the evidence that fits our argument needs to be considered. The shift from beliefs to framing in this thesis is partly an attempt to avoid certain problems involved in trying to understand beliefs that conflict with those of the author. In addition, the primary use of the term 'seance phenomena' rather than of 'spiritualist' or 'psychic' is an attempt to reduce unnecessary (and potentially influential) conceptual baggage. However, only an extraordinary confirmation bias could lead to the belief that such steps would produce historical objectivity. Perhaps, rather than denying our subjectivity, or attempting to avoid it, the historian could simply admit his guilt and provide information on his own agenda. With this in mind, the views of the author about Home's phenomena are provided in appendix A.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, it is worth stating that the author remains sceptical about the authenticity of the phenomena, and the relevance of this position to the interpretation of the evidence will be discussed briefly in the concluding chapter. This sceptical position, however, recognises the difficulty in providing an adequate explanation for how Home produced his reported phenomena. As the following chapters will show, Victorians had no easy answer either.

1.4.5. Summary of section 1.4.

The issues outlined earlier have shifted this study in the following way: rather than ask what contemporaries believed about seance phenomena, the study will ask how contemporaries (appearing in the available sources) framed such phenomena; rather than consider why they held such beliefs (or why they framed the phenomena in the way they did), the study will consider how they supported the frames they chose.

Such a shift, it is argued, avoids the assumption that we have direct access either to

⁵⁸ Gilovich, 1991, 49-72.

⁵⁹ This is based on a paper written and delivered to the Parapsychological Association's 42nd Annual Convention during the writing of this thesis. As it involves a detailed examination of Home's seance accounts, it does not fit easily into the main thesis. Its purpose, however, is to provide the reader with the position of the author, and that position is summarised above. Detailed justification of that position can be found in Appendix A.

any 'real past' out there or to the beliefs individuals held. It also avoids the need (at this point) to assign causes to contemporary views when access to such causes is not available to us, and is intended to limit the influence of the author's beliefs on how the views of others are read. In addition, in an attempt to recognise the influence of author bias on the interpretative process, the position of the author towards Home's phenomena has been stated at the outset, and detailed justification for this position is provided in appendix A. Finally, it should be noted that while the past (in terms of contemporary beliefs) has been bracketed, it has certainly not been dismissed. Such an approach allows for subsequent argument about how contemporary frames (and the form of their support) might relate to relevant historiographical debates. Throughout the thesis, links will be made to a number of historical narratives that discuss Victorian beliefs, and where it is felt useful or necessary, some arguments will be made about how contemporaries may have thought. However, the primary concern of the thesis will be to examine how the Victorians in the sources framed the phenomena they were discussing, and how they supported those frames. Rather than seek to provide a definitive answer to the question being asked, the thesis will offer what the author believes to be (and will frame as) the best way of reading the available evidence. How convincing others find the argument may be what finally determines the quality of this particular history.

2. Setting the scene

2.1. Medium, audience and venue

Before considering how the phenomena that reportedly occurred at Home's seances were discussed by contemporaries, this section is intended to provide some general background information relating to Home, his witnesses and critics, and the city in which the debate about his phenomena primarily took place.

2.1.1. Daniel Dunglas Home

Biographies of Home disagree on a number of matters, but some general details are agreed upon.¹ He was born in Currie, near Edinburgh, on 20th March 1833, son of William Home and Elizabeth McNeill. Home claimed his father was the illegitimate son of the tenth Earl of Home, though he tells us little else about him, while the 1841 census records Home's father as a labourer. The third of eight children, Home was adopted when he was a year old by his childless aunt, Mary Cook, and her husband, and moved to Portobello, Edinburgh. When he was nine, they emigrated to America, where Home lived until 1855. Home's early life there, according to his autobiography, was one dominated by ill health and a variety of psychic experiences. By the age of twenty, Home had a growing reputation as a spiritualist medium in America.

¹ Biographical information on Home is taken from his own writings (Home, 1863; Home, 1872; Home, 1877), those of his widow (Home, 1888; Home 1890), and subsequent texts dealing with his life and phenomena (Wyndham, 1937; Burton, 1948; Edmonds, 1978; Jenkins, 1982; Hall, 1984; Zorab, unpub'd).

Modern Spiritualism had emerged in 1848, when the Fox sisters of Rochester, New York had reported hearing raps in their parents' home. They had concluded that the raps were communications from departed spirits, and many others subsequently agreed.² Within months, there were thousands of adherents to Modern Spiritualism in the United States. Spiritualism came to be articulated in a number of ways, with both Christian and non-Christian adherents, but what all spiritualists shared was a belief in the survival of bodily death and the ability to communicate with the spirits of the departed. Seances were therefore the primary focus of spiritualists, since it was here that spirit communication and spirit manifestations ostensibly took place. The role of the medium was, by definition, to act as a conduit for spirit manifestations, which might take the form of mental phenomena (such as spoken, written, and rapped messages) or physical phenomena (such as table movements, materialisation of spirit forms, and levitation). Such phenomena were regarded by spiritualists as proof of an afterlife and of the possibility of communication between the spirit world and this world, and as it was upon such phenomena that their beliefs rested, their importance to spiritualists can hardly be overstated. While the ability to act as a medium was not considered exclusive in any way, some individuals appeared to be more sensitive to the task, and their presence tended to accompany more regular or more impressive phenomena. Indeed, many professional mediums emerged who charged fees for their facilitation of spirit manifestations. Home was not a professional medium as he did not accept payment for his services, but he was an extremely effective medium. Since such phenomena were necessarily extraordinary, and provoked initial scepticism in almost everybody who heard of them, the ability to produce phenomena that could not be easily dismissed as fraud was central to success as a medium. In 1854, Home convinced Professor Hare, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, and Judge Edmonds of the New York Supreme Court, that his phenomena were genuinely the result of spirits, and received their public support. The following year, his illness was diagnosed as tuberculosis, and his doctor suggested that he move to Europe to a more hospitable climate.

He arrived in London in 1855 to stay at a fashionable hotel in Jermyn Street, owned by

² Podmore, 1902, i, 179ff.

a wealthy hotelier and spiritualist, William Cox. Home stayed there for several weeks, as an invited guest rather than as a customer, before being invited to stay with J. S. Rymer. Rymer, a solicitor with offices in Whitehall and Chancery Lane, owned a villa in the prosperous suburb of Ealing, with a household that included his wife, seven children, a governess, a cook and three housemaids. Such were the venues of seances that attracted distinguished company such as Robert Owen, Lord Henry Brougham, and Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Home left for Continental Europe the following year, where he went on to conduct seances for Anglo-American society in Florence, which included writers such as the Brownings, the Trollopes and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Shortly afterwards, he claimed to receive a spirit message to the effect that his powers would be suspended for one year. For the next year, until February 10th 1857, he conducted no seances. During that time, he was a companion of Count Branicka, a Polish nobleman who had been in Florence, and travelled to Rome where he converted to Roman Catholicism. His fame at that time was such that he received an audience with Pope Pius IX, who is reported to have questioned him on spirit communication. When the spirits resumed contact with Home, he was in Paris, and within a day of the predicted date of their return, he had been summoned to perform for Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie at the Tuileries. For the next month, Home conducted seances for the Emperor and Empress, and their offer to educate Home's sister at a prestigious school in Paris, which Home accepted, suggests that he continued to be in royal favour regardless of the gossip he attracted. Home's royal audiences continued in Russia, where he performed for Czar Alexander the following year. While in Russia, he married Alexandra de Kroll (known as Sacha), god-daughter of the late Czar Nicholas and from a wealthy St Petersburg family, his best man being the author, Alexandre Dumas, whom Home had met and befriended in Paris.

On returning to Britain in 1859, he was something of a celebrity, and soon met new acquaintances. Through the soirees of hostesses such as the Duchess of Sutherland and Mrs Milner Gibson, wife of the President of the Board of Trade, Home continued

to entertain the London intelligentsia and aristocracy. At Mrs Gibson's home in Hyde Park Place in 1860, the Irish writer Robert Bell attended a Home seance which he subsequently described in an article for the *Cornhill Magazine*, then edited by his friend William Thackeray, and this attracted a great deal of public attention. Over the following years, Home continued to conduct private seances for such sitters, and regularly provoked press attention. In 1863, he received several reviews following publication of the first volume of his biography, *Incidents in my life*, ghost-written by his close friend, the solicitor William Wilkinson. In 1864, Home was expelled from Rome on suspicion of practising sorcery, and appealed in vain to the Foreign Office to extract compensation from the Roman authorities. However, while the outcry of his supporters prompted John Roebuck, the radical MP for Sheffield, to ask a question in the House of Commons, press coverage suggests this event was primarily seen as an opportunity to poke fun at the Vatican. In 1866, Home lectured on spiritualism at Willis' Rooms, a well-known lecture hall and former assembly rooms in the West End, which attracted both distinguished literary figures and press interest. It was here that Home was heckled by a reportedly aggressive and somewhat inebriated John Henry Anderson, the well-known conjuror and arch-debunker of spiritualism.

Towards the end of his mediumship, three key developments occurred that shaped how Home's contemporaries discussed him. The first began in 1867, when a widow, Mrs Jane Lyon, befriended and subsequently adopted Home as a son. Shortly afterwards, she gave the medium £30,000 as a gift. Some months later, she fell out with Home, and sought the return of her money, alleging that her gift had been suggested by the spirit of her dead husband via Home, a communication she now doubted had been authentic. In April 1868, Home was in court charged with extortion and undue influence by Mrs Lyon, and the trial attracted considerable attention. It was at this trial that several respectable and scientific figures came forward as character witnesses and publicly declared their belief in Home's phenomena for the first time. The second development began the following year, when the London Dialectical Society instigated an investigation into the phenomena of spiritualism. The society had been founded in 1866, and was one of several metropolitan debating societies boasting

a distinguished membership that discussed all manner of topics. It was by no means the only society to debate the topic of spiritualism, but it was the only one to attempt a scientific investigation of the phenomena, and Home featured in these. The third development began the next year, when the physicist William Crookes began his own experiments with Home. Crookes was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. His conclusions echoed those of the Dialectical Society, that the phenomena were not the product of imposture or delusion, and were evidence of a new 'psychic' force. What the press made of such events will be described in the following chapters.

Home's economic condition remains a mystery for much of his life. Unlike the majority of successful mediums, Home never accepted fees for his seances, though he did accept many expensive gifts and a great deal of hospitality from well-to-do spiritualist friends. American spiritualists provided him with the means to travel to Britain, and European spiritualists invited him to stay at their homes and offered to pay travel expenses around Europe. For much of his mediumship, Home presumably survived on financial support from his many wealthy acquaintances. Certainly, his own income seems to have been limited. Home's first wife died in 1862, but her fortune was claimed by his brother-in-law and, being situated in Russia, it was not until 1871 that the estate was restored to Home. In the meantime, his son Gricha was looked after by friends, while he continued to refuse payment for seances and sought alternative means of income. He published his biography in 1863 and, shortly afterwards, he began giving public lectures and recitals of poetry, initially in America, later in England. In 1866, a group of Home's friends began to arrange subscriptions to give him £150 a year in return that he undertake to hold a certain number of seances per year, but Home refused on the grounds that it amounted to professional mediumship. Instead, they established the Spiritual Athenaeum, a spiritualist headquarters based at 22 Sloane Street, London, and appointed Home as Resident Secretary. It was here that Home met Mrs Lyon, who presented him with many gifts until her change of heart provoked her to take the medium to court. In 1870, his financial position must have been much improved, as he was living in comfortable

apartments in the West End of London. Nevertheless, he worked as an American press correspondent in Paris during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-1. After the war, Home visited Russia, and met Mme. Julie de Gloumeline, cousin to the Imperial Councillor, whom he married in Paris in the autumn of 1871. The Czar presented him with a valuable ring, a sapphire set in diamonds, and the following year saw the conclusion of his legal battle for his first wife's fortune, when he was awarded £1500. Home 'retired' as a medium that year for reasons of ill health, after which he spent most of his time on the Continent.

He received relatively little attention after that, though he published a second volume of his biography in 1872, and his last book, *Lights and Shadows* (1877), made some impact as its last section denounced the prevalence of fraud within the mediumistic profession and exposed some of the tricks of the trade (though none that would provide an explanation for his own phenomena). His final years were spent in Italy, Russia, and France, living the life of a retired celebrity. Home died in Paris in 1886, his second wife surviving him and writing two biographies of his life, *D. D. Home, his life and mission* (1888), and *The Gift of D. D. Home* (1890).

2.1.2. His witnesses and critics

While the numbers of those who attended his seances is unknown - though there must have been several hundred in Britain alone - first-hand testimony was found for 124 witnesses. Given the number of individuals concerned, there is little room to consider biographical details and, in any case, the thesis is not concerned with individual beliefs but with how a topic was discussed in the periodical press. At the same time, while some background would be useful, inclusion of such details in the main text is likely to obscure the narrative which is primarily concerned with the form of the debate. With this in mind, the full list of witnesses (with a brief background note on those for which there is information) appears in appendix B. Meanwhile, it is worth pointing out that these witnesses were mostly (though by no means all) professional men based in

London, and though many seances took place elsewhere, reports of the seances appeared in the periodical press which was primarily London-based. There does not appear to be any significant correlation between the views of witnesses and such details as gender, profession or location. In fact, the clearest distinction in the discourse by far was between witnesses, who with few exceptions accepted Home's phenomena as genuine (either psychic or supernatural), and the periodical press, who for the most part dismissed the phenomena as the product of imposture and delusion. Spiritualists, of course, attributed the phenomena to spirits, but as the thesis will later discuss, many of the witnesses were reluctant to draw such a conclusion.

Some of Home's witnesses took a more active part in the public debate surrounding seance phenomena than others, and this matter deserves brief consideration. Prominent figures included individual spiritualists, such as Benjamin Coleman and Henry Jencken. They were typical of many of Home's witnesses, the former a successful stockbroker, the latter a well-known barrister, and their respectable social positions would have no doubt carried some weight with their readership. Home attracted many celebrities to his seances and this in turn drew press interest, but the views of these individuals were not prominent in the public debate. British aristocracy and Continental monarchs attended his seances, and this was certainly noted in the press but, perhaps not surprisingly, they tended not to make their views about the phenomena public. One of Home's closest friends, Viscount Adare, did publish a book in 1869 describing his experiences with the medium, but this was quickly withdrawn from circulation.³ Home's more famous believers included Robert Owen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, though their views were also expressed in private correspondence. This was also the case with John Ruskin, though he did publish an article in the *Contemporary Review* around the time he was attending Home's seances, which argued for the possibility of miraculous phenomena.⁴ The publisher Robert Chambers, who had written the preface for Home's biography in 1863, did not publicly admit his views until acting as a character witness for Home during the Lyon versus Home case

³ Adare, 1869. This is discussed in chapter five of Hall (1984).

⁴ *Contemporary Review*, 21, 1872, 627-34. Ruskin's letters to Home were published in Home, 1888, 117-18.

in 1868, and this case, along with the London Dialectical Society's 'Report on Spiritualism' the following year, provoked a number of converts to publicly admit their position, including the Atlantic telegraph engineer, Cromwell Varley, and Augustus De Morgan, professor of mathematics at University College, London. Prior to that time, many articles expressing a positive view on Home's phenomena were written anonymously, most famously the article, 'Stranger than fiction', that had appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860, and referred to in the opening of chapter one. Yet anonymous articles were hardly rare at his time, and the editor of the journal, William Thackeray, expressed his confidence in the reliability of the author, subsequently identified as the Irish writer, Robert Bell. For much of Home's mediumship, then, seance accounts would have been given greater credibility on the basis of the known social and intellectual status of many of Home's witnesses, rather than the fact that it was such individuals who were putting their names to such accounts. Certainly, the press referred to celebrities, and those who did put their names to seance accounts cited such figures in support of the credibility of their own arguments. Where the intellectual authority of the author became central, however, was when witnesses were backed by the authority of science. Of particular importance were those scientists who expressed views quite different from those of most of their scientific colleagues, most notably Cromwell Varley, William Crookes, and Alfred Russell Wallace. Varley was a pioneer of the Atlantic telegraph, Crookes the discoverer of the element thallium, Wallace the codiscoverer of the theory of natural selection, and all of them were Fellows of the Royal Society. As we shall see, their scientific credentials were of some importance to the contemporary debate.

Similarly, some of Home's critics were more prominent than others. Some of the most prominent sceptics were conjurors, notably John Henry Anderson and John Nevil Maskelyne, probably the two most famous British conjurors of their day. Anderson, born in Aberdeen, had taken the title of 'Wizard of the North', which he claimed he had been given by Walter Scott, though this is almost certainly untrue. His sceptical position towards seance phenomena was no doubt partly a genuine one, though his well-known publicity skills suggest that his public debunking attempts were as much

to do with gaining press attention as they were to do with true scientific investigation. During the middle of the century, Anderson was the most talked of conjuror in the country. John Nevil Maskelyne entered the conjuring profession in the mid-1860's after challenging the Davenport brothers that he could duplicate their alleged spirit manifestations. He went on to establish two theatres devoted to conjuring, subsequently teaming up with David Devant, who became the founding president of the London Magicians' Club (a.k.a. The Magic Circle). As chapter three will show, the prominence of these two individuals in their profession is of some importance. Similarly, some of the most famous scientists of the period expressed sceptical views about Home, including Michael Faraday and his most prestigious former student, John Tyndall, both of whom privately corresponded with Home on the subject of testing him, and in both cases their private letters subsequently became public. Francis Galton attended a Home seance, and encouraged his cousin, Charles Darwin, to attend. Letters between the two, in fact, suggest Darwin was willing to investigate, though a suitable arrangement was not found.⁵ The most active scientific sceptic of the period, however, was William Boyd Carpenter. Carpenter, a Fellow of the Royal Society, lectured and published extensively on the psychology and physiology of the mind to both scientific and more popular audiences. He was the first to attribute table-tipping to unconscious muscular movement, and consistently attributed seance phenomena either to imposture or to subjective mental processes related to James Braid's theory of neuro-hypnotism. Eminent as Carpenter was, he also cited the names of Faraday and other better-known scientists in support of his position. Many of those on both sides of the debate, then, held impressive social and intellectual credentials that must have impressed those who read about Home's phenomena, and can only have led them to take a more serious interest in the debate.

2.1.3. Mid-Victorian London

Home, those who debated his phenomena, and the periodicals in which the debate took place were all predominantly London-based, and the city in which the authenticity of

⁵ Jenkins, 1982, 250-1.

the phenomena was largely debated was a unique one. It was the largest city in the world, the capital of the most powerful nation on earth, and was regarded by its inhabitants as the centre of technological and scientific achievement, at the cutting edge of modernity. One might expect, then, that its residents would have been particularly confident in their view of the world, and certainly such confidence was expressed. Yet this perceived progress must have been accompanied by a corresponding air of mystery. The sheer scale of the city meant that most of it was invisible to observers, and that unseen London must have formed a significant part of the outlook of the metropolitan middle class. Beyond the gas-lit main streets was an imagined London containing images of various Others - the poor, the drunk, the indecent, and the dangerous.⁶ These Others might have been associated with alien parts of the city, notably the East End, but their presence was felt among the better off by the occasional demonstration, and their ongoing existence was reported by social commentators from Mayhew to Booth, described in the novels of Dickens, and depicted in the engravings of Cruickshank and Dore. Middle class Londoners could view these artistic representations as realistic, as evidence of a social truth, yet at the same time it was a dark and mysterious truth “edging beyond reality into the supernatural”.⁷ Literary images of the supernatural were provided by Lytton and Poe and Stevenson, and real-life horror would be reflected in the dark and mysterious activities of Jack the Ripper.⁸

In addition to these physical and social unknowns were increasingly unknowable advances in knowledge, notably in science and technology. Over the middle decades of the century, telegraph lines began to cover the rooftops of the city, allowing for a new form of communication that few understood, and some viewed as almost magical.⁹ Technological developments also offered new ways of seeing. On the one hand, this might increase the sense of control over the ability to view the unobserved - a panoramic view of an otherwise unseeable city, perhaps, or the realist representations of photographs.¹⁰ On the other hand, the popularity of optical illusions meant that

⁶ Walkowitz, 1992, 15-39.

⁷ Nenadic, 2000, 6-7.

⁸ Walkowitz, 1992, 191-228.

⁹ Noakes, 1999, 421.

¹⁰ Horton, 1995.

contemporaries must have sometimes doubted whether they could even trust their own senses, a point that could only have been reinforced by Victorian conjurors when they exploited new and unknown technology to deceive their audiences in London theatres.¹¹ The reliability of the powers of observation may have been reinforced in the form of the literary detective, most famously Sherlock Holmes, who came to represent the exemplary scientific observer, yet few readers can have felt equal in their ability to utilise reason and a considerable knowledge of science to overcome the darker and more mysterious aspects of London life.¹²

These aspects of metropolitan mystery were linked to the mysteries of the seance room. Cromwell Varley, a pioneer of the Atlantic telegraph, not only publicly stated his belief in Home's phenomena, but also compared the electric telegraph to the spiritual telegraph.¹³ The emergence of spirit photographs, many spiritualists claimed, provided proof of the phenomena they reported.¹⁴ Conjurors exploited technology not only to deceive, but in an attempt to debunk seance phenomena. Even the creator of Sherlock Holmes himself became a devout spiritualist.¹⁵ The mysterious phenomena that Home's witnesses reported were clearly linked to a more general sense of mystery related to new forms of knowledge and the accompanying new forms of ignorance felt by the mid-Victorian metropolitan middle class, yet the link was not a simple one. On the one hand, there was an increasing recognition that, to paraphrase a quote popular with Victorians, there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of. On the other hand, this was accompanied by an increasing confidence in the authority of science and scientists to know about such things. When, in 1855, Michael Faraday investigated the Thames water supply and officially concluded that it was polluted, *Punch* recognised the scientist's authority. Faraday, it seemed, "had shown society

¹¹ Conjurors not only used new technology to accomplish their tricks but exploited the language of new technology to misdirect their audiences. The link between conjuring and science is discussed in chapter three.

¹² Thomas, 1995.

¹³ Noakes, 1999; Indeed, the first spiritualist journals - the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* (1855) and the *British Spiritual Telegraph* (1857) - had already appropriated the term at the same time as the *Daily Telegraph* (1856) had. Mesmeric fluids that produced anomalous phenomena were subsequently compared to the electric telegraph by Olcott (1875/1933, 13-14).

¹⁴ This will be discussed briefly in chapter four (page 79, note 5).

¹⁵ Brandon, 1984, 168ff.

that it was the expert who had the right to pronounce upon society's unseen threats".¹⁶

Yet, as individuals increasingly came to rely on expert observers to shed light on areas of urban darkness, observers who would have been deemed reliable on any other matter came to be challenged about what they had observed in the darkness of the seance room (and this, decades before doubt was expressed about the observational skills of the creator of Sherlock Holmes). In a city whose residents must have been uniquely aware of what they could not see and what they did not know, reports of seance phenomena provoked a debate about fundamental ways of seeing and knowing. In an urban environment that surrounded its inhabitants with evidence of new technology that they did not fully understand, the possibility that another mysterious form of communication had been discovered must have seemed all the more plausible. In the centre of Western materialistic culture, the possibility of a spiritual experience must have been all the more appealing. It was, therefore, an ambiguous London into which Home entered in 1855.

2.2. First impressions: the 1855 seances

Home was not the first spiritualist medium to arrive in Britain from America, the first being Mrs Hayden in 1852. At a typical Hayden seance, however, little more than raps were heard which were translated into messages purportedly from departed spirits.¹⁷ Table-tipping and table-turning also seem to have been extremely popular in the early 1850's, during which sitters would place their fingers on top of a small table, and the table would tip or turn in accordance with the spirit message, though how seriously such pursuits were taken is difficult to assess. It was not long before normal explanations were provided for such phenomena. In the United States, the rapping noises were soon attributed to the snapping of the medium's knee and toe joints, a

¹⁶ Noakes, unpub'd thesis, 21, who also refers to Tyndall's public demonstration of the existence of microscopic disease-bearing dust particles by the use of lamps, as a further example of the scientist who sheds light on the invisible (29).

¹⁷ Podmore, 1902, ii, 4ff.

confession appearing in the *New York Herald* in 1851 from a former associate of the Fox sisters.¹⁸ Various British periodicals dismissed the phenomena as a trick, G. H. Lewes explaining in the *Leader* how Mrs Hayden had the spirits apparently answer the thoughts of sitters.¹⁹ Table-tipping and turning, on the other hand, were attributed to unconscious muscular action on the part of the sitters, and this was demonstrated via experiment by Michael Faraday in 1853.²⁰ A decline in interest in table-turning seems to have followed, the *Scottish Review* writing in 1854 of “the epidemic which has recently prevailed in our country, and which has now, we trust, so nearly run its course that we may treat it as a matter of history”.²¹ However, the provision of normal explanations did not prevent new converts to spiritualism, who dismissed the normal explanations as inadequate in the light of their own experiences, and these individuals included such figures as Robert Owen and the publisher, Robert Chambers. Others attributed table movements to various forms of animal magnetism, while others still regarded the phenomena as satanic.²² Nevertheless, by the middle of the decade, the initial interest in the subject seems to have declined, and the position taken by the periodical press towards early seance phenomena was one that dismissed them as the product of imposture and delusion. Such was the situation when Home arrived in Britain.

2.2.1. The 1855 seances

Home arrived in London in April, 1855. He had already something of a reputation in America, but nothing in comparison to the fame (and notoriety) he would gain in

¹⁸ Podmore, 1902, i, 185.

¹⁹ *Household Words*, 1852, November 20; *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, 73, 1853, 629-46; *National Miscellany*, May 5; *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, 1853, May 21, 321-4. As Lewes explained, the spirit message was communicated one letter at a time, the sitter proceeding through the alphabet until a rap indicated at what letter to stop. According to Lewes, sitters would inadvertently pause at the letter they were thinking of, thereby unconsciously cuing the medium. Attending a Hayden seance, Lewes deliberately misled the medium leading the spirits to respond in nonsensical terms (*Leader*, 1853, March 12).

²⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 1853, July 2, 923.

²¹ cited in Podmore, 1902, ii, 21.

²² Examples of the former position are: Anon, 1853; Birt, 1853; Koch, n.d. For the latter position see: Gillson, 1853; Godfrey, 1853; Cowan, 1854.

Britain and Europe. Though not the first medium to arrive from the United States, what made Home stand out from the numerous so-called 'spirit-rappers' was that the phenomena experienced by sitters at his seances were of a nature and scale such that no similar explanation was applicable. According to numerous reports of his seances, large mahogany tables (rather than small card tables) moved and rose in the air, and sometimes Home himself levitated. One could hardly attribute such things to unconscious muscular movement. In addition, in contrast to most mediums, Home regularly operated in what was described as good light. Over the period of Home's mediumship, various theories were proposed in an attempt to account for such phenomena, and the next four chapters will deal with these in depth. From the beginning, however, contemporaries disagreed about how to frame the phenomena, and these early responses are the subject of this section.

On the 23rd of July 1855, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning attended a seance with Home at the home of the Rymers in Ealing. Both wrote of the events of the seance in private letters that describe how, in addition to other phenomena, a table had risen in the air, an accordion had played music without being touched, and spirit hands had appeared. Yet while their accounts of the phenomena were similar, they do not seem to have been equally convinced that the phenomena had been produced by spirits. Elizabeth found it "wonderful and conclusive; and I believe that the medium present was no more responsible for the things said and done, than I myself was".²³ Robert, on the other hand, was "hardly able to account for the fact that there can be another opinion than his own on the matter - that being that the whole display of 'hands', 'spirit utterances', etc. were a cheat and imposture".²⁴ This was not the first time witnesses had come to strikingly different conclusions about Home's phenomena.

In the previous month, Sir David Brewster, author of *Letters on natural magic* (1832), founding member of the British Association, and soon to be Principal of Edinburgh University, had attended a Home seance. He had been invited by Lord Brougham, the former Lord Chancellor, and a fellow septuagenarian. Brewster also attended a second

²³ Huxley, 1929, 217-221.

²⁴ Burton, 1948, 28-9.

seance shortly afterwards. Present at the second seance was the writer, Thomas Adolphus Trollope. When, in October of that year, the *Morning Advertiser* published an article from an American newspaper that claimed both Brougham and Brewster now believed in spiritual manifestations, Brewster wrote to the *Advertiser*. In this letter, he stated that he “never thought of ascribing them to spirits stalking below the drapery of the table; and I saw enough to satisfy myself that they could all be produced by human hands and feet and to prove to others that some of them, at least, had such an origin”. He added that Home, as he did not admit to being a conjuror but claimed to be in communication with the dead, “insults religion and common sense, and tampers with the most sacred feelings of his victims”. Yet, in a letter to the same newspaper, Trollope stated of the same phenomena that he “was wholly convinced, that be what may their origin and cause, and nature, they are not produced by any fraud, machinery, juggling, illusion, or trickery, on [Home’s] part”.²⁵ Several others attending seances with Home at that time dismissed the idea of trickery and some became convinced of the spiritual origin of their nature. John Jones, who became an active advocate for spiritualism over the following years, described a visit to Home in August, noting that the conditions “prevented even the suspicion of trickery being carried out ... I at once yielded my mind to the truthfulness of the phenomena of Spirit-power”.²⁶

It would seem clear that from the beginning of Home’s mediumship in Britain, those who attended his seances framed similar events in quite different ways. In attempting to account for such contrasting frames, some writers have suggested various reasons. For example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning has been presented (by a sceptic) as a trusting soul, reluctant to think others would deceive her, and somewhat credulous.²⁷ On the other hand, it has been argued (by a proponent of Home’s phenomena) that Robert’s scepticism about Home was a result of personal dislike of the medium. Browning is reported to have subsequently verbally insulted and physically threatened Home, and his poem ‘Mr Sludge’, published in 1864 and to be discussed in the next

²⁵ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 3, 4; November 11, 4.

²⁶ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, I, 101.

²⁷ Dingwall, 1947, 101-2.

chapter, was commonly seen as an attack on the medium.²⁸ Such displays of animosity have, in turn, been attributed to Browning's dislike of Home's demeanour, and suspicions about Home's sexuality.²⁹ Yet such explanations of views are extremely problematic. For example, the image of Mrs Browning as credulous may, as has been suggested, be supported by her apparent belief in clairvoyance and mesmerism³⁰, but beliefs in such phenomena were hardly unique, and were held by a number of scientists who were critical of spiritualism. In addition, there is direct evidence of Mrs Browning suspecting trickery with another medium.³¹ More generally, the link between personal feelings about an individual and conclusions about the nature of his mediumship is hardly straightforward. As Mrs Browning herself pointed out in regard to unsuccessful attempts by sceptics to catch Home cheating, "[t]hey hate him and believe the facts".³²

While such factors may have been important, there is simply no way we can know the extent to which individual views about Home's phenomena were shaped by emotional factors such as jealousy, ambition, or desire to believe in an after-life. Neither can we know what people actually believed about the phenomena since that would not necessarily be reflected in what they wrote. Several individuals who attended Home seances were claimed by spiritualists to be believers though they did not say so publicly. Such a discrepancy could be attributed to factors such as fear of public derision, but it could also have been nothing more than wishful thinking on the part of spiritualists. What we can say based on the available evidence is that contemporary witnesses framed the phenomena they saw in different ways. While Coleman referred to himself as "one of a hundred"³³ who attended a Home seance in 1855, written views have been found from 21 of them. Most of these accounts were either written or published within months of the seance, though some were not published until several

²⁸ Allingham and Radford, 1907, 101-2; Browning, 1864.

²⁹ Jenkins, 1982, 43; Dingwall (1947, 107ff.) argues that Home was "homosexually inclined", and that Browning's personal dislike of the medium was at least in part homophobic. However, while others commented on Home's sensitive nature, there was no public discussion of his sexuality, and there is no evidence of anyone suggesting Home was a homosexual.

³⁰ Dingwall, 1947, 102.

³¹ Huxley, 1929, 266.

³² Huxley, 1929, 238.

³³ Home, 1863, 244.

years later. Apart from Brewster and Browning, only one other witness explicitly claimed that the phenomena were produced by trickery, though he did not write this until many years later.³⁴ All the rest stated that they believed the phenomena to be genuine (i.e., objectively real and not the result of deception), and many concluded that they were produced by departed spirits. Some, such as Robert Owen, had already announced his conversion to spiritualism and framed Home's phenomena as further evidence of spirit communication.³⁵ Some, such as John Jones, claimed to have been converted to spiritualism by Home's phenomena almost immediately. Some, such as Benjamin Coleman, the stockbroker and prominent spiritualist, may have been initially convinced by the seances of 1855 but did not say so. It was not until 1860 that Coleman wrote that he was "forced to admit, that (as all other solutions entirely fail to explain the phenomena,) I do accept the one claimed for them of 'spirit manifestations'."³⁶ Others stopped short of admitting spiritual agency. For example, William Gregory, Professor of Chemistry at Edinburgh University, told spiritualists, "My feelings are entirely in favour of Spiritualism, but I cannot feel thoroughly and logically satisfied until facts and arguments are produced which render every other theory untenable".³⁷ Gregory, like several others, went on to consider the possibility of a new natural, rather than a supernatural, force as the responsible agency.

2.2.2. Framing Home's phenomena

While individuals expressed a range of views, and sometimes changed their views over time, it would seem clear that those who attended the first British seances with Home used one of three basic frames in which to view the phenomena. These frames might be described as: 'the phenomena were due to trickery'; 'the phenomena were genuine, but not necessarily supernatural'; and 'the phenomena were attributable to

³⁴ *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 120-2. The writer, Fanny Trollope also attended these early seances and second-hand sources suggest she was convinced initially, though later concluded Home used trickery (Neville-Sington, 1997, 350-2).

³⁵ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1855, 29-30.

³⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 43.

³⁷ *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1856, 110.

spirits'. In addition to these hypotheses, however, another theme is prominent in the narratives of the early witnesses, namely, the question of whether the phenomena reported actually happened at all. There is little evidence that the witnesses had any serious doubts as to the reality of what they saw, whatever the agency. However, in narrating their experiences, there are clear signs that they were aware of potential scepticism about the content of what they reported. In a narrative of a Home seance in 1855, the lawyer and friend of the medium, William Wilkinson admitted:

“In relating these words I usually have to tell my hearer that I know he must believe me to be deluded, albeit they took place in the company of some dozen gentlemen known to me, and strangers to Mr Home, in a friend’s house, in clear candlelight, and in a room which Mr Home until that evening had never entered. Were he to have told me a like story I should have been incredulous”.³⁸

Wilkinson’s apparent concern that others would not believe that the events he described actually happened is reflected throughout the early witness accounts in a number of ways. From the earliest reports, observers of Home consistently stated that the phenomena were ‘facts’ and that these facts were observed through the normal senses. When, in a letter to the *Morning Advertiser*, Benjamin Coleman suggested others “should be ready to accept the evidence of their senses, when, by an exercise of their faculties, they can give no reasonable explanation of the marvellous facts which are brought before them” he was reflecting a common stress on the reliability of the senses to ascertain facts. Indeed, when Sir David Brewster suggested that he was uncertain as to what he had seen, he was criticised severely. His account of a Home seance included a passage in which he stated that “a table actually rose, as appeared to me, from the ground”. Coleman responded to this letter, “*Appeared* to rise from the ground. Did it rise? Why make a question of so plain a fact?”, and one writer wryly noted that Brewster “placed himself before the public as a person who really could not tell whether a table, under his nose, did or did not rise from the ground”.³⁹

³⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 220.

³⁹ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 15, 4; Maitland, 1855.

Yet the notion that their experiences might have been purely subjective was nevertheless discussed by the early witnesses. Regarding the appearance of spirit hands at an 1855 seance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to her sister, "I put up my glass to look at [them] - proving that it was not a mere mental impression, and that they were subject to the usual laws of vision".⁴⁰ In a letter to the *London Critic* in 1855, which described seances with Home, Sir Charles Isham, an early convert to spiritualism, wrote that "the theory that [the phenomena are] entirely the results of the minds of the parties present or not present, will appear almost as inadequate to a rational solution of the matter as [that of trickery]".⁴¹ Others explicitly ruled out delusion as well as trickery. Coleman, for example, wrote that he had asked Brewster whether he attributed the phenomena either to trickery or delusion and that Brewster had ruled out each separately.⁴² The meaning of the term 'delusion' will be discussed in chapter four, but it is sufficient to note here that, in addition to considering the possibility that what they reported might have been the result of trickery, the early witnesses of Home justified their frames through stressing that the phenomena they reported actually occurred.

It is felt that the most useful way to understand how witnesses of Home seances framed the phenomena they saw is to consider their views in relation to four basic questions about possible causes of the phenomena. First, did the phenomena really happen? Second, were they the product of trickery? Third, were they produced by a natural (but unknown) force? Fourth, were they produced by supernatural agency? That contemporaries asked these questions should not seem surprising. After all, they amount to a list of possible explanations: either the phenomena were objectively real or the result of subjective experience; if objectively real, they were either trickery or genuine; if genuine, they were either natural or supernatural. However, that such a list is not simply being imposed onto Victorian views can be seen from some contemporary views about the phenomena in question. For example, an article on seance phenomena that appeared in 1857 began by considering and rejecting the

⁴⁰ Huxley, 1929, 220.

⁴¹ *Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 17.

⁴² Home, 1863, 250. See also: *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 3, 1857, 2; *Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 43.

“hypotheses of imposture and hallucination”, then dismissed “electrical, mechanical, and physiological, and magnetic theories”, before concluding that the phenomena were the result of supernatural agency.⁴³ Similarly, a minister summed up his argument about what he regarded as diabolical phenomena in the following way: 1. The facts of Spiritualism are sufficiently authenticated; 2. The facts cannot be interpreted in the light of imposture and trickery; 3. Neither can they be accounted for by any known laws; 4. They belong, therefore, to the domain of the preternatural.⁴⁴ While such a structured argument was by no means the norm, it was certainly available, and other contemporaries used similar structures when discussing seance phenomena.⁴⁵ As the following chapters will illustrate, each of the four themes reflected in this structure was an ongoing topic of debate throughout the period of Home’s mediumship. As far as the mainstream periodical press was concerned, Home’s phenomena were primarily framed as the product of trickery, and so this theme will be the subject of the next chapter. The following three chapters will then deal respectively with the debates surrounding the questions: were the phenomena objectively real?; were they the product of a currently unrecognised natural force? were they the result of supernatural agency?

⁴³ *Weekly Register*, 1857 cited in *Spiritual Magazine*, 8, 1873, 312-26.

⁴⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 49-59.

⁴⁵ Baker, 1862; *Human Nature*, 1872, 64-72; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1872, 271-80.

3. Conjuring spirits or conjuring tricks?

Home, along with other spiritualists, attributed seance phenomena to spirits. However, the theory that the phenomena were really the product of trickery was, throughout his mediumship, the most prominent argument in the periodical press. How convincing it was as an argument is quite another matter, however, and is the subject of this chapter. Yet the idea that apparently supernatural phenomena might be due to trickery was by no means new, and its significance is perhaps better understood by considering the broader cultural role that magic played. Magic (i.e., the art of entertaining through deception) has always had links with 'real' magic (what today would most likely be called the paranormal (i.e., the alleged ability to interact with the environment through means not currently understood), and some terminological distinction would be useful from the start. The most common term in nineteenth-century Britain used to refer to the honest art of deception was 'conjuring', previously 'juggling' having been more common, so this term will be used here, the term 'magic' being used to refer to what is now called paranormal. As will be seen, the distinction is significant.

3.1. Conjuring and magic

Conjuring as an entertainment may be seen within the context of leisure as a whole. Historians of leisure have identified an increased ordering of leisure pursuits from the



end of the 18th century. Middle class emphasis on respectability, sobriety, and self-discipline, largely influenced by evangelical Christianity, prompted attempts to suppress activities considered cruel or unruly. Middle class leisure activities became increasingly temperate, orderly and serious, and popular leisure was increasingly restricted in the interests of 'civilising' the poor. Such a process of 'civilisation' was, of course, driven by social and political concerns as well as religious ones, and the suppression of fairs - Bartholomew Fair was finally suppressed by the Corporation of London in 1854 - was no doubt as much to do with fear of the mob as moral reform. Nevertheless, the middle class desire for greater order in leisure seems clear enough. Supply of alternative (and more orderly) leisure pursuits was increased by the rise in the number of voluntary societies between 1780 and 1850, many of which were influenced by evangelical and utilitarian ideologies. While their objectives were extremely diverse, they often stressed that their activities were 'rational', and the stress upon intellectual improvement was accompanied by the provision of greater access to reading material and intellectual debate.¹ The virtue of particular leisure pursuits was increasingly proclaimed throughout this period, often in terms of providing 'useful knowledge', and this was not restricted to activities such as reading and debating. Hugh Cunningham points out that promoters of prizefighting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were "equally assertive in proclaiming their virtue, and advertisers of the most unlikely shows in the same period had stressed the 'rational recreation' which they were offering".² While historians have not written about conjuring in this context, reference has been made to related forms of entertainment. Drawing on a private collection of early nineteenth century printed ephemera, R. J. Morris has identified a shift in the form of entertainment that relied upon wonder, particularly in terms of the content of exhibitions. Morris points out that "[t]he giantess and the dwarf were replaced by the reformed drunkard [and] the Christianized African", concluding that "[c]uriosity and amazement were still used to draw the audience but that audience was now offered explanation and the orderly knowledge of modernity".³ While this conclusion is based on a small set of sources, this link

¹ Morris, 1990; Bailey, 1978.

² Cunningham, 1980, 333.

³ Morris, 1996.

between wonder as entertainment and the orderly nature of modernity is worth looking at in more detail and, in order to do so, it is necessary to consider magic alongside conjuring.

3.1.1. Conjuring and modernity

Zygmunt Bauman has written that modernity's quest for order was a war against ambivalence.⁴ Elsewhere, he has extended Weber's notion of modernity as a 'disenchantment of the world', arguing that "[t]he war against mystery and magic was for modernity the war of liberation leading to the declaration of hostilities that made the unprocessed, pristine world into the enemy", an enemy he describes as "the grey area of ambivalence, indeterminacy, and undecidability".⁵ In this extended metaphor, magic and mystery were fought against because they made the world more ambivalent, less certain, less orderly. The role of leisure in this war can be seen in the rise of knowledge as entertainment, not only in public lectures but in exhibitions which presented the wonders of nature and of science alongside "the orderly knowledge of modernity". But while such 'wonders' may have provoked wonder in the sense of admiration for nature, this is quite different from the wonder associated with conjuring. Conjuring relied upon wonder perhaps more than any other form of entertainment, and did so in a way that had obvious links to the mystery and magic that modernity fought against. It is, perhaps, worth clarifying this point. Conjuring has always been viewed to some extent as an art whose virtue is that it instills wonder through providing the audience with an anomaly. In doing so, it leaves audiences uncertain about (lacking an explanation for) the conjuring effect, and it is this uncertainty or lack of explanation that causes wonder. While a particular agency may be guessed at - such as trapdoors or mirrors or sleight-of-hand - the very effectiveness of conjuring relies upon (and has always relied upon) the extent to which such agencies are ruled out.⁶ The more effectively the conjuror can exclude such possibilities

⁴ Bauman, 1991.

⁵ Bauman, 1992, x-xvi.

⁶ Lamont & Wiseman, 1999.

in the mind of the audience, and can leave the audience with no explanation of how the effect was produced, the more wonder provoked, the more mysterious the trick, the more successful the entertainment. It has also been the case throughout history that when audiences have witnessed a conjuring effect, and have been unable to explain how it might have been produced, some have attributed the effect to magical or supernatural or psychic forces. While such conclusions declined significantly with the rise of the modern scientific worldview, they nevertheless continue to this day. In short, conjuring instills wonder through presenting an effect for which the audience has no explanation, and that lack of explanation may lead some to a conclusion that is contrary to the modern scientific worldview. In terms of Bauman's war against ambivalence, conjuring's inherent anomaly (and subsequent wonder caused by uncertainty) would have been the enemy of modernity. It is within this context that the way in which conjuring came to be presented in the nineteenth century might best be understood.

Conjuring texts had traditionally taken a sceptical line towards magic. The first English-language text explaining the methods of conjurers, Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), had done so explicitly for the purpose of demonstrating that ostensibly magical feats could be performed without the need for genuine magic. Scot had stated that his intention was to demonstrate the foolishness of a superstition that resulted in violence towards harmless individuals. King James VI and I, who had held a quite different view on the subject, had ordered all available copies of the book to be burned on his accession to the throne in 1603. Later, Ady (1655) followed Scot's sceptical line on magic and witchcraft, while others simply plagiarised Scot's writings about trickery for more mundane reasons.⁷ However, that conjuring continued to be attributed to supernatural means long after Scot is clear from the preface of Neve (1716), which states, "there is not a trick that any juggler in the world can show thee, but thou shalt be able to conceive after what manner it is done, if he do it by sleight of hand, and not by unlawful and detestable means, as too many do at this day".⁸ Books on conjuring continued to present themselves as a weapon in the ongoing battle with

⁷ R[id], 1612; Anon, 1634; Dean, 1722.

⁸ Neve, 1716.

superstition and, by the end of the 18th century, this was linked to the notion of rational recreation. Breslaw's *Last Legacy* (first published in 1784) pointed out that it "did not recommend vice or idleness" and that "the knowledge which the book conveys will wipe away many ill-grounded notions which ignorant people have imbibed". Similarly, Hooper's *Rational Recreations* (first published 1774) was written plainly "so that the reader will readily discover, at the same time that he admires the phenomena, ... that far from being marvellous or incomprehensible, they are the regular and necessary effects of the laws of nature". Hooper's desire to remove the incomprehensible in the interests of propagating the modern scientific worldview may have been due in part at least to the fact he was a doctor rather than a conjuror. In fact, over the following decades, most books explaining conjuring methods were written not by conjurors but by scientists and educators, and reflected a similar desire to remove the incomprehensible. These texts presented tricks as rational amusement, part of the scientific education of the young.⁹ While drawing on conjuring knowledge, there was nothing magical about the way in which such knowledge was presented. On the contrary, the 'experiments' were presented as illustrations of natural law. For example, Wylde's *The Magic of Science* (1861) defined natural magic as "amusing instances of applications of scientific laws". Yet conjuring methods could be described not simply to illustrate scientific law but to remove the sense of wonder about conjuring effects. Wylde listed 116 "amusing and instructive experiments" which were explained so that when the reader next attended a magic performance, he would no longer be deceived. Similarly, *The Boy's Own Book* (1844) explained the method behind 'The Invisible Girl', a popular illusion at the time, to its young readers in an explicit attempt to remove any uncertainty as to what was going on. "We trust ... we have said sufficient to render the Invisible Girl no wonder".¹⁰ This was a long way from Scot, even from Breslaw, who had sought to demonstrate that nothing supernatural was involved in conjuring. This was an explicit attempt to remove the wonder inherent in conjuring as a part of rational education.

⁹ For example: Accum, 1817; Griffin, 1827; Paris, 1831; [Clarke], 1844; Piesse, 1859; Wylde, 1861.

¹⁰ Wylde, 1861, 325-6; Clarke, 1844, 385.

3.1.2. Conjuring as a debunking tool

The use of conjuring to debunk the supernatural can be seen in a number of more scholarly texts on natural magic that appeared around the same time, and which appear to have shared a common aim, such as Scot's *Letters on demonology and witchcraft*, Brewster's *Letters on natural magic*, and Davenport's *Sketches of Imposture, Deception and Credulity*. These and subsequent texts¹¹ presented all phenomena that appeared to contradict the laws of nature, with the exception of Biblical miracles, as the result of imposture and delusion. Written prior to the appearance of reports of seance phenomena to be considered later, they appear to reflect an increasing use of conjuring to debunk the supernatural and define the limits of natural law.

But what of conjurors themselves? Historians of conjuring have tended to see the early nineteenth century as a period of decline, and the Victorian period as a golden age in which conjurors achieved an unprecedented social status.¹² By mid-century, the street conjuror, well-paid compared to his fellow street performers but nevertheless making a precarious living, was on the decline.¹³ The increasingly dominant image of conjuring in the mid-Victorian periodical press was of the respectable, well-dressed stage performer, and increased respectability was reflected in the emergence of new venues for performing such as Piccadilly's Egyptian Hall, bought by conjurors Maskelyne and Cooke in the 1860's. Such venues provided new opportunities for clever performers who could appeal to the intelligent educated spectator. While historians of conjuring have tended to attribute the rise in status and popularity of their art to individual conjurors and the spectacular nature of their shows, it would seem reasonable to suppose that other influences were present in the emergence of conjuring's golden age. I would suggest that conjuring's rise in respectability was also facilitated by its increasing image as a rational recreation, and its growing role in reinforcing the modern scientific worldview. Victorian conjurors were active participants in changing the image of conjuring. While it was not in their interests to explain their methods and

¹¹ For example: Mackay, 1841; Godwin, 1843; Religious Tract Society, 1848.

¹² Frost, 1876; Christopher, 1973; Lamb, 1976.

¹³ Mayhew, 1861, 3, 107-13.

remove the element of wonder, their allegiance to natural law was stated with unprecedented clarity. John Henry Anderson, the most famous of mid-nineteenth-century British conjurers, published a pamphlet in the 1840's which saw several dozen editions over the following decades.¹⁴ Its preface stated, "Let the operator state that everything he exhibits can be accounted for on rational principles, and is only in obedience to the unerring laws of Nature". In the interests of this position, Anderson went so far as admitting, "there can be no objection to his occasionally showing by what means the most apparently marvellous feats are accomplished". Colonel Stodare, one of the best-known performers of the 1860's, was equally explicit about there being nothing contrary to natural law in conjuring. He distinguished between conjurers of earlier times, who claimed various powers, and modern conjurers, who "use as scientifically as possible the natural properties of matter to aid in their exhibition of wonderful results ... They sometimes mystify the matter, and so increase the puzzle, in order to heighten the interest and amusement of the spectators; but they throw aside any solemn asseveration [sic] of possessing hidden powers, or of ability to fathom mysterious secrets." His disavowal continued to the point of explaining that while the conjuror's language may claim to change black into white, "the practical meaning of any exaggerated pretension is clearly understood to mean no more than that Mr So-and-So undertakes to present before you what, *to all appearances*, is the conversion of black into white, or *vice versa*; and the audience are clearly aware that no more is assumed to be presented to them than a very striking illusion [original italics]".¹⁵ The *British Quarterly Review* actually complimented the conjuror Hartz on his appeal "to the ingenuity and reasoning faculties of his audience", arguing that the value of conjuring was as a mental exercise rather than in its ability to instill wonder.¹⁶ Similarly, the influential writer on conjuring, Professor Hoffmann, explicitly sided with the known laws of nature against superstition, and explained how one could simulate clairvoyance through trickery, noting that with such an explanation, "it will cause wonder no more".¹⁷

¹⁴ Anderson, n.d..

¹⁵ Stodare, 1867, 5-6.

¹⁶ *British Quarterly Review*, 42, 1865, 96. M. Henry won similar praise for his 'Rational Entertainment' which included scientific demonstrations alongside conjuring tricks.

¹⁷ Hoffmann, 1876, 546.

By the time Home's phenomena were being discussed in Britain, conjurors had taken on the role of debunkers of the supernatural. In London in 1855, Anderson's main attraction was an expose of spirit-rapping, which involved answers (to questions about the number of letters in a given word, or of pips on a card drawn from a pack) being given by the ringing of glass bells and raps on a table. It ended with a claim that he had challenged a medium to produce spirit raps in a way that the conjuror could not explain and that the medium had failed. "This part of the entertainment", it was reported later, "was distinguished from the rest by the grave tone with which the conjurer expatiated on the mischief done by pretended spirit media, and was received with applause equally serious".¹⁸ Anderson's interest in Home extended to attending the medium's lectures in 1866, where he halted proceedings with shouts of 'Humbug' and had to be escorted from the room.¹⁹ His importance can be seen from the fact that the opening article of the first British spiritualist journal was a criticism of him, and such criticism continued.²⁰ Spiritualist exposes came to form an integral part of conjuring performances, with several other conjurors - including Robin, Dobler and J. N. Maskelyne - producing spirit-raps or reproducing the alleged spirit manifestations of the Davenport Brothers²¹, and conjurors' texts regularly expressed a sceptical position in relation to seance phenomena.²² Indeed, Maskelyne's first performance (in 1864) was a duplication of the Davenports' spirit cabinet, and he continued to be a prominent opponent of alleged supernatural phenomena.²³

By the beginning of the century, then, conjuring was being presented as a rational recreation and, as the century proceeded, conjuring increasingly became an ally of the modern scientific worldview. This can be seen in the writings on natural magic that

¹⁸ Frost, 1876, 249-53.

¹⁹ Burton, 1948, 174.

²⁰ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1855, 9; *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 4, 1857, 138; *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 42; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 322.

²¹ The Davenport Brothers claimed to produce spirit manifestations inside a spirit cabinet on stage. The brothers would sit inside the cabinet, be tied to their chairs, and the doors would be closed. Various 'spirit phenomena' would then occur inside the cabinet, such as the playing of musical instruments and objects being thrown in the air. On opening the doors, the brothers would be seen still tied securely to their chairs.

²² For example, Anderson, n.d.; Stodare, 1867; Hoffmann, 1876; Maskelyne, 1876.

²³ Maskelyne, 1876; Weatherly & Maskelyne, 1891; Maskelyne, 1913.

described conjuring methods in order to debunk supernatural claims outside of Scripture, and it can be seen in conjurors' increasing stress upon the scientific nature of their tricks. When scientists and educators described conjuring tricks as experiments that illustrated natural law, and explained methods for the purpose of removing incomprehensibility, the element of wonder associated with conjuring increasingly became re-framed as admiration for, rather than uncertainty about, the laws of nature. Here, one could argue, were Weber's 'disenchantment of the world', and Bauman's 'war against ambivalence'. In this war, conjuring had become the enemy of magic. Conjurors continued to baffle their audiences. That, after all, was their job. But they did so in a way that stressed the scientific basis of their art, and assured the public that seemingly inexplicable phenomena could be explained according to natural law. Home arrived in Britain in 1855, reports of his phenomena appeared shortly afterwards, and such extraordinary phenomena required explanation. Not surprisingly, it was to conjurors that contemporaries looked for such an explanation.

3.2. The appeal to the authority of conjurors

Most Victorians did not attend a Home seance, but anyone who read the periodical press was aware of what occurred at his seances. Within months of Home's arrival, his phenomena were being discussed in the press and, over the following years, his phenomena continued to be discussed in a wide range of popular periodicals. Descriptions of the extraordinary phenomena that were reported at Home's seances were invariably accompanied by attempts to explain how they might have been produced. Anyone who read these was being informed by the following debate.

3.2.1. Explanations for Home's phenomena in the periodical press

As the last chapter noted, among the earliest sitters at a Home seance were Lord

Brougham and Sir David Brewster. In June 1855, Home was staying at Cox's Hotel in Jermyn Street, and the spiritualist proprietor, William Cox invited the seventy-seven year old former Lord Chancellor to a sitting. Shortly before the seance, Brougham requested that he bring Brewster, as the latter subsequently explained, "to assist in finding out the trick". Brewster was only slightly younger than Brougham, but as author of *Letters on natural magic* (1832), was regarded as something of an authority on natural explanations for ostensibly supernatural phenomena. During the seance, Brewster witnessed various phenomena, including raps, the movement of a table, and the ringing and movement of a bell without any apparent contact. Following the seance, he wrote a letter to his sister in which he stated that, though he did not believe the phenomena to be the result of spirits, he could not conjecture as to how they were produced.²⁴ In October of that year, however, the *Morning Advertiser* included a statement suggesting Brewster and Brougham were spiritualists, and this prompted Brewster to write to the paper to reject the charge. In doing so, he suggested that the phenomena "could all be produced by human hands and feet". Brewster's accusation of imposture provoked others present at the seance to question his recollection of events, and remind him that he had regarded the phenomena as inexplicable at the time. Brewster's second letter, however, offered more specific suggestions about how Home produced his phenomena. The raps, he suggested, had been produced by displacement of a toe muscle, the table had been raised by Home's feet, and the bell had been moved by some machinery attached to Home. The success of the deception he attributed to the table having been covered with "copious drapery, beneath which nobody was allowed to look". This statement was directly contradicted by others who had been present, who pointed out that he had been invited to look under the table, that he had in fact looked under the table, and that he had admitted he was still unable to explain the phenomena. The inadequacy of his conjectures was further suggested by another account of Home's phenomena which appeared in the *Advertiser*, and which described additional phenomena, ruled out trickery as an explanation, and warned readers not to be impressed by Brewster's scientific credentials in such matters.²⁵

²⁴ Gordon, 1870, 257-8.

²⁵ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 3, 4 onwards. The letters relevant here are reproduced in Home, 1863, 237-61.

It seems clear that Brewster was unable to explain the phenomena and, as such a position would no doubt have been embarrassing for the author of *Letters on Natural Magic*, it is not surprising he came up with some conjectures, as he put it, “for the information of the public”. While Brewster’s conjectures were cited by some sceptics in the following years,²⁶ their shortcomings must have been obvious to many readers, and his apparent dishonesty made Brewster a target of spiritualists for many years to come. Meanwhile, the debate in the *Advertiser* continued for two months and, in the absence of an adequate explanation, some appealed to the authority of conjurors, pointing out that though they did not know themselves how Home’s phenomena might be produced, conjurors would be familiar with the secret. Conjurors, however, were not particularly helpful. John Henry Anderson, the most famous of early Victorian conjurors and the first public debunker of spiritualism, claimed that, from his enquiry into seance phenomena, he was aware of the use of electromagnetism and, at other times, “skilful adjustment of levers and cleverly arranged horsehairs”. Precisely how Home could have exploited such methods in private drawing rooms was not explained. This matters because it is clear that accusations of imposture without adequate explanations did not convince everyone. One correspondent was clearly not impressed, and demanded, on behalf of “the anxious public”, a proper explanation. A few days later, having received no reply, he wrote, “I again ask for a straightforward answer or explanation to the cause of the phenomena”. A more direct request is hard to imagine, yet no such explanation was forthcoming.²⁷

Home left Britain shortly before the controversy in the *Advertiser*, and though he received occasional mention in the press, British spiritualism generally declined in popularity during the late 1850’s, as evidenced by the demise of the only existing spiritualist journals at that time, the *Spiritual Herald* and the *British Spiritual Telegraph*.²⁸ In 1859, Home returned from a tour of Europe that had included giving seances for Napoleon III and Czar Nicholas, and was soon being entertained by the great and good of London. His most devoted hostesses were the Duchess of

²⁶ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 41-2; Maskelyne, 1876, chapter 4.

²⁷ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 13, 3; October 20, 3; October 23, 3; October 27, 5.

²⁸ Gauld, 1968, 69. The *Spiritual Magazine* did not appear until 1860, by which time Home had returned to Britain.

Sutherland and Mrs Milner Gibson, wife of the President of the Board of Trade, and it was at the home of the latter in Hyde Park Place that his most famous seance to date took place. Present was Robert Bell, an Irish writer and friend of William Thackeray, who subsequently wrote an anonymous article for an early issue of the *Cornhill Magazine*, then edited by Thackeray.²⁹ The article described a seance in which, among other things, Home had levitated up to the ceiling and made a mark there. While the author of the article had described the room as being in darkness, he had no doubts that Home had really levitated, and stressed that these were facts that could not be ignored, however unlikely they might seem. Given the large readership of the *Cornhill*³⁰, it is almost certain that this would have been the best-known account of any seance at the time, and it provoked responses in several periodicals.

In *Blackwood's Magazine*, the eminent biologist and philosopher, G. H. Lewes argued that while he accepted the facts described, he attributed them to trickery, though he failed to explain what sort of methods might have been involved.³¹ An article in Dickens' *Once a week* by one John Delaware Lewis described how he had detected the medium Mrs Marshall in fraud, and offered to test Mr Home and report his findings in a future issue of the journal. The *Literary Gazette* in turn commented on this article, and on Lewis' offer, noting that "this is a fair challenge, which Mr Home would do well to accept; as on a non-acceptance an unfavourable construction must necessarily be placed".³² Curiously, the *Spiritual Magazine* subsequently reported both the Lewis article and the comment in the *Literary Gazette*, but deleted Lewis' challenge to Home from the extract.³³ It seems unlikely that Home would not have known about the challenge, but it was never taken up, and neither the challenge nor the failure to respond received further attention.

The following month, however, *Once a Week* published an article entitled "Spirit-rapping made easy", under the name 'Katerfelto', which explained how one might

²⁹ *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 211-24.

³⁰ Circulation is estimated to have been 80,000 at this time (Ellegard, 1958, 372).

³¹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 87, 1860, 381-95.

³² *Literary Gazette*, 1860, September 8, 180-1.

³³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 437.

produce spirit raps, and make a small card table seem to float in the dark through using one's legs.³⁴ Subsequently, the well-known writer and spiritualist, William Howitt, wrote to the *Morning Star*, challenging Katerfelto to explain Home's phenomena as described in the *Cornhill* account. That same month, "Spirit-rapping made easy, no. II" appeared in *Once a Week*, in response to Howitt's challenge.³⁵ The author stated at the outset that he intended to explain "how Mr Home floated about the top of the room ... and all the other wonders mentioned in the 'Cornhill' narrative". Yet while the article explained certain simple mediumistic tricks, it did not begin to deal with Home's phenomena. Indeed, it closed by referring to "the performances of Mr Home, which I am about to examine, [are more impressive, but the secret] when I have explained it, will be found to be ridiculously simple in proportion to its effects on the bewildered and mystified spectators (to be continued)." Whether the author examined the performances of Home is unknown, but the article was never continued, the "ridiculously simple" secret was never explained, and the "bewildered and mystified spectators" were none the wiser. Home's amusement at the article was later described in a friend's diary, which told how, during a seance, the spirits playfully destroyed a copy of the magazine.³⁶

Other periodicals provided little more by way of explanation. Indeed, so far as explanations for Home's phenomena went, the only specific suggestion at the time appeared in an article in *All The Year Round*, in which Dickens suggested that Home's levitation could have been simulated by the medium standing on top of furniture in the dark in order to mark the ceiling.³⁷ While a possible explanation for that specific event, there was no attempt to explain the other phenomena described in the *Cornhill* article or anywhere else. Some general suggestions were made, however. *Punch* included a poem, 'Home great Home' which, in addition to darkness, suggested that Home's phenomena depended upon prior preparation of the venue.³⁸ While this was clearly satirical, similar points were subsequently made more seriously in *Fraser's Magazine*

³⁴ *Once a Week*, 3, 1860, 403-7.

³⁵ *Once a Week*, 3, 1860, 489-94.

³⁶ Home, 1863, 193.

³⁷ *All The Year Round*, 1860, July 28, 370-4.

³⁸ *Punch*, 1860, August 18, 63.

which claimed that Home's phenomena "were only enacted in special conditions. It was always in Mr Home's own house or in that of some person who, if not an accomplice, was at all events an implicit believer in his supernatural powers, and allowed him free scope for his preparations".³⁹ Yet the *Cornhill* author had stated that he had examined the phenomena in "[h]ouses into which it would have been impossible to ... make preparations for the most ordinary tricks of collusion, without the assent or knowledge of the proprietors, and to which no previous access could be obtained".⁴⁰ Otherwise, the main response in the periodical press was a general assurance that conjurors could do equally wonderful things, and without the aid of darkness. In a subsequent issue, *Punch* argued that Home was not worthy to be called a conjuror as he did not perform in light, the *News of the World* reckoned that John Henry Anderson could shed some light on those "strange things done in the darkness", and *Fraser's Magazine*, having claimed that Home invariably performed in the dark, described the phenomena as "not in the least more wonderful than many of the tricks which any clever juggler performs".⁴¹

With the publication of Home's biography three years later, *Incidents in my Life* (1863), public attention was again drawn to accounts of Home's phenomena. Once again, it was a wide range of periodicals that dealt with the topic and, once again, those that did failed to shed additional light on Home's methods. The *Quarterly Review* pointed to the suspiciousness of darkness, and cited a false allegation that Home had

³⁹ *Fraser's Magazine*, 66, 1862, 521-22.

⁴⁰ *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 215. The sculptor, Hiram Powers, made a similar statement of a seance with Home in Florence, 1855: "I certainly saw, under circumstances where fraud, or collusion, or prearrangement of machinery was impossible - in my own house, and among friends incapable of lending themselves to imposture - very curious things. That hand floating in the air, of which the world has heard, I have seen." (Home, 1888, 61).

⁴¹ *Punch*, 1860, August 25, 73; *News of the World* cited in *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 438; *Fraser's Magazine*, 66, 1862, 521.

failed to produce any phenomena in front of conjurors.⁴² Similarly, the *Times* suggested Home's phenomena relied upon darkness, cited an equally false allegation that Home had been caught out, and described conjuring tricks as more impressive than his phenomena.⁴³ Meanwhile, the *North British Review* cited some of the more colourful suggestions made by his accusers (such as his levitation being faked by a gas-filled balloon). The general themes of darkness and the superiority of conjurors were repeated in *The Athenaeum* and *All The Year Round*. Ironically, perhaps, the *Cornhill* reviewer said nothing about possible trickery in his review of the book, declaring that he simply did not believe a word of it.⁴⁴ Throughout the 1860's, anyone reading about Home's phenomena in any of these periodicals was being told that they were the product of trickery, but were being told precious little about what methods might have been involved. For many, that was no doubt sufficient, but anyone curious was being told, whatever the methods were, that they relied upon darkness, and that conjurors could do similar things.

As Home's mediumship progressed, the argument that Home's phenomena relied upon darkness became increasingly challenged. At first, the question of light had not been discussed. Certainly, the Brewster seance in 1855, which had been discussed in the *Morning Advertiser*, seems to have been conducted in good light. There is no explicit statement to this effect but, in an attempt to explain the raps after the seance,

Brewster claimed that he "distinctly saw three movements in [Home's] loins, perfectly

⁴² *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 179-210. The basis of this allegation was an article in *All The Year Round* which had accused a gentleman "trumpeted about London as the most wonderful of all the wonderful mediums ever wondered at" (*All The Year Round*, 7, 1863, 608). While the Quarterly Reviewer concluded that this meant Home, this is highly unlikely since Dickens and the French conjuror Robin were stated to have been present, and there is no reference anywhere else to suggest that either Dickens or Robin ever attended a Home seance. Given the prominence of the former as a critic, and of the latter as a performer of spiritualist exposes, it seems inconceivable neither would have mentioned this at some point. The procedure described by Dickens sounds more like Charles Foster, who arrived in Britain that year and rapidly rose to prominence. However, he was caught cheating almost as rapidly, and returned to America.

⁴³ *Times*, 1863, April 9, 4-5. The rumour cited concerned Richard Monckton Milnes, subsequently Lord Houghton. He had attended a seance in which he had discovered a handkerchief in the dark, and it had been claimed that Home used this handkerchief in the dark to simulate spirits brushing by sitters. Home promptly wrote to the *Times* in response to this allegation, noting that Monckton Milnes made no such claim, dismissing another false statement made in *The Critic*, and challenging his accusers to come forward (*Times*, April 16, 12).

⁴⁴ *North British Review*, 39, 1863, 174-206; *The Athenaeum*, 1863:I, 351-3; *All The Year Round*, 1863, April 4, 135; *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 710.

simultaneously with the three raps”. However Brewster thought Home had produced the phenomena he saw, and he suggested a few theories, at no point did he suggest it had anything to do with darkness. With the publication of the *Cornhill* narrative in 1860, however, the degree of light in a seance became a more obviously relevant factor. Following publication of the *Cornhill* narrative, the well-known pioneer of hydropathy, Dr James Gully (his friends included Darwin and Tennyson) had written to the *Morning Star* admitting he had been present at the *Cornhill* seance, confirming what had happened, and noted that, while the room “was comparatively darkened, light streamed through the window from a distant gas-lamp outside”. From that point on, the *Spiritual Magazine* included a growing number of accounts of Home seances conducted in good light, one by a former chairman of the Stock Exchange, who pointed out that “contrary to the assertions so constantly made that the manifestations are always in the dark, the whole of the phenomena of which I have spoken were manifested in a room light with gas, and a bright fire burning”.⁴⁵ Occasionally, such accounts reached a wider audience, such as the letter in the *Sunday Times* describing a seance in which Home levitated in a “clearly illuminated room”.⁴⁶ These accounts found additional readers with the publication of *Incidents* in 1863, which included all of them, and with subsequent reviews of the book. Witnesses would continue to describe Home seances in good light and, by the end of his mediumship, his reputation as one who performed in light would be regularly held up as what made him superior to other mediums, a point he stressed himself in *Lights and Shadows* (1877) when he dismissed phenomena in the dark as unconvincing.⁴⁷

For the remainder of the 1860’s, the conjuring theory continued to be supported, though not by any more specific explanations as to how Home did what he did. Indeed, the only other public statement by a witness in support of the conjuring theory appeared in 1865, and did little more than repeat Brewster’s theories. Describing a sitting with Home that may have been five years earlier, the writer repeated Brewster’s allegation that Home “did nothing but what might easily have been done by hand and

⁴⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1861, 89-90. See also: *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 341; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 524-6.

⁴⁶ *Sunday Times*, 1861, February 17, quoted in Home, 1863, 175-9.

⁴⁷ Home, 1877, 350.

foot; for the whole of the so-called manifestations took place under a table of limited dimensions, with a green cloth lapping over the edge which we were warned on no account to lift".⁴⁸ In 1868, another false allegation was made in *The Star*, which claimed that Home had apparently declined an invitation to perform in front of the great French conjuror, Robert-Houdin, though no source was given for this rumour.⁴⁹ Home immediately wrote to the paper contradicting the claim, and no further accusation was made. This may have been a distorted version of the earlier (and equally false) allegation about Home having failed in front of the French conjuror, Robin⁵⁰, but its appearance can be seen as a further example of the argument that conjurors were wise to what the medium was doing. Indeed, as Home's mediumship increasingly challenged the notion that his phenomena were produced by methods that relied upon darkness, the argument that conjurors were capable of similar feats continued, and became the dominant support for the conjuring frame, with several periodicals taking this position.⁵¹ Increasingly, anyone who had seen or read of Home's phenomena, regarded them as trickery, and sought support for their position, was relying on the authority of conjurors.

3.2.2. Conjurors' failure to provide explanation

While support for the conjuring theory in the periodical press failed to provide readers with an adequate explanation for how Home did what he did, the authority of conjurors was appealed to. Those who adopted the conjuring theory had to do so on the assumption that, while they themselves did not know exactly what was going on, a competent conjuror would know. Certainly, this was the impression that conjurors gave in their performances and writings. One way in which conjurors sought to demonstrate that seance phenomena were fraudulent was through performance on

⁴⁸ *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 22-42.

⁴⁹ quoted in *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 255-6

⁵⁰ See note 42, page 65 above.

⁵¹ In addition to those mentioned above, see: *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 96, 1864, 16; *British Quarterly Review*, 42, 1865, 97; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 97, 1865, 205; *All The Year Round*, 1866, March 3, 184; *The Athenaeum*, 1871, October 2, 558.

stage. John Henry Anderson had begun performing so-called ‘spirit-rapping exposes’ during his theatre shows in the early 1850’s, in which he had raps sound on a table on stage, and they soon featured on his playbills as among the highlights of his shows. Several other conjurors followed suit, performing ‘anti-spiritualist’ routines in their shows, notably John Nevil Maskelyne, who succeeded Anderson both as Britain’s most successful conjuror and as its most public critic of spiritualism. Indeed, his career began when he attempted to duplicate the alleged (and quite different) spirit manifestations of the Davenport brothers, which will be discussed below. Whatever form these presentations took, however, conjurors regularly claimed to duplicate the phenomena produced by mediums and, though they did not necessarily explain the method employed, their assurance that nothing supernatural was going on was intended to be sufficient.

Responses to such performances varied. Charles Bradlaugh, the radical politician and atheist, and one of the few witnesses who suspected Home of using trickery, saw the conjuror J. N. Maskelyne on stage at Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly in the 1860’s, and regarded him as more impressive than Home.⁵² On the other hand, the writer T. A. Trollope, who concluded Home did not use trickery, disagreed, pointing to the fact that Maskelyne performed in conditions which allowed for all kinds of preparation and apparatus.⁵³ Many other witnesses pointed to the inadequacy of these performances as duplications of Home’s phenomena. One described John Henry Anderson’s exhibitions as “foolish”, and another pointed out that the raps he heard at Home’s seance were “very unlike the Great Wizard’s raps, and occurred indifferently, as I said before, in all places and corners of the chamber”, adding that Home operated “without any paraphernalia which would characterise a wizard’s art”. After Home’s retirement, the writer and journalist, S. C. Hall, challenged Maskelyne to duplicate Home’s phenomena in the same conditions in which the medium had produced them.⁵⁴ Indeed, as shall be discussed below, that Home worked in conditions that apparently ruled out trickery became a major theme in witnesses’ rejection of the conjuring frame. On the

⁵² *Medium and Daybreak*, 4, 1873, 2

⁵³ Trollope, 1887, i, 390

⁵⁴ *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 17; Home, 1863, 75; Hall, 1884, 49; Trollope, 1887, i, 390

other hand, most contemporaries had never attended a Home seance. While witnesses regarded conjurors' performances as inadequate duplications of what they had seen, others would have had to rely on comparisons with eye-witness accounts they had read. Since the best-known accounts stressed the conditions in which Home produced his phenomena were different from that of a conjuror, any comparison would have included this point. But how thorough such comparisons were is another matter, and we do not know how many made such a comparison in the first place.

Evidence from the periodical press, however, suggests that conjurors' exposes were not entirely convincing. Comparing Anderson's performance to the events of the seance room, the extremely popular *Family Herald* stated, "there is no more resemblance between his rapping and theirs than there is between the lowing of an ox and the song of a titmouse".⁵⁵ Similarly, when contemporary periodicals cited conjuring performances in support of the conjuring theory, they referred to straightforward conjuring effects more often than pseudo-spiritualist demonstrations, and this suggests that the latter may not have been as effective as intended.⁵⁶ Further evidence of the inadequacy of such performances is available from a text that appeared some years later by a former fraudulent medium, which explained the methods he and other mediums used. In doing so, it referred to the methods used by conjurors in their attempts to duplicate seance phenomena, noting that "[t]here is absolutely no resemblance of any kind or description, to the seance of the "medium", in these alleged exposes of the professional magician".⁵⁷ This is, perhaps, not surprising, since the conditions in which conjurors performed ensured that such performances could hardly have been accurate duplications of what Home did. However, it does raise the question of whether conjurors could in fact explain what Home did. Fortunately, written sources allow this question to be considered more carefully.

⁵⁵ *Family Herald*, 13, 1855, 349.

⁵⁶ For example, of the following articles that made explicit comparisons between Home's phenomena and the tricks of professional conjurors, only the last referred to a pseudo-Spiritualist demonstration: *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 88, 1860, 389; , *Fraser's Magazine*, 66, 1862, 521; *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 197; *British Quarterly Review*, 42, 1865, 76-97; *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 22.

⁵⁷ Price & Dingwall, 1922, 17.

As the previous section showed, throughout the 1860's, suggestions about Home's methods were made in periodicals and newspapers, but sceptics failed to adequately explain what had been reported, stressing in the main the ability of conjurors to produce similar phenomena. Elsewhere, conjurors offered suggestions about Home's methods, but they failed to give more adequate explanations. The first booklet claiming to explain the methods behind seance phenomena was Anderson's *The Magic of Spirit-Rapping*. This was sold for a shilling at Anderson's performances, sometimes as part of a larger booklet that included explanations for simple tricks that the reader could perform, and had undergone several editions prior to Home's arrival. However, even the explanations it provided for such simple effects as spirit-rapping were unnecessarily elaborate, his method involving an electromagnetic device connected to the table, and operated by a confederate in an adjacent room.⁵⁸ That Home could not have arranged such a set-up in someone else's house without their knowledge must have been obvious to anyone considering the worth of Anderson's explanation. Another early text failed to offer any additional clues, arguing simply that the *Cornhill* levitation required complete darkness and the use of confederates.⁵⁹ Over the following years, the most famous and creative conjurors of the day - including Bosco, Robert-Houdin and Maskelyne - expressed views on Home's phenomena, without offering any greater insight. According to the writer T. A. Trollope, the renowned Italian conjuror, Bosco "utterly scouted the idea of the possibility of such phenomena as I saw produced by Mr Home being produced by any of the resources of his art".⁶⁰ Both spiritualists at the time and a recent biographer have claimed that Robert-Houdin was unable to explain the phenomena, though neither gives any source for their claim.⁶¹ Nevertheless, some idea of Robert-Houdin's opinion can be gained from a book he was writing at the time of his death in 1871. In a passage referring to Home's reported ability to levitate and to make a table float in the air, Robert-Houdin noted that

⁵⁸ Anderson, n.d.; see also his claim in the *Morning Advertiser* referred to above.

⁵⁹ Home, 1860.

⁶⁰ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 278.

⁶¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 461; Burton, 1948, 103. The form of these suggest they are independent. Burton's claim is more likely a distortion of a response by Home to the allegation that he had declined to perform for Robert-Houdin (*The Star*, 1868, May 6). In this response, Home denied the allegation, and referred to "one of the most clever conjurors in France" who had attended a seance and had given "testimony that, whatever the power might be, it was not a conjuring trick" (*Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 256).

“[s]cience has succeeded in reproducing these surprising phenomena”, citing a performance that had taken place in the Polytechnic Institute in London. This method, however, required an elaborate stage set-up with a huge glass plate that needed to be mechanically raised from below the stage. The author also referred to a method he had used himself which needed a specially-made table supported by thin wires from above the stage.⁶² Robert-Houdin must have been well aware that such methods could hardly have been used in the private drawing rooms that Home visited.

Other conjurers were no more helpful. Maskelyne’s intention was to “thoroughly expose and explain the tricks and modus operandi of [mediums] ... and other spirit jugglers.” However, he failed to explain how Home produced his phenomena, simply repeating the claims of Brewster, and some of the periodical articles referred to above.⁶³ In the same year, the most influential English-language conjuring book of the century appeared, Professor Hoffman’s *Modern Magic* (1876). In the appendix, as part of an attempt to explain the tricks of spiritualist mediums, the author offered methods for various effects associated with Home, such as the playing of an accordion, the production of spirit hands, and the levitation to the ceiling. Yet all of them involved conditions quite different from those described by witnesses. For example, the levitation of the medium was explained by substituting a model of the medium, which was suspended from the top of the stage by cords, and the spirit hands were attributed to stuffed gloves in phosphorous.⁶⁴ Despite their utter impracticality, similar methods were cited in subsequent texts.⁶⁵

In fact, the most elaborate exposure of the tricks of fraudulent mediums came the following year, from Home himself. Part three of *Lights and Shadows* (1877), on Modern Spiritualism, was primarily an attack on fraudulent mediums that explained many of their methods while maintaining that some phenomena, such as his own, were genuine. “If we wish that our belief should conquer”, he stated, “and its truth be made manifest, let us court examination, and do all things in the light”, and elsewhere stating

⁶² Robert-Houdin, 1900, 111-18.

⁶³ Maskelyne, 1876, chapter IV.

⁶⁴ Hoffmann, 1876, 551-7.

⁶⁵ For example: Sachs, 1877, 387-8; Vere, 1879, 96-7.

“no phenomena should be accepted as genuine that are not produced under strict test conditions”. He attributed most full-form spirit materialisations to trickery, pointing out that when they produced such in light, he would “cease to denounce their seances as more or less cunningly-contrived vehicles of deception”.⁶⁶ The worth of such a text to sceptics can be seen from the hostile reaction of many spiritualists.⁶⁷ That it provided the most extensive explanations available for fraudulent mediums’ methods can be seen by the use made of it by sceptics, who used the book as ammunition against belief in spiritualist phenomena generally.⁶⁸ Yet while the book explained many of the methods apparently used by fraudulent mediums, it offered no additional clues to how Home could have produced his own phenomena. W. B. Carpenter, a leading physiologist and psychologist, and the most prominent scientific critic of spiritualism at this time, accepted the methods offered by Home and stated in *Fraser’s* that, “the cause of Common Sense has been so greatly served by Mr Home’s fearless exposure of the knavery of ‘mediums’ ... that I would not call into question his own belief in the phenomena”. Carpenter was left simply “to exercise, in regard to the validity of Mr Home’s own pretensions, the independent judgement as to what is inherently probable, which he himself so freely passes upon the pretensions of others”. Yet to absolve Home of fraud was to reject the most plausible normal explanation for most of Home’s phenomena, and this was pointed out by the eminent naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace, in the following edition of the same journal.⁶⁹ The result, if anything, was that Home’s phenomena remained a mystery, qualitatively more impressive than that of other mediums.

So far as conjurors failed to explain what Home was doing, how can such a failure be accounted for? Was it that they did not know, or was it that they knew but would not say? After all, conjurors have traditionally been reluctant to reveal their secrets. Yet it is difficult to attribute the lack of explanation of Home’s methods to such a reluctance. At a general level, the role of the conjuror as an ally of the modern scientific worldview

⁶⁶ Home, 1877, 350.

⁶⁷ Spiritualists’ comments included: “superficial and unsatisfactory” (*Human Nature*, 11, 1877, 204-21) and “unfair and selfish” (*Human Nature*, 11, 1877, 265-75).

⁶⁸ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 15, 1877, 541-64; *The Athenaeum*, 1877, May 26, 666-7.

⁶⁹ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 15, 1877, 694-706.

and as a debunker of the supernatural demonstrates both motivation and willingness to explain conjuring methods. More specifically, the conjuring texts cited above revealed conjuring secrets that had nothing to do with seance phenomena. Surely if the writers knew the methods used by Home, exposing such methods would have been preferable to explaining methods actually used by professional conjurors. On the surface at least, there seems to be no reason why conjurors would have been reluctant to explain Home's methods if they could have. That they did not strongly suggests that the most informed conjurors of the period simply did not know how Home produced his phenomena. How many contemporaries were aware of this is obviously quite another matter. What does seem clear, however, is that those who read accounts of Home's seances were faced with accounts of phenomena for which no adequate explanation was available. The main argument being used was that conjurors were capable of such things, and this seems not to have been the case. Presumably, anyone comparing the available evidence with the available explanations would have become increasingly aware of the gap between the two. In addition, those who had witnessed the phenomena for themselves overwhelmingly (and publicly) rejected the explanations of conjurors.

3.3. Witnesses on the conjuring frame

Most mid-Victorians, not having attended any of Home's seances, would have been informed primarily by what they read in the periodical press. Those who attended his seances, on the other hand, would have been able to draw on personal experience. For the vast majority, such experience led them to reject trickery as an explanation.

3.3.1. Home's witnesses reject the conjuring frame

Of the hundreds of witnesses that attended seances with Home, only a handful framed

his phenomena as trickery, and those who did offered very little in support of their position. Robert Browning was one of this handful, and his private conjectures echoed the initial mystery and subsequent guesswork of his fellow sceptic, Sir David Brewster. The Brownings first sat with Home in 1855 and, as the last chapter noted, Robert's conclusions had been a good deal more sceptical than those of his wife. He dismissed the phenomena - which had included 'spirit hands' appearing from beneath the table - as nothing to do with the spirits, but he admitted in a private letter two days after the seance, "I don't in the least pretend to explain how the [phenomena were produced]". Three years later, however, the writer Nathaniel Hawthorn reported how Browning had claimed that the spirit hands had been attached to Home's feet which were stretched under the table.⁷⁰ Another writer, Mrs Linton, one of the early woman journalists, an author of some success, and a close friend of Mrs Milner Gibson who hosted many of Home's seances, attended a seance at the home of her friend in 1860. In a private letter, she described how a chaise longue had moved along the floor, and Home had levitated in the air and made a cross on the ceiling. She concluded, "There was nothing to have prevented Mr Home from drawing the chaise longue to him by means of a string round the front of his two legs, moving it by his own feet and muscles; standing on the centre-piece of the ottoman, and, with a knife tied to the end of a stick, scratching a cross on the ceiling. The rest was easy to ventriloquism and certain to credulity". Her scepticism seems to have been provoked by a communication, allegedly from the spirit of a child that she had known, but in which Home had used the wrong name for the child. This apparent mistake, Linton stated, "saved me from all after dangers of credulity".⁷¹ But her theories about Home's methods, like Browning's conjectures, were never stated publicly.

Witnesses made indirect fictional references to Home, however. Fanny Trollope, along with her two sons and fellow authors, Anthony and Thomas, had been one of Home's earliest visitors. Anthony does not mention his experience, while Thomas has been cited above. Mrs Trollope's views about Home can be inferred from her last novel, *Fashionable Life: or Paris and London* (1856), which includes a medium by the name

⁷⁰ Hawthorn, 1883, 296.

⁷¹ Layard, 1901, 169-70.

of Mr Wilson, a thinly disguised and not very complimentary portrait of Home. Of Wilson, Trollope wrote “The great majority of those whom curiosity led to witness the marvellous phenomenon ... proclaimed him fraudulent”.⁷² Similarly, though several years after Home’s mediumship, Mrs Linton’s *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885) described satirically the sitting she had attended at the home of Mrs Milner Gibson in 1860.⁷³ Yet neither Trollope nor Linton offered any clues as to how Home did what he did.

The best-known portrait of Home at the time, however, was Browning’s ‘Mr Sludge, the medium’, published in 1864 in *Dramatis Personae*. That Sludge was intended to depict Home was confirmed by the poet, William Allingham, shortly after publication of the poem, as well as by second-hand evidence from Tennyson.⁷⁴ The poem appears to have been written by Browning in 1860, but not published until the death of his wife, whose opinion of the medium and the phenomena was more positive than that of her husband. It takes the form of a confession, and depicts a ruthless swindler who despises the victims from whom he has taken money. Yet, despite its considerable length of 1525 lines, few make any reference to how the medium produced his phenomena. The most enlightening are as follows:

“To turn, shove, tilt a table, crack your joints,
Manage your feet, dispose your hands aright,
Work wires that twitch the curtains, play the glove
At end o’ your slipper, - then put out the lights” [445-8]

“...I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands to work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phospher match,
And all the rest...” [800-5]

⁷² Neville-Sington, 1997, 350-2. The connection was noted in *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 33.

⁷³ Linton, 1885, ii, 15ff.

⁷⁴ Allingham & Radford, 1907; Home, 1888; Jenkins (1988) suggests this came via Dr Gully, Tennyson’s doctor.

How satisfying contemporaries would have found such information is extremely difficult to say, assuming they did make a link between Sludge and Home. What does seem clear is that Browning himself was merely guessing. Despite much later claims that Browning had caught Home cheating, the poet himself subsequently admitted that his opinion of Home had been the result of hearing second-hand testimony to the effect that the medium had been caught experimenting with phosphorous, ostensibly for the production of 'spirit-lights'.⁷⁵ During Home's mediumship, while the poem no doubt added to the existing impression that Home was a trickster, it added very little to the attempts to explain how he did what he did. The same could be said for the only three witnesses who, during Home's mediumship, made direct public statements claiming that he was a trickster.⁷⁶ Brewster and Hayward, the author of the *Fraser's Magazine* article in 1865 referred to above, have already been noted, as have the limits of their conjectures about being denied access below the table. The other sceptical witness was the radical politician, Charles Bradlaugh, who stated simply that what he saw "might have been easily produced without extraordinary means".⁷⁷

Anyone wondering how Home produced his phenomena and, in the absence of explanations from conjurors, was looking to witnesses for assistance, was not getting much help from the handful of sceptics who had seen Home work. On the contrary, anyone considering the evidence of witnesses was being told by the vast majority that trickery did not take place. Almost all of Home's witnesses rejected the conjuring theory, and one of the striking themes in their accounts is the confidence with which they did so. It is true that some witnesses described the phenomena as inexplicable without explicitly dismissing the possibility of trickery. Patrick Proctor Alexander, for example, author of *Mill and Carlyle* and other intellectual works, witnessed home in

⁷⁵ *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 102.

⁷⁶ Following Home's death, some witnesses dismissed him as a trickster in published texts. In 1889, a published letter by Merrifield, recalling an 1855 seance, described having seen a connection between Home's shoulder and the spirit hand that had appeared, and recalled that as the spirit hand moved, so there was a corresponding movement of Home's shoulder. "The situation struck me so forcibly - the trick so plain to my eyes ... that I was seized with a strong impulse to laugh" (*Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 120-2). Published texts appeared even later in which witnesses drew similar conclusions about seances from the 1850's (Gambier, 1907, 282; Barthez, 1912, 141-2).

⁷⁷ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 279.

Edinburgh in 1871, and seems to have recognised the limit of his own expertise.⁷⁸ However, most witnesses made explicit statements to the effect that trickery did not take place. Some were convinced⁷⁹, some were certain⁸⁰, and others described trickery as impossible.⁸¹

Such firm conclusions seem to have been based on little or no knowledge of conjuring. It seems reasonable to assume that witnesses would have claimed such expertise if they could have yet, of all those who witnessed Home's seances in Britain, the playwright E. L. Blanchard seems to have been the only one who claimed to have any conjuring knowledge. Blanchard was one of many writers who attended a Home seance at the home of Mrs Milner Gibson in 1860, and became a regular sitter with various mediums. Blanchard, like Dickens, was an amateur conjuror, and attended conjuring performances regularly.⁸² Giving evidence to the London Dialectical Society committee in 1869, he stated that he was "thoroughly acquainted with all the modes by which the acknowledged celebrities in that art practise their diverting deceptions". By that time, Blanchard had witnessed not only Home but the medium Charles Foster, and admitted, "I have never been able to detect the slightest attempt at imposition".⁸³ When one bears in mind that Foster was suspected of trickery within weeks of his arrival in Britain, and was subsequently caught cheating on several occasions, there would seem to be a question mark against Blanchard's level of expertise.

Real conjuring expertise was nevertheless appealed to. As sceptics had appealed to the authority of conjurors in support of their conclusions, so did witnesses. In doing so, they made similarly misleading claims. If one accepts, as T. A. Trollope claimed, that

⁷⁸ Alexander, 1871, 4; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 224; *Times*, 1872, December 26, 5.

⁷⁹ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233; Bell, 1860, 215; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 226, *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 65; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 378.

⁸⁰ For example: Crosland, 1856, 23; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 266; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1877, 554; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 132.

⁸¹ For example: *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, November 3, 3; Webster, 1865, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1871, 465; Hall, 1884, 58; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 123; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 127; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 129; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 134.

⁸² Clement & Howard, 1891.

⁸³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 412; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 134-5.

Bosco ruled out trickery, and even if one accepts the similar (though unsubstantiated) claim that Robert-Houdin had concluded likewise, it is difficult to accept the claim by the *Spiritual Magazine* that Home had been subjected to the scrutiny of “the most accomplished professors of the ‘Herr Frickell and Robert-Houdin’ order - and these witnesses, with one consent, assert, not only that they have not detected any contrivances by which he could accomplish the manifestations they witnessed, but that it was impossible he could have any without their having detected them, and they accordingly affirm their belief in the ultra-mundane cause of the phenomena”.⁸⁴ Not only was this stated prior to either of the above claims, but none of these conjurors had actually attended a Home seance. Indeed, the only professional conjuror reported to have witnessed a Home seance was a French conjuror (in Paris), Canti.⁸⁵ While he is reported to have dismissed trickery as an explanation, there is no evidence of any professional conjuror in Britain rejecting the conjuring theory on the basis of personal observation.

Nevertheless, despite this and the almost complete lack of expertise among witnesses, almost all of them rejected the idea of trickery, many stating so with certainty. How can we explain this? Given the lack of conjuring knowledge among the witnesses, their dismissal of trickery was presumably based on their idea of what conjuring could do. This, in turn, would have been informed by what they had read and seen of conjuring, particularly by those conjurors attempting to duplicate seance phenomena. Presumably, they concluded that the explanations they read and performances they saw did not provide an adequate explanation for their own experience. In the absence of another explanation, therefore, they concluded the phenomena were genuine. Evidence certainly suggests that there was a significant difference between what Home did and what conjurors attempted to simulate. At the same time, not everyone concluded from this that Home was genuine. Those that did may, as so many have suggested of spiritualists, been led by a desire to believe. Their assertiveness in rejecting trickery as an explanation may have been a reflection of wishful thinking rather than critical thinking. Were they simply reluctant to admit the possibility of trickery? Such

⁸⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 354.

⁸⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 485.

questions, of course, cannot be answered easily, if at all. But if we are to understand more about this question of reluctance, it would be useful to understand more about how witnesses responded to explanations for phenomena that they had concluded were genuine, but were subsequently exposed as fraudulent. Since Home was never caught cheating, and his phenomena were never convincingly explained, it is worth considering how Home's witnesses viewed the phenomena of other mediums with less impressive records.

3.3.2. Evidence relating to other mediums

After Home, the mediums that attracted the greatest attention during the 1860's were the Davenport brothers, Ira and William. In 1864, they arrived from America and attracted considerable interest as they performed their spirit cabinet phenomena in theatres around Britain. Their performance involved the brothers being tied to chairs with rope inside a cabinet containing various objects including musical instruments. On closing the doors of the cabinet, the objects would be thrown into the air and the instruments would be heard to play. When the doors were opened, the brothers were seen to be still tied securely to the chairs. While this performance was presented as a manifestation of genuine spirit phenomena, it normally took place on stage and before a paying public. When they performed in Cheltenham Town Hall, John Nevil Maskelyne was present, and was chosen by the audience as one of a committee to check on stage for trickery. According to Maskelyne, this was how he learned the secret of the trick, and two months later he was performing his own version of the trick around the country, though explicitly framing it as a piece of trickery. The spirit cabinet routine was duplicated by several subsequent conjurors, their methods were published, the brothers were reported to have been exposed on several occasions, even to have confessed to using trickery, and versions of the act have continued to be performed up to this day.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Podmore, 1902, ii, 55-61; Clarke, 1983, 199-203; Houdini (1924) claimed that Ira Davenport confessed to him personally (p. 18ff). The act is currently performed by Glenn Falkenstein and Frances Willard.

Nevertheless, many contemporaries, including some witnesses of Home, were convinced that the phenomena were spiritual. A private audience of twenty gentlemen, including Robert Bell, Robert Chambers and Benjamin Coleman “formally and unanimously admitted that the manifestations ... were ... free from all suspicion of trickery”, William Howitt compared their phenomena to Samson and St Peter, and the *Spiritual Magazine* described their powers as “beyond reasonable question.”⁸⁷ Assuming that the Davenports used the same method that everyone since has used, the method involved being able to quickly escape from the rope, and it was therefore crucial to the effect that the audience were convinced the mediums could not escape. This seems to have been the case, as spiritualist witnesses explicitly stated that the mediums could not have produced the manifestations because they were tied up.⁸⁸ In addition, the *Spiritual Magazine* dismissed a conjuror’s attempt to duplicate the phenomena by suggesting that he was able to release himself from the rope.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the journal had already published articles describing how the Davenports were able to release themselves from the knots almost immediately.⁹⁰ In this case, however, the event had been attributed by the *Magazine* to spirits. While details in reports of these performances differed, the essential method for the phenomena was already available in the main spiritualist periodical, yet had been dismissed, and conjurors continued to be mocked for being unable to duplicate the performance or explain how the phenomena were produced.⁹¹

Further evidence of the mediums’ ability to release themselves from the ropes emerged and was published in the spiritualist press. Following a private performance in Brighton, a lady told how she had seen the form of Ira Davenport pass her during the seance. Rather than conclude this was evidence that he had escaped from the rope, however, she concluded it was evidence of a spirit ‘double’. Benjamin Coleman agreed, and the double theory was used later to explain a sighting of the medium,

⁸⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 470; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 163; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 565.

⁸⁸ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 2, 1856 158; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 577.

⁸⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 522.

⁹⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 461; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 89.

⁹¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 33; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 510.

Florence Cook, when she was supposed to be tied up.⁹² A similar line of reasoning was used when *Medium and Daybreak* reported an account of a seance in which a 'spirit hand' had been smeared with ink and, subsequently, ink had been found on the hands of one of the Davenport brothers. They initially doubted the story but, based on further evidence of similar occurrences, suggested that the ink transferred from the spirit hand to the hand of the medium.⁹³ How many of Home's witnesses accepted such theories is impossible to say but, as they appeared in the main spiritualist periodicals, they must have been aware of them. Yet there is no evidence of any of them suggesting the Davenport brothers might be fraudulent, and those that did refer to them stated their conviction that the phenomena were genuine.⁹⁴

While the Davenports were reportedly exposed on several occasions, it is clear that many spiritualists did not accept their exposure as legitimate. However, other mediums' exposures were more clear cut, some being at the hands of spiritualists themselves. One of those caught was Charles Foster, and it is worth briefly considering his case since it gives some perspective to witness accounts of potential trickery, and outlines the emergence of a particular argument that would become significant in the history of psychical research. Foster arrived in Britain from America in 1862, and quickly attracted the interest of several individuals who had witnessed Home. While some, such as John Jones, were suspicious about him immediately⁹⁵, others seem to have had no doubts. In a letter to the *Spiritual Magazine*, William Howitt described seances with Foster, in which controls had been attempted to eliminate any suspicion of legerdemain, and concluded, "I conjecture that nothing in the shape of evidence can be made more complete, not even, if an angel stood visibly before us, and provided the truth of these facts with a trumpet. They who do not admit this evidence, would not admit that of any other demonstration". Another witness wrote, "Those who know me may perhaps give a guarantee that I am not very easily deceived" and described "manifestations ... so clear and convincing ... that any

⁹² *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 127; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1873, 555.

⁹³ *Medium and Daybreak*, 1, 1870, 243; *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 56.

⁹⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 470; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 539; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 33; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 89; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 163.

⁹⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 45.

qualified and candid investigator must at once have owned the reality of spirit communication". A month later, the writer and journalist, S. C. Hall wrote of "my entire conviction as to the truth of Mr Foster's mediumship ... It would have been so utterly impossible for him to have fraudulently done that which he did do, as to convert a diamond ring into an inkstand; and I presume to say that the persons present were such as must have detected fraud in any one who dared to practise it".⁹⁶ Following further investigation which resulted in the exposure of Foster, rather than concluding that previous seances had been fraudulent, the *Spiritual Magazine* concluded that Foster was both a genuine medium and a trickster. It announced, "We believe Mr Foster to be a medium ... of remarkable powers, but we know him also to deceive and to cheat", and concluded, "we should no longer soil our pages with his name or mediumship", noting, "we believe it to be lamentably common that real mediums will occasionally "help the Spirits"."⁹⁷ Later, the magazine even criticised the gullibility of the mainstream press for having been taken in by Foster yet, despite the decision not to 'soil their pages' with his name, it began to report his seances a few years later, and other spiritualists subsequently ruled out trickery as an explanation for his phenomena.⁹⁸

Furthermore, this was not an isolated case. Benjamin Coleman, having described a seance with the medium Colchester concluded, "Querulous sceptics may save themselves the trouble of speculating on whether or not I may have been deceived by a sleight-of-hand trick. There was no trick in the case. It was broad daylight, and no possibility of deception".⁹⁹ After Colchester was caught cheating, the *Spiritual Magazine* announced, "We do not agree that Mr Colchester is not a medium, for we know him to be one, and have seen remarkable phenomena in his presence ... but this system of mixing fact and fraud, is enough to put him out of the pale of those, whose

⁹⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 45; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 47-8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 90.

⁹⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 147, 91.

⁹⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 219; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 66-70; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 214; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1873, 193-220; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 21; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 26.

⁹⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 294.

manifestations we choose to record in the *Spiritual Magazine*".¹⁰⁰ A few years later, on news of his conviction for fraud in Buffalo, the *Magazine* stated its approval, though pointed out this was only in the case of charlatans like Colchester.¹⁰¹ As in the case of Foster, there were no doubts expressed about the genuineness of the phenomena previously endorsed by the witnesses. That a medium might be both genuine and fraudulent was argued for several mediums who were reported to have been caught cheating, including the Davenport Brothers, Florence Cook, and Henry Slade. In addition, when spiritualists caught a medium cheating, they did not always blame the medium for his or her actions. Reported exposure of the Davenport Brothers was attributed by one believer to bad spirits that "made the boys do what they were unconscious of doing themselves", another was suspected of being under "bad spiritual influence" when cheating, and the cheating of yet another was attributed to "conscious somnambulism".¹⁰²

Such arguments may suggest a real reluctance on the part of some spiritualists to accept trickery as an explanation for the phenomena they had seen. Sceptics faced with a medium who had been caught cheating would assume that he or she cheated all the time. However, those who had accepted the phenomena as genuine seem to have concluded that, when a medium was not detected in trickery, it was because there was no trickery rather than that it was not detected. This, in turn, suggests a genuine confidence in their ability to detect trickery when it was present.¹⁰³ It also, no doubt, would have been a more attractive idea than recognising that they had been fooled. But to return to the matter of those individuals who had witnessed Home, how did they respond to evidence of trickery with other mediums, and to what extent does their response suggest a similar reluctance to accept trickery as an explanation?

¹⁰⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 153.

¹⁰¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 464.

¹⁰² *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 273; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1873, 41; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1874, 280-1.

¹⁰³ See for example, *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 6.

3.3.3. Home versus other mediums

Certainly, while some made statements suggesting they had never witnessed fraud themselves, most of the witnesses seem to have accepted the existence of fraud.¹⁰⁴ Robert Bell had pointed out in his *Cornhill Magazine* article that the existence of fraudulent activity did not imply all phenomena were fraudulent, and this point was echoed by other witnesses.¹⁰⁵ As pointed out above, some of Home's witnesses dismissed trickery as an explanation for phenomena produced by mediums that were subsequently caught cheating, but this could simply be the result of incompetence, and does not mean that they were reluctant to admit trickery as an explanation for seance phenomena. Some criticised acceptance of what they regarded as fake spirit photographs, and several of the witnesses made clear distinctions between fraudulent mediums and Home. Dr John Elliotson, the Professor of Medicine and advocate of mesmerism, and Dr Charles Lockhart Robertson, a specialist in mental health, had both publicly declared spiritualism to be a fraud, but both subsequently endorsed Home's phenomena. Another witness described how he had been previously cheated but regarded Home's phenomena as genuine, and another wrote to the medium the same year complaining of fraudulent mediums but stressing his belief in Home.¹⁰⁶ Yet another witness contrasted Home's phenomena with that of a dark seance medium he had caught the previous night and, a few years later, two witnesses wrote similar letters to Home stating that, with the exception of what Home had shown them, all the phenomena they had seen looked like trickery.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, William Crookes, though he failed to report trickery with several known tricksters, subsequently wrote to Home in 1875 expressing his disgust with the amount of fraud and describing Home as the only reason for not ending the spiritualist connection completely.¹⁰⁸ Such comments hardly suggest a reluctance among witnesses to attribute the phenomena of mediums other than Home to trickery. So what made Home special?

¹⁰⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 412; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 212.

¹⁰⁵ *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 215; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 388; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 91; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1874, 280; Home, 1888, 218.

¹⁰⁶ *Morning Post*, 1868, August 3, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 342; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 375; Home, 1888, 138.

¹⁰⁷ Home, 1888, 157-8; Home, 1888, 217-8.

¹⁰⁸ Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 115.

One reason why Home was framed differently may be that, unlike most well-known mediums, he was not paid for his seances and therefore lacked the usual motivation to cheat. That he was not a professional medium was also pointed out by witnesses at the time. Some stated that, on this point alone, Home should be regarded as “beyond suspicion”¹⁰⁹ and, when the press wrote that he had been paid for his services, this was strenuously denied in the spiritualist press.¹¹⁰ Rather than attend a professional seance, sitters were introduced to Home as a friend or an invited guest¹¹¹, and private letters to him suggest many became close friends.¹¹² William Wilkinson was his lawyer, Robert Chambers wrote the preface to his autobiography, several allowed him to stay at their homes, and some bought him expensive gifts. However, while later writers have pointed out that Home clearly benefited financially from his mediumship, none of the witnesses seem to have associated this with professional mediumship or motivation to cheat.

What really made Home distinct from other mediums, however, was his record as someone who could successfully produce phenomena in challenging conditions. As we shall see in the next section, this is what witnesses stressed, and his proficiency is further suggested by events after 1872, when Home’s mediumship came to an end, and reports of fraud increased significantly.¹¹³ Home’s phenomena, on the other hand, were never exposed. Whether one concludes from all this that Home was genuine, or simply that he was a more skilful trickster, it does challenge the idea that his witnesses were reluctant to accept trickery as an explanation for his phenomena. No doubt some individuals were taken in by frauds because their desire to believe led to a lack of critical scrutiny. However, the distinctions made by witnesses between Home and other mediums, and which are supported by records of exposure, suggest that witness reluctance to admit trickery is an inadequate explanation for their rejection of the

¹⁰⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 143; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 535; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 426.

¹¹⁰ *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1869, 68; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 261; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1871, 174; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 274.

¹¹¹ For example: *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 218; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 89; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 375; J.S.P.R., 1889, 129.

¹¹² Some of these are reprinted in Home (1888).

¹¹³ This was discussed briefly in chapter one, page 3.

conjuring frame. From their point of view, if the most informed and sceptical conjurors of the period could not explain how Home did what he did, rejecting trickery as an explanation seemed a perfectly reasonable conclusion.

3.4. The emergence of scientific authority

Since conjurors were unable to provide an explanation for sceptics, and as their shortcomings were being pointed to by witnesses, it is perhaps not surprising that the authority of conjurors became a less prominent theme in the debate as Home's mediumship progressed. Increasingly, the debate over Home's phenomena came to be articulated in the language of science.

3.4.1. Witness use of scientific language

When one considers the confidence with which witnesses rejected trickery as an explanation for what they saw, the dominant impression one gets from reading witness reports throughout Home's mediumship is that the witnesses did not conclude trickery because they did not detect any. Such apparent confidence in their ability to detect trickery present, despite no expertise in the area, was supported by stressing that they were critical observers. The importance of careful observation was stressed from the earliest seances and, throughout the period of Home's mediumship, witnesses described how they had observed carefully and regarded themselves as good observers.¹¹⁴ In addition, throughout Home's mediumship, numerous witnesses stressed their critical faculties by invariably pointing out that they were not credulous, having previously been sceptical about spiritualist phenomena. As one convert insisted, "I have been *forced* to the conclusion that we are surrounded by intelligent

¹¹⁴ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 3, 1857, 2; *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 43; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 226; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 294; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 519; Home, 1863, 244; Webster, 1865, 6; *Medium and Daybreak*, 1, 1870, 121; Alexander, 1871, 2; Podmore, 1902, ii, 16.

beings who once existed in material bodies like our own ... I have been, in spite of a bitterly opposed state of mind, compelled to believe in Spiritualism”.¹¹⁵

Witnesses also justified their rejection of trickery by describing conditions in which they felt trickery would have been detected, or that prevented trickery altogether. Witnesses stressed that the phenomena occurred in a room where conjuring apparatus were not available, usually the private home of a respectable acquaintance. Accounts suggest witnesses felt that if the phenomena had been faked, significant apparatus would have been necessary. For example, tables that were reported to have floated in the air were often described as large and heavy¹¹⁶, and some reported what later became known as the ‘earthquake effect’.¹¹⁷ As one witness described it, “the room vibrated to such a degree that an engineer who was present declared that nothing but the strongest machinery would have been sufficient to account for it”.¹¹⁸ That such machinery was available to Home was dismissed by witnesses. The journalist Robert Bell had witnessed phenomena in “(h)ouses into which it would be impossible to introduce mechanical contrivances, to lay down electric wires, or to make preparations for the most ordinary tricks”¹¹⁹, and others dismissed the idea of machinery, ropes or other apparatus in such circumstances¹²⁰, or pointed out that Home had never even been to the house before.¹²¹ As the Edinburgh author Patrick Proctor Alexander put it, he could imagine Anderson being able to duplicate some of Home’s phenomena, but not in Mr Hall’s drawing room.¹²²

A second distinction witnesses made between Home and conjurors was in noting the¹¹⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1877, 552. See also: *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233; Home, 1863, 174; Webster, 1865, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 368; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 461; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 142; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 145, London Dialectical Society, 1873, 157; Home, 1921, 87.

¹¹⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 525; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 431; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 336; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 383

¹¹⁷ Beloff, 1993, 43.

¹¹⁸ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 128.

¹¹⁹ *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 215.

¹²⁰ Home, 1863, 75; Webster, 1865, 186-7; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 128; Alexander, 1871, 2; Zorab, unpublished, 26.

¹²¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 220; *Human Nature*, 4, 1871, 138; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1873, 137; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 126; Zorab, unpublished, 105.

¹²² Alexander, 1871, 2.

opportunities they had to check and control for possible trickery. The openness with which Home allowed such checks was praised by witnesses and various specific checks were described.¹²³ The most common check witnesses described was that they looked under the table while phenomena such as raps or table movement occurred in order to ensure that the source of the phenomena was not concealed there¹²⁴, and some concluded this was sufficient to rule out trickery.¹²⁵ When observing an accordion floating in the air, some had passed their hands around it to ensure nothing was attached to it, and others examined the room and furniture.¹²⁶ As these witnesses concluded that trickery did not take place, it would seem clear that witnesses felt such conditions were sufficient to prevent successful deception taking place. Edward Cox, a former M.P. and Serjeant at Law, is reported to have pointed out, “No conjurer permits you to hold his hands while he is performing his tricks”, and he challenged Anderson and Robert-Houdin to perform their normal repertoire whilst their hands were held by members of the audience.¹²⁷

The stress placed by witnesses upon critical observation and conditions referred to above continued throughout the period of Home’s mediumship and, from the late 1860’s, such concerns increasingly came to be articulated in scientific language. In the early 1860’s, some witnesses had explicitly challenged the need for strict experimental controls.¹²⁸ However, spiritualist periodicals increasingly came to refer to seances with mediums in term of ‘tests’ and ‘test conditions’, the latter of which appears to have meant that trickery was impossible.¹²⁹ For example, *Medium and Daybreak* referred to

¹²³ For example: London Dialectical Society, 1873, 279; Alexander, 1871, 15; Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 42.

¹²⁴ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 525; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 431; Alexander, 1871, 12.

¹²⁵ For example: *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 217; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 129.

¹²⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 100; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 42; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 336.

¹²⁷ *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 222.

¹²⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 449; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 452.

¹²⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 62, 37; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 64, 468; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 259; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 255; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 46; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 177; *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 106; *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 6; *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 362; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 15; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 47.

“indisputable test conditions” which “absolutely precluded trickery”, and the *Spiritualist* suggested only accepting evidence of phenomena that occurred in test conditions following a report of an exposed cheat.¹³⁰ What test conditions entailed is less clear, however. One account describing test conditions with the mediums, Herne and Williams, referred to a dark seance in which the mediums’ hands were held, their feet were tied, and plasters were placed over their mouths.¹³¹ That both these mediums were subsequently caught cheating suggests such test conditions did not prevent trickery after all. Nevertheless, Home’s witnesses continued to use scientific language to refer to conditions in which they felt trickery would have been impossible.¹³² This increasing use of scientific language was, no doubt, a reflection of growing scientific support for Home’s phenomena.

3.4.2. The emergence of limited scientific support

With the Lyon versus Home case in 1868, the question of whether Home’s phenomena were fraudulent became focussed on motivation rather than method. In 1867, while Home was working as secretary at the Spiritual Athenaeum, he met a widow, Mrs Lyon. She subsequently adopted Home as a son and, some months later, gave the medium £30,000 on the advice of her dead husband during a seance with Home. However, when she later fell out with Home, she sought the return of her money, and alleged that Home had obtained the money under false pretences. In April 1868, Home was in court charged with extortion and undue influence by Mrs Lyon, and the trial attracted considerable attention. Reporting the verdict, *The Times* referred to “this celebrated case, which has, during its ten days’ hearing last Term, occupied so much space in our columns day by day, and excited public attention to an extent quite unprecedented in the annals of the proceedings of the High Court of Chancery”.¹³³ During the trial several notable individuals came forward to testify to Home’s good character: the writer and publisher, Robert Chambers, testified to his “irreproachable

¹³⁰ *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 362; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 47.

¹³¹ *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 250.

¹³² Alexander, 1871, 2; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 123.

¹³³ *Times*, 1868, May 23, 8.

character”; the pioneer of the Atlantic telegraph, Cromwell Varley, testified to his “truthfulness and honesty”; and Dr James Gully, populariser of hydropathy and a friend of Tennyson and Darwin, pointed out he had never known Home to accept money for his seances, but had known him to “repeatedly refuse offers of as much as 20 guineas for a single seance”.¹³⁴ The question of how Home produced his phenomena was not raised, the judge simply referring to “manifestations and communications ... brought about by some means or other”, and to spiritualism as “mischievous nonsense, well calculated, on the one hand, to delude the vain, the weak, the foolish, and the superstitious; and, on the other, to assist the projects of the needy and of the adventurer”. The trial was, as the *Spectator* pointed out, “to some extent a test of the reality of spiritual manifestations”¹³⁵, and the judge’s verdict was, not surprisingly, against Home. However, Mrs Lyon hardly emerged unscathed, receiving serious criticisms from the judge about inconsistencies in her testimony.

In addition, the trial drew support from certain scientific figures such as Chambers, Varley and Gully. The trial also brought out the first public statements to the effect that Home had been tested by scientists. Home read out a letter from J. Hawkins Simpson, an electrical engineer who had “carefully tested varied phenomena due to Mr Home’s mediumship”, and Cromwell Varley explained that he had “examined and tested [the phenomena] with Home and others, under conditions of my own choice, under a bright light, and have made the most jealous and searching scrutiny”. Concerned about this public support from acknowledged scientists for phenomena that contradicted the laws of nature, the physicist John Tyndall published a letter in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, claiming that Home had previously shrunk from investigation by Michael Faraday. Tyndall was one of several scientists who have been associated with ‘scientific naturalism’, a school of thought epistemologically founded on verification by observable facts and correspondence with the known laws of nature.¹³⁶ His position, along with those of some other main contenders in this debate, will be discussed in more depth in chapter five. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that his allegation

¹³⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 242-5.

¹³⁵ *Spectator*, 1868, April 25, 491.

¹³⁶ Turner, 1974.

prompted a reply from Home, and a correspondence ensued in which Tyndall's claim was severely damaged.¹³⁷

The following year, the London Dialectical Society began an investigation into the "Phenomena alleged to be Spiritual Manifestations", in which Home was a prominent participant. As the last chapter noted, the Dialectical Society was only one of a number of distinguished debating societies that considered the question of spiritualist phenomena, but was the only one to instigate an investigation. The committee responsible consisted of thirty-three individuals, both active spiritualists such as the eminent naturalist, A. R. Wallace, and avowed non-spiritualists such as the radical reformer, Charles Bradlaugh. The society also invited T. H. Huxley and G. H. Lewes to co-operate, but they declined. The investigation consisted of several sittings with Home and other mediums, which were observed and reported by six experimental sub-committees, and many interviews with both individuals who had witnessed seance phenomena and mediums such as Home. They also obtained correspondence on the subject from a variety of individuals, such as John Tyndall and Edwin Arnold, a successful poet and then journalist with the *Daily Telegraph*, of which he would become editor. The results of the investigation were not published until 1871, due to disagreement between the Committee responsible and other members of the Society. However, the published report dismissed trickery as out of the question as it concluded "that motion may be produced in solid bodies without material contact, by some hitherto unrecognised force".¹³⁸

By this time, the physicist William Crookes had already carried out experiments with Home. Crookes had discovered the element thallium, invented the radiometer, and had been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society at the age of 31. He would go on to become President of the Royal Society and gain a knighthood. He also carried out experiments with Home, and his scientific status gave Home's phenomena greater credibility than ever before. In the *Quarterly Journal of Science* in 1870 (which Crookes edited at the time), he had declared he had seen enough to make investigation

¹³⁷ The correspondence is reproduced in *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 254-81.

¹³⁸ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 12-13.

worthwhile, but felt that guards against fraud and measurements were insufficient. A year later, following experiments with Home, Crookes announced the existence of a new 'psychic force', in a paper that "set all London on fire, and the Spiritualists rabid with excitement".¹³⁹ The accuracy of the reported conditions of the experiments were attested to by Edward 'Serjeant' Cox (who would later found the Psychological Society of Great Britain) and by the astronomer William Huggins FRS, though the latter declined to draw conclusions from the experiments. The conclusions were supported by Cromwell Varley and A. R. Wallace.

Press reaction to the emergence of scientific support varied. The *Pall Mall Gazette* called the Dialectical Society report "contemptuous", the *Athenaeum* referred to it as a "piece of absurdity", and the *Morning Post* described it as "'entirely worthless".¹⁴⁰ However, *The Spectator*, *Echo* and *Daily News* cautiously recognised the need for further investigation. So did the *Daily Telegraph*, its leader-writer having contributed to the investigation, pointing out that "[t]he fact that some men, respectable in intellect and conversant with science, have testified their faith in the reality of the phenomena, makes it worth our while to investigate the matter with keener eyes than if the believers were all impulsive and unscientific observers".¹⁴¹ Similarly, the *Times* stated of the Dialectical Society report that "if it proves nothing else it proves that it is high time competent hands undertook the unravelling of this Gordian knot". Presumably it was with this object in mind that the writer of the article had attended seances with Home, though he failed to unravel the knot any further. Indeed, he complained that scientists had failed in their duty to explain the phenomena.¹⁴² That the phenomena appeared to be gaining at least some level of scientific credibility is further suggested by the subsequent correspondence in the *Times*, provoked by a letter from Henry Dircks. Dircks had co-created the illusion known as 'Pepper's Ghost' that had been demonstrated at the Polytechnic Institute in Regent Street, and that had been loosely

¹³⁹ *Quarterly Journal of Science*, 7, 1870; *Quarterly Journal of Science*, 8, 1871, 339-49, 484-92; *Birmingham Morning News*, cited in *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 189.

¹⁴⁰ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 1-7.

¹⁴¹ *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28; other views collated in London Dialectical Society, 1873, 5ff.

¹⁴² *Times*, 1872, December 26, 5.

compared to Home's spirit manifestations.¹⁴³ In reply to Dircks letter, which claimed that "[n]o really scientific man believes in Spiritualism", letters cited the Dialectical Society investigation and the experiments of Crookes, and pointed out that Crookes and Varley and Wallace were clearly 'scientific men'. When Dircks responded that two or three names among so many was negligible, A. R. Wallace was only the most eminent of those who supplied the names of several other scientific men who attested to the phenomena of spiritualism, and stressed the scientific nature of investigations into such phenomena.¹⁴⁴ Such scientific support made it more difficult for other scientists to simply dismiss the evidence for seance phenomena out of hand. During the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) conference of 1871 in Edinburgh, for example, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* was critical of Professor Allen Thomson's denouncing of all spiritualistic phenomena. The editorial stated that the paper was by no means an advocate of spiritualism, but it regarded Thomson's remark as unscientific, particularly as equally qualified scientists had investigated and testified to the reality of some phenomena. A similar position was taken by the (London) *Evening Standard*, which described W. B. Carpenter's criticisms of seance phenomena as weak, and stated, "We do not want to side with the spiritualists; but it would be affectation at the present day to say what a year or two back we might have been entitled to say - that no evidence is before the world in support of their views that demands respectful consideration".¹⁴⁵

3.4.3. The response of orthodox science

The initial response of some scientists to Crookes' experiments, however, was to question his scientific competence. *The Spectator* reported that Crookes' paper had been rejected by the Royal Society as it had shown an "entire want of scientific precision" and, when these claims were challenged by Crookes, it responded that it had simply been repeating the words of Professor Stokes, secretary of the Royal

¹⁴³ Pepper's Ghost is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁴ *Times*, 1872, December 27, 10 to 1873, January 6, 7.

¹⁴⁵ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 1871, August 7, 4; *Evening Standard*, 1872, January 15, 4.

Society.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the *Quarterly Review*, in a somewhat misleading article subsequently attributed to W. B. Carpenter, questioned the scientific competence of the experimenters.¹⁴⁷ This rejection of Crookes' and others scientific authority will be considered in more detail in chapter five. For the purposes of this chapter, what is important is that in addition to questioning the competence of Home's experimenters, some scientists offered an alternative explanation for Home's phenomena by suggesting that the experiences might be purely subjective. Such a view was expressed in *Nature* by Professor Balfour Stewart, and the same journal later published a similar view by the early anthropologist E. B. Tylor which was subsequently challenged by A. R. Wallace. This view was not restricted to scientific periodicals and, the following year, it was espoused by *Punch* who, in doing so, also reflected the shift of authority from conjurors to scientists.¹⁴⁸ Criticising the attempts by conjurors to expose the methods of mediums, the magazine pointed out that, "[m]en of science believe them to be either fictitious or subjective ... To give imitations, then, of those pretended phenomena ... is not a clever way to prove Spiritualism humbug. What is there to imitate?"¹⁴⁹

Home's retirement in 1872 prevented any further scientific investigation involving him, and the subsequent increase in exposures of physical mediums could only have made these mediums seem less credible. Nevertheless, scientific investigation of seance phenomena continued throughout these years. Darwin and Galton attended seances and were impressed with what they saw, while more regular research was carried out by individuals such as William Barret and Lord Rayleigh and, later, with the founding of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. However, the association with fraud led to a decline in interest in physical phenomena, and research was concentrated primarily on mental phenomena such as clairvoyance and telepathy. In the early 1870's, however, anyone who wondered about how Home produced his phenomena were being told by scientists that they might be the product of subjective

¹⁴⁶ *The Spectator*, 1871, July 22, 879; *The Spectator*, 1871, July 29, 917.

¹⁴⁷ *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 341-3.

¹⁴⁸ *Nature*, 1871, July 27, 237; *Nature*, 1872, February 29, 343; *Nature*, 1872, March 7, 364-5; *Punch*, 1873, July 19, 23.

¹⁴⁹ *Punch*, 1873, July 19, 23.

experiences. In the absence of any conjuring method, such a theory no doubt seemed plausible, but it was hardly a new idea. Though not as prominent a theme as trickery, the theory that Home's phenomena were not objectively real appeared throughout his mediumship. How this theory was discussed is the subject of the next chapter.

3.5. Summary and conclusions

When Victorians framed Home's phenomena, they did so primarily in relation to trickery. This can be seen as part of an increasing tendency in the Victorian period to use conjuring as a debunking tool against alleged supernatural phenomena and in defence of natural law, and conjurors appear to have been active participants in this 'war against mystery and magic'. Home's witnesses, however, overwhelmingly rejected trickery despite no knowledge of conjuring, and evidence relating to other mediums suggests this might have been due to a reluctance to consider such an explanation fully. Nevertheless, while no doubt this was the case for many spiritualists, many of Home's witnesses were not spiritualists, and several of those who were distinguished between him and other mediums who they considered to be fraudulent. To dismiss such witnesses as gullible or victims of wishful thinking therefore seems inappropriate. Moreover, explanations in support of the conjuring theory were hardly adequate. The periodical press regularly framed Home's phenomena as trickery yet their support for such a position - which included false accusations and utterly impractical methods - was primarily to claim that conjurors could do similar things. Conjurors, however, failed to provide an adequate explanation, and it seems probable that they did not know how Home did what he did. Though many contemporaries no doubt would have accepted the broad accusation of trickery against Home, anyone comparing the available explanations with the available evidence would have become increasingly aware of the gap between the two. Certainly, most of Home's witnesses were aware of this gap, as were spiritualists more generally, and the emergence of scientific authority in the debate suggests a

broader recognition that conjurors had failed to deal with the subject. Increasingly, the discourse became a scientific one, and limited scientific support emerged in support of Home's phenomena being genuine. The Lyon versus Home case brought out the first public statements to the effect that Home had been tested by scientists, and that they had concluded the phenomena were not the result of deception. The following year, the London Dialectical Society began its investigation, its report being published in 1871, by which time Crookes had announced the existence of a new 'psychic force'. The response of orthodox science was twofold: to question the competence of the experimenters, and to suggest that the phenomena were subjective. The former position will be discussed in chapter five, but it is first necessary to consider the effectiveness of the alternative explanation put forward by orthodox scientists in an attempt to attribute Home's phenomena to processes compatible with their own worldview.

4. Fact or fancy?

While Home's phenomena were primarily framed in relation to conjuring, that was by no means the only theory suggested to explain them. As the last chapter described, the failure of conjurors to provide an explanation was accompanied by increasing appeals to the authority of science. With the emergence of limited scientific support, and some recognition in the press of that support, scientists provided an alternative explanation for Home's phenomena when they suggested they might be purely subjective experiences. However, this was certainly not the first time such a theory had been considered. Indeed, as chapter two pointed out, the earliest witnesses discussed this possibility and, throughout Home's mediumship, the notion that his phenomena were not objectively real was a recurring theme, and took a number of forms. When contemporaries questioned whether witnesses had really seen what they said they had seen, they were engaging in wider debates about scientific observation, mesmerism, insanity, and testimony. This chapter considers the question of Home's phenomena being purely subjective in the context of these wider Victorian concerns, and argues that Home's phenomena presented significant problems to anyone who sought to frame them as such.

4.1. Scientific observation and seance phenomena

The Victorian period was one that reflected an increasing reliance upon experts. Civil service exams replaced patronage as the main criteria for recruitment in 1855, by which

time a plethora of acts and official enquiries, such as the Public Health Act of 1848, had provided opportunities for qualified individuals to become inspectors and consultants. Increasingly, expertise carried authority, and this was particularly the case with scientific expertise. When Michael Faraday, in 1855, pronounced upon the filth in the Thames water supply, his scientific observations were regarded as expert and authoritative.¹ Scientific authority clearly depended upon scientific observations being regarded as accurate. It should not be surprising, then, that scientists were deeply concerned with the process of observation itself. Historians of science have noted their concern with, on the one hand, instruments that enhanced or extended what the human eye could see and, on the other, devices that exploited optical processes, and which raised questions about the reliability of human observation.² The authority of scientists as expert observers and the increasing debate about the reliability of observation were both part of the debate about how one might frame science phenomena.

4.1.1. Scientific authority and the observation of facts

Contemporaries of Home showed a great deal of interest in the question of how one might ascertain facts. Indeed, the early Victorian preoccupation with facts had been satirised by Dickens in *Hard Times* through the character of Mr Gradgrind. However, it can be seen more specifically in the post-Darwinian debate during the 1860's which regularly stressed the primacy of facts over theory in scientific investigation. A major criticism of Darwinian theory at this time was that it was insufficiently supported by facts, that it had abandoned induction in favour of theorising. Ellegard has described such criticisms in the context of the contemporary discussion between empiricists and idealists in the philosophy of science. According to his view, "[i]f the periodical press can be taken as evidence, the idealistic, anti-Darwinian view of scientific philosophy was favoured by the majority of the educated public in the 1860's".³ In making this point, he argues that there were different levels of understanding of scientific theory.

¹ Noakes, unpub'd thesis, 21.

² Hankins & Silverman, 1995.

³ Ellegard, 1958, 175.

While both John Stuart Mill and William Whewell, the respective leading proponents of empiricism and idealism in the philosophy of science, agreed on the need for hypotheses, the popular view of induction was that it amounted to the collection and description of facts. Less informed readers, presumably unaware of their own assumptions, criticised theorising and stressed the need for conclusions to be based on facts. Ellegard has suggested that the debate was part of an attempt by idealists to discredit empiricist philosophy as part of a broader attempt to defend religion against science.⁴ What does seem clear, however, is that evidence from the periodical press suggests most of the reading public were critical of Darwin's theory, that one of the main criticisms of the theory was that it was not sufficiently scientific, and that this criticism was in turn based on the accusation that Darwin had given primacy to theory over fact.

At the same time, mid-Victorians were showing an increasing awareness of the vulnerability of the senses. Art historians have presented two conflicting models in the history of vision. On the one hand, from Manet onwards, a new model of visual representation and perception emerged that constituted a break with several centuries of another model of vision, loosely definable as Renaissance. This, however, co-existed uneasily with a second model concerning invention and dissemination of photography and other related forms of 'realism' that represent a continuous unfolding of a Renaissance-based mode of vision.⁵ While such models presumably intend to do no more than narrate a shift in attitudes about how art might present truth, there are links to how contemporaries viewed the process of observation more generally. The emergence of photography, for example, might have represented an improvement in observational technique, but so far as the camera was regarded as a superior observer to the naked eye, it can only have highlighted the limits of the latter in its ability to

⁴ Ellegard, 1958, 177ff.

⁵ Crary, 1992.

“capture images that escape natural vision”.⁶ In an anonymous treatise on the reliability of testimony, the writer and publisher, Robert Chambers complained that “The scientific scepticism of our age professes to spring from a sense of the extreme fallaciousness of the human senses”, and this position was defended in the *North British Review*.⁷ Moreover, the emergence and popularity of optical devices that relied upon persistence of vision - such as the zoetrope, the stroboscope, and the kaleidoscope - were part of a growing awareness at a wider level that the eye was unreliable in its perception of reality. Victorians not only read about optical illusions but also bought and made such devices, read of such spectacles in contemporary novels, and attended shows relying upon optical principles.⁸ One could, for example, visit the Royal Polytechnic Institution on London’s Regent Street, which had been founded in 1838 as a hall of popular science, and view a range of optical illusions such as ‘Pepper’s Ghost’. Drawing on well-known optical principles that had previously been experimented with and shown by the French conjuror, Robin, Henry Dirks and Professor John Henry Pepper patented an illusion that allowed audiences to see the projection of an actor dressed as a ghost on stage. London guidebooks encouraged that the Polytechnic be “visited by all when in town”, and Pepper’s Ghost was for many years its most popular attraction.⁹

The mid-Victorian preoccupation with facts combined with a growing awareness of the vulnerability of the senses clearly had significant implications for the question of how

⁶ Thomas, 1995, 134. The relevance of new modes of observation to spiritualism can most obviously be seen in the emergence of spirit photography. From the early 1860’s, some mediums claimed to be able to produce images of spirits on photographs, and many cited these as further evidence of the reality of the phenomena. The debate among spiritualists over the authenticity of such photographs was lengthy, though nobody denied that at least some were fake. Photographers also engaged in the debate, and explanations of how such images could be simulated illustrated the limits of the photograph as a reliable provider of truth (*Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 88; *British Journal of Photography*, 1868, August 14; *British Journal of Photography*, 1873, August 22). Photography also provided an analogy for spiritualists who defended dark seance phenomena on the grounds that, as with the production of photographs, success relied to some extent upon darkness (*Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 143). However, Home never produced a spirit photograph - indeed, he expressed some scepticism about them - and he was equally dismissive of dark seances (Home, 1877, 350). For a brief discussion of spirit photography and its role in shaping contemporary views about photography, see Tucker (1997).

⁷ Chambers, 1859, 1; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 111.

⁸ Horton, 1995.

⁹ Hankins & Silverman, 1995, 66.

one might observe facts.¹⁰ On the one hand, scientists were pointing out and demonstrating to the public that the senses could not necessarily be trusted. On the other hand, scientific enquiry rested upon observation of facts, therefore the reliability of the former rested upon the reliability of the latter. This dilemma was dealt with by arguing that scientists were more reliable observers of facts than others. During this period, scientists were increasingly distinguishing between themselves and non-specialists, with the emergence of clearly demarcated scientific disciplines and establishments responsible for education and training in experimental investigation. As science was becoming increasingly professionalised and specialised, the authority of the scientist as expert observer and interpreter of nature grew and, not surprisingly, this authority was expressed in relation to reports of seance phenomena. In 1856, in a public lecture in London entitled “Popular Scientific Errors”, the eminent zoologist and Fellow of the Royal Society, E. R. Lankester concluded that “the evidence of Prof Faraday was of more value in reference to Table Turning and Knocking than is the testimony of large numbers of persons not so well practised in observing”.¹¹ He was not alone in making this point, and the point was not only made by critics of seance phenomena. William Crookes, around the time that he was beginning his investigations into Home’s phenomena, stated that an increasingly uncertain world needed “those trained in exact observation to show a class of facts ... upon which reliance can be placed”.¹² When Home’s witnesses reported having seen phenomena that contradicted natural law, they were therefore engaging in a broader debate about observation and the authority of science and scientists. So how did they go about arguing their case?

¹⁰ Hankins & Silverman (1995) describe how scientists and artists debated the relationship between stereoscopic and photographic representations of the world and human observation (148ff.) It is worth noting that some of those who did so, such as David Brewster and John Ruskin, also attended Home seances.

¹¹ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1856, 169.

¹² *Chemical News*, 18, 1869, 3. Faraday himself made the same point (Noakes, unpub’d thesis, 70) as did W. B. Carpenter (Carpenter, 1871, 26).

4.1.2. Witnesses appeal to the authority of science

As the last chapter noted, Sir David Brewster's suggestion that what he witnessed might not have been objectively real drew the accusation that he was "a person who really could not tell whether a table, under his nose, did or did not rise from the ground". This was hardly the ideal impression of a scientific observer. As the co-editor of the *Spiritual Magazine*, Thomas Shorter put it in 1858, "Whether a table does so rise is a question of fact to be determined upon evidence. I, in common with thousands, testify to have been many times an eye-witness of it".¹³ Throughout the period of Home's mediumship, witnesses continually stressed that, however one tried to account for them, the phenomena themselves were facts that had been obtained through the normal means of observation, and the spiritualist press regularly made the same point. Every issue of the *Spiritualist Newspaper* stated its aim of supplying facts to non-spiritualists, and those facts always included examples of Home's phenomena. The *Spiritual Magazine* pointed out that the materialist "clamours for facts which his senses can take note of. Spiritualism meets that demand in the most simple and direct way. It gives him the very kind of evidence he needs - plain, palpable facts, and plenty of them".¹⁴ In a public debate with the radical reformer and atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, the spiritualist publisher James Burns began his argument by stating that he argued not as a philosopher but as an observer of facts, and ended the evening by stressing "we must succumb to FACTS".¹⁵ Such stress upon facts was reinforced by explicit distinctions between facts and theories. One of Home's earliest witnesses pointed out that she presented only facts not conclusions, and this distinction continued to be made regularly throughout Home's mediumship. As one anonymous witness put it, "the phenomena of Spiritualism I cannot but believe, if I am to take my five senses as my guides in this as in other matters... When, however, I pass from facts to theories, and I am asked to account for these facts, then I hesitate".¹⁶

¹³ *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 2, 1858, 104.

¹⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 3.

¹⁵ *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 517.

¹⁶ *Human Nature*, 7, 1873, 162. See also: *Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 1; Crosland, 1856, 23; Rymer, 1857, 39; Baker, 1862, 3; Home, 1863, 173; Webster, 1865, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 136; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867; *Medium and Daybreak*, 1, 1870, 236; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1871, 1, Alexander, 1871, 42; Home, 1888, 87.

When Home's witnesses stressed that the phenomena they had observed were facts, they were tapping directly into a broader debate. When the playwright E. L. Blanchard argued that what he had seen at Home's seances were facts, he cited Dickens' Mr Gradgrind as he criticised those he regarded as narrow-minded sceptics.¹⁷ Most witnesses, however, were engaging in a scientific discourse. The primary role of observation and description of facts within the scientific process was hardly new, but the Darwinian debate in the 1860's among both philosophers of science and the more general reading public stressed the distinction between fact and theory more strongly, and pointed to the primacy of facts in scientific enquiry. At the same time that critics of Darwin were stressing that the weakness of his theory lay in his lack of facts, Home's witnesses were stressing they themselves presented nothing but facts. When Home's witnesses made the point that whatever lay behind the phenomena, the phenomena themselves were facts, they were appealing to the dominant contemporary view of the scientific method.

Scientists, however, did not readily accept such facts, and the growing awareness of the vulnerability of the senses provided a potential line of argument against the authenticity of such facts. Certainly, there were direct links between knowledge of sensory deception and the contemporary debate about supernatural phenomena in general, and this was one of the themes apparent in contemporary texts that sought to provide ordinary explanations for supernatural phenomena. According to *Letters on Natural Magic (1832)*, "[t]he eye is consequently the principal seat of the supernatural. ..[when objects are seen] for whose presence no cause can be assigned, the conviction of supernatural agency becomes under ordinary circumstances unavoidable".¹⁸

There were also direct links between this more general debate and that concerning the phenomena associated with Home. Some of the most prominent sceptics in the debate about Home's phenomena were directly involved in educating the public about the vulnerability of the senses. Sir David Brewster, one of the most eminent scientists in the area, inventor of the kaleidoscope, and author of *Letters on Natural Magic (1832)*,

¹⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 407.

¹⁸ Brewster, 1832, 11; a similar theme can be found in Religious Tract Society, 1848.

was also one of the first to attend a Home seance. G. H. Lewes, whose *Life and Works of Goethe* (1855) would have introduced the average English reader to what came to be called the persistence of vision, wrote sceptically about both Mrs Hayden and Home.¹⁹ Professor John Henry Pepper, who presented ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ at the Polytechnic Institution, also publicly dismissed seance phenomena, and Henry Dircks, who helped pioneer and present Pepper’s Ghost, was involved in a letters dispute in the *Times* regarding Home’s phenomena.²⁰ It is hardly surprising that such individuals were drawn into the debate about seance phenomena; comparisons were made between ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ and Home’s phenomena in the popular press, and complaints about such comparisons appeared in the spiritualist press.²¹

Yet none of these individuals claimed that Home’s phenomena were the result of any kind of optical illusion, and both Brewster and Lewes explicitly claimed the phenomena were the result of trickery. Lewes’ wrote in *Blackwood’s Magazine* that he accepted the facts narrated in the *Cornhill* article, but that he did not accept that the phenomena were genuine. He pointed out that, “[i]t is one thing to believe *what* you have seen, and another to believe that you have seen *all* there was to be seen”, and went on to cite examples of conjuring tricks.²² Given that such authorities on the topic publicly expressed a sceptical view about Home’s phenomena, but did not invoke the theory of optical illusion, it seems reasonable to assume that few would have regarded such a theory as adequate. Nevertheless, the notion that witnesses’ senses might have been deceived seems to have been present at a more general level, and the prominence of this theme is clear from the regularity with which witnesses stressed that their senses had not been deceived. In doing so, they initially questioned then subsequently exploited the authority of the scientist.

Over the period of Home’s mediumship, there was an increasing tendency among

¹⁹ Horton, 1995, 3; *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 88, 1860, 381-95 .

²⁰ *Times*, 1872, December 27, 10 to 1873, January 4, 10.

²¹ See, for example, the front page illustration of the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1868, May 16, 304, 307 entitled ‘Spiritual Manifestations a la Home at the Polytechnic’. Conversely, the *Spiritual Magazine* complained of Pepper’s negative references to Spiritualism, dismissed him as ignorant of the subject, and questioned the originality of his invention (*Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 112).

²² *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 88, 1860, 381.

witnesses to appeal to the authority of science. As chapter three showed, witnesses increasingly referred to controlled conditions and used scientific language. In addition, witnesses increasingly appealed to the scientific credentials of those who had witnessed Home's phenomena. This was not the case at first, however. Needless to say, when Lankester claimed that scientists were uniquely qualified observers, spiritualists disagreed. Indeed, throughout Home's mediumship, witnesses stressed their competence to observe facts. In support of the reality of Home's phenomena, witnesses argued that such facts were observable by anyone. Witnesses sometimes referred to themselves as 'plain' men, and stated they were "perfectly competent to deal with matters of ordinary evidence."²³ They regularly pointed out that whether the phenomena were facts or not was a matter of observation by the normal senses.²⁴ As several witnesses explained, "it was impossible for me to disbelieve the evidence of my own senses".²⁵ Several questioned scientific authority when it came to observation of extraordinary phenomena. Comparing Home's phenomena to the Christian miracles, the writer William Howitt pointed out that, "When Christ came to display His miracles, He did not ask for scientific men to come and explain them .. He chose men of plain sense and healthy observation, enslaved to no theories, blinded by no prejudices, to witness and record a series of plain though astonishing facts", and J. S. Rymer had already made a similar point.²⁶ Others pointed out that when it came to observation of facts by the senses, there was no need for a scientist, or complained of scientific leaders who regarded their own testimony as higher than others, or, in the words of Benjamin Coleman, resented scientists that regarded people like him "not qualified to judge of plain matters of fact made patent to our senses, because, forsooth, we are deficient in scientific training! You insult our practical common sense, and earn our contempt for your scientific nonsense".²⁷

²³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 245; see also: *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 43; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 41, *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 123.

²⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 45; Webster, 1865, 37-8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 72; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 179; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1871, 13; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 347.

²⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 266. See also: *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 4, 4; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 177; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 21; *Human Nature*, 7, 1873, 162.

²⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 450; Rymer, 1857, 41.

²⁷ Webster, 1865, 37-8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 452; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1871, 13.

However, if observation of ‘plain matters of fact’ did not require scientific expertise, many of Home’s witnesses were nonetheless presented as particularly reliable observers. Social and intellectual status were often cited as one reason for reliability. Lord Lyndhurst, for example “was a careful and scrutinising observer of all facts”, and elsewhere beliefs in such phenomena were presented as “not incompatible with the largest calibre of intellect and the highest culture”.²⁸ Many were lawyers, writers and scientists and, as Dr Gully pointed out, were, like him, “all working in callings in which matters of fact, and not of fancy, especially come under observation”.²⁹ From the late 1860’s, supporters of Home increasingly stressed the scientific credentials of witnesses. Although spiritualist periodicals occasionally questioned whether Crookes’ experiments were any more important than the testimony of other witnesses³⁰, they nevertheless regularly stressed the competence of those scientists who had admitted the facts of Home’s phenomena.³¹ *Medium and Daybreak* may have argued that Crookes’ investigation “differs in no essential respect from the ordinary procedure at seances”, but it nevertheless recognised its influence on the public.³² Likewise, other spiritualist periodicals initially criticised the Crookes’ experiments as offering nothing new, but it was not long before they cited the scientific nature of the experiments in support of the phenomena, and pointed to the scientific status of witnesses such as Crookes and Varley.³³

This growing acknowledgement of scientific authority in such matters was, no doubt, a reflection of the emerging scientific support for Home’s phenomena. Indeed, Crookes had explicitly stated the need for scientific methods of observation of such phenomena, and his experiments had employed measuring instruments in an attempt to

²⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 519; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 466; see also *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 73; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 87; Rymer, 1857, 2; Webster, 1865, 3; Alexander, 1871, 2.

²⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 63.

³⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 347; *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 110.

³¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 480; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 428; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 87; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 12, 92; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 22, 169.

³² *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 231; *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 362.

³³ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 347; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 1; *Human Nature*, 4, 1870, 192; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 92; *Human Nature*, 8, 1874, 13.

demonstrate their objective existence.³⁴ The response of orthodox science, however, in the absence of any conjuring explanation, had been to suggest that the phenomena had been a subjective experience. While the precise nature of this subjective experience had not been spelt out, nobody was seriously suggesting optical illusion as an explanation. In fact, Tylor had spoken of mesmerism, and William Barret - who would help found the Society of Psychical Research in 1882 - also suggested mesmerism as an explanation for such phenomena.³⁵ Crookes expressed his frustration at such a suggestion, but the idea was by no means new, and is worth considering in more detail.

4.2. Mesmerism and seance phenomena

Mesmerism had begun to attract significant attention in Britain in the 1830's, with the arrival of mesmeric practioners from the continent who demonstrated their ability to affect the sensation, perception and behaviour of subjects in theatres, lecture halls, and private homes. During such demonstrations, the mesmerizer would pass his hands over the subject, and look intently into his or her eyes. Depending on the suggestions made by the mesmerizer, the subject might then be unable to feel pain, or might be led to behave in a bizarre fashion, or might claim to see what was not there. It is this latter effect that is the concern of this chapter.

By the 1850's, mesmerism had attracted some respectable advocates in Britain. John Elliotson, Professor of Medicine at University College London, had given mesmeric demonstrations in the early 1840's at UCL, much to the discomfort of many of his colleagues. On resigning his post, he had founded *The Zoist* in 1843, which was still the main periodical on mesmerism when Home arrived in Britain. William Gregory, Professor of Chemistry at Edinburgh University, had been impressed by mesmeric

³⁴ The importance of measuring instruments to Victorian scientific investigation is discussed in Hankins & Silverman (1995).

³⁵ Oppenheim, 1988, 356.

demonstrations in the 1840's, and later wrote a major text on the subject, *Letters to a Candid Enquirer on Animal Magnetism (1851)*. Not that mesmerism was considered part of orthodox science. Rather, as Alison Winter has shown, it played an important role in the establishment of what was considered to be orthodox science.³⁶ By the 1850's, though, the 'facts' of mesmerism were a good deal more established than the various theories. Most early Victorians must have seen or read of the effects of mesmerism on the behaviour of subjects, and it had been used as an anaesthetic in surgery, though by then it had been replaced by first ether, then chloroform. Explanations for these effects, however, were more controversial, and it is these explanations that are most relevant to how Victorians linked mesmerism to seance phenomena.

4.2.1. Mesmerism and spiritualism

While there were a number of terms used to describe similar processes, William Gregory regarded mesmerism, animal magnetism, electro-biology, electro-psychology, and hypnotism as essentially the same.³⁷ He, along with most writers on mesmerism, seem to have assumed a physical effluence of some sort passing from mesmerizer to subject and being responsible for the effect on the behaviour or condition of the subject.³⁸ Conversely, the surgeon, James Braid was already arguing that the mesmeric process was purely subjective, the effect on the subject being the result of an altered state of mind induced by the mesmerizer, but without the involvement of any 'fluid' passing from the latter to the former. It was, of course, a version of Braid's theory, which he termed 'neurohypnotism' and later became known as hypnotism, that would subsequently become accepted by orthodox science. The relevance of these potential mechanisms to how scientists and non-scientists viewed seance phenomena will be discussed in the next chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, what matters is the extent to which Home's phenomena were attributed to

³⁶ Winter, 1998.

³⁷ Gregory, 1851, 186ff.

³⁸ Podmore, 1902, i, 111ff.

purely subjective experiences which could have been induced by mesmerism.

Certainly, the general connections between mesmerism and spiritualism were significant. Prior to the advent of Modern Spiritualism mid-century, mesmerists had held seances in which extraordinary phenomena had been reported, and these phenomena had been dismissed by many as the product of imposture and delusion. Most scientists had been dismissive of mesmerism, while a minority had debated both the facts and the theory.³⁹ In the 1850's, many spiritualists, including William Cox, Home's first British host, entered spiritualism via mesmerism.⁴⁰ Contemporary spiritualist journals regularly advertised books on mesmerism, and included articles on the topic.⁴¹ The *British Spiritual Telegraph*, for example, published a whole series of essays by John Ashburner on the connection between mesmerism and spiritualism.⁴² Ashburner was by no means the only expert on mesmerism involved in the investigation of spiritualist phenomena. William Gregory and John Elliotson, both took an active interest in spiritualism, and both personally witnessed Home's phenomena. Mesmerism and spiritualism were also linked in the periodical press, with articles and reviews often dealing with both topics together.⁴³ The subject of mesmerism received considerable attention in the middle decades of the century and, with the emergence of spiritualism, comparisons between the phenomena were made by proponents of various theories.⁴⁴ What is of direct concern here, however, is the extent to which contemporaries expressed the view that Home's phenomena might be the product of mesmerism.

4.2.2. Mesmerism as an explanation for Home's phenomena

It first needs to be borne in mind that terms such as mesmerism and animal magnetism

³⁹ Podmore, 1902, i, 202ff.; Oppenheim, 1988, 217ff.; Winter, 1998.

⁴⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 135.

⁴¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 31-2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1866, 340.

⁴² *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 12, 1859, 285ff.

⁴³ *Quarterly Review*, 93, 1853, 501-57; *North British Review*, 22, 1854, 179-224; *Athenaeum*, 1867, February 2, 150; *Fraser's Magazine*, 15, 1877, 135-57, 382-405.

⁴⁴ For example: Anon, 1853; Guppy, 1863; Zerffi, 1871; Mahan, 1875.

were not used consistently when referring to possible explanations for Home's phenomena. For example, when one writer wrote that he did not believe the phenomena to have been caused by 'magnetism' but by a 'magnetic force', he seems to have meant the phenomena had been objectively real (and caused by an invisible physical force) rather than purely subjective.⁴⁵ What is important here is the degree to which individuals, when they used such terms, were referring to some form of induced subjective experience rather than an invisible physical force directly responsible for the phenomena themselves (which will be discussed in the next chapter). These writers described mesmeric phenomena as subjective (i.e., as the result of an altered mental state induced by the invisible physical effluence), and it does seem fairly clear that when individuals stressed they themselves had not been mesmerized (or 'psychologized' or 'biologized') they were referring to what later became known as hypnosis. In short, they were denying that the phenomena they reported had been the product of their own mind, but had in fact really happened.

As many had been practitioners of mesmerism, they presumably felt they knew the difference. The spiritualist John Jones, describing a seance with Home to the London Dialectical Society in 1869, stated bluntly: "I never was biologized. I have biologized others. I therefore feel that what I saw, I saw, and what I heard, I heard, really and truly; and if you say I was biologized, the friends I see before me do not exist, and the scene before me is biological".⁴⁶ He was not the only witness to make this point.⁴⁷ Some of Home's witnesses were among the most prominent experts in mesmerism - such as Gregory, Ashburner and Elliotson - and none of them believed his phenomena to be the result of mesmeric influence. Indeed, Elliotson had been publicly hostile towards spiritualism until he attended a Home seance, after which he admitted the phenomena were genuine.⁴⁸ As far as other witnesses were concerned, the answer was unanimous. Not even sceptical witnesses suggested they might have been mesmerized, and all those who considered the possibility clearly rejected the idea, several

⁴⁵ *Nineteenth Century*, 27, 1890, 576-81.

⁴⁶ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 146.

⁴⁷ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, November 2, 2; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 136.

⁴⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 216; *Morning Post*, 1868, August 3, 3.

individuals stressing they had not been ‘psychologized’, ‘biologized’, or ‘mesmerized’.⁴⁹ When the editor of a London newspaper reported that he was unable to explain the phenomena that had occurred at a recent Home seance, he pointed out that Home “did not fix his attention upon any of us, or we might have imagined ourselves under mesmeric influence”, and further ruled out other possible forms of induced hallucination by adding not only that he was sober but that, while tea and coffee had been served, he had not accepted any.⁵⁰ The regularity with which witnesses rejected mesmerism as an explanation for Home’s phenomena suggests it was considered a plausible theory, but the unanimity with which they rejected it can only have severely weakened the case for it.

Certainly, evidence from the periodical press suggests it was not a popular theme for most of Home’s mediumship. Prior to Home’s arrival, periodicals discussed the raps and table movements associated with the early stages of spiritualism and, in explaining them in terms of intentional or unintentional deception, accepted most of the phenomena themselves as facts. Where reported facts were rejected, of course, was where they clearly contradicted the laws of nature. For example, unconscious muscular action might explain subtle table movements but the levitation of a subject by the mental will of the mesmerizer was quite another matter.⁵¹ For some, table movements were attributable to mesmeric fluids but, at this stage, mesmerism as a means of producing a purely subjective experience was not offered as an explanation for seance phenomena. With Home’s arrival, reported seance phenomena became significantly more impressive (and the reported facts less believable). Yet, for most of Home’s mediumship, the notion that such phenomena might be mesmeric was not a noticeable theme in the periodical press. Mesmerism and spiritualism might be lumped together, but there was little suggestion that the former might be responsible for the phenomena

⁴⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 170; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 29; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 144; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 7; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 336.

⁵⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 336.

⁵¹ *Quarterly Review*, 93, 1853, 536.

associated with the latter beyond the denials of witnesses.⁵² Rather, both mesmeric and spiritualist phenomena were presented as evidence of the need for greater understanding of mental science.⁵³

It was not until 1871 that mesmerism came to be more prominent as an explanation for seance phenomena. Zerffi (1871) argued all such phenomena were subjective, brought about by animal magnetism, while W. B. Carpenter attributed certain phenomena to such a process, though not those associated with Home.⁵⁴ The most direct attempt to attribute Home's phenomena to mesmerism, however, appeared in *Nature* in the same year. *Nature* had only been founded in 1869 but had quickly become a major force among scientific periodicals, and though its circulation was small, its influence in scientific circles was considerable.⁵⁵ Professor Balfour Stewart, a renowned physicist, suggested in the journal that Crookes' results might have been the result of a purely subjective experience on the part of the experimenter, noting "for what avails the most perfect instrument as long as we suspect the operator to be under a mental influence of the nature, it may be, of that which is witnessed in electro-biological experiments?"⁵⁶ The following year, the early anthropologist, E. B. Tylor, made a similar suggestion in *Nature* which, given its form, might require some context. The suggestion came in a response to a review by A. R. Wallace of Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. Tylor had suggested that expectant attention might best explain certain apparitions, including those associated with were-wolves. Wallace had suggested mesmerism a more appropriate explanation, since differences in descriptions of such apparitions pointed to the were-wolf being able to make people see what he wanted them to see, rather than what they expected. Tylor responded by accepting the possibility, then asking, "Is Mr

⁵² Such a claim does appear to have been made in 1863. The *Spiritual Magazine* complained of a story going round the press which claimed that a scientist in Paris had attended a seance, and placed paper beneath a bronze figure prior to its being moved by the spirits. The lack of damage to the paper demonstrated, so the story went, that the effect was a 'deception practised on the eyes alone'. The source of the story was not given, but it appears to have been unsubstantiated, it was denied by Home, and was dismissed by the journal as another false allegation by the press (*Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 224).

⁵³ For example, see *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 110-42. This theme will be discussed in more detail below.

⁵⁴ Zerffi, 1871; *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 301-53.

⁵⁵ Haines, 1958, 218-19.

⁵⁶ *Nature*, 1871, July 27, 237.

D. D. Home a were-wolf? Is a professional “medium” usually or ever a person who has the power of acting on the minds of sensitive spectators, so as to make them believe they see what he pleases?”⁵⁷

Crookes’ response to the suggestion that he had been mesmerized was simply to present it as one more example of narrow-minded scientists who rejected facts that did not fit with a theory.⁵⁸ A. R. Wallace, in a response in *Nature*, made more practical points, noting differences between mesmeric phenomena and those associated with Home. In the former case, he pointed out, the subject never doubts what he is seeing, and loses memory of it - this was not the case at a Home seance. In addition, those susceptible to a mesmerizer without previous manipulation amounted to less than one in a hundred people, while sitters at Home seance saw the phenomena collectively, and there were hundreds of them.⁵⁹ These criticisms also appeared in the spiritualist press, which ran articles intended to show that the phenomena were objective rather than subjective, and regularly dismissed the various subjective theories as inadequate, and that had been “so utterly exploded many, many years ago ... that it is scarcely necessary to answer them seriously”.⁶⁰ The limits of the mesmerism theory can be further seen from the fact that William Barret, who also suggested it as an explanation for such phenomena, came to believe in the objective reality of at least some physical phenomena.⁶¹

Whatever the limits of the theory, the view that scientists now believed the phenomena to be subjective was reported to a wider audience in *Punch* shortly afterwards.⁶² While it is difficult to know what the general reading public made of such theories, the explicit rejection of mesmerism as an explanation by all of the witnesses, some of whom were among the most prominent mesmerists of the time, must have made the explanation somewhat unconvincing to anyone considering the topic in any depth.

⁵⁷ *Nature*, 1872, February 29, 343.

⁵⁸ Crookes, 1874, 22.

⁵⁹ *Nature*, 1872, March 7, 363-4.

⁶⁰ *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 17-18; see also: *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 427; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 145-51 for similar views.

⁶¹ Oppenheim, 1988, 355-7.

⁶² *Punch*, 1873, July 19, 23.

Indeed, it is only with the emergence of experimental support and in the absence of an alternative explanation that the theory seems to have been proposed at all. How long such a theory could have been maintained as an explanation for Home's phenomena is difficult to say but, as Home retired shortly afterwards, it was not severely put to the test. However, so far as the theory was considered plausible, the implications were extremely problematic. As the discussion so far has noted, scientific authority rested on the perceived competence of scientists to observe facts. If scientific results were to be attributed to some form of hallucination on the part of the experimenter, the authority of science itself would be seriously undermined, and Crookes made this point in a reply to Carpenter.⁶³ Contemporaries who did choose to frame Home's phenomena as the product of mesmerism not only did so with very limited support for their position, but also raised serious questions about the reliability of scientific evidence. As the next section will discuss, a similar dilemma existed for those who chose to dismiss the phenomena as the product of some kind of mental failure.

4.3. Insanity and seance phenomena

Insanity, it would seem fairly clear, was a topic of great concern to those who read and participated in the debate about seance phenomena, and this is hardly surprising. A number of historians have stressed the relationship between insanity and the social context in which it is defined.⁶⁴ Foucault has seen the distinction between sane and insane in terms of a "principle of exclusion" (i.e., one of the concepts and codes by which societies operate and by which a society defines itself).⁶⁵ If this is the case, one might expect that when a discourse employs the language of insanity, it is a reflection that some participants in the discourse are challenging contemporary norms. One might expect, therefore, a discourse on seance phenomena to include such language since, throughout the last few centuries at least, such phenomena have been contrary to the

⁶³ Crookes, 1874, 49-50.

⁶⁴ Foucault, 1971; Scull, 1993; Porter, 1996.

⁶⁵ Foucault, 1971, 7.

dominant worldview. One might also expect that the individuals involved in the discourse being studied would be particularly aware of the issue of insanity, as it clearly seems to have been a concern of the mid-nineteenth century British middle-class. Official concerns about insanity were reflected in the Lunatic Act of 1845 which led to the rapid provision of public asylums in England and Wales. Two years later, the Population Census included a question about numbers of lunatics within households, and contemporary periodicals continued to express concern about the apparent increase of lunacy. More generally, the preoccupation of the middle-class with insanity can be seen in the popular literature of the period. Insanity, as Nenadic puts it, was one of the ‘Victorian nightmares’.⁶⁶

It should not be surprising, then, that there was a perceived link between insanity and spiritualism. That link, however, was primarily expressed in terms of spiritualism being a cause of insanity. Even before Home arrived in Britain, the 38th edition of the conjuror John Henry Anderson’s *Magic of Spirit-rapping* was describing spiritualism as “a delusion that has driven ten thousand persons mad in the United States”, and Anderson made a similar claim in the newspapers and during his performances of ‘spirit-rapping’.⁶⁷ While Anderson’s numbers were highly questionable, *Chambers’ Journal* cited an American paper that referred to “lunatic asylums, filled with maniacs on the subject of Spiritualism”, and, a few years later when spiritualism was established in Britain, the *North British Review* noted, “it is a fact, that many of the persons who constitute the circles of the spiritualists ... are either insane or on the verge of insanity”.⁶⁸ However, it was not only sceptics that proposed such a link. The claim that spiritualism could lead to insanity was also made by a spiritualist and supporter of Home. In a pamphlet suggesting that insanity could be treated by spiritualism, J. G. Wilkinson (who had already published an account of a Home seance in the *Morning Advertiser* in 1855) admitted, “it is a well-known fact, that spiritualism has the power of producing mental excitement at first in nearly all cases;

⁶⁶ Nenadic, 1990; For a contemporary review of reports by the Commissioner of Lunacy, see *North British Review*, 50, 1869, 123-58.

⁶⁷ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 20, 3; Anderson, n.d., 67-8.

⁶⁸ *Chambers’ Journal*, 6, 1856; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 120; in 1877, spiritualism was still being cited as a prominent cause of insanity (Walkowitz, 1994, 174).

and, in many instances, real insanity. My practise has furnished me with several such instances".⁶⁹ Indeed, it was this fact that made spiritualism, in Wilkinson's eyes, a suitable remedial agent. In addition to "the fact that it can, and does produce insanity: the homoeopathic law, that a moderate dose of that which will cause, will cure, is God's law: therefore Spiritualism will cure insanity". Wilkinson's admission that spiritualism could produce insanity was repeated in the *Journal of Mental Science*, in an article dismissive of Wilkinson's main thesis.⁷⁰ Throughout Home's mediumship, spiritualism seems to have been associated with insanity by some, as can be seen from the frequency with which spiritualist periodicals denied that the former caused the latter.⁷¹ When Robert Dale Owen, one of Home's most famous witnesses, was reported to have become insane as a result of spiritualism, it was pointed out by spiritualists that this was due to the shock of discovering one of the mediums he had trusted was a cheat.⁷² Nevertheless, it is likely that many contemporaries simply regarded this as further evidence of spiritualism being a potential cause of insanity. Indeed, John Ruskin, another of Home's sitters, was to suffer from hallucinations and later insanity, but his condition was not publicly known until well after Home's death. During Home's mediumship, however, while spiritualism was regularly linked with insanity, it was primarily as a cause. Insanity as an explanation for reported seance phenomena was another matter.

4.3.1. Fools and madmen

There is significantly less evidence of insanity being cited as an explanation for reports of seance phenomena. The link between insanity and reports of seance phenomena might have implicitly suggested that the latter was the result of the former, but to what extent were explicit links being made? Certainly, witnesses made references to the

⁶⁹ Wilkinson, 1857.

⁷⁰ *Journal of Mental Science*, 4, 1857, 364.

⁷¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 463; *Human Nature*, 2, 1868, 273; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 427; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1873, 86-8; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 86; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 155; *Medium and Daybreak*, 4, 1873, 2; *Medium and Daybreak*, 6, 1875, 477; *Medium and Daybreak*, 7, 1876, 684, 748, 758, 814.

⁷² *Medium and Daybreak*, 6, 1875, 477.

theory throughout Home's mediumship. In its first year, the *Spiritual Magazine* pointed out that witnesses of Home's phenomena included aristocracy and other celebrities, and asked whether it could be that such people "were and are in the simple ranks of the deluded". Six years later, looking back on the first series of the magazine, the promoters admitted, "they know well enough that the only repute it was likely to bring them was that of being knaves, fools, and madmen", and the labelling of witnesses as 'fools and madmen' was referred to throughout Home's mediumship.⁷³ However, the distinction between the two was not necessarily a simple one. When one sceptical reader of Home's biography sneered "if it finds one reader who believes it, I would point [him] to the lunatic asylum", it is as likely the insult was meant to imply stupidity as insanity.⁷⁴ What seems clear, however, is that sceptics regularly associated the phenomena with some sort of mental failure on the part of the witness. How contemporaries discussed the nature of that mental failure is what concerns this section.

Witnesses denied the charge of being 'fools or madmen' as part of a general stress that the phenomena were not objectively real, but the charge of stupidity also applied to the possibility that they may have been deceived by the medium. A corollary of the 'imposture and delusion' theory was that spiritualists were sometimes seen as 'either impostors or idiots', 'charlatans or imbeciles', 'knaves or fools'.⁷⁵ Even spiritualists could use the term 'knaves or fools' towards those who had sat with fraudulent mediums and this association between being fooled and being foolish has remained part of the debate in psychical research.⁷⁶ However, we are concerned here with the theory that the phenomena were purely subjective, the last chapter having already considered the question of deception by the medium. In any case, the obvious weakness of arguing that Home's witnesses were stupid was that they included well-

⁷³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 311; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 1. See also: Crosland, 1856, 23-4; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 375; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 280; Webster, 1865, 4; *Medium and Daybreak*, 1, 1870, 217.

⁷⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 266.

⁷⁵ See respectively, *Spiritual Magazine*, 1866, 44, Webster, 1865, 4; and: *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 375; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 1; *Medium and Daybreak*, 1, 1870, 260; Alexander, 1871, 60; *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 238; Hall, 1884, 8.

⁷⁶ *Medium and Daybreak*, 3, 1872, 238; Lamont, 1999.

known intellectuals of the day as well as those who, as Dr Gully put it, were “all working in callings in which matters of fact, and not of fancy, especially come under observation”.⁷⁷ Certainly, some witnesses stated that they expected to be thought foolish⁷⁸, but the intellectual calibre of Home’s witnesses was often cited both in support of the reported phenomena, and by sceptics as an obstacle to dismissing the phenomena.⁷⁹ On the other hand, if the intellectual reputation of witnesses might have made the charge of stupidity seem less convincing, there is no reason why it would have been a barrier to the allegation of some form of insanity. Contemporary medical texts referred to forms of delusional insanity that might have been seen as compatible with high intellect. Contrary to idiocy or dementia, which reflected “deficient or depressed conditions of the intellectual constitution”, delusional insanity was seen to exemplify “undue intensity or exaltation of the conceptive and perceptive faculties”, and, in cases of monomania, “the individual affected is rendered incapable of thinking correctly on subjects connected with the particular illusion, while in other respects he betrays no palpable disorder of the mind”.⁸⁰ One did not have to read medical texts to be aware of this point, as it was made in popular periodicals.⁸¹ Given the intellectual status of many of Home’s witnesses, the label of fool might have seemed less plausible than that of madman to many contemporaries.

Certainly, witnesses made references to the possibility. Giving a public lecture on spiritualism, Benjamin Coleman noted that some present “thought that he was a fit subject for a lunatic asylum” and, on another occasion, felt a Member of Parliament had implied the same.⁸² Other witnesses pointed out that while they might be thought mad, they were not, and John Jones noted how, “At one time the public when speaking of a spiritualist would tap their foreheads with the finger and say, “Ah! poor fellow! There’s something wrong here!”. Now, all that feeling is dying out”.⁸³

⁷⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 63.

⁷⁸ Crosland, 1857, 1; Alexander, 1871, 8.

⁷⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 63; Webster, 1865, 6; Alexander, 1871, 60; Hall, 1884, 11.

⁸⁰ Bucknill & Tuke, 1858, 123; see also Pritchard, 1837, 16 for a similar position.

⁸¹ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 60, 1859, 630; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 123; *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 416.

⁸² *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 319.

⁸³ Webster, 1865, 38, Crosland, 1856, 23-4; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 2.

Nevertheless, other witnesses continued to reject insanity as an explanation for Home's phenomena.⁸⁴ While such references do not tell us much about the extent to which contemporaries thought Home's witnesses insane, they do at least indicate that witnesses felt the thought might have crossed their minds.

4.3.2. The language of mental science

More common, however, were references to terms such as delusion and hallucination, both of which were regularly rejected as explanations by witnesses. During Home's mediumship, the term 'delusion' was regularly used as a potential explanation for reports of his phenomena. In 1855, Benjamin Coleman had considered (and subsequently rejected) both 'imposture' and 'delusion' as explanations for Home's phenomena and, throughout his mediumship, 'imposture and delusion' became a catch-all term to cover the various theories that claimed the phenomena were not genuine, a claim that was regularly rejected in spiritualist periodicals.⁸⁵ What witnesses meant by the term 'delusion' is not entirely clear. The term then (as now) could have been used to mean deception generally, and there are instances in which that appears to have been the case.⁸⁶ However, in most cases, individuals distinguished between delusion and imposture suggesting they meant something other than being the victim of deception by someone else, and seem to have meant some form of self-deception or sensory error. What does seem clear is that it was one of a number of ways in which contemporaries referred to the idea that the phenomena witnesses had reported might have been purely subjective experiences. That such subjective experiences might have been caused by being in an excited state - as contemporary medical texts had said of delusions - seems to have concerned some. For example, Dr Gully, who must have been familiar with the medical text in question, stressed "we were neither asleep, nor

⁸⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 10; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1871, 465; *Human Nature*, 7, 1873, 169.

⁸⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 451; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 74; *Human Nature*, 4, 1870, 81; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 201; *Human Nature*, 1, 1871, 443; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1873, 92.

⁸⁶ For example, *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 226, but the term was also used by contemporary conjurors.

intoxicated, nor even excited. We were complete masters of our senses”.⁸⁷ Other witnesses distinguished between imposture and delusion in different terms and, in doing so, ruled out any form of hallucination.⁸⁸

The extent to which contemporaries associated terms such as delusion or hallucination with insanity is difficult to say. After all, the nature of subjective experiences was being discussed in contemporary medical texts at that time, and the terminology was admittedly ambiguous. Bucknill & Tuke (1858), a standard contemporary text on mental science, cited dictionary definitions for ‘hallucination’, ‘illusion’ and ‘delusion’, noting they were “not remarkable for their discrimination”. Following some discussion of possible meanings, ‘hallucination’ was defined as sensing what is not there, as opposed to illusion which was defined as sensing incorrectly what is there, with a third type of delusion amounting to a false belief in which no sensory error was present. Yet, as the text admitted, such distinctions were far from established, and contemporary periodicals agreed that “no sharp line can be drawn between these various forms of illusions, hallucinations, and delusions”.⁸⁹ Given the absence of any agreement on such terms among experts, one can reasonably assume that the same terms would have been at least as flexible for the more general reader.

The periodical press showed a similar preference for terms other than insanity. The *Journal of Mental Science* article referred to above included an account by J. S. Rymer, one of Home’s early hosts, which described a Home seance involving table movements. The writer of the article was Dr Charles Lockhart Robertson, who became Commissioner for Lunacy. However, there was no suggestion that Rymer was a lunatic. Rather, Robertson responded, “These are strong facts, and it is allowing a great deal to say that we think Mr Rymer to be in earnest in stating his belief in them. For ourselves, we entirely disbelieve them”, and suggested Rymer read a college

⁸⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 63; see also: Baker, 1862, 11; *Human Nature*, 4, 1870; Alexander, 1871, 9.

⁸⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 36; *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 140; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 135; Dingwall, 1953, 63; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 135; Alexander, 1871, 9-10.

⁸⁹ Bucknill & Tuke, 1858, 124-8; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 123; see also *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 392.

textbook describing “those immutable laws which the unchanging God has impressed, once for ever, on his creation” so that he might come to share the writer’s “disbelief of those imaginings which tell us of their violation in moving tables”.⁹⁰ Such a position amounted to an a priori view that such phenomena must have been ‘imaginings’ since they could not happen. As increasing numbers of respectable witnesses came forward to attest to such ‘imaginings’, such a position could only have been weakened. Notably, one of these witnesses was Robertson himself, who was converted from his sceptical position by attending a Home seance three years later.⁹¹

Robertson’s use of the term ‘imaginings’ was only one of many ways in which commentators stopped short of accusing witnesses of insanity. Over the following years, periodicals used phrases such as “intellectual condition”, “mental defects”, “excited imagination”, “verge of sanity” and “weak nerves” in relation to Home’s witnesses.⁹² On occasion, the language became more severe, such as when the *Athenaeum*, one of the most sceptical of contemporary periodicals, referred to Jencken’s book as “a really painful exhibition of mental disease”.⁹³ Such offensive terms were rare, however, and more common were articles in periodicals that argued much of the phenomena reported by spiritualists could be explained by forms of delusions, illusions and hallucinations.⁹⁴ While these made general accusations of insanity towards some of the more colourful claims of spiritualists, they did not attempt to explain Home’s phenomena in such terms, and they explicitly stated that many subjective experiences could be the product of a sane mind. Indeed, one point on

⁹⁰ *Journal of Mental Science*, 4, 1857, 385-6.

⁹¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 342.

⁹² See respectively: *Athenaeum*, 1860, February 11, 202; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 66, 1862, 522; *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 190; *Athenaeum*, 1864, April 23, 576; *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 557.

⁹³ *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 556. In 1857, a Catholic periodical had published an article which considered both imposture and hallucination as possible explanations for seance phenomena, framing the latter theory in terms of mental illness. The article first dismissed trickery as an inadequate explanation for the phenomena, then went on, “The same condemnation we must make of that other opinion, which pretends to explain everything by ‘hallucination’. According to this opinion it is not now the juggler who [is responsible]; but it is a disease of the imagination or of the senses which illudes people, and makes them fancy that they see really certain objects, which have no other existence after all than in their own diseased brains”. This definition, however, would hardly have been well-known.

⁹⁴ *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 29-66; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 110-41; *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 387-418; *Cornhill Magazine*, 11, 1865, 472-81; *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 558.

which both the medical texts and periodicals did agree was in noting that delusions, illusions and hallucinations could be the product of a sane mind. The *North British Review* noted that hallucinations and delusions could result from “a great number of morbid states not insanity”, and the *British Quarterly Review* agreed they could be “more or less transitory in a perfectly sound mind”. The *Cornhill Magazine*, which had published an early account of a Home seance in 1860, also pointed to subjective mental states well short of insanity. An article on epidemic hallucinations in Chablais suggested such experiences lay behind reports of seance phenomena, but stressed the normality of such events, stating, “We do not set down those who believe in spiritist and other marvels as knaves or fools, but as victims of a very common disturbance of the faculties that we think deserves serious attention”, noting that “nothing is less certain than any given observation”.⁹⁵ While the language being used was associated with mental illness, periodicals were making explicit distinctions between insanity per se and mental conditions that might be the product of a sane mind, and it was to the latter rather than the former that reports of Home’s phenomena were being attributed.

One can also see elsewhere the more general use of terms associated with mental illness. The term ‘delusion’ (along with the term ‘madness’) had already been used to refer to a diverse range of beliefs viewed by many as credulous. Mackay’s *Memoirs of extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of crowds (1841)* had intended to deal with topics not covered by Scott’s *Letters on demonology and witchcraft (1830)*, but it included such mundane topics as the ‘South Sea bubble’ and ‘Popular admiration for great thieves’. Yet these same topics were referred to as “epidemic maladies” in both the *Journal of Mental Science* and the *Westminster Review*.⁹⁶ When sceptics later referred to spiritualism as an ‘epidemic delusion’, the *Spiritual Magazine* rejected the idea that they were “victims to a delusive epidemic [as] a monstrous folly which no intelligent man will dare at this day to assert, unless he is himself nursing an idle delusion”.⁹⁷ The language may seem to us to be that of mental illness yet, to many

⁹⁵ Pritchard, 1837, 16; Bucknill & Tuke, 1858, 123; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 60, 1859, 625-31; *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 123; *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 416; *Cornhill Magazine*, 11, 1865, 481.

⁹⁶ Mackay, 1841; *Journal of Mental Science*, 4, 1857, 396; *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 65.

⁹⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 73.

contemporaries, the phrase 'epidemic delusion' could equally have meant little more than 'popular error'. Terms associated with mental illness continue to form part of popular discourse and there is no reason to assume that when Victorians used such terms they were seriously accusing individuals of insanity.

One can conclude that there were general associations between spiritualism and insanity, but very little in the way of explicit accusations of insanity towards witnesses of Home. Certainly terms associated with mental illness formed a part of the debate, but the degree of ambiguity surrounding the use of such terms makes it difficult to assume that Home's witnesses were actually considered to be suffering from any mental illness. Indeed, so far as Home's phenomena were seriously attributed to some form of mental condition, distinctions were made between such conditions and insanity. This could only have contributed to the increasing awareness of the complexity of the mind and of mental conditions both among experts and the more general reading public, and would have reinforced the model of a range of altered mental states with madness as one extreme.⁹⁸ However, even if one took the view that otherwise perfectly sane witnesses had been the victims of a hallucination, there were significant implications of such a position. As experimental evidence emerged in support of Home's phenomena, such an explanation would have had to accept that competent scientists were prone to hallucination during experiments. This must have been at least as disturbing as the theory that scientists might be victims of mesmerism. In either case, the competence of scientists to observe facts was in question. When William Barret speculated that some of Crookes' results might be explained by hypnosis or hallucination, Crookes argued that, if such an argument was accepted, it would "entirely stop the whole progress of research in any branch of science".⁹⁹

Given the extraordinary nature of the phenomena reported, it is hardly surprising that contemporaries expressed scepticism about the reports, and attempted to account for them in ways compatible with their worldview. Given the problems associated with doubting the competence of observers, however, it is hardly surprising that sceptics

⁹⁸ Winter, 1998, 46.

⁹⁹ Reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 1876, September 13 (Palfreman, 1979, 224).

expressed doubts about other aspects of the evidence. In addition to debating the reliability of the observation process, contemporaries discussed the value of testimony.

4.4. The problem of testimony and seance phenomena

The status of testimony in the Victorian period was changing with the rise of scientific authority, the worth of testimony being de-valued by a scientific model that stressed testable phenomena.¹⁰⁰ The problem of testimony was also inextricably linked to the question of miracle since David Hume had suggested reporters of miracles were either stupid or lying. Over a century later, Herbert Spencer noted a general association between credulity and lying, and this link was cited in an article on seance phenomena in the *Fortnightly Review*.¹⁰¹ However, the suggestion was not directed towards any of Home's witnesses, and their social and intellectual status was no doubt one reason why such a suggestion would have been felt inappropriate. Yet the problem of testimony remained relevant. When the *Spiritual Magazine* cited the publications of the Dialectical Society and of Crookes as evidence that 1871 had seen more progress, perhaps, than any year since the advent of Modern Spiritualism, it nevertheless complained, "What is to be done with the testimony of highly-intelligent and honourable men? It is a mere trifling and impertinence to say they did not see what they saw, but only thought they saw it".¹⁰²

4.4.1. The question of honesty

Perhaps it should not be surprising that reports of such things as floating tables could provoke a response of sheer incredulity, and some simply stated that they did not believe what was written. In relation to the *Cornhill* narrative of 1860, for example, the

¹⁰⁰ Winter, 1998, 304-5.

¹⁰¹ *Fortnightly Review*, 85, 1874, 88.

¹⁰² *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 1-4.

Literary Gazette stated, “we suspect an entire hoax. The writer gives us full leave to distrust his narrative, and we avail ourselves of the permission to the utmost extent”.¹⁰³ However, despite regular accusations of imposture being directed towards Home’s phenomena, there is very little evidence of the witnesses themselves having been accused of dishonesty. While commentators occasionally raised the question as a possibility, nobody seems to have actually suggested it was the case.¹⁰⁴ On the contrary, several explicitly stated that while they did not share the conclusions of the witnesses, neither did they doubt their integrity, describing Home’s witnesses as of “unimpeachable veracity”, “incapable of falsehood” or “perfectly sincere”.¹⁰⁵ Ironically, perhaps, the most prominent accusations of dishonesty in reporting a Home seance were those directed against David Brewster, who became engaged in a public debate about what he said, and was accused by spiritualists of deliberately playing down the phenomena he had witnessed at a Home seance.¹⁰⁶ Home himself told a Conference of London spiritualists in 1865 that he thought to lie about such matters was unthinkable¹⁰⁷, but even if sceptics thought witnesses were lying, they did not say so in print.

Nevertheless, witnesses of Home referred to the question of honesty both directly and indirectly. Some simply denied the hypothetical charge, asking their readers what motives they could have for lying, while others used pseudonyms such as ‘Verax’, ‘a lover of truth’, and ‘Honestas’.¹⁰⁸ In describing Home seances, some admitted that they did not expect others to take their word for the events they reported, and another noted that his own brother did not believe him.¹⁰⁹ While such statements did not necessarily imply accusations of dishonesty, the gap between trusting the witness but

¹⁰³ *Literary Gazette*, 1860, July 28, 38. Similar remarks can be found in: *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 706; *Athenaeum*, 1863, March 14, 353.

¹⁰⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 41-2; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 190.

¹⁰⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 353; *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 50; *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 557. See also: *Journal of Mental Science*, 4, 1857, 385; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 266; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 27.

¹⁰⁶ See chapter three, pages 48-9.

¹⁰⁷ *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 55.

¹⁰⁸ Rymer, 1857, 38; Alexander, 1871, 42; *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 211; Home, 1863, 251; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 216.

¹⁰⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 20; *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 211; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 342.

not his testimony was made clear by the *Spiritual Magazine* in a criticism of a review of Home's biography that expressed complete faith in the honesty of the witnesses, yet rejected their evidence all the same.¹¹⁰ The same implicit accusation seems to have been felt some years later, following Crookes' experiments with Home, when one spiritualist criticised the scientific establishment for implying that Crookes and Varley were fools or liars, and both Crookes and Varley made similar complaints themselves.¹¹¹ But whatever private views contemporaries held, the accusation of falsehood was not one directed at Home's witnesses in the contemporary press, and this is not particularly surprising. After all, Victorians did not make a habit of public accusations of dishonesty. However, it also seems clear that sceptical contemporaries felt there were alternative explanations. As *Fraser's Magazine* put it, "it is a complete mistake to imagine ... that the respectability, honesty, and good faith of a witness are in any way a sufficient guarantee of his accuracy in reporting a matter of fact. Great allowances must be made for want of observation, for credulity, and the many other mental defects which more or less incapacitate [most] persons of average ability and information".¹¹² Indeed, accounts of seance phenomena seem to have provoked a significant amount of discussion about the value of testimony.

4.4.2. The problem of testimony and Home's phenomena

David Hume's famous essay on miracles had already been debated for a century when Abercrombie wrote his influential *Inquiries concerning the intellectual powers and the investigation of truth*, in its tenth edition by 1840. Knowledge, he pointed out, was not simply based on observation and experience - testimony was fundamental to our worldview. In assessing the credibility of a witness, not only his honesty, but also his opportunity to ascertain facts and his competence to judge their accuracy were cited as basic criteria. Abercrombie also explicitly wrote of accounts of marvellous and miraculous phenomena, and of how one might assess them. In doing so, he noted the

¹¹⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 353.

¹¹¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 465; Crookes, 1874, 21.

¹¹² *Fraser's Magazine*, 65, 1862, 522 .

tension between the limits of personal experience and probability in terms of known natural laws, and stressed that one's conclusions depended on a balance between confidence in the credibility of particular testimony and in the uniformity of nature.¹¹³ As science increasingly diminished the authority of testimony, some repeated Abercrombie's stress of its fundamental role in the acquisition of knowledge, and the tension between the credibility of testimony and the uniformity of nature became a topic of direct relevance to the debate over Home's phenomena. In 1860, Robert Chambers cited both Hume and Abercrombie in his pamphlet 'On Testimony', stressing the importance of testimony, and defending the evidence for Biblical miracles and other extraordinary events. Similarly, J. S. Rymer pointed out that to "deny the facts" because they seemed impossible was to "reject all the rules of evidence by which in this life we test the truth or the falsehood of which is submitted to our consideration".¹¹⁴ It was not just Home's witnesses who made this point. Spiritualist journals repeatedly pointed out how an American professor had stated that, despite having personally observed no seance phenomena at all, the abundance of testimony meant that "either the facts must be admitted to be such as they were reported, or the possibility of certifying facts by human testimony must be given up".¹¹⁵ That testimony of such extraordinary events would be difficult to accept was admitted by the author of the *Cornhill* narrative. However, he argued that "[e]vidence, if it be otherwise trustworthy, is not invalidated by the unlikelihood of that which it attests".¹¹⁶ This, of course, was precisely the point, and the problem of balancing the worth of testimony with its correspondence to natural law, which Abercrombie had pointed to, was given greater attention as a result of seance accounts.

A central theme among sceptics was that testimony in relation to the supernatural was particularly unreliable. From the emergence of Modern Spiritualism, comparisons had been made with witchcraft, and the latter had been seen as an example of how the worth of testimony about extraordinary events had to be treated with particular caution.

¹¹³ Abercrombie, 1840, 70-91.

¹¹⁴ Rymer, 1857, 3.

¹¹⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 372; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 423; *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 325.

¹¹⁶ *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 224.

In the 1870's, testimony both generally, and of seance phenomena in particular, received more detailed attention. *Fraser's Magazine* noted that testimony often suffered from "extreme inaccuracy, the exaggeration with which nearly all persons in ordinary conversation relate what they have seen or heard", but that "[i]n periods of great excitement it is evidently hopeless to expect any approach to accuracy".¹¹⁷ W. B. Carpenter wrote two articles for the *Contemporary Review* on the subject. In the first, he stressed the subjective nature of belief in testimony, noting the role of personal prejudices in assessing testimony that conflicted with one's worldview. In the second he illustrated, though perhaps inadvertently, his own prejudices in relation to Home's phenomena. Of Crookes' claim that he had witnessed Home levitating, Carpenter admitted, "I can regard his statements in no other light, than as evidence of the degree in which certain minds are led by the influence of a strong 'prepossession,' to believe in the creations of their own visual imagination".¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, he also stressed that the prepossession to believe was such that testimony about the supernatural was especially unreliable. So far as contemporaries accepted this argument, there was an obvious implication. Such a position weakened the case for Biblical miracles, and this point was regularly made, not only by spiritualists. No less an authority than Lord Amberley - author of *Analysis of Religious Belief* (1876) - pointed out that the evidence for spiritualist phenomena was greater than it was for Biblical miracles, and that to reject the former was to reject all human testimony relating to the supernatural, including that in the Bible.¹¹⁹ This topic will be dealt with in more detail in chapter six. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to note that the debate around seance accounts, in addition to pointing up fundamental problems relating to the nature of testimony and belief, also linked directly to the historicity of Biblical miracles.

Some specific aspects of testimony were also discussed. Abercrombie had pointed to the greater reliability of collective first-hand testimony, and witnesses agreed. William Wilkinson admitted second-hand testimony could not be as convincing as personal experience, and this point was exemplified by the cases of Elliotson and Robertson,

¹¹⁷ *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 522.

¹¹⁸ *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 123-45; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1875, 285.

¹¹⁹ *Fortnightly Review*, 85, 1874, 89-90. See also: M.P., 1871, 53; *Westminster Review*, 98, 72, 461.

who had dismissed testimony of Home's phenomena but became convinced after attending his seances. Varley noted how the eye could deceive and warned not to accept the testimony of a single individual as conclusive.¹²⁰ On the other hand, sceptics noted discrepancies in the testimony about Home given to the Dialectical Society, and suggested exaggeration present in an account of a levitation by Home given by Lord Lindsay. Carpenter, noting the subjective nature of belief, argued that a believer and a sceptic would produce quite diverse accounts and, speaking of the same reported levitation by Home, stated, "a whole party of believers will affirm that they saw Mr Home float out of one window and in at another, while a single honest sceptic declares that Mr Home was sitting in his chair all the time."¹²¹ While no doubt theoretically plausible, the example was unfortunate since all present agreed that Home floated out of the window, and A. R. Wallace pointed this out in the most direct terms.¹²² Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that public debate over such phenomena raised awareness of the problem of testimony. In 1871, *Fraser's Magazine* was observing that, "[t]he requirements of our age as to the amount and quality of the evidence necessary to produce credibility differ so widely from that which satisfied our forefathers, that the change is producing a silent revolution in history, science and even theology", and over the following years periodicals published several articles discussing in depth the nature of testimony and belief, particularly in relation to supernatural phenomena.¹²³

4.5. Summary and conclusions

The discussion over whether Home's phenomena might have been purely subjective

¹²⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 221; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 160; *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 420. See also Chambers, 1859.

¹²¹ *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 556-7; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1875, 286.

¹²² *Fraser's Magazine*, 1877, 697.

¹²³ *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 522; *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 123-45; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1875, 279-95, 440-6; *Fraser's Magazine*, 16, 1877, 541-64, 694-706; *Fortnightly Review*, 19, 1877, 479-719; *Fortnightly Review*, 22, 1877, 355-76; *Fortnightly Review*, 22, 1877, 680-97, 792-810.

raised fundamental problems about the nature of scientific and other evidence. Witnesses consistently stressed that the phenomena were observed facts, and that these facts were independent of any theory. In doing so, they were appealing to the dominant view of the scientific method. Yet most of their contemporaries, including most scientists, rejected the facts. While the growing awareness of the vulnerability of the senses might have offered a possible explanation to some for the reported phenomena, even those sceptics most qualified to write on this subject failed to suggest the phenomena were some form of optical illusion. In raising the question of who was most competent to ascertain facts, both sceptics and, increasingly, spiritualists stressed scientific competence. With the emergence of limited experimental support for Home's phenomena, and a growing recognition in the press that some explanation was necessary, the response of some scientists was to question the competence of the experimenters, and this will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. Others suggested the phenomena were the result of mesmerism. Such an explanation had already been unanimously rejected by all of Home's witnesses, some of whom were among the most noted experts on the subject, and Crookes and Wallace continued to dismiss the idea. Yet even for those who accepted the theory, it presented a serious problem as it undermined the role of the scientist as a reliable observer. This was equally the case for those who dismissed the phenomena as a form of mental failure. While contemporaries certainly appear to have linked spiritualism and insanity, few suggested the latter as an explanation for the former. As for those who regarded witnesses as sane but victims of a hallucination, the emergence of experimental evidence by respected scientists must have severely weakened such a theory. Indeed, for most of Home's mediumship, the intellectual status of so many of Home's witnesses must have made it difficult to dismiss them as unreliable observers, but attributing experimental results to hypnosis or hallucination can only have been harder. It is not simply that contemporaries would have found such a theory less plausible, it is the implications of the theory itself. For to accept that respected scientists could not be trusted to observe facts was to question the authority of science itself. To make matters worse, reports of seance phenomena also raised fundamental questions about the nature of testimony, and these questions were not easily answered, not least because

they linked directly to the historicity of Christian miracles. The implications of this will be discussed more fully in chapter six. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to note that there was no straightforward way to dismiss the phenomena as purely subjective experiences. Witnesses rejected these theories as utterly inadequate and, even if one accepted them, they raised larger problems than they solved. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that contemporaries preferred to frame Home's phenomena in another way, and to attribute them to trickery. Yet, as the last chapter pointed out, no adequate conjuring explanation was available either.

Home remains something of an enigma partly because, to this day, sceptics have failed to explain adequately how he produced his phenomena. To the Victorians, his phenomena were at least as puzzling, and significantly more topical, and attempts to explain how they were produced occupied both the minds of his contemporaries and a significant amount of column space in the periodical press. So far as the latter is representative of the former, most contemporaries regarded Home as a trickster, and supported this view by claiming that conjurors could explain the details. Conjurors, however, do not appear to have known what was going on. Their failure to explain, no doubt along with the general rise of scientific authority, led to the discourse increasingly becoming a scientific one, yet mainstream science provided no additional clues. Though many contemporaries no doubt would have accepted the broad accusation of trickery against Home, anyone comparing the available explanations with the available evidence would have become increasingly aware of the gap between the two. Those who had attended Home's seances were certainly aware of this gap, as were spiritualists more generally. In terms of understanding Victorian spiritualist beliefs, this is important. When Victorian spiritualists articulated their beliefs, they repeatedly stressed that they had become convinced by the evidence, that is, by seance phenomena. As nobody else seems to have been able to provide an adequate alternative explanation, perhaps it is time more credit was given to the reasons they themselves gave for their beliefs. Such an acknowledgement does not require acceptance that Home's phenomena were genuine, but it does challenge the assumption that the witnesses were gullible or irrational. Psychologists and anthropologists have often

written on paranormal and magic beliefs in an attempt to explain what they regard as erroneous beliefs.¹²⁴ It has been argued that such a position can be a hindrance to understanding views that conflict with our own.¹²⁵ So far as Victorian spiritualism is concerned, one need not form any conclusion on the authenticity of the phenomena to acknowledge that Victorians could have been convinced by evidence that eluded explanation by some of the most eminent conjurors and scientists of the period. The proposal that the phenomena were purely subjective was a reflection of the lack of any alternative explanation, and the failure of conjurors to supply an explanation could only have increased the authority of scientists in such matters. Yet the limits of such an explanation have been described. Evidence from areas of the contemporary press suggests a growing awareness not only that it was the job of scientists to explain the phenomena, but that they had some way to go yet. As the *Times* put it, “our scientific men have signally failed to do their duty by the public, which looks to them for its facts”.¹²⁶ How scientists, witnesses and the press dealt with this situation is what concerns the next chapter.

¹²⁴ For example: Alcock, 1981; Gilovich, 1991; Zusne & Jones, 1989.

¹²⁵ See Wilson (1967) on magic beliefs and Wooffitt (1992) on paranormal beliefs.

¹²⁶ *Times*, 1872, December 26, 5 to 1873, January 6, 7. See also *Evening Standard*, 1872, January 15, 4.

5. A crisis of evidence?

In a letter to the *Times*, a sceptical scientist, Henry Dircks, mocked spiritualists for attributing seance phenomena to spirits simply because they could not explain how else the phenomena were produced. The following day, a spiritualist responded, “Dircks says. “We believe because we cannot explain”. Would it not be at least equally true to say that he disbelieves because he cannot explain”.¹ Indeed, throughout this period, spiritualists regularly criticised those who dismissed the facts because they did not fit with any scientific theory. The last two chapters have noted the limits of attempts to provide normal explanations for Home’s phenomena, and it is hardly surprising that so many of his witnesses dismissed imposture and delusion as explanations, and concluded that they were attributable to spirits. However, by no means all of Home’s witnesses were spiritualists, and many took the position of believing the facts without being able to explain them. This chapter considers those who accepted the phenomena as genuine without attributing them to the spirits, and the wider relevance of evidence for anomalous phenomena that challenged the scientific worldview of the mid-Victorians.

5.1. Anomalous forces in Victorian Britain

Victorians took a keen interest in reported events that were considered anomalous in

¹ *Times*, 1873, January 2, 7; *Times*, 1873, January 4, 10.

relation to orthodox science. The most important, of course, were those central to the Christian faith, Biblical miracles. However, as the next chapter will discuss, these held a unique position in the minds of Victorians. Other anomalous phenomena, such as those associated with magic and mesmerism, were treated somewhat differently.

5.1.1. Magic and mesmerism

For most of the Victorian period, all manner of anomalous phenomena (and beliefs in them) were consigned to the past. In 1830, Walter Scott's *Letters on demonology and witchcraft* had noted that "the present fashion of the world seems to be ill suited for students of this fantastic nature; and the most ordinary mechanic has learning sufficient to laugh at the figments which in former times were selected by persons far advanced in the deepest knowledge of the age".² What Scott said of witchcraft was echoed by David Brewster and several others, and was extended to fortune-telling, spectres and various superstitions. Brewster's *Letters on natural magic* (first published in 1832) was presented as a humble supplement to Scott, and Davenport's *Sketches of Imposture, Deception and Credulity* (first published in 1837) was presented as a humble supplement to Brewster. These and subsequent texts - such as Mackay's *Memoirs of extraordinary delusions* (first published in 1841) and Godwin's *Lives of the necromancers* (first published in 1843) offered natural explanations for what had been seen in the past as supernatural phenomena, and all from what the authors presented as a more enlightened position, the story of the decline of superstition being repeated most forcibly in Lecky's *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1865).³

Nevertheless, interest in anomalous phenomena continued, with both magic and magic beliefs often being associated with areas beyond modern urban Britain; not only with the past and, as chapter six will discuss, with the East, but with areas closer to home.

² Scott, 1830, 320.

³ Scot, 1830; Brewster, 1832; Davenport, 1837; Mackay, 1841; Godwin, 1843; Lecky, 1865. A similar line was also taken in: Religious Tract Society, 1848; Colquhoun, 1851; Draper, 1864.

The persistence of magic beliefs among the uneducated in some rural areas of Britain continued to be remarked upon. “Those who are not in daily intercourse with the peasantry”, a Victorian commentator noted, “can hardly be made to believe or comprehend the hold that charms, witchcraft, wise men and other relics of heathendom have upon the people”.⁴ John Henry Anderson, the famous conjuror and public debunker of psychic phenomena, told of how a small town near his native Aberdeen had imprisoned him in 1842 for bewitching a local landlady.⁵ Indeed, the north of Scotland was often associated with clairvoyance and second sight. Reports of second sight had been common in parts of Scotland from the 17th century, those that recorded such phenomena often being clergymen seeking to present evidence of survival of the human spirit.⁶ Georgian visitors to the Highlands, such as Boswell and Johnson, had treated such accounts seriously.⁷ The most renowned of Highland prophets, Kenneth Mackenzie, the so-called ‘Braham Seer’, reputedly predicted the Jacobite defeat at Culloden, several decades before it happened. Yet it was not until a century after Culloden that the Braham Seer’s predictions were published.⁸ The chronology not only makes the prophecy less impressive, but suggests that Victorians took a particular interest in such folklore, and this interest continued.⁹ Indeed, in the 1890’s, second sight would be the subject of an enquiry by the Society for Psychical Research.¹⁰ By the end of the Victorian period, a growing interest in the occult emerged, reflected in the founding of the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and in the writings of prominent figures such as H. P. Blavatsky and Anna Kingsford, but this did not produce significant evidence of anomalous phenomena. In any case, it is beyond the scope of this study.¹¹

For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that mid-Victorians regularly

⁴ *Notes and Queries*, ii, 1856, 415.

⁵ Frost, 1876, 238-41.

⁶ Cohn, 1999, 148.

⁷ Cohn, 1999, 158.

⁸ Miller, 1852; Mackenzie, 1899.

⁹ MacBain, 1887; 1889; Campbell, J. G., 1900; 1902; MacGregor, 1901.

¹⁰ *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 10, 1894, 25, 422.

¹¹ Nevertheless, the spiritualist and Eastern roots of the Theosophical Society will be discussed in chapter seven.

expressed sceptical views about all manner of anomalous phenomena, and those that attracted interest seem to have been associated with areas beyond the urban world of the Victorians; with the past, with the Orient, with the Highlands of Scotland. Similarly, as the next chapter will discuss, for the majority of Victorian Christians, the age of miracles was past, while more recent miracles, such as those associated with Roman Catholicism, were regularly dismissed as the product of imposture and delusion. However, not all reported anomalous phenomena were dismissed in this way. Some phenomena previously thought to be supernatural were framed according to contemporary knowledge of science. For example, knowledge of optics or mental science allowed ghostly apparitions to be attributed to illusion or hallucination. As the *Cornhill Magazine* put it, “[w]e do not set down those who believe in spiritist and other marvels as knaves or fools, but as victims of a very common disturbance of the faculties that we think deserves serious attention”.¹² The question was whether certain phenomena could be attributed to causes consistent with natural law, and individuals did not always agree on this. Nowhere was this more evident than in the debate about mesmerism, a topic of great interest to the early Victorians.

The last chapter described how mesmerism began to attract significant attention in Britain in the 1830’s, with demonstrations of mesmerism taking place in theatres, lecture halls, and private homes. Today, of course, one would frame such demonstrations as hypnosis, but to the early Victorians, this was new and startling, and the mechanisms that might be involved were hotly debated over the following decades. Some respected scientists were active proponents of mesmerism, notably John Elliotson, Professor of Medicine at University College London, who carried out demonstrations in his lectures. That this led to his resignation illustrates that he was hardly representative of his colleagues.¹³ However, as Alison Winter has shown, mesmerism was not so much an unorthodox or pseudo-science as an area of scientific investigation that helped shape the boundaries of scientific orthodoxy.¹⁴ To what extent mesmeric phenomena were viewed as anomalous would of course depend upon where

¹² *Cornhill Magazine*, 9, 1865, 481.

¹³ Oppenheim, 1988, 212.

¹⁴ Winter, 1998.

one drew such boundaries, and there was no consensus on that subject among scientists at that time, much less so among the wider public. But it also depended upon the nature of the phenomena being attributed to mesmerism, as some were more clearly challenging to existing scientific knowledge than others. For example, mesmerism had been shown to be an effective anaesthetic, but when some mesmerized subjects claimed to be able to foresee the future or read the minds of others, such reports were often dismissed as imposture and delusion, in much the same way as seance phenomena would later be dismissed. Increasingly, aspects of mesmerism came to be accepted. Mackay (1841), for example, considered “the delusion [of mesmerism] to be fairly exploded”, but revised his position in a later edition.¹⁵ No doubt this shift was partly influenced by the continuing scientific investigations and, gradually, James Braid’s theory of neurohypnotism came to be accepted by mainstream science. What is significant here is that Braid differed from the majority of those studying mesmerism in that he dismissed the existence of a mesmeric fluid that passed from mesmerizer to subject. His proposal that mesmeric phenomena originated in the mind of the subject was considered significantly more compatible with Newtonian laws. According to Braid’s view, there was nothing anomalous about mesmerism, and mesmeric phenomena became increasingly acceptable as facts as they came to be framed in line with the contemporary scientific view of how the world worked. Mesmerism could also be proposed as a scientific explanation for other anomalous phenomena, and this took various forms. Colquhoun’s *An History of Magic*, for example, attributed such things as clairvoyance and spiritual healing to mesmerism. Ennemoser’s *The History of Magic* was translated by William Howitt in 1854, himself a prominent Christian spiritualist, who attributed such phenomena to a natural mechanism such as magnetism under spiritual or Divine guidance. But so far as the scientific establishment was concerned, the existence of such a physical fluid passing between individuals, whether it was called mesmeric, electro-magnetic or anything else, was not considered compatible with a scientific view of the world.

¹⁵ Mackay, 1841, 403; Mackay, 1852, 344

5.2. Seance phenomena as natural, not supernatural

Those who sought to attribute seance phenomena to natural forces differed significantly on the forces they felt were involved. Most scientists rejected a mesmeric fluid in favour of natural forces more compatible with existing scientific knowledge. A few scientists argued in favour of such a fluid, and argued that it was an addition to existing scientific knowledge. The majority of Victorians, less informed about existing scientific knowledge, must have found a physical fluid theory more plausible. They would have seen electricity and magnetism being applied in radically new ways, most obviously in the rapid spread of the electric telegraph that now allowed them to communicate over distances and at speeds never previously imagined. The limits of these invisible forces must have been wondered at. The public also had access to lecturers and pamphlets arguing a fluid theory, with the names of prominent scientists such as Elliotson and Gregory to back them up. But they also had access to a periodical press that was significantly more sceptical about such a force. To attribute seance phenomena to natural rather than supernatural forces may have been a rejection of the spiritualist claim, but it was no less problematic, and particularly so in the case of Home's phenomena.

5.2.1. Seance phenomena attributed to natural forces

Prior to Home's arrival in Britain, a number of theories had been offered in an attempt to explain seance phenomena in terms of natural forces. For the most part, such forces were in line with the mainstream scientific worldview. Table-tipping and table-turning had been attributed by Carpenter to *ideomotor action* resulting from a state of *expectant attention* on the part of the performer. The table moved, it was argued, as a result of unconscious muscular action provoked by anticipation of the movement. He presented the theory at the Royal Institution in 1852 and, in the following year, in the *Quarterly Review*.¹⁶ By that time, Faraday had already carried out an experiment to test the

¹⁶ *Quarterly Review*, 93, 1853, 501-57.

theory, and the success of this experiment was well publicised.¹⁷ Carpenter also coined the term ‘unconscious cerebration’, by which he meant the ability of the brain to hold and access information of which the individual has no conscious knowledge. Such a process, it was argued, could explain how a medium might be able to demonstrate knowledge of information that he did not believe he had. Carpenter continued to espouse his theories throughout his career, regularly offering natural explanations for seance phenomena.¹⁸ Such natural forces were clearly presented as being in perfect harmony with the currently understood Newtonian universe. No doubt this is one reason they were commended by the scientific press.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the emergence of previously unknown processes to explain seance phenomena must have raised awareness that such phenomena might lead to science discovering new information about how the world worked. This point was not lost on Crookes, who noted criticism of his own ‘psychic force’ often rested on acceptance of other new forces, such as Hamilton’s ‘latent thought’, Laycock’s ‘reflex action of the brain’, and Carpenter’s ‘ideo-motor’, and that not all these forces were accepted by physiologists.²⁰ However, such forces were not offered as an explanation for Home’s phenomena. While regularly cited in relation to less impressive seance phenomena, such as table-tipping and table-turning, ideomotor action could hardly account for such things as the levitation of a heavy dining room table. At no point did Carpenter (or anybody else for that matter) attempt to explain Home’s phenomena in terms of ideomotor action, unconscious cerebration, or any similar process. Rather, Carpenter relied upon an indirect and unsubstantiated allegation of fraud by citing other mediums who had been caught cheating. The weakness of this argument has been discussed in chapter three. For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that, while some of the less impressive seance phenomena were being attributed to newly-discovered psychological and physiological processes that were consistent with the current scientific worldview, Home’s phenomena were not, even by the most active sceptics of the period.

¹⁷ For example: Faraday, 1853; *Times*, 1853, July 4, 8; *Athenaeum*, 1853, July 2, 801; lecture at Royal Institution, February 27, 1857.

¹⁸ *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 301-353; *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 123-45; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 280-95; *Fraser's Magazine*, 15, 1877, 135-57, 382-405; *Fraser's Magazine*, 16, 1877, 541-64.

¹⁹ *Athenaeum*, 1871, October 28, 556.

²⁰ Crookes, 1874, 49-50.

At the same time, some had attributed seance phenomena to currently unknown natural forces less compatible with the Newtonian universe. The notion of an unknown force capable of causing action at a distance had been most prominent among those involved in mesmerism. Many names had been given to this force (including mesmeric, magnetic, electric, odylic and odic), but William Gregory had regarded these processes as essentially the same.²¹ While some contemporaries attributed the phenomena of Home to mesmerism, most were referring to an invisible physical force that produced subjective experiences among sitters, and this has already been discussed in chapter four. However, the belief in the existence of an invisible physical force capable of affecting people and objects at a distance led some to conclude that the physical phenomena reported in seances were objectively real and directly attributable to this force. Some of the earliest texts on table-turning had attributed raps and small table movements to the same physical force described in mesmerism.²² Yet, while such relatively small-scale phenomena may have been more easily accommodated by such an explanation, this view did not attract many adherents during the period of Home's mediumship in Britain. William Howitt, for example, rejected the odylic force theory as "useless" to explain the variety and nature of seance phenomena.²³

Nevertheless, others attributed both mental and physical phenomena to a mass of odylic vapours, and the philosopher Charles Bray wrote that thought rays were the cause of various spiritualistic phenomena and, by being converted back into the grosser modes of energy from which they began, were capable of producing impressive physical phenomena, including the levitation of the human body.²⁴ As one might expect, reactions to such a theory in the periodical press were somewhat dismissive. The *Athenaeum* responded by coming to the defence of Newtonian cause-and-effect, noting that "[u]p to this time, the efforts of scientific men have been directed to explain an orderly world; but if the "mind-force," with its relatives, begin to behave in the lawless manner described by Mr Bray, [it] will certainly result in a great

²¹ Gregory, 1851, 186ff.

²² For example: Anon, 1853; Koch, n.d.

²³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 407.

²⁴ Guppy, 1863; Bray, 1867; Podmore, 1902, ii, 172.

universal Bedlam. Incoherence and inconsistency will be the rule”.²⁵ Meanwhile, the *Leader* simply expressed its regret and surprise to find Bray “in such company”.²⁶

While these writers did not base their theories on having witnessed Home, the medium was the most prominent of those who produced phenomena for the investigation of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society. This was the first organised scientific investigation into the phenomena yet its conclusion that some phenomena demonstrated “that motion may be produced in solid bodies without material contact, by some hitherto unrecognised force”²⁷ could hardly have been more vague. The most influential proponent of a new natural force was William Crookes, who proposed the theory as a direct result of having carried out experiments with Home. The results of these experiments, which involved the astronomer William Huggins and the former M.P. Serjeant Cox, were published in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. While Huggins declined to draw conclusions about the results, both Crookes and Cox advocated a ‘psychic force’ theory to explain Home’s phenomena.²⁸ Spiritualists pointed out that there was nothing particularly new about such a force, and pointed to Biblical evidence and more recent reports of phenomena. What was new about Crookes theory, however, was its ostensible scientific basis. Crookes’ article appeared in a respected scientific journal, attracting the attention of the wider scientific establishment and, as the last chapter discussed, their primary response was to question the authenticity of the evidence rather than the worth of the theory. This is hardly surprising as Crookes’ claim was meaningless unless one accepted the facts. Indeed, Crookes offered little in the way of theory beyond the term he employed. As he put it, the term ‘psychic force’ was as good as any other, but as for “the correlation existing between that and other forces of nature, it would be wrong to hazard the most vague hypothesis”.²⁹ What he did stress, however, was that Home’s phenomena were the result of a natural force, and Cox made the same point. In the *Athenaeum*, Cox stressed that he was not a convert to spiritualism and that he and other “assertors of a Psychic Force ... hold it to

²⁵ *Athenaeum*, 1867, February 2, 150.

²⁶ *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 43.

²⁷ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 12-13.

²⁸ Crookes, 1871; Cox, 1876.

²⁹ Crookes, 1874, 21.

be a purely physical phenomenon, and wholly within the domain of science”.³⁰ It is significant that, in the absence of any theory, they nevertheless stressed that natural forces were responsible for the phenomena, and this strong preference for a natural agent was one which this chapter will discuss further. Crookes and Cox, however, were by no means representative of Home’s witnesses in their confident assertions. On the contrary, evidence suggests little more than a reluctance on the part of many witnesses to admit supernatural agency.

5.2.2. Reluctance to admit supernatural agency

As the last two chapters have shown, nearly all of the witnesses who expressed written views about Home’s phenomena dismissed theories involving deception and self-deception. However, by no means all of them admitted the phenomena were the result of spiritual intervention. Many ruled out trickery but simply did not remark on agency in the available sources. Of these witnesses, some of their accounts include remarks that suggest they were spiritualists³¹, but most do not, and simply go no further than dismissing trickery³² or state only that they were unable to explain the phenomena.³³ To what extent this reflected a final position is impossible to know, though presumably it was not for those who called for further study.³⁴ Of those witnesses who made statements relating to agency, some seem inconsistent. For example, one referred to “so-called Spiritualist phenomena” but noted he was “no longer a materialist”³⁵, while another claimed to be “sceptical about spiritual tricks”, “inclined towards [a natural force] theory”, yet described a seance in which he identified a particular spirit.³⁶ However, for the most part, the language of these witnesses was consistent, if not

³⁰ *Athenaeum*, 1871, November 11, 622.

³¹ *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 17; *Human Nature*, 1, 1870, 91-2; *Human Nature*, 1, 1870, 131-3; *Human Nature*, 1, 1870, 133-6; *Human Nature*, 1, 1870, 191.

³² *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 266; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 336; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 461-2; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 123-4; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 129-32; Zorab, unpub’d, 105; Home, 1888, 159; Bright, 1930, 276.

³³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 233; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 224.

³⁴ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 6; Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 42-3.

³⁵ *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 132-3.

³⁶ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 223-4.

precise, in its reluctance to admit supernatural agency. Some affirmed the genuineness of the phenomena but explicitly declined to draw conclusions about agency. One witness had “not yet found a place in my system for the phenomena, but that they were genuine phenomena, is settled in my mind”.³⁷ Another witness “left it for science to explain”, while another “express[ed] no opinion as to the cause”, and others made similar disclaimers.³⁸ Other witnesses stated they did not believe the phenomena to be spiritual. William Gregory, for example, told spiritualists in 1856 he was inclined towards the spiritual hypothesis but was not entirely convinced and repeated this position in 1863.³⁹ Another witness wrote to Home, explaining that “while admitting the extraordinary character of the phenomena that occur when you are present, I never could feel convinced that they emanated from the volition of the spirits”.⁴⁰ Some witnesses explicitly stated they did not accept that the phenomena were spiritual⁴¹, others were not yet convinced.⁴² According to Home’s widow, several others for whom we have no first-hand evidence were convinced that the phenomena were genuine without admitting spiritual agency.⁴³

Having accepted that the phenomena were genuine, but not that they were supernatural, presumably these witnesses considered some sort of natural force theory likely though they did not say so. Yet even those witnesses who explicitly framed the phenomena as the result of some kind of new natural force were not particularly clear. Dr Gully suggested that the physical phenomena might be the result of a new physical force⁴⁴ but large-scale phenomena such as those associated with Home were considered by some witnesses as beyond the influence of such forces.⁴⁵ Others simply stated that they preferred a natural cause to a supernatural one.⁴⁶

³⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 84-86.

³⁸ *Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 43; Home, 1888, 201; see also: Home, 1863, 174; Baker, 1862, Home, 1888, 87.

³⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 451.

⁴⁰ Home, 1888, 137.

⁴¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 151; *The Spiritualist*, 3, 1873, 72.

⁴² *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 98; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 66; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 383.

⁴³ Home, 1888, 129.

⁴⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 66.

⁴⁵ Zorab, unpub’d, 26.

⁴⁶ Alexander, 1871, 48; *Human Nature*, 6, 1873, 162; *Nineteenth Century*, 27, 1890, 576-81.

Even during the London Dialectical Society investigation, witnesses remained ambiguous about the agency involved. Edwin Arnold told the Society he was not against the idea of supernatural agency but, for him, it was not a proved fact, and he inclined toward the phenomena being an “initiatory demonstration of mental and vital power not yet comprehended”.⁴⁷ Lord Lytton was more positive, if not very specific, when he warned the Society against prematurely concluding supernatural agency, and explained that his experience had led him to conclude the phenomena “were traceable to material influences of the nature of which we are ignorant”.⁴⁸ Several years later, another witness stated simply that the phenomena were due to an invisible agent “capable of going out of [Home’s] person and operating at a considerable distance from it”.⁴⁹

What is striking here is the ambiguity with which witnesses framed the phenomena as the result of natural forces. Most who stopped short of concluding supernatural agency only implicitly framed the phenomena as due to a natural force, and most of those who were explicit were extremely ambiguous. Given Crookes’ own reluctance to theorise, this is not particularly surprising, but it does point up the sheer lack of theoretical support for this position. As was noted above, the rejection of facts in the absence of an appropriate theory was argued to be unscientific, and sceptics who rejected the evidence of Home’s mediumship were criticised for doing so on the basis that there was no theory available both in the spiritualist and general periodical press.⁵⁰ Yet many of those who accepted the facts nevertheless rejected the spiritual theory in favour of a natural force without theoretical support.

While the nature of the sources make simple classification difficult, there were roughly as many witnesses who stopped short of concluding Home’s phenomena were spiritual, as there were that explicitly concluded spiritual agency. Given the initial scepticism regularly referred to by witnesses, and the uncertainty about agency expressed above, it is quite likely that some of the witnesses changed their views over

⁴⁷ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 258-9.

⁴⁸ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 240.

⁴⁹ *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 123.

⁵⁰ *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 716; *Times*, 1873, January 4, 10.

time. Dr Gully, for example, wrote in 1861, “whilst I obstinately stand up for the integrity of my senses during my observation of the wonders above related, my inner senses cannot but observe many gaps that must be filled up before the bridge between the spiritual body’s life here in the flesh, and its life elsewhere out of the flesh, can be finished”.⁵¹ An account some years later of a seance with another medium makes it clear that the gaps had by then been filled⁵², and it is quite possible other that witnesses who stated they were not yet convinced of spiritual agency became convinced later. However, changes of view could have occurred in either direction. Certainly, Crookes seems to have changed his views over time.⁵³ Nevertheless, there is a surprising lack of evidence of changing views in the sources. Whether this is a reflection of remarkable consistency, or simply of lack of evidence of change, it is worth bearing in mind that individuals did not necessarily hold to the positions expressed in the sources cited.

It is also worth bearing in mind that fear of public derision may have influenced statements. Certainly this is what Home’s widow claimed of some witnesses.⁵⁴ Yet this is hardly a sufficient explanation. Firstly, there was no need to make any public statement in the first place, and in publicly asserting that the phenomena were genuine an individual was already open to the charge of imposture and delusion. Secondly, many made use of pseudonyms in an attempt to avoid this problem, and the effectiveness of such a device would not have been affected by the content of the statement. Finally, a number of witnesses rejected the spiritual theory in private letters to Home himself. The fact that so many witnesses made statements both publicly and privately in which they accepted Home’s phenomena were genuine, but refused to accept his explanation for them, even in the absence of another explanation, surely suggests a strong reluctance to admit supernatural agency for reasons other than fear of public derision.

Indeed, there seems to have been a general preference for natural rather than

⁵¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 66.

⁵² *The Spiritualist*, 3, 1873, 68-9.

⁵³ Fournier d’Albe, 1923.

⁵⁴ Home, 1888, 138ff.

supernatural agency even among those who were not entirely convinced of the authenticity of the phenomena. As the last two chapters have shown, most of the periodical press framed the phenomena as the result of imposture and delusion and, in doing so, rejected the notion that they were genuine. However, as a degree of scientific support emerged for Home's phenomena, greater credence was given to their authenticity. Certainly, this was little more than a growing recognition that there might be something in it after all, and even this view was by no means universal. However, so far as the periodical press discussed the notion that Home's phenomena might be genuine, there seems to have been a clear preference for natural rather than supernatural agency. During the debate in the *Pall Mall Gazette* between John Tyndall and Home, a letter to the paper criticised Tyndall's dichotomy between spiritual agency and fraud, pointing out that a natural force was more probable. Letters to the *Times* and *Nature* also expressed their preference for a natural agency over a supernatural one, as did a *Times* editorial. Similarly, in the light of the Dialectical Society Report, the *Echo* stated, 'If there is any truth in these phenomena - and in the teeth of the testimony of men like Mr Wallace the eminent naturalist, it seems rash and presumptuous to say peremptorily that there is none - the force that produces them, be what it may, is as strictly a *natural* force as gravitation or electricity" [original italics].⁵⁵ The significance of this preference for a natural agency over a supernatural one will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter. First, however, it is necessary to consider how scientists responded to this notion of a new natural force.

5.3. The challenge to the scientific worldview

A few months after reports of Home's seances first appeared in the newspapers, an article in *Chambers' Journal* stated, "If this be a world of natural law, as most enlightened persons believe it to be, it is impossible that such things can be realities:

⁵⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1868, May 20, 3; *Times*, 1873, January 2, 7; *Nature*, 1871, 279-80; *Times*, 1872, December 26, 5; *Echo* quoted in London Dialectical Society, 1873, 7.

they can only be some form of delusion or fallacy”.⁵⁶ The author of this article, Robert Chambers, was shortly to be converted from this position of scepticism through attending seances with Home, and went on to become a close friend to the medium. Others, however, expressed greater anxiety over the implications of such phenomena. The *Saturday Review* admitted not all the reported facts had been explained, and noted their conflict with the known laws of nature, stressing that “[u]nless such laws are absolute ... all confidence in cause and effect vanishes ... Chaos has come again. The reign of Chance is inaugurated”. Some years later, the *Athenaeum* made precisely the same point.⁵⁷ Such was the perceived potential threat of seance phenomena to the scientific worldview. The threat became all the more real, however, when Home’s phenomena came to be backed by some respected scientists from the late 1860’s onwards.

5.3.1. Scientific method versus scientific worldview

It was in defence of the natural order that the physicist and former student of Faraday, John Tyndall, entered the debate following the Lyon-Home trial of 1868. Tyndall expressed his concern that, “[i]n the public courts of England men with heavy scientific appendages to their names had testified, on oath, their conviction that the phenomena reputed to manifest themselves in the presence, and through the agency, of Mr Home are “not due to the operation of any of the known laws of nature”. This solemn testimony had been circulated through the length and breadth of the land”.⁵⁸ Tyndall was one of several scientists who have been associated with ‘scientific naturalism’, a school of thought epistemologically founded on verification by

⁵⁶ *Chambers’ Journal*, 1856, February 9, 83.

⁵⁷ *Saturday Review*, 1856, January 12, 194; *Athenaeum*, 1867, February 2, 150.

⁵⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1868, May 18, 2. The impact feared by Tyndall is reflected in the comments of a convert to the phenomena, who noted, “I first heard of Spiritualism by reading the trial of “Lyon v Home”, and I then considered it to be partly mesmerism, partly imagination, and partly trickery. Still, I saw that respectable persons, more intelligent than myself, testified to its truth, so I thought I was not justified in condemning it without investigation” (*Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 73).

observable facts and correspondence with the known laws of nature.⁵⁹ Tyndall's stated concern was that scientific men had claimed to have observed facts that did not correspond to the known laws of nature: an alleged discrepancy, one might say, between the scientific method and the scientific worldview.

The apparent dominance of fact over theory in mid-Victorian philosophy of science meant that theoretical objections to observed facts must have carried limited weight. In fact, Levine has argued that the essential position of Victorian naturalists was a move against a priori thinking.⁶⁰ Yet the theory and practise of science is not necessarily the same thing. One can see this with the response to Faraday's publication of 'On the conservation of force' in 1857, in which he had referred to "clear ideas of the possible and impossible". In a review of the publication, *The Athenaeum* directly criticised Faraday's use of the phrase, noting:

"We stared when we first read this ... We thought that mature minds were rather inclined to believe that a knowledge of the limits of possibility and impossibility was only the mirage which constantly recedes as we approach it".⁶¹

The same criticism of Faraday's statement was made by the journal in 1860, in a subsequent review that pointed out that every now and then an anomaly appears which cannot simply be ignored.⁶² Yet while a prominent scientifically-minded periodical might criticise a highly-respected scientist for his apparent endorsement of a priori scepticism, the same periodical was probably the most dismissive of the reported facts

⁵⁹ As Turner (1974) has shown, this loose coalition - which included Huxley, Galton and Spencer - were active publicists and dissemination of their views was intended to promote not simply scientific ideas but the plausibility of a wholly secular society. However, these individuals were not representative of scientists as a whole, most scientists rejecting a wholly secular outlook, and some - including Lord Rayleigh, J. J. Thomson, and Henry Sidgwick - became a good deal more open to phenomena that suggested currently unknown processes at work. Indeed, even Galton attended a Home seance, and was initially impressed by what he saw such that he wrote to Darwin to encourage him to attend. Yet this degree of willingness to investigate was not apparent among his fellow 'scientific naturalists'. Tyndall followed Faraday's example in offering to investigate in conditions which several outsiders regarded as unfair, and Huxley declined to be involved in the London Dialectical Society investigation.

⁶⁰ Levine, 1990, 235.

⁶¹ *The Athenaeum*, 1857, March 28, 397-9.

⁶² *The Athenaeum*, 1860, March 12, 349-51.

relating to Home's mediumship, stating of Home's biography, "There is not a statement in the book so presented as to warrant a sensible man in paying attention to it".⁶³ So much for the dangers of ignoring anomalies, and it was not only scientific journals that rejected the evidence out of hand. An article in the *Cornhill Magazine* which attempted to defend its rejection of the evidence for Home had to "admit the fact that Mr Home floated in the air to be sufficiently well attested to let in explanations ... Give a reasonable explanation, and I should admit it instantly".⁶⁴ It was such a position that provoked Robert Chambers - shortly after his change of view - to complain that "external facts are in certain cases nothing, and a scientific theory everything".⁶⁵

Given this apparent inconsistency between a scientific method that claimed to be open to all facts, and a scientific worldview that appeared to be closed to some, it is hardly surprising that witnesses of Home's phenomena criticised scientists for rejecting reported facts on an a priori basis. Throughout Home's mediumship, the spiritualist press pointed to the contradiction between scientists advocating the importance of observation and open-mindedness in science yet dismissing the evidence for seance phenomena.⁶⁶ William Howitt accused sceptics of being unwilling "to look an unwelcome fact in the face" and, when a sceptic suggested Home's elongations were the product of imagination, *Human Nature* criticised him for rejecting the facts.⁶⁷ Similarly, many other witnesses of Home criticised a priori scepticism.⁶⁸ Indeed, it was a general complaint among spiritualists that facts were being ignored, as they accused scientists of (unscientific) a priori scepticism⁶⁹, with the occasional reference to Galileo and Copernicus as examples of scientists who had been initially dismissed by their peers.⁷⁰

⁶³ *The Athenaeum*, 1863, March 14, 351-3.

⁶⁴ *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 716.

⁶⁵ Chambers, 1859, 18.

⁶⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 100; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 130.

⁶⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 372; *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 44.

⁶⁸ For example: Crosland, 1856, 7; Rymer, 1857, 37; Baker, 1862, 1-2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 452; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 462; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 465.

⁶⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 294; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 370; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 451.

⁷⁰ Rymer, 1857, 5; *Spiritualist*, 1, 1869, 2.

Prominent scientists convinced of the genuineness of Home's phenomena also pointed out that it was unscientific to reject facts a priori. William Gregory, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, pointed out to his colleagues that, "Our duty is to study nature as she presents herself and to take the facts as we find them". Cromwell Varley, in a letter to J. J. Thomson, stated bluntly, "I wish you to understand that it is not a question of *belief* in the marvellous on our part, it is a case of *actual knowledge* that these phenomena do occur [original italics]", and complained that his colleagues dismissed what he wrote about Home's phenomena while they accepted his work on mainstream scientific topics. When the physicist William Crookes began his investigation into Home, he began with a criticism of the same view of Faraday's that *The Athenaeum* had criticised. In an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, Crookes stated clearly:

"Faraday says, 'Before we proceed to consider any question involving physical principles, we should set out with clear ideas of the naturally possible and impossible.' But this appears like reasoning in a circle: we are to investigate nothing till we know it to be possible, whilst we cannot say what is impossible, outside pure mathematics, till we know everything. In the present case I prefer to enter upon the enquiry with no preconceived notions whatever as to what can or cannot be".⁷¹

When Crookes went on to conclude the existence of a new 'psychic force', he placed the scientific method in opposition to the currently accepted scientific worldview. Those who sought to defend the scientific worldview could hardly do so by attacking the scientific method. Instead, they questioned his competence to apply the scientific method properly.

5.3.2. Orthodox science responds to Crookes

As the last chapter pointed out, some scientists responded to Crookes' results by

⁷¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 452; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 465; Crookes, 1874, 4.

suggesting the phenomena were subjective, perhaps the result of Crookes having been mesmerized, and the problems with such an explanation have been discussed. A second line of defence emerged, however, and it was associated with that bastion of the scientific establishment, the Royal Society. Crookes had been the recipient of a Royal Society grant only a few years before his experiments with Home, to carry out research into spectroscopy, during which time he had collaborated with Sir George Gabriel Stokes, president of the society.⁷² The extent of collaboration was such that he later wrote: “if what I owe to Stokes is deducted from my work there will be precious little left I can claim for my own!”⁷³ However, Crookes’ conclusions about Home met with significantly less support from Stokes and the society. Indeed, their response was to question his scientific competence. In an editorial note in *The Spectator*, it was stated that Crookes’ paper had been rejected by the Royal Society because it had shown an “entire want of scientific precision”. When these claims were challenged by Crookes, *The Spectator* responded that it had simply been repeating the words of “Professor Stokes of the Royal Society”.⁷⁴ Around the same time, W. B. Carpenter, who was also a prominent FRS, wrote a somewhat misleading article in the *Quarterly Review* that questioned the scientific competence of the experimenters. Huggins, who would later be elected president of the society, was described as one of those “scientific amateurs” who suffered from a “want of that broad basis of *general* scientific culture”, while Cox was dismissed as “one of the most gullible of the gullible”. Admittedly, the article stated, Crookes had been awarded a fellowship of the society, but “this distinction was conferred on him with considerable hesitation”. This latter claim was also challenged by Crookes, and the Royal Society admitted that it was untrue, the admission subsequently being published in the *Daily Telegraph*.⁷⁵ Carpenter gave public lectures in which he seems to have misrepresented Crookes’ experiments

⁷² A recent historian has described Stokes as “smitten by spiritualism and psychics” (Schabas, 1997, 86), but there is no evidence that this was the case. Indeed, he has been described elsewhere as an Anglican to whom the idea of disembodied spirits was abhorrent (Noakes, unpub’d thesis, 176). Certainly, his attitude towards Crookes’s work suggests he was less than smitten by spiritualism.

⁷³ Larmor, 1907, 362.

⁷⁴ *The Spectator*, 1871, July 22, 879; *The Spectator*, 1871, July 29, 917. Crookes later pointed out that Stokes’ private correspondence with him was significantly different from what appeared in the press (Crookes, 1874). Crookes’ paper was also rejected by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, a decision most likely influenced by W. B. Carpenter, who became President of the B.A.A.S. later that year (Noakes, unpub’d thesis, 185).

⁷⁵ *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 341-3; *Daily Telegraph*, 1872, May 2.

with Home and, in doing so, offered a straightforward explanation for the results. When Crookes complained to Carpenter about this misrepresentation, the latter maintained that his understanding of the experiment was based on the authority of Professor Stokes and Sir Charles Wheatstone of the Royal Society. When, in turn, Crookes challenged Stokes and Wheatstone, their replies were somewhat evasive.⁷⁶ However, Carpenter's criticism ceased for a while, and he made no comment about Crookes or spiritualism generally in his presidential address to the B.A.A.S. later that year.⁷⁷

While one cannot be sure these pillars of the scientific establishment were consciously misleading the public in defence of the established scientific worldview, their questioning of Crookes' scientific competence seems clear, and seems to have been limited to his research with Home. After all, Crookes received three medals from the Royal Society throughout his career and, like Huggins, would later become its president.⁷⁸ Criticism of Crookes' experiments also appeared in the influential science journal, *Nature*, in a letter which concluded that, as his experiments were "inaccurately performed - the details were not sufficiently examined, nor obvious errors apparently avoided ... [the experiments were] ... not worthy of scientific consideration".⁷⁹ However effective such criticisms might have been, the press response to Crookes' experiments suggests that his reputation lent credibility to the results, as did the reputation of Huggins.⁸⁰ It is also worth noting that the same issue of *Nature* included another letter on the topic, and this ruled out both self-deception and deception as explanations for the results, praising the competence of Crookes and Huggins in the process.⁸¹

⁷⁶ The private correspondence is reproduced in Crookes, 1874, 73-80.

⁷⁷ Palfreman, 1979, 218.

⁷⁸ Noakes, unpub'd thesis, 60.

⁷⁹ *Nature*, 1871, August 3, 278-9.

⁸⁰ *Spectator*, 1871, July 8, 828.

⁸¹ *Nature*, 1871, August 3, 279-80.

5.4. Summary and conclusions

The proposed existence of a new natural force challenged a scientific worldview based on the known laws of nature, while the proposal itself came from witnesses who regularly cited scientific method in support of this new force. Yet the evidence remained unsupported by any scientific theory. Despite this, and the fact that almost all of Home's witnesses being considered regarded the phenomena as genuine, about half of them failed to frame the phenomena as spiritual. Some simply did not refer to agency, but others explicitly declined to comment or stated they did not accept spiritual agency, or else advocated a natural force theory. While this latter group was relatively small, such a theory must have been considered likely by many more that accepted the phenomena as genuine but not supernatural, yet few discussed the view. That so many rejected supernatural agency without explicitly concluding a natural force, and that most of those who did explicitly conclude natural agency did so in such ambiguous terms, suggests a surprising reluctance to admit supernatural agency in the absence of any clear alternative explanation. As was briefly discussed above, there is no obvious reason why such a reluctance was based on fear of public derision. In addition, there seems to have been a general preference for natural agency even among those commentators who were not entirely convinced that the phenomena were genuine.

All of this matters because historians have viewed this period as one characterised by an emotional and intellectual crisis of faith prompted by Biblical criticism and Darwinism, and Victorian spiritualism has been seen in relation to this crisis. No doubt many individuals were influenced by such crises of faith, but this in turn begs another question. Rather than asking why some Victorians came to be convinced of spiritualism, perhaps one should be asking why others did not. If the mid-Victorian period was one characterised by a crisis of faith, why was there such a strong rejection of evidence of an after-life when nobody had an adequate alternative explanation for such phenomena? This question will be considered in the next chapter. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that this reluctance to admit supernatural agency in the absence of any scientific theory suggests that, if there was any crisis of faith involved here, it was in

the modern scientific worldview, and it was the result of a 'crisis of evidence'. The response of some scientists to this crisis of evidence was, as the last chapter discussed, to argue that what they reported had not in fact happened. The response of some pillars of the scientific establishment was, as this chapter has discussed, to question the scientific competence of those who had tested Home. Such a response is reminiscent of a Kuhnian view of science. Kuhn has argued that scientists work within paradigms, and that normal science involves the further articulation of the paradigm and of the phenomena and the theories that the paradigm supplies. When unable to resist anomalies that contradict currently held views, there is a shift towards a 'scientific revolution', such as that associated with Copernicus or Newton. However, normal science does not seek (and can suppress) novelties of fact and theory.⁸² With few exceptions, Victorian scientists declined to investigate the phenomena, and the response of normal science to those who did was to question the scientific competence of the experimenters. This was in spite of the fact that the scientific credentials of Crookes, Wallace and Varley were substantial and, as they pointed out themselves, their competence was not doubted in other matters. The reluctance of the vast majority of scientists to investigate or to accept scientific evidence for Home's phenomena is, perhaps, most easily understood from a Kuhnian perspective.

⁸² Kuhn, 1970. The relevance of Kuhnian theory to the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena has been discussed for some years (Collins & Pinch, 1982; Hovelmann, 1984; Pinch, 1984)

6. Miracles past and present

The possibility that Home's phenomena might be the result of a new natural force was a threat to the scientific establishment, and the response to that threat has been described. Spiritualists, however, claimed that seance phenomena were supernatural. Tables floated and raps were heard, they maintained, as a result of direct communication between this world and the spirit world. The phenomena that occurred were, in the opinions of all spiritualists, direct evidence of the existence of the soul after death. The vast majority of mid-Victorians, on the other hand, seem to have rejected this view. Indeed, even many who accepted the phenomena as genuine seem to have preferred a natural explanation to a supernatural one. Yet the question of whether Home's phenomena were supernatural or not remained important to the mid-Victorians. It was important because they were negotiating the boundaries between science and religion. Throughout the nineteenth century, natural theology had presented science and religion as complementary, and increasing scientific knowledge as further evidence of God's design of nature. As some scientific discoveries began to challenge areas of Christian faith, the relationship between Victorian science and religion came to be viewed as less than harmonious, and some Victorians came to speak of the conflict between science and religion.¹ But it could never have been that simple. After all, Victorians themselves were neither scientific nor religious but both. The debate about Darwinian theory may have been shaped by religious concerns but it

¹ Draper, 1864; Huxley, 1889; White, 1896; Draper, 1904. As a number of historians have pointed out since, this conflict between science and religion might be better seen as a conflict within science, between 'religious' and 'irreligious' scientists (Ellegard, 1958, 337; Moore, 1979, 84; Cosslett, 1984, 12).

was articulated primarily in scientific language, even by Bishop Wilberforce.² On the other hand, most scientists rejected a materialistic view and many maintained deeply-held Christian beliefs as they continued with their scientific endeavours. Intellectuals might reject traditional Christian concepts, but even those ‘scientific naturalists’ could easily be described as evangelical in their promotion of a scientific cosmology.³ The debate about Home’s phenomena clearly had both scientific and religious significance, but the boundaries between the two are not so clear, partly because the boundaries between Victorian science and religion are not so clear, and partly because the questions raised had implications for both areas, however one draws the boundaries. This chapter, however, is concerned with two specific questions, both of which might be seen as essentially religious: first, how were Home’s phenomena framed in relation to the question of supernatural agency?; and second, following from the first question, how were Home’s phenomena compared to those anomalous phenomena central to the Christian faith, Biblical miracles?

6.1. The question of supernatural agency

As the previous chapter pointed out, many of the witnesses who accepted the phenomena as genuine stopped short of framing the phenomena as supernatural, and spiritualists argued that some witnesses had privately believed but had not been prepared to admit this to a sceptical public. An example of such a case was Lord Brougham, who attended a seance with Brewster in 1855. In contrast to Brewster’s public accusations of fraud, Brougham’s apparent reluctance to speak on the matter was interpreted by spiritualists at the time, and by some biographers of Home since, as an indication that he had been convinced by the phenomena but did not wish to say.⁴ Despite subsequent public condemnations of spiritualism by Brougham, the spiritualist press later maintained that he had died a believer, pointing to a preface he wrote in

² Ellegard, 1958; Cosslett, 1984, 1.

³ Turner, 1974; Oppenheim, 1988, 329.

⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 164; Home, 1888; Burton, 1948, 75; Jenkins, 1988, 36.

1870 that suggested there might be something in Modern Spiritualism.⁵ However, not only is the form of this statement somewhat ambiguous but, at the time of the Brewster controversy, the *Morning Advertiser* had explained that Brougham had written a private letter to the paper in which he “expressed his entire acquiescence in the views of Sir David Brewster”, yet this statement was not reported in any spiritualist journal at the time or in any biography of Home since.⁶ In addition, there is no evidence that Brougham ever attended another seance. Such are the problems of trying to assess personal beliefs based on limited evidence.

However, we are concerned here not with personal beliefs but with the form of debate surrounding the question of supernatural agency, and the witnesses considered in this chapter are restricted to those for whom there is first-hand evidence from the individual concerned. As with others who framed the phenomena, simple classification is difficult, but it seems reasonably clear that around two fifths of the witnesses found made statements to the effect that the phenomena were the result of spiritual agency. Conversely, evidence from the periodical press suggests an overwhelming rejection of this view among the public at large. As previous chapters have discussed, evidence suggests that most dismissed the phenomena as the product of imposture and delusion and, so far as there was any acceptance that they might be genuine, a preference was shown for a natural agency.

In concluding that Home’s phenomena were due to spiritual agency, few of the witnesses actually referred to the question of natural but unknown forces as the cause of the phenomena. William Howitt argued that the nature of the communications made such a force “useless” as an explanation, noting that “[i]t cannot enable people to draw, and write, and play exquisite music, who have no such power or knowledge in their brains”, and others referred to mental rather than physical phenomena as convincing evidence that Home’s phenomena were spiritual, implying a similar point.⁷ In these cases, it should be noted, there was no attempt to reject the possibility of clairvoyance,

⁵ *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 52.

⁶ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October, 8, 4.

⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 407. See also: *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 341; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 160; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 212; Home, 1888, 154.

which would have accounted for all of the mental phenomena through natural (what we would now call paranormal) means. Yet the point being made was not about mechanism but about there being an intelligent source behind the phenomena. From what evidence is available, those who framed Home's phenomena as spiritual seem to have had little problem with the idea that an invisible natural force was involved, but they regarded this force as one that operated under spirit guidance. Mrs Crosland, who, along with her husband, a London wine merchant, had been an early convert to spiritualism, explained that "[i]n Home's case it is evident that the spirits appropriate some sort of vital magnetic force from his body with which or by which to clothe the spirit members, and make them visible to every one present". Similarly, the solicitor Henry Jencken, who constructed a theory on the after-life based on observation of Home, argued that physical phenomena arose from "an action on the organically-mediated free nerve aura of the body of the medium" in conjunction with the spirit.⁸ Most of the witnesses, however, made no reference to the possibility of natural forces being responsible. This may, of course, be a reflection of limited evidence. For some witnesses, the only evidence available is a short statement that clearly suggests the acceptance of spiritual agency, but which does not discuss the conclusion.⁹ Most, however, reported events in more detail with some discussion of possible agency and, while they dismissed trickery as an explanation, they did not refer to the possibility of a natural force.¹⁰ As the *Spiritualist* explained, spiritualists did not claim seance phenomena involved the suspension of natural law, but were produced by laws that govern them yet to be discovered¹¹, and it may be that most spiritualists accepted a supernatural rather than a natural mechanism. However, the lack of comment relating to the topic suggests that they regarded the mechanism as unimportant compared to the ultimate source. In addition, given the lack of theory to support a psychic force, perhaps they did not feel there was a great deal to comment on.

⁸ Crosland, 1857, 66; *Human Nature*, 1, 1867, 580; see also *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 59.

⁹ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 431; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 564; Home, 1888, 155.

¹⁰ For example: *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1855, 101; *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 3, 1856, 15; Crosland, 1856; *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 102; Rymer, 1857; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 407-13; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 123-6; Home, 1863, 147ff.; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 375-9; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 210-11; Hall, 1884.

¹¹ *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 14. See also *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 200 for a similar position.

The rejection of supernatural agency, on the other hand, does not appear to have been simply a rejection of the supernatural. It is true that some of the most prominent materialists of the period dismissed the idea that the phenomena were supernatural, and Charles Bradlaugh, the radical atheist, did so having attended a Home seance, but his materialism was hardly representative of witnesses. Most who rejected Home's phenomena were open to the the idea of supernatural intervention, yet this did not translate into acceptance of Home's phenomena as such. Several witnesses stated that they were open to the idea of spiritual agency, even wanted to believe in spiritual agency, but could not. One witness pointed out that most people believed in the possibility of divine intervention, and other witnesses who did not accept Home's phenomena as supernatural made references elsewhere to belief in either Biblical miracles or spirit communication.¹² Even the most publicly sceptical of the witnesses accepted Biblical miracles. Sir David Brewster, the most prominent of Home's early sceptical witnesses, had already complained of one writer on natural magic who had dismissed Biblical miracles along with other supernatural phenomena, and the author of the *Fraser's* article in 1865 - which framed Home's phenomena as trickery - argued for the authenticity of Biblical miracles.¹³ As we shall see, the distinction between canonical and other miracles was central to the question of the supernatural agency of seance phenomena.

Clerical reaction to reports of seance phenomena, however, show that supernatural agency was more plausible to the clergy than to the rest of the public. The authenticity of spiritual communication was not considered so problematic as the form of such communications, and the potential threat to clerical authority no doubt made such direct links with the supernatural all the more offensive.¹⁴ As the threat to scientific authority had provoked a negative response from scientists, so Christian clerics regularly denounced spiritualism generally, and seance phenomena in particular, as diabolical. That seance phenomena were the result of satanic agency had been argued by some of the earliest texts on seance phenomena, written primarily by Christian ministers, and

¹² Baker, 1862, 12; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 139; *Human Nature*, 7, 1873, 163-74.

¹³ Brewster, 1838, 6; *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 32.

¹⁴ Oppenheim, 1988, 63-6.

denials in the spiritualist press suggest the accusation continued throughout Home's mediumship, if not directed specifically towards Home's phenomena.¹⁵ In fact, an Anglican minister who had seen Home, and was himself reluctant to frame seance phenomena as supernatural, suggested that most clerics regarded the phenomena as diabolical.¹⁶

However, there is very little evidence of Home's witnesses concluding that his phenomena were diabolical. One told the London Dialectical Society that he had concluded satanic agency because a spirit message had told him so, and another concluded in 1889 that, if the phenomena were supernatural, then they were satanic.¹⁷ This latter conclusion had been based on the spurious content of the spirit messages he had received, though not at seances with Home. Otherwise, the only references by witnesses to diabolical agency were directed against the charge. For example, the well-known spiritualist, John Jones, pointed out that Jesus' miracles were regarded as diabolical by his contemporaries.¹⁸ This is not to say that spiritualists did not report communications from evil spirits. Indeed, when a spirit communication proved to be inaccurate, or when a medium was caught in the act of cheating, evil spirits (rather than the medium) could be blamed.¹⁹ But Home was never caught cheating, so witnesses did not have to resort to such explanations. So far as the periodical press is any measure, satanic agency was not a common view among the general reading public either. Few references were made in the mainstream periodical press to the possibility of satanic agency behind the phenomena, and then with little sign of support.²⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine* was hardly typical, therefore, when it concluded that if "there be anything in those manifestations, beyond fraud, juggling, and deceit ... what other

¹⁵ For example: Godfrey, 1853; Cowan, 1854; *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1857, 27; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 276; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 222; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 513; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 49.

¹⁶ *Human Nature*, 7, 1873, 163.

¹⁷ London Dialectical Society, 1873, 205; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 134.

¹⁸ *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 2, 1858, 105.

¹⁹ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 273; *The Spiritualist*, 2, 1872, 41.

²⁰ *Chambers' Journal*, 1853, May 21, 323; *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 35; *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 320ff. See also *Human Nature*, 6, 1872, 64-72 which listed a range of press views relating to seance phenomena, none of which suggested satanic agency. The only suggestion that Home's phenomena were diabolical was made in *Once a Week* in regard to the *Cornhill* seance, which also described it as "childish nonsense" (*Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 276).

conclusion can we form than this, that evil spirits are permitted to delude the unwary".²¹

A more common theme was the suggestion that the phenomena were blasphemous, and this was not a theme restricted to the clergy, being argued by some of the most prominent of the early sceptics, including the conjuror, John Henry Anderson, and the scientists, David Brewster and Michael Faraday.²² The argument remained throughout Home's mediumship, and came to be focussed on comparisons between seance phenomena and Biblical miracles. Indeed, explicit comparisons were made with specific miracles of Jesus in an attempt to stress the blasphemous nature of Home's phenomena.²³ On the other hand, some clerics were more sympathetic to the view expressed by many spiritualists that seance phenomena provided support for Christian faith at a time when it was dearly needed, and most spiritualists being considered in this study spoke supportively of Christianity.²⁴ Both Christian critics and supporters of spiritualism, therefore, stressed the comparisons between seance phenomena and Christian miracles.

6.2. Victorian views about miracles

As the last chapter noted, the Victorians increasingly dismissed all manner of anomalous phenomena as the result of imposture and delusion, with the exception of those central to the Christian faith. Yet these too were coming under increasing scrutiny. Before considering how Home's phenomena were discussed in relation to Christian miracles, it is necessary to consider views about the latter in more detail.

²¹ *Blackwood's Magazine*, 97, 1865, 208.

²² See respectively: *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, November 6, 2; *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 12, 4; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1868, May 15, 3.

²³ *Blackwood's Magazine*, 97, 1865, 194; *North British Review*, 39, 1863, 202 .

²⁴ Indeed, with the exception of those associated with the radical London publisher, James Burns, anti-Christian spiritualism was primarily a provincial working class phenomenon (Barrow, 1986).

6.2.1. The unique status of Biblical miracles

There was considerable theological debate about miracles in the mid-Victorian period, but such debate had been going on for some time. David Hume's chapter 'On miracles' from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) became the most commonly cited sceptical argument against miracles, but it was by no means the first challenge to Biblical miracles in post-Reformation Britain. From the end of the 17th century, and related to arguments about witchcraft, Biblical miracles had received a great deal of attention and criticism. On the one hand, Latitudinarians (such as Newton and Boyle) had argued that science was compatible with belief in miracles since the existence of God was a presupposition of their epistemological stance. Miracles and prophecy, they had stated, were "the two main pillars on which revelation is built". Deists, on the other hand, had dismissed all events that contradicted natural law, including the Resurrection, which Thomas Woolston described as "the most bare-faced imposture ever put upon the world". How radical such a position was can be seen from the reaction of the authorities; Woolston was arrested, imprisoned and, unable to pay the necessary fine, died in confinement in 1733. Adherents to the Latitudinarian position, on the other hand, dominated the Church of England by the early 18th century.²⁵

While Hume's essay would become the most famous critique of miracles, at the time of its publication, Conyers Middleton's *Free Enquiry* (1749) received greater interest. Middleton argued against the alleged miracles of the early church, and though he was suspected of indirectly questioning the authenticity of the New Testament miracles, his arguments seem to have been influential.²⁶ Increasingly, theologians attempted to establish the peculiar quality of those miracles recorded in the Bible, though how they did so varied. John Douglas, Bishop of Salisbury, set out criteria in 1754 by which the 'true miracles' of the New Testament might be distinguished from the 'false miracles' of Roman Catholics, arguing that accounts of false miracles might be identified by their not being published at the time or place of the reported miraculous event, or by the

²⁵ This synopsis of the miracle debate of the 17th and 18th centuries relies heavily upon Burns (1981).

²⁶ Burns, 1981, 10-11.

event itself passing without examination.²⁷ Archbishop Paley, on the other hand, stressed in his *Evidences* (1802) that witnesses of the Christian miracles had been changed in their conduct, and often submitted to great suffering in attestation of the miracle accounts.²⁸ However they attempted to support their position, by the nineteenth century, the distinction any Protestant had to make was between the authenticity of canonical miracles and the falsity of all others. This distinction, as we shall see, would become increasingly challenged in the Victorian period.

While the early nineteenth century has often been associated with a strong evangelical Christian influence, from the mid-century onwards, contemporary commentators and historians since have paid more attention to the question of secularisation. The growth of secularisation, suggested by such measures as the 1851 Census, which showed that around half the population did not attend church, figures being particularly low in urban areas, has been linked to broader social and economic changes, and no doubt such factors played their part.²⁹ However, the reliability of such measures and the validity of such causal links have been questioned, and the growth of religious organisations in the late Victorian period have been cited as evidence against the overall picture of secularisation.³⁰ Yet even if one accepted the evidence about church attendance or religious affiliation, it would tell us very little about contemporary views about miracles. The decision to attend a particular church or chapel might be based on all sorts of factors, and non-attendance hardly equated to a materialistic view of the world. Moreover, concerns about secularisation were largely middle class concerns about working class non-belief, and this study is primarily concerned with middle class views.

So far as the middle class showed signs of non-belief, they were expressed in a way that has since been described by historians as ‘crises of faith’, and such doubts were linked to views about miracles. According to this narrative, aspects of the Christian faith were increasingly challenged by scientific enquiry, resulting in an emotional and

²⁷ Douglas, 1754.

²⁸ Paley, 1802.

²⁹ Gilbert, 1976, 113.

³⁰ Brown, 1988; Harris, 1993.

intellectual crisis of faith for many individuals that was reflected in personal diaries and in published writings.³¹ In the 1830's, Biblical history was confronted by Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), and the problem of miracles was revived when intellectuals attempted to define the miraculous such that it could be compatible with natural science, particularly with recent advances in geology.³² Traditional Christian faith was also challenged by the German historical criticism associated with Schleiermacher and the Tubingen school who, in pointing to errors and contradictions in the Bible, concluded that it did not provide reliable evidence for miracles. While few in Britain seem to have taken an interest in this debate at first, it did receive greater attention in the controversy that followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), in which a group of liberal Anglicans attempted to deal with the theological problems raised.³³ At the same time, Darwin's theory of natural selection not only provided a natural explanation for miracles such as the creation of individual species, but assumed an absence of miraculous events.

Press reaction to Darwin was to cite Creation as evidence of the possibility of miracles.³⁴ But Creation was the least problematic of miracles, since evidence of a created universe was everywhere to be seen. Other Biblical miracles, however, challenged the laws of nature that God had created, and did so with limited evidential support. Those wishing to retain the dominant Protestant position had to defend the unique status of Biblical miracles against what Lecky (1865) described as a long-standing tendency towards disbelief in all manner of miracles, associated in his view with the progress of civilisation.³⁵ That this increasing scepticism about miracles in general could accompany a continued belief in Biblical miracles can be seen in contemporary discussion of Roman Catholic miracles.

Non-canonical miracles continued to play an essential part in the traditional belief

³¹ See, for example: Appelman et al, 1959; Brett, 1965; Symondson, 1970; Wolff, 1977; Jay, 1986; Kella, 1989; Helmstadter & Lightman, 1990; Wheeler, 1990. Gilbert (1976) and Chadwick (1990) explicitly locate these 'crises of faith' within the broader theme of secularisation in the 19th century.

³² Cannon, 1960.

³³ Chadwick, 1990, 215-16; Newsome, 1999, 202.

³⁴ Ellegard, 1958, 141ff.

³⁵ This growing scepticism towards non-canonical miracles was described by Lecky, 1865, 151-205.

system of Roman Catholicism. Aquinas had stated their importance and, six centuries later, the Third Session of the First Vatican Council (1870-1) reiterated this. In addition to theological support, mid-Victorians could read of contemporary accounts, most famously the reports of miraculous healing that followed the vision of Bernadette in Lourdes in 1858. Presumably, many orthodox Catholics attributed such events to Divine intervention, but elsewhere modern Roman Catholic and other extra-canonical miracles were treated with extreme scepticism. Indeed, Roman Catholic miracles, it was stated in the *Contemporary Review*, “are objects of derision rather than exultation, even among [educated] Roman Catholics”.³⁶ So far as such scepticism was widespread, it had been informed by several texts published from the early Victorian period that had dealt in a sceptical manner with various anomalous phenomena, providing natural explanations for what had been seen in the past as supernatural phenomena, and all from what the authors presented as a more enlightened position.³⁷ This enlightened position, however, did not question the supernatural phenomena central to the Protestant faith. That is to say, non-canonical Roman Catholic miracles were described (alongside non-Christian miracles) as the product of imposture and delusion, but Biblical miracles were either not referred to or presented as genuine. The special place of Biblical miracles was admitted by Brewster (1832), who criticised a French writer on natural magic for going too far, noting, “[i]n his anxiety to account for every thing miraculous by natural causes, he has ascribed to the same origin some of those events in sacred history which Christians cannot but regard as the result of divine agency”.³⁸ With this exception, however, all supernatural phenomena and anything else that appeared to contradict the laws of nature were presented as the result of imposture and delusion.

6.2.2. The appeal to religious authority

The mid-Victorian press nevertheless reflected increasing doubt about the evidence for

³⁶ *Contemporary Review*, 1, 1866, 376.

³⁷ Scot, 1830; Brewster, 1832; Davenport, 1837; Mackay, 1841; Godwin, 1843; Religious Tract Society, 1848; Colquhoun, 1851; Draper, 1864; Lecky, 1865.

³⁸ Brewster, 1832, 6.

Biblical miracles. As the *Cornhill Magazine* put it, “if Christianity rested on their veracity, it would surely come to the ground”, while an article in *Fraser’s Magazine* calling for the Church of England to modify its position argued that no scientific man believed in the creation of the world in seven days, or regarded the account of the Noachian deluge as reliable (though, notably, Gospel miracles were not mentioned).³⁹ In defence of miracles, orthodox Christians argued that their possibility followed from assuming the existence of an omnipotent God, and the probability of their occurring could be inferred from a Divine wish to communicate with Man. As to the question of their actual occurrence, however, that was dependent on historical testimony.⁴⁰ Yet the worth of historical testimony in support of Gospel miracles seems to have been downplayed at this time. Increasingly, Gospel miracles were defended in terms of internal evidence. Rather than argue for their authenticity on the basis of the quality of the testimony, this argument stressed that their authenticity could be seen in the internal evidence of revelation. According to the Dean of Westminster, “we in this generation do not believe in the Gospel because of the miracles, but in the miracles because of the Gospel”.⁴¹ The argument that Christian ‘doctrine proved the miracles rather than miracles the doctrine’ was by no means new, but the value set upon internal evidence was, in the view of *Fraser’s Magazine*, “evidently increasing: the tendency now is to believe the history from the intrinsic merits of the character, and to say that it is strong enough to carry the weight of the miracles, instead of *vice versa*”.⁴² Such a position can be seen as part of a broader theological argument that recognised its religious rather than scientific basis, and suggested that theological issues were not necessarily a matter for science.⁴³

³⁹ *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 717; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 77, 1868, 365.

⁴⁰ This distinction was made by J. B. Mozley in his 1865 Bampton lectures (Mozley, 1865; *Contemporary Review*, 2, 1866, 297-313).

⁴¹ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 259-60.

⁴² *Fraser’s Magazine*, 4, 1871, 515. The argument that Christianity proved the miracles rather than vice versa had been made by Locke. Indeed, W. B. Carpenter cited Locke as he stressed the effect of personal belief on testimony (*Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 295). Thomas Arnold had also argued the point in the 1830’s with reference to mesmeric phenomena (Winter, 1988, 271). The stress upon internal evidence was also made in mid-Victorian periodicals (e.g. *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 32; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 259-60; *British Quarterly Review*, 58, 1873, 169; *Cornhill Magazine*, 30, 1874, 39).

⁴³ Ellegard, 1958, 141ff.

The question of scientific versus religious authority on such matters was raised in the contemporary discussion about the efficacy of prayer. After all, ongoing Divine intervention in the world remained plausible to anyone who prayed. Indeed, the Dean of Chichester, in his Church Dictionary, had defined prayer as a request to God to interfere with the laws of nature.⁴⁴ As Frank Turner has pointed out, while prayer as a private practice was not problematical to a Victorian scientist, it became so when “it was forced upon his attention as a form of physical energy, or as the equivalent of such energy”.⁴⁵ It was at this point that the boundary between science and religion was crossed and became, in the words of Francis Galton, a “perfectly appropriate and legitimate subject of scientific enquiry”.⁴⁶ Letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1866 discussed the effect of prayer on physical laws, with the physicist John Tyndall arguing against the notion then, and again in the *Contemporary Review* in 1872.⁴⁷ By that time, the debate had grown considerably following the illness of the Prince of Wales. At the end of the previous year, the Prince had contracted typhoid and, throughout the country, special prayers had been said for his recovery. A few days later, he had improved dramatically, several clergymen had claimed that this was a demonstration of the efficacy of prayer, and the government, seeking to revive support for the monarchy, had proclaimed a national day of thanksgiving for the recovery of the heir to the throne. Some months later, however, the efficacy of prayer was challenged by scientists who sought to test the hypothesis, and those who had confidently asserted the physical efficacy of prayer in the royal recovery now maintained that prayer was solely a matter of internal moral influence.⁴⁸ The debate about the efficacy of prayer has been seen by Turner as part of a contest over authority between church and science, as an attempt to uphold the cultural supremacy of scientific experts, even on matters traditionally regarded as religious. In this sense, when prayer was described by Christians as a personal moral matter, it was being presented as an area that was subject to religious rather than scientific authority. But

⁴⁴ *Fortnightly Review*, 12, 1872, 125.

⁴⁵ Turner (1974, 48) citing John Tyndall.

⁴⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, 12, 1872, 124.

⁴⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 30; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1872, 382-92. Tyndall was criticised on theological grounds in *Fraser's Magazine*, 8, 1873, 338-47.

⁴⁸ Turner, 1974, 46-65.

while the debate between science and religion involved a negotiation of intellectual and moral territory, the question being asked by scientists (whatever their underlying motives were for asking it) was whether prayer actually worked, and it is that question which is most relevant to contemporary views of miracles.

The debate was widespread, being discussed not only by clergy but also by eminent scientists and the periodical press, so the question must have been in the minds of many contemporaries. While many clergy clearly viewed divine intervention as possible, others were significantly more sceptical. For example, Charles Kingsley, a liberal clergyman, refused to employ an approach that relied upon intervention in the laws of nature, and saw his own position as that of “the broad churchman, science, and common-sense”.⁴⁹ Francis Galton cited all manner of statistics as examples of why prayer did not appear to improve illness or prolong life.⁵⁰ His arguments would not have necessarily stopped any Victorians from praying, but his point that a successful result need not involve any suspension of natural law is relevant. While prayer might often include a request for some form of Divine intervention, the extent to which individuals expected their prayers to be answered (or subsequently concluded that they had been) is another matter. More importantly, the extent to which answered prayers were considered to take the form of a miracle (i.e., an event contrary to the laws of nature) is another matter again. No doubt, at some level, many Victorians regarded prayer as a request for Divine intervention, but it seems highly unlikely that many would have expected the result to be contrary to the laws of nature in ways that seance phenomena were. Indeed, that was why Galton had only studied the effect of prayer on situations that would not require such an event. As he put it, “the modern feeling of this country is so opposed to a belief in the occasional suspension of the general laws of nature, that an English reader would merely smile at such an investigation”.⁵¹

But if the debate about the efficacy of prayer reflected scepticism about ongoing Divine intervention, such scepticism was towards contemporary suspensions of natural law. It

⁴⁹ Turner, 1974, 50-1.

⁵⁰ *Contemporary Review*, 20, 1872, 763ff. This was discussed at the time in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 461-4.

⁵¹ *Fortnightly Review*, 12, 1872, 131.

did not necessarily reflect scepticism about Biblical miracles. On the other hand, theological debates in the 1860's did reflect increasing scepticism about Biblical miracles, but they tended to be confined to the highbrow press, and how many contemporaries based their views on detailed consideration of theological issues is difficult to say.⁵² Even those debating the theological issues stressed that such arguments did not coincide with more general religious feeling.⁵³ Alongside the ongoing theological debate, most individuals presumably held to a conventional Christian position that what the Bible said was true. According to Ellegard, until the 1860's, "miracles had hitherto been accepted as a matter of course by practically everybody", and during the 1860's the periodical press could rely on the commonsense of their readers to reject Darwin's claim that miracles never happened.⁵⁴ So far as such a position was commonsense, it arose from a Christian culture that continued to stress the historicity of Biblical miracles. It was certainly not based on a widespread acceptance of contemporary miracles.

6.3. Miracles and Home's phenomena

The age of miracles was past, and the unique status of those past miracles was increasingly defended by an appeal to internal rather than external evidence, that is, to religious rather than scientific authority. The miraculous phenomena reportedly produced by Home in Victorian drawing rooms, on the other hand, challenged both this increasing scepticism about miracles in general and the unique status of Biblical miracles, and were argued by appealing primarily to scientific rather than religious authority.

⁵² The limited relevance of such theological debates to broader religious beliefs has been noted (Gilbert, 1976; Newsome, 1999).

⁵³ *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 253.

⁵⁴ Ellegard, 1958, 140-6; A similar point is made by Neill, 1990, 33.

6.3.2. Biblical miracles and Home's phenomena

While most of the theological debate about miracles concerned whether they could occur, there was significant debate about the worth of the historical evidence for Biblical miracles. Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, had challenged Humean scepticism about the character of historical evidence, arguing that the reality of Napoleon Bonaparte was no better attested to than Biblical miracles.⁵⁵ Mesmeric phenomena had also been compared to, and discussed as a possible explanation for, Biblical miracles.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, a prominent theme among Home's witnesses was in comparing his phenomena to the miracles of the Bible. Several witnesses referred to the Bible as authority for the possibility of miracles and, therefore, of Home's phenomena.⁵⁷ Some pointed out that the evidence for Home's phenomena was better than for Biblical miracles, and that to reject Home's phenomena was tantamount to rejecting the miracles of the Bible. The *Spiritual Magazine*, for example, pointed out that, if the miracles of the Bible were subjected to the criteria expected of Home's phenomena, they "would soon crumble in our hands under the application of such a test".⁵⁸

Comparisons were also regularly made in the periodical press between Home's phenomena and Biblical miracles though, as far as the *Quarterly Review* was concerned, the effect of this comparison was "not to raise the modern manifestations to the rank of the Scripture miracles, but rather to sink the latter to the level of a common ghost-story".⁵⁹ Explicit comparisons were made with specific miracles of Jesus in an

⁵⁵ Whately, 1849. This saw several editions in the 1850's. Incidentally, Whately subsequently stated that, though he advised the avoidance of necromantic practises, he believed Home's phenomena to be genuine (Oppenheim, 1988, 409).

⁵⁶ Winter, 1998, 268ff.

⁵⁷ Crosland, 1856, 6; *Spiritual Herald*, 1, 1856, 17; Rymer, 1857, 4; Crosland, 1857, 41ff.; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 245; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 314; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1866, 122; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1869, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 347; Hall, 1884, 18.

⁵⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 177. See also: Chambers, 1859, 19-23; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 391; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 96; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 171; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 175-7; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 356; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 370.

⁵⁹ *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 180ff. See also: *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 13, 4; *All The Year Round*, 1863, April 4, 135.

attempt to stress the blasphemous nature of the phenomena.⁶⁰ However, the longer term effect of comparing Home's phenomena to Biblical miracles seems to have been that, increasingly, the evidence for the former was admitted to be better than for the latter. That spiritualists argued this point was recognised early by the *Westminster Review*, and over the period several journals pointed to the relative weakness of the evidence for the Christian miracles.⁶¹ Lord Amberley pointed out in the *Fortnightly Review*, "not only is the testimony offered by Spiritualists immeasurably stronger, both in kind and amount, than that on which the orthodox miracles repose, but it conforms far more closely to scientific conditions".⁶²

While it was often admitted that the external evidence for seance phenomena was superior to that for the miracles of the Bible, it was being increasingly argued that belief in the Christian miracles relied upon internal rather than external evidence. As internal evidence became more important in the assessment of the authenticity of Biblical miracles, so did the moral and spiritual value of seance phenomena. In addition to considering the agency behind the phenomena, spiritualists debated their function. While occasional references⁶³ were made to cures or good advice, the functional value of the physical phenomena of Home was most commonly argued to be that they served to demonstrate the reality of Biblical miracles and support faith in an after-life.⁶⁴ Some witnesses explicitly pointed out that this had worked in their case. S. C. Hall admitted, "Not long ago, I must have confessed to disbelief in all miracles. I have seen so many, that my faith as a Christian is now not merely outward profession, but entire and solemn conviction", and others explained how the phenomena had caused them to renounce their earlier materialism.⁶⁵ The need for such proof was

⁶⁰ *Blackwood's Magazine*, 97, 1865, 194; *North British Review*, 39, 1863, 202.

⁶¹ *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 62; *Cornhill Magazine*, 7, 1863, 717; *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 515; *Westminster Review*, 98, 1872, 462; *Fortnightly Review*, 85, 1874, 90; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1875, 290; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 441.

⁶² *Fortnightly Review*, 85, 1874, 90.

⁶³ For example, *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 47.

⁶⁴ For example: Crosland, 1856, 12; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 63; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 143; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 334.

⁶⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 336. See also: Crosland, 1856, 9; *Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 102; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 70; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 143; *Human Nature*, 7, 1873.

stressed through constant references by witnesses to the scepticism of the period.⁶⁶ In 1873, a convert wrote to Home after attending one of his seances, and described him as “the most marvellous missionary of modern times in the greatest of all causes ...Where Mr Home passes, he bestows around him the greatest of all blessings, the certainty of a future life”.⁶⁷ Conversely, throughout Home’s mediumship, the periodical press regularly dismissed the phenomena as trivial and worthless.⁶⁸ According to the *Quarterly Review*, they “nearly all exhibit that aimless love of the marvellous for its own sake, which is characteristic of false miracles as compared with true ones”.⁶⁹ Following Home’s retirement, A. R. Wallace attempted to stress the worth of such phenomena yet, though his double essay in the *Fortnightly Review* was described (in the *Cornhill*) as marking “an epoch in the progress of the movement”, the phenomena were nevertheless dismissed (as a delusion and bordering on the sacrilegious), primarily in terms of their lack of moral and spiritual value.⁷⁰

6.3.3. Non-canonical miracles and Home’s phenomena

Home’s phenomena were also regularly compared with non-canonical miracles, and the unique status of Biblical miracles was directly challenged by spiritualists. In 1861, the *Spiritual Magazine* complained of “thousands of most orthodox Christians who are ready to swear and die in attestation of every wonder narrated in Scripture, are as ready with vehement assertion, to maintain the untruth of every wonder outside of Scripture”, and similar criticisms continued to be made of those who admitted the possibility of certain miracles but not others.⁷¹ In addition to evidence from Scripture,

⁶⁶ For example: Crosland, 1856, 7; Mrs Crosland, 1857, 3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 245; Baker, 1862, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 433; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 111; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 163; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 136; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 137; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 471; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 97 and 145; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 40.

⁶⁷ Home, 1888, 213.

⁶⁸ *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 10, 4; *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, November 3, 3; *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 182; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 24; *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 12, 3; *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 119, 1876, 36, London Dialectical Society, 1873, 229.

⁶⁹ *Quarterly Review*, 114, 1863, 182.

⁷⁰ *Fortnightly Review*, 15, 1874, 801ff.; *Cornhill Magazine*, 30, 1874, 36-43.

⁷¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 150; see also *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 142; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 12; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 187.

countless references were made in spiritualist periodicals to evidence of miraculous phenomena throughout Western history and within various cultures and faiths.⁷² Some made references to phenomena specifically associated with Home.⁷³ Comparisons were made with Roman Catholic miracles but, while the reality of some Catholic miracles was accepted, these were rarely cited in support of Home's phenomena.⁷⁴ On the contrary, sometimes the opposite was suggested. When Home was expelled from Rome in 1864, on the charge of sorcery, the *Spiritual Magazine* reacted with hostility, criticising "a country where superstition is made a trade to bring pence to its mendicant priests, and where a small proportion of true spiritual phenomena have been eked out by nine-tenths of impostures, in the shape of winking Madonnas [and] bleeding pictures". Comparing Home's manifestations to those of the saints, the magazine argued that "[i]f the Pope were other than a lunatic, he would have made Mr Home a cardinal, and have retained him to have sittings twice a week at the Vatican, that by means of his manifestations, the belief in the possibility of Romish miracles, might have some chance of being a little re-established, and rescued from the mass of fraud in which the true ones are justly lost".⁷⁵ Following complaints from some Catholic readers, the magazine reiterated (in somewhat more polite terms) the point that Home's phenomena might lend credence to some of the Catholic miracles.⁷⁶ So far as individual witnesses of Home are concerned, some certainly appealed to non-canonical evidence of similar phenomena. In particular, William Howitt and Benjamin Coleman were the authors of many of the articles citing evidence of similar phenomena throughout history and other cultures. Some challenged the Protestant claim that miracles no

⁷² Examples of the former can be found in: *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 3, 1859, 5; *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1857, 95; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 22; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 215; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 378; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 508; *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 357; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 272; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 72; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1869, 12. Examples of the latter can be found in: *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 135; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 215; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 71; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 72; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 100.

⁷³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 72; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 87; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 332; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 193.

⁷⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 159; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 314; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 92; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 62-4; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 172; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 347; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1866, 356; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 354; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 179; *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1871, 221.

⁷⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 62-4.

⁷⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 172.

longer occurred as having no basis in Scripture.⁷⁷ Others cited historical evidence of spiritual communication in support of Home's phenomena.⁷⁸ Crookes, for example, in a private letter that suggested a greater inclination towards spiritual agency than his public statements, noted that "[h]istorical testimony is overwhelming as to the fact of communications having been made to mortals from invisible intelligent beings distant from the human race; and contemporary evidence to similar occurrences is accumulating daily".⁷⁹

The mainstream periodical press also compared Home's phenomena to non-canonical miracles but, as one might expect, tended to dismiss them all as false. Home's expulsion from Rome received some publicity - indeed, the refusal of Earl Russell to take any action over Home's expulsion led to a question being asked in the House by the radical member for Sheffield, John Roebuck - and the *London Review* was not alone in pointing out in a somewhat sarcastic tone that his phenomena were on a par with many Catholic miracles.⁸⁰ Mormon miracles received similar treatment.⁸¹ Regular references were made to past superstitions, bemoaning the existence of such beliefs in a modern scientific age.⁸² However, such regular criticisms of the miraculous seem to have raised doubts about the unique status of Biblical miracles and, as Biblical evidence was increasingly subjected to the scrutiny other miracles received, the line drawn by Protestants between the age of miracles and the rest of history was questioned.⁸³ In the 1870's, the argument that there was nothing special about the evidence for Biblical miracles seems to have received greater prominence. Certainly, when the *Fortnightly Review* included articles on spiritualism by both Lord Amberley and A. R. Wallace, while their conclusions were opposed, one point they agreed upon

⁷⁷ Crosland, 1856, 7; Baker, 1862, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 378.

⁷⁸ *British Spiritual Telegraph*, 1, 1857, 60; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 378.

⁷⁹ *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 169.

⁸⁰ Cited in Burton, 1948, 160. See also: *Blackwood's Magazine*, 96, 1864, 14ff; *British Quarterly Review*, 42, 1865, 80ff.

⁸¹ *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 25.

⁸² *Literary Gazette*, 1860, October 6, 276; *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 39; *North British Review*, 39, 1863, 174; *Edinburgh Review*, 122, 1865, *All The Year Round*, 1866, May 5, 405; *Athenaeum*, 1867, February 2, 150; *Westminster Review*, 95, 1871, 3; *Quarterly Review*, 131, 1871, 351; *Blackwood's Magazine*, 119, 1876, 35.

⁸³ *Fraser's Magazine*, 71, 1865, 32-9; *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 515.

was the superior quality of the evidence for seance phenomena over other miraculous events, and the *Contemporary Review* noted among even “orthodox” theologians of the time, “indications of a disposition to regard the New Testament miracles rather as encumbrances, than as props, to what is essential in Christianity”.⁸⁴

6.4. Summary and conclusions

Witnesses framing the phenomena as spiritual devoted little space to arguing against the notion of a psychic force, or to discussing satanic agency. Neither did the contemporary press, though the argument that the phenomena were blasphemous was more common. The dominant theme of the debate surrounding the question of supernatural agency, however, was the attempt to distinguish between Home’s phenomena and other miraculous events, particularly those reported in the Bible. Spiritualists regularly pointed out, and the periodical press often conceded, that the evidence for seance phenomena (particularly Home’s) was better than that for Biblical miracles. In this way, and reinforced by regular comparisons with other non-canonical miracles, the unique status of the Biblical miracles was increasingly challenged. Those defending the traditional Protestant position increasingly pointed to the importance of internal over external evidence in the assessment of miracles, and Home’s phenomena were also discussed in such terms. As spiritualists stressed the worth of the phenomena in terms of convincing sceptics, most nevertheless dismissed raps and floating tables as trivial and worthless. However, while the importance of external evidence was often played down, the need for such undoubtedly remained. Throughout Home’s mediumship, external evidence was a constant theme. Critics of David Hume’s essay on miracles had argued that testimony could be sufficient to demonstrate extraordinary phenomena, and their argument was cited by witnesses of Home.⁸⁵ The perceived importance of quantity (as well as quality) of testimony was

⁸⁴ *Fortnightly Review*, 15, 1874, 82-91; *Fortnightly Review*, 15, 1874, 630-57, 785-807; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 290. See also: *Fraser’s Magazine*, 4, 1871, 512ff; *Westminster Review*, 98, 1872, 461ff.

⁸⁵ Chambers, 1859, 8; Baker, 1862, 4.

reflected in the countless articles published by spiritualist periodicals which stressed the bulk of testimony about similar phenomena. Regular articles appeared in spiritualist periodicals citing testimony for extraordinary phenomena throughout history, and Biblical authority was regularly appealed to. Alongside their own accounts, witnesses cited the testimony of others.⁸⁶ Indeed, at times, the spiritualist press played down new investigations as unnecessary on the grounds that there was already sufficient evidence.⁸⁷ This was all part of the ongoing stress (discussed in chapter four) that their beliefs were based on observation of facts, and part of their appeal to induction as the true scientific method.

The hostility towards, and reluctance to cite, Catholic miracles is, no doubt, best understood in terms of the tradition of anti-Catholic feeling in Britain. Catholic miracles had long been dismissed as fake, and appealing to them in support of seance phenomena presumably would have done more harm than good. Spiritualists nevertheless accepted that some Catholic miracles were genuine. Likewise, in addition to the Bible, they cited all manner of other sources which described similar phenomena having occurred, and pointed to the apparent inconsistency in accepting those in Scripture but denying others. When spiritualists pointed out that Home's phenomena were better supported than the miracles of the Bible, they presumably hoped most Christians would get the point that one could not have one's cake and eat it. Either extraordinary phenomena could occur, had occurred, and continued to occur, or the sceptics were right and all the evidence wrong. This is presumably what the editors of the *Spiritual Magazine* had in mind when they bemoaned:

“There is a great disbelief in miracles at the present day, but there is hardly a greater miracle than to see a mass of people who profess to believe in the Bible, and whose religion is utterly based upon it and upon the miracles it relates, deny the whole range of analogous facts which are not only found throughout history, but are naturally occurring in their midst, and are supported by ten

⁸⁶ For example: London Dialectical Society, 1873, 230-1; Alexander, 1871, 60.

⁸⁷ For example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1863, 170; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 347; *Medium and Daybreak*, 2, 1871, 286; *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 63.

times the testimony of those in the scriptures. Such a power of rejecting facts by the human mind is of itself a miracle greatly to be wondered at".⁸⁸

As Darwinism and Biblical criticism challenged the miraculous aspects of Christianity, reports of and experiments into Home's phenomena represented the strongest evidence yet for the possibility of miraculous phenomena. While Christians (including many scientists) increasingly appealed to revelation in support of their miracles, evidence for seance phenomena was presented primarily in scientific language. Crookes became associated with Wallace and Varley (both avowed spiritualists), and their combined scientific credentials led to "the humourous remark ... that they represent the spiritualistic trinity, and furnish the evidences of belief upon which the spiritualistic apologist most fervently relies".⁸⁹ Yet despite the stress upon the scientific nature of the evidence, it was overwhelmingly rejected and, so far as the press acknowledged there might be something to it, a natural agency was preferred to a supernatural one. At the end of the last chapter, the question was asked, "If the mid-Victorian period was one characterised by a crisis of faith, why was there such a strong rejection of evidence of an after-life when nobody had an adequate alternative explanation for such phenomena?"

One reason would appear to be that seance phenomena had all the problems of miracles without the advantages. Whatever contemporaries thought of the evidence for seance phenomena being stronger than that for Biblical miracles, the latter clearly had significant cultural support. More recent miracles, on the other hand, such as those associated with Roman Catholicism, had long been dismissed as the result of imposture and delusion. It is hardly surprising that evidence for such phenomena was treated with scepticism. The tendency to adopt the cultural norm, rather than base one's views on scientific evidence, has been noted by Keith Thomas in relation to the decline of beliefs in magic in the 18th century.⁹⁰ No doubt many Victorians simply conformed

⁸⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1866, 12.

⁸⁹ *Human Nature*, 9, 1875, 113.

⁹⁰ Thomas cites psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, who noted in the 1920's that "[t]he average man of today does not hesitate to reject the same evidence of witchcraft that was so convincing to the man of three centuries ago, though he usually knows no more about the true explanation than the latter did" (Thomas, 1973, 774).

to the cultural norm without significant attention to the evidence, and this seems to have been recognised at the time. As the Victorian press increasingly recognised the relative weakness of the external evidence for Biblical miracles, continued belief in them seems to have prompted discussion of the nature of belief. W. B. Carpenter stressed the cultural influences of belief in the *Contemporary Review*, and other articles discussed the subjectivity of belief in relation to evidence.⁹¹ Perhaps *Fraser's Magazine* had a point when, speaking of religious rather than scientific evidence, it argued, "The majority of the world ... will always believe, not according to evidence at all, but simply as their previous habits of thought lead them to think".⁹²

⁹¹ *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1873, 123-45. See also: *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 512-24; *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 279-95, 440-6; *Fraser's Magazine*, 16, 1877, 541-64; 694-706; *Fortnightly Review*, 22, 1877, 355-76, 681-97, 792-810.

⁹² *Fraser's Magazine*, 4, 1871, 512.

7. The link with the mystic East

The previous chapters have described how Home's phenomena were framed by his contemporaries in relation to four questions: were they trickery?; were they objectively real; were they the result of a new natural force; and were they the result of supernatural agency? In the process of answering these questions, the mid-Victorians made regular comparisons between the phenomena reported at Home's seances and analogous events such as conjuring tricks and Christian miracles. But they also compared Home's phenomena to the feats of Indian jugglers, the term most commonly used to refer to Indian conjurors and fakirs at this time. This is not particularly surprising. After all, seance phenomena were being compared with the feats of British conjurors who, as chapter three described, were increasingly stressing that their tricks were reliant upon natural law. Indian juggling, on the other hand, also had associations with 'genuine' magic and, as chapter four noted, while Victorians retained an interest in magic, such phenomena were consigned to areas beyond modern urban Britain; to rural areas, to the Scottish Highlands, and to the past. Indeed, the unique status of Biblical miracles discussed in the last chapter can be seen partly as a reflection of this increasing tendency to consign such phenomena to the past. As the modern scientific worldview grew in influence, phenomena that were deemed incompatible with the currently understood laws of nature were bound to be relegated to another arena. It should not be surprising, then, that distant lands should also have become associated with such phenomena, and India, which must have been the most prominent of distant lands in the minds of Victorians, came to be seen in this way. Since reports from India included anomalous phenomena such as levitation, the Victorians compared these to the levitations being reported by Home's witnesses. This chapter considers the link

between the feats of Indian jugglers and the phenomena that were reportedly taking place in the capital of the Empire.

7.1. Victorian views of Indian juggling

Victorians must have thought of many things when they thought of India, but historians have identified certain major themes. On the one hand, India was viewed as primitive and irrational in contrast with the West's modern and rational self-image.¹ On the other hand, India provided a romantic image of mystery and magic that was lacking in the West.² The former would have been reinforced by regular articles in the periodical press describing the 'barbaric' suicides associated with sati and the juggernath festival, and other reports of native superstitions.³ The latter would have been reinforced by reports of extraordinary feats taking place in India that appeared to be inexplicable even to 'rational' Western observers. While historians have studied examples of the former range of phenomena, including sati, thuggee and human sacrifice, the latter phenomena have been virtually ignored.⁴ Yet by the end of the Victorian period, feats of Indian juggling (as they were called) were central to how the British viewed India. As the *Strand Magazine* put it in 1899:

“Ask the average man for what India is most celebrated, and chances are ten to one that he will ignore the glories of the Taj Mahal, the beneficence of British rule, even Mr Kipling, and will unhesitatingly reply in one word, ‘Jugglers’.”⁵

The prominence of Indian jugglers in the minds of the British was presumably due to their feats being regarded as more impressive than those of British conjurors. For

¹ Said (1978) stressed this theme in relation to the Orient generally, but it has also been discussed specifically in relation to India (Inden, 1990).

² Clarke, 1997, 19, 57; King, 1999, 97.

³ The Times published dozens of articles on these topics over the period in question (Palmer's Index to the Times). See also: Buchanan, 1833, 88-91; Murray, 1844, 279.

⁴ Chatterjee, 1998; Mani, 1989; Bates, 2000.

⁵ *The Strand Magazine*, 18, 1899, 657-64.

many, such feats were unexplained, perhaps even inexplicable by Western science. In this sense, they were directly comparable to seance phenomena, and Victorians did indeed compare them directly to seance phenomena. This was not always the case, however. In order to provide a context for such a comparison, this chapter first considers more general views about Indian juggling over the Victorian period.

7.1.1. Tales of magic from India

Tales of Indian magic date as far back as the earliest Western visitors to Asia. Marco Polo wrote of Kashmiri conjurors who “bring on changes of weather and produce darkness, and do a number of things so extraordinary that no-one without seeing them would believe them”, and of Indian sorcerers who, in the court of the Great Khan, could cause cups of wine “to move from their place without being touched by anybody, and to present themselves to the Emperor!”.⁶ Ibn Battuta, the Moroccan traveller who wrote of travels in Asia at the beginning of the 14th century, reported having seen a man levitate before his eyes at the Delhi court.⁷ As visitors increased in number, so did such reports. European travellers in 17th century India told of equally marvellous things, the most common phenomenon being what became known as the ‘mango trick’, where a mango tree reportedly grew from seed to fruit-bearing bush in a matter of minutes.⁸ However, it was not until the 19th century that such accounts became widely read, since most of these texts were not published in English until then.⁹ In these texts, Victorian readers came across accounts of all manner of phenomena, of magicians who “tell any person his thoughts, cause the branch of a tree to blossom and to bear fruit within an hour, hatch an egg in their bosom in less than

⁶ Yule, 1873, 1, 177; ii, 292.

⁷ Lee, 1929, 162.

⁸ Bernier, 1826, 29; Ovington, 1929, 153-4; Fryer, 1912, 104; Tavernier, 1925, 55.

⁹ Marco Polo’s travels had been available in English since Frampton (1579), but further editions only appeared in the 19th century (e.g. Murray, 1844; Wright, 1854; Yule, 1873). Ibn Battuta’s travels were first translated in 1829, Bernier’s diary in 1826. It is true that Tavernier had been translated by John Phillip more than 200 years previously, but his 19th century editor pointed out that this had been inadequate, and so the text was practically unknown to English readers (Crooke, 1899, viii). The memoirs of Emperor Jehangir were also published in 1829, which also gave accounts of inexplicable jugglers feats (Price, 1829).

five minutes, producing whatever bird may be demanded, and made to fly about the room; and execute many other prodigies that need not be enumerated".¹⁰

How Victorian readers framed such phenomena is, of course, difficult to say. Certainly, some of these reported phenomena were framed as trickery or imagination by witnesses. In the 17th century, the French official Francois Bernier had remarked with some reluctance that, "the cause lay in some cheat or slight of hand" and a British civil servant in India had noted that the mango trick was a mere deception¹¹, but many of the early visitors seem to have accepted that such phenomena might be authentic.¹² Expressions of scepticism, therefore, might be left to their Victorian editors. Wright (1844), for example, noted that Marco Polo had "introduced some statements from which our belief must be withheld ... [as he] shared that spirit of credulity which was then general over the world, and particularly through the East".¹³ No doubt many Victorians would have agreed with this view.

However, in addition to new editions of early traveller's accounts, contemporary accounts of magical phenomena in India began to appear at this time. In 1832, stories of a levitating Brahmin began to appear in the British press. The *Saturday Magazine* included a drawing to accompany an account of how a performer in Madras called Sheshal had seemingly floated in the air while engaged in prayer. The effect, it should be noted, involved a set-up during which Sheshal was concealed from the audience by a blanket. When the blanket was removed, Sheshal was seen to be sitting cross-legged in the air, his hand resting on a staff that touched the ground. The writer of the article deduced that the method involved a metal support connected to the staff and worn under the clothes of the performer, and he was almost certainly correct.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the effect seems to have attracted a great deal of attention both in India and Britain. "For a while", wrote *The Leisure Hour* in 1853, "there was nothing heard or talked of but this wonderful 'man that sat in the air'. Newspapers were full of him;

¹⁰ Bernier, 1826, 28.

¹¹ Bernier, 1826, 28-30; Clarke, 1983, 276.

¹² Bernier, 1826, 28; Foster, 1926, 271; Kamroff, 1928, 184.

¹³ Wright, 1844, 19.

¹⁴ *Saturday Magazine*, 1832, July 28, 28.

private letters teemed about him”. The writer of this article described how the trick had been attributed by many to “some wonderful discovery in magnetism” until finally exposed by a British resident of Madras. This exposure “made people wonder how they could ever have been so simple as not to guess at the truth long before”.¹⁵ It would seem, then, that despite the secret having been provided in the original account of 1832, for many the illusion continued to be a mystery. Indeed, the same illusion continued to be presented by some writers as a genuine levitation well into the 20th century.¹⁶

At the same time, other bizarre phenomena were being reported from India. In 1834, the *Oriental Annual* included an account by the Reverend Hobart Caunter of what became known as the Indian basket trick, in which a girl was placed into a basket, and the magician plunged a sword through the wicker until “blood ran in streams from the basket”.¹⁷ After the girl was seen to have vanished from the basket and appeared nearby in perfect health, Caunter concluded that this was a ‘deception’. However, the language he used - the sword was “plunged with all the blind ferocity of an excited demon”, “my first impulse was to rush upon the monster and fell him to the earth”, yet he was “pale and paralyzed with terror” - must have conjured up barbaric images for his readers. Similarly colourful accounts of the trick appeared subsequently in popular periodicals without any clue as to how the trick was done, and some questioned whether it was a trick at all.¹⁸ In 1855, the *Family Herald* wrote that “No European that witnesses it can discover [its secret]” and, a few years later, *All The Year Round* felt a need to state that it was merely trickery, noting how “hundreds of shrewd hard-headed unimaginative and scientific Englishmen have seen it, thought about it, tried it - and been baffled”.¹⁹

At least as mysterious must have been accounts of fakirs being buried alive. In 1837,

¹⁵ *Leisure Hour*, 1853, 791-4. *Chambers' Journal*, 1839, March 16, 69 had described the basic method but noted it was still unclear as to how it could actually work.

¹⁶ See, for example: Michell and Rickard, 1979, 96-7; Rogo, 1991, 32-4.

¹⁷ Caunter, 1834.

¹⁸ *Chambers' Journal*, 1839, Mar 16, 69; *Once A Week*, 4, 1861, 40-3; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 120; Frost, 1876, 114.

¹⁹ *Family Herald*, 13, 1855, 349-59; *All The Year Round*, 1862, April 19, 133.

at the court of Runjeet Singh in Lahore, a fakir survived being buried alive without food or water for a month. Witnesses to this feat included one Captain Osborne, who wrote a book about it²⁰, and Sir Claude Martin Wade, who provided a narrative for James Braid, the pioneer of research into hypnotism. Braid subsequently provided his readers with several similar accounts, stating that the evidence “must set the point at rest for ever as to the fact of the feats referred to having been genuine phenomena”.²¹ In Braid’s view, such phenomena were attributable to a form of self-hypnosis. More popular portrayals of the phenomena were less informative, however, *The Leisure Hour* failing to provide any solution to the mystery, stating simply that “it appears almost incredible that some artifice was not resorted to” while the *Family Herald* claimed that “all seems and is *bona fide*”, linking the effect to yoga and the occult.²² Other feats of Indian juggling were described in the popular press with little more by way of explanation, the *Penny Magazine* stating of snake charming that “suspicions of trick in this curious process are unfounded”.²³

The early Victorian period therefore saw the appearance of a variety of past and contemporary accounts of anomalous phenomena reportedly having taken place in India, and they appear to have been framed in different ways. Contemporary accounts of levitation and the basket trick were framed as trickery by those who reported them, though apparently not by all who read about them. Concluding that such phenomena were fake was, of course, consistent with the general view that Indians were superstitious and the victims of credulity. Such a conclusion led to Indians being presented not only as credulous observers but as ingenious deceivers. In either case, British supervision was deemed desirable.²⁴ However, not everyone concluded that such phenomena were fake. Some might be described simply as inexplicable, but levitation had been attributed to magnetism, live burial to self-hypnosis, and other forms of Indian magic such as reports of native magical healing were elsewhere being

²⁰ Capt. Osborne, *Camp and court of Runjeet Singh*. Olcott (1875/1933, 37) notes this is a very rare book.

²¹ Braid, 1850, 9.

²² *Leisure Hour*, 1853, 791-4. *Family Herald*, 13, 1855, 349-59. Others subsequently ruled out any form of deception (e.g. Olcott, 1875/1933, 38).

²³ *Penny Magazine*, 1833 [cutting from Lane collection].

²⁴ *Leisure Hour*, 1853, 791-4.

attributed to mesmerism.²⁵ With the emergence of Modern Spiritualism, Indian magic began to be compared to seance phenomena. By that time, however, Indian juggling was being performed in Britain.

7.1.2. Indian jugglers in Britain

The first Indian jugglers to appear in Britain performed at Pall Mall from November 1813 until the autumn of 1815, when they were succeeded by 'The Four Surprising Indian Jugglers just arrived in this country from Seringapatam'. This latter group was led by one 'Ramo Samee', and he - or other performers using his name - continued to perform for the next thirty years in theatres around the country.²⁶ Shortly after the appearance of Ramo Samee, rival Indian jugglers such as Kia Khan Khruse, Vera Breda and Mooty Moodaya began to perform in London and around the country over the following years, achieving widespread recognition in the press.²⁷

In the early 19th century, the term 'juggling' referred to all forms of magic and conjuring as well as feats of dexterity. However, though the performances of Indian jugglers included conjuring effects such as the cups and balls and the colour-changing sand, they consisted primarily of feats of dexterity - such as the juggling of four brass balls, balancing feats, and top spinning -, or apparent dexterity, such as stringing beads in the mouth. Furthermore, it was to manual dexterity that press commentators on the Indian jugglers drew attention.²⁸ Similarly, the essayist William Hazlitt described the juggling of four brass balls as "the utmost stretch of human ingenuity", and praised the jugglers for their ability to perfect such mechanical feats and demonstrate the limits of human skill and industry. No other feats were discussed, and no reference was made to magic.²⁹ Another writer also presented these performances as

²⁵ *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, 1852, October 2, 217-19.

²⁶ Ramo Samee appeared on the same bill as Charles Dickens in Hull theatre in 1838-9 (Dawes, 1979, 131).

²⁷ Clarke, 1983, 283ff.

²⁸ *Sporting Magazine*, 45, 1815, 262-5.

²⁹ Hazlitt, 1821, 77-89.

feats of skill, with no reference to anything magical. The cups and balls was considered more skilful than European versions, and the swallowing of a sword - the most prominently advertised effect on Samee's posters, and at that time a new and presumably startling effect to European audiences - was explained in terms of physiology, such that though it was described as a "wonderful exhibition", there was "nothing at all improbable, much less impossible" involved.³⁰

Indian jugglers were not the only Eastern performers to appear in Britain, but they were the most notable. Chinese jugglers also appeared from around 1830. However, though they performed some new effects, such as the linking rings, and the production of a large bowl of water, their feats were, on the whole, similar to those of the Indian jugglers. Ching Lau Lauro, most likely an Englishman, presented in 1834, "An imitation of a Chinese juggler" which included ball juggling while "sitting in the air upon nothing". This was not, as some have subsequently assumed, a levitation, but was in fact a balancing feat.³¹ A performance was reported in 1828 of a 'Chinese Conjuror [possibly Lauro], who swallows fifty needles, which, after remaining some time in his throat, are pulled out threaded", a trick already being performed by Indian jugglers.³² By the time John Henry Anderson brought over a Chinese troupe in 1854, there was, according to one historian of magic, "practically no difference between Indian and Chinese jugglers", a point supported by advertisements for such performers as 'an Anglo-Chinese juggler a la Ramo Samee'.³³ Indeed, the first prominent Chinese magician was Ching Ling Foo (1854-1922), who did not appear until the end of the century, and who prompted a number of Western imitators. By that time, other troupes of Indian jugglers had been brought over to perform, and Wilkie Collins had referred to "strolling Indians who infest the streets".³⁴

What is notable is that visiting Indian performers did not perform the feats of juggling being reported from India at that time, such as the mango trick, the basket trick, the

³⁰ Platts, 1822, 62-3.

³¹ Clarke, 1983, 127; Lauro poster (Lane collection).

³² Daniel, 1842, 192.

³³ Clarke, 1983, 285.

³⁴ Collins, 1868, 177.

live burial or levitation. Indeed, the first Indian performer to include the basket trick in his repertoire does not appear to have been until the 1870's³⁵ and, by the end of the century, Indian conjurers were increasingly performing effects with European roots.³⁶ Throughout the century, Indian juggling as performed in Britain seems to have been framed primarily as feats of skill, yet Indian jugglers seem to have retained a more mysterious image than their performances justified. A troupe of Indian jugglers appear in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868). While the novel does not describe any of the effects that formed the act, Indian juggling is nevertheless presented as both impressive - the narrator admits to having been fooled by the effects, despite it having been nothing more than "a very bad and clumsy imitation of Indian juggling" - and as having links with the occult. Indeed, the only feat described is one performed without an audience, an apparent demonstration of clairvoyance performed by a small boy accompanying the jugglers, and achieved through looking into ink poured into his palm. This demonstration, despite having been almost certainly based on an account of alleged clairvoyance from Egypt, is later dismissed as "a development of the romantic side of the Indian character".³⁷ Presumably, it is that mystical image that Western conjurers intended to tap into when they appropriated various aspects of Indian magic.

7.1.3. The appropriation of Indian juggling

When, in 1731, the famous Georgian conjuror, Isaac Fawkes had "raised up an apple tree which bore ripe apples in less than a minute's time, which several of the company tasted of", he had almost certainly got the idea from the Indian mango trick, which several travellers had given accounts of by that time.³⁸ A century later, Robert-Houdin, the pioneering French conjuror, employed intricate mechanical methods to produce a similar illusion. He also modified Sheshal's levitation to create 'Suspension

³⁵ Clarke (1983) claims it was Sayad Hassan in 1886 (p. 284-5), but Maskelyne refers to a performance "not long ago" (*Leisure Hour*, 1878, 217).

³⁶ Whaley, 1989, 357.

³⁷ An almost identical (and often cited) account of alleged clairvoyance in Egypt had been described by Lane (1860); Collins, 1868, 265.

³⁸ The account appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1731, and was cited in the *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 195.

ethereenne'. This suspension of his son was attributed by the performer to the properties of ether.³⁹ Robert-Houdin's application of new scientific methods and presentations was such that no audience was likely to leave concluding any form of supernatural agency was involved.

Robert-Houdin did not present these effects as being of Indian origin, but subsequent European performers were more open about their appropriation of Indian magic. The earliest recorded appearance of Colonel Stodare is on Hogmanay 1860-1 in Edinburgh, where he presented his show, 'Indian Magic'. The *Scotsman* advertised his 'Celebrated and Original Illusions of INDIAN or EASTERN MAGIC', and a subsequent review of the show distinguished between this style of magic, involving little or no apparatus, and the type of glamorous prop-centred magic of Anderson. It also distinguished between European exponents of Indian magic and "their more simple-minded Indian congeners, who practise with bare arms". Stodare's repertoire included many standard European effects, including an expose of spirit-rapping, but Indian magic was presented as, and reviewed as, the main feature. This was still the case in 1865, when the Colonel was playing Egyptian Hall in London, and featuring two new Indian effects, the 'Indian Basket Trick' and the 'Instantaneous Growth of Flowers', the latter based on the Indian mango trick. Advertises in the *Times* and a review in the *Daily News* both described Stodare's show as an opportunity to see for the first time such famous Indian tricks. Stodare also sold a pamphlet entitled 'Hindu Magic' that included descriptions of the mango and basket tricks. Stodare was English and presented himself as a French ex-army officer, but his magic was predominantly framed as Indian, and it was the Indian connection that press reviews focussed on.⁴⁰

Other performers appropriated a more visual image of India to enhance their magic. The first British conjuror known to have performed as an Indian was Charles Dickens. In a performance in the Isle of Wight in 1849, Dickens, a keen amateur conjuror, blacked up his face and hands, dressed himself in exotic robes, and presented himself as 'The Unparalleled Necromancer Rhia Rhama Rhoos'. The name was presumably

³⁹ Lamb, 1978, 34.

⁴⁰ Stodare, 1865; Dawes, 1998.

derived from the Indian jugglers, Ramo Samee and Kia Khan Khruse, the former having appeared on the same bill as Dickens at Hull theatre in the winter of 1838-9. Dickens' interest in Indian magic would continue. However, the effects he performed were conventional European ones, and other than the name and costume, no references were made to India or the East. Perhaps, more importantly, this was apparently a one-off private performance and so had an extremely limited audience.⁴¹

However, it was not long before professional conjurers were presenting themselves as Indians. The first to adopt such a persona seems to have been Isaiah Harris Hughes, who was born in Essex in 1813, and later moved to the United States where he became the so-called Fakir of Ava. An advertisement for a show in 1854 boasted of "the Fakir of Ava, Chief of Staff of Conjurers to His Sublime Greatness the Nanka of Aristaphae! who will appear in his native costume, and will perform the most Astonishing Miracles of the East!!" However, none of the tricks described in a subsequent review had any connection to the East either in name or in form. In addition, from around that time, the Fakir gave up his 'native costume' for formal evening dress, following the style of Robert-Houdin. A subsequent English programme listing all of his tricks included not only the Hindoo Cup Trick, but also a Chinese Plate Illusion and, in much more prominent lettering 'The Great African Box and Sack Feat'. The rest of the programme were standard European effects.⁴²

Some years later, however, another fakir attracted attention. Alfred Sylvester had been an assistant to Professor John Henry Pepper at the London Polytechnic Institution, and had demonstrated 'Pepper's Ghost', the optical illusion of a ghost on stage that had been compared to spiritualist phenomena.⁴³ In 1863, he attempted an 'improvement' which, when it came to the attention of the original patentees, resulted in Sylvester having to place a public apology in the *Times*. In 1870-1, he took Pepper's Ghost to America (with permission) and while there obtained a second-hand version of Robert-Houdin's levitation illusion 'Suspension ethereenne', and this became the main feature

⁴¹ On Dickens' performance see: Dawes, 1979, 131-4; Tigner, 1990.

⁴² *Abracadabra*, 55, 1973, 42-4, 125-6; Waller, 1980, 8-9; Price, 1985, 142.

⁴³ *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1868, May 16, 304, 307; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 112.

of a new show presented in the character of an Eastern Mystic, the Fakir of Oolu.⁴⁴ On returning to London he appeared at Egyptian Hall, where the *Times* reported his performance of the levitation of his assistant and other “marvellous deeds”.⁴⁵ An illustration of the Fakir shows this levitation performed in turban and robe in an Oriental setting.⁴⁶ Despite the gap in years between these two fakirs, others must have been adopting Indian garb around this time. A historian of magic wrote in 1876 that he was as doubtful of the Chinese descent of Ching Ling Lauro “as I am whether a juggler of the present day, who appears in a brown face and an Oriental garb, is an Asiatic”.⁴⁷ Over the following years, other Western magicians exploited the Indian connection, including the Fakir of Vishnu, The White Mahatma, and The White Yogi, and the famous English conjurors, Maskelyne and Cooke, performed a popular magical sketch in 1884 entitled ‘The Fakirs of Benares’.⁴⁸

Of course, India was by no means the only source of inspiration for magicians. Victorian performers adopted various names and performed effects with titles referring to various parts of the world, but apparently not to the same extent as India. The most obvious comparison was with China, which also provided its share of visiting jugglers, and had both its native effects and costumes borrowed by Western performers. However, as noted above, the jugglers do not appear to have been significantly different from the already present Indians, and the effects borrowed received less attention in the press. Phillipe, a French performer dressed for part of his show in a large Chinese-style robe to present ‘A night in the palace of Pekin’, but his reasons were primarily methodological - a great deal may be concealed beneath a large robe - and his effects were described as ‘Indian and Chinese experiments’.⁴⁹ As for those who adopted Chinese appearance full-time, there were no notable performers until around 1900, and in direct response to the success of an authentic Chinese performer, Ching Ling Foo.

⁴⁴ Dawes, 1998, 82.

⁴⁵ *Times*, 1873, April 15, 4.

⁴⁶ Reprinted in Clarke, 1983, 186.

⁴⁷ Frost, 1876, 221.

⁴⁸ Whaley, 1989.

⁴⁹ From a poster in the Lane collection.

The European performers who appropriated aspects of Indian magic, it should be noted, did so within an overall scientific framing of magic. Robert-Houdin founded what was termed the 'scientific school' of conjuring, whereby effects were presented as entirely reliant upon scientific laws, and Stodare was absolutely explicit about there being nothing anomalous involved.⁵⁰ They and others regularly performed 'spiritualistic exposes' in their shows as a means of debunking supernatural phenomena. Indeed, Stodare was praised by *Punch* for his honest deceptions in comparison with the supernatural claims of the Davenport brothers.⁵¹ Yet clearly such performers felt that the image of Indian magic lent an air of mystery to their shows. While they may have presented Indian magic as nothing more than trickery, the appropriation of the Indian image suggests that they felt their potential audience framed Indian magic differently from Western magic, presumably as more exotic and more mysterious. This is confirmed by the attitude of conjurors to Indian magic from the 1870's onwards.

7.1.4. The debunking of Indian juggling

In 1878, J. N. Maskelyne wrote an article for *The Leisure Hour* on 'Oriental Jugglery' where he went so far as exposing the methods of Indian jugglers to the public, his reasons clearly similar to those that had provoked him and other conjurors to expose the methods used by fake spiritualist mediums. Describing the East as the home of magic, "not the innocent conjuring we give that name to in England ... but the crafty and sometimes audacious imposture in which the magician pretends to possess supernatural powers", he complained of fakirs who "have deluded innocent Englishmen into writing of their jugglery as though it had an element of the miraculous in it". He then attributed Indian marvels to exaggeration "tinged by the romance clinging to all things Oriental", and went on to explain the methods behind Sheshal's levitation, the basket trick (as described by the Rev. Hobart Caunter) and sword-

⁵⁰ Stodare, 1867, 5-6.

⁵¹ *Punch*, 1865, June 3, 220.

swallowing.⁵² All of these tricks had been attributed to trickery several decades earlier by those who had first reported them, yet clearly they were being associated with a general view that Indian juggling was being presented as and attributed to genuine magical powers.

Whether Indian performers were making claims to such powers beyond the usual theatrical patter is difficult to say. The *Times*, for example, had recently reported on an Indian juggler “who pretended to possess some power which rendered his life proof against any attempt that might be made upon it with powder and ball”.⁵³ This was the ‘Gun Trick’, which had been originally performed in Britain by Indian jugglers, and subsequently by British magicians, including John Henry Anderson. Had Anderson claimed to possess a similar power while performing the trick, and he almost certainly did, it is difficult to imagine anyone thinking that such a claim was intended to be taken seriously given his credentials as a debunker of supernatural phenomena. It is quite possible that the claims of Indian performers were no more serious, but were taken to be so. In any case, it does seem clear that Indian magic as a whole was being taken seriously by some, and too many for Maskelyne’s liking.

Maskelyne’s example was followed by other Western magicians who had visited India. The first Western conjuror to have visited India seems to have been the Swede, Hartwig Seeman, in 1872.⁵⁴ While there, he met a native juggler who demonstrated a levitation for the visitor, and was reportedly surprised when the visitor explained that he performed a similar effect for European audiences. The narrator writes with respect of the Indian performer, though he does subsequently point out that his own version of the trick was superior.⁵⁵ A few years later, Dr Lynn visited India, and presented a similar picture of a native conjuror who, while competent, was no match for the European. While Lynn thought the conjuror worth bringing over to Britain, he

⁵² *The Leisure Hour*, 1878, 250-3; 298-301. The article also discussed the live burial, but no explanation was provided.

⁵³ *Times*, 1876, April 18, 10.

⁵⁴ Frickell claimed to have visited India earlier, but this claim needs to be treated with caution (Clarke, 1983, 198).

⁵⁵ Burlingame, 1891a.

nevertheless pointed out that the skill of Indian conjurors had been exaggerated and stressed the superiority of European conjurors.⁵⁶ That the quality of Indian magic had been exaggerated became an ongoing theme in the writings of Western conjurors. As one prominent writer on magic put it, “more nonsense has been written about East India fakirs and jugglers than any other class of conjurers”.⁵⁷ The quality of Indian juggling was linked to the notion that it was inexplicable (perhaps inexplicable by Western science) and this led to several Western conjurors publishing books available to the general public in which they exposed the methods of Indian tricks.⁵⁸ In addition to published texts, several articles appeared in a wide variety of popular periodicals on the topic of Indian juggling, and included exposures of the methods of Indian jugglers.⁵⁹

This public exposure of the methods of Indian jugglers by British conjurors from the 1870’s was no doubt provoked to some extent by a degree of professional jealousy, but it also seems to have been in response to an increasing tendency among the public at this time to view Indian juggling, in Maskelyne’s words, “as though it had an element of the miraculous in it”. What provoked this shift in attitude towards Indian juggling is not immediately obvious. Certainly one might suppose that the Theosophical Society played a part, its role in shaping Western views of Indian mysticism being significant.⁶⁰ However, Theosophy was not mentioned in the sceptical writings referred to above until the 1890’s, by which time it had been investigated by the Society for Psychical Research, and its phenomena dismissed as the product of deception and self-deception.⁶¹ The other immediate suspected influence might be the legend of the Indian rope trick. Several historians of magic have located the rope trick in the 1870’s, and certainly this legend grew to become the most famous mystery of

⁵⁶ Lynn, 1882.

⁵⁷ Burlinghame, 1891b, 183.

⁵⁸ For example: Burlinghame, 1891a; Baldwin, 1895; Thurston, 1911; Branson, 1922; Elliot, 1934.

⁵⁹ *The Strand*, 1899, 18, 1899, 657-64; *New Penny Magazine*, 1900, May 26; *Chambers’ Journal*, 4, 1901, 757-61; *Living Age*, 1901, March 1. At the same time, articles appeared that presented descriptions of such feats without providing any explanation (e.g. *Routledge’s Every Boy’s Annual Magazine*, 1879 (January), 46-8; *Graphic*, 1888, April 14, 393-4; *Graphic*, 1892, January 2, 13; *The Boy’s Own Paper*, 16, 1894, 741-2; ‘Oriental magic’ (c.1899); *Cassell’s*, 1901, July 15.

⁶⁰ Clarke, 1997, 89ff.

⁶¹ *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, 9, 1885, 205.

the Orient, provoking many magicians to denounce the trick publicly as a myth in response to public discussion about its possible supernatural origins. In fact, throughout the early 20th century, Western conjurors regularly attempted to debunk the notion that the rope trick was inexplicable by Western science, the first scientific explanation not being published until a few years ago.⁶² However, it also now seems clear that the legend was not widely known about until the 1890's. The claim made by several historians of magic that the trick was famous during the time of the Prince of Wales' visit to India in 1875-6 are without foundation, and contemporary texts that refer to Indian magic do not mention the trick until the closing few years of the century.⁶³ The efforts of British conjurors to debunk Indian juggling, though they soon became directed against the growing legend of the rope trick, were already underway by the time the rope trick arrived on the scene. On the other hand, the attempt to debunk Indian juggling seems to have been clearly linked to similar attempts to debunk seance phenomena. Maskelyne said as much, and the writings of other conjurors on Indian juggling were often accompanied by exposures of pseudo-spiritualist phenomena. How, then, did this link between seance phenomena and Indian magic emerge?

7.2. Indian juggling and seance phenomena

As the last four chapters have shown, Home's phenomena were framed by contemporaries in various ways and compared to seemingly anomalous phenomena such as conjuring tricks and religious miracles. However, they were also compared to various extraordinary feats associated with India. The feats of Indian jugglers and fakirs had been attributed by some to trickery, yet for many they remained unexplained (if not inexplicable), and they retained an element of mystery that came to be exploited by British conjurors in their performances. In the last two decades of the century, however, a concerted effort seems to have been made through the mainstream press to

⁶² Wiseman & Lamont, 1996.

⁶³ Lamont & Wiseman, 2001, 176-9.

debunk feats of Indian juggling, suggesting an increasing tendency among the public at large to view such phenomena as genuinely anomalous. In this sense, they were directly comparable to seance phenomena, and this section considers the comparisons made by contemporaries between the two groups of phenomena. It also briefly discusses the link with the Theosophical Society and the legendary Indian rope trick which, as noted above, became two of the most powerful influences in shaping the image of India as a land of magic.

7.2.1. Indian juggling and Home's phenomena

From Home's arrival in Britain, his phenomena were compared to the feats of Indian jugglers, the *Family Herald* regarding both as superior to the tricks of Anderson.⁶⁴ Given Charles Dickens' interest in both Indian juggling and fraudulent mediums, it is hardly surprising the two were also compared early on in one of his publications, where he cited the mango and basket tricks as examples of how Indian juggling was a superior form of deception to that of spiritualist mediums.⁶⁵ However, the link between Indian juggling and spirit manifestations became more widely discussed with the arrival of the Davenport brothers in 1864, who employed the methods of Indian jugglers to produce an effect they attributed to spirits. The performances of Indian jugglers in early nineteenth-century Britain had included a rope-tying feat, in which the performer was tied up, yet managed to release himself. The jugglers had presented the effect as an example of what would later become known as escapology. The Davenport brothers, on the other hand, performed a 'spirit cabinet' effect that relied on a similar method. The effectiveness of the performance relied entirely upon the belief among the audience that the brothers were securely tied to chairs within the cabinet. In that sense, the effect was one of escapology. Yet it was presented as (and many people seem to have regarded it as) a demonstration of spirit manifestations, with the rope acting as a

⁶⁴ *Family Herald*, 13, 1855, 349-50.

⁶⁵ *All The Year Round*, 1862, Apr 18, 130-7. Indian jugglers' physical dexterity was also cited as an example of how a medium might accomplish certain feats through using his feet to manipulate objects below the table (*Once A Week*, 3, 1860, 403).

control against trickery.⁶⁶

The methodological link between the Indian rope-tying feat and the Davenports' spirit cabinet was not restricted to those with inside knowledge of conjuring. Lay contemporaries expressed the view that the spirit manifestations of the Davenports were nothing more than a modification of the Indian trick, and in such diverse publications as *The Lancet* and *The Field*.⁶⁷ In addition, several performers presented the feat in order to show that this was the case. Indeed, it was the desire to duplicate the Davenport brothers' effect that started the career of John Nevil Maskelyne.⁶⁸ The notion that the rope-tying feat might be attributed to spirits was even mocked by an Indian performer. According to a British witness of a performance of the trick in India, "I told [the juggler] there were men in England who were bound in the same way, but had spirits to untie them, at which he laughed the laugh of the incredulous".⁶⁹ Before long, both the spiritualist and mainstream periodical press were making broader comparisons between Indian juggling and seance phenomena, and came to focus on certain of Home's phenomena.

Not surprisingly, spiritualists rejected the notion that the Davenport brothers phenomena were explicable by the same methods as Indian jugglers. They cited the famous traveller, Captain Burton, who had "spent a great part of my life in Oriental lands, and have seen there many magicians" yet, having attended four seances with the Davenports, he was unable to explain how they produced their phenomena.⁷⁰ While the *Spiritual Magazine* seems to have accepted that this particular feat (as performed by Indian jugglers) was trickery, it also argued that Indian juggling itself was more than mere deception, stating the view that "these Orientals are mediums as well as conjurors".⁷¹ When a British financier in India, referred to as 'Mr A', was reported to have duplicated the Davenport phenomena, the magazine concluded that "Mr A is

⁶⁶ *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, 4, 1856, 158; *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 527.

⁶⁷ *Lancet* cited in *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 511; *The Field*, 1864, October 29; see also: 'Indian rope feat', n.d.

⁶⁸ Frost, 1876, 337ff.

⁶⁹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 167.

⁷⁰ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 89.

⁷¹ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 524.

possessed of the occult powers of India”, and cited other ‘marvellous and incomprehensible’ Indian phenomena, such as the basket trick.⁷² It subsequently reported various examples of ‘fire ordeals’, such as walking on hot irons and placing a red-hot iron on the tongue, and, in doing so, ruled out trickery as an explanation.⁷³ There was, of course, nothing new or particularly Eastern about ‘fire ordeals’, and the article described many examples from environments more familiar to their readers, such as ancient Britain and the Old Testament, noting their presence in every society. In addition, there were performers throughout the 19th century, sometimes referred to as ‘human salamanders’ or ‘fire-kings’, who demonstrated various types of resistance to fire, strictly for entertainment purposes.⁷⁴ However, perhaps because similar phenomena occurring in the East were regarded as of spiritual significance, when William Howitt wrote on the topic shortly afterwards, he presented them as ‘phenomena of the Eastern nations’.⁷⁵ During the same year, tests on Home were carried out by Henry Jencken, a barrister, who reported Home’s ability to resist the effects of fire, a phenomenon Jencken called the ‘fire-test’. The phenomenon, which primarily consisted of the handling of red-hot coals, was reported in the spiritualist press and to the Committee of the Dialectical Society when they carried out their investigation into spiritualism in 1869. Spiritualists attributed these phenomena to spirit influence. The *Spiritualist Newspaper* even described the methods used by conjurors, noting that the length of contact between Home and the hot coals made such methods impractical as explanations.⁷⁶ The authenticity of Home’s phenomenon was supported by noting that such abilities had been known about in the East for thousands of years.⁷⁷ From this time, the spiritualist press began to show a more general interest in India, with articles reporting on the progress of spiritualism in India and drawing comparisons with Indian magical phenomena.⁷⁸

⁷² *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 120.

⁷³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 72.

⁷⁴ Jay, 1987, 239-73.

⁷⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 289-96.

⁷⁶ *The Spiritualist*, 1, 1870, 49.

⁷⁷ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 466.

⁷⁸ *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 179; *Human Nature*, 5, 1871, 324; *Spiritual Magazine*, 9, 1874, 38-43; 90-1; *Spiritualist Newspaper*, 1875 cited in Olcott, 1933, 30. See also Benjamin Coleman’s comments on Jaccoliot’s experiments with a fakir (Olcott, 1876, 38).

The mainstream periodical press took a different line, of course, framing both Indian juggling and seance phenomena as the result of trickery and, in doing so, presenting the former as superior to the latter. The *British Quarterly Review*, for example, rejected the notion that “Orientals appear to have an insight into natural laws with which we are unacquainted”, attributing feats of Indian juggling such as the mango trick (along with seance phenomena) to legerdemain.⁷⁹ Indian juggling, however, was held up as more ingenious than seance phenomena, and Indian jugglers as better than mediums.⁸⁰ What was said of mediums in general was said of Home in particular. Home never used ropes as controls - indeed he was scathing of those who did - so escaped direct comparisons with the Indian rope-tying feat. Neither do the fire-tests appear to have attracted much attention outside the spiritualist press, though the *Glasgow Daily News* did publish a letter of Jencken’s that described Home’s ability to handle hot coals.⁸¹ However, greater attention was provoked when Home was reported to have levitated in front of witnesses at his London residence in Ashley Place. One of the witnesses of what became known as the ‘Ashley House levitation’ was Viscount Adare, who published his experiences shortly afterwards, and described how Home had floated out of a window of a third floor flat, then into the window of the adjacent room.⁸² The event was commented on in several contemporary periodicals, and has received considerable attention throughout the history of psychical research, with suggested explanations ranging from hypnosis to Home jumping between window ledges.⁸³ The initial response of the press, however, was to make direct comparisons with earlier reports of the floating Indian fakir. The (London) *Daily News* suggested that everybody who had spent significant time in India had seen a poor juggler levitate:

“without apparatus of any kind. The Indian juggler walks into your garden, and suddenly appears six feet from the ground, sitting cross-legged, with nobody and nothing nearer to him than the grass. How does he do it? We cannot explain, any

⁷⁹ *British Quarterly Review*, 42, 1865, 88-9. A similar line was taken by W. B. Carpenter in *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 123-45.

⁸⁰ *Punch*, 1865, June 3; *All the year round*, 1865, February 1, 59; Stodare, 1865, 22-4.

⁸¹ *Human Nature*, 3, 1869, 89.

⁸² Dunraven, 1869.

⁸³ For example: *Contemporary Review*, 27, 1876, 286; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 15, 1877, 135; Podmore, ii, 1902, 255ff; Hall, 1965, 368ff; Jenkins, 1982, 235ff; Hall, 1984, 103-38.

more than we can explain Mr Home's achievements".⁸⁴

A few months later, the comparison was less even-handed, in part due to the fakir feat being exaggerated into a more impressive effect, the *Observer* observing that

"[a]n Indian juggler could sit down in the middle of Trafalgar Square, and then slowly and steadily rise in the air to a height of five or six feet, still sitting, and as slowly come down again ... none of Mr Home's 'levitations', come anywhere near [such] simple performances".

Such a performance as the *Observer* described would have been by no means simple, and the Indian levitation was not such a performance. However, the use of Indian juggling to argue that simple Indians could duplicate the feats of the greatest mediums was no doubt considered an effective rhetorical tool. When *The Examiner* asked, "How is it that the very poorest Hindoo juggler can beat the Spiritualists at their own tricks?", no doubt the answer was expected to be obvious to its readers.⁸⁵

For sceptical writers, both seance phenomena and Indian juggling were the result of trickery. For spiritualists, both were evidence of psychic or supernatural forces. While their comparisons may have intended to promote quite different positions, their agreement that the two groups of phenomena were of a similar ilk seems to have cemented the link. Increasingly, the debate surrounding Indian juggling began to echo the debate about seance phenomena, with the authenticity of Indian juggling being discussed in relation to belief in Biblical miracles and to the reliability of testimony. The link with Biblical miracles had been made already. James Braid, when he had attributed survival of live burial to natural causes in 1850, had noted that such a conclusion in no way invalidated Christ's Resurrection, since his mortal wound from a spear made his subsequent recovery a genuine miracle.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Religious Tract Society had published a popular text at that time which had argued for the authenticity

⁸⁴ cited in *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 59.

⁸⁵ cited in *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1871, 550-2. Comparisons between Home and Indian jugglers were also made in the *Saturday Review*, 1871, July 18, 83.

⁸⁶ Braid, 1850, 14.

of Biblical miracles, yet attributed snake handling to “the laws which regulate the venomous secretion”.⁸⁷ However, the debate about seance phenomena had pointed up general problems in assessing the authenticity of miraculous phenomena, and mid-Victorian periodicals noted how reports of Indian juggling provided further evidence of such problems.⁸⁸ W. B. Carpenter, in an article for the *Contemporary Review* that discussed belief in various anomalous phenomena, even doubted the reliability of testimony relating to live burials that Braid had felt unassailable, comparing such accounts to those of Marco Polo.⁸⁹

The link between Indian juggling and seance phenomena took another form around the time of publication of Home’s *Lights and Shadows* (1877). In this book, Home was dismissive about many of the phenomena reported at the seances of other mediums, and made derogatory comments about those reported in Colonel Olcott’s *People from the Other World* (1875), which had included accounts of what later became known as the Indian rope trick. W. B. Carpenter, in an article in *Fraser’s Magazine* later that year, used Home’s comments as part of a more general assault on spiritualism. In doing so, he not only compared the mango trick to seance phenomena, but cited Home against Olcott’s acceptance of accounts of Oriental magic.⁹⁰ Home, who only a few years earlier had been dismissed as a trickster by being compared to an Indian juggler, was now being cited as an authority against the authenticity of Oriental magic.

It is from this time that the methods of Indian conjurors came to be publicly exposed. As noted above Maskelyne published an article in 1878 in *Leisure Hour* on ‘Oriental Jugglery’, in which he complained of those who concluded such tricks were the result of supernatural forces, and exposed the methods of several Indian tricks in the process. His example was followed by several other Western conjurors, and the methods of Indian tricks were exposed in several popular periodicals, often by British

⁸⁷ Religious Tract Society, 1848, 19.

⁸⁸ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 71, 1865, 35-6; *Fraser’s Magazine*, 4, 1871, 515; *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 133-4.

⁸⁹ This comparison was subsequently criticised as illogical by William Crookes, in an article arguing for the genuineness of Home’s phenomena (Crookes, 1874, 51).

⁹⁰ *Fraser’s Magazine*, 16, 1877, 548, 551.

conjurers who also exposed the methods of pseudo-spiritualist phenomena. Indian juggling, which in previous years had been used as a debunking tool against spiritualism, was now a target for debunking by some of the most prominent enemies of spiritualism. This new link between Indian juggling and seance phenomena was reinforced by the appearance of the Theosophical Society, recently founded by Colonel Olcott and H. P. Blavatsky. The Society was to prove hugely influential in how Indian juggling would be viewed over the following decades.

7.2.2. The Theosophical Society and the roots of the Indian rope trick

The early history of the Theosophical Society is inseparable from the life of its co-founder and first president, H. P. Blavatsky. Details of Blavatsky's earlier life may be vague, but it does seem clear that her path to Theosophy began with an interest in spiritualism, and that her interest was sparked by D. D. Home. Blavatsky met Home in Paris in 1858, attending one of his seances. Though Home makes no mention of her in any of his published writings, he did recall meeting Blavatsky in a letter to a friend, in which he wrote of her in less than glowing terms:

“I took no interest in her, excepting a singular impression I had the first time I saw a young gentleman who has ever since been a brother to me. He did not follow my advice. He was at the time her lover, and it was most repulsive to me that in order to attract attention she pretended to be a medium. My friend still thinks she is a mediumistic, but he is also just as fully convinced that she is a cheat”.⁹¹

Blavatsky's career as a medium took her to Egypt in the early 1870's, where the spiritualist press reported that she held regular seances in Cairo, but she seems to have had limited success.⁹² Months before founding the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky

⁹¹ Maskelyne, 1913, 29.

⁹² *Spiritual Magazine*, 7, 1872, 160f; *Human Nature*, 6, 1872, 190. Maskelyne (1913, 32) claimed that Blavatsky had been caught trying to simulate the manifestation of a spirit hand using a stuffed glove, but characteristically he gives no source for his claim.

worked briefly in Philadelphia with the Holmes', a couple who claimed to produce full-form spirit materialisations, and who had convinced Robert Dale Owen, former U.S. Congressman and foreign ambassador, that such manifestations were genuine. Unfortunately for the Holmes, their stooge, Eliza White, confessed to dressing up as the spirit, and Dale Owen publicly admitted to having been duped by the mediums, a shock that reportedly contributed to his subsequent decline in mental health.⁹³

With the foundation of the Theosophical Society in 1875, links with spiritualism continued, with initial recruits to the society coming largely from the ranks of spiritualists. This is not to say that there were not fundamental differences between the two groups. Phenomena framed as supernatural by spiritualists were generally framed by Theosophists as the result of natural forces. So far as Blavatsky's writings are representative, Theosophists accepted the reality of spiritual intervention, but tended to regard such phenomena as spirit hands as the product of the nervous system of the medium.⁹⁴ However, broad theological similarities meant that many individuals could continue to sympathise with both groups. Both non-Christian spiritualists and Theosophists agreed on the absence of a personal deity, and shared both a dislike of priesthoods and a conviction that each person created his future destiny. Nevertheless, while Theosophy's condemnation of certain Christian doctrines, such as eternal reward or punishment, may have made for closer links with non-Christian spiritualism, the society contained Christian as well as non-Christian members.⁹⁵

An arguable difference between spiritualism and Theosophy might be in their approaches to the production of phenomena, as Blavatsky's public position towards seance phenomena in the 1880's seems to have lain somewhere between ambivalence and hostility. However, this was by no means the case at first. As a medium, Blavatsky had reportedly produced phenomena - such as raps and the materialisation of spirit hands - and immediately prior to the foundation of the society, she had formed with Olcott the short-lived Miracle Club, where it was intended to produce seance-type

⁹³ *Medium and Daybreak*, 6, 1875, 477.

⁹⁴ Blavatsky, 1877.

⁹⁵ Oppenheim, 1988, 162-74.

phenomena on a regular basis. As a Theosophist, she continued to produce similar phenomena. Reports of clairvoyance and the materialisation of objects were common and, perhaps most importantly, of materialised messages from her spiritual masters. Blavatsky referred to her Tibetan masters whom she termed the Mahatmas, or Adepts, and claimed that they contacted her from Tibet either through clairvoyance or through written messages that materialised near her. It also seems clear that such phenomena, however they may have been downplayed by Blavatsky later, were central to Theosophy. At the start of the society, Blavatsky stressed the importance of producing phenomena as ‘vital proof’ of the doctrines, and a decade later she reportedly stated that without such phenomena, nobody would have been attracted to the society.⁹⁶ Indeed, one prominent member admitted that all those joining the society when he was there, “did so in the hope of mastering the secrets of magic”.⁹⁷ Theosophical writings were full of examples of occult phenomena, A. P. Sinnet’s *The Occult World* giving the majority of its pages to reported phenomena.⁹⁸ It also remained the case that the spiritual foundation of the society, as well as Blavatsky’s ongoing inspiration, purportedly came from messages sent through the ether from Tibet. To doubt the authenticity of such phenomena was to doubt the authority upon which Theosophy rested.

What was new about Theosophy was its association with India. Theosophy as espoused by Blavatsky was a combination of aspects of Vedanta, Buddhist and ancient Western philosophy. It is true that the originality and quality of her writings were heavily criticised at the time and have continued to be since - one critic described her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) as “a re-hash of Neo-Platonic and Kabbalistic mysticism with Buddhist terminology”, while Max Muller, the pioneer of comparative religion, defined her ‘esoteric Buddhism’ as “Buddhism misunderstood, distorted, caricatured”.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, while Blavatsky’s scholarship may have been in question, her influence was considerable, and the significance of Theosophy was in its framing of the East. Theosophy may have had links with spiritualism and Western occultism,

⁹⁶ Cranston, 1993, 223; Symonds, 1965, 220.

⁹⁷ Oppenheim, 1988, 185.

⁹⁸ Sinnet, 1881.

⁹⁹ Cited in Oppenheim, 1988, 163-4.

but it presented the East, particularly India, as the source of true wisdom. According to a reviewer in 1889, the three essentials of Theosophy were maya, karma and nirvana, all of Hindu origins.¹⁰⁰ The Society headquarters moved to Madras shortly after its foundation, and theosophists were possibly the first Europeans to embrace Buddhism publicly, introducing some of its fundamental concepts into the West. That this new Oriental direction was attractive to spiritualists can be seen from the review of Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877) written by Stainton Moses, a prominent spiritualist, who pointed out:

“it is not in these western countries that we must seek for [spiritual answers]. The eastern lands have been and are the fields of these studies - studies which we, in England, have resuscitated only of late, amid angry persecution and supercilious contempt from Orthodox Science and Religion”.¹⁰¹

The importance of India as a land of magical phenomena can be seen in *Isis Unveiled*, where Blavatsky described all manner of phenomena associated with India, including several described by travellers such as the mango trick and the live burial. Of levitating fakirs, she pointed out that hundreds of travellers had reported this, and complained that all of them had been dismissed as either liars or victims of hallucination.¹⁰² Dismissing trickery as an explanation for such phenomena, she cited the French colonial magistrate, Louis Jacolliot, who had “not met, either in India or in Ceylon, a single European, even among the oldest residents, who has been able to indicate the means employed by those devotees for the production of these phenomena”.¹⁰³ Attributing such phenomena to natural, though little understood forces, she presented Indian knowledge as superior to the West in such matters. When an Indian correspondent questioned the importance of the phenomena to theosophical teachings, she replied that they served to demonstrate to the West the existence of powers already known in India.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Review in the *New York Herald*, 1889, August 18 cited in Cranston, 1993, 168-9.

¹⁰¹ *Human Nature*, 11, 1877, 425.

¹⁰² Blavatsky, 1877, i, 115.

¹⁰³ Blavatsky, 1877, ii, 104.

¹⁰⁴ Cranston, 1993, 223

Certainly, it was the phenomena that later attracted the interest of the Society for Psychical Research. Theosophy, like spiritualism, used the language of science, Blavatsky's writings presenting science and religion as complementary, and scientific support was felt desirable.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately for Blavatsky, however, the S.P.R. concluded that the phenomena were the product of imposture and delusion.¹⁰⁶ However, while the S.P.R. report was no doubt damaging in the short term, the influence of the Theosophical Society continued. In 1891, J. N. Maskelyne felt no need to provide a substantial criticism of Theosophy, noting that "the occult portion of Theosophy has seen its best days, and will soon be on the wane ... If these supposed marvels are no longer flaunted in the eyes of a credulous world, the matter concerns me no more".¹⁰⁷ Two decades later, however, he had clearly changed his mind when he published *The fraud of modern theosophy exposed: a brief history of the greatest imposture ever perpetuated under the cloak of religion* (1912). By that time, however, the public had become enchanted by another Indian miracle.

The roots of the legend of the Indian rope trick are somewhat complex. What does seem clear is that the legend only became widespread following a hoax article in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1890.¹⁰⁸ However, what remained unclear is the way in which a legend that could be found in different forms in several cultures came to be associated primarily with India. It now appears that the origins of this association are to be found somewhat unexpectedly in the early writings of the Theosophical Society.

Legends describing a rope or chain being thrown into the air then somebody climbing to the top until they disappeared, can be found in the mythology and folklore of several

¹⁰⁵ Oppenheim, 1988, 193-5.

¹⁰⁶ The S.P.R. committee concluded that there was a: "very strong general presumption that all the marvellous narratives put forward as evidence of the existence and occult power of the Mahatmas are to be explained as due either (a) to deliberate deception carried out by or at the instigation of Madame Blavatsky, or (b) to spontaneous illusion, or hallucination, or unconscious misrepresentation or invention on the part of the witnesses." (*Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, 9, 1885, 205)

¹⁰⁷ Weatherley & Maskelyne, 1891, 215

¹⁰⁸ At the start of this thesis, it had been expected that the Indian rope trick would have formed a more significant part of the study. Historians of magic have claimed (it now seems erroneously) that the trick was already legendary in the 1870's. The chronology of the legend has therefore been described elsewhere (Lamont & Wiseman, 2001)

countries.¹⁰⁹ Ibn Battuta had given an account of such a trick from China in the 14th century, and this had appeared in a footnote of Yule's edition of the Book of Ser Marco Polo in 1873.¹¹⁰ That year, W. B. Carpenter compared this account to reports of live burials in India, doubting the reliability of both.¹¹¹ In *People from the Other World* (1875), Colonel Olcott described how Mme Blavatsky had witnessed the trick in Egypt, and noted:

"I have seen it stated in the papers that the late William H Seward, ex-Secretary of State, witnessed a similar feat in India, while on his tour around the world. He saw a man climb up a pole sixty feet high, standing in open air, and when he reached the top he mysteriously disappeared. After a while his feet reappeared, then his legs and body, and then he came down".¹¹²

Blavatsky, in the contents page of *Isis Unveiled* (1877), subsequently called the effect the 'Indian tape-climbing trick', referring to a passage that plagiarised the relevant section of Yule (1873). The subsequent hoax in the *Chicago Tribune* that located the trick in India was most likely inspired by the Seward account cited by Olcott. However, Olcott and Blavatsky seem to have been the first to refer to the trick as Indian. The link between the Theosophical Society and the rope trick was later recognised by Maskelyne, whose *The fraud of modern theosophy exposed* (1912) had an illustration of the rope trick on the front cover, noted Blavatsky's claim to have seen it, and devoted a section of the book to explaining how it was done.

7.3. Summary and conclusions

Tales of magic from India date from Marco Polo onwards, but it was not until the 19th

¹⁰⁹ O'Grady, 1892; Giles, 1880/1936; Eliade, 1956; Dingwall, 1974; Taylor, 1982

¹¹⁰ Yule, 1873, ii, 308-9

¹¹¹ *Contemporary Review*, 23, 1873, 133

¹¹² Olcott, 1875, 332

century that these travellers' tales became widely read. From the early Victorian period, contemporary tales of anomalous phenomena also appeared in the press. Indian jugglers first appeared in Britain in the early 19th century and, though their feats were primarily presented and framed as feats of manual dexterity, they retained a mysterious image. This mysterious image was appropriated by several British conjurors, who began to perform Indian tricks and perform in Indian costume. From the 1870's, however, Indian juggling received more hostile treatment as British conjurors began to debunk Indian juggling, dismissing it as mere trickery, and publicly exposing their methods to demonstrate this was the case. So far as this suggests a growing tendency among the public to view Indian juggling as something other than trickery, the source of this attitudinal shift would appear to be in mid-Victorian comparisons between Indian juggling and seance phenomena.

Seance phenomena and feats of Indian juggling were compared in a variety of ways. The methodological link with the Davenport brothers was rejected by spiritualists, who framed much of Indian jugglery as genuine and comparable to Home's phenomena. The mainstream periodical press, on the other hand, used Indian jugglery as a debunking tool, framing it as superior trickery to that used by Home and others. The Theosophical Society emerged from Blavatsky's involvement with spiritualism, an interest sparked by Home, though the latter showed nothing but scepticism towards the phenomena associated with Theosophy, and was later cited in the mainstream press as part of an attempt to debunk Indian juggling. While the modern legend of the Indian rope trick did not become widespread until the last years of the century, its roots lay in the mid-Victorian comparisons between Indian juggling and seance phenomena, particularly those associated with Home, and with the emergence of the Theosophical Society that played such an influential role in framing India as a land in which magical phenomena occurred. Indeed, the rope trick and other Indian feats came to be framed in similar ways to seance phenomena: as the product of unreliable testimony; as the result of hypnosis; as feats of conjuring; and as evidence of psychic and supernatural

forces.¹¹³

The emergence of this image of India as a land of magic and mystery from the mid-Victorian comparisons with seance phenomena reflects a more general theme. In 1979, the eminent psychiatrist and parapsychologist, Jule Eisenbud, criticised experimental parapsychologists' reluctance to accept anecdotal evidence of levitation. He argued that, despite the amount of testimony in favour of the levitation of individuals such as D. D. Home, most experimental parapsychologists made such facts "null and void" by consigning them to a safe distance. "[W]e 'undo' a fact", Eisenbud argued, "by recognising it in a dim sort of way while putting it as fast as possible into the fading and innocuous past".¹¹⁴ By consigning controversial phenomena to the "innocuous past", he suggested, the question of their authenticity becomes less urgent, and the challenge posed by such phenomena is thereby reduced. This tendency to consign anomalous phenomena to a safe distance has been a theme throughout this thesis. Victorians may have increasingly dismissed all manner of anomalous phenomena as the product of imposture and delusion, but they continued to associate them with areas beyond modern urban Britain, not only with the past but with rural areas, with the Highlands of Scotland and, of course, with India. The distant East, like the distant past, was a necessary Other by which to define the modern Western Self, but the construction of this Other involved more than the attribution of superstitious beliefs to 'primitive' society. The associations between anomalous phenomena and India, like the continued belief in Biblical miracles, show that many Victorians found such phenomena more plausible when located at a safe distance. Indeed, even Indian juggling in India was more mysterious than Indian juggling in Britain. The extent to which Victorians viewed Indian phenomena as inexplicable rather than merely unexplained is, of course, difficult to say, but the debunking attempts of the last quarter of the century suggest a growing tendency to view such phenomena as

¹¹³ Unreliable testimony as an explanation for the rope trick was originally suggested by Bertram (1911), repeated subsequently (e.g. Branson 1922; Elliot, 1934), the theory finally being supported by empirical evidence in Wiseman & Lamont (1996). Mass hypnosis was suggested by the original *Chicago Tribune* hoax story in 1890, and the theory repeated regularly (e.g. Secrett, 1929; Von Urban, 1962). On trickery see, for example, Maskelyne (1891) and Keel (1958). Psychic or supernatural forces are suggested, by Puharich (1974) and McGill (1977).

¹¹⁴ Eisenbud, 1979, 144.

8. Final thoughts

D. D. Home was the most famous medium of his day, his seances being attended by British aristocracy, Continental monarchs, and some of the most celebrated writers and thinkers of the Victorian period. At these seances, witnesses reported seeing large tables float in the air, the materialisation of spirit hands, and, on occasion, the levitation of the medium. This thesis has been concerned with what Victorians made of such reports over the period of his mediumship in Britain (which began in 1855) and up to the publication of his last book (in 1877), by which time exposure of fraudulent mediums was becoming widespread. The thesis is based upon spiritualist journals and a wide range of popular periodicals and texts published at this time, and is concerned primarily with the form of the debate that appeared in these publications. For methodological reasons, the main question being asked is: how did Victorians frame the phenomena associated with Home, and how did they support such frames? Chapter two argues that, from the beginning of his mediumship in Britain, Home's phenomena were framed in relation to four possible explanations: they were the result of trickery; they were not objectively real; they were the result of a psychic force; they were the result of supernatural agency. These explanations are discussed in depth in each of the following four chapters. Chapter seven then considers how seance phenomena, particularly those associated with Home, were compared to the feats of Indian jugglers, and points to the links between mid-Victorian spiritualism and the emergence of the Theosophical Society and, in turn, the legend of the Indian rope trick.

A number of themes raised by the thesis are felt to be relevant. Chapter one discussed

some fundamental issues related to historical methodology and, in doing so, stressed both the advantages of considering how contemporaries framed seance phenomena in the available sources (rather than what they believed), and the need to avoid dismissing phenomena as unworthy of study simply because one does not accept their authenticity. It is hoped that the conclusions of this thesis are sufficient justification for such a position. More specifically, in an attempt to recognise the importance of the historian's view in the interpretative process, appendix A assesses the evidence for Home's phenomena, concluding that, while Home's record is undoubtedly impressive and no full explanation is available, the author remains sceptical about the authenticity of the phenomena. Other chapters, however, have stressed the impressiveness of the evidence and the inadequacy of the contemporary sceptical position. Anyone familiar with the polarised nature of much of the literature in the history of psychical research might find it easier to suspect a spiritualist, for example, of exaggerating the case in favour of the phenomena, or a sceptic of playing it down. Since this thesis has begun from a sceptical position yet stressed the strength of the evidence in favour of the phenomena, it is felt that the position of the author may be seen to have some bearing on the rhetorical strength of the thesis. This is no pretence to objectivity. On the contrary, it is merely an attempt to recognise not only the relevance of the historian's worldview to the history he writes, but also the relevance of that worldview to how that history might be read by others.

In relation to the history of science, it was noted in the introduction that Alison Winter has recently stressed the mainstream scientific significance of mesmeric phenomena, arguing that mesmerism played a prominent role in the construction of scientific orthodoxy by challenging the very nature of scientific enquiry.¹ Similarly, the debate about Home's phenomena raised fundamental issues about scientific enquiry. Witnesses continually stressed that the phenomena were observed facts, regardless of whether they fitted with any particular theory and, in doing so, appealed to the dominant view of the scientific method. Sceptics argued that scientists were the most competent to observe facts and, increasingly, Home's witnesses agreed. This was, no doubt, a reflection of the growing, if limited, scientific support in favour of the

¹ Winter, 1998.

genuineness of the phenomena. From 1868 onwards, limited experimental support emerged in favour of Home's phenomena, and the press response, though predominantly sceptical, suggests a growing awareness that there was a need for further scientific investigation. Indeed, the scientific evidence in support of Home's phenomena led to a situation in which the scientific method appeared to be challenging the dominant scientific worldview. The response of mainstream science, however, was to question the scientific competence of those who investigated, despite their accepted scientific competence in other matters. It has been argued that the reluctance of most scientists to investigate further, and the response of some scientists to those who did is, perhaps, best understood from a Kuhnian perspective of science, in which normal science does not seek (and can suppress) novelties of fact or theory.

In terms of a general view of Victorian science and religion, it could be argued convincingly that the debate about Home's phenomena was primarily scientific rather than religious. Of course, such a distinction between science and religion is simplistic. It has been argued recently that, for the early Victorians, "religious and scientific knowing were neither separate or separable categories. It was not clear whether there were boundaries between them and, if there were, where they should be drawn".² According to this view, early Victorian science was framed as a means of reflecting and discovering religious truth. By the mid-Victorian period, however, Darwin's theory was being framed as a threat to the perceived harmony between science and religion provided by natural theology. Moreover, the form of this debate, it has been pointed out, was primarily a scientific debate rather than one between science and religion.³ Home's phenomena, on the other hand, were presented by spiritualists as evidence of religious truths, and supported not only in scientific language but by scientific evidence. If the debate about Darwinian theory can be seen as a scientific challenge not to religion but to the common ground between the two, then the debate about Home's phenomena might be seen as a scientific challenge to the mainstream scientific position from a group advocating harmony between science and religion.

² Richards, 1997, 52.

³ Ellegard, 1958; Cosslett, 1984.

The strength of this challenge relied upon the existence of an anomaly that lacked an adequate explanation. To argue that the phenomena were not objectively real was to raise serious problems relating to observation and testimony. As chapter four showed, none of the various subjective theories could have been particularly attractive. Mesmerism had been dismissed by all of the witnesses, some of whom were acknowledged experts on mesmerism and, despite a growing awareness of the vulnerability of the senses, none of the experts involved suggested this might be the explanation. In any case, as witnesses included respected scientists, to attribute the phenomena to some form of hallucination, or to a more severe form of mental disease, was to undermine the authority of scientists as reliable observers. It is hardly surprising, then, that the dominant theme in the periodical press was that the phenomena were the product of trickery. Yet no adequate method was supplied, with the main theme being an appeal to the authority of conjurors, and conjurors do not appear to have known how the phenomena were produced. Increasingly, the authority of scientists was appealed to, but mainstream science provided no further suggestions, falling back on the theory of mesmerism.

To what extent contemporaries were aware of this anomaly is, of course, difficult to say, but it seems reasonable to suppose that anyone who took a significant interest in the debate would have become increasingly aware of the gap between the evidence presented and the normal explanations being provided. Certainly, spiritualists appear to have been aware of this gap, and this matters in terms of how we can best understand their beliefs. So far as Victorian spiritualist beliefs are concerned, historians have tended to view them in relation to the so-called crises of faith. Spiritualists, however, consistently appealed to the evidence as the primary reason for their beliefs. Given the inadequacy of alternative explanations for Home's phenomena, it is hardly surprising that some witnesses accepted the frame in which the phenomena were presented to them. No doubt individuals were influenced by a range of personal and religious factors, but as the most qualified sceptics of the period were unable to provide an adequate explanation for the phenomena, it has been argued that Victorian spiritualist beliefs might be better understood if we acknowledge to a greater extent the reason

they themselves gave for their beliefs.

The failure of conjurors and scientists to deal with this anomaly begs another question. Rather than ask why some individuals became convinced by phenomena for which no alternative explanation was available, perhaps we should ask why others were not? When one considers that many Victorians were supposed to be suffering from a crisis of faith, and that spiritualists claimed to provide empirical evidence of an after-life, this does not seem an irrelevant question. It may be that, despite the extensive press coverage, many simply did not take an interest in the debate, yet the fame of the medium, the social and intellectual credentials of his witnesses, and the extraordinary nature of the phenomena reported, all suggest there would have been significant interest. In addition, the medium, most of his witnesses and critics, and the bulk of the periodical press in which his phenomena were discussed, were located in London, a city that must have uniquely provoked an increasing awareness of what one could not see and did not understand accompanied by an increasing reliance on the observations of others and the authority of experts. It seems reasonable to suppose, then, that the influence of the debate would have been significant. The continuing scepticism towards Home's phenomena was discussed at the end of chapter six, which noted that though evidence for Home's phenomena was often admitted to be better than for Biblical miracles, the latter had the support of a Christian culture that stressed the importance of internal evidence, and pointed to their spiritual worth. While it was pointed out that the theological debate was limited to the highbrow press, the comparisons between the evidence for Biblical miracles and for Home's phenomena can only have made the appeal to internal evidence more attractive to anyone wishing to view the former as uniquely genuine. In that sense, Biblical miracles were increasingly backed by religious rather than scientific authority. It was also suggested that many no doubt simply adopted the cultural norm without critical attention to the evidence or arguments. In terms of prevailing scepticism about Home's phenomena, it also needs to be remembered that Home would have been seen as part of a wider movement involving significantly less impressive mediums, several of whom were publicly exposed as frauds.

Yet this cannot be the whole story, since even many of the individuals who accepted the facts of Home's phenomena did not accept that they were the result of spirits. Some preferred to attribute the phenomena to a new kind of natural force for which there was no theoretical support, while others simply declared they could not accept supernatural agency. Similarly, so far as the periodical press cautiously acknowledged that the phenomena appeared to have some empirical support, it did so in language that favoured natural rather than supernatural agency. This reluctance to admit supernatural agency in the absence of an alternative theory suggests that, so far as there was any crisis of faith involved here, it was in the scientific worldview, and it was the result of a 'crisis of evidence'. The response of mainstream science to this crisis has already been framed in Kuhnian terms.

However, the views of the periodical press (which included false accusations) suggest that the threat posed by the anomaly surrounding Home's allegedly supernatural phenomena was not only felt by scientists, and might be best understood in broader sociological terms. Since Weber described modernity as the 'dis-enchantment of the world', secularisation and rationalisation have been seen as central to the modernisation process.⁴ As chapter three noted, Bauman has extended Weber's theme, arguing that "[t]he war against mystery and magic was for modernity the war of liberation leading to the declaration of hostilities that made the unprocessed, pristine world into the enemy", an enemy he describes as "the grey area of ambivalence, indeterminacy, and undecidability".⁵ The increasing stress placed by conjurors on the fact that what they did was entirely consistent with natural law, and the attempts of conjurors, scientists and most of the periodical press to debunk Home's phenomena could be seen more generally as part of modernity's 'dis-enchantment of the world', as a battle in its 'war against ambivalence'. This thesis has described how such a battle was fought in the mid-Victorian period, and it was by no means a simple contest between science and superstition. Both sides appealed to the authority of science as well as to the authority of religion, and the authority of both were challenged in the process. Moreover, while modernity fought its domestic campaign against ambivalence

⁴ Weber, 1930; Kumar, 1988; Bauman, 1991; Bauman, 1992.

⁵ Bauman, 1992, x-xvi.

and uncertainty, individuals increasingly looked elsewhere for magic and mystery, and India provided an alternative source. There may have been no room for magic and miracles in the modern scientific society that the Victorians were constructing, but the Victorian imagination found room elsewhere in the alternative battleground of the imagined East where ambivalence and uncertainty remained, and where magic and mystery might yet survive. The persistence of the image of the mystic East, and the continued widespread belief in paranormal phenomena in the West, suggest that the war has never ended.

APPENDIX A:

Author's view of Home's phenomena

Chapter one stressed the need to recognise the subjective nature of history. Having recognised this, however, what can one do about it? If true objectivity is impossible, perhaps the best one can do is to admit one's prejudices at the outset. Such an admission would allow the reader at least some insight into the interpretative process. How one goes about admitting one's own prejudices in relation to a particular topic is not necessarily obvious but, so far as this topic is concerned, there is a clear opportunity to make such an admission. In an attempt to take advantage of this opportunity, this appendix provides the author's view of the evidence in favour of Home's phenomena. As the thesis is concerned with Victorian views about Home's phenomena, the author's view of the phenomena is clearly relevant to the interpretative process. One need only compare the biographies of Home written respectively by proponents and sceptics to become immediately aware of how the views of the biographer influence broader interpretation of the evidence.¹ Providing the reader with the author's view, however, is not as simple a task as one might think. One might describe oneself as sceptical about such phenomena, for example, but almost everyone begins from such a position, and that need not have any bearing on conclusions drawn after having studied the evidence in depth.² Since the thesis considers not only how

¹ Compare, for example, the sceptical biographies of Wyndham (1937) and Hall (1984) with the significantly more sympathetic biographies of Burton (1948) and Jenkins (1982).

² Wooffitt (1992) points out that individuals tend to describe paranormal experiences in language designed to convince the audience. Such language includes the appeal to scepticism, and such appeals were constantly made in the Victorian period by those who framed the phenomena as genuine.

Victorians framed the phenomena but how they supported the frames they chose, it seems only reasonable to provide support for a sceptical position. It is therefore felt that the most appropriate way to provide the author's view on the topic is to discuss and assess the quality of the evidence.³

Such a discussion is also useful, however, because the quality of the evidence for the phenomena is itself central to the thesis. For example, several chapters have noted the intellectual credentials of many witnesses and the inadequacy of sceptical explanations, and will stress that the overall quality of the evidence was such that contemporaries had difficulty in framing the phenomena in line with the mainstream scientific worldview. This appendix attempts to explain why, despite both the quantity and quality of the evidence in favour of Home's phenomena, the author is not convinced that they were genuinely paranormal or supernatural. The relevance of this sceptical position to how the thesis might be read is briefly discussed in the final chapter.

Finally, the need for a proper consideration of the evidence also stemmed from what the author believed to be the inadequacy of the sceptical case. Despite the large body of testimony from many recognised intellectuals of the period, most sceptics have tended to concentrate either on evidence relating to Home's character or on individual phenomena.⁴ On the other hand, proponents of Home have tended to argue on two fronts, appealing both to the best cases and to the apparent ability of Home to produce his phenomena over a long period of time in impressive conditions and before competent witnesses.⁵ This appendix is primarily concerned with the second line of argument, though some consideration will be given to the first.⁶

³ A version of this appendix (Lamont, 1999) was presented at the 42nd Parapsychological Association Annual Convention (Stanford University, Ca., 1999) before several proponents of Home's authenticity, and an article based on this chapter is due to be published in a major parapsychology journal. The views outlined here may not be universally agreed with, but they have been subjected to significant scrutiny within the field of parapsychology.

⁴ See, for example: Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1909; Dingwall, 1947; Hall, 1984; Kurtz, 1985.

⁵ See, for example: Zorab, unpublished; Beloff, 1993; Braude, 1997.

⁶ This is because the thesis is concerned with the British discourse, and much of what proponents have described as the best evidence comes from elsewhere. For example, the investigations that took place in Amsterdam (Zorab, 1970) make for impressive reading, but they did not form part of the British discourse. The experiments of William Crookes will be considered, however, as these were central to the debate in Britain, and have been presented as among the strongest evidence in favour of Home's phenomena being genuine (Braude, 1997).

From ‘What happened?’ to ‘Am I convinced?’

When one reads an account of a seance in which, for example, a large table floats in the air, spirit hands appear, and the medium himself levitates, it is difficult to avoid wondering what actually happened. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to attempt to discover what actually happened. As chapter one discussed, recent historiographers have stressed that the idea one can access a past beyond available historical sources is a realist illusion and, at some level, this seems difficult to refute. It is felt that how the historian deals with this issue is largely a matter of what question is being asked. In terms of seance phenomena, as such events are contrary to everyday experience, it is not surprising that the reader will tend to question the validity of the source. As chapter one also discussed, such scepticism is an imposition of the reader’s worldview onto past evidence, and there is a need to recognise the subjective role of the reader of the historical text. If one accepts that we cannot know what actually happened, only what evidence remains, and that how that evidence is interpreted will depend upon who is doing the interpreting, how does one deal with the seance account? Rather than ask what actually happened, one can instead consider how convincing one finds the evidence. The question of how convincing one finds the evidence depends, of course, on one’s worldview. If one has a worldview that allows for spiritual communication in the form of physical seance phenomena, the evidence should be straightforward and convincing. However, if one takes a position that evidence for such phenomena is dependent upon normal explanations being ruled out, the question becomes, “How convinced am I that the accounts rule out normal explanations?” Since individuals hold different worldviews, it is not necessarily the question that everyone would ask, and not everyone is likely to answer it in the same way. Nevertheless, it is the position of the author that this is the most relevant question to be asked. It is, therefore, with this question in mind that the accounts of Home seances will be considered in relation to the phenomena described, the conditions in which the phenomena are reported to have taken place, and evidence relating to the competence of the witnesses.

The reported phenomena: how can we explain them?

The immediate question that arises in considering Home is, if he was not a genuine medium, how did he produce the phenomena? Some of the effects⁷ might readily be attributed to trickery but others are more difficult to explain in this way. If the accounts accurately describe what happened, it is quite believable that expert magicians such as Bosco and Robert-Houdin ruled out conjuring methods in some cases.⁸ But then these magicians did not know what happened, only what they were told by witnesses. As the conjuror Professor Hoffmann pointed out, there is a significant difference between the two.⁹ We do not know how accurately the accounts reflect actual events, but we can consider the extent to which they rule out normal explanations. At the time, Victorians regularly attributed reports of seance phenomena to 'imposture and delusion', and this unfortunate phrase has been followed by similar phrases that are as derogatory and off-putting. When asked whether spiritualists are all 'fools or frauds' or whether there could have been such large-scale 'imbecility and dishonesty', it is easier to reply in the negative.¹⁰ But being the victim of deception or self-deception, to use more appropriate terms, has little to do with imbecility or dishonesty. While pseudo-mediums were dishonest, there is no reason to assume the witnesses who wrote the accounts were anything other than intelligent and honest (though clearly it is possible they were not).

One hypothesis has been that the phenomena might have been purely subjective rather than objective experiences. It has been argued, for example by Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, that hallucination seems an unlikely explanation for Home's phenomena since some of them at least appear to have been objective in nature.¹¹ Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo's conclusion comes from his initial assumption that certain

⁷ Certain magicians' terms will occasionally be used as they are felt to be the most appropriate available. In the terminology of magicians, the 'effect' is the trick as seen by the audience, whilst the 'method' is the secret behind the effect (Lamont & Wiseman, 1999).

⁸ Trollope to London Dialectical Society, 1873; Home, 1863/1972.

⁹ Cited in Barrett & Myers, 1889.

¹⁰ These phrases have been used by proponents (see respectively: Fontana, 1997; Broad cited in Braude, 1997) in an attempt to dismiss the accusation that witnesses were unreliable.

¹¹ Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1909.

phenomena, such as spirit hands, must have been either purely subjective or objective. However, it remains not only the case that some of the other phenomena might have been purely subjective in nature, but also that certain phenomena, such as the spirit hands, may have been at times subjective and at other times objective (for example, some might have been the result of hallucination, others might have been Home's foot simulating a spirit hand in semi-darkness). John Beloff has argued that it is implausible to suggest everyone hallucinated since there is not a single case of someone failing to see what everyone else saw.¹² However, the question here is not whether everyone hallucinated but how convincingly the accounts rule out hallucination. In any case, Beloff is incorrect, as there are a number of accounts in which the writer states that certain sitters saw what others did not.¹³ There are other accounts that actually state hallucination was involved, and others still that strongly suggest wishful thinking on the part of the writer, or mesmeric influence by Home.¹⁴ It is also worth bearing in mind that the evidence for the phenomena consists of accounts by individuals and in the vast majority of cases there is no independent corroboration. While an individual account may state that several others were present when phenomena were witnessed, with relatively few exceptions there is no evidence from those other witnesses. As for those seances for which there is more than one account, there are some discrepancies between different versions.¹⁵ While one cannot access the causes of such discrepancies, neither can one dismiss the idea that some of the phenomena described in the accounts might have been purely subjective experiences.

In terms of trickery, specific methods have been put forward to explain specific effects, some perhaps more plausible than others.¹⁶ The spirit-hands, for example, have been attributed to Home secretly using his feet, and there is evidence that Home was actually caught using this method, though it is hardly conclusive.¹⁷ Certainly,

¹² Beloff, 1993, 44.

¹³ See, for example: *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 4, 1869, 8; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1870, 11; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 125; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1889, 129.

¹⁴ Dunraven, 1869/1924; Podmore, 1902; Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1909; Hall, 1984.

¹⁵ Podmore, 1902; Hall, 1984.

¹⁶ For example, Stein (1993) offers methods for various phenomena, but they are not consistent with accounts, and most were dismissed at the time by witnesses.

¹⁷ Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1930.

some of the accounts describe details that would seem to make Home's feet an unlikely explanation if we accept such accounts as accurate reports of events. But then we do not know what actually occurred, only what was reported. In addition to possible self-deception or deception at the time of the seance there is the possibility that the evidence for the phenomena may have been influenced by inaccurate recall or exaggeration, which seem to have been an important factor in reports of other apparently anomalous phenomena.¹⁸ This is not to argue that the reports are entirely invalid, only that significant details could have been lost or that exaggeration could result in an inexplicable reported effect. It is also worth noting that although magicians have produced reports demonstrating exaggeration, they have not produced reports that replicate those describing Home's phenomena. In addition, while some witnesses might have mistaken Home's foot for a spirit hand in dim light then subsequently recalled additional details, presumably fewer people would find exaggeration a convincing explanation for the levitation of a large dining room table.

While there would seem to be some evidence that both self-deception and deception could have taken place, such a general explanation seems somewhat inadequate to anyone who has read some of the more impressive accounts and is aware of the large body of evidence in favour of Home. To regard all this evidence as invalid on the basis that the reported phenomena are difficult to explain otherwise would seem to be, as Braude (1997) has argued, 'hodge-podge skepticism'.¹⁹ However, a combination of self-deception and deception as a general explanation for what happened is not an unreasonable theory. Neither is it unprecedented, since magicians and pseudo-psychics regularly exploit both self-deception and deception.²⁰ Whether one finds it a more convincing explanation than the alternative will depend at least in part on how plausible one finds the idea of large-scale physical phenomena. But, if one is to avoid a priori scepticism, it should also depend on the available evidence. How much evidence one needs to be convinced either way will, of course, depend on the individual. But given the apparent quantity and quality of evidence for Home, any sceptic that is not

¹⁸ Hodgson & Davey, 1887; Wiseman & Morris, 1995; Wiseman & Lamont, 1996.

¹⁹ Braude, 1997, 45.

²⁰ Keene, 1976; Tamariz, 1988; Lamont & Wiseman, 1999.

convinced by it, and wants to argue on the basis of the evidence, might reasonably be expected to show there was significant scope for self-deception and deception. If, for example, most of the evidence failed to rule out possible accomplices or preparation of the area, or described minimal controls against trickery in association with witnesses who wanted to believe Home was genuine or were not competent to detect trickery, the possibility of large-scale self-deception and deception would appear significantly more plausible. In other words, how convincing one finds the accounts will depend upon how impressed one is with the conditions in which the seances reportedly took place and how competent one believes the witnesses to have been. The same point can be made for the regular argument that Home was never caught cheating. While this claim has been challenged²¹, the worth of the claim itself surely rests on the nature of the conditions and the witnesses involved. These will now be considered.

The reported conditions: do the accounts rule out deception?

Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo (1930) argued that the bulk of evidence for Home could be discarded, leaving a residuum that could not be easily explained. Nevertheless, some writers have continued to argue that the quantity (as well as the quality) of evidence for Home is relevant, and a number of points have been made that would appear to make trickery an implausible explanation. For example, Beloff (1993) has pointed out that seances normally took place in good light and “were held in private houses or, occasionally, in hotels, often at short notice that did not allow for any preparation, and it goes without saying there could be no question of accomplices”.²² Braude (1985) makes a similar point, and notes that Home produced his phenomena in such conditions for 25 years undetected despite attempts to discover fraud.²³ Is it plausible that Home could have deceived so many for so long in good light, with no preparation and no accomplices, and in the face of attempts to catch him out? The answer, of course, depends on whether the phenomena discussed could be produced

²¹ Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1930; Hall, 1984; Stein, 1993.

²² Beloff, 1993, 44.

²³ Braude, 1985; see also Braude, 1997.

in such conditions, but the general implication seems to be that what is convincing about the evidence is that it combines both quantity and quality. In an attempt to get some idea of the general quality of evidence over the period of Home's mediumship, a study was made of reported conditions in a sample of accounts of Home seances. The sample was taken from the *Spiritual Magazine* which was the leading spiritualist periodical over the period of Home's mediumship, and a consistent supporter of the medium.²⁴ From 1860 (its first issue) to 1873 (by which time Home had retired), the journal published 49 first-hand accounts of seances with the medium.²⁵ The conditions described will give some idea of the overall quality of accounts of Home seances.

While Home seances are normally associated with good light, most of these accounts either do not mention light²⁶, or state that lights were turned out at the request of Home (or the spirits)²⁷, or describe the seances as having taken place in the dark.²⁸ On the other hand, there are many accounts that mention 'sufficient light' being present but this is described as the result of, at most, a few candles in a large dining room in the evening, and sometimes is merely twilight entering via the window. Nevertheless, this seems to have been more light than other mediums used, and the importance of light as a factor might be seen to vary with the scale of the phenomena reported. At the same time, the degree of visibility present is impossible to determine, as is the extent to which witnesses actually saw what they claim to have seen. However, in terms of how convincing one finds the evidence for Home, it is worth bearing in mind that while he

²⁴ The *Spiritual Magazine* was chosen as it is the single largest source of Home seance accounts. Other sources include biographies of Home (e.g. Home, 1863; Home, 1872; Home, 1877; Home, 1888; Home 1890; Wyndham, 1937; Burton, 1948; Edmonds, 1978; Jenkins, 1982; Hall, 1984) and other contemporary Spiritualist periodicals (such as *Human Nature*, *The Spiritualist* newspaper, and *Medium and Daybreak*) but there is significant overlap among these.

²⁵ How representative this sample is of Home's seances is impossible to say since, for the vast majority of seances that reportedly took place, there are no accounts available. However, as far as the available evidence for Britain is concerned, this sample would seem to include most of the accounts. The list of the sample is given below. Excluded from this list were second-hand accounts, and extracts of seance accounts referring to specific phenomena such as the fire-test, because of a distinct lack of detail. Their inclusion would only have exaggerated the characteristic lack of detail in normal seance accounts. On the other hand, the experiments of Crookes and others were also excluded, as these have tended to be regarded as distinct from normal seances. For this reason, their detail, while significantly greater than that given in the above accounts, has nevertheless been criticised as lacking. Crookes' experiments are discussed elsewhere in the article, however.

²⁶ See below: 1, 3, 4, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 31, 35, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 47, 48.

²⁷ 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 24, 49.

²⁸ 2, 5, 9, 12, 14, 25.

may have held many seances in what witnesses later reported as good light, most of the accounts studied here do not fall into such a category.

What of other evidence relating to possible deception? Of the 49 accounts studied, most do not identify the location of the seance, and those that do state it took place either where Home was living²⁹ or at a house of a good friend of his.³⁰ In addition, only ten³¹ of the accounts state that the witness knew all those present at the seance, and four³² state another medium was present. So far as attempts to detect fraud are concerned, only twelve³³ of the accounts make any mention of checking for trickery, and ten³⁴ of those were in response to a request by Home. This is, perhaps, not surprising. After all, these seances took place in the homes of respectable Victorians to whom Home was an invited guest (not a professional medium), and each of the witnesses was either a guest or the host. As S.C.Hall, one of Home's closest friends, admitted, "the very fact of being an invited guest, stills enquiry, forbids searching remarks, and, therefore, rarely convinces or satisfies. Mr Hume is, in the estimation of many, thus circumstanced".³⁵ However, in terms of how convincingly the evidence rules out possible accomplices, one would need to bear in mind that few of the accounts state the narrator knew everyone present. In terms of how convincingly the evidence rules out preparation, one would need to bear in mind that the only identified locations in which the seances took place were either Home's abode or that of close friends that he had visited many times. Finally, in terms of how convincingly the evidence rules out trickery, one would need to bear in mind that few of the accounts mention making any checks at all, and most of these are stated to have been at Home's request. In bearing these things in mind, one might find the argument that Home was never caught a less impressive point. So far as this sample is representative of the wider evidence, and there is no reason to think it is not, one might conclude that the

²⁹ 1, 7, 20, 26, 31.

³⁰ 5, 21, 33, 46, 47. (NB. Account 5, though not stating the location, does point out Home had never been to the house before)

³¹ 3, 6, 7, 19, 26, 29, 30, 31, 43, 47.

³² 13, 24, 34, 49.

³³ 3, 13, 17, 22, 30, 33, 35, 36, 39, 44, 45, 49.

³⁴ 3, 13, 17, 22, 30, 33, 35, 36, 39, 44.

³⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 89.

bulk of evidence does not convincingly rule out deception, and so find the ‘quantity and quality’ argument less convincing.

There are, of course, some accounts which are more impressive than others. The evidence for Home includes a number of experiments, and those carried out by William Crookes, a Fellow and later President of the Royal Society, have been held up as particularly strong evidence of Home’s genuineness. Reports of these experiments have been recognised by both sceptics and proponents as lacking the level of detail one might want³⁶, but Crookes himself ruled out trickery. Indeed, while the reader might regularly feel there is insufficient detail in the accounts, one of the elements that makes so many of them appear convincing is that Home’s witnesses frequently and explicitly ruled out the possibility of fraud. While the witnesses no doubt felt this to be the case, if such assurances are to be meaningful (i.e. if one is to find them convincing), one presumably needs to have faith in the competence of the witnesses to be able to detect and report fraud. The witnesses of Home were held up by contemporary spiritualists as competent (i.e. as unlikely to be the victims of self-deception and deception) and, if one regards lack of detail in the evidence as a problem, the question of witness competence would seem to be crucial.

The authors of the accounts: how competent were they?

One of the arguments made in support of Home, both at the time and since, is that many of his sitters were sceptics, and so were less likely to be the victim of deception and self-deception. It is true that many witnesses of Home stated that, prior to observing seance phenomena, they were sceptical about such things. But it is a standard rhetorical device to present accounts of paranormal experiences in a form that will appeal to a sceptical audience, and Victorian spiritualists invariably stated that they had been shifted from a position of scepticism by ‘the facts’. However, there is evidence for only a handful of Home’s witnesses having made such statements prior to witnessing the phenomena. Beliefs about the phenomena may be relevant in terms of

³⁶ For example: Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1930; Hall, 1984; Braude, 1997.

observation and recall, and there is both anecdotal and experimental evidence that this is the case³⁷, but we simply do not know how sceptical witnesses were. There is, on the other hand, evidence that many found personal comfort in spiritualism, and it is possible that such beliefs could have influenced experiences. For example, Hall (1984) has argued that one of Home's particular strengths was in his ability to influence his sitters by suggestion, and this presumably would have been easier with a less sceptical audience. Finally, even if scepticism might limit self-deception, it would not have prevented deception by Home. Witnesses such as Sir David Brewster and Robert Browning remained sceptical while admitting they had no explanation for what they had seen. Brewster, in fact, publicly declared Home to be a trickster with no evidence to support the claim, and evidence suggests he was less than consistent in his reports of what he saw.³⁸ However, his behaviour only demonstrates that he was unable to explain what happened, and this in turn only raises the general issue of how competent witnesses were.

At the time, spiritualists regularly stressed the competence of Home's witnesses in terms of social status and intellectual ability. Presumably few people today would regard social status as a measure of competence in such matters, but the intellectual status of witnesses has continued to be presented as relevant. Scientists, in particular, were regarded in Home's time as particularly competent to detect trickery, no doubt influenced by the popular misconception that being fooled is something to do with being foolish. Magicians, of course, have argued for some time that scientists are not necessarily qualified to detect trickery.³⁹ However, neither does it follow that magicians are invulnerable. As Truzzi (1996) has pointed out, magicians are more than capable of being deceived, particularly by original methods developed by individuals.⁴⁰ In addition, while magicians and pseudo-psychics may share many techniques, the differences between the two are significant. Many of the techniques used by a pseudo-psychic are not well-known and rarely practised by magicians, and the way in which

³⁷ Hodgson & Davey, 1887; Keene, 1976; Smith, 1993; Wiseman & Morris, 1995.

³⁸ This is discussed more fully in chapter nine.

³⁹ Randi, 1983; Hansen, 1990.

⁴⁰ Truzzi, 1996, 31.

effects are framed is central to the pseudo-psychic.⁴¹ However, rather than attempting to assess the competence of individuals to detect trickery in such specific circumstances through their profession, there is more direct evidence of their level of competence in these matters. Many of the individuals who witnessed and commented on Home also saw other mediums, and for several we have direct evidence of their views.

The 49 accounts referred to above were written by 32 different individuals, and for thirteen of them we have evidence in relation to other mediums. In addition, there is evidence from another fifteen of Home's witnesses relating to other mediums taken from the wider literature. Of these 28 individuals, several of them failed to detect trickery with known tricksters. Richard Burton, Benjamin Coleman, John Jones, Thomas Shorter, and William Howitt ruled out trickery in the case of the Davenports, while Charles Massey and Alfred Russell Wallace did the same in relation to Slade.⁴² S. C. Hall explicitly ruled out trickery with Foster, as did E. L. Blanchard and Dr Ashburner, despite early suspicions by fellow spiritualists.⁴³ Gerald Massey was convinced by Herne and Williams and C. M. Davies, while apparently suspicious of some mediums, regarded Showers as "above suspicion".⁴⁴ It is true that Serjeant Cox reported having caught Showers cheating but, according to his account in the *Spiritual Magazine*, this was by accident and he attributed it to 'conscious somnambulism'.⁴⁵ Such a view may have had more to do with Victorian notions of propriety than with uncritical thinking, but as Cox also ruled out trickery in the case of Slade, his competence remains debatable⁴⁶. If one assumes that mediums such as Slade and the Davenports regularly cheated, then the competence of those who ruled out trickery at their seances would seem to be seriously in question.

Against this is the argument made by spiritualists at the time and since that, while

⁴¹ Lamont & Wiseman, 1999, 102ff.

⁴² See respectively *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 2; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 10; *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 11; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 1; *Spiritual Magazine*, 6, 1865, 4; Podmore, 1902; Oppenheim, 1988.

⁴³ *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 2; London Dialectical Society, 1873, 133; *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1867, 12. On early suspicions, see *Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 1.

⁴⁴ *Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1873, 2; Davies, 1875.

⁴⁵ *Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1874, 4.

⁴⁶ Podmore, 1902.

mediums may have been caught cheating at times, it does not follow that they were cheating at other times.⁴⁷ This argument has been repeated more recently⁴⁸, and is, of course, a logical position, but how convincing is it? It is worth considering this question in relation to William Crookes, who carried out experiments with Home that have been viewed as among the strongest evidence for Home's phenomena. As noted above, these experiments have been criticised for lacking detail and, when criticised at the time, Crookes complained that his competence was called into question.⁴⁹ But if the accounts of Crookes' experiments do not include enough detail to convince the reader, his competence is central to the argument, and it is not his scientific competence that is in question, but his competence to detect and expose trickery. In addition to Home, Crookes investigated a number of mediums with less impressive records, including Showers, Fay and Cook. Showers later confessed to Crookes that she cheated and how she did it, and Cook held joint seances with Showers and was reported cheating several times. Fay was a stage performer who Frederick Myers (founding member of the Society of Psychical Research) dubbed "an undoubted cheat".⁵⁰ Crookes was also convinced of the genuineness of phenomena produced by Herne and Williams, and carried out experiments with the latter, endorsing his phenomena, yet both men were later caught cheating in seances.⁵¹ Since Crookes did not report fraud with any of these mediums, one might reasonably conclude that either he was incompetent in such matters or that the phenomena they produced for him were genuine. There is no space to discuss the relevant details, but considering all the evidence will not remove the logical possibility that these mediums may have been genuine some of the time. One is faced with a choice that cannot be determined solely by the evidence. To argue, for example, that Cook's phenomena were genuine when investigated by Crookes would seem to assume Crookes' competence. On the other hand, to argue that Crookes was incompetent would seem to assume that Cook regularly cheated. Both are logical positions, but how convincing one finds them will presumably rest on the position one starts from. The more plausible one regards large-scale physical phenomena, the more

⁴⁷ This is discussed in chapter five.

⁴⁸ Beloff, 1991.

⁴⁹ Crookes, 1874.

⁵⁰ Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 94.

⁵¹ Podmore, 1902; Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 35ff.

convincing one should find the evidence for it, and the more convincing one should find the idea that mediums might be both fraudulent and genuine. On the other hand, if one takes the view that evidence for such phenomena should rule out deception, and one accepts the evidence that Cook was reported producing her usual phenomena in a fraudulent way, one will probably find it more plausible that this is how she usually produced the phenomena. If one takes the view that these mediums were regularly fraudulent, the failure of Crookes to report any fraud after testing Cook (and Showers and Fay and Williams) will presumably lead to the conclusion that Crookes was not a competent judge of whether deception was present.⁵²

It is, of course, also possible that Crookes' failure to report trickery may have been due to a failure to report rather than a failure to detect. Hall (1962) has suggested as much in relation to Cook, but there is also contemporary evidence from colleagues of Crookes. While publicly he did not say so, according to Lord Rayleigh, Crookes privately suspected Showers of fraud, albeit unconscious and due to the influence of bad spirits.⁵³ According to Bennet, Crookes said that virtually all the mediums he had met had resorted to trickery at some time.⁵⁴ One need not share Hall's conclusion about motives (he suggests Crookes and Cook were having an affair) to doubt whether Crookes would have reported fraud even if he had detected it. Finally, Mme Home (1888) pointed out that criticisms of other mediums Crookes had investigated did not necessarily affect the worth of his work with Home. Again, this is logically true, but if one is concerned with how convincing the evidence for Home is, and if one accepts that the competence of witnesses is central to any conclusion, then clearly it is relevant. After all, the enthusiasm with which Crookes' studies of Home were cited by proponents was based on the reputation of Crookes.

As for the remaining fourteen of the 28 individuals mentioned above, one was

⁵² It could also be argued that, even if Cook's phenomena were genuine, Crookes failure to detect and report potential fraudulent techniques suggests he could have been deceived and, therefore, should be regarded as incompetent. However, such a line of argument would need a significantly more detailed analysis of individual experiments, and is not felt necessary here.

⁵³ Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 107.

⁵⁴ Medhurst & Goldney, 1964, 50.

Cromwell Varley, who also carried out experiments with Florence Cook.⁵⁵ Another was John Elliotson, who denounced Mrs Hayden as a charlatan but was later converted through Home.⁵⁶ If he was right about Hayden, then this would suggest competence in such matters. However, it would also suggest that four⁵⁷ of Home's other witnesses lacked such competence since they were convinced by Hayden. In addition, six⁵⁸ were convinced of the genuineness of Squire, and two⁵⁹ of Marshall. While one should not assume that Squire, Hayden and Marshall used trickery, their phenomena were significantly less impressive than that of Home, and comments by the witnesses do offer insight into their competence to detect trickery. For example, Squire worked in complete darkness, yet trickery was explicitly ruled out by witnesses. Whether trickery was present or not, to rule it out explicitly in such conditions suggests a serious lack of understanding of possible deceptive strategies. Hayden and Marshall rarely did more than produce raps and apparent spirit messages yet, when one reads a savant such as Robert Chambers claiming that by watching Hayden closely he was convinced he could not have been deceived⁶⁰, it does raise serious doubts (at least in the mind of someone with a background in conjuring) as to his competence in such matters. When considering both the overall body of evidence for Home, and some of the more impressive cases, the less convinced one is of the competence of those who reported events, the less likely one is to be convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena reported.

Summary and conclusion

In the evidence considered above, venues are rarely specified, the sitters are rarely

⁵⁵ Hall, 1962; Broad, 1964; Stephenson, 1966.

⁵⁶ *Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1864, 5.

⁵⁷ Chambers (Podmore, 1902, 5), De Morgan (Podmore, 1902, 6-7), Isham (*Spiritual Herald*, 1856, 1), and Owen (Podmore, 1902, 18).

⁵⁸ Crawford (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 100), 'M.R.C.P.' (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 4), Pierart (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 495), Robertson ((London Dialectical Society, 1873, 247-54), 'J.J.S.' (*Spiritual Magazine*, 1, 1860, 233), and W. Wilkinson (*Spiritual Magazine*, 2, 1861, 359-63).

⁵⁹ Beattie (*Spiritual Magazine*, 5, 1877, 552-4) and Friswell (London Dialectical Society, 1873, 223-4).

⁶⁰ Podmore, 1902, 5-6.

stated to have all been known to the witness, reported attempts to detect trickery are minimal, and the competence of the witnesses to detect trickery would seem to be seriously in question. While individuals will no doubt differ in how convincing they find the evidence, it could reasonably be argued that the bulk of evidence for Home does not convincingly rule out deception and self-deception. Since this is largely due to lack of detail in the accounts, and when one considers cases such as Crookes' experiments, the question of competence is likely to be central to how convincing one finds the evidence. Depending on one's views about mediums who were caught cheating, the failure of Crookes and others to report trickery with such mediums might lead to one finding their testimony about Home less convincing. It is argued here that one has a choice of reasonable interpretations of available evidence, and that one's conclusion will be influenced by one's starting position. That does not seem to be a particularly radical point, but it does imply that how convincing one finds the evidence for Home will depend largely on how plausible one finds the idea that phenomena such as those reported might be genuine. So far as the evidence is concerned, the lack of detail and questionable competence of the witnesses may not explain what actually happened but, in the opinion of the author, they offer sufficient scope for significant deception to have taken place and, therefore, allow for a reasonable sceptical position to be maintained. Such a position, however, is held in the recognition that there is a significant discrepancy between the reported phenomena and attempts to provide a 'normal' explanation for them. It is highly unlikely that this gap will be filled, and the record of D.D. Home will no doubt continue to be one of the most impressive in the history of psychical research.

Accounts of seances from *Spiritual Magazine*

1. 'Investigator' [Coleman, B.] Vol. 1, 1860, 1, 43.
2. Howitt, W. Vol. 1, 1860, 2, 75-6.
3. Pears, Mr. Vol. 1, 1860, 2, 85-6.
4. Kyd, A. Vol. 1, 1860, 2, 86-7.
5. 'J.G.C.' [Crawford, J.] Vol. 1, 1860, 2, 89-90.
6. Wilkinson, W. Vol. 1 1860, 5, 220.
7. 'J.J.S.' [unknown] Vol. 1, 1860, 5, 232-3.
8. 'Two evenings' [unknown] Vol. 1, 1860, 6, 266-7.
9. 'Two evenings' [unknown]. Vol. 1, 1860, 6, 267-9.
10. 'Dr _____' [Robertson]. Vol. 1, 1860, 8, 337-8.
11. 'Another evening' [unknown lady]. Vol. 1, 1860, 9, 370-1.
12. Pierart, M. Vol. 1, 1860, 11, 496-7.
13. Wason, J. Vol. 1, 1860, 11, 524.
14. Wason, J. Vol. 1, 1860, 11, 524-5.
15. Jones, J. Vol. 2, 1861, 2, 68-70.
16. Hutchison, J. Vol. 2, 1861, 2, 89-90.
17. 'A plain man' [unknown] Vol. 2, 1861, 3, 123-6.
18. E.F. [unknown] Vol. 2, 1861, 5, 224-6.
19. Wilkinson, W. Vol. 2, 1861, 8, 359-63.
20. Brancker, A. Vol. 2, 1861, 9, 431-2.
21. Jones, J. Vol. 2, 1861, 10, 479-80.
22. Chawner, E. Vol. 5, 1864, 8, 375-9.
23. Chawner, E. Vol. 6, 1865, 1, 45-7.
24. Gregory, L. Vol. 1, 1866, 5, 226-7.
25. 'Easter eve' [unknown]. Vol. 1, 1866, 6, 278-80.
26. Jencken, H. Vol. 2, 1867, 10, 478-9.
27. Jencken, H. Vol. 3, 1868, 1, 30-6.
28. Jencken, H. Vol. 3, 1868, 8, 380-2.
29. Jones, J. Vol. 3, 1868, 9, 430-1.

30. 'A friend' [unknown]. Vol. 3, 1868, 12, 564.
31. Adare, Viscount. Vol. 4, 1869, 2, 82-3.
32. Adare, Viscount. Vol. 4, 1869, 4, 176.
33. 'editor' [unknown]. Vol. 4, 1869, 7, 334-6.
34. Varley, C. Vol. 4, 1869, 8, 368-9.
35. Jeffrey, H. Vol. 4, 1869, 10, 461-2.
36. Morgan, N. Vol. 5, 1870, 2, 89-90.
37. White, W. Vol. 5, 1870, 9, 390-1.
38. Beattie, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 9, 429.
39. Beattie, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 11, 512-13.
40. Beattie, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 11, 513-14.
41. Beattie, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 11, 514-15.
42. Beattie, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 11, 515.
43. Jones, J. Vol. 5, 1870, 11, 515-17.
44. Brodrickson, F. Vol. 6, 1871, 8, 383-4.
45. Thompson, G. Vol. 6, 1872, 1, 42-3.
46. Beattie, J. Vol. 7, 1872, 7, 334-6.
47. Beattie, J. Vol. 7, 1872, 9, 424-8.
48. 'Times commisioner' [Broome] Vol 1, 1873, 2, 49-50.
49. 'Times commisioner' [Broome] Vol 1, 1873, 2, 50-1.

APPENDIX B:

Home's witnesses

The number of witnesses who attended Home's seances is unknown, though it must have been several hundred in Britain alone. According to Jean Burton, "by the end of the sixties, there was scarcely a man or woman of note who had not personally viewed the marvels of his seances, or could consult a friend who had".¹ What Burton means by "of note" is suggested by the list of aristocrats she subsequently provides. Home's audience was, of course, considerably broader than that, and his biographies contain the names of scores of individuals who attended his seances. However, we know very little about many of these individuals. For some, we have only a name, and not always a real name. What these individuals thought privately, and how their beliefs reflected and informed their life, is beyond the reach of the historian. What is within the historian's grasp, however, and what this thesis has been concerned with, is what witnesses wrote about what they saw, and what was written in response. The witnesses considered in this thesis have been those who expressed their views in the periodical press and other contemporary texts. Private correspondence and diary extracts of a few individuals have been included where it has been felt of particular relevance, but there has been no attempt to study private papers of all known witnesses in the hope of finding a comment about Home's phenomena. As chapter one pointed out, it is not individual beliefs that are the focus of the thesis but the form of the public debate surrounding Home's phenomena. Nevertheless, some brief notes on Home's witnesses would at least give the reader some sense of who contributed to this debate.

¹ Burton, 1948, 127.

The list of witnesses that follows includes all those who were involved in the public debate in Britain, and whose views have informed this thesis. Unidentified pseudonyms are listed at the end.

List of witnesses

Adare, Viscount (later Earl of Dunraven)

Son of Lord Dunraven, and a Lieutenant in the First Life Guards. Adare was a close friend of Home, with whom he lived in Ashley House, central London. It was here that Home's famous 'Ashley Place' levitation took place, this being first published in Adare's *Experiences in Spiritualism* (1869), which was quickly withdrawn from circulation. Travelled with Home in the early 1870's as a war correspondent for the *Telegraph*.

Aide, Hamilton

Composer, novelist, poet, and friend of Alphonse Karr, editor of *Le Figaro*. Aide attended a Home seance, with Karr, on the Riviera in 1872. He subsequently published an article in *Nineteenth Century*, which discussed whether he had been hypnotised.

Alexander, Patrick Proctor (1823-86)

Author of *Mill and Carlyle*, *Moral Causation* and other works. Attended a Home seance in 1871, at the Edinburgh home of a friend, Dr Doun. Alexander subsequently wrote *Spiritualism: a narrative with a discussion*. (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo. 1871) which concluded the phenomena were neither imposture or delusion.

Arnold, Sir Edwin (1832-1904)

Poet and journalist. A former principal of the British college at Poona, Arnold worked as leader-writer, and from 1873 editor, of the *Daily Telegraph*. He was later knighted

in 1888. Arnold gave evidence to the Dialectical Society in 1869, where he ruled out imposture and delusion, though he also declined to accept the spirit hypothesis.

Ashurst, W. H.

Wrote a letter to Home, which appears in Home (1888).

Baker, Mrs Georgina

Daughter of Major Gregorie, formerly of the 13th Regiment of the Light Dragoons and a veteran of Waterloo. She met Home in Florence, at her parents' villa, and subsequently wrote *Fraud, fancy or fact - which is it? An enquiry into the mystery of spiritualism; with a narrative from personal experience*. London: authoress, 1862.

Barlee, Thomas

Resident of Ealing and neighbour of J. S. Rymer when Home was staying with the latter. He attended a seance in 1855, and gave an account of this in the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*.

Beattie, John

Resident of Clifton, Surrey, who became an active spiritualist in the 1870's and tested Home on several occasions towards the end of his mediumship. He published several articles in the spiritualist press, and reported some new phenomena such as fire resistance and body elongation.

Bell, Robert (1800-67)

Journalist, historian and literary critic, and a friend of both Lytton and Thackeray. Bell attended a seance in 1860 at the home of Mrs Milner Gibson, and subsequently gave an account of this in an article, 'Stranger than fiction', for the *Cornhill Magazine*. This provoked much debate and was defended by Thackeray, then editor of the *Cornhill*.

Bielfeld, H.

Wrote to *Medium and Daybreak* in 1872, giving an account of one of Home's last

seances.

Bird, John

Early convert to spiritualism who attended seance with Home in 1855, and gave an account of this in the *Spiritual Herald*

Blanchard, Edward L

Playwright and dramatic critic for the *Telegraph*. Blanchard met Home at the home of Mrs Milner Gibson in 1860, and attended several seances with different mediums over the following years. Blanchard gave evidence to the London Dialectical Society in 1869 where he ruled out trickery, claiming some expertise in conjuring, and attributed the phenomena to spirits.

Boldero, General

Met Home in Edinburgh, with P. P. Alexander, at the home of Dr Doun. Subsequently gave an account of this to the JSPR.

Boldero, Mrs

Wife of General Boldero, who attended the above seance and also gave evidence to the JSPR.

Bradlaugh, Charles (1833-91)

Political reformer, and founder, in 1860, of the *National Reformer*. Later M.P. for Northampton. An avowed atheist, Bradlaugh attended seances with Home as a result of his involvement in the London Dialectical Society investigation of 1869. He also engaged in a public debate with the spiritualist publisher, James Burns, in 1873.

Brancker, Ann

Sat with Home in 1861, and gave an account of this in the *Spiritual Magazine*.

Brewster, Sir David (1781-1868)

Eminent physicist, specialising in optics, inventor of the kaleidoscope, and author of *Letters on natural magic* (1832), who became Principal of Edinburgh University in 1859. Brewster attended a Home seance in 1855 with Lord Brougham and dismissed it as trickery, resulting in a debate in the *Morning Advertiser*. His private views also reached the public arena following posthumous publication of his letters.

Bright, John (1811-89)

M.P. and leading reformer of the Corn Laws. Invited to a seance in 1863 by fellow M.P., Edmond Beale, who was a neighbour of the Halls in Brompton. With him came Samuel Lucas, editor of the *Morning Star*. He only refers to the event briefly in his diary, though others commented upon it.

Brodrickson, F. N.

Resident of Ryde, Isle of Wight, who witnessed Home in 1871 and gave an account of the seance in the *Spiritual Magazine*.

Broome, Mr

Author of the *Times* leader in 1872, 'Spiritualism and science', which describes seances with Home involving checks for trickery, but fails to detect fraud. He was identified by a fellow-journalist, H.T. Humphries, to Mme Home.

Brougham, Lord Henry (1778-1868)

Politician, founder of *Edinburgh Review*, and Lord Chancellor in Grey's Whig ministry. He was, with Brewster, one of the first to attend a Home seance after the medium's arrival in Britain in 1855, following an invitation from Robert Owen. He makes no mention of the event in his memoirs, though his fame led to the event receiving some publicity.

Browning, Robert (1812-89)

The poet met Home at a seance which he attended with his wife in 1855. He seems to

have developed an intense dislike of the medium, reportedly threatened him at one point, and wrote a long poem, 'Mr Sludge', about a fraudulent medium, which was not published until after his wife's death.

Browning, Elizabeth Barret (1809-61)

The poet met Home at seance which she attended with her husband in 1855. She wrote of Home to her sister with some interest, expressing a belief in the phenomena she saw. However, her husband's animosity towards the medium led to her promising not to visit him again.

Chambers, Robert (1802-71)

Well-known writer and publisher, co-editor of *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, and author of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844)*, which first suggested an evolutionary theory of creation. Initially publicly sceptical about seance phenomena, he was converted at a seance with Home in 1859. He became a close friend of the medium, wrote an anonymous introduction to his biography in 1863, and publicly supported him during the Lyon-Home trial of 1868.

Chawner, Edward Henry

Resident of Hampshire who attended seances with Home in 1864, and gave accounts of these in the *Spiritual Magazine*.

Coleman, Benjamin

Successful stockbroker and early convert to spiritualism who became one of the most prominent advocates of the spiritualist cause. Wrote countless articles for the spiritualist press.

Cox, William Stockton (d.1864)

Owner of Cox's hotel, Jermyn Street, a fashionable London hotel referred to in *Vanity Fair*. Friend of Robert Owen and fellow spiritualist, who housed Home when he first arrived in London. Involved in the Brewster controversy of 1855.

Cox, Edward William (Serjeant) (1809-76)

M.P. for Taunton till 1869, edited *Law Times*, founder of Crockford's Clerical Directory and of Psychological Society of Great Britain in 1875. Sat on the committee of London Dialectical Society, and subsequently investigated Home with William Crookes. He later published his theories on a new psychic force.

Crawford, J. G.

Gave account of a Home seance in *Spiritual Magazine* under 'J.G.C.' which was included in Home's *Incidents* in 1863.

Crookes, William (1832-1919)

Eminent chemist, discoverer of thallium, founder of *Chemical News* and editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. A Fellow and later President of the Royal Society, Crookes carried out experiments with Home from 1870 from which he concluded the existence of a new 'psychic force'. His paper being rejected by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he published it in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, of which he was editor at that time. He went on to test several other mediums before finally becoming disillusioned with spiritualism.

Crosland, Newton

London wine merchant and one of the first public speakers and writers on spiritualism. Attended a Home seance in 1855 at the home of the Rymers, and wrote *Apparitions* in 1856, which argued for the authenticity of seance phenomena and stressed links between spiritualism and Christianity.

Crosland, Mrs Newton

Wife of Newton Crosland and early spiritualist, who took a similar position to her husband in her book *Light in the Valley* (1857), which argued for the authenticity of seance phenomena and stressed links with Christianity.

Davies, Rev. Charles Maurice (1828-1910)

Anglican clergyman and spiritualist, headmaster of the West London Collegiate School, and regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*. Author of a series of books on metropolitan religion which included *Unorthodox London (1875)* and *Mystic London (1875)*. Attended Home seances in Paris and London, and subsequently visited several mediums.

De Burgh, Mrs

Convert to spiritualism following a Home seance in 1859, she wrote a letter to Home expressing her belief which is cited by Mme Home (Home, 1888).

Douglas, Miss

Spiritualist and resident of Mayfair. Attended seances with Home, gave evidence to the London Dialectical Society, and later hosted seances attended by Francis Galton and others.

Douglas, Rev. H.

Rector of Edmondthorpe, Rutlandshire, who witnessed Home in the 1860's at the home of Lady Poulett in Regent Street, and gave an account of this to the JSPR.

Dunsany, Lady

Widow of Lord Dunsany, and friend of Dr Gully, the Halls, and Mrs Senior, who wrote to Home expressing the comfort she found in spiritualism, her letter cited by Mme Home.

Edgeworth, G. M.

Witnessed Home and wrote to him subsequently, his letter being cited by Mme Home.

Elliotson, Dr John (1786-68)

Distinguished therapist, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Fellow of the Royal Society, and Professor at University College London. Elliotson was also

founder of the London Phrenological Society in 1823, and editor of the *Zoist*, the main journal of mesmerism. He resigned his position at UCL rather than cease demonstrations of mesmerism, yet he was publicly sceptical about spiritualism until being converted by a Home seance in 1863.

Galton, Francis, later Sir (1822-1911)

Noted early psychologist, anthropologist, and eugenicist, knighted in 1909. Attended seances at home of Crookes in 1872, where he observed testing of Home. Impressed by the results, he subsequently wrote to his cousin, Charles Darwin, suggesting the two of them test Home. Letters from Galton suggest that Darwin was prepared to test Home, but the latter did not reply.

Gibson, Mrs Milner

Wife of Thomas Milner Gibson, President of the Board of Trade (1859-66), and Home's most prominent London hostess. Through her extensive social contacts, she helped introduce Home to London society, and it to him. Many seances took place in the drawing room of her home in Hyde Park Place, including the famous *Cornhill* seance in 1860.

Gledstanes, J. H.

Witness of Home who wrote account of seance to *Spiritualist Magazine* in 1868.

Glover, Mr

Witness of Home who gave evidence at London Dialectical Society investigation in 1869. He concluded that spiritual communications in general were satanic, though he described his experiences at Home seances positively.

Gomm, Lady

One of several who attended seances with Home and wrote privately of their views. Her latter was published by Mme. Home

Gregory, L. M.

Witness of Home who provided account of seance to *Spiritual Magazine* in 1866.

Gregory, William (1803-58)

Professor of Chemistry at University of Edinburgh, authority on mesmerism, and author of *Letters to a Candid Enquirer on Animal Magnetism (1851)*. Attended seances with Home from 1855, though never stated his conviction that the phenomena were supernatural, preferring to frame them as due to some sort of natural force.

Gully, Dr James (1807-33)

Well-known doctor in Malvern, pioneer of hydropathy, friend of Darwin and Tennyson. Attended *Cornhill* seance in 1860, and subsequently became a spiritualist and friend of Home, inviting him to stay at his house in Malvern on several occasions, and often providing treatment for the medium.

Hall, Samuel Carter (1800-89)

A popular and prolific writer, journalist and editor of the *Art Journal*. Rumoured to be Dickens' inspiration for the character of Mr Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Close friend of the Howitts and of Home, and author of *The Use of Spiritualism (1884)*.

Hall, Anna Maria (1800-81)

Wife of S. C. Hall, also a writer and close friend of Home. Hosted many seances and, along with Mary Howitt, she contributed a paper on Sacha Home to Home's *Incidents in my Life (1863)*.

Hastings, Marchioness of

Attended seances with Home, and cited by Mme Home (1888).

Hawksley, Dr Thomas

Attended seances with Home in the early 1860's, cited in *Incidents* as 'Dr H', had letters published in Home (1888), and in the JSPR.

Hayward, Abraham

Barrister and essayist who wrote an article in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1865, which framed Home's phenomena as trickery.

Heaphy, Thomas

Artist and friend of the Halls, who attended seances in the 1860's and became a friend of the medium.

Hennings, Mrs

Host of several seances at her house near Crystal Palace attended by prominent spiritualists such as Viscount Adare, and Henry Jencken.

Honywood, Mrs

Spiritualist and witness at the London Dialectical Society investigation of 1869.

Hope-Vere, Miss Sophia

Sister to Marchioness of Ely. Wrote to Home after attending seance in 1860, at which her sister and William Makepeace Thackeray were present, the letter being published in Home (1888).

Howitt, William (1792-1879)

Poet, journalist, historian, miscellaneous writer, and editor of the *People's Journal*. He embraced many causes, denounced the Anglican church in *A Popular History of Priestcraft* (1834), and later translated Ennemoser's *History of Magic* into English in 1854. Along with his wife, he first witnessed Home in 1855, and soon embraced spiritualism as complimentary to Christianity, becoming the main contributor to the *Spiritual Magazine* throughout the 1860's. The Howitts hosted many seances with Home at their home in Highgate.

Howitt, Mary (1805-88)

Wife of William and equally versatile writer on a wide range of topics, including

improving stories for children, and first introduced Hans Christian Anderson into the British public. With her husband, she embraced Christian spiritualism in the 1850's. With Mrs Hall, wrote a tribute to Home's wife at the end of *Incidents* (1863).

Huggins, William, later Sir (1824-1910)

Astronomer who used spectroscopy to revolutionise observation of celestial bodies, Huggins later became President of the Royal Society, and was knighted in 1897. Huggins was present at Crookes' experiments with Home and, though he confirmed the observations, he declined to draw conclusions.

Humphreys, H. T.

Journalist who attended a Home seance in 1868 and gave an account that was cited by Home (1888).

Hutchison, J.

Published an account of a Home seance in the *Spiritual Magazine*, later cited by Home (1863).

Isham, Sir Charles

Early spiritualist and host to the medium at his home, Lamport Hall. Isham later helped found the British National Association of Spiritualists.

Jarves, A. S.

Resident of Boston who wrote to the *Spiritual Magazine* of a successful prophecy made by Home in 1863.

Jeffrey, Henry

Member of the Dialectical Society committee who changed from a sceptical position as a result of the investigation.

Jencken, Henry

Former barrister, and friend of the medium who carried out personal investigations of Home's phenomena, and published several accounts in the spiritualist press. Married Kate Fox, one of the original Fox sisters, in 1872.

Jones, John 'Enmore'

Early convert to spiritualism and prominent Christian spiritualist, who hosted many seances at his Sydenham home, and wrote countless letters and articles for the spiritualist press.

Jones, Miss Alice

Daughter of John Jones, who stayed with her father and attended seances regularly. Gave evidence to the Dialectical Society in 1869.

Kirkup, Baron Seymour

Aging and eccentric artist with a keen interest in the occult, who met Home in Florence in the 1850's and continued to express his belief in him, despite later dismissing other mediums as fraudulent.

Kyd, A

Resident of Germany who published an account of a Home seance (venue not stated) in the *Spiritual Magazine* in 1860.

Lindsay, Lord (1812-80)

Later Earl of Crawford, a young friend of Home and Viscount Adare (later Earl of Dunraven). First met Home in Florence in 1856, and later a witness of the Ashley House levitation in 1869.

Linton, Mrs Lynn

Early woman journalist and friend of Mrs Milner Gibson. She witnessed Home at the home of the latter but remained sceptical, and later wrote a novel in which a fraudulent

medium appeared.

Lyon, Mrs Jane

Rich widow who met and subsequently adopted Home as a son while he was working at the Spiritual Athenaeum. After changing her mind about a large monetary gift to Home, she took him to court in 1868 in a case that attracted a great deal of publicity.

Lytton, Edward Bulwer-, Baron (1803-73)

Novelist, poet, dramatist and politician. He met Home at the Rymers in 1855 and attended seances over subsequent years. Mme Home suggested he believed in the spirits. Lytton gave evidence to the London Dialectical Society in 1869, where he rejected the spirit hypothesis, and letters to Home suggest he viewed such phenomena as genuine though not the product of spirits.

Lytton, Robert Bulwer-, Earl (1831-91)

Son of Edward, and also a poet and politician. He became the first Viceroy of India in 1876, though was better known to his contemporaries as a poet. He attended seances with his father and the Brownings.

Massey, Gerald (1828-1907)

Poet with a background in Chartism and Christian Socialism. Met Home at the home of the Halls in the early 860's, and became a devout Christian spiritualist. Testified for Home in the Lyon-Home case of 1868.

Merrifield, F

One of very few witnesses who subsequently concluded trickery as an explanation for the phenomena. Years later, Merrifield gave an anonymous account of a Home seance to the JSPR, and subsequently supplied more comments in 1903, this time with his name attached.

Milnes, Richard Monkton (later Lord Houghton) (1809-85)

Eclectic poet, influential critic, and politician. Milnes attended a Home seance in 1860 and was subsequently linked to a rumour that he had caught Home cheating. He denied ever having made such a claim, however.

Morgan, Nicholas

Resident of Darlington who met Home in 1870, and wrote to the *York Herald* about the seance.

Nicholson, J.

Resident of Glasgow, who attended seances in 1870 with H. Nisbet, and wrote account to *Human Nature*.

Nisbet, H

Resident of Glasgow, who attended seances in 1870 with J. Nicholson, and wrote account to *Human Nature*.

Nixon, B

Witness who wrote to Home, his letter later being cited in Home (1888).

Owen, Robert (1771-1858)

Socialist thinker and reformer. Endorsed spiritualism in 1853 (at the age of 82), prior to meeting Home, and remained a believer for the remaining few years of his life. Owen met Home in 1855 while both were living at Cox's hotel, and subsequently invited his old friend, Lord Brougham.

Owen, Robert Dale (1801-77)

Son of Robert Owen, social reformer and member of US Congress. While American minister at the court of Naples, he met Home and noted his gifts as a psychic. He subsequently wrote *Footfalls on the boundary of another world* (1860). In the late 1870's, he was reported to have become insane, following the exposure of the

Holmes', mediums whom he had previously publicly endorsed.

Parkes, Mrs Cranford

Former resident of India, who met Home at Mrs Milner Gibson's home in 1860, and became a spiritualist. The following year, Home, his wife and son came to live at her house at 7 Cornwall Terrace, which became another regular venue of seances. Extracts from her diary of seance accounts were included as an appendix in Home's biography.

Pears, Mr

Met Home in 1860, and gave an account in the *Spiritual Magazine*, which subsequently appeared in Home's biography.

Peck, Mrs

American woman who met Home in Geneva in 1873, and managed to attend a seance. Subsequently gave an account in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1876.

Remus, Major

Resident of Hague, who gave account of seance given by Home when in Holland in 1858.

Robertson, Dr Charles Lockhart

An editor of the *Journal of Mental Science*, Superintendent of the Sussex County lunatic asylum, and chancery visitor in lunacy. Publicly dismissed Home's phenomena in the *JMS* but subsequently converted following a Home seance in 1860 (his first account in the *Spiritual Magazine* being signed Dr ____). Robertson joined the SPR at its foundation and was later a member of its governing council until his death in 1897.

Rowcroft, Mr

Attended seances with Home at home of John Jones, and later gave evidence to the Dialectical Society.

Ruskin, John (1819-1900)

Influential thinker on art and social issues. Following his loss of faith, his close friend, Mrs Cowper Temple, introduced him to Home in 1864. He continued to attend seances with Home and the Howitts, and subsequently wrote to Home in affectionate terms.

Russell, Mrs Harriet Scott

Witness of Home and convert to spiritualism, whose comments were recorded in Home's biographies.

Rymer, John Snaith

Solicitor with offices on Chancery Lane, and early convert to spiritualism. Home stayed at Rymer's Ealing home after leaving Cox's hotel, and conducted many seances there that were attended by such celebrities as the Brownings. Rymer gave lectures and wrote one of the first texts on spiritualism, *Spirit Manifestations* (1857). A few years later, however, he lost his fortune in business and moved to Australia to begin a new life.

Senior, Mrs Adelaide

Sister of Tom Hughes (author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*), and friend of Mrs Parkes, at whose house she met Home. She gave accounts of seances there that were published in Home (1888), and she introduced Home to her brother-in-law, Nassau Senior.

Senior, Nassau (1790-1864)

Professor of Political Economy at Oxford, and a member of the Poor Law Commission. Introduced to Home in 1860 by his sister-in-law, Adelaide Senior, and attended several seances. Senior subsequently negotiated the publication of Home's biography with Longmans.

Shelley, Lady

Daughter-in-law of the poet, and author of *Shelley and Mary*. She met Home,

converted to spiritualism, and later wrote to Home, her letter being cited in Home (1863).

Simpson, J Hawkins

Described by another witness as 'a scientific gentleman'. Witnessed Home in the late 1860's and gave evidence at the Dialectical Society investigation, and later to the SPR.

Sinclair, Miss Catherine

Daughter of Sir John Sinclair (compiler of the Statistical Account), and author of a successful children's book, *Holiday House*. A friend of Mrs Milner Gibson, but first met Home at the home of Mrs Parkes, the account given in Home (1888) by Mrs Adelaide Senior.

Spencer, Dr

Research chemist who attended a seance at Jermyn St in 1855. Many years later, he told of this event at a lecture, the comments being reported in the *Spiritualist*.

Sutherland, Duchess of

Eminent social hostess, who entertained guests at Stafford House, at the bottom of Pall Mall. An important influence in Home's introduction to London society, she befriended the medium and his wife, and expressed her deep interest in spiritualism in letters to Home.

Thackeray, William Makepeace (1811-63)

Novelist, satirist, and founding editor of *Cornhill Magazine*, an early edition of which published an account of Home seances. Thackeray attended a seance with Home in 1860, and defended the *Cornhill* account of Robert Bell on the basis of what he had seen.

Trollope, Thomas Adolphus (1810-92)

Writer, son of Frances Trollope, and brother of Anthony. Trollope met Home in

Florence, and at the Rymer's home in London. He was involved in the Brewster controversy of 1855, and the Dialectical Society investigation of 1869, admitting he could not explain the phenomena.

Trollope, Mrs Frances (1780-1863)

Authoress, best known for *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). She met Home in Florence and London, and invited Dickens, who declined to attend. According to Elizabeth Barret Browning, Mrs Trollope came to dislike Home, and her last novel included a thinly disguised and not very complimentary portrait of Home.

Varley, Cromwell

Atlantic telegraph engineer, and prominent spiritualist. Publicly supported Home at the Lyon-Home trial, and appeared at the Dialectical Society investigation, and wrote many articles for the spiritualist press.

Wallace, Alfred Russell (1822-1913)

Eminent naturalist who evolved a theory of natural selection independently of Darwin. Wallace was also a prominent spiritualist who publicly supported Crookes' conclusions about Home, and wrote several essays on the subject.

Wason, James

Liverpool solicitor who attended a Home seance on a visit to London in 1860. He later invited Edmond Beales, MP, who invited John Bright. Wason gave an account of his seance in the *Spiritual Magazine*, which also appeared in Home's biography.

Webster, Mrs Helen

Authoress who met Home in Paris and came to believe in spiritual agency of his phenomena. Subsequently wrote *Scepticism and spiritualism* (1865), and wrote privately to Home.

White, William

Attended Home seance in 1855 and became Christian spiritualist, though it was many years before he described the seance in the spiritualist press. At this time, he also began to lecture and write on the subject.

Wilbraham, Colonel E. B.

Wrote letter in defence of Home's phenomena being genuine, following criticism of Home's biography in 1863.

Wilkinson, James John Garth (1812-99)

Medical doctor with practise in Belford Square. Though a member of the RCS, Wilkinson was a regular critic of the medical establishment, and a promoter of mesmerism and homeopathy. He attended a Home seance in 1855, describing this in the *Morning Advertiser*, and later was part of the Dialectical Society investigation.

Wilkinson, William

Solicitor, brother of J.J.G.Wilkinson, and co-editor of the *Spiritual Magazine*. Wilkinson was a prominent spiritualist, a close friend of Home, who also acted as his attorney, and ghost-wrote *Incidents in my life* (1863).

Wynne, Captain Charles

Cousin of Lord Adare, and a serving officer in the Guards. He was a close friend of Home and, along with Adare and Lindsay, witnessed the famous Ashley House levitation in 1869.

Unidentified witnesses:

'A friend' (*Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1868, 564)

'A Plain Man' (*Spiritual Magazine*, 3, 1862, 123-6)

'C. of E. clergyman' (*Human Nature*, 4, 1873, 161-74)

- 'H. C.' (Spiritual Herald, 1856, 102)
- 'M. D.' (Spiritual Magazine, 2, 1867, 113-18)
- 'An Edinburgh gentleman' (Human Nature, 2, 1870, 191)
- 'editor' (Spiritual Magazine, 3, 1869, 335-6)
- 'E. F.' (Spiritual Magazine, 2, 1861, 224-33)
- 'A. G.' (Human Nature, 2, 1870, 131-3)
- 'a lady' (Spiritual Magazine, 1, 1860, 90)
- 'K. R. H. M.' (Spiritual Magazine, 1, 1860, 6)
- 'E. T. P.' (JSPR, 1889, 129)
- 'J. J. S.' (Spiritual Magazine, 1, 1860, 233)

APPENDIX C:

Articles in periodical press pertaining to anomalous phenomena, 1853-78

- The Rappings. *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, 1853, Mar 26, 193-5.
- The Spirits come to town. *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, 1853, May 21, 321-4.
- Spiritual manifestations. *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, 73, 1853, 629-46.
- Faraday on table-moving. *The Athenaeum*, 1853, July 2, 801-3.
- Table-turning. *The Athenaeum*, 1853, July 2, 923.
- Electro-biology and mesmerism. *Quarterly Review*, 93, 501-57.
- Spirit manifestations. *The Athenaeum*, 1853, November 5, 1323.
- Indian impostors and jugglers. *Leisure Hour*, 1853, 791-4.
- Works on mental philosophy, mesmerism, electro-biology, & c. *North British Review*, 22, 1854, 179-224.
- Letters. *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 3, 4 - November 11, 2.
- Evenings with Mr Home. *Morning Advertiser*, 1855, October 12, 2.
- Juggling, wizarding, and similar phenomena. *Family Herald*, 13, 1855, 349-50.
- Superstition and science. *Saturday Review*, 1856, January 12, 194.
- The Spirit faith in America. *Chambers Journal*, 1856, Feb 9, 81-3.
- Popular superstition. *Times*, 1857, May 5, 6.
- On the conservation of force. *The Athenaeum*, 1857, March 28, 397-9.
- The life of a conjuror. *Westminster Review*, 72, 1857, 91-111.
- Mrs Crosland's experiences of Spiritualism. *The Athenaeum*, 1857, July 25, 941.
- Spirits and spirit rapping. *Westminster Review*, 13, 1858, 29-66.
- The homoeopathic principle applied to insanity; a proposal to treat lunacy by Spiritualism. *Asylum Journal of Mental Science*, 4, 1858, 360-96.
- Experimental researches in chemistry and physics by Faraday. *The Athenaeum*, 1859, March 12, 349.
- On hallucinations. *The Athenaeum*, 1859, June 18, 801-3.

Order of Nature. *Quarterly Review*, 106, 1859, 420-54.

Hallucinations. *Fraser's Magazine*, 60, 1859, 625-31.

Spiritualism and the age we live in. *The Athenaeum*, 1860, February 11, 201-2.

Spirit bribery and corruption. *Punch*, 1860, April 14, 150.

Cartoon. *Punch*, 1860, May 12, 189.

Stranger than fiction. *Cornhill Magazine*, 2, 1860, 211-24.

Modern magic. *All the year round*, 1860, July 28, 370-4.

Home, Great Home. *Punch*, 1860, August 18, 63.

Spirit conjuring, *Punch*, 1860, August 25, 73.

Spiritual "Hume" - bug. *Punch*, 1860, August 11, 59.

Recent Spirit rappings. *Once a week*, 3, 1860, 212-15.

Stranger than fiction. *Literary Gazette*, 1860, July 28, 38.

Spirit-rapping made easy; or, how to come out as a medium. *Once a week*, 3, 1860, 403-7, 489-94.

Seeing is believing. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 88, 1860, 381-95.

Spirit-rapping. *Literary Gazette*, 1860, September 8, 180-1.

Elegant extracts. *Literary Gazette*, 1860, October 6, 276.

Fallacies of faith. *All the year round*, 1860, September 15, 540-5.

Magic and science. *All the year round*, 3, 1861, March 23, 561-6.

Spirit-rapping testimonials, *Punch*, 1860, October 27, 167.

Mr H's [Heaphy] own narrative. *All the year round*, 5, 1861, October 5, 36-43.

Indian juggling. *Once A Week*, 4, 1861, 40-3.

Are Spiritual manifestations genuine? *British Controversialist*, 1, 1861, 306-15.

Are Spiritual manifestations genuine? *British Controversialist*, 2, 1861, 26-36, 86-100, 164-79, 244-56, 310-21.

A faithful spirit. *Punch*, 41, 1861, 19 October 159.

Modern necromancy. *North British Review*, 34, 1861, 110-41.

Illusions and hallucinations. *British Quarterly Review*, 36, 1862, 387-418.

Spiritualism. *Dublin University Magazine*, 60, 1862, 3-13.

Mediums under other names. *All the year round*, 7, 1862, 130-7.

The latest from spirit land. *Once a Week*, 6, 1862, 295-8, 351-3.

Religious heresies of the working classes. *Westminster Review*, 77, 1862, 60-96.

Superstition. *Cornhill Magazine*, 5, 1862, 706-19.

Spirit-rapping extraordinary. *Once a Week*, 7, 1862, 611-16.

Strange and yet true. *All the year round*, 1862, Aug 16, 540-4.

Small beer chronicles. *All the year round*, 1862, September 6, 607-9.

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