

one to suppose, the writer goes on to describe one of the characteristics of the place—the darkened room for refractory patients.

“They were like the ordinary single bed-rooms, except that the windows above the door leading to the hall were closed with planks so as to shut out the light. The door had a slide window for observation from outside, and the window to the exterior was blocked up with masonry, converting it into a police-station cell, with the exception that no air or light was admissible. There was no furniture, no chamber, no padding to protect the patient from self-inflicted injury. It is true there was a ventilator at the ceiling leading to the hall, but the room had the dampness and close air of a vault; and even had the ventilator been in active operation it would not admit fresh air from without, but only the contaminated air of the hall, which in the female wards had a very perceptible uriferous smell. The doctor informed me that usually half an hour’s imprisonment was sufficient to abate any refractoriness, though sometimes it required a longer period.”

He ends by saying,—“The water-closets were filthy, and in short there was no redeeming quality in the whole establishment. So much for political appointments.”

Lyon v. Home.

No one who has read the reports of the trials for witchcraft which were so frequent at one time, and has studied the sort of evidence given by witnesses and accepted by judges on these occasions, will be much surprised at the revelations made in this trial. There is no limit to the credulity of the ignorant and superstitious except the limit which there is in the nature of things to the audacity of the impostor and charlatan: what some people believe is measured only by what any one may confidently dare to ask them to believe. And it would seem to be almost impossible to speculate too much on the credulity of persons of a certain temperament in regard to all matters having relation to the unseen or spiritual world. Let the grossest absurdity be presented to them in the name of the spiritual, they accept it with a childlike helplessness of faith.

The facts of this extraordinary case lie in a small compass; the affidavits of the plaintiff and defendant, notwithstanding many contradictions, agreeing so far in essential points as to leave little doubt of what actually took place at the interviews be-

tween them. Mrs. Lyon, who is now 75 years of age, became a widow in 1859, her husband, with a grievously misplaced confidence, leaving her upwards of £100,000 at her own disposal. Of a superstitious and fanciful disposition, imagining throughout life that she dreamed extraordinary dreams, and even saw visions, she appears to have had the conviction that the spirit of her dead husband would be present with her, and that she would meet him again at the end of seven years. Gossiping concerning this foolish fancy to a Mrs. Sims, a photographer, she was directed to the Spiritual Athenæum, in Sloane Street, where, without the necessity of dying, she might hear of her husband through Mr. Home, the "head spiritualist."

Mrs. Lyon at once acted on this advice, and had an interview with Home on the 2nd or 3rd of October. A few days after this interview she transferred to him—previously an entire stranger to her—Bank of England Stock to the value of £24,000, in consequence, as she asserted, of communications received through him from the spirit of her husband, which enjoined her to adopt Home as her son. The defendant, though he denied much which Mrs. Lyon swore to, did not deny that the spirits did put in an appearance, and have their say at the interview; on the contrary, he admitted that the following message was received on one occasion:—"Do not, my darling Jane, say 'Alas! the light of other days is for ever fled;' the light is with you. Charles lives and loves you." But he solemnly asserted that he had nothing to do with causing the messages—that "whatever communications there were, were caused by the plaintiff herself, if they were caused by anybody." In fact, he, the great master of his art, whose speciality it was to be the medium of spiritual manifestations, was on these occasions the humble pupil of the superstitious old lady who had suddenly developed miraculous powers as a medium. Whether the spirits dictated the phraseology of the letter in which Mrs. Lyon made the gift, he did not say; but no one who reads the letter can feel much doubt of the truth of her statement that some spirit, embodied or disembodied, helped her. The letter was as follows:—

"Oct. 10th, 1866.

"MY DEAR MR. HOME,—

"I have a desire to render you independent of the world, and having ample means for the purpose, without abstracting from any needs or comforts of my own, I have the

greatest satisfaction in now presenting you with, and as an entirely FREE GIFT from me, the sum of £24,000, and am, my dear sir,

“Yours very truly and respectfully,

“JANE LYON.”

Mrs. Lyon affirmed that this letter was copied by her from a draught composed by the defendant; but Mrs. Lyon was fanciful and might have had an hallucination, while Mr. Home “trusts he is too much of a gentleman” to use even such an expression as “Death is all humbug.” The suggestion, therefore, that he, the honoured guest of emperors, prepared the draught for the old lady to copy, should, perhaps, be discarded in face of his denial. If a spirit was the agent, it must have been an evil minded and malicious demon, grinning all the while in its sleeve—for spirits have their earthly dresses, by which they may be identified, Mr. Home states; *a fortiori*, therefore, sleeves—at the clever way in which it was cunningly devising to trip up the great master. The internal evidence of the letter could hardly have been more damaging to the defendant’s case. It was morally decisive.

The absolute gift of £24,000 was not all the good which their kind spirits designed to confer on this peculiarly organized favourite of theirs. The passion for bestowing benefits seems to have grown by indulgence, as the appetite for swallowing them, capacious as this was originally, certainly did. Early in November a will was drawn up by a solicitor, the friend of Home and a spiritualist, by which Mrs. Lyon left all her property to Daniel, the adopted son. Again, on the 10th December, a further transfer of £6,000 stock was made to Daniel, he taking the name of Lyon; and in the January following, the same solicitor prepared, and Mrs. Lyon executed, an assignment to him of a mortgage of £30,000. Thus in the course of about three months he had obtained about £60,000. Mr. Home now left town to recruit his health and to digest his good fortune; but absence did not make the mother’s heart grow fonder. On the contrary, reflecting on what she had done, and listening to the representations of friends, she began to suspect that she had not acted wisely, and thereupon consulted an independent solicitor, who informed her that she had been grossly imposed upon, and advised her to institute proceedings to get back her property. What happened next tells very strongly in favour of the truth of her story regarding the in-

fluence under which she had made her extraordinary gifts; for, before acting on the sensible advice given to her, she visited another medium, the daughter of a Mrs. Berry, and again consulted the spirits. The following conversation took place:—"Are there any spirits here that know me?" she asked. "Yes." "Who?" "Charles." "Is it my own husband's spirit, Charles Lyon?" "Yes." "Do you know of this business with Daniel Home?" "Yes." "Do you approve of it?" "No; it is an imposition." "What shall I do?" "Go to law at once; be firm and decided." "Was your spirit ever with Daniel?" "No, never." "Whose spirit was it?" "His own spirit." This singular consultation is entirely consistent, not only with her account of what took place at her interviews with Home, but with the traits of her character as displayed throughout the case. The result of it was that she peremptorily demanded the restoration of her property at a stormy interview which she had with the defendant. He was generously willing to give up the trust deed of January, 1867, on condition that he and his should be left in undisputed possession of the £30,000, which, "my darling mother, you, in your noble generosity and kindness of heart, gave me." However, that did not satisfy the "darling mother," who had been enjoined by the true spirit of her husband to go to law; and she immediately filed a bill in Chancery to set aside her transactions with the defendant, on the ground of fraud and undue influence unscrupulously exercised. It is a curious and important feature in the case that even then she was not, and seemingly is not now, convinced that spiritualism is a gross imposture; she believed only that she had been imposed upon by Home, who had brought up a lying spirit to work his purposes.

What was the defendant's answer to her case? A tissue of extraordinary statements which might well call up an angry blush on the face of the spirit of the age, if there be any such spirit. Assuredly the sublime faith of the prophet, or the matchless effrontery of the charlatan, never went further in any witness-box in any court of the world. He was a peculiarly organised being, and had been the subject of peculiar manifestations from his childhood; spirits were in the habit of coming of their own accord and conversing with him; they had lifted him into the air and floated him about the room, together with tables and chairs. Sometimes they were merry enough to play practical jokes, but a more serious effect of their manifestations was to convince unbelievers of the immortality

of the soul. They had never given any information on stock jobbing, but they would go so far as to recommend a particular doctor. The identity of a spirit might be established by the peculiarity of its dress—not the ghost of a dress, but the real article. What more natural than a desire on the part of the spirit to benefit by a paltry £60,000 a being so attractive to them, and for whose company they had always exhibited such a special liking! In one thing we heartily agree with Mr. Home—that he has a peculiar organisation. Certainly we do not think that any other person could be found in the world willing or able calmly to make such assertions in the witness-box. “Daniel is the only medium!”

But what, if we are to believe the defendant’s story, were the plaintiff’s real motives for so richly endowing him? “I believe,” he says, in his affidavit, “that she adopted me and gave me the £24,000 mainly because she wished to have some one to care for and enliven her, and who would be bound to her by ties of gratitude, and to bring her into aristocratic society, thereby spiting her husband’s relatives, and acquiring for her notoriety by the largeness of the gift. . . . The second £30,000 I never could understand, as she told me in general terms that she had made her will in my favour, and I solemnly believe that she turned against me and determined to heap insults upon, and, if possible, ruin my good name, because I refused to accept any other relations between us than those of mother and son.” We learn then from this statement that the plaintiff had two motives—first, to be brought into aristocratic society, which, by interpretation, was to be introduced to Mr. Home’s friends, some literary, and some in high social position; secondly, the passion for a warmer relation than that of mother and son. The former motive, which is consistent with some facts in the case, was hardly a sufficient one to induce the plaintiff to part so easily with her property; the latter, which is certainly adequate to instigate the perpetration of any folly, was unfortunately not consistent with certain letters of the defendant, and was indignantly denied by Mrs. Lyon. In fact, her counsel, Mr. James, Q.C., using the license of an advocate, described it as “a charge utterly without foundation—false, lying, and malignant, and discredited by every fact in the case.” If the charge made so solemnly was true, it certainly seemed a strange proceeding on the part of Home, when he found that Mrs. Lyon had refused to have anything more to do with him and was

determined to have her money back again, to write to his "darling mother," asking her to accompany him to the German baths, where he had been ordered by his doctor to go, and saying, "I took your name because I could in no other way show my esteem and respect for you. I felt that I was taking upon myself a solemn undertaking in the sight of God and man when I called you by the sacred name of mother." "If he had one spark of feeling or honour," said Mr. Druce, Q.C.—who would, doubtless, have been as honourably indignant on the other side, had he chanced to be retained upon it—"he would not have dared to pen those sentences, and then to put forward in his affidavit the revolting suggestions that she was determined to ruin him because he refused to accept any other relations but those of mother and son. By the language used in that letter, he had himself given the lie to that base calumny." The Vice-Chancellor in his judgment expressed his entire disbelief in the charge.

We have no intention of descending to the humiliating work of discussing the impudent pretensions of spiritualism. We hold it to be contrary to all experience of the order of nature that the spirits of the departed should appear in their habits as they lived, or in any habit, and incredible that, if they did, they would select such persons as Daniel Home, or Mrs. Berry's daughter, as the medium of communicating, by knocks and scratches on tables and like follies, with their friends on earth. Certainly, if they did select such company and such means, they must have lost a great deal of the self-respect and dignity as well as intelligence which they had during life. It is not, however, contrary to experience to suppose that people may be deceived and grossly imposed upon by juggling tricks, nor by any means incredible that impostors and needy adventurers may find their profit in practising such deception. Of the two hypotheses, therefore, regarding the so-called spiritual manifestations, we do not feel any hesitation which to accept.

Looking at the trial of *Lyon v. Home* merely as a question of legal evidence, apart from the bearing of spiritualism upon the facts, there could be small room for doubt upon which side the weight of evidence lay. The plaintiff's theory not *only fitted well the facts of the case, as far as they were undisputed*, but it was singularly consistent with the *inconsistencies of her character*, and even with the contradictions in her evidence. If the essential part of her testimony was not

true, she must have had an extremely acute solicitor to devise so complete and consistent a theory, and to work the evidence so well up to it; if the defendant's allegations were true, and he was not the cheat and liar alleged by the plaintiff, then he was anything but happy in the mode in which his case was presented to the court. Perhaps it would have been wiser in any case for the guest of emperors, the frequenter of aristocratic society, the chosen organ of messages from the spiritual world, to whom the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is under obligations, not to have attributed the motives of an old lady, 75 years of age, desirous after reflection to get back £60,000 which she had hastily parted with, to a malignant desire to ruin him because of a slighted amorous passion. Strange that it did not suggest itself to the sensitive mind of this honourable gentleman, whose good name was so precious a possession, that he ought to return the money with which he had been bought when he was unwilling to execute the implied contract! We fear that Mrs. Lyon has indeed robbed him of that which, not enriching her, leaves him poor indeed.

The chief interest of the singular case lies, after all, in Mrs. Lyon's contributions of materials for a psychological study. How any one possessing so much shrewdness and sense as she displayed could act so foolishly, almost passes comprehension. It was plain, however, that her common sense deserted her when she came under the influence of her superstitious and spiritualistic fancies. And yet not altogether: although it was overpowered it was not entirely silenced, as the following passage in her first letter to Home indicates:—"You must excuse me if I tell you at our first acquaintance I rather felt a repugnance towards you when you said 'Mother, I shall so love you.' I said, and drew away from you, 'The less of that the better I shall love your child.'" Mr. Matthews, Q.C., the defendant's counsel, read this passage in his tediously long address, but how it, or much besides which he elicited in cross-examination, helped his case, it is not easy to perceive; it plainly testified to an instinct of suspicion and repugnance excited in her mind at her first interview with the defendant. The same counsel asked her in cross-examination whether if her husband had been alive she would have obeyed him so readily as she did his spirit, to which she replied, "Certainly not;" the strongest possible evidence of the truth of her story, and of the temporary madness which had blinded her

natural sense under the influence of spiritualistic operations and the agreeable attentions of the great apostle of spiritualism. She probably did not, as she said, care anything for her relations; she evidently cared a great deal for herself, liked her own way, and liked any one who let her have it, or flattered her into the belief that she was having it; and there can be no question that she was pleased and proud to have the head-spiritualist, whom emperors entertained and aristocracy ran after, bound to her as a slave. In the psychological revelation which she has made of herself, she has certainly not disclosed anything calculated to make her relations or any one else feel much regard or respect for her. But she has disclosed sufficient reasons why Mr. Home should not have accepted her extravagant gifts; or, if he did inconsiderately accept them, should have returned them instantly when she demanded them back. Whether they were made in consequence of direct communications with the spirit world through Mr. Home or not, it is quite evident that it was because of his spiritualistic fame and claims that Mrs. Lyon visited and so greatly affected him; that spirits did intervene at their interviews and influence her; and that she believed she was doing the will of her husband's spirit in adopting him. Unless, therefore, the Court of Chancery was prepared to acknowledge a belief in spiritualism, it was bound to set aside the deed and gifts as fraudulent and void. If it had been possible to condemn both parties in all the costs, every sensible person might have rejoiced at the decision.

If we were tempted to draw any moral from this strange and humiliating case, it would be this—that no husband who has not taken leave of his senses should leave a large property to his wife absolutely, whatever confidence he may have in her. There is no predicting what folly she may not perpetrate when deprived of the support of his judgment, and subjected to the influences always ready to be brought to bear from one quarter or another under such circumstances.

Another conclusion might be drawn regarding the folly of attempting by argument to convince sincere believers in spiritualism of its absurdity. No real evidence or strict reasoning will touch their belief; it will simply run from their minds, or rather, using Lord Westbury's expression, "that which they are pleased to call their minds," like water from a duck's back. A person's belief is not for the most part determined by logical reasoning, but depends mainly on the original structure of his mind, and on the character of its

education. There are persons of a certain temperament who will necessarily be Calvinistic; others who will of a certainty be Unitarians; others who will be Swedenborgians; others who will be spiritualists; and so on with all the variety of creeds, or no creeds, which prevail among men. While the mental development of the race is going steadily on, it is in truth natural to expect all sorts of strange beliefs to be entertained by individuals or by associations of individuals. If it were not so, the future would indeed look gloomy; if all conditions of degeneration and corruption of thought were not really necessary phenomena in the progress of mental development through the ages, just as daily death is a part of the history of life, the ridiculous pretensions and impudent juggleries of spiritualism might well excite alarm, if not despair. Happily the current of progress flows deep and strong beneath the foam and the scum which it casts up; these being indeed but the effect and evidence of its silent and ceaseless energy.

H. M.
