

Daniel D. Home (1833-1886)

Considered by many to be the greatest physical medium ever, Daniel Dunglas Home (March 20, 1833 to June 21, 1886) was born near Edinburgh, Scotland but moved to the United States at age 9 when adopted by an aunt in Greeneville, Connecticut.

Although most remembered for his levitations, Home [pronounced Hoom in Scotland, Hume in England] produced a variety of phenomena, including phantom forms, floating objects, luminous hands, strange luminous vapors, beautiful music from an accordion with no hands on it, and voices talking and singing. In one sitting, an "invisible intelligence" began speaking through Home, who was in a trance state. However, rather than a single spirit entity, the communicator claimed to be a "general influence." It was explained that it took two or three spirits to control Home.

Many educated people who heard the stories about the levitations and other mediumistic phenomena surrounding Home dismissed them as so much humbug, suggesting that Home was either a magician or hypnotist, or that the witnesses had had too much to drink. However, there were so many stories about Home from credible people that William Crookes, one of England's most distinguished scientists, decided to investigate. Crookes, later admitted that he undertook his investigation intent on demonstrating fraud. He opined that the increased employment of scientific methods would drive such stories into the unknown limbo of magic and necromancy.

But upon closely observing and studying Home, Crookes (who discovered the element thallium, and later invented the radiometer, the spintharoscope, and the Crookes tube, a high-vacuum

tube which contributed to the discovery of the X-ray) changed his views. "The most striking cases of levitation which I have witnessed have been with Mr. Home," Crookes wrote after 28 "sittings" with Home over a two-year period (1870-71), stating that he saw Home levitated on three different occasions and that there were at least a hundred recorded instances of Home rising from the ground in the presence of many credible witnesses.¹ In one of the levitations, Crookes passed his hands under Home's feet and over his head to rule out any kind of invisible wires, as was suggested by some of Crookes' scientific colleagues. Most of the sittings were in Crookes' home and in lighted conditions.



As Crookes came to understand it, Home was "being levitated" rather than Home having the ability to levitate himself. That is, spirits were lifting him. In his autobiography, published in 1862, well before Crookes was introduced to him, Home wrote that during his elevations, or levita-

tions, that he experienced an electrical fullness about his feet. He was usually lifted up perpendicularly with his arms rigid and drawn above his head, as if he were grasping the unseen power raising him from the floor. At times, he would reach the ceiling and then be moved into a reclining position. Some of the levitations lasted four or five minutes.

Home's most famous levitation is said to have taken place on December 16, 1868 on the third floor of the Ashley House, the London mansion of Lord Lindsay. It was witnessed by Lord Lindsay, Lord Adare, and Captain Charles Wynne. After the three men and Home were seated, Home slumped in his chair and went into a trance. He then got up and walked out of the room. The three men apparently didn't know what to make of the departure and remained seated. They then heard the sound of a window in the adjoining room being raised. They looked out the window in their room and saw Home standing on air, three stories above the ground. Home then floated to the closed window out of which they were looking, opened it, stepped into the room, went to his chair, and sat down, still in a trance state.

As the three men questioned what they had seen and wondered how Home got out the window in the adjoining room, which was open only a foot or so, Home got up from his chair, walked to the other room, went through the open space, head first, and then floated back in the same window, feet first.

On March 4, 1869, Adare, Wynne, and Adare's father, the Earl of Dunraven, accompanied Home on a tour of the ruins of Adare Abbey. There they observed Home leave the ground and float horizontally for, according to Adare, "at least ten or twelve yards."

On April 12, 1871, Crookes experienced what he called the most exciting and satisfactory sitting, probably because two other mediums were present and added to Home's "psychic force." At first, they had very rough manifesta-

tions, chairs knocking about, a table floating above the floor and then being slammed down, loud and unpleasant noises, what Crookes termed "phenomena of a low class." It was well known by this time that harmony among the sitters was necessary for good results and this harmony could often be achieved by singing. Thus, they began singing in hopes of improving conditions. After the group song, Home sung solo, what Crookes referred to as "a sacred piece," after which one of the other mediums "was carried right up, floated across the table and dropped with a crash of pictures and ornaments at the other end of the room."² When Home sang again, both of the other mediums were lifted up by the invisible spirits and placed on the table. Crookes surmised that the other two mediums brought low-class influences with them and Home's singing drove them away, allowing his good ones to enter.

Crookes asked the communicating spirits why there was so much tomfoolery and they explained that they were experimenting on their side just as Crookes was on his side. "There are comparatively few spirits who are able to communicate with you at all," the spirit influence communicating through Home's entranced body explained. "They are constantly working and experimenting to try and render the communication easier. They practice on some of you when you are asleep and in that way your dreams are influenced. Sometimes they think they have found out some of the conditions which will lead to success, and the next time something occurs which shows them that they know scarcely anything about it."³ Voices were sometimes heard in which one invisible being seemed to be instructing another invisible being on how to effect the levitation.

In his autobiography, Home recalled that his first clairvoyant experience came at age 13, when a boyhood friend living some 300 miles away came to tell him he had died three days earlier. At age 17, Home received an impression that his mother, who lived 12 miles away, wanted

to see him. He walked to her home and she told him that she would be dying in four months. She explained that her deceased daughter, Mary, came to her in a vision and broke the news to her. Four months later, the prophecy was fulfilled as Home's mother became ill and died. That night, before word reached him, Home's mother appeared to him and told him she had departed.

Several months after his mother's death in 1850, loud raps began in the home of the aunt and uncle who had adopted him. Home recalled that his aunt immediately attributed the disturbances to him and concluded it was the devil's work. One evening, the table and chairs began moving around on their own. His aunt threw herself on a moving table and was lifted up with it from the floor. Another aunt, having heard about the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, and how communication was effected by so many raps being given for each letter of the alphabet, was more understanding and began to ask questions. Home's mother communicated: "Daniel, fear not, my child, God is with you, and who shall be against you? Seek to do good: be truthful and truth-loving, and you will prosper my child. Yours is a glorious mission – you will convince the infidel, cure the sick, and console the weeping."⁴

From that point on, Home's mediumship developed rapidly. Not only did he find himself communing with spirits, he soon realized that he had the gift of healing. His reputation spread and in 1855, he traveled to England, where poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning became one of his most ardent supporters, although her husband, poet Robert Browning, a dogmatic disbeliever in psychic phenomena, took a dislike to Home and labeled him "Mr. Sludge, the Medium."

Home was called upon to give demonstrations of his gifts to royalty and aristocracy throughout Europe. In 1856, he became a Catholic, but eight years later the Church excommunicated him as a "sorcerer."

Many affluent and distinguished people were among the observers at the Crookes home, including Alfred Russel Wallace, co-origination with Charles Darwin of the natural selection theory of evolution. On one occasion, Wallace and Crookes, two of the world's most famous scientists, were on their hands and knees under a levitating table searching for some kind of physical explanation. Wallace defended Crookes against attacks by other scientists who had concluded that Home was a magician and that Crookes had been duped. One of the critics, Sir David Brewster, sat with Home and saw a table levitate right in front of him, but still concluded that since there was no natural explanation for what he saw that Home had to be a magician. Brewster scoffed at the idea that spirits played a part in it and saw no other explanation beyond sleight of hand that was beyond his understanding.

"To reject the recorded evidence on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever; for no fact in sacred or profane history is supported by a stronger array of proofs," Crookes wrote, stressing the fact that he took every possible precaution to rule out fraud.⁵

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¹ Crookes, Sir William, *Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*, Austin Publishing Co., 1906/1922 p. 38.

² Medhurst, R. G., *Crookes and the Spirit World*, Taplinger Publishing Co., 1972, p. 158.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴ Home, Daniel D., *Incidents in My Life*, University Books, Inc., reprint of an 1862 book, p. 8.

⁵ Crookes, p. 39.