ANIMISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE:
E. B. TYLOR’S UNPUBLISHED ‘NOTES ON “SPIRITUALISM”’

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Since the publication of *Primitive culture*, the name of E. B. Tylor has been indissolubly linked with the concept ‘animism’ in the collective memory of anthropology. It is interesting to note, however, that the term is in a sense one step removed from its referent. The ‘minimum definition of Religion’ which Tylor offered was ‘the belief in Spiritual Beings’, and one might have expected him to denote this as ‘Spiritualism’. Indeed, Tylor felt it necessary to explain why he did not: ‘The word Spiritualism . . . has this obvious defect to us, that it has become the designation of a particular modern sect’ (1873: I, 424–6). This aside on rejected terminology takes on greater interest in the context of the recovery of a small manuscript diary dated November 1872 from Tylor’s surviving papers at the Pitt Rivers Museum. At that time, Tylor’s concern with the modern spiritualist sect was so strong that he left his accustomed armchair in Somerset to come up to London for a month to engage in a kind of anthropological fieldwork. This suggests that it may be worth considering briefly the mid-nineteenth century spiritualist movement as an additional context for the historical understanding of Tylor’s anthropology (cf. Stocking 1968a and 1968b).

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Although the literature of spiritualism suggests the importance of such precursory figures as Swedenborg and Mesmer, the origin of the movement is customarily dated with great precision to March 31, 1848 (Doyle 1926: I, 11). On that date in the village of Hydesville near Rochester, New York, the pre-pubescent daughters of a Methodist farmer named Fox discovered that the strange rappings which had disturbed the family’s sleep for several weeks seemed to convey meaningful messages about a murder which had taken place in the house before the Foxes moved in. Occurring in the same ‘burned-over district’ that had nourished such luxuriant religious growths as Mormonism and Adventism, these spirit manifestations quickly became a matter of considerable local concern. Indeed, the Fox girls—with the assistance of the entertainment entrepreneur P. T. Barnum—were soon to be the agents for the rapid spread of ‘spiritualism’ through much of the eastern United States (Fornell 1964: 9–24; Nelson 1969: 1–85).

In October, 1852, the by then rather more highly elaborated spiritual manifestations were introduced into England through the visit of the first of a long series of American mediums. The next few months saw a virtual craze of table-tipping, which was ended only by an experiment of Faraday’s attributing the phenomena to the unconscious muscular action of those attending séances. Although
there was a brief flurry of interest in 1855 with the first visit of the most famous nineteenth century medium, Daniel Dunglas Home, public interest in spiritualism did not revive until around 1860. Home had returned to England the previous year, and the new decade saw the publication of *The Spiritual Magazine* (1860–1875) under the aegis of a small group of London literary men including William Howitt, father of the Australian ethnographer (Podmore 1902: II, 1–62). Although in its early stages the English movement tended to be localised in small circles meeting in the homes of the relatively well-to-do (Porter 1958), the middle 1860’s saw the beginning of a more formal organisational development and an appeal to segments of lower social strata. In 1863, the Burns Progressive Library and Spiritual Institute was organised; 1865 saw an abortive Association of Progressive Spiritualists of Great Britain; in 1867 and 1869 there were additional spiritualist journals founded; and the summer of 1872 saw the second attempt to form a national organisation (Nelson 1969: 97–104).

These developments, which were attended by considerable comment in the public press, did not escape the notice of men involved in anthropological studies. Alfred Russel Wallace, co-enunciator of the doctrine of organic evolution, began attending séances in 1865. Convinced of the reality of the manifestations, he published in the following year an account of ‘The scientific aspect of the supernatural’ (Wallace 1906: II, 293–317). In 1868, an attempt was made to involve the Anthropological Society of London in evaluating the claims of the Davenport brothers, visiting American mediums whose speciality lay in producing a variety of spiritual manifestations while their hands were tightly bound. After one unsuccessful séance, the committee of the Society specified a number of conditions for their continued participation; and when these were declined, they withdrew from the investigation (Podmore 1902: II, 61). The following year, a more extended attempt to evaluate the claims of mediums was undertaken by a committee of the London Dialectical Society, which in 1871 issued a report generally accepting the reality of the phenomena (Doyle 1926: I, 306–14). At about the same time, William Crookes, a prominent chemist, began a series of experiments with Daniel Home which convinced him, too, and which were reported in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* during 1870 and 1871. However, Crookes and Wallace were exceptions, and in general the world of science was inclined to dismiss the phenomena as either fraudulent, delusional, or otherwise not worthy of serious consideration. When asked to participate in the Dialectical Society’s investigation, Thomas Henry Huxley declined on the grounds that even if the phenomena were real, he had better things to do than to listen ‘to the chatter of old women and curates in the nearest cathedral town’ (Podmore 1902: II, 148, 237–43; cf. Hall 1962).

Although Tylor shared this general scientific disdain, he was nevertheless very much aware of the spiritualist movement, and there is evidence to suggest that his ideas on animism developed in the context of this awareness. The concept was developed in a series of papers between 1866 and 1869. In each of them Tylor referred to spiritualism, and the references became more highly elaborated in parallel with the elaboration of the concept itself. In an article on ‘The religion of savages’ published in 1866, Tylor put forward his argument rather tentatively, suggesting that the term ‘animism’ was perhaps preferable to ‘fetishism’ as a name for ‘the state of mind which thus sees in all nature the action of animated life
and the presence of innumerable spiritual beings’. He suggested that the development of religion was a series of stages reflecting ‘the long-waged contest between the theory of animation’ and ‘a slowly-growing natural science which in one department after another substitutes for independent voluntary action the working out of systematic law’—although new errors occasionally arose and old ones were sometimes revived, as in the case of ‘modern spiritualism, [which] as every ethnographer may know, is pure and simple savagery both in its theory and the tricks by which it is supported’ (Tylor 1866: 83–5).

The following year, in discussing ‘Traces of the early mental condition of man’, Tylor’s reference to spiritualism was somewhat more elaborated, although he still saw the terminological alternatives as ‘animism’ and ‘fetishism’. Here he offered a number of examples to show how ‘man in his lowest known state of culture is a wonderfully ignorant, consistent, and natural spiritualist’, how the ‘effects of his early spiritualism may be traced through the development of more cultured races’, and how this early ‘all-pervading spiritualism’ forms ‘a basis upon which higher intellectual stages have been reared’ (Tylor 1867: 87–92). Two years later, in developing further the argument ‘On the survival of savage thought in modern civilization’, Tylor gave a more extended treatment of ‘the ethnography of spiritualism’. Here he dealt with various specific manifestations—rapping, spirit writing, Daniel Home’s levitations, and the ‘unbinding trick’ of the Davenport brothers—arguing in each case that they had extensive analogues among savage tribes and in earlier periods of European history. ‘Even supposing the alleged spiritualistic facts to be all true, and the spiritualistic interpretation of them sound’, Tylor argued that it would still be true that ‘modern spiritualism is a survival and a revival of savage thought, which the general tendency of civilization and science has been to discard’ (Tylor 1869: 523–8). Two weeks later, in a lecture which survives only by its title, Tylor discussed the ‘Spiritualistic philosophy of the lower races of mankind’ (Freire-Marreco 1907: 378).

The last and most systematic preliminary statement of the concept of animism was presented to the Ethnological Society of London in 1870 as ‘The philosophy of religion among the lower races of mankind’. Here Tylor developed the theory of animism as a functioning ‘philosophic system of nature’ among lower races. Consequently, he noted, there was little mention of modern analogues. However, it was here that Tylor shifted his terminological alternatives. Fetishism now receded into the background, and Tylor opened his argument with the suggestion that ‘the belief in spiritual beings, and the spiritualistic philosophy of nature connected with this belief, may be called “Spiritualism”—but for the obvious difficulty noted above. It was therefore a matter of convenience to select instead the term ‘animism’ to refer to the ‘spiritualistic philosophy’ of low tribes (Tylor 1870: 369–71). When Primitive culture appeared in 1871, the argument of this essay, and of the earlier one on survivals, was incorporated in extended but essentially similar form, down to a repetition of much of the language (1873: I, 141–55, 424 sqq.).

One would hardly be justified on this basis in suggesting that Tylor’s theory of animism was in any direct sense based on his familiarity with the English spiritualist movement. Intellectually, it had its roots—as Tylor himself pointed out—in Comte, and more especially in DeBrosse’s concept of fetishism. Empirically, Tylor seems to have drawn on the observed behaviour of children, as well as on his own
extensive ethnographic readings. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that between 1866 and 1871, the concept moved away from its roots in the notion of fetishism, and that it did so in the context of an increased interest in modern spiritualist analogues. These analogues in fact played an especially important role in the argument from ‘survivals’. Indeed, the essay ‘On the survival of savage thought’ would suggest that the spiritualist movement provided a major source of the empirical data in terms of which that concept was developed (cf. Hodgson 1936).

At several points throughout his writings on spiritualism, Tylor maintained that he was only interested in presenting an ‘ethnographic view of the matter’ and not in ‘how far it may be concerned with facts insufficiently appreciated and explained by science, and how far with superstition, delusion, and sheer knavery’ (Tylor 1873: i, 142). In fact, however, he had no doubts about this matter. It was in effect a choice between ‘the Red Indian medicine-man, the Tatar necromancer, the Highland ghost-seer, and the Boston Medium’, on the one hand, and ‘the great intellectual movement of the last two centuries’, on the other (1873: 1, 156). The most with which Tylor was prepared to credit the former was a delusional belief in the reality of their own performances, combined with the possibility (suggested by Wallace) that they might possess a mesmeric faculty which could delude other people ‘into fancying that they perceive monstrous unrealities’ (Tylor 1872: 343).

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It is in the context of this set of attitudes that Tylor went up to London in November, 1872, to ‘look into the alleged manifestations’. As the diary indicates, Tylor had had two previous experiences with spiritualism. One, briefly referred to, took place some years earlier—the evidence of Alfred Wallace’s autobiography (1906: II, 299) would suggest in 1867. Another, described in some detail, occurred in the spring of 1872 in the context of the Crookes-Home experiments. The specific ‘manifestations’ which occasioned Tylor’s November trip may have been those associated with the new departure in English spiritualism which took place in 1872: the first ‘materialisations’ of visible, palpable, spirit figures. Starting in January with Mrs Samuel Guppy, these phenomena were taken up in April by Frank Herne and Charles Williams, and later by a young medium named Florence Cook, whose performances were described in the London press during October, 1872. Or Tylor may have referred to the incident—well-known in the annals of spiritualism and mentioned toward the end of his diary as having had contemporary publicity—in which the Reverend W. Stainton Moses’s clothes, locked in his bedroom, were arranged on his bed in the form of a cross (Podmore 1902: II, 96–7, 276–8).

Before turning to Tylor’s diary itself, it may help to identify some of the names mentioned in it. Of the ten mediums with whom he had séances, all, with the exception of Mrs Olive, are identifiable in the standard histories of the spiritualist movement. Three of them were among its major figures: Kate Fox, one of the founding sisters; Daniel Home, its most glamorous public personage; and the Reverend Moses, a country curate whose gradual conversion to spiritualism was accomplished just prior to Tylor’s acquaintance with him, and who was to become what one historian called ‘the best modern exponent’ of spiritualist views in a series of articles and books published in the ’70’s and ’80’s (Doyle 1926: II, 53). Among
the participants in the séances are several of the more prominent of what might be called ‘lay’ figures in the movement: Lord Dunraven, who was to publish a little book on his experiences with Home; W. H. Harrison, the editor of The Spiritualist; Edward Cox, a prominent lawyer who in 1875 founded the Psychological Society of Great Britain (a forerunner of the Society for Psychical Research); and the already mentioned William Crookes and William Howitt. In a number of cases the other participants are quite well known, or readily identifiable in the Dictionary of National Biography: Alfred Wallace; Colonel Lane Fox, remembered in the history of anthropology as General Pitt Rivers; the wife of the political economist Nassau Senior; the artist (later Sir) Wyke Baylis; and the medical men Wilson Fox and Sydney Ringer. All in all, one might say that they were a representative group, both of the practitioners and leaders of spiritualism, and of the middle class professional and intellectual men and women who provided one important segment of the movement’s audience (cf. Gauld 1968; Nelson 1969; Porter 1958).

Notes on ‘Spiritualism’

In November 1872, I went up to London to look into the alleged manifestations. My previous connexion with the subject had been mostly by way of tracing its ethnology, & I had commented somewhat severely on the absurdities shown by examining the published evidence. A séance to which I took Wilson Fox at Mr A. R. Wallace’s in . . . [1867?] & at which Miss . . . [Nicol,] now Mrs Guppy[,] was present had produced no results, the medium going away early[,] as her father was conveniently poorly & she left with him. In the present year (spring) a spirit-balance made by Rob[ert] Knight had drawn my attention to the Crookes-Home experiments. I made acquaintance with W[j]illiam Crooke & sat the home of his brother Walter Crookes in Motcomb St. I met with Home. We sat long, & at last rappings were heard, which by convenient testimony were agreed to come from different points of the large table[,] & also appeared to come sometimes from floor & skirting. An accordion under the table held wrong end up by Home played a few notes[,] as if by a player accustomed to the instrument touching them. The table was tilted & made light & heavy as anyone wished and asked[,] It was at first tried [?] by side-lifting, but afterwards a doctor from Australia & I lifted it standing at the sides opposite [+] & it became very light & very heavy. The doctor was under the table part of the time of raps & accordian, [but] nothing I think happened while I was under the table. [When] Lord Dunraven came [?] in, & they remarked [to him] that there was one under the table, [he] said that looked quite sociable. All complained that the sitting was a total failure, but I failed to make out how either raps, table-levitation, or accordian-playing were produced. People complained of draughts, cold wind[,] etc., [which] I did not feel. I was not touched as some were, including a handsome old Mrs Nassau Senior, I presume his widow, who put her hand under the table (she was next to Home) at a certain kind of rap, and with the most pathetic and ecstatic look on her beautiful old Irish face, said, “Thank you dear, oh thank you!” Home is clever, speaks several languages[,] is said to sing & play with much feeling[,] I noticed at a previous call the extreme skill with which he sent out rings of tobacco smoke. He declared that he and a Russian friend used to sit and smoke opposite one another and send one ring through one meeting it, like the Grace hoops. My distrust was excited by Home’s cleverness, and the way in which he could get a pretty woman like Mrs Walter Crookes to dance with joy at sitting down to his performance, paw him about, call him Dan, etc[,] which all his intimates have to do.

Accounts since of Home from Geo[rg]e Young[,] who knew him through some friend[,] speak for his cleverness[,] but he never could or would have a séance & raps. G.Y. described the disgusting fawning voice in which he said “May I call you George?” He replied “Yes, if you like.” To the further question “Will you call me Dan?” G.Y. gave a very forcible negative. Details of pawing and story of before a lady [sic]. “If I had known you were going to I would have waited till you had done.”[?] This [was] told by A.Y. sometime walking in

At the bottom of the third page of this section, Tylor inserted a reference to page 167 of Wallace’s ‘Miracles and modern spiritualism’, which unfortunately was not available to me (G.W.S.).

[November 4] In consequence of correspondence with William Crookes & Serjeant Cox, then [7], I came to town Nov. 4 [8] went by myself to a séance advertised [by] the Medium, Mrs Jennie Holmes. [Here Tylor pasted in a clipping of the advertisement.] Mrs Holmes [was] a stout pasty-faced half-educated American with a black bush of curls[.] [Her] husband “Nelson” was master of ceremonies & looked after fees. Room thus: [here Tylor inserted a small drawing indicating the layout of the room. The spectators were seated in a semi-circle; the medium sat at a separate table in the centre.] On the table were rings[.] bells[.] etc.[.] and tambourines & guitars about lying or standing. Mrs H. first delivered an address, [8] then we were parted with the alleged view of putting each newcomer or sceptic between two oldcomers or believers. I was at the end. Pieces of gummed paper were put to seal the two doors, but they came off and were put on again & proved nothing. Lights were put out, I think the Medium having been first bound by someone present. All took hands, lights were put out[,] and a row among the apparatus immediately began, with rappings. I think at first a hymn was sung in the dark[.] “Are you coming to the River[,] etc., Which flows by the Throne of God[?]” At various times hymns, nigger melodies and other songs were sung (Home Sweet Home, Auld Lang Syne[, etc.), the medium taking part with great force and out of tune. The noises of bells, etc. were caused by the medium being accompanied or visited by a spirit called Richard. In the dark the guitars were twanged & heard twanging up and down in different parts of the room[,] now down to the floor, now high up[,] and they touched people gently on face, hands, knees, etc. I was touched several times[,] and having one hand free was able to follow the guitar a little way[,] but never enough to clutch it. A guitar banged against the foot of some one who stuck it out, and it was declared that the guitar was broken. The medium[,] on coming to herself and professing to know nothing of what she had been saying in possessed state, when told examined it and found the damaged place, [but] this was later. (N.B. Mr Moses told me of a friend of his who had struck a light suddenly and seen Nelson standing half up with his hand up to a guitar. He declared that when the light was struck he only held up his hand to defend himself from the thing coming down, as the things are declared to do when a light is struck at the wrong moment and objects are in the air. I suppose he knew the right moment[,] for he occasionally struck a match to show things about in the room. I think Moses said they caught Holmes walking about the room touching people with the guitar, but his account did not come to this when the subject was reopened another time, & there had been some correspondence between Moses and the Holmes’s [sic] with [a] promise that they would give him a test private séance.)

The medium was then possessed by a little Indian girl—spirit named Rosie, who talked a kind of negro jargon, speaking of Mrs Holmes as my squaw, my medy [short for medium[,] etc. A favourite joke was to say “you stand under me” for you understand, etc. Singing out of tune continued. She said she saw some of our faces light, [8] reproved me for keeping one leg crossed over the other[,] which she declared she saw in the dark (she might well have noticed my habit in the light). She did not[,] however[,] appear to see the free hand which I occupied in making the long nose for a good time in her direction. It was about now I think that the spirits loosed the medium and threw the rope at the binder in the dark. Afterwards the spirits themselves bound and unbound her. Afterwards the “ring-test” was done three times, last on me. I held the medium’s hand in the dark, [8] she touched the ring lying on the table with my hand, & then passed my hands down her face[,] neck and arms to show there was no ring there[,] but all at once it came on to my arm as if thrown on from hers. It was a 4 or 5 inch iron ring without join[.] (i.e., if it was not changed after it left my arm). It came on in the dark, [8] then [a] light was struck, [8] then extinguished and relighted[,] before the hands were loosed & the ring examined. While it was doing [sic] in the dark, I was touched on arms[,] shoulders[,] & hair by the spirits, my hands being of course held by the medium. The contact on the flat of my temples seemed to prove that the touch was by a rod or ruler brought lengthwise against the temples, not pointwise. The medium was next
possessed by "Irish Ann" and talked rubbish about Fenians in brogue. I noticed that her simulated voice failed her once in the word child[,] which she began ðhi in American vowel but caught herself and harked back to put the word into Irish (a Mr Wyke Baylis with whom I talked it over going away did not notice this[,] but said he noticed similar cases in which she missed her tip). Afterwards came a spirit called Bell, who inspired the medium, who seemed to get on a chair and talk high up in the dark, to deliver a plaint about spheres and spirits in other realms, just as they were here, [and we] must believe base works of the Great Spirit, etc. — a nauseous dose of spiritualistic goody. In the character of Bell, the medium saw in the dark spirit figures near us, and described them. Near me she saw an old tall white-haired lady, an aunt she thought, with gold "specs" in her hands, with arm on my shoulder and half embracing me. [She] also [saw] a fair woman near Mr Baylis. [There was] no sense in either guess. Toward the end we had spirit lights, so light [like?] phosphorous rubbed on finger ends and trailed upwards leaving [a] luminous cloud, that they need not be described. Among other things to be mentioned is that the two only ladies present[,] who sat at the end by Mrs Holmes, one of them a believer, were touched by hands on the face, which happened to no one else in the company. Rosie declared [that] she saw light about my face and [that] I was highly mediumised. She did not mind my being what she called a skeptic, [because] this does not interfere with truth. Rosie talked what she called Ojibwyan Indian and I call gibberish[,] I asked her the word for stone[,] which was nothing like the real word. On the whole[,] walking home with Mr Wyke Baylis, 4 North Rd., Clapham Park, and Mr G. S. Carr, a lawyer, and another, our verdict was simply imposture. I should say the most shameless and shameless I ever came across.

Nov. 5, [18]72 at Sergeant Cox's, 36 Russell Square, [there were] present his sister Mrs Jaquet, [&] Mr & Mrs Walter Crookes, to see the medium Mrs Olive. [Here Tylor pasted in another advertisement.] After the performance her account of herself was that her husband had been a chemist at Devonport[,] and that Frank Herne (the coarser of the two mediums, Herne and Williams) was much at her house when getting into his medium state and out of work and hungry. Her own baby died and she saw it alive an hour after, which was the means of her falling into the spiritual profession and becoming eventually a medium.

On sitting round the table with light lowered, the mediums[,] having yawned much before now[,] with sighs and compulsive starts went into a trance (real or simulated) with eyes shut. She was first possessed by an Indian child-spirit, Sunshine (N.B. the origin of the spirit movement being in America is clearly betokened by the same set of Indian and negro child-spirits going through the whole posse of mediums, who are possessed very much after a set pattern developed no doubt by the American practitioners). The spirit Sunshine spoke through Mrs Olive in childish jargon[,] me says[,] etc., hims gives my squaw, 'bout my squaw's height, little pappoose, etc. On possession the medium shook hands with us round, addressing each. To me she said inter alia "me tells you somestings presently," "me likes honest doubt"[,] etc. In answer to my question about the loss of the bewitched onions she said, "me sees dey not lost, you get them back in two or three days, before you goes away." (Would it had come to pass[l]) When asked who has them she said she saw a tall dark big man [with] dark hair[,] moustache and beard, [&] she saw coloured dress, like [a] servant's uniform. In this character of Sunshine the medium described spirits she saw near us, one called Harriet who was near Mrs Jaquet and me (but who was unlike anybody of the name either of us knew). She told Serg[en]t Cox she saw the old woman formerly Mrs Goodhouse[,] who had suckled him because his mother could not (this was totally untrue). She also professed to see me a deceased sister of mine, a girl of 18 or 19 with long, curly hair, and her name A[***] [sic. This last sentence was added by Tylor as an afterthought in a note at the top of the page.]

Then the medium was controlled by the spirit of Mesmer and reminded me of Little S - - L's [several letters undecipherable] coming in in the character of the coroner—not in the least like him, for there was nothing to show that she had any knowledge of what Mesmer was even like[,] or thought[,] or said. She made him talk the usual spiritualistic anti-vaccination cant[,] and about spiritual influences. Another character, Dr Forbes or Sir John Forbes[,] came to as little, and was a mess as to identity, much as might well be when an unknowing person got in among the clan of Forbes's. When Mrs Olive and the Crookes were gone,
Serjeant Cox and Mrs Jaquet and I agreed that she might have really been in a kind of mesmeric trance and might believe in her own foolish imaginations [. . .] her way was indeed rather [more] like self-delusion than mere fraud [. . .] but it was all purely subjective without a trace of any knowledge that could surprise one. We could see where all her poor little notions came from; [. &] the acting of her different characters was superficial, without any insight, and in voice and language pitiable attempts [. . .] except the little girl[,] who has indeed become a conventional character among spiritualists. [However,] the Crookes seem to have thought otherwise, for I heard that Walter C. had made his delicate wife take to a fish diet, which she hated, because this woman ordered it medico-spiritually. We heard that Mrs Olive had previously described Serjeant Cox (I think to the Crookes's) without having seen him (though of course she had means of knowing about so prominent a man in this world). She had described his “monkey trick” of putting his hand up to scratch about [his] ear when in thought, and had given an account in her way of his being a judge, sitting up in a high place with papers[,] judging criminals and wearing a black cap, which this evening on the subject coming up again she appeared to think was a kind of black skull-cap. She had previously missed the point that he was not a judge of the bench and could not condemn to death or wear a black cap, but now she shifted her former description of actual black cap wearing into a prophecy (which she didn’t know was quite unlikely to come true) that one of these days he would wear [a] cap and condemn to death.

Verdict[,] subjectivity[,] hysteria[,] & the poorest cockplates[?] dodging and fortune-telling.

Nov. 8. In [the] afternoon [I] called at Serjeant Cox’s and had some talk with Mrs Jaquet, who has her wits about her[,] & [she] told me her experiences about Herne and Williams[,] who gave a private séance there. Being hit much over the head with the paper speaking trumpet[,] she got her hand clear and grasped the burly and very human hand that wielded it. Her account was very diverting[,] of the manifest cheating of these people in the cabinet[,] which was inconvenient for them[,] of Herne bursting out and pretending to be in a fit and rolling about and getting hold in the dark (as she divined) of some flower vase behind curtains & then shying it out of the cabinet[,] & of his exhibiting a pocket handkerchief on the end of the tube. [He] seems to have found it impossible to get his hands (covered with handkerchief to make a sham spirit hand) out at the top[,] so burst out and got the tube (pronounced too in his dialect). Mrs Jaquet was amazed[,] at his making a heavy cottage piano move [sic] apparently without contact. She believes that these H. & W. are real mediums and only temper it with imposture when the real thing will not come on.

In [the] evening [I] went to 15 Southampton Row (Burns Spiritual Institution) to see Miss Lottie Fowler. In the room I found a curious assortment of 20 people. Among them [was] a girl of 22 in sealskin jacket, lady-like but ready to talk confidentially with anybody[.] She declared there was one name [that] would make her believe if she heard it. I talked with a Frenchwoman, a professional mesmerist, who had done of course to believe. A variety of people[,] some odd and credulous, others like other people, made up the lot. Then came in the medium[,] a pasty-faced[,] long-nosed[,] ugly creature. We joined hands[,] but her going off into a trance was interrupted by a grave absorbed old man sneezing violently[,] which his hands being held made embarrassing[,] & the medium[,] who had a sense of humour[,] withdrew in agonia of suppressed laughter. At last going off[,] with sighs[,] yawns and starts she became possessed[,] & started up with a child’s voice & gesture & attitude in the character of Annie[,] a child-spirit with quaint child’s jargon[,] & conventional jokes such as calling herself (as medium) “’you little great fool!’[.]” etc. She went round the company[,] stopping before each with eyes shut[,] and telling each of the spirits she saw behind him or her. Her descriptions were guessed wrong 4 times in 5[,] or 9 in 10[,] but cleverly shifted and made right by getting something out of the sitter[,] and harking back and telling them back what she had learnt from themselves. Thus “I see little girl[,] golden hair ‘bout 7 years old[,] she your sister[,] she die scarlet fever[,] me see name of Emma[,]” [This would be brought round to the fact that the sitter had lost a sister[,] though name[,] age and description [were] more or less wrong. Stopping over against a youth of 20 who wore a woman’s wedding ring[,] she said “I know whose that ring[,] dat your mother’s ring.” N]o one of the interested audience seemed to be struck with my simple question[:] whose else could it be? People who have lost some one very dear to them[,] or who are in trouble[,] take this kind of evidence vaguely and
meet the medium more than half way[,] in fact giving hints and promptings. The scene
when she came to the French magnetizer (for whom a young gentleman who sat next [to]
her interpreted) was amazing. The medium tried for a spirit Marie Thérèse, but this didn’t
do. [But when afterwards she said, I see a Caroline, the she-magnetizer sprang up & threw
herself into a dramatic attitude[,] crying “Ma mère!”] Then they went on, the magnetizer
making passes over the medium, who went on guessing and picking through the interpreter,
who blandly carried on the conversation. The magnetizer asked if her mother was happy, and
the medium answered to the translated question [“yes! but her spirit tells me there no such
place as heaven”], a reply which was a curious slip, for she had declared that the spirit
talked only French[,] which she could not understand. However, this flagrant disclosure that
the thing was a sham made no difference to the audience. She afterward told an elderly
woman that her son’s spirit was there, [that] he was a sailor and died on board ship, but he
was buried on land, [that] he died of fever, not scarlet fever, not cholery fever, but what
you call yellow fever. The woman said it was so, [that] he had died in harbour and was buried
on land. Afterwards she went to the old man who sneezed, told him he lived among his
old books, like an old bookworm, that the place he lived in was like an old rag-shop, that
he had been in business but was too easy going and was imposed on, & that his wife lived
away from him, [because] they quarrelled about religion & other things. All this (some of it
being of course tricked out or guessed in course of talk) he admitted to be true. These two
last were the best cases, the rest simply poor guesses. Were these known people, had they
been before, were they simply put there as plants[?] I don’t know. She did not get round the
circle to my seaskinned neighbour or me.

Nov. 9. Called at 119 Lansdowne Rd., Notting Hill, at the Howitts, [&] saw Mr and Mrs
Watts [...] she formerly Miss Howitt. She promised to do all she could for me and gave
me [an] introduction to Mrs Everett, 20 Panton St., the inspired wife of a tailor, [&] also
to Mrs Mackdougal Gregory. Mr Watts is in Somerset House (?) [&] is a son (?) of Alaric
Watts the poet. The house looked artistic. Mr Watts recommended me the Friends’ method
of spiritual intercourse. He began himself by sitting daily for months “with a hat” and
recommended me to do so for 6 months, [in] dark or dusk & alone, till communication
came. Mrs Watts sent me afterward the S[piritualist] Mag[zine] with the story of the
miraculously untied (?) Quaker of Bohemia from Bern’s Sufferings[,] vol. II[,] p. 112, Richard
Seller.

Nov. 15. Being instigated by Mr Moses, I went in the afternoon to consult [Miss Hudson,
whose advertisement Tylor pasted in.] Moses’ account was that he had promised to go to
Mrs Mackdougal Gregory’s[,] but had put it off on plea of illness, [and] that she had consulted
Miss Hudson, who told a rigmarole about a green spreading tree[,] adding that it
had to do with a great medium, but he was ill—so she described his cough & symptoms.
I went to her lodging[,] and her confidante[,] a kind of [word illegible] with lackadasical
air & hair down[,] let me in. The medium sat by the fire & went into a semi- trance under the
control of Daisy, an Indian child-spirit whose voice she mimicked. Now and then to complete
the interest she would throw off influence [?] with her fingers and back of hand from her
eyes, and carry on conversation with spirits about, especially stamping and ordering off
certain dark spirits who would come on all fours and made her uncomfortable by touching
her[,] “Get away, I don’t like you[!]” “Go away, horrid creature[!]” Her answers to my
questions were the barest clever fortunetelling[:] she thought I was in two businesses[,] in
one the people knew better but were doing badly for me, [&] I had better get rid of them[,] etc.
(It would have been a perfect hit for Sylvanus.) In answer to my questions about my lost
scourge [?] she said it was on a shelf with a heap of old things[,] & if I looked I should find it.
As for the lost onions in the cannister, my friend was fond of curiosities and pleasant[,] and
I didn’t like to press a quarrel with him, but he has them still[,] and the way is to get some
friend to inveigle him into showing them. She told me I was a medium with light not all
developed in my head, and should get full force not by putting hands on table[,] but by just
sitting still for it. Evidently her hit about Moses is her cheval de bataille, for when I suggested
she had given a friend of mine good answers, she asked if I had to do with the gentleman of
the green tree. As her talk was pitiable rot, I was not sorry for a ring at the bell and the confidante
putting in her head and addressing her as “Daisy”[.] “that old gentleman has come again
to be magnetized.” So I put my ill spent five shillings on the mantel piece and departed from the coarse[,] dark-browed imposter.

Nov 18. Miss Kislingtonbury, 93 Clarendon Road, Notting Hill, governess to Mr & Mrs Davey, a nice intelligent but rather wild eyed thin woman of 30 or 35, was unhappy till she got into spiritualism, going by herself to séances to the disgust of her family, whom however she has now converted. She kindly hunted up at great trouble to herself Mrs Basset[t]. Of Mrs Basset[t] I have heard twice before [. . .] once from my seal-skinned neighbour at Miss Lottie Fowler’s, who had seen her, and noticed that only the people she could reach were touched by the spirit-hand[, and] once from Col. Lane Fox, who was with his wife at a séance at Lady Powlett’s. When the phosphoric lights came, Mrs L-F let go Mrs Crookes’ hand, jumped up & caught the light & a very human hand[,] which struggled out of her grasp, which of course in the elaborate Medium report became a spirit-hand. Mrs L-F has not I think cared much for the business since.

On Nov. [18] I arrived at Miss Kislingtonbury’s and found the stout Mrs Basset[t], Mr W. H. Harrison, Ed[tor] of [the] *Spiritualist*, Mrs and Miss K. First we sat round the table to hear raps. They were near the medium, & some purported to come from Isaac, a relative of the K. family, who afterwards[,] when the name of Waterlow had been suggested as a relative[,] solidified into Isaac Waterlow[. W]hat he rapped out did not come to much, [only] ordinary messages. The little apparatus of sprinkled starch & stretched blotting papers which I had brought for impression, the spirits unequivocally declared their disgust at, [saying] they couldn’t do anything with them. The raps might easily have been done mechanically. Then the lights being put out, the medium talked in her natural voice[,] & then from a foot or two behind & above the ordinary position of her head, there would issue a croaking voice of a spirit talking the stupidest buffoonery, & saying he had materialised himself & voice & was making a hand. As it seemed to me that the medium[,] for the purpose of sending her own voice from another spot, merely leaned back & put her head back, I held the tips of my fingers [behind her head] while she was speaking naturally, & as she actually came back upon them, removed them [. . .] I do not know if they were felt. I was touched on the shoulder by her (I sat next to her)[,] so presently tried with the finger-tips again between us, and met an arm in the same feel of dress (woollen [. . .] perhaps the objection of spirits to silk dresses is their bustling) as the medium wore. This quite satisfied me of the nature of the touch which had come to me the last time, but did not this time. Then from another place[,] as if her head were turned away from me, came the voice & phraseology of a revival preacher converted to spiritualism and talking its flatulent saws about the spirits of the dear ones, the necessity of investigation, the similarity of spirits in the next life to the characters in this, their being gradually raised from sphere to sphere[,] etc. About this time a curious noise about the medium’s waist induced me to ask myself “what the devil is the woman unpinning herself for?” The mystery was explained by the parting spirit saying he should bring us a present, which plopped down on the table and proved to be a little writing case belonging to the lost lover, No spirit-lights were shown. Mrs Basset[t] got more refreshment about 10. Though I had been told that a gratuity would be accepted as she had to go about so much, she would not take anything[,] but was seen off into her omnibus. I cannot understand her[,] & she may believe in herself to a certain extent, but no doubt she cheated unscrupulously. At supper Miss Kislingtonbury[,] who was in an excited state, became more & more hysterical, walking about twitching, etc. I asked her to let me hold her hand [&] she did, but struggled, & on my holding both hands finally wriggled off her chair & into a heap on the ground. She was possessed by spirits, but[,] as she said[,] they were influencing her to mesmerise her for her good. Speaking in “their” name she walked up & down, speaking fiercely when spoken to, showing horror at me & keeping far at the other end of the room. “Do you think we don’t know how to treat our own medium[?]” “These physical manifestations do her harm, she’ll be killed one of these days with these séances[,] etc.” She talked entirely as [if] she believed herself possessed. After a while she calmed down, & [afterwards] I went some way with W. H. Harrison, a sincere youngish man, half-bred. After much talk I ventured to say that I had felt Mrs Basset[t]’s arm coming out to touch me[,] I said it rather gingerly expecting the disclosure would hurt him, but he calmly replied “you know that the hands & arms & dresses that the spirits materialise are so like the
ordinary ones, that it's impossible to distinguish them." But, said I, the arm came out from the woman's shoulder to touch me! "Yes" he said, "you scientific men must of course give such natural explanation as seems sufficient to you, but we know[,] etc[,] etc." After which there was not much to be said, except to ascertain that Harrison had sacrificed better-paid work to enthusiasm for the subject, of which he had become the apostle. Serjeant Cox writes "I hear you had an interesting evening with Mrs Basset[ ]"

Nov. 19. Through Miss Kislingbury, I have become acquainted with Dr Geo[rge] Bird and Miss Bird, 49 Welbeck St[,] and on Nov. 19, I went there to see Kate Fox[ ]. She was there with her mate Miss Ogden, [ &] also Dr Sydney Ringer, of University Hospital. K.F. is a little nervous woman [,] American[,] but seems by her talk to have got into English ways. Everybody takes trouble to please her & keep her in good temper, for a little sets her flighty[,] excitable[,] hysterical little mind wrong. I understand moreover from people who know her ways, that she now takes fits of drinking, especially gin. When we had talked a few minutes round the fire, the raps began sounding as if under the floor, and on the fender with the proper sound of sheet iron. They are strange bangings or creakings, some of them seeming to require much actual power. Next when we went near the door, K.F. touched it with her finger-tips[,] producing loud thumps. (N.B. In spirit-rape trials I have noticed again & again people[']s ignorance of the way of transmission of sound through wood. They will put their ears to a door or table or chair, or listen at them with a stethoscope[,] as if this were not the precise way to spoil any chance of localising the spot whence the sound actually issues.) I produced my slate & blotting paper[,] which we took down when we went to sit in the dark. We sat in the diningroom round a solid four-legged round table. Raps came abundantly[,] and they answered questions. E.g., a spirit named Elizabeth, who on enquiry as to further name could not get distinctly beyond Sa. . . . [sic] was there, & wanted to see me[,] & would talk to me another time. I think it was this spirit who informed me I should be able to produce physical manifestations, & when I asked how, told me I should hear sounds when alone. We joined hands round[,] & then there were wild bangings on & under the table. The little slate-frame with the blotting paper was flung off, and it sounded as if its frame were engaged in banging with might & main under the table. Afterwards the 4 drawing pins which had attached the blotting paper to its corners were thrown near Dr Ringer. When examined in the light[,] it proved that the pins had been carefully extracted[,] & the blotting paper was left untouched somewhere else. There was an uncertainty in my mind as to whether we had properly joined hands at the moment when the frame was flung off the table. Dr Bird had told us that on these occasions it was customary for him to be instrumentally treated for his deafness by some unseen agent; & this time he was standing near the door with K.F. and one other (I fancy Miss Ogden[,] & they three [were] holding hands, [when] he declared that he felt an instrument pushed into his ear. He does not seem a credulous or morbidly imaginative man [,] . . did he dream it[,]? The raps are unintelligible to me, some are in sound very like finger-nail taps on wood[,] others I have since imitated to a certain degree by drawing resined fingers over a table[,] & there is frequently a continuous creak with the spirit-raps which is like what the resined finger produces when ill-managed. What is said about the raps appearing to come from within the substance of the wood does not appear to me to have anything in it. I never heard the rap I could not imitate from the outside, from the tiny finger-nail like tap[,] to the bang of Kate Fox like knuckles banged down on the table[,] or the violent thumps on the door. It is to be noticed that one is told that raps come from all about, on the ceiling[,] or on the side opposite to which the medium is. This is not my experience anywhere, & when I asked Kate Fox [who in a small diagram is shown on Tyler's right] to give raps anywhere about [points] A or B behind me [on Tyler's left], she could not, saying that the force was insufficient then. K.F. made some curious mistakes about lights. She professed to see lights, and as luminous[,] but she mistook lights which I saw at once to be from a shutter, & the flashing of the fire on [the] ceiling behind a screen[,] for spirit-lights. She[,] or rather the spirits[,] promised me lights next time. Upstairs in [the] light came raps as before, and violent thumps on [the] door when she touched it. Walking home with Dr Ringer, who had been there before, he told me his experience that the messages have no value or truth & little sense [. . .] they come over and over with their half-spelt names & words[,] "we will come again and do you good[,] etc." (Dr Bird
having to go out to see a patient, was told that the spirits had given him healing power in his hand, and that he was to use that hand.) Dr Ringer thinks she does not produce the raps by trickery.

That evening I had some talk with Wilson Fox, who expatiated on the difficulty of either accounting for or detecting hysterical patients[,] who begin by finding themselves made interesting by ailments [and] have gone on to simulate them [. . . ] like the lady whose catalogue of diseases baffled my doctor, & who at last was at the point of death with dark bister rings under her eyes; in this state Jenner came to see her, and calling for soap and water, washed off the paint under her eyes. Also [there was] the case of[the] patient who declared she voided no excrement[,] and who proved to have got up in the night & burnt it, and the fasting patients who steal mounds of toast off the table[,] etc. He seems to think that a hysterical simulator is a match for any odds except long observation & lucky chance. All mediums are hysterical, ergo[,] etc. Altogether my experience of Kate Fox is very curious[,] & her feats are puzzling to me. My comment in [a] letter at the time is "Last night for the first time I saw & heard what deserves further looking into if I can get the chance." [Here Tylor inserted a photograph with the caption "the three Fox sisters of Rochester, originators of the spirit-rapping movement," and the comment "taken some years ago, but recognizably like Kate Fox."]

[Undated.] Through Ser[jean]t Cox I made acquaintance with Rev W[illiam] Stainbon Moses[,] MA Oxon, late of Exeter Col[lege] School[,] & Gower St. After my first interview with him at the school I wrote to A[nna] R. Tylor on Nov. 8 that he is "a plain good sort of Mr Adiam[?] to look at, & seems not only honest but not morbid-minded" At our first talk he jumped at the idea of experimental tests. He has chronic bronchitis which became acute about then[,] & he was too ill to produce much in the way of manifestations. His friend is Dr Spear (?) [Stanhope Spear] somewhere in St. John's Wood, and they hold séances together, circumstances [being] favourable there for strong manifestations. On Nov. 15 I saw him again at the school[,] & he told me about his life, how he was a sickly boy & a sleepwalker, [&] did an essay in his sleep which had weighed on his mind when awake, & got a prize for it.[He] would have got honours at Oxford[,] for [he was] always at [the] head of [his] class, but [he] broke down with brain fever just before examinations. He described himself as sensitive in the extreme, only sleeps 4 hours, [&] has mysterious senses of future things.

Nov. 23. [I] went to Hendon with Mr. Moses to Ser[jean]t Cox's house, Moat Mount[?]. In the house were Ser[jean]t and Mrs. Cox, Capt. Edwards and his wife (their daughter)[,] & Miss Jill. Moses was still in poor health [with a] bad cough. [The] séance [was] rather late in [the] evening, with all but Capt. Edwards there, who objects to encouraging this sort of thing, as doing harm to many people. [We] sat in [the] library[,] & [it was] darkened after a while more or less completely. From the first, raps began on Moses's heavy chair [. . . some] tiny[,] as if it were finger-nail tips in showers[,] also louder taps on [the] floor & less frequently about & on top of [the] table[,] but most of these last were ill-defined. A particular kind of tap was referred by him to "Imperator"[,] the spirit whom he had described in the papers as arranging the contents of his dressing case & bag in cross and crown shape on [his] bed, the door being locked & no human access possible. We sat long, & the process was stimulated by the striking up of songs such as ["Partant pour la Syrie"] etc. The spirits like songs[,] racket[,] gaiety[,] inanity[,] etc[,] & are not particular [as] to melody or harmony. [There were] raps negative & affirmative, also indiscriminate showers but not much beyond[.] I don't think anything was spelt out, but raps were given for instance when it was a question of knowing whether spirits came for this or that person. The next morning we spent about the grounds[,] & [I] had a long smoke & talk with Moses in the afternoon, on the question of the spirit photographs [. . .] of which on the whole his talk[,] though professing scepticism[,] tended to confirm the reality of in certain instances. He showed us photos, taken with blurs of white, behind, which he suggested however might have been made by waving a white handkerchief. In the evening [there was] another earlier séance, but almost more unsatisfactory than the last, in spite of frantic mock merriment & song. One song about ["The Little Woman & the Pedler called Stout"] seemed to be a favourite with the spirits. [Nothing happened to my frame & blotting paper[,] & my whole apparatus
returned without proving anything.) One characteristic of the evening was that it came to be gradually opined that my presence was injurious, & when I abstained myself for a while I was informed on returning that more moving & noise had happened than the whole time of my presence. In fact[,] the manifestations had been violent. Moses expressed strong belief that[,] as [a] similar effect followed on his early sittings with Herne and Williams [(whose manifesting force he almost neutralised, so I, being a powerful but undeveloped medium, was absorbing all the force. In the course of the evening Moses "became entranced," yawning[,] gasping & twitching[,] & falling into a comatose state[]. Then his hand twitched violently, & a pencil and paper being put into it[,] he wrote rapidly in large letters, "We cannot manifest through the medium"[,] or something of the kind. I think it was genuine, & afterwards, I myself became drowsy & seemed to the others about to go off likewise[]. To myself[,] I seemed partly under a drowsy influence, and partly consciously shamming, a curious state of mind which I have felt before & which is very likely the incipient stage of hysterical simulation[]. It was a kind of tendency to affect more than I actually felt. On neither evening did any raps come from where Moses (supposing trickery) could not have made them. The whole question turns, as Mrs Edwards said when I asked her on Monday morning, the evidence so far depends on Moses's honesty, he being a gentleman & apparently sincere. His trance seemed real, & he made out that he knew nothing of what he had done[]. He has been twice or so entranced before. He declares that three times he has been raised into the air, once his chair rising & dropping from him. He seems to consider the phenomena possible & in a general way true, though often simulated. He gains a certain social consideration by his mediumship, but no money[]. Indeed it must cost him more than he can afford, & in his miserable health it must be wearing work. On the Monday Moses and I returned to town, Ser[jean]t Cox [coming] part of the way. M & I went in at 15 Southampton Row[, where he showed me the spirit-paintings [. . .] Duguid's ordinary vulgar landscapes, said to be done by spirit-control in the dark. Some others had real touches of art in them, whether said to be done in the dark I know not. We ordered Williams for next evening at 36 Russell Square.

Nov. 27. Dined at Russell Square[] but no Williams, who had written at the last hour about a previous engagement[], which was for his partner [Herne] also. Mrs Cox, Mrs Jaquet, & Mrs Edwards [were there] beside Cox[]. Moses and I. Moses seemed disappointed and distressed that the professional did not come. We sat in the dark, [with] rappings as before. I forget whether the table was moved when I sat at it or stood aside[,] but I went out of the room for a while[,] during which time there were some movements. Moses [was] anxious to be away early[,] & seemed to hurry off in a way that reminded me of Mrs. Bassett somehow. When he was gone the two ladies[,] Mrs Jaquet & Mrs Edwards[,] agreed in the most positive way that Moses sat close up & into the table[,] & moved it by main force. Mrs Jaquet put her hand in under the table edge[,] & it was caught tight between Moses's thigh & the wood, & then at once the table was thrust violently against her chest. She doubted whether with his thick woolen trousers he felt her hand. But the two were utterly convinced (while retaining their faith in the manifestations of mediums under other circumstances) that this particular medium had been fraudulently assisting nature. So that our talk ended with more reference to simulating hysteria, & the way in which even occasional fraud spoils the evidence of psychic force, tho' in wonder at Moses's spiritual gifts.

Nov. 28. Returned home. What I have seen & heard fails to convince me that there is a genuine residue[]. It all might have been legerdemain, & was so in great measure[,] except that legerdre is too complimentary for the clumsiness of many of the obvious imposters. The weight of the argument lies in testimony of other witnesses, such as Ser[jean]t Cox declaring he has seen a table rise in the air[,] etc., also Mr Nixon, Geo[rgo] Grove[,] etc. My judgment is in abeyance[]. I admit a prima facie case on evidence, & will not deny that there may be a psychic force causing raps, movements, levitations[,] etc. But it has not proved itself by evidence of my senses, and I distinctly think the case weaker than written documents led me to think. Seeing has (to me) been believing, & I propose a new text to define faith[]. "Blessed are they that have seen, and yet have believed."
There are several comments that seem worth making about Tylor’s diary. Most obvious, perhaps, is the contrast between his public and private attitudes towards spiritualism: the grudgingly admitted ‘prima facie case on evidence’ of his diary’s last paragraph is rather a far cry from the tone of his published opinions. And although Tylor said he found the case weaker than he had been led to think, the dramatic structure of the diary would suggest quite the opposite. If one surveys the whole November sequence of séances, there is a distinct movement from active disbelief to perplexed uncertainty: Mrs Holmes was a ‘shameful and shameless’ impostor; Mrs Olive a cocky, if hysterical, dodger; Lottie Fowler was still suspected of cheating; and Miss Hudson was an impostor. But with Mrs Bassett, Tylor moved toward uncertainty; Kate Fox left him explicitly ‘puzzled’; and with Moses, although commenting on occasional fraud, he was left ‘in wonder at [his] spiritual gifts’.

On the other hand, closer analysis of Tylor’s account does not suggest that this movement to uncertainty was based on his observation of the evidence itself. Tylor was able actually to ‘explain’ about as much at the end of the diary as he was in the beginning. The purely ‘psychic’ phenomena were at no point too much of a problem, save perhaps in the case of his deceased sister. His failure to comment on this, and his use of asterisks to represent her name, might suggest that Mrs Olive had scored a ‘hit’ here; but unfortunately the biographical details which might confirm this are not available. Aside from this, the phenomena of clairvoyance seem to have given him little difficulty. The errors of representation, the failed predictions, and the statements so generalised that they could be pieced out with the responses of an over-eager audience, left only a slight residue of clairvoyance to be explained in terms of prior knowledge or assumed confederacy. And as far as possession itself was concerned, Tylor seems to have been inclined to accept an explanation in terms of hysterical simulation—a theme which becomes stronger toward the end of the diary, until Tylor even found a trace of the tendency in himself.

Turning to the ‘physical’ phenomena, it does not seem that their evidential status is any stronger at the end of the diary than at the beginning. The slate-frame experiment was inconclusive. But other essentially experimental approaches—such as the fingers wagged at Jennie Holmes or the hand held behind Mrs Bassett’s head—explained or cast into doubt some of the phenomena. Others were similarly affected by hypothesised explanation, such as the possibility of the substitution of a jointed ring, or the observation that raps never came from an area where they could not be made mechanically by the medium. But although he was able to offer a good bit more by way of explanation of Kate Fox’s rappings than he had been able to offer for Home’s, Tylor nevertheless found them explicitly ‘unintelligible’, and was left feeling ‘for the first time’ that he had experienced something really out of the ordinary. And in the case of Moses, this feeling seems heightened, despite the fact that two witnesses alleged that Moses accomplished some of his effects through the use of ‘main force’.

Perhaps the movement toward uncertainty is to be accounted for as the cumulative effect of phenomena only partially explained. Perhaps it reflects the greater strength of the later manifestations. Or perhaps it has something to do with the personalities of Fox and Moses. The last possibility suggests another one. As Tylor
himself indicated in his concluding comment, ‘the weight of the argument’ lay in hearsay evidence—in the ‘testimony of other witnesses’. There is evidence to suggest that it made a considerable difference to Tylor who these witnesses were. Indeed, one of the strongest and most interesting undercurrents of the diary is provided by the interwoven themes of respectability and social class.

Especially in the first half of the diary, Tylor was inclined to make rather deprecating remarks about the appearance, the character, and the style of mediums—almost all of whom were of American or English lower class origin, and a number of whom were professionals. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that he did this as a way of dismissing phenomena he could not adequately explain. Thus Lottie Fowler was ‘a pasty-faced, long-nosed ugly creature’; Miss Hudson was a ‘coarse, dark-browed imposter’; and Home was guilty of social gaucheries and forward behaviour with middle class women. The fact that controlling spirits were (in Tylor’s terms) racial or social inferiors, spoke in dialect, and said stupid things seems itself to have been reason for disbelieving in them. The same attitude is evident in regard to W. H. Harrison, who was ‘sincere’, but only ‘half-bred’.

But there was another type of person involved in all this that Tylor did not dismiss quite so easily—a thoroughly respectable person who was neither lower class, nor ‘morbid-minded’, nor completely credulous. Despite Tylor’s suggestion that the positive case for spiritualism was based on hearsay, it is clear from the diary that much of the negative evidence was of the same character. In this context, the fact that respectable witnesses provided important evidence for specific fraud, but yet on the whole were convinced of the reality of the phenomena, complicated the weighing of the evidence considerably. Mrs Jaquet, who ‘had her wits about her’, described ‘manifest cheating’, but felt it was only a supplement to ‘the real thing’. Dr Bird, who was not ‘morbidly imaginative’, actually believed his deafness was treated by Kate Fox. Dr Ringer, who thought her rappings stupid, nevertheless did not believe them to be trickery. Nor was it only a matter of witnesses. The man who in terms of weight of testimony might be regarded as Tylor’s primary informant was himself a medium. And although the Reverend Moses provided Tylor with evidence of fraud and was even sceptical of some spiritual performances, he also firmly testified to his own levitation. As Tylor said himself, the ‘whole question’ turned on Moses’s honesty. But it is clear that Tylor had every impulse to believe Moses was basically honest—‘he being a gentleman and apparently sincere’—and, one might add, an amateur medium whose unpaid performance took place during a weekend at a country home outside London.

The problem was that people who theoretically should not have believed were in fact believers. According to Tylor’s notion of survivals, the contemporary locus of traces of early animistic belief should have been among the lower classes. As he suggested subsequently in his article on ‘Demonology’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ‘educated opinion’ had rejected the notion of ‘familiar spirits’, but ‘popular credulity’ was still susceptible to the ‘convulsive and hysterical symptoms (pretended or real) of the “medium” under the “control” of his “guiding spirit”’ (Tylor 1876). By the time Tylor wrote this, he had put aside his private perplexity. Indeed, in so far as he drew in later writings on his ‘field’ experience of November, 1872, it was in order to document the general fraudulence of spiritualist manifestations (*ibid.*; cf. Tylor 1884). By this time, the uncertainty engendered by respectable
witnesses had receded from the foreground of memory, the diary was beginning to gather dust somewhere in a drawer, and recollected experience was cast in the mould of theoretical commitment.

And yet to put the matter in this way is to miss the point—which is precisely that the issues involved were of much greater importance than their theoretical significance to anthropology. Spiritualism was, after all, a religious manifestation—in Tylor’s terms, a religious manifestation of the most basic, primitive sort. The interest of certain mid-Victorian middle class intellectuals in spiritualism cannot be viewed apart from the general ‘Victorian crises of faith’. That interest has been analysed in terms of the impact of the doubt generated by science and historical criticism on men reared in ‘Evangelical homes of a gentler and more cultivated kind, in which faith had to be professed freely or not at all, and example was a better teacher than violence’ (Gauld 1968: 37 sqq.). These men found in the religion of their youth a great emotional security, and the loss of that security was a terrible loss indeed. It could be compensated for in various ways, one of which was spiritualism. The interest in spiritualism could take several forms, but even where (as in the case of Alfred Russel Wallace) it involved the attempt to rationalise spiritual phenomena in terms of ‘the laws of a yet unknown chemistry’, its essentially religious character is quite evident. Although Wallace spoke of abolishing the supernatural and extending the sphere of law, the effect of that extension was to validate the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and to confirm the reality of a life after death in which the soul, separated from the body, would experience the ‘natural and inevitable consequences of a well or ill-spent life’, rather than the ‘arbitrary’ rewards of traditional religion (Wallace 1874: 46, 51, 57, 62).

Perhaps more consciously than Wallace, Tylor was one of the major carriers of the germs of scientific doubt. *Primitive culture*, which interpreted an evolutionary growth of religion in terms which rendered divine revelation unnecessary, was one of the most important contributions to the scientific rationalism which reached its apogee in the 1870’s. Indeed, in some doggerel he later wrote for Andrew Lang, Tylor suggested that ‘theologians all to expose’ had been ‘the mission of primitive man’ (cf. Lang 1888: 44-6). We know little of what in Tylor’s Quaker childhood might have led him to such a missionary view, but it is doubtful that his scientific rationalism can be understood in purely intellectual terms, or that such a viewpoint could either be achieved or maintained without some psychic cost. Paradoxically, science, which for some men extracted this cost, could for others repay it: one of the latent functions of the idea of scientific law was clearly to provide emotional security to men who were shedding their religious belief.

For such men, the phenomena of spiritualism could be the agents of doubt rather than of reassurance. One could of course follow Wallace in hypothesising an extension of scientific law to include spiritual phenomena—and Tylor did not entirely exclude the possibility of a ‘psychic force’ that might cause certain physical manifestations. But such a ‘psychic force’ was not very comfortably fitted into the framework of a ‘positive science’ which Tylor was inclined to equate with ‘materialism’ and to pose against religion defined in terms of the belief in spiritual beings (Tylor 1869: 523; cf. Stocking 1968a: 103). Any impulse Tylor had to make such an accommodation would have been frustrated by the fact that the physical phenomena such a ‘psychic force’ would explain were themselves part
of a framework which specifically included belief in spiritual beings. The alternative, then, was to dismiss phenomena which could not be fitted into one’s conception of scientific law, and thereby to retain the surrogate faith of scientific rationalism. In this context seeing, for Tylor, could hardly be believing, and there was at least a touch of unintended irony in his closing definition of faith: ‘Blessed are they that have seen, and yet have believed.’

NOTES

I wish to thank the Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Mr Bernard Fagg, for permission to reproduce the Tylor diary, and both Mr Fagg and his colleagues at the Museum for their efforts in facilitating my research there, which was supported in part by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc.

1 The notebook is about four by six inches in size, and contains sixty-eight pages of manuscript. The punctuation is often haphazard, the language is often elliptical, and the handwriting is often quite difficult to decipher. Inside the front cover is inserted a photograph of D. D. Home.

At the end of the diary are inserted two photographs. One bears the caption ‘Spirit-photograph of William Howitt (in the flesh) and grandaughter (in the spirit)’. The other is described as ‘bought in May 1872 at Burn’s 15 Southampton Row, for 1/- under the distinct assertion that it was a real spirit-photograph of Mr John Jones, & a spirit supposed to be a deceased daughter’.

2 Although it has not seemed germane to develop the point here, it is worth commenting that it is hardly surprising that an interpretation of religion motivated by such considerations as these should later have been subject to criticism as over-rationalistic.

REFERENCES