

The Incredible Powers of D. D. Home

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He could levitate tables - and himself - in full view of witnesses, elongate his body, and hold burning embers in his bare hands. Was he the greatest supernatural medium of his time... or the best magician?



Daniel Dunglas Home was the most celebrated medium of the 19th century. Although his name is not very well known today, he astonished audiences, friends, heads of state, and the rich and famous with startling paranormal feats and levitation. His seemingly impossible powers bewildered those who witnessed them, including many respected scientists and journalists.

Did D. D. Home truly possess extraordinary paranormal abilities? Or was he a gifted magician, far ahead of his time, who was able to fool even the closest of observers with slight of hand and magician's illusions? Although there were certainly many skeptics among his contemporaries who denounced him as a clever fraud, they could never really prove how he accomplished his many incredible demonstrations. To this day, there is much mystery surrounding Home.

Home (pronounced "Hume") was born in 1833 in Currie, Scotland. Like many people who seek the public spotlight or a presence in "show business," Home seems to have exaggerated or fabricated details of his early life and heritage. For example, he was baptized as Daniel Home and seems to have adopted the middle name of Dunglas. Although he claimed to that his father was the bastard son of the tenth earl of Scotland, his father was actually an ordinary laborer and, by some accounts, an abusive drunk. As a baby, he was adopted by an aunt and at age nine was brought to America where his new family settled in Connecticut.



Home may also have created some myths about his childhood. He said that as an adolescent he began to experience premonitions. At age 17, poltergeist activity would occur when he entered a room: mysterious raps would be heard and furniture would move by itself. Were these stories Home made up to enhance his mystical persona, or were they early signs of unexplained abilities that Home would later be able to control?

Although he had little formal education, as an adult Home could converse intelligently on a number of subjects, could play the piano, and developed an easy wit and charm that facilitated his profession as a "professional houseguest." It was at this time that his remarkable abilities came to prominence. His early reputation as a medium was made by his séances, which participants declared as uncanny, and his apparent powers of clairvoyance and healing.

Over his controversial career, these are just some of the feats D. D. Home was seen to perform around the world:



- In a well-lit room before Professor David Wells of Harvard and three other spiritualist investigators, Home caused a table to move all about, even though he stood nowhere near it. It took all the strength of two of the witnesses to restrain the table. Upon its release, the table levitated completely off the floor for several seconds. When Wells and two others sat on the table, it continued to rock. They could find no scientific explanation for the experience.



- In 1852, Home first demonstrated self-levitation. Witnesses watched in astonishment as he rose a foot or more above the floor. When they tried to hold him down, they too were lifted off the ground.

- During séances, he was able to make phantom hands appear, which sitters were able to feel. In 1857, he held a séance in Paris with Napoleon III and his empress, Eugénie. The empress held a spirit hand that she recognized as her dead father's - because of the characteristic deformity of one finger.

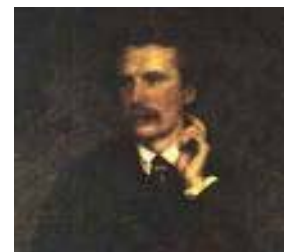
- He was able to elongate his body by as much as 11 inches.

- In a July, 1868 séance in a normally lit room of the home of a client, the host's elderly mother was levitated in the chair in which she sat.

- In December, 1868, Home gave what is perhaps his most famous performance. At his apartment in London, Home conducted a séance for three respected gentlemen. After some "conventional" spirit apparitions, Home began to walk around the room. His body elongated, according to the witnesses, then Home rose off the ground. Returning to the floor he then went into an adjoining room. The men heard a window open in that room and shortly after saw Home apparently floating in midair outside their window. The apartment was three stories up. Home opened the window from the outside, then "glided into the room feet foremost and sat down."



- In 1871, Home was tested by William Crookes, a respected physicist and fellow of the Royal Society. With a contraption of weights he had devised, Crookes sought to measure the "power, force or influence, proceeding from his hand." Crookes measured a force equal to about three-quarters of a pound, and was at a complete loss to explain it. Crookes was also witness to Home's levitation, which, he wrote, challenged his "most firmly rooted articles of scientific belief."



- In a demonstration he did many times, Home could hold white-hot embers in his bare hands. He was even seen to plunge his hands and his face into a hearth fire, "moving it about as though bathing it in water." His skin showed no signs of injury whatsoever.



Home astonished many, but not all. Harry Houdini, known for his debunking of spiritualists and séances, denounced Home as a fraud and claimed to be able to duplicate his feats of levitation... although he never did. And while many skeptics were sure Home's demonstrations were only trickery, Home was not once -

in any of his 1,500 séances - caught in any kind of deception or exposed in perpetrating a hoax. This fact alone earned him his great reputation.



So, while reason says that Home was an extremely gifted magician and illusionist - on a par, perhaps, with some of the great magicians working today - such legerdemain was never proved. And because many of his feats were accomplished in broad daylight in full view and inspection of witnesses, Home must be regarded either as one of the greatest magicians of all time... or a true medium with extraordinary, unexplained powers.

That brings about an interesting point, if one takes the position that Home's abilities were not supernatural: If Home had presented himself as a magician rather than a medium, he might be regarded and remembered today with greater awe than the legendary Houdini.