

TRICKS FROM TEEDS TO TEY

Like Harry Price, Mr. Sutton, and Mrs. Smith—each indispensable in the niche chosen by the authors of HBR—Marianne Foyster plays a unique role, not only in the real records of Borley Rectory but also in the contrived drama of the S.P.R. stage. We have been invited to believe that “no objective phenomena of a supposed poltergeist nature took place at the rectory until the Smith incumbency”; we have been asked to accept the authors’ “conclusion” that the events during this incumbency were all due to accident, known Nature, or trickery; and finally, after being told “it is not a dispute that nothing remotely approaching the Foyster manifestations occurred after Mrs. Foyster left the rectory,” we are expected to admit that Marianne “may have had something to do with them”—though not in the “psychic sense.” Having traced the errors of these propositions through the incumbencies of the Bulls, the Smith, and the Foysters, as the methods and summaries of the authors deviated ever wider of the facts and actual evidence, one is now hardly ready to accept HBR’s solution to the “mystery of Marianne.” Especially is this true when consideration is made of the reasons for preferring physical guilt to something in a “psychic sense.” Special argument is offered that “none of Mrs. Foyster’s immediate neighbours at Ipswich, Snape, Rendlesham and Martlesham, near Woodbridge, Suffolk, where she lived successively after leaving Borley, having so much as hinted that there was anything strange about her in a psychic sense” (HBR, pp. 116-7). (Twenty-seven pages previously the authors had qualified this claim with the assertion “None of these persons, whom we have interviewed...” Yet, even then, the reader had not been told how many of these necessarily numerous parties had been located; nor, whether or not the question of evidence was made a matter of query or

allowed to pass without “so much as a hint” on the part of the interviewers.¹) Passing over the little mystery of silence concerning Marianne’s “immediate neighbours” prior-to her residence at the Rectory, one is brought up against the question as to why, in considering “the theory that Mrs. Foyster was herself a poltergeist-focus,” the authors failed to record that one important adjunct to the theory is that the problem is one of subject plus environment.

It is a vivid commentary on the authors’ trend of imagination to see such elaborate display of speculative abilities as HBR provides—when a “normal” explanation is wanted—and yet to find the speculators unable to add one and one. Or, that is to say, unable or unwilling for the sake of their skepticism, to suggest that perhaps it took a favorable concatenation of circumstances—a specially disposed “poltergeist focus” such as Mrs. Foyster—or Mrs. Smith—plus a Borley Rectory—to empty a bedroom’s contents down the stairway, or to hurl a table across a room, paranormally.

They complain the “poltergeist-focus” theory does not “seem to us readily to explain the events of the evening of 14 October 1931, i.e. when, Mrs. Foyster being under “strict control”, “One alleged phenomenon only occurred.” (Ibid., p. 117.) Contrasted with the records of performance set by such famous mediums as Mrs. Piper and Eusapia Palladino—when whole sittings and séances were sometimes “bad” and sometimes “blank”—the fact that not once under “strict control” did the mysterious Marianne fail to evoke a “puzzling” phenomenon is rather remarkable and on the contrary, quite in accord with the “poltergeist-focus” theory.

It is only when one approaches the “fraud” theory that the authors begin to display a wonderful liberality of speculation. Attempting to account for the many months of mysterious events reported: the numerous voices; footsteps; apparitions; strange odours; the appearing and

¹ One wonders if they overlooked as many mysterious events in the later [text missing] presumably in communication with his relations till his death in 1945 (Ibid., p. 75)—whether by monthly “news-letter” or otherwise—and yet HBR never gives so much as a “hint” on facts from this source.

disappearing books, crockery, etc.; the bell-ringing; the scores of bottles carried into the house and broken; the handfuls of stones and pebbles shot about and placed here and there; the pictures and brush and parasol and unnumbered other objects picked up and tossed around; the booby-traps in the doorways; the bends turned over; the furniture hurled about; the contents of rooms upset and the furnishings scattered on the stairs or in the walkways; the several outbreaks of fire; the locking and unlocking of doors; the appearance and disappearance of keys; the writing of messages on walls; papers of appeal fluttering about; the black-eyes and the injuries and drawn blood; and all the rest—, the authors, of course, feel obligated to suggest a motive for all this prodigious and protracted, presumably surreptitious labor. It is that, for at least almost a year and a half, Mrs. Foyster bamboozled a parade of witnesses—from Harry Price and Mrs. Goldney and the Braithwaites on down the line, including Sir George and Lady Whitehouse, visiting Rectors, Mrs. Richards, Miss. May Walker, Miss. Gordon, Mrs. Wildgoose (nee Dytor), Edwin Whitehouse, Mr. L'Estrange, Mr. d'Arles, Captain Deane, and others, not to speak of the Rev. Foyster himself—“in an endeavor to demonstrate to her husband that life for her in ‘the most haunted house in England’ was intolerable to the point of adversely affecting her health.” *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

On the one hand, we are asked to believe that Marianne was an “extremely vital” young woman, “physically attractive,” and evidently of so persuasive a temperament that she succeeded in making Messrs. Whitehouse and d'Arles “rival claimants” at “telling ‘tall stories’” for and “fostering belief—[text missing] when it [text missing] have us believe—that “Mr. Foyster was and always had been deeply in love with his young wife Marianne, a fact which is confirmed by his references to her in his testimony, which is consistently display an affectionate and implicit trust.” (*Ibid.*, p. 90). And yet, paradoxically, we are required to swallow the concoction that,

despite all these wiles and powers of persuasion, and in the face of all this marital devotion, totally unable to obtain his consent to quitting the “haunted” home. Surely, one must take their pick—it was “implicit trust” or it was such adamant and callous disbelief by the Rev. Foyster that his “deeply-loved” young wife had to resort to a torturous regime of complicated chicanery for fifteen months, involving—what the authors seem happy to repeat—“at least 2,000 alleged paranormal phenomena”!

But—not entirely strange to say! —After passing “the documents and motives of all the persons involved under the most exacting scrutiny”, (including, of course, the 200 and more pages left by the Rev. Foyster) the authors were not able to come up with a single testimony, a single notation, or a single statement from any source or anyone that Marianne Foyster at any time asserted an implacable dislike for the place or had ever asked her husband that they move out or had ever made a special complaint as to its effect upon her health. In fact the only relevant quotation they present on the question of removal demonstrates that the Rectory and his wife, while dissatisfied and “trying to stick it out,” were not too confident about staying for long, for more than “a bit”: “This is certainly not a pleasant place to live in, and I think we have had an even worse time than you had; but since the diocese and Q.A.B. have spent a lot of money in repairing it, we are trying to stick it out for a bit,” letter to the Rev. Smith (4 December 1931), Ibid., p. 117.²

It is a remarkable oversight that while in prefacing this theory of Marianne’s motive, with reference to Borley Rectory being “grim comfortless,” without central heating, gas, electricity or main water” and “cold and depressing”, the authors pass without understanding their own immediate remark, “...he came from Canada.” (Loc sit.) It appears undisputed that, shortly

² What the Rev. Foyster was not opposed to changing quarters is evidenced in that we have seen he did live out for a while, perhaps for a “considerable period”—a point HBR makes none to clear! (See p.)

before his residence at Borley, the Rev. Foyster had returned from “nineteen years” of sacrificial “missionary work in Canada”, (EBR, p. 17); and as the authors themselves show, he and Marianne had been married in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1922. So it is reasonable to assume that after years of living in the wretched climate of that place, chilled by the cold of winter winds from the interior, and where the average rainfall is about 40 to 45 inches, and snowfalls reach and exceed 100 inches (New Brunswick; —see Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1944 ed., Vol. 16, p. 277), the simple inconveniences and idyllic picture of the rectory premises (as painted by Canon Lawton for the authors) would have presented no new or particularly poignant discomfort to the ex-missionary or his “superbly healthy” wife.

It is further curious that, in absence of any warranty by evidence or testimony the authors should propose an alternative or collateral supposition, i.e. that “in the isolation of Borley, limited more or less to the companionship of her husband, [plus Adelaide, and Mr. d’Arles and his child, etc.], Mrs. Foyster may well have suffered from boredom, frustration, and even unhappiness” and took to bottle-smashing and the like (thus making herself “the centre of a good deal of attention from interesting people like Edwin Whitehouse, Sir George and Lady Whitehouse, the various spiritualistic groups who visited the rectory, and so on.” HBR, p. 118.) In doing so the authors appear to have carefully and prudently avoided several obstacles fatal to their suggestion. One is that the (alleged) trickery by Marianne began so early as the family’s very first day in the Rectory; or, in the estimation of the authors, at least dated “from the early days of [the Re. Foyster’s] tenancy,” Ibid., p. 91. One is hard put to believe that during the excitements and fresh discoveries of a new occupation, meeting new friends, re-establishing the household, etc., so childish a mind as the authors picture would have become bored or unhappy. Furthermore, if the motive was a desire to escape from boredom and frustration, how explain the

fact—if fact it was—that the unhappy and impatient Marianne persisted in her tenacious preoccupation with monotonously repeated trickeries for six months or more, despite the obvious frustration of her attempts thereby to dislodge her recalcitrant husband, and when the “interesting people” her activities are supposed to have entertained had not yet arrived on the scene?! (the earliest date the authors give for a visit by any of the Whitehouse family is 4 May 1931, Ibid., p. 104’; Cf. Ibid., p. 98; and HBR refers to the Spiritualists as visiting “during the last months of 1931,” Ibid., p. 80.)

Even more strange is the fact that nowhere in this amusingly pretentious delineation of character, have the authors examined the question of Mrs. Foyster’s possible “isolation” before and after her residence at “isolated” Borely. Great stress is laid upon the implication that this deprived soul yearned for the “lights and strange sights” of the big city; that “it seems clear that in the later stages of her husband’s incumbency Mrs. Foyster took the opportunity offered of living away from the loneliness and discomfort of the rectory (to which she returned only at week-ends [an allegation by no means provided in HBR!] in the completely contrasting environment of London. As her husband’s health was deteriorating, and since she must have realized that there would be village gossip [one possibly as irresistible as that which has driven the authors to indulge in these insinuations].” HBR, p. 118.

What all of this has to do with psychical research or determining, for example, what pulled the bell-wire in Adelaide’s room, 14 October 1931, is a mystery to me. Perhaps the authors are so rash as to suppose their readers will accept a hypothetical, unverified “motive” in lieu of evidence! But it is interesting to know that this muck-raking was not committed to print until the authors had first unsuccessfully searched “Ipswich, Snape, Rendlesham, and Martlesham, near Woodbridge, Suffolk,” as well as “Romiley, near Stockport, Cheshire” and

possibly parts unnamed for the missing Marianne; and, evidently felt safe in the belief she could not be found. (One wonders if this part of the “S.P.R. enquiry”—this search for Mrs. Foyster—may not have been a principal and prudent occupation of the year or more separating the time “this report was first prepared” (pre-26 July 1954, Ibid., p. 106... and its going to press.)

But it is revealing to see that the lady—despite her “strong motive” and “isolation” at Borley with its “approximately 120 inhabitants” (Ibid., p. 9)—seems never to have stayed much in London, for by the authors’ chronology, we find her migrating successively from Ipswich to Snape, Rendlesham, and Martlesham, the last three being presumably small settlements (too small in fact to be found in the geographical work at hand, with its approximately 100,000 indexed names and with its notice of some towns inhabited by only 7 or so residents. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 24, 1944 Ed.) Truly, one cannot explore psychology and ignore environment; but the authors omit the indication—incompatible with their suggested “motive”—that Marianne Foyster seems to have been a small-town [text missing].

The only other two communities (aside from Sackville) with which the authors have connected her are her birthplace (Romiley, near Stockport, Chesire; and Salmonhurst, New Brunswick, Canada where her certificate of marriage to the Rev. Foyster was addressed), both of which are so insignificantly small as to be likewise unlisted, though one might suspect that the latter may be situated on the Salmon River in the rugged backcountry of northern New Brunswick.

Indeed it appears altogether evident that, of the resident couple, the one who might have been expected to have found the situation most difficult would have been the Rev. Foyster himself, the “delightful, typical cultured person of the best type, a scholar, a Cambridge

(Pembroke College) M.A. and much travelled”, (as Price described him) and a man in his fifties “suffering acutely from rheumatism,” HBR, p. 88.

But let one assume that all this evidence is to be put aside for the sake of the skeptic’s non-evidential hypothesis—what then? Are we to imagine that this cunning, callous charlatan the authors have painted, this faker who deserts her sick husband weekly (presumably against his wishes) to indulge the sensations of London, this madwoman who hoaxed and deceived her family and friends, destroys their property and endangers their well-being with fire, hammer-head, splintering glass and booby-traps for fifteen months—did all this “in an endeavor to demonstrate to her husband that life for her in ‘the most haunted house in England’ was intolerable”—?

If that was what was wanted, I cannot help thinking that so importune and conscienceless a trouble-maker would have taken a lesson from Adelaide or “Sunex-Amures” or whoever it may have been and would have—in the absence of prospective discoverers—burnt the rectory down at the end of the first six months if not the first week! And then moved into a new and pleasant quarters—perhaps at Arthur Hall with such sympathetic and “interesting people like Edwin Whitehouse, Sir George and Lady Whitehouse” etc.

It is typical of those remarkable incongruities scattered throughout HBR that, after introducing the “hypothesis that Marianne was indulging in falsehood and trickery in order to shake his determination to endure the discomforts and isolation of the rectory,” the authors give as their “first example” the Rev. Foyster’s record that “A wonderfully delicate perfume would come into the house etc.”—! (One would think so troublesome a “poltergeist” as the “falsehood and trickery” theory here demands would have preferred asafoetida to “lavender”.) But, the critics add, “It seems curious that Mr. Foyster should apparently see no connection between an

allegedly paranormal smell of lavender and the [mysterious discovery of the] physical presence in the rectory, and indeed in the bedroom, of a bag of the same substance.” To which is added the claim that “when Mr. Foyster enlarged his story from 31 sheets to Fifteen Months, with over 180 sheets, the ‘phenomenon’ became (on p. 22) ‘Perfumes... wonderful, fragrant, almost overwhelming’,...” Ibid., pp. 91-2.

There is no reason to suppose the Rev. Foyster saw no connection between the perfume and the bag; the curious thing is that the authors do not see here any significance that the “smell” appeared on “p. 3” of his Diary of Occurrences and the bag of lavender only appeared later, “p. 5”. Surely, one should not expect the “delicate perfume” to have been connected with the bag of lavender—presumably before the bag ever appeared!

Likewise, no evidence is offered that this ‘phenomenon’ became, in a later account, “Perfumes... etc.” If the authors are correct the first account is dated from, at the latest, “July 1931,” (Ibid., p. 82)—when the manifestations had yet six months or more to run—while the later account of “Perfumes... etc.” was possibly written, (at least in part) in 1932 or later (Ibid., p. 83.) Not a scrap of evidence is presented to substantiate the implication that no mysterious “Perfumes...etc.”—no new and pleasant fragrances—were detected by the household or “after the Foysters had retired to bed: a delayed action which was not mentioned in the earlier account” or at any time apart from (or in the months after) this phenomenon of “lavender.” Amusingly, the authors themselves belie the charge of “embellishment,” by acknowledging on the same page the Rev. Foyster’s recollection that the “odd smell of cooking”—presumably pleasant fragrances—were mysteriously “noticeable at times between 11 and 12 p.m.,” apparently after the hour of retirement. And this notation, is found in what the authors term “clearly the first account of the

alleged haunting written by Mr. Foyster,” (Ibid., p. 82)—the Diary of Occurrences—following by a page the “smell” of lavender,” (p. 4).

The complaint that “He does not appear to have connected this somewhat homely ‘phenomenon’ with the Mitchells, ‘the people from the cottage’ (p. 5), who may quite conceivably have prepared a meal at a late hour on occasions” is equally discredited by admission, on the page following (HBR, p. 93), that “Mr. Foyster mentioned the possible connection between the smell of cooking and the cottage. He dismissed it on the grounds that the window of the Blue Room, in which the smell of cooking had been noticed, was on the opposite side of the house. This afterthought is scarcely conclusive, especially when one can assume that (a) the “landing window” perhaps not “opened” at all and (b) “the door of the Blue Room” could certainly have been closed.

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...example, a most useful tin trunk suddenly ‘appeared’ in the kitchen. Its history was quite unknown. A very nice powder-bowl was ‘apported’ to the bathroom (just before Christmas—a seasonably gesture!), and an expensive gold wedding-ring was discovered in the same place”—though the “bad spirits” appear to have made off with it within hours. Ibid., p. 54.

Having for fifteen months played the devil—as well as the “good fairy”—Marianne, the authors suggest, “brought abruptly to an end the spate of ‘phenomena.’” HBR, p. 115. The date was 23-24 January, 1932, and the occasion was the visit of a spiritualist circle from Marks Tey, Essex. After “Great demonstrations—bottles dashing down back stairs, kitchen passage strewn with broken glass, etc.; bells ringing,” as the Rev. Foyster put it—, the visitors held a sitting and exorcised or “laid” the ghost, EBR, pp. 62-4. The authors do not find this easy to believe; and are prompt to supply “a normal explanation... a fairly ready explanation,” i.e. “that strong suspicious

grew in Borely that Mrs. Foyster was producing the phenomena by trickery”—and “It might be thought that, if Mrs. Foyster were indulging in trickery and were worried by repeated accusations from all sides to this effect, this proposed visit might be an opportunity to bring the matter to an end, without incurring further suspicion, by a complete cessation of the phenomena immediately after the ‘cleansing.’” HBR, pp. 119-20.

Another incentive to this would, according to the theory, be “that by January 1932 Mrs. Foyster had finally realised that her husband was not going to leave the rectory because of the phenomena, and had already begun to consider the flower-shop project in London.” (Loc. cit.)

In ostensible substantiation of this premise, the authors cite an incident concerning Mr. Walter Bull, which is beside the point as no accusation was made—only that the “sceptical Walter was not convinced.” (Ibid., p. 120). Side-by-side, collated with the assertion that Esther Cox “was tried, convicted, and sentenced to 4 months’ imprisonment as a thief and incendiary,”³ the authors charge: “M.F. was repeatedly accused of responsibility for the phenomena by neighbours, investigators, and even Spiritualists who visited the house during the last months of 1931.” HBR, p. 80. Who were these “neighbours,” these “investigators” and these “even

³ Extract from “Letter from the late Arthur Davison, Esq., Clerk of County Court, Amherst, Nova Scotia, to F.E. Morgan. Copied from the Central Ray Magazine, vol. xvii, May, 1893, No. 8, published in Pella, Iowa, by the students of Central University of Iowa... Through kindness of R.B.H. Davison, High Sheriff, Amherst, N.S., son of Arthur Davison”: “Esther used to milk the cow... The cow stood at the farther end of the barn (say twenty-five feet from the door) where I kept a brush with my curry-comb and brushes. This particular evening she had just finished milking and met me at the door. As I stepped inside I saw my curry-comb running along the floor about eight or ten feet behind her. You may depend upon it that I stepped out of the way, quick too. It struck the door-post. I then picked it up and after that I kept the key in my pocket. The next evening when I came home she wanted the key to go and milk. I handed it to her, she had the milk bucket in her other hand, and just as our hands met, a large two-quart dipper of water which had been on the table struck our hands and spilled the water over both of us, giving me a pretty good wetting, spoiling my cuffs. It appears she had just been using this dipper, but it was laying six or eight feet from us and had to pass through an open door at right angles to get where it did.

“My wife saw ashes, tea-leaves, scrubbing-brushes, soap and mop rags, and an old ham bone often flying around, and it sometimes put them out in the work, but we got so used to it that we put up with all these things, as it was hard at the time to get help, especially help like her, until she set the barn on fire; we then had her put in jail...”

To which Walter Hubbell adds the footnote: “Esther Cox never set anyone’s house or barn on fire or stole anything from anyone. Bob Nichol, the demon ghost, was not only a thief but also a fire fiend, and all such charges against her should be attributed to him as already stated and fully explained by myself and others.” Carrington, Personal Experiences in Spiritualism, p. 108.

Spiritualists”—? With a single exception, none of them are named; with a single, exception, the accusation of none is to be found in HBR. The reader is presumably expected to regard as a record of “accusations” the fact “a party of spiritualists staged a séance at the rectory and their leader informed Mr. Foyster that Marianne ‘was behind it all’” and the additional fact that “Later still a further group of spiritualists visited Borley and expressed the opinion that the phenomena were due to human agency..” Ibid., p. 120. This expectation suggests the authors are “playing ignorant” of the fair certainty that no more was meant than that, in the first instance, Marianne was a “medium” unbeknownst to herself and the household; and, in the second, that “the spirits of the human dead” were “haunting” the place. (That the authors—“Psychical Researchers of standing”, presumably conversant with the colloquialisms of the occult world—should fob off these statements as “accusations” of trickery likely to worry anyone, and that this should be done when the source of the references is unavailable to the reader who is provided with nothing more relevant than three words suspiciously ripped from the context of one discussion, is itself something amply sufficient, it seems to me, to bring to mind an accusation of trickery of another sort!)

Beyond this feeble try at substantiation, one has still to consider the implication that the Rev. Foyster himself suspected his wife (see HBR, p. 91, where the authors lay particular stress upon the assertion he was “outwardly”—and perhaps not inwardly—“convinced.”) Indications, scattered here and there, doubles designed to arrest the reader’s attention in that direction, are given. We have already treated ourselves to most of these charges of omission; one final example awaits. “A final example of the lack of a critical approach, and one of much greater interest, is Mr. Foyster’s somewhat significant silence over the matter of ‘Mrs. Foyster’s wine trick’,... The incident is not recorded in the Diary of Occurrences since it took place after this was written; but

the date, 13 October 1931, is covered by the Summary of Experiences, yet Mr. Foyster simply omits any reference whatsoever to what would have been, if genuine, the most spectacular ‘phenomenon’ of the evening. It seems to us reasonable to assume that he formed some opinion about it and decided that the incident should not properly be included in his account of the Borley manifestations. If this is true, it is not easy to guess the point where his speculations regarding the matter ceased unless, as we have suggested, he was not of an enquiring turn of mind where his wife was possibly involved, however significant the indications.” Ibid., p. 93.

Passing aside the perhaps “somewhat significant silence” in which HBR “simply omits any reference whatsoever” to the last and most complete of the Reverend’s accounts, Fifteen Months—which for all the reader knows may contain a full and favorable account of the wine-into-ink ‘phenomenon’—it is hardly strange that the witness would have thought it “should not properly be included in his account of the Borley manifestations,” i.e. the Summary of Experiences, (“written by Mr. Foyster for inclusion in MHH at Price’s request”), when the occurrence had been “laughed at” by Price as “an example of childish fraud on Mrs. Foyster’s part” and had prefaced Price’s accusation of fraud against the Rector’s wife the next day (Ibid., pp. 84, 60, 78.) Had he not been a man of charity, it is true the Rev. Foyster could have formed a number of unfavorable theories on the matter. Like the authors, (Ibid., p. 167 and 60-1), he could have wondered at the “extraordinary coincidence” that this singular phenomenon, so easily simulated (under certain conditions) by any novice conjuror, should have occurred in the presence of someone as Price, “interested in conjuring all his life, etc.”; and, could also have observed that “the circumstances point somewhat directly to Price himself being responsible.” And whatever the merit of such a line of reasoning, he could have logically arrived at the

conclusion that Price had indeed performed the trick—if trick it was—as a psychological experiment to test the reaction upon Mrs. Foyster or any other suspect present.

As for the final remark, it appears, strange to say, that of all those present at the Rectory on that occasion, the Rev. Foyster was the one with the most “enquiring turn of mind”—for it was he himself, according to Mrs. Goldney who was there, who offered the “suggestion that, [Mrs. Foyster] be submitted to test conditions”—! (Ibid., p. 78.)

So much indeed for the theory that Mrs. Foyster, “indulging in trickery”, was “worried by repeated accusations from all sides to this effect.” The authors record one—and just one accusation of trickery against her before 23-24 January, 1932, an accusation which, curiously enough, originated with one person of all people least expected to propagate suspicion against the Borely Rectory ‘phenomena’: Harry Price. And this solitary accusation had been followed without respite by several months of “manifestations” before the Marks Tey circle’s visit.

Having disposed thusly of the principal “fairly ready explanation” and its baseless charge and unevenced suppositions, one can turn attention to the adjunctive propositions, i.e. that by 23-24 January 1932, Mrs. Foyster “finally realised that her husband was not going to leave the rectory because of the phenomena, and had already begun to consider the flower-shop project in London.” First of all, one must say that if it took her fifteen months more or less to realise her efforts were not going to secure this desired effect, Marianne was by no means a clever person but a fool. On the other hand, we have seen by this letter of 4 December 1931, the Rev. Foyster was not at all “determined” to stick it out permanently, not to repeat the possibility he himself may have disliked the place more than did his wife. As for the suggestion, given without evidence of any sort, that by 23-24 January, Mrs. Foyster “had already begun to consider the flower-shop,” the authors significantly admit it to be “unfortunate” that “we are lacking some

vital dates.” To which is appended the consolation: “...but we know from Mrs. Wildgoose that preparations for it were being made in 1932 and from Canon Lawton that the shop was in operation during the following year.” (*Ibid.*, p. 120.) But this is hardly satisfactory, especially when the authors have chosen to omit Mrs. Wildgoose’s testimony on the point (in so far as dates might be concerned) and, when according to their own showing (*Ibid.*, p. 110) she only arrived at the rectory several months after the “phenomena abruptly ceased”.

Concisely, there is no more reason to believe that the hypothetical beckon of a contemplated flower-shop (which eventually appeared only after another year or so, in 1933) or the (alleged) obstinate fixity of her spouse or the (alleged) “accusations from all sides” brought an end to phenomena than there is to believe the phenomena had begun as a result of Marianne Foyster’s “isolation” or “loneliness.”

In fact, there is indisputable proof on their own showing it did not—as the authors put it—“bring the matter to an end.” Perhaps no better illustration than this—of the metamorphosis of fiction into “fact”—can be found in the results of this “S.P.R. enquiry”. The cogency of the argument, so far as the authors have it and so far as it goes, rests upon the supposition that, guided by one incentive or another, Marianne had decided to make the most of the “opportunity to bring the matter to an end, without incurring further suspicion, by a complete cessation of the phenomena immediately after the ‘cleansing,’ of 23-24 January, 1932. Her fifteen-month project had not succeeded in dislodging the adamant resident; she was not threatened by possible discovery on all sides; and, most important of all, by going to London with Mr. d’Arles, she could escape the “loneliness” and “isolation” of Borely and its “cold and depressing” rectory. It is obvious that all this—which only obstinate skepticism would prefer to accept place of legitimate suspension of belief—allows no re-occurrence of the “Foyster manifestations.” And

yet the authors are forced to confess: “Mr. Foyster records.. (Summary of Experiences): January 23-24 [1932]...Next morning the house entirely different: demonstrations definitely stop (with but two exceptions)... till 1935.

“1935. Some indications of a little trouble starting up again. A few things disappear in unaccountable ways.

“August [5] bank holiday... Noises, much like a picture falling heard in drawing-room: ... These continue at intervals, some upstairs. About 13 or 14 bangs heard altogether.’

“With these slight exceptions, the ‘haunt’ appeared to be at an end... Ibid., p. 115.

Elsewhere, more or less in accord with the testimony admitted, the authors assert that in “January 1932, ...the manifestations practically ceased,” Ibid., p. 75.

A few pages later, this is changed to “The manifestations at Borley during the Foyster incumbency lasted 15 months,” (Ibid., p. 79), which is a period not only insufficient to cover the interval from 16 October 1930 (the date the Foysters took up residence, Ibid., p. xii) to 23-24 January 1932, —it being recalled that, according to the authors “Mrs. Foyster was at least outwardly convinced from the early days of his tenancy,” whether or not a voice calling “Marianne” was heard on the first day as alleged, —but quietly ignores the :slight exceptions” noted in the testimony admitted above.

With the turn of another page, the careless reader is further ensnared by one more development in “history”: “In January, 1932, immediately after the ‘cleansing’ of the house by the Marks Tey Circle of Spiritualists, the phenomena abruptly ceased.” Ibid., pp. 80-1.

And lastly, in their remarks concluding discussion of the matter, the reader reaches the denouement of their theory and “complete cessation of the phenomena immediately after th ‘cleansing.’” Ibid., p. 120.

Truly, one must marvel at the stealth and skill with which even “these slight exceptions”—important though they may be—are made to steal away into limbo: “...to diminish in force and finally vanish away.”

Nor is this all that is relevant and hidden in “the act.” The reader cannot fail to suppose that the excised testimony indicated by the full stops apparently inserted by the authors between “exceptions” and “till 1935” and between “holiday” and “Noises” and between “drawing-room” and “These” in the testimony shown (p.) abetted the facility of the act.

Furthermore, the reader can supposed what he wants, but I myself cannot resist the suspicion that the phrase ‘(with two exceptions)’ may perhaps not even be found in the original;—that it may be interpolation, understandably and inadvertently provided with round instead of square brackets. Certainly the phrase appears to be false and is contradicted by other evidence which the authors know to exist but which they not surprisingly suppressed. Mr. Price recounts that after the séance of 23-24 January, “the phenomena did not entirely cease”; and, that though “few and far between,” the “phenomena that were recorded after Mr. L’Estrange’s visit” with the Marks Tey Circle “were interesting nevertheless. During the June following some objects were thrown (as Mr. Foyster records in his diary.) Later in the year there was a strange incident with the lamp. Mrs. Foyster happened to be unwell and had gone to bed early. The Rector had gone into the garden for something, and the maid had taken the two little children to a party. When Mr. Foyster returned to order to light the lamp in her room. To his astonishment the lamp was alight! “‘Did you light it?’ asked in some surprise, not thinking she was well enough to do so. ‘No,’ she replied, ‘some one lit it. I don’t know who it was. I woke up just in time to hear the retreating footsteps.’” The Rector was much mystified as his wife was then alone in the house.

“During June 1933 the Rector records: ‘I hear strange noises in the house that I cannot account for, but nothing further follows.’

“During 1935, ‘says the Rector, there were some indications of ‘a little trouble starting up again.’ A few things disappeared in unaccountable ways. On August 5 of that year a noise like a picture falling in the drawing-room was heard. Investigations revealed that nothing was out of place. Mr. Foyster concludes his diary: ‘These noises continued at intervals, some appearing to come from upstairs. Altogether, we heard the bangs thirteen or fourteen times.’” EBR, pp. 64-5.

By following the indications of plurality in the above description of events, it is seen that not just “two” mysterious occurrences were experienced after 23-24 January 1931, but at least nine were noted (even counting the 13 or 14 “bands” as a single incident); and, unlike the authors who present them as being confined to the year 1935, EBR shows these “Foyster manifestations” as occurring at five or more separated junctures during three different years.

The important question is not whether one can account for these “unaccountable” events by “normal explanation... a fairly ready explanation,” but whether, in the face of it all, one is likely to put much faith hereafter in HBR, Dr. Dingwall, Mrs. Goldney, or Mr. Hall, or in an “S.P.R. enquiry.”

[text missing] ...”principal points in the available evidence which would seem to be generally indicative of Mrs. Foyster having produced the phenomena ‘normally,’” the author state:

“It is not easy to dismiss the suspicion that the striking similarities between the Esther Cox case and the Foyster incumbency may have been more than coincidental. The Foysters sojourn in Sackville in Nova Scotia, five miles from the Amherst of Esther Cox, immediately before coming to Borely, and the use of the pseudonym ‘Teed’ in Fifteen Months in a Haunted

House (cf. pp. 80; 82), are contributory factors in the suspicion that the two cases are not unconnected. If normal causation at Borely is assumed, it can scarcely be denied that a textbook was available in Walter Hubbell's The Haunted House... The Great Amherst Mystery." HBR, p. 120.

Approaching this denouement, the authors wrote previously, "...Esther paid a visit to her married sister in Sackville, which is another small community some five miles distant from Amherst. An examination of Crockford's Clerical Directory (1931), in which Mr. Foyster's previous incumbencies are recorded, showed that he was rector of Sackville, Nova Scotia, from 1928 to 1930, i.e. immediately before the Foysters returned to England and took up living at Borley. In view of this it does not seem unreasonable to postulate that the Foysters would be familiar with the story of Esther Cox and the manifestations at Amherst, and that one or both of them may have read one of the many editions of Hubbell's book. This suspicion is heightened by the curious fact that in manufacturing pseudonyms for the real characters in his Fifteen Months in a Haunted House (pp. 111, 113, and 114), Mr. Foyster called one member of a party of spiritualists 'Mr. Teed'. Teed was, of course, the unusual name of Esther Cox's sister and brother-in-law and it was in the Teeds house that the Amherst [text missing] ...does not appear) less than "28 months" after 23-24 January 1931, HBR, p. 83. The very fact this name pops up at so late a date, when the Rev. Foyster was interested in preparing a narrative for publication, suggests no more than that, as a preparatory enquiry in modes of presentation, he had consulted previous works on "haunted" houses—much as the authors have just been shown consulting EBR—and thus discovered "Teed" in Hubbell's book.

But what of the more impressive claim that, "immediately before coming to Borley" the Foysters had "lived within five miles" of "Teed's house at Amherst," Ibid., Cf. pp. 120, 82, 80.

What of the alleged fact that the Reverend “was rector of Sackville, Nova Scotia, from 1928 to 1930, i.e. immediately before the Foysters returned to England and took up the living at Borley”—? The authors date the beginning of “The Foyster Incumbency” from “16 October 1930,” Ibid., p. xii, and affirm: “On 16 October 1930 the Rev. Lionel Algernon Foyster, M.A. (Cantab.), entered upon his duties as the new incumbent at Borley and took up residence at the rectory,” Ibid., p. 75.

Alas!, for elsewhere they acknowledge, “He was a cousin of the patrons of the living, the Misses Bull, and, as already stated, when he first returned to England in 1929 he lived for a time at Great Cornard, Sudbury, some three or four miles from Borely,” Ibid., pp. 90-1. On their own showing then:

- (1) The Rev. Foyster was Rector of Sackville, while residing nowhere near the place (1929-30.)
- (2) His residence overseas, whether at Sackville or elsewhere, —and the authors have presented no good evidence the Foysters ever lived in Sackville—did not occur “immediately before coming to Borley” nor “immediately before the Foysters returned to England and took up the living at Borley”!

It is clear that it would have been a great boost to HBR had it been possible to show the Foysters had moved directly from Amherst to Borely Rectory; it is clear that what the authors would have preferred to demonstrate—had it been possible—would have been that the Foysters had resided in Teed’s “haunted” house, or at least “within five miles” of it.

But in lieu of such pleasant opportunities, the authors have, it seems, managed the best they could; and, in the process, prove that the protagonists of a particular school in psychical research can never be relied upon to give the plainest fact straight—that there are “experts”

moving in the best of “psychic society” who are quite incompetent to deal with evidence that can be manipulated to serve a prejudicial purpose, even when that evidence is so publicly accessible as the common geography book.

- (1) Despite the authors’ repeated claim to the contrary, there is no Sackville in Nova Scotia!
- (2) And Sackville is not “some five miles distant from Amherst”—as the authors first put it; nor is it “five miles from Amherst”—as they later assert it to be; nor is Sackville “within five miles” of Amherst—as HBR again variantly situates it (pp. 82, 111)—!

In 1784 New Brunswick was separated from Nova Scotia and became a province of Canada,⁴ and Sackville is in New Brunswick, five miles or more from the province of Nova Scotia and ten miles by rail from the city of Amherst, Nova Scotia!⁵

If by nothing else in HBR, I venture to say that Dr. Dingwall, Mrs. Goldney, and Mr. Hall have (in the question of the Foysters at Sackville) provided for future generations one of those distinctive and classic demonstrations that truly merits—though not in just the intended meaning—Mrs. Salter’s tribute: “a notable contribution.” It illustrates how the occult powers of unrestrained skepticism can prevail over the bounds of time and space in a most remarkable manner. It instructs the novice “investigator” or “psychical researcher” how—if he cannot get his subjects from one point of time to another as expeditiously as he wishes within the limitations of the record—he may, by ignoring the record and by dropping whole days, weeks, and months out

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 16, p. 278, (1944 ed.)

⁵ Ibid., Vol. 24, p. 94; Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World Atlas (Centennial ed.) p. 70; “The Times” Survey Atlas of the World, Plate 85 (London, 1922.)

It appears Amherst is at least 7 or 8 miles from Sackville “as the crow flies”—but to avoid any new addition to the “mystery of Marianne” one must assume she would have taken the more prosaic trip by land, (see Leahy’s Hotel-Motel Guide & Travel Atlas of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. P. 128, (Chicago, 1955.)

of the calendar, shamelessly gratify his suspicions. It shows him how—when unable to get his subjects into the proper house or even into the proper town, to prove his point—he can, if he himself is in the proper mood and if his “healthy skepticism” is [text missing] robust, mix the facts, shift whole cites about on the map, amalgamate provinces, and perhaps persuade somebody that a hoax is being exposed.⁶

What then of these of whom the authors paternally warn us: —“these who should exhibit the most absolute integrity in their work” and yet “are themselves in the plot to deceive their followers and the public who believe in their good faith”—? HBR, p. 176.

Are they not all too often the first victims of that most deadly of all sources of deception—their own will to disbelieve?

⁶ The authors, as has been seen, lost no opportunity to chastise Mr. Whitehouse (Dom Richard) for making a “major error” in , presumably, interchanging a numeral “5” for a numeral “6”. (One wishes for some good evidence that a handwritten numeral “6” has not been misread by his critics for a somewhat similar numeral “5”.) And the lady with “hospital training”, divulging the remark of a conversation had with the gentleman in “October 1931”, relates “He told her that he had had a nervous breakdown”;--to which the authors are quick to add that in 1937 “he was suffering from a further maladjustment of some severity.” Ibid., pp. 102-3. It is a pity someone with “hospital training” cannot say as much on behalf of the authors of The Haunting of Borley Rectory.