

MAGIC,
WITCHCRAFT, ANIMAL MAGNETISM,
HYPNOTISM,
AND ELECTRO-BIOLOGY;

BEING A DIGEST OF THE LATEST VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR
ON THESE SUBJECTS.

BY

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THIRD EDITION, GREATLY ENLARGED,

EMBRACING OBSERVATIONS ON

J. C. COLQUHOUN'S "HISTORY OF MAGIC," &c.

"AMICUS PLATO, AMICUS SOCRATES, SED MAGIS AMICA VERITAS."

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communicate or impart to their subjects, by whatever name they may call it—whether magnetic, mesmeric, odylic, nervous, or vital force transferred from the operators into the bodies of their subjects.

“A chiel’s amang you takin’ notes,
And faith he’ll prent them.”

I append the following narrative, believing that it may be interesting to some of my readers, especially as it has a direct bearing on the question regarding the truth or error of what has been asserted as the special gifts of mesmeric clairvoyants. It may also aid them in conducting similar investigations in future, so as to guard against some of the many sources of fallacy with which such an inquiry is necessarily surrounded.

Whilst the last sheet of this little book was passing through the press, Mons. Lassaigne and Mdlle. Prudence Bernard, of Hungerford Hall notoriety, made their appearance in Manchester, to astonish us by their wonderful mesmeric, clairvoyant, and supersentient feats. In their circulars, Monsieur Lassaigne was heralded as “The First Magnetiser in Europe,” and Mdlle. Prudence as “the best Clairvoyante known ;” and, in support of these high pretensions, thirty-two paragraphs were appended from the London Newspaper Press.

Under these circumstances, and having been urged by an Edinburgh friend to test this lady’s wonderful pretensions, I did not see how I could refuse to go and witness at least *one* of their public exhibitions, without subjecting myself to the charge of acting like the philosophers in the days of Galileo, who refused to look through his telescope, from a dread that they might thereby be compelled to admit the alleged fact, which they had so strenuously denied. I, therefore, went to the *séance* announced for Friday, the 27th of February, 1852, and secured one of the best seats on the platform, so that I might have an opportunity of observing, with the greater accuracy, all which might be said or done by Mons. L. and his mesmeric clairvoyante.

I was perfectly well aware that many of the feats announced in the programme were capable of being accomplished by a system of collusion, so devised that it might be difficult to detect the sources of fallacy, particularly on a public platform ; but there were others, and those the more important pretensions, which I knew that I could

test in such a simple and satisfactory manner as must convince every one in the room, either that she possessed the supersensient gifts asserted, or that she possessed them not; and I, therefore, went prepared to test this fairly, should a favourable opportunity offer.

The first point which arrested my attention, after the lady was announced as being in the mesmeric state, was this,—that she was one of those subjects who, during the mesmeric condition, have the use of their eyes, *i.e.*, seeing through, or rather from under, their partially closed eyelids. I am quite aware that many of the mesmeric phenomena may be feigned, as, indeed, every other condition may be, and daily is, on the stage; and it is, therefore, quite *possible* that Mdlle. Prudence Bernard was not in the mesmeric state at all, which some seemed to suppose was the case. For my own part, however, I think it much more *probable* that she *was* in the so-called mesmeric state, and for this reason,—that during the state of mental concentration peculiar to that condition, all the organs of sense which are called into action become prodigiously quickened, so that they can hear at much greater distances than when awake; and some have the sense of smell so exalted that they can readily detect the owner of a glove in a room full of company, by *smell*,—for, if their nostrils are stopped, they cannot do so. (The blind boy, Mitchell, recognised people by smell in his ordinary state; and he formed a favourable or an unfavourable opinion of them when first introduced to him, according to the peculiar odour from their persons.) The sense of touch and resistance, and of heat and cold, and no doubt taste also, are in like manner greatly quickened.

Many of the first experiments of the evening were, in my opinion, quite vitiated, from the requests to do such and such feats having been given to M. Lassaigne, or the interpreter, in a whisper, which, I well knew, any attentive mesmerised subject might over-hear, from their quickened sense of hearing. I called attention to this source of fallacy, and suggested that all future requests should be conveyed to M. Lassaigne in writing. This proposal was at once most readily acceded to; and she still continued to give proofs of her power of understanding M. Lassaigne,—although both myself, and others near me, observed, in certain instances, that suggestions were *now* given which were “not in the bond”—such

as, "you are near him," audibly expressed, before she gave the flower to the reporter—which was the order proposed on this occasion, and was to have been conveyed to the clairvoyante silently, and by the mere force of Mons. Las-saigne's will. At first she passed by the reporter, and went up to several other persons seated behind him, and fenced about as if she expected it should be some of them; but, at length, judging from their looks and manners that she was off the proper scent, she drew back and stood still for a little, as if quite at a loss what to do next; but the instant the words "you are near him" were audibly uttered, she turned round and gave the flower to the reporter, who was the person nearest to her at that moment. It was, therefore, easy for her to fix upon the reporter, seated at a table by himself, and near to where she was standing, when the audible suggestion was given regarding their proximity. A similar hesitation took place before giving a book to the proper person; so that, instead of what I saw, being *clear* seeing, I considered it *dim* seeing and artful dodging. Moreover, Mons. L.'s mode of walking behind his clairvoyante when he wished her to advance, and standing still when she had gone to the extent desired, was a mode of suggestion which did not escape observation. When to all this is added the mode of giving suggestions through watching the eye of another, and signals communicated through slight movements felt and heard by the patient, though unobserved by the audience, there is no difficulty in comprehending how Mons. L. succeeded with almost all the experiments tried by him and his clairvoyante whilst I was in the room, without the possession by her of any supersentient gift of the nature which he alleged. Even Mons. Robin's experiments with the bell, with his blindfolded clairvoyante, were still more remarkable; and yet he avowed that they were done *entirely by collusion*, and by means so simple, too, that he could scarcely restrain himself from laughing outright when thinking of the ease with which the audience could be deceived by those experiments.

But now arrived the experiment which I considered by far the most interesting of all on the programme, viz., playing at cards and reading, when her eyes were to be so securely blindfolded that not a ray of light could reach them, in the common acceptation of the term. To effect this, folds of

cotton wadding were placed across the forehead, eyes, and nose, and over the face as far as the point of the nose, and then a white handkerchief folded several times, so as to be about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, was bound round the head and eyes, so as to maintain the cotton in its place. This done, M. Lassaigne triumphantly asked any one to examine his subject, and say whether it was *possible* for her to see through all this apparatus. Some one having exclaimed "no," the lady sat down at a table to challenge any one present to play a game at cards with her. Whilst they were making arrangements for the game, even without being mesmerised, I was sufficiently clairvoyant to observe the lady pensively lay her face upon her hands, so as to enable her very conveniently, and *by mere accident no doubt*, to give the proper twist and finish to the apparatus for *excluding* light from her eyes. I observed this manœuvre by the lady *twice*, and called the attention of some friends to it, who can also testify to the fact. The clairvoyante now became very lively; described the personal appearance of her opponent, played dexterously, and beat him. She also did the same by another gentleman who tried a round with her; and with a third gentleman, a friend of my own, who, by my suggestion, had taken a *new* pack of cards with him, she proved her power of describing his personal appearance correctly, and playing well, but she lost on this occasion from having bad cards.

As the lady was now considered to have proved her clairvoyant powers to the satisfaction of all present, I stepped forward and announced my desire to have the privilege of applying a test which would be far more satisfactory to *my* mind, because I had no confidence in the supposed efficacy of the blindfolding then in use, for effectually accomplishing what it professed to do. I told the audience that I felt convinced that the patient was seeing through interstices between the cotton and the face, near the side of the nose. My proposal for guarding against such a source of fallacy as this, was simply to place a thin sheet of brown card board under her chin and round her neck, so as to guard against the possibility of the deception which I suspected. This I intended to have accomplished by tying the sheet of pasteboard around her neck, proceeding from the bottom of the throat upwards in a conical form, after the fashion of the Elizabethan frill, extending considerably higher than the head, so as to prevent

the possibility of her raising her hands or lowering her head sufficiently for seeing over it, without exciting the attention of the audience. Indeed, whoever had had the opportunity of observing the clairvoyante, as I did, during this card scene, must have felt that he would be permitting an insult to be perpetrated upon himself and upon the whole audience, were he not to endeavour to expose what appeared to me to be such an absurd farce. I was aware that my test would be objected to, on the ground that she did not profess to read *through card board* (although I must confess my surprise that a person who can see and read through stone or brick walls, should not be competent to penetrate through thin card board), so I, therefore, offered to remove that objection, by cutting out a piece of the card board, and covering the hole with the cotton wadding and folded handkerchief, which *she actually professed to see through*; but, although the audience were almost unanimous in their opinion that my proposed test was a fair one, and such as they wished to see tried, M. Lassaigne well knew that it was too certain and obvious a mode of testing to answer his purpose, and, therefore, under various pretexts, and in a most rude manner, he obstinately refused to try it. I therefore withdrew from the platform and left the room, feeling the force of the remark,—“*Ex uno, disce omnes.*”

Had Mr. Lassaigne, like M. Robin, admitted that his feats were done by ingeniously contrived collusion, I should have considered it perfectly fair for him to refuse submitting to any mode of testing which might destroy the interest of his *future* public exhibitions. Here, however, we had a different sort of pretensions to deal with, for M. Lassaigne represented that there was no collusion in the matter, but that all was accomplished by supersentient gifts imparted to his patient by his mesmerising processes. According to this notion, that the mind of the subject could hold intercourse with the outer world without the aid of the physical organs required for such purposes during the waking condition, I consider the audience not only had a right to expect, but to *demand*, that they should have satisfactory proof adduced, that all chance of the subject deceiving us by using her natural physical organs of sight, hearing, feeling, and smell, when we thought these excluded, should be clearly demonstrated to be impossible, under existing circumstances. Such was the sole purport of my

test, which was perfectly fair, and would not have been refused had she really possessed the power alleged; for, be it observed, I was willing to cut a hole in the pasteboard, and cover it merely with the wadding and handkerchief which she really *professed to see through*; that is, to take them off the eyes and cover the aperture in the mask with the *same materials*. Inasmuch, then, as the objects to be seen and described and the light were still to remain in the same relative position to the eyes, wherein existed a difference between the mode she professed and the one I suggested—unless in the facility for deceiving us by the *former* mode, and the impossibility of doing so by the latter?

At their first *séance* at Manchester, on the 24th of February, 1852, a gentleman went prepared to test the lady's power of reading without seeing through interspaces. He had written a short sentence from a French book, in a plain hand, and folded and enclosed it in a common letter envelope, so that, including the envelope, four folds of paper would have required to be read through. The gentleman has written to me, and enclosed the test unopened. After detailing various alleged clairvoyant feats done by the lady, such as playing at cards, and reading written words with the eyes covered with cotton and a handkerchief, he adds, "When these experiments were concluded, I rose and said,—Now that the balls of cotton and the cloth are removed from the lady's eyes, will she read a few words, plainly written, on a slip of paper, and enclosed in a common envelope? 'No,' replied the interpreter, 'that is a very difficult experiment.' 'But some of Dr. —'s patients have done it.' 'It cannot be done, except light falls in some way on the words to be read.' 'O!' said a gentleman in another part of the hall, 'that throws *light* on the proceedings.' I was of the same opinion, and did not again interfere."

This gentleman's test was really not a very severe one, had she possessed any remarkable quickness of vision, for I find that, with the aid of *transmitted* light, I can myself see to read the writing through *two* folds of the paper, and surely *four* folds ought not to be impossible for a clairvoyante who pretends to see through stone or brick walls innumerable, or even through mountains, and to the other side of the globe, or what is being transacted by living men or their departed spirits, throughout any part of illimitable space? Middle.

Prudence Bernard, moreover, had the double chance of reading the silent *thoughts* of the *writer*, which was one of her *professed feats*.* *

As my object in attending Mons. L.'s *séance* was neither simply to be amused, nor to be deceived by mere illusions, but to investigate what was proposed for our consideration with some degree of philosophical accuracy—although a public platform is by no means a favourable place for doing so—when I found the latter was to be peremptorily denied us, I could not condescend to remain and countenance a mere *sham* investigation, which might be set forth to the world, hereafter, as having been exhibited before me and not demurred to. Had fair and full investigation been permitted, there were several other experiments in the programme which I wished to have tested, with as much accuracy as a public platform would have permitted; but I must have a fair field and no favour when testing, or totally decline being a party to any proposed scientific, but merely *sham*, investigation.

I understand, moreover, that, after I had left the room, it

* Many years ago reports were published of a remarkably clairvoyant boy, in _____, who could see through a mask of nine folds of silk stuffed with cotton wadding. Through all this his optics were said to enable him to penetrate, when mesmerised; so that he could play cards and read any book, or print new from the press, more fluently and elegantly than when awake. I wrote to the gentleman whose book this account appeared in, told him what I suspected, and how he was deceived. He could not believe it possible to trick him, and the hundreds of respectable people who had seen the boy, in the manner I supposed; but offered me an opportunity of testing him, by a friend who was visiting that city. The boy having played cards dexterously, as usual, with his mask on, my friend took him in hand according to the plan suggested by me, which was—to guard against interspaces near the nose. The boy read the superscription of my letter to him, then opened it and read on with fluency; but the moment my friend placed his card over the writing, or below the nose, the clairvoyance was gone—but returned when he withdrew it, the same with a sheet of paper interposed; and, finally, by carrying his hand, holding the letter, sufficiently high to prevent any ray of light getting to the eye by the side of the nose, it was a dead pause, without covering the writing with any substance. This opened the eyes and understanding of all present to the source of fallacy through which they had been deceived; and they wrote and begged I would not publish the case, because the boy's father was such a respectable man, being one of the town council. I consider that Mademoiselle Prudence Bernard was clairvoyant on the evening when I saw her through the same means, and the object of my test was simply to prove this to be a fact.

was represented to the audience that Mons. Lassaigne had been so polite as to invite me to his *séance*, and that, in return for that kindness, I had rudely come and interrupted the harmony of the meeting. The audience must, naturally, have inferred from this, that Mons. Lassaigne had presented me with a free ticket of admission, but such was not the case. The only civility of the sort which I am aware of was this—that one of his circulars was left at my house, as they were at other houses in Manchester, in order to tempt me to go and pay the usual admission fee, which I did pay, and therefore was under no such obligation to Mons. Lassaigne as he wished the audience to believe.

From my anxious desire to guard against every chance of misrepresenting, in any respect whatever, what really occurred at said *séance* of Mons. Lassaigne, before going to press, I submitted a proof of the above narrative to the inspection of three of the most intelligent gentlemen who engaged in testing Mdlle. Prudence Bernard, that evening, who are ready to vouch for its accuracy on *every point*.

In conclusion, I would beg leave only farther to observe, that the advanced state of physical and chemical science has now enabled us to explain, on scientific principles, many phenomena which, in former days, were looked upon as the results of Magic and Witchcraft. When to these are added the peculiar manifestations of nervous diseases, and the power of imagination, sympathy, imitation, predominant ideas, easy credulity, fixed attention, habit, and suggestion in all its various forms, in changing or modifying mental and physical phenomena in many individuals, even in the waking condition, and their almost unlimited control over those who pass into the second-conscious stage of hypnotism—as explained in the foregoing pages—the whole of the well-ascertained apparent marvels of Magic, Witchcraft, Animal Magnetism, Hypnotism, Electro-Biology, Crystal-seeing, &c., become level to our apprehension, and admit of explanation without violating any of the recognised laws of physiology and psychology.