

During the past winter he experienced a severe attack of illness, which at one time it was thought would prove fatal, but Richard appears now to be almost himself again. It will be remembered by the reader, that to Wagner was given

the honor of composing a grand centennial march, which was performed at the opening of our Exposition in 1876. For this piece, of which little is heard nowadays, the author received the sum of five thousand dollars.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUPERSTITION.

I AM not naturally credulous, but so far from pluming myself upon the absence of this quality, I meet the fact with a sort of tender regret. I come from the old Pilgrim stock (the Primes), who could never take anything upon trust, but must always be able to give a reason for the faith that was in them, and, therefore, have been rather of the Doubting-Thomas order; whereas, I consider the child-like faith and lovingness of John as belonging to a far finer order of character.

Superstition is the blind side of Faith, and I would a great deal rather believe too much than too little. In justice to myself, let me say, I have not that mean, distrustful nature, that inclines one to doubt the fidelity of friends, and which imputes interested or unworthy motives to the friendly demonstrations of others. I am never jealous, never suspicious. I am apt to think that people say no more than what they mean, and truly feel. If they praise me I am apt to think I deserve it, at least in their estimation, and I take their reproaches with a like simplicity.

All this does not apply to the kind of credulity of which I wish to speak, which applies more properly to what is popularly called superstition; a belief in the occult, spiritual, or supernatural. On this ground, where most of persons behold what is strange or unnatural, I am apt to see a beautiful fact in Nature, vouchsafed to the few, but which, in the progress of human development, will become an ordinary experience.

Does any one doubt that the process of civilized culture is gradually evolving finer intuitions, a higher moral sense, and

a more Christ-like tenderness and sympathy; and does it not thence follow, that faculties once in a rudimentary state have grown to be leading characteristics; the brute, man, rising to the spiritual, intelligent being? We now behold the things that pertain to the Spirit, as in a glass, darkly; but in process of growth we shall see face to face, and be no more surprised when beautiful creatures, who have laid aside the garniture of earth, as an outworn garment, come to greet us, and sit down by our side, or walk with us by the wayside; than we now are at the visit of friends to us from a journey, or making neighborly calls upon us, of our friends and acquaintances.

Even the Gradgrinds of science, who decry the human tendency to superstition, and scout at the idea of accepting as truth, what they call the "crude Jewish teachings, wrought out in the infancy of science," can not deprive us of the *natural* inferences to be deduced from the stony gifts they offer us in lieu of bread. Grant that our religious ideas have come to us when Geology and all other sciences were unknown, it should be remembered that the Scriptures do not teach any scientific system, but are addressed to the moral and spiritual nature of man, and in the abstract it does not matter whether they come from a small or large section of the world as known in history; the only question being, do they teach as they pretend to teach? Do they bring us a certain oracle? Do they aid our aspiration, and purify our hearts? Are they the best inculcations of wisdom for the guidance of just such beings as they propose to teach and guide; or would the world be better if

thoroughly convinced that all our moral ideas were gradually evolved from the slowly-expanding brain of a monkey; and that the far-off Lawgiver, in the silence of the Eternities, has never revealed a Fatherly face to the creature thus produced? Never affirmed the justness of ideas so laboriously reached; never revealed to him His eternal will and pleasure?

Suppose we are evolved from a higher race of monkey, surely the creature, when he first held his head erect, and dropped the caudal appendage, must have exclaimed by instinct: "It is never too late to mend!" But I do not see how, without a revelation, the creature could ever get hold of a single abstract idea! How, after ages upon ages of chattering and screaming; cracking nuts and eating birds' eggs, he should reach the grand idea of gravitation, of the infinitude of suns and stars, or be able to snatch the lightnings, and make them propel him through seas and over mountains, and convey his thoughts under oceans and over continents—far less reach that most ennobling of all our ideas, that of a life beyond the physical life of this present world. It seems to me that man, without a revelation, would indeed be cast a hopeless waif upon the quicksands of time.

Still, if Darwin will have it so, and all our ideas have been the slow growth of necessity, if man *has* through the myriads of ages developed thus much; has already mastered matter, and plucked out the mystery of being; has become capable of law and order, science and aspiration; has evolved spiritual, no less than material ideas; even following up the idea of evolvment, there is no limit to progress, no limit to development, and a creature who has mastered one world *has earned his right to another*; and in proportion as he has outgrown the natural body, he has developed into the spiritual body, and the natural evolvment is a soul, and a Soul-Life.

Thus, even in the least acceptable theory, we reach the conclusions we reach through a revelation of God to His

creature, namely, an Immortality. We also perceive that the natural development must be on the side of what is highest in sentiment, and most spiritual in idea; and hence it will be as natural hereafter to see, upon occasion, groups of those of whom Milton sang:

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."

All this I fully believe, and I have tried to believe in, and sympathize with, the so-called Spiritualists. I wish I could do so without questioning. I am ashamed of my lack of faith and sympathy, but, because they do not see much that I see, and as I see, I am apt to treat the matter coldly. I shrink from their pretentiousness, their rhapsodies, and revelations from the dead, in every point of view inferior to the ordinary expression by the same individuals while they were denizens of this terrestrial sphere. I admit that all may be true, but I do not see the utility of wasting ourselves over what seems of a retrograde character.

It may be that vast numbers of persons who leave this world wander about its confines in a sort of Limbo, driven, as Dante saw, "like feathers before the wind," or such as Milton describes, as too vile for heaven, and short of the vileness of hell; characterless, aimless beings upon earth, they can hardly be "clothed upon" in the world of spirits. I have an idea that these weak and bodiless beings, having more of terrestrial instinct than spiritual aspiration, linger for a time near the earth and suffer torment from a perpetual desire to communicate with, and participate in, scenes and companionships with which they no longer possess the organs necessary for such intercourse; hence, when by means of any of the more subtle elements, such as electricity, they are able to make themselves known to persons in the flesh, they will do so, and assume any name desired by the consultant. They are not the spirits of those whom they pretend to represent, who may have long since passed onward to a higher sphere, but pretenders to the same, and hence they, from their false-

ness and weakness, give us but a poor simulation of the language and opinions of those whom they pretend to be.

I have before me communications purporting to come from Margaret Fuller, Felicia Hemans, L. E. L., my honored mother, Plato, and the "poor Indian," who is made to father so much nonsense, and who professes unbounded admiration of my character, etc. St. John has written me, and apostles and martyrs. Now, I do not believe all this to be collusion, falsehood, a mere delusion. I believe there are atoms of truth in all delusions, which will hereafter be better understood.

We do not half enough reverence the body, and I remember how my beautiful son, Edward, who possessed a mind of great purity and tenderness, would often quote, "Know ye not that your bodies are the temple for the Holy Ghost to dwell in?" and his life and death accorded with this high sentiment. We are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made." A medical writer has lately asserted that the ecstasies and spiritual visions of St. Theresa were in fact an "unconscious exaltation of the reproductive organs;" grant that it may be so, I do not see that it renders her state of mind and her life any the less wonderful or beautiful; it only points to a deeper and a holier mystery of being; intimates that there is more in marriage than is yet comprehended—that unchastity is a more fearful crime than is yet accounted for; that errors springing from impurity of mind and consequent action, are deeper in their significance than we have yet learned, and drag down the soul to depths of earthliness and degradation, just in proportion to that sanctity of person, as in the case of St. Theresa, which is able to lift us up to divine visions. It but shows that the companionship of the "natural body" and the "spiritual body" is more intimate, and of a deeper foreshadowing than we are apt to think.

I like to read of the superstitions of different people, and see how they are gloomy or cheerful, just in proportion to

the wildness or loveliness of the aspect of nature about them, or the asceticism of their religious ideas, or otherwise.

Thus, in some parts of Germany, the Will-o'-the-Wisp is supposed to be the souls of unbaptized children, who thus flit from place to place till some pious hand shall sprinkle them with consecrated water, when they are able at once to find rest!

In Denmark the Will-o'-the-Wisp is supposed to be the souls of unjust and extortionate land-owners, who are condemned forever to measure off land with red-hot iron rods.

In these northern countries, also, is to be found the Khobold, which sometimes takes the shape of a black cat, and even of a calf with *fiery eyes*; which are known to be Khobolds by antics peculiar to themselves, and a disposition to tease untidy house-maids, or inhospitable householders, when they will sometimes appear in the shape of a blue flame in the stove, which will burst out and scatter the ashes over the kitchen.

In Friesland and Jutland they call him a Puk. The North American Indians have the word Puck-wudjies, which were a sort of woodland sprites, not unlike those described by Shakespeare, and it is most likely that the great dramatist obtained the word from these Indians, through Sir Walter Raleigh. They are more erratic and mischievous than the good household Brownie, which sometimes takes up his abode in a favorite family, and though invisible, makes himself known in various ways, by pinching and bruising the maids who neglect their work and keep a dirty house; on the contrary, when the maids set a bowl of milk for them after sweeping the hearth clean at night, they drive away evil spirits, make the bread light, and the cream to rise thick in the pans of milk; and when the tired girl nods at her work they finish it up while she sleeps; and rock the cradle of the sick child while the poor anxious mother is beguiled to slumber.

The Brownie seems to answer to the

classical Lares or Penates, those beneficent deities who presided over the hearthstone of the ancients, and to whom was allotted a bit of bread and fruit daily; the Hindoos of the lower caste, and the Chinese, have a like order of spirits, before whom they daily place a few grains of rice. These beliefs and customs are the initiative faith in a daily providence, and a superintending daily beneficent power, which the Christian recognizes in the grace before meat.

Time was when children shuddered at the recital of a ghost-story, and were afraid in the dark, and their elders shook in their shoes at an unwonted appearance at midnight of an object in white. Times are changed now; the goriest ghost has ceased to be a bugbear. Whole communities are on the alert for the very shapes that once inspired terror. People have learned through science that the *death-tic* is a bug, and the owl may screech his throat out and inspire no dread, so intent are all upon discovering ghosts in the creak of a table or the flutter of a curtain. If the Banshee should scream at the chamber-window now, thousands would little heed it, or would rejoice at the manifestation. The thumping, rattling spook that infested the paternal roof of the great founder of Methodism, is completely eclipsed by the rapping spirits of the present day. Spirits are thick as blackberries; every family has its medium, and have their bell-ringers and rappers, so that it is difficult to know which is the street-door, and which is the ghost. Little boys talk as coolly about spirits as about a top, and little girls name their dolls after children in the spirit-world. The earth seems to have been invaded by a perfect swarm of spirits, "thick as leaves in Vallombrosa," and now a ghost-story, so far from exciting awe, is received with a sense of thankfulness, and considered a refreshing.

What then? Are we to look upon all this as delusion? as an imposture? By no means. There must be recognized therein the wonderful diffusion of the Scriptural idea of "ministering spirits,"

as taught by the Christ, as sung by Milton, and the poets, from Shakespeare down; and as elaborated by that most wonderful man, Swedenborg. It is nothing new, nothing more than an extension and deepening of the old Socratic idea of an attendant genius; of the warning of Brutus, "Meet me at Philippi"; of the experience of a thousand saints and martyrs, who saw celestial faces beaming upon them in their hour of agony.

True, these modern manifestations have not the prestige of remoteness and dignity, but that does not militate against a vast amount of truth and reality involved therein. I think too well of our humanity to believe that such vast multitudes are practicing a deception. I do not call it a new religion. I think the spiritual idea has become involved in much that is lascivious, and to be reprehended—ignorant people who will not and can not accept the awe-inspiring inspirations of Job, or the rapt visions of Isaiah, or the pure and comforting teachings of Jesus, will bow down in admiration of the crude rhapsodies of some medium, who may or may not be entranced while uttering a jargon of platitudes.

But let us not be too critical; let us believe all that it is possible to believe; and in the course of time the positive truth contained in all this will be made to appear, and the chaff will be rejected. As at present found, it may not meet a need of yours or mine, but it comforts many dear, simple souls.

To illustrate what I have said, I might quote some of the poetry addressed to me. Many of my readers are familiar with the fine utterances of Amelia B. Welby; now I have more than one communication from her, who seemed the very soul of melody, and from Frances S. Osgood, that lovely child of song, but all are so crude, so disjointed, that I reject them, and believe they come from one of those poor, flighty spirits, who assumed their name; in that case the expression is most likely an advance on their part, while it would seem to be ret-

rograde if really coming from those gifted women who are purported to have written them.

I am willing to believe that celestial poetry is unlike terrestrial; am willing to believe that the rules of Lindley Murray have not penetrated to the seventh heaven; that the cherubs are not bothered with orthography, logic, or rhetoric, but I must believe that thought, harmony, beauty, are progressive, and that to remove impediments is to place us in diviner affinities; hence those women who struck so melodious a harp while bodily with us, would, if permitted to revisit this mundane sphere, afford us gushes of melody such as would enrich and enchant our earth-wearied senses.

Alas! these communications, purporting to emanate from such a source, are but a miserable rigmarole, devoid of aspiration or any nobleness of thought. I am pre-Raphaelite enough to accept a good idea, even though faulty in execution, but I must reject what is unredeemed by a single poetic idea.

To say that I have been greatly flattered by Mediums of various kinds, would but poorly express the sentiment of my heart in this matter, for, looking upon the whole as involving the elements of truth, though as yet but imperfectly revealed, as an evidence of the partially evolved spiritual organs, these revelations addressed to me assume a sacredness and solemnity.

Often at the close of one of my lectures before a Lyceum or Literary Association, my hand has been grasped by some attentive listener with solemn aspect and weird, sunken eyes, who whispered in my ear: "You are a Medium; all the time you spoke I saw a halo of light around your head."

This is certainly a very beautiful tribute, and that must be a weak, vain mind that would receive it other than reverently.

Again, I have been warned, that, being a Medium, I was "resisting the light, guilty of great wrong, exposing myself to the loss of power, and health, and utter-

ance, if I did not accept the mediumship so forced upon me."

Indeed, I was like the miserable Caliban, so fearfully threatened by the potent Prospero:

"For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side stitches, that shall pen the breath up; urchins
Shall, for that part of the night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honey-combs, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made them. . . .
If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches."——

Perhaps I am not entirely deficient in that development of the brain, which brings us into a certain relationship with the hidden mysteries of Nature, but I have always forborne so to exercise such faculties, that they would become urgent, and thus, perhaps, render me less alive to those actualities of life which the relations of wife and mother require in this world. Having assumed these relations, every woman is bound to carry them out with the utmost conscientiousness, and the best common-sense, pertaining to her, which can by no means be affected in that dreamy, irresponsible state belonging to the spiritual mediumship so called.

For instance, I have often been in that exalted aspect of the eye that I could see objects in total darkness, read, note the position of books, furniture, etc., this too while in perfect health. At these times the human body is to me transparent, and I note any lesions, any abnormal condition, and have prescribed with great success. I have felt and realized presentiments, and my dreams have been true fore-shadows. Certainly some of these have been peculiar.

For instance, I lately dreamed that I was traveling—that I saw a country most lovely to behold; mountains and valleys through which crystal waters flowed, the banks being lined with rose-blossoms; trees waved their tall branches, and fountains of purest waters leaped from the hill-side. Colonnades of marble festooned with vines gleamed in the softest light, soothing the senses to repose. I was en-

chanted with all I beheld, and yet I saw no human face. I had a sense of companionship, and was by no means lonely; on the contrary, I was conscious of a feeling of indescribable peace and happiness.

At length my companion seemed to say, "It is time for you to go back."

I re-entered my chamber; I saw the pillows of my bed, the quilt, the book upon my table, the extinguished lamp, and said to him of whom I have a distinct recollection, "Where is my body? where can my body be?" and immediately I saw it sleeping, with one hand under my cheek, as is my wont; and I whispered again, quite confidentially, "There, I have slipped in, but I came pretty near losing the chance;" and immediately I felt myself to be alone and awake. I was in perfect health, and experienced no inconvenience from having left the body for a brief journey to the unseen land.

I believe there is some mystery connected with all spiritual manifestations, by which persons lose sight, for at least the time being, of *human moral obligations*. I have observed that those who devote themselves to them have a strong tendency to exaggeration, if not falsehood. Surprised, gratified, and elated by what seems extraordinary, the imagination takes the lead, and the merest trifle assumes enlarged dimensions; vague intimations are exalted and magnified quite beyond their intrinsic value, just as children magnify events, and with their immature judgment make a mountain out of a mole hill.

This is natural, for the spiritual organs are yet in their infancy, and they can as yet learn only the A, B, and C of the spiritual language. I have heard conscientious persons acknowledge and deplore this wayward tendency, and eventually refrain from the exercise of a faculty so little to be regulated.

There is no doubt that such is the weakness of this undeveloped, rudimentary organ, that no sooner does an indi-

vidual perceive in himself one inlet of light denied to his fellows than he is seized with an unaccountable and childish tendency to exaggerate it, and thus runs the hazard of extinguishing altogether the divine ray, and of plunging himself and others also into the quagmire of falsehood and delusion. He will have this spark to become a flame; he will convert the star, just trembling upon the horizon of a human soul, into a great, burning sun, to amaze the beholder. He loses the simplicity of truth by making her the mere creature of noise and wonderment.

This has always been the case in every general advance of the human faculties. A multitude of delusive elements swarm in, and gross, perverted, unhallowed sensualities come in to cast suspicion and reproach upon all connected therewith; but at length a generation goes by, the judgment of the times becomes awakened, and the grain of truth is separated from the mountain of falsehood, and the ever advancing mind accepts it, and casts the delusive chaff to the winds. So has it been in all ages, and one superstition after another yields to the superior light of science, just as moles, and bats, and owls retire to their dim hiding-places before the resplendent rays of the rising sun.

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH.

SPRING.

WINTER has risen to bid his gruff good-bye.

I feel the first warm touches of the sun.

As of a mother's hand when work is done.

I hear the first lark's anthem in the sky;

I watch the great white clouds go flying by;

I note the flowers awaking one by one;

And soft airs whisper, "Summer is begun!"

O how the soul leaps up exultingly,

As it would break its heavy prison-bar!

And man seems dearer, God seems nearer, far,
For this is truth, deny it how we may—

That light and darkness make us what we are.

We are the creatures of our moods, and they

Are creatures of the clear or cloudy day.

E. W. HOWSON.