LETTERS

ON

DEMONOLOGY AND WITCHCRAFT

ADDRESSED TO

J. G. LOCKHART, ESQ.

BY

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

LETTERS

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Origin of the general Opinions respecting Demonology among Mankind —The Belief in the Immortality of the Soul is the main Inducement to credit its occasional Reappearance—The philosophical Objections to the Apparition of an abstract Spirit little understood by the Vulgar and Ignorant—The Situations of excited Passion incident to Humanity, which teach Men to wish or apprehend supernatural Apparitions— They are often presented by the sleeping Sense—Story of Somnambulism—The Influence of Credulity contagious, so that Individuals will trust the Evidence of others in despite of their own Senses— Examples from the Historia Verdadera of Bernal Dias del Castillo, and from the Works of Patrick Walker—The apparent Evidence of Intercourse with the supernatural World is sometimes owing to a depraved State of the bodily Organs—Difference between this Disorder and Insanity, in which the Organs retain their Tone, though that of the Mind is lost—Rebellion of the Senses of a Lunatic against the Current of his Reveries—Narratives of a contrary Nature, in which the Evidence of the Eyes overbore the Conviction of the Understanding—Example of a London Man of Pleasure—Of Nicolai, the German Bookseller and Philosopher—Of a Patient of Dr. Gregory— Of an eminent Scottish Lawyer deceased—Of this same fallacious Disorder are other Instances, which have but sudden and momentary Endurance—Apparition of Maupertuis—Of a late illustrious modern Poet—The Cases quoted chiefly relating to false Impressions on the visual Nerve, those upon the Ear next considered—Delusions of the Touch chiefly experienced in Sleep—Delusions of the Taste—and of the Smelling—Sum of the Argument.

You have asked of me, my dear friend, that I should assist the Family Library, with the history of a dark chapter in human nature, which the increasing civilization of all well-instructed countries has now almost blotted out, though the subject attracted no

ordinary degree of consideration in the older times of their history.

Among much reading of my early days, it is no doubt true that I travelled a good deal in the twilight regions of superstitious disquisitions. Many hours have I lost,—"I would their debt were less!"—in examining old, as well as more recent narratives of this character, and even in looking into some of the criminal trials so frequent in early days, upon a subject which our fathers considered as matter of the last importance. And, of late years, the very curious extracts published by Mr. Pitcairn, from the criminal Records of Scotland, are, besides their historical value, of a nature so much calculated to illustrate the credulity of our ancestors on such subjects, that, by perusing them, I have been induced more recently to recall what I had read and thought upon the subject at a former period.

As, however, my information is only miscellaneous, and I make no pretensions, either to combat the systems of those by whom I am anticipated in consideration of the subject, or to erect any new one of my own, my purpose is, after a general account of Demonology and Witchcraft, to confine myself to narratives of remarkable cases, and to the observations which naturally and easily arise out of them;—in the confidence that such a plan is, at the present time of day, more likely to suit the pages of a popular miscellany, than an attempt to reduce the contents of many hundred tomes, from the largest to the smallest size, into an abridgment, which, however compressed, must remain greatly too large for the reader's powers of patience.

A few general remarks on the nature of Demonology, and the original cause of the almost universal belief in communication between mortals and beings of a power superior to themselves, and of a nature not to be comprehended by human organs, are a necessary introduction to the subject.

The general or, it may be termed, the universal belief of the inhabitants of the earth, in the existence of spirits separated from the encumbrance and incapacities of the body, is grounded on the consciousness of the divinity that speaks in our bosoms, and demonstrates to all men, except the few who are hardened to the celestial voice, that there is within us a portion of the divine substance, which is not subject to the law of death and dissolution, but which, when the body is no longer fit for its abode, shall seek its own place, as a sentinel dismissed from his post. Unaided by revelation, it cannot be hoped that mere earthly reason should be able to form any rational or precise conjecture concerning the destination of the soul when parted from the body; but the conviction that such an indestructible essence exists, the belief expressed by the poet in a different sense, *Non omnis moriar*, must infer the existence of many millions of spirits, who have not been annihilated, though they have become invisible to mortals who still see, hear, and perceive only by means of the imperfect organs of humanity. Probability may lead some of the most reflecting to anticipate a state of future rewards and punishments; as those experienced in the education of the deaf and dumb find that their pupils, even while cut off from all instruction by ordinary means, have been able to form, out of their own unassisted conjectures, some ideas of the existence of a Deity, and of the distinction between the soul and body—a circumstance which proves how naturally these truths arise in the human mind. The principle that they do so arise, being taught or communicated, leads to farther conclusions.

These spirits, in a state of separate existence, being admitted to exist, are not, it may be supposed, indifferent to the affairs of mortality, perhaps not incapable of influencing them. It is true, that, in a more advanced state of society, the philosopher may

challenge the possibility of a separate appearance of a disimbodied spirit, unless in the case of a direct miracle, to which, being a suspension of the laws of nature, directly wrought by the Maker of these laws, for some express purpose, no bound or restraint can possibly be assigned. But, under this necessary limitation and exception, philosophers might plausibly argue, that, when the soul is divorced from the body, it loses all those qualities which made it, when clothed with a mortal shape, obvious to the organs of its fellow-men. The abstract idea of a spirit certainly implies, that it has neither substance, form, shape, voice, or any thing which can render its presence visible or sensible to human faculties. But these skeptic doubts of philosophers on the possibility of the appearance of such separated spirits, do not arise till a certain degree of information has dawned upon a country, and even then only reach a very small proportion of reflecting and better informed members of society. To the multitude, the indubitable fact, that so many millions of spirits exist around and even among us, seems sufficient to support the belief that they are, in certain instances at least, by some means or other, able to communicate with the world of humanity. The more numerous part of mankind cannot form in their mind the idea of the spirit of the deceased existing, without possessing or having the power to assume the appearance which their acquaintance bore during his life, and do not push their researches beyond this point.

Enthusiastic feelings of an impressive and solemn nature occur both in private and public life, which seem to add ocular testimony to an intercourse between earth and the world beyond it. For example, the son who has been lately deprived of his father feels a sudden crisis approach, in which he is anxious to have recourse to his sagacious advice—or a bereaved husband earnestly desires again to behold the form of which the grave has deprived him for ever

—or, to use a darker yet very common instance, the wretched man who has dipped his hand in his fellow-creature's blood is haunted by the apprehension that the phantom of the slain stands by the bedside of his murderer. In all or any of these cases, who shall doubt that imagination, favoured by circumstances, has power to summon up to the organ of sight spectres which only exist in the mind of those by whom their apparition seems to be witnessed?

If we add, that such a vision may take place in the course of one of those lively dreams, in which the patient, except in respect to the single subject of one strong impression, is, or seems, sensible of the real particulars of the scene around him, a state of slumber which often occurs—if he is so far conscious, for example, as to know that he is lying on his own bed, and surrounded by his own familiar furniture, at the time when the supposed apparition is manifested—it becomes almost in vain to argue with the visionary against the reality of his dream, since the spectre, though itself purely fanciful, is inserted amid so many circumstances which he feels must be true beyond the reach of doubt or question. That which is undeniably certain becomes in a manner a warrant for the reality of the appearance to which doubt would have been otherwise attached. And if any event, such as the death of the person dreamed of, chances to take place, so as to correspond with the nature and the time of the apparition, the coincidence, though one which must be frequent, since our dreams usually refer to the accomplishment of that which haunts our minds when awake, and often presage the most probable events, seems perfect, and the chain of circumstances touching the evidence may not unreasonably be considered as complete. Such a concatenation, we repeat, must frequently take place, when it is considered of what stuff dreams are made —how naturally they turn upon those who occupy our mind while awake, and, when a soldier is exposed to

death in battle, when a sailor is incurring the dangers of the sea, when a beloved wife or relative is attacked by disease, how readily our sleeping imagination rushes to the very point of alarm, which when waking it had shuddered to anticipate. The number of instances in which such lively dreams have been quoted, and both asserted and received as spiritual communications, is very great at all periods; in ignorant times, where the natural cause of dreaming is misapprehended, and confused with an idea of mysticism, it is much greater. Yet perhaps, considering the many thousands of dreams which must, night after night, pass through the imagination of individuals, the number of coincidences between the vision and real event, is fewer and less remarkable than a fair calculation of chances would warrant us to expect. But in countries where such presaging dreams are subjects of attention, the number of those which seem to be coupled with the corresponding issue is large enough to spread a very general belief of a positive communication between the living and the dead.

Somnambulism and other nocturnal deceptions frequently lend their aid to the formation of such *phantasmata* as are formed in this middle state between sleeping and waking. A most respectable person, whose active life had been spent as master and part owner of a large merchant vessel in the Lisbon trade, gave the writer an account of such an instance which came under his observation. He was lying in the Tagus, when he was put to great anxiety and alarm, by the following incident and its consequences. One of his crew was murdered by a Portuguese assassin, and a report arose that the ghost of the slain man haunted the vessel. Sailors are generally superstitious, and those of my friend's vessel became unwilling to remain on board the ship, and it was probable they might desert rather than return to England with the ghost for a passenger

To prevent so great a calamity, the Captain determined to examine the story to the bottom. He soon found, that though all pretended to have seen lights, and heard noises, and so forth, the weight of the evidence lay upon the statement of one of his own mates, an Irishman and a Catholic, which might increase his tendency to superstition, but in other respects a veracious, honest, and sensible person, whom Captain —— had no reason to suspect would wilfully deceive him. He affirmed to Captain S——, with the deepest obtestations, that the spectre of the murdered man appeared to him almost nightly, took him from his place in the vessel, and, according to his own expression, worried his life out. He made these communications with a degree of horror, which intimated the reality of his distress and apprehensions. The Captain, without any argument at the time, privately resolved to watch the motions of the ghost-seer in the night; whether alone, or with a witness, I have forgotten. As the ship bell struck twelve, the sleeper started up, with a ghastly and disturbed countenance, and lighting a candle, proceeded to the galley or cook-room of the vessel. He sat down with his eyes open, staring before him as on some terrible object which he beheld with horror, yet from which he could not withhold his eyes. After a short space he arose, took up a tin can or decanter, filled it with water, muttering to himself all the while—mixed salt in the water, and sprinkled it about the galley. Finally, he sighed deeply, like one relieved from a heavy burden, and, returning to his hammock, slept soundly. In the next morning, the haunted man told the usual precise story of his apparition, with the additional circumstances, that the ghost had led him to the galley, but that he had fortunately, he knew not how, obtained possession of some holy water, and succeeded in getting rid of his unwelcome visiter. The visionary was then informed of the real transactions of the night, with so many particu

lars as to satisfy him he had been the dupe of his imagination; he acquiesced in his commander's reasoning, and the dream, as often happens in these cases, returned no more after its imposture had been detected. In this case, we find the excited imagination acting upon the half-waking senses, which were intelligent enough for the purpose of making him sensible where he was, but not sufficiently so as to judge truly of the objects before him.

But it is not private life alone, or that tenor of thought which has been depressed into melancholy by gloomy anticipations respecting the future, which disposes the mind to midday fantasies, or to nightly apparitions—a state of eager anxiety, or excited exertion, is equally favourable to the indulgence of such supernatural communications. The anticipation of a dubious battle, with all the doubt and uncertainty of its event, and the conviction that it must involve his own fate, and that of his country, was powerful enough to conjure up to the anxious eye of Brutus the spectre of his murdered friend Cesar, respecting whose death he perhaps thought himself less justified than at the Ides of March, since instead of having achieved the freedom of Rome, the event had only been the renewal of civil wars, and the issue might appear most likely to conclude in the total subjection of liberty. It is not miraculous, that the masculine spirit of Marcus Brutus, surrounded by darkness and solitude, distracted probably by recollection of the kindness and favour of the great individual whom he had put to death to avenge the wrongs of his country, though by the slaughter of his own friend, should at length place before his eyes in person the appearance which termed itself his evil Genius, and promised again to meet him at Philippi. Brutus's own intentions, and his knowledge of the military art, had probably long since assured him that the decision of the civil war must take place at or near that place: and, allowing that his own

imagination supplied that part of his dialogue with the spectre, there is nothing else which might not be fashioned in a vivid dream or a waking revery, approaching, in absorbing and engrossing character the usual matter of which dreams consist. That Brutus, well acquainted with the opinions of the Platonists, should be disposed to receive without doubt the idea that he had seen a real apparition, and was not likely to scrutinize very minutely the supposed vision, may be naturally conceived; and it is also natural to think, that although no one saw the figure but himself, his contemporaries were little disposed to examine the testimony of a man so eminent, by the strict rules of cross-examination and conflicting evidence, which they might have thought applicable to another person, and a less dignified occasion.

Even in the field of death, and amid the mortal tug of combat itself, strong belief has wrought the same wonder, which we have hitherto mentioned as occurring in solitude and amid darkness; and those who were themselves on the verge of the world of spirits, or employed in despatching others to these gloomy regions, conceived they beheld the apparitions of those beings whom their national mythology associated with such scenes. In such moments of undecided battle, amid the violence, hurry, and confusion of ideas incident to the situation, the ancients supposed that they saw their deities Castor and Pollux fighting in the van for their encouragement; the heathen Scandinavian beheld the Choosers of the slain; and the Catholics were no less easily led to recognise the warlike Saint George or Saint James in the very front of the strife, showing them the way to conquest. Such apparitions being generally visible to a multitude, have in all times been supported by the greatest strength of testimony. When the common feeling of danger, and the animating burst of enthusiasm, act on the feelings of many men at

once, their minds hold a natural correspondence with each other, as it is said is the case with stringed instruments tuned to the same pitch, of which, when one is played, the chords of the others are supposed to vibrate in unison with the tones produced. If an artful or enthusiastic individual exclaims, in the heat of action, that he perceives an apparition of the romantic kind which has been intimated, his companions catch at the idea with emulation, and most are willing to sacrifice the conviction of their own senses, rather than allow that they did not witness the same favourable emblem, from which all draw confidence and hope. One warrior catches the idea from another; all are alike eager to acknowledge the present miracle, and the battle is won before the mistake is discovered. In such cases, the number of persons present, which would otherwise lead to detection of the fallacy, becomes the means of strengthening it.

Of this disposition to see as much of the supernatural as is seen by others around, or, in other words, to trust to the eyes of others rather than to our own, we may take the liberty to quote two remarkable instances.

The first is from the *Historia Verdadera* of Don Bernal Dias del Castillo, one of the companions of the celebrated Cortez, in his Mexican conquest. After having given an account of a great victory over extreme odds, he mentions the report inserted in the contemporary Chronicle of Gomara, that Saint Iago had appeared on a white horse in van of the combat, and led on his beloved Spaniards to victory. It is very curious to observe the Castilian cavalier's internal conviction, that the rumour arose out of a mistake, the cause of which he explains from his own observation; while at the same time he does not venture to disown the miracle. The honest Conquestador owns, that he himself did not see this animating vision; nay, that he beheld an individua

cavalier, named Francisco de Morla, mounted on a chestnut horse, and fighting strenuously, in the very place where Saint James is said to have appeared. But instead of proceeding to draw the necessary inference, the devout Conquestador exclaims,—"Sinner that I am, what am I that I should have beheld the blessed apostle!"

The other instance of the infectious character of superstition occurs in a Scottish book, and there can be little doubt that it refers, in its first origin, to some uncommon appearance of the aurora borealis, or the northern lights, which do not appear to have been seen in Scotland so frequently as to be accounted a common and familiar atmospherical phenomenon, until the beginning of the eighteenth century. The passage is striking and curious, for the narrator, Peter Walker, though an enthusiast, was a man of credit, and does not even affect to have seen the wonders, the reality of which he unscrupulously adopts on the testimony of others, to whose eyes he trusted rather than to his own. The conversion of the skeptical gentleman of whom he speaks, is highly illustrative of popular credulity, carried away into enthusiasm, or into imposture, by the evidence of those around, and at once shows the imperfection of such a general testimony, and the ease with which it is procured, since the general excitement of the moment impels even the more cold-blooded and judicious persons present to catch up the ideas, and echo the exclamations, of the majority, who, from the first, had considered the heavenly phenomenon as a supernatural weapon-schaw, held for the purpose of a sign and warning of civil wars to come.

"In the year 1686, in the months of June and July," says the honest chronicler, "many yet alive can witness that about the Crossford Boat, two miles beneath Lanark, especially at the Mains, on the water of Clyde, many people gathered together

for several afternoons, where there were showers of bonnets, hats, guns, and swords, which covered the trees and the ground; companies of men in arms marching in order upon the water-side; companies meeting companies, going all through other, and then all falling to the ground and disappearing; other companies immediately appeared, marching the same way. I went there three afternoons together, and as I observed there were two-thirds of the people that were together saw, and a third that saw not, and *though I could see nothing*, there was such a fright and trembling on those that did see, that was discernible to all from those that saw not. There was a gentleman standing next to me, who spoke as too many gentlemen and others speak, who said, 'A pack of damned witches and warlocks that have the second sight! the devil ha't do I see;' and immediately there was a discernible change in his countenance. With as much fear and trembling as any woman I saw there, he called out, 'All you that do not see, say nothing; for I persuade you it is matter of fact, and discernible to all that are not stone-blind.' And those who did see told what works (*i. e.* locks) the guns had, and their length and wideness, and what handles the swords had, whether small or three-barred, or Highland guards, and the closing knots of the bonnets, black or blue; and those who did see them there, whenever they went abroad, saw a bonnet and a sword drop in the way."*

This singular phenomenon, in which a multitude believed, although only two-thirds of them saw what must, if real, have been equally obvious to all, may be compared with the exploit of a humorist, who planted himself in an attitude of astonishment with his eyes riveted on the well-known bronze lion that

* Walker's Lives, Edinburgh, 1827, vol. i. p. xxxvi. It is evident that honest Peter believed in the apparition of this martial gear, on the principle of Partridge's terror for the ghost of Hamlet—not that he was afraid himself, but because Garrick showed such evident marks of terror

graces the front of Northumberland-house in the Strand, and having attracted the attention of those who looked at him by muttering, "By Heaven, it wags!—it wags again!" contrived in a few minutes to blockade the whole street with an immense crowd, some conceiving that they had absolutely seen the lion of Percy wag his tail, others expecting to witness the same phenomenon.

On such occasions as we have hitherto mentioned, we have supposed that the ghost-seer has been in full possession of his ordinary powers of perception, unless in the case of dreamers, in whom they may have been obscured by temporary slumber, and the possibility of correcting vagaries of the imagination rendered more difficult by want of the ordinary appeal to the evidence of the bodily senses. In other respects, their blood beat temperately, they possessed the ordinary capacity of ascertaining the truth, or discerning the falsehood, of external appearances, by an appeal to the organ of sight. Unfortunately, however, as is now universally known and admitted, there certainly exists more than one disorder known to professional men, of which one important symptom is a disposition to see apparitions.

This frightful disorder is not properly insanity, although it is somewhat allied to that most horrible of maladies, and may, in many constitutions, be the means of bringing it on, and although such hallucinations are proper to both. The difference I conceive to be, that, in cases of insanity, the mind of the patient is principally affected, while the senses, or organic system, offer in vain to the lunatic their decided testimony against the fantasy of a deranged imagination. Perhaps the nature of this collision—between a disturbed imagination and organs of sense possessed of their usual accuracy—cannot be better described than in the embarrassment expressed by an insane patient con-

fined in the Infirmary of Edinburgh. The poor man's malady had taken a gay turn. The house, in his idea, was his own, and he contrived to account for all that seemed inconsistent with his imaginary right of property;—there were many patients in it, but that was owing to the benevolence of his nature, which made him love to see the relief of distress. He went little, or rather never abroad—but then his habits were of a domestic and rather sedentary character. He did not see much company—but he daily received visits from the first characters in the renowned medical school of this city, and he could not therefore be much in want of society. With so many supposed comforts around him—with so many visions of wealth and splendour, one thing alone disturbed the peace of the poor optimist, and would indeed have confounded most *bons vivans*,—"He was curious," he said, "in his table, choice in his selection of cooks, had every day a dinner of three regular courses and a dessert; and yet, somehow or other, every thing he eat *tasted of porridge*." This dilemma could be no great wonder to the friend to whom the poor patient communicated it, who knew the lunatic eat nothing but this simple aliment at any of his meals. The case was obvious; the disease lay in the extreme vivacity of the patient's imagination, deluded in other instances, yet not absolutely powerful enough to contend with the honest evidence of his stomach and palate, which, like Lord Peter's brethren in the Tale of a Tub, were indignant at the attempt to impose boiled oatmeal upon them, instead of such a banquet as Ude would have displayed when peers were to partake of it. Here, therefore, is one instance of actual insanity, in which the sense of taste controlled and attempted to restrain the ideal hypothesis adopted by a deranged imagination. But the disorder to which I previously alluded is entirely of a bodily character, and consists principally in a disease of the visual organs, which present to the

patient a set of spectres or appearances, which have no actual existence. It is a disease of the same nature, which renders many men incapable of distinguishing colours; only the patients go a step farther, and pervert the external form of objects. In their case, therefore, contrary to that of the maniac, it is not the mind, or rather the imagination, which imposes upon and overpowers the evidence of the senses, but the sense of seeing (or hearing) which betrays its duty, and conveys false ideas to a sane intellect.

More than one learned physician, who have given their attestations to the existence of this most distressing complaint, have agreed that it actually occurs, and is occasioned by different causes. The most frequent source of the malady is in the dissipated and intemperate habits of those who, by a continued series of intoxication, become subject to what is popularly called the Blue Devils, instances of which mental disorder may be known to most who have lived for any period of their lives in society where hard-drinking was a common vice. The joyous visions suggested by intoxication when the habit is first acquired, in time disappear, and are supplied by frightful impressions and scenes, which destroy the tranquillity of the unhappy debauchee. Apparitions of the most unpleasant appearance are his companions in solitude, and intrude even upon his hours of society; and when by an alteration of habits, the mind is cleared of these frightful ideas, it requires but the slightest renewal of the association to bring back the full tide of misery upon the repentant libertine.

Of this the following instance was told to the author by a gentleman connected with the sufferer. A young man of fortune, who had led what is called so gay a life as considerably to injure both his health and fortune, was at length obliged to consult the physician upon the means of restoring at least the former. One of his principal complaints was the

frequent presence of a set of apparitions, resembling a band of figures dressed in green, who performed in his drawing-room a singular dance, to which he was compelled to bear witness, though he knew, to his great annoyance, that the whole *corps de ballet* existed only in his own imagination. His physician immediately informed him that he had lived upon town too long and too fast not to require an exchange to a more healthy and natural course of life. He therefore prescribed a gentle course of medicine, but earnestly recommended to his patient to retire to his own house in the country, observe a temperate diet and early hours, practising regular exercise, on the same principle avoiding fatigue, and assured him that by doing so he might bid adieu to black spirits and white, blue, green, and gray, with all their trumpery. The patient observed the advice, and prospered. His physician, after the interval of a month, received a grateful letter from him, acknowledging the success of his regimen. The green goblins had disappeared, and with them the unpleasant train of emotions to which their visits had given rise, and the patient had ordered his town-house to be disfurnished and sold, while the furniture was to be sent down to his residence in the country, where he was determined in future to spend his life, without exposing himself to the temptations of town. One would have supposed this a well-devised scheme for health. But, alas! no sooner had the furniture of the London drawing-room been placed in order in the gallery of the old manor-house, than the former delusion returned in full force! the green *figurantes*, whom the patient's depraved imagination had so long associated with these moveables, came capering and frisking to accompany them, exclaiming with great glee, as if the sufferer should have been rejoiced to see them, "Here we all are—here we all are!" The visionary, if I recollect right, was so much shocked at their appearance, that he retired abroad, in despair that any part of Britain

could shelter him from the daily persecution of this domestic ballette.

There is reason to believe that such cases are numerous, and that they may perhaps arise, not only from the debility of stomach brought on by excess in wine or spirits, which derangement often sensibly affects the eyes and sense of sight, but also because the mind becomes habitually predominated over by a tram of fantastic visions, the consequence of frequent intoxication; and is thus, like a dislocated joint, apt again to go wrong, even when a different cause occasions the derangement.

It is easy to be supposed that habitual excitement by means of any other intoxicating drug, as opium, or its various substitutes, must expose those who practise the dangerous custom to the same inconvenience. Very frequent use of the nitrous oxide, which affects the senses so strongly, and produces a short but singular state of ecstasy, would probably be found to occasion this species of disorder. But there are many other causes which medical men find attended with the same symptom, of imbodying before the eyes of a patient imaginary illusions which are visible to no one else. This persecution of spectral deceptions is also found to exist when no excesses of the patient can be alleged as the cause, owing, doubtless, to a deranged state of the blood, or nervous system.

The learned and acute Dr. Ferriar, of Manchester, was the first who brought before the English public the leading case, as it may be called, in this department, namely, that of Mons. Nicolai, the celebrated bookseller of Berlin. This gentleman was not a man merely of books, but of letters, and had the moral courage to lay before the Philosophical Society of Berlin an account of his own sufferings, from having been, by disease, subjected to a series of spectral illusions. The leading circumstances of this case may be stated very shortly, as it has been repeatedly

before the public, and is insisted on by Dr. Ferriar, Dr. Hibbert, and others who have assumed Demonology as a subject. Nicolai traces his illness remotely to a series of disagreeable incidents which had happened to him in the beginning of the year 1791. The depression of spirit which was occasioned by these unpleasant occurrences was aided by the consequences of neglecting a course of periodical bleeding which he had been accustomed to observe. This state of health brought on the disposition to see *phantasmata*, who visited, or it may be more properly said frequented, the apartments of the learned bookseller, presenting crowds of persons who moved and acted before him, nay, even spoke to and addressed him. These phantoms afforded nothing unpleasant to the imagination of the visionary either in sight or expression, and the patient was possessed of too much firmness to be otherwise affected by their presence than with a species of curiosity, as he remained convinced, from the beginning to the end of the disorder, that these singular effects were merely symptoms of the state of his health, and did not in any other respect regard them as a subject of apprehension. After a certain time, and some use of medicine, the phantoms became less distinct in their outline, less vivid in their colouring, faded, as it were, on the eye of the patient, and at length totally disappeared.

The case of Nicolai has unquestionably been that of many whose love of science has not been able to overcome their natural reluctance to communicate to the public the particulars attending the visitation of a disease so peculiar. That such illnesses have been experienced, and have ended fatally, there can be no doubt; though it is by no means to be inferred, that the symptom of importance to our present discussion has, on all occasions, been produced from the same identical cause.

Dr. Hibbert, who has most ingeniously, as well as philosophically, handled this subject, has treated it

also in a medical point of view, with science to which we make no pretence, and a precision of detail to which our superficial investigation affords us no room for extending ourselves.

The visitation of spectral phenomena is described by this learned gentleman as incidental to sundry complaints; and he mentions, in particular, that the symptom occurs not only in plethora, as in the case of the learned Prussian we have just mentioned, but is a frequent hectic sympton—often an associate of febrile and inflammatory disorders—frequently accompanying inflammation of the brain—a concomitant also of highly excited nervous irritability—equally connected with hypochondria—and finally, united in some cases with gout, and in others with the effects of excitation produced by several gases. In all these cases there seems to be a morbid degree of sensibility, with which this symptom is ready to ally itself, and which though inaccurate as a medical definition, may be held sufficiently descriptive of one character of the various kinds of disorder with which this painful symptom may be found allied.

A very singular and interesting illustration of such combinations as Dr. Hibbert has recorded of the spectral illusion with an actual disorder, and that of a dangerous kind, was frequently related in society by the late learned and accomplished Dr. Gregory, of Edinburgh, and sometimes, I believe, quoted by him in his lectures. The narrative, to the author's best recollection, was as follows:—A patient of Dr. Gregory, a person, it is understood, of some rank, having requested the Doctor's advice, made the following extraordinary statement of his complaint. "I am in the habit," he said, "of dining at five, and exactly as the hour of six arrives, I am subjected to the following painful visitation. The door of the room, even when I have been weak enough to bolt it, which I have sometimes done, flies wide open; an old hag, like one of those who haunted the heath of

Forres, enters with a frowning and incensed countenance, comes straight up to me with every demonstration of spite and indignation which could characterize her who haunted the merchant Abudah, in the Oriental tale; she rushes upon me; says something, but so hastily that I cannot discover the purport; and then strikes me a severe blow with her staff. I fall from my chair in a swoon, which is of longer or shorter endurance. To the recurrence of this apparition I am daily subjected. And such is my new and singular complaint." The Doctor immediately asked, whether his patient had invited any one to sit with him when he expected such a visitation? He was answered in the negative. The nature of the complaint, he said, was so singular, it was so likely to be imputed to fancy, or even to mental derangement, that he shrunk from communicating the circumstance to any one. "Then," said the Doctor, "with your permission, I will dine with you to-day, *tete-à-tete*, and we will see if your malignant old woman will venture to join our company." The patient accepted the proposal with hope and gratitude, for he had expected ridicule rather than sympathy. They met at dinner, and Doctor Gregory, who suspected some nervous disorder, exerted his powers of conversation, well known to be of the most varied and brilliant character, to keep the attention of his host engaged, and prevent him from thinking on the approach of the fated hour, to which he was accustomed to look forward with so much terror. He succeeded in his purpose better than he had hoped. The hour of six came almost unnoticed, and it was hoped, might pass away without any evil consequence; but it was scarce a moment struck when the owner of the house exclaimed, in an alarmed voice—"The hag comes again!" and dropped back in his chair in a swoon, in the way he had himself described. The physician caused him to be let blood, and satisfied himself that the periodical shocks of

which his patient complained, arose from a tendency to apoplexy.

The phantom with the crutch was only a species of machinery, such as that with which fancy is found to supply the disorder called *Ephialtes*, or nightmare, or indeed any other external impression upon our organs in sleep, which the patient's morbid imagination may introduce into the dream preceding the swoon. In the nightmare an oppression and suffocation is felt, and our fancy instantly conjures up a spectre to lie on our bosom. In like manner, it may be remarked, that any sudden noise which the slumberer hears, without being actually awakened by it —any casual touch of his person occurring in the same manner—becomes instantly adopted in his dream, and accommodated to the tenor of the current train of thought, whatever that may happen to be; and nothing is more remarkable than the rapidity with which imagination supplies a complete explanation of the interruption, according to the previous train of ideas expressed in the dream, even when scarce a moment of time is allowed for that purpose. In dreaming, for example, of a duel, the external sound becomes, in the twinkling of an eye, the discharge of the combatants' pistols;—is an orator haranguing in his sleep, the sound becomes the applanse of his supposed audience;—is the dreamer wandering among supposed ruins, the noise is that of the fall of some part of the mass. In short an explanatory system is adopted during sleep with such extreme rapidity, that supposing the intruding alarm to have been the first call of some person to awaken the slumberer, the explanation, though requiring some process of argument or deduction, is usually formed and perfect before the second effort of the speaker has restored the dreamer to the waking world and its realities. So rapid and intuitive is the succession of ideas in sleep, as to remind us of the vision of the prophet Mahommed, in which he saw the whole won-

ders of heaven and hell, though the jar of water which fell when his ecstasy commenced had not spilled its contents when he returned to ordinary existence.

A second and equally remarkable instance was communicated to the author by the medical man under whose observation it fell, but who was, of course, desirous to keep private the name of the hero of so singular a history. Of the friend by whom the facts were attested, I can only say, that if I found myself at liberty to name him, the rank which he holds in his profession, as well as his attainments in science and philosophy, form an undisputed claim to the most implicit credit.

It was the fortune of this gentleman to be called in to attend the illness of a person now long deceased, who in his lifetime stood, as I understand, high in a particular department of the law, which often placed the property of others at his discretion and control, and whose conduct, therefore, being open to public observation, he had for many years borne the character of a man of unusual steadiness, good sense, and integrity. He was, at the time of my friend's visits, confined principally to his sick-room, sometimes to bed, yet occasionally attending to business, and exerting his mind, apparently with all its usual strength and energy, to the conduct of important affairs intrusted to him; nor did there, to a superficial observer, appear any thing in his conduct, while so engaged, that could argue vacillation of intellect, or depression of mind. His outward symptoms of malady argued no acute or alarming disease. But slowness of pulse, absence of appetite, difficulty of digestion, and constant depression of spirits, seemed to draw their origin from some hidden cause, which the patient was determined to conceal. The deep gloom of the unfortunate gentleman—the embarrassment which he could not conceal from his friendly physician—the briefness and obvious constraint with which he answered the interrogations of his medical