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Etc.: Volume 1

Augustin Calmet

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The Phantom World

The Benedictine monk and biblical scholar Antoine Augustin Calmet (1672–1757) published this work in 1746; it was translated into English in 1850 by Henry Christmas (1811–68). It examines a wide selection of supernatural tales and beliefs from across Europe. Taking the stance of a scientific enquirer, Calmet sought to understand the truth behind stories of good and bad angels, vampires, witchcraft, possession by demons, and the dead who come back to life. He compiled accounts of the supernatural from official reports, newspapers, eyewitness accounts and travel writing, and this two-volume anthology of his collected data analyses the material, noting problems and inconsistencies. Volume 1 investigates the appearance of good and bad angels, magic among the Greeks and Romans, sorcerers and witches, and possession by demons. Covering a vast repertory of legends, the work paints a vivid picture of the beliefs entertained in an ostensibly Christian era.

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The Phantom World

*Or, the Philosophy of
Spirits, Apparitions, Etc.*

VOLUME 1

AUGUSTIN CALMET

TRANSLATED BY HENRY CHRISTMAS



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PHANTOM WORLD :

OR,

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPIRITS, APPARITIONS,

&c.

BY AUGUSTINE CALMET.

EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY THE

REV. HENRY CHRISTMAS, M.A. F.R.S. F.S.A.

LIBRARIAN AND SECRETARY OF SION COLLEGE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CRADLE OF THE TWIN GIANTS," ETC. ETC.

Quemadmodum multa fieri non posse, priusquam facta sunt, judi-
cantur; ita multa quoque, quæ antiquitùs facta, quia nos ea non
vidimus, neque ratione assequimur, ex iis esse, quæ fieri non
potuerunt, judicamus. Quæ certè summa insipientia est.—*PLIN. Hist.*
Nat. lib. vii. c. 1.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

HENRY JAMES SLACK, Esq. F.G.S.

&c. &c. &c.

MY DEAR HENRY,

I inscribe these Volumes with your name, to record a friendship which has lasted from our infancy, tainted by no suspicion, and darkened by no shadow.

So long as eminent talents can challenge admiration, varied and extensive acquirements command respect, and unfeigned virtues ensure esteem and regard, so long will you have no common claim to them all; and none will pay the tribute more gladly than your affectionate

Friend and Cousin,

HENRY CHRISTMAS.

SION COLLEGE, *May* 1850.

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INTRODUCTION.



AMONG the many phases presented by human credulity, few are more interesting than those which regard the realities of the invisible world. If the opinions which have been held on this subject were written and gathered together they would form hundreds of volumes—if they were arranged and digested they would form a few, but most valuable volumes. It is not merely because there is in almost every human error a substratum of truth, and that the more momentous the subject the more important the substratum, but because the investigation will give almost a history of human aberrations, that this otherwise unpromising topic assumes so high an interest. The superstitions of every age, (for no age is free from them,) will present the popular modes of thinking in an intelligible and easily accessible form, and may be taken as a

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means of gauging (if the expression be permitted) the philosophical and metaphysical capacities of the period. In this light, the Volumes here presented to the reader will be found of great value, for they give a picture of the popular mind at a time of great interest, and furnish a clue to many difficulties in the ecclesiastical affairs of that era.

In the time of Calmet, cases of demoniacal possession, and instances of returns from the world of spirits, were reputed to be of no uncommon occurrence. The Church was continually called on to exert her powers of exorcism; and the instances gathered by Calmet, and related in this Work, may be taken as fair specimens of the rest. It is then, first, as a storehouse of facts, or reputed facts, that Calmet compiled the Work now in the reader's hands—as the foundation on which to rear what superstructure of system he pleases; and secondly, as a means of giving his own opinions, in a detached and desultory way, as the subjects came under his notice. The value of the first will consist in their *evidence*,—and of this the reader will be as capable of judging as the compiler; that of the second will depend on their truth,—and of this, too, we are as well, and in some respects better, able to judge than Calmet himself.

Those accustomed to require rigid evidence will be but ill satisfied with the greater part of that

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which will be found in this Work ; simple assertion for the most part suffices—frequently made long after the facts, or supposed facts, related, and not seldom at a distance from the places where they were alleged to have taken place. But these cases are often the *best* authenticated, for in the more modern instances there is frequently such an evident mistake in the whole nature of the case, that all the spiritual deductions made from it fall to the ground.

Not a few cases of so-called demoniacal possession are capable of being resolved into cataleptic trance, a state very similar to that produced by mesmerism, and in which many of the same phenomena seem naturally to display themselves ; the well-known instance of the young servant girl, related by Coleridge, who, though ignorant and uneducated, could during her sleep-walking discourse learnedly in rabbinical Hebrew, would furnish a case in point. The circumstance of her old master having been in the habit of walking about the house at night, reading from rabbinical books aloud and in a declamatory manner ; the impression made by the strange sounds upon her youthful imagination ; their accurate retention by a memory, which, however, could only reproduce them when in an abnormal condition,—all teach us many most interesting psychological facts, which, had this young girl fallen into other hands, would have been useless

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in a philosophical point of view, and would have been only used to establish the doctrine of diabolical possession and ecclesiastical exorcism. We should have been told how skilled was the fallen angel in rabbinical traditions, and how wholesome a terror he entertained of the Jesuits, the Capuchins, or the *Fratres Minimi*, as the case might be.

Not a few of the most remarkable cases of supposed *modern* possession are to be accounted for by involuntary or natural mesmerism. Indeed the same view seems to be taken by a popular minister of the Church in our own day, viz. that mesmerism and diabolical possession are identical. Our difference with him is, that we should consider the cases called by the two names as all natural, and he would consider them as all supernatural. And here, to avoid misconception, or rather misrepresentation, let me at once observe, that I speak thus of *modern* and *recorded* cases only, accepting *literally* all related in the New Testament, and not presuming to say that similar cases *might* not occur now. Calmet, however, may be supposed to have collected all the most remarkable of modern times, and I am compelled to say I believe not one of them. But when we pass from the evidence of truth, in which they are so wanting, to the evidence of fraud and collusion by which so many are characterised, we shall wonder less at the general spread of infidelity in

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times somewhat later, on all subjects not susceptible of ocular demonstration. Where a system claimed to be received as a whole, or not at all, it is hardly to be wondered at, that when some portion was manifestly wrong, its own requirements should be complied with, and the whole rejected.

The system which required an implicit belief in such absurdities as those related in these volumes, and placed them on a level with the most awful verities of religion, might indeed make some interested use of them in an age of comparative darkness, but certainly contained within itself the seeds of destruction, and which could not fail to germinate as soon as light fell upon them.

The state of Calmet's own mind, as revealed in this book, is curious and interesting. The belief of *the intellect* in much which he relates is evidently gone, the belief of *the will* but partially remains. There is a painful sense of uncertainty as to whether certain things *ought* not to be received more fully than he felt himself able to receive them; and he gladly follows in many cases the example of Herodotus of old, merely relating stories without comment, save by stating that they had not fallen under his own observation.

The time, indeed, had hardly come to assert freedom of belief on subjects such as these. Theology embraced philosophy, and the Holy Inquisition

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defended the orthodoxy of both ; and if the investigators of Calmet's day were permitted to hold, with some limitations, the Copernican theory, it was far otherwise with regard to the world of spirits, and its connexion with our own. The rotundity of the earth affected neither shrines nor exorcisms ; metaphysical truth might do both one and the other ; and the cry of " Great is Diana of the Ephesians ! " was not raised in the capital of Asia Minor, till the " craft by which we get our wealth " was proved to be in danger.

Reflections such as these are painfully forced on us by the evident fraud exhibited by many of the actors in the scenes of exorcism narrated by Calmet, the vile purposes to which the services of the Church were turned, and the recklessness with which the supposed or pretended evil, and equally pretended remedy, were used for political intrigue or state oppression.

Independent of these conclusions, there is something lamentable in a state of the public mind, which was so little prone to examination as to receive such a mass of superstition without sifting the wheat, for such there undoubtedly is, from the chaff. Calmet's Work contains enough, had we the minor circumstances in each case preserved, to set at rest many philosophic doubts, and to illustrate many physical facts ; and to those who desire to

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know what was believed by our Christian forefathers, and why it was believed, the narrative is absolutely invaluable. Calmet was a man of naturally cool, calm judgment, pious and truthful, and possessed of singular learning. A short sketch of his life will not, perhaps, be unacceptable to the reader.

Augustine Calmet was born in the year 1672, at a village near Commerci, in Lorraine. He early gave proofs of aptitude for study, and an opportunity was speedily offered of devoting himself to a life of learning. In his sixteenth year he became a Benedictine of the Congregation of St. Vannes, and prosecuted his theological and such philosophical studies as the time allowed with great success. He was speedily appointed to teach the younger portion of the community, and gave in this employment such decided satisfaction to his superiors, that he was soon marked for preferment. His chief study was the Scriptures; and in the twenty-second year of his age, a period unusually early at a time when all benefices and beneficial employments were matters of sale, he was appointed to be sub-prior of the monastery of Munster, in Alsace, where he presided over an academy. This academy consisted of ten or twelve monks, and its object was the investigation of Scripture. Calmet was not idle in his new position. Besides communicating so much

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valuable information as to make his pupils the best biblical scholars of the country, he made extensive collections for his Commentary on the Old and New Testaments, and for his still more celebrated work, the History of the Bible. These materials he subsequently digested and arranged. The Commentary, a work of immense value, was published in separate volumes from 1707 to 1716. His labours attracted renewed and increased attention, and the offer of a bishopric was made to him, which he unhesitatingly declined.

In 1718, he was elected to the abbacy of St. Leopold, in Nancy; and ten years afterwards, to that of Senones, where he spent the remainder of his days. His writings are numerous: two have been already mentioned; and so great was the popularity of his Commentaries, that they were translated into no fewer than six languages within ten years. They exhibit a favourable aspect of the author's mind, and give a very high idea of his erudition. One cause which tended greatly to the universal acceptability of this Work, was its singular freedom from sectarian bitterness. Protestants as well as Romanists may use it with equal satisfaction; and accordingly, it is considered a work of standard authority in England as much as on the Continent.

In addition to these Commentaries, and his

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History of the Bible, and Fragments, (the best edition of which latter work in English is by Isaac Taylor,) he wrote the “Ecclesiastical and Civil History of Lorraine;” “A Catalogue of the Writers of Lorraine;” “Universal History, Sacred and Profane;” a small collection of Reveries; and a work entitled, “A Literal, Moral, and Historical Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict,” a work which is full of curious information on ancient customs, particularly ecclesiastical. He is among the few, also, who have written on ancient music. He lived to a good old age; and died regretted and much respected in 1757.

Of all his Works, that now presented to the reader is perhaps the most popular; it went rapidly through many editions, and received from the author’s hand continual corrections and additions. To say that it is characterised by uniform judgment, would be to give it a praise somewhat different as well as somewhat greater than that which it merits. It is a vast repertory of legends, more or less probable; some of which have very little foundation,—and some which Calmet himself would have done well to omit, though *now*, as a picture of the belief entertained in that day, they greatly add to the value of the book. For the same reasons which have caused the retention of these passages, no alterations have been made in

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the citations from Scripture, which being translations from the Vulgate, necessarily differ in phraseology from the version in use among ourselves. The apocryphal books too are quoted, and the story of Bel and the Dragon referred to as a part of the prophecy of Daniel; but what is of consequence to observe, is, that *doctrines* are founded on these translations, and on those very points in which they differ from our own.

If the history of Popery, and especially that form and development of it exhibited in the monastic orders, be ever written, this Work will be of the greatest importance:—it will show the means by which dominion was obtained over the minds of the ignorant; how the most sacred mysteries were perverted; and frauds, which can hardly be termed pious, used to support institutions which can scarcely be called religious. That the spirits of the dead should be permitted to return to earth, under circumstances the most grotesque, to support the doctrines of masses for the dead, purgatory and propitiatory penance; that demons should be exorcised to give testimony to the merits of rival orders of monks and friars; that relics, many of them supposititious, and many of the most disgusting and blasphemous character, should have power to affect the eternal state of the departed; and that *all*, saints, angels, demons, and the ghosts of

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the departed, should support, with great variations indeed, the corrupt dealings of a corrupt priesthood,—form a creed worthy of the darkest and most unworthy days of heathenism.

There is, however, one excuse, or rather palliation, for the superstition of that time. In periods of great public depravity—and few epochs have been more depraved than that in which Calmet lived—Satan has great power. With a ruler like the Regent Duke of Orleans, with a Church governor like Cardinal Dubois, it would appear that the civil and ecclesiastical authority of France had sold itself, like Ahab of old, to work wickedness; or, as the Apostle says, “to work all uncleanness with greediness.” In an age so characterised, it does not seem at all improbable that portentous events should from time to time occur; that the servants of the devil should be strengthened together with their master; that many should be given over to strong delusions and to believe a lie; and that the evil part of the invisible world should be permitted to ally itself more closely with the men of an age so congenial. Real cases of demoniacal possession might, perhaps, be met with, and though scarcely amenable to the exorcisms of a clergy so corrupt as that of France in that day, they would yet justify a belief in the reality of those cases got up for the sake of filthy lucre, personal ambition, or private

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revenge. If the public mind was prepared for a belief in such cases, there were not wanting men to turn it to profitable account; and the quiet student, who believed the efficacy of the means used, and was scarcely aware of the wickedness of the age in which he lived, might easily be induced to credit the tales told him of demons expelled by the power of a Church, to which in the beginning an authority to do so had undoubtedly been given, and whose awful corruptions were to him at least greatly veiled.

Calmet was a man of great integrity and considerable acumen: he passed an innocent and exemplary life in studious seclusion, mixing of course little with the world at large, resided remote “from courts, and camps, and strife of war or peace;” and there appears occasionally in his writings a kind of nervous apprehension lest the dogmas of the Church to which he was pledged should be less capable than he could wish of satisfactory investigation. When he meets with tales like those of the vampires or vroucolacas, which concern only what he considered an heretical Church, and with which, therefore, he might deal according to his own will—apply to them the ordinary rules of evidence, and treat them as mundane affairs—there he is clear-sighted, critical and acute; and accordingly he discusses the matter philosophically and logically,

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and concludes, without fear of sinning against the Church, that the whole is delusion. When, on the other hand, he has to deal with cases of demoniacal possession, in countries under the rule of the Roman hierarchy, he contents himself with the decisions of the scholastic divines and the opinions of the fathers, and makes frequent references to the decrees of various provincial parliaments. The effects of such a state of mind upon scientific and especially metaphysical investigation, may be easily imagined, and are to be traced more or less distinctly in every page of the Work before us.

Books like this—the “*Disquisitiones Magicæ*” of Delrio, the “*Demonomania*” of Bodin, the “*Malleus Maleficarum*” of Sprengel, and the like, are at no time to be regarded merely as subjects of amusement: they have their philosophical value; they have a still greater historical value; and they show how far even upright minds may be warped by imperfect education, and slavish deference to authority.

The edition here followed is that of 1751, which contains the latest corrections of the author, and several additional pieces, which are all included in the present Volumes.

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P R E F A C E.



THE great number of authors who have written upon the apparitions of angels, demons, and disembodied souls is not unknown to me; and I do not presume sufficiently on my own capacity to believe that I shall succeed better in it than they have done, and that I shall transcend their knowledge and their discoveries. I am perfectly sensible that I expose myself to criticism, and perhaps to the mockery of many readers, who regard this matter as done with, and settled in the minds of philosophers, learned men, and many theologians. I must not reckon either on the approbation of the people, whose want of discernment prevents their being competent judges of this same. My aim is not to foment superstition, nor to feed the vain curiosity of visionaries, and those who believe without examination everything that is related to them as soon as they find therein anything marvellous and supernatural. I write only for reasonable and unprejudiced minds, which examine things seriously and coolly; I speak but for those who assent even to known truth only after mature reflection, who know how to doubt of what is uncertain, to suspend their judgment on what is doubtful, and to deny what is manifestly false.

As for pretended freethinkers, who reject everything in order to distinguish themselves, and to place themselves above the common herd, I leave them in their elevated sphere; they will think of this work as they

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may consider proper, and as it is not calculated for them, will not probably take the trouble to read it.

I undertook it for my own information, and to form to myself a just idea of all that is said on the apparitions of angels, of the demon, and of disembodied souls. I wished to see how far that matter was certain or uncertain, true or false, known or unknown, clear or obscure.

In this great number of facts which I have collected I have endeavoured to make a choice, and not to heap together too great a multitude of them, for fear that in the too numerous examples the doubtful might harm the certain, and in wishing to prove too much I might prove absolutely nothing. There will, even amongst those I have cited, be found some which will not easily be credited by many readers, and I allow them to regard such as not related.

I beg those readers, nevertheless, to discern justly amongst these facts and instances; after which they can with me form their opinion—affirm, deny, or remain in doubt.

From the respect which every man owes to truth, and the veneration which a Christian and a Priest owes to religion, it appeared to me very important to undeceive people respecting the opinion which they have of apparitions, if they believe them all to be true; or to instruct them and show them the truth and reality of a great number, if they think them all false. It is always shameful to be deceived; and dangerous, in regard to religion, to believe on light grounds, to remain wilfully in doubt, or to maintain oneself without any reason in superstition and illusion; it is already much to know how to doubt wisely, and not to form a decided opinion beyond what one really knows.

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I never had any idea of treating profoundly the matter of apparitions; I have treated of it, as it were, by chance, and occasionally. My first and principal object was to discourse of the vampires of Hungary. In collecting my materials on that subject, I found many things concerning apparitions; the great number of these embarrassed this treatise on vampires. I detached some of them, and thus have composed this treatise on apparitions: there still remains a large number of them, which I might have separated for the better arrangement of this treatise. Many persons here have taken the accessory for the principal, and have paid more attention to the first part than to the second, which was, however, the first and the principal in my design. For I own I have always been much struck with what was related of the vampires or ghosts of Hungary, Moravia, and Poland; of the vroucolacas of Greece; and of the excommunicated, who are said not to be subject to decomposition after death. I thought I ought to bestow on it all the attention in my power; and I have deemed it right to treat on this subject in a particular dissertation. After having deeply studied it, and obtaining as much information as I was able, I found little solidity and certainty on the subject; which, joined to the opinion of some prudent and respectable persons whom I consulted, had induced me to give up my design entirely, and to renounce labouring on a subject which is so contradictory, and embraces so much uncertainty.

But looking at the matter in another point of view, I resumed my pen, decided upon undeceiving the public, if I found that what was said of it was absolutely false; to show that what is uttered on this subject is uncertain, and that we ought to be very reserved in pronouncing on these vampires, which have made so much

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noise in the world for a certain time, and still divide opinions at this day, even in the countries which are the scene of their pretended return, and where they appear; or to show that what has been said and written on this subject is not destitute of probability, and that the subject of the return of vampires is worthy the attention of the curious and the learned, and deserves to be seriously studied, to have the facts related of it examined, and the causes, circumstances, and means sounded deeply.

I am then about to examine this question as a historian, philosopher, and theologian. As a historian, I shall endeavour to discover the truth of the facts; as a philosopher, I shall examine the causes and circumstances; lastly, the knowledge or light of theology will cause me to deduce consequences as relating to religion. Thus I do not write in the hope of convincing free-thinkers and pyrrhonians, who will not allow the existence of ghosts or vampires, nor even of the apparitions of angels, demons, and spirits; nor to intimidate those weak and credulous, by relating to them extraordinary stories of apparitions. I do not reckon either on curing the superstitious of their errors, nor the people of their prepossessions; not even on correcting the abuses which arise from this unenlightened belief, nor of doing away all the doubts which may be formed on apparitions; still less do I pretend to erect myself as a judge and censor of the works and sentiments of others, nor to distinguish myself, make myself a name, or divert myself, by spreading abroad dangerous doubts upon a subject which concerns religion, and from which they might make wrong deductions against the certainty of the Scriptures, and against the unshaken dogmas of our creed. I shall treat it as solidly and gravely as it