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Etc.: Volume 2

Augustin Calmet

Excerpt

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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND VOLUME.

EVERY age, every nation, every country, has its prejudices, its maladies, its customs, its inclinations, which characterise it, and which pass away, and succeed one to another; often, that which has appeared admirable at one time, becomes pitiful and ridiculous at another. We have seen that in some ages the attention of all was turned towards a certain kind of devotion, of studies, and of exercises. It is known that, for more than one century, the prevailing taste of Europe was the journey to Jerusalem. Kings, princes, nobles, bishops, ecclesiastics, monks, all pressed thither in crowds. The pilgrimages to Rome were formerly very frequent and very famous. All this is now fallen away. We have seen provinces overrun with flagellants, and now none of them remain, except in the brotherhoods of penitents, which are still found in several parts.

We have seen in more recent times, jumpers and dancers, who, every moment, jumped and danced in the streets, squares, or market places, and even in the churches. The convulsionaries of our own days seem to have revived them; posterity will be surprised at them, as we laugh at them now. Towards the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, nothing was talked of in Lorraine but wizards and

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witches. For a long time we have heard nothing of them. When the philosophy of M. Descartes appeared, what a vogue it had! The ancient philosophy was despised; nothing was talked of but experiments in physics, new systems, new discoveries. Newton appears; all minds turn to him. The system of Law, bank notes, the rage of the Rue Quinquampoix, what movements did they not cause in the kingdom! A sort of convulsion had seized on the French. In this age, a new scene presents itself to our eyes, and has done for about sixty years in Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland; men, it is said, who have been dead for several months, come back to earth, talk, walk, infest villages, ill use both men and beasts, suck the blood of their near relations, destroy their health, and finally cause their death; so that people can only save themselves from their dangerous visits and their hauntings, by exhuming them, impaling them, cutting off their heads, tearing out their hearts, or burning them. These are called by the name of oupires or vampires, that is to say, leeches; and such particulars are related of them, so singular, so detailed, and attended by such probable circumstances, and such judicial information, that one can hardly refuse to credit the belief which is held in those countries, that they come out of their tombs, and produce those effects which are proclaimed of them.

Antiquity certainly neither saw nor knew anything like it. Let us read through the histories of the Hebrews, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Latins; nothing approaching to it will be met with.

It is true that we remark in history, though rarely,

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that certain persons after having been some time in their tombs and considered as dead, have returned to life. We shall see even that the ancients believed that magic could cause death, and evoke the souls of the dead. Several passages are cited, which prove that at certain times they fancied that sorcerers sucked the blood of men and children, and caused their death. In the twelfth century also, in England and Denmark, some resuscitations similar to those of Hungary were seen. But in no history do we read any thing similar, so common, or so decided, as what is related to us of the vampires of Poland, Hungary, and Moravia.

Christian antiquity furnishes some instances of excommunicated persons, who have visibly come out of their tombs and left the churches, when the deacon commanded the excommunicated, and those who did not partake of the communion, to retire. For several centuries nothing like this has been seen, although it is known that the bodies of several excommunicated persons, who died while under sentence of excommunication and censure of the Church, have been buried in churches.

The belief of the modern Greeks, who will have it that the bodies of the excommunicated do not decay in their tombs or graves, is an opinion which has no foundation, either in antiquity, in good theology, or even in history. This idea seems to have been invented by the modern Greek schismatics, only to authorize and confirm them in their separation from the Church of Rome. Christian antiquity believed, on the contrary, that the incorruptibility of a body was rather a probable mark of the sanctity of the person, and a proof of the particular protection of God, extended to a body

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which during its life-time had been the temple of the Holy Spirit, and of one who had retained, in justice and innocence, the mark of Christianity.

The *vroucolacas* of Greece and the Archipelago are revisitors of a new kind. We can hardly persuade ourselves that a nation so witty as the Greeks, could fall into so extraordinary an opinion. Ignorance or prejudice must be extreme among them, since neither an ecclesiastic nor any other writer has undertaken to undeceive them.

The fancy of those who believe that the dead eat in their graves, with a noise similar to that made by hogs, is so ridiculous, that it does not deserve to be seriously refuted. I undertake to treat here on the matter of the vampires of Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland, at the risk of being criticised, however I may discuss it; those who believe them to be true, will accuse me of rashness and presumption, for having raised a doubt on the subject, or even of having denied their existence and reality; others will blame me for having employed my time in discussing this matter, which is considered as frivolous and useless by many sensible people. Whatever may be thought of it, I shall be satisfied with myself for having sounded a question which appeared to me important in a religious point of view. For, if the return of vampires is real, it is of import to defend it, and prove it; and if it is illusory, it is of consequence to the interests of religion to undeceive those who believe in its truth, and destroy an error which may produce dangerous effects.

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DISSERTATION

ON THOSE PERSONS WHO RETURN TO EARTH BODILY,
THE EXCOMMUNICATED,
THE OUIPIRES OR VAMPIRES, VROUCOLACAS, ETC.



CHAPTER I.

THE RESURRECTION OF A DEAD PERSON IS THE WORK OF GOD ONLY.

AFTER having treated in a separate dissertation on the matter of the apparitions of angels, demons, and disembodied souls, the connexion of the subject invites me to speak also of the ghosts and excommunicated persons, whom, it is said, the earth rejects from her bosom ; of the vampires of Hungary, Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland ; and of the vroucolacas of Greece. I shall report first, what has been said and written of them ; then I shall deduce some consequences, and bring forward the reasons or arguments that may be adduced for, and against, their existence and reality.

The *revenans* of Hungary, or vampires, which form the principal object of this dissertation, are men who have been dead a considerable time, sometimes more, sometimes less ; who leave their tombs, and come and disturb the living, sucking their blood, appearing

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to them, making a noise at their doors and in their houses, and lastly, often causing their death. They are named vampires, or oupires, which signifies, they say, in Slavonic, a leech. The only way to be delivered from their haunting, is to disinter them, cut off their head, impale them, burn them, or pierce their heart.

Several systems have been propounded to explain the return and apparition of the vampires. Some persons have denied and rejected them as chimerical, and as an effect of the prepossession and ignorance of the people of these countries, where they are said to return.

Others have thought that these people were not really dead, but that they had been interred alive, and returned naturally out of their tombs.

Others believe that these people are truly dead, but that God, by a particular permission or command, permits or commands them to come back to earth, and resume for a time their own body; for when they are exhumed, their bodies are found entire, their blood red and fluid, and their limbs supple and pliable.

Others maintain that it is the demon who causes these *revenans* to appear, and by their means does all the harm he can both to men and animals.

In the supposition that vampires veritably resuscitate, we may raise an infinity of difficulties on the subject. How is this resurrection accomplished? Is it by the strength of the *revenant*, by the return of his soul into his body? Is it an angel, is it a demon who reanimates it? Is it by the order, or by the permission

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of God that he resuscitates? Is this resurrection voluntary on his part, and by his own choice? Is it for a long time, like that of the persons who were restored to life by Jesus Christ? or that of persons resuscitated by the Prophets and Apostles? Or is it only momentary, and for a few days and a few hours, like the resurrection operated by St. Stanislaus upon the lord who had sold him a field; or that spoken of in the life of St. Macarius of Egypt, and of St. Spiridion, who made the dead to speak, simply to bear testimony to the truth, and then left them to sleep in peace, awaiting the last, the judgment day.

First, I lay it down as an undoubted principle, that the resurrection of a person really dead is effected by the power of God alone. No man can either resuscitate himself, or restore another man to life, without a visible miracle.

Jesus Christ resuscitated himself, as he had promised he would; he did it by his own power; he did it with circumstances which were all miraculous. If he had returned to life as soon as he was taken down from the cross, it might have been thought that he was not quite dead, that there was yet in him some remains of life, that he might have been revived by warming him, or by giving him cordials and something capable of bringing him back to his senses.

But he revives only on the third day. He had, as it were, been killed after his apparent death, by the opening made in his side with a lance, which pierced him to the heart, and would have put him to death, if he had not then been beyond receiving it.

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When he resuscitated Lazarus,^a he waited until he had been four days in the tomb, and began to show corruption; which is the most certain mark that a man is really deceased, without a hope of returning to life, except by supernatural means.

The resurrection which Job so firmly expected;^b and that of the man who came to life on touching the body of the Prophet Elisha in his tomb;^c that of the child of the widow of Shunem, whom the same Elisha restored to life;^d that army of skeletons, whose resurrection was predicted by Ezekiel,^e and which in spirit he saw accomplished before his eyes, as a type and pledge of the return of the Hebrews from their captivity at Babylon;—in short, all the resurrections related in the sacred books of the Old and New Testament, are manifestly miraculous effects, and attributed solely to the Almighty power of God. Neither angels, nor demons, nor men, the holiest and most favoured of God, could by their own power restore to life a person really dead. They can do it by the power of God alone, who when he thinks proper so to do, is free to grant this favour to their prayers and intercession.

^a John xi. 39.^b Job xxi. 25.^c 1 Kings xiii. 21, 22.^d 2 Kings iv.^e Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 2, 3.

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CHAPTER II.

ON THE REVIVAL OF PERSONS WHO WERE NOT REALLY DEAD.

THE resuscitation of some persons who were believed to be dead, and who were not so, but simply asleep, or in a lethargy; and of those who were supposed to be dead, having been drowned, and who came to life again through the care taken of them, or by medical skill, must not pass for real resuscitations; they were not dead, or were so only in appearance.

We intend to speak in this place of another order of resuscitated persons, who had been buried sometimes for several months, or even several years; who ought to have been suffocated in their graves, had they been interred alive, and in whom are still found signs of life: the blood in a liquid state, the flesh entire, the complexion fine and florid, the limbs flexible and pliable. Those persons, who return either by night or by day, disturb the living, suck their blood, kill them, appear in their clothes, in their families, sit down to table, and do a thousand other things; then return to their graves without any one seeing how they re-enter them. This is a kind of momentary resurrection, or revival; for whereas the other dead persons spoken of in Scripture

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have lived, drank, eaten and conversed with other men after their return to life, as Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha,^a and the son of the widow of Shunem, resuscitated by Elisha;^b these appear during a certain time, in certain places, in certain circumstances; and come no more as soon as they have been impaled, or burned, or have had their heads cut off.

If this last order of resuscitated persons were not really dead, there is nothing wonderful in their revisiting the world, except the manner in which it is done, and the circumstances by which that return is accompanied. Do these *revenans* simply awaken from their sleep, or do they recover themselves like those who fall down in syncope, in fainting fits, or in swoons, and who at the end of a certain time come naturally to themselves when the blood and animal spirits have resumed their natural course and motion.

But how can they come out of their graves without opening the earth, and how re-enter them again without its appearing? Have we ever seen lethargies, or swoons, or syncopes last whole years together? If people insist on these resurrections being real ones, did we ever see dead persons resuscitate themselves, and by their own power?

If they are not resuscitated by themselves, is it by the power of God that they have left their graves? What proof is there that God has anything to do with it? What is the object of these resurrections? Is it to show forth the works of God in these vampires? What glory does the Divinity derive from them? If it is not

^a John xii. 2.^b 2 Kings viii. 5.