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978-1-108-04434-9 - True History of the Ghost: And All About Metempsychosis

John Henry Pepper

Excerpt

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THE
TRUE HISTORY OF THE GHOST.

WHEN the Hyde Park second Great Exhibition in 1862 had closed its doors, and the reaction from the bustle attendant on the arrival and departure of country visitors had set in, so that the halls and lecture rooms lately crowded with the numerous patrons of the old Royal Polytechnic were somewhat deserted, there came to the aid of the Institute a new invention, which people by common consent called "The Ghost."

The latter was matured in this wise:—Mr. Dircks, a patent agent, who had saved some property and was an independent man, wrote a paper for the *Athenæum Literary Journal*, in which he described an optical effect that could be performed with sheets of glass. This paper excited no attention because the explanation of it was somewhat vague and unsatisfactory. The Christmas of 1862 was fast approaching, when Messrs. Horne, Thornthwaite, and Wood, philosophical instrument makers, of Newgate Street, invited the author to see a model which Mr. Dircks had caused to be constructed. This was the beginning of the Ghost; but as Mr. Dircks said that an entirely new theatre must be built to show the effects which he allowed could only be seen by a few people placed in an upper gallery, and then only by *daylight*, it was no wonder that the Crystal Palace, the Colosseum, and other places had all declined to have anything to do with Mr. Dircks or his model, which was now placed in the hands of Professor Pepper—so called because the Directors

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of the then Royal Polytechnic had determined that his title should be Professor of Chemistry and Honorary Director of the above Institution. The title was not that of a hair-dresser or a dancing-master, but was conferred upon him by express minute of the Board of Directors. Professor Pepper had had his services in establishing classes at the Royal Polytechnic already recognised by the authorities at South Kensington, who gave him an honorary diploma in Physics and Chemistry of the Committee of Council on Education some two or three years before the ghost was brought out, and at a time when he was sole lessee of the Polytechnic at a rental of £2,480 per annum, which had to be paid before a single lecture or entertainment was brought before the public. The classes Mr. Pepper established were for the study of Drawing, French, German, Arithmetic, and Mathematics, with, of course, Chemistry and Physics; and pupils were admitted at very low fees in order to encourage the working men to attend. He also arranged Monday evening lectures for the working classes, and reduced the admission to sixpence if the workmen came with proper tickets supplied by Professor Pepper, but signed by the foreman under whom the men worked.

All this took place about the years 1858—9, and was continued until the Institute finally closed its doors, principally caused by the fall of the stone staircase, and sold all off to a new limited liability company when Mr. Pepper was giving courses of lectures at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham. Again, for the last time, and during the absence of Professor Pepper in Australia, where he stopped ten years, viz., from 1879 to 1889, a sale of the plant and machinery, &c., of the Royal Polytechnic took place, on the 28th of February and three following days in 1882. Mr. George Buckland and his friends tried to secure the lease by purchase; but, not completing the purchase in time, it was

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bought by Quintin Hogg, Esq., who has greatly added to the size of the building, which is chiefly devoted to classes, at least fifty in number, teaching all kinds of useful knowledge, with a large day school for boys, who are numbered by hundreds, and are well and most efficiently taught by competent masters. The Laboratory has also been enlarged, and is now under the able guidance of Mr. Ward, the teacher of Chemistry and Physics.

But to return to the Christmas of 1862, ever memorable in the annals of the Institute because Mr. Pepper brought out the illusion in quite a different manner from that contemplated by Mr. Dircks, and so improved and simplified the ghost that it could be shown in any lecture hall or theatre, if sufficiently large to contain the necessary apparatus.

The following is a narrative from the lips of the inventor of the ghost improvement:—"Just before Christmas Day in 1862, I invited a number of literary and scientific friends, and my always kind supporters, the members of the press, to a private view of the new illusion to be introduced into Bulwer's romantic and dramatic literary creation, called 'A Strange Story.' The effect of the first appearance of the apparition on my illustrious audience was startling in the extreme, and far beyond anything I could have hoped for and expected, so much so that, although I had previously settled to explain the whole *modus operandi* on that evening, I deferred doing so, and went the next day to Messrs. Carmel, the patent agents, and took out a provisional patent for the ghost illusion, in the names, at my request, of Dircks and Pepper. The day after the first evening I showed the ghost, Mr. Dircks came down to the Polytechnic, and after saying how much pleased he was with the manner in which I had introduced the illusion, ended by handing me a letter, in which he spoke highly of my work in respect of the ghost, and gave me spontaneously whatever profits might accrue from the invention. Moreover, he went to

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Carpmael with me, and, being an old and experienced patent agent himself, assisted in drawing up the patent which is here copied, with my original drawing of the improved method of showing the ghost by the use of a ‘Double Stage,’ at the old Royal Polytechnic Institute.”



A.D. 1863, 5th FEBRUARY. N^o 326.

APPARATUS FOR EXHIBITING DRAMATIC AND OTHER
PERFORMANCES.

LETTERS PATENT to Henry Dircks, of Blackheath, in the County of Kent, Civil Engineer, and John Henry Pepper, of No. 309, Regent Street, in the County of Middlesex, Professor of Chemistry, and Honorary Director of the Polytechnic Institution, for the Invention of “IMPROVEMENTS IN APPARATUS TO BE USED IN THE EXHIBITION OF DRAMATIC AND OTHER LIKE PERFORMANCES.”

Sealed the 25th September 1863, in pursuance of an Order of the Lord Chancellor, and dated the 5th February 1863.

PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION left by the said Henry Dircks

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and John Henry Pepper at the Office of the Commissioners of Patents, with their Petition, on the 5th February 1863.

We, HENRY DIRCKS, of Blackheath, in the County of Kent, Civil Engineer, and JOHN HENRY PEPPER, of No. 309, Regent Street, in the County of Middlesex, Professor of Chemistry, and Honorary Director of the Polytechnic Institution, do hereby declare the nature of the Invention for “IMPROVEMENTS IN APPARATUS TO BE USED IN THE EXHIBITION OF DRAMATIC AND OTHER LIKE PERFORMANCES,” to be as follows :—

The object of our said Invention is by a peculiar arrangement of apparatus to associate on the same stage a phantom or phantoms with a living actor or actors, so that the two may act in concert, but which is only an optical illusion as respects the one or more phantoms so introduced.

The arrangement of the theatre requires in addition to the ordinary stage a second stage at a lower level than the ordinary one, hidden from the audience as far as direct vision is concerned; this hidden stage is to be strongly illuminated by artificial light, and is capable of being rendered dark instantaneously whilst the ordinary stage and the theatre remain illuminated by ordinary lighting. A large glass screen is placed on the ordinary stage and in front of the hidden one.

The spectators will not observe the glass screen, but will see the actors on the ordinary stage through it as if it were not there; nevertheless the glass will serve to reflect to them an image of the actors on the hidden stage when these are illuminated, but this image will be made immediately to disappear by darkening the hidden stage. The glass screen is set in a frame so that it can readily be moved to the place required, and it is to be set at an inclination to enable

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the spectators, whether in the pit, boxes, or gallery, to see the reflected image.

The glass is adjustable and it is readily adjusted to the proper inclination, by having a person in the pit and another in the gallery to inform the party who is adjusting the glass when they see the image correctly.

SPECIFICATION filed in pursuance of the conditions of the Letters Patent, and of an Order of the Lord Chancellor, by the said Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper in the Great Seal Patent Office on the 31st October 1863.

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, we, HENRY DIRCKS, of Blackheath, in the County of Kent, Civil Engineer, and JOHN HENRY PEPPER, of No. 309, Regent Street, in the County of Middlesex, Professor of Chemistry, and Honorary Director of the Polytechnic Institution, send greeting.

WHEREAS Her most Excellent Majesty Queen Victoria, by Her Letters Patent, bearing Date the Fifth Day of February, in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, in the twenty-sixth year of Her reign, did, for Herself, Her heirs and successors, give and grant unto us, the said Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper, Her special licence that we, the said Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper, our executors, administrators, and assigns, or such others as we, the said Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper, our executors, administrators, and assigns, should at any time agree with, and no others, from time to time and at all times thereafter during the term therein expressed, should and lawfully might make, use, exercise, and vend, within the United Kingdom of

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Great Britain and Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Isle of Man, an Invention for “IMPROVEMENTS IN APPARATUS TO BE USED IN THE EXHIBITION OF DRAMATIC AND OTHER LIKE PERFORMANCES,” upon the condition (amongst others) that we, the said Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper, our executors or administrators, by an instrument in writing under our or their hands and seals, or under the hand and seal of one of us or them, should particularly describe and ascertain the nature of the said Invention, and in what manner the same was to be performed, and cause the same to be filed in the Great Seal Patent Office on or before the Third day of November, in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty-three.

Now KNOW YE, that I, the said John Henry Pepper, on behalf of myself and the said Henry Dircks, do hereby declare the nature of the said Invention, and in what manner the same is to be performed, to be particularly described and ascertained in and by the following statement thereof, that is to say:—

The nature and object of our said Invention is by a peculiar arrangement of apparatus to associate on the same stage a phantom or phantoms with a living actor or actors, so that the two may act in concert, but which is only an optical illusion as respects the one or more phantoms so introduced.

The arrangement of the theatre requires in addition to the ordinary stage a second stage at a lower level than the ordinary one, hidden from the audience as far as direct vision is concerned; this hidden stage is to be strongly illuminated by artificial light, and is capable of being rendered dark instantaneously whilst the ordinary stage and the theatre remain illuminated by ordinary lighting. A large glass screen is placed on the ordinary stage and in front of the hidden one. The spectators will not observe

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Having thus stated the nature of our Invention, we will proceed more fully to describe the manner of performing the same.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS.—Fig. 1. (*Frontispiece*).

Figure 1 of the annexed Drawings illustrates the arrangement of a theatre for carrying our Invention into effect; the Figure shows a section taken through the stage, the orchestra, the pit, and gallery.

a, a, is an opening which is formed in the ordinary stage. In the front part of the stage, but at a lower level, is the hidden stage *b*. The opening *a* is capable of being closed at the top by trap doors, a plan of which is shewn at Figure 2. When the trap doors are closed, actors on the ordinary or visible stage can pass freely to and fro above the lower or hidden stage. The ordinary stage and trap doors are covered with green baize or other dark material, so that when the trap doors are opened, the audience, even those in the gallery, will not readily be able to perceive the opening. The actors or objects corresponding

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with the phantom images, which it is desired to represent to the audience, are on the lower or hidden stage *b*, and are strongly illuminated by the lime light or the electric light, or other powerful illuminating means may be employed. This light must accompany the actor in any movement he has to make. The hidden stage *b*, and the lanterns *c*, may be mounted on a carriage on rails (a plan of which is shown at Figure 3), so that when it is necessary for the phantom actor or object on the lower stage to be moved, the lanterns may be caused to move also, or the lanterns may remain stationary whilst the actor moves, provided the whole space through which he moves is sufficiently illuminated. The lanterns are to be provided with means for instantaneously extinguishing or masking the light, and for reproducing it so that the phantom may be made to disappear and reappear at pleasure, whilst the audience and the ordinary stage will be more or less lighted in the ordinary manner according to the effects desired to be obtained. For this purpose a board *b*¹ is employed, which is capable of being raised into the position shewn by dotted lines so as entirely to cut off the light from the hidden stage when desired, or an ordinary opaque shade attached to each lantern may be used for the purpose, or when using the lime light the desired effects are caused by gradually or instantaneously (as the case may require) cutting off the supply of gases, and the phantom image may by any of these means be caused gradually or instantaneously to fade away. When the trap doors over the hidden stage are open, the part *d* thereof assists in hiding the lanterns and the opening from the audience. The part *e* is raised into the position shown in the Drawing and acts (together with the part *d*) to screen the lanterns from the audience, and also to insure that any actor or object on the hidden stage shall not accidentally appear above the level of the visible stage. The phantom actor,

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when standing on the stage b , leans against the screen k , which is inclined so as to be parallel with the glass screen, and is covered with black velvet or other dark material, as is also the stage b , in order that no image of either the screen k or the stage b may be seen in the reflection. f (the glass screen) is a large sheet of plate glass on the ordinary stage, of sufficient size to reflect the full length of the actors or objects on the hidden stage to the audience in the pit, boxes, and galleries of the theatre. The hidden stage is between the glass and the audience. The glass may be mounted in a swing frame so that it may be adjusted to the angle required, or it may readily be done by screws or ropes and pulleys, or otherwise. The glass screen is to be set at such an inclination as to bring the reflected image to the level of the visible or ordinary stage. This will enable the spectators, whether in pit, boxes, or gallery, to see the reflected image without any obstruction to the view above the foot lights, and it will be visible from all parts of the house except those extreme positions which cannot command a view through the glass of that part of the stage where the image is reflected.

The proper angle of inclination of the glass is ascertained experimentally by having persons in the different parts of the house to say when the image is shewn to them correctly. The scenery is so disposed as to conceal the frame of the glass, and we prefer that the glass should be able to descend into an opening or box g beneath the stage, in which case we counterbalance the glass and frame so that they may easily be raised into the position desired by means of a rope h , by which, aided by the bolts i , the glass is supported in the required position. The glass may either be adjusted when screened from the audience, and remain in position during the scene, or (the proper angle of inclination having been previously ascertained by experiment) the glass may be raised on to the ordinary or visible