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978-1-108-06794-2 - Ghost Land: Or Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism

Edited and Translated by Emma Hardinge Britten

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

The following series of papers was first prepared for the press in 1872, when a few ladies and gentlemen interested in the cause of Spiritualism, and believing its interests would be promoted by the publication of a high-toned periodical, agreed to sustain me in the production of "The Western Star," a magazine issued expressly to meet the above design. As soon as I had decided upon the expediency of this undertaking I applied to several European friends from whom I deemed I might obtain literary assistance of the highest value, and contributions which would be more fresh to my American readers than those of the writers on this side of the Atlantic.

The foremost and perhaps the most urgent applications I made were addressed to two gentlemen from whose friendship for me and their talent as writers I anticipated the most favorable results. I knew that both had enjoyed rare opportunities of research into the realms of spiritual existence.

One, whom I shall henceforth speak of as the Chevalier de B——, was, as I well knew, a member of several Oriental and European societies, where he had enjoyed the privilege of initiation into the ancient mysteries, and opportunities for the study of occultism rarely open to modern investigators. I had myself witnessed many evidences of this gentleman's wonderful powers as a seer and adept in magical rites, no less than what is now called "mediumship," for every conceivable phase of spirit power. Already familiar with many of his remarkable experiences, and believing I could obtain still further information on the subject from his intimate and near connection, an English nobleman, to whom I give the nom de plume of John Cavendish Dudley, I laid my case before both parties, soliciting from them such a series of papers as would embody their joint experiences in Spiritualism without impinging upon any points they might desire to reserve

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from the public eye. The cordial response which I obtained from these well-trying and valued friends was accompanied, however, with some restrictions, the most important of which was the positive charge to withhold their names, also to arrange their MSS. under such veiled expressions as would effectually conceal their identity. Both gentlemen were aware that their personalities would be recognized by their own immediate circle of acquaintances should the narratives ever fall into such hands; but whilst they were most willing to oblige me, and deemed their remarkable experiences might benefit and instruct many a spiritualistic reader, they protested strongly against subjecting themselves to the rude criticism and cold infidelic sneers of an unsympathetic world.

"I would not wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at," said my English friend, in the words of the immortal bard of Avon; whilst the Chevalier de B——— urged private and personal reasons still more stringent. To mask the identity of my authors then, and even maintain a strict incognito for all those associated with them, became the conditions upon which the terms of my editorship in these papers were founded.

Less, perhaps, with a view of enlightening a generation which is not always prepared to recognize its need of enlightenment, than with a desire to embellish my periodical with a series of papers which I deemed eminently worthy of the place assigned them, I cheerfully accepted the offer of my two friends, subject to the restrictions they laid upon me. On examining the MSS. committed to my charge, I found that I could commence the publication of the Chevalier de B———'s papers in a serial entitled "Ghost Land," and from the mass of records furnished me by Mr. J. C. Dudley I extracted the humorous and racy description of that gentleman's experiences in America, to which he had given the caption of "Amongst the Spirits." The autobiographical sketches of the Chevalier were written originally in German, but as I was not sufficiently familiar with that language to read or translate it, my kind friend, himself an excellent linguist, engaged to furnish me with a literal translation—that is, to render his writings into "rough English," and leave to me the task of arranging the phraseology and construction of the sentences. In many instances I found this task unnecessary, although in others I have had much labor in re-transcribing, arranging, and compiling fragmentary memoranda, written not unfrequently in French or imperfect English.

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As I proceeded with my work, I found that the MSS. would be wholly incomplete without that of Mr. Dudley, and as I had the good fortune to be in possession of the latter's journal, I selected from it such chapters relating to the Chevalier as supplied the hiatus in question, and enabled me to form a consecutive narrative of that gentleman's singular and eventful career.

I encountered some opposition from both my friends in this course of procedure, the Chevalier objecting strongly to the eulogistic tone adopted by his friend in reference to himself, and Mr. Dudley urging me to say more on the same subject than I deemed it prudent to insert. Another and still graver difficulty in my path has been the necessity of transcribing a foreigner's ideas and statements to a considerable extent in my own language, and clothing thoughts, opinions, and even the framework of the dialogues given by the author in my own form of expression. I feel keenly the loss the reader must sustain in many instances by this infusion of my personality into the author's sublime and exalted ideality. I am aware, also, what a handle it affords to those untruthful and uncandid critics who see themselves in other's acts, and who, being naturally deceptive and tricky themselves, cannot recognize truth and honesty even when it stares them in the face.

Although I have been and shall be again, induced from the force of circumstances to mask the noble sentiments of the Chevalier de B—— in my own peculiarities of style, I have in vain labored to persuade him to place his works in other hands or avail himself of a less prononcee style of compilation. Had I not devoted myself to this work it would never have been accomplished, and that thought has been my chief recompense for the slander and misrepresentation that has been cast on my share of the publication. Although my friend's courtesy has induced him to treat these misrepresentations lightly, and even to allege that he felt honored in hearing the authorship of his works attributed to me, such a slander upon him, no less than the wrong done to my veracity and the character for straightforward candor which I deemed my life had earned, has been the worst stab my enemies could have inflicted upon me, and calls for this explanation concerning the necessary share which I have had in characterizing the Chevalier de B——'s writings.

In view of the stringent charge I received from each of my authors, not only to preserve their incognito, but even to represent an ideal personage as the vehicle of the thoughts rendered. I drew up an introductory sketch of the supposed author of "Ghost

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Land," which I printed in the first number of "The Western Star."

In becoming more familiar with the later portions of the autobiography, I found that the author had stated the real events of his life so candidly, and alluded to the various dates and epochs that marked it with such fidelity of detail, that my ideal sketch had to be abandoned; the two histories would not cohere together: hence in republishing the first five chapters of "Ghost Land" in their present form I have felt obliged to present the author in his real character from beginning to end; and although I have observed all the other restrictions laid upon me in respect to the names of persons and places, the incidents of this strange life are so true, so candidly and simply detailed, that I doubt whether the lovers of fiction will be able to recognize that truth, and I shall not be surprised to hear that the whole narrative is a made-up affair.

I have some reason to believe this view would not be displeasing to the author himself, who, although compelled to write under the efflatus of the same power that obliges the "sibyl to vaticinate" even when she is not believed in, still feels sensitively opposed to parading his peculiar and often most painful personal experiences before a hard, unkind, and unsympathetic world. I, on the contrary, have a deep and religious interest in urging the exact truth of these experiences, and as I have been mainly instrumental in inducing my friend to narrate them, I would gladly, most gladly, add the lustre of a far more authoritative name than my own to the solemn assurance that they are all literal transcripts of history, and that they ought to be studied and classified by every philosophic thinker as amongst the rarest and most important psychological facts on record.

It simply remains for me to explain how and why this autobiography appears at this particular time. I need not remind those of my readers who may have been subscribers to "The Western Star," that just after the issue of the sixth number, the occurrence of the disastrous Boston fires and the immense losses sustained by some of my principal supporters, compelled me to suspend that periodical; but immediately upon the announcement of this suspension and up to the present time I have been literally besieged with requests to issue a reprint and continuance of "Ghost Land," my correspondents assuring me that those delightful and absorbing papers were more to them than all the rest of the magazine. The same request has been repeatedly made in

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reference to the articles of Mr. Dudley, entitled "Amongst the Spirits." In a word, the high appreciation accorded to those two serials made me often regret that leisure and opportunity were not afforded me for their publication in separate and continuous forms.

It was some three years after the suspension of "The Western Star" that my esteemed friend, the Chevalier de B——, made a second visit to the United States, travelling, as was his custom, in a private and unostentatious manner under an incognito, and employing his time in the observation and study of those Spiritu-  
alistic facts which it has been the main object of his life to gather up. It was then that I learned from him that two works, the scheme of which he had often laid out in project to me, were nearly completed; and as he was unable to undertake the fatigue and master the harassing details of their publication, he offered to present me with the MSS., although he wished that their production should be deferred for a stated period.

One of the MSS. thus intrusted to me was "Art Magic." It was written, like "Ghost Land," partly in French and partly rendered into English, for the sake of aiding me in its translation. Much of the language I found capable of representing the author's ideas without any alteration; but the whole work struck me as so important, sublime, and beautiful that I urged upon my friend its immediate production without waiting for further contingencies.

Tendering all the services I deemed likely to be available on the occasion, I at last succeeded in overcoming the Chevalier's reticence, and provided that I would give it to the world under the conditions which he dictated, he said the work was at my disposal. My friend then laid down those conditions of publication which have called forth the clouds of abuse, scandal, and insult which it has been my privilege to endure in so good a cause, and I dictated the financial terms by which I had hoped to save him from loss. In this respect the results belong to ourselves, not to the world. It is enough that I have been instrumental in launching a noble work upon the ocean of human thought. Many a bitter experience has been added to those which both author and editor have had to endure, many that might have been more gracefully spared by those who inflicted them. The effect of these experiences, however, it may not be amiss to notice a little more in detail, for it is evident they have not fulfilled the exact purpose with which they were freighted. In the first place, they

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have taught the sensitive author to rise superior to all human opinion, by showing him that which the editor has long since understood, namely, that there is always a certain amount of journalistic criticism which can be bought or sold, according to the purchaser's disposition or means of payment; another class from which praise would be dishonor; still another, who never waste time one way or the other on any subject that is not a marketable commodity and likely to pay well; and a fourth class, but one alas! greatly in the minority, who can and will recognize truth and beauty wherever they find it: and to this class "Art Magic" has indeed been "the gem of Spiritualistic effort of this and every other generation."

All this the author has had to learn. That he was not entirely ignorant of the crucible through which his work would have had to pass had it been published for "the masses" instead of the few, he himself proved, as I find in a letter addressed to me on this very subject the following complimentary expressions of opinion concerning the "great public":

"The masses, to whom you so enthusiastically would have me commend the perusal of 'Art Magic,' ever halt between two horns of a dilemma. If you tell them what they do not already know, they will cry: 'We cannot understand this writer!' If you repeat old truths, no matter how new may be your methods of representation, they will scream against you for telling them nothing new; and herein lies the real power of the critic, which is just to tell the world, according to his own personal predilections, what that poor imbecile thing ought to believe or reject, exalt to the skies or trample in the dust."

I have learned something as well as the author in this publication, for despite the infamous slanders of one part of a press calling itself "spiritual," and the significant silence of others, the subscribers to this work have in general been of that class which bravely and boldly takes the task of thinking into its own hands; hence they have not only written to me in the most glowing and enthusiastic praise of this "great and sublime work," but they have insisted upon having something more from the same "facile and fascinating pen."

Now, although this gentleman has submitted to me the rough draft of a still more elaborate exposition of the subjects on which "Art Magic" treats than even that admirable work itself, it may be some time before it can be completed and ready for press. In the interim the continued demand for "another work from the

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same author" induces me to turn my attention to the long-promised continuation of "Ghost Land," the deeply interesting and instructive character of which is fully equal to "Art Magic"; and besides, I am still more inclined to pursue this course from the very natural and spontaneous desire of many readers to know more about the gifted individual who wrote "Art Magic." That these autobiographical sketches will prove as acceptable as they are instructive I cannot doubt, and I once more commend them to the reader with the assurance that, though the truths in these pages are, as truth generally is, stranger than fiction, I respect myself and my friend too highly to apologize further for the fact that some of those truths may be unprecedented, hence difficult of realization.

I now commit the precious MSS. intrusted to me to the tender mercies of a world of which my respectful but candid opinion may be gathered from the aphorism which has been my life's motto, and the one which has urged me forward to the publication of this volume, namely, "The truth against the world!"

Boston, 1876.

EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTERESTING SPIRITUAL MYSTERIES AND EXPERIENCES.

ON THE THRESHOLD—AUTHOR'S VIEWS—PARENTAGE—FIRST YEARS  
AT COLLEGE—PROFESSOR VON MARX—THE BERLIN BROTHER-  
HOOD—FIRST SEANCE.

As the sole object of these sketches has been to present to the investigator into spiritual mysteries some experiences of a singular and exceptional character, I would gladly have recorded them as isolated facts, or even communicated their curious details to such Spiritualistic journalists as might have deemed them worthy of a place in their columns; but on attempting to arrange them in such a form as would accord with this design, I found it impossible to separate the phenomenal portions of the history from the person with whom they were most immediately connected.

Had I been a mere spectator of the scenes detailed, I could have easily reduced them to narrative form, but as in most instances I was either the "medium" through whom the phenomena worthy of record transpired, or their interest was derived from their association with a consecutive history, I found I must either relinquish the design of contributing my experiences to the world, or consent to the repulsive task of identifying them with one who has sufficient reason to shrink from publicity, and sighs for nothing so much as the peaceful retirement which should precede the last farewell to earth. As my own desires have been completely overruled by one whose wishes I gladly prefer to my own, I find myself either obliged to identify my Spiritualistic experiences with a fictitious personage, or accept the repulsive alternative of adding to the many characters I have been compelled to act out on the stage of life's tragic drama the unwelcome one of an autobiographer.

For many reasons unnecessary to detail, I have a special dislike to tales of fiction. Life is all too real, too thoroughly momentous, to be travestied by fictional representations. Truth appeals to the consciousness of true natures with much more earnestness



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## GHOST LAND.

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than fiction; and Spiritualistic narratives in particular, as pointing the way on a new path of discovery, and one wherein the eternal interests of the race are concerned, are simply degraded by fictional contrivances. Even the too common tendency to exaggerate the marvels of Spiritualistic phenomena should be carefully avoided, for the sake of arriving at the heart of truths so important and unfamiliar as those which relate to the spiritual side of man's nature.

It is with these reverential views of truth that I enter upon the task of narrating my singular and exceptional experiences. The only departure I have permitted myself to make from the line of stern and ungarbled fact is in relation to my own identity and that of the persons associated with me. My reasons for suppressing my real name, and in every possible way veiling the identity of those connected with me, are imperative, and if fully understood would be fully appreciated. In all other respects I am about to enter upon a candid history of myself, so far as I am connected with the incidents I am required to detail.

My father was a Hungarian nobleman, but having deemed himself wronged by the ruling government of his country, he virtually renounced it, and being connected on the mother's side with the most powerful native princes of India, from whom he received tempting offers of military and official distinction, he determined to prepare himself for his new career by the requisite course of study in England; hence, the belief very generally prevailed that he was an English officer, an opinion strengthened by the fact that for many years he abandoned his title, and substituted for the rank which he had once held in his native country that which was to him far more honorable, namely, a military distinction won on the battle-fields of India by services of the most extraordinary gallantry.

Before his departure for the East my father had married a beautiful Italian lady, and as he resolved to maintain his Hungarian title and estates, barren as they were, for the benefit of his children, he left his eldest son, my only brother, in Austria, for education, in the charge of near relatives. I was born on the soil of Hindoostan shortly after my parents arrived there, and as my eldest brother died when I was about ten years of age, I was sent to Europe to take his place, receive a European education, and become formally installed into the empty dignity, title, and heirship of our Hungarian estates. As my poor father tenaciously adhered to these shadowy dignities for his children, even though

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he despised and rejected them for himself, I was accustomed from early childhood to hear myself addressed as the Chevalier de B——, and taught to believe, when my brother died, I had become the heir of a noble house, the prerogatives of which I have never realized, except in the form of the same wrong, oppression, and political tyranny which made my father an alien and a professed subject of a foreign power.

I was about twelve years of age, as well as I can remember, when, returning one day late in the afternoon from the college I attended at B., just as I was about to enter the gate of the house where I boarded, I felt a hand laid on my shoulder, and looking around, I saw myself confronted with one of my teachers, a man who, during the period of my ten months' study in that place, had exerted a singular and irresistible influence over me. He was a professor of Oriental languages, and though I had not been regularly entered in his class, I had joined it because he one day suddenly asked me to do so, and I as suddenly felt impelled to accept his offer. From the very moment that I entered Professor von Marx's class, I became absorbed in the study of Eastern literature, and the proficiency I made was doubtless owing to my desire to master the subjects to which these Oriental tongues formed the key. On the morning of the day from which I commence my narrative, Professor von Marx had abruptly asked me if I were a dreamer. I replied in the negative, adding that I thought I often dreamed something, but the memory of what it might be only remained with me on awaking sufficiently long to impress me with the opinion that I had been somewhere in my sleep, but had forgotten where. When the professor touched me on the shoulder, as above mentioned, at my own doorstep, he said:

"Louis, my boy, how would you like to have some dreams that you could remember, and go to places in your sleep from which you should return and give accounts of?"

"O, professor!" I exclaimed in astonishment, "could I do this, and how?"

"Come with me, boy," replied my teacher. "I belong to a philosophical society, the existence or at least the real nature of which is but little known. We want the aid of a good, smart lad, like you, especially one who is not a conscious dreamer. I have long had my eye upon you, and I think I cannot only trust you with our secrets, but, by making you a partaker of them, instruct you in lore of great wisdom, which few children of your age would be thought worthy to know."