

**WHAT I SAW AT
CASSADAGA LAKE: A
REVIEW OF THE SEYBERT
COMMISSIONERS' REPORT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649732753

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Cover @ 2017

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A. B. RICHMOND

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CASSADAGA LAKE—BEFORE THE CAMP GROUNDS WERE OCCUPIED BY THE ASSOCIATION.

WHAT I SAW AT CASSADAGA LAKE:

A REVIEW

OF THE

commissioners'

SEYBERT COMMISSIONERS' REPORT.

BY

A. B. RICHMOND, Esq.,

A MEMBER OF THE PENNSYLVANIA BAR; AUTHOR OF "LEAVES FROM THE DIARY OF AN OLD LAWYER," "COURT AND PRISON," "DR. CROSBY'S CALM VIEW FROM A LAWYER'S STANDPOINT," AND "A HAWK IN AN EAGLE'S NEST."

"Sir, do all you can to combat the error into which my commissioners have fallen. They were unworthy and unfaithful."

H. SEYBERT.

SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON:

COLBY & RICH, PUBLISHERS,

9 BOSWORTH STREET.

1888.

DEDICATION.



To the Members of the Seybert Commission, whose profound researches into the mysteries of Modern Spiritualism; whose scientific investigation with hand-mirrors, printer's ink and fly-paper; whose "*thorough and impartial investigation of all systems of morals, religion or philosophy which assume to represent the truth, and particularly of Modern Spiritualism*" (so apparent in their Report as to cover them with undying fame, and transmit their names in a halo of glory to the remotest ages of the future); whose keen wit and satire (so appropriately applied, and which for brilliancy will forever rival that of Scott's noted character in *Ivanhoe*, "Wamba, the son of Witless, the son of Weather-brains, who was the son of an alderman"); whose patient labor given in the performance of their arduous duties, without hope of reward, save that which by nature's inevitable laws always follows the acts of the good and the great, have so effectually settled all questions referred to them, and so clearly exposed the fraud and folly of the religious belief of twenty millions of their fellow-men — and whose receipt for making an important product from the gooseberry has been given to the world: — as a mark of unbounded esteem and admiration, this Review is most respectfully dedicated by the

AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

Glen. I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hot. Why, so can I, or so can any man;

But will they come when you do call them?"

SHAKESPEARE.

A CURIOSITY like that manifested in Hotspur's question to Glendower, induced me to visit Cassadaga Lake in August last (1887). *Will they come when you do call them?* I had heard a great number of honest and intelligent men and women say that they would, but I did not believe it. In fact, I was not sure that there was a "vasty deep," or any spirits to come when called; and so I visited the lake in a frame of mind very unfavorable to conversion. My experience in the occult world of magic, my knowledge of the manner in which certain deceptions were produced, my success in exposing the jugglery feats of itinerating mountebanks who called themselves "spiritual mediums," gave me great confidence in my own detective skill; and when to all this was superadded the vast amount of useful knowledge I had derived from a careful perusal of the report of the profound investigations of the "Seybert Commission," I felt confident that I could not be deceived by pretended ghost or medium; and as I entered the camp-ground, and saw the great number of visitors there assembled, I smiled a complacent kind of a "Seybert Commission" smile at the weakness and credulity of my fellow-men.

"What fools these mortals be!"

remarked the sage Puck, as he contemplated the vagaries of mankind; this thought of the fairy philosopher passed through my mind as I entered the arched gateway of the beautiful grounds of Cassadaga Lake.

"And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray,"

was my reflection as I made my exit therefrom.

CASSADAGA LAKE

is a beautiful little lake—or, rather, a chain of three lakes, connected by narrow watercourses—situated in Chautauqua County, N.Y. The name is derived from the Seneca Indian dialect, in which it was called *Gus-dā'-go Te-car-ne-o-dī*; meaning, *Gus-dā'-go, under the rocks; Te-car-ne-o-dī, lake.*¹

The assembly ground is situated in a beautiful grove or woodland, and contains forty acres. It is artistically laid out in streets, a number of which are thickly bordered with tasteful cottages. It has a capacious auditorium which will comfortably seat eight hundred persons; and during the summer months, when the association is in session, the ground is filled with a concourse of well-dressed, intelligent people, who go there for pleasure, as well as to hear lectures on spiritual philosophy, and witness the strange sights of the many séances held daily, either in public or in the private rooms of professed mediums. A very pretty little steamer makes trips around the lakes every few hours, mostly accommodating pleasure-seekers who prefer water to "communication with the spirits." A fine hotel has just been completed on the ground, while several others are located on the shore of the lake near by.

On my visit, I was surprised at the class of visitors I met there,—judges of our courts, doctors, lawyers, and learned professors, as well as business men in every condition in life. A fine brass band enlivened the scene with music, while innocent mirth and amusements were judiciously mingled with lectures and other intellectual enjoyments; and yet all was as quiet and orderly as if a perpetual Sabbath reigned within the solemn woods. A large number of intelligent ladies were there, and the voices of happy little children were heard among the trees, making the ancient forest echo with the music of their gladness. It is a charming place,—one well calculated to entice visitations from the spirit world, if such a world exists.

What I saw and heard there induced me to write this little book, which I present to the reader, not as the work of inspiration, neither as a display of erudition, but as a simple narration of facts, and arguments and conclusions drawn therefrom.

¹ See *League of the Ho-de'-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*, by Lewis H. Morgan, a member of the New York Historical Society; Appendix, p. 1.

Many of my readers perhaps may not thoroughly understand what is meant by the "Seybert Commission." It was formed in accordance with a bequest made by Henry Seybert to the University of Pennsylvania, for certain purposes therein stated. When I addressed my letter to that Commission, I did not know what the terms and conditions of this bequest were, but since then I have obtained a copy of the grant to the University by Mr. Seybert, and I now give it to the public.

To the Board of Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania:

GENTLEMEN: Being mindful of the uncertainty of life at my advanced age, and feeling deeply the importance of making permanent provision for certain interests that seem to me of the highest moment, I hereby offer to your honorable Board fifty 1st Mortgage Bonds, Raleigh and Gaston R. R. (\$1000 each), being equal to the sum of sixty thousand dollars, to be devoted to the maintenance of a chair in the University of Pennsylvania that shall be known as the "Adam Seybert Chair of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy," upon the condition that the incumbent of said chair, either individually, or in conjunction with a commission of the University faculty, shall make a thorough and impartial investigation of all systems of morals, religion or philosophy which assume to represent the truth, and particularly of Modern Spiritualism.

I further empower your Board to invest the said sum of money in such securities, strictly legal or otherwise, as may be deemed best, provided that at all times the interest alone shall be expended for the purpose of maintaining the said Adam Seybert Chair.

I further empower your Board, in case there may be any income arising from said sum of money over and above the amount required for the salary of the incumbent of said Chair, to dispose of such excess of income in such way as may be deemed best to promote the views I have expressed. I have the honor to remain,

Your obedient servant,

(Signed)

HENRY SEYBERT.

My readers will observe that the condition on which this generous donation was made is to secure a "*thorough and impartial* investigation, etc.,—particularly of *Modern Spiritualism*." All the donor asked in return for his \$60,000 was that the investigation should be "*thorough and impartial*." Has this been done? If not, does not common honesty require it at the hands of the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania? I have no doubt of the probity of their intentions, in doing what has already been accomplished; but is their work completed? Have they

complied with the requirements of the bequest? If they have not, their task is not yet ended; and the money does not belong to them, either in law or equity, until the intention of the donor is fully complied with.

Unkind sneers and sarcasm at the cherished belief of Henry Seybert is a poor return for the princely gift; and that feature alone, so prominent in the Report of the Commissioners, should have impelled the Trustees to reject it, as unworthy of them and the institution they represent.

But the report has been made, and published to the world; and to review its honesty, its truthfulness, its "*thoroughness*," and its "*impartiality*," this little book is written. I am well aware that it will be the subject of many unkind criticisms; yet while malice may be thus gratified, the claims of justice will still remain unanswered.

So much has been said and written on so-called "modern spiritualism" that I do not expect to be able to present any new facts or theories, or even ideas on the phenomena claimed by its advocates or believers. The subject has generally been expounded from two standpoints, — either that of actual or pretended inspiration by mediums or trance speakers or writers; or that of scientists who have investigated it thoroughly and learnedly. I do not refer to the Seybert Commissioners, as their report, to my mind, is neither the one nor the other. Surely inspiration did not direct their investigations; and science would hesitate long ere it claimed them as its own.

When alleged inspiration has spoken or written, both style and matter have been somewhat stilted, and vastly too ethereal for the ordinary comprehension of mankind; when science has attempted to lend its aid in solving the mysterious problems, the explanation has been too learned or abstruse to be well understood by the average hearer or reader. The "seven spheres" of Dr. Hare, and the "fourth dimension of space" of Professor Zöllner, are alike almost incomprehensible to the ordinary enquirer.

In my review I propose to pursue, as far as possible, a middle course. I am accustomed to jury trials and investigations in our courts, where all controverted issues are solved and decided by human testimony and its circumstantial auxiliaries; where the evidence of credible witnesses is believed, and relied upon as proof of the facts they relate. I propose, then, to make the public my