

**MESMERISM, SPIRITUALISM, &C.,
HISTORICALLY & SCIENTIFICALLY
CONSIDERED: BEING
TWO LECTURES, DELIVERED AT THE
LONDON INSTITUTION, WITH PREFACE
AND APPENDIX**

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WILLIAM B. CARPENTER

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BEING TWO LECTURES
DELIVERED AT THE LONDON INSTITUTION

With Preface and Appendix

BY

WILLIAM B. CARPENTER, C.B.

M.D. LL.D. F.R.S. F.G.S. V.P.L.S.

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE
REGISTRAR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
ETC.



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PREFACE.

THE recent direction of the public mind to the claims of what is called 'Spiritualism,' partly by the discussion which took place in the Anthropological Section of the British Association at its Meeting in Glasgow, and partly by the Slade prosecution which followed, having led the Directors of the London Institution to invite me to deliver two Lectures on the subject, I consented to do so on the understanding that I should treat it purely in its Historical and Scientific aspects: my purpose being to show, first, the relation of what seems to me essentially an Epidemic Delusion, to Epidemics, more or less similar, which have at different periods taken a strong—though transient—hold on the popular imagination; and secondly, to point out how completely the evidence adduced by the upholders of the system fails to afford a scientific proof of the existence of any new Power or Agency capable of antagonising the action of the known Forces of Nature.

In consequence of many representations made to me that these Lectures might be advantageously brought under the notice of a wider circle than that of their original auditors, I was led to prepare them for publication in *Fraser's Magazine*, with the addition of passages which want of time prevented me from including in their oral delivery. And in now reproducing them in a separate form, with an Appendix of *pièces justificatives*, I have no other motive than a desire to do what I can to save from this new form of Epidemic Delusion some who are in danger of being smitten by its poison, and to afford to such as desire to keep themselves clear from it, a justification for their 'common sense' rejection of testimony pressed upon them by friends whose honesty they would not for a moment call in question. Among these *pièces*, there are none which seem to me of more value than the extracts I have given from the writings (long out of print) of the late Mr. Braid; whose experiments, which I repeatedly witnessed, not only contributed essentially to the elucidation of what is real in the phenomena of Mesmerism and the states allied to it, but furnished (by anticipation) the clue to the explanation of many of the curious psychical phenomena of *honest* Spiritualism.

In the discussion to which I have just referred, Mr. A. R. Wallace, speaking from the Chair of the Anthropological Section, addressed me in the follow-

ing words:—‘You expect us to believe what *you* say, ‘but you will not believe what *we* say.’ And the same distinguished Naturalist has since publicly accused me of ‘habitually giving only one side of the ‘question, and completely ignoring all facts which tell ‘against [my] theory.’—The reader of these Lectures will see that my whole aim is to discover, on the generally accepted principles of Testimony, what *are* facts; and to discriminate between facts and the inferences drawn from them. I have no other ‘theory’ to support, than that of the constancy of the well-ascertained Laws of Nature; and my contention is, that where apparent departures from them take place through Human instrumentality, we are justified in assuming in the first instance either *fraudulent* deception, or unintentional *self*-deception, or both combined,—until the absence of either shall have been proved by every conceivable test that the sagacity of sceptical experts can devise.

The two different modes in which Spiritualists and their opponents view the same facts, according to their respective predispositions, is well brought out in cases of the so-called ‘materialization.’—A party being assembled in a front drawing-room, the ‘medium’ retires into a back room separated from it by curtains, and professes there to go into a trance. After a short interval, during which the lights are turned down so as to make ‘darkness visible,’ a figure dressed in some strange guise enters between the curtains, and dis-

plays itself to the spectators as an 'embodied spirit.' Precluded from any direct interference with the performance, a sceptic among the company slyly puts some ink on his fingers, and, whilst this is still wet, grasps the 'spirit-hand,' which he finds very like a mortal one. The 'spirit' withdraws behind the curtains, after a short interval the lights are raised, and the 'medium' returns to the company *in propria persona*. The sceptic then points out inkstains on one of the 'medium's' hands, and tells what he has done.

These are the *facts* of the case.—Now, the 'common-sense' interpretation of these facts is, that the 'medium' is a cheat, and the 'embodied spirit' a vulgar ghost personated by him; and until adequate proof shall have been given to the contrary, I maintain that we are perfectly justified in holding to this interpretation, confirmed as it is by the exposure of the trick in every instance in which adequate means have been taken for its detection.

But the explanation of his inked fingers given by the 'medium' is, that the impress made on the hand of the 'embodied spirit' has been transferred 'according to a well-known law of Spiritualism' to his own; and this assumption is regarded as more probable, by such as have accepted the system, than that their pet 'medium' is a cheat, and their belief in him a delusion!

That such an assumption should not only gain