

COCK LANE AND COMMON-SENSE

THE SACRED BOOKS
OUTPUT

#433

Cock Lane And Common-Sense

Andrew Lang

Contents:

Andrew Lang (1844-1912)

Cock Lane And Common-Sense

To James Payn, Esq.

Preface.

Introduction.

Savage Spiritualism.

Ancient Spiritualism.

Comparative Psychical Research

Haunted Houses

Cock Lane And Common-Sense

Apparitions, Ghosts, And Hallucinations.

Scrying Or Crystal-Gazing

The Second Sight

Ghosts Before The Law

A Modern Trial For Witchcraft

Presbyterian Ghost Hunters.

The Logic Of Table-Turning

The Ghost Theory Of The Origin Of Religion

Cock Lane And Common-Sense, A. Lang Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck 86450 Altenmünster, Germany

ISBN: 9783849622589

www.jazzybee-verlag.de admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put

down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weathercock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was preeminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of

poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of proseform largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's "Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honeydew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies

was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published "Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in "Helen of Troy "Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time. Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual

career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had "never heard "of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had "never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with "What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! "This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, "Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never "spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later

youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: "Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to "repose on the bosom of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends, who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden

slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that "don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas pêre, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonderworking, incorporeal, and tricksy fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years

ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will, And, ken'd I ony fairy hill I#d lay me down there, snod and still, Their land to win; For, man, I maistly had my fill O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's "yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called " Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls, Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled, They know not, poor misguided souls, They, too, shall perish unconsoled. I am the batsman and the bat, I am the bowler and the ball, The umpire, the pavilion cat, The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of "Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," "Old Friends," and "Essays in Little "will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral, genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will

survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

COCK LANE AND COMMON-SENSE

TO JAMES PAYN, Esq.

Dear Payn,

Spirits much more rare and valuable than those spoken of in this book are yours. Whatever 'Mediums' may be able to do, you can 'transfer' High Spirits to your readers; one of whom does not hope to convert you, and will be fortunate enough if, by this work, he can occasionally bring a smile to the lips of his favourite novelist.

With more affection and admiration than can be publicly expressed,

Believe me,

Yours ever,

ANDREW LANG.

PREFACE.

Since the first publication of *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* in 1894, nothing has occurred to alter greatly the author's opinions. He has tried to make the Folklore Society see that such things as modern reports of wraiths, ghosts, 'fire-walking,' 'corpse-lights,' 'crystal-gazing,' and so on, are within their province, and within the province of anthropology. In this attempt he has not quite succeeded.

As he understands the situation, folklorists and anthropologists will hear gladly about wraiths, ghosts, corpse-candles, hauntings, crystal-gazing, and walking unharmed through fire, as long as these things are part of vague rural tradition, or of savage belief. But, as soon as there is first-hand evidence of honourable men and women for the apparent existence of any of the phenomena enumerated, then Folklore officially refuses to have anything to do with the subject. Folklore will register and compare vague savage or popular beliefs; but when educated living persons vouch for phenomena which (if truly stated) account in part for the origin of these popular or savage beliefs, then Folklore turns a deaf ear. The logic of this attitude does not commend itself to the author of *Cock Lane and Common-Sense*.

On the other side, the Society for Psychical Research, while anxiously examining all the modern instances which Folklore rejects, has hitherto neglected, on the whole, that evidence from history, tradition, savage superstition, saintly legend, and so forth, which Folklore deigns to regard with interest. The neglect is not universal, and the historical aspect of these beliefs has been dealt with by Mr. Gurney (on Witchcraft), by Mr. Myers (on the Classical Oracles), and by Miss X. (on Crystal-Gazing). Still, the savage and traditional evidence is nearly as much eschewed by psychical research, as the living and contemporary evidence is by Folklore. The truth is that anthropology and Folklore have a ready-made theory as to the savage and illusory origin of all belief in the spiritual, from ghosts to God. The reported occurrence, therefore, of phenomena which suggest the possible existence of causes of belief *not* accepted by anthropology, is a distasteful thing, and is avoided. On the other hand, psychical research averts its gaze, as a rule, from tradition, because the testimony of tradition is not 'evidential,' not at first hand.

In Cock Lane and Common-Sense an attempt is made to reconcile these rather hostile sisters in science. Anthropology ought to think *humani nihil a se alienum*. Now the abnormal and more or less inexplicable experiences vouched for by countless living persons of honour and sanity, are, at all events, *human*. As they usually coincide in character with the testimony of the lower races all over the world; with historical evidence from the past, and with rural Folklore now and always, it really seems hard to understand how anthropology can turn her back on this large human province. For example, the famous affair of the disturbances at Mr. Samuel Wesley's parsonage at Epworth, in 1716, is reported on evidence undeniably honest, and absolutely contemporary. Dr. Salmon, the learned and acute Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, has twice tried to explain the phenomena as the results of deliberate imposture by Hetty Wesley, alone, and unaided. {0a} The present writer examined Dr. Salmon's arguments (in the *Contemporary Review*, August, 1895), and was able, he thinks, to demonstrate that scarcely one of them was based on an accurate reading of the evidence. The writer later came across the diary of Mr. Proctor of Wellington, near Newcastle (about 1840), and found to his surprise that Mr. Proctor registered on occasion, day by day, for many years, precisely the same phenomena as those which had vexed the Wesleys. {0b} Various contradictory and mutually exclusive theories of these affairs have been advanced. Not one hypothesis satisfies the friends of the others: not one bears examination. The present writer has no theory, except the theory that these experiences (or these modern myths, if any one pleases), are part of the province of anthropology and Folklore.

He would add one obvious yet neglected truth. If a 'ghoststory' be found to contain some slight discrepancy between the narratives of two witnesses, it is at once rejected, both by science and common-sense, as obviously and necessarily and essentially false. Yet no story of the most normal incident in daily life, can well be told without *some* discrepancies in the relations of witnesses. None the less such stories are accepted even by juries and judges. We cannot expect human testimony suddenly to become impeccable and infallible in all details, just because a 'ghost' is concerned. Nor is it logical to demand here a degree of congruity in testimony, which daily experience of human evidence proves to be impossible, even in ordinary matters.

A collection of recent reports of 'fire-walking' by unscorched ministrants, in the South Seas, in Sarawak, in Bulgaria, and among the Klings, appeals to the present writer in a similar way. Anthropology, he thinks, should compare these reports of living witnesses, with the older reports of similar phenomena, in Virgil, in many books of travel, in saintly legends, in trials by ordeal, and in Iamblichus. {Oc} Anthropology has treasured the accounts of trials by the ordeal of fire, and has not neglected the tales of old travellers, such as Pallas, and Gmelin. Why she should stand aloof from analogous descriptions by Mr. Basil Thomson, and other living witnesses, the present writer is unable to imagine. The better, the more closely contemporary the evidence, the more a witness of the abnormal is ready to submit to cross-examination, the more his testimony is apt to be neglected by Folklorists. Of course, the writer is not maintaining that there is anything 'psychical' in fire-walking, or in fire-handling. Put it down as a trick. Then as a trick it is so old, so world-wide, that we should ascertain the *modus* of it. Mr. Clodd, following Sir B. W. Richardson, suggests the use of diluted sulphuric acid, or of alum. But I am not aware that he has tried the experiment on his own person, nor has he produced an

example in which it was successfully tried. Science demands actual experiment.

The very same remarks apply to 'Crystal-Gazing'. Folklore welcomes it in legend or in classical or savage divination. When it is asserted that a percentage of living and educated and honourable people are actually hallucinated by gazing into crystals, the President of the Folklore Society (Mr. Clodd) has attributed the fact to a deranged liver. <code>{Od}</code> This is a theory like another, and, like another, can be tested. But, if it holds water, then we have discovered the origin of the world-wide practice of crystalgazing. It arises from an equally world-wide form of hepatic malady.

In answer to all that has been urged here, anthropologists are wont to ejaculate that blessed word 'Survival'. Our savage, and mediæval, and Puritan ancestors were ignorant and superstitious; and we, or some of us, inherit their beliefs, as we may inherit their complexions. They have bequeathed to us a tendency to see the viewless things, and hear the airy tongues which they saw and heard; and they have left us the legacy of their animistic or spiritualistic explanation of these subjective experiences.

Well, be it so; what does anthropology study with so much zest as survivals? When, then, we find plenty of sane and honest people ready with tales of their own 'abnormal' experiences, anthropologists ought to feel fortunate. Here, in the persons of witnesses, say, to 'death-bed wraiths,' are 'survivals' of the liveliest and most interesting kind. Here are parsons, solicitors, soldiers, actors, men of letters, peers, honourable women not a few, all (as far as wraiths go), in exactly the mental condition of a Maori. Anthropology then will seek out these witnesses, these contemporary survivals, these examples of the truth of its

own hypothesis, and listen to them as lovingly as it listens to a garrulous old village wife, or to an untutored Mincopi.

This is what we expect; but anthropology, never glancing at our 'survivals,' never interrogating them, goes to the Aquarium to study a friendly Zulu. The consistency of this method *laisse a désirer*! One says to anthropologists: 'If all educated men who have had, or believe they have had "psychical experiences" are mere "survivals," why don't you friends of "survivals" examine them and cross examine them? Their psychology ought to be a most interesting proof of the correctness of your theory. But, far from studying the cases of these gentlemen, some of you actually denounce, for doing so, the Society for Psychical Research.'

The real explanation of these singular scientific inconsistencies is probably this. Many men of science have, consciously or unconsciously, adopted the belief that the whole subject of the 'abnormal,' or, let us say, the 'psychical,' is closed. Every phenomenon admits of an already ascertained physical explanation. Therefore, when a man (however apparently free from superstitious prejudice) investigates a reported abnormal phenomenon, he is instantly accused of *wanting to believe* in a 'supernatural explanation'. Wanting (*ex hypothesi*) to believe, he is unfit to investigate, all his conclusions will be affirmative, and all will be worthless.

This scientific argument is exactly the old argument of the pulpit against the atheist who 'does not believe because he does not want to believe'. The writer is only too well aware that even scientific minds, when bent on these topics, are apt to lose balance and sanity. But this tendency, like any other mental bad habit, is to be overcome, and may be vanquished.

Manifestly it is as fair for a psychical researcher to say to Mr. Clodd, 'You won't examine my haunted house because you are afraid of being obliged to believe in spirits,' as it is fair for Mr. Clodd to say to a psychical researcher, 'You only examine a haunted house because you want to believe in spirits; and, therefore, if you *do* see a spook, it does not count'.

We have recently seen an instructive example. Many continental savants, some of them bred in the straitest sect of materialists, examined, and were puzzled by an Italian female 'medium'. Effects apparently abnormal were attested. In the autumn of 1895 this woman was brought to England by the Society for Psychical Research. They, of course, as they, *ex hypothesi*, 'wish to believe,' should, *ex hypothesi*, have gone on believing. But, in fact, they detected the medium in the act of cheating, and publicly denounced her as an impostor. The argument, therefore, that investigation implies credulity, and that credulity implies inevitable and final deception, scarcely holds water.

One or two slight corrections may be offered here. The author understands that Mr. Howitt does not regard the Australian conjurers described on p. 41, as being actually *bound* by the bark cords 'wound about their heads, bodies, and limbs'. Of course, Mr. Howitt's is the best evidence possible.

To the cases of savage table-turning (p. 49), add Dr. Codrington's curious examples in *The Melanesians*, p. 223 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891).

To stories of fire-handling, or of walking-uninjured through fire (p. 49), add examples in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. ii., No. 2, June, 1893, pp. 105-108. See also 'At the Sign of the Ship,' *Longman's Magazine*, August, 1894,

and *The Quarterly Review*, August, 1895, article on 'The Evil Eye'.

Mr. J. W. Maskelyne, the eminent expert in conjuring, has remarked to the author that the old historical reports of 'physical phenomena,' such as those which were said to accompany D. D. Home, do not impress him at all. For, as Mr. Maskelyne justly remarks, their antiquity and worldwide diffusion (see essays on 'Comparative Psychical Research,' and on 'Savage and Classical Spiritualism') may be accounted for with ease. Like other myths, equally uniform and widely diffused, they represent the natural play of human fancy. Inanimate objects are stationary, therefore let us say that they move about. Men do not float in the air. Let us say that they do. Then we have the 'physical phenomena' of spiritualism. This objection had already occurred to, and been stated by, the author. But the difficulty of accounting for the large body of respectable evidence as to the real occurrence of the alleged phenomena remains. Consequently the author has little doubt that there is a genuine substratum of fact, probably fact of conjuring, and of more or less hallucinatory experience. If so, the great antiquity and uniformity of the tricks, make them proper subjects of anthropological inquiry, like other matters of human tradition. Where conditions of darkness and so on are imposed, he does not think that it is worth while to waste time in examination.

Finally, the author has often been asked: 'But what do you believe yourself?'

He believes that all these matters are legitimate subjects of anthropological inquiry.

London, 27th October, 1895.

INTRODUCTION.

Nature of the subject. Persistent survival of certain Animistic beliefs. Examples of the Lady Onkhari, Lucian, General Campbell. The Anthropological aspect of the study. Difference between this Animistic belief, and other widely diffused ideas and institutions. Scientific admission of certain phenomena, and rejection of others. Connection between the rejected and accepted phenomena. The attitude of Science. Difficulties of investigation illustrated. Dr. Carpenter's Theory of unconscious Cerebration. Illustration of this Theory. The Failure of the Inquiry by the Dialectical Society. Professor Huxley, Mr. G. H. Lewes. Absurdity and charlatanism of 'Spiritualism'. Historical aspect of the subject. Universality of Animistic Beliefs, in every stage of culture. Not peculiar to savagery, ignorance, the Dark Ages, or periods of Religious crisis. Nature of the Evidence.

It is not without hesitation that this book is offered to the reader. Very many people, for very various reasons, would taboo the subjects here discoursed of altogether. These subjects are a certain set of ancient beliefs, for example the belief in clairvoyance, in 'hauntings,' in events transcending ordinary natural laws. The peculiarity of these beliefs is, that they have survived the wreck of faith in such elements of witchcraft as metamorphosis, and power to cause tempest or drought. To study such themes is 'impious,' or 'superstitious,' or 'useless'. Yet to a pathologist, or anthropologist, the survivals of beliefs must always be curious and attractive illustrations of human nature.

Ages, empires, civilisations pass, and leave some members even of educated mankind still, in certain points, on the level of the savage who propitiates with gifts, or addresses with prayers, the spirits of the dead.

An example of this endurance, this secular survival of belief, may be more instructive and is certainly more entertaining than a world of assertions. In his *Études Égyptiennes* (Tome i. fascic. 2) M. Maspero publishes the text and translation of a papyrus fragment. This papyrus was discovered still attached to a statuette in wood, representing 'the singer of Ammen, Kena,' in ceremonial dress. The document is a letter written by an ancient Egyptian scribe, 'To the Instructed Khou of the Dame Onkhari,' his own dead wife, the *Khou*, or *Khu*, being the spirit of that lady. The scribe has been 'haunted' since her decease, his home has been disturbed, he asks Onkhari what he has done to deserve such treatment: 'What wrong have I been guilty of that I should be in this state of trouble? what have I done that thou should'st help to assail me? no crime has been wrought against thee. From the hour of my marriage till this day, what have I wrought against thee that I need conceal?'

He vows that, when they meet at the tribunal of Osiris, he will have right on his side.

This letter to the dead is deposited in the tomb of the dead, and we may trust that the scribe was no longer annoyed by a Khou, which being instructed, should have known better. To take another ancient instance, in his *Philopseudes* Lucian introduces a kind of club of superstitious men, telling ghost stories. One of them assures his friend that the spectre of his late wife has visited and vexed him, because he had accidentally neglected to burn one of a pair of gilt shoes, to which she was attached. She indicated the place where the shoe was lying hidden, and she was pacified. Lucian, of course, treats this narrative in a spirit

of unfeeling mirth, but, if such tales were not current in his time, there would have been no point in his banter. Thus the belief in the haunting of a husband by the spirit of his wife, the belief which drives a native Australian servant from the station where his *gin* is buried, survived old Egypt, and descended to Greece. We now take a modern instance, closely corresponding to that of the Instructed *Khou* of the Dame Onkhari.

In the *Proceedings of the Psychical Society* (part xiv. p. 477) the late General Campbell sends, from Gwalior House, Southgate, N., April 27, 1884, a tale of personal experiences and actions, which exactly reproduces the story of the Egyptian Scribe. The narrative is long and not interesting, except as an illustration of survival,—in all senses of the word.

General Campbell says that his wife died in July, 1882. He describes himself as of advanced age, and cautious in forming opinions. In 1882 he had never given any consideration to 'the subject of ultra-mundane indications'. Yet he recounts examples of 'about thirty inexplicable sounds, as if inviting my attention specially, and two apparitions or visions, apparently of a carefully calculated nature, seen by a child visitor, a blood relation of my late wife, whom this child had never seen, nor yet any likeness of her'. The general then describes his house, a new one, and his unsuccessful endeavours to detect the cause of the knocks, raps, crashes, and other disturbances. Unable to discover any ordinary cause, he read some books on 'Spiritualism,' and, finally, addressed a note, as the Egyptian Scribe directed a letter, to the 'agent': {4} Give three raps if from my deceased wife!

He was rewarded by three crashing sounds, and by other peculiar phenomena. All these, unlike the scribe, he

regarded as sent 'for my particular conviction and comfort'.

These instances prove that, from the Australian blacks in the Bush, who hear raps when the spirits come, to ancient Egypt, and thence to Greece, and last, in our own time, and in a London suburb, similar experiences, real or imaginary, are explained by the same hypothesis. No 'survival' can be more odd and striking, none more illustrative of the permanence, in human nature, of certain elements. To examine these psychological curiosities may, or may not, be 'useful,' but, at lowest, the study may rank as a branch of Mythology, or of Folklore.

It is in the spirit of these sciences, themselves parts of a general historical inquiry into the past and present of our race, that we would glance at the anecdotes, legends, and superstitions which are here collected. The writer has been chiefly interested in the question of the Evidence, its nature and motives, rather than in the question of Fact. It is desirable to know why independent witnesses, practically everywhere and always, tell the same tales. To examine the origin of these tales is not more 'superstitious' than to examine the origin of the religious and heroic mythologies of the world. It is, of course, easy to give both mythology, and 'the science of spectres,' the go by. But antiquaries will be inquiring, and these pursuits are more than mere 'antiquarian old womanries'. We follow the stream of fable, as we track a burn to its head, and it leads us into shy, and strange scenes of human life, haunted by very fearful wildfowl, and rarely visited save by the credulous. There may be entertainment here, and, to the student of his species, there may be instruction.

On every side we find, as we try to show, in all ages, climates, races, and stages of civilisation, consentient testimony to a set of extraordinary phenomena. Equally

diffused we find fraudulent imitations of these occurrences, and, on one side, a credulity which has accepted everything, on the other hand, a scepticism which denies and laughs at all the reports. But it is a question whether human folly would, everywhere and always, suffer from the same delusions, undergo the same hallucinations, and elaborate the same frauds. The problem is one which, in other matter, always haunts the student of man's development: he is accustomed to find similar myths, rites, customs, fairy tales, all over the world; of some he can trace the origin to early human imagination and reason, working on limited knowledge; about others, he asks whether they have been independently evolved in several places, or whether they have been diffused from a single centre. In the present case, the problem is more complicated. Taboos, totemism, myths explanatory of natural phenomena, customs like what, with Dr. Murray's permission, we call the Couvade, are either peculiar to barbarous races, or, among the old civilised races, existed as survivals, protected by conservative Religion. But such things as 'clairvoyance,' 'levitation,' 'veridical apparitions,' 'movements of objects without physical contact,' 'rappings,' 'hauntings,' persist as matters of belief, in full modern civilisation, and are attested by many otherwise sane, credible, and even scientifically trained modern witnesses. In this persistence, and in these testimonies, the alleged abnormal phenomena differ from such matters as naturemyths, customs like Suttee, Taboo, Couvade, and Totemism, the change of men into beasts, the raising of storms by artmagic. These things our civilisation has dropped, the belief in other wild phenomena many persons in our civilisation retain.

The tendency of the anthropologist is to explain this fact by Survival and Revival. Given the savage beliefs in magic, spirit rapping, clairvoyance, and so forth, these, like

Märchen, or nursery tales, will survive obscurely among peasants and the illiterate generally. In an age of fatigued scepticism and rigid physical science, the imaginative longings of men will fall back on the savage or peasant necromancy, which will be revived perhaps in some obscure American village, and be run after by the credulous and half-witted. Then the wished-for phenomena will be supplied by the dexterity of charlatans. As it is easy to demonstrate the quackery of paid 'mediums,' as that, at all events, is a *vera causa*, the theory of Survival and Revival seems adequate. Yet there are two circumstances which suggest that all is not such plain sailing. The first is the constantly alleged occurrence of 'spontaneous' and sporadic abnormal phenomena, whether clairvoyance in or out of hypnotic trance, of effects on the mind and the senses apparently produced by some action of a distant mind, of hallucinations coincident with remote events, of physical prodigies that contradict the law of gravitation, or of inexplicable sounds, lights, and other occurrences in certain localities. These are just the things which Medicine Men, Mediums and classical Diviners have always pretended to provoke and produce by certain arts or rites. Secondly, whether they do or do not occasionally succeed, apart from fraud, in these performances, the 'spontaneous' phenomena are attested by a mass and quality of evidence, ancient, mediæval and modern, which would compel attention in any other matter. Living, sane, and scientifically trained men now,—not to speak of ingenious, and intelligent, if superstitious observers in the past,—and Catholic gleaners of contemporary evidence for saintly miracle, and witnesses, judges, and juries in trials for witchcraft, are undeniably all 'in the same tale'.

Now we can easily devise an explanation of the stories told by savages, by fanatics, by peasants, by persons under ecclesiastical influence, by witches, and victims of witches. That is simple, but why are sane, scientific, modern observers, and even disgusted modern sceptics, in a tale, and that just the old savage tale? What makes them repeat the stories they do repeat? We do not so much ask: 'Are these stories true?' as, 'Why are these stories told?' Professor Ray Lankester puts the question thus, and we are still at a loss for an answer.

Meanwhile modern science has actually accepted as real, some strange psychological phenomena which both science and common-sense rejected, between 1720 and 1840, roughly speaking. The accepted phenomena are always reported, historically, as attendant on the still more strange, and still rejected occurrences. We are thus face to face with a curious question of evidence: To what extent are some educated modern observers under the same illusions as Red Men, Kaffirs, Eskimo, Samoyeds, Australians, and Maoris? To what extent does the coincidence of their testimony with that of races so differently situated and trained, justify curiosity, interest, and perhaps suspense of judgment?

The question of the value of the facts is one to be determined by physiologists, physicians, physicists, and psychologists. It is clear that the alleged phenomena, both those now accepted and those still rejected, attend, or are said to attend, persons of singular physical constitution. It is not for nothing that Iamblichus, describing the constitution of his diviner, or seer, and the phenomena which he displays, should exactly delineate such a man as St. Joseph of Cupertino, with his miracles as recounted in the *Acta Sanctorum* [9] (1603-1663). Now certain scientific, and (as a layman might suppose), qualified persons, aver that they have seen and even tested, in modern instances, the phenomena insisted on by Iamblichus, by the Bollandists, and by a great company of

ordinary witnesses in all climes, ages, and degrees of culture. But these few scientific observers are scouted in this matter, by the vast majority of physicists and psychologists. It is with this majority, if they choose to find time, and can muster inclination for the task of prolonged and patient experiment, that the ultimate decision as to the *portée* and significance of the facts must rest. The problem cannot be solved and settled by amateurs, nor by 'commonsense,' that

Delivers brawling judgments all day long, On all things, unashamed.

Ignorance, however respectable, and however contemptuous, is certainly no infallible oracle on any subject. Meanwhile most representatives of physical science, perhaps all official representatives, hold aloof,—not merely from such performances or pretences as can only be criticised by professional conjurers,—but from the whole mass of reported abnormal events. As the occurrences are admitted, even by believers, to depend on fluctuating and unascertained personal conditions, the reluctance of physicists to examine them is very natural and intelligible.

Whether the determination to taboo research into them, and to denounce their examination as of perilous moral consequence, is scientific, or is obscurantist, every one may decide for himself. The quest for truth is usually supposed to be regardless of consequences, meanwhile, till science utters an opinion, till *Roma locuta est*, and does not, after a scrambling and hasty inquiry, or no inquiry at all, assert a prejudice; mere literary and historical students cannot be expected to pronounce a verdict.

Spiritualists, and even less convinced persons, have frequently denounced official men of science for not making more careful and prolonged investigations in this dusky region. It is not enough, they say, to unmask one imposture, or to sit in the dark four or five times with a 'medium'. This affair demands the close scrutiny of years, and the most patient and persevering experiment.

This sounds very plausible, but the few official men of science, whose names the public has heard,—and it is astonishing how famous among his peers a scientific character may be, while the public has never heard of him —can very easily answer their accusers: 'What,' they may cry, 'are we to investigate? It is absurd to ask us to leave our special studies, and sit for many hours, through many years, probably in the dark, with an epileptic person, and a few hysterical believers. We are not conjurers or judges of conjuring.' Again, is a man like Professor Huxley, or Lord Kelvin, to run about the country, examining every cottage where there are rumours of curious noises, and where stones and other missiles are thrown about, by undetected hands? That is the business of the police, and if the police are baffled, as in a Cock Lane affair at Port Glasgow, in 1864, and in Paris, in 1846, we cannot expect men of science to act as amateur detectives. {11} Again, it is hardly to be expected that our chosen modern leaders of opinion will give themselves up to cross-examining ladies and gentlemen who tell ghost stories. Barristers and solicitors would be more useful for that purpose. Thus hardly anything is left which physical science can investigate, except the conduct and utterances of the hysterical, the epileptic, the hypnotised and other subjects who are occasionally said to display an abnormal extension of the perceptive faculties, for example, by way of clairvoyance. To the unscientific intelligence it seems conceivable that if Home, for example, could have been