

Introduction to "The Ancient Magic Crystal and Its Probable Connection to Mesmerism"

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INTRODUCTION

THE following articles are taken from an old volume of the *Zoist*, a journal which some of our readers may remember appeared every three months about 1850, and was devoted to vindicating the claims of Cerebral Physiology and Mesmerism, with a view to combating the material and disbelieving attitude of the orthodox mind in dealing with and approaching these and kindred subjects; it was a work that was full of labour and assiduous industry, and was undertaken, not from the aim of any pecuniary benefits to be obtained, but from the desire to spread the truth at any cost, and demonstrate by ample proof the real knowledge of mesmerism. In this noble work the name of Dr. Esdaile will ever stand foremost, and after thirteen years hard labour, it announced that its work had been done — to place upon record a mass of facts and proofs that bore no gainsaying—as it is truly stated in its last number, that were it to prolong its existence it would only be a useless repetition of facts. Too large to be purchased and too expensive to be useful, it must now be regarded as a complete work, and it is from this rich storehouse that I thought the following articles upon Crystal Vision would prove acceptable reading to the Subscribers of Theosophical Siftings.

THE COLLABORATEUR

EVERY one has heard of the *crystal*, by means of which pretenders to magical powers, etc., formerly asserted that they could call up and render visible the forms of angels, demons, the spirits of the dead, distant or otherwise invisible scenes, the absent and their occupations at the time, *etc.*, *etc.* .

The famous Dr. John Dee, or rather his coadjutor, Edmund Kelly, gave out that he could not only cause spiritual beings to appear in his crystal (which is said to be preserved in the British Museum), but could also constrain them to answer whatever questions might be put to them. However clear it may be that these were simply the pretensions of a person who found it profitable to take advantage of the well-known credulity of the British public in matters of this, as well as of many other [Page 4] descriptions, still the appearance of "visions" (as they were called) in a crystal may, perhaps, deserve a little impartial investigation.

It has been proved beyond doubt by Mr. Braid of Manchester, and other highly respectable authorities, that by earnestly regarding any small object in such a manner as to fatigue the muscles and nerves of

the eye, the mesmeric sleep or trance may be induced without the co-operation of a second person or magnetizer. Now, let us apply this fact to the case of the (so-called) *magical* crystal.

Previously to looking into this mysterious instrument a vast number of superstitious rites required to be observed. These were: the preparation of two concentric circles on the ground between which a variety of mystical words and characters were chalked. In the interior, or centre, of these circles the operator was to stand while invoking demons, angels, spirits of the dead, or the appearance of distant scenes, and the occupations of the absent.

These circles, as also a plate of gold, or piece of vellum inscribed with certain cabalistic signs, letters, names of the Deity, etc., and suspended round the neck, were intended to prevent any attacks from evil demons, who, it appears, did not approve of invasions on the spiritual world, and this will not seem surprising when we state that the magician's spells were said to be so potent as to force those summoned to reveal even their own family secrets and modes of living; and they, no doubt, were as averse to having their private concerns exposed and commented upon by human beings, as the latter are to any interference on the part of the unseen world with the occupations and other circumstances connected with our daily life.

In order to obtain a command over the beings of the invisible world a certain form of address to them, or incantation, is specified in works upon magical and cabalistic matters; and the most approved modern author on these occult subjects, viz., Barrett, [The "Magus" by Francis Barrett, F.R.C., etc., London. 1801] gives a prayer to God, which is to be repeated previously to invoking the "vision", and which, from its solemnity, shows that he must have been either a thorough believer in the science, or one of the most impious blasphemers that it is possible to conceive. Indeed, the introduction of any form of address to the Almighty under such circumstances must lead to one or other of these conclusions.

A number of other ceremonies were to be observed both before and during these invocations, such as the assumption of a particular style of dress, the use of consecrated water and tapers, a magic wand or staff covered with characters, words, symbols, etc., fumigations with different kinds of spices and perfumes, wearing the great seal of Solomon, etc., etc., [Page 5] but one chief observance must be particularly noticed, viz., strict previous fasting.

It was said that the longer and more rigidly this had been adhered to, before using the crystal, the more free did the operator become from the grossness of humanity, and therefore the more likely to be obeyed by the shadowy forms which might appear. The crystal was placed at a certain distance from the eye and contemplated attentively until the desired vision appeared. It was necessary that the whole attention and powers of the mind should be concentrated on the subject of the expected apparition or vision, and that *perfect silence and stillness should be observed* after repeating the introductory prayers, incantations, etc., unless a demon proved refractory and refused to appear, when a more urgent and powerful formula was to be had recourse to.

Without entering on the much-disputed ground of the reality of mesmeric phenomena, as extending to *clairvoyance*, or the perception during the mesmeric trance of what is, either from distance or other causes, invisible to others, or wholly beyond the ken of the waking senses — let us *assume* their truth,

supported as it is by a large and respectable body of evidence.

We have seen that one principal preparation for the seeing of visions in the crystal was *fasting*. This practice is well-known to produce, in those whose health is not injured by it, an improvement in the intellectual powers, or, at least, an increased capability of application to studies requiring much reflection and a clearness of mind, along with a vividness and flow of ideas which we find it impossible to command when the stomach contains a certain portion of *aliment*.

According to writers on the use of the crystal, the success of the experiment varies very much in different individuals. A steady, immovable contemplation of the object, and a concentration of the whole mind upon the subject on hand, are said to be absolutely requisite in all. It is stated, that some individuals are favoured with the expected phantasm, or with a view of the situation and employment of their absent friends, in ten or fifteen minutes, while in other cases, one, two, or more *hours* have elapsed before anything is seen. Those who assert that they have succeeded in bringing scenes and other objects into view, state that immediately before the apparition is beheld the crystal becomes clouded or darkened, and that this appearance is accompanied by an indescribable feeling of awe and faintness on their part, which vanishes as the glass gets brighter. The crystal is said then to become exceedingly bright, as if it were illuminated by an effulgence pervading its interior, in the midst of which the vision appears. Now, the fixed and earnest gaze directed to a particular object and the concentration and abandonment of the mind to one idea, are [Page 6] precisely analogous to one of Mr. Braid's methods of inducing the mesmeric trance. The mental or psychical perceptions may fairly be supposed to be in a highly acute condition from the previous fasting, and although long abstinence from food is well-known to have occasionally the effect of actually creating imaginary appearances or baseless phantasms in some persons, yet giving this objection all due weight, and of course rejecting all superstitious observances and rites attending upon the ancient use of the crystal as only worthy of the knaves, who employed them, let us just hazard the idea that *some* at least of those who used this agent, actually fell into a mesmeric condition *unconsciously*, and that they not only did see distant scenes and occurrences, such as the occupations of absent friends, but also that they themselves were deceived as to the nature of the phenomena which they witnessed and conscientiously attributed to supernatural agency what was in fact merely the now familiar, although little understood, mesmeric clairvoyance.

If the accounts are to be depended on which Messrs. Spencer, Hall Braid, Dove, Lang, Dr. Elliotson, Rev. Chauncey, Townshend, Miss Martineau, and others have given (and no one surely would doubt the veracity of these individuals, neither is it at all probable that imposture could have been successful in all the cases which they report as having witnessed), we must believe that there are certain conditions of the human constitution which are denominated mesmeric, and in which the spirit or power of perception becomes for a time, to a *certain degree*, a separate existence, or partially detached from the material or corporeal part of the individual, and is actually present at, and cognizant of places and circumstances at indefinite distances from the body.

A young woman (whose exhibitions of clairvoyance are mentioned in Mr. Lang's work on the subject, ["Mesmerism, its History, Phenomena, and Practice" Frazer and Co., Edinburgh, 1843] and several of which exhibitions the writer of these observations witnessed himself) was observed to become more clear in her descriptions of distant (and to her utterly unknown) localities, when desired by her mesmeriser to "look" steadfastly into a tumbler of water. To *look* is here a wrong expression, at least as far as the bodily eyes were concerned, as she was at the time completely blindfolded, but certainly

whatever was its effect upon her *mental vision*, her answers to the various queries put, were more distinct and minute while she seemed to regard the glass steadily. If the writer's memory does not deceive him, she said that she *saw in the glass* the objects which she described.

The conclusion, therefore, is that, if there be truth in clairvoyance, it is probable that there was the same degree of truth in "divining" (as it was termed) by the crystal; and that certain objects appeared in it in [Page 7] consequence of the experimenter having induced a mesmeric condition of his own system by his own immoveable gaze with which he regarded it, and by the concentration of his mind upon the subject on hand.

I subjoin a description of crystal as given by Barrett in his "Magus". The latter may be acceptable to some one of your readers who may wish to try the experiment for himself. I should suppose that no one would go to the expense of *rock crystal*, as a sphere of flint glass, free from air bubbles and well polished, must answer the purpose quite as well. It should be set in a frame of black wood. The symbols, words, etc., to be engraved on a plate of gold, of course belong to the superstitions connected with the ancient use of this (it may be) mesmeric agent

"Of the making of the crystal, etc. [From Barrett's "Magus"]

" Procure of a lapidary, a good, clear, and pellucid crystal, of the size of a small orange, *i.e.*, about one inch and a half in diameter; let it be a globular or round every way alike: then when you have got this crystal, fair and clear, without any clouds ,or specks, get a small plate of pure gold, to encompass the crystal round one half; let this be fitted on an ivory or ebony pedestal; let there be engraved a circle round the crystal with characters around inside the circle next the crystal: afterwards the name "*Tetragrammaton*", on the other side of the plate let there be engraved 'Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael.'"

Barrett goes on to describe various other mysterious symbols, etc., which are to be engraved upon the table on which the crystal is to be placed, but the above will serve to show the wretched superstitious absurdities which were believed in by many of our forefathers. It might be interesting to examine more into the relative effect of a fixed gaze upon the lucid or bright objects, and upon those which are opaque without lustre, in producing the mesmeric sleep.

Edinburgh, 1848. Г.

Note

The incident above-mentioned curiously corresponds with the ancient account of the divinations of the Emperor Didius Julianus, quoted in the paper on *Traces of Mesmerism in Antiquity*, Zoist No. xi., p. 313, in which a speculum is mentioned, although the divining agent was a blindfolded boy, " Fecit quae ad speculum dicunt fieri, in quo pueri praelegatis oculis, *incantato vertice*, respicere dicuntur. Aelian Spart, c. 7. Divination by means of crystals is referred to as employed in antiquity, to compel the appearance of gods or spirits, as Ulysses is said by Teiresias (ad Lycophron 813) to have evoked Teiresias by the

λεκανομαυτεία, described as of the same nature as the κρυσταλλομαντεία, on this subject the learned article, *Magia*, in Pauly's Encyclopaedia, refers to Psellus de Daem, p. 359, [Page 8] apparently the treatise referred to by Tom Taylor, the platonist, in Appendix to his *Bacchic and Eleusinian Mysteries*.

Nothing is to be found on the subject in the short dialogue of Psellus on the influence of demons, though much else that is illustrative of the process by which the natural vagaries of a disordered nervous system were of old interpreted as demoniacal agency.

One of the interlocutors relates the phrenzy of his brother's wife, who when delirious from a difficult confinement, became excessively violent, and muttered sounds which were unintelligible, but assumed by the witnesses to be language. All were at a loss, but some of the women, "with the natural readiness of the sex at an emergency" (καὶ γὰρ ἔισι γένος εὕρετικὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸ συμπίπτον ἀνυσιμώτατον): brought a hideous Armenian, who scolded her violently in his own language, at the same time threatening her with a naked sword. The sick woman, to the wonder of all, answered him in Armenian, a language of which she had no previous knowledge, at first boldly, but at last more and more submissively, until she fell asleep. She awoke recovered, and could give no other account of her sufferings than that she had been alarmed with a female spectre with loose hair. Very puzzling indeed, says the sage narrator, for this would seem to imply that demons are male and female, like mortal beings of the earth; and then do demons differ among themselves in language as well as sex, speaking some Greek, some Chaldee, some Persian, etc, and lastly how came the demon to be alarmed at the naked sword of the magician (γοης)? It could scarcely be susceptible of mutilation, etc., etc.

Perhaps the comments of the Greek are not fuller of false assumptions than those of many a modern physiologist on the phenomena of the same class of disorders, and at least he is modest enough to admit the existence of difficulties, and does not hold himself bound to deny or ignore everything which he finds it beyond him to explain. Instances are on record of the recovery in delirium of languages forgotten since childhood, and others that come still nearer to our anecdote, in which, it will be observed, that we have only the word of the worthy exorciser that the answers he received were really intelligible and Armenian.

London, March, 1849.