

BRACKETT EDWARD AUGUSTUS

MATERIALIZED
APPARITIONS: IF NOT
BEINGS FROM ANOTHER
LIFE, WHAT ARE THEY

Edward Brackett

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Brackett E.

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Materialized Apparitions: If Not Beings from Another Life, What Are They

To abandon these spiritual phenomena to credulity, is to commit a treason against human reason. Nevertheless, we see them always rejected and always reappearing. They date not their advent from yesterday.

Victor Hugo.

PREFACE

Written at intervals from the pressure of business, and at times that should have been devoted to recreation, these pages make no claim to artistic arrangement or literary merit. If they enable any one to arrive at a clearer and better appreciation of the wonderful phenomena of which they treat, they will have accomplished all that was intended.

Winchester, Mass.

INTRODUCTION

In 1840 I became acquainted with Dr. Colyer, then lecturing on Mesmerism, at Peel's Museum, New York, and fully believed, at that time, that he was a humbug, and Mesmerism a fraud. Soon after this, while visiting some friends, with Mr. Pendleton, formerly from Boston, this subject was pretty thoroughly discussed, – Mr. Pendleton insisting that there was truth in it, and that I was not treating it fairly; and he proposed, as a matter of amusement, that I should try the experiment on some one of the party present. Willing to turn the discussion into a less serious form, I consented to take the part assigned me; and soon found, to my astonishment, that I had before me a most excellent clairvoyant subject. What had been started as amusement became a very interesting entertainment, resulting in the meeting of the parties once a week for the purpose of studying Mesmerism.

In the following spring I removed to Boston, where in my leisure hours I continued my investigations, part of the time with Dr. William F. Channing, the inventor of the Fire Alarm, and at the time a student with Dr. Jackson. I was indebted to him for many interesting suggestions, and especially for the use of a very delicate galvanometer, for the purpose of detecting, if possible, any magnetic or electric currents passing between the magnetizer and his subject. No such currents were discovered, and when we found that our subject could be controlled and thrown into a trance when more than a mile away, by the action of the will alone, the idea of testing currents was abandoned. All that has since been made public under the names of Mind-Reading and Telepathy, and much more, was familiar to us.

When trance-mediumship became known, believing that it was only a form of Mesmerism, I gave considerable attention to it. There were few mediums of note that I did not have more or less sittings with, but the most satisfactory communications I received came through a member of my own family. While the evidence was such as would have convinced most persons that these messages came from the other side of life, I was by no means sure of it.

In this state of mind, in consequence of some statements made to me by Mr. Thomas Appleton, of what he had seen in Europe, I decided to investigate what is known as "Materialization," that is, the alleged production of visible and tangible apparitions out of seeming nothingness. I felt, whether right or wrong, that my experience in Mesmerism, and the long training of my perceptive faculties as a sculptor, which enabled me to detect the slightest differences between objects, was as good a preparation as one could have for studying this class of phenomena. I had no sectarian prejudices to overcome, and no lack of courage in stating my convictions, no matter which way the evidence might lead. That I prejudged the case in the beginning, I freely admit, and, like thousands of others, formed an opinion without giving to it that attention which is necessary in dealing fairly with any subject.

I have a thorough abhorrence of fraud, whether in the séance-room or in the pulpit, regarding any one who would trifle with the most sacred feelings of our nature as deserving the severest punishment.

In briefly detailing some of the facts that have come under my own observation, it is a matter of no consequence to me what may be said about them, since it is impossible for any one to give the subject the same careful study without arriving at similar results.

Part I.

MATERIALIZATION AND DEMATERIALIZATION OF FORMS AND OBJECTS.

Man is what he feels. He may dazzle the world for a while with the splendor of his acquirements, but, like an iceberg that glistens in the frosty air and disappears in a more genial clime, the pride of his intellect is lost in the warmth of his affections.

What Swedenborg aptly terms his "loves," alone indicate man's true character. They determine his relation to superior as well as to inferior beings. There is no other way through which he can advance to a higher life, or commune with those exalted spirits who are ever ready to welcome him, than by the elevation of his affections. Through every phase of his spiritual progress, whether in this or the other life, forever arches over him in letters of gold the divine commandment, "That ye love one another."

CHAPTER I. MY FIRST SÉANCE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

Not being acquainted with any "materializing medium," so termed, I obtained from Mr. Luther Colby, of Boston, a letter of introduction to Mrs. H. B. Fay, of that city, stating that I was desirous of visiting her séances. I called upon the lady and presented the letter, but found that she was out of health, and, for the present, had discontinued her sittings. I, however, left my address, with the request that she would inform me when she resumed her séances.

More than a year passed without hearing from her, and, finding that she was giving sittings, I made free to call at the house and ask admittance, which was granted. As she did not recognize me, I felt confident that she had forgotten the circumstance of the letter, and, as I preferred to remain as far as possible *incog.*, I made no allusion to it.

Curiosity led me to scan the audience. There were about thirty persons present, and, as far as I could judge, they were of more than ordinary intelligence. At the beginning of the séance, the light was lowered, but not so low that we could not discern clearly the features of those around us.

I do not propose now to deal with the experience of others, although I have from the beginning made that a part of my study, but shall confine myself to what came to me.

Near the close of the séance, the lady who sat next the cabinet said there was a form present who gave the name of "Maggie Brackett." She would not be certain about the first name, as the form was very weak and spoke in a whisper. Here was a chance to come in contact with one of these beings, supposed to belong to another life. Although I knew of no one, in or out of my family, by that name, I assumed that it was for me, and stepped up to the cabinet. As I did so, the curtain parted, and a very beautiful female, apparently about sixteen years old, stood before me. I looked at her very closely, but could trace no resemblance to the medium, nor to any one I had known. I said, "I do not remember you; did I ever see you before?" She shook her head, and tried to speak, but I could not make out what she intended to say.

Finding that I did not understand, she held out her hand, about three feet from the floor; but I did not know what that meant, and, seeing that she was greatly disappointed, shook hands with her, saying, "Never mind; we will find out about this some other time;" then bade her Good-bye, and she stepped behind the curtain.

As I turned to my seat, a hoarse voice inside the cabinet somewhat startled me by saying, "Your wife is here!" I answered, "Very well, I shall be glad to see her."

If I was disappointed in the first form, I was doubly so in this. It was a much smaller person than my deceased wife, and had a tired, careworn expression, while the features strongly resembled the medium. She greeted me warmly. Holding her at arms' length, in order to better study her form, I said, "You are not tall or stout enough for my wife." "Wait," she said; and, stepping behind the curtain, returned in a few moments, fuller, and near a head taller. The height and general build of the form were now very good, but the face was a medley. I saw, or fancied, some resemblance to my wife, but still more to the medium.

She appeared overjoyed at meeting me; so much so that I felt it would be heartless on my part to repel it. Laying her head upon my shoulder, she talked freely with me, saying things that it seemed impossible that any one but my wife could know. I knew what Mesmerism and clairvoyance meant. Was this another phase of them? Was it mind-reading? If so, it was a very clever performance. I could not realize that I had my wife before me, and yet here was a being who had penetrated the inmost secrets of my domestic life; had dragged from the past the well-worn pages of memory and read them anew.

She remained out much longer than most of the forms had done, when I noticed that she appeared to be growing weaker, and, in spite of her efforts to sustain herself, was sinking downward.

Bidding her Good-night, I let go her hand. As I did so, she went down directly in front of me, within a foot of where I stood, her head and shoulders being the last part visible. On the carpet, where she disappeared, there was a glow of phosphorescent light, which gradually faded away.

For the first and only time during my investigations, I was unduly excited. It came so suddenly and unexpectedly upon me that I was confused. I brushed my hand across my forehead and eyes to make sure of my bearings, and slowly returned to my seat, fully conscious of the importance of what had passed before me. If real, – if the form had thus dematerialized, – then the reality of materialization followed as a matter of course.

While turning these thoughts over in my mind, the séance closed; and as I stepped out into the full light of the autumnal moon, everything seemed changed. The sound of feet on the brick pavement grated harshly on my ears; before me rose the tall spire of the stone church, throwing its ghostly shadow across the way; behind me was the séance-room, and a dreamy consciousness of the strange phenomena I had witnessed surged through my brain. Was it possible that I had stood face to face and been in communication with one from another life?

As I pondered over this, a reaction came, and before I reached my home the probability, or the possibility even, that I had been deceived, vexed and annoyed me, and aroused a determination to know whether or not there was truth in materialization. I was not over-pleased with what I had seen, and, but for this last incident, my investigations might have ended here. Materialization was either a great truth or a stupendous humbug. Thousands of intelligent persons believed in it, on what appeared to me uncertain evidence. Was it not a disgrace to science that this had been allowed to go on so long without any honest attempt to investigate it? If I could only get the inside track, how easy it would be to expose it! The whole thing lay in a nutshell: either the forms appearing were confederates, or personations by the medium; perhaps both. I would if possible adopt a system of investigation so thorough that nothing should escape me.

To go to séances as an ordinary visitor was, to me, to throw time away. If the manifestations were genuine, and my personal relations with the medium not objectionable, I saw no reason why I should not obtain privileges without which, to my skeptical mind, it would be useless to pursue the subject.

I therefore continued my visits, having this object constantly in view. Otherwise I remained perfectly passive, neither demanding nor asking anything.

Several times I was surprised by finding thoughts to which I had given no outward expression anticipated by what claimed to be "the control," that is, the spirit alleged to hold possession of the entranced medium. I had not asked, although greatly desirous, to be taken into the cabinet during the séance. While thinking this, "Auntie," Mrs. Fay's "control," said, "You shall come in."

The forms were coming quite freely to me, and one said, "You may go in with me." As I entered, the control greeted me in a friendly way, saying that she liked me; that I was a skeptic, but an honest one.

While talking with her, I had my left arm around the waist of the form that took me into the cabinet. With my right hand I reached out and satisfied myself that the medium was sitting in her chair, entranced. There could be no mistake; there were four of us in the cabinet, – the two forms that appeared to be materialized, the medium, and myself!

I know how two got in, but where did the other two come from?

Taking advantage of the expressions of kindness on the part of the control, I sought an early opportunity to express to the medium what I desired. To my surprise, she made no objections, saying that she was entranced, and did not know what the forms were, nor was she conscious of taking any part in what came before the audience; that she was simply the instrument, not the operator. I thanked her, saying I trusted that I should do nothing which would be distasteful to her or the control; that the first step would be a thorough investigation of the cabinet.

On my first visit to Mrs. Fay's, the cabinet consisted simply of a curtain drawn across the corner of the room. It was soon after changed to a light, portable structure, which could be easily moved to any part of the room.

I had this cabinet moved out, the floor, wall, and everything connected with it thoroughly examined. There was no chance for confederates to be used here. I have since assisted in moving it out for the satisfaction of others, and have seen it placed in the opposite corner of the room, where it remained for weeks without in the least affecting the manifestations. Whatever may be the cause of these phenomena, they are certainly not due to confederates.

I herewith submit a [carefully drawn plan](#) of the cabinet and its surroundings, made by a competent architect, who has never seen any of the manifestations, and consequently is not a believer in them.

There could be no doubt; it was impossible for any one to enter the cabinet except through the door of the séance-room, in the presence of the whole audience. To be perfectly sure on this point, I sought and obtained permission to sit next the cabinet, which place I occupied for more than forty sittings. I know that it is impossible to use a confederate in this cabinet without its being instantly detected.

Having settled this so thoroughly that it could not come up as an element of doubt in any future investigations I might make, the next step seemed to be a plain one.

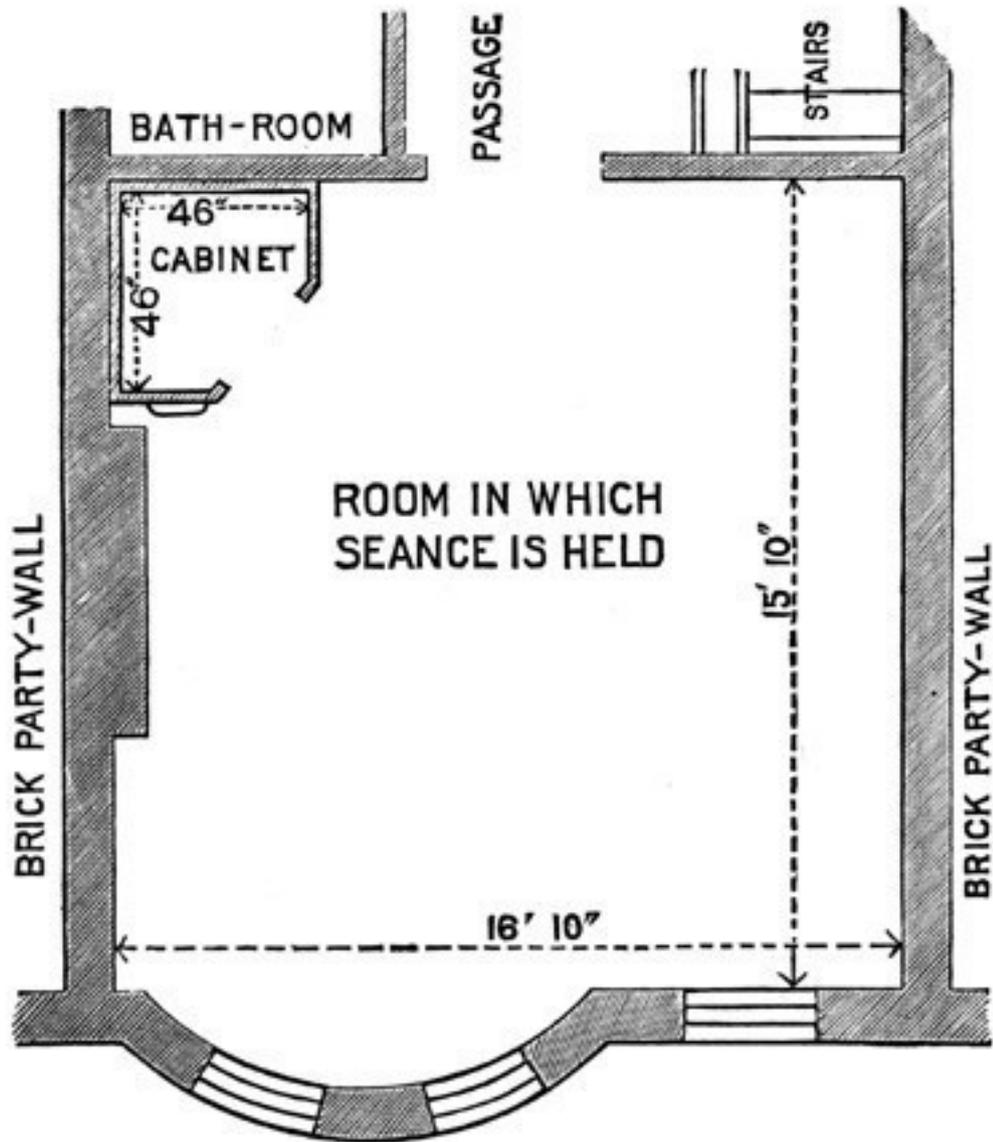


Diagram of Mrs. Fay's Séance-Room.

CHAPTER II. PERSONIFICATION BY THE MEDIUM, OR MATERIALIZED FORMS?

The forms that came from the cabinet were either personations by the medium, or they were what they purported to be – materializations.

I had, during this time, allowed nothing to pass unnoticed. From forty to sixty forms would often manifest at a séance, apparently of both sexes, and of all ages and sizes, from a little child to extreme old age, each form individualized and complete in itself.

What claimed to be my wife came to me quite often, and so many times disappeared in the way heretofore described, that I was no longer startled by the occurrence, for I had become so familiar with it that I had come to regard it as a natural consequence of her appearance. She not only grew stronger, but the likeness was much improved, and the resemblance to the medium, at times, entirely disappeared.

In my first visits to these séances, I was led, like many others, to attach great importance to the resemblance which these forms might bear to what they claimed to have been when in earth-life. I was constantly looking for it, and have seen many instances where the likeness was so marked that it would have been impossible to mistake it; yet I have learned not to regard it as positive evidence of identity. Whatever they may be, whether from this or the other side of life, there can be no question that they possess the wonderful power of changing their forms at pleasure, as any one at all familiar with them can testify.

I have seen a tall young man, wearing a full beard, claiming to be a brother of the lady with me, while standing before her, one hand on her waist, the other in mine – upon her saying, "I have not seen you since you were a lad; how do you suppose I should know you now?" – stoop, kiss her on the cheek, and raise his roguish face without the beard; at the same time diminishing in size until he was more nearly like the boy she knew.

I have witnessed similar changes outside of the cabinet, in the presence of the audience, quite often.

The mental and moral tone of the audience has more to do with the character of the séance than the medium has. I have, several times, by the action of a strong will, caused the forms to recede from the position which they at first assumed.

Persons, without being fully aware of it, find themselves more or less reflected in these séances. They reap what they sow. Their condition of mind prevents the forms from approaching them.

I have known persons to visit séances many times without receiving any attention; and, on the other hand, I have seen entire strangers, coming from distant parts of the country, who had never before been in a séance-room, receive the most tender demonstrations of affection and recognition.

Sometimes these forms have treated me to little jokes, that illustrated better than words the information I was seeking; enjoying heartily anything that for a moment seemed to disconcert me.

What claimed to be my niece came to me in a very beautiful illuminated dress. I asked her to appear to me at the next séance dressed in the same way. I took a friend with me to that séance, expecting to astonish him with the wonderful illumination. But, instead of keeping her promise, she came out in a dark dress, such as I had never seen her wear. As my friend had gone up to the cabinet with me, I was greatly disappointed in the way she came, and said, "Bertha, why do you come in this dress?" Placing her right elbow in the palm of her left hand and her index finger on her lip, in a bashful, coquettish way, she said, "I'm in mourning." I said, "For what?" She replied, "I expect I have lost my friend." I said to my companion, "This is something new; I don't understand it." While we were both looking at her, instantly the dark dress disappeared, and she stood before us radiant

in her beautiful garments. With a girlish laugh she threw her arms around my neck, kissed me and said, "It is all right now, uncle." The disappearance of the dark dress was quite as marvellous to my friend as the illumination.

I have never been able to detect any fraud, or any indication of it, on the part of Mrs. Fay at these séances; and in the absence of any information which would lead to any other conclusion, I shall hereafter call these forms spirits. That they are not beings belonging to this side of life, I feel certain. What they are, each one must determine for himself.

CHAPTER III. MATERIALIZATION AND DEMATERIALIZATION OF OBJECTS

The severest tests which I could apply to these manifestations convinced me that not only the forms which surrounded these spirits, but the garments which they wore were "materialized" (that is, made visible and tangible out of previously invisible substances) inside of the cabinet. How this is done we may not comprehend. Emerson says, "The whole world is the flux of matter over the wires of thought to the points or poles where it would build." We only know that here, as in Nature, there must be a germ or starting-point around which the particles aggregate. This is seen in the materialization of objects, which is important as being the only materializations outside the cabinet, and the only ones that we can study.

I have spoken of a beautiful spirit claiming to be my niece, Bertha, that came to me at Mrs. Fay's. In all my attendance there she has never failed to meet me. This did not arise from any understanding or agreement, but seemed to grow up as a natural consequence of the magnetic relations between us. Simple and childlike in her bearing, I have found her remarkably conscientious, intelligent, and affectionate. She comes freely, and in all my intercourse with her I have never found her judgment at fault.

I do not care to discuss the question as to who or what Bertha is; I know she is not the medium, nor a confederate, and that her materialization of objects is genuine. In my long and delightful association with her, extending over more than two years, I have never been able to detect the slightest thing that would lead me to doubt that she is what she claims to be.

No parent ever watched the unfolding of a young life with more interest than I have studied the apparent growth or development of this delightful spirit. It may be that what I have considered her progress arises from the increasing strength gained through her long association with me, enabling her to more freely express herself; for during my acquaintance with her she has seemingly passed from a commonplace person into a remarkable embodiment of intelligence and affection. If I have refrained from expressing the many inspired thoughts and feelings which in her exalted moments she has freely given forth, it is because they are sacred to my own domestic circle. They belong to that centralization of the affections without which life loses its force, and all investigations or attempts to reach these beings are only time thrown away.

As I never saw her before she passed to the other life, I have no means of proving her identity except by what she has told me. Owing to the fact that her family live many hundred miles away, and that I am very forgetful of names, I did not recall, until reminded by others, the existence of any one of that name. She came, at first, very weak, not being able to come out from the cabinet, and spoke in a whisper. She either gave a wrong name, or, what is quite as likely from the difficulty she then had in expressing herself, was misunderstood. This, with my limited experience, led me to regard her appearance, so far as it related to me, a mistake, and I am quite conscious that I treated her coldly. That she felt this indifference on my part was evinced more than once by the expression of her face.

She, however, continued to come whenever I was present, growing stronger each time, apparently demanding recognition, and showing plainly that she did not mean to be put aside for any one. At length I said, "Will you tell me who you are?" She replied, "I am Bertha; you are my uncle; I am your niece;" at the same time holding out her hand about three feet from the floor. As I did not understand this, she subsequently explained it by coming out as a child about four years old, that being the age, as I afterward learned, when she passed to the other life. As I was a stranger to the medium and all present (except one, and that one knew nothing of my relatives), it does not seem probable that the medium could have known anything about her.

The individuality of Bertha is very striking, bearing little or no resemblance to any other materialized form which I have seen. She never comes shrouded in a profusion of drapery; on the contrary, she appears scantily but richly dressed, wearing a short skirt and close-fitting waist, with short sleeves, leaving her finely-rounded arms bare. She never wears a head-dress; her long silken hair floats freely round her shoulders. In form and feature she is the embodiment of girlhood, with a playful disposition which leads her to make amusing remarks, at times, about those who come within her mental atmosphere.

Her figure is compactly built, and well proportioned, with a remarkably fine face, the expression of which, at times, surpasses anything I have ever seen. She is much shorter than the medium, as the following measurements will show: —

Mrs. H. B. Fay, medium, height,	5.6.4 in.
Bertha, materialized form, height,	4.6.2.4 in.
Male form (to Mr. Tallman), height,	5.6.2.4 in.
Difference between Mrs. Fay and Bertha,	1.0.2 in.
Difference between Mrs. Fay and male form,	0.0 in.
Difference between Bertha and male form,	1.0 in.

These measurements were taken by means of an upright staff with a cross piece at right angles, and I was assisted by a gentleman who is a thorough skeptic. Care was taken to have the forms stand perfectly upright, so that there could be no mistake as to accuracy.

I have given this brief sketch of Bertha as I shall have occasion to allude to her hereafter, for I am greatly indebted to her for much that I have learned about materialization. She has taught me that the ability to communicate intelligently depends upon the use these beings can make of our aro-mal emanations, or magnetism; that frequent association with us is necessary to enable them to gain control of material elements, and that where the relations are harmonious they gather strength every time they come in contact with us.

From a feeble and almost unintelligible whisper, Bertha now speaks in clear tones, with little or none of the German accent of the medium, and very often, no matter where I am placed, comes across the room, and pulls me up with both hands; or, if there is a vacant chair beside me, sits down and begins to talk, apparently not noticing those around her.

At a Thursday afternoon séance, held last spring, she came out very lively; and after a cordial greeting I said, "You are feeling strong to-day; can you not do something to interest us?" She hesitated a moment; then leading me into the middle of the room, looked up laughingly into my face and said, "I will show you how we dress the forms in the cabinet."¹ Stretching out her bare arms, turning them that every one could see that there was nothing in them, she brought the palms of her hands together, rubbing them as if rolling something between them. Very soon there descended from her hands a substance which looked like very white lace.

She continued this until several yards of it lay upon the carpet, and then asked me to kneel down, saying I was too tall for her to work easily. She then took the fabric and made a robe around me, which appeared seamless. On being reminded that there were no sleeves, she took each arm in turn and materialized sleeves. Putting her hand on my head she said, "You have not hair enough," and, rubbing her hand over my head, materialized a wig. This I could not see, but put my hand up and felt of it, and those who were near me said it was in keeping with my own hair and quite an improvement.

Removing the garment, she rolled it into a compact mass, manipulated it a few moments, and it was gone! In materializing and dematerializing this fabric, her arms, which were bare to the shoulders, were stretched out at full length, precluding the possibility of any deception.

¹ The control had stated to me, only a few minutes before, that the forms were first materialized and then draped.

Thursday afternoon, Oct. 2, I visited Mrs. Fay's séance with some friends from New Bedford and Cincinnati. When Bertha came out I introduced her to my friends, and asked if she would be kind enough to show them how to make lace. She stepped forward and asked for my handkerchief, which she placed between her hands, manipulating it much after the manner of starching fine fabrics. It was easy to see that the material in her hands was rapidly increasing in volume, and soon the lace began to descend; but instead of being only one piece, there were two, one dark red, and one white, both falling at the same time, each piece about three quarters of a yard wide.

When she had completed it, she held one end, while I took the other and walked across the room, stretching it out to its full length, between three and four yards, so that all could see it; and while it was so held, the controlling spirit shut off the light, showing that the lace was brilliantly illuminated. Bertha then gathered it in, rolled it up and dematerialized it on my shoulder, the light remaining on my coat for nearly a minute after the lace had entirely disappeared.

These things are not new; they are as old as the history of man, and are of common occurrence in India at the present time. They have no possible connection with what is known as sleight-of-hand, or legerdemain. Louis Jacolliot, Chief Justice of Chandernagur, French East Indies, in his able work on Occult Science in India, thus points out the difference: —

"Every European has heard of the extraordinary skill of the Hindoo Fakirs, who are popularly designated under the name of Charmers or Jugglers. They claim to be invested with supernatural powers. Such is the belief of all Asiatic people. When our countrymen are told of their performances, they usually answer, 'Go to the regular magicians; they will show you the same things.'

"To enable the reader to appreciate the grounds of this opinion, it seems necessary to show how the Fakirs operate. The following are facts which no traveller has ventured to contradict: —

"*First.*— They never give public representations in places where the presence of several hundred persons makes it impossible to exercise the proper scrutiny.

"*Second.*— They are accompanied by no assistant, or confederate, as they are usually termed.

"*Third.*— They present themselves in the interior of the house, completely naked, except that they wear, for modesty's sake, a small piece of linen about as large as the hand.

"*Fourth.*— They are not acquainted with goblets, or magic bags, or double-bottomed boxes, or prepared tables, or any of the thousand and one things which our European conjurers find necessary.

"*Fifth.*— They have absolutely nothing in their possession save a small wand of seven knots of bamboo, as big as the handle of a pen-holder, which they hold in their right hand, and a small whistle, about three inches long, which they fasten to one of the locks of their long, straight hair; for, having no clothes, and consequently no pockets, they would otherwise be obliged to hold it constantly in the hand.

"*Sixth.*— They operate, as desired by the person whom they are visiting, either in a sitting or standing posture, or, as the case may require, upon the marble, granite, or stucco pavement of the veranda, or upon the bare ground in the garden.

"*Seventh.*— When they need a subject for the exhibition of magnetic or somnambulistic phenomena, they take any of your servants whom you may designate, no matter whom, and they act with the same facility upon a European in case he is willing to serve.

"*Eighth.*— If they need any article, such as a musical instrument, a cane, a piece of paper, a pencil, etc., they ask you to furnish it.

"*Ninth.*— They will repeat any experiments in your presence as many times as you require, and will submit to any test you may apply.

"*Tenth.*— They never ask any pay, merely accepting, as alms for the temple to which they are attached, whatever you choose to offer them.

"I have travelled through India in every direction for many years, and I can truthfully state that I have never seen a single Fakir who was not willing to comply with any of these conditions.

"It only remains for us to ask whether our more popular magicians would ever consent to dispense with any of their numerous accompaniments, and perform under the same conditions. There is no doubt what the answer would be."

Whether the forms or articles exhibited are considered as objects invisibly brought into the room, or created from the atmosphere, they are alike astonishing manifestations of an occult power. It does not simplify or explain these singular phenomena to deny their relation to beings of another life, and refer them to a supposed power in man, the laws of which are unknown to us. We have to deal with them as we would with any of the natural manifestations of life.

To assume that these things are not honest, — that these beings, who come to us claiming to be our friends and relatives, are deceiving us, playing on our credulity, — is to decide the question without evidence.

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