

Chapter 7

The Philosophy of Obsession

**WHO ARE BEST ADAPTED TO THE AFFLICITION—
COMMUNITIES OFTEN AffECTED—THE SUBJECT'S EXPERIENCE
WITH A TELESCOPE—ASTRONOMERS AND SPIRITS.**

In this day of universal enlightenment there can be few if any readers of these pages who have not heard, read of, or witnessed some cases of obsession similar to that described in the last chapter. The well-informed student of psychologic phenomena must be aware that I have understated rather than exaggerated the worst features of such scenes, whilst I refer those who are unfamiliar with the subject to the graphic accounts of obsession in different countries, and occurring at different epochs of time, given by William Howitt, Dr. Ennemoser, Schubert, Horst, Upham, and other writers on Spiritualistic subjects. By these eminent authorities descriptions have been given of the convulsionnaires of St. Medard, the nuns of Loudon, the preaching epidemic at Sweden, etc., before the thrilling horrors of which my brief sketch of obsession in the Scotch Highlands becomes tame and lifeless. Perhaps one of the most forcible and striking instances of this demoniac fever on record occurred as recently as 1864, when a wholesale obsession seized upon the quiet and peaceful inhabitants of Morzine, Switzerland, which lasted for a period of over four years, and included in its ravages more than a thousand of the best disposed, most pure, pious, and inoffensive dwellers of that district. William Howitt has given a fine magazine sketch of this terrible visitation, which he justly entitles "The Devils of Morzine." Whether this caption be regarded as referring to the unhappy victims or the power that controlled them, it is certainly a most appropriate definition of the condition in which hundreds of hapless persons appeared during the reign of the demoniac fever which infested Morzine for several years.

I know it is the favorite theory of the modern Spiritualists, especially in America, to attribute all extra-mundane visitations, good, bad, or indifferent, to the spirits of deceased persons. I have conversed with many very intelligent clairvoyants who have described apparitions which manifested themselves in the form of dogs, cats, bears, tigers, and other animals, and all these appearances they assured me, were but the representation of human beings under low conditions of development. The same persons have informed me they often saw different individuals surrounded by toads, lizards, serpents, and vermin, but that such objects had no real objective existence, but were projections from the evil tendencies of the parties, whose thoughts engendered them. They have cited Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences in support of their opinions, urging that the great seer assures us it is the invariable tendency of evil thoughts to clothe themselves in the shape of the animals to which they correspond. It is wonderful to note with what ingenuity and

ceaseless stretch of the imagination such reasoners argue for the crystallization of thought into forms. In their philosophy the varying appearances of the human spirit are sufficient to account for all the ground once occupied by supernaturalism.

The Good People or Fairies of England, and the Pixies of Scotland are simply the spirits of small children clothed in green. Pigmies, Gnomes, Kobolds, etc., are the souls of the early men, who of course, were very small or very very large, in accordance with the size of the phantoms they are to account for. In the same manner, Sylphs, undines, Salamanders, and all the weird apparitions of every country, clime and time are disposed of on elastic human hypotheses. In the opinion of these philosophers there never was, will, or can be any other than human spirits, and the whole boundless universe must look to this little planet earth to furnish forth the material for its population. There can be but little doubt that this is a relic of that materialistic theology which made a man of its God, and taught that the sun, moon, and stars were but heavenly gaslights, fixed in a crystal firmament for the especial purpose of illuminating the path of the sole end and aim of creation, Man. Those who plead for the existence of human spirits only, are wonderfully ingenious in showing how they can enlarge themselves into giants, contract into dwarfs, expand into winged, horned, crooked, rounded, or elongated animal substances; and all this mobility of representation is designed, they assure us, to signify certain passions or states of spiritual growth and development.

In the cases of obsession at Morzine, Sweden, Scotland, France, etc., also in the reports of trials for witchcraft, especially in New England and Scotland, it is notorious that the reputed witches and wizards were accused of mimicking the actions of animals. In all cases of obsession, too, this is one of the most marked features of the frenzy. Little children are seized with the passion for climbing, mewing, barking, and coiling themselves up into all sorts of animal shapes. The records of witchcraft and obsession both present these repulsive features as an invariable rule, and those who claim that nothing but the action of human spirit influence is manifested in these, the lowest and most revolting phases of spiritism, fail, to my apprehension, to account for this invariable tendency. It is contended that the demons of the Jewish Scriptures, whose obsession of human beings is so often referred to, could be accounted for on the ground of epilepsy and other conditions of physical disease to which Eastern nations are peculiarly liable.

Without being able to combat the opinions of so many respectable witnesses and sound thinkers as abound in the ranks of American spiritism (the chief supporters I find, of the human spiritual theory), I would yet submit that there is a vast array both of direct and circumstantial evidence favoring a belief in the interposition of other than human spirits, especially in the cases of obsession, witchcraft, and all other forms of spiritual manifestation, where demoniac wickedness, animal tendencies, and malignity towards the race are demonstrated.

I neither venture to offer my own testimony as a clairvoyant nor that of the thousands of seers and seeresses who in all ages of the world have professed to see and commune with the elementaries, as irrefragable proof of their existence. Swedenborg and the American spiritists generally have undoubtedly a certain amount of truth on their side when they plead for the representation of man's basest passions in the form of animals; in fact it is rather in the tone of speculation than certainty that we should question whether this theory covers the whole ground of apparitional manifestations.

In another place I shall present more extended views concerning the existence and gradations of elemental life, for the present, it must suffice to say, the visions narrated in the

previous chapter, have been faithfully described, and their results conform so closely to the experiences of a vast number of seers, who have like myself, witnessed the underlying causes for obsession, the source of which is in the invisible world, that I have no shadow of doubt in my own mind concerning the exact nature of the influence at work in the case I have related. The theory of ancient magicians and medieval mystics will be found in harmony with those of the Brotherhood from whom I first derived my opinions concerning the existence of the elementaries; and as I have before dwelt upon this subject, I shall simply add in this place that whilst I now believe the undeveloped spirits of humanity are actively engaged in stimulating every scene of human folly and error which re-enacts their own misspent lives, I am still assured such occasions offer opportunities for the intervention of the lower orders of elementaries. I conceive, moreover, that those beings exert a more constant and important influence upon humanity than we have dreamed of in our narrow philosophy, and that the demonstrations of this momentous truth will form the next phase of spiritual revelation to this generation.

Let me conclude these remarks by suggesting in brief the theories presented to us by certain of our spirit teachers, concerning the physical philosophy of obsession. The conditions that furnish opportunities for this affection are sometimes peculiar to individuals; at others, to communities. In the former case, it is generally the result of a highly mediumistic temperament, in which some disturbance of the nervous system has arisen, rendering the subject unusually negative and open to the control of strong, brutal spirits, who desire to reincarnate themselves again in human bodies, or elementaries, who are attracted by sympathetic states of the physical system they wish to obsess. In nearly every instance, the subjects best adapted to this terrible affliction are delicate and sensitive persons, young children, pure and simple-minded women, those in fact, whose physical and nervous temperaments are negative and whose minds are receptive to the influence of others.

When obsession affects an entire community as in the case described in the last chapter, it may generally be attributed to epidemic states of the atmosphere. Solar, planetary, and astral changes are forever transpiring in the grandly permanent yet grandly varied march of the universe. That these changes must affect the earth, itself the subject of every beam of light that can reach its surface, the simplest review of the sublime scheme of the sidereal heavens will show. Yet more potential by far than the merely mathematical astronomer can perceive, are the influences which solar, planetary, and astral conjunctions exercise upon the receptive earth. We must also glance at the opinion which the study of astrology combined with astronomy inclines us to arrive at, which is, that all diseases, mental, moral, or physical, that bear upon man in the form of epidemics are produced in the first instance by malignant conjunctions of the bodies in space in relation to the earth. Tides of atmosphere, especially equatorial currents, are the carriers and distributors of these malignant influences. Hence arises the war spirit which so often marches from land to land in regular tidal waves. In the same line of atmospheric influences are borne the subtle elements of criminal propensities, popular opinions, fashions, tastes, customs, an epidemic of genius, mechanical skill, physical susceptibility to certain diseases and all manner of plagues. One susceptible organism is first attacked; then by the force of sympathy in mental, and contagion in physical states, a whole community or district succumbs, until the prevailing influence is fully spent, when a reaction sets in.

I have cited the experience of Professor von Marx and myself in the Scotch obsession chiefly to show how available the all-potential force of spiritual and animal magnetism may, become in such affections, and how much more rapidly endemic disorders, especially of a nervous or Spiritualistic character, might yield to such influences than to the ordinary methods of cure. In my own case I attribute the marvelous effect produced upon

the demoniacs by my presence, to the operation of the beautiful planetary spirits who poured their divine influence upon a human multitude through the instrumentality of a human medium. Professor von Marx's influence was more direct and physically potential, for he infused his own powerful and healthful magnetism upon the afflicted ones by direct contact. I doubt if every case of obsession could not be thus instantly and effectually cured, could the right elements of spiritual and human magnetism both be brought to bear upon the subject.

I well remember being in London, some years ago, when a most malignant and fatal form of Asiatic cholera was raging through the city. The season was that of summer, the temperature immensely high, and the deserted city seemed wholly abandoned to the ravages of the fell plague. Going forth in the silent and woeful streets, one bright morning, when not a single particle of vapor flecked the deep azure of the sky, and not a cloud was visible, I beheld with open spiritual eyes an enormous column of black vapor hanging in seething, murky folds, horizontally extended and stretching for miles across the infected districts of the city. Curious to ascertain the nature of this columnar mass I gave myself up to the magnetic efflatus, and presently perceived that the column was composed of millions and tens of millions of living creatures generated in the atmosphere by a certain potent but malignant conjunction of the earth and stars.

I realized that this conjunction had converted the unparticled matter of the atmosphere into particled and finally organic conditions, and though the organisms thus produced were far too attenuated to come within the range of any instruments yet known to science, they were and are perpetually in course of formation, and when operating under malignant planetary and astral influences, they impressed, as in the instance under consideration, a diseased and pernicious influence on the atmosphere through which they were swept, and wherever they were borne they left their tracery behind in the form of pestilence.

I can scarcely hope to be believed by those who have not had the same opportunities of observation and analysis as myself, but for the truth's sake I will here leave a record behind, which may be accepted and understood in future generations even if rejected now.

It was during the prevalence of the great cholera plague to which I refer that I was invited by a few gentlemen, who were in sympathy with my mystical studies, to join them in a select party, the aim of which was to make astronomical experiments under peculiarly favorable circumstances. I do not feel at liberty to mention the names of those who graced our little gathering; it is enough to state that they were all distinguished for their scientific attainments. At a certain period of the night we adjourned to an observatory, where we were to enjoy the rare privilege of making observations through an immense telescope, constructed under the direction of Lord Rosse. When my turn arrived for viewing the heavens through this wonderful piece of mechanism, I confess I beheld a sight which for a long time held me breathless. At first I saw only the glorious face of the spangled firmament, with that sense of mingled awe and reverence which never forsakes the mind of the most accustomed observer when he exchanges the view of the black vault of midnight, with its thinly-scattered field of distant lamps checkering the heavens, for the gorgeous mass of divine pyrotechnics which bursts upon the sight through the dazzling revealments of the magic telescope.

Breathless, transfigured, whirled away from a cold, dim, cloudy world to a land—not of fairies or angels, but of gods and demigods—to skies burning and blazing with millions of suns, double suns, star roads, and empyrean walls, in which the bricks and mortar are sparkling suns and glowing systems, miracle of miracles! I hold my breath and tremble as I

think, for the sight never grows old nor familiar to me, and every time I have thus gazed, it has only been to find the awe and wonder deepen.

Absorbed as I was in contemplating the immensity and brilliancy of this ever new and ever gorgeous spectacle, in about forty seconds from the time when I first began to look through Lord Rosse's telescope, I found a singular blur coming between the shining frame of the heavens and the object glass. I was about to draw back, deeming some accidental speck had fallen upon the plane of vision, when I was attracted by observing that what I had deemed to be a blur actually assumed the shape of a human profile, and was, even as I gazed, in the act of moving along in space between the glass and the heavens. Fascinated and wonder-struck, I still retained the calm and fixed purpose of continuing my observations, and in this way I saw, yes! I distinctly saw, a gigantic and beautifully proportioned human face sail by the object-glass, intercepting the view of the stars, and maintaining a position in mid-air which I should judge to have been some five miles above the earth's surface.

Allowing for the immense magnifying powers of the instrument, I could not conceive of any being short of a giant whose form would have covered whole acres of space, to whom this enormous head could have appertained. When I first beheld this tremendous apparition, it seemed to be sailing perpendicularly in the air, intercepting the field of vision just between myself and the planet to which the glass was pointed. I have subsequently seen it four times, and on each occasion, though the face was the same, the inclination of the form must have varied, sometimes floating horizontally, at another time looking down as if from a height, and only permitting a partial view of the features, greatly foreshortened, to appear. Still again I have seen it as at first, and finally, it sailed by in such a fashion as to permit the sight of an immense cloudy bulk which followed in the wake of the beautiful head, the whole apparition occupying at least a hundred seconds in passing the glass, during which period the sight of all other objects but this sailing, dense mass was entirely obscured. On the occasion I at first alluded to, I became so fixed with astonishment and doubt, that I should not have mentioned what I saw had not the figure returned and from the side where it had disappeared I beheld it slowly, gradually, unmistakably float by the object-glass with even more distinctness than at first.

This second time I could perceive as unequivocally as if I had been gazing at my own reflection in a mirror, the straight, aquiline cast of features, the compressed lip, and stern expression of the face, the large, glittering eye, fixed like a star upon the earth beneath, and long lashes, like a fringe of beams, falling upon the side of the face. A vast curtain of streaming hair floated back from the head, and its arrangement seemed to imply that the form was moving at an inconceivably rapid rate through a strong current of opposing winds. When I had fully, unquestionably satisfied myself that what I had seen was a reality, I withdrew from the instrument, then requested one of the company present to examine my pulse and report upon its action. "Moderate and firm," was the reply, given in a tone of curious inquiry; but you look somewhat pale, Chevalier. May we not know what has occurred to disturb you?" Without answering, I proceeded carefully to examine the glass, and to scrutinize all its parts and surroundings, with a view of endeavoring to find some outside cause for what I must else have deemed a hallucination.

I was perfectly familiar with the use, capacity, and arrangement of the telescope, and as neither within nor without the instrument, nor yet in the aspect of the cloudless sky could I find the least possible solution to my difficulty, I determined to resolve the occurrence into the convenient word I have just used, and set the matter down as hallucination. But my

friends were not so easily satisfied. Some of them were personally acquainted with me, and fancied they perceived in my manner a thread of interest which they were not disposed to drop. At last, one of them, an old and very venerable scientist, whose opinions I had long been accustomed to regard with respect, looking steadily in my face, asked in a deep and earnest tone: "Will you not tell us if you have seen anything unusual? We beg you to do so, Monsieur, and have our own reasons for the query." Thus adjured, but still with some hesitation, I answered that I had certainly thought I had seen the outlines of a human face, and that twice, crossing the object-glass of the telescope.

Never shall I forget the piercing look of intelligence interchanged by my companions at this remark. Without a word of comment, however, the one whose guest I had the honor to be, stepped to a cabinet in the observatory where he kept his memoranda, and drawing forth a package, he thus addressed me: "What you may have seen to-night, Chevalier, I am not yet informed of, but as something remarkable appears to have struck you in the observation you have just made, we are willing to place ourselves at your mercy, and provided you will reciprocate the confidence we repose in you, we will herewith submit to you some memoranda which will convince you some of us at least, have beheld other bodies in space than suns and planets." Before my honored entertainer could proceed further, I narrated to him as exactly as I could, the nature of what I had seen, and then confessed I was too doubtful of my own powers of observation to set down such a phenomenon as an actuality unless I could obtain corroborative evidence of its truth. "Receive it, then, my friend," cried my host, in such deep agitation that his hand trembled violently as he unfolded his memoranda, and raising his eyes to heaven, gleaming through an irrepressible moisture, he murmured in deep emotion: "Good God! then it must be true."

I dare not recall verbatim the wording of the notes I then heard read, as they were so mixed up with details of astronomical data, which have since become public property, that the recital might serve to do that which I then solemnly promised to avoid, namely, whilst publishing the circumstances I then heard of, for the benefit of those who might put faith in them, carefully to suppress the names of the parties who furnished me with the information. My friends then (five in number on the occasion referred to) assured me that during the past six months, whilst conducting their observations at that place, and by the aid of that as well as two other telescopes of inferior power, they had, all on several occasions, seen human faces of gigantic proportions floating by the object-glass of their telescopes, in almost the same fashion and with the same peculiarities of form and expression as the one I had just described. One gentleman added that he had seen three of these faces on one night, passing one after the other, their transit occupying, with slight intervals between them, nearly half an hour. For many successive weeks this party had stationed themselves at distant places, at given periods of time, and determined to watch for several consecutive nights and see if the same phenomenon could or would appear to more than one observer at a time. The memoranda which record the results of this experiment were indeed most startling. Take the following extracts:

"Tuesday, June 4, 18—. Third night of watching. Took my station at the glass at 11:30 p.m. At 2, or just as the last vibration of the clock resounded from the observatory, the first outline of the head came into view. This time the form must have been directly perpendicular, for the sharp outline of the straight profile came into a direct line with the glass, and enabled me to see a part of the neck, and clear the top of the head. The figure was sailing due north, and moved across the glass in 72 seconds," etc., etc.

Memoranda 2d. I began to despair of success as three days had now elapsed without any interruption of the kind anticipated in my observations. At 10 minutes and 3 seconds

to 2, I began to experience an overpowering sense of fatigue, and determined to close my observations at the moment my chronometer should strike the hour. 2:30.—The giant has just appeared; his head came into view exactly as the clock was striking 2, and placing my chronometer directly before me so as to catch the first glimpse of the time when he disappeared, I find that his transit occupied exactly 72 seconds. Attitude horizontal, position of head, a direct and magnificent profile." Note No 3 simply states:

"Tuesday, June 4, 18—. Titanus came into view at 2 o'clock precisely, sailed by in 71 seconds, upright, and face in profile, moving due north," etc., etc.

Some of the observations recorded by the spectators of this phenomenon were full of emotion, and as the venerable gentleman who first questioned me read over the comments this strange sight called forth, my companions were so deeply moved, and manifested such intense feeling on the subject of what they had seen, that the reading was several times interrupted, and one of the party remarked, he believed he should be disposed to shoot anyone who should presume to cast doubt or ridicule on a subject which had affected them all so deeply.

For the next fortnight I enjoyed the privilege of spending a considerable portion of each night in that observatory. Twice the strange phantom sailed before my view in one week. By permission of my friends, I changed my station and continued my anxious watch with another instrument. On the second night I beheld the Titanic head with even more distinctness than before, and three of my fellow-watchers shared the weird spectacle with me from different posts of observation. One week later, although greatly fatigued by my long and close vigils for so many nights, I determined to avail myself of a final observation with one of the most superb instruments ever constructed. For many hours my exhaustive watch was unsuccessful; but just as I was about to take my leave of the enchanting fields of fiery blossoms that lay outstretched before me, two faces of the same size and expression, the one slightly in advance of, and measurably shading the other, sailed slowly, very slowly into view. They passed on with such an unappreciable, gentle motion that I could almost have imagined they were stationary for some seconds of time. Their appearance so completely surprised me at the moment when I was about to retire that I omitted to take note of the time they occupied in passing. The companion who shared my watch had pointed his glass a little more to the east than mine, and I had but time to murmur an injunction for him to change it as the figures came into view. He saw them, however, just as they were passing out of the field of vision, and exclaimed, with a perfect shout of astonishment: "By heavens! there are two of them!"

Some years after this memorable night I received a letter from one of my associates in this weird secret, according to me the permission I sought, namely, to publish the circumstances I have related thus far, but carefully to withhold the witnesses' names. In answer to my query whether my correspondent had again seen the tremendous phantom of the skies, he replied in the negative, adding: "Call me superstitious or what you will; the whole history lays us open to ourselves and to each other, to such wild suggestions and inconceivable possibilities, that no hypothesis can seem so improbable as that we should all be correct. I will venture to hint to you, one of us, you know, that I have somehow always connected the apparitions in question with the prevalence of the cholera. It was immediately in advance of this pestilence, and during the time when it raged, that we all saw them. Since that period we have never again beheld them, that is, none of us who now remain on earth."

"These appearances ceased with the pestilence, and came with it. Could they have been the veritable destroying angels, think you? You, who are a mystic, should be able to answer

me. I, with all my materialism, am so terribly shaken when I recall the terrific reality, that I endeavor to banish its remembrance whenever it recurs to me."

Again, I have anticipated the experiences of later years, and been guilty of wandering from the line of narrative which the march of events prescribes. I feel as if I should attempt, too, to render the explanations of the foregoing circumstances which my astronomical friends looked to me to supply them with, but looked, as the reader may do, in vain.

It seems to me as if a vain and egotistical fear of a sneering and skeptical age, keeps many others besides my astronomical associates silent on the occurrence of events which are chiefly remarkable because they are unprecedented, and which encounter jeers and denial chiefly from those who strive to measure eternity by the foot-rule of their own petty intellects. The buffets of such small wits as these have done me the good service of making me at last wholly indifferent to their opinions; hence I have in this instance, and shall in many more throughout these papers, record what I know to be true, without fear or favor. I cannot always explain what I have seen, heard, and taken part in, but the favorite motto of a very dear friend has now become my own, and "the truth against the world" will be the ruling inspiration in the dictation of these pages.