

Chapter 2

Marvel of Magnetic Influence and Somnambulism

SECRET SOCIETIES—MAGIC—THE "ATMOSPHERIC SPIRIT"— FLYING SOULS—MURDER AND ITS RESULTS

As I recall the singular experiences which marked my early boyhood, it seems but yesterday that I, now a man in the meridian of life, was the lad of twelve summers, led to my home by the hand of Professor von Marx, on the memorable night when I first realized the marvel of magnetic influence and somnambulic lucidity, in the experiment detailed in the last chapter. As such experiments were constantly repeated, and spread over a period of full six years, I do not propose to recapitulate them seriatim, but will endeavor to occupy my readers' time more profitably by presenting them with a summary of the revealments which those six years of occult practices disclosed to me.

On the night of what I may call my initiation into the society associated with Professor von Marx, that gentleman informed me, on our way to our lodgings, that the unconscious condition into which I had fallen after my spiritual visit to Hamburgh was occasioned by the lack of force necessary to sustain my system to the close of the seance.

He added that as I grew stronger and more accustomed to the magnetic control, I should be privileged to retain a recollection of what had transpired; and where this power failed, as it might do, my memory should be refreshed by a perusal of the memoranda which he kept of every seance, a storehouse of information which he intended to transcribe and correct in my presence.

In fulfillment of this promise, the professor spent some hours of every week with me; and as I was permitted to propound any questions which arose in my mind, and he seemed to take a singular pleasure in explaining the philosophy connected with the facts he recorded, I soon became possessed of the opinions entertained by the society with whom I was unwittingly associated.

Professor von Marx was not only a member of that society described so graphically by Jung Stilling in vision, but he also belonged to several others, all of which were more or less addicted to the practices of animal and mineral magnetism. The particular association to which I was first introduced constituted the German branch of a very ancient secret order, the name and distinctive characteristics of which neither I nor any other human being is privileged to mention, or even indicate more fully than I shall do in the following statements.

Many learned men, and patient students into life's profoundest mysteries, had transmitted from generation to generation the result of their investigations and the opinions deduced from their experiments. This society, which I shall call for distinction's sake, the "Berlin Brotherhood," conserving the experiences of their predecessors, had evolved the following elements of philosophy: They believed that every fragment of matter in the universe represented a corresponding atom of spiritual existence; that this realm of spiritual being was the essence, force, and real substance of the material; but that both inevitably dissolved together, both being resolved back into their component parts in the chemical change called death.

They acknowledged that the realm of spiritual being was ordinarily invisible to the material, and only known through its effects, being the active and controlling principle of matter; but they had discovered, by repeated experiments, that spiritual forms could become visible to the material under certain conditions, the most favorable of which were somnambulism procured through the magnetic sleep. This state, they had found, could be induced some times by drugs, vapors, and aromal essences; sometimes by spells, as through music, intently staring into crystals, the eyes of snakes, running water, or other glittering substances; occasionally by intoxication caused by dancing, spinning around, or distracting clamors; but the best and most efficacious method of exalting the spirit into the superior world and putting the body to sleep was, as they had proved, through animal magnetism.

They taught that in the realms of spiritual existence were beings who composed the fragmentary and unorganized parts of humanity, as well as beings of higher orders than humanity. Thus, as man was composed of earthly substances, vegetable tissues, mineral, atmospheric, and watery elements, so all these had realms of spiritual existences, perfectly in harmony with, their peculiar quality and functions. Hence, they alleged there were earthy spirits; spirits of the flood, the fire, the air; spirits of various animals; spirits of plant life, in all its varieties; spirits of the atmosphere; and planetary spirits, without limit or number. The spirits of the planets and higher worlds than earth took rank far above any of those that dwelt upon or in its interior. These spirits were more powerful, wise, and far-seeing than the earth spirits, whilst their term of existence was also more extended in point of time; but to no spirit did the Brotherhood attribute the privilege of immortality, and least of all to the fleeting and composite essence which formed the vital principle of man.

Assuming that, as man's soul was composed of all the elements which were represented in the construction of his body, so his spirit was, as a whole, far superior to the spirits of earth, water, plants, minerals, etc., to hold communion with them, however, was deemed by the Brotherhood legitimate and necessary to those who would obtain a full understanding of the special departments of nature in which these embryotic existences were to be found. Thus they invoked their presence by magical rites, and sought to obtain control over them, for the purpose of wresting from them the complete understanding of and power over the secrets of nature. Whilst I found, by repeated conversations with my new associates, that every one of them emphatically denied the continued existence of the soul after death, they still believed that the soul's essence became progressed by entering into organic forms, and thus that our essences, though not our individualities, were taken up by higher organisms than man's, and ultimately formed portions of that exalted race of beings who ruled the fate of nations, and from time to time communicated with the soul of man as planetary spirits. They taught that the elementary spirits, like the soul essence in man, were dissipated by the action of death, but, like that soul essence, became progressed by existence in forms, and were taken up by higher organisms, and ultimately helped to make up the spirit of man.

Strange and even fantastic as the belief sketched above may appear to the skeptic, mate-

rialist, or Spiritualist, permit me to assure all these differential classes of thinkers that these views have a far wider acceptance than the bare facts of history or biography would lead mankind to believe.

I have conversed with leading minds of the German schools in many phases of thought, and have found them unable to combat the facts I had to show, and compelled them to acknowledge the plausibility of my theory as an explanation of many of what would otherwise remain insoluble problems in nature. The society to which I was introduced by Professor von Marx was not the only one which cherished these views. In Arabia, India, Asia Minor, Hungary, Bohemia, Italy, France, Sweden and Great Britain, secret societies exist where these beliefs are accepted, and some of the experiences I am about to relate occurred in the great Babylon of materialism, London, during a visit which I made with Professor von Marx to England.

The professor was exceedingly generous, and distributed his abundant means with an unstinted hand. One day, discoursing with me on the subject of his lavish expenditure, he remarked, carelessly:

"There is that mineral quality in my organism, Louis, which attracts to me and easily subjects to my control the elementary spirits who rule in the mineral kingdoms. Have I not informed you how invariably I can tell the quality of mines, however distant? how often I have stumbled, as if by accident, upon buried treasures? and how constantly my investments and speculations have resulted in financial successes? Louis, I attract money, because I attract mineral elements and the spirits who rule in that realm of nature.

"I neither seek for nor covet wealth. I love precious stones for their beauty and magnetic virtues, but money, as a mere possession, I despise. Were I as mercenary in my disposition as I am powerful in the means of gaining wealth, I could be richer than Croesus, and command a longer purse than Fortunatus."

"Is it not strange, my master," I replied, "that the specialty of your physical nature—namely, the power of attracting riches, as you allege—should not find a corresponding desire in your soul?"

"Not at all, my Louis; on the contrary, Nature is purely harmonious, and ever tends to equilibrium, in all her strivings. Have you not remarked how often the possession of a special gift is accompanied by an indifference to its possession?"

"Good singers, great musicians, and even poets, painters, and sculptors, rarely estimate their gifts as highly as the world that enjoys them. They are ever dissatisfied with themselves, and unless the world praises, applauds, and recompenses them, they find but little or no interior reward from the mere exercise of their faculty. And thus it is with all Nature's gifts. Abundance of strength in the physical departments of our being rarely accompanies unusual vigor of thought or profundity of intellect; muscle and brain seldom hold companionship; and so the magnetic attractions which draw unto my physique the metallic treasures of the earth fail to find any response in the magnetic attractions of my spirit, whereas, were I so constituted as to lack the force which attracts the service of the spirits of the metals, my soul would feel and yearn for a supply of the deficiency in a constant aspiration for money and treasure."

And that is why (as I then believed) Professor von Marx was rich, but did not care for or value his wealth, whilst so many millions, who do not possess in their organisms that pecu-

liar mineral quality which, as the Brotherhood taught, was necessary to attract wealth, pine for its possession, yet spend their lives vainly in its pursuit.

It becomes necessary, for the benefit of any students of psychological mysteries who may peruse these pages, that I should here state, as briefly as possible, the specialties in my association with the "Berlin Brotherhood" which attracted them to me.

They believed (and with good reason) that the spiritual essence in man called soul is susceptible of acting a part independent, to some extent, of the body; that when the body is entranced, or subsides into perfect rest beneath the action of the mesmeric sleep, the spirit, becoming liberated from its control, acquires highly exalted functions, amongst which are the powers of traversing space, and beholding objects through the lucidity of spiritual light. Professor von Marx had detected, through certain signs familiar to good mesmerists, that I was a subject for magnetic experiments.

My power as a "clairvoyant" exceeded what he had anticipated; hence my services to the Brotherhood were highly appreciated. Ever since the practices of Mesmer had become familiar to them, they had delighted in pursuing them in support of their favorite theory, which was that the soul essence of man could appear, make signs, sounds, and disturbances, in places distant from the body; that at times, when these soul essences were dissipated suddenly, as in the action of violent death, they inhered to earthly things and places, and for a time could maintain a sort of vague, shadowy existence, which at length melted away, and became dissipated in space, to be taken up from the grand reservoir of spiritual essences in other souls. Now, the brothers insisted that these soul essences, which they called the "double goer," and more frequently the "atmospheric spirit," by its occasional appearances, both before and after the death of individuals, covered the whole ground of spectres, ghosts, apparitions, hauntings, and supernaturalism in general.

The fact that the "atmospheric spirit" often lingered around the earth after the death of the body, and could be seen, heard, and felt, did not militate against their theory that immortality was a fiction and that the soul died with the body. "It was merely the atmospheric spirit; a shadowy remnant of the soul," they said, "which had ever been seen or manifested in the realm of ghost land; and this was not a permanent, intelligent existence, but merely a temporary relic of the broken organism, like the perfume which lingers about the spot where the flower has been." By repeated and patient experiments with their magnetic subjects, they found that they could send the "double" or "atmospheric spirit" abroad in the somnambulic sleep, and that it could be seen, heard, and felt precisely like the spectres that were claimed to have been manifested in tales of the supernatural.

On one occasion, the society having thrown me into a profound sleep by the aid of vital magnetism, and the vapors of nitrous oxide gas, they directed my "atmospheric spirit" to proceed, in company with two other lucid subjects, to a certain castle in Bohemia where friends of theirs resided, and then and there to make disturbances by throwing stones, moving ponderable bodies, shrieking, groaning, and tramping heavily, etc., etc. I here state emphatically, and upon the honor of one devoted only to the interests of truth, that these disturbances were made, and made by the spirits of myself and two other yet living beings, a girl and a boy who were subjects of the society; and though we, in our own individualities, remembered nothing whatever of our performance, we were shortly afterwards shown a long and startling newspaper account of the hauntings in the castle of Baron von L_____, of which we were the authors.

an account of the "manifestations," as they were termed, which occurred, on three several occasions, at a certain castle in Bohemia. The writer attributes these disturbances to disembodied spirits, but in the particular ease in question, I insist that the atmospheric spirits of the Berlin Brotherhood were the authors of the facts recorded. As the experiments of these grave gentlemen were neither pursued in fun or mischief, but solely with a view to evolve the rationale of a psychological science, I must confess that they followed out their experiments without remorse or consideration for the feelings of others; and as we were all bound by the most solemn oaths of secrecy, there was little or no chance that a solution to any of the mysteries that originated in our circle could escape from its charmed precincts. I am now writing at a period of nearly half a century after the following occurrences; there will be no impropriety, therefore, in my recalling to any individual who may chance to retain a recollection of the event, the scandal that prevailed about fifty years ago in a town in Russia, concerning a nobleman much given to the study of occult arts, who was alleged to have put to death a young country girl whom he had subjected for some months to his magical experiments, and that for the purpose of proving whether her atmospheric spirit, violently thrust out of the body in the vigor of vitality, could not continue hovering around the scene of death, and make manifestations palpable to the sense of sight and sound. The popular rumor concerning this barbarous sacrifice was that the nobleman in question had seduced the unhappy peasant girl, and, after having periled her immortal soul by his magical arts, he had ruthlessly destroyed her body for fear she should betray him.

Certain it was that the gentleman in question was charged with murder, tried and acquitted, just as it was supposed any other powerful nobleman in his place would have been. The results, however, were that strange and horrible disturbances took place in his castle. The affrighted domestics alleged that the spirit of the victim held possession of her destroyer's dwelling, and night after night her wild shrieks and blood-stained form, flying through gallery and corridor, "made night hideous," and startled the surrounding peasantry from slumber. Rumor added that the ghost, spectre, or "atmospheric spirit," whatever it might be, was not laid for years, and that the adept who had resorted to such terrible methods of gratifying his insatiate thirst for occult knowledge paid a tremendous penalty for what he had sought. Tortured with the horrible phantom he had evoked, his mind succumbed, and became a mere wreck. At the time when I commenced my experiences with the Brotherhood, this man, who had once been an honored member of their society, was confined as a hopeless lunatic, whilst his castle and estates were abandoned by his heir to the possession of the dread haunter and the destructive spirit of neglect and dilapidation.

It was by the command of my associates that I one night visited, in the magnetic sleep, the cell of the lunatic; and being charged by the power of the Brothers with their combined magnetic force, I threw it on the maniac, and by this means, whilst his suffering body slumbered tranquilly, I returned to our "sanctuary" with his spirit; and from the records of that night's proceedings, I extract the following minutes of what transpired. He whose office I am not permitted by my honor to name, I shall call "Grand Master," and he thus questioned what was always called on these occasions the "flying soul" of the maniac:

Grand Master—Did you kill the body of A. M? Answer truly.

Flying Soul—I did.

G. M.—For what purpose, and how?

F. S.—To ascertain if the atmospheric spirit, being full of life, could remain with me. I killed her by a sudden blow, so as to let all the life out at once, and I drew out the spirit from the dead form by mesmeric passes.

G. M.—Did you see that spirit pass?

F. S.—I did.

G. M.—How did it look?

F. S.—Exactly like the body, only it wore an aspect of horror and appeal terrible to behold.

G. M.—Did the spirit stay with you, and how long? Did it obey you, and act intelligently, or did it act a merely automatic part?

F. S.—Mortals, know that there is no death! I did not kill A. M. I only broke up the temple in which her soul dwelt. That soul is immortal, and cannot die. I found this out the moment after it had left the body, for it looked upon me, spoke to me, and reproached me. O, God of heaven, saints and angels, pity me! It spoke to me as intelligently, but far, far more potentially than ever it had done in earthly being. It was not dead. It could not die; it never will die, and so it told me at once; but ah, me, miserable! when I sank down aghast and struck with ineffable horror, as the spirit approached me, into a deep swoon, I entered the land of immortal souls. There I saw many people whom I had thought dead, but who were all still living.

There, too, I saw the still living and radiantly glorious soul of my old pastor, Michael H_____. Sternly but sorrowfully he told me I had committed a great and irreparable crime; that all crime was unpardonable, and could only be wiped out by personal, and not by vicarious atonement, as he had falsely taught whilst on earth; that my only means of atonement was suffering, and that in-kind, or in connection with my dreadful crime; that, as the poor victim would be engaged during the term of her earthly life (broken short by my act) in working it out in an earthly sphere, so her magnetism, actually attracted, as I had deemed, to the spot where her life had been taken, would continue to haunt me, and repeat in vision the last dread act of murder until her life essence should melt away, and her spirit become free to quit the earth, and progress, as she would do, to higher spheres.

Sometimes, this stern teacher informed me, I should see the real living soul of my victim, and then it would be as a pitying angel striving to help me; but still oftener I should see only the "spectre," and this would always appear as in the death-moment, an avenging form, partly conjured up from my own memory, and partly from the magnetic aura of my victim, and always taking the shape and circumstances of my dreadful crime. Mortals, there is much more to tell you of the awful realms beyond the grave, and the solemn connection between life and death, but more I dare not speak. Human beings will soon learn it for themselves; for the souls of the immortals are preparing to bridge over the gulf of death, and men and spirits will yet cross and recross it. Meantime ye are the blind leading the blind; deceiving yourselves with a vain philosophy, and deceiving all to whom ye teach it. There is no Death! I must be gone. Hark, I am called."

The minutes which follow, on this strange revelation of the maniac's "flying soul," add:

"It would seem that the body was disturbed in its somnambulism, and the soul recalled; but we could have gained nothing by prolonging this interview, for evidently that soul had returned in its lucid intervals to the ancient and false philosophy in which it had in childhood been instructed, namely, the mythical belief in its immortality.

"The spirits of lunatics can be evoked, and always speak and think rationally when freed from the disordered body; but we note that they most commonly go back to the rudimental periods of their existence, and generally insist on the popular myth of immortality.

"Perhaps they are en rapport with the prevailing opinions of men, and are thus psychologized into repeating accepted ideas. There is nothing, however, to be gained from this experiment."