

[FOR THE BEE.]

POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS.—No. 5.

APPARITIONS.

Mr DAWSON. Sir,—This is a part of popular superstition, a distinct idea of the meaning of which cannot easily be conveyed: It is a belief that something is seen while at the same time it will be acknowledged, by at least some of the believers in apparitions, that there is nothing to be seen. I have already expressed an opinion regarding miracles; we therefore let them alone, and say this is a paradox, the unravelling of which we will now attempt.

It is an imaginary idea, impressed under peculiar circumstances, the sense of sight acquiescing in the delusion, and leading to a false conclusion. In Scotch phraseology, these species are pronounced Wreaths and Ghosts, both being connected with mortality—the wreath, or appearance of a person while alive, saying they will soon die, and likely in some unnatural way; the ghost, or appearance of the dead, making known that they are not resting well in their graves from some untoward circumstance in life. Some light may be thrown upon this mystical subject, by the relation of a melancholy catastrophe that happened some forty years ago. As I believe there are none whose feelings may be hurt from personal connection that may see this, I shall mention names. In the village of Koth, there resided a very respectable unmarried lady about thirty-five years of age, who gained a comfortable livelihood by her needle, but who unfortunately became the victim of intemperance to such a degree, that she got embarrassed in circumstances, and was sued by a merchant for a small debt. The following night Miss Riach left her room half dressed, and ran through a light snow, bounding over fences and ditches, in a way that seemed more than human, for about a mile, to the river Isla, and plunged into the pool where she was found a corpse in the morning. The body was carried to an old school house. Happening to be in the village at the time, and from being acquainted with the lady, I was induced to go and see the most humiliating spectacle I ever witnessed. Superstition interfered, forbade, and even defied humanity to perform sepulchral rites. From the unblemished character she had maintained during the greater part of her life, the most respectable of the inhabitants wished to have a coffin made, and the body interred in some by-corner of the church yard; but no carpenter could be found to make a coffin, and after a grave was dug it was not permitted to lay the body in it. Conflicting opinions with respect to its disposal, at last determined to have it conveyed to the public square, where it lay a considerable time in some old boards not large enough to cover it—a woeful comment on the depravity of human nature,—it was then removed to the dungeon in the common jail, and how it was finally disposed of I cannot say.

From the deep and lasting impression the scene made upon my mind, if I went into a dark room or any sequestered place for a long time after, some part of the tragical event occurred to my mind, and a little tincture of superstition would have persuaded me that I saw Miss Riach's ghost.

Were those who are tainted with a belief in apparitions to reflect a little upon the subject, and investigate it in a philosophical way, they might be led to see how the deception arises. It may proceed at times from an optical illusion; things that are seen at an unusual time in a way not expected, have often an extraordinary appearance. An acquaintance with the magic lantern or camera obscura, would illustrate this. I have known a broom bush to be taken for a water Kelpie, and a cart in which lime had been carried, for Lady Francie's ghost.

Yours, &c.

AMICUS VERITATIS

April, 1837.

[FOR THE BEE.]

MR DAWSON,

Sir,—In one of your numbers of the BEE, I observed a few remarks upon the influence of the Moon, under the title of *Popular Superstitions*, and signed "Amicus Veritatis;" upon which I wish to make a few observations, if I am allowed the liberty.

The writer enumerates a variety of superstitious opinions prevalent among the credulous—some that I always considered too absurd upon which to indulge a thought,—others that I never made it my business to enquire into, or prepare myself by experience to judge of their veracity.—And though I believe that the moon has some influence upon animal life, still, I am not of that class who maintain that "all things animate and inanimate, are under her guidance."—But as an argument against such opinions, he says, "a question may be asked, has the moon this power inherent of itself, or is it delegated by God? If the first, then an acknowledgment is made that God is not omnipotent; if the latter, then God has committed his works to a creature, which I think is contrary to Scripture or reason." I think that "Amicus Veritatis" would have done nothing more than justice to his readers, if he had shewed in what respect it is contrary to either. Though I believe that there is no object in nature that is possessed of power, but which has received it of its Creator, still I cannot understand why it is contrary to Scripture or reason, to say that it has been committed to it by Him, for when God created the heaven and the earth, he said, "let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed," &c.; and likewise, "God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night." Was not this the work of God limited to a creature? and wherefore should we say that it is contrary to reason? But he adds,—"superstition has a powerful effect upon a sound mind, no wonder it works powerfully upon the disordered; and when a return of the disease is looked for at a particular time, it is most likely to happen at that time," and assigns no other reason for its return than that it was looked for, as if under the control of the imagination. These periodical diseases must necessarily have had a beginning, and what was to account for their first return when they were not looked for.

But "Amicus Veritatis" states farther, "I question whether there is such a disease as lunacy; some will say it is spoken of in Scripture; granted: So are Astrologers, and the science they taught is now exploded among the better informed,—the other may erelong." The disease of lunacy is spoken of in Scripture in a positive manner, and really prevailing, as recorded by the Evangelist Matthew, who says—"There came unto Jesus such as were lunatic, and he healed them." Astrology as a science, is false, and contrary to religion; therefore there is not that similarity between them that would give us reason to condemn the belief in the one because the other is exploded.

Philosophers assert for a certainty, that the attraction of the moon, is the principal cause of the ebbing and flowing of the ocean; and likewise that the various changes of the atmosphere have a powerful effect upon the animal life, by making it sometimes dull and languid, and listless; at other times cheerful, active, and vigorous. Now, sir, if these are facts, may we not as reasonably suppose, that the moon, in a similar manner as she acts upon the ocean, acts upon our atmosphere, (but to a greater degree, as it is fluid and much more elastic,) and thus produce those various changes that take place in it, which affect the animal constitution. But the following quotation from the writings of a scientific man upon the subject, is well worthy of our attention.

"The changes in our atmosphere at high water, new and full moon, the equinoxes, &c., must occasion alterations in all animal bodies; for all living creatures require air of a determined gravity to perform respira-

tion easily;—for it is by its weight that this fluid insinuates itself into the cavity of the breast and lungs: By a slow circulation the secretion of the spirits is diminished; and by the want of the force of elasticity and gravity, the juices begin to ferment, change the union of their parts, break their cavals, and diseases follow."

I hope our friend "Amicus Veritatis" will excuse me for the liberty I have taken upon the subject, as I did not write with a view to criticise, (for I feel myself quite incapable,) but with an intention to defend and maintain my own sentiments; and I do not wish to be classed among the superstitious, when I think a philosophical reason can be assigned for my opinions.

Yours truly,

A COUNTRYMAN.

April, 1837.

UNITED STATES.

[From the Providence Journal.]

THE TIMES.—The whole country is now suffering under the inflated and extravagant system which has pervaded all its business relations for the past three years. Property of every description has risen beyond its legitimate value, and it must now come down. The prices which have been paid for lots in the city of New York and elsewhere, stocks, provisions, rents, fuel, all must come down, just as they did in 1818, when the paper currency was regulated by the Bank of the United States. We have gone ahead too fast; our debts have increased in consequence of the expansion of credits, and the passion of enterprise far beyond our means to pay. Millions are due abroad and millions at home, which, with the arbitrary measures of Government, and the want of some controlling agent in finance, like the Bank of the United States, have induced present embarrassments. Prices will come down, we say, and they have already diminished. The farmers in the western part of New York are reducing the prices of wheat, flour, pork, butter, beef, &c. The North River is navigable, and the Western canals will probably be in the course of ten days, and then a fresh supply of all these articles will contribute to bring about this desirable object. With a diminution of prices will follow a decrease in wages. This is the legitimate consequence, and at the same time a working man will buy food at a cost far below what he has been obliged to pay.

A striking fact of the extravagant spirit which has prevailed so long in and about New York, is mentioned in the Philadelphia Herald. A farm near Jamaica, Long Island, was valued at about \$20,000—the owner was offered \$76,000 and sold it. One third of the purchase money was paid in cash, and the remainder secured by bond and mortgage. The vender becoming thus unexpectedly rich, commenced building a large house, and soon dissipated his \$25,000. He could not hire the money on the bond and mortgage, and abandoned the completion of his house. The purchaser of the farm could not pay the instalments and the embarrassments that followed made him a poor man. This is but one of a thousand facts, we doubt not, which might be mentioned, where this extravagant system of speculation has brought poverty and misery in its train. May the Country learn wisdom from the bitter experience which is now visiting it.

The New York Gazette says:—"It is estimated that there are above 1,000 idle boys, from 12 to 16 years of age, daily prowling about our streets, who are capable of making very useful men if a proper course be pursued."