

The Hand of Glory; The Bloody Hand of Ulster; The Seventh Son; Birthmarks; Nature's Devil Signals; Pre-Existence; The Future; Projection; Telepathy, Etc.

By Elliott O'Donnell

The Hand of Glory

Belief in the power of the Hand of Glory still, I believe, exists in certain parts of European and Asiatic Russia. Once it was prevalent everywhere. The Hand of Glory was a hand cut off from the body of a robber and murderer who had expiated his crimes on the gallows. To endow it with the properties of a talisman, the blood was first of all extracted; it was then given a thorough soaking in saltpetre and pepper, and hung out in the sun. When perfectly dry, it was used as a candlestick for a candle made of white wax, sesame seed, and fat from the corpse of the criminal. Prepared thus, the Hand of Glory was deemed to have the power of aiding and protecting the robbers in their nefarious work by sending to sleep their intended victims. Hence no robber ever visited a house without having such a talisman with him.

The Bloody Hand of Ulster

The Red Right Hand of Ulster is the badge of the O'Neills, and according to tradition it originated thus:—On the approach of an ancient expedition to Ulster, the leader declared that whoever first touched the shore should possess the land in the immediate vicinity. An ancestor of the O'Neills, anxious to obtain the reward, at once cut off his right hand and threw it on the coast, which henceforth became his territory.

Since then the O'Neills have always claimed the Red Right Hand of Ulster as their badge, and it figured only the other day on the banner which, for the first time since the days of Shane the Proud, was flown from the battlements of their ancient stronghold, Ardglass Castle, now in the possession of Mr F. J. Bigger.

A very similar story to that of the O'Neill is told of an O'Donnell, who, with a similar motive, namely, to acquire territory, on arriving within sight of Spain, cut off his hand and hurled it on the shore, and, like the O'Neills, the O'Donnells from that time have adopted the hand as their badge.

The Seventh Son

It was formerly believed that a seventh son could cure diseases, and that a seventh son of a seventh son, with no female born in between, could cure the king's evil. Indeed, seven was universally regarded as a psychic number, and according to astrologers the greatest events in a person's life, and his nearest approach to death without actually incurring it, would be every seven years. The grand climacterics are sixty-three and eighty-four, and the most critical periods of a person's life occur when they are sixty-three and eighty-four years of age.

Birthmarks

Some families have a heritage of peculiar markings on the skin. The only birthmark of this description which I am acquainted with is "The Historic Baldearg," or red spot that has periodically appeared on the skins of members of the O'Donnell clan. Its origin is dubious, but I imagine it must go back pretty nearly to the time of the great Niall. In the days when Ireland was in a chronic state of rebellion, it was said that it would never shake off the yoke of its cruel English oppressors till its forces united under the leadership of an O'Donnell with the Baldearg. An O'Donnell with the Baldearg turned up in 1690, in the person of Hugh Baldearg O'Donnell, son of John O'Donnell, an officer in the Spanish Army, and descendant of the Calvagh O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, who had been created Earl of Wexford by Queen Elizabeth. But the Irish, as has ever been the case, would not unite, and despite the aid given him by Fralbot (who had succeeded the O'Donnells in the Earldom of Tyrconnell), he met with but little success, and returning to Spain, died there with the rank of Major-General in 1704.

References to the Baldearg may be seen in various of the Memoirs of the O'Donnells in the libraries of the British Museum, Madrid, Dublin, and elsewhere.

Nature's Devil Signals

I have already alluded to the fingers typical of murderers; I will now refer in brief to a form of Nature's other danger signals. The feet of murderers are, as a rule, very short and broad, the toes flat and square-tipped. As a rule, too, they either have very receding chins, as in the case of Mapleton Lefroy, or very massive, prominent chins, as in the case of Gotfried.

In many instances the ears of murderers are set very far back and low down on their heads, and the outer rims are very much crumpled; also they have very high and prominent cheek-bones, whilst one side of the face is different from the other. The backs of many murderers' heads are nearly perpendicular, or, if anything, rather inclined to recede than otherwise—they seldom project—whilst the forehead is unusually prominent.

It is a noteworthy fact that a large percentage of modern murderers have had rather prominent light, steely blue eyes—rarely grey or brown.

Their voices—and there is another key to the character—are either hollow and metallic, or suggestive of the sounds made by certain animals.

Many of these characteristics are to be found in criminal lunatics.

Pre-existence and the Future

To talk of a former life as if it were an established fact is, of course, an absurdity; to dogmatise at all on such a question, with regard to which one man's opinion is just as speculative as another's, is, perhaps, equally ridiculous. Granted, then, the equal value of the varying opinions of sane men on this subject, it is clear that no one can be considered an authority; my opinion, no less than other people's, is, as I have said, merely speculation. That I had a former life is, I think, extremely likely, and that I misconducted myself in that former life, more than likely, since it is only by supposing a previous existence in which I misbehaved, that I can see the shadow of a justification for all the apparently unmerited misfortunes I have suffered in my present existence.

I do not, however, see any specific reason why my former existence should have been here; on the contrary, I think it far more probable that I was once in some other sphere—perhaps one of

the planets—where my misdeeds led to my banishment and my subsequent appearance in this world. With regard to a future life, eternal punishment, and its converse, everlasting bliss, I fear I never had any orthodox views, or, if I had, my orthodoxy exploded as soon as my common sense began to grow.

Hell, the hell hurled at my head from the pulpit, only excited my indignation—it was so unjust—nor did the God of the Old Testament fill me with aught save indignation and disgust. Lost in a quagmire of doubts and perplexities, I inquired of my preceptors as to the authorship of the book that held up for adoration a being so stern, relentless, and unjust as God; and in answer to my inquiries was told that I was very wicked to talk in such a way about the Bible; that it was God's own book—divinely inspired—in fact, written by God Himself. Then I inquired if the original manuscript in God's handwriting was still in existence; and was told I was very wicked and must hold my tongue. Yet I had no idea of being in any way irreverent or blasphemous; I was merely perplexed, and longed to have my difficulties settled. Failing this, they grew, and I began to question whether the terms “merciful” and “almighty” were terms that could be applied with any degree of consistency to the scriptural one and only Creator. Would that God, if He were almighty, have permitted the existence of such an enemy (or indeed an enemy at all) as the Devil? And if He were merciful, would He, for the one disobedient act of one human being, have condemned to the most ghastly and diabolical sufferings, millions of human beings, and not only human beings, but animals? Ah! that's where the rub comes in, for though there may be some sense, if not justice, in causing men and women, who have sinned—to suffer, there is surely neither reason nor justice in making animals, who have not sinned—to suffer.

And yet, for man's one act of disobedience, both man and beast have suffered thousands of years of untold agonies. Could anyone save the blindest and most fanatical of biblical bigots call the ordainer of such a punishment merciful? How often have I asked myself who created the laws and principles of Nature! They are certainly more suggestive of a fiendish than a benevolent author. It is ridiculous to say man owes disease to his own acts—such an argument—if argument at all—would not deceive an infant. Are the insects, the trees, the fish responsible for the diseases with which they are inflicted? No, Nature, or rather the creator of Nature, is alone responsible. But, granted we have lived before, there may be grounds for the suffering both of man and beast. The story of the Fall may be but a contortion of something that has happened to man in a former existence, in another sphere, possibly, in another planet; and its description based on nothing more substantial than memory, vague and fleeting as a dream. Anyhow, I am inclined to think that incarnation here might be traced to something of more—infinately more—importance than an apple; possibly, to some cause of which we have not, at the present, even the remotest conception. People, who do not believe in the former existence, attempt to justify the ills of man here, by assuming that a state of perfect happiness cannot be attained by man, except he has suffered a certain amount of pain; so that, in order to attain to perfect happiness, man must of necessity experience suffering—a theory founded on the much misunderstood axiom, that nothing can exist save by contrast. But supposing, for the sake of argument, that this axiom, according to its everyday interpretation, is an axiom, *i.e.* a true saying, then God, the Creator of all things, must have created evil—evil that good may exist, and good that evil may exist. This deduction, however, is obviously at variance with the theory that God is all goodness, since if nothing can exist save by contrast, goodness must of necessity presuppose badness, and we are thus led to the conclusion that God is at the same time both good and bad, a conclusion which is undoubtedly a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Seeing, then, that a God all good cannot have created evil, surely we should be more rational, if less scriptural, were we to suppose a plurality of gods. In any case I cannot see how pain, if God is indeed all mighty and all good, can be the inevitable corollary of pleasure. Nor can I see the necessity for man to suffer here, in order to enjoy absolute happiness in the hereafter. No, I think if there is any justification for the suffering of mankind on this earth, it is to be found, not in the theory of “contrast,” but in a former existence, and in an existence in some other sphere or plane. Vague recollections of such an existence arise and perplex many of us; but they are so elusive, the moment we attempt to grapple with them, they fade away.

The frequent and vivid dreams I have, of visiting a region that is peopled with beings that have nothing at all in common with mankind, and who welcome me as effusively as if I had been long acquainted with them, makes me wonder if I have actually dwelt amongst them in a previous life.

I cannot get rid of the idea that in everything I see (in these dreams)—in the appearance, mannerisms, and expressions of my queer companions, in the scenery, in the atmosphere—I do but recall the actual experience of long ago—the actual experience of a previous existence. Nor is this identical dreamland confined to me; and the fact that others whom I have met, have dreamed of a land, corresponding in every detail to my dreamland, proves, to my mind, the possibility that both they and I have lived a former life, and in that former life inhabited the same sphere.

Projection

I have, as I have previously stated in my work, *The Haunted Houses of London*, succeeded, on one occasion, in separating at will, my immaterial from my material body. I was walking alone along a very quiet, country lane, at 4 P.M., and concentrating with all my mind, on being at home. I kept repeating to myself, “I WILL be there.” Suddenly a vivid picture of the exterior of the house rose before me, and, the next instant, I found myself, in the most natural manner possible, walking down some steps and across the side garden leading to the conservatory. I entered the house, and found all my possessions—books, papers, shoes, etc.—just as I had left them some hours previously. With the intention of showing myself to my wife, in order that she might be a witness to my appearance, I hastened to the room, where I thought it most likely I should find her, and was about to turn the handle of the door, when, for the fraction of a second, I saw nothing. Immediately afterwards there came a blank, and I was once again on the lonely moorland road, toiling along, fishing rod in hand, a couple of miles, at least, away from home. When I did arrive home, my wife met me in the hall, eager to tell me that at four o’clock both she and the girls had distinctly heard me come down the steps and through the conservatory into the house. “You actually came,” my wife continued, “to the door of the room in which I was sitting. I called out to you to come in, but, receiving no reply, I got up and opened the door, and found, to my utter amazement, no one there. I searched for you everywhere, and should much like to know why you have behaved in this very extraordinary manner.

Much excited in my turn, I hastened to explain to her that I had been practising projection, and had actually succeeded in separating my material from my immaterial body, for a brief space of time, just about four o’clock. The footsteps she had heard were indeed my own footsteps—and upon this point she was even more positive than I—the footsteps of my immaterial self.

I have made my presence felt, though I have never “appeared,” on several other occasions. In my sleep, I believe, I am often separated from my physical body, as my dreams are so intensely real and vivid. They are so real that I am frequently able to remember, almost *verbatim*, long

conversations I have had in them, and I awake repeating broken-off sentences. Often, after I have taken active exercise, such as running, or done manual labour, such as digging or lifting heavy weights in the land of my dreams, my muscles have ached all the following day.

With regard to the projections of other people, I have often seen phantasms of the living, and an account of one appearing to me, when in the company of three other persons, all of whom saw it, may be read in the *Psychical Research Society's Magazine* for October 1899. I have referred to it as well as to other of my similar experiences in *Ghostly Phenomena* and *Haunted Houses of London*.

Doubles, i.e. people who are more or less the exact counterpart of other people, may easily be taken for projections by those who have but little acquaintance with the occult. I, myself, have seen many doubles, but though they be as like as the proverbial two peas, I can tell at a glance whether they be the material or immaterial likeness of those they so exactly resemble. I think there is no doubt that, in a good many instances, doubles have been mistaken for projections, and, of course, *vice versa*.

Telepathy and Suggestion

Though telepathy between two very wakeful minds is an established fact, I do not think it is generally known that it can also take place between two minds when asleep, or between one person awake and another asleep, and yet I have proved this to be the case. My wife and I continually dream of the same thing at the same time, and if I lie down in the afternoon and fall asleep alone, she often thinks of precisely what I am dreaming about. Though telepathy and suggestion may possibly account for hauntings when the phenomenon is only experienced individually, I cannot see how it can do so when the manifestations are witnessed by numbers, i.e. collectively. I am quite sure that neither telepathy nor suggestion are in any degree responsible for the phenomena I have experienced, and that the latter hail only from one quarter—the objective and genuine occult world.

The Psychic Faculty and Second Sight

Whereas some people seem fated to experience occult phenomena and others not, there is this inconsistency: the person with the supposed psychic faculty does not always witness the phenomena when they appear. By way of illustration: I have been present on one occasion in a haunted room when all present have seen the ghost with the exception of myself; whilst on other occasions, either I have been the only one who has seen it, or some or all of us have seen it. It would thus seem that the psychic faculty does not ensure one's seeing a ghost, whenever a ghost is to be seen.

I think, as a matter of fact, that apparitions can, whilst manifesting themselves to some, remain invisible to others, and that they themselves determine to whom they will appear. Some types of phantasms apparently prefer manifesting themselves to the spiritual or psychic-minded person, whilst other types do not discriminate, but appear to the spiritual and carnal-minded alike. There is just as much variety in the tastes and habits of phantasms as in the tastes and habits of human beings, and in the behaviour of both phantasm and human being, I regret to say, there is an equal and predominant amount of inconsistency.

Intuition

I do not think it can be doubted that psychic people have the faculty of intuition far more highly developed than is the case with the more material-minded.

“Second sight” is but another name for the psychic faculty, and it is generally acknowledged to be far more common among the Celts than the Anglo-Saxons. That this is so need not be wondered at, since the Irish and the Highlanders of Scotland (originally the same race) are far more spiritual-minded than the English (in whom commerciality and worldliness are innate), and consequently have, on the whole, a far greater attraction for spirits who would naturally prefer to reveal themselves to those in whom they would be the more likely to find something in common.

There is still a belief in certain parts of the Hebrides that second sight was once obtained there through a practice called “The Taigheirm.” This rite, which is said to have been last performed about the middle of the seventeenth century, consisted in roasting on a spit, before a slow fire, a number of black cats. As soon as one was dead another took its place, and the sacrifice was continued until the screeches of the tortured animals summoned from the occult world an enormous black cat, that promised to bestow as a perpetual heritage on the sacrificer and his family, the faculty of second sight, if he would desist from any further slaughter.

The sacrificer joyfully closed with the bargain, and the ceremony concluded with much feasting and merriment, in which, however, it is highly improbable that the phantasms of the poor roasted “toms” took part.

Clairvoyance

Clairvoyance is a branch of occultism in which I have had little experience, and can, therefore, only refer to in brief. When I was the Principal of a Preparatory School, I once had on my staff a Frenchman of the name of Deslys. On recommencing school after the Christmas vacation, M. Deslys surprised me very much by suddenly observing: “Mr O'Donnell, did you not stay during the holidays at No. . . . The Crescent, Bath?”

“Yes,” I replied; “but how on earth do you know?” I had only been there two days, and had certainly never mentioned my visit either to him or to anyone acquainted with him.

“Well!” he said, “I'll tell you how I came to know. Hearing from my friends that Mine. Leprès, a well-known clairvoyante, had just come to Paris, I went to see her. It is just a week ago to-day. After she had described, with wonderful accuracy, several houses and scenes with which I was familiar, and given me several pieces of information about my friends, which I subsequently found to be correct, I asked her to tell me where you were and what you were doing. For some moments she was silent, and then she said very slowly: ‘He is staying with a friend at No. . . . The Crescent, Bath. I can see him (it was then three o'clock in the afternoon) sitting by the bedside of his friend, who has his head tied up in bandages. Mr O'Donnell is telling him a very droll story about Lady B—, to whom he has been lately introduced.’ She then stopped, made a futile effort to go on, and after a protracted pause exclaimed: ‘I can see no more— something has happened.’ That was all I found out about you.”

“And enough, too, M. Deslys,” I responded, “for what she told you was absolutely true. A week ago to-day I was staying at No. . . . The Crescent, Bath, and at three o'clock in the afternoon I was sitting at the bedside of my friend, who had injured his head in a fall, and had it tied up in bandages; and amongst other bits of gossip, I narrated to him a very amusing anecdote concerning Lady B——, whom I have only just met, for the first time, in London.”

Now M. Deslys could not possibly have known, excepting through psychical agency, where I had been staying a week before that time, or what I had been doing at three o'clock on that identical afternoon.

Automatic Writing

I have frequently experimented in automatic writing. Who that is interested in the occult has not! But I cannot say I have ever had any astonishing results. However, though my own experiences are not worth recording, I have heard of many extraordinary results obtained by others—results from automatic messages that one can not help believing could only be due to superphysical agency.

Table-turning

I do not think there is anything superphysical in merely turning the table, or making it move across the room, or causing it to fall over on to the ground, and to get up again. I am of the opinion that all this is due to animal magnetism, and to the unconscious efforts of the audience, who are ever anxious for the ghost to come and something startling to happen. The ladies, in particular, I would point out, press a little hard with their dainty but determined hands, or with their self-willed knees resort to a few sly pushes. When this does not happen, I think it is quite possible that an elemental or some other equally undesirable type of phantasm does actually attend the séance, and, emphasising its arrival by sundry noises, is responsible for many, if not all the phenomena. On the other hand, I certainly think that ninety per cent of the rappings and the manifestations of musical enthusiasts is due to trickery on the part of the medium, or, if there be no professional medium present, to an overzealous sitter.

But since ghosts can and do show themselves spontaneously in haunted houses, why the necessity of musical instruments, professional medium, and sitting round a table with fingers linked? Surely, when one comes to think of it, the *modus operandi* of the séance, besides being extremely undignified, is somewhat superfluous. Tin trumpets, twopenny tambourines, and concertinas are all very well in their way, but, try how I will, I cannot associate them with ghosts. What phantasm of any standing at all would be attracted by such baubles? Surely only the phantasms of the very silliest of servant girls, of incurable idiots, and of advanced imbeciles. But even they, I think, might be “above it,” in which case the musical instruments, tin trumpets, tambourines, and concertinas, disdained by the immaterial, must be manipulated by the material! And this rule with regard to table-turning, the manipulation of musical instruments, etc., equally applies to materialisation. I have no doubt that genuine phantasms of the earth-bound or elementals do occasionally show themselves, but I am quite sure in nine cases out of ten the manifestations are manifestations of living flesh and blood.

Charms and Checks against Ghosts

“When I feel the approach of the superphysical, I always cross myself,” an old lady once remarked to me; and this is what many people do; indeed, the sign of the cross is the most common mode of warding off evil. Whether it is really efficacious is doubtful. I, for my part, make use of the sign, involuntarily rather than otherwise, because the custom is innate in me, and is, perhaps, with various other customs, the heritage of all my race from ages past; but I cannot

say it always or even often answers, for ghosts frequently manifest themselves to me in spite of it. Then there is the magic circle which is described differently by divers writers. According to Mr Dyer, in his *Ghost World*, pp. 167-168, the circle was prepared thus: "A piece of ground was usually chosen, nine feet square, at the full extent of which parallel lines were drawn, one within the other, having sundry crosses and triangles described between them, close to which was formed the first or outer circle; then about half a foot within the same, a second circle was described, and within that another square corresponding to the first, the centre of which was the spot where the master and associate were to be placed. The vacancies formed by the various lines and angles of the figure were filled up by the holy names of God, having crosses and triangles described between them. . . . The reason assigned for the use of the circles was, that so much ground being blessed and consecrated by such holy words and ceremonies as they made use of in forming it, had a secret force to expel all evil spirits from the bounds thereof, and, being sprinkled with pure sanctified water, the ground was purified from all uncleanness; besides, the holy names of God being written over every part of it, its forces became so powerful that no evil spirits had ability to break through it, or to get at the magician and his companion, by reason of the antipathy in nature they bore to these sacred names. And the reason given for the triangles was, that if the spirits were not easily brought to speak the truth, they might by the exorcist be conjured to enter the same, where, by virtue of the names of the essence and divinity of God, they could speak nothing but what was true and right."

Again according to Mr Dyer, when a spot was haunted by the spirit of a murderer or suicide who lay buried there, a magic circle was made just over the grave, and he who was daring enough to venture there, at midnight, preferably when the elements were at their worst, would conjure the ghost to appear and give its reason for haunting the spot. In answer to the summons there was generally a long, unnatural silence, which was succeeded by a tremendous crash, when the phantasm would appear, and, in ghastly, hollow tones answer all the questions put to it. Never once would it encroach on the circle, and on its interrogator promising to carry out its wishes, it would suddenly vanish and never again walk abroad. If the hauntings were in a house, the investigator entered the haunted room at midnight with a candle, and compass, and a crucifix or Bible. After carefully shutting the door, and describing a circle on the floor, in which he drew a cross, he placed within it a chair, and table, and on the latter, put the crucifix, a Bible, and a lighted candle. He then sat down on the chair and awaited the advent of the apparition, which either entered noiselessly or with a terrific crash. On the promise that its wishes would be fulfilled, the ghost withdrew, and there were no more disturbances. Sometimes the investigator, if he were a priest, would sprinkle the phantasm with holy water and sometimes make passes over it with the crucifix, but the results were always the same; it responded to all the questions that were put to it and never troubled the house again.

How different from what happens in reality! Though I have seen and interrogated many ghosts, I have never had a reply, or anything in the shape of a reply, nor perceived any alteration in their expression that would in any way lead me to suppose they had understood me; and as to exorcism—well, I know of innumerable cases where it has been tried, and tried by the most pious of clergy—clergy of all denominations—and singularly failed. It is true I have never experimented with a magic circle, but, somehow, I have not much faith in it.

In China the method of expelling ghosts from haunted houses has been described as follows:—An altar containing tapers and incense sticks is erected in the spot where the manifestations are most frequent. A Taoist priest is then summoned, and enters the house dressed in a red robe, with blue stockings and a black cap. He has with him a sword, made of the wood of the peach or date

tree, the hilt and guard of which are covered with red cloth. Written in ink on the blade of the sword is a charm against ghosts. Advancing to the altar, the priest deposits his sword on it. He then prepares a mystic scroll, which he burns, collecting and emptying the ashes into a cup of spring water. Next, he takes the sword in his right hand and the cup in his left, and, after taking seven paces to the left and eight to the right, he says: "Gods of heaven and earth, invest me with the heavy seal, in order that I may eject from this dwelling-house all kinds of evil spirits. Should any disobey me, give me power to deliver them for safe custody to rulers of such demons." Then, addressing the ghost in a loud voice, he says: "As quick as lightning depart from this house." This done, he takes a bunch of willow, dips it in the cup, and sprinkles it in the east, west, north, and south corners of the house, and, laying it down, picks up his sword and cup, and, going to the east corner of the building, calls out: "I have the authority, Tai-Shaong-Loo-Kivan." He then fills his mouth with water from the cup, and spits it out on the wall, exclaiming: "Kill the green evil spirits which come from unlucky stars, or let them be driven away. This ceremony he repeats at the south, west, and north corners respectively, substituting, in turn, red, white, and yellow in the place of green. The attendants then beat gongs, drums, and tom-toms, and the exorcist cries out: "Evil spirits from the east, I send back to the east; evil spirits from the south, I send back to the south," and so on. Finally, he goes to the door of the house, and, after making some mystical signs in the air, manoeuvres with his sword, congratulates the owner of the establishment on the expulsion of the ghosts, and demands his fee.

In China the sword is generally deemed to have psychic properties and is often to be seen suspended over a bed to scare away ghosts. Sometimes a horse's tail—a horse being also considered extremely psychic—or a rag dipped in the blood from a criminal's head, are used for the same purpose. But no matter how many, or how varied, the precautions we take, ghosts will come, and nothing will drive them away. The only protection I have ever found to be of any practical value in preventing them from materialising is a powerful light. As a rule they cannot stand *that*, and whenever I have turned a pocket flashlight on them, they have at once dematerialised often, however, materialising again immediately the light has been turned off.

The cock was, at one time, (and still is in some parts of the world) regarded as a psychic bird; it being thought that phantasms invariably took their departure as soon as it began to crow. This, however, is a fallacy. As ghosts appear at all hours of the day and night, in season and out of season, I fear it is only too obvious that their manifestations cannot be restricted within the limits of any particular time, and that their coming and going, far from being subject to the crowing of a cock, however vociferous, depend entirely on themselves.