

THE COLUMBIA SPY.

AND LANCASTER AND YORK COUNTY RECORD.

NEW SERIES, VOL. I, No. 21.]

COLUMBIA, PA. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1847.

WHOLE NUMBER, 912.

CHARRICK WESTBROOK,
EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Printing Office—Front Street, opposite Barr's Hotel
Pub.—Box Office—Locust Street, opposite the P. O.
Terms.—The COLUMBIA SPY is published every
Saturday morning at the low price of ONE DOLLAR A
YEAR.—A SUBSCRIPTION, or one dollar and a half, is
now due, and is due at the time of subscribing.
Single copies, THREE CENTS.

Terms of Advertising.—Advertisements not exceeding
a square three times for \$1.00 per week.
Each additional insertion, for a greater length in proportion.
A liberal discount made to yearly advertisers.

Job PRINTING.—Such as Hand-bills, Posting-bills,
Circulars, etc., etc., executed with neatness and despatch
and on reasonable terms.

For the Spy and Columbian.

THOUGHTS IN A RELIGIOUS MEETING.

Though few in number, Father, Lord!
Still in the name we come
To wait for thy interesting word,
Though human lips be dumb;
Though neither sad nor joyful tone
Be lent to mortal ear—
Thou, thou, who knowest the heart alone,
With kindly listen here.

The while a cold and formal throng
We seem to mortal eye,
Thou knowest full many a grateful song,
And many a burdened sigh;
And heartfelt prayer for strength and grace,
To walk from error free,
Rise from this silent gathering place,
In sounds of power to thee.

The few that here are wholly thine,
Who tread the narrow way,
Told not by outward seal or sign,
Of their baptismal day;
Thou only knowest the way and time
Their covenant begun,
Thou only, when they seek sublime
Communication with thy Son.

Join me to these, as deep to deep,
Their way be all my choice;
My soul's an infant keep,
That knows its parent's voice.
While others labour in thy cause
With words of power and skill,
Be it mine to know thy laws,
To love thee, and be still.

From Blackwood's Magazine.

LETTER ON THE TRUTHS CONTAINED IN POPULAR SUPERSTITION.

Religious Delusions—The Possessed—Witchcraft.

DEAR ARCHY.—The subjects about which I propose writing to you to-day are, delusions of religious nature;—the idea of being possessed;—the grounds of the belief in witchcraft. With so much before me, I have no room to waste. So, of the first, first.

The powerful hold which the feeling of religion takes on our nature, at once attests the truth of the sentiment, and warns us to be on our guard against fanatical excesses. No subject can surely be permitted to have exclusive possession of our thoughts, least of all the most absorbing and exciting of any.

"So—it will make us mad."

It is evident that, with the majority, Providence has designed that worldly cares should largely and wholesomely employ the mind, and prevent inordinate craving after an indulgence in spiritual stimulation; while minds of the highest order are diverted, by the active duties of philanthropy, from any perilous excess of religious contemplation.

Under the influence of constant and concentrated religious thought, not only is the reason liable to give way—which is not our theme—but, alternatively, the nervous system is apt to fall into many a form of trance, the phenomena of which are mistaken by the ignorant for divine visitation. The weakest frame sinks into an insensibility profound as death, in which he has visions from heaven and the angels. Another lies in half-waking trance, rapt in celestial contemplation and beatitude; others are suddenly fixed in cataleptic rigidity; others, again, are dashed upon the ground in convulsions. The impressive effect of these seizures is heightened by their supervention in the midst of religious exercises, and by the contagious and sympathetic influence through which their spread is accelerated among the more excitable temperaments and weaker members of large congregations. What chance have ignorant people, witnessing such attacks, or being themselves the subjects of them, of escaping the persuasion that they mark the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit? Or, to take ordinarily informed and sober-minded people—what would they think at seeing mixed up with this hysterical disturbance, distinct proofs of extraordinary perceptive and anticipatory powers, such as occasionally manifest themselves as parts of a trance, to the rational explanation of which they might not have the key?

In the preceding letter, I have already exemplified, by the case of Henry Engelbrecht, the occurrence of visions of hell and heaven during the deepest state of trance. No doubt the poor ascetic implicitly believed his whole life the reality of the scenes to which his imagination had transported him.

In a letter from the Earl of Shrewsbury to Ambrose Mark Phillips, Esq., published in 1841, a very interesting account is given of two young women who had lain for months or years in a state of religious beatitude. Their condition, when they were exhibited, appears to have been that of half-waking in trance; or, perhaps, a shade nearer the lightest form of trance-sleep. To increase the force of the scene, they appear to have exhibited some degree of trance-perceptive power. But without this the mere aspect of such persons is wonderfully imposing. If the pure spirit of Christianity finds a bright comment and illustration in the Madonna and Cherubim of Raffaelle, it seems to shine out in still more truthful vividness from the brow of a young person rapt in a religious ecstasy. The hands clasped in prayer—the upturned eyes—the expression of humble confidence and seraphic hope, (displayed, let me suggest, on a beautiful face,

constitute a picture of which, having witnessed it, I can never forget the force. Yet I knew it was only a trance. So one knows that village churches are built by common mechanics. Yet when we look over an extensive country, and see the spire from its clump of trees rising over each hamlet, or over the distant city its minister tower—the images find an approving harmony in our feelings, and seem to aid in establishing the genuineness and the truth of the sentiment and the faith which have rendered such expressive symbols:

In the two cases mentioned in Lord Shrewsbury's pamphlet, it is, however, painful to observe that trick and artifice had been used to bend them to the service of Catholicism. The poor women bore on their hands and feet wounds, the supposed spontaneous eruption of delineations of the bleeding wounds of the crucifix, and, on the forehead, the bloody marks of the crown of thorns. To convert the imposture, the blood-stains from the wounds in the feet ran upwards towards the toes, to complete a *fae-simile* of the original, though the poor girls were lying on their backs. The wounds, it is to be hoped, are inflicted and kept fresh and active by means employed when the victims are in the insensibility to pain which commonly goes with trance.

To comprehend the effects of religious excitement operating on masses, we may inspect three pictures—the revivals of modern times—the fanatical delusions of the Cevennes—the behavior of the Convulsionaries at the grave of the Abbe Paris.

"I have seen," says M. Le Roi Suerland, himself a preacher, [Zion's Watchman, New York, Oct. 2, 1842.] "persons often lose their strength, as it is called, at camp-meetings, and other places of great religious excitement; and not pious people alone, but those also who were not professors of religion. In the spring of 1824, while performing pastoral labor in Dennis, Massachusetts, I saw more than twenty people affected in this way. Two young men, of the name of Crowell, came one day to a prayer meeting. They were quite indifferent. I conversed with them freely, but they showed no signs of penitence. From the meeting they went to their shop, (they were shoemakers,) to finish some work before going to the meeting in the evening. On sealing themselves they were both struck perfectly stiff. I was immediately sent for, and found them sitting paralyzed [he means cataleptic] on their benches, with their work in their hands, unable to get up, or to move at all. I have seen scores of persons affected the same way. I have seen persons lie in this state forty-eight hours. At such times they are unable to converse, and are sometimes unconscious of what is passing round them. At the same time they say they are in a happy state of mind."

These persons, it is evident, were thrown into one of the forms of trance through their minds being powerfully worked upon; with which cause the influence of mental sympathy with what they saw around them, and perhaps some physical agency, co-operated.

The following extract from the same journal portrays another kind of nervous seizure, allied to the former, and produced by the same cause, as it was manifested at the great revival, some forty years ago, in Kentucky and Tennessee:

"The convulsions were commonly called 'the jerks.' A writer, (McNeman,) quoted by Mr. Power, (*Essay on the Influence of the Imagination over the Nervous System*), gives this account of their course and progress:

"At first appearance these meetings exhibited nothing to the spectator but a scene of confusion, that could scarcely be put into language. They were generally opened with a sermon, near the close of which there would be an unusual outcry, some bursting out into loud ejaculations of prayer, &c.

"The rolling exercise consisted in being cast down in a violent manner, doubled with the head and feet together, or stretched in a prostrate manner, turning swiftly over like a dog. Nothing in nature could better represent the jerks, than for one to goad another alternately on every side with a piece of red hot iron. The exercise commonly began in the head, which would fly backwards and forwards, and from side to side, with a quick jolt, which the person would naturally labor to suppress, but in vain. He must necessarily go on as he was stimulated, whether with a violent dash on the ground, and bounce from place to place, like a foot-ball; or hopping round with head, limbs, and trunk, twitching and jolting in every direction, as if they must inevitably fly asunder," &c."

The following sketch is from Dow's Journal:

"In the year 1805 he preached at Knoxville, Tennessee, before the governor, when some hundred and fifty persons, among whom were a number of Quakers, had the jerks."

"I have seen all denominations of religious exercised by the jerk, gentleman and lady, black and white, young and old, without exception. I passed a meeting-house, where I observed the undergrowth had been cut away for camp-meetings, and from fifty to a hundred saplings were left, breast high, on purpose for the people who were jerked to hold by. I observed when they had held on, they had kicked up the earth, as a horse stamping fine."

Every one has heard of the extraordinary scenes which took place in the Cevennes at the close of the seventeenth century.

It was towards the close of the year 1688, a report was first heard, of a gift of prophecy which had shown itself among the persecuted followers of the reformation, who, in the south of France, had taken themselves to the mountains. The first instance was said to have occurred in the family of a glass-dealer, of the name of Du Serre, well known as the most zealous Calvinist of the neighborhood, which was a solitary spot in Dauphine, near Mount Peyras. In the enlarging circle of enthusiasts, Gabriel Astier and Isabella Vincent made themselves first conspicuous. Isabella, a girl of sixteen years

of age, from Dauphine, who was in the service of a peasant, and tended sheep, began in her sleep to preach and prophesy, and the reformers came from far and near to hear her. An advocate, of the name of Gerfan, describes the following scene which he had witnessed. At his request she had admitted him, and a good many others, after nightfall, to a meeting at a chateau in the neighborhood. She there disposed herself upon a bed, shut her eyes, and went to sleep; in her sleep she chanted in a low tone the commandments and a psalm; after a short respite she began to preach in a louder voice, not in her own dialect, but in good French, which hitherto she had not used. The theme was an exhortation to obey God rather than man. Sometimes she spoke quickly as to be hardly intelligible. At certain of her pauses, she stopped to collect herself. She accompanied her words with *gestures*. *Gestic*—her pulse quiet, her arm not rigid, but relaxed as natural. After an interval, she began anew her exhortation, which was now mixed with ironical reflections upon the church of Rome. She then suddenly stopped, continuing asleep. It was vain that they stirred her. When her arms were lifted and let go, they dropped unconsciously. As several now went away, whom her silence rendered impatient, she said in a low tone, but just as if she was awake, "Why do you go away? Why do not you wait till I am ready?" And then she delivered another ironical discourse against the Catholic church, which she closed with a prayer.

When Boucha, the intendant of the district heard of the performances of Isabella Vincent, he had her brought before him. She replied to his interrogatories, that people had often told her that she preached in her sleep, but that she did not herself believe a word of it. As the slowness of her person made her appear younger than she really was, the intendant merely sent her to an hospital at Grenoble, where, notwithstanding that she was visited by persons of the reformed persuasion, there was an end to her preaching—she became a Catholic!

Gabriel Astier, who had been a young laborer, likewise from Dauphine, went in the capacity of a preacher and prophet into the valley of Brassac, in the Vivarais. He had infected his family; his father, mother, elder brother, and sweetheart, followed his example, and took to prophesying. Gabriel, before he preached, used to fall into a kind of stupor, in which he lay rigid. After delivering his sermon, he would dismiss his auditors with a kiss, and the words, "My brother, or my sister, I impart to you the Holy Ghost!" Many believed that they had thus received the Holy Ghost from Astier, being taken with the same seizure. During the period of the discourse, first one then, another would fall down; some described themselves afterwards as having felt first a weakness and trembling through the whole frame, and an impulse to *yawn* and stretch their arms, then they fell convulsed and foaming at the mouth. Others carried the contagion home with them, and first experienced its effects, days, weeks, months afterwards. They behaved—not is it wonderful they did so—that they had received the Holy Ghost.

Not less curious were the seizures of the convulsionaries at the grave of the Abbe Paris, in the year 1727. These Jansenist visionaries used to collect in the church-yard of Medard, round the grave of the deposed and deceased deacon, and before long, the reputation of the place for working miracles getting about, they fell in troops into convulsions.

Their state had more analogy to that of the jerks. A writer, (McNeman,) quoted by Mr. Power, (*Essay on the Influence of the Imagination over the Nervous System*), gives this account of their course and progress:

"At first appearance these meetings exhibited nothing to the spectator but a scene of confusion, that could scarcely be put into language. They were generally opened with a sermon, near the close of which there would be an unusual outcry, some bursting out into loud ejaculations of prayer, &c.

"The rolling exercise consisted in being cast down in a violent manner, doubled with the head and feet together, or stretched in a prostrate manner, turning swiftly over like a dog. Nothing in nature could better represent the jerks, than for one to goad another alternately on every side with a piece of red hot iron. The exercise commonly began in the head, which would fly backwards and forwards, and from side to side, with a quick jolt, which the person would naturally labor to suppress, but in vain. He must necessarily go on as he was stimulated, whether with a violent dash on the ground, and bounce from place to place, like a foot-ball; or hopping round with head, limbs, and trunk, twitching and jolting in every direction, as if they must inevitably fly asunder," &c."

The following sketch is from Dow's Journal:

"In the year 1805 he preached at Knoxville, Tennessee, before the governor, when some hundred and fifty persons, among whom were a number of Quakers, had the jerks."

"I have seen all denominations of religious exercised by the jerk, gentleman and lady, black and white, young and old, without exception. I passed a meeting-house, where I observed the undergrowth had been cut away for camp-meetings, and from fifty to a hundred saplings were left, breast high, on purpose for the people who were jerked to hold by. I observed when they had held on, they had kicked up the earth, as a horse stamping fine."

Every one has heard of the extraordinary scenes which took place in the Cevennes at the close of the seventeenth century.

It was towards the close of the year 1688, a report was first heard, of a gift of prophecy which had shown itself among the persecuted followers of the reformation, who, in the south of France, had taken themselves to the mountains. The first instance was said to have occurred in the family of a glass-dealer, of the name of Du Serre, well known as the most zealous Calvinist of the neighborhood, which was a solitary spot in Dauphine, near Mount Peyras. In the enlarging circle of enthusiasts, Gabriel Astier and Isabella Vincent made themselves first conspicuous. Isabella, a girl of sixteen years

Then there are persons who permanently fancy themselves other beings than they are, and act as such.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there prevailed in parts of Europe a seizure, which was called the wolf-sickness. Those affected with it held themselves to be wild beasts, and betook themselves to the forests. One of these, who was brought before De Lance, at Bordeaux, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, was a young man of Besancon. He allowed himself to be hunted of the forest lord, his invisible master. He believed that through the power of his master, he had been transformed into a wolf; that he hunted in the forest as such, and that he was often accompanied by a bigger wolf, whom he suspected to be the master he served—with more details of the same kind. The persons thus affected were called *Wehrwolves*. They enjoyed in those days the alternative of being exorcised or executed.

Arnold relates, in his history of church and of heresy, how there was a young man in Konigsberg, well educated and natural son of a priest, who had the impression, that he was not near a crucifix in the wayside by seven angels, who revealed to him that he was to represent God the Father on earth, to drive all evil out of the world, &c. The poor fellow, after pondering upon this impression a long time, issued a circular commencing thus—

"We, John Albrecht, Adelgrief, Syros, Amata, Kamemata, Kilkis, Matilda, Schmalkillundis, Sabrundis, Elijoris, Overarch High-priest, and Emperor, Prince of Peace of the whole world, Overarch King of the holy kingdom of Heaven, Judge of the living and of the dead, God and Father, in whose divinity Christ will come on the last day to judge the world, Lord of all lords, King of all kings," &c.

He was therupon thrown into prison at Konigsberg, regarded as a most frightful heretic, and every means were used by the clergy to reclaim him. As they continued to practice for fifty years under the cloak of punctual attendance to discipline and pretended piety. She was long in the station of sub-priestess, and would, for her capacity, have been promoted to the rank of prioress, but her husband, had she not betrayed a certain discontent with the ecclesiastic life, a certain contrariety to her superiors, something half expressed only of inward dissatisfaction. Renata had not ventured to let any one about the convent into her confidence, and she remained free from suspicion, notwithstanding that, from time to time, some of the nuns, either with the herbs she mixed with their food, or through sympathy, had strange seizures, of which some died. Renata became at length extravagant and unguarded in her witch propensities, partly from long security, partly from desire of stronger excitement; made noise in the dormitory, and uttered shrieks in the garden; went at nights into the cells of the nuns to pinch and torment them, to assist her in which she kept a considerable supply of cats. The removal of the keys of the cells counteracted this annoyance; but a still more efficient means was determined by the part of a nun, struck at the aggressor with the penitential scourge one night, on the morrow following which Renata was observed to have a black eye and a cut face. This event awakened suspicion against Renata. Then one of the nuns, who was much esteemed, declared, believing herself upon her death-bed, "that she shortly expected to stand before her Maker, Renata was uncanny, that she had often at night been visibly tormented by her, and that she warned her to desist from this course." General alarm arose, and apprehension of Renata's arts; and one of the nuns, who previously had had fits, now became possessed, and in the paroxysms told the wildest tales against Renata. It is hard upon them because they were innocent. But the regular witches, at times deserved any better fate—considering, I mean, their honest and straight-forward intentions of doing that which they believed to be the most desperate wrong achievable. Many there were who sought to be initiated into the black art. They were re-baptized with the support of responsible witch sponsors, abjured Christ, and entered to the best of their belief into a compact with the devil; and forthwith commenced a course of bad works, poisoning and bewitching men and cattle, and the like, or trying to do so.

One feature transpired in these details, that is merely pathetic, not horrifying or disgusting.

The little children of course talked witchcraft, and you may fancy, Archy, what charming gossip it must have made. Then the poor little things were easily wrought on the tales they told. And they fell into trances and had visions shaped by their heated fancies.

A little maid, of twelve years of age, used to fall into fits of sleep, and afterwards she told her parents, and the judge, how an old woman and her daughter, riding on a broom-stick, had come and done奇妙的事情 to her. The daughter sat foremost, the woman behind, the little maid between them. They went away through the roof of the house, over the adjoining houses and the town gate, to a village some way off. There they went down a chimney of a cottage into a room, where sat a tall black man and twelve women. They eat and drank. The black man filled their glasses from a can, and gave each of the women a handful of gold. She herself had received none; but she had eaten and drunk with them.

A list of persons buried in Salzburg for participation in witchcraft, between the years 1627 and 1639, in an outbreak of this frenzy, which had its origin in an epidemic among the cattle, enumerates children of 14, 12, 11, 10, 9, years of age; which in some degree reconciles one to the fate of the fourteen canons, four gentlemen of the choir, two young men of rank, a fat old lady of rank, the wife of a burgomaster, a counsellor, the fattest bargee of Wartburg, together with his wife, the handsomest woman in the city, and a midwife of the name of Schiekelter, with whom (according to N. B. in the original report) the whole mischief originated. To amuse the executors in those days the fatness of the victim was evidently a point of consideration, as it shows by the specifications of that quality in some of the victims in the above list. Were men devils then? By no means; there existed then as now upon earth, worth, honor, truth, benevolence, gentleness. But there were other ingredients, too, from which the times are not yet purged. A century ago people did not know—do they now?—that vindictive punishment is a crime; that the only allowable purpose of punishment is to prevent the recurrence of the offence; and that restraint, isolation, employment, instruction, are the extreme and only means towards that end which reason and humanity justify. Alas, for human nature! Some centuries hence, the first half of the nineteenth century will be charged with having manifested no admission of principle in advance of a period, the judicial crimes of which make the heart shudder. The old lady witches had, of course, much livelier ideas than the innocent children, on the subject of their intercourse with the devil.

At Mora, in Sweden, in 1660, of many who were put to the torture and executed, seventy-two women agreed in the following avowal, that they were in the habit of meeting at a place called Blocus. That on their calling out "Come forth!" the devil used to appear to them in a gray coat, red breeches, gray stockings, with a red beard, and peaked hat

Dians propria; hue enim daemona est illusio."¹ But the main source from which we derived this superstition, is the East, and traditions and facts incorporated in our religion. There were only

wanted the ferment of thought of the fifteenth century, the