The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies

Robert Kirk
Andrew Lang
Bibliographical Note

This Dover edition, first published in 2008, is an unabridged, slightly altered version of the work published by Eneas Mackay, Stirling, Scotland, in 1933. The punctuation and spelling in Robert Kirk’s text have been modernized for ease of reading. The Introduction by R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Comment by Andrew Lang (introduction to the 1893 edition) are unaltered. Six black-and-white illustrations by H. J. Ford have been added.

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Dedication to
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

O Louis! you that like them maist,
Ye’re far frae kelpie, wraith, and ghaist,
And fairy dames, no unco chaste,
And haunted cell.
Among a heathen clan ye’re placed,
That kens na hell!

Ye hae nae heather, peat, nor birks,
Nae troot in a’ your burnies lurks,
There are nae bonny U.P. kirks,
An awfu’ place!
Nane kens the Covenant o’ Works
Frae that of Grace!

But whiles, maybe, to them ye’ll read
Blads o’ the Covenanting creed,
And whiles their pagan wames ye’ll feed
On halesome parritch;
And syne ye’ll gar them learn a screed
O’ the Shorter Carritch.

Yet thae uncovenanted shavers
Hae roوث, ye say, o’ clash and clavers
O’ gods and etins—auld wives’ havers,
But their delight;
The voice o’ him that tells them quavers
Just wi’ fair fright.

And ye might tell, ayont the faem,
Thae Hieland clashes o’ oor hame,
To speak the truth, I tak’ na shame
To half believe them;
And, stamped wi’ TUSITALA’s name,
They’ll a’ receive them.

And folk to come, ayont the sea,
May hear the yowl of the Banshie,
And frae the water-kelpie flee,
Ere a’ things cease,
And island bairns may stolen be
By the Folk o’ Peace.

Faith, they might steal me, wi’ ma will,
And, ken’d I ony Fairy hill,
I’d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win,
For, man, I’ve maistly had my fill
O’ this world’s din.

A. L.
1893
THE FAIRY MINISTER

IN MEMORY OF
THE REV. ROBERT KIRK,
WHO went to his own herd, AND ENTERED INTO
THE LAND OF THE PEOPLE OF PEACE,
IN THE YEAR OF GRACE SIXTEEN
HUNDRED AND NINETY-TWO,
AND OF HIS AGE
FIFTY-TWO.

People of Peace! A peaceful man,
Well worthy of your love was he,
Who, while the roaring Garry ran
Red with the life-blood of Dundee,
While coats were turning, crowns were falling,
Wandered along his valley still,
And heard your mystic voices calling
From fairy knowe and haunted hill.
He heard, he saw, he knew too well
The secrets of your fairy clan;
You stole him from the haunted dell,
Who never more was seen of man,
Now far from heaven, and safe from hell,
Unknown of earth, he wanders free.
Would that he might return and tell
Of his mysterious company!
For we have tired the Folk of Peace;
No more they tax our corn and oil;
Their dances on the moorland cease,
   The Brownie stints his wonted toil.
No more shall any shepherd meet
   The ladies of the fairy clan,
Nor are their deathly kisses sweet
   On lips of any earthly man.
And half I envy him who now,
   Clothed in her Court’s enchanted green,
By moonlit loch or mountain’s brow
   Is Chaplain to the Fairy Queen.

A. L.
A seventh son and born bi-lingual, having passed his life amongst the “Scottish-Irish,” first in Balquhidder, and then in Aberfoyle, no one was better fitted to discourse upon the “Secret Commonwealth of Elves and Fairies,” where since his last daunder on the Fairy Hill, in 1692 (circa), he now resides, than was the writer of this book. The tomb that Walter Scott saw in the east neuk of the kirkyard of Aberfoyle, so good a judge of fairydom as Andrew Lang held for a mockery. It was inscribed, “Robertus Kirk, M.A., Linguæ Hibernæ Lumen,” for the Reverend Kirk had more than a tincture of the Humanities, and to his English, and the Lingua Hibernica, added Latin, and certainly had more Greek than Shakespeare, for he quotes from the Septuagint (Job xxvi. 5.) in the original.

Andrew Lang, steeped to the lips in all the lore of fairydom, of elves, of doppelgangers, peghts, brownies, banshees, and the second sight, stood sponsor for the edition of 1893.

I, though unworthy, a descendant of men long domiciled within sight of the Fairy Hill, the Sith Bruach of the writer, stand sponsor, in a measure, for the reprint. I do so in full faith and admiration, though an infrequent worshipper of any kind of Gods, but with a lurking tenderness towards Gualichu, having seen his tree in days gone by on the south Pampa below Bahia Blanca, adorned with bits of cast off saddlery, ostrich feathers, and all the flotsam and the jetsam of the Pampa Indians and Matrero Gauchos (of those days) who being realists as are in general every race of plainsmen, offered to their deity only those articles useless to themselves.

I sponsor it, because it is a monument in my opinion of a style of literature that long has disappeared, and has “a curiosa felicitas,” that shows the writer to have been a man of parts and a believer, “quia impossibilis,” in all he writes about. Faith it is said consists of the belief in something that we know to be untrue. At least that was the way a child defined it, and from the mouths of babes and sucklings, so we are informed, comes wisdom.
Robertus Kirk, M.A., had the true faith that removes mountains, though not sufficient in his case to shift the Fairy Hill from its eternal anchorage, for which and for his book I am indebted to him, and recommend it to all painful readers (in the Elizabethan sense), certain that they will find much in it worthy of being read, marked, learned and inwardly digested.

Lang affixed some of his most characteristic Grass of Parnassus to the edition of 1893.

It now appears to give a generation that seems to have lost faith, both in the Pentateuch and the Apocalypse, something that may be worthy of belief. In the old grey manse of Aberfoyle, not beautified in our author’s time with the old Spanish chestnuts, brought from Inchmaholme, as says tradition, and planted by the Reverend Patrick Graham a few years after Kirk “went to his owne herd” he would have ample leisure to ponder on the fairy clan that in his time peopled the valley of the Avondhu. The weekly sermon, I conjecture, could not have given him much trouble, for I feel certain he had the gift of words, and was not of that weak-backit, schaucle-kneed breed of ministers, “sair confined to the paper,” whose sermons, at the best, are a mere cauld morality. I like to picture him with his Geneva gown, neatly starched bands, and well sleekit pow, after having waled a text from Malachi or Nahum, drowsing along, for a full hour by his sand glass, placed beside the Bible, to the contentment of his sleepy congregation. There could not have been many thrawn commentators in his day in Aberfoyle, and almost every individual of the congregation must have preferred half-an-hour’s clash o’ the kirkyard to a’ the sermons in the wurrld. If not, they were not the right progenitors of the men of Aberfoyle, that I remember when in the Inn, (it was not in those days called an Hotel), there hung an almanac in the entrance hall, containing the announcement, “12th of August. Grouse Shooting opens. Episcopacy abolished.” All the above taken into consideration, it may well be the Reverend Mr. Kirk was but a changeling from his birth, a Leprechaun I think they call it, in the dialect of Erse, spoken in Ireland, and sent on earth as an ambassador from the Secret Commonwealth of Elves and Fairies, to make their ways and customs manifest to us, the grosser mortals, nurtured on beef and brose.

That is one hypothesis, largely discounted, I must admit, by his knowledge of the classics, and his sacred calling, for the Good People could but have spoken Gaelic, or perhaps Pictish, and certainly, as Andrew Lang
says in his verses, none of them could have kent the Covenant o’ Works, frae that of Grace.

So perhaps after all the writer of this most curious book was but a mortal, mystical by nature, with his mysticism sublimated in the crucible of the Vale of Aberfoyle. Even to-day, in the half-light of autumn evenings, the vale takes on once more an air as of an older world.

Standing up sentinel above Loch Chon, Ben Lomond with the shadows of the evening creeping up its flanks, to join the fleecy clouds that mantle round its top, looms as gigantic as Aconcagua, or as Puracé. It seems to watch over the whole district and to dominate it. No sound is heard, except the babbling of the mountain streams as they slip down over the smooth stones, or the sharp belling of a roe in the thick alder copsewood that surrounds Lock Ard. The little wavelets break upon the pebbly beaches, or plash gently on the rocks of the steep islet on which Duke Murdoch’s ruined castle stands. In Couligarten Bay, the bulrushes bend gently, as the homing wild duck squatter down noiselessly amongst their stems, vanishing as silently as a seal slips into the sea. The lime trees on the point below the mansion of Alt Skeigh look dark and menacing, as the light fades gradually, blotting out the little pier, the beach, the high road, and the ground they stand upon, leaving their tops suspended in the air.

All the old names, hard to pronounce by the mere Sassenach, fantastic looking on a map, Blairushinmore, Blairhulachan, Bofrishlie, Glasnarichnish, Loch au Cheiard, and Blairachapuill, then lose their harshness, becoming as inevitable as the great blocks, of pudding-stone balanced on the hill sides, and strewed upon the muirs.

The district would be colourless without them, and they transplanted into different surroundings would rather sound like epithets of opprobrium, than names expressive of the natural features of the land. No doubt the congregation that the ingenious minister served, were most of them devout believers in the second sight, in dreams, in portents, will-o’-the-wisps, in fairy rings, and in corpse candles, being convinced of their reality in quite a different way from that in which they held the dogmas of the fiery creed they were constrained to listen to in church. These without doubt they all believed in, or at least assented to, for in those days in Scotland, to doubt was to be damned. The fairy lore they sucked in with their mothers’ milk,
and held, not by conviction, for they had never reasoned on it, but quite naturally, as part and parcel of themselves.

In such surroundings it was not strange the writer of the book also believed in them; at least in all the farrago of heterogeneous learning, he has brought together, he gives no indication that he doubted in the least of the strange cases he discourses on. In fact all those who doubted of what they thought they saw, came to untimely ends. Thus, “as is notoriously known in Killin” (a parroch in the country of the Scottish-Irish), “a yeoman that lived hard by, who coming into a companie within ane Ale-House, where a Seer sat at Table . . . at the Sight of the Intrant Neighbour, the Seer starting rose to go out of the Hows; and being asked the Reason of his haste, told that the Intrant man would die within two days.” It was a most unneighbourly prediction, and in no wise astonishes those who have lived amongst the Scottish-Irish that the Intrant, intending evidently to mak siccar, in the old Scottish fashion, incontinently stabbed the Seer, and was himself executed in the Jedburgh fashion, without suffering the law’s delay. Thus was a prophecy fulfilled, a thing infrequent in our days, and the Seer justified of faith, to his own detriment. These Buddiel and Aqua Vitae houses were the curse of the Highlands, for the Gael had not learned as Mr. Kirk avers the elves and fairies knew, that “Aqua vitae (moderately taken)” both prolongs life, and if I apprehend the writer, nourishes the “aerial and ætherial parts” (of human and of elfin nature), “leaving the terrestrial behind.”

Another case, most worthy of recording, was that of “a woman of fourtie years of age” whom the Reverend gentleman examined (“having another Clergie Man in my Companie”). This certainly showed his discretion, a quality rarely conspicuous amongst the clergy, who are too prone at times to examine ladies, even less than forty years of age, without a witness of their own cloth to testify that their intentions were innocuous.

This woman, close on the grand climacteric, her name, see the original MS., not “in tyre,” was as it seems a noctambule, and “having tarried in the Fields over Night in seeking of her sheep, saw and conversed with a People she knew not, and slept upon the ground.” This seeking of her sheep, may after all have been a pretext, for as Pope tells us, “women ben full of ragerie,” and, as the writer says, but without comment, she had a “Child
since that time, and is still prettie melanchollyus and silent and never seen to laugh.”

Death we are told on good authority, is the reward of sin, a saying that is discounted as an apothegm, as it is also the reward of virtue, however rigorous.

The semi-Highland district with its wealth of billowy little hills, covered by scrubby oak, with now and then an old Scotch fir clinging to an outcrop of rock, its trunk as red as a stripped cork tree in the Estremenian glades, was a fit setting for the fairy minister. His flock, so quietly listening to time pass by, as plants must listen, for it is impossible their sweetness does not minister to their own enjoyment of their brief lives, was an oasis in that wild Scotland, below and up above the Pass. Rob Roy was in the vigour of his early manhood, looking no doubt as dour as in the print taken from the picture once owned by Buchanan of Arden, on Lochlomond side. In London “Bobbing John,” the Earl of Mar, was a young cornet in the Horse Guards, famed for his swordsmanship, his perhaps too courteous manners, and for his flattering tongue. The memory, both of Montrose and Claverhouse, was still revered by Gaelic-speaking men, from John o’ Groats, down to the steep pitched bridge that spanned the Forth at Aberfoyle. Beyond the bridge, for the dividing line is there (or thereabouts), dour Lowlanders with their blue bonnets and their love of quite a different kind of liberty—a liberty that left them free to dogmatize upon the Scriptures in their own fashion, but without the pride that bearing arms imparted to the Gael, grinned at the mention of their names. But if they grinned, when near the Pass of Aberfoyle, they did so inwardly, for as we know, his mourners dared not take the body of Stewart of Ardvoilich, the slayer of Kilpont, to its resting-place, “east by Dundura,” but discreetly shoughed it at Coilmore, “for there were many powerful families that were kin to the Menteiths, especially the Graems.”

For two and forty years did the good pastor sojourn in this vale of tears, daundering about his parish, from the manse to the Fielbarachan tree round which the clachan grew; occasionally, no doubt, dropping into the changehouse, for a crack with his elders, over that usquebagh, that in his own words, should be imbibed with moderation. Often he must have passed long hours in his own study in the manse, collating all the various accounts of the elves, droichs, wraiths, and apparitions, during the composition of his
veracious book. Oftener by far, during his wanderings up the steep path that leads to Gartmore, crossing the tawny burn, with its deep, darkling linns, on the flat stones beside the lochan on which float water lilies, as white as swans frozen into the ice in a hill tarn, he must have communed with the Good People, seated on stones, on bulrushes and thistle stalks, decked in their fairy green. He saw them, for what we are convinced we see exists for us, as certainly as if we touched it, so that a man who is convinced that he has seen a ghost, has seen it actually—with the interior vision, that vision a thousand times more vivid than the exterior eye.

Wandering along, seeing each hillock peopled with the elves who must have nudged each other, laughing as they watched the passing of the elf-parson, who was designed, by fate, to be their chronicler, he found himself, just at the bottom of the Fairy Hill. Bees hummed in the air, and dragon-flies hawked just above the linns or hung suspended for an instant, like humming birds, upon a flower.

The wind soughed softly in the heather, ruffling the leaves of the sweet gale, and bending down the supple stems of the bog asphodel.

The rest is silence; but we the natives of the district are well assured that he was reft away, and still lives in the recesses of the Fairy Hill, serving the fairy mass.

Does he, I wonder, ever have a longing once again to see the valley where he used to wander with one eye on his parishioners and the other on his own true world of elfindom. There are delights, no doubt, in the unsubstantial world where he has a cure of tiny souls, for once a minister, always a minister, that we cannot appreciate. Yet still, I fancy, sometimes he must have what in Portuguese is called “saudades,” a sad half longing recollection of a life where on the moors, the blue Alexis and the meadow brown, float with their wings fanning the rushes and the ling, or swing on hare-bells awave in the south wind.

The Gray Mare’s Tail still thunders after a spate, into the foaming pot below, a miniature Niagara, and the grass grown Fingalian path above Ledard, winds through the heather by Eas Chagill down to Glasahoil. Above the waterfall of rocks, high on Craigmore, hard to discern except by children, or in certain states of atmosphere, still the White Lady seems to kneel in prayer.
Could he return, he might expound to us if she has any real existence (stone or shadow), or is but a figment compounded in the brain of the old race that named the hills, the straths, the corries, all the copses and the burns, giving them names appropriate to them, just as in Eden, Adam named the beasts. The Downans still is sweet and green, its grass all flecked with eye-bright and with tormentil, as fair as anything in fairyland. We know, he once kept tryst with Graham of Duchray, but though the fateful dagger was not cast that was to have restored their pastor to the Scottish-Irish congregation, it may be that, like Orpheus, he too looked back to his “owne herde” and so was lost.

Happier by far he must be with those green-clad little folk who know no care, no envy, malice, hatred or uncharitableness and are always glad.

Cha Tille E Tuilleadh.

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM
The History of the Book and Author

By ANDREW LANG

The bibliography of the following little tract is extremely obscure. The title-page of the edition of 1815 [Dover p. 45] gives the date as 1691. Sir Walter Scott says in his *Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830, p. 163, note), “It was printed with the author’s name in 1691, and reprinted, in 1815, for Longman & Co.” But was there really a printed edition of 1691? Scott says that he never met with an example. Research in our great libraries has discovered none, and there is none save that of 1815 at Abbotsford. The reprint, of one hundred copies, was made, as it states, from no printed text, but from “a manuscript copy preserved in the Advocates’ Library.” On page 45 of the edition of 1815, at the end of the comments on Lord Tarbott’s Letters, there is a “Note by the Transcriber”—that is, the person who wrote out the manuscript in the Advocates’ Library: “See the rest in a little manuscript belonging to Coline Kirk.” Now Coline or Colin Kirk, Writer to the Signet, was the son of the Rev. Mr. Kirk, author of the tract. If the son had his father’s book only in manuscript, it seems very probable that it was not printed in 1691; that the title-page is only the title-page of a manuscript. Till some printed text of 1691 is discovered, we may doubt, then, whether the hundred copies published in 1815, and now somewhat rare, be not the original printed edition. The editor has a copy of 1815, but it is the only one which he has met with for sale.

The Rev. Robert Kirk, the author of *The Secret Commonwealth*, was a student of theology at St. Andrews: his Master’s degree, however, he took at Edinburgh. He was (and this is notable) the youngest and *seventh* son of Mr. James Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle, the place familiar to all readers of *Rob Roy*. As a seventh son, he was, no doubt, specially gifted, and in *The Secret Commonwealth* he lays some stress on the mystic privileges of such
birth. There may be “some secret virtue in the womb of the parent, which increaseth until the seventh son be borne, and decreaseth by the same degree afterwards.” It would not surprise us if Mr. Kirk, no less than the Rev. Robert Blair of St. Andrews (1650–60), could heal scrofula by the touch, like royal persons—Charles III. in Italy, for example. As is well known to all, the House of Brunswick has no such powers. However this may have been, Mr. Kirk was probably drawn, by his seventh sonship, to a more careful study of psychical phenomena than most of his brethren bestowed. Little is known of his life. He was minister originally of Balquhidder, whence, in 1685, he was transferred to Aberfoyle. This was no Covenanting district, and there is no bigotry in Mr. Kirk’s dissertation. He was employed on an “Irish” translation of the Bible, and he published a Psalter in Gaelic (1684). He married, first, Isobel, daughter of Sir Colin Campbell of Mochester, who died in 1680, and, secondly, the daughter of Campbell of Fordy: this lady survived him. From his connection with Campbells, we may misdoubt him for a Whig. By his first wife he had a son, Colin Kirk, W.S.; by his second wife, a son who was minister of Dornoch. He died (if he did die, which is disputed) in 1692, aged about fifty-one; his tomb was inscribed—

ROBERTUS KIRK, A.M.
Linguæ Hiberniæ Lumen.

The tomb, in Scott’s time, was to be seen in the east end of the churchyard of Aberfoyle; but the ashes of Mr. Kirk are not there. His successor, the Rev. Dr. Grahame, in his Sketches of Picturesque Scenery, informs us that, as Mr. Kirk was walking on a dun-shi, or fairy-hill, in his neighbourhood, he sunk down in a swoon, which was taken for death. “After the ceremony of a seeming funeral,” writes Scott (op. cit., p. 105), “the form of the Rev. Robert Kirk appeared to a relation, and commanded him to go to Grahame of Duchray. ‘Say to Duchray, who is my cousin as well as your own, that I am not dead, but a captive in Fairyland; and only one chance remains for my liberation. When the posthumous child, of which my wife has been delivered since my disappearance, shall be brought to baptism, I will appear in the room, when, if Duchray shall throw over my head the knife or dirk which he holds in his hand, I may be restored to society; but if this is neglected, I am lost for ever.” True to his tryst, Mr. Kirk did appear at the christening, and “was visibly seen;” but Duchray was
so astonished that he did not throw his dirk over the head of the appearance, and to society Mr. Kirk has not yet been restored. This is extremely to be regretted, as he could now add matter of much importance to his treatise. Neither history nor tradition has more to tell about Mr. Robert Kirk, who seems to have been a man of good family, a student, and, as his book shows, an innocent and learned person.

The Secret Commonwealth

The tract, of which the reader now knows the history, is a little volume of somewhat singular character. Written in 1691 by the Rev. Robert Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle, it is a kind of metaphysic of the Fairy world. Having lived through the period of the sufferings of the Kirk, the author might have been expected either to neglect Fairyland altogether, or to regard it as a mere appanage of Satan’s kingdom—a “burning question” indeed, for some of the witches who suffered at Presbyterian hands were merely narrators of popular tales about the state of the dead. That she trafficked with the dead, and from a ghost won a medical recipe for the cure of Archbishop Adamson of St. Andrews, was the charge against Alison Pearson. “The Bischope keipit his castle lyk a tod in his holl, seik of a disease of grait fetiditie, and oftymes under the cure of women suspected of witchcraft, namlie, ane wha confessit hir to haiff learnt medecin of ane callit Mr. Wilyeam Simsone, that apeired divers tymes to hir efter his dead, and gaiff hir a buik. . . . She was execut in Edinbruche for a witch” (James Melville’s Diary, p. 137, 1583). The Archbishop, like other witches, had a familiar in the form of a hare, which once ran before him down the street. These were the beliefs of men of learning like James, the nephew and companion of Andrew Melville. Even in our author’s own time, Archbishop Sharp was accused of entertaining “the muckle black Deil” in his study at midnight, and of being “levitated” and dancing in the air. This last feat, creditable to a saint or a Neo-Platonist like Plotinus, was reckoned for sin to Archbishop Sharp, as may be read in Wodrow’s Analecta. Thus all Fairydom was commonly looked on as under the same guilt as witchcraft. Yet Mr. Kirk of Aberfoyle, living among Celtic people, treats the land of faery as a mere fact in nature, a world with its own laws, which he investigates without fear of the Accuser of the Brethren. We may thus regard him, even more than Wodrow, as an early student in folk-lore and in psychical research—topics which run
into each other—and he shows nothing of the usual persecuting disposition.
Nor, again, is Mr. Kirk like Glanvil and Henry More. He does not, save in his title-page and in one brief passage, make superstitious creeds or
psychical phenomena into arguments and proofs against modern Sadducees.
Firm in his belief, he treats his matter in a scientific spirit, as if he were dealing with generally recognized physical phenomena.

Our study of Mr. Kirk’s little tractate must have a double aspect. It must be an essay partly on folk-lore, on popular beliefs, their relation to similar
beliefs in other parts of the world, and the residuum of fact, preserved by tradition, which they may contain. On the other hand, as mental phenomena are in question—such things as premonitions, hallucinations, abnormal or unusual experiences generally—a criticism of Mr. Kirk must verge on “Psychical Research.” The Society organised for that difficult subject certainly takes a vast deal of trouble about all manner of odd reports and strange visions. It “transfers” thoughts of no value, at a great expense of time and of serious hard work. But, as far as the writer has read the Society’s Proceedings, it “takes no keep,” as Malory says, of these affairs in their historical aspect. Whatever hallucination, or illusion, or imposture, or the “subliminal self” can do today, has always been done among peoples in every degree of civilisation. An historical study of the topic, as contained in trials for witchcraft, in the reports of travellers and missionaries, in the works of the seventeenth-century Platonists, More, Glanvil, Sinclair, and others, and in the rare tracts such as The Devil in Glen Luce and The Just Devil of Woodstock, not to mention Lavater, Wierus, Thyraeus, Reginald Scott, and so on, is as necessary to the psychologist as to the folk-lorist. If there be an element of fact in modern hypnotic experiments (a matter on which I have really no opinion), it is plain that old magic and witchcraft are not mere illusions, or not commonplace illusions. The subliminal self has his stroke in these affairs. Assuredly the psychologists should have an historical department. The evidence which they would find is, of course, vitiated in many obvious ways, but the evidence contains much that coincides with that of modern times, and the coincidence can hardly be designed—that is to say, the old Highland seers had no design of abetting modern inquiry. It may be, however, that their methods and ideas have been traditionally handed down to modern “sensitives” and “mediums.” At all events, here is an historical chapter, if it be but a chapter in “The History of Human Error.” These wide and multifarious topics can only be touched on
lightly in this essay; the author will be content if he directs the attention of students with more leisure and a better library of diablerie to the matter. But first we glance at The Secret Commonwealth as folk-lorists.

The Subterranean Inhabitants

Mr. Kirk’s first chapter, “Of the Subterranean Inhabitants,” naturally suggests the recent speculations of Mr. MacRitchie. The gist of Mr. MacRitchie’s Testimony of Tradition is that there once was a race of earth-dwellers in this island; that their artificial caves still exist; that this people survive in popular memory as “the legendary Feens,” and as the Pechts of popular tales, in which they are regarded as dwarfs. “The Pechs were unco wee bodies, but terrible strang.” Here, then, it might be thought that we have the origin of Fairy beliefs. There really was, on this showing, a dwarf race, who actually did live in the “fairy-hills,” or howes, now commonly looked on as sepulchral monuments.

There is much in Mr. MacRitchie’s theory which does not commend itself to me. The modern legends of Pechts as builders of Glasgow Cathedral, for example, do not appear to prove such a late survival of a race known as Picts, but are on a level with the old Greek belief that the Cyclopes built Mycenæ (Testimony of Tradition, p. 72). Granting, for the sake of discussion, that there were still Picts or Pechts in Galloway when Glasgow Cathedral was built (in the twelfth century), these wild Galloway men, scourges of the English Border, were the very last people to be employed as masons. The truth is that the recent Scotch have entirely forgotten the ages of mediæval art. Accustomed to the ill-built barns of a robbed and stinted Kirk, they looked on the Cathedral as no work of ordinary human beings. It was a creation of the Pechts, as Mycenæ and Tiryns of the mighty walls were creations of the Cyclopes. By another coincidence, the well-known story of the last Pecht, who refuses to divulge the secret of the heather ale, is told in the Volsunga Saga, and in the Nibelungenlied, of the Last Niflung. Again, the breaking of a bar of iron, which he takes for a human arm, by the last Pecht is a tale current of the Drakos in modern Greece (see Chambers’s Popular Traditions of Scotland for the last Pecht.) I cannot believe that the historical Picts were a set of half-naked, dwarfish savages, hairy men living underground. These are the topics of Sir Arthur Wardour and Monkbarns. Mr. W. F. Skene may be said
to have put the historic Picts in their proper place as the ancestors of the Highlanders. The Pecht of legend answers to the Drakos and the Cyclopes: the beliefs about his habits may have been suggested by the tumuli, still more by the brochs: it seems less probable that they represent an historical memory. As to the Irish “Feens,” the topic can only be discussed by Celtic scholars. But it does not follow, because the leader of the Feens seemed a dwarf among giants, that therefore his people were a dwarfish race. The story proves no more than Gulliver’s Travels.

Once more, we often read in the Sagas of a hero like Grettir, who opens a howe, has a conflict with a “barrow-wight,” as Mr. Morris calls the “howe-dweller,” and wins gold and weapons. But the dweller in the howe is often merely the able-bodied ghost of the Norseman, a known and named character, who is buried there; he is not a Pecht. Thus, as it seems to me, the Scotch and Celts possessed a theory of a legendary people, as did the Greeks. Whether any actual traditions of an earlier, perhaps a Finnish race, was at the bottom of the legend, is an obscure question. But, having such a belief, the Scotch easily discovered homes for the fancied people in the sepulchral howes: they “combined their information.” The Fairies, again, are composite creatures. As they came to births and christenings, and as Norse wise-wives (as in the Saga of Eric the Red) prophesied at festivals, Mr. MacRitchie combines his own information. The Wise-wife is a Finn woman, and Finn and Fairy amalgamate. But the Egyptians, as in the Tale of Two Brothers (Maspero, Contes Egyptiens), had their Hathors, who came and prophesied at births; the Greeks had their Mœræ, as in the story of Meleager and the burning brand. The Hathors and Mœræ play, in ancient Egypt and in ancient Greece, the part of Fairies at the christening. But surely they were not Finnish women! In short, though a memory of some old race may have mingled in the composite Fairy belief, this is at most but an element in the whole, and the part played by ancestral spirits, naturally earth-dwellers, is probably more important. Bishop Callaway has pointed out, in the preface to his Zulu Tales, that what the Highlanders say of the Fairies the Zulus say of “the Ancestors.” In many ways, as when persons carried off to Fairyland meet relations or friends lately deceased, who warn them, as Persephone and Steenie Steenson were warned, to eat no food in this place, Fairyland is clearly a memory of the pre-Christian Hades. There are other elements in the complex mass of Fairy tradition, but Chaucer knew “the Fairy Queen Proserpina,” as Campion calls her, and it is plain
that in very fact “the dread Persephone,” the “Queen over death and the
dead,” had dwindled into the lady who borrows Tamlane in the ballad.
Indeed Kirk mentions but does not approve of this explanation, “that those
subterranean people are departed souls.” Now, as was said, the dead are
dwellers under earth. The worshippers of Chthonian Demeter (Achaia) beat
the earth with wands; so does the Zulu sorcerer when he appeals to the
Ancestors. And a Macdonald in Moidart, being pressed for his rent, beat the
earth, and cried aloud to his dead chief, “Simon, hear me; you were always
good to me.”

**Fairyland and Hades**

Thus, to my mind at least, the *Subterranean Inhabitants* of Mr. Kirk’s
book are not so much a traditional recollection of a real dwarfish race living
underground (a hypothesis of Sir Walter Scott’s), as a lingering memory of
the Chthonian beings, “the Ancestors.” A good case in point is that of
Bessie Dunlop, of Dalry, in Ayrshire, tried on 8th November, 1576, for
witchcraft. She dealt in medicine and white magic, and obtained her
prescriptions from Thomas Reid, slain at Pinkie fight (1547), who often
appeared to her, and tried to lead her off to Fairyland. She, like Alison
Pearson, was “convict and burnt” (Scott’s *Demonology*, p. 146, and
Pitcairn’s *Criminal Trials*). Both ladies knew the Fairy Queen, and Alison
Pearson beheld Maitland of Lethington, and Buccleugh, in Fairyland, as is
recounted in a rhymed satire on Archbishop Adamson (Dalzell’s *Scottish
Poems*, p. 321). These are excellent proofs that Fairyland was a kind of
Hades, or home of the dead.

Mr. Kirk, who speaks of the *Sleagh Maith* as confidently as if he were
discussing the habits of some remote race which he has visited, credits
them, as the Greek gods were credited, with the power of nourishing
themselves on some fine essential part of human sacrifice, of human food,
“some fine spirituous Liquors, that pierce like pure Air and Oil, on the
poysin or substance of Corns and Liquors.” Others, more gross, steal the
actual grain, “as do Crowes and Mice.” They are heard hammering in the
howes: as Brownies they enter houses and cleanse the hearths. They are the
Domovoys, as the Russians call them. John Major, in his exposition of St.
Matthew (1518, fol. xlviii.), gives perhaps the oldest account of Brownies,
in a believing temper. Major styles them Fauni or *brobne*. They thrash as
much grain in one night as twenty men could do. They throw stones about
among people sitting by the fire. Whether they can predict future events is
doubtful (see Mr. Constable in Major’s *Greater Britain*, p. xxx. Edinburgh,
1892). To us they seem not much remote from the Roman Lares—spirits of
the household, of the hearth. In all these creatures Mr. Kirk recognises “an
abstruse People,” who were before our more substantial race, whose
furrows are still to be seen on the hill-tops. They never were, to his mind,
plain palpable folk; they are only visible, in their quarterly flittings, to men
of the second sight. That gift of vision includes not only power to see
distant or future events, but the viewless forms of air. To shun the flittings,
men visit church on the first Sunday of the quarter: then they will be
hallowed against elf-shots, “these Arrows that fly in the dark.” As is well
known, superstition explained the Neolithic arrow-heads as Fairy weapons;
it does not follow that a tradition of a Neolithic people suggested the belief
in Fairies. But we cannot deny absolutely that some such memory of an
earlier race, a shy and fugitive people who used weapons of stone, may
conceivably play its part in the Fairy legend.

Thence Mr. Kirk glides into that singular theory of savage metaphysics
which somewhat resembles the Platonic doctrine of Ideas. All things, in
Red Indian belief, have somewhere their ideal counterpart or “Father.” Thus
a donkey, when first seen, was regarded as “the Father” or archetype “of
Rabbits.” Now the second-sighted behold the “Double-man,”
“Doppelganger,” “Astral Body,” “Wraith,” or what you will, of a living
person, and that is merely his counterpart in the abstruse world. The
industry of the Psychical Society has collected much material—evidence,
whatever its value, for the existence of the Double-man. We may call it a
hallucination, which does not greatly increase our knowledge. From
personal experience, and the experience of friends, I am constrained to
believe that we may think we see a person who is not really present to the
view—who may be in the next room, or downstairs, or a hundred miles off.
This experience has occurred to the sane, the unimaginative, the healthy, the
free from superstition, and in circumstances by no means mystic—for
example, when the person supposed to be seen was not dying, nor
distressed, nor in any but the most normal condition. Indeed, the cases when
there was nothing abnormal in the state of the person seen are far more
numerous in my personal knowledge, than those in which the person was
seen dying, or dead, or excited. The reverse appears to be the rule in the
experience of the Psychical Society. “The actual proportion of coincidental to non-coincidental cases, after all deduction for possible sources of error, was in fact such that the probability against the supposition of chance coincidence became enormous, on the assumption of ordinary accuracy on the part of informants” (Professor Sidgwick, Proc. S. P. R., vol. viii. p. 607).

Some 17,000 answers were collected. We must apparently accept these facts as not very abnormal nor very unusual, and doubtless as capable of some subjective explanation. But when such things occurred among imaginative and uneducated Highlanders, they became foundations and proofs of the doctrine of second sight—proofs, too, of the primitive metaphysical doctrine of counterparts and correspondances. “They avouch that every Element and different state of Being have Animals resembling these of another Element.” By persons not knowing this, “the Roman invention of guardian Angels particularly assigned” has been promulgated. The guardian Angel of the Roman superstition is merely the Double or Co-walker—the type (in the viewless world) of the man in the apparent world. Thus are wraiths and ghosts explained by our Presbyterian psychologist and his Highland flock. All things universally have their types, their reflex: a man’s type, or reflex, or “co-walker” may be seen at a distance from or near him during his life—nay, may be seen after his death. The gifted man of second sight can tell the substantial figure from the airy counterpart. Sometimes the reflex anticipates the action of the reality: “was often seen of old to enter a House, by which the people knew that the Person of that Likeness was to visit them in a few days.” It may have occurred to most of us to meet a person in the street whom we took for an acquaintance. It is not he, but we meet the real man a few paces farther on. Thus a distinguished officer, at home on leave, met a friend, as he tells me, in Piccadilly. The other passed without notice: the officer hesitated about following him, did not, and in some fifty yards met his man. There is probably no more in this than resemblance and coincidence, but this is the kind of thing which was worked by the Highlanders into their metaphysics.7

The end of the Co-walker is obscure. “This Copy, Echo, or living Picture goes at last to his own Herd.” Thus Ghosts are short-lived, and, according to M. d’Assier on the Manners of Posthumous Man (L’Homme Posthume), seldom survive for more than a century. By an airy being of this kind the Highlanders explained the false or morbid appetite. A “joint-eater” inhabited the patient; “he feeds two when he eats.” As a rule, the Fairies get
their food as witches do—take “the Pith and Milk from their Neighbours’ Cows unto their own chieleshold, throw a Hair-tedder, at a great distance, by Airt Magic, only drawing a spigot fastened in a Post, which will bring Milk as far as a Bull will be heard to roar.” This is illustrated in the drinking scene in Faust. This kind of charge is familiar in trials for witchcraft.

In accordance with the whole metaphysics of the system of doubles, which are parasites on humanity, is the superstition of nurses stolen by Fairies, and of children kidnapped while changelings are left in their places. The latter accounts for sudden decline and loss of health by a child; he is not the original child, but a Fairy brat. To guard against this, bread (as human food is hateful to Fairies—so the Kanekas carry a boiled yam about at night), or the Bible, or iron is placed in the bed of childbirth. “Iron scares spirits,” as the scholiast says of the drawn sword of Odysseus in Hades. The Fairy bride, in Wales, vanishes on being touched with iron. This belief probably came in when iron was a new, rare, and mysterious metal. The mortal nurses in Fairyland are pleasantly illustrated by the ballad

“I heard a cow lowe,
A bonny, bonny cow lowe.”

in C. Kirkpatrick Sharpe’s Ballad Book. This part of the superstition is not easy to elucidate. Kirk repeats the well-known tales of the blinding of the mortal who saw too clearly “by making use of their Oyntments.” Well-known examples occur in Gervase of Tilbury, and are cited in Scott’s note on Tamlane in the Border Minstrelsy. As Homer fables of the dead, their speech is a kind of whistling like the cry of bats—another indication of the pre-Christian Hades. They have feasts and burials; and Pashley, in his Travels in Crete, tells the well-known Border story of a man who fired on a Fairy bridal, and heard a voice cry, “Ye have slain the bonny bridegroom.” It is, of course, to be noted that the modern Greek superstition of the Nereids, who carry off mortal girls to dance with them till they pine away, answers to some of our Fairy legends, while it will hardly be maintained that the Nereids are a memory of pre-historic Finns. “Antic corybantic jollity” is a note of Nereids, as well as of the Sleagh Maith. “The Inconvenience of their succubi,” the Fairy girls who make love to young
men, is well-known in the Breton ballad, _Le Sieur Nan_. The same superstition is current among the Kanekas of New Caledonia. My cousin, Mr. Atkinson, was visited by a young Kaneka, who twice or thrice returned to take leave of him with much emotion. When Mr. Atkinson asked what was the matter, the lad said that he had just met, as he thought, the girl of his heart in the forest. After a scene of dalliance she vanished, and he knew that she was a forest Fairy, and that he must die in three days, which he did. This is the “inconvenience of their succubi,” regretted by Mr. Kirk. Thus it appears that the mass of these opinions is not local, nor Celtic merely, but of world-wide diffusion. Thus Sir Walter Scott observes of the Afghans and Highlanders. “Their superstitions are the same, or nearly so. _The Gholee Beabacan_ (demons of the desert) resemble the _Boddach_ of the Highlanders, ‘who walked the heath at midnight and at noon’” (_Quarterly Review_, xiv. 289). Again, Mr. Kirk says that “Werewolves and Witches’ true Bodies are (by the union of the spirit of Nature that runs thorow all, echoing and doubling the Blow towards another) wounded at home, when the astrial or assumed Bodies are stricken elsewhere.” Thus, if a witch-hare is shot, the witch’s real body is hurt in the same part; and Lafitau, in North America, found that when a Huron shot a witch-bird, the real magician was stricken in the same place. The theory that the Fairies appear as “a little rough Dog” is illustrated by the Welsh Dogs of Hell. _Blackwood’s Magazine_ for 1818 contains many examples of these Hell-dogs, which are often invested in a sheet of fire, as Rink says is the case among the Eskimo. Take a modern instance. “Mr. F. A. Paley and friend, walking home at night on a lonely road, see a large black dog rise from it, slowly walk to the side, and disappear. They search in vain. Mr. Paley hears subsequently that this mysterious dog is the terror of the neighbourhood, but no such real dog is known.” Date, summer 1837 (_Journ. of S. P. R._, Feb. 1893, p. 31).

The dwellings of these airy shadows of mankind are, naturally, “Fairie Hills.” There is such a hill, the Fairy Hill at Aberfoyle, where Mr. Kirk resided: Baillie Nicol Jarvie describes its legends in an admirable passage in _Rob Roy_. Mr. MacRitchie says, “How much of this ‘howe’ is artificial, or whether any of it is, remains to be discovered.” It is much larger than most artificial tumuli. According to Mr. Kirk, the Highlanders “superstitiously believe the souls of their Predecessors to dwell” in the fairy-hills. “And for that end, say they, a Mote or Mount was dedicate beside every Churchyard, to receive the souls till their adjacent bodies arise, and so become as a Fairy
hill.” Here the Highland philosophers have conspicuously put the cart before the horse. The tumuli are much older than the churches, which were no doubt built beside them because the place had a sacred character. Two very good examples may be seen at Dalry, on the Ken, in Galloway, and at Parton, on Loch Ken. The grassy howes are large and symmetrical, and the modern Presbyterian churches occupy old sites; at Parton there are ruins of the ancient Catholic church. Round the tumulus at Dalry, according to the local form of the *Marchen* of Hesione, a great dragon used to coil in triple folds, before it was killed by the blacksmith. Nobody, perhaps, can regard these tumuli, and many like them, as anything but sepulchral. On the road between Balantrae, in Ayrshire, and Stranraer, there is a beautiful tumulus above the sea, which at once recalls the barrow above the main that Elpenor in the *Odyssey*, asked Odysseus to build for him, “the memorial of a luckless man.” In the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, the ghost of a hero who fell at Troy appears to the adventurers on a tumulus like this of the Ayrshire coast. In speaking of these barrows Mr. Kirk tells how, during a famine about 1676, two women had a vision of a treasure hid in a fairy-hill. This they excavated, and discovered some coins “of good money.” The great gold corslet of the British Museum is said to have been found in Wales, where tradition spoke of a ghost in golden armour which haunted a hillock. The hillock was excavated, and the golden corslet, like the Shakespearian bricks is “alive to testify” to the truth of the story.

**Fairies and Psychical Research**

The Fairy belief, we have said, is a composite thing. On the materials given by tradition, such as the memory, perhaps, of a pre-historic race, and by old religion, as in the thoughts about the pre-Christian Hades, poetry and fancy have been at work. Consumption, lingering disease, unexplained disappearances, sudden deaths, have been accounted for by the agency of the Fairies, or People of Peace. If the superstition included no more than this, we might regard it as a natural result of imagination, dealing with facts quite natural in the ordinary course of things. But there are elements in the belief which cannot be so easily dismissed. We must ask whether the abnormal phenomena which have been so frequently discussed, fought over, forgotten, and revived, do not enter into the general mass of folk-lore. They appear most notably in the two branches of Brownie-dom—of “Pixies,” as
they say in Devonshire, who haunt the house, and in the alleged examples of the second sight. The former topic is the more obscure, if not the more curious. Let us examine the occurrences, then, which may have begotten the belief in Brownies, and in house-haunting Pixies or Fairies. These appearances may be alleged, on one hand, to be actual facts in Nature, the workings of some yet unexplained forces; or they may merely be the consequences of some very old traditional method of imposture, vulgar in itself, but still historical. That form of imposture, again, may be wrought either by conscious agents, or unconsciously and automatically by persons under the influence of somnambulism; or, finally, the phenomena may in various cases be due to any one of these three agencies, all of which may possibly be verae causae, as conscious imposture and trickery is certainly one vera causa.

In Mr. Kirk’s book we meet “the invisible Wights which haunt Houses, . . . throw great Stones, Pieces of Earth and Wood at the Inhabitants,” but “hurt them not at all.” As we have said, Major (1518) calls these wights “Fauni or Brobne”—that is, Brownies—and says that they thrash as much grain in one night as twenty men could do, and throw stones about. The legend of their working was common in Scotland, and a correspondent says that in Devonshire the belief in Pixies who set the house in order exists among the grandparents of the present generation. But the sportive is more common than the kindly aspect of Brownies. Through history we constantly find them causing objects to move without visible contact, and “acting in sport, like Buffoons and Drolls.” In his Letters on Demonology (p. 377) Scott gives instances where the buffoon or droll was detected, and confessed that the rattlings of plates and movements of objects were caused by an apparatus of threads or horsehair. He also quotes the famous doings of “The Just Devil of Woodstock” in 1649, which so perplexed and discomfited the Cromwellian Commissioners. He accounts for those annoyances by the confessions of Joe Collins of Oxford, “Funny Joe,” which he quotes from Hone’s Every-Day Book, while Hone quotes from the British Magazine of 1747. But the writer in the British Magazine gives no references or authorities for the authenticity of Funny Joe’s confessions, nor even for the existence of Joseph. Scott could not find his original in the pamphlets of the British Museum, and some of the statements attributed to Joe do not tally with the official account, and other contemporary documents collected in Sir Walter’s Woodstock. Joe pretends, for example, to have been secretary to
the Commission under the name of Giles Sharpe; but in the other accounts
the secretary is named Browne. A Royalist Brownie or Polter-geist lies
under shrewd suspicion, but Joe’s own existence is unproved, and his
alleged evidence is of no value. However, no sane person can dream of
doubting that many a Brownie has been as much in flesh and blood as the
Brownie of Bodsbeck in Hogg’s story.

There remain the less easily explicable tales of strange and humorous
disturbances, accompanied by loud sounds, rappings, the moving of objects
without visible contact, and so forth. Perhaps we may best examine these
by taking modern instances, collected by the Psychical Society, in the first
place, and then comparing them with cases recorded at distant times and in
remote places. Some curious common features will be observed, and the
evidence has at least the value of undesigned coincidence. Glanvil, Telfair
(minister of Rerrick), the Wesleys, Dr. Adam Clarke, Increase Mather, were
not modern students of psychical research. The modern Psychical
Researchers, we fear, are not students of old legendary lore, which they
dismiss on evidence not first-hand nor scientifically valid. Thus they do not
seem to be aware that they are describing, almost in identical terms,
phenomena identical with those noted by Telfair, Mather, Lavater, and the
rest, and by those ancients attributed to devils. The modern recorders are
not consciously copying from old accounts; the coincidences therefore have
their value, as proving that certain phenomena have occurred and recurred.
Now these phenomena may be due to conscious or to hysterical imposture,
but they have been frequent and common enough to keep alive, and
probably to originate, a part of the Fairy belief— that part which is
concerned with Brownies and house-haunting Pixies, or Domovoys. These,
again, correspond to the tricky beings described by Mr. Leland in his
_Etruscan Remains_ as survivals of old Roman and Etruscan popular
religions, while we find similar occurrences in the Empire of the Incas not
long after the Spanish conquest of Peru.

Beginning, then, with what is nearest to us in time, we take Mr. F. W. H.
Myers’s essays “On the Alleged Movement of Objects without Contact,
occurring not in the Presence of a Paid Medium.” The alleged phenomena
are, of course, as common as blackberries in the presence of paid mediums,
but are to the last degree untrustworthy. Even when there is no paid medium
present, the mere contagious excitement which is said to be developed at
seances makes all that is thought to occur there a story to be taken with plenty of salt.¹³ One of Mr. Myers’s examples was the result of seances, but it had features of great importance for the argument. It will be found in Proc. S. P. R., vol. xix. p. 189, July, 1891. The performers are Mr. C., Mrs. C., and Mr. H. Mr. C. and Mrs. C. are spoken of as good witnesses, known to Mr. Myers and Professor Barrett. Mr. H.’s health has suffered so much that he cannot be examined, and Mr. H. is the person who interests us here, for reasons which will be given later. All three were “unbelievers” in these matters. On the second evening “lights floated about the room,” which was lit, apparently, by a full moon. “F.” (who is also “H.”) felt cold hands touching, and “hands” recur in the old pre-scientific accounts. The three mages were holding hands tightly at the time. Now Mr. H. had hitherto been in excellent health, but after his chair was dragged from under him, and he was “thrown down on the ground,” he went into “a trance.” His watch and ring (on the finger of a hand held by Mrs. C.) were carried to a remote part of the room. H. leaves the circle and sits at the window. Another figure walks through the room. H. returns, is “thrown down,” his coat is dragged off, and his boots are discovered on a distant sofa. He asks for “something from home,” goes into a trance, a photograph locked up by him at home is found on the table. His wife, in town, “being quite ignorant of our having had seances, told us that, at that very hour, a fearful crash occurred in his bedroom. The photograph vanished, and returned last night, when H. was in a trance.” He is “thrown down” again. He has “alternate fits of unconsciousness and raving delirium.” The home of Mr. and Mrs. C. (not the house where they sat) is vexed by “figures,” noises, knockings; “we were sprinkled with water in the night,” haunted by sounds of drums and horns, and so forth. Before a “manifestation,” “we all felt a sudden chill, like either a wave of intensely cold air passing, or a rapid decrease of temperature.”¹⁴

This is a disgusting story if Mr. H.’s health was ruined by his presence at the performances. The point, however, is that he did behave in epileptic fashion while these events were in progress. It is natural to suppose that, in his “trances,” he may have been capable, unconsciously, of feats physically and morally impossible to him in his normal condition. This explanation would not cover all the alleged occurrences, but would account for many of them.
We now take an ancient instance, similar disturbances at Newberry, in New England, in 1679, similarly accompanied by the presence of an epileptic patient. The house of William Morse was “strangely disquieted by a daemon.” The inmates were Morse, his wife, and their grandson, a boy whose age is not given. The trouble began on December 3, with a sound of heavy objects falling on the roof. On December 8, large stones and bricks “were thrown in at the west end of the house . . . the bedstead was lifted up from the floor, and the bed-staff flung out of the window, and a cat was hurled at the wife. A long staff danced up and down in the chimney. The man’s wife put the staff in the fire, but she could not hold it there, inasmuch as it would forcibly fly out; yet after much ado, with joynt strength, they made it to burn. . . . A chair flew about, and at last lighted on the table, where victuals stood ready to eat, and was likely to spoil all, only by a nimble catching they saved some of their meat. . . . A chest was removed from place to place, no hand touching it. Two keys would fly about, making a loud noise by knocking against each other. . . . As they lay in bed with their little boy between them, a great stone from the floor of the loft was thrown upon the man’s stomach, and he turning it down upon the floor, it was once more thrown upon him.” On January 23, 1680, “his ink-horn was taken away from him while he was writing” (he was keeping a diary of these events), “and when by all his seeking he could not find it, at last he saw it drop out of the air, down by the fire. . . . February 2, while he and his boy were eating of cheese, the pieces which he cut were wrested from them. . . . But as for the boy, he was a great sufferer in these afflictions, for on the 18th of December he, sitting by his grandfather, was hurried into great motions. The man made him stand between his legs, but the chair danced up and down, and was like to have cast both man and boy into the fire, and the child was tossed about in such a manner as that they feared his brains would have been beaten out.”

All these contortions of the boy were apparently what M. Charcot calls clownisms. When taken to a doctor’s house the boy “was free of disturbances,” which returned with his return home. He barked like a dog, clucked like a hen, talked nonsense about “Powel,” who pinched and bullied him. While he was in bed with the old people, “a pot with its contents was thrown upon them.” They were clutched by hands, like Mr. and Mrs. C. Once a voice was heard singing, “Revenge, revenge is sweet.”
Finally a mate of a ship came, declared that the grandmother was not rightly suspected as a witch, and offered, if he were left alone with the boy, to cure him. “The mate came next day betimes, and the boy was with him till night; since which time his house, Morse saith, had not been molested with evil spirits.” Probably the mate used a rope’s end: the boy was more speedily cured than Mr. H.

The phenomena are those of droll or buffooning wights, as Mr. Kirk says, and no man can doubt that the boy was at the bottom of the whole affair. But whether he was capable, when well and conscious, of such diversions, is another question. Children like him produced the famous witch-mania in New England.

We have here, undeniably, a well-recorded case, analogous to that of Mr. H. In a modern case of bell-ringing, heavy thumps, and movement of objects, the agent was “a young girl who had never been out to service before,” and who passed the night in a state of wildly agitated somnambulism, repeating the whole of the Service for the day. Mather gives several other examples, in which motives for trickery are manifest, while we hear nothing of an epileptic or hysterical patient.

In the majority of instances, ancient or modern, children are the agents. Thus we have “Physical Phenomena obtained in a Family Circle,” that of Mr. and Mrs. Davis, with their children, at Rio Janeiro. The time was 1888. Curiosity had been caused by “the notorious Henry Slade.” There were “touches and grasps of hands.” A table “ran after me” (Professor Alexander) “and attempted to hem me in,” when only C., a little girl, was in the room. “As far as I could see, she did not even touch the table.” The chair of Amy (aged thirteen months) was moved about, like that of Master Morse two hundred years earlier. A table jumped into the laps of the public. There were raps and thumps, which “seemed to shake the whole building.” Lights floated about. A slate, covered with flour, was placed in C.’s lap; her hands lay on the table. Marks of fingers came on the flour, and, in answer to request, the mark of “a naked baby foot.” The children present were wearing laced boots, and we are not told that little Amy was under the table. Bluish lights and the phantasm of a dog were seen.

All this answers to an ancient example—the disturbances in Mr. Wesley’s house at Epworth, December, 1715, to January, 1716. The house was a
new one, rebuilt in 1709. We have Mr. Samuel Wesley’s Journal, with many contemporary letters from members of the family, and later reminiscences. There were many lively girls in the house, and two servants—a maid and a man, recently engaged. The disturbances began with groanings; then came knockings, which flitted about the house. Mr. Wesley heard nothing till December 21. The knocks replied to those made by the family, but they never could imitate the sounds. Mrs. Wesley and Emily saw an object “like a badger” run from under a bed and vanish. The mastiff was much alarmed by the sounds. Mr. Wesley was “thrice pushed by invisible power.” The bogie was a Jacobite, as was Mrs. Wesley; Mr. Wesley was for King George. The knocks were violent when that usurper was prayed for. They did not try praying for King James. Robin, the servant, saw a handmill work violently. “Naught vexed me but that it was empty. I thought, had it but been full of malt, he might have ground his heart out for me.” But this was a jocose, not an industrious devil. Robin called it “old Jeffries,” after a gentleman lately dead; the family called it “Jeffrey,” unless one name is a mere misspelling. It “seemed to sweep after” Nancy Wesley, when she swept the chambers. “She thought he might have done it for her, and saved her the trouble.” Mrs. Wesley concealed the matter from her husband, “lest he should fancy it was against his own death” (Letter of January 12, 1716–17). This belief in noises foretelling death is very common; compare Scott’s nocturnal disturbances at Abbotsford when Bullock, his agent in building it, was dying in London. The racket occurred on April 28 and 29, 1818, and Scott examined the scene “with Beardie’s broadsword under my arm.” Bullock died in Tenterden Street, in London, whether on April 28 or 29 is not easily to be ascertained. “The noise resembled half a dozen men putting up boards and furniture, and nothing can be more certain than that there was nobody on the premises at the time.” The noises used to follow Hetty Wesley, and thump under her feet, as under those of C. in Professor Alexander’s narrative. Mr. Wesley’s plate “danced before him on the table a pretty while, without anybody’s stirring the table.” The disturbances quieted down in January, but recurred on March 31. Similar phenomena had occurred “long before” in the family. “The sound very often seemed in the air, in the middle of a room, nor could they ever make any such themselves by any contrivance.” On February 16, 1740, twenty-three years later, Emily writes to Jack about “that wonderful thing called by us Jeffrey. . . . That something calls on me against any extraordinary new affliction.”
Priestley styles this affair “the best-authenticated that is anywhere extant.” He supposes it to have been “a trick of the servants, for mere amusement.” The *modus operandi* is difficult to explain. We hear nothing of bad health or hysterics in the household.\(^{25}\) For our purpose it is enough that a few incidents of this kind, however produced, might originate and keep alive the belief in Brownies, and

“That shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow,"

who

“Frights the maidens of the villagery,
Skims milk, and sometimes labours in the quern.”

By a curious coincidence, we can show a case in which phenomena of the kind usually reported as occurring at *seances*, and in examples like that of William Morse, were actually accepted as manifestations of the *Sleagh Maith*, or Fairies. In his account of the disturbances in the Wesley family, Dr. Clarke, the author, averred that he had himself witnessed similar events. It thus became necessary to consult his *Life* (London, 1833). In the history of my own life,” says Dr. Clarke, “I have related this matter in sufficient detail.”\(^{26}\) Unluckily, in his *Life* (pp. 76, 77) he gives scarce any details. Previous to sudden deaths in a family called Church, the phenomena of falling plates, heavy tread, and other noises occurred. Mr. Clarke “sat up one whole night in the kitchen, and most distinctly heard the above noises.” He was a born mystic, and even in childhood a reader of Cornelius Agrippa, and, later, of the alchemists. But he records the instance of a woman, who solemnly declared to Mrs. Clarke that a number of the *gentle people* (*Sleagh Maith*) “occasionally frequented her house; that they often conversed with her, one of them putting its hands on her eyes during the time, which hands she represented, from the sensation she had, to be about the size of those of a child of four or five years of age.” The family were “worn down” with these visits, and from the mention of touches of hands it
is pretty plain that we have to do with the kind of sprite who paws people at seances. But these sprites are recognised (the scene is the North of Ireland) as “gentle people,” Folk of Peace. The amusing thing is, that Mr. Clarke, while he believes in Mr. Wesley’s Jeffrey, and in the supernatural origin of a noise in a kitchen, laughs at similar phenomena when assigned to Fairies. It is a mere difference of terminology.

Another old example may be given. It is Alexander Telfair’s “True Relation” of disturbances at Ringeroot, in the parish of Rerrick.\(^{27}\) The story is attested by the signatures of Ewart, minister of Kells, in Galloway; Monteith, minister of Borg; Murdoch, minister of Crosmichael, on Loch Ken; Spalding, minister at Parton, also by Loch Ken; Falconer, minister at Keltown; Mr. M‘Lellan of Colline, Lennox of Millhouse, and a number of farmers. These were all neighbours, and all attested what they saw and heard. Robert Chambers says, “There never, perhaps, was any mystic history better attested. Few narrations of the kind have included occurrences and appearances which it was more difficult to reconcile with the theory of trick or imposture.” Mr. Telfair himself had been chaplain, in 1687, to Sir Thomas Kirkpatrick of Closeburn. He was then an Episcopalian.

Andrew Mackie was a stone-mason at Rerrick. On March 7 (1695?), and for long after, stones began to fly about in his house by night and day. “The stones which hit any person had not half their natural weight.” Mackie complained to Telfair, his minister, who entered the house and prayed: nothing odd occurred. As he stood outside, he “saw two little stones drop down on the croft”; then he was asked to return, and was pelted inside the cottage. This was March 11. For a week there was no more trouble, then the disturbances began again. Mr. Telfair was sent for, and was pelted, beaten with a staff, and heard loud knockings. “That night, as I was at prayer, leaning on a bedside, I felt something lifting up my arm. I, casting my eyes thither, perceived a little white hand and arm from the elbow down, but presently it evanished.” “There was never anything seen except that hand I saw,” and an apparition of a boy in grey clothes. Sometimes the stoning went on in the open air.\(^{28}\) There were plenty of touchings, grippings, and scratchings. “The door-bar” (a long, heavy piece of squared wood) “would go thorow the house as if a person were carrying it in their hand, yet nothing seen doing it.” Here we compare, in Proc. S. P. R., February, 1892, the story of a carpenter’s shop at Swanland, in Yorkshire, where pieces of
wood were levitated into abnormal flight. No imposture was discovered, nor was the presence of any one person necessary.

The ministers of Kells and Crosmichael were pelted with stones of eight pounds weight. On April 6, fire-balls floated through the cottage. When five ministers were present, “it made all the house shake, brake a hole through the thatch, and poured in great stones.” “It handled the legs of some as with a man’s hand”; it hoisted Mr. Telfair, Lennox of Millhouse, and others off the ground! A sieve flew through the house; Mackie caught it; a force gripped it, and pulled the interior part out of the rim. A day of humiliation was solemnly kept in the parish, which only excited the emulation of the disturbing agent; “it continued in a most fearful manner without intermission.” Voices were heard, which talked nonsense of a semi-scriptural kind; finally the thing died out early in May. By the way, on April 28, “it pulled down the end of the house, all the stonework thereof.”

This is a very odd case, as no suspicion is thrown on the children. The attestations of several witnesses are given, not only at the close, but for almost every separate incident. The vision of the white hand is agreeable.

The Devil of Glen Luce, in Galloway, was published by Sinclair in his Hydrostaticks, of all places, in 1672, and again in Satan’s Invisible World, and by Glanvil in Sadducismus Triumphatus. In this affair a boy called Thomas, a son of the unlucky householder, was clearly the agent. The phenomena were stone-throwing, beating with sticks, levitation of a plate, and a great deal of voices, probably uttered by the aforesaid Thomas. The Synod ordered a day of humiliation (1655–56).

The affair of the Drummer of Tedworth (1661) is, or ought to be, too well known for quotation. The troubles began after Mr. Mompesson seized the drum of a vagrant musician. In the presence of a clergyman, chairs walked about the room of themselves, “a bed-staff was thrown at the minister, but so favourably that a lock of wool could not have fallen more softly.” The children, as usual, were especially haunted. A jingling of money was common, as it also was at Epworth. Lights wandered about the house, “blue and glimmering.” The noise was persistent in the woodwork of the children’s beds, while their hands were outside. The knocks answered knocks made by visitors. There were divers other marvels. The Drummer was suspected, but, consciously or not, the children were probably the
agents. They seem to have been in their usual health. In Galashiels (date not given), loud knocks on the floor accompanied a hystero-epileptic girl wherever she sat. In bed, “her body was so lifted up that many strong men were not able to keep it down.” The minister, who could make nothing of her, was Mr. Wilkie; the girl was Margaret Wilson (Sinclair, p. 200).

This little parcel of strange stories may suffice to show that part of the Fairy belief is based on such incidents as still occur, or are reported to occur, just in the old fashion. It is for psychologists and physicians to ascertain how far, if at all, the incidents are produced by hysterical, or epileptic, or somnambulistic patients. Common forthright trickery is usually detected in paid mediums. But the trickery simulates real events, or continues an old traditional form of imposture. The moral that parents should not allow their children to be present at seances hardly needs enforcing. Some of them may escape unharmed, but frightful injuries may be inflicted on health and on character.

Second Sight and Telepathy

We have already hinted that events of an ordinary kind—illusions, cases of mistaken identity, or hallucination—are probably the groundwork in part of the Highland belief in second sight. Of course, if a certain proportion of hallucinations were or could be taken for “veridical,” attention would be given to these alone: the others would be neglected. The Psychical Society has collected and examined hundreds of these cases in modern life.

The Society may find out, experimentally, whether second sight can be acquired in the manner described by Mr. Kirk—whether by the hair tether, or by merely putting the foot under that of a seer. Thus contact is used in thought reading, as, in second sight, the seer by contact communicates his hallucination. Second sight itself is now called telepathy, which, however, does not essentially advance our knowledge of the subject. It is either very common, or people who choose to claim the possession of it are very common. In our society it is mere matter for idle tales; in the Highlands the second sight was a belief and a system. Mr. Pepys and Dr. Johnson investigated the matter, and Dr. Johnson came away open to conviction, but unconvinced. The Psychical Society is now examining second sight in the Highlands. It is interesting to learn that the Presbyterian seers justified their
visions out of the Bible, which also justified the burning of these gifted men on occasion. Mr. Kirk is tolerant enough to ascribe their visions to a “bounty of Providence.” This may have passed, north of the Highland line, but in Fife and the south the seers would speedily have been accommodated with a stake and tar-barrel. The writings of Wodrow and Mr. Robert Blair of St. Andrews (1650–60) prove that if a savoury preacher wrought marvels, he was inspired, but if an amateur did the very same things,—prophesied, healed diseases, and so forth,—he or she, was likely to be haled before the Presbytery, and possibly dragged to the stake. In the Highlands these invidious distinctions were less forcibly drawn. Mr. Kirk treats the whole question in his curiously cold scientific way. If these things occur, they are in the realm of Nature, and are results of causes which may be variously conjectured. They may be providential, or a sport of evolution, derived from “a complexionall Quality of the first acquirer,” which often becomes hereditary in his lineage.

Lord Tarbott’s letter to an inquirer, Robert Boyle, is added by Mr. Kirk to his little treatise, with his own annotations. His belief that the Fairy sights could only be seen while the eyes are kept steady without twinkling, is attested by a well-known anecdote. On the afternoon of Culloden, a little girl, staying with Lord Lovat at Gortuleg, was reading in a window-seat. Chancing to look out, she saw a company of headlong riders hastening to the castle. Believing them to be the Sleagh Maith, she tried hard to keep her eyes from twinkling, that she might not lose the vision. But these, alas! were no Fairies, they were Prince Charles and his men flying from the victorious English. The tale proves that the belief long survived the day of the minister of Aberfoyle. Lord Tarbott mentions, also, the vision of the shroud on the breast of a man about to die, which seems to be alluded to in the prophecy of Theoclymenus in the Odyssey. Lord Tarbott’s tales are of the familiar kind, there are dozens of such in Theophilus Insulanus. Mr. Kirk’s notes are chiefly remarkable for his citation of Walter Grahame’s “evil eye,” which killed what he praised,—a world-wide superstition, too common to need supporting by foreign and classical examples.

Unluckily, at this point Mr. Kirk abandons what we may call his scientific attitude. He has accounted for his “supernatural” affairs as not supernatural at all, but phenomena in Nature, and subject, like other phenomena, to laws. But now it occurs to him to explain the conduct of his
Sleagh Maith as the result of missionary zeal on their part: “they endeavour to convince us of a Deity”; though, on the face of his argument, a Co-walker no more proves a Deity than does an ordinary “walker.” He may have been reading “the learned Dr. Mor” (More the Platonist), and may have altered his ideas. His account of a girl who learned, or rather composed, a long poem by aid of “our nimble and courteous spirits,” affords an early example of what is called “an inspirational medium.” It is unlucky that Mr. Kirk did not publish this work, of which he had a copy. The ordinary “spiritual” poetry may be written, as Dr. Johnson said of Ossian, “by any one who would abandon his mind to it.” When Mr. Kirk maintains that Neolithic arrow-heads could not have been executed “by all the Airt of man,” he relapses from his usual odd common-sense. He also believes in men who are magically shot-proof, like Claverhouse, who had to be shot by a silver bullet; like Archbishop Sharp, on whom his pious assassins erroneously held that their bullets took no effect; and like certain soldiers mentioned by Dugald Dalgetty of Drumthwacket. This absurd belief was very generally held by the Covenanters. Where his local superstitions and those of his generation are not concerned, Mr. Kirk recovers his clearness of intellect. In Purgatory he finds only the pre-Christian Hades, “our secret Republick,” with an ecclesiastical colouring—“additional Fictions of Monks’ doting and crazied Heads.” Mr. Kirk did not perceive the danger involved in his own argument. If a Highland second-sight man answers to a Hebrew prophet in his visions and trances, a Hebrew prophet is in danger of being no more considered than a Highland second-sighted man. However, it is to Mr. Kirk’s praise that he shows no persecuting disposition as far as witches are concerned (though he has seen them pricked), and that he argues very fairly from his premisses, and within his limits. He recognises the unity of spiritual phenomena and of popular beliefs, whether it springs from a common well-head of delusion in our nature, or whether it really has a source in the observation of peculiar and rather rare phenomena.

To the Edinburgh edition of 1815 (probably the only one) the editor added the work of Theophilus Insulanus on Second Sight. This is not rare nor expensive, and we do not reproduce it. One case of “telepathy” may be quoted from Theophilus.
“Donald Beaton, residenter in Hammir, related that, in his passage from Glasgow to the Isle of Skye, he stopped at Tippermory, a known harbour in the Isle of Mull.” Here some one gave him a loin of venison. Donald, whose wife’s mother was a seer, to try her powers, wished that piece of venison in her hands. “The same night the seer, who lived with her daughter, his wife, apprehended she saw him enter the house with a shapeless lump in his hands—she knew not what, but it resembled flesh, which gave herself and her daughter great joy, as they had despaired of him by his long absence.” This is “telepathy,” if telepathy there be.

Another picturesque tale shows how, on the night before the Rout of Moy, Patrick M‘Caskill met the famed M‘Rimmon (sic), M‘Leod’s piper, in the town of Inverness, and saw him contract into the size of a boy of five or six, and expand again into this athletic proportions. M‘Rimmon was killed in the Rout of Moy—an attempt to surprise and seize Prince Charles. Before leaving Skye he had prophesied—

“M‘Leod shall come back,  
But M‘Rimmon shall never.”

The editor is acquainted with a splendid case of second sight in Kensington. The seer was an accomplished English gentleman, and mentioned his vision at the moment to a witness who remembers and corroborates the statement. Thus the Hebrides and Highlands have no monopoly of second sight.

The researches of M. Charcot, M. Richet, and other psychologists do not at present help us much in the matter of veridical second sight. It is not a hallucination “suggested” to a hypnotised subject, but an impression produced by a remote person or event on a subject who has not been hypnotised at all. For example, Dr. Adam Clarke, in his Life (vol. ii. p. 16) tells us of Mr. Tracy Clarke, who, being in the Isle of Man with his son, dreamed that he had visited his wife in Liverpool. He told his son that Mrs. Clarke was looking very well, but, contrary to her habit, was sleeping in the best bedroom. On the day when Mr. Clarke said this, Mrs. Clarke, who had been sleeping in her best bedroom, told the little son who lay in her room that she had heard his father ride up to the house, stable his horse, open the
door, come upstairs, and walk round her bed, but that she could not see him. This is a case at least of second hearing, and has no hypnotic explanation.

We end in the candid spirit of Dr. Johnson, as far as the Polter-Geist and second sight are concerned—willing to be convinced, but far indeed from conviction. As to the Fairy belief, we conceive it to be a complex matter, from which tradition, with its memory of earth-dwellers, is not wholly absent, while more is due to a survival of the pre-Christian Hades, and to the belief in local spirits—the Vuis of Melanesia, the Nereids of ancient and modern Greece, the Lares of Rome, the fateful Mœræ and Hathors—old imaginings of a world not yet “dispeopled of its dreams.”
AN ESSAY

of

The nature and actions of the subterranean (and, for the most part) invisible people, heretofore going under the name of ELVES, FAUNES, and FAIRIES, or the like, among the low-country Scots, as they are described by those who have the SECOND SIGHT; and now, to occasion further inquiry, collected and compared, by a circumspect inquirer residing among the Scottish-Irish in Scotland.
Secret Commonwealth

OR,

A Treatise displaying the Chief Curiosities as they are in Use among the Diverse People of Scotland to this Day; SINGULARITIES for the most Part peculiar to that Nation.

A Subject not heretofore discoursed of by any of our Writers; and yet ventured on in an Essay to suppress the impudent and growing atheism of this age, and to satisfy the desire of some choice Friends.

Then a spirit passed before my face, the hair of my flesh stood up; it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes.—Job 4.15–16.

This is a rebellious people, which say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, but speak unto us smooth things.—Isaiah 30.9–10.

And the man whose eyes were open hath said . . .

—Numbers 24.15.

For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face . . .

—1 Corinthians 13.12.

It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we shall be like God, and see him as he is.—1 John 3.2.
Shall the dead be borne under the waters, and inhabitants thereof?—Job 26. 5 (Septuag).

BY MR. ROBERT KIRK, Minister at Aberfoyle.
1691
Of the Subterranean Inhabitants

These siths or fairies they call sleagh maith or the good people, it would seem, to prevent the dint of their ill attempts, (for the Irish use to bless all they fear harm of) and are said to be of a middle nature betwixt man and angel, as were dæmons thought to be of old, of intelligent studious spirits, and light, changeable bodies (like those called astral) somewhat of the nature of a condensed cloud and best seen in twilight. These bodies be so pliable through the subtlety of the spirits that agitate them, that they can make them appear or disappear at pleasure. Some have bodies or vehicles so spongy, thin, and desecat [pure] that they are fed by only sucking into some fine spirituous liquors that pierce like pure air and oil: others feed more gross on the foison [what can be harvested from something] or substance of corns and liquors or on corn itself that grows on the surface of the earth, which these fairies steal away, partly invisible, partly preying on the grain as do crows and mice. Wherefore in this same age, they are sometimes heard to bake bread, strike hammers, and do such like services within the little hillocks they most haunt: some whereof of old, before the Gospel dispelled paganism, and in some barbarous places as yet, enter houses after all are at rest and set the kitchens in order, cleansing all the vessels. Such drudges go under the name of Brownies. When we have plenty, they have scarcity at their homes, and on the contrary (for they are empowered to catch as much prey everywhere as they please). Their robberies notwithstanding they oftimes occasion great ricks [stacks] of corn not to bleed so well (as they call it), or prove so copious by very far as was expected by the owner. 47

Their bodies of congealed air are sometimes caried aloft, other whiles grovel in different shapes, and enter into any cranny or cleft of the earth (where air enters) to their ordinary dwellings, the earth being full of cavities and cells and there being no place nor creature but is supposed to have other animals (greater or lesser) living in or upon it as inhabitants and no such thing as a pure wilderness in the whole universe.
We then (the more terrestrial kind), have now so numerously planted all countries, do labour for that abstruse [shut up close, hid] people as well as for ourselves. Albeit when several countries were uninhabited by us, these had their easy tillage above ground as we now, the print of those furrows do yet remain to be seen on the shoulders of very high hills, which was done when the champaign ground [open fields] was wood and forest.

They remove to other lodgings at the beginning of each quarter of the year, so traversing till doomsday, being impatient of staying in one place and finding some ease by sojourning and changing habitations. Their chameleon-like bodies swim in the air near the earth with bag and baggage. And at such revolution of time, seers, or men of the second sight (females being seldom so qualified) have very terrifying encounters with them, even on highways; who therefore usually shun to travel abroad at these four seasons of the year and thereby have made it a custom to this day among the Scottish-Irish to keep church duly every first Sunday of the quarter to hallow themselves, their corns and cattle, from the shots and stealth of these wandering tribes. And many of these superstitious people will not be seen in church again till the next quarter begin, as if no duty were to be learned or done by them, but all the use of worship and sermons were to save them from these arrows that fly in the dark.\textsuperscript{33}

They are distributed in tribes and orders and have children, nurses, marriages, deaths, and burials, in appearance even as we (unless they so do for a mock-show, or to prognosticate some such things among us).

They are clearly seen by these men of the second sight to eat at funerals and banquets. Hence many of the Scottish-Irish will not taste meat at these meetings, lest they have communion with or be poisoned by them. So are they seen to carry the bier or coffin with the corpse among the middle-earth men [humans] to the grave. Some men of that exalted sight (whether by art or nature) have told me they have seen at these meetings a double-man, or the shape of some man in two places; that is, a superterranean and a subterranean inhabitant perfectly resembling one another in all points, whom he notwithstanding could easily distinguish one from another by some secret tokens and operations, and so go speak to the man his neighbour and familiar, passing by the apparition or resemblance of him. They avouch that every element and different state of being have animals resembling those of another element, as there be fishes sometimes at sea
resembling monks of late order in all their hoods and dresses; so as the Roman invention of good and bad dæmons and guardian angels particularly assigned is called by them an ignorant mistake sprung only from this original. They call this reflex-man a co-walker, every way like the man, as a twin-brother and companion, haunting him as his shadow, as is oft seen and known among men (resembling the original) both before and after the original is dead, and was also often seen of old to enter a house, by which these people knew that the person of that likeness was to visit them within a few days. This copy, echo, or living picture goes at last to his own herd. It accompanied that person so long and frequently for ends best known to itself, whether to guard him from the secret assaults of some of its own folks or only as one sportful ape to counterfeit all his actions. However, the stories of old witches prove beyond contradiction that all sorts of people spirits which assume light airy bodies, or crazed bodies co-acted by foreign spirits, seem to have some pleasure (at least to assuage from pain or melancholy) by striking and capering like satyrs, or whistling and screeching (like unlucky birds) in their unhallowed synagogues and sabboths. If invited and earnestly required, these companions make themselves known and familiar to men. Otherwise, being in a different state and element, they neither can nor will easily converse with them. They avouch that a heluo [glutton] or great-eater, has a voracious elf to be his attender called a joint-eater or just-halver, feeding on the pith or quintessence of what the man eats, and that therefore he continues lean like a hawk or heron, not with standing his devouring appetite. Yet it would seem that they convey that substance elsewhere, for these subterraneans eat but little in their dwellings; their food being exactly clean and served up by pleasant children like enchanted puppets. What food they extract from us is conveyed to their homes by secret paths, as some skilful women do the pith and milk from their neighbours’ cows into their own cheese-hold through a hair-tether, at a great distance by art, magic, or by drawing a spigot fastened to a post, which will bring milk as far off as a bull will be heard to roar. The cheese made of the remaining milk of a cow thus strained will swim in water like a cork. The method they take to recover their milk is a bitter chiding of the suspected enchanters, charging them by a counter-charm to give them back their own in God or their master’s name. But a little of the mother’s dung stroked on the calf’s mouth before it suck any does prevent this theft.
Their houses are called large and fair and (unless at some odd occasions) unperceivable by vulgar eyes, like Rachland and other enchanted islands, having for lights continual lamps and fires, often seen without fuel to sustain them. Women are yet alive who tell they were taken away when in child-bed to nurse fairie children, a lingering voracious image of theirs being left in their place (like their reflexion in a mirrour), which (as if it were some insatiable spirit in an assumed body) made first semblance to devour the meat that it cunningly carried by and then left the carcass as if it expired and departed thence by a natural and common death. The child and fire, with food and other necessaries, are set before the nurse how soon she enters, but she neither perceives any passage out nor sees what those people do in other rooms of the lodging. When the child is weaned, the nurse dies, or is conveyed back, or gets it to her choice to stay there. But if any superterraneans be so subtle as to practice sleights for procuring a privacy to any of their mysteries (such as making use of their ointments, which as Gygef’s ring makes them invisible or nimble, or casts them in a trance, or alters their shape, or makes things appear at a vast distance, etc.), they smite them without pain, as with a puff of wind, and bereave them of both the natural and acquired sights in the twinkling of an eye (both these sights where once they come being in the same organ and inseparable), or they strick them dumb. The tramontanes [here, northerners] to this day put bread, the Bible, or a piece of iron, in women’s beds when travelling to save them from being thus stolen; and they commonly report that all uncouth unknown wights are terrifed by nothing earthly so much as by cold iron. They deliver the reason to be that Hell lying betwixt the chill tempests and the firebrands of scalding metals and iron of the north (hence the loadstone causes a tendency to that point), by an antipathy thereto, these odious farscenting [able to perceive at a distance] creatures shrug and fright at all that comes thence relating to so abhorred a place, whence their torment is either begun or feared to come hereafter.

Their apparel and speech is like that of the people and country under which they live; so are they seen to wear plaids and variegated garments in the Highlands of Scotland and suanochs, [garments made from tartan] therefore in Ireland. They speak but little and that by way of whistling, clear, not rough. The very devils conjured in any country do answer in the language of the place, yet sometimes the subterraneans speak more distinctly than at other times. Their women are said to spin very fine, to
dye, to tissue, and embroider: but whether it is as manual operation of substantial refined stuffs with apt and solid instruments, or only curious cobwebs, impalpable rainbows, and a fantastic imitation of the actions of more terrestrial mortals, since it transcended all the senses of the seer to discern whether, I leave to conjecture as I found it.

Their men travel much abroad, either presaging or aping the dismal and tragical actions of some amongst us, and have also many disastrous doings of their own, as convocations, fighting, gashes, wounds, and burials, both in the earth and air. They live much longer than we yet die at last, or at least vanish from that state. ’Tis one of their tenets that nothing perisheth, but (as the sun and year) everything goes in a circle, lesser or greater, and is renewed and refreshed in its revolutions, as ’tis another that every body in the creation moves (which is a sort of life), and that nothing moves but has another animal moving on it, and so on, to the utmost minutest corpuscle that is capable to be a receptacle of life.

They are said to have aristocratical rulers and laws, but no discernible religion, love, or devotion towards God, the blessed maker of all. They disappear whenever they hear His name invoked or the name of Jesus (at which all do bow willingly or by constraint that dwell above or beneath within the earth, Philippians 2.10) nor can they act ought at that time after hearing of that sacred name. The tabhaisver, or seer, that corresponds with this kind of familiars, can bring them with a spell to appear to himself or others when he pleases as readily as Endor Witch to those of her kind. He tells they are ever readiest to go on hurtful errands, but seldom will be the messengers of great good to men. He is not terrified with their sight when he calls them, but seeing them in a surprise (as often he does) frights him extremely. And glad he would be quit of such, for the hideous spectacles seen among them, as the torturing of some wight, earnest ghostly staring looks, skirmishes, and the like. They do not all the harm which appearingly they have power to do, nor are they perceived to be in great pain, save that they are usually silent and sullen. They are said to have many pleasant toyish books, but the operation of these pieces only appears in some paroxysms of antic corybantic jollity, as if ravished and prompted by a new spirit entering into them at that instant, lighter and merrier than their own. Other books they have of involved abstruse sense, much like the Rosicrucian style. They have nothing of the Bible save collected parcels for
charms and counter-charms, not to defend themselves withal but to operate on other animals, for they are a people invulnerable to our weapons. And albeit werewolves’ and witches’ true bodies are (by the union of the spirit of nature that runs through all, echoing and doubling the blow towards another) wounded at home when the astral assumed bodies are stricken elsewhere; as the strings of a second harp tune to a unison sound though only one be struck; yet these people have not a second or so gross a body at all to be so pierced; but as air, which when divided unites again. Or if they feel pain by a blow, they are better physicians than we and quickly cure it. They are not subject to sore sicknesses, but dwindle and decay at a certain period, all about one age. Some say their continual sadness is because of their pendulous state (like those men in Luke 13.26), as uncertain what at the last revolution will become of them when they are locked up into an unchangeable condition. And if they have any frolic fits of mirth, ’tis as the constrained grinning of a mort-head, or rather as acted on a stage and moved by another, than cordially coming of themselves. But other men of the second sight, being illiterate and unwary in their observations, learn from these, one averring those subterranean people to be departed souls attending awhile in this inferior state and clothed with bodies procured through their alms deeds in this life; fluid, active, ethereal vehicles to hold them, that they may not scatter, nor wander and be lost in the totum [whole] or their first nothing; but if any were so impious as to have given no alms, they say when the souls of such do depart, they sleep in an unactive state till they resume the terrestrial bodies again. Others, that what the low-country Scot calls a wraith and the Irish taibshe\textsuperscript{35} or death’s messenger, (appearing sometimes as a little rough dog, and if crossed and conjured in time will be pacified by the death of any other creature instead of the sick man), is only exuvious fumes of the man approaching death, exhaled and congealed into a various likeness\textsuperscript{36} (as ships and armies are sometimes shaped in the air), and called astral bodies, agitated as wildfire with wind. And are neither souls nor counterfeiting spirits. Yet not a few avouch (as is said) that surely these are a numerous people by themselves, having their own politics. Which diversities of judgements may occasion several inconsonancies in this rehearsal, after the narrowest scrutiny made about it.

Their weapons are mostwhat solid earthly bodies, nothing of iron but much of a stone, like to yellow soft flint shaped like a barbed arrowhead,
but flung like a dart with great force. These arms (cut by art and tools it seems beyond human) have somewhat of the nature of thunderbolt, subtly and mortally wounding the vital parts without breaking the skin, of which wounds I have observed in beasts and felt them with my hands. They are not as infallible Benjamites, hitting at a hairsbreadth, nor are they wholly unvanquishable, at least in appearance.

The men of that second sight do not discover strange things when asked, but at fits and raptures, as if inspired with some genius at that instant, which before did lurk in or about them. Thus I have frequently spoke to one of them, who in his transport told he cut the body of one of these people in two with his iron weapon and so escaped this onset, yet he saw nothing left behind of that appearing divided body; at other times he outwrestled some of them. His neighbours often perceived this man to disappear at a certain place, and about one hour after to become visible and discover himself near a bowshot from the first place. It was in that place where he became invisible, said he, that the subterraneans did encounter and combat with him. Those who are unseen or unsanctified (called fey [doomed]) are said to be pierced or wounded with those people’s weapons, which makes them do somewhat very unlike their former practice, causing a sudden alteration, yet the cause thereof unperceivable at present. Nor have they power (either they cannot make use of their natural powers or ask not the heavenly aid) to escape the blow impending. A man of the second sight perceived a person standing by him (found to others’ view) wholly gored in blood, and he, (amazed-like), bid him instantly flee. The whole man laughed at his art and warning since there was no appearance of danger. He had scarce contracted his lips from laughter when unexpectedly his enemy leapt in at his side and stabbed him with their weapons. They also pierce cows or other animals, usually said to be elf-shot, whose purest substance (if they die) these subterraneans take to live on, viz., the aerial and ethereal parts, the most spirituous matter for prolonging of life, such as aquavitae (moderately taken) is among liquors, leaving the terrestrial behind. The cure of such hurts is only for a man to find out the hole with his finger, as if the spirits flowing from a man’s warm hand were antidote sufficient against their poisoned darts.

As birds and beasts, whose bodies are much used to the change of the free and open air, foresee storms, so those invisible people are more
sagacious to understand by the Books of Nature things to come than we who are pestered with the grosser dregs of all elementary mixtures and have our purer spirits choked by them. The deer scents out a man and powder (though a late invention) at a great distance; a hungry hunter, bread; and the raven, a carrion: their brains being long clarified by the high and subtle air will observe a very small change in a trice. Thus a man of the second sight, perceiving the operations of these forecasting invisible people among us (indulged through a stupendious providence to give warnings of some remarkable events, either in the air, earth, or waters), told he saw a winding-shroud creeping on a walking healthful person’s legs till it came to the knee, and afterwards it came up to the middle, then to the shoulders, and at last over the head, which was visible to no other person. And by observing the spaces of time betwixt the several stages, he easily guessed how long the man was to live who wore the shroud, for when it approached his head, he told that such a person was ripe for the grave.

There be many places called fairy-hills which the mountain people think impious and dangerous to peel or discover by taking earth or wood from them, superstitiously believing the souls of their predecessors to dwell there. And for that end (say they) a mote or mount was dedicate beside every churchyard to receive the souls till their adjacent bodies arise, and so become as a fairy-hill, they using bodies of air when called abroad. They also affirm those creatures that move invisibly in a house, and cast huge great stones, but do not much hurt because counter-wrought by some more courteous and charitable spirits that are everywhere ready to defend men (Daniel 10.13), to be souls that have not attained their rest through a vehement desire of revealing a murder or notable injury done or received, or a treasure that was forgot in their lifetime on earth, which when disclosed to a conjurer alone, the ghost quite removes.

In the next country to that of my former residence, about the year 1676, when there was some scarcity of grain, a marvellous illapse and vision strongly struck the imagination of two women in one night, living at a good distance from one another, about a treasure hid in a hill called sithbhruaich, or fairy-hill. The appearance of a treasure was first represented to the fancy, and then an audible voice named the place where it was to their awakening senses. Whereupon both arose, and meeting accidentally at the place, discovered their design; and jointly digging, found a vessel as large as a
Scottish peck, full of small pieces of good money, of ancient coin; which halving betwixt them they sold in dishfuls for dishfuls of meal to the country people. Very many of undoubted credit saw and had of the coin to this day. But whether it was a good or bad angel, one of the subterranean people, or the restless soul of him who hid it that discovered it, and to what end it was done, I leave to the examination of others.

These subterraneans have controversies, doubts, disputes, feuds, and siding of parties; there being some ignorance in all creatures and the vastest created intelligences not encompassing all things. As to vice and sin, whatever their own laws be, sure according to ours, and equity, natural, civil, and revealed, they transgress and commit acts of injustice, and sin by what is above said as to their stealing of nurses to their children and that other sort of plaginism [kidnapping] in catching our children away (may seem to heir some estate in those invisible dominions), which never return. For the inconvenience of their succubi, who tryst with men, it is abominable. But for swearing and intemperance, they are not observed so subject to those irregularities as to envy, spite, hypocrisy, lying, and dissimulation.

As our religion obliges us not to make a peremptory and curious search into these abstrusenesses, so that the histories of all ages give as many plain examples of extraordinary occurrances as make a modest inquiry not contemptible. How much is written of pygmies, fairies, nymphs, sirens, apparitions, which though not the tenth part true, yet could not spring of nothing? Even English authors relate of Barry Island, in Glamorgan shire, that laying your ear into a cleft of the rocks, blowing of bellows, striking of hammers, clashing of armour, filing of irons will be heard distinctly ever since Merlin enchanted those subterranean wights to a solid manual forging of arms to Aurelius Ambrosius and his Britains till he returned, which Merlin being killed in a battle and not coming to loose the knot, these active Vulcans are there tied to a perpetual labour. But to dip no deeper into this well, I will next give some account how the seer, my informer, comes to have this secret way of correspondence beyond other mortals.

There be odd solemnities at investing a man with the privileges of the whole mystery of this second sight. He must run a tether of hair (which bound a corpse to the bier) in a helix about his middle from end to end; then bow his head downwards, as did Elijah, 1 Kings 18.42, and look back
through his legs until he see a funeral advance till the people cross two
marches, or look thus back through a hole where was a knot of fir. But if the
wind change points while the hair tether is tied about him he is in peril of
his life. The usual method for a curious person to get a transient sight of this
otherwise invisible crew of subterraneans (if impotently and over-rashly
sought) is to put his left foot under the wizard’s right foot, and the seer’s
hand is put on the inquirer’s head, who is to look over the wizard’s right
shoulder (which has an ill appearance, as if, by this ceremony an implicit
surrender were made of all betwixt the wizard’s foot and his hand ere the
person can be admitted a privado [an initiate] to the art). Then will he see a
multitude of wights, like furious hardy men flocking to him hasty from all
quarters as thick as atoms in the air, which are no nonentities or phantasms,
creatures proceeding from an affrighted apprehension, confused or crazed
sense, but realities, appearing to a stable man in his awakening sense and
enduring a rational trial of their being. Those through fear strike him
breathless and speechless. The wizard, defending the lawfulness of his skill,
forbids such horror, and comforts his novice by telling of Zacharias, as
being struck speechless at seeing apparitions, Luke 1.20. Then he further
maintains his art by vouching Elisha to have had the same and disclosed it
thus unto his servant (in 2 Kings 6.17) when he blinded the Syrians, and
Peter (in Acts 5.9) forseeing the death of Saphira by perceiving as it were
her winding-sheet about her beforehand, and Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12.4,
who got such a vision and sight as should not nor could be told. Elisha also
in his chamber saw Gehazi his servant at a great distance taking a reward
from Naaman, 2 Kings 5.26. Hence were the prophets frequently called
seers or men of a second or more exhalted sight than others. He acts for his
purpose also Matthew 4.8, where the devil undertakes to give even Jesus a
sight of all nations and the finest things in the world at one glance, though
in their natural situations and stations at a vast distance from another. And
’tis said expressly, he did let see them, not in a map it seems, nor by a
fantastic magical juggling of the sight, which he could not impose upon so
discovering a person. It would appear then to have been a sight of real solid
substances and things of worth which he intended as a bait for his purpose.
Whence it might seem (comparing this relation of Matthew 4.8 with the
former) that the extraordinary or second sight can be given by the ministry
of bad as well as good spirits to those that will embrace it. And the instance
of Balaam and the pythoness [an oracle] makes it nothing the less probable.
Thus also the seer trains his scholar by telling of the gradations of nature, ordered by a wise providence, that as the sight of bats and owls transcend that of shrews and moles, so the visive faculties of men are clearer than those of owls; as eagles’, lynxes’, and cats’ are brighter than men’s. And again that men of the second sight (being designed to give warnings against secret engines [traps]) surpass the ordinary vision of other men, which is a native habit in some, descended from their ancestors, and acquired as an artificial improvement of their natural sight in others, resembling in their own kind the usual artificial helps of optic glasses (as prospectives, telescopes, and microscopes). Without which adscititious [supplementary] aids, those men here treated of do perceive things that for their smallness or subtlety and secrecy are invisible to others, though daily conversant with them. They having such a beam continually about them, as that of the sun, which when it shines clear only lets common eyes see the atoms in the air that without those rays they could not discern. For some have this second sight transmitted from father to son, through the whole family without their own consent or others teaching, proceeding only from a bounty of providence, it seems, or by compact or a complexional quality of the first acquirer. As it may seem alike strange (yet nothing vicious) in such as Master Great-rake, the Irish stoker, seventh sons, and others that cure the King’s Evil [disease of the lymph nodes], and chase away diseases and pains, with only stroking of the affected part. Which (if it be not the relics of miraculous operations or some secret virtue in the womb of the parent which increaseth until seven sons be born and decreaseth by the same degrees afterwards), proceeds only from the sanitive balsam of their healthful constitutions, virtue going out from them by spirituous effluxes unto the patient, and their vigourous healthy spirits affecting the sick as usually the unhealthy fumes of the sick infect the sound and whole.

The minor sort of seers prognosticate many future events, only for a month’s space, from the shoulder-bone of a sheep on which a knife never came (for as before is said, and the Nazarites of old had something of it), iron hinders all the operations of those that travail in the intrigues of these hidden dominions. By looking into the bone, they will tell if whoredom be committed in the owner’s house; what money the master of the sheep had; if any will die out of that house for that month; and if any cattle there will take a trake, as if planet-struck. Then will they prescribe a preservative and prevention.
A woman (it seems an exception from the general rule) singularly wise in these matters of foresight, living in Colnasnach, an isle of the Hebrides (in the time of the Marquess of Montrose, his wars with the states in Scotland), being notorious among many, and so examined by some that violently seized that isle, if she saw them coming or not, she said she saw them coming many hours before they came in view of the isle. But earnestly looking, she sometimes took them for enemies, sometimes for friends, and moreover they looked as if they went from the isle, not as men approaching it, which made her not put the inhabitants on their guard. The matter was that the barge wherein the enemy sailed was a little before taken from the inhabitants of that same isle, and the men had their backs towards the isle when they were plying the oars towards it. Thus this old scout and Delphian Oracle was at last deceived and did deceive. Being asked who gave her such sights and warnings, she said that as soon as she set three crosses of straw upon the palm of her hand a great ugly beast sprang out of the earth near her and flew in the air. If what she enquired had success according to her wish, the beast would descend calmly and lick up the crosses. If it would not succeed, the beast would furiously thrust her and the crosses over on the ground and so vanish to his place. Among other instances of undoubted verity proving in these the being of such aerial people or species of creatures not vulgarly known, I add the subsequent relations, some whereof I have from my acquaintance with the actors and patients and the rest from the eye-witnesses to the matter of fact. The first whereof shall be of the woman taken out of her child-bed and having a lingering image of her substituted body in her room, which resemblance decayed, died, and was buried, but the person stolen returning to her husband after two years’ space, he being convinced by many undeniable tokens that she was his former wife, admitted her home and had diverse children by her. Among other reports she gave her husband, this was one: that she perceived little what they did in the spacious house she lodged in until she anointed one of her eyes with a certain unction that was by her; which they perceiving to have acquainted her with their actions, they fanned her blind of that eye with a puff of their breath. She found the place full of light, without any fountain or lamp from whence it did spring. This person lived in the country next to that of my last residence and might furnish matter of dispute amongst casuists, whether if her husband had been married in the interim of her two years’ absence, he was obliged to divorce from the second spouse
at the return of the first. There is an art appearingly without superstition for
recovering of such as are stolen, but think it superfluous to insert it.

I saw a woman of forty years of age and examined her (having another
clergyman in my company) about a report that passed of her long fasting. It
was told by them of the house, as well as herself, that she took very little or
no food for several years past; that she tarried in the fields overnight, saw
and conversed with a people she knew not, having wandered in seeking of
her sheep and slept upon a hillock, and finding her self transported to
another place before day. The woman had a child since that time and is still
pretty melancholious and silent, hardly ever seen to laugh. Her natural heat
and radical moisture seem to be equally balanced, like an unextinguished
lamp, and going in a circle, not unlike to the faint life of bees and some sort
of birds that sleep all the winter over and revive in the spring.

It is usual in all magical arts to have the candidates prepossessed with a
belief of their tutor’s skill and ability to perform their feats and act their
juggling pranks and legerdemain [sleight of hand], but a person called
Stewart, possessed with a prejudice at that was spoken of the second sight
and living near to my house, was so put to it by a seer before many
witnesses that he lost his speech and power of his legs and, breathing
excessively as if expiring, because of the many fearful wights that appeared
to him, the company were forced to carry him into the house.

It is notoriously known what in Killin within Perthshire, fell tragically
out with a yeoman that lived hard by, who coming into a company within an
ale-house where a seer sat at table, that, at the sight of the entrant
neighbour, the seer, starting, rose to go out of the house, and being asked
the reason of his haste, told that the entrant man should die within two days,
at which news the named entrant stabbed the seer and was himself executed
two days after for the fact.

A minister, very intelligent but misbelieving all such sights as were not
ordinary, chancing to be in a narrow lane with a seer, who perceiving a
wight of a known visage furiously to encounter them, the seer desired the
minister to turn out of the way, who scorning his reason and holding
himself in the path with them when the seer was going hastily out of the
way, they were both violently cast aside to a good distance, and the fall
made them lame for all their life. A little after the minister was carried
home, one came to toll the bell for the death of the man whose representation met them in the narrow path some half an hour before.

Another example is a seer in Kintyre in Scotland, sitting at table with diverse others, suddenly did cast his head aside. The company asking him why he did it, he answered that such a friend of his, by name, then in Ireland, threatened immediately to cast a dishful of butter in his face. The men wrote down the day and hour and sent to the gentleman to know the truth, which deed the gentleman declared he did at that very time, for he knew that his friend was a seer and would make sport with it. The men that were present and examined the matter exactly told me this story and withal that a seer would, with all his optics, perceive no other object so readily as this at such a distance.
A SUCCINT ACCOUNT OF MY LORD TARBETT’S RELATIONS IN A LETTER TO THE HONOURABLE ROBERT BOYLE, ESQUIRE, OF THE PREDICTIONS MADE BY SEERS

whereof himself was ear- and eye-witness.

I thought fit to adjoin hereunto, that I might not be thought singular in this disquisition, that the matter of fact might be undeniably made out, and that I might, with all submission give annotations, with animadversions on his supposed causes of that phenomenon, with my reasons of dissent from his judgement.

Sir,

I heard very much but believed very little of the second sight, yet its being assumed by several of great veracity, I was induced to make inquiry
after it in the year 1652, being then confined to abide in the North of Scotland by the English usurpers. The more general accounts of it were that many Highlanders, yet far more Islanders, were qualified with this second sight. That men, women, and children indistinctly were subject to it, and children where parents were not. Sometimes people came to age who had it not when young, nor could any tell by what means produced. It is a trouble to most of them who are subject to it, and they would be rid of it at any rate if they could. The sight is of no long duration, only continuing so long as they can keep their eyes steady without twinkling. The hardy therefore fix their look that they may see the longer. But the timorous see only glances, their eyes always twinkles at the first sight of the object. That which generally is seen by them are the species of living creatures and of inanimate things which are in motion, such as ships and habits [clothing] upon persons. They never see the species of any person who is already dead. What they foresee fails not to exist in the mode and in that place where it appears to them. They cannot well know what space of time shall intervene between the apparition and the real existence. But some of the hardiest and longest experience have some rules for conjectures as: if they see a man with a shrouding sheet in the apparition, they will conjecture at the nearness or remoteness of his death by the more or less of his body that is covered by it; they will ordinarily see their absent friends, though at a great distance, sometimes no less than from America to Scotland, sitting, standing, or walking in some certain place, and then they conclude with assurance that they will see them so and there. If a man be in love with a woman, they will ordinarily see the species of that man standing by her, and so likewise if a woman be in love, and they conjecture at their enjoyments (of each other) by the species touching the person or appearing at a distance from her (if they enjoy not one another). If they see the species of any person who is sick to die, they see them covered over with the shrouding sheet.

These generals I had verified to me by such of them as did see and were esteemed honest and sober by all the neighbourhood. For I inquired after such for my information. And because there were more of these seers in the Isles of Lewis, Harris, and Uist than in any other place, I did entreat Sir James M‘Donald (who is now dead), Sir Norman M‘Loud, and Mr. Daniel Morison, a very honest person (who are still alive) to make inquiry in this uncouth sight and to acquaint me therewith, which they did, and all found
an agreement in these generals and informed me of many instances confirming what they said. But though men of discretion and honour, being but at second hand, I will choose rather to put myself than my friends on the hazard of being laughed at for incredible relations.

I was once travelling in the Highlands and a good number of servants with me, as is usual there, and one of them going a little before me, entering into a house where I was to stay all night, and going hastily to the door, he suddenly stepped back with a screech and did fall by a stone which hit his foot. I asked what the matter was, for he seemed to be very much frightened. He told me very seriously that I should not lodge in that house because shortly a dead coffin would be carried out of it, for many were carrying of it when he was heard cry. I, neglecting his words and staying there, he said to other of his servants he was sorry for it and that surely what he saw would shortly come to pass, though no sick person was then there. Yet the landlord, a healthy High-lander, died of an apoplectic fit before I left the house.
In the year 1653, Alexander Monro (afterwards Lieutenant Colonel to the Earl of Dunbarton’s Regiment) and I were walking in a place called Ullabill, in Lochbroom, on a little plain at the foot of a rugged hill. There was a servant working with a spade in the walk before us; his back was to
us and his face to the hill. Before we came to him, he let the spade fall and
looked towards the hill. He took notice of us as we passed near by him,
which made me look at him, and perceiving him to stare a little strangely, I
conjectured him to be a seer. I called at him, at which he started and smiled.
What are you doing? said I. He answered, I have seen a very strange thing;
an army of Englishmen leading of horses coming down that hill; and a
number of them are come down to the plain and eating the barley which is
growing in the field near to the hill. This was on the fourth of May (for I
noted the day), and it was four or five days before the barley was sown in
the field he spoke of. Alexander Monro asked him how he knew they were
Englishmen. He said, Because they were leading of horses and had on hats
and boots, which he knew no Scot man would have there. We took little
notice of the whole story as other than a foolish vision, but wished that an
English party were there, we being then at war with them and the place
almost inaccessible for horsemen. But in the beginning of August thereafter,
the Earl of Midleton (then Lieutenant for the King in the Highlands), having
occasion to march a party of his towards the South Highlands, he sent his
foot through a place called Inverlawell, and the fore-party which was first
down the hill did fall off eating the barley which was on the little plain
under it, and Monro calling to mind what the seer told us in May preceding,
he wrote of it, and sent an express to me to Lochslin in Ross (where I then
was) with it.

I had occasion once to be in company where a young lady was (excuse
my not naming of persons) and I was told there was a notable seer in the
company. I called him to speak with me, as I did ordinarily when I found
any of them, and after he had answered me to several questions, I asked if
he knew any person to be in love with that lady. He said he did, but he knew
not the person, for during the two days he had been in her company, he
perceived one standing near her and his head leaning on her shoulder, which
he said did foretell that the man should marry her and die before her,
according to his observation. This was in the year 1655. I desired him to
describe the person, which he did, so that I could conjecture by the
description of such a one who was of that lady’s acquaintance, though there
were no thought of their marriage till two years thereafter. And having
occasion in the year 1657 to find this seer, who was an Islander, in company
with the other person whom I conjectured to have been described by him, I
called him aside, and asked if that was the person he saw beside the lady
near two years then past. He said it was he indeed, for he had seen that lady just then standing by him hand in hand. This was some few months before their marriage, and that man is since dead and the lady still alive.

I shall trouble you with but one more which I thought most remarkable of any that occurred to me. In January 1652 the above mentioned Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Monro and I happened to be in the house of one William M‘Cleud of Ferrinlea in the county of Ross. He, the landlord, and I were sitting in three chairs near the fire, and in the corner of the great chimney there were two Islanders, who were that very night come to the house and were related to the landlord. While the one of them was talking with Monro, I perceived the other to look oddly towards me. From this look and his being an Islander, I conjectured him a seer and asked him at what he stared. He answered by desiring me to rise from that chair for it was an unlucky one. I asked him why. He answered, because there was a dead man in the chair next to me. Well, said I, if it be in the next chair, I may keep mine own. But what is the likeness of the man? He said he was a tall man with a long grey coat, booted, and one of his legs hanging over the arm of the chair, and his head hanging dead to the other side, and his arm backwards as if it were broken. There were some English troops then quartered near that place, and there being at that time a great frost after a thaw, the country was covered all over with ice. Four or five of the English riding by this house some two hours after the vision, while we were sitting by the fire, we heard a great noise which proved to be those troopers, with the help of other servants, carrying in one of their number, who had got a very mischievous fall and had his arm broke, and falling frequently in swooning fits. They brought him into the hall and set him in the very chair and in the very posture that the very seer had prophesized. But the man did not die, though he recovered with great difficulty.

Among the accounts given me by Sir Norman M‘Cleud, there was one worth special notice, which was thus. There was a gentleman in the Isle of Harris who was always seen by the seers with an arrow in his thigh. Such in the Isle who thought those prognostications infallible did not doubt but he would be shot in the thigh before he died. Sir Norman told me that he heard it the subject of their discourse for many years. At last he died without any such accident. Sir Norman was at his burial at Saint Clement’s Church in the Harris. At the same time the corpse of another gentleman was brought
to be buried in the same very church. The friends on either side came to
debate who should first enter the church, and in a trice from words they
came to blows. One of the number (who was armed with bow and arrows)
let one fly among them. (Now every family in that isle have their burial-
place in the church in stone chests, and the bodies are carried in open biers
to the burial-place). Sir Norman having appeased the tumult, one of the
arrows was found shot in the dead man’s thigh. To this Sir Norman was a
witness.

In the account which Mr. Daniel Morison, parson in the Lewis, gave me,
there was one, though it be heterogeneous from the subject, yet it may be
worth your notice. It was of a young woman in his parish who was mightily
frightened by seeing her own image still before her, always when she came
to the open air, the back of the image being always to her, so that it was not
a reflection as in a mirrour but the species of such a body as her own and in
a very like habit which appeared to herself continually before her. The
parson kept her a long while with him but had no remedy of her evil, which
troubled her exceedingly. I was told afterwards that when she was four or
five years older she saw it not.

These are matters of fact, which I assure you they are truly related. But
these, and all others that occurred to me, by information or otherwise, could
never lead me into a remote conjecture of the cause of so extraordinary a
phenomenon. Whether it be a quality in the eyes of some people into these
parts, concurring with a quality in the air also; whether such species be
everywhere, though not seen by the want of eyes so qualified, or from
whatever other cause, I must leave to the inquiry of clearer judgements than
mine. But a hint may be taken from this image which appeared still to this
woman above mentioned, and from another mentioned by Aristotle in the
fourth of his *Metaphysics* (if I remember right, for it is long since I read it),
as also from the common opinion that young infants (unsullied with many
objects) do see apparitions which were not seen by those of elder years, as
likewise from this, that several did see the second sight when in the
Highlands or Isles, yet when transported to live in other countries,
especially in America, they quite lose this quality, as was told me by a
gentleman who knew some of them in Barbadoes who did see no vision
there, although he knew them to be seers when they lived in the Isles of
Scotland.
My Lord, after narrow inquisition, hath delivered many true and remarkable observations on this subject, yet to encourage a further scrutiny I crave leave to say that:

1. But a few women are endowed with this sight in respect of men, and their predictions not so certain.

2. This sight is not criminal, since a man can come by it unawares, and without his consent. But it is certain he see more fatal and fearful things than he do gladsome.

3. The seers avouch that several who go to the siths (or people at rest, and, in respect of us, in peace) before the natural period of their lives expire do frequently appear to them.

4. A vehement desire to attain this art is very helpful to the inquirer, and the species of an absent friend, which appears to the seers as clearly as if he had sent his lively picture to present itself before him, is no fantastic shadow of a sick apprehension but a reality and a messenger coming for unknown reasons, not from the original similitude of itself but from a more swift and pragmatic people, which recreate themselves in offering secret intelligence to men, though generally they are unacquainted with that kind of correspondence, as if they had lived in a different element from them.

5. Though my collections were written long before I saw My Lord of Tarbett’s, yet I am glad that his descriptions and mine correspond so nearly. The maid My Lord mentions who saw her image still before her suiteth with the co-walker named in my account. Which though some at first thought might conjecture to be by the refraction of a cloud or mist, as in the parelij [illusory sun] (the whole air and every drop of water being a mirrour to return the species of things, were our visive faculty sharp enough to apprehend them), or a natural reflexion from the same reasons that an echo can be redoubled by art, yet it were more feasible to impute this second sight to a quality infused into the eye by an unction (for witches have a sleepy ointment that, when applied, troubles their fantasy, advancing it to have unusual figures and shapes represented to it, as if it were a fit of
fanaticism, hypochondriac melancholy, or possession of some insinuating 
spirit raising the soul beyond its common strain), if the palpable instances 
and realities seen and innocently objected to the senses did not disprove it 
and make the matter a palpable verity and no deception. Yet since this sight 
can be bestowed without ointment or dangerous compact, the qualification 
is not of so bad an original. Therefore,

6. By My Lord’s good leave, I presume to say that this sight can be no 
quality of the air nor of the eyes because, i. such as live in the same air and 
see all other things as far off and as clearly, yet have not the second sight. ii. 
A seer can give another person this sight transiently by putting his hand and 
foot in the posture he requires of him. iii. The unsullied eyes of infants can 
naturally perceive no new unaccustomed objects but what appear to other 
men, unless exalted and clarified some way, as Balaam’s ass for a time 
(though in a witch’s eye the beholder cannot see his own image reflected, as 
in the eyes of other people), so that defect of objects, as well as diversities 
of the subject, may appear differently on several tempers and ages. iv. 
Though also some are of so venomous a constitution, by being radicated in 
envy and malice, that they pierce and kill (like a cockatrice) whatever 
creature they first set their eye on in the morning, so was it with Walter 
Grahame, sometime living in the parish wherein now I am, who killed his 
own cow after commending its fatness and shot a hare with his eyes, having 
praised its swiftness (such was the infection of an evil eye) albeit this was 
unusual, yet he saw no object but what was obvious to other men as well as 
to himself. v. If being transported to live in another country did obscure the 
second sight, neither the parson nor the maid needed be much troubled for 
her reflex-self, a little peregrination and going from her wonted home 
would have salved her fear. Wherefore,
7. Since the things seen by the seers are real entities, the presages and predictions found true, but a few endowed with this sight and those not of bad lives or addicted to malefices, the true solution of the phenomenon seems rather to be the courteous endeavours of our fellow creatures in the invisible world to convince us (in opposition to Sadduce’s, Socinians, and atheists) of a deity, of spirits, of a possible and harmless method of correspondence betwixt men and them even in this life, of their operation for our caution and warning, of the orders and degrees of angels, whereof one order with bodies of air condensed and curiously shaped may be next to man, superior to him in understanding yet unconfirmed, and of their region, habitation, and influences on man, greater than that of stars on inanimate bodies; a knowledge (belike) reserved for these last atheistic ages, wherein the profanity of men’s lives hath debauched and blinded their understanding as to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets (unless they get convictions from things formerly known) as from the regions of the dead. Nor doth the ceasing of the visions upon the seer’s transmigration into foreign kingdoms make His Lordship’s conjecture of the quality of the air and eye a whit more probable, but on the contrary, it confirms greatly my account of an invisible people, guardian over and careful of men, who have their different offices and abilities in distinct countries, as appears in Daniel 10.13, etc., Israel’s, Grecia’s, and Persia’s assistant princes, whereof who so prevaleth, give the dominion and ascendant to his pupils and vassals over the opposite armies and kingdom having their topical spirits or powers assisting and governing them, the Scottish seer banished to America, being a stranger there as well to the invisible as to the visible inhabitants and wanting a familiarity of his former correspondents, he could not have the favour and warnings, by the several visions and predictions which were wont to be granted him by these acquaintances and favourites in his own country. For if what he wont to see were realities (as I have made appear), ’twere too great an honour for Scotland to have such seldom-seen watchers and predominant powers over it alone, acting in it so expressly, and all other
nations wholly destitute of the like; though without all peradventure all other people wanted the right key of their cabinet and the exact method of correspondence with them, except the sagacious active Scots, as many of whom have retained it of a long time and by surprises and raptures do often foretell what in kindness is really represented to them at several occasions. To which purpose the learned lynx-eyed Mr. Baxter on Revelation 12.7, writing of the fight betwixt Michael and the Dragon, gives a very pertinent note, viz. that he knows not but ere any great action (especially tragical) is done on earth, that first the battle and victory is acted and achieved in the air betwixt the good and evil spirits (thus he). It seems these were the men’s guardians, and the like battles are ofttimes perceived aloft in the night time, the event of which might easily be represented by some one of the number to a correspondent on earth, as frequently the report of great actions have been more swiftly carried to other countries than all the art of us mortals could possibly dispatch it. Saint Augustine on Mark 9.4 giveth no small intimation of this truth, averring that Elias appeared with Jesus on the Mount in his proper body, but Moses in an aerial body, assumed like the angels who appeared, and had ability to eat with Abraham, though no necessity on the account of their bodies, as likewise the late doctrine of the pre-existence of souls living into aerial vehicles, gives a singular hint of the possibility of the thing if not a direct proof of the whole assertion; which yet moreover may be illuminated by diverse other instances of the like nature and as wonderful, besides what is above said. As,
8. The invisible wights which haunt houses seem rather to be some of our subterranean inhabitants (which appear often to men of the second sight) than evil spirits or devils, because though they throw great stones, pieces of earth, and wood at the inhabitants, they hurt them not at all, as if they acted not maliciously like devils but in sport like buffoons and drolls. All ages have afforded some obscure testimonies of it, as Pythagoras, his doctrine of transmigration; Socrates’s Daemon that gave him warning of future dangers; Plato’s classing them into various vehiculated species of spirits; Dionysius Areopagitica’s marshaling nine orders of spirits superior and subordinate; the poets their borrowing of the philosophers and adding their own fancies of fountain, river, and sea nymphs, wood, hill, and mountain inhabitants, and that every place and thing in cities and countries had special invisible regular gods and governours. Cardano speaks of his father, his seeing the species of his friend in a moonshine night riding fiercely by his window on a white horse the very night his friend died at a vast distance from him, by which he understood that some alteration would suddenly ensue. Cornelius Agrippa and the learned Dr. More have several passages tending that way. The noctambulos themselves would appear to have some foreign joking spirit possessing and supporting them when they walk on deep waters and tops of houses without danger when asleep and in the dark. For it was no way probable that mere apprehension and strong imagination, setting the animal spirits awork to move the body, could preserve it from sinking in the deep or falling down headlong when asleep anymore than when awake, the body being then as ponderous as before; and it is hard to attribute it to a spirit flatly evil and enemy to man, because the noctambulo returns to his own place safe. And the most furious tribe of the daemons are not permitted by providence to attack men so frequently either by night or by day: for in our Highlands, as there may be many fair ladies of this aerial order which do often tryst with lascivious young men in the quality of succubi or lightsome paramours and strumpets, (called leannain sith, or familiar spirits
in Deuteronomy 18.11), so do many of our Highlanders, as if astrangling by the nightmare, pressed with a fearful dream, or rather possessed by one of our aerial neighbours rise up fierce in the night and apprehending the nearest weapons, do push and thrust at all persons in the same room with them, sometimes wounding their own comrades to death, the like whereof fell sadly out within a few miles of me at the writing hereof. I add but one instance more of a very young maid who lived near to my last residence, that in one night learned a large piece of poesy by the frequent repetition of it from one of our nimble and courteous spirits, whereof a part was pious, the rest superstitious (for I have a copy of it), and no other person was ever heard to repeat it before, nor was the maid capable to compose it of herself.

9. Having demonstrated and made evident to sense this extraordinary vision of our tramontane seers and what is seen by them by what is said above, many having seen this same spectres and apparitions at once, having their visive faculties entire; for *non est disputandum de gustu*, it now remains to show that it is not unsuitable to reason nor the Holy Scriptures. First, that it is not repugnant to reason: doth appear from this that it is no less strange for immortal sparks and souls to come and be immersed into gross terrestrial elementary bodies and be so propagated, so nourished, so fed, so clothed as they are, and breathe in such an air and world prepared for them, than for Hollanders, or hollow-cavern inhabitants, to live and traffic among us in another state of being without our knowledge. For Raymond de Subinde, in his third book, chapter 12, argues quaintly that all sorts of living creatures have a happy rational polity of their own with great contentment, which government and mutual converse of theirs they all pride and plume themselves because it is as unknown to man, as man is to them. Much more, that the Son of the Highest Spirit should assume a body like ours convinces all the world that no other thing that is possible needs be much wondered at.

The manucodiata, or bird of paradise, living in the highest region of the air; common birds in the second region; flies and insects in the lowest; men and beasts on the earth’s surface; worms, otters, badgers, in waters; likewise Hell is inhabited at the centre and Heaven in the circumference; can we then think the middle cavities of the earth empty? I have seen in Weems (a place in the county of Fyfe in Scotland), divers’ caves cut out as vast temples underground; the like is a county of England. In Malta is a cave wherein
stones of a curious cut are thrown in great numbers every day. So I have
had barbed arrowheads of yellow flint that could not be cut so small and
neat, of so brittle a substance, by all the art of man. It would seem therefore
that these mentioned works were done by certain spirits of pure organs and
not by devils, whose continual torments could not allow them so much
leisure. Besides these, I have found five curiosities in Scotland, not much
observed to be elsewhere. i. The Brownies, who in some families are
drudges, clean the houses and dishes after all go to bed, taking with him his
portion of food and removing before daybreak. ii. The Mason Word which,
though some make a mystery of it, I will not conceal a little of what I know.
It is like a rabbinical tradition in way of comment on Jachin and Boaz, the
two pillars erected in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7.21) with an addition of
some secret sign delivered from hand to hand by which they know and
become familiar one with another. iii. This second sight so largely treated of
before. iv. Charms and curing by them very many diseases, sometimes by
transferring the sickness to another. v. A being proof of lead, iron, and
silver, or a brieve [a spell] making men invulnerable. Divers of our Scottish
commanders and soldiers have been seen with blue marks only, after they
were shot with leaden balls, which seems to be an Italian trick, for they
seem to be a people too curious and magically inclined. Finally Irishmen, or
Northern Scottish, and our Athole men are so much addicted to and
delighted with harps and music as if, like King Saul, they were possessed
with a foreign spirit, only with this difference: that music did put Saul’s
play-fellow asleep but roused and awakened our men, vanquishing their
own spirits at pleasure, as if they were impotent of its powers and unable to
command it, for we have seen some poor beggars of them chattering their
teeth for cold, that how soon they saw the fire and heard the harp, leapt
through the house like goats and satyrs. As there are parallel stories in all
countries and ages reported of these our obscure people (which are no
dotages), so is it more of necessity to us fully to know their beings and
manner of life than to understand distinctly the polity of the nine orders of
angels; or with what oil the lamp of the sun is maintained so long and
regularly; or why the moon is called a great luminary in Scripture, while it
only appears to be so; or if the moon be truly inhabited because telescopes
discover seas and mountains in it, as well as flaming furnaces in the sun; or
why the discovery of America was looked on as a fairy tale and the
reporters hooted at as inventors of ridiculous utopias, or the first probable
asserters punished as inventors of new gods and worlds; or why in England
the King cures the struma by stroking, and the seventh son in Scotland,
whether his temperate complexion conveys a balsam and sucks out the
corrupting principles by a frequent warm sanative contact, or whether the
parents of the seventh child put forth a more eminent virtue to his
production than to all the rest, as being the certain meridian and height to
which their vigour ascends and from that forth have a gradual declining into
a feebleness of the body and its production. And then, i. Why is not the
seventh son infected himself by that contagion he extracts from another? ii.
How can continual stroking with a cold hand have so strong a natural
operation as to exhale all the infectious worming, corroding vapours? iii.
Why may not a seventh daughter have the same virtue? So that it appears,
albeit a happy natural constitution concur, yet something is in it above
nature. Therefore every age hath left some secret for its discovery; who
knows but this intercourse betwixt the two kinds of rational inhabitants of
the same earth may be not only believed shortly but as freely entertained
and as well known as now the art of navigation, printing, gunning, riding on
saddles with stirrups, and the discoveries of microscopes which were
sometimes as great a wonder and as hard to be believed.

10. Though I will not be so curious nor so peremptory as he who will
prove the possibility of the philosopher’s stone from Scripture, Job 28.1.2,
Job 22.24.25; nor the plurality of worlds, from John 14.2 and Hebrews ii. 3;
nor the circulation of blood from Ecclesiastes 12.6; nor the talismanical art
from the blind and lame mentioned in 2 Samuel 5.6, yet I humbly propose
these passages which may give some light to our subject at least and show
that this polity and rank of people is not a thing impossible, nor the modest
and innocent scrutiny of them impertinent or unsafe. The legion or brigade
of spirits (mentioned in Mark 5.10) besought our Saviour not to send them
away out of the country; which shows they were daemones loci, topical
spirits, and peculiar superintendents and supervisors assigned to that
province. And the power over the nations granted (Revelation 2.26) to the
conquerors of vice and infidelity sound somewhat to that purpose. Tobit had
a daemon attending marriage, (Tobit 3.8), and in Matthew 4.5 an evil spirit
came in a visible shape to tempt our Saviour, who himself denied not the
sensible appearing of ghosts to our sight, but said, their bodies were not
composed of flesh and bones as ours, (Luke 24.39) and in Philippians 2.10
our very subterraneans are expressly said to bow to the name of Jesus.
Elisha, not intellectually only but sensibly, saw Gehazi when out of the reach of an ordinary view. It wants not good evidence that there are more managed by God’s spirits, good, evil, and intermediate spirits, among men in this world, than we are aware of; the good spirits ingesting fair and heroic apprehensions and images of virtue and the divine life, thereby animating us to act for a higher happiness according to our improvement and relinquishing us as strangely upon our neglect or our embracing the deceitful siren-like pictures and representations of pleasures and gain presented to our imaginations by evil and sportful angels to allure us to an unthinking, ungenerous, and sensual life; none of them having power to compel us to any misdemeanour without our flat consent. Moreover, this life of ours being called warfare, and God’s saying that at last there will be no peace to the wicked, our busy and silent companions also being called siths, or people at rest and quiet, in respect of us; and withal many ghosts appearing to men that want this second sight, in the very shapes and speaking the same language they did when incorporate and alive with us; a matter that is of an old imprescriptable tradition (our Highlanders making still a distinction betwixt sluagh saoghalta and sluagh sith, averring that the souls go to the sith when dislodged); many real treasures and murders being discovered by souls that pass from among ourselves or by the kindness of these our airy neigh-bours, none of which spirits can be altogether inorganical, no less than the conceits about Purgatory, or a state of rescue; the limbus patrum et infantum, inventions though misapplied, yet are not chimeras and altogether groundless. For ab origine it is nothing but blanch and faint discoveries of this secret republic of ours here treated on, and additional fictions of monks’ doting and crazied heads, our creed saying that our Saviour descended to the invisible place and people. And many divines supposing that the deity appeared in a visible shape seen by Adam in the cool of the day and speaking to him with an audible voice. And Jesus probably by the ministry of invisible attendants conveying more meat of the same kind to the five thousand that was fed by him with a very few loaves and fishes (for a new creation it was not). The zijmjiim and ochim, in Isaiah 13.21.22. Those satyrs and doleful unknown creatures of islands and deserts seem to have a plain prospect that way. Finally, the eternal happiness enjoyed in the third Heavens being more mysterious than most of men take it to be. It is not a sense wholly adduced to Scripture to say that this sight and the due objects of it hath some vestige in Holy Writ,
but rather ’tis modestly deduced from it.

It only now remains to answer the obvious objections against the reality and lawfulness of this speculation:

Question 1: How do you salve the second sight from compact and witchcraft?

Answer: Though this correspondence with the intermediate unconfirmed people (betwixt man and angel) be not ordinary to all of us who are superterraneans, yet this sight falling to some persons by accident and its being connatural to others from their birth, the derivation of it cannot always be wicked. A too great curiosity indeed to acquire any unnecessary art may be blameworthy, but diverse of the secret commonwealth may by permission discover themselves as innocently to us, who are in another state, as some of us men do to fishes, which are in another element, when we plunge and dive into the bottom of the seas, their native region; and in process of time we may come to converse as familiarly with those nimble and agile clans (but with greater pleasure and profit) as we do now with the Chinese and Antipodes.
Question 2: Are they subject to vice, lusts, passion, and injustice as we who live on the surface of the earth? answer: The seers tell us that these wandering aerial people have not such an impetus and fatal tendency to any vice as men, as not being drenched into so gross and dreggy bodies as we, but yet are in an imperfect state, and some of them making better essays for heroic actions than others, having the same measures of virtue and vice as we, and still expecting advancement to a higher and more splendid state of life. One of them is stronger than many men, yet do not incline to hurt mankind, except by commission for a gross misdemeanour, as the destroying angel of Egypt and the Assyrians, Exodus 12.29, 2 Kings 19.35. They haunt most where is most barbarity, and therefore our ignorant ancestors to prevent the insults of that strange people used as rude and coarse a remedy; such as exorcisms, donations, and vows: but how soon ever the true piety prevailed in any place, it did not put the inhabitants beyond the reach and authority of those subtle inferiour co-inhabitants and colleagues of ours: the Father of all Spirits and the person himself having the only command of his soul and actions. A concurrence they may have to what is virtuously done, for upon committing of a foul deed, one will find a demur upon his soul, as if his cheerful colleague had deserted him.

Question 3: Do these airy tribes procreate? If so, how are they nourished and at what period of time do they die?

Answer: Supposing all spirits to be created at once in the beginning, souls to pre-exist and to circle about into several states of probationship to make them either totally unexcusable or perfectly happy against the last day, solves all the difficulties. But in every deed, and speaking suitable to the nature of things, there is no more absurdity for a spirit to inform an infantine in body of air than a body composed of dull and drowsy earth, the best of spirits have always delighted more to appear into aerial than into terrestrial bodies. They feed most what on quintessences and ethereal essences. The pith and spirits only of women’s milk feed their children, being artificially conveyed (as air and oil sink into our bodies) to make them vigourous and fresh. And this shorter way of conveying a pure aliment (without the usual digestions), by transfusing it and transpiring through the pores into the veins, arteries, and vessels that supply the body, is nothing more absurd than an infant’s being fed by the navel before it is born, or than a plant which groweth by attracting a lively juice from the earth through
many small roots and tendons, whose coarser parts be adapted and made connatural to the whole, doth quickly coalesce by the ambient cold; and so are condensed and baked up into a confirmed wood in the one and solid body of the flesh and bone in the other. A notion which if entertained and approved, may show that the late invention of soaking and transfusing not blood, but ethereal virtual spirits, may be useful both for nourishment and health, whereof is a vestige in the damnable practice of evil angels, their sucking of blood and spirits out of witches’ bodies (till they drain them into a deformed and dry leanness) to feed their own vehicles withal, leaving what we call the witches’ mark behind; a spot that I have seen, as a small mole, horny, and brown coloured; through which mark, when a large brass pin was thrust (both in buttock, nose, and roof of the mouth), till it bowed and become crooked, the witches, both men and women, neither felt a pain, nor did bleed, nor knew the precise time when this was adoeing to them (their eyes only being covered). Now the air being a body as well as earth, no reason can be given why there may not be particles of more vivific spirit formed of it for procreation than is possible to be of earth, which takes more time and pains to rarify and ripen it ere it can come to have a prolific virtue. And if our aping darlings did not thus procreate, their whole number would be exhausted after a considerable space of time. For though they are of more refined bodies and intellectuals than we, and of far less heavy and corruptive humours (which cause a dissolution), yet many of their lives being dissonant to right reason and their own laws and their vehicles not being wholly free of lust and passion, especially of the more spiritual and haughty sins, they pass (after a long healthy life) into an orb and receptacle fitted for their degree till they come under the general cognizance of the last day.

Question 4: Doth the acquiring of this second sight make any change on the acquirer’s body, mind, or actions?

Answer: All uncouth sights enfeebles the seer. Daniel, though familiar with divine visions, yet fell frequently down without strength when dazzled with a power which had the ascendant of and pressed on him beyond his comprehension, Daniel 10.8-17. So our seer is put in a rapture, transport, and sort of death, as divested of his body and all its senses, when he is first made participant of this curious piece of knowledge. But it maketh no wramp or strain in the understanding of any; only to the fancies of clownish
or illiterate men it creates some affrightments and disturbances, because of
the strongness of the shows and their unacquaintedness with them. And as
for their life, the persons endowed with this rarity are for the most part,
candid, honest, and sociable people. If any of them be subject to
immoralities, this abstruse skill is not to be blamed for it; for unless
themselves be the tempters, the colonies of the invisible plantations with
which they intercommune, do provoke them by no villainy or malefice,
neither at their first acquaintance nor after a long familiarity. question 5:
Doth not Satan interpose in such cases by many subtle unthought-of
insinuations, as to him who let the fly or familiar go out of the box, and yet
found the fly of his own putting-in as serviceable as the other would have
been?

Answer: The goodness of life and designs of the ancient prophets and
seers was one of the best proofs of their mission.\textsuperscript{39}
Note

In trying to collect evidence as to the Rerrick “evil spirit” from Kirk-Session records, I have been most kindly assisted by the Rev. Mr. M‘Conachie, Minister of Rerrick. Mr. M‘Conachie finds that only two parishes in the Stewartry, Kells and Girthon, have records containing the years 1695, 1696. The records of Rerrick do not go so far back. We are therefore left to the pamphlet of 1696, by Telfair, which is an unusually business-like statement, the names of attesting witnesses being added in the marginal notes. For phenomena singularly similar to those of Rerrick, Obeah, by Mr. H. J. Bell, may be consulted. (Obeah, Sampson Low & Co., London, 1889, p. 93.)
Notes

Note (a), p. 17.—“The Psychical Society.”

The Psychical Society, as far as the writer is aware, has not examined officially the old accounts of the phenomena which it investigates at present. The Catalogue of the Society’s Library, however, proves that it does not lack the materials.

Note (b), p. 24.—“Their speech is a kind of whistling.”

That the voice of spirits is a kind of whistling, twittering, or chirping, is a very widely diffused and ancient belief. The ghosts in Homer twitter like bats; in New Caledonia an English settler found that he could scare the natives from a piece of ground by whistling there at night. Mr. Samuel Wesley says, “I followed the noise into almost every room in the house, both by day and by night, with lights and without, and have sat alone for some time, and, when I heard the noise, spoke to it to tell me what it was, but never heard any articulate voice, and only once or twice two or three feeble squeaks, a little louder than the chirping of a bird, and not like the noise of rats, which I have often heard” (Memoirs of the Wesley Family, p. 164). Professor Alexander mentions the “peculiar whistling sound” at some manifestations in Rio Janeiro as “rather frequent” (Proc. S. P. R., xix. 180). Here children were the mediums; how did they get the idea of the traditional whistle? See also the following note.

Note (c), pp. 29 and 36.—“Not long after the Spanish conquest of Peru.”
The phenomena alluded to here are said to have occurred in 1549. The evidence is a mere report by Cieza de Leon, who does not pretend to have been an eye-witness. But, as Mr. Clements Markham, Cieza’s editor, remarks, the phenomena are analogous to those of spiritualism. At the very least, we find a belief in this kind of manifestation at a remote date, and in an outlandish place. Cieza says:40

“When the Adelantado Belalcazar was governor of the province of Popyan, and when Gomez Hernandez was his lieutenant in the town of Auzerma, there was a chief in a village called Pirsa, almost four leagues from the town, whose brother, a good-looking youth named Tamaraqunga, inspired by God, wished to go to the town of the Christians to receive baptism. But the devils did not wish that he should attain his desire, fearing to lose what seemed secure, so they frightened this Tamaraqunga in such sort that he was unable to do anything. God permitting it, the devils stationed themselves in a place where the chief alone could see them, in the shape of birds called auras. Finding himself so persecuted by the devils, he sent in great haste to a Christian living near, who came at once, and hearing what he wanted, signed him with the sign of the cross. But the devils then frightened him more than ever, appearing in hideous forms, which only were visible to him. The Christian only saw stones falling from the air and heard whistling. A brother of one Juan Pacheco, citizen of the same town, then holding office in the place of Gomez Hernandez, who had gone to Caramanta, came from Auzerma with another man to visit the Indian chief. They say that Tamaraqunga was much frightened and ill-treated by the devils, who carried him through the air from one place to another in presence of the Christians, he complaining and the devils whistling and shouting. Sometimes when the chief was sitting with a glass of liquor before him, the Christians saw the glass raised up in the air and put down empty, and a short time afterwards the wine was again poured into the cup from the air.” Compare what Ibn Batuta, the old Arab traveller, saw at the court of the King of Delhi. The matter is discussed in Colonel Yule’s Marco Polo.

This may suffice as a specimen of the manifestations. They continued while the chief was on his way to church; he was lifted into the air, and the Christians had to hold him down. In church the ghostly whistling was heard, and stones fell around, while the chief said that he saw devils
standing upside down, and himself was thrown into that unusual posture. The combination of convulsive movements with the other phenomena is that which we have already remarked in the cases of “Mr. H.” and the grandson of William Morse. Cieza de Leon says that the chief was not troubled after his baptism. The illusions of the newly-converted, so like those of the early Christian hermits, are described by Callaway in his Zulu Tales.

**Note (d), p. 34.**

Priestley’s explanation of the Epworth disturbances is imposture by the servants, by way of a practical joke. Coleridge, on the other hand, says that “all these stories, and I could produce fifty cases at least equally well authenticated, and, as far as the veracity of the narrators, and the single fact of their having seen and heard such and such sights or sounds, above all rational scepticism, are as much like one another as the symptoms of the same disease in different patients.”

It is a pity that Coleridge did not produce his fifty well-authenticated examples. The similarity of the narratives everywhere, all the world over, it exactly what makes them interesting. Coleridge goes on: “This indeed I take to be the true and only solution—a contagious nervous disease, the acme, or intensest form of which is catalepsy” (Southey’s Wesley, vol. i. p. 14, Coleridge’s note). If there be such a contagious nervous disease, it is a very remarkable malady, and well worth examining. The Wesleys were not alarmed; they bantered the spirit; they wished they could set him to work; and beyond the trembling of the children when Jeffrey was knocking during their sleep, there is no sign of morbid conditions. A neighbouring clergyman, who was asked to pass a night in the house, saw and heard just what the others heard and saw. The hypothesis of a contagious nervous disease, in which every witness exhibits the same symptoms of illusion in all parts of the world, is a theory which needs a good deal of verification. Where material traces of the disturbances remain, it is absurd to speak of contagious hallucinations. We must fall back on the hypothesis of trickery, or must say with Southey, “Such things may be preternatural, yet not miraculous; they may not be in the ordinary course of nature, yet imply no alteration of its laws.” Any theory is more plausible than the idea that Mr. Wesley and Mr. Hoole were in a state bordering on catalepsy. Believers in
hypnotism may think it possible that this, that, and the other persons, if they submitted themselves to hypnotic influences, might have the same hallucinations suggested to them. But there is no evidence, in the Epworth case nor in the Rerrick case, of any such matter. “So far as we yet know, sensory hallucination of several persons together, who are not in a hypnotic state, is a rare phenomenon, and therefore not a probable explanation” (Proc. S. P. R., iv. 62). There is some evidence that epileptic patients suffer from the same illusions—for example, the presence of a woman in a red cloak; and in delirium tremens the “horrors” are usually similar. But that all the persons who enter a given house should be impressed by the same material illusions, as of chairs and tables, and even beds (like Nancy Wesley’s) flying about, is a theory more incredible than the hypothesis either of trickery or of abnormal occurrences. When the disturbances always cease on the arrival of a competent witness, then it is not hard to say which theory we ought to choose. For imposture see next note.

Note (e), p. 38.—“Children at seances.”

The phenomena discussed are most frequently connected with children, who may be regarded either as mediums or impostors, conscious or unconscious. In Proc. S. P. R., iv. 25–42, Professor Barrett gives the case of a little girl whom he knew. She had raps wherever she went, even when alone with the Professor, who made her stand with her hands against the wall, at the greatest stretch of her arms, “with the muscles of the legs and arms all in tension.” “A brisk pattering of raps” followed Professor Barrett’s request. But he also mentions a boy “of juvenile piety,” who “for twelve months deceived his father, a distinguished surgeon, and all his family, by pretended spiritualistic manifestations, which appeared at first sight inexplicable, until the cunning trickery of the lad was discovered.” The only difference between these cases is that an “outsider” discovered trickery in one instance and not in the other. This is a very ticklish kind of certainty, and it is plain that children can do a great deal in the way of mere imposture. The state of any young Wesley who might have been caught out is unenviable. Verily Mr. Wesley would not have spared for his crying.

Note (f), p. 40.—“The pricking of witches.”
It is pretty certain that some of these unlucky old women were pricked “in anæsthetic areas.”

**Note (g), p. 48.—“These Arrows that fly in the Dark.”**

The arrows are the ancient flint arrow-heads, which Mr. Kirk later asserts to be too delicate for human artificers. On this matter Isabel Gowdie, the witch, confessed, “As for Elf arrows, the Divell sharpes them with his ain hand, and deliveris them to Elf boys, wha whyttlis and dightis them with a sharp thing lyk a paking needle; bot whan I was in Elfland, I saw them whyttling and dightung them.” Isabel described the manner in which witches use this artillery: “We spang them from the naillis of our thoombs,” and with these she and her friends shot and slew many men and women. The confessions of Isabel Gowdie are in the third volume of Pitcairn’s *Scottish Criminal Trials*. They contain little or nothing of the “psychical;” all is mere folklore, fairy tales, and charms derived from the old Catholic liturgy. The poor woman, having begun to fable, fabled with manifest enjoyment and considerable power. It seems from her account that each “Covin,” or assembly of witches, had a maiden in it, and “without our maiden we could do no great thing.” On the other hand, an extraordinary case of an epileptic boy, who was hurled about, and beheld distant occur-rences in trance, may be read in Chambers’s *Domestic Annals of Scotland, iii.* 449. Candles used to go out when this boy, a third son of Lord Torpichen, was in the room. The date (1720) and the place (MidLothian) prevented any one from being burned for bewitching him. A fast was proclaimed. The boy recovered, and did good service in the navy. He said to have been “levitated” frequently.

**Note (h), p. 50.—“Milk thorow a hair-tedder.”**

Isabel Gowdie confessed to stealing milk from the cow by magic. “We plait the rope the wrong way, in the Devil’s name, and we draw the tether between the cow’s hind feet, and out betwixt her forward feet, in the Devil’s name, and thereby take with us the cow’s milk.”

Mr. Kirk, it will be observed, does not connect the Fairy kingdom with that of Satan, as some of his contemporaries were inclined to do.
Note (i), p. 53.—“The Wreath (wraith) . . . is only exuvious fumes of the Man, . . . exhaled and congealed into a various likeness.”

What is this theory of “Men illiterate and unwary in their Observations,” but Von Hartmann’s doctrine of “the nerve force which issues from the body of the medium, and then proceeds to set up fresh centres of force in all neighbouring objects . . . while it still remains under the control of the medium’s unconscious will?” See Mr. Walter Leaf on Hartmann’s Der Geisterhypothese des Spiritismus, Proc. S. P. S., xix. 293. It is amusing to find a learned German coinciding in scientific theory with “ignorant and unwary” Highland seers. Both regard the phantasms as manifestations of “nerve-force,” “exuvious fumes,” and as “neither souls nor counterfeiting spirits.”

Note (j), p. 55.—“Fairy hills.”

The hypothesis that the Fairy belief may be a tradition of an ancient race dwelling in subterranean homes, is older than Mr. McRitchie or Sir Walter Scott. In his Scottish Scenery (1803), Dr. Cririe suggests that the germ of the Fairy myth is the existence of dispossessed aboriginals dwelling in subterranean houses, in some places called Picts’ houses, covered with artificial mounds. The lights seen near the mounds are lights actually carried by the mound-dwellers. Dr. Cririe works out in some detail “this marvellously absurd supposition,” as the Quarterly Review calls it (vol. lix., p. 280).

Note (k), p. 59.—“Master Greatrake, the Irish Stroaker.”

Glanvill, in Essays on Several Important Subjects (1675), prints a letter from an Irish Bishop on Greatrex, the “stroker.” He cured diseases “by a sanative contagion.” According to the Bishop, Greatrex had an impression that he could do “faith-healing,” and found that he could, but whether by virtue of some special power or by “the people’s fancy,” he knew not. He
Postscript

It has been said that no trace can be found of a printed Secret Commonwealth before 1815. The present editor is inclined to believe that in 1699 the work was still in manuscript. In a letter of Lord Reay’s to Mr. Samuel Pepys (Oct. 24, 1699), he says, “I have got a manuscript since I last came to Scotland, whose author, though a parson, after giving a very full account of the Second Sight, defends there being no sin in it. . . . With the first opportunity I shall send you a copy of his books.” This description answers very well to Mr. Kirk’s treatise, and to no other contemporary work with which I am acquainted, unless it be A Discourse of the Second Sight, by the Rev. Mr. John Frazer, minister of Tiree and Coll. There were, doubtless, other parsons busy with these topics; and the minister of Rerrick informs me that several mss. by Mr. Telfair, author of the tract already quoted, were only dispersed about 1877. Examples of these clerical psychical researchers may be found in C. K. Sharpe’s prefatory notice to Law’s Memorials (Edinburgh, 1818). Such an one is the Rev. Robert Knox, who writes from Cavers to the Rev. Mr. Wyllie on the case of Sir George Maxwell of Pollock. He dare not attribute the medium-ship of Janet Douglas “positively to an evil cause. . . . It is our ignorance of any natural agent that makes us impute the effects to evil spirits” (Memorials, p. lxxv). Moreover, Lord Reay writes as if his “parson” were still alive in 1699, whereas Mr. Kirk “went to his own herd” in 1692. “I am promised the acquaintance of this man, of which I am very covetous.” Lord Reay was at Durness, and may not have heard of the mishap which carried the minister of Aberfoyle into Fairyland. It may be added that Dr. Hickes writes to Mr. Pepys about neolithic arrow-heads as “a subject of near alliance to that of the Second Sight, and of witchcraft, which is akin to them both.” He also speaks of “a very tragical, but authentic story told me by the Duke of Lauderdale, which happened in the family of Sir John Dalrymple, Laird of Stair, and then Lord President. His Grace had no sooner told it me, but my Lord President coming into the room, he desired my Lord to tell it himself,
which, altering his countenance, he did with a very melancholick air; but it is so long since that I dare not trust my memory with relating the particulars of it” (June 19, 1700).

Dr. Hickes calls the first Lord Stair “John,” Scott calls him “James.” There can be no doubt that Dr. Hickes refers to the woeful tale of the bride of Lammermoor, who died on September 12, 1669. Law, in his *Memorials*, says she “was harled through the house”—by spirits, he means. This “harling” or tossing about of a patient, probably epileptic, we have noticed in many of the old stories, as in the modern instance of “Mr. H.” Now, in his Introduction to the *Bride of Lammermoor*, Scott gives all the authorities at his command: Law, Symson’s *Elegie*, and Hamilton of Whitelaw’s *Satire*, which avers that Satan seized the bride and “threw the bridegroom from the nuptial bed.” Sir Walter was unacquainted with Dr. Hickes’ hint, which actually produces the bride’s own father as evidence for a story which was plainly regarded as supernatural. It is most unlucky that Dr. Hickes distrusted his memory. However, it is something to feel assured that “a memorable story” was accepted at the time by the family of the bride, and was known to Lauderdale. Lauder dale himself, by the way, was a psychical researcher, and accommodated Richard Baxter with some accounts of haunted houses, published in his *World of Spirits*. One story of a haunted house, where a spectral hand appeared, he gives on the authority of “the Rev. James Sharp,” afterwards the famous Archbishop. Lauderdale inspected the famed Loudun nuns, and saw only “wanton wenches singing baudy songs in French.” His letter to Mr. Baxter is dated March 12, 1659. His best haunted house is of the Epworth type.
Footnote


3 Some commentators put his age at fifty. An examination of the archives of the fairy hill would settle the matter.

4 Note (a), p. 87.

5 The Testimony of Tradition, p. 75.

6 In Father Macdonald’s book on Moidart.

7 A much odder case is reported. Two young men photographed a reach of a river. In the photograph, when printed, was visible the dead body of a woman floating on the stream. The water was dragged. Nothing was found; but two or three days later a girl drowned herself in the pool! As the Reports of the Psychical Society sometimes say, “no confirmation has been obtained”; but this is a pleasing instance of the Reflex, and of second sight in a photographic camera.

8 It is also published in Mrs. Graham Tomson’s Border Ballads (Walter Scott).

9 Note (b), p. 87.

10 Many instances may be read of in a little anonymous work, Obeah. The scene is Hayti.

11 Note (c), p. 87.
As far as the author has watched seances personally, they have ended in nothing but “giggling and making giggle.”

Some seances were held at —— College, Oxford, about 1875. The performers were all athletic undergraduates. The breath of chill air was always felt “before anything happened,” and, when the out-college men had gone, the owner of the rooms, in his bed-chamber, was disturbed by the racket which continued in the sitting-room. But I know not if he had sported his oak!


Letter to Terry, April 30. Lockhart, v.309.

Scott to Terry, May 16.

Susannah Wesley to Samuel Wesley, March 27, 1717.


Note (d), p. 89.

Memoirs of the Wesley Family, p. 198.
Edinburgh: Mossman, 1696. There is a London reprint, of which I have a copy. The pamphlet is republished in Mr. Stevenson’s edition of Sinclair’s *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered*, 1685–1871, Appendix, p. xix.

Compare similar phenomena in *Obeah*, and in Peruvian example, note (c), p. 87.

Glanvil’s version is given in Sinclair’s *Satan’s Invisible World*.

Note (e), p. 90.

Note (f), p. 90.

The “earth-houses” in Scotland and the isles, which seem to have been inhabited at an early period, can seldom be called hills or mounds; being built for purposes of concealment, they are usually almost on a level with the surrounding land. The *Fairy hills*, on the other hand, are higher and much more notable, and were probably sepulchral. This, at least, is the impression left on me by Mr. MacRitchie’s book, *The Underground Life*. (Privately printed. Edinburgh, 1892.)

The death-candle is called *druig*.

Note (i), p. 91.

Note (j), p. 91.

Note (k), p. 92.

The original transcriber has added: “See the rest in a little manuscript belonging to Coline Kirk,” probably the author’s son of that name.—A.L.

*The Travels of Pedro de Cieza de Leon*, ch. cxviii.
41 Mr. Hoole’s account, *Memoirs of the Wesleys*, p. 91.

42 The letters to Pepys are quoted from his Correspondence, published as Vol. X. of his *Diary* (New York, 1885).