

DEMONOLOGY

BRIAN O'CONNELL

THE LECTURE: Moncure D. Conway delivered his lecture entitled "Demonology" in the Masonic Temple last evening. The hall was well filled with a cultured audience. Close attention was paid to the lecturer, and the curious and amusing features of his subject were greeted with smiles and applause as they were presented. The lecture was illuminated by outline crayon drawings. Among the figures represented were those of Beelzebub, "the Devil of Japan" and Lalith. Mr Conway spoke rather slowly and without much gestures. He will give a lecture this evening in the same place on "St. George and the Dragon; or, Ancient Fable and English Folklore;" and another to-morrow evening on "Oriental Religions: their Origins and Present Condition."

The above description appeared on page 2 of the Dec. 11, 1875 edition of the *New York Tribune*. That was the first year the *Tribune* published an index. There were 85 entries listed under "Lectures." Unfortunately, the previous 34 years of publication seem never to have been indexed, and apart from a few examples of random editions held in the manuscript rooms of various libraries around New York, the only access to those years seems to be through the scratched and dimly lit images available on microfilm.*

I began my search of the pages of the *New York Tribune* on a mission to discover the source of some of the manifestations of possession we know so well—banging furniture, floating bodies, ectoplasm projections covering the glass plates of ghost photographs and presumably the walls of the medium's chamber, glossolalia (speaking an unknown language), xenoglossy (speaking in a language unknown to the speaker), and of course, the occasional 180-degree turning of the head. As it turns out, the *Tribune's* founding editor, Horace Greeley, was not only committed to social reform, a founder of what was at the time a progressive political party, and a champion of industrial labor interests (both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were correspondents for the *Tribune*). He was also a major factor in the rise of a movement to which, as the *Times* reported in April 1868.**

I'll leave it to the reader to imagine how this account proceeds. By November 1849 the sisters were giving public lectures at Rochester's Corinthian Hall, and in early June 1850 they had made their much-anticipated way to New York City, where on the night of June 4 Greeley attended one of their first performances in a room at the Barnum Hotel. A firsthand account of the events of that evening appeared in the center of the front page of the *Tribune* the next day.[†]

Thanks to Greeley and the Fox sisters, Spiritualism or Spiritism gained instant mass appeal. It cannot be forgotten that these remarkable events took place at the Barnum Hotel, and that when demand became too great for the intimacy of



Western New-York belongs the distinction of having originated modern Spiritualism. The initial "spirit-rapping" phenomena began in March, 1848, in the family of John D. Fox, in Hydeville, Wayne County, N. Y. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Fox only their two younger children, Margaretta, 12 years old, and Kate, 9 years old, were at home when the family were startled by mysterious rappings that were heard nightly upon the floor of one of the bedrooms, and sometimes in other parts of the house. They endeavored to trace the sounds to their cause, but failed. It is also alleged that a pattering of footsteps was sometimes heard, the bed clothes were pulled off, and Kate felt a cold hand passed over her face. On the night of March 31, when the raps occurred, Kate imitated them by snapping her fingers, and the raps responded by the same number of sounds. Kate then said: "Now, do as I do; count one, two,

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passed several icebergs. June 20, passed Gibraltar, for Liverpool. The America has 36 passengers. She sailed for New-York at 11 1/2 o'clock, weather cloudy and calm.

CITY ITEMS.

AN HOUR WITH "THE SPIRITS."—The young ladies from the vicinity of Rochester, who have excited so much curiosity from the fact of their being accompanied by spiritual "manifestations," or knockings, have now been in this City three or four days. They have taken rooms at Barium's Hotel, where they have already been visited by a number of persons, all of whom have been astonished at the developments made to them, and some more or less convinced of their supernatural origin. We understand that the ladies, who have recently been creating quite a sensation in Troy, left that place and came to this City in obedience to the direct injunction of the spirits, who, it seems, exercise a very arbitrary control over their movements.

In company with a friend, we called upon them yesterday afternoon. It was past the usual hour for the appearance of the spirits, but after a short delay we were admitted to the presence of the ladies. The eldest, Mrs. Fish, is about twenty-five years old, and has a pleasing and intelligent countenance. Her two sisters, the Misses Fox, are of the ages of eighteen and fourteen. Their eyes and hair are dark, and their complexions of a transparent paleness, such as we have observed in persons highly susceptible of mesmeric influences. Their manner is quiet and refined, and all their actions are marked by entire propriety.

They were seated on a sofa, with a plain table before them. We had scarcely taken seats on the opposite side, before a succession of raps was

we fear we are too material to be made the subject of their special attention.

A GOOD MOVE.—We observe that a resolution has been laid before the Board of Assistants to prohibit burials, except at private vaults, below Eighty-sixth st. and that no more burial places be established on the Island. The Governors of the Alms House say also that Potter's Field is nearly full, and it will soon be necessary to provide a new place of sepulture. We trust no argument is needed at this day to convince our City Fathers of the great injury inflicted upon the health of the people by burials in their midst, and that they will speedily provide for and promulgate a law to prohibit such an outrage upon those who live near these dangerous Cemeteries. Indeed it would be better to resort to cremation at once, than to continue this unhealthy and repulsive business—especially so far as Potter's Field is in question. We have had too many of these plague-spots already; the citizen who enjoys an airing in Washington-square is troubled with most unwelcome memories of the place, and soon the picks and shovels that clear the way for new dwellings will be exhuming the bones of the dead at Fifty-fourth-st. Nearly 12,000 persons were buried within the vicinity of the City last year, and of these 1,602 went to Potter's Field. Such a mass of animal decay should go on in some place far removed from the abodes of men—some secluded nook in the country where settlers would never voluntarily come, much less be forced to come, as they are in the city. We hope the resolution we have referred to will be taken from the table and passed, and that the act will extend to the procurement of a Potter's Field

The motion was carried. Mr. Brown's resolution

posed by Mr. Edwin of Ala. a part of the Committee disposed of.

Mr. Brown withdrew upon

Mr. Pickens moved the Committee of Orga

Mr. Edwin opposed could not support the resolution, but it might acquiesce, but it

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It is proposed in *The New Era*, a ghost-seeing paper, to set up a now fashioned telegraph which will supersede the invention of Morse and Wheatstone. The center of the proposed establishment is to be fixed at Randolph, N. Y., some three miles south of the village, on an elevation about 1,500 feet above the tide waters of the Atlantic. There a tower is to be constructed of such a form, and such a peculiar combination of mineral and chemical substances, that it shall constitute a grand focus of magnetic and electric influences; while other towers of similar contrivance are to be placed in subordinate places, such as Boston, New-York, Pekin, Timbuctoo, or wherever arrangements for correspondence may be desirable. In these electrical foci the mediums of the correspondence are to be placed. The spirits are not to be called into play here, but only persons who "bear certain temperamental and other relations to each other, so as naturally by affinity and attraction to blend soul with soul, according to certain electrical and mental laws not hitherto understood among mankind on this 'lower earth' of the 'lower universe,' and then thought is as readily and infallibly communicated from one station to another as persons convey thought by words when within ordinary sight and hearing of each other." Thus the little township of Randolph will become the grand Telegraphic Center of the Globe, and possibly in time of the Universe, for we believe it is easier, as a general thing, for a first-rate somnambulist, let alone a ghost-seer, to communicate with the most distant planet or fixed star than to report correctly a fact in the next street. But as for Randolph—when the towers are built, and a communicating soul seated on the tripod of each tower—the next thing will be to build around it a model town, where ghost-seers and somnambulists may find congenial society and a happy existence. Exactly on what principles the town is to be organized the public are not informed. It seems, however, that there is some sort of an eclectic doctrine about it, (that of sexual promiscuity, perhaps,) which cannot yet be divulged, though the time is rapidly approaching when it may be let out without injury to the world or its revealers.

Meanwhile, as the entire enterprise seems to be dependent on the preliminary establishment of the Soul-Blending Telegraph, we abstain from all comment till that experiment is tried. We may be allowed to say, however, that we have no great faith in the accuracy of the intelligence which is there to radiate "through the electric wires of nature." One day a famous ghost-seer and clairvoyant visited the office of *THE TRUSTEE* to impart some very recent intelligence concerning the present pñce and state of Sir John Franklin. That information we declined to receive, but in its stead requested a report of the previous day's news in London and Paris, offering to the medium a permanent and profitable engagement should it prove correct. Strange to say, however, it was not so easy to ascertain what was going on at the other side of the Atlantic as to learn what had transpired at the North Pole, and our visitor departed in a disappointed and perturbed frame of mind. Since then we have had a rather bad opinion of that mode of procuring knowledge.

Broken 'Saucer' . . .



Associated Press Wirephoto

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hotel rooms, the sisters found themselves back on the stages of the lecture circuit (P.T. Barnum did much of the booking). However, mediums and Spiritualism were not taken simply as amusement; rather, for many, it became intimately tied to the need for radical change, including the abolition of slavery and the extension of women's rights. What made Spiritualism so appealing was its ability to literally transcend differences of race, gender, and religion along with time, space, and mortality. That this ability was most often manifest in women further served to establish a sphere neither private nor entirely public, in which they had privileged, unique, and professional access. So while Marx was struggling to turn the relationship of spirit and matter on its head in Europe, it seems that many American reformers aided by his own editor were flirting with spirits whose manifestations would, in a little more than a century's time, become the template for Friedkin's famous cinematic head-turner.

Although the Fox sisters would ultimately confess to an uncanny ability to crack their toes at great volume, their performances seemed to foreshadow two familiar phenomena: technological media that carry the voices and images of the dead, and forms of entertainment dependant on contact with unknown worlds, whether on other planes or other planets. Thomas Edison famously advertised both the phonograph and motion pictures as means of raising the dead. Already in 1854, a "soul-bending telegraph" had been proposed. This telegraph was in essence a broadcast system to be deployed through the construction of giant psychic antennae. This time the *Tribune* reacted with more caution.^{††}

Our favorite radio, film, and television images and sounds often require a collective suspension of disbelief, and insist on the incredulity of what we see and hear. So I was not too surprised to find that the first account of the exorcism that would later become the basis for a novel and a film shared the front page of the Sept. 20, 1949 *Washington Post* with the following two items: Finnish Troops Alerted for Communist Coup" and the discovery of "the original flying saucer ... in a barn 11 miles south of Baltimore."[‡]

I have to admit a certain personal attachment to these issues. My father is a Catholic theologian who carries a pontifical degree that in some technical way would—in theory—qualify him to perform an exorcism. In 1976, when I was almost 4 years old, my family moved to St. Louis, where he took a position as one of the few laypeople on an otherwise older, predominantly clerical faculty. The film *The Exorcist* had been released only three years earlier. It was widely known that the film, a faithful adaptation of William Blatty's novel (Blatty himself did the adapting) was in fact an updated, re-gendered, and transplanted version of events that had taken place in 1949 in the tower of the red-brick-and-terra-cotta Gothic revival building in which my father worked. In fact, the true exorcism

had taken place in the attic of the tower two stories directly above my father's office. Never mind that the psychological wing of the Alexian Brother's hospital, where the boy had been kept, was two miles away and had by then been demolished.[#]

It was my father's semiannual duty to change the lock on the door barring access to the attic, only to find it broken again and again. This was not the result of demons struggling to be released—they surely have more spectacular ways of making their presence known than breaking padlocks. Rather, breaking into and entering the site of a ritual that had taken place miles away had itself become a ritual for each year's incoming students.

nish Troops Alert

Group Priest Frees Mt. Rainier Boy 5 to 8 Reported Held in Devil's Grip

By Bill Brinkley
Post Reporter

In what is perhaps one of the the pallet on which the sleeping most remarkable experiences of boy lay slid slowly across the floor its kind in recent religious history, until the boy's head bumped a 14-year-old Mount Rainier boy against a bed, awakening him. has been freed by a Catholic priest. In another instance reported by of possession by the devil, Catholic the Protestant minister, a heavy sources reported yesterday. armchair in which the boy was sit-

Only after 20 to 30 performances ting, with his knees drawn under of the ancient ritual of exorcism, his chin, tilted slowly to one side here and in St. Louis, was the devil and fell over, throwing the boy on finally cast out of the boy, it was the floor.

In all except the last of these, the boy broke into a violent tantrum of screaming, cursing and voicing of Latin phrases—a language he had never studied—when ever the priest reached those climactic points of the 27-page ritual in which he commanded the demon to depart from the boy.

"I command you, whoever you are, unclean spirit, and all of your associates obsessing this friend of God . . . give me your name, the day and the hour of your exit, together with some sign . . . I command thee to obey in all these things nor ever again in any manner to offend this creature of God . . ."

In complete devotion to his task, the priest stayed with the boy over a period of two months, during which he said he personally witnessed such manifestations as the bed in which the boy was sleeping suddenly moving across the room.

A Washington Protestant minister had previously reported personally witnessing similar manifestations, including one in which

The final rite of exorcism in which the devil was cast from the boy took place in May, it was reported, and since then he has had no manifestations.

A priest here voiced the belief that it was probably the first casting out of the devil through the ritual in at least a century of Catholic activities here and perhaps in the entire history of the church in this area.

The ritual in its present form goes back 1500 years and from there to Jesus Christ.

But before it was undertaken, said a priest here, all medical and psychiatric means of curing the boy—in whose presence such manifestations as fruit jumping up from the refrigerator top in his home and hurling himself against the wall also were reported—were exhausted.

The boy was taken to Georgetown University Hospital here, where his affliction was exhaustively studied, and to St. Louis University. Both are Jesuit institutions.

Finally, both Catholic hospitals said the priest reported they were unable to cure the boy through natural means.

Only then, said a priest here, was a supernatural cure sought. The ritual was undertaken by a St. Louis priest—a Jesuit in his 50s—who devoted himself to the task through prayers and fasting.

FCC R End to Giveav

By Marsh
Post

The Federal Communications Commission acted to halt vision giveaways with their an listeners run millions.

Response from industry was in orous. The Advertising Co., producing "Sunda Music" show, a challenge in court to prohibit the

"No changes in ABC programs, FCC regulation, according to the declared in New

Ruling by J. M. Justin Miller, National Association of Broadcasters, said he had oversteered and pointed out was made by seven-member were out of the

ABC's challenge to seek an United States for the District

where orders agencies are re

The complaint antitrust laws

forbid broadcast pending on the

said application news could a

the case of such such programs.

Winship Committee

15-8 vote, the Committee of the Senate home rule at least.

en at a special ended all possible suffrage issue house floor for a recess adjourns.

ates on the Hill immediately an full committee's te against the r signal to start charge the House ee from further the legislation. e sustained the ntee's decision e the Kefauver of the Senate by 1.

Pending

re rule proposals before the Dis- Subcommittee, but nan Harris (D. ar he would not ings or meetings ar because "ad- cted in the near

Hillan (D. S. C. full committee the last of the

Han declined to call vote on the Kefauver bill.

'48 Population For D. C. Area Hits 1,402,000

The population of Greater Wash-