

**REUBEN BRIGGS
DAVENPORT**



**THE DEATH-BLOW
TO SPIRITUALISM**

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Reuben Briggs Davenport

The Death-Blow to Spiritualism

Being the True Story of the Fox Sisters

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

I. INTRODUCTION.

INTRODUCTION.

POETIC JUSTICE OF THE EXPOSURE.

II. RENUNCIATION.

CHAPTER I.

GOD HAS NOT ORDERED IT.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISCOMFITED ENEMY.

CHAPTER III.

A SECOND BLOW.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAND OF THE PERSECUTOR

CHAPTER V.

SOLEMN ABJURATION.

III. HISTORY.

CHAPTER VI.

ORIGIN OF THE FRAUD.

CHAPTER VII.

GARBLED AND DISTORTED TESTIMONY.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAUD.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MERCENARY CAMPAIGN.

CHAPTER X.

SPIRITUALISTIC BOOMERANGS.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUPREME AUDACITY OF FRAUD.

CHAPTER XII.

A SCIENTIFIC JURY.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE UNALTERABLE VERDICT.

IV. REPENTANCE.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEART PLEADS FOR THE SOUL.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM SHADOW TO LIGHT.

INDEX.

INDEX.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

This book has been written in extreme haste. It does not pretend to literary style. But it pretends to absolute truthfulness and a reverent regard for justice.

Its sole value is its character as a contribution to the real history of Spiritualism. As such, it is unquestionably of great importance, greater even than any work of the kind that has been published since the beginning of modern Spiritualism.

It is, in fact, what its title sets forth—"THE DEATH-BLOW TO SPIRITUALISM."

No one who does not love illusion for illusion's sake—better, in other words, than he loves the truth—can, after reading this volume, remain a follower of Spiritualism and its hypocritical apostles.

The full authorization of Mrs. MARGARET Fox KANE and Mrs. CATHERINE Fox JENCKEN for the publication of this work will be found on the next to the following page.

29th October, 1888.



*Margaret Fox Kane
Catherine Fox Jencken*

We hereby approve of Mr. Reuben B. Davenport's design to write a true account of the origin of Spiritualism and of our connection therewith, and we authorize him to make proper use of all data and material that we furnish him.

New York, 15th Oct., 1888.

*Margaret Fox Kane
Catherine Fox Jencken*

I. INTRODUCTION.

[Table of Contents](#)

INTRODUCTION.

[Table of Contents](#)

POETIC JUSTICE OF THE EXPOSURE.

[Table of Contents](#)

That the inventors of an infamous fraud should deal to it its death-blow, is the poetic justice of fate.

Over the creature, the creator has power of life and death.

The creators of Spiritualism abjure its infamy.

They decree its death.

They condemn it to final destruction.

They fasten upon those who continue to practice it the obloquy of history, and the scorn of mankind for all time to come.

Margaret and Catharine Fox, the youngest of three sisters, were the first to produce "spiritualistic manifestations."

They are now the most earnest in denunciation of those impostures; the most eager to dissipate the foolish belief of thousands in the flimsiest system of deception that was ever cloaked with the hypocrisy of so-called religion.

When, as by accident, they discovered a method of deceiving those around them by means of mysterious noises, they were but little children, innocent of the thought of wrong, ignorant of the world and the world's guile, and

imagining only that what they did was a clever lark, such as the adult age easily pardons to exuberant and sprightly youth.

Not to them did the base suggestion come that this singular, this simple discovery, should be the means of deluding the world, of exalting them in the minds of the weakly credulous and of bringing them fame and splendor and sumptuous pleasure.

No one who learns their true history can still believe them guilty of the willful inception of this most grotesque, most transparent and corrupting of superstitions.

The idea had its monstrous birth in older heads, heads that were seconded by hearts lacking the very essence of truth and the fountain of honest human sympathy.

The two children, who had at first delighted, as younglings will, in what was but a laughable mystification, were dragged into a sordid, wicked and loathsome speculation, built upon lying and fraud, as unforgivable as the sin of Satan, and of which they were but the unthinking instruments, often reluctant and remorseful, yet docile and compliant by nature.

Thus the "Rochester knockings," the example and prototype of all later so-called spiritualistic "phenomena," began merely in a curious childish freak, disguised without effort, and which, from the first, was encouraged to partly formed understandings by the wonder and intense spirit of inquiry it provoked.

The young operators were carried away by the undreamt-of current of enthusiasm and awe in which they soon became involved. They felt the natural need of maintaining

with unabating dexterity, that false sense of the miraculous which by chance they had called forth.

Thus they went from one stage to another of this queer illusion, and, being compelled by a harder and more mature intelligence to repeat their part over and over again, became the chief means of establishing that injurious belief in communications from the spirits of the departed, of which such great numbers have become the victims.

Many an older offender against common sense, reason and strict morality persists through force of circumstance in the pathway he has chosen, and does not turn backward, merely because he cannot do so without wearing the face of shame.

From such slight and trivial beginning came the great movement—great because of the number which it comprised and of the sensation which attended its progress—that for more than forty years has alternately surprised, puzzled, disgusted and amused the world.

From so little a plant has grown a gigantic weed of deceit, corruption and fraud, nurtured upon the fattening lust of money, and of the flesh.

What has developed from it is not alone a system of so-called communications through a puerile code of signals with an unseen world; but, as Dante describes, in his incomparable epic, forms of monstrosity which combine a hideous human semblance and a loathly animal foulness, so this venomous evil has become conglomerate in its hateful phases of delusion, and its petty sordidness and depravity.

Thus the Tuscan bard describes the spirit of fraud:

“Lo! the fell monster with the deadly sting!
Who passes mountains, breaks through fenced walls
And firm embattled spears, and with his filth
Taints all the world! Thus me my guide addressed,
And beckon’d him, that he should come to shore,
Near to the stony causeway’s utmost edge.
“Forthwith that image vile of fraud appear’d,
His head and upper part expos’d on land,
But laid not on the shore his bestial train.
His face the semblance of a just man’s wore.
So kind and gracious was its outward cheer;
The rest was serpent all; two shaggy claws
Reach’d to the armpits, and the back and breast,
And either side, were painted o’er with nodes
And orbits. Colors variegated more
Nor Turks nor Tartars e’er on cloth of state
With interchangeable embroidery wove,
Nor spread Arachne o’er her curious loom.
As ofttimes a light skiff, moor’d to the shore,
Stands part in water, part upon the land;
Or, as where dwells the greedy German boor,
The beaver settles watching for his prey;
So on the rim, that fenced the sand with rock,
Sat perched the fiend of evil. In the void
Glancing, his tail upturn’d its venomous fork,
With sting like scorpion’s armed.”

The world has not seen in all its long procession of follies, vagaries, and strange mania, one so utterly devoid of a reasonable foundation as this.

Yet none has been more eagerly believed; and this very tendency has evolved into so strong a desire to believe that thousands of those who have professed to investigate it have done so only ostensibly, their eyes, figuratively speaking, tightly bandaged, to shut out everything but the artificial vision that they were most eager to see.

It is to be hoped that the world will now form its ultimate conclusion upon this flagrant and audacious system of humbuggery:—that, regarded as a superstition, it ranks even below voudooism and fetich-worship, and, as an illusion, below the effects produced by the most ordinary magician at a country fair.

Dragged into this life when infants, rescued from it for an interval by two men^[1] whose names are historical, the one as a hero and explorer, the other as a journalist and daily philosopher; borne back to it again by the tide of ill-fortune; used and controlled, by those whose heart's were “dry as summer's dust,” for their own hateful purposes; menaced when conscience rebelled and suggested retraction and amends; driven to seek momentary oblivion of their present degradation in a vice that was the result of their enforced public career; finally, persecuted in a stealthy and treacherous way by those who had profited most by the fraud that they had set up, because it was feared that sooner or later they could no longer keep silent and would betray its real origin; seeing their existence slipping away from them with nothing but Dead Sea fruit remaining to their bitter portion; feeling more and more the need of an atonement to conscience and the opinion of the world—Margaret and Catherine Fox now denounce and

anathematize Spiritualism as absolutely and utterly false from beginning to end; and they declare their solemn intention to devote themselves henceforth to the noble task of undoing the great evil which they have done, and of leaving no single stone of foundation behind them for weak-minded future generations to base a futile faith upon.

In these pages will be found the full and truthful story of Spiritualism, as it was and is, as gathered from the lips of both Margaret Fox Kane and Catharine Fox Jencken, and verified by letters, documents and published data. It is written with their full knowledge and earnest sanction.

The bold fabric of lies built up to sustain the claim that the "rappings" in which all spiritualistic so-called phenomena originated were unaccountable except on the supernatural hypothesis, can no longer be cited to an intelligent mind. The elaborate narrative published by the eldest sister, Mrs. Ann Leah Fox Underhill, who is now the only remaining stay of spiritualistic deception, is proven to be false from title-page to finis.

I have given in the following pages, the real lives of Mrs. Kane and Mrs. Jencken, in so far as they bear in any important degree upon the development of the fraud of Spiritualism.

II. RENUNCIATION.

[Table of Contents](#)

CHAPTER I.

[Table of Contents](#)

GOD HAS NOT ORDERED IT.

[Table of Contents](#)

The world of “spiritualists” and non-spiritualists was startled on the 24th of September, 1888, by the publication in the New York *Herald*, of an article with the following head-lines:

“GOD HAS NOT ORDERED IT.”

A Celebrated Medium Says the
Spirits Never Return.

CAPTAIN KANE’S WIDOW.

One of the Fox Sisters Promises an Interesting
Exposure of Fraud.

To many, an article of this kind seemed in a degree sensational. Not to those, however, who had previously had some inkling of the secret history of Spiritualism, and who for years had looked for the day of its inevitable confounding.

A sudden disclosure like this, by one of the “Mothers of Spiritualism,” if the term may be used, suggested a sort of reckless vagary, a species of extravagance, due, as might have been fancied, to some abnormal condition of the mind.

Yet to those who had had an intimate acquaintance with Maggie Fox Kane this step had long been foreshadowed. As

will appear later, no one could have imagined the real intensity of moral pain that for years she had endured.

In recent years, both she and her sister, Catharine Fox Jencken, had been but poorly provided with this world's goods. Obliged to depend almost wholly on themselves for support, they had dropped more and more out of sight, till the public at last hardly recognized their names, if perchance they appeared in print, as those of the principal instruments in the founding of Spiritualism. For this, there was a reason. It was a deep-seated and long increasing disgust with their fraudulent profession—the fuller realization to their minds, as their knowledge of the world grew broader, of the monstrous evil to which, innocently at first, they had given birth. So at intervals they were filled with despairing despondency and remorse. Their weaknesses, their self-indulgence, their lack of providence for themselves, are largely attributable to these causes. It could not be said of them that they were ever remarkably selfish, or cold-hearted or calculating. Such a character, however, has of right been coupled with the name of their elder sister, who by reason of the ties of blood and of her older experience ought long ago to have led them out of the by-ways of imposture, instead of persistently seeking to shut off their escape from this horrible bondage, and to plunge them deeper into the mire of guilt and infamy, so that the chance of their rising above it, and denouncing it, might grow less and less.

The impulse to set herself right on the record of the world, after years of enslavement in the hateful gyves of charlatanism, must stand to Maggie Fox's credit alone. It

sprang from her own bosom, not from the inspiration, suggestion or persuasion of any one else. Returning from Europe in September, 1888, after a peculiar experience, which had convinced her that those chiefs of spiritualistic fraud who feared her and her sister, because they held the key of the whole of the artificial mystery, were bent upon persecuting them into an abject silence, she at once put in execution the resolution which had been so long in process of growth, but until then had never been fully ripened.

This was to effect the unqualified exposure of the false system of Spiritualism. She naturally chose as a medium for her repentant message to the world, that great cosmopolitan journal, the *New York Herald*, which is known in every corner of the earth, and is ever ready to perform an important service to mankind. Before she started on her homeward voyage, she committed herself once and for all to this courageous and worthy step.

The disclosures regarding the notorious Madam Diss De Barr had offended Mrs. Kane more than anything which had occurred in Spiritualism in a long time, for they presented the enforced association of her name and the simple, childish origin of the "Rochester knockings," with the gross and revolting frauds which had been their outgrowth. So imbued had she become, by this time, with the idea that the developed system of Spiritualism was something to be loathed, as Milton loathed the hideous creature who sat by the inner portals of hell, that words could not express her utter scorn and hatred of this common woman, who posed as an agent of sacred communications between the living and the dead.

The New York *Herald* of May 27, 1888, contained this letter, written by Mrs. Margaret Fox Kane in London:

THE CURSE OF SPIRITUALISM.

GOWER STREET, BEDFORD SQUARE, W. C.,
LONDON, MAY 14, 1888.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:

I read in the *Herald* of Saturday, May 5, an account of the sad misfortune that has befallen my dear sister Katie, Mrs. Kate Fox Jencken, and in the article it is stated that I am still a resident of New York, which is a mistake. I sailed for England on the 22d of March, and I presume my absence has added to my darling sister's depressed state of mind. The sad news has nearly killed me. My sister's two beautiful boys referred to are her idols.

Spiritualism is a curse. God has set His seal against it! I call it a curse, for it is made use of as a covering for heartless persons like the Diss De Barrs, and the vilest miscreants make use of it to cloak their evil doings. Fanatics like Mr. Luther R. Marsh, Mr. John L. O'Sullivan, ex-Minister to Portugal, and hundreds equally as learned, ignore the "rappings" (which is the only part of the phenomena that is worthy of notice) and rush madly after the glaring humbugs that flood New York. But a harmless "message" that is given through the "rappings" is of little account to them; they want the "spirit" to come to them in full form, to walk before them, talk to them, to embrace them, and