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WITCHCRAFT OF NEW ENGLAND

EXPLAINED BY

MODERN SPIRITUALISM.

BY

ALLEN PUTNAM, Esq.,

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PREFACE.

"The nobler tendency of culture — and, above all, of scientific culture — is to honor the dead without groveling before them; to profit by the past without sacrificing it to the present." — EDWARD B. TYLOR, *Primitive Culture.*

MOST history of New England witchcraft written since 1760 has dishonored the dead by lavish imputations of imposture, fraud, malice, credulity, and infatuation; has been sacrificing past acts, motives, and character to skepticism regarding the sagacity and manliness of the fathers, the guilelessness of their daughters, and the truth of ancient records. Transmitted accounts of certain phenomena have been disparaged, seemingly because facts alleged therein baffle solution by to-day's prevalent philosophy, which discards some agents and forces that were active of old. The legitimate tendency of culture has been reversed; what it should have availed itself of and honored, it has busied itself in hiding and traducing.

An exception among writers alluded to is the author of the following extract, who, simply as an historian, and not as an advocate of any particular theory for the solution of witchcraft, seems ready to let its works be ascribed to competent agents.

"So far as a presentation of facts is concerned, no account of the dreadful tragedy has appeared which is more accurate and truthful than Governor Hutchinson's narrative. His theory on the subject — that it was wholly the result of fraud and deception on the part of the afflicted children — will not be generally accepted at the

present day, and his reasoning on that point will not be deemed conclusive. . . . There is a tendency to trace an analogy between the phenomena then exhibited and modern spiritual manifestations." — W. F. POOLE, *Geneal. and Antiq. Register, October*, 1870.

While composing the following work, its writer was borne onward by the tendency which Poole named. Survey of the field of marvels has been far short of exhaustive — his purpose made no demand for very extended researches. Selected cases, representative of the general manifestations and subject treated of were enough. The aim has been to find in ancient records, and thence adduce, statements and meanings long resting unobserved beneath the gathered dust of more than a hundred years, and therefore practically lost.

The course of search led attention beyond overt acts, to inspection of some natural germs and their legitimately resultant development into creeds, which impelled good men on to the enactment of direful tragedy.

Examination of the basement walls — the foundations — of prevalent popular explanation of ancient wonders, forces conviction that they lack both the breadth and the materials needful to stability. Modern builders of witchcraft history have either failed to find, or have deemed unmanageable by any appliances at their command, and therefore would not attempt to handle, a vast amount of sound historic stones which are accessible and can be used. Lacking them, these moderns have let fancy manufacture for them, and they have builded upon blocks of her fragile stuff, which are fast disintegrating under the chemical action of the world's common sense.

We proposed here an incipient step towards refutation of the sufficiency and justness of a main theory, now long prevalent, for explaining satisfactorily very many well-proved marvelous facts. Some such have been presented on the pages of Hutchinson, Upham, and their followers; and yet these have been either not