

PHRENOLOGY¹ AND ANIMAL MAGNETISM².

HOW THEY SERVED AN INDIVIDUAL.

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*‘Trifles light as air,
Are to the jealous, confirmations strong,
As proofs of Holy Writ.’³*

The text may be found in the tragedy of Othello, third act, third scene. I state this remarkable fact, to show that the above is an ‘original quotation,’ taken directly from the author, and not merely quoted from a previous quoter⁴. I hold that there may be as much piracy in quotation as in stealing an original idea; and I am ready to wager that half the scribblers in the world quote from *quoters*, without ever reading the originals. But to the illustration of my quotation.

A few years ago, I left my native state, on an invitation from my kind uncle Scrapings⁵, of Havana, to join him in partnership there, under the firm of Scrapings, Scrapps⁶, and Company; but before I went, I had incontinently fallen in love with a beauty of my native city, of eighteen years, and a little money. She was a most voluptuous-looking little creature, with eyes as black as a pair of suspender buttons, and two little fairy hands, as white— oh, *how* white! And the dear creature loved me, too; and so it came to pass, that we were ‘engaged.’ It was arranged that I should go to Havana, get well established in business, the return to claim

¹ Phrenology was the study of a person’s head. Based on the shape of the head, with focus placed on any prominent bumps, a phrenologist would be able to tell someone about their true personality. The psuedoscience was also used to explain racial inequality; the heads of non-white people were shaped in such a way as to suggest subservience (Dean).

² Animal magnetism was a practice developed by Franz Anton Mesmer to cure psychosomatic illnesses. Mesmer would use a magnet (largely for show) to disrupt the magnetic tides that were causing harm to his patient (Crabtree). At the same time, the patients would be in a hypnotic

³ Taken from *Othello*, as the narrator notes. The quote is said by Iago when he realizes that he does not need proof of Desdemona’s infidelity to make Othello jealous (*Othello*, Scene 3, Act 3).

⁴ The narrator uses quotes throughout the story, though not all are as immediately recognized as the one from *Othello*, and some of the quoted material has, since the time this was written, fallen into obscurity.

⁵ “Money-grubbing, miserly” (*scraping*, OED). The use of ‘scraping’ as an adjective to describe scrooge-like characters seems to have lost popularity after the late 19th century, and the use of the word in this way would be archaic in our time.

⁶ “To quarrel, squabble; to engage in heated argument or angry dispute” and “to fight, box” (*scrap*, OED). The narrator’s name is used to suggest early in the reading that he is an argumentative, as well as physically aggressive, person.

Clara Smith, (an own sister of John,) for my bride. In due time, I *was* established, and business prospered famously. Every thing we touched was converted into gold, and almost without an effort.

I kept up a correspondence with Clara, in which there was a due proportion of vows, rhapsodies, and apostrophes; but occasionally interspersed, on her side and on mine, with little trifling jealousies, which tended to give a lively dash of bitters to the otherwise too sickening draughts of sweets. There was nothing very serious in these lovers' quarrels, however, and after a short time, we always returned again to the old worn-out track of unadulterated love.

Two years passed away, and I was making ready to return for my beloved. I was always fond of exciting surprise, and determined, on this occasion, to make a sort of trap-door entrée into the presence of my little idol. So, having deceived her as to the time when she might begin to expect me, I found myself, in the month of September, in New-York, on my way home; and the next evening found me at Clara's gate—that gate over which I had taken and given many a parting kiss! The evening was warm; the parlor windows were open; and I heard within voices and laughter. Softly I approached, and slyly I looked in. With a thrill of horror, I beheld Clara seated in a rocking-chair, while a fellow, a young fellow, a handsome fellow, seemed with one hand to be playfully covering her eyes, and with the other 'paddling in her neck with his damned fingers;⁷ while her mother and sister sat on a sofa, quietly grinning at the fellow's imprudence! I felt my blood hissing in my veins, yet I stood still. I saw him play with her ear; 'I grinned horribly a ghastly smile.'⁸ He spanned her face with her fingers; I twisted off two buttons of my coat. He encircled her head with his arm; I tore off two buttons of my coat. He encircled her head with his arm; I tore out a handful of hair. Finally, the dumb ass opened his mouth and spake; and I felt my blood reddening the very tip of my nose; but I restrained my indignation, to listen.

'I think,' said he, 'you are fond of me in general; and I think you would find little difficulty in transferring your affections from one to another, after the decease or treachery of the first. Now suppose your lover prove treacherous— don't you think so?'

I paused no longer. Job himself, when incrustated with 'sore boils,'⁹ would not have waited so long as I did. I rushed into the room, and catching the dog by the throat, laid him prostrate. 'Villain!' cried I, 'and is it thus you attempt to inveigle away the affections of my betrothed? Know, Sir, that I will suffer death, rather than dishonor!'

The mother and sister ran screaming from the room; but Clara, recognizing me at once, fell upon my neck, cried out, 'O Judgment, (Reader, my euphonious name is Judgment Scrapps,) dear, dearest Judgment! Spare him, and I will explain all to your satisfaction!'

Half doubting, I quitted my hold, and half doubtfully I returned her embrace. 'Say on then, my Clara; I shall be but too happy to believe any thing you can say in explanation.'

'That gentleman whom you have so wronged, is Dr. Feeler¹⁰, the Phrenologist.'

'Phrenologist! — and pray what may *that* be?'

'Why, dearest, it is one who uses the same means to discover another's intellect and disposition, that a monkey does to discover a certain species of animal creation.'

'Ah, I understand; such as we used to call craniologists¹¹. Humph! I never had the pleasure of seeing one. But *is* that indeed all? What a fool I have been! My dear Clara, and you my dear Dr. Feeler, is it possible

⁷ The wording of this line is very similar to a line in a poem called "Phrenologos in Search of a Wife": "Young, blushing Susan, too, must feel his fingers, / And, somewhere near her neck, he, paddling, fondly lingers." The poem was published in *The Scots Magazine* in January 1822, well before the publication of "Phrenology and Animal Magnetism."

⁸ Used by Milton to describe Death in *Paradise Lost* (Book II, Line 846) (*Bartleby*).

⁹ Job 2:7. In an effort to tempt Job to sin, Satan smites him with boils. Job, unlike Scrapps, is able to resist temptation, and takes comfort from God.

¹⁰ "One who feels or perceives by the senses, *esp.* by the touch" (*feeler*, OED). The name is given to indicate what it is the doctor does.

¹¹ Dr. Gall's original name for his science. Spurzheim changed it to phrenology, by which it became better known (Dean).

you can pardon my atrocious violence?’ ‘Sir,’ continued I hesitatingly, for he looked rather needy¹², as I thought, ‘Sir, if money —’

‘Say no more, Sir,’ replied he; ‘I perceive that your animal organs, and that of ideality, vastly preponderate over the reflective; and this unfortunate combination has led to these unhappy consequences: but if you will allow me a thorough examination of your —’

‘Sir, you are very kind — very; but having just returned from a foreign land, Sir, and wishing, Sir, to say something to this lady, Sir, will you be so good as to call again, Sir; any other time, Sir; but don’t let me detain you *now*, Sir; good evening, Sir; and I politely bowed him out of the room.

‘And now, my dear girl, let us forget this laughable mistake; and, dear, we must be getting ready to be married. We will be married in one month from this very day!’

‘A month! — dear me! So *very* soon! So unexpected!’

‘Soon! Not a bit *too* soon, dearest! So just shut that little ripe mouth, and let me hear no arguments, no objections. I must be back to Havana in all November.’

At this juncture, the mother and sister reëntered; and after explanations, recitals of adventure, statements of future arrangements, and obtaining the old lady’s consent, they considerably left us to ourselves, and we poured out our souls together, in all the rapture of passionate attachment. Next day I left for New-York, there to purchase my wedding garments, and to transact certain other necessary business.

At the expiration of a week, I again drew near the temple of my idol, secretly hoping that the accursed phrenologist had been extending his examinations in other regions, if any where, during my absence, and feeling beside a great curiosity to find how Clara employed her leisure. So I crept up softly to the house, and again peeped in at the fatal window. The phrenologist was *not* there— would to Heaven that he had been! — but a person somewhat older, and a great deal larger, with spectacles on nose, and a most diabolical smirk of total depravity. *She* was seated in the old-fashioned easy chair, leaning back, while her eyes were closed, as if in conscious shame at her degraded situation; and *he* was standing over her, making motions that almost stifled me with mortification and rage. He seemed to be rubbing his dirty digits up and down over her soft velvet cheeks; those cheeks I had so often kissed; cheeks that now blushed with guilty passion! Anon, the rascal passed his hands over her full, heaving bosom. Yet I had resolution enough to await the result. The scoundrel kneeled — ay, *kneeled* to her! — and passed his hands up and down each side, even to her very feet! How my blood tingled! ‘Yet,’ thought I, ‘I will wait! It *may* be, after all, some other new-fangled notion, started during my absence. I must not again make a fool of myself too suddenly. She may be asleep, and the fellow takes this opportunity to insult her and me. But no; her sister is there, and smiles complacently, as if in mockery of my disgrace!’

Soon this fellow rose, and whispered in Clara’s ear. She replied aloud: ‘O how rejoiced I am at your return, dearest! My heart is all your own!’

A single moment’s reflection would have convinced me that she supposed herself addressing me; but, blinded by what I had seen, and the agony I had felt, I could appreciate nothing save my own dishonor; and jumping in at the window, I rushed upon the villain, and dealt him a thwack that sent him reeling to the wall. He recovered, however, immediately, and returned the compliment with great vigor. Finding we both might expect some severe sparring, before we had finished, we placed ourselves in the attitude of experienced pugilists, while our eyes glared like the eyes of hungry wolves.

Clara and her sister advanced to the rescue, and caught my arms, crying out, the while, at the top of their voices: ‘Animal Magnetism! Animal Magnetism! It was nothing but Animal Magnetism!’

‘Ay, ay,’ I replied, ‘I saw it was!’ at the same time shaking them off, and redoubling my efforts; ‘there was quite too much of animal attraction to suit me; but wait till I spoil your magnet, and then you, madam, may go to —’

‘Here,’ as Yellowplush¹³ says, ‘I recollect I was obliged to stop;’ for at this moment I received a blow under the left leg, which laid me prostrate and senseless.

When I recovered, I found myself upon the sofa, and Clara’s sister bathing my temples.

¹² Possibly a dig on the personal visits phrenologists performed to make easy money.

¹³ *The Memoirs of Mr. Charles J. Yellowplush*, written by William Thackeray, author of *Vanity Fair*, under the pseudonym of Charles James Yellowpush (Trollope).

‘How! — what!’ I exclaimed: ‘Ah! I remember! Where is Clara?’

‘She left the room but now, declaring she had done with you for ever.’

‘Glad of it! Have the kindness to call her in to receive my farewell.’

Presently she entered, whom I commenced a tirade upon her fickleness and faithlessness, etc., which only ended when I was out of breath. She listened calmly till I had done, when she replied with freezing coldness and hauteur:

‘Mr. Scrapps! You have spared me the pain I might have felt in bidding you farewell for ever. This is not the first time your absurd jealousy has brought you into a situation the most ridiculous. You will doubtless ere long learn, Sir, that the science of Animal Magnetism is an exalted and innocent one; quite as much so, Sir, as that of Phrenology; and that a woman may submit to the process from pure love of knowledge, without compromising her dignity, her modesty, or her honor!’ And so saying, she turned her back upon me, and was stalking out of the room with great dignity.

Bitter remorse overwhelmed me. ‘Stay! stay!’ I cried; ‘I entreat, I implore! Pardon, pardon my ignorance!’

‘No, Sir; I am well satisfied, from the frequent manifestations of your jealousy and violent disposition, that we never could be happy together. I should be as jealous as yourself; and our life would be one scene of discord and rude commotion. And, Sir— however reluctantly— I must not bid you an unequivocal and eternal farewell!’

I lost that girl, merely because I was ignorant of the extent to which modern science had been carried; because I had not then learned, that undue familiarity with the female sex might be extenuated, by the forced ‘march of the age.’



EDITOR'S NOTE

“Phrenology and Animal Magnetism” was published in 1840, around the time when two new ‘theories’ in science had become popular in America: phrenology and animal magnetism. The better-known pseudoscience, phrenology, was introduced to America in 1832 by Dr. Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, a student of the pseudoscience’s creator, Dr. Franz-Josef Gall. Very shortly afterwards, phrenology became a popular subject in America, particularly in the New England area, where Spurzheim had originally introduced it. The popularity of phrenology in the general public made for a good opportunity to make money; phrenologists began giving private visits to households for personal readings, as Scrapps witnesses and is shocked by in the story (Dean). Despite the popularity of the science, there were skeptics, and periodicals from the Antebellum period were occasionally written in defense of phrenology (Combe).

Animal magnetism is a less well-known pseudoscience that, like phrenology, had become popular in Antebellum America. The pseudoscience was developed in 1779 by a man named Franz Anton Mesmer, though it did not become popular until much later (Crabtree). The science was widely contested— one article suggests that this was due to Mesmer’s overly theatric approach to curing people— and was not well regarded until after his death in 1815. One aspect of the practice was hypnosis, which is likely what Scrapps witnesses when he sees Clara, who seems to be asleep, receiving the attentions of the second doctor. Modern day hypnosis originated and developed from animal magnetism.

In addition to the two ‘sciences’ being explored, the narrator also drops quotations from popular works of the time period through out the story. A few of these references are from texts that are now obscure and widely unknown. Most of the quotes are relevant to whatever situation Scrapps has gotten himself into.

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