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Written for The Observer. The Death of the Old Year. BY LENORE. I am all alone in my chamber. Alone in a chamber of death. For the dear old Year is dying; I feel his last cold lips upon my forehead; I feel his cold hands upon my face; I hear the beeping of his wings; That calls him away to the tomb. How softly, though swiftly, the moments of his life are passing away; How fast the shadows of the night are falling; On the coming New Year's day; But, all will be forgotten; In the years that will roll around; With we hear his old name spoken; And not a mortal ever will speak.

WITCHES AND WIZARDS. MIDDLE-AGE SPIRITUALISM. The Superstition of the Predecessors. Some of the Folly of Five Centuries Ago. Popular Science Monthly. The doctrine of human intercourse with invisible beings of spirit, as old as superstition, and has its fashions; or, rather, it takes on different phases according to the degrees of ignorance and stupidity that characterize society. It was one thing in Greece and Rome, and a very different thing in the middle ages. In the former there was a mythologic machinery of gods and goddesses, who meddled actively with terrestrial affairs, both in peace and war. This was the dignified spiritualism of the middle ages, which continued to form the cornerstone of a "college education."

Science has worked a great change in relation to this subject. It has drawn the teeth of medieval ghostology. Though it has not been able to banish spirits, it has greatly transformed and subdued it, so that it is no longer the scourge and curse of society that it was in the pre-scientific ages. We are apt to forget what we owe to science in this respect, and the horrors that modern society has escaped by getting rid of the grosser and more malignant forms of belief in ghostly superstitious agents and diabolic agency. But fully to appreciate our advantages it is necessary, once in a while, to turn back and contemplate the condition of things in the ages of ignorance, when men were given over to the terrors of vicious and cruel superstitions. An admirable book has been lately published, which presents a vivid picture of the general state of mind and society a few centuries ago in Western Europe, resulting from the current belief in supernatural agencies, and we propose to call a few statements from its pages in illustration of the subject.

The author first finds the theological root of his subject. During the middle ages, it was held by the people that the world was spiritual, that it came from a spiritual source—from God—and was communicated to the earth by spiritual agents or angels. No inevitable causation was held to exist between the material and the spiritual, and the precepts in accordance with which the angels executed the will of God. Sometimes he suspended their agency, acting everywhere himself, or he delegated his power, and when their operations were known as miracles. Hence a knowledge of nature was at this time chiefly a knowledge of the angels, Lucifer, the highest of these angels, rebelled against God. The consequence was the overthrow of the rebels and his followers; but God, calm in the consciousness of his omnipotence, determined that Lucifer, now changed by his rebellion into a spirit wholly evil, should enjoy liberty of action within certain limits. The activity of the fallen spirit consists henceforth in incessant warfare against God. Man is tempted and falls. The earth is divided into antagonistic kingdoms, those of good and evil. Over the one reigns God and his angels of light, over the other the devil and his minions. Such was the dualistic conception of the middle ages, and to it may be traced the magic of the Church, the astrology, alchemy, and sorcery of the learned, as well as the diabolical forms of witchcraft believed in by the common people.

man—sorcerers and wizards—the power to destroy the fields, the vineyards, and dwellings of man by rain, hail, and lightning; as it to be wondered at if the Church, which is man's protection against the devil, and whose special calling it is to fight him, should in this sphere also be his counterpoise, and should seek, from the treasury of its living power, means adequate to frustrate his atmospheric mischief? To these means belong the church-bells, provided they have been duly consecrated and baptized. The aspiring sorcerers, around which cluster the low dwellings of men, are to be likened, when the bells in them are ringing, to the ben spreading its protecting wings over its chickens; for the tones of the consecrated metal repel the demons and avert storm and lightning.

The most scrupulous attention to legal forms was given to the frequently recurring processes against May-bugs, grasshoppers, worms, and other noxious vermin, for any neglect of these forms was supposed to deprive a judgment of its magical power. The question whether they were subject to spiritual or legal tribunal was much agitated, but without being definitely settled. A civil prosecution of the field rats in the Tyrol, 1519-20, proves that this respect, and the times such suits were decided by secular tribunals.

Nothing was too absurd, nothing too superstitious, for the credulity of this age was so various and complete that, if one explanation did not serve the purpose of the Church, another could usually be found. One question, however, did not remain unanswered, namely: How are the divine miracles to be distinguished from the infernal ones? Attempts of the acutest scholastics failed to establish a rule of definite separation; for the two kinds of miracles were revealed under identical forms, and Satan could transform himself to an angel of light. The grossest doctrines, received the sanction of the Church, and thus was laid the foundation of that labyrinth of superstitions among the people, the darkness of which humanity groped for a thousand years. If the miracles worked by the apostles of the Church had their source in divine agencies, then those performed by its opponents must have been indicated by the devil. The white magic stood opposed to the black, and by the idea of a conscious league between man and the devil became a well-established dogma.

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