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### Seven Months of Spirits, 1890-11

Joseph Peace Hazard

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#### Recommended Citation

Hazard, Joseph Peace, "Seven Months of Spirits, 1890-11" (1890). *Joseph Peace Hazard Papers*. 12.  
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Stone Sunday Herald  
Nov 28, 1890

## TWENTY-EIGHT PAGES

### SEVEN MONTHS OF SPIRITS.

#### Remarkable Things Recalled by the Death of Prof. Phelps.

**His Father's House in Stratford, Ct.,  
the Scene of Wonderful and Startling  
Phenomena Forty Years Ago—  
Nobody Doubts the Authenticity of  
the Facts as Recorded.**

The recent death of Prof. Austin Phelps of Andover brings to mind the noted pamphlet which he many years ago wrote upon modern spiritualism, and the facts which led to his interest in the matter.

Those of us who are old enough, well remember the great excitement that was caused by transactions of a remarkable character which were continually taking place at the residence of Dr. Eliakim Phelps, a Congregationalist minister settled over an Orthodox church at Stratford, Ct., and the father of the Andover professor. These occurrences were witnessed by large numbers of people, who visited the house from all over the state, and, indeed, from many places far beyond the borders of Connecticut.

There was never the slightest reason to suppose that Dr. Phelps was himself other than perfectly honest in the matter, both in his relations of what took place, and in his endeavor to trace the phenomena to a legitimate cause.

Mrs. Phelps was a widow, with children, at the time of her marriage to the Stratford clergyman, and when these remarkable and, to him especially, annoying manifestations began to demonstrate themselves, he was disposed to attribute them to mischievous tricks on the part of the members of her first family. Having become convinced that this was not the case, and the matter having excited public curiosity to an extent that was very annoying, he challenged the strictest investigation, even going so far as to offer his house and all that it contained—whether this included the children upon whom suspicion had at first rested, I do not remember—to any one who should discover a natural law for the disturbances of the household peace.

These phenomena continued during a period of seven months, and, although properly to the value of several thousand dollars was injured or destroyed by the turbulent demonstrations of an unknown and undiscoverable power, here did not appear to be, at any time, an attempt to do violence to the person of any member of the household or of any one who visited the family for the purpose of investigation.

Bells were rung about the house, even in rooms and other places where no bells were hung, and the servants were continually disturbed and frightened while in the performance of their domestic duties.

Silver spoons were bent double in the presence of various witnesses, and window panes were broken without visible agency. The spirits seemed to have some reverence for the plate which was not shared by the glass; for, in every instance in which a piece of silver was put out of shape and rendered useless, it was afterward restored to its original form; but I do not remember that a pane of glass was ever replaced except at

#### The Hands of a Corporeal Glazier.

Seventy-one panes of glass were broken, and of these the owner stated that he had himself been a witness to the destruction of more than 30, and that he had seen numberless articles in motion when there was exerted no physical power by which the motion could be produced.

He further stated the agents by which, in many instances, the glass of the windows had been broken.

"I have seen," he is made to say in a letter written by Dr. Hayward to the Transcript in February, 1881, "I have seen objects such as tumblers, candlesticks, snuffers, etc., which but a few moments before I knew to be at rest, fly against the glass and dash it in pieces, when it was utterly impossible from the direction in which they moved that any visible power could have caused the motion. As to the reality of these facts, they can be proved by testimony a hundred-fold greater than is ordinarily required in our courts of justice in cases of life and death."

Some of the manifestations took very strange forms. Trunks and wardrobes would be mysteriously emptied of their contents, which would afterward be found in various attitudes in different parts of the house. Different articles of clothing would be brought together and arranged so as to make it appear that human bodies were encompassed by them, and thus were found in different rooms, the contents of the chests representing effigies of human beings; but in no instance did it appear that the clothes themselves were destroyed or in any way injured.

The spirits were not quite so tender in their dealings with them as with the spoons—they did not restore them to their original shapes and places. The servants and the members of the family had to fold them up again and return them to the places from which they had been removed.

On one occasion, it was said; that when the whole family was at church and the house seemingly locked, the front door was opened. Upon returning and finding things in this condition, they naturally concluded that a robbery had been committed; but the strictest search failed to find that any article had been removed from the house.

They had, however, been greatly disturbed. Furniture was thrown about in disorder; chairs were found upon the beds, and tables with their legs in the air. The fire irons were scattered about, some in rooms and places where they did not belong. A teakettle which had been left in the dining room was found behind some boxes in the cellar.

In one bedroom a sheet had been taken from beneath the blankets and placed outside the door, and up in this were arranged a pair of stockings and a nightdress, with arms crossed upon the breast, representing

sion, as to hurl the Bible at the head of the venerable clergyman as he was engaged in the pious exercise. It does not appear that any actual harm was ever done in these attempts to show their displeasure at his proceedings, though in several instances the sacred book would brush his whiskers in its hurried flight through the air.

This was taken as additional evidence that the spirits engaged were followers of his satanic majesty, and they were therefore questioned as to their estimate of the truths contained in the volume.

One of them is said to have replied that "there was a good deal of truth in it, and also considerable that was nonsense."

From other questions, to which answers were received by means of raps, it was ascertained that their disrespectful treatment of the book did not arise from any opinion of the contents, but that they had no superstitious reverence for the material components of the book, whatever might be the nature of the lessons and doctrines which it taught.

Nothing whatever had any effect in imposing even a temporary check upon

**The Daily and Nightly Performances** of the undesirable guests. The young divinity student, fresh from the halls of theological lore of the most brimstonian kind, was set at defiance and utterly baffled, as had been all others engaged in the investigation. As they began without notice or apparent cause, so they ceased.

No means that were attempted had any effect whatever in mitigating the unpleasantness. The only effect that was ever experienced from attempts to obtain a cessation of the phenomena was an irritation, which, for the time being, was manifested by an increase both in number and in force of the demonstrations.

After about seven months the manifestations ceased, and the family was again left in peace.

One peculiar feature of the matter was that some of the spirits seemed to be personally attached to the son Henry. When he left home they would accompany him, and manifest themselves in various ways to him. On these occasions some of the power seemed to be drawn from the house, and the demonstrations became less violent. When, for instance, this boy was at school he would on occasion be pinched and pricked with pins, his clothes and his books would be torn, and knockings would be heard about his room.

Once, while taking a walk in the neighborhood of the school, his cap was lifted from his head, without any visible agent or apparent cause, and thrown to the ground. Almost at the same instant some one fired off a gun which was pointed toward him, and, as he stooped to pick up his cap, the bullet passed over him and buried itself in a fence by his side.

In relating this event to his father, he said that he had been informed by means of raps that the removal of his cap was a measure taken by a friendly spirit for the preservation of his life.

As was very natural the proprietors of the school in which he had been placed, declined to allow him to remain with them, unless he could dismiss his invisible and undesirable companions. As, however, he had no power over them, he was unable to comply with this reasonable requirement, and he was taken away.

He returned with his father to Stratford, and from this time the power appeared to wane. The disturbances began to subside, and about the middle of December, 1851, they ceased altogether.

Several accounts were given of these weird manifestations during the life of Dr. Phelps, but he said, on several occasions, that no verbal description could do justice to the scenes that were enacted in his house during the months that these manifestations lasted. An idea of the stupendous force that was at times evinced could not be imparted in words, because it was beyond anything with which we are familiar.

#### In Our Study of Natural Law.

After the death of the venerable divine, his son, who, at this time, was one of the professors at Andover, wrote to the Congregationalist a series of articles entitled "A Pastor of the Last Generation."

In these were contained a statement of the case, in which, as I have mentioned, he attributed the whole thing to demoniac agency. He further maintained that his father, long before his death, had renounced all interest in spiritual phenomena. It is probable that in this he was wrong. I do not think that he would be guilty of a wilful misrepresentation, but in his ardor to vindicate his strong religious views, he was probably led unconsciously into a somewhat stronger coloring of the facts than the circumstances warranted.

At any rate some of the friends and personal acquaintances of the reverend gentleman have taken exception to the son's statements regarding this matter. It must be remembered, however, that these were all firm believers in, and advocates of, the spiritualistic theory, and were thereby, perhaps, as strongly biased in favor of the views of their school as I have supposed that the Andover professor was in those of his.

I have already mentioned a letter which Dr. Hayward wrote upon this subject to the Boston Evening Transcript in February, 1881. In this he makes the following reference to the articles in the Congregationalist:

"In part III., Prof. Austin Phelps speaks of his father's belief in Spiritualism in a manner that does not seem to me to convey the views of that gentleman correctly, and having had myself some facts from Dr. Phelps, the father, as late as 1875, which facts Prof. Phelps, the son, had no means of knowing, I believe that they should be



**A Corpse Lying Upon the Sheet,**  
while upon the wall of the room were found undecipherable characters, said by some to belong to a spiritual language which certain mediums could interpret. The interpretation was, however, so far as I can remember, never attempted.

Next day the sheet was found upon the floor of the room, with a wash-stand lying full length upon it. The wash-bowl and pitcher had been removed, and were found standing, one on each side of the wash-stand, while the articles used to represent the dead body of the day before were found stuffed into the bowl and pitcher.

The spirits seemed to entertain a very strong affection for this nightgown and these stockings, for however carefully they might be looked away in a trunk and the key concealed, they were day after day found in various parts of the house, while the key remained in its hiding place and the trunk was always found locked as it had been left.

Day after day these things went on until at length Dr. Phelps decided to call in the aid of some reverend friends to help him unfold the mystery. But their presence seemed to make no difference. Knives and forks were thrown about; spoons were bent and again straightened, and furniture was endowed with vital energy as before. Lamps were taken from the tables and placed upon the floor, and upon their chimneys were suspended hats and caps; nails, pieces of iron, keys and other things were placed upon the mantel; books were opened and screams were heard from empty rooms, and an iron stand containing the fire-irons jumped from its place to the middle of the room, and began pounding the floor with a violence sufficient to jar the whole house.

All these things took place in the presence of members of the family and visitors, and no clue could be found to the phenomena.

It was, however, taken for granted that some spiritual agency must be at work to produce the marvels that were being witnessed day after day, and it was further concluded that no good self-respecting spirits would be guilty of transactions so trivial and unmeaning in their character.

Science did not seem able to render any aid in the investigation, and it was therefore regarded as a settled fact that everything that had transpired must be the work of the devil.

This appeared to be supported by letters which the spirits were said to have written at the request of diverse individuals. One of those was signed "H. P. Devil." But there soon afterward appeared one with the subscription, "Your faithful brother in Christ, R. A."

No wonder Prof. Phelps writes to the Congregationalist: "I don't hold to the hypothesis that Spiritualism is of satanic origin, without qualification \* \* \* It is not wise to find more of

**The Demoniacal in the Universe**  
than we are compelled to find. But so long as science gives us nothing better, my mind falls back upon the Biblical demonology, as being the most probable thing we have within the range of human knowledge, in explanation of the mystery."

The son Austin, who had just commenced his theological studies at Andover, was now called home to assist in the investigation. He seems to have accepted at once the theory that the whole disturbance was the work of Satan and his imps, and he determined to call in superior aid and put a stop to the unruly demonstrations.

It was all, however, of no use. They neither recognized his authority nor paid the slightest respect to the wishes of his venerable father. Prayer was resorted to, with unserving faith in the promise that "whatever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Faith was certainly strong, for one morning, after having spent the night in prayer, the aged minister told his daughter, with all confidence, that they would not be troubled any more, a voice having declared to him, in answer to his prayers, that from that time all these demonstrations should cease.

They did not cease, however, but faith did not waver, and prayer was continued. This only seemed to incense the unseen visitants, who even went so far, on more than one occa-

tion, and believing that they should be made public at this time, in order that he (Dr. Phelps) should be put on record correctly, and that Spiritualism may have, openly, the benefit of this good man's privately cherished opinions concerning its truthfulness and use, I desire that you will give these facts publicly in your columns."

He then states the facts and assumes that though Dr. Phelps looked upon the manifestations as a "visitation from God," as stated by the professor, he did not regard them as an affliction, but considered rather that he had been blessed by them, inasmuch as they had been the means of convincing him of the unity of the material and the spiritual worlds.

He maintains that he had it from the reverend doctor himself, that he regarded the destruction of his property as a small matter compared with the benefits that he had received from the invisible powers, and that his spirit relatives were in communication with him, keeping him continually apprised of coming events, "sometimes years before they took place."

The son, however, maintained his position to the last, unshaken by the rejoinders to his statement, and now that he, too, has passed away, I suppose that the matter will have to rest where it at present stands.

Of the authenticity of the facts as recorded, there has never seemed any reason for doubt. Of the laws which operated to produce the phenomena, there will probably be, for a long time, a wide divergence of opinion.

J. S. C.