

Sylvan Horrors

By Elliott O'Donnell

I believe trees have spirits; I believe everything that grows has a spirit, and that such spirits never die, but passing into another state, a state of film and shadow, live on for ever. The phantasms of vegetable life are everywhere, though discernible only to the few of us. Often as I ramble through thoroughfares, crowded with pedestrians and vehicles, and impregnated with steam and smoke and all the impurities arising from over-congested humanity, I have suddenly smelt a different atmosphere, the cold atmosphere of superphysical forest land. I have come to a halt, and leaning in some doorway, gazed in awestruck wonder at the nodding foliage of a leviathan lepidodendron, the phantasm of one of those mammoth lycopods that flourished in the Carboniferous period. I have watched it swaying its shadowy arms backwards and forwards as if keeping time to some ghostly music, and the breeze it has thus created has rustled through my hair, while the sweet scent of its resin has pleasantly tickled my nostrils. I have seen, too, suddenly open before me, dark, gloomy aisles, lined with stupendous pines and carpeted with long, luxuriant grass, gigantic ferns, and other monstrous primeval flora, of a nomenclature wholly unknown to me; I have watched in chilled fascination the black trunks twist and bend and contort, as if under the influence of an uncontrollable fit of laughter, or at the bidding of some psychic cyclone. I have at times stayed my steps when in the throes of the city-pavements; shops and people have been obliterated, and their places taken by occult foliage; immense fungi have blocked out the sun's rays, and under the shelter of their slimy, glistening heads, I have been thrilled to see the wriggling, gliding forms of countless smaller saprophytes. I have felt the cold touch of loathsome toadstools and sniffed the hot, dry dust of the full, ripe puff-ball. On the Thames Embankment, up Chelsea way, I have at twilight beheld wonderful metamorphoses. In company with the shadows of natural objects of the landscape, have silently sprung up giant reeds and bull-rushes. I have felt their icy coldness as, blowing hither and thither in the delirium of their free, untrammelled existence, they have swished across my face. Visions, truly visions, the exquisite fantasies of a vivid imagination. So says the sage. I do not think so; I dispute him *in toto*. These objects I have seen have not been illusions; else, why have I not imagined other things; why, for example, have I not seen rocks walking about and tables coming in at my door? If these phantasms were but tricks of the imagination, then imagination would stop at nothing. But they are not imagination, neither are they the idle fancies of an over-active brain. They are objective—just as much objective as are the smells of recognised physical objects, that those, with keenly sensitive olfactory organs, can detect, and those, with a less sensitive sense of smell, cannot detect; those, with acute hearing, can hear, and those with less acute hearing cannot hear. And yet, people are slow to believe that the seeing of the occult is as much a faculty as is the scenting of smells or the hearing of noises.

I have heard it said that, deep down in coal mines, certain of the workers have seen wondrous sights; that when they have been alone in a drift, they have heard the blowing of the wind and the rustling of leaves, and suddenly found themselves penned in on all sides by the naked trunks of enormous primitive trees, lepidodendrons, sigillarias, ferns, and other plants, that have shone out with phosphorescent grandeur amid the inky blackness of the subterranean ether. Around the feet of the spellbound watchers have sprung up rank blades of Brobdingnagian grass and creepers, out of which have crept, with lurid eyes, prodigious millipedes, cockroaches, white ants,

myriapods and scorpions, whilst added to the moaning and sighing of the trees has been the humming of stone-flies, dragonflies, and locusts. Galleries and shafts have echoed and re-echoed with these noises of the old world, which yet lives, and will continue to live, maybe, to the end of time.

But are the physical trees, the trees that we can all see budding and sprouting in our gardens to-day—are they ever cognisant of the presence of the occult? Can they, like certain—not all—dogs and horses and other animals, detect the proximity of the unknown? Do they tremble and shake with fear at the sight of some psychic vegetation, or are they utterly devoid of any such faculty? Can they see, hear, or smell? Have they any senses at all? And, if they have one sense, have they not others? Aye, there is food for reflection.

Personally, I believe trees have senses—not, of course, in such a high state of development as those of animal life; but, nevertheless, senses. Consequently, I think it quite possible that certain of them, like certain animals, feel the presence of the superphysical. I often stroll in woods. I do not love solitude; I love the trees, and I do not think there is anything in nature, apart from man, I love much more. The oak, the ash, the elm, the poplar, the willow, to me are more than mere names; they are friends, the friends of my boyhood and manhood; companions in my lonely rambles and voluntary banishments; guardians of my siestas; comforters of my tribulations. The gentle fanning of their branches has eased my pain-racked brow and given me much-needed sleep, whilst the chlorophyll of their leaves has acted like balm to my eyelids, inflamed after long hours of study. I have leaned my head against their trunks, and heard, or fancied I have heard, the fantastic murmurings of their peaceful minds. This is what happens in the daytime, when the hot summer sun has turned the meadow-grass a golden brown. But with the twilight comes the change. Phantomland awakes, and mingled with the shadows of the trees and bushes that lazily unroll themselves from trunk and branches are the darkest of shades, that impart to the forest an atmosphere of dreary coldness. Usually I hie away with haste at sunset, but there are occasions when I have dallied longer than I have intended, and only realised my error when it has been too late. I have then, controlled by the irresistible fascination of the woods, waited and watched. I ~vell recollect, for example, being caught in this way in a Hampshire spinney, at that time one of my most frequented haunts. The day had been unusually close and stifling, and the heat, in conjunction with a hard morning's work—for I had written, God only knows how long, without ceasing,—made me frightfully sleepy, and on arriving at my favourite spot beneath a lofty pine, I had slept till, for very shame, my eyelids could keep closed no longer. It was then nine o'clock, and the metamorphosis of sunset had commenced in solemn earnest. The evening was charming, ideal of the heart of summer; the air soft, sweetly scented; the sky unspotted blue. A peaceful hush, broken only by the chiming of some distant church bells, and the faint, the very faint barking of dogs, enveloped everything and instilled in me a false sensation of security. Facing me was a diminutive glade padded with downy grass, transformed into a pale yellow by the lustrous rays of the now encrimsoned sun. Fainter and fainter grew the ruddy glow, until there was nought of it left but a pale pink streak, whose delicate marginal lines still separated the blue of the sky from the quickly superseding grey. A barely perceptible mist gradually cloaked the grass, whilst the gloom amid the foliage on the opposite side of the glade intensified. There was now no sound of bells, no barking of dogs; and silence, a silence tinged with the sadness so characteristic of summer evenings, was everywhere paramount. A sudden rush of icy air made my teeth chatter. I made an effort to stir, to escape ere the grotesque and intangible horrors of the wood could catch me. I ignominiously failed; the soles of my feet froze to the ground. Then I felt

the slender, graceful body of the pine against which I leaned my back, shake and quiver, and my hand—the hand that rested on its bark—grew damp and sticky.

I endeavoured to avert my eyes from the open space confronting them. I failed; and as I gazed, filled with the anticipations of the damned, there suddenly burst into view, with all the frightful vividness associated only with the occult, a tall form—armless, legless—fashioned like the gnarled trunk of a tree—white, startlingly white in places where the bark had worn away, but on the whole a bright, a luridly bright, yellow and black. At first I successfully resisted a powerful impulse to raise my eyes to its face; but as I only too well knew would be the case, I was obliged to look at last, and, as I anticipated, I underwent a most violent shock. in lieu of a face I saw a raw and shining polyp, a mass of waving, tossing, pulpy radicles from whose centre shone two long, obliquely set, pale eyes, ablaze with devilry and malice. The thing, after the nature of all terrifying phantasms, was endowed with hypnotic properties, and directly its eyes rested on me I became numb; my muscles slept while my faculties remained awake, acutely awake.

Inch by inch the thing approached me; its stealthy, gliding motion reminding me of a tiger subtly and relentlessly stalking its prey. It came up to me, and the catalepsy which had held me rigidly upright departed. I fell on the ground for protection, and, as the great unknown curved its ghastly figure over me and touched my throat and forehead with its fulsome tentacles, I was overcome with nervous tremors; a deadly pain griped my entrails, and, convulsed with agony, I rolled over on my face, furiously clawing the bracken. In this condition I continued for probably one or even two minutes, though to me it seemed very much longer. My sufferings terminated with the loud report of firearms, and slowly picking myself up, I found that the apparition had vanished, and that standing some twenty or so paces from me was a boy with a gun. I recognised him at once as the son of my neighbour, the village schoolmaster; but not wishing to tarry there any longer, I hurriedly wished him good night, and leaving the copse a great deal more quickly than I had entered it, I hastened home.

What had I seen? A phantasm of some dead tree? some peculiar species of spirit (I have elsewhere termed a vagrarian), attracted thither by the loneliness of the locality? some vicious, evil phantasm? or a vice-elemental, whose presence there would be due to some particularly wicked crime or series of crimes perpetrated on or near the spot? I cannot say. It might well have

been either one of them, or something quite different. I am quite sure, however, that most woods are haunted, and that he who sees spirit phenomena can be pretty certain of seeing them there. Again and again, as I have been passing after nightfall, through tree-girt glen, forest, or avenue, I have seen all sorts of curious forms and shapes move noiselessly from tree to tree. Hooded figures, with death's-heads, have glided surreptitiously through moon-kissed spaces; icy hands have touched me on the shoulders; whilst, pacing alongside me, I have oft-times heard footsteps, light and heavy, though I have seen nothing.

Miss Frances Sinclair tells me that, once, when walking along a country lane, she espied some odd-looking object lying on the ground at the foot of a tree. She approached it, and found to her horror it was a human finger swimming in a pool of blood. She turned round to attract the attention of her friends, and when she looked again the finger had vanished. On this very spot, she was subsequently informed, the murder of a child had taken place.

Trees are, I believe, frequently haunted by spirits that suggest crime. I have no doubt that numbers of people have hanged themselves on the same tree in just the same way as countless people have committed suicide by jumping over certain bridges. Why? For the very simple reason that hovering about these bridges are influences antagonistic to the human race, spirits whose chief and fiendish delight is to breathe thoughts of self-destruction into the brains of

passers-by. I once heard of a man, medically pronounced sane, who frequently complained that he was tormented by a voice whispering in his ear, "Shoot yourself! Shoot yourself!"—advice which he eventually found himself bound to follow. And of a man, likewise stated to be sane, who journeyed a considerable distance to jump over a notorious bridge because he was for ever being haunted by the phantasm of a weirdly beautiful woman who told him to do so. If bridges have their attendant sinister spirits, so undoubtedly have trees—spirits ever anxious to entice within the magnetic circle of their baleful influence anyone of the human race.

Many tales of trees being haunted in this way have come to me from India and the East. I quoted one in my *Ghostly Phenomena*, and the following was told me by a lady whom I met recently, when on a visit to my wife's relations in the Midlands.

"I was riding with my husband along a very lonely mountain road in Assam," my informant began, "when I suddenly discovered I had lost my silk scarf, which happened to be a rather costly one. I had a pretty shrewd idea whereabouts I might have dropped it, and, on mentioning the fact to my husband, he at once turned and rode back to look for it. Being armed, I did not feel at all nervous at being left alone, especially as there had been no cases, for many years, of assault on a European in our district; but, seeing a big mango tree standing quite by itself a few yards from the road, I turned my horse's head with the intention of riding up to it and picking some of its fruit. To my great annoyance, however, the beast refused to go; moreover, although at all times most docile, it now reared, and kicked, and showed unmistakable signs of fright.

"I speedily came to the conclusion that my horse was aware of the presence of something—probably a wild beast—I could not see myself, and I at once dismounted, and tethering the shivering animal to a boulder, advanced cautiously, revolver in hand, to the tree. At every step I took, I expected the spring of a panther or some other beast of prey; but, being afraid of nothing but a tiger—and there were none, thank God! in that immediate neighbourhood—I went boldly on. On nearing the tree, I noticed that the soil under the branches was singularly dark, as if scorched and blackened by a fire, and that the atmosphere around it had suddenly grown very cold and dreary. To my disappointment there was no fruit, and I was coming away in disgust, when I caught sight of a queer-looking thing just over my head and half-hidden by the foliage. I parted the leaves asunder with my whip and looked up at it. My blood froze.

"The thing was nothing human. It had a long, grey, nude body, shaped like that of a man, only with abnormally long arms and legs, and very long and crooked fingers. Its head was flat and rectangular, without any features saving a pair of long and heavy lidded, light eyes, that were fixed on mine with an expression of hellish glee. For some seconds I was too appalled even to think, and then the most mad desire to kill myself surged through me. I raised my revolver, and was in the act of placing it to my forehead, when a loud shout from behind startled me. It was my husband. He had found my scarf, and, hurrying back, had arrived just in time to see me raise the revolver—strange to relate—at him! In a few words I explained to him what had happened, and we examined the tree together. But there were no signs of the terrifying phenomenon—it had completely vanished. Though my husband declared that I must have been dreaming, I noticed he looked singularly grave, and, on our return home, he begged me never to go near the tree again. I asked him if he had had any idea it was haunted, and he said: 'No! but I know there are such trees. Ask Dingan.' Dingan was one of our native servants—the one we respected most, as he had been with my husband for nearly twelve years—ever since, in fact, he had settled in Assam. 'The mango tree, mem-sahib!' Dingan exclaimed, when I approached him on the subject, 'the mango tree on the Yuka Road, just before you get to the bridge over the river? I know it well. We call it "the devil tree," mem-sahib. No other tree will grow near it. There is a spirit peculiar

to certain trees that lives in its branches, and persuades anyone who ventures within a few feet of it, either to kill themselves, or to kill other people. I have seen three men from this village alone, hanging to its accursed branches; they were left there till the ropes rotted and the jackals bore them off to the jungles. Three suicides have I seen, and three murders—two were women, strangers in these parts, and they were both lying within the shadow of the mango's trunk, with the backs of their heads broken in like eggs! It is a thrice-accursed tree, mem-sahib.' Needless to say, I agreed with Dingan, and in future gave the mango a wide berth."

Vagrarians, tree devils (a type of vice elemental), and phantasms of dead trees are some of the occult horrors that haunt woods, and, in fact, the whole country-side! Added to these, there are the fauns and satyrs, those queer creatures, undoubtedly vagrarians, half-man and half-goat, that are accredited by the ancients with much merry-making, and grievous to add, much lasciviousness. Of these spirits there is mention in Scripture, namely, Isaiah xiii. 21, where we read: "And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there"; and in Baddeley's *Historical Meditations*, published about the beginning of the seventeenth century, there is a description by Plutarch, of a satyr captured by Sulla, when the latter was on his way from Dyrrachium to Brundisium. The creature, which appears to have been very material, was found asleep in a park near Apollonia. On being led into the presence of Sulla, it commenced speaking in a harsh voice that was an odd mixture of the neighing of a horse and the crying of a goat. As neither Sulla nor any of his followers could understand in the slightest degree, what the monstrosity meant, they let it go, nor is there any further reference to it.

Now, granted that this account is not "faked," and that such a beast actually did exist, it would naturally suggest to one that vagrarians, pixies, and other grotesque forms of phantasms are, after all, only the spirits of similar types of material life, and that, in all probability, the earth, contemporary with prehistoric, and even later-day man, fairly swarmed with such creatures. However, this, like everything else connected with these early times, is merely a matter of speculation. Another explanatory theory is, that possibly superphysical phenomena were much more common formerly than now, and that the various types of sub-human and sub-animal apparitions (which were then constantly seen by the many, but which are now only visible to the few) have been handed down to us in the likeness of satyrs and fauns. Anyhow, I think they may be rightly classified in the category of vagrarians. The association of spirits with trees is pretty nearly universal. In the fairy tales of youth we have frequent allusions to them. In the Caucasus, where the population is not of Slavonic origin, we have innumerable stories of sacred trees, and in each of these stories the main idea is the same—namely, that a human life is dependent on the existence of a tree. In Slavonic mythology, plants as well as trees are magnets for spirits, and in the sweet-scented pinewoods, in the dark, lonely pinewoods, dwell "psipolnitza," or female goblins, who plague the harvesters; and "lieshi," or forest male demons, closely allied to satyrs. In Iceland there was a pretty superstition to the effect that, when an innocent person was put to death, a sorb or mountain ash would spring over their grave. In Teutonic mythology the sorb is supposed to take the form of a lily or white rose, and, on the chairs of those about to die, one or other of these flowers is placed by unseen hands. White lilies, too, are emblematic of innocence, and have a knack of mysteriously shooting up on the graves of those who have been unjustly executed. Surely this would be the work of a spirit, as, also, would be the action of the Eglantine, which is so charmingly illustrated in the touching story of Tristram and Yseult. Tradition says that from the grave of Tristram there sprang an eglantine which twined about the statue of the lovely Yseult, and, despite the fact of its being thrice cut down, grew again, ever embracing the same fair image. Among the North American Indians there was, and maybe still is, a general

belief that the spirits of those who died, naturally reverted to trees—to the great pines of the mountain forests—where they dwelt for ever amid the branches. The Indians believed also that the spirits of certain trees walked at night in the guise of beautiful women. Lucky Indians! Would that my experience of the forest phantasms had been half so entrancing. The modern Greeks, Australian bushmen, and natives of the East Indies, like myself, only see the ugly side of the superphysical, for the spirits that haunt their vegetation are irredeemably ugly, horribly terrifying, and fiendishly vindictive.

The idea that the dead often passed into trees is well illustrated in the classics. For example, Æneas, in his wanderings, strikes a tree, and is half-frightened out of his wits by a great spurt of blood. A hollow voice, typical of phantasms and apparently proceeding from somewhere within the trunk, then begs him to desist, going on to explain that the tree is not an ordinary tree but the metamorphosed soul of an unlucky wight called Polydorus, (he must have been unlucky, if only to have had such a name). Needless to say, Æneas, who was strictly a gentleman in spite of his aristocratic pretensions, at once dropped his axe and showed his sympathy for the poor tree-bound spirit in an abundant flow of tears, which must have satisfied, even, Polydorus. There is a very similar story in Swedish folk-lore. A voice in a tree addressed a man, who was about to cut it down, with these words, "Friend, hew me not!" But the man on this occasion was not a gentleman, and, instead of complying with the modest request, only plied his axe the more heartily. To his horror—a just punishment for his barbarity—there was a most frightful groan of agony, and out from the hole he had made in the trunk, rushed a fountain of blood, real human blood. What happened then I cannot say, but I imagine that the woodcutter, stricken with remorse, whipped up his bandana from the ground, and did all that lay in his power—though he had not had the advantages of lessons in first aid—to stop the bleeding. One cannot help being amused at these marvellous stories, but, after all, they are not very much more wonderful than many of one's own ghostly experiences. At any rate, they serve to illustrate how widespread and venerable is the belief that trees—trees, perhaps, in particular—are closely associated with the occult.

Pixies! What are pixies? That they are not the dear, delightful, quaint little people Shakespeare so inimitably portrays in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is, I fear, only too readily acknowledged. I am told that they may be seen even now, and I know those who say that they have seen them, but that they are the mere shadows of those dainty creatures that used to gambol in the moonshine and help the poor and weary in their household work. The present-day pixies, whom I am loath to imagine are the descendants of the old-world pixies—though, of course, on the other hand, they may be merely degenerates, a much more pleasant alternative—are I think still to be occasionally encountered in lonely, isolated districts; such, for instance, as the mountains in the West of Ireland, the Hebrides, and other more or less desolate islands, and on one or two of the Cornish hills and moors.

Like most phantasms, the modern pixies are silent and elusive. They appear and disappear with equal abruptness, contenting themselves with merely gliding along noiselessly from rock to rock, or from bush to bush. Dainty they are not, pretty they are not, and in stature only do they resemble the pixie of fairy tales; otherwise they are true vagrarians, grotesque and often harrowing.

In my *Ghostly Phenomena* I have given one or two accounts of their appearance in the West of England, but the nearest approach to pixies that I have myself seen, were phantasms that appeared to me, in 1903, on the Wicklow Hills, near Bray. I was out for a walk on the afternoon of Thursday, May 18; the weather was oppressive, and the grey, lowering sky threatened rain, a

fact which accounted for the paucity of pedestrians. Leaving my temporary headquarters, at Bray, at half-past one, I arrived at a pretty village close to the foot of the hills and immediately began the ascent. Selecting a deviating path that wound its way up gradually, I, at length, reached the summit of the ridge.

On and on I strolled, careless of time and distance, until a sudden dryness in my throat reminded me it must be about the hour at which I generally took tea. I turned round and began to retrace my steps homeward. The place was absolutely deserted; not a sign of a human being or animal anywhere, and the deepest silence. I had come to the brink of a slight elevation when, to my astonishment, I saw in the tiny plateau beneath, three extraordinary shapes. Standing not more than two feet from the ground, they had the most perfectly proportioned bodies of human beings, but monstrous heads; their faces had a leadish blue hue, like that of corpses; their eyes were wide open and glassy. They glided along slowly and solemnly in Indian file, their grey, straggling hair and loose white clothes rustling in the breeze; and on arriving at a slight depression in the ground, they sank and sank, until they entirely disappeared from view. I then descended from my perch, and made a thorough examination of the spot where they had vanished. It was firm, hard, caked soil, without hole or cover, or anything in which they could possibly have hidden. I was somewhat shocked, as indeed I always am after an encounter with the superphysical, but not so much shocked as I should have been had the phantasms been bigger. I visited the same spot subsequently, but did not see another manifestation.

To revert to trees—fascinating, haunting trees. Much credulity was at one time attached to the tradition that the tree on which Jesus Christ was crucified was an aspen, and that, thenceforth, all aspens were afflicted with a peculiar shivering. Botanists, scientists, and matter-of-fact people of all sorts pooh-pooh this legend, as, indeed, many people nowadays pooh-pooh the very existence of Christ. But something—you may call it intuition—I prefer to call it my Guardian Spirit—bids me believe both; and I do believe as much in the tradition of the aspen as in the existence of Christ. Moreover, this intuition or influence—the work of my Guardian Spirit—whether dealing with things psychical, psychological, or physical has never yet failed me. If it warns me of the presence of a phantasm, I subsequently experience some kind or other of spiritual phenomenon; if it bids me beware of a person, I am invariably brought to discover later on that that person's intentions have been antagonistic to me; and if it causes me to deter from travelling by a certain route, or on a certain day, I always discover afterwards that it was a very fortunate thing for me that I abided by its warning. That is why I attach great importance to the voice of my Guardian Spirit; and that is why, when it tells me that, despite the many obvious discrepancies and absurdities in the Scriptures, despite the character of the Old Testament God—who repels rather than attracts me—despite all this, there was a Jesus Christ who actually was a great and benevolent Spirit, temporarily incarnate, and who really did suffer on the Cross in the manner described in subsequent MSS.,—I believe it all implicitly. I back the still, small voice of my Guardian Spirit against all the arguments scepticism can produce.

Very good, then. I believe in the existence and spirituality of Jesus Christ because of the biddings of my Guardian Spirit, and, for the very same reason, I attach credence to the tradition of the quivering of the aspen. The sceptic accounts for the shaking of this tree by showing that it is due to a peculiar formation in the structure of the aspen's foliage. This may be so, but that peculiarity of structure was created immediately after Christ's crucifixion, and was created as a memento, for all time, of one of the most unpardonable murders on record.

There is something especially weird, too, in the ash; something that suggests to my mind that it is particularly susceptible to superphysical influences. I have often sat and listened to its groan-

ing, and more than once, at twilight, perceived the filmy outline of some fantastic figure writhed around its slender trunk.

John Timbs, F.S.A., in his book of *Popular Errors*, published by Crosby, Lockwood & Co. in 1880, quotes from a letter, dated 7th July 1606, thus: "it is stated that at Brampton, near Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, 'an ash tree shaketh in body and boughs thereof, sighing and groaning like a man troubled in his sleep, as if it felt some sensible torment. Many have climbed to the top of it, who heard the groans more easily than they could below. But one among the rest, being on the top thereof, spake to the tree; but presently came down much aghast, and lay grovelling on the earth, three hours speechless. In the end reviving, he said: "Brampton, Brampton, thou art much bound to pray!" ' The Earl of Lincoln caused one of the arms of the ash to be lopped off and a hole bored through the body, and then was the sound, or hollow voice, heard more audibly than before, but in a kind of speech which they could not comprehend. This is the second wonderful ash produced by past ages in this district—according to tradition, Ethelreda's budding staff having shot out into the first." So says the letter, and from my own experience of the ash, I am quite ready to accredit it with special psychic properties, though I cannot state I have ever heard it speak.

I believe it attracts phantasms in just the same way as do certain people, myself included, and certain kinds of furniture. Its groanings at night have constantly attracted, startled, and terrified me; they have been quite different to the sounds I have heard it make in the daytime; and often I could have sworn that, when I listened to its groanings, I was listening to the groanings of some dying person, and, what is more harrowing still, to some person I knew.

I have heard it said, too, that the most ghastly screams and gurgles have been heard proceeding from the ash trees planted in or near the site of murders or suicides, and as I sit here writing, a scene opens before me, and I can see a plain with one solitary tree—an ash—standing by a pool of water, on the margin of which are three clusters of reeds. Dark clouds scud across the sky, and the moon only shows itself at intervals. It is an intensely wild and lonely spot, and the cold, dank air blowing across the barren wastes renders it all the more inhospitable. No one, no living thing, no object is visible save the ash. Suddenly it moves its livid trunk, sways violently, unnaturally, backwards and forwards—once, twice, thrice; and there comes from it a cry, a most piercing, agonising cry, half human, half animal, that dies away in a wail and imparts to the atmosphere a sensation of ice. I can hear the cry as I sit here writing; my memory rehearses it; it was one of the most frightful, blood-curdling, hellish sounds I ever endured; and the scene was on the Wicklow hills in Ireland.

The narcotic plant, the mandrake, is also credited with groaning, though I cannot say I have ever heard it. Though there is nothing particularly psychic about the witch-hazel, in the hands of certain people who are mediumistic, it will indicate the exact spot where water lies under the ground. The people who possess this faculty of discovering the locality of water by means of the hazel, are named dowsers, and my only wonder is that their undeniably useful faculty is not more cultivated and developed.

To my mind, there is no limit to the possibilities suggested by this faculty; for surely, if one species of tree possesses attraction for a certain object in nature, there can be no reason why other species of trees should not possess a similar attraction for other objects in nature. And if they possess this attraction for the physical, why not for the superphysical—why indeed, should not "ghosts" come within the radius of their magnetism?

The palm and sycamore trees have invariably been associated with the spiritual, and made use of symbolically, as the tree of life. An illustration, on a stele in the Berlin Museum, depicts a

palm tree from the stem of which proceeds two arms, one administering to a figure, kneeling below, the fruit or bread of life; the other, pouring from a vase the water of life.

On another, a later Egyptian stele, the tree of life is the sycamore. There is no doubt that the Egyptians and Assyrians regarded these two trees as susceptible only to good psychic influences, they figure so frequently in illustrations of the benevolent deities. Nor were the Jews and Christians behind in their recognition of the extraordinary properties of these two trees, especially the palm. We find it symbolically introduced in the decoration of Solomon's Temple—on the walls, furniture, and vessels; whilst in Christian mosaics it figures as the tree of life in Paradise (*vide* Rev. xxii. 1, 2, and in the apsis of S. Giovanni Laterans). It is even regarded as synonymous with Jesus Christ, as may be seen in the illuminated frontispiece to an *Evangelium* in the library of the British Museum, where the symbols of the four Evangelists, placed over corresponding columns of lessons from their gospels, are portrayed looking up to a palm tree, rising from the earth, on the summit of which is a cross, with the symbolical letters alpha and omega suspended from its arms.

I am, of course, only speaking from my own experience, but this much I can vouch for, that I have never heard of a palm tree being haunted by an evil spirit, whereas I have heard of several cases in which palm leaves or crosses cut from palms have been used, and apparently with effect, as preventives of injuries caused by malevolent occult demonstrations; and were I forced to spend a night in some lonely forest, I think I should prefer, viewing the situation entirely from the standpoint of psychical possibilities, that that forest should be composed partly or wholly of palms.

Before concluding this chapter, I must make a brief allusion to another type of spirit—the Barrowvian—that resembles the vagrarian and pixie, inasmuch as it delights in lonely places. Whenever I see a barrow, tumulus or druidical, circle, I scent the probability of phantasms—phantasms of a peculiar sort. Most ancient burial-places are haunted, and haunted by two species of the same genus: the one, the spirits of whatever prehistoric forms of animal life lie buried there; and the other, grotesque phantasms, often very similar to vagrarians in appearance, but with distinct ghoulish propensities and an inveterate hatred to living human beings. In my *Ghostly Phenomena* I have referred to the haunting of a druidical circle in the North of England, and also to the haunting of a house I once rented in Cornwall, near Castle on Dinas, by barrowvians; I have heard, too, of many cases of a like nature. I have, of course, often watched all night, near barrows or cromlechs, without any manifestations taking place; sometimes, even, without feeling the presence of the Unknown, though these occasions have been rare. At about two o'clock one morning, when I was keeping my vigil beside a barrow in the South of England, I saw a phenomenon in the shape of a hand—only a hand, a big, misty, luminous blue hand, with long crooked fingers. I could, of course, only speculate as to the owner of the hand, and I must confess that I postponed that speculation till I was safe and sound, and bathed in sunshine, within the doors of my own domicile.

Hauntings of this type generally occur where excavations have been made, a barrow broken into, or a dolmen removed; the manifestations generally taking the form of phantasms of the dead, the prehistoric dead. But phenomena that are seen there are, more often than not, things that bear little or no resemblance to human beings; abnormally tall, thin things with small, bizarre heads, round, rectangular, or cone-shaped, sometimes semi-or wholly animal, and always expressive of the utmost malignity. Occasionally, in fact I might say often, the phenomena are entirely bestial—such, for example, as huge, blue, or spotted dogs, shaggy bears, and monstrous horses. Houses, built on or near the site of such burial-places, are not infrequently disturbed by

strange noises, and the manifestations, when materialised, usually take one or other of these forms. In cases of this kind I have found that exorcism has little or no effect; or, if any, it is that the phenomena become even more emphatic.