

TO MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, [24] JUNE 1872

Mrs. Stowe wrote lengthy descriptions of her *planchette* "conversations" with Charlotte Brontë's spirit, which lasted more than two hours. [v, 279-82]

[Redhill]

We too are in a country refuge, you see, and this bit of Surrey, as I dare say you know, is full of beauty of the too garden-like sort for which you pity us. How different from your lodge in the wilderness! I have read your description three or four times—it enchants me so thoroughly; and Mr Lewes is just as much enamoured of it. We shall never see it, I imagine, except in the mirror of your loving words; but thanks many and warm, dear friend, for saying that our presence would be welcome. I have always had delight in descriptions of American forests since the early days when I read [Châteaubriand's] 'Atala,' which I believe that you would criticize as half unveracious. I dwelt on the descriptions in 'Dred' with much enjoyment. . . .

Your experience with the *planchette* is amazing; but that the words which you found it to have written were dictated by the spirit of Charlotte Brontë is to me (whether rightly or not) so enormously improbable, that I could only accept it if every condition were laid bare, and every other explanation demonstrated to be impossible. If it were another spirit aping Charlotte Brontë—if here and there at rare spots and among people of a certain temperament, or even at many spots and among people of all temperaments, tricky spirits are liable to rise as a sort of earth-bubbles and set furniture in movement, and tell things which we either know already or should be as well without knowing—I must frankly confess that I have but a feeble interest in these doings, feeling my life very short for the supreme and awful revelations of a more orderly and intelligible kind which I shall die with an imperfect knowledge of. If there were miserable spirits whom we could help—then I think we should pause and have patience with their trivial-mindedness; but otherwise I don't feel bound to study them more than I am bound to study the special follies of a particular phase of human society. Others, who feel differently, and are attracted towards this study, are making an experiment for us as to whether anything better than bewilderment can come of it. At present it seems to me that to rest any fundamental part of religion on such a basis is a melancholy misguidance of men's minds from the true sources of high and pure emotion. I am comforted to think that you partly agree with me there. . . .

Dear friend, how much you have lived through both in the flesh and in the spirit! My experience has been narrow compared with yours. I assure you I feel this, so do not misinterpret anything I say to you as being written in a flippant or critical spirit. One always feels the want of the voice and eyes to accompany a letter, and give it the right tone.