

DICKINSON SIDNEY

TRUE TALES
OF THE WEIRD

Sidney Dickinson

True Tales of the Weird

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Dickinson S.

True Tales of the Weird / S. Dickinson — «Public Domain»,

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Sidney Dickinson

True Tales of the Weird / a record of personal experiences of the supernatural

PREFATORY NOTE

It is a pleasure to testify that the MS. of this volume of stories has been submitted with abundant testimonies from the individuals who knew their author and his facts at first hand, to the American Society for Psychical Research for approval or disapproval.

No more interesting or better attested phenomena of the kind have come to our attention, and we have asked that a copy of the MS. be filed permanently in the Society's archives for preservation from loss. These accounts by Mr. Dickinson bear internal evidence to their true psychic origin and to the trained observer scarcely need corroboration or other external support. They ring true. And they are, in addition, moving human documents, with a strong literary appeal.

Gertrude Ogden Tubby,

Asst. Sec., A. S. P. R.

April 5, 1920.

INTRODUCTION

This account of striking and peculiar events by Mr. Sidney Dickinson is but the fulfillment of an intention of the writer interrupted by sudden death. Mr. Dickinson had taken careful notes of the happenings described and, being a professional observer and writer, it was inevitable that he should preserve the narrative. He had been slow to prepare it for publication because of the prominent and enabling part played by his wife in the occurrences. After her death, when an increasing interest in the subject had developed, it seemed to Mr. Dickinson that the narrative might be received as he had written it – as a careful and exact account of most remarkable events. In reverence to the memory of his wife and out of respect to the friends concerned he could not present it otherwise to the public.

As the narrative is of some time ago and the principal witnesses are dead or inaccessible the account must stand for itself; the endorsement of the American Society for Physical Research testifies to its intrinsic interest. But the character and personality of the writer is a vital consideration. Mr. Sidney Dickinson was a professional journalist and lecturer. After graduation from Amherst in 1874 he served on the *Springfield Republican* and the *San Francisco Bulletin*. Later he was prominent as an art and dramatic critic on the staff of the *Boston Journal*. After extended study of art in European galleries he lectured before many colleges, universities and art associations. He spent some years in Australia, where many of the events of this account took place. While travelling in Europe and Australia he was correspondent for a number of papers and magazines, including *Scribner's Monthly*, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Journal*, and the *Springfield Republican*. During a visit to New Zealand he was engaged by the Colonial Government to give lectures on New Zealand in Australia and America.

His work and his associates testify to careful observation and sane judgment. Mr. Dickinson had an unusual memory, a keen sense of accuracy and he was cool and practical rather than emotional or excitable. No one who was much with him in the later days could doubt the entire sincerity of the man. There could have been no ulterior motive as the account itself will show. The narrative was written because he felt that it might well be a contribution of some scientific interest.

R. H. Stetson,

*Professor of Psychology,
Oberlin College.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

These stories are not "founded upon fact"; they *are* fact. If I may claim any merit for them it is this – they are absolutely and literally true. They seem to me to be unusual even among the mass of literature that has been written upon the subject they illustrate; if they possess any novelty at all it may be found in the fact that the phenomena they describe occurred, for the most part, without invitation, without reference to "conditions," favorable or otherwise, and without mediumistic intervention.

I have written these stories with no purpose to bolster up any theory or to strengthen or weaken any belief, and I must say frankly that, in my opinion, they neither prove nor disprove anything whatsoever. I am not a believer, any more than I am a sceptic, in regard to so-called "Spiritualism," and have consistently held to my non-committal attitude in this matter by refraining, all my life, from consulting a medium or attending a professional séance. In the scientific study of Psychology I have a layman's interest, but even that is curious rather than expectant; – my experience, which I think this book will show to have been considerable, in the observation of occult phenomena has failed to afford me anything like a positive clue to their causes or meaning.

In fact, I have long ago arrived at the opinion that any one who devotes himself to the study of what, for want of a better word, we may call "supernatural" will inevitably and at last find himself landed in an *impasse*. The first steps in the pursuit are easy, and seductively promise final arrival at the goal – but in every case of which I, at least, have knowledge the course abruptly ends (sometimes sooner, sometimes later) against a wall so high as to be unscalable, not to be broken through, extending to infinity on either hand.

That disembodied spirits can at least make their existence known to us appears to me as a well-approved fact; that they are "forbid to tell the secrets of their prison-house" is my equally firm conviction. I am aware that such an opinion can be only personal, and that it is hopeless to attempt to commend it by satisfactory evidence; those who have had experiences similar to those which I have recorded (and their number is much greater than is generally supposed) will understand how this opinion has been reached – to others it will be inconceivable, as based upon what seems to them impossible.

If what I have written should seem to throw any light, however faint, upon the problem of the Mystery of Existence in whose solution some of the profoundest intellects of the world are at present engaged, my labor will have been worth the while. I submit the results of this labor as a record, with a lively sense of the responsibility I assume by its publication.

A MYSTERY OF TWO CONTINENTS

This story, as well as the one that immediately follows it, was first related to the late Wilkie Collins, the noted English novelist, with whom I had the good fortune to be acquainted – and who, as all his intimates know, and as those whose knowledge of him is derived from his romances may surmise, was an earnest and careful student of occult phenomena. I placed in his hands all the concurrent *data* which I could secure, and furnished the names of witnesses to the incidents – which names are now in possession of the publishers of this volume – equipped with which he carried out a thorough personal investigation. The result of this investigation he made known to me, one pleasant spring afternoon, in his study in London.

"During my life," he said, "I have made a considerable study of the supernatural, but the knowledge I have gained is not very definite. Take the matter of apparitions, for instance, to which the two interesting stories you have submitted to me relate: – I have come to regard these as subjective rather than objective phenomena, projections from an excited or stimulated brain, not actual existences. Why, I have seen thousands of ghosts myself! Many a night, after writing until two o'clock in the morning, and fortifying myself for my work with strong coffee, I have had to shoulder them aside as I went upstairs to bed. These apparent presences were nothing to me, since I knew perfectly well that their origin was nowhere else than in my overwrought nerves – and I have come to conclude that most cases of visions of this sort are to be explained by attributing them to a temporary or permanent disorganization of the brain of the percipient. Mind, I do not say *all* cases – there are many that are not to be set aside so readily. Again, it is not easy to arrive at the facts in any given case; even if the observer is honest, he may not have cultivated the habit of exact statement – moreover, stories are apt to grow by repetition, and a tendency to exaggerate is common to most of us. Now and then, however, I have come upon an account of supernatural visitation which seems an exception to the general run, and upsets my theories; and I must say that, having from time to time investigated at least fifteen hundred such instances, the two stories you have furnished me are of them all the best authenticated."

Some years ago, in the course of a tour of art study which took me through the principal countries of Europe, I found myself in Naples, having arrived there by a leisurely progress that began at Gibraltar, and had brought me by easy stages, and with many stops *en route*, through the Mediterranean. The time of year was late February, and the season, even for Southern Italy, was much advanced; – so, in visiting the Island of Capri (the exact date, I recollect, was February 22) I found this most charming spot in the Vesuvian Bay smiling and verdant, and was tempted by the brilliant sunshine and warm breezes to explore the hilly country which rose behind the port at which I had landed.

The fields upon the heights were green with grass, and spangled with delicate white flowers bearing a yellow centre, which, while smaller than our familiar American field-daisies, and held upon more slender stalks, reminded me of them. Having in mind certain friends in then bleak New England, whence I had strayed into this Land of Summer, I plucked a number of these blossoms and placed them between the leaves of my guide-book – Baedeker's "Southern Italy," – intending to inclose them in letters which I then planned to write to these friends, contrasting the conditions attending their "Washington's Birthday" with those in which I fortunately found myself.

Returning to Naples, the many interests of that city put out of my head for the time the thought of letter-writing, and three days later I took the train for Rome, with my correspondence still in arrears. The first day of my stay in Rome was devoted to an excursion by carriage into the Campagna, and on the way back to the city I stopped to see that most interesting and touching of Roman monuments, the Tomb of Cecilia Metella. Every tourist knows and has visited that beautiful memorial – so I do not need to describe its massive walls, its roof (now fallen and leaving the sepulchre open to

the sky) and the heavy turf which covers the earth of its interior. This green carpet of Nature, when I visited the tomb, was thickly strewn with fragrant violets, and of these, as of the daisylike flowers I had found in Capri, I collected several, and placed them in my guide-book – this time Baedeker's "Central Italy."

I mention these two books – the "Southern" and the "Central Italy" – because they have an important bearing on my story.

The next day, calling at my banker's, I saw an announcement that letters posted before four o'clock that afternoon would be forwarded to catch the mail for New York by a specially fast steamer for Liverpool, and hastened back to my hotel with the purpose of preparing, and thus expediting, my much-delayed correspondence. The most important duty of the moment seemed to be the writing of a letter to my wife, then living in Boston, and to this I particularly addressed myself. I described my trip through the Mediterranean and my experience in Naples and Rome, and concluded my letter as follows:

"In Naples I found February to be like our New England May, and in Capri, which I visited on 'Washington's Birthday,' I found the heights of the island spangled over with delicate flowers, some of which I plucked, and enclose in this letter. And, speaking of flowers, I send you also some violets which I gathered yesterday at the Tomb of Cecelia Metella, outside of Rome – you know about this monument, or, if not, you can look up its history, and save me from transcribing a paragraph from the guide-book. I send you these flowers from Naples and Rome, respectively, in order that you may understand in what agreeable surroundings I find myself, as compared with the ice and snow and bitter cold which are probably your experience at this season."

Having finished the letter, I took from the guide-book on "Central Italy" which lay on the table before me, the violets from the Tomb of Cecilia Metella, enclosed them, with the sheets I had written, in an envelope, sealed and addressed it, and was about to affix the stamp, when it suddenly occurred to me that I had left out the flowers I had plucked at Capri. These, I then recalled, were still in the guide-book for "Southern Italy," which I had laid away in my portmanteau as of no further present use to me. Accordingly I unstrapped and unlocked the portmanteau, found the guide-book, took out the flowers from Capri which were still between its leaves, opened and destroyed the envelope already addressed, added the daisies to the violets, and put the whole into a new inclosure, which I again directed, stamped, and duly dropped into the mail-box at the bankers'.

I am insistent upon these details because they particularly impressed upon my mind the certainty that both varieties of flowers were inclosed in the letter to my wife. Subsequent events would have been strange enough if I had not placed the flowers in the letter at all – but the facts above stated assure me that there is no question that I did so, and make what followed more than ever inexplicable.

So much for the beginning of the affair – in Italy; now for its conclusion – in New England.

During my year abroad, my wife was living, as I have said, in Boston, occupying at the Winthrop House, on Bowdoin street – a hotel which has since, I believe, been taken down – a suite of rooms comprising parlor, bedroom and bath. With her was my daughter by a former marriage, whose mother had died at her birth, some seven years before. On the same floor of the hotel were apartments occupied by Mrs. Celia Thaxter, a woman whose name is well known in American literature, and with whom my wife sustained a very intimate friendship. I am indebted for the facts I am now setting down not only to my wife, who gave me an oral account of them on my return from Europe, four months later, but also to this lady who wrote out and preserved a record of them at the time of their occurrence, and sent me a copy of the same while I was still abroad.

About ten days after I had posted my letter, inclosing the flowers from Capri and Rome, my wife suddenly awoke in the middle of the night, and saw standing at the foot of her bed the form of the child's mother. The aspect of the apparition was so serene and gracious that, although greatly startled, she felt no alarm; moreover, it had once before appeared to her, as the reader will learn in the second story of this series, which, for reasons of my own, I have not arranged in chronological

order. Then she heard, as if from a voice at a great distance, these words: "I have brought you some flowers from Sidney." At the next instant the figure vanished.

The visitation had been so brief that my wife, although she at once arose and lighted the gas, argued with herself that she had been dreaming, and after a few minutes extinguished the light and returned to bed, where she slept soundly until six o'clock the next morning. Always an early riser, she dressed at once and went from her bedroom, where the child was still sleeping, to her parlor. In the centre of the room was a table, covered with a green cloth, and as she entered and happened to glance at it she saw, to her surprise, a number of dried flowers scattered over it. A part of these she recognized as violets, but the rest were unfamiliar to her, although they resembled very small daisies.

The vision of the night before was at once forcibly recalled to her, and the words of the apparition, "I have brought you some flowers," seemed to have a meaning, though what it was she could not understand. After examining these strange blossoms for a time she returned to her chamber and awakened the child, whom she then took to see the flowers, and asked her if she knew anything about them.

"Why, no, mamma," the little girl replied; "I have never seen them before. I was reading my new book at the table last night until I went to bed, and if they were there I should have seen them."

So the flowers were gathered up and placed on the shelf above the fireplace, and during the morning were exhibited to Mrs. Thaxter, who came in for a chat, and who, like my wife, could make nothing of the matter.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon of that day the postman called at the hotel, bearing among his mail several letters for my wife, which were at once sent up to her. Among them was one that was postmarked "Rome" and addressed in my handwriting, and with this she sat down as the first to be read. It contained an account, among other things, of my experiences in Naples and Rome, and in due course mentioned the enclosure of flowers from Capri and from the Tomb of Cecilia Metella. There were, however, no flowers whatever in the letter, although each sheet and the envelope were carefully examined; my wife even shook her skirts and made a search upon the carpet, thinking that the stated enclosure might have fallen out as the letter was opened. Nothing could be found – yet ten hours before the arrival of the letter, flowers exactly such as it described had been found on the centre-table!

Mrs. Thaxter was summoned, and the two ladies marvelled greatly. Among Mrs. Thaxter's friends in the city was a well-known botanist, and she at once suggested that the flowers be offered for his inspection. No time was lost in calling upon him, and the flowers were shown (without, however, the curious facts about them being mentioned), with the request that he state, if it were possible, whence they came. He examined them carefully and then said:

"As to the violets, it is difficult to say where they grew, since these flowers, wherever they may be found in the world (and they are of almost universal occurrence, through cultivation or otherwise) may everywhere be very much alike. Certain peculiarities in these specimens, however, coupled with the scent they still faintly retain and which is characteristic, incline me to the opinion that they came from some part of Southern Europe – perhaps France, but more likely Italy. As to the others, which, as you say, resemble small daisies, they must have come from some point about the Bay of Naples, as I am not aware of their occurrence elsewhere."

"A SPIRIT OF HEALTH"

It is common, and, in the main, a well-founded objection to belief in so-called supernatural manifestations, that they seem in general to subserve no purpose of usefulness or help to us who are still upon this mortal plane, and thus are unworthy of intelligences such as both love and reason suggest our departed friends to be. The mummeries and too-frequent juggleries of dark-séances, and the inconclusive and usually vapid "communications" that are vouchsafed through professional mediums, have done much to confirm this opinion, and the possibility of apparitions, particularly, has been weakened, rather than strengthened, in the minds of intelligent persons by the machinery of cabinets and other appliances which seem to be necessary paraphernalia in "materializing" the spirits of the dead.

That the departed *ever* reappear in such form as they presented during life I am not prepared to affirm, even in view of many experiences of a nature like that which I am about to relate. In the generality of such cases I am decidedly in agreement with the opinion of the late Wilkie Collins, as set forth in the preceding story – although I should be inclined to extend that opinion far enough to include the admission of the possibility that it was the actual Presence which so worked upon the mind of the percipient as to cause it to project from itself the phantom appearance. This may seem somewhat like a quibble to confirmed believers in apparitions, of whom there are many, and perhaps it is – while those who are impatient of ingenious psychological explanations may find in the following story a confirmation of the conviction which they hold, that the dead may appear in the form in which we knew them, bringing warning and aid to the living.

It is now thirty-one years ago that the wife of my youth, after less than a year of married life, was taken from me by death, leaving to me an infant daughter, in whom all the personal and mental traits of the mother gradually reproduced themselves in a remarkable degree. Some three years later I married again, and the child, who, during that period, had been in the care of her grandparents, at regular intervals, on either side of the house respectively, was taken into the newly-formed home.

A strong affection between the new mother and the little girl was established at once, and their relations soon became more like those of blood than of adoption. The latter, never having known her own mother, had no memory of associations that might have weakened the influence of the new wife, and the step-mother, as the years passed and she had no children, grew to regard the one who had come to her at her marriage as in very truth her own.

I often thought, when seeing those two together, so fond and devoted each to each, that if those we call dead still live and have knowledge of facts in the existence they have left behind, the mother of the child may have felt her natural yearnings satisfied in beholding their mutual affection, and even have found therein the medium to extend from her own sphere the influence of happiness which some may believe they see exercised in the events that this narrative, as well as others in the series, describes.

At the time in which these events occurred, I was traveling in Europe, and my wife and daughter were living in Boston, as stated in the story with which this book opens. In the adjoining town of Brookline there resided a lady of wealth and social prominence, Mrs. John W. Candler, wife of a gentleman who had large railway interests in the South, and who was, moreover, Representative for his district in the Lower House of Congress. Mrs. Candler was a woman of rare beauty and possessed unusual intellectual gifts; she was also a close personal friend of Mrs. Thaxter, whom I have before mentioned and who introduced her to my wife – the acquaintance thus formed developing into an affectionate intimacy that ended only with Mrs. Candler's death, a dozen years ago. As her husband's business interests and legislative duties frequently compelled his absence from home, it was Mrs. Candler's delight to enliven her enforced solitudes by dispensing her large and unostentatious

hospitality to her chosen friends – so that it often happened that Mrs. Thaxter, and my wife and child, were guests for considerable periods at her luxurious residence.

One afternoon in mid-winter, Mrs. Candler drove into the city to call upon my wife, and, finding her suffering from a somewhat obstinate cold, urged her, with her usual warmth and heartiness, to return home with her for a couple of days, for the sake of the superior comforts which her house could afford as compared with those of the hotel. My wife demurred to this, chiefly on the ground that, as the weather was very severe, she did not like to take the child with her, since, being rather delicate that winter although not actually ill, she dared not remove her, even temporarily, from the equable temperature of the hotel.

While the matter was being discussed another caller was announced in the person of Miss Mae Harris Anson, a young woman of some eighteen years, daughter of a wealthy family in Minneapolis, who was pursuing a course of study at the New England Conservatory of Music. Miss Anson was very fond of children, and possessed an unusual talent for entertaining them – and thus was a great favorite of my little daughter, who hailed her arrival with rapture. This fact furnished Mrs. Candler with an idea which she immediately advanced in the form of a suggestion that Miss Anson might be willing to care for the child during my wife's absence. To this proposal Miss Anson at once assented, saying, in her lively way, that, as her school was then in recess for a few days, she would like nothing better than to exchange her boarding-house for a hotel for a while, and in consideration thereof to act as nursemaid for such time as might be required of her. It was finally agreed, therefore, that Miss Anson should come to the hotel the next morning, prepared for a two or three days' stay; – this she did, and early in the afternoon Mrs. Candler arrived in her sleigh, and with my wife was driven to her home.

The afternoon and evening passed without incident, and my wife retired early to bed, being assigned to a room next to Mrs. Candler, and one that could be entered only through that lady's apartment. The next morning she arose rather late, and yielding to the arguments of her hostess, who insisted that she should not undergo the exertion of going down to breakfast, that repast was served in her room, and she partook of it while seated in an easy chair at a table before an open fire that blazed cheerily in the wide chimney-place. The meal finished and the table removed, she continued to sit for some time in her comfortable chair, being attired only in dressing-gown and slippers, considering whether she should go to bed again, as Mrs. Candler had recommended, or prepare herself to rejoin her friend, whom she could hear talking in the adjoining room with another member of the household.

The room in which she was sitting had a large window fronting upon the southeast, and the morning sun, shining from a cloudless sky, poured through it a flood of light that stretched nearly to her feet, and formed a golden track across the carpet. Her eyes wandered from one to another object in the luxurious apartment, and as they returned from one of these excursions to a regard of her more immediate surroundings, she was startled to perceive that some one was with her – one who, standing in the full light that came through the window, was silently observing her. Some subtle and unclassified sense informed her that the figure in the sunlight was not of mortal mold – it was indistinct in form and outline, and seemed to be a part of, rather than separate from, the radiance that surrounded it. It was the figure of a young and beautiful woman with golden hair and blue eyes, and from both face and eyes was carried the impression of a great anxiety; a robe of some filmy white material covered her form from neck to feet, and bare arms, extending from flowing sleeves, were stretched forth in a gesture of appeal.

My wife, stricken with a feeling in which awe dominated fear, lay back in her chair for some moments silently regarding the apparition, not knowing if she were awake or dreaming. A strange familiarity in the face troubled her, for she knew she had never seen it before – then understanding came to her, and the recollection of photographs, and of the features of her daughter by adoption, flashed upon her mind the instant conviction that she was gazing at the mother who died when the child was born.

"What is it?" she finally found strength to whisper. "Why do you come to me?"

The countenance of the apparition took on an expression of trouble more acute even than before.

"The child! The child!" – the cry came from the shadowy lips distinctly, yet as if uttered at a great distance. "Go back to town at once!"

"But why?" my wife inquired. "I do not understand what you mean."

The figure began to fade away, as if reabsorbed in the light that enveloped it, but the voice came again as before: – "Go to your room and look in your bureau drawer!" – and only the sunlight was to be seen in the spot where the phantom had stood.

For some moments my wife remained reclining in her chair, completely overcome by her strange vision; then she got upon her feet, and half ran, half staggered, into the next room where Mrs. Candler and her companion were still conversing.

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Candler, "what in the world is the matter? You are as pale as a ghost!"

"I think I have seen one," panted my wife. "Tell me, has anyone passed through here into my room?"

"Why, no," her friend replied; "how could anyone? We have both been sitting here ever since breakfast."

"Then it is true!" cried my wife. "Something terrible is happening in town! Please, please take me to my rooms at once!" – and she hurriedly related what she had seen.

Mrs. Candler endeavored to soothe her – she had been dreaming; all must be well with the child, otherwise Miss Anson would at once inform them; – moreover, rather than have her brave a ride to town in the bitter cold of the morning, she would send a servant after luncheon to inquire for news at the hotel. My wife was not convinced by these arguments but finally yielded to them; Mrs. Candler gave her the morning paper as a medium for quieting her mind, and she returned with it to her room and resumed her seat in the easy chair.

She had hardly begun her reading, however, when the newspaper was snatched from her hand and thrown to the opposite side of the room, and as she started up in alarm she saw the apparition again standing in the sunlight, and again heard the voice – this time in a tone of imperious command – "Go to your rooms at once and look in your bureau drawer!" At the utterance of these words the apparition vanished, leaving my wife so overwhelmed with fear and amazement that for some time she was powerless to move – then reason and control of action returned to her, and she was able to regain her friend's room and acquaint her with the facts of this second visitation. This time Mrs. Candler made no attempt to oppose her earnest purpose to return to town, the horses and sleigh were ordered from the stables, my wife hurriedly dressed herself, and in half an hour both ladies were speeding toward Boston.

When they reached the entrance of the hotel, my wife, whose excitement had increased greatly during the drive, sprang from the sleigh and rushed upstairs, with Mrs. Candler close behind her, burst into the door of her rooms like a whirlwind, and discovered – the child absorbed in architectural pursuits with a set of building blocks in the middle of the sitting-room, and Miss Anson calmly reading a novel in a rocking chair by the window!

The picture thus presented was so serene and commonplace by comparison with what my wife's agitation had led her to expect, that Mrs. Candler at once burst out laughing; my wife's face also showed intense bewilderment – then, crying, "She said 'look in the bureau drawer!'" she hurried into the bedroom with Mrs. Candler at her heels.

The bureau, a conventional piece of bedroom furniture, stood at the head of the child's bed, and presented an entirely innocent appearance; nevertheless my wife went straight up to it, and, firmly grasping the handles, pulled out the topmost drawer. Instantly a mass of flame burst forth, accompanied by a cloud of acrid smoke that billowed to the ceiling, and the whole interior of the bureau seemed to be ablaze. Mrs. Candler, with great presence of mind, seized a pitcher of water

and dashed it upon the fire, which action checked it for the moment, and Miss Anson flew into the hall, arousing the house with her cries. Mrs. Thaxter, who was at the moment coming to my wife's apartment from her own, hurried in and saw the blazing bureau and the two white-faced women before it and turned quickly to summon help – employees came running with an extinguisher, and in five minutes the danger was over.

When the excitement had subsided, an examination was made as to the cause of the conflagration, with the following result:

My wife, who was a skilful painter in oils, and devoted much of her time to this employment, was accustomed to keep her colors and brushes in the upper drawer of the bureau in her bedroom. She had also, and very carelessly, placed in a corner of the drawer a quantity of loose rags which had become thoroughly saturated with oil and turpentine from their use in cleaning her palette and brushes.

I am indebted for the above facts not only to Mrs. Thaxter and Mrs. Candler, both of whom I have frequently heard relate this story, but, particularly, to Miss Anson herself, who has been, at the time of writing this, for several years connected with the editorial staff of the *Minneapolis Journal*. In a letter which she sent me in response to my request that she should confirm my recollection, she set forth clearly the causes of the conflagration in the following words:

"Some time before she [my wife] had put a whole package of matches into a stewpan, in which she heated water, and set the pan in with these paints and rags. Then, one night, when in a hurry for some hot water, she had gone in, in the dark, and forgetting all about the matches, had dumped them upon the tubes of oil paints when she pulled out the pan.

"Every one of the heads of these matches had been burned off, evidently through spontaneous combustion. I went through them all, and not one had been ignited. The rags were burned and the whole inside of the drawer was charred. The fire could not have been kept under longer than the following night, and would probably have burned the child and me in bed, before anyone dreamed there was a fire."

THE MIRACLE OF THE FLOWERS

Among the "phenomena" which attend the average spiritualistic séance a favorite one is the apparent production from space of quantities of flowers – to the supernatural source of which credence or doubt is given according to the degree of belief or scepticism inherent in the individual sitters. Having never attended one of these gatherings, I am not able to describe such an incident as occurs under such auspices; but the suggestion recalls to my mind two very remarkable events in which flowers were produced in a seemingly inexplicable manner, and without the assistance (if that be the right word) of mediumistic control. In one of these experiences I personally participated, and in both of them my wife was concerned – therefore I can vouch for their occurrence.

Some months after the happenings recorded in the two previous narratives, I was spending the summer following my return from Europe in Northampton, Massachusetts, at the residence of my father, having with me my wife and daughter. The mother of the child, who, as I have said, died in giving her birth, was a resident of the town at the time of our marriage, and her body reposed in our family's lot in the cemetery. The circumstance of this bereavement caused the warmest affections of my father and mother to centre upon my daughter, she being then their only grandchild.

The little girl was passionately fond of flowers, and her indulgent grandfather, himself a zealous horticulturist and grower of choice fruits, had that summer allotted to her sole use a plot six feet square in his spacious gardens, which became the pride of her heart from the brilliant array of blooms which she had coaxed to grow in it. Her favorite flowers were pansies, with the seeds of which she had planted nearly one-half of the space at her disposal. They had germinated successfully and flourished amazingly, and at the time of which I write that part of the bed devoted to them was a solid mass of pansies of every conceivable variety.

At about four o'clock one afternoon my wife and I set out for a walk through the famous meadows that stretched away from the back of the grounds, and on our return, some two hours later, we saw at a distance the child standing upon the terrace awaiting us, clean and wholesome in a fresh white frock, and bearing a large bouquet of her favorite pansies in her hand. As we approached she ran to meet us and extended the pansies to my wife, saying: – "Mamma, see these lovely pansies! I have picked them for you from my pansy-bed."

My wife thanked the child and kissed her, and we went upstairs to our room together to prepare for supper that was then about to be served. A vase stood on the shelf at one side of the room, and in this, first partly filling it with water, I placed the bunch of pansies.

After supper I suggested to my wife that we should call upon some relatives who lived about a quarter of a mile away, and went with her to our room while she made her preparations for our excursion. While waiting for her I took from the shelf the vase containing the pansies, and we examined and commented upon them for some time; then, her toilette being completed, I restored the vase and flowers to their former position, and we left the room, and immediately thereafter the house, together.

We found our friends at home and spent a pleasant evening with them, leaving on our return at about ten o'clock. The night was warm and perfectly calm, and, as there was no moon, the way was dark save where, here and there, a street lamp threw about its little circle of light. As we turned into the street which led to my father's house we passed under a row of maple trees whose heavy foliage made the darkness even more profound than we had known it elsewhere, and beside a high hedge which enclosed the spacious grounds of a mansion that stood at the corner of the two highways. This hedge extended for a distance of about fifty yards, and as many feet beyond the point where it terminated a lighted street lamp dimly illumined the pathway. We were at a point about midway of the hedge when my wife, who was the nearer to it, suddenly stopped and exclaimed: "Was it you

that gave that pull at my shawl?" and readjusted the garment – a light fleecy affair – which I at once observed was half off her left shoulder.

"Why, no," I replied, "I did not touch your shawl. What do you mean?"

"I mean," she answered, "that I felt a hand seize my shawl and try to draw it away from me."

I pointed out the fact that I could not well have reached her shawl on the side on which it had been disarranged, and suggested that it might have caught upon a projecting twig; but although she accepted this explanation as reasonable she still insisted that she had the consciousness of some person having laid a hand upon her.

After a few moments we went on, and had left the hedge behind us and were within a few feet of the street lamp, when my wife stopped a second time, declaring that her shawl had been seized again. Sure enough, the garment was as before, lying half off her shoulder, and this time obviously not because of any projecting twig, since we were in a perfectly clear space, and could look about us over an area of several yards in every direction. This we did, puzzled but not alarmed at the twice-recurring incident; then, on a sudden, my wife seized my arm with a convulsive grip, and, raising her eyes until I thought she was looking at the light in the street lamp before us, whispered: "Heavens! Do you see *that*?"

I followed the direction of her gaze, but could see nothing, and told her so, in the same breath asking her what she meant.

"It is Minnie!" she gasped (thus uttering the name of my dead wife) "and she has her hands full of flowers! Oh, Minnie, Minnie, what are you doing?" and hid her face in her hands. I clasped her in my arms, thinking she was about to faint, and gazed fearfully above us in a vain effort to discern the declared apparition – and at the same moment I felt a shower of soft objects strike upon my upturned face and upon my straw hat, and saw against the light before me what seemed like blossoms floating downward to the ground.

As soon as I could quiet my wife's agitation and induce her to look again for the appearance which she believed she had beheld, but which she told me had now vanished, I made a search upon the sidewalk for the objects whose fall I had both felt and seen. They were plainly evident, even in the dim light, and I gathered up a number of them and carried them under the lamp for examination. They were pansies, freshly gathered, and with their leaves and stems damp, as if just taken from water. Hastening to the house, we went directly to our room, and lighting the gas looked eagerly toward the shelf where we had left the vase filled with pansies some three hours before. The vase was there, half-filled with water, but not a single flower was standing in it.

The next day was Sunday and all the family went to morning service at the church. As my wife and I, with our daughter between us and following my father and mother at some distance, reached the scene of our adventure on the previous night, we saw lying on the sidewalk a half-dozen pansies which we had evidently overlooked, owing to the dim light in which we had gathered up the others. At sight of them the little girl dropped my hand, to which she was clinging, and with a cry of surprise ran to pick them up.

"Why," she exclaimed, "how did these come here? They are the pansies I picked for mamma yesterday from my pansy bed!"

"Oh, no, dear," I said; "these are probably some other pansies; how can you tell they came from your bed?"

"Why," she replied, "I know every one of my pansies, and this one" – holding up a blossom that was of so deep and uniform a purple as to appear almost black – "I could tell anywhere, for there was no other in the bed like it."

So she collected all the scattered flowers and insisted on carrying them to church, and on returning home they were replaced, with their fellows, in the vase from which they had been so mysteriously transferred the night before.

It has been my purpose, in preparing these stories for publication, not to permit myself to be led into any attempt to explain them, or even to embellish them with comment, and thus perhaps weaken what I desire to present as a plain statement of fact – yet this incident of the pansies seems to me (although for quite personal reasons) so touching, and so tender in its suggestions, that I cannot forbear a word or two concerning it. In thus indulging myself I am aware that the reader may think he finds a contradiction of the statement I have made in the preface of this book as to my non-committal attitude regarding Spiritualism. On this point I can only say that while I am not convinced as to the origin of the phenomenon, I should find much comfort if I could with assurance attribute it to a spiritualistic source. There are doubtless many who will thus refer it, and I write these lines in sympathy, even if somewhat doubtingly, with their point of view.

In every way this event stands unique in my experience – in place of its occurrence, and in all its circumstances. The town was the scene of my youthful wooing – the street one in which my *fiancée* and I had walked and talked a thousand times on the way between my home and hers. To this town, and to this familiar path, the new wife had come with me, and with us both the child of *her* love and sacrifice. Is there no significance, is there no consolation, not only to myself but to others who have been bereaved, in this episode? The loving gift of flowers to her new guardian by the innocent and unconscious child; the approval of the offering through its repetition, by the apparent spirit of the mother that bore her! – these things may mean nothing, yet in me whom they approached so nearly they have strengthened the hope that lives in every human heart, that the flame of our best and purest affections shall survive the seeming extinguishment of the grave.

Science, to be sure, has its explanation, and in fairness that explanation should be heard. To quote an eminent authority who has favored me with his views on the subject: – "The power that moved the pansies was a psychic force inherent in the human personality [of your wife] and exercised without the knowledge or cooperation of the objective self." (Dr. John D. Quackenbos.)

In other words, it was not the spirit of the dead wife that lifted the pansies and showered them upon us, but what we must call, for want of a better term, the living wife's "subliminal self." The vision that appeared and seemed to be casting the flowers was a freak of the psychical consciousness – there was no apparition save in my wife's overwrought imagination.

To quote again: "But that does not preclude the possibility of the levitation of the pansies, which levitation was accomplished by the lady herself, however ignorant of the operation of this psychic force she used objectively. The fact that she was thus objectively ignorant would be no obstacle to her subjective mind using in the objective earth-life her own super-sensible attributes and powers."

The principal objection to this argument seems to me to lie in this: – the pansies did not first fall upon us, and thus, by suggestion or otherwise, so excite my wife's imagination that she thought she saw the apparition; the apparition was first manifest, and the rain of flowers followed. That is to say, an appearance of the immaterial was followed by a tangible manifestation – there was nothing imaginary about *that*. Had the conditions been reversed, the fall of the flowers might very well have excited apprehension of the vision – but I cannot see where there was any place for fancy in experience of this incident.

The second episode to which I have alluded in the opening paragraph of this narrative occurred in the following winter, and was, in a certain sense, a sequel to the first. Business took me from my home in Boston, and during my absence my wife and daughter were invited by the lady I have already mentioned to spend a few days at her house in Brookline. Her husband was away on one of his frequent business trips, leaving with his wife her widowed sister, Mrs. Myra Hall, his daughter, a girl of eighteen, and a young German lady, *Fräulein Botha*, whose acquaintance the hostess had formed abroad, and who at the time was at the head of the Department of Instruction in Art at Wellesley College. All these were witnesses, with my wife, of the remarkable event which I am about to describe.

On the afternoon of the second day of my wife's visit, the child became suddenly ill, and as evening drew on exhibited rather alarming symptoms of fever. A physician was summoned who

prescribed remedies, and directed that the patient should be put to bed at once. This was done, and at about ten o'clock my wife, accompanied by the ladies I have mentioned, went quietly upstairs to observe her condition before retiring for the night themselves. The upper floor was reached by a very broad staircase which branched near the top to give access to the chambers upon a wide hall, from every part of which one could look down over a railing upon the floor below – and the room in which the child lay was about half-way around this hall on the left-hand side.

The ladies entered the chamber and the hostess turned up the gas, showing the child peacefully slumbering and with forehead and hands moist with a wholesome perspiration, although her face was still somewhat flushed. As the night was a bitter cold one in mid-January, the mistress of the house suggested that some additional covering should be placed upon the bed, and produced from another room an eider-down counterpane, covered with scarlet silk, which was carefully arranged without waking the sleeper. All then left the room and started downstairs again, the hostess being the last to go out, after lowering the gas until it showed only a point of light.

They were near the bottom of the staircase when my wife suddenly cried out: "Oh, there is Minnie! She passed up the stairs by me, all in white, and has gone into the room! Oh, I know something dreadful is going to happen!" – and she rushed frantically to the upper floor, followed by the others in a body. At the half-open door of the child's room they all stopped and listened, not daring for the moment to enter, but no sound came from within. Then, mustering up courage and clinging to each others' hands, they went softly in, and the hostess turned up the gas. With one accord they looked toward the bed, and, half-blinded by the sudden glare of the gaslight, could not for a moment credit what their eyes showed them – that the sleeping child was lying under a coverlet, not of scarlet, as they had left her hardly a minute before, but of snowy white. Recovering from their astonishment, an examination revealed the cause of the phenomenon. The scarlet eider-down counterpane was in its place, but completely covered with pure white lilies on long stalks, so spread about and lying in such quantities that the surface of the bed was hidden under their blooms. By actual count there were more than two hundred of these rich and beautiful blossoms strewn upon the coverlet, representing a moderate fortune at that time of year, and probably unprocurable though all the conservatories in the city had been searched for them.

They were carefully gathered and placed about the house in vases, jugs, and every other receptacle that could be pressed into service to hold them, filling the rooms for several days with their fragrance until, like other flowers, they faded and died.

THE MIDNIGHT HORSEMAN

On a brilliant moonlit evening in August, 1885, a considerable party of friends and more or less intimate acquaintances of the hostess assembled at the summer cottage of Mrs. Thaxter at Appledore Island, Isles of Shoals. Included in the company were the then editor of the New York *Herald*, Rev. Dr. Hepworth, – also well known as a prominent divine and pulpit orator – two of the leading musicians of Boston (Julius Eichberg and Prof. John K. Paine) – of whom one occupied a chair in Harvard University, – and, among others, my wife and myself. The cottage was the charming resort which the visitor would be led to expect from the well-known refinement and artistic taste of its occupant, and its interior attractions might well have been suggested even to the casual passer-by who looked upon its wonderful flower-garden, wherein seeds of every variety had in spring been scattered broadcast and in profusion, and now, as autumn approached, had developed into a jungle of blooms of every conceivable color.

We had some music, as I remember, and after that an interesting conversation, which, in consequence of the many varied and brilliant intellects there assembled, took a wide range, coming around finally – I do not recall by what steps – to occultism, clairvoyance, and the phenomena of so-called "Spiritualism." In the course of the discussion of this topic, the editor interested us by a humorous account of some recent experiences of his own in "table-tipping" and "communications" by rappings – and incidentally remarked that he believed any assembly of persons who wished could experience similar phenomena, even though none of them possessed what it is usual to describe as "mediumistic" powers. Some one else then suggested that, as our company seemed to fulfil this condition, the present might be a favorable time to test the theory – whereupon we all proceeded to the adjoining dining-room with the view of making experiment by means of the large dinner table that stood in the middle of it.

(I may here state that although my wife had already had some abnormal experiences, only Mrs. Thaxter and I were acquainted with the fact, and even these had come to her unsought in every instance.)

Somewhat to our disappointment, the table failed to show itself susceptible to any "influence" other than the law of gravitation, but remained insensible and immovable, even though we sat about it under approved "conditions" for half an hour or so – lights lowered, and our imposed hands touching each other in order to form upon it an uninterrupted "circuit." We finally tired of this dull sport, turned up the lights, and pushing back our chairs from the table, fell into general conversation.

Hardly had we done so, when my wife suddenly exclaimed: – "How strange! Why, the wall of the room seems to have been removed, and I can see rocks and the sea, and the moonlight shining upon them!" At this interruption our talk naturally ceased abruptly, and one of us asked her to describe more in detail what was visible to her.

"It is growing stranger still," she replied. "I do not see the sea any more. I see a long, straight road, with great trees like elms here and there on the side of it, and casting dark shadows across it. There are no trees like those and no such road near here, and I cannot understand it. There is a man standing in the middle of the road, in the shadow of one of the trees. Now he is coming toward me and I can see his face in the moonlight. Why! it is John Weiss!" (naming the Liberal clergyman and writer whom most of us had known in Boston, and who had died some five or six years before) "Why, is that you? What are you doing here, and what does this mean? He smiles, but does not speak. Now he has turned and gone back into the shadow of the tree again."

After a few moments' pause: – "Now I can see something coming along the road some distance away. It is a man on horseback. He is riding slowly, and he has his head bent and a slouch hat over his eyes, so that I cannot see his face. Now John Weiss steps out of the shadow into the moonlight; the horse sees him and stops – he rears up in the air and whirls about and begins to run back in the

direction from which he came. The man on his back pulls him up, lashes him with his whip, turns him around, and tries to make him go forward. The horse is terrified and backs again, trying to break away from his rider; the man strikes him again, but he will not advance.

"The man dismounts and tries to lead the horse, looking about to see what he is frightened at. I can see his face now very clearly – I should know him anywhere! John Weiss is walking toward him, but the man does not see him. The horse does, though, and plunges and struggles, but the man is strong and holds him fast. Now John Weiss is so close to the man that he *must*

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