

Anyone who has once participated in such proceedings feels instinctively that some stigma must almost inevitably attach to one who has thus been placed on his trial, though it is not easy to convey the impression in words; and it is difficult to see what advantages such a system offers over that now in use in England.

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*Visions: A Personal Narrative of Morbid Phenomena.*

[The following communication was sent for publication by a journalist of experience. The mental aberrations described were preliminary to an attack of acute mania, from which the author happily recovered some three years ago.—*Ed.*]

THE HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF NATURE AND OF SCIENCE.

Experiences in the mystical borderland of science have generally so little to commend them to the consideration of practical intellects, and are so often narrated in terms calculated to offend common sense, that I have for some years refrained from giving publicity to this account of the strange impressions on the visual sense which marked a period of some months of physical weakness and nervous tension. And if I now write of these visions it is in the hope that a faithful narrative of the circumstances may lead to sounder views than are now obtaining, and being widely promulgated by certain would-be leaders of thought who, in the Press and on the platform, are confounding this age of materialism by reviving teaching which would disgrace a heathen priesthood, and which outrages our fondest hopes and beliefs.

I have used the word "visions" to express the presentment to the sense of sight of pictures having no material embodiment, and in no single instance did these convey to my mind any other impression than that of views projected by the eye, as by a magic lantern, nor did they appear at all unnatural or alarming, any more than when by an effort of the imagination one calls up at will the picture of a well-remembered place or person.

The wonders of photography have been obtained by following Nature in the construction of the eye, and to me it is not more incredible that "negatives"—for want of a better word—should be retained by the visual organs, than that the record of facts and events, which we call memory, should remain in the hidden chambers of the mind to be

called up at will while health permits, or to run riot or altogether vanish with decaying faculties.

I cannot better describe my mental attitude under these impressions than by saying that throughout I was fully conscious of their being distinct from the actual life around me. If they interrupted action or diverted thought from other matters then engaging attention, it was but for the moment; though this very quietude of mind at these times may have found its reaction in the brief periods of uncontrolled and sometimes unremembered speech that on several occasions supervened. "Brain fever," the doctors said, and I must leave the faculty to determine how far that disorder may account for the phenomena, simply contenting myself with the assurance that at the times to which I am about to refer I was able both to think clearly and act coolly, nor did I feel any of the nervous irritation from which at other times during my illness I suffered so keenly as to be unable to control.

The first occasion on which I experienced what I cannot call a visual deception, since I was not for a moment in doubt as to the unreality of the thing portrayed, was at the close of an ordinary day's business. I was engaged in a handicraft requiring almost constant supervision of the workmen, and in which there was little or no mere routine work. On this particular day I had a business appointment at 6.30, from which I hoped to be at liberty in time for the commencement of a musical performance, which was one of the chief local events of the year. I had booked seats in a good position, and being disappointed in obtaining the company of the friend I had asked to join me, the chair next to mine was vacant. I was tired, and perhaps looked it, but enjoyed the performance, though once or twice the music that I heard seemed out of keeping with the programme to which I referred, expecting to find that a chorus from one of the oratorios had been selected. A considerable number of the orchestra and vocalists were personally known to me, but several times I found my perception of well-known people lost in a sort of idealised crowd, out of which looked faces that belonged to other times and places. Shaking off the tired feeling for the time, I resolved to leave at ten and go straight home to bed. Shortly afterwards an interval occurred in the programme, and while looking round at the occupants of adjacent seats, I glanced at the empty chair by my side and saw thereon the image of a wreath of exquisite

white flowers. The illusion lasted but a few seconds, and I could not then or since recall having recently seen any such floral ornament, or remember any occurrence likely to fix such a fancy in my mind. The only possible suggestion that I could think of was that I had that morning met a florist with whom I was well acquainted. He was entering the railway station as I was quitting it, and was carrying a box, evidently containing flowers. I remembered thinking that it was a wreath from the shape of the box, and the question was in my mind as we nodded a passing salutation.

In that instant, did there pass from eye to eye the picture of the contents of the box? I cannot tell, for apart from that, my mind may have retained the imagery of dozens of such wreaths; but whatever the original, how came its phantom to be selected from the store-room of the eye's stock of negatives?

No, kind cynic, I had not been imbibing. I was just worn out with work and worry, that was all.

Within a week from this, under medical advice, I took a three months' rest from business, only returning to the office when an approaching parliamentary election rendered my presence absolutely necessary, and was fortunately able to see all the most important of my contracts through before I was again compelled to rest from business. This time, my nervous prostration was much greater than on the previous occasion, and such sleep as I got during the succeeding fortnight was of a very fitful nature, and only obtained by the use of bromide of potassium, but it was wonderfully exempt from dreams. Indeed, it appeared that the mental activity, or cerebral excitement, which under ordinary circumstances produces dreams, wore itself out during periods when I was lying, to all intents and purposes, wide awake and fully conscious of my surroundings. This was generally in the early morning.

On one occasion a series of vignette portraits of faces disfigured by disease and malformation formed themselves against the white hangings of the bed. These were circular in form and of the size of the discs which one sees after looking at the sun. I can well remember that it was a favourite amusement of my youthful days to watch such discs rise from the gas lights in the church, and, having started two or three, race them across the white-washed ceiling under the gallery over our pew. To indigestion I afterwards learnt to ascribe this faculty of whiling away the

time during an unappreciated sermon. The last of the vignettes was a three-quarter figure of a lovely woman, beautifully attired. Asked what sort of a night I had had, I told the doctor pretty good, but I had been seeing "devils" while awake.

A morning or two afterwards I had a very pleasant variation of this fantasy. Lying gazing at the walls of the room, I found that the pattern of the wall-paper had vanished, and in its place were exquisite drawings of many favourite subjects of statuary. These remained constant before my vision for an apparently lengthy period, and when the doctor jocularly asked me that day whether I had seen any more devils, I said I had not, but I had seen the walls of the room decorated with such perfect drawings that if I could only imitate them my fortune would be made.

And now I come to one of the most remarkable of these experiences, since it followed on a train of thought and argument to which it was an appropriate conclusion.

For some time before rising and while dressing, I had been engaged in a mental conversation with an ecclesiastic, whom in some way I associated with the Dean of Norwich, although I have never even seen that dignitary of the Church. As in answer to somewhat bitter memories, I was assured by this unknown teacher that the pure love and affections of boyhood and manhood were the links in a living chain by which the angel messengers of the Church were enabled to carry on the work of God, and turn aside evil from the lives of the faithful.

That in this mighty array of spirit messengers all creeds and sects were represented, for it was drawn from all the families of mankind. In especial, through this spiritual channel, there was maintained a union between the Anglican and Roman Churches that, despite all external conflict, was working for the advancement of the race. Loves unconfessed, attachments formed and doomed by the hard realities of existence to live but in the memory only, these, said he, are the links by which the Church Catholic is held together, and the thought and teaching of the ages preserved from corruption and decay, for the Divine message of Love has lived through all times and all races, and is the same to-day as in the beginning, and as it will remain until Love, self-sacrificing but ever triumphant, has conquered lust and cruelty and greed. In this cause all must suffer, for the Church of the Living God values not the love which seeks after selfish

pleasure, and ranks not that true affection which knowingly risks the future welfare of the loved one.

Thus, and in even more authoritative terms, he dealt with the bitter and angry thought by which I had been beset; but I was but half convinced, and almost aloud my rebellious thought replied: "This may be all very satisfactory to you, Sir, but the proof, the proof!" With these words on the tip of my tongue, I turned from the dressing-table, and my glance fell through the old-fashioned window of the room across the yard to where hung, framed in by trees in full foliage, the entrance doors. Everything else around wore its natural appearance, but there, right in the gateway, stood the life-size presentment of a priest in full academic costume, of a good and manly presence. His eyes lit with a smile that dispelled even the thought of fear, he acknowledged my involuntary bend of the head by a courteous raising of his cap, and passed away with a movement so lifelike that only the instant perception that the great doors had not moved convinced me of the non-corporeal nature of the visitant. Now this occurred in broad daylight, about 9 o'clock, on a June morning, yet the effect on the senses was much the same as if the reflection from a powerful lantern had been cast upon the doors as upon a screen.

Of one alone, of many friends in cap and gown, did this mental portrait remind me. He had paused to greet me with such a smile not many weeks before, and as we each turned on our respective ways had passed with such a salutation.

For the next two appearances I have never been able to think of any likely originating cause. Both occurred within a few days of the last-mentioned. The house I was living in was about nine miles east of the neighbouring city, and the window of the bath-room looked to the west. I was washing my hands at the time, and suddenly felt a slight shock, as from a galvanic battery, strike my left side. Looking quickly upwards I saw, apparently suspended over the city, a glittering cross. It was a Latin cross, a yard or more in length, not standing erect, but lying obliquely, with its head to the west, and it scintillated as though formed of magnificent brilliants. The vision soon faded, but not so quickly that my thoughts had not time to reason on the sight. Was it such a vision as this that Constantine beheld, and, if so, why was the cross lying with its arms to the four quarters of the

compass, instead of standing erect? But however that might be, thenceforth I felt convinced that the legend of Constantine was no senseless fable, for there in mid-heaven, in brightest daylight, I had seen the reflected image of a cross flashing with an intense white light.

A similar illusion arresting attention, but with no accompanying train of thought, occurred while I was playing tennis—I think on the following day. Severe and repeated cramping pains in my right arm had compelled me to stop playing, and while I was talking to the friend with me I suddenly started forward on seeing an arc of electric light across the western sky. My friend, who knew the nervous condition in which I was, and alarmed at the fixity of my gaze, hastened to assure me that there was nothing to be seen, to which I responded, "There was, but it has gone now."

A few days later this same friend and myself were reclining in easy chairs under the shade of the trees. He was reading and I, who had been smoking a cigarette, was in that abstracted state popularly described as "thinking," though I was really making no effort to pursue any definite line of thought. As we thus sat, I became dreamily conscious of our being concerned in a conversation carried on by invisibles. So far as I could gather, there appeared to be a dispute among the wills of men, who believed that only by an appeal to arms and the supreme arbitrament of life and death could the evils of the world be dealt with. Then I experienced the queer sensation that we were assailed by numberless missiles that fell around us, or sung as they flew past, cutting the leaves from the branches overhead. All that came near us appeared like small flashes of lightning, and powerless to injure us. This fusillade lasted for some time and then ceased, and one party to the preceding argument withdrew, expressing themselves satisfied.

"These men," said they, "fear not death, and we, who hold it right to slay and be slain at duty's call in the cause of all we love and cherish, are satisfied."

And now occurred a curious development. Opposite us, as we sat, was a range of buildings connected with the adjoining farm, presenting on our side a blank surface of stone wall and roof. In the latter appeared the semblance of a dormer window, such as is common in old-fashioned houses, having a lattice opening outwards. This was thrown wide open, and in the aperture a man holding a gun pre-

sented himself. First he hailed us, addressing each by titles, as though challenging the presiding officers of a secret society, and thus conveying to my mind the idea that he represented the secret organisation of such as were prepared to attempt the redress of their grievances by force. Having hailed us, he then covered each in turn with his weapon, while a voice asked, "Have you challenged?" and he replied "Yes."

"What did he answer?"—"Nothing."

"What is he doing?"—"Thinking."

"Then let him think!"

"And the other, what is he doing?"—"Reading."

"Then let him read!"

Then the figure at the window withdrew, and the vision of the window itself vanished, while, apparently from persons in consultation, came the announcement, "We have been on the wrong tack."

The features of the man at the window were well-known to me as those of a retired soldier, who had seen service on the Indian frontier. He was a seven-years' man, and though proud of his service under the colours, he and the bulk of his comrades had been too dissatisfied with the regimental control to enlist for a further period. He had resumed the calling he had followed as a boy, and having occasion for his services he had been for some time in my employ, but I cannot recall having ever seen him at an open window handling a gun.

In this case, therefore, there were two distinct scenes coming and going, and for a time superposed, in the electric lanterns of the eye. First, the picture of the dormer window with the opening casement, and then the appearance of the man and his moving away from the window before the likeness of it faded from the roof of the building, of which, while it lasted, it was apparently a structural part.

For the associated dialogue I could think of no likely originating cause. In a vague way it had at the time impressed me with the idea that it had relation to the Irish Secret Societies; but there was no direct allusion, and the titles used afforded no clue.

In the instance I am now about to relate there was no accompanying speech, but the import of it appeared at the time to be an assault upon a cardinal doctrine of our Faith. During the afternoon I had visited an old lady,

whom I found sitting up in bed reading. Afterwards I took a walk through the neighbouring fields and lanes, and on nearing her house on my return I glanced up at the window of her room. Again a mental vision was incorporated with the actual scene. As from the window I saw the picture of the old lady, seated as I had last seen her, slowly ascend until lost in the azure of the sky. Just for an instant, the thought occurred to me that she might have died since I saw her, but the suggestion was at once repelled by my reasoning faculty, the thought being instantly answered by the mental comment—"No, it is not in such fashion that the spirit of life is called home to its eternal source." But I am free to admit that it was with a sense of relief that I found, some few hours afterwards, that the dear old lady was in her usual health, and, needless to say, I did not speak of the queer trick my eyes had played me, for I did not think her life would be made any the happier, or her hopes of heaven any the surer by recounting my experience.

Most people, at some time or other, I suppose, have caught themselves in the fancy that some person approaching them in the passing crowd is an acquaintance, and perhaps only discovered their mistake when at close quarters, just in time to save themselves the annoyance of greeting a stranger. The reason of this I take to be that some fancied resemblance is suggested to the "identification department" in the visual faculty, and the thoughts being preoccupied, or the brain tired, the energy required to establish or refute the suggestion is not put forth until much later than would be the case if one was thoroughly "wide awake" at such a time. I pass over, therefore, mere momentary confusion of sight easily traceable to such causes, and will conclude with recording two or three visions which presented themselves some two months later.

Of these, one would be uninteresting save for the fact that it seemed a suggested picture, though how or why the memory was recalled I am unable to say. With the friend previously alluded to, I had been strolling along the banks of a small trout stream, watching the fish in the pools, and towards the end of our walk my friend, himself an ardent fisherman, stopped to discuss, with a fresh arrival in the village, the prospects of sport. While talking, the stranger suddenly bent forward to pick something from the turf, holding his rod erect with one hand and reaching far out



with the other, while to preserve his balance he extended one leg high in the air. At the time his attitude suggested to my mind an amusing resemblance to the three-legged bearings of the Isle of Man, but I thought no more of the incident as just then their conversation ceased and my friend turned to rejoin me. A few days after, this same friend was idling away the time by searching the surrounding hills with a fairly good telescope. Suddenly he passed me the glass, saying, "Look! There is a man up at the signalling flagstaff." Sure enough, I saw a man in that glass, but scarcely the one he expected, I think, for what I saw was the mental photograph of the fisherman in the attitude I have already described. I was tired, the incident seemed trivial and uninteresting, and being in no mood to discuss it, I returned the glass in silence.

On another occasion, accompanied by a mutual friend, we had been down to the old harbour of the adjoining town, where once a considerable local trade had been done, although the shipping is now confined to a few fishing boats, an occasional yacht, or a small collier. It was about mid-tide, and as we came round the head of the harbour we stood for a few minutes looking down from the parapet of the roadway at the water below.

Then from out the waves I saw advancing the figure of a man grasping a staff, each hand towards one of the ends, and carrying it horizontally. Only his head and shoulders were visible when I first became conscious of the sight, and I was on the point of calling attention to his dangerous position when I received a mental warning to give no sign of surprise, nor in any way try to call the attention of my comrades to what I was witnessing. Meanwhile the apparition—for such I had by this realised it to be—slowly advanced into shallower waters, and when clear from about the knees upward faded into nothingness. At the same time it seemed as though a voice whispered, "Behold! the sign of the man rising from the waters, holding the staff of the two Houses." In this case I had the curious impression that one or both of my friends were also witnesses of this illusion; but, however this might have been, the sum total of our knowledge would not have been enhanced by discussion. Mentally, I concluded that the original of this visual photograph was a friend of ours whose passion for the piscatorial art led him to spend hours in wading the larger trout streams of the country.

The next and last of these experiences affected my nerves more strongly than any of the preceding—not so much at the

time as for some days afterwards, during which it formed the basis of strange dreams and fancies. I cannot altogether place it in the same category as the foregoing, and if I had then heard of Captain Rowland Scott's invention for cloud signalling and sky advertising I should have felt sure I was witnessing an experiment of that nature. It was about 10 p.m., and I was on my way to the rooms where we were staying, when suddenly I saw a great circle of light travelling across the sky and finally alighting on and encircling the full moon. What strange phenomenon was this? Was it the ring of Saturn slipped from its allegiance and come to adorn our attendant satellite? And what was this black monster, whose dragon-like head and coils stretched across the heavens and seemed to threaten to engulf the newly-ringed Goddess of the Night? Bah! At once my reason recovered its balance. That, at all events, was but a shadowy reflection, whatever the explanation of the other striking sight, for that also had by this vanished. Some month or so afterwards I saw in the possession of an astronomical enthusiast, living not many miles away, a walking-stick cut from a gnarled and twisted root, the very *fac-simile* in shape of the shadow whose horrible form had seemed to darken the whole western sky.

Having told my tale, I will leave it to convey its own lessons according to the understanding of its readers, save only that it be not perverted to serve selfish ends or forge anew the fetters of superstition. Let language be used to instruct and not to mystify the ignorant, and then, maybe, press, platform, and pulpit will resound with less discordant cries than now make confusion the worse confounded. "Supernatural," rightly interpreted, means that which is *above* our comprehension of natural law, and since our comprehension of natural law cannot possibly set a limit to its operations, it is both misleading and absurd so to use the word as to imply that which is contrary to Nature. In fact, I am by no means satisfied that our "physical" doctors are not greater offenders against Nature than the "spiritual" pastors of the Church; and the tyranny of their mysteries is not more to be desired than the older priestcraft; but to either the one or the other I would more readily commit the guidance and rule of the people than to the new profession of women-inspired prophets, who would inaugurate a millennium for sensation mongers and idle sentimentalists, while leaving untouched the burdens and sorrows of the children of Nature.