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Real Ghost Stories

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Imprint

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INTRODUCTION.

During the last few years I have been urged by people in all parts of the world to re-issue some of the wonderful stories of genuine psychic experiences collected by my Father several years ago.

These stories were published by him in two volumes in 1891-92; the first, entitled *Real Ghost Stories*, created so much interest and brought in so large a number of other stories of genuine experiences that the first volume was soon followed by a second, entitled *More Ghost Stories*.

The contents of the two volumes, slightly curtailed, were, a few years later, brought out as one book; but the three volumes have long been out of print and are practically unknown to the present generation.

I remember when I was a child my Father read some of these stories aloud to us as he was making his collection; and I remember, too, how thrilled and awed we were, and how at times they brought a creepy feeling when at night I had to mount many flights of stairs to my bedroom at the top of the house.

Reading these stories again, after many years' study of the subject, I have realised what a wealth of interesting facts my Father had gathered together, and that not only the gathered facts, but his own contributions, his chapter on "The Ghost That Dwelleth in Each One of Us" and his comments on the stories, show what an insight he had into and what an understanding he had of this vast and wonderful subject.

I felt as I read that those who urged re-publication were right, that if not a "classic," as some have called it, it at least merits a place on the shelves of all who study psychic literature and are interested in psychic experiences.

I demurred long as to whether I should change the title. The word "Ghost" has to a great extent in modern times lost its true meaning to the majority and is generally associated in many minds with something uncanny—with haunted houses and weird apparitions filling with terror those who come into contact with them.

"Stories from the Borderland," "Psychic Experiences," were among the titles which suggested themselves to me; but in the end I decided to keep the old title, and in so doing help to bring the word "ghost" back to its proper and true place and meaning.

"Ghost," according to the dictionary, means "the soul of man; the soul of a deceased person; the soul or spirit separate from the body; apparition, spectre, shadow":—it comprises, in fact, all we mean when we think or speak of "Spirit." We still say "The Holy Ghost" as naturally and as reverently as we say "The Holy Spirit." So for the sake of the word itself, and because it covers everything we speak of as Spirit to-day; these two considerations take away all reason why the word should not be used, and it gives me great pleasure in re-issuing these stories to carry on the title originally chosen by my Father.

There is a large collection of stories to be drawn upon, for besides those given in the two volumes mentioned, many of equal interest and value appeared in *Borderland*, a psychic quarterly edited and published by my Father for a period of four years in the nineties and now long out of print.

If this first volume proves that those who advised me were right in thinking that these experiences will be a valuable addition to psychic literature, I propose to bring out two further volumes of stories from my Father's collection, and I hope to add to these a volume of stories of a later date, of which I already have a goodly store. For this purpose I invite those who have had experiences which they consider will be of interest and value for such a collection, to send them to me so that, if suitable and appropriate, they may be placed on record.

In bringing this Introduction to a close I should like to quote what my Father wrote in his Preface to the last edition published by him, as it embodies what many people are realising to-day. To them, as to him, the reality of the "Invisibles" is no longer a speculation. Therefore I feel that these thoughts of his should have a place in this new edition of his collection of *Real Ghost Stories*.

"The reality," he wrote, "of the Invisibles has long since ceased to be for me a matter of speculation. It is one of the things about which I feel as certain as I do, for instance, of the existence of the people of

Tierra del Fuego; and while it is of no importance to me to know that Tierra del Fuego is inhabited, it is of vital importance to know that the spirits of the departed, and also of those still occupying for a time the moveable biped telephone which we call our body, can, and given the right conditions *do*, communicate with the physical unconsciousness of the man in the street. It is a fact which properly apprehended would go far to remedy some of the worst evils from which we have to complain. For our conception of life has got out of form, owing to our constant habit of mistaking a part for the whole, and everything looks awry."

Estelle W. Strad

Bank Buildings,

Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

Easter, 1921.

A PREFATORY WORD.

Many people will object—some have already objected—to the subject of this book. It is an offence to some to take a ghost too seriously; with others it is a still greater offence not to take ghosts seriously enough. One set of objections can be paired off against the other; neither objection has very solid foundation. The time has surely come when the fair claim of ghosts to the impartial attention and careful observation of mankind should no longer be ignored. In earlier times people believed in them so much that they cut their acquaintance; in later times people believe in them so little that they will not even admit their existence. Thus these mysterious visitants have hitherto failed to enter into that friendly relation with mankind which many of them seem sincerely to desire.

But what with the superstitious credulity of the one age and the equally superstitious unbelief of another, it is necessary to begin from the beginning and to convince a sceptical world that apparitions really appear. In order to do this it is necessary to insist that your ghost should no longer be ignored as a phenomenon of Nature. He has a right, equal to that of any other natural phenomenon, to be examined and observed, studied and defined. It is true that he is a rather difficult phenomenon; his comings and goings are rather intermittent and fitful, his substance is too shadowy to be handled, and he has avoided hitherto equally the obtrusive inquisitiveness of the microscope and telescope.

A phenomenon which you can neither handle nor weigh, analyse nor dissect, is naturally regarded as intractable and troublesome; nevertheless, however intractable and troublesome he may be to reduce to any of the existing scientific categories, we have no right to allow his idiosyncrasies to deprive him of his innate right to be regarded as a phenomenon. As such he will be treated in the following pages, with all the respect due to phenomena whose reality is attested by a sufficient number of witnesses. There will be no attempt in this book to build up a theory of apparitions, or to define the true inwardness of a ghost. There will be as many explanations as there are minds of the significance of the extraordinary narratives which I have collated from correspondence and from accessible

records. Leaving it to my readers to discuss the rival hypotheses, I will stick to the humbler mission of recording facts, from which they can form their own judgment.

The ordinary temper of the ordinary man in dealing with ghosts is supremely unscientific, but it is less objectionable than that of the pseudo-scientist. The Inquisitor who forbade free inquiry into matters of religion because of human depravity, was the natural precursor of the Scientist who forbids the exercise of the reason on the subject of ghosts, on account of inherited tendencies to attribute such phenomena to causes outside the established order of nature. What difference there is, is altogether in favour of the Inquisitor, who at least had what he regarded as a divinely constituted authority, competent and willing to pronounce final decision upon any subject that might trouble the human mind. Science has no such tribunal, and when she forbids others to observe and to reflect she is no better than a blind fetish.

Eclipses in old days used to drive whole nations half mad with fright. To this day the black disc of the moon no sooner begins to eat into the shining surface of the sun than millions of savage men feel "creepy," and begin to tremble at the thought of the approaching end of the world. But in civilised lands even the most ignorant regard an eclipse with imperturbable composure. Eclipses are scientific phenomena observed and understood. It is our object to reduce ghosts to the same level, or rather to establish the claim of ghosts to be regarded as belonging as much to the order of Nature as the eclipse. At present they are disfranchised of their natural birthright, and those who treat them with this injustice need not wonder if they take their revenge in "creeps."

The third class of objection takes the ground that there is something irreligious and contrary to Christianity in the chronicling of such phenomena. It is fortunate that Mary Magdalene and the early disciples did not hold that theory. So far from its being irreligious to ascertain facts, there is a subtle impiety in the refusal to face phenomena, whether natural or supernatural. Either these things exist or they do not. If they do not exist, then obviously there can be no harm in a searching examination of the delusion which possessed the mind of almost every worthy in the Old Testament, and which

was constantly affirmed by the authors of the New. If, on the other hand, they do exist, and are perceptible under certain conditions to our senses, it will be difficult to affirm the impiety of endeavouring to ascertain what is their nature, and what light they are able to throw upon the kingdom of the Unseen. We have no right to shut our eyes to facts and close our ears to evidence merely because Moses forbade the Hebrews to allow witches to live, or because some of the phenomena carry with them suggestions that do not altogether harmonise with the conventional orthodox theories of future life. The whole question that lies at bottom is whether this world is divine or diabolic. Those who believe it divine are bound by that belief to regard every phenomenon as a window through which man may gain fresh glimpses of the wonder and the glory of the Infinite. In this region, as in all others, faith and fear go ill together.

It is impossible for any impartial man to read the narratives of which the present book is composed without feeling that we have at least one hint or suggestion of quite incalculable possibilities in telepathy or thought transference. If there be, as many of these stories seem to suggest, a latent capacity in the human mind to communicate with other minds, entirely regardless of the conditions of time and space, it is undeniable that this would be a fact of the very first magnitude. It is quite possible that the telegraph may be to telepathy what the stage coach is to the steam engine. Neither can we afford to overlook the fact that these phenomena have in these latter days signally vindicated their power over the minds of men. Some of the acutest minds of our time have learned to recognise in them scientific demonstration of the existence of the fact that personal individuality survives death.

If it can be proved that it is occasionally possible for persons at the uttermost ends of the world to communicate instantaneously with each other, and even in some cases to make a vivid picture of themselves stand before the eyes of those to whom they speak, no prejudice as to the unhealthy nature of the inquiry should be allowed to stand in the way of the examination of such a fact with a view to ascertaining whether or not this latent capacity of the human mind can be utilised for the benefit of mankind. Wild as this suggestion may seem to-day, it is less fantastic than our grandfathers a hundred years ago would have deemed a statement that at

the end of the nineteenth century portraits would be taken by the sun, that audible conversation would be carried on instantaneously across a distance of a thousand miles, that a ray of light could be made the agent for transmitting the human voice across an abyss which no wire had ever spanned, and that by a simple mechanical arrangement, which a man can carry in his hand, it would be possible to reproduce the words, voice, and accent of the dead. The photograph, the telegraph, the telephone, and the phonograph were all more or less latent in what seemed to our ancestors the kite-flying folly of Benjamin Franklin. Who knows but that in Telepathy we may have the faint foreshadowing of another latent force, which may yet be destined to cast into the shade even the marvels of electrical science!

There is a growing interest in all the occult phenomena to which this work is devoted. It is in evidence on every hand. The topic is in the air, and will be discussed and is being discussed, whether we take notice of it or not. That it has its dangers those who have studied it most closely are most aware, but these dangers will exist in any case, and if those who ought to guide are silent, these perils will be encountered without the safeguards which experience would dictate and prudence suggest. It seems to me that it would be difficult to do better service in this direction than to strengthen the hands of those who have for many years past been trying to rationalise the consideration of the Science of Ghosts.

It is idle to say that this should be left for experts. We live in a democratic age and we democratise everything. It is too late in the day to propose to place the whole of this department under the care of any Brahmin caste; the subject is one which every common man and woman can understand. It is one which comes home to every human being, for it adds a new interest to life, and vivifies the sombre but all-pervading problem of death.

W. T. Stead.

London, 1891.

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REAL GHOST STORIES.

PART I.

THE GHOST THAT DWELLS IN EACH OF US.

Chapter I.

The Unconscious Personality.

"Real Ghost Stories!—How can there be real ghost stories when there are no real ghosts?"

But are there no real ghosts? You may not have seen one, but it does not follow that therefore they do not exist. How many of us have seen the microbe that kills? There are at least as many persons who testify they have seen apparitions as there are men of science who have examined the microbe. You and I, who have seen neither, must perforce take the testimony of others. The evidence for the microbe may be conclusive, the evidence as to apparitions may be worthless; but in both cases it is a case of testimony, not of personal experience.

The first thing to be done, therefore, is to collect testimony, and by way of generally widening the mind and shaking down the walls of prejudice which lead so many to refuse to admit the clearest possible evidence as to facts which have not occurred within their personal experience, I preface the report of my "Census of Hallucinations" or personal experiences of the so-called supernatural by a preliminary chapter on the perplexing subject of "Personality." This is the question that lies at the root of all the controversy as to ghosts. Before disputing about whether or not there are ghosts outside of us, let us face the preliminary question, whether we have not each of us a veritable ghost within our own skin?

Thrilling as are some of the stories of the apparitions of the living and the dead, they are less sensational than the suggestion made by hypnotists and psychical researchers of England and France, that each of us has a ghost inside him. They say that we are all haunted by a Spiritual Presence, of whose existence we are only fitfully and sometimes never conscious, but which nevertheless inhabits the innermost recesses of our personality. The theory of these researchers is that besides the body and the mind, meaning by the mind the Conscious Personality, there is also within our material frame the soul or Unconscious Personality, the nature of which is shrouded in unfathomable mystery. The latest word of advanced science has thus landed us back to the apostolic assertion that man is composed of body, soul and spirit; and there are some who see in the scientific

doctrine of the Unconscious Personality a welcome confirmation from an unexpected quarter of the existence of the soul.

The fairy tales of science are innumerable, and, like the fairy tales of old romance, they are not lacking in the grim, the tragic, and even the horrible. Of recent years nothing has so fascinated the imagination even of the least imaginative of men as the theory of disease which transforms every drop of blood in our bodies into the lists in which phagocyte and microbe wage the mortal strife on which our health depends. Every white corpuscle that swims in our veins is now declared to be the armed Knight of Life for ever on the lookout for the microbe Fiend of Death. Day and night, sleeping and waking, the white knights of life are constantly on the alert, for on their vigilance hangs our existence. Sometimes, however, the invading microbes come in, not in companies but in platoons, innumerable as Xerxes' Persians, and then "e'en Roderick's best are backward borne," and we die. For our life is the prize of the combat in these novel lists which science has revealed to our view through the microscope, and health is but the token of the triumphant victory of the phagocyte over the microbe.

But far more enthralling is the suggestion which psychical science has made as to the existence of a combat not less grave in the very inmost centre of our own mental or spiritual existence. The strife between the infinitely minute bacilli that swarm in our blood has only the interest which attaches to the conflict of inarticulate and apparently unconscious animalculæ. The strife to which researches into the nature and constitution of our mental processes call attention concerns our conscious selves. It suggests almost inconceivable possibilities as to our own nature, and leaves us appalled on the brink of a new world of being of which until recently most of us were unaware.

There are no papers of such absorbing interest in the whole of the "Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research" as those which deal with the question of the Personality of Man. "I," what am I? What is our Ego? Is this Conscious Personality which receives impressions through the five senses, and through them alone, is it the only dweller in this mortal tabernacle? May there not be other personalities, or at least one other that is not conscious, when we are

awake, and alert, and about, but which comes into semi-consciousness when we sleep, and can be developed into complete consciousness when the other personality is thrown into a state of hypnotic trance? In other words, am I one personality or two? Is my nature dual? As I have two hemispheres in my brain, have I two minds or two souls?

The question will, no doubt, appear fantastic in its absurdity to those who hear it asked for the first time; but those who are at all familiar with the mysterious but undisputed phenomena of hypnotism will realize how naturally this question arises, and how difficult it is to answer it otherwise than in the affirmative. Every one knows Mr. Louis Stevenson's wonderful story of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The dual nature of man, the warfare between this body of sin and death, and the spiritual aspirations of the soul, forms part of the common stock of our orthodox belief. But the facts which recent researches have brought to light seem to point not to the old theological doctrine of the conflict between good and evil in one soul, but to the existence in each of us of at least two distinct selves, two personalities, standing to each other somewhat in the relation of man and wife, according to the old ideal when the man is everything and the woman is almost entirely suppressed.

Every one is familiar with the phenomenon of occasional loss of memory. Men are constantly losing consciousness, from disease, violence, or violent emotion, and emerging again into active life with a gap in their memory. Nay, every night we become unconscious in sleep, and rarely, if ever, remember anything that we think of during slumber. Sometimes in rare cases there is a distinct memory of all that passes in the sleeping and the waking states, and we have read of one young man whose sleeping consciousness was so continuous that he led, to all intents and purposes, two lives. When he slept he resumed his dream existence at the point when he waked, just as we resume our consciousness at the point when we fall asleep. It was just as real to him as the life which he lived when awake. It was actual, progressive, continuous, but entirely different, holding no relation whatever to his waking life. Of his two existences he preferred that which was spent in sleep, as more vivid, more varied, and more pleasurable. This was no doubt an extreme and very unusual case. But it is not impossible to conceive the possibility

of a continuous series of connected dreams, which would result in giving us a realizing sense of leading two existences. That we fail to realize this now is due to the fact that our memory is practically inert or non-existent during sleep. The part of our mind which dreams seldom registers its impressions in regions to which on waking our conscious personality has access.

The conception of a dual or even a multiple personality is worked out in a series of papers by Mr. F. W. H. Myers[1], to which I refer all those who wish to make a serious study of this novel and startling hypothesis. But I may at least attempt to explain the theory, and to give some outline of the evidence on which it is based.

If I were free to use the simplest illustration without any pretence at scientific exactitude, I should say that the new theory supposes that there are inside each of us not one personality but two, and that these two correspond to husband and wife. There is the Conscious Personality, which stands for the husband. It is vigorous, alert, active, positive, monopolising all the means of communication and production. So intense is its consciousness that it ignores the very existence of its partner, excepting as a mere appendage and convenience to itself. Then there is the Unconscious Personality, which corresponds to the wife who keeps cupboard and storehouse, and the old stocking which treasures up the accumulated wealth of impressions acquired by the Conscious Personality, but who is never able to assert any right to anything, or to the use of sense or limb except when her lord and master is asleep or entranced. When the Conscious Personality has acquired any habit or faculty so completely that it becomes instinctive, it is handed on to the Unconscious Personality to keep and use, the Conscious Ego giving it no longer any attention. Deprived, like the wife in countries where the subjection of woman is the universal law, of all right to an independent existence, or to the use of the senses or of the limbs, the Unconscious Personality has discovered ways and means of communicating other than through the recognised organs of sense.

How vast and powerful are those hidden organs of the Unconscious Personality we can only dimly see. It is through them that Divine revelation is vouchsafed to man. The visions of the mystic, the prophecies of the seer, the inspiration of the sibyl, all come

through this Unconscious Soul. It is through this dumb and suppressed Ego that we communicate by telepathy,—that thought is transferred without using the five senses. This under-soul is in touch with the over-soul, which, in Emerson's noble phrase, "abolishes time and space." "This influence of the senses has," he says, "in most men, overpowered their mind to that degree that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is in the world the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul." It is this Unconscious Personality which sees the *Strathmore* foundering in mid-ocean, which hears a whisper spoken hundreds of miles off upon the battlefield, and which witnesses, as if it happened before the eyes, a tragedy occurring at the Antipodes.

In proportion as the active, domineering Conscious Personality extinguishes his submissive unconscious partner, materialism flourishes, and man becomes blind to the Divinity that underlies all things. Hence in all religions the first step is to silence the noisy, bustling master of our earthly tabernacle, who, having monopolised the five senses, will listen to no voice which it cannot hear, and to allow the silent mistress to be open-souled to God. Hence the stress which all spiritual religions have laid upon contemplation, upon prayer and fasting. Whether it is an Indian Yogi, or a Trappist Monk, or one of our own Quakers, it is all the same. In the words of the Revivalist hymn, "We must lay our deadly doing down," and in receptive silence wait for the inspiration from on high. The Conscious Personality has usurped the visible world; but the Invisible, with its immeasurable expanse, is the domain of the Sub-conscious. Hence we read in the Scriptures of losing life that we may find it; for things of time and sense are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

It is extraordinary how close is the analogy when we come to work it out. The impressions stored up by the Conscious Personality and entrusted to the care of the Unconscious are often, much to our disgust, not forthcoming when wanted. It is as if we had given a memorandum to our wife and we could not discover where she had put it. But night comes; our Conscious Self sleeps, our Unconscious Housewife wakes, and turning over her stores produces the missing impression; and when our other self wakes it finds the mislaid