

Does Richard Harding Davis Guide the Daily Career of Little Hope?

HARDLY any one doubts the old saying, "Truth is stranger than fiction." Yet always there is something of surprise in any new proof that the philosopher who coined the phrase was indeed wise.

These are the days of "ghost stories," of tales of the psychic and of constantly newer manifestations of what some call the spirits, and others, less convinced but still inclined to believe, will designate as "the unreal." Skeptics put all these accounts of strange and mysterious things down as "ghost stories"—and call all of them fiction. But in the most unexpected place a bit of what might be stubbornly called a "ghost story" has made most serious appearance, and there is so much of the element of unquestionable truth about it that it may well be credited to the account of those truths which are, indeed, stranger than all fiction.

The "truth" of this situation is that the beautiful and vivacious Bessie McCoy Davis, widow of the famous war correspondent Richard Harding Davis, believes most sincerely that she is in daily communication with the husband whose death was mourned by the English speaking world some time ago.

Whether or not Mrs. Davis is right—whether she is the victim of a hallucination, there is, of course, the very grave question. But that she sincerely believes that Richard Harding Davis is watching over her career, that he speaks to her every day and advises her and guides her, and particularly directs the education and training of little Hope, the beloved daughter he left behind, is undoubted truth.

Mrs. Davis believes it; all who know the pretty "Yama Yama Girl," who was like one of her husband's heroines, stepping out of one of his books to give him just such a romance as he liked to write, do not doubt for a moment that to Mrs. Davis it all is very much truth.

Went Out of Her Way

To Poke Fun at Ghosts

And that is the strangeness of it—that of all people this young woman who is of the stage, whose fame was built upon her nimble feet and frolicsome mimicry, who with her brilliant husband went out of her way to poke ridicule at those who believed in the supernatural, should be one of those suddenly to meet with experiences which to her mind should prove that the dead may communicate with the living.

It is a most amazing circumstance that has resulted. One may, or may not, believe—not that Mrs. Davis is sincere, but that she is right in her convictions. But one's attitude toward the possibilities in the situation does not detract from the interesting statements little Bessie McCoy Davis makes to her friends and the incidents she describes.

Those who are familiar with the attitude of mind of the famous war correspondent know that he was bitterly opposed to all beliefs in the supernatural, the occult, the psychic or the "unreal." One of his books is devoted to an exposure of what he considered the charlatanism of those who profess to believe in "spiritism." He frequently said that all the fundamentals of human existence were opposed to credence in a bridge connecting the here with the hereafter. He was impatient with those who sought to convince him—impatient with all but one, a close friend, who will be spoken of later.

But Mrs. Davis declares that her husband, at the very moment of his passage from this life to that beyond, was persuaded that he had been wrong. And in this moment, the young widow is certain, he found a most characteristic method of informing her that he had been wrong—as she puts it—and that she must have faith in his presence near her and in his ability to communicate with her and guide her.

And—increasing the strangeness of it all—Mrs. Davis is not unsupported. Mrs. Charles Belmont Davis, her sister-in-law, and other relatives and intimate friends have been as convinced as she and, with her, are certain Richard Harding Davis is as much of the world to-day as he was when his body hovered between home and wherever there was war or battle to write about.

Is Somewhat Reminiscent of

'The Return of Peter Grimm'

It is all reminiscent of the quaint and delightful character in the play "The Return of Peter Grimm." Those who remember this play will recall that Peter Grimm was skeptical when his friend the Doctor declared that he believed those who were dead could return in spirit to the earth and watch over those they left behind. Peter Grimm was angry at first that his doctor friend should think him such a fool as to believe such things. Then he was amused. At last he made a pact, just to quiet his old friend, that whichever should die first should return and tell the other about what was to come after death. Peter Grimm smiled in his sleeve—in fact, smiled outwardly behind his friend's back, when he entered the pact. It was ridiculous to him.

But the play is built around Peter Grimm's coming back. It is an entertaining play, pure fiction, of course, and not supposed to be taken as other than a fanciful

Dramatic Incidents That Lead the Yama Yama Girl to Believe Brilliant War Correspondent and Author Watches Over Those He Loved Most Dearly

ful entertainment. But Mrs. Davis reminds one of the circumstances in the life—and death—of old Peter Grimm when she tells of her own extraordinary state of mind—and her experiences.

Mr. Davis, it will be remembered, died suddenly while in a telephone booth sending a message. It was concluded that his physical strength had been undermined by the hardships and exposures incident to his work as war correspondent at the front. Death came so suddenly that there was no alarm—his body was found crumpled in the booth, the telephone receiver dangled over his huddled form.

The day before, Mrs. Davis says, she and her husband had entertained at their charming Mount Kisco estate a mutual friend, a woman who was the only person Mr. Davis would allow to discuss with him seriously the question of after death communications. This friend was one whose intellectual attainments Mr. Davis profoundly respected. She was the only one, he frequently said, who could talk with intelligence on the subject that usually irritated him—spiritism. He frequently declared he rather enjoyed arguing with her, as from her he could keep himself acquainted with the "clever jargon," as he called it, of the believers in the psychic and the spiritualistic.

Called It Hypnosis and

Regretted It as Waste

They never talked together for any length of time but the friend brought the subject up. After she had left their home, the day before his death, Mr. Davis remarked to his wife:

"She makes vastly interesting deductions. She is a victim of self hypnosis—she has hypnotized herself into believing her premises and she is capable of further convincing herself by the deductions her brilliant mind conceives. It is to be regretted her talents are wasted in such a hopeless field."

It is important to remember the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Davis to understand properly Mrs. Davis's feelings in the light of an incident associated with her husband's death.

Mrs. Davis herself describes what she believes was the first sign that caused her to think her husband would find a way to communicate with her after death.

"When my husband fell in the telephone booth his body scraped against the wall, which was of plaster. It was a small place and the body fell heavily. Part of the plaster broke and showered over my husband's body. A cloud of plaster dust rose and whitened almost every surface in the booth.

"Of course I was too hysterically upset to pay attention to anything but the body of my husband when I found him. The next day, however, something drew me to that telephone booth. I called Miss Madeline Fray, who was Richard's secretary, and together we went to the booth.

Odd Trait of Author

That Led to Discovery

"Now let me explain a trait of Richard's: When he was concentrating upon some subject, often he would sit at his desk and, absent mindedly, print big letters on whatever piece of paper was near. Usually he printed my name at such moments—'Bessie'—often some disconnected words or even strings of disassociated letters. He had a peculiar way of shaping these letters so that there never could be any doubt as to who drew them.

"Now, to return to my visit to the telephone booth the next day after his death. I drew open the booth door. Suddenly Miss Fray caught my arm and pointed to the pane of glass in the door. There, unmistakably in Richard's peculiar manner, was printed the name of the woman who had so recently called upon us and who had talked with Richard about psychic communication.

"At once, without reason or thought, the understanding came to me—to me, the skeptic—Richard in some way had printed there the name of this woman as his message to me that I should 'believe' in the woman's theories—that, as she said could be done, he would do—watch over me and find a way to talk to me.

"I believed it—knew it. I was convinced and comforted. Half my loneliness seemed to leave me that instant. I called others of the family to see with me, and, strange to say, they all felt that here was the sign—that Richard had not left us except in the flesh."

Mrs. Davis, in the quaint loveliness of sixteenth century crinolines and ruffles,

curls and garlands of her dancing costume, talks to every one of her faith in the manifestations of her husband's returning spirit. The dean of Princeton University had just left her when she gave this information, after paying his respects to the widow of one of the students of whom Princeton is proud. He, too, had heard her story, and he was grave and thoughtful as he walked away.

"I understood the message on the door," continued Mrs. Davis, "as completely as though I had heard it in my husband's beloved voice. He was telling me that in the new light, in the new world he had entered, he knew that her belief was right."

Top picture shows Bessie McCoy Davis to-day. In oval she is shown with Hope Davis. Figure at right is Yama Yama Girl. Below—Richard Harding Davis.



Then the little widow told of the next incident that encouraged her:

"It was a few weeks after he had gone away. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Charles Belmont Davis, and I were standing at the entrance to the house in which Richard and I had lived so happily for five years and in which he had died. Suddenly my sister-in-law drew a sharp, startled breath. I looked at her in surprise. I saw that her eyes were raised above the line of trees. My gaze followed hers. As though painted against the sky I saw a perfect reproduction of the house before which we were standing. Lintel for lintel, pane for pane, gable for gable, chimney for chimney, the house was duplicated there in the sky before us. It was an aerial sketch. Such an one as any one looking down upon it would have made.

"Had I alone seen it I might have thought that my grief and my fancy had painted this duplicate of our home. But my matter of fact sister-in-law was the first to see it. It was equally clear to her and to me. He who had loved that farm home of ours more than any spot on earth was looking down upon it from a far sphere. The picture of it which we saw was that which was visible to the eyes of his homesick spirit."

The strongest, most striking proof, to Mrs. Davis's mind, that her husband

though absent is present, came to her through their seven-year-old daughter Hope.

"Richard adored Hope. He could never bear to hear her cry. She seldom cried. When she did he was in a dreadful state of mind until she stopped. He was opposed to the modern method of leaving a fretful child alone to cry it out. He said it is an inhuman practice. Always he

would say 'When a child cries it is because something is the matter with it. The sane, intelligent thing is to find out what is the matter.'

"We were staying in a village in Nova Scotia one summer. We were preparing for bed. Hope was fretful. She lay with eyes wide open staring at a framed tintype that hung opposite her bed. It seemed to us a harmless picture. It was of an elderly woman in a black silk gown with tight waist and full skirt. About her thin neck and across her high shoulders rested a large, white lace collar. Her smooth hair was parted in the middle and combed down over her ears.

"The child twisted her body and turned her head away from the picture. Finding herself uncomfortable in that posture she turned back again. When her eyes fell upon the picture she frowned, then began to cry. We turned the picture to the wall, but she still cried. We moved it to another nail on the wall, but her impatient, tear filled eyes still followed it. We took it down from the wall and put it into the drawer of the old fashioned bureau. But she still fretted.

Hand and Arm Reached To Little Hope's Shoulder

"I tried the modern method of letting Hope alone. I fell into a doze. Miss Fray's startled cry awoke me. She, the entirely reliable, unimaginative woman of business, had been sitting beside Hope when she saw a hand and arm reach forth. The arm was covered with a gray flannel sleeve, a little short at the cuff. The short cuff had been a joke in the family. Richard had liked that old gray flannel shirt. He used to wear it about the farm. After it shrunk until the cuff was far from meeting the hand he still wore it. Miss Fray recognized the hand. It was Richard's even to the hairy covering on its back. The hand reached the child's shoulder. Her crying lessened. The hand gently stroked her shoulder, just as had been my husband's habit with our little girl in life.

"Hope's cries ceased. She did not cry

again. Soon, under the influence of the hand, she fell asleep—then the hand was slowly withdrawn. It was suspended for a moment above our little girl's head, as though in blessing. Then slowly it vanished."

Mrs. Davis says that she has always the consciousness that her husband is near her. She is confident that his eyes are upon her.

"I have never done anything since my husband left us of which he would not approve," she said. "Even though I were disposed to I should not, for I am always sure he sees every movement of mine. I know that he reads every thought.

"One bit of evidence that he is present, guiding and directing me in all I do is my change of feeling toward a relative of his. I always disliked this member of his family. I often spoke of our lack of congeniality. I expressed my positive distaste for the society of that person. This grieved Richard, for the relative was one of whom he was very fond. He used to say, 'Some-time you two will understand each other and be friends.' Gradually since his death came that new state of feeling has come. We are now excellent friends. I am confident that he who loved us both so well had brought us to an understanding."

Mrs. Davis is persuaded, too, that the author of the "Van Bibber Tales" and a hundred other more than worthy pen products attends all her business conferences. She is satisfied that he looks over her shoulder while she signs her contracts. He would arrest the hand, she thinks, that was about to affix itself to other than an advantageous contract.

"That is the reason why no great mistakes are made," she says in simple fashion with the direct gaze of candid, childlike eyes. "Things have gone pretty well with us since my husband left us. I have sold the motion picture rights to all his novels. That money I have invested for Hope's future use.

"It has been conveyed to me silently, but unmistakably, that it is his wish that our daughter shall live in England part of the time. So I have bought a little house in London. From there I shall commute to my work in America, say, spend six months

here and six months there. It is not my choice, but his. He wants Hope to be a citizen not of one country but of all. He wants her to learn the languages. The best way to learn is to spend much time abroad. I am providing her with a governess for French and another for her music and a third for English. She is in Bermuda now with one of her governesses.

He Wants Little Hope

To Live in England

"I am bringing up Hope as he would have wished me to, for he holds before me his ideal of womanhood. That was his mother, Rebecca Harding Davis. Mrs. Davis was a writer. Hope I think will be. Although she is only 7 she already writes verses. Many times, I know, Richard has pointed the way for me when I was in a quandary about Hope. I have decided on something—he has warned and advised me, and I have followed his advice."

The many suitors who hover about the attractive young widow of the great author will be interested in this decision:

"I will never marry any one unless Richard approves of him, and I shall know if he does. He will make clear to me his approval or disapproval. He will guide me in that as he does in all else."

As the facts concerning Mrs. Davis's belief are becoming noised among her friends, more and more interest is being shown in her experiences. Convinced that her husband's keen mind is guiding little Hope's life, she is devoting herself wholeheartedly to her public work and is meeting with even greater success than in days past.

