An Impromptu Seance

By DAVID G. BAILLIE.

A SPIRIT rap startled me while I was calling on a lonely old lady who lives beside Shelburn Bay, Lake Champlain. If I had had any doubts of the genuineness of the signal, its sequel would have removed them. In view of present and increasing interest in "psychic" matters, it is worth while to present a specific report of this manifestation, with the connotation that a well known physician and surgeon has just said to me: "I am very far from being prepared to deny that there is an 'X' or unknown quantity in the equation of life. This is a subject which it behooves us to approach and study with an open mind."

I am a hardened and experienced newspaper man; and not gullible. As a young reporter I chronicled the investigation in New York at which Katie Fox, of the famous Fox Sisters, heroines of the Rochester knockings which heralded modern Spiritualism as a cult, pretended to give a physical explanation of the rappings. The explanation was fantastic and unbelievable; but it brought ridicule on all "spiritualist" phenomena; and I had not bestowed on "knocking" one serious thought, until a genuine rap or knocking was produced without physical intervention in my friend's country cottage, near Burlington, Vt.

The old lady of Shelburn Bay is not a professional psychic intermediary; which is the new research way of saying spirit medium. On a recent gloaming I was at my friend's cottage. There was with us a Professor of Physics (not Psychics—the very opposite) at a great Northern university.

He told us in simple, straightforward manner that Dr. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge are on the right path, in his opinion; and from his personal experience drew examples and instances justifying that opinion.

Vermont, I should add, is an eerie State. Almost any man with a live soul will be impressed by the mystic influences manifest in the poetical hour of a still summer evening; the hour between the gloaming and the mirk, in that land of haunted lakes and pools and fairy folked copses; land of tradition and romance; land of known and unknown Indian and pioneer graves, savage man and "civilized" man in one red burial blent; land of grewsome incidents in the ensanguined youth of this bitterly born nation.

The professor departed, leaving us impressed and creepy; for when the erudite begin to preach that the era of psychic communication among all the sons of men, ancient and modern, is at hand, following the era of wireless, what shall the less informed say? I was thinking about demons, cacodemons and eudemons, friends and familiars' succubi and succubae; vampires (real, not imitation) ghouls, freets, jinns, for whom is named the liquor that formerly foundationed the rickey; of bogies, kobolds, dwergers, sprites, oufes, nixies, pigwidgeons, specters, apparitions, visions, shades, wraiths, boggarts, banshees and all manner of supernatural, weird, uncanny, unearthly, spectral, ghostly demoniacal, angelic and haunting things.

Unseen Force Arrives.

There was a door behind and to the left of the old lady, who was sitting opposite and to the left of me; the position of the door with relation to me being therefore at the end of a diagonal line from my right hand. This door, which led to another room, was ajar, and was in my view. The back of my chair was not far from an outside door, opened full width, leading to the porch, the doorway being screened.

The room, furnished in a crowded and old fashioned way and cluttered with books and pictures—blessed old New England style—was well lighted. It was about 9 P. M. and the darkness outside was far from intense, being broken and modified by street lamps, lights from other cottages, from a little park across the way, and from a large hotel near by. If there was to be anything in the nature of a seance there was nothing in the stage setting to suggest or invite it. When doors or windows are opened in such a cottage the occupants are practically in a mere nook or niche of the open air; hardly strictly housebound.

In spite of the spooky turn to the conversation which had been given by the professor, and the natural sequel, of mentality predisposed to accept anything that might happen—the ghost story frame of mind, well known to everybody—there was not at this particular time any more than at any other time any valid reason for anticipating progressive developments. I was about to make my excuses and follow the professor outward when—suddenly (of course suddenly—there was no preliminary whistling of throat clearing) there came to the inner door, ajar diagonally opposite me, an Unseen Force—and — "B-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-Tat-Tat-Tat"—tirled at the pin.

If you have read old ballads and visited old New England and Old England and Auld Scotland houses, you know what that means.

On the outer door of such dwellings hang a rasper and a pin suspended from a chain, and a knocker. You, being at the outside of the door and seeking to have it opened, seize the pin and on the rasper make a noise like that made on a modern fence by a modern small boy running along and rattling a stick or cane on the posts, uprights, slats, rails—whatever are they, anyway? Having rasped, or tirled at the pin, you raise the hammer part of the knocker and go "Tat-tat-tat-tat."

Well, that's what happened on the inner door which stood ajar behind my aged friend. But!—There wasn't any pin on it, and there wasn't any rasper, and there wasn't any knocker. . . . It was as plain an old wooden door as ever was painted or varnished. . . . And there wasn't anybody at it—that I could see.

The noise was evolved with such percussional clarity and staccato definiteness that when my hostess said to me:

"That was a rap!"

I misunderstood her, and my brain eagerly but mistakenly grabbing at the commonplace materialism in which all our poor brains are educated, I echoed, inquiringly. "A rat?"

No Such Thing as Dead.

I am trying to report what happened just exactly as it happened; because I wish you to understand that the orchestral accompaniment, if there had been one, would not have been Strings Pizzicati all the time. The ridiculous seems to be the Mr. Hyde of Dr. Jekyll the Sublime, and the transition from one to t'other is—well, everybody knows about that, so I won't amplify.

Along with my mistaken monosyllable I projected to my friend a wave of pity, continuing to think in terms of rodents.

"Poor woman!" (I mentalized), "living here all alone in this rat infested old hut."

"No! No! No!" enunciated her voice, in brisk and horrified protest. "Not a rat . . . I—said—a—RAP. . . . And I think it is Norah again. She has been paying visits to me for a week."

"Who is Norah?"

"My sister on the other side."

"The other side? You mean—ah—that is to say—is she dead?"

"No, indeed, she is not dead! How can she be dead when she is in the room here with us and signaling to us? There's no such condition as 'dead.' Surely Christians should know that. Jesus taught it explicitly and in so many words, saying, 'That the dead are alive.'

"No; I tell you there's no such condition as 'dead,' in the usually accepted meaning of that word.

"Norah hasn't her body. She has learned to do without it. But she is alive—more alive than ever she was; and is more active than ever she was.

"Please don't go—I want you to stay. Something is about to happen. I am sure of it. Norah made that noise to attract our attention. So let's keep qu"——

She fell back in her chair. Her eyes were glazed. The "fashion of her countenance was changed"—indeed it looked deathlike; and a strange voice issuing from her mouth began in even monotone to deliver a homily on spirit conditions. The substance of the message was trite, and the alleged or claimant sender, whose identity was not revealed, was rather tedious or prosy, although very earnest. Apparently the sender was a man. That could be gathered by the listener. His statement was a diffuse paraphrase of Longfellow's more succinct and compact:

"Life is real; life is earnest
And the grave is not its goal.
'Dust thou art; to dust returnest'
Was not spoken of the Soul."

Some Power From Outside.

The speaker said we should live all we can and as well as we can to the limit of our opportunities; at the highest possible pitch of endeavor and attainment. The language used was excellent. Words were well chosen and phraseology was good. Indeed the message sounded as if it were being read from a dull book; so exact was it and so far from conversational in structure. The stuff in substance and quality resembled the "strenuous life" material Theodore Roosevelt used to give to interviewers when he kindly assisted them to fill space without committing himself to definite politics; a masterly collection of abstracts which gave the ear the impression of being concretes, until the post-interview and disenglamoured intellect analyzed them. Sometimes, without Roosevelt's accompanying action, his gestures, his oratory, his handclappings, his knee slappings, his desk whackings, his clenched fist thumpings, his frownings, his facial expressions, his teeth revealing smiles and grins, the matter of his discourse would have been dull and tedious and prosy. Pray do not misunderstand me. I am not iconoclasting T. R. I am merely stating that an old lady in Vermont sermonized in a fashion and with a vocabulary reminiscent of T. R. and gave a remarkably close imitation of the style and the verbal output of a man she never had seen and never heard speak. The "visitor," however, was not identified. I have no idea who he was (or what it was).

My friend straightened up in her chair, and the eloquent outflow was ended. She rubbed her eyes.

"What was I talking about?" she asked. "Some power from outside of me took possession of me. . . . No—It is not the first time anything like that has happened to me. I haven't said anything about it. I haven't told any one. . . . From a physical point of view I don't like it. The strain is very great, and one of these days I'll be stepping out with one of my visitors. . . . It's Norah who is bringing them, I think. . . . I seem to be more susceptible of late. . . ."

And away she went again, flinging herself back in her chair and becoming dead to the world so far as perceptive and receptive faculties are concerned, but delivering messages like a human wireless receiver—which, I should venture to guess, is what she was, temporarily.

I gathered from the talk that another male spirit was using Miss Blank's vocal organs. He was anxious I should know that he and "his band" were taking good care of their "little sister." He talked volubly for ten or fifteen minutes, without saying anything striking or important. I think spirits, as talkers, are even gabbier than human beings. They seem to be in the condition ascribed by Disraeli to Gladstone, "Intoxicated by the exuberance of their own verbosity."

When Miss Blank recovered consciousness (in Scriptural language, when the spirit departed from her), she said: "I recognized that one. That was Oneonta."

"Yes?"

"An Indian friend of mine."

"Oh! What mediums call an Indian guide?"

"I don't know. I cannot say that I am a medium, although I have been told I have mediumistic tendencies and could be developed."

Her voice became feeble Her eyes glazed—then closed. Her face was grayish white. She appeared to be dead . . . I was scared.

I perceived that Miss Blank regarded mediums and mediumship with very great respect. She was much impressed by the suggestion Oneonta is her "Indian guide." I had heard that some New York professional mediums are eager to claim Indian guides, the theory being that Indians, children of nature, who have lived "in the open," are first rate scouts and pathfinders "on the other side."

"But how do you know this communicator is an Indian and that his name is Oneonta?" I inquired, skeptically. A "wild Indian's" command of fluent English was puzzling me.

"He has told me his name; and—I—have—seen—him. He has shown himself to me. One day when I was lying back in my reclining chair he came behind me and stooped over me and looked into my eyes. . . . He was in full costume—I could see the feathers of his headdress—the features of his face. He spoke to me——"

"What? In English?"

"To be sure. I don't understand any other language."

"But how came a wild Indian to talk English? Or—is he a Carlisle boy?"

"His earth life was away, away back, long before there was any Carlisle. He is of the old time, true, clean Indian type, before the red men were contaminated and lowered by contact with the materialistic whites; when they lived next to nature, and knew the nature spirits, whom they later joined, becoming themselves nature spirits with strong human sympathies. The Indians are not gone from the North American continent. In their old haunts they hide. On their old trails they hunt—perhaps forever and forever—perhaps to be removed later to another sphere—perhaps to return."

"But," I persisted, "in the case, say, of Oneonta, does that include the power to speak English even if he knew nothing of the language when he was alive—had never even heard of it?"

"When he was alive? He is still alive. When was he dead? He did not know English when he was first living in what we now call the United States, in the land of his forefathers, that we now occupy. He has learned English since he went into the advanced sphere of existence in which he now continues to live.

"He now understands English perfectly; and that is why he can act as a communicating and guiding spirit for an English speaking woman. I do not understand any other language. I may later—but now—no."

"Oneonta, you say, has learned English?"

"Oh, yes; and is very glad of opportunities to express himself through me; and is very faithful and grateful and devoted to me. He has done some really very extraordinary deeds for me—saved a man's life, for instance."

"What? Do spirits think a material or incarnated life is worth saving in its material or incarnated state?"

"Of course they do. An interrupted human life is an interrupted experience and prolongs the trials of incarnation, for doubt not that an interrupted or incomplete experience must be resumed and rounded out."

"By teachers on the other side?"

"Assuredly. I have not had much education or information or knowledge on the earth plane. I was inclined to a musical career, and have sung at meetings. But I have not had a chance of developing my musical talent in my present existence. My psychic experience comfortingly assures me I may yet develop it. My life without psychic experience would have been very cramped and narrow.

"Early in my childhood I was convinced by what I saw that I have what the Scotch call the second sight. My mediumship may yet be developed. . . . I have been told and I know by my experiences that sometimes transcendental or transliminal voices speak through me. . . .

"True, I have not had a great deal of education nor have I acquired much information or knowledge on the earth plane. My life has been quiet and secluded. Without psychic experience it would have been a very cramped and narrow ex-

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