

The Major's Menagerie

REMARKABLE achievements of Ivan Brodsky, physician, whose investigations into psychic phenomena enabled him to cure spiritual diseases and to exorcise evil spirits from the bodies of his victims.

By H. M. EGBERT

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MOST of the examples of psychical manifestations that I had hitherto investigated in the company of Dr Ivan Brodsky were of spiritual possession and the allied phenomena—matters astonishing to laymen but more or less commonplace to students of the science. I was now to witness one of the darker and more mysterious phases of spirit power.

I remember that Brodsky and I had been reading an account of a so-called "haunted" house in a lonely neighborhood 10 or 12 miles distant. The structure, which was a rambling old place, had belonged to a major in the army, who had retired from active service to reside there and spend his declining bachelor days alone. He had seen service in the Philippines, had traveled in India, and brought back with him an assortment of curious animals, including a cheetah, one of the wild cats of Bengal, several large parrots of brilliant plumage, and a young orang-outang, which he had captured in Borneo. He had become greatly attached to this beast and had educated it until it developed almost human intelligence. The major had died suddenly, however, the large ape had refused food and pined away until it followed him, and the old house was now occupied only by a caretaker and his daughter, who tended the surviving animals under the terms of the major's will.

About two months after the owner's death rumors had spread through the neighborhood that the place was haunted. Pictures had fallen from the walls, crockery had been seen to fly violently across the kitchen, chairs and tables acquired a predilection for waltzing without the application of visible motor power. The neighbors, at first interested spectators of these phenomena, had come to shun the place when it was seen that the player of these pranks was actuated by some malicious motive. A gossiping woman had been struck senseless by a flying tumbler. A member of a psychical research society, who had volunteered to pass the night in the menagerie, where these manifestations mostly appeared, had been found senseless upon the floor next morning, his body covered with bruises, and three ribs broken. He had been removed to a hospital, where he lay precariously ill and mentally deranged as a result of his fearful experiences.

"What do you make of it, Doctor?" I asked, when Brodsky had laid down his paper.

"It's nothing in the world but a poltergeist," the Doctor answered. Then, seeing my look of mystification, he continued:

"A poltergeist is one of those elemental, half human forms that have never achieved incarnation in human form. The universe is a palpitating, crowding mass of soul stuff, most of it discarnate, a small part exteriorized in various highly heterogeneous physical forms. Whether this elemental being has already gone through the millions of progressive incarnations between the uncellular organism and man, and is now waiting for its first appearance in human shape, probably as a degraded savage—whether it is this, or whether the poltergeist is simply a leakage from the universal soul stuff, I am not prepared to say. At any rate, it possesses a very limited intelligence and strong earthward aspirations, which show themselves mostly in the flinging of crockery and the playing of malicious tricks. This is a well-known phenomenon; the celebrated Cuck Lane ghost of Dr. Johnson's day, which perplexed eighteenth century London, was undoubtedly a poltergeist. Curiously enough, it is invariably associated with the presence of an imbecile child, the reason probably being that this is the intelligence which draws it earthward and furnishes the source of power.

"I saw a diminutive child come swiftly out of the house. She might have been 14 years of age, from her general appearance, though her stature was that of a child half her years. She came up furtively, taking no notice of any of us, and stood still, biting the corner of her apron. The caretaker scolded her for her absence. "Baby been with Plunk," said the girl in a childish treble. "Plunk good. Baby love Plunk. Plunk no love big cat. Baby no love big cat." Her father caught her roughly by the hand and pulled her toward him. "Polly, have done with that nonsense," he said sharply. "Plunk's dead and gone and you won't see him again." He turned to us. "We're hoping she'll grow up like any other child," he said more softly; "but the monkey's death's kind of upset her mind a little. Now, Polly, you come home to your Ma."

The girl burst into a passion of tears and sobbed as though her heart were broken. We left them there and set off at a brisk pace in the direction which had been indicated. "You really think it's the spirit of the old major?" queried the reporter, when we had left the house behind us. "My dear fellow," Brodsky answered, "if I were in the habit of forming hypotheses without a basis of satisfactory evidence I should never have learned what little I know about these things. Never be led into hypotheses, even in your own trade," he continued whimsically. "I can tell you one thing, however, it's

"Nevertheless," Brodsky continued thoughtfully, "I confess that I should like to make a personal investigation of this matter, for it presents fascinating, but obscure, allied symptoms which might put me on the track of a discovery."

He had hardly concluded when there came a violent rattle at the doorbell and a young man hurried into the room.

"Dr. Brodsky," he began, "I am a reporter for the Wayne County Gazette, and I have been commissioned to ask you for an interview concerning the haunted house over at Turnerville. You have heard of the two deaths?"

"Nothing beyond what your paper contains," said Brodsky, picking up the sheet.

"That's two days old," said the reporter, glancing at it. The young man died insane in the hospital last night, just at the time the second one was killed. Another psychical investigator," he continued, "volunteered to pass the night in the menagerie and was found with one side of his body crushed completely in this morning. What do you make of it?"

He had pulled out his pencil and notebook, but Brodsky made no immediate reply. He stepped to a hook where his hat hung and placed it up on his head. "Let's go and find out," he answered.

"To spend the night there?" gasped the reporter.

"If you are willing."

"Willing?" the reporter cried. "Just wait till I telephone over to my editor!"

A few minutes later we were on our way to the station to catch the local. Inside the car the reporter piled the Doctor with many questions, to which Brodsky replied sympathetically. The young man made copious notes, but after a while ceased to write and seemed to fall under the spell of Brodsky's words. His notebook and pencil rested motionless upon his knees.

"Doctor," he said at last, "I am most grateful to you for the trouble you have taken in telling me all this. But, to be perfectly frank with you, I can't make use of it."

I saw Brodsky smile sympathetically, but he made no rejoinder. "The fact is, the young man went on, in a lower voice, 'my paper wouldn't stand for it. I believe—in fact I know that these things are true. I have had experience of them, and so have many of my acquaintances. But to write what you have told me I should be thrown out of my job, and probably be sent to an insane asylum. No, Doctor, I can't use it.'"

"Perhaps you can see for yourself to-night and tone the facts down to suit," said Brodsky with the suspicion of a laugh.

The young man looked at him dubiously, but at that moment the train stopped and we got out at Turnerville. It was but five minutes to the house, a large, straggling building dating back to the beginning of the last century, set in an isolated situation upon a hill. The door was opened to us by a surly-looking man, evidently the caretaker.

"What, more of you?" he sneered. "Come to see the haunted house, I suppose. I can't admit you, gentlemen; police orders is very strict. The county sheriff was here this morning, and if I hadn't been able to prove I spent the night in my own cottage down in Turnerville they'd have arrested me for murder. It's as much as my life is worth to let you in; they cautioned me."

The reporter pulled something from his pocket and passed it to the caretaker. The man's had closed upon it avidly.

"Well, it ain't my funeral," he grumbled. "It's my time to close up, anyway. All I'll ask of you gentlemen is to take a fifteen minutes' walk until I'm safe down to my home and don't know nothing of your coming. And there, if you should find the side door open and walk in, I guess they can't lay no blame on me. Polly!" He called loudly. "Drat that child! Run away again, I suppose. Now, gentlemen!"

"One minute," interrupted Brodsky. "You're speaking of your daughter?"

"My little girl, yes," grumbled the man. "She ain't strong in her head and takes to running away. She's been worse since they all died, especially Plunk. When Plunk cashed in it nigh broke her heart—the big monkey, gentlemen. Loved him like her was human. She didn't care nothing much about the tiger, though—and glad I was to see him kick the bucket last week. I feared every night he'd get loose and make off into Turnerville. Everybody was afraid of him except the old man, and as for Plunk—why, if he saw the tiger's tail the other end of the garden he'd scream himself sick with fright."

"The big cat's dead, too, eh?" asked Brodsky.

you would have the goodness to make off in that direction until I'm gone, I won't be back hunting for no burglars until morning. Better keep together, though, or he'll stave your ribs in separate, as easy as barrels."

"Who?" Brodsky demanded.

The caretaker jeered at him. "No, no, you don't catch me in any affidavits," he answered. "I done my duty by the old man and his animals, and he knows it and lets me alone. He was always hot-headed, the old major was, and if he chooses to squeeze your ribs in now that he's dead, why, it's just what he'd have done if he'd been alive." He made a trumpet of his hands. "Polly! Polly! Polly!" he yelled.

I saw a diminutive child come swiftly out of the house. She might have been 14 years of age, from her general appearance, though her stature was that of a child half her years. She came up furtively, taking no notice of any of us, and stood still, biting the corner of her apron. The caretaker scolded her for her absence.

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almost always the unexpected that happens in everything."

That was all that we could get out of him. We walked on in silence. The sun went down in a burst of splendor, and by the time we got back we had prolonged our walk into a generous half hour. The place seemed absolutely deserted, but the side door was invitingly ajar, as the caretaker had promised.

We passed through the caretaker's quarters into a long, low room, with lumber, wire netting and bags of animal food piled up around it. Instantly we were startled by harsh, discordant screams. Four giant parrots, or macaws, rather, of splendid tropical plumage, were suspended in four enormous steel cages from the rafters over our heads. They watched us, uttering their ill-sounding cries, their heads bent to one side inquiringly, their large beaks open. Brodsky, whose fondness for animals was almost an obsession, went from cage to cage, stroking the creatures' heads fearlessly. He had soon established himself upon terms of intimacy with them. Suddenly he recalled himself with a start.

"Let's go and look at the cheetah skin," he said.

We found it in an ill-smelling out-building—a magnificent furry pelt, newly cured. The animal must have been a beauty when alive.

"We'll take this with us; it may get cold during the night," he said, lifting the skin and carrying it back to the parrots' room. Immediately the birds saw him enter, his head half hidden beneath the pelt, they set up shrill screams of fear and began to flutter their wings wildly. Brodsky concealed the skin beneath a couple of empty sacks and reassured the creatures.

"Now you boys take a look through the house," he said; "and see if you can find any bedding and eatables. I'll stay here with the macaws."

We passed upstairs but found nothing of interest. The plainly furnished

rooms were evidently in the same condition as they had been left in after the major's death though dust was everywhere. We dragged down a couple of mattresses, candles and matches. In the kitchen we found some bread and cold mutton, and all ate heartily. Then we went back into the menagerie to pass the night. As we entered the reporter started back and gripped my shoulder.

"Look, look!" he said, in a half scream.

The cage of the macaw on the side most remote from us was swinging rhythmically, as though someone were pushing it, while the bird, with open beak and expanded wings, was chattering—not with fear but with anger. Brodsky went up and steadied it. Almost immediately the cage on the other side began to swing in the same manner. Brodsky stepped back.

"Well, my friend, whoever you are, we won't grudge you your little pastime," he said. He turned to us. "We have nothing to fear from such childish intelligences that take delight in these mischievous pranks," he said with a smile. "And I think the three of us can overcome any manifestations of physical force. Hi! You! Show me how far you can throw."

There was no answer in deed, except that the cage stopped swinging. Evidently the challenge had fallen on deaf ears. We lit the candles, for it had grown dark, and sat down. I looked at the reporter. He was trembling violently. Suddenly the candles went out, one after the other.

"Blown out!" cried the reporter, his voice resounding queerly through the gloom.

"Pinched out," said Brodsky. The glowing ends of the wicks had been cut clean as though with snuffers. He lit them slowly, and instantly the same phenomenon resulted.

"Well, they won't put this one out," he said, lighting the one nearest him and carefully conveying it to where he sat beside the concealed cheetah skin. He set it down upon a packing case, close to the ground. True to his word, the candle flared steadily. He carried another to the same place and lit it from the flame of the first. Nothing occurred.

of the results of their own promptings. Nevertheless, you are the murderer of two men, and would-be murderer of more."

The girl burst into imbecile laughter.

"Bad man beat me!" she shrieked to the rafters. "Bad man beat Baby. Bad man fall dead. Squeeze bad man dead. You bad man! He squeeze you dead!"

"So!" said the doctor, loosening his hold and watching her. He seemed nonplussed; or, perhaps, with his innate love for children, even his steel nerves had yielded to the horror of this. But the reporter leaped with a cry from the bags on which he sat. His nerves had broken. He came scrambling toward us, tossing away the bags, the lumber, wildly.

"Put her out! Put her out!" he screamed. "I can't bear it. It's not a child, but a devil!"

Brodsky saw that he was beyond reason. He endeavored to catch him, but the man evaded him and flung himself upon the child like a madman, his eyes gleaming with insanity. He grasped her by the neck of the thin calico pinafore and lifted her bodily from her feet.

"Put her down, fool, put her down!" cried the doctor furiously. "As you value your precious life," he yelled, "release her."

"It's a trap!" I cried involuntarily. In that single instant a light of overpowering possibilities rushed in on my brain. I saw the demon, halting his trap with the young imbecile child, harm toward whom would arouse into action all its own latent powers for destruction. She had been present at both the former murders; she had been there that evening, waiting for our own, waiting to tempt one of us to violence. But the man made no sign of having heard Brodsky's command; only began dragging the child toward the door. For a moment she made no resistance, uttered no sound; the next she clung to the packing case with all her infantile strength, and a wild shriek of simulated terror broke from her lips. The macaws awoke and added their screams to hers. The case upset; the candles fell to the ground, expiring instantly, and plunging us into almost fathomless darkness.

"Give me a match," I heard Brodsky cry, loudly. "A match, for God's sake!"

But the words were drowned upon his lips in the mad scream that followed. I heard the reporter bellow like a steer; through the darkness he plunged, writhing, stumbling toward the door. All the while mad peals of frenzied terror and anguish came from him. Midway in the long dark room he went down, his heels tattooing upon the ground. I leaped toward him, but Brodsky was before me. I seemed to sense a hairy body at my side that stretched forth incredibly long arms wherewith to grip me. Then I felt the doctor grapple with it; and the next moment the three of us were fighting for our lives.

It was no fancied effort now. To and fro we plunged. Now that octopus-like tentacle would come stealing toward me, now I would free myself and plunge my fists into something incredibly hard, yet having the feel of human flesh. Once the Thing grasped me round the chest and the breath went hissing through my lips. Then, as I reeled and stumbled, I felt the doctor's strong arm interposed, and once again the tentacle was torn bodily from me, leaving me sick and faint.

"By putting out the lights," Brodsky continued, "though it tried to extinguish them in its freakish pranks, this sort of spirit, unlike those of a higher order, is really afraid of darkness."

The reporter leaped up with a scream.

"Something pinched me, I swear!" he cried, trembling.

"Sit over here," said Brodsky, indicating the bags that covered the cheetah skin. "Now, my friend, stay there, no matter what occurs, and nothing will harm you. Draw closer," he added to me. "I'll take your place. Now, silence, please, everyone."

Everything was silent now. The birds had gone to sleep. Sitting there I was conscious that my own fear gradually yielded to a sensation of in-

finite sorrow. All the sorrow, the anguish in the world seemed to have been heaped upon me. I felt a longing for light, for human companionship which even Brodsky's presence was powerless to assuage. I felt the doctor's hand upon my shoulder; instinctively he had divined my grief. And then I could have sworn I heard a sob.

Brodsky did, too. Upon the instant he was on his feet. He sprang into a corner, where lumber and bags were thickly piled, and dragged forth—the idiot girl. She had been weeping bitterly, and her face was yet wet with tears; yet a baleful and malignant light shone through them.

"As I expected," said the doctor, regarding her intently. "You hunt in couples, of course. I suspected that you must be somewhere in the vicinity when your disembodied friend began playing his pranks with the cages and candles." He was silent a moment, regarding her with the ruthless, emotionless expression of some dreadful judge. "Soul!" he said, as though the childish body did not exist for him, "you have but a poor fleshly lamp to light upon its way. The senses which you can control are ignorant

"No," said the reporter, thoughtfully, next morning. "No, I shall not write up that story. I shall go home and spend the week-end in bed and tell the editor that I fell down on it."

He smiled faintly through his bruised and blackened lips. His face was a mass of wounds.

"And so it was the cheetah skin that saved our lives," I queried.

The doctor nodded. He looked hardly more presentable than either myself or the reporter. "A happy inspiration, indeed, that led me to bring it into the house," he said. "Surely some good angel was helping us last night. Never have I come so near failure, nor have your lives been saved so miraculously."

"You knew it was not a poltergeist all the while?" I asked.

"It actually was a poltergeist," the doctor answered, "for it had concluded its last incarnation before assuming the body of a man, and will doubtless reappear, some centuries hence, as a human of very degraded order—possibly a native Australian or Andaman islander. The major's training had undoubtedly assisted the beast in working out the end of its brute births."

"Yet it was no agent of evil," continued Brodsky. "The education it received, which brought it almost up to the verge of human understanding, had kindled in it a world of longing, of appreciation of its outcast state. It wanted human love, companionship, by virtue of its nearly human soul, consciousness persisted after death, as is common among the anthropoid apes, instead of rushing back into the vast well of eternal consciousness—and it lingered near the child who had befriended it. It knew the caretaker and did not molest him, but when strangers approached the girl it watched them narrowly, and harshness or blows inspired it to a furious defense of her. Yes, I suspected the orang-outang early in the proceedings. I knew it couldn't be the cheetah, for the cat family is too low in the scale to retain any individual memories of life. I was convinced when it made no response to that challenge we hurled at it, which a true poltergeist would have understood and taken up immediately. And luckily I remembered that the big cats are the only enemies feared by these monster apes; that was why it wouldn't go near the candles when I set them beside the skin. And that swinging of the bird-cages—it was just what an ape would do, wasn't it?"

"But will it not return," I asked, "and injure others?"

"Not for awhile," said Brodsky. "And meanwhile, I shall make it my business to see that that child is removed to an institution for the feeble-minded. She has lived too long with the other world; with care and intelligent companionship I am convinced we shall yet succeed in making a fairly rational human being of her."

CURIOUS MAKE-UP OF FENCES

Unique and Interesting Collections Noted in a Tour Throughout the Country.

The present age seems to be one wherein persons vie with one another to devise curious work. One might make a unique and interesting collection by gathering views of freaks in fence building, in which nothing should be so commonplace as a "worm" fence.

Not many miles from New Bedford, in Massachusetts, there stands a solid fence, with a curiously curved upper line, and here and there a number painted upon it in white. On examination it proves to be built of the few doors from a dismantled church.

In Maine a man attached to a life-saving station at Small Point amassed a sufficient number of swords of the swordfish to build a picket fence 40 feet in length.

In an old town of New Hampshire there is a house the yard of which is inclosed with a fence constructed of the few doors of the old Brattle street church of Boston. This fence once felt the jar of the solid cannon ball that struck the church full in the face in the revolutionary days.

Some years ago the government authorities at Washington condemned a large number of flagpoles in use on the department buildings at the capital and on the federal buildings elsewhere. These were purchased by a contractor, who turned them into pickets for a fence to surround his country place near Washington. On these poles, which were sawed into the proper length for fencing purposes, may be read many interesting inscriptions placed thereon by various officials of the government and by tourists who had climbed to the top of the buildings which they once graced.

Business Before Pleasure.

"I see that you have been reading political economy."

"A little," answered Senator Sorghum; "but I had to give it up. I got so interested I was in danger of neglecting the appropriations demanded by my constituents."

Cruelty.

"This poem," said the confident author, "belongs, I might say, to the earlier school of composition."

ing. I could fight no longer. I sank down; I felt a fetid breath upon my throat and the points of brazen fingers that closed on my gullet . . . then . . . something furry and soft fell over me and our enemy was gone. I lay there, hardly breathing. Long afterward, it seemed to me, the doctor lit the candles.

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OWES HER LIFE TO

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Bishop Ward, in company with two senators, came forth from a Nashville reception the other day and entered a waiting motor car.

"Ah, bishop," said one of his companions, "you are not like your master. He was content to ride an ass."