

An Astral Christmas

By JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

FOR over a twelve-month I have been awaiting an opportunity to go before the American Chapter of the Paris Society of Metaphysics to lay before them the somewhat interesting details of an experience which befell me during the Christmas holidays of last year.

It was the night of December 12, 1905, that I retired at the early hour of eight o'clock, resolved to gather in the necessary rest and strength to go fully equipped on the day following into the Christmas shopping fray. Ordinarily I buy my Christmas presents for my numerous family in August preceding the greatest festival of the year, as it is an economy in time, money, and strength to do this. But in August, 1905, however, I found myself so busy with other things that I neglected the usual Christmas work, and became so confirmed in the habit of putting it off from day to day that, before I knew it, mid-December was upon me, and the Christmas crop still unharvested.

Sleep came to me almost immediately, sleep the more refreshing because it was deep, peaceful, and utterly dreamless; and it lasted for nigh unto twelve hours, for the clock on my mantelpiece was striking the hour of eight A. M. when consciousness returned.

"Great Heavens!" I muttered, as the lateness of the hour dawned upon me—I had expected to rise at seven and to be breakfasting by this—"I shall find myself in the rear ranks of the mob if I don't hurry. It's me for a hurried bath, a quick shave, and a lightning change costume."

I started to jump out of bed, when a horrid realization of a most singular fact swept over me. I had nothing to get out of bed with! The plain and simple facts are that, in some way or other, while I slept, my body had got up, either of itself or with the aid of some agency at that moment unknown to me, and departed, leaving behind it nothing but myself—that is to say, my spiritual self, my intrinsic me, if I may so put it—and there I lay, a stark and staring consciousness with no semblance whatever of a corporeal garment to cover me.

I shall never forget the awful sense of horror that swept over me at that moment of discovery. To be a disembodied spirit was bad enough, but what chilled my senses most deeply to the marrow was the apprehension of what had become of what I may call my externals. Where was my corporeal self? And—dreadful thought!—had it gone out upon the public highway clad only in the pink silk pajamas in which it had been arrayed when I retired the night before? Visions of my treasured self being arrested for appearing upon the streets in such negligé tortured me. The fear that the cold of winter was even now penetrating the bones that had been mine was almost prostrating. The notions that flitted through my consciousness were unbearable to such a degree that I think I should have



Where I Wished to Be.

There I Was At Once.

lost my wits likewise, had I not a moment or so later taken in the fact, from a cursory survey of the room, that the pajamas were still there, neatly folded across the chair, and my other clothing was gone. Evidently I had had the presence of mind to dress myself before going out, or at least the squatter who had eloped with my personality had done so, and the relief was enormous.

The sense of ease following this discovery was not prolonged, however. It wore away almost as quickly, indeed, as it had come before the awful questionings of my mind as to the main fact—my body was gone! Where was it? Who had it? To what good or evil purposes was it being devoted at this moment? Would it ever be returned to me, and, if so, in what condition?

Spurred on by such reflections, I made the effort to get myself, or rather what was left of me, into action, and was overjoyed to find at the first impulse to move about that, freed from the weight of my material frame, I was able to project myself hither and yon at will. You may be sure that from the moment of this discovery I was all over the house indulging in a systematic search for myself. Not a nook or a cranny in the whole establishment revealed so much as a hair of me, and all my inquiries of servants failed to elicit any response, for the simple reason that they had neither visual nor psychic apprehension of my presence.

I discovered one or two things from their chance observations on things in general, concerning the estimation in which I was held by the ladies of the kitchen and the laundry, that were not particularly flattering to me, either as a man of intellect or generosity; but inasmuch as they have no immediate bearing upon my story, I shall not set them down here in detail. It suffices to say that later on, when all was well with me again, they received notice to quit, with instructions not to stand upon the order of going but to go at once, Christmas or no Christmas.

Not finding my body in any part of the house, I next resolved to extend the search to the accustomed haunts of my daily life. I projected myself

to the office of my brokers Barkley, Walters & Higgins, but there was nothing in anywise resembling me hanging anxiously over their tickers, or seeking a tip in the private office from the private secretary of the head of the firm. I insinuated my consciousness into the subterranean precincts of the Café Delarin, suspecting that possibly my material self, under a new control, afraid to trust itself at breakfast with the family, might have stopped therein for a cup of coffee and a matutinal chop, but I was again disappointed. I wasn't there.

Next I sped up town to the office of "The Salmagundi Magazine," a periodical which pays for accepted material on publication, and from which, judging from the number of accepted manuscripts of mine in its possession, my great-grandchildren will some day derive a considerable income, provided the concern does not go into the hands of a receiver in the interim. I had latterly been a frequent visitor to its editor, in a vain effort to secure an agreement by which my material should be held not longer than thirty-seven years—especially the timely stuff—and it occurred to me that possibly mere force of habit might have carried me there externally, and again was I doomed to disappointment. Everybody was out except the office boy, who was sitting in the editor's chair with his feet on the desk, reading and rejecting spring poems. At the moment of my arrival, he, like my servants, not having a psychic nature, was wholly ungetatable

in my then forlorn incorporeal condition, and was as oblivious to my presence as though he was indeed an editor, and I was an unknown genius with a manuscript message for mankind, which I was willing to sell at the rate of a cent a hundred words.

A cold chill came over me as I thought of another possibility. What if, impelled by some dishonest streak in the new spirit that now occupied my earthly tenement, I had gone to the bank, ascertained my balance, and drawn it all out for the gratification of its spendthrift desires? I realized, as I thought it all

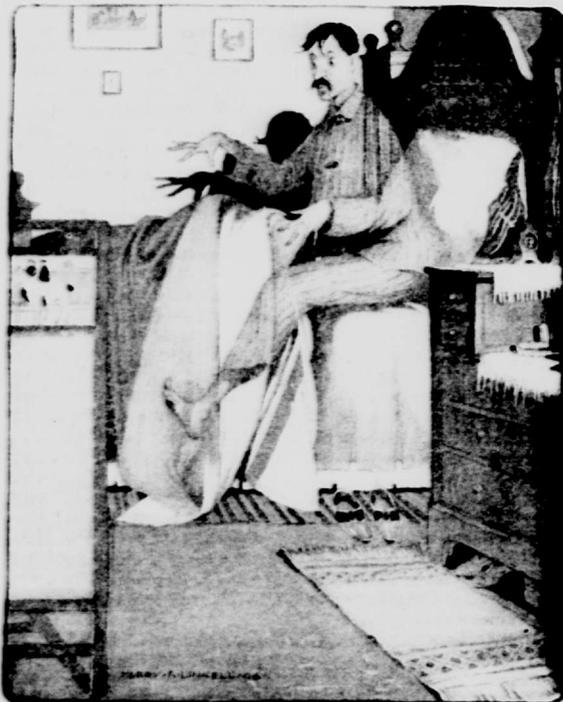
over, that it was only my good senses—that alone had, from time to time, restrained my physical self from doing that same thing, and it was with an overwhelming apprehension of impending ruin that I sped to the bank.

It was relief unmeasurable that I discovered, as my consciousness hovered over the bookkeeper's shoulder, that my ninety-eight dollars and fourteen cents was still there, intact, with no recently written outstanding checks to blot it out past redemption. I visited the club, and with the same result: I was not and had not been there. Thus I exhausted the possibilities of the morning. All that was left was the chance that I might find myself at a vaudeville matinee after lunch.

Meanwhile, realizing that nothing was to be gained by further worry, and making up my mind, as is my habit, to make the best of my difficulties, I turned to the enjoyment of my new found estate; and I must confess it was considerable.

Relieved of the weight of my material self, I floated about the town like a sun mote freed from the mass of earth pressing dust. Wherever in my consciousness I wished to be, by the mere exercise of my will to be there, there I was. In certain ways it was exhilarating. If I chose to roam through the ether, high above the world of sordid things, I had only to will myself above the clouds, to attain to heights immeasurable. I bounded over the Flatiron building with the ease of a chamois surmounting an Alpine crag. I leaped, with the elasticity of a wizard rubber ball, from the arrow of Diana on the Madison Square tower to the topmost point of Trinity's steeple over two miles away. I fluttered like a will-o'-the-wisp from one end of the subway to the other, as careless of the thundering expresses, the blundering locals, and dread third rail, as though these things had no tangible reality whatsoever. I bearded the lion in his Central Park den, and perched my consciousness on the hood of an excessively speedy motor car with no fear of consequences—in short, I let myself go, and indulged myself in such innocent pranks as only a disembodied spirit could possibly permit itself with entire safety. There were no impenetrable places. Every door in town was open to me; no seclusion, however well protected, was proof against my will to penetrate it.

It was indeed a joyous sensation, and, best of all,



I Had Nothing to Get Out of Bed With!



My Self Fell Sprawling on the Floor.