HEAVEN FROM ALL MEN HIDES THE BOOK OF FATE

Strange Happenings that will be of Interest to Believers in Luck

THE VEILED HAND OF DESTINY

Paul Armstrong, of "Chicago Times-Herald," Tells How Fate Has Changed the Lives of Men.

(Paul Armstrong, in Chicago-Times Herald.)

"Round about what is lies a whole mysterious world of what might be—a psychological romance of possibilities and things that do not happen. By going out a few minutes sooner or later, by stopping to speak with a friend at a corner, by meeting this man or that, or by turning down this street instead of the other, we may let slip some great occasion of good or avoid some impending evil by which the whole current of our lives would have been changed.

"DRIFTWOOD."

Education, science and cold common sense have made the superstitions the beliefs and the bogieboos of the past appear curiously humorous to this age. We laugh at the people who are afraid of certain numbers, and those in whom we observe the touch of the mariner by their abhorrence of Friday. We smile indulgently as we read of the beliefs of past generations and wonder how people that appeared in every other way to be intelligent could have treated such weird nonsense seriously. Charms and spells have faded into fables. The witches have vanished, and with them their craft. In this age even the oldest and most dishevelled hag fails to do mischief with her most violent curse.

But in spite of all the education, discoveries of science and thought which have dispelled the illogical things of an old civilization, there is still a force which even the most learned mind does not understand or explain. It goes by many names. To the religious it is "the workings of an all-wise Providence." Again it is fate and destiny. But to the world it is luck.

It is a curious thing which cannot be depended upon, for those who trust to luck seldom have aught but a humdrum, miserable existence. Its workings are as uncertain as the lightning. It makes a stroke here and there for good or ill and passes on leaving the thoughtful mind to blink at its mysterious flashings.

A man works and struggles. He gives himself no play spells, but in spite of his constancy to his task he barely lives. Another man with no more ability, because he happened to turn a certain corner or crossed a street, succeeded.

Two men once had bachelor apartments together. For the same evening they had two invitations to house parties. One man wished to accept one invitation his friend the other. Neither could induce the other to attend the one he favored. Each went his way, and on that evening met for the first time the woman whom he afterward married. The marriage of one and his latter life has been ideal. The other found he had been mistaken and died by his own hand within the year. A man once stood at a ticket office in a railway depot. He had just secured the last lower berth in the sleeping car, and was putting the ticket in his pocket when a man rushed up and asked for a lower berth. The agent informed him that the last one had been sold. "I'll give $5 for a berth," said the man.

The man who had bought the last one, feeling that he could not make $3 easier, sold the man his ticket and returned home to wait until morning. The train was wrecked and the man who paid $5 for the ticket was killed.

A man had been invited to enjoy a trip on a private sailing yacht. The hour for the departure of the party was 10 o clock in the forenoon. Being late in finishing up some important business, he hired a cab to take him to the wharf. He explained that the time was short and that the driver of the cab must hurry. In consequence the cab collided with a street car and a policeman arrested the driver. The occupant of the cab made every effort to have the driver released. He offered the officer $10 and his card as security that the driver would appear, but all in vain. He then ran all the way to the wharf, but the yacht had gone. She was lost with all hands on board.

A veteran of the war tells this story. During a battle the firing became so hot that everyone either lay down or sought shelter. Seeing a small tree which would partially protect him from the murderous fire, he ran toward it. Something tripped him and he fell. A comrade, who had also started for the tree the same time, reached it and was shot dead.

A man walked into a building which was being raised a story and rebuilt to watch out of idle curiosity, the men at work. He was smoking a cigar. A man who was employed in the building looked up, and, seeing the man smoking, it reminded him that he wanted to smoke. His pipe was in his coat in a tool box on the opposite side of the street. He dropped his tools, walked out and had reached the middle of the street when the building collapsed. The stranger was killed, while the workman who at any other moment in eight hours would have been there to meet the same fate, stood scarcely twenty feet away, white to the lips as he realized his escape.

A child, who lived with his parents near a river, finding the gate unlatched, toddled off toward the docks. He walked upon an old wharf and stumbled through a hole into the water beneath. The occupants of a rowboat passing a moment afterward, seeing something which looked human rise to the surface reach out a hand and pulled the youngster into the boat. Had he found the gate unlatched thirty seconds sooner he would have sunk for the last time—thirty seconds later the boat would have passed.

A young man looking for employment saw a sign fall from its fastenings in a storm. The accident called his attention to the firm who owned the sign. He applied for a position, it was given him, he suggested some new ideas to the firm and is now in good circumstances.

There are few men whom I have known whose success in life has not at some time hinged upon an accident over which they had no control. An illustration of this is found in Tom Reed, who is now one of our country's greatest statesmen. It was a speech, and a very short one at that, which opened his way to fame.

It was delivered not long after he began his career in congress. He had not up to that time taken much part in debate, but one day, while he was making a somewhat labored argument, an older member tried to break him up by putting a question to him suddenly and demanding an immediate answer. Reed gave the answer readily. Then he paused, turned toward the speaker's desk, and drawled out:

"And now, having embalmed that fly in the liquid amber of my remarks, I will go on again."

The house roared. The galleries took it up. The newspaper correspondents sent it flying all over the country, and to his own surprise more than any one's else Reed found himself a man of note from that hour.

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HOW "THE RAVEN" WAS WRITTEN.

One day when I was a child of twelve or thirteen I stood tiptoing in my uncle's office: my eyes were caught by an engraving hung high over a lamp-bracket at one side of the chimney-place, writes Frances Aymar Mathews in the *Bachelor of Arts*. It was the portrait of a man's face, dark, sad, proud, irresistible almost in the attraction of its deep eyes and the suggestive curve of the weak though haughty mouth. Underneath the picture was written in a beautiful, firm, small, even hand: "To my friend, Cornelius Mathews, from his devoted friend, Edgar Allan Poe."

"Is that the man who wrote 'The Raven'?" I asked, breathless in my gaze at the weird, spiritual face, it seemed to me, flickering with suppressed life at that very moment, in the flare of the smoky little lamp below it.

My uncle nodded, laid down his pen and wheeled his chair nearer to the fire.

"Do you want to know how 'The Raven' was written?" he asked me, as I drew a bit nearer to him and the blaze.

Of course I did. Hungry for the eerie and the strange, I fairly shivered with delightful anticipation, then, over its first hearing as I have many a time since when I have begged for its repetition at my uncle's lips. It is because I have heard it so often that I am able to put down so accurately the picturesque little history of at least one of (if not the) inceptional phases of a poem that has run the gamut of the world and ensnared its every reader.

"It was in the winter of 44-45," began my uncle, "a drizzling night full of chill and murk, and shifty with freaks of an east wind that shivered against lamp-posts and rattled the swinging signs all along Broadway. Broadway was not then what it is now, and on such a night years ago the warm flare of the gas at the entrance to the Park Theatre—the old Park Theatre down yonder on Park Row—seemed very attractive to a young man still in his twenties, and with a play of his own in his desk, into which he had put his best. I crossed over and went in. I found Edgar Poe in the seat beside mine. We shook hands, we had known each other for some years by letter, and for some months face to face.

"He was one of the most courteous and attentive listeners I ever encountered, and, with a delicacy and interest unbounded, he inquired as to the play I was then so intent upon. It was 'Witchcraft,' and as briefly as I could I outlined the plot to him. As I came to the close of the fourth act, depicting the anguish and horror of my hero Gideon, on being convinced that his mother is in truth a witch, beholding as he does the signs in the elements and in the sky, Poe, his gaze fixed before him, said in his low, melodious voice, 'Mr. Mathews, why do you not at this point have a raven, that bird of ill-omen, flit across the stage over the witch's head. Do you know,' he went on, his eyes still immovably riveted on the glowing space before him, his voice so low that it could not disturb even his nearest neighbor, 'that that bird, that imp bird, pursues me mentally, perpetually. I cannot rid myself of its presence. As I sit here I seem to hear the melancholy of its croak as I used to hear it in my boyish days at school in Stoke-Newington. I seem to hear the sordid flap of its wings in my ears. I wonder, Mr. Mathews,' he said, looking at me now squarely in the face, 'if Dickens has ever been haunted by the raven as I am; I wonder if the raven in 'Barnarby Rudge' in his expression of the monotonous power the bird has had over his mind—what do you think?'

"'Candidly,' I answered, 'from a long correspondence with Dickens, I take him to be a man so little inclined to the introspective that his presentation of Barnaby's raven is likely to have been more for its effect than the result of a deep cause.' 'I see,' Poe responded; 'that is precisely it. Some men sway trifles, foibles, or events to their own shaping; others—' he shifted his gaze back to the space no doubt peopled by his fancies—'are swayed and swung hither and fro by whispers heard only by themselves.'

"We talked much more, and on many themes about many people, issues, schemes, books and friends, until the audience, rising in a mass, we knew that the last curtain had fallen for that night. I put out my hand to touch my companion's arm, and bid him under the shelter of my umbrella (I observed that he had none and but a thin overcoat), come across the street and join me for a hot oyster supper. But my hand met nothing, my friendly eyes and invitation were to be useless—Poe, like a spirit, had dissolved seemingly in the murk of the night and left me standing alone. I started out and searched everywhere about for him, well understanding his rare delicacy of feeling, which, half anticipating my hospitality, thus sought to elude it. I could not find him so I went over and took my supper by myself.

"Half an hour later I came out jumped into the omnibus, and away it went rattling over the wet cobble-stones—oh, yes nothing smoother in those old days!—up through the mirth of Broadway. We had reached Bleecker street, when there in the circle of a sickly yellow light, under the lamppost, I beheld Edgar Poe standing, writing on the margin of a paper, apparently oblivious of everything around him. I pulled the strap and dashed out, and yet, even then something made me pause as I saw him—a something that shone, like a glitter of stars in a hot summer sky, in the depths of his gray eyes—a something that exuded from his white brow, where the dark curls gemmed with the frozen raindrops, sparkled in the meagre light of the almost deserted thoroughfare; but for an instant, when common-sense came to my aid combined with common feeling for a man standing inviting disease in such weather as this—

"'Poe!' I cried, touching him lightly on the shoulder, as I held the umbrella over his head.

"With a curious urbanity, a gentleness which yet spoke to me another language and told me of his chagrin at being interrupted, he greeted me and thanked me, and said, answering my earnest queries as to why he had given me the slip and deprived me of the pleasure of his company at supper:

"'I thank you very much; I could not have eaten, or drunk, or slept, or gone a step farther than this, or waited a moment longer than now.' (Poe then lived in Amity street, only a few blocks distant.) 'It is "The Raven,"' he went on, pushing his dark hair back from his forehead, and with his feet almost frozen in a puddle; with my umbrella beating now this way, now that, by the fierceness of the wind; with the rumble of a solitary cart emphasizing the solitude; with the creaking of a board sign at the corner—Poe said in a hushed, strained voice, a voice where some pent-up, surging sorrow seemed slipping from his control:

"'Let me read you a stanza or two here, now will you?'

"'Go on,' I answered quickly as eager as he in my attitude. Truth to tell the fantasy of his mood was communicated to me in force, and that freezing quarter of an hour in December, '44, I shall never forget.

"He began in a low monotone the well known lines. A blast keener and more cutting than any that had come before nearly turned the umbrella inside out, and made his slight figure sway against the post while the paper fluttered in his fingers. As rapt as he, was I. The melody incomparable and the magic rhythm of 'The Raven' had seized upon my soul as tensely as it held his and, reckless of the storm of the December night, I repeated, 'Go on go on.'

"He read on from the scrap of paper that he held as far as the words,

'Perched, and sat, and nothing more,'

when lack of mere physical strength, I believe, made him stop and I came to a realizing sense of our surroundings and position.

"'It is cold,' he said with a slight tremor, while he looked half inquiringly at me.

"'The poem is superb, Mr. Poe,' I cried, 'but it is madness for us to stop out here in the street in the storm.' We walked along together, and all the while his lips were framing snatches of the poem destined to win him immortality. More often the fatal refrain coming to my ears of

'Quoth the Raven Nevermore.'

"We reached the steps of his residence, and then he turned and thanked me with the peculiar grace and charm of manner which in my acquaintance with him always distinguished Edgar Allan Poe. 'Be sure to finish this Raven poem,' I said.

"With a melancholy sigh, the insensible, impalpable waft of a restless and imprisoned spirit, he answered:

"'I shall have to—it has not let me rest; it will not let me sleep until it is completed. Perhaps if I have once put it on paper the ill-omened fowl will quit my ear and leave me in peace.'

"Not many weeks after, my dear, I bought and read that very copy of 'The Raven' which I now give to you, and a little later it was the most admired and wondered over of the productions of the day.'

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