

FOUR STRANGE AND TRUE STORIES.

In the January of 1876 I crossed the Atlantic for the first time. My destination was Rome, and my dear friend John G. Whittier gave me a letter of introduction to William and Mary Howitt, who were then residing there, and whose friendship he had made by a long correspondence. Soon after my arrival in Rome, I presented this letter, and the weekly evenings I spent with the Howitts are among the pleasantest recollections of my Roman winter and spring. Both Mr. and Mrs. Howitt were firm believers in the phenomena of spiritualism, and a *séance* of an hour with some amateur or professional medium was often part of the evening's entertainment. I can recall nothing that was at all convincing in these *séances*, and nothing of a special interest except the conversations to which they led. But one of these talks fixed itself in my memory as the most striking record of spiritualism experience which had then come to my knowledge.

I was calling one afternoon on Mrs. Howitt, and we were speaking of the *séance*—a very barren one, as it seemed to me—of the night before. 'I am afraid I am a born sceptic,' I said. 'I find nothing convincing in any of these experiments.' Mrs. Howitt was silent for a moment, and then she said, 'I think I will tell thee something that happened in my own life.'

I must say, before going any further, that there are certain unimportant details of Mrs. Howitt's story which I have forgotten. I cannot recall the name of the river which she mentioned, nor do I remember just how many years 'Willie' Howitt had been dead; but the main facts, those which bear upon spirit communion or thought transference, are indelibly impressed upon my memory.

Mrs. Howitt told me that her son had been of an exploring party to New Zealand. She was in the habit of hearing from him by every possible post, for he was the darling of her heart, and he took the greatest possible care to spare her all possible anxiety by keeping her informed of his movements. One day she received a letter telling her that she must not be anxious if several succeeding posts brought her no communication, for he was going with his party to explore the largest river in New Zealand, a river which led through an uncivilized and unknown country, and no postal communication would be possible until his return. She felt no anxiety, therefore, during the first week or two of his silence. Then all at once a strange impression came to her.

'I was out in the garden,' she said, 'among my flowers, when suddenly I was told that my Willie was dead.'

'Told!' I asked. 'How? Did you hear a voice?'

'I cannot make thee understand. I heard, and yet I did not hear with my bodily ears. I was made aware. I did not believe then so firmly as I believe now in the possibility of spiritual communication, and I said nothing to my husband, but he saw that something had saddened me, and several times he said, "What ails thee, Mary? What is weighing on thy mind?" But on Sunday he came to me and he said, "I know now, Mary, what is troubling thee—Willie is dead." And the very next day a letter came from New Zealand, and it was from one of Willie's companions on the exploring expedition; and it said that Willie had fallen overboard where the river was swift as well as deep, and all efforts to rescue him had been in vain.'

Soon after, I remember, Mr. Howitt came in, and Mrs. Howitt said to him, 'William, will thee tell Mrs. Moulton how we heard of Willie's death?' and Mr. Howitt's version corresponded in all respects with the one his wife had just given me.

My second story of spiritual communication concerns a relative of my own, a cousin, born like myself in Connecticut, who was married and settled in the West. Her mother, who had in her lifetime been a firm believer in spiritualism, had been dead for some years; and even since her death my cousin had believed in her constant presence of influence, and had arranged her life according to what she believed to be her mother's guidance. I do not remember the precise date, but it must have been about eighteen years ago when she was urgently entreated by her mother to change all her plans for the summer and go to far-off Connecticut. 'Ask your husband to let you go,' said the influence; 'tell him how important you feel that it is, and beg him not to answer hastily, but to take time to consider it.'

That evening my cousin made her request. I am not certain whether her husband believes that the compelling influences by which his wife is so often moved are really of spiritual origin, but at any rate he knows how significant they are to her. So when she asked if she might take their three children and go East, and at the same time entreated him not to answer hastily, he listened in silence. A few days later he said to her: 'I have been thinking of what you proposed the other night; and if you feel so earnestly about it, I don't like to say no. But I can't have the family all broken up. You may take the youngest boy' (a little fellow of three) 'and leave the others with me.'

Accordingly my cousin made her preparations for leaving home. All this time she had no intimation whatever as to the special reason for which her journey was to be made; but when she was leaving the house, her housekeeper said to her: 'I do hope, ma'am, you won't be gone all summer. It will be lonesome here without you.' And my cousin answered, 'Oh, no, my father will be dead and buried, and I shall be back here before the middle of July.'

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She assured me that these words were as unexpected to herself as to her listener. *Until she heard them with her own ears, she did not at all know what she was saying.*

She came to Connecticut, and went at once to see her father, who seemed to her as well as when she had seen him three years before, and as well as a man of his age was at all likely to be. That night she was sitting in her own room, and she said to herself, 'I really don't see what I was sent on here for—father seems as well as ever to me.' And instantly the answer came, 'Yes, he seems so, now. He won't be taken sick till June, when you are visiting Mrs. ———, and then he'll never get better.'

Soon after that she came to Boston to pass a few days with me; and during her visit she said to me: 'You have often wished for some test as to the genuineness of spiritual impressions. I will put one in your keeping. Then she told me this story, precisely as I have here related it, and added, 'Now, you know why I came East, when I didn't mean to, and what I have been told; and you can see for yourself what the next developments are.'

Early in June she went to make the visit to Mrs. ———. She had been there but two or three days when the person with whom her father boarded arrived, and asked to see her.

'Your father's been taken sick,' said this woman, 'and he's a very sick man. I'd like to have you move him. He's got relations enough, and I don't feel like having him sick and maybe die in my house.'

My cousin went with her to her father, summoning a skillful physician to her aid. 'Can I move him?' she asked, after a thorough examination had been made. 'Yes,' was the answer, 'I don't think it will hurt him to be moved to-day, but you must make haste about it. He's a very sick man, and he'll be worse before he is better.'

The patient was moved, thereupon, to the house of a widowed sister, and his daughter watched faithfully beside him. When a fortnight had passed, her aunt said to her one morning: 'You ought to get out and take the air. It does your father no good for you to shut yourself up so closely.'

'I can't go out to-day,' was the instant reply, 'for it is the last day of my father's life;' and again, my cousin assures me, she had not the least idea of what was coming until she herself heard the spoken words. Her aunt went into the sick man's room, and presently returned, saying, 'I don't see any change in your father, or anything that looks as if this was going to be his last day.' 'No,' said my cousin, 'he will not die till nearly four o'clock this afternoon,' and again these words were as unexpected to her until she heard them, as to her aunt.

It was from twenty minutes to a quarter of four, that afternoon, when the sick man breathed his last; and it was July 12 when, after a brief sojourn at some seaside place, my cousin again entered the doors of her Western home.

My other two stories were told me by a Massachusetts man who has travelled much and lived much abroad, and has made more investigations into the occult than I could recount here. He has read widely and thought deeply, and at any rate he is entirely to be trusted. He is a disbeliever in spiritualism, so called,—or perhaps I should say a doubter,—but he pledges his word for the truth of these stories, which he admits that he is entirely unable to explain.

Both incidents date back at least a dozen years. My friend lives in Whitinsville, Mass., and he had been invited to the house of an acquaintance, in the neighboring town of Uxbridge, for a spiritualistic *séance* at which the much-decried Maud Lord was to be the medium.

On the afternoon of the appointed day, a friend from Providence arrived unexpectedly, and there was nothing for it but to take this unforeseen guest along to Uxbridge. But it all caused some delay, and the *séance* had already begun when they arrived, and the man from Providence was not introduced even to the host of the evening, and he was an entire stranger to every one in the room.

Very soon, however, the medium turned to him, and said, 'If you please, sir, Sarah wants to speak to you.' The Providence young man made no response, and the medium turned her attention to some one else. Again she turned back to him, later on, and said, as before, 'Sarah wants to speak to you,' and again he made no response. Finally just as the *séance* was nearly over, she turned to him a third time, and said: 'Sarah wants very much to speak to you. She says her name is Sarah Thornton Deane—D-e-a-n-e, Deane,' spelling out the last name, letter by letter. Still the Providence man made no reply, and after they had left the house, he said to my friend: 'What rubbish it all is! Why, I never knew any Sarah Thornton Deane in my life.'

But he chanced one day, some weeks later, on an impulse of idle curiosity, to ask an aunt of his if she ever heard of a Sarah Thornton Deane. 'Yes, indeed,' was the answer, 'but she's dead, long ago. She lived with your mother three years—one before you were born and two afterwards. She took care of you those two years, and she just set her life by you.'

'And did she call herself Sarah Thornton Deane—all three names! And was the Deane spelled with a final e?'

'Yes, she always put the Thornton in; and she spelled the Deane with an e. But what set you to thinking about her? She's been dead years and years, and I doubt if you ever saw her after you were three or four years old.'

'Yes, but I chanced to hear her name,' said the Providence young man; and he began to think that perhaps it was not all a fraud.

The fourth and last of my stories seems to me perhaps the strangest of all. It was of a *séance* at which my Whitinsville friend was present, in

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