

A First Venture Into Spiritualism.

By

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PREFACE.

THIS short account is not intended to be an attempt to deal with the question of the truth or otherwise of Spiritualism, but is sent forth simply for what it is. Namely, an absolutely true and reliable account of a religious service held by Spiritualists, which the writer attended, and at which he was convinced beyond all question that, on that occasion at any rate, contact was established, by means of a genuine and reliable Medium, between the spirits of people who had passed away and living persons present in the Church.

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CHAPTER I.

THE LURE.

I MAKE a most profound bow, and ask leave of you, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, to present this sketchy account of an adventurous experience I had recently, hoping that my attempt may be received with favour by some of the many thousands of persons who are now being drawn to consider occult subjects.

"There go six of them!" I exclaimed, as I trudged through a zig-zag of streets one Sunday evening, and heard a public clock ring out the hour. "I shall be in the first flight for this six-thirty service."

I brought up at six-ten, to the tick, in front of the building I had made my objective.

It was an edifice of dull red brick, that reared itself before me; many windowed, graceful in elevation

and contour, but planned on somewhat spare lines for a building that called itself a church. It yielded up to the public its name and gave the public its greeting by a leviathan announcement, which, in flaring capitals, stretched boldly across its wide, soaring front. As plain as print, and impossible to misunderstand, was the fact that this was a Spiritualists' Church, and that I had hit upon the right place.

As I stood stock-still, regarding with attentive interest this home of the spirits, and appraising the dignity it imparted to a not very superlative neighbourhood, a strange irresolution seized me. I became in two minds about going in, and I found myself mumbling a sort of feeble, wavering monologue—"Shall I go in? . . . Shall I" . . . Shan't I?" It came almost to a toss-up; but at length I made for the door, bounded inside, and, uncertain how far to venture, tiptoed with doubtful steps towards the nearest seat, upon which I sat me down to make the best of the hard accommodation it afforded. In I had come! Well or ill, excusably or inexcusably, the thing was done!

Few worshippers were present, for it was full early

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yet, and, peopled by but just one or two, the interior looked a little forlorn.

"What in the world was this radiant temple?" I queried, as soon as I was able to dispose myself in my seat and stretch my legs. I took a good look at the place. Where was I? Not in the home of spirits? No, impossible! It had the usual lay-out, and looked just an ordinary domain, sacred to religious exercises. It was headed and fronted by a platform; it offered the accommodation of seats; it presented a coco-nut matting right-of-way up the centre; it was lighted in the ordinary way: in short, it looked, for all the world, the same as any other place that made similar pretensions, and there was nothing to arrest my attention here that I had not seen dozens of times before in what was, as this place was, half meeting-room, half-church. It was nave, choir, transepts, aisle, all in one. Chairs, seats, forms, Scripture texts, umbrella stands, hat-racks, hanging-pegs for coats, hymn-book repositories, and divers other things proper to a church, environed me. Understand, I do not say that this sanctum displayed the opulent dimensions of a cathedral; nor was it as

poky as a parlour ; but while it had no special perfections to boast of, I could not see that it had many defects to deplore.

Sitting near the door, I was able to catch sight of entrants as they straggled in and distributed themselves about the church. It soon began to receive constant additions, and I watched people come and come. Unversed, as I was, in their ways, and a prey to many doubtings and misgivings, I screwed myself round and round in my seat as one after another arrived, and bold to the point of audacity, glanced them up and down in an open stare. I was anxious to note if they sported emblems, or carried decorations, or had any insignia to mark them out from the usual run of church-goers ; but no clue, not the faintest, rewarded my scrutiny.

This bygone event does not go back so far, does not recede so long into the past, but that I can remember as though it were yesterday—for the memory of it clings—how densely the worshippers at last gathered themselves together, and what a crush it was with as many as two hundred crammed into the church. It looked almost as if the edifice

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would burst its confines. Three persons sat either side of me, which made it a tight fit, but I just managed to pinch room.

The worshippers looked to me to be, for the most part, people in easy circumstances, with a sprinkling of the lower orders. I was a 'lower order' myself. Women outnumbered men in the ratio of three to two, and I thought there was an undue bias of old age.

Presently I observed a figure hastening on to the platform. It was the dapper figure of the general utility man, who was taking a part, and yet not taking a part, in the evening's proceedings. Could that work be called a part that consisted in whipping off the chintz cover, lightly flicking his duster and opening the organ? Because that is what he did, this trusty church officer. But he did the duty well, and I accord him a place as one who discharges a small office properly.

CHAPTER II.

ASTIR !

THUS a quarter of an hour went by. Somewhere about six twenty-five, or five minutes in front of actual starting-time, the meeting being duly and truly assembled, there entered from an ante-room at the head of the church, a lady who mounted the platform and seated herself before the organ. She did a little fidget on her stool, adjusted the stops of her instrument, fluttered the leaves of a book in looking for the piece she wanted, and then tried, with both hands, to flatten a page that refused to be flattened, and to make it stand before her just where apparently it did not want to stand, and whence it came slipping off. By and by she settled herself, and then, with a sudden stiffening of the figure, she began an opening voluntary, appearing to be able to make her organ do just

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what she wished it to. It was a choice prelude that shrilled from her instrument.

Soon afterwards, a murmur of concerted voices fell upon the congregation, as a door opened at the head of the church, and there emerged from an ante-room someone who inspired me with the hope of my seeing the scenes enacted that I had come purposely to witness. It was the medium !

She was arrayed with natty precision in a fetching pink jumper and a well-defined hobble-skirt of light brown. She looked quite a modish young lady, and had, I should say, seen some five-and-twenty summers.

Two squires attended her, the one a masterful man, with "Chairman" written all over him, and the other a gentlemanly enough figure, who, I was informed, was the speaker. All three ascended a short flight of stairs, strode lightly across the platform, and slipped into three arm-chairs yawning to receive them. There were no outward observances, no spiritual armour, no stately panoply, no pomp, no ostentation—nothing. These three principals just came in and sat down.

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There they sat, in open order, facing this large congregation, a perfect platform triad, ready to take the meeting, if the meeting was ready to take them.

The chairman sat for an instant fingering a fragment of paper—toying with it and screwing up his eyes in order properly to scan its contents. I assumed the paper to be that masterly piece of precision known as the agenda—and, unless I erred, the chairman, before he began, was going to refresh himself with the cold water that sparkled in that fat decanter with the narrow neck, reposing on the table before him. Look at him ! I knew he would ! Reaching across the green baize, he gripped the bottle by the neck and, tipping it to the pouring angle, decanted the water with a clucking sound into the tumbler. Having partly filled that container, he then raised it to his lips, and tossed off the whole allowance.

Presently, straightening himself, the chairman arose and resting his left hand on the table, held in his right hand the agenda, whence he derived the invitation he extended to his hearers to please sing the opening hymn—"Spirits bright are ever nigh."

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The congregation turned to their hymn books. Let me premise that the church was well dowered with hymn books. Everyone had a book, and in an instant everybody was as busy as could be, finding the hymn, the simultaneous turning of leaves causing a general flutter. For me, quite unversed in the ritual of the church, this hymn book set out some astounding particulars. It was wonderful to read what it said about spirits. Won-der-ful !

But now the people hymned together, and refrained together, and the church was filled with gleeful song, I lifting up my voice with others.

Then came the prayer, with more about spirits and angels, during rapt silence and tense strain.

The supplication over, the chairman announced—
“We will now sing Hymn 254, ‘Spirits, come with us to-day.’”

I stood up with the rest and took my fill of this hymn, a wayward son though I felt myself to be.

Then the Chairman again quizzed his agenda, to see what it mapped out next ; and that informing document must have told him, for he left his chair and hied him to the reading-desk, where reposed a

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Bible of striking immensity and large print. He began turning over the leaves of that ennobling volume, and continued to do so, until he lighted upon the right place. What was it he read? Let me think—oh, I know! He opened up that marvellous story of the Resurrection, making it his care to give the holy narrative the proper light and shade.

Scarcely need it be said of a people much given to singing, that after that another hymn was tried—
“I come, I come from my spirit-home.”

This was rendered as effectively as the two previous numbers, by a congregation that seemed able to bring out the full beauty of hymns.

The Speaker was now to get his turn. It was so given out, and forth the Speaker came.

This “Mr. Speaker” had a fine presence and a taking style.

It made me tremble a little at first, unused as I was to such declarations, to know that “We all had the constant company of invisible beings, that were soaring over us, hovering about us, all day and all night long.” It was most upsetting to a novice in such matters; and I felt at first that the speaker did

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not, could not, mean that. "Only fancy," I said to myself, "this world being overrun with spirits. Yet this downright person said it was!"

While I sat scornfully erect, preserving my most stony demeanour, I noted that there were sitters to right of me, sitters to left of me, and sitters in front of me, who betrayed no surprise at the insistence upon this ghostly companionship, but were, instead gloriously content with it and looked their quiet approval at what to me was the most exciting deliverance I had ever listened to.

The speaker dwelt on our fleeting existence upon "this little o, the earth." He showed—this gentleman who was talking to us, did—how the plan of life worked out to its natural fulfilment, when it ushered us into a more glorious abode as soon as this world knew us no more—the head and centre of our spiritual being, our angelic home, which had been in existence since the beginning of time.

"The victory and sting of death,

Its triumphs all are o'er ;

Let fear depart, we know the truth—

We live for evermore !"

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There we might still have to work and work, but the labour we engaged in enriched us to an extent that dwarfed all our previous experience of rewards here on earth. Nay, more, we were not to be merely persons at large, with our time our own. It was indeed unlikely to the last degree that our transformation was to be a happy release only. The speaker begged us to accept his assurance that it was to be something very different, because he knew full well it was something very different. We should reappear on this planet again and again, in spiritual guise, he declared, to guide our friends, to be a pledge to them of future reunion in the spirit world, and to comfort and cheer them on their earthly pilgrimage.

It was the gladdest kind of message.

I thought the address reached its highest level of wisdom, when it was able to say, in good set terms, and in language that went home, that we should wake up in the next world and prepare for the next life in exactly the state in which we quitted this life. Instantly I pricked up my ears — Eh ?

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"Yes," said the speaker, emphasising his point by repetition, "rely upon it, as you are when you achieve your earthly deliverance, so you will be when you open a new life in your spiritual home."

His hearers were then enjoined to do all that in them lay here and now, to surrender themselves to spirit influence, and to aim at that perfection which can only be obtained by perpetual striving.

The speaker showed himself in deadly earnest, his voice vibrating through the church, in emphasizing one point in his message. You would not believe how he stressed it. He endeavoured to work up his hearers into a state of fiery enthusiasm for the cause by enjoining them strictly to consider their ways. It seemed as if his vocabulary hardly held words strong enough to enforce the duty he laid upon them to be rampantly active in this sure thing that had been revealed to them of the after life, so that others might share the blessed knowledge that man never dies. When they had brought others to see as they saw, when they had done their utmost to strengthen the cause, then they might

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consider themselves to be good church members.
But not before !

But, there ; I must not be too "preachy," as I
have not this speaker's fluency to expend upon the
topic.

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CHAPTER III.

EN AVANT THE SPIRITS !

NEXT followed that act of procedure, which not for worlds would any church omit, namely, the effort to reinforce the funds of an almost moneyless society. It was a good collection. As the plate passed me I saw it glittered with a rich vein of silver ; and the two excellent wardens having gathered in the church's offering, then carried their welcome burden up the centre aisle, and laid it carefully on the table.

We had now been favoured with singing, prayer, speaking, Bible-reading, collecting—everything ! All the regular beginnings had been accomplished, and we were about to receive what the meeting was billed to give, namely, spiritual visions ; but no, I was wrong. We must carry on songfully yet, for what does the Chairman announce next, but one more hymn—"Soft and low, those angel voices" !

I, who was a nobody at this service—just a looker-on—I wondered at the subdued rendering of this hymn, at the organ accompaniment on the soft pedal,

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but most of all why the congregation sat while they sang. I learnt afterwards that it was done "in order to silence every form of disquietude, to concentrate thought, to get the right atmosphere for the clairvoyance which was to follow." Of course, of course ! These good people could tune their lays as they listed, could honour the muses as fancy dictated or occasion served, without any obtrusive comment from me.

From this time forward the service rapidly expanded and became redundant with sensation—that is to say, for me.

The soothing strains of "Soft and low, those angel voices" had hardly died away, when up rose the Chairman and presented the Medium to us, asking the congregation, with great solicitude, to extend their utmost love, their tenderest sympathy, to her as she described and interpreted her spiritual visions.

To the enhancement of the scene, I looked to the place being at once darkened, as I had been assured by gossips, over and over again, that it always was darkened. Of course, these gossips had been saying the sort of thing gossips will say. From now

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onwards the church remained as resplendent and the lights as accommodating as before.

It was not a baddish beginning at this part of the service, to discover that the clairvoyante was a lady of considerable refinement, possessed a voice of rich tone, and joined to a natural gift of sympathy an almost caressing manner.

At the outset she voiced the, to me, disturbing disclosure that with us mortals, in that very edifice, had come a large accession of spiritual beings—legions of them.

The two hundred votaries around me sat quietly and composedly in their places, whereas I followed the direction in which the Medium's eyes prompted me to look. "Give me a sight of these things," I said softly to myself. "I should dearly like to see them." I looked up to the ceiling, at the walls, along the seats, at the platform, and where not, until my gaze became a set stare ; but, sad to relate, I was completely baffled in the search—I dare say, for an all-sufficient reason. Meanwhile, others of the congregation did not stir. To them the Medium's news seemed like no news.

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CHAPTER IV.

TREMBLING MOMENTS.

I WOULD like to star the whole of this chapter, and to italicise some of its passages—those depicting the key movement in a weird scheme that I saw developed that night of unfading memory.

The Medium fascinated me. Her plan was simple as A B C—it was transparently simple. Having, from her position of eminence, descried a spirit form, she signalled with outstretched hand to the sitter nearest the form, and then, having coupled them together—the angelic and the human—she acted as intermediary to both, describing to the sitter the appearance of the celestial visitant, and conveying the spirit message it brought.

I was thunderstruck !

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I should have been a stone man had I failed to be impressed by the wonderful penetralia I had come bang upon, and the arresting disclosures that ensued.

I learnt that the contact thus brought about formed part of every service, and that, neither as a means of beguiling the time, nor for mere Sunday abstraction, nor as a substitute for ritual pomp, nor for any such pretext whatsoever ; but that the manifestation was devised and carried out as one means of uniting the destinies of the here and the hereafter.

Before I outline any revelation I saw, I want to break it gently to the reader that there were no idle stories, no silly outpourings, no drivel that could be designated "fortune-telling." To me the rite of this church was the portrayal of one long scene "for the edification of those of the mundane plane—to give them comfort in life, to guide their course, to cheer, to help, to shed sunshine on the sorrowing, to render the perfection of solicitous service." I am echoing here a platform utterance of that night on this unfailing theme.

It is difficult to put into words the intensity of the longing I felt now—reconciled as I became to my

surroundings—that, if any celestial one had come on the wings of the wind, to hold parley with me, the Medium would picture it and disclose to my wondering self the nature of its errand. Well, that endearing lady on the platform did eye me sitting back there, at the far end of the church—as I feared, in entire seclusion—did report that a shade was taking shape beside me, and did proffer me both a description and a message. I was awed by the occurrence, and felt that it made an addition to my understanding. But more of this anon.

Perfect quiet reigned throughout the clairvoyance. There was no necessity to enjoin silence, for never were there more attentive auditors. Nothing broke the stillness—not a whisper, not a shuffle of feet, not a restless move, not the dropping of an umbrella or stick, not even a cough. Yes, one male worshipper was afflicted with a most distressing cough, but he had learnt the art of coughing in church and coughed only between the parts. This balmy state utterly confounded the writer, who, knowing nothing of the workings of a Spiritualist Church, had thought to find the people, jointly and severally, in a condition of

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misrule, and, as far as a Sunday congregation could be wayward and wild, to be those things. But, bless me, their behaviour was irreproachable.

The meeting being all attention, the fair demoiselle in command beamed upon the congregation, and in a confiding voice besought the love and sympathy the chairman had already asked for. She stipulated that the friends would bear with her, regarding the age of the spirit form she described.

"Say 'yes' or 'no,' when I ask if you recognise the spirit I describe," was another request preferred to a congregation which, not over-particular on that point, was, seemingly, given now and then to express its yea or nay by a curt nod or a silent shake of the head. If the reply was 'yes,' people were now told, they had to 'out' with it; if 'no,' well, 'out' with that, too.

We had really and truly started. At the first selection of a subject for the description and message, I should have faced about to see who was to undergo the experience, but that I saw that others of the congregation, with a fine sense of courtesy, were refraining from paying any staring attention towards

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the chosen one. Then, neither would I turn. No, I would sit four-square with the rest, and not disturb the formation by so much as a sidelong glance.

"I notice there, in the centre of the church," rang out the Medium's clear voice, accompanied by an intent look and a shading of the eyes, verandah-wise, by the left hand, "a lady I am coming to first. That lady at the end of the seat there,—You, I mean, with a little red in your hat.—Excuse my being personal," added the Medium, with outstretched hand and indicative forefinger.

The sitter in question returned an appealing look and held up a timid right hand interrogatively. She was about to undergo what was apparently a coveted experience, and wanted to be sure she was the one being spoken to.

"Yes, you," confirmed the Medium, with a nod. Then she begged the lady's instant attention.

"I see building up with you," the speaker continued, developing her descriptive power as she went on, "the spirit-form of an old gentleman. He is standing close to you, his right hand on your shoulder and looking affectionately into your face."

This enigma of a woman, as I regarded the Medium, went into a chain of particulars concerning this spirit-form. She summed up the sequence of events in his earthly career, and went on to give his outward semblance, his varying qualities, and beyond, and above all, his christian name. She never flagged or faltered; and I remember how readily she particularised this man, the unerring character of her description, and the perfectly connected story she related of him.

The sitter recognised at once, with a start of pleased surprise, that it was the spirit of her father. She had exacted a promise from him before he went, well nigh ten years ago, that he would endeavour to reappear to her; and now that he had made good his promise she was out and out glad. Delight overspread her features, the eyes shone, and her overcharged feelings found vent in a glistening tear.

A brief confidence was exchanged between the two, through the intermediary on the platform. Rest assured that the message the father gave the daughter was private and confidential—the Medium saw to that. I gave a glance at the daughter, just sufficient

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to see that the message she had received was joyously welcome.

After beholding a manifestation which filled me with awe, I followed, with warming interest, the disclosures that succeeded it.

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CHAPTER V.

ENTER THE SOLDIER.

ESTABLISHED in this sanctuary, and eager to hear of marvels so interesting, I followed with the closest attention the Society's emissary in a further stretch of her powers. A spirit-entity from the battle-field was her next find. She brought him on, as she had brought on the old boy in the previous episode, by easy stages until he had completely shown himself as he used to be—a dauntless soldier of the great war.

It was passing strange that this son of Mars should be able to manifest himself fully accoutred. But there he was, we were told, a soldier to the life—in the style he affected, the kit he donned, and even the swagger cane he switched about when on furlough.

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There was no gainsaying that such a transformation had been effected, somehow, and that this soldier did it that he might be received as a trustworthy chronicler, when he said he was what he was. For the life of me, I could not understand it. But then a mere narrator need not explain : he merely records that it was so.

I looked intently at our intermediary and found myself hanging upon her words as she featured this young soldier whom, she averred, she saw in vision, amplifying his appearance, and laying bare his leading characteristics in a delineation that was crystal clear.

The spirit-form of this soldier had attached itself to a sitter half-way back in the congregation—a man between thirty and forty, who voiced a ready 'Yes,' when asked if he knew he was being referred to. The Medium added to her description, that "she heard the name of Tom coming to her, and believed it to be the soldier's name."

The man could not credit at first that he had heard aright. His face blanched as he listened, letting her have her say out.

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"Tom?" he then queried. "Why, it must be Tom Schuster! I know him. He was in the trenches with me."

"Tom" seemed to have been one of those rankers who had lived untrumpeted and died unsung. In early days a farmer's boy, he was the firstling of a flock of nine little ones at home, who came into the world at the rate of one per annum. Fighting in France, he squared himself to face the enemy, and went down to the murderous fire of their guns.

This ex-soldier in the congregation was fond of Tom. It was "Tom this" and "Tom that" with him.

"Tom is right down glad," the Medium went on, her talents in full play, "of something you did for him and wants to thank you. He is holding up before me pen and paper. I don't know what he means."

But the man was able to translate the meaning of it.

"Oh, yes," he returned, with an understanding nod, as the idea took shape and found utterance. "I know. I wrote home to Tom's people, and told them how he died."

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"It does you credit," observed the Medium, her features brightening. "Tom is so glad. I can hear him saying now, how pleased he is to have been able to thank old JIM for writing home."

The sitter made a laughing remark in reply, and his face took on a look of quiet content.

Then our accredited emissary, who was invoking these spectral appearances, contacted a spirit-form to a lady well to the front in the congregation, who failed to identify the visitant. The Medium hazarded some suggestions to the lady, asking her, for instance, if she knew all the relations on her mother's side, and whether there was a maternal uncle who sailed the seas, and whose vital spark made its exit years and years ago. It was quite a little catechism. The sitter tried to invoke memory by smoothing down her features with her right hand, but at length she shook her head ruefully, and seemed unable to help to the extent of one word.

Steadfastly the Medium tried to make headway against this set-back, taking a fresh grip of the subject, and then another ; but all was in vain, hard as she tried ; and though she left no means untried, and

exhausted all possible conjectures, clue there was none.

If the truth must be told—as it must and ought to be—I thought this a right-down, complete failure.

At length the Medium decided to pass on. Before doing so, however, she entreated the subject of her remarks to try and recollect the description she had received and to cause enquiries to be made later, when she would answer for it either that the departed one would be known by somebody in her household, or that little by little she might herself come to recollect what uncle it was whose spirit-form stood beside her.

But this did not finish it. Oh, no ; it was only half of what happened. The Medium suddenly discovered a saving-clause.

“Wait a moment,” she rapped out. “This uncle gives me a message for you.”

The spirit-form then opened up to the Medium that his niece now present was a prey to much uneasiness, because of sickness in the family. Her husband had been under a doctor for some time, for lung trouble, which would hasten his departure

hence, unless those about him were extremely careful. *She was advised* what measures to take, and then it was foretold that the attack would pass ; and she was encouraged to be of good cheer.

"Thank God !" fervently exclaimed the wife.

She had not meant to say that ; it just said itself. Silly do you call it of her ? Do not be horrid. Recollect it was news for which this poor woman had been waiting for days and weeks and months ; and she only voiced her thanks that deliverance was about to come.

Be it set down that Revelation No. 4, in the parlance of the day, gave a great spiritual uplift.

A matronly old soul from the spirit-world, who so please you, had been haunting the church since the start of the service, was now intent upon communicating with a young man five seats from the front, at whose side she stood wistfully waiting, her motherly feelings worked up to the utmost. Our clairvoyante singled out the dear old lady, and passed the word for her to the brave boy at her side.


She had stood there, upon the identical spot, for an hour by the clock, regarding with moistened eyes

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her darling boy, feeling unutterable tenderness for him, looking him up and down, wanting particularly to have a quiet talk with him—just those two—and wishing she could give him a good hug and a smack of a kiss by way of beginning.

The message conveyed by the Medium from mother to son does not concern us here one little bit, any more than the soft persuasions that accompanied it. But I thought it was like the mother to say what she did, and I regarded her boy as of the true descent. He visibly brightened after this interview with his mother, and a flush of exhilaration overspread his features, as though sorrow had been suddenly transmuted into joy.



CHAPTER VI.

MY TURN COMES.

THE next manifestation was one that honoured me. I half hoped and half feared I should be invited to enter the charmed circle, and may I say that mine was one of the Medium's best showings?

She apprised me that standing a foot or two away from where I sat was the spirit-form of a whiskered old man. She pictured him as partly bald, with curly hair round the sides of the head, shortish, tubby in build, grey-blue eyes, straight nose, firm mouth, and about seventy years of age. He gave the name of Henry.

By Jove ! she was word for word right, name and all ! It was such a correct presentiment, that, in one swift instant, and with an excess of boyishness that welled up within me, I muttered to myself and almost called out, "It's Dad, for a sovereign !" and had this

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revelation been made to me in the open, instead of within a church interior, I should, undoubtedly, have given a shout as a vent for my exuberant feelings.

"Is it your father," asked the Medium briefly. I strove to outdo her in brevity, and answered, "Yes."

That sire of mine said his good-byes to this orb, way back in the eighties, leaving me to trace him in his line and carry on the family consequence.

The Medium drew him out, and he did me a world of good by his coming.

It was a message for which I would like to have returned the Medium my most profound thanks. The onus of expression was on me, and I hope she saw it in my eye.

Our amazing Medium, never once flagging from the start, was now in great force, and going it like a good one.

In the midst of a deep hush, she lighted upon a lady seated in front, for whose benefit she not only delineated a spirit-friend, but uttered an oracular prediction.

The visitant from the other world had settled itself near a lady upon whom sorrow plainly hung its sign,

for she was consumed with grief over a recent personal loss, and badly wanted comforting. The *Medium*, whose interposition was happily timed, came to the distressed one, and, reading her like a book, revealed some of the heart-break she had undergone since the chastening hand had been on her.

The mourning one took in good part the urgings of the Medium not to let grief prey upon her, when there was the sure knowledge that her son Harry, of whom she had been bereft, was not only alive, but was living an intensified and more glorious life among the arisen.

Stretching out entreating hands she besought the sorrowing mother to accept the assurance that her boy, in spirit-form, stood at that moment beside her, with his hand upon her shoulder, and that he was looking into her face with a whole wealth of love.

"He features in your life often," the Medium went on, in words no less gracious than they were admonitory. "I know it is difficult for you to believe this, for you are new to our movement; but though difficult, it should not be impossible. Come

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now, cheer up, and be brave ! He whose absence you mourn—I won't say whose death, for there are no dead—devoutly hopes, by every tie of family affection, that you won't go on sorrowing because he is no longer with you. He is insistent upon it, and says you must dismiss all frets and worries. It is no good else. Your boy tries to rally you. 'Don't mope,' he reproves ; and it is an imperative 'Don't,' too."

The mother, reflecting how greatly she had erred in supposing the future loomed so darkly before her, said contritely she would try not to.

"I won't weep any more," she exclaimed in broken accents, and with an accordant shake of the head.

"I hope, to heaven, you won't," came the rejoinder from the platform.

In this way the mother was consoled, her load lightened, and her outlook on life made more hopeful, invested as it was with a new interest.

This mother's attention was further arrested by what followed. The clairvoyante paused to lend impressive point to a message to deliver from Harry.

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It did—indeed, it did—make the mother happy, this message. She had indulged in some repinings about her material prospects after the loss of one who had been her stand-by ; but she was no longer beset by fear for the future, when she learnt from her son, that, greatly to her astonishment, he was always proffering help, that any and every bar to her peace of mind would shortly be removed, and that she would be amply provided for. He would, in fact, see her righted every way. Charged with this message she became another woman, and an air of resignation and peace rested blessedly upon her.

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CHAPTER VII.

CHAIRMAN TO THE FORE.

THEN it befell that the Medium visualised a spirit-form that sought to be identified with no other than the Chairman. I did not think the platform would be counted in, much less the ruler on the platform ; but there I was wrong. Everybody was counted in, the Chairman with the rest. Well, the Chairman came into view ; and he looked at the Medium, and looked again, stirring uneasily in his chair, like one suffering discomfiture.

The blank look which the Chairman gave the Medium, when she started on him, was, however, not due to his objecting to receive her message. I discovered afterwards that he considered a message the very best conceivable thing for him, for he wanted something predicted, and wanted it very particularly. But while a message would be of

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inestimable benefit to him, he did not desire to appropriate to himself the solace and comfort of which others, he felt, stood more urgently in need—and by “others,” he had in mind those who were actually waiting for, and who would be disappointed, if they did not get such help—for he, while desiring a message, did not mind whether he heard from the spirit-world just then, or not.

Our platform guide stood no way in awe of his worship the Chairman. She was cool and collected.

“I see with you,” went on this splendid damsel, bringing her power to bear upon him, and speaking in her clear, level voice.

“I see building up there, on your left, the spirit-form of an oldish gentleman, who passed over, I should say, at least twenty years ago. He shows himself clearly. I feel the tie of relationship, and I should say this man was your father. I get a fatherly influence with him. He was seventy-five or perhaps eighty years of age when his spirit took its flight.

“Tall and upright of figure, though a little rounded in the shoulders, silvery white hair, a well-shaped forehead, regular features, blue-grey eyes, straight

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nose, firm mouth and determined chin—his contour and features bespeak him a person of some distinction.

“By right of his position, he stood among the captains of commerce ; he was accustomed to have his own way, was rather a strong disciplinarian, and a man of the world. He knew what he wanted and how to get it—a successful man of business, I take it, who secured a competence and retired into private life before age enfeebled him.

“Up to this moment, he has had a formative influence in your life.

“I hear the name Richard. I am not sure whether it is his name or the name of somebody in the flesh. Richard—yes, Richard ! He repeats the name to emphasise it.”

Thus spake the Medium.

“That’s right,” confirmed the Chairman ; and with a catch in his voice, he made the avowal that Richard was his father’s name.

To this the Medium replied, “I thought so. See, your father is rubbing his hands in glee, to think he is recognised.”

Then the Medium did the hoped-for thing. She outlined the Chairman's ambitions and laid bare his story.

"A fine prospect stretches before you," she predicted. "Your father tells me that you are aiming at something, and that the determination to achieve it has been a mastering purpose with you. Your claim is as well-assured as mortal claim can be, and your father fights your battles right fatherly; and though doubts assail you at times and difficulties encompass you about, he asks me to say he is with you then, smoothing your ruffled feelings and pointing you the way onward to the success you desire and deserve.

"He outlines your future. Don't give up, he urges, for he is giving you the power to form a coherent plan, and the dash to carry it out. You will know how to acquit yourself—make no mistake about that."

"Well said!" I thought.

Then our platform divinity, gazing about her, took compassion upon an aged man over there, in the corner—a dingy, penniless old fellow, who sat huddled up to himself, in an idle and nameless con-

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dition. This woebegone figure stumped about the world with one wooden leg, and, cumbered with many cares, was, unless appearances belied him, subject to galling trials.

Members of the congregation brought themselves to attention for this unfolding, which was one of throbbing interest ; and I was animated to an equal pitch with the others. The old gentleman rather fancied himself, I thought, thus to be brought into notice. It gave him consequence.

He was a sufferer from internal trouble, and the Medium, through the promptings of a medico in the spirit-world, opened up a situation for him that was rich in possibilities for his gradual, but complete, recovery. She counselled him to take heed at once, adding, more darkly, that unless he did the worst would happen. By rights, he ought to have been under a doctor before this.

I do not want the reader to pore over the details of the decoction our friend was to take. It did him no end of good to hear about it. It made quite a catalogue for a person of his pitifully small means, but still we all hoped he would have sufficient over-


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plus of cash to stock himself as directed, and use it as he had been told to do.

Then! out came another piece of information for the old boy, and that, too, information that he had pined for ; and that was about his son, who was killed in the war, and from whom he did so want to get a message.

The Medium fulfilled her dual embassy most fully regarding this son, to the manifest delight of his waiting father ; and besides that—mystery upon mystery—she gladdened him with news of wife, mother, father, Uncle Tom, Cousin Dick, Aunt Jane, and all his kin.

The old one was right-down glad.



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CHAPTER VIII.

A VAIN QUEST.

I CANNOT forego mentioning here the next episode which forced itself upon our notice, namely, that of a stray spirit that, in a detached way, had, wonderful to relate, wandered into the meeting, on the off chance of being recognised. Believe me, there he was—or there he was alleged to be : and he came not once only ; he came and came again.

“ I see walking up and down the centre of the church,” quoth our guide, “ now looking into one row of seats, and now into another, the spirit-form of an old gentleman, who, apparently in a state of great agitation, is searching for someone whom he knew before he went to his reward.”

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The Medium then told us his age, appearance, manner, dress—everything ! There was, however, no clue to the wanted one ; and the spirit did not bring word as to who he was or state definitely the object of his visit. I learnt it was not the first time he had been there—nor the second, nor the third ; but always the looked-for subject had remained unfound.

At length, the last hope having left him, he was off again. The way in was the way out.

Expanding her power of vision and portrayal, the Medium next contacted with a boy. He was a young hopeful of about twelve years of age, and the heir apparent of the house of one Samuel Martin. A spirit-form had put an arm around the youngster's neck in a fondling manner, and, with its free hand holding up his chin, was looking with deep affection into his face.

The Medium's talk was meant for and was seized by the lad's mother, by whom he had been brought there.

Who should the spirit-form be but a one-time Uncle John, the women's erstwhile brother—a

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bachelor who was fond of his young nephew, and thought worlds of him. Morning, noon and night it was "Tom" with him—always "Tom."

"Well" the Medium remarked, "this uncle is anxious about Tom—his name is Tom, isn't it?" she ventured.

The mother answered that Tom was his name.

"This Uncle John, then," resumed the Medium, "refers to a malady that has tinged the boy's whole life. He commissions me to say that the greatest care will have to be taken of Tom if he is to grow into a strong man. Keep him warm, see that he gets medical attention, and, above all, be sure he has nourishing food. Although Tom does not look over strong, the uncle asks me to assure you that it will come alright."

That was good hearing. The Medium pleaded with the mother not to neglect this advice from the spheres, beseeching her to give good heed to her son's health.

The mother nodded her assent, and smiled her thanks. And she was no longer the dejected Mrs. Martin that had entered the church an hour before ;

but apparently another woman altogether, such was the change wrought in her.

It seemed a nice question with the Medium where to go for her next subject, for her gaze circled the crowded congregation. Then, suddenly, her hand shot out to the full stretch in order to indicate a working-man of middle age, whose attention she craved for a few minutes—only a very few minutes. From one of the furthestmost seats in the church, this working-man became apparent, as, with expectation in his every feature, he signalled back a reply with upraised hand.

Subject to the differing conditions applicable to his case, the Medium, with the same happy look on her face, the same cheery smile, and the same charm of manner, told him the same as she had told the others.

But, somehow, she did not get him right. It was an enigma to the man, whose spirit-form it was she had brought within her focus. Inside one minute he had decided he could not recall such a one.

"Never mind," the Medium nodded. "It may be a guide you have, or a sometime friend whom you have forgotten."

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Then it came out that the recognition of the spirit was of less importance than the message it brought ; and our sibyl told her subject all there was to tell of a scheme he was dead-set on. The sum of her information was that he must not be so madly eager ; that now was not the accepted time for his plan ; that he must discipline himself for a longer wait ; and that by doing so he would better his circumstances and secure ultimate triumph.

These cheery words warmed and expanded him. My word, yes !

Behold, next, a description given to a young man, to which he could not help attending, since it forced itself so plainly on his notice.

The lady did not envisage any spirit-form in this case ; and what was the young man's astonishment, and what was mine, to hear from her that over his head, whirling in circlets, were numbers of small anchors of pure gold, surmounted by a crown of the same precious metal.

It was no bad symbol either, as she discoursed about it, for the anchors were the anchors of hope and the crown was the crown of achievement ; and

the message gave the young man an assurance of success for a personal venture of his, after it had undergone some improving changes.

"Mark my words," said the Medium, "you will achieve what you are aiming at, in good time."

The young man openly voiced his thanks.

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**CHAPTER IX.
ONE ANOTHER.**

To come to the next reading that challenged attention.

The Medium evoked now a spectral figure, which she contacted with a lady seated in the middle of the church. Several minutes went by while particulars were unfolded of this figure—appearance, height, manners in earth-life, the dress he wore before his transition, the manner of his passing out, some incidents in his career, and I don't know what all.

It was such an "unfolding," that the sitter recognised the shade at once as that of her departed brother, whom tuberculosis had carried off ten years ago and more.

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From impressions conveyed from this brother, the lady was entreated to be less sympathetic.

"In these days," went on the Medium, "when we are so full of ourselves, to the exclusion of the rest of mankind, it is well that we should cultivate the gift of sympathy. Others require and deserve our assistance. But that isn't to say, we should take on all the troubles and bear all the burdens of our friends and our friends' friends. We must learn to live our own lives. You must look to it," remarked her ladyship of the platform, reprovingly, to her ladyship seated below, "that all these people's affairs are not made your personal concern. Your brother asks me to give you a good scolding for being so remiss in this particular. He charges you, as you value your health, at all hazards to try and wean yourself from this propensity. In earth-life, he says, you never crossed him. Do not cross him now by letting his caution go unheeded."

The lady took the advice in good part, and replied with some easy remark which I failed to catch. I hope it was that she would begin to reform.

Our next visitor from the beyond was no visitor at

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all—which is paradoxical. Well it was a visitor and yet it was not, if you can make that out. In other words it was a vision not fully revealed—that is only a part of a vision.

I fancied at first that this sight did not come within the ordinary routine ; yet here it was—a spirit-hand !

The Medium claimed the hand as belonging to a spirit. The hand was poised in mid-air over the head of a lady, and was located by the Medium. Nobody appeared to think the vision of particular consequence—perhaps judging from some former experience of the symbol.

I do not want to specify the phenomenon with greater precision than anything else in this weird code. A hand is a hand.

The lady sitting beneath this abbreviated shade, with five digits, was told that it symbolised a desire to help her in some change she contemplated.

“I am asked to tell you,” observed the Medium, “that you must halt, and that if you will only wait three months longer as you are, your plan will be quite successful. Delay is sometimes a good

corrective. You stand by for the present. It is known that you will chafe at this inaction, but it must be endured."

I sighed in acquiescence over the next disclosure.

A working-woman had apparently paid a stolen visit to the church, goodness only knows at what sacrifice, in order to seize upon some guiding information, if she could only get it from a spiritual source, as to whether she would be able, and, if so, how soon, to free herself from home conditions which were sapping her life.

The Medium sensed her state, and knew how sorely she was smitten.

"You are an unfortunate woman," came the comment from the platform; "that's what you are."

"I have done everything I could to smooth things at home. Truly I have," faltered the woman in a piteous way.

"I know you have," confirmed the Medium, "and I don't much like the look of things with you. You deserve to be rewarded for all your struggles, instead of being reduced to this pass. I ask you to believe that ours is an exacting world, in which we have

sometimes to work without so much as a thank-you by way of recompense."

The sitter assented with a monosyllabic "Yes."

Heedless of the interruption, the Medium proceeded.

"I cannot promise you that your trials are over, but, rely upon it, they cannot last always. There must come an end to this constant friction, and I hope that one day you will be once more the woman your friends knew you to be. Meanwhile, I am asked by my guides, and by the spirits I see in your vicinity, to advise you to try not to be betrayed into reprisals, however you may be provoked."

It took but five minutes—only a little five minutes—to convey to this poor stricken woman the comfort and the guidance that were destined to be her stay for years. She looked round after receiving her message, as if exhorting the company to witness that she was no longer downhearted.

Then the Medium took observation of another sitter—an oldish man. I wondered she could espy him because he had disposed himself in a deep corner on the very confines of the crowd. But find him she did.

The reader will pardon me, if I do not allude in detail to the two spirit-entities which were indicated as being with this old gentleman ; but I fear to try the reader too severely by constant repetition of the same procedure. Suffice it to say that the Medium made a glorious attestation of these two spirit-presences, and two minutes ticked by while she was unfolding to the sitter the striking scene they presented.

The really important part of the manifestation was that it voiced a warning.

The man had fallen down at home and hurt his left knee, from the effects of which he was still suffering, and he was warned that unless he saw to the fastening of a loose stair-rod there would be a second accident.

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CHAPTER X.

A WELCOME UTTERANCE.

WE soon heard all there was to tell of the spirits that next showed themselves. It appeared that a company of angelic ones had settled near a gentleman four seats from the platform. Learning that he was so companioned, the recipient-to-be straightened himself, and became hot and anxious for what was to follow. But very little followed.

The Medium explained that these visitants were in their spirit-robcs ; that they had descended from the higher spheres ; and that she only visioned them in misty outline, that made it difficult to say who and what they were.

But we could all be sure, if we accepted what was told us, that the spirits were within the edifice, just where she said they were, hovering about this individual member of the congregation.

We knew that much.

Then it turned out that though these holy messengers had no story to lay open, they were not to be regarded as of inferior significance, or slighted, or affronted on that account, since there was a purpose in their visit, as we were promptly to learn from the lady who was interpreting for us the lovely spectacle they presented.

Through this manifestation, the subject of it, an ardent disciple, had the unspeakable bliss of hearing that, by sitting regularly in a circle, he could exercise the gift of clairvoyance, that the platform would one day be glad of his services, and—highest and best of all—that his accomplishments included the wonderful power of healing.

It rejoiced our friend to discover this hitherto hidden knowledge. He exclaimed gleefully that he would try and cultivate his power for the church's sake, for his own sake, for everybody's sake ; and his features beamed with the prospect of being able to league himself with his fellows in a capacity that would permit him to meet their rightful needs and satisfy their allowable desires.

The next subject that came under notice, had,

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seemingly, endangered his peace of mind, by encouraging a dread that at times possessed him of coming poverty and sickness. But, presto! everything was transformed when our intermediary on the voids inspired by his and her spirit guides.

"Put away that old horror," she flashed out at him, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "It is a very scant instalment you will be called upon to bear either of want or illness. I can assure you, my friend, in the most positive terms, of quite the contrary. You will always have a sufficiency of means, and bad health will never be your destined lot. For heaven's sake, don't confuse and darken your life by such dread."

The man at once brightened.

And so the manifestations went on. I have not set down half of the events that occurred, and the question is, can I say ditto for the rest, and tabulate what there is left to say in a general schedule?

Members of the congregation attested their close interest in the episodes that followed. Down to the last detail and the final word, there sat these


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expectants as one revelation was made, and then another, and then again, another.

The Medium directed her gaze now here, now there, spreading her efforts all over the meeting, and bringing together the spirit-form and the sitter for the advantage of both. Everything she did seemed to tell. She looked to possess foreknowledge from another sphere, and as she received, so she gave ; and the audience, with every sense taut, sat listening to her as she went on with subject after subject for too many times to count. Personally I was surprised at her—upon my word, I was ; for it was work that must have tasked her utmost powers.

At length the appointed end was reached, and she dropped into her seat, I fear, exhausted and overwrought.

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CHAPTER XI.

FINIS.

I WOULD not say I was tired of the phenomena, but what I had seen sufficed for one night. It was about enough. It had been an undeniable demonstration of spirit agency ; and there is no experience to equal it, if you ask me. I regard it as a classic, pioneered by such a Medium as I had sat under that night.

The closing hymn, "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended," was followed by a final invocation.

To the pleasant sound of a voluntary on the organ, the liberated throng began to make dispositions for departure, and presently the whole congregation moved outwards, trailing along the aisles, and out via the main exit and lobby. Out they all trooped, and it was as if Mother Church had scattered her children by one executive swish.

As I joined the moving file in its retreat, I glanced at the faces of these people, and doing so, I could not help noticing that, unless appearances belied

them, they were spiritually refreshed.

Outside they shook hands—everybody with everybody—good-nights were said, and a general dispersal took place.

Sitting by the fire that night until ever so much o'clock, unwilling to seek the Land of Nod and fold myself to rest, I ruminated on what it all meant—that which I had seen ; and I kept asking and asking myself the question, without being able to supply myself with a satisfactory reply.

However, I had not done with these people for good, for I would court their company again in church. Yes, on peril of my salvation, I would pray as they prayed, sing as they sang, and do everything that seemed proper to beget in me this new faith ; and if I could only number myself among the believers I would produce at the proper time, in the proper place, and to the proper people, a full, true, and particular account of my conversion to this pictured and revealing gospel.

THE END.