

Personal Experiences of the Occult

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I must premise that I have no faith whatever in the supernatural character of appearances and sounds that are 'occult' because inexplicable. I have had no occasion to see anything that in any way could be regarded as an apparition. Perhaps ghosts know that I am extremely short-sighted, and would have to put on my spectacles to do them the justice they would demand. As to the sounds I have heard, they have been very remarkable, and not easily to be explained. But it does not follow because a thing is not easily to be explained that it is not explicable. I may instance a phenomenon that has been seen in a certain place on the coast of Norway, described by Vibe in Dr. Petermann's *Mittheilung über wichtige neue Erforschungen*, 1861. At a point in the Lyse Fjord where the precipices are contracted is to be seen a phenomenon so strange as to give rise to superstition. On the south side, where the cliff rises 3,000 ft. above the sea, three-quarters of the way up is a cavern, and from this in certain conditions of the air a white luminous streak is seen to shoot out horizontally, and then turning upwards to break into several short rays, for all the world like a gigantic arm with a hand at the extremity. Vibe gives a drawing of it as seen and he also describes the cave from which this shoot of pale white light emanates. He then goes on to give a scientific explanation. But a scientific explanation would certainly not satisfy a Norwegian peasant, who regards it as the arm and hand of a Troll woman or giantess.

And now to come to the point.

One night I was sitting in my hall on one side of the great open fireplace, and a friend, now dead, a solicitor of Colchester, who-^{was} staying with me, was seated in a carved oak settle on the further side of the fireplace. Behind the settle is the way into the ballroom. The night was still and the moon was shining in through the hall window, and we talked on till nearly midnight, when suddenly my friend sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'Good heavens! what is that?' and stood in the attitude of listening. I remained seated, and listened also, and we both heard a sound as of someone walking from behind the settle, the length of the hall, drawing a stiff satin dress along the oak-polished floor.

After a moments hesitation I said, 'I can account for the sound in one way. There may be a scud of rain passing outside the window over the terrace walls'. Then I ran out and looked, but the pavement was perfectly dry. On comparing notes, we found that we had both heard the same sound; but I cannot account for it.

On another occasion I was sitting late at night writing in the hall. Two of my daughters had gone to a Cinderella dance, and I had impressed on them not to remain later than midnight, as I expected them to be home by one o'clock. Midnight had long passed, and I was becoming impatient; so laying down my pen, I ran and walked to the hall door, to open it and go out and listen if I could hear the carriage in the distance.

As I was on my way to the door I suddenly was startled by a harsh burst of laughter close in my ear, over my right shoulder. It was precisely as if someone were standing behind me, and had brayed this hideous laugh into my ear to frighten me. I turned sharply round, and there was no one in the hall. If anything of moment had come after this, I might

conceivably have arrived at the notion that it was a premonition of evil. But nothing did come of it. My daughters returned from their ball very well, and had enjoyed themselves vastly.

I had been home for my sister's marriage. That concluded, I had gone into Sussex. Whilst there it occurred to me that I wanted to communicate with my sister on something of great importance. I sat late at night over my fire considering. She was on her honeymoon in Wales, and precisely where she was I did not know. If I wrote home so that the letter might be forwarded, too much time would elapse before I could communicate with my sister. The second morning after this I got a letter from her, saying — 'What do you want to say to me? You came to my bedside last night and said, 'Margaret, write, I have something urgent to say ' — what is it?'

Now, in the meantime, in revolving the matter in my head, I had arrived at a conclusion not to say anything about it to my sister. So I replied that I had nothing to say, but that she must not trust to dreams.

Of course, it was a coincidence, and nothing more.

These are about all the so-called occult phenomena that I have experienced

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