

fantastic

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ONE FOOT IN YESTERDAY

BY WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

*A true story of the supernatural, recounted by the author of that dynamic modern novel — *Nightmare Alley*. The facts which Mr. Gresham sets forth in this article have never been successfully refuted. Still, there are many who remain doubtful. And they can hardly be blamed, because the story is so fantastic as to be almost beyond belief.*

IT HAS been done. A kink in space-time has been found; people have slipped through it, seen the earth as it was, spoken to the inhabitants of another age, and returned from Yesterday. To believe it we have only to believe evidence — evidence which would stand up in any law court in the world where

justice and truth were the objects, and where no axes, political or pseudo-scientific, were being ground. It was done by accident on the 10th of August, 1901.

If you have heard the story before, bear with us; Dr. Johnson said that men need to be instructed less frequently than they need to

be reminded. When I first heard the story I, too, thought it was an elaborate hoax. But let us consider the witnesses from the standpoint of intelligence, acuteness of observation, character and academic status.

Miss C. Anne E. Moberly was principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Miss Eleanor F. Jourdain was vice-principal and Taylorian lecturer in French at Oxford University. Both were daughters of Church of England clergymen. Both were sceptics, who abhorred anything savoring of the occult.

In the Bodleian Library, Oxford, are two statements, written and signed by the Misses Moberly and Jourdain, of what they saw. There are also the depositions of 20 other people who heard them describe their journey before anyone suspected that it was a voyage into the past.

If this were a hoax it was pointless, profitless, and what is more damning in view of the ladies' background — in very poor taste. Also in substantiating it later they turned up hitherto unknown facts; library records show that no one had consulted the sources in years.

The time-travel adventure had a picturesque setting: 12 miles southwest of Paris stands the palace of Versailles, built by Louis XIV, its fountains fed by a hundred miles of water channels from the plateau of Rambouillet, its gardens blooming above a net-

work of underground pipes and reservoirs. In 1766 Louis XV had his architect put up a pleasure house called the Petit Trianon. In this love nest there is a table which sinks down into the floor below. It was loaded with food and liquor and raised again when Louis XV was hungry and in no mood to put on his clothes. Later Marie Antoinette lived there and set up a mimic country life where she and her maids-in-waiting dressed as shepherdesses.

Sight-seeing in Paris is not complete without a trip to Versailles and on August 10, 1901, the two vacationing English ladies took the train from Paris, guidebooks in hand. Paris had been stifling but when they left the train the sky was overcast and a cool breeze was sweeping over the gardens, the broad staircases, the noble bronze statues and the pools and woods where once the nobility of France had paced in stately vanity or chased one another through the trees.

Tired at last of picture-admiring in the long galleries of the palace, the ladies sat down to rest their feet. Miss Moberly suddenly turned to her companion. "Suppose we visit the Petit Trianon!"

Those were fateful words.

Their Baedeker books gave a map of the grounds and there seemed little chance of their getting lost — at least in the three

dimensions that these ladies knew.

They descended the great staircase outside, leaving the fountains, and followed the central avenue until they reached the lake where they turned right, passed Louis XIV's Grand Trianon retreat, and came to a drive of smooth turf. Instead of walking down it to the Petit Trianon they crossed it, following a narrow lane. This was the Rubicon river of Time; unknown to them the fourth dimensional die was cast, for somewhere along that lane they walked into the year 1789.

Miss Moberly wished that her friend, who was the French conversationalist of the team, would ask directions of a woman she saw shaking a dust cloth from the window of a house they were approaching, a house which was not on the Baedeker map. But she didn't mention it.

They took a right turn, went past some buildings, saw a door open in one and looked in but didn't enter, then came to a place where the path branched into three. Two men stood in the center path and here Miss Jourdain asked the way to the Petit Trianon. The men told them to walk straight on. The men were dressed in long coats of grey-green. They wore three-cornered hats.

To the ladies' right was a cottage. In the doorway stood a woman holding a jug, a little girl

reaching up her hands to take it. Both figures were "frozen" as if they were holding the pose in a tableau. They wore kerchiefs about their shoulders, the ends tucked into bodices; the child wore a skirt which reached the ground and a tight-fitting white cap. These were not the styles of the year 1901.

On entering the lane both women had felt a strange heaviness in the air like a sudden increase of barometric pressure. They both felt depressed in spirits, but neither mentioned it for fear of spoiling the trip for the other. The world about them took on an eerie flat quality, as if it were a color photograph; there were no shadows.

They walked on, following the directions of the green-coated gentlemen, until their path ended in another at right angles. Directly in front of them was a patch of woods and in it a small, circular pavilion like a band-stand, with pillars and a low wall. On the steps of this kiosk sat an evil-looking man, deeply pock-marked, wrapped in a heavy cloak and with a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes. He watched them come toward him. Just then rapid footsteps sounded on the path behind them. They turned and met a young man, also in wide-brimmed hat, wearing knee-breeches and buckled shoes. His cloak billowed out behind him as he ran. He halted and spoke to

them in French, the vowels of which were slightly different from the French they knew. He insisted that to find the Petit Trianon they must turn right. Then he ran past them and vanished, but the sound of his footfalls seemed to persist for several seconds after he had gone.

The way led across a small rustic bridge, so close to a tiny waterfall that they could have wet their hands in its spray. Farther on lay a tree-arched meadow and toward the south they spied the Petit Trianon. Passing through Marie Antoinette's English garden, they approached the terrace and here Miss Moberly saw a lady sitting on a folding stool, sketching the landscape. She wore a billowy skirt, a fichu, and a wide picture hat of antique vintage. That the guards and gardeners were dressed in the style of the 18th century was quaint but logical—but what of the lady artist and the woman and child? It was very puzzling.

The ladies mounted the terrace; the silence was oppressive. From a chapel nearby a young man suddenly burst out, slamming the door behind him. He smiled in spite of himself at the clothes the two Englishwomen wore, then called to them that the front entrance to the building was around the corner. He offered to show them the way and they primly fol-

lowed him down through the French gardens, along the west side of the building and to the entrance fronting the drive. They walked through the front door. And back into the year 1901.

A very voluble, very 1901 French wedding party was "doing" the Petit Trianon and the ladies joined it and were shown through Louis XV's one-man bordello, the one place where in later years Marie Antoinette seems to have been happy.

Back in Paris the Englishwomen discussed the strange costumes of the people they had met and talked to. A fete? Or some historic pageant, possibly; or perhaps they were models for a photographer preparing stereoscopic views of Versailles. Or even a company of actors, performing before one of the new cameras which produced motion pictures when the film was projected on a screen.

It was not until the following November that, in comparing notes, they learned something uncanny about their experience: Miss Moberly had seen, and observed very closely, the woman landscape artist seated by the building. Miss Jourdain had a clear recollection of the spot—empty.

The only possible explanation for their strange experience began to dawn on the two spinsters.

Then they did what few other people of whom we have any record thought of doing: each wrote a full account of what she herself had seen on that overcast August day. They found that only Miss Jourdain had seen the cottage with the woman and child in the doorway.

These statements were placed on file in the Bodleian Library; copies were sent to the Society for Psychical Research. Then the two time-travelers began to dig into the history of the Trianon. No guards had ever worn green coats or tricorne hats — not since the fall of the King. There had been no fêté, masquerade, pageant or picture taking in the gardens that day. Authorities assured them that there had never been a rustic bridge at the spot where they had crossed one. Nor was there any kiosk in those woods.

On January 2, 1902, Eleanor Jourdain again visited the gardens of Versailles. They were much different than those she had seen before. She looked for the kiosk. It wasn't there. But while walking in a stretch of woods nearby the feeling of pressure and despondency settled down on her again. And she heard music, seeming to come from a distance. Twelve bars remained in her memory; she noted them down. When checked with musicologists, they were identified as typical of 18th century popular opera. At the Con-

servatoire de Musique in Paris much digging finally turned up some unpublished scores of a number of light operas of the period. The themes were there — what Eleanor Jourdain had heard was a small string orchestra playing a medley of popular tunes of the 1780's.

The ladies began research in earnest and research was something they knew how to do.

The only extant map of the Trianon, dating from 1789, showed paths and buildings in different places than those the ladies had seen. This shook their confidence in their own observation. Then, in 1903, an old map was found, stuffed in a blocked-off chimney in an old house in France. It was a map of the Trianon, made by Marie Antoinette's landscape gardener, Mique. It showed the terrain exactly as the 20th century observers had seen it. And it contained the little rustic bridge of which there had been neither record nor tradition up to that time. In 1908, on a visit to the scene, the Misses Moberly and Jourdain discovered the supports of a tiny bridge, and more conclusive still, half-swallowed by a tree trunk growing around it, a broken column of the kiosk — right where they had seen the entire building, and where Mique's map had shown it to be. Later, in the French National Archives, they turned up

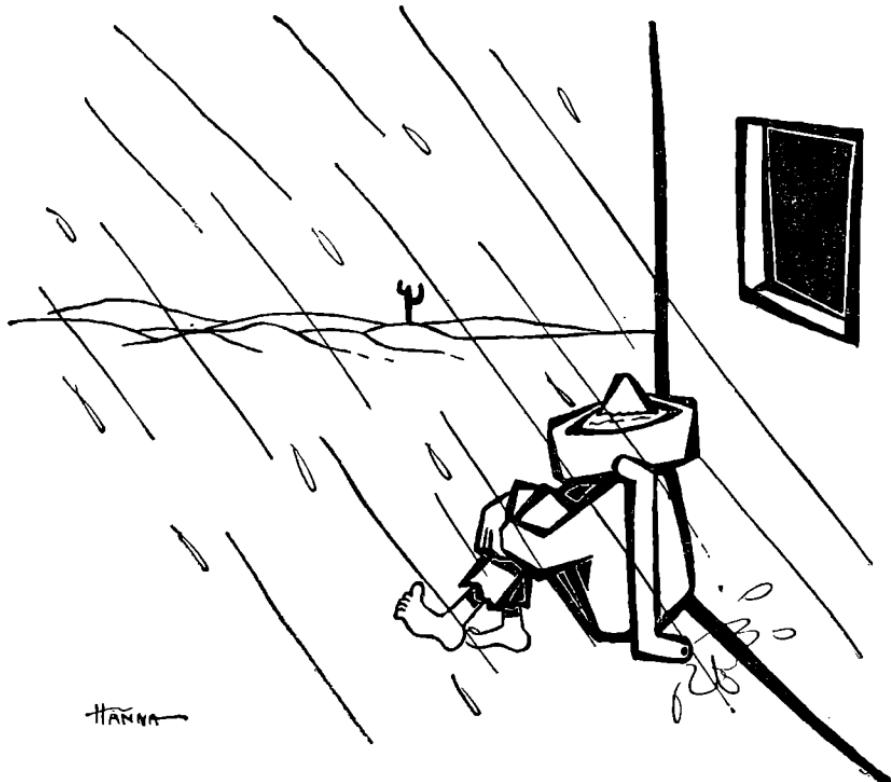
an estimate for such a structure and a notation of the sum it cost when completed.

The chapel door from which the youth had hurried had, in 1901, not been opened for 15 years, according to the authorities.

Then, on going over the ground they had covered that first time, the adventurers into the fourth dimension realized that in their walk around the building, accompanied by their volunteer guide, they had passed *through* buildings now standing on the site of the old road.

Bit by bit they reconstructed the Trianon of 1789 out of historical records, and compared it with the one they had walked through. The two matched. The ladies had no purpose save to report the truth and this they did with a genuine scientific spirit — unafraid of whatever new problems might arise.

After nine years of research they published their findings in a book modestly titled "An Adventure." For fear of ridicule they used pseudonyms- "Elizabeth Morrison" and "Frances Lamont."



The book encouraged others who had had similar experiences to admit them. In 1914 a family visited the authors, asking that their names be withheld. This family had lived in Versailles from 1907 to 1908 — and had seen the topography shift and change in that eerie half-light which illuminates the edges of "the fields we know." They had noticed something else: a strange buzz in the air as of an electrical disturbance which always accompanied the change in perception of the landscape. Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain looked it up. Sure enough, on August 10, 1901, there had been an electrical storm blanketing Europe.

The Trianon adventure is not the only case of real time travel — it is simply the best reported and substantiated.

On an afternoon in October 1926 another English school teacher, Miss Ruth Wynne, took a walk with a pupil of hers, a 14-year-old girl named Allington. It was on the outskirts of the village of Rougham, four miles from Bury St. Edmunds. They decided to cut across fields toward the church of Bradfield St. George, the spire of which they could see above the trees. On a back road they came to a wall of yellow-brick, then tall iron gates and through them they saw a driveway and a great Georgian manor house, standing in a park of stately trees. They ad-

mired it, wondered who lived there, and passed on, visiting the church as they had intended. On returning home by another route Miss Wynne described to her parents the house they had seen and remarked that it was strange that no family of such prominence had ever been mentioned by the neighbors as living so near their own home. Four months later she and her pupil took the same walk. No wall. No gate. No manor. Only the great trees which had surrounded the house remained, "denser, and shadier, and greener . . ." At this point both pupil and teacher, without comparing memories, wrote down what they had seen on that October day. The two accounts matched perfectly. Unfortunately, there was no map of the countryside available from olden days. And only mounds of earth remained to show where once that mansion had stood.

Are there kinks or knots in Time just as there are flaws in crystals? Let us hope that some patient observer, equipped with a camera, will take these phenomena seriously enough to set up a watch at places where they have occurred. The gardens of the Petit Trianon would be an obvious spot to begin — on an overcast day when radios are crackling with static. But he would need a stout heart — for once in Yesterday could he be sure of coming back?