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# Personal Adventures in the Spirit World

By Stephen Leacock

Illustrated by F. Strothmann

**I** DO not write what follows with the expectation of convincing or converting anybody. We Spiritualists—or Spiritists (we call ourselves both, or either)—never ask anybody to believe us. If they do, well and good. If not, all right. Our attitude simply is that facts are facts. There they are, believe them or not as you like. As I said the other night, in conversation with Aristotle and John Bunyan and George Washington and a few others, why should anybody believe us? Aristotle, I recollect, said that all that he wished was that everybody should know how happy he was; and Washington said that for his part, if people only knew how bright and beautiful it all was where he was, they would willingly, indeed gladly, pay the mere dollar—itsself only a nominal fee—that it cost to talk to him. Bunyan, I remember, added that he himself was quite happy.

But, as I say, I never ask anybody to believe me; the more so as I was once an absolute sceptic myself. As I see it now, I was prejudiced. The mere fact that spiritual *séances* and the services of a medium involved the payment of money condemned the whole thing in my eyes. I did not realize, as I do now, that these *medii*, like anybody else, have got to live; otherwise they would die and become spirits.

Nor would I now place these disclosures before the public were it not that I think that in the present crisis they will prove of value to the Allied cause.

But let me begin at the beginning. My own conversion to spiritualism came about, like that of so many others, through the more-or-less casual remark of a Friend.

Noticing me one day gloomy and depressed, this Friend remarked to me: "Have you any belief in Spiritualism?" Had it come from any one else, I should have turned the question aside with a sneer.

But it so happens that I owe a great deal of gratitude to this particular Friend. It was he who, at a time when I was so afflicted with rheumatism that I could scarcely leap five feet into the air without pain, said to me one day quite casually: "Have you ever tried PYRO for your rheumatism?" One month later I could leap ten feet in the air (had I been able to) without the slightest malaise. The same man, I may add, hearing me one day exclaiming to myself: "Oh! If there were anything that would remove the stains from my clothes!" said to me very simply and quietly: "Have you ever washed them in LUXO?" It was he too who, noticing a haggard look on my face after breakfast one morning, inquired immediately what I had been eating for breakfast; after which, with a simplicity and directness which I shall never forget, he said: "Why not eat HUMPO?"

Nor can I ever forget my feeling on another occasion when, hearing me exclaim aloud: "Oh! If there were only something invented for removing the proteins and amygdaloids from a carbonized diet and leaving only the pure nitrogenous life-giving elements!" seized my hand in his, and said in a voice thrilled with emotion: "There is! It has!"

The reader will understand, therefore, that a question, or query, from such a Friend was not to be put lightly aside. When he asked: "Do you believe in Spiritualism?" I answered with perfect courtesy: "To be quite frank, I do not."

There was silence between us for a time, and then my Friend said: "Have you ever given it a trial?"



At this point, right in the middle of my conversation with Napoleon, the attendant touched me on the shoulder. "Your time is up," he said.

I paused a moment as the idea was a novel one.

"No," I answered, "to be quite candid, I have not."

Neither of us spoke for perhaps twenty minutes after this, when my Friend said: "Have you anything against it?"

I thought awhile and then: "Yes," I said, "I have."

My Friend remained silent for perhaps half an hour. Then he asked: "What?" I meditated for some time. Then I said:

"This: It seems to me that the whole thing is done for money. How utterly unnatural it is to call up the dead—one's great-grandfather, let us say—and pay money for talking to him."

"Precisely," said my Friend without a moment's pause. "I thought so. Now suppose I could bring you into contact with the spirit world through a medium, or through different *medii*, without there being any question of money, other than a merely nominal fee—the money being, as it were, left out of count, and regarded as only, so to speak, nominal, something given merely *pro forma* and *ad interim*. Under these circumstances, will you try the experiment?"

I rose and took my Friend's hand.

"My dear fellow," I said, "I not only will, but I shall."

From this conversation dated my connection with Spiritualism, which has since opened for me a new world.

**I**T would be out of place for me to indicate the particular address or the particular methods employed by the Agency to which my Friend introduced me. I am anxious to avoid anything approaching a commercial tinge in what I write. Moreover, their advertisement can be seen along with many others—all, I am sure, just as honorable and just as trustworthy—in the columns of any daily newspaper. As everybody knows, many methods are employed. The tapping of a table, the movement of a ouija board, or the voice of a trance medium, are only a few among the many devices by which the spirits now enter into communication with us. But in my own case the method used was not only simplicity itself, but was so framed as to carry with it the proof of its own genuineness. One had merely to speak into the receiver of a telephone, and the voice of the spirit was heard through the transmitter as in an ordinary telephone conversation.

It was only natural, after the scoffing remark that I had made, that I should begin with

my Great-grandfather. Nor can I ever forget the peculiar thrill that went through me when I was informed by the head of the Agency that a tracer was being sent out for Great-grandfather to call him to the 'phone.

Great-grandfather—let me do him this justice—was prompt. He was there in three minutes. Whatever his line of business was in the spirit world—and I was never able to learn it—he must have left it immediately and hurried to the telephone. Whatever later dissatisfaction I may have had with Great-grandfather, let me state it fairly and honestly, he is at least a punctual man. Every time I called he came right away without delay. Let those who are inclined to cavil at the methods of the Spiritualists reflect how impossible it would be to secure such punctuality on anything but a basis of absolute honesty.

In my first conversation with Great-grandfather I found myself so absurdly nervous at the thought of the vast gulf of space and time across which we were speaking that I perhaps framed my questions somewhat too crudely.

"How are you, Great-grandfather?" I asked.

His voice came back to me as distinctly as if he were in the next room:

"I am happy, very happy. Please tell everybody that I am *happy*."

"Great-grandfather," I said, "I will. I'll see that everybody knows it. Where are you, Great-grandfather?"

(Concluded on page 52)

## PERSONAL ADVENTURES IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

(Concluded from page 43)

"Here," he answered, "beyond."  
 "Beyond what?"  
 "Here on the other side."  
 "Side of which?" I asked.  
 "Of the great vastness," he answered.  
 "The other end of the Illimitable."  
 "Oh, I see," I said, "that's where you are."  
 We were silent for some time. It is amazing how difficult it is to find things to talk about with one's Great-grandfather. For the life of me I could think of nothing better than: "What sort of weather have you been having?"  
 "There is no weather here," said Great-grandfather. "It's all bright and beautiful all the time."  
 "You mean bright sunshine?" I said.  
 "There is no sun here," said Great-grandfather.  
 "Then how do you mean—" I began.  
 But at this moment the Head of the Agency tapped me on the shoulder to remind me that the two minutes' conversation for which I had deposited, as a nominal fee, five dollars, had expired. The Agency was courteous enough to inform me that for five dollars more Great-grandfather would talk another two minutes.

But I thought it preferable to stop for the moment.

Now I do not wish to say a word against my own Great-grandfather. Yet in the conversations which followed on successive days I found him—how shall I put it?—unsatisfactory. He had been, when on this side—to use the term which we Spiritualists prefer—a singularly able man—an English judge; so at least I have always been given to understand. But somehow Great-grandfather's brain, on the other side, seemed to have got badly damaged. My own theory is that, living always in the bright sunshine, he had got sunstroke. But I may wrong him. Perhaps it was locomotor ataxia that he had. That he was very, very happy where he was is beyond all doubt. He said so at every conversation. But I have noticed that feeble-minded people are often happy. He said, too, that he was glad to be where he was; and on the whole I felt glad that he was too. Once or twice I thought that possibly Great-grandfather felt so happy because he had been drinking: his voice, even across the great gulf, seemed somehow to suggest it. But on being questioned he told me that where he was there was no drink and no thirst, because it was all so bright and beautiful. I asked him if he meant that it was "bone-dry" like Kansas, or whether the rich could still get it? But he didn't answer.

Our intercourse ended in a quarrel. No doubt it was my fault. But it *did* seem to me that Great-grandfather, who had been one of the greatest English lawyers of his day, might have handed out an opinion.

The matter came up thus: I had had an argument—it was in the middle of last winter—with some men at my club about the legal interpretation of the Adamson Law. The dispute grew bitter. "I'm right," I said, "and I'll prove it if you give me time to consult the authorities."

"Consult your Great-grandfather!" sneered one of the men.

"All right," I said, "I will."

I walked straight across the room to the telephone and called up the Agency. "Give me my Great-grandfather," I said. "I want him right away."

He was there. Good, punctual old soul, I'll say that for him. He was there.

"Great-grandfather," I said, "I'm in a discussion here about the constitutionality of the Adamson Law, involving the power of Congress under the Constitution. Now, you remember the Constitution when they made it. Is the law all right?"

There was silence.

"How does it stand, Great-grandfather?" I said. "Will it hold water?"

Then he spoke.

"Over here," he said, "there are no laws, no members of Congress and no Adamsons; it's all bright and beautiful and—"

"Great-grandfather," I said, as I hung up the receiver in disgust, "you are a Muttl!" I never spoke to him again.

Yet I feel sorry for him, feeble old soul, sitting about in the Illimitable, and always so punctual to hurry to the telephone—so happy, so feeble-witted and so courteous; a better man, perhaps, take it all in all, than he was in life: lonely, too, it may be, out

there in the Vastness. Yet I never called him up again. He is happy. Let him stay.

INDEED, my acquaintance with the spirit world might have ended at that point but for the good offices, once more, of my Friend.

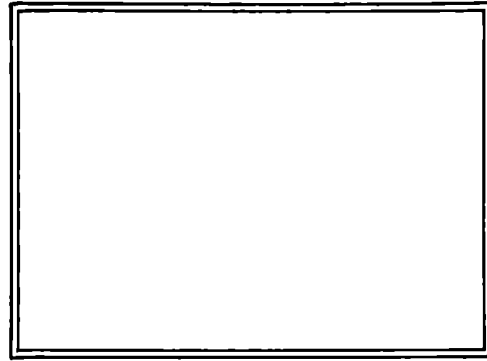
"You find your Great-grandfather a little slow, a little dull?" he said. "Well, then, if you want brains, power, energy, why not call up some of the spirits of the great men, some of the leading men, for instance, of your Great-grandfather's time?"

"You've said it!" I exclaimed. "I'll call up Napoleon Bonaparte."

I hurried to the Agency.

"Is it possible," I asked, "for me to call up the Emperor Napoleon and talk to him?"

Possible? Certainly. It appeared that nothing was easier. In the case of Napoleon Bonaparte the nominal fee had to be ten dollars in place of five: but it seemed to me that if Great-grandfather cost five, Napoleon Bonaparte at ten was cheapness itself.



"Will it take long to get him?" I asked anxiously.

"We'll send out a tracer for him right away," they said.

Like Great-grandfather, Napoleon was punctual. That I will say for him. If in any way I think less of Napoleon Bonaparte now than I did, let me at least admit that a more punctual, obliging, willing man I never talked with.

He came in two minutes. "He's on the line now," they said. I took up the receiver, trembling.

"Hello!" I called. "*Est-ce que c'est l'Empereur Napoleon à qui j'ai l'honneur de parler?*"

"How's that?" said Napoleon.

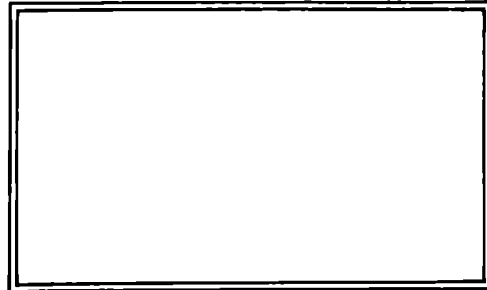
"*Je demand si je suis en communication avec l'Empereur Napoleon—*"

"Oh!" said Napoleon, "that's all right; speak English."

"What!" I said in surprise. "You know English? I always thought you couldn't speak a word of it."

He was silent for a minute. Then he said: "I picked it up over here. It's all right. Go right ahead."

"Well," I continued, "I've always admired you so much, your wonderful brain and genius, that I felt I wanted to speak to you and ask you how you are."



"Happy," said Napoleon, "very happy."

"That's good," I said, "that's fine!"

"And how is it out there? All bright and beautiful, eh?"

"Very beautiful," said the Emperor.

"And just where are you," I continued. "Somewhere out in the Unspeakable, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes," he answered, "out here beyond."

"That's good," I said, "pretty happy, eh?"

"Very happy," said Napoleon. "Tell everybody how happy I am."

"I know," I answered, "I'll tell them all. But just now I've a particular thing to ask. We've got a big war on, pretty well the whole

world in it, and I thought perhaps a few pointers from a man like you—"

But at this point the attendant touched me on the shoulder. "Your time is up," he said.

I was about to offer to pay at once for two minutes more when a better idea struck me. Talk with Napoleon? I'd do better than that. I'd call a whole War Council of great spirits, lay the war crisis before them and get the biggest brains that the world ever produced to work on how to win the war.

Who should I have? Let me see! Napoleon himself, of course. I'd bring him back. And for the sea business, the submarine problem, I'd have Admiral Nelson. George Washington, naturally, for the American end; for politics, say, good old Ben Franklin, the wisest old head that ever walked on American legs, and witty, too; yes, Franklin certainly, if only for his wit to keep the council from getting gloomy; Lincoln—honest old Abe—him certainly I must have. Those and perhaps a few others.

I reckoned that a consultation at ten dollars apiece with spirits of that class was cheap to the verge of the ludicrous. Their advice ought to be worth millions—yes, billions—to the cause.

The Agency got them for me without trouble. There is no doubt they are a punctual crowd, over there beyond in the Unthinkable.

I gathered them all in and talked to them, all and severally, the payment, a merely nominal matter, being made, *pro forma*, in advance.

I have in front of me in my rough notes the result of their advice. When properly drafted it will be, I feel sure, one of the most important state documents produced in the war.

In the personal sense—I have to admit it—I found them just a trifle disappointing. Franklin, poor fellow, has apparently lost his wit. The spirit of Lincoln seemed to me to have none of that homely wisdom that he used to have. And it appears that we were quite mistaken in thinking Benjamin Disraeli a brilliant man; it is clear to me now that he was dull—just about as dull as Great-grandfather, I should say. Washington, too, is not at all the kind of man we thought him.

Still, these are only personal impressions. They detract nothing from the extraordinary value of the advice given, which seems to me to settle once and forever any lingering doubt about the value of communications with the Other Side.

My draft of their advice runs in part as follows:

The Spirit of Admiral Nelson, on being questioned on the submarine problem, holds that if all the men on the submarines were where he is everything would be bright and happy. This seems to me an invaluable hint. There is nothing needed now except to put them there.

The advice of the Spirit of Napoleon about the campaign on land seemed to me, if possible, of lower value than that of Nelson on the campaign at sea. It is hardly conceivable that Napoleon has forgotten where the Marne is. But it may have changed since his day. At any rate, he says that if ever the Russians cross the Marne, all is over. Coming from such a master-strategist, this ought to be attended to.

Franklin, on being asked whether the United States had done right in going into the war, said Yes; asked whether the country could with honor have stayed out, he said No. There is guidance here for thinking men of all ranks.

Lincoln is very happy where he is. So too, I was amazed to find, is Disraeli. In fact, it was most gratifying to learn that all of the great spirits consulted are very happy, and want everybody to know how happy they are. Where they are, I may say, it is all bright and beautiful.

Fear of trespassing on their time prevented me from questioning each of them up to the full limit of the period contracted for.

I understand that I have still to my credit at the Agency five minutes' talk with Napoleon, available at any time, and similarly five minutes each with Franklin and Washington, to say nothing of ten minutes' unexpired time with Great-grandfather.

All of these opportunities I am willing to dispose of at a reduced rate to anyone still skeptical of the reality of the spirit world: