

PSYCHIC
ADVENTURES
IN
NEW YORK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY SIR OLIVER LODGE

BY
NEVILLE WHYMANT

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INTRODUCTION

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE

ONE Sunday morning, in May, 1927, as I was in London, I saw by appointment a stranger named Dr. Whymant, who with some compunction told me a long and strange story about what was then a somewhat recent experience of his in New York, whence he had not long returned. He told it much as it is now written in this book, and we talked for some hours. This gentleman claimed to know a great many languages, including many used in the East. In fact, he was evidently an Orientalist and a Scholar. His narration was interesting and surprising, and I introduced him on the strength of it to the S.P.R. I myself was familiar with the phenomenon of the direct voice, and had actually had one sitting with Valiantine, but never had I heard foreign languages spoken that I remembered: they would have been largely wasted on me. Dr. Whymant, however, testified to having heard a number of them, most of them known to him, others unknown or only partly known or in unusual dialects; and among them he told me of his distinct hearing of Archaic Chinese of the time of Confucius, which he had studied but could not speak. He happened to know an ancient poem of that period, the meaning of which was obscure, so he took advantage of the

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opportunity to get it recited in a corrected version and made sense of. All this, if confirmed by other authorities, seemed to me of great importance, and he told me that he had already submitted the amended text to the Chinese Professors in several Universities.

His narrative is skilfully told and very readable, in spite of the complexity of the subject, and I commend it to close attention: for on any view it is an extraordinary phenomenon well worthy of study. It does not seem necessary to assume the actual presence of the great Chinese Sage himself, but it is possible that some disciple of that period may be exerting himself, as so many others on that side are exerting themselves, to give scholarly proof of survival, and to awaken our dormant minds to possibilities in the universe to which we are for the most part blind and deaf. The existing multiplicity of languages on the earth is in itself a nuisance, but as it exists it can be used to give evidence that might not otherwise be accessible, or at least that could not be so convincing. I hope that Scholars will give Dr. Whyment a fair hearing, and I congratulate him on the way he has told the tale.

July 7, 1930.

FOREWORD

By strange and unfathomable routes come men's greatest adventures. I little thought that a pleasant dinner-party in Park Avenue, New York, was to raise the curtain on one of the most exacting and inexplicable episodes of my life. There is a story in it, and it is the story which is here set down; no complicated psychological analysis has been attempted in this place.

I have frequently been told that there is a message in my experiences. For some this may be so, but for my own part I have yet to read the riddle.

N. W.

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I

I AM not a spiritualist. I am not in any way connected with psychic research societies. I merely have a story to tell, a few questions to ask in return, although some believe that they can read a message into what I have to say. But my position is one of extreme simplicity; having no theory to expound, no scheme to foster, my memory is untrammelled in its backward groping, and my vision is unimpaired by any preconceived notions. Indeed, to be frank, I did not wish to tell my story at all, and while there was a chance that another, almost as closely concerned as I was with the events here set down, would relieve me of the responsibility, I withheld my hand. But time has passed and the awaited record has not appeared; those impatient ones who envied me my experience and are eager to trace it step by step plague me for a permanent account of it, and assure me that this is the only sure escape from their periodical importunities. So for a time I have put away my dictionaries and grammars to

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tell of the strange adventures which befell me when I wandered into a side-path far from the normal road of my daily life.

II

At the end of March, 1926, I first arrived in New York, having left England a few days before. Previously I had spent several years in the Far East engaged in ethnologic research, an occupation which necessitated my speaking several Oriental languages daily. This acquaintance with a variety of tongues was the direct cause of my being drawn into the series of strange happenings which form the burden of this tale. My visit to the United States was undertaken in order that I might gain further material for anthropological treatises then in preparation.

My wife accompanied me, and we were welcomed on arrival by her brother, a prominent American official whose duties at that time were in New York State. A few evenings after landing we were invited with my brother-in-law to the house of Judge Cannon in Park Avenue, and in the course of the evening Mrs. Cannon asked me many questions concerning life and religious custom and practice in the Far East. Shortly after this dinner-party Mr. and Mrs. Cannon left to spend the summer in Europe (as we afterwards

discovered), and nothing further disturbed my peaceful researches until the middle of October.

III

Our brief introduction to the Cannon *ménage* had given us no further knowledge of the family than that Mr. William Cannon was a lawyer of eminence, important in the judgments of New York State, and that Mrs. Cannon had a strong interest in certain aspects of Oriental life and experience, although she had never visited the East. Neither my wife nor I had any indication that Mrs. Cannon was concerned with spiritualism or psychical research, and our conversation with Judge Cannon had certainly not led us to consider that he had any such interest. For our part, my amateurish experiments in the years immediately preceding the war had led to such a waste of time and energy that it had been agreed between us that the whole matter should be dropped and that neither of us would thereafter engage in any "psychic" experiment or study without due consideration and mutual consultation. The subject had definitely not arisen since the war, and other interests had completely banished all thought of it from our minds.

Imagine our surprise, then, to receive an invitation by telephone on Friday, October 15, to go again to the Cannon apartment "to meet some

people interested in discussing psychical research." Mrs. Cannon added that she needed someone with a knowledge of Oriental languages, as "there might be a need for some interpreting." This *addendum* did not surprise me, as it might have done earlier, as I had already discovered for myself the cosmopolitan nature of many New York gatherings.

It is important to state here that *we did not know until we arrived at the Cannon apartment that we were being invited to a spiritualist séance*. On our arrival Mrs. Cannon explained that she had made the message purposely vague, as she very much desired our attendance (for purely linguistic service, be it understood), and she felt that had we been bluntly invited to a *séance* we might have declined.

The dining-room had already been arranged, its heavy furniture pushed up against the wall on one side of the room, and chairs were set round the centre space thus cleared. On one of these chairs sat a stout, genial figure who was introduced to us as George Valiantine, the medium. Then we heard for the first time that Mr. and Mrs. Cannon had, for a long period, been the host and hostess of a "spiritualist study-circle," the various members of which were now arriving for the evening session. We were told very little of the progress of the sitters—briefly that they were seeking psychic development, that they had had

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wonderful results with the present medium, and that they hoped eventually to be able to get messages through "on their own"—*i.e.*, without the presence of a medium being necessary. We were assured that each member had received well-attested messages from loved ones who had gone before, and that some spirits, not at present identified, were making themselves heard and felt. There *might* be something in the nature of a surprise for me personally, Mrs. Cannon continued, if I liked to go through with the sitting.

We were now asked what we knew of spiritualism, and the little we did know was soon told. It was obvious that we knew nothing of recent developments in the psychic arts; we were even unable to understand the jargon of the new cult. Then we were informed that Valiantine was a "direct-voice medium": in other words, his vocal cords did not produce the sounds heard during the sittings. An aluminium trumpet was produced and placed in the centre of the circle of chairs, together with a bowl of plain cold water and a child's doll. The trumpet (which was touched here and there with phosphorus paint so that its movements in the darkness might be followed) was used by the spirits, we were told, to amplify their otherwise weak or whispered voices. The presence of the medium was necessary merely, we gathered, for the purpose of providing,

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from his own body, the ectoplasm from which the spirits made vocal cords and larynxes.

Before the sitting began I had a talk with Valiantine, who struck me as a typical example of the simpler kind of country American citizen. His speech was far from polished, he seemed to lack imagination, his interests were of a very commonplace order, and he seemed as much puzzled as proud of the queer happenings which appeared to have their centre in him. He found it easier, I imagine, to accept what the pundits of the local psychic research bodies said about his powers of mediumship than to attempt to think out an explanation for himself. He was almost untravelled, and exhibited no desire to see or know anything of countries other than his own. Occasionally he made amusing (and obviously unrehearsed) blunders in speech and misconception, and above all he seemed always to be natural. It was as if he were incapable of any form of acting at all. He was, in that company, a fish out of water, and although somewhat bewildered at it all, he seemed quite prepared to accept the position and make the best of it.

IV

As soon as the last member of the circle arrived we went into the dining-room and took our seats. The members of the circle were typical upper-

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class New Yorkers, women friends of Mrs. Cannon with numerous social interests, and in addition to ourselves—the only strangers—the Cannons' medical adviser, a pleasant, level-headed, up-to-date American physician. We, as new-comers, were invited to examine the room before the doors were closed, and everything appeared to be fool-proof and fake-proof. The room was of such a size that when, with my chair-back against the communicating doors (closed), I stretched out my legs I could almost touch any of the objects in the centre of the circle. This would also hold good for any other sitters, unless they had exceptionally short legs, but the possible movement of the medium or any other person round the circle could be impeded effectively in this manner.

There was no appearance or suspicion of trickery, but I mention these things to show that I was alert from the beginning, and that within the limits imposed upon us I was prepared to apply all the tests possible to whatever phenomena might appear. We were warned at the beginning of the sitting that among the forbidden acts was the sudden production of a light (this, it was said, might be so dangerous to the medium as to prove fatal); the seizure of any touching or tapping agent; leaving one's seat after the lights were turned off; and crossing the legs—this was supposed to break the "circle of power" and reduce the possibility of good results.

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Mrs. Cannon, I remember, sat on the left side of the medium (who was on the opposite side of the circle from us) near a corner of the table on which was a gramophone. Several records were played at the beginning of each sitting "to calm the nerves of all present and to bring all the vibrations into harmony with those of the spirit world." This was the invariable procedure as soon as the lights had been extinguished, an office usually performed by Mrs. Cannon. The Lord's Prayer was said, all present joining in, and then sacred music was played or sung until "the voices" manifested themselves.

Suddenly into the sound of the singing came the sound of a strong voice raised in greeting. It seemed to rise up from the floor and was so strong that for some moments I felt convinced that I could actually feel the vibrations of the floor. After a few words of greeting and a promise of spirit communication on a large scale, the voice bade us farewell till the end of the sitting. This was the voice, we were told, of Dr. Barnett, who was the spirit leader of the circle, and who opened and closed it at will. Shortly after this voice had ceased, another, totally different in *timbre* and quality, was heard. This belonged, we were told, to Blackfoot, an American Indian of the tribe of that name, who was the "guardian of the spirit door." This was followed by several whispered communications to regular members of the circle,

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messages said to be from relatives who had at one time or another "passed over."

Presently there sounded a very strong voice like that of an Italian singer. "Christo di Angelo" was roared at full lung force! The voice in this instance seemed to soar up to the ceiling and hover there. The mobility and speed of movement of these voices was not the least remarkable feature of the experience. Speaking at first in pure and clear Italian, the voice soon dropped into a Sicilian dialect of which I knew nothing. Before leaving the circle, however, "Christo di Angelo" was prevailed upon to sing a Sicilian ballad.

Again there were personal messages for the regular sitters, some of an intimate nature which made the other members of the circle feel like eavesdroppers. These were followed by a sound very difficult to describe. It was the sound of an old wheezy flute not too skilfully played. Those who have wandered through Chinese streets in the evening will readily recall the sound. In a few seconds it had carried me back to sights and experiences in the old Celestial Kingdom. In that indefinable fashion known only to those who have sat for some hours on end in pitch darkness waiting for something to happen, I sensed the eager thrill that ran through all the people there gathered as they heard this sound and waited for what was to follow. There was a rustling of silks as women straightened themselves in their chairs, there was

the sharp intake of breath around the circle, and I noticed at the same moment the heavy, languorous breathing of Valiantine, whose position, directly facing me, I kept in the forefront of my mind. The flute-like sound faded, and then stopped.

The next sound seemed to be a hollow repetition of a Chinese name—K'ung-fu-tzu—the name by which Confucius was canonized. I was not quite sure that I had heard aright, but I did recognize the sound for some variety of Chinese speech and so I asked, in Chinese, for another opportunity of hearing what had been said before. This time without any hesitation at all came the name K'ung-fu-tzu. Now, I thought, was my opportunity. Chinese I had long regarded as my own special research area, and he would be a wise man, medium or other, who would attempt to trick me on such soil. If this tremulous voice were that of the old ethicist who had personally edited the Chinese Classics, then I had an abundance of questions to ask him. More even than any classical scholar could have to ask of Plato or Socrates should they venture to put in an appearance in a twentieth-century classroom. For if Homer and his followers nodded, at least they had a language far easier than that of Confucius and his successors, and the loose ends in the Chinese Classics had defied the efforts of twenty-five centuries of commentators.

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The voice, as I have said, was tremulous. It was very difficult to discover what was said next, and I had to keep calling for a repetition. Then it burst upon me that I was listening to Chinese of a purity and delicacy not now spoken in any part of China. I was getting distressed at not hearing distinctly all that was said, and I was far from sure that all I was saying was being understood, although there should really be no difficulty in that if I were indeed talking with a spirit.

As the voice went on I realized that the style of Chinese used was identical with that of the Chinese Classics, edited by Confucius two thousand five hundred years ago. Only among the scholars of Archaic Chinese could one now hear that accent and style, and then only when they intoned some passage from the ancient books. In other words, the Chinese to which we were now listening was as dead colloquially as Sanskrit or Latin, and had been so for even a greater length of time. If this was a hoax, it was a particularly clever one, far beyond the scope of any of the sinologues now living. I was determined to test the matter to the full limit permitted, and so my next remark took the form of a question intended to prove the identity of the communicator.

All Chinese who attain any eminence in public or private life have an abundance of names bestowed upon them at different periods. Confucius was no exception, and I asked for details of his

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life and "style" (the name by which a man is known as soon as he achieves individuality in early manhood), for particulars of his preoccupations on this earth, and set some posers of the type with which all students of Chinese have wrestled in their studies of the Confucian Canon. All my questions were answered at once, without any pause or fumbling; in fact, the answers came so swiftly upon the question that all too often I had to ask the voice to repeat its answer, as I had been unable to follow. The voice grew stronger with the passing of the moments, so that although the early part of the conversation was to some extent lost or doubtful, the succeeding phrases were quite clear so far as I was able to understand them. Although I had given much study to the classics—even to the length of knowing whole sections of them by heart—I found it extremely difficult to follow a voice speaking in that style. Another remarkable thing about this communicator was that, sensing my difficulty, he gradually assimilated his speech to my own, all the time, however, keeping his own accent and intonation so distinct that it was obvious to the other sitters (none of whom understood Chinese) that there *were* two distinct voices and that an actual conversation was going on.

I thought suddenly of a supreme test. There are several poems in the *Shih King* (Classic of Poetry) which have baffled the commentators ever

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since Confucius himself edited the work and left it to posterity as a model anthology of early Chinese verse. Western scholars have attempted in vain to wrest from them their meaning, and Chinese classical scholars versed in the lore and literature of the ancient Empire have long ago given up trying to understand them. Now when Confucius came to edit the Book of Poetry there were, we are told, over three thousand pieces from which to choose. Exercising the privilege of an editor, Confucius struck out many of these as "unworthy" either in subject-matter or in form to go down to future generations. Finally, he reduced the unwieldy mass to slightly over three hundred poems, and those who have read of his exertions and have ploughed their way through the work as he left it have often wondered what he saw in some of the odes he preserved. These "difficult" poems never form part of the curriculum of the Chinese student; for that reason they are usually left untouched and only the plain poems are learnt.

I had never read any of these poems myself, but I knew the first lines of some of them through seeing them so often while looking through the book for others. At this moment it occurred to me that if I could remember the first line of one of them I might now get a chance to astound the communicator who called himself Confucius. Using the flowery language of Chinese honorifics,

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I asked if "the Master" would explain to me the meaning of one of these long-obscure odes.

Without exercising conscious choice, I said *Ts'ai ts'ai chuan êrh*, which is the first line of the third ode of the first book (*Chou nan*) of the Classic of Poetry. I could certainly not have repeated another line of this poem, for I did not know any one of the remaining fifteen lines; but there was no need or even opportunity, for the voice took up the poem at once and recited it to the end. I was somewhat distracted by people in the circle whispering to each other, "He's chanting," or similar remarks, and could not therefore pay full attention to the voice. I had, however, a pad of paper and a pencil, and as well as I was able in the darkness I made notes of what the voice said and jotted down keys to the intonation used. It was necessary, however, to ask the voice to go through the whole thing again, so that I could make my notes as complete as possible.

It is perhaps little to be wondered at if I say that my mind was by this time in a state of turmoil. In declaiming the ode the voice had put a new construction on the verses and made the whole thing hang together as a normal poem. It was, I was told, a psychic poem, and it was well known that the Chinese recognized psychic literature as a thing apart from ordinary literary compositions. "Read in this way," the voice had said, "does not its meaning become plain?"

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Surprised as I was, I did not intend to let matters rest here. I would venture yet another test. A distinguished British sinologue had some time before offered a solution (in the form of textual criticism) of a difficult passage in the *Lun Yü*, or "Analects of Confucius," which are said to have been written under the personal supervision and authority of the old ethicist himself. As the passage stands in the standard version of the book it makes no sense at all, but with the textual emendations suggested by Professor H. A. Giles of the University of Cambridge it shows itself a balanced sentence of the true classical type. I remember being so struck with this brilliant piece of textual criticism when I first saw it in *Adversaria Sinica* that I had fixed the passage in my mind and had used it in the classroom as an example to my students of what could be done by intelligent analysis.

So now, I thought, was my opportunity to set another test. A communication might proceed from a medium or a spirit, said the scoffers, but never was anything said which could not be better said by an intelligent man on earth. Certainly individual scraps of foreign languages had been heard in various sittings before, but no definite conversation had taken place. Well, here was a conversation which had by this time been going on for some ten minutes, and certainly what I had got out of it had been sufficient to make me think seriously as to what was happening.

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I thereupon addressed a question to the "voice": "Shall I ask of one passage in the Master's own writing? In *Lun Yü*, *Hsia Pien*, there is a passage which is wrongly written. Should it not read thus: . . .?" But before I could get out even the details of the passage in question, the "voice" took up my sentence and carried it through to the end. "You were going to ask me about the two characters which end the last two phrases: you are quite right. The copyists were in error. The character which is written *sé* should be *i*, and the character which is written *yen* is an error for *fou*." Again all the wind had been taken out of my sails!

I know it is easy to say that here was a case of simple telepathy, since I had already in the forefront of my mind the material which I was using as an experiment, and it would not need a great deal of effort to bring it out. But as an explanation, even of this particular episode, the telepathic hypothesis leaves much to be desired, since it is but explaining one difficulty by means of another. What is telepathy and how does it work? And when this point has been settled, how did telepathy work in this case just cited?

After this there was nothing much of interest. The voice seemed to weary a little of its sustained effort, and it fell into a fainter sound altogether. The substance of its remarks, too, fell to a lower plane: a criticism all too often deserved in *séance* communications. Unfortunately, too, later sittings

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did not reach the promise of this first one. It seemed that the voice was only too eager to discuss the affairs of this world, sometimes, indeed, going the length of prophecy.

I shall conclude this section with a transcript of my notes of this conversation (taken at the time and written down in the dark), and with the full report of the incident of the poem, taken from page 21 of the New York *Herald Tribune* of Wednesday, April 6, 1927.

TRANSCRIPT OF MY NOTES OF THE FIRST SÉANCE

Some part of the following conversation was a little difficult to follow owing to the archaic nature of the language used by the "voice" and, apparently, its difficulty in understanding my purely modern Chinese.

The Voice: Greeting, O son of learning and reader of strange books! This unworthy servant bows humbly before such excellence.

I: Peace be upon thee, O illustrious one. This uncultured menial ventures to ask thy name and illustrious style.

The Voice: My mean name is K'UNG, men call me FU-TZU, and my lowly style is KIU (?). I wasted more than three score years and reached the end of no road. Peace upon thy house. May

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I know thine honourable name and illustrious style ?

I: My humble name is WANG, and men call me WEN-TZU. My despicable style is WEN-TZU-TSANG. I have thrown away two score years in folly and I lack understanding. Will the Master teach me in words of wisdom ?

The Voice: Alas, my shade is that of a single hair and knowledge is not in me. What is the honourable question ?

I: This stupid one would know the correct reading of a verse in the SHIH KING. It has been hidden from understanding for long centuries, and men look upon it with eyes that are blind. The passage begins thus: *Ts'ai ts'ai chuan erh . . .*

The Voice: It should be read this way, O master of mysteries. (The voice here intoned the poem throughout, and on my asking for it again it was repeated.) Thus read, does not its meaning become plain ?

I: Indeed, O leader of the wise ones, it shines with a myriad lights. There are other things I would ask of thy wisdom.

The Voice: Ask not of an empty barrel much fish, O wise one ! Many things which are now dark shall be light to thee, but the time is not yet. They shall yield to thy touch in a time (day) which is not yet born.

I: Shall I ask of one passage in the Master's own writing ? In LUN YÜ, HSIA PIEN, there is a

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passage which is wrongly written. Should it not read thus: . . . ? (Here I began to quote and was interrupted as explained above.)

The Voice: That it may be understood by those who sincerely seek what is hidden in the symbols. It was a mistake of those who tried to see in darkness, and wrote that which they did not understand.

I: There are many dark places, O leader of the thoughtful ones, and I fear they may not be made plain.

The Voice: Fear not. There are those who love learning, and they will not let the treasure lie hid. Even as thou hast done with Mongolian, so thou shalt do with the problems of my old home. Those old Mongols waited long for one such as thou art. . . .

I: Long years have I sought to give the message of the East to the West, but the clinking of money in the markets and the clanking of wheels in the factories have driven away the poor sound of my croaking voice.

The Voice: There are those, O silver-tongued, who wait for instruction from thee. They will listen patiently and long, for they will love thy teaching.

I: Where shall I find such, O wise one ?

The Voice: They shall find thee ! From long searching shall they come, having sought thee out. Rest, my son, and do not strive too eagerly.

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I: I will seek peace.

*The Voice: I go, my son, but I shall return. . . .
Wouldst thou hear the melody of eternity? Keep
then thine ears alert. . . .*

* * * * *

A REPORT OF THE SÉANCE IN THE NEW YORK "HERALD TRIBUNE" OF APRIL 6, 1927

Dr. Neville Whymant, Oxford and London scholar, who has made himself master of more than thirty languages and an authority on the Orient, made known here last night the results of a psychic experiment carried on three months ago with a medium named George Valiantine, which may, as Dr. Whymant says, "have the most far-reaching and revolutionary effect on students of Oriental literature and on systems of thought in general."

Dr. Whymant, who declared that he is not ready to say whether he believed the phenomena he witnessed were genuine or faked, told of a series of meetings held by a psychic group just before Christmas at 375, Park Avenue, in a private apartment. He was invited to attend, he said, because the "direct-voice" medium, Mr. Valiantine, was "receiving languages neither he nor the assembled sitters could understand."

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Believed Voice of Confucius

Mr. Valiantine is what is known as a "direct-voice" medium. It was claimed that through him were speaking the voices of the spirits of ancient philosophers, including that of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, who died in 478 B.C.

Dr. Whymant, who was assistant in Chinese at Oxford University from 1913 to 1915, says he attended the first séance sceptically, and was amazed to hear recited in Chinese one of the poems of the Shih King, which Confucius edited in the Chinese Classics. He was startled, he declared, for he heard this obscure poem recited for the first time in a way which makes it intelligible to modern scholars. The Chinese voice also cleared up difficulties, he said, which have puzzled scholars of Chinese literature for generations.

"When the séance opened," Dr. Whymant explained, "I carried on a conversation for some time with a voice speaking Italian. Then suddenly the voice and language changed. For a moment I was puzzled, and then I realized that I was listening to Chinese of a refinement and delicacy which is spoken nowhere today, but which was convincingly authentic and clear.

Answers Clear and Prompt

"The voice asserted it was that of the spirit of Confucius. I asked several general questions about

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the Chinese Classics of the period, and the answers came clearly and spontaneously, without hesitation."

Dr. Whymant said he at length remarked that there were many poems in the ancient classics which are unintelligible to modern readers. The voice inquired, he said, as to which seemed puzzling, and offered to clear up the difficulties.

"I referred to the third poem of the Shih King," Dr. Whymant said, "because it is especially obscure and unintelligible. The only good translation is that of Professor James Legge, containing sixteen lines. I could remember only the first line, which I repeated. Immediately the voice took up the intonation and recited a version which is not only different in vital places from the existing version, but which makes the meaning clear."

Legge Version of Poem

The Legge version of the poem is as follows :

*"I was gathering and gathering the mouse ear,
But I could not fill my shallow basket ;
With a sigh for the man of my heart
I placed it there on the highway.*

*"I was ascending that rock-covered hill,
But my horses were too tired to breast it.
I will now pour a cup from that gilded vase,
Hoping I may not have to think of him long.*

*"I was ascending that lofty ridge,
But my horses turned of a dark yellow.
I will now take a cup from that rhinoceros horn,
Hoping I may not have long to sorrow.*

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*" I was ascending that flat-topped height,
But my horses became quite disabled,
And my servants were also disabled ;
Oh, how great is my sorrow !"*

To this translation Professor Legge appended the notation : " The whole representation is, however, unnatural, and . . . I can make nothing more of the piece than that someone is lamenting in it the absence of a cherished friend—in strange fashion."

Voice Gives Significance

But Dr. Whymant says that the Chinese voice recited to him a version which, it is explained, gives the entire verse a significance, showing that the woman in the poem was sorrowing for a dead lover who returns to her in the form of a spirit. The Chinese at one period believed in psychic phenomena, he said. The new version, which Dr. Whymant caused the voice to repeat slowly in order that he might make a copy, reads as follows in translation :

*" Feverishly gathering the mouse ear
I could not fill my shallow basket.
He once enshrined in my heart called to me,
And I put the thing down in the path.*

*" While going up that rock-covered hill
My horses suddenly went weak ;
Let me pour out a draught from my golden vase
And repel from my thoughts he who comes back.*

*" Then while ascending that lofty ridge
My horses changed colour from fright ;
Let me pour out a draught from that horn vessel
To break down my stabbing sorrow.*

*" Climbing that flat-topped hill
My horses were finally stricken down ;
My slaves too were stricken down—
He speaks ! Oh, terrible distress !"*

Figures of Speech Explained

Dr. Whymant declared that he challenged the voice to explain certain obscure figures of speech in the verse, especially " My horses changed colour from fright." The voice explained that the horses could see the spirit of the dead lover even before the woman was aware of it, and sweated with terror, thus darkening in colour. During the discussion with the voice which followed, many points which have baffled scholars were readily explained by the voice, all in a strange Archaic Chinese, Dr. Whymant declared.

Dr. and Mrs. Whymant will sail for London on the " American Trader" tomorrow. The trip is to be made partly as a vacation and partly to see if the psychic performance can be reproduced in London with other mediums. Dr. Whymant, who has been in this country a little more than a year studying the languages of the American Indian, said he will probably take the matter up with prominent English psychics, including Sir Oliver Lodge and others.

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He will return in October to continue his research work here.

Dr. Whyment has himself translated extensively from Chinese poetry, and has studied and travelled for several years in the Orient. He is responsible for a widely accepted theory of the origin of the Japanese.

V

It will, perhaps, have struck some observers that there are certain phrases in the conversation recorded above which may be said to be "stock phrases" of the *séance* room. The outstanding example is: "Many things which are now dark shall be light to thee, but the time is not yet." In one form or another this phrase is used in reply to all sorts of questions asked by the sitters. Sometimes it comes appropriately enough, but at other times it is simply annoying when one knows that the answer required is much too frivolous to demand such a heavy period.

There was one other remarkable happening in this first sitting. I should explain in the first place that my brother-in-law has been so long in the United States that he is taken for a lifelong American citizen, especially as he has adopted the unmistakable Kentucky drawl. Among all his acquaintances, therefore, his sister was taken to be also from Kentucky, but married to an Englishman.

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On the occasion of our first dinner at the Cannons' my wife had been honoured by a spread of true Southern dainties, and it was not until my brother-in-law explained to us his idea of his friends' conception of my wife's nationality that we could understand many similar efforts to make my wife feel at home! As it might have hurt people's feelings if we attempted to explain, we left matters where they were, and my wife was looked upon as an American woman.

In the course of the evening a voice made itself heard, speaking my wife's Christian name. It was very faint at first, like most of the "intimate" voices; in fact, it was little more than an inarticulate whisper. In the course of a few moments, however, it became stronger, until finally it was loud enough for the other sitters in the immediate neighbourhood to hear what was being said. It claimed to be the voice of my wife's father. Judge Cannon sat on the left of my wife, and he seemed particularly interested in this voice. When the sitting was over he told my wife that he flattered himself that he recognized the characteristics of all the local dialects in the United States—it was a hobby of his and he had travelled extensively—but he could not place this one. My wife said she was not surprised he could not place it as an American dialect—she herself had only heard it in the West Country of England. The voice certainly had the West Country tone and slight drawl, reminiscent

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of the speech of my wife's family in Somerset. Explanations followed, and every member of the circle showed indubitable astonishment at learning that my wife was in reality as English as her obviously English husband !

After the lights had been turned on we all sat discussing the sitting (and some excellent sandwiches), and I was asked what I thought of it all. I found then, so near the events just described, the same difficulty as hampers me now in saying just what I thought about it. I had no knowledge of the procedure of modern psychical research, and more than half its terminology was worse than Greek to me. I knew even less of conjuring and the various subterfuges said to be adopted by fraudulent mediums. I had, moreover, no reason to suspect any of the people there gathered of a desire to impress me into the spiritualist fold. They would have little enough to gain by such an accomplishment. At other sittings I had felt that the scoffers had hit the nail on the head when they spoke of the triviality of communications "from the other side," and even on this occasion I had felt that some of the things said had been banal to a degree. But there was no doubt that somebody or something had been speaking most excellent Chinese there that evening, better Chinese than I, with all my training and experience in China, could speak. Whence came it, and for what purpose ?

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I had to admit that this question was too difficult for me to answer. After all, I pointed out that I had been brought in merely to tell them what sort of language they had been hearing *for some time past*, and to tell them, if possible, what had been said on this occasion, not to analyze the whole business and arrive at a definite conclusion. And there I had to leave the matter; there, in spite of much thought and discussion with psychic research specialists and others, it still remains.

VI

I have said that I was asked by the regular members of the circle to say what I thought of the evening's occurrences, but I must also state that there appeared to be no particular eagerness on the part of the most definitely convinced sitters to enrol me as a believer on the strength of this one experience. They seemed, indeed, to be too full of wonder themselves to worry very much about my reactions. It appeared that this and similar voices had been making themselves heard in their sittings over a period of some weeks, and only the sitters' preoccupation with the more intimate messages (some of which concerned people at a distance, whose addresses were given together with a request that a written message be

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sent and an answer awaited) had prevented them from attempting to find out what "all this foreign stuff" was about at an earlier stage. Now, however, they were all agog for further experiments along the same lines. They had had, I was told, other languages which did not sound a bit like the Chinese, but these tongues had not been heard before the sitting was closed by Dr. Barnett. But, I must realize, these voices were very irregular. Sometimes they would put in an appearance on four or five consecutive occasions and then not be heard for several weeks. So would I be prepared to visit the circle again until the other voices should be heard, and discover if the languages spoken were within my repertoire? I said that the whole thing was so mysterious that I certainly should not rest until I had talked it over with people who were in a better position than I to judge the value of what had happened. It might, therefore, help to have more than this isolated experience upon which to found an inquiry by persons used to investigating so-called psychic manifestations. I still maintained my position of strict detachment from the purely psychic side of the affair, but I could not avoid the feeling of puzzlement and the consequent futile efforts to find some explanation which recurred from time to time in the next few days.

In the course of the evening we talked of the

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possible value of the communication we had received, and I heard much of some remarkable experiences which had come to members of the circle. They do not enter here, but in talking of the frequent charge brought against "spirit communicators" that they speak always of trivial matters, Mrs. Cannon seized on this evening's work as a complete refutation of such a statement. I pointed out, however, that while I was quite certain of the parts I had noted down, much had been said of which I had not even an inkling, and that I felt it would be necessary, at some future sittings, to have an educated Chinese as one of the sitters. Such a man would not only act as a check on my own version of what was said, but he could also relieve me of the whole responsibility by taking some part of the conversation entirely on himself. I was tired, and not at all sure that I wished to be drawn into a new sphere of activities. My research work occupied me very closely for at least ten hours a day, and in the evening I usually preferred to go out walking. In any case I had not the time, nor had I the inclination, to follow up this incident at all closely. I was promised that at some future time a Chinese should be admitted to the circle. This promise, however, was never kept, and I had to wait until I returned to England to make the full experiment along these lines.

Certain parts of the conversation with the

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Chinese voice were discussed at length, and I was asked to explain some points which were not clear. The reference to the Mongols apparently conveyed nothing to any member of the circle, and I said that I could only suppose that the reference was to a small Mongolian grammar which I had published a month or so before in England, but which had not yet appeared in the American bookshops. Such personal references always made me a little distrustful. Sometimes they were so trivial as to be beyond the notice of any normal person on this plane of life, and I could not conceive it possible that they could be of any interest at all to people no longer attached to the world of matter. I went away from the *séance* room and the house in a very troubled frame of mind. I had, however, given my promise to help again in a similar capacity on future occasions.

VII

In all there were about a dozen sittings, at which I assisted in exactly the same fashion as that detailed in the account of the first sitting. The procedure never varied. The speakers were, broadly, the same on each occasion, always excepting the "foreign" voices, which seemed to chop and change in the most extraordinary manner.

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The self-styled voice of Confucius was, however, very regular in its incidence. I was compelled to be absent from several sittings, and on my return the Chinese voice, as we had come to call it, always made some mention of the fact.

But other queer languages were spoken, and in circumstances which had something of the bizarre in them. In the course of the preceding summer I had ordered from a Paris bookseller a grammar of the Labourdin dialect of the Basque language. This treatise had reached me about two months before the sittings began, and I had had no time to do more than give the book a cursory reading. One evening, when the circle had as a sitter an American business man with wide trade interests in France, we were startled by the sound of a totally new voice speaking in a very harmonious strain, but so rapidly as to make it impossible for any member of the circle to understand. At first the American-French business man, who sat on my right, declared that the voice was speaking in some French *patois*, and as he had interested himself in studying these speech systems over a number of years he broke in enthusiastically, using the current speech of widely separated localities with an ease which amazed me. The voice, which at first was very low, began to get stronger, and by the sound of a certain repeated phrase I discovered that the voice was speaking Labourdin Basque. Although more used to Spanish Basque,

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I attempted to carry on a conversation with the voice. The whole difficulty arose from the repetition of a word which to most of the sitters sounded like *alouette*, but which, from a satirical chant sung by the voice, was finally discovered to be *Expeleta*, the name of a village in the French Basque country. The song, which I did not know at that time, I later found to be *Expeleta Herrian* (the village of Ezpeleta). Some months later, Sallaberry's *Chants populaires du pays basque* (Bayonne, 1870) came into my hands, and remembering the incident of the Basque voice and its statement that while on this earth it had lived at Ezpeleta, a village about which a popular song had been written, I searched the book and found the music and text of the song on pages 235 and 236, and on pages 404 and 405 the text of a French song on the local fête of Espelette, written by the Baron d'Uhart.

On another occasion one of the sitters, who had merely been introduced to me by name, happened to have been a close friend of Abdul Baha at Haifa during his lifetime. The sitter in question was a woman who had been very friendly with the daughter of Abdul Baha, and she was at this time expecting a message from the Near East of which she had said nothing to anyone in the circle. That evening, after a long absence, the voice of "Abdul Baha" was heard again, speaking in a Levantine dialect of which I had the sketchiest

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knowledge. I could not understand much of what was said, but I translated the more elementary parts of what was quite a long speech. I must frankly admit that I did not even understand the purport of my English rendering, as it had much to do with the practice of the Bahai faith, of which I knew very little. But I was assured at the end of the evening that the long-awaited message had been delivered, and that acting on it the sitter was prepared to undertake a long and arduous journey into the Near East.

Altogether fourteen foreign languages were used in the course of the twelve sittings I attended. They included Chinese, Hindi, Persian, Basque, Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, Italian, Yiddish (spoken with great fluency when a Yiddish- and Hebrew-speaking Jew was a member of the circle), German, and modern Greek. Psychical research specialists declared that at this time Valiantine was developing "foreign-voice transmission," and that it was a natural stage in the development of his mediumship. This aspect of the matter, however, did not concern me, as I was too ignorant of the terminology of modern spiritualism to follow such discussions, and had no time to indulge in the necessary study to bring me abreast of them. What did worry me was my inability to find any satisfactory *normal* explanation for the phenomena. Even if the medium had been a first-class linguist, it was manifestly impossible for him to be speaking

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in Chinese and American English at one and the same time, and yet all the sitters had heard Valiantine carrying on a conversation with his neighbour while other voices (two and three at one time) were speaking foreign languages fluently. I am assured, too, that it is impossible for anyone to "throw his voice," this being merely an illusion of the ventriloquist. Yet in these sittings voices seemed to come from the far corners of the room, out of the very wall against which the back of one's chair was pressed, from the ceiling, and from the floor. Some of us had our legs outstretched to the centre of the circle throughout the sittings, and nobody ever stumbled over them. In fact, look at it which way I would, I could see no *physical* explanation which would cover all the circumstances of the case. I therefore decided that if I were called upon to do anything at all in the way of making the affair public, my rôle would be that of the story-teller; I must leave others to elucidate the problem.

VIII

I have said that there were other sittings, and that at most of them the Chinese voice spoke at some length. I shall not weary the reader with detailed accounts of what was said at these other

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sittings, as much of it began to descend to that personal level which is always so disappointing to the sitter who is anxious for something more solid. I shall content myself, therefore, with giving only extracts from subsequent records, but first I must draw attention to a rather remarkable occurrence at the very outset of the second sitting.

I had not taken with me to America any of my many copies of the Book of Poetry. I had therefore no means of checking the version I had received at the first sitting until I should find a copy of the Chinese text. On the morning of the next day I went to the New York Public Library with very little hope of finding what I wanted. Such are the resources of that institution that within half an hour I had before me several Chinese editions as well as the volume of the Chinese Classics containing the translation and notes by the veteran Professor James Legge of Oxford. By comparing my notes of the previous evening with the original text I discovered that an error had been made—either I had misheard and had written down one wrong character or the voice had erred in its recital of the poem. Before I had time to comment on this at the second sitting the voice said:

“Speaking the other day, this clumsy witless one stepped into error. Too frequently, alas! has he done this, and the explanation he gave was a faulty one. Listen now to the true reading of the

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passage about which the illustrious scholar inquired."

Then followed the true reading with the faulty character corrected ! This certainly impressed me as out of the ordinary.

Most of the rest of the speech at the second sitting was concerned with injunctions such as Confucius gave in life.

"Not for ever can we help you over the difficult road. Only by struggle can things worth while be reached, and if we make the way too easy there is much dependence on others' efforts and none relies on himself.

"The ancients have always been ready to help those whose desires are pure, and who love learning more than they love life. There is still much deceit and treachery in the hearts of men, and this makes our task harder. . . .

"But the life which knows no trial is no life. The one who treads the path of ease will assuredly fall into error. . . .

"Aforetime I would have speech with thee, but thou wast absent, for the weed of sickness was growing beside thy door. . . .

"It is but a sorrow that those things we did, poor and unworthy as we know them to be, should be adjudged superlative by the dwellers on earth. . . ."

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IX

Such, then, is my story. If there are those who can gain any measure of comfort from it I am glad to have given it. And henceforth there is no excuse for those who would tear me away from other pursuits that I may tell—for the fifty-first time—the *real* story of what happened in “that exciting *séance* in New York.”