

Chapter 16: Reading the Newspaper before it is Printed Story of Mrs. Osborne Leonard

- Nandor Fodor -

NO EDITOR could wish for a better proof of supernormal knowledge than a definite forecast, by an outsider, of the layout of his own paper at a time when it is yet in the limbo of things to come. A thousand and one things may happen during the making up of a newspaper up to the last moment. To foresee in the early afternoon paragraphs that are not yet set up in the column, and the position which they will occupy next day - if there is anything beyond human knowledge this is one of the nearest things to it!

Yet this feat of divination was achieved. The evidence for it is unassailable. We have the personal asseveration of the Rev. Charles Drayton Thomas, of Bromley, Kent, an eminent Methodist clergyman psychical researcher. We have corroboration in the information which - immediately after his sittings with Mrs. Osborne Leonard, the foremost trance medium of our day - Mr. Drayton Thomas posted to the Society for Psychical Research. Thus it was proved that at an hour when neither the editor nor the compositor could tell what text would appear in the next edition in the column mentioned, the manifesting intelligence (who claimed to be the deceased father of the experimenter) could invade the offices of *The Times* and make a forecast that was beyond human calculation.

As told by the Rev. Charles Drayton Thomas in *Some Recent Evidence for Survival* (Pp. 131-179.), the following tests were given on February 13th, 1920:

1. The first page of the paper. in column two, and near the top the name of a minister with whom your father was friendly at Leek. (Perks was found, a name which was verified from an old diary.)
2. Lower in this column, say one quarter down, appear his name, your own, your mother's and that of an aunt; all four within the space of two inches. (John and Charles were correctly found, then came the name Emile Sauret, which presumably suggested Emily and Sarah, his aunt and mother.)
3. Near these the word "Grange". (Not found.)
4. In column one, not quite half-way down, is a name which is your mother's maiden name or one very like it. (The maiden name was Dore, the name found Dorothea.)
5. Somewhat above that is named a place where your mother passed some years of her girlhood. (Hants. Correct. Shirley, where she spent her girlhood, being in Hampshire.)
6. Close to the foregoing is a name, which suggests an action one might make with the body in jumping. (Cummock, a bad pun: come knock.)
7. Towards the bottom of column one is named a place where you went to school. (Lincolnshire. Correct.)
8. In the vicinity is mentioned a - shall I say teacher, other than a schoolmaster - of ours whom you will remember well. (Watts and Joseph correct.)
9. There is a word close by which looks to your father like Cheadle. (Not found.)

10. Higher in column one, say two-thirds down, is a name suggesting ammunition. (Found the ecclesiastical title Canon.)

11. Between that and the teacher's name is a place-name. French, looking like three words hyphenated into one. (Braine-le-Chateau.)

12. About the middle of this page, the middle both down and across, is a mistake in print; it cannot be right. Some wrong letters inserted or something left out, some kind of mistake just there. (The word "page" printed imperfectly: "Paae".)

Out of twelve items in this test two entirely failed. The others were correct. The forecast came at 3 p.m. By 6 p.m. a copy was posted to the Society for Psychical Research. At that time some of the passages referred to might have been in type, others not yet, but in any case no one could have known their ultimate position on the page.

What was the purpose of this extraordinary test? The intelligence that gave it claimed that he was a discarnate human being. He desired to prove that the knowledge displayed was not springing from the mind of the medium or the sitter or anybody else living. But that it was associated with the memory of someone called dead, and was a proof of his greater mental powers than mortals possess.

How did he do it? This was the explanation which the entity gave:

"These tests have been devised by others in a more advanced sphere than mine, and I have caught their ideas. I am not yet aware exactly how one obtains these tests, and have wondered whether the higher guides exert some influence whereby a suitable advertisement comes into position on the convenient date. I am able to sense what appear to me to be sheets and slips of paper with names and various information upon them. I notice suitable items and, afterwards, visualize a duplicate of the page with these items falling into their places. At first I was unable to do this. It seems to me that it is an ability which throws some light upon foretelling, a visualizing of what is to be, but based upon that which already is. Sometimes I see further detail upon visualizing which I had not sensed from the letters. I think there is an etheric foreshadowing of things about to be done. It would probably be impossible to get anything very far ahead, but only within a certain number of hours, and I cannot say how many. I scarcely think it would be possible to get a test for the day after the morrow, or, even if possible, that it could result in more than a jumble of the morrow's with a few of the day following."

Highly interesting, but a little beyond our grasp! We always find that in things psychic. We always have to reach higher and learn by our efforts. An effort at improvement is always manifest on the invisible side. These newspaper tests, for instance, represent a step forward in development from the book tests which the Rev. Drayton Thomas, and also Lady Glenconner, had put on previous record. They were devised for a similar purpose: to disprove telepathy, and establish the existence of intelligences out of the flesh. The sitter asked a question. The trance entity did not answer in the ordinary way. He said that if the sitter would look up a certain book on a certain shelf in his home on page so and so he would find the answer. The books selected were usually those of which the communicator was fond in his lifetime. That alone was a suggestion of personal identity, but not yet fool-proof. So the test was tried with books unknown to the sitter, sent by an antiquarian in an unopened parcel, with books placed in the dark in an iron deed-box, with an unseen bookshelf, etc. The communicator was equally successful in selecting from these books suitable items in answer to the questions.

As an illustration, let us quote the experience of Sir William Barrett, late Professor of Physics at the Royal College of Science of Dublin, as told by himself in his preface to the Rev. Thomas' book. Sitting with Mrs. Leonard he was given the following message which

purported to come from the discarnate F. W. H. Myers, a pioneer psychical researcher:

"There were some books on the right-hand side of a room upstairs in your house in Devonshire Place. On the second shelf, four feet from the ground, in the fourth book counting from the left, at the top of page 78, are some words which you should take as direct answer from him (Myers) to so much of the work you have been doing since he passed over. Asked if the name of the book could be given, the reply was 'No', but that whilst feeling on the cover of the book he got a sense of 'progression'. Two or three books from this test book are one or two books on matters in which Sir William used to be very interested, but not of late years. It is connected with studies of his youth."

Mrs. Leonard had never visited Sir William's house.

He himself had no idea what books were referred to, but on returning home he found in the exact position indicated George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. On the first line at the top of page seventy-eight were the words: "Ay, ay, I remember - you'll see I've remembered 'em all." It was a singularly appropriate quotation, as much of Sir William's work since Mr. Myers passed over concentrated on the question of survival after death and whether the memories of friends on earth continued with the discarnate. But the most remarkable part of the test was this: In dusting the bookshelves the maidservant, unknown to the Professor, had replaced two of George Eliot's novels by two volumes of Dr. Tyndall, *Heat*, and *Sound*, which were found exactly in the position indicated. In his youth Prof. Barrett was an assistant to Prof. Tyndall and one of the books was written whilst he was with him.

Again the question: What is the process by which the relevant passage in a closed book can be gleaned? The communicator replied that "he sensed the appropriate spirit of the passage rather than the letters composing it." After eighteen months he appeared to acquire the power of occasionally seeing the words by some sort of clairvoyance. The giving of the page was one of the greatest difficulties. The operator appeared to count the pages between the suitable text and the commencement. He started from the beginning of the printed matter and when the flow of thoughts stopped and recommenced higher he concluded that a page had been passed.

Who is Mrs. Leonard, this highly efficient doorkeeper between two worlds? Before the war she was a professional singer. She blundered into Spiritualism behind the scenes. In her dressingroom with two girl friends she tried table-turning experiments. After a series of failures, exciting things happened. In the subdued light on the white walls "like clearly cut shadows which showed up perfectly against the light background" strange forms appeared. Messages came through the table from an entity who called herself Feda. She said she was an Indian native girl who, at the age of thirteen, around 1800, married an ancestor of Mrs. Leonard and died shortly after. She constituted herself as her "guide", and in March, 1914, gave instructions that Mrs. Leonard must begin work as a professional medium for "something big and terrible is going to happen to the world. Feda must help many people through you."

Help she did. Her *cas celebre* by which she founded Mrs. Leonard's reputation came in the autumn of 1915. To Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge whose son Raymond was killed in action in September, she gave evidence of his survival. On September 25th, 1915, Lady Lodge had an anonymous sitting. Raymond purported to communicate and sent this message:

"Tell father I have met some friends of his."

On asking for names, Myers was mentioned. The very man, long dead, from whom a message of warning of the impending blow was sent to Sir Oliver through Mrs. Piper, the famous American medium.

On November 25th, Sir Oliver Lodge received a letter from a complete stranger. She was in

possession of a photograph of the officers of the South Lancashire Regiment, of which Raymond Lodge was a second lieutenant, and offered to send it. The picture was totally unknown to the Lodge family. On December 3rd, in a sitting with Mrs. Leonard, a complete description of the photograph came through. Raymond sitting on the ground, an officer placing his hand on his shoulder. Four days later the photograph arrived and corresponded with the description in every detail.

Of the many other messages, bearing the stamp of Raymond's identity, the episode of "Mr. Jackson" is the most curious one. Fedra was puzzled. She said that Raymond was funny. He mixes it up with a bird and pedestal.

"Mr. Jackson" was a peacock which, after its death, was stuffed and put on a pedestal.

Fedra is quite a famous personality. She is known to researchers all over the world. The woman who knows her the least is Mrs. Leonard. She goes out when Fedra comes in. She cannot remember what happens whilst she is entranced. But once she heard Fedra speak. In the home of Mr. Dennis Bradley, the author, she spoke to her in the "direct" voice.

Why should Fedra, a child in mentality, act as control? All we can rely on is what we are told. Apparently it requires a special aptitude to use the body of someone else. And in some cases people who die young are more efficient than grown-ups.

Occasionally, Fedra vacates her place for others. And in late years a whispered voice is often heard near the medium before Fedra picks up the message. The Society for Psychological Research recorded this voice on the gramophone. It is not coming through the medium's vocal organ. In discussing it with Sir Oliver Lodge he gave me his own experience as follows:

"I have heard the whisper before Fedra spoke. Somebody is telling her things which she repeats. If you are sharp of hearing, you can hear the whisper before Fedra speaks, and it is better than her interpretation. The last time when I heard this whisper, my daughter, who was with me, recognized her mother's voice quite clearly, without a possibility of doubt."

Fedra is not an exclusive guide. There is another. A picturesque Red Indian who calls himself North Star and is interested in healing. His methods are highly unorthodox. To quote from Mrs. Leonard's autobiography: *My Life in Two Worlds*, this is how he cured a certain Mrs. Massey:

"Mrs. Massey's chair was a wooden rocking one. Suddenly her chair began to rock backwards and forwards, gently at first, then gathering speed, till it rocked at a tremendous rate. Then, to our horror, the chair turned a complete somersault. So did Mrs. Massey. She fell right on her head, and lay where she fell. I rushed to her, and before I realized what was happening, North Star had taken control of me. A lump, the size of an egg, had come up on Mrs. Massey's head. North Star placed my hands upon it; in a few moments it had gone. North Star then left her head alone and proceeded to make passes over her body, particularly over the heart. He gave loud grunts of satisfaction, and seemed extraordinarily well pleased with something. After about half an hour's hard work he stopped controlling me, and Mrs. Massey then disclosed the fact that she had felt very ill for some days past, and she felt better now than she had done for months."

A bump for a lump! A good slogan, but not likely to attract the sick. The levity, however, is not fully justified. North Star is a very solemn personality. Believe it or not, there is something in his ways which does not meet the eye.