

Chapter 25: The Spirit which made a "Talkie" Story Of Mrs. Meurig Morris

- Nandor Fodor -

CONFESSIONS OF famous writers disclose a fact which has not yet been sufficiently marvelled at. It is that creative inspiration, in many cases, only differs from mediumistic trance in degree and not in kind.

To Harriet Beecher Stowe when she wrote the chapter on *The Death of Uncle Tom*, it seemed "as though what she wrote was blown through her mind as with the rushing of a mighty wind".

W. M. Thackeray admitted in one of his Roundabout papers (*Cornhill Magazine*, August, 1862):

"I have been surprised at the observations made by some of my characters. It seems as if an occult power was moving the pen. The personage does or says something, and I ask: 'How did he come to think of that?'"

Such confessions could be easily multiplied. They point to a profound mystery. Psychologists will seek the key in the subconscious mind, writers in a mental world, spiritualists in the world of spirits. Between the last two there are no walls of division. Mrs. Hester Dowden's *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* would have been acclaimed as a literary sensation had it been based on her natural talents. Instead of the flotsam and jetsam of a mental world which attach themselves to "affinitive souls", as Edgar Wallace put it, she ascribed her book to the direct influence of the spirit of Oscar Wilde.

In the case of automatic writing concealment would be comparatively easy. In the case of trance oratory, almost impossible. Oratory demands the limelight. The speaker's marked change of personality and mannerism is an eloquent sign of something out of the ordinary. But while an ordinary orator is freely granted all the credit for his rhetorical achievement a trance speaker is invariably suspected of duplicity and stunting. Nor can that be wondered at. The claim that a discarnate entity is using an alien organism to speak to the people of the earth is too stupendous and bewildering. But science cannot persistently ignore phenomena.

Why does Mrs. L. A. Meurig Morris, one of the greatest woman orators of to-day, appear to be possessed by a totally different personality? Why does her soprano change into a ringing baritone? Why does she assume a masculine and priestly mannerism? Where is the source of the erudition and grasp of philosophy which she displays, which is far above her intellectual capacities? Why does she in trance persistently claim to be a messenger spirit, a discarnate missionary teaching the mysteries of life and death to the world?

Tentative suggestions are easy to exhaust. She might be simulating. She might be in a secondary state of dissociated personality. She might be in hypnotic trance. Lastly, her claim might be true.

You cannot simulate knowledge which you do not possess. Neither secondary nor hypnotic personalities can give an exhibition of amazing erudition if such has not been consciously acquired.

Mrs. Meurig Morris is a charming but extremely simple West-country woman. She had a limited education. Reliance on her own intellectual powers on the platform would not give her the ghost of a chance. She has a sterling character for which prominent people are ready to vouch. She would have to be a great actress to portray the distress of her entrancement and her coming to, to keep up that sustained change of voice, to display all the tricks and bodily movements of an accomplished ecclesiastical orator. But she knows nothing of acting. Nor

would it help her if she did. For the first doctor that happened to come along would expose her in five minutes.

Trance cannot be simulated. Both the hypnotic and mediumistic trance have marked characteristics. And they differ essentially. The hypnotic subject would do whatever the hypnotizer suggests. In the mediumistic trance suggestion does not work. The personalities which manifest do not obey your wish. In variety they far surpass the imitative efforts of hypnotic subjects. Were they subjective creations of the medium's mind they would not exhibit those special peculiarities by which the sitters establish their identity with their departed friends. The hypnotic self is sincere. It never shows such diabolic cunning as the personation of hundreds of individuals and the acquisition of facts deep below in the subconscious or totally unknown to the sitter would involve. Moreover, the hypnotic personality has an uncanny sense of time. The mediumistic personalities, on the other hand, are vague and uncertain on this point. Many mediums are not hypnotizable at all. Those who are exhibit, in the hypnotic sleep, faculties of more transcendental character than the ordinary subjects. In the case of Mrs. Meurig Morris, from the platform the public only hears one personality: "Power". Who he is, no one knows. He never revealed his identity. It is the teaching and not the teacher which counts. His desire is to remain impersonal. There are rumours that he claimed to be Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. They have been vigorously denied. There were whisperings that he could not come but in the presence of Mr. Lawrence Cowen, the well-known author and playwright, who has the powers of a Svengali over Mrs. Morris. Nothing could be more nonsensical. The case of Mr. Lawrence Cowen is an example of religious conversion. If anything was totally absent from his eventful and stormy life it was faith and religion. He was a jeering, sneering agnostic until by accident he crossed the path of Mrs. Meurig Morris. "Power" converted him. Out of the terrific spiritual upheaval which followed he emerged as a missionary. He organized regular Sunday services (first at the Fortune Theatre, then at Aeolian Hall, Bond Street, London) for "Power", and arranged tours all over the country. He spent a fortune on religious propaganda without the slightest hope of any return or attempt at personal aggrandizement. "Power" comes whether he is there or not. And so overwhelming is his personality that people learn to approach him in a spirit of reverence. Sir Oliver Lodge had met him, and from the conversation on the immediate future of humanity the great scientist emerged with tears in his eyes.

"Power's" foreknowledge might be disbelieved, but the wisdom with which he lays his plans is evident. The strange incident which occurred at the British Movietone Company when a talking film was made of "Power's" oratory was declared by him a well-thought-out demonstration.

The microphones were seen by seventy people high up in the air held up by new half-inch ropes.

A rope suddenly snapped and a terrific crash startled all present. Within half an inch of Mrs. Morris' face the microphone swept across the space and went swaying to and fro. A foreman rushed up and dragged the rope aside to keep it out of the sight of the camera. The cameraman never stopped. Nor did Mrs. Morris. In spite of the obvious danger to her life she never stirred and went on undisturbed with her trance speech. According to expert opinion the voice registering must have been a failure. Yet it was found that the accident had not the least influence. The record was perfect. According to "Power" the rope was supernaturally severed so as to prove, by the medium's demeanour, that she was indeed in trance, as no human being could have consciously exhibited such self-possession as she did when the accident occurred.

A still more amazing incident, a veritable technical miracle occurred at the Columbia Gramophone Company's studio in the course of recording "Power's" voice. According to C. W. Nixon's (of the Columbia Gramophone Company) publicly rendered account, an incident occurred at the very commencement of the operation which, by all the rules, should have spoiled the first side of the record. Mr. Ernest Oaten, President of the International Spiritualist Federation, was in the chair, and being unaware that the start was to be made without the appearance of the usual red light, he told Mrs. Morris as she stood up: "Wait for the signal."

These words were picked up by the microphone and were heard by the engineers in the recording-room after the apparatus had been started. It was believed that they must be on the record.

Later, when the second side of the record was to be made, there was confusion in starting. Toward the end, as if to make technical failure a certainty, Mrs. Morris turned and walked several paces away from the microphone.

A week before the record was ready for reproduction Cowen rang up Nixon and told him that "Power" asserts that notwithstanding the technical mistakes the record would be a success, that Mr. Oaten's words would not be reproduced and that the timing and volume of the voice would not be spoiled by the later accidents. This statement was so extraordinary and appeared to be so preposterous that Nixon had it taken down word by word, and sent it in a sealed envelope to Mr. Oaten in Manchester with the request that he would keep it unopened until the record was ready and the truth or otherwise of the prediction could be tested. The record was played in the Fortune Theatre on April 25th, 1931. It was perfect. The letter was opened. The prediction was found to be true in every detail.

I heard "Power" on many occasions. Once I have been sitting close to Mrs. Morris on the stage. I was struck by seeing her eye muscles in continual play while her eyes were shut. You cannot move your eyeballs without contracting and dilating the pupil. I wondered what did it mean. Could "Power" see through the closed eyelids, so keeping up with the audience that magnetic touch with which no great orator dispenses? A paleontologist is able to reconstruct an extinct animal from a single bone. I wondered if from a close study of Mrs. Morris' mannerisms, but mostly from the remarkable play of her facial muscles, the general movements of her body and the distention of her lungs a physiognomist or a physiologist could not draw some definite conclusions as to the physical appearance that they suggested "Power" to have had.

Mentally, Mrs. Morris appears to reap a harvest from "Power's" visitations. Though she cannot remember the subject or substance of "Power's" address when she comes out of trance, she receives unconscious education. In ordinary conversation, as she admitted to me some time ago, she may find herself uttering answers which she could not consciously think of and which apparently proceeded from the subconscious stratum of her mind. "Power," in fact, is foreseeing the day when it will not be necessary to entrance her for public speaking. He says that when the bridge between the physical and the higher mind would be made, as it eventually would, all the knowledge which was uttered through her would become accessible to her. He ("Power") would then become able to use her in a perfectly normal way.

If this stage will be reached "Power" will have an added difficulty in convincing people of his independent existence. His missionary efforts will stand out even then undoubted. Why should they be thrust upon an unheeding world?

The question is deeply bound up with the fundamentals of Spiritualism. There is a living force in the spiritualist movement which fills its workers with apostolic zeal. They claim more than a belief in the teachings of the Nazarene. They claim to *know* their truth. They take it as a sacred duty to convince the world of their practical demonstrability. This mighty urge has never been sufficiently dwelt upon by the critics of Spiritualism. Yet this is the sole secret of its growth and spread. Money there is none in it, only labour and sacrifice. No fortune is made by famous mediums, just a bare living. And if the best speakers, who have made a special study of their subject for years, average £1 per lecture, they do quite well. The thing is not done for personal gain. It is done for a Movement which, they fervently hope, will conquer the world and make it a better place to live in.