

## **Riding the Air**

- Nandor Fodor -

THE IMPOSSIBLE of yesterday is the accepted fact of today.

Scientific progress has done that. It has swept away our natural resistance to novel discoveries.

We have become used to the fantastic. Recent experience has taught us to call no thing impossible in the realm of physical science.

We all believe in miracles - when they are material miracles: the discoveries and achievements of scientists.

But as soon as it comes to psychological findings, to the discoveries of the mind, to the latent powers of the human soul, we are on our guard at once in fact, most of us are frankly sceptical.

A strange paradox. For whereas our scientific age hardly has a past of a hundred years, the powers of the soul were with us in Biblical days and have left a trail of light down the corridors of time.

Will there be a science of the soul? A momentous question.

If there is but a germ of truth in all the wonders ascribed to mysterious psychic faculties, we are on the threshold of a new world.

And it seems as if orthodox science were about to admit the existence of a vast uncharted sea, though it instantly recoils from the formidable claims it is asked to face.

### **The Miracle of the Abyss**

Think of the staggering demand which Dr. Cannon's turbulent book, *The Invisible Influence*, makes on your imagination.

The learned doctor has barely escaped suspension from the Colney Hatch Mental Home of the London County Council because of this amazing record of his experiences in Tibet.

He acquaints us with a new form of locomotion: *levitation over an unbridged abyss*, a gulf fifty feet wide with a roaring river at the bottom 300 feet below.

We read of a mysterious Knight Commander in glowing scarlet robes. He stands on the other side of the chasm and gives instructions as to how they should cross the gulf by levitation.

"Within the course of a few hours," says Dr. Cannon, "we had made our bodily state fit to allow of this great miraculous transportation phenomenon taking place by pure mental effort; and in another moment of time we were both landed safely on the other side."

Dr. Cannon's account of weird experiences received unexpected support from Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, the great Egyptologist. He stated in a newspaper interview(1):

"I knew an African and an Indian who could vanish into air as you spoke to them, touched them... It was no question of hypnotism, for I walked through the spot where they had been standing.

(1) "Daily Express", Jan. 17, 1934.

In the same way they would reappear, and, as they solidified, push me away."

Without a risk to sanity, can we be expected to believe in such miracles?

We can only answer with other questions.

Have such claims ever been put forward in the West? Who were the witnesses? What were the conditions?

For if a satisfactory answer were found to each of those queries we would be wise to reserve judgment - at least for the time.

At the Third International Congress of Psychical Research in Paris in 1927, Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, a noted German scientist, described the case of a young man who, by breathing exercises, levitated his own body twenty-seven times.

The young man was a student of Yoga, a Hindu school of psychic training.

Breathing exercises appear to have a curious effect on the weight of the human body. They form part of the Yoga curriculum.

The Western inquirer, however, will demand more in the way of proof. A dip into psychic literature provides sufficient food for thought.

### **Man in the Air**

In 1886, in the St. Germain Cemetery in Paris, they laid to rest a Scotsman who was one of the most remarkable men of the last century. His name was Daniel Dunglas Home.

His father was said to be a natural son of an earl. If the story is true the flighty earl was not a patch on his grandson. For, according to no less distinguished a witness than Sir William Crookes, "there are at least a

hundred instances of Mr. Home's rising from the ground, in the presence of as many separate persons; and I have heard from the lips of three witnesses to the most striking occurrence of this kind - the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Lindsay and Captain C. Wynne - their most intimate accounts of what took place.

"To reject the recorded testimony on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever, for no fact, in sacred or profane history, is supported by a stronger array of proof."

The astonishing occurrence took place on December 13th, 1868, at Ashley House, Victoria Street, London. In a state of trance Home floated out of a third-story window and came in through the window of another room.

The three witnesses heard Home go into the next room, heard the window thrown up, and presently Home appeared standing upright outside their own window. He opened the window and walked in quite coolly.

Lord Adare, later Lord Dunraven, went into the other room to shut the window, and found that it was not raised a foot. He could not think how Home managed to squeeze through.

Home told him, "Come and see."

"I went with him," Lord Adare writes. "He told me to open the window as it was before. I did so. He told me to stand a little distance off.

"He then went through the open space head first, quite rapidly, his body being nearly horizontal and apparently rigid.

"He came in again, feet foremost, and we returned to the other room.

"It was so dark I could not see clearly how he was supported outside.

"He did not appear to grasp or rest upon the balustrade, but rather to be swung out and in."

A truly remarkable incident, well worthy of the violent controversy which arose over it in later years.

To Lord Lindsay we owe two accounts. One in 1869, another in 1871.

In the latter he speaks of the moon shining into the room. This was a serious discrepancy, as a nautical almanack disclosed a new moon on the date in question. The moon, therefore, could not have lighted the room.

But Lord Adare's almost 'contemporary account and Lord Lindsay's first version do not mention the moon. Which was correct?

Dr. W. B. Carpenter, vice-president of the Royal Society, intimated that

Captain Wynne never testified to having seen Home float out of the room. He must have been discomfited by Captain Wynne's answer to a letter to Home:

"The fact of your having gone out of the window and in at the other I can swear to."

Other writers attacked the testimonies on the grounds of poor visibility. But Andrew Lang was to the point in remarking that people in a room can see even in a fog a man coming in by the window, and go out again, head first, with body rigid.

The account of this levitation is too remarkable and too well attested to be treated lightly. It essentially differs from Dr. Cannon's feat, as Home had no conscious recollection of what had taken place.

We find this the case in nearly all mediumistic levitations and in all cases of aerial journeys.

### **The Vanishing Marquise**

Nor are such extraordinary records a matter of past history. There is a recent case, perhaps the best authenticated of all.

The scene was the medieval Millesimo Castle in Italy; its unwilling hero the Marquise Centurione Scotto, an ex-M.P. and scion of the oldest Italian nobility with the title of Principe del Sacro Romano Impero.

In 1926 he lost a son in an aeroplane accident. Grief-stricken, he strove to find comfort in Spiritualism. He found himself the possessor of remarkable powers.

On July 29th, 1928, in the course of a sitting, the Marquise, who was the medium, exclaimed, in a frightened voice:

"I can no longer feel my legs!"

The gramophone was stopped. An interval of death-like silence followed.

The medium was addressed, without answer; then felt for. His place was empty.

They turned on the red light. The door was still securely locked with the key on the inside, but the medium had disappeared.

All the rooms of the castle were searched without result.

Two and a half hours later it occurred to the anxious sitters to ask for information through automatic writing. Mrs. Gwendolyn Kelley Hack, an American authoress, made the attempt. Her hand wrote:

"Do not be anxious, we are watching and guarding... The medium is asleep."

But the members of the circle, among them Ernesto Bozzano, the doyen of Italian psychical researchers, were not to be calmed. Finally precise information came through:

"Go to the right. Then outside wall and gate. He is lying. Hay, hay. On soft place."

The place indicated a granary in the stable yard. The great entrance door was locked; the key was not in the lock.

They ran back to fetch it, and entering, found a small door which had been previously overlooked. This door was also locked, the key being in the keyhole on the outside.

They opened it with the greatest caution. On a heap of hay and oats the medium was comfortably lying immersed in a profound sleep.

When he first regained consciousness and found himself in the stable he feared that he had gone out of his mind and burst into tears.

### **The Two Pansini Boys**

The case of the Pansini boys, into which Dr. Joseph Lapponi, medical officer to Popes Leo XVII and Pius X, made a special investigation, is, in a sense, unique.

It concerns Alfred and Paul, ten and eight years old respectively, sons of a building contractor of Ruvo, Apulia.

The old house in which they lived was the scene of strange visitations. There were poltergeist phenomena: throwing and breaking of crockery by invisible hands.

The elder boy, then only seven years of age, fell into trance and spoke and recited in French, Latin and Greek.

He was sent off to a seminary and the phenomena ceased.

On his return in 1904 the terror broke out anew.

In the space of half an hour, by some unknown power, both he and his brother were transported from Ruvo to Molfetta, a distance of nine miles.

Another time they found themselves at sea in a boat, having no idea how they got there.

Once they disappeared from the square of Rovo to discover themselves, ten minutes later, before their uncle's house in Trani, a good distance away.

The children hugely enjoyed these mysterious trips. But their parents were badly frightened.

They sent for the Bishop of Bitonto. While the mother was voicing her fears of the Devil to the holy man, both boys vanished from the room.

For one moment they were there. The next moment they were gone without a trace. The windows and doors were locked, a precaution which the mother had taken. There was no way out from the room - except for a mouse.

No light was ever thrown on that mystery. Italian scientists talked of "ambulatory automatism"; moving in a secondary state and forgetting it when regaining consciousness.

But what about the locked room?

And how could two boys run nine miles in half an hour without anyone perceiving them on the road?

### **A Giantess Who Was Spirited Away**

An extraordinary instance of transportation took place in London on June 3rd, 1871. It happened to Mrs. Samuel Guppy, a famous medium of the day, with whom Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace, co-discoverer with Darwin of the principle of natural selection, had sittings for years.

From her home in Highbury, by some invisible power, she was whisked away to the house of Charles Williams, another medium, at 61, Lamb's Conduit Street, a distance of over three miles.

She dropped down like a log on the top of a table around which, closely packed, ten people were sitting in a séance.

They were having an amiable chat with "Katie King", the famous spirit guide with whom Sir William Crookes was to have been photographed arm-in-arm.

Someone asked "Katie King" to bring something. Another sitter jokingly observed:

"I wish you would bring Mrs. Guppy."

A third sitter protested:

"Good gracious, I hope not. She is one of the biggest women in London!"

"Katie King's" voice cried aloud in the dark:

"I will, I will, I will."

Three minutes had hardly passed when someone cried out:

"Good God, there is something on my head."

There was a heavy thud. One or two screams. A match was struck.

There was Mrs. Guppy on the table.

She was perfectly motionless, in a state of trance.

She was arrayed in a loose dressing-gown, in a more or less *decollete* condition, with bedroom slippers on her feet.

One arm was rigidly held over her eyes, the other hung by her side, holding a pen wet with ink.

Great fears were entertained for her health. But she recovered consciousness, shook off the effect of the shock and joined the sitting.

From the ceiling her boots, hat and clothes dropped down piece by piece, also a lot of flowers.

The flowers were her own psychic contribution. She could produce heaps of flowers out of the void - even full-sized sunflowers with fresh earth clotted around the roots.

Inquiries at Mrs. Guppy's home revealed that at the time of her transportation she was writing in her room. Her companion was sitting near the fire, making up accounts.

Suddenly, looking up, she found that Mrs. Guppy had disappeared. She fancied seeing a slight haze near the ceiling. That was all.

The case was the occasion of much drollery in the London press. *But nothing was brought forward to shake or disprove the written testimony of ten witnesses, most of them well-known people with a reputation and social standing.*