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For THE TIMES.

GOLDEN ROD AND LIFE EVER-LASTING.

O, lonely fields of golden rod,
And pearly life-everlasting, you,
When white with frost, or moist with dew,
How many a vanished year I've trod!
Each Autumn by the hand of God,
Beneficent, adorned anew,
Beneath a sky as soft as nd blue
As ever bent o'er earthly sod.
When sing the birds, the bees may woo
Flowers that more brightly gleam and nod;
But none so charm sad Memory's view
As life-everlasting's pearly hue,
And magic of the golden-rod—
So, lonely fields, I dot on you.

Georgetown, D. C., W. L. SHOEMAKER.

A GHOSTLY WARNING.

I CALL it a ghostly warning because, though it came not in the night-watches, in faraway tones, from the lips of a filmy apparition, it did come to me in the name of a dear friend long since gone to the Unknown Land.

In the spring of 1875, I visited New York, and wishing to be entirely free for the business which necessitated my presence there, instead of going to the house of a relative, engaged board in convenient locality under the same roof with an acquaintance. Excepting this lady, one friend and a cousin, no one to whom I was known was, during the first week, aware that I was in the city. This cousin, a very favorite one, then chanced to be in America for a few weeks, having left his wife and family temporarily alone in their home in Paris. As G——'s evenings hung rather heavily on his hands while away from his family, to which he was always devoted, he was good enough to enliven by his welcome presence many of mine, which otherwise would have been as dull as evenings in a boarding-house full of strangers must be.

One evening, perhaps the third or fourth after my arrival, came the warning, delivered in a very straightforward, prosaic, unghostly way by the letter-carrier. One always examines the outside of a letter to see whom it is from, probably for the same reason that leads one to listen to what others say about one's friends before hearing what these have to say for themselves. I looked at the letter curiously. It was post marked in the city at five o'clock of the previous afternoon, yet it was directed in a hand I had never expected to see again save when I looked with tearful eyes over a bundle of yellow old letters tied up carefully in a corner of my desk at home. It was curious, I thought, that this rather peculiar chirography should be duplicated. Then I observed, with a start, that the middle name in the direction was not that which belongs to me, but one which I had adopted for two or three years of my childhood, preferring it to the family name which my parents gave me. I had outgrown the whim and returned to my baptismal name, but the friend referred to always took a sort of pleasure in reminding me of this and several other childish fancies which we had held in common. No one now living, so far as I was aware, so much as knew that I had signed the name I now saw before me.

"DEAREST E——: It is sometimes permitted to us who have already stepped into the light to give words of comfort or of warning to those who still wander in darkness. My word to you now is one of warning.

"One who is very dear to you is about to trust his life to the treacherous deep. If he does so he will be lost. Upon you rests the responsibility. Prevent him from recrossing the ocean if you value his life.

"I am now, as of yore, ever lovingly yours,
ANNIE M. H.—
By the hand of A. B. Sears, Spiritual Medium."

I don't think I am naturally supersti-

tious, but it would be difficult to describe the effect of this letter upon my mind. It was not merely the nature of the communication, but its entire unexpectedness, that made it impressive. I read it carefully. The handwriting, if not precisely the same as that of my friend, certainly resembled it very strongly, and, though I had with me none of the actual writing to compare with it, I felt reasonably sure that my memory on this point was trustworthy. After thinking carefully over my list of acquaintances, I felt certain that there was none of them who would be willing to play a practical joke of such a nature, and I knew of no one in the city who had ever heard Annie's name. Then, too, there was the middle name of childish fancy which I had never signed since the days Annie was my sole correspondent.

I put the letter in my bureau-drawer and turned the key upon it. Putting this in my pocket, I went out, as usual, for the day, resolved not to let the matter trouble me. The business of the day totally drove it out of mind, until, as I entered the house at dusk, the memory came back to me with a slight shock, such as unwelcome memories frequently produce. This was repeated and intensified when, upon entering my room, I found the letter lying on the top of the bureau. I tried the drawers; all were locked; I felt in my pocket; there was the key. I laughed at myself, and said, "I must have locked the stable door, leaving the horse outside. I'll see that it's in now, any way." So I put the letter into the drawer, and turning the key, placed it in my pocket before going down to dinner.

Soon after dinner my cousin came in and we passed the evening in the pleasant parlor of my only acquaintance in the house, whom I will call Mrs. Murray. During these hours I did not think of the letter, having determined I would not think of it; but when I went into my room for the night, and turning on the gas stirring the fire, I went to the bureau to lay off my bracelets. There, stuck in the frame of the looking-glass, was the letter. The drawers were all locked; not a thing in them had been disturbed. A brooch, a little money, a finger-ring, some laces, and many little things that might have tempted a thief or a pilfering housemaid, were all just as I had left them, in the same drawer where the letter had been.

There could be no mistake about the matter this time. I had locked that letter in the drawer just before dinner and had not since entered the room.—Yet there the thing was staring me in the face, with the old, well-remembered handwriting and the long disused middle name, defying me to doubt the reality of its presence in a place where I had not put it.

Holding it in my hand and sitting in a low chair by the fire, I thought over the subject of the letter.

It had never seemed to me to be unreasonable to believe that if there is a life beyond the present, the spirits of those who have reached it before us may sometimes possess the inclination and the power to communicate with us.—But I was not all inclined to accept this communication as coming from the Spirit Land simply because it purported to do so. I had seen but one or two professed "mediums," and these by accident, but they had given me no desire to see more of their sport. It was a strong argument against the genuineness of this communication that it professed to come through the hands of a "medium." Still, I would grant to myself, for the moment, that this letter undoubtedly was from my dear friend.—What, in that case, could—what ought I to do? Of course, the person referred to as in danger could only be my cousin G——, for, as far as I knew, no one else who was dear to me was then thinking of crossing the Atlantic or any other ocean. But it was nonsense to say that if he were lost the responsibility of his loss would rest upon me. If any particular vessel had been mentioned in which it said it would be dangerous to sail, or if any special week or month had been named, I would, to have satisfied my conscience, have faced my cousin's certain ridicule, and used my best powers of persuasion to induce him to take passage on another vessel or at a different time. But there was no such mention. He did not even know by what steamer he would leave New

York, as all depended upon his business arrangements. As it was, how could I do or say anything to prevent his going where both his domestic and his business relations called him?

Thinking about it as a real communication from a present but unseen friend, I at last said aloud, as to one within hearing:

"No, Annie, I can do nothing, and I will burn this letter, so that it shall not trouble me any more."

A distinct whisper, apparently just by my ear, answered:

"You'll be sorry if you do. Startled, I looked about the room—behind the sofa, under the bed, back of the window curtains—though I knew as well before as I did afterward that there was no one in the room. The occupants of the room next to mine had been snoring for the last hour, and the halls had long been perfectly quiet.

Heedless of the whispered warning, I persisted in my purpose. The grate-fire was nearly out, but there were live coals enough to light the paper, and I watched it while it was consumed, to ashes.

The next morning I went out, as usual, spending the day in tedious details of business that would not arrange itself satisfactorily, and happily forgetting the burned letter until it was recalled, as I entered the house late in the afternoon, by the sight of the mail-carrier's latest budget waiting its several claimants on the shelf of the hat-rack. Three letters were for me, and one of them was directed in the strange-familiar hand, and mailed in the city that morning.

In the evening my cousin was to take Mrs. Murray and me the Academy of Design; so I put the letter, unopened, into my pocket, and resolutely forgot it until I had locked myself into my room for the night. Then I opened it. The contents were the same as before, only that this time the missive opened with a tender reproach for my unbelief, and the address of the "medium" was placed below his name.

Again I sat down and thought it all over, coming to the same conclusion as before. Even supposing, I reasoned, that this is a genuine communication from Annie, she is mistaken in imagining that I can do anything to save G——'s life upon such vague information as this. If she knows as much of the future as she here professes to do, she must know much more than has here been told, and if she could write what she has written, she can write more.—If that "medium" thinks I'm going to him to make inquiries, he's mistaken. The communication either is or is not from Annie. If it is, she must remember that I always detested hints and oracular utterances, and know that I shall wait till she gives me proof of her power to foretell future events. If it is not from herself, the whole thing is despicable, unworthy of a thought. But who, I reasoned again, could have either the information necessary to enable him even so far to personate Annie or the motive to induce him to do it?—Certainly, no one that I knew.

So I went to bed with the resolve that, as I could know nothing, I would think no more about it—a resolution easier to make than to adhere to.

The next morning my first thought was how I should dispose of the communication. Plainly, it was of no use to lock it up, and as little to burn it. I would carry it with me. If I lost it in crossing the lower part of Broadway, that would surely be the last of this copy, and perhaps the discouraged writer would not try it again. So, crossing hurriedly in the neighborhood of the "Herald" office, I drew out my pocket-handkerchief, and with an emotion of relief felt that the uncanny little missive had fallen upon the mud-covered pavement amid thick-coming hoofs and wheels. But I had congratulated myself too quickly. A gentleman who crossed the street just after me saw it fall, and in the mistaken kindness of his heart, followed half a block to restore the document. I'm afraid he thought my acknowledgements very ungracious, yet I tried my best to dissemble.

Two more efforts to rid myself of the letter met with no better success. There was nothing for it but to fetch the mud-colored epistle back with me, and that evening, as my cousin had other en-

gagements and Mrs. Murry had gone out, I had nothing to hinder me from reflection on its contents.

I would not allow myself to think that I believed in the genuineness of the communication, yet the more I thought of it the more unaccountable it became. Still, I was strongly fixed in the opinion that ever, if the communication were what it purported to be, there was no step that I could or ought to take in regard to it.

For a few moments I thought of handing the letter to my cousin to read, and so shifting whatever responsibility there might be over to his broad shoulders. But that, I reflected, would be but a cowardly thing to do. Even if he should now laugh at the warning—as doubtless he would do—yet, if on his homeward voyage, an accident should happen to the steamer on which he was, the memory of the despised warning would be sure to awaken, as people always think of the things they should not and perhaps, by disturbing the coolness of his judgment and arousing the notion of fatality which slumbers in us all, the prophecy might help to its own fulfillment. That was a responsibility I would not take.

The letter continued a dreadful plague to me. I burnt this second one, and the next day's mail brought a third nearly-literal copy. This I tried to hide, but every evening, when I unlocked my door the letter appeared in some new and conspicuous place—now pinned to the head of my bedstead, then to a window-curtain; now on the sofa, or again stuck in the frame of the looking glass—once tied to the gas-fixture, and twice to the door-handle. I could not get rid of its ever-reproachful face, silently saying:

"I warn and you will not heed."

As far as I could without exciting suspicion as to my motives in making the inquiries—for I dreaded the sort of notoriety which would surely attach to one who was supposed to have received a supernatural communication—I satisfied myself that the landlady and servants had, and could have had, nothing to do with this letter and its mysterious migrations. It was ascertained that there had once been a duplicate key to my hall-door. The other doors were bolted on both sides.

Now, whether it was altogether owing to the effect on my imagination of this mysterious agility of an inanimate thing, or whether it was the vexatious and troublesome nature of the business which detained me in town, and the physical and mental weariness it induced, combined with the undeniably poisonous cookery of the fashionable boarding-house, had together seriously affected my nervous system, I do not know, but certain it is that day and night I could not escape from the haunting refrain, "I have warned you, but you will not heed, and you will be responsible for a life. For his life—the life of the father of the beautiful children you are so fond of, the husband of the woman who is dear to you, the friend whom you love for his own sake. It is for his life you will be responsible."

During the daytime my work smothered this refrain, so that I only heard it as a disturbing echo; but when evening came with its relaxations, I could not shut it out.

At the theatre, the brilliant stage where Reigold played Henry V., or where Wallack personated the jaunty youth of fashion, seemed written over with the flaming words. When I dined friends, and one said in a laughing way about some trifling thing:

"You will be responsible for that," I felt as if I had received judicial condemnation. When my cousin stood on the rug in front of Mrs. Murray's sitting-room fire, telling in eloquent words about Old World wonders which had burnt themselves into his artist heart, I heard them only through a din of surging waters, in which I saw his noble head uselessly struggling, or I heard his voice as through the sobs of wife and children lamenting her husband and father.

I had maturely reflected and decided upon my course, and I would not permit reason to be overridden by imagination so far as to let the latter influence my actions; yet many a night I woke to find myself bitterly weeping and praying the pardon of G——'s wife that I

had not at least tried the effect of giving him the warning.

I was glad when my business was at length dispatched and I could leave the city; but it was not until several weeks after this that my cousin started for France. The twelve days that elapsed between the sailing of his steamer and that on which its safe arrival was reported in the New York papers were very long. And when it was all over, how angry I was at myself that I should have paid any heed to such a vague, and, as it now seemed, transparently spurious sort of warning.

My next thought was to send to a friend the letter of which I still held the third copy (its power of self-movement forsook it when I left New York), with the request that he would ascertain for me if there were any such person as A. B. Sears, professing to be a "Spiritual medium." After some weeks the answer was returned:

"Yes, A. B. Sears is the *nom-de-guerre* of Abiathar Parsons who, under his proper name, boarded in the same house where you boarded last spring."

Abiathar Parsons! Then I remembered. In the days when Annie H—— and I, as recently-separated schoolmates, were carrying on an active correspondence by mail, this Parsons was a clerk in the employ of the storekeeper who acted as postmaster in our native village. Upon inquiry, which I caused to be made of the housekeeper at my late lodgings, I found that during my stay in New York he had occupied the room next to Mrs. Murray's parlor, and on the same floor with my room, and that his place at table had been nearly opposite my own. Parsons had not borne the best of reputations during his clerkship with the postmaster, and after a stay of a year or so had drifted away, carrying his laziness and cunning to a more appreciative market. In the well-covered, florid-faced man with dark hair I had failed to recognize the lank, sallow, red-haired youth whom I had only seen and hardly noticed behind the counter. Evidently his memory had been better than mine, and from the position of his room in relation to Mrs. Murray's parlor he might easily have overheard the conversations between my cousin and myself relative to the former returning to Europe. How Mr. Parsons obtained access to my room and bureau drawers I do not certainly know, but as it seems that he had once occupied the apartment for some weeks, it may not be doing him injustice to suggest that he then supplied himself with duplicate keys, thinking that they might prove useful in some possible contingencies.

Possessing, as he did, a remarkable facility in imitating handwritings—a facility which had more than once turned the eye of suspicion upon the postmaster's clerk—and remembering that of Annie H——, which must often have passed through his hands, while knowing that she had long since passed away, his cunning presented to Abiathar Parsons—alias A. B. Sears—the idea that as he knew me, and probably remembered many little things connected with my family and early life which he could use to advantage in trading upon my credulity (while he remained by me) here was an excellent opportunity to get a little money and extend his reputation as one whose predictions of the future must be relied upon, seeing that he knew so much of the past.

If, by any chance, the steamer on which my cousin had met with disaster and he had failed to reach his home, I would probably have made no investigation, but have simply accepted the communication as having been a genuine but simply unheeded warning from the Spirit Land, and all the rest of my life have been weighed down with a burden of remorse as heavy as any ever borne by an actual murderer.

The trick of Mr. Parsons-Sears was a very simple one, now it has been told, and I have not found it any easy task to excuse myself to myself for the importance I attached to the supposed warning and for the real suffering so uselessly endured on account of it. But since that time I have felt much more charity than before for those unfortunate people who in hours of doubt, anxiety and grief have resorted for knowledge or consolation to sources which in their calmer moments the would have seen offered but spurious draughts of either.