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FRIDAY, AUGUST 5th, 1921.

The Poltergeist.

FROM far Australia comes news of mysterious occurrences at the house of William Bowen, a ganger, who resides at Guyra, a prosperous little township in New South Wales. The phenomena take the form of stones being thrown at the house, the smashing of windows and heavy thumps upon the walls. The "Harbinger of Light" tells us that the phenomena appear to centre around a 12 year old girl, Minnie Bowen, and the violence seems to be directed against her. Stones crashed through the bedroom windows and fell on her bed, and the thumpings occurred when the police were inside the room watching her. The "Sydney Sunday Times" says, "Bump after bump was heard, sufficient to shake the cottage to its foundations, and audible to watchers 100 yards or more from the house."

The Sydney police have sent a number of constables in charge of a sergeant to investigate the case. Several of them, reinforced by some 40 carefully chosen men, and including a J.P. or two, were deputed to watch the outside of the house, whilst a couple of constables remained in the bedroom with the girl. The knockings still occurred, and those outside the house were confident that they came from inside, whilst those inside were quite convinced that they were produced externally.

The Superintendent of Police at Sydney, who did not personally visit the scene, contemptuously dismisses the occurrences by referring them to the antics of the girl and local larrikins, but the public want to know why, if this be the case, a dozen police with two score assistants are impotent to catch the offenders.

It further appears that Minnie Brown was recently removed to the home of Mrs. Shelton some distance away, but the trouble followed her. We are not told whether she took the "larrikins" with her in her pocket. It is admitted that on one occasion when at home the girl picked up a piece of wood, and twice struck the wall with it in imitation of the thumps, but this she did openly and when watched. Mr. Alex. Hay, a prominent business man in Guyra, who has taken an active part in the endeavour to elucidate the problem, says in a long interview with the "Sydney Morning Herald":—

As a matter of fact, one night the sergeant was inside with the whole family, including the girl, whilst Constable Taylor and two trusted civilians sat within a few yards of the wall on the outside. Notwithstanding these precautions, seven very loud raps came on the wall in quick succession. As soon as the first knock was heard a powerful spot-light was turned on the walls from a distance of 30 yards. THUS, THE OUTSIDE WALL WAS IN A BLAZE OF LIGHT WHILST THE KNOCKING WAS GOING ON. When the knocking had ceased Constable Taylor and his two companions insisted that the knocks came from the inside, and that no stones fell on the ground on the outside. Sergeant Ridge had insisted, however, that the knocking did not come from the inside, as he was closely watching every person in the room.

I might also quote another case, during which I posted six trusted men, standing with their backs to the outside wall of a 12-foot room, after which we placed the girl in the inside of the room, with a good light burning, and being closely watched by three men, including Constable Taylor. Notwithstanding this well-organised guard, two very loud knocks came on the wall. As usual the men on the outside insisted that the knocks came from the inside, whilst the watchers inside believed that they came from outside. I would like to mention that the six men picked for positions on the outside wall were selected from at least 40, and were absolutely above suspicion. Constable Taylor, one of our oldest J.P.'s, and myself were inside watching the girl. I could quote many cases similar to these two, where every member of the Bowen family has been under strict observation whilst the knocking went on.

It is evidently a dangerous pastime for anyone who may be practising tricks, since Mr. Bowen has become very much incensed at the annoyance, and on a recent occasion when the rappings occurred rushed out of the house with his gun and fired three shots in the direction from which the stones appeared to come.

The police having failed, and a local committee of vigilantes being unable to fathom the mystery, Psychical Research methods are to be applied. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle left Australia a few months too soon to be an observer, which is to be regretted in view of the fact that he has had some experience of such investigations.

These Australian happenings, however, do not stand alone. Poltergeist (noisy ghost) phenomena have a long history, and readers will remember a recent case at Horn... in which Dr. E. T. Powell was interested. To the Spiritualist they are perplexing. Whilst they generally centre round some particular person, yet they have been known to happen when no one was actually present. The elements of disorder being traceable subsequently. In many cases the phenomena are quite probably due to some troubled spirit, whilst in others no evidence has been adduced which points to this explanation. The violence of the force at work is often very great, whilst the phenomena produced are generally annoying and meaningless, reminding one more of the playful antics of animals or irresponsibles than a deliberate attempt to attain a definite object.

Doubtless, as consistent research makes us more familiar with the borderland between the two phases of human activity, we shall find the present complexities simplified.

One thing, however, appears certain, that such phenomena are supernormal, and we have more to hope for from the methods of the Psychical Researcher and the medium than we have from the cumbrous and limited method of the police, which is but another way of saying that "the shoemaker must stick to his last."

The armchair critic who has seen nothing and dwells in a limited environment bounded by his own experience, can often give us explanations galore, but the individual of critical faculty who has spent a few years in research is generally more modest. The complexities of life, in its larger phases are far greater than even the Spiritualist imagines.

IGNORANCE can only be seen by the wise and exhibited to the wise. This is why it exists; if it could see itself, it would cease to exist.

WEST HARTLEPOOL had a glorious week-end recently with Mr. W. R. Sutton, of Sheffield. This remarkable medium gave many proofs of the continuity of life after death, giving full names to many, and delivering helpful messages. Three absent members were called by name and a message given for them, which, to those who knew the circumstances, was most appropriate. The services were well attended, and both spiritually and materially were most helpful.