

AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A MEDIUM.

COMMUNICATED BY GEORGE C. BARTLETT.

THERE appears to be an increasing interest at present in occult or mediumistic phenomena, and their investigation has become quite respectable. In the year 1870 when I first met Mr. Charles H. Foster and began to investigate so-called spiritual manifestations I was looked upon by many of my acquaintances as one sold out to Satan.

In my search of thirty-seven years I have not met a person, or read any account of seances, that in my judgment have equaled Mr. Foster's. His conferences were given in broad day-light and without the possibility of trickery or deception.

I quote the following selected at random from many, published in Boston, Dec., 28, 1885.

AN AWFUL VISION.

Conjured up by Foster in a Southern Hotel—He Describes the Terrible Death of a Man Alone on the Plains—A Strange Seance by the man of Many Weird Secrets.

NEW YORK, Dec. 27.—I knew Charles Foster, the medium, who died last week, very well indeed, says a writer in the *New York World*. I spent one winter—that of 1873-4, I think—down South. I was traveling from town to town, and every once in a while I found that I was putting up at the same hotel with Foster. We used to meet under such conditions every evening in the bar-room. He was an exceptionally sociable fellow, who never "talked shop," and, without drinking very much, loved to be convivial with cheerful company. He was on a professional tour, giving seances at five dollars a head, and even in the impoverished South thought nothing of \$200 or \$300 as a day's income.

While we were talking one night, Foster and I, there came a knock at the door. Bartlett arose and opened it, disclosing as he

did so two young men plainly dressed, of marked provincial aspect. They were ordinary middle-class Southerners. I saw at once that they were clients, and arose to go. Foster restrained me.

"Sit down," he said. "I'll try and get rid of them, for I'm not in the humor to be disturbed. In any case they are only commonplace chaps, and I'll soon be through with them."

I stayed, and it was the first and only seance of Foster's that I, in my character of unbeliever, ever took part in.

By this time the young men had ascertained from the courteous Bartlett that the great medium was disengaged, and they entered. Foster hinted that he had no particular inclination to gratify them then and there, but they protested that they had come some distance, and, with a characteristically good-natured smile, he gave in. What followed I shall describe as minutely as I can, for the whole seance is to this day as vividly impressed upon my memory as if it had taken place only yesterday.

In the room I have pictured, Foster sat as far from the table with the marble top as two feet at least. Bartlett had returned to his sofa and to his newspaper. I sat by the door and the two young men, with awestricken faces, sat by the table, one of them resting his arm on it. Foster lolled back in his chair, voluptuously watching the smoke of his cigar. His left hand was in his trousers pocket, his right was free and toying constantly with his mustache. One leg was thrown over the other. On the table were several long, narrow strips of paper, about the width of the margin of a newspaper, and a couple of short pencils. The young men looked furtively round the room and at Foster. It was easy to see that one of them was inclined to unbelief.

"Now," said Foster, in his usual indolent manner, "it will be necessary for you (to the skeptic) to think of some person, now in the spirit world, in whom you have confidence. Ah! as I speak to you some one has arrived. It is a woman—perhaps your mother. She is going to communicate with you."

And at that instant there came a rap upon the table, apparently in the lower edge of the marble, so loud and so distinct that three of us started—the young strangers and myself.

"Take this card," proceeded Foster, his eyes shut and his expression one of delicious drowsiness. "It contains all the letters of the alphabet. Spell out, letter by letter, in silence, the name of any spirit you may expect."

Then followed what to me seemed a most extraordinary inci-

dent of telegraphy. As fast as the young man struck the right letter an invisible something smote the marble with a ringing tap.

"Do you recognize the spirit," inquired Foster, still drowsy and uninterested.

"It's my aunt, sir," replied the countryman, very white, but with a resolute face, as became a brave young fellow who was bound to stand any revelation, no matter how tremendous.

"You are sure of it?"

"That's her name."

"She is standing between us looking at you. She is tall and thin, dark hair, mixed with gray, very wrinkled, and her smile is very gentle."

"It's my aunt!" cried the lad, with eyes dilated.

"Take one of those slips of paper," continued Foster, twisting his cigar in his mouth. "Write on it whatever question you want to ask of her. Then roll it up in your fingers as small as possible and give it to me."

It took the young man a few minutes to think out and then compose his question—a task in which he was aided by his friend. Then he rolled it up into a ball about the size of a pea, and handed it to the medium. Foster took it indifferently, held it against his forehead just as he received it, and without a moment's delay, but in rather hesitating voice, said:

"You have asked your aunt whether in her judgment it would be a safe speculation for you to go as a partner in the butcher business with So-and-So (mentioning a name) in Algiers." Algiers, by the way, is the Brooklyn of New Orleans.

"Yes, sir," gasped the young man.

"Your aunt says to you in reply," drawled Foster, "that she does not like to interfere with your plans, but you must be very careful in your dealings with So-and-So. His reputation is a very bad one, and he has cheated everybody he ever was in business with."

A flock of other questions followed, all expressed in the same way. The more he replied the drowsier and more indolent grew Foster. I thought he was tired of the interview and was feigning sleep to end it. All of a sudden he sprang to his feet with such an expression of horror and consternation as an actor playing Macbeth would have given a good deal to imitate. His eyes glared, his breast heaved, his hands clenched. It seemed as if some horrible spectacle fascinated him. I could have sworn he saw a raw and bloody spectre standing beside the young man from Algiers. The lad, on

his part, arose stupidly a moment after, his eyes fixed with an anxious stare on the medium.

"Why did you come here?" cried Foster, in a wail that seemed to come from the bottom of his soul. "Why do you come here to torment me with such a sight? Oh, God! It's horrible! It's horrible!" And he clasped his two hands before his face, shuddering as if to shut out the vision which dismayed him, but which none other of us beheld.

Incredulous as I was, the sincerity of his distress troubled me. Even on Bartlett it had such an effect that he dropped his paper and sat bolt upright. As for the young men, they fairly trembled.

"It is your father I see!" cried Foster, in the same wailing tone of anguish and repulsion. "He died fearfully! He died fearfully! He was in Texas—on a horse—with cattle. He was alone. It is the prairies! Alone! The horse fell! He was under it! His thigh was broken—horribly broken! The horse ran away and left him! He lay there stunned! Then he came to his senses! Oh! his thigh was dreadful! Such agony! My God! Such agony!"

Foster fairly screamed at this. The younger of the men from Algiers broke into violent sobs. His companion wept, too, and the pair of them clasped hands. Bartlett looked on concerned. As for me, I was astounded.

"He was four days dying—four days dying—of starvation and thirst," Foster went on, as if deciphering some terrible hieroglyphs written on the air. "His thigh swelled to the size of his body. Clouds of flies settled on him—flies and vermin—and he chewed his own arm and drank his own blood. He died mad. And my God! he crawled three miles in those four days! Man! man! that's how your father died!"

So saying, with a great sob, Foster dropped into his chair, his cheeks purple, and tears running down them in rivers. The younger man from Algiers burst into a wild cry of grief and sank upon the neck of his friend. He, too, was sobbing as if his own heart would break. Bartlett stood over Foster, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. I sat stock still in my chair, the vivid scene of human anguish and desperation which had been conjured up slowly vanishing like the illusion of a magic lantern.

"It's true," said the younger man's friend; "his father was a stockraiser in Texas, and after he had been missing from his drove for over a week, they found him dead and swollen with his leg broken. They tracked him a good distance from where he must have fallen. But nobody ever heard till now how he died."

Perhaps these two young men are still alive in New Orleans. I believe that Bartlett survives. If they read this they will affirm that plainly and with absolute accuracy I have described the only seance I ever saw conducted by Charles Foster.

EDITORIAL COMMENT.

George C. Bartlett's communication of "An Episode in the Life of a Medium" tells us a most striking but after all typical case of a medium's mode of procedure. We must remember that for many years Mr. Bartlett took a great interest in the phenomena of occultism and has endeavored to study them in the company of one of the most renowned mediums of this country, the well-known Charles H. Foster. He was so overwhelmed with his belief in Mr. Foster's extraordinary psychic powers that he became his follower and joined him on his professional journeys. We can understand that a believer who had an implicit faith in his master and expected verifications only, would not be the right man to watch the traveling medium critically or to look behind the scenes of his performances. Accordingly Mr. Bartlett states facts only, yet even these in the present case are but the report of an anonymous writer. For all that they are interesting and may be true in all their details. Certainly, they are told most dramatically by the anonymous writer whom Mr. Bartlett quotes.

Mr. Foster's revelations must have made a very great impression upon his visitors, but judging merely from the report as it lies before us we see nothing impossible or extraordinary in the performance. A critical reader will notice that the writer says of Mr. Foster, "We used to meet every evening in the bar-room. He was an exceptionally sociable fellow who never talked shop and, without drinking very much, loved to be convivial with cheerful company."

Mr. Foster would have been a poor medium if he had not been able to turn the bar room into a gold mine from which he dug up the valuable materials for his seances. We can very well understand that he never "talked shop," for he was busy gathering the much-needed information concerning the people of the towns visited so as to spring it afterwards unawares upon his patrons.

Any one who is familiar with mediumistic operations will be convinced that Mr. Foster did not go for pleasure to the bar room, which to a man who is not specially given to drink is by no means a very pleasant place. It is expressly stated that Mr. Foster drank

very little, perhaps just enough to be tolerated in the bar room, or to stay there without attracting attention.

It is not possible that such a horrible disaster as Mr. Foster recapitulated in his seance reported by Mr. Bartlett, should have escaped his attention while posting himself on significant occurrences of the place; and would not any one of his bar room acquaintances have also added that the son of this man who died such a horrible death on the prairie was just contemplating to establish himself in business in Algiers near New Orleans, and that it was rather a pity if he did so, for the man with whom he intended to associate was a shrewd man with a bad business reputation?

Unsophisticated people, when confronted by a stranger whom they never met, would naturally be overwhelmed with astonishment and gruesome awe if the tragic events of their life were thus suddenly revealed to them; and we see in this story a confirmation of how easy it is to work upon the sentiments of people who are not on their guard and not familiar with mediumistic methods. P. C.