

The Prophecy of General Yermolov



Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov (1843) Pyotr Zakharov-Chechenets

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The materializing of an immaterial Spirit — a divine Breath — by the Spiritualists, is on a par with the anthropomorphizing of the Absolute, by the Theologians. It is these two claims which have dug an almost impassable abyss between the Theosophist-Occultists and the Spiritualists on the one hand, and the Theosophists and the Church Christians on the other.

Every educated Englishman has heard the name of General Yermolov, one of the great military heroes of this age; and if at all familiar with the history of the Caucasian wars, he must be acquainted with the exploits of one of the chief conquerors of the land of those impregnable fastnesses where Shamil and his predecessors have defied for years the skill and strategy of the Russian armies.

Be it as it may, the strange event herein narrated by the Caucasian hero himself, may interest students of psychology. That which follows is a *verbatim* translation from V. Potto's Russian work *The War in Caucasus*. In Volume II, chapter "The Last Years of Yermoloff"¹ one reads these lines:

Silently and imperceptibly glided away at Moscow the last days allotted to the hero. On April the 12th, 1861, he died in his 85th year, seated in his favourite armchair, with one hand on the table, the other on his knee; but a few minutes before, in accordance with an old habit of his, he was tapping the floor with his foot.

It is impossible better to express the feelings of Russia at the news of this death than by quoting the obituary notice from the [Russian Daily] *Kavkaz*, which did not say a word more than was deserved.

"On April the 12th, at 11^{3/4} a.m., at Moscow, the Artillery General, famous throughout Russia — Alexey Petrovich Yermolov, breathed his last. Every Russian knows the name; it is allied with the most brilliant records of our national glory: Valutino, Borodino, Kulm, Paris, and the Caucasus, will be ever transmitting the name of the hero — the pride and ornament of the Russian army and nation . . . We will not enumerate the services of Yermolov. His name and titles are: a true son of Russia, in the full significance of the term."

¹ pp. 829-32

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It is a curious fact that his death did not escape its own legend, one of a strange and mystical character. This is what a friend who knew Yermolov well, writes of him:

Once, when leaving Moscow, I called on Yermolov to say good-bye, and found myself unable to conceal my emotion at parting.

“Fear not,” he said to me, “we will yet meet; I shall not die before your return.”

This was eighteen months before his death.

“In life and death God alone is the Master!” I observed.

“And I am telling you most positively that my death will not occur in a year, but somewhat later” — he answered. With these words he led me into his study, where, getting out of a locked chest a written sheet of paper, he placed it before me and asked — “Whose handwriting is this? “Yours,” I said. “Read it then!”

It was a kind of memorandum, a record of dates, since the year when Yermolov was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, showing, as in a programme, every significant event that was to happen in his life, so full of such events.

He followed me in my reading, and when I came to the last paragraph, he covered the last lines with his hand. “This you need not read,” he said. “On this line, the year, the month, and the day of my death are given. All that you have read here was written by me before-hand, and has come to pass to the smallest details, and this is how I came to write it.

“When I was yet a young Lieutenant Colonel, I was sent on business to a small district town of T. My lodging consisted of two rooms — one for the servants, the other for my personal use. There was no access into the latter but through the former. Once, late at night, I sat writing at my desk. Having finished, I lighted my pipe, leaned back in my chair, and fell into a reverie, when, suddenly lifting my eyes, I saw standing before me across the desk a stranger, a man, judging by his dress, belonging to the lower classes of society. Before I had time to ask him who he was or what he wanted, the stranger said: ‘Take your pen and write.’ Feeling myself under the influence of an irresistible power, I obeyed in silence. Then *he* dictated to me all that was to happen to me during my whole life, concluding with the date and hour of my death. With the last word he vanished from the spot. A few minutes elapsed before I regained my full consciousness, when, jumping, from my seat, I rushed into the adjoining room, which the stranger could not have by any means avoided passing through. Opening the door, I saw my clerk writing by the light of a candle, and my orderly lying asleep on the floor across the entrance door, which door was securely locked and bolted. To my question: ‘Who was it who has just been here?’ — the astonished clerk answered, ‘No one.’ To this day I have never told this to anyone,” concluded Alexey Petrovitch, “as I knew beforehand that while some would suspect me of having invented the whole thing, others would see in me a man subject to hallucinations. But for myself, personally, the whole thing is *a most undeniable fact*, an objective and palpable fact, the tangible proof of which is in this very written document.”

The last date found on the letter proved, after the death of the General, to be the correct one. He died on the very day and hour of the year recorded in his own handwriting.

Yermolov is buried at Orel. An inextinguishable lamp,¹ made of a fragment of a bomb-shell, burns before his tomb. On the cast-iron of the shell these words are wrought by an unskilled hand, "The Caucasian soldiers who served on the Goonib."² The ever-burning lamp is established through the zeal and grateful love of the lower ranks of the Caucasian Army, who collected among themselves from their poor pittance (copeck by copeck, verily!) the needed sum. And this simple monument is more valued and admired than would be the richest mausoleum. There is no other monument to Yermolov in Russia. But the proud and lofty rocks of the Caucasus are the imperishable pedestal on which every true Russian will always behold the majestic image of General Yermolov, surrounded by the aureole of an everlasting and immortal glory.

And now for a few words about the nature of the apparition.

No doubt every word of General Yermolov's concise and clear narrative is true to a dot. He was pre-eminently a matter-of-fact, sincere, and clear-headed man, with not the slightest taint of mysticism about him, a true soldier, honourable, and straightforward. Moreover, this episode of his life was testified to by his elder son, known to the present writer and her family personally, for many years during our residence at Tiflis. All this is a good warrant for the genuineness of the phenomenon, testified to furthermore by the written document left by the General, bearing the correct and precise date of his death. And now what about the mysterious visitor? Spiritualists will, of course, see in it a disembodied Entity, a "materialized Spirit." It will be claimed that a *human spirit* alone could prophecy a whole series of events and see so clearly in Futurity. So we say, too. But having agreed on that point, we diverge in all the rest; *i.e.*, while Spiritualists would say that the apparition was that of a Spirit distinct from and independent of the Higher Ego of the General, we maintain precisely the reverse, and say it was that Ego. Let us argue dispassionately.

Where is the *raison d'être*, the *rationale* of such apparition or prophecy; and why should you or I, for instance, once dead, appear to a perfect stranger for the pleasure of informing him of that which was to happen to him? Had the General recognised in the visitor some dear relative, his own father, mother, brother, or bosom friend, and received from him some beneficent warning, slight proof as it would have been, there would still be something in it to hang such theory upon. But it was nothing of the kind: simply "a stranger, a man, judging by his dress, belonging to the lower classes of society." If so, why should the soul of a poor disembodied tradesman, or a labourer, trouble itself to appear to a mere stranger? And if the "Spirit" only *assumed* such appearance, then why this disguise and masquerading, such *post-mortem* mystifica-

¹ [Cf. "The quenchless Lamps of Alchemy," in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² Goonib is the name of the last stronghold of the Circassians, on which the famous *Murid* Shamil, the Priest-Sovereign of the Mountaineers was conquered and captured by the Russians, after years of a desperate struggle. Goonib is a gigantic rock, deemed for a long time impregnable but finally stormed and ascended by the Russian soldiers at an enormous sacrifice of life. Its capture put virtually an end to the war in the Caucasus, a struggle which had lasted for over sixty years, and assured its conquest. — Editor, *Lucifer*.

tion, at all? If such visits are made of a “Spirit’s” free will; if such revelations can occur at the sweet pleasure of a disembodied Entity, and independently of any established law of intercourse between the two worlds — what can be the reason alleged for that particular “Spirit” playing at soothsaying Cassandra with the General? None whatever. To insist upon it, is simply to add one more absurd and repulsive feature to the theory of “Spirit-visitation,” and to throw an additional element of ridicule on the sacredness of death. The *materializing* of an *immaterial* Spirit — a divine Breath — by the Spiritualists, is on a par with the anthropomorphizing of the Absolute, by the Theologians. It is these two claims which have dug an almost impassable abyss between the Theosophist-Occultists and the Spiritualists on the one hand, and the Theosophists and the Church Christians on the other.

And now this is how a Theosophist-Occultist would explain the vision, in accordance with esoteric philosophy. He would premise by reminding the reader that the Higher Consciousness in us, with its *sui generis* laws and conditions of manifestation, is still almost entirely *terra incognita* for all (Spiritualists included) and the men of Science pre-eminently. Then he would remind the reader of one of the fundamental teachings of Occultism. He would say that besides the attribute of divine omniscience in its own nature and sphere of action, there exists in Eternity for the *individual* immortal Ego neither *Past* nor *Future*, but only one everlasting PRESENT. NOW, once this doctrine is admitted, or simply postulated, it becomes only natural that the whole life, from birth to death, of the Personality which that Ego informs, should be as plainly visible to the Higher Ego as it is invisible to, and concealed from, the limited vision of its temporary and mortal Form. Hence, this is what must have happened according to the Occult Philosophy.

The friend is told by General Yermolov that while writing *late in the night* he had suddenly fallen into a *reverie*, when he suddenly perceived upon lifting the eyes a stranger standing before him. Now that *reverie* was most likely a sudden doze, brought on by fatigue and overwork, during which a mechanical action of purely somnambulant character took place. The *Personality* becoming suddenly alive to the Presence of its Higher SELF, the human sleeping automaton fell under the sway of the Individuality, and forthwith the hand that had been occupied with writing for several hours before resumed mechanically its task. Upon awakening the *Personality* thought that the document before him had been written at the dictation of a visitor whose voice he had heard, whereas, in truth, he had been simply recording the innermost thoughts — or shall we say knowledge — of his own divine “Ego,” a prophetic, because all-knowing Spirit. The “voice” of the latter was simply the translation by the physical memory, at the instant of awakening, of the mental knowledge concerning the life of the mortal man reflected on the lower by the *Higher* consciousness. All the other details recorded by the memory are as amenable to a natural explanation.

Thus, the stranger clothed in the raiments of a poor little tradesman or labourer, who was speaking to him *outside of himself*, belongs, as well as the “voice,” to that class of well-known phenomena familiar to us as the *association of ideas* and *remiscences* in our dreams. The pictures and scenes we see in sleep, the events we live through for hours, days, sometimes for years in our dreams, all this takes less time, in reality, than is occupied by a flash of lightning during the instant of awakening

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and the return to full consciousness. Of such instances of the power and rapidity of fancy physiology gives numerous examples. We rebel against the materialistic deductions of modern science, but no one can controvert its facts, patiently and carefully recorded throughout long years of experiments and observations by its specialists, and these support our argument. General Yermolov had passed several days previously holding an inquest in a small town, in which official business he had probably examined dozens of men of the poorer classes; and this explains his fancy — vivid as reality itself — suggesting to his imagination the vision of a small tradesman.

Let us turn to the experiences and explanations of a long series of philosophers and Initiates, thoroughly acquainted with the mysteries of the *Inner Self*, before we father upon “departed spirits” actions, motives for which could never be explained upon any reasonable grounds.

