

*Amazing stories, discounted by
the scientist from conceit, by the
religious bigot from ignorance*



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If anyone of us nowadays ventures to relate some weird experience or seemingly incomprehensible phenomenon, two classes of objectors try to stop his mouth with the same gag. The scientist cries:

I have unravelled all Nature's skein, and the thing is impossible; this is no age for miracles!

The Hindu bigot says:

This is the Kali-Yuga, the spiritual night-time of humanity; miracles are no longer possible.

Thus the one from conceit, the other from ignorance reaches the same conclusion, *viz.*, that nothing that smacks of the supernatural is possible in these latter days. The Hindu, however, believes that miracles did once occur, while the scientist does not. As for the bigoted Christians, this is not a Kali-Yuga, but — if one might judge by what they say — a golden era of light, in which the splendour of the Gospel is illuminating humanity and pushing it onward towards greater intellectual triumphs. And as they base all their faith upon miracles, they pretend that miracles are being wrought now by God and the Virgin — principally the latter — just as in ancient times. Our own views are well known — we do not believe a “miracle” ever did occur or ever will; we do believe [93] that strange phenomena, falsely styled miraculous, always did occur, are occurring now, and will to the end of time; that these are natural; and that when this fact filters into the consciousness of materialistic sceptics, science will go at leaps and bounds towards that ultimate *Truth* she has so long been groping after. It is a wearisome and disheartening experience to tell anyone about the phenomena of the less familiar side of nature. The smile of incredulity is too often followed by the insulting challenge of one's veracity or the attempted impugment¹ of one's character. An hundred impossible theories will be broached to escape accepting the only right one. Your brain must have been over-excited, your nerves are hallucinated, a “glamour” has been cast over you. If the phenomenon has left behind it positive, tangible, undeniable proof, then comes the sceptic's last resource — *confederacy*, involving an amount of expenditure, time, and trouble totally incommensurate with the result to be hoped for, and despite the absence of the least possible evil motive.

If we lay down the proposition that everything is the result of combined force and matter, science will approve; but when we move on and say that we have seen phenomena and account for them under this very law, this presumptuous science having never seen your phenomenon denies both your premise and conclusion, and falls to calling you harsh names. So it all comes back to the question of personal credibility as a witness, and the man of science until some happy accident forces the new fact upon his attention, is like the child who screams at the veiled figure he takes for

¹ [Implication that one is not entirely honest or honourable]

a ghost, but which is only his nurse after all. If we but wait with patience we shall see some day a majority of the professors coming over to the side where Hare, De Morgan, Flammarion, Crookes, Wallace, Zöllner, Weber, Wagner, and Butleroff have ranged themselves, and then though “miracles” will be considered as much an absurdity as now, yet occult phenomena will be duly taken inside the domain of exact science and men will be wiser. These circumscribing barriers are being vigorously assaulted just now at St. Petersburg. A young girl medium is “shocking” all the wiseacres of the University. [94] For years mediumship seemed to be represented in the Russian metropolis but by American, English, and French mediums on flying visits, with great pecuniary pretensions and, except Dr. Slade, the New York medium, with powers already waning. Very naturally the representatives of science found a good pretext to decline. But now all excuses are futile. Not far from Petersburg, in a small hamlet inhabited by three families of German colonists, a few years ago a widow, named Margaret Beetch, took a little girl from the House of Foundlings¹ into her service. The little Pelagueya was liked in the family from the first for her sweet disposition, her hard-working zeal, and her great truthfulness. She found herself exceedingly happy in her new home, and for several years no one ever had a cross word for her. Pelagueya finally became a good-looking lass of seventeen, but her temper never changed. She loved her masters fondly and was beloved in the house. Notwithstanding her good looks and sympathetic person, no village lad ever thought of offering himself as a husband. The young men said she “awed” them. They looked upon her as people look in those regions upon the image of a saint. So at least say the Russian papers and the *Police Gazette* from which we quote the report of the District Police Officer sent to investigate certain facts of *diablerie*.² For this innocent young creature has just become the victim of “the weird doings of some incomprehensible, invisible agency,” says the report.

November 3rd, 1880, accompanied by a farm servant, she descended into the cellar under the house to get some potatoes. Hardly had they opened the heavy door, when they found themselves pelted with the vegetable. Believing some neighbour’s boy must have hidden himself on the wide shelf on which the potatoes were heaped, Pelagueya, placing the basket upon her head laughingly remarked, “Whoever you are, fill it with potatoes and so help me!” In an instant the basket was filled to the brim. Then the other girl tried the same, but the potatoes remained motionless. Climbing upon the shelf, to their amazement the girls found no one there. Having notified the widow Beetch of the strange occurrence, the latter went herself, and unlocking the cellar which had [95] been securely locked by the two maids on leaving, found no one concealed in it. This event was but the precursor of a series of others. During a period of three weeks they succeeded each other with such a rapidity that if we were to translate the entire official Report it might fill this whole issue of *The Theosophist*. We will cite but a few.

From the moment she left the cellar the invisible “power” which had filled her basket with potatoes, began to assert its presence incessantly, and in the most varied ways.

¹ [abandoned children]

² [witchcraft connected with devils]

Does Pelagueya Nikolaeff prepare to lay wood in the oven — the billets¹ rise in the air and like living things jump upon the fireplace; hardly does she apply a match to them when they blaze already as if fanned by an invisible hand. When she approaches the well, the water begins rising, and soon overflowing the sides of the cistern runs in torrents to her feet; does she happen to pass near a bucket of water — the same thing happens. Hardly does the girl stretch out her hand to reach from the shelf some needed piece of crockery, than the whole of the earthenware, cups, tureens, and plates, as if snatched from their places by a whirlwind, begin to jump and tremble, and then fall with a crash at her feet. No sooner does an invalid neighbour place herself for a moment's rest on the girl's bed than the heavy bedstead is seen levitating towards the very ceiling, then turns upside down and tosses out the impertinent intruder; after which it quietly resumes its former position. One day Pelagueya having gone to the shed to do her usual evening work of feeding the cattle, and after performing her duty was preparing to leave it with two other servants, when the most extraordinary scene took place. All the cows and pigs seemed to become suddenly possessed. The former, frightening the whole village with the most infuriated bellowing, tried to climb up the mangers, while the latter knocked their heads against the walls, running round as if pursued by some wild animal. Pitchforks, shovels, benches and feeding trough, snatching away from their places, pursued the terrified girls, who escaped within an inch of their lives by violently shutting and locking [96] the door of the stables. But, as soon as this was done every noise ceased inside as if by magic.

All such phenomena took place not in darkness or during night, but in the daytime, and in the full view of the inhabitants of the little hamlet; moreover, they were always preceded by an extraordinary noise, as if of a howling wind, a cracking in the walls, and raps in the window frames and glass. A real panic got hold of the household and the inhabitants of the hamlet, which went on increasing at every new manifestation. A priest was called, of course — as though priests knew anything of magnetism! — but with no good results: a couple of pots danced a jig on the shelf, an oven fork went stamping and jumping on the floor, and a heavy sewing machine followed suit. The news about the young witch and her struggle with the invisible imps ran round the whole district. Men and women from neighbouring villages flocked to see the marvels. The same phenomena, often intensified, took place in their presence. Once when a crowd of men upon entering, placed their caps upon the table, every one of these jumped from it to the floor, and a heavy leather glove, circling round struck its owner a pretty sound thump on his face and rejoined the fallen caps. Finally, notwithstanding the real affection the widow Beetch felt for the poor orphan, towards the beginning of December, Pelagueya and her boxes were placed upon a cart, and after many a tear and warm expression of regret, she was sent off to the Superintendent of the Foundling Hospital — the Institution in which she was brought up. This gentleman returning with the girl on the following day, was made a witness to the pranks of the same force, and calling in the Police, after a careful inquest had a *procès verbal*² signed by the authorities, and departed.

¹ [chunky pieces of wood]

² [official written record]

This case having been narrated to a Spiritist, a rich nobleman residing at St. Petersburg, the latter betook himself immediately after the young girl and carried her away with him to town.

The above officially noted facts are being reprinted in every Russian daily organ of note. The prologue finished, [97] we are put in a position to follow the subsequent development of the power in this wonderful medium, as we find them commented upon in all the serious and arch-official papers of the metropolis.

A new star on the horizon of Spiritism has suddenly appeared at St. Petersburg — one Mlle. Pelagueya,

thus speaketh an editorial in the *Novoye Vremya*, January 1st, 1881.

The manifestations which have taken place in her presence are so extraordinary and powerful that more than one devout Spiritualist seems to have been *upset* by them — literally and by the agency of a heavy table. . . . But the spiritual victims do not seem to have felt in the least annoyed by such *striking* proofs. On the contrary, hardly had they picked themselves up from the floor (one of them before being able to resume his perpendicular position had to crawl out from beneath a sofa whither he had been launched by a heavy table) that, forgetting their bruises, they proceeded to embrace each other in rapturous joy, and with eyes overflowing with tears, congratulate each other upon this new manifestation of the mysterious force.

In the *St. Petersburg Gazette*, a merry reporter gives the following details:

Miss Pelagueya is a young girl of about nineteen, the daughter of poor but dishonest parents (who had thrust her in the Foundling Hospital, as given above), not very pretty, but with a sympathetic face, very uneducated but intelligent, small in stature but kind at heart, well-proportioned — but nervous. Miss Pelagueya has suddenly manifested most wonderful mediumistic faculties. She is a “first-class Spiritistic Star” as they call her. And, indeed, the young lady seems to have concentrated in her extremities a phenomenal abundance of magnetic aura; thanks to which, she communicates instantaneously to the objects surrounding her hitherto unheard and unseen phenomenal motions. About five days ago, at a *séance* at which were present the most noted Spiritualists and mediums of the St. Petersburg *grand monde*,¹ occurred the following. Having placed themselves with Pelagueya around a table, they (the Spiritists) had barely time to sit down, when each of them received what seemed an electric shock. Suddenly, the table violently [98] upset chairs and all, scattering the enthusiastic company to quite a respectable distance. The medium found herself on the floor with the rest, and her chair began to perform a series of such wonderful aerial jumps that the terrified Spiritists had to take to their heels and left the room in a hurry.

¹ [We seriously doubt whether there ever will be more than there are now believers in Spiritualism among the middle and lower classes of Russia. These are too sincerely devout, and believe too fervently in the devil to have any faith in “spirits.” — *H.P. Blavatsky.*]

Most opportunely, while the above case is under consideration, there comes from America the account of a lad whose system appears to be also abnormally charged with vital magnetism. The report, which is from the *Catholic Mirror*, says that the boy is the son of a Mr. and Mrs. John C. Collins, of St. Paul, in the State of Minnesota. His age is ten years and it is only recently that the magnetic condition has developed itself — a curious circumstance to be noted. Intellectually he is bright, his health is perfect, and he enters with zest into all boyish sports. His *left* hand has become

. . . a wonderfully strong magnet. Metal articles of light weight attach themselves to his hand so that considerable force is required to remove them. Knives, pins, needles, buttons, *etc.*, enough to cover his hand, will thus attach themselves so firmly that they cannot be shaken off. Still more, the attraction is so strong that a common coalscuttle can be lifted by it, and heavier implements have been lifted by stronger persons taking hold of his arm. With heavy articles, however, the boy complains of sharp pains darting along his arm. In a lesser degree his left arm and the whole left side of his body exerts the same power, but it is not at all manifest on his right side.

The only man who has thrown any great light upon the natural and abnormal magnetic conditions of the human body is the late Baron von Reichenbach of Vienna, a renowned chemist and the discoverer of a new force which he called *Odylic*. His experiments lasted more than five years, and neither expense, time nor trouble were grudged to make them conclusive. Physiologists had long observed, especially among hospital patients, that a large proportion of human beings can sensibly feel a peculiar influence, or aura, proceeding from the magnet when downward passes are made along their persons but without touching them. And it was also observed that in such diseases as St. Vitus' dance (*chorea*),¹ various forms of paralysis, hysteria, *etc.*, the patients showed this sensitiveness in a peculiar degree. [99] But though the great Berzelius² and other authorities in science had urged that men of science should investigate it, yet this most important field of research had been left almost untrodden until Baron von Reichenbach undertook his great task. His discoveries were so important that they can only be fully appreciated by a careful reading of his book, *Researches on Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization, and Chemical Attraction, in their Relations to the Vital Force*: — unfortunately out of print, but of which copies may be occasionally procured in London, second hand.³

For the immediate purpose in view, it need only be said that he proves that the body of man is filled with an aura, “dynamide,” “fluid,” vapour, influence, or whatever we may choose to call it; that it is alike in both sexes; that it is specially given off at the head, hands, and feet; that, like the aura from the magnet, it is polar; that the whole left side is positive, and imparts a sensation of warmth to a sensitive to whom we may apply our left hand, while the whole right side of the body is negative, and imparts a feeling of coolness. In some individuals this vital magnetic (or, as he calls it, Odylic) force is intensely strong. Thus, we may fearlessly consider and believe any

¹ [Sydenham's chorea]

² [Baron Jöns Jacob Berzelius, 1779–1848, Swedish chemist, considered along with Robert Boyle, John Dalton, and Antoine Lavoisier, to be one of the founders of modern chemistry.]

³ [See reference on last page.]

phenomenal case such as the two above-quoted without fear of outstepping the limits of exact science, or of being open to the charge of superstition or credulity. It must at the same time be noted that Baron von Reichenbach did not find one patient whose aura either deflected a suspended magnetic needle, or attracted iron objects like lodestone. His researches, therefore, do not cover the whole ground; and of this he was himself fully aware. Persons magnetically surcharged, like the Russian girl and the American boy, are now and then encountered, and among the class of mediums there have been a few famous ones. Thus, the medium Slade's finger, when passed either way over a compass, will attract the needle after it to any extent. The experiment was tried by Professors Zöllner¹ and W. Weber (Professor of Physics, founder of the doctrine of Vibration of Forces) at Leipzig.² Professor Weber

. . . placed on the [100] table a compass, enclosed in glass, the needle of which we could all observe very distinctly by the bright candlelight, while we had our hands joined with those of Slade,

which were over a foot distant from the compass. So great was the magnetic aura discharging from Slade's hands, however, that

. . . after about five minutes the needle began to swing violently in arcs of from 40° to 60° till at length it several times turned completely round.

At a subsequent trial, Professor Weber succeeded in having a common knitting needle, tested with the compass just before the experiment and found wholly unmagnetized, converted into a permanent magnet.

Slade laid this needle upon a slate, held the latter under the table . . . and in about four minutes, when the slate with the knitting needle was laid again upon the table, the needle was so strongly magnetized at one end (and *only* at one end) that iron shavings and sewing needles stuck to this end; the needle of the compass could be easily drawn round in a circle. The originated pole was a south pole, inasmuch as the north pole of the (compass) needle was attracted, the south pole repelled.³

Baron von Reichenbach's first branch of inquiry was that of the effect of the magnet upon animal nerve; after which he proceeded to observe the effect upon the latter of a similar aura or power found by him to exist in crystals. Not to enter into details — all of which, however, should be read by everyone pretending to investigate Aryan science — his conclusion he sums up as follows:

. . . *with the magnetic force, as we are acquainted with it in the lodestone and the magnetic needle, that force ["Odyle" — the new force he discovered] is associated, with which, in crystals, we have become acquainted.*

Hence:

. . . *the force of the magnet is not, as has been hitherto taken for granted, one single force, but consists of two, since, to that long known, a new, hitherto un-*

¹ [Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner, 1834–1882, German astrophysicist who studied optical illusions, and an early psychical investigator.]

² [Wilhelm Eduard Weber, 1804–1891, German physicist who, together with Carl Friedrich Gauss, invented the first electromagnetic telegraph.]

³ *Transcendental Physics*, p. 47

*known, and decidedly distinct one, must be added, the force, namely, which resides in crystals.*¹

One of his patients was a Mlle. Nowotny, and her sensitiveness to the auras of the magnet and crystal was phenomenally acute. When a magnet was held near her hand it was irresistibly attracted to follow the magnet wherever the Baron moved it. The effect upon her hand

. . . was the same as if someone had seized her hand, and by means of this drawn or bent her body towards her feet.

(She was lying in bed, sick, and the magnet was moved in that direction.) When approached close to her hand,

. . . the hand adhered so firmly to it, that when the magnet was raised, or moved sideways, backwards, or in any direction whatever, *her hands stuck to it, as if attached in the way in which a piece of iron would have been.*

This, we see, is the exact reverse of the phenomenon in the American boy Collins' case, for, instead of his hand being attracted to anything, iron objects, light and heavy, seem attracted irresistibly to his hand, and *only his left hand*. Reichenbach naturally thought of testing Mlle. Nowotny's magnetic condition. He says:

To try this, I took filings of iron, and brought her finger over them. *Not the smallest particle adhered to the finger*, even when it had just been in contact with the magnet . . . A magnetic needle finely suspended, to the poles of which I caused her to approach her finger alternately, and in different positions, did not exhibit the slightest tendency to deviation or oscillation.

Did space permit, this most interesting analysis of the accumulated facts respecting the occasional abnormal magnetic surcharge of human beings might be greatly prolonged without fatiguing the intelligent reader. But we may at once say that since von Reichenbach proves magnetism to be a compound instead of a simple force, and that every human being is charged with one of these forces, Odyle; and since the Slade experiments, and the phenomena of Russia and St. Paul, show that the human body does also at times discharge the true magnetic aura, such as is found in the lodestone; therefore the explanation is that in these latter abnormal cases the individual has simply evolved an excess of the one instead of the other of the forces which together form what is commonly known as magnetism. *There is, therefore, nothing whatever of supernatural in the cases.* Why this happens is, we conceive, quite [102] capable of explanation, but as this would take us too far afield in the less commonly known region of occult science it had better be passed over for the present.



¹ Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Reichenbach, *Physikalisch-physiologische Untersuchungen: über die Dynamide des Magnetismus, der Elektrizität, der Wärme, des Lichtes, der Kristallisation, des Chemismus in ihren Beziehungen zur Lebenskraft*. Braunschweig, 1850, 2 vols. Translated and edited "at the desire of the author," by Dr. William Gregory of Edinburgh, as *Researches on Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization, and Chemical Attraction in their Relation to the Vital Force*. London & Edinburgh, 1850; p. 25 [p. 46, in 2nd ed.]