

Odd Way to Spot a Thief

MESMERIZING A MAN AND LETTING HIM
DO DETECTIVE WORK

Some Experiences with a Mysterious Séance
—Curing Grave Diseases and Befogging
Men's Minds with Magnetic Force.

The narrative here presented is familiar to many who have heard from the lips of the gentleman who asserts that he played the most conspicuous part in it. He is a man more than sixty years of age, active in business, and of unblemished reputation wherever he is known.

“It was in 1847 that my attention was first attracted to the subject of animal magnetism, by the appearance in the western town in which I then lived of a man named Keely, who advertised to give public exhibitions. His method was to select ten or fifteen persons, males and females, from the audience, seat them in a half circle on the stage and placing a piece of coin or metal in the palm of the hand of each, request them to look steadily at it. While their attention was thus concentrated he made a few passes over each one, seeming to obtain control over more or less of the group, causing them to aid him in what is now the familiar performance of a mesmerist. Four of us young fellows waited on Prof. Keely and requested him to teach us his tricks for our own amusement. He replied that he knew very little of this strange power; he only knew that some persons possess a larger amount of personal magnetism than others, and, where one had a super abundance and another very little, the one with the larger supply, after gaining the attention, often could control the mind and will of the other. He showed us how he magnetized his subjects, selecting these of negative passive temperament, and explained that, after having magnetized them once or twice, he had no difficulty in gaining entire control by simply looking at them.

“I boarded at the chief hotel in our town of about 3,000 inhabitants. Having a large room in so convenient a locality, it was, after business hours, the rendezvous of three or four young men with whom I was most intimate. We first selected two of Prof. Keely's old subjects, and after experimenting on them with entire success, added others, and soon gave exhibitions of our own, which were well patronized by our townspeople. In our experiments it soon became apparent that I possessed a larger amount of this mysterious magnetic power than any of the others. It continually presented new phases and opened up channels for new developments. We gave circus performances, in which after magnetizing fifteen or twenty persons, the name of an animal was given to each subject. We would appoint also a ring master and clown. Those personating animals naturally antagonistic to each other took on all the natural brute attributes and would fight savagely unless separated. The clown, who might be the dullest and most stupid of all, would set the audience into roars of laughter by his witticisms, and set the part to perfection. We were sitting on the long plaza of the hotel one afternoon, when a peddler's wagon rolled up with a grand flourish. A man jumped down, and, coming up to our group with a box of cigars, offered them for sale. I saw at a glance that he was of a temperament suited for magnetic experiments,

and catching his attention for a moment, directed him to divide up the box between us all. This he did, and asking the price, which was five dollars, I placed a penny in his hand, telling him it was a five-dollar gold piece. He looked critically at it for a moment, then seemed satisfied, dropped it into his vest pocket, and went on into the barroom, offering his wares for sale. A little while afterward he came to me with an amused smile on his face and said, 'You made a mistake in paying me for that box of cigars. You gave me a penny instead of a five-dollar gold piece, as you thought.' Producing the penny he laid it conspicuously on the palm of his hand. I looked up at him, replying that it was certainly a five-dollar gold piece. He scanned it closely again with the usual half-dazed look characteristic of the magnetized condition, felt in his pockets doubtfully, and, muttering that he thought it was a penny, again departed on his rounds, satisfied that he had received full payment. After the laugh had subsided I called him back and paid for the cigars.

"Hitherto we had looked upon it simply as a source of amusement. Some one suggested that perhaps it might be utilized for deadening the sensibilities and removing or relieving pain. My first experiment in that line was upon the daughter of one of the leading citizen in the place. I had for years been intimate at the house, and had known the child, a girl of 13, ever since she was born. Two large tushes had grown out on her upper jaw, disfiguring her face. It was decided to have them removed. These were the days before anesthetics were in common use, and the operation had been deferred too long already in dread of pain and accident. I accompanied the girl, with other members of the family, to their dentist, an old-fashioned conservative, who shook his head doubtfully at my assurance in asserting to the child that she would feel no pain. Seating her in the operating chair, he produced his instruments, and disapprovingly watched my mode of procedure. I stroked her face lightly, looked into her eyes, which were trustingly raised to mine, told her that she would feel no pain, and motioned the doctor to proceed. He cut around the gums, extracting the two teeth without a muscle of her face moving or the slightest indication of suffering being apparent. She said she did not feel the operation, though perfectly conscious all the time. A few days afterward I was requested to examine into the case of one of the richest men in the town, whose disease was so peculiar that it had baffled the skill of every physician consulted. He called at my room. Two or three of us were, as usual, together. He seemed embarrassed and nervous, said his sisters had begged him to call, he hardly knew why; that at about 4 o'clock each afternoon he was seized with a terrible pain in the side of his head, which forced him to leave his bank and go home. As he spoke I saw that he was suffering intensely. I went up to him, rested my hand a moment on his head, drew it slowly down until I reached his knee. 'There,' said I, 'is the seat of your disease. You are mistaken about the pain being in your head; it is in your knee. 'Oh, no!' said he, emphatically. 'I never had any trouble with my knee. It is all in my head.' He rose as he spoke and turned toward the door, but at the first step he limped painfully, stooped, rubbed his knee, and then putting his hand to his head with a bewildered look exclaimed that the pain had certainly left his head and gone to his knee. I told him to come in every day or two, and let me see how his case was progressing. He walked away apparently with great difficulty. He returned next day at the same hour with the pain in his head. I again convinced him that the trouble was in the knee, and after a few more visits he was entirely cured. This was effected, as I believe, by imparting a more healthful magnetism to his system, equalizing circulation and giving rest to his overtaxed brain.

"Not long afterward I heard some of the women at the hotel talking of poor Mrs. Malony and her dreadful sufferings. I learned that Mrs. Malony was afflicted with a very painful felon; had been

unable to sleep for a week or more; was worn out with exhaustion and suffering, and, being an old woman, it was feared she would die of prostration. I requested my landlady to take me to see her; but, being a very pious woman, and having in common with many others of the church people, a growing suspicion that this unexplained power of mine must be an emanation from the evil one, she refused at first, but, after consulting with her minister, it was decided that in such an extreme case it was perhaps admissible to use any agency. Fat, red, dreadfully dirt, worn out with pain and lack of sleep, with one hand and arm rolled in poultices, she was walking up and down the floor in agony, supported by a sympathizing friend on either side, while a half dozen old crones sat around groaning responsively. Thus I found Mrs. Malony. I told her I could cure her, and, removing the bandages, examined the hand and finger, swollen to immense proportions. She allowed me to gently stroke her arm, but upon my touching the hand she would fearfully draw it away, declaring that if I touched the finger she knew she would die. As I lightly drew my hand down her arm, suddenly, before she was aware of my intention, I grasped the afflicted finger, and, pressing it with all my strength, said: 'You see now that your finger is not even sore. There is nothing the matter with it. You are nervous, worn out. It does not hurt, does it?' 'Divil a bit,' said she, looking with stupid amazement at the finger I had pressed so hard that I left deep indentations in the swollen hand. 'Now,' said I, turning to my landlady, 'have her lie down at once, leave her hand uncovered, send her friends away, and she will sleep twenty-four hours. If she awakens send for me.' They all drew away from me half fearfully as I passed out. I was not sent for, and she had no more pain.

At about this time I began to notice that I was being avoided by many of my old friends among the strict church people and whispers of our employing our supernatural agencies and experimenting in the black art were abroad. More than one old acquaintance whom I saw approaching turned a convenient corner before we met. I began to learn how difficult it was to stem the superstitious current.

"One evening my friend Wells—my principal assistant and myself were sitting in my room. A tap came at the door and there entered a man about fifty years old. He said he had heard about our having a strange power over the minds and senses of many persons, and had called to ask our assistance in detecting a thief. He was the owner of a line of packet boats running between Cincinnati and Toledo on the canal which passed through our town. One of his captains on his return trip had spent the night at a tavern on the opposite side of the canal much frequented by boatmen, had slept with a roll of money under his pillow, had forgotten it and left without removing it from his bed the next morning, had returned for it within an hour, but it was gone, and nothing had been seen or heard of it at the hotel. Such crimes were rare in these days, and detectives were not at hand on all occasions as now. This would be a novel experiment, and at least prove interesting. Hitherto the minds of our subjects had simply followed ours. Here was the opportunity of ascertaining if the mind of the subject could lead.

"It had been just a week since the theft was committed, which put us at great disadvantage in point of time. I had often soon the old tavern, but had never entered it. I requested the packet owner, Mr. Miller, to give me a description of the interior and of the room the captain occupied, which was situated, he said, at the extreme end of the long hall, into which all the bedrooms opened on the second floor, and close to the stairs leading to the third floor. A person passing up or down must of necessity pass this door.

“We pledged ourselves to strict secrecy. Only Mr. Miller, my friend Wells, my subject and myself were to be present at our seances. I sent for a man of the name of Reeves, an honest, good-natured countryman, heavy and dull almost to stupidity, but one of our best subjects. Of course he know nothing about the robbery, and it was not known to a dozen persons in the place. We subdued the light in the room, drew a table up near the window, seated my friend Wells at one end with writing materials to take notes, the subject at the other, and Mr. Miller at the locked door to prevent intrusion. I bandaged my subject’s eyes tightly, and taking one of his hands in mine, I made a few passes before his bandaged eyes with my free hand, and requested him to go with me mentally wherever I went. I said to him that it was now 6 o’clock Thursday morning (giving the date of the morning of the theft) and said we were now going to Burns tavern. Immediately he seemed to conceive the idea that he was leading me. We passed mentally out of my room into the hall—I keeping my mind closely up on the track we must travel—down the stairs, through the passage, and into the street. In order to reach the bridge across the canal we must turn to the right, go two squares further on cross the bridge, turn again to the right, and one block away reach the tavern. I observed with alarm for my experiment that as we passed mentally into the street he said we are now turning to the left when he should have said to the *right*; but before I could correct him he spoke of seeing old Dr. Powell at his gate as we passed and I know his residence stood at the right of my hotel. He bade the doctor good morning as we passed by.

“ ‘Now we are at a grocery,’ said he.

“ ‘Whose?’ I asked.

“ ‘I don’t know,’ he replied.

“ ‘Can you not read the sign?’

“ ‘I will go in and see,’ said he. Then raising his head, as if looking at some object, he said, slowly, as if spelling it out: ‘John Green, flour, feed and groceries.’

“I knew the grocery and saw he was on the right track. He spoke to several persons I knew as we passed on; and as we neared the bridge said: ‘Here comes John Bates, he is speaking to you; why don’t you answer him?’ ‘Never mind’ said I, controlling my surprise. ‘Go on.’ John Bates had been dead six months. Nothing further occurred until we reached the tavern, which he insisted stood on the left of the bridge. When we had reached the long hall on the second floor I said: ‘Now stand here and describe the people as they come out of their rooms.’

Presently he said: ‘There is one comin’ out of that door’ ‘What is the number of the room?’ I asked. ‘I will go in and see.’ he replied. Again I observed the curious fact that, in order to read a sign or a number, he had to look at it from the other side. In a moment he said: ‘It is No. 12.’ He described that man and, others, but their descriptions did not tally with that of the captain, whose personal appearance had been minutely described to me. ‘Here comes another man,’ said he, ‘from that room down to the end of the hall, a big man with a red face. He left his door open. Guess he ain’t comin’ back.’ After a moment he continued: ‘There’s another comin’ down them

other stairs; he's a natty lookin' fellow; light skin, blue eyes, light brown hair, younger'n any of the rest. He's lookin' inter that room that big feller come out of, right here by the stairs. Why, he looks as if he'd seen somethin'. Now he's goin' in. Now he's comin' out agin, puttin' somethin' in his pocket—looks kinder scared like.'

"I directed him to keep his eye on this man, and follow him wherever he went. We followed him down the stairs and into the street. 'Here comes another feller. He's a speakin' to him. He looks a awful lot like him, only older. They are whisperin' together. He's goin' with him. Now we are goin' by the Methodist meetin' house. There's Judge Clark comin'. Why didn't you speak to him?' 'Go on. Go on. You will lose sight of those men,' said I. Judge Clark, whom every one had known and loved, had been dead three years. 'They are goin' inter that old lumber yard. They are doin' somethin' there in that corner. As sure's you live they're a buryin' that little yellin' bundle tied with a pink string. He got that outer that feller's room this mornin'. He's a tellin' how he seen it stickin' out under his pillar when he went by the door.' My subject had now been under influence as long as I thought it safe to keep him here for that day. So I placed the notes my friend had made in the drawer, unbandaged his eyes, and brought him back to his normal condition by a quick upward motion of my hand. As he opened his eyes the dazed, troubled expression seen in the eyes of a somnambulist on first regaining consciousness came into them for a second, but he was utterly unconscious of anything which had occurred, supposing it to have been one of our usual experiments, and was too dull and indifferent even to ask.

"At the same hour the next day we again met at my room, according to appointment, and took the same positions. Blindfolding my subject, I told him to go back and take up the clue. He soon found the man again. I told him that he must now condense time, counting every six hours as one, in order to catch up in the week. He readily comprehended, although in his normal condition it would have taken him a week to have understood me, and immediately passed over six hours. 'Now, ' said he, 'it is night, and he is in bed. He feels bad, and can't sleep, turnin' and tossin' and gettin' up every few minutes, wishin' it was mornin'.' Jumping over another six hours he described his getting up, his hurried breakfast, his worried and anxious manner, his departure from the tavern, his again meeting his brother, who seemed to be waiting for him. 'They are goin' down that street,' said he. 'Now they're climbin' up them steps and goin' inter that door. Stand back,' said he, 'an' let me open the door. Come in. This is a carpenter shop They're down by that old chest. They hid it in the lumber yard once. Now they're hidin' it here, an' whisperin' together. The young one's agoin' out.' As we followed he again startled me by calling my attention to meeting and being spoken to by a friend long since dead! We had a description of another anxious restless night, and another day—my subject always leading me and we following the clue. After dismissing our somnambulist my friend and myself as before went over every rod of the ground we had just been traveling mentally and visited the carpenter shop, where the subject said the money was hidden. We then understood why he requested me to stand back while he opened the door. We found that the stairs, which he climbed on the outside, led up to a small platform. The door opened outward, and a person entering must step aside to allow it room to swing.

"At our third sitting we had brought the time down to within two days of our present date. This time, in following our man around, he came across the bridge and step by step we followed him

to the hotel, 'Now he's goin' inter the stage office,' said he. 'He's givin' Mr. Walton, the stage agent, a paper. It looks like a bill. Mr. Walton is givin' him some money an' tells him to sign a paper.' 'Read the name he signs,' said I. 'I can't,' said he, 'Mr. Walton has folded it up and put it in the left-hand corner of his desk. There's a bundle of other papers in their just like it in there.' Without disturbing him in his comments I picket up a scrap of paper and penciled a note to Mr. Walton requesting him to send me a package of receipts in the right hand corner of his desk. Mr. Miller took it down and directly returned with the package, and some twenty or more, which I did not unfold, but spread around on the table within roach of our somnambulist's hand, which, as I have before said he never removed from the table. He had never been entirely unconscious of what he had done, but kept up his running comments, following the man back across the canal and to various places when all at once he moved his hand toward the papers and exclaimed, "Why here's that paper now; the very one he gave Mr. Walton." Without hesitating a second he picked up one of the folded papers, and without unfolding it, also without even turning his bandaged eye toward it, he read:

Received from Samuel Walton, June, 1847, one dollar and fifty cents in full of all accounts.

JAMES R. FREEMAN.

Here was the name of our man at last! We knew him by sight, Wells and I, and that he had a brother, a carpenter. They were considered honest and respectable. We were getting the facts down to a fine point, but the difficulty would be in the proof. How could a man be convicted on the testimony of a somnambulist? We were all greatly excited except our subject who unconscious of anything extraordinary having occurred took up his account precisely where he broke off to read the receipt. Condensing another six hours it was evening. We followed Freeman into a livery stable where his brother George joined him, and after a protracted conversation with the proprietor, a man of the name of Sykes, he said Freeman handed Sykes the parcel, and the brothers went away as if greatly relieved. Instead of following them he followed Sykes back into a remote part of the stable, where he described him as slipping back the string on the package and taking out a bill. 'It is money,' said he, 'and that other chap stole it and give it to this un, an' now he's took one of them bills out and then tied it up so no one would know it had been opened.' Right here we were interrupted by a knock at the door which our subject did not observe. Mr. Miller stepped out, but almost immediately returned with a radiant face and, without speaking held up a little yellow parcel tied with a pink string, which though, never having seen it, I recognized at a glance as the lost package of money. Our subject followed the livery stable man to Burns tavern. Up the stairs he took us again, through the hall to the foot of the second flight where, nearly opposite the same room from which the money was taken, he discovered a basket of clean linen with a pile of towels on the top 'Why he's a stickin' that package down under the towels. Now he's a hurryin' off.' Suddenly he exclaimed. 'The money is here. Right over there. That man has got it in his pocket. All but one bill. The livery man's got that.'

"We dismissed our subject and rested our case. Mr. Miller opened the package which had been sent over to him by the landlord of the Burns hotel with a message that it had been found in a basket of linen, counted the money, which was all in one-hundred-dollar bills, and found one bill missing. Eleven hundred dollars were returned put of the original twelve hundred which the package had contained. Later my friend Wells and myself sauntered into the barroom of the

Burns House. A good many men were standing about, and the one subject of discussion was the finding of the money. By this time everybody knew that the money had been lost and quite as mysteriously found, it was said, by a chambermaid among the linen. All sorts of surmises and suspicions were floating about. Many looked askance at us as we drew near and whispered together, for somehow it had leaked out that Mr. Miller had been closeted a great deal with us. An uneasy feeling that some accusations might be made was evident. Soon after Mr. Miller came up to the bar and, while being congratulated on all sides smilingly said that he never felt uneasy. He knew all the time that it would be returned, 'but' said he, 'I am \$100 short; I don't worry any about that.' Seating himself and elevating his legs comfortably to the back of a chair opposite, he said: 'That \$100 is all right,' biting off the end of a cigar and lighting it. 'I'll get it in a few days.' Everybody looked curiously at his neighbor, but no one thought best to ask for any explanation. Several went away soon afterward. As we passed out the elder of the Freeman brothers was just ahead of us. The next day Mr. Miller left on one of his boats for home, thirty miles distant. Two weeks later he called at my room again and said he had received the other one hundred dollar bill! Two young men drove up to his door one day the previous week, he said, strangers to him, and asked if he was Mr. Miller. They declined to enter the house, said they were from the town where his money was lost. Had heard that he had intimated that they were in some way connected with the loss of the money—or at least with the missing one hundred dollar bill. He replied that he had accused no one. One of them remarked that it was hard to rest under a suspicion and rather than have their names connected with it they would prefer to make good the deficiency at the same time handing Mr. Miller a one hundred dollar bill. He took it, bade them good day and they drove away.

“How far the superstitious fears of the guilty parties influenced them in returning the money we never knew, but the disagreeable notoriety we had gained and a fear that it might affect our business interests, made us decide to discontinue all further experiments. I also saw that it was leading into a realm at that time new and unexplored. The startling recognition on the part of the clairvoyant of those long dead filled me with terror.

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