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SPIRITUALISM

I met the devil only once, and that was not by appointment. This is the story. Take it or leave it.

I was stationed in a Parish thirty years ago and one day I met a lady engaged in social work, and a point of religion came up which I explained as well as I could in casual conversation, and forthwith forgot about it. Weeks later I had a letter from her on another angle of the same problem, and I replied at length. It is a hopeless job trying to explain theological questions on two pages of note paper. After some more exchanges I agreed to meet her. She could not come to me, I had to go to her, and it ended up by her asking for further instruction on Catholic belief.

That, of course, is a vague assignment. Anyway, I went to her cottage for six months twice a week, at some personal discomfort to myself. You see, I was a young priest full of zeal and anxious to convert the world. I did my best, but as time went on I began to feel that we were just talking. I decided to bring matters to a head. I said to her, "I have told you enough about the Catholic Faith and now you must make up your mind. Do you want to be a Catholic or not?" She said, "No". "Well, there you are," I said. She replied, "I just like to listen to you talking". I was so flabbergasted that I just could not trust myself to speak. I said to myself, "This woman has kept me talking for six months for nothing just because she liked to hear me talk". There is only one practical thing to do and that is to keep your mouth shut and go home. That I did! Diplomatic relations were at an end.

Months later I received a letter from her asking me about spiritualism. My thought was that I couldn't go on spending my life answering letters to people who are just curious. My reply was short. She had been dealing with spiritualists, mediums, table writing, and so forth, and she was beginning to feel the effect of it on her mind. My reply simply said that if she didn't stop, she would either commit suicide or end up in a psychopathic ward. She was the daughter of a doctor. He was dead and she was the sole owner of a private mental home.

I didn't remember this until my letter had gone and when I did remember it I said to myself, "That is the finish of it". Private mental homes thirty or forty years ago were simply camouflaged prisons for feeble minded people. The minimum of furniture, low quality food, locked doors, and the only relief a bell. If the bell rang too often it was simply cut off.

One evening I got a telephone message asking me to come immediately. I knew what it was. At that time I had the feeblest of all cars, a vintage Morris Cowley. I set out on a late autumn evening and reached her home around 7 p.m. She was a professional woman living with a woman who had a London practice and who, to my knowledge, was just as queer as she was. The country cottage, divided in two, with the usual amenities, was approached by a public path through two fields divided by a stile. There was also a lane approach, but I decided not to risk that because my lights were not too good and it would not be easy to turn around.

So I walked through the fields. I knocked and got no answer. The door was open and I walked in. Her bedroom was second on the left and it was in complete darkness. I found the light and then I saw something that completely astonished me. She was in bed with her arms outside the covers and she looked a picture of death. I sat beside the bed and tried to figure out what had happened.

Here we must go back on history. She had been deeply in love with an officer called Jack in the First World War. He died in the battle of the Somme—the worst holocaust that has ever occurred in the history of England. Forty thousand men died in twenty minutes in an attack on the German entrenched positions. He was one of them. She was dedicated to him and it seemed to me that her whole desire in life was to find him again. Not in this life but in the hereafter. She sought the help of spiritualists, of mediums, of fortune tellers—in fact she tried to find out the eternal mysteries of God and of the hereafter so that she might be united to her lost lover. A very understandable position, but it led her into the land of the spirits and eventually into the land of the devil.

She had been to many spiritualistic meetings. She had asked these charlatans to bring before her the image of her dead lover, his voice, his personality. It was always the same story. It went something like this. Darling, I am unhappy, and never will be happy without you. Our souls are united, and our unity of soul is broken by the earth between us. I will be eternally unhappy, darling, until you can join me.

That was the message that continually cropped up. It cost her much money and great trouble of mind. In the end she bought a ouija board. It is a board on which one can write, on paper or otherwise, but the process is to empty one's mind completely and give over the mind and will to the control of something else, maybe of the subconscious, maybe of some outside influence. Having bought this board she started to practice this emptying of mind and will and of submission to outside influence to guide her in her search. In the

middle of the night she used to submit her emptied mind and will to the control of this influence and always the message was the same. "Darling, I cannot live without you". There was only one conclusion to that plea and it stood out a mile—suicide.

One night she decided this was the only way out. She had been through a session with this devilish writing board and she decided that the only thing to do was to end it all. It came to her after endless scribblings on paper, all of which lay beside the bed, haphazard and sometimes illegible.

She didn't know how to commit suicide but she found in the bathroom an open razor and she decided to cut her throat or her wrists. She was an Anglican and consequently had some residue of religion. She said, "If I am going to die I had better pray to God". She knelt down beside the bed and repeated the "Our Father" and suddenly the control broke, and she was free. She collapsed on the floor and was found there the following morning. She looked like a dead body in from the sea. Then, she remembered my letter—"Either you will commit suicide or end up in a psychopathic ward" and she decided to ring me.

I knew the story of Jack. I knew what she had been up to. I remembered my letter. She indicated by a motion of her hand that I should read the writings on the papers.

I have seen blasphemy. I have read obscenity, but I have never in my life imagined that a human being could be so immersed in blasphemy, in filth, in sex, and in hatred of God as was contained in those writings. I didn't read them all, they were too terrible. I lit a fire in the grate and burned the lot. Those writings frightened me, frightened me because they were not the writings of a human being at all, they were the writings of a human dominated by the spirit of evil, dominated by hatred of God and by the spirit of blasphemy. Having done that I looked at the burning papers and it seemed to me that the devil might jump out of the fireplace, but he didn't.

I said to myself, "What on earth can I do now?" "She is not a Cath-

olic, what can I do?" I found water and salt and I blessed some holy water. I found in my pocket the unattached cross of a rosary beads, and a medal of Our Lady. I found a small safety pin on the dressing table and these I pinned upon her breast. I blessed the room and I blessed her with holy water, then I made her repeat some prayers. Then I sat down to consider what I should do next. I could do nothing. She was asleep. I went quietly out. It was a fine moonlit night, and I started my way down the path through the fields.

About half way down I knew that there was something behind me. I could hear no footsteps, so I said to myself, "You are imagining things". In the end the feeling became so strong that I stopped and turned around to face my back tracks, and there I froze stiff. It was as if I was turned into a pillar of ice. I could feel the cold sweat on the palms of my hands; I could feel it running down my chin and the back of my neck. My mind was paralysed and it seemed that I was pin pointed on a precipice of terrible destruction. I could see nothing. I could feel nothing but the presence of terrible evil, of malignity and of hatred of God. I carried a stick in my hand and I crossed upon the path the sign of the cross. One thinks at such a moment of prayer. I didn't because I couldn't. I had only the strength to make the sign of the cross with the ferrule of my stick, and the only thing I could say was, "Don't come any further because if you do you are fighting the Cross of Christ". Maybe that was a prayer.

It was full moonlight and I saw nothing. I could only feel. I don't know how long I stood there, but I know that things came to a deadlock. Eventually I turned and reached the stile that divided the two fields. It was the simple practical English stile—one step up, wind your leg over the cross bar and one step down the other side. I remember sitting on the cross bar and looking at the track behind me, and saying to whatever it was, "Don't come past here".

Then there rushed to my mind the memory of the baptismal service where the child is annointed with the

sign of the Cross and the devil is forbidden ever to violate it. I don't know how long I sat there, but eventually I wound my other leg over the cross bar and went down the short field to the road. Half way down I said to myself, "I am safe now, I should make a run for it". But I didn't. Some streak of obstinacy in my nature said, "Take your time". Did I have at that moment the strength to hurry? I don't know. It is what I wanted to do. I came to the road and to the old car. I sat in it for a long time. My hands trembled, but the cold was gone and my worst fears were over. I couldn't trust myself to turn the car round although the road was wide enough. so I drove a half mile down the road to the entrance of a brick works.

I reached the friendly lights of a neighbouring town. How glad I was to see them. I needed encouragement and human company. I went to an hotel where I was well-known to the residents lounge. The hall porter was remarkable for never saying a word that was not necessary. Once somebody asked him, "How did you propose to your wife?" He replied, "She did!" He came in with his tray, and looked at me to say, "Are you alright, Sir?" I said, "Yes". I ordered some whisky. Before he brought it the manageress came in to see if the fire was alright. In reality she came in to see if I was alright. She decided that I looked a bit worn but capable of travel and the hall porter brought me the whisky. I asked him to put it on the table because my hands were shaking. Somehow or other I never drank the whisky but drove home and went to bed.

I remember nothing more until I wakened up. There was the doctor and a lay brother. I heard the doctor say, "Well he has no temperature and his pulse is alright and there can be no real injury, but let us have a look". It was then I brushed aside his stethoscope. He said, "What happened to you?" I replied, "I saw the devil". Now, he was a North of Ireland man and I was Southern Irish, and that was enough. "Well, well, well!"

He turned me over a couple of times, then he sent for some hot milk

and into it he put the ends of a bottle of brandy. Along with that he gave me some pills and I settled down to sleep again. I had already slept for forty hours but I went off again into the sleep of the blessed.

About five o'clock the next morning I wakened up. I didn't know what time of day it was, I did not know if it was morning or evening, but I had a terrible hunger.

There was then in our parish a devoted convert from the Salvation Army, and every Sunday she donated a steak and kidney pie with four hard boiled eggs in the four corners of the dish. We were supposed to have it hot on Sunday, cold on Monday, and then make a sort of repast of it to end up. I was so hungry that I went downstairs and found a quarter of the cold steak and kidney pie with the hard boiled egg in the corner. I ate the lot.

The days went by. Then I found out that the devil never forgets, that he doesn't play fair, that he just doesn't observe the rules of the game.

By the time I got rid of that steak and kidney pie I knew that devils are resisted by prayers and fasting, but never by steak and kidney pie.

It is now more than thirty years ago. Brother Franco is dead, the doctor is dead, the hall porter is dead, she is dead and I am nearly dead. May God have mercy on our souls!

There is a lesson in this story. Never invite the devil to meet you half way because he will come a little further. Don't try to peer into the future because God doesn't wish it. Don't try to look beyond the curtains of eternity because God has closed it forever. Don't try to double-cross God by invoking the aid of witches, necromancers, fortune tellers and deluders. Those who practice the arts of spiritualism and witchery are quacks, but there is a small percentage who are really in the control of the devil and who have relations with him. If you meet him you are lost. He who sups with the devil needs a long spoon.

Many of our St. Jude clients wish to thank him for numerous favours received.

OUR BURSES

	<i>Already acknowledged</i>			<i>Increase</i>		
The St. Jude Burse No. 2 ...	£1,432	18	6	now £1,446	18	6
Holy Child of Prague Burse ...	83	5	0	87	5	0
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Burse ...	35	10	0	39	10	0
Our Lady of Lourdes Burse ...	30	10	0	31	10	0
Immaculate Conception B.V.M. Burse	78	10	0	88	10	0
Little Flower Burse ...	41	5	0	43	5	0
Sacred Heart Burse ...	27	0	0	29	0	0
St. Anthony Burse ...	29	5	0	31	5	0
St. Joseph Burse ...	290	0	0	293	0	0
St. Kilian's Burse ...	14	0	0	14	5	0

OUR COMING NOVENAS

THE LITTLE FLOWER	-	-	-	-	Sept. 25th—Oct. 3rd
OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY	-	-	-	-	Sept. 29th—Oct. 7th
SAINT JUDE	-	-	-	-	Oct. 20th—Oct. 28th

Our Lady keep you !

Yours in Carmel

M. E. Lynch O.T.