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TALKS WITH THE DEAD.

(SECOND INSTALMENT.)

Those who are acquainted with the journalistic habits of Mr. W. T. Stead will be well aware that the attack, published in the *Matin*, on his alleged interview with the spirit of the late M. Lefebvre, the aviator who recently met with such a sad death, would not have to wait long for a reply. Accordingly, in last Wednesday's issue of that journal there appeared, with eye-arresting headings, a two-column counter-blast from Mr. Stead, a counter-blast which, I venture to think, is a "corker," as it is said in the *Vulgate*. I hold no brief for the intrepid explorer of the spook-world, but I admire his sturdy enthusiasm. Mr. Stead remarks that he has the greatest respect for all the objections which have been brought forward, and points out that he is not a dogmatist, but an experimentalist, open to reason from whatever source. He certainly scores a magnificent point over M. Lambert in regard to the damaged motor of the aeroplane, and clearly proves that, on this point, the spirit was much better informed than Lefebvre's employer. Why the motor failed has been a mystery ever since the accident, and Mr. Stead assumes that Lefebvre, as the only person who could speak authoritatively, was anxious to inform his friends of what had actually occurred. The spirit, as they say in the ghost-stories, could not "rest."

Concerning M. Lambert's attacks on the good faith of the Julia bureau, and to the unlikelihood of a once-promising civil-engineering pupil describing himself as a "mécancien," in the sense of "machiae-driving," Mr. Stead observes that when spirits pass to the Other Side they are seldom so particular in regard to the exact nature of their earthly callings as they are in this world. The petty conceits of this sphere trouble them no more. Trades and professions are of no further importance. Mr. Stead recalls an occasion when he doubted the authenticity of a message concerning the future of Austria-Hungary, because it was signed simply "Otto von Bismarck," which was not exactly Bismarck's way of doing things when he ruled as prince and chancellor. Mr. Stead's doubts were dissolved when the reply came to him, pat as a bullet on the target: "In the spirit-world I am no more than Otto von Bismarck!"

What a vista of possibilities is opened up for us by this little anecdote of the ingenious Mr. Stead! When enquiries were made about the mundane occupation of Lefebvre's spirit, it said that he was connected with aviation, and had been dead some time. Mr. Stead thought that he was dealing with Montgolfier, or one of the early balloonists, but the spirit in stating that he was a "mécancien" merely made clear the difference between the aeronaut and the aeroplane. One up against M. Lambert!

Touching Lefebvre's ignorance of English, Mr. Stead avers that what the spirit meant to say was that he knew only a few words of English, such as "Yes," "No," "All right," "How are you," etc., but that he could not sustain a conversation, and therefore our esteemed journalist thinks that he was justified in saying "Pas beaucoup." He does not regard this as inconsistent with M. Lambert's statement that Lefebvre did not know English at all, and could not read an ordinary English text. Another "downer" to M. Lambert!

Lefebvre still lives.

Mr. Stead strongly denies that anything in his words could be taken to mean that Lefebvre, when the accident occurred, was rendered helpless by terror. All that the spirit declared to him was that, apart from the swift sensation of falling, it had no knowledge of what had happened until it awoke from this paralysis of the perceptions and saw the broken machine down below. The spirit, of course, was then free from the body. According to this, Mr. Stead assumes that Lefebvre was first stunned by the shock

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of the fall and killed by the blade of the propeller immediately afterwards. It all happened so quickly that there could have been hardly time to feel sensations of any kind, fear or otherwise. Mr. Stead therefore airily dismisses the more categorical objections of M. Lambert and deals with the one which has occurred to most of the French debaters in this remarkable discussion:—"Why did Lefebvre not communicate with his relatives or French friends, instead of opening up negotiations with Julia?" A one-eyed cynic could easily see what opportunities for propaganda this opens up for Mr. Stead.

The first reason was that the sorrow of the relatives, by its very stress, formed a temporary but insurmountable barrier, and this barrier would exist until the mourners had dried their tears and accepted their loss with submission. The second reason is still more powerful. When you wish to telephone to a friend who does not happen to possess the necessary instrument, you telephone to the nearest person who has a telephonic receiver. This, as we say in England, is where Julia "comes in." She runs the only bureau of its kind on this planet, and don't you forget it! She is always there to hitch up sorrowing relatives with the dear departed.

Mr. Stead expresses his regret that the publication of the famous "interview" should have caused pain to those who were mourning Lefebvre, but he does not think that his declaration, made in such excellent good faith, could be anything but a consolation to them. It proves in effect:—(1) that Lefebvre is still living, (2) that he did not suffer at his death, (3) that he has been capable of establishing communication with this world, and that probably, sooner or later, he will enter into communication with his intimate friends.

Mr. Stead also states that the expenses of the "Julia" bureau are defrayed entirely out of his own pocket, and that its annual cost to him is £1,000. One must pay for luxuries.

And now, in the words of Lord Rosebery, when he came forth from his furrow in a recent national crisis: "What do you think of it?"

G. A. A.

NEWS OF THE WORLD.

The British Board of Trade returns for the month of September were issued late on Thursday afternoon. The imports amounted to £49,473,546, compared with £48,014,655 in the same month last year (or an increase of £1,458,891), and with £45,335,451 in the same month of 1907 (or an increase of £1,138,095). The exports for the month amounted to £32,801,024, an increase of £1,179,818, compared with £31,621,206 in September last year, but a decrease of £2,355,296 when compared with £35,156,320 in the corresponding month of 1907. For the nine months ended September 30, the imports amounted to £149,777,616, which is an increase of £13,999,185 when compared with the corresponding nine months of last year, but a decrease of £25,355,257 when compared with the same period in 1907. The exports during the nine months under review totalled £277,337,314, a decrease of £8,325,688 when compared with last year, and of £41,943,850 when compared with 1907.

During the forthcoming Michaelmas term Mr. J. M. Barrie, the well-known novelist, will apply in the Divorce Court for a dissolution of his marriage. The case will appear in the list as Barrie v. Barrie and Cannon. Mr. Barrie was married in 1894 to Miss Mary Ansell, who appeared in his play, "Walker, London."

According to a New York cablegram, the death has taken place at Brooklyn of the organist and composer, Mr. Dudley Buck. Though the best work of the deceased was accomplished as a composer of orchestral and organ music, he wrote many admirable and popular glees and other vocal music, and by this branch of his art Mr. Buck will be remembered in England. The deceased, who studied at the leading foreign academies, had done practically nothing for several years past. He was in his 71st year.

It has just leaked out that a few days ago Mrs. Robinson Rea, the sister of Senator George Oliver, was robbed at Pittsburg (Pa.) of jewels valued at over £100,000. The theft was for certain reasons kept secret. Other ladies in the same town have also been robbed of their jewellery, and it is believed that the thefts have been committed by an organised gang of foreign thieves, who have obtained situations in various hotels in the United States.

In conformity with the ancient proverb that a certain class of irresponsible people rush in where angels fear to tread, Mr. Winston Churchill has dashed valiantly into the grave crisis now threatening the existence of the present British Government. Neither the significant silence of his superiors nor the broad hints thrown out from the Cabinet that the time for public declamation has not arrived prevented Mr. Churchill, in his capacity as President of the Board of Trade, from delivering a fighting speech at London on Friday evening, in the course of which he said it was inconceivable that the Peers should throw out the Finance Bill. A refusal by the Lords to pass the Budget, he continued, would constitute an act of violence against the Constitution, and would be nothing less than a claim on the part of the Upper House to make and unmake Governments. The Government, concluded this verbal fire-eater, would enter into no sort of compromise with the Peers. We must not pay too much attention to Mr. Churchill's flamboyant utterances, since they have a habit of being tacitly contradicted by his colleagues in the Cabinet on the following day. Winston is a young man possessed of high ambition and an unbridled tongue, but if he is really become the oracle of the Liberal party, then that party deserves all that is in store for it at the polls.

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