

**MARY S. VANDERBILT:
A TWENTIETH CENTURY
SEER, PP. 1-125**

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Mary S. Vanderbilt: A Twentieth Century Seer, pp. 1-125 by M. E. Cadwallader

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A
Twentieth Century
Seer

BY
M. E. CADWALLADER

"I have found Spiritualism a good thing to live by, and I have come pretty close to finding it a good thing to die by."—M. S. Vanderbilt.

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BIRTHPLACE OF MRS. VANDERBILT
Happy Hollow, West Mansfield, Mass.

Mary S. Vanderbilt

CHAPTER I.

DAWNING MEDIUMSHIP

In the evolution of the race toward a higher state there comes to us, in hours of greatest need, someone who, out of life's seeming darkness, shines forth among his fellow men as a prophet of a new dispensation.

For ages, man sought to come into communication with invisible, mysterious forces, beyond his power to command or comprehend. The history of civilization is marked by spiritual phenomena, but it was left for Modern Spiritualism to give the world a conscious knowledge of the spirit world and its inhabitants through the seers of modern times.

Andrew Jackson Davis is recognized as the John the Baptist of Modern Spiritualism. Since "the Rochester rappings" in the Hydesville cottage on March 31, 1848, through the mediumship of the Fox Sisters, many media have given proof of the stupendous message, "There are no dead"; but of all these there was none who in the development of mediumship surpassed Mary S. Vanderbilt.

On May 7, 1867, in a community called "Happy Hollow," in West Mansfield, Mass., a girl child was born to Richard and Bridget Scannell. Did the little one, then first gazing into this life, give any token of the strenuous career she was to follow, blazing the way for others? Was there one who dreamed that the child in that cradle was destined to be a Revealer, a Prophet and a Seer?

Many of us, if we could peer into the future, would shrink from taking up the cross and following the vision. Could that little one have been vouchsafed a knowledge of her future, well might she have cried out, "Father, let this cup pass from me!"

Ralph Waldo Emerson says that every talent somewhere reaches its apotheosis. This is a truth, but it is stated in cloudy terms. For talent is an instrument through which a power is expressed, and power itself is only an attribute of faculty, which in turn is an attribute of the soul; and back of the soul is the spirit, the part that cannot die, that must go on forever. It is Spirit that maintains eternal contact with the universe of reality, but often enough the instrument, in its earlier time of use, is hard to bring into fluent melody. It was so with Mary Pepper Vanderbilt when first her powers began to urge for expression, while yet she was a child. But what a full and flowing harmony her later years poured forth!

Since in our western civilization psychic powers have as yet been given slight culture, it cannot be claimed that modern psychical manifestation has been brought to completion; but in the development of her mental mediumship Mary Pepper Vanderbilt reached a place high up along—

The world's great altar stairs,
That slope through darkness toward God.

To honor her achievements is to choose a garland more significant than could be bestowed for a like progression in any other human possibility; for her upward course followed a trail not only disapproved, but actually condemned. A hard trail to travel, which called for a degree of perseverance greater and more determined than that required for triumphant effort in any industry or art. Her unwavering resolution might rather be likened to that of a great leader, a standard bearer, a pioneer.

West Mansfield was (and is) a small place, dating back to early colonial days. The people there still retain the colonial state of mind, especially in matters touching religion—the parochial mind, narrow, hard, clinging to outworn creeds, to shriveled ethics, rigidly shutting its eyes to any new light, hostile to all evidence of the truth that they themselves proclaimed by rote but could not prove—that man must die, but spirit is immortal.

No thought touching Spiritualism lit the religious ideas of her parents. The influence of Romanism and Methodism was present, but only insofar as it could find its way through the interstices of workaday lives. Then, when she was barely past babyhood, came an event that had potent effect upon her spiritual future. The mother of the family was summoned to the life beyond.

Those reading these lines, who already are Spiritualists, need not be reminded that upon release from the bonds of flesh, affection revives and expands; that loving thoughts entwine between us and our so-called dead; that they bring us closer to a plane of higher expression, so that we are at times prepared to receive, along these tendrils, some vibratory, conscious thrill from the heights. So when this New England child, early deprived of the physical presence of her best friend, began in timid bewilderment to contact the realization of spirit communion, her arisen mother was one of the first to reach across the sundering interval.

An aunt had taken the little girl into her care; and childhood years passed by. Her first great psychic experience came when she was fifteen.

With her foster-mother she had gone to visit friends at Narragansett. The fact that these people were Spiritualists was unknown to them. No allusion to it was made until after the occurrence which first indicated that she had mediumistic power. A newspaper interview in *The Lewiston Journal* in 1908 gives her own account of what then took place:

"I had retired, but still was wide awake. I became aware of a human form in the room, near the bed. . . . There was something about it that differed from the persons I knew . . . and I screamed.

"When I described the person I had seen, the family there said I had described one of their relatives, who had died—a person I never had seen, nor even heard of."

The members of this household were accustomed to receiving spirit messages by means of table-tipping. They knew no other way.

They had not long been seated around the table when tremulously, hesitatingly, yet clearly, the name of Mary's mother was spelled out, letter by letter. Thus it was made out that the spirit of a little Indian girl, Bright Eyes, desired to control her. The spirit requested that Mary remain in that home three months, to receive development.

All this was incomprehensible and unwelcome—to the young prospective medium. The idea failed to impress her. Farther, she vigorously declared she would not remain one hour beyond the time when her aunt must leave for home.

The Society for Psychical Research once gave its opinion that of all the people not more than one-fourth of one per cent, that is, one individual out of each four hundred, receive definite psychic manifestations; and this opinion was derived from a broad and comprehensive survey. But whether psychic faculty comes to the surface with many or with few, it is certain that in rare instances spirit co-operation does at times impart psychic impulses toward unusual psychic activity, often involuntary, quite apart from the individual's conscious intent or desire. Thus when the time came for the aunt to leave the house where Mary had her startling vision of a spirit, Mary herself, in the face of her former obstinacy, could not be persuaded to go. She remained