

**THE WATSEKA WONDER: A NARRATIVE
OF STARTLING PHENOMENA
OCCURRING IN THE CASE OF MARY
LURANCY VENNUM; MARY RAYNOLDS,
A CASE OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS**

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The Watseka Wonder: A Narrative of Startling Phenomena Occurring in the Case of Mary Lurancy Vennum; Mary Raynolds, a case of double consciousness by E. W. Stevens & Wm. S. Plummer

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E. W. STEVENS & WM. S. PLUMMER

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PSYCHICAL AND PHYSIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES.

THE
WATSEKA WONDER.

A NARRATIVE OF STARTLING PHENOMENA OCCURRING IN
THE CASE OF

MARY LURANCY VENNUM.

BY E. W. STEVENS.

MARY REYNOLDS,
A Case of Double Consciousness.

BY REV. WM. S. PLUMMER, D. D.

[Republished by permission, from Harper's Magazine for May, 1860.]

CHICAGO:
RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE.
1887.

PUBLISHER'S FIRST NOTE.

To members of the various learned professions we especially commend this narrative. We believe the history of the case as herein told to be strictly true. The account is given in a modest, unassuming way, with no attempt to exaggerate or enlarge; it could have been made far more thrilling and yet have remained within the bounds of truth. It will be observed there is no chance for the witnesses to have been honestly mistaken and to have thought they heard and saw that which in fact they did not. Either the account is in exact accordance with the facts or the author and witnesses have willfully prevaricated. The evidence which we publish herewith as to the credibility of the Roff family, could not be stronger; and the reputation of E. W. Stevens is equally good; the publisher has known him for years and has implicit confidence in his veracity.

The case of Lurancy Vennum is not by any means an isolated one, and there are others which in some respects are even more remarkable. Yet on account of its recent occurrence and the facilities for investigation, we believe this case deserves and demands the careful, candid, unbiassed consideration, not only of professional men, but of all who are interested, either as advocates of a future existence or as disbelievers therein. The publisher will be glad to receive honest, intelligent criticisms, which may be utilized in a future edition. We are all in search of truth, let us not be so blinded with prejudice as to be disgusted with its wrappings and fail to find the fair treasure so snugly ensconced within.

CHICAGO, September, 1879.

PUBLISHER'S SECOND NOTE.

Although fifty thousand copies of the case of Lurancy Vennum have been published, including the original publication in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, yet there has continued to be a steady call for the narrative. The publisher, therefore, in response to the demand, sends out this edition, from new plates. By kind permission of Harper Brothers, he combines with it an account of the case of Mary Reynolds, an instance of Double Consciousness narrated in the pages of *Harper's Magazine* in 1860, which has been frequently referred to in various books and periodicals since, but never before republished.

The case of Mary Reynolds lacks some important features developed in that of Lurancy Vennum, is less interesting as a psychical and physio-psychological study. Yet it offers valuable data for consideration, and may be more intelligently handled now than when first published. In his valuable work, "The Scientific Basis of Spiritualism" (Boston: Colby & Rich), Epes Sargent refers to the case of Mary Reynolds and offers an explanation. He also details interesting experiments of his own in 1840 with Mrs. A. C. Mowatt, afterwards Mrs. Ritchie. Mr. Sargent was an expert mesmerist and a close student of mental science; his opinions are worthy of attention.

The publisher purposely omits from this edition a number of able papers bearing upon the case of Lurancy Vennum, contributed by medical men and experts in mental science and published in previous editions, in response to the invitation given in the closing lines of his first "Note." His reasons for this omission are, no doubt, obvious; he desires in renewing the invitation, to leave those interested untrammelled by published opinions. Communications treating of the contents

of this pamphlet may be published in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, and included in future editions; they should be addressed to

JNO. C. BUNDY,

Chicago, Illinois.

TRIBUTE TO DR. E. W. STEVENS.

Dr. Stevens finished his earthly career on December 9th, 1885, at the age of sixty-three years. He was a man of pure life, and great benevolence. His honesty, candor, modesty and deeply religious nature combined to make him one of the noblest of men. His wonderful cures and good deeds have embalmed his memory in thousands of hearts. He left a wife and family of children whose love and reverence no space nor time can weaken. The publisher deems it only just to make this brief mention in this new edition of a story which illustrates, among other things, one instance of the beneficent work which filled the entire life of E. Winchester Stevens; a work which enabled him to leave his family rich only in recollections of the husband's and father's affection, and of his life-long work for humanity.

THE CASE OF LURANCY VENNUM.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY, AND AUTHENTICATED
INSTANCE OF SPIRIT MANIFESTATION.

BY E. W. STEVENS.

Facts are the basis of philosophy;
Philosophy the harmony of facts
Seen in their right relation.—T. L. Harris.

* * The springing up of Spiritualism and Theosophy on grounds burnt over by the fires of the orthodox hell, and right in the teeth of the east winds that blow from the cheerless seas of doubt, testify to the hunger of men for some assurance that the loved and departed are not also lost.—*Rev. M. J. Savage, in a Sermon on "Immortality and Modern Thought," Delivered at the Saratoga Convention of Unitarians, September, 1888.*

* * There may be in what is called Spiritualism, and the mind cure, and many other new developments, the germs of a something higher; and we should be willing for the new theory to take its place, and under the great laws of life, to work out its destiny; and not, Pharaoh-like, seek to "kill the young child." It may be that in the first appearances of many of these new ideas, that they are crude, and that those who receive them and advocate them do not themselves understand all their real meaning. * * Let us rejoice that the continuity of life seems to some to be a demonstrated fact; and that to others there seems to be possible a higher law of mental healing; and that in one way and another, and by all ways the truth is coming to our world, and our world is coming to the truth. * * —H. W. Thomas, D. D., in *Religio-Philosophical Journal for December 25th, 1888.*

Rationally studied and interpreted, unmingled with delusions self-generated or imposed by others, Spiritualism is the one safeguard against all superstitions. It shows that the unseen world is as much within the sphere of universal nature as our own; it is the solvent of all mysteries that have perplexed philosophers.—*Eyes Sargent in Scientific Basis of Spiritualism.*

STATEMENT OF DR. E. W. STEVENS.

Watseka, Illinois, has been swept by a tidal wave of excitement, on account of the presumed insanity of one Lurancy Vennum, a young girl belonging to an unpretentious family in the suburbs of the city. Her insanity, as it was thought to be, dates from July 11th, A. D., 1877, and the remarkable phenomena continued until her perfect restoration through the aid of friendly Spiritualists and spirits, on the 21st of May, 1878.

Thus, for ten months and ten days, did these phenomena continue to excite and agitate the people. The following is a true narrative, and as full as the facts collected from the parents and relatives of the parties named herein and observations made by the writer, will warrant.

Thomas J. Vennum was born May 7th, 1832, in Washington Co., Penn.; Lurinda J. Smith (his wife), was born October 14th, 1837, in St. Joseph Co., Ind. They were married in Fayette Co., Iowa, December 2nd, 1855.

MARY LURANCY VENNUM,

daughter of the above named Thomas J. and Lurinda J. Vennum, was born on the 16th day of April, 1864, in Milford township, seven miles south of Watseka. The family moved to Iowa, July 12th, 1864, and returned to the vicinity eight miles from Watseka, in October, 1865. In August, 1866, they removed to Milford, twelve miles south of Watseka, and remained there till March 1st, 1870, then moved out two and one-half miles from Milford until April 1st, 1871, when they moved into Watseka, locating about forty rods from the residence of A. B. Roff, the spirit daughter of whom, according to all the facts and representations every way tested, is the principal character in this remarkable narrative. The family remained at this place during the summer. The only acquaintance ever had between the two families during the season, was simply one brief call of Mrs. Roff, for a few minutes, on Mrs. Vennum, which call was never returned; and a formal speaking acquaintance between the two gentlemen. Since 1871, the Vennum family

have lived entirely away from the vicinity of Mr. Roff's, and never nearer than now, on extreme opposite limits of the city.

"Rancy," as she is familiarly called, had never been sick, save a light run of measles in 1873. A few days before the following incidents took place, she said to her family: "There were persons in my room last night, and they called 'Rancy! Rancy!!' and I felt their breath on my face." The very next night she arose from her bed, saying that she could not sleep, that every time she tried to sleep, persons came and called "Rancy! Rancy!!" to her. Her mother went to bed with her, after which she rested and slept the rest of the night.

On the 11th day of July, 1877, Lurancy had been sewing carpet a part of the afternoon, when, at about six o'clock she laid by her work, as her mother said: "Lurancy, you had better commence getting supper." The girl replied: "Ma, I feel bad: I feel so queer," and placing her hand to her left breast, she immediately went into what seemed like a fit, falling heavily on the floor, lying apparently dead, every muscle becoming suddenly rigid. Thus she lay five hours. On returning to consciousness she said she felt "very strange and queer." The remainder of the night she rested well. The next day the rigid state returned, and passing beyond the rigidity, her mind took cognizance of two states of being at the same time. Lying as if dead, she spoke freely, telling the family what persons and spirits she could see, describing them and calling some of them by name. Among those mentioned were her sister and brother, for she exclaimed, "Oh, mother! can't you see little Laura and Bertie? They are so beautiful!" etc., etc. Bertie died when Lurancy was but three years old.

She had many of these trances, describing heaven and the spirits, or the angels as she called them. Sometime in September she became free from them and seemed to the family to be quite well again.

On the 27th day of November, 1877, she was attacked with a most violent pain in her stomach, some five or six times a day; for two weeks she had the most excruciating pains. In these painful paroxysms, she would double herself back until