

**NEITHER DEAD NOR  
SLEEPING, WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION  
BY BOOTH TARKINGTON**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649655885

Neither Dead nor Sleeping, with an Introduction by Booth Tarkington by May Wright Sewall

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Cover @ 2017

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# Neither Dead Nor Sleeping

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INDIANAPOLIS  
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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## DEDICATION

To all honest souls who have hitherto believed the grave to be a chasm and who would be comforted to know that it is a gate that swings both ways and can be unlocked by humans on both sides of it—to such I speak. May many such find in this record, made in a purely scientific manner, illumination for the intellect, solace for the heart, and stimulus to aspiration of spirit.

Mind, heart and spirit—the power to know, the capacity to love, the tendency to aspire—such is the trinity that constitutes the being that is incarnated in man's mortal body. These three elements being separable only from the body, their mortal vestment, are never separable from one another.

Hence: To hearts that swell with rapture in the present enjoyment of the Beloved or ache with longing for the Absent, to minds that love knowledge and seek its increase, to spirits that aspire to know their origin and their destiny, this book is inscribed by its author.

## INTRODUCTION

### I

**B**EFORE venturing to offer a slight comment upon Mrs. Sewall's strange manuscript, the writer feels that to make clear his own neutral views upon the subject of "psychic phenomena" might be well in point. Therefore, they may be assembled, from a previous expression of them, to stand as follows:

We are dwelling in the night. To the man of ten thousand years hence, who will not be able to distinguish through his archeological researches which of the forgotten tribes fought the Great War that left the long line of bones in the subsoil from the Channel to the Alps—to that enlightened modern we shall seem to have been formless gropers in the dusk of ignorance.

We do not really believe it, but that man of ten thousand years hence is actually going to live and speculate about us and study the dust heaps which we shall leave. He will see that we were dwellers in the night—in the unknown.

All this horror of death is horror of the unknown. Men face it magnificently. What would this mean: that they should face it knowing definitely what they face?

. . . Consider the Smith family of Topeka,

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Kansas. The Topeka Smiths were twentieth-century people; they believed in education, prosperity and clean politics; and they knew a great deal about chemistry, mechanics, modern jurisprudence and music.

There was only one point upon which they were curiously provincial, and that was geography. Mr. Smith, the father, had an inexplicable eccentricity: he was dismally superstitious about geography; and, marrying early, he was able to communicate this peculiarity to his wife so that she came to share it. Neither of them had ever been outside of Kansas, and neither wished ever to leave Kansas. If among their acquaintances there chanced to be one who, in their presence, referred to his travels, they looked vaguely distressed, and as soon as possible changed the subject.

They brought up their children without any knowledge of geography, and taught them to avoid the mention of travel, as if such a topic were neither wholesome nor polite; so that the children, too, got the habit of looking troubled and changing the subject whenever a neighbor spoke of going away from Topeka. And when any friend of the family did go upon a journey, or perchance accepted a business position in another town, the Smiths would cease to speak of him, except when it was absolutely necessary, and they would walk in silence if they passed the house he had rented while he lived in Topeka. They made no inquiries about him, and in



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every possible way they tried to keep him out of their thoughts. They were through with him if he left Topeka.

The insanest thing about all this was that the Smiths knew that they themselves were going to leave Topeka some day. Mr. Smith was the agent for a harvesting machine; he had to go where the company ordered him, and the company's policy was to move its agents about at indefinite intervals. Mrs. Smith and the children would, of course, have to go wherever Mr. Smith did; yet they never allowed themselves to think of anything outside of Topeka, and they considered people queer and unreliable who spoke unnecessarily of geography.

The harvester company sent Mr. Smith abroad. The order came one day without any previous notification, and it was so imperative that he had no time to pack a trunk. In fact, he was at his office when he received the message, and he was obliged to leave without even going home to tell his family good-by.

Of course, finding him gone, they knew he had obeyed the company's order, and they understood that they must follow him; yet they made no effort to discover to what city abroad he had been ordered. They did not even make inquiries to see if there came a letter from him. He was no longer in Topeka; and that was enough for them. Everything beyond Topeka was the Great Unknown, and they shivered and sorrowed at the thought of it,

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Nevertheless, the whole family had to leave Topeka. The mother went, a year after the father; but the children did not try to learn where she had gone or if she had joined Mr. Smith. Then, one by one, the sons and daughters went; but those who remained in Topeka never tried to discover whither the others had betaken themselves or what were their experiences of travel, or the conditions in the foreign place to which they had gone. The Smith children still in Topeka knew all the time that they, too, would soon be going abroad, but they shiveringly declined to consider learning foreign languages, or even to look at time-tables and ask if anybody knew what to do for seasickness.

Having the journey to make, they revolted at the mere idea of learning anything about what was at the other end of it, because in their hearts they believed that there wouldn't be anything at all at the other end of it. Sometimes one of them would murmur, "But if there should be—" And then he would shudder slightly, and close his mind to the idea, and return to his thought about Topeka.

To this day there are still some Smiths left in Topeka. They know they will not be there long, but they are making no preparations for travel, and they think that people who would like to know something about geography are rather crazy.

That is the "attitude of civilization" toward death and what may lie beyond death. Man, after a million years of the struggle to think, is still refusing

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to recognize as a fit subject for study that subject which most concerns him. Here he remains barbaric; he looks upon death as an ultimate horror which is "unwholesome to dwell upon." Man is still tribal in his attitude toward war because he is still tribal in his attitude toward death.

. . . . Savages are somewhat more prejudiced in the matter. They will not mention the dead, fearing to be haunted, and consequently, though they sometimes have legends, the historian can trace fragments of their history only by digging up their burying-grounds—an irony sufficiently grotesque.

Man regards death as so horrible that when he reaches the utmost pitch of his rage he inflicts death upon his enemies. When he feels that life is unendurable he says the worst thing about it that he can think of; he says he prefers death. It is true that individuals, here and there, unbearably anguished by their lives, do long for death; and they think of death as peace, just as in the torrid days of summer we think of January as pleasant; and, seeking peace, they seek it blindly through suicide. But they do not know what they will find. In their utter ignorance they guess; and usually their guess is that they will find nothing. Nevertheless, they may be like one of the Smiths of Topeka who decided finally that city life was not to be borne, and got on a train which landed him in Chicago.

We do not know that death is nothing. If death is nothing, then we still know nothing about noth-