

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 29

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# Telegraphy and Telepathy

By R. T. HOUSE

THE telegraph, the idea of which would not so long ago have produced on the average intelligence quite as eery an effect as telepathic thought-transference does now, has played a part in telepathic phenomena of the most mysterious character.

The Austrian traveler and writer Friedrich von Gagern published in 1932, under the title "Geister, Gänger, Gesichte, Gewalten" [Spirits, Ghosts, Visions, Powers], a record of mysterious occurrences most of which had come under his personal attention. For one of these an Austrian station-master of von Gagern's acquaintance is responsible, and it deals with the remarkable receptive powers of a young assistant of the narrator's who was as expert with the violin as with the telegraph keys. This young man and his musical instrument were inseparable. Not only did its music constitute his only amusement and his only relaxation, but he brought it to the station with him every day, and when he was on night duty and the telegraph was silent for long periods, he paced back and forth between the telegraph-table and his leather sofa, playing softly to himself. When his superior discovered what he was doing and complained, the young man explained that his violin kept him awake as no stimulants could have done, and that when he played quietly he heard better than if he were sitting still and dreaming. After watching him carefully for some time, the station chief decided that the music did not as a matter of fact interfere with the young man's dependability, and left him undisturbed. He did his work satisfactorily till the abrupt end of his short life.

This telegrapher was quite as proficient as any other in the transmission and reception of messages, and he could do one thing with the help of his instrument which the most expert of his colleagues made no pretense of doing. He could see the sender. Here was unmistakable tele-vision, back at the end of the Nineteenth Century.

The young telegrapher could see the sender—sometimes. This curious clair-voyant power of his was not active constantly, but only in occasional marvelous flashes which he was as completely unable to explain as anyone else was. On one occasion he was gossiping over the wires with a friend in another city, when he turned anxiously to his chief and said: "There is something wrong with X——, over at Y——. He hasn't said anything about it, but I can see that he has a bandage about his head."

Since the telegraph conversation had been begun only a few minutes before, and since it had taken place entirely in the hearing of the chief, that puzzled official was reasonably certain that the young man had not got hold earlier of information which he was making use of to mystify his superior. And in further evidence of the telegrapher's good faith and his remarkable super-vision, X——, from Y——, began to tap out an account of how, a few hours earlier, the sliding shutter of the baggage-room delivery window, which must have been carelessly secured when it had been raised, had fallen on his head, nearly guillotining him and leaving him with a badly bruised scalp.

The young wizard talked very frankly about his gift, but had no explanation of

how at times he managed to see through stone walls and mountains and around corners. He had a feeling that there was a connection between his clairvoyant sensitiveness and his musical capacity, which enabled him at times to catch melodies out of the air whereas at other times he was entirely deaf to them. He thought that he usually saw most vividly when he was tired or in a condition of nervous tension, when his nerves were taut like the strings of his beloved violin. And he thought that certain weather conditions favored the clairvoyance, no doubt because of their effect on his nerves.

ONE day he began to chuckle with delight and describe a funny old Franciscan friar who he declared was coming into the city on a certain train. Several of his colleagues who heard the description managed to be on hand when the train came in an hour or two later, and were completely dumfounded when a fat old monk answering exactly to the telegrapher's description stepped off the train and approached the young telegrapher himself with a request for information.

On another occasion, as he sat at his table before the silent instrument, he suddenly threw his hands to his head and cried out in terror: "Oh, it's horrible, it's horrible!" His neighbors ran to him, under the impression that he was ill. "No, it isn't I, it's the poor brakeman!" he groaned.

"What brakeman?" cried a chorus of voices.

"Oh, he's fallen between the cars!" (This was before the advent of the automatic coupler, in the days when a brakeman risked his life every time he coupled two cars together.) "It's crushing the life out of him!"

And a little later the news came of a

fatal accident in the yards, which had cost the life of a clumsy coupler. It was in connection with this extraordinary vision of his that his chief remarked to him: "It ought to be possible for us to set you to watching the whole system. If you could warn us every time a switch is left open, or a bridge goes out, or a cow gets on the track, you could save us millions of kronen and dozens of accidents."

"Yes," the young man said sadly, "if I could see and hear everything all the time, like this. But if I could do that" (he always insisted on the fundamental identity of his two gifts), "I'd be the greatest violinist in the world."

But the most exciting experience in which his long-range receptivity played a part was in connection with the terrible Steinbrück landslide.

The station-master reports that one morning along toward four o'clock the telegrapher came and pounded on his window in great excitement. "Chief! Chief! Get up! Something terrible has happened!"

The station-master crawled out of his warm bed, sleepily and a little crossly. What could be happening at that time of night, when not even a freight-train was moving in his territory?

"It isn't anything around here — it's over toward Steinbrück somewhere!"

"Toward Steinbrück? Have you had a telegram?"

No, he hadn't had anything but one of his visions. An uncertain sort of vision it had been, but he could tell where it was located, or nearly. A bridge had fallen in or been blown up, or a hill had caved in. He was unable to see exactly what it had been, but he knew some serious disturbance had happened, and he was sure all trains in each direction must be warned.

While the two stood arguing the matter, they were called over to the telegraph office. There had been a gigantic landslide down in the Carniola country, in what was then southern Austria and is now northwestern Yugoslavia. The mountain had caved in, dammed the little Sann River, and covered the main line of the track between Vienna and Trieste. The track was buried, feet deep. The night train from Vienna had been warned and stopped, just in the nick of time. The dammed Sann was climbing higher. The service would be halted for days. But the immediate peril was averted.

The Steinbrück landslide has gone into history. The hollowed-out mountain on the right bank of the Sann had taken a notion to drop into the river all at once, and had just missed burying a presumably tipsy yardman who was wandering down the track at an hour when he ought by all the rules of decency and discretion to have been snoring in his bed at home. But although his nocturnal expedition came near ending his career, it turned out that it saved the lives of probably dozens of travelers. The yardman is supposed to have been on his way to or from some liquor establishment in the neighborhood. It appears that the blast of air from the falling mountain flung

him clear across the little stream and landed him unhurt, or at least not so seriously hurt that he hadn't kept his wits or regained them, over on the tracks in the direction of Vienna. When he picked himself up and found that he could still navigate, he had the presence of mind to struggle on down the track and warn the Vienna express. The train was stopped within half a mile of the barricade, the wires were set in motion, and the whole system was apprised of the situation.

The hero of the occasion was the tipsy yardman at Steinbrück, but the sensitive telegrapher down the road might conceivably have been enabled by his marvelous gift to save lives quite as dramatically. But it seems that he was never able to do anything of the sort. He was still very young when he shot himself.

He shot himself because he was in trouble. He had been offered a wonderful violin which he had not the funds to pay for. Unfortunately for his success in resisting temptation, he had access to the station cash-box. His indiscretion was discovered before he had had time to make good the deficit; so he put a bullet into his head. The violin was worth a few hundred kronen. Some of the most gifted men have lacked the gift of self-control.

