

PRECOGNITION OF A FATAL FIRE

by ANDREW MACKENZIE

Precognitive experiences are often greeted with a certain amount of doubt because of their unlikeliness, but the following case carries conviction because of the detailed nature of the evidence. I heard about it from a correspondent who had read one of my books and I passed on the details to Mr John Stiles, Honorary Spontaneous Cases Liaison Officer. After various delays the inquiry was taken over by Mr K. Agg and Miss P. Butler, who arranged to meet the various witnesses. It is an interesting point that the experience took place in daylight but the scene conveyed to the percipient was of the fire occurring at night. Two children, aged three and two, died in the fire.

The following details were taken from the statements of the witnesses.

Mrs Mary Edwards (*pseudonym*), aunt of the percipient, who was then aged six, was in the kitchen when the boy shouted from the front room to come quickly. She went to the front room and he was looking through the front window and said to her "Look at that fire over there—get some water quick!" She went to the window and saw nothing. She took him home because she thought he must be tired. "I knew differently the day afterwards, though."

What happened was set out in a report in the Bolton *Evening News* of 28th October 1971, which said that fire swept through a condemned terrace house in Winter Street, Horwich, when two brothers, aged three and two, died, despite efforts by neighbours to help them. One fireman described the blaze as "an inferno".

On the day concerned (presumably 27th October) Mrs F., the percipient's sister, then aged nine, said that she and her brother (the percipient) had just returned from school and went to her uncle's house in Winter Street. "Our uncle lived in a house opposite the house where the fire happened. My brother was looking out of the window; the time would have been about 3.30 p.m. My brother had a vision of the house opposite being on fire—the house was blazing, there were fire engines, stretchers being brought out of the house, the bodies on them being covered by blankets. Although the time was about 3.30 p.m., as I stated, the vision appeared to take place at night-time, as my brother stated that it was dark outside." Mrs F. added "My brother ran out into the street, urging my uncle to get some water. My brother then ran home. He later got smacked for making up stories."

Mr W., the percipient, gave his own account of the incident. "I was looking through the window of my uncle's house. I saw the house opposite on fire. I could see a pram under the window; there was wood and glass falling onto the pram. I could hear people screaming, I could see smoke. Although it was daylight in reality, the events appeared to be taking place at night. I called my uncle, but, by the time he looked out, the scene had turned back to normal. I was smacked for telling lies. The actual fire happened the next day in the evening."

When asked if he had experienced anything which he would term out of the normal, Mr W. replied that once, when he was talking to a friend on the

telephone, he heard a third voice on the line. He recognized the voice, although he could not put a name to it. He could not make out what the other voice was saying.

A statement was received from Mr W.'s father, dictated to his daughter, Mrs F., "Your brother came to the shop in quite a state, telling us (me and his mother) about the fire in Winter Street and to come quickly. Of course when we got there nothing was happening. The most important factor I remember about the day was that your brother said the fire was happening at night-time but when he was telling us about it only an hour or so later it was still day-time. I do recall something about the family owing money (possibly rent) and being badgered and threatened about it. After the fire I seem to think that this was investigated as a possible arson attack. The family's name was Turnbull. There were two fatalities. I think it could have been summer time because I remember the weather being quite warm. When the fire actually happened the next day your brother was fast asleep in bed. He never saw it for real. I can't remember much more. Sorry."

Mrs F.'s father recalled another event. "I do remember another small incident when your brother was about thirteen years of age. He was on the telephone and he gave me a message from my deceased grandmother, who only lived in Agra, New Delhi, India, whom your brother had never met. I was astonished at the detail of the location. Only she would have known how her house looked and I knew who it was instantly.

"I must say I am a very sceptical person and am only recalling this after being badgered incessantly for weeks. I don't see the point of investigating these incidents. I think we are just slabs of cold meat when we go, but I can't deny the incidents; I do remember them and being briefly convinced."

DISCUSSION

The statement of the aunt, Mrs Edwards (*pseudonym*), was taken down in writing by her niece, Mrs F., "because she was not a good reader or writer". The various people interviewed were uncertain about the date because the fire had occurred more than twenty years earlier, but it was established by the cutting from the Bolton *Evening News*, which, incidentally, was not shown to the uncle or the aunt. The percipient, Mr W., had not spoken to his uncle or aunt for two years because of a family feud, so this eliminates the chance that they had discussed the matter between them and concocted a story.

We know from the father's testimony that the fire occurred at night because his son was asleep at the time, so it is puzzling to read in an evening newspaper that the fire occurred "today". Either there was a very late edition or the fire had occurred on the previous day. However, in view of the wealth of evidence, the point is not really relevant. Evidence was given by the niece (Mrs F.), the aunt, and Mr W., and by the uncle, who confirmed the story but left it to his wife to relate it. Perhaps the most convincing evidence is that of Mr W.'s father, who confesses that he is a "very sceptical person" who thinks "we are just slabs of cold meat when we go", but could not deny the incidents, which earned the small boy a smacking for making up stories. The last word is with Mrs F., who wrote to Mr Stiles that "The experience has left us with the thought that perhaps 'tomorrows' are already planned, somehow. Truly,

experiencing something like this is the only way, I feel, you can honestly believe what can happen 'out of the ordinary', or not in line with the 'natural' way we expect things to happen or be."

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DOUBLE-ASPECT MONISM

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ABSTRACT

Double-aspect monism is the theory that mind and body are different components of a single neutral substance. It is to be distinguished from monistic panpsychism, which contends that all matter—not only the body—has mind. Various theories of mind-body relationship are considered and the advantages of double-aspect monism over materialism, idealism and dualism are presented. With respect to the possibility of post-mortem survival of the mind separate from the body, dualism has the advantage over dual-aspect monism.

Double-aspect monism, also known as neutral monism, is the theory that mind and body are different components of a single neutral substance. In this metaphysic neither mind nor body exists separately as such but instead there is only one kind of stuff with mind and body as its manifestations. It is to be distinguished from panpsychism, the monistic theory that all material objects in the universe have an inner mental nature. Panpsychism pertains to all material objects, whereas dual-aspect monism applies only to objects that are living bodies. All panpsychists are double-aspect monists (e.g. Spinoza, 1677) as they believe that all matter has mind including the matter of living bodies. On the other hand a double-aspect monist (e.g. Hume, 1739) is not a panpsychist unless he believes that mind is not limited to living bodies but is present in all matter. In an article on panpsychism (Nash, 1978) I have presented my conception of how the dual aspects of mind and inanimate matter evolved into the dual aspects of mind and living body.

For a better understanding of the double-aspect theory, it might be helpful to consider its alternatives in the mind-body problem. One of these is the monistic ontology of idealism, which affirms that minds and mental images or perceptions of those minds are the only reality (Berkeley, 1710). A weakness of this theory is that the perceptions of two minds may differ when they are exposed to the same object. For example, normal room temperature may seem to be hot to one who has just come in from wintry cold and to be frigid to another person newly emerging from desert heat.