



The Book of Dreams and Ghosts

Andrew Lang

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The Book of Dreams and Ghosts Details

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From Reader Review The Book of Dreams and Ghosts for online ebook

Diane says

Best known for his collection of fairy tales, Andrew Lang also wrote about other subjects, including ghosts. This is not a collection of ghostly short stories. Rather, it is Andrew Lang's exploration of the "true" ghost stories and prophetic (or supposedly prophetic) dreams.

"The author has frequently been asked, both publicly and privately: 'Do you believe in ghosts?' One can only answer: 'How do you define a ghost?' I do believe, with all students of human nature, in hallucinations of one, or of several, or even of all the senses. But as to whether such hallucinations, among the sane, are ever caused by psychical influences from the minds of others, alive or dead, not communicated through the ordinary channels of sense, my mind is in a balance of doubt. It is a question of evidence."

There is the account of the Ogilvie family, all five of whom dream the same night that Mrs Ogilvie's poodle Fanti goes mad (rabid). Fortunately, this does not happen. The dog lives to a ripe old age. However, how do you explain such a coincidence? As Lang says, "Thus, as several people may see the same ghost at once, several people may dream the same dream at once."

Lang recounts the tale of the Swithinbank family. The father and two sons all dreamed the same night that Mrs Swithinbank had died. As it turned out, she had died that night. As Lang points out, "some such dreams must occasionally hit the target."

Dreams can also come in handy when trying to solve a problem:

"A little girl of the author's family kept ducks and was anxious to sell the eggs to her mother. But the eggs could not be found by eager search. On going to bed she said, 'Perhaps I shall dream of them'. Next morning she exclaimed, 'I did dream of them, they are in a place between grey rock, broom, and mallow; that must be 'The Poney's Field!'" And there the eggs were found."

A young boy is walking home after running an errand and finds he has an unusual traveling companion - the a coworker who died several months earlier. A woman dreams of her mother's death, and then months later finds a letter describing the actual event, which is identical to her dream. People gaze into a crystal ball and see visions of varying accuracy. Catherine the Great and her court witness what appears to be her double sitting on her throne - so the czarina orders the vision to be shot. It promptly vanishes and she calmly takes her throne as if nothing happened.

This is an interesting collection of tales and legends, though I take issue with Lang's theory that some of the visions due to telepathy or "telegraphy." I personally don't believe in psychic phenomena or ghosts, though I

enjoy reading about them. The accounts in this book remind me of a large book of English legends in my high school library. I kept that book constantly checked out (along with "The Thousand and One Nights"), and it led in large part to my love of myths and legends.

Andrew Lang looked at the stories of ghosts, visions, and prophetic dreams with a skeptical eye, though I doubt he would be considered a skeptic by today's definition. He is inclined to find mostly rational explanations for what happened, rather than believe someone actually saw a ghost or dreamed of an event before it happened. However, when faced with something he can't quite explain, he admits it. For example, the tale mentioned above of the woman who dreamed of her mother's death.

This is a good read if you're into "true" ghost stories, but if you want ghost short stories, then I recommend trying out these volumes instead:

Winter Ghosts: Classic Ghost Stories for Christmas
Ghost Stories of an Antiquary by M.R. James
The Fourth Ghost Story MEGAPACK TM: 25 Classic Haunts!

Batgrl (Book Data Kept Elsewhere) says

Available here on Gutenberg.

[As always, when this is on the currently reading shelf I'm not done and will continue adding bits to this. And it will continue to pop up again and again in your updates feed when I forget to check that "add to my updates box. Sorry 'bout that.]

Because of the other work of Lang's (specifically the fairy tales) I've read I thought that this book would be a collection of stories. So far it appears to be an essay on dreams, ghosts and reality, with brief anecdotes/accounts here and there to illustrate a point. (I'm still just starting this so this could turn out to be a really long introduction.) This looks to be the book I'll slowly read, specifically before going to bed, as I've found that anything highly interesting/suspenseful/etc. will not make me at all sleepy. This is important as I've accidentally stayed up all night reading more than once.

Random quotes:

Noting this one because I had to immediately look something up (3% in):

"...Arbuthnot, in his humorous work on *Political Lying*, commends the Whigs for occasionally trying the people with "great swingeing falsehoods." When these are once got down by the populace, anything may follow without difficulty. Excellently as this practice has worked out in politics (compare the warming pan lie of 1688), in the telling of ghost stories a different plan has its merits."

Lang goes on to say that a narrator who begins with stories of the familiar and then goes on to those more incredible can make ghosts seem more possible. What did I have to look up? The warming pan comment of course!

History link time! (Thanks to google of course.) The quote refers to Mary of Modena, and via that wikipedia link:

"Born a princess of the Italian Duchy of Modena, Mary is primarily remembered for the controversial birth of James Francis Edward, her only surviving son. It was widely rumoured that he was a changeling, brought into the birth-chamber in a warming-pan, in order to perpetuate King James II's Catholic dynasty. Although the accusation was entirely false, and the subsequent privy council investigation only reaffirmed this, James Francis Edward's birth was a contributing factor to the Glorious Revolution. The revolution deposed James II and replaced him with his daughter from his first marriage Mary and her husband, William III of Orange."

I do love immediate gratification. And knowing that in 1897 when this book was published apparently everyone would have understood the warming pan reference. Or so Lang thought, anyway.

Sandy Carlson says

I chose this title because of the author. It was fascinating to read Andrew Lang's "other" interests (besides folk and fairy tales). This read a bit dry and was not "stories," but the mindset of the day and retellings of actual sightings and events of people in the late 1800's and earlier. There was nothing spooky about it, as it was written very matter-of-factly. Interesting, but not a quick read. Curious people and thoughtful (thinking) people who wonder about such things could benefit from its contents.

Leif says

Versatile Scots literary critic and man of letters Andrew Lang is at it again. In this commodious and rangy essay Land collects many stories of ghosts---or, as he intimates at times, hallucinations or outright lies---with an eye towards their fascinating qualities as everyday encounters with the uncanny. His pose is one of the critic, but shades into curatorship towards the end of the book, especially the collected Icelandic and Chinese stories. (Fair warning: Lang, a man of his time, does not here rise above racial prejudice.) This is a worthwhile research object into historical perspectives, too, as it collects many documented stories from newspapers, journals, magazines, correspondence, and personal experience. A nice little book, all told, if a little dry from history's dust these days.

Irka says

Love it! Interesting, fascinating, a bit psychological with a dose of mystery. This is not really an art of fiction, more like a story collection.
