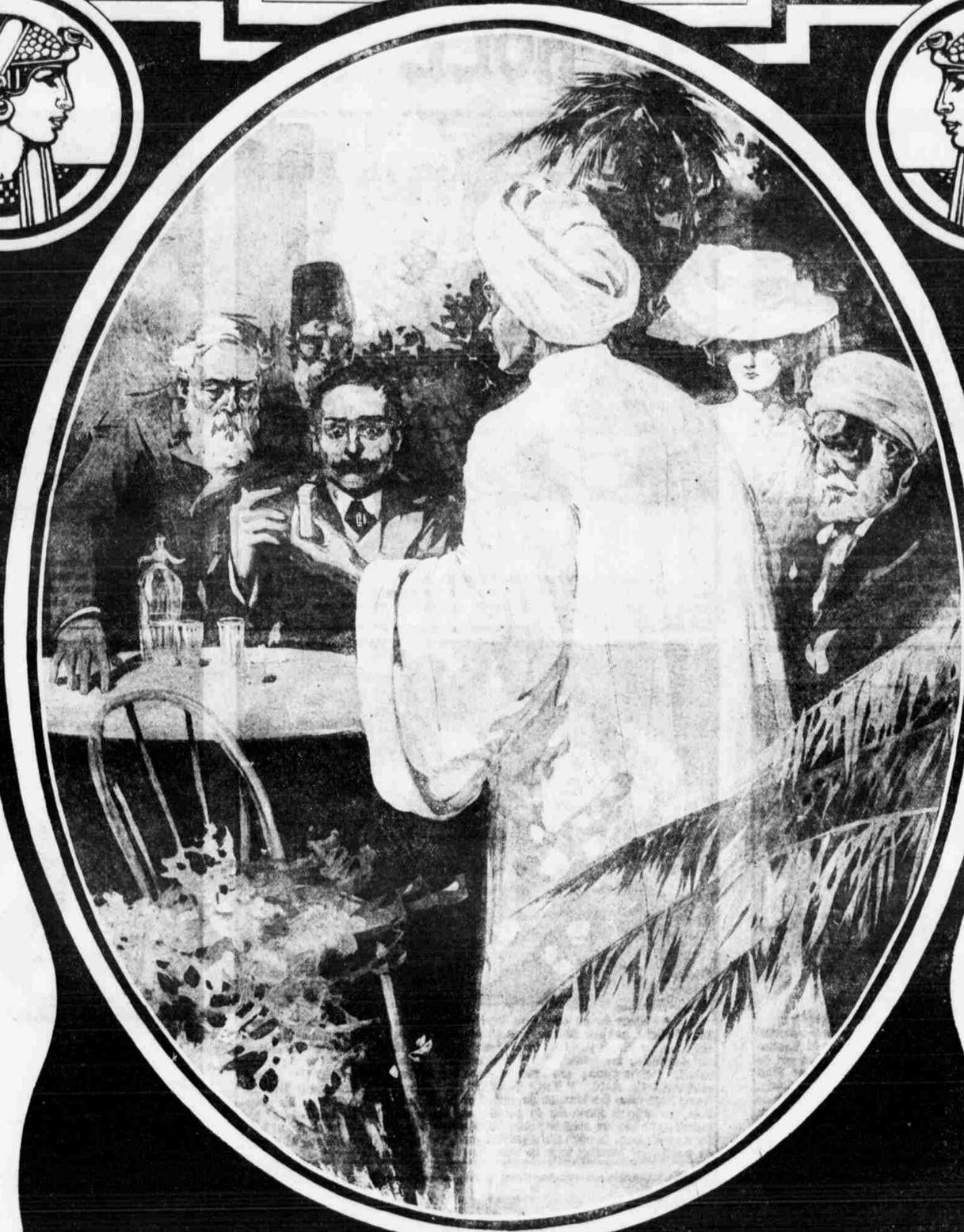


The OCCULT MYSTERY OF Dr. BURNETT'S MATCHBOX

CHERISHED SOUVENIR LOST BY MR. ACHORN IN
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA RETURNED TO HIM BY A
HINDOO AT KARNAK, EGYPT.



MYSTERY surrounding an extraordinary experience of a prominent Boston lawyer led to the conjecture that our dearest friends after their death strive to assist us in our hopes and to relieve our distress.

By the seeming intervention since his death of the late Dr. Swan Moses Burnett, of Washington, D. C., who was the first husband of Frances Holman Burnett and father of the original "Little Lord Fauntleroy," keepsake lost by Mr. Edgar O. Achorn, the Boston attorney, has been returned to him.

The doctor and the lawyer were lifelong friends, and cherished an unusual comradeship, broken only by the doctor's death last January shortly before Dr. Burnett died Mr. Achorn lost in Asheville, N. C., a silver matchbox, a gift from Dr. Burnett. Dr. Burnett died with knowledge of his friend's loss, a fact which may have significance with what followed. To Mr. Achorn the loss of the souvenir was much intensified by the loss of the giver. He has been mystified by its restoration, for it was handed to him without explanation by a stranger, believed to be a Hindoo, while he sat by the Nile bank contemplating the ruins of Karnak, in the ancient capital of Egypt.

How the matchbox got from North Carolina to Egypt, who the unannounced Oriental was, how the finder knew the loser—in fact, the entire remarkable occurrence—transcends the lawyer's knowledge. That the recovered matchbox is absolutely and beyond dispute the same as the one he lost in the woods at Asheville Mr. Achorn is positive. Beyond that he offers no testimony save a precise description of his experience. To him the mystery of the matchbox seems inexplicable, although psychical investigators and adepts in occultism may gather from his evidence additional data for their belief.

That Mr. Achorn's experience will be of wide interest may be assumed from the various prominent affiliations of both men. Dr. Burnett, aside from being of world-wide prominence in his profession, having been an eminent eye and ear specialist, was a man of deep culture and intellectual attainments, with fondness for the fine arts. He had occupied the chair of ophthalmology in the medical department of Georgetown University, was a former president of the Cosmos Club and was president of the Washington Literary Society. As a student of Japanese work he had collected one of the finest private collections of Japanese art in America. As a bibliophile he collected many rare old volumes, among which may be cited his gift to the Congressional Library of a complete set of the first American edition of Shakespeare.

He was thoroughly conversant and had read much in Eastern religions, having taken a deep interest in such subjects from a philosophical standpoint, and to his intimates he had proclaimed himself a Buddhist.

Their Friendship Great.
With Dr. Burnett, Mr. Achorn shared an interest in aesthetic study and culture. Thoroughly cosmopolitan, the Boston lawyer has spent much time in research into Scandinavian folklore, has given to the literary world an intimate study of Iberia and has delivered many commemorative addresses in various cities.

Kindred tastes and sympathies had welded a friendship between the doctor and the lawyer, surpassing ordinary comradeship. Over a period of fifteen to twenty years the friendship had mellowed. Among the most charming contemplations of the memory of his friend, of whose purity and sweetness of character he speaks with reverence, Mr. Achorn has told friends of his pleasure derived from the many discussions he and Dr. Burnett used to prolong in the doctor's library at Washington. Throughout winter evenings, as the fire-place softly glowed, the two would discuss problems of religion and philosophy. During such confidential chats, one may assume, Dr. Burnett doubtless expressed his convictions regarding soul existence and the progress of the soul after the death of the physical body. With Buddhism he held that the development of the soul during its tenancy of the body determined its next progressive stage of being.

Inasmuch as Dr. Burnett had discussed such questions with his friend while living, it may be assumed that to this friend he would have expressed his belief in the death of his body, his soul found means of communication.

In this connection, the unusual incident of the silver matchbox may be held to have psychic significance. It is held that of Mr. Achorn's distress at losing the matchbox the soul of Dr. Burnett had learned during its earthly cycle. If his soul persisted after physical death, as Dr. Burnett while living was convinced that it would, by means of what physical agencies could it demonstrate its continued existence? What topic of concern to each friend would, by presentation to the living

friend, reveal that the absent one still exercised concern for him? There was a lost matchbox, the whereabouts of which Mr. Achorn could not solve. Perhaps to human souls in a higher cycle of life there is omniscience surpassing the narrow limits of human eyes and human minds.

Dr. Burnett gave the matchbox to Mr. Achorn to be a constant daily reminder of their friendship, and since the lawyer is very fond of smoking no more appropriate article could have been chosen. For several years and many times a day Mr. Achorn would use the matchbox, never, however, without thinking of the giver.

On December 29 last Mr. Achorn left Boston to attend a Christmas house party at the country home of a friend four miles out from Asheville. The morning after Christmas he recalls having taken a stroll in the woods with a friend, and he knows that at that time he used the matchbox to light a cigarette. His chaquin at missing the treasured souvenir the next time he had occasion to use it made its distinct impression. He immediately searched his clothes without success. On the journey back to Boston Mr. Achorn stopped at Washington, on December 29, to visit with the doctor, who was so pained to relate that he had lost the much valued gift.

On December 31 the two friends parted, little knowing that they then looked into each other's eyes for the last time.

Soon after Mr. Achorn's arrival in Boston he received the distressing news that his dear friend was dead.

The lawyer sailed from New York last February 2 for a Mediterranean cruise on the steamer Arctik. In the party was none other who had been of the house investigation, but especially because none of them would have made a practical joke, carried the matchbox habitually in the

right side pocket of his trousers, with keys and small change. This mode of carrying these articles was a personal eccentricity of Mr. Achorn's, and he had never immediately attracted his notice. Every suit had been minutely searched at least twenty times. There were no holes in any of the pockets, as even the suit lined which Mr. Achorn wore on the morning when he lost the matchbox was worn up to the time of sailing. Mr. Achorn alone knows how many times he anxiously and curiously emptied the pockets of the suit. When he sailed he packed this suit in a trunk and wore a lighter weight blue serge suit, which had not been at Asheville but which had hung in a closet at home since the preceding October. Of other wearing apparel which had been used at Asheville and which was taken on the cruise ahead were a dark overcoat and an evening dress suit carried in a rather suit case. These garments had all been repeatedly and carefully searched. The evening suit had been worn on the cruise nearly every evening at dinner through all the tour of Spain, Algeria, Madeira, Greece, Turkey and Palestine. In it the matchbox could not have escaped notice. The overcoat was also as carefully

scrutinized during the voyage and it was not at Luxor, where the matchbox was recovered.

During the trip up the Nile the overcoat was left in the steamer, 400 miles away. Mr. Achorn wore the blue serge suit and is positively convinced that he did not carry the matchbox about him.

Of what was about to happen other Americans then traveling in Egypt are able to contribute interesting side lights on the mysterious transaction. Says Mr. John H. Stevens, of Newark, N. J.—

"Three days before Mr. Achorn's arrival I also had stopped at Luxor, and while there was accosted by a Hindoo, who insisted in a pleasantly courteous manner on telling me something that was about to happen. I confess that I was so impressed by his confident claim of mystic power and the soft, spiritual gleam in his handsome eyes that I shrank from venturing into the realm of the future."

"What a charming scene it was in the ancient capital of Egypt, where the impressions of romance and mysticism of the western world who have not seen there can little imagine or little grasp its impression of romance and mysticism."

The garden about the hotel at Luxor answers the description of the garden so happily described and frequently referred to in "The Garden of the Gods." "I wish you could have seen it as I did on several nights," writes a traveler, "under the moonlight, with its magnificent royal palms, its profusion of tropical plants and flowers, its enchanting walks and retreats, its Egyptian coloring in fragments of pillar, cap and statue from the temples close at hand, and in the faces of those who came and went—and all this brooded over by the spirit of the desert and haunted by the specters and memories of a civilization three thousand years ago."

If one might believe that the return of the matchbox had any occult significance, especially because of Dr. Burnett's love for the beautiful, there is no place where this incident might more fitly have happened.

After dinner Mr. Achorn was sitting in the magnificent hotel gardens of Luxor, enjoying with friends the coming of night over the historic ruins in the desert. The sun had sunk beyond the western hills. The travelers watched how the lengthening shadows crept over the eastern slopes, though a golden glow still spread over the plain Nile and brightened here and there the grim cliffs behind which have slept for thousands of years the ancient Pharaohs and their queens, at rest in the House of Osiris, god of the dead. The Americans listening to the evening chorus of frogs by the river and to the braying of donkeys and the barking of dogs, loud sounding in the heavy night air, were fast succumbing to the weird and melancholy night scenes in this mysterious and ancient place so far from their native land. Beautiful as it was to the vision the whole scene overwhelmed the inner soul with potent mystery. Suddenly one attention of the garden guard was attracted to an approaching Oriental, differentiated from the Egyptian hotel attendants by a long robe and a turban. As he neared the group, the man, who was taken to be a Hindoo, centred his gaze upon Mr. Achorn, and, approaching very near, extended his right hand, as he did so, declaring in a low voice—

"This is your matchbox."

Mr. Achorn immediately pronounced the amazed American curiously clutched the matchbox from the stranger's hand. He turned, muttering inarticulate words of surprise, to say, "Where did you get"— But the Hindoo had departed. He had vanished quite as quickly as he had appeared to the group.

It was no apparition. For others in the garden had seen the stranger. He had absorbed in the surprise of the matchbox, however, and interested in the profound effect the incident had made upon the Boston lawyer, none had noted the stranger's departure. Who he was or whence he came no investigation disclosed.

Mr. Achorn immediately pronounced the matchbox to be the one he had lost in Asheville during the preceding Christmas week. Its pattern of half-turned leaves growing from a double scroll was readily recognized, as were its details of leaves and leafy vines. Friends with the lawyer were doubtful of the identification, but the owner showed them a dent in the side which he had made by accident by striking it with a rifle during a hunting trip in Mexico.

"I can further verify it," he said. "If it be mine the inside of the lid is burned black from an accidental firing of matches."

The recovered matchbox lid inside was fire blackened.

Can it be now more the lawyer as he contemplates his doubly valued souvenir, that our dead friends preserve an interest in our worldly distresses and have power to perform physical wonders?

"This is your matchbox."

