I STILL cannot believe what you tell me about obsessions. They may be simply a reflection of the sub-conscious mind. For do we not all hear and read and see all kinds of things during our life-time? Then we forget them; but the fissures of our brain somehow retain these facts and, then later, unexpectedly disclose them. Then they seem entirely foreign to us."

Thus spoke a friend in Urga to me. He, being an official, regards scepticism as the supreme mark of dignity.

One must never insist, nor even try to convince. Often, it is only necessary to draw another's attention to a slight incident, and at this sign of the semaphor, the entire trend of life may change its course. Hence, without insistence, our friend was informed of a few other events, which had obsession as their underlying theme. He was told about the Tibetan "Rollang"—the resurrection of the dead. But of course the sceptic only shrugged his shoulders; he disdained to speak of it.

We told him of an incident in the United States, where a person of high intelligence maintained that her deceased bridegroom had taken possession of her and was controlling her entire life, offering advice and giving her orders. In fact, her obsessor demonstrated such distinction from her own consciousness, that he caused her not only spiritual indisposition but even physical pain.

Our sceptic answered that such "obsessed" people could probably be found by the score in our lunatic asylums and that in the practice of the law, such incidents of irresponsible consciousness were well-known. However, this did not convince him in the least. We then told him how, according to the Chinese, the Tao-tai of Khotan had become obsessed by the Titai whom he himself had killed. And how the Chinese now point out that the murderer has adopted certain characteristic habits of the dead man and that even the face of the murderer has changed most characteristically within a short time.

The sceptic again only shrugged his shoulders.
Several days passed. Then one evening our sceptic came to visit us looking somewhat strange. Apparently something perplexed him and he seemed to search for an opportunity to blurt it out. Finally he exclaimed:

"One listens to your tales—and then all kinds of strange things begin to happen. After the last conversation we had concerning the 'obsessed' people, as you call them, I dropped into the Chinese photographer's. He is married to a very simple Buryat woman, quite illiterate. I have known them for a long time. I noticed that the Chinese was somewhat sad, quite changed; so I asked him if he was ill.

"'No,' he answered me. 'I am all right—but it's my wife. It's bad. I don't know how to cure her. Recently she began to talk of the strangest things! She says that some one has taken possession of her—not one person but two simultaneously. God knows where she gets the strange words from. It seems that one of them was drowned. The other died from over-drink. I know that things like that happen, because we used to have many cases like that at home in China.'

"I asked him to call his wife. In she came. She always was small and slight, but now she looked far thinner. You know, she is quite a simple Buryat woman, entirely illiterate. When she entered, her husband left the room. I asked her, 'Won't you have tea with me, too?'

"'No,' she answered, 'he forbids me to drink tea with you because you do not believe and you wish me harm.'—'Who forbids you?' I asked her. 'Oh, it's always he—the German.'—'What German? Tell me where he comes from.'

"'Well,' she continued, 'one is Adolph; the other is Felix. They are in me for three weeks already!'—'And where are they from?' I asked.

"'Some time ago,' she began, 'a man came to see my husband, to have his picture taken. He was a fat German—may be you have seen him in the street; he has some kind of business. These two were with him. He went away, but the two remained and they became tied up to me. One of them, Adolph, became a coolie after the war in Vladivostok. He was drowned when he went out boating. They had a fight. The other, Felix, is also a German, and he is always drunk and swears terribly.'

"And so she continued to tell me what they made her do, how they compelled her to eat much meat, especially uncooked, because they liked it with blood. They also suggested to her to drink wine because they liked it very much. One of them, the drunkard, continuously whispers to her to hang herself or to cut her throat and that then they could help her to accomplish anything.

"The Buryat woman told me the kind of things the men tell her. They seemed to have travelled a great deal on ship, especially one of them. He must have been a sailor. Why, think of it, she
gave me the names and descriptions of towns of which she could not have had the slightest notion. Then she spoke of ships, and used such technical terms which only a person completely at home on a sailing craft would know. Many of the terms she was unable to explain, when I questioned her further, but she insisted she heard them from the men. I must confess that I left the Chinaman rather puzzled. This is the first time I ever heard such things with my own ears, and it all correlates with the things you have been telling me.

"I must confess I had an insatiable desire to go and see the people again; so I went to-day for the second time. When I asked the Chinese about his wife, he just waved his hands in despair and said that things had become worse. As I asked him whether I could see his wife again, she herself entered the room.—'I cannot stay here with you,' she said to me. 'They forbid me; they say you want to harm me. They want me to be happy and you can spoil it all. Because you know some people who can drive them away.' Then she left the room and her husband, waving his hands once again, muttered, 'Bad, very bad, indeed. Our home will be destroyed.'"

"You see, I am a man of the law and I therefore like everything to be authentic. I confess that I did not believe the tales you told me last time, because nothing like it had ever occurred previously in my life. But, since I have heard and have seen this thing myself, I can no longer doubt it, because I have known the woman for a long time and she now impresses me quite differently.

"She does not just talk, or talk nonsense as happens in cases of paralysis or pathological cases such as I have often had in my practice. No, in this case I can clearly see something foreign, not her own, with a decided and characteristic psychology. For when she repeats the sentences told to her by the sailor, one can distinctly feel the speech of a seaman, and a seaman of recent, pre-war days. Thus also in the speech of the other man, the drunkard; it is precisely that of one of the derelicts whom the war cast into the far-off lands of Siberia.

"By the way," suddenly the confused sceptic asked, "how does one proceed to drive away such obsessions? Because, when she hinted at people I know, I felt at once that she spoke of you."

I laughingly remarked to the sceptic that it appeared as though we had changed roles, and that he would probably laugh if I told him that in such cases of obsession one puts pieces of bloody raw meat on the table and then pours strong-smelling intoxicants all around the room. Then every one must leave the house and the person obsessed must never return to it again. Of course, other methods may be used.

This reminded me of a curious episode which happened in America, when I had a serious disagreement with the spirits. I was asked to view some paintings which were alleged to have been done by an obsessed woman. Up to that time, the
woman knew nothing about art and had never touched a brush. I saw a series of strange paintings, obviously painted in various technics and by different hands.

On one and the same canvas, one could see the characteristic technic of a French impressionist, and beside it an equally clear Japanese technic. Here also were Egyptian temples with a decidedly German romantic turn. Thereupon, I remarked to the artist that it seemed peculiar to me that such varied styles should be painted together and on one canvas without any co-ordination whatsoever. But the artist stated that the painting had been done thus not accidentally, because the spirits who guided her were indeed of various nationalities. Thereupon I observed that this technical medley did not contribute to a completeness of painting. Upon this the artist reflected for a long time and then said sharply: "They find it very good so!" I continued to persist in my opinion and the spirits in a very brisk and rough manner persisted in their own wish that the painting remained as it was. Thus proceeded a quarrel with the spirits which continued with some vigor......"

"I do not know anything of your American incident," interrupted the sceptic. "But after all I have seen and heard, I now consider it entirely possible. But I would not like to leave the Buryat woman in her present situation. I think that I ought to go there again and try to take some measures."

I attempted to explain to the sceptic that with his complete ignorance of the subject he would only bring harm to the woman, and that he might easily cause her to commit suicide or take other extreme measures. Finally we exchanged roles completely. I tried to dissuade my friend from all further visit to the Chinese, while he, like a drunkard who smells wine, began ingeniously to invent all kinds of excuses to continue this adventure...It was strange to see how the old lawyer, recently so staid, was trying to find every invention decently possible to justify himself and to show his need of continuing his visits to the Chinese. Naturally, he did not overlook poor science; he had to continue his excursions in the name of science! And again, it was in the name of science that humanity had to be warned. But behind all these important considerations, there was clearly revealed an instinct suddenly aroused to the knowledge of invisible worlds.

The wife of the sceptic, who was also present and who had previously upheld me, now insisted by every measure that I should dissuade her husband from his excursion, for during the last days he had been talking only about the Buryat woman and the Germans. Finally the recent sceptic gave his promise to drop the matter, after I assured him that if he would but look around him, he would see many far more significant things.

On leaving, he suddenly suggested to me that I accompany him just once to a Mongolian witch—"You know, it is the same woman who fortold to ungarn the day of his death and all his immediate
future, which was exactly fulfilled. She lives near here now."

I declined to visit the sorceress, but I wonder whether the sceptic did not go to see her himself!

As always happens, an unusual conversation does not cease at once. Hardly had the sceptic left our house, when two other visitors came. One of them, a local Mongol, was highly educated and had lived abroad. The other, an ex-officer, had served throughout the war. The conversation began with some entirely unrelated matters. The Mongol was telling of the natural wealth of Mongolia, where mineral oil flows in streams through the desert and where the rivers carry inexhaustible gold. Then, describing the gold districts, he added in the same calm narrative tone: "And those murdered Chinamen allowed us no sleep all the time we were staying at the mines."

"But how could the dead disturb your sleep?"

"Those were the dead Chinamen who were killed during the riots, after the war and the revolution."

"But look here, how could people, killed long since, prevent you from sleeping?"

"Exactly by walking around, talking, knocking the ashes out of their pipes and rattling the crockery."

"You are certainly joking."

"No," was the serious reply. "We could not see them; but all through the night we could hear them. A lot of them had been killed there and, as people say, they were killed unawares. They went to bed quite calmly that night, not suspecting an attack. It is always so; people who are unexpectedly killed cannot give up their daily habits. The Chinese are especially like that. They love their ground and their houses. And when people are attached to their earthly possessions, it is always difficult for them to leave them behind." So spoke the Mongol seriously.

The officer who had thus far been silent, then added: "Yes, with the Chinese this often happens. In Mukden there is an old house in which no one wants to live. A Chinaman was killed there and he gives no one any peace. Each night he screams out as if he was being killed again. We wanted to verify this rumour once, and we went there and stopped overnight. But about one o'clock we noticed a bright blue sphere descending from the top floor along the railing of the staircase. This was enough for us, I admit, and we packed off.

"But now I remember another case that happened during the war near the Prussian border. The whole staff had stopped over-night in a small hut. At midnight we all suddenly awoke together, each one shouting something about horses. One man shouted: 'Who brought the horses in here?' Another roared, 'Look at the horses running away!' I also awoke and in the darkness near me, I saw some horses pass me by in a flash neighing as
though in fright. The guards stationed outside had heard nothing. But in the morning we discovered that our drove of horses had been blown up by a shell."

The Mongol became lively thereupon and confirmed this: "I also have heard about invisible animals. It was in the Yurta of our Shaman-sorcerer. The Shaman invoked the lower elementary powers and we all could hear the galloping and neighing of whole droves of horses; we could hear the flight of entire flocks of eagles and the hissing of innumerable snakes right inside the Yurta......you should speak to our Minister of War. He is a fortune-teller and he could tell you numberless unsuspected things."

"But why do you think they are unsuspected?"

"Well, I have become accustomed to think that all foreigners regard our customary occurrences as most strange......"