

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

The Man with a History

While a young man, I used to dine at a little restaurant on the side street where a menu was not elaborate, but the cost thereof sufficiently small to fit my purse. There were a number of habitués of the place, all of whom attracted my notice more or less, but none so much as an old man who always sat at the table directly opposite me. He was a man evidently past sixty, of fine powerful build and thoughtful face; that is, his face bore at all times an appearance of abstraction, of deep thought upon some subject apart from his present occupation. He very frequently caught my eye, and at such times would bow very politely to me.

He interested me so much that I made inquiries of the restaurant people as to his name and position, and was very much surprised to find that he was a man well known in business circles as a careful and thoroughly shrewd man of the world and one of considerable wealth. That he should dine every day at such an insignificant place as the one in question surprised me; but every day he was there and always sat at the same table which was reserved for him.

One day when I came in, I found every table occupied; the only vacant place was the seat at his table just opposite him. He saw my embarrassment and motioning me to sit down, began a conversation with me. After a few remarks of a general nature, he observed that he was a strong believer in the power of imagination. He said that Des Carte's (*sic*) fundamental formula "I think therefore I am," comprised a larger part of human feeling if changed to the statement, "I think, therefore you are."

In other words, as he explained, the mere fact of one's existence is dependent upon the imagination of the thinker.

We kept up a conversation on this and kindred topics until the close of the meal. When I arose to leave the older man asked me to make the seat I had just occupied, my permanent place, to which I readily assented; as I was desirous of keeping up the acquaintance, as the old man interested me very much.

After that time I regularly had the old gentleman for a table companion, and found him always a most interesting talker. His one hobby was the effect and influence of the imagination.

One day while we were at lunch and together my companion startled me by saying that he had been married that morning. I was astonished at this intelligence as he was quite an old man whom one would hardly connect with the idea of marriage, and my astonishment was increased when he went on to speak of his wife as a young and beautiful girl whom he had loved devotedly for years. However, I made no comments.

A few months later he remarked that there had been born to them a girl baby, and not long after that his daughter had just gotten married. Upon these announcements, I finally came to the conclusion that my friend was insane; and yet in all respects he seemed to be perfectly rational.

I found upon inquiry that he showed no decline in his mental powers in the transaction of his business, and in fact that in every respect he was the last man in the world to call insane. I continued to lunch with him every day after these statements, and found him perfectly rational, as I have always found him, except at the times I have mentioned.

A few months after the announcement of the marriage of his daughter, he told me with a great deal of feeling that his wife had just died, and a day or so later he lost his daughter. But to add to my astonishment he announced that they were buried under the table at which we were lunching. This statement convinced me of the man's insanity. I made a number of inquiries and finally found that years before he had married, had a daughter who in turn married, but that both wife and daughter had died long since.

The restaurant where we lunched occupied a piece of ground that had formerly been a graveyard in which he had buried his family, and the table where we sat every day stood just over their graves. The dates on which he had announced the various instances of his family life were the anniversaries of the dates of the occurrences which he recounted, and such had been the influence of his imagination of the spot where he dined at each year as he sat at the table over the place where formerly had been the graves of his wife and daughter, he lived over again his whole life.

Neglecting to take account of the years that had passed between the various

dates, but simply recalling them as days of the month. In fact just a year from the date of the announcement of his marriage, he made the same announcement to me, and in time as the next year passed by the whole story was told over again.

I knew him for a number of years after this, and always found him the most entertaining man and one of clear ideas, except on this one point, – a fit illustration of his theory, “I think, therefore you are.”

Charles Theodore Greve

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Wald Editor

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