The Old Church Pew

Yes, I am a White Owl, or Barn Owl or Screech Owl; call me which of these you like, so long as you do not cling to your heathenish superstition and de scribe me as a bird of ill-omen.

I am an owl of venerable age, and may reasonably expect that you will pay attention to my whim. Moreover, the whole of my life has been passed here, in the precincts of this antiqua picturesque, tumble-down church-which, alas! the new rector seems fully determined must soon be, what he calls, restored. These dear old rafters will have to give place to some high art invention in way of a ceiling; and the high-backed, dark-oaken pews, so endeared to us through sacred memories, will be supplanted by new ones of pale yellow wood. I heard them discussing it in the vestry the other day and I hissed and snapped for more than an hour after, until I nearly choked with rage and mortification.

I could tell you a story concerning each of these quaint old pews, only I dare say you'll find one enough. So as twilight is coming on. I'll fly down beside you, and perch upon the reading desk; then you need not strain your cars to listen.

If the same to you, I would rather choose the pew with the ragged red hassocks, about half way down the middle aisle. There are three shabbylooking prayer books, with brown leather backs, lying on the ledge, one a little smaller than the others—ah, you see it now. Well, I had just come into the world when the owners of the two large prayer books first made their appearance in that pew. My poor dear parents, now dead and gone, have described them to me with much minuteness, little guessing what the sad sequel might be.

They were a young couple of most prepossessing exterior-or, at any rate, the happiness which shone in the eyes of both gave one that impression. He was the village carpenter, and just married to the girl he had always loved, pretty little Rose, the innkeeper's

My father and mother brought me up to take a friendly interest in every individual belonging to our congregation; but more especially did they watch, with pleasure, the weekly devotions of these two young creatures, For they were regular church-goers and every Sunday saw them in their accustomed seats until an event happened to add a new sweetness to the peaceful sameness of their days.

I was already a promising young owlet, and sufficiently intelligent to understand something of the ceremony when they brought their tiny infant to be baptized, down there, over the old stone font. A fine little fellow, and how he screamed when the rector-a splendid type of the regular out and out gentleman he was, and quite different to our last importation-took him in his arms, and sprinkled the holy water on his miniature rosy visage,

How proud the young mother looked as she tries to hush his shrill cries; My parents were so highly edific1 by the spectacle that they took me out on a glorious mousing expedition that very night in the farmyard which lies to the right of the village pond, and which has since been one of my favor-

Ah, well, time crept on, and the little babe whom I had last seen and heard in his christening robe no longer de-tained his mother at home, but grew old enough to accompany her and his

At the beginning we entertained every hope that the boy would prove a blessing to the fond parents, to whom he was so evidently all in all. alas! I was the first to note that as the childish precocity quickened and developed within him the evil instinct seemed to predominate, and was ever ready to extinguish the gool.

He used to turn round during the service and make faces at the school children, then he would take his marbles out of his pocket and count them over when his parents were not look-The dear old hymns that my owls always delighted to hear possessed for him not an atom of attraction, Notwithstanding that he had learned to read at the village school, he did not even trouble to follow the words, though I doubt not that through constantly hearing them some of the lines must have entered and, perhaps unconsciously, become engraven on his

After a few years had thus elapsed his parents came one Sunday alone, and I ascertained that the boy, developing a taste for book learning, had been apprenticed to a bookseller in the neighboring town. Occasionally he returned home for a short holiday and accompanied his parents as usual to the old pew on Sunday morning. But, alas! his behavior was even less excusable than of yore. He would either sleep through the sermon, or, on the sly, dip into a book which he held concealed with a dirty yellow cover.

After this, owing to many sad famfly losses, my mind was too much distracted by personal sorrow to oc-cupy itself with the misfortunes of . First, my father died of asthms; and my poor mother, heart-broken at his loss, did not long survive him. Then my only brother was unfortunately caught in a trap, placed in the church, I believe, by some rural naturallst. Unable to release the poor fellow, who screamed most piteously, I had in silence to behold a strangelooking man come and carry him away, and have never succeeded in obtaining the smallest tidings of him since.

Still a solitary bachelor, having been always too difficult to please in my choice of a mate, I now became subicct to such depression of spirits that my health began to give way. In short, I must have eventually succumbed had not been for the kindness of a friend, who persuaded me to go and pay a long-deferred visit to his home in a hollow tree on the adjoining ea-Thither I accompanied him, and owing to his sympathy and gental com-panionship became gradually reconciled to life as it was, instead of as it might be

It is a lesson we have most of us to learn, my friend, even we owls; and if it only helps us to grow more loving, more humble, and more thankful for what we have, why, then, come what may, we shall be in the right spirit to receive it. But I am digress-

ing from my siory, and must not weary

When I returned at length to the old haunt, all my former interests revived within me, and anxiously, when Sunday arrived, did I ccan the familiar faces and note the changes that time had offected during my long absence.

The light in our church, as you may have observed, is always a subdued one—partly owing to the dark glass window there above the altar—so that membrane of the eye I am enabled to observe what passes pretty clearly.

Well, to my surprise, the old pew more apprehensive as to what might have befallen its joint occu-

However, on the following Sunday morning I soon discovered that my favorites were there. But, alas! how altered from the blithe and light-hearted couple whom I can even yet barrassed faces bore evidence to some bitter anguish within.

I at once conjectured that their son must be dead. But, no, I was mistak-en. From scraps of talk let fall by the sexton in the vestry, I gathered that he had been found guilty of a crime, and had been condemned to penal ser-vitude for several years. That innocent babe, whom I saw baptized at the sacred font, had attempted to commit a murder-had tried to kill a man!

I was not astonished now at the striking change produced in his parents; nor that after this they seemed to wax older and feebler every Sunday, their hair turning whiter and their frames more shaky. They were among the saddest sights that it has ever been my lot to witness.

At length there came a Sunday when the old man appeared alone, and from his deep mourning and woebegone aspect I knew that his wife must be dead, Her funeral took place the next day, and the old man was there. But, as I had anticipated, judging from my own parents' case, he was not long in following her to the grave.

Three Sundays later his place was also vacant, and the pew stood deso-late and empty. The old couple died about a year after the conviction of their son, and it was some years later that I witnessed the end of my story, which I will now relate.

It was New Year's eve, and there had been evensong-at the usual hour, for our good old rector was getting too infirm to undertake a midnight service. How well I remember the sermon that evening! It was one of the most eloquent that he ever preach-The ground was white with snow, which was lying deep and still falling, oh, so fast. The church door was standing partly open, the sexton being busied in the vestry.

The lights were burning low, and all was very calm and still, when I saw and heard a man creep softly through the door and into the church. Bowed, attenuated and ragged, with hair cropped quite close, some instinct told me that this could only be one manand he once the little boy with the curly hair and bright blue eyes, so like what his mother's had been when she

I watched him intently as he stole up the aisle cautiously and slowly, until he reached the well-known pew. Then, when he had stood there some minutes, I observed by the shaking of his shoulders-for his face was turned away from me-that the man way weeping. He did not venture to seat imself therein, but hesitatingly, and with feeble gait, he again moved up the aisle and toward the altar, fust be neath the beam upon which I was perched.

I saw that he was gazing up at the painted window, where the Crucifixion s depicted. In the dim light of the burch the surrounding figures were nearly lost; the cross alone stood o vividly dark against the white land-scape beyond. Then the man crouched lower and lower, until he reached the ground and lay there prostrate on the chancel steps, close to the altar.

Suddenly the lights were turned out, I heard the sexton go away, locking the door behind him, and it became certain that the man was shut in for

It seemed to me that hours must have elapsed before the man slow! his head and stored blankly ground him, as if he had forgotten what were his surroundings, and was scacering how he had got there. There his eyes were attracted by and rested on the black cross thrown into relief the background of pure white snow.

"All blood!" he gasped breathlessly. Blood, blood-everywhere blood!" He threw back his head with a frenzied action, and I could imagine that his countenance must be fearful in its terror. Still apparently under this aw-Involuntarily his neeling posture. hands were extended upward to the cross, with a gesture of frantic pleading. Then a great sob echoed through the church,

Though your sins be as red as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.'

Was it a voice or a whisper? Or was it a wave of soft angelic music that came floating round the altar, as if a part of heaven itself? I know not

But surely the man also heard it, for his attitude had changed. The strained muscles relaxed in their rigidity, the whole figure collapsed.

A low, long sigh again broke the stillness-a sigh of glad release, a sigh of infinite peace.

The man lay stretched upon the ground; and though the bells rang out joyous peal to welcome in the new born year, he neither moved nor stir red again.

In the morning they found him dead. -Household Words.

First Summer Boarder-They say it isn't so long since wild animals were pleatiful around here.

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Pittsburg, took a dose of poison, and died before he could note the effect of his condition on his wife. The experiment was a failure.

Constipation

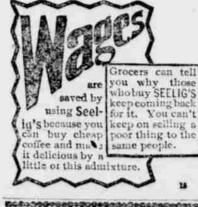
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