

TRAPPING A GHOST.

CONCLUDED.

NOTWITHSTANDING these bold words, I must confess that when Andrew started on his message, and left me alone—for the ayah had gone down to the village—I felt a little uneasy. I did not believe in spiritual presences, but I did believe in wickedness driven to desperation. I was bidding defiance to a foe of whose resources I was utterly ignorant. What if my defiance should be taken up? Mentally I felt strong enough, physically I was conscious of being weak, but I set about the performance of my household duties, which occupied me fully till the return of Andrew.

I took him, as also the joiner and blacksmith, into the parlor, and told them my experiences of the previous evening. Andrew exhibited symptoms of alarm; but I found the joiner a sensible man, and inclined, after what I told him, to take a similar view with myself of the situation, namely, that we were being made the subjects of some diabolical trickery, in order to drive us out of the house. He asked about Mrs. Weevil, and if I had ever been in her rooms. I said I had not. He proposed at once to visit them. The door of her apartments was, as usual, locked; but the blacksmith had little difficulty in successfully picking the lock, and effecting an entrance for us—Andrew being meanwhile sent to keep a lookout in the garden, that no one approached the house unawares.

There was nothing to attract attention in Mrs. Weevil's apartments. The joiner carefully examined them, but no means of egress from either of the rooms could be discovered, save the door by which he had entered, the windows having iron gratings outside. We took the utmost care that nothing was disarranged; and any piece of furniture or apparel which we had occasion to disturb was replaced exactly as found. Previous to this, I should have mentioned, both the joiner and blacksmith had made a particular examination of the bow-window of my bedroom; but had failed to find anything to awaken suspicion in the slightest. Our search had so far been entirely fruitless; and I was beginning to feel more perplexed than ever as, after what Andrew had told me of Mrs. Weevil, and of her son's former relations to the owner of the house, I had somehow begun to connect her in my mind with the mysterious appearance which had given it such a bad fame.

We were in the act of quitting the housekeeper's sitting-room, afraid that she might return before we had had time to refasten the door, when I noticed the blacksmith kneel down on the floor of the inner apartment, and examine the foot of one of the bed-posts. It was an ancient Elizabethan, with heavy faded hangings, and stood on a floor covered with a carpet, out of which long use had extracted almost all traces of its original pattern. At a signal the joiner stooped down beside him; and I then observed that the caster at the foot of the bed-post was glistening with oil, as if it had but recently been lubricated; and we all three then noticed that there was a distinct dark oily streak along the carpet, as if the bed had been moved forward obliquely for a few feet from where it stood, and then moved back again. The joiner at once rose, and taking hold of the bed found that he could pull it forward easily and without making the slightest noise, till it was about a foot from the wall against where it stood. At this point we noticed that the bed seemed to dip slightly to one side, as if something were yielding to its weight; and at the same moment we observed a paneling slightly open in that part of the wall which had formerly been hid behind the hangings.

I was in a high state of excitement and with difficulty could suppress my feelings, but stood silent as the two men went round and looked into the opening thus discovered. They asked for a candle, which I presently brought them, when we found that the recess was a small place, about five feet high and two deep, and that it was formed of solid mason-work on all sides but the front. A box, large enough to fill the whole space of the bottom, was attached to the wall by strong iron staples, as if to prevent its removal; but curiously enough, the box itself was not locked, though supplied with a hasp and padlock. The lid was at once lifted, when we saw stuffed into it, as if hurriedly, a mass of white garment, which we found to be an old chasuble or surplice, that must have formed at one time part of the ceremonial robes of a priest. We brought it forth to the light, and examined it; and there, in the skirt of the garment, we found that a piece had been torn out, which was exactly fitted by the bit of white embroidered cloth which I had picked up in my bedroom on the previous evening. This was evidence indisputable that, whoever or

whatever my ghostly vision was, here at least was the garment that had been worn on that occasion; the more so, that attached to the upper part of the garment was a kind of hood which, when drawn over the head and face, would give in a dim and uncertain light the grim aspect that I had seen on the previous evening. I felt within me a burning indignation that for years the peace and happiness of successive families in the house should have been destroyed by the wretched trickery of this depraved old woman, in her malicious desire to injure the young lady who owned the house, by depriving her of the income that would otherwise have been derived from it.

My first impulse was to leave things as they were in the apartment till the arrival of the old hag, and confront her at once with the evidences we had discovered of her malevolent practices; but on a second examination of the box, it was found that it contained a false bottom, easily removed, under which were found a pair of loaded pistols. This struck us as being scarcely in keeping with the idea that Mrs. Weevil alone was cognizant of the mischievous operations which had been carried on here for so many years. These were rather the weapons of a person who was both able and willing to use them should an emergency offer. And what was still more puzzling, while we had thus far discovered the means by which the ghostly reputation of the house had been maintained, there was as yet no trace of the manner in which access was gained, either to the bedroom which I occupied, or to any other parts of the house which had been so mysteriously visited. In these circumstances, it was agreed at once to replace everything as we had found them, except that the blacksmith took the precaution of drawing the charge out of both pistols, stuffing the barrels afterward to the required depth with paper, so that, on being probed, they might still appear as if loaded. This done, the bed was moved back to its place, when the paneling of itself closed as before. We then left the apartment, the door of which was, though not without some difficulty, so fastened as not readily to excite the woman's suspicion that it had been tampered with.

It was now two hours after noon, and Mrs. Weevil might return at any moment. The two men therefore departed, but first arranging with me that they should return after dusk, bringing the village constable along with them, to await with me the events of the evening, as I felt certain somehow that the "ghost" would again appear, with the object of driving me from the house, as other tenants had been driven before.

Like his namesake in "Rob Roy," the old gardener, Andrew, was not a very good keeper of secrets; hence it was proposed that the joiner and blacksmith should take him along with them to the village, and keep him under surveillance till the evening. I was glad when I saw them all out of the place, without, so far as I knew, being seen by any one; and still more glad when the ayah shortly afterward returned with the children, as I could not help feeling alarmed in the house by myself, considering what we had discovered, and especially what we had failed to discover, namely, how the person playing the ghost could obtain access to different parts of the house so freely as report represented, and as I had myself in one instance painfully experienced.

Unlike her usual practice, Mrs. Weevil did not return to the house that day till far on in the afternoon; and after she had entered her rooms I could hear her bustling about with an activity and noise quite unprecedented in my experience of her habits. This rather alarmed me. I was afraid she had suspected, from the appearance of her rooms, notwithstanding our care in removing all traces of our presence; and this might be sufficient to defeat my hopes of bringing to light the trickery that had been so long and so systematically practiced. But I was still more astonished when, about an hour after her return, she sent a message to me by the ayah that she wished to speak with me, if I would grant her an interview. At first I scarcely knew what answer to make. Were I to refuse to see her, this might complete the suspicion which she perhaps entertained; and if I did see her, I was afraid I might by some word or look betray the knowledge of which I had become possessed. I thought upon the whole I had better see her, and answered accordingly.

As she entered the room with a basket on her arm, she dropped a courtesy; and from the flow of words with which she at once opened the conversation, she seemed to put on a frankness of manner which I had not before observed in any slight intercourse I had had with her.

"Yes, ma'am," she went on, "I were just a-comin' ma'am, to say as I would be goin' from the 'ouse for a few days;

my son, as is steward to Lord B—, being took very badly last night, ma'am; as he have no one to wait upon him, it holds as I, ma'am, as his mother, must do my dooty—yes, ma'am."

All this she said without once stopping to take breath; and I could not help observing that she was slightly flurried in my presence, and seemed to keep talking as much to hide her uneasiness as to enlighten me regarding her errand. I said I was very sorry to hear that her son was ill, and that it was very proper she should, in the circumstances, attend to him. "But," I asked, "has he no servant in the house?"

"Not presently, ma'am," she answered; "leastways, the 'ouse-maid have gone away over to Brookford for a few days to see her mother, who stays there, ma'am—yes, ma'am;" and she courted again in the excess of her civility.

After I had dismissed her I did not know what to think. This was an interference with my plans on which I had not counted. I had no one to advise with me, and felt much perplexed. An evening approached, and the gloom of twilight, I had a strange, nervous feeling, such as I had only once before experienced, and that was in India during the terrible days when the mutiny was at its height, and every footfall made us start as if next moment were to be our last. As the dusk deepened, my anxiety increased; and when at length the ayah condescended the joiner, as I had before instructed her, to my room, I was almost too overpowered to speak. Andrew and the blacksmith were for the time detained in the kitchen, as I wished to talk the matter over with the joiner, as the most intelligent of the three.

As he entered my room, I was surprised to find a second person behind him, whom he introduced to me as Mr. Burrows, the district Inspector of Police, who had been on an official visit to the village that day, and who, when he heard the story, volunteered his services in place of the constable. His presence at once gave me relief; and this was enhanced when I found he had had long experience in the London detective force and was entering with the enthusiasm of his profession into our plans. He had heard already from the joiner what had passed that day; complimented me highly on the presence of mind I had displayed on the previous evening and expressed acquiescence in everything that we had since done.

When, however, I mentioned to him my unexpected interview that afternoon with Mrs. Weevil, and that she had left the house, he was a good deal taken back. He questioned me closely as to her manner and appearance when she was in my room, and as to whether she seemed much affected by her son's illness. I answered his several questions to the best of my ability; and he, after thinking awhile, paced up and down the room, turned to me and said:

"Let everything be carried out as you formerly proposed. See that your family retire to rest at their usual time, and with a little appearance as possible of anything unusual going on. If the woman has taken alarm, nothing will be lost by waiting till to-morrow, when her rooms can be more carefully examined by daylight. In the first place, will you show me the bedroom in which you were disturbed last night?"

I conducted him thither, the joiner following; and after he had ascertained where, to use his own expression, I had first seen the "party," and where and how the party had disappeared, he at once intimated his plans. He said I was to retire to my room as usual, seat myself in my chair by the fire as on the previous evening, and either sleep or appear to sleep, as was most agreeable to myself. Beyond the window stood a large wardrobe, in which, after the house was all quiet, he and the joiner would conceal themselves, the blacksmith and the gardener being set as a guard upon the door of the housekeeper's room below. The village constable, he had arranged, would keep watch on the outside of the house, but so as not to be readily discovered.

The duties of the household, in the absence of my servants, fell somewhat heavily on the ayah and myself, and the time passed quickly for me as I bustled about, seeing the children put to bed, after which the ayah also retired. During all this time, everything had been carried on in our customary way. Mr. Burrows and the rest of his helpers betook themselves for the time to a distant apartment up stairs, and the house had resounded all the evening with the mingled sounds of laughter and noise inseparable from a large family of children such as ours. But now all was silent; the men had slipped quietly to their different posts; Mr. Burrows and the joiner were, I knew, in the wardrobe at the other end of my bedroom; and I was seated in my lounging-chair, as on the previous evening.

As I sat in this position thinking, I could not help observing to myself how near we were all making ourselves

ridiculous. The old woman whom I had suspected was out of the house; no one else but the ordinary members of the household and the watchers could possibly be in; and here was I, sitting at my bedroom fire, making believe to sleep, with my two men concealed in the wardrobe, all hoping to catch—we did not know what. The humor of the situation so strongly affected me at one time that I could scarcely refrain from bursting into laughter. But the thought of Mr. Burrows having put himself to so much trouble on my account, combined with a remembrance of what I had experienced during the past twenty-four hours, gradually sobered my feelings, and I shortly found my thoughts floating away in dim remembrance to my life in India—to my distant husband; to our long separation; to the terrible nights and days of that fearful mutiny, whose horrors still rose up before me; to—

There was a thud on the floor, and I started. I had been asleep, and in my slumber had knocked a book off the small table at my elbow. The fire was burning low, and I rose in a confused state to trim it, when my eyes fell upon what I had seen on the previous evening. In the imperfect light it seemed taller and more ghastly-looking than before, and was approaching me from behind. As my eyes fell upon it I gave a loud shriek, and caught hold of the chair to support me. As I did so, I saw the figure gradually recede from me, and the room seemed to grow suddenly darker. I am certain that, left to myself, I should at that moment have fainted right away, for the whole thing had been so sudden, and found me so unprepared, that in my confusion I forgot all about the business of the night. But just as the white figure seemed to be approaching the curtained windows, I saw two dark figures dash quickly upon it from behind, then a sharp and violent struggle, in which all three rolled on the floor, as if locked together in a deadly embrace. The white figure had managed to wrench one arm loose, and in another moment there was the sharp click of a pistol. Thanks to our forethought, the weapon was harmless. By this time the noise of the struggle that was going on had brought the blacksmith and Andrew up to my apartment, and with their help the white figure was in a few seconds manacled and led forward to the light, his white garment—an old surplice—hanging in tatters about him. He was at once known to the majority of the company—it was the steward! He turned his back on me with a stifled oath.

Leaving him, now helpless, with his hands fast behind his back, in charge of the blacksmith, Mr. Burrows led the way to the housekeeper's room below, the door of which was found to be locked. It was at once burst open, and, taking a candle with us, we entered. The outer room was in the same condition as I had seen it during the day, but the inner room showed the bed drawn forward, and the paneling of the recess which we had discovered standing open. Nobody was there. Taking the candle forward to examine the recess, Mr. Burrows found that the box had a movable bottom, in addition to that which we had discovered, and that by its removal an opening sufficient for one person at a time led down a trap-stair into the cellars below. Mr. Burrows and the joiner at once descended, taking the light with them, the rest of us waiting, as directed, in the outer apartment, or the lobbies that led to it. In a few minutes I heard sudden footsteps in my bedroom, and, rushing thither, found that Mr. Burrows and the joiner had reached it from the cellars, into which the trap-door led, the whole of the wood-work of one side of the window of my room being ingeniously made to move back upon hinges like a door, yet so constructed that it could not be opened by any one in the room. When the steward was searched there was found on him, besides the pistols, a bunch of duplicate keys, which could open any chamber or any other lock-fast place in the house.

The constable having been called in from the garden, the steward, who had hitherto stood silent and sullen, with a dark expression of malice and revenge upon his face, was handed over to him, and he was instructed by his superior to convey him to the local Police office and place him in a cell. The blacksmith he ordered to accompany the constable, and see that the prisoner did not effect an escape.

Meantime, the gardener, who, since the "ghost" had been discovered to be but flesh and blood like himself, had become as bold as a lion, volunteered to stay in the house with us all night and help me to soothe the fears of my poor terrified children; while Mr. Burrows, accompanied by the joiner, proceeded to the house of the steward. I need not burden the reader with details, but I may mention that in answer to a quiet tap at the window, the door of the house was immediately opened, and old Mrs.

Weevil was at once in the grip of the officer. She was absolutely thunder-struck, and quite lost her presence of mind. Without telling her anything of what had happened, Mr. Burrows asked for her son, the steward. At first she hesitated, then said he was ill in bed.

"No," said Mr. Burrows, "he is not in bed, but he is safe enough by this time in the Police office; so you had better just tell us all about it."

At this Mrs. Weevil entirely broke down and confessed all. It is unnecessary to repeat at length what the reader can guess in great measure for himself; but the sum of her story was this:

The mother, equally with her son, hated Miss Roupel for despising his addresses, and took the means we have seen in order to drive each successive tenant out of her house. She also admitted that after the sudden death of Mrs. Roupel it was they who had spread the stories charging foul play against the daughter. In answer to a question from Mr. Burrows, she confessed that it was she who had played the ghost on the previous evening; but she had never before shown herself to any one who did not at once flee and quit the house. My attempt to get hold of her, therefore, had so alarmed her that she had great difficulty in escaping; and next morning had gone to her son, and told him she durst not play the part of ghost any longer, as the present tenant was likely to stand her ground, and they would in that way be found out. They were both enraged at thus being at last baffled in their long cherished course of malicious practices against Mrs. Roupel; and her son determined to take out his revenge upon me that night by first frightening me and then robbing the house, after which they were resolved to take the first opportunity of quitting that part of the country. Their cupidity had been aroused by the sight of some trinkets in Indian jewelry which I possessed; hence the design to rob me. In order to cover their purpose, the old hag was sent to me with the story of her son being ill; and as he had a secret means of access to the house, he readily affected an entrance after he supposed the family asleep. It was her son who had first put her upon these evil practices—had brought the old surplice from Lord B—'s house, in which either of them as occasion offered, was in the habit of terrifying the inmates, and thus depriving the object of their hatred of her chief means of livelihood.

Mr. Burrows did not trouble to apprehend the old woman at that time; but he took care that she should not leave the country till after the trial of her son for house-breaking and felony, when she had to appear against him as a witness. He was found guilty and sent to a penal settlement. Mrs. Weevil, ashamed to show her face in the neighborhood, departed, no one knew whither.

As for the ghost story, as soon as its salient points were known in the neighborhood, the house not only lost its bad character, but I became for the time quite a kind of heroine, everybody praising my courage and sagacity. I had the pleasure, some weeks later, of entertaining in the house Mrs. Richard Egerton, the former Miss Roupel, whom the neighborhood, conscious of unjust condemnation, received with open arms. After the term of my tenancy expired the charming house let for a more suitable rent, and ever since I believe it has formed an adequate source of income to its worthy owners.

Compensation asked for by a Convict.

About two years ago John Roberts, at that time proprietor of a restaurant in New York, and living in Brooklyn, was arrested and charged with being one of the Astoria masked burglars.—On the testimony of a woman, who swore that by the light of a lamp she saw his eyes and, although he was masked identified him, Roberts was convicted. He served twenty-one months in the State Prison, and then having established his innocence, was pardoned. Roberts now applies to the Legislature for compensation, and he ought to have it.

Honored and Blest.

When a board of eminent physicians and chemists announced the discovery that by combining some well known valuable remedies, the most wonderful medicine was produced, which would cure such a wide range of diseases that most all other remedies could be dispensed with, many were skeptical; but proof of its merits by actual trial has dispelled all doubt, and to-day the discoverers of that great medicine, Hop Bitters, are honored and blessed by all as benefactors.—Democrat. 11 21

Quick and Sure.

Many miserable people drag themselves about from day to day, not knowing what ails them, but with falling strength and spirits all the time that they are steadily sinking into their graves. If these sufferers would only use Parker's Ginger Tonic, they would find a cure commencing from the first dose, and vitality, strength and cheerfulness quickly and surely coming back to them, with restoration to perfect health. See advertising column. 1041