

## THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM.

I AM not superstitious. I may have a soft place in my head, like the greater part of man and woman kind, but I am not so weak as to believe in witchcraft, or in omens, or in warnings. I never did believe in them, nor in dreams (generally speaking), though as to these latter phenomena I will not speak positively, for reasons which I could give, but I shall not just now. Nor do I believe in apparitions, most of which may be easily accounted for by the state of the seer's health, or his nerves, or by the state of the atmosphere, or a hundred other circumstances. But I will say, without fear of contradiction from any reasonable person, that *some things* are quite unaccountable, though they cannot either be denied or explained away.

For example, noises! Dreadfully unaccountable are the noises that a person, sitting up late at night, and alone, "and when a weary world to rest are gone," may hear in some houses. I say *alone*, because it is not to be supposed that when several persons are together, some talking and laughing, some moving about, some occupied one way and some another, that they should pay any attention to the mysterious noises of which I am speaking. I am not nervous, but really I could not live in a house that was so afflicted—no, not if I could get it rent free, and, moreover, be paid for living in it.

And again there are still worse things than mere noises that make some houses very undesirable habitations for the living; such things, for instance as shadowy figures to be seen flitting by when there is apparently no substance to cause them; or a trembling to be felt in the air which makes the bell-wires vibrate, or even the bell to ring at unreasonable hours.—I cannot say that I ever actually saw these things myself, but I confess that once, just at midnight,—no, I will not say what it was now. I do not wish to make my friends either nervous or uncomfortable; still more unwilling am I to give them any cause for distrusting my veracity, so I will pass over that strange affair for the present at least, and to give a true account of what happened in a house that I was well acquainted with, and then they may judge for themselves whether or not that house was—

The house in question was a large and substantially-built mansion, standing in a beautiful, sheltered spot, although scarcely a furlong from the sea, and on the eastern coast of England. I know no other such spot on the whole line of coast from Berwick-on-Tweed to Dover. You already imagine that it is a stately edifice with gables, and turrets, partly clad with ivy, with deep-set, narrow pointed windows, and winding stairs complete? No such thing—neither is it a great staring modern house, standing stark naked, with neither an evergreen shrub outside, nor a superstitious legend inside, to enliven it. On the contrary the garden can boast of fig-trees of a magnitude seldom attained in our island except upon the southern coast, and the myrtle, which, further inland, can only be kept alive through the winter months in a greenhouse, covers the walls with its shining, dark green leaves and fragrant, silvery blossoms, to a height far above the drawing-room windows. The house may be a hundred years old—it may be more, or it may be less, though I should not think it. Who lives there now is no matter; our business is with the "good old squire," as he was commonly called in the neighborhood, who lived there five-and-twenty years ago. I knew him well, and a hearty, hospitable, old trump he was, too. He was a widower, and had no family; but as his means were ample, his house large and well appointed, and, moreover, his disposition social and jovial, it seldom happened that his house was without visitors.

Of all the places I ever knew it was the most pleasant to stay in; there was no trying to be cheerful and gay, it all came naturally; it seemed to be the very air of the place. There was plenty of shooting in the autumn; in the winter, hunting with two or three packs of harriers that were kept in the neighborhood; in the summer an endless variety of amusements on sea or land, and for wet days there was a billiard table and a good library for those who were inclined to be studious or quiet, or lazy—everybody did as he liked—Liberty Hall it was.

And yet—I had heard certainly, for I remembered it afterwards, though I paid very little attention to the matter at the time—I had heard that the house once had a reputation for being—for not being quite pleasant in all respects; but such things are said of so many country houses, that I looked upon this as mere idle gossip. Besides, the house had no appearance of the kind to warrant such reports. If such things had been said of Cranberry Hall, which was only two miles distant inland, I should not so much wonder; its gloomy battlements, its windows divided by heavy stone

mullions, its stacks of twisted and fretted chimneys, and, above all, that great dismal pine wood at the back, whose spire tops by moonlight always looked to me like an enormous army of giants with their javelins piercing the sky—these might justify such a popular belief, but I never heard that there was even any suspicion of the kind attached to that melancholy-looking place. This however, is an idle digression.

It was the last week in September, the weather was remarkably fine, we were a large party at the squire's, he was in the best possible spirits, for he expected a visit from an old school-fellow whom he had not seen for many years, but who had just written to say that he would come and give the pheasants a benefit on the first of October, as he had done twenty years before. The major as I now learned from my host, was born and had spent his early youth in this neighborhood; the two boys had gone to Eaton together, and had always kept up a friendly correspondence, though their way in life had been so different that they had not met for twenty years.

On the last day of the month just as we were sitting down to breakfast, the squire evidently a little disappointed at not finding a letter in the post-bag from the major, to our great surprise, the old soldier walked in. He had come down from London the day before, slept at the inn of the little market-town of Sandland, where the coach stopped in the evening, had risen betimes, and now walked over to his old friend's house.

After the first hearty salutations had passed between the two friends, and sundry rough and schoolboyish jokes on the alteration that time had wrought in their personal appearance had been exchanged, it was decided that when breakfast was over, the rest of that day should be spent in reconnoitering certain favorite old haunts of their youth, and in paying visits to some half-dozen aged laborers and fishermen, whom the major's kind heart had not suffered him to forget. The next day was to be dedicated to the slaughter of partridges and pheasants. Well, there is no need to dwell upon the unimportant events of the day. We dispersed in small parties according to our different tastes and inclinations, and assembled again when dinner-time approached. The evening came, and the time had passed away very quickly, the old gray-headed clergyman, I believe it was, reminded the company that it was drawing close upon midnight. Knowing our host's dislike to late hours, we arose to take our candles and depart.

"And where am I to perch?" demanded the major, as we were shaking hands and bidding each other good-night.

"O, you are to go to your own room; you recollect it, don't you, Charles? I fancied you, would like it best."

"To be sure I do—recollect it, indeed! I'm not likely to forget your almost blowing me up with gunpowder, one New Year's night, in that room—sing'd half the hair off my head! 'Tis a wonder that I recovered my beauty as I did. Yes, I remember it; the third door on the right-hand side, opposite—ah, by the by, who sleeps there? The old housekeeper, in your good father's time, used to try to frighten us boys about that room; she declared that nobody—"

"Foolish old woman!" interrupted our host, rather hastily; "he was obliged to threaten her with instant dismissal if she spread such absurd reports; why, you would hardly believe it, but I assure you, at one time, my father could scarcely get a servant to stay in the house—you know how superstitious most of our rural population is; however, the thing is forgotten now."

I was struck with the hurried manner in which these words were uttered, and still more with the uneasiness which the squire betrayed when several of the younger part of the company, whose curiosity had naturally been aroused by the foregoing conversation, began eagerly asking questions as to what the housekeeper had related. It was in vain that he tried to put an end to the conversation, or turn it to some other subject; our curiosity was excited, and we were not satisfied till we heard all the major could tell us about the matter. It was not much, certainly.

"Mrs. Lofty—that was her name—used to tell us that nobody could sleep in that room; there was something so very dreadful to be seen, or to be heard, or perhaps, for the old dame never would tell us all that she knew, or pretended to know; she declared, too, that no one had ever dared to pass a second night in it—was not that the story, squire? We boys used to laugh at her superstition, but, to confess the truth, I believe at that time neither of us would have been very willing to spend a night in that room by himself."

We took up our several candlesticks, and proceeded up stairs to bed.

"Let us take a look at this mysterious apartment," said I, as we were about to pass the door, which was closed, but not locked; let us see what is to be seen;"

and several of us walked in. It was a large comfortable looking room. The windows looked toward the east catching a glimpse of the restless ocean at the end of a fine old avenue which led up to that side of the house. It was a still night; the moon which was near the full, had but just risen, throwing a bright path of light across the rippling water, and causing the massy foliage of the elms to look back against the sky.—For a night view, I thought I had never seen anything more lovely.

The furniture in the room was heavy looking and old-fashioned, unlike that in the other apartments, which had all been handsomely furnished when the squire took possession of the place; this remained just as it was in his father's time. Between the windows was a large oval mirror of the fashion of the last century; the frame, which was white and gold, seemed intended to represent a confusion of deer's horns, dripping foliage, and icicles intermixed, the effect of which though the connection between these objects is not very obvious, was undoubtedly pleasing. On each side of the fireplace was a large, high-backed, well-stuffed arm chair; there were also other chairs of probably the same antiquity, if I may judge from their ample size, the elaborate carvings on the dark mahogany, and the faded worsted work which covered the seats. Besides these there was a table, a large oak chest with brass clasps, such as our great-grandmothers used to keep their linen or their blankets in, and a bedstead, on which, however, there were neither hangings nor bedding of any sort. The walls were of painted wainscot, the floor was well carpeted, and the room had merely the appearance of being disused, not the least of dirt or neglect.

The major seated himself in one of the large easy-chairs, and made a scrutinizing survey of the room.

"So this room is given up to the—"

"Come, come," interrupted the squire; "there's the clock striking twelve, and—"

"Upon my honor, Jack, I believe you know a good deal more than you choose to tell us—what is it now? Nay, don't look so grim. I've a great mind to take up my quarters here for the night. I wish I may never have a worse berth to sleep in than this great downy chair; it fits me exactly." And the old boy stretched out his legs, threw back his head into the soft cushions, and yawned as if he had finally settled himself for the night.

"Major, you'll oblige me by going into your own room," urged the host.

"Squire you'll oblige me by letting me have my own way," retorted his friend; and with your leave," continued he, rising, "I'll just look into that big chest, too. O! empty; then I will keep it so;" and locking it, he put the key into his pocket.

Amongst the guests was an old clergyman, who, many years ago, had been rector of the parish, which he quitted on being presented to a better living in a distant part of England; he was now on a visit to the squire, with whom, and with his father before him, he had lived on terms of considerable intimacy.—Whilst the major was making his observations, Mr. Bradley was carefully examining the wainscot, now and then tapping it, as if to ascertain whether it were hollow in any place.

"Is there any closet in this room?" asked Mr. Bradley.

"No—and no other door than the one we came in at. By the by, there once was a plate-closet, just behind the chair next the fireplace, but it was closed up ages ago, when my father had one made for the plate in his own bed-room. The closet now opens into the room at the back of this—my man servant's."

"And formerly the housekeeper's room; you remember, perhaps, that I came to see her, by her own request, a few days before she died?"

The major fixed his eyes on Mr. Bradley as he was speaking, as if he were trying to read his thoughts, but it was in vain; if he had any secret, his mild countenance did not betray it.

"What do you say, Mr. Bradley, for I fancy you know something more than we do; tell me, now, would you have any objection to sleeping here?"

"None whatever, except that I prefer a bed to a chair to sleep in."

The squire said, "The truth is that many years ago the room got a bad name and it has not been slept in since; in fact, the house so large that it has no been wanted. As to myself, I never did sleep in it, for I prefer my own room, which has a south aspect."

"Perhaps," suggested one of the party, "the rats may have found their way over the ceiling, or a cowl, on the chimney top makes a noise—when people go to bed with nonsense of this sort in their heads, the hooting of an owl, the roaring of the sea, or even the wind in the trees becomes something supernatural in their imagination."

At length, much to the satisfaction of

us young people, who scorned the idea rats, crows, or wind, and who had a strong inclination to believe in the supernatural, some of the major's traps, as he called them, were removed from the opposite room, as he declared that here, and nowhere else would he spend the night. Some of the youngsters proposed that he should be provided with pistols, but he shook his head, and said that he should be sufficiently armed against all comers with a good stout walking-stick. "And you had better not attempt to play any tricks, my lads, unless you have a mind to get a broken head," he added laughing.

After some arrangements for the major's comfort, which, by the way, he protested against as being quite superfluous, the party dispersed for the night.

The first of October was as fine a morning as any sportsman could wish for. At a little after eight we were all in the breakfast-parlor, except the squire and Mr. Bradley, who were slowly walking up and down the grass plot before the windows apparently in earnest conversation.

The major had already been besieged by a number of questions, which he answered in a joking manner, saying that the morning was no time for such subjects, that we must keep our nerves steady, and think no more about hobgoblins, or the pheasants would escape us. But when the squire and Mr. Bradley joined us, and the latter pointedly asked him how he had passed the night, he replied:

"I really am sorry to disappoint you, but I must confess I slept very well, and I saw nothing worse than myself (after these young chaps left the room, I mean)—what I heard, is quite another affair!"

"What—what did you hear, sir?" from half a dozen of us at once.

"I heard—don't let me alarm you—I heard the fellow in the room back of mine snoring like a pig."

"Nothing else?"

"No, upon my honor nothing else; my story is a very short one!"

"It is very satisfactory," said the old clergyman. "In the evening the squire and I have our stories to tell, but not till then, as there are some matters connected with my story which are not quite clear. While you are out shooting, I am in hopes of finding the missing links in a chain of evidence which will be satisfactory to all parties."

When breakfast was over, all those amongst us who were sportsmen took their guns, and went out for a day's shooting. I have seen younger men than the major used up after walking five or six hours through turnip-fields and underwood, with a double-barreled gun on their shoulders; but he seemed as full of mirth and jollity as he was the day before, and assured us, when we sat down to dinner, that he felt as fresh after his day's work, as he should have done twenty years ago.

In the evening, we reminded Mr. Bradley of the promise he had made us.

"I had not forgotten it," he replied; "but it will be best that the squire should tell his part of the story first."—Concluded next week.

## A Feminine Trick.

A feminine trick, very common among foreigners at Rome, Italy, is described as follows: A lady goes to a milliner's and looks over her stock of bonnets. She selects those which she thinks will suit her, and begs the milliner to send them to her the following morning that she may try them on at home and select the one which suits her. The poor milliner consents. At nine o'clock she sends the bonnets. The lady is not up. Will the "young woman" call again a little later? The "young woman" consents to leave the bonnets until three o'clock. What does my lady do then? She takes the bonnet she likes best to a little working milliner in a back street, and bids her make one exactly like the model she leaves with her until half past two o'clock, when she takes it back to the grand milliner, saying that she is very sorry, but none of them "suit her."

What makes people so discontented with their own lot in life is the mistaken ideas which they form of the happy lot of others.

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**ALBERT E. RICHMOND,**  
Chas. H. SMILEY, Atty. Administrator  
May 10, 1881.