

THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM.

CONCLUDED.

THE 'squire said, "If it had not been for the—what shall I call it?—obstinacy? resolution? firmness? of my old friend, here, who would persist in sleeping in that unlucky room last night, and the fortunate circumstance of Mr. Bradley's being here you certainly would never have heard, from me at least, any account of the mystery which has so long perplexed me. I must begin by telling you, that to the best of my knowledge, that room was never slept in but twice since I was born, and I am more than forty years old. You heard what the major said respecting our old housekeeper. She and her husband lived here in my grandfather's time, they grew old in the service, and died within a few weeks of one another. On the day that the old woman was buried, as I was returning from the funeral, I overheard something which, it appeared to me, was spoken purposely for me to hear, though it was addressed by one old village gossip to another. I do not recollect the precise words, but the purport was, that the 'squire would have no more evil spirits in his house now. This brought to my mind the strange stories I used to hear when I was a boy, and without having the slightest idea that my father attached any importance to the matter, for I never in my life had heard him allude to it, I unwittingly asked him what could have induced the housekeeper to tell such terrible stories about one room in his house. You imagine how much I was astonished at his reply, when he told me that what the housekeeper had said was but too true!

"For some time past," he added, "I have intended to speak to you about this painful matter, but having hitherto always endeavored to drive the subject from my mind, I have not had sufficient resolution to do so."

"I begged my father to explain himself, and to conceal nothing from me; for, to confess the truth, the more reluctant he appeared to be, the more urgently I pressed him.

"He then told me that, not long after my grandfather's death, he had ordered this room to be prepared for a friend who was coming to spend a few days with him; that his servant had made difficulties and objections, and had proposed some other room for his guest, but that he did not choose to give way to her whims, and accordingly his friend slept in the room as he desired, but on the following morning he told my father that he must leave him that day, and when pressed to give his reasons, so sudden a determination, he protested that nothing could induce him to stay another night in a house in which his rest had been disturbed by such frightful visions. He refused to tell my father what it was he had seen—he refused to sleep in any other room, and he tried hard to persuade my father never either to sleep in that room himself, or allow any other person to do so.

"Fully persuaded, however, that his friend was laboring under some mental delusion, my father, who had no fears whatever about the matter himself, was so far from being deterred from sleeping there, that he immediately resolved to do so that very night, and accordingly, in spite of the evident reluctance of his housekeeper, he did so, thinking, as he told me, that this would be the most effectual means of putting an end to the foolish rumors which had been spread by ignorant and superstitious servants.

"Taking the precaution to lock the door in order to prevent any intrusion in the night, he left a lamp burning on the dressing-table, and went to bed; and, undisturbed by any apprehensions, soon fell asleep. My father was always a sound sleeper, and not easily disturbed by noise in the night, and it was not by any noise that he was now awakened, but by feeling the bed-clothes gently moving, as if some one were pulling them towards the foot of the bed. The bed, I should observe, stood just as you saw it last night, facing the fireplace, on each side of which stand those high-backed chairs, and with the left side towards the door. As it was a cold night, my father had drawn the side-curtains of his bed, but there were no window curtains, nor even blinds, and though the moon shone brightly into his room at the time he woke, and the lamp was still burning, he could see nothing but the furniture standing in their usual places. He lay quite still, and hearing no noise, nor perceiving any motion in the bed-clothes, he began to think he had been dreaming, in consequence of the conversation he had had with his guest in the morning. But hardly had he composed himself to sleep again, when he felt the curtains on both sides of his bed first gently, then violently shake. Still he saw nothing, and, notwithstanding a certain degree of trepidation which he confessed that he felt, he made a sudden plunge at the curtains with open arms, but whatever was there it eluded his grasp, and again for a

minute all was quiet. He now determined to rise, but the moment he began to stir, he beheld two figures slowly and noiselessly gliding from the sides of his bed towards the foot—they stopped for an instant, then moved in the direction of the windows, which were opposite the door, and between which was the table on which the lamp stood. Without again attempting to raise, my father turned to look whether the door was open. No, it was shut, and the key remained in the lock as he had left it.—During the few seconds which passed while he was looking at the door, he perceived that the lamp had gone out, or had been extinguished, for instead of the yellow light of the lamp, there was now only the pale blue light of the moon, shining through the windows.—The two figures were still there, now standing motionless, then slowly retreating backwards in the direction of the fireplace. My father became nervous and extremely uncomfortable, yet he retained sufficient presence of mind to enable him to examine his nocturnal visitors.

"Except that they were of different height, in all other respects they presented precisely the same horrible aspect, which my father described as that of a death's head, partially concealed by a sort of cowl or veil, which fell over the shoulders, while the body was loosely wrapped in long white drapery, which, descending to the feet, concealed the whole of the figure except one bony wrist and hand. The idea of being looked in with these two frightful unearthly beings became intolerable, and my father resolved at all hazards to rush out of bed and make his escape. He rose, keeping his eyes fixed on the spectres who were now nodding their ghastly heads, and beckoning him with their skeleton fingers, but making no attempt to approach nearer the bed, or to intercept his retreat towards the door.—Though in a state of considerable agitation, my father never for an instant lost his presence of mind, and though, as he told me, his hand shook violently as he unlocked the door, he did not neglect to lock it again on the other side, as soon as he found himself safely in the passage. This done, he passed on quickly to his own bedroom, and hurrying on his dressing-gown, went without a minute's delay to call up his man-servant.—Now I must explain for the benefit of those here who are not so well acquainted with the geography of the house as Mr. Bradley and the major, that in order to reach the butler's room it was necessary first to go down the front stairs, then through the servant's hall, and up the back stairs, which led to the servant's rooms. With all the haste, therefore, that my father could make, several minutes must have elapsed between the time of his leaving the room in which he slept, and his reaching that of his servants.

"He knocked sharply at the door, but receiving no answer, he went in, and, as he expected, found the butler and his wife both fast asleep. His first idea was to wake them, and ask if they had seen or heard anything unusual; but, after a moment's reflection, he decided that it would be much more discrete to leave them to their repose, which he felt assured had not been disturbed that night.

"Without betraying his secret to any person in the house, the next morning he made a careful examination of the room. The door he found locked as he had left it; the windows were both of them barred. The old-fashioned linen-chest which you saw last night, I should tell you, was not then kept in the room, and if it had been it could never have contained two, or even one being of the size of those whom my father had seen gliding about in the moonlight. It was impossible that they should have been secreted under the bedstead, which was too low to admit of such a supposition. The chimney was much too narrow, and had it been otherwise, the white garments of the apparitions would have afforded sufficient proof that they did not enter by that means. The sliding panel in the wainscot was immovable, having been made fast at the time that my father had the plate-closet removed to his own chamber. The thing was inexplicable: the more my father pondered on the matter, the more he was perplexed, and at length, finding no clue to the mystery, he resolved, whether wisely or not I cannot say, to keep it to himself, and comply with his friend's entreaty never to allow any person to occupy the room again.

"Such was my father's strange story, which he concluded by begging me, whenever I should take his place as master of the house, to prevent anyone's sleeping in that chamber,—and no one ever has done so till last night, when, you are all aware how much against my wish, the major persisted in passing the night in a room which for such extraordinary reasons had been disused for so many years. I have nothing more to add, but Mr. Bradley will now tell you, not only what came to his knowledge several years ago, but of

the discoveries he made this morning whilst we were out with our guns; and when you have heard his story, I think you will agree with me in believing that he has thrown such a strong light upon the spectres that they will never again venture to show themselves in this neighborhood."

Addressing himself to the 'squire, Mr. Bradley said:

"Although I have been in orders almost forty years, I never till to-day was called upon to lay a ghost! In former times, I believe, it was considered to be one part of the priest's duty, and probably a very profitable part, for who would not pay a pretty round sum of money to get rid of such unwelcome visitors as those you have just described.

"I must tell you then that about sixteen years ago, whilst I was still a resident in this parish, I was sent for one day to see Mrs. Lofty, the old housekeeper here, who was dying. I had buried her husband a few weeks before. The old couple had for a great many years been considered as most trustworthy and conscientious servants of the old 'squire, your father (for you were called the young 'squire then), but it seems in one particular they had not deserved the confidence which was reposed in them. The woman, it seems, was greatly afraid of her husband, for whilst he was alive she had never had sufficient courage to confess the guilty part she had taken in deceiving her master. After his death, and feeling that her own end was approaching, she determined to relieve her conscience by making a full confession of the deception they had practised. She told me that in his youth, her husband, like a great many men of his class on this coast, had often been actively engaged in smuggling spirits, and that long after he had discontinued going out to sea, and had to all appearance become a steady man he had kept up a connection with smugglers, and aided them in various ways, but so cunningly that he had never been suspected by his master.—You observed," continued Mr. Bradley, addressing himself to me, "the beautiful view of the sea from the windows of the 'haunted room,' as it has been called for many years? Now there are only two bedrooms in the house which command this particular view, looking down the great avenue—the one just mentioned and the adjoining one, occupied by the man-servant. It was well known that a very favorite place for running a cargo of spirits on shore was just that opposite the end of the avenue, where it was easy to conceal the kegs amongst the black rocks at low water, and where the proximity of so many trees afforded concealment to the boat's crew. In order to prevent, if possible, the room from being used at night, they gave it a bad name, and affected to believe that it was haunted, and so long as this scheme answered their purpose, they took no other means but if, in spite of the dark hints that the housekeeper threw out, any person should persist in sleeping there, they were prepared with some frightful disguises with which to terrify him sufficiently to prevent a second attempt at such indiscretion. "Still," continued Mr. Bradley, again addressing the 'squire, "this does not account for the most perplexing part of the business. I have no doubt that it was the belief that there was no other means of entering the room except by the door or windows, which were known to be securely fastened, which caused the terror that was felt by both your late father and by his friend. But there was, and there still is, if I have not been misinformed, a perfectly easy means of access from one of these rooms to the other, which, with your permission, sir, we will now go and examine. I expect that we shall find other proofs of roguery which will leave no doubt as to the character of the monstrous apparitions you have just described."

We went up stairs into the man-servant's room. Mr. Bradley opened the door of a closet by the side of a fireplace at the back of which were five or six brass hooks, on which hung the man's great-coat, a water-proof cape, and some other garments.

"I think if we remove these things," said Mr. Bradley, "we shall discover the entrance into the other room."

The coats were instantly taken down, but still we could see no signs of any communication with the "haunted room."

"This closet, you observe, is not eighteen inches in depth, and as there is no recess by the side of the chimney in the other room, there must be plenty of space for another of similar dimensions at the back of this—the question is, how is it to be got at?"

"My carpenter can show us that," said the 'squire; he fitted up the plate-closet, and made this for the servants at the same time."

"And you were absent from home at the time, so I think Mrs. Lofty told me?"

"Yes, she cunningly suggested that

the job had better be done when I was out of the way, on account of the dust and other disturbances it would make.—I see her reasons now—the old hypocrite!"

"You need not send for the carpenter; a sliding door, like the one her master had ordered to be fastened up," that is what she said, and though she was much confused, and at times quite incoherent, repeating these words frequently without any obvious sense, I believe I now understand what she meant.—Those pegs, you see, are placed above the panel, and are immovable, but the panel itself, which in fact forms the partition between the two rooms, I have no doubt it is the one she attempted to describe."

It was probably a great many years since the door had been moved, so that it did not give way immediately when we endeavored to push it aside. However some little impatience, and a good deal of humoring we at length got it to slide in the groove which had been made for it.

If there were any doubt remaining in our minds as to the nature of the apparitions which had caused so much dismay in the family in goneby times, what we now beheld would have dissipated it, for on the back of the panel which opened into the "haunted room," hung two pasteboard masks, made to closely represent two death's heads, and on the floor lay a heap of dusty, yellow-looking linen, which had once been white. On removing these ghostly habiliments, we found two skeleton hands, or imitations of them, I cannot say that I examined them sufficiently to know what materials they were made of.—Such were the abominable disguises that had been used by the butler and the housekeeper his wife!

There now remained only to remove the partition between the closet and the "haunted room." This was done without any difficulty, after a small iron hook, or catch, had been raised. The passage between the two rooms was thus easily made, yet quite imperceptible when it was closed.

Some of the company present proposed that masks and other trumpery should be shown in the village, but the old clergyman suggested that it would be far better they should be burnt, and as the 'squire was of the same opinion, we immediately made an *auto da fe* of all the rubbish.

"There is one thing I don't quite understand," said the 'squire, speaking to Mr. Bradley; "how was it that you never till now told me of the rascally trick that had been played by Lofty and his wife?"

"You recollect that I left Sandiland just at the time of the old woman's death. If had remained here, most likely the subject would have been mentioned, and the discovery which we have just now made would have been made sixteen years ago. But the fact is, I had not any notion that the audacious plan of using frightful disguises had ever been carried into execution, or, that your father himself had ever been so insulted by his servants. What was meant by the sliding door I never suspected till last night, when you told us of the secret closet that had formerly been used for plate. I think, sir, that the ghost is now forever laid, and that this room may safely be used in the future; perhaps it would be the best way of silencing foolish tongues if it were slept in occasionally. Some of these young men—"

Four or five candidates offered themselves immediately.


Before the party at Sandiland broke up, I was obliged to return to my studies. Many years have rolled on since the happy days, bringing their stores of good and of evil, bringing new friends and dearer relations, sweeping away old friends, none more dear to me than my kind-hearted old friend the 'squire.—The major, too, is gone, and the fine old house where we met has passed into very different hands, and no longer has "The Mysterious Room."

Spiders as Telegraph Obstructors.

One of the chief hindrances to telegraphing in Japan is the grounding of the current by spider lines. The trees bordering the highways swarm with spiders, which spin their webs everywhere between the earth, wires, posts, insulators, and trees. When the spider webs are covered with heavy dews they become good conductors and run the messages to the earth. The only way to remove the difficulty is by employing men to sweep the wires with brushes of bamboo; but as the spiders are more numerous and persistent than the brush-users the difficulty remains always a serious one.

A Lady's Wish.

"Oh, I do wish my skin was as clear and soft as yours," said a lady to her friend. "You can easily make it so," answered the friend. "How?" inquired the first lady. "By using Hop Bitters, that makes pure rich blood and blooming health. It did for me as you observe." Read of it.—*Cairo Bulletin*, 36



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May 10, 1881.