

THE ARTIST.

The gold of sunshine fills the land;
The garners teem with gold of sheaves;
And day by day the cunning hand
Of Autumn paints the ripened leaves.

A bolder touch than Titian's spreads
The gorgeous, effluent colors out—
Broad masses of harmonious reds,
With flaming orange edged about;

Imperial purples flecked with gold,
Bright emerald crossed with scarlet rays—
Then tones them down with fold on fold
Of gauzy veils of sapphire haze.

But, day by day, the artist's eyes
Grow grave, her tints more faint and cold;
Out of her face the glad light dies,
With browns she blurs her red and gold.

She hears the Winter's fateful tread,
Sound from the North at dead of night—
What matter if 'tis brown or red?
He only paints with ghostly white!

She hurries through the woodland walks,
Above her head the west wind grieves,
Beneath her feet are crackling stalks,
And sombre brown of rustling leaves.

She paints the tops of distant hills
With softest rose and amethyst,
Sweet Indian-summer wine distills,
And spreads a solemn eucharist.

She gives to all the earth who tread,
With lingering, fond, pathetic grace,
Then draws a glory round her head,
And turns away her sweet, sad face.

And all the land lies bleak and bare!
The nipping wind, remorseful, grieves!
And, through the shivering, sobbing air,
Drop, one by one, the latest leaves!

W. M. L. JAY.

A SUMMER GHOST STORY.

One fine July morning, some four years ago, my brother and myself left Euston Square en route for Wales. We were at this time tolerably hard-headed medical students; and, as we had each of us just succeeded in passing an examination, we considered ourselves fully entitled to enjoy a couple of months absolute cessation from work.

Safely arrived in the principality, we spent a fortnight at Llandudno, and then, after a brief visit to Rhyl, we shouldered our knapsacks and set off on a march southward. In due course of time we came to a lonely little village in Breconshire; and here, as we were heartily sick of continuous pedestrianism, we resolved to pass the rest of the vacation. We chose this secluded spot because, being both of us ardent disciples of Isak Walton, we fell in love with the capital troutstream which wound through a neighboring valley. It was here that I met with the adventure which forms the subject of this narrative. It came to pass in this wise.

One evening, after dinner, I was seated in the window-sill of the parlor which we tenant. I was not by any means unpleasantly employed, for I was engaged in the threefold occupation of smoking a cigar, reading a novel, and paying assiduous attention to a glass of whisky-toddy which lay within convenient reach on the table. To me, thus delightfully beguiling time away, entered my brother Felix.

"George," said he, coming up and tapping me on the shoulder, "do you see that house facing us on the hill yonder—the one half hidden by trees, I mean, not the farm-house to the left?"

"Yes," answered I, lazily puffing at my cigar, "I see it."

"Well," said my brother impressively, taking off his spectacles and wiping them, "that house is haunted!"

"Dear me!" returned I, yawning. "I shouldn't have thought it."

"It appears," continued my brother, "that numbers of people have endeavored to occupy the house; but they have always been disturbed by hearing strange noises in the night, and compelled to relinquish the attempt. This has been the case for many years—in fact, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant."

"I know him," observed I—"a little snub-nosed man—keeps a public house."

"I am ignorant of the station in life of the oldest inhabitant in this neighborhood," said my brother, with some irritation; "but whoever he may be, he distinctly affirms that that house has been so haunted ever since he can remember. But the most remarkable part of the story is yet untold. It appears that some six months ago a laboring man and his family came to reside in this part of the country, and, being unable to find any cottage vacant that suited them, and as there was no rent charged for the haunted house, they determined to settle down there. They were disturbed as every one else had been, by the extraordinary sounds which they heard in the night; but the father, being a determined man, resolved next morning, if possible, to solve the mystery, and he accordingly commenced a thorough inspection of the premises. In the course of his exploration something white in a crevice in one of the walls attracted his attention. He endeavored to insert his arm, for the purpose of removing it, but failed to do so, as the aperture was too narrow. Being fully resolved, however, to see what it was, he fetched his pickaxe and soon widened the breach. Directly the dust arising from the falling bricks and mortar had subsided, a tolerably large cavity, somewhat resembling a cupboard, was laid bare; and in this he discovered a long roll of parchment, a piece of which had at first attracted his attention. This parchment

contained a list of the inhabitants of the parish in the year 1642, and, in addition, revealed some extraordinary facts concerning the birth and parentage of many of them—in fact, had it been brought to light a hundred years before, it might have materially affected the fortunes of nearly every family in the place. Well, the laborer lost no time in communicating his discovery; and although it was not deemed of any importance by the community at large, yet it had a wonderful effect upon the house in which it was found. That house ceased to be haunted from that day, and during the remaining four months of the laborer's stay he never on any occasion had his night's rest disturbed. It was conjectured by some people that the ghost had been troubled in his mind at the concealment of the parchment, but that, as it had been discovered, all care was removed from his breast, and, having now no longer any motive for haunting the house, he had taken his departure forever."

"Ah," said I, "quite possible! Pass the bottle, there's a good fellow."

"But that is not all," continued my brother, as he complied with my request. "About three weeks ago the ghost appeared again, and not only this, but he now haunts the place as regularly as ever. A tramp who slept there a short time back was nearly frightened out of his wits by the noises he heard, and one or two others have been disturbed also. Those who had advocated the theory that the ghost had been troubled about the concealment of the parchment were now held up to ridicule; but they soon got out of the difficulty by affirming that there must be something else of importance hidden in the building, and that the ghost will never be finally laid until that also is discovered. It is an extraordinary story," said my brother, in conclusion, "and I feel great interest in it."

"I can't say that I do, much," said I, when he had finished; "but where are you off to?"

"I am going up the river, to try my fortune for an hour or so," he answered, abruptly; and taking up his hat he left the room, evidently greatly disgusted at my want of interest in his narrative.

But, though I did not choose to tell him so, I did feel great interest in the matter—so much indeed that, as soon as I had watched him out of sight, I left the room for the purpose of making further inquiries. I intended questioning the landlord in reference to the matter; but I found, to my disappointment, that neither he nor his wife was at home. Their diminutive son, a sharp boy of eleven, I lighted upon in the kitchen, engaged in brushing his hat, and he informed me that his respected parents had gone to a prayer-meeting, and would not be back for an hour at least. In these circumstances I thought I could not do better than interrogate the young gentleman himself on the subject; so I commenced at once. I found him very well posted up in the details of the mystery; but he gave me no further information than that which I had already heard from my brother. He told me, however, in conclusion, that the house had formerly been a country-seat, and that it had been unoccupied for many years. It was now the property of a gentleman who but rarely visited the neighborhood, and was rapidly sinking into a ruin. My small friend also informed me that his father kept the key, and that he would there and then have himself shown me over the place but that he was at that very moment on the point of starting for a two days' visit to an uncle on the hills.

I inquired for the key, and, when he brought it to me, I "tipped" him for the information he had supplied, and suffered him to depart rejoicing. As soon as he had gone, I sprang over a hedge in front of the house—we lived some little distance out of the village—and descending the steep meadow which lay beyond it, I crossed the river by means of some stepping-stones, and I mounted the hill on the other side. After passing through a field, I reached the main road from our village to Brecon, and, following this, I came in due course of time to a path which wound through a copse of fir-trees to its left, and which I had noticed led to my destination.

The grove in which I was walking surrounded the house on all sides but the front. On the north and south there was about twenty yard's distance between the building and the trees, but at the back they grew so close to the walls that their branches ever and anon touched the windows. A dry stone wall ran between the wood and the house, and this enclosed a space in front which had been laid down in grassward, and in which even now the outlines of a few flower beds could be detected.

Removing a hurdle which filled up the space formerly occupied by a gate, I entered the enclosure. I made my way up to the house along a path which in earlier days had evidently consisted of gravel, but which was now so thickly clothed with grass as to be hardly distinguishable from the sward through which it ran. The house was a very old building, or rather, collection of buildings. It consisted of a small cottage in the centre, with a huge wing on each side—but the wings were so out of proportion to the centre, that the whole structure looked like a gigantic butterfly.

The windows, of which there were a great many, had at one time been supplied with their natural complement of panes, but these had now for the greater part gone the way of all glass, and their places were occupied by boards or wisps of straw. The door was knockerless and chinky, and creaked dismally as I inserted

the key. Opening it with some difficulty, I stepped into a large entrance hall paved with stones amid which the grass was peeping. A toad, who was evidently out for his constitutional, and who appeared greatly disgusted at being interrupted, crawled away at my approach toward a distant corner, and disappeared behind a pile of bricks and mold which lay there.

Opening a door at my left, I found myself in a huge room which had apparently served as a library in days gone by, for there were still to be seen some musty and rotten shelves attached to the walls. It was totally unfurnished, the dust lay thickly around, and it smelled like a family vault. Another room, which faced it, was similarly unfit for occupation, but in this I found a decrepit old table leaning on two legs against the wall. At the back of the hall there was a kitchen; and in this evidently the mysterious parchment had been found, for the newly-discovered cupboard gaped in one corner, and a huge heap of bricks and mortar lay piled up near its mouth. Returning to the hall, I found, on opening two more doors—one on each side—that it possessed another peculiarity—it had three staircases leading from it, one ordinary flight in the centre and one on each hand, concealed by the doors just mentioned. These I conjectured—and rightly, as I very soon found—led respectively to the first floors of the centre and the two wings.

The rooms up stairs in the centre—which was only two stories high—were in a similar state to those below; but in the wings the case was different. The right wing had several rooms in a semi-furnished condition, and one, which was at the back of the house on the third story, was tolerably clean and comfortable. It was furnished as a sitting room, and had, besides chairs and a table, a by-no means-to-be-despised sofa. In the left wing, again, I found another apartment on the same story which was fitted up as a bedroom. None other besides these two was suitable for occupation.

I inspected the house for nearly an hour, and the longer I looked over it the more did I feel inclined to pass a night within its walls, and see what effect the strange noises would have upon me.

"Yes," I said aloud, as I quitted the building and shut the door behind me—"yes, I will sleep here, and what's more, this very night, too, or I'll know the reason why!"

Then I hurried down the walk, and once more shifting and replacing the hurdle, made the best of my way back to the village.

To tell my brother and the landlord, and to secure their co-operation, in order that I might get a fire lighted, a bed prepared, pistols provided, and perhaps a companion?

No, certainly not—the very reverse. I returned to my lodgings in order to secure three articles—viz., a spirit-flask, an overcoat, and a lantern—and I hurried thither because I wished to obtain possession of them and again leave the house before my brother returned from his fishing excursion.

When I reached the house I found, to my great delight, that my brother was still absent, and that the only person on the premises was the landlady, who had just come in from her prayer-meeting. Hastily securing the things I wanted, I told her that I intended walking over that night to a certain watering place seven miles distant, in order to purchase some fishing tackle, and that I should feel obliged by her informing my brother that I should not return until the next morning. So saying, I quitted the house.

I intended to let no one know of my intention of passing the night in the haunted house; and for pursuing this line of conduct I had the following two very good reasons: First, if any supernatural manifestations took place—and this I doubted—I thought it just barely possible that I might give way to terror and rash madly from the house. If I did this in the present circumstances no one would know anything of my pusillanimity, and so my reputation for courage would remain untarnished. In the second place, if the mysterious noises were the work of some prankish inhabitant—and this I strongly suspected was the case—I should, as no human being knew of my visit, very likely be undisturbed; and moreover, if this turned out to be the case, my passing the night there, seeing that no one had as yet escaped, would be almost conclusive proof that the whole affair was of earthly origin.

It was about half-past eight when I left the house the second time, and, as this was far too early an hour at which to retire for the night, I went out for a four miles walk to a country inn I had before visited. Here I filled my flask with tolerably good brandy and procured a supply of lights. I stayed some little time at the inn, so that it was after eleven before I again reached the path which led through the fir-tree copse to the haunted house. The wind had risen considerably during my walk, and it now shook the trees in a manner which plainly indicated that a storm was coming on.

It was at the beginning of the month of September, and the night was as dark as pitch. I had lighted my lantern long since, so that I experienced no difficulty in finding the path. The wind swept by in such powerful gusts as I was unfatigued the hurdle, that it well-nigh knocked me, the lantern and the hurdle over together. I got through at last, however, and, carefully fastening it behind me, I went on to the house. It had looked dismal enough by daylight; but that was nothing to its appearance now. It seemed ten times more dismal, and my lantern threw such strange shadows on

the floor and on the pile of bricks in the corner, that I shudderingly drew my coat closer and hurried up-stairs.

I selected the left-hand flight, and I did this because I had determined to occupy the little room on the top-most story which was fitted up as a sitting-room. The stairs creaked ominously as I mounted, and I turned several times and listened for the footsteps which I fancied I heard coming after me. But I detected nothing; and at length, reaching the room I had selected, I entered and carefully locked myself in.

As I had not the slightest intention of sitting up and watching all night, but had resolved to enjoy as sound a night's sleep as possible, I at once set to work to make myself comfortable. I dragged the sofa close up to the wall, and, depositing myself thereon, covered myself with my coat and a huge old rug which I found in the room; then, planting an enormous cudgel—cut on my way back from the inn—close to me on the floor, I took a hearty pull at my flask, put out my lantern, and composed myself to slumber. Singular to state, I speedily forgot the little uneasiness I had experienced in mounting the stairs, and the novelty of the thing soon wearing off, I sank into a profound sleep.

As I afterward found, I had been in Morpheus' clutches about three hours when I awoke with a start. I sprang up into a sitting position on the sofa and endeavored to collect my scattered thoughts; for a moment I could not imagine where I was. At length, when I became fully conscious of my situation, it struck me as very extraordinary that I had awoke in this sudden manner. Something out of the way must have occurred, or I should unquestionably have slept on till morning. What could have happened? As I put this question to myself, a series of most unpleasant sensations crept over me. I listened attentively, and endeavored to pierce the surrounding darkness, but I could neither see nor hear anything. I sunk down again and dived completely under the rug; but directly I did so the uncomfortable feeling came again with redoubled force. I could not lie still. At length, being wide awake, and finding myself as unlikely to go to sleep again as possible, I sprang from the sofa and commenced searching for my lights. I groped my way carefully toward the mantel-piece, as I had a faint recollection of leaving them there, but could not discover anything of them. I made my way to the table and then explored the sofa, but still met with no success.

"It's very odd," I muttered. "Where in the world can they be? Must have fallen on the floor, I suppose."

Stooping down, I felt about carefully in all directions. Crash! Powers of darkness, what was that!

I started up like a jack-in-the-box, and seizing the first thing I could lay hands on, and which chanced to be a chair, I subsided into a rigid attitude of defiance, and stood attentively listening for a repetition of the sound.

"What could it have been?" I exclaimed breathlessly. "It came apparently from the other wing, and sounded as if some heavy object had come into contact with the floor. What on earth was it?"

I listened for some minutes more, but there was nothing further to be heard.

"Pooh!" said I at length, setting down my chair. "It was only a tile falling off, or a shutter banging to, or something of that sort."

So saying, I resumed my search for the matches, and, after an exploration which lasted seven or eight minutes, I discovered them snugly ensconced in my waistcoat-pocket. Striking a light, I illuminated my lantern, and was shutting its door, when—crash!

I gave a jump that carried me at least two feet above the level of the ground; then I rushed to where my stick was lying, and, clutching it spasmodically, I planted my back against the nearest wall and mentally resolved to have it out with the crash-causer, whether he were human or infernal.

"That sounded as if half a dozen fire-irons were being clashed together," I said to myself, when I found no immediate attack impending—"the ghost and a friend having a fencing-match perhaps."

I laid down my stick, placed my lantern so that it threw its light upon the door, and then, taking a pull at my flask, I listened attentively, for something fresh. Almost immediately I heard a fresh sound in the direction of the two previous ones—i. e., in the opposite wing—but of a different nature, and by no means so loud. This last noise was of a dull, heavy kind, and I had not the faintest idea by what it could be caused.

I took a fresh pull at my flask, covered the lantern with the rug, and noiselessly unlocked and opened the door; then, stick in hand, I groped my way to the stair-head, and again listened attentively. But to hear anything there seemed impossible; the wind howled and shrieked in its highest notes, the rain hissed against the window-panes, and the branches of a huge tree which grew close to the house ever and anon came crashing against the casement as if it were trying to force an entrance into the building.

I waited patiently for a lull, and at last one came. But, although, I strained my ear to catch the slightest sound, I could hear nothing; and, satisfied at last that I had been terrified by no supernatural or unusual noise, I was returning to my room, when a tremendous gust of wind came suddenly and dashed to my door with a force that shook the house. I rushed and opened it, and, directly I had re-entered the room and