

THE HAUNTED HAT

I had taken my evening repast, after my customary modest fashion, at the Hotel Benvenuto, a cozy little Italian restaurant in Soho. Lest the fact that I had been dining should, in skeptical minds, tend to cast a doubt upon the strict accuracy of the strange story which follows, I hasten to add that my potatoes had been limited to a flask of Chianti and a cup of black coffee.

I lighted a cigar and started to walk home. I should here mention that I am a bachelor, and occupy the drawing-room floor of a house not far from Enston Square. I had not gone many yards when my ears were assailed by a sound, faint but distinct, of hand-clapping. I was at the moment passing a theatre, and I imagined the sound to be the applause of the audience. I wondered, in a careless way, how it was that I had never heard it in the same spot before, but I concluded that it must be owing to some difference in the direction of the wind. Strange to say, however, after an interval of silence, the sound again became audible when I was not near any place where it was likely to have proceeded. I know how easily a highly strung intellect like mine may be upset, and I began to feel a little bit nervous. In my sitting-room is an early Victorian piece of furniture called, I believe, a chiffonier, surmounted by a bust of Mr. Chamberlain. I laid my hat beside the bust, and, filling my pipe, sat down to read a magazine. I was half-way through an interesting article when the clock began to strike. I looked up, uncertain whether it was ten or eleven. As I did so I became conscious of a strange phenomenon. My hat, which I had placed on the top of the chiffonier, now surmounted Mr. Chamberlain's head. It was tilted on one side in a most unstatesman-like manner, and an eyeglass, which I had never noticed before, was stuck in the right eye of the figure. Even the expression of the bust was changed. In its normal condition it represented a grave and dignified personage, as one might picture Mr. Chamberlain when expounding the advantages of reciprocity; but under his present aspect one would rather have expected from him a comic song or a smoking-room story. Such a libel upon a distinguished statesman was not to be tolerated for a moment. I hastily got up and removed the hat and eyeglass, when the bust reverted to its ordinary expression. As I did so, the mysterious hand-clapping again sounded in my ears.

On entering my sitting-room the next morning I instinctively glanced at the bust of Mr. Chamberlain. It wore its normal expression of calm cocksureness, not in the least like the "won't-go-home-till-morning" air it had borne on the previous evening, and beside it rested my hat, just as I had placed it overnight. I breakfasted in usual course, and started for my office in Lincoln's Inn. I ought to have mentioned that I am a solicitor. The firm is Bramwell & Browne. Bramwell is the senior partner, and I am Browne.

On arriving, I sat down at my table and began to open my letters. I had been thus occupied for about half an hour when the office boy came in with a fresh batch. He looked at me with a curious expression, as if amused at something, and as soon as he had got outside the door I heard a sound of smothered laughter. A few minutes later another clerk came in. I noticed on his face the same expression of suppressed amusement, and again heard a choking sound when he got outside the door. I looked carefully around in search of anything to account for their conduct, but in vain. Shortly afterwards my partner came in. He too looked at me in a curious way.

"Going out?" he inquired.

"No," I replied; "not at present."

"Then why have you got your hat on, and why are you wearing it in such an extraordinary way?"

I put my hands to my head. I found that my hat, which I imagined I had taken off as usual on entering, was still on my head, but tilted backward in a manner which quite accounted for the frivolous behavior of our underlings.

"I am—it slipped my memory," I said, and, taking off the hat, placed it on the table beside me. Again I heard the sound of faint applause. I glanced at my partner to see if he too heard it, but he made no sign.

The morning passed without further incident till after lunch, when I had arranged to meet my broker at the Bank of England in order to execute a transfer of stock. On arriving at the bank I placed my hat on the counter beside me while I wrote my signature. There was certainly nothing in it when I laid it down, but when I took it up again to replace it a grinning cannon-ball rolled out of it. Stock Exchange men are proverbially fond of practical jokes, and I glanced savagely at my broker, with the idea that he was somehow responsible for the phenomenon. His astonished expression, however, satisfied me that he was innocent; and the clerks behind the counter looked equally surprised, not to say alarmed.

The situation was most embarrassing. The thing had unmistakably come out of my hat, and there was nothing for it but to account for its presence as best I could. I endeavored to appear unconcerned, but it was a poor attempt.

"I didn't intend to show you that," I stammered. "It's a little scientific experiment of mine; an invention that may—er—have money in it. I am taking it to my—my patent agent."

I went straight back to my office. On the landing outside the door is a wooden receptacle, half bin, half coal supply. I lifted the flap, and taking the cannon-ball out of my bag, dropped it in among the coals, only too pleased to be rid of it.

peg, and the rabbit came out of it." In view of my recent experience, the statement did not appear so incredible as it would otherwise have done, and as he spoke I perceived that a small rabbit was dodging about among the legs of the office stools. This time, however, I could safely disclaim responsibility.

"It seems to me, gentlemen," I said, "that some one is playing practical jokes. I won't inquire who it is" (I knew I had better not), "but if it occurs again I shall deal with the matter very severely."

I returned to my own room and proceeded with my work as best I could. From the subdued chuckles which I heard in the outer office at intervals, I fear that the rabbit interfered a good deal with the serious business of the afternoon, and I was not sorry when office hours were over and the clerks dispersed to their respective homes.

I had arranged to dine with a friend at his club. I was half inclined to confide in him, and take his opinion on my singular experiences; but I felt that it wouldn't do. Mr. Brayne is the sort of man who prides himself on the very few things he believes. I felt that if I told him my story he would set me down as either a liar or a lunatic, possibly both. My mind, however, kept recurring to the subject after dinner; and my host chafed me more than once about my absent-mindedness. Toward the close of the meal a terrible thought struck me. What if the object which I had taken to be a mere cannon-ball contained some violent explosive? And, good heavens! I had deposited it in our own coal bin. I felt a horrible presentiment that the good lady who looks after our office would choose that particular "lump" the very next morning to place on one of the fires, in which case not only might she blow herself up, but one side of New Square might be in ruins, and whole pages of the Law List out of date by reason of the untimely death of the rising barristers and eminent solicitors whose names had hitherto adorned it.

I took a hasty leave of my host, (who did not seem pleased at my sudden departure) and made my way back to Lincoln's Inn. I had never been there at night before, and I had an uneasy consciousness that the porters eyed me with suspicion. I didn't wonder at it, for I felt like a burglar; indeed, a real burglar would probably have been much more at his ease. I proceeded to our staircase, the stairs creaked as they never creak in the daytime, but in due course I reached our landing. To my great discomfort, it was in all but darkness. There was a feeble gas jet on the floor below and one on the landing above, but none on ours. I lifted the lid of the coal bin, and by the aid of wax matches peered into its grimy recesses. The object of my search had apparently rolled into some remote corner, for I could not see it. I draw a veil over the difficulties of my search; no description could possibly do them justice. Suffice it to say that after actually getting into that coal bin, burning the best part of a box of matches, and ruing a nearly new pair of trousers, I secured that wretched hall and returned it, with infinite precaution, to my brief-case. It looked harmless enough, but I dared not take any chances. What was I to do with it?

After a little reflection I decided for Waterloo Bridge, and I hastened in that direction. Watching my opportunity, I opened the bag, took out the cannon-ball, and dropped it into the stream below. "Thank goodness," that's done with," I soliloquized as I heard the splash. No one appeared to have observed my strange proceeding, and I made the best of my way home, accompanied by the faint ripple of applause in my ears, which by this time I was beginning to be almost accustomed to.

The following day was Saturday. The morning passed without any abnormal occurrence and in the afternoon I took advantage of the customary half-holiday to pay a visit to a lady whom I hope shortly to make Mrs. Browne. My fiancée resides with an elderly aunt by no means easy to get on with. Miss MacTaggart holds prominently the opinion which King David expressed in a hasty moment, that all men are liars. Indeed, she goes further than did David in her poor opinion of the male sex, who, according to her, are with very few exceptions, gamblers, whiskey-bibbers and general evil livers. I had had considerable difficulty in persuading her that my moral character was a little above the very low average. I think the point which told most in my favor was the fact that I am one of the very few men who do not play bridge. Indeed, I very rarely touch a card at all, my favorite recreation being golf and chess, to neither of which she could find any serious objection. She happened, to my secret satisfaction, to be out driving on the occasion of my visit; and as I gathered that her return was expected at five o'clock, I mentally resolved to make my adieux ten minutes earlier.

The time passed only too quickly. Several times in the course of the afternoon I had been on the point of confiding to Ethel my strange experiences of the previous day; but the fear of being disbelieved prevented me, and when I rose to go my tale was still untold. But my lack of moral courage brought a heavy punishment. I had brought my hat with me into the drawing-room, and placed it on a chair. When I took it up again to go, it struck me as being unusually heavy. Glancing down into it, I perceived that it was nearly filled by something or other loosely wrapped in a red cotton handkerchief with white spots.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, as I realized that I was in for some new embarrassment.

"What in the world have you got in your hat?" said my lady-love.

"Pon my word, I don't know," I said, desperately. "There was nothing in it when I came in, I'll take my oath."—I was going to say "oath," but professional instinct made me substitute "affidavit."

"You surely don't mean to suggest that anything has been put into it since?" No one has come into the room but the parlor-maid, and I'm sure she never went near your hat."

Ethel's logic was unanswerable. Nothing could possibly have got into my hat, and yet something had certainly done so.

greater part more or less soiled and dog-eared.

"Oh, Arthur!" exclaimed Ethel, in tones of horror; "and I thought you never played cards."

"Nor do I; and if I did, you surely don't suppose I would use such a grubby lot as these?"

"Then why," she sobbed—"why do you carry them in your hat?" I tried to explain that I had nothing to do with the matter—that various supernatural things happened to me without any volition of mine. Naturally, she didn't believe it. Her faith in me was shattered, and my attempts at exculpating myself only made the matter worse.

"Oh, never mind all that!" she said, impatiently. "Please put away the wretched things, and get away before Aunt Priscilla comes home, or it will all be over. I shall never be allowed to speak to you again."

I felt that for the time there was nothing else to be done, and I forthwith began to stow away the cards again. They were packed, I suppose with some amount of system, for in my haste, and in their now more scattered condition, I found it impossible to get them back into the handkerchief. I filled every available pocket. My garments were distended in every direction by objectionable bulges. At last I succeeded in reducing the remainder to such a quantity as would just go into the handkerchief; but here a further difficulty presented itself. Nothing would induce the packages thus made to go again into the hat; and I had finally to take my leave (apparently just in time to escape Aunt Priscilla), carrying the distended handkerchief in my hand, as a navy carries his dinner. And this is one of the most fashionable squares of the West End.

Luckily, there was a hansom in sight. I hailed it, keeping my objectionable parcel well behind me, and jumped in, stowing my burden under the seat. I was about to tell the man to drive me home, when a happy thought struck me. I would make him a present (without his knowledge) of the pocket-handkerchief and its contents. I accordingly told him to drive me to Gower Street Station. When I reached it I got out hurriedly, leaving the parcel behind me, gave him a liberal fare and took a return ticket for Moorgate. I jumped into an empty compartment, and as soon as the train had started, opened the window and began to clear my pockets of their objectionable contents.

Having completed my task, I started homeward, congratulating myself on having made a clean sweep of my embarrassments. But I reckoned without my host, or rather without my cabman. A hansom was standing before my door. It appeared that the job was done by sight, having been driven home once or twice from a theatre. Having found the parcel under the seat, he had come, with inconvenient honesty, to restore it to me. With a smile upon his countenance, but imprecations in my heart, I gave him a liberal reward for his trouble, with a further allowance for the hour or so which he had lost in waiting for my arrival.

Fortunately there was a fire in my grate, and as soon as I had got fairly into my rooms and closed the door I set to work to burn those detestable cards. I could not have believed that it would be so difficult a task. The more I burned the more there seemed to be left, and the smell was atrocious. Half-way through the operation there was an agitated knock at the door, and my landlady rushed in, carrying a pail of water. She justified her sudden entrance by a tremendous saff, and the remark that she "reely thought the ouse was afire."

"It is all right, Mrs. Jenkins," I explained. "I am merely burning some—some papers."

Unluckily, that villainous red handkerchief lay open on the hearth-rug. It still contained a goodly quantity of cards. Some were scattered over the carpet, and others in various stages of combustion choked the fireplace.

"An' a very noble thing on your part, if you'll excuse me sayin' so," Mr. Browne, I 'ope an' trust you're a-givin' of 'em up for good, an' I only wish all young men ad the moral kerriage to do the same. If my poor 'usband—"

he uses in his famous trick of the Chapeau du Diable. To my mind, one tall hat's very much like another; but he don't seem to think so. I'm told he has had to cut out the trick for the last two nights for lack of this particular hat, and he's been in five times to know if we had any tidings of it. I can't see anything very special about it myself—and he turned it over in his hand—but he says he wouldn't part with it for a hundred pounds. Ah! here he is."

As he spoke a gentleman entered, whom I remembered to have been seated near me on the occasion of my last visit. He was unmistakably a foreigner. He was very dark, with an aquiline nose and unusually piercing eyes. His most noteworthy features, however, were the eyebrows, which, either by nature or art, were bent upward at their outer ends. The ends of his moustache were bent upward in the same manner, the combination giving him a Mephistophelean expression singularly appropriate to the nature of his profession. He caught sight of the hat in the waiter's hands, and seemed to know instinctively that it was his lost property. He almost rushed toward us.

"Aha! you find my hat?" "Yes, sir," said the waiter. "This gentleman had took it by mistake."

Herr Blitzen bowed politely to me, and took the hat from the waiter's hands.

"I am much glad to find him once again," he smoothed it tenderly with his sleeve. "I hope he give you no trouble, sir."

"Oh, dear, no," I said. "It's no trouble at all, so far as I am concerned. The fault was mine. I am only sorry to have inconvenienced you by my mistake."

He handed me back my own hat with another polite bow, and we sat down at different tables to our dinner. But half way through my meal a startling idea struck me. When the magician expressed his hope that I had had no trouble with the hat, I had taken the remark to apply to the mere fact of the exchange, but I now perceived that it was capable of quite a different interpretation. Why, I had had nothing but trouble ever since it had been in my possession, and I now began to realize that that wretched hat, and nothing else, had been the cause of all my embarrassments. The mysterious sound of hand-clapping which had so worried me at intervals was doubtless its way of congratulating itself on the successful accomplishment of some new act of villainy.

I took a sudden resolve. As soon as I had finished my dinner I went round to the Empire Theatre and secured a stall to witness Herr Blitzen's performance. In due time his "turn" came. He did sundry wonderful things, which, however, I have seen equalled by other conjurers. But at last came his special feat, the much-advertised Chapeau du Diable, and that was very truly a marvel. Exhibiting a hat—the hat—he showed it empty, handing it round that there should be no mistake about it being so. Then, for some twenty minutes, he proceeded to take various articles from it. He began with such small matters as flowers, cards and ribbons; but these were merely introductory. Soon, in rapid succession came cannon-balls, rabbits, clocks, bird-cages, ladies' hats, lighted lanterns, and even soda-water, till at the finish he had completely filled all the chairs and tables on the stage.

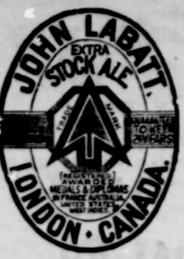
I heard two men behind me explaining to each other "how it was done"; how the articles to be produced are stowed in the performer's pockets, and up his sleeves, and inside his collar, and down his back, and in all sorts of possible and impossible places, and how "the quickness of the hand deceives the eye"; how the wizard puts them in the hat when you are not looking, and takes them out again when you are; and so on.

But I smile at such childish explanations. I know better. I have worn that hat!—Prof. Hoffman in Chambers' Journal.

Economy Point, N.S., May 1—(Special)—Geo. S. McLaughlin, of this place, gives two splendid reasons for his belief that Dodd's Kidney Pills are the one remedy for Kidney ailments. Here are the two reasons in his own words:

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French Masonry Arraigned London, April 24.—The Daily Express publishes the following from Paris:—A vigorous, attack on the Grand Oriental Lodge of French Freemasons is delivered by M. Bidegain, its late Assistant Secretary, in his book which has just been issued.

The author alleges that the Grand Orient has warped the true objects of Freemasonry by converting it into an unscrupulous political machine and a vast secret spying organization. At the request of the Grand Orient, he says, every ambitious Maçon in France became a private police spy on his neighbor, and hundreds of thousand malignant reports were, he alleges, thus communicated to the late Combes Government.

He accuses many thousands of Freemasons all over France of being mere tools for the furtherance of the political ambitions of Masons of high degree.

The Tail of the Kite Speaker Cannon's all but indecipherable handwriting got Congressman Cushman into a mess a few days ago. The Washington representative got a note from the speaker, but was unable to make out more than two or three words. Then he showed it to several friends, and between them they read it all but the last three words. In despair he called on Mr. Cannon, and told him of the difficulty. Said the speaker: "You showed this letter to several people, you say?" "Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker, I tried every way to read it before troubling you about the matter. None of us could make out the last three words, though." "Why," said Mr. Cannon, "the last three words were 'personal and confidential,' you chump."

Speaker Cannon is a great lover of green corn. He boards at the Arlington, and one day took one of his Illinois farmer constituents to dinner with him. Cannon made his dinner on green corn, eating seven ears. The farmer asked him how much he paid for board at the Arlington, and Cannon replied: "Six dollars a day."

"Well," said the farmer constituent, "Joe, don't you think it would be cheaper for you to board at a livery stable?"—Kansas City Journal.

An End to Bilious Headache.—Biliousness, which is caused by excessive bile in the stomach, has a marked effect upon the nerves, and often manifests itself by severe headache. This is the most distressing headache one can have. There are headaches from cold, from fever, and from other causes, but the most excruciating of all is the bilious headache. Parmelee's Vegetable Pills will cure it—cure it almost immediately. It will disappear as soon as the Pills operate. There is nothing surer in the treatment of bilious headache.

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Do Not Go to Roost

A matter-of-fact mind like Mrs. Salter's is a comfort to the person who has it, and a never-ending delight to the person's friends.

"I suppose you went to bed with the chickens while you were away," said one of the neighbors, after Mrs. Salter had returned from her vacation visit to a farm.

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Salter, indignantly. "They were very neat, quiet people, though they've never had any advantages. We had rooms in the front of the house on the second story, and the chickens slept somewhere at the back of the house. We never saw them after sunset, and we were there nearly three weeks. I am sure farming people are often more particular than we have been led to suppose."

Jack-Bess said "No" to me last evening, but I don't think she really could tell why she did it. May—Oh, yes she could. She told me. Jack—Did she? May—Yes, she said she didn't think you'd take "No" for an answer.—Philadelphia Press

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