

Noddington stirred itself a little concerning me on the following morning. But I had pre-arranged my line of conduct; I was calm, discreet, reserved. Huxham, I found, had been setting afloat a preposterous account of his adventures; but I ignored Huxham. I averred that he had gone home much inebriated at an early hour; and Noddington, notwithstanding its desire to credit the fact that something marvellous had in truth occurred, had yet unquestioning belief in the inebriety of its sexton. The statement that I had slept as sound as a top, it was much less disposed to accept. Mr. Mumford was congratulatory. He was glad to find that a sensible tenant had at last been secured for the White Hart. Dr. Blossop was kind enough to express his pleasure at the fact that a hardheaded London medical man had come down to Noddington to send to the right-about all the absurd fables that had been rife about the place a great deal too long.

The excitement through Noddington during the day brought a little business to the surgery: I dispensed a blue pill and black draught, I strapped up a cut finger, and I applied some liniment to a contused wound on a child's leg. I began to think that, ghost or no ghost, I was beginning to make a practice.

When night came, I locked up the house carefully, and lighted my candles in the surgery, late the bar-parlour; but I did not remain there. Leaving the candles burning, I went up, without a light, to the great room, the window of which was closed. I took up my station in a corner of the room. I had the poker with me, with very vague notions as to what I intended to do with it; but it seemed to me that the possession of some sort of weapon, of offence or defence, was decidedly desirable.

It had struck eleven o'clock. The time passed very slowly. It was rather miserable work waiting in that great, cold, dark room for the advent of the perturbed spirit. I was sorely tempted to steal back to my surgery, and refresh myself with another dose of the Red Lion brandy. I began to wish that I had not taken upon myself to prescribe for the White Hart ghost. After all, strictly speaking, a general practitioner had no right to be regarding a ghost as a patient. It was no part of my duty to be curing Noddington of its haunted house. I was just deciding in my own mind that it was a pity I had ever heard of Noddington, or ever dreamed of settling there with the view of making a practice, when distinctly there was the sound of some one crossing the stable-yard without, then a curious rustling of the ivy; a shadow darkened the window; then came a rush of cold night-air into the room; the window opened slowly, noiselessly; a leg appeared, then another, then a whole body. A man stepped into the room.

He was close to me. Stretching out my arm, I could have hit him with the poker; certainly, I could have touched him. I could hear him breathing. He paused for a moment, as though to recover himself after his exertion of climbing into the room; then he began to walk with a firm, heavy, solemn footfall up and down, up and down the middle of the deserted room; and it seemed to me that he trod with especial weight when he came to that part of the floor which was over my surgery, where, possibly, he presumed me to be sitting.

Was I frightened? Never mind whether I was or not. For some minutes, I was certainly irresolute as to what course I should adopt. One thing I was pretty clear about—it was not a ghost I had to deal with—it was a living man. At last, I made up my mind what to do. As he paced down the room, I followed him stealthily, so that when arriving at the opposite wall, he turned to pace again, he met me face to face in the dark.

He stopped, started, gave a scream, threw up his hands, and staggered back, falling heavily on the floor. I went up to him. The man had fainted. I ran down stairs, to return immediately, with a candle and a tumbler of water. I threw away the poker; I had no further need for that. In a minute, I was untying a stiff white cravat, and sprinkling water in the pale face of—Dr. Blossop. Presently, he revived a little.

"The ghost! the ghost!" he moaned feebly, shivering. It was clear—a spurious ghost himself—he had taken me for the genuine article, and the misconception had considerably disturbed his nervous system.

"*Similia similibus curantur*," I said.

"An infernal homœopathist," he muttered. Even at such a moment, professional prejudices strongly possessed him.

"Nothing of the kind. As respectable an allopathist as you are; more respectable, if you come to that. This is very pretty conduct, Dr. Blossop."

"Don't expose me," he whined piteously; "don't expose me. There's a dear, good, kind young man. For Heaven's sake—for my poor dear child."

He was well enough presently to come down into the surgery. He was very humble and contrite; he confessed everything: he had been the ghost of the White Hart; he had climbed his garden-wall, and made his way into the great room by the help of the broken pump and the ivy—he had been in the habit of walking up and down, heavily, after the manner of Jugby the suicide—sometimes he had even brought his dog-chain, and rattled it, by way of being additionally terrible; he had rung the bell from the stable-yard. And his motive? Well, it had arisen years back. It had then been a matter of vast importance to him to prevent any other medical man from settling in Noddington; and he had commenced to haunt the White Hart—the only empty house in the place. His plan had succeeded. He had kept away his rivals; he had ruled supreme for many years—Noddington's only medical man—until I had come, and detected him, compelling him to give up the ghost indeed!

But why, I asked, had he not permitted the auctioneer, the lawyer, the retired linen-draper, to occupy the White Hart peaceably? Why had he haunted them, who could prejudice or interfere with him in no way? Well, he was afraid suspicion would be excited, and would attach to him, if it were found that the ghost only disturbed rival medical men. He therefore had been compelled to treat all tenants alike. And then he admitted that he had felt a sort of pleasant excitement in haunting the White Hart and alarming its inmates. If I only knew how dreadfully dull Noddington was, he declared, I should appreciate the importance of obtaining entertainment in any shape. But he was prepared to confess that his conduct had been very shameful; that he had treated me very ill—the more so, that no real reason existed now for his desire to keep other practitioners out of Noddington. And he intimated that he had feathered his nest very satisfactorily—that he had no need to fear opposition—that he was advancing in life—and soon thought of retiring altogether from practice. He ended by again imploring me not to expose him.

I did not expose him; indeed, I forgave him. I am, I fear, absurdly good-natured; and then he promised to advance my interests, and to make all possible amends. We had a glass of brandy and water together, and became very good friends.

I remained in Noddington; and the talk about the White Hart being haunted began gradually to die away. I had effected a cure. By and by, Dr. Blossop made me an offer of a partnership, and I accepted it. Since then, I have been doing very well indeed.

The Noddington people say there's only one thing against me—I am not married, and they hold that a medical man ought to be a married man. I am trying to get rid of this objection. Miss Julia Blossop looks more and more kindly upon me every day. I have had to struggle against her ridiculous predilection for the curate of Noddington, whom I have always held to be a singularly inane young man. But as the rumour gains ground that the curate and the rector's daughter are to be seen playing suspiciously protracted games of croquet together, I fancy that Julia is disposed to think she might do worse than accept my suit. In regard to which matter, I venture to say there can hardly be two opinions.

THE FAIR UNKNOWN.

YOU know, my dear fellow, that love sometimes makes fools of the wisest. You want my advice in a delicate matter; well, I believe, I cannot do better than relate to you what a ludicrous predicament I once got into, while under the influence of the little god.

"Out with it, Hal! I may perhaps learn wisdom from your folly."

"Well, it happened about three years ago. I was walking along Notre Dame Street, one January afternoon when I saw, a few yards ahead of me a lady, whose figure struck me as remarkably graceful. She was of middle height, very tastefully dressed, and as she glided along many a head was turned in order to obtain a second look at her. I was susceptible at the time, and could not but ascribe to such a graceful figure a face correspondingly beautiful. I quickened my step, therefore, in order to gratify my curiosity, when she started to cross the street. At the same moment a carter came driving past at a furious rate, making her position one of real danger. I bounded forward, and had the happiness to grasp her just in time to prevent what would, probably, have been a sad accident. She was in a half fainting condition from fright, however, and I supported her into the nearest store. A glass of water, and in a few minutes rest restored her.

I was not mistaken in ascribing to her a beautiful face; but its beauty did not consist in a striking regularity of features. It was the indescribable gentleness that revealed itself in the clear eyes and well shaped mouth, that formed its chief attraction. I had seen a similar expression on canvas, in Dawson's picture gallery, and had been so strongly impressed with its beauty that it haunted me for a long time afterwards. I gazed in silent admiration, therefore, on the living model, until, rising from her seat, she laid her hand in mine, and in well chosen words expressed her gratitude for my timely succour. A sigh unconsciously escaped me as she passed out of the door and entered the sleigh which one of the salesmen had procured for her. I would have given a year's salary to have been on terms of friendship with her. She did not even mention her name, however, but I heard her direct the driver to No.—Dorchester street, and upon this slight foundation I built many an airy castle.

The next day the papers duly chronicled the "gallant feat." My activity and presence of mind were lauded; but the name of the rescued lady, I was vexed to find, was as far from my knowledge as ever.

For a week I failed to obtain the slightest clue. I haunted Dorchester street with a persistency that greatly troubled the somnolent guardian of the night. I destroyed many quires of scented note paper in the vain attempt to pour out my troubled thoughts in verse; I grew abstracted, lost my appetite, and my friends predicted a speedy decline. In this state of mind I was prevailed upon to attend the Concert of the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society. The band was in the middle of the overture, when, amongst the crowd that was entering the Hall, I discovered the Fair Unknown, as I had dubbed her, leaning on the arm of a tall, middle-aged gentleman. I stood almost spell-bound at her appearance. More beautiful, more graceful than ever she seemed; and a jealous pang shot through me as I saw how affectionately she leaned on her escort, how proudly she looked up into his face. The pang was but a transient one, however, for I concluded from the tall gentleman's age and appearance, that he was her father.

The movement of the crowd brought them in a few moments close to where I stood, and her glance, in roving round the room, encountered mine. A bright smile immediately lit up her features, and a graceful bow acknowledged my presence. For a few minutes I stood conscious that I was forming the subject of their conversation. The tall gentleman's eyes, from time to time, beamed kindly upon me, and I imagined they seemed to say that were the place not quite so public how happy he should be to thank me for having rescued his daughter. Another move-