

THE MYSTERY OF SHAFT NUMBER SIX.

By JOHN A. FOOTE, in the "CATHOLIC WORLD" MAGAZINE.

I have always maintained that many, so-called, ghostly manifestations could be properly attributed to natural causes, if they were thoroughly investigated; and it was this unyielding scepticism of mine that enabled me to solve the apparently preternatural mystery of Shaft No. 6.

In the year 1867 I stepped out from the portals of an Eastern medical college with little else beside a brand-new diploma, and a determination to work. The newly developed anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania seemed a promising field, and I decided to locate at the growing village of Carbondale. I did so, and suffered the experience of nearly every young physician in trying to establish a practice. Time hung heavily on my hands, and as I was something of an amateur botanist, I passed some of my idle moments in wandering among the beautiful forests that surrounded the town, collecting specimens of plants and ferns. Of the latter I discovered and classified several hitherto unknown varieties.

Several times during my wanderings I encountered a tall, gray-haired man who was invariably accompanied by a large St. Bernard dog. But my attention was more particularly drawn to this man by the peculiar expression of his face. He was very pale, and deeply pitted with smallpox marks. His features were irregular and coarsely moulded, and his eyes, deep set under beetling brows, had a furtive, sinister look that was intensified by a peculiar twitching of the muscles controlling his thin, bloodless lips.

I made inquiries at the town, and found that this person was Captain William Galt, general superintendent of the mines of the Pennsylvania Coal Company, and one of the wealthiest and most influential residents of Carbondale. My informants also said that he was a most peculiar man, very taciturn and reserved, and that few of the people of the town had ever seen the interior of his residence. All agreed that he was highly valued by his employers. What I heard served to arouse my curiosity, and I only waited for an opportunity to form his acquaintance. I was not obliged to wait long. One day while in the woods I heard a dog barking violently, and when I stepped out of the thicket I saw Captain Galt's St. Bernard facing a large rattlesnake that had coiled ready to spring. I stepped behind the reptile and stunned it with a blow of my cane, so that its killing became an easy matter. The captain, who had come up to thank me for the destruction of the snake, was greatly surprised to find me with my timely action.

So our acquaintance began, and after this incident I met him often and found him a well-informed man and an agreeable companion. We had many tastes in common, and I became a frequent caller at his residence, first to help him in some investigations which he was pursuing regarding the chemistry of mine gases, and later, at his expressed wish that I would continue my visits, "for the sociability of the thing."

During the period of our acquaintance I was twice called to see him professionally. Each time I found him in an extreme state of nervous exhaustion, the twitching of his facial muscles much intensified, and his mental condition bordering on delirium, in which an overpowering fear seemed to be the dominating symptom. This led me to suspect that he had passed through a terrible mental ordeal at some former period; but on inquiring I found that he had lived an apparently uneventful life.

On June fourth, 1870, I was hurriedly summoned to the captain's residence. I had not seen him for over a week, and I found that he had been very busy superintending the draining and pumping of some old, water-filled mines, in which a large amount of good coal had been left in the days of primitive coal mining. This work had demanded close attention, and I was prepared to find that he had broken down, under the severe strain on his energies. I made all haste to reach him, and was ascending the steps leading to his residence when I met T. J. Murray, the captain's legal adviser, coming down.

"Is he dangerously ill?" I asked anxiously. Mr. Murray looked at me with surprise.

"Ill?" he said. "Why no! I don't think I ever saw him looking better in his life. Don't look so disappointed," he added, laughingly, as I passed in.

Murray's statements relieved my anxiety, and my fears were entirely dispelled when I greeted the captain in his library. He was seated at his desk, amidst a confusion of documents and papers of various kinds, and there were no signs of illness on his face. After a few commonplace had been exchanged he said, in an abrupt manner, which was not uncommon with him:

"You met Murray outside?"

"Just as I was about to come in," I answered.

"Did he tell you anything?"

"Nothing, excepting that you were in good health."

"Hum?" said the captain, nervously chewing the end of an unlit cigar. "Well, he might have told you that I have just drawn up my will, and that you are named as the executor." Then, noticing the look of surprise that had come into my face, he continued hastily:

"Now don't say that you will not serve me, for there is more involved in this matter than you suspect."

"I will gladly do anything that may be of service to you," I said.

The captain thanked me, and then there ensued an uncomfortable pause. After awhile he spoke again, saying: "Perhaps you remember telling me that I am likely to succumb to one of my periodical nervous attacks. Did you notice that both of my past attacks began on June fifth?"

"No," I answered, "but now that you speak of it I recall the coincidence. Do you think that you will have an attack to-morrow?"

"You are a prudent man, and, of course, you will understand that what I am about to tell you must remain a secret between us until my death. After that you may act as you see fit. The incidents which I will relate occurred about fifteen years ago, when I first came to Carbondale. At that time I was for many years in these mines, and I had for an assistant a young man named Thomas Burke. We were both of about the same age, and as was natural, we became fast friends. Burke possessed a happy, even-tempered disposition; he was the kind of a man that people call a 'good fellow.' Unfortunately for myself, I was not at all like him, being then, as now, excessively nervous and prone to fly into a passion at trifles.

"It was a woman that caused all of this subsequent misery, and I impelled me to the terrible act which I committed. Her name was Mary Miller, and she was the daughter of an old German shoemaker. I had earned for myself the reputation of being a woman-hater, and I will confess that I was not the kind of a man that she should have chosen for her husband; but I fell desperately in love with this girl. I earned her gratitude by giving her father, who was very poor, a position as a pump engineer in the new mines. Her gratitude, I say now; but at that time, unhappily, I mistook gratitude for love.

"One day I brought Burke to Mary's home and introduced him to her. He was much better company than I, and I was glad when I found that Mary enjoyed his lively talk. After that he became a frequent visitor; but, although the affair was gossip, I did not suspect his motives until the fateful night of June fifth.

"Mary's father was willing and anxious that I should marry her, and I felt that she did not dislike me; so it was with a light and confident heart that I called at her home that night, with the purpose of asking her to become my wife.

"I found her alone, and she seemed to have guessed the object of my visit by that subtle instinct which women possess, for she wore an air of restraint that was totally unlike her usual manner. I will not weary you with details; it is enough to say that she refused to marry me, and said that it would be impossible for her even to consider the matter. I was stunned with amazement, and I asked her for her reasons in thus treating me. She smilingly told me that, if I had patience, I would learn some day.

"At this my devilish temper broke down my self-control, and, before her, in heated language, of trifling with my affections. She laughed at my jealous rage, and told me that she had never loved me, or even liked me, and that she had promised to marry Thomas Burke. These last words came crashing out every feeling of humanity that was in me. Choking with chagrin, I rushed from the house and tried to drown the recollections of my unhappiness in a near-by saloon, while I brooded in impotent rage on the perfidy of my treacherous friend.

"I have no remembrance of what occurred after that until I experienced the thrill of horror that overcame me when I found myself in a thicket near the Miller cottage, with the body of a man at my feet. The moon made it as bright as day, and a vague, terrifying instinct told me, even before I had seen its features, that the body was Burke's. Moved by an unaccountable impulse, I stooped down to smooth the tangled, yellow hair, and my hand became clotted with a warm, sticky fluid. It was blood!

"I was sick with fear, and horror, and regret when I realized the enormity of the crime which I had committed. I could not believe that he was dead, and I made frantic efforts to revive him; but even while I worked with him, his body grew cold and his limbs began to stiffen. Then, as the fumes of what I had drunk began to pass away, all of my emotions were consumed in a terrible, overmastering fear. What if some other person had seen my deed? My cowardly thoughts rendered me almost helpless, and I crouched in silence over the body, while I strained my ears to catch any sound that might betray the presence near by of another person. My teeth chattered with nervousness, and I felt impelled to shout, or do something to break the awful silence that prevailed. A cricket chirped behind me, and I leaped to my feet in alarm. Gradually, my spasms of fear passed away, and I determined to hide the body.

"I remembered that the opening to an abandoned water-filled mine was not far away, so I carried the corpse to this place and weighted it with several heavy stones. A sort of a shed had been built over this place, which was known as Shaft No. 6; a roof-like structure of rough boards erected so as to prevent unwary travellers from falling into the old mine. With a strength that my fears stimulated, I tore two of the boards from the roofing and threw the body through the aperture, which I had made. I was, by this time, fairly self-possessed, and I watched it as it sank feet downwards. For an instant the glassy eyes seemed to reproach me, and then the murky, yellow water closed over the head and it disappeared from view. I carefully fastened the boards in place, and, with my terrible recollections, seized the captain at this point, and I could see that he was in the throes of another attack.

"I cannot finish," he said weakly. "I cannot lay him on the sofa, and gave him a hypodermic dose of morphia to quiet him. For nearly an hour he writhed in convulsions, but by degrees the soporific influence of the drug gained ascendancy, and he dropped into a fitful slumber. I left him then, and told his housekeeper to send for me if his condition should become critical during the night.

"The following morning I called to see him, and was surprised to learn that he was not at home. Late that night Mrs. Drew, his housekeeper, came to my office and told me that the captain had not yet returned. She was alarmed about his absence, and she besought me to try and find him. I made an exhaustive search for him all that night and the following morning, but to no avail; I could find no trace of him. Two days passed, and then went to Scranton in the hope that I might find him at some of the hotels. I stopped at the Forest House, and at eight o'clock that night I received a telegram:

"Come at once; captain found."

"MRS. DREW."

I left for Carbondale on the 8.20 train, and when I reached the town it was buzzing with the details of the story. The captain has been found in a branch of the old mine which had recently been pumped dry, and he was said to be in a critical condition. But when I saw him I was shocked at his emaciated appearance. A frightful delirium had seized him, and he shrieked almost continuously in a paroxysm of fright, and sought to shut out the fearful delusions of his brain by covering his head with the pillows of the bed. Father Daly, the parish priest of Carbondale, was at his bedside, and assured me that he had done all that lay in his power for the captain's spiritual comfort. He left shortly after my arrival, promising to return as soon as possible. After about an hour the captain grew calmer, and recognized me. He was comparatively lucid for a little while, but seemed too weak to walk. Then, suddenly, with a vigorous twist, he raised himself on one elbow, and his sunken eyes took on the despairing glare of a madman.

"O God!" he shrieked, "the conscience of a murderer is hell." Then he went on with feverish rapidity: "You remember what I told you a few days ago? I knew then that I would not live much longer. Was I not right? What is death but peace?—peace from the fear, the haunting dread in which I lived; the dread that I should see him as I saw him on that night; the dread lest he should rise and accuse me of my hideous crime. And in the end of all I saw him!"

A soul-harassed wail came from the despairing man, and he rocked to and fro in the bed and placed his wasted hands over his eyes. He was silent for a few minutes, and then, with a fierce gesture, he grasped the lapel of my coat and drew me towards him until his hollow, drawn face was close to me, and his sickly breath fanned my cheek. Talking eagerly, and in hoarse whispers, he went on:

"It was in the old time—the mine that is connected with Shaft No. 6. Some force that I could not resist impelled me to steal out at night and go there to walk. So, stealthily, I crept through the new workings, and then I came to where the props were rotten and covered

THE TRUE WITNESS AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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with strange growths, and the coal was slimy and yellow. . . . And I saw him, as he stood near a pool of putrid water, all dripping with ooze and slime; and the coal was yellow, and the water dripped from his fingers as he pointed at me, and—O God, look!"

While he shrieked this out his features worked convulsively, and with a tectonic spasm he rose and pointed over my shoulder. Involuntarily I turned my head, and in that instant he fell back, limp and unconscious. The tell-tale rattle began in his throat; in a little while he was dead!

After the funeral I opened his will, and found, not to my surprise, that the bulk of his property, aggregating nearly \$40,000, had been bequeathed to Mary Miller, who was supposed to be living in Pittsburgh. If it could be shown that she was dead, part of the estate would go to several charities and part to me.

I found it a difficult matter to obtain any clue to the whereabouts of Mary Miller, and, after some vainly useless correspondence with a firm of Pittsburgh detectives, I started for that city to conduct the inquiry in person. To guide me in my search I took a great part of the captain's letters and papers with me. Among the latter I found a clipping, taken from the Scranton "Star," and evidently inspired by the captain, stating that "Thomas Burke, treasurer of the Miners' Accident Fund of Carbondale, had disappeared, with \$232 belonging to the society." After ten days of unavailing inquiry at Pittsburgh, I secured evidence that Burke Miller had died in an almshouse some miles from the city. This accomplished, I returned to Carbondale.

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The more I thought on the matter the more I became convinced that the miners had seen a ghost, but the body of Thomas Burke. It was only natural that they should connect the supposed apparition with Captain Galt, and say that his spirit was haunting the mine that had caused his death.

That evening I sent for the two persons who were said to have seen the apparition. One was a driver boy about eighteen years of age; the other an experienced and fairly intelligent miner. Both described accurately the location of the quarter of the mine in which they had encountered the supposed spirit, and both said that it was the figure of a man dripping with phurous water, and standing near a decayed prop. Both said they were certain that it could not have been the body of any human being, because the mine had been filled with water until the day preceding the disappearance of the captain. After considerable urging on my part, and the promise of a reward, the miner agreed to guide me to the place.

Having secured two mine lamps, we immediately set out, and to quiet the nervous fears of my companion I told him all that I could reveal with safety of my theory regarding the supposed mystery. The mine under Shaft No. 6 had been abandoned because the coal was "rusty"—that is, because it contained an unusually large amount of the sulphur salts of iron. Another, though less urgent, reason for its abandonment was the fact that pumps were needed to work continuously in order to prevent it from filling with water. All mine water contains some of these astringent mineral salts, but the water here was almost saturated with them. What he had seen, I told him, was, in all likelihood, the body of some unfortunate man who had fallen into the shaft, and had become imbedded in a thick layer of the sulphur and iron salts that collected in the bottom of the mine. The antiseptic and astringent properties of these salts had preserved the certain resemblance to human likeness in the body and prevented it from wholly decaying. When the mine was pumped dry the body was carried with the current of water from the bottom of the shaft toward the direction in which the pumps lay. But with all my assurances and explanations I could see that he did not feel at ease when we entered the mine. Presently we came to the wet and slippery chambers of the old workings, where the mine water had dyed everything an ochre tint. We

were now quite near to the baleful spot, and my companion refused to go any farther. I went forward alone, lamp in hand, and a moment later I stood, shivering with a strange terror, and looking at the mute witness to the captain's guilt.

The sight was a horrible one. There was just the form of a man—a bag of leathery skin and bone wrapped up in tattered rags, and all covered with the yellow sulphur-slime of the mine. It was in an upright position behind an old and fungus-covered wooden prop, where the outgoing waters had left it. While I looked a portion of the rotten prop gave way and the body fell towards me with an almost life-like motion. Thoroughly unnerved, I turned and ran, almost forgetting my companion in my strange terror.

When I came out of the mine I lost no time in reporting the matter to the proper authorities, although I did not then reveal any of the knowledge I had obtained concerning the identity of the body with the murdered Thomas Burke. I was very anxious to show that she was dead, part of the estate would go to several charities and part to me.

I found it a difficult matter to obtain any clue to the whereabouts of Mary Miller, and, after some vainly useless correspondence with a firm of Pittsburgh detectives, I started for that city to conduct the inquiry in person. To guide me in my search I took a great part of the captain's letters and papers with me. Among the latter I found a clipping, taken from the Scranton "Star," and evidently inspired by the captain, stating that "Thomas Burke, treasurer of the Miners' Accident Fund of Carbondale, had disappeared, with \$232 belonging to the society." After ten days of unavailing inquiry at Pittsburgh, I secured evidence that Burke Miller had died in an almshouse some miles from the city. This accomplished, I returned to Carbondale.

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The more I thought on the matter the more I became convinced that the miners had seen a ghost, but the body of Thomas Burke. It was only natural that they should connect the supposed apparition with Captain Galt, and say that his spirit was haunting the mine that had caused his death.

That evening I sent for the two persons who were said to have seen the apparition. One was a driver boy about eighteen years of age; the other an experienced and fairly intelligent miner. Both described accurately the location of the quarter of the mine in which they had encountered the supposed spirit, and both said that it was the figure of a man dripping with phurous water, and standing near a decayed prop. Both said they were certain that it could not have been the body of any human being, because the mine had been filled with water until the day preceding the disappearance of the captain. After considerable urging on my part, and the promise of a reward, the miner agreed to guide me to the place.

Having secured two mine lamps, we immediately set out, and to quiet the nervous fears of my companion I told him all that I could reveal with safety of my theory regarding the supposed mystery. The mine under Shaft No. 6 had been abandoned because the coal was "rusty"—that is, because it contained an unusually large amount of the sulphur salts of iron. Another, though less urgent, reason for its abandonment was the fact that pumps were needed to work continuously in order to prevent it from filling with water. All mine water contains some of these astringent mineral salts, but the water here was almost saturated with them. What he had seen, I told him, was, in all likelihood, the body of some unfortunate man who had fallen into the shaft, and had become imbedded in a thick layer of the sulphur and iron salts that collected in the bottom of the mine. The antiseptic and astringent properties of these salts had preserved the certain resemblance to human likeness in the body and prevented it from wholly decaying. When the mine was pumped dry the body was carried with the current of water from the bottom of the shaft toward the direction in which the pumps lay. But with all my assurances and explanations I could see that he did not feel at ease when we entered the mine. Presently we came to the wet and slippery chambers of the old workings, where the mine water had dyed everything an ochre tint. We

were now quite near to the baleful spot, and my companion refused to go any farther. I went forward alone, lamp in hand, and a moment later I stood, shivering with a strange terror, and looking at the mute witness to the captain's guilt.

The sight was a horrible one. There was just the form of a man—a bag of leathery skin and bone wrapped up in tattered rags, and all covered with the yellow sulphur-slime of the mine. It was in an upright position behind an old and fungus-covered wooden prop, where the outgoing waters had left it. While I looked a portion of the rotten prop gave way and the body fell towards me with an almost life-like motion. Thoroughly unnerved, I turned and ran, almost forgetting my companion in my strange terror.

When I came out of the mine I lost no time in reporting the matter to the proper authorities, although I did not then reveal any of the knowledge I had obtained concerning the identity of the body with the murdered Thomas Burke. I was very anxious to show that she was dead, part of the estate would go to several charities and part to me.

I found it a difficult matter to obtain any clue to the whereabouts of Mary Miller, and, after some vainly useless correspondence with a firm of Pittsburgh detectives, I started for that city to conduct the inquiry in person. To guide me in my search I took a great part of the captain's letters and papers with me. Among the latter I found a clipping, taken from the Scranton "Star," and evidently inspired by the captain, stating that "Thomas Burke, treasurer of the Miners' Accident Fund of Carbondale, had disappeared, with \$232 belonging to the society." After ten days of unavailing inquiry at Pittsburgh, I secured evidence that Burke Miller had died in an almshouse some miles from the city. This accomplished, I returned to Carbondale.

ly, my spasms of fear passed away, and I determined to hide the body. I remembered that the opening to an abandoned water-filled mine was not far away, so I carried the corpse to this place and weighted it with several heavy stones. A sort of a shed had been built over this place, which was known as Shaft No. 6; a roof-like structure of rough boards erected so as to prevent unwary travellers from falling into the old mine. With a strength that my fears stimulated, I tore two of the boards from the roofing and threw the body through the aperture, which I had made. I was, by this time, fairly self-possessed, and I watched it as it sank feet downwards. For an instant the glassy eyes seemed to reproach me, and then the murky, yellow water closed over the head and it disappeared from view. I carefully fastened the boards in place, and, with my terrible recollections, seized the captain at this point, and I could see that he was in the throes of another attack.

"I cannot finish," he said weakly. "I cannot lay him on the sofa, and gave him a hypodermic dose of morphia to quiet him. For nearly an hour he writhed in convulsions, but by degrees the soporific influence of the drug gained ascendancy, and he dropped into a fitful slumber. I left him then, and told his housekeeper to send for me if his condition should become critical during the night.

"The following morning I called to see him, and was surprised to learn that he was not at home. Late that night Mrs. Drew, his housekeeper, came to my office and told me that the captain had not yet returned. She was alarmed about his absence, and she besought me to try and find him. I made an exhaustive search for him all that night and the following morning, but to no avail; I could find no trace of him. Two days passed, and then went to Scranton in the hope that I might find him at some of the hotels. I stopped at the Forest House, and at eight o'clock that night I received a telegram:

"Come at once; captain found."

"MRS. DREW."