

Byways of Ghost-Land

O'Donnell, Elliott, 1872-1965

BYWAYS OF GHOST-LAND

BY

AUTHOR OF
"SOME HAUNTED HOUSES OF ENGLAND AND WALES,"
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CONTENTS

	CHAP.	PAGE
1. THE UNKNOWN BRAIN		1
2. THE OCCULT IN SHADOWS		21
3. OBSESSION, POSSESSION		28
4. OCCULT HOOLIGANS		47
5. SYLVAN HORRORS		56
6. COMPLEX HAUNTINGS AND OCCULT BESTIALITIES		80
7. VAMPIRES, WERE-WOLVES, FOX-WOMEN, ETC.		110
8. DEATH-WARNINGS AND FAMILY GHOSTS		132
9. SUPERSTITIONS AND FORTUNES		153
10. THE HAND OF GLORY; THE BLOODY HAND OF ULSTER; THE SEVENTH SON; BIRTH-MARKS; NATURE'S DEVIL SIGNALS; PRE-EXISTENCE; THE FUTURE; PROJECTION; TELEPATHY; ETC.		176
11. OCCULT INHABITANTS OF THE SEA AND RIVERS		198
12. BUDDHAS AND BOGGLE CHAIRS		210
INDEX		244

[1]

BYWAYS OF GHOST-LAND

CHAPTER I THE UNKNOWN BRAIN

Whether all that constitutes man's spiritual nature, that is to say, *ALL* his mind, is inseparably amalgamated with the whitish mass of soft matter enclosed in his cranium and called his brain, is a question that must, one supposes, be ever open to debate.

One knows that this whitish substance is the centre of the nervous system and the seat of consciousness and volition,

and, from the constant study of character by type or by phrenology, one may even go on to deduce with reason that in this protoplasmic substance—in each of the numerous cells into which it is divided and subdivided—are located the human faculties. Hence, it would seem that one may rationally conclude, that all man's vital force, all that comprises his mind—*i.e.* the power in him that conceives, remembers, reasons, wills—is so wrapped up in the actual matter of his cerebrum as to be incapable of existing apart from it; and that as a natural sequence thereto, on the dissolution of the brain, the mind[2] and everything pertaining to the mind dies with it—there is no future life because there is nothing left to survive.

Such a condition, if complete annihilation can be so named, is the one and only conclusion to the doctrine that mind—crude, undiagnosed mind—is dependent on matter, a doctrine confirmed by the apparent facts that injury to the cranium is accompanied by unconsciousness and protracted loss of memory, and that the sanity of the individual is entirely contingent upon the state of his cerebral matter—a clot of blood in one of the cerebral veins, or the unhealthy condition of a cell, being in itself sufficient to bring about a complete mental metamorphose, and, in common parlance, to produce madness.

In the deepest of sleeps, too, when there is less blood in the cerebral veins, and the muscles are generally relaxed, and the pulse is slower, and the respiratory movements are fewer in number, consciousness departs, and man apparently lapses into a state of absolute nothingness which materialists, not unreasonably, presume must be akin to death. It would appear, then, that our mental faculties are entirely regulated by, and consequently, entirely dependent on, the material within our brain cells, and that, granted certain conditions of that material, we have consciousness, and that, without those conditions, we have no consciousness—in other words, "our minds cease to exist." Hence, there is no such thing as separate spiritual existence; mind is merely an eventuality of matter, and, when the latter perishes, the former perishes too. There[3] is nothing, absolutely nothing, that can exist apart from the physical.

This is an assertion—unquestionably dogmatic—that exponents of materialism hold to be logically unassailable. To disprove it may not be an easy task at present; but I am, nevertheless, convinced there is a world apart from matter—a superphysical plane with which part of us, at least, is in some way connected, and I discredit the materialist's dogma, partly because something in my nature compels me to an opposite conclusion, and partly because certain phenomena I have experienced, cannot, I am certain, have been produced by any physical agency.

In support of my theory that we are not solely material, but partly physical and partly superphysical, I maintain that consciousness is never wholly lost; that even in swoons and dreams, when all sensations would seem to be swallowed up in the blackness of darkness, there is *SOME* consciousness left—the consciousness of existence, of impression. We recover from a faint, or awake from the most profound of slumbers, and remember not that we have dreamed. Yet, if we think with sufficient concentration, our memory suddenly returns to us, and we recollect that, during the swoon or sleep, *ALL* thought was not obliterated, but, that we were conscious of being somewhere and of experiencing *SOMETHING*.

It is only in our lighter sleeps, when the spirit traverses superphysical planes more closely connected with the material, that we remember *ALL* that occurred. Most of us will agree that there are two distinct forms of mental existence—the[4] one in which we are conscious of the purely superphysical, and the one wherein we are only cognisant of the physical. In the first-named of these two mental existences—*i.e.* in swoons, sleep, and even death, consciousness is never entirely lost; we still think—we think with our spiritual or unknown brain; and when in the last-named state, *i.e.* in our physical wakefulness and life, we think with our material or known brain.

Unknown brains exist on all sides of us. Many of them are the earth-bound spirits of those whose spiritual or unknown brains, when on the earth, were starved to feed their material or known brains; or, in other words, the earth-bound spirits of those whose cravings, when in carnal form, were entirely animal. It is they, together with a variety of elementary forms of superphysical life (*i.e.* phantasms that have never inhabited any kind of earthly body), that constantly surround us, and, with their occult brains, suggest to our known brains every kind of base and impure thought.

Something, it is difficult to say what, usually warns me of the presence of these occult brains, and at certain times (and in certain places) I can feel, with my superphysical mind, their subtle hypnotic influences.

It is the unknown brain that produces those manifestations usually attributed to ghosts, and it is, more often than not, the possessors of the unknown brain in constant activity, *i.e.* the denizens of the superphysical world, who convey to our organs of hearing, either by suggestion or actual presentation, the sensations of uncanny knocks,[5] crashes, shrieks, etc.; and to our organs of sight, all kinds of uncanny, visual phenomena.

All the phenomena we see are not objective; but the agents who "will" that we should see them are objective—they are the unknown brains. It is a mistake to think that these unknown brains can only exert their influence on a few of us. We

are all subject to them, though we do not all see their manifestations. Were it not for the lower order of spirit brains, there would be comparatively few drunkards, gamblers, adulterers, fornicators, murderers, and suicides. It is they who excite man's animal senses, by conjuring up alluring pictures of drink, and gold, and sexual happiness. By the aid of the higher type of spirit brains (who, contending for ever with the lower forms of spirit brains, are indeed our "guardian angels") I have been enabled to perceive the atmosphere surrounding drinking-dens and brothels full of all kinds of bestial influences, from elementals, who allure men by presenting to their minds all kinds of attractive tableaux, to the earth-bound spirits of drunkards and libertines, transformed into horrors of the sub-human, sub-animal order of phantasms—things with bloated, nude bodies and pigs' faces, shaggy bears with fulsome, watery eyes; mangy dogs, etc. I have watched these things that still possess—and possess in a far greater degree—all the passions of their life incarnate, sniffing the foul and vitiated atmosphere of the public-houses and brothels, and chafing in the most hideous manner at their inability to gratify their lustful cravings in a more substantial way. A man[6] advances along the road at a swinging pace, with no thought, as yet, of deviating from his course and entering a public-house. He comes within the radius of the sinister influences, which I can see and feel hanging around the saloon. Their shadowy, silent brain power at once comes into play and gains ascendancy over his weaker will. He halts because he is "willed" to do so. A tempting tableau of drink rises before him and he at once imagines he is thirsty. Soft and fascinating elemental hands close over his and draw him gently aside. A look of beastly satisfaction suffuses his eyes. He smacks his lips, hastens his steps, the bar-room door closes behind him, and, for the remaining hours of the day, he wallows in drink.

But the unknown brain does not confine itself to the neighbourhood of a public-house—it may be anywhere. I have, intuitively, felt its presence on the deserted moors of Cornwall, between St Ives and the Land's End; in the grey Cornish churches and chapels (very much in the latter); around the cold and dismal mouths of disused mine-shafts; all along the rocky North Cornish coast; on the sea; at various spots on different railway lines, both in the United Kingdom and abroad; and, of course, in multitudinous places in London.

A year or so ago, I called on Mrs de B——, a well-known society lady, at that time residing in Cadogan Gardens. The moment I entered her drawing-room, I became aware of an occult presence that seemed to be hovering around her. Wherever she moved, it moved with her, and I *FELT* that its strange, fathomless, enigmatical eyes were fixed on[7] her, noting and guiding her innermost thoughts and her every action with inexorable persistence.

Some six months later, I met Lady D——, a friend in common, and in answer to my inquiries concerning Mrs de B——, was informed that she had just been divorced. "Dorothy" (*i.e.* Mrs de B——), Lady D—— went on to explain, "had been all right till she took up spiritualism, but directly she began to attend séances everything seemed to go wrong with her. At last she quarrelled with her husband, the climax being reached when she became violently infatuated with an officer in the Guards. The result was a decree *nisi* with heavy costs." I exhibited, perhaps, more surprise than I felt. But the fact of Mrs de B—— having attended séances explained everything. She was obviously a woman with a naturally weak will, and had fallen under the influence of one of the lowest, and most dangerous types of earth-bound spirits, the type that so often attends séances. This occult brain had attached itself to her, and, accompanying her home, had deliberately wrecked her domestic happiness. It would doubtless remain with her now *ad infinitum*. Indeed, it is next to impossible to shake off these superphysical cerebrums. They cling to one with such leech-like tenacity, and can rarely be made to depart till they have accomplished their purposes.

Burial-grounds appear to have great attractions for this class of spirit. A man, whom I once met at Boulogne, told me a remarkable story, the veracity of which I have no reason to doubt.

"I have," he began, "undergone an experience which, though, unfortunately, by no means unique,[8] is one that is rarer nowadays than formerly. I was once all but buried alive. It happened at a little village, a most charming spot, near Maestel in the valley of the Rhone. I had been stopping at the only inn the place possessed, and, cycling out one morning, met with an accident—my machine skidded violently as I was descending a steep hill, with the result that I was pitched head first against a brick wall. The latter being considerably harder than my skull, concussion followed. Some villagers picked me up insensible, I was taken to the inn, and the nearest doctor—an uncertificated wretch—was summoned. He knew little of trepanning; besides, I was a foreigner, a German, and it did not matter. He bled me, it is true, and performed other of the ordinary means of relief; but these producing no apparent effect, he pronounced me dead, and preparations were at once made for my burial. As strangers kept coming to the inn and the accommodation was strictly limited, the landlord was considerably incensed at having to waste a room on a corpse. Accordingly, he had me screwed down in my coffin without delay, and placed in the cemetery among the tombs, till the public gravedigger could conveniently spare a few minutes to inter me. The shaking I received during my transit (for the yokels were exceedingly rough and clumsy), together with the cold night air which, luckily for me, found an easy means of access through the innumerable chinks and cracks in the ill-fitting coffin-lid, acting like a restorative tonic, I gradually revived, and the horror I felt in realising my[9] position is better, perhaps, imagined than described. When consciousness first began to reassert itself, I simply fancied I was awakening from a particularly deep sleep. I then struggled hard to

remember where I was and what had taken place. At first nothing came back to me, all was blank and void; but as I continued to persevere, gradually, very gradually, a recollection of my accident and of the subsequent events returned to me. I remembered with the utmost distinctness striking my head against the wall, and of *SEEING* myself carried, head first, by two rustics—the one with a shock head of red hair, the other swarthy as a Dago—to the inn. I recollected seeing the almost humorous look of horror in the chambermaid's face, as she rushed to inform the landlord, and the consternation of one and all during the discussion as to what ought to be done. The landlady suggested one thing, her husband another, the chambermaid another; and they all united in ransacking my pockets—much to my dismay—to see if they could discover a card-case or letter that might give them a clue as to my home address. I saw them do all this; and it seemed as if I were standing beside my own body, looking down at it, and that on all sides of me, and apparently invisible to the rest of the company, were strange, inscrutable pale eyes, set in the midst of grey, shapeless, shadowy substances.

"Then the doctor—a little slim, narrow-chested man, with a pointed beard and big ears—came and held a mirror to my mouth, and opened one of my veins, and talked a great deal of gibberish, whilst[10] he made countless covert sheep's eyes at the pretty chambermaid, who had taken advantage of his arrival to overhaul my knapsack and help herself from my purse. I distinctly heard the arrangements made for my funeral, and the voice of the landlord saying: 'Yes, of course, doctor, that is only fair; you have taken no end of trouble with him. I will keep his watch' (the watch was of solid gold, and cost me £25) 'and clothes to defray the expenses of the funeral and pay for his recent board' (I had only settled my account with him that morning). And the shrill voice of the landlady echoed: 'Yes, that is only fair, only right!' Then they all left the room, and I remained alone with my body. What followed was more or less blurred. The innumerable and ever-watchful grey eyes impressed me most. I recollected, however, the advent of the men—the same two who had brought me to the inn—to take me away in my coffin, and I had vivid recollections of tramping along the dark and silent road beside them, and wishing I could liberate my body. Then we halted at the iron gate leading into the cemetery, the coffin was dropped on the ground with a bang, and—the rest was a blank. Nothing, nothing came back to me. At first I was inclined to attribute my memory to a dream. 'Absurd!' I said to myself. 'Such things cannot have occurred. I am in bed; I know I am!' Then I endeavoured to move my arms to feel the counterpane; I could not; my arms were bound, tightly bound to my side. A cold sweat burst out all over me. Good God! was it true? I tried again; and the same thing happened—I[11] could not stir. Again and again I tried, straining and tugging at my sides till the muscles on my arms were on the verge of bursting, and I had to desist through utter exhaustion. I lay still and listened to the beating of my heart. Then, I clenched my toes and tried to kick. I could not; my feet were ruthlessly fastened together.

"Death garments! A winding-sheet! I could feel it clinging to me all over. It compressed the air in my lungs, it retarded the circulation, and gave me the most excruciating cramp, and pins and needles. My sufferings were so acute that I groaned, and, on attempting to stretch my jaws, found that they were encased in tight, clammy bandages. By prodigious efforts I eventually managed to gain a certain amount of liberty for my head, and this gave me the consolation that if I could do nothing else I could at least howl—howl! How utterly futile, for who, in God's name, would hear me? The thought of all there was above me, of all the piles of earth and grass—for the idea that I was not actually buried never entered my mind—filled me with the most abject sorrow and despair. The utter helplessness of my position came home to me with damning force. Rescue was absolutely out of the question, because the only persons, who knew where I was, believed me dead. To my friends and relations, my fate would ever remain a mystery. The knowledge that they would, at once, have come to my assistance, had I only been able to communicate with them, was cruel in the extreme; and tears of mortification poured down my cheeks when I[12] realised how blissfully unconscious they were of my fate. The most vivid and alluring visions of home, of my parents, and brothers, and sisters, flitted tantalisingly before me. I saw them all sitting on their accustomed seats, in the parlour, my father smoking his meerschaum, my mother knitting, my eldest sister describing an opera she had been to that afternoon, my youngest sister listening to her with mouth half open and absorbing interest in her blue eyes, my brother examining the works of a clockwork engine which he had just taken to pieces; whilst from the room overhead, inhabited by a Count, a veteran who had won distinction in the campaigns of '64 and '66, came strains of 'The Watch on the Rhine.' Every now and then my mother would lean back in her chair and close her eyes, and I knew intuitively she was thinking of me. Mein Gott! If she had only known the truth. These tableaux faded away, and the gruesome awfulness of my surroundings thrust themselves upon me. A damp, foetid smell, suggestive of the rottenness of decay, assailed my nostrils and made me sneeze. I choked; the saliva streamed in torrents down my chin and throat! My recumbent position and ligaments made it difficult for me to recover my breath; I grew black in the face; I imagined I was dying. I abruptly, miraculously recovered, and all was silent as before. Silent! Good heavens! There is no silence compared with that of the grave.

"I longed for a sound, for any sound, the creaking of a board, the snapping of a twig, the ticking of an insect—there was none—the silence was the[13] silence of stone. I thought of worms; I imagined countless legions of them making their way to me from the surrounding mouldering coffins. Every now and then I uttered a shriek as something cold and slimy touched my skin, and my stomach heaved within me as a whiff of something particularly offensive fanned my face.

Suddenly I saw eyes—the same grey, inscrutable eyes that I had seen before—immediately above my own. I tried to fathom them, to discover some trace of expression. I could not—they were insoluble. I instinctively felt there was a subtle brain behind them, a brain that was stealthily analysing me, and I tried to assure myself its intentions were not hostile. Above, and on either side of the eyes, I saw the shadow of something white, soft, and spongy, in which I fancied I could detect a distinct likeness to a human brain, only on a large scale. There were the cerebral lobes, or largest part of the forebrain, enormously developed and overhanging the cerebellum, or great lobe of the hindbrain, and completely covering the lobes of the midbrain. On the cerebrum I even thought I could detect—for I have a smattering of anatomy—the usual convolutions, and the grooves dividing the cerebrum into two hemispheres. But there was something I had never seen before, and which I could not account for—two things like antennæ, one on either side of the cerebrum. As I gazed at them, they lengthened and shortened in such quick succession that I grew giddy and had to remove my eyes. What they were I cannot think; but then, of course the brain, being occult, doubtless[14] possessed properties of a nature wholly unsuspected by me. The moment I averted my glance, I experienced—this time on my forehead—the same cold, slimy sensation I had felt before, and I at once associated it with the cerebral tentacles. Soon after this I was touched in a similar manner on my right thigh, then on my left, and simultaneously on both legs; then in a half a dozen places at the same time. I looked out of the corner of my eyes, first on one side of me and then the other, and encountered the shadowy semblance to brains in each direction. I was therefore forced to conclude that the atmosphere in the coffin was literally impregnated with psychic cerebrums, and that every internal organ I possessed was being subjected to the most minute inspection. My mind rapidly became filled with every vile and lustful desire, and I cried aloud to be permitted five minutes' freedom to put into operation the basest and filthiest of actions. My thoughts were thus occupied when, to my amazement, I suddenly heard the sound of voices—human voices. At first I listened with incredulity, thinking that it must be merely a trick of my imagination or some further ingenious, devilish device, on the part of the ghostly brains, to torture me. But the voices continued, and drew nearer and nearer, until I could at length distinguish what they were saying. The speakers were two men, François and Jacques, and they were discussing the task that brought them thither—the task of burying me. Burying me! So, then, I was not yet under the earth! The revulsion of[15] my feelings on discovering that there was still a spark of hope is indescribable; the blood surged through my veins in waves of fire, my eyes danced, my heart thumped, and—I laughed! Laughed! There was no stopping me—peal followed peal, louder and louder, until cobblestones and tombstones reverberated and thundered back the sound.

"The effect on François and Jacques was the reverse of what I wished. When first they heard me, they became suddenly and deathly silent. Then their pent-up feelings of horror could stand it no longer, and with the wildest of yells they dropped their pick and shovel, and fled. My laughter ceased, and, half drowned in tears of anguish, I listened to their sabots pounding along the gravel walk and on to the hard highroad, till the noises ceased and there was, once again, universal and awe-inspiring silence. Again the eyes and tentacles, again the yearnings for base and shameful deeds, and again—oh, blissful interruption! the sound of human voices—François and Jacques returning with a crowd of people, all greatly excited, all talking at once.

"I call God as my witness I heard it, and Jacques too. Isn't that so, Jacques?' a voice, which I identified as that of François, shrieked. And Jacques, doubtless as eager to be heard—for it was not once in a lifetime anyone in his position had such an opportunity for notoriety—as he was to come to his companion's rescue, bawled out; 'Ay! There was no mistaking the sounds. May I never live to eat my supper again if it was[16] not laughter. Listen!' And everyone, at once, grew quiet.

"Now was my opportunity—my only opportunity. A single sound, however slight, however trivial, and I should be saved! A cry rose in my throat; another instant and it would have escaped my lips, when a dozen tentacles shot forward and I was silent. Despair, such as no soul experienced more acutely, even when on the threshold of hell, now seized me, and bid me make my last, convulsive effort. Collecting, nay, even dragging together every atom of will-power that still remained within my enfeebled frame, I swelled my lungs to their utmost. A kind of rusty, vibratory movement ran through my parched tongue; my jaws creaked, creaked and strained on their hinges, my lips puffed and assumed the dimensions of bladders and—that was all. No sound came. A weight, soft, sticky, pungent, and overwhelming, cloaked my brain, and spreading weed-like, with numbing coldness, stifled the cry ere it left the precincts of my larynx. Hope died within me—I was irretrievably lost. A babel of voices now arose together. François, Jacques, the village curé, gendarme, doctor, chambermaid, mine host and hostess, and others, whose tones I did not recognise, clamoured to be heard. Some, foremost amongst whom were François, Jacques, and a boy, were in favour of the coffin being opened; whilst others, notably the doctor and chambermaid (who pertly declared she had seen quite enough of my ugly face), ridiculed the notion and said the sooner I was buried the better it would be. The weather[17] had been more than usually hot that day, and the corpse, which was very much swollen—for, like all gourmands, I had had chronic disease of the liver—had, in their opinion, already become insanitary. The boy then burst out crying. It had always been the height of his ambition, he said, to see someone dead, and he thought it a dastardly shame on the part of the doctor and chambermaid to wish to deny him this opportunity.

The gendarme thinking, no doubt, he ought to have a say in the matter, muttered something to the effect that children were a great deal too forward nowadays, and that it would be time enough for the boy to see a corpse when he broke his mother's heart—which, following the precedence of all spoilt boys, he was certain to do sooner or later; and this opinion found ready endorsement. The boy suppressed, my case began to look hopeless, and the poignancy of my suspense became such that I thought I should have gone mad. François was already persuaded into setting to work with his pick, and, I should most certainly have been speedily interred, had it not been for the timely arrival of a village wag, who, planking himself unobserved behind a tombstone close to my coffin, burst out laughing in the most sepulchral fashion. The effect on the company was electrical; the majority, including the women, fled precipitately, and the rest, overcoming the feeble protests of the doctor, wrenched off the lid of the coffin. The spell, cast over me by the occult brains, was now by a merciful Providence broken,[18] and I was able to explain my condition to the flabbergasted faces around me.

"I need only say, in conclusion, that the discomfiture of the doctor was complete, and that I took good care to express my opinion of him everywhere I went. Doubtless, many poor wretches have been less fortunate than I, and, being pronounced dead by unskilled physicians, have been prematurely interred. Apart from all the agony consequent to asphyxiation, they must have suffered hellish tortures through the agency of spirit brains."

This is the anecdote as related to me, and it serves as an illustration of my theory that the unknown brain is objective, and that it can, under given circumstances—*i.e.* when physical life is, so to speak, in abeyance—be both seen and felt by the known brain. At birth, and more particularly at death, the presence of the unknown brain is most marked. And here it may not be inappropriate to remark that, in my experience at least, the hour of midnight is by no means the time most favourable to occult phenomena. I have seen far more manifestations at twilight, and between two and four a.m., than at any other period of the day—times, I think, according with those when human vitality is at its lowest and death most frequently takes place. It is, doubtless, the ebb of human vitality and the possibility of death that attracts the earth-bound brains and other varying types of elemental harpies. They scent death with ten times the acuteness of sharks and vultures, and hie with all haste to the spot, so as to be there in good time to[19] get their final suck, vampire fashion, at the spiritual brain of the dying; substituting in the place of what they extract, substance—in the shape of foul and lustful thoughts—for the material or known brain to feed upon. The food they have stolen, these vampires vainly imagine will enable them to rise to a higher spiritual plane.

In connection with this subject of the two brains, the question arises: What forms the connecting link between the material or known brain, and the spiritual or unknown brain? If the unknown brain has a separate existence, and can detach itself at times (as in "projection"), why must it wait for death to set it entirely free? My answer to that question is: That the connecting link consists of a magnetic force, at present indefinable, the scope, or pale, of which varies according to the relative dimensions of the two brains. In a case, for example, where the physical or known brain is far more developed than the spiritual or unknown brain, the radius of attraction would be limited and the connecting link strong; on the other hand, in a case where the spiritual or unknown brain is more developed than the physical or known brain, the magnetic pale is proportionately wide, and the connecting link would be weak.

Thus, in the swoon or profound sleep of a person possessing a greater preponderance of physical than spiritual brain, the conscious self would still be concerned with purely material matters, such as eating and drinking, petty disputes, money, sexual desires, etc., though, owing to the lack of concentration, which is a marked feature of those who[20] possess the grossly material brain, little or nothing of this conscious self would be remembered. But in the swoon, or deep sleep of a person possessing the spiritual brain in excess, the unknown brain is partially freed from the known brain, and the conscious self is consequently far away from the material body, on the confines of an entirely spiritual plane. Of course, the experiences of this conscious self may or may not be remembered, but there is, in its case, always the possibility, owing to the capacity for concentration which is invariably the property of all who have developed their spiritual or unknown brain, of subsequent recollection.

At death, and at death only, the magnetic link is actually broken. The unknown brain is then entirely freed from the known brain, and the latter, together with the rest of the material body, perishes from natural decay; whilst the former, no longer restricted within the limits of its earthly pale, is at liberty to soar *ad infinitum*.

[21]

CHAPTER II

THE OCCULT IN SHADOWS

Many of the shadows, I have seen, have not had material counterparts. They have invariably proved themselves to be

superphysical danger signals, the sure indicators of the presence of those grey, inscrutable, inhuman cerebrums to which I have alluded; of phantasms of the dead and of elementals of all kinds. There is an indescribable something about them, that at once distinguishes them from ordinary shadows, and puts me on my guard. I have seen them in houses that to all appearances are the least likely to be haunted—houses full of sunshine and the gladness of human voices. In the midst of merriment, they have darkened the wall opposite me like the mystic writing in Nebuchadnezzar's palace. They have suddenly appeared by my side, as I have been standing on rich, new carpeting or sun-kissed swards. They have floated into my presence with both sunbeams and moonbeams, through windows, doors, and curtains, and their advent has invariably been followed by some form or other of occult demonstration. I spent some weeks this summer at Worthing, and, walking one afternoon to the[22] Downs, selected a bright and secluded spot for a comfortable snooze. I revel in snatching naps in the open sunshine, and this was a place that struck me as being perfectly ideal for that purpose. It was on the brow of a diminutive hillock covered with fresh, lovely grass of a particularly vivid green. In the rear and on either side of it, the ground rose and fell in pleasing alternation for an almost interminable distance, whilst in front of it there was a gentle declivity (up which I had clambered) terminating in the broad, level road leading to Worthing. Here, on this broad expanse of the Downs, was a fairyland of soft sea air, sunshine and rest—rest from mankind, from the shrill, unmusical voices of the crude and rude product of the County Council schools.

I sat down; I never for one moment thought of phantasms; I fell asleep. I awoke; the hot floodgates of the cloudless heaven were still open, the air translucent over and around me, when straight in front of me, on a gloriously gilded patch of grass, there fell a shadow—a shadow from no apparent substance, for both air and ground were void of obstacles, and, apart from myself, there was no living object in the near landscape. Yet it was a shadow; a shadow that I could not diagnose; a waving, fluctuating shadow, unpleasantly suggestive of something subtle and horrid. It was, I instinctively knew, the shadow of the occult; a few moments more, and a development would, in all probability, take place. The blue sky, the golden sea, the tiny trails of smoke creeping up lazily from the myriads of[23] chimney-pots, the white house-tops, the red house-tops, the church spire, the railway line, the puffing, humming, shuffling goods-train, the glistening white roads, the breathing, busy figures, and the bright and smiling mile upon mile of emerald turf rose in rebellion against the likelihood of ghosts—yet, there was the shadow. I looked away from it, and, as I did so, an icy touch fell on my shoulder. I dared not turn; I sat motionless, petrified, frozen. The touch passed to my forehead and from thence to my chin, my head swung round forcibly, and I saw—nothing—only the shadow; but how different, for out of the chaotic blotches there now appeared a well—a remarkably well—defined outline, the outline of a head and hand, the head of a fantastic beast, a repulsive beast, and the hand of a man. A flock of swallows swirled overhead, a grasshopper chirped, a linnet sang, and, with this sudden awakening of nature, the touch and shadow vanished simultaneously. But the hillock had lost its attractions for me, and, rising hastily, I dashed down the decline and hurried homewards. I discovered no reason other than solitude, and the possible burial-place of prehistoric man, for the presence of the occult; but the next time I visited the spot, the same thing happened. I have been there twice since, and the same, always the same thing—first the shadow, then the touch, then the shadow, then the arrival of some form or other of joyous animal life, and the abrupt disappearance of the Unknown.

I was once practising bowls on the lawn of a very old house, the other inhabitants of which[24] were all occupied indoors. I had taken up a bowl, and was in the act of throwing it, when, suddenly, on the empty space in front of me I saw a shadow, a nodding, waving, impenetrable, undecipherable shadow. I looked around, but there was nothing visible that could in any way account for it. I threw down the bowl and turned to go indoors. As I did so, something touched me lightly in the face. I threw out my hand and touched a cold, clammy substance strangely suggestive of the leafy branch of a tree. Yet nothing was to be seen. I felt again, and my fingers wandered to a broader expanse of something gnarled and uneven. I kept on exploring, and my grasp closed over something painfully prickly. I drew my hand smartly back, and, as I did so, distinctly heard the loud and angry rustling of leaves. Just then one of my friends called out to me from a window. I veered round to reply, and the shadow had vanished. I never saw it again, though I often had the curious sensation that it was there. I did not mention my experience to my friends, as they were pronounced disbelievers in the superphysical, but tactful inquiry led to my gleaning the information that on the identical spot, where I had felt the phenomena, had once stood a horse-chestnut tree, which had been cut down owing to the strong aversion the family had taken to it, partly on account of a strange growth on the trunk, unpleasantly suggestive of cancer, and partly because a tramp had hanged himself on one of the branches.

[25] All sorts of extraordinary shadows have come to me in the Parks, the Twopenny Tube, and along the Thames Embankment. At ten o'clock, on the morning of 1st April 1899, I entered Hyde Park by one of the side gates of the Marble Arch, and crossing to the island, sat down on an empty bench. The sky was grey, the weather ominous, and occasional heavy drops of rain made me rejoice in the possession of an umbrella. On such a day, the park does not appear at its best. The Arch exhibited a dull, dirty, yellowish-grey exterior; every seat was bespattered with mud; whilst, to render the general aspect still more unprepossessing, the trees had not yet donned their mantles of green, but stood dejectedly drooping their leafless branches as if overcome with embarrassment at their nakedness. On the benches

around me sat, or lay, London's homeless—wretched-looking men in long, tattered overcoats, baggy, buttonless trousers, cracked and laceless boots, and shapeless bowlers, too weak from want of food and rest even to think of work, almost incapable, indeed, of thought at all—breathing corpses, nothing more, with premature signs of decomposition in their filthy smell. And the women—the women were, if possible, ranker—feebly pulsating, feebly throbbing, foully stinking, rotten, living deaths. No amount of soap, food, or warmth could reclaim them now. Nature's implacable law—the survival of the fittest, the weakest to the wall—was here exhibited in all its brutal force, and, as I gazed at the weakest, my heart turned sick within me.

[26] Time advanced; one by one the army of tatterdemalions crawled away, God alone knew how, God alone knew where. In all probability God did not care. Why should He? He created Nature and Nature's laws.

A different type of humanity replaced this garbage: neat and dapper girls on their way to business; black-bowled, spotless-leathered, a-guinea-a-week clerks, casting longing glances at the pale grass and countless trees (their only reminiscence of the country), as they hastened their pace, lest they should be a minute late for their hateful servitude; a policeman with the characteristic stride and swinging arms; a brisk and short-stepped postman; an apoplectic-looking, second-hand-clothes-man; an emaciated widow; a typical charwoman; two mechanics; the usual brutal-faced labourer; one of the idle rich in shiny hat, high collar, cutaway coat, prancing past on a coal-black horse; and a bevy of nursemaids.

To show my mind was not centred on the occult,—bootlaces, collar-studs, the two buttons on the back of ladies' coats, dyed hair, servants' feet, and a dozen and one other subjects, quite other than the superphysical, successively occupied my thoughts. Imagine, then, my surprise and the shock I received, when, on glancing at the gravel in front of me, I saw two shadows—two enigmatical shadows. A dog came shambling along the path, showed its teeth, snarled, sprang on one side, and, with bristling hair, fled for its life. I examined the plot of ground behind me; there was nothing that could in any way account for the[27] shadows, nothing like them. Something rubbed against my leg. I involuntarily put down my hand; it was a foot—a clammy lump of ice, but, unmistakably, a foot. Yet of what? I saw nothing, only the shadows. I did not want to discover more; my very soul shrank within me at the bare idea of what there might be, what there was. But, as is always the case, the superphysical gave me no choice; my hand, moving involuntarily forward, rested on something flat, round, grotesque, horrid, something I took for a face, but a face which I knew could not be human. Then I understood the shadows. Uniting, they formed the outline of something lithe and tall, the outline of a monstrosity with a growth even as I had felt it—flat, round, grotesque, and horrid. Was it the phantasm of one of those poor waifs and strays, having all their bestialities and diseases magnified; or was it the spirit of a tree of some unusually noxious nature?

I could not divine, and so I came away unsatisfied. But I believe the shadow is still there, for I saw it only the last time I was in the Park.

[28]

CHAPTER III OBSESSION, POSSESSION

Clocks, Chests and Mummies

As I have already remarked, spirit or unknown brains are frequently present at births. The brains of infants are very susceptible to impressions, and, in them, the thought-germs of the occult brains find snug billets. As time goes on, these germs develop and become generally known as "tastes," "cranks," and "manias."

It is an error to think that men of genius are especially prone to manias. On the contrary, the occult brains have the greatest difficulty in selecting thought-germs sufficiently subtle to lodge in the brain-cells of a child of genius. Practically, any germ of carnal thought will be sure of reception in the protoplasmic brain-cells of a child, who is destined to become a doctor, solicitor, soldier, shopkeeper, labourer, or worker in any ordinary occupation; but the thought-germ that will find entrance to the brain-cells of a future painter, writer, actor, or musician, must represent some propensity of a more or less extraordinary nature.

We all harbour these occult missiles, we are all[29] to a certain extent mad: the proud mamma who puts her only son into the Church or makes a lawyer of him, and placidly watches him develop a scarlet face, double chin, and prodigious paunch, would flounce out a hundred and one indignant denials if anyone suggested he had a mania, but it would be true; gluttony would be his mania, and one every whit as prohibitive to his chances of reaching the spiritual plane, as

drink, or sexual passion. Love of eating is, indeed, quite the commonest form of obsession, and one that develops soonest. Nine out of ten children—particularly present-day children, whose doting parents encourage their every desire—are fonder of cramming their bellies than of playing cricket or skipping; games soon weary them, but buns and chocolates never. The truth is, buns and chocolate have obsessed them. They think of them all day, and dream of them all night. It is buns and chocolates! wherever and whenever they turn or look—buns and chocolates! This greed soon develops, as the occult brain intended it should; enforced physical labour, or athletics, or even sedentary work may dwarf its growth for a time, but at middle and old age it comes on again, and the buns and chocolates are become so many coursed luncheons and dinners. Their world is one of menus, nothing but menus; their only mental exertion the study of menus, and I have no doubt that "tuck" shops and restaurants are besieged by the ever-hungry spirit of the earth-bound glutton. Though the drink-germ is usually developed later (and its later growth is invariably accelerated with[30] seas of alcohol), it not infrequently feeds its initial growth with copious streams of ginger beer and lemon kali.

Manual labourers—*i.e.* navvies, coal-heavers, miners, etc.—are naturally more or less brutal. Their brain-cells at birth offered so little resistance to the evil occult influences that they received, in full, all the lower germs of thought inoculated by the occult brains. Drink, gluttony, cruelty, all came to their infant cerebrums contemporaneously. The cruelty germ develops first, and cats, dogs, donkeys, smaller brothers, and even babies are made to feel the superior physical strength of the early wearer of hobnails. He is obsessed with a mania for hurting something, and with his strongly innate instinct of self-preservation, invariably chooses something that cannot harm him. Daily he looks around for fresh victims, and finally decides that the weedy offspring of the hated superior classes are the easiest prey. In company with others of his species, he annihilates the boy in Etons on his way to and from school, and the after recollections of the weakling's bloody nose and teardrops are as nectar to him. The cruelty germ develops apace. The bloody noses of the well-dressed classes are his mania now. He sees them at every turn and even dreams of them. He grows to manhood, and either digs in the road or plies the pick and shovel underground. The mechanical, monotonous exercise and the sordidness of his home surroundings foster the germ, and his leisure moments are occupied with the memory of those glorious times when he was hitting out at someone, [31] and he feels he would give anything just to have one more blow. Curse the police! If it were not for them he could indulge his hobby to the utmost. But the stalwart, officious man in blue is ever on the scene, and the thrashing of a puny cleric or sawbones is scarcely compensation for a month's hard labour. Yet his mania must be satisfied somehow—it worries him to pieces. He must either smash someone's nose or go mad; there is no alternative, and he chooses the former. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals prevents him skinning a cat; the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children will be down on him at once if he strikes a child, and so he has no other resource left but his wife—he can knock out all her teeth, bash in her ribs, and jump on her head to his heart's content. She will never dare prosecute him, and, if she does, some Humanitarian Society will be sure to see that he is not legally punished. He thus finds safe scope for the indulgence of his crank, and when there is nothing left of his own wife, he turns his unattractive and pusillanimous attentions to someone else's.

But occult thought-germs of this elementary type only thrive where the infant's spiritual or unknown brain is wholly undeveloped. Where the spiritual or unknown brain of an infant is partially developed, the germ-thought to be lodged in it (especially if it be a germ-thought of cruelty) must be of a more subtle and refined nature.

I have traced the growth of cruelty obsession in children one would not suspect of any great tendency to animalism. A refined love of making[32] others suffer has led them to vent inquisitorial tortures on insects, and the mania for pulling off the legs of flies and roasting beetles under spyglasses has been gradually extended to drowning mice in cages and seeing pigs killed. Time develops the germ; the cruel boy becomes the callous doctor or "sharp-practising" attorney, and the cruel girl becomes the cruel mother and often the frail divorcée. Drink and cards are an obsession with some; cruelty is just as much a matter of obsession with others. But the ingenuity of the occult brain rises to higher things; it rises to the subtlest form of invention when dealing with the artistic and literary temperament. I have been intimately acquainted with authors—well-known in the popular sense of the word—who have been obsessed in the oddest and often most painful ways.

The constant going back to turn door-handles, the sitting in grotesque and untoward positions, the fondness for fingering any smooth and shiny objects, such as mother-of-pearl, develop into manias for change—change of scenery, of occupation, of affections, of people—change that inevitably necessitates misery; for breaking—breaking promises, contracts, family ties, furniture—but breaking, always breaking; for sensuality—sensuality sometimes venial, but often of the most gross and unpardonable nature.

I knew a musician who was obsessed in a peculiarly loathsome manner. Few knew of his misfortune, and none abominated it more than himself. He sang divinely, had the most charming[33] personality, was all that could be desired as a husband and father, and yet was, in secret, a monomaniac of the most degrading and unusual order. In the daytime, when all was bright and cheerful, his mania was forgotten; but the moment twilight came, and he saw the shadows of

night stealing stealthily towards him, his craze returned, and, if alone, he would steal surreptitiously out of the house and, with the utmost perseverance, seek an opportunity of carrying into effect his bestial practices. I have known him tie himself to the table, surround himself with Bibles, and resort to every imaginable device to divert his mind from his passion, but all to no purpose; the knowledge that outside all was darkness and shadows proved irresistible. With a beating heart he put on his coat and hat, and, furtively opening the door, slunk out to gratify his hateful lust. Heaven knows! he went through hell.

I once watched a woman obsessed with an unnatural and wholly monstrous mania for her dog. She took it with her wherever she went, to the theatre, the shops, church, in railway carriages, on board ship. She dressed it in the richest silks and furs, decorated it with bangles, presented it with a watch, hugged, kissed, and fondled it, took it to bed with her, dreamed of it. When it died, she went into heavy mourning for it, and in an incredibly short space of time pined away. I saw her a few days before her death, and I was shocked; her gestures, mannerisms, and expression had become absolutely canine, and when she smiled—smiled in[34] a forced and unnatural manner—I could have sworn I saw Launcelot, her pet!

There was also a man, a brilliant writer, who from a boy had been obsessed with a craze for all sorts of glossy things, more especially buttons. The mania grew; he spent all his time running after girls who were manicured, or who wore shining buttons, and, when he married, he besought his wife to sew buttons on every article of her apparel. In the end, he is said to have swallowed a button, merely to enjoy the sensation of its smooth surface on the coats of his stomach.

This somewhat exaggerated instance of obsession serves to show that, no matter how extraordinary the thought-germ, it may enter one's mind and finally become a passion.

That the majority of people are obsessed, though in a varying degree, is a generally accepted fact; but that furniture can be possessed by occult brains, though not a generally accepted fact, is, I believe, equally true.

In a former work, entitled *Some Haunted Houses of England and Wales*, published by Mr Eveleigh Nash, I described how a bog-oak grandfather's clock was possessed by a peculiar type of elemental, which I subsequently classified as a vagrarian, or kind of grotesque spirit that inhabits wild and lonely places, and, not infrequently, spots where there are the remains of prehistoric (and even latter-day) man and beast. In another volume called *The Haunted Houses of London*, I narrated the haunting of a house in Portman Square by a grandfather's clock, the spirit in possession [35] causing it to foretell death by striking certain times; and I have since heard of hauntings by phenomena of a more or less similar nature.

The following is an example. A very dear friend of mine was taken ill shortly before Christmas. No one at the time suspected there was anything serious the matter with her, although her health of late had been far from good. I happened to be staying in the house just then, and found, that for some reason or other, I could not sleep. I do not often suffer from insomnia, so that the occurrence struck me as somewhat extraordinary. My bedroom opened on to a large, dark landing. In one corner of it stood a very old grandfather's clock, the ticking of which I could distinctly hear when the house was quiet. For the first two or three nights of my visit the clock was as usual, but, the night before my friend was taken ill, its ticking became strangely irregular. At one moment it sounded faint, at the next moment, the reverse; now it was slow, now quick; until at length, in a paroxysm of curiosity and fear, I cautiously opened my door and peeped out. It was a light night, and the glass face of the clock flashed back the moonbeams with startling brilliancy. A grim and subdued hush hung over the staircases and landings. The ticking was now low; but as I listened intently, it gradually grew louder and louder, until, to my horror, the colossal frame swayed violently backwards and forwards. Unable to stand the sight of it any longer, and fearful of what I might see next, I retreated into my room, and, carefully locking the door, lit the[36] gas, and got into bed. At three o'clock the ticking once again became normal. The following night the same thing occurred, and I discovered that certain other members of the household had also heard it. My friend rapidly grew worse, and the irregularities of the clock became more and more pronounced, more and more disturbing. Then there came a morning, when, between two and three o'clock, unable to lie in bed and listen to the ticking any longer, I got up. An irresistible attraction dragged me to the door. I peeped out, and there, with the moonlight concentrated on its face as before, swayed the clock, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, slowly and solemnly; and with each movement there issued from within it a hollow, agonised voice, the counterpart of that of my sick friend, exclaiming, "Oh dear! Oh dear! It is coming! It is coming!"

I was so fascinated, so frightened, that I could not remove my gaze, but was constrained to stand still and stare at it; and all the while there was a dull, mechanical repetition of the words: "Oh dear! Oh dear! It is coming, it is coming!" Half an hour passed in this manner, and the hands indicated five minutes to three, when a creak on the staircase made me look round. My heart turned to ice—there, half-way down the stairs, was a tall, black figure, its polished ebony skin shining in the moonbeams. I saw only its body at first, for I was far too surprised even to glance at its face. As it glided

noiselessly towards me, however, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I looked. There was no face at all, only two eyes[37]—two long, oblique, half-open eyes—grey and sinister, inexpressibly, hellishly sinister—and, as they met my gaze, they smiled gleefully. They passed on, the door of the clock swung open, and the figure stepped inside and vanished! I was now able to move, and re-entering my room, I locked myself in, turned on the gas, and buried myself under the bedclothes.

I left the house next day, and shortly afterwards received the melancholy tidings of the death of my dear friend. For the time being, at least, the clock had been possessed by an elemental spirit of death.

I know an instance, too, in which a long, protracted whine, like the whine of a dog, proceeded from a grandfather's clock, prior to any catastrophe in a certain family; another instance, in which loud thumps were heard in a grandfather's clock before a death; and still another instance in which a hooded face used occasionally to be seen in lieu of the clock's face.

In all these cases, the clocks were undoubtedly temporarily possessed by the same type of spirit—the type I have classified "Clanogrian" or Family Ghost—occult phenomena that, having attached themselves in bygone ages to certain families, sometimes cling to furniture (often not inappropriately to clocks) that belonged to those families; and, still clinging, in its various removals, to the piece they have "possessed," continue to perform their original grizzly function of foretelling death.

Of course, these charnel prophets are not the only phantasms that "possess" furniture. For example, I once heard of a case of "possession"[38] by a non-prophetic phantasm in connection with a chest—an antique oak chest which, I believe, claimed to be a native of Limerick. After experiencing many vicissitudes in its career, the chest fell into the hands of a Mrs MacNeill, who bought it at a rather exorbitant price from a second-hand dealer in Cork.

The chest, placed in the dining-room of its new home, was the recipient of much premature adulation. The awakening came one afternoon soon after its arrival, when Mrs MacNeill was alone in the dining-room at twilight. She had spent a very tiring morning shopping in Tralee, her nearest market-town, and consequently fell asleep in an arm-chair in front of the fire, directly after luncheon. She awoke with a sensation of extreme chilliness, and thinking the window could not have been shut properly, she got up to close it, when her attention was attracted by something white protruding from under the lid of the chest. She went up to inspect it, but she recoiled in horror. It was a long finger, with a very protuberant knuckle-bone, but no sign of a nail. She was so shocked that for some seconds she could only stand staring at it, mute and helpless; but the sound of approaching carriage-wheels breaking the spell, she rushed to the fireplace and pulled the bell vigorously. As she did so, there came a loud chuckle from the chest, and all the walls of the room seemed to shake with laughter.

Of course everyone laughed when Mrs MacNeill related what had happened. The chest was minutely examined, and as it was found to contain nothing[39] but some mats that had been stored away in it the previous day, the finger was forthwith declared to have been an optical illusion, and Mrs MacNeill was, for the time being, ridiculed into believing it was so herself. For the next two or three days nothing occurred; nothing, in fact, until one night when Mrs MacNeill and her daughters heard the queerest of noises downstairs, proceeding apparently from the dining-room—heavy, flopping footsteps, bumps as if a body was being dragged backwards and forwards across the floor, crashes as if all the crockery in the house had been piled in a mass on the floor, loud peals of malevolent laughter, and then—silence.

The following night, the disturbances being repeated, Mrs MacNeill summoned up courage to go downstairs and peep into the room. The noises were still going on when she arrived at the door, but, the moment she opened it, they ceased and there was nothing to be seen. A day or two afterwards, when she was again alone in the dining-room and the evening shadows were beginning to make their appearance, she glanced anxiously at the chest, and—there was the finger. Losing her self-possession at once, and yielding to a paroxysm of the wildest, the most ungovernable terror, she opened her mouth to shriek. Not a sound came; the cry that had been generated in her lungs died away ere it reached her larynx, and she relapsed into a kind of cataleptic condition, in which all her faculties were acutely alert but her limbs and organs of speech palsied.

She expected every instant that the chest-lid[40] would fly open and that the baleful thing lurking within would spring upon her. The torture she suffered from such anticipations was little short of hell, and was rendered all the more maddening by occasional quiverings of the lid, which brought all her expectations to a climax. Now, now at any rate, she assured herself, the moment had come when the acme of horroddom would be bounced upon her and she would either die or go mad. But no; her agonies were again and again borne anew, and her prognostications unfulfilled. At last the creakings abruptly ceased—nothing was to be heard save the shaking of the trees, the distant yelping of a dog, and the far-away footfall of one of the servants. Having somewhat recovered from the shock, Mrs MacNeill was busy

speculating as to the appearance of the hidden horror, when she heard a breathing, the subtle, stealthy breathing of the secreted pouncer. Again she was spellbound. The evening advanced, and from every nook and cranny of the room, from behind chairs, sofa, sideboard, and table, from window-sill and curtains, stole the shadows, all sorts of curious shadows, that brought with them an atmosphere of the barren, wind-swept cliffs and dark, deserted mountains, an atmosphere that added fresh terrors to Mrs MacNeill's already more than distraught mind.

The room was now full of occult possibilities, drawn from all quarters, and doubtless attracted thither by the chest, which acted as a physical magnet. It grew late; still no one came to her rescue; and still more shadows, and more, and[41] more, and more, until the room was full of them. She actually saw them gliding towards the house, in shoals, across the moon-kissed lawn and carriage-drive. Shadows of all sorts—some, unmistakable phantasms of the dead, with skinless faces and glassy eyes, their bodies either wrapped in shrouds covered with the black slime of bogs or dripping with water; some, whole and lank and bony; some with an arm or leg missing; some with no limbs or body, only heads—shrunk, bloodless heads with wide-open, staring eyes—yellow, ichorous eyes—gleaming, devilish eyes. Elementals of all sorts—some, tall and thin, with rotund heads and meaningless features; some, with rectangular, fleshy heads; some, with animal heads. On they came in countless legions, on, on, and on, one after another, each vying with the other in ghastly horridness.

The series of terrific shocks Mrs MacNeill experienced during the advance of this long and seemingly interminable procession of every conceivable ghoulish abortion, at length wore her out. The pulsations of her naturally strong heart temporarily failed, and, as her pent-up feelings found vent in one gasping scream for help, she fell insensible to the ground.

That very night the chest was ruthlessly cremated, and Mrs MacNeill's dining-room ceased to be a meeting-place for spooks.

Whenever I see an old chest now, I always view it with suspicion—especially if it should happen to be a bog-oak chest. The fact is, the latter is more likely than not to be "possessed" by elementals, which need scarcely be a matter of surprise when[42] one remembers that bogs—particularly Irish bogs—have been haunted, from time immemorial, by the most uncouth and fantastic type of spirits.

But mummies, mummies even more often than clocks and chests, are "possessed" by denizens of the occult world. Of course, everyone has heard of the "unlucky" mummy, the painted case of which, only, is in the Oriental department of the British Museum, and the story connected with it is so well known that it would be superfluous to expatiate on it here. I will therefore pass on to instances of other mummies "possessed" in a more or less similar manner.

During one of my sojourns in Paris, I met a Frenchman who, he informed me, had just returned from the East. I asked him if he had brought back any curios, such as vases, funeral urns, weapons, or amulets. "Yes, lots," he replied, "two cases full. But no mummies! Mon Dieu! No mummies! You ask me why? Ah! Therein hangs a tale. If you will have patience, I will tell it you."

The following is the gist of his narrative:—

"Some seasons ago I travelled up the Nile as far as Assiut, and when there, managed to pay a brief visit to the grand ruins of Thebes. Among the various treasures I brought away with me, of no great archæological value, was a mummy. I found it lying in an enormous lidless sarcophagus, close to a mutilated statue of Anubis. On my return to Assiut, I had the mummy placed in my tent, and thought no more of it till something awoke me with a startling suddenness in the night.[43] Then, obeying a peculiar impulse, I turned over on my side and looked in the direction of my treasure.

"The nights in the Soudan at this time of year are brilliant; one can even see to read, and every object in the desert is almost as clearly visible as by day. But I was quite startled by the whiteness of the glow that rested on the mummy, the face of which was immediately opposite mine. The remains—those of Met-Om-Karema, lady of the College of the god Amen-ra—were swathed in bandages, some of which had worn away in parts or become loose; and the figure, plainly discernible, was that of a shapely woman with elegant bust, well-formed limbs, rounded arms and small hands. The thumbs were slender, and the fingers, each of which were separately bandaged, long and tapering. The neck was full, the cranium rather long, the nose aquiline, the chin firm. Imitation eyes, brows, and lips were painted on the wrappings, and the effect thus produced, and in the phosphorescent glare of the moonbeams, was very weird. I was quite alone in the tent, the only other European, who had accompanied me to Assiut, having stayed in the town by preference, and my servants being encamped at some hundred or so yards from me on the ground.

"Sound travels far in the desert, but the silence now was absolute, and although I listened attentively, I could not detect

the slightest noise—man, beast, and insect were abnormally still. There was something in the air, too, that struck me as unusual; an odd, clammy coldness that reminded me at once of the catacombs in[44] Paris. I had hardly, however, conceived the resemblance, when a sob—low, gentle, but very distinct—sent a thrill of terror through me. It was ridiculous, absurd! It could not be, and I fought against the idea as to whence the sound had proceeded, as something too utterly fantastic, too utterly impossible! I tried to occupy my mind with other thoughts—the frivolities of Cairo, the casinos of Nice; but all to no purpose; and soon on my eager, throbbing ear there again fell that sound, that low and gentle sob. My hair stood on end; this time there was no doubt, no possible manner of doubt—the mummy lived! I looked at it aghast. I strained my vision to detect any movement in its limbs, but none was perceptible. Yet the noise had come from it, it had breathed—breathed—and even as I hissed the word unconsciously through my clenched lips, the bosom of the mummy rose and fell.

"A frightful terror seized me. I tried to shriek to my servants; I could not ejaculate a syllable. I tried to close my eyelids, but they were held open as in a vice. Again there came a sob that was immediately succeeded by a sigh; and a tremor ran through the figure from head to foot. One of its hands then began to move, the fingers clutched the air convulsively, then grew rigid, then curled slowly into the palms, then suddenly straightened. The bandages concealing them from view then fell off, and to my agonised sight were disclosed objects that struck me as strangely familiar. There is something about fingers, a marked individuality, I never forget. No two persons'[45] hands are alike. And in these fingers, in their excessive whiteness, round knuckles, and blue veins, in their tapering formation and perfect filbert nails, I read a likeness whose prototype, struggle how I would, I could not recall. Gradually the hand moved upwards, and, reaching the throat, the fingers set to work, at once, to remove the wrappings. My terror was now sublime! I dare not imagine, I dare not for one instant think, what I should see! And there was no getting away from it; I could not stir an inch, not the fraction of an inch, and the ghastly revelation would take place within a yard of my face.

"One by one the bandages came off. A glimmer of skin, pallid as marble; the beginning of the nose, the whole nose; the upper lip, exquisitely, delicately cut; the teeth, white and even on the whole, but here and there a shining gold filling; the under-lip, soft and gentle; a mouth I knew, but—God!—where? In my dreams, in the wild fantasies that had oft-times visited my pillow at night—in delirium, in reality, where? Mon Dieu! *Where?*

"The uncasing continued. The chin came next, a chin that was purely feminine, purely classical; then the upper part of the head—the hair long, black, luxuriant—the forehead low and white—the brows black, finely pencilled; and, last of all, the eyes!—and as they met my frenzied gaze and smiled, smiled right down into the depths of my livid soul, I recognised them—they were the eyes of my mother, my mother who had died in my boyhood! Seized with a madness that knew no[46] bounds, I sprang to my feet. The figure rose and confronted me. I flung open my arms to embrace her, the woman of all women in the world I loved best, the only woman I had loved. Shrinking from my touch, she cowered against the side of the tent. I fell on my knees before her and kissed—what? Not the feet of my mother, but that of the long unburied dead. Sick with repulsion and fear I looked up, and there, bending over and peering into my eyes was the face, the fleshless, mouldering face of a foul and barely recognisable corpse! With a shriek of horror I rolled backwards, and, springing to my feet, prepared to fly. I glanced at the mummy. It was lying on the ground, stiff and still, every bandage in its place; whilst standing over it, a look of fiendish glee in its light, doglike eyes, was the figure of Anubis, lurid and menacing.

"The voices of my servants, assuring me they were coming, broke the silence, and in an instant the apparition vanished.

"I had had enough of the tent, however, at least for that night, and, seeking refuge in the town, I whiled away the hours till morning with a fragrant cigar and novel. Directly I had breakfasted, I took the mummy back to Thebes and left it there. No, thank you, Mr O'Donnell, I collect many kinds of curios, but—no more mummies!"

[47]

CHAPTER IV OCCULT HOOLIGANS

Deducing from my own and other people's experiences, there exists a distinct type of occult phenomenon whose sole occupation is in boisterous orgies and in making manifestations purely for the sake of causing annoyance. To this phantasm the Germans have given the name *POLTERGEIST*, whilst in former of my works I have classified it as a Vagrarian Order of *ELEMENTAL*. It is this form of the superphysical, perhaps, that up to the present time has gained the greatest credence—it has been known in all ages and in all countries. Who, for example, has not heard of the famous Stockwell ghost that caused such a sensation in 1772, and of which Mrs Crowe gives a detailed account in her *Night Side of Nature*; or again, of "The Black Lion Lane, Bayswater Ghost," referred to many years ago in *The Morning Post*;

or, of the "Epworth Ghost," that so unceasingly tormented the Wesley family; or, of the "Demon of Tedworth" that gave John Mompesson and his family no peace, and of countless other well-authenticated and recorded instances of this same type of occult phenomenon? The poltergeists in the above-[48]mentioned cases were never seen, only felt and heard; but in what a disagreeable and often painful manner! The Demon of Tedworth, for example, awoke everyone at night by thumping on doors and imitating the beatings of a drum. It rattled bedsteads, scratched on the floor and wall as if possessing iron talons, groaned, and uttered loud cries of "A witch! A witch!" Nor was it content with these auditory demonstrations, for it resorted to far more energetic methods of physical violence. Furniture was moved out of its place and upset; the children's shoes were taken off their feet and thrown over their heads; their hair was tweaked and their clothes pulled; one little boy was even hit on a sore place on his heel; the servants were lifted bodily out of their beds and let fall; whilst several members of the household were stripped of all they had on, forcibly held down, and pelted with shoes. Nor were the proceedings at Stockwell, Black Lion Lane, and Epworth, though rather more bizarre, any less violent.

To quote another instance of this kind of haunting, Professor Schuppart at Gressen, in Upper Hesse, was for six years persecuted by a poltergeist in the most unpleasant manner; stones were sent whizzing through closed rooms in all directions, breaking windows but hurting no one; his books were torn to pieces; the lamp by which he was reading was removed to a distant corner of the room, and his cheeks were slapped, and slapped so incessantly that he could get no sleep.

According to Mrs Crowe, there was a case of a similar nature at Mr Chave's, in Devonshire, in[49] 1910, where affidavits were made before the magistrate attesting the facts, and large rewards offered for discovery; but in vain, the phenomena continued, and the spiritual agent was frequently seen in the form of some strange animal.

There seems to be little limit, short of grievous bodily injury—and even that limit has occasionally been overstepped—to poltergeist hooliganism. Last summer the Rev. Henry Hacon, M.A., of Searly Vicarage, North Kelsey Moor, very kindly sent me an original manuscript dealing with poltergeist disturbances of a very peculiar nature, at the old Syderstone Parsonage near Fakenham. I published the account *ad verbum* in a work of mine that appeared the ensuing autumn, entitled *Ghostly Phenomena*, and the interest it created encourages me to refer to other cases dealing with the same kind of phenomena.

There is a parsonage in the South of England where not only noises have been heard, but articles have been mysteriously whisked away and not returned. A lady assures me that when a gentleman, with whom she was intimately acquainted, was alone in one of the reception rooms one day, he placed some coins to the value, I believe, of fifteen shillings, on the table beside him, and chancing to have his attention directed to the fire, which had burned low, was surprised on looking again to discover the coins had gone; nor did he ever recover them. Other things, too, for the most part trivial, were also taken in the same incomprehensible manner, and apparently by the same mischievous unseen agency. It is true that one[50] of the former inhabitants of the house had, during the latter portion of his life, been heavily in debt, and that his borrowing propensities may have accompanied him to the occult world; but though such an explanation is quite feasible, I am rather inclined to attribute the disappearances to the pranks of some mischievous vagrarian.

I have myself over and over again experienced a similar kind of thing. For example, in a certain house in Norwood, I remember losing in rapid succession two stylograph pens, a knife, and a sash. I remembered, in each case, laying the article on a table, then having my attention called away by some rather unusual sound in a far corner of the room, and then, on returning to the table, finding the article had vanished. There was no one else in the house, so that ordinary theft was out of the question. Yet where did these articles go, and of what use would they be to a poltergeist? On one occasion, only, I caught a glimpse of the miscreant. It was about eight o'clock on a warm evening in June, and I was sitting reading in my study. The room is slightly below the level of the road, and in summer, the trees outside, whilst acting as an effective screen against the sun's rays, cast their shadows somewhat too thickly on the floor and walls, burying the angles in heavy gloom. In the daytime one rather welcomes this darkness; but in the afternoon it becomes a trifle oppressive, and at twilight one sometimes wishes it was not there. It is at twilight that the nature of the shadows usually undergoes a change, and there amalgamates, with them, that Something, that peculiar, indefinable [51] Something that I can only associate with the superphysical. Here, in my library, I often watch it creep in with the fading of the sunlight, or, postponing its advent till later—steal in through the window with the moonbeams, and I feel its presence just as assuredly and instinctively as I can feel and detect the presence of hostility in an audience or individual. I cannot describe how; I can only say I do, and that my discernment is seldom misleading. On the evening in question I was alone in the house. I had noticed, amid the shadows that lay in clusters on the floor and walls, this enigmatical Something. It was there most markedly; but I did not associate it with anything particularly terrifying or antagonistic. Perhaps that was because the book I was reading interested me most profoundly—it was a translation from Heine, and I am devoted to Heine. Let me quote an extract. It is from *Florentine Nights*, and runs: "But is it not folly to wish to

sound the inner meaning of any phenomenon outside us, when we cannot even solve the enigma of our own souls? We hardly know even whether outside phenomena really exist! We are often unable to distinguish reality from mere dream-faces. Was it a shape of my fancy, or was it horrible reality that I heard and saw on that night? I know not. I only remember that, as the wildest thoughts were flowing through my heart, a singular sound came to my ear." I had got so far, absorbingly, spiritually interested, when I heard a laugh, a long, low chuckle, that seemed to come from the darkest and most remote corner of the room. A cold paroxysm[52] froze my body, the book slid from my hands, and I sat upright in my chair, every faculty within me acutely alert and active. The laugh was repeated, this time from behind a writing-table in quite another part of the room. Something which sounded like a shower of tintacks then fell into the grate; after which there was a long pause, and then a terrific bump, as if some heavy body had fallen from a great height on to the floor immediately in front of me. I even heard the hissing and whizzing the body made in its descent as it cut its passage through the air. Again there came an interval of tranquillity broken only by the sounds of people in the road, the hurrying footsteps of a girl, the clattering of a man in hobnails, the quick, sharp tread of the lamplighter, and the scampering patter of a bevy of children. Then there came a series of knockings on the ceiling, and then the sound of something falling into a gaping abyss which I intuitively felt had surreptitiously opened at my feet.

For many seconds I listened to the reverberations of the object as it dashed against the sides of the unknown chasm; at length there was a splash, succeeded by hollow echoes. Shaking in every limb, I shrank back as far as I possibly could in my chair and clutched the arms. A draught, cold and dank, as if coming from an almost interminable distance, blew upwards and fanned my nostrils. Then there came the most appalling, the most blood-curdling chuckle, and I saw a hand—a lurid grey hand with long, knotted fingers and black, curved nails—feeling its way[53] towards me, through the subtle darkness, like some enormous, unsavoury insect. Nearer, nearer, and nearer it drew, its fingers waving in the air, antennæ fashion. For a moment it paused, and then, with lightning rapidity, snatched the book from my knees and disappeared. Directly afterwards I heard the sound of a latchkey inserted in the front door, whilst the voice of my wife inquiring why the house was in darkness broke the superphysical spell. Obeying her summons, I ascended the staircase, and the first object that greeted my vision in the hall was the volume of Heine that had been so unceremoniously taken from me! Assuredly this was the doings of a poltergeist! A poltergeist that up to the present had confined its attentions to me, no one else in the house having either heard or seen it.

In my study there is a deep recess concealed in the winter-time by heavy curtains drawn across it; and often when I am writing something makes me look up, and a cold horror falls upon me as I perceive the curtains rustle, rustle as though they were laughing, laughing in conjunction with some hidden occult monstrosity; some grey—the bulk of the phantasms that come to me are grey—and glittering monstrosity who was enjoying a rich jest at my expense. Occasionally, to emphasise its presence, this poltergeist has scratched the wall, or thumped, or thrown an invisible missile over my head, or sighed, or groaned, or gurgled, and I have been frightened, horribly, ghastly frightened. Then something has happened—my wife has called out, or someone has rung a bell, or the postman has[54] given one of his whole-hearted smashes with the knocker, and the poltergeist has "cleared off," and I have not been disturbed by it again for the remainder of the evening.

I am not the only person whom poltergeists visit. Judging from my correspondence and the accounts I see in the letters of various psychical research magazines, they patronise many people. Their *modus operandi*, covering a wide range, is always boisterous. Undoubtedly they have been badly brought up—their home influence and their educational training must have been sadly lacking in discipline. Or is it the reverse? Are their crude devices and mad, tomboyish pranks merely reactionary, and the only means they have of finding vent for their naturally high spirits? If so, I devoutly wish they would choose some locality other than my study for their playground. Yet they interest me, and although I quake horribly when they are present, I derive endless amusement at other times, in speculating on their *raison d'être*, and curious—perhaps complex—constitutions. I do not believe they have ever inhabited any earthly body, either human or animal. I think it likely that they may be survivals of early experiments in animal and vegetable life in this planet, prior to the selection of any definite types; spirits that have never been anything else but spirits, and which have, no doubt, often envied man his carnal body and the possibilities that have been permitted him of eventually reaching a higher spiritual plane. It is envy, perhaps, that has made them mischievous, and generated in them an insatiable thirst to[55] torment and frighten man. Another probable explanation of them is, that they may be inhabitants of one of the other planets that have the power granted, under certain conditions at present unknown to us, of making themselves seen and heard by certain dwellers on the earth; and it is, of course, possible that they are but one of many types of spirits inhabiting a superphysical sphere that encloses or infringes on our own. They may be only another form of life, a form that is neither carnal nor immortal, but which has to depend for its existence on a superphysical food. They may be born in a fashion that, apart from its peculiarity and extravagance, bears some resemblance to the generation of physical animal life; and they may die, too, as man dies, and their death may be but the passing from one stage to another, or it may be for eternity.

But enough of possibilities, of probable and improbable theories. For the present not only poltergeists but all other

phantoms are seen as through a glass darkly, and, pending the discovery of some definite data, we do but flounder in a sea of wide, limitless, and infinite speculation.

[56]

CHAPTER V

SYLVAN HORRORS

I believe trees have spirits; I believe everything that grows has a spirit, and that such spirits never die, but passing into another state, a state of film and shadow, live on for ever. The phantasms of vegetable life are everywhere, though discernible only to the few of us. Often as I ramble through thoroughfares, crowded with pedestrians and vehicles, and impregnated with steam and smoke and all the impurities arising from over-congested humanity, I have suddenly smelt a different atmosphere, the cold atmosphere of superphysical forest land. I have come to a halt, and leaning in some doorway, gazed in awestruck wonder at the nodding foliage of a leviathan lepidodendron, the phantasm of one of those mammoth lycopods that flourished in the Carboniferous period. I have watched it swaying its shadowy arms backwards and forwards as if keeping time to some ghostly music, and the breeze it has thus created has rustled through my hair, while the sweet scent of its resin has pleasantly tickled my nostrils. I have seen, too, suddenly open before me, dark, gloomy aisles, lined with stupendous pines and carpeted[57] with long, luxuriant grass, gigantic ferns, and other monstrous primeval flora, of a nomenclature wholly unknown to me; I have watched in chilled fascination the black trunks twist and bend and contort, as if under the influence of an uncontrollable fit of laughter, or at the bidding of some psychic cyclone. I have at times stayed my steps when in the throes of the city-pavements; shops and people have been obliterated, and their places taken by occult foliage; immense fungi have blocked out the sun's rays, and under the shelter of their slimy, glistening heads, I have been thrilled to see the wriggling, gliding forms of countless smaller saprophytes. I have felt the cold touch of loathsome toadstools and sniffed the hot, dry dust of the full, ripe puff-ball. On the Thames Embankment, up Chelsea way, I have at twilight beheld wonderful metamorphoses. In company with the shadows of natural objects of the landscape, have silently sprung up giant reeds and bullrushes. I have felt their icy coldness as, blowing hither and thither in the delirium of their free, untrammelled existence, they have swished across my face. Visions, truly visions, the exquisite fantasies of a vivid imagination. So says the sage. I do not think so; I dispute him *in toto*. These objects I have seen have not been illusions; else, why have I not imagined other things; why, for example, have I not seen rocks walking about and tables coming in at my door? If these phantasms were but tricks of the imagination, then imagination would stop at nothing. But they are not imagination, neither are they the idle fancies of an[58] over-active brain. They are objective—just as much objective as are the smells of recognised physical objects, that those, with keenly sensitive olfactory organs, can detect, and those, with a less sensitive sense of smell, cannot detect; those, with acute hearing, can hear, and those with less acute hearing cannot hear. And yet, people are slow to believe that the seeing of the occult is as much a faculty as is the scenting of smells or the hearing of noises.

I have heard it said that, deep down in coal mines, certain of the workers have seen wondrous sights; that when they have been alone in a drift, they have heard the blowing of the wind and the rustling of leaves, and suddenly found themselves penned in on all sides by the naked trunks of enormous primitive trees, lepidodendrons, sigillarias, ferns, and other plants, that have shone out with phosphorescent grandeur amid the inky blackness of the subterranean ether. Around the feet of the spellbound watchers have sprung up rank blades of Brobdingnagian grass and creepers, out of which have crept, with lurid eyes, prodigious millipedes, cockroaches, white ants, myriapods and scorpions, whilst added to the moaning and sighing of the trees has been the humming of stone-flies, dragon-flies, and locusts. Galleries and shafts have echoed and re-echoed with these noises of the old world, which yet lives, and will continue to live, maybe, to the end of time.

But are the physical trees, the trees that we can all see budding and sprouting in our gardens to-day—are they ever cognisant of the presence of the occult? Can they, like certain—not all—dogs and[59] horses and other animals, detect the proximity of the unknown? Do they tremble and shake with fear at the sight of some psychic vegetation, or are they utterly devoid of any such faculty? Can they see, hear, or smell? Have they any senses at all? And, if they have one sense, have they not others? Aye, there is food for reflection.

Personally, I believe trees have senses—not, of course, in such a high state of development as those of animal life; but, nevertheless, senses. Consequently, I think it quite possible that certain of them, like certain animals, feel the presence of the superphysical. I often stroll in woods. I do not love solitude; I love the trees, and I do not think there is anything in nature, apart from man, I love much more. The oak, the ash, the elm, the poplar, the willow, to me are more than mere names; they are friends, the friends of my boyhood and manhood; companions in my lonely rambles and voluntary banishments; guardians of my siestas; comforters of my tribulations. The gentle fanning of their branches has eased my pain-racked brow and given me much-needed sleep, whilst the chlorophyll of their leaves has acted like balm

to my eyelids, inflamed after long hours of study. I have leaned my head against their trunks, and heard, or fancied I have heard, the fantastic murmurings of their peaceful minds. This is what happens in the daytime, when the hot summer sun has turned the meadow-grass a golden brown. But with the twilight comes the change. Phantom-land awakes, and mingled with the shadows of the trees and bushes that lazily unroll themselves from[60] trunk and branches are the darkest of shades, that impart to the forest an atmosphere of dreary coldness. Usually I hie away with haste at sunset, but there are occasions when I have dallied longer than I have intended, and only realised my error when it has been too late. I have then, controlled by the irresistible fascination of the woods, waited and watched. I well recollect, for example, being caught in this way in a Hampshire spinney, at that time one of my most frequented haunts. The day had been unusually close and stifling, and the heat, in conjunction with a hard morning's work—for I had written, God only knows how long, without ceasing,—made me frightfully sleepy, and on arriving at my favourite spot beneath a lofty pine, I had slept till, for very shame, my eyelids could keep closed no longer. It was then nine o'clock, and the metamorphosis of sunset had commenced in solemn earnest. The evening was charming, ideal of the heart of summer; the air soft, sweetly scented; the sky unspotted blue. A peaceful hush, broken only by the chiming of some distant church bells, and the faint, the very faint barking of dogs, enveloped everything and instilled in me a false sensation of security. Facing me was a diminutive glade padded with downy grass, transformed into a pale yellow by the lustrous rays of the now encrimsoned sun. Fainter and fainter grew the ruddy glow, until there was nought of it left but a pale pink streak, whose delicate marginal lines still separated the blue of the sky from the quickly superseding grey. A barely perceptible mist gradually cloaked the grass, whilst the gloom[61] amid the foliage on the opposite side of the glade intensified. There was now no sound of bells, no barking of dogs; and silence, a silence tinged with the sadness so characteristic of summer evenings, was everywhere paramount. A sudden rush of icy air made my teeth chatter. I made an effort to stir, to escape ere the grotesque and intangible horrors of the wood could catch me. I ignominiously failed; the soles of my feet froze to the ground. Then I felt the slender, graceful body of the pine against which I leaned my back, shake and quiver, and my hand—the hand that rested on its bark—grew damp and sticky.

I endeavoured to avert my eyes from the open space confronting them. I failed; and as I gazed, filled with the anticipations of the damned, there suddenly burst into view, with all the frightful vividness associated only with the occult, a tall form—armless, legless—fashioned like the gnarled trunk of a tree—white, startlingly white in places where the bark had worn away, but on the whole a bright, a luridly bright, yellow and black. At first I successfully resisted a powerful impulse to raise my eyes to its face; but as I only too well knew would be the case, I was obliged to look at last, and, as I anticipated, I underwent a most violent shock. In lieu of a face I saw a raw and shining polyp, a mass of waving, tossing, pulpy radicles from whose centre shone two long, obliquely set, pale eyes, ablaze with devilry and malice. The thing, after the nature of all terrifying phantasms, was endowed with hypnotic properties, and directly its eyes rested on me I became numb;[62] my muscles slept while my faculties remained awake, acutely awake.

Inch by inch the thing approached me; its stealthy, gliding motion reminding me of a tiger subtly and relentlessly stalking its prey. It came up to me, and the catalepsy which had held me rigidly upright departed. I fell on the ground for protection, and, as the great unknown curved its ghastly figure over me and touched my throat and forehead with its fulsome tentacles, I was overcome with nervous tremors; a deadly pain griped my entrails, and, convulsed with agony, I rolled over on my face, furiously clawing the bracken. In this condition I continued for probably one or even two minutes, though to me it seemed very much longer. My sufferings terminated with the loud report of firearms, and slowly picking myself up, I found that the apparition had vanished, and that standing some twenty or so paces from me was a boy with a gun. I recognised him at once as the son of my neighbour, the village schoolmaster; but not wishing to tarry there any longer, I hurriedly wished him good night, and leaving the copse a great deal more quickly than I had entered it, I hastened home.

What had I seen? A phantasm of some dead tree? some peculiar species of spirit (I have elsewhere termed a vagrarian), attracted thither by the loneliness of the locality? some vicious, evil phantasm? or a vice-elemental, whose presence there would be due to some particularly wicked crime or series of crimes perpetrated on or near the spot? I cannot say. It might well have[63] been either one of them, or something quite different. I am quite sure, however, that most woods are haunted, and that he who sees spirit phenomena can be pretty certain of seeing them there. Again and again, as I have been passing after nightfall, through tree-girt glen, forest, or avenue, I have seen all sorts of curious forms and shapes move noiselessly from tree to tree. Hooded figures, with death's-heads, have glided surreptitiously through moon-kissed spaces; icy hands have touched me on the shoulders; whilst, pacing alongside me, I have oft-times heard footsteps, light and heavy, though I have seen nothing.

Miss Frances Sinclair tells me that, once, when walking along a country lane, she espied some odd-looking object lying on the ground at the foot of a tree. She approached it, and found to her horror it was a human finger swimming in a pool of blood. She turned round to attract the attention of her friends, and when she looked again the finger had vanished. On this very spot, she was subsequently informed, the murder of a child had taken place.

Trees are, I believe, frequently haunted by spirits that suggest crime. I have no doubt that numbers of people have hanged themselves on the same tree in just the same way as countless people have committed suicide by jumping over certain bridges. Why? For the very simple reason that hovering about these bridges are influences antagonistic to the human race, spirits whose chief and fiendish delight is to breathe thoughts of self-destruction into the brains of passers-by. I once heard of a man, medically[64] pronounced sane, who frequently complained that he was tormented by a voice whispering in his ear, "Shoot yourself! Shoot yourself!"—advice which he eventually found himself bound to follow. And of a man, likewise stated to be sane, who journeyed a considerable distance to jump over a notorious bridge because he was for ever being haunted by the phantasm of a weirdly beautiful woman who told him to do so. If bridges have their attendant sinister spirits, so undoubtedly have trees—spirits ever anxious to entice within the magnetic circle of their baleful influence anyone of the human race.

Many tales of trees being haunted in this way have come to me from India and the East. I quoted one in my *Ghostly Phenomena*, and the following was told me by a lady whom I met recently, when on a visit to my wife's relations in the Midlands.

"I was riding with my husband along a very lonely mountain road in Assam," my informant began, "when I suddenly discovered I had lost my silk scarf, which happened to be a rather costly one. I had a pretty shrewd idea whereabouts I might have dropped it, and, on mentioning the fact to my husband, he at once turned and rode back to look for it. Being armed, I did not feel at all nervous at being left alone, especially as there had been no cases, for many years, of assault on a European in our district; but, seeing a big mango tree standing quite by itself a few yards from the road, I turned my horse's head with the intention of riding up to it and picking some of its fruit. To my great annoyance, however, [65] the beast refused to go; moreover, although at all times most docile, it now reared, and kicked, and showed unmistakable signs of fright.

"I speedily came to the conclusion that my horse was aware of the presence of something—probably a wild beast—I could not see myself, and I at once dismounted, and tethering the shivering animal to a boulder, advanced cautiously, revolver in hand, to the tree. At every step I took, I expected the spring of a panther or some other beast of prey; but, being afraid of nothing but a tiger—and there were none, thank God! in that immediate neighbourhood—I went boldly on. On nearing the tree, I noticed that the soil under the branches was singularly dark, as if scorched and blackened by a fire, and that the atmosphere around it had suddenly grown very cold and dreary. To my disappointment there was no fruit, and I was coming away in disgust, when I caught sight of a queer-looking thing just over my head and half-hidden by the foliage. I parted the leaves asunder with my whip and looked up at it. My blood froze.

"The thing was nothing human. It had a long, grey, nude body, shaped like that of a man, only with abnormally long arms and legs, and very long and crooked fingers. Its head was flat and rectangular, without any features saving a pair of long and heavy lidded, light eyes, that were fixed on mine with an expression of hellish glee. For some seconds I was too appalled even to think, and then the most mad desire to kill myself surged through me. I raised my revolver, and was in the act of placing it to my forehead, when a loud[66] shout from behind startled me. It was my husband. He had found my scarf, and, hurrying back, had arrived just in time to see me raise the revolver—strange to relate—at him! In a few words I explained to him what had happened, and we examined the tree together. But there were no signs of the terrifying phenomenon—it had completely vanished. Though my husband declared that I must have been dreaming, I noticed he looked singularly grave, and, on our return home, he begged me never to go near the tree again. I asked him if he had had any idea it was haunted, and he said: 'No! but I know there are such trees. Ask Dingan.' Dingan was one of our native servants—the one we respected most, as he had been with my husband for nearly twelve years—ever since, in fact, he had settled in Assam. 'The mango tree, mem-sahib!' Dingan exclaimed, when I approached him on the subject, 'the mango tree on the Yuka Road, just before you get to the bridge over the river? I know it well. We call it "the devil tree," mem-sahib. No other tree will grow near it. There is a spirit peculiar to certain trees that lives in its branches, and persuades anyone who ventures within a few feet of it, either to kill themselves, or to kill other people. I have seen three men from this village alone, hanging to its accursed branches; they were left there till the ropes rotted and the jackals bore them off to the jungles. Three suicides have I seen, and three murders—two were women, strangers in these parts, and they were both lying within the shadow of the mango's trunk, with the backs of their heads[67] broken in like eggs! It is a thrice-accursed tree, mem-sahib.' Needless to say, I agreed with Dingan, and in future gave the mango a wide berth."

Vagrarians, tree devils (a type of vice elemental), and phantasms of dead trees are some of the occult horrors that haunt woods, and, in fact, the whole country-side! Added to these, there are the fauns and satyrs, those queer creatures, undoubtedly vagrarians, half-man and half-goat, that are accredited by the ancients with much merry-making, and grievous to add, much lasciviousness. Of these spirits there is mention in Scripture, namely, Isaiah xiii. 21, where we read: "And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there"; and in Baddeley's *Historical Meditations*, published about the beginning of the seventeenth century, there is a description by

Plutarch, of a satyr captured by Sulla, when the latter was on his way from Dyrrachium to Brundisium. The creature, which appears to have been very material, was found asleep in a park near Apollonia. On being led into the presence of Sulla, it commenced speaking in a harsh voice that was an odd mixture of the neighing of a horse and the crying of a goat. As neither Sulla nor any of his followers could understand in the slightest degree what the monstrosity meant, they let it go, nor is there any further reference to it.

Now, granted that this account is not "faked," and that such a beast actually did exist, it would naturally suggest to one that vagrarians, pixies, and other grotesque forms of phantasms are, after all, only the spirits of similar types of material life,[68] and that, in all probability, the earth, contemporary with prehistoric, and even later-day man, fairly swarmed with such creatures. However, this, like everything else connected with these early times, is merely a matter of speculation. Another explanatory theory is, that possibly superphysical phenomena were much more common formerly than now, and that the various types of sub-human and sub-animal apparitions (which were then constantly seen by the many, but which are now only visible to the few) have been handed down to us in the likeness of satyrs and fauns. Anyhow, I think they may be rightly classified in the category of vagrarians. The association of spirits with trees is pretty nearly universal. In the fairy tales of youth we have frequent allusions to them. In the Caucasus, where the population is not of Slavonic origin, we have innumerable stories of sacred trees, and in each of these stories the main idea is the same—namely, that a human life is dependent on the existence of a tree. In Slavonic mythology, plants as well as trees are magnets for spirits, and in the sweet-scented pinewoods, in the dark, lonely pinewoods, dwell "psipolnitsa," or female goblins, who plague the harvesters; and "lieshi," or forest male demons, closely allied to satyrs. In Iceland there was a pretty superstition to the effect that, when an innocent person was put to death, a sorb or mountain ash would spring over their grave. In Teutonic mythology the sorb is supposed to take the form of a lily or white rose, and, on the chairs of those about to die, one or other of these flowers is placed by unseen hands. White lilies, too, are[69] emblematic of innocence, and have a knack of mysteriously shooting up on the graves of those who have been unjustly executed. Surely this would be the work of a spirit, as, also, would be the action of the Eglantine, which is so charmingly illustrated in the touching story of Tristram and Yseult. Tradition says that from the grave of Tristram there sprang an eglantine which twined about the statue of the lovely Yseult, and, despite the fact of its being thrice cut down, grew again, ever embracing the same fair image. Among the North American Indians there was, and maybe still is, a general belief that the spirits of those who died, naturally reverted to trees—to the great pines of the mountain forests—where they dwelt for ever amid the branches. The Indians believed also that the spirits of certain trees walked at night in the guise of beautiful women. Lucky Indians! Would that my experience of the forest phantasms had been half so entrancing. The modern Greeks, Australian bushmen, and natives of the East Indies, like myself, only see the ugly side of the superphysical, for the spirits that haunt their vegetation are irredeemably ugly, horribly terrifying, and fiendishly vindictive.

The idea that the dead often passed into trees is well illustrated in the classics. For example, Æneas, in his wanderings, strikes a tree, and is half-frightened out of his wits by a great spurt of blood. A hollow voice, typical of phantasms and apparently proceeding from somewhere within the trunk, then begs him to desist, going on to explain that the tree is not an ordinary tree but the metamorphosed [70] soul of an unlucky wight called Polydorus, (he must have been unlucky, if only to have had such a name). Needless to say, Æneas, who was strictly a gentleman in spite of his aristocratic pretensions, at once dropped his axe and showed his sympathy for the poor tree-bound spirit in an abundant flow of tears, which must have satisfied, even, Polydorus. There is a very similar story in Swedish folk-lore. A voice in a tree addressed a man, who was about to cut it down, with these words, "Friend, hew me not!" But the man on this occasion was not a gentleman, and, instead of complying with the modest request, only plied his axe the more heartily. To his horror—a just punishment for his barbarity—there was a most frightful groan of agony, and out from the hole he had made in the trunk, rushed a fountain of blood, real human blood. What happened then I cannot say, but I imagine that the woodcutter, stricken with remorse, whipped up his bandana from the ground, and did all that lay in his power—though he had not had the advantages of lessons in first aid—to stop the bleeding. One cannot help being amused at these marvellous stories, but, after all, they are not very much more wonderful than many of one's own ghostly experiences. At any rate, they serve to illustrate how widespread and venerable is the belief that trees—trees, perhaps, in particular—are closely associated with the occult.

Pixies! What are pixies? That they are not the dear, delightful, quaint little people Shakespeare so inimitably portrays in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is, I fear, only too readily acknowledged. [71] I am told that they may be seen even now, and I know those who say that they have seen them, but that they are the mere shadows of those dainty creatures that used to gambol in the moonshine and help the poor and weary in their household work. The present-day pixies, whom I am loath to imagine are the descendants of the old-world pixies—though, of course, on the other hand, they may be merely degenerates, a much more pleasant alternative—are I think still to be occasionally encountered in lonely, isolated districts; such, for instance, as the mountains in the West of Ireland, the Hebrides, and other more or less desolate islands, and on one or two of the Cornish hills and moors.

Like most phantasms, the modern pixies are silent and elusive. They appear and disappear with equal abruptness, contenting themselves with merely gliding along noiselessly from rock to rock, or from bush to bush. Dainty they are not, pretty they are not, and in stature only do they resemble the pixie of fairy tales; otherwise they are true vagrarians, grotesque and often harrowing.

In my *Ghostly Phenomena* I have given one or two accounts of their appearance in the West of England, but the nearest approach to pixies that I have myself seen, were phantasms that appeared to me, in 1903, on the Wicklow Hills, near Bray. I was out for a walk on the afternoon of Thursday, May 18; the weather was oppressive, and the grey, lowering sky threatened rain, a fact which accounted for the paucity of pedestrians. Leaving my temporary headquarters, at Bray, at half-past[72] one, I arrived at a pretty village close to the foot of the hills and immediately began the ascent. Selecting a deviating path that wound its way up gradually, I, at length, reached the summit of the ridge.

On and on I strolled, careless of time and distance, until a sudden dryness in my throat reminded me it must be about the hour at which I generally took tea. I turned round and began to retrace my steps homeward. The place was absolutely deserted; not a sign of a human being or animal anywhere, and the deepest silence. I had come to the brink of a slight elevation when, to my astonishment, I saw in the tiny plateau beneath, three extraordinary shapes. Standing not more than two feet from the ground, they had the most perfectly proportioned bodies of human beings, but monstrous heads; their faces had a leadish blue hue, like that of corpses; their eyes were wide open and glassy. They glided along slowly and solemnly in Indian file, their grey, straggling hair and loose white clothes rustling in the breeze; and on arriving at a slight depression in the ground, they sank and sank, until they entirely disappeared from view. I then descended from my perch, and made a thorough examination of the spot where they had vanished. It was firm, hard, caked soil, without hole or cover, or anything in which they could possibly have hidden. I was somewhat shocked, as indeed I always am after an encounter with the superphysical, but not so much shocked as I should have been had the phantasms been bigger. I visited the same spot subsequently, but did not see another manifestation.

[73]

To revert to trees—fascinating, haunting trees. Much credulity was at one time attached to the tradition that the tree on which Jesus Christ was crucified was an aspen, and that, thenceforth, all aspens were afflicted with a peculiar shivering. Botanists, scientists, and matter-of-fact people of all sorts pooh-pooh this legend, as, indeed, many people nowadays pooh-pooh the very existence of Christ. But something—you may call it intuition—I prefer to call it my Guardian Spirit—bids me believe both; and I do believe as much in the tradition of the aspen as in the existence of Christ. Moreover, this intuition or influence—the work of my Guardian Spirit—whether dealing with things psychical, psychological, or physical has never yet failed me. If it warns me of the presence of a phantasm, I subsequently experience some kind or other of spiritual phenomenon; if it bids me beware of a person, I am invariably brought to discover later on that that person's intentions have been antagonistic to me; and if it causes me to deter from travelling by a certain route, or on a certain day, I always discover afterwards that it was a very fortunate thing for me that I abided by its warning. That is why I attach great importance to the voice of my Guardian Spirit; and that is why, when it tells me that, despite the many obvious discrepancies and absurdities in the Scriptures, despite the character of the Old Testament God—who repels rather than attracts me—despite all this, there was a Jesus Christ who actually was a great and benevolent Spirit, temporarily incarnate, and who really did suffer on the Cross in the manner[74] described in subsequent MSS.,—I believe it all implicitly. I back the still, small voice of my Guardian Spirit against all the arguments scepticism can produce.

Very good, then. I believe in the existence and spirituality of Jesus Christ because of the biddings of my Guardian Spirit, and, for the very same reason, I attach credence to the tradition of the quivering of the aspen. The sceptic accounts for the shaking of this tree by showing that it is due to a peculiar formation in the structure of the aspen's foliage. This may be so, but that peculiarity of structure was created immediately after Christ's crucifixion, and was created as a memento, for all time, of one of the most unpardonable murders on record.

There is something especially weird, too, in the ash; something that suggests to my mind that it is particularly susceptible to superphysical influences. I have often sat and listened to its groaning, and more than once, at twilight, perceived the filmy outline of some fantastic figure writhed around its slender trunk.

John Timbs, F.S.A., in his book of *Popular Errors*, published by Crosby, Lockwood & Co. in 1880, quotes from a letter, dated 7th July 1606, thus: "It is stated that at Brampton, near Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, 'an ash tree shaketh in body and boughs thereof, sighing and groaning like a man troubled in his sleep, as if it felt some sensible torment. Many have climbed to the top of it, who heard the groans more easily than they could below. But one among the rest, being on[75] the top thereof, spake to the tree; but presently came down much aghast, and lay grovelling on the earth, three hours speechless. In the end reviving, he said: "Brampton, Brampton, thou art much bound to pray!"' The Earl of

Lincoln caused one of the arms of the ash to be lopped off and a hole bored through the body, and then was the sound, or hollow voice, heard more audibly than before, but in a kind of speech which they could not comprehend. This is the second wonderful ash produced by past ages in this district—according to tradition, Ethelreda's budding staff having shot out into the first." So says the letter, and from my own experience of the ash, I am quite ready to accredit it with special psychic properties, though I cannot state I have ever heard it speak.

I believe it attracts phantasms in just the same way as do certain people, myself included, and certain kinds of furniture. Its groanings at night have constantly attracted, startled, and terrified me; they have been quite different to the sounds I have heard it make in the daytime; and often I could have sworn that, when I listened to its groanings, I was listening to the groanings of some dying person, and, what is more harrowing still, to some person I knew.

I have heard it said, too, that the most ghastly screams and gurgles have been heard proceeding from the ash trees planted in or near the site of murders or suicides, and as I sit here writing, a scene opens before me, and I can see a plain with one solitary tree—an ash—standing by a pool of water, on the margin of which are three clusters[76] of reeds. Dark clouds scud across the sky, and the moon only shows itself at intervals. It is an intensely wild and lonely spot, and the cold, dank air blowing across the barren wastes renders it all the more inhospitable. No one, no living thing, no object is visible save the ash. Suddenly it moves its livid trunk, sways violently, unnaturally, backwards and forwards—once, twice, thrice; and there comes from it a cry, a most piercing, agonising cry, half human, half animal, that dies away in a wail and imparts to the atmosphere a sensation of ice. I can hear the cry as I sit here writing; my memory rehearses it; it was one of the most frightful, blood-curdling, hellish sounds I ever endured; and the scene was on the Wicklow hills in Ireland.

The narcotic plant, the mandrake, is also credited with groaning, though I cannot say I have ever heard it. Though there is nothing particularly psychic about the witch-hazel, in the hands of certain people who are mediumistic, it will indicate the exact spot where water lies under the ground. The people who possess this faculty of discovering the locality of water by means of the hazel, are named dowsers, and my only wonder is that their undeniably useful faculty is not more cultivated and developed.

To my mind, there is no limit to the possibilities suggested by this faculty; for surely, if one species of tree possesses attraction for a certain object in nature, there can be no reason why other species of trees should not possess a similar attraction for other objects in nature. And if they possess this[77] attraction for the physical, why not for the superphysical—why, indeed, should not "ghosts" come within the radius of their magnetism?

The palm and sycamore trees have invariably been associated with the spiritual, and made use of symbolically, as the tree of life. An illustration, on a stele in the Berlin Museum, depicts a palm tree from the stem of which proceeds two arms, one administering to a figure, kneeling below, the fruit or bread of life; the other, pouring from a vase the water of life.

On another, a later Egyptian stele, the tree of life is the sycamore. There is no doubt that the Egyptians and Assyrians regarded these two trees as susceptible only to good psychic influences, they figure so frequently in illustrations of the benevolent deities. Nor were the Jews and Christians behind in their recognition of the extraordinary properties of these two trees, especially the palm. We find it symbolically introduced in the decoration of Solomon's Temple—on the walls, furniture, and vessels; whilst in Christian mosaics it figures as the tree of life in Paradise (*vide* Rev. xxii. 1, 2, and in the apsis of S. Giovanni Laterans). It is even regarded as synonymous with Jesus Christ, as may be seen in the illuminated frontispiece to an *Evangelium* in the library of the British Museum, where the symbols of the four Evangelists, placed over corresponding columns of lessons from their gospels, are portrayed looking up to a palm tree, rising from the earth, on the summit of which is a cross, with the symbolical letters alpha and omega suspended from its arms.

[78]

I am, of course, only speaking from my own experience, but this much I can vouch for, that I have never heard of a palm tree being haunted by an evil spirit, whereas I have heard of several cases in which palm leaves or crosses cut from palms have been used, and apparently with effect, as preventives of injuries caused by malevolent occult demonstrations; and were I forced to spend a night in some lonely forest, I think I should prefer, viewing the situation entirely from the standpoint of psychical possibilities, that that forest should be composed partly or wholly of palms.

Before concluding this chapter, I must make a brief allusion to another type of spirit—the *Barrowvian*—that resembles the vagrarian and pixie, inasmuch as it delights in lonely places. Whenever I see a barrow, tumulus or druidical, circle, I scent the probability of phantasms—phantasms of a peculiar sort. Most ancient burial-places are haunted, and haunted by two species of the same genus: the one, the spirits of whatever prehistoric forms of animal life lie buried there; and

the other, grotesque phantasms, often very similar to vagrarians in appearance, but with distinct ghoulish propensities and an inveterate hatred to living human beings. In my *Ghostly Phenomena* I have referred to the haunting of a druidical circle in the North of England, and also to the haunting of a house I once rented in Cornwall, near Castle on Dinas, by barrowvians; I have heard, too, of many cases of a like nature. I have, of course, often watched all night, near barrows or cromlechs, without any manifestations taking place; sometimes, [79] even, without feeling the presence of the Unknown, though these occasions have been rare. At about two o'clock one morning, when I was keeping my vigil beside a barrow in the South of England, I saw a phenomenon in the shape of a hand—only a hand, a big, misty, luminous blue hand, with long crooked fingers. I could, of course, only speculate as to the owner of the hand, and I must confess that I postponed that speculation till I was safe and sound, and bathed in sunshine, within the doors of my own domicile.

Hauntings of this type generally occur where excavations have been made, a barrow broken into, or a dolmen removed; the manifestations generally taking the form of phantasms of the dead, the prehistoric dead. But phenomena that are seen there are, more often than not, things that bear little or no resemblance to human beings; abnormally tall, thin things with small, bizarre heads, round, rectangular, or cone-shaped, sometimes semi- or wholly animal, and always expressive of the utmost malignity. Occasionally, in fact I might say often, the phenomena are entirely bestial—such, for example, as huge, blue, or spotted dogs, shaggy bears, and monstrous horses. Houses, built on or near the site of such burial-places, are not infrequently disturbed by strange noises, and the manifestations, when materialised, usually take one or other of these forms. In cases of this kind I have found that exorcism has little or no effect; or, if any, it is that the phenomena become even more emphatic.

[80]

CHAPTER VI COMPLEX HAUNTINGS AND OCCULT BESTIALITIES

What are occult bestialities? Are they the spirits of human beings who, when inhabiting material bodies, led thoroughly criminal lives; are they the phantasms of dead beasts—cats and dogs, etc.; or are they things that were never carnate? I think they may be either one or the other—that any one of these alternatives is admissible. There is a house, for example, in a London square, haunted by the apparition of a nude woman with long, yellow, curly hair and a pig's face. There is no mistaking the resemblance—eyes, snout, mouth, jaw, jowls, all are piggish, and the appearance of the thing is hideously suggestive of all that is bestial. What, then, is it? From the fact that in all probability a very sensuous, animal-minded woman once lived in the house, I am led to suppose that this may be her phantasm—or—one only of her many phantasms. And in this latter supposition lies much food for reflection. The physical brain, as we know, consists of multitudinous cells which we may reasonably take to be the homes of our respective faculties. Now, as each material cell has its representative immaterial inhabitant,[81] so each immaterial inhabitant has its representative phantasm. Thus each representative phantasm, on the dissolution of the material brain, would be either earth-bound or promoted to the higher spiritual plane. Hence, one human being may be represented by a score of phantasms, and it is quite possible for a house to be haunted by many totally different phenomena of the same person. I know, for instance, of a house being subjected to the hauntings of a dog, a sensual-looking priest, the bloated shape of an indescribable something, and a ferocious-visaged sailor. It had had, prior to my investigation, only one tenant, a notorious rake and glutton; no priest or sailor had ever been known to enter the house; and so I concluded the many apparitions were but phantasms of the same person—phantasms of his several, separate, and distinct personalities. He had brutal tendencies, sacerdotal (not spiritual) tendencies, gluttonous, and nautical tendencies, and his whole character being dominated by carnal cravings, on the dissolution of his material body each separate tendency would remain earth-bound, represented by the phantasm most closely resembling it. I believe this theory may explain many dual hauntings, and it holds good with regard to the case I have quoted, the case of the apparition with the pig's head. The ghost need not necessarily have been the spirit of a dead woman *in toto*, but merely the phantasm of one of her grosser personalities; her more spiritual personalities, represented by other phantasms, having migrated to the higher plane. Let me take, as another example, the case which I personally[82] investigated, and which interested me deeply. The house was then haunted (and, as far as I know to the contrary, is still haunted) by a blurred figure, suggestive of something hardly human and extremely nasty, that bounded up the stairs two steps at a time; by a big, malignant eye—only an eye—that appeared in one of the top rooms; and by a phantasm resembling a lady in distinctly modern costume. The house is old, and as, according to tradition, some crime was committed within its walls many years ago, the case may really be an instance of separate hauntings—the bounding figure and the eye (the latter either belonging to the figure or to another phantasm) being the phantasms of the principal, or principals, in the ancient tragedy; the lady, either the phantasm of someone who died there comparatively recently, or of someone still alive, who consciously, or unconsciously, projects her superphysical ego to that spot. On the other

hand, the three different phenomena might be three different phantasms of one person, that person being either alive or dead—for one can unquestionably, at times, project phantasms of one's various personalities before physical dissolution. The question of occult phenomena, one may thus see, is far more complex than it would appear to be at first sight, and naturally so,—the whole of nature being complex from start to finish. Just as minerals are not composed of one atom but of countless atoms, so the human brain is not constituted of one cell but of many; and as with the material cerebrum, so with the immaterial—hence the complexity. With regard to the phenomena of superphysical bestialities[83] such as dogs, bears, etc., it is almost impossible to say whether the phantasm would be that of a dead person, or rather that representing one of some dead person's several personalities—the phantasm of a genuine animal, of a vagrarian, or of some other type of elemental.

One can only surmise the identity of such phantasms, after becoming acquainted with the history of the locality in which such manifestations appear. The case to which I referred in my previous works, *Some Haunted Houses of England and Wales*, and *Ghostly Phenomena*, namely, that of the apparition of a nude man being seen outside an unused burial-ground in Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, furnishes a good example of alternatives. Near to the spot, at least within two or three hundred yards of it, was a barrow, close to which a sacrificial stone had been unearthed; consequently the phantasm may have been a barrowvian; and again, as the locality is much wooded and but thinly populated, it may have been a vagrarian; and again, the burial-ground being in such close proximity, the apparition may well have been the phantasm of one of the various personalities of a human being interred there.

One night, as I was sitting reading alone in an isolated cottage on the Wicklow hills, I was half-startled out of my senses by hearing a loud, menacing cry, half-human and half-animal, and apparently in mid-air, directly over my head. I looked up, and to my horror saw suspended, a few feet above me, the face of a Dalmatian dog—of a long since dead Dalmatian dog, with glassy, expressionless eyes,[84] and yellow, gaping jaws. The phenomenon did not last more than half a minute, and with its abrupt disappearance came a repetition of the cry. What was it? I questioned the owner of the cottage, and she informed me she had always had the sensation something uncanny walked the place at night, but had never seen anything. "One of my children did, though," she added; "Mike—he was drowned at sea twelve months ago. Before he became a sailor he lived with me here, and often used to see a dog—a big, spotted cratur, like what we called a plum-pudding dog. It was a nasty, unwholesome-looking thing, he used to tell me, and would run round and round his room—the room where you sleep—at night. Though a bold enough lad as a rule, the thing always scared him; and he used to come and tell me about it, with a face as white as linen—'Mother!' he would say, 'I saw the spotted cratur again in the night, and I couldn't get as much as a wink of sleep.' He would sometimes throw a boot at it, and always with the same result—the boot would go right through it." She then told me that a former tenant of the house, who had borne an evil reputation in the village—the peasants unanimously declaring she was a witch—had died, so it was said, in my room. "But, of course," she added, "it wasn't her ghost that Mike saw." Here I disagreed with her. However, if she could not come to any conclusion, neither could I; for though, of course, the dog may have been the earth-bound spirit of some particularly carnal-minded occupant of the cottage—or, in[85] other words, a phantasm representing one of that carnal-minded person's several personalities,—it may have been the phantasm of a vagrarian, of a barrowvian, or, of some other kind of elemental, attracted to the spot by its extreme loneliness, and the presence there, unsuspected by man, of some ancient remains, either human or animal. Occult dogs are very often of a luminous, semi-transparent bluish-grey—a bluish-grey that is common to many other kinds of superphysical phenomena, but which I have never seen in the physical world.

I have heard of several houses in Westmoreland and Devon, always in the vicinity of ancient burial-places, being haunted by blue dogs, and sometimes by blue dogs without heads. Indeed, headless apparitions of all sorts are by no means uncommon. A lady, who is well known to me, had a very unpleasant experience in a house in Norfolk, where she was awakened one night by a scratching on her window-pane, which was some distance from the ground, and, on getting out of bed to see what was there, perceived the huge form of a shaggy dog, without a head, pressed against the glass.

Fortunately for my informant, the manifestation was brief. The height of the window from the ground quite precluded the possibility of the apparition being any natural dog, and my friend was subsequently informed that what she had seen was one of the many headless phantasms that haunted the house. Of course, it does not follow that because one does not actually see a head, a head is not objectively there—it may be very much there, only not materialised. A story of one of[86] these seemingly headless apparitions was once told me by a Mrs Forbes du Barry whom I met at Lady D.'s house in Eaton Square. I remember the at-home to which I refer, particularly well, as the entertainment on that occasion was entirely entrusted to Miss Lilian North, who as a reciter and raconteur is, in my opinion, as far superior to any other reciter and raconteur as the stars are superior to the earth. Those who have not heard her stories, have not listened to her eloquent voice—that appeals not merely to the heart, but to the soul—are to be pitied. But there—I am digressing. Let me proceed. It was, I repeat, on the soul-inspiring occasion above mentioned that I was introduced to Mrs Forbes du Barry, who must be held responsible for the following story.

"I was reading one of your books the other day, Mr O'Donnell," she began, "and some of your experiences remind me of one of my own—one that occurred to me many years ago, when I was living in Worthing, in the old part of the town, not far from where the Public Library now stands. Directly after we had taken the house, my husband was ordered to India. However, he did not expect to be away for long, so, as I was not in very good health just then, I did not go with him, but remained with my little boy, Philip, in Worthing. Besides Philip and myself, my household only consisted of a nursery-governess, cook, housemaid, and kitchen-maid. The hauntings began before we had been in our new quarters many days. We all heard strange noises, scratchings, and whinings, and the servants complained that often, when they[87] were at meals, something they could not see, but which they could swear was a dog, came sniffing round them, jumping up and placing its invisible paws on their lap. Often, too, when they were in bed the same thing entered their room, they said, and jumped on the top of them. They were all very much frightened, and declared that if the hauntings continued they would not be able to stay in the house. Of course, I endeavoured to laugh away their fears, but the latter were far too deeply rooted, and I myself, apart from the noises I had heard, could not help feeling that there was some strangely unpleasant influence in the house. The climax was brought about by Philip. One afternoon, hearing him cry very loudly in the nursery, I ran upstairs to see what was the matter. On the landing outside the nursery I narrowly avoided a collision with the governess, who came tearing out of the room, her eyes half out of her head with terror, and her cheeks white as a sheet. She said nothing—and indeed her silence was far more impressive than words—but, rushing past me, flung herself downstairs, half a dozen steps at a time, and ran into the garden. In an agony of fear—for I dreaded to think what had happened—I burst into the nursery, and found Philip standing on the bed, frantically beating the air with his hands. "Take it away—oh, take it away!" he cried; 'it is a horrid dog; it has no head!' Then, seeing me, he sprang down and, racing up to me, leaped into my open arms. As he did so, something darted past and disappeared through the open doorway. It was a huge greyhound without a head! I left the house[88] the next day—I was fortunately able to sublet it—and went to Bournemouth. But, do you know, Mr O'Donnell, that dog followed us! Wherever we went it went too, nor did it ever leave Philip till his death, which took place in Egypt on his twenty-first birthday. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I think," I replied, "that the phantasm was very probably that of a real dog, and that it became genuinely attached to your son. I do not think it was headless, but that, for some reason unknown for the present, its head never materialised. What was the history of the house?"

"It had no history as far as I could gather," Mrs Forbes du Barry said. "A lady once lived there who was devoted to dogs, but no one thinks she ever had a greyhound."

"Then," I replied thoughtfully, "it is just possible that the headless dog was the phantasm of the lady herself, or, at least, of one of her personalities!"

Mrs du Barry appeared somewhat shocked, and I adroitly changed the conversation. However, I should not be at all surprised if this were the case.

The improbability of any ancient remains being interred under or near the house, precludes the idea of barrowvians, whilst the thickly populated nature of the neighbourhood and the entire absence of loneliness, renders the possibility of vagrarians equally unlikely. That being so, one only has to consider the possibility of its being a vice elemental attracted to the house by the vicious lives and thoughts of some former occupant, and I am, after all, inclined to favour the theory that the phantasm was the[89] phantasm of the old dog-loving lady herself, attaching itself in true canine fashion to the child Philip.

The most popular animal form amongst spirits—the form assumed by them more often than any other—is undoubtedly the dog. I hear of the occult dog more often than of any other occult beast, and in many places there is yet a firm belief that the souls of the wicked are chained to this earth in the shape of monstrous dogs. According to Mr Dyer, in his *Ghost World*, a man who hanged himself at Broomfield, near Salisbury, manifested himself in the guise of a huge black dog; whilst the Lady Howard of James I.'s reign, for her many misdeeds, not the least of which was getting rid of her husbands, was, on her death, transformed into a hound and compelled to run every night, between midnight and cock-crow, from the gateway of Fitzford, her former residence, to Oakhampton Park, and bring back to the place, from whence she started, a blade of grass in her mouth; and this penance she is doomed to continue till every blade of grass is removed from the park, which feat she will not be able to effect till the end of the world. Mr Dyer also goes on to say that in the hamlet of Dean Combe, Devon, there once lived a weaver of great fame and skill, who the day after his death was seen sitting working away at the loom as usual. A parson was promptly fetched, and the following conversation took place.

"Knowles!" the parson commanded (not without, I shrewdly suspect, some fear), "come down! This is no place for thee!" "I will!" said the weaver, "as soon as I have worked out my quill." [90] "Nay," said the vicar, "thou hast been long

enough at thy work; come down at once." The spirit then descended, and, on being pelted with earth and thrown on the ground by the parson, was converted into a black hound, which apparently was its ultimate shape.

Some years ago, Mr Dyer says, there was an accident in a Cornish mine whereby several men lost their lives, and, rather than that their relatives should be shocked at the sight of their mangled remains, some bystander, with all the best intentions in the world, threw the bodies into a fire, with the result that the mine has ever since been haunted by a troop of little black dogs.

According to the *Book of Days*, ii. p. 433, there is a widespread belief in most parts of England in a spectral dog, "large, shaggy, and black," but not confined to any one particular species. This phantasm is believed to haunt localities that have witnessed crimes, and also to foretell catastrophes. The Lancashire people, according to Harland and Wilkinson in their *Lancashire Folk-lore*, call it the "stuker" and "trash": the latter name being given it on account of its heavy, slopping walk; and the former appellation from its curious screech, which is a sure indication of some approaching death or calamity. To the peasantry of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire it is known as "the shuck," an apparition that haunts churchyards and other lonely places. In the Isle of Man a similar kind of phantasm, called "the Mauthe dog," was said to walk Peel Castle; whilst many of the Welsh lanes—particularly that leading from Mowsiad to Lisworney [91] Crossways—are, according to Wirt Sikes' *British Goblins*, haunted by the gwyllgi, a big black dog of the most terrifying aspect.

Cases of hauntings by packs of spectral hounds have from time to time been reported from all parts of the United Kingdom; but mostly from Northumberland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cumberland, Wales, Devon, and Cornwall. In the northern districts they are designated "Gabriel's hounds"; in Devon, "the Wisk, Yesk, or Heath hounds"; in Wales, "the Cwn Annwn or Cwn y Wybr" (see Dyer's *Ghost World*); and in Cornwall, "the devil and his dandy dogs." My own experiences fully coincide with the traditional belief that the dog is a very common form of spirit phenomena; but I can only repeat (the same remark applying to other animal manifestations), that it is impossible to decide with any degree of certainty to what category of phantasms, in addition to the general order of occult bestialities, the dog belongs. It seems quite permissible to think that the spirits of ladies, with an absorbing mania for canine pets, should be eventually earth-bound in the form of dogs—a fate which many of the fair sex have assured me would be "absolutely divine," and far preferable to the orthodox heaven.

I cannot see why the shape of a dog should be appropriated by the less desirable denizens of the occult world. But, that it is so, there is no room to doubt, as the following illustration shows. As soon as the trial of the infamous slaughterer X—— was over, and the verdict of death generally known, a deep sigh of relief was heaved[92] by the whole of civilisation—saving, of course, those pseudo-humanitarians who always pity murderers and women-beaters, and who, if the law was at all sensible and just, should be hanged with their bestial *protégés*. From all classes of men, I repeat, with the exception of those pernicious cranks, were heard the ejaculations: "Well! he's settled. What a good thing! I am glad! The world will be well rid of him!"

Then I smiled. The world well rid of him! Would it be rid of him? Not if I knew anything about occult phenomena. Indeed, the career on earth for such an epicure in murder as X—— had only just begun; in fact, it could hardly be said to begin till physical dissolution. The last drop—that six feet or so plunge between grim scaffolding—might in the case of some criminals, mere tyros at the trade, terminate for good their connection with this material plane; but not, decidedly not, in the case of this bosom comrade of vice elementals.

From both a psychological and superphysical point of view the case had interested me from the first. I had been anxious to see the man, for I felt sure, even if he did not display any of the ordinary physiognomical danger signals observable in many bestial criminals, there would nevertheless be a something about or around him, that would immediately warn as keen a student of the occult as myself of his close association with the lowest order of phantasms. I was not, however, permitted an interview, and so had to base my deductions upon the descriptions of him given me, first hand, by two experts in psychology, and upon photographs. [93] In the latter I recognised—though not with the readiness I should have done in the photo's living prototype—the presence of the unknown brain, the grey, silent, stealthy, ever-watchful, ever-lurking occult brain. As I gazed at his picture, as in a crystal, it faded away, and I saw the material man sitting alone in his study before a glowing fire. From out of him there crept a shadow, the shadow of something big, bloated, and crawling. I could distinguish nothing further. On reaching the door it paused, and I felt it was eyeing him—or rather his material body—anxiously. Perhaps it feared lest some other shadow, equally baleful, equally sly and subtle, would usurp its home. Its hesitation was, however, but momentary, and, passing through the door, it glided across the dimly lighted hall and out into the freedom of the open air. Picture succeeding picture with great rapidity, I followed it as it curled and fawned over the tombstones in more than one churchyard; moved with a peculiar waddling motion through foul alleys, halting wherever the garbage lay thickest, rubbed itself caressingly on the gory floors of slaughter-houses, and finally entered a dark, empty house in a road that, if not the Euston Road, was a road in every way

resembling it.

The atmosphere of the place was so suggestive of murder that my soul sickened within me; and so much so, in fact, that when I saw several grisly forms gliding down the gloomy staircases and along the sombre, narrow passages, where X——'s immaterial personality was halting, apparently to greet it, I could look no longer, but[94] shut my eyes. For some seconds I kept them closed, and, on re-opening them, found the tableau had changed—the material body before the fire was re-animated, and in the depths of the bleared, protruding eyes I saw the creeping, crawling, waddling, enigmatical shadow vibrating with murder. Again the scene changed, and I saw the physical man standing in the middle of a bedroom, listening—listening with blanched face and slightly open mouth, a steely glimmer of the superphysical, of the malignant, devilish superphysical, in his dilated pupils. What he is anticipating I cannot say, I dare not think—unless—unless the repetition of a scream; and it comes—I cannot hear it, but I can feel it, feel the reverberation through the crime-kissed walls and vicious, tainted atmosphere.

Something is at the door—it presses against it; I can catch a glimpse of its head, its face; my blood freezes—it is horrible. It enters the room, grey and silent—it lays one hand on the man's sleeve and drags him forward. He ascends to the room above, and, with all the brutality of those accustomed to the dead and dying, drags the—— But I will not go on. The grey unknown, the occult something, sternly issues its directions, and the merely physical obeys them. It is all over; the plot of the vice elementals has triumphed, and as they gleefully step away, one by one, patting their material comrade on the shoulder, the darkness, the hellish darkness of that infamous night lightens, and in through the windows steal the cold grey beams of early morning. I am assured; I have had enough; I pitch the photograph into the[95] grate. The evening comes—the evening after the execution. A feeling of the greatest, the most unenviable curiosity urges me to go, to see if what I surmise, will actually happen. I leave Gipsy Hill by an early afternoon train, I spend a few hours at a literary club, I dine at a quiet—an eminently quiet—restaurant in Oxford Street, and at eleven o'clock I am standing near a spot which I believe—I have no positive proof—I merely believe, was frequented by X——. It is more than twelve hours since he was executed; will anything—will the shape, the personality, I anticipate—come? The night air grows colder; I shrink deeper and deeper into the folds of my overcoat, and wish—devoutly wish—myself back again by my fireside.

The minutes glide by slowly. The streets are very silent now. With the exception of an occasional toot-toot from a taxi and the shrill whistle of a goods train, no other sounds are to be heard. It is the hour when nearly all material London sleeps and the streets are monopolised by shadows, interspersed with something rather more substantial—namely, policemen. A few yards away from me there slips by a man in a blue serge suit; and then, tip-toeing surreptitiously behind him, with one hand in his trousers-pocket and the other carrying a suspicious-looking black bag, comes a white-faced young man, dressed in shabby imitation of a West End swell; an ill-fitting frock-coat, which, even in the uncertain flicker of the gas-lamps, pronounces itself to be ready made, and the typical shopwalker's silk hat worn slightly on one side. Whether this night bird goes through life[96] on tiptoe, as many people do, or whether he only adopts that fashion on this particular occasion, is a conundrum, not without interest to students of character to whom a man's walk denotes much.

For a long time the street is deserted, and then a bedraggled figure in a shawl, with a big paper parcel under her arm, shuffles noiselessly by and disappears down an adjacent turning. Then there is another long interval, interrupted by a pretentious clock sonorously sounding two. A feeling of drowsiness creeps over me; my eyelids droop. I begin to lose cognisance of my surroundings and to imagine myself in some far-away place, when I am recalled sharply to myself by an intensely cold current of air. Intuitively I recognise the superphysical; it is the same species of cold which invariably heralds its approach. I have been right in my surmises after all; this spot is destined to be haunted. My eyes are wide enough open now, and every nerve in my body tingles with the keenest expectation. Something is coming, and, if that something is not the phantasm of him whom I believe is earthbound, whose phantasm is it? There is a slight noise of scratching from somewhere close beside me. It might have been the wind rustling the leaves against the masonry, or it might have been—I look round and see nothing. The sound is repeated and with the same result—*Nothing!* A third time I heard it, and then from the dark road on one side of me there waddles—I recognise the waddling at once—a shadow that, gradually becoming a little more distinct, develops into the rather blurry form of a[97] dog—a gaunt, hungry-looking mongrel. In a few seconds it stops short and looks at me with big swollen eyes that glitter with a something that is not actually bestial or savage, something strange yet not altogether strange, something enigmatic yet not entirely enigmatic. I am nonplussed; it was, and yet it was not, what I expected. With restless, ambling steps it slinks past me, disappearing through the closed gate by my side. Then satisfied, yet vaguely puzzled, I come away, wondering, wondering—wondering why on earth dogs should thus be desecrated.

Contrary to what one would imagine to be the case from the close association of cats with witches and magic, phantasms in a feline form are comparatively rare, and their appearance is seldom, if ever, as repulsive as that of the occult dog. I have seen phantasm cats several times, but, though they have been abnormally large and alarming, only

once—and I am anxious to forget that time—were they anything like as offensive as many of the ghostly dogs that have manifested themselves to me. In my *Haunted Houses of England and Wales* I have given an instance of dual haunting, in which one of the phenomena was a big black cat with a fiendish expression in its eyes, but otherwise normal; and, à propos of cats, there now comes back to me a story I was once told in the Far West—the Golden State of California. I was on my way back to England, after a short but somewhat bitter absence, and I was staying for the night at a small hotel in San Francisco. The man who related the anecdote was an Australian, born and[98] bred, on his way home to his native land after many years' sojourn in Texas. I was sitting on the sofa in the smoke-room reading, when he threw himself down in a chair opposite me and we gradually got into conversation. It was late when we began talking, and the other visitors, one by one, yawned, rose, and withdrew to their bedrooms, until we found ourselves alone—absolutely alone. The night was unusually dark and silent.

Leaning over the little tile-covered table at which we sat, the stranger suddenly said: "Do you see anything by me? Look hard." Much surprised at his request, for I confess that up to then I had taken him for a very ordinary kind of person, I looked, and, to my infinite astonishment and awe, saw, floating in mid-air, about two yards from him, and on a level with his chair, the shadowy outlines of what looked like an enormous cat—a cat with very little hair and unpleasant eyes—decidedly unpleasant eyes. My flesh crawled!

"Well?" said the stranger—who, by-the-by, had called himself Gallaher,—in very anxious tones, "Well—you don't seem in a hurry, nor yet particularly pleased—what is it?"

"A cat!" I gasped. "A cat—and a cat in mid-air!"

The stranger swore. "D—— it!" he cried, dashing his fist on the table with such force that the match-box flew a dozen or so feet up the room—"Cuss! the infernal thing! I guessed it was near me, I could feel its icy breath!" He glanced sharply round as he spoke, and hurled his tobacco pouch at the shape. It passed right[99] through it and fell with a soft squash on the ground. Gallaher picked it up with an oath. "I will tell you the history of that cat," he went on, as he resumed his seat, "and a d——d queer history it is."

Pouring himself out a bumper of whisky and refilling his pipe, he cleared his throat and began: "As a boy I always hated cats—God knows why—but the sight of a cat made me sick. I could not stand their soft, sleek fur; nor their silly, senseless faces; nor their smell—the smell of their skins, which most people don't seem able to detect. I could, however; I could recognise that d——d scent a mile off, and could always tell, without seeing it, when there was a cat in the house. If any of the boys at school wanted to play me a trick they let loose half a dozen mangy tabbies in our yard, or sent me a hideous 'Tom' trussed up like a fowl in a hamper, or made cats' noises in the dead of night under my window. Everyone in the village, from the baker to the bone-setter, knew of my hatred of cats, and, consequently, I had many enemies—chiefly amongst the old ladies. I must tell you, however, much as I loathed and abominated cats, I never killed one. I threw stones and sticks at them; I emptied jugs, and cans, and many pails of water on them; I pelted them with turnips; I hurled cushions, bolsters, pillows, anything I could first lay my hands on, at them; and"—here he cast a furtive look at the shadow—"I have pinched and trodden on their tails; but I have never killed one. When I grew up, my attitude towards them remained the same, and wherever I went I won the reputation for being the[100] inveterate, the most poignantly inveterate, enemy of cats.

"When I was about twenty-five, I settled in a part of Texas where there were no cats. It was on a ranch in the upper valley of the Colorado. I was cattle ranching, and having had a pretty shrewd knowledge of the business before I left home, I soon made headway, and—between ourselves, mate, for there are mighty 'tough uns' in these town hotels—a good pile of dollars. I never had any of the adventures that befall most men out West, never but once, and I am coming to that right away.

"I had been selling some hundred head of cattle and about the same number of hogs, at a town some twenty or so miles from my ranch, and feeling I would like a bit of excitement, after so many months of monotony—the monotony of the desert life—I turned into the theatre—a wooden shanty—where a company of touring players, mostly Yankees, were performing. Sitting next to me was a fellow who speedily got into conversation with me and assured me he was an Australian. I did not believe him, for he had not the cut of an Australian,—until he mentioned one or two of the streets I knew in Adelaide, and that settled me. We drank to each other's health straight away, and he invited me to supper at his hotel. I accepted; and as soon as the performance was over, and we had exchanged greetings with some half-dozen of the performers, in whisky, he slipped his arm through mine and we strolled off together. Of course it was very foolish of me, seeing that I had a belt full of money; but then I had not had an[101] outing for a long time, and I thirsted for adventure as I thirsted for whisky, and God alone knows how much of *THAT* I had already drunk. We arrived at the hotel. It was a poor-looking place in a sinister neighbourhood, abounding with evil-eyed Dagos and cut-throats of all kinds. Still I was young and strong, and well armed, for I never left home in those days without a six-shooter. My

companion escorted me into a low room in the rear of the premises, smelling villainously of foul tobacco and equally foul alcohol. Some half-cooked slices of bacon and suspicious-looking fried eggs were placed before us, which, with huge hunks of bread and a bottle of very much belabelled—too much belabelled—Highland whisky, completed the repast. But it was too unsavoury even for my companion, whose hungry eyes and lantern jaws proclaimed he had a ravenous appetite. However, he ate the bacon and I the bread; the eggs we emptied into a flower-pot. The supper—the supper of which he had led me to think so much—over, we filled our glasses, or at least he poured out for both, for his hands were steadier—even in my condition of semi-intoxication I noticed they were steadier—than mine. Then he brought me a cigar and took me to his bedroom, a bare, grimy apartment overhead. There was no furniture, saving a bed showing unmistakable signs that someone had been lying on it in dirty boots, a small rectangular deal table, and one chair.

"In a stupefied condition I was hesitating which of the alternatives to choose—the chair or the table, for, oddly enough, I never thought of the bed, when[102] my host settled the question by leading me forcibly forward and flinging me down on the mattress. He then took a wooden wedge out of his pocket, and, going to the door, thrust it in the crack, giving the handle a violent tug to see whether the door stood the test. 'There now, mate,' he said with a grin—a grin that seemed to suggest something my tipsy brain could not grasp, 'I have just shut us in snug and secure so that we can chat away without fear of interruption. Let us drink to a comfortable night's sleep. You will sleep sound enough here, I can tell you!' He handed me a glass as he spoke. 'Drink!' he said with a leer. 'You are not half an Australian if you cannot hold that! See!' and pouring himself out a tumbler of spirits and water he was about to gulp it down, when I uttered an ejaculation of horror. The light from the single gas jet over his head, falling on his face as he lifted it up to drink the whisky, revealed in his wide open, protruding pupils, the reflection of a cat—I can swear it was a cat. Instantly my intoxication evaporated and I scented danger. How was it I had not noticed before that the man was a typical ruffian—a regular street-corner loiterer, waiting, hawklike, to pounce upon and fleece the first well-to-do looking stranger he saw. Of course I saw it all now like a flash of lightning: he had seen me about the town during the earlier part of the day, had found out I was there on business, that I was an Australian, and one or two other things—it is surprising how soon one's affairs get mooted in a small town,—and guessing[103] I had the receipts of my sales on my person, had decided to rob me. Accordingly, with this end in view, he had followed me into the theatre, and, securing the seat next me, had broken the ice by pretending he was an Australian. He had then plied me with drink and brought me, already more than half drunk, to this cut-throat den. And I owed the discovery to a cat! My first thought was to feel for my revolver. I did, and found it was—gone. My hopes sank to zero; for though I might have been more than a match for the wiry framed stranger had we both been unarmed, I had not the slightest chance with him were he armed, as he undoubtedly was, with my revolver as well as his own. Though it takes some time to explain this, it all passed through my mind in a few seconds—before he had finished drinking. 'Now, mate!' he said, putting down his glass, the first *WHOLE* glass even of whisky and water he had taken that night, 'that's my share, now for yours.'

"'Wait a bit!' I stammered, pretending to hiccough, 'wait a bit. I don't feel that I can drink any more just yet! Maybe I will in a few minutes.' We sat down, and I saw protruding from his hip pocket the butt end of a revolver. If only I could get it! Determined to try, I edged slightly towards him. He immediately drew away, a curious, furtive, bestial smile lurking in the corner of his lips. I casually repeated the manœuvre, and he just as casually repeated his. Then I glanced at the window—the door I knew was hopeless,—and it was iron barred. I gazed[104] again at the man, and his eyes grinned evilly as they met mine. Without a doubt he meant to murder me. The ghastliness of my position stunned me. Even if I shrieked for help, who would hear me save desperadoes, in all probability every whit as ready as my companion to kill me.

"A hideous stupor now began to assert itself, and as I strained to keep my lids from closing, I watched with a thrill of terror a fiendish look of expectancy creep into the white, gleaming face of the stranger. I realised, only too acutely, that he was waiting for me to fall asleep so as the more conveniently to rob and murder me. The man was a murderer by instinct—his whole air suggested it—his very breath was impregnated with the sickly desire to kill. Physically, he was the ideal assassin. It was strange that I had not observed it before; but in this light, this yellow, piercing glare, all the criminality of his features was revealed with damning clearness: the high cheek-bones, the light, protruding eyes, the abnormally developed forehead and temporal regions, the small, weak chin, the grossly irregular teeth, the poisonous breath, the club-shaped finger-tips and thick palms. Where could one find a greater combination of typically criminal characteristics? The man was made for destroying his fellow creatures. When would he begin his job and how?

"I am not narrow minded, I can recognise merit even in my enemies; and though I was so soon to be his victim, I could not but admire the thoroughly professional manner, indicative of past mastership, with which he set about his business. So far all[105] his plans, generated with meteor-like quickness, had been successful; he was now showing how devoted he was to his vocation, and how richly he appreciated the situation, by abandoning himself to a short period of greedy, voluptuous anticipation, fully expressed in his staring eyes and thinly lipped mouth, before experiencing the delicious sensation of slitting my windpipe and dismembering me. My drowsiness, which I verily believe was in a great measure

due to the peculiar fascination he had for me, steadily increased, and it was only with the most desperate efforts, egged on by the knowledge that my very existence depended on it, that I could keep my eyelids from actually coming together and sticking fast. At last they closed so nearly as to deceive my companion, who, rising stealthily to his feet, showed his teeth in a broad grin of satisfaction, and whipping from his coat pocket a glittering, horn-handled knife, ran his dirty, spatulate thumb over the blade to see if it was sharp. Grinning still more, he now tiptoed to the window, pulled the blind as far down as it would go, and, after placing his ear against the panel of the door to make sure no one was about, gaily spat on his palms, and, with a soft, sardonic chuckle, crept slowly towards me. Had he advanced with a war-whoop it would have made little or no difference—the man and his atmosphere paralysed me—I was held in the chair by iron bonds that swathed themselves round hands, and feet, and tongue. I could neither stir nor utter a sound,—only look, look with all the pent-up agonies of my soul[106] through my burning, quivering eye-lashes. A yard, a foot, an inch, and the perspiring fingers of his left hand dexterously loosened the gaudy coloured scarf that hid my throat. A second later and I felt them smartly transferred to my long, curly hair. They tightened, and my neck was on the very verge of being jerked back, when between my quivering eyelids I saw on the sheeny surface of his bulging eye-balls,—the cat—the damnable, hated cat. The effect was magical. A wave of the most terrific, the most ungovernable fury surged through me. I struck out blindly, and one of my fists alighting on the would-be murderer's face made him stagger back and drop the knife. In an instant the weapon was mine, and ere he could draw his six-shooter—for the suddenness of the encounter and my blow had considerably dazed him—I had hurled myself upon him, and brought him to the ground.

"The force with which I had thrown him, together with my blow, had stunned him, and I would have left him in that condition had it not been for the cat—the accursed cat—that, peeping up at me from every particle of his prostrate body, egged me on to kill him. My intense admiration for his genius now manifested itself in the way in which I imitated all his movements, from the visit to the door and window, to the spitting on his palms; and with a grin—the nearest counterpart that I could get, after prodigious efforts, to the one that so fascinated me—I approached his recumbent figure, and, bending over it, removed his neckerchief. I sat and admired the gently throbbing whiteness of[107] his throat for some seconds, and then, with a volley of execrations at the cat, commenced my novel and by no means uninteresting work. I am afraid I bungled it sadly, for I was disturbed when in the midst of it, by the sound of scratching, the violent and frantic scratching, of some animal on the upper panels of the door. The sound flustered me, and, my hand shaking in consequence, I did not make such a neat job of it as I should have liked. However, I did my best, and at all events I killed him; and I enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of knowing that I had killed him—killed the cat. But my joy was of short duration, and I now bitterly regret my rash deed. Wherever I go in the daytime, the shadowy figure of the cat accompanies me, and at night, crouching on my bedclothes, it watches—watches me with the expression in its eyes and mouth of my would-be murderer on that memorable night."

As he concluded, for an instant, only for an instant, the shadow by his side grew clearer, and I saw the cat, saw it watching him with murder, ghastly murder lurking in its eyes. I struck a match, and, as I had anticipated, the phenomenon vanished.

"It will return," the Australian said gloomily; "it always does. I shall never get rid of it!" And as I fully concurred with this statement, and had no suggestions to offer, I thanked him for his story, and wished him good night. But I did not leave him alone. He still had his cat. I saw it return to him as I passed through the doorway. Of course, I had no means of verifying his story;[108] it might have been true, or it might not. But there was the cat!—thoroughly objective and as perfect a specimen of a feline, occult bestiality as I have ever seen or wish to see again.

That a spirit should appear in the form of a pig need not seem remarkable when we remember that those who live foul lives, *i.e.* the sensual and greedy, must, after death, assume the shape that is most appropriate to them; indeed, in these circumstances, one might rather be surprised that a phantasm in the shape of a hog is not a more frequent occurrence.

There are numerous instances of hauntings by phenomena of this kind, in some cases the phantasms being wholly animal, and in other cases semi-animal.

What I have said with regard to the phantasms of dogs—namely, the difficulty, practically the impossibility, of deciding whether the manifestation is due to an elemental or to a spirit of the dead—holds good in the case of "pig" as well as every other kind of bestial phenomenon.

The phantasm in the shape of a horse I am inclined to attribute to the once actually material horse and not to elementals.

With regard to phantom birds—and there are innumerable cases of occult bird phenomena—I fancy it is otherwise, and that the majority of bird hauntings are caused either by the spirits of dead people, or by vicious forms of elementals.

Though one hears of few cases of occult bestialities in the shape of tigers, lions, or any other wild animal—saving bears

and wolves, phantasms[109] of which appear to be common—I nevertheless believe, from hearsay evidence, that they are to be met with in certain of the jungles and deserts in the East, and that for the most part they are the phantasms of the dead animals themselves, still hankering to be cruel—still hankering to kill.

[110]

CHAPTER VII

VAMPIRES, WERE-WOLVES, FOX-WOMEN, ETC.

Vampires

According to a work by Jos. Ennemoser, entitled *The Phantom World*, Hungary was at one time full of vampires. Between the river Theiss and Transylvania, were (and still are, I believe) a people called Heyducs, who were much pestered with this particularly noxious kind of phantasm. About 1732, a Heyduc called Arnauld Paul was crushed to death by a waggon. Thirty days after his burial a great number of people began to die, and it was then remembered that Paul had said he was tormented by a vampire. A consultation was held and it was decided to exhume him. On digging up his body, it was found to be red all over and literally bursting with blood, some of which had forced a passage out and wetted his winding sheet. Moreover, his hair, nails, and beard had grown considerably. These being sure signs that the corpse was possessed by a vampire, the local bailie was fetched and the usual proceedings for the expulsion of the undesirable phantasm began. A stake, sharply pointed at one end, was handed to the bailie, who, raising it above his head, drove[111] it with all his might into the heart of the corpse. There then issued from the body the most fearful screams, whereupon it was at once thrown into a fire that had been specially prepared for it, and burned to ashes. But, though this was the end of that particular vampire, it was by no means the end of the hauntings; for the deaths, far from decreasing in number, continued in rapid succession, and no less than seventeen people in the village died within a period of three months. The question now arose as to which of the other bodies in the cemetery were "possessed," it being very evident that more than one vampire lay buried there. Whilst the matter was at the height of discussion, the solution to the problem was brought about thus. A girl, of the name of Stanoska, awoke in the middle of the night, uttering the most heartrending screams, and declaring that the son of a man called Millo (who had been dead nine weeks) had nearly strangled her. A rush was at once made to the cemetery, and a general disinterment taking place, seventeen out of the forty corpses (including that of the son of Millo) showed unmistakable signs of vampirism. They were all treated according to the mode described, and their ashes cast into the adjacent river. A committee of inquiry concluded that the spread of vampirism had been due to the eating of certain cattle, of which Paul had been the first to partake. The disturbances ceased with the death of the girl and the destruction of her body, and the full account of the hauntings, attested to by officers of the local garrison, the chief surgeons, and most influential[112] of the inhabitants of the district, was sent to the Imperial Council of War at Venice, which caused a strict inquiry to be made into the matter, and were subsequently, according to Ennemoser, satisfied that all was *bona fide*.

In another work, *A History of Magic*, Ennemoser also refers to a case in the village of Kisilova, in Hungary, where the body of an old man, three days after his death, appeared to his son on two consecutive nights, demanding something to eat, and, being given some meat, ate it ravenously. The third night the son died, and the succeeding day witnessed the deaths of some five or six others. The matter was reported to the Tribunal of Belgrade, which promptly sent two officers to inquire into the case. On their arrival the old man's grave was opened, and his body found to be full of blood and natural respiration. A stake was then driven through its heart, and the hauntings ceased.

Though far fewer in number than they were, and more than ever confined to certain localities, I am quite sure that vampires are by no means extinct. Their modes and habits—they are no longer gregarious—have changed with the modes and habits of their victims, but they are none the less vampires. Have I seen them? No! but my not having been thus fortunate, or rather unfortunate, does not make me so discourteous as to disbelieve those who tell me that they have seen a vampire—that peculiar, indefinably peculiar shape that, wriggling along the ground from one tombstone to another, crawls up and over the churchyard [113] wall, and making for the nearest house, disappears through one of its upper windows. Indeed, I have no doubt that had I watched that house some few days afterwards, I should have seen a pale, anæmic looking creature, with projecting teeth and a thoroughly imbecile expression, come out of it. I believe a large percentage of idiots and imbecile epileptics owe their pitiable plight to vampires which, in their infancy, they had the misfortune to attract. I do not think that, as of old, the vampires come to their prey installed in stolen bodies, but that they visit people wholly in spirit form, and, with their superphysical mouths, suck the brain cells dry of intellect. The baby, who is thus the victim of a vampire, grows up into something on a far lower scale of intelligence than dumb animals, more bestial than monkeys, and more dangerous (far more dangerous, if the public only realised it) than tigers; for, whereas the tiger is content with one square meal a day, the hunger of vampirism is never satisfied, and the half-

starved, mal-shaped brain cells, the prey of vampirism, are in a constant state of suction, ever trying to draw in mental sustenance from the healthy brain cells around them. Idiots and epileptics are the cephalopoda of the land—only, if anything, fouler, more voracious, and more insatiable than their aquatic prototypes. They never ought to be at large. If not destroyed in their early infancy (which one cannot help thinking would be the most merciful plan both for the idiot and the community in general), those polyp brains ought to be kept in some isolated place where they would have only[114] each other to feed upon. When I see an idiot walking in the streets, I always take very good care to give him a wide berth, as I have no desire that the vampire buried in his withered brain cells should derive any nutrition at my expense. From the fact that some towns which are close to cromlechs, ancient burial-grounds, woods, or moors are full of idiots, leads me to suppose that vampires often frequent the same spots as barrowvians, vagrarians and other types of elementals. Whilst, on the other hand, since many densely crowded centres have fully their share of idiots, I am led to believe that vampires are equally attracted by populous districts, and that, in short, unlike barrowvians and vagrarians, they can be met with pretty nearly everywhere. And now for examples.

A man I know, who spends most of his time in Germany, once had a strange experience when staying in the neighbourhood of the Hartz mountains. One sultry evening in August he was walking in the country, and noticed a perambulator with a white figure, which he took to be that of a remarkably tall nursemaid, bending over it. As he drew nearer, however, he found that he had been mistaken. The figure was nothing human; it had no limbs; it was cylindrical. A faint, sickly sound of sucking caused my friend to start forward with an exclamation of horror, and as he did so, the phantasm glided away from the perambulator and disappeared among the trees. The baby, my friend assured me, was a mere bag of bones, with a ghastly, grinning anæmic face. Again, when touring in Hungary, he had a similar experience. [115] He was walking down a back street in a large, thickly populated town, when he beheld a baby lying on the hot and sticky pavement with a queer-looking object stooping over it. Wondering what on earth the thing was, he advanced rapidly, and saw, to his unmitigated horror, that it was a phantasm with a limbless, cylindrical body, a huge flat, pulpy head, and protruding, luminous lips, which were tightly glued to the infant's ears; and again my friend heard a faint, sickly sound of sucking, and a sound more hideously nauseating, he informed me, could not be imagined. He was too dumbfounded to act; he could only stare; and the phantasm, after continuing its loathsome occupation for some seconds, leisurely arose, and moving away with a gliding motion, vanished in the yard of an adjacent house. The child did not appear to be human, but a concoction of half a dozen diminutive bestialities, and as my friend gazed at it, too fascinated for the moment to tear himself away, it smiled up at him with the hungry, leering smile of vampirism and idiocy.

So much for vampires in the country and in crowded cities, but, as I have already remarked, they are ubiquitous. As an illustration, there is said to be a maritime town in a remote part of England, which, besides being full of quaintness (of a kind not invariably pleasant) and of foul smells, is also full of more than half-savage fishermen and idiots; idiots that often come out at dusk, and greatly alarm strangers by running after them.

Some years ago, one of these idiots went into a stranger's house, took a noisy baby out of its cot,[116] and after tubbing it well (which I think showed that the idiot possessed certain powers of observation), cut off its head, throwing the offending member into the fire. The parents were naturally indignant, and so were some of the inhabitants; but the affair was speedily forgotten, and although the murderer was confined to a lunatic asylum, nothing was done to rid the town of other idiots who were, collectively, doing mischief of a nature far more serious than that of the recently perpetrated murder.

The wild and rugged coast upon which the town is situated was formerly the hunting-ground of wreckers, and I fear the present breed of fishermen, in spite of their hypocritical pretensions to religion, prove only too plainly by their abominable cruelty to birds and inhospitable treatment of strangers, that they are in reality no better than their forbears. This inherited strain of cruelty in the fishermen would alone account for the presence of vampires and every other kind of vicious elemental; but the town has still another attraction—namely, a prehistoric burial-ground, on a wide expanse of thinly populated moorland—in its rear.

À propos of vampires, my friend Mrs South writes to me as follows (I quote her letter *ad verbum*): "The other night, I was dining with a very old friend of mine whom I had not seen for years, and, during a pause in the conversation, he suddenly said, 'Do you believe in vampires?' I wondered for a moment if he had gone mad, and I think, in my matter-of-fact way, I blurted out something of the sort; but I saw in a moment,[117] from the expression in his eyes, that he had something to tell me, and that he was not at all in the mood to be laughed at or misunderstood, 'Tell me,' I said, 'I am listening.' 'Well,' he replied, 'I had an extraordinary experience a few months ago, and not a word of it have I breathed to any living soul. But sometimes the horror of it so overpowers me that I feel I must share my secret with someone; and you—well, you and I have always been such pals.' I answered nothing, but gently pressed his hand.

"After lighting a cigarette, he commenced his story, which I will give you as nearly as possible in his own words:—

"It is about six months ago since I returned from my travels. Up to that time I had been away from England for nearly three years, as you know. About a couple of nights after my return, I was dining at my Club, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round, I saw my old friend S——.

"As I had no idea he was in London, you may imagine my delight. He joined me at dinner and we went over old times together. He asked me if I had heard anything of our mutual friend G——, to whom we were both very much attached. I said I had had a few lines from him about six months previously, announcing his marriage, but that I had never heard from him nor seen him since. He had settled, I believe, in the heart of the country. S—— then told me that he had not seen G—— since his engagement, neither had he heard from him; in fact he had written to him once[118] or twice, but his letters had received no answer. There were whispered rumours that he was looking ill and unhappy. Hearing this, I got G——'s address from S——, and made up my mind I would run down and see him as soon as I could get away from town.

"About a week afterwards I found myself, after driving an interminable distance, so it seemed to me, through Devonshire lanes, stopping outside a beautiful house which appeared to be entirely isolated from any other dwelling.

"A few more minutes and I was standing before a blazing log fire in a fine old hall, eagerly awaiting the welcome I knew my old friend would give me. I did not anticipate long; in less time than it takes to tell G—— appeared, and with slow, painfully slow steps, crossed the hall to greet me. He was wasted to a shadow, and I felt a lump rise in my throat as I thought of the splendid, athletic boy I used to know. He made no excuse for his wife, who did not accompany him; and though I was naturally anxious to see her, I was glad that Jack and I were alone. We chatted together utterly regardless of the time, and it was not until the first gong had sounded that I thought of dressing for dinner. After performing a somewhat hurried toilette, I was hastening downstairs, when I suddenly became conscious that I was being watched. I looked all round and could see no one. I then heard a low, musical laugh just above my head, and looking up, I saw a figure leaning over the banisters. The beauty of the face dazzled me for a moment, and the loveliness of the eyes, which[119] looked into mine and seemed to shine a red gold, held me spellbound. Presently a voice, every whit as lovely as the face, said: "So you are Jack's chum?" The most beautiful woman I have ever seen then came slowly down the stairs, and slipping her arm through mine, led me to the dining-room. As her hand rested on my coat-sleeve, I remember noticing that the fingers were long, and thin, and pointed, and the nails so polished that they almost shone red. Indeed, I could not help feeling somewhat puzzled by the fact that everything about her shone red with the exception of her skin, which, with an equal brilliancy, shone white. At dinner she was lively, but she ate and drank very sparingly, and as though food was loathsome to her.

"Soon after dinner I felt so exceedingly tired and sleepy, a most unusual thing for me, that I found it absolutely impossible to keep awake, and consequently asked my host and hostess to excuse me. I woke next morning feeling languid and giddy, and, while shaving, I noticed a curious red mark at the base of my neck. I imagined I must have cut myself shaving hurriedly the evening before, and thought nothing more about it.

"The following night, after dinner, I experienced the same sensation of sleepiness, and felt almost as if I had been drugged. It was impossible for me to keep awake, so I again asked to be excused! On this occasion, after I had retired, a curious thing happened. I dreamed—or at least I suppose I dreamed—that I saw my door slowly open, and the figure of a woman carrying a candle in one hand,[120] and with the other carefully shading the flame, glide noiselessly into my room. She was clad in a loose red gown, and a great rope of hair hung over one shoulder. Again those red-gold eyes looked into mine; again I heard that low musical laugh; and this time I felt powerless either to speak or to move. She leaned down, nearer and nearer to me; her eyes gradually assumed a fiendish and terrible expression; and with a sucking noise, which was horrible to hear, she fastened her crimson lips to the little wound in my neck. I remembered nothing more until the morning. The place on my neck, I thought, looked more inflamed, and as I looked at it, my dream came vividly back to me and I began to wonder if after all it was only a dream. I felt frightfully rotten, so rotten that I decided to return to town that day; and yet I yielded to some strange fascination, and determined, after all, to stay another night. At dinner I drank sparingly; and, making the same excuse as on the previous nights, I retired to bed at an early hour. I lay awake until midnight, waiting for I know not what; and was just thinking what a mad fool I was, when suddenly the door gently opened and again I saw Jack's wife. Slowly she came towards me, gliding as stealthily and noiselessly as a snake. I waited until she leaned over me, until I felt her breath on my cheek, and then—then flung my arms round her. I had just time to see the mad terror in her eyes as she realised I was awake, and the next instant, like an eel, she had slipped from my grasp, and was gone. I never saw her again. I left early the next morning, and I shall never[121] forget dear old Jack's face when I said good-bye to him. It is only a few days since I heard of his death."

Were-wolves

Closely allied to the vampire is the were-wolf, which, however, instead of devouring the intellect of human beings,

feeds only on their flesh. Like the vampire, the were-wolf belongs to the order of elementals; but, unlike the vampire, it is confined to a very limited sphere—the wilds of Norway, Sweden, and Russia, and only appears in two guises, that of a human being in the daytime and a wolf at night. I have closely questioned many people who have travelled in those regions, but very few of them—one or two at the most—have actually come in contact with those to whom the existence of the were-wolf is not a fable but a fact. One of these travellers, a mere acquaintance whom I met in an hotel in the Latin Quarter of Paris, assured me that the authenticity of a story he would tell me, relating to the were-wolf, was, in the neighbourhood through which he travelled, never for a single moment doubted.

My informant, a highly cultured Russian, spoke English, French, German, and Italian with as great fluency as I spoke my native tongue, and I believed him to be perfectly genuine. The incident he told me, to which unanimous belief was accredited, happened to two young men (whom I will call Hans and Carl), who were travelling to Nijni Novgorod, a city in the province of Tobolsk. The route they took was off the beaten track, and led[122] them through a singularly wild and desolate tract of country. One evening, when they were trotting mechanically along, their horses suddenly came to a standstill and appeared to be very much frightened. They inquired of the driver the reason of such strange behaviour, and he pointed with his whip to a spot on the ice—they were then crossing a frozen lake—a few feet ahead of them. They got out of the sleigh, and, approaching the spot indicated, found the body of a peasant lying on his back, his throat gnawed away and all his entrails gone. "A wolf without a doubt," they said, and getting back into the sleigh, they drove on, taking good care to see that their rifles were ready for instant action. They had barely gone a mile when the horses again halted, and a second corpse was discovered, the corpse of a child with its face and thighs entirely eaten away. Again they drove on, and had progressed a few more miles when the horses stopped so abruptly that the driver was pitched bodily out; and before Carl and Hans could dismount, the brutes started off at a wild gallop. They were eventually got under control, but it was with the greatest difficulty that they were forced to turn round and go back, in order to pick up the unfortunate driver. The farther they went, the more restless they became, and when, at length, they approached the place where the driver had been thrown, they came to a sudden and resolute standstill. As no amount of whipping would now make them go on, Hans got out, and advancing a few steps, espied something lying across the track some little distance ahead of them. Gun in hand,[123] he advanced a few more steps, when he suddenly stopped. To his utter amazement he saw, bending over a body, which he at once identified as that of their driver, the figure of a woman. She started as he approached, and, hastily springing up, turned towards him. The strange beauty of her face, her long, lithe limbs (she stood fully six feet high) and slender body,—the beauty of the latter enhanced by the white woollen costume in which she was clad,—had an extraordinary effect upon Hans. Her shining masses of golden hair, that curled in thick clusters over her forehead and about her ears; the perfect regularity of her features, and the lustrous blue of her eyes, enraptured him; whilst the expression both in her face and figure—in her sparkling eyes and firmly modelled mouth; in her red lips, and even in her pearly teeth, repulsed and almost frightened him. He gazed steadily at her, and, as he did so, the hold on his rifle involuntarily tightened. He then glanced from her face to her hands, and noticed with a spasm of horror that the tips of her long and beautifully shaped nails were dripping with blood, and that there was blood, too, on her knees and feet, blood all over her. He then looked at the driver and saw the wretched man's clothes had been partially stripped off, and that there were great gory holes in his throat and abdomen.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" the woman cried, addressing him in a strangely peculiar voice, that thrilled him to the marrow of his bones. "It is the wolves. Do come and see what they have done. I saw them, from a distance, attack this poor[124] man, and leaving my sleigh, for my horses came to a dead halt, and nothing I could do would induce them to move, I ran to his assistance. But, alas! I was too late!" Then, looking at her dress, from which Hans could scarcely remove his eyes, she cried out: "Ugh! How disgusting—blood! My hands and clothes are covered with it. I tried to stop the bleeding, but it was no use"; and she proceeded to wipe her fingers on the snow.

"But why did you venture here alone?" Hans inquired, "and why unarmed? How foolhardy! The wolves would have made short work of you had you encountered them!"

"Then you cannot have heard the report of my gun!" the woman cried, in well-feigned astonishment. "How strange! I fired at the wolves from over there"; and she pointed with one of her slender, milky-white fingers to a spot on the ice some fifty yards away. "Fortunately, they all made off," she continued, "and I hastened hither, dropping my gun that I might run the faster."

"I can see no gun," Hans exclaimed, shading his eyes with his hand and staring hard.

The woman laughed. "What a disbelieving Jew it is!" she said. "The gun is there; I can see it plainly. You must be short-sighted." And then, straining her eyes on the far distance, she shrieked: "Great Heavens! My sleigh has gone! Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

Giving way to every gesture of despair, she looked so forlorn and beautiful that Hans would have been full of pity for

her, had not certain vague suspicions, which he could neither account[125] for nor overcome, entered his heart. Sorely perplexed, he did not know what to do, and stood looking at her in critical silence.

"Won't you come with me?" she said, clasping her hands beseechingly. "Come with me to look for it. The horses may only have strayed a short distance, and we might overtake them without much difficulty."

As she spoke thus, her piercing, earnest gaze thrilled him to the very soul, and his heart rose in rebellion against his reason. He had seen many fair women, but assuredly none as fair as this one. What eyes! What hair! What a complexion! What limbs! It seemed to him that she was not like ordinary women, that she was not of the same flesh and blood as any of the women he had ever met, and that she was in reality something far superior; something generated by the primitive glamour of the starry night, of the great, sparkling, ice-covered lake, and the lone, snow-capped peaks beyond. And all the while he was thinking thus, and unconsciously coming under the spell of her weird beauty, the woman continued to gaze entreatingly at him from under the long lashes which swept her cheeks. At last he could refuse her no longer—he would have gone to hell with her had she asked it—and shouting to Carl to remain where he was, he bade her lead the way. Setting off with long, quick strides that made Hans wonder anew, she soon put a considerable distance between herself and companion, and Carl. Hans now perceived a change; the sky grew dark, the clouds heavy, and the farther they went, the more perceptible [126] this change became. The brightness and sense of joy in the air vanished, and, with its dissipation, came a chill and melancholy wind that rose from the bosom of the lake and swept all around them, moaning and sighing like a legion of lost souls.

But Hans, who came of a military stock, feared little, and, with his beautiful guide beside him, would cheerfully have faced a thousand devils. He had no eyes for anything save her, no thought of anything but her, and when she sidled up to him, playfully fingering his gun, he allowed her to take it from him and do what she liked with it. Indeed, he was so absorbed in the contemplation of her marvellous beauty, that he did not perceive her deftly unload his rifle and throw it from her on the ice; nor did he take any other notice than to think it a very pretty, playful trick when she laughingly caught his two hands, and bound them securely together behind his back. He was still drinking in the wondrous beauty of her eyes, when she suddenly slipped one of her pretty, shapely feet between his, and with a quick, subtle movement, tripped him and threw him to the ground. There was a dull crash, and, amid the hundred and one sounds that echoed and re-echoed through his head as it came in contact with the ice, he seemed to hear the far-off patter of horses' hoofs. Then something deliciously soft and cool touched his throat, and opening his eyes, he found his beautiful companion bending over him and undoing the folds of his woollen neckerchief with her shapely fingers. For such an experience he would fall and faint till[127] further orders. He sought her eyes, and all but fainted again—the expression in them appalled him. They were no longer those of a woman but a devil, a horrible, sordid devil that hungered not merely for his soul, but for his flesh and blood. Then, in a second, he understood it all—she was a were-wolf, one of those ghastly creatures he had hitherto scoffingly attributed to the idle superstitions of the peasants. It was she who had mutilated the bodies they had passed on the road; it was she who had killed and half-eaten their driver; it was she—but he could think no more, it was all too horrible, and the revulsion of his feelings towards her clogged his brain. He longed to grapple with her, strangle her, and he could do nothing. The bare touch of those fingers—those cool, white, tapering fingers, with their long, shining filbert nails, all ready and eager to tear and rend his flesh to pieces—had taken all the life from his limbs, and he could only gaze feebly at her and damn her from the very bottom of his soul. One by one, more swiftly now, she unfastened the buttons of his coat and vest and then, baring her cruel teeth with a soft gurgle of excitement, and a smack of her red glistening lips, she prepared to eat him. Strangely enough, he experienced no pain as her nails sank into the flesh of his throat and chest and clawed it asunder. He was numb, numb with the numbness produced by hypnotism or paralysis—only some of his faculties were awake, vividly, startlingly awake. He was abruptly roused from this state by the dull crack of a rifle, and an agonising, blood-curdling scream, after which he knew no more[128] till he found himself sitting upright on the ice, gulping down brandy, his throat a mass of bandages, and Carl kneeling beside him.

"Where is she?" he asked, and Carl pointed to an object on the ice. It was the body of a huge white wolf, with half its head blown away.

"An explosive bullet," Carl said grimly. "I thought I would make certain of the beast, even at the risk of hurting you; and, mein Gott! it was a near shave! You have lost some of your hair, but nothing more. When I saw you go away with the woman, I guessed something was up. I did not like the look of her at all; she was a giantess, taller than any woman I have ever seen; and the way she had you in tow made me decidedly uncomfortable. Consequently, I followed you at a distance, and when I saw her trip you, I lashed up our horses and came to your rescue as fast as I could. Unfortunately, I had to dismount when I was still some distance off, as no amount of lashing would induce the horses to approach you nearer, and after arriving within range, it took me some seconds to get my rifle ready and select the best position for a shot. But, thank God! I was just in time, and, beyond a few scratches, you are all right. Shall we leave the beast here or take it with us?"

"We will do neither," Hans said, with a shudder, whilst a new and sad expression stole into his eyes. "I cannot forget it was once a woman! and, my God! what a woman! We will bury her here in the ice."

The story here terminated, and from the fact[129] that I have heard other stories of a similar nature, I am led to believe that there is in this one some substratum of truth. Were-wolves are not, of course, always prepossessing; they vary considerably. Moreover, they are not restricted to one sex, but are just as likely to be met with in the guise of boys and men as of girls and women.

Fox-women

Very different from this were-wolf, though also belonging to the great family of elementals, are the fox-women of Japan and China, about which much has been written, but about which, apparently, very little is known.

In China the fox was (and in remote parts still is) believed to attain the age of eight hundred or a thousand years. At fifty it can assume the form of a woman, and at one hundred that of a young and lovely girl, called Kao-Sai, or "Our Lady." On reaching the thousand years' limit, it goes to Paradise without physical dissolution. I have questioned many Chinese concerning these fox-women, but have never been able to get any very definite information. One Chinaman, however, assured me that his brother had actually seen the transmigration from fox to woman take place. The man's name I have forgotten, but I will call him Ching Kang. Well, Ching Kang was one day threading his way through a lovely valley of the Tapa-ling mountains, when he came upon a silver (*i.e.* white) fox crouching on the bank of a stream in such a peculiar attitude that Ching Kang's attention was at once arrested. Thinking[130] that the animal was ill, and delighted at the prospect of lending it aid, for silver foxes are regarded as of good omen in China, Ching Kang approached it, and was about to examine it carefully, when to his astonishment he found he could not move—he was hypnotised. But although his limbs were paralysed, his faculties were wonderfully active, and his heart almost ceased beating when he saw the fox slowly begin to get bigger and bigger, until at last its head was on a level with his own. There was then a loud crash, its skin burst asunder, and there stepped out of it the form of a girl of such entrancing beauty that Ching Kang thought he must be in Heaven. She was fairer than most Chinese women; her eyes were blue instead of brown, and her shapely hands and feet were of milky whiteness. She was gaily dressed in blue silk, with earrings and bracelets of blue stone, and carried in one of her hands a blue fan. With a wave of her slender palms she released Ching Kang from his spell, and, bidding him follow her, plunged into a thick clump of bushes. Madly infatuated, Ching Kang needed no second bidding, but, keeping close to her heels, stolidly pushed his way through barricades of brambles that, whilst yielding to her touch, closed on him and beat him on the face and body so unmercifully that in a very short time he was barely recognisable, being literally bathed in blood. However, despite his wounds increasing and multiplying with every step he took, and naturally causing him the most excruciating agony, Ching Kang never, for one instant, thought of turning back; he[131] always kept within touching distance of the blue form in front of him. But at last human nature could stand it no longer; his strength gave way, and as with a mad shriek of despair he implored her to stop, his senses left him and he fell in a heap to the ground. When he recovered he was lying alone, quite alone in the middle of the road, exactly opposite the spot where he had first seen the fox, and by his side was a fan, a blue fan. Picking it up sadly, he placed it near his heart (where it remained to the very day of his death), and with one last lingering look at the bank of the stream, he continued his solitary journey.

This was Ching Kang's story. His brother did not think he ever met the fox-woman again. He believed Ching Kang was still searching for her when he died.

[132]

CHAPTER VIII
DEATH WARNINGS AND FAMILY GHOSTS

Candles are very subject to psychic influences. Many years ago, when I was a boy, I was sitting in a room with some very dear friends of mine, when one of them, suddenly turning livid, pointed at the candle, and with eyes starting out of their sockets, screamed, "A winding-sheet! A winding-sheet! See! it is pointing at me!" We were all so frightened by the suddenness of her action, that for some seconds no one spoke, but all sat transfixed with horror, gaping at the candle. "It must be my brother Tom," she continued, "or Jack. Can't you see it?" Then, one after another, we all examined the candle and discovered that what she said was quite true—there was an unmistakable winding-sheet in the wax, and it emphatically pointed in her direction. Nor were her surmisings in vain, for the next morning she received a telegram to say her brother Tom had died suddenly. I am sceptical with regard to some manifestations, but I certainly do believe in this one, and I often regard my candle anxiously, fearing that I may see a winding-sheet in it.

To have three candles lighted at the same time[133] is also an omen of death, and as I have known it to be fulfilled in several cases within my own experience, I cannot help regarding it as one of the most certain.

I am sometimes informed of the advent of the occult in a very startling manner—my candle burns blue. It has done this when I have been sitting alone in my study, at night, writing. I have been busily engaged penning descriptions of the ghosts I and others have seen, when I have been startled by the fact that my paper, originally white, has suddenly become the colour of the sky, and on looking hastily up to discover a reason, have been in no small measure shocked to see my candle burning a bright blue. An occult manifestation of sorts has invariably followed. I am often warned of the near advent of the occult in this same manner when I am investigating in a haunted house—the flame of the candle burns blue before the appearance of the ghost. It is, by the way, an error to think that different types of phantasms can only appear in certain colours—colours that are peculiar to them. I have seen the same phenomenon manifest itself in half a dozen different colours, and blue is as often adopted by the higher types of spirits as by the lower, and is, in fact, common to both. I have little patience with occultists who draw hard and fast lines, and, ignoring everybody else's experiences, presume to diagnose within the narrow limits of their own. No one can as yet say anything for certain with regard to the superphysical, and the statements of the most humble psychic investigator, provided he has had actual experience,[134] and is genuine, are just as worthy of attention as those of the most eminent exponents of theosophy or spiritualism, or of any learned member of the Psychical Research Societies. The occult does not reveal itself to the rich in preference to the poor, and, for manifestation, is not more partial to the Professor of Physics and Law than to the Professor of Nothing—other than keen interest and common sense.

Corpse-candles

In Wales there are corpse-candles. According to the account of the Rev. Mr Davis in a work by T. Charley entitled *The Invisible World*, corpse-candles are so called because their light resembles a material candle-light, and might be mistaken for the same, saving that when anyone approaches them they vanish, and presently reappear. If the corpse-candle be small, pale, or bluish, it denotes the death of an infant; if it be big, the death of an adult is foretold; and if there are two, three, or more candle-lights, varying in size, then the deaths are predicted of a corresponding number of infants and adults. "Of late," the Rev. Mr Davis goes on to say (I quote him *ad verbum*), "my sexton's wife, an aged, understanding woman, saw from her bed a little bluish candle upon her table: within two or three days after comes a fellow in, inquiring for her husband, and, taking something from under his cloak, clapt it down directly upon the table end where she had seen the candle; and what was it but a dead-born child? Another time, the same woman saw such another candle upon the other end of the same[135] table: within a few days later, a weak child, by myself newly christened, was brought into the sexton's house, where presently he died; and when the sexton's wife, who was then abroad, came home, she found the women shrouding the child on that other end of the table where she had seen the candle. On a time, myself and a huntsman coming from our school in England, and being three or four hours benighted ere we could reach home, saw such a light, which, coming from a house we well knew, held its course (but not directly) in the highway to church: shortly after, the eldest son in that house died, and steered the same course.... About thirty-four or thirty-five years since, one Jane Wyatt, my wife's sister, being nurse to Baronet Rud's three eldest children, and (the lady being deceased) the lady of the house going late into a chamber where the maid-servants lay, saw there no less than five of these lights together. It happened awhile after, the chamber being newly plastered, and a great grate of coal-fire therein kindled to hasten the drying up of the plastering, that five of the maid-servants went there to bed as they were wont; but in the morning they were all dead, being suffocated in their sleep with the steam of the newly tempered lime and coal. This was at Llangathen in Carmarthen."

So wrote the Rev. Mr Davis, and in an old number of *Frazer's Journal* I came across the following account of death-tokens, which, although not exactly corpse-candles, might certainly be classed in the same category. It ran thus:

[136] "In a wild and retired district in North Wales, the following occurrence took place, to the great astonishment of the mountaineers. We can vouch for the truth of the statement, as many of our own teutu, or clan, were witnesses of the facts. On a dark evening a few weeks ago, some persons, with whom we are well acquainted, were returning to Barmouth on the south or opposite side of the river. As they approached the ferry house at Penthryn, which is directly opposite Barmouth, they observed a light near the house, which they conjectured to be produced by a bonfire, and greatly puzzled they were to discover the reason why it should have been lighted. As they came nearer, however, it vanished; and when they inquired at the house respecting it, they were surprised to learn that not only had the people there displayed no light, but they had not even seen one; nor could they perceive any signs of it on the sands. On reaching Barmouth, the circumstance was mentioned, and the fact corroborated by some of the people there, who had also plainly and distinctly seen the light. It was settled, therefore, by some of the old fishermen that this was a death-token; and, sure enough, the man who kept the ferry at that time was drowned at high water a few nights afterwards, on the very spot where the light was seen. He was landing from the boat, when he fell into the water, and so perished. The

same winter the Barmouth people, as well as the inhabitants of the opposite bank, were struck by the appearance of a number of small lights, which were seen dancing in the air at a place called Borthwyn, about[137] half a mile from the town. A great number of people came out to see these lights; and after awhile they all but one disappeared, and this one proceeded slowly towards the water's edge to a little bay where some boats were moored. The men in a sloop which was anchored near the spot saw the light advancing, they saw it also hover for a few seconds over one particular boat, and then totally disappear. Two or three days afterwards, the man to whom that particular boat belonged was drowned in the river, while he was sailing about Barmouth harbour in that very boat."

As the corpse-candle is obviously a phantasm whose invariable custom is to foretell death, it must, I think, be classified with that species of elementals which I have named—for want of a more appropriate title—*CLANOGRIAN*. *Clanogrians* embrace every kind of national and family ghost, such as The White Owl of the Arundels, the Drummer of the Airlies, and the Banshee of the O'Neills and O'Donnells.

With regard to the origin of corpse-candles, as of all other clanogrians, one can only speculate. The powers that govern the superphysical world have much in their close keeping that they absolutely refuse to disclose to mortal man. Presuming, however, that corpse-candles and all sorts of family ghosts are analogous, I should say that the former are spirits which have attached themselves to certain localities, either owing to some great crime or crimes having been committed there in the past, or because at some still more remote[138] period the inhabitants of those parts—the Milesians and Nemedhians, the early ancestors of the Irish, dabbled in sorcery.

Fire-coffins

Who has not seen all manner of pictures in the fire? Who has not seen, or fancied he has seen, a fire-coffin? A fire-coffin is a bit of red-hot coal that pops mysteriously out of the grate in the rude shape of a coffin, and is prophetic of death, not necessarily the death of the beholder, but of someone known to him.

The Death-watch

Though this omen in a room is undoubtedly due to the presence in the woodwork of the wall of a minute beetle of the timber-boring genus *ANOBIUM*, it is a strange fact that its ticking should only be heard before the death of someone, who, if not living in the house, is connected with someone who does live in it. From this fact, one is led to suppose that this minute beetle has an intuitive knowledge of impending death, as is the case with certain people and also certain animals.

The noise is said to be produced by the beetle raising itself upon its hind legs (see *Popular Errors explained*, by John Timbs), with the body somewhat inclined, and beating its head with great force and agility upon the plane of position; and its strokes are so powerful as to be heard from some little distance. It usually taps from six to twelve times in succession, then pauses, and then[139] recommences. It is an error to suppose it only ticks in the spring, for I know those who have heard its ticking at other, and indeed, at all times in the year.

Owls

Owls have always been deemed psychic, and they figure ominously in the folk-lore of many countries. I myself can testify to the fact that they are often the harbinger of death, as I have on several occasions been present when the screeching of an owl, just outside the window, has occurred almost coincident with the death of someone, nearly related either to myself or to one of my companions. That owls have the faculty of "scenting the approach of death" is to my mind no mere idle superstition, for we constantly read about them hovering around gibbets, and they have not infrequently been known to consummate Heaven's wrath by plucking out the eyes of the still living murderers and feeding on their brains. That they also have tastes in common with the least desirable of the occult world may be gathered from the fact that they show a distinct preference for the haunts of vagrarians, barrowvians, and other kinds of elementals; and even the worthy Isaiah goes so far as to couple them with satyrs.

Occasionally, too, as in the case of the Arundels of Wardour, where a white owl is seen before the death of one of the family, they perform the function of clanogrians.

[140]

Ravens

A close rival of the owl in psychic significance is the raven, the subtle, cunning, ghostly raven that taps on window-panes and croaks dismally before a death or illness. I love ravens—they have the greatest fascination for me. Years ago I had a raven, but, alas! only for a time, a very short time. It came to me one gloomy night, when the wind was blowing and the rain falling in cataracts. I was at the time—and as usual—writing ghost tales. Thought I to myself, this raven is just what I want; I will make a great friend of it, it shall sit at my table while I write and inspire me with its eyes—its esoteric eyes and mystic voice. I let it in, gave it food and shelter, and we settled down together, the raven and I, both revellers in the occult, both lovers of solitude. But it proved to be a worthless bird, a shallow, empty-minded, shameless bird, and all I gleaned from it was—idleness. It made me listless and restless; it filled me with cravings, not for work, but for nature, for the dark open air of night-time, for the vast loneliness of mountains, the deep secluded valleys, the rushing, foaming flow of streams, and for woods—ah! how I love the woods!—woods full of stalwart oaks and silvery beeches, full of silent, moon-kissed glades, nymphs, sirens, and pixies. Ah! how I longed for all these, and more besides—for anything and everything that appertained neither to man nor his works. Then I said good-bye to the raven, and, taking it with me to the top of a high hill, let it go. Croaking, croaking, croaking it flew away, without giving me as much as one farewell glance.

[141]

Mermaids

Who would not, if they could, believe in mermaids? Surely all save those who have no sense of the beautiful—of poetry, flowers, painting, music, romance; all save those who have never built fairy castles in the air nor seen fairy palaces in the fire; all save those whose minds, steeped in money-making, are both sordid and stunted. That mermaids did exist, and more or less in legendary form, I think quite probable, for I feel sure there was a time in the earth's history when man was in much closer touch with the superphysical than he is at present. They may, I think, be classified with pixies, nymphs, and sylphs, and other pleasant types of elementals that ceased to fraternise with man when he became more plentiful and forsook the simple mode of living for the artificial.

Pixies, nymphs, sylphs, and other similar kinds of fairies are all harmless and benevolent elementals, and I believe they were all fond of visiting this earth, but that they seldom visit it now, only appearing at rare intervals to a highly favoured few.

The Wandering Jew

No story fascinated me more when I was a boy than that of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew. How vividly I saw him—in my mental vision—with his hooked nose, and wild, dark eyes, gleaming with hatred, cruelty, and terror, spit out his curses at Christ and frantically bid him begone! And Christ! How plainly I saw Him, too, bathed in the sweat of agony, stumbling, staggering, reeling,[142] and tottering beneath the cross he had to carry! And then the climax—the calm, biting, damning climax. "Tarry thou till I come!" How distinctly I heard Christ utter those words, and with what relief I watched the pallor of sickly fear and superstition steal into the Jew's eyes and overspread his cheeks! And he is said to be living now! Periodically he turns up in some portion or other of the globe, causing a great sensation. And many are the people who claim to have met him—the man whom no prison can detain, no fetters hold; who can reel off the history of the last nineteen hundred odd years with the most minute fluency, and with an intimate knowledge of men and things long since dead and forgotten. Ahasuerus, still, always, ever Ahasuerus—no matter whether we call him Joseph, Cartaphilus, or Salathiel, his fine name and guilty life stick to him—he can get rid of neither. For all time he is, and must be, Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew—the Jew Christ damned.

Attendant Spirits

I believe that, from the moment of our birth, most, if not all of us, have our attendant spirits, namely, a spirit sent by the higher occult powers that are in favour of man's spiritual progress, whose function it is to guide us in the path of virtue and guard us from physical danger, and a spirit sent by the higher occult powers that are antagonistic to man's spiritual progress, whose function it is to lead us into all sorts of mental, moral, and spiritual evil, and also to bring about[143] our path some bodily harm. The former is a benevolent elemental, well known to the many, and termed by them "Our Guardian Angel"; the latter is a vice elemental, equally well known perhaps, to the many, and termed by them "Our Evil Genie." The benevolent creative powers and the evil creative powers (in whose service respectively our attendant spirits are employed) are for ever contending for man's superphysical body, and it is, perhaps, only in the proportion of our response to the influences of these attendant spirits, that we either evolve to a higher spiritual plane, or remain earth-bound. I, myself, having been through many vicissitudes, feel that I owe both my moral and physical preservation from danger entirely to the vigilance of my guardian attendant spirit. I was once travelling in the United States at the time of

a great railway strike. The strikers held up my train at Crown Point, a few miles outside Chicago; and as I was forced to take to flight, and leave my baggage (which unfortunately contained all my ready money), I arrived in Chicago late at night without a cent on me. Beyond the clothes I had on, I had nothing; consequently, on my presenting myself at a hotel with the request for a night's lodging, I was curtly refused. One hotel after another, one house after another, I tried, but always with the same result; having no luggage, and being unable to pay a deposit, no one would take me. The night advanced; the streets became rougher and rougher, for Chicago just then was teeming with the scum of the earth, ruffians of every[144] description, who would cheerfully have cut any man's throat simply for the sake of his clothes. All around me was a sea of swarthy faces with insolent, sinister eyes that flashed and glittered in the gaslight. I was pushed, jostled, and cursed, and the bare thought of having to spend a whole night amid such a foul, cut-throat horde filled me with dismay. Yet what could I do? Clearly nothing, until the morning, when I should be able to explain my position to the British Consul. The knowledge that in all the crises through which I had hitherto passed, my guardian spirit had never deserted me, gave me hope, and I prayed devoutly that it would now come to my assistance and help me to get to some place of shelter.

Time passed, and as my prayers were not answered, I repeated them with increased vigour. Then, quite suddenly, a man stepped out from the dark entrance to a by-street, and, touching me lightly on the arm, said, "Is there anything amiss? I have been looking at you for some time, and a feeling has come over me that you need assistance. What is the matter?" I regarded the speaker earnestly, and, convinced that he was honest, told him my story, whereupon to my delight he at once said, "I think I can help you, for a friend of mine runs a small but thoroughly respectable hotel close to here, and, if you like to trust yourself to my guidance, I will take you there and explain your penniless condition." I accepted his offer; what he said proved to be correct; the hotel-keeper believed my story, and I passed the night in decency and comfort. In the morning the[145] proprietor lent me the requisite amount of money for a cablegram to Europe. My bank in England cabled to a bank in Chicago, and the hotel-keeper generously made himself responsible for my identity; the draft was cashed, and I was once again able to proceed on my journey. But what caused the man in the street to notice me? What prompted him to lend me his aid? Surely my guardian spirit. Again, when in Denver, in the Denver of old times, before it had grown into anything like the city it is now, I was seized with a severe attack of dysentery, and the owner of the hotel in which I was staying, believing it to be cholera, turned me, weak and faint as I was, into the street. I tried everywhere to get shelter; the ghastly pallor and emaciation of my countenance went against me—no one, not even by dint of bribing, for I was then well off, would take me in. At last, completely overcome by exhaustion, I sank down in the street, where, in all probability, I should have remained all night, had not a negro suddenly come up to me, and, with a sympathetic expression in his face, asked if he could help me. "I passed you some time ago," he said, "and noticed how ill you looked, but I did not like to speak to you for fear you might resent it, but I had not got far before I felt compelled to turn back. I tried to resist this impulse, but it was no good. What ails you?" I told him. For a moment or so he was silent, and then, his face brightening up, he exclaimed, "I think I can help you. Come along with me," and, helping me gently to my feet, he conducted me to his own[146] house, not a very grand one, it is true, but scrupulously clean and well conducted, and I remained there until I was thoroughly sound and fit. The negro is not as a rule a creature of impulse, and here again I felt that I owed my preservation to the kindly interference of my guardian spirit.

Thrice I have been nearly drowned, and on both occasions saved as by a miracle, or, in other words, by my attendant guardian spirit. Once, when I was bathing alone in a Scotch loch and had swum out some considerable distance, I suddenly became exhausted, and realised with terror that it was quite impossible for me to regain the shore. I was making a last futile effort to strike out, when something came bobbing up against me. It was an oar! Whence it had come Heaven alone knew, for Heaven alone could have sent it. Leaning my chin lightly on it and propelling myself gently with my limbs, I had no difficulty in keeping afloat, and eventually reached the land in safety. The scene of my next miraculous rescue from drowning was a river. In diving into the water off a boat, I got my legs entangled in a thick undergrowth of weeds. Frantically struggling to get free and realising only too acutely the seriousness of my position, for my lungs were on the verge of bursting, I fervently solicited the succour of my guardian spirit, and had no sooner done so, than I fancied I felt soft hands press against my flesh, and the next moment my body had risen to the surface. No living person was within sight, so that my rescuer could only have been—as usual—my guardian spirit.

Several times I fancy I have seen her, white,[147] luminous, and shadowy, but for all that suggestive of great beauty. Once, too, in the wilder moments of my youth, when I contemplated rash deeds, I heard her sigh, and the sigh, sinking down into the furthestmost recesses of my soul, drowned all my thoughts of rash deeds in a thousand reverberating echoes. I have been invariably warned by strangers against taking a false step that would unquestionably have led to the direst misfortune. I meet a stranger, and without the slightest hint from me, he touches upon the very matter uppermost in my mind, and, in a few earnest and never-to-be-forgotten words of admonition, deters me from my scheme. Whence come these strangers, to all appearance of flesh and blood like myself? Were they my guardian spirit in temporary material guise, or were they human beings that, like the hotel proprietor's friend in Chicago, and the negro, have been impelled by my guardian spirit to converse with me and by their friendly assistance save me? Many of the faces we see

around us every day are, I believe, attendant spirits, and phantasms of every species, that have adopted physical form for some specific purpose.

Banshees

It has been suggested that banshees are guardian spirits and evil genii; but I do not think so, for whereas one or other of the two latter phantasms (sometimes both) are in constant attendance on man, banshees only visit certain families before a catastrophe about to happen in those families, or before the death of a member of those families.[148] As to their origin, little can be said, for little is at present known. Some say their attachment to a family is due to some crime perpetrated by a member of that family in the far dim past, whilst others attribute it to the fact that certain classes and races in bygone times dabbled in sorcery, thus attracting the elementals, which have haunted them ever since. Others, again, claim that banshees are mere thought materialisations handed down from one generation to another. But although no one knows the origin and nature of a banshee, the statements of those who have actually experienced these hauntings should surely carry far more weight and command more attention than the statements of those who only speak from hearsay; for it is, after all, only the sensation of actual experience that can guide us in the study of this subject; and, perhaps, through our "sensations" alone, the key to it will one day be found. A phantasm produces an effect on us totally unlike any that can be produced by physical agency—at least such is my experience—hence, for those who have never come in contact with the unknown to pronounce any verdict on it, is to my mind both futile and absurd. Of one thing, at least, I am sure, namely, that banshees are no more thought materialisations than they are cats—neither are they in any way traceable to telepathy or suggestion; they are entirely due to objective spirit forms. I do not base this assertion on a knowledge gained from other people's experiences—and surely the information thus gained cannot properly be termed knowledge—but from the sensations I myself, [149] as a member of an old Irish clan, have experienced from the hauntings of the banshee—the banshee that down through the long links of my Celtic ancestry, through all vicissitudes, through all changes of fortune, has followed us, and will follow us, to the end of time. Because it is customary to speak of an Irish family ghost by its generic title, the banshee, it must not be supposed that every Irish family possessing a ghost is haunted by the same phantasm—the same banshee.

In Ireland, as in other countries, family ghosts are varied and distinct, and consequently there are many and varying forms of the banshee. To a member of our clan, a single wail signifies the advent of the banshee, which, when materialised, is not beautiful to look upon. The banshee does not necessarily signify its advent by one wail—that of a clan allied to us wails three times. Another banshee does not wail at all, but moans, and yet another heralds its approach with music. When materialised, to quote only a few instances, one banshee is in the form of a beautiful girl, another is in the form of a hideous prehistoric hag, and another in the form of a head—only a head with rough matted hair and malevolent, bestial eyes.

Scottish Ghosts

When it is remembered that the ancestors of the Highlanders, *i.e.*, the Picts and Scots, originally came from Ireland and are of Formosian and Milesian descent, it will be readily understood that their proud old clans—and rightly proud, for who but a[150] grovelling money grubber would not sooner be descended from a warrior, elected chief, on account of his all-round prowess, than from some measly hireling whose instincts were all mercenary?—possess ghosts that are nearly allied to the banshee.

The Airlie family, whose headquarters are at Cortachy Castle, is haunted by the phantasm of a drummer that beats a tattoo before the death of one of the members of the clan. There is no question as to the genuineness of this haunting, its actuality is beyond dispute. All sorts of theories as to the origin of this ghostly drummer have been advanced by a prying, inquisitive public, but it is extremely doubtful if any of them approach the truth. Other families have pipers that pipe a dismal dirge, and skaters that are seen skating even when there is no ice, and always before a death or great calamity.

English Family Ghosts

There are a few old English families, too, families who, in all probability, can point to Celtic blood at some distant period in their history, that possess family ghosts. I have, for example, stayed in one house where, prior to a death, a boat is seen gliding noiselessly along a stream that flows through the grounds. The rower is invariably the person doomed to die. A friend of mine, who was very sceptical in such matters, was fishing in this stream late one evening when he suddenly saw a boat shoot round the bend. Much astonished—for he knew it could be no one from the house—he threw down his rod and watched. Nearer and[151] nearer it came, but not a sound; the oars stirred and splashed the rippling, foaming water in absolute silence. Convinced now that what he beheld was nothing physical, my friend was

greatly frightened, and, as the boat shot past him, he perceived in the rower his host's youngest son, who was then fighting in South Africa. He did not mention the incident to his friends, but he was scarcely surprised when, in the course of the next few days, a cablegram was received with the tidings that the material counterpart of his vision had been killed in action.

A white dove is the harbinger of death to the Arundels of Wardour; a white hare to an equally well-known family in Cornwall. Corby Castle in Cumberland has its "Radiant Boy"; whilst Mrs E. M. Ward has stated, in her reminiscences, that a certain room at Knebworth was once haunted by the phantasm of a boy with long yellow hair, called "The Yellow Boy," who never appeared to anyone in it, unless they were to die a violent death, the manner of which death he indicated by a series of ghastly pantomimics.

Other families, I am told, lay claim to phantom coaches, clocks, beds, ladies in white, and a variety of ghostly phenomena whose manifestations are always a sinister omen.

Welsh Ghosts

In addition to corpse-candles and blue lights, the Welsh, according to Mr Wirt Sykes, in his work, *British Goblins*, pp. 212-216, possess a species of ill-omened ghost that is not, however, restricted to any one family, but which visits promiscuously [152] any house or village prior to a death. Sometimes it flaps its leathern wings against the window of the room containing the sick person, and in a broken, howling tone calls upon the latter to give up his life; whilst, at other times, according to Mr Dyer in his *Ghost World*, it actually materialises and appears in the form of an old crone with streaming hair and a coat of blue, when it is called the "Ellyllon," and, like the banshee, presages death with a scream.

Again, when it is called the "Cyhyraeth," and is never seen, it foretells the death of the insane, or those who have for a long time been ill, by moaning, groaning, and rattling shutters in the immediate vicinity of the doomed person.

[153]

CHAPTER IX

"SUPERSTITIONS AND FORTUNES"

Thirteen at Table

There is no doubt that there have been many occasions upon which thirteen people have sat down to dinner, all of which people at the end of a year have been alive and well; there is no doubt also that there have been many occasions upon which thirteen have sat down to dine, and the first of them to rise has died within twelve months. Therefore, I prefer not to take the risk, and to sit down to dinner in any number but thirteen.

A curious story is told in connection with this superstition. A lady was present at a dinner party given by the Count D —— in Buda-Pesth, when it was discovered that the company about to sit down numbered thirteen. Immediately there was a loud protest, and the poor Count was at his wits' end to know how to get out of the difficulty, when a servant hurriedly entered and whispered something in his ear. Instantly the Count's face lighted up. "How very fortunate!" he exclaimed, addressing his guests. "A very old friend of mine, who, to tell the truth, I had thought to be dead, has just turned up. We may, therefore, sit down in peace,[154] for we shall now be fourteen." A wave of relief swept through the party, and, in the midst of their congratulations, in walked the opportune guest, a tall, heavily bearded young man, with a strangely set expression in his eyes and mouth, and not a vestige of colour in his cheeks. It was noticed that after replying to the Count's salutations in remarkably hollow tones that made those nearest him shiver, he took no part in the conversation, and partook of nothing beyond a glass of wine and some fruit. The evening passed in the usual manner; the guests, with the exception of the stranger, went, and, eventually, the Count found himself alone with the friend of his boyhood, the friend whom he had not seen for years, and whom he had believed to be dead.

Wondering at the unusual reticence of his old chum, but attributing it to shyness, the Count, seeing that he now had an opportunity for a chat, and, anxious to hear what his friend had been doing in the long interval since they had last met, sat down beside him on the couch, and thus began: "How very odd that you should have turned up to-night! If you hadn't come just when you did, I don't know what would have happened!"

"But I do!" was the quiet reply. "You would have been the first to rise from the table, and, consequently, you would have died within the year. That is why I came."

At this the Count burst out laughing. "Come, come, Max!" he cried. "You always were a bit of a wag, and I see you haven't improved. But be[155] serious now, I beg you, and tell me what made you come to-night and what you have been doing all these years? Why, it must be sixteen years, if a day, since last I saw you!"

Max leaned back in his seat, and, regarding the Count earnestly with his dark, penetrating eyes, said, "I have already told you why I came here to-night, and you don't believe me, but *WAIT!* Now, as to what has happened to me since we parted. Can I expect you to believe that? Hardly! Anyhow, I will put you to the test. When we parted, if you remember rightly, I had just passed my final, and having been elected junior house surgeon at my hospital, St Christopher's, at Brunn, had taken up my abode there. I remained at St Christopher's for two years, just long enough to earn distinction in the operating theatre, when I received a more lucrative appointment in Cracow. There I soon had a private practice of my own and was on the high road to fame and fortune, when I was unlucky enough to fall in love."

"Unlucky!" laughed the Count. "Pray what was the matter with her? Had she no dowry, or was she an heiress with an ogre of a father, or was she already married?"

"Married," Max responded, "married to a regular martinet who, whilst treating her in the same austere manner he treated his soldiers—he was colonel of a line regiment—was jealous to the verge of insanity. It was when I was attending him for a slight ailment of the throat that I met her, and we fell in love with each other at first sight."

[156] "How romantic!" sighed the Count. "How very romantic! Another glass of Moselle?"

"For some time," Max continued, not noticing the interruption, "all went smoothly. We met clandestinely and spent many an hour together, unknown to the invalid. We tried to keep him in bed as long as we could, but his constitution, which was that of an ox, was against us, and his recovery was astonishingly rapid. An indiscreet observation on the part of one of the household first led him to suspect, and, watching his wife like a cat does a mouse, he caught her one evening in the act of holding out her hand for me to kiss. With a yell of fury he rushed upon us, and in the scuffle that followed——"

"You killed him," said the Count. "Well! I forgive you! We all forgive you! By the love of Heaven! you had some excuse."

"You are mistaken!" Max went on, still in the same cold, unmoved accents, "it was I who was killed!" He looked at the Count, and the Count's blood turned to ice as he suddenly realised he was, indeed, gazing at a corpse.

For some seconds the Count and the corpse sat facing one another in absolute silence, and then the latter, rising solemnly from the chair, mounted the window-sill, and, with an expressive wave of farewell, disappeared in the absorbing darkness without. Now, as Max was never seen again, and it was ascertained without any difficulty that he had actually perished in the manner he had described, there is surely every reason to believe that a *bona fide* danger had threatened the Count, and that the[157] spirit of Max in his earthly guise had, in very deed, turned up at the dinner party with the sole object of saving his friend.

Spilling Salt

Everyone knows that to avoid bad luck from spilling salt, it is only necessary to throw some of it over the left shoulder; but no one knows why such an act is a deterrent to misfortune, any more than why misfortune, if not then averted, should accrue from the spilling.

That the superstition originated in a tradition that Judas Iscariot overturned a salt-cellar is ridiculous, for there is but little doubt it was in vogue long before the advent of Christ, and is certainly current to-day among tribes and races that have never heard of the "Last Supper."

In all probability the superstition is derived from the fact that salt, from its usage in ancient sacrificial rites, was once regarded as sacred. Hence to spill any carelessly was looked upon as sacrilegious and an offence to the gods, to appease whom the device of throwing it over the left, the more psychic shoulder, was instituted.

Looking-glasses

The breaking of a looking-glass is said to be an ill omen, and I have certainly known many cases in which one misfortune after another has occurred to the person who has had the misfortune to break a looking-glass. Some think that because looking-glasses were once used in sorcery, they possess certain psychic properties, and that by[158] reason

of their psychic properties any injury done to a mirror must be fraught with danger to the doer of that injury, but whether this is so or not is a matter of conjecture.

Psychic Days

"Friday's child is full of woe." Of all days Friday is universally regarded as the most unlucky. According to Soames in his work, *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit on a Friday and died on a Friday. And since Jesus Christ was crucified on a Friday, it is naturally of small wonder that Friday is accursed.

To travel on Friday is generally deemed to be courting accident; to be married on Friday, courting divorce or death. Few sailors care to embark on Friday; few theatrical managers to produce a new play on Friday. In Livonia most of the inhabitants are so prejudiced against Friday, that they never settle any important business, or conclude a bargain on that day; in some places they do not even dress their children.

For my part, I so far believe in this superstition that I never set out for a journey, or commence any new work on Friday, if I have the option of any other day. Thursday has always been an unlucky day for me. Most of my accidents, disappointments, illnesses have happened on Thursdays. Wednesday has been my luckiest day. Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday the days when I have mostly experienced occult phenomena. On All-Hallows E'en the spirits of the dead are supposed to walk. I remember when a child hearing[159] from the lips of a relative how in her girlhood she had screwed up the courage to shut herself in a dark room on All-Hallows E'en and had eaten an apple in front of the mirror; and that instead of seeing the face of her future husband peering over her shoulder, she had seen a quantity of earth falling. She was informed that this was a prognostication of death, and, surely enough, within the year her father died. I have heard, too, of a girl who, on All-Hallows E'en, walked down a gloomy garden path scattering hempseed for her future lover to pick up, and on hearing someone tiptoeing behind her, and fancying it was a practical joker, turned sharply round, to confront a skeleton dressed exactly similar to herself. She died before the year was out from the result of an accident on the ice.

I have often poured boiling lead into water on All-Hallows E'en and it has assumed strange shapes, once—a boot, once—a coffin, once—a ship; and I have placed all the letters of the alphabet cut out of pasteboard by my bedside, and on one occasion (my door was locked, by the way, and I fully satisfied myself no one was in hiding) found, on awakening in the morning, the following word spelt out of them—"Merivale." It was not until some days afterwards that I remembered associations with this word, and then it all came back to me in a trice—it was the name of a man who had once wanted me to join him in an enterprise in British West Africa.

On New Year's Eve a certain family, with whom I am very intimately acquainted, frequently see ghosts of the future, as well as phantasms of the[160] dead, and, when I stay with them, which I often do at Christmas, I am always glad when this night is over. On one occasion, one of them saw a lady come up the garden path and vanish on the front doorsteps. She saw the lady's face distinctly; every feature in it, together with the clothes she was wearing, stood out with startling perspicuity.

Some six months later, she was introduced to the material counterpart of the phantasm, who was destined to play a most important part in her life. On another New Year's Eve she saw the phantasm of a dog, to which she had been deeply attached, enter her bedroom and jump on her bed, just as it had done during its lifetime. Not in the least frightened, she put down her hand to stroke it, when it vanished. I have given several other instances of this kind in my *Haunted Houses of London* and *Ghostly Phenomena*—they all, I think, tend to prove a future existence for dumb animals.

The 28th of December, Childermass Day, or the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the day on which King Herod slaughtered so many infants (if they were no better mannered than the bulk of the County Council children of to-day, one can hardly blame him), is held to be unpropitious for the commencement of any new undertaking by those of tender years.

The fishermen who dwell on the Baltic seldom use their nets between All Saints and St Martin's Day, or on St Blaise's Day; if they did, they believe they would not take any fish for a whole year. On Ash Wednesday the women in those parts neither sew nor knit for fear of bringing misfortune upon[161] their cattle, whilst they do not use fire on St Lawrence's Day, in order to secure themselves against fire for the rest of the year.

In Moravia the peasants used not to hunt on St Mark's or St Catherine's Day, for fear they should be unlucky all the rest of the year. In Yorkshire it was once customary to watch for the dead on St Mark's (April 24) and Midsummer Eve. On both those nights (so says Mr Timbs in his *Mysteries of Life and Futurity*) persons would sit and watch in the church porch from eleven o'clock at night till one in the morning. In the third year (for it must be done thrice), the watchers were said to see the spectres of all those who were to die the next year pass into the church.

I am quite sure there is much truth in this, for I have heard of sceptics putting it to the test, and of "singing to quite a different tune" when the phantasms of those they knew quite well suddenly shot up from the ground, and, gliding past them, vanished at the threshold of the church. Occasionally, too, I have been informed of cases where the watchers have seen themselves in the ghastly procession and have died shortly afterwards.

Fortune-telling

Before ridiculing the possibility of telling fortunes by cards, it would be just as well for sceptics to inquire into the history of cards, and the reason of their being designated the Devil's pasteboards. Their origin may be traced to the days when man was undoubtedly in close touch with the occult, and each card, *i.e.* of the original design, has a psychic[162] meaning. Hence the telling of fortunes by certain people—those who have had actual experience with occult phenomena—deserves to be taken seriously; and I am convinced many of the fortunes thus told come true.

Palmistry

That there is much truth in palmistry—the palmistry of those who have made a thorough study of the subject—should by this time, I think, be an established fact. I can honestly say I have had my hand told with absolute accuracy, and in such a manner as utterly precludes the possibility of coincidence or chance. Many of the events, and out-of-the-way events, of my life have been read in my lines with perfect veracity, my character has been delineated with equal fidelity, and the future portrayed exactly in the manner it has come about—and all by a stranger, one who had never seen or heard of me before he "told my hand."

To attempt to negative the positive is the height of folly, but fools will deny anything and everything save their own wit. It does not follow that because one palmist has been at fault, all palmists are at fault. I believe in palmistry, because I have seen it verified in a hundred and one instances.

Apart from the lines, however, there is a wealth of character in hands: I am never tired of studying them. To me the most beautiful and interesting hands are the pure psychic and the dramatic—the former with its thin, narrow palm, slender, tapering fingers and filbert nails; the latter a model of symmetry and grace, with conical finger-tips and[163] filbert nails—indeed, filbert nails are more or less confined to these two types; one seldom sees them in other hands.

Then there are the literary and artistic hands, with their mixed types of fingers, some conical and some square-tipped, but always with some redeeming feature of refinement and elegance in them; and the musical hand, sometimes a modified edition of the psychic, and sometimes quite different, with short, supple fingers and square tips. And yet again—would that it did not exist!—the business hand, far more common in England, where the bulk of the people have commercial minds, than elsewhere. It has no redeeming feature, but is short, and square, and fat, with stumpy fingers and hideous, spatulate nails, the very sight of which makes me shudder. Indeed, I have heard it said abroad, and not without some reason, that, apart from other little peculiarities, such as projecting teeth and big feet, the English have two sets of toes! When I look at English children's fingers, and see how universal is the custom of biting the nails, I feel quite sure the day will come when there will be no nails left to bite—that the day, in fact, is not far distant, when nails, rather than teeth, will become extinct.

The Irish, French, Italians, Spanish, and Danes, being far more dramatic and psychic than the English, have far nicer hands, and for one set of filbert nails in London, we may count a dozen in Paris or Madrid.

Murderers' hands are often noticeable for their knotted knuckles and club-shaped finger-tips;[164] suicides—for the slenderness of the thumbs and strong inclination of the index to the second finger; thieves—for the pointedness of the finger-tips, and the length and suppleness of the fingers. Dominating, coarse-minded people, and people who exert undue influence over others, generally have broad, flat thumbs. The hands of soldiers and sailors are usually broad, with short, thick, square-tipped fingers; the hands of clergy are also more often broad and coarse than slender and conical, which may be accounted for by the fact that so many of them enter the Church with other than spiritual motives. The really spiritual hand is the counterpart of the psychical, and rarely seen in England. Doctors, doctors with a genuine love of their profession, in other words, "born" doctors, have broad but slender palms, with long, supple fingers and moderately square tips. This type of hand is typical, also, of the hospital nurse.

It is, of course, a gross error to think that birth has everything to do with the shape of the hand; for the latter is entirely dependent on temperament; but it is also a mistake to say that as many beautiful-shaped hands are to be found among the lower as among the upper classes in England. It is a mistake, because the psychic and dramatic temperaments (and the psychic and dramatic type of hand is unquestionably the most beautiful) are rarely to be found in the middle and lower classes in England—they are almost entirely confined to the upper classes.

Pyromancy

Predicting the future by fire is one of the oldest methods of fortune-telling, and has been practised from time immemorial. I have often had my fortune told in the fire, but I cannot say it has ever proved to be very correct; only once a prognostication came true,—a sudden death occurred in a family very nearly connected with me, after a very fanciful churchyard had been pointed out to me amid the glowing embers.

Hydromancy

There are many ways of telling the fortune by means of water. One of the most usual methods is to float some object on the water's surface, predicting the future in accordance with the course that object takes; but I believe future events are just as often foretold by means of the water only.

Many people believe that especially successful results in fortune-telling may be obtained by means of water only, on All-Hallows E'en or New Year's Eve.

On the former night, the method of divining the future is as follows:—Place a bowl of clear spring water on your lap at midnight, and gaze into it. If you are to be married, you will see the face of your future husband (or bride) reflected in the water; if you are to remain single all your life, you will see nothing; and if you are to die within the year, the water will become muddy. On New Year's Eve a tumbler of water should be placed at[166] midnight before the looking-glass, when any person, or persons, destined to play a very important rôle in your life within the coming year, will suddenly appear and sip the water. Should you be doomed to die within that period, the tumbler will be thrown on the ground and dashed to pieces.

The conditions during the trial of both these methods are that you should be alone in the room, with only one candle burning.

The Crystal

I often practise crystal-gazing, and the results are strangely inconsistent. I see with startling vividness events that actually come to pass, and sometimes with equal perspicuity events that, as far as I know, are never fulfilled. And this I feel sure must be the case with all crystal-gazers, if they would but admit it. My method is very simple. As I cannot concentrate unless I have absolute quiet, I wait till the house is very still, and I then sit alone in my room with my back to the light, in such a position that the light pours over my shoulders on to the crystal, which I have set on the table before me. Sometimes I sit for a long time before I see anything, and sometimes, after a lengthy sitting, I see nothing at all; but when a tableau does come, it is always with the most startling vividness. When I want to be initiated into what is happening to certain of my friends, I concentrate my whole mind on those friends—I think of nothing but them—their faces, forms, mannerisms, and surroundings—and then, suddenly, I see them in the crystal! Visions are sometimes[167] of the future, sometimes of the present, sometimes of the past, and sometimes of neither, but of what never actually transpires—and there is the strange inconsistency. I do not know what methods other people adopt, I daresay some of them differ from mine, but I feel quite sure that, look at the crystal how they will, it will invariably lie to them at times.

A day or so before the death of Lafayette, when I was concentrating my whole mind on forthcoming events, I distinctly saw, in the crystal, a stage with a man standing before the footlights, either speaking or singing. In the midst of his performance, a black curtain suddenly fell, and I intuitively realised the theatre was on fire. The picture then faded away and was replaced by something of a totally different character. Again, just before the great thunder-storm at the end of May, when Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone, was struck, I saw, in the crystal, a black sky, vivid flashes of lightning, a road rushing with brown water, and a church spire with an enormous crack in it.

Of course, it is very easy to say these visions might have been mere coincidences; but if they were only coincidences, they were surpassingly uncommon ones.

Talismans and Amulets

Amulets, though now practically confined to the East, were once very much in vogue throughout Europe.

Count Daniel O'Donnell, brigadier-general in the Irish Brigade of Louis XIV., never went into[168] battle without

carrying with him an amulet in the shape of the jewelled casket "Cathach of Columbcille," containing a Latin psalter said to have been written by St Columba. It has quite recently been lent to the Royal Irish Academy (where it is now) by my kinsman, the late Sir Richard O'Donnell, Bart. Count O'Donnell used to say that so long as he had this talisman with him, he would never be wounded, and it is a fact that though he led his regiment in the thick of the fight at Borgoforte, Nago, Arco, Vercelli, Ivrea, Verrua, Chivasso, Cassano, and other battles in the Italian Campaign of 1701-7, and at Oudenarde, Malplaquet, Arleux, Denain, Douai, Bouchain, and Fuesnoy, in the Netherlands, he always came through scathless. Hence, like him, I am inclined to attribute his escapes to the psychic properties of the talisman.

The great family of Lyons were in possession of a talisman in the form of a "lion-cup," the original of Scott's "Blessed Bear of Bradwardine," which always brought them good luck till they went to Glamis, and after that they experienced centuries of misfortune.

Another famous talisman is the "Luck of Edenhall," in the possession of Sir Richard Musgrave of Edenhall, in Cumberland; and many other ancient families still retain their amulets.

"The Evil Eye"

I was recently speaking to an Italian lady who informed me that belief in "the evil eye" is still very prevalent in many parts of Italy. "I[169] myself believe in it," she said, "and whenever I pass a person whom I think possesses it, I make a sign with my fingers"—and she held up two of her fingers as she spoke. I certainly have observed that people with a peculiar and undefinable "something" in their eyes are particularly unlucky and invariably bring misfortune on those with whom they are in any degree intimate. These people, I have no doubt, possess "the evil eye," though it would not be discernible except to the extremely psychic, and there is no doubt that the Irish and Italians are both far more psychic than the English.

People are of opinion that the eye is not a particularly safe indicator of true character, but I beg to differ. To me the eye tells everything, and I have never yet looked directly into a person's eyes without being able to satisfy myself as to their disposition. Cruelty, vanity, deceit, temper, sensuality, and all the other vices display themselves at once; and so with vulgarity—the glitter of the vulgar, of the ignorant, petty, mean, sordid mind, the mind that estimates all things and all people by money and clothes, cannot be hidden; "vulgarity" will out, and in no way more effectually than through the eyes. No matter how "smart" the *parvenu* dresses, no matter how perfect his "style," the glitter of the eye tells me what manner of man he is, and when I see that strange anomaly, "nature's gentleman," in the service of such a man, I do not say to myself "Jack is as good"—I say, "Jack is better than his master."

[170] But to me "the evil eye," no less than the vulgar eye, manifests itself. I was at an "at home" one afternoon several seasons ago, when an old friend of mine suddenly whispered:

"You see that lady in black, over there? I must tell you about her. She has just lost her husband, and he committed suicide under rather extraordinary circumstances in Sicily. He was not only very unlucky himself, but he invariably brought misfortune on those to whom he took a liking—even his dogs. His mother died from the effects of a railway accident; his favourite brother was drowned; the girl to whom he was first engaged went into rapid consumption; and no sooner had he married the lady you see, than she indirectly experienced misfortune through the heavy monetary losses of her father. At last he became convinced that he must be labouring under the influence of a curse, and, filled with a curious desire to see if he had 'the evil eye,'—people of course said he was mad—he went to Sicily. Arriving there, he had no sooner shown himself among the superstitious peasants, than they made a sign with their fingers to ward off evil, and in every possible way shunned him. Convinced then that what he had suspected was true, namely, that he was genuinely accursed, he went into a wood and shot himself."

This, I daresay, is only one of many suicides in similar circumstances, and not a few of the suicides we attribute, with such obvious inconsistency (thinking thereby to cover our ignorance), to "temporary insanity," may be traceable to the influence of "the evil eye."

[171]

Witches

Though witches no longer wear conical hats and red cloaks and fly through the air on broomsticks, and though their *modus operandi* has changed with their change of attire, I believe there are just as many witches in the world to-day, perhaps even more, than in days gone by. All women are witches who exert baleful influence over others—who wreck the happiness of families by setting husbands against wives (or, what is even more common, wives against husbands),

parents against children, and brothers against sisters; and, who steal whole fortunes by inveigling into love, silly, weak-minded old men, or by captivating equally silly and weak-willed women. Indeed, the latter is far from rare, and there are instances of women having filled other women with the blindest infatuation for them—an infatuation surpassing that of the most dotting lovers, and, without doubt, generated by undue influence, or, in other words, by witchcraft. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that the orthodox witch of the past was harmless compared with her present-day representative. There is, however, one thing we may be thankful for, and that is—that in the majority of cases the modern witch, despite her disregard of the former properties of her calling, cannot hide her danger signals. Her manners are soft and insinuating, but her eyes are hard—hard with the steely hardness, which, granted certain conditions, would not hesitate at murder. Her hands, too, are coarse—an exaggeration of the business type[172] of hand—the fingers short and club-shaped, the thumbs broad and flat, the nails hideous; they are the antipodes of the psychic or dramatic type of hands: a type that, needless to say, witches have never been known to possess. Once the invocation of the dead was one of the practices of ancient witchcraft: one might, perhaps, not inappropriately apply the term witch to the modern spiritualist.

If we credit the Scriptures with any degree of truth, then witches most certainly had the power of calling up the dead in Biblical days, for at Endor the feat—rare even in those times—was accomplished of invoking in material form the phantasms of the good as well as the evil. Though I am of the opinion that no amount of invocation will bring back a phantasm from the higher spiritual planes to-day, unless that invocation be made in very exceptional circumstances, with a specific purpose, I am quite sure that *bona fide* spirits of the earth-bound do occasionally materialise in answer to the summons of the spiritualist. I do not base this statement on any experience I have ever had, for it is a rather singular fact that, although I have seen many spontaneous phenomena in haunted houses, I have never seen anything resembling, in the slightest degree, a genuine spirit form, at a séance. Therefore, I repeat, I do not base my statement, as to the occasional materialisation of *bona fide* earth-bound spirits, on any of my experiences, but on those of "sitters" with whom I am intimately acquainted. What benefit can be derived from getting into close touch with earth-bound spirits, [173] *i.e.* with vice and impersonating elementals and the phantasms of dead idiots, lunatics, murderers, suicides, rakes, drunkards, immoral women and silly people of all sorts, is, I think, difficult to say; for my own part, I am only too content to steer clear of them, and confine my attentions to trying to be of service to those apparitions that are, obviously, for some reason, made to appear by the higher occult powers. Thus, what is popularly known as spiritualism is, from my point of view, a mischievous and often very dangerous form of witchcraft.

A Frenchman to whom I was recently introduced at a house in Maida Vale, told me the following case, which he assured me actually happened in the middle of the eighteenth century, and was attested to by judicial documents. A French nobleman, whom I will designate the Vicomte Daverny, whilst on a visit to some friends near Toulouse, on hearing that a miller in the neighbourhood was in the habit of holding Sabbats, was seized with a burning desire to attend one. Consequently, in opposition to the advice of his friends, he saw the miller, and, by dint of prodigious bribing, finally persuaded the latter to permit him to attend one of the orgies. But the miller made one stipulation—the Vicomte was on no account to carry firearms; and to this the latter readily agreed. When, however, the eventful night arrived, the Vicomte, becoming convinced that it would be the height of folly to go to a notoriously lonely spot, in the dark, and unarmed, concealed a brace of pistols under his clothes. On[174] reaching the place of assignation, he found the miller already there, and on the latter enveloping him in a heavy cloak, the Vicomte felt himself lifted bodily from the ground and whirled through the air. This sensation continued for several moments, when he was suddenly set down on the earth again and the cloak taken off him. At first he could scarcely make out anything owing to a blaze of light, but as soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the illumination, he perceived that he was standing near a huge faggot fire, around which squatted a score or so of the most hideous hags he had ever conceived even in his wildest imagination. After going through a number of strange incantations, which were more or less Greek to the Vicomte, there was a most impressive lull, that was abruptly broken by the appearance of an extraordinary and alarming-looking individual in the midst of the flames. All the witches at once uttered piercing shrieks and prostrated themselves, and the Vicomte then realised that the remarkable being who had caused the commotion was none other than the devil. Yielding to an irresistible impulse, but without really knowing what he was doing, the Vicomte whipped out a pistol, and, pointing at Mephistopheles, fired. In an instant, fire and witches vanished, and all was darkness and silence.

Terrified out of his wits, the Count sank on the ground, where he remained till daylight, when he received another shock, on discovering, stretched close to him, the body of the miller with a bullet wound in his forehead. Flying from the spot, he[175] wandered on and on, until he came to a cottage, at which he inquired his way home. And here another surprise awaited him. For the cottagers, in answer to his inquiries, informed him that the nearest town was not Toulouse but Bordeaux, and if he went on walking in such and such a direction, he would speedily come to it. Arriving at Bordeaux, as the peasant had directed, the Vicomte rested a short time, and then set out for Toulouse, which city he at length reached after a few days' journeying. But he had not been back long before he was arrested for the murder of the miller, it being deposed that he had been seen near Bordeaux, in the immediate neighbourhood of the tragedy, directly after its enactment. However, as it was obviously impossible that the Vicomte could have taken less than a few days to

travel from Toulouse to a spot near Bordeaux, where the murder had taken place, a distance of several hundreds of miles, on the evidence of his friends, who declared that he had been with them till within a few hours of the time when it was presumed the crime was committed, the charge was withdrawn, and the Vicomte was fully acquitted.

[176]

CHAPTER X

THE HAND OF GLORY; THE BLOODY HAND OF ULSTER; THE SEVENTH SON; BIRTHMARKS; NATURE'S DEVIL SIGNALS; PRE-EXISTENCE; THE FUTURE; PROJECTION; TELEPATHY, ETC.

The Hand of Glory

Belief in the power of the Hand of Glory still, I believe, exists in certain parts of European and Asiatic Russia. Once it was prevalent everywhere. The Hand of Glory was a hand cut off from the body of a robber and murderer who had expiated his crimes on the gallows. To endow it with the properties of a talisman, the blood was first of all extracted; it was then given a thorough soaking in saltpetre and pepper, and hung out in the sun. When perfectly dry, it was used as a candlestick for a candle made of white wax, sesame seed, and fat from the corpse of the criminal. Prepared thus, the Hand of Glory was deemed to have the power of aiding and protecting the robbers in their nefarious work by sending to sleep their intended victims. Hence no robber ever visited a house without having such a talisman with him.

The Bloody Hand of Ulster

The Red Right Hand of Ulster is the badge of the O'Neills, and according to tradition it originated[177] thus:—On the approach of an ancient expedition to Ulster, the leader declared that whoever first touched the shore should possess the land in the immediate vicinity. An ancestor of the O'Neills, anxious to obtain the reward, at once cut off his right hand and threw it on the coast, which henceforth became his territory.

Since then the O'Neills have always claimed the Red Right Hand of Ulster as their badge, and it figured only the other day on the banner which, for the first time since the days of Shane the Proud, was flown from the battlements of their ancient stronghold, Ardglass Castle, now in the possession of Mr F. J. Bigger.

A very similar story to that of the O'Neill is told of an O'Donnell, who, with a similar motive, namely, to acquire territory, on arriving within sight of Spain, cut off his hand and hurled it on the shore, and, like the O'Neills, the O'Donnells from that time have adopted the hand as their badge.

The Seventh Son

It was formerly believed that a seventh son could cure diseases, and that a seventh son of a seventh son, with no female born in between, could cure the king's evil. Indeed, seven was universally regarded as a psychic number, and according to astrologers the greatest events in a person's life, and his nearest approach to death without actually incurring it, would be every seven years. The grand climacterics are sixty-three and eighty-four, and the most critical periods[178] of a person's life occur when they are sixty-three and eighty-four years of age.

Birthmarks

Some families have a heritage of peculiar markings on the skin. The only birthmark of this description which I am acquainted with is "The Historic Baldearg," or red spot that has periodically appeared on the skins of members of the O'Donnell clan. Its origin is dubious, but I imagine it must go back pretty nearly to the time of the great Niall. In the days when Ireland was in a chronic state of rebellion, it was said that it would never shake off the yoke of its cruel English oppressors till its forces united under the leadership of an O'Donnell with the Baldearg. An O'Donnell with the Baldearg turned up in 1690, in the person of Hugh Baldearg O'Donnell, son of John O'Donnell, an officer in the Spanish Army, and descendant of the Calvagh O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, who had been created Earl of Wexford by Queen Elizabeth. But the Irish, as has ever been the case, would not unite, and despite the aid given him by Talbot (who had succeeded the O'Donnells in the Earldom of Tyrconnell), he met with but little success, and returning to Spain, died

there with the rank of Major-General in 1704.

References to the Baldearg may be seen in various of the Memoirs of the O'Donnells in the libraries of the British Museum, Madrid, Dublin, and elsewhere.

[179]

Nature's Devil Signals

I have already alluded to the fingers typical of murderers; I will now refer in brief to a form of Nature's other danger signals. The feet of murderers are, as a rule, very short and broad, the toes flat and square-tipped. As a rule, too, they either have very receding chins, as in the case of Mapleton Lefroy, or very massive, prominent chins, as in the case of Gotfried.

In many instances the ears of murderers are set very far back and low down on their heads, and the outer rims are very much crumpled; also they have very high and prominent cheek-bones, whilst one side of the face is different from the other. The backs of many murderers' heads are nearly perpendicular, or, if anything, rather inclined to recede than otherwise—they seldom project—whilst the forehead is unusually prominent.

It is a noteworthy fact that a large percentage of modern murderers have had rather prominent light, steely blue eyes—rarely grey or brown.

Their voices—and there is another key to the character—are either hollow and metallic, or suggestive of the sounds made by certain animals.

Many of these characteristics are to be found in criminal lunatics.

Pre-existence and the Future

To talk of a former life as if it were an established fact is, of course, an absurdity; to dogmatise at all on such a question, with regard to which one man's opinion is just as speculative as another's, is,[180] perhaps, equally ridiculous. Granted, then, the equal value of the varying opinions of sane men on this subject, it is clear that no one can be considered an authority; my opinion, no less than other people's, is, as I have said, merely speculation. That I had a former life is, I think, extremely likely, and that I misconducted myself in that former life, more than likely, since it is only by supposing a previous existence in which I misbehaved, that I can see the shadow of a justification for all the apparently unmerited misfortunes I have suffered in my present existence.

I do not, however, see any specific reason why my former existence should have been here; on the contrary, I think it far more probable that I was once in some other sphere—perhaps one of the planets—where my misdeeds led to my banishment and my subsequent appearance in this world. With regard to a future life, eternal punishment, and its converse, everlasting bliss, I fear I never had any orthodox views, or, if I had, my orthodoxy exploded as soon as my common sense began to grow.

Hell, the hell hurled at my head from the pulpit, only excited my indignation—it was so unjust—nor did the God of the Old Testament fill me with aught save indignation and disgust. Lost in a quagmire of doubts and perplexities, I inquired of my preceptors as to the authorship of the book that held up for adoration a being so stern, relentless, and unjust as God; and in answer to my inquiries was told that I was very wicked to talk in such a way about the Bible; that it was God's[181] own book—divinely inspired—in fact, written by God Himself. Then I inquired if the original manuscript in God's handwriting was still in existence; and was told I was very wicked and must hold my tongue. Yet I had no idea of being in any way irreverent or blasphemous; I was merely perplexed, and longed to have my difficulties settled. Failing this, they grew, and I began to question whether the terms "merciful" and "almighty" were terms that could be applied with any degree of consistency to the scriptural one and only Creator. Would that God, if He were almighty, have permitted the existence of such an enemy (or indeed an enemy at all) as the Devil? And if He were merciful, would He, for the one disobedient act of one human being, have condemned to the most ghastly and diabolical sufferings, millions of human beings, and not only human beings, but animals? Ah! that's where the rub comes in, for though there may be some sense, if not justice, in causing men and women, who have sinned—to suffer, there is surely neither reason nor justice in making animals, who have not sinned—to suffer.

And yet, for man's one act of disobedience, both man and beast have suffered thousands of years of untold agonies. Could anyone save the blindest and most fanatical of biblical bigots call the ordainer of such a punishment merciful?

How often have I asked myself who created the laws and principles of Nature! They are certainly more suggestive of a fiendish than a benevolent author. It is ridiculous to say man owes disease to his own acts—such an argument—if argument at all[182]—would not deceive an infant. Are the insects, the trees, the fish responsible for the diseases with which they are inflicted? No, Nature, or rather the creator of Nature, is alone responsible. But, granted we have lived before, there may be grounds for the suffering both of man and beast. The story of the Fall may be but a contortion of something that has happened to man in a former existence, in another sphere, possibly, in another planet; and its description based on nothing more substantial than memory, vague and fleeting as a dream. Anyhow, I am inclined to think that incarnation here might be traced to something of more—infinity more—importance than an apple; possibly, to some cause of which we have not, at the present, even the remotest conception. People, who do not believe in the former existence, attempt to justify the ills of man here, by assuming that a state of perfect happiness cannot be attained by man, except he has suffered a certain amount of pain; so that, in order to attain to perfect happiness, man must of necessity experience suffering—a theory founded on the much misunderstood axiom, that nothing can exist save by contrast. But supposing, for the sake of argument, that this axiom, according to its everyday interpretation, is an axiom, *i.e.* a true saying, then God, the Creator of all things, must have created evil—evil that good may exist, and good that evil may exist. This deduction, however, is obviously at variance with the theory that God is all goodness, since if nothing can exist save by contrast, goodness must of necessity presuppose badness, and we are thus led to the conclusion[183] that God is at the same time both good and bad, a conclusion which is undoubtedly a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Seeing, then, that a God all good cannot have created evil, surely we should be more rational, if less scriptural, were we to suppose a plurality of gods. In any case I cannot see how pain, if God is indeed all mighty and all good, can be the inevitable corollary of pleasure. Nor can I see the necessity for man to suffer here, in order to enjoy absolute happiness in the hereafter. No, I think if there is any justification for the suffering of mankind on this earth, it is to be found, not in the theory of "contrast," but in a former existence, and in an existence in some other sphere or plane. Vague recollections of such an existence arise and perplex many of us; but they are so elusive, the moment we attempt to grapple with them, they fade away.

The frequent and vivid dreams I have, of visiting a region that is peopled with beings that have nothing at all in common with mankind, and who welcome me as effusively as if I had been long acquainted with them, makes me wonder if I have actually dwelt amongst them in a previous life.

I cannot get rid of the idea that in everything I see (in these dreams)—in the appearance, mannerisms, and expressions of my queer companions, in the scenery, in the atmosphere—I do but recall the actual experience of long ago—the actual experience of a previous existence. Nor is this identical dreamland confined to me; and the fact that others whom I have met, have dreamed[184] of a land, corresponding in every detail to my dreamland, proves, to my mind, the possibility that both they and I have lived a former life, and in that former life inhabited the same sphere.

Projection

I have, as I have previously stated in my work, *The Haunted Houses of London*, succeeded, on one occasion, in separating at will, my immaterial from my material body. I was walking alone along a very quiet, country lane, at 4 P.M., and concentrating with all my mind, on being at home. I kept repeating to myself, "I *WILL* be there." Suddenly a vivid picture of the exterior of the house rose before me, and, the next instant, I found myself, in the most natural manner possible, walking down some steps and across the side garden leading to the conservatory. I entered the house, and found all my possessions—books, papers, shoes, etc.—just as I had left them some hours previously. With the intention of showing myself to my wife, in order that she might be a witness to my appearance, I hastened to the room, where I thought it most likely I should find her, and was about to turn the handle of the door, when, for the fraction of a second, I saw nothing. Immediately afterwards there came a blank, and I was once again on the lonely moorland road, toiling along, fishing rod in hand, a couple of miles, at least, away from home. When I did arrive home, my wife met me in the hall, eager to tell me that at four o'clock both she and the girls had distinctly heard me come down the steps and through the conservatory [185] into the house. "You actually came," my wife continued, "to the door of the room in which I was sitting. I called out to you to come in, but, receiving no reply, I got up and opened the door, and found, to my utter amazement, no one there. I searched for you everywhere, and should much like to know why you have behaved in this very extraordinary manner."

Much excited in my turn, I hastened to explain to her that I had been practising projection, and had actually succeeded in separating my material from my immaterial body, for a brief space of time, just about four o'clock. The footsteps she had heard were indeed my own footsteps—and upon this point she was even more positive than I—the footsteps of my immaterial self.

I have made my presence felt, though I have never "appeared," on several other occasions. In my sleep, I believe, I am often separated from my physical body, as my dreams are so intensely real and vivid. They are so real that I am frequently able to remember, almost *verbatim*, long conversations I have had in them, and I awake repeating broken-off sentences. Often, after I have taken active exercise, such as running, or done manual labour, such as digging or lifting heavy weights in the land of my dreams, my muscles have ached all the following day.

With regard to the projections of other people, I have often seen phantasms of the living, and an account of one appearing to me, when in the company of three other persons, all of whom saw it, may be read in the Psychical Research Society's Magazine for October 1899. I have referred to it[186] as well as to other of my similar experiences in *Ghostly Phenomena* and *Haunted Houses of London*.

Doubles, i.e. people who are more or less the exact counterpart of other people, may easily be taken for projections by those who have but little acquaintance with the occult. I, myself, have seen many doubles, but though they be as like as the proverbial two peas, I can tell at a glance whether they be the material or immaterial likeness of those they so exactly resemble. I think there is no doubt that, in a good many instances, doubles have been mistaken for projections, and, of course, *vice versa*.

Telepathy and Suggestion

Though telepathy between two very wakeful minds is an established fact, I do not think it is generally known that it can also take place between two minds when asleep, or between one person awake and another asleep, and yet I have proved this to be the case. My wife and I continually dream of the same thing at the same time, and if I lie down in the afternoon and fall asleep alone, she often thinks of precisely what I am dreaming about. Though telepathy and suggestion may possibly account for hauntings when the phenomenon is only experienced individually, I cannot see how it can do so when the manifestations are witnessed by numbers, i.e. collectively. I am quite sure that neither telepathy nor suggestion are in any degree responsible for the phenomena I have experienced, and that the latter hail only[187] from one quarter—the objective and genuine occult world.

The Psychic Faculty and Second Sight

Whereas some people seem fated to experience occult phenomena and others not, there is this inconsistency: the person with the supposed psychic faculty does not always witness the phenomena when they appear. By way of illustration: I have been present on one occasion in a haunted room when all present have seen the ghost with the exception of myself; whilst on other occasions, either I have been the only one who has seen it, or some or all of us have seen it. It would thus seem that the psychic faculty does not ensure one's seeing a ghost, whenever a ghost is to be seen.

I think, as a matter of fact, that apparitions can, whilst manifesting themselves to some, remain invisible to others, and that they themselves determine to whom they will appear. Some types of phantasms apparently prefer manifesting themselves to the spiritual or psychic-minded person, whilst other types do not discriminate, but appear to the spiritual and carnal-minded alike. There is just as much variety in the tastes and habits of phantasms as in the tastes and habits of human beings, and in the behaviour of both phantasm and human being, I regret to say, there is an equal and predominant amount of inconsistency.

Intuition

I do not think it can be doubted that psychic people have the faculty of intuition far more[188] highly developed than is the case with the more material-minded.

"Second sight" is but another name for the psychic faculty, and it is generally acknowledged to be far more common among the Celts than the Anglo-Saxons. That this is so need not be wondered at, since the Irish and the Highlanders of Scotland (originally the same race) are far more spiritual-minded than the English (in whom commerciality and worldliness are innate), and consequently have, on the whole, a far greater attraction for spirits who would naturally prefer to reveal themselves to those in whom they would be the more likely to find something in common.

There is still a belief in certain parts of the Hebrides that second sight was once obtained there through a practice called "The Taigheirm." This rite, which is said to have been last performed about the middle of the seventeenth century, consisted in roasting on a spit, before a slow fire, a number of black cats. As soon as one was dead another took its place, and the sacrifice was continued until the screeches of the tortured animals summoned from the occult world an enormous black cat, that promised to bestow as a perpetual heritage on the sacrificer and his family, the faculty of

second sight, if he would desist from any further slaughter.

The sacrificer joyfully closed with the bargain, and the ceremony concluded with much feasting and merriment, in which, however, it is highly improbable that the phantasms of the poor roasted "toms" took part.

[189]

Clairvoyance

Clairvoyance is a branch of occultism in which I have had little experience, and can, therefore, only refer to in brief. When I was the Principal of a Preparatory School, I once had on my staff a Frenchman of the name of Deslys. On recommencing school after the Christmas vacation, M. Deslys surprised me very much by suddenly observing: "Mr O'Donnell, did you not stay during the holidays at No. ... The Crescent, Bath?"

"Yes," I replied; "but how on earth do you know?" I had only been there two days, and had certainly never mentioned my visit either to him or to anyone acquainted with him.

"Well!" he said, "I'll tell you how I came to know. Hearing from my friends that Mme. Leprès, a well-known clairvoyante, had just come to Paris, I went to see her. It is just a week ago to-day. After she had described, with wonderful accuracy, several houses and scenes with which I was familiar, and given me several pieces of information about my friends, which I subsequently found to be correct, I asked her to tell me where you were and what you were doing. For some moments she was silent, and then she said very slowly: 'He is staying with a friend at No. ... The Crescent, Bath. I can see him (it was then three o'clock in the afternoon) sitting by the bedside of his friend, who has his head tied up in bandages. Mr O'Donnell is telling him a very droll story about Lady B——, to whom he has been lately introduced.' She then stopped, made a futile effort to go on, and after a[190] protracted pause exclaimed: 'I can see no more—something has happened.' That was all I found out about you."

"And enough, too, M. Deslys," I responded, "for what she told you was absolutely true. A week ago to-day I was staying at No. ... The Crescent, Bath, and at three o'clock in the afternoon I was sitting at the bedside of my friend, who had injured his head in a fall, and had it tied up in bandages; and amongst other bits of gossip, I narrated to him a very amusing anecdote concerning Lady B——, whom I have only just met, for the first time, in London."

Now M. Deslys could not possibly have known, excepting through psychical agency, where I had been staying a week before that time, or what I had been doing at three o'clock on that identical afternoon.

Automatic Writing

I have frequently experimented in automatic writing. Who that is interested in the occult has not! But I cannot say I have ever had any astonishing results. However, though my own experiences are not worth recording, I have heard of many extraordinary results obtained by others—results from automatic messages that one can not help believing could only be due to superphysical agency.

Table-turning

I do not think there is anything superphysical in merely turning the table, or making it move[191] across the room, or causing it to fall over on to the ground, and to get up again. I am of the opinion that all this is due to animal magnetism, and to the unconscious efforts of the audience, who are ever anxious for the ghost to come and something startling to happen. The ladies, in particular, I would point out, press a little hard with their dainty but determined hands, or with their self-willed knees resort to a few sly pushes. When this does not happen, I think it is quite possible that an elemental or some other equally undesirable type of phantasm does actually attend the séance, and, emphasising its arrival by sundry noises, is responsible for many, if not all the phenomena. On the other hand, I certainly think that ninety per cent. of the rappings and the manifestations of musical enthusiasts is due to trickery on the part of the medium, or, if there be no professional medium present, to an over-zealous sitter.

But since ghosts can and do show themselves spontaneously in haunted houses, why the necessity of musical instruments, professional medium, and sitting round a table with fingers linked? Surely, when one comes to think of it, the *modus operandi* of the séance, besides being extremely undignified, is somewhat superfluous. Tin trumpets, twopenny tambourines, and concertinas are all very well in their way, but, try how I will, I cannot associate them with ghosts. What phantasm of any standing at all would be attracted by such baubles? Surely only the phantasms of the very

silliest of servant girls, of incurable idiots, and of[192] advanced imbeciles. But even they, I think, might be "above it," in which case the musical instruments, tin trumpets, tambourines, and concertinas, disdained by the immaterial, must be manipulated by the material! And this rule with regard to table-turning, the manipulation of musical instruments, etc., equally applies to materialisation. I have no doubt that genuine phantasms of the earth-bound or elementals do occasionally show themselves, but I am quite sure in nine cases out of ten the manifestations are manifestations of living flesh and blood.

Charms and Checks against Ghosts

"When I feel the approach of the superphysical, I always cross myself," an old lady once remarked to me; and this is what many people do; indeed, the sign of the cross is the most common mode of warding off evil. Whether it is really efficacious is doubtful. I, for my part, make use of the sign, involuntarily rather than otherwise, because the custom is innate in me, and is, perhaps, with various other customs, the heritage of all my race from ages past; but I cannot say it always or even often answers, for ghosts frequently manifest themselves to me in spite of it. Then there is the magic circle which is described differently by divers writers. According to Mr Dyer, in his *Ghost World*, pp. 167-168, the circle was prepared thus: "A piece of ground was usually chosen, nine feet square, at the full extent of which parallel lines were drawn, one within the other, having sundry crosses and triangles described[193] between them, close to which was formed the first or outer circle; then about half a foot within the same, a second circle was described, and within that another square corresponding to the first, the centre of which was the spot where the master and associate were to be placed. The vacancies formed by the various lines and angles of the figure were filled up by the holy names of God, having crosses and triangles described between them.... The reason assigned for the use of the circles was, that so much ground being blessed and consecrated by such holy words and ceremonies as they made use of in forming it, had a secret force to expel all evil spirits from the bounds thereof, and, being sprinkled with pure sanctified water, the ground was purified from all uncleanness; besides, the holy names of God being written over every part of it, its forces became so powerful that no evil spirits had ability to break through it, or to get at the magician and his companion, by reason of the antipathy in nature they bore to these sacred names. And the reason given for the triangles was, that if the spirits were not easily brought to speak the truth, they might by the exorcist be conjured to enter the same, where, by virtue of the names of the essence and divinity of God, they could speak nothing but what was true and right."

Again according to Mr Dyer, when a spot was haunted by the spirit of a murderer or suicide who lay buried there, a magic circle was made just over the grave, and he who was daring enough to venture there, at midnight, preferably when the elements were at their worst, would conjure the ghost to appear and[194] give its reason for haunting the spot. In answer to the summons there was generally a long, unnatural silence, which was succeeded by a tremendous crash, when the phantasm would appear, and, in ghastly, hollow tones answer all the questions put to it. Never once would it encroach on the circle, and on its interrogator promising to carry out its wishes, it would suddenly vanish and never again walk abroad. If the hauntings were in a house, the investigator entered the haunted room at midnight with a candle, and compass, and a crucifix or Bible. After carefully shutting the door, and describing a circle on the floor, in which he drew a cross, he placed within it a chair, and table, and on the latter, put the crucifix, a Bible, and a lighted candle. He then sat down on the chair and awaited the advent of the apparition, which either entered noiselessly or with a terrific crash. On the promise that its wishes would be fulfilled, the ghost withdrew, and there were no more disturbances. Sometimes the investigator, if he were a priest, would sprinkle the phantasm with holy water and sometimes make passes over it with the crucifix, but the results were always the same; it responded to all the questions that were put to it and never troubled the house again.

How different from what happens in reality! Though I have seen and interrogated many ghosts, I have never had a reply, or anything in the shape of a reply, nor perceived any alteration in their expression that would in any way lead me to suppose they had understood me; and as to exorcism—well, I know of innumerable cases where it has[195] been tried, and tried by the most pious of clergy—clergy of all denominations—and singularly failed. It is true I have never experimented with a magic circle, but, somehow, I have not much faith in it.

In China the method of expelling ghosts from haunted houses has been described as follows:—An altar containing tapers and incense sticks is erected in the spot where the manifestations are most frequent. A Taoist priest is then summoned, and enters the house dressed in a red robe, with blue stockings and a black cap. He has with him a sword, made of the wood of the peach or date tree, the hilt and guard of which are covered with red cloth. Written in ink on the blade of the sword is a charm against ghosts. Advancing to the altar, the priest deposits his sword on it. He then prepares a mystic scroll, which he burns, collecting and emptying the ashes into a cup of spring water. Next, he takes the sword in his right hand and the cup in his left, and, after taking seven paces to the left and eight to the right, he says: "Gods of heaven and earth, invest me with the heavy seal, in order that I may eject from this dwelling-house all kinds of evil spirits. Should any disobey me, give me power to deliver them for safe custody to rulers of such demons." Then,

addressing the ghost in a loud voice, he says: "As quick as lightning depart from this house." This done, he takes a bunch of willow, dips it in the cup, and sprinkles it in the east, west, north, and south corners of the house, and, laying it down, picks up his sword and cup, and, going to the east corner of the[196] building, calls out: "I have the authority, Tai-Shaong-Loo-Kivan." He then fills his mouth with water from the cup, and spits it out on the wall, exclaiming: "Kill the green evil spirits which come from unlucky stars, or let them be driven away." This ceremony he repeats at the south, west, and north corners respectively, substituting, in turn, red, white, and yellow in the place of green. The attendants then beat gongs, drums, and tom-toms, and the exorcist cries out: "Evil spirits from the east, I send back to the east; evil spirits from the south, I send back to the south," and so on. Finally, he goes to the door of the house, and, after making some mystical signs in the air, manœuvres with his sword, congratulates the owner of the establishment on the expulsion of the ghosts, and demands his fee.

In China the sword is generally deemed to have psychic properties, and is often to be seen suspended over a bed to scare away ghosts. Sometimes a horse's tail—a horse being also considered extremely psychic—or a rag dipped in the blood from a criminal's head, are used for the same purpose. But no matter how many, or how varied, the precautions we take, ghosts will come, and nothing will drive them away. The only protection I have ever found to be of any practical value in preventing them from materialising is a powerful light. As a rule they cannot stand *that*, and whenever I have turned a pocket flashlight on them, they have at once dematerialised; often, however, materialising again immediately the light has been turned off.

The cock was, at one time, (and still is in some parts of the world) regarded as a psychic bird; it[197] being thought that phantasms invariably took their departure as soon as it began to crow. This, however, is a fallacy. As ghosts appear at all hours of the day and night, in season and out of season, I fear it is only too obvious that their manifestations cannot be restricted within the limits of any particular time, and that their coming and going, far from being subject to the crowing of a cock, however vociferous, depend entirely on themselves.

[198]

CHAPTER XI

OCCULT INHABITANTS OF THE SEA AND RIVERS

Phantom Ships

From time to time, one still hears of a phantom ship being seen, in various parts of the world. Sometimes it is in the Straits of Magellan, vainly trying to weather the Horn; sometimes in the frozen latitudes of the north, steering its way in miraculous fashion past monster icebergs; sometimes in the Pacific, sometimes in the Atlantic, and only the other day I heard of its being seen off Cornwall. The night was dark and stormy, and lights being suddenly seen out at sea as of a vessel in distress, the lifeboat was launched. On approaching the lights, it was discovered that they proceeded from a vessel that mysteriously vanished as soon as the would-be rescuers were within hailing. Much puzzled, the lifeboat men were about to return, when they saw the lights suddenly reappear to leeward. On drawing near to them, they again disappeared, and were once more seen right out to sea. Utterly nonplussed, and feeling certain that the elusive bark must be the notorious phantom ship, the lifeboat men abandoned the pursuit, and returned home.

[199] A fisherman of the same town—the town to which the lifeboat that had gone to the rescue of the phantom ship belonged—told me, when I was out with him one evening in his boat, that one of the oldest inhabitants of the place had on one occasion, when the phantom ship visited the bay, actually got his hands on her gunwales before she melted away, and he narrowly escaped pitching headlong into the sea. Though the weather was then still and warm, the yards of the ship, which were coated with ice, flapped violently to and fro, as if under the influence of some mighty wind. The appearance of the phenomenon was followed, as usual, by a catastrophe to one of the local boats.

I very often sound sailors as to whether they have ever come across this ominous vessel, and sometimes hear very enthralling accounts of it. An old sea captain whom I met on the pier at Southampton, in reply to my inquiry, said: "Yes! I have seen the phantom ship, or at any rate a phantom ship, once—but only once. It was one night in the fifties, and we were becalmed in the South Pacific about three hundred miles due west of Callao. It had been terrifically hot all day, and, only too thankful that it was now a little cooler, I was lolling over the bulwarks to get a few mouthfuls of fresh air before turning into my berth, when one of the crew touched me on the shoulder, and ejaculating, 'For God's sake——' abruptly left off. Following the direction of his glaring eyes, I saw to my amazement a large black brig bearing directly down on us. She was about a mile off, and, despite the intense calmness of the[200] sea, was pitching and tossing as if

in the roughest water. As she drew nearer I was able to make her out better, and from her build—she carried two masts and was square-rigged forward and schooner-rigged aft—as well as from her tawdry gilt figurehead, concluded she was a hermaphrodite brig of, very possibly, Dutch nationality. She had evidently seen a great deal of rough weather, for her foretopmast and part of her starboard bulwarks were gone, and what added to my astonishment and filled me with fears and doubts was, that in spite of the pace at which she was approaching us and the dead calmness of the air, she had no other sails than her foresail and mainsail, and flying-jib.

"By this time all of our crew were on deck, and the skipper and the second mate took up their positions one on either side of me, the man who had first called my attention to the strange ship, joining some other seamen near the forecastle. No one spoke, but, from the expression in their eyes and ghastly pallor of their cheeks, it was very easy to see that one and all were dominated by the same feelings of terror and suspicion. Nearer and nearer drew the brig, until she was at last so close that we could perceive her crew—all of whom, save the helmsman, were leaning over the bulwarks—grinning at us. Never shall I forget the horror of those grins. They were hideous, meaningless, hellish grins, the grins of corpses in the last stage of putrefaction. And that is just what they were—all of them—corpses, but corpses possessed by spirits of the most devilish sort, for as we stared, too petrified with fear to remove our gaze, they[201] nodded their ulcerated heads and gesticulated vehemently. The brig then gave a sudden yaw, and with that motion there was wafted a stink—a stink too damnably foul and rotten to originate from anywhere, save from some cesspool in hell. Choking, retching, and all but fainting, I buried my face in the skipper's coat, and did not venture to raise it, till the far-away sounds of plunging and tossing assured me the cursed ship had passed. I then looked up, and was just in time to catch a final glimpse of the brig, a few hundred yards to leeward, (she had passed close under our stern) before her lofty stern rose out of the water, and, bows foremost, she plunged into the stilly depths and we saw her no more. There was no need for the skipper to tell us that she was the phantom ship, nor did she belie her sinister reputation, for within a week of seeing her, yellow fever broke out on board, and when we arrived at port, there were only three of us left."

The Sargasso Sea

Of all the seas in the world, none bear a greater reputation for being haunted than the Sargasso. Within this impenetrable waste of rank, stinking seaweed, in places many feet deep, are collected wreckages of all ages and all climes, grim and permanent records of the world's maritime history, unsinkable and undestroyable. It has ever been my ambition to explore the margins of this unsightly yet fascinating marine wilderness, but, so far, I have been unable to extend my peregrinations further south than the thirty-fifth degree of latitude.

[202] Among the many stories I have heard in connection with this sea, the following will, I think, bear repeating:—

"A brig with twelve hands aboard, bound from Boston to the Cape Verde Islands, was caught in a storm, and, being blown out of her course, drifted on to the northern extremities of the Sargasso. The wind then sinking, and an absolute calm taking its place, there seemed every prospect that the brig would remain where it was for an indefinite period. A most horrible fate now stared the crew in the face, for although they had food enough to last them for many weeks, they only had a very limited supply of water, and the intense heat and terrific stench from the weeds made them abnormally thirsty.

"After a long and earnest consultation, in which the skipper acted as chairman, it was decided that on the consumption of the last drop of water they should all commit suicide, anything rather than to perish of thirst, and it would be far less harrowing to die in a body and face the awful possibilities of the next world in company than alone.

"As there was only one firearm on board, and the idea of throat-cutting was disapproved of by several of the more timid, rat poison, of which there was just enough to go all round, was chosen. Meanwhile, in consideration of the short time left to them on earth, the crew insisted that they should be allowed to enjoy themselves to the utmost. To this the captain, knowing only too well what that would mean, reluctantly gave his consent. A general pandemonium at once ensued,[203] one of the men producing a mouth accordion and another a concertina, whilst the rest, selecting partners with much mock gallantry, danced to the air of a popular Vaudeville song till they could dance no longer.

"The next item on the programme was dinner. The best of everything on board was served up, and they all ate and drank till they could hold no more. They were then so sleepy that they tumbled off their seats, and, lying on the floor, soon snored like hogs. The cool of the evening restoring them, they played pitch and toss, and poker, till tea-time, and then fooled away the remainder of the evening in more cards and more drink. In this manner the best part of a week was beguiled. Then the skipper announced the fact that the last drop of liquor on board had gone, and that, according to the compact, the hour had arrived to commit suicide. Had a bombshell fallen in their midst, it could not have caused a greater consternation than this announcement. The men had, by this time, become so enamoured with their easy and irresponsible mode of living, that the idea of quitting it in so abrupt a manner was by no means to their liking, and they

evinced their displeasure in the roughest and most forcible of language. "The skipper could d——d well put an end to himself if he had a mind to, but they would see themselves somewhere else before they did any such thing—it would be time enough to talk of dying when the victuals were all eaten up.' Then they thoroughly overhauled the ship, and on discovering half a dozen bottles of rum and a small cask of water[204] stowed away in the skipper's cabin, they threw him overboard and pelted him with empty bottles till he sank; after which they cleared the deck and danced till sunset.

"Two nights later, when they were all lying on the deck near the companion way, licking their parched lips and commiserating with themselves on the prospect of their gradually approaching end—for they had abandoned all idea of the rat poison—they suddenly saw a hideous, seaweedy object rise up over the bulwarks on the leeward side of the ship. In breathless expectation they all sat up and watched. Inch by inch it rose, until they saw before them a tall form enveloped from head to foot in green slime, and horribly suggestive of the well-known figure of the murdered captain. Gliding noiselessly over the deck, it shook its hands menacingly at each of the sailors, until it came to the cabin-boy—the only one among them who had not participated in the skipper's death—when it touched him gently on the forehead, and, stooping down, appeared to whisper something in his ears. It then recrossed the deck, and, mounting the bulwarks, leaped into the sea.

"For some seconds no one stirred; and then, as if under the influence of some hypnotic spell, one by one, each of the crew, with the exception of the cabin-boy, got up, and, marching in Indian file to the spot where the apparition had vanished, flung themselves overboard. The last of the procession had barely disappeared from view, when the cabin-boy, whose agony of mind during this infernal[205] tragedy cannot be described, fell into a heavy stupor, from which he did not awake till morning. In the meanwhile the brig, owing to a stiff breeze that had arisen in the night, was freed from its environment, and was drifting away from the seaweed. It went on and on, day after day, and day after day, till it was eventually sighted by a steamer and taken in tow. The cabin-boy, by this time barely alive, was nursed with the tenderest care, and, owing to the assiduous attention bestowed on him, he completely recovered."

I think this story, though naturally ridiculed and discredited by some, may be unreservedly accepted by those whose knowledge and experience of the occult warrant their belief in it.

Along the coast of Brittany are many haunted spots, none more so than the "Bay of the Departed," where, in the dead of night, wails and cries, presumably uttered by the phantasms of drowned sailors, are distinctly heard by the terrified peasantry on shore. I can the more readily believe this, because I myself have heard similar sounds off the Irish, Scottish, and Cornish coasts, where shrieks, and wails, and groans as of the drowning have been borne to me from the inky blackness of the foaming and tossing sea. According to Mr Hunt in his *Romances of the West of England*, the sands of Porth Towan were haunted, a fisherman declaring that one night when he was walking on them alone, he suddenly heard a voice from the sea cry out, "The hour is come, but not the man." This was repeated three times, when a black figure, like that of a man, appeared on the[206] crest of an adjacent hill, and, dashing down the steep side, rushed over the sands and vanished in the waves.

In other parts of England, as well as in Brittany and Spain, a voice from the sea is always said to be heard prior to a storm and loss of life. In the Bermudas, I have heard that before a wreck a huge white fish is often seen; whilst in the Cape Verde Islands maritime disasters are similarly presaged by flocks of peculiarly marked gulls.

On no more reliable authority than hearsay evidence, I understand that off the coast of Finland a whirlpool suddenly appears close beside a vessel that is doomed to be wrecked, and that a like calamity is foretold off the coast of Peru by the phantasm of a sailor who, in eighteenth-century costume, swarms up the side of the doomed ship, enters the captain's cabin, and, touching him on the shoulder, points solemnly at the porthole and vanishes.

River Ghosts

In China there is a strong belief that spots in rivers, creeks, and ponds where people have been drowned are haunted by devils that, concealing themselves either in the water itself or on the banks, spring out upon the unwary and drown them. To warn people against these dangerous elementals, a stone or pillar called "The Fat-pee," on which the name of the future Buddha or Pam-mo-o-mee-to-foo is inscribed, is set up near the place where they are supposed to lurk, and when the hauntings become very frequent the evil spirit[207] is exorcised. The ceremony of exorcism consists in the decapitation of a white horse by a specially selected executioner, on the site of the hauntings. The head of the slaughtered animal is placed in an earthenware jar, and buried in the exact spot where it was killed, which place is then carefully marked by the erection of a stone tablet with the words "O-me-o-to-fat" transcribed on it. The performance concludes with the cutting up and selling of the horse's body for food. Amongst the numerous other creeks that have witnessed this practice in recent years are those adjoining the villages of Tsze-tow (near Whampoa) and Gna-zew (near Canton).

Various of the lakes, particularly the crater lakes of America, were once thought to be haunted by spirits or devils of a fiery red who raised storms and upset canoes.

Sirens

But by far the most fascinating of all the phantasms of the water are the sirens that haunted (and still occasionally haunt) rivers and waterfalls, particularly those of Germany and Austria. Not so very long ago on my travels I came across an aged Hungarian who declared that he had once seen a siren. I append the story he told me, as nearly as possible in his own words.

"My brother Hans and I were wandering, early one morning, along the banks of a tributary of the Drave, in search of birds' eggs. The shores on either side the river were thickly wooded, and so rough and uneven in places that we had to[208] exercise the greatest care to avoid getting hurt. Few people visited the neighbourhood, save in the warmest and brightest time of the day, and, with the exception of a woodcutter, we had met no one. Much, then, to our astonishment, on arriving at an open space on the bank, we heard the sound of singing and music. 'Whoever can it be?' we asked ourselves, and then, advancing close to the water's edge, we strained our heads, and saw, perched high on a rock in midstream a few feet to our left, a girl with long yellow hair and a face of the most exquisite beauty. Though I was too young then to trouble my head about girls, I could not help being struck with this one, whilst Hans, who was several years older than I, was simply spellbound. 'My God! how lovely!' he cried out, 'and what a voice—how exquisite! Isn't she divine? She is altogether too beautiful for a human being; she must be an angel,' and he fell on his knees and extended his hands towards her, as if in the act of worship. Never having seen Hans behave in such a queer way before, I touched him on the shoulder, and said: 'Get up! If you go on like this the lady will think you mad. Besides, it is getting late, we ought to be going on!' But Hans did not heed me. He still continued to exclaim aloud, expressing his admiration in the most extravagant phrases; and then the girl ceased singing, and, looking at Hans with her large blue eyes, smiled and beckoned him to approach. I caught hold of him, and begged and implored him to do nothing so foolish, but he wrenched himself free, and, striking me savagely[209] on the chest, leaped into the water and swam towards the rock.

"With what eagerness I counted his strokes and watched the dreaded distance diminish! On and on he swam, till at length he was close to the rock, and the lady, bending down, was holding out her lily hands to him. Hans clutched at them, and they were, I thought, already in his fevered grasp, when she coyly snatched them away and struck him playfully on the head. The cruel, hungry waters then surged over him. I saw him sink down, down, down: I saw him no more. When I raised my agonised eyes to the rocks, all was silent and desolate: the lady had vanished."

[210]

CHAPTER XII BUDDHAS AND BOGGLE CHAIRS

It was in Paris, at the Hotel Mandeville, that I met the Baroness Paoli, an almost solitary survivor of the famous Corsican family. I was introduced to her by John Heroncourt, a friend in common, and the introduction was typical of his characteristic unorthodoxy.

"Mr Elliott O'Donnell, the Baroness Paoli. Mr Elliott O'Donnell is a writer on the superphysical. He is unlike the majority of psychical researchers, inasmuch as he has not based his knowledge on hearsay, but has actually seen, heard, and felt occult phenomena, both collectively and individually."

The Baroness smiled.

"Then I am delighted to meet Mr O'Donnell, for I, too, have had experience with the superphysical."

She extended her hand; the introduction was over.

A man in my line of life has to work hard. My motto is promptness. I have no time to waste on superfluity of any kind. I come to the point at once. Consequently, my first remark to the Baroness was direct from the shoulder:

[211] "Your experiences. Please tell them—they will be both interesting and useful."

The Baroness gently clasped her hands—truly psychic hands, with slender fingers and long shapely nails—and, looking at me fixedly, said:

"If you write about it, promise that you will not mention names."

"They shall at all events be unrecognisable," I said. "Please begin."

And without further delay the Baroness commenced her story.

"You must know," she said, "that in my family, as in most historical families—particularly Corsican—there have been many tragedies. In some cases merely orthodox tragedies—a smile, a blow, a groan; in other cases peculiar tragedies—peculiar even in that country and in the grimness of the mediæval age.

"Since 1316 the headquarters of my branch of the Paolis has been at Sartoris, once the strongest fortified castle in Corsica, but now, alas! almost past repair, in fact little better than a heap of crumbling ruins. As you know, Mr O'Donnell, it takes a vast fortune to keep such a place merely habitable.

"I lived there with my mother until my marriage two years ago, and neither she nor I had ever seen or heard any superphysical manifestations. From time to time some of the servants complained of odd noises, and there was one room which none of them would pass alone even in daylight; but we laughed at their fears, merely attributing them to the superstition which is so common among the Corsican peasants.

[212] "The year after my marriage, my husband, a Mr Vercoe, who was a great friend of ours, and I, accepted my mother's invitation to spend Christmas with her, and we all three travelled together to Sartoris.

"It was an ideal season, and the snow—an exceptional sight in my native town—lay thick in the Castle grounds.

"But to get on with my story—for I see I must not try your patience with unnecessary detail—I must give you a brief description of the bedroom in which my husband and I slept. Like all the rooms in the Castle, it was oak panelled throughout. Floor, ceiling, and walls, all were of oak, and the bed, also of oak, and certainly of no later date than the fourteenth century, was superbly carved, and had been recently valued at £30,000.

"There were two entrances, the one leading into a passage, and the other into a large reception room, formerly a chapel, at the furthest extremity of which was a huge barred and bolted door that had not been opened for more than a hundred years. This door led down a flight of stone steps to a series of ancient dungeons that occupied the space underneath our bedroom and the reception room.

"On Christmas Eve we retired to rest somewhat earlier than usual, and, being tired after a long day's motoring, speedily fell into a deep sleep. We awoke simultaneously, both querying the time and agreeing that it must be about five o'clock.

"Whilst we were talking, we suddenly heard, to our utter astonishment, the sound of footsteps[213]—heavy footsteps—accompanied by a curious clanging sound, immediately beneath us; and, as if by mutual consent, we both held our breath and listened.

"The footsteps moved on, and we presently heard them begin to ascend the stone steps leading to the adjoining room. Up, up, up, they came, until, having reached the summit, they paused. Then we heard the huge, heavy bolts of the fast-closed door shoot back with a sonorous clash. So far I had been rather more puzzled than frightened, and the idea of ghosts had not entered my mind, but when I heard the door—the door which I knew to be so securely fastened from the inside—thus opened, a great fear swept over me, and I prayed Heaven to save us from what might ensue.

"Several people, talking rapidly in gruff voices, now entered the room, and we distinctly heard the jingling of spurs and the rattling of sword scabbards coming to us distinctly through the cracks of the door.

"I was so paralysed with fear that I could do nothing. I could neither speak nor move, and my very soul was concentrated in one great, sickly dread, one awful anticipation that the intruders would burst into our room, and, before our very eyes, perform unthinkable horrors.

"To my immeasurable relief, however, this did not happen. The footsteps, as far as I could judge, advanced into the middle of the room—there was a ghastly suggestion of a scuffle, of a smothered cry, a gurgle; and the mailed feet then retired whence they had come, dragging with them some heavy load which bumped, bumped, bumped down the[214] stairs and into the cellar. Then a brief silence followed, abruptly broken by the sound of a girlish voice, which, though beautifully tintinnabulous, was unearthly, and full of suggestions so sinister and blood-curdling, that the fetters which had hitherto held me tongue-tied snapped asunder, and I was able to give vent to my terror in words. The instant I did so the singing ceased, all was still, and not another sound disturbed us till morning.

"We got up as soon as we dared and found the door at the head of the dungeon steps barred and bolted as usual, while the heavy and antique furniture in the apartment showed no sign of having been disturbed.

"On the following night my husband sat up in the room adjoining our bedroom, to see if there would be a repetition of what had taken place the night before, but nothing occurred, and we never heard the noises again.

"That is one experience. The other, though not our own, was almost coincidental, and happened to our engineer friend, Mr Vercoe. When we told him about the noises we had heard, he roared with laughter.

"'Well,' he said, 'I always understood you Corsicans were superstitious, but this beats everything. The regulation stereotype ghost in armour and clanking chains, eh! Do you know what the sounds were, Baroness? Rats!' and he smiled odiously.

"Then a sudden idea flashed across me. 'Look here, Mr Vercoe,' I exclaimed, 'there is one room in our Castle I defy even you—sceptic as you are[215]—to sleep in. It is the Barceleri Chamber, called after my ancestor, Barceleri Paoli. He visited China in the fifteenth century, bringing back with him a number of Chinese curiosities, and a Buddha which I shrewdly suspect he had stolen from a Canton temple. The room is much the same as when my ancestor occupied it, for no one has slept in it since. Moreover, the servants declare that the noises they so frequently hear come from it. But, of course, you won't mind spending a night in it?'

"Mr Vercoe laughed. 'He, he, he! Only too delighted. Give me a bottle of your most excellent vintage, and I defy any ghost that was ever created!'

"He was as good as his word, Mr O'Donnell, and though he had advised the contrary, we—that is to say, my mother, my husband, our two old servants and I—sat up in one of the rooms close at hand.

"Eleven, twelve, one, two, and three o'clock struck, and we were beginning to wish we had taken his advice and gone to bed, when we heard the most appalling, agonising, soul-rending screams for help. We rushed out, and, as we did so, the door of Mr Vercoe's room flew open and something—something white and glistening—bounded into the candle-light.

"We were so shocked, so absolutely petrified with terror, that it was a second or so before we realised that it was Mr Vercoe—not the Mr Vercoe we knew, but an entirely different Mr Vercoe—a Mr Vercoe without a stitch of clothing, and with a face metamorphosed into a lurid, solid[216] block of horror, overspreading which was a suspicion of something—something too dreadful to name, but which we could have sworn was utterly at variance with his nature. Close at his heels was the blurred outline of something small and unquestionably horrid. I cannot define it. I dare not attempt to diagnose the sensations it produced. Apart from a deadly, nauseating fear, they were mercifully novel.

"Dashing past us, Mr Vercoe literally hurled himself along the corridor, and with almost superhuman strides, disappeared downstairs. A moment later, and the clashing of the hall door told us he was in the open air. A breathless silence fell on us, and for some seconds we were all too frightened to move. My husband was the first to pull himself together.

"'Come along!' he cried, gripping one of the trembling servants by the arm. 'Come along instantly! We must keep him in sight at all costs,' and, bidding me remain where I was, he raced downstairs.

"After a long search he eventually discovered Mr Vercoe lying at full length on the grass—insensible.

"For some weeks our friend's condition was critical—on the top of a violent shock to the system, sufficient in itself to endanger life, he had taken a severe chill, which resulted in double pneumonia. However, thanks to a bull-dog constitution, typically English, he recovered, and we then begged him to give us an account of all that had happened.

[217] "'I cannot!' he said. 'My one desire is to forget everything that happened on that awful night.'

"He was obdurate, and our curiosity was, therefore, doomed to remain unsatisfied. Both my husband and I, however, felt quite sure that the image of Buddha was at the bottom of the mischief, and, as there chanced just then to be an English doctor staying at a neighbouring chateau, who was on his way to China, we entrusted the image to him, on the understanding that he would place it in a Buddhist temple. He deceived us, and, returning almost immediately to England, took the image with him. We subsequently learned that within three months this man was divorced, that he murdered a woman in Clapham Rise, and, in order to escape arrest, poisoned himself.

"The image then found its way to a pawnbroker's establishment in Houndsditch, which shortly afterwards was burned to

the ground. Where it is now, I cannot definitely say, but I have been told that an image of Buddha is the sole occupant of an empty house in the Shepherd's Bush Road—a house that is now deemed haunted. These are the experiences I wanted to tell you, Mr O'Donnell. What do you think of them?"

"I think," I said, "they are of absorbing interest. Can you see any association in the two hauntings—any possible connection between what you heard and what Mr Vercoe saw?"

A look of perplexity crossed the Baroness's face. "I hardly know," she said. "What is your opinion on that point?"

[218] "That they are distinct—absolutely distinct. The phenomena you heard are periodical re-enactions, (either by the earth-bound spirits of the actual victim and perpetrators, or by impersonating phantoms), of a crime once committed within the Castle walls. A girl was obviously murdered in the chapel and her coffin dragged into the dungeons, where, no doubt, her remains are to be found. I presume it was her spirit you heard tintinnabulating. Very possibly, if her skeleton were unearthed and re-interred in an orthodox fashion, the hauntings would cease.

"Now, with regard to your friend's experience. The blurred figure you saw pursuing the engineer was not the image of Buddha—it was one of Mr Vercoe's many personalities, extracted from him by the image of Buddha. We are all, as you are aware, complex creatures, all composed of diverse selves, each self possessing a specific shape and individuality. The more animal of these separate selves, the higher spiritual forces attaching themselves to certain localities and symbols have the power of drawing out of us, and eventually destroying. The higher spiritual forces, however, do not associate themselves with all crucifixes and Buddhas, but only with those moulded by true believers. For instance, a Buddha fashioned for mere gain, and by a person who was not a genuine follower of the prophet, would have no power of attraction.

"I have proved all this, experimentally, times without number.

"Mr Vercoe must have had—as indeed many of us have—vices, in all probability, little suspected.[219] The close proximity of the Buddha acted on them, and they began to leave his body and form a shape of their own. Had he allowed them to do so, all might have gone well; they would have been effectually overcome by the higher spiritual forces attached to the Buddha. But as soon as he saw a figure beginning to form—and no doubt it was very dreadful—he lost his head. His shrieks interrupted the work, the power of the Buddha was, *pro tempus*, at an end, and the extracted personality commenced at once to re-enter Vercoe. Rushing at him with that end in view, it so terrified him that he fled from the room, and it was at that stage that you appeared upon the scene. What followed is, of course, pure conjecture on my part, but I fear, I greatly fear, that by the time Mr Vercoe became unconscious the mischief was done, and the latter's evil personality had once again united with his other personalities."

"And what would be the after-effect, Mr O'Donnell?" the Baroness inquired anxiously.

"I fear a serious one," I replied evasively. "In the case of the doctor you mentioned, who committed murder, an evil ego had doubtless been expelled, and, receiving a rebuff, had reunited, for after a reunion the evil personality usually receives a new impetus and grows with amazing rapidity. Have you heard from Mr Vercoe lately?"

The Baroness shook her head. "Not for several months."

"You will let me know when you do?"

She nodded.

A week later she wrote to me from Rome.

[220] "Isn't it terrible?" she began, "Mr Vercoe committed suicide on Wednesday—the Birmingham papers—he was a Birmingham man—are full of it!"

The Barrowvian

The description of an adventure Mr Trobas, a friend of mine, had with a barrowvian in Brittany (and which I omitted to relate when referring to barrowvians), I now append as nearly as possible in his own words:—

"Night! A sky partially concealed from view by dark, fantastically shaped clouds, that, crawling along with a slow, stealthy motion, periodically obscure the moon. The crest of a hill covered with short-clipped grass, much worn away in places, and in the centre a Druidical circle broken and incomplete; a few of the stones are erect, the rest either lie at full

length on the sward, close to the mystic ring, or at some considerable distance from it. Here and there are distinct evidences of recent digging, and at the base of one of the horizontal stones is an excavation of no little depth.

"A sudden, but only temporary clearance of the sky reveals the surrounding landscape; the rugged mountain side, flecked with gleaming granite boulders and bordered with sturdy hedges (a mixture of mud and bracken), and beyond them the meadows, traversed by sinuous streams whose scintillating surfaces sparkle like diamonds in the silvery moonlight. At rare intervals the scene is variegated, and nature interrupted, by a mill or[221] a cottage,—toy-like when viewed from such an altitude,—and then the sweep of meadowland continues, undulating gently till it finds repose at the foot of some distant ridge of cone-shaped mountains. Over everything there is a hush, awe-inspiring in its intensity. Not the cry of a bird, not the howl of a dog, not the rustle of a leaf; there is nothing, nothing but the silence of the most profound sleep. In these remote rural districts man retires to rest early, the physical world accompanying him; and all nature dreams simultaneously.

"It was shortly after the commencement of this period of universal slumber, one night in April, that I toiled laboriously to the summit of the hill in question, and, spreading a rug on one of the fallen stones, converted it into a seat. Naturally I had not climbed this steep ascent without a purpose. The reason was this—at eight-thirty that morning I received a telegram from a friend at Armennes, near Carnac, which ran thus: 'Am in great difficulty—Ghosts—Come.—Krantz.'

"Of course Krantz is not the real name of my friend, but it is one that answers the purpose admirably in telegrams and on post-cards; and of course he well knew what he was about when he said 'Come.' Not only I but everyone has confidence in Krantz, and I was absolutely certain that when he demanded my presence, the money I should spend on the journey would not be spent in vain.

"Apart from psychical investigation, I study every phase of human nature, and am at present, among[222] other things, engaged on a work of criminology based on impressions derived from face-to-face communication with notorious criminals.

"The morning I received Krantz's summons was the morning I had set aside for a special study of S—— M——, whose case has recently commanded so much public attention; but the moment I read the wire, I changed my plans, without either hesitation or compunction. Krantz was Krantz, and his dictum could not be disobeyed.

"Tearing down la rue Saint Denis, and narrowly avoiding collision with a lady who lives in la rue Saint François, and will persist in wearing hats and heels that outrage alike every sense of decency and good form, I hustled into the station, and, rushing down the steps, just succeeded in catching the Carnac train. After a journey which, for slowness, most assuredly holds the record, I arrived, boiling over with indignation, at Armennes, where Krantz met me. After luncheon he led the way to his study, and, as soon as the servant who handed us coffee had left the room, began his explanation of the telegram.

"'As you know, Trobas,' he observed, 'it's not all bliss to be a landlord. Up to the present I have been singularly fortunate, inasmuch as I have never experienced any difficulty in getting tenants for my houses. Now, however, there has been a sudden and most alarming change, and I have just received no less than a dozen notices from tenants desirous of giving up their habitations at once. Here they are!' And he handed me a bundle of letters, for the most[223] part written in the scrawling hand of the illiterate. 'If you look,' he went on, 'you will see that none of them give any reason for leaving. It is merely—"We *CANNOT POSSIBLY* stay here any longer," or "We *MUST* give up possession *IMMEDIATELY*," which they have done, and in every instance before the quarter was up. Being naturally greatly astonished and perturbed, I made careful inquiries, and, at length—for the North Country rustic is most reticent and difficult to "draw"—succeeded in extracting from three of them the reason for the general exodus. The houses are all *HAUNTED*! There was nothing amiss with them, they informed me, till about three weeks ago, when they all heard all sorts of alarming noises—crashes as if every atom of crockery they possessed was being broken; bangs on the panels of doors; hideous groans; diabolical laughs; and blood-curdling screams. Nor was that all; some of them vowed they had seen things—horrible hairy hands, with claw-like nails and knotted joints, that came out of dark corners and grabbed at them; naked feet with enormous filthy toes; and faces—*HORRIBLE* faces that peeped at them over the banisters or through the windows; and sooner than stand any more of it—sooner than have their wives and bairns frightened out of their senses, they would sacrifice a quarter's rent and go. "We are sorry, Mr Krantz," they said in conclusion, "for you have been a most considerate landlord, but stay we cannot.'" Here my friend paused.

"'And have you no explanation of these hauntings?' I asked.

[224] "Krantz shook his head. 'No!' he said, 'the whole thing is a most profound mystery to me. At first I attributed it to practical jokers, people dressed up; but a couple of nights' vigil in the haunted district soon dissipated that theory.'

"You say district," I remarked. "Are the houses close together—in the same road or valley?"

"'In a valley,' Krantz responded—"the Valley of Dolmen. It is ten miles from here."

"'Dolmen!' I murmured, 'why Dolmen?'"

"'Because,' Krantz explained, 'in the centre of the valley is a hill, on the top of which is a Druids' circle.'"

"'How far are the houses off the hill?' I queried."

"'Various distances,' Krantz replied; 'one or two very close to the base of it, and others further away.'"

"'But within a radius of a few miles?'"

"Krantz nodded. 'Oh yes,' he answered. 'The valley itself is small. I intend taking you there to-night. I thought we would watch outside one of the houses.'"

"'If you don't mind,' I said, 'I would rather not. Anyway not to-night. Tell me how to get there and I will go alone.'"

"Krantz smiled. 'You are a strange creature, Trobas,' he said, 'the strangest in the world. I sometimes wonder if you are an elemental. At all events, you occupy a category all to yourself. Of course go alone, if you would rather. I shall be far happier here, and if you can find a satisfactory solution to the mystery and put an end to the hauntings, I shall be eternally[225] grateful. When will you start, and what will you take with you?'"

"'If that clock of yours is right, Krantz,' I exclaimed, pointing to a gun-metal timepiece on the mantelshelf, 'in half an hour. As the night promises to be cold, let me have some strong brandy-and-water, a dozen oatmeal biscuits, a thick rug, and a lantern. Nothing else!'"

"Krantz carried out my instructions to the letter. His motor took me to Dolmen Valley, and at eight o'clock I began the ascent of the hill. On reaching the summit, I uttered an exclamation. 'Someone has been excavating, and quite recently!'"

"It was precisely what I had anticipated. Some weeks previously, a member of the Lyons literary club, to which I belong, had informed me that a party of geologist friends of his had been visiting the cromlechs of Brittany, and had committed the most barbarous depredations there. Hence, the moment Krantz mentioned the 'Druidical circle,' I associated the spot with the visit of the geologists; and knowing only too well that disturbances of ancient burial grounds almost always lead to occult manifestations, I decided to view the place at once."

"That I had not erred in my associations was now only too apparent. Abominable depredations *HAD* been committed,—doubtless, by the people to whom I have alluded—and, unless I was grossly mistaken, herein lay the clue to the hauntings."

"The air being icy, I had to wrap both my rug and my overcoat tightly round me to prevent[226] myself from freezing, and every now and then I got up and stamped my feet violently on the hard ground to restore the circulation."

"So far there had been nothing in the atmosphere to warn me of the presence of the superphysical, but, precisely at eleven o'clock, I detected the sudden amalgamation, with the ether, of that enigmatical, indefinable *SOMETHING*, to which I have so frequently alluded in my past adventures. And now began that period of suspense which 'takes it out of me' even more than the encounter with the phenomenon itself. Over and over again I asked myself the hackneyed, but none the less thrilling question, 'What form will it take? Will it be simply a phantasm of a dead Celt, or some peculiarly grotesque and awful elemental[1] attracted to the spot by human remains?'"

"Minute after minute passed, and nothing happened. It is curious, how at night, especially when the moon is visible, the landscape seems to undergo a complete metamorphosis. Objects not merely increase in size, but vary in shape, and become possessed of an animation suggestive of all sorts of lurking, secretive possibilities. It was so now. The boulders in front and around me, presented the appearance of grotesque beasts, whose hidden eyes I could feel following my every movement with sly interest. The one solitary fir adorning the plateau was a tree no longer but an ogre, *pro tempus*, concealing the grim terrors of its spectral body beneath[227] its tightly folded limbs. The stones of the circle opposite were ghoulish, hump-backed things that crouched and squatted in all kinds of fantastic attitudes and tried to read my thoughts. The shadows, too, that, swarming from the silent tarns and meadows, ascended with noiseless footsteps the rugged sides of the hill, and, taking cover of even the smallest obstacles, stalked me with unremitting persistency, were no mere common shadows, but intangible, pulpy things that breathed the spirit of the Great Unknown."

Yet nothing specified came to frighten me. The stillness was so emphatic that each time I moved, the creaking of my clothes and limbs created echoes. I yawned, and from on all sides of me came a dozen other yawns. I sighed, and the very earth beneath me swayed with exaggerated sympathy.

"The silence irritated me. I grew angry; I coughed, laughed, whistled; and from afar off, from the distant leas, and streams, and spinneys, came a repetition of the noises.

"Then the blackest of clouds creeping slowly over the moor crushed the sheen out of the valley and smothered everything in sable darkness. The silence of death supervened, and my anger turned to fear. Around me there was now—*NOTHING*—only a void. Black ether and space! Space! a sanctuary from fear, and yet composed of fear itself. It was the space, the nameless, bottomless *SOMETHING* spreading limitless all around me, that, filling me with vague apprehensions, confused me with its terrors. What was it? Whence came it? I threw out my arms and Something, Something[228] which I intuitively knew to be there, but which I cannot explain, receded. I drew them in again, and the same *SOMETHING* instantly oppressed me with its close—its very close proximity.

"I gasped for breath and tried to move my arms again—I could not. A sudden rigor held me spellbound, and fixed my eyes on the darkness directly ahead of me. Then, from somewhere in my rear, came a laugh—hoarse, malignant, and bestial, and I was conscious that the *SOMETHING* had materialised and was creeping stealthily towards me. Nearer, nearer and nearer it came, and all the time I wondered what, *WHAT* in the name of God it was like! My anticipations became unbearable, the pulsations of my heart and the feverish throbbing of my temples warning me that, if the climax were postponed much longer, I should either die where I sat, or go mad. That I did neither, was due to a divine inspiration which made me suddenly think of a device that I had once seen on a Druidical stone in Brittany—the sun, a hand with the index and little fingers pointing downwards, and a sprig of mistletoe. The instant I saw them in my mind's eye, the cords that held me paralytic slackened.

"I sprang up, and there, within a yard of where I had sat, was a figure—the luminous nude figure of a creature, half man and half ape. Standing some six feet high, it had a clumsy, thick-set body, covered in places with coarse, bristly hair, arms of abnormal length and girth, legs swelling with huge muscles and much bowed, and a very large and long dark head. The face was [229] *DREADFUL*!—it was the face of something long since dead; and out of the mass of peeling, yellow skin and mouldering tissues gleamed two lurid and wholly malevolent eyes. Our glances met, and, as they did so, a smile of hellish glee suffused its countenance. Then, crouching down in cat-like fashion on its disgusting hands, it made ready to spring. Again the device of the sun and mistletoe arose before me. My fingers instinctively closed on my pocket flashlight. I pressed the button and, as the brilliant, white ray shot forth, the satanical object before me *VANISHED*. Then I turned tail, and never ceased running till I had arrived at the spot on the high-road where Krantz's motor awaited me.

.....

"After breakfast next morning, Krantz listened to my account of the midnight adventure in respectful silence.

""Then!" he said, when I had finished, 'you attribute the hauntings in the valley to the excavations of the geologist Leblanc and his party, at the cromlech six weeks ago?'

""Entirely,' I replied.

""And you think, if Leblanc and Cie were persuaded to restore and re-inter the remains they found and carted away, that the disturbances would cease?'

""I am sure of it!' I said.

""Then,' Krantz exclaimed, banging his clenched fist on the table, 'I will approach them on the subject at once!'

"He did so, and, after much correspondence, eventually received per goods train, a Tate's[230] sugar cube-box, containing a number of bones of the missing link pattern, which he at once had taken to the Druids' circle. As soon as they were buried and the marks of the recent excavations obliterated, the hauntings in the houses ceased."

Boggle Chairs

"Killington Grange," near Northampton, was once haunted, so my friend Mr Pope informs me, by a chair, and the following is Mr Pope's own experience of the hauntings, as nearly as possible as he related it to me:—

Some years ago, shortly before Christmas, I received an invitation from my old friend, William Achrow.

"Killington Grange,
'Northampton.

"Dear Pope' (he wrote)—'My wife and I are entertaining a few guests here this Christmas, and are most anxious to include you among them.

"When I tell you that Sir Charles and Lady Kirlby are coming, and that we can offer you something startling in the way of a ghost, you will, I know, need no further inducement to join our party.—Yours, etc.,

"W. Achrow.'

Achrow was a cunning fellow; he knew I would go a thousand miles to meet the Kirlbys, who had been my greatest friends in Ireland, and that ghosts invariably drew me like magnets. At that time I was a bachelor; I had no one to think about but myself, and as I felt pretty sure of a fresh theatrical engagement in the early spring, I was happily careless [231] with regard to expenditure—and to people of limited incomes like myself, staying in country houses means expenditure, a great deal more expenditure than a week or so at an ordinary hotel.

However, as I have observed, I felt pretty secure just then; I could afford a couple of 'fivers,' and would gladly get rid of them to see once more my dear old friends, Sir Charles and Lady K——. Accordingly, I accepted Achrow's invitation, and the afternoon of December 23rd saw me snugly ensconced in a first-class compartment *en route* for Castle Street, Northampton. Now, although I am, not unnaturally, perhaps, prejudiced in favour of Ireland and everything that is Irish, I must say I do not think the Emerald Isle shows her best in winter, when the banks of fair Killarney are shorn of their vivid colouring, and the whole country from north to south, and east to west, is carpeted with mud. No, the palm of wintry beauty must assuredly be given to the English Midlands—the Midlands with their stolid and richly variegated woodlands, and their pretty undulating meadows, clad in fleecy garments of the purest, softest, and most glittering snow. It was a typical Midland Christmas when I got to Northampton and took my place in the luxurious closed carriage Achrow had sent to meet me.

Killington Grange lies at the extremity of the village. It stands in its own grounds of some hundred or so acres, and is approached by a long avenue that winds its way from the lodge gates through endless rows of giant oaks and elms, and slender, silver birches. On either side, to[232] the rear of the trees, lay broad stretches of undulating pasture land, that in one place terminated in the banks of a large lake, now glittering with ice and wrapped in the silence of death.

The crunching of the carriage wheels on gravel, the termination of the trees, and a great blaze of light announced the close proximity of the house, and in a few seconds I was standing on the threshold of an imposing entrance.

A footman took my valise, and before I had crossed the spacious hall, I was met by my host and kind old friends, whose combined and hearty greetings were a happy forecast of what was to come. Indeed, at a merrier dinner party I have never sat down, though in God's truth I have dined in all kinds of places, and with all sorts of people: with Princesses of the Royal blood, aflame with all the hauteur of their race; with earls and counts; with blood-thirsty anarchists; with bishops and Salvationists, miners and policemen, Dagos and Indians (Red and Brown); with Japs, Russians, and Poles; and, in short, with the *élite* and the rag-tag and bobtail of all climes. But, as I have already said, I had seldom if ever enjoyed a dinner as I enjoyed this one.

Possibly the reason was not far to find—there was little or no formality; we were all old friends; we had one cause in common—love of Ireland; we hadn't met for years, and we knew not if we should ever meet again, for our paths in life were not likely to converge.

But Christmas is no season for prigs and dullards, and, possibly, this rare enjoyment was, in no small[233] measure, due to the delightful snugness and, at the same time, artistic nature of our surroundings, and to the excellence, the surpassing excellence of the vintage, which made our hearts mellow and our tongues loose.

Long did our host, Sir Charles, and I sit over the dessert table, after the ladies had left us, filling and refilling our glasses; and it was close on ten before we repaired to the drawing-room.

"Lady Kirlby,' I said, seating myself next her on a divan, 'I want to hear about the ghost. Up to the present I confess I have been so taken up with more material and, may I add'—casting a well-measured glance of admiration at her beautifully moulded features and lovely eyes—lovely, in spite of the cruel hand of time which had streaked her chestnut hair with grey—'infinitely more pleasing subjects, that I have not even thought about the superphysical. William,

however, informs me that there is a ghost here—he has, of course, told you.'

"But at this very psychological moment Mrs Achrow interrupted: 'Now, no secrets, you two,' she said laughingly, leaning over the back of the divan and tapping Lady Kirlby playfully on the arm. 'There must be no mention of ghosts till it is close on bedtime, and the lights are low.'

"Lady Kirlby gave me a pitying look, but it was of no avail; the word of our hostess was paramount, and I did not learn what was in store for me until it was too late to retreat. At half-past eleven William Achrow turned out the gas, and when we were all seated round the fire, he suggested[234] we should each relate in turn, the most thrilling ghost tale we had ever heard. The idea, being approved of generally, was carried out, and when we had been thrilled, as assuredly we had never been thrilled before, William coolly proclaimed that he had put me in the haunted room.

"'I am sure,' he said, amid a roar of the most unfeeling laughter, in which all but the tender-hearted Lady Kirlby joined, 'that your nerves are now in the most suitable state for psychical investigation, and that it won't be your fault if you don't see the ghost. And a very horrible one it is, at least so I am told, though I cannot say I have ever seen it myself. No! I won't tell you anything about it now—I want to hear your version of it first.'

"With a few more delicate insinuations, made, as he candidly confessed, in the fervent hope of frightening me still more, on the stroke of midnight my friend conducted me to my quarters. 'You will have it all to yourself,' he said, as we traversed a tremendously long and gloomy corridor that connected the two wings of the house, 'for all the rooms on this side are at present unoccupied, and those immediately next to yours haven't been slept in for years—there is something about them that doesn't appeal to my guests. What it is I can't say—I leave that to you. Here we are!' and, as he spoke, he threw open a door. A current of icy cold air slammed it to and blew out my light, and as I groped for the door-handle, I heard my host's footsteps retreating hurriedly down the corridor, whilst he wished me a rather nervous good-night.

[235] "Relighting my candle and shutting the window—Achrow is one of those open-air fiends who never had a bronchial cold in his life, and expects everyone else to be equally immune—I found myself in a room that was well calculated to strike even the most hardened ghost-hunter with awe.

"It was coffin-shaped, large, narrow, and lofty; and floor, panelling, and furniture were of the blackest oak.

"The bedstead, a four-poster of the most funereal type, stood near the fireplace, from which a couple of thick pine logs sent out a ruddy glare; and directly opposite the foot of the bed, with its back to the wall, stood an ebony chair, which, although in a position that should have necessitated its receiving a generous share of the fire's rays, was nevertheless shrouded in such darkness that I could only discern its front legs—a phenomenon that did not strike me as being peculiar till afterwards.

"Between the chair and the ingle, was a bay window overlooking one angle of the lawn, a side path connecting the back premises of the house with the drive, and a dense growth of evergreens, poplars, limes, and copper beeches, the branches of which were now weighed down beneath layer upon layer of snow.

"The room, as I have stated, was long, but I did not realise how long until I was in the act of getting into bed, when my eyes struggled in vain to reach the remote corners of the chamber and the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling, which were fast presenting the startling appearance [236] of being overhung with an impenetrable pall, such a pall as forms the gloomy coverlet of a hearse; the similarity being increased by waving plume-like shadows that suddenly appeared—from God knows where!—on the floor and wall.

"That the room was genuinely haunted I had not now the slightest doubt, for the atmosphere was charged to the very utmost with superphysical impressions—the impressions of a monstrous hearse, with all the sickly paraphernalia of black flowing drapery and scented pine wood.

"I was annoyed with William Achrow. I had wanted to see him; I had wanted to meet the Kirlbys; but a ghost—no! Honestly, candidly—no! I had not slept well for nights, and after the good things I had eaten at dinner and that excellent vintage, I had been looking forward to a sound, an unusually sound sleep. Now, however, my hopes were dashed on the head—the room was haunted—haunted by something gloomily, damnably evil, evil with an evilness that could only have originated in hell. Such were my impressions when I got into bed. Contrary to my expectations, I soon fell asleep. I was awakened by a creak, the loud but unmistakable creak of a chair. Now, the creaking of furniture is no uncommon thing. There are few of us who have not at some time or other heard an empty chair creak, and attributed that creaking either to expansion of the wood through heat, or to some other equally physical cause. But are we always right? May not that creaking be sometimes due to an invisible presence in the chair? Why not?[237] The laws that govern the superphysical are not known to us at present. We only know from our own experiences and from the compiled

testimony of various reputable Research Societies that there is a superphysical, and that the superphysical is a fact which is acknowledged by several of the greatest scientists of the day.

"But to continue. The creaking of a chair roused me from my sleep. I sat up in bed, and as my eyes wandered involuntarily to the ebony chair to which I have already alluded, I again heard the creaking.

"My sense of hearing now became painfully acute, and, impelled by a fascination I could not resist, I held my breath and listened. As I did so, I distinctly heard the sound of stealthy respiration. Either the chair or something in it was breathing, breathing with a subtle gentleness.

"The fire had now burned low; only a glimmer, the very faintest perceptible glimmer, came from the logs; hence I had to depend for my vision on the soft white glow that stole in through the trellised window-panes.

"The chair creaked again, and at the back of it, and at a distance of about four feet from the ground, I encountered the steady glare of two long, pale, and wholly evil eyes, that regarded me with a malevolency that held me spellbound; my terror being augmented by my failure to detect any other features saving the eyes, and only a vague Something which I took for a body.

"I remained in a sitting posture for many minutes without being able to remove my gaze, and when I[238] did look away, I instinctively felt that the eyes were still regarding me, and that the Something, of which the eyes were a part, was waiting for an opportunity to creep from its hiding-place and pounce upon me.

"This is, I think, what would have happened had it not been for the very opportune arrival of the Killington Waits, who, bursting out with a terrific and discordant version of 'The Mistletoe Bough,' which, by the way, is somewhat inexplicably regarded as appropriate to the festive season, effectually broke the superphysical spell, and when I looked again at the chair, the eyes had gone.

"Feeling quite secure now, I lay down, and, in spite of the many interruptions, managed to secure a tolerably good night's sleep.

"At breakfast everyone was most anxious to know if I had seen the ghost, but I held my tongue. The spirit of adventure had been rekindled in me, my sporting instinct had returned, and I was ready and eager to see the phenomena again; but until I had done so, and had put it to one or two tests, I decided to say nothing about it.

"The day passed pleasantly—how could it be otherwise in William Achrow's admirably appointed household?—and the night found me once again alone in my sepulchral bed-chamber.

"This time I did not get into bed, but took my seat in an easy-chair by the fire (which I took care was well replenished with fuel), my face turned in the direction of the spot where the eyes had appeared. The weather was inclined to be boisterous, [239] and frequent gusts of wind, rumbling and moaning through the long and gloomy aisle of the avenue, plundered the trees of the loose-hanging snow and hurled it in fleecy clouds against the walls and windows.

"I had been sitting there about an hour when I suddenly felt I was no longer alone; a peculiarly cold tremor, that was not, I feel sure, due to any actual fall in the temperature of the room, ran through me, and my teeth chattered. As on the previous occasion, however, my senses were abnormally alive, and as I watched—instinct guiding my eyes to the ebony chair—I heard a creak, and the sound of Something breathing. The antagonistic Presence was once again there. I essayed to speak, to repeat the form of address I had constantly rehearsed, to say and do something that would tempt the unknown into some form of communication. I could do nothing. I was lip-bound, powerless to move; and then from out of the superphysical darkness there gleamed the eyes, lidless, lurid, bestial. A shape was there, too: a shape which, although still vague, dreadfully so, was nevertheless more pronounced than on the former occasion, and I felt that it only needed time, time and an enforced, an involuntary amount of scrutiny on my part, to see that shape materialise into something satanical and definite.

"I waited—I was obliged to wait—when, even as before—Heaven be praised!—the arrival of the gallant waits, (I say, gallant, for the night had fast become a white inferno) loosened my fetters, and as I sprang towards the chair, the eyes vanished.

[240] "I then got into bed and slept heavily till the morning.

"To their great disappointment, the clamorous breakfasters learned nothing—I kept the adventure rigidly to myself, and that night, Christmas night, found me, for the third time, listening for the sounds from the mysterious, the hideously,

hellishly mysterious, high-backed, ebony chair.

"There had been a severe storm during the day, and the wind had howled with cyclonic force around the house; but there was silence now, an almost preternatural silence; and the lawn, lavishly bestrewn with huge heaps of driven snow, and broken, twisted branches, presented the appearance of a titanic battlefield. In marked contrast to the disturbed condition of the ground, the sky was singularly serene, and broad beams of phosphorescent light poured in through the diamond window-panes on to the bed, in which I was sitting, bolt upright.

"One o'clock struck, and ere the hollow-sounding vibrations had ceased, the vague form once again appeared behind the chair, and the malignant, evil eyes met mine in a diabolical stare; whilst, as before, on trying to speak or move, I found myself tongue-tied and paralysed. As the moments slowly glided away, the shape of the Thing became more and more distinct; a dark and sexless face appeared, surmounted with a straggling mass of black hair, the ends of which melted away into mist. I saw no trunk, but I descried two long and bony arms, ebony as the chair, with crooked, spidery, misty fingers. As I watched its development [241] with increasing horror, hoping and praying for the arrival of the never-again-to-be-despised waits, I suddenly realised with a fresh grip of terror that the chair had moved out of the corner, and that the Thing behind it was slowly creeping towards me.

"As it approached, the outlines of its face and limbs became clearer. I knew that it was something repulsively, diabolically grotesque, but whether the phantasm of man, or woman, or hellish elemental, I couldn't for the life of me say; and this uncertainty, making my fear all the more poignant, added to my already sublime sufferings, those of the damned.

"It passed the chair on which my dress-shirt flashed whiter than the snow in the moonlight; it passed the tomb-like structure constituting the foot-board of the bed; and as in my frantic madness I strained and strained at the cruel cords that held me paralytic, it crept on to the counterpane and wriggled noiselessly towards me.

"Even then, though its long, pale eyes were close to mine, and the ends of its tangled hair curled around me, and its icy corpse-tainted breath scoured my cheeks, even then—I could not see its body nor give it a name.

"Clawing at my throat with its sable fingers, it thrust me backwards, and I sank gasping, retching, choking on to the pillow, where I underwent all the excruciating torments of strangulation; strangulation by something tangible, yet intangible, something that could create sensation without being itself sensitive; something detestably, abominably [242] wicked and wholly hostile, madly hostile in its attitude towards mankind.

"What I suffered is indescribable, and it was to me interminable. Days, months, years, seemed to pass, and I was still being suffocated, still feeling the inexorable crunch of those fingers, still peering into the livid depths of those gloating, fiendish eyes. And then—then, as I was on the eve of abandoning all hope, a thousand and one tumultuous noises buzzed in my ears, my eyes swam blood, and I lost consciousness. When I recovered, the dawn was breaking and all evidences of the superphysical had disappeared.

"I did not tell Achrow what I had experienced, but expressed, instead, the greatest astonishment that anyone should have thought the room was haunted. 'Haunted indeed!' I said. 'Nonsense! If anything haunts it, it is the ghost of some philanthropist, for I never slept sounder in my life. I am, as you know, William, extremely sensitive to the superphysical, but in this instance, I can assure you, I was disappointed, greatly disappointed, so much so that I am going home at once; it would be mere waste of my valuable time to stay any longer in the vain hope of investigating, when there is *NOTHING* to investigate. How came you to get hold of such a crazy idea?'

"'Well,' William replied, a puzzled expression on his face, 'you noticed an ebony chair in the room?'

"I nodded.

"'I bought it in Bruges, and there are two stories current in connection with it. The one is to the [243] effect that a very wicked monk, named Gaboni, died in it (and, indeed, the man who sold me the chair was actually afraid to keep it any longer in his house, as he assured me Gaboni's spirit had amalgamated with the wood); and the other story, which I learned from a different source, namely, from someone who, on finding out where I bought the chair, told me he knew the whole history of it, is to the effect that it was of comparatively modern make, and had been designed by W——, the famous nineteenth-century Belgian painter, who specialised, as you may know, in the most weird and fantastic subjects. W—— kept the chair in his studio, and my informant half laughingly, half seriously remarked that no doubt the chair was thoroughly saturated with the wave-thoughts from W——'s luridly fertile brain. Of course, I do not know which story is true, or if, indeed, either story is true, but the fact remains that, up to now, everyone who has slept in the room with that chair has complained of having had the most unpleasant sensations. I own that after all that was told me, I was

afraid to experiment with it myself, but after your experience, or rather lack of experience, I shall not hesitate to have it in my own bedroom. Both my wife and I have always admired it—it is such a uniquely beautiful piece of furniture.'

"Of course I agreed with my friend, and, after congratulating him most effusively on his good luck in having been able to secure so unique a treasure, I again thanked him for his hospitality and bade him good-bye."

[244]

INDEX

- Adventure in Chicago, [143-145](#).
 - of Hans and Carl with a were-wolf, [121-129](#).
 - with pixies near Bray, [71](#).
- Æneas, story of, [69-70](#).
- All-Hallows E'en, [158-159](#).
- *Anglo-Saxon Church, The*, [158](#).
- Arundels, White Owl of the, [137](#), [139](#), [151](#).
- Ash trees, [74-75](#).
- Aspens, [73](#).
- Assam, haunted tree in, [64-67](#).
- Assiut, [42](#).
- Attendant spirits, [142-145](#).
- Automatic writing, [190](#).
- Baldearg, the, [178](#).
- Banshee, the, [137](#), [147-149](#).
- Barrowvians, [78](#), [220-230](#).
- Bay of the Departed, [205](#).
- Bears, phantasms of, [79](#).
- Birthmarks, [178](#).
- Bloody Hand of Ulster, [176](#).
- Blue hand, phantasm of a, [79](#).
- Boggle chairs, [230-243](#).
- *Book of Days*, [90](#).
- Brampton, haunted ash tree of, [74](#).
- *British Goblins*, Book of, [91](#), [151](#).
- Buddhas, [210-220](#).
- Candles, warnings by, [132](#).
- Castle on Dinas, [78](#).
- Cats, phantasms of, [97-108](#).
- Charley, T., [134](#).
- Charms and checks against ghosts, [192-197](#).
- Childermass Day, [160](#).
- Ching Kang and the Fox-woman, story of, [129-131](#).
- Clairvoyance, [189](#).
- Clanogrians, [37](#), [137](#).
- Complex hauntings and occult bestialities, [80](#).
- Complex hauntings by phantasms of one person, [81](#).
- Corpse-candles, [134-137](#).
- Count Daniel O'Donnell, [167](#).
- Crystal-gazing, [166-167](#).
- D., Lady, [7](#).
- Dalmatian dog, phantasm of, [83](#).
- Davis, Rev. Mr., [135](#).
- De B., Mrs., [6](#).
- Dean Combe Ghost, [89](#).
- Death warnings, [132-140](#).

- Death-Watch, [138](#).
 - Demon of Stockwell, [48](#).
 - of Tedworth, [48](#).
 - Dogs, spirits of, [79](#), [81](#), [83-91](#).
 - Dowsers, [76](#).
 - Drummer of the Airlies, [137-150](#).
 - Dyer's *Ghost World*, [89](#).
-
- Earl of Lincoln and the ash tree, [75](#).
 - Elementals, [5](#).
 - Ellyllon, the, [151](#).
 - English family ghosts, [150](#).
 - Ennemoser, works by Jos., [110](#).
 - Epworth, hauntings at, [48](#).
 - Evil eye, the, [168-170](#).
 - Exorcism, [195-196](#).
 - Eye, phantasm of, [82](#).
-
- [245] Fire-coffins, [138](#).
 - Forbes du Barry, Mrs, [86](#).
 - Fortune-telling, [161](#).
 - Fox-women, [119-131](#).
 - *Frazer's Journal*, [135](#).
-
- Gabriel's hounds, [91](#).
 - Ghost of Black Lion Lane, [48](#).
 - Gluttony, [29](#).
 - Grandfather clocks, hauntings by, [35](#).
 - Gwyllgi, the, [91](#).
-
- Hacon, Rev. Henry, [42](#).
 - Hand of Glory, [176](#).
 - Hands, [162-164](#).
 - Hartz mountains, vampirism in the, [114-115](#).
 - Haunted trees, [60-70](#).
 - in Caucasus, [68](#).
 - in Slavonic mythology, [68](#).
 - seas, [198-206](#).
 - Hauntings on Wicklow nets, [83-85](#).
 - Headless dogs, [85](#), [87-88](#).
 - History of magic, [112](#).
 - Horses, phantasms of, [79](#), [108](#).
 - Howard, phantasm of Lady, [89](#).
 - Hunt, works of Mr, [205-206](#).
 - Hydromancy, [165](#).
-
- Idiots and vampirism, [113-114](#).
 - Intuition, [187-188](#).
-
- Land's End, [6](#).
 - Looking-glasses, [157](#).
 - Luck of Edenhall, [168](#).
 - Lyons family, [168](#).
-
- Mandrake, the, [76](#).
 - Manias, [28-34](#).
 - for buttons, [38](#).
 - of manual workers, [30](#).
 - of women for dogs, [33](#).
 - Mauthe dog, the, [90](#).

- Mermaids, [141](#).
- Midsummer eve, [161](#).
- Mines, hauntings of, [58](#).
- Monomaniac musician, [33](#).
- Mummy of Met-Om-Karema, haunted, [42-46](#).

- Nature's devil signals, [179](#).
- New year's eve, [160](#), [166](#).
- *News from the Invisible World*, [134](#).
- North, recitations of Miss Lilian, [86](#).
- Numbers, climacteric, [177](#).

- Oak chests, haunted, [38](#).
- Obsession and possession, [28](#).
- Occult hooligans, [47-55](#).
- Occult in shadows, [21](#).
- Owls, [139](#).

- Palm tree, [77](#).
- Palmistry, [162](#).
- Paul, vampirism of Arnauld, [110](#).
- Phantasms of living, [184-186](#).
 - of pigs, [108](#).
 - of sailors, [81](#).
 - of wild animals, [108](#).
- Phantom rowers, [150](#).
 - ships, [198-201](#).
 - white hares, [151](#).
 - world, [110](#).

- Pixies, [70](#).
- Plutarch's account of satyrs, [67](#).
- Poltergeists, [47-50](#).
- and Professor Schuppart, [48-50](#).
- in Norwood, [50](#).
- Polydorus, story of, [70](#).
- Poor in Hyde Park, [25](#).
- Pre-existence, [179-184](#).
- Premature burial, [2-18](#).
- Primitive trees, visions of, [56-57](#).
- Projection, [184-186](#).
- Psychic days, [158](#).
 - faculty, [186](#).
- Pyromancy, [165](#).

- "Radiant Boy of Corby," the, [151](#).
- [246] Ravens, [140](#).
- River ghosts, [206-207](#).
- Romances of West of England, [205-206](#).

- St Blaise's Day, [160](#).
- St Catherine's Day, [161](#).
- St Lawrence's Day, [161](#).
- St Mark's Day, [161](#).
- St Martin's Day, [160](#).
- Sargasso Sea, [201-205](#).
- Satyrs and fawns, [67](#).
- Scottish ghosts, [149-150](#).
- Séances, [191-192](#).
- Second sight, [187](#).
- Seventh son, the, [177](#).

- Shadow on the Downs, the, [22-23](#).
 - in Hyde Park, [26](#).
 - of a tree, [24](#).
- Shuck, the, [90](#).
- Sinclair, Miss, [63](#).
- Sirens, [207-209](#).
- Soames, work of Mr, [158](#).
- South's tale of a vampire, Mrs, [116-121](#).
- Spells, [159-161](#).
- Spilling salt, [157](#).
- Stuker, the, [90](#).
- Suggestion, [186](#).
- Superstitions and fortunes, [153](#).
- Sycamore, the, [77](#).
- Sylvan horrors, [56-79](#).
- Table-turning, [191-192](#).
- Talismans and amulets, [167](#).
- Telepathy, [186](#).
- Thirteen at table, [153-157](#).
- Timbs, John, [74](#), [138](#), [161](#).
- "Trash," [90](#).
- Tree of life, the, [77](#).
- Trees, haunted, [60-70](#).
- Tristram and Yseult, legend of, [69](#).
- "Unknown depths," the, [20](#).
- Vampires, [110-121](#).
- Wandering Jew, the, [141-142](#).
- Welsh ghosts, [151](#).
- Were-wolves, [121-129](#).
- Wirt Sikes, work by, [91](#), [151](#).
- Witches, [171-175](#).
- Worthing, [22](#), [86-88](#).
- X., phantasm of murderer, [91-97](#).
- "Yellow Boy," the, [151](#).

Transcriber's Note:

The following corrections were made:

- [p. 23](#): extra comma removed (after "time" in "but the next time I visited the spot")
- [p. 32](#): sensuality to sensuality (sensuality sometimes venial)
- [p. 34](#): thought germ to thought-germ to match other instances (how extraordinary the thought-germ)
- [p. 34](#): later-day to latter-day (even latter-day)
- [p. 67](#): extra comma removed (after "degree" in "in the slightest degree what the monstrosity meant")
- [p. 88](#): Du to du to match other instances (Mrs du Barry)
- [p. 90](#): Haviland to Harland (Harland and Wilkinson)
- [p. 91](#): Wyhr to Wybr (Cwn y Wybr), to match cited source
- [p. 110](#): missing period added (Jos. Ennemoser)
- pp. [110](#), [112](#), and [244](#) (Index): Ennemoses to Ennemoser
- [p. 116](#): pretentions to pretensions (hypocritical pretensions)
- [p. 129](#): Thanking to Thinking (Thinking that the animal was ill)
- [p. 140](#): syrens to sirens (nymphs, sirens, and pixies)
- [p. 154](#): ont he to on the (on the couch)
- [p. 176](#): he to the (badge of the O'Neills)

- [p. 222](#): added missing single close quote (Here they are!')
- [p. 224](#): double close quote to single close quote (one of the houses.')
- [p. 225](#): had to has ('Someone has been excavating, and quite recently!')
- [p. 245](#): missing periods added after several Index entries (Gluttony, 29.; Haunted Trees ... in Caucasus, 68.)

On [page 110](#), the author refers to Jos. Ennemoser as the author of *The Phantom World*. In fact, the cited passage comes from a work by Augustine Calmet, which was translated into English by William Howitt as *The Phantom World*; Ennemoser quotes from it in his book *The History of Magic*. This error has not been corrected.

Irregularities in hyphenation and capitalization have not been corrected. Antiquated or misspelled place names have been left as in the original.