

GHOSTS

BY
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HOSTS! How wide a field of speculation does the subject unfold! Personally, I enter on tip-toe on a theme so fraught with weird possibilities. Not so unjust to others as to disbelieve all that I cannot understand, I am

still far from accepting the manifestations they professedly realise, yet cannot explain away by any accompanying motive, good, bad, or indifferent. I have been present, amongst spiritualists at the raising of ghosts, which consisted, in most cases of the so-called reappearance of objectless ne'er-do-wells—Hindoos who have spoken broken English with an Irish accent, and French Marquesses and German Barons with the dialect of the Seven Dials. Some, again, had they been in the flesh, would, in their disregard for the period of their costumes, have been worthy the mummies of a country fair. When a mediæval magnate has on Blucher boots, which couldn't well have been worn before Waterloo, one may be prepared, without undue surprise, to see Helen of Troy in a poke bonnet or Psyche with a sunshade.

Quoting still from personal experience, I may mention a haunted studio I once had, in which the previous occupier, who had been a great friend of mine, and who



"IN THE CHURCHYARD."

had died there suddenly of apoplexy, several times appeared to others—people who knew nothing of him, or the circumstances connected with his death, but who, in each case, described his peculiarities to a nicety. When in that studio alone at midnight I confess to having once been to some extent scared by unearthly noises, which seemed to come from the atmosphere round about me. I felt I was on the eve of a spirit manifestation. A bottle of sherry and a glass were at hand—which, by the way, I had not so far touched—my courage was failing me, I would take just one glass; but, no, it should never be said that I, the victim of ghost-fright, had found it necessary to— At that moment came a sound as of a stifled groan from the other end of the studio. I could stand it no longer. I poured out a bumper, and drank it to the dregs. This was immediately followed by a chuckle—a peculiar and well-remembered chuckle—in the mid-air. It was unmistakably the voice of my dead friend. He had been one too many for me. I had invested in that libel on a brave nation—"Dutch courage"—in spite of myself.

Still touching on points which apply to myself, I may say that twice in my life has my own ghost been met and interviewed, once in England and subsequently in Spain, as the following extract from a letter from my old friend Edmund O'Donovan, the late well-known special of *The Daily News*, will testify:—

"You remember Mrs. Temple and her

two daughters here in San Sebastian. Well, a few nights since the eldest dreamt that you were picked off while plying your pencil for *The Illustrated London News*, and that your ghost would appear to her. . . . Three gentle knocks announced your coming. She hastened to her mother and sister, who were amused at her folly, till those three gentle knocks were repeated. Then, in great trepidation, the folding doors leading to the landing were thrown open, and all three declare they saw, standing before them, the vapoury image of yourself, wearing your Boina in approved Spanish fashion, as you wore it many a time and oft at the front. Creepy, isn't it?"



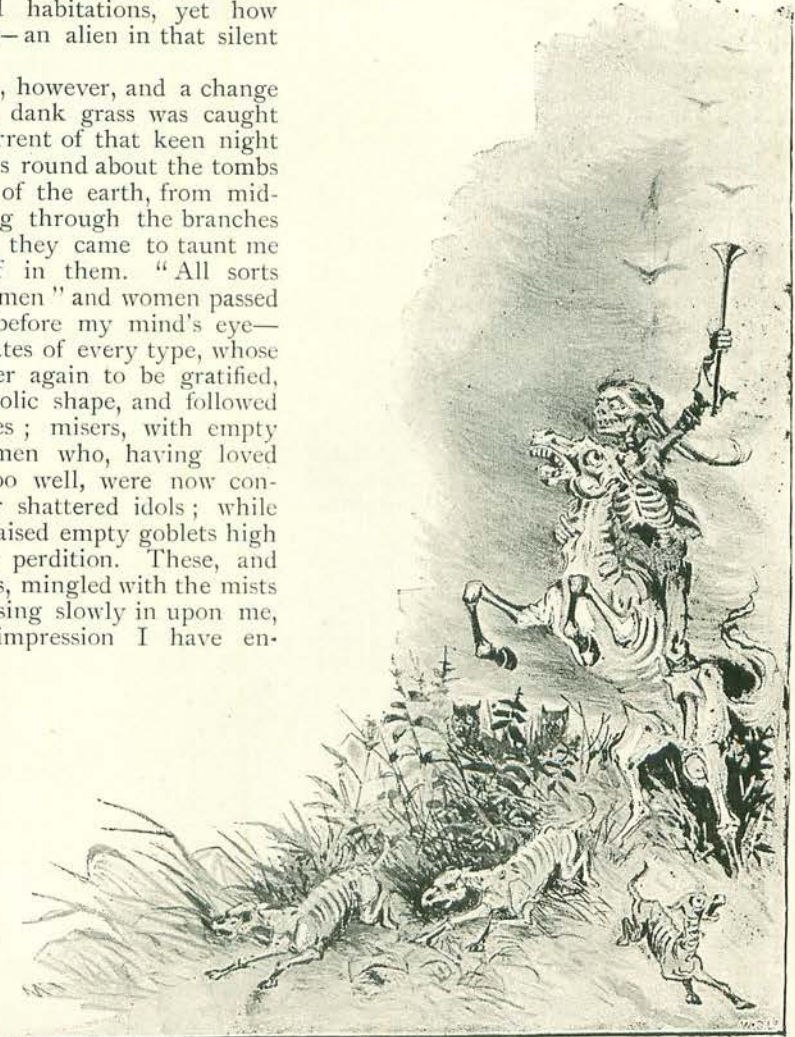
It seems to me that the Old World family ghost is a sort of hall-mark of respectability. It's the next best thing to having come over with the Conqueror. There could be no ghosts without ancestors. By the way, talking of ancestors, what a thrilling topic tombstones might be made! One evening late last September I was wandering alone round about the tombs in a country churchyard not ten miles from town. The shadowy twilight was deepening into night, a funeral yew casting its broad, black, outstretched limbs athwart the flat-topped tombs, as if to protect their mouldering tenants from the chill breezes which now and again came sighing and sobbing through its interlacing branches. They were a goodly company around me, judging from these monumental habitations, yet how utterly alone I felt—an alien in that silent Campo Santa.

A moment later, however, and a change came. The long, dank grass was caught in the eddying current of that keen night air, and the shadows round about the tombs took shape. Out of the earth, from mid-air, and struggling through the branches of that giant yew, they came to taunt me with my disbelief in them. "All sorts and conditions of men" and women passed in silent review before my mind's eye—gamblers; profligates of every type, whose evil passions, never again to be gratified, had assumed symbolic shape, and followed them to the spheres; misers, with empty money-bags; women who, having loved wisely but not too well, were now confronted with their shattered idols; while bibulous sprites raised empty goblets high in air to pledge perdition. These, and many more besides, mingled with the mists of night, now closing slowly in upon me, conveying the impression I have endeavoured to give in my sketch, and which, as far as the lingering light would admit of, I drew in that same churchyard.

A few days later—still goblin-hunting—I ran to earth a veritable demon huntsman, the legend of whose wild quest is said

to be the basis from which "The Isle of Dogs" and "Barking" (two neighbouring London suburbs) take their names.

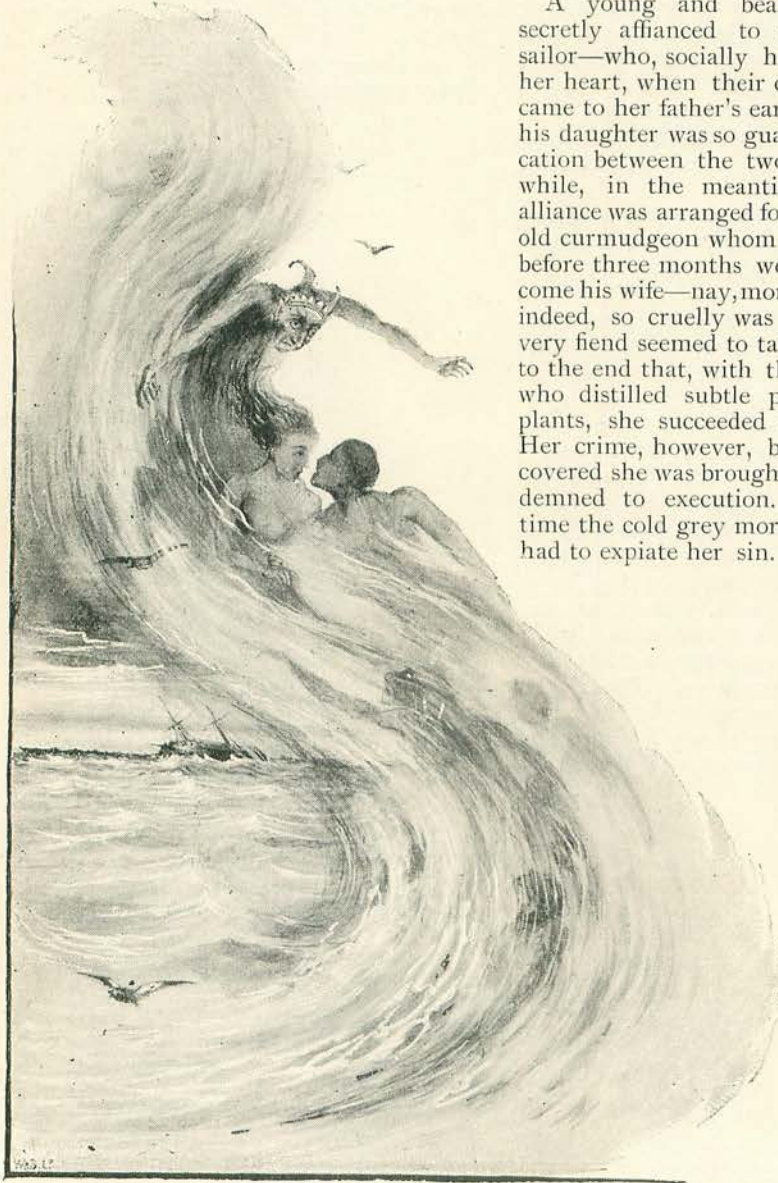
In old times the forest of Hainault, overrunning this part of Essex, lost itself in a swamp of Thames mud. The story is of a handsome young huntsman and his bride, who elected to spend their wedding-day boar hunting. Foremost in the chase, this Di Vernon of the period, forgetful in her excitement of impending pitfalls, dashed wildly on till she found herself beyond reclaim sinking, slowly but surely, in the quagmire from which now no escape was possible. Her lover—alas! too late to be of service—plunged gallantly into the slushy expanse, and was also lost in his effort



"THE SKELETON HORSEMAN."

to save his impetuous young bride. On this sad honeymoon is based the superstition that a skeleton horseman, on the boniest of steeds, is to be seen o' nights in this locality ; in fact, that—

"A hideous huntsman's seen to rise,
With a lurid glare in his sunken eyes ;
Whose bony fingers point the track,
Of a phantom prey to a skeleton pack,
Whose frantic courser's trembling bones
Play a rattling theme to the hunter's groans ;
As he comes and goes in the fitful light,
Of the clouded moon on a summer's night.



"IN THE MIDST A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN."

Then, a furious blast from his ghostly horn
Is over the forest of Hainault borne,
And the wild refrain of the mourner's song
Is heard by the boatmen all night long,
That demon plaint on the still night air,
With never an answering echo there."

Of the earth earthy as this story of the then dismal swamp of Hainault is, it may be well to find in a storm-wave a fresh element for our next subject. Up to a certain point historical, its termination was also vouched for at the time by all the survivors of the ill-fated vessel it concerns.

A young and beautiful woman was secretly affianced to a comely youth—a sailor—who, socially her inferior, had won her heart, when their clandestine meetings came to her father's ears. Then it was that his daughter was so guarded that communication between the two became impossible, while, in the meantime, a matrimonial alliance was arranged for her with a wealthy old curmudgeon whom she detested. Thus, before three months were over she had become his wife—nay, more—his veriest slave ; indeed, so cruelly was she ill-used that a very fiend seemed to take possession of her, to the end that, with the aid of an old hag who distilled subtle poisons from certain plants, she succeeded in murdering him. Her crime, however, being ultimately discovered she was brought to justice and condemned to execution. In due course of time the cold grey morning came when she had to expiate her sin. She had but one

last request to make, and this was granted—it was that her sailor lover might accompany her to the scaffold. This sad journey accomplished, at a sign from the executioner the two embraced "for the last time," when they were heard to make a half-whispered compact which ended in mutual assurances, in a louder key. "You will," said the dying woman, whose smile was even now bewitching ;

"you promise me you will?" "I swear it," replied her heartbroken swain, who was now assisted down the scaffold steps, while the woman, apparently unconcerned, turned to meet her fate.

Three long years rolled on, and the next scene in this strange life-drama was that of a vessel helplessly, and almost hopelessly, floundering in the trough of a tempestuous sea, amongst the crew of which was the young sailor whom we last met at the "Gallows Tree." Every moment did the captain, as the storm increased in violence, expect his craft to be submerged. Yet the hurricane knew no abatement, wave after wave overlapping each other with fresh fury, till one huge billow, snapping the masts fore and aft like matchwood, and rebounding from the deck, shot upwards like a waterspout, till it seemed lost in the thunderclouds above. Now some hours later, when the gale had somewhat subsided, it was discovered that the young sailor had been spirited away, and, moreover, from that day to this, has never been heard of. "Washed overboard," you would naturally say, and so should I if I hadn't the testimony of the whole of that ship's crew to the effect that the devil himself rode the waves on that fearful occasion, surrounded by a posse of fiends who bore in their midst a beautiful woman, who, with the magnetism of love, drew her sailor sweetheart to her arms, whisking him

from the deck of that shattered vessel into the obscurity beyond. There is, I understand, a prosaic reading of this legend, from which the more poetic may have been taken, or *vice versa*.

However this may be, let us, without more ado, hurry off in a flight of fancy to Rosewarne Hall. What?—you never heard of it—never heard of the Ghost of Rosewarne? Then follow me closely, remembering at the same time that it is no business of ours how Ezekiel Grosse, the lawyer, became possessed of the fine



"THE MISER'S GHOST."

old estate of that name. He had at least secured it in its entirety, ghost and all, nor was it long before this family phantom (a hoary-headed and miserly Rosewarne), put in an appearance. It was in the drive, the third night after Ezekiel Grosse had come into possession, that he was first accosted. "Follow me," said the spectre, as he led the way to a lonely hollow in the adjacent wood, "Dig, and you will find," and he pointed to a huge moss-grown stone. "There will you see the accumulated hoard of Roger Rosewarne, the miser. I am he. In life I sent the poor and needy penniless from my door, and damned them for their impertinent supplications, for which I am doomed to experience the pangs of starvation throughout endless eternity, unless the hidden treasure be wisely dispensed!"

The next moment the bewildered lawyer found himself alone. It's needless to say that, before many days had passed, the whole of that buried wealth had been transferred by him to his own private coffers, and was soon being expended, regardless of the ghost's warning, in the wildest extravagance. Gallants more famed for their profanity than their wit, accompanied by powdered and painted beauties, now held high revel in those ancestral halls, more especially on one Christmas Eve, when, as the clock struck midnight, the lights grew dim and blue, and the miser's ghost, in a phosphorescence all its own, appeared slowly descending the broad oaken staircase, cursing, as it did so, the founder of the feast, who, squandering in debauchery his easily-acquired gold, condemned, by doing so, the perturbed soul of the Miser of Rosewarne to walk the earth to all eternity.

A certain clergyman, detained late one night at a friend's house, accepted, unhesitatingly, the offer of sleeping accommodation in the only disengaged room—the haunted chamber. Now, as the reverend gentleman made it a practice never to travel ever so short a distance without some abstruse theological work in his pocket for perusal at odd moments, it is not surprising that on this occasion he sat up till after the witching hour; indeed, it was nearly one o'clock a.m. when, in a complete but threadbare mediæval suit, the vapoury spirit of yet another miser—a skinflint ancestor of the clergyman's host—appeared before him, whom the ready-witted parson at once interviewed somewhat as follows:—

"Pardon me, sir, you are, doubtless, a resident in this neighbourhood?"

"I am!" replied the somewhat flabby phantom in sepulchral tones.

"Ah! just so. You *live*, if I may be allowed the expression, in this house; have done so, in fact, for some time past?"

"Three hundred years."

"Dear me! you don't say so?"

"I do."

"And have subscribed, naturally, to many local charities—eh?"

"Devil-a-bit," said the skinflint's ghost, clutching the bag of sovereigns he carried more closely to his bony sides. "Devil-a-bit, sir."

"Well, then," replied the cleric, "you'll pardon my saying so, I know, but don't you think it's about time you did?" and with this he politely presented a subscription list for the renovation of the parish church. "You will see," he went on, "I have here the names of some of the most influential——" He could proceed no further. The smell of sulphur was simply unbearable, and the miser's ghost was laid for ever. The room has since been converted into a nursery.

Immediately below the sketch which illustrates the preceding anecdote is to be found one of the late lamented Terese des Moulin, of whom our dear old friend Ingoldsby discourses so graphically in "The Black Mousquetaire;" how being haunted o' nights by the ghost of a beautiful nun of that name, whom he had deceived, his brother officers, fearing he would go mad, decided to disillusionise him by introducing into his room, at the hour when his victim was said to appear, none other than her twin sister "Agnes," who continued *also* as a nun, and, playing the part of a ghost, was at a given moment to be unmasked, so that, having been proved to be mortal, his hallucination might be explained away, as a practical joke. The opportunity, however, never came, for at one and the same moment the actual ghost of the injured one appeared, which was visible only to the Mousquetaire himself. She seated herself by the side of her living sister. Now, *two* sisters Terese were too much even for *that* devil-may-care officer. He raised himself in bed, glared at the double apparition, and shrieked, with a weird, almost diabolic halloo—

"Mon Dieu! V'là deux! By the Pope, there are *Two*!" whereupon he immediately collapsed, fell back, and—died.



As to the skeleton, my next sketch, well, the least said about him the soonest mended. He has not always led quite an exemplary life, hence it is that armour has been added, in expiation, to the weight he carries. He is one of the fine old crusted family brands, whose Sunday best suit of mail still hangs at the Hall, while his second quality, much battered, in which he did all his dirty work with the Saracens, is buried with him.

The following story of the Spectre Bridegroom is thrilling to a degree. Briefly, it is this:—Nancy Trenoweth, the heroine, was, as a matter of course, young and beautiful, and was, moreover, almost as good as she was attractive. No wonder, then, that young Frank Lenine should have fallen desperately in love with her. Their parents, however, being much averse to the prospective match, took every means in their power to frustrate their assignations; efforts which, for some time, it is needless to say, were unavailing. Before long, however, young Frank was more effectually disposed of, by being sent on a long voyage to the West Indies, which, it was hoped, might cure him of his love sickness. For three long years Nancy yearned in vain for tidings of young Lenine, till it came about that one night, in a heavy gale, a huge merchantman went to pieces on the rocky coast not far from where her parents' cottage was situated. Now, among those who perished was her sailor lover, homeward-bound to make her his bride.

The finding of the body amongst the drowned, however, was so carefully concealed from her that, even on the day of the funeral, she was unaware of it. What followed?

That night when locking up, as was her wont, she peered out of the cottage door into the darkness beyond, and there, to her amazement, she saw Frank, her long lost

marriage should have been solemnised—the ghost of her drowned love hurrying off with her to the spot which had that day closed over his mortal remains. Happily, according to this quaint old Cornish legend, “The village blacksmith intercepted them, and succeeded, by seizing her dress as she was being hurried past him, in saving her from being buried alive with the sprite of

Lenine;” though it really mattered very little after all, as she only survived for two or three days from the horrors of that grim night ride.

Inclined as I am to vary as far as possible place and period, my next uncanny revelation shall concern the eighteenth century, when George the First was King. It is of two staunch college chums who, at about the same age, joined his Majesty’s service. Their military careers, however, were destined to have very different issues. One having joined a fighting regiment did prodigies of valour on foreign service for his

King and country, being ultimately killed in the thick of the fight, while the other, in a home regiment, wasted his substance in the wildest profligacy. Now the young hero who had fallen so gloriously was found to have bequeathed to his old friend the sword with which he had won so honourable a name, enjoining him at the same time to prove himself, as a soldier, worthy of the inheritance. Years passed. That sword—now rusting in its scabbard—was suspended with other curios over the mantelshelf of the man who was, as we have seen, a soldier by name only. It was past midnight. This jaded roué having gambled



“THE TWO CHUMS.”

Frank, as she had so often before seen him, mounted on his favourite colt. Turning in his saddle he addressed her in his old familiar voice. He shouted to her to mount beside him, and as he did so leant forward to receive her. In a moment she had leapt into his arms and clasped him about the neck the better to secure her seat. And then—hey, presto!—they were off at a breakneck pace before she could realise the horror of the situation: she was in the clammy embrace of a spectre horseman mounted on a phantom horse which was galloping at full speed towards the graveyard of that same old church where their



"THE WHITE LADY"

away his last shilling, was reviewing his misspent life when the door of his room slowly opened, the fire at the same moment emitting a vapour which at first half filled the apartment. Presently, this mist clearing away, there stood before him the stern soldierly sprite of his late companion in arms, which, with its bony fingers, pointed significantly at that rusty scabbard. "In my time," said the shade of the departed in sepulchral tones, "that sword would not have rusted thus: had your life been fuller of honours than of tricks you would have better served your country and your King."

With a hollow groan, the debauchee fell, an inert mass, to the ground—he was dead!

Steeped as you and I are by this time in ghostly horrors, we cannot, I take it, do better than seek out a denizen of the other world who has succeeded in preserving her good looks, for to this advantage in a marked degree "The White Lady," better known as Prechta

von Rosenberg, may lay undisputed claim. Prechta, born in 1520, was married when in her teens to Baron von Lichtenstein, who so utterly crushed her young life by his continued cruelty and excesses, that she died while yet in the very heyday of her youth and beauty, and has ever since haunted the estates of the illustrious Bohemian family to which she belongs—sometimes at one castle, sometimes at another—while again she has been known to follow some of its members further afield, having been seen in December, 1628, in Berlin. She is said to affect somewhat scanty vapoury tissue as she floats through space, beckoning invitingly as she does so.

Since time began a belief in the supernatural has existed which was modelled to a considerable extent by the introduction of the Greek and Roman mythologies, the symbolic deities of which were supposed to come down now and again from Olympus to regulate the affairs of men, while side by side with these we have Hindoo, Persian, and Chinese spirits too numerous to mention, with whom wilder tribes have brought up the rear, accompanied by all sorts of grim monsters.

Then, in later years, came the canonisation of saints, who were for all sorts of worldly ends propitiated, and a belief in whose healing and other powers developed by easy stages into the propitiation of ghosts, fiends, sprites, and hobgoblins of every description. In this short pen and

pencil sketch it has been impossible to do more than glance, in passing, at Ghostland. Yet

the theme has been, at least to me, an interesting one, and may, I venture to hope, afford the readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE some pleasure as well.

