

THE LAST OF A LEGEND.

"I don't believe in 'em!" declared little Jim stoutly.

It required some courage of both sorts to make the statement, for Micky Byrne, who had just been delighting the company with "banshee" anecdotes, was a year older and a head taller, and, moreover, given to supporting his assertions with his fists in an unphilosophical manner.

The boys were all assembled in their favorite Sunday lounging-place, on the soft grass of Horsham churchyard, in the south corner, under the yew-trees. Possibly it was the locality that suggested the subject.

"Ye don't believe in ghosts, and me tellin' ye what me own father saw wid his own eyes, sorra a lie in it!" was Micky's indignant response.

"That was in Ireland, and things may be different there," said Jim, with moderation.

"There's as many ghosts in England as ever were in Ireland," broke in Johnny Ellis, jealous of his country's honor—"real bad ones—and Horsham ghost's as bad as any; and Mr. Don't-believe-it here knows that quite well."

"An' what would bring a ghost to Horsham, will ye tell me?" asked Micky disdainfully. "Sure it's only the rare old families they'd be frequentin'; and it's no one at all that owns Horsham nowadays. A Manchester cotton-spinner!" Micky elevated his snub-nose superciliously.

He was a new comer to the village, but had already achieved considerable popularity amongst the youthful Horshamites, especially as a story-teller. He had plenty of Irish humor, and an inexhaustible fund of material in the valiant exploits of his father, the old pensioner, in any campaign that might be mentioned, or the marvellous adventures in foreign parts of his brother, who held some imposing but undefined position in the merchant-service.

His only rival was little Jim, who was also a favorite in his small way. He was the son of a poor widow who drove a struggling trade in a tiny general shop down in the village, a slender delicate little lad, with great grey eyes and a sensitive mouth, the sort of child that, tended and cherished, would have become preternaturally wise and good, made beautiful saintly speeches, died early, and been immortalised in a tract, but, knocked about among the hardy village lads, developed the courage of a cock-sparrow and the tenacity of a bull-dog, and held his own with the best of them. His classmates, great broad-shouldered, sluggish, thick-tongued youths from the neighboring farms, stared in wonder at the presumptuous mite who "took them down" in class and had an answer for every one ready on the tip of his tongue. They might, and did, bully him on occasion; but he was such an amusing, ingenious little fellow that the bigger ones took to patronising him instead, and even backed him against the renowned Micky in any merely verbal encounter.

"Jim can tell you about Horsham ghost, whether he believes in it or not," said Big Bob Fox, Jim's great patron. "It's there, sure enough! Didn't our Sam see it, coming home short cut from t' fair, and didn't we find him next morning in the ditch, all flustered in his mind like, all along o' seeing it?"

"I know what father says about it," put in Will Franks, son of the head-gardener at the Hall. "When he came here first, that holly-tree walk hadn't been touched for years, and not a man would go into it alone; and he says, though the path had never been weeded nor scuffled, and the nettles at each side were as high as your knee, and the hedges well-nigh met across it, yet, right down the middle, the gravel was trodden as clean as the high-road."

"Well, give us the story, Jim," said Ellis, settling himself at full length on a tombstone.

Micky composed himself to listen with a comic, critical expression on his droll face; said Jim, leaning against a yew-tree, began in his clear little child's voice.

"Ever, ever so long ago there was a Squire of Horsham, an awful bad one. He rioted and he drank and he swore, and kept the whole village in terror with his mad doings. He would fill the Hall with friends as well as himself, and—You see that gate?" Jim broke off, pointing to the opposite gate across the churchyard they would come tearing, with the Squire at their head, roaring drunk and full of wickedness. One Sunday, when the people were in church and the doors left open, didn't the mad Squire and his gang come galloping down, and because it lay right in their way, tear clean through the church, in at one door and out at the other, laughing and whooping like so many fiends? Next day the parson went straight up to the Hall and gave him his mind, he did; and the Squire up with his big horse-whip and drove him out, swearing that the next time he came he'd be the death of him. Parson didn't give in—not he; he was a right good holy man, mother says. So he cursed the Squire back again, and gave as good as he got; and the Squire never got over it. He wouldn't let a parson near him to his dying day, and swore, and made his wife swear, that, when he was buried, nought of the Prayer-

book should be read over him."

"He'd be a bad one to meet, wouldn't he?" ejaculated Ellis, with gusto. "Go on to the coffin, Jim."

"They do say," continued Jim, his eyes dilating and his voice growing hollow with awe, "that at twelve o'clock every night, down the path to the churchyard, there come four evil spirits dressed like undertakers carrying the old Squire in his coffin; and they rest it for a moment on the big stone under the elm-tree, and, if any one passes, up jumps the old Squire, screaming to him to stop and save him. And, if any one will but say a bit of the burial service, without stopping or being scared by the awful words he uses, why, he'll vanish in a flash, and be never seen again!"

"How do you know that, when nobody has ever tried?" demanded Micky sceptically; but no one cared to answer.

The short November sunshine had faded into twilight, the yew-tree shadows grew gloomy and chill, and the end of the holly-tree walk looked undesirably near. Ellis felt his tombstone chilly, and silently descended.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed a big voice; and they all jumped like rabbits.

The present owner of Horsham, the Manchester man, was leaning over the low churchyard wall behind them, with a sardonic smile on his handsome dark face. He had been quietly listening and taking the measure of Jim and his comrades during the last ten minutes.

"So these are the stories you tell about me and my place! Pack o' lies! Damaging my property by false statements! If there is a ghost, why haven't I seen it? Answer me that!"

"Sure it wouldn't be appearing to your honor, an' you wan of the family!" said plausible Mike. The Squire laughed.

"And my servants, sir? What of them?"

"Please, sir, there's not one of them would go down that walk at midnight alone; and two people can't see a ghost," explained Will Franks.

"That's it, is it? Well, I'm a practical man, and I mean to put that ghost down. Which of you boys will go down and walk by himself to-night?"

There was a general flutter amongst the group. Big Bob Fox being out of the Squire's view, had sauntered off.

"You shall have fair play. If any one comes to grief, I'll be on the look out to help him directly, and no tricks shall be played. You shall go to-night. It's full moon—light enough to read the burial service, if required."

No response.

"Now listen! As I go home to-night, I'll put a sovereign on the big stone under the elm-tree, and the lad who fetches it shall keep it. If he buries the ghost, I'll make it ten. Settle it amongst you," and off the Squire strode swinging his black stick.

The boys kept a respectful silence till his tall Sunday hat and broad shoulders were out of sight; then out spoke Will Franks.

"Well, lads, here's luck! Fair share you know, whoever goes."

"Shares, of course," affirmed Ellis; "but who's going?" No reply.

"Franks."

"Not I. I don't want his ten pounds! Go yourself!"

"Sha'n't! Micky's the boy, for the honor of old Ireland—eh Micky?"

"Is it me you're askin' to get out of my bed at midnight to go ghost-catchin' for a cotton-spinner? Tare and ages, it is like your Saxon insularity!" Mike liked a polysyllable, and one done just as well as another for his audience.

"Nice fools you look," growled Heyshaw. "I'm not going to lose four bob because nobody has pluck enough to go after it. Here, you Jim Stokes—you let us in for this; you've got to go. Do you hear?"

Jim shook his head.

"No mother would never let me."

"None of that," said Ellis. "You don't believe in ghosts, you know, and you're not going to leave us in the lurch now, and say you're afraid. Your going. Your mother need never know."

"But I daren't go there at night—I daren't indeed!" pleaded Jim his eyes wide with terror.

"You shut up! Go you shall, or I'll murder you the first time I catch you alone, and it isn't Sunday," said Heyshaw, a great rough bully. "Make him promise, lads."

Poor little Jim looked round him in dismay. The two whom he always secretly dreaded, loomed over him, as he sat on the grass beneath the yew-tree, big and threatening. He scrambled to his feet and looked for Bob Fox—in vain. Micky looked compassionate, but was not likely to imperil his own popularity by interfering in his behalf, and Franks was not much bigger than himself, if it came to a fight.

"C me—say you'll go," demanded his tormentors, each seizing an arm and pinning him against the tree-trunk.

"Suppose I won't," replied Jim, with a vigorous effort to jerk himself loose.

"Then into the pond you'll go, and spoil your Sunday jacket," was Ellis's answer with a tug in the direction of the next field.

"Duck him! Why I'll hang him tomorrow on the big elm by the school-house! Yes, and we'll flay Dame Trot

alive, and break all his mother's windows," amended Heyshaw. "Now you know what you've got before you! Will you go or not?"

Driven to desperation, not so much by fear to himself as of possible annoyance to his mother and his dear old friend the tabby school-room cat, Jim tore himself out of his persecutors' grasp.

"I'll go? There's naught that'll kill me there; but, if there is, I'll come back and haunt every one of you worse than the old Squire ever did Horsham!"

Hurling this threat at them, with a crimson face and trembling lips, Jim turned his back on them and marched sturdily homeward, trying not to cry. Ellis and Heyshaw did not attempt to follow; but Will Franks ran after him and took his hand.

"Don't you mind Jim. I'll meet you at the end of your lane to-night, and go with you as far as the churchyard."

"Deed an' I'll go that far wid you myself," said the renowned Micky, overtaking them, slightly ashamed of his friends' behaviour, "for it's a fine bold fellow ye are Jim, as I ever see!"

The church clock chimed the quarter before twelve as little Jim emerged stealthily from his mother's back-gate.

Once on the road he plunged his hands deep into his pockets and trudged along sturdily, wisely dwelling on the prospective advantages of his undertaking rather than its perils. Four shillings to be earned by one night's work! The little general shop had its reverses lately, he knew, and the schooling might be any day cut down to the lowest of limits. Four shillings! Why, it was as much as a small boy like Jim could earn in a month at farm-work—and all to be gained in five minutes for looking for what did not exist! At the suggestion of the ten pounds, that was altogether too dazzling a vision to be entertained for a moment, though he did carry his mother's little old Prayer-book, with the leaf turned down at the burial service, buttoned inside his jacket. On he strode valiantly to the appointed corner where his trusty allies were waiting. Mick with a martial bearing shouldering his father's, the pensioner's, old musket.

"It's loaded to the muzzle with powder and shot," whispered Franks admiringly; "and he's got his aunt Judy's 'gospel' round his neck, and says he's afraid of nothing."

Nevertheless the trio by common consent avoided all conversation, except in occasional whispers, and sneaked along under the hedgerow till they reached the churchyard gate. There was the whole length of the churchyard to be crossed before reaching the entrance of the haunted lane, which however might also be approached by a shady by-road, a favorite haunt of the rural swain and maid in the summer days, though known by name of evil sound as Hangman's Walk. Jim hesitated between the two paths.

"Better stick to the churchyard," whispered Mick. "I don't like that road by night, ever since the gipsies murdered the drunken waggoner there. They say you hear him and his team sometimes, and one ghost's enough at a time. We'll wait here for you."

Jim nodded, and, without giving himself time to be scared, slipped through the light-gate and sped recklessly across the churchyard. The moon that the Squire promised had barely half risen, and he stumbled along over surely twice as many graves as were ever to be found by daylight! It cooled his courage woefully; and why had Mick reminded him of the murdered waggoner? The big trees overhanging the evil-named lane rose black between him and the sky; and where did all those mysterious noises come from? What made the branches rustle and creak with never a breath of wind; and what was that smothered sound of wheels and horses' hoofs in Hangman's Walk, where no cart ever passed? Ugh! The old Squire was better company than all this; and Jim's trembling little fingers lifted the latch and pushed open the wicket-gate, and into the ghost's path he turned with what determination he might.

The moon began to shine clearer now, full in his face, as he made his way between the tall holly-hedges. He could see the rank grass and dock-leaves beneath them, and on the moss-grown path the glittering lines of snail-tracks. On he went. How much shorter and straighter the path had always looked from the outside! One turn more and the church was in view, some two hundred yards distant; and mid-way was the end of his quest, the tall elm-tree, standing alone. One half, which had been smitten by lightning, gleamed ghastly through the nodding dark boughs that overhung a low square stone.

Only one step forward now, and the reward would be within his reach! He could see the small freshly-placed tile that covered it; but, as he stretched out his hand eagerly, "Clang, clang!" pealed from the church tower, making him jump with his heart almost in his mouth. "Clang!" How close and startling it sounded! "Clang!" He crept into the dark elm-tree shadow, looking fearfully up and down the path. "Clang!" What—oh, what was that dark shadow moving softly silently towards him? "Clang!" He gazed with wild dilated eyes at the shortening of the moonlit path between

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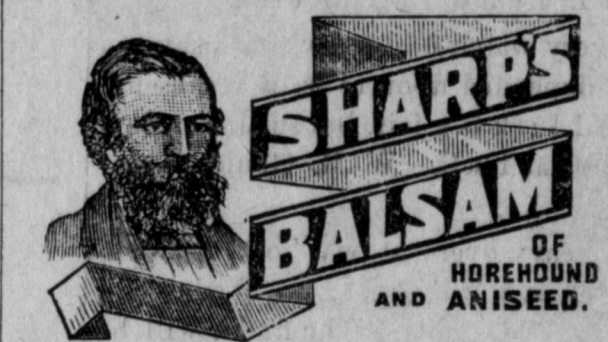
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Kent Revision Courts.

Judge Landry, revising officer for Kent County, will hold courts for the revision of the Dominion electoral lists in the different parishes as follows:

Cocagne, Gallant Hotel, 18th November, 10 a. m., for districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Applications received till 4th November.

Buctouche, Roberts' Hotel, 18th November, 10 a. m., for districts 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Applications received till 5th November.

St. Paul, school house near chapel, 20th November, 10 a. m., for districts 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. Applications received till 6th November.

Richibucto, Court House, 23rd November, 10 a. m., for districts 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Applications received till 9th November.

St. Louis, Hotel de Lourdes, 24th November, for districts 21, 22, 23, 24. Applications received till 10th November.

Carleton, at hotel, Kouchibouguac, 25th November, 10 a. m., for districts 25, 26, 27. Applications received till 11th November.

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