

LITERATURE, &c.

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THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

It was in the autumn of 1830, after a long and animated correspondence with my tailor, bootmaker, and a host of other rapacious anthropophagi, that, disgusted by the sordidness of mankind in general, and of creditors in particular, I resolved, after the example of Bolingbroke, Byron, and other prosecuted men of genius, to forsake the busy haunts of men, and to bury myself and my sorrows in the bosom of some sequestered and solitary retreat.

The little village of Boreham was a hamlet, such as few are now to be found in over-populated and over-civilized England. The simple denizens pursued their daily labours with peaceful and contented hearts; there were no idle gentry to excite their envy—no drinking establishments to corrupt their morals. The village boasted not of an exciseman; the vicar resided in a neighbouring town; there was no practice for an apothecary, and in fine, the only respectable inhabitant of the place was an antiquated attorney, who at the time I speak of, was engaged in the superintendence of his clients' business in London. It was indeed the most stupid "gite" upon the face of the earth. That I did not expire of ennui during my sojourn there, was owing to a singular piece of good fortune which I shall presently relate.

About a quarter of a mile from the extremity of the village, on the bank of the river Bore, stood a spacious old weather-stained mansion. Dreary, dark, and desolate, with its steep shelving roof and mouldered casements, it seemed a blot upon the fertile and well cultivated tract of country that surrounded it.

At the front of the house were the remains of a garden that extended to the water's edge, but its once trim alleys were neglected and overgrown with bushes. Grass grew upon the walks, rank weeds flourished where once had bloomed the dahlia and the rose; the fruit trees, long unused to the pruning knife, bore no fruit upon their moss-grown branches; the sundial, with its quaint motto—*fugit hora brevis*—hung loosely from its worm-eaten supporter. The tangled thicket by the river side had once been an arbour, but the rustic table, with its benches, lay rotting upon the ground. I deemed, as I gazed upon the place, that it had once appertained to some wealthy squire, a mighty hunter perhaps, and a game preserver; a devourer of fruit, a fancier of flowers, and a follower of Isaac Walton.

I felt a melancholy pleasure in contemplating the wreck of that deserted garden; the remnants of taste and attention that lay mouldering around me conjured up the image of the former proprietor, as the banners which flaunt raggedly above some fretted sepulchre recall the memory of the once proud noble who sleeps beneath.

The condition of the house seemed little superior to that of the garden; the roof was uncovered in various places, the walls were overgrown with ivy, swallows had built their nests at the window-angles; heat and cold, summer and winter, seemed to have done their worst upon the decaying wood-work; the windows, with the exception of one that looked into the garden, were closed; the bat and the owl, the rat and the mole, were the only tenants of the deserted village.

The spacious court-yard, that stood at the rear, was in melancholy unison with the other parts of the premises; the pavement was overgrown with weeds; the roofs of the offices had fallen in; bloated toads basked lazily upon the heated stones in the autumnal sun.

On every part an unknown hand seemed to have traced the word—MYSTERY!

During the continuance of my residence at Boreham, the romantic aspect of "Haverfield Grange" became inexpressibly interesting to me. It was better than a ruin. Ruins are noted down in guide-books and country surveys; this building, comparatively modern, yet preying, as it were, upon itself, contained a secret—a mystery, as I have said; it was a treasure to a dreamer and fantastic idler like myself.

In the sombre evenings of October, I loved to linger and to meditate in the solitary pleasure ground. I formed a thousand speculations, a thousand extravagant romances, in connexion with it. For worlds I would not have asked a question of the inhabitants of the village upon the subject. A sentence, nay even a word, might have put to flight the happiest creation of my excited fancy.

Throughout the retreat, all seemed sombre, silent, and solitary,—a cemetery without a tomb! a monastery without a monk! An involuntary tremour sometimes crept over me, as I heard the evening breeze moaning dismally amongst the tangled bushes, and scattering the crisping leaves upon the ground, or turning the ancient weathercock, with a creaking sound, upon its rusty pivot.

Alas! I grow tedious: there was too much whiskey in the last tumbler of punch.

One evening when the ground felt damp and clammy; when an icy mantle seemed to have descended upon me, I stood, with folded arms, looking upon the discoloured front of the mysterious mansion. I took no note of time, for my thoughts were bent upon the solution of the enigma which seemed to lurk in the desolation that surrounded me. I turned my eyes upon the casement; time or tempest had divested it of its massy shutters. I started—it surely could not be, and yet when I gazed more earnestly, I was convinced I had not been mistaken. At that window, unfurnished as it was with either curtains or glass, I plainly discerned the figure of a man. He seemed young and handsome; long ringlets of dark brown hair flowed gracefully around a face, the extreme paleness of which

appeared to be its only defect: his dress was of a somewhat antiquated fashion; the extreme richness of the material might have furnished matter for a diatribe to the satirists of the spectator. The exclamation that I uttered seemed to attract the attention of the figure; it slowly turned its dark full eyes upon me, and receding from the window, gradually disappeared from my view. A shudder ran chillily through my frame, for I deemed that the glassy glance so lately cast upon me had not been bestowed by a living man.

I returned to the "Ship and Shovel," where I lodged, a prey to a thousand fantastic imaginings.

When I had nearly concluded my supper, the landlady entered with an air of mystery, and announced Mr. Pettiquirk!

I was aware that Mr. Pettiquirk was the village attorney, but a visit from him was more than I had calculated on.

Mr. Pettiquirk entered, making a grotesque species of salaam, that bore a faint resemblance to a bow.

The attorney was a short thick man, about sixty years of age, attired in a rusty suit of black; the jovial, though alert expression of his crimsoned countenance, put me in mind of a glass jug filled with claret.

"Make yourself a glass of grog, Mr. Pettiquirk," said I, as I stirred the fire; "the night is chilly, and the rum, I'll venture to assert, is unexceptionable."

The fat lawyer took his seat, mixed his toddy, rubbed his hands, and commenced the conversation.

"My name, Sir, is Pettiquirk."

I inclined my head, and emitted a lengthy volume of tobacco smoke from the corner of my mouth.

"I have taken the liberty of waiting on you," added he, "in consequence of information that has reached me, touching divers visits of your's to a certain close or message, situate and being in this township, commonly called Haverfield Grange?"

"Well, Sir," said I, "and what then?"

"What then?" cried he, as he drank off the remainder of his grog; "why, Sir, I have to inform you, that you have been guilty of a most flagrant trespass: you have with force and arms, broke and entered the aforesaid close or message, and trod down, trampled upon, consumed, and spoiled the grass and herbage, there growing, and divers other wrongful acts done. But," continued he, softening, as I pushed the garden-vine towards him, "it is not my wish to be hard upon a gentleman of your stamp. I come here in performance of a duty, as the executor of the late Mrs. Desborough, I am compelled to request that you will discontinue your visits to the premises now known, and distinguished by the denomination of Haverfield Grange. You are a stranger, Sir, and not aware of the circumstances that have obliged me to permit the prettiest spot in the parish to fall into decay. Since the opening of Mrs. Desborough's will, a period of twenty years, I have not once passed the boundaries myself. It was a most unaccountable will that. The heir talked of litigating it, but—"

I respected the loquacity of the worthy man, and proffered him a cigar, as a testimony of my reverential feeling.

"If it is not too great a liberty," said I, "might I inquire the particulars of this extraordinary business?"

The rubicund little lawyer took an enormous pinch of snuff, rubbed his hands, crossed his legs, and put himself in the posture of a man about to tell a long story.—The will of the late Mrs. Desborough, was evidently one of his favourite topics.

"You must know, Sir," said Mr. Pettiquirk, "that about twenty years ago I was head clerk in the chambers of old Muddleman, the attorney, in Pump-court, Inner Temple—capital chambers they were. I dare say you have heard of Muddleman; he would not have taken me into partnership, Sir, but the sly old fox wanted more money than, at that time, I could command, so I came back here to Boreham, where I had some relations, and set up for myself. It was about three months after I had made my arrangements, that about eleven o'clock at night, just as I was thinking of retiring to bed, a message arrived from Mrs. Desborough, who was then at Desborough Park about seven miles distant from Boreham, requesting I would attend her without delay; her own maid, a bouncing lass, who now lives as chambermaid at this inn, had come over in the family coach, for the purpose of fetching me out. Now, I should have informed you before, that the Squire, Mr. Desborough, one of the most extensive land owners in the county, had died in London a very short time previous—he perished, as I have been given to understand, in a very shocking manner—given up to every kind of debauchery and excess. Well, Sir, what was very unaccountable, the very day of his departure for town, Mrs. Desborough left the grange where they had been residing, carried off all the furniture, and, as some said, had it burnt upon the lawn at Desborough Park! You have been to the Park?—No! Fine place!—beautiful spot. I have heard," continued the attorney, "that for some time previous to their separation, the Squire and his lady lived very unhappily together; they inhabited different parts of the house—rarely met even at meal-time—seldom spoke to each other. When her husband had left the county, Mrs. Desborough shant herself up at the park. She never went to church—refused to see any one but Margaret, her maid—the poor people whom she used to relieve were neglected. The poor dear lady (I only saw her once, when she presented me with this diamond ring) became very ill; no doubt, she despaired of her recovery, for she refused to call in a physician in spite of the entreaties of Margaret. Some people said she was not quite right in her head.

"Well, Sir, my curiosity was wonderfully excited by the summons I had received from Mrs. Desborough, I questioned the maid as unobtrusively as I could, but she did not seem inclined to give me much information. I learned from her, that her mistress had consented to receive the Doctor and the Curate of the parish, and that she was not expected to live through the night.

"The clock was striking twelve as I ascended the grand staircase at Desborough Park; under Margaret's guidance, I traversed long damp musty smelling galleries, and at length arrived at the chamber where the dying lady lay.

"After the various reports I had heard, and you have no idea how many idle stories there were afloat, I expected to have met with a fantastic fine lady—a coquette. Alas! Sir, it was with difficulty I could discern her slender figure, as she reclined in the great old-fashioned bed. It was a large desolate looking apartment, dimly lighted by a small chamber lamp—there were a few heavy chairs with their tarnished gilding, a toilet-table, and glass, and a small sofa. The whole of the furniture would not have fetched five pounds at a sale, with the exception of the bed, which might have been worth seven pounds ten.

"Ah! my dear Sir, if you had seen, as I did, the attenuated figure that lay supported by pillows upon that bed, by the light of the lamp—she looked more like a wasted waxen figure, than an animated, though expiring being. Her dark hair, partially escaping beneath her cap, made the paleness of her countenance more ghastly, her great black eyes were dull and heavy her forehead was damp, her hands were skin and bone. She might once have been pretty, but when I saw her it was frightful; never did I behold a living creature so dreadfully emaciated—disease had attenuated her to a miserable shadow—her lips were of a violet paleness, when she spoke it was with difficulty she moved them; her upper lip was faintly marked with a small downy moustache, and this token of a constitution, originally strong, impressed me, more than any thing else, with the sufferings the poor creature must have undergone, before she attained to such an extremity of feebleness.

"I confess," continued the attorney, "that, though I had been a witness to many death-bed scenes in the prosecution of my profession, the aspect of that silent and solitary female, and that antique, and desolate-looking chamber, affected me more than all the wailings and lamentations I had been in the habit of hearing on similar occasions; not a single sound was perceptible in the large lonely mansion—the respiration of the invalid was so faint as not to communicate any motion to the cashmere shawl in which she was enveloped. At length, her large eyes moved; she endeavoured to raise her right hand that lay helpless upon the counterpane; her voice, with her utmost exertion, was not louder than a shrill whisper."

"I have expected you with much anxiety," said she, then her cheeks became flushed, and she paused, apparently in great pain.

"Madam," I began. "Speak not, I beseech you," said she, "for my time is very short." Then raising her arm with infinite difficulty, she drew forth a sealed packet from her bosom. Large drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

"You will take charge of my will," said she. Oh, heavens! Mary! Her countenance became convulsed; she fell back upon the pillows, and expired.

"I took the will from her wasted hand, and returned home deeply affected by the scene I had witnessed. When the will of the diseased lady was opened, it appeared that I was named the sole executor and trustee of it; to me was entrusted the charge of seeing its provisions carried into effect. As the interest of the testatrix in the estates of her late husband had determined with her life, the only property she had a power of disposing of by will, was that of the Haverfield Grange, which she was seized of in her own right.

"She bequeathed these premises to me and my heirs upon trust to permit the said premises to be, and remain for the space of sixty years, to commence from the decease of testatrix, in such state as they should then be found, to bar up the gates, to fasten the doors, to close up the windows of the said dwelling house, and premises, and to prohibit and prevent the entry or ingress thereupon of any person or persons whatsoever. After the expiration of the sixty years, the testatrix bequeathed the premises to me, and my heirs for ever to our own use and behoof; with a proviso, that if the directions of her will were not punctually carried into execution, the Grange should then descend to testatrix's right heirs. [To be Concluded.]

DESCRIPTION OF SICILY.

THE beautiful and fertile island of Sicily, in the Mediterranean, occupies a surface of about 10,642 British square miles, and has a population of 1,787,771 inhabitants; being in the proportion of 168 to each square mile. Its population is said to have been much greater in ancient times, but it is now considerably more than it was fifty years ago, having been 1,123,163 in the year 1770; and 1,619,305 in the year 1798.

Sicily was formerly the granary of ancient Rome, and it has still capabilities of feeding a population very far exceeding its own, if its agriculture were not depressed and shackled by bad husbandry and erroneous regulations. Artificial meadows are unknown; so are potatoes, turnips, beets, and other green crops; unless when planted with beans or peas, the ground is constantly cropped with corn, with intervals of one or two years' fallow or wild pasture. The soil, though badly cleaned and manured, yields upon an average eight for one, in some districts sixteen for one, and in some few, even thirty-two for one. The land is let in large tracts to companies of farmers, or rather shepherds, some of them proprietors of ten or twelve thousand sheep. The different flocks feed together, and once a year an account is taken of them, the result of which is afterwards entered in a book, where each of the proprietors is debited and credited with his share of the proceeds and expences, in proportion to his number of