

THE DEMON OF HOMICIDE.

Some time ago I was dining tete-a-tete with Dr. D., a gentleman well known in his profession but whose name I prefer to suppress. After dinner the conversation turned upon a certain murder that had been committed—a murder of details so revolting and extraordinary as to attract a great part of public attention and a good many columns of the newspapers, the perpetrator lying at the time under the sentence of death. A stranger, a tramp, actuated as it seemed, by no particular object, such as revenge or plunder, but possessed solely, it would appear, with a sudden lust of blood, had murdered a whole family from the aged grandfather to the infant in its cradle. He had betrayed neither before nor since any symptoms of insanity, and was now laboring, if the papers were to be believed, under an awakened and horrified sense of his guilt, but was unable to explain his motive or give reason for his deed. We talked as I have said, on this subject, and I asked my friend whether he could give any explanation, or possessed any theory which would account for a circumstance so extraordinary.

'I do possess a theory,' he replied, and it is possible you may think it a wild one, as coming from a professional man. I, myself, ten years ago, would have scouted it as absurd, but I had since that time a certain experience, an experience so dreadful so incredible, that when I look back upon it I can scarcely bring myself to believe that it actually occurred, and but for the terrible attendant circumstances that deprived me of two of the dearest friends I ever had, I should imagine myself to have been the victim of an hallucination. I will tell my story for the first time to you, and you shall then judge whether my theory has not strong grounds for support.'

Accordingly, having replenished our glasses and lit our cigars, the doctor commenced his tale.

The best friend I ever had—I may say my only real friend, as friend should be—the Jonathan to my David—was a man named John Hargreaves. We had been educated together; as a little boy he was my father's pupil; we went to Westminster together, moved up through the school together, at all sports and amusements we were inseparable; and when, at the close of our school life, he went to Oxford, I gave my parents no rest till I was allowed to accompany him. On our life at Oxford I need not dilate; suffice it to say that there we drifted somewhat apart; his mode of life and mine were different; he was heir to a considerable fortune, and the rather straitened income of my father would not permit of my indulging in the amusements in which he and his set delighted, but nevertheless we were still friends, though we did not meet as often as formerly. To tell the truth, he became rather wild, and in his second year was 'sent down' for some foolish prank, while I stayed on, and took my degree. We still corresponded with great regularity, and during the next three years I frequently enjoyed his society—as frequently, that is to say, as a young and struggling physician could afford the time.

About a year after his leaving college he met, wed and married Lillian Cludesley, a very charming girl, closely related to me and who was as dear to me as a sister, so that our bonds of friendship became, if possible more closely drawn than ever. It was some three years after his marriage that I received a strange letter from him. He had, through the death of a relative, come into a considerable fortune, and he now wrote to tell me that he had recently purchased a place in Yorkshire, called 'Moorlands,' from which he dated his letter, and begged me in somewhat exaggerated terms, as I thought, to come down and spend a few days with him, if I could not spare more. There was, I seemed to observe, running through his letter something strained and unlike his usual style of correspondence, and his invitation savored of actual entreaty, as though my acceptance was almost a matter of necessity to him.

My practice at that time was not so large but that a few days might easily be spared, and I wrote to him accordingly, naming the day and hour of my arrival.

On my stepping off the train at the little station some four miles from 'Moorlands,' the first person I saw was Jack Hargreaves anxiously scanning the passengers, and the air with which he greeted me had it, to my eye, something of relief. He was in excellent spirits, almost boisterously so, and had never appeared in better health in his life, so that an idea I had formed that he had asked me down to consult me professionally was almost dissipated.

I may pause here a moment to describe him. He was what you would call a fine-looking man, not strictly handsome, but with a charming open countenance; six feet in his stockings, fair, clean shaven, with the exception of a long yellow moustache, clean-limbed, carrying himself like a soldier, and with gentleman written on every inch of him.

He had come down himself, he said, to meet me, not daring to trust me to the tender mercies of his coachman over Yorkshire roads, and certainly I should have been loth, had I not been aware of his reputation as the best whip of his day at Oxford, to trust myself in the vehicle which he had brought for my transportation—an abnormally high dogcart, with a pair of fiery looking chestnuts, harnessed tandem. However, conquering any little qualms of nervousness I felt, and devoutly hoping that the frightful hills I saw in the distance

were not on the road to 'Moorlands' I mounted and we rode off.

We had not proceeded more than half the distance, when my companion, who had at first been extremely talkative, relapsed into silence, and seemed to be meditating deeply.

'What's the matter with you, Jack?' I asked. 'For the last quarter of an hour you have been talking thirteen to the dozen, and now you haven't a word to throw to a dog.'

He replied with another question: 'Did you notice anything strange about my letter, Billy?'

'Nothing particular,' I answered, 'except that you seemed unnecessarily anxious and rather ceremonious in your invitation and that there were rather more blunders than usual in the spelling. But seriously, Jack, is anything the matter?'

'There is,' he commenced, and stopped. 'Never mind about it now, Billy; you shall have it all in the smoking room, after dinner. See! There is 'Moorlands,' and he pointed with his whip to a large gray stone building, half house, half castle, which lay half screened by trees in a valley while around it and towards it the purple moors from which it doubtless took its name, and sloped downwards.

'So that is 'Moorlands? I congratulate you on its picturesqueness. By the way, who was the former tenant?'

'It has been in the market a long time,' he replied. 'It has not been inhabited for ten years. The last tenant, or rather owner, a man named Beverley, murdered his only son there, a strange thing, too, for he was said to be uncommonly fond of him, and then killed himself, and the heirs have never yet, for some reason or other, been able to dispose of it, until I happened to hear of it. I got it at quite a bargain. There are queer stories about it in the neighborhood. But here we are,' and crossing an old stone bridge and turning through the heavy, massive gates, we drove up to the hall-door, where Lillian, with her two-year-old boy in her arms, was waiting to welcome us.

Whatever care might be weighing on her husband's mind it was evident that she had no share in it. There was no sign of trouble in those clear-shining eyes, no print of care on that low, broad forehead.

She greeted me like a sister—in early life we had been much thrown together—and young Master John was exhibited, and I was called upon to admire the progress he had made since I last saw him. His father was evidently very proud of him, and from the looks of affection he bestowed on his wife and child it was plain that his heart was bound up in them. And Lillian—she had eyes for no one but him, and in their pure depths shone love unalterable when she looked upon him. 'Here at any rate,' I said to myself, 'is a thoroughly happy and loving couple.'

The points and proficiencies of the son and heir having been duly admired, I was taken on a tour of inspection. The house or castle, whatever you might call it, had been thoroughly renovated, but the old furniture and tapestries had been retained, and the modern appointments had been made to conform as much as possible to the general style of the whole.

Of all the rooms through which we passed the one which took my fancy most was the smoking room, or study, as Jack preferred to call it; his own private sanctum. It was situated in the western tower, the oldest part of the building, was lit by small mullioned windows, and a large pane of glass admitted light from the stairway leading to several rooms above, one of which had been assigned to me. It was a paradise of a smoking room, with soft rugs, inviting chairs, and a roaring fire in the open hearth.

'And this,' I said to myself, 'is where we are to have our confidence to night? So be it.'

And so it was, for after Lillian had retired for the night it was he that Jack and I found ourselves with a glass of grog apiece and a couple of priceless Havanas between our lips, prepared to give and receive confidence.

'And now, Jack,' I said, 'when you have done twirling that moustache that Lillian and you are so proud of, and bowling at the fire, will you tell me what it was that induced you to write me that urgent letter, and, in short, what is the matter?'

'It is hard to tell you exactly, Billy,' he answered, 'what is the matter. I have had strange feelings lately—presentiments—I don't know what you would call them, something indefinite weighing on my spirits, and when I sit here at an evening I cannot fix my attention on anything. I have a feeling as though there were some thing unnatural, uncanny, in the room with me, which I cannot see but which is watching me. I see you laugh—you think I am growing nervous. You were never further from the mark in your life. My nerves are as steady as yours, and out of this part of the house it does not affect me. It is in this room particularly that I am aware of it.'

'Then why not close the room?'

'Because I suppose I am too proud to give in. I want to investigate it, to have your opinion. I should feel myself to be a poor sort of creature if I closed up such room as this merely because I fancied that old ghost haunted it.'

'So it is Mr. Beverley you suspect?'

I asked. 'Is this room, by any chance, the one in which the murder you spoke of was committed?'

'It is,' he replied. 'Look here,' and,

lifting up a corner of the rug, he pointed to a dark discoloration of the planks. 'That is his blood, they say.'

'How long is it since this affair happened?'

'Ten years to-morrow night. To tell you the truth straight out, that is the reason that I so particularly wished you to come. They say in the neighborhood that something is seen on the anniversary of that night, though what it is nobody seems exactly to know, and I wished for some companion, to test the truth of the rumor, and whom should I choose but you, my old friend?'

'Your old friend is infinitely obliged to you for such a mark of consideration,' I replied. 'But in spite of the compliment you paid my nerves just now, I doubt whether I have any great desire to make Mr. Beverley's acquaintance. But seriously Jack, don't give way to this morbid feeling. If you do you will find yourself unable to live in the house, and your health will suffer. I will sit up with you with the greatest pleasure, but as for any expectation of seeing anything, I have none. You had much better let me prescribe for you.'

Jack once more indignantly disclaimed any such necessity, and, picking up a magazine, was soon deep in its contents. I busied myself with the newspaper, and, having met with an article which interested me, and had been reading for some little time when, happening to glance at my friend, I saw that he had laid down his book and was looking uncomfortably about him.

'Billy,' he said suddenly, 'it is in the room. I feel it.'

There was something very unpleasant about so abrupt an announcement and though I do not think that I could be called at all a nervous sort of person, I felt a decided cold thrill run through me.

'Where?' I asked, with an attempt at a laugh.

'I feel the presence most distinctly, more distinctly than at any previous time. It seems as though it, whatever it may be, were watching me from that corner,' and he pointed to some old tapestry worked in uncouth figures which adorned one side of the room.

I glanced towards the point indicated. There was something there—something vague, shadowy, indistinct, something like a human figure. I sprang up, and as I did so it disappeared, but not before I had caught sight of a countenance so fell, so diabolical, so utterly surpassing anything I had ever conceived, that I felt sick with downright terror. I mastered my emotion with a strong effort, but I felt that I was white to the lips.

'What is the matter?' said Jack, starting up.

'Nothing,' I replied. 'Nothing—only you frightened me by your abruptness, and I fancied that I saw something. But it was only a shadow.'

'You are more easily scared than I expected,' he said, and so I thought myself when common sense once more resumed her throne and I was able to think quietly over the matter. What more probable than that the phantom which had appeared to me, as I thought had been conjured up by an excited imagination. I had doubtless been startled by Jack's sudden announcement that he was conscious of a supernatural presence in the room. His abruptness had frightened me, and it was most probable that fancy had woven out of nothing that fleeting vision, that horrible countenance, that shadowy, indistinct figure. I was ashamed, surprised, at my weakness, and so determined to reassure myself of its unreality that I ridiculed my absurdity to Jack, though with half-hearted merriment. It was his turn now to assume the mentor, and he counselled me with much wisdom about diseased imaginations, in much the same words as I had addressed to him. By the time his homily was finished it was time to retire and I went to bed in a very divided frame of mind.

It was long before I fell asleep, and when I did so at length I was constantly awakening, with that horrible vision burnt, as it were, into my eyeballs. It required a vast amount of reasoning to assure myself of the absurdity of my fears.

The morning dawned bright and fair, and with it the terrors of the night departed. After breakfast Jack and I sallied forth, bent on the destruction of such unwary partridges as might chance in our way. I have been reckoned a pretty fair shot—in fact, it is the only field sport to which I have any leaning—but today I shot wide and wild, although unconscious of any particular sense of nervousness. Nevertheless, it was evident that my nerves had received a pretty severe strain, nor did Jack fail to remark it. He chaffed me about it unmercifully, and indeed the fright I had exhibited the previous night appeared to have raised his spirits in a proportionate degree. There were no fits of deep meditation, no heavy locks; his brow was clear, he was all jollity and laughter. Poor fellow! It was late when we returned home with a heavy bag, due mostly to Jack's unerring aim.

Lillian was awaiting us at the hall-door, and Jack, bounding up the steps and kissing his wife with an exuberance of affection, related to her my sad falling off as a sportsman, with many a jest at my expense, though of the real reason he breathed not a word—in fact, it seemed to weight with him not a featherweight. I observed that Lillian, although she returned her husband's embrace with equal ardor and entered into his mood, abetting him in his badinage, did not seem to be in her usual happy and serene state of mind; her jests were somewhat forced; she seemed to me to be hiding some care with an effort though her husband appeared at the time to notice nothing unusual in her manner. As he turned away to carry the results of day's sport to the larder and to receive the encomiums of the cook, she and I were left together.

'Billy,' she said to you believe in presentiments? There seems to be some

cloud over today, as though some trouble were coming upon us. I have been terribly anxious about you all day, fearing that some accident had befallen one of you. It was a great relief to me when you returned. I know it is foolish, but I cannot shake it off.'

'You are as bad as your husband,' I was about to say, but I forbore. It was apparent that he had not confided to her the facts which in last night's confab he had imparted to me; and I had no wish to enlighten her, so I turned it off with a laugh and a jest about nerves.

While I was dressing for dinner Jack entered my room, for the ostensible purpose of borrowing a tie, and as he stood folding it before the glass, he asked me: 'Is anything the matter with Lillian? She is not here; she has been hinting something about presentiments. I hope to heaven she is not going to suffer from my complaint, or we shall be obliged to close up the house. I wonder what there is in the atmosphere of this place that affects us—first me, then you last night, and now Lillian.'

'Her presentiment,' I replied, 'was I fancy, chiefly on your account—fear lest I should mistake you for a partridge—and now that you have returned with a whole skin it will vanish; but from the unflattering reports you have given of my skill, don't be surprised if it returns tomorrow.'

'I wish I could think so,' he replied, 'but I hold to my opinion, there is something unwholesome to the mind in this place and I almost wish we were out of it, or that I could discover something definite which would give me an excuse for shutting it up or selling it.'

'That,' said I, 'with luck we shall do tonight. If we are to discover anything, tonight, by all reports, should be the time.'

Little did I think then how my jesting words were to be realized.

Dinner was a rather slow affair. In spite of our light treatment of the matter, both Jack and I began to feel our spirits grow less buoyant as the night grew darker, and Lillian was still noticeably depressed. It is one thing to laugh and jest about such a matter in the broad day light, but the prospect before us of a preconcerted investigation into the truth, coupled with Jack's previous unaccountable sensation and my alarming experience fanciful at it may have been, was quite another sort of thing and we both felt the effects as time drew on. Dinner over, and Lillian having left us to our wine, Jack opened the subject.

'Do you know, Billy,' he began, 'I begin to feel most confoundedly nervous about this business tonight. I only half fancy the idea of sitting waiting for a ghost to appear, and if he should come, which of course is rather unlikely, what are we to do then? We can't catch him; we can only sit and stare at him. Upon my soul, I have half a mind to back out of it. It isn't that I'd feel myself ever after a most credulous and impressionable ass, I would do so.'

'Back out, by all means,' I said. 'I will help you out in that with pleasure, for the vision I had fancied last night was being to return to me with remarkable distinctness, and I think I had even less relish for the job in hand than Jack; but my words had the opposite effect to what I had intended, and strengthened his wavering resolution.'

So it was settled, and we adjourned to the smoking room, where we found Lillian seated before the fire, with some needle work lying in her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the coals. She started violently at her entrance.

'You are nervous tonight, Lill,' said Jack.

'I think I must be,' she replied, but said no more, and presently she challenged her husband to a game of chess an amusement of which they were both extremely fond.

I stood before the fire a short time and watched them, wholly engrossed with their game.

'What a handsome, what a perfectly matched pair!' I said to myself; and once when, with a light laugh, she correct ed one of his moves and smiled up in his face, I caught the quiet look of devotion, given and received. They might have been lovers. I watched them for a few minutes, and then left the room, to search for a book which I had mislaid. As I passed up the stairs the old clock struck ten.

'Two hours yet to midnight,' I said, 'and then for Mr. Beverley.'

I was not long in discovering the object of my search, and I returned downstairs to the room in which I had left my friends. I think I have mentioned before that the chamber was partially lighted from the staircase by a large pane of glass. Across this window a heavy curtain usually hung in the evening, but on that night it was withdrawn, and the interior of the room was visible to anyone ascending or descending the stairs.

I passed on my way down and looked through this window, and never to my dying day shall I forget the sight I saw or the scene which ensued.

Jack Hargreaves and his wife were still seated as I had left them, their eyes bent upon the chess board, her chin resting on her two hands, and he with one hand shading his eyes. But what was that third figure?—filmy, intangible, in dark robes of vapor, with the horrible face and the twisting, writhing hands? Close behind Hargreaves it stood, and seemed almost to envelope him in its misty garments, and its eyes were fixed on the unconscious Lillian, with a hideous malignity, an awful, gloating cruelty, in its gaze. The cry I would have uttered was frozen on my lips. Suddenly the figure vanished; where it had stood was empty air.

As I stood and gazed, panic stricken, Hargreaves raised his head and his wife looked up at him. And then a cry found utterance, followed by a scream—sarpiercing, agonizing, resonant with terror—from the unfortunate girl, as she sprang to her feet and gazed upon her husband with starting eyes. Her husband? Was

that thing her husband? His features livid and distorted, bore a horrible resemblance to the phantom which had stood at his back, and in his eyes gleamed the same frightful expression which the demon had worn.

For a few seconds they looked on on another, she in terror and he in utter abandonment of cruelty; and then, quick as thought, he snatched from the wall an Afghan dagger and rushed upon her. Again that awful scream rang out, and I dashing the window to shivers with my foot, and scarce conscious of my actions, sprang into the room.

Alas! Alas! Too late! Ere I could raise myself from the floor the fatal blow had fallen.

Then like a tiger which has tasted blood the fiend turned upon me and I found myself locked in a deadly grapple.

I was naturally a far stronger man than Hargreaves and my muscles, from a long course of training, were at their best. My left hand had instinctively clutched the hand which held the knife, and so knee to knee we struggled desperately. Oh, it was horrible! To know that from those fierce eyes which glared into mine the devil was looking forth; that the limbs, which now possessed a strength colossal, were animated by that hellish influence! What chance had I in such a contest, struggling though I was for life? Slowly but surely I was forced back—back—and I felt that my hold of his hand was failing. At length with a sudden effort he released it; I saw the bright steel flash in the lamplight, and gave myself up. But even as the dagger hung poised in the air the door was burst open, and the man-servants of the establishment appeared on the threshold. For a second he glanced at them in his filled rage and spite, and then the dagger was turned against his own breast, and he fell across me a corpse—the best, the truest friend I ever had!—and from his broad breast ran a dark stream, renewing that stain upon the floor which he had shown to me, the evidence of that ten-year-old tragedy.

How often in the past, I wondered, had that foul spirit hovered round the living, gloating over his prey and waiting for the fatal day when he might wreck his will upon them. Poor Jack! honest, upright and gentle all his days, and murderer and suicide at the last.

There was an inquest, of course. My evidence was soon given. I testified to having seen him but a few minutes before the tragedy, in full possession of his senses and to having witnessed the sudden turn of madness spring up. The verdict, a unanimous one, was, as is usual in such cases, that of 'temporary insanity.' I remained to pay the last tributes of respect to the dead, and then returned to town broken in health and spirit without having mentioned to anyone the vision which I had seen. What purpose would it have served? I should have been laughed at and suspected of insanity myself. You are the first person to whom my tale has been told, and now that you have heard it you can guess my theory.

'Well, doctor,' I said, 'as regards your theory, I am neither disposed to accept or refute it, and considering that I should have been at home an hour ago, I cannot stop to argue on it. And so I took my leave, much surprised at the doctor's story, and strongly inclined to suspect him of an unusually exuberant imagination.'

DOCTORS BAFFLED

BY THE CASE OF MRS. HARRISON OF ORANGEVILLE.

She Was Completely Run Down—Racked With Pains in the Back, Head and Limbs—Again Rejoicing in Good Health. From the Sun, Orangeville, Ont.

Many cases are constantly being brought to light of persons being cured by that wonderful remedy—Dr. Williams' Pink Pills—after doctors have failed to be of benefit. Among them may be noted the case of Mrs. Benjamin Harrison, a well known lady who resides in the near vicinity of Orangeville, Ont. A reporter of the Sun here of Mrs. Harrison's wonderful cure called at her home to inquire into the facts of the case. Mrs. Harrison said she was pleased to be able to testify to the great curative powers of these pills. She said: 'For some years I have been a constant sufferer. Just what to call my disease I do not know; even the doctors were unable to diagnose it. I was completely run down, I had racking pains in my head, back and limbs. I was unable to secure sound sleep, and on arising in the morning would feel as tired as before going to bed. My stomach was in a bad condition and the least movement caused my heart to palpitate violently. Doctors treatment failed to be of benefit to me and I was in a very discouraged state when a friend advised me to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. Thinking that they might relieve me a little I procured a supply and began taking them according to directions. From the first I could see that they were helping me, and by the time I had taken half a dozen boxes I was free from the ailments that had made my life miserable. It is now several years since I took the pills and not the least sign of my old trouble has since shown itself. I would strongly urge the use of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for any person who has a weak or run down system and I am sure they will not fail to be beneficial.'

To those who are weak, easily tired, nervous, or whose blood is out of condition Dr. Williams' Pink Pills come as a blessing, curing when all other medicines fail and restoring those who give them a fair trial to a full measure of health and strength. Sold by all dealers in medicine or sent by mail, post paid, at 50 cents a box, or six boxes for \$2.50, by addressing the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co. Brockville, Ont.