

The Ghosts at Grantley

Leonard Kip

CHAPTER I

The London stagecoach dropped me at the gate lodge of Grantley Grange, and according to my usual custom I started up to the Hall on foot. It was such a pleasant Christmas morning as perhaps is not often seen, and might well have tempted to a longer walk than that short mile up the carefully trimmed avenue. There had been a slight fall of snow, a mere sprinkle indeed; but it was sufficient to clothe the brown turf with a dainty tint of pearl, and to make the dry leaves rattle crisp beneath the feet, and to project the great oaks in seemingly more ancient grandeur against the brightened background and generally to give an unusually cheery and exhilarating aspect to the whole scenery of the park.

When I had nearly reached the Hall, the church clock struck noon, and immediately all the bells began to ring out a merry Christmas peal. Up and down, hither and thither, now a snatch of tune and again a meaningless clashing of all the bells at once--single notes and double and triple concords, and, in fact, everything that well-disposed bells ever can or will do--so it ran on right cheerily. Now it was that I anticipated my Uncle Ruthven would hasten out to meet and welcome me. For I knew that he was fond of listening to the chimes; and when the changes were being sounded upon them he would not unfrequently sit at the open window, the better to enjoy them.

And of course, as I could now plainly see the Hall through the leafless trees, he from his open window could as readily watch my approach. Somewhat to my momentary chagrin, however, he did not come forth or even meet me at the door, and I was suffered to enter unannounced. And passing through the main hall, I wandered into the library.

There I found my Uncle Ruthven standing in the middle of the floor, his head thrown back, his eyes fixed intently upon the opposite wall, one arm raised in front to the level of his face, the other hand thrown behind him, an expression of resolute determination impressed upon every feature, his whole appearance and position resembling that of the antique Quoit Thrower.

Evidently he had been engaged in similar action; for, in a moment, he stepped to the other side of the room, picked up a short, fat book which had been thrown thither, and replaced it upon the table.

"Anatomy of Melancholy," he remarked, turning to me with a little chuckling laugh. "The first person who for a long while has got the book all through him--eh, Geoffrey? Though, of course, we all relish a little of it, now and then. Hit him directly upon the breast, and it went through him as through a summer mist, dropping out behind between his shoulder blades. Of course he has vanished, taking the hint of not being longer wanted here."

"Who, Uncle Ruthven?" I asked.

"Why, the ghost, of course," was the answer.

I was a little startled at this. It is true that I had sometimes thought that the library at Grantley Grange might be just the place for ghosts. It was wainscoted heavily with carved oak darkened in tint with the seasoning of four centuries. Above, the walls were covered with hangings of Spanish leather, stamped in quaint pattern. The fireplace was deep set and broad--so deep and broad, indeed, that the great logs smoldering within appeared no larger than ordinary sticks. The windows were projected into oriels with heavy mullions and let in the light, encumbered with a thousand stray shadows. The tables and chairs and high bookcases seemed almost immovable with their sculptured massiveness, and as though designed for a race of giants. Queer lamps hung from the ceiling and grotesque candle sconces projected themselves from the walls, each with heavy metal shades that would shut in more light than they sent forth. Over the mantel and beside the doors were paintings blackened with age; a Salvator Rosa, turned by the grime of time into a mere confusion of different shadows, with only here and there a touch of faded light for contrast, and, on either hand, eight or ten old portraits in ruffs and crimson coats and armor, cracked and worm-eaten and sometimes almost undistinguishable in face, but serving in costume to show the different careers into which, in times past, the fates or inclinations of the originals had carried them. A gloomy old library, indeed, full of crevices that would not stay closed, and cobwebs that could not be got at, and drafts that came from no one knew where, and flickering shades that seemed to obey no philosophic law, but stole here and there across wall and ceiling as their fancy led them. So that not unnaturally it appeared at times as

though the place could never have been made for man's enjoyment, but rather as a hall for witches' Sabbath or ghostly revels; and as I watched the subdued and hesitating flickering of an errant sunbeam across the tarnished gilt pattern of the Spanish leather, it was not difficult for queer fancies and imaginings to take hold of me. But, after all, they were mere idle conceits, and at the most I had not for an instant anticipated the actual presentment of unearthly visitants.

"The ghost, did you say?" I therefore repeated, in some amazement.

"Yes, the ghost. Has been here every Christmas for many a year. Always comes just as the chimes strike up at noon, as regularly as though they had waked him. If you had ever before this happened to spend a Christmas with us, you might have met him yourself. Assumes that he belongs to the house, and that therefore he has his vested rights in it. Frightened me a little at the first, but have become used to him now and do not care. Am rather disposed, indeed, to lord it over him with high hand; and he is such a patient ghost that it hardly seems to make much difference with him. Am sorry always, in fact, if I speak crossly to him. But, then, you know my temper, Geoffrey, and how little I can brook presumption. How, then, would you feel if a ghost were to come, implying that he was the master of the house and that you were merely a visitor? Gets just so far, indeed, and then vanishes without telling anything important."

I looked wonderingly at Uncle Ruthven thus calmly discoursing about the supernatural.

"But do you ever let him get further than that?" I suggested, my eyes wandering to the book upon the table.

"Perhaps not, Geoffrey--perhaps not. I suppose that if I were more patient he would talk a little better to the purpose. But then I am very quick tempered, and it is so exasperating, every Christmas to go through the very same thing. I always throw a book at him and am sorry for it afterward. It is certainly not the hospitable thing upon my part. But then to be so constantly beset, year after year, and not to know how many more there may be of them. For there is at least one other ghost somewhere about the house, Geoffrey. I have never seen him, but Bidgers the butler has, and he says it is as like this fellow as two peas. And if I am too polite to them, who knows but that they may be encouraged to come in swarms and make the house very uncomfortable? But let us leave all that for the present. You will be

wanting to see your room, I suppose. The South Oriel, just past the second landing. Bidgers will carry up your portmanteau."

"Am sorry, by the way, that Lilian has not yet returned from the continent. She could, of course, make your stay much more pleasant for you than I can. But will do my best, Geoffrey. Luncheon at one, as usual." Escorted by Bidgers, I proceeded upstairs to the South Oriel. It was a large apartment upon the south side of the house, with a broad octagonal window projection. If possible, the furniture was heavier and more antiquated than that of the library. There were quaint old tapestry hangings to the bedstead, so queer and faded that it seemed almost as though they might have been embroidered during the Crusades. The wardrobe was a marvel of size and solidity, and gave the impression that in troublous times, obnoxious owners of the estate might have safely been concealed in a false recess. Other articles of furniture were in similar style, and all together gave quite a gloomy aspect to an apartment that naturally, if left to itself, might have been well disposed to be cheerful. The effect was not diminished by a dingy picture over the mantel shelf, representing a funeral urn and drooping willow worked in hair, with an exceedingly numerous and mournfully dressed family coming two by two down a winding path to weep in concert around the tomb. While I gazed solemnly at this work of art, a ragged yew tree kept striving at every breath of wind to thrust one of its gnarled old branches in at the window; and putting all things together, the cheerfulness went out of me entirely, and the idea of ghosts came in quite as naturally as in the library. I tried to shake it off, remembering my late experience and not wishing to have my mind burdened with any further queer fancies of the kind; and after a moment or two, indeed, seemed to be succeeding very tolerably and became able to hum an operatic drinking song with comparative ease and correctness. Just then, however, happening to turn my head, I saw a strange figure standing near the foot of the bed and gazing at me with fixed but not unpleasing or unfriendly expression.

The figure of a pleasant young fellow; not, to all appearance, over twenty-two years of age, and exhibiting a lifelike rotundity and opacity that would have prevented any suspicion in my mind of the supernatural, if I had not had my uncle's word for it, or if I had discovered any way in which the stranger could have entered the room without my seeing him. A handsome young fellow, courtly in manner and dress, with coat of purple velvet, slashed and embroidered the whole

length of the sleeves, a dainty little rapier swinging at his side and a plumed cap held in his hand. Hair falling in long curls over his broad lace collar, and the beard twisted into a point, while the small mustachios also twined into points turned up against the cheeks. A mild, responsive kind of face, with courteous smiles and replete with indications of gentle disposition.

"I am exceedingly happy to meet you," he remarked, playing with the gold-lace upon his sword hilt. "The more so that since I have been ill, so few persons come to visit me at all. I do not know that I have seen anybody of late, excepting the butler; and even he appears to be a new butler, most unaccountably put into possession by some other and pretended authority. I must inquire into it when I am completely restored."

"You say that you have been ill?"

"Yes; a faintness and much uneasy want of rest at night, principally arising from this lump in my chest; and that, in turn, coming from the attack upon me by my brother Harold. Would be glad to introduce him to you if it were not for that. But I put it to you now: after what has happened could I show him any such attention, or, indeed, associate with him at all? If cousin Beatrice were here, now--" At this moment there came a rap at the door; and the ghost, shrinking a little toward one side, began to pale before me, and I saw that he was slowly fading away, beginning at the legs, and so the line of invisibility extending upward until gradually the whole figure had entirely vanished. Again I saw in its entirety the carved footboard which he had hitherto partially obscured; there was nothing left, indeed, to remind me of the strange visitant.

And opening the door I saw only Bidgers, the butler.

"Luncheon is ready, Master Geoffrey," he said. "No fish today, for the West stage is not in, but the mushrooms is particularly fine. Heard you talking to the ghost as I came along--the upstairs ghost, not Sir Ruthven's downstairs ghost. Sir Ruthven has only seen the downstairs one, but I've seen both. Saw this one last Christmas, about this time. He would not speak to me, however, it being that I am only the butler. They're very much alike, Master Geoffrey. There's a very nice haunch of venison for dinner today, let me recommend; and the kidneys is not to be despised, either."

CHAPTER II

After that, and during the remainder of my visit, nothing else happened especially worthy of mention. The Christmas festivities passed off as they generally do; and the next morning I returned to London, where my recollection of the ghosts soon began to die away. At first, indeed, as is natural, I could think of nothing else. But inasmuch as my Uncle Ruthven had taken the matter so coolly, I began to be impressed by a careful and more deliberate consideration of his manner, and to wonder whether I might not have imagined many of the most singular circumstances attending the incident; until, at last, I concluded that there could have been no ghost at all, but that I must have dreamed the whole story.

In addition, my time became so fully occupied that I had few occasions in which I might engage in desultory wandering of idle curiosity or speculation; for during the first eight months I was diligently employed reading for my admission to the Bar. After that, I was actively forgetting most of what I had learned, giving myself up as escort to my cousin Lilian. She had returned from her travels upon the continent, and with her father was stopping awhile in London before continuing on to the Grange. It was my pleasing duty to remain at Lilian's side most of the time, Sir Ruthven being glad to avoid the toil of active companionship. I was very much in love with Lilian, but would not for the world have prematurely told her of it--it would have made her so tyrannical. At last, of course, we quarreled. It was the day before Sir Ruthven and Lilian returned home; and she informed me that she was going on the 10.45 stagecoach, and that she would be seriously displeased if I attempted to see her off. This looked well for me upon the whole, I thought, and I started for the coach at once. As ill luck would have it, I missed it, a circumstance which really helped my cause; since Lilian, being thereby persuaded that I understood it to be a lasting quarrel, felt suitably piqued into anxiety and regret.

A little before Christmas, Sir Ruthven wrote me to run down to the Grange as usual. With his letter came a perfumed note from Lilian, stating that if she could, she would gladly be away at Christmas with her Aunt Eleanor; but since she could not, but was obliged to remain home, she would consider it a great insult if I presumed to visit the Grange before she could get away in some other direction. I was wonderfully encouraged at this, feeling that all was going on well; and packing

my trunk at once, I went down by the earliest stage on Christmas morning.

Again the chimes happened to be ringing just as I alighted; and, as before, no one coming forth to meet me, I pressed on to the library, there to make my respects to Uncle Ruthven, feeling well assured that I should find him in his accustomed seat beside the fireplace. He was in the room, indeed, but not sitting down. He was standing beside the chair and bowing with great affection of cordiality to some one in the further corner of the room. Looking in that direction, I beheld a young fellow in court suit of two centuries ago, with hand upon his heart, bowing back to my uncle with still greater excess of old-fashioned courtesy and cordiality; and I did not for an instant doubt that I was looking upon the downstairs ghost. Almost the duplicate of the other one, indeed. Evidently about the same age, with equally agreeable, sunny, ingratiating expression.

Like the other, he had thick curls falling over the collar, beard cultivated to a point, slashed velvet coat, laces, gold tassels, and a slim, daintily decorated rapier. The most notable differences consisted in his complexion and hair being a shade darker, and his coat being of a lively crimson. It was a pleasant thing to see these two persons salaaming cordially and ceremoniously to each other; my uncle bowing until he struck the table behind him, and the ghost bending over in responsive courtesy until the point of the scabbard of his sword tipping up, made a new scratch upon the worm-eaten picture of Salvator Rosa.

"You see, Geoffrey," my uncle whispered between his repeated genuflexions, "he has come again to the very minute. The very same time as last year, just as though the chimes waked him up. I remember that you then thought that perhaps I was accustomed to cut him short rather too suddenly. We will be more cautious now, and will not end until we get his whole story out of him." Then to the ghost "I am rejoiced to see you once more, kind sir."

"It gives me equal and exceeding pleasure," responded the ghost. "And I know that my brother Arthur would be similarly gratified could he only know about your arrival. But, then, how is he to know? After his conduct toward me--the obloquy he has thrown around me, in fact--it certainly would be beneath my dignity to approach him, even for the sake of imparting information. I can, therefore, merely myself welcome you."

"Now, just listen to that!" muttered Uncle Ruthven, beginning to flush up

angrily. "I have done my best; but is it possible to continue politeness with a person who insists upon treating me as his guest? I treat him with all the cordiality I can muster, and the only result of it is that he turns around and seems to patronize me."

It chanced that, moved by the first warmth of my uncle's courtesy, the ghost had advanced a little, as though to meet us, and thereby he now stood between us and the window. This change of position seemed to produce a marvelous alteration in his appearance. The face so fair and genial and prepossessing became at once a queer confusion of lines, every feature being obscured by what looked like converging cuts and wrinkles, making the whole expression of the countenance unintelligible. It was only for an instant, however. The next moment, the ghost moving away from the window, his face became as before--clear, distinct, filled with amiable and courteous refinement and intelligence. It was not until afterward that the mystery explained itself. Now, indeed, the singular appearance had lasted for such a brief moment that it seemed scarcely worth while to seek an explanation. The only thing, in fact, that particularly struck me was a red line extending around the throat, as though the result of a forced compression. This was observable even after the ghost had passed from directly before the window, and until he had moved completely out of reach of the entire spread of sunlight.

"If Cousin Beatrice were here," remarked the ghost in continuation, "she would undoubtedly be very happy to take part in entertaining you. But where is she now? It is some days since I have seen her. Do you think it possible that Brother Arthur, in addition to the ignominy to which he has subjected me by his unjust suspicions, can have influenced her mind against me? If so, as long as I live, I will never--" "Listen again to that! As long as he lives! How can anybody stand such drivel?" cried Uncle Ruthven. "I suppose, Geoffrey, you will now see that it is as well to put an end to this first as last?"

With that, as upon the previous Christmas, my uncle seized a large book and vindictively let fly at the stranger. If until that time I had had any doubts as to his unsubstantial nature, they were now relieved. Corporeal and opaque as he had seemed, it was none the less true that the volume, striking him in the stomach, passed completely through him as through a stratum of air, falling upon the floor behind, while the figure remained unblemished and uninjured; with this exception, however, that naturally he seemed scarcely pleased with the roughness of the reception, and a shadow of discontent flickered across his face. Then appearing to

comprehend that possibly he might be unwelcome, he slowly faded away.

"Middleton's Cicero, this time," remarked my uncle, wiping his face and gazing toward the weapon he had just so successfully used. "And the fellow has digested that as well as the volume last year. At this rate he will get my whole library into him before long. I cannot help it, Geoffrey. You saw that I tried my best to be polite. But when a ghost acts as though he owned the house, and moreover talks as though he were alive, mortal man could not withstand the temptation to cut him down. Well, well, get ready for lunch, Geoffrey. The South Oriel, as last year."

Of course, being sent up to the same room and the old program seeming to begin being played, I expected once again to meet the purple-coated ghost. And as is natural, I went up with some little trepidation. For it is one thing to have a ghost appear to you; good natured and smiling from the first; and another thing deliberately to throw one's self in the way of a ghost who might not happen at the moment to be in a very pleasant humor, and might exert some supernatural power to make himself extremely disagreeable. All the time I was dressing, I looked uneasily over my shoulder, in search of apparitions. But inasmuch as we seldom find what we most surely expect to see, I was left entirely undisturbed, and finally began my descent to the dining room with feelings greatly relieved and composed.

Passing the drawing-room, I heard the subdued rustle of silk, and entering, found Cousin Lilian all arrayed for luncheon and smoothing herself out before the fire. Of course after what had passed in London, she swept me a stately courtesy, addressing me by my surname as though I were a stranger whom she had casually met the previous day; and of course I bowed in her presence with ceremonious reverence befitting the first presentation of Raleigh to Queen Elizabeth. Then Lilian, slightly lifting her eyebrows in spirit of wonderment at my intrusion, remarked that she believed Sir Ruthven was in the library. I replied that I had already seen Sir Ruthven and had found him busily engaged with a ghost; and that as this seemed to be their reception day and others might be expected by him, I would not intrude upon him for a while, but with her permission would prefer to remain where I was.

These preambles having been thus satisfactorily entered into, of course we began making up by throwing at each other little spiteful remarks of an epigrammatic nature; now and then spontaneous, but for the most part carefully manufactured weeks before and treasured up for the occasion. Snapping these off

from side to side like torpedoes, and mutually rebounding them harmlessly from our casemated natures, we gradually composed our feelings and began getting along very well on the path to reconciliation. How long it might have taken under ordinary circumstances I cannot tell; but it happened all at once that Lilian was startled into an unexpectedly rapid advance. For of a sudden I felt her hand grasping my arm, and she called me by my first name in the old familiar manner; and turning, I saw her gaze fixed with a wondering but not altogether alarmed expression upon the opposite corner of the room.

"See, Geoffrey!" she whispered. "The upstairs ghost! How comes he in here?"

CHAPTER III

Turning, I saw the purple velvet ghost at last, bowing low to the floor, with a humble courtesy that disarmed wrath, though nonetheless did an explanation seem necessary.

"Really, my good sir," I therefore said, "this intrusion--"

"I must apologize for it, certainly," he remarked, again bowing low. "I was a little behindhand this morning in reaching the South Oriel. And passing through the hall, I saw a female figure inside this room. I entered, expecting to meet my Cousin Beatrice. I see that I am mistaken. Last night I slumbered more uneasily than usual--the lump in my chest causing me very great disturbance, and doubtless it has excited my nerves and made me easily deceived. It has all come from Brother Harold's outrage upon me, I suppose. Which being so, it only remains for me to take my leave, with apology for the intrusion."

"Stay yet a moment," I said. "This is my cousin Miss Lilian, who certainly will not fear you and will forgive your slight mistake. And--and I have so much to say to you."

In fact, I felt that this might be the last time I should see him; and that it would be no more than a charity to enlighten him as to his true condition. It was a very sad thing to see a bright, amiable young ghost going around century after century as though he were still alive, and I decided that it would be a kind action to correct his error. Moreover, it happened that just at this moment, chance threw a

convincing explanation within my reach. For as the ghost stepped a little to one side preparatory to taking his departure, it came about that he stood between me and the window, just as the other ghost had done; and in like manner, every feature seemed obscured with a network of contrary lines and wrinkles. But as he chanced to remain there a little longer than the other one had done, the mystery became almost at once revealed. I saw that the singular appearance was caused by the strong sunlight showing through him, whereby his whole head appeared as a transparent object. It was exhibited as a mass of dim, lurid light, not entirely endowed with all the bright translucent qualities of glass, but rather as when a sheet of thin porcelain is held up to the light, so that its semicloudy transparency is revealed, and with it, any dark spots or imperfections in the surface are brought to notice. In like manner, our visitor's head now seemed transformed with the brightness of the sunlight behind it, so that its former opacity was gone and there was a light, cloudy appearance as of a dissolving mist, marked in every direction with straight and curved lines of greater or less intensity. At first, the features, excepting as they appeared in profile, seemed entirely to have vanished beneath a confusion of other lines; but a moment's observation assured me of the contrary. They were all still there--the sparkling eye, the delicate mouth, the well-shapen ear. With a little attention, I could still trace the sweep of their several outlines. It was merely that those outlines were now somewhat confused by the addition of other lines appearing from within the skull. These also, I found that with a little study, I could still make out. There was a broad, irregularly-curved mark showing the outline of the lobes of the brain. I could follow the whole ball of the eye beneath its socket and the fainter lines which connect the eye with the brain behind. The drum and the small bones of the ear, and the twisted passages from the nose to the ear were all now clearly defined. The palate, too, and the sides of the throat, until hidden at last beneath the laced collar of that courtly coat. In fine, under the influence of that bright sunlight behind it, the young fellow's head became something like one of the modern medical wax preparations, exhibiting every portion of its frame in exact position; except that, far superior to any work of art, it did not require to be taken apart for study, but could be examined in detail, just as it stood.

"How long," I said, myself moving a little one side so that he might not appear between me and the window; by which judicious movement he became at once

like any other person, his features returning to their usual distinctness of outline, unclouded by any rival lines and curves from behind; "how long have you been thus ill and disturbed at night by pain within your chest?"

"A week, or even more, I think," he said.

"Pardon me," I responded; "here is where you have made a trifling mistake in your chronology--you, and the other, as well. This little episode which you believe has occupied a few days or so, has lasted, in reality, upward of two centuries. You have been thrown into a certain condition of mind in which you are unable to take due note of time. Why this is so, I cannot attempt to explain. The melancholy fact remains that you have already been wandering some two hundred years, and for all we know, may be destined to wander to all eternity. In proof of this, I might refer you to your costume, which is of the fashion of Charles the Second; while, in fact, we are living in the thirty-eighth of Victoria."

I paused for a moment here, thinking that he might wish to ask some question. But as he maintained a perplexed silence, I continued:

"You are in further error in believing that the only consequence of some injury you have received has been mere restlessness at night. Instead of which, you died and of course were suitably buried. And consequently, you are not now a man, but merely a ghost. It may be unpleasant to be told this, but it is as well that you should know it first as last. And, after all, there can be no harm in being a well-conducted, creditable ghost. As such, you are allowed to appear each Christmas day for a few minutes, at the expiration of which, doubtless, you return to your grave. There, I presume, you slumber until the next Christmas day, for you seem to have no definite knowledge of your whereabouts. At the least you must be comfortable, which perhaps is more than can be said of many ghosts. Even Hamlet's father seems to have suffered torments; though there is presumptive evidence that he was a very good man, and totally unlike his brother."

"You are incredulous about what I am now telling you? In proof of it, let me stand you directly in front of the window, so that the sunlight will strike full upon your person. Then let me hold this looking-glass before you. Now studying your reflection carefully, you will see that you are transparent; which, I take it, is the surest proof any man can enjoy of his being a ghost. You can trace out the passages of your ears, the convolutions of your brain, the course of your jugular vein. This

line, which you might easily mistake for a nerve or cord, is merely a crack in the looking-glass. Should you feel disposed, hereafter, for your amusement, to study your internal anatomy more thoroughly, I would advise a new and more perfect mirror. But can you any longer doubt your condition?"

"I can no longer doubt, indeed," groaned the ghost. "But what, alas, can I now do?"

"A thousand things," I responded. "I take it that, inasmuch as men must not live idle lives, in like manner ghosts, also, may have their duties to perform. Surely, it can scarcely be intended, in the economy of the unseen world, that they should pass lives--or, rather, existences--of careless idleness. I know that, were I a ghost, I would do my best to find some useful employment. I think that I would endeavor to obtain some occupation that might be of benefit to the world I had left behind. Suppose, for instance, that you endeavored to retain some, even trifling, recollection of the nature of your abode in the unseen world, how you are associated, whither you are sent, and other facts of a kindred character, and were to impart them to the human race from time to time through myself. Do you not think that you would be doing great good, as well as entitling yourself to the gratitude of all living men?"

The ghost mutely shook his head. Evidently he did not care particularly about the gratitude of living men.

"Or suppose," I continued, struck with a new, and, in my estimation, better idea--for it happened that I had lately been interesting myself deeply in medical jurisprudence--"suppose that you were to apply yourself to the benefit of the human race in an anatomical or pathological capacity. There is on record the case of a man who had a hole in the side of his stomach through which processes of digestion could be watched, to the great service of medical science. Need I say that, for every purpose of interest or utility, you surpass him infinitely? I must assume, with tolerable certainty, that if your head is transparent, so, also, is your whole body; and that the workings of your inner system are simply hidden from sight by your clothing. Divested of that, you could easily unfold, in the strong light of the sun, the entire operations of your heart, your lungs and your stomach. Daily could you have your seances, and new discoveries could be noted down. There must be some thin, ghostly, almost impalpable fluid in your system answering the

purpose of blood in the human frame, and of this physicians might succeed in watching the circulation and flow. There are vexed questions in medical science as to the real use of certain vessels and attachments---whether they are actually necessary in the human constitution, or whether they are mere rudimentary relics of a lower organization. These questions you might succeed in determining. In fact--"

I had reached thus far, becoming so transported with the increasing magnitude of my speculations that I no longer looked at the ghost, but with half-closed eyes gazed upward at the ceiling; when suddenly Lilian plucked me gently by the sleeve, and, with quiet movement of the eyes, called my attention more directly to our visitor. He was standing motionless beside the window; but I observed that the pleasant expression had faded from his face, an angry flush was mounting into every feature, grim, transporting rage was clouding every line. And, as I paused in natural hesitation, he turned roughly toward me.

"Have you done?" he cried, bursting out with an old-fashioned oath of the days of the royal Stuarts. "Have you come to the end of your base proposals? Have you reflected sufficiently what it is to dare to suggest to Sir Arthur Grantley, of the Court of Charles, that he should pass his time illustrating the labors and theories of leeches, quacks, and charlatans?"

Another old-fashioned oath, a half withdrawal of the slender rapier from its sheath, a driving it down again with impetuous, angry energy, and the ghost strode wildly out of the drawing room, and was no more seen. But for two or three moments we could hear him growling forth his queer old court oaths as he rattled away along the outside passage.

CHAPTER IV

Lilian and I gazed at each other in speechless wonderment. The bell rung for luncheon, and we passed toward the dining room; still with thoughts too deep for words.

"Can it be," I said at length, as we entered the other room, "that this person, whom we had supposed to be merely some retainer of the family, was in reality its head? That he could have been an ancestor of yours, Lilian?"

"Papa will know," she answered. "We will ask him at luncheon." Then, when the old gentleman sat eating his nuts and raisins and sipping his wine--before which time he disliked to be disturbed about anything excepting the occupation immediately in view--she began:

"Was there ever a Sir Arthur Grantley, papa?"

"Let me think," mumbled Uncle Ruthven. "Yes, there was a Sir Arthur about two centuries ago. And now the story begins to come to me. There were two brothers--twins; the oldest having the estate and title, and the youngest being a captain in the Royal Guard. One would have supposed that, being so nearly of an age and closely related, they would have kept the peace; but the contrary was the fact. They quarreled so that one of them murdered the other, and was suitably hanged for it."

"Is there record of the fact, Uncle Ruthven?"

"Nowhere, unless it may be in the State Trials. I have never looked there. You will find no allusion to it in Burke or Debrett. Those useful and accommodating compilers, out of regard for the family honor, I suppose, merely state that Harold Grantley died, aged twenty-two: a piece of reticence which, after all, was scarcely worthwhile, considering that it happened so long ago."

"Time is a great cleanser of family escutcheons. It would be unpleasant to have a murder attached to the reputation of one's father or grandfather; but carry it two centuries backs and no one seems to care. If it were not so, there is scarcely a royal family on earth which would not be hanging its head. I do not read that Her Most Gracious Majesty Victoria ever makes herself miserable about any suspicions attaching to the memory of Queen Mary of Scotland. In fact, rather a disreputable ancestry, if distinguished, is better than none at all. It is scarcely to be supposed, for instance, that any of us would take it much to heart at finding Guy Fawkes seated upon one of the limbs of the family tree. At any rate, we have no reason to complain of this little murder in the Grantley line, seeing that it finished up the direct descent in that quarter and sent down the entail to us through a collateral branch."

With that, having exhausted his knowledge upon the subject, Uncle Ruthven went on sipping his wine and turned the subject upon the culture of turnips. But

after luncheon Lilian and myself, feeling by no means contented, slipped up to the library again and took down one of the time-worn dusty volumes of the State Trials. The books had evidently not been moved out of place for years; but it was easy, having the reign, to find all that we wanted, and in a few minutes we opened at the case of Rex Grantley. The book was very heavy, and at the first we spread upon the table. This proving inconveniently high we took to the sofa, where we let the volume rest on both our laps and read together. It was very pleasant, altogether. It was necessary for Lilian to lean over so that her curls brushed across my shoulder, and at times I could feel her breath warm upon my cheek. That she might have greater strength to hold her share of the book, I passed my arm sustainingly about her waist; a fact which she did not seem to realize, so intent was she upon the story of the murder. We have often read about young men and maidens looking upon the same book and in just such positions. In those narrations it is generally a book of poetry, or at least a novel that interests them. I question if very often a young lady sits with her lover absorbed in the story of a murder committed by one of her own family and reads it without any feeling except of curiosity about its mere incidents, and as coolly as though it were Jack Sheppard or Oliver Twist.

But then, as Uncle Ruthven justly observed, it was so long ago.

It appeared, then, from the account in the State Trials, that Arthur and Harold Grantley were twin brothers of the age of twenty-two. As Uncle Ruthven had stated, Arthur was the oldest and in possession of the title and estate, while Harold held commission in the Palace Guard.

Naturally the two brothers were thrown much together, and were supposed to be greatly attached to each other. Of course, they sometimes had their little disagreements; but, until the period of the murder, it was never supposed that there was any especial ill feelings between them. The trouble ensued about noon one Christmas day. Harold had obtained leave to visit his brother at the Grange; and after an early dinner--for they were alone and much form and ceremony was dispensed with--they sat at the table, conversing, eating filberts and drinking their wine.

Possibly they had been drinking too much; but not so much, in fact, as to exhibit its effects upon them to any great extent. The most that could be said was, that it might have tended to make them quarrelsome; but as it turned out, this after

all was the whole mischief in the case, and much worse in its results than downright and less harmful intoxication. It chanced that Sir Arthur had taken the opportunity of exhibiting to his brother a certain valuable heirloom, known in the family as the great Lancaster diamond, having come into the line from a collateral Lancaster branch. It had lain concealed in a secret closet during the Cromwellian troubles, and had just been brought to light again. It is supposed that Sir Arthur, being attached to their cousin Beatrice and wishing marriage with her, had designed presenting her with the diamond; and that Harold, being equally in love with her and perhaps with no less prospect of success, had made objection; and that from this fact the quarrel had arisen. Be that as it may, their voices were heard in loud dispute; and suddenly Harold calling out for help, his brother was found lying upon his back lifeless and with every appearance about the throat of having been foully dealt with. Harold's account of the circumstance was to the effect that Sir Arthur all at once had thrown himself back in his chair and gasped and seemed to have been seized with a fit. On the other hand, it was argued that young men of his vigorous constitution did not readily die in fits--that the appearances of foul play by strangulation were too evident--that there had certainly been high words between them, a fact, indeed, which Harold was obliged to admit--that the known passion of both the young men for the same lady would have been sufficient of itself to produce fraternal hatred and strife--and furthermore, that Harold would have a supreme interest in his brother's death, by reason of the succession to the estate. And then again, the diamond had disappeared. If the death had been a natural one, the diamond would not have been disturbed; but inasmuch as it was the leading cause of the dissension, nothing was more natural than that the murderer should have made away with it, by throwing it out of the window, into the lake, most likely, so as to remove one great evidence of the crime. Altogether the feeling ran very high against the surviving brother, political prejudices that could scarcely now be explained intervened to increase the excitement, while certain favorites of the king, desiring promotion in the Guard by removal of one person of higher rank, prejudiced the royal mind against pity or pardon. In fine, after much agitation and a protracted trial, young Harold was found guilty and executed.

"And this explains," I said to Lilian, "many circumstances that hitherto have not been clear to me. The red line around the throat of the downstairs ghost; the pain in

the chest of the upstairs ghost--a difficulty most naturally resulting from outside pressure--all these things now tell the story very clearly, and agree most wonderfully with the State trials account. Only---which at first seems strange--the murdered now does not seem to remember that he was put to death, nor the murderer that he was executed for it."

"That is, indeed, singular," said Lilian. "But, then, ghosts are so silly!"

"At first sight, it may seem strange," I answered; "but not after a moment's reflection. Violence endured by us in life is very often with difficulty afterward brought to our memory. One has a fall or is stricken down by a club and made senseless; he recovers after awhile, and knows that in some way he has been injured, but does not remember the actual fall or blow. And why should it be different if the injury leads to death? Looking upon it in this light, and with this philosophy, we see the young baronet awakening in the grave with no conception of ever having been killed, but merely with some indistinct idea of previous attack or vituperation. And, in the same manner, we find the younger brother awakening in the belief that he is still alive, and remembering not his execution at the hands of the law, but only the fact of having been charged with some outrage against the other, the nature of which he cannot comprehend, while the circumstance of any charge being made at all grievously offends and distresses him."

"All very plausible, indeed," responded Lilian. "But suppose that, after all, he was innocent?"

"A thing very hard to believe, with so much contrary evidence," I said. "All that is a mere woman's unreasoning supposition, with endeavor to wipe off a blemish from the family escutcheon."

"Pho! for the family escutcheon," responded Lilian, putting up her lips in pholike form. And as she spoke she looked so pretty that, having my arm still about her waist, I began seriously to consider whether I had not better improve the opportunity and now make my offer. So much was already understood between us, indeed; and everyone, even Lilian herself, knew very well that it was destined some day to come about, as a suitable family arrangement long foreseen and often talked about; and, therefore, what better moment than the present to unburden my heart?

"I think, Lilian," I said, "that it is about time I spoke a word or two to you about

our future."

"Well, Geoffrey," she replied.

I saw the flush gather in her face, that she knew what must be coming, that she anticipated tender avowal with loving expression. In this last respect, at least, mindful of recent aggravations on her part, I determined that I would disappoint her.

"No," I said, "it is not probable that Harold was innocent. And therefore you must see for yourself, Lilian, that your family have been a most disreputable lot. But for all that, having unfortunately a strong personal prejudice in your favor, I am inclined to believe that I shall not be doing myself too great injustice in offering you my alliance."

"You are very kind, certainly, Geoffrey," she responded. "I cannot but feel intensely gratified at the preference. I suppose that every family must at some time or other meet its misfortune of a public execution or some similar disgrace. I consider it particularly fortunate that with us it has already happened. In your line of the family it is yet to come; and if I may judge by circumstances, it will probably take place during the present generation. And merely that I may legally enjoy the privilege of standing at your side and comforting you during that closing ordeal, I take pleasure in accepting your offer."

And this is how Lilian and I became engaged.

CHAPTER V

It was understood that the wedding would not take place immediately. Uncle Ruthven had some old-fashioned notions about matrimony, prominent among which was the idea that no young man should marry without having the means of support from his profession, so as to be independent of the fluctuations and liabilities to loss of private fortune. Upon this basis, it was determined that we should not wed until I had made a public and credible appearance at the Bar.

This came about in the following October. I had been engaged as third counsel in the great case of Charity-boy v. Church-warden, for assault. Churchwarden had boxed the ears of Charity-boy for playing marbles on a

tombstone; but unfortunately had not succeeded in catching him to do so until they were over the boundary-line of the graveyard. Upon this defect, want of jurisdiction as to place was alleged, and action brought. The suit had been running nearly five years, and therefore could now reasonably be moved for trial. The rector, curate, half the vestry and three of the bell-ringers had been subpoenaed to give evidence and stood ready. It was necessary to have, in addition, the testimony of the toy-maker who had sold the marbles; and he, it happened, was on his deathbed at the north of Scotland. A commission had been issued to take his testimony.

The toy-maker lay delirious for the most part, having a lucid interval of about half an hour each day, during which he desired to make his will. He was constantly prevented from doing so, however, by the entrance of the commissioners demanding to take his testimony, which so confused him that he always went off wandering again. Pending the execution of the commission, of course an adjournment was desired.

Now it happened that, both the senior counsel being away, it devolved upon me to make the application for the adjournment, and with a little difficulty about the pitch of my voice, I succeeded in doing so. The judge said that if the other side were agreed, there could be no objection; and the other side having duly consented, the adjournment was ordered. Whereupon I wrote down to Sir Ruthven that I had made my first appearance. Sir Ruthven immediately wrote back, asking whether my speech would be reported in the Times. I replied that I did not suppose it would, as the papers were unusually interested in the Montenegro difficulty, to the exclusion of much other valuable news. Uncle Ruthven thereupon responded that he was satisfied, upon the whole, even if the Times was silent about me; and that now that I had resources for support independent of inherited estate, the wedding might come off immediately after Christmas. And he told me to run down the day before Christmas, so that we could have a pleasant little Christmas dinner by ourselves, before the invited visitors began to arrive.

Accordingly, I arrived at Grantley Grange upon the after-noon of the twenty-fourth, and was at once shown to my room by Bidgers, who not only lighted me up, but followed me in to assist in unpacking my wardrobe. And while doing so, naturally with the self-allowance of an old family servant he let his tongue run loose with the gossip and events of the day.

"A hamper just come in, Master Geoffrey, with a fine large salmon; but that is for tomorrow. You must praise it when you see it, for Sir Ruthven sets great store in having got it. There has been no ghosts seen since you was here last--perhaps they have all gone away for good. There is talk that the Earl of Kildare will be at the wedding next week; but any which way, he has sent a silver pitcher. Maybe, after all, the ghosts have all been locked up where they are. Miss Lilian's Aunt Eleanor has done better than the Earl of Kildare though. She cannot come, they say; but such diamond earrings as she has sent--almost as large as filberts, Mr. Geoffrey! As to the grapes today, I am fearful there's a little mold on some of them; but the oysters--"

"That will do--thank you, Bidgers," I said, tired of the running stream; and Bidgers, taking the hint, affected to blow a speck of dirt off the sleeve of my wedding coat, and gently glided out of the room. I was not so much tired, indeed, as that I felt I would like to be alone for thought.

Something in Bidgers last remark had awakened an association of ideas in my mind; but of such intangible, confused character that I could not follow it up to any definite purpose. Diamonds as large as filberts--filberts and diamonds, so ran the words, through and through my mind like the strain of a tune; but out of it all I could not, with the utmost concentration of thought, gain any clue that I might--follow up to a satisfactory certainty. At night the same--I fell asleep with the old sequence of words running in my head, still like the strain of a tune, as sometimes we will set to meter the thumping of a railroad car. In the middle of the night I awoke; and then there flashed upon my mind a solution of the puzzle, but so wild and improbable, so idiotic and fantastic did it seem, that at once I discouraged it. Even then, when scarcely half aroused, and at an hour when the waking fancies run riot in premonition and alliance with hardly more fanciful dreams, did I laugh at the crude conception and try to beat it down, falling asleep again at last with mind apparently entirely relieved of the foolish notion. But when in the morning I awoke with the sun broadly shining in upon me, there again was the queer idea; and now, wonderful to relate, though I lay with the collectedness of thought appertaining to the open day, and with little chance of crude fancies any longer overwhelming me, the idea, though still as strange and ghostlike as before, no longer bore that first impress of the ridiculous, but was as something real and to be soberly and carefully considered. At least the experiment suggested by it might be tried, though secretly

and cautiously, so as not to provoke ridicule in case it came to nothing.

Dressing myself, I stole softly downstairs. It was still very early, and there was no one stirring below, excepting a housemaid dusting the furniture. She merely looked up and then continued her task, my habit of morning walks being too well known to excite observation. I passed through the long window and came upon the bare winter-stained lawn. There was the gardener, muffling anew some plants in straw; but he too, merely touching his hat, said nothing. Then I followed a gravel path around the terrace to the rear of the house, and thence struck off to a little grove of pines a hundred yards or so away.

In the midst of these was the burial vault of the Grantley family. It was by no means a repulsive object, being merely a brick erection a few feet above the surface of the ground, and originally constructed with some pretense of architectural symmetry. Neither was it an object of superstitious or sentimental reverence. In fact, at the present time there were not more than twelve or fifteen of the family laid away in it. It had been built four centuries ago, and with accommodation for a hundred or so; but at the time of the rebellion a party of Cromwell's troops came sweeping down upon the house, and, being in want of material for bullets, turned all the dead Grantleys out of doors and took their leaden coffins to cast into ammunition. After that time the burials continued for only a few generations; since which, the yard around the village church had received the family dead. About ten years ago it had been found necessary to open the vault in order to get the date of some particular death for legal evidence. The long-closed door had stoutly resisted, and at length the lock was obliged to be broken. It was intended, of course, to restore the fastenings; but equally of course, and as happens so often with matters that can be done any day, the duty was postponed from time to time, and gradually came to be no longer remembered. The closed door then warped open a little of itself, and the gardeners leaned their tools against it, and after awhile pushed the door further back, and slipped their tools just inside out of the rain; and so, step by step, the almost empty vault became only used as a toolhouse.

Vines were trained to grow over it, ferns gathered around its base, and a stranger would have taken it for a somewhat dilapidated icehouse.

I pushed the door open yet a little further and peeped within. The sunbeams,

still low and shut out by the screen of trees, could not now enter; but enough light stole in to show a pile of rakes and hoes just inside, and a little further along, a row of empty recesses, built for coffins, but long since made vacant. Entering, I could see that the recesses ran in double rows for some distance in front of me, being at the further end shrouded in darkness. I drew out my cigar lighter and by the aid of repeated tapers proceeded to explore. Then I could see that at the further end, a few of the recesses were filled with coffins. These were in various stages of decay. In all cases, the dark coverings of cloth had moldered away and lay in fragments at the side or on the stone floor below. In some, the outer wooden shells were nearly whole; but in others, they had crumbled into dust and splinters. With a few of the recesses, the names and dates of the remains within were fastened at the lower edge upon brass plates; with others, the plates had entirely disappeared. There was one recess which contained a worm-eaten coffin of somewhat plain construction, but no name or date or even evidence that any such had ever been affixed. I could not resist the impression that here lay the unfortunate Harold Grantley; given, as matter of right, a place in this ancestral vault, but, through some charitable idea of letting his unhappy fate become forgotten, denied all record that could lead to future identification. Passing onward, with gathering assurance that my search would not prove unavailing, at each minute renewing my quickly expiring tapers, I carefully read every name, now and then rubbing the brass plates with my handkerchief before I could decipher the blurred old-fashioned letterings. Then, for a while, as the number of remaining niches one by one was lessened without rewarding my search, hope began to give way to disappointment. Only for a moment, however; for soon, to my abundant gratification, I read upon one of the plates, the words and characters, "Arthur Grantley, Obt. Dec. 25, 1663, Aet 22."

Here then, lay he whom I sought, and I scrutinized attentively all that remained. A moth-eaten, rat-torn pall, a nest of coffins, and that was all. Uneasily for the instant I turned my head, dreading lest the blithe young apparition with its purple and laced coat and dangling sword should arise and demand wherefore I was about to disturb him; but all remained quiet about me. I was alone with my own thoughts and purposes, and could prosecute my designs unquestioned and unimpeded.

I had feared lest I might be obliged to seek for assistance, but it was not so. Every thing, in fact, seemed made ready and convenient for me. The outer box was

worm-eaten, warped and decayed, so that it could be broken and brushed away in places with a mere stroke of the hand; the leaden coffin inside had corroded, and the solder of the seams parted, so that the joints had spread apart, and, with no great effort, I was able to bend open the end; the mahogany coffin inside of all had suffered similar decay with the outer box, and readily parted. In a moment the outer end of all three coffins lay open, and I could easily insert my hand.

For a moment I hesitated. What if, as sometimes happens, the remains had not suffered corruption, and my touch were to encounter a solid form! Repressing this fear, I passed my hand stealthily within, finding no obstruction. Only a little dust at the bottom, hardly deep enough for a finger to write a name upon. This was all that was left of the gay young courtier, twelfth baronet of Grantley. Slowly I let my hand wander up along the bottom of the coffin, groping among the dust, until two-thirds up to the top; then I struck against a small, hard lump. My heart gave a loud thump of excitement. What could it be? Was it the prize that I had hoped for, or was it merely some fragment of unpulverized bone? Half wild with tremulous expectation, I grasped the little lump of substance firmly between thumb and forefinger, and hurried with it to the door of the vault. Even as I approached the dim, lurid light just within the half-opened entrance, I began to feel my assurances grow more sure; and when I emerged into the bright glow of day beyond, and held my prize up against the golden rays of the risen sun, I could no longer doubt that I had gained possession of the long lost Lancaster diamond.

CHAPTER VI

When I returned to the house, I said nothing about what I had been doing. It seemed as though the time for explanation would not come until toward evening. How, in that broad garish light of morning, could I venture to reveal that secret of dreams and darkness and rifled tombs? How, indeed, would my story be believed, unless with the glow of nightfall thrown around it to attune the listeners to credence?

Moreover, what if, during the day, the ghost were to appear, condemn my invasion of his sepulcher, demand his diamond, and possibly, by threats of supernatural force and terrors, obtain it? Certainly the accustomed hour for the ghosts was close at hand, and at any moment they might visit us. Already Sir

Ruthven sat in the library awaiting his especial apparition. My uncle was, for the time, in no particularly friendly mood toward ghosts; and he now loudly declared that, whatever might before have been his courtesy, his forbearance had at last ceased, and he would not tolerate their coming. Certainly not now, he said, seeing that the house was preparing for a season of festivity, and had other things than the next world to think about. Accordingly he sat, watching, in his great elbow chair, with the heaviest volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at his side, in readiness to crush out the first sign of ghost before even a word of salutation could be uttered.

But to the wonder of all and greatly to Sir Ruthven's disgust as well--seeing that, having made up his mind for action, he did not like to feel that his time had been thrown away--no ghost appeared, upstairs or down. Punctually at twelve, indeed, the chimes rang out the merriest peal we had enjoyed for years--the changes were sounded by the hundred with unusual exactness and celerity; yet all the time my uncle sat unmolested, with his *Encyclopaedia* lying idle beside him.

At length the day wore itself out, the bell sounded for dinner, and we repaired to the dining room.

It was to be our last little dinner by ourselves; a very small Christmas party, indeed, but on the morrow the guests would begin to arrive and to break up our privacy, and then there could be no complaint about lack of excitement in the household. This last day Sir Ruthven had desired we should have for ourselves. But few as we were, no one had forgotten that it was the Christmas season and should be honored accordingly. Holly and mistletoe decked the room in every direction. A great yule log lay cosily ensconced in the chimney-back and good humoredly tried to blaze up as merrily as the smaller branches that crackled around it; though being so unwieldy, it was not very successful in the attempt. But those smaller branches, invading the yule log's smoldering dignity with their blithe sport of gaiety, snapped and sputtered around it with uproarious mirthfulness; sending none but the prettiest colored smoke wreaths up the chimney, and casting out bright tongues of flames that lighted up every corner of the room and gave a ruddy glow to the time-faded portraits, and even brought out patches of cheerful sunlight upon an old cracked Rembrandt that no one had ever been able to decipher.

The table was set for us three only; but, in honor of the day, with as much ceremony as though there were to be twenty present. A tall branch wax-light, used

only on occasions of great festivity, was brought out from its green baize covering and planted in the center. Treasures of antique silver, the very existence of which Sir Ruthven had nearly forgotten, were exhumed from their places of long concealment, and now once more, as in past centuries, pleasantly glimmered in the gentle gleam of wax-light. Flowers here and there unobtrusively exhaled sweet odors from tiny vases. There was to be a boar's head brought out and placed on the table at the proper time for each of us to look at and taste and pretend to enjoy. The plum-pudding was turning out a great success--the greatest for many years, as Bidgers whispered to me. All the circumstances of the scene around us were soft, harmonious and cheerful; certainly now was the time for me to tell my story.

With some little affectation of ceremony, perhaps, I drew forth the Lancaster diamond and placed it in Lilian's hand. I told her that I could make her no more valuable Christmas gift than to restore this rich family relic of the past. Lightly I touched upon the process whereby I had found it; rather elaborating, instead, the train of thought that had led me to suspect where it had lain hidden. I explained how the finding of the diamond gave new illustration to the record in the State Trials, proving that the younger brother had not been guilty of any murder at all--that during the agitation of a quarrel the older brother must have accidentally swallowed the diamond, mistaking it for one of the filberts that lay beside it near his plate, and which were of similar size--how that this unfortunate error had been sufficient of itself to cause his death by suffocation--how that thereby the discoloration around the neck of the deceased, as well as the disappearance of the diamond were properly accounted for--how that, most probably, it also gave an explanation of the unpleasant lump in the chest of the crimson-coated ghost.

"It is doubtless so," a soft voice thereat interrupted. We all looked up; and, at the further side of the table, we beheld both the ghosts. More alike now than ever before, it seemed to me; only with that single difference of color of the coats. The same bright engaging faces, the same gentle manner; as now, all heart burnings seemingly healed, they stood with their arms bound lovingly about each other in fraternal embrace.

"We have heard it all," continued the crimson ghost, "and thereby we find an explanation of some things that we never thought of before. Both Brother Arthur and myself now know that we are dead; and that it is fitting, therefore, that we should no longer haunt these scenes, to which indeed, we have no claim. I know

that I have been hanged; a matter, however, which occasions me no concern, seeing that I deserved it not. I should at any rate have been dead long before this; and since my family can be satisfied of my innocence and I know that my Brother Arthur, in spite of a few harsh words, loves me still the same, I care not for others' opinions."

"And I," said the purple ghost, "cannot sufficiently thank you for the relief you have given me. Nightly have I lain in what I now perceive was my grave, unable to sleep by reason of the strange lump in my chest. This morning about eight, there came sudden relief; such sweet relief, indeed, that I overslept myself, and for the first time in many years have missed the chimes, and neglected at the appointed hour to make my usual Christmas visit. Even this bodily relief, perhaps, is not equal to what I feel at knowing that in reality I have suffered no wrong at the hands of Brother Harold. I think that if now we could only agree about the only subject which has ever estranged us--by which I refer to our mutual attachment to Cousin Beatrice we might--"

"I think I can easily make your mind easy about that matter," remarked Uncle Ruthven, coming forward. "If you will bear with me a minute, I will show you the lifelike picture of your Cousin Beatrice in after days."

He lifted one of the branch candlesticks from the table, and directed its light upon a painting on the wall. The portrait of Cousin Beatrice in more advanced life. A cracked, blackened and moth-eaten picture; but in which, by singular chance, the face had remained intact. The face of a woman who had long survived the natural freshness and graces of youth, and had gained in place of them none of those more matured and ennobling qualities that dignify age. The patched and painted and powdered face of a woman given up to all lightness and frivolity; a face in which there was nothing sweet or pleasant or kindly; in which all the art of Sir Godfrey Kneller had not succeeded in mingling with accurate likeness one spark of generous nature or blotting out the appearance of sordid vanity that pervaded it throughout all.

"The portrait of your Cousin Beatrice in her fiftieth year," remarked my Uncle Ruthven. "She never married, and was noted at Court for her skill in cheating at cards."

The two young ghosts gazed for a moment intently at the picture. As they did

so, it seemed as though their embrace grew more intimate and fraternal. At last they turned again, as satisfied.

"I do not think that we shall ever quarrel again about Cousin Beatrice, even if at times we forget that we are all dead," the older ghost then said, with a sweet smile. "And now that all differences are so pleasantly made up, it remains for us only to bid you farewell. And since Brother Harold can now rest in his grave untroubled by any idea of wrong from me, and I can sleep, no longer annoyed by the lump that pained my chest, it is probable that we shall never be aroused to visit you again."

"But stay a moment," cried Uncle Ruthven, fairly touched at heart, and no longer remembering the Encyclopaedia. "You will not go so soon? At least you will take dinner with us?" As he spoke the ghosts had already begun to vanish, the line of invisibility starting at the feet, as before, and working upward until they were half gone. Then, for a moment, the line trembled irresolutely, and so began to descend until again they stood entirely revealed. It was as though a person going out at a door had indeterminately held the handle for an instant and then returned.

"Moreover," continued my uncle, "I have apologies to make for many a past act of rudeness toward one of you."

"It is forgotten already," said the crimson ghost, bowing.

"What do you say Brother Arthur, can we wait a little longer?"

"A very few minutes, Brother Harold, if only to give myself time to make amends for an act of impoliteness on my part toward this other gentleman only last year."

So they seated themselves at the table and the dinner began. It was pleasant to watch the old-fashioned politeness with which they conducted themselves--the courtesy with which they bowed to Lilian at each word they addressed to her--the grace with which, wishing to cause no remark, they affected to eat and drink. Not able to do so, indeed, by reason of their incorporeal nature, but all the time lifting the full glasses and laden forks to their mouths and dropping them again untouched. It was delightful to listen to their conversation, marked here and there indeed, after the fashion of their time, with a light oath, but bright and sparkling throughout all, with vivacity and wit. At first, indeed; the time was somewhat

occupied by Uncle Ruthven giving sketches of the late history of the family; but after that the ghosts were encouraged to talk, and pleasantly beguiled half an hour with hitherto unknown anecdotes of the Court of the Merry Monarch. As I listened my thoughts naturally strayed from the present back to the romantic past, and my imagination carried me, unresisting, into the olden days of the Stuarts. I was no longer in the prosaic nineteenth century, I was in the midst of a laughing, careless throng of king and courtiers, all busily making up for their enforced deprivations during the somber period of the Commonwealth. Hamilton and Nelly Gwynn, De Grammont and Villiers and Frances Stewart, these and others of those long dead disreputables, whose actions may not have been comely but whose names live vividly in story, and to whose memories some glamor of romance still kindly attaches us, now crowded around and made the past a reality and the present a mere unstable myth. In the hallucination of the moment even the portrait of the poor old card-cheating Beatrice Grantley seemed to invest itself with something of her long-departed youthfulness; and as the mingled gleam of wax-lights and yule log flickered upon it, it was as though some hitherto unnoted beauties of expression came to the surface, and the whole countenance became once more aglow with that youthful loveliness which, doubtless, in the time of it, and during her occasional visits to the Court, must have enticed Charles himself awhile from his more stable attachments in order to enjoy passing flirtation with her.

"A joyous Court, indeed; and sadly now coming to my memory as I feel that I can never mingle with it more," said the purple ghost. "A Court to which I know that my fair young kinswoman would have done ample honor, could she have been there," he added, bowing to Lilian; "even more abundantly, indeed, than Cousin Beatrice. Growing old with more grace and dignity than did Beatrice, I am very sure. And that she may live to grow old in such gentle manner, let her take heed and not make my sad mistake."

As he spoke, he pointed significantly to the Lancaster diamond which chanced at that moment to be beside her plate, and, by a singular coincidence, among a little pile of filberts.

"Yet I am sure," he added, still with the courtly manner of his period, "that such sweet lips could never make mistake about anything. Rather should the diamond, with its appropriate mate, be reserved to grace those beauteous ears." "Its mate, do you say?" I remarked; not sure, for the moment, but that the young ghost had

swallowed two diamonds, and that I had not carried my researches far enough.

"Yes, its mate," he said. "Surely you must know? Not so, indeed? Well, there were two of these great diamonds, the Lancaster and the York. They had come into possession of one family through union of adherents of those two rival parties, and thence into our own line, through subsequent alliance of that family with the Grantleys. In Cromwell's time, the diamonds were hidden in separate places to preserve them from confiscation, the knowledge of those places being handed down only by word of mouth, for greater security. At the Restoration, I alone knew the secret. At the time of my death I had already brought the Lancaster diamond to light, as you are well aware. The York still remains hidden. Permit us now, my brother and myself, to offer it to you as our joint Christmas present. You will find it in a little metal box close beside--"

At that very moment it chanced that a small bantam rooster outside the window set up a crow.

It was a miserable little banty, scarcely half fledged. It had a drooping wing, and a twisted toe; and for these defects and others, perhaps, which we had not noticed, was constantly driven away from the general society of the poultry-yard. Even the hens were accustomed to pick at it. Its crow was weak, and piping, like a school-boy's first attempt at whistling. Nor was this the hour of midnight or early dawn, but merely seven in the evening. There seemed no reason why any ghost with self-respect should be moved by such a feeble crow from such a despicable source, and at such an early hour. And yet there may be a certain, inflexible rule for well-constituted ghosts; and perhaps, in cock-crowing, the line cannot easily be drawn between different styles.

Be that as it may, at the very first pretense of sound from the little banty, the ghost stopped speaking, gazed inquiringly at his brother and received an answering nod; and then without another word they slowly faded away.

"Ghosts are so ridiculous!" said Lilian. But I thought that as she gazed at the Lancaster diamond and reflected how well the two Christmas gifts would have looked if worn together, she seemed sadly disappointed that the little banty had not put off his crowing for a minute longer.