

## A Ghost's Revenge

Lettice Galbraith

It was a dismal evening. Heavy clouds covered the sky. The air was full of a raw dampness, which hung like a veil over the flat marshy district through which the London train was winding its way, like some huge fiery serpent, now pausing in its sinuous course, now darting forward with a writhe and a shriek, to vanish under a lurid cloud of steam.

"Mallowby," shouted the hoarse voice of the porter, "Mallowby." The door of a first-class smoking carriage was reluctantly opened, and a solitary passenger alighted.

"What a beast of a night! " he muttered, hastily buttoning up his fur-lined overcoat, "and what a beast of a place!" peering discontentedly across the low white railing at the monotonous stretch of snow-powdered fallow and pasture. "What on earth has induced Forster to bury himself in such a desolate hole?"

"Any luggage, sir ? Two portmanteaus and a gun-case—very good, sir. Where for—the Rectory? The cart is just outside, through the gate on the left."

With another malediction on the rawness of the atmosphere, the passenger from town picked his way across the sloppy platform and climbed into the dogcart which was in waiting for him. He was cold, hungry, and, if the truth must be told, considerably out of temper; and, as he splashed down the mile of muddy road which lay between the station and the village, Gerald Harrison was half inclined to repent his promise of spending a couple of days with his old college chum on his way to Scotland.

A hearty welcome, a sherry and bitters, a roaring fire, and a hot bath went a long way towards dispelling his ill-humour. The Reverend Richard Forster, now acting as *locum tenens* for the absent rector of Mallowby, thoroughly understood the art of making his guests comfortable.

"You will not have too much time, old fellow," he said, when he had conducted Harrison to his room. "I am sorry to hurry you, but dinner is at half-past seven, and I cannot well put it back because I have asked another man. His name is

Granville. He has lately come to the old Hall, and we are going to shoot over one of his farms to-morrow."

Twenty minutes later, when Gerald (with temperature and temper alike restored to their normal condition) descended to the library, he found his host in earnest confabulation with the visitor—a slight dark man, with an anxious, rather worried expression, and a trick of glancing nervously over his shoulder.

"I give you my word, Forster," he was saying, "that it is going on worse than ever. I can't get a servant to sleep in the front of the house, and if I were not ashamed of acknowledging myself a fool, I would cut the place tomorrow and go back to town."

The opening of the door put an end to the discussion. Forster changed the subject by introducing his guests, and as dinner was almost immediately announced, the conversation fell into general channels—such as the Irish question, pheasant-rearing, and the chances of an open season. It struck Harrison that Mr. Granville had all the appearance of a man who has received some severe mental shock. Though he talked intelligently and even well, it was evident that his attention was never wholly given to the subject in hand. He seemed to be constantly listening for some expected sound, and once, when footsteps were audible on the gravel without, he started violently and turned as white as a sheet.

"It is only Kenwell bringing back the keys of the church," remarked Forster. "He has been taking the choir practice for me this evening. There is the bell."

A servant answered the door, and the footsteps died away again, accompanied by the distant clash of the iron gate. Granville sank back in his chair with a long breath of relief. He had let his cigar out, and now looked round for a light. Harrison offered him a match, and, as the elder man took it, he could feel that his hand was cold and shaking.

The evening passed in pleasant desultory chat. At eleven o'clock Granville rose. "Will you order my cart?" he said. Then, in answer to his host's demur, he answered nervously, "Don't tempt me to stay, Forster; it only makes matters worse. Yes, I know it is quite early and all that; but they will take ten minutes to put the horse in, and," with a ghastly attempt at a smile, "I am like Cinderella, I must be indoors before midnight. You will come up early tomorrow, and of course you both

lunch with me. I would ask you to dine as well, only—only I am not good company in my own house now."

Forster's hand was on the bell. He paused, and looked keenly into his friend's face.

"Don't go back, Granville," he said, earnestly. "Let me tell your man that you will stay the night here. I can easily put you up."

"No, thanks; no," with the nervous haste of one who fears that his resolution may fail him, "I cannot do that. After all I have said, I dare not show the white feather to the servants. They would think me a fool; but, my God! they don't hear it as I do. Tell them to bring the cart round, Forster. For pity's sake, man, don't waste time! It is ten minutes past eleven already."

The order was given. As the minutes wore on, Granville became increasingly uneasy. He could not restrain his restless anxiety to be off, and it was a relief to every one when the grating of wheels outside announced that the trap was in readiness. Forster accompanied him to the door, whither Harrison presently followed.

"It is not much of a night," he commented, peering out into the chill darkness. "Your friend will have a coolish drive."

Forster was standing on the step.

"Hush!" he said, holding up his hand. "Listen! He is galloping."

From the old grey tower on their left chimed the half-hour, and, as the notes died away, they could hear the receding rattle of a cart being driven at a furious pace along the road below.

"He must be cracked to drive at that rate in the dark," cried Gerald, as the clatter of hoofs grew fainter and finally died away. "It will be more by luck than management if he doesn't upset at the first corner. What is the matter with him, Dick—does he drink, or is he off his head?"

"Neither at present. He thinks his house is haunted, and it is getting on his nerves."

"Oh, he must be cracked, then," with easy decision.

"No one but a lunatic believes in ghosts in these days. Accept the possibilities of terrestrial elementaries and left-hand magic if you like; but the common or garden ghost, never."

"There is something queer about the old Hall, though," persisted Forster. "I do not believe that any consideration you could offer would induce a Mallowby man to sleep there alone. The place has a bad name. It stood empty for years before Granville bought it. He spent no end of money in repairs and furniture too, which makes it additionally hard on him to be driven out by----"

"A ghost," concluded Harrison, with a shout of laughter. "My dear Dick, it is too absurd. Let us exorcise the place. I will back my six-shooter at thirty feet against any combination of goblins and blue fire. We will arrange a match to-morrow. Fifty pounds a side, to be paid in material currency only. Come, admit now that the thing is a huge joke."

"It is a good deal more like death to Granville," returned Forster, seriously. "His nerves are regularly gone to pieces. He is not like the same fellow who came down in the autumn."

"Have the ghosts been trying to evict him ever since?"

"Sounds weak, I dare say," Dick answered, "but I am inclined to believe, Gerald, that there is more in it than meets the eye. Last October Granville was every bit as sceptical as you are. If he heard anything he treated it with contempt. When the servants complained of mysterious noises, he laughed them to scorn. You saw for yourself that he does not laugh at it now. He told me this evening that these—these—manifestations are of nightly occurrence. I am afraid it is taking serious effect upon his health. I wish I had kept him here to-night."

"Oh, he will be all right," said Harrison, lightly. "Funk is a deuced unpleasant complaint, but it don't often kill. Twelve o'clock; I think I'll be turning in. This time to-morrow, I suppose, we shall be wishing each other a happy new year."

But the glad new year was destined to be ushered in by no hearty shaking of hands, no joyous congratulations at Mallowby Rectory. In the grey dawn of the December morning Harrison was awakened by the flashing of a candle before his eyes. Forster was standing beside the bed, with a pale and horror-stricken face.

"Gerald," he said hurriedly, "will you get up at once? I want you to come with me to the Hall. Something terrible has happened. Poor Granville is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the other blankly, "dead! Why, he only left here at eleven."

"I know that. Seven hours ago he was here, only seven hours ago, and now they are carrying his body up from the pond where it was found. Why did I not keep him?" he cried, pacing the room in deep agitation. "Why did I let him go back to that accursed house? I knew his mind was unhinged by what he had heard there. Poor fellow! poor Granville! and now it is too late."

Harrison was already out of bed,

"I will be downstairs in five minutes," he said. "Of course, I know no particulars, but has any one thought of sending for a doctor?"

Forster caught eagerly at the implied hope.

"Some one shall go for Mr. Tilling at once," he said, hurrying out of the room.

It was a relief to be able to do something, but long before the surgeon arrived they knew that his services would be useless. Death had sealed the master of Ravenshill for his own. The cold and rigid limbs refused to respond to the revivifying influences of hot blankets and artificial respiration.

Harrison was of opinion, as he assisted in his friend's frantic endeavours to restore some semblance of life, that poor Granville had been dead for several hours.

It was a painful task. In vain Forster tried to close the dull, lack-lustre eyes, fixed in a wide stare of indescribable horror. The tense features would not relax. Never had human being passed away from life leaving behind him so terrible an impression of fear. At seven o'clock the surgeon for whom Forster had sent appeared on the scene. One glance at the body was sufficient for him.

"He's dead," said the plain-spoken country practitioner. "Dead as a door-nail. How did it happen?"

Ah! how indeed? That was a mystery. A secret known only to the dead man and to those unspeakable powers who work behind the veil.

In the early morning of the last day of the year the household at the Hall had

been startled from their slumbers by a wild, agonised cry, followed by shriek upon shriek of demoniacal laughter. The horrible sounds lasted only for a minute. Before the terrified servants were fairly aroused and crowding together into the corridor, to learn the meaning of this strange alarm, the house was wrapped in its customary silence. For a few moments they had been too scared to do more than wonder at their master remaining undisturbed; then some one, bolder than the rest, suggested that it would be as well to waken him. They knocked at his door and received no answer. They called, but no voice replied. At last the butler ventured into the room. It was empty. The night lamp, which Granville had lately used, was burning brightly, the fire was nearly out. The bed had not been occupied. Thoroughly alarmed now, a search party was formed, and, armed with lights and a brace of revolvers, the men descended to the ground floor. In the library the lamp was also burning. The odour of tobacco still hung in the air; a few embers glowed in the grate; the spirit decanters and an empty soda-water bottle lay on the table beside an open book. There was no trace of any disturbance, and there was no sign of Granville.

The servants looked at each other in silence. No one dared to put into words the fear that lay chill at his heart. Suddenly the butler uttered an exclamation. His eyes had fallen on one of the windows. The long curtains were swaying gently backward and forward in the current of cold air from without.

The shutters were thrown back, and the casement stood wide open. They crowded round. "Steady, keep back a bit," protested one man, more astute than his fellows, "there is snow enough to hold footmarks. It's a pity to tread it about till we've got a lantern and struck the trail."

In a few minutes a covered light had been procured, and the threshold of the window was examined. There could be no doubt as to the way in which Granville had quitted the room. Straight from the sill the footprints were distinctly traced in the light snow. Along the path they tracked the marks, round the corner of the house, across the lawn to the edge of the pond. And there, beneath the willows, half-hidden by the drooping frost-browned ferns, they found the body of their master, still in evening dress, with clenched fingers, and features transfixed in an expression of ghastly dread.

The quiet little village was shaken to its core. All day long the people gathered

in knots to discuss the awful tragedy which had been enacted in their midst. Horror was in the air. Old superstition reasserted its sway with renewed strength. Old stories were repeated with bated breath; for once again the curse of the Deverels had fallen, and the truth of the half-forgotten legend was triumphantly vindicated.

By nightfall every human being had quitted the precincts of the fateful Hall. The scared domestics absolutely refused to remain on the premises, and the big house was deserted, save for the silent form lying so still beneath the white sheet on one of the sofas in the library, in which room the body of Philip Granville had been laid to await the coroner's inquest.

To Forster this desertion of the helpless corpse seemed terrible. He would have spent the night in watching beside the poor fellow who had so lately been his guest, and was only dissuaded from his purpose by the earnest solicitations of his churchwarden, a stalwart farmer, on whose grey head seventy odd years sat lighter than most men's fifty.

"Parson," said the old man, solemnly, "theer's noa good a fly in' in the faace o' Providence. Noa body thinks as you're a coward, but what sort o' use be theer in flingin' good loives a'ter bad uns? Yon poor lad tried it, and see how they've served him. Thirty year back Lord Broadborough's agent died in saame way. My feyther used to tell how, when he were a little lad, one of the Dawbenys caam doon hissen' and boasted as how he'd better the Deverels. It was i' the summer toime, and all went well enow. But as soon as winter caame on, 'they' were at work ag'in, and t' ould squoire, he began to grow graave and stern-like. He would na gi' in, till, on New Year's Eve, the house were fetched up by a fearful cry, and next mornin' they found his body in the pond theer, with a look on t' faace as, God forbid, should iver be sean on yours or rnoine. Mony an' mony a good mon has met that death, sin' the noight that Katharine Deverel stood in yon winder and cursed the mon who had robbed her of her husband's naame, an' theer lad of his lawful inheritance. 'You hev ta'an it by fraud,' she croid; 'but the Lord will avenge me. Noa good shall it bring thee. You shall neyther live in it yoursen, nor shall another receive it at your hands. Though I lose my immortal soul,' she says, 'I'll hev revenge. You may tak' my choild's birthright, you may slur ma fair naame, but noa mon—be he young or auld, good or evil, so that he does na' bear th' naame o' Deverel—shall live to see a new year dawn wi'in these walls. I'll die on Deverel land,' says she; 'and he who braves ma curse shall die even as I hev died.' Then

she called on the God of the feytherless to hear her words and turned awa', and next mornin' they found her body stiff an' stark in yonder pond, with the dead baby still clasped in her arms. You'll bear in moind, sir, what the Lord did to the mon who built up the walls o' Jericho. It's His will, an' you bein' a parson, should know better than to goa agin' Him. What harm can taake von poor bit o' clay now? But you hev a wark to do i' the world, and you ain't got no reet to chuck you loife a'ter his'n."

"Mr. Dawson is right, Dick," urged Harrison ; "you can't do the poor fellow any good. Your nerves are shaken, and I am free to confess, ghost or no ghost, to spend the night in that dismal house with a dead man is more than I should care about."

Very unwillingly Forster at last agreed to yield.

Three days later the local jury brought in a verdict of "Died by the visitation of God," and once again the spirit of Katharine Deverel had triumphed and the home of her ancestors stood empty.

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Five years had come and gone, bringing with them many changes. Dick Forster, now Bishop of Honduras, was doing good work for God and man in his far-off colonial diocese. His place in Harrison's daily life had been filled by another friend of his schoolboy days, who was also shortly to become his brother-in-law. Jack Chamberlayne was a handsome, genial young fellow, blessed with a fine constitution, a sweet temper, and a very considerable fortune, and the match between his favourite sister and his special chum was a source of unmixed satisfaction to Gerald. The two men were constantly together until a matter of business obliged Harrison to visit the South of Europe. The transaction occupied him for some months, and it was not till the end of December that he found himself once more on English soil. He reached Dover at noon on the last day of the year, and went straight to the "Lord Warden." A packet of letters was awaiting him. They had been forwarded from San Carremo after his departure, and among them was an envelope addressed in Chamberlayne's characteristic handwriting.

"Dear old boy," ran the letter, "what do you mean by spending Christmas in a dirty Italian village, instead of returning to the bosom of your family like a respectable Englishman? I don't believe a word about the vineyards. Tell your agent

to go to the devil, and come to us for the new year, or neither Elaine nor I will have anything more to do with you. The Hunt Ball is on the 5th, the Cardwell's on the following evening. On the 7th Mrs. Verelst is giving some theatricals in which we are going to distinguish ourselves, and there are three or four other minor events which you ought not to miss. Also I want your valuable advice as to the wisdom of buying a place in Creamshire. I only heard of it last week, and have already made up my mind to purchase, so your counsel must tend in that direction if you wish me to profit by it. It is a jolly old house, with capital stabling, and nice gardens. There is a ripping tennis-lawn (room for two courts, if I fill up a pond at the end), and a lot of old oak indoors. I forgot to say the house is furnished. It is in the best part of the Broadborough country, and within reach of the outside meets of Lord Cremorne's and the Turton. Plenty of shooting, and the whole thing going for a mere song. I believe there is even a family ghost thrown in. I am running down on Friday for a week to see how I like it; but of course you will put up at my place as you come through town whether I am there or not----"

Harrison waited to hear no more. In a moment the letter was crushed into his pocket, and he was out in the street, and, hurrying to the nearest telegraph-office, without a second's delay he wrote the message and handed it in to the clerk—

"Chamberlayne, 112 Piccadilly.—On no account go to Ravenshill Hall till you have seen me. Shall be in town this afternoon and will explain.—GERALD."

Then he hastened back to the hotel and ordered some luncheon. While he was eating he looked out the trains for town. The next was due in twenty minutes. His portmanteaus had not been unstrapped. Harrison sent for a cab, paid his bill, and in less than an hour was well on his way to London. From the moment of reading Chamberlayne's description of his projected purchase, he had decided on the course he must pursue. Though the name of the place was not mentioned he knew, by a sudden swift intuition, that it was Ravenshill Hall. Back to his mind, with the freshness of yesterday, swept the memory of that terrible night five years ago, and he shuddered as he recalled the words of the old farmer.

"No man—be he young or old, good or evil, so that he does not bear the name of Deverel—shall live to see the new year break within these walls. I will die on Deverel land, and he who braves my curse shall die even as I have died."

"Many and many a good man has met that death since." Was another victim

destined to be added to the long roll-call of that terrible vengeance, and that victim his old playmate, his friend, his almost brother? No, thank God; there was yet time to avert the stroke of fate. Jack must have received his wire by now. He would be waiting for the promised explanation.

The slow hours wore on; the train rattled and ground its way through the wintry landscape. The sky was leaden and dull. On the horizon lay dense masses of clouds, black and heavy with snow. By the time they ran into Charing Cross, large flakes were floating lazily down to join their crushed and mud-stained comrades on the dirty pavement. Evidently there had been a considerable fall earlier in the day, for the roofs down the Strand were gleaming white, and great heaps of snow had been scraped up from the roadway and piled behind the pillars of the station gates. Harrison got his luggage on to a hansom and drove straight to his friend's chambers. As he glanced up at the windows, it struck him as odd that no lights were to be seen.

The housekeeper answered his ring.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Harrison? Very glad to see you back, sir. There is a letter for you upstairs and three telegrams. The first came on Wednesday, sir. The note Mr. Chamberlayne left for you; he expected you would be here on Wednesday."

"Left for me," repeated Gerald, anxiously. "He has not gone, surely? Did he not get my wire?"

"I sent it on with the other letters this morning, sir. Mr. Chamberlayne has been gone a week—him and Mr. Curtis. He is staying at Creamshire, at Ravenshill Hall, Mallowby."

Harrison's brain reeled. He saw it all now. That letter had been a week in travelling to Italy and back again to England. He had cried, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace; when all the time he was too late, and Jack had gone to that accursed house, and—this was New Year's Eve.

"Fetch the letters, Mrs. Williams; or, stay, I will get them myself."

He tore upstairs, two steps at a time, snatched the envelopes from the mantelpiece and was back to the cab before the astounded housekeeper could utter a syllable.

"King's Cross !" he shouted to the driver; "and a double fare if I catch the 7.5 for the north. It is a matter of life and death."

"I'll do my best, sir," said the man, dubiously; "but it's darned bad going." Never had the way seemed so long; never did time go faster and horse more slowly. To Harrison's overwrought fancy they crept along, and again and again he raised the trap and implored the man to whip up. The agony and anxiety in his white drawn face moved the cabby's heart to pity, and he generously refrained from swearing at his impetuous fare.

"A cove is that onreasonable when 'e's in trouble," he growled to himself aloft. "Does 'e want me to let the mare down and make sure of losing 'is blooming train?"

At last they turned into the Euston Road. The snow was coming down in good earnest now, and Gerald could hardly see the hands of the clock for the blinding flakes. It wanted eight minutes to seven.

"Thank God!" he murmured, as the hansom turned into the yard of the Great Northern. Before the man had time to pull up, he was out on the ground.

"Mallowby," he called to the porter, "can I do it?"

"Four minutes," was the response.

Gerald flung half a sovereign to the driver, and rushed into the booking-office. The bell was ringing when he got on to the platform. The porter had put his portmanteaus into a carriage and was holding open the door. He threw himself into a seat with a sense of gratitude that he was to have the compartment to himself.

To maintain an appearance of indifferent calm at this moment would, he felt, have been impossible. He was enduring a martyrdom of suspense. If his friend's life had not already paid the forfeit for another's sin, every second that ticked its course was bringing him nearer to its end. He conjured up with horrible distinctness the dark library, the deep recesses on either side of the fireplace lined with books, the massive oak furniture. He could hear the weird murmur of voices, without, the ghostly steps on the drive; then the heavy velvet curtains trembled, parted, and a woman's figure stood framed in the long window—a woman with dripping garments and a white set face, lighted by strange, lurid eyes—eyes which were dead, and yet alive in their fierce hatred and unquenchable thirst for revenge. How

they glittered ! They were close to him now, looking in through the carriage window, and Harrison, who had once laughed contemptuously at the mere notion of supernatural manifestations, was perilously near raising a ghost for himself from the intensity of his nervous excitement. Fortunately, at this juncture he remembered that Jack's letter and the telegrams were still unopened in his pocket, and the break in the sequence of thought gave him time to pull himself together.

With a half-laugh at his own weakness, he drew the curtains across the windows, and, lighting a cigar, tore open the yellow envelopes.

All three messages had been handed in at Mallowby Station.

The first was dated December 29, and said: "Come down as soon as possible. Dull and seedy. Want cheering up.—CHAMBERLAYNE"

"He is getting nervous," Gerald said to himself "and did not like to acknowledge it."

The second telegram was more urgent, and enclosed a reply form. "Must see you to-day. Important. Wire what train. Don't fail me.— JACK."

The third was signed by Chamberlayne's valet. "Something seriously wrong here. Please come at once, very anxious about master."

Harrison's face grew very grave. Something must indeed have been wrong before the punctilious Curtis would take upon himself to send a wire like that. His fears returned with renewed force. It was torture to think of Jack sending message after message only to meet with blank silence. There was a piteous reproach in the last appeal, "Don't fail me."

"As if I were likely to do that so long as I am above ground," thought Gerald. "Poor old Jack, he might have known I should have answered if I'd ever got the things."

At Peterborough he went to the refreshment-room and swallowed a sandwich and a few mouthfuls of soup while his flask was replenished with brandy. Very few passengers joined the train, and no one came into Harrison's carriage. As the hours dragged out their weary length he grew more and more restless and nervous. He paced the six feet of floor like a caged animal. He let down the window. A cloud of fine snow blew in through the opening. All around hedges, fields, and trees were

wrapped in a dense white mantle. It was bitterly cold. Despite his fur-lined coat, hot tin, and a couple of rugs, his teeth were chattering and his hands were like ice.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past nine. In thirty minutes the train was due at Mallowby, and they had not passed Grantham yet. Surely, too, they were slackening speed. Half doubting the evidence of his senses, he again opened the window. The train was unmistakably at a standstill, but there was not the slightest sign of a station. The wind had risen, and whistled through the telegraph-wires overhead. Between the gusts he could hear the murmur of voices. Presently a man passed along the footboard. It was the guard. Harrison inquired the cause of the delay.

"Line blocked, I'm afraid, sir," was the reply, " but I will let you know as I come back."

With an exclamation, which was almost a groan, Gerald flung himself back in his seat. Were the fates league against him, that now, when every moment might seal Jack Chamberlayne's death-warrant, he must perforce sit idle, bound hand and foot by the victory of the forces of nature over the inventions of man? Five minutes passed, ten, twenty, thirty. Then the guard put his head in at the door.

"All right, sir, line is clear; we shall go on directly."

At one minute past eleven the London train, more than an hour behind its time, set down a single passenger at Mallowby. Harrison at once addressed himself to the stationmaster, and inquired how he could get to the old Hall. The man had been on the coroner's jury five years before, and remembered his face.

"Going to the Hall to-night, sir? Why, were not you here when poor Mr. Granville was drowned? You don't want to see it a second time, surely!"

"God forbid!" answered Gerald, quickly, "but I want to prevent it. A dear friend of mine is at that devilish house to-night. He does not know his danger, and I mean to save him."

"You can't do it," returned the man, bluntly. "Best keep clear of the black work that will be going forward up there. There is no baulking the Deverel curse. It will have its victim. God help him I say, and all those who sleep under that roof on New Year's Eve. You can do nothing for them."

"I mean to try," answered Harrison, with set teeth. "I have no time to waste. Where can I get a trap?"

"Nowhere nearer than the village. It will take you as long as walking the whole way. The roads are awful."

"Then I must walk. Can you find me a lantern? For Heaven's sake be quick. Every minute may mean his life now. What do I care about the danger? Man, I tell you he is my friend. He is to marry my sister in a fortnight, and I will either save him or die with him."

The stationmaster hesitated a moment.

"Look here, sir," he said, hurriedly, "you're a brave man, and I'll do what I can to help you. That was my last train till 1.30. I'll come with you as far as the gates. It will save you losing the way, and perhaps a bit of time getting through the drifts beside."

Gerald thanked him heartily, and side by side they turned their backs to the lights of the little station, and struck into the lonely road which lay between the railway and the haunted house. It had ceased snowing now. A few stars gleamed out between the rifts in the cloudy sky. From time to time a pale moon showed her face, now flooding the white landscape with a cold grey light, now hiding herself in a veil of fleecy vapour, as though she feared to see those things which should be done on the earth. By the help of the stationmaster's lantern the two men managed to keep to the narrow cart tract. The road was desperately bad. In places the snow was fully two feet deep. With the rising moon a keen wind had got up, which came sweeping over the level fields right in their faces, and cut like a knife. At the turning into the village where the land sloped a little, the drifts were almost impassable. At every step they sank above the knee. Harrison could hear his companion's breath coming thick and short. He was evidently getting done. For himself he was impervious to all outward discomfort. Cold, fatigue, hunger; he was vaguely conscious that he should know them all, if he were not past feeling now. His whole mind, will, nerve, aye, his very being, were centred in the one intense determination to save his friend. At length they gained the main street of the village. Here the snow was trodden down, and the going comparatively easy. Hardly a light was to be seen in any of the cottages. Involuntarily Gerald's eyes turned towards the rectory. It was wrapped in shadow and silence; but from the old grey tower,

looming up behind, gleamed a small point of yellow light. Slowly it crept from window to window, steadily rising, rising. A cold shudder ran through the man who watched it. He knew what it meant; that the last sands were falling from the hour-glass of time; that the life of the old year must now be measured by minutes. The ringers were going up to the belfry.

"Oh, God!" he groaned inwardly, "give me strength, give me time."

"Have you got a drop of brandy about you, sir?" suggested the practical Miles. "It would help to keep the spirit in us a bit."

Without slackening his pace, Gerald held out his flask.

"A'ter you, sir, a'ter you."

"I don't want any, thanks." His ears were strained for the first stroke of that ominous bell.

"Oh, come now, sir, fair do's. You will need your strength more than me, and I say a'ter you."

To save discussion, Harrison put the flask to his lips.

The spirit sent a warm glow through his sluggish veins. At the same moment the stillness of the night was broken by the solemn tolling of the passing bell. With a cry of horror he thrust the brandy into his companion's hands, and began to run as if for his life. Immediately before him the road curved sharply to the left, and far ahead through the skeleton branches of the leafless elms gleamed half a dozen irregular patches of light. They shone from the windows of the Hall.

Slowly, mournfully pealed the muffled notes from the belfry. The knell of the old year, dying hard in the chill winter night; the knell of a human soul, who might even now be passing from life and love to the horror of unknown darkness, through the gate of a fearful death. The thought was torture. How he lived through those moments of suspense Harrison never knew. He could not have told how he covered the ground, or when he passed the gates which led up to the house. His brain burned like molten iron, on which the slow, monotonous clang of the bell fell like the strokes of a heavy hammer.

He forgot the stationmaster, plodding along in the rear— forgot everything but

that his goal was reached, if only he had not come too late.

The lower windows were closed, but from the chinks in the shutters stole the warm glow of fire and lamp, and as he reached the corner of the house he could catch the sound of approaching voices. Voices, yes!— but what sort of voices? Nearer they came, now swelling louder, now sinking to a whisper, but ever drawing nearer, till he could hear the words repeated in every shade of tone, from malignant exultation to concentrated passion of resolve.

"We shall have him to-night!" they said, with ghastly reiteration. "We shall have him to-night!"

Like a wave of ice-cold air, the horrible sounds passed by him, receded, and died away with an echo of fiendish laughter.

Despite an inexpressible thrill of fear, that sent a shudder through his whole frame and nearly raised the hair on his head, Harrison was conscious of a faint hope that all was not over yet. Slowly and more slowly came the tolling of the bell. It was on the verge of midnight.

Suddenly from within the closed windows of the library issued a wild awful cry. The shutters were flung back, as if by magic the casement was thrown open, and the dark shadow of a man crossed the sill.

The moon emerging suddenly from behind a bank of clouds poured down a flood of silvery light on the stone wall, the snow-covered path, and on the figure of Jack Chamberlayne, who, with hands clenched as if in mortal pain, his eyes fixed with an expression of nameless horror on some object, invisible to all but him, was slowly following the ghostly vision along the drive, across the lawn, to---

With a supreme effort Harrison threw off the paralysing numbness which was creeping over him. Instinctively he dashed across the grass and stood between Chamberlayne and the fatal pond. Twelve paces from him his friend was advancing, slowly, unswervingly, like one who walks in his sleep.

"Jack," he shouted, "Jack, it is I, Gerald. Don't you know me?"

There was not a quiver of the tense eyeballs, not a sign that his voice had reached those ears, deaf now to all earthly sounds, but from the open window of the library a man rushed towards them, crying wildly, "Stop him, for God's sake,

stop him before it is too late."

Gathering all his strength, Gerald flung himself upon the approaching figure. A frantic struggle ensued, for Chamberlayne was the taller by a head, and was at this moment, moreover, endowed with abnormal strength. It was then that his knowledge of wrestling, acquired during a "long" spent in the Cumberland dales, stood Harrison in right good stead. He closed with his antagonist, and by a sudden dexterous manoeuvre threw him heavily to the ground, while overhead across the snowy fields the bells rang out their joyous welcome to the glad new year.

"Is he—dead ? "

The valet on his knees beside his master's prostrate form had torn open Chamberlayne's vest and shirt, and was feeling for the faint pulsation which tells that the spirit has not yet quitted its earthly tenement.

"Fainted, I think; I can feel his heart beat."

"Thank God, sir, you came when you did. I should have been too late. Can you help me to carry him, Mr. Harrison? No, not to that d----d place! " as Gerald glanced involuntarily towards the lighted windows. "They are all up at the gardener's cottage. I wanted Mr. Chamberlayne to sleep there to-night; but you know what he is—told me to go myself if I was frightened. I had not been out of the room five minutes when I heard that awful cry, and—Holy Virgin! What is that ? "

Harrison turned instinctively towards the library window. From the open sash a long tongue of yellow flame leaped out, curling round the edge of the curtain and licking up the thick silk cording as though it were a mere thread. Then another, and another. Fanned by the fresh breeze from without, the yellow glare broadened and deepened till the whole room was filled with a fierce lurid glow, succeeded by dense clouds of smoke and an ominous crackling sound.

"The place is on fire!" cried Gerald. "There is not a moment to lose. We must get your master into shelter and give the alarm!"

"Holy St. Patrick, defend us! " murmured Curtis, hastily crossing himself, as he stooped to raise the helpless form of poor Chamberlayne. Then, as best they could, the two men carried their burden across the lawn, along the drive, and up the side path leading to the fruit-gardens.

"Who is in the house?" gasped Harrison, as, staggering and breathless, they reached the door of the cottage. "Are any servants there?"

"Not a soul. Mrs. Bamfield here came in the day. She left directly dinner was served. There is no one in the place to burn but the devil's spawn as lighted it."

The valet's resonant knocks soon brought the gardener to the door, and while his wife was helping Curtis to restore his master to consciousness, Bamfield hurried Gerald off to the village to obtain assistance.

Just outside the gates they encountered the stationmaster, who was hanging about in great distress of mind, too anxious on Harrison's account to return to Mallowby, yet not daring to adventure himself within the fatal precincts of the Hall. His relief and joy at finding Gerald still alive knew no bounds, and he readily undertook to see a messenger despatched for the nearest doctor on his way back to the station. Meanwhile an alarm had been raised, and the sleeping village was raised by the hoarse cries of "Fire!" The ringers had been the first to see the red glare through the trees; but before long some forty men had turned out to join the little crowd already assembled before the burning house. Under Harrison's direction a body of labourers, headed by the gardener and bailiff, made an attempt to check the progress of the flames. But their efforts were scarcely perceptible. With a sharp wind blowing, and no better appliances at command than a line of buckets and a couple of garden-hose, it was evident from the first that the Hall was practically doomed. The old oak, of which the interior was chiefly built, burned like tinder. Within twenty minutes of the first outbreak the flames had spread to the upper story. Window after window lent its aid to that weird illumination. The great carved bedsteads, the massive presses and cabinets glowed and crackled in the fierce heat. Deverel after Deverel, clothed in dainty satin or shining armour, shrivelled and cracked away from their frames, to go down calm and unflinching as became true knights and brave gentlewomen into that burning fiery furnace. Still the fire-fiend raged on, vast clouds of black smoke mingling with the glare, while from time to time could be heard the heavy crash of falling beams and flooring. As the clock of the old church chimed the first hour of the new year, with a sound like the roll of distant artillery, swelling gradually into a deafening roar, the roof fell in and there shot up to heaven one mighty sheet of flame, which turned the sky into a crimson pall, and lighted up the snow-clad country for miles around. Was it a trick of over-heated imagination, a play of superstitious fancy, or did those who stood by at that

moment really hear that hideous peal of shrill triumphant laughter, which made the stoutest heart among them quail, and forced each man to edge involuntarily nearer his neighbour? It lasted but for an instant, then nothing was audible but the continuous roar of the flames. Before the pale dawn had warmed into the red flush of sunrise, Ravenshill Hall was a heap of smouldering ashes enclosed in four grim, smoke-blackened walls. From attic to cellar not a corner had been spared. The fire had done its work thoroughly, and of the original structure nothing remained save the bare tottering shell.

"It wer' th' Lord's will," said old Dawson, who had come down to inspect the scene of the late catastrophe, "that Katharine Deverel should hev her reets; and now as He's proved as mon caan't go agin' Him, He's maade awa' wi' th' dommed ould plaace, an' a good riddance too. The Lord avenges the widder and the feytherless, though He keeps 'un waitin' a bit first soomtoimes, and it seams to me," concluded the farmer, thoughtfully, "as soom o' they poor bodies in Oireland should be hevin' theer turn afore long."

"It will be a bad look-out for the Moonlighters when they do," answered Harrison, with a quiet smile.

He was a little oppressed by the situation in which he found himself; for the events of that New Year's Eve were the talk of the country-side, and Gerald the hero of the hour. A man who, single-handed, had braved the Deverel ghosts and baulked them of their prey ranked, by the Mallowby standard, above Gordon, and only a little lower than Nelson. The worthy Miles was never tired of recounting the incidents of that midnight walk, and drew upon his imagination for certain effective touches to that part of the adventure to which he had not been an eye-witness.

The rustic mind is slow to receive a new impression; but when it does get a sensation, it makes the most of it. The people would listen to the story twenty times a day. They repeated it to each other; they turned it inside and out and discussed it threadbare, beginning it over again for the benefit of every fresh comer. To Gerald, who was heartily sick of the place and the subject, this lionising was inexpressibly irritating, and he was thankful when the doctor at last gave permission for Chamberlayne to be removed.

Thanks to his splendid constitution, backed up by the devoted nursing of Curtis and his friend, Jack escaped brain fever; but he had received a terrible shock,

and his nerves were sorely shaken. It was not till the snow-wreaths had melted on the Creamshire Wolds, and crocuses were showing their gold and purple heads above the dark earth in suburban gardens, that Harrison was called upon to officiate as best man at a very pretty wedding in a certain fashionable London church, after which ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Jack Chamberlayne went off to the Riviera, where it was hoped that southern sunshine and a little judicious excitement at Monte Carlo would efface from the bridegroom's memory the experiences of that terrible New Year's Eve.

Of what he had actually seen and heard in the awful interval between his servant's departure and his subsequent return to consciousness Chamberlayne never speaks.

"I used to wonder," he once said to Gerald, "why Lazarus and those other fellows who were raised from the dead never told what they did and how they felt. I think I understand now. It was too terrible. They could not put it into words, and that is how I feel about that night—as if I had been brought back from the dead."