

THE TRAGEDY OF THE... TORCHESTER GHOST

By W. W. JACOBS

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I wanted a few nights for Christmas, a festival for which the small market town of Torchester was making extensive preparations. The narrow streets, which had been thronged with people, were now almost deserted, the cheap Jack from London, with the remnant of breath left him after his evening's exertions, was making feeble attempts to blow out his naphtha lamp, and the last shops open were rapidly closing for the night.

In the comfortable coffee room of the old Boar's Head half a dozen guests, principally commercial travelers, sat talking by the light of the fire. The talk had drifted from trade to politics, from politics to religion and so by easy stages to the supernatural. Those ghost stories, never known to fall before, had fallen flat; there was too much noise outside, too much light within. The fourth story was told by an old hand with more success. The streets were quieter, and he had turned the gas out. In the flickering light of the fire as it shone on the glasses and danced with shadows on the walls the story proved so enthralling that George, the waiter, whose presence had been forgotten, created a very disagreeable sensation by suddenly starting up from a dark corner and gliding silently from the room.

"That's what I call a good story," said one of the men, sipping his hot whisky. "Of course, it's an old idea that spirits like to get into the company of human beings. A man told me once that he traveled down the Great Western with a ghost and hadn't the slightest suspicion of it until the inspector came for tickets. My friend said the way that ghost tried to keep up appearances by feeling for it in all its pockets and looking on the floor was quite touching. Ultimately it gave it up and with a faint groan vanished through the ventilator."

"That'll do, Hirst," said another man. "It's not a subject for jesting," said a little old gentleman who had been an attentive listener. "I've never seen an apparition myself, but I know people who have, and I consider that they form a very interesting link between us and the after life. There's a ghost story connected with this house, you know."

"Never heard of it," said another speaker, "and I've been here some years now."

"It dates back a long time now," said the old gentleman. "You've heard about Jerry Bundler, George?"

"Well, I've just heard odds and ends, sir," said the old waiter, "but I never put much count to 'em. There was one chap 'ere what said he saw it, and the gov'ner sacked him prompt."

"My father was a native of this town," said the old gentleman, "and knew the story well. He was a truthful man and a steady churchgoer, but I've heard him declare that once in his life he saw the apparition of Jerry Bundler in this house."

"And who was this Bundler?" inquired a voice.

"A London thief, pickpocket, highwayman, anything he could turn his dishonest hand to," replied the old gentleman, "and he was run to earth in this house one Christmas week some eighty years ago. He took his last supper in this very room, and after he had gone to bed a couple of Bow street runners, who had followed him from London, but lost the scent a bit, went up stairs with the landlord and tried the door. It was stout oak and fast, so one went into the yard and by means of a short ladder got on to the window sill while the other stayed outside the door. Those below in the yard saw the man crouching on the sill, and then there was a sudden crash of glass, and with a cry he fell in a heap on the stones at his feet. Then in the moonlight they saw the white face of the pickpocket peeping over the sill, and while some stayed in the yard others ran into the house and helped the other man to break the door in. It was difficult to obtain an entrance even then, for the door was barred with heavy furniture, but they got in at last, and the first thing that met their eyes was the body of Jerry Bundler lying on the top of the bed by his own handkerchief."

"Which bedroom was it?" asked two or three voices together.

The narrator shook his head. "That I can't tell you. But the story goes that Jerry still haunts this house, and my father used to declare positively that the last time he slept here the ghost of Jerry Bundler lowered itself from the top of his bed and tried to strangle him."

"That'll do," said an uneasy voice. "I wish you'd thought to ask your father which bedroom it was."

"What for?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Well, I should take care not to sleep in it; that's all," said the voice shortly.

"There's nothing to fear," said the other. "I don't believe for a moment that ghosts could really hurt one. In fact, my father used to confess that it was only the unpleasantness of the thing that upset him and that for all practical purposes Jerry's fingers might have been made of cotton wool for all the harm they could do."

"That's all very fine," said the last speaker again. "A ghost story is a ghost story, sir, but when a gentleman tells a tale of a ghost in the house in

which one is going to sleep I call it blamed ungentlemanly."

"Pooh! Nonsense!" said the old gentleman, rising. "Ghosts can't hurt you. For my own part, I should rather like to see one. Good night, gentlemen."

"Good night," said the others. "And I only hope Jerry'll pay you a visit," added the nervous man as the door closed.

"Bring some more whisky, George," said a stout commercial. "I want keeping up when the talk turns this way."

"Shall I light the gas, Mr. Malcolm?" said George.

"No; the fire's very comfortable," said the traveler. "Now, gentlemen, any of you know any more?"

"I think we've had enough," said another man. "We shall be thinking we see spirits next, and we're not all like the old gentleman who has just gone."

"Old humbug!" said Hirst. "I should like to put him to the test. Suppose I dress up as Jerry Bundler and go and give him a chance of displaying his courage."

"Bravo!" said Malcolm, huskily drowning one or two faint "noes."

"Just for the joke, gentlemen."

"No, no; drop it, Hirst," said another man.

"Only for the joke," said Hirst, somewhat eagerly. "I've got some things up stairs in which I am going to play in 'The Rivals'—knee breeches, buckles and all that sort of thing. It's a



"I turned around and saw it."

rare chance. If you'll wait a bit, I'll give you a full dress rehearsal entitled 'Jerry Bundler; or, The Nocturnal Strangler.'

"You won't frighten us," said the commercial, with a husky laugh.

"I don't know that," said Hirst sharply; "it's a question of acting—that's all. I'm pretty good, ain't I, Somers?"

"Oh, you're all right—for an amateur," said his friend with a laugh.

"I bet you a level 'soy' you don't frighten me," said the stout traveler.

"Done," said Hirst; "I take the bet—to frighten you first and the old gentleman afterward. These gentlemen shall be the judges."

"You won't frighten us, sir," said another man, "because we're prepared for you, but you'd better leave the old man alone. It's dangerous play."

"Well, I'll try you first," said Hirst, springing up. "No gas, mind."

He ran lightly up stairs to his room, leaving the others, most of whom had been drinking somewhat freely, to wrangle about his proceedings. It ended in two of them going to bed.

"He's crazy on acting," said Somers, lighting his pipe; "thinks he's the equal of anybody almost. It doesn't matter with us, but I won't let him go to the old man, and he won't mind so long as he gets an opportunity of acting to us."

"Well, I hope he'll hurry up," said Malcolm, yawning; "it's after 12 now."

Nearly half an hour passed. Malcolm drew his watch from his pocket and was winding it for the night when George, the waiter, who had been sent on an errand to the bar, suddenly rushed into the room and rushed toward them.

"E's coming, gentlemen!" he said breathlessly.

"Why, you're frightened, George," said the stout commercial with a chuckle.

"It was the suddenness of it," said George sheepishly, "and, besides, I didn't look for seeing 'im in the bar. There's only a glimmer of light there, and 'e was sitting on the floor behind the bar. I nearly trod on 'im."

"Oh, you'll never make a man, George," said Malcolm.

"Well, it took me unawares," said the waiter; "not that I'd have gone to the bar by myself if I'd known it was there, and I don't believe you would either, sir."

"Nonsense!" said Malcolm. "I'll go and fetch him in."

"You don't know what it's like, sir," said George, catching him by the sleeve. "It ain't fit to look at by yourself; it ain't, indeed. It's got the—what's that?"

They all started at the sound of a smothered cry from the staircase and the sound of somebody running hurriedly along the passage. Before anybody could speak the door flew open, and a figure, bursting into the room, flung itself, gasping and shivering, upon them.

"What is it? What's the matter?" demanded Malcolm. "Why, it's Mr. Hirst!" He shook him roughly and then held some spirit to his lips. Hirst drank it greedily and with a sharp intake of his breath gripped him by the arm.

"Light the gas, George," said Malcolm.

The waiter obeyed hastily. Hirst, a ludicrous but pitiable figure in knee breeches and coat, a large wig all awry and his face a mess of greasy paint, clung to him, trembling.

"Now, what's the matter?" asked Malcolm.

"I've seen it!" said Hirst, with a hysterical sob. "O Lord, I'll never play the fool again—never!"

"Seen what?" asked the others.

"Him—it—the ghost—anything!" said Hirst wildly.

"Rot!" said Malcolm unceasingly.

"I was coming down the stairs," said Hirst; "just capering down as I thought it ought to do. I felt a tap"—He broke off suddenly and peered nervously through the open door into the passage.

"I thought I saw it again," he whispered. "Look—at the foot of the stairs. Can you see anything?"

"No; there's nothing there," said Malcolm, whose own voice shook a little. "Go on. You felt a tap on your shoulder—"

"I turned round and saw it—a little wicked head and a white dead face—pah!"

"That's what I saw in the bar," said George. "Horrid it was—devilish."

Hirst shuddered and, still retaining his nervous grip of Malcolm's sleeve, dropped into a chair.

"Well, it's a most unaccountable thing," said the dumfounded Malcolm, turning round to the others. "It's the last time I come to this house."

"I leave tomorrow," said George. "I wouldn't go down to that bar again by myself—no, not for £50."

"It's talking about the thing that's caused it, I expect," said one of the men. "We've all been talking about this and having it in our minds. Practically we've been forming a spiritualistic circle without knowing it."

"Dash the old gentleman!" said Malcolm heartily. "Upon my soul, I'm half afraid to go to bed. It's odd they should both think they saw something."

"I saw it as plain as I see you, sir," said George solemnly. "Praps if you keep your eyes turned up the passage you'll see it for yourself."

They followed the direction of his finger, but saw nothing, although one of them fancied that a head peeped round the corner of the wall.

"Who'll come down to the bar?" said Malcolm, looking round.

"You can go if you like," said one of the others, with a faint laugh. "We'll wait here for you."

The stout traveler walked toward the door and took a few steps up the passage. Then he stopped. All was quite silent, and he walked slowly to the end and looked down fearfully toward the glass partition which shut off the bar. Three times he made as though to go to it; then he turned back and, glancing over his shoulder, came hurriedly back to the room.

"Did you see it, sir?" whispered George.

"Don't know," said Malcolm shortly. "I fancied I saw something, but it might have been fancy. I'm in the mood to see anything just now. How are you feeling now, sir?"

"Oh, I feel a bit better now," said Hirst somewhat brusquely as all eyes were turned upon him. "I dare say you think I'm easily scared, but you didn't see it?"

"Not at all," said Malcolm, smiling faintly despite himself.

"I'm going to bed," said Hirst, noticing the smile and resenting it. "Will you share my room with me, Somers?"

"I will, with pleasure," said his friend, "provided you don't mind sleeping with the gas on full all night."

He rose from his seat and, bidding the company a friendly good night, left the room with his crestfallen friend. The others saw them to the foot of the stairs and, having heard their door close, returned to the coffee room.

"Well, I suppose the bet's off," said the stout commercial, poking the fire and standing with his legs apart on the hearth rug, "though, as far as I can see, I won it. I never saw a man so scared in all my life. Sort of poetic justice about it, isn't there?"

"Never mind about poetry or justice," said one of the listeners. "Who's going to sleep with me?"

"I will," said Malcolm affably.

"And I suppose we share a room together, Mr. Leek," said the third man, turning to the fourth.

"No, thank you," said the other briskly. "I don't believe in ghosts. If anything comes into my room, I shall shoot it."

"That won't hurt a spirit, Leek," said Malcolm decisively.

"Well, the noise'll be like company to me," said Leek, "and it'll wake the house too. But if you're nervous, sir," he added, with a grin, to the man who had suggested sharing his room, "George'll be only too pleased to sleep on the doormat inside your room, I know."

"That I will, sir," said George fervently, "and if you gentlemen would only come down with me to the bar to put the gas out I could never be sufficiently grateful."

"Come on," said Malcolm, taking a candle from the fireplace and lighting it. "We'll take this to come back with."

They went out in a body, with the exception of Leek, peering carefully before them as they went. The bar looked uninviting enough in the light of one small jet, and the billiard room, with the table shrouded in white holland, looked so greivous that Malcolm hastily shut the door as they passed it. Then George turned the light out in the bar, and they returned unmolested to the coffee room and, avoiding the sardonic smile of Leek, prepared to separate for the night.

"Give me the candle while you put the gas out, George," said the traveler. The waiter handed it to him and extinguished the gas, and at the same

moment all distinctly heard a step in the passage outside. It stopped at the door, and as they watched with bated breath the door creaked and slowly opened. Malcolm, with the candle extended, fell back open mouthed as a white, leering face with sunken eyeballs and closely cropped, bullet head appeared at the opening. Leek, with a faint scream, sprang from his chair and stood by the others, breathing heavily.

For a few seconds the creature stood regarding them, blinking in a strange fashion at the candle; then, with a sidling movement, it came a little way into the room and stood there as if bewildered.

Not a man spoke or moved, but all watched with a horrible fascination as the creature removed its dirty neckcloth and its head rolled on its shoulder. For a minute it paused and then, holding the rag before it, moved toward Malcolm.

The candle went out suddenly with a flash and a bang. There was a smell of powder, and something writhed in the darkness on the floor. There was a faint, choking cough, and then silence.

Malcolm was the first to speak. "Matches!" he said in a strange voice. He took a box from his pocket and rattled them insanely. George, who had put his foot on something on the floor, took them from him and struck one. Then he leaped at the gas and a flame burst from the match. Malcolm touched the thing on the floor with his foot and found it soft.

He looked at his companions. They mouthed inquiries at him, but he shook his head. He lit the candle and, kneeling down, examined the silent thing on the floor. Then he rose swiftly and, dipping his handkerchief in the water jug, bent down again and grimly wiped the white face. Then he sprang back with a cry of incredulous horror, pointing at it. Leek's pistol fell to the floor, and he shut out the light with his hands, but the others, crowding forward, gazed spellbound at the dead face of Hirst.

Before a word was spoken the door opened and Somers hastily entered the room. His eyes fell on the floor. "Good God!" he cried. "You didn't?"

"Sobody spoke."

"I told him not to," he said in a suffocating voice. "I told him not to. I told him!"

He leaned against the wall deathly sick, put his arms out feebly and fell fainting into the traveler's arms.

How the Trust Barons Grow Rich by Robbing the Consumers.

Every trust that has power to fix prices arbitrarily steals from the people.

Most of these thieving combines are so fortunate as to be able to conceal their thefts from the mass of their victims.

The food trust can't do that. Hence the outcry against it.

When a man is forced to pay more for a beefsteak than he has been used to paying because the food trust controls the meat market, he doesn't need to be told by anybody that the food trust is robbing him.

But tell the same man that the steel trust is robbing him, and you don't convince and rouse him in the same way. The process is more obscure.

The steel trust puts up the price of steel rails and steel cars; the people have to pay the higher railroad charges when they buy the things carried. It puts up the price of structural steel and other building materials; the people have to pay in rent.

Many trusts sell their goods in foreign countries cheaper than they do at home. We may be sure that they don't sell anywhere at a loss.

Therefore every cent that the American pays for an American made article more than is charged for the same article abroad is stolen from him.

An American sea captain, whose ship lay at a New York pier, sent an order up town for three sewing machines to be shipped to Liverpool. He was charged \$25 apiece for those sewing machines. They did not go to Liverpool, however. The captain sent one of them to his home in Harlem, and his first and second mates took the other two to their wives in Brooklyn. Had the machines been bought for these three American homes instead of for English homes, as the dealer supposed, the price would have been \$50 instead of \$25.

That is to say, the dealer would have stolen \$75 from his American customers.

To the extent that the tariff enables the trusts to charge higher prices at home than they do abroad the tariff enables them to rob the American people just as truly as the food trust does by extorting high prices for food.

The American people stand these tariff taxes—collected not for public use, but for private gain—because they are so accustomed to them that they don't know, or at least don't feel, that they are being plundered.

To be charged more for a beefsteak than it is worth is the same thing as to be charged more for a suit of clothes than it is worth, or a hat or a pair of shoes or a railroad ride or a house or a sewing machine.

No matter what the thing is that a trust monopolizes with the tariff's help, it steals your money by artificially high prices exactly as the food trust picks your pocket every time you go to the butcher's.

Out of the stealings which the tariff empowers the trusts to collect great fortunes have been piled up, and every day other great fortunes are being accumulated.

These fortunes do not represent honest business profits, but just plain booty—the same kind of gains that the highwayman pouches when he is so lucky as not to be caught and sent to jail.

WASHINGTON LETTER

(Special Correspondence.)

Senator Mason of Illinois has a double in the acting assistant clerk of his committee, Keeler by name. Mr. Keeler is short and very stout, his figure just in the same mold as Mason's. His head is a duplicate of the senator's not only in features, but in black mustache, curly hair and a bit of baldness. It is no wonder, therefore, that half of the people who come to the capitol to see Senator Mason address their remarks to Mr. Keeler. He has been congratulated any number of times for speeches which Senator Mason delivered.

The other day a young man to whom Senator Mason had promised a position met Keeler at the capitol and asked him if he had yet obtained the place.

"I haven't got any position for you, and I don't know anything about it," said Keeler, who was in a hurry.

The young man was surprised and annoyed. He let the matter drop until Senator Mason met him on Pennsylvania avenue.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" asked the senator. "I have that place for you."

"Why, senator," said the young man, "I asked you about it at the capitol, and you said you didn't have anything for me."

"You saw me?" queried Mason.

"Yes, and you said you didn't know anything about it."

A light broke in upon Mason. "Great heavens!" he said. "That was Keeler."

"Leave to Print."

A voluble talker himself, Representative Sulzer of New York nevertheless looks askance at the habit of making speeches to the country through the eave to print.

"We all do it sometimes," said Mr. Sulzer, "but if I had my way about it I would allow nothing to go into The Congressional Record except what is actually uttered by members on the floor. Of course constituents sometimes like to read a speech by their congressman. They may not stop to think whether it was uttered in debate or whether it was written out in black and white in the quiet of his apartments and railroaded to the government printing office without ever having seen the hall of representatives, but there would be plenty of talking if The Record was restricted solely to what the members say during the proceedings."

Then Bate Chuckled.

Every once in a while Senator Bate of Tennessee indulges in a burst of humor. The other day while a bill was being discussed in the senate Mr. Hoar and Mr. Burton, who were standing side by side, talked about the measure, but addressed their remarks to each other in a low tone.

"Mr. President," said Senator Bate, "cannot the senators take us into their confidence? They seem to be having a delightful private colloquy, and really we would like to share in the good things which they are saying."

Senator Bate chuckled as he sat down. His sarcasm, however, had its effect, and when the two senators spoke again everybody heard them.

Had to Buy Tickets.

So great was the demand upon senators and members for tickets of admission to the McKinley memorial services that the members themselves, who were allowed but one ticket, were offered as high as \$25 each for them. Representative Sibley of Pennsylvania more than a month before the date set for the ceremonies promised five of his constituents that he would give them tickets, not realizing that each member was to have but one. He finally offered \$25 each for the tickets and after much effort secured them from doorkeepers and pages who had corralled some of them.

To Buy Pictures.

There are two pictures of arctic scenes packed away down in the capitol basement in which interest has just been revived through a bill introduced by Senator McComas. These pictures have lain in the basement for ten years. They are "The Highest North of All Time" and "Camp Clay; or, The Rescue of Lieutenant Greely and Party." They were painted by Albert Opert. The bill introduced by Senator McComas provides for their purchase by the secretary of war for \$7,500 each.

Homeless California Indians.

Senator Bard of California talked with the president the other morning about the appointment of a commission to find a new home for what are called the Warner ranch Indians of the Mission Indians of California. The Warner Indians have lost some long pending litigation involving their lands and are to be ejected from their homes. The Indian appropriation bill, which has passed the house, provides an appropriation of \$100,000 for the purchase of lands for homes for these Mission Indians.

A Diplomatic Senate Employee.

"Well," said a certain senator, who had been engaged in a sharp tilt with a colleague, as he met a senate employee, "do you think that I made a fool of myself?"

"Senator," was the reply, "if I said that you made a fool of yourself I would be disrespectful; if I said you did not, I would be saying what is not true."

All the diplomacy is not in the state department.

Reception to Many Daughters.

Mrs. Fairbanks, wife of the senator from Indiana and president general of the Daughters of the American Revolution, gave a very large reception during the recent convention in this city to that body of women over which she presides. Invitations were extended, of course, to the entire congress of visiting Daughters, and the guests numbered fully 800. CARL SCHOFIELD.

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