

The TANGIBLE INTANGIBLE

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The person removed a sturdy-looking pipe from between his lips, and after emitting a more than usually long stream of smoke, thoughtfully took up the doctor's last remark.

"Only the effect of a disordered stomach, did you say, and all spiritual manifestations, but so many optical delusions? Well, for the moment, I propose, of argument, let it be as what they are of the tangible, visible results that have been known to follow so-called ghost-like appearances."

"Tangible and visible results?" snapped the doctor with increasing disdain. "I never heard of any. Such things begin in air, and end in smoke."

The squire meantime, who had as yet wisely declined to side with either of the parties, and who seemed the chance of a year, lately exclaimed: "Go on, padre, speak up your mystic sayings, and enlighten our darkness with a parable to the point."

"Very well," said the parson, "though I can see that that stiff-necked heretic of a doctor is already declining to be charmed, charm I never so sweetly. But no matter, since in the armor of truth, I scorn his base insinuations as to disordered stomach and excited nerves. Faith! Do I look like a man who suffers from nerves and dyspepsia? And if not now, how much less so ten years ago—when the muscle and wind of my rowing days were fresh upon me! Well, to my tale."

"Ten years ago I was curate at H—, in Essex, which for a downright dull, stupid country village would be hard to beat. A game of quills with the blacksmith and another of chess with a free-thinking cobbler well-nigh made up the sum total of my amusements. Under these circumstances, I, an unmarried man, considered considerable interest in the only available genteel society of the place."

"I consisted of two old maiden ladies named Lavale, who lived in a quaint old house half a mile out of the village. Many and many a cup of fragrant tea have I enjoyed out of their delicate old-fashioned cups, and many a time have I wondered at the gentle content which seemed to pervade all the surroundings of the house, and enable the ladies to live on year after year, free from all desire to share in the gaiety of the outer world."

"Village gossip made me aware that the old house was haunted, and upon questioning my friends, they frankly admitted that such was the case, somewhat piously complaining that the noises occasionally heard at night had rendered it necessary to lock up and condemn the best room in the house. But they went on to say they had no right to complain, as the ghostly visitor never invaded any other part of the building."

"Like our worthy Sawbones there, I in those days did not believe in the possibility of spiritual manifestations, and soon persuaded my old friends to allow me to pass the night in the haunted room. I questioned them closely as to what I might expect to see or hear, but they at once professed their inability to enlighten me, declaring that the room had been closed by order of their father, who had forbidden them ever to enter or make inquiries on the subject."

"You will think us very inhospitable," said the elder lady, "but you will have to make your own fire and all other arrangements yourself, as our servants dare not and we must not go inside."

"The following evening, having been duly presented with the faithful key, and laden with a large basket, in which firewood, matches, candles, whisky and lemons were beautifully and symmetrically arranged, I made my way to the mysterious room. In my pockets a tobacco pouch, a pipe and a book made it manifest that my vigil was not to be a melancholy kind."

"My first act, the key turned in the lock, enabling me to enter the haunted room with my burden. A solitary candle not being the best means of investigating the precincts, I looked around and soon discovered several old-fashioned candlesticks, with the help of which the gloom was effectually dispelled and I was enabled to make a careful study of my surroundings."

"The room was large and airy, though from having been so long closed, the atmosphere was not well-chosen; in fact, notwithstanding the cold, my first care was to open all the windows wide to somewhat purify the atmosphere. As I stood by one of them, lost in silent admiration of a glorious full moon sailing majestically on her downward course I was not a little amused to see two of the madma feebly watching my net motions from the shelter of some distant laurels; whilst Thomas, the gardener and factotum, more boldly scrutinized my actions from the lawn below."

"Having thus carefully ventilated the apartment I closed the windows, and drew the heavy, old-fashioned curtains across them to prevent the moonlight playing me any of her fanciful and deceptive freaks, and as nearly as possible, I put on the spectacles, like our good friend the doctor, who with one sniff of 'Moonlight, my dear fellow, moonbeams account for anything,' often deminish the best constructed ghost story."

"Having secured fresh air, plenty of light, and excluded the objectionable moon, my next step was to provide for comfort, and thanks to my good training as a 'fag' at Harrow I soon had the room in a comfortable state. The hearth, an archaic in front of it, whisky toddy to hand, and a full pipe of tobacco drawing comfortably."

"Before, however, settling down into the cosy-looking chair that awaited me, I made a careful examination of the room. Nine good paces by four gave the length and breadth; three windows at regular intervals on this side and two on that. The fireplace was to the left of the door, and entering, facing the windows just mentioned. This fireplace was perhaps the most noticeable feature of the room, being in fact five feet high and so wide that chilly mortals could easily creep in on each side and bask there in safety."

"The candles burned brightly, and the flames of the log fire leapt and danced cheerfully."

"All of a sudden the noise as of a clanking chain attracted my attention, now near, now far; moving backwards and forwards, up and down the whole length of the room. I stood up, and with my back to the fire gazed carefully in every direction. Clank, clank, the chains were by me; and again clank, clank, they were moving slowly away."

"Chains I call them, but nothing was visible. The room was full of light, and my heart beat steadily, but as if to confound my sense of sight the horrible noise held on unceasingly—to and fro, to and fro, till with a loud crash, close to one of the windows, the noises ceased."

"Not a little astonished, I stepped across to the spot whence the clanking had last come, but in a moment, louder than ever the spectral chains rattled past me with unmelodious sound. Backwards and forwards, with measured cadence, moved the unwelcome noise!"

"How absurd!" I angrily exclaimed, throwing myself once more into the armchair. "Am I going to let my common sense desert me, and begin to fancy and imagine nonexistent sights and sounds? Steady now! Let me stir up the flames and fortify myself with a glass of whisky toddy."

"No sooner said than done; but ere the glass could be lifted to my lips a crash at my very feet caused me to spring up in alarm, but was probably only a few moments, the clanking and rattling ran a riot—now here, now there, now in this corner, now in that, till but for very shame I had rushed headlong from the room."

"Once more, as at my very feet, the noise ceased, and then—well, then, believe me every word I am telling you is true, heavy steps moved slowly down the room, halting for a moment at the spot whence the last noises had proceeded, and then onward through the fireplace to the furthest corner of the little nook, the creaking and groaning of machinery, the shriek of a woman in pain, and then silence—deathlike silence!"

"I had seen nothing, though the room was full of light. And yet such was the power of the noise, that I was unable to see that my knees knocked together from shock and weakness, and with a groan I sank unbidden into the chair beside me."

"Soon, however, my heart began to beat less convulsively, and with an effort I steadied myself sufficiently to cross over and examine the corner where the last shriek had proceeded. Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Apparently the walls were sound and solid."

"Not content with this first examination, I snatched up a spare log of wood and tapped soundly with it, beginning low down and working steadily upward. At length, when about the level of my shoulder, a distinctly hollow sound greeted me. So far as I could judge, the space which sounded thus was a square block some three feet long, but to the eye nothing revealed the slightest aperture."

"No great amount," I indignantly muttered to myself, "for so much search. No doubt the rats have made a snug corner there and are at the bottom of all this trouble." But even as I spoke I knew and felt that such a suggestion was absurd. The rattling of chains, the heavy steps, the wild shriek would have to be accounted for by something more than by the scuffling of rats."

"My next thought was that it was now past 12 o'clock, so once more, throwing on some good big logs of wood, I sat down to watch for daylight. Not another sound disturbed the silence of the night, and when at last sounds on the outside told that the household was up and stirring I made my way downstairs, intending to go home and thoroughly pull myself together before meeting the gentle old ladies of the house, whom I was anxious to put to sleep. This, however, was not to be, for, early as it was, both the sisters were awaiting me in the breakfast room."

"What have you seen? What have you heard?" they piped in chorus. "Now, as a respectable young curate, I ought no doubt to have made a clean breast of it, but as a man and a brother, although a younger one, the idea of frightening my net motions out of the parish did not by any means commend itself favorably to me. To gain time I broke into affected indignation at the early rising of my friends. So paltry a subterfuge, however, could not long avail."

"Please tell us what you have seen or heard," repeated the elder sister. "You do not look at all like yourself," mercifully chimed in the younger. "My dear ladies," I exclaimed in desperation, "will you let me to play a sleepless man, who is dying to get home and rest?"

"Certainly not!" they exclaimed. "A good strong cup of tea and some food will suit you far better!" "Kismet!" I exclaimed, and meekly took my place at the breakfast table. "The laws of hospitality protected me for the next ten minutes, as I steadily attacked sausages, kidneys and other good things, but alas! no sooner was evident that hunger had been appeased than with one consent the combined attack was renewed."

"I saw nothing, dear ladies—absolutely nothing." "Ahem!" dryly ejaculated the elder. "And did you hear anything?" "Internally I said 'Checkmate.' Externally I smiled and lightly admitted that for a short time in the middle of the night 'there had been some slight disturbance.'"

"Oh, nothing, indeed; possibly best described as of one chain rattled against another." "I have been in the witness box, under cross-examination, more than once, but the most trying onset of a well-paid counsel was but child's play to the old lady's efforts. At length, limp and exhausted, I made my escape and went home."

"Had I been allowed to follow my own inclination, nothing as would have been heard of this matter; the room would have been locked up and abandoned to its former ghostly inhabitants, but this was not to be. The curiosity of woman, ay, even of the best of them, is a dangerous thing to arouse. Somehow or other the ticking sensation it causes them must be gratified, and a prudent man will, instead of contending with the inevitable, carry out whatever is needed to satisfy the feelings he has caused."

led the way into a room I had not yet seen, but which, saving for the difference of furniture, was, line for line, the same as the room above."

"I stepped into the empty hearth, and, with a heavy oak stick, tried the walls, as if I had done upstairs on the night of my vigil. Strange to say, at a similar height from the ground, and in exactly the same position, a hollow sound came in answer to my blows."

"What," I inquired, "is there beneath this room?" And upon hearing that very large vine cellars, long disused, ran all the way beneath the house, I obtained permission to continue the exploration a little farther."

"The worthy Thomas accompanied me with a lantern, and after considerable tumbling about in the maze below we at last satisfied ourselves that we were directly under the dining room fireplace. Upon seeing me hard at work thumping the walls with my stick, the gardener looked anxiously around, somewhat doubtful as to the sanity of his companion, but at last even his dull senses realized that a hollow sound could be obtained all along a space some three feet wide, reaching from the ceiling down to the floor."

"What have we here, most worthy Thomas?" I inquired. "Well, sir," quoth Thomas, scratching thoughtfully his fast thinning locks, "it do sound like an 'ole!'"

"We made our way upstairs and faithfully reported our discovery. To cut a long story short, suffice it to say that I spent three hours the following day superintending the labor of the village mason, whilst Thomas enlightened our darkness with the stable lantern. After some hard work the mason carefully removed several square-cut stones and made an aperture large enough to enable me to seize the lantern and gaze anxiously into a dark well or pit, into the side of which, thus rudely pierced, but the feeble light with its insufficient to dispel the black gloom beneath. More light was obtained, and at last, by carefully peering downward, I could distinctly see the bottom, some eight or ten feet farther down, and a something dark and intangible lying on it."

"A stout rope was obtained, and the mason, who certainly could not be accused of suffering from nervous or dyspeptic complaint, was called to explore. A few minutes later he called to us to pull him up again; we did so, whereupon the man exclaimed somewhat breathlessly, 'Good God, sir, there is a skeleton down there, with chains round its wrists and ankles! How came it there? Ah, how indeed! The luckless bones were brought up, and when examined by a medical man pronounced to be those of a woman!'"

"Unhappy creature, what was her story? Why those cruel fetters on hand and foot? And oh, what connection could have existed between this lifeless horror and the clanking noise and death-shriek of yonder haunted room?"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor, "so that is what you are pleased to call a tangible result, is it? You heard a noise upstairs, and, like a wise man, went to search for its origin in the cellar! By the way, do they generally build pits or wells in the houses of your old parish?"

"Not the least disturbed by his friend's sarcasm, the parson replied: "One thing is a time, beloved Sawbones, if you please! If you will patiently hear me out, I venture to think you will be satisfied as to the presence of the pit, and also that the finding of the female skeleton in chains therein may well be considered as the direct and tangible result of the mysterious noises heard by me in the manner I have already described."

"Fair play," said the 'squire, "by all means let us have fair play, which is only another way of saying, let us hear the end of the story." Thus urged, the parson resumed: "The skeleton was decently buried, and from that day out, strange though it may seem, the haunted room ceased to deserve its name."

"It must have been about a year after this that an old gentleman, a cousin of the two ladies to whom this house belonged, came to stay with them on a visit, and as was only natural, soon heard a full and detailed account of what had occurred."

"Unlike our worthy skeptic here, the old gentleman did not for a moment try to impugn the veracity of me, but, on the contrary, exclaimed: 'Merciful heavens! I have in my possession, among some old family papers, an old document that I have till now always regarded as the ravings of some mad ancestor of ours, but by the light of this discovery the tragedy therein portrayed becomes all too true and intelligible.'"

"After some search the paper was found, and, as I have already said, the writing, evidently impressed by a strong hand, had survived marvellously. Without reproducing the faults of spelling and sundry expressions now obsolete, here is a copy of the document: "A murderer! In the eyes of man a murderer—am I? Mine hour is come, and well I know that to-morrow's sun will be the last I shall see on earth! Whilst then there is time let me in all its simple truth record the incidents of that awful day, so that if after my death barbarians speak evilly of what was done, the truth may vindicate me in the eyes of godly men."

"Against a tyrant king and against the scarlet sin which he would have forced upon I drew my sword and fought, as all men know, in many a stubborn fight for God and for a free Parliament. But in the hottest fight let me in all its simple truth record the incidents of that awful day, so that if after my death barbarians speak evilly of what was done, the truth may vindicate me in the eyes of godly men."

"Towards midday a tramping of many horses was heard below, and on looking out we could see that Lord Marchmont had returned with at least a dozen armed retainers, and with the evident intention of carrying off my faithless Alice. Rather than that she should fall into the hands of that miscreant I would have passed my life in the dark concealment. Her last wish was to die, but before taking this terrible step I called about for some means of concealing her."

"Not a moment was to be lost, as the wretched woman was shrieking wildly to her lover to come and save her. I pressed the spring of the secret chamber and ere the foremost ruffian could gain the room had seized her, notwithstanding her frantic struggles, and hurried her, all fettered as she was, into a dark concealment. Her last wish was to die, but before taking this terrible step I called about for some means of concealing her."

"For a moment it seemed that madness had overcome me! Was it thus that Alice mourned my absence? Was it thus she awaited my return? My foster brother seized my arm and pointed upwards to a window, where clearly might be seen two figures locked in a loving embrace. The one was Lord Marchmont—the profligate, dissipated, worthless cousin whom I had forbidden to darken the doors of my home; the other, ah, merciful God! the other was my Alice!"

"Without a word we led our horses to the stables and turned back to the house. At the door some Royalist troopers, it remains for such a master, were carousing and laughing, whilst a horse ready caparisoned showed that the vile intruder's visit was drawing to a close. Upon seeing us, one of the men rushed to the alarm bell, and whilst the others drew their swords to prevent us entering; but our good swords, scarce dry from the slaughter at Marston Moor, scattered them like sheep, and in

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another minute I was face to face with my accursed kinsman. "Verily I thought the Lord had delivered him into my hand, but even as our swords crossed and all my wrongs gave strength unto mine arm his minions rallied fiercely, and in their numbers succeeded in carrying him away safe and unharmed, and I could hear their horses' hoofs disappearing in the distance. Vengeance was denied me on the lover; as against my wife I desired none, and turned in grief and sadness to meet her. Was this woman, with eyes full of hate and mouth breathing forth scorn and disgust, the gentle Alice I had known? Was this brazen harlot, who called many for her lover, the tender, loving wife who had hidden me 'God-speed only four months ago? What devil had possessed her? Madly she raved and swore, and with a wild rush had thrown herself from the window but for my restraining arm."

"Hour after hour passed, bringing no relief or cessation to her madness; if freed an instant she would seek to do herself or me a hurt. At length, in despair, I bade my foster brother bring me some chains that hung below, which had often been used in securing the convicts brought before the magistrates—to which body both my father and myself belonged. Carefully but securely we fastened her hands and feet, leaving the latter so as to enable her to walk with short steps where she listed. Even this left her untamed, and with a strength incredible in one so slightly built she paced backwards and forwards the weary length of the room, without ceasing, till daylight came."

"It is not that they last long sleep, O bard of the great Western land, is not as best and pure and deep. Upon thy fair and native strand, O Urbana, let the organize the Chautauqua. Mr. Menely has been connected with the Chautauquas at Kankakee, Urbana, Greenville and Clinton, and it has occurred to them that measures might be taken not only to attract visitors to the region, but to provide a place where they could themselves enjoy not only intellectual entertainment, but the contact with nature and the informality which are the special charms of the Chautauqua camp life. It seemed feasible to provide all the customary features—lectures, addresses, courses for teachers and students, concerts and choruses, athletic sports, bathing and boating, competitive drills, bicycle races, etc. To this end an organization was recently effected, the necessary funds subscribed for preliminary arrangements, and the enterprise is now fairly on its feet. The Commercial Club has taken the matter in charge, and has invited Mr. G. C. Menely, of Urbana, Ill., to organize the Chautauqua. Mr. Menely has been connected with the Chautauquas at Kankakee, Urbana, Greenville and Clinton, and it has occurred to them that measures might be taken not only to attract visitors to the region, but to provide a place where they could themselves enjoy not only intellectual entertainment, but the contact with nature and the informality which are the special charms of the Chautauqua camp life. It seemed feasible to provide all the customary features—lectures, addresses, courses for teachers and students, concerts and choruses, athletic sports, bathing and boating, competitive drills, bicycle races, etc. To this end an organization was recently effected, the necessary funds subscribed for preliminary arrangements, and the enterprise is now fairly on its feet. The Commercial Club has taken the matter in charge, and has invited Mr. G. C. 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