

The Baron's Room

By C. W. Leadbeater

Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was a many-sided genius—the most remarkable personality I have ever met. Her followers naturally think of her as the great occult teacher to whom we all owe so much, but to us who had the privilege of knowing her in the flesh she is very much more than that, and we have in our minds pictures of her as filling many and various parts. She was, for example, a weirdly brilliant performer on the piano on the very rare occasions when she chose to exhibit that talent. Though she hated conventionality, and often went out of her way quite unnecessarily to outrage it (or so we used to think in those days), I have never seen anyone who could better play the part of the great aristocrat when she chose to do so. On any and all subjects she was an exceptionally brilliant conversationalist; but that which more than all others she made her own was the domain of the occult. All her narrations were witty and dramatic, but she was at her best when telling a ghost-story.

I shall never forget the evenings we used to spend in listening to her on the deck of the s.s. *Navarino*, when I was travelling with her from Egypt to India in the year 1884. The missionary element was strong in the motley gathering of our fellow passengers, and some of its representatives were of the coarsely ignorant and blatantly aggressive type which was perhaps commoner then than now. Passages of arms were frequent, and to us intensely amusing, for Madame Blavatsky knew the Christian scriptures and the Christian faith very much better than these self-appointed exponents of them. But even the crosser of the missionaries had to succumb to her charm when she began to tell ghost-stories on the deck after dinner in the evenings. She held her audience spell-bound, she played on them as on an instrument and made their hair rise at pleasure, and I have often noticed how careful they were to go about in couples after one of her stories, and to avoid being alone even for a moment!

Under these circumstances we heard “The Cave of the Echoes,” “The Bewitched Life,” and other legends which all who will may read in her *Nightmare Tales*. One striking tale I remember, which does not appear in that collection. If I could hope to tell it as she told it, my readers might perhaps share something of the feeling with which we heard it; but I know that cannot be. I told it once, as well as I could, to a friend who is a well-known novelist; she did her best with it, altering it in various particulars to make it more effective and dramatic, and adding many picturesque touches; but even that best could not reproduce the magical charm with which Madame Blavatsky's narration invested it. I cannot hope to do even as well as the novelist; but anyhow I shall try, and I shall adhere as closely as possible to my recollection of the original form as Madame Blavatsky gave it.

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Two young men (let us call them Charles and Henri) were on a walking tour in one of the most picturesquely beautiful parts of the pleasant land of France. One day, as evening was drawing on, they found themselves approaching a pretty little town which lies in a secluded valley, its inns, its shops and its smaller houses clustering round a little stream, while the larger dwellings of the more important inhabitants are situated on the gentle slopes of the surrounding bills. The two

friends expected to pass the night at the principal inn of the place, and one of them, Monsieur Charles, had an acquaintance living on the outskirts of the town upon whom he wished to call.

Just as the road began to slope down into the village, they came in sight of a specially picturesque old house, almost covered with ivy and creepers. It stood back some little distance from the road, and both the house itself and its extensive grounds bore an air of neglect which showed quite clearly that it was unoccupied, and indeed, that it must have been so for a long series of years. The friends were much struck by its appearance and the beauty of its situation, and Henri, who was an enthusiastic collector of old-fashioned furniture, began at once to speculate upon the treasures which might lie concealed there. Since the place was so obviously unoccupied, it was natural that the idea should suggest itself that possibly they might persuade its custodian to let them look over it; so they directed their steps towards a little lodge which, though it partook of the general air of neglect and was almost overgrown with luxurious vegetation, was still evidently inhabited.

In answer to their knock a very old man came to the door. They asked for permission to look through the house, but the old man told them with polite regrets that it was not allowed. They fell into conversation with this old care-taker, who indeed had the air of one who leads a lonely life, and is glad of an opportunity to talk with his fellow-men. Henri at once enquired about the furniture, and when he heard that it was old—very old—and that everything remained untouched, precisely as it had been many years ago when the house was inhabited, he was seized with an irresistible desire to see it, and he intimated to the old man, as delicately as possible, that he was prepared to offer a substantial present for the privilege. But the old man only replied:

“No, monsieur, I am sorry, but it is impossible; I should be glad enough to avail of your generosity, for I am a poor man, as you see, and times are hard with me. But it is quite impossible.”

“But, after all,” said Henri, “why impossible? The place has evidently been unoccupied for years; this is a lonely road; no one is passing; no one will ever know; why should you not gratify us by allowing us to see the rooms, and at the same time profit yourself?”

“Ah, monsieur, I dare not,” said the old man. “It is not because of the owner or the agent; as you say, they would never know. It is far more than that, far worse than that! Indeed, I dare not do it.”

Scenting a mystery here, the friends pressed the old man to reveal his real reason, and at last with much difficulty and persuasion they drew from him the admission that the house bore an evil reputation, that terrible things had happened there, and that for twenty years at least no one had entered it except when at long intervals the agent came down and made some sort of inspection of it. If Henri was an enthusiast for old furniture, he was even more deeply interested in matters psychical. At once he suspected here an interesting story, so he enquired:

“You say the house bears a bad reputation. Do you mean that it is said to be haunted?”

“Alas! yes, monsieur,” replied the old man, “but it is no mere rumour; it is terribly true.”

Of course after this our friends would not be satisfied until they had heard the whole story, though they had much difficulty in extracting it from the old man, who seemed very reluctant to speak of it, and crossed himself repeatedly while telling the tale. It was simple enough; the last owner had been a man of dark and evil life—a man who had the reputation of indulging in orgies of wild debauchery, of being a monster of cruelty, selfishness and lust. The old man knew no details; but in some way or other, the Baron’s sins had been found out, and his affairs came to some sort of terrible crisis, from which he had escaped (or thought he had escaped) by suicide.

He had come down quite unexpectedly from Paris one evening, and the next morning he was found sitting in his great chair with his throat cut.

After this there had been a terrible exposure of some sort, the old man said, and all kinds of dreadful stories had come out. He knew little of their nature; it was all many years ago, and he had never really understood it. There was some litigation, he thought, and all the riches of the family were somehow swallowed up, and the house passed into the hands of a distant branch of the family. It was, he said, many years after the Baron's death before the legal business was settled, and the new owner came into possession. Even then the house was not touched in any way; it was to be left for the inspection of the new master, but an army of gardeners was sent in, and the grounds were all put into order. The new master came down with his wife and some servants, but after one night in the house they returned to Paris, declaring that nothing would induce them to enter the place again.

"What happened to them," said Henri eagerly; "what did they see?"

"That I do not know, monsieur," replied the old man; "there were many stories, but I never really knew which was true. Then the owners tried to let the house. Twice tenants came, but neither of them stopped more than the one night. In the second case there was a scandal; a lady in the family was so terrified that she fell into a series of fits. They tell me that she went mad afterwards and died; and since then no further effort has been made to let the place. But on four occasions strangers have arrived with a note from the owner, giving them permission to sleep in the house, and in every case frightful evil has followed. One of them cut his throat, like Monsieur le Baron; another was found dead in a fit, and the other two were driven mad by terror. So the reputation of the place has grown worse and worse."

"Now my good friend, see here," said Henri, "and pay particular attention to what I am going to say. I told you that I was interested in old furniture, and I was willing to give you a napoleon to let me see what you had in the *château*. But I am a hundred times more interested in haunted houses, and after what you have told me I positively must and will spend a night in this one, and I will give you a hundred francs if you will let me do so."

"Indeed, sir," replied the old man, "I do assure you that it is quite impossible; you would die without doubt, and I should be your murderer. Indeed, I wish I could, but it is useless to ask me."

But all this protestation only made Henri more determined, and he steadily increased his offer, assuring the old man that whatever might happen he should be held entirely guiltless, and that if he preferred it, he might shut himself up in his own cottage and have no part whatever in the affair beyond leaving open the door. The care-taker was in an agony of indecision. The heavy bribe offered was unquestionably a great consideration to him, and still more his kindly French courtesy could not bear to disappoint the persuasive stranger, who had so evidently set his heart upon trying this experiment. Yet his superstitious fear was stronger than his greed, and it took the best part of an hour's talk to win from him a reluctant and tearful consent.

He agreed to take them over the house now in the daylight, and to point out to them the haunted room of Monsieur le Baron; and when they came again in the darkness of night, since come they must, (and he wrung his hands in despair) he would give them the key, yes, if they would call for it at his little gate-house, but on no account must they expect him then to come outside his own door, or go any nearer to the haunted building. And even so, over and over again, he asserted that he washed his hands of all responsibility, that their doom was certain, and he could but commend their souls to God.

They spoke heartily to him, they clapped him on the shoulder, they assured him that to-morrow morning he should drink a bottle of wine with them, and laugh over all his presentiments; but

nothing that they could say moved him in the least from his melancholy certainty of their immediate destruction. He showed them over the house, in which Henri went into raptures over splendid specimens of wonderful old furniture; he directed their attention to the Baron's portrait in the drawing room; he pointed out to them the long room on the ground floor which had been the Baron's special study, and indicated to them the identical arm-chair in which he had committed suicide.

Before they left they pressed upon him the money which they had promised him; yet, badly as he obviously needed it, he took it with manifest reluctance, saying:

"Messieurs, this is a fortune for me, and yet I feel as though I could not take it, for I believe that it is the price of your lives; and who knows but that it may be the price of your immortal souls as well? Monsieur the Baron was an evil man, and who knows what happens to his victims?"

So they left him, impressed in spite of themselves by his invincible gloom and his despairful attitude, even though they smiled to themselves at it while they talked over the adventure that lay before them. So they went their way into the charming little town and sat themselves down to such refreshment as the bright little inn could give them. They had covenanted to be back at the haunted house at half-past ten, and now it was hardly six.

Charles, as we have said, had some friends in the neighbourhood whom he wished to visit; he had pointed out their house to Henri as they descended the hill into the town. These friends were unknown to Henri, and as he had some urgent letters to write he excused himself from accompanying Charles in his visit. Presently the latter reappeared, bearing a most cordial invitation to dinner from his friends for both the tourists; but Henri had not finished his letters, so he begged Charles to go alone and to make his excuses, but promised to call for him at his friend's house at half-past ten, since that house lay in the general direction of the haunted *château* and would be but little out of his way as he walked there from the hotel. This understood, Charles started off once more to his friend's, while Henri ordered for himself a little dinner at the hotel, and sat down again to his writing.

In due course of time he had his dinner and finished his letters. Having posted them, he started a few minutes before half-past ten for the house which Charles had pointed out to him. While he had been writing his thoughts were fully occupied with his work, but now that he was free from that, the adventure upon which he was about to embark loomed large on his horizon, and he could not but admit to himself that on the whole it looked distinctly less pleasant and heroic, now that night had fallen, than it had done in the warm glow of the summer afternoon.

He was even conscious of a half-formed desire to escape from it all and go snugly to bed in that clean little hotel; but he put away these craven thoughts from him, asking himself how he could miss so splendid an opportunity, and still more how he could be so selfish as to think of disappointing Charles, who in his quieter way was just as eager for the adventure as he had previously been himself. He owned to himself quite cynically that he felt distinctly nervous, and that if he were there alone, he should instantly abandon the undertaking, but he thought that with the encouragement and support of his more phlegmatic friend's presence, he might contrive to get through the affair creditably. But his thoughts *would* return uncomfortably to the grim fate of those four predecessors, and he wondered whether any of them had felt as nervous as he did.

Presently he arrived at the appointed house, and there, in the shadow of a little porch at the top of the Steps which led up to the front door, he saw Charles already expecting him—evidently punctual to the minute and eager to waste no time, since instead of waiting to be called for, he had already finished his leave-taking and shut the door behind him. Henri called out a hearty

word of greeting to him, but it seemed to him that Charles scarcely answered him, as he descended the steps. The night was not a very dark one, but still he could not see his friend's face at all clearly when he tried to peer into it. Though he could see so little, it seemed to him that Charles was hardly himself; he appeared to be *distract*, preoccupied, almost sullen in the short answers which he gave to his friend's questions.

After a few unavailing attempts to draw him into cheery conversation, Henri tactfully let him alone, making only now and then some casual remark on indifferent subjects, which did not call for reply. He thought that perhaps some unfortunate *contretemps* at his friend's house had annoyed Charles, or perhaps that he had heard some bad news. But he did not ask further what was the matter, feeling sure that his friend would confide in him in his own good time. His own sensations, meantime, were far from pleasant. His nervousness seemed to be increasing, and he felt as though something was steadily, slowly but relentlessly sucking away his strength, his courage, his very life. Never had he been so strangely, so uncomfortably affected before.

Thus their walk to the haunted house was a somewhat silent one. When they knocked at the door of the old care-taker's cottage, he met them with fresh outbursts of protestations and lamentations, telling them that the more he thought over this project of theirs the more he felt that he could not possibly be a party to it. He even went the length of offering to return their money to them, declaring that he could not reconcile it to his conscience to accept it. Henri, however pressed it upon him with kindly and cheering words, averring that all would be well, and that when they met safe and sound in the morning, he would even add a trifle extra to the very handsome present that he had already made.

The old care-taker made a dignified protest against this, assuring them that he was already much overpaid, and that if indeed they were so fortunate as to escape with their lives and their reason, it would be sufficient joy to him to see them safe and in good health when the morning dawned. Henri was really moved at the old man's solicitude, and pressed his hand heartily in bidding him good-night. Charles had all this time remained in the background saying practically nothing—nothing at any rate that was not absolutely necessary. Evidently his dark humour had not yet been completely shaken off, and Henri wondered much what could be the cause which in those few short hours had so entirely changed the mood of his friend.

They unlocked the door, they entered the great forsaken house, and, having provided themselves with a dark lantern, they made their way without difficulty to the study of the late Baron. A curious room it was, built out into the garden at one side of the house, as a billiard room sometimes is, suggesting that it had been added at some later period and was no part of the original design. It was a long and narrow room, with many French windows opening down to the floor at each side along its length; but each end of the room was almost entirely occupied by a huge pier-glass. This produced a remarkable effect, for as one looked along the room, it gave the illusion of extending to infinity in both directions, everything in it being repeated again and again in a seemingly endless vista. There was a good deal of furniture of one sort and another, and in each of the four corners a suit of armour was arranged precisely as though there was a figure inside it. In the centre of the room was a large and well-appointed writing-table, in front of which stood the Baron's chair—the chair in which he had committed suicide.

Our friends had bargained that the old man should leave a lamp ready trimmed for them, and they soon had it alight. So large a room, however, would have needed twenty lamps to make it really cheerful, and the far-away corners were still suggestively gloomy. A curious and eerie effect was produced by the indefinite reproduction of the light in the great mirrors at each end of the room. The place had the close musty smell which always haunts a room that has long been

closed; and altogether Henri was acutely conscious of a sense of discomfort and of a yearning for the comfortable, prosaic, nineteenth-century bedroom at the hotel.

Besides, he was growing weaker and weaker; he felt exactly as a living fly might feel when a spider was slowly sucking away his life-blood, and leaving him a mere empty shell. Clearly it would never do to admit this, so he tried to conceal his qualms by light and easy conversation, and attempted to rally Charles upon his taciturnity and apparent lowness of spirits. He received only the briefest of replies, and it was evident that Charles was still in the same strange mood; indeed, it would seem that if anything he had sunk into it more deeply than ever. Now that Henri could see him clearly in the brilliant light of the lamp, he became still more impressed with the oddity of his friend's appearance and behaviour. It would seem that Charles himself was to some extent conscious of this, and tried to avoid the light. He had thrown himself upon a settee, and for a long time he remained there motionless, answering only in surly monosyllables the sprightly observations of his friend.

After a time, however, this strange inertia was replaced by an equally strange disquiet, for he sprang up suddenly from the settee and began to walk up and down the long room like a wild animal marching up and down his cage. And it seemed to Henri, unless his imagination was playing tricks with him, that this suggestion of a wild beast was more than a mere simile; it was not only the restless marching up and down, but a curious air of repressed ferocity which somehow permeated the usual gentle and pacific bearing of his friend. Henri could not understand his own feelings, and tried to throw them off as ridiculous; but the persistent march up and down got upon his weakened nerves at last to such an extent that he was compelled to beg his friend to desist. The latter seemed scarcely to understand him—at least not until he had repeated his words more than once; and then with a curious, half-impatient exclamation he once more threw himself down upon the settee—no longer, however, to remain lethargic, for it was evident that his restlessness was still upon him, and that he could not retain the same position for more than a few seconds.

All this began to make Henri decidedly uncomfortable; he felt that no ordinary pre-occupation could fully account for this change, and he began to fear that some illness was falling upon his friend. He began also very heartily to wish that he had not been so eager to enter upon this adventure, for, as has already been said, it was upon the presence amid upon the assistance of his friend that he had relied to carry it through to a successful conclusion; and now in some strange way this seemed to be failing him. However, the hour of midnight, at which the Baron was supposed to appear, was now rapidly drawing near, and he determined that, as soon as it was decently possible after that witching hour was past, he would get his friend safely back to the hotel and into bed, and if there was not a distinct for the better by the next morning, he would consult the village doctor.

Meantime Charles's agitation appeared to have become uncontrollable; once more he sprang to his feet and resumed the strange, stealthy and subtly-threatening march backwards and forwards. And now he altogether disregarded his friend's remarks, seeming not even to hear them, but throwing all his energy into that weird and ceaseless promenade. It seemed to Henri, as he watched him, that his very face was changing, and inapposite reminiscences came to his mind of the way in which at a spiritualistic séance he had sometimes seen the face of a medium change, when some control took possession. His own nervousness and anxiety were becoming intolerable, and though the curiously surly attitude of his friend certainly did not invite further interference, he felt that he actually must try to relieve the tension by one more remonstrance. But just as he had made up his mind to speak, Charles suddenly sat down, not upon the settee

which he had formerly chosen, but upon the Baron's chair in front of the table, and there he sat sluggish and irresponsive as ever, shading his eyes from the light.

"Get up, man, get up!" cried Henri. "Don't you know that that is the very chair in which it is said that the Baron sits? And," looking at his watch, "it is within a few moments of his time too!"

But Charles took no notice, and remained immovable. Uncontrollably excited, Henri rushed up to him and shook him by the shoulder, calling loudly to him:

"Wake up, wake up! what is the matter with you?"

Even as he was speaking the great clock in the turret outside began to strike the hour of midnight. A sudden sound—a sort of subdued crash for which he could not account—drew his attention towards one end of the room, and as his eye fell upon the great mirror, he saw reflected in it the little group of Charles and himself, strongly illuminated by the light of the great lamp on the table close to them. He saw his own startled visage, and Charles with his face shaded by his hand; but even as he watched the mirror, the other figure raised its head, and with a shock of horror he realised that the countenance reflected was not his friend's at all! It was the face of the Baron, just as they had seen it in his portrait, and he was in the very act of drawing the razor across his throat once more.

With a shout of terror Henri tore away his eyes from the mirror and looked down on the figure under his hand, to see unmistakably not his friend's face but the Baron's looking up at him with a diabolical grin of triumphant malice, even as he felt a torrent of blood flow down upon his hand. It seemed to Henri as though something gave way inside his brain, and he fell to the ground unconscious.

He was aroused at length by a hand upon his shoulder—a tremulous hand—and by an anxious voice asking him:

"Where is your friend?"

For a few moments he felt too confused to be capable of answering; but after a while he collected his scattered wits and realised his position. He found himself lying on the floor of the Baron's room, close to the central table, and the old care-taker bending over him with a face full of agitation and anguish.

"Where is your friend, monsieur?" he asked again, "where is the other gentleman?"

The horrible events of the previous night came back to his mind with a rush, and he sat up and looked about him. Truly Charles was not to be seen, nor was there any trace of the ghastly figure which had repeated the Baron's suicide. He could give no answer to the old man's question, but after a time he became collected enough to tell his story. The old care-taker was full of lamentations, and wrung his hands as though distracted; declaring over and over again that he had known from the first that evil would come from this mad adventure, and blaming himself most severely for having ever allowed himself to become a party to it, even in the most indirect manner.

"It is strange and terrible that your friend should thus have disappeared," he cried.

"Yes," said Henri; "we must search the house for him. He may have been smitten by terror; he may have fled and concealed himself; he may have fainted just as I did, but in some other room. Let us go and search."

"But you yourself, monsieur—you are wounded, are you not?" queried the old man.

"No," replied Henri, "I think not; I feel nothing but great weakness and trembling."

"But," said the old man, "look at your hand; it is covered with blood!"

To his great horror Henri saw that this was so. The blood of the Baron or of Charles (for he knew not what was the truth of it) had flowed over his hand as the suicide was repeated, and that blood remained—a ghastly witness of the reality of that awful scene!

“Bring me water,” he cried to the old man, “bring me water at once, or I shall cut my hand off.”

The old man quickly fetched him a bowl of water from a well close by, and he soon removed those ill-omened stains; yet though they yielded to the water in the ordinary way, though to the sight they had disappeared, he felt as though they were still there, as though his hand could never be clean again. Slowly, because he was very weak, they passed from room to room of the old house, seeking for any trace of Charles, but in vain. They saw their own foot-marks in the dust, the foot-marks which they had made when they went over the house the day before; but they saw no others, and found no trace of any sort of the missing man.

“He must have been carried away by the devil!” cried the old care-taker.

They searched the nearest part of the gardens also; but Henri’s strength failed him, and this work was left uncompleted, for he resolved first to return to the town and to make certain enquiries. But before leaving him, he turned to the old man and said to him impressively:

“Do not grieve; you have done nothing but what is right. All through, you did your very best to persuade us not to undertake this mad experiment, but we would not be warned. You are in no way responsible if any harm has come from it. I do not know where my friend is; I do not understand at all the events of last night; but I decline altogether to believe that my friend has been carried off by the devil, as you think. If he saw what I saw—but how could he have seen it when it was he himself? I do not understand; but he may have been frightened, he may have rushed away. I may yet find him; I hope so; but in any case be assured of this. You at least have nothing with which to reproach yourself, and I shall never reproach you; nor shall I ever say anything of the occurrence of last night unless I am compelled to do so in my friend’s interest. I shall go into the village now; before I leave it I will see you again if I have any news to give.”

And so, shaking hands with the old man, he left him somewhat comforted.

As he walked slowly townwards his mind was filled with agitated reflections. He felt scarcely yet capable of connected thought or of reasoning, and indeed this thing was a nightmare which seemed to defy reason. He could not even think what he ought to do, or whether he should give notice to the authorities of the disappearance of his friend.

Before he had come to any decision he found himself approaching the hotel, and he made his way to his room without attracting attention. He went to Charles’s room, but there was no sign of him, nor had his bed been slept in. Henri returned to his own room and threw himself upon a couch, for it seemed to him that most of all he needed rest—that he must sleep before he would be capable of facing this strange and terrible emergency. He felt that something should be done, and done at once, and yet he could do nothing, nor did he even know what should be done. He knew he needed sleep, and yet his anxiety would not let him sleep. And so he lay for awhile, wondering vaguely what would come of it all.

His wearied body was almost yielding to slumber, when suddenly the door was thrown open and there before him stood Charles in his ordinary dress, looking precisely as though nothing had happened!

Henri sprang to his feet, crying something wildly and incoherently, rushed up to the astonished Charles and grasped his arm to see if indeed it was he or only an hallucination of his half-maddened brain.

“My dear fellow, what in the world is the matter with you?” said Charles. “What has happened?”

“Thank God, it is you,” said Henri, “and that you look quite well again; but surely I should rather ask *you* what happened and where you went last night, when you so mysteriously disappeared.”

“Disappeared!” said Charles. “What do you mean? I left you at about six o’clock, you know, and you were to call at my friend’s house at half-past ten, but you never came, and I was really anxious about you.

“Never came!” said Henri. “What do *you* mean? Certainly I came; I met you—”

“What!” interrupted Charles, “You met me? But I have never seen you since I left this hotel at six o’clock. There is some mystery here, and you look as though it had been a terrible one. Sit down now, and tell me all about it.”

“I will,” said Henri; “but first tell me where you have spent the night.”

“At my friend’s house, of course,” said Charles. “I dined with my friend as I intended, but unfortunately after dinner a slight faintness came over me. Nothing serious—no; but it lasted some time, and left me feeling weak and tottering, and my friends insisted that I should not think under such circumstances of attempting our adventure, nor even of trying to make my way back to the hotel until after a night’s rest. They seized upon me with kindly fussiness, they put me to bed in their spare room, and administered cordials to me, assuring me that when you called they would explain everything to you and, if I were still awake, would bring you up to my bedside. But long before you were due, I had fallen asleep under the influence of their medicine. I slept until this morning, and awoke feeling perfectly refreshed and strong and well again. Having heard that you had not come after all, I was anxious to see what was the matter, so I came to the hotel as soon as possible, and here I am! I am all impatience to hear your story.”

Henri told it as well as he could, to the accompaniment of many exclamations of wonder from Charles, and then they began gradually to try to construct some sort of a theory as to what had really happened. One thing at least seemed clear; that terrible Baron had somehow or other foreseen their intention, perhaps had invisibly accompanied them during their examination of his house in the afternoon, and then had resolved to lure Henri to what might very well have been his destruction, by taking the place of his friend, upon whose company and assistance he was depending for the due carrying out of his plan. Perhaps, indeed, the Baron may somehow or other have caused Charles’s indisposition; at any rate he unquestionably decided to take advantage of it by personating him; and it is equally certain that he kept up his materialisation for so long a time by draining away Henri’s strength.

In this very fact lay the peculiar horror of the situation—that Henri himself had felt unusually nervous, and certainly would not have undertaken the investigation but for the presence and support of his friend; and yet at the critical moment, when above all things support was needed, that friend himself proved to be the apparition! They talked over the matter for hours, but they could make nothing more of it than this. On one point at least they both heartily agreed, that they desired to make no further investigations into the mystery of the Baron’s room.

Nevertheless, they felt that they owed it to their good old friend, the care-taker, to pay one more visit to his cottage, and to relieve his mind as to the consequences of their strange adventure. But they took care to make that visit at high noon, and nothing would have induced either of them to enter that fatal house again. The old caretaker had been sunk in the blackest despair; but when he saw them both safe and well, he blessed God fervently and declared that a

great weight was lifted from his heart, for he had been feeling all morning that he should never forgive himself for his share in the events of the previous night.

They told him their story, for they felt that that at least was due to him. They asked particularly whether he had seen Monsieur Charles the night before, and whether he had detected any difference in him, but the old man said:

“No, I did not notice the second gentleman particularly; now I come to think of it, it is true that Monsieur Charles stood back away from the light that shone out through the door, but I took no particular notice of this, since I was myself in a very agitated frame of mind.” And then he broke forth again in rhapsodies of relief that after all there was no blood upon his soul, since they were both safe and well.

They pressed on him a still further gift, assuring him when he protested that the experience through which they had passed was indeed well worth it to them; but though he was much the richer for this strange adventure, he asseverated most fervently that never again under any circumstances whatever, not even for all the wealth of the Rothschilds, should any one with his consent spend a night in the Baron’s room.