

the plain. At the tent they found Harold Piercy anxiously awaiting them. He shook hands with both heartily.

A head was thrust in at the tent door, and a voice said,—

“I believe Major —— lives here?”

“Hillo! Scheldtz, my boy!” said the owner of the tent.

“Come in!”

Eustace Scheldtz entered, and recognizing Jack, greeted him warmly.

“Where are you staying?” asked Delamaine.

“I was over in Kesanlyk,” said the correspondent, “when I was told at ten o'clock last night” (it was grey dawn by this time) “that there was to be a great assault. I rode over, and got half-way up the crag after the men, when the battle began, and before I well knew where I was, a whole crowd of fellows came tearing down, saying that they were beaten. I found afterwards that they were the supports, and that they had never been near. They were Musāfis and Bashi Bazouks. Of course they could not be expected to fight. Were you there?”

“We were on the crag for ten minutes,” said Jack.

“Oh!” said Scheldtz; “then you were there too, my friend! That is capital! You shall tell me all about it, and I will write my letter, and ride away to catch the mail.”

“Where shall you catch the mail?” asked the owner of the tent.

“At Yeni Mahali, beyond Tchirpan,” replied the correspondent. “Let me see. It is four miles to Kesanlyk from here. Kesanlyk is ten miles to Eski Zaghra. That is fourteen. Twenty miles to Tchirpan. That is thirty-four. Fourteen to Yeni Mahali. That is forty-eight. If I can get fresh horses at Tchirpan, I can catch Friday's train to Adrianople. Yes; that will do. The steamer leaves Constantinople on Sunday. So now, Mr. Delamaine, tell me all about it.”

“Come down to my house in the village,” Jack answered, “and I will tell you all I know as we go along.”

(To be continued.)

## OLD GRIMSHAW'S GHOST,

OR, CHRISTMAS GAMBOLS AT HAROLDSTONE HALL.

BY VERNON FIELDING.

CHAPTER I.—AN INTRODUCTION TO HAROLDSTONE HALL AND ITS INHABITANTS.



AT that period of the year, when rain, wind, and frost, by their combined powers, have stripped the trees of their foliage and plucked even the last rose of autumn from its stem, a large merry party of all ages were collected under the hospitable roof of the warm-hearted generous Sir Gilbert Ilderton, of

Haroldstone Hall, prepared for a Christmas campaign of fun and jollity. Sir Gilbert should be described before his mansion. He stood six foot two in his stockings. His figure was tall, stout, and well-built; his countenance oblong, with blue eyes, large and expressive, a longish well-formed nose, and a mouth from which a benignant smile was seldom absent. He might be taken as the *beau ideal* of an English country gentleman.

His eldest son, Gilbert, a fine handsome young fellow, very like him in appearance, was at college, and soon about to come of age. His next was in the army; and the third, Charley, the delight of his mother, the favourite of the whole household and of the neighbourhood, was serving his country at sea, in the exalted position of a midshipman. But never mind, he intended some day to be an admiral, and to thrash the enemies of Old England with right good will.

There were several other younger boys, Harry, David, and Tom, who were at home for their holidays; and three daughters, known to the country round as the “Three Graces”—fair, gentle, and refined.

Then there was Lady Ilderton, a true English matron, kind, and gentle, and thoughtful, dignified and courteous, utterly above the littlenesses of common minds. She was the very antipodes of vulgarity, yet was full of animation, and could keep every one alive and make them happy—at least, it was their own fault if they were not so.

The Hall at Christmas was always full of guests, for Sir Gilbert delighted to see joyous faces around him, and relations and friends, old and young. The life and moving spirit of the house was a certain Mr. Giles Markland. Everybody called him Cousin Giles. All the young people not learned in genealogies thought that he was their cousin, though they didn't know how. He was, however, a cousin of Sir Gilbert's, who valued him more for the qualities of honesty, simplicity, and kindness of heart which he possessed, than on account of his relationship. The boys delighted in him, for he put them up to all sorts of games and amusements; and when they wanted to know what to do, they had only to apply to him, and he was sure to suggest something pleasant.

Besides Harry, David, and Tom Ilderton, three of their schoolfellows had been invited to the Hall. Ned Lightfoot, who was Harry's friend, Jack Masson, who was David's, and Nat Spankie, who had been asked as the companion of Tom—not exactly to assist in keeping him in order, for they were both of the same kidney, and it seemed wonderful, as Uncle Giles observed, that they didn't break their necks every day in the week during the countless pranks they took it into their heads to play. Of course there were numerous older guests, ladies and gentlemen of various ages, for the mansion was calculated to hold, on occasion, an almost unlimited number. The worthy Sir Gilbert was never so happy as when he had his house full. Cousin Giles went and came as he pleased. When he was away, letters always followed him, asking him to come back; and when he was there, his arms and coat-tails were held too tightly to let him get away again without violent struggles. Last time he arrived he brought a friend with him, whom he introduced as Mr. Alec Fairbairn.

Greater contrasts than Cousin Giles and his friend could scarcely be found. Whereas Cousin Giles was somewhat short, and round, and comfortable, and had a merry smiling face, with a ruddy complexion, short hair standing up, and whiskers slightly tinged with grey; his friend, Alec Fairbairn, was tall and swarthy, with long black hair hanging over his shoulders, his cheeks so thin that Cousin Giles used to tell a story about a barber once shaving him, who cut his finger through one of them, when putting it inside that he might scrape off the stubble. His eyes were dark and solemn-looking on ordinary occasions, though they lighted up sometimes when his well-formed

mouth, his redeeming feature, was wreathed with smiles. But Alec Fairbairn was not an ordinary person. He was known to be a poet and a professor of science, and was supposed to be a novelist. At all events, few people could beat him, so Uncle Giles declared, at telling a good story.

Among the ladies, was a Miss Jane Otterburn, a niece of Lady Ilderton's, a small, active, intelligent young lady, well out of her teens, and acknowledged by all to be very pretty. Captain Fotheringsail, of the navy, a thorough sailor from top to toe—or, as he would have said, from truck to kelson, must not be forgotten. He was not supposed to be a marrying man, because he loved his ship so well when he had one; but opinions were divided on that subject. Not that the boys, who had plenty of other things to think of, troubled their heads about such nonsense, as they were employed from early morning till bedtime in carrying out the various plans devised for them by Cousin Giles and his friend, who, though he was tall, and lank, and a poet, took no small amount of pains to make himself useful to them.

By-the-bye, Miss Susan Langdon—a distant relation of Sir Gilbert, and as different as possible to Jane Otterburn—must not be overlooked. She was good-natured, and fair, and fat, and deliciously dull, as Cousin Giles used to say. She was a general and well-satisfied butt; for she was, he added, too obtuse to observe the shafts aimed at her, or too good-natured to mind them when they struck her harder than usual. She had a brother, Simon, possessed of the same characteristics, who always chuckled and rubbed his hands whenever he discovered any tricks played on Susan, not perceiving that similar ones were practised on himself. However, the individual members of the party must be made to appear as they are required.

Christmas Day arrived. Everybody walked over the hard, crisp ground to the church, which was decked with holly and bright red berries; and there were appropriate inscriptions over the organ gallery; and the sermon inculcated on the congregation peace and good-will towards each other. No one could doubt that Sir Gilbert practised this, as they saw the pleased countenances of the villagers as he passed among them. Then there was luncheon, and a brisk walk taken by the younger people—Cousin Giles leading—among hedges no longer green, and woods denuded of leaves, and by ponds to see how soon the ice was likely to bear; and a dozen or more cottages were visited, and gifts bestowed on old people unable to move out, the party singing joyous carols; and Susan Langdon laughing, she knew not why, except that she felt happy; and Simon trying to play her a trick, but not having the wit to invent one.

Then came the dinner—old English fare, but better cooked than formerly—roast beef, and turkey, and plum-pudding, and mince-pies, all decked with holly; and lighted brandy to warm the pies and puddings; and no lack of generous wine of the best; and a blessing asked by the minister, present with his family.

Little attendance was demanded from the servants when the cloth was removed, for they, too, were enjoying Heaven's bounteous gifts, bestowed through their kind master's hands, in the servants' hall below. This was decked with holly; and at one end, with the aid of screens and boughs, a graceful stage had been formed. The meals, in dining-room and hall, over, voices outside announced the arrival of the carol-singers, who, being speedily admitted, after partaking of refreshment, were arranged on the stage. The whole party from the drawing-room now assembled in the hall, where chairs and benches had been placed in long rows, to hear them, Sir Gilbert taking his seat in front, with purse in hand, giving many an encouraging and approving smile at the sweet sounds produced by their bells.

When the ringers retired, the curtain dropped; but was speedily drawn up again, and the oddest possible little dwarf

was seen, with a huge head encircled by a crown, and a bowl of barley porridge before him, which his goggle eyes were regarding with disconsolate glances, as if he was longing for better fare. After his majesty had produced roars of laughter by his grimaces, the curtain fell; but almost instantly again rising, the king appeared, with pipe in hand, and a glass of punch by his side; but after trying to sing, in a cracked voice, "Old King Cole was a merry old soul," as he smoked and sipped, his head nodded, his nose grew red, his eyes half closed, his visage elongated, when Sir Gilbert, considering that he was not keeping up his kingly dignity, ordered him to disappear. Down came the curtain, and, Presto! he had vanished. When it rose an instant afterwards, a band of mummers, to the great satisfaction of the younger part of the audience, next marched on to the stage. There was Father Christmas, and his attendant sprites—Hail, Frost, and Snow, and heroes innumerable, dressed in paper helmets, and armour decked with spangles and ribbons, and swords of wood, and long spears—altogether a motley group. The Duke of Wellington and Napoleon Buonaparte, Nelson, Soult, and Blucher, the Black Prince and Julius Cæsar, the Duke of Marlborough and Richard of the Lion Heart, and numerous other men of renown of all ages, brought together, with delightful disregard to historical correctness. They fought one with the other till all fell mortally wounded, the Great Duke of modern days alone surviving; when a new character rushed in—a doctor, with a nostrum to cure all complaints; and applying it to their noses, with some words of a cabalistic character, which sounded like, "Take some of this riff-raff up thy sniff-snaff," he set each dead hero on his feet, ready to fight another day.

"That gentleman would have wonderful practice if he could be as successful among the public as he has been to-night," observed Cousin Giles, while Sir Gilbert was bestowing his largesse on the performers.

"Let's have it all over again!" "Encore! encore!" was shouted by the younger members of the audience; and, not unwillingly, the actors, with the utmost gravity, went through their parts without the slightest variation of word or gesture.

Tea over, the juveniles were invited into the dining-room, where, at the far end of the table, a hideous witch was seen presiding over a huge bowl, from which suddenly, as the lights were withdrawn, blue flames burst forth, and the witch, her long arms extending over the bowl, grew more hideous still, and a voice was heard inviting them to partake of the contents. "Hot raisins, sweet raisins, nice burning raisins." But few hung back, for the voice was not unfriendly, and was easily recognized as that of Cousin Giles; and when they had seen their own faces turn blue, and yellow, and green, and the raisins were eaten up, the witch sunk down under the table, and Cousin Giles popped up.

Then came games of all sorts, old and young gentlemen joining with equal zest, led by Cousin Giles and Alec Fairbairn. Now all were silent to listen to, and many to join in, a Christmas Carol, sweetly sung; and family prayers were held, and the Scriptures read, and Christmas Day was over, and all retired, with grateful hearts, and kindly thoughts of one another, to rest.

#### CHAPTER II.—A TALE OF A GHOST.

THERE is said to be a skeleton in some out-of-the-way cupboard of every house. There was one at Haroldstone Hall. No one liked to speak of it though. Even the jovial Sir Gilbert shunned the subject. The morning had been spent on the ice. Several of the ladies had put on skates for the first time, and the gentlemen had exerted themselves to teach them, until all were tolerably tired. Notwithstanding this, however, when the party were assembled after dinner games of all sorts were carried on, for the benefit of the younger members of the party. They had a jolly game of blind-man's buff, when Cousin Giles, Alec

Fairbairn, and even Jane Otterburn, consented in their turn to act blind-man. It was great fun to see Cousin Giles leaping about in the most extraordinary fashion, darting here and there, and seldom failing before long to catch one of his tormentors, though in a short time he again got caught himself. Alec Fairbairn, however, caused quite as much merriment by his extraordinary antics, greatly resembling as he did a huge daddy long-legs, or a spider rushing on its prey. Jane Otterburn was in reality the most active of the party, though she glided about in a more graceful way, soon managing to catch some one, aided by her sense of hearing, however, rather than by her activity.

"The game over, what say you to a story," cried Cousin Giles, "that we may rest ourselves after our exertions?"

"A story! a story!" exclaimed a dozen boyish voices.

"Who shall tell it? that's the question," said Cousin Giles.

"Miss Otterburn, will you?"

Jane shook her head. Perhaps it was that Captain Fotheringsail had just then seated himself by her side, and was saying something which appeared to interest her.

"Then Fairbairn, we must get a story from you," said Cousin Giles.

"Yes! yes! Let's have a jolly story from Mr. Fairbairn. Do, Mr. Fairbairn, tell us one," cried the boys, gathering round him.

Alec Fairbairn looked bashful, but at length took the seat to which Cousin Giles led him, in a part of the large semicircle formed round the fire. Sir Gilbert took a chair on one side, and Lady Ilderston on the other.

"We're all listening; do begin," cried the boys.

"Go ahead, Alec!" said Cousin Giles.

Alec Fairbairn, after having been silent for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts, began,—

"Some of you may have read 'The Castle of Otranto,' and 'The Old English Baron.' True as you must have thought those tales of mystery, they are not so true as the story I am about to narrate.

"There was an old, old family, whose ancestors were among the Norman Conquerors of Britain, and who had ever since owned the same estate those ancestors had won by the sword. At length a certain Sir Hugh Oswald inherited the property.

"Sir Hugh was a bold knight, who had gained credit and renown in many a fierce battle. He was proud of his family, proud of his estate, and prouder yet of himself.

"It chanced that his head keeper had been shot in an affray with some deer-poachers, when the subordinate keepers had, like dastards, run away. On hearing of their cowardly conduct, Sir Hugh swore that none of them should be raised to the vacant post. It was necessary, however, to fill it. Sir Hugh was seated



in his justice-room, when a stranger was announced. He was habited in a hunting-frock of Lincoln green, with a leathern belt; he wore a round-topped forester's hat on his head, and a long hunting-knife stuck in his leathern belt. High boots encased his legs, while in his hand he held a huge spear, which must have required a strong arm to wield it.

"'I come to offer myself as your head keeper, Sir Hugh,' said the stranger. 'Here are documents which will prove that I possess the necessary knowledge and qualification for the post.'

"Sir Hugh glanced over the papers.

"'Your name, my friend?' he asked.

"'Grimshaw,' answered the forester.

"'You look grim enough to keep the boldest poacher in awe!' observed the knight.

"'I take your remark as a compliment, Sir Hugh,' said the forester.

"'I engage you,' said the knight; 'the steward will put you in possession of the house left vacant by the late keeper.'

The stranger bowed, and receiving a note from the knight stalked out of the room.

"'He's a bold churl that, and will keep the rest in order,' said the knight to himself.

"Grimshaw, the new keeper, was duly installed in his office. The poachers came as they had been wont to do, to carry off Sir Hugh's deer, but soon found that they had made a mistake, and more than one paid the penalty with his life. The new keeper not only kept the poachers in awe, but everybody else on the estate. The steward paid him the greatest respect, and even Sir Hugh dare find no fault with any of his acts. Mysterious whispers were uttered among the retainers; they said he was not what he seemed—he had got a footing on the property, and it would be found a hard task to drive him out.

"A report, long forgotten, that Sir Hugh's title to the estate was not so sound as it should be, was revived; some went even so far as to aver that old Grimshaw was the rightful owner; but how that exactly was, no one knew. These rumours at length reached Sir Hugh's ears, and disgusted him greatly. Though formerly a cheery, jovial man, he became morose and silent, no longer taking pleasure in the sports of the field; nor did he even associate, as was his former custom, with the magnates of the county. Why did not he dismiss his head keeper unless there was some truth in what was said? Whether or not the keeper heard these reports it was hard to ascertain, as no one ventured to ask him.

It was a stormy night at the end of autumn; dark clouds covered the sky; not a star was seen; the thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and the wind howled through the boughs of the trees, scattering the leaves which had hitherto clung to them. The rain came down in heavy showers, occasionally ceasing for a short time. It was a night that poachers would have selected for killing the deer or other game. Notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, Sir Hugh, with his cloak wrapped round him, which might have concealed any arms he carried, was observed to sally forth into the park—an unwonted proceeding on his part. He walked quickly on until the lights streaming from the windows of his mansion were lost to view. Yet further into the depths of the forest he went. He came to an open glade, when he saw by a flash of lightning which just then darted from the clouds a figure approaching. He recognized his keeper. Drawing his sword, and folding his cloak around his arm, he stepped rapidly on.

"'Defend yourself, whoever you are,' he exclaimed; 'the survivor shall be the owner of the estate.'

"'Whether I live or die, I intend to hold my own,' answered the pretended keeper in a hollow voice, presenting as he spoke his hunting-spear to defend himself. But Sir Hugh, with an activity