B 88.

[CONTINUED.]

I could not describe to you the cold, sickening feeling that crept over me as I looked round. Had that gruesome tragedy, as seen by me in my dream, ever been really enacted in that room? Did the murdered man's bones still lie uncoffined under the boards of that old floor? I shuddered like a frightened child as I put these questions to myself.

Fortunately, I had time to pull myself together a bit before Mr. Keppel came into the room. He was very kind and affable, and had the decanters and a cold fowl brought out before ever he asked me a question. Just then I could not eat, but a stiff tumbler of brandy and water helped me to get my nerve back again. After that Mr. Keppel began to question me, and I gave him a full, true, and particular account of all the circumstances, so far as I knew them, in connection with his uncle's death. He was greatly interested. But when I had got through every thing that he wanted to know, and he had nothing further to ask me, I plucked up heart of grace, and determined to tell him how Mr. Muxloe had appeared to me several times since his death, and of my strange dream in B 88.

I never saw any one more astonished than Mr. Keppel was by the time I had finished my story. For a little while he seemed almost too overcome to speak. At last he said: "If what you say be true—and I have no reason to doubt your word—it apparently points to one of those mysteries which seem purposely sent now and then as if to baffle the utmost exercise of human reason. This house, which now belongs to me, was certainly my uncle's property for a great number of years. Although he lived for the most part in London, he used to come down here for one or two days almost every month, ostensibly for the sake of the excellent fishing with which the neighborhood abound. He would never let the house, although he might have had tenants by the score. One old woman had the sole charge of it when he was away, and waited upon him when he was here. There is one fact in connection with my uncle's residence here which seems in some measure to bear out the most singular point of your narrative: this very room in which we are sitting—in which, according to your account, a dreadful tragedy took place many years ago—was never, so long as I can remember, made use of by my uncle. It was always kept locked and shuttered; and often as I was here during my uncle's lifetime, I never saw inside the door of this room till after his death. Enough, however, for the present. I must have time to think this strange story of yours carefully over. Come and see me at eight the evening after to-morrow, if you have no better engagement."

Punctual to the time, I was there. I was shown into the oak-paneled room. There I found Mr. Keppel, two gentlemen, and Donald the gardner.

"I have told these two gentlemen, who are particular friends of mine," said Mr. Keppel, "all that you told me the other evening. We have consulted together, and have decided, not without hesitation, to investigate the matter, so far as it is in our power to do so after so great a lapse of time. As a matter of course, our first step is to ascertain whether any one has been buried in the way described by you under the flooring of this room. Donald here, who is discretion itself, will proceed to make the necessary search. Be good enough to point out the exact spot, as nearly as you can remember it, where you saw the body put away."

I had no difficulty in doing this—every thing was fixed too clearly in my memory for that. So Donald set to work under my directions. I took off my coat, and gave him a helping hand, while the three gentlemen looked quietly on. I need not trouble you with details. It will be sufficient to say that before long we came upon a skeleton, intermixed with some fragments of clothing and some rusted jewelry. Near at hand were the remains of what had at one time been a riding-whip, loaded with lead, while no great distance away was the rusted tin canister which I felt certain from the first that we should not fail to find.

Mr. Keppel opened the canister, and drew from it a strip of parchment. We all crowded round the table. After glancing through the paper himself, he proceeded to read aloud what was there written. This is what was written:

"I, John Muxloe, of the Inner Temple, barister at law, having this night done a deed which, if made public, would in all probability bring me to the gallows, hereby solemnly depose to the truth of the under-mentioned facts:

"At nine o'clock this evening, being at that time busy over my law-books, I was disturbed by a knock at the front-door. My servant having left me to attend the death-bed of her mother, I was constrained to open the door myself. The person who knocked was my friend, Arthur Cleveden, the dearest friend I had on earth. He had his riding-boots on, and was splashed with mud. In one hand he carried a heavy whip. He walked past me without a word of greeting into the oak-paneled room, and I followed, wondering what could possibly be the matter with him. His first words to me were: 'John Muxloe, you are an infernal villain!' I was thunderstruck.

"'Those are very hard words, Arthur,' I said. 'You must be either crazy or drunk.'

"'Neither one nor the other,' he answered. 'I repeat that you are an infernal villain, and I have come here to horsewhip you.'

To be continued.

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