

THE ACTOR'S DOUBLE.

WE were talking about spirit manifestations at the Thirty-nine Club, and retailing the usual second or third-hand accounts of deceased ladies and gentlemen showing themselves to their sorrowing relatives.

"It is strange the tricks which our brains will sometimes play us," said Doctor Macpherson. "I remember once seeing a ghost myself, and it can tell you that the sensation is a very curious one. It was a good many years ago in my examination days, and I had been sitting until the early hours 'cramming.' Everybody in the house had long since gone to bed, where I ought to have been myself, so I was rather surprised when I glanced up from my book to see somebody sitting at the table where I myself had been a few moments before writing. I felt quite startled for an instant, until I recognised the intruder. He was a little hazy, but I could see plainly enough who it was."

"A dead relative?" asked Major Dennett, who was a firm believer in the good old fashioned ghost.

Macpherson answered in his peculiarly quiet way. "No, it was myself. The experience of seeing one's own ghost is not altogether unusual, I believe."

"Now, I do not think your experience was half so remarkable as one of mine," said Gilbert Dane, the well-known actor and manager of the Howard Theatre, who happened to be there that night. Dane is not a member of the Thirty-nine, but had come with Macpherson. Most of the brain specialist's friends are in the profession, a fact which is perhaps due to the year which he himself spent on the stage as a young man.

"My story begins provisionally," said the actor, when he begged to hear it. "I lost the latch-key with which I let myself into the theatre, and took somebody else's to the locksmith's to have a duplicate made. I agreed to call for it the following morning as I was going up to town for rehearsal. I was living at Patney then, and we were actively preparing a play which deserved a better fate than it received, if thought and preparation go for anything, for I came near making myself ill over it. I was feeling out of sorts on the morning that I called for the latch-key, and when the locksmith swore positively that he had given me the thing already—that less than ten minutes previously I had come in for the key, paid for it, and taken it away with me, I will confess that I lost my temper, and stormed as the fellow; but I could not get him to budge a line from his story. He seemed to have an idea that I was playing a practical joke, and the only result of my talking was that I nearly lost my train to Waterloo. It was moving when I reached the platform, and I had to run for the only compartment of which the door was open, near the end of the train.

"The compartment contained two other passengers, but if I glanced at them at all, I noticed nothing except that each was pretty well hidden behind a daily paper. I had fortunately bought my own paper before calling at the locksmith's, and I speedily followed their example. So far the story is painfully commonplace. Now comes the truly remarkable experience which has stamped the doings of that day indelibly on my memory."

The actor paused to strike a match and relight his cheroot, which he had allowed to go out, and we all watched him in silence, wondering what was coming. Macpherson only had the air of a man who had heard the story before.

"I had become rather interested in my paper," Dane went on, when the cigar was alight again, "and did not notice my companions talking, until one of them started telling an anecdote. Then it gradually dawned upon me that the story he was telling was one that I consider my own peculiar property, and when I listened, it struck me that the story was being told, not only in my exact words, but also in my own voice. They say that a man does not recognise his own voice—when he hears it in the phonograph, for instance; but that is possibly the fault of the phonograph, and, at any rate, I know that I recognised mine instantly. The story and the voice startled me, but it is difficult to describe my feelings when I put down my paper to glance at the narrator."

"It was yourself?" asked Major Dennett, excitedly, as the actor paused; and Dane nodded.

"Yes, gentlemen, I saw seated at the other end of the compartment by the window, opposite his companion, a figure that was an exact fac simile of the reflection which I see in my glass every day when I have dressed for the part of a respectable citizen. It was myself complete in every detail of face and attire."

"An optical delusion, I suppose?" I suggested; and the actor shook his head.

"No; that was the first idea that occurred to me—that I had been working and worrying too much over the new play, and my brain had played me a trick. The unconcerned way in which the third man glanced at me encouraged me in the belief, for the likeness, unless I was imagining it, was enough to attract instant attention. I wondered whether there was actually a man sitting and talking where I had seen and heard my facsimile; for the third man, an ordinary, everyday individual, had not spoken a word to him, and might from his expression have been listening to his anecdote or simply thinking. I was relieved when he laughed at the point when 'my double' began to call his companion to the joke of the story, but when he opened his mouth it was only to increase the mystery of the affair, for it showed me that 'my double' possessed my name, as well as my voice, my dress, my face and figure."

"I began to wonder then, not whether the man at the window was a reality, but whether I was reality myself, and it really would not have surprised me if I had looked in a mirror at that moment and found it reflect back a face that was strange to me. It is strange how quickly a single phenomenon will sometimes change all one's fixed opinions on the subject of the supernatural. I felt that I must speak to the men if only to prove whether I was awake or dreaming, and I seized the opportunity of introducing myself offered by hearing 'my double' called by my name."

"Excuse me," I said, addressing him, "but I heard your friend just now call you 'Mr Dane.' I wonder whether we are related at all, for that happens to be my name, and we seem to bear a striking similarity to one another."

"My double" turned and surveyed me through his single eyeglass in exactly the same manner as that with which I should have surveyed a stranger who addressed me in the train.

"I really do not know whether we are related," he said,

in the voice I use when I wish to be slightly patronising. "I am Gilbert Dane, of the Howard Theatre," and he actually handed me one of my own cards.

"There was something in the substantial nature of the familiar bit of pasteboard that brought back a little of my commonsense, and relieved me from the state of stupefaction into which the phenomenon had driven me."

"Come, this is a very clever trick," I said, with a smile which, I am afraid, was rather feebly. "You have certainly succeeded in startling me. Now I should like your own card, so that I may know whom to congratulate on a very clever performance."

"And what did the Mystery do?" I inquired with interest when the actor paused.

"He did exactly what I should have done, if a stranger addressed me in the same manner. He became angry, and asked me what I meant, and who I called myself."

"Well! until to day I have been in the habit of calling myself Gilbert Dane, of the Howard Theatre—" I was beginning, keeping as cool as I could, when "my double" interrupted me in a tone which I still recognised perfectly as my own.

"Well! you had better not do so any more," he said, sharply, "or you will find yourself in the hands of the police. I see that you have been imitating my dress, too, which I cannot help, but the use of my name is another thing."

"We had just reached Vauxhall, our first stopping-place, as he spoke, and a ticket collector who knows me by sight came to the door. "My double" caught his eye first.

"I wish you would tell this gentleman who I am," he said, and the man answered promptly:

"Certainly, sir, you are Mr Dane, the actor."

"He looked startled when I asked him the same question. "I should call you a very good imitation," he said, when he had recovered from his surprise.

"This was becoming decidedly uncomfortable, and I began to wonder how I could prove to anybody that I was not a very good imitation of myself. The ticket-collector's ready acceptance of my double as the real Mr Dane showed me how helpless I should be in an appeal to anyone who did not know me well. But I felt that it would not do for two Gilbert Danes to remain at large; the question which one was to surrender the title must be settled at once. It struck me that the easiest way to do it would be to go together to the theatre, and submit the question to the company assembled for the rehearsal. I suggested this course to my facsimile, and he surprised me by accepting it readily.

"I warn you that I shall detain you when it is settled, and send for the police," he said in my haughtiest voice.

"It was what I was intending to do with him."

The actor paused to light another cheroot.

"And did you both go back?" somebody asked. Dane nodded.

"Yes, together. The third man left us at Waterloo," he said. "You may not believe it, but I felt rather uneasy as I approached the stage door, and the fact that I had no latch-key to open it for myself seemed a calamity. My double calmly produced his, and marched me into my own theatre with the air of a proprietor. Then he closed the door behind him, and changing his voice and manner, suddenly turned towards me and said quietly: "And now, Mr Dane, I will puzzle you no more, but apologise for giving you so much trouble, which I hope you will think repaid by the enjoyment of a unique sensation. The fact is that I am very anxious to go on the stage under your auspices, and I thought that this would be the best way to obtain an introduction to you, and at the same time, show you a specimen of my acting in the part of your understudy. You will admit at least that I understand the art of making up. Now, are you going to give me an engagement—or to send for the police?"

"And you gave him the engagement, I suppose?" I asked.

"Yes; I have always regretted that he threw it up before the year was up, and returned to his former profession, that of a medical man."

"It was he, of course, who called for the latch-key in the morning?"

"Yes; he had been in the shop when I ordered it, and the fact finally determined him to carry out the affair, which he had been pondering some time."

"But he must have haunted you like a shadow beforehand," put in Major Dennett, "to learn all your gestures and that. I should hardly think the result was worth the trouble."

Macpherson, who had been sitting quietly in the background, surprised us by replying for his friend.

"Excuse me, Major," he said, in his usual quiet way, "but you make a mistake there. Any man would have been glad to give a hundred pounds down for the engagement which Dane offered me straight away. It cost me less than ten pounds for clothes, and about a month of study; and my time was not worth ninety pounds a month then, or I should not have thought of giving up medicine and taking to the stage."

HERBERT FLOWERDEW.

THE BEGGING LETTER-WRITER.

BY JAMES PAYN.

In the old histories of literature there is very little said about those persons on the last rung of the ladder—the literary begging letter-writer. The Post Office arrangements did not give them the facilities they enjoy at present, or the popular author was not so successful or well paid as to make him worth their attention. For these importunate gentry, forgetful of the proverb that "Hawks do not peck out hawks' eyes," almost exclusively confine their attentions to members of that craft to which they themselves pretend to belong. Perhaps they shrewdly suspect that the world at large is not much interested in the affairs of Grub Street, whereas the literary man, being above all things what his contemporaries call 'shoppy,' is easily moved by a tale of non success in his own line. Men of letters are generally open handed, and almost universally averse to trouble, and, like the unjust judge, are far too weak to resist importunity. They may have a strong suspicion that they are being done, but the bother of investigation is too much for them. A member of the Charity Organisation Society once told me that authors encouraged imposture more than all the other professions put together. The Society's last report does not say this, but if any literary person should give himself the pains,

which is doubtful, to read it, he will certainly recognise the portraits of some old friends. Where these have found their greatest advantage over him is in his neglect to send back something they have forwarded to him as a guarantee of good faith—a paragraph from some obscure newspaper—the only copy, as it turns out, of the man's supreme literary effort; or a very filthy pawn-ticket, to show how poor he is; or a medical certificate, the very appearance of which suggests infection. The literary person averse to disagreeable spectacles often throws these things into the fire directly he sets eyes on them, the result of which is that he has a pensioner for life. Where is a man to look for help after these precious documents have been destroyed if not to the person to whose carelessness their irrevocable loss is owing? But if he has not this solid ground for compensation, the begging-letter writer has many particular claims up his literary victim. He had once the happiness of belonging to a printing establishment when one of the author's 'delightful works' was passing through the press, and trusts that the humble finger he has had in the pie of his success will plead for him, or he has been an artist who has assisted to produce the coloured pictures which flame on the cheap editions of the author's works upon the bookstalls; or whether his appeal is listened to or not, he shall never forget the amusement and instruction he has derived from Mr Jones's genius—and I am not sure that this does not 'fetch' Mr Jones more than all his other arguments.

Nevertheless, as a past master among the victims of the begging-letter writer, I venture to suggest a few alterations and improvements in the method of application. The very carelessness of the persons from whom they get their living, and on which they mainly count for it, should teach them a little prudence and forethought: they need not keep their books by double entry, but they might make notes on their shirt-cuffs (when they have any) of the dates on which their applications have been made. It is impossible that they can have had an addition to their family on November 4th and then again on December 4th. A reasonable time should be allowed, not, indeed, for the operations of nature, for those may be disregarded, but for the circumstances in question to have escaped the memory of the proposed victim. Again, I cannot but think it a mistake after having obtained the exact sum (half a guinea) requisite 'to restate me in my proper position,' to write by return of post for thirty 'shillings' more, on account of a miscalculation of my finances. A third and very common plan that I think might be dispensed with is the application for a loan when that for a gift has been a considerable and continuous success. Even a literary person who has been freely irritated at this new method of depletion, which, in addition to its other advantages, establishes a link with the very person he yearns to get rid of. It is said that the best way to shake off a disagreeable acquaintance is to lend him money, but this only grapples you to the begging-letter writer with hooks of steel.



District Land and Survey Office, Auckland, 20th December, 1894.

IT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED that the undermentioned Suburban and Rural Lands will be submitted for sale by public auction at this office on FRIDAY, the 22nd day of March, 1895, at 11 o'clock a.m.

TOWN OF HAMILTON WEST—Lot 56, 1 road 13 poles; upset price, £5 12s 6d. WELMOUTH SUBURBS (Manukau County)—Lot 39, 2 acres 3 rods 8 poles; upset price, £19 12s. Lots 43 and 44, each 5 acres; upset price per lot, £10.

PAPAROA PARISH (Otamatea County)—Section, north-east part, 75, 103 acres; upset price, £7 17s 6d. Open land, about 6 miles from Pahi, and intersected by the main road.

RUSSELL, S.D. (Bay of Islands County)—Section 7, Block 1, 7 acres; upset price, £7. Open land, with Swampy Gully, near Russell, and lying between the Recreation Reserve and Cemetery.

MANUKA KARAMEA PARISH (Whangarei County)—Section 136, 4 acres; upset price, £24. Situated near Manukakaramea Wharf, and weighted with £588 10s for Improvements Effected.

CONDITIONS OF SALE. One-fifth of the purchase money to be paid on the fall of the hammer, and the balance, with Crown grant fee £1, within 30 days thereafter, otherwise the one-fifth paid by way of deposit shall be forfeited and the contract for the sale of the land be Null and Void.

GERHARD MUELLER, Commissioner Crown Lands.



District Lands and Survey Office, Auckland, Nov. 8, 1894.

IT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED that the undermentioned SUBURBAN AND RURAL LANDS will be offered for Sale by public auction at this office on FRIDAY, the 22nd day of March, 1895, at 11 o'clock a.m.

PAKIHU NGAROTO.—Section 400, 66, upset price per section £6; 401, 5a 1r, £50s; 402, 4a 1r, 2 1/2a; 403, 2a 1r 10p, £29, 40s; 404, 3s 2r, £45 10s; 405, 2 1/2a 2r, £21 10s.—Open and grass land, fertile soil, situated at Te Rore, and adjoining the bridge.

MANUKAU COUNTY.

SUBURBS OF MANUKAU.—Section 17, 8a 1r 17p, upset price per section £100 5s 6d; 18, 1a, £36. Situated at Mangera, opposite Ouehanga wharf.

WAIPA COUNTY.

PARISH OF PUKETE.—Section 73A, 4a, upset price per section £3. Open land near Hamilton. Subject to £16 for draining, fencing and grassing.

TERMS OF SALE.—One-fifth of the purchase money to be paid on the fall of the hammer, together with full amount of valuation for improvements (if any), and the balance, with Crown grant fee, within 30 days thereafter. Plans may be inspected at the office, Customs-street West.

GERHARD MUELLER, Commissioner Crown Lands.