Winifred, his niece. From his place of vantage he could plainly overhear all that they were saying. Their conversation ran somewhat as follows:—

"Are you sure, Dick, dear, that you mean what you say?" whispered the girl, who, by the way, had her arms round the Cavalier's neck.

"Quite sure," the ghost of the grey Cavalier replied. "The old man loves you, and though he doesn't trust me I'll be dashed if I'll be such a mean cad as to carry you off and break his heart while there's a chance of winning him round to our way of thinking. He'll like me all the better when he sees how hard I'm trying to be worthy of you, and, on the other hand, just think what life here would be to him without you, little woman."

"I wish, Dick, dear, he knew you as you are. He has only heard the things evil disposed people have said about you. He doesn't know how good you really are."

"Not very good, I'm afraid," the other replied. "If I've improved a bit of late I owe it all to you and your gentle influence. But I am trying to pull up, and that at least is something. And now I must be off. You say there is a ball on Boxing Night, so I suppose I must wait until another night to see you."

"Cannot you come then?"

What! The grey Cavalier make his appearance on such a festive occasion? If you think you could manage to slip away for a quarter of an hour I might try."

"I'm sure I could. At anyrate I'll do my best. But isn't it a great risk to run?"

"Risk? Not a bit of it. In that case the Spectre will be seen at midnight precisely."

The Squire waited to hear no more, but, softly opening the door, picked up his candle and fled to his own room to think over all he had heard. So far as that particular night was concerned his rest was likely to be disturbed. In the morning, however, he was a different being; he had come to an understanding with himself, and was brighter in consequence. His face at breakfast said as much. Never had such a Christmas Day been known at Penterton Hall. The Squire was like a new man: he proposed everyone's health at lunch, and conducted himself like an amiable lunatic during the remainder of the day. Boxing Day arrived in due course, and discovered no change in his condition. Winifred scarcely knew what to make of his behaviour. Poor child, the dance of that evening presented no chance of enjoyment for her. Before dusk the Squire summoned the Colonel and two or three of the young men to his study and kept them there for upwards of an hour. It was to be observed that when they emerged they seemed to be staggering under the weight of a great responsibility.

Of all the balls that have taken place at Penterton that of which I am about to attempt a description will always be considered the most remarkable. One of the most noticeable features was the fact that shortly before midnight the Colonel and the young men aforesaid disappeared from the ball room. Winifred followed their example a little later. The Squire also was not to be seen.

The clock in the belfry had scarcely struck twelve before the door of the ball room opened and the Squire entered, escorting his niece. She was very pale, and seemed much put out about something. Almost at the same moment the door at the further end of the room opened, and a singular figure, attired after the manner of the reign of the first Charles, entered, escorted by the Colonel and his stalwart aides. Winifred, on seeing him uttered a cry, and would have run towards him but that the Squire held her back.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the dear old fellow began, looking round at those present as he spoke, "all of you have heard of the famous Grey Cavalier of Penterton Hall. You will in the future be able to say that you have seen him face to face, and that he is not as terrible as you have been led to suppose. At last the Spectre has been laid by the heels, and in saying that I have to make a confession to you. My dear friends, I feel that I am very much to blame. For a long time past I have listened to the voice of public opinion, and refused to hear that of love. The first I am about to put on one side; upon the other for the future I will pin my faith. Mr Beverley, you have played me a trick in the matter of the Grey Cavalier, but I am sure if I give you my darling's hand you will show me that my confidence has not been misplaced. From this moment we will let bygones be bygones, and now," (here he turned to the musicians) "play up; let us have some music."

Of course, we all knew the story of the unhappy love affair, and we were all, or at any rate those of us who were married, delighted at the denouement. Winifred's face was a picture to see, and as for the Ghost, well, if ever the Grey Cavalier was half as happy as he appeared to be as he whirled his lady love over the ball room floor, he must have been as jolly a spectre as could have been found throughout the length and breadth of the land.

They are to be married in three months time, and the Squire has commanded our presence at the ceremony. Everyone agrees that Beverley is a reformed character, and if he is at all grateful for his happiness, he must surely reflect that he owes it to the lucky thought which induced him to take upon himself the rôle of the Grey Cavalier of Penterton Hall.

A Mistletoe Faury:

A Story of Christmas Eve.

By FERGUS HUME.

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," Etc.

Squire Amyot was not a miser, though there were many who said he was. He was something of a hermit, it is true, and his mode of life was nothing if not economic. But he was indifferent utterly to the world, and what it said of him; so that it is not difficult to understand how the spiteful tongues were set a-wagging. There was no ostensible crime with which to brand the man, so they perforce fell back upon the charge of avarice. They knew not that the misanthrope is not of necessity penurious; because he is a misanthrope. And they seemed oblivious to the fact that an unsuspecting credulous nature can be so crushed, so deceived, so grievously wounded, as to recoil within itself to excess and shrink from any contact with the world. And this indeed was what had happened to Gilbert Amyot.

He was a recluse in every sense of the word—and as ascetic too as any monk of the Thebaid. So far as his experience went this world was full of scoundrels, traitors, seekers after self. And he had done with it. He had never married for the good reason that the one woman he had chosen for his own had jilted him. She had preferred a wealthier suitor. And he had not felt inclined to try again. For thirty years he had sought for one honest man, for one truthful heart. But his search had been in vain. And so he had retired to his own domain, far away from the hollow, noisy, strenuous world. And here at least he was able to avoid association with the seekers after self whom he abhorred. And here he was still this snowy December.

The Hall was three miles distant from any human habitation. For that alone he loved it. It was a quaint Tudor building of grey stone, richly ornate, and ivy clothed. There it lay in the heart of the great woods, for all the world like the palace of some Sleeping Beauty. When you emerged from the woods you came on the wide moors, so desolate. But the trees were all round the house, and the wintry wind whistled through them now. For many days the snow had fallen fast and thick, and the ground was masked as with a white coverlet. This was the seventieth Christmas of Gilbert Amyot, and it found him the true misanthrope and introspective egotist.

One servant only did he keep—they urged it as further proof that he was a miser—and she an old dame of sixty years. They called her Granny Jee. She came from the three mile distant hamlet of Saxton. Her history was a simple one of hardship and unceasing toil. Her husband was long since dead. But she had one son. He was a clerk in London. She had always dreaded lest she should come at last to the workhouse. And so when she had heard that Squire Amyot's housekeeper had died she had lost no time but had tramped out to the Hall in quest of her post. Perhaps because she was an excellent cook, or because she was alone in the world, or because she was as fond of her own fireside as any cat—or perhaps for all these reasons, Amyot had taken her in, and the countryside had not been a little surprised thereat. All this had happened fifteen years ago, and Granny Jee was still at the Hall. She occupied a small bedchamber in the rear of the house, and was but little seen. And the Squire came more nearly to trusting her completely than he had thought possible. On her part the old dame worried him not at all; and he took but small account of her.

Now none of the county neighbours ever called on Squire Amyot. The most frequent visitors to the Hall were of the genus vagrant; and with them did Granny Jee deal after her own way. Assuredly they came, as well she knew, for no good purpose. For there were rumours of immeasurable wealth stored therein. Yet in truth it was that although Amyot spent but small portion of his income his surplus funds were straightway well invested, and of actual money he had but little in the house. It is true there were both gold and silver plate, but these were seldom, if ever, taken from the strong room. He used to spread them out there sometimes, and examine them piece by piece in the light of a powerful lamp, and think how beautiful they were. And it may be that Granny Jee had seen the treasure thus exposed, and babbled not wisely but too well of all its splendours on those rare occasions when she visited her home. But be that as it may, Amyot Hall was commonly reported to contain the treasures of Peru. And so it was that a strange episode befell on this particular Christmas Eve.

On the morning of that day Granny Jee, in a great state of perturbation, made her appearance in the room which her master reserved wholly to himself. It was a large apartment this, with three windows looking out on to the terrace, and facing the tangled coppice which encroached nigh up to the house. The walls were lined with oak and draped with hangings of red velvet faded now beyond recognition of their pristine shade. Where there were no hangings there were books—many of them. The Squire ate and slept here; indeed, the Squire lived here. His bedstead—a quite unpretentious one of iron—was concealed from view by a screen. It stood in one corner of the room. The table whereon he took his meals stood in another: and a large desk occupied the centre. It was littered with papers in disorder. He toiled far into the night at this desk; for he was in the throes of a work on the Empire of Islam, Religious and Political; perhaps by way of reducing the rigours of his seclusion. But he was fascinated by and engrossed in his subject, and often he would find the days evaporate "like ice in the sunlight." That was his way of putting it, because he remembered the phrase of Balzac.

And so it was with fear and trembling that Granny Jee intruded on this day before Christmas upon the seclusion of her master, for she knew so well how impatient he was of interruption. She saw no reason to hope that he would be less so now than usually.

She stepped timidly round to the corner of his desk. He looked up fiercely, keeping one finger to mark the page of the book he was reading. For the moment he held the woman in the fascination of his gaze. How strangely contrasted these two aged people! Granny Jee was so young looking for her age. She had no wrinkles to speak of, and her complexion was almost an anachronism, so pink it was and so smooth. It compared oddly with the whiteness of her hair. But Granny Jee had never taxed her brain, and it had reciprocated her kind use of it by inflicting nothing approaching physical ravage upon her. To do honour to this visit she had assumed her very ancient gown of hard black silk and her muslin fichu, too—not forgetting the mittens for her hands. She looked so dignified and comely. You could quite believe it true what they said—that Granny Jee had good blood in her veins. Amyot even thought as much.

Now the Squire looked for all the world like a magician of mediaeval times. His skin was like parchment,