

'That difficulty is easily got over,' replied Tom. 'You will take with you a long "tenpenny nail" and a small hammer from my work-box. Two or three of the boys will accompany you to within view of the Hall. You will then proceed by yourself, and entering the Hall by one of the windows—of which nothing remains but the woodwork—you will go up the main stairs and drive the nail into the topmost step. The boys will hear the sound of the hammer, and the nail will be there to-morrow to prove you are not an empty boaster.'

There was no escape, and, much as he disliked it, Jim had to accept the conditions. Tim McGovern, Charlie Murphy, and I volunteered to be the convoy, and the four of us were soon on our way. The snow had ceased to fall and the moon appeared to be striving furiously to get from behind the heavy banks of cloud that obscured her. Occasionally she succeeded, but only for a few seconds at a time before being again hidden from view. There was little talk as we plodded along through the yielding snow on the lonely road leading to the Hall. Truth to tell, any of us would have gone ten miles round before we would have passed the Hall alone so late at night. Probably we all thought of this and said nothing. Soon we arrived at the gates, or rather where the gates had been, as barely a vestige of them remained. Pushing onwards by the grass-grown path that was once an avenue, we gained the immediate vicinity of the Hall itself. Very dark and forbidding it looked under the fitful beams of moonlight. For nearly ten years it had been lying vacant and going to decay, and ever since the mysterious death of the old squire it had been spoken of as 'the haunted Hall.'

'Here,' said Charlie, 'we won't go any farther. Let us wait under this tree.' We stopped, and I could see

sult of our escapade. Of course we were immediately overwhelmed with questions, but it was some time before Jim could give anything like a connected account of what happened.

Bit by bit we learned that he had driven the nail into the stairs as arranged, but as he arose from doing so, a black figure glided along the wall, and, as he turned to descend, clutched at him. He felt his overcoat grabbed by some unseen hand, and with a shriek he plunged forward. The coat tore with a snap, and he fell headlong down the stairs, remembering nothing more until he was outside with Tim, Charlie, and me. We supported his statement by affirming that we heard the hammering; and, most wonderful of all, his overcoat was found to have a piece torn off at the bottom. The whole thing created a decidedly 'creepy' feeling among the audience, and nobody seemed anxious to start for home. Indeed, we all suddenly discovered that it would be more convenient to go to early Mass from Tom's than from our own homes.

The following morning Charlie and I went over to the Hall to rescue Tom's hammer. We discovered it lying at the bottom of the stairs; but we also made another discovery which deeply interested us. There, on the topmost stair, was the nail driven home, through the missing portion of Jim's overcoat. In his haste and nervousness he had accidentally nailed himself by the coat-tail to the stairs. As he arose from his bent position, his shadow on the wall in the dim moonlight seemed an oncoming spectre, while the tug at his coat, when he tried to get away, must have conjured up visions of Tam O'Shanter.

We returned with the hammer; but even when armed with a hammer it is dangerous to broach the subject of Christmas Eve ghosts to Jim Bryan.



HORSESHOE BAY, STEWART ISLAND.

that it was only by a great effort that Jim was able to continue alone. He started running across the open space and soon was lost to our view in the shadow of the building. We held our breath in expectancy for the sound of the hammer, and after what seemed an interminable time we heard the first tap, another louder, then others in quick succession, ending with a muffled sound, as if the hammer had struck something soft. A second later there was an ear-piercing scream that almost froze us with horror. In the dim light I could see that my companions' faces were pale as death, and our first impulse was to run for our lives. After waiting a few minutes, with no further sound and no sign of Jim, we rushed forward to the window through which he had entered. We called him, in voices that seemed strange and husky even to ourselves, but no answer came. 'We must go in,' said Charlie, who seemed less excited than either Tim or I. All three abreast, we clambered in, and made our way to the bottom of the stairs. There we found Jim lying quite motionless and in a fainting condition. Hastily we picked him up and hurried out of the building without waiting to explore further. Once out in the open air, he quickly revived, and soon we were out on the road again and hurrying along towards Tom Connor's. If we were silent when going, we were more so going back. We were not anxious to hear what had happened to Jim after that last muffled hammer-stroke, and he seemed no more anxious to begin the narration. In fact, our one thought was to get inside a human dwelling, and among companions with as little delay as possible. When we reached Tom's and rushed in all together, we must have looked like ghostly visitors, so startled were the others who had remained to hear the re-

UNDER THE STARS

Under the stars, one holy night
A little Babe was born;
Over His head a star shone bright,
And glistened till the morn.
And wise men came from far away,
And shepherds wandered where He lay
Upon His lowly bed of hay,
Under the stars one night.

Under the stars, one blessed night,
The Child-Christ came to earth,
And through the darkness broke the light
Of morning at His birth.
And sweet hosanna filled the air,
And guardian angels watched Him where
The Virgin Mother knelt in prayer,
Under the stars one night.

Under the stars, this happy night,
We wait for Him once more,
And seem to see the wondrous sight,
The shepherds saw of yore.
O Baby born in Bethlehem,
Come to us as You came to them,
And crown us with love's diadem,
Under the stars to-night.

—Sacred Heart Review.