

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE GREY ROOM.*

"The guns were returning, and eight men with three women arrived at the lofty gates. One of the party rode a grey pony, and a woman walked at each side of him. They chatted together, and the little company of tweed-clad people passed into Chadlands Park and trudged forward, where the manor house rose half a mile ahead."

Sir Walter Lennox was fifth baronet grown old, with archaic principles, great wealth, invincible kindness of heart, a popular and respected man. The house-party consisted of his lately married daughter and her husband, a naval captain—still a devoted pair of lovers—his nephew and heir, Harry Lennox, and one or two other intimate friends.

Upon the pleasant circle of these everyday folk was destined to break an event, unique and extraordinary. A very trivial and innocent remark was prelude to the disaster.

At eleven the master of the house rose.

"Will anyone have another whiskey?" he asked.

It was ordinarily the signal for departure to their various rooms, but to-night it was delayed. Tom May, his son-in-law, spoke:

"Fayre-Mitchell has never heard the ghost-story governor," he said, "and Mr. Travers badly wants another drink."

So after a psychical discussion, Sir Walter told the history of the grey room, which we give in brief.

A death had occurred in the room when he was a child, which caused a vague feeling against it, and it was finally, although beautifully furnished with antiques, for which Sir Walter had no feeling, relegated to a sort of store room for unwanted articles.

One Christmas an old aunt unexpectedly arrived and strained the resources of the house. The strong-minded old lady insisted on occupying the grey room.

In the morning she was found dead on the floor. As she was eighty-eight the doctor found her end in no way unusual. This increased the prejudice against the room.

Twelve years after, when Mary was a child, she had a serious illness, and a trained nurse was engaged. As the grey room was closely adjacent to the nursery, the nurse laughingly said she was not afraid of ghosts, and that she must be near her patient. She was a fearless little woman, and chaffed the butler and the maids as they made the room comfortable and lighted the fire.

At ten o'clock the nurse retired, leaving the sleeping child in charge of her own nurse, directing that she should be called at seven.

Sir Walter was aroused next morning by his man telling him the nurse had been called according to her direction, but had not responded.

The door was forced open. Nurse Forrester was apparently lying awake, but she was not awake;

* By Eden Phillpotts. (Hurst, Blackett & Co.)

she slept the sleep of death. Her eyes were open but glazed, and she was already cold. Yet, save for a slight but hardly unnatural pallor, not a trace of death marked the poor little creature. An expression of wonder seemed to sit on her features, otherwise she was looking much as when she said "good night."

At the post-mortem no trace of physical trouble solved the mystery.

At the conclusion of Sir Walter's recitation of these events, the guests, who now consisted only of men, the ladies having retired some time before, expressed a desire to see the grey room, and Sir Walter consented.

It was a fascinating room, with nothing sinister in its aspect.

The description of it would appeal to lovers of antiques had we space to quote the passages.

Tom May made "a sporting offer":

"Let me sleep in this room to-night, and I'll report a clean bill, and you can throw it open and announce that it's forgiven without a stain on its character."

But Sir Walter would not hear of it, handed his nephew the keys to lock it up, and retired to bed.

The two young men, left to themselves, decided to brave the element, whatever it might be, and after some argument, tossed for the privilege of sleeping there. Tom May won, and clothing himself in his pyjamas, and armed with a rug, the stalwart sailor shut himself in the fateful room.

In the morning, Harry Lennox, who at the last moment had tried to dissuade his friend, rose early, and, strolling in the garden, he looked up at the oriel window of the grey room. To his surprise he saw Tom May, still in his pyjamas, kneeling on the cushioned recess, looking out at the morning. He made no response to his friend's salutation. History repeated itself, and brave Tom May was dead, without any physical reason being revealed.

We must leave it to our readers to read for themselves the fate of the famous detective and the old clergyman, who both tried to solve the mystery from their own point of view.

We will not spoil the thrill of suspense by any explanation of the phenomenon, as we expect we have said enough to make all interested in mystery procure the book for themselves.

We defy anyone, however, to unravel the explanation before it is given at the close of the book.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

April 22nd.—The Lady Mayoress (Lady Baddeley) "At Home," to meet the Past and Present Nurses of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The Mansion House, London. Music 4 to 6 p.m.

April 27th.—Central Midwives Board. Monthly Meeting. 1, Queen Anne's Gate Buildings, Westminster, S.W.

April 29th.—Registered Nurses Parliamentary Council. Meeting to discuss extension of Objects. 431, Oxford Street, London, W. 4.30 p.m.

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