

Anyone who has ever read more than one high-priced anthology of ghost stories must surely have encountered the name of W. F. Harvey—generally attached to a tale called "The Beast With Five Fingers." Now Dr. Harvey has written a good many more stories than that one. From these stories we have selected "Sambo" as a curious account of the utterly odd result of mistaking one kind of doll for another.

Sambo

by William Fryer Harvey

ONE THING is certain: Arthur ought never to have sent Janey the doll.

It came about like this.

He wrote us one of his absurd letters from a place in Africa, where he had been helping to put down a native rising. It was embellished as usual with lively pen-and-ink sketches of his black soldiers (who seemed to bear an extraordinary likeness to Christy Minstrels), and in a postscript contained the information that he was sending Janey a little black doll he had discovered in a deserted hut.

The doll appeared a fortnight later, wrapped up in a year-old engineering supplement of *The Times*, tied together with three knotted pieces of string. The stamps I put by for my three-year-old nephew, until the time arrived when he would be able to appreciate their value.

Janey was disappointed, and I do not wonder at it. She had been looking forward to the arrival of this new member of her family, all the more eagerly because Cicely White had been unbearably conceited about a doll her godmother had sent from Paris. The little African, instead of having a neatly painted trunk containing an elaborate wardrobe, appeared on the removal of his paper covering in a state of absolute nudity. I think Janey

could have forgiven his lack of clothes if he had been less ugly. Without doubt he was hideous. His nose was a shapeless, protruding lump; his lips were thick, and his hair was represented by a collection of knobs. The one redeeming feature was his size; he measured just two feet and a half, and could stand unsupported in the bath of Condyl's fluid to which he was subjected. But I thought my sister wrong in punishing Janey for her tears; the contrast between Sambo and Cicely White's gay Parisienne was too great.

For three whole days Sambo remained unnoticed and uncared for, in the engineering supplement. During that period Mary in her leisure moments made a few alterations in a scarlet petticoat she had originally intended for a youthful inhabitant of Uganda.

Clothed in this garment, Sambo looked uglier than before. Janey would not come near him. She hated him. He was not a nice doll. She even asked Mary to take him away. But my sister had never spoiled her nephews and nieces. She drew a graphic if inaccurate picture of Arthur's surprise and resentment if he knew the manner in which his gift had been received.

Her authority, but not her arguments, prevailed. After an altogether unreasonable amount of crying, even in so sensitive a child as Janey, Sambo's rights were acknowledged.

Sambo was a name for which Janey was not responsible. If she had been left to herself she would have called the doll IT, and nothing more. But Mary is one of those people who believe that all dogs should be called Rover and all canaries Dick. When Sambo arrived there was never any doubt in my mind as to the name; my diffident suggestion of Lobengula was contemptuously dismissed on the ground that that individual came from an altogether different part of Africa.

The doll, at the period of his adoption, had fourteen brothers and sisters of different nationalities. As was natural, he took his place at the bottom of the class, was the last to be washed, the first to be put to bed, and if the plates and cups gave out at tea time, he was the one to suffer.

Sambo arrived at the beginning of October; by the end of the month a change had set in. One day I surprised Janey at tea. Sambo was sitting in the fourteenth place with the last cup and saucer before him, and Gulielma Maria, a plain but well-meaning doll, was going supperless to bed.

Needless to say, I accused my niece of injustice and favouritism. She

was very pale, and tears were in her eyes. She told me that she was sorry for Guly, but she could not help it. It was Sambo's fault, and she hated him for it.

I thought the explanation a trifle lame, and offered to take Guly to tea downstairs; my proposal was promptly and joyfully accepted.

A week later Sambo was ninth on the list, Nelson, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, a golliwog, and Gulielma Maria being below him, and on his plate, in the manner of Benjamin of old, was a double portion.

In vain I remonstrated. It seemed that Sambo had insisted. Janey was exceedingly sorry for the others, but she could not help it.

On 1st November, Sambo had risen to the fourth place. He wore, in addition to his scarlet petticoat, a pair of stockings which belonged to the Salvation Army lass sitting next to him, and whose feet seemed to have suffered from the exposure that the absence of their usual covering involved. I asked Janey if she had offered the stockings to him of her own free will. No, the Salvation Army lass had almost broken her heart. It was Sambo's fault. He wanted them, and Janey had pulled them off when Susan was asleep.

On the eve of Guy Fawkes day, I had my annual debate with Mary as to the feasibility of a small bonfire. One by one I abolished the same old objections, the danger to the house, the waste of good fuel when there were millions in London alone with no fires to warm them, the perpetuation of religious animosity, and the danger of contracting colds in the head. I went to bed, weary but triumphant. Next morning at breakfast I propounded my plans, and Mary gave official sanction for Janey and four dolls to watch the performance from the bathroom window. The greater part of the day was spent by my niece in settling the claims of rival dolls.

My surprise was great when, in the red glare of the bonfire, I recognized, propped up against the glass of the bath-room window, the expressionless faces of Rose, Eric (how I disliked that boy who, in his Eton jacket, was the very essence of priggishness), Alatheia, and Sambo.

When I got to the stage of green Bengal lights I noticed that he was clad in a Japanese kimono he had certainly never had before, and wore a cocked hat, which I had a shrewd suspicion belonged to Nelson.

The next fortnight saw deliberate war between Sambo and Eric. The immediate object was the possession of the Eton jacket, the ulterior

the privilege of sitting between Rose and Alatheia, and dominating the rest of the family.

Janey's sympathies were all for Eric, who was for her the embodiment of English manhood; mine were on the side of his opponent, who came out as usual successful.

Eric jacketless, was left to face the rigour of our English winter in his shirt-sleeves.

Now that all his male rivals had been defeated, I expected that we should see an end to Sambo's ambition.

No such thing occurred. In an altogether unchivalrous manner, he began to wage war on Rose, the oldest and most beautiful of Janey's dolls, who was the only possessor of that much prized accomplishment of falling into a trancelike sleep whenever she lay down.

When Christmas came, Sambo was the first to be served, the first to be dressed, and the last to be put to bed.

And Janey hated him.

For the next three months nothing noteworthy took place with regard to Janey and her dolls. For a large part of the time I was away from home and saw little of my niece.

On my return, Mary called my attention to a new development. "I really believe that Janey is growing out of her childishness at last," she said. "She is putting away some of her dolls: she really ought to be content with fewer."

Six weeks later, the numbers were reduced to one.

It was Sambo who remained.

Though Janey had carried out the change on her own initiative, she became low-spirited, and I have no doubt shed many tears in private. So much I had expected. What surprised me was the fact that she showed no signs of transferring her affection to the one remaining member of her family.

It was true that Sambo was always with her, in the house and out of doors. He had meals by her side and slept at the bottom of her bed at night. But it was not because she cared for him; I began to think she was actuated by fear.

One afternoon I wanted Janey, and she was not to be found in nursery or garden; I searched the house in vain and was beginning to despair, when I remembered the attics. The attics were out of bounds owing to an unrailed stair that led up to them, but I was none the less successful.

There, in a stockade composed of trunks and portmanteaux, sat Janey surrounded by her dolls.

Her face was wreathed in smiles. On her lap sat Eric, at her feet lay Rose in the well-known state of trance.

"So this is the way you spend your afternoons!" I said. "I wonder what your aunt would say if she knew." "Oh, please don't tell her, uncle!" Janey replied. "And whatever happens, don't tell Sambo!"

Until she spoke, I had not noticed the absence of that individual. On inquiry it seemed that Sambo had been left fast asleep in the garden. I raised the heavy attic window and looked out. Yes, there he was sitting propped up on the garden seat looking up at us with eyes that seemed to me very wide awake.

"I'm afraid he knows where we are!" said Janey, "he is so very clever."

Of course I said nothing to Mary of what went on upstairs. There was less need to, as Janey's visits to her banished family very soon ceased. It was my belief that Sambo had put a stop to them. Of what happened behind the raspberry canes I very seldom speak. I never told Mary, who being entirely without imagination would have believed that I was either lying or Janey mad.

The afternoon had been more than usually close. Mary was cross, Janey was listless, and I sleepy. I had as usual ensconced myself in the shady corner of the kitchen garden where the maid never thinks of looking when she comes to announce callers, and where I not infrequently surprise school children in search of our blackbirds' nests. I was awakened from my nap by the accustomed sound of someone in the raspberry canes.

In among the brown sticks, I caught sight of a white dress. I bent low and followed. Janey was some fifteen yards ahead of me. In her arms she was clasping a doll. She was sobbing bitterly.

Through the raspberry canes I followed her—along a little track that had not been there a fortnight before, over an open space which in autumn was trenched for celery, past the deserted graveyard where generations of cats and dogs had been laid to rest, to the very end of the long garden.

It was a deserted place given over to rubbish, broken flower pots, piles of old pea-sticks, and mounds of yellow rotting grass cut from the lawns last summer. I hid myself behind a turf stack and watched.

On a chair that Arthur had given Janey three birthdays ago sat Sambo, wearing his usual expression of utter vacuity. About a yard in front of him was a pile of straw and dried twigs; within reach was the silver matchbox

I had spent hours in hunting for the previous two days. There was also a little saw from my tool chest.

I ground my teeth as I noticed the rusty blade. Janey placed her doll on the ground, cried over it and kissed it. Then before I realized what she was doing she had sawn off its legs and arms, and placed its dismembered trunk upon the wooden pyre. From the tennis lawn came Mary's voice calling "Janey! Janey!"

It is no easy matter to strike matches on an old silver matchbox from which the roughness has long since departed. She was successful at last, and in a moment there was a blaze. The dried wood crackled with the heat. Then again came Mary's voice louder and more persistent, and Janey was gone.

I lit a cigarette, and watched the fire die down, controlling with difficulty an impulse to add more fuel to it in the person of Sambo. Before I left the place I found the charred remains of eight dolls. One which I took to be Eric was hideous to behold, his head was featureless, one glass eye protruding from a lump of wax.

I made my way back to the house as stealthily as I had come. Under my coat I carried Sambo.

I had to go up to town that evening on business, and I wrapped up the doll in a paper parcel (my kit bag was already full), with the intention of consulting a friend at the British Museum as to its nature and origin.

Mary had apparently taken Janey with her to call on the vicar's wife. I saw neither of them before I left.

I did not carry out my plan; for as I was walking down Paternoster Row the following day, with my parcel under my arm, Sambo was stolen.

I had stopped opposite a stationer's shop in whose window was exhibited a large map of Africa, flanked by Bibles. I was wondering why such an immense area had been covered black instead of the more customary scarlet, and had come to the conclusion that it probably referred to unexploited coal, when I received a push in the back. After apologizing to the clergyman with whom I came into somewhat violent contact, I became aware that my parcel had disappeared. Of the thief there was no sign. Yards away I saw the imposing dark blue mass of a constable. I took two steps towards him with the intention of notifying my loss. Then I turned and walked in the opposite direction. Sambo after all had been no friend of ours.

Ten months later I went with Mary to the Agricultural Hall to see the "Orient in London." She had promised after my visit to spend a day with me at the Franco-British Exhibition, a bargain which to my mind was never fully ratified, as she resolutely declined free seats in the Scenic Railway and Flip-Flap.

I was glad I had gone as I met two acquaintances I should not otherwise have seen, Captain Carter, of my old regiment, who had taken orders and was going out to China as a missionary, and Sambo. The latter seemed to be superintending operations in an African village, and was very much at home. There was a label tied to his arm. On it I read:

"This undoubtedly genuine African idol was found in a compartment in the Bakerloo tube. Nothing is known as to the circumstances in which it was placed there, but it was probably stolen from some museum. This idol affords an interesting example of the gods that were worshipped in the childhood of our race."

The childhood of our race appeared to me a particularly appropriate phrase as I thought of Janey.

The abbot of Ursperg, in his Chronicle, year 1123, says that in the territory of Worms they saw during many days a multitude of armed men, on foot and on horseback, going and coming with great noise, like people who are going to a solemn assembly. Every day they marched, towards the hour of noon, to a mountain, which appeared to be their place of rendezvous. Someone in the neighbourhood, bolder than the rest, having guarded himself with the sign of the cross, approached one of these armed men, conjuring him in the name of God, to declare the meaning of this army, and their design. The soldier or phantom replied, "We are not what you imagine; we are neither vain phantoms nor true soldiers, we are spirits of those who were killed on this spot a long time ago. The arms and horses which you behold are the instruments of our punishment, as they were of our sins. We are all on fire, though you can see nothing about us which appear inflamed." It is said that they remarked in this company the Count Emico, who had been killed a few years before, and who declared that he might be extricated from that state by alms and prayers.