



J. S. FLETCHER (1863-1935), prolific author of detection and adventure, wrote many articles in the press, chiefly on agricultural matters, under the signature, "Son of the Soil." He started writing fiction shortly after joining the staff of the "Leeds Mercury." Among his well-known works of fiction are "The Charing Cross Mystery," "The Green Room," and "The Wild Oat."

THE OTHER SENSE

OCT. 21st.—They have told me to-day, with obvious reluctance, and in the kindest fashion, that I am to go to-morrow to the house of a Dr. Schreiber, in whose care I am to remain until I am restored to health. Restored to health!—my God! I am as healthy a lad of nineteen (I believe) as any one would wish to meet; certainly I have no recollection of any illness beyond a dose of measles when I was seven, and a very slight touch of scarlet fever a few years ago. Restored to health!—no, that is merely their kind way of putting it. What they really mean is: I am to go and live with this Dr. Schreiber, whoever he may be, until he, and they, and the doctors whom they have brought to see me so often lately, think I am—*sane*.

That, of course, is the real truth. I have often wondered, as I have grown up out of my lonely childhood towards manhood, how strange it is that what seems so easy to the child about truth-telling seems so difficult to the man—now I am beginning to understand. All the same, it would have been much more to my taste if my guardian and his wife had said to me, "Angus, we're very, very sorry, but the doctors and we don't think everything is as it should be with your intellect, and Dr. Schreiber is a famous mental specialist, and—" so on.

But then—equally, of course—they couldn't have said that to me if they really believe that I *am* mad. And they *do*. I know—I have seen them not once, but a thousand times since I came here to London from Alt-na-Shiel two years ago (when shall I see it again, and the mists on the mountains!), watching me as country folk watch the freaks at a fair. There is a puzzled look which comes into their faces; their brows

knit, and their lips are slowly compressed, or pursed up, and—if they think I do not see them—*they look at each other and shake their heads and sigh.*

I cannot think of more than three things which should make them believe me mad. One is that I am very fond of solitude, liking to be left to myself as much as I can. Another is that I think a great deal—just as I read a great deal—and that I sometimes frown at my thoughts, sometimes smile at them, sometimes laugh, long and loud, at them. Perhaps, when Major Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy and I are alone after dinner, he reading *The Times* and she busied with her knitting, behaviour of this sort on my part may seem strange—it is only now occurring to me that it *may*. Certainly I have seen the Major drop his newspaper and jump—literally *jump*—in his arm-chair when, thinking of something that amused me, I have indulged in a sudden peal of laughter—yet why should one not laugh whenever one sees or thinks of something to laugh at? But I have found that a great many of the people whom I have met in London only laugh when a sort of signal is given.

Those are two reasons. The only other reason I can think of is that I have told them once or twice—just as I told the doctors whom they have at times brought to see me—that I can *see* things which, I find out, most other people do not or cannot see. The first time I told them, for instance, of the spirit which I have seen a score or so of times at Alt-na-Shiel, they stared at me as if I were telling them lies, and they both looked curiously uncomfortable. Now, my old nurse, Margaret Lang, never looked uncomfortable when I told her of these things, neither did Dugald Graeme, my father's old body-servant. They seemed to realize and to understand my meaning.

I have been thinking to-day (since I heard what my guardian and his wife had to tell me—he, poor man, in his stiff military-modelled sentences, and she more by tears than by words) about my life as a child and afterwards as a boy. Alt-na-Shiel is in one of the loneliest glens of the Strathern Mountains—a very great way indeed from the railways. There my father—Angus MacIntyre, like myself—went to live just after he was married to my mother, and there my mother died just after I was born. My father was a man of books, and after my mother's death he thought of nothing but books. Margaret Lang—helped by Dugald Graeme—brought me up, but after I was able to walk, my real nurse and mother was the open air. I used to sit out—anywhere—all day long, content to see the

sky, and hear the countryside sounds, and smell the heather and the gorse and the bracken. And I cannot remember, looking back, when it was that I did not see things that other people did not see. I was never afraid of anything that I ever saw.

I have gone on *seeing* ever since—now, usually, at long intervals. When I was seventeen my father died, and it was found that Major Kennedy, a distant connection, was to be my guardian, and that I was to live with him until my twenty-first year. That is why I am now writing this in my journal in my own room in Major Kennedy's house in Bayswater—and why I am to-morrow to take up my residence with Dr. Schreiber at Wimbledon Common. Possibly I am writing it because, for anything I know, this may be my last day of complete liberty. I do not know what the rules are in these private mad-houses—if this to which I am going is such a place.

If I may speak frankly to myself in these pages, I must say that I cannot see why I should be considered at all mentally afflicted. I am, as things go, fairly well educated; fond as I am of solitude, I am fond of games, especially of football, golf, and tennis; I am certainly very strong in body, and of rude health. And as for my appetite . . .

However, they say I suffer from occasional delusions. We shall see.

II

OCT. 23rd.—I came here—to Dr. Schreiber's house—yesterday afternoon, accompanied by Dr. Wilkinson, one of the two doctors who have been to see me so often lately. The parting between the Kennedys and myself made me think of the conventional descriptions of boys going to school. Major Kennedy shook hands with me at least six times, and Mrs. Kennedy cried. Dr. Wilkinson and I talked football all the way from Bayswater to Wimbledon, and I found out that he got his Blue at Oxford—I forget in what year.

Just before we got to Wimbledon Common I thought I would have a little straightforward conversation with Dr. Wilkinson.

"Look here, sir," I said. "You, in common with Dr. Gordon and Major and Mrs. Kennedy, think I am a little mad?"

"I think that a few months' residence with Dr. Schreiber will turn you out as fit as a fiddle," he replied.

“Why do most people give an evasive answer when it would be much simpler to tell the truth in one word?” I asked him.

“Ah, why don't they?” he answered. “I've often wondered that myself.”

“Or, again,” said I, “how is it that people who happen through no fault of their own to possess a certain faculty, or certain faculties, which other people—most people—do not possess, are invariably considered to be—queer?”

He shook his head, and I relapsed into such a profound and cogitative silence that at last he asked me what I was thinking about.

“I was thinking, sir,” I replied, “how admirably you would have filled the *rôle* of those physicians of the Middle Ages who, whenever powerful monarchs or statesmen wanted to get rid of any person inimical to them, were ever ready to testify to their madness and to enclose them within a dungeon or an oubliette, or——”

“Well, you'll not find Dr. Schreiber's place much of a dungeon, my boy!” he said, laughing. “Here we are, so you can see for yourself.”

I got out of the brougham and looked about me. This house is an old-fashioned structure of red brick, covered over with climbing plants, and it stands in the midst of a bright green lawn, the flower-beds and borderings of which are just now cheerful with a profusion of autumn blooms. There is not a suspicion of anything prison-like about it—on the contrary, its appearance suggests freedom and liberty. My first glance at it forced me to set up a comparison between it and Bayswater.

Dr. Schreiber came out to meet us. He is a youngish man—perhaps thirty-five, perhaps forty—tall, muscular, broad-shouldered, bronzed, cheery. I should have taken him for one of the sweller sort of professional cricketers rather than for what I was led to believe him—a private mad-house keeper. He welcomed me in a very friendly way, and after Dr. Wilkinson had gone volunteered to show me round the house and grounds. I was somewhat astonished to find no one about, except servants in the house and a gardener sweeping up fallen leaves on the lawn.

“Where, sir,” I asked, “are the rest of us?”

“The rest of whom?” he inquired, looking surprised.

“The rest of your other mad folk,” I answered. “I am sent here because they think me mad.”

He laughed—burst, rather, into laughter—and slapped my shoulders.

“Oh, hang all that, old chap!” he said. “There’s no one here but you, myself, my assistant, Pollard, who’s a real good sort, and the servants. You’re as free as air here, and if I don’t give you a first-class time it won’t be my fault.”

Later we fell to talking about golf. To-day, after he had been to visit his patients—he seems to have a pretty extensive practice—we managed to get a full round in before dusk came on. He beat me by two up and one to play.

III

OCT. 27th.—I have been very happy here so far—much happier, I believe—nay, am sure, than I have ever been since I left Alt-na-Shiel. Life is very pleasant in this house, and with Dr. Schreiber. He is very different, I think, to all other men I have ever met. I have been with him frequently to visit some of his poorer patients—it seemed to me that he *laughs* them out of their complaints. I do not mean that he laughs *at* them, but that his cheeriness is infectious, and lifts them out of themselves. He is certainly a great man—a big *human*.

Last night, after dinner, he and I were playing billiards, and somehow—I do not know how—we reached the question of what those other people call my delusion. We sat down—this was the first time I had ever spoken of it to him—and I told him of some things which I had seen—especially of the ghost (if it is a ghost) of the parish clerk of Ardnashonach. Instead of looking as if he could scarcely believe his ears (as Major Kennedy looks), or shaking his head (as Dr. Wilkinson did), he listened most intently, and asked me a lot of questions. Not questions about myself, which is what I detest, but sensible questions.

“And they aren’t delusions, you know,” I said at the end. “I *have* seen these things—*seen* them! You believe me?”

“Yes,” he said, “I do. Look here—if you ever *see* anything while you’re here, just come that minute and tell me. Now, then, we’ve time for another hundred before bed.”

IV

NOV. 4th.—I have been examining this old house inside and out with some interest since Dr. Schreiber told me, a day or two ago, that it was once (a century or more ago)

the residence of a famous statesman. It is, I think, Early Georgian, and has the most delightful rooms, many of which are panelled in oak to a considerable height. There is one, now used as a dining-room, but formerly the library, which attracts me more than all the rest. It has four high narrow windows overlooking the garden, and with its quaint old oak furniture (which Dr. Schreiber took over from his predecessor in the practice, a man named Turrell, who was, he says, one of the cleverest men of his day) it makes a picture of colour and distinction. There is an old oak long settle near the deep fireplace in which I shall love to sit when the winter really settles in—if it ever does in this soft-aired, sunny south, so different to the far-away north.

V

NOV. 17th.—Something has happened. That seems a trite enough thing to write down, but the three words, after all, mean much, followed by an explanation. The truth is, my curious sense (*extra sense*, I suppose), has manifested itself again. I believe the last time was five years ago, when I saw the fairies near the church of Dalnarsossie.

Yesterday afternoon, about five o'clock, Dr. Schreiber having gone to London, and Mr. Pollard to visit a patient across the Common, I was alone in the dining-room, and sitting in the corner of the long settle. There was no light in the room except that of the fire, which had burnt itself down to that clear glow which fires get on sharp, frosty afternoons of late autumn. I had spent most of the time since lunch reading a curious old book which I had found in Dr. Schreiber's study the day before, and was leaning back against the cushions of the long settle with my eyes closed—thinking of what I had read, and enjoying the quiet of the shadowy, scarcely-lighted room—when I suddenly *felt* that I was not alone. The feeling was so strong, so acute, that for a full minute I remained quiescent. At last I opened my eyes, knowing without doubt that I was going to see something.

What I saw was this :

There stood upon the big, square hearthrug, within a few feet of me, a young man whom I judged to be of about my own age—perhaps a little older. He was tall, he stooped slightly, and he was spare of figure. His attire was modern—a black morning coat and vest and dark, striped trousers—and he stood with his hands in his pockets, after the fashion

affected by Eton boys—somewhat slouchingly. His head was bent forward, and at first I could not see his face, but he presently turned a little, and the glow of the fire fell on it. I knew then that I was regarding a ghost.

The face confirmed me in my belief that this was—had been, I should say—a young man of say, nineteen years of age. It was a sad, uneasy face—a face whereon were many signs of anxiety, trouble, perplexity—and it was curiously *old*. It was not a strong face—the chin was small and delicate; the mouth amiable, but weak; the eyes, big and blue, were the eyes of a child—and there was a frightened expression in them.

I sat perfectly still, watching. The figure remained in an irresolute position—fidgeting on the hearthrug for a minute or so—then it walked slowly to the window, stood looking out into the garden awhile, then came back to the hearthrug, lingered there a minute more, and finally crossed the room and opened the door. I followed it through the doorway on the instant; the servants had already lighted the hall lamp, and the hall was clearly illuminated. And the hall was empty. There was no figure there.

I told Dr. Schreiber all this after we had finished our usual game of billiards last night. He listened with the gravest attention to everything I said, and when I had finished merely remarked:

“Angus, if you should ever see this apparition, or whatever it may be, again, do not be afraid to tell me at once.”

VI

NOV. 22nd.—I have seen the ghost of the young man again.

This afternoon I went out to stroll about the neighbourhood, and in the course of my wanderings turned into Wimbledon churchyard. I was walking aimlessly about the paths, looking at the tombstones and wondering if they had any unusual names or quaint epitaphs upon them, when I suddenly saw the apparition again, standing at the side of a grave which lay at the chancel end of the church. It was attired exactly as before, and stood in a similar fashion, slightly slouching, with its hands in the pockets of its trousers. The face was just as sad and troubled as ever, and had the same air of perplexity. The big, blue, childish eyes turned from the grave to the headstone, and from the headstone to the grave, as if trying to

read something on the one or to see something on the other. Then they stared all round the churchyard—wonderingly.

I drew nearer, and looked at the inscription on the tombstone by which the ghost stood—in fact, I approached to within a few feet of the ghost itself. It seemed to me that it saw me—but only looked at me in the casual, uninterested way in which strangers regard each other.

The inscription was short and simple :

Here lieth the body of Major-General Sir Arthur Debenham, K.C.B. ; born January 15th, 1831 ; died October 4th, 1892. Also that of Florence Georgiana, his wife ; born September 12th, 1834 ; died February 7th, 1893. Also in memory of their only child, Everard ; born August 12th, 1874 ; died July 20th, 1893, at Hudiksvall, Sweden, where he is interred.

When I looked round again the apparition had disappeared.

I came straight back to Dr. Schreiber's house, and happened to catch him just coming in. After I had told him of this second appearance he remained silent for some time, and at last, without making any comment, asked me to go with him into the garden. He approached the gardener, an oldish man, who was at work there before Dr. Schreiber took over the practice.

"Gregson," he said, "you've lived a long time about here, haven't you ?"

"Man and boy, five-and-fifty years, sir," replied Gregson.

"Did you ever know Major-General Sir Arthur Debenham ?"

"Know the old General, sir ? I should think I did !—why, he lived not half a mile from here. I knew 'em all. Why, the young gentleman, poor Mr. Everard, he lived here in this very house with your predecessor, Dr. Turrell, for some months after Lady Debenham died. Dr. Turrell and him was a-travelling on the Continent when Mr. Everard died, sir."

"What was the matter with him—with Mr. Everard ?"

"Matter, sir ? Why, what I calls a galloping consumption. He was a weak, white-faced lad always, and he got a deal worse after he came to live with the doctor. That was why they went to foreign parts—to see if it would do him any good."

"Why did he come to live with Dr. Turrell—had he no relations of his own that he could go to ?"

"They did say, sir, that he'd neither kith nor kin. Dr.

Turrell had been the old General's doctor, and Lady Debenham's too—he was about the only friend they had hereabouts, sir. They were a bit queer, the old gentleman and his wife—eccentric, as they term it."

"Was the General rich?"

Gregson scratched his head.

"Well, I should say he was a warm man, sir—always considered to be so, anyway. Kept his carriage, and so on," he answered.

After a few more questions we went away. But I have since been asking more questions of Gregson and of the housekeeper. Their description of Everard Debenham is that of the apparition of the young man whose ghost I have now seen on two occasions.

VII

NOV. 28th.—I think that even Major Kennedy will now believe that I possess some curious power of seeing the usually unseen.

Yesterday afternoon, at two o'clock, Dr. Schreiber, Mr. Pollard, and myself were lunching in the dining-room when I suddenly saw the ghost enter. It came in very quietly—in its usual half-slouching attitude, and immediately upon entering the room halted and stood looking about it in an irresolute manner. The expression of the face was, if anything, more anxious than ever, and the eyes were almost miserable in their perplexity.

My companions saw me lay down my knife and fork and look towards the door with a fixed expression.

"What is it, Angus?" inquired Dr. Schreiber.

"It is here again," I answered, knowing that Mr. Pollard was by this time acquainted with the matter.

"Where is it?"

"Standing between you and the door. It looks as if it did not know where to go, or what to do, or as if it were seeking somebody or something."

"Watch it closely, then, and tell us what happens."

Then I began to report the ghost's movements to them.

"It has walked over to the window and is standing there, looking out into the garden . . . now it has come to the hearthrug, and is staring into the fire . . . and now it is going out of the room again. . . ."

"Follow it," said Dr. Schreiber.

The three of us left the table and followed the ghost out of the room. This time it did not disappear—instead, it turned to the right along the hall and went into Dr. Schreiber's study.

"What is it doing?" asked the doctor, when we got within.

"It is standing in front of your desk, looking at your writing-chair. It seems more perplexed than ever. Now it has gone round to the hearth and is looking all along the mantelpiece as if it wanted to find something . . . now it is leaving the room.

"Follow it."

The ghost went out through the hall into the garden—we three close upon its heels. It stood on the step outside the door for a moment, looking very dejected; then moved slowly away across the garden and walked round the lawn in the centre once or twice. It now slouched more than ever, and its head hung forward as if it were in trouble or pain. Suddenly it turned away by a side path towards a part of the garden given up to trees and shrubs. I described its further movements to my companions.

"It is walking up that little path which leads to the summer-house . . . now it has entered the summer-house . . . it is standing there looking just as lost, perplexed, troubled as ever . . . now it . . . ah!"

"What do you see, Angus?" asked the doctor.

"It has gone—disappeared," I replied.

We turned back to the house.

"What do you think of that, Pollard?" said Dr. Schreiber.

"Queer!" replied Mr. Pollard.

Nobody said anything more just then, and very soon afterwards the two doctors went out together. An hour later they returned with a carpenter and his assistant and a couple of men who looked like navvies. Dr. Schreiber asked me to come with them, and then led the way to the summer-house. When we arrived there he addressed the carpenter.

"I want the floor of this place removed, and the soil beneath excavated until I tell the men to stop," he said. "Do it at once."

It did not take much time for the carpenter and his men to take up the floor, which was formed of squares of pine wood, easily detachable.

Then the men began to dig.

There is no necessity to write down the details of this

gruesome search. We found the body of the young man whose ghost I had seen so many times. It was dressed just as the ghost was dressed. Gregson at once identified it as that of Evererd Debenham.

Dr. Schreiber has communicated with the Home Office, the police, and the coroner.

VIII

NOV. 30th.—The coroner's inquest is just over. The expert from the Home Office, a famous doctor, says that Everard Debenham was poisoned, and the jury have returned a verdict of wilful murder against Dr. Turrell, to whom, it seems, all General Debenham's estate was left in the event of Everard's death if that took place previous to his marriage and the birth of children. We hear that Dr. Turrell has been arrested at Edinburgh, where he had gone to live after selling his practice to Dr. Schreiber.

IX

MARCH 21st.—*Alassio, Italy*.—On arriving here this afternoon we found the English newspapers, and learnt from them that Dr. Turrell was hanged at Wandsworth Gaol last week, and that he left a full confession. There are also articles commenting upon the strange circumstances under which the crime was discovered.

But there was nothing strange about them to me.