

Editorial Bulletin

Saturday, July 11, 1908



"The Screaming Skull"

¶ *The second and concluding part of F. Marion Crawford's story of "The Screaming Skull" will appear in next week's Collier's. It moves successfully to a climax of horror. In its cumulative skill of terror by suggestion, it reminds the careful reader of Mr. Crawford's "The Upper Berth," where, also, nothing is told but everything implied. In this concluding chapter the church sexton plays his part in finding the missing jaw-bone that makes a perfect fit. And the mystery of the boiling lead is solved.*

SKULL

an's Wife, and What Followed

RD

don't you? Some that at all explained the rolling, at all events. That I got something else into my head, after a time that made me feel downright uncomfortable.

Oh, I don't mean as to anything supernatural! There may be ghosts, or there may not be. If there are, I'm not inclined to believe that they can hurt living people except by frightening them, and, for my part, I would rather face any shape of ghost than a fog in the channel when it's epaouled. No. What bothered me was just a foolish idea, that's all, and I can not tell how it began, nor what made it grow till it turned into a certainty.

I was thinking about Luke and his poor wife one evening over my pipe and a dull book, when it occurred to me that the skull might possibly be hers, and I have never got rid of the thought since. You'll tell me there's no sense in it, no doubt; that Mrs. Pratt was buried like a

Christian and is lying in the churchyard, where they put her, and that it's perfectly monstrous to suppose her husband kept her skull in her old handbox in his bedroom. All the same, in the face of reason and common sense and probability, I'm convinced that he did. Before do all sorts of queer things that would make men like you and me feel creepy, and those are just the things that don't seem probable, nor logical, nor sensible to us.

Then, don't you see?—if it really was her skull, poor woman, the only way of accounting for his having it is that he really killed her, and did it in that way, as the woman killed her husbands in the story, and that he was afraid there might be an examination some day which would betray him. You see, I told that too, and I believe it had really happened some fifty or sixty years ago. They dug up the three skulls, you know, and there was a small lump of lead rattling about in each one. That was what haunted the woman, Luke remembered that. I'm sure. I don't want to know what he did when he thought of it, my taste never ran in the direction of horrors, and I don't fancy you care for them either, do you? No. If you did, you never supply what is wanting to the story.

It must have been rather grim, eh? I wish I did not see the whole thing so distinctly, just as everything must have happened. He took it the night before she was buried. I'm sure after the coffin had been shut, and when the servant girl was asleep. I would bet anything that when he'd got it he put something under the sheet in his place, to

fill up and look like it. What do you suppose he put there under the sheet?

I don't wonder you took me up on what I'm saying! First I tell you that I don't want to know what happened, and that I don't want to know how it occurred, and that the whole thing to you as if I had seen it. I'm quite sure that it was her work-box that he put there. I remember the bag very well, for she always used for ten years or so; it was made of brown plush, and when it was stuffed full it was about the size of—you understand. Yes, there I am at it again. You must have known that I had done it here alone, where it was done, and you didn't tell Luke the story about the melted lead. I'm not nervous, I tell you, not so nervous as you are, and I don't care to frighten people, or I dwell on all that when I'm alone, and I dream of it, and when that thing screams—well, frankly, I don't care to dwell on it, but I don't care to dwell on it; I should be used to it by this time.

I ought not to be nervous. I've sailed in a haunted ship. There was a Man in the Top and two thirds of the crew died of the West-Indy fever of ten days, and you started as anchored; but I was all right, then and afterward. I have seen some ugly things, too, just as you have, and all the rest of us. But nothing ever stuck in my head in the way this does.

You see, I've tried to get rid of the thing, but it doesn't like that. It wants to be there in its place, in Mrs. Pratt's hand-box in the cupboard in the best bedroom. I'm not happy anywhere else. How do I know that? Because I've tried it. You don't suppose that I've not tried, do you? As long as it's there it only screams now and then, generally at this time of year, but if I put it out of the house it goes on all night and no-sleep will stay, here twenty-four hours. As it is, I've often been left alone and have been obliged to shift for myself for a fortnight at a time. No one from the village would ever pass a night under the roof now, and as for selling the place, or even letting it, that's out of the question. The old women say that if I stay here I shall come to a bad end myself before long.

I'm not afraid of that. You snick at me, there, but that any one could take nonsense seriously. Quite right. It's utterly blatant nonsense, I agree with you. Didn't I tell you that it's only a noise after all, when you started and looked round as if you expected to see a ghost standing behind your chair?

I may be all wrong about the skull, and I like to think that I am—when I can. It may be just a fine specimen which Luke got somewhere long ago, and what rattles about inside when you shake it may be nothing but a pebble, or a bit of hard clay, or anything. Skulls do have lain long in the ground generally have something inside them that rattles, don't they? No, I've never tried to get it out, whatever it is; I'm afraid it's not yours, don't you see? And if it is, I don't want to know the fact, for I'd much rather not be sure. If it really is lead, I shall be quite as much as if I had done done it myself. Anybody must see that, I should think. As long as I don't know for certain, I have the consolation of saying that it's all utterly ridiculous nonsense, that Mrs. Pratt was a natural death, and that the beautiful skull belonged to Luke when he was a student in London. But if I were quite sure, believe I should have to leave the house, indeed I do, most certainly. As it is, I had to give up trying to sleep in the best bedroom where the cupboard is.

You ask me why I don't throw it into the pond—yes, but please don't call it a "confoundin'"—it doesn't like being called names.

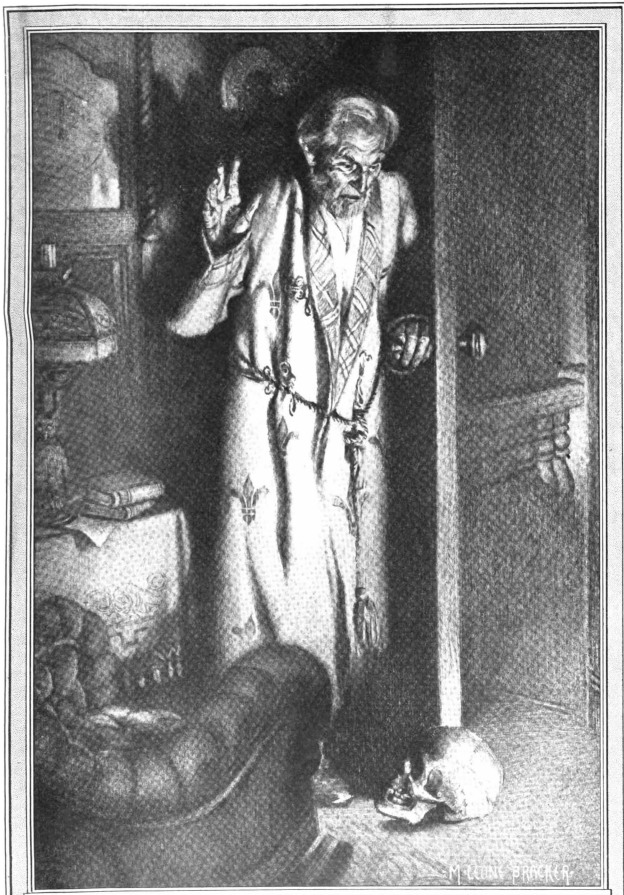
There! Lord, what a shriek! I told you so! You're quite a man. Fill up your pipe and draw your chair nearer to the fire, and take some more drink. Old Holland never hurt anybody yet. I've seen a Dutchman in Java drink half a jug of Hulekamp in a morning without turning a hair. I don't take much rum myself, because it doesn't agree with my rheumatism, but you are not rheumatic and it won't damage you. Besides, it's a very damp night outside. The wind is howling again and it will soon be in the southwest; do you hear how the windows rattle? The tide must have turned, too, by the manging.

We should not have heard the thing again, if you had not said that. I'm pretty sure we should not. Oh, yes, if you choose to describe it as a coincidence, you are quite welcome, but I would rather that you should not call the thing names again, if you don't mind. It may be that the poor little woman hears, and perhaps it hurts her, don't you know?—ghost? No. You don't call anything a ghost, that you can take in your hands and look at in broad daylight, and that rattles when you shake it. Do you now? But it's something that hears and understands; there's no doubt about that.

I tried sleeping in the best bedroom when I first came to the house, just because it was the best and the most comfortable, but I had to give it up. It was (their room, and there's the big bed she died in, and the cupboard is in the thickness of the wall near the head, on the left, and where it likes to be kept, in its hand-box. I only used the room for a fortnight after I came, and then I turned out, and took the little room downstairs, next door to the surgery, where Luke used to sleep when he expected to be called to a patient during the night.

I was always a good sleeper ashore; eight hours is my dose, eleven to seven when I'm alone, twelve to eight when I have a friend with me. But I could not sleep after three o'clock in the morning, in that room—a quarter past, to be accurate—as a matter of fact, I timed it with my old pocket chronometer, which still keeps good time, and it was always at exactly seventeen minutes past three. I wonder whether that was the hour when she died.

It was not what you have heard. If it had been that I could not have stood it two nights. It was just a start and a moan and hard breathing for a few seconds, in the cupboard, and it could never have waked me, under ordinary circumstances. I'm sure. I suppose you are like me in that, and we are just like other people who have been to sea. No natural sounds disturb us at all, not all the racket of a square-rigger hove to in a heavy gale, or rolling on her beam end before the wind. But if a hand pencil goes clack and rattles in the drawer of your cabin table when you are



"Something rolled across the threshold and stopped against my foot"

awake in a moment. Just so—you always understand. Very well, the noise in the cupboard was no louder than that, but it woke me instantly.

I said it was like a "start." I know what I mean, but it's hard to explain without seeming to talk nonsense. Of course you can not exactly "hear" a person "start"; at the most, you might hear the quick drawing of the breath between the parted lips and closed teeth, and the almost imperceptible sound of clothing that moved suddenly, though very slightly. It was like that.

You know how one feels what a sailing vessel is going to do, two or three seconds before she does it, when one has the wheel. Riders say the same of a horse, but that's less strange because the horse is a live animal with feelings of its own, and only poets and handmen talk about a ship being alive, and all that. But I have always felt somehow that besides being a steaming machine or a sailing machine for carrying weights, a vessel at sea is a sensitive instrument and a means of communication between nature and man, and most particularly the man at the wheel, if she is steered by hand. She takes her impressions directly from wind and sea, tide and stream, and transmits them to the man's hand, just as the wireless telegraph picks up the interrupted currents aloft and turns them out below in the form of a message.

You see what I am driving at; I felt that something started in the cupboard, and I felt it so vividly that I heard it, though there may have been nothing to hear, and the sound inside my head waked me suddenly. But I really heard the other noise. It was as if it were muffled inside a box, as far away as if it came through a long-distance telephone; and yet I knew that it was inside the cupboard near the head of my bed. My hair did not bristle and my blood did not run cold that time. I simply resented being waked up by something that had no business to make a noise, any more than a pencil should rattle in the drawer of my cabin table on board ship. For I did not understand; I just supposed that the cupboard had some communication with the outside air, and that the wind had got in and was moaning through it with a sort of very faint screech.

I struck a light and looked at my watch, and it was seventeen minutes past three. Then I turned over and went to sleep on my right ear. That's my good one; I'm pretty deaf with the other, for I struck the water with it when I was a lad, in diving from the foretop-sail yard. Silly thing to do, it was, but the result is very convenient, if I want to go to sleep when there's a noise. That was the first night, and the same thing happened again and several times afterward, but not regularly, though it was always at the same time, to a second; perhaps I was sometimes sleeping on my good ear, and sometimes not. I overhauled the cupboard, and there was no way by which the wind could get in, or anything else, for the door makes a good fit, having been meant to keep out moths, I suppose; Mrs. Pratt must have kept her winter things in it, for it still smells of camphor and turpentine.

After about a fortnight, I had had enough of the noises. So far, I had said to myself that it would be silly to yield to it and take the skull out of the room. Things always look differently by daylight, don't they? But the voice grew louder—I suppose one may call it a voice—and it got inside my dust ear, too, one night. I realized that when I was wide awake, for my good ear was jammed down on the pillow and I ought not to have heard a fog-horn in that position. But I heard that, and it made me lose my temper, until it scared

me, for sometimes the two are not far apart. I struck a light and got up, and opened the cupboard, grabbed the hand-box and threw it out of the window, as far as I could.

Then my hair stood on end. The thing screamed in the air, like a shell from a twelve-inch gun. It fell on the other side of the road. The night was very dark, and I could not see it fall, but I know it fell beyond the road. The window is just over the front door, it's fifteen yards to the fence, more or less, and the road is ten yards wide. There's a quickset hedge beyond, along the globe that belongs to the vicarage.

I did not sleep much more that night. It was not more



"Then I took it and carried it up"

than half an hour after I had thrown the hand-box out, when I heard a shriek outside—like what we've had to-night, but worse, more despairing. I should call it; and it may have been my imagination, but I could have sworn that the screams came nearer and nearer each time. I lit a pipe, and walked up and down for a bit, and then took a book and sat up reading, but I'll be hanged if I can remember what I read, nor even what the book was, for every now and then a shriek came up that would have made a dead man turn in his coffin.

A little before dawn some one knocked at the front door. There was no mistaking that for anything else, and I opened my window and looked down, for I guessed that some one wanted the doctor, supposing that the new man had taken Luke's house. It was rather a relief to hear a human knock after that awful noise.

You can not see the door from above, owing to the little porch. The knocking came again, and I called out, asking who was there, but nobody answered, though the knock was repeated. I sang out again, and said that the doctor did not live here any longer. There was no answer, but it occurred to me that it might be some old countryman who was stone deaf. So I took my candle and went down to open the door. Upon my word, I was not thinking of the thing yet, and I had almost forgotten the other noises. I went down convinced that I should find somebody outside on the door-step, with a message. I set the candle on the hall table—so that the wind should not blow it out when I opened. While I was drawing the old-fashioned door I heard the knocking again. It was not loud, and it had a queer, hollow sound, now that I was close to it, I remember, but I certainly thought it was made by some person who wanted to get in.

It wasn't. There was nobody there, but as I opened the door inward, standing a little on one side so as to see out at once, something rolled across the threshold and stopped against my foot.

I drew back, as I felt it, for I knew what it was before I looked down. I can not tell you how I knew, and it seemed unreasonable, for I am still quite sure that I had thrown it away across the road. It's a French window, that opens wide, and I got a good swing when I flung it out. Besides, when I went out early in the morning I found the hand-box beyond the quickset hedge.

You may think it opened when I threw it, and that the skull dropped out; but that's impossible, for nobody could throw an empty cardboard box so far. It's out of the question; you might as well try to fling a ball of paper twenty-five yards, or a blown bird's egg.

To go back, I shut and bolted the hall door, picked the thing up carefully and put it on the table beside the candle. I did that mechanically, as one instinctively does the right thing in danger without thinking at all—unless one does the opposite. It may seem odd, but I believe my first thought had been that somebody might come and find me there on the threshold, while it was resting against my foot, lying a little on its side and turning one hollow eye up at my face, as if it meant to accuse me. And the light and shadow from the candle played in the hollows of the eyes as it stood on the table, so that they seemed to open and shut at me. Then the candle went out quite unexpectedly, though the door was fastened and there was not the least draft; and I used up at least half a dozen matches before it would burn again.

I sat down rather suddenly, without quite knowing why. Probably I had been badly frightened, and perhaps you will admit there was no great shame in being scared. The thing had come home, and it wanted to go upstairs, back to its cupboard.

I sat still and stared at it for a bit, till I began to feel very cold; then I took it and carried it up and set it in its place, and I remember that I spoke to it and promised that it should have its hand-box again in the morning.

(To be concluded next week)

SKULL

Widow's Wife, and What Followed

RD

candle, doesn't it? The fact is, candles are not very good about here. I don't know where they come from, but they have a way of burning low, occasionally, with a greenish flame that spits tiny sparks, and I'm often annoyed by their going out of themselves. It can not be helped, for it will be long before we have electricity in our village. It really is rather a poor light, isn't it?

You think I had better leave you the candle and take the lamp, do you? I don't like to carry lamps about, that's the truth. I never dropped one in my life, but I have always thought I might, and it's so confoundedly dangerous if you do. Besides, I am pretty well used to these rotten candles by this time.

You may as well finish that glass while I'm getting it.

for I don't mean to let you off with less than three before you go to bed. You won't have to go upstairs either, for I've put you in the old study next to the surgery—that's where I live myself.

The fact is, I never ask a friend to sleep upstairs now. The best man who did was Crackenthorpe, and he said he was kept awake all night. You remember old Crack, don't you? He stuck to the service, and they've just made him an admiral. Yes, I'm off now—unless the candle goes out. I couldn't help asking if you remembered Crackenthorpe. If any one had told us that the skilly little idiot he used to be was to turn out the most successful of the lot of us, we should have laughed at the idea, shouldn't we? You and I did not do badly, it's true—but I'm really going now. I don't mean to let you think that I've been putting it off by talking. As if there were anything to be afraid of! If I were scared, I should tell you so quite frankly, and get you to go upstairs with me.

HERR'S the box. I brought it down very carefully so as not to disturb it, poor thing. You see, if it were shaken, the jaw might get separated from it again, and I'm sure it wouldn't like that. Yes, the candle went out as I was coming downstairs, but that was the draft from the loaky window on the landing. Did you hear anything? Yes, there was another scream. Am I pale, do you say? That's nothing. My heart's a little queer sometimes, and

I went upstairs too fast. In fact that's one reason why I really prefer to live altogether on the ground floor.

Wherever it is that box, I'm sure it's not far from the skull, for I had the box in my hand when I heard the noise, and here it is now; so we have proved definitely that the screams are really and truly my own. So no doubt I shall find out some day what makes them. Some crevice in the wall, of course, or a crack in a chimney, or a chink in the frame of a window. That's the way all ghost stories end, in real life. Do you know? I'm sorry I thought of going up and bringing it down for you to see, for that last shriek settles the question. To think that I should have been so weak to fancy that the poor skull could really cry out like a living thing!

Now I'll open the box, and we'll take it out and look at it under the bright light. It's rather dark, isn't it, because the poor lady used to sit there, in your chair, evening after evening, in just this same light, isn't it? But then—we made up our minds that all our gold and silver were to end, and that it's just an old skull that Luke had when he was a student; and perhaps he put it into the lime merely to whiten it, and not to find the jaw.

I made a seal on the string, you see, after I had put the jaw in its place, and I wrote on the cover. There's the old white label on it still, from the milliner's, addressed to Mrs. Pratt when the hat was sent to her, and as there was room I wrote on the edge: "A skull, once the property of the late Luke Pratt, M.D.;" I can't quite know why I wrote that, unless it was with the idea of explaining the thing happened to be in my possession. I can not help wondering sometimes what sort of hat it was that came in the hat-box. What color was it, do you think? Was it a gay spring hat with a bobbing feather and pretty ribbons? Strange that the very same box should hold the head that wore the finery—perhaps. No—we made up our minds that that it just came from the hospital in London where Luke did his time. It's far better to look at it in that light, isn't it? There's no more connection between the skull and poor Mrs. Pratt than there was between my story about the lead and—

Good Lord! Take the lamp—don't let it go out if you can help it—I'll have the window fastened again in a second—I say, what a gale! There, it's out! I told you so! Never mind, there's the light—let me get the window shut; the bolt was only half down. Was the box blown off the table? Where the deuce is it? There! You don't open again, for I've put up the bar. Good dodge, an old-fashioned bar—there's nothing like it. Now, you find the handle, while I light the lamp. Confound these wretched matches! Yes, a pipe spill is better—it must light in the fire—I hadn't thought of it—thank you—there are again. Now where's the box? Yes, put it back on the table and we'll open it.

That's the first time I have ever known the wind to burst that window open; but it was partly careless on my part when I last shut it. Yes, of course I heard the scream, it seemed to go all round the house before it broke in at the window. That proves that it's always been the wind and nothing else, doesn't it? When it was not the wind it was my imagination. I've always been a very imaginative man; I must have been, though I did not know it. As we grow older we understand ourselves better, don't you know?

I'll have a drop of the Hulskaamp neat, by way of an exception, since you are filling up your glass. That damp gale chilled me, and with my rheumatic tendency I'm very much afraid of a chill, for the cold sometimes seems to stick in my joints all winter when it once gets in.

By George, that's good stuff! I'll just light a fresh pipe, now that everything is snug again, and then we'll open the box. I'm so glad we heard that last scream together, with the skull here on the table between us, for a thing can not possibly be in two places at the same time, and the noise most certainly came from outside, as any noise the wind makes must. You thought you heard it scream through the room, after the window was bare open? Oh, yes, so did I, but that was natural enough, when everything was open. Of course we heard the wind. What could one expect.

Look here, please. I want you to see that the seal is intact, before we open the box together. Will you take my glasses? No, you have your own. All right. The seal is sound, you see, and you can read the words of the motto easily. "Sweet and low"—that's it—because the poem goes on "Wind of the Western Sea" and says "blow low to me, and all that. Here is the seal on my watch-chain, where it's hung for more than forty years. My poor little wife gave it to me when I was counting, and I never had any other. It was just like her to think of those words—she was always fond of Tenneyson.

It's of no use to cut the string, for it's fastened to the box, so I'll just break the wax and untie the knot, and afterward we'll seal it up again. You see, I like to feel that the thing is safe in its place and that nobody can take it out. Not that I should suspect Treloar of meddling with it, but I always feel that he knows a lot more than he tells.

You see, I've managed it without breaking the string, though when I fastened it I never expected to open the hand-box again. The lid comes off easily enough. There! Now look!

What? Nothing in it! Empty! It's gone, man, the skull is gone!

NO, THERE'S nothing the matter with me. I'm only trying to collect my thoughts. It's so strange, I'm positively certain that it was inside when I put on the seal last spring. I can't have imagined that: it's utterly impossible. If I ever took a stiff glass with a friend now and then, I would admit that I might have made some idiotic mistake when I had taken too much. But I don't, and I never did. A pint of ale at supper and half a gin and rum at bedtime was the most I ever took in my good days. I believe it's always the sober fellows who get rheumatism and gout! Yet there was my seal, and there is the empty hand-box. That's plain enough.

I say, I don't half like this. It's not right. There's



"What? . . . It's gone, man, the skull is gone!"

something wrong about it, in my opinion. You needn't talk to me about supernatural manifestations, for I don't believe in them, not a little bit! Somebody must have tampered with the seal of the lantern. Sometimes, when I go out to work in the garden in summer, I leave my watch and chain on the table. Trebarn must have taken the seal then, because I'm sure he would be quite sure that I should not come in for at least an hour.

If it was not Trebarn,—oh, don't talk to me about the possibility that the thing has got out by itself! If it has, it must be somewhere about the house, in some out-of-the-way corner, waiting. We may come upon it any day, waiting for us to go out, or for the moon to wait in the dark. Then it will scream at me; it will shriek at me in the dark, for it hates me. I tell you!

The band-box is quite empty. We are not dreaming, either of us. There, I turn it upside down. What's that? Something is there, but it's turned it over. It's on the floor; it's near your feet; I know it and, we must find it! Help me to find it, man! Have you got it? For God's sake, give it to me quickly!

Lead! I knew it when I heard it fall; I knew it couldn't be anything else by the little thud it made on the hearth rug. So it was lead after all, and Luke did it.

I feel a little bit shaken up,—not exactly nerve, you know, but badly shaken up, that's the fact. Anybody would, I should think. After all, you can't say that it's fear of the thing, for I was sitting up and brought the lantern to the table. I was bringing it down, and that's the same thing, and, by George, rather than give in to some silly nonsense, I'll get the lantern up again and put it back in its place. It's not that. It's the certainty that that poor little woman came to her end in the way she did, a natural fault, because I told the story. That's what is so dreadful. Somehow I had always hoped that I should never get quite so close to it, but there is no doubting it now. Look at that!

Look at that! That little lump of lead with no particular shape, and which she did make, man! Doesn't it make you shiver? He gave her something to make her sleep, of course, but there must have been on that moment a fearful awful agony. Think of having boiling lead poured into your brain. Think of it. She was dead before she could scream, but only this of—oh!—there it is again! It's outside—inside—I know it's just outside—I can't keep it out of my head—oh!—oh!

Y^OU thought I had fainted? No, I wish I had, for it would have stopped sooner. It's all very well to say you don't believe in it, but noise, and that a noise never hurt anybody—noise, as white as a shroud yourself. There's only one thing to be done if you want to close her eyes to-night. We must find it and put it back into its band-box, and shut it up in the cupboard, where it likes to be. I don't know how it got out, but what we must do is that, whatever it screams so awfully to-night—it is never so bad as this—never since I first came.

Be very fit! Yes, if you can't bear it, I'll bury it, if it takes us all night. We'll bury it six feet deep and ram down the earth over it, so that it shall never get out again, and if it screams we shall be able to sleep down. Quick, we'll get the lantern and look for it. It can't be far away; I'm sure it's just outside—it was coming in when I looked in the window; I know it.

Yes, you're quite right, I'm losing my senses, and I must get hold of myself. Don't speak to me for a minute or two; I'll sit quite still here, and you must repeat something I know. That's the best way.

"Add together the altitude, the latitude, and the polar distance, divide by two and the tangent of the half-sum from the half-sum; then add the logarithm of the secant of the latitude, the cosecant of the polar distance, the cosine of the half-sum and the sine of the half-sum minus the altitude"—here! I'm out of my senses, for my memory is all right, isn't it?

Of course, you may say that it's mechanical, and that we never forget the things we learned when we were boys and have used almost every day for a lifetime. But that's the very point. When a man is going crazy, it's the mechanical part of his mind that goes out of order and won't work right; he remembers things that never happened, or he sees things that aren't real, or he hears noises when there is perfect silence. That's not what is the matter with either of us, is it?

Come, we'll get the lantern and go round the house. It's not raining—only blowing like old horses, so we need to say. The lantern is in the cupboard under the stairs in the hall, and I always keep it trimmed, in case of a leak.

No use to look for the thing! I don't see how you can say that. It was nonsense to talk of burying it, of course, for it doesn't want to be buried. It wants to go back into its band-box and be taken upstairs, poor thing! Trebarn took it out, I know, and made the seal over again. Perhaps he took it to the churchyard, and it may have meant well. I darsay though, that that would not scream any more if it were quietly laid in consecrated ground, near where it belongs. But it has come home. Yes, that's it, it's the same thing that follows Trebarn, and rather religiously inclined. I think. Does that not sound natural, and reasonable, and well meant? It's not natural, because it's not natural to be buried—with the rest. But he was wrong. How should he know that it screams at me because it hates me and because it's my fault that there was that little lump of lead in it?

No use to look for it, anyhow? Nonsense! I tell you

it wants to be found—hark! What's that knocking? Do you hear it! Knock—knock—knock—three times, then a pause, and then again. It has a hollow sound, hasn't it?

It has come home. I've heard that knock before. It wants to come in and be taken upstairs, in its box. It's at the front door.

Will you come with me? I'll take it in. Yes, I own that I don't like to go alone and open the door. The thing will roar and stop against my foot, just as it did before, and the light will go out. I'm a good deal shaken by finding that bit of lead, and, besides, my heart isn't quite right—too much strong tobacco, perhaps. Besides, I'm quite willing to own that I'm a bit nervous to-night, if I never was before in my life.

That's right, come along! I'll take the box with me, so as not to come back. Do you hear the knocking? It's not like any other knocking I ever heard of. If you will hold this door open, I can find the lantern under the stairs by the light from this window without bringing the lamp into the hall—it would only go out.

The thing knows we are coming—hark! It's inside now to get in. Don't shut the door till the lantern is lit, whatever you do. There will be the usual trouble with matches, I suppose, no, the first one, by—Jove! I tell you, and I want to get in, so there's no trouble. All right with that door now; shut it, please. Now come and hold the lantern, or it's blowing so hard outside that I shall have to use both hands. That's it, hold the light low. Do you hear the knocking still? Here goes—I've just enough, with my foot against the bottom of the door—now!

The knocking is over—the wind that blows it across the floor, that's all—there's had a hurricane in the night. I'll have you up there! I have got got it! The band-box is on the table. One minute, and I'll have the bar up there! There!



"By the hands or teeth of some person unknown"

Why did you throw it into the box so roughly? It doesn't like that, you know.

What do you say? Bitten your hand? Nonsense, man! You did just what I did. You pressed the jaws together with your other hand and pinched yourself. Let me see. You don't mean to say you've got a scratch on your hand? You must have squeezed hard, by Jove, for the skin is certainly torn. I'll give you some carbolic solution for it before we go to bed, for they say a scratch from a skull's tooth may go bad and give trouble.

Come inside again, and let me see it by the lamp. I'll bring the band-box—never mind the lantern, it may ruin the altitude—here! I shall see it presently when I go up the stairs. Yes, shut the door if you will; it makes it more cheerful and bright. Is your finger still bleeding? I'll get you the carbolic in an instant; just let me see the thing.

Light! There's a drop of blood on the upper jaw. It's on the eye too. Ghastly, isn't it? When I saw it running along the floor of the hall, the strength almost went out of my hands, and I felt my knees bending; then I understood that it was the smile driving it over the smooth boards. You don't blame me? No, I should think not! We were boys together, and we've seen a thing or two, and we may just as well own it.

Other than that we were both in a beastly fun when it slid across the floor at you. No wonder you pinched your finger, pinched it up after that. If I did the same thing out of sheer nervousness in broad daylight, with the sun streaming in on me should that stick to it so closely. The thing is that the jaw should stick to it so closely, isn't it? I suppose it's the dampness, for it sticks like a vise—I have wiped off the drop of blood, for it was not nice to look at. I'm not going to try to open the jaws, don't be afraid; I shall be playing any trick on the poor thing, but I'll just seal the box again, and we'll take it upstairs and put it away where it wants to be. The thing is, I shall be a little bit nervous, I think. You know, it will be long before I leave my seal being again, for Trebarn to use. I can tell you. Examination will be a very natural thing, and I don't choose to think that Trebarn had hidden it somewhere in the bushes, and that the gale blew it to the house, because it's my fault that there was that little lump of lead in it, you're not thinking the impossible, and I'm very ready to agree with you.

Do you see that? You can swear that you've actually seen me seal it this time, in case anything of the kind should occur again. The wax fastens the strings to the lid, which can not possibly be lifted, even though you get in one finger. You're quite satisfied, aren't you? Besides, I shall lock the cupboard and keep the key in my pocket.

Now we can take the lantern and go upstairs. Do you know? I'm very much inclined to agree with your theory that the wind blew it against the house. I'll go ahead for I know the way, and now you see me near my feet as you go up. How the wind howls and whistles! Did you feel the sand on the floor under your shoes as we crossed the street?

Yes—this is the door of the best bedroom. Hold up the lantern, please. This side, by the head of the bed. I left the cupboard open when I got the box. Isn't it queer how the faint odor of women's dresses will hang about an old closed for years? This is the shelf. You've seen me seal the lantern, and now you see me near the key and put it into my pocket. So that's done!

GOOD NIGHT. Are you sure you're quite comfortable? It's not much of a room, but I darsay you would as soon sleep here as upstairs to-night. If you want anything, sing out; there's got a lath and plaster partition between us. There's not so much wind on this side, by half. There's the Hollands, on the table, if you'll have them to-night, please. No well, do as you please. Good night again, and don't dream about that thing if you can help it.

The following paragraph appeared in the *Penradden "News,"* November 23, 1906:

Mysterious Death of a Retired Cox-Captain.—The village of Tredome is much disturbed by the strange death of Captain Charles Bradcock, and all sorts of impossible stories are circulating with regard to the circumstances, which certainly seem difficult of explanation. The retired Captain, who had successively commanded in his time the largest and fastest liners belonging to one of the principal transatlantic steamship companies, was found dead in his bed on Tuesday morning in his own cottage, a quarter of a mile from the village. An examination was made at once by the local practitioner, which revealed the horrible fact that the deceased had been bitten in the throat by a human assailant with such amazing force as to crush the windpipe and cause death. The marks of the teeth of both jaws were so plainly visible on the skin that they could be counted, but the perpetrator of the deed had evidently had the two lower middle incisors. It is hoped that this peculiarity may help to identify the murderer, who can only be a dangerous escaped maniac. The deceased, though over sixty-five years of age, is said to have been a hale man of considerable physical strength, and it is remarkable that no signs of any struggle were visible in the room, nor could it be ascertained how the murderer had entered the house. Warning has been sent to all the insane asylums in the United Kingdom, but as yet no information has been received regarding the escape of any dangerous patient.

The coroner's jury returned the somewhat singular verdict that Captain Bradcock came to his death "by the hands or teeth of some person unknown." The local surgeon is said to have expressed privately the opinion that the maniac is a woman, a view he deduces from the small size of the jaws, as shown by the marks of the teeth. The whole affair is shrouded in mystery. Captain Bradcock was a widower and lived alone. He leaves no children.

[Note.—Students of ghost lore and haunted houses will find the foundation of the foregoing story in the legends about a skull which is still preserved in the farmhouse called Bettiscombe Manor, situated, I believe, on the Dorsetshire coast.—F. M. C.]