

MY SPOOK - 012

IT'S no use getting away from facts, and it is a fact that there are ghosts. Call them spooks, spirits, anything you will the fact remains that there are, as surely as you will find out sooner or later whether you believe it or not.

Now do not expect that I am going to tell you any tale or a long, dark, solitary road running beside a deserted churchyard in the dead of night, or anything of the kind—because I am not.. Neither am I asking you to believe my story. I am merely relating an incident which happened to me in broad daylight under the actual circumstances, when my eyes were as good as any and when no spooky thought was near my mind. Take it or leave it, as the Broad Street clerks' and managers' looks and gestures say all too eloquently when you go in their stores now-a-days.

In those days I played bat and ball (unrefined cricket) anywhere, but mostly in the roads and on a special spot which provided a first-class pitch (as far as my playmates' and my judgment of pitches went) where the railway tracks had been removed. About six yards from the wicket was the home of one Mr. Charles, who had died a few days previously, and whose house was now closed and empty. I had often heard it whispered here and there that he practised obeah, and I must admit that I was always a little scared when the ball struck his house, and he pushed his big, ugly face over the half-door, pouring threats and curses on our youthful heads. But he was dead at last and we could slam his old house to our hearts' content. I remember, when my turn came to

bat on this special day, that I looked gratefully in its direction and felt fit for a hundred. Down came the bowler—a long hop on the off side—and I made haste to punish it justly. I put every ounce of strength behind a mighty cross-haul; the ball rose to some height into the air and then fell clear over into Mr. Charles yard.

Now, it was a rule with us since the old man's death that whoever struck the ball into his yard should climb over the palings and secure it.

I therefore quickly clambered over the perilous palings, and looked around the small enclosure for the knitted cloth-ball. It was nowhere to be seen, so I stooped and looked under the cellar. The ball had rolled a short way under the house, and dropping to my all fours, I soon secured it. I reached the open again, and as I straightened—oh my heavens!—my heart still misses a beat whenever I remember the awful fear I knew. There on the square block before the back door of his home stood Mr. Charles in the same greenish, reddish black suit that he always wore, the same old felt hat whose brim fell dejectedly round his face and ears, and the rough, too big slip-slops on his feet. My heart gave one bound against my ribs and then stopped—my blood froze within my veins—I stood transfixed and mute as the ball dropped from my nerveless fingers. I have never been able to determine how long it all lasted. I only know my friends' calling my name came faintly to my senses, and closing my eyes to shut out the spectacle, I screamed.

Copyrighted Material

Then, stumbling blindly toward the palings, I managed, I know not how, to clamber to the top and fall prostrate among my surprised friends below.

Copyrighted Material