

My mother had insisted upon me taking our servant with me, therefore I was not quite alone. But as I went on, I could not help feeling a superstitious dread. I was obliged to cross the fields to reach the Hall, but across these fields there were two ways.

One of these ways (the nearest) was the very path on which poor Hester was murdered. The other (the one which made it a longer walk to the Hall from the village) led through the field which contained the old quarry shaft.

I chose the latter. But I shuddered as I walked quickly along followed by the maid; I shuddered, and dared scarcely glance into the centre of the field, in which a rude railing was placed round the old quarry shaft for safety.

My dear father had often contemplated filling in this shaft. It had been sunk under the belief that there was valuable stone below. But this was found not to be the case, and soon after the shaft was made the undertaking was given up. We had always called it the "old quarry" when we were children, and used to go and gather cowslips in the field where it was, and I remember being warned by our mother not to go too near the shaft.

All this came back to my mind as I hurried on in the fitful moonlight, bound on my miserable errand to my brother's house. Ah, we were happy then, I thought; why did we not die as children, and why had the shadow of such a terrible crime fallen upon my life?

On, on I went, half-running. Then for a moment I glanced back; glanced back, and gave a cry of terror. There, standing by the railing round the shaft, was now a misty figure. My superstitious fears came back with tenfold force when I beheld this. It was Hester's spirit I imagined, and I could not suppress the shriek which rose on my trembling lips.

Our maid Jane was equally frightened. "Oh! Miss—it's the ghost!" she cried. "Young Mrs Selby's ghost, and they say it's always wandering about—oh! oh!"

Jane's last exclamations of real terror was caused by the misty figure standing by the railings round the shaft, now turning and coming swiftly towards us.

"Oh!—" cried Jane, falling on her knees, "Oh! save us, save us!"

"What the deuce is the matter?" said a voice the next minute, that I knew. It was Edward's voice—Edward, whom in our superstitious fear we had mistaken for poor Hester's restless spirit!

"What is the matter?" he said again, and by this time he was near enough to recognise me. "Why, is it you, Peggy?" he asked. "Whatever is the matter with that girl? And what on earth were you both shrieking about?"

"The ghost! the ghost!" roared Jane, still on the ground.

"Nonsense," said Edward, but there was ever so faint a tremor in his voice. "Get up girl," he added. "Peggy, were you going to the Hall?"

"Yes," I said, "yes, Edward," and I put my trembling arm through my unhappy brother's.

MR DARWIN ON WORMS.

MR DARWIN'S new work, "The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms, with Observations on their Habits," is devoted to a minute yet extremely interesting account of the anatomy and habits of the lowly earthworm, and the wonderful effects which its taste for eating dirt and voiding it again, "acting through long ages," has produced on the surface of the earth. From this point of view the book has some slight bearings on the "theory" to the support of which all of his researches tend more or less. In every other respect it is simply a popular treatise on a common object of almost every country in the world. Nor, indeed, is the subject new. A score of works and "papers" have been written on the earthworm, and forty-four years ago Mr Darwin himself published an outline of the observations of which the present book may be considered as the expansion. In 1837 he showed that worms by swallowing earth, in order to extract from it the organic nutriment which it contains, passing it through their intestines, and then voiding it in the little castings so familiar to every one, play an important part in the natural cultivation of the soil. In time the stony surface of the ground is covered with a layer of virgin earth, brought up from a depth of from three to eight feet; or if the ground is, as in forests, littered with leaves, aids in forming a rich mould peculiarly suited for the growth of vegetable life. In rainy weather the finely-levigated castings flow down any moderate slope, so that there is a continual renewal of the surface. In this manner great results are accomplished for the benefit of the agricultural interest. But Mr Darwin is even more enthusiastic over the gratitude antiquaries owe to the despised worm. Coins, gold ornaments, stone implements, &c., if dropped on the surface of the ground will infallibly be buried by the castings of the worms in a few years, and will thus be safely preserved until the land at some future period is turned up. The tessellated pavement of Abinger, in Surrey, was covered with at least fourteen inches of worm castings. The remains of a Roman villa at Chedworth, in Gloucestershire, were concealed under thirty-eight inches of similar soil; and the fine villa recently discovered at Brading, in the Isle of Wight, had been buried by worms to the depth of from three to four feet, the floor having gradually sank as the earth which the annelids piled up was removed by them. In like manner—not to heap one fact above another—the Roman town of Silchester, in Hampshire, and Uriconium (Wroxeter), in Shropshire, have experienced the kindly attention of the worms; and, among other instances of a like nature, one of the fallen blocks at Stonehenge has sunk considerably below the level of the surrounding ground through the same agency. "It is a marvellous reflection," Mr Darwin remarks in closing his volume, "that the whole of the superficial mould over any turf-covered expanse has passed, and will pass again every few years, through the bodies of worms. The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions: but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed, by earthworms. It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organised creatures."

CHAPTER XXX — EXILED!

In the dear room that I had once loved so well—where I had sat on my father's knee when I was a