



# SOME WISCONSIN GHOSTS



THERE are ghost stories in great abundance, but ghost stories related with circumstantiality as to time, place, and events, sworn to by reputable and judicious persons, are not particularly common. Wisconsin has two remarkable ghost stories, or rather stories of two ghosts, since neither ghost has contented itself with one manifestation. A ghost which chooses a theological seminary for the scene of its appearances acquires a standing and authenticity which caviling skeptics must respect. A ghost which has hurled three human beings into its own chill realm possesses a gruesome, terrible interest, aside from that excited by the apparently reliable character of the testimony offered to prove its existence.

The Nashotah Theological Seminary, at Nashotah, Wis., a few miles from that Western Newport, Oconomowoc, is the principal stronghold of the High Church wing of the Episcopal Church in the West. The founder of this institution was the Rev. William Lloyd Breck, styled in the annals of his faith "the pioneer of the Church," a title well earned. In addition to dozens of parishes in Wisconsin, he was the founder of the system of schools at Faribault, Minn., afterward brought to such great prominence by Bishop Whipple; Seabury Theological Seminary, Shattuck Military School, and St. Mary's Hall, and in California he founded St. Augustine's College and St. Mary's of the Pacific. He died and was buried at Benicia, Cal., the scene of his last labors, but after a few years the Church in Wisconsin asked that his body be exhumed and brought back to Nashotah, his first love. This was done, and the occasion of the return and reburial was made memorable by a series of phenomena which it is possible may be explained by natural causes, but which have not yet been so explained. This may be due to the unscientific character of the investigators at the seminary, inclined by the nature of their calling to believe in a supernatural intervention where a scientist would see only the workings of a mundane force or the misinterpretation of sights and sounds. But I will relate the tale as the Nashotah people tell it, and the reader can draw his own conclusions.

After its arrival the casket containing the body of Dr. Breck lay for a time on the ground floor of one of the buildings and watchers sat with it. On the night before the reburial the watchers were the Rev. Charles P. Dorset, for fifteen years rector of St. James, in Chicago, now of the Diocese of Texas, and Dr. Wilson, now of Chicago. Along in the hours near morning Wilson stepped out for a breath of fresh air, but in a moment came rushing back, with the exclamation:

"Dorset, Dorset, the woods are full of ghosts!"

Both clergymen went out. In every direction through the trees they saw figures darting hither and thither in a wild and fitful dance. The clergymen approached, but the figures drew back before them, forming to left and right of them, and it was impossible to get within close range. In the morning, when the casket was lifted, the floor beneath was found to be blackened by fire, and a hole was actually burned through to the space beneath. How did this happen? No one has ever tried to offer a conjecture.

This was not the end. At night the Faculty of the institution sat in the office of Dr. Gardiner, the President, discussing the strange events that perplexed them. Suddenly their discussions were abruptly terminated by a startling and tremendous racket just outside the door, a clattering and whacking that was deafening. Dr. Gardiner threw open the door. Not a soul in the hall. He returned to his room, but hardly had he sat down when the noises began again. Again a sudden dash into the hall failed to reveal any one. Nor did a search of the building reveal that outside the Faculty a living being was in it. A third time the noises began, and this time Dr. Gardiner spoke into the hall: "If you are gentlemen, be still." The noise stopped. Coming at another time, all this might not have occasioned any mystification, but in conjunction with the other strange and unexplained happenings it assumed

an importance it would not have assumed alone.

After the reburial of Dr. Breck a photograph was taken of the cemetery. One of the students was the photographer. In the foreground of the picture can be seen two graves, just as they appear in the cemetery. But at the foot of each grave stands something no visitor has ever seen, and for the peace of his mind it is to be hoped never will see. At the foot of one grave stands the Rev. Dr. Cole, a former President of the seminary, in full canonicals. At the foot of the other grave stands the counterfeit presentment of its occupant, a woman who in life was a benefactress of the school. When these startling things appeared at the time the photograph was developed the seminary authorities decided that possibly some well-timed conjunction of sunlight and foliage was the cause of the images; that they had no real existence—were only shadows. So they had the picture thrown on a screen by a stereopticon. But the figures came out more plainly—so plainly that there was no denying that they were the well-remembered features of Dr. Cole and the seminary's benefactress. The possibilities of photography were not so well known then as now. The superimposing of one negative upon another and the resulting "ghost photographs" that have been the stock in trade of so many impostors was an art not well known then. Still, there were those who suspected the photographer of a trick and charged him with it. He denied the charge and offered this unassailable plea of innocence: There was no such thing as a photograph of Dr. Cole in existence and nobody had ever heard of one.

The other well-authenticated Wisconsin ghost has chosen his haunt in a less urban region and among less cultivated people than the theologians of Nashotah. Indeed, the scene of his walkings is most artistically chosen in the midst of a wild and savage landscape that would have delighted Doré. Indeed, it is another Brittany, both in topography and ethnology, for that weird, strange land of Wisconsin's lead region, with its cairns and pinnacles and citadels of rock, its gloomy, tortuous, cavernous vales, is inhabited by Celtic folk, Welsh and their kindred of Corn Wales, and a sprinkling of Galwegian Irish, notable ghost seers all. The ghost himself is apparently a remnant of the days when the population of the region was Anglo-Saxon, Virginians and Kentuckians. He is supposed to be the wraith of a man killed in the lead mining days before the civil war. At any rate, he appears in Ridgeway Township, at the spot where the house of this murdered man long stood, a rotting heap of blackened boards. The first person to see the ghost—see it a generation after the murder was committed—was one Dr. Cutler of Dodgeville, county seat of Iowa County, next town beyond Ridgeway. One night as the doctor was driving homeward after a visit to a patient in the country, he was suddenly affrighted at seeing a dark figure seated on the pole between the horses. The reins slipped from his nerveless hands and the horses dashed away at full speed, the spectre riding the pole nothing discommoded by the shaking he was getting. Up a hill, down another, and lo! the spectre vanished. The doctor's story found little credence. He was known to love the flowing bowl and his friends said he had taken a drop too much. It was a dream, a spectre of delirium tremens, of mania à potu. But the doctor declared he was sober. He recalled the fact that a year previous, when he really was a little full, while passing the self-same haunted spot, he had become aware of a dark and silent stranger sitting beside him in the carriage. For a mile the stranger rode without saying a word, and all at once he was gone. At the time the doctor had asked no question of his drunken wits and had considered it a strange experience and nothing more. He was now convinced that the man beside him and the thing on the end of the pole were one and the same, and that a being not of this world. Whereat the people laughed—in the daytime.

But not long afterward the reputation of the doctor received sudden and terri-

ble vindication, as he was himself afterward to vindicate it almost as terribly. John Lewis, father of Evan Lewis, champion wrestler of the United States, known to sports everywhere, was a prosperous farmer living in the vicinity of Ridgeway, a man of sober life, undaunted courage, and possessed of the tremendous physical strength his son has inherited. He was returning home one Fall evening after spending the day assisting a friend in butchering. The night was not dark, and when he drew near the haunted spot he determined to cut across lots to reach his home. He was approaching the stone wall at the roadside to climb it, when his attention was arrested by the sight of a figure that seemed to have gathered itself together out of the just now tenantless air and stood confronting him in a menacing attitude. He knew of no enemy, and highwaymen were unknown in that retired quarter of the State. He decided that some one must be trying to frighten him and so he hailed the figure, and no response being given he advanced upon it. The figure did not budge, but stood a towering shape of blackness, a gigantic and grizzly thing.

Some unaccountable awe and the uncanny hugeness of the thing made Lewis decide to avoid a conflict, and, drawing his butcher's knife from his pocket, he started to pass by, when the figure, raising its arm with a forbidding gesture, stepped athwart his path. Obeying a hasty impulse that was more a ghastly and soul-chilling fear than it was anger, Lewis let drive his keen knife. Next morning a neighbor found Lewis lying inside the wall in a semi-conscious condition. Of what happened after he had struck with his knife he had but vague impressions. He said he had been hurled in the air as if in the vortex of a cyclone, pounded, crushed into insensibility. He died a few hours after he was carried home, asserting with his dying breath that he had come to his end by a supernatural agency.

Thus did the death of John Lewis make the first vindication of the reputation of Dr. Cutler and the scoffing ceased. But a second and a third time was the doctor to be vindicated. A dressmaker encountered the ghost, and, pursued by it, soon after died of the shock occasioned by the intense fright. At last, Dr. Cutler himself, seeing the ghost for a third time, finally and triumphantly vindicated his word, though at the cost of his own life, for, dying as the result of fright, he became the third of the victims of the implacable spectre of "the old military road."

Since that time the ghost has been seen a number of times—seen by the ignorant and the learned, the superstitious and skeptical. Three agnostics in company aver that they saw it. They offer no attempt at an explanation. They saw it. They believe that some natural causes could explain the apparition, yet so far as their eyes could give them information they saw a ghost.

What of these ghosts? What explanation can be offered? The writer confesses he is unconvinced. Yet he has personal acquaintance with persons who claim to have seen them, with clergymen on the one hand, with university-bred agnostics on the other. The calling of the former ought to prevent them from lying, even did one believe them predisposed to believe in the reversal of the laws of nature as expounded by the scientific. The latter had no predisposition to affect their judgment. So there you are, and from the evidence presented can render your own verdict.

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