

[Written for *the Flag of our Union*]

## *A Mysterious Manifestation*

BY N.T. MUNROE

It was a still, warm, pleasant summer evening, and Mrs. Sherman had just succeeded in hushing the last baby into a sound sleep, and stood by the window looking out upon the quiet scene. She was a little weary, for the day had been warm, the children had needed a great deal of looking after, she was not very strong herself, and a feeling of relief came over her as she laid “the blessed baby” in its crib, safely for the night. The good man had gone out to a lecture, or concert, or something of the kind—she did not exactly know what—and as the evening was too warm for work, and the lounge looked very inviting, Mrs. Sherman threw herself down to indulge the weariness which the day’s labor had induced. The soft evening breeze came into the open window and fanned her forehead as she lay there, and with thoughts of the dear children, the husband, and the many cares of her little household running through her matronly brain, she was fast yielding to the sleeping god, when the door-bell rung. One would have thought she had been attached to the bell-wire, by the suddenness with which she rose to her recumbent position.

“O dear!” said she, all in a tremor, “visitors, and I am in such a state!” And she began to shake out her dress, smooth down her collar, and ran to the glass to brush her hair and make herself look more presentable.

Her chamber door stood open, and while standing at the glass she caught sight of her domestic’s face, which caused her to stop her preparations and turn short round with a “For mercy’s sake, Bridget, what is the matter?”

“O, ma’am, the bell rung and I went to the door, and sure not a living soul was there.”

Mrs. Sherman was easily startled, and her heart beat quick at the intelligence; but it would not do to let the affrighted servant know her weakness, so she merely said:

“It was some roguish boys, I suppose. Are you sure you fastened the door?”

“Yes, ma’am, but do you really suppose it was the boys?”

“Why, what else could it be?” said she.

“Goodness knows, ma’am, but the heart of me is leaping in my throat this minute.” And turning on her heel she went down stairs.

Two or three minutes had scarcely elapsed when the bell rang again. Bridget went to the door, Mrs. Sherman leaned over the banister—the door swung open—not a soul was there. Again the girl came rushing up the stairs.

“O, ma’am, nobody is there again; what can it be?” and her eyes stood out with fear and wonder.

“I don’t know, I’m sure, Bridget, what it means!” And her own heart grew fainter every minute. “Don’t go to the door again,” said she, “no matter who comes, but stay up here with me.”

In this state of fear and alarm the evening passed away, and when Mr. Sherman came home, he found, much to his surprise, no notice taken of his repeated ringing of the bell, and was obliged to walk round to the back door where his knock was answered by Bridget, in a great state of trepidation.

“Why, what’s the matter, Bridget? Didn’t you hear the bell?”

“O, Mr. Sherman, my mistress told me not to go to the door, no matter who rung.”

“Why so, Bridget?”

“O, sir, such an evening as we have had; the house is surely haunted. The bell has done nothing but ring all evening, and it’s little but mistress and myself are frightened out of our wits!”

“What do you mean, Bridget? Who has been ringing the bell?”

“And it’s just what we don’t know, sir; but it rings when no mortal hand touches it.”

“Some boys, I suppose,” said Mr. Sherman, passing up stairs. Here the same story was repeated by his affrighted wife, and even as she was in the act of relating the strange events, the bell pealed forth its startling summons.

“There it is again, George, what can it mean?” said Mrs. Sherman, clasping her hands over her trembling heart, for she was terribly nervous. Mr. Sherman went down and opened the door—not a soul was there. It was after ten at night; he went out and walked around the house; all was quiet; he even stood in the street watching the front door of his house, and even while he thus stood, the bell rung. It was very strange; no hand had touched the knob; what could it mean? He went in—his wife was in a terribly excited state, and Bridget was going round the house with wide staring eyes, calling upon all the saints in the calendar.

After much conjecture and cogitation they retired to rest, and for the remainder of the night the house was quiet.

The next morning they all slept late. The children woke first and clamored for their breakfast. Mrs. Sherman tried to shake off the effects of last night’s fright, and proceeded to dress the little ones, when again the bell rung. She dropped the garment she held in her hand and listened. She heard Bridget open the door, but there was no voice, no inquiry. She rose and went and leaned over the bannister. The poor servant girl stood with the door open, staring with amazed looks into the street.

“Anybody there, Bridget?” she whispered.

“Not a soul, ma’am,” she answered, in a mysterious tone.

“Shut the door, Bridget, and don’t open it again.” She obeyed.

“Sure it’s well not to be opening the door to folks who can as well come through the key hole.”

“What is to become of us, George?” said Mrs. Sherman, going back into her chamber. “I cannot live this way.”

“It does indeed seem very unaccountable,” said Mr. Sherman.

Ding-a-ling, went the bell again, and Mrs. Sherman threw herself on the side of the bed and burst into tears. Mr. Sherman went down stairs and opened the front door, but not a soul was there!

“This is very strange,” said he, with a half-vexed, half-puzzled air.

He passed out into the kitchen where Bridget was preparing breakfast, and here he was met with a most unwelcome surprise:

“O, what is to become of us,” said she, “the silver spoons and forks are all gone. I have looked all around but I cannot find them. Sure, what has come upon the house.”

The plot thickened; the spoons, the forks and other valuable articles were most surely missing, and Mr. Sherman began to think the house had been robbed. Just then his wife came down, and on hearing of the missing articles, it added not a little to her former state of nervousness.

“O, George, I cannot stay here! I cannot stay in this house another night,” and she sank upon a chair and sobbed hysterically.

Some of the neighbors came in after breakfast, to whom the story was told, of the mysterious bell-ringing and the missing articles. One said, some one must have been concealed in the house; another had not a doubt but it was spiritual manifestations; but Mrs. Sherman could not but wonder what use spirits could have for spoons and forks. But all were puzzled and could come to no final solution of the mystery. Mr. Sherman asked himself a hundred questions. Could there be any one concealed in the house? and if so, could that person have rung the bell? for it was certain the bell was rung by no person outside; and then again, could a person concealed, ring the bell, the wire merely passing through the entry into the kitchen? This was preposterous. Could it have been rung without material agency? He believed not. As he was thus sitting in his study, he heard his wife’s step as she passed through the entry to her chamber, she was going to get the babe to sleep. The house was silent save occasionally the sound of Bridget’s footsteps as she pursued her work below stairs. As he sat thus, thinking what could be the cause of all this mystery, he began to feel himself yielding to the influence of sleep, when suddenly loud and long rung the bell, and almost simultaneously came a shriek from his wife’s apartment. He started up and rushed to her chamber; she was pale with fright.

“O, George,” said she, “what can this mean?”

“Be calm,” said he, “I will go and see.”

At this instant Bridget rushed up stairs.

“The blessed virgin protect me, but I cannot stay in this house another night!”

“Nonsense,” said Mr. Sherman, who saw that his wife was growing paler and paler every minute, “what is going to hurt you? You needn’t go to the door, and if robbers come, they cannot carry us off bodily.”

So saying, Mr. Sherman went down and opened the door, and behold a form of flesh and blood stood before him.

“Ah, Sherman, how do you do?”

“Glad to see you, doctor, will you walk in?”

The gentleman proved to be the family physician; a small, brisk man, who carried a little cane, with which he was in the habit of giving vigorous little strokes or thrusts to himself, or anything which came in his way. He had bright, twinkling eyes, which danced from object to object, with the rapidity of thought; he had a quick, nervous way of talking; his hands were never still, his eyes were never quiet; he never sat more than five minutes in a place; he was the spirit of unrest and nervousness. Just the one to delight in a little mystery for the mere sake of ferreting it out.

He followed Mr. Sherman into the parlor and took a chair, then suddenly jumped up again. With a little stroke of his cane upon his left leg, he said:

“I heard that something mysterious had happened in your house—bells ringing without hands and spoons disappearing—is it so?” And down went the little cane upon the other leg, as he whirled completely round and faced Mr. Sherman.

“Something of the kind has happened,” said Mr. Sherman.

“Ah,” said he, rubbing his hands nervously, and walking back and forth in the room, “tell me about it.” And he sat himself desperately into a chair, and fell to tapping his boot with his cane.

Mr. Sherman related the case in as few words as possible, and when he finished, the little man jumped from his chair and rushed to the front door.

“Let me see,” said he, and his eyes sought the bell-wire. “Ah, it goes right along the ceiling, through the entry into the kitchen, all in plain sight, no chance for that, I see. I didn’t know,” said he, to Mr. Sherman, “but I could explain it. I heard your bell rung without hands—I thought I might explain it—I know of a case once, where the bell kept ringing mysteriously—folks got frightened half to death—wife got nervous—husband grew desperate, threatened to desert the house—I called in—I traced the bell-wire—it was carried through the ceiling, where the rats in

their peregrinations had got hold of it, and caused all the fright—did not know but this might be so here; but it cannot be.”

“Even if rats had rung the bell,” said Mr. Sherman, “they would not have been very likely to have carried off the spoons and forks.”

“No, no,” said he, shaking his head, “it was not rats, that’s certain. I understand your wife is very uneasy about these things.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Sherman.

At this moment Mrs. Sherman entered the room.

“Ah, madam,” said the little man, going forward to meet her, “happy to see you—sorry that you have such cause for alarm—very strange, very strange—but it will all come clear in time, you may depend; don’t think it is spirits, or any of that nonsense. Little ones all well?” said he, abruptly.

Mrs. Sherman said they were.

“You are a little alarmed, I see—not to be wondered at with your nervous temperament—I would advise you to take aconite alternate with belladonna; you have that medicine, I presume? I have some patients to visit now; I will be back again soon.” And the doctor hurried away.

When dinner was prepared Mrs. Sherman was scarcely able to eat.

“I don’t think, George, I shall be able to stay in the house to-night. I am dreadfully nervous.”

“I think,” said her husband, “that after tea you had better take the children and go into Mrs. C—’s and spend the night.”

This was agreed upon, and Mrs. Sherman took the children and went up stairs while Mr. Sherman, taking a book, went into the parlor. He laid down on sofa and was fast asleep when his wife came in.

“George,” whispered she, “I think Bridget is preparing to leave, for she came into my chamber, and the poor girl was dreadfully frightened, and said that for all the world she could not stay in the house another night. I told her I could not possibly spare her, she must not go. But she persisted, saying there were spirits about the house, she knew. She was sorry to leave me and the children, but she must go.”

Mr. Sherman started up, and as he was going up stairs he met Bridget coming down, all dressed for her departure.

“Where are you going, Bridget?” said he.

“To my sister’s, sir,” said she.

“Not to-night?” said he.

“Yes, sir, I cannot stay in the house where there are such strange doings.”

“Pooh, Bridget, go up stairs and take off your things, we cannot spare you; Mrs. Sherman is [very nervous and wants you to help to take care of] the children.”

“And indeed, haven’t I nerves too?” said she, “and I cannot stay in the house another night.”

“You needn’t stay in the house to-night, you can go with Mrs. Sherman. I shall watch here so that your things will be perfectly safe.”

Bridget looked sullen and displeased; however, she went up stairs, took off her bonnet and came down to the kitchen, where she was sitting moodily by the window, when the little doctor came in.

“And how do you do, Bridget? I thought I would come in this way, so as not to disturb Mr. and Mrs. Sherman. Has the bell rung much to-day?”

“Ah yes, sir, it is ringing all the time.”

“And what do you suppose, Bridget,” and he came up close to her, “what do you suppose is the cause of all this?”

“I am sure I cannot tell, sir.”

“It frightens you a little, Bridget, doesn’t it?”

“Ah, sir, and the life is scared almost out of me; and do you think it is the spirits, the same as the ladies tell about, that tips the tables and upsets chairs?”

“I don’t know, Bridget, but if spirits, they must be very bad ones. Is Mr. Sherman at home?”

“Yes, sir, he is.”

“Will you call him?”

Bridget left the room. No sooner had she done than the little doctor jumping into a chair, succeeded in securing a small piece of wire with a feather attached, to the tongue of the bell; after doing this he walked very quickly into the parlor, and was sitting there when Mr. Sherman, Mrs. Sherman and the children came in. They were talking very earnestly, when suddenly the bell was rung loud and long. They looked at each other a moment, then Mr. Sherman started for the door, followed by Mrs. Sherman and the children. The door was opened, no one was there. But where was the doctor? At the first alarm he had started for the kitchen where he found

Bridget standing in the middle of the room in a terrible state of alarm. He scarcely heeded her, but taking up the broom which stood in the corner of the kitchen, carried it into the parlor. Looking very attentively at this article of household labor, he pulled therefore a small feather which he held between his thumb and finger with a very significant look. As his quick eye glanced over the group just returned to the room, he saw that Mrs. Sherman was very pale. He stepped to the kitchen door, "Bridget," said he, "bring a glass of water, your mistress is faint." He was still holding the broom in one hand, the little feather in the other, when she entered.

Mr. Sherman took the glass from her hand, and as she turned to leave the room:

"Bridget," said the doctor, "stop a moment." She obeyed.

"Bridget," said he, "I think you must know more about this bell-ringing than any one else, for it rings only when you are in the kitchen. What say, Bridget?" But Bridget said nothing.

"Without this broom I think you will be hardly able to go on with your operations, and as the amusement must be rather stale by this time, perhaps it would be as well to defer any more manifestations of your skill in this line; all that remains for you now, is to bring forward the missing articles."

Without a word of reply, but with the strongest indignation in her countenance and manner, the girl turned and left the room.

"Why doctor," said Mrs. Sherman, "why do you accuse Bridget of all this trouble?"

"My dear madam," said the doctor, walking briskly up to her, "listen for a moment, and I will convince you. I knew that the bell would never ring without material agency, so I cast about me to think what it could be—I thought of Bridget—I determined to test her—I took a small piece of wire which I succeeded in securing to the bell, to this I attached a feather in such a manner that the least touch would brush it off. Soon the bell rings—the door is opened—no one is there—I go out into the kitchen—take up the broom standing in the corner—behold, there is the very feather which I attached to the bell—you perceive, madam, the inference I draw from all this?"

"But why should she do all this?"

"That is more than I know. I merely deal in facts. Has she been with you long?"

"Some weeks, and we like her very much."

"It would be well to search her trunk, as no doubt she will be packing off as soon as possible."

"I think, doctor, you must be mistaken. I don't think Bridget could be guilty, for she has been as alarmed as any of us."

"Can't help it, madam; but I am convinced that no stronger agency has been at work, than this simple broom."

“But what possible benefit could this be to her, she will only lose her place thereby.”

“But you forget, my dear madam, that she did not intend being found out.”

“You are very hard, doctor,” said the kindhearted lady. “I think you will yet find she is innocent.”

Mr. Sherman who had been absent from the room, now entered.

“I have, by Bridget’s request, searched her trunks and found nothing to confirm my suspicions, and she loudly protests her innocence.”

Mrs. Sherman looked at the doctor with a triumphant air.

“I cannot help that,” said the imperturbable doctor; “the bell-ringing and the robbery are by some means connected. Call Bridget, if you please.”

Bridget was called, but as she came down the back stairs, the doctor stepped up the front. He went into her chamber, looked into her closet, it was empty, every article was in her trunk. He pulled the clothes from the bed—the mattress from the beadstead—but found nothing—with his little cane he gave vigorous strokes to the featherbed, but nothing rewarded his search, and he stood for a few minutes as if nonplussed. Then he took up a pillow—pulled off the case—examined the ends very carefully—something attracted his keen eye—he squeezed the feathers in his hand—he pulled out his penknife and ripped open the end—out came the feathers—out came also the silver spoons and forks—open came the other pillow, and out came more missing articles. He went to the stairs and called for Mr. Sherman; up came the gentleman and his wife.

“Look at here!” said the doctor, pointing to the feathers, spoons and forks, laying about the floor. “What do you think now, madam?”

Mrs. Sherman said nothing, but rushed the door and screamed, “Bridget! Bridget!”

Bridget came, gave one look at the room and its contents, and stood as immovable as a statue.

“Do you know anything of all this, Bridget?”

“No, ma’am,” said she.

“Have you any idea how all those things came into your pillows? Own the truth, Bridget and we will try and forgive you.”

“I know nothing about them, ma’am”

“How can you say so, Bridget?” said Mrs. Sherman, the tears standing in her eyes.



“Why should I have done this, ma’am? What did I want of your spoons and forks? It’s enough to have one’s life frightened out of them by such doings. If I ever get out of this horrid house, sure and I’ll never set foot in it again.”

“But how came these things in your pillows, Bridget?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” and she persisted in her innocence, and left the house that very night taking all her effects with her; for Mrs. Sherman was so kind-hearted that she would not give her consent for her husband to pursue any vigorous measures against her, although circumstances went so much towards proving her guilt. Mrs. Sherman’s shattered nerves gradually recovered their tone, the family quiet was restored, and whether Bridget was guilty or no, certain it is there was no mysterious bell-rings after her departure, and the silver was never after found stowed away in the pillows.

Some months after these strange occurrences, as Mr. and Mrs. Sherman were sitting together, the doctor came in holding a paper in his hand, and in his usual abrupt manner began:

“My dear madam, I have a paragraph I wish to read: “Bridget McCarthy was brought before the Police Court, charged with taking spoons and other valuable articles, from the family with whom she was at service. The court brought her in guilty, and sent her to House of Correction for three years.””

Mrs. Sherman’s work dropped from her hands. “Poor girl, I was in hopes that her experience here would have been a lesson to her. What can induce her to pursue such a course?”

“I suppose,” said the doctor, with a very wise look, “it is the infirmity of her nature. I have heard of many cases of a similar character. In low life this disease is called the depravity of the heart—vicious propensity—in high life, it is treated with much more lenity, and is called monomania—a morbid state of mind—and is considered more a misfortune than a fault; but it is my opinion that the disease is the same in both cases, and that a strict system of diet, and some wholesome restraint is necessary for the good of the patient; and even then, the disease often baffles all the skill and tact of the physician. I hope that poor Bridget’s medical attendant will be successful in arresting the progress of her disease, for it is one of those complaints for which I am sorry to say homœopathy has no specific.”

*Flag of Our Union*, Oct 11, 1856