

INTRODUCTION

These stories may be looked at from two standpoints (and no doubt the standpoint the reader chooses will be dictated by personal taste and previous knowledge of the subject under discussion). They may be regarded as fiction, designed, like the conversation of the Fat Boy recorded in *The Pickwick Papers*, ‘to make your flesh creep,’ or they may be considered to be what they actually are, studies in little-known aspects of psychology put in the form of fiction because, if published as a serious contribution to science they would have no chance of a hearing.

It may not unreasonably be asked what motive anyone could have for securing a hearing for such histories as are set forth in these tales, beyond the not unreasonable interest in the royalties that usually fall to the lot of those who cater for the popular taste in horrors; I would ask my readers, however, to credit me with another motive than the purely commercial. I was one of the earliest students of psychoanalysis in this country, and I found, in the course of my studies, that the ends of a number of threads were put into my hands, but that the threads disappeared into the darkness that surrounded the small circle of light thrown by exact scientific knowledge. It was in following these threads out into the darkness of the Unknown that I came upon the experiences and cases which, turned into fiction, are set down in these pages.

I do not wish to imply by that, however, that these stories all happened exactly as set down, for such is not the case; they are, however, all founded on fact, and there is not a single incident herein contained which is pure imagination. That is to say, while no picture is an actual photograph, not one is an imaginary sketch; they are rather composite photographs, obtained by cutting out and piecing together innumerable snapshots of actual happenings, and the whole, far from being an arbitrary product of the imagination, is a serious study in the psychology of ultra-consciousness.

I present these studies in super-normal pathology to the general reader because it has been my experience that such cases as I chronicle here are by no manner of means as uncommon as might be supposed, but, being unrecognized, pass unhelped. I have personally come across several instances of the Power House, some of which are well known to the members of the different coteries who are interested in these matters; 'Blood Lust' is literally true, and both these stories, far from being written up for the purposes of fiction, have been toned down to make them fit for print.

'Dr. Taverner' will no doubt be recognized by some of my readers; his mysterious nursing home was an actual fact, and infinitely stranger than any fiction could possibly be. To 'Dr. Taverner' I owe the greatest debt of my life; without 'Dr. Taverner' there would have been no 'Dion Fortune,' and to him I offer the tribute of these pages.

—*Dion Fortune*

BLOOD LUST

I

I have never been able to make up my mind whether Dr. Taverner should be the hero or the villain of these histories. That he was a man of the most selfless ideals could not be questioned, but in his methods of putting these ideals into practice he was absolutely unscrupulous. He did not evade the law, he merely ignored it, and though the exquisite tenderness with which he handled his cases was an education in itself, yet he would use that wonderful psychological method of his to break a soul to pieces, going to work as quietly and methodically and benevolently as if bent upon the cure of his patient. The manner of my meeting with this strange man was quite simple. After being gazetted out of the Royal Army Medical Corps. I went to a medical agency and inquired what posts were available.

I said: 'I have come out of the Army with my nerves shattered. I want some quiet place till I can pull myself together.'

'So does everybody else,' said the clerk.

He looked at me thoughtfully. 'I wonder whether you would care to try a place we have had on our books for some time. We have sent several men down to it but none of them would stop.'

He sent me round to one of the tributaries of Harley Street, and there I made the acquaintance of the man who, whether he

was good or bad, I have always regarded as the greatest mind I ever met.

Tall and thin, with a parchment-like countenance, he might have been any age from 35 to 65. I have seen him look both ages within the hour. He lost no time in coming to the point.

‘I want a medical superintendent for my nursing home,’ he told me. ‘I understand that you have specialized, as far as the Army permitted you to, in mental cases. I am afraid you will find my methods very different from the orthodox ones. However, as I sometimes succeed where others fail, I consider I am justified in continuing to experiment, which I think, Dr. Rhodes, is all any of my colleagues can claim to do.’

The man’s cynical manner annoyed me, though I could not deny that mental treatment is not an exact science at the present moment. As if in answer to my thought he continued:

‘My chief interest lies in those regions of psychology which orthodox science has not as yet ventured to explore. If you will work with me you will see some queer things, but all I ask of you is, that you should keep an open mind and a shut mouth.’

This I undertook to do, for, although I shrank instinctively from the man, yet there was about him such a curious attraction, such a sense of power and adventurous research, that I determined at least to give him the benefit of the doubt and see what it might lead to. His extraordinarily stimulating personality, which seemed to key my brain to concert pitch, made me feel that he might be a good tonic for a man who had lost his grip on life for the time being.

‘Unless you have elaborate packing to do,’ he said, ‘I can motor you down to my place. If you will walk over with me to the garage I will drive you round to your lodgings, pick up your things, and we shall get in before dark.’

We drove at a pretty high speed down the Portsmouth road till we came to Thursley, and, then, to my surprise, my companion turned off to the right and took the big car by a cart track over the heather.

‘This is Thor’s Ley or field,’ he said, as the blighted country unrolled before us. ‘The old worship is still kept up about here.’

‘The Catholic faith?’ I inquired.

‘The Catholic faith, my dear sir, is an innovation. I was referring to the pagan worship. The peasants about here still retain bits of the old ritual; they think that it brings them luck, or some such superstition. They have no knowledge of its inner meaning.’ He paused a moment, and then turned to me and said with extraordinary emphasis: ‘Have you ever thought what it would mean if a man who had the Knowledge could piece that ritual together?’

I admitted I had not. I was frankly out of my depth, but he had certainly brought me to the most unchristian spot I had ever been in my life.

His nursing home, however, was in delightful contrast to the wild and barren country that surrounded it. The garden was a mass of colour, and the house, old and rambling and covered with creepers, as charming within as without; it reminded me of the East, it reminded me of the Renaissance, and yet it had no style save that of warm rich colouring and comfort.

I soon settled down to my job, which I found exceedingly interesting. As I have already said, Taverner’s work began where ordinary medicine ended, and I have under my care cases such as the ordinary doctor would have referred to the safe keeping of an asylum, as being nothing else but mad. Yet Taverner, by his peculiar methods of work, laid bare causes operating both within the soul and in the shadowy realm where the soul has its dwelling, that threw an entirely new light upon the problem, and often enabled him to rescue a man from the dark influences that were closing in upon him. The affair of the sheep-killing was an interesting example of his methods.

II

One showery afternoon at the nursing home we had a call from a neighbor—not a very common occurrence, for Taverner and his ways were regarded somewhat askance. Our visitor shed her

dripping mackintosh, but declined to loosen the scarf which, warm as the day was, she had twisted tightly round her neck.

‘I believe you specialize in mental cases,’ she said to my colleague. ‘I should very much like to talk over with you a matter that is troubling me.’

Taverner nodded, his keen eyes watching her for symptoms.

‘It concerns a friend of mine—in fact, I think I may call him my *fiancé*, for, although he has asked me to release him from his engagement, I have refused to do so; not because I should wish to hold a man who no longer loved me, but because I am convinced that he still cares for me, and there is something which has come between us that he will not tell me of.

‘I have begged him to be frank with me and let us share the trouble together, for the thing that seems an insuperable obstacle to him may not appear in that light to me; but you know what men are when they consider their honour is in question.’ She looked from one to the other of us smiling. No woman ever believes that her men folk are grown up; perhaps she is right. Then she leant forward and clasped her hands eagerly. ‘I believe I have found the key to the mystery. I want you to tell me whether it is possible or not.’

‘Will you give me particulars?’ said Taverner.

Clearly and concisely she gave us what was required.

‘We got engaged while Donald was stationed here for his training (that would be nearly five years ago now), and there was always the most perfect harmony between us until he came out of the Army, when we all began to notice a change in him. He came to the house as often as ever, but he always seemed to want to avoid being alone with me. We used to take long walks over the moors together, but he has absolutely refused to do this recently. Then, without any warning, he wrote and told me he could not marry me and did not wish to see me again, and he put a curious thing in his letter. He said: “Even if I should come to you and ask you to see me, I beg you not to do it.”

‘My people thought he had got entangled with some other girl, and were furious with him for jilting me, but I believe

there is something more in it than that. I wrote to him, but could get no answer, and I had come to the conclusion that I must try and put the whole thing out of my life, when he suddenly turned up again. Now, this is where the queer part comes in.

‘We heard the fowls shrieking one night, and thought a fox was after them. My brothers turned out armed with golf clubs, and I went too. When we got to the hen-house we found several fowl with their throats torn as if a rat had been at them; but the boys discovered that the hen-house door had been forced open, a thing no rat could do. They said a gipsy must have been trying to steal the birds, and told me to go back to the house. I was returning by way of the shrubberies when someone suddenly stepped out in front of me. It was quite light, for the moon was nearly full, and I recognized Donald. He held out his arms and I went to him, but, instead of kissing me, he suddenly bent his head and—look!’

She drew her scarf from her neck and showed us a semicircle of little blue marks on the skin just under the ear, the unmistakable print of human teeth.

‘He was after the jugular,’ said Taverner, ‘lucky for you he did not break the skin.’

‘I said to him: “Donald, what are you doing?” My voice seemed to bring him to himself, and he let me go and tore off through the bushes. The boys chased him but did not catch him, and we have never seen him since.’

‘You have informed the police, I suppose?’ said Taverner.

‘Father told them someone had tried to rob the hen-roost, but they do not know who it was. You see, I did not tell them I had seen Donald.’

‘And you walk about the moors by yourself, knowing that he may be lurking in the neighbourhood?’

She nodded.

‘I should advise you not to, Miss Wynter; the man is probably exceedingly dangerous, especially to you. We will send you back in the car.’

‘You think he has gone mad? That is exactly what I think. I believe he knew he was going mad, and that was why he broke off our engagement. Dr. Taverner, is there nothing that can be done for him? It seems to me that Donald is not mad in the ordinary way. We had a housemaid once who went off her head, and the whole of her seemed to be insane, if you can understand; but with Donald it seems as if only a little bit of him were crazy, as if his insanity were outside himself. Can you grasp what I mean?’

‘It seems to me you have given a very clear description of a case of psychic interference—what was known in scriptural days as “being possessed by a devil,”’ said Taverner.

‘Can you do anything for him?’ the girl inquired eagerly.

‘I may be able to do a good deal if you can get him to come to me.’

On our next day at the Harley Street consulting-room we found that the butler had booked an appointment for a Captain Donald Craigie. We discovered him to be a personality of singular charm—one of those highly-strung, imaginative men who have the makings of an artist in them. In his normal state he must have been a delightful companion, but as he faced us across the consulting-room desk he was a man under a cloud.

‘I may as well make a clean breast of this matter,’ he said. ‘I suppose Beryl told you about their chickens?’

‘She told us that you tried to bite her.’

‘Did she tell you I bit the chickens?’

‘No.’

‘Well, I did.’

Silence fell for a moment. Then Taverner broke it.

‘When did this trouble first start?’

‘After I got shell shock. I was blown right out of a trench, and it shook me up pretty badly. I thought I had got off lightly, for I was only in hospital about 10 days, but I suppose this is the aftermath.’

‘Are you one of those people who have a horror of blood?’

‘Not especially so. I didn’t like it, but I could put up with it. We had to get used to it in the trenches; someone was always getting wounded, even in the quietest times.’

‘And killed,’ put in Taverner.

‘Yes, and killed,’ said our patient.

‘So you developed a blood hunger?’

‘That’s about it.’

‘Underdone meat and all the rest of it, I suppose?’

‘No, that is no use to me. It seems a horrible thing to say, but it is fresh blood that attracts me, blood as it comes from the veins of my victim.’

‘Ah!’ said Taverner. ‘That puts a different complexion on the case.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought it could have been much blacker.’

‘On the contrary, what you have just told me renders the outlook much more hopeful. You have not so much a blood lust, which might well be an effect of the subconscious mind, as a vitality hunger which is quite a different matter.’

Craigie looked up quickly. ‘That’s exactly it. I have never been able to put it into words before, but you have hit the nail on the head.’

I saw that my colleague’s perspicacity had given him great confidence.

‘I should like you to come down to my nursing home for a time and be under my personal observation,’ said Taverner.

‘I should like to very much, but I think there is something further you ought to know before I do so. This thing has begun to affect my character. At first it seemed something outside myself, but now I am responding to it, almost helping, and trying to find out ways of gratifying it without getting myself into trouble. That is why I went for the hens when I came down to the Wynters’ house. I was afraid I should lose my self-control and go for Beryl. I did in the end, as it happened, so it was not much use. In fact I think it did more harm than good, for I seemed to get into much closer touch with “It” after I had yielded to the impulse. I know that the best thing I could do would be to do away with

myself, but I daren't. I feel that after I am dead I should have to meet—whatever it is—face to face.'

'You should not be afraid to come down to the nursing home,' said Taverner. 'We will look after you.'

After he had gone Taverner said to me: 'Have you ever heard of vampires, Rhodes?'

'Yes, rather,' I said. 'I used to read myself to sleep with *Dracula* once when I had a spell of insomnia.'

'That,' nodding his head in the direction of the departing man, 'is a singularly good specimen.'

'Do you mean to say you are going to take a revolting case like that down to Hindhead?'

'Not revolting, Rhodes, a soul in a dungeon. The soul may not be very savoury, but it is a fellow creature. Let it out and it will soon clean itself.'

I often used to marvel at the wonderful tolerance and compassion Taverner had for erring humanity.

'The more you see of human nature,' he said to me once, 'the less you feel inclined to condemn it, for you realize how hard it has struggled. No one does wrong because he likes it, but because it is the lesser of the two evils.'

III

A couple of days later I was called out of the nursing home office to receive a new patient. It was Craigie. He had got as far as the doormat, and there he had stuck. He seemed so thoroughly ashamed of himself that I had not the heart to administer the judicious bullying which is usual under such circumstances.

'I feel as if I were driving a baulking horse,' he said. 'I want to come in, but I can't.'

I called Taverner and the sight of him seemed to relieve our patient.

'Ah,' he said, 'you give me confidence. I feel that I can defy "It,"' and he squared his shoulders and crossed the threshold. Once

inside, a weight seemed lifted from his mind, and he settled down quite happily to the routine of the place. Beryl Wynter used to walk over almost every afternoon, unknown to her family, and cheer him up; in fact he seemed on the high road to recovery.

One morning I was strolling round the grounds with the head gardener, planning certain small improvements, when he made a remark to me which I had reason to remember later.

‘You would think all the German prisoners should have been returned by now, wouldn’t you, sir? But they haven’t. I passed one the other night in the lane outside the back door. I never thought that I should see their filthy field-grey again.’

I sympathized with his antipathy; he had been a prisoner in their hands, and the memory was not one to fade.

I thought no more of his remarks, but a few days later I was reminded of it when one of our patients came to me and said:

‘Dr. Rhodes, I think you are exceedingly unpatriotic to employ German prisoners in the garden when so many discharged soldiers cannot get work.’

I assured her that we did not do so, no German being likely to survive a day’s work under the superintendence of our ex-prisoner head gardener.

‘But I distinctly saw the man going round the greenhouses at shutting-up time last night,’ she declared. ‘I recognized him by his flat cap and grey uniform.’

I mentioned this to Taverner.

‘Tell Craigie he is on no account to go out after sundown,’ he said, ‘and tell Miss Wynter she had better keep away for the present.’

A night or two later, as I was strolling round the grounds smoking an after-dinner cigarette, I met Craigie hurrying through the shrubbery.

‘You will have Dr. Taverner on your trail,’ I called after him.

‘I missed the post-bag,’ he replied, ‘and I am going down to the pillar-box.’

Next evening I again found Craigie in the grounds after dark. I bore down on him.

‘Look here, Craigie,’ I said, ‘if you come to this place you must keep the rules, and Dr. Taverner wants you to stay indoors after sundown.’

Craigie bared his teeth and snarled at me like a dog. I took him by the arm and marched him into the house and reported the incident to Taverner.

‘The creature has re-established its influence over him,’ he said. ‘We cannot evidently starve it out of existence by keeping it away from him; we shall have to use other methods. Where is Craigie at the present moment?’

‘Playing the piano in the drawing-room,’ I replied.

‘Then we will go up to his room and unseal it.’

As I followed Taverner upstairs he said to me: ‘Did it ever occur to you to wonder why Craigie jibbed on the doorstep?’

‘I paid no attention,’ I said. ‘Such a thing is common enough with mental cases.’

‘There is a sphere of influence, a kind of psychic bell jar, over this house to keep out evil entities, what might in popular language be called a “spell.” Craigie’s familiar could not come inside, and did not like being left behind. I thought we might be able to tire it out by keeping Craigie away from its influences, but it has got too strong a hold over him, and he deliberately co-operates with it. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and you can’t keep company with a thing like that and not be tainted, especially if you are a sensitive Celt like Craigie.’

When we reached the room Taverner went over to the window and passed his hand across the sill, as if sweeping something aside.

‘There,’ he said. ‘It can come in now and fetch him out, and we will see what it does.’

At the doorway he paused again and made a sign on the lintel.

‘I don’t think it will pass that,’ he said.

When I returned to the office I found the village policeman waiting to see me.

‘I should be glad if you would keep an eye on your dog, sir,’ he said. ‘We have been having complaints of sheep-killing

lately, and whatever animal is doing it is working in a three-mile radius with this as the centre.’

‘Our dog is an Airedale,’ I said. ‘I should not think he is likely to be guilty. It is usually collies that take to sheep-killing.’

At 11 o’clock we turned out the lights and herded our patients off to bed. At Taverner’s request I changed into an old suit and rubber-soled tennis shoes and joined him in the smoking-room, which was under Craigie’s bedroom. We sat in the darkness awaiting events.

‘I don’t want you to do anything,’ said Taverner, ‘but just to follow and see what happens.’

We had not long to wait. In about a quarter-of-an-hour we heard a rustling in the creepers, and down came Craigie hand over fist, swinging himself along by the great ropes of wisteria that clothed the wall. As he disappeared into the shrubbery I slipped after him, keeping in the shadow of the house.

He moved at a stealthy dog-trot over the heather paths towards Frensham.

At first I ran and ducked, taking advantage of every patch of shadow, but presently I saw that this caution was unnecessary. Craigie was absorbed in his own affairs, and thereupon I drew closer to him, following at a distance of some 60 yards.

He moved at a swinging pace, a kind of loping trot that put me in mind of a blood-hound. The wide, empty levels of that forsaken country stretched out on either side of us, belts of mist filled the hollows, and the heights of Hindhead stood out against the stars. I felt no nervousness; man for man, I reckoned I was a match for Craigie, and, in addition, I was armed with what is technically known as a ‘soother’—two feet of lead gas-piping inserted in a length of rubber hose-pipe. It is not included in the official equipment of the best asylums, but can frequently be found in a keeper’s trouser-leg.

If I had known what I had to deal with I should not have put so much reliance on my ‘soother.’ Ignorance is sometimes an excellent substitute for courage.

Suddenly out of the heather ahead of us a sheep got up, and then the chase began. Away went Craigie in pursuit, and away

went the terrified wether. A sheep can move remarkably fast for a short distance, but the poor wool-encumbered beast could not keep pace, and Craigie ran it down, working in gradually lessening circles. It stumbled, went to its knees, and he was on it. He pulled its head back, and whether he used a knife or not I could not see, for a cloud passed over the moon, but dimly luminous in the shadow, I saw something that was semitransparent pass between me and the dark, struggling mass among the heather. As the moon cleared the clouds I made out the flat-topped cap and field-grey uniform of the German Army.

I cannot possibly convey the sickening horror of that sight—the creature that was not a man assisting the man who, for the moment, was not human.

Gradually the sheep's struggles weakened and ceased. Craigie straightened his back and stood up; then he set off at his steady lope towards the east, his grey familiar at his heels.

How I made the homeward journey I do not know. I dared not look behind lest I should find a Presence at my elbow; every breath of wind that blew across the heather seemed to be cold fingers on my throat; fir trees reached out long arms to clutch me as I passed under them, and heather bushes rose up and assumed human shapes. I moved like a runner in a nightmare, making prodigious efforts after a receding goal.

At last I tore across the moonlit lawns of the house, regardless who might be looking from the windows, burst into the smoking-room and flung myself face downwards on the sofa.

IV

'Tut, tut!' said Taverner. 'Has it been as bad as all that?'

I could not tell him what I had seen, but he seemed to know.

'Which way did Craigie go after he left you?' he asked.

'Towards the moonrise,' I told him.

'And you were on the way to Frensham? He is heading for the Wynters' house. This is very serious, Rhodes. We must go after him; it may be too late as it is. Do you feel equal to coming with me?'

He gave me a stiff glass of brandy, and we went to get the car out of the garage. In Taverner's company I felt secure. I could understand the confidence he inspired in his patients. Whatever that grey shadow might be, I felt he could deal with it and that I would be safe in his hands.

We were not long in approaching our destination.

'I think we will leave the car here,' said Taverner, turning into a grass-grown lane. 'We do not want to rouse them if we can help it.'

We moved cautiously over the dew-soaked grass into the paddock that bounded one side of the Wynters' garden. It was separated from the lawn by a sunk fence, and we could command the whole front of the house and easily gain the terrace if we so desired. In the shadow of a rose pergola we paused. The great trusses of bloom, colourless in the moonlight, seemed a ghastly mockery of our business.

For some time we waited, and then a movement caught my eye.

Out in the meadow behind us something was moving at a slow lope; it followed a wide arc, of which the house formed the focus, and disappeared into a little coppice on the left. It might have been imagination, but I thought I saw a wisp of mist at its heels.

We remained where we were, and presently he came round once more, this time moving in a smaller circle—evidently closing in upon the house. The third time he reappeared more quickly, and this time he was between us and the terrace.

'Quick! Head him off,' whispered Taverner. 'He will be up the creepers next round.'

We scrambled up the sunk fence and dashed across the lawn. As we did so a girl's figure appeared at one of the windows; it was Beryl Wynter. Taverner, plainly visible in the moonlight, laid his finger on his lips and beckoned her to come down.

'I am going to do a very risky thing,' he whispered, 'but she is a girl of courage, and if her nerve does not fail we shall be able to pull it off.'

In a few seconds she slipped out of a side door and joined us, a cloak over her night-dress.

‘Are you prepared to undertake an exceedingly unpleasant task?’ Taverner asked her. ‘I can guarantee you will be perfectly safe so long as you keep your head, but if you lose your nerve you will be in grave danger.’

‘Is it to do with Donald?’ she inquired.

‘It is,’ said Taverner. ‘I hope to be able to rid him of the thing that is overshadowing him and trying to obsess him.’

‘I have seen it,’ she said; ‘it is like a wisp of grey vapour that floats just behind him. It has the most awful face you ever saw. It came up to the window last night, just the face only, while Donald was going round and round the house.’

‘What did you do?’ asked Taverner.

‘I didn’t do anything. I was afraid that if someone found him he might be put in an asylum, and then we should have no chance of getting him well.’

Taverner nodded.

“Perfect love casteth out fear,” he said. ‘You can do the thing that is required of you.’

He placed Miss Wynter on the terrace in full moonlight.

‘As soon as Craigie sees you,’ he said, ‘retreat round the corner of the house into the yard. Rhodes and I will wait for you there.’

A narrow doorway led from the terrace to the back premises, and just inside its arch Taverner bade me take my stand.

‘Pinion him as he comes past you and hang on for your life,’ he said. ‘Only mind he doesn’t get his teeth into you; these things are infectious.’

We had hardly taken up our positions when we heard the loping trot come round once more, this time on the terrace itself. Evidently he caught sight of Miss Wynter, for the stealthy padding changed to a wild scurry over the gravel, and the girl slipped quickly through the archway and sought refuge behind Taverner. Right on her heels came Craigie. Another yard and he would have had her, but I caught him by the elbows and pinioned him securely. For a moment we swayed and struggled across the dew-drenched flagstones, but I locked him in an old wrestling grip and held him.

‘Now,’ said Taverner, ‘if you will keep hold of Craigie I will deal with the other. But first of all we must get it away from him, otherwise it will retreat on to him, and he may die of shock. Now, Miss Wynter, are you prepared to play your part?’

‘I am prepared to do whatever is necessary,’ she replied.

Taverner took a scalpel out of a pocket case and made a small incision in the skin of her neck, just under the ear. A drop of blood slowly gathered, showing black in the moonlight.

‘That is the bait,’ he said. ‘Now go close up to Craigie and entice the creature away; get it to follow you and draw it out into the open.’

As she approached us Craigie plunged and struggled in my arms like a wild beast, and then something grey and shadowy drew out of the gloom of the wall and hovered for a moment at my elbow. Miss Wynter came nearer, walking almost into it.

‘Don’t go too close,’ cried Taverner, and she paused.

Then the grey shape seemed to make up its mind; it drew clear of Craigie and advanced towards her. She retreated towards Taverner, and the Thing came out into the moonlight. We could see it quite clearly from its flat-topped cap to its knee-boots; its high cheek-bones and slit eyes pointed its origin to the south-eastern corner of Europe where strange tribes still defy civilization and keep up their still stranger beliefs.

The shadowy form drifted onwards, following the girl across the yard, and when it was some 20 feet from Craigie, Taverner stepped out quickly behind it, cutting off its retreat. Round it came in a moment, instantly conscious of his presence, and then began a game of ‘puss-in-the-corner.’ Taverner was trying to drive it into a kind of psychic killing-pen he had made for its reception. Invisible to me, the lines of psychic force which bounded it were evidently plainly perceptible to the creature we were hunting. This way and that way it slid in its efforts to escape, but Taverner all the time herded it towards the apex of the invisible triangle, where he could give it its *coup de grâce*.

Then the end came. Taverner leapt forward. There was a Sign then a Sound. The grey form commenced to spin like a top. Faster and

faster it went, its outlines merging into a whirling spiral of mist; then it broke. Out into space went the particles that had composed its form, and with the almost soundless shriek of supreme speed the soul went to its appointed place.

Then something seemed to lift. From a cold hell of limitless horror the flagged space became a normal backyard, the trees ceased to be tentacled menaces, the gloom of the wall was no longer an ambushade, and I knew that never again would a grey shadow drift out of the darkness upon its horrible hunting.

I released Craigie, who collapsed in a heap at my feet: Miss Wynter went to rouse her father, while Taverner and I got the insensible man into the house.



What masterly lies Taverner told to the family I have never known, but a couple of months later we received instead of the conventional fragment of wedding cake, a really substantial chunk, with a note from the bride to say it was to go in the office cupboard, where she knew we kept provisions for those nocturnal meals that Taverner's peculiar habits imposed upon us.

It was during one of these midnight repasts that I questioned Taverner about the strange matter of Craigie and his familiar. For a long time I had not been able to refer to it; the memory of that horrible sheep-killing was a thing that would not bear recalling.

'You have heard of vampires,' said Taverner. 'That was a typical case. For close on 100 years they have been practically unknown in Europe—Western Europe that is—but the War has caused a renewed outbreak, and quite a number of cases have been reported.

'When they were first observed—that is to say, when some wretched lad was caught attacking the wounded, they took him behind the lines and shot him, which is not a satisfactory way of dealing with a vampire, unless you also go to the trouble of burning his body, according to the good old-fashioned way of dealing

with practitioners of black magic. Then our enlightened generation came to the conclusion that they were not dealing with a crime, but with a disease, and put the unfortunate individual afflicted with this horrible obsession into an asylum, where he did not usually live very long, the supply of his peculiar nourishment being cut off. But it never struck anybody that they might be dealing with more than one factor—that what they were really contending with was a gruesome partnership between the dead and the living.’

‘What in the world do you mean?’ I asked.

‘We have two physical bodies, you know,’ said Taverner, ‘the dense material one, with which we are all familiar, and the subtle etheric one, which inhabits it, and acts as the medium of the life-forces, whose functioning would explain a very great deal if science would only condescend to investigate it. When a man dies, the etheric body, with his soul in it, draws out of the physical form and drifts about in its neighbourhood for about three days, or until decomposition sets in, and then the soul draws out of the etheric body also, which in turn dies, and the man enters upon the first phase of his post mortem existence, the purgatorial one.

‘Now, it is possible to keep the etheric body together almost indefinitely if a supply of vitality is available, but, having no stomach which can digest food and turn it into energy, the thing has to batten on someone who has, and develops into a spirit parasite which we call a vampire.

‘There is a pretty good working knowledge of black magic in Eastern Europe. Now, supposing some man who has this knowledge gets shot, he knows that in three days time, at the death of the etheric body, he will have to face his reckoning, and with his record he naturally does not want to do it, so he establishes a connection with the subconscious mind of some other soul that still has a body, provided he can find one suitable for his purposes. A very positive type of character is useless; he has to find one of a negative type, such as the lower class of medium affords. Hence one of the many dangers of mediumship to

the untrained. Such a negative condition may be temporarily induced by, say, shell-shock, and it is possible then for such a soul as we are considering to obtain an influence over a being of much higher type—Craigie, for instance—and use him as a means of obtaining its gratification.’

‘But why did not the creature confine its attentions to Craigie, instead of causing him to attack others?’

‘Because Craigie would have been dead in a week if it had done so, and then it would have found itself minus its human feeding bottle. Instead of that it worked *through* Craigie, getting him to draw extra vitality from others and pass it on to itself; hence it was that Craigie had a vitality hunger rather than a blood hunger, though the fresh blood of a victim was the means of absorbing the vitality.’

‘Then that German we all saw—?’

‘Was merely a corpse who was insufficiently dead.’