

The Ghosts of Surrency

By Ittie K. Reno

THIS strange story of ghost-haunted and deserted Surrency was told to me by a friend who was one of the most brilliant railroad attorneys in the South. It was so wild, so weird, so altogether uncanny that I sought to put it from my thoughts, to treat it as one ever treats such seemingly unreal and unnatural things. But with little success in the issue. For its very horrors and gruesomeness had taken my imagination captive, and, after much hesitation, I decided, finally, to go to that distant, desolated spot within fifty miles of the coast of Georgia and to get the facts in the remarkable case for my own satisfaction.

It was with an unwonted tumult of heart-throbs and a rather disquieting tingle of nerves that I first beheld Surrency, the original abode of that name. The house, as the picture shows, is a double, frame structure two stories high, with a wing in the rear, and is both roomy and comfortable, and far more imposing than any in the vicinity. Though deserted all these years and bearing the unmistakable scars of wind and storm and desolation, it is in a state of preservation scarcely to have been expected.

The gates and outside doors are all boarded, the shutters hang loosely from their hinges, while some are entirely missing, and many of the windows are broken, and the wind sweeps through the old house with a mournful sound as though lamenting its ruin and desolation.

Mr. Surrency, who is a living witness to the story he told me, is possibly sixty years of age. He is the presiding magistrate of the little railway station of Surrency.

"My father's name," he said, in answer to my query, "was A. P. Surrency. He built our old home there away back in the forties, and he, with my mother, brothers, and sisters, lived there many happy years before the troubles came that finally drove us from the old place to seek a new home.

"Though not rich, my father was in comfortable circumstances, and this old farm, with another plantation that he owned, about five miles from here, was well stocked and cultivated with intelligent care, and the results, of course, were good and profitable returns. He was respected and prominent in our little community of farmer friends and neighbors. One afternoon in the summer of 1867 my mother was sewing in her bedroom, that first room to the left of the entrance in the old house there. She had often assured me, in speaking of the circumstance, of her quiet happiness at that time. Her children were all with her for the long vacation, her household was well ordered and pleasant, and she and my father were prospering and happy. She was suddenly startled by an unaccustomed noise. Hers was a calm, placid nature, unknown to the nervous strain of the present time, and, with nothing to fear, she feared nothing. She merely glanced up from her work for a moment and then went on with her sewing.

"Again came the strange sound, but this time mother did not accord it the dignity of her attention. Again, and yet again, it came, with ever-lessening intervals, and when my mother, interested in spite of herself, finally looked up, she was amazed to see the pitcher in the bowl on the wash-stand rocking back and forth. She was alone in the room at the time, so she got up and went over to the pitcher to see if any string or wire were attached to it, for a mother of mischievous boys is rarely taken by surprise; but she found none, and investigation assured her that all her boys were out of the house and that she was indeed alone.

"She resumed her former seat and her sewing, and was about to conclude that the strange occurrence would not be repeated, when she was amazed to see the pitcher lift itself several inches from the bowl and then settle down into it again with a loud noise. This was repeated several times, then the pitcher was lifted entirely out of the bowl and placed, with deliberate care, beside it on the wash-stand.

"Immediately after this the bowl was flung from the wash-stand and fell in a shower of fragments at my mother's feet, and in quick succession the smaller pieces of the entire toilet set followed and added their several little heaps to the debris on the floor. Then, as if done by invisible hands, the larger pitcher on the wash-stand was lifted and poised on its side, so that the clear spring water it contained was poured slowly from it on the carpet, and, when quite emptied, it was lifted high and flung with great violence to the floor, where it was entirely shattered."

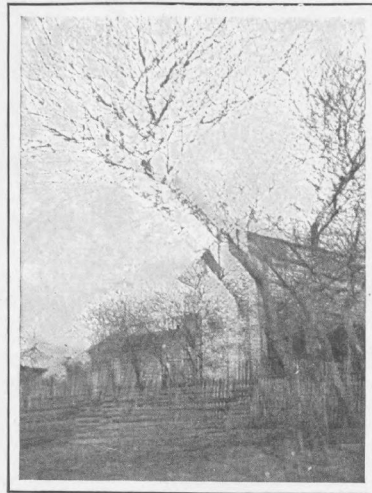
From that day the peace and quiet of the happy old homestead were destroyed and were never again re-established.

At first the demonstrations were confined to the dining-room and Mr. Surrency's mother's bedroom, but, after a few days, they spread until there was not a room in the house free from the annoying and frightful phenomena. At all hours of the day and night and at the most unexpected times doors and windows would be suddenly and violently flung open or shut; the heavy, old-fashioned furniture would creak and groan; then, as if moved by unseen giants, it would rush from its place in a mad dance about the room, and would either move quickly back to its accustomed place or would be dashed to splinters on the floor with a noise like thunder.

There was, of course, constant and imminent danger to the family in these manifestations, for scarcely a day passed without pictures or mirrors falling from the walls, the toppling over and complete wrecking of canopied beds, great, heavy wardrobes and bureaus, tables, and chairs, and on several occasions some of the younger children, being caught under falling objects, received serious wounds and bruises and severe

nervous shocks, while, again, other members of the family barely escaped death.

The father and mother of the family had become by this time thoroughly mystified and unhappy, and the constant wrecking of their furniture and other household effects had become quite a serious matter, for in six months they had been forced to refurnish the house six separate times. They were constantly alarmed for their own and their children's safety.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

This picture of the deserted house of Surrency was made by the author, who had taken the precaution to procure the best of cameras and to have it filled with special care. There was, therefore, no reason why many good pictures should not have been obtained, yet all were failures, except this one, which is indistinct and gives only an imperfect view of the old house. It was taken in the presence of Mr. Surrency and other members of the author's party. No one else was in sight, but, even had there been, it is evident none could have "stood" for the pictures of the two women's heads, for the pose is impossible. The other "faces" act as dissolving views, for it is rare that the same one is seen twice in the myriads of faces that come and go constantly.

To get the best view of the strange effects in the picture, it should be held inverted. Then, instantly, will be seen the heads and shoulders of two women in the upper right corner of the photograph, the heads just touching the top of the old rail fence. In addition to these are countless shadowy and less distinct faces of men, women, and children, and figures of owls, birds, dogs, and horses, that appear and fade away, only to reappear again and again, in the grass, the fences, through the trees, and over the housetops. That such effects should be found in any picture would be weird in the extreme, but the coincidence of their appearing in the photograph of a house considered haunted for nearly fifty years gives increased interest to the story of the ghosts of Surrency.

This picture has been examined by several expert photographers. One of them has said of it: "In all my experience I have seen nothing like this strange picture. One point, notably, the tree in the foreground, which shows double, would suggest a slip in the camera; but a slip at one point would necessitate a uniform slip throughout the entire plane of the plate, and this the picture does not show. Even if it did, that could not account for the appearance of the heads of the two women in the picture, or of the more mysterious and elusive faces and figures which come and go. It puzzles, it baffles me, I frankly admit."

Being now thoroughly unmoved, they were earnestly discussing the advisability of moving to their other farm, several miles away, when something occurred which made them come to a sudden and definite decision.

Here, Mr. Surrency, who had been talking all this time in a low monotone, raised his voice a trifle, and, pointing to the front room on the right of the entrance of the homestead, said, with a vibrating excitement in his voice:

"It occurred in there. That was our sitting-room, and one afternoon in February, just as I entered the hall, I glanced into it and saw my elder brother, Robert, leaning over a table, reading. A low fire was flickering in the open fireplace, and several logs that had burned through had fallen apart and rolled from the andirons to the hearth. I wished particularly to

peek with my brother, and called to him, but he was so absorbed in his book he did not hear me.

"Just as I entered the room, I noticed a commotion on the hearth, when, to my surprise, I saw one of the huge andirons lift itself from the fire and begin to move across the room. It gathered momentum as it went and rose swiftly in the air, till it reached the level of my brother's head, when it dealt him a blow on the temple. He sprang to his feet, bleeding profusely, while I grasped the andiron in my hands, trying thus to shield him; but I might as well have essayed to hold a thunderbolt, for it wrenched itself free from my grasp and struck him again on the head.

"Run," I called to him, "run for your life! If you stay here you will be killed and I cannot help you." The boy did run out of the room and the andiron followed, striking him heavily till the poor victim fell unconscious and covered with blood at our mother's feet. Then the andiron moved slowly across the hall, entered the sitting-room, and resumed its accustomed place on the hearth.

"The next day," said Mr. Surrency, "my father moved the entire family to the other farm, leaving the old home here closed. We took nothing but our clothes, for the other home was furnished, and my parents thought it best to leave everything here undisturbed. A long illness followed my brother's frightful experience with the andiron, for several of his wounds were ugly, and the shock produced a fever that came very nearly proving fatal."

"Did you find the peace in the new home, Mr. Surrency, that you went there to seek?" I questioned.

"For a brief time only," was the response. "For a week or ten days we enjoyed absolute freedom and quiet. Then quite suddenly the strange manifestations began again with increased power and persistence. They did not vary much in character from what we had experienced in this house, but their reappearance at all was, to say the least, discouraging.

"At first we tried to keep the matter secret, but we found it was impossible. Then my father freely discussed it with any who chanced to mention it to him. I remember," said the narrator, musingly, "that, soon after we moved from the old home here, Foster, the great medium and clairvoyant of that time, called on my father to question him about the phenomena. My father told him the whole story and Foster became intensely interested.

"I should like," said he, "to spend a week in that old home of yours, Mr. Surrency, with some friends of mine who are also mediums and spiritualists, to investigate it thoroughly. May I hope to gain your consent?"

"Certainly," said my father; "as long as you like, and invite whom you please, and I hope you will be able to explain the affair to me."

"Foster and his friends remained in the house there a week, and then he called on my father again, and said:

"Mr. Surrency, I have witnessed all the phenomena which you mentioned, and many more, under strictly test conditions, and I can and do assure you that they are due entirely to spirit control. I saw no materializations, but I asked the spirits why they had driven you from your home, and, through raps on the table, I received this reply: 'The entire Surrency family is strongly psychic and mediotic, especially Miss Clementine Surrency; therefore we have sought to make them recognize our power, for we have need of them, and especially of Miss Surrency, to deliver our message to the world.'

"If there was more, Foster did not divulge it. But the news of our singular misfortune spread afar, and people, many of them distinguished in the various positions of life, came from all parts of the country to see and investigate for themselves. Among the prominent Georgians who came for that purpose were Henry Grady; Bridges Smith, at one time Mayor of Macon; and Henry Pockleton, editor of the Macon Telegraph."

Mr. Surrency then assured me that as soon as his father became convinced that he had not been deceived by the move he had so recently made, he decided to abandon both houses, which seemed to him accursed. So he had a small cottage built a little distance down the railroad on some other property of his, which really was the actual founding of our little town of Surrency.

And while the new home was being constructed the father and mother thought it best to send their daughter, Clementine, away on a visit, for the repeated shocks she had undergone were telling heavily against her strength.

"So father and I drove over here with sister one day," Mr. Surrency said, with much earnestness, "for her to pack in a trunk many things she needed for her visit, which she had left here. She ran up to her room and father and I waited there on the front porch. Finally she closed the outside shutters of the room and joined us, saying the trunk was ready for us to carry down."

"At that moment we heard a noise, as if some heavy object was being dragged over the floor, then the crash of wood and glass, and in a moment more my sister's trunk was lying on the lawn there, burst open, and all her outfit torn to shreds.

"We made a thorough search through the house, but we found it all locked and barred as we had left it a few months before, and it was untenanted save by ourselves at that moment. Yet my sister's trunk had been dragged across the floor and hurled through the closed sash and shutters by the same unseen agencies that had, for nearly a year, destroyed the happiness of our home.

"The house is truly accursed," said my father, "and from this day none of us shall enter here again. That was over forty years ago, and not one of us has ever crossed the threshold of the old home since."