

The Wonderful Visit

By

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR FRIEND, WALTER LOW.

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THE NIGHT OF THE STRANGE BIRD.

I.

On the Night of the Strange Bird, many people at Sidderton (and some nearer) saw a Glare on the Sidderford moor. But no one in Sidderford saw it, for most of Sidderford was abed.

All day the wind had been rising, so that the larks on the moor chirruped fitfully near the ground, or rose only to be driven like leaves before the wind. The sun set in a bloody welter of clouds, and the moon was hidden. The glare, they say, was golden like a beam shining out of the sky, not a uniform blaze, but broken all over by curving flashes like the waving of swords. It lasted but a moment and left the night dark and obscure. There were letters about it in Nature, and a rough drawing that no one thought very like. (You may see it for yourself--the drawing that was unlike the glare--on page 42 of Vol. cclx. of that publication.)

None in Sidderford saw the light, but Annie, Hooker Durgan's wife, was

lying awake, and she saw the reflection of it--a flickering tongue of gold--dancing on the wall.

She, too, was one of those who heard the sound. The others who heard the sound were Lumpy Durgan, the half-wit, and Amory's mother. They said it was a sound like children singing and a throbbing of harp strings, carried on a rush of notes like that which sometimes comes from an organ. It began and ended like the opening and shutting of a door, and before and after they heard nothing but the night wind howling over the moor and the noise of the caves under Sidderford cliff. Amory's mother said she wanted to cry when she heard it, but Lumpy was only sorry he could hear no more.

That is as much as anyone can tell you of the glare upon Sidderford Moor and the alleged music therewith. And whether these had any real connexion with the Strange Bird whose history follows, is more than I can say. But I set it down here for reasons that will be more apparent as the story proceeds.