

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget, Ferris Editor
May 29th 1886

The Tale of a Dog

The old house which stands high on the bank among the apple trees On Park Avenue Walnut Hills has been the scene of many incidents worth remembering. It is been thrice burglarized from cellar to garrett; and in its early days was often taken by storm by mobs of friendly neighbors who used to get up the old-fashioned country surprise party.

Those were occasions of rude, uproarious fun. It has also been taken possession of by grief stricken friends who filled the rooms in dumb silence in the presence of sorrow and death: and, could the old walls speak, they would repeat many a theological wrangle, and they would echo back many a scene sacred in domestic life, such as that so well described in "The Cotters Saturday Night."

The summer of 1866 was one of gloom and distress. The cholera was epidemic, and the deaths very many. During the month of August, the days were hot and so sultry as to be well nigh suffocating, and the night brought no relief. The pall of Death seemed everywhere, and the shadow of his black wing to obscure the last shimmer of sun-light. All were in dread of the pestilence walking in darkness. It was like the time of old when it was said: "And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shall have none assurance of thy life; in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even; and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning: for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

One evening, when the scourge was at its worst, I happened to be left alone, all the other members of the family being out among our neighbors to give aid where it was most needed. By good luck, a friend of mine, who was then and still is a rising young physician, dropped in to see how I was getting on, and because he found me alone, he sat with me on the porch observing the night funerals pass up the road, for the days were not long enough to get all the dead under-ground, – and he kindly consented to remain with me one night. I put him in the South room and I went to bed in the North room, with a hall between us, and our doors open.

In the deadest hour of the night we were both awakened by a loud, long-drawn howl of a dog, so full and resonant that it seemed to be inside of the house. I arose and went to the

doctor's bedside, and found him much disturbed & depressed by the unwelcome serenade. In fact, by reason of some superstitious dread, he was decidedly frightened. I am superstitious – about some things, very much so; but I had no qualms about a dog's midnight song to the moon and the doctor's excitement threw me into a fit of merriment. I had him get up, and we gently opened the shutter, and there saw, sitting on his haunches, just like a frog, a very large, white dog, throwing up his head and uttering such a succession of howls as might terrify the soul of a buccaneer. The waning moon had just risen, dull and red, and the air was very heavy. When the yellow gas-light showed the dog's color, or rather his want of color, I thought my friend would faint. A white dog wailing like that in the night to him forboded ill. He thought it was an ante mortem dirge for some one who belonged to the house, and he freely admitted the effect the incident had upon his mind. To me, the interest grew to know how the beast made such a noise, and why he did it. He was a stranger, not only on the place, but to all the region round about. Where he came from, and why he should squat on the edge of our bank and behave as he did, I greatly wished to know.

At my suggestion that we shoot the top of his head off with buckshot, my friend was really horrified. He declared that if I attempted such a thing, he would leave the house and never enter it again. At length I got him to consent to allow me to try to frighten the thing away; and I had left from the last 4th of July one of those large fire-crackers which explode like a shotted gun, one of those big fellows, the size of the candle. I lighted its fuse, and when the dog was about in the middle of one of his longest notes, we gently dropped the bomb. It fell upon his tail and at the same instant went off. The music changed in the twinkling of an eye from E flat to C sharp: – very sharp: from a melancholy wail, very soft and dolorous it became a piercing scream of terror: and the troubadour bonded into the air as if he were thrown up by a very strong spring-board. He came up as high as the window, where we were, and with a graceful curve he descended forward and over the bank into the road: a fall of at least 35 feet. So rapid was his rise and fall that we heard him strike the ground long before the echoes of the bomb had quit coming back from the Kentucky hills, and thus he faded from history. – I never learned whence he came, nor whither he went: what was his name, or whether he had a name nor who was his master if ever he had a master. I have often thought of him and remembered his sudden departure, and wondered if he is not running yet. He had lungs as deep as a well, and he was a good singer in his way: but when he got up his concert on a minor key, which was mal a propos for that gloomy night, and he got fired.

I induced my medical friend to resume his pillow and for myself I slept well the rest of the night. The little episode was a diversion to me, but as long as any cases of cholera were heard of, the doctor had that dog's wail in his ears, and on his heart: and it was not until the frost had killed the last microbe and he knew that I and all my immediate friends were well, that he would bid farewell to his superstitious dread, as we had done to its unreasoning author, and he to us.

Theophilus Kemper