

(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* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

Budget, Herron Editor
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An Honest Ghost

On McMillan streets (sic) west of Gilbert avenue stands a large, handsome, brick house, which is distinguished from all of its neighbors by a swell of a portion of its rear wall. In ancient times a little brick school house stood there in what was then an open field, whose walls the builder included in the larger house now there; and the rear wall of the school house still preserves the remembrances of innumerable nuisances thereon committed by the boys of former generations. Those boys were a frolicsome lot, brave fellows who had no fears, and no compunctions; never knew repentance, and were strangers to remorse. There were Bill Anderson, Al Stiles, Steve Minshal, Dan Bedinger, and a dozen others; but the burly leader of the gang was Bill McDivitt. They were well-grown, and used to long summers of farm work, and short winters of book-learning and fun. In the fall the favorite game was "Fox" and the boys would collect from their homes after dusk to indulge in the chase. Two would be provided with a tin horn each, and when they had gotten off a certain distance they had to blow a vigorous blast, and then separate and go. At reasonable intervals each had to blow, and the fun was to run them down.

One of the favorite hiding places was among the old lime kilns in the ravines which lay in the uninhabited country along the Reading Road and among the brick-yards of the hill-tops north of them. Here the horns were very misleading on account of the echoes, and the many convenient hiding-places. On a cloudy night the Foxes could keep out a long time, and sometimes elude the dogs and get back to the school-house whence a jolly blast would announce that the game was up.

It was a moonlight night near the end of October when we had a hunt which resulted in finding something that we were not looking for. One of the attractions of lime kiln hollow was its bad reputation. It was a resort of bad People and murder had been committed there; and we had our stories about blood and ghosts. The night in question was cool and windy, and broken clouds were swiftly crossing the sky, frequently obscuring the moon, and sending dark, rapid shadows over the ground. The gusty and fitful wind made the old sheds sigh and rattle, and blew the echoes of the horns and our shouts into a hundred fantastic cries. We had succeeded in getting one of the Foxes, as we thought penned into one of the half-demolished brick-kilns, and we were closing in on him from all sides, when a cry from the interior of the kiln arrested our headlong steps, and brought us all to a sudden and silent halt. It was a blood-curdling shriek, and said in plainest United States "O! O! O! Let me out O! O! O!" The boys who were on my side of the kiln began to move cautiously around to the other side to see if the noise came from the other crowd. And we got there in time to see them disappearing over the hill as fast as their legs could

take them, and again on that side and in a more frightful tone came the same voice, accompanied by still more distressing groans. That was enough for us. The cry came from inside the solid kiln where no earthly thing could get. We were not then in a frame of mind to think deliberately, and we followed already frightened comrades until each of us had landed himself in his own house. One of us felt no ease of mind until he had got up to bed and covered up his head.

The next day we discussed the thing in all its bearings and at noon we went near the kiln and listened. We heard various noises, about which there were as many opinions as there were of us; but we fired up under Bill McDivitt's appeal to meet again that night and see what it was. We all came and let him take the lead, but the nearer we got to the kiln the slower we all traveled; and we hung closely together and became as silent as death. McDivitt pushed forward cautiously to the edge of the level ground where the bricks were spread out to dry, and we followed in close order, and were standing so when a moon broke through a rift of clouds, and we saw a shadowy figure pass around the corner and disappear behind the kiln. The sight upset us and led to various ejaculations and at once following our confused and subdued cries, came again the shriek of the night before. Nothing could have been more terrifying. The groans were those of despair, and the appeal for help was pitiful.

It broke us down again. We ran away, and the next day we told all about it to the teacher, a Mr. Dunn, who was a large, pleasant man and whom we all liked. He arranged to join us the same night upon our consenting to join hands all around, and give him our word that not a boy of us should run until he did. This time he was commander in chief; and he led us silently nearer the kiln, and we all sat down on the boards which were used to protect the green bricks from the rain. We heard no sounds; saw no sights. Mr. Dunn finally became impatient, and he called out something. Immediately there came a reply from the interior of the kiln. First, cries of "O! O! O!" then a long, whining cry which ended in "let me out! Let me out!" and then more groans. He got up, but was shaky on his legs; and when he managed to say something to us, it was evident that he was suffering great agitation. After a time he led us around the kiln, keeping at a good distance off, and as we passed around we heard the groans and sobs. They came from the center of the solid pile; a pile that had not been disturbed since many cords of wood had been burned in its arches.

No one had a suggestion to make, and the further we got away from the place the easier we breathed, and the less we stumbled over our own feet. Mr. Dunn bade us "good night" at his gate without another word. The next morning he questioned us all sharply as to whether we were not trying to play him a trick, and satisfied himself that such was not the case. He then went at noon to see old man Pieper the owner of the brick-yard, and asked him all about the kiln, and learned that no more bricks were to be taken from it until the next spring. He told Pieper there must be something inside of it besides bricks, and asked to be allowed to open it on one side the next Saturday; but old Pieper ended by telling him the "damned" boys were fooling him, and he threatened shot gun vengeance on any of us who might be caught there day or night.

We thought of little else; books were neglected, and Bill McDivitt swelled with the notion that Mr. Dunn was scared out, and that he must be the hero who would lay the

ghost; and under his harangues we organized another raid. Mr. Dunn reluctantly consented to go with us. That night was a bad one. The moon was late coming up, and it was so cloudy that she did not do us much good. The wind was high and chilly, and a thin, spitting snow flew hither and thither.

We waited some time in silence until we heard again the awful sounds; but they were much fainter and more stifled and even more distressing. We stood our ground, and then Mr. Dunn and McDevitt arranged to divide the crowd and each to take a squad on opposite sides of the kiln and try to smoke out the mystery. We were counted off; the "ones" went with Mr. Dunn to the other side and the "twos" stayed with McDevitt where we were. We had commenced calling out under the arches and were venturing nearer when more groans and a rumble of falling brick drowned our frightened voices, but it did not cover up old Pieper's "Gott in Himmel! What there you do! Aus Mit you! Gott fur damn!" – and bang went the shot-gun. In the stampede, Mr. Dunn and McDevitt ran in opposite directions away from Pieper and they collided in the dark with a bump that knocked fire and both fell heavily and rolled over in the weeds. It was every man for himself, and between the ghost and old Pieper no time was lost in the scatterment. One of us dashed down the hill into the Reading Road, as the old man let go the other department of his gun, and then he stole his way through the butchers' houses on Deer Creek, and over the terraced hills of the Garden of Eden, and reached home in the state of disfigurement which induced his home folks to forbid any more fox hunts.

None of us knew that night how many or who of our comrades lay dead in the brick yard, and we went to school the next day weighted down with apprehensions. But at roll-call every fellow answered. McDevitt had had to undergo considerable mending. His face was scratched and his lip bruised so that it stuck out on one side, giving him an awkward and ridiculous look. Mr. Dunn also had been repaired. A wide expanse of court-plaster ornamented the side of his nose, and he could not write or figure on the board with his right hand. Not a reference was made by anybody to the battle-field where those scars were won; and Mr. Dunn was so grave and stern that we feared that his temper was soured, and looked out for squalls. For a long time the school went on as if there had been a death amongst us and a dark spell seemed to hang over us. In the meantime the winter rains came on, making the lime kiln country inaccessible on account of mud and then the snow covered all and we gave up the ghost for a time and coasted.

When the spring was fairly on Pieper's wagons began to haul away his bricks, and as the huge pile dwindled we went every noon in small parties, and hung around quietly to see what might come to light.

The bricks near the center of the kiln had fallen in confusion; the ground had given way, and an arch caved in; and in the middle of the broken bats hemmed in fore and aft was the emaciated body of a hog.

At the end of the school term Bill McDevitt did up the valedictory in rhyme, of which I remember these lines.

“Good bye to all the jolly fun
We had when out with Mr. Dunn

Good bye to all the hoggish tricks
We played upon old Pieper's bricks
Good bye the Fox chase and the coast;
And last of all, Good bye the Ghost.”

Theo. Kemper