The Skeleton in The Column

The opening of the collegiate year brought the usual number of new students to Davidson, one hundred and twenty fellows who were to enter on the pursuit of knowledge in and about the buildings of the college. To the old students the freshmen all look pretty much alike for the first week or two of the new session, and some time is required to bring out differences and individualities in the crowd. But in this particular class there was one member whom no one could accuse of looking like anybody else. Tall and gaunt, broad-shouldered, yet pathetically thin, he stalked about over the campus like an emaciated specter. But a nearer view showed a more remarkable factor in his strange appearance, for he had eyes that no one, having once seen, could ever hope to forget. Great, round, ghostly eyes they were, with the dark fires of imagination smouldering in their depths. Many a time during the first night or two, did some student, meeting him for the first time in the gathering darkness of early evening, start in voluntary alarm at sight of the angular figure and the face with the ghostly eyes. “Spook” they called him, and the fitness of the name made it cling to him. On classes he would sit and look vacantly out of the window, or stare off into space as if gazing at nothing at all. He seemed to be all brooding and imagination, with only a passing thought of ordinary things.

“Spook” had his room on the third floor of South Wing Chambers, among a crowd of other newly-matriculated men, and a few older students. Among them there was a Senior named Pips, who loved to draw on his longer memory of college affairs and tell tales to the freshmen of the old days when Davidson was a place of wild escapade and daring adventure, before the freshman’s person was sacred or college property a thing to be reveredence. Tales of milking the Faculty’s cows or of stealing the college coal got years of scrapes that threatened such tales held the average fire but for “Spook” they seemed to have some fascination that held him.

It was one Saturday night in autumn winds were just bringing in winter that Pips gathered his friends around him, “Spook” being one of them. He gave them the best that his memory and his fertile imagination, could about to start, one youngster broach.

“Say, Pips, tell us that story a column out there. Somebody said you and I’d like to know how he got.”

Pips slipped down in his chair against the mantle, put his fingers into the fire.

“No,” he began, “I know all about that. The ‘med’ college was here. They once in a while, and the people and their robbing graves and all. So I get a chance to lay their hands on and were ready to rob it. More than about these bodies, and the time I was the worst scrape of all.

“I don’t remember just what you know long time ago, and it happened in a name Bill Ashton, a right poet killed by a fall over near the Big Gold the road when he was walking home a steep bank head first, for there was bottom, and his head was pretty missed the next day, and late in
The Column

year brought the usual Davidson, one hundred and enter on the pursuit of buildings of the college, look pretty much alike for him, and some time is rel- individualities in the crowd, one member whom no one y else. Tall and gaunt, he stalked about over the at a nearer view showed more appearance, for he had could ever hope to forget, with the dark fires of his. Many a time during sent, meeting him for the of early evening, start in figure and the face with id him, and the fitness of classes he would sit and stare off into space as if it to be all brooding and sight of ordinary things.

Third floor of South Wing. newly-matriculated men, then there was a Senior in longer memory of college of the old days when he and daring adventure, nicked or college property a lking the Faculty's cows or of stealing the college coal gave way to more highly colored years of scrapes that threatened more serious consequence. Such tales held the average freshman's attention pretty well, but for "Spook" they seemed to have some fatal attraction, some fascination that held him spell-bound.

It was one Saturday night near the first of October, when autumn winds were just bringing the first forecasts of the coming winter that Pipps gathered his crowd of admiring "fresh." around him, "Spook" being one of the number, and prepared to give them the best that his memory of like stories told to him and his fertile imagination, could put together. Just as he was about to start, one youngest broke in:

"Say, Pippe, tell us that story about the skeleton in the front column out there. Somebody said there was a dead man in it, and I'd like to know how he got there. What about it?"

Pipps slipped down in his chair, propped his feet high up against the mantle, put his finger-tips together and squinted into the fire.

"Yes," he began, "I know all about that, it happened when the 'school' college was here. They used to be hard up for stiff's once in a while, and the people around here wouldn't stand for their robbing graves at all. So if by any luck the med. did get a chance to lay their hands on a stiff, they were always right there ready to nab it. More than once they got into trouble about these bodies, and the time I am telling you about was the worst scrape of all.

"I don't remember just what year it was, but it was quite a long time ago, and it happened in the winter time. A farmer named Bill Ashton, a right prominent man in the county, got killed by a fall over near the big gullies. He must have missed the road when he was walking home at night, and fallen down a steep bank head first, for there was blood on a rock at the bottom, and his head was pretty badly battered up. He was missed the next day, and late in the afternoon parties were
formed to search for him. Some of the medics got wind of the
truth of the matter, and quietly made up a party of their own.
They found him just about dark, hid his body in a clump of
bushes, and waited till late at night. After everybody had gone
to sleep they laid their stiff on a horse and brought it here to
the college, where they hid it in the big loft up there just under
the roof.

"Of course none of Bill Ashton’s friends found his body that
day, nor the next, nor any day after. About the second day
somebody got a suspicion that the medical students might have
had a hand in the thing, and it was decided to search the college
for the body. The students found out about the search before
anybody came, and got ready in time. The fellows who stole
the stiff had to do something in a hurry, so they went up under
the roof and picked old Bill Ashton’s body down into one
of the hollow columns, poured a bag of salt in on top of him,
and covered him up with rubbish. Nothing was ever found out
about it until years afterward, and then nobody cared to in-
vestigate. They say that every fall about this time Bill Ashton’s
ghost comes out and walks around, hunting for the fellows
who put his body there, but of course that part of it is all a
tale. The rest of it, though, I would almost swear to, but you
can’t ever be right certain about what other people tell you."

Pipps finished the tale and noted with satisfaction the interest
that the freshmen had showed in his recital. Most of them
appeared to forget the tale in a few minutes, but “Spook” sat
like one stunned, with his eyes wide, his nostrils distended,
breathing as if with effort. For the rest of the night until the
party broke up he remained quiet, saying nothing and ap-
parently hearing nothing that anyone else had to say. Then he
went to his room alone and retired for the night.

About two o’clock Pipps awoke suddenly without knowing
why—he felt as if he had been startled, but he could not
imagine what had waked him. All was as quiet as the grave.

He listened intently for several minutes, open and close softly. Getting
out of his dressing-gown he noiselessly felt his way in spite of himself. Just as he
reached the door of his room, he turned round and saw a white-clad figure of a
man, outlined in front of him, with the old old house and the
building. A gust of cold air
the old floor creaked dismally and
and his teeth chattered again, but
the cold. About forty feet away from
the candle held above his head, staring for a while at the four great columns,
flickered and flared in the uncertain
weird light over the white-robed figure. At sight of that face, Pipps felt his
apparently cease to beat. Those
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sockets, and the shifting play of the
light caused the tomb and its shrouded dead
and now, but for his life he could
from where he stood. As the last
the aura of the figure in front of him,
ter in a jerky undertone, and Pipps said

"I know he must be down there and
mentioned to me and pointed up the stairway or he’d never let me alone. I tried
here and I couldn’t help it. He made
help it. Oh—oh!

He stepped with a shudder, for the
out of his candle. The gust shook the
He listened intently for several minutes, then he heard a door open and close softly. Getting out of bed and slipping on a dressing-gown he noiselessly felt his way into the hall, shivering in spite of himself. Just as he entered the hall he saw the white-clad figure of a man, outlined by the light of a candle held in front of him, turning up the auditorium stairs. Hastening on he saw it disappear up the narrow steps that lead to the cupola. In the dark he could not go as fast as the man with the light, but guided by the faint reflection from the candle, he came to the narrow entrance to the loft over the front part of the building. A gust of cold air made his teeth chatter, and the old floor creaked dismally under his feet. He looked in and his teeth chattered again, but this time it was not from cold. About forty feet away from him stood Spooks with the candle held above his head, staring down into the hollow interior of one of the four great columns of the portico. The candle flickered and flared in the uncertain puffs of wind, casting a weird light over the white-robed figure and the ghostly face. At sight of that face, Pipps felt his heart give a leap and then apparently cease to beat. Those wild eyes were all a-flare, stretched until it seemed as if the balls would start from their sockets, and the shifting play of the candlelight over them suggested the tomb and its sheeted dead, Pipps was really frightened now, but for his life he could not have moved one step from where he stood. As it tied there he watched the uncanny motions of the figure in front of him. “Spook” began to mutter in a jerky undertone, and Pipps strained to catch the words:

“I know he must be down there I dreamed about him, and he motioned to me and pointed up the stairs. I've got to see him, or he'll never let me alone. I tried to keep from coming up here and I couldn't help it. He made me come, and I couldn't help it. O—oh!"

He stopped with a shudder, for the wind had almost blown out his candle. The gust shook the rafters, and Pipps heard
the old timbers creaked dismally. Involuntarily he looked behind him and then——

"There he is now! I see him! I see him! let me go! let me go!" shrieked the freshman in an unearthly voice. Pipps looked in time to see him lean far over the dark hole as if drawn to it by some irresistible force. He started again and his foot slipped, he tried to recover his balance, then fell headlong down the dark wall of the column. A fiendish cry rent the night air and all was still. Pipps called the freshman's name, but received no answer. Then recovering more fully from his paralysis, he ran back to his room for a light.

He roused his sleeping room-mate and hurried him up to the loft, making disjointed explanations on the way. The two of them made their way to the fatal pit, and holding the lamp above them, peered down into the blackness. There at the bottom was the body of "Spook," with the face upturned and the cold death stare petrified in his eyes; even if he survived the fall no man could live in the poisonous air at the bottom. They exchanged a glance of comprehension. The myth of the dead man in the column had become a reality.

A. W. W., '12.

The Positive Asse:

In THINKING of the assets of a college we should first of all estimate the less important or, rather, the most tangible and the ones under our observation, but we should also note also how much of the positive are natural and how much is due to our own efforts. The effects of the forces at work have been.

In considering the assets of any college naturally suggests itself is the inside of any college should not be over-rated. Every one admires a solution which stands for a high intellectual, but it should not be forgotten that and ability is merely a negative quantity which mere the intellect is truly good and does not reach its full development until it is worthlessness to the world at large. The intellect, then, should be the greatest labor. It is part of one's life, though it is the greatest