

A REMARKABLE PASSAGE OF AN
APPARITION,
RELATED BY THE REV. DR
RUDDLE, OF LAUNCESTON IN
CORNWALL,
IN THE YEAR 1665.

from

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IN the beginning of this year, a disease happened in this town of Launceston, and some of my scholars died of it. Among others who fell under the malignity then triumphing, was John Elliot, the eldest son of Edward Elliot of Treherse, Esq., a stripling of about sixteen years of age, but of more than common parts and ingenuity. At his own particular request, I preached at the funeral, which happened on the 20th day of June, 1665. In my discourse (ut mos reique iocique postulabat), I spoke some words in commendation of the young gentleman; such as might endear his memory to those that knew him, and, withal, tended to preserve his example to the fry which went to school with him, and were to continue there after him. An ancient gentleman, who was then in the church, was much affected with the discourse, and was often heard to repeat, the same evening, an expression I then used out of Virgil:-

"Et puer ipse fuit cantari dignus."

The reason why this grave gentleman was so concerned at the character, was a reflection he made upon a son of his own, who being about the same age, and, but a few months before, not unworthy of the like character I gave of the young Mr Elliott, was now, by a strange accident, quite lost as to his parent's hopes and all expectation of any further comfort by him.

The funeral rites being over, I was no sooner come out of the church, but I found myself most courteously accosted by this old gentleman; and with an unusual importunity, almost forced against my humour to see his house that night; nor could I have rescued myself from his kindness, had not Mr Elliott interposed and pleaded title to me for the whole of the day, which, as he said, he would resign to no man Hereupon I got loose for that time, but was constrained to leave a promise behind me to wait upon him at his own house the Monday

following. They then seemed to satisfy, but before Monday came I had a new message to request me that, if it were possible, I would be there on the Sunday. The second attempt I resisted, by answering that it was against my convenience, and the duty which mine own people expected from me. Yet was not the gentleman at rest, for he sent me another letter on the Sunday, by no means to fail on the Monday, and so to order my business as to spend with him two or three days at least. I was indeed startled at so much eagerness, and so many dunnings for a visit, without any business; and began to suspect that there must needs be some design in the bottom of all this excess of courtesy. For I had no familiarity, scarce common acquaintance with the gentleman or his family; nor could I imagine whence should arise such a flush of friendship on the sudden.

On the Monday I went, and paid my promised devoir, and met with entertainment as free and plentiful as the invitation was importunate. 'There also I found a neighbouring minister, who pretended to call in accidentally, but by the sequel I suppose it otherwise. After dinner this brother of the coat undertook to show me the gardens, where, as we were walking, he gave me the first discovery of what was mainly intended in all this treat and compliment.

First he began to tell the infortunity of the family in general, and then gave an instance in the youngest son. He related what a hopeful, sprightly lad he lately was, and how melancholic and sottish he was now grown. Then did he with much passion lament, that his ill-humour should so incredibly subdue his reason; for, says he, the poor boy believes himself to be haunted with ghosts, and is confident that he meets with an evil spirit in a certain field about half a mile from this place, as often as he goes that way to school.

In the midst of our twaddle, the old gentleman and his lady (as observing their cue exactly) came up to us. Upon their approach, and pointing me to the arbour, the parson renews the relation to me; and they (the parents of the youth) confirmed what he said, and added many minute circumstances, in a long narrative of the whole. In fine, they all three desired my thoughts and advice in the affair.

I was not able to collect thoughts enough on the sudden to frame a judgment upon what they had said, only I answered, that the thing which the youth reported to them was strange, yet not incredible, and that I knew not then what to think or say of it; but if the lad would be free to me in talk, and trust me with his counsels, I had hopes to give them a better account of my opinion the next day.

I had no sooner spoken so much, but I perceived myself in the springle their courtship had laid for me; for the old lady was not able to hide her impatience, but her son must be called immediately. This I was forced to comply with and consent to, so that drawing off from the company to an orchard near by, she went herself, and brought him to me, and left him with me.

It was the main drift of all these three to persuade me that either the boy was lazy, and glad of any excuse to keep from the school, or that he was in love with some wench and ashamed to confess it; or that he had a fetch upon his father to get money and new clothes, that he might range to London after a brother he had there; and therefore they begged of me to discover the root of the matter, and accordingly to dissuade, advise, or reprove him, but chiefly, by all means, to undeceive him as to the fancy of ghosts and spirits.

I soon entered into a close conference with the youth, and at first was very cautious not to displease him, but by smooth words to ingratiate myself and get within him, for I doubted he would be too distrustful or too reserved. But we had scarcely passed the first situation,

and begun to speak to the business, before I found that there needed no policy to screw myself into his breast; for he most openly, and with all obliging candour did aver, that he loved his book, and desired nothing more than to be bred a scholar; that he had not the least respect for any of woman-kind, as his mother gave out; and that the only request he would make to his parents was, that they would but believe his constant assertions concerning the woman he was disturbed with, in the field called the *Higher-Broom Quartils*. He told me with all naked freedom, and a flood of tears, that his friends were unkind and unjust to him, neither to believe nor pity him; and that if any man (making a bow to me) would but go with him to the place, he might be convinced that the thing was real, &c.

By this time he found me apt to compassionate his condition, and to be attentive to his relation of it, and therefore he went on in this way:-

"This woman which appears to me," saith he, "lived a neighbour here to my father, and died about eight years since; her name, Dorothy Dingle, of such a stature, such age, and such complexion. She never speaks to me, but passeth by hastily, and always leaves the foot-path to me, and she commonly meets me twice or three times in the breadth of the field.

"It was about two months before I took any notice of it, and though the shape of the face was in my memory, yet I did not recall the name of the person, but without more thoughtfulness, I did suppose it was some woman who lived thereabout, and had frequent occasion that way. Nor did I imagine anything to the contrary before she began to meet me constantly, morning and evening, and always in the same field, and sometimes twice or thrice in the breadth of it.

"The first time I took notice of her was about a year since, and when I first began to suspect and believe it to be a ghost, I had courage enough not to be afraid, but kept it to myself a good while, and only wondered very much about it. I did often speak to it, but never had a word in answer. Then I changed my way, and went to school the Under Horse Road, and, then she always met me in the narrow lane, between the Quarry Park and the Nursery, which was worse.

"At length I began to be terrified at it, and prayed continually that God would either free me from it or let me know the meaning of it. Night and day, sleeping and waking, the shape was ever running in my mind, and I often did repeat these places of Scripture, (with that he takes a small Bible out of his pocket,) Job, vii, I4 :- 'Thou scarest me with dreams, and temptest me through visions.' And Deuteronomy, xxviii. 67: 'In the morning, thou shalt say, Would God it were evening; and at evening thou shalt say, Would God it were morning; for the fear of thy heart, wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes, which thou shalt see.'"

I was very much pleased with the lad's ingenuity in the application of these pertinent Scriptures to his condition, and desired him to proceed.

"When," says he, "by degrees, I grew very pensive, inasmuch that it was taken notice of by all our family; whereupon, being urged to it, I told my brother William of it, and he privately acquainted my father and mother, and they kept it to themselves for some time.

"The success of this discovery was only this; they did sometimes laugh at me, sometimes chide me, but still commanded me to keep to my school, and put such fopperies out of my head. I did accordingly go to school often, but always met the woman in the way."

This, and much more to the same purpose, yea, as much as held a dialogue of near two

hours, was our conference in the orchard, which ended with my proffer to him, that, without making any privy to our intents, I would next morning walk with him to the place, about six o'clock. He was even transported with joy at the mention of it, and replied, - " But will you, sure, sir? Will you, sure, sir? Thank God! Now I hope I shall be relieved." From this conclusion we retired into the house.

The gentleman, his wife, and Mr Sam were impatient to know the event, insomuch that they came out of the parlour into the hall to meet us; and seeing the lad look cheerfully, the first compliment from the old man was, "Come Mr Ruddle, you have talked with him; I hope now he will have more wit. An idle boy! an idle boy" At these words, the lad ran up the stairs to his own chamber, without replying, and I soon stopped the curiosity of the three expectants by telling them I had promised silence, and was resolved to be as good as my word; but when things were riper they might know all. At present, I desired them to rest in my faithful promise, that I would do my utmost in their service, and for the good of their son. With this they were silenced; I cannot say satisfied.

The next morning before five o'clock, the lad was in my chamber, and very brisk. I arose and went with him. The field he led me to I guessed to be twenty acres, in an open country, and about three furlongs from any house. We went into the field, and had not gone above a third part, before the spectrum, in the shape of a woman, with all the circumstances he had described her to me in the orchard the day before, (as much as the suddenness of its appearance and evanition would permit me to discover,) met us and passed by. I was a little surprised at it, and though I had taken up a firm resolution to speak to it, yet I had not the power, nor indeed durst I look back; yet I took care not to show any fear to my pupil and guide, and therefore only telling him that I was satisfied in the truth of his complaint, we walked to the end of the field, and returned, nor did the ghost meet us that time above once. I perceived in the young man a kind of boldness, mixed with astonishment; the first caused by my presence, and the proof he had given of his own relation, and the other by the sight of his persecutor.

In short, we went home: I somewhat puzzled, he much animated. At our return, the gentlewoman, whose inquisitiveness had missed us, watched to speak with me. I gave her a convenience, and told her that my opinion was that her son's complaint was not to be slighted, nor altogether discredited; yet, that my judgment in his case was not settled. I gave her caution, moreover, that the thing might not take wind, lest the whole country should ring with what we had yet no assurance of.

In this juncture of time I had business which would admit no delay; wherefore I went for Launceston that evening, but promised to see them again next week. Yet I was prevented by an occasion which pleaded a sufficient excuse; for my wife was that week brought home from a neighbour's house very ill. However, my mind was upon the adventure. I studied the case, and about three weeks after went again, resolving, by the help of God, to see the utmost.

The next morning being the 27th day of July, 1665, I went to the haunted field by myself, and walked the breadth of the field without any encounter. I returned and took the other walk, and then the spectrum appeared to me, much about the same place where I saw it before, when the young gentleman was with me. In my thoughts, it moved swifter than the time before, and about ten feet distance from me on my right hand, insomuch that I had not time to speak, as I had determined with myself beforehand.

The evening of this day, the parents, the son, and myself, being in the chamber where I

lay, I propounded to them our going altogether to the place next morning, and after some asseveration that there was no danger in it, we all resolved upon it. The morning being come, lest we should alarm the family of servants, they went under the pretence of seeing a field of wheat, and I took my horse and fetched a compass another way, and so met at the stile we had appointed.

Thence we all four walked leisurely into the Quartels, and had passed above half the field before the ghost made appearance. It then came over the stile just before us, and moved with that swiftness that by the time we had gone six or seven steps it passed by. I immediately turned head and ran after it, with the young man by my side; we saw it pass over the stile by which we entered, but no farther. I stepped upon the hedge at one place, he at another, but could discern nothing; whereas, I dare aver, that the swiftest horse in England could not have conveyed himself out of sight in that short space of time. Two things I observed in this day's appearance. 1. That a spaniel dog, who followed the company unregarded, did bark and run away, as the spectrum passed by; whence it is easy to conclude that it was not our fear or fancy which made the apparition. 2. That the motion of the spectrum was not gradation, or by steps, and moving of the feet, but a kind of gliding, as children upon the ice, or a boat down a swift river, which punctually answers the descriptions the ancients gave of their *Lemures*, which was [*a line of Greek omitted here*]— HELIONOVCS.

But to proceed. This ocular evidence clearly convinced, but, withal, strangely frightened the old gentleman and his wife, who knew this Dorothy Dingle in her lifetime, were at her burial, and now plainly saw her features in this present apparition. I encouraged them as well as I could, but after this they went no more. However, I was resolved to proceed, and use such lawful means as God hath discovered, and learned men have successfully practised in these irregular cases.

The next morning, being Thursday, I went out very early by myself, and walked for about an hour's space in meditation and prayer in the field next adjoining to the Quartils. Soon after five I stepped over the stile into the disturbed field, and had not gone above thirty or forty paces before the ghost appeared at the further stile. I spoke to it with a loud voice, in some such sentences as the way of these dealings directed me; whereupon it approached, but slowly, and when it came near, it moved not. I spake again, and it answered, in a voice neither very audible nor intelligible. I was not in the least terrified, and I therefore persisted until it spake again, and gave me satisfaction. But the work could not be finished at this time; wherefore, the same evening, an hour after sunset, it met me again near the same place, and after a few words on each side, it quietly vanished, and neither doth appear since, nor ever will more to any man's disturbance. The discourse in the morning lasted about a quarter of an hour.

These things are true, and I know them to be so, with as much certainty as eyes and ears can give me, and until I can be persuaded that my senses do deceive me about their proper object, and by that persuasion deprive myself of the strongest inducement to believe the Christian religion, I must and will assert that these things in this paper are true.

As for the manner of my proceeding, I find no reason to be ashamed of it, for I can justify it to men of good principles, discretion, and recondite learning, though in this case I chose to content myself in the assurance of the thing, rather than be at the unprofitable trouble to persuade others to believe it; for I know full well with what difficulty relations of so uncommon a nature and practice obtain belief. He that tells such a story may expect to be dealt withal as a traveller in Poland by the robbers, viz., first murdered and then searched, —

first condemned for a liar, or superstitious, and then, when it is too late, have his reasons and proofs examined. This incredulity may be attributed –

1. To the infinite abuses of the people, and impositions upon their faith by the cunning monks and friars, &c., in the days of darkness and popery; for they made apparitions as often as they pleased, and got both money and credit by quieting the *terriculamenta vulgi*, which their own artifice had raised.

2. To the prevailing of Somatism and the Hobbean principle in these times, which is a revival of the doctrine of the Sadducees; and as it denies the nature, so it cannot consist with the apparition of spirits; of which, see 'Leviathan,' p. i, c. I2.

3. To the ignorance of men in our age, in this peculiar and mysterious part of philosophy and of religion, namely, the communication between spirits and men. Not one scholar in ten thousand (though otherwise of excellent learning,) knows anything of it or the way how to manage it. This ignorance breeds fear and abhorrence of that which otherwise might be of incomparable benefit to mankind.

But I being a clergyman and young, and a stranger in these parts, do apprehend silence and secrecy to be my best security.

"In rebus abstrusissimis abundans cautela non nocet"

Sept. 4, 1665.

POSTSCRIPT.

IT is possible that the unacquaintedness of some men with church history and the writings of the ancient fathers may be one cause of their prejudice against things and narratives of this nature, I could cite out of them hundreds of passages in confirmation (*a pari*) of what I have now done and written. But a single testimony shall serve to fill up this page.

St Cyprian was a father of the third century, contemporary with Origen, Tertullian, Lactantius, Clemens of Alexandria, and other learned men. Observe his words (S. Cypriani Epist. ad Demetrium Ethnicum, p. 328) :—

"Si audire velles et videre quando spiritus mali a nobis adjurantur et torquentur spiritualibus flagris; quando daemones ejulantes et gementes humanii voce venturum judicium confitentur; videbis nos rogari ab iis quos tu rogas, et tamen ab iis quos tu adoras; Videbis sub manu nostra stare vinctos et tremere captivos, quos tu veneraris ut dominos. Certe! vel sic in erroribus tuis confundi poteris, cum conspexeris et audieris deos tuos quid sitit, nostra interrogatione, statim prodere," &c. *

See Pamelius 'Notes on Tertullian,' n. 64.

*If you would hear and see when evil spirits are by us adjured and put to spiritual torture; when the very devils, groaning and lamenting with a human voice, confess a future Judgment; you shall hear us intreated by those whom you intreat, and by those whom you adore: you shall see these stand fettered, as it were, under our hands, and tremble like captive slaves, whom you worship as deities. Certainly you must be thus confounded in your errors when you shall see and hear your gods, upon questions we put to them, immediately betray what they are.