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GOTHIC BOURNES

STORY OF AN APPARITION
(1818)

TRANSCRIPTION BY
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“Story of an apparition.”

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http://books.google.es/books?pg=PA218&lpg=PA225&dq=%22abyss+of+eternity%22&id=qLUCAAAAIAAJ&ots=y5cimZpowx&redir_esc=y%20-%20v=onepage&q=%22abyss%20of%20eternity%22&f=false#v=snippet&q=%22abyss%20of%20eternity%22&f=false (pages 705-707)

[705] MR EDITOR,

OBSERVING that you have frequently introduced into your Miscellany popular fables collected from various quarters, I send you the following, which I solemnly protest is no invention of mine, but a ghost-story of natural growth, which I heard in conversation. If you can find room for it, it will probably afford more amusement than the Welsh superstitions you published some time ago, which were rather heavy. I am, yours, &c. A. B.

About the fall of the leaf, in the year 1737, Colonel D. went to visit his friend Mr N. at his country seat in the north of England. As this country seat was the scene of a very singular adventure, it may be proper to mention its antiquity and solemnity, which were fitted to keep in countenance the most sombre events. The following circumstances were well known in the family, and are said to have been related by one of its members to a lady much celebrated in the literary world, but now deceased.

Upon arriving at the house of his friend, Colonel D. found there many guests, who had already got possession of almost all the apartments. The chillness of an October evening, and the somewhat mournful aspect of nature, at that season, collected them, at an early hour, round the blazing hearth, where they thought no better amusement could be found than the ancient and well approved one of story-telling, for which all mankind seem to have a relish. I do not mean the practice of circulating abominable slanders against one's friends, but the harmless, drowsy, and good-natured recreation of retailing¹ wonderful narratives, in which, if any ill is spoken, it is generally against such as are well able to bear it, namely, the enemy of mankind, and persons who, having committed atrocious crimes, are supposed, after death, to haunt the same spots to which their deeds have attached dismal recollections.

While these tales went round, the evening darkened apace, and the windows ceased any longer to contrast the small glimmerings of external twilight with the bright blaze of the hearth. The rustling of withered leaves, casually stirred by the wind, is always a melancholy sound, and, on this occasion, lent its aid to the superstitious impressions which were gaining force by each successive recital of prodigies. One member of the family began to relate a certain tradition, but he was suddenly stopped by their host, who [706] exhibited signs of displeasure, and whispered something to him, at the same time turning his eyes upon Colonel D. The story was accordingly

¹ As opposed to 'retelling', the word chosen by this author comes from the verb 'retail' dating back to the mid 14c. meaning: "to deal out (information, etc.) in small quantities; hand down by report; recount, tell over again" (<https://www.etymonline.com/>).

broken off, and the company went to supper with their hair standing on end; but so transitory are human impressions, that in a few minutes they had all recovered their gayety,² except the Colonel, who was unable to comprehend why any tradition should be concealed from him in particular.

When they separated to go to sleep, he was led by Mr N. (as the reader will probably anticipate), to a chamber at a great distance from the other bed-rooms [sic], and which bore evident marks of having been newly opened up, after remaining long unoccupied. In order to dissipate the confined air of the place, a large wooden fire had been lighted, and the gloomy bed-curtains were tucked stiffly up in festoons. I have not heard whether there was tapestry in the room or not; but one thing is certain, that the room looked as dreary as any tapestry could have made it, even if it had been worked on purpose by Mrs Ann Radcliffe herself. Romance writers generally decorate their imaginary walls with all the wisdom of Solomon; but, as I am unable to vouch for the truth of every particular mentioned in this story, I mean to relate the circumstances faithfully as they were told me, without calling in so wise a man to lend his countenance to them.

Mr N. made apologies to Colonel D. for putting him into an apartment which was somewhat uncomfortable, and which was now opened only because all the rest were already filled. With these excuses, and other suitable compliments, he bade his guest good night, and went away with a good deal of seriousness in his countenance, leaving the door a-jar behind him.

Colonel D—, observing that the apartment was large and cold, and that but a small part of the floor was covered with carpet, endeavoured to shut the door, but found he could only close it half way. Some obstacle in the hinges, or the weight of the door pressing upon the floor, opposed his efforts. Nevertheless, being seized with some absurd fancies, he took the candle, and looked out. When he saw nothing, except the long passage and the vacant apartments beyond, he went to bed, leaving the remains of the fire still flickering upon the broad hearth, and gleaming now and then upon the door as it stood half open.

After the Colonel had lain for a long while, ruminating half asleep, and when the ashes were now nearly extinguished, he saw the figure of a woman glide in. No noise accompanied her steps. She advanced to the fire-place, and stood between him and the light, with her back towards him, so that he could not see her features. Upon observing her dress, he found that it exactly corresponded in appearance with the ancient silk robes represented in the pictures of English ladies of rank, painted three centuries ago. This circumstance filled him with a degree of terror which he had never experienced before. The stately garniture of times long past had a frightful meaning,

² More commonly spelled: 'gaiety'.

when appearing, as it now did, not upon a canvas,³ but upon a moving shape, at midnight. Still endeavouring to shake off those impressions which benumbed him, he raised himself upon his arm, and faintly asked “who was there?” The phantom turned round—approached the bed—and fixed her eyes upon him; so that he now beheld a countenance where some of the worst passions of the living were blended with the cadaverous appearance of the dead. In the midst of traits which indicated noble birth and station, was seen a look of cruelty and perfidy, accompanied with a certain smile which betrayed even baser feelings. The approach of such a face near his own, was more than Colonel D— could support; and when he rose next morning from a feverish and troubled sleep, he could not recollect how or when the accursed spectre had departed. When summoned to breakfast, he was asked how he had spent the night, and he endeavoured to conceal his agitation by a general answer, but took the first opportunity to inform his friend Mr N—, that, having recollected a certain piece of business which waited him at London, he found it impossible to protract his visit a single night. Mr N— surprised, and anxiously sought to discover whether any thing occurred to render him displeased with his reception; but finding that his guest was impenetrable, and that his remonstrances against his departure were in vain, he insisted upon shewing⁴ Colonel [707] D— the beauties of his country residence, after which he would reluctantly bid him farewell. In walking round the mansion, Colonel D— was shewn the outside of the tower where he had slept, and vowed, mentally, never to enter it again. He was next led to a gallery of pictures, where Mr N— took much delight in displaying a complete series of family portraits, reaching back to a very remote era. Among the oldest, there was one of a lady. Colonel D— had no sooner got a glimpse of it, than he cried out, “May I never leave this spot, if that is not she.” Mr N— asked whom he meant? “The detestable phantom that stared me out of my senses last night;” and he related every particular that had occurred.

Mr N—, overwhelmed with astonishment, confessed that, to the room where his guest had slept, there was attached a certain tradition, pointing it out as having been, at a remote period, the scene of murder and incest. It had long obtained the repute of being haunted by the spirit of the lady, whose picture was before him; but there were some circumstances in her story so atrocious, that her name was seldom mentioned in his family, and his ancestors had always endeavoured as much as possible to draw a veil over her memory.

³ Written ‘canvass’ in the source text.

⁴ Show.