

Powys Castle

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IT had been for some time reported in the neighbourhood that a poor unmarried woman, who was a member of the Methodist society, and had become serious under their ministry, had seen and conversed with the apparition of a gentleman, who had made a strange discovery to her. Mr Hampson, being desirous to ascertain if there was any truth in the story, sent for the woman, and desired her to give an exact relation of the whole affair from her own mouth, and as near the truth as she possibly could. She said she was a poor woman who got her living by spinning hemp and line; that it was customary for the farmers and gentlemen of that neighbourhood to grow a little hemp or line in the corner of their fields, for their own home consumption, and as she had a good hand at spinning the materials she used to go from house to house to inquire for work; that her method was, where they employed her, during her stay to have meat and lodging (if she had occasion to sleep with them) for her work, and what they pleased to give her besides. That, among other places, she happened to call in one day at the Welsh Earl Powis's country seat, called Redcastle, to inquire for work, as she usually had done before. The quality were at this time in London, and had left the steward and his wife, with other servants, as usual, to take care of their country residence in their absence. The steward's wife set her to work, and in the evening told her that she must stay all night with them, as they had more work for her to do next day. When bed-time arrived, two or three of the servants in company, with each a lighted candle in her hand, conducted her to her lodging. They led her to a grand room, with a boarded floor and two sash windows. The room was grandly furnished, and had a genteel bed in one corner of it. They had made her a good fire, and had placed her a chair and a table before it, and a large lighted candle upon the table. They told her that was her bedroom, and she might go to sleep when she pleased, they then wished a good night and withdrew all together, pulling the door quickly after them, so as to hasp the springsneck in the brass lock that was upon it. When they were gone she gazed a while at the fine furniture, under no small astonishment that they should put such a poor person as her in so grand a room and bed, with all the apparatus of fire, chair, table, and candle. She was also surprised at the circumstance of the servants coming so many together, with each of them a candle; however, after gazing about her some little time, she sat down and took out of her pocket a small Welsh Bible which she always carried about with her, and in which she usually read a chapter—chiefly in the New Testament—before she said her prayers and went to bed. While she was reading she heard the room door open, and, turning her head, saw a gentleman enter in a gold-laced hat and waistcoat, and the rest of his dress corresponding there-with. (I think she was very particular in describing the rest of his dress to Mr Hampson, and he to me at the time, but I have now forgot the other particulars.) He walked down by the sash window to the corner of the room, and then returned. When he came at the first window in his return (the bottom of which was nearly breast-high) he rested his elbow on the bottom of the window, and the side of his face upon the palm of his hand, and stood in that leaning posture for some time, with his side partly towards her. She looked at him earnestly to see if she knew him, but though, from her frequent intercourse with them, she had a personal knowledge of all the present family, he appeared a stranger to her. She supposed afterwards that he stood in this manner to encourage her to speak; but as she did not, after some little time he walked off, pulling the door after him as the servants had done before. She began now to be much alarmed, concluding it to be an apparition and that they had put her there on purpose. This was really the case. The room, it seems, had been disturbed for a long time, so that nobody could sleep peaceably in it; and as she passed for a very serious woman, the servants took it in their heads to put the Methodist and spirit together, to see what they would make out of it. Startled at this thought, she rose from her chair, and kneeled down by the bedside to say her prayers. While she was praying he came in again, walked round the room and came close behind her. She had it on her mind to speak, but when she attempted it she was so very much agitated that she could not utter a word. He walked out of the room again, pulling the door shut as before. She begged that God would strengthen her, and not suffer her to be tried beyond what she was able to bear; she recovered her surprise and thought she felt more confidence and resolution, and determined if he came in again she would speak to him if possible. He presently came in again, walked round, and came behind her as before; she turned her head and said, "Pray, sir, who are you, and what do you want?" He put up his finger and said, "Take up the candle and follow me, and I will tell

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you." She got up, took up the candle and followed him out of the room. He led her through a long boarded passage, till they came to the door of another room which he opened and went in; it was a small room, or what might be called a large closet. "As the room was small, and I believed him to be a spirit," said she, "I stopped at the door; he turned and said, 'Walk in, I will not hurt you'; so I walked in. He said, 'Observe what I do'; I said, 'I will.' He stooped and tore up one of the boards of the floor, and there appeared under it a box with an iron handle in the lid. He said, 'Do you see that box?' I said, 'Yes, I do.' He then stepped to one side of the room and showed me a crevice in the wall, where he said a key was hid that would open it. He said, 'This box and key must be taken out, and sent to the Earl in London' (naming the Earl and his residence in the city). He said, 'Will you see it done?' I said, 'I will do my best to get it done'; and he said, 'Do, and I will trouble the house no longer!' He then walked out of the room and left me. (He seems to have been a very civil spirit, and to have been very careful to affright her as little as possible.) I stepped to the room door, and set up a shout. The steward and his wife, with the other servants, came to me immediately; all clinging together, with a number of lights in their hands. It seems they had all been waiting to see the issue of the interview betwixt me and the apparition. They asked me what was the matter. I told them the foregoing circumstances, and showed them the box. The steward durst not meddle with it, but his wife had more courage, and, with the help of the other servants, tugged it out, and found the key. She said by their lifting it appeared to be pretty heavy, but that she did not see it opened, and therefore did not know what it contained—perhaps money, or writings of consequence to the family, or both." They took it away with them, and she then went to bed and slept peaceably till morning.

It appeared that they sent the box to the Earl in London, with an account of the manner of its discovery, and by whom; as the Earl sent down orders immediately to his steward to inform the poor woman who had been the occasion of its discovery that if she would come and reside in his family she would be comfortably provided for during her remaining days; or, if she did not choose to reside constantly with them, if she would let them know when she wanted assistance, she would be liberally supplied at his lordship's expense as long as she lived. And Mr Hampson said it was a known fact in the neighbourhood that she had been supplied from his lordship's family, from the time the affair was said to have happened, and continued to be so at the time she gave Mr Hampson this account. She told him that she was so often solicited by curious people to relate the story that she was weary of repeating it; but, to oblige him, she once more related the particulars, wishing now to have done with it. Mr Hampson said she appeared to be a sensible, intelligent person, and that he saw no reason to doubt her veracity. I know many persons in the present day laugh at such stories, and affect very much to doubt their reality, while others totally deny the possibility of their existence. However, Scripture and many well-attested relations seem to favour the idea, and the present story appeared so singular and so well attested, and I had it so near the fountain-head, that I thought it might perhaps be worth preserving, and I have therefore taken pains to record it. Admitting it to be true, it should seem that the consequence to the family of what the hidden box contained was the formal cause of the spirit's disquiet, and of its disturbing the house so much and so long, in order to bring about the discovery; but why the departed spirit should concern itself in the affairs of this world after it has left it—or why they should disquiet it so as to cause it to reappear and make disturbances, in order to discover and have things righted, as in the preceding case—or why this should be done in some cases of apparently less moment, while in other cases much greater family injuries seem to be suffered, and no spirit appears to interest itself in the case—are circumstances for which we can by no means account. A cloud sits deep on futurity; and we are so little acquainted with the laws of the spiritual world that we are perhaps incapable, in our present state, of comprehending its nature or of giving any satisfactory account of these matters.