

The Radiant Boy of Corby Castle

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THE HAUNTED room forms part of the old house, with windows looking into the court. It adjoins a tower built for defence, for Corby was, properly, more a border tower than a castle of any consideration. There is a winding staircase in this tower, and the walls are from eight to ten feet thick.

When the times became more peaceable, our ancestors enlarged the arrow-slit windows, and added to that part of the building which looks towards the river Eden; the view of which, with its beautiful banks, we now enjoy. But many additions and alterations have been made since that.

To return to the room in question: I must observe that it is by no means remote or solitary, being surrounded on all sides by chambers that are constantly inhabited. It is accessible by a passage cut through a wall eight feet in thickness, and its dimensions are twenty-one by eighteen. One side of the wainscoting is covered with tapestry, the remainder is decorated with old family pictures, and some ancient pieces of embroidery, probably the handiwork of nuns. Over a press, which has doors of Venetian glass, is an ancient oaken figure, with a battle-axe in his hand, which was one of those formerly placed on the walls of the City of Carlisle, to represent guards. There used to be also an old-fashioned bed and some dark furniture in this room; but so many were the complaints of those who slept there, that I was induced to replace some of these articles of furniture by more modern ones, in the hope of removing a certain air of gloom, which I thought might have given rise to the unaccountable reports of apparitions and extraordinary noises which were constantly reaching us. But I regret to say, I did not succeed in banishing the nocturnal visitor, which still continues to disturb our friends.

I shall pass over numerous instances, and select one as being especially remarkable, from the circumstance of the apparition having been seen by a clergyman well known and highly respected in this county, who, not six weeks ago, repeated the circumstances to a company of twenty persons, amongst whom were some who had previously been entire disbelievers in such appearances.

The best way of giving you these particulars will be by subjoining an extract from my journal, entered at the time the event occurred.

Sept. 8, 1803.—Amongst other guests invited to Corby Castle came the Rev. Henry A., of Redburgh, and rector of Greystoke, with Mrs A., his wife, who was a Miss S., of Ulverstone. According to previous arrangements, they were to have remained with us some days; but their visit was cut short in a very unexpected manner. On the morning after their arrival we were all assembled at breakfast, when a chaise and four dashed up to the door in such haste that it knocked down part of the fence of my flower garden. Our curiosity was, of course, awakened to know who could be arriving at so early an hour; when, happening to turn my eyes towards Mr A., I observed that he appeared extremely agitated. "It is our carriage," said he; "I am very sorry, but we must absolutely leave you this morning."

We naturally felt and expressed considerable surprise, as well as regret, at this unexpected departure, representing that we had invited Colonel and Mrs S., some friends whom Mr A. particularly desired to meet, to dine with us on that day. Our expostulations, however, were vain; the breakfast was no sooner over than they departed, leaving us in consternation to conjecture what could possibly have occasioned so sudden an alteration in their arrangements.

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I really felt quite uneasy lest anything should have given them offence; and we reviewed all the occurrences of the preceding evening in order to discover, if offence there was, whence it had arisen. But our pains were vain; and after talking a great deal about it for some days, other circumstances banished the matter from our minds.

It was not till we some time afterwards visited the part of the county in which Mr A. resides that we learnt the real cause of his sudden departure from Corby. The relation of the fact, as it here follows, is in his own words:—

"Soon after we went to bed, we fell asleep; it might be between one and two in the morning when I awoke. I observed that the fire was totally extinguished; but, although that was the case, and we had no light, I saw a glimmer in the centre of the room, which suddenly increased to a bright flame. I looked out, apprehending that something had caught fire, when, to my amazement, I beheld a beautiful boy, clothed in white, with bright locks resembling gold, standing by my bedside, in which position he remained some minutes, fixing his eyes upon me with a mild and benevolent expression. He then glided gently towards the side of the chimney, where it is obvious there is no possible egress, and entirely disappeared. I found myself again in total darkness, and all remained quiet until the usual hour of rising. I declare this to be a true account of what I saw at Corby Castle, upon my word as a clergyman."

Mrs Crowe, alluding to this story in her "Night Side of Nature," said that she was acquainted with some of the family and several of the friends of the Rev. Henry A., who, she continued, "is still alive, though now an old man; and I can most positively assert that his own conviction with regard to the nature of this appearance has remained ever unshaken. The circumstance made a lasting impression upon his mind, and he never willingly speaks of it; but when he does, it is always with the greatest seriousness, and he never shrinks from avowing his belief that what he saw admits of no other interpretation than the one he then put upon it."