

# **Captain Wheatcroft**

DALE OWEN

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# Captain Wheatcroft

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IN the month of September 1857 Captain German Wheatcroft, of the 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons, went out to India to join his regiment.

His wife remained in England, residing at Cambridge. On the night between the 14th and 15th of November 1857, towards morning, she dreamed that she saw her husband, looking anxious and ill; upon which she immediately awoke, much agitated. It was bright moonlight; and, looking up, she perceived the same figure standing by her bedside. He appeared in his uniform, the hands pressed across the breast, the hair dishevelled, the face very pale. His large dark eyes were fixed full upon her; their expression was that of great excitement, and there was a peculiar contraction of the mouth, habitual to him when agitated. She saw him, even to each minute particular of his dress, as distinctly as she had ever done in her life; and she remembers to have noticed between his hands the white of his shirt-bosom, unstained, however, with blood. The figure seemed to bend forward, as if in pain, and to make an effort to speak; but there was no sound. It remained visible, the wife thinks, as long as a minute, and then disappeared.

Her first idea was to ascertain if she was actually awake. She rubbed her eyes with the sheet, and felt that the touch was real. Her little nephew was in bed with her; she bent over the sleeping child and listened to its breathing; the sound was distinct, and she became convinced that what she had seen was no dream. It need hardly be added that she did not again go to sleep that night.

Next morning she related all this to her mother, expressing her conviction, though she had noticed no marks of blood on his dress, that Captain Wheatcroft was either killed or grievously wounded. So fully impressed was she with the reality of that apparition, that she thenceforth refused all invitations. A young friend urged her soon afterwards to go with her to a fashionable concert, reminding her that she had received from Malta, sent by her husband, a handsome dress cloak, which she had never yet worn. But she positively declined, declaring that, uncertain as she was whether she was not already a widow, she would never enter a place of amusement until she had letters from her husband (if indeed he still lived) of a later date than the 14th of November.

It was on a Tuesday, in the month of December 1857, that the telegram regarding the actual fate of Captain Wheatcroft was published in London. It was to the effect that he was killed before Lucknow on the fifteenth of November.

This news, given in the morning paper, attracted the attention of Mr Wilkinson, a London solicitor, who had in charge Captain Wheatcroft's affairs. When at a later period this gentleman met the widow, she informed him that she had been quite prepared for the melancholy news, but that she had felt sure her husband could not have been killed on the 15th of November, inasmuch as it was during the night between the 14th and 15th that he appeared to her.

The certificate from the War Office, however, which it became Mr Wilkinson's duty to obtain, confirmed the date given in the telegram, its tenor being as follows:— "No. 9579-1

WAR OFFICE, 30th January 1858.

## Captain Wheatcroft

"These are to certify that it appears, by the records in this office, that Captain German Wheatcroft of the 6th Dragoon Guards, was killed in action on the 15th of November 1857. "(Signed) B. HAWES."

The difference of longitude between London and Lucknow being about five hours, three or four o'clock a.m. in London would be eight or nine o'clock a.m. at Lucknow. But it was in the afternoon not in the morning, as will be seen in the sequel, that Captain Wheatcroft was killed. Had he fallen on the 15th, therefore, the apparition to his wife would have appeared several hours before the engagement in which he fell, and while he was yet alive and well.