

Dorothy Durant

Mrs CROWE

Table of Contents

<u>Dorothy Durant</u>	1
<u>Mrs CROWE</u>	1

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A SCHOOLBOY named Bligh, who went to Launceston Grammar School, of which the Rev. John Ruddle was headmaster, from being a lad of bright parts and no common attainments, became on a sudden moody, dejected, and melancholy. His friends, seeing the change without being able to find the cause, attributed it to laziness, an aversion to school, or to some other motive which he was ashamed to avow. He was led, however, to tell his brother, after some time, that in a field through which he passed to and from school, he invariably met the apparition of a woman, whom he personally knew while living, and who had been dead about eight years. Ridicule, threats, persuasions, were alike used in vain by the family to induce him to dismiss these absurd ideas. Finally, Mr Ruddle was sent for, and to him the boy ingenuously told the time, manner, and frequency of this appearance. It was in a field called Higher Broomfield. The apparition, he said, appeared dressed in female attire, met him two or three times while he passed through the field, glided hastily by him, but never spoke. He had thus been occasionally met about two months before he took any particular notice of it; at length the appearance became more frequent, meeting him both morning and evening, but always in the same field, yet invariably moving out of the path when it came close to him. He often spoke, but could never get any reply. To avoid this unwelcome visitor he forsook the field, and went to school and returned from it through a lane, in which place, between the quarry pack and nursery, it always met him. Unable to disbelieve the evidence of his own senses, or to obtain credit with any of his family, he prevailed upon Mr Ruddle to accompany him to the place.

"I arose," says this clergyman, "the next morning, and went with him. The field to which he led me I guessed to be about twenty acres, in an open country, and about three furlongs from any house. We went into the field, and had not gone a third part before the specter in the shape of a woman, with all the circumstances he had described the day before, so far as the suddenness of its appearance and transition would permit me to discover, passed by.

"I was a little surprised at it, and though I had taken up a firm resolution to speak to it, I had not the power, nor durst I look back; yet I took care not to show any fear to my pupil and guide, and therefore, telling him I was satisfied of the truth of his statement, we walked to the end of the field and returned—nor did the ghost meet us that time but once.

"On the 27th July, 1665, I went to the haunted field by myself, and walked the breadth of it without any encounter. I then returned and took the other walk, and then the spectre appeared to me, much about the same place in which I saw it when the young gentleman was with me. It appeared to move swifter than before, and seemed to be about ten feet from me on my right hand, insomuch that I had not time to speak to it, 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 proposed to them our going altogether to the place next morning. We accordingly met at the stile we had appointed; thence we all four walked into the field together. We had not gone more than half the field before the ghost made its appearance. It then came over the stile just before us, and moved with such rapidity that by the time we had gone six or seven steps it passed by. I immediately turned my head and ran after it, with the young man by my side. We saw it pass over the stile at which we entered, and no farther. I stepped upon the hedge at one place and the young man at another, but we could discern nothing; whereas I do 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: first, a spaniel dog, which had followed the company unregarded, barked and ran away as the specter passed by; whence it is easy to conclude that it was not our fear or fancy which made

Dorothy Durant

the apparition. Secondly, the motion of the spectrum was not gradatim or by steps, or moving of the feet, but by a kind of gliding, as children upon ice, or as a boat down a river, which punctually answers the description the ancients give of the motion of these Lamures. This ocular evidence clearly convinced, but withal strangely affrighted, the old gentleman and his wife. They well knew this woman, Dorothy Durant, in her life-time; were at her burial, and now plainly saw her features in this apparition.

"The next morning, being Thursday, I went very early by myself, and walked for about an hour's space in meditation and prayer in the field next adjoining. Soon after five I stepped over the stile into the haunted field, and had not gone above thirty or forty paces before the ghost appeared at the further stile. I spoke to it in some short sentences with a loud voice; whereupon it approached me, but slowly, and when I came near it moved not. I spoke again, and it answered in a voice neither audible nor very intelligible. I was not in the least terrified, and therefore persisted until it spoke again and gave me satisfaction; but the work could not be finished at this time. Whereupon 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 now, nor hath appeared 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," concludes the Rev. John Ruddle, "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 all deceive me about their proper objects, and by that persuasion deprive me of the strongest inducement to believe the Christian religion, I must and will assert that the things contained in this paper are true."