

The Ghost of Major Sydenham

JOSEPH GLANVIL

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CONCERNING the apparition of the Ghost of Major George Sydenham, (late of Dulverton in the County of Somerset) to Captain William Dyke, late of Skilgate in this County also, and now likewise deceased: Be pleased to take the Relation of it as I have it from the worthy and learned Dr Tho. Dyke, a near kinsman of the Captain's, thus: Shortly after the Major's Death, the Doctor was desired to come to the House, to take care of a Child that was there sick, and in his way thither he called on the Captain, who was very willing to wait on him to the place, because he must, as he said, have gone thither that night, though he had not met with so encouraging an opportunity. After their arrival there at the House, and the Civility of the People shewn them in that Entertainment, they were seasonably conducted to their Lodging, which they desired might be together in the same Bed: Where after they had lain a while, the Captain knocked, and bids the Servant bring him two of the largest and biggest Candles lighted that he could get. Whereupon the Doctor enquires what he meant by this? The Captain answers, You know Cousin what Disputes my Major and I have had touching the Being of a God, and the Immortality of the Soul; in which points we could never yet be resolv'd, though we so much sought for and desired it; and therefore it was at length fully agreed between us, That he of us that died first, should the third Night after his Funeral, between the Hours of Twelve and one, come to the little House that is here in the Garden, and there give a full account to the Survivor touching these Matters, who should be sure to be present there at the set time, and so receive a full satisfaction; and this, says the Captain, is the very Night, and I am come on purpose to fulfil my promise. The Doctor dissuaded him, minding him of the danger of following those strange Counsels, for which we could have no Warrant, and that the Devil might by some cunning Device make such an advantage of this rash attempt, as might work his utter Ruin. The Captain replies, That he had solemnly engaged, and that nothing should discourage him, and adds, that if the Doctor would wake awhile with him, he would thank him, if not, he might compose himself to his rest; but for his own part he was resolv'd to watch, that he might be sure to be present at the Hour appointed: To that purpose he sets his watch by him, and as soon as he perceived by it that it was half an Hour past 11, he rises, and taking a Candle in each Hand, goes out by a back-door, of which he had before gotten the Key, and walks to the Garden-house, where he continued two hours and a half, and at his return declared, that he had neither saw nor heard any thing more than what was usual. But I know, said he, that my Major would surely have come, had he been able.

About 6 weeks after, the Captain rides to Eaton to place his Son a Scholar there, when the Doctor went thither with him. They lodged there at an Inn, the Sign was the Christopher, and tarried two or three Nights, not lying together now as before at Dulverton, but in two several Chambers. The morning before they went thence, the Captain staid in his Chamber longer than he was wont to do before he called upon the Doctor. At length he comes into the Doctor's Chamber, but in a Visage and Form much differing from himself, with his Hair and Eyes staring, and his whole Body shaking and trembling: Whereupon at the Doctor wondering, presently demanded: What is the matter Cousin Captain? The Captain replies, I have seen my Major: At which the Doctor seeming to smile, the Captain immediately confirms it, saying, If ever I saw him in my Life, I saw him but now: And then he related to the Doctor what had passed, thus: This morning after it was light, someone comes to my bedside, and suddenly drawing back the Curtains, calls, Cap. Cap. (which was the term of familiarity that the Major used to call the Captain by). To whom I replied, What my Major? To which he returns, I could not come at the time appointed, but I am now come to tell you, That there is a God, and a very just and terrible one, and if you do not turn over a new leaf, (the very Expressions as is by the Doctor punctually remembered) you will find it so. The Captain proceeded: On the Table by there lay a Sword, which the Major had formerly given me. Now after the Apparition

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had walked a turn or two about the Chamber, he took up the Sword, drew it out, and finding it not so clean and bright as it ought, Cap. Cap. says he, this Sword did not use to be kept after this manner when it was mine. After which Words he suddenly disappeared.

The Captain was not only thoroughly persuaded of what he had thus seen and heard, but was from that time observed to be very much affected with it: and the Humour that before in him was brisk and jovial, was then strangely alter'd; insomuch, as very little Meat would pass down with him at Dinner, though at the taking leave of their Friends there was a very handsome Treat provided: Yea it was observed that what the Captain had thus seen and heard, had a more lasting Influence upon him, and 'tis judged by those who were well acquainted with his Conversation, that the remembrance of this Passage stuck close to him, and that those words of his dead Friend were frequently sounding fresh in his Ears, during the remainder of his Life, which was about Two Years.