
The Best Ghost Stories

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BEST GHOST STORIES

THE APPARITION OF MRS. VEAL

By Daniel De Foe

THE PREFACE

This relation is matter of fact, and attended with such circumstances, as may induce any reasonable man to believe it. It was sent by a gentleman, a justice of peace, at Maidstone, in Kent, and a very intelligent person, to his friend in London, as it is here worded; which discourse is attested by a very sober and understanding gentlewoman, a kinswoman of the said gentleman's, who lives in Canterbury, within a few doors of the house in which the within-named Mrs. Bargrave lives; who believes his kinswoman to be of so discerning a spirit, as not to be put upon by any fallacy; and who positively assured him that the whole matter, as it is related and laid down, is really true; and what she herself had in the same words, as near as may be, from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth, who, she knows, had no reason to invent and publish such a story, or any design to forge and tell a lie, being a woman of much honesty and virtue, and her whole life a course, as it were, of piety. The use which we ought to make of it, is to consider, that there is a life to come after this, and a just God, who will retribute to every one according to the deeds done in the body; and therefore to reflect upon our past course of life we have led in the world; that our time is short and uncertain; and that if we would escape the punishment of the ungodly, and receive the reward of the righteous, which is the laying hold of eternal life, we ought, for the time to come, to return to God by a speedy repentance, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well: to seek after God early, if happily He may be found of us, and lead such lives for the future, as may be well pleasing in His sight.

A RELATION OF THE APPARITION OF MRS. VEAL

This thing is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation has not given me anything like it: it is fit to gratify the most ingenious and serious inquirer. Mrs. Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs. Veal appeared after her death; she is my intimate friend, and I can avouch for her reputation, for these last fifteen or sixteen years, on my own knowledge; and I can confirm the good character she had from her youth, to the time of my acquaintance. Though, since this relation, she is calumniated by some people, that are friends to the brother of this Mrs. Veal, who appeared; who think the relation of this appearance to be a reflection, and endeavor what they can to blast Mrs. Bargrave's reputation, and to laugh the story out of countenance. But by the circumstances thereof, and the cheerful disposition of Mrs. Bargrave, notwithstanding the ill-usage of a very wicked husband, there is not yet the least sign of dejection in her face; nor did I ever hear her let fall a desponding or murmuring expression; nay, not when actually under her husband's barbarity; which I have been witness to, and several other persons of undoubted reputation.

Now you must know, Mrs. Veal was a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, and for some years last past had been troubled with fits; which were perceived coming on her, by her going off from her discourse very abruptly to some impertinence. She was maintained by an only brother, and kept his house in Dover. She was a very pious woman, and her brother a very sober man to all appearance; but now he does all he can to null or quash the story. Mrs. Veal was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Bargrave from her childhood. Mrs. Veal's circumstances were then mean; her father did not take care of his children as he ought, so that they were exposed to hardships; and Mrs. Bargrave, in those days, had as unkind a father, though she wanted neither for food nor clothing, whilst Mrs. Veal wanted for both; insomuch that she would often say, Mrs. Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the world, and no circumstances of life shall ever dissolve my friendship. They would often condole each other's adverse fortunes, and read together Drelincourt upon Death, and other good books; and so, like two Christian friends, they comforted each other under their sorrow.

Some time after, Mr. Veal's friends got him a place in the custom-house at Dover, which occasioned Mrs. Veal, by little and little, to fall off from her intimacy with Mrs. Bargrave, though there was never any such thing as a quarrel; but an indifferency came on by

degrees, till at last Mrs. Bargrave had not seen her in two years and a half; though above a twelvemonth of the time Mrs. Bargrave hath been absent from Dover, and this last half year has been in Canterbury about two months of the time, dwelling in a house of her own.

In this house, on the 8th of September, 1705, she was sitting alone in the forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate life, and arguing herself into a due resignation to providence, though her condition seemed hard. And, said she, I have been provided for hitherto, and doubt not but I shall be still; and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me: and then took up her sewing-work, which she had no sooner done, but she hears a knocking at the door. She went to see who was there, and this proved to be Mrs. Veal, her old friend, who was in a riding-habit. At that moment of time the clock struck twelve at noon.

Madam, says Mrs. Bargrave, I am surprised to see you, you have been so long a stranger; but told her, she was glad to see her, and offered to salute her; which Mrs. Veal complied with, till their lips almost touched; and then Mrs. Veal drew her hand across her own eyes, and said, I am not very well; and so waived it. She told Mrs. Bargrave, she was going a journey, and had a great mind to see her first. But, says Mrs. Bargrave, how came you to take a journey alone? I am amazed at it, because I know you have a fond brother. Oh! says Mrs. Veal, I gave my brother the slip, and came away because I had so great a desire to see you before I took my journey. So Mrs. Bargrave went in with her, into another room within the first, and Mrs. Veal sat her down in an elbow-chair, in which Mrs. Bargrave was sitting when she heard Mrs. Veal knock. Then says Mrs. Veal, My dear friend, I am come to renew our old friendship again, and beg your pardon for my breach of it; and if you can forgive me, you are the best of women. O, says Mrs. Bargrave, do not mention such a thing; I have not had an uneasy thought about it; I can easily forgive it. What did you think of me? said Mrs. Veal. Says Mrs. Bargrave, I thought you were like the rest of the world, and that prosperity had made you forget yourself and me. Then Mrs. Veal reminded Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort, in particular, they received from Drelincourt's Book of Death, which was the best, she said, on that subject ever written. She also mentioned Dr. Sherlock, the two Dutch books which were translated, written upon death, and several others. But Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death, and of the future state, of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave, whether she had Drelincourt. She said, Yes. Says Mrs. Veal, Fetch it. And so Mrs. Bargrave goes up stairs and brings it down. Says Mrs. Veal, Dear Mrs. Bargrave, if the eyes of our faith were as open as the eyes of our body, we should see numbers of angels about us for our guard. The notions we have of heaven now, are nothing like what it is, as Drelincourt says; therefore be comforted under your afflictions, and believe that the Almighty has a particular regard to you; and that your afflictions are marks of God's favor; and when they have done the business they are sent for, they shall be removed from you. And believe me, my dear friend, believe what I say to you, one minute of future happiness will infinitely reward you for all your sufferings. For, I can never believe (and claps her hand upon her knee with great earnestness, which indeed ran through most of her discourse), that ever God will suffer you to spend all your days in this afflicted state; but be assured, that your afflictions shall leave you, or you them, in a short time. She spake in that pathetic and heavenly manner, that Mrs. Bargrave wept several times, she was so deeply affected with it.

Then Mrs. Veal mentioned Dr. Kenrick's Ascetick, at the end of which he gives an account of the lives of the primitive Christians. Their pattern she recommended to our imitation, and said, their conversation was not like this of our age: For now, says she, there is nothing but frothy, vain discourse, which is far different from theirs. Theirs was to edification, and to build one another up in faith; so that they were not as we are, nor are we as they were: but, says she, we ought to do as they did. There was an hearty friendship among them; but where is it now to be found? Says Mrs. Bargrave, It is hard indeed to find a true friend in these days. Says Mrs. Veal, Mr. Norris has a fine copy of verses, called Friendship in Perfection, which I wonderfully admire. Have you seen the book? says Mrs. Veal. No, says Mrs. Bargrave, but I have the verses of my own writing out. Have you? says Mrs. Veal, then fetch them. Which she did from above stairs, and offered them to Mrs. Veal to read, who refused, and waived the thing, saying, holding down her head would make it ache; and then desired Mrs. Bargrave to read them to her, which she did. As they were admiring friendship, Mrs. Veal said, Dear Mrs. Bargrave, I shall love you for ever. In these verses there is twice used the word Elysian. Ah! says Mrs. Veal, these poets have such names for heaven. She would often draw her hands across her own eyes, and say, Mrs. Bargrave, do not you think I am mightily impaired by my fits? No, says Mrs. Bargrave, I think you look as well as ever I knew you. After all this discourse, which the apparition put in much finer words than Mrs. Bargrave said she could pretend to, and as much more than she can remember, (for it cannot be thought, that an hour and three quarters' conversation could all be retained, though the main of it she thinks she does,) she said to Mrs. Bargrave, she would have her write a letter to her brother, and tell him, she would have him give rings to such and such; and that there was a purse of gold in her cabinet, and that she would have two broad pieces given to her cousin Watson.

Talking at this rate, Mrs. Bargrave thought that a fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself in a chair just before her knees, to keep her from falling to the ground, if her fits should occasion it: for the elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs. Veal, as she thought, took hold of her gown-sleeve several times, and commended it. Mrs. Veal told her, it was a scowered silk, and newly made up. But for all this, Mrs. Veal persisted in her request, and told Mrs. Bargrave, she must not deny her: and she would have her tell her brother all their conversation, when she had opportunity. Dear Mrs. Veal, says Mrs. Bargrave, this seems so impertinent, that I cannot tell how to comply with it, and what a mortifying story will our conversation be to a young gentleman? Why, says Mrs. Bargrave, it is much better, methinks, to do it yourself. No, says Mrs. Veal, though it seems impertinent to you now, you will see more reason for it hereafter. Mrs. Bargrave then, to satisfy her importunity, was going to fetch a pen and ink; but Mrs. Veal said, Let it alone now, but do it when I am gone; but you must be sure to do it: which was one of the last things she enjoined her at parting; and so she promised her.

Then Mrs. Veal asked for Mrs. Bargrave's daughter; she said, she was not at home: But if you have a mind to see her, says Mrs. Bargrave, I'll send for her. Do, says Mrs. Veal. On which she left her, and went to a neighbor's to seek for her; and by the time Mrs. Bargrave was returning, Mrs. Veal was got without the door in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on a Saturday, which is market-day, and stood ready to part, as soon as Mrs. Bargrave came to her. She asked her, why she was in such haste. She said she

must be going, though perhaps she might not go her journey till Monday; and told Mrs. Bargrave, she hoped she should see her again at her cousin Watson's, before she went whither she was going. Then she said, she would take her leave of her, and walked from Mrs. Bargrave in her view, till a turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three quarters after one in the afternoon.

Mrs. Veal died the 7th of September, at twelve o'clock at noon of her fits, and had not above four hours' senses before her death, in which time she received the sacrament. The next day after Mrs. Veal's appearing, being Sunday, Mrs. Bargrave was mightily indisposed with a cold, and a sore throat, that she could not go out that day; but on Monday morning she sent a person to Captain Watson's, to know if Mrs. Veal was there. They wondered at Mrs. Bargrave's inquiry; and sent her word, that she was not there, nor was expected. At this answer Mrs. Bargrave told the maid she had certainly mistook the name, or made some blunder. And though she was ill, she put on her hood, and went herself to Captain Watson's though she knew none of the family, to see if Mrs. Veal was there or not. They said, they wondered at her asking, for that she had not been in town; they were sure, if she had, she would have been there. Says Mrs. Bargrave, I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours. They said, it was impossible; for they must have seen her if she had. In comes Captain Watson, while they were in dispute, and said, that Mrs. Veal was certainly dead, and her escutcheons were making. This strangely surprised Mrs. Bargrave, when she sent to the person immediately who had the care of them, and found it true. Then she related the whole story to Captain Watson's family, and what gown she had on, and how striped; and that Mrs. Veal told her, it was scowered. Then Mrs. Watson cried out, You have seen her indeed, for none knew, but Mrs. Veal and myself, that the gown was scowered. And Mrs. Watson owned, that she described the gown exactly: For, said she, I helped her to make it up. This Mrs. Watson blazed all about the town, and avouched the demonstration of the truth of Mrs. Bargrave's seeing Mrs. Veal's apparition. And Captain Watson carried two gentlemen immediately to Mrs. Bargrave's house, to hear the relation of her own mouth. And when it spread so fast, that gentlemen and persons of quality, the judicious and skeptical part of the world, flocked in upon her, it at last became such a task, that she was forced to go out of the way. For they were, in general, extremely satisfied of the truth of the thing, and plainly saw that Mrs. Bargrave was no hypochondriac; for she always appears with such a cheerful air, and pleasing mien, that she has gained the favor and esteem of all the gentry; and it is thought a great favor, if they can but get the relation from her own mouth. I should have told you before, that Mrs. Veal told Mrs. Bargrave, that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs. Bargrave, How came you to order matters so strangely? It could not be helped, says Mrs. Veal. And her brother and sister did come to see her, and entered the town of Dover just as Mrs. Veal was expiring. Mrs. Bargrave, asked her, whether she would drink some tea. Says Mrs. Veal, I do not care if I do; but I'll warrant you, this mad fellow (meaning Mrs. Bargrave's husband) has broke all your trinkets. But, says Mrs. Bargrave, I'll get something to drink in for all that; but Mrs. Veal waived it, and said, It is no matter, let it alone; and so it passed.

All the time I sat with Mrs. Bargrave, which was some hours, she recollected fresh sayings of Mrs. Veal. And one material thing more she told Mrs. Bargrave, that old Mr. Breton allowed Mrs. Veal ten pounds a year; which was a secret, and unknown to Mrs. Bargrave, till Mrs. Veal told it her.

Mrs. Bargrave never varies in her story; which puzzles those who doubt of the truth, or are unwilling to believe it. A servant in the neighbor's yard, adjoining to Mrs. Bargrave's house, heard her talking to somebody an hour of the time Mrs. Veal was with her. Mrs. Bargrave went out to her next neighbor's the very moment she parted with Mrs. Veal, and told her what ravishing conversation she had with an old friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's Book of Death is, since this happened, bought up strangely. And it is to be observed, that notwithstanding all the trouble and fatigue Mrs. Bargrave has undergone upon this account, she never took the value of a farthing, nor suffered her daughter to take anything of anybody, and therefore can have no interest in telling the story.

But Mr. Veal does what he can to stifle the matter, and said, he would see Mrs. Bargrave; but yet it is certain matter of fact that he has been at Captain Watson's since the death of his sister, and yet never went near Mrs. Bargrave; and some of his friends report her to be a liar, and that she knew of Mr. Breton's ten pounds a year. But the person who pretends to say so, has the reputation of a notorious liar, among persons whom I know to be of undoubted credit. Now Mr. Veal is more of a gentleman than to say she lies; but says, a bad husband has crazed her. But she needs only present herself, and it will effectually confute that pretense. Mr. Veal says, he asked his sister on her death-bed, whether she had a mind to dispose of anything? And she said, No. Now, the things which Mrs. Veal's apparition would have disposed of, were so trifling, and nothing of justice aimed at in their disposal, that the design of it appears to me to be only in order to make Mrs. Bargrave so to demonstrate the truth of her appearance, as to satisfy the world of the reality thereof, as to what she had seen and heard; and to secure her reputation among the reasonable and understanding part of mankind. And then again, Mr. Veal owns, that there was a purse of gold; but it was not found in her cabinet, but in a comb-box. This looks improbable; for that Mrs. Watson owned, that Mrs. Veal was so very careful of the key of the cabinet, that she would trust nobody with it. And if so, no doubt she would not trust her gold out of it. And Mrs. Veal's often drawing her hand over her eyes, and asking Mrs. Bargrave whether her fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs. Bargrave of her fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should put her upon writing to her brother to dispose of rings and gold, which looked so much like a dying person's request; and it took accordingly with Mrs. Bargrave, as the effects of her fits coming upon her; and was one of the many instances of her wonderful love to her, and care of her, that she should not be affrighted; which indeed appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the day-time, waiving the salutation, and when she was alone; and then the manner of her parting, to prevent a second attempt to salute her.

Now, why Mr. Veal should think this relation a reflection, as it is plain he does, by his endeavoring to stifle it, I cannot imagine; because the generality believe her to be a good spirit, her discourse was so heavenly. Her two great errands were to comfort Mrs. Bargrave in her affliction, and to ask her forgiveness for the breach of friendship, and with a pious discourse to encourage her. So that, after all, to suppose that Mrs. Bargrave could hatch such an invention as this from Friday noon till Saturday noon, supposing that she knew of Mrs. Veal's death the very first moment, without jumbling circumstances, and without any interest too; she must be more witty, fortunate, and wicked too, than any indifferent person, I dare say, will allow. I asked Mrs. Bargrave several times, if she was sure she felt the gown? She answered modestly, If my senses be to be relied on, I am sure of it. I asked her, if she heard a sound when

she clapped her hand upon her knee? She said, she did not remember she did; but said she appeared to be as much a substance as I did, who talked with her. And I may, said she, be as soon persuaded, that your apparition is talking to me now, as that I did not really see her: for I was under no manner of fear, and received her as a friend, and parted with her as such. I would not, says she, give one farthing to make any one believe it: I have no interest in it; nothing but trouble is entailed upon me for a long time, for aught I know; and had it not come to light by accident, it would never have been made public. But now, she says, she will make her own private use of it, and keep herself out of the way as much as she can; and so she has done since. She says, She had a gentleman who came thirty miles to her to hear the relation; and that she had told it to a room full of people at a time. Several particular gentlemen have had the story from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth.

This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied, as I am of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me. Mrs. Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone, would have been undoubted in any other case.

TO THE READER

The origin of the foregoing curious story seems to have been as follows:—

An adventurous bookseller had ventured to print a considerable edition of a work by the Reverend Charles Drelincourt, minister of the Calvinist church in Paris, and translated by M. D'Assigny, under the title of "The Christian's Defense against the Fear of Death, with several directions how to prepare ourselves to die well." But however certain the prospect of death, it is not so agreeable (unfortunately) as to invite the eager contemplation of the public; and Drelincourt's book, being neglected, lay a dead stock on the hands of the publisher. In this emergency, he applied to De Foe to assist him (by dint of such means as were then, as well as now, pretty well understood in the literary world) in rescuing the unfortunate book from the literary death to which general neglect seemed about to consign it.

De Foe's genius and audacity devised a plan which, for assurance and ingenuity, defied even the powers of Mr. Puff in the *Critic*: for who but himself would have thought of summoning up a ghost from the grave to bear witness in favor of a halting body of divinity? There is a matter-of-fact, business-like style in the whole account of the transaction, which bespeaks ineffable powers of self-possession. The narrative is drawn up "by a gentleman, a *Justice of Peace* at Maidstone, in Kent, a very intelligent person." And, moreover, "the discourse is attested by a very sober gentlewoman, who lives in Canterbury, within a few doors of the house in which Mrs. Bargrave lives." The Justice believes his kinswoman to be of so discerning a spirit, as not to be put upon by any fallacy—and the kinswoman positively assures the Justice, "that the whole matter, as it is related and laid down, is really true, and what she herself heard, as near as may be, from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth, who, she knows, had no reason to invent or publish such a story, or any design to forge and tell a lie, being a woman of so much honesty and virtue, and her whole life a course, as it were, of piety." Skepticism itself could not resist this triple court of evidence so artfully combined, the Justice attesting for the discerning spirit of the sober and understanding gentlewoman his kinswoman, and his kinswoman becoming bail for the veracity of Mrs. Bargrave. And here, gentle reader, admire the simplicity of those days. Had Mrs. Veal's visit to her friend happened in our time, the conductors of the daily press would have given the word, and seven gentlemen unto the said press belonging, would, with an obedient start, have made off for Kingston, for Canterbury, for Dover,—for Kamchatka if necessary,—to pose the Justice, cross-examine Mrs. Bargrave, confront the sober and understanding kinswoman, and dig Mrs. Veal up from her grave, rather than not get to the bottom of the story. But in our time we doubt and scrutinize; our ancestors wondered and believed.

Before the story is commenced, the understanding gentlewoman (not the Justice of Peace), who is the reporter, takes some pains to repel the objections made against the story by some of the friends of Mrs. Veal's brother, who consider the marvel as an aspersion on their family, and do what they can to laugh it out of countenance. Indeed, it is allowed, with admirable impartiality, that Mr. Veal is too much of a gentleman to suppose Mrs. Bargrave invented the story—scandal itself could scarce have supposed that—although one notorious liar, who is chastised towards the conclusion of the story, ventures to throw out such an insinuation. No reasonable or respectable person, however, could be found to countenance the suspicion, and Mr. Veal himself opined that Mrs. Bargrave had been driven crazy by a cruel husband, and dreamed the whole story of the apparition. Now all this is sufficiently artful. To have vouched the fact as universally known, and believed by every one, *nem. con.*, would not have been half so satisfactory to a skeptic as to allow fairly that the narrative had been impugned, and hint at the character of one of those skeptics, and the motives of another, as sufficient to account for their want of belief. Now to the fact itself.

Mrs. Bargrave and Mrs. Veal had been friends in youth, and had protested their attachment should last as long as they lived; but when Mrs. Veal's brother obtained an office in the customs at Dover, some cessation of their intimacy ensued, "though without any positive quarrel." Mrs. Bargrave had removed to Canterbury, and was residing in a house of her own, when she was suddenly interrupted by a visit from Mrs. Veal, as she was sitting in deep contemplation of certain distresses of her own. The visitor was in a riding-habit, and announced herself as prepared for a distant journey (which seems to intimate that spirits have a considerable distance to go before they arrive at their appointed station, and that the females at least put on a *habit* for the occasion). The spirit, for such was the seeming Mrs. Veal, continued to waive the ceremony of salutation, both in going and coming, which will remind the reader of a ghostly lover's reply to his mistress in the fine old Scottish ballad:—

Why should I come within thy bower? I am no earthly man; And should I kiss thy rosy lips, Thy days would not be lang.

They then began to talk in the homely style of middle-aged ladies, and Mrs. Veal prozes concerning the conversations they had formerly held, and the books they had read together. Her very recent experience probably led Mrs. Veal to talk of death, and the books written on the subject, and she pronounced *ex cathedra*, as a dead person was best entitled to do, that "Drelincourt's book on Death was the best book on the subject ever written." She also mentioned Dr. Sherlock, two Dutch books which had been translated, and several others; but Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and the future state of any who had handled that subject. She then asked for the work [we marvel the edition and impress had not been mentioned] and lectured on it with great eloquence and affection. Dr. Kenrick's *Ascetick* was also mentioned with approbation by this critical specter [the Doctor's work was no doubt a tenant of the shelf in some favorite publisher's shop]; and Mr. Norris's *Poem on Friendship*, a work, which I doubt, though honored with a ghost's approbation, we may now seek for as vainly as Correlli tormented his memory to recover the sonata which the devil played to him in a dream. Presently after, from former habits we may suppose, the guest desires a cup of tea; but, bethinking herself of her new character, escapes from her own proposal by recollecting that Mr. Bargrave was in the habit of breaking his wife's china. It would have been indeed strangely out of character if the spirit had lunched, or breakfasted upon tea and toast. Such a consummation would have sounded as ridiculous as if the statue of the commander in *Don Juan* had not only accepted of the invitation of the libertine to supper, but had also committed a beefsteak to his flinty jaws and stomach of adamant. A little more conversation ensued of a less serious nature, and tending to show that even the passage from life to death leaves the female anxiety about person and dress somewhat alive. The ghost asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she did not think her very much altered, and Mrs. Bargrave of course complimented her on her good looks. Mrs. Bargrave also admired the gown which Mrs. Veal wore, and as a mark of her perfectly restored confidence, the spirit led her into the important secret, that it was a *scoured silk*, and lately made up. She informed her also of another secret, namely, that one Mr. Breton had allowed her ten pounds a year; and, lastly, she requested that Mrs. Bargrave would write to her brother, and tell him how to distribute her mourning rings, and mentioned there was a purse of gold in her cabinet. She expressed some wish to see Mrs. Bargrave's daughter; but when that good lady went to the next door to seek her, she found on her return the guest leaving the house. She had got without the door, in the street, in the face of the beast market, on a Saturday, which is market day, and stood ready to part. She said she must be going, as she had to call upon her cousin Watson (this appears to be a *gratis dictum* on the part of the ghost) and, maintaining the character of mortality to the last, she quietly turned the corner, and walked out of sight.

Then came the news of Mrs. Veal's having died the day before at noon. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours." And in comes Captain Watson, and says Mrs. Veal was certainly dead. And then come all the pieces of evidence, and especially the striped silk gown. Then Mrs. Watson cried out, "You have seen her indeed, for none knew but Mrs. Veal and I that that gown was scoured"; and she cried that the gown was described exactly, for, said she, "I helped her to make it up." And next we have the silly attempts made to discredit the history. Even Mr. Veal, her brother, was obliged to allow that the gold was found, but with a difference, and pretended it was not found in a cabinet, but elsewhere; and, in short, we have all the gossip of *says I*, and *thinks I*, and *says she*, and *thinks she*, which disputed matters usually excite in a country town.

When we have thus turned the tale, the seam without, it may be thought too ridiculous to have attracted notice. But whoever will read it as told by De Foe himself, will agree that, could the thing have happened in reality, so it would have been told. The sobering the whole supernatural visit into the language of the middle or low life, gives it an air of probability even in its absurdity. The ghost of an exciseman's housekeeper, and a seamstress, were not to converse like Brutus with his Evil Genius. And the circumstances of scoured silks, broken tea-china, and such like, while they are the natural topics of such persons' conversation, would, one might have thought, be the last which an inventor would have introduced into a pretended narrative betwixt the dead and living. In short, the whole is so distinctly circumstantial, that, were it not for the impossibility, or extreme improbability at least, of such an occurrence, the evidence could not but support the story.

The effect was most wonderful. *Drelincourt upon Death*, attested by one who could speak from experience, took an unequalled run. The copies had hung on the bookseller's hands as heavy as a pile of lead bullets. They now traversed the town in every direction, like the same balls discharged from a field-piece. In short, the object of Mrs. Veal's apparition was perfectly attained.—[See The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., vol. iv. p. 305, ed. 1827.]

CANON ALBERIC'S SCRAP-BOOK

By Montague Rhodes James

St. Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagnères-de-Luchon. It was the site of a bishopric until the Revolution, and has a cathedral which is visited by a certain number of tourists. In the spring of 1883 an Englishman arrived at this old-world place—I can hardly dignify it with the name of city, for there are not a thousand inhabitants. He was a Cambridge man, who had come specially from Toulouse to see St. Bertrand's Church, and had left two friends, who were less keen archæologists than himself, in their hotel at Toulouse, under promise to join him on the following morning. Half an hour at the church would satisfy *them*, and all three could then pursue their journey in the direction of Auch. But our Englishman had come early on the day in question, and proposed to himself to fill a note-book and to use several dozens of plates in the process of describing and photographing every corner of the wonderful church that dominates the little hill of Comminges. In order to carry out this design satisfactorily, it was necessary to monopolize the verger of the church for the day. The verger or sacristan (I prefer the latter appellation, inaccurate as it may be) was accordingly sent for by the somewhat brusque lady who keeps the inn of the Chapeau Rouge; and when he came, the Englishman found him an unexpectedly interesting object of study. It was not in the personal appearance of the little, dry, wizened old man that the interest lay, for he was precisely like dozens of other church-guardians in France, but in a curious furtive, or rather hunted and oppressed, air which he had. He was perpetually half glancing behind him; the muscles of his back and shoulders seemed to be hunched in a continual nervous contraction, as if he were expecting every moment to find himself in the clutch of an enemy. The Englishman hardly knew whether to put him down as a man haunted by a fixed delusion, or as one oppressed by a guilty conscience, or as an unbearably henpecked husband. The probabilities,

when reckoned up, certainly pointed to the last idea; but, still, the impression conveyed was that of a more formidable persecutor even than a termagant wife.

However, the Englishman (let us call him Dennistoun) was soon too deep in his note-book and too busy with his camera to give more than an occasional glance to the sacristan. Whenever he did look at him, he found him at no great distance, either huddling himself back against the wall or crouching in one of the gorgeous stalls. Dennistoun became rather fidgety after a time. Mingled suspicions that he was keeping the old man from his *déjeuner*, that he was regarded as likely to make away with St. Bertrand's ivory crozier, or with the dusty stuffed crocodile that hangs over the font, began to torment him.

"Won't you go home?" he said at last; "I'm quite well able to finish my notes alone; you can lock me in if you like. I shall want at least two hours more here, and it must be cold for you, isn't it?"

"Good heavens!" said the little man, whom the suggestion seemed to throw into a state of unaccountable terror, "such a thing cannot be thought of for a moment. Leave monsieur alone in the church? No, no; two hours, three hours, all will be the same to me. I have breakfasted, I am not at all cold, with many thanks to monsieur."

"Very well, my little man," quoth Dennistoun to himself: "you have been warned, and you must take the consequences."

Before the expiration of the two hours, the stalls, the enormous dilapidated organ, the choir-screen of Bishop John de Mauléon, the remnants of glass and tapestry, and the objects in the treasure-chamber, had been well and truly examined; the sacristan still keeping at Dennistoun's heels, and every now and then whipping round as if he had been stung, when one or other of the strange noises that trouble a large empty building fell on his ear. Curious noises they were sometimes.

"Once," Dennistoun said to me, "I could have sworn I heard a thin metallic voice laughing high up in the tower. I darted an inquiring glance at my sacristan. He was white to the lips. 'It is he—that is—it is no one; the door is locked,' was all he said, and we looked at each other for a full minute."

Another little incident puzzled Dennistoun a good deal. He was examining a large dark picture that hangs behind the altar, one of a series illustrating the miracles of St. Bertrand. The composition of the picture is well-nigh indecipherable, but there is a Latin legend below, which runs thus:

"Qualiter S. Bertrandus liberavit hominem quem diabolus diu volebat strangulare." (How St. Bertrand delivered a man whom the Devil long sought to strangle.)

Dennistoun was turning to the sacristan with a smile and a jocular remark of some sort on his lips, but he was confounded to see the old man on his knees, gazing at the picture with the eye of a suppliant in agony, his hands tightly clasped, and a rain of tears on his cheeks. Dennistoun naturally pretended to have noticed nothing, but the question would not away from him, "Why should a daub of this kind affect any one so strongly?" He seemed to himself to be getting some sort of clue to the reason of the strange look that had been puzzling him all the day: the man must be monomaniac; but what was his monomania?

It was nearly five o'clock; the short day was drawing in, and the church began to fill with shadows, while the curious noises—the muffled footfalls and distant talking voices that had been perceptible all day—seemed, no doubt because of the fading light and the consequently quickened sense of hearing, to become more frequent and insistent.

The sacristan began for the first time to show signs of hurry and impatience. He heaved a sigh of relief when camera and note-book were finally packed up and stowed away, and hurriedly beckoned Dennistoun to the western door of the church, under the tower. It was time to ring the Angelus. A few pulls at the reluctant rope, and the great bell Bertrande, high in the tower, began to speak, and swung her voice up among the pines and down to the valleys, loud with mountain-streams, calling the dwellers on those lonely hills to remember and repeat the salutation of the angel to her whom he called Blessed among women. With that a profound quiet seemed to fall for the first time that day upon the little town, and Dennistoun and the sacristan went out of the church.

On the doorstep they fell into conversation.

"Monsieur seemed to interest himself in the old choir-books in the sacristy."

"Undoubtedly. I was going to ask you if there were a library in the town."

"No, monsieur; perhaps there used to be one belonging to the Chapter, but it is now such a small place——" Here came a strange pause of irresolution, as it seemed; then, with a sort of plunge, he went on: "But if monsieur is *amateur des vieux livres*, I have at home something that might interest him. It is not a hundred yards."

At once all Dennistoun's cherished dreams of finding priceless manuscripts in untrodden corners of France flashed up, to die down again the next moment. It was probably a stupid missal of Plantin's printing, about 1580. Where was the likelihood that a place so near Toulouse would not have been ransacked long ago by collectors? However, it would be foolish not to go; he would reproach himself for ever after if he refused. So they set off. On the way the curious irresolution and sudden determination of the sacristan recurred to Dennistoun, and he wondered in a shamefaced way whether he was being decoyed into some purlieu to be made away

with as a supposed rich Englishman. He contrived, therefore, to begin talking with his guide, and to drag in, in a rather clumsy fashion, the fact that he expected two friends to join him early the next morning. To his surprise, the announcement seemed to relieve the sacristan at once of some of the anxiety that oppressed him.

"That is well," he said quite brightly—"that is very well. Monsieur will travel in company with his friends; they will be always near him. It is a good thing to travel thus in company—sometimes."

The last word appeared to be added as an afterthought, and to bring with it a relapse into gloom for the poor little man.

They were soon at the house, which was one rather larger than its neighbors, stone-built, with a shield carved over the door, the shield of Alberic de Mauléon, a collateral descendant, Dennistoun tells me, of Bishop John de Mauléon. This Alberic was a Canon of Comminges from 1680 to 1701. The upper windows of the mansion were boarded up, and the whole place bore, as does the rest of Comminges, the aspect of decaying age.

Arrived on his doorstep, the sacristan paused a moment.

"Perhaps," he said, "perhaps, after all, monsieur has not the time?"

"Not at all—lots of time—nothing to do till to-morrow. Let us see what it is you have got."

The door was opened at this point, and a face looked out, a face far younger than the sacristan's, but bearing something of the same distressing look: only here it seemed to be the mark, not so much of fear for personal safety as of acute anxiety on behalf of another. Plainly, the owner of the face was the sacristan's daughter; and, but for the expression I have described, she was a handsome girl enough. She brightened up considerably on seeing her father accompanied by an able-bodied stranger. A few remarks passed between father and daughter, of which Dennistoun only caught these words, said by the sacristan, "He was laughing in the church," words which were answered only by a look of terror from the girl.

But in another minute they were in the sitting-room of the house, a small, high chamber with a stone floor, full of moving shadows cast by a wood-fire that flickered on a great hearth. Something of the character of an oratory was imparted to it by a tall crucifix, which reached almost to the ceiling on one side; the figure was painted of the natural colors, the cross was black. Under this stood a chest of some age and solidity, and when a lamp had been brought, and chairs set, the sacristan went to this chest, and produced therefrom, with growing excitement and nervousness, as Dennistoun thought, a large book wrapped in a white cloth, on which cloth a cross was rudely embroidered in red thread. Even before the wrapping had been removed, Dennistoun began to be interested by the size and shape of the volume. "Too large for a missal," he thought, "and not the shape of an antiphoner; perhaps it may be something good, after all." The next moment the book was open, and Dennistoun felt that he had at last lit upon something better than good. Before him lay a large folio, bound, perhaps, late in the seventeenth century, with the arms of Canon Alberic de Mauléon stamped in gold on the sides. There may have been a hundred and fifty leaves of paper in the book, and on almost every one of them was fastened a leaf from an illuminated manuscript. Such a collection Dennistoun had hardly dreamed of in his wildest moments. Here were ten leaves from a copy of Genesis, illustrated with pictures, which could not be later than 700 a.d. Further on was a complete set of pictures from a psalter, of English execution, of the very finest kind that the thirteenth century could produce; and, perhaps best of all, there were twenty leaves of uncial writing in Latin, which, as a few words seen here and there told him at once, must belong to some very early unknown patristic treatise. Could it possibly be a fragment of the copy of Papias "On the Words of Our Lord," which was known to have existed as late as the twelfth century at Nîmes?[A] In any case, his mind was made up; that book must return to Cambridge with him, even if he had to draw the whole of his balance from the bank and stay at St. Bertrand till the money came. He glanced up at the sacristan to see if his face yielded any hint that the book was for sale. The sacristan was pale, and his lips were working.

"If monsieur will turn on to the end," he said.

So monsieur turned on, meeting new treasures at every rise of a leaf; and at the end of the book he came upon two sheets of paper, of much more recent date than anything he had yet seen, which puzzled him considerably. They must be contemporary, he decided, with the unprincipled Canon Alberic, who had doubtless plundered the Chapter library of St. Bertrand to form this priceless scrapbook. On the first of the paper sheets was a plan, carefully drawn and instantly recognizable by a person who knew the ground, of the south aisle and cloisters of St. Bertrand's. There were curious signs looking like planetary symbols, and a few Hebrew words in the corners; and in the northwest angle of the cloister was a cross drawn in gold paint. Below the plan were some lines of writing in Latin, which ran thus:

"Responsa 12^{mi} Dec. 1694. Interrogatum est: Inveniamne? Responsum est: Invenies. Fiamne dives? Fies. Vivamne invidendus? Vives. Moriarne in lecto meo? Ita." (Answers of the 12th of December, 1694. It was asked: Shall I find it? Answer: Thou shalt. Shall I become rich? Thou wilt. Shall I live an object of envy? Thou wilt. Shall I die in my bed? Thou wilt.)

"A good specimen of the treasure-hunter's record—quite reminds one of Mr. Minor-Canon Quatremain in 'Old St. Paul's,'" was Dennistoun's comment, and he turned the leaf.

What he then saw impressed him, as he has often told me, more than he could have conceived any drawing or picture capable of impressing him. And, though the drawing he saw is no longer in existence, there is a photograph of it (which I possess) which fully

bears out that statement. The picture in question was a sepia drawing at the end of the seventeenth century, representing, one would say at first sight, a Biblical scene; for the architecture (the picture represented an interior) and the figures had that semi-classical flavor about them which the artists of two hundred years ago thought appropriate to illustrations of the Bible. On the right was a king on his throne, the throne elevated on twelve steps, a canopy overhead, soldiers on either side—evidently King Solomon. He was bending forward with outstretched scepter, in attitude of command; his face expressed horror and disgust, yet there was in it also the mark of imperious command and confident power. The left half of the picture was the strangest, however. The interest plainly centered there. On the pavement before the throne were grouped four soldiers, surrounding a crouching figure which must be described in a moment. A fifth soldier lay dead on the pavement, his neck distorted, and his eyeballs starting from his head. The four surrounding guards were looking at the King. In their faces the sentiment of horror was intensified; they seemed, in fact, only restrained from flight by their implicit trust in their master. All this terror was plainly excited by the being that crouched in their midst. I entirely despair of conveying by any words the impression which this figure makes upon any one who looks at it. I recollect once showing the photograph of the drawing to a lecturer on morphology—a person of, I was going to say, abnormally sane and unimaginative habits of mind. He absolutely refused to be alone for the rest of that evening, and he told me afterwards that for many nights he had not dared to put out his light before going to sleep. However, the main traits of the figure I can at least indicate. At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long, coarse hairs, and hideously taloned. The eyes, touched in with a burning yellow, had intensely black pupils, and were fixed upon the throned king with a look of beast-like hate. Imagine one of the awful bird-catching spiders of South America translated into human form, and endowed with intelligence just less than human, and you will have some faint conception of the terror inspired by the appalling effigy. One remark is universally made by those to whom I have shown the picture: "It was drawn from the life."