

THE GHOST OF TRINITY CHURCH, YORK

Some years ago I heard mention made of an apparition said to have been seen in Trinity Church, Micklegate, York, which at the moment excited my curiosity. But as I heard no more about it, it passed out of my mind.

In 1869 I was invited to deliver a lecture at Middlesborough, when I met a clergyman who introduced himself to me as an old acquaintance. We had not met for some years, and then he had been a boy at school. About a week after I left Middlesborough I received from him the following letter: —

I

“Easter Sunday Evening, 1869.

“DEAR MR. BARING-GOULD.

“I venture, from the slight acquaintance I am happy to have with you personally, and the deeper one I have with your tastes from external sources, to enclose for your perusal a narrative of a perfectly true event, drawn up by myself some few years ago, at the request of some friends who doubted the truth of the circumstances therein related. If you have ever heard anything of it, and can help me in explaining it, I shall be grateful, as it perplexes me, as one always is teased when something which one cannot account for has been brought to one’s notice.

“Mr. S—— is going in a few Sundays to preach at the very church in York where this took place, and this bringing again before my mind the spectacle I then saw, caused me to apply to my friends for the account I gave them, and I now send it to you. I could, if you are interested, supply some minor details, but better by word of mouth, if ever we meet again. The only correction I should make is this: You will find that I relate a sequence of events, and I am not quite satisfied in my own mind that I have given the order of the incidents exactly as they occurred, and it is possible that I may have inverted them. At the time I was so startled that I was more intent on observing the figures than noting what was the succession in the scenes, if I may use the expression. Indeed, each reappearance was a surprise; and when I tried to recall each incident in the order in which it occurred, I found that though I could recall the appearance distinctly before my mind’s eye, yet I could not swear to which scene preceded the other.

“This was the only occasion of my visiting the church. I confess the impression left on my nerves was not pleasant, and I do not think I should like

to risk the effect of a repetition of it. Apologising for thus troubling you with my experiences,

“I remain, yours very truly,
“A. B.

“P.S. — The Incumbent, Mr. W——, has left, and another, Mr. M——, has now the living of Holy Trinity, Micklegate.”

The following account, dated 1866, was enclosed in the letter: —

“While staying in York at this time last year (1865), or perhaps a little earlier, I first heard of the apparitions or ghosts supposed to be seen in Trinity Church, Micklegate. I felt curious to see a ghost, I confess, if such a thing is to be seen without the usual concomitants of a dark night and a lone house. Accordingly I went to the church for morning service on a blazing hot Sunday morning in August last, with a girl about thirteen years old and her little brother.

“The east window of the church, I must explain, is of stained glass, rather tawdry, and of no particular design, except that the colouring is much richer in the centre than at the sides, and that at the extreme edge there is one pane of unstained glass which runs all round the window.

“The peculiarity of the apparition is, that it is seen on the window itself, rather less than halfway from the bottom (as I saw it from the gallery), and has much the same effect as that of a slide drawn through a magic lantern when seen on the exhibiting sheet. The form seen — I am told invariably — is that of a figure dressed in white walking across the window, and gives the idea of some one passing in the churchyard in a surplice. only on Trinity Sunday did more than one appear, and that then there were three.

“But I can vouch for the larger number appearing on other occasions, as on the day I was there, which was one of the Sundays after Trinity, there were rarely fewer than three visible.

“The figures began to move across the window long before the commencement of the service, when in fact there was no one present but ourselves. They did so again before the service began, as well as during the ‘Venite’, and subsequently as many as twenty or thirty times, I should suppose, till the conclusion of the sermon.

“Of the three figures two were evidently those of women, and the third was a little child. The two women were very distinct in appearance. One was tall and very graceful, and the other middle-sized; we called the second one the nursemaid, from her evident care of the child during the absence of the mother, which relationship we attributed to the tall one, from the passionate affection she exhibited towards the child, her caressing it, and the wringing of her hands over it.

“I may add that each figure is perfectly distinct from the others, and after they had been seen once or twice are at once recognisable.

“The order of their proceedings, with slight variation, was this: The mother came alone from the north side of the window, and having gone about half-way across, stopped, turned round, and waved her arm towards the quarter whence she had come. This signal was answered by the entry of the nurse with the child. Both figures then bent over the child, and seemed to bemoan its fate; but the taller one was always the most endearing in her gestures. The mother then moved towards the other side of the window taking the child with her, leaving the nurse in the centre of the window, from which she gradually retired towards the north corner, whence she had come, waving her hand, as though making signs of farewell, as she retreated.

“After some little time she again appeared, bending forward, and evidently anticipating the return of the other two, who never failed to reappear from the south side of the window where they had disappeared.

“The same gestures of despair and distress were repeated, and then all three retired together to the north side of the window.

“Usually they appeared during the musical portions of the service, and especially during one long eight line hymn, when — for the only occasion without the child — the two women rushed on (in stage phrase), and remained during the whole hymn, making the most frantic gestures of despair. Indeed, the louder the music in that hymn, the more carried away with their grief did they seem to be.

“Nothing could be more emphatic than the individuality of the several figures; the manner of each had its own peculiarity. I do not doubt that if the stained glass were removed, a much plainer view would be obtained. I think so, because the nearer the centre of the window, where the stained glass was thickest, there the less distinct were the forms. It was like catching glimpses of them through leaves. But nearer the edge of the window, where the colours were less bright, they were *perfectly* distinct; and still more so on the pane of unstained glass at the edge. There they seemed most clear, and gave one the impression of being real persons, not shadows.

“Indeed, by far the most remarkable and perplexing incident in the whole spectacle was this, that on one occasion, when the mother and child had taken their departure, the medium figure — the nurse — waved her hands, and after walking slowly to the *very edge* of the window, turned round *whilst on the pane of unstained glass*, and waved her arm towards the other two with what one would call a stage gesture, and then I most distinctly saw, and I emphatically declare I did see the arm bare nearly to the shoulder, with beautiful folds of white drapery hanging from it like a picture on a Greek vase. Nothing could be plainer than the drag of the robes on the ground after the figures as they retired at the edge of the window where the clear glass was, previous to going out. The impression produced was that one saw real persons in the churchyard; for

though the figures were seen on the window, yet they gave one the impression of walking past the window outside, and not moving upon the glass.

“No one in the church seemed to be in the smallest degree attracted or discomposed by all this, or, indeed, to observe it.

“I talked a great deal on the subject with Miss C——, daughter of the late Dr. C——, of York, and she told me that Mr. W——, the Incumbent of Trinity Church, would give anything to get rid of it, or discover the imposture, if imposture there be. She told me that he and his family had watched day and night without being able to find any clue to the mystery. Their house is in the churchyard and opposite the east window, and therefore very favourably placed for such an investigation. I am not inclined to think that the trees outside the church at the east end can originate the appearance by any optical illusions produced by waving branches. I could see their leaves rustling in the air, and their movement was evidently unconnected with the appearance and movement of the figures.

“A. B.”

This curious communication led to my making inquiries, and I speedily heard of several persons who had seen the “ghosts” at a later date. Friends to whom I applied have sent me the following letters, written independently of one another. They naturally shrink from having their names published, but I can testify to these accounts being perfectly *bona fide*: —

II

SOUTH PARADE, YORK, *March 22nd, 1871.*

“DEAR MR. BARING-GOULD,

“I promised to send you an account of the ghost at Holy Trinity, Micklegate, and I now forward you the enclosed, written by a friend on whose word you may perfectly rely.

“I heard another account a few days ago from a lady who saw it on Sunday, the 19th February last. She described the figure — for she saw only one—as being dressed in a shining white garment, and says that it crossed the east window twice, with a slightly ‘skipping’ step. It appeared to be outside the church, as she saw it distinctly through the stained glass.

“I have never seen it myself, though I have been several times to the church.

“There are four lights in the east window, and the glass of the two central lights is of a darker tint than that in the side ones. There are, however, narrow panes of transparent glass in each of the lights, so that a person passing across the window outside could be distinctly seen by anyone sitting in the west gallery.

“The sill of the east window is about five feet from the ground outside, and about seven feet from the pavement inside; about ten yards from the east wall separating the churchyard from a private garden.

“Yours very truly,
“R. T.”

This is the enclosure alluded to by my friend “R. T.”: —

III

“Having heard from several people of the ghost at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Micklegate, York, on Sunday, at the end of September, 1869, a friend and myself made up our minds to go and see if we also could be favoured with a sight of this wonderful apparition.

“Well, we went up into the gallery, the only place whence they say it is to be seen. You may, perhaps, already know that the gallery faces the east window, which is filled with modern stained glass.

“I am afraid that our attention rambled somewhat from the service, for we were looking out for the ghostly visitant. However, we watched and watched, as we began to think, in vain, until at the very end of the second lesson, when, just before the beginning of the ‘Jubilate Deo,’ I saw a figure, I should say of a shortish woman, with something white folded over her, covering even her head and face, but still I could see what it was. The figure appeared to walk very fast across the two middle lights of the east window, from right to left (*i.e.*, from south to north), and seemed to be at some distance from the window.

“The strange thing is, that I saw it clearly through the thick painted glass.

“The whole thing happened so suddenly, and really surprised me so much, that for some time I could hardly get up from the seat or find my place at the beginning of the chant. Just as it disappeared my friend said, ‘Did you see that?’ To which, of course, I answered, ‘Yes; did you?’ that was all we saw; and a lady who was there at the same time, whom we knew, saw it also, exactly as we did, only apparently not with the same distinctness.

“Many persons have seen a great deal more. I believe that the figure is generally seen to walk across the window in the reverse way to that which my friend and I saw, and returns with a child, some say with two.

“We examined outside the window. It is a good deal above the ground, about five feet, I should think, and at the side of it is a very old gravestone, with no inscription on the headstone as far as I could make out. I believe it is currently reported that the apparition issues from that grave.

“Some people thought that it might be a shadow caused in some peculiar manner by the trees that grew outside; but it was not, for the trees were cut down about three years ago, and the apparition is still seen, as it has been, I have been told, for a century.

“I have nothing to add, except that this is a true and unexaggerated account of what I saw.”

IV.

YORK, *March 28th, 1874.*

“SIR,

“Owing to severe illness in my family, I was not able to reply to your note earlier. I will now try and tell you what I have seen and been told on the subject of the ghosts at Holy Trinity Church, Micklegate.

“A York lady, now dead, told me she remembered seeing it when a child, and that she once read an account of it in an old History of York: she thought the book must have been published in the seventeenth century.

“We now live in the parish of Holy Trinity, and attend the church regularly. A part of my family sit in the gallery, therefore I will tell you, in as matter of fact a manner as possible, what I myself have seen, and leave one of my daughters, if she likes, to give you her experiences.

“I must state also that the ghost is seen more or less distinctly as you happen to be seated in the centre or side of the gallery; as a rule, the former is the best place.

“As I have no faith in ghosts, I have been most wishful to have the matter cleared up. At present I cannot account for the appearance in any way.

“I went many times to the gallery in hopes of seeing the phenomenon, but was repeatedly disappointed. At last, one dull day, hopeless for the purpose as I thought — rain was falling at the time — I was startled by seeing something.

“There are two east windows — one on the right, filled with green glass, the organ in front of it. From the outside of this window I saw something move, and immediately a graceful figure of a girl of eighteen or twenty years crossed the outside of the stained east window with a light, free step. She was entirely covered with a fine lace veil which, as she walked and met the air, showed the outline of the head and figure; the features I could not distinguish, but could see a shade through the veil where they naturally would be.

“The veil was of a pure white, flowing back as a train as she walked. In two or three minutes the figure returned, the robe flowing back in the same way, and disappeared behind the organ window.

“The figure appeared to me to be decidedly outside the window, and at a greater distance than was possible for any one to be; in the first place, because the east window is high up, and therefore anyone walking past it, to be seen at all, must be at some little distance from it; and, secondly, because there is a dead wall within a few yards of the window.

“The pure white of the robe quite obliterated the colours in the window, but the lead work was distinct enough, and the figure appeared behind it. The distinct outline of the figure is most striking.

“The apparition always returns to the organ window. I have seen this several times since the first. Owing to the dull day and the darkness of the windows, the appearance on the first occasion was the more remarkable. Two or three other figures also appear, but I never thought them as distinct as the first, and I thought the second and third might be reflections of the first. The two or three often move quickly back and forwards with a dancing movement somewhat like the reflection of the sun on a wall, but taking the form of human figures. However, it was dull and raining when first I saw the apparition, so that on that occasion there could have been no reflection of sunlight.

“These appearances are sometimes not seen for weeks and months; then they appear once or twice on succeeding days or Sundays. No one can be sure of seeing them if they go to the church for that purpose. I do not believe the apparition takes place at one more favoured time than another, though some people like to think so. The present rector wished to abolish the ‘ghosts,’ and was advised to cut down one or two trees. This was done; all thought that the ghosts were banished. Ten months after there was a gay wedding; my daughters went into the gallery to witness the ceremony, and lo! The ‘ghost or ghosts’ were there also. They had not been seen for nine or ten months. That was the first occasion since the cutting down of the trees on which they reappeared.

“The Sunday School children who sit in the gallery see the form so often as to be quite familiar with the sight, and call them ‘the mother, nurse, and child.’

“The legend I have heard told of it is that a family, consisting of a father, mother, and only child, lived here once upon a time. The father died, and was buried at the east end of the church, under or near the organ window. After a while the plague broke out in York and carried off the child, and it was buried outside the city, as those who died of plague were not allowed to be laid in the churchyards for fear of communicating the infection.

“The mother died afterwards, and was laid in her husband’s grave, and now, as in her lifetime, continues to visit the grave of her child and bemoan the separation. The child is brought from its grave in the plague pit by the mother and nurse, and brought to the grave of its father, and then it is taken back to where it lies outside the walls.”

“L. S.”

V

The following appeared in the “Newcastle Daily Chronicle” a couple of years after the publication of my book, in 1874: —

“SIR, — On Good Friday last I went to Holy Trinity Church, York, for morning service, at 11 o’clock, and repaired with a friend to the gallery, being anxious to see a certain apparition which is said to haunt the place.

“The gallery is situated at the extreme west end of the building, and faces the east window, from which it is distant some 50 feet or so. It is said that in the aisle and body of the church nothing is ever seen. The gallery was full, but no one seemed to have come there especially for the ghost, and though many of them afterwards said they saw it, they were not in the least affected by the apparition, treating it as a matter of course, to which they were well accustomed.

“I kept my eyes fixed upon the east window for nearly the whole of the hour and a half during which the service lasted, but was not favoured with a sight of the phenomenon; although others saw it cross the window and return, and my friend, who knows it well, called my attention to the fact, at the moment, yet I could not perceive nothing. I therefore left the place as unbelieving as ever, and supposed that either I was the victim of a hoax, or that it required a great stretch of imagination to fancy that a passing shadow was the desired object. However, not liking to discredit the statements of many friends who were used to seeing it almost every Sunday, I consented on Easter Day to go to the same place and pew. The seat I occupied was not an advantageous one, a large brass chandelier being between me and the lower panes of the window. In the middle of the service my eyes, which had hardly once moved from the left or north side of the window, were attracted by a bright light formed like a female robed and hooded

passing from north to south with a rapid gliding motion outside the church apparently at some distance. The window is Gothic, and I fancy, from 20 to 25 feet high, by 12 to 15 feet wide at the base. The panes through which the ghost shines are about 5 feet high and about halfway between the top and bottom. There are four divisions in the window, all of stained glass, of no particular pattern, the outer on right and left being of lighter colour than the two centre panes, and at the edge of each runs a rim of plain transparent white glass, about two inches wide, and adjoining the stone work. Through this rim, especially, could be seen what looked like a form transparent, but yet thick, (if such a term can be used) with light. It did not resemble linen, for instance, but was far brighter, and would, no doubt, have been dazzling to a near observer. The robe was long, and trailed. The figure was of course not visible when it had crossed the window and passed behind the wall. My friend whispered to me that it would return, must return, and at the end of five minutes or so, the same figure glided back from right to left, having turned round while out of sight. About half an hour later it again passed across from north to south, and having remained about ten seconds only, returned with what I believe to have been the figure of a young child, and stopped at the last pane but one, where both vanished. I did not see the child again, but a few seconds afterwards the woman reappeared, and completed the passage, behind the last pane, very rapidly. Nothing more was seen during the service, and no other opportunity presented itself to me for making observations. During each time, the chandelier prevented me from obtaining a complete view but there could be no doubt as to the shape, a certain amount of indistinctness, however, being caused by the stained glass. On the reappearance for the last time, I saw the head, which was, I believe, that of the child, move up and down distinctly, as if nodding. The figure shone with dazzling brightness, and appeared to be at a considerable distance, say thirty yards or so, though at the same time as distinct as possible, considering the obstruction of coloured glass. Each time the level upon which it glided was precisely the same, and afterwards, on carrying a straight line from the spot in the gallery where I sat, through the part of the glass where the feet of the figure shone, and continuing that line (in my mind's eye, with all the objects before me, except the ghost, whose position I had taken good notice of), I found that it would traverse a thick holly tree eight or nine feet high at about four feet from the ground, and at two or three feet from the ground a low wall about four feet high, and would reach the ground itself in the middle of a gravel yard belonging to the back premises of the house, called the vicarage, at a distance of twelve or fifteen yards from the window. Any person walking between the window and the holly tree would barely be seen at all, much less be seen in the place which the apparition occupies; and any one on the further side of the tree would be almost if not quite invisible on account of the holly and other bushes and the dead wall. Any one about there at all can easily be seen from the many houses on all sides.

“If it were a shadow thrown upon the glass of the window it would, of course, be seen by those who sit in the body of the church as well as those in the gallery.

“It cannot be a reflection on the principle of Pepper's Ghost, which is produced by the figure actually being in a very strong light and appearing

reflected on glass in a darkish spot. The lights both inside and outside of the church at York which might be thought to produce the ghost, are precisely the reverse, and any figure required to be reproduced by reflection on the east window would have to be standing or walking in the centre of the aisle.

“For the above facts I can vouch, and I have no reason to believe that the following are either incorrect or exaggerated.

“It is said to appear very frequently on Trinity Sunday, and to bring two other figures on to the scene, another female, called the nurse, and the child. It is often seen as distinctly on a dark, rainy, or snowy day, as when the sun is shining. When I saw it the sun was not bright.

“The motion is even, not at all jerky. Sometimes it glides swiftly; at other times slowly. It cannot be a mere accidental reflection, from a door or window, for instance, for the figure faces different ways, according to the direction in which it is going; and it is not always alone, nor do the figures always act in concert.

“One of my friends, with a companion, has watched outside on the wall, where he had a full view of the whole place around, during morning service. The ghost has been seen from the inside while outside nothing was visible.

“It is said to have haunted the church for 150, 200, and some authorities say 300 years, and there are many pretty legends connected with it.

“One of the many traditions says that 300 years ago, during religious disturbances, a party of soldiers came to sack the convent attached to this church; that the abbess, a woman of great virtue and courage, stopped them, as they were entering, declaring that they should enter over her dead body only, and that, should they succeed in their sacrilegious purpose, as they afterwards did, her spirit would haunt the place until the true Church were re-established, and a convent built on the same spot. Another story relates that during the plague, some two hundred years ago, a nurse and child died of the pestilence, and were necessarily buried outside the city walls, while the unfortunate mother of the child, at her death, was interred in Holy Trinity Churchyard. Here the mother waits and receives the nurse and child, weeping and wringing her hands before parting with them. The same scene is often enacted several times during the same day, and even during the same service.

“Whatever may have been the circumstances under which the ghost (if it is one, which it is hard to believe in these matter of fact days) commenced its peculiar promenade, I would recommend those who have the chance to go to Holy Trinity Church, York, and see for themselves, though an audience of the apparition cannot always be assured. A ghost in broad daylight does no harm, frightens no one, and ought to interest everybody. — I am, etc.,

“H. G. F. T.”

Finally the Rector of Holy Trinity, York, intervened; he wrote to the "York Herald": —

"I think the time has come when it is perhaps necessary for me to give a word of explanation in regard to this imaginary apparition. The fact is simply this: Any one seated in the gallery of the church which is at the west end, can see through the east window any person, or persons, walking in the vicarage garden. The wall at the east end of the church, below the east window, is too high to allow anyone in the body of the church to see either the garden or anyone in it. This fact explains at once the reason, how it is absolutely necessary for anyone to be in the gallery in order to see the 'ghost.' This is the real truth of the matter. What is seen is not a 'ghost;' it is not a 'reflection,' but it is a living being, or beings, walking in a garden. Of course the east window being of stained glass and of a rather peculiar pattern, a distinct form is not always visible. And I may say that this simple explanation has been attested and verified over and over again both by myself and others. One argument of proof is all, I think, that I need give. The Vicarage House was at one time empty for about 12 months, during which time the 'ghost' was neither seen nor heard of, and then it was let to a person with a large family; and on the very first Sunday after the family took possession of the premises, I was told by a simple minded youth that the ghost had returned, and five or six young ghosts with it. After what I have here stated, I need hardly say that all the sensational matter in regard to vivid lights, mother, nurse, and child, extraordinary displays on Trinity Sunday, etc., etc., is as pure an invention as ever was fabricated by a morbid imagination. And I will add that I sincerely hope that the people of York will not take the advice of one of your voluminous correspondents, and will not go to the church for the mere purpose of seeing this purely imaginative ghost. I trust that all who go will remember it is God's house, intended to be a house of prayer, and not a place for gratifying an idle curiosity."

This letter called forth a sharp animadversion from another correspondent who signed himself "Novocastrensis," to which H. G. F. T. replied: — "I have read Mr. Gould's accounts since I saw the 'ghost,' and find that though they differ considerably in the details from my description, in the essential points they agree with and corroborate it. I should like to state here distinctly that the story was not adapted for my 'own' or any other's 'purpose' from 'Yorkshire Oddities,' but is an unprejudiced, and to the best of my belief, an unexaggerated and true account and description of what I myself saw. It is not my desire to raise a discussion, but the injustice implied in the letter is the excuse I urge for thus trespassing upon your space. — I am, etc.

"H. G. F. T.
"Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 6th May, 1876."

This provoked another letter from a fresh correspondent: — "SIR, — I was in York when the letters appeared in the *Chronicle* and the *Journal* about the ghost

in Holy Trinity Church. A lady, a member of the congregation, who has frequently seen the ghost, gave me the following simple explanation. Opposite the window there is a cottage, in one of the windows of which there is a swing pane of glass. The tenant of the cottage can cause the ghost to appear and disappear at pleasure by simply opening and shutting it, thus causing reflected sunlight to fall on the church window: — I am, etc.,

“J. L.
“May 9th, 1876.”

Another correspondent rushed into print: — “SIR, — though I am not one of those who can boast of having seen the York ghost, yet even to me the explanation published in today’s *Journal*, in a letter signed ‘J. L.’ seems utterly inadequate to explain the matter. The fact of a swing window opening and shutting might throw sunlight upon the church window, but it is perfectly clear that in such a case the reflection would not be confined perpetually to the same identical part of the window, the angles caused by the sun and the swing window being of course varied, according to the time of day. It strikes me that by those means the figures could not be reversed on their return as is always the case, according to the story. Again, the apparition is often seen in dull weather, when no sunbeam could be reflected. If the light were actually turned on to the stained glass, the congregation seated in the body of the church would be able to see it as well as those in the gallery, but they do not. I should like to see the matter explained. Yet a reason such as ‘J. L.’ gives for it is altogether unsatisfactory, and may be taken for what it is worth, which is not much, considering the evidence against him, and the fact that his information is only second-hand. — I am, etc.,

“R. H. H.
“Newcastle-on-Tyne.”

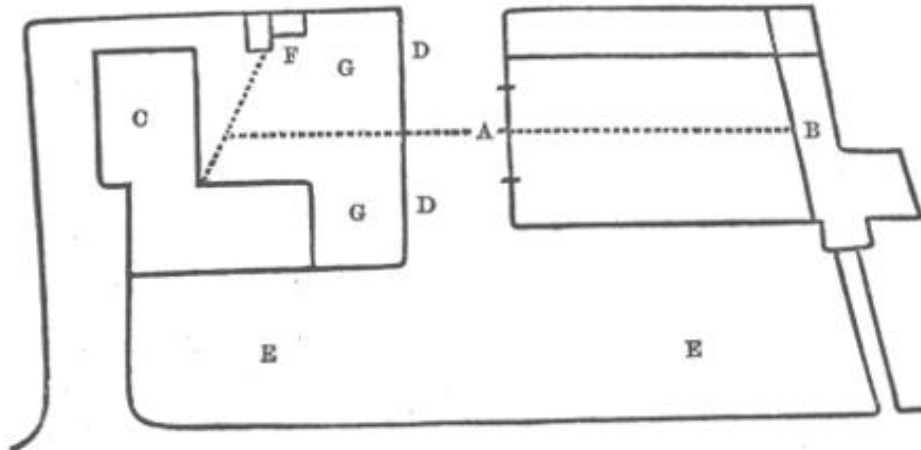
VI

“M—— Rectory, York, “*Aug. 11th, 1875.*”

“DEAR SIR, — Having had the pleasure of reading your interesting book ‘Yorkshire Oddities,’ I recognised an old acquaintance in the ‘Trinity Ghost.’ Happening to have found out an apparent explanation of the ghost, I thought you would be interested in hearing what I know about it.

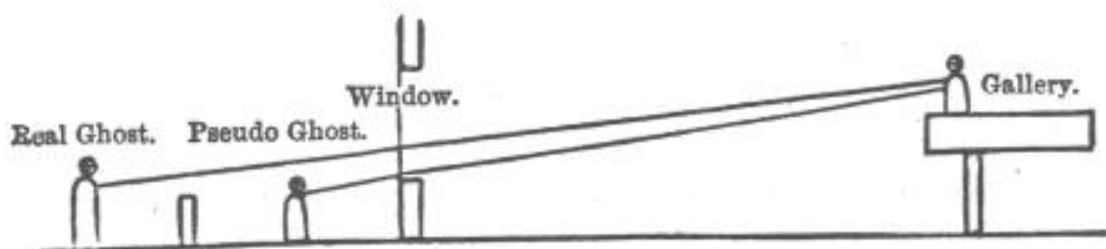
“In 1869 I went to school at Mr. Metcalfe’s, the present incumbent of the church. For my first year I saw and heard nothing about the ghost. We used to sit in two pews in the body of the church under the gallery. In 1870 we changed to a pew in the front of the gallery and the one behind it. Soon after we changed our seats, some of us saw the ghost, and the next Sunday we looked for it, and most of us saw it. The attempt was made known to find out what the ghost was. In 1871 my curiosity being rather excited by the frequent appearances of the

ghost, I and a boy of the name of Yewdall determined to find out what it was. The appearance of the ghost was, as one of your informants describes it, that of a figure in a surplice, and it always went across the window from left to right, and returned from right to left. The east window is a pattern window of a good deal of red and blue glass, and beyond the window there is a small strip of churchyard and then a wall. Beyond the wall is the yard of the old parsonage house. On the left hand side of this yard is the parsonage which is rented to a few poor families who used to take in lodgers. On the other side are the offices.



- A East window
- B Gallery
- C Parsonage
- D Wall
- E Churchyard
- F Ashpit, etc.
- G yard formerly garden

“As we used to teach at the Sunday School which was held in a large room jutting out from the parsonage towards the church, we often noticed the women and children of the house going across the yard to the ashpits; and it struck us that this might be the ghost. So we went into the church directly the doors were opened and went up into the gallery while another of us walked across the churchyard in front of the east window. Curiously enough, at the same time we saw him going across the window near the bottom, the ghost went across higher up. This goes a good way to proving my supposition, as is drawn in the following diagram.



“I have forgotten to state that the ghost was always seen best in sunny weather, but it is also to be seen in cloudy weather as well as bright sunshine. Usually one ghost appeared, but I have often seen two, and a few times as many as eight children with the two big ones. This was, I suppose, the husband and wife of one of the families surrounded by the children. In 1862 (I believe the date is correct) Mr. Saul was the Incumbent, but upon his death, on vacation of the living, the parsonage house was uninhabited. During this time I have been told that the church was delivered from the ghost, but the very first Sunday the new rector came the ghosts reappeared as before.—I remain, yours truly,

“____.”

The name I have not given, though the letter was signed.

PETER PRIESTLY, THE WAKEFIELD PARISH CLERK

In the middle of last century there lived in Wakefield a certain Peter Priestly, who for many years was sexton of the parish church of All Saints. The then vicar was Michael Bacon, D.D., a tall, portly man, of a commanding presence, who wore a large bushy wig, as was the wont of many old divines of that date. He was a man of rather a warm temperament, and was apt at times, when matters did not flow quite according to his will, to grow a little irritable, and whilst in that condition his habit was frequently to thrust his right hand in a testy, impetuous way under his wig. This habit destroyed the symmetry of that capital ornament, and made it protrude considerably on the right side; and this protrusion grew greater the longer the wig was worn.

The vicar's wigs were inherited and worn by the sexton, whose venerable and awe inspiring appearance was much enhanced thereby. Mrs. Priestly in vain endeavoured to reduce the protuberance of hair on the right side, so as not to betray the origin of the wig. The horsehair resumed its elasticity in spite of her efforts, and the congregation in the parish church were amused to see the stately Doctor in his reading desk with a deformed wig, and below him the scarcely less stately clerk in a wig the counterpart of that of the Doctor. But what amused the wags not a little was to observe the fact that when the Doctor's wig was perfectly symmetrical, instantly the sexton's assumed the most exaggerated inequality in the sides. The secret, of course, was that the Doctor had donned a new wig, and had given his old one to the clerk. But after a while the irascible vicar had succeeded in brushing out the tufts of his false head of hair on the right, and simultaneously the continued efforts of Mrs. Priestly had reduced the right-hand protuberance in the wig of her husband. Consequently, as one bush grew, the other shrank into itself. But there were points — like the equinoxes — when both wigs were alike.

Now it fell out that Doctor Bacon had determined to present himself with a new wig one Easter, and he had accordingly given Peter Priestly his old wig, which had arrived at its maximum of extension on the right hand side.

Peter had heard it said that on S. Mark's Eve the spirits of all those who are to die during the year may be seen in the church. Half believing this popular superstition and half in doubt about the truth of it, and thinking, moreover, that if it might be so, he should like to know whether trade would be brisk for him during the rest of the year, he decided that anyhow he would go to the church and see what would happen; and not wishing to spend his time idly, he determined to occupy himself with lettering some gravestones which he had not completed. The place in which he carried on this work was the base of the church tower, which was shut off from the nave by a large boarded partition, against which stood the west gallery of the church. The opening from the tower into the nave consisted of large folding doors.

Now, according to the story, on St. Mark's Eve a train of all those who are to die before the ensuing St. Mark's Eve come into the church through one of the

doors in their winding-sheets, each carrying a corpse candle. A ghostly priest precedes the weird procession, and dolefully intones the burial service.

When Peter had finished his supper on that eventful evening, he said to his wife: "I think, lass, I'll go and do a bit o' my lettering; so gi'e me my lantern wi' a can'le in it. I happen shan't be so varry long; but I think I'll just go for a bit. Howsomever, if I should stop a middling while, ye needn't be flayed (frightened), for I want to finish them two stoanes."

It was not without some trepidation that Peter took up his place in the tower, and left the folding doors ajar that he might look into the nave and see the awful train sweep in.

Peter was not a nervous man, or at least he did not think himself so, and he began his work, whistling a psalm tune. He was engaged on a large gravestone on which he had already completed about half the inscription. It was standing raised upon tressels to the required height; and at this he worked diligently for a long while, with his face towards the east and the folding doors, and every now and then he stole to the doors and peeped through into the nave. All was perfectly dark and silent. He returned to his work with lighter heart after each glance into the great dark church. He had taken the candle out of his lantern, and had put it into an old rusty candlestick, which he kept there for the purpose, in order that he might have a better light.

The church clock, with many premonitory groanings, had struck the hours of ten and eleven, and Peter still pursued his work. The eventful ghostly hour was approaching when the graves reveal their secrets. As this hour drew nigh Peter's courage began to fail. It flashed across his mind that perhaps the spectral procession would enter the church, not through the south porch, as he had at first conjectured, but through the western tower door; in which case it would be upon him, envelop him, before he knew where he was.

This caused great agitation in Peter's breast, and made him turn his head every now and then to see if anything were stirring. But all remained still; the only sound that broke the silence was the pulse of time, the old clock throbbing above in the tower, and that sound seemed to grow more monotonous and weary.

Twelve o'clock drew near, and Peter's heart began to beat quicker. "I arn't flayed" he said to himself, "but I'm varry hot; t' work ha' made me so, I reckon. There's nowt to be flayed at, for there's nowt to be seen. I'll just wait while it strikes twelve, and then I'll go home."

So on he worked, but his hand was not as steady as usual, and he made a blunder in the letter he was cutting; and this annoyed him.

"I doan't know how it is" he said; "I think I mun be getting ow'd, for my hand rather shakes, and I can't see as weel as I used." He wiped his spectacles and snuffed the candle which stood at his right hand, and drew it closer to him. At

that moment the striking apparatus of the clock groaned and prepared for twelve. Peter looked round over his shoulder. The quarter began to strike, and then with a great whirr the first stroke of the ominous hour sounded — the second — the third. How slow they did strike — surely slower than usual. At each stroke he turned his head and glanced behind him. Twice he started. Surely there was a little sharp sound for a moment, like an unearthly hiss. He raised himself and looked about him. There was nothing.

He bent himself again over his work, and the clock had reached the eleventh stroke. The twelfth followed. He turned sharply round, and on the instant such a rush sounded close to his right ear — such a strange, supernatural light glared suddenly through the tower — such a breath of hot air fanned his cheek — that he thought surely the ghostly train was passing. Over went the candle, and was extinguished. Down fell mallet and chisel. The old man stumbled out of the tower, rushed through the churchyard, and ran home, never looking behind him till he reached his door.

His house stood at the northeast corner of the churchyard. Opening his door, he ran through the room, and, pale and breathless, sank into his old armchair by the side of the fire. For a moment or two his mouth opened and gasped inarticulate words. Then, extending his trembling hand, he said to his alarmed wife “Gi’e me my pipe, lass — gi’e me my pipe.”

“Why, Peter” said his loving spouse “whativer is t’ matter wi’ thee? Thou looks right flayed.”

“Gi’e me my pipe, lass — gi’e me my pipe” he gasped again.

She went to the clock case and took the pipe down from a ledge at the side of it, where it always rested when not in use, and reached down the tobacco box from the delf case against the wall; and bringing them to the old man, said, as she gained a closer view of him, “Why, Peter, whativer hast thou been doing? Thou’st burnt ommost half t’ hair off t’ right side o’ thy wig!”

“What?” said Peter, with a sudden feeling of relief from his fright.

“Why, tak’ thy wig off, and thou’ll soon see” said the wife.

Doing as he was bid, he sat studying the precious wig. The great bunch of hair ruffled out by the vicar’s hand was consumed to the roots.

Peter burst out laughing; the mystery was solved. But he made no more visits to the church at midnight on St. Mark’s Eve.

Peter was remarkable for many witty sayings, but most of these have been forgotten.

He was lettering a gravestone in the churchyard one day, when a physician came by, who, looking at the inscription, which was partly cut, said, "Why, Peter, you've spelt it wrong."

"Have I, Doctor?" said he, sharply. "Then how should it be?"

When he was told how to correct his blunder, he looked slyly into the physician's face and said, "Well, well, pass it over, Doctor — pass it over. I've covered up monny a blot o' yours."

He one day stood listening to a Methodist local preacher in the marketplace. The preacher was attempting an oratorical effect, and exclaimed, "My brethren, if every field in the world was thrown into one field, what a great field that would be!"

"Ah!" said Peter, loud enough to be heard, "if every jackass i' t' world was one jackass, what a big jackass that 'ud be!"