

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION.

ABOUT seventeen years since, the inhabitants of Hammer-smith were alarmed by the mischievous pranks of some person, who, arrayed in a white sheet, acted the part of a ghost, choosing the church-yard for the theatre of his exploits. The sequel of this adventure was of a very tragical description: an exciseman and another individual, provided with fire-arms, sallying out in the evening with a view to detect the ghost, met, not the real object of their search, but a harmless brick-layer in a light working dress. The exciseman seized with a sudden panic, discharged his gun at the supposed apparition, and thus occasioned the death of a fellow creature.

For some weeks previous to this accident, the newspapers teemed with accounts of spectres. The most curious, if not the most formidable, of these phantoms, was one which appeared in St. James's Park; and which proved to be an optical deception, contrived by some young gentlemen belonging to Westminster school.

Happening to be in company with a party of friends soon after these occurrences, a conversation arose on the subject of supposed supernatural spectacles. A gentleman present, who is now dead, told the following story, with a view to demonstrate that the most striking cases of spectral visitations did not depend entirely on the imaginations of those who were the subjects of such delusions. Struck with the singularity of the narrative, I begged him to give it me in writing; and to oblige me, he drew up the ensuing statement.

Several years ago, calling on a friend, who resided at Y——, in Somersetshire, soon after he had lost his wife, to whom he had been united but six weeks when she died, I was by no means surprised to find him deeply plunged in grief. But making him a second visit in the following year, when nearly twelve months had elapsed since his misfortune, and perceiving that his sorrow and melancholy, far from being alleviated, were considerably increased, I thought it right to expostulate with him on the unreasonableness of

indulging in unavailing contemplation on a distressing accident, which shocking as it was, ought not to unfit a man of sense and resolution from performing with alacrity the common duties of his station. The replies he made to the exhortations of this kind which I addressed to him, soon convinced me, that the profound melancholy in which he was involved, arose from some cause which he felt unwilling to acknowledge. He was a man possessed of much good sense and acquaintance with the world; but his education had been neglected, and he was almost a stranger to those sciences which are now often cultivated by persons of his rank and fortune. In the first conversation I had with him, I could learn no more than that his mental anxiety originated in something which had occurred subsequent to the death of his wife. This made me more desirous to gain his confidence; and, a few days afterwards, I obtained from him a disclosure of the singular circumstances which had operated on his imagination, and reduced him to a state of mind, which had led several of his friends to form serious apprehensions for the stability of his intellects.

He spoke as follows:—"I should not expect to gain your credit to the statement I shall make, if I did not believe that I could afford you ocular demonstration to the truth of what I am about to tell you. The courtship between my poor Louisa and myself was, as you know, a long one. In the interviews and correspondence I had with her, sufficient opportunities were afforded me for discovering her sentiments and opinions on a variety of subjects. On one point alone we completely differed. She was prepossessed with a firm belief that the ghosts of the dead were sometimes allowed to revisit the scenes of their earthly existence. I had been accustomed to regard stories of apparitions with an incredulity closely bordering on contempt; and was therefore seriously vexed to find, that I could neither by ridicule nor reasoning, overcome her strong prejudice in favor of what I had always considered a vulgar error. She did not, however, want for arguments to support her own notions, and they were sometimes so ingeniously urged, that I found myself by no means able satisfactorily to combat them.

"At length, as we perceived that our respective reasonings

did not tend to produce conviction, but that, as it often happens, each party continued to think as before, we, by tacit consent, avoided the subject, and had recourse to themes which could create no difference between us; though I am disposed to conjecture, that she would have been less unwilling than I was to renew the discussion, especially after our marriage. On one occasion only, however, was the doctrine of spectral visitations agitated by us, and then she, feeling apparently hurt at the little respect I expressed for the understandings of those who could credit ghost stories, hastily, yet firmly, said, "Charles, if I die before you, depend on it you will not continue a sceptic a month after my decease." I was vexed with myself for having said any thing which could make her express herself so warmly and positively on what I thought a frivolous subject; but I should have soon forgotten the expression, if her sudden death, three days after this conversation, had not led me to retrace, as closely as possible, every thing that had passed between us during the short period that I was blessed with her society. Her funeral took place a fortnight after she died, and that over, I had more leisure for reflection. The evening after I had seen her remains committed to the tomb, I was sitting alone in the room where we were when she made the strange declaration I have just mentioned. In such a situation, I could not fail to recollect it. The more I thought of it the more it puzzled, and I must own, alarmed, me. I endeavored to banish from my mind the mysterious prediction, but in vain. At first I reasoned with myself on the folly of giving way to superstitious notions, which I then thought deserved to be considered as the cast-off opinions of a less enlightened age than our own. But finding it impossible to dismiss the subject from my thoughts, I gradually retraced the arguments by which my late wife had been accustomed to try to persuade me of the probability of an intercourse with the dead. She would sometimes say, that the virtuous friends whom we had lost might still watch over us, and even make themselves visible to mortal eyes, for the purpose of warning, consoling, or instructing them. 'Perhaps,' thought I, 'such was the office she herself expected to fill, when she uttered the expression on which I have been pondering.' This idea so often recurred to me.

that I was persuaded I had discovered the meaning of her words. I then began sometimes to hope, and sometimes to dread, that my lost Louisa would appear to me. As the period she had mentioned drew towards a termination, I felt when alone a sort of restless anxiety which was almost unbearable. I could think of nothing else. Had it been it easily practicable, I should have sought society; but circumstances preventing me, I was under the necessity of trusting to my own resolution to support me under the mental conflicts to which I was exposed. My wife had been dead a month all but three days, when I considered, that, if the time she had specified should elapse without any thing extraordinary taking place, my apprehensions might subside. The idea made me more cheerful; and I began to think I had shewn weakness and folly in tormenting myself as I had done in giving way so much to reflection on words uttered under the influence of prejudice. In the evening, I felt myself considerably relieved from the load of anxious and tormenting thoughts which had oppressed me. I took a walk in my garden, and thence strolled into the adjoining fields. I continued there till it was late, and was preparing to return home, when the moon, rising above a grove of trees at a distance, attracted my attention. It was near the full, and shone with particular brightness. Its general appearance and situation reminded me of the evening of my remarkable conversation with Louisa; and it immediately occurred to me, that it was on that day month it had happened. In an instant, all my apprehensions on the subject of spectral visitations returned; and I felt an internal conviction that the hour was come in which I should be made a convert to the sentiments of my deceased wife. I was almost afraid to look round lest some appalling object should meet my view. The moon, however, gave too much light to admit of my being deceived as to the forms of the objects around me. I wished myself at home; and, with hesitation and dread, prepared to return thither.

" You know, that about half a mile from my house are the ruins of a church, which heretofore belonged to a nunnery. It was long after the Reformation used for parochial worship; but, a chapel having been built in a more central part of the parish, the old church was abandoned to the

rooks and owls, which have taken up their residence in it. The area, however, is still used as a burying place; and here the remains of my Louisa were deposited. This place was situated in the direct road by which I was returning home. Such a spot, at this season, and in a temper of mind like that I have described, could not be approached without perturbation of mind. However, I retained perfect possession of my faculties, and, should what I am now going to relate lead you to doubt this assertion, I must beg you to suspend your judgment till you have heard the whole of my story; and if that should not convince you, I must be content to be considered as a visionary till you have yourself witnessed the appearance which has so often perplexed and alarmed me.

(To be concluded in our next.)

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(Concluded from page 195.)

THOUGH the walls and roof of the abbey-church are still perfect, the windows are open, and afford a view of the interior. On the western side, there is one large window in particular, through which a considerable portion of one of the side walls may be perceived. It was in this direction I approached the dilapidated pile, at the time of which I am speaking. There is a ledge, or projecting space on a line with the upper tier of windows. It forms a sort of corridor on each side of the edifice; and though it is wide enough for a person to stand on, it must, from its great height, be extremely dangerous; and it is at present inaccessible, as the staircase by which it was formerly approached is quite ruinous, and the passage leading to it is blocked up with rubbish, which has fallen from a higher part of the building. I am thus particular in describing the place, as I wish to convince you, that no deception could have been practised on me, and that what I witnessed, as I believe it to be otherwise unaccountable, must have been supernatural. When I had got within a hundred yards of the abbey, casting my eyes accidentally towards the large western window, which afforded a view of the inside, I observed beneath one of the side windows, a glimmering light, for the appearance of which I could in no way account. I continued to advance, though not without increased agitation of mind. What then will you suppose were my feelings, when, on drawing nearer, I beheld the figure of a female dressed in white flowing garments, standing on the ledge I have before mentioned, which extended along the wall, below the upper windows of the abbey? It was the apparition of my deceased wife. She slowly waved her hand towards me. In this I could not be deceived: I beheld the motion as plainly as I can see the lineaments of your face at this moment. Till now, as I before said, I retained complete possession of my senses; but here my feelings overpowered me, and I sunk to the ground in a state of insensibility. The damp

chill of the dewy grass, however, probably soon revived me. On recollecting myself, I looked immediately for the object of my alarm, but it had vanished, and the wall presented a uniform appearance of shade. Returning home, I retired to bed; and during the imperfect slumbers which occurred, I seemed to behold the form of my Louisa standing where I had really seen her. I thought she descended to meet me, and I was about to clasp her in my arms, when I awoke. In the morning, I felt languid and sick. However, in a few days, being sufficiently recovered, I ventured out alone in the evening to the spot whence I had witnessed the apparition; but it was not visible. Since then, however, I have repeatedly seen it; and what affords me a convincing proof that it is produced by no natural cause, is the circumstance, that it is never apparent but at the stated period so mysteriously alluded to by my deceased wife. I cannot, indeed, say, that I have seen it every month; but each visitation has been separated from the last, by an interval of exactly a month; and I have more than once, in vain, watched for it, in the intermediate period."

Such was the story of my friend, to which I listened with some surprise. The first impression on my mind was, that imagination alone had operated in producing the alarming spectre; but a little reflection induced me to conjecture, that some natural phenomenon, for which my friend was not able to account, had assisted in promoting his delusion. After a short pause, I asked him when he expected again to see the apparition. "In three days," replied he. "Well then," returned I, "my opinion, or at least the expression of it, shall be suspended till then. After you have afforded me the means of judging for myself, as to the cause of your alarm, I shall much better know what to think of it." "You shall," said he, "accompany me; and if it should not be visible to your eyes, as it will be to mine, I must despair of convincing you that I am not the dupe of own imagination."

Here we dismissed the subject, and I own that I waited with anxious curiosity for the expected opportunity of unravelling the cause of the strange spectacle which had operated so powerfully on the susceptible mind of my friend. At the time prefixed, we went to the place whence the sup-

posed spectre had been visible. On looking through the large western window towards the wall which has been already described, it was, as my friend had remarked, entirely shaded: for the moon which shone brightly cast its beams on the outside of it, and, of course, could not, by its direct rays, illuminate that part of the wall on which we were looking. We waited about a quarter of an hour, not without impatience on my part, and I was just about to express an opinion that the spectre would not appear, when my friend exclaimed, "It is coming! There is the light which always precedes it." I looked, and at first could see nothing; but in a very short space of time a portion of the wall became faintly illuminated. I observed it attentively, and perceived the enlightened spot gradually to assume a shape, which bore a degree of resemblance to a figure in a female dress. My friend seemed to be extremely agitated. "Well," said he, "do you now believe me?" I was engaged in examining the object, and did not immediately reply; and on turning towards him a minute afterwards, for that purpose, he seemed to be so violently affected by the spectacle we had witnessed, that I thought it best to lead him from the place, and we accordingly went back to his house. He soon recovered sufficiently to converse with calmness on the cause of his alarm. I could plainly perceive that he was a good deal disappointed to find, that though I did not choose to admit the truth of his opinion of this phantasm, I could give no satisfactory explanation of my own. At length I asked him, if he had ever seen the supposed ghost for two nights together. He said, he had not; for being persuaded, after the second time of its appearance, that he knew the period at which it would return, he neglected visiting the spot at any other season. "Let us then," said I, "watch for the phantom to-morrow night; and if you have courage enough to venture with me into the abbey, we shall there be able, if it appear, more accurately to observe it; and after a little more acquaintance with it, I do not doubt being able to give you a more decisive and satisfactory opinion about it. He did not seem to relish the proposal, but I at last got him to promise that he would accompany me on the following evening. When the time came, I be-

lieve he would willingly have avoided fulfilling his engagement; but on my assuring him, that I thought I could point out to him the natural cause of the phenomenon, his curiosity got the better of his fears, and we set out.

I was unwilling to trust any one with our purpose, therefore, we went unaccompanied into the abbey, the keys of which he had procured. Walking into the midst of the edifice, we observed the moon shining through the open windows on the side where we had the night before seen the mysterious figure. The wall was now shaded. Leaving my friend to watch for the appearance of the phantom, I employed myself in taking a survey of the opposite side of the building. I had not long been thus engaged, when he cried—"Yonder it is." I turned my eyes to the place, and observed an illuminated line, which, in a few minutes grew broader, and at length made an appearance very similar to that of the foregoing night. My friend caught hold of my arm. "Do not be alarmed," said I, "we shall soon know the cause of this phantom." I turned to look at the opposite wall, and immediately saw that the supposed spectre was nothing more than the light reflected from a white marble monument, illuminated by the beams of the moon, shining through one of the windows overagainst it. All the phenomena were now easily to be accounted for. The *spectrum* could only appear for a few nights when the moon was near the full, because at that time only did its rays reach the monument. The marble was of a square figure, surmounted by an oval tablet. The enlightened image falling on the wall in a slanting direction, was narrower than the monument itself, and presented to the view a figure, which, in its outline, much resembled a female in a leaning posture. Indeed, on examining it attentively while it lasted, I did not at all wonder, that amidst the combination of circumstances which had accompanied it in my friend's imagination, it had acted so strongly on his feelings, and been considered as something supernatural. The apparent motion of the figure, which was noticed, might be caused by a light cloud passing swiftly over the face of the moon, if it did not indeed depend entirely on the fancy of the observer.

It is hard'y necessary to remark that I had the satisfac-

tion of seeing my friend cured of the prejudices he had conceived, and restored to a state of tranquillity of mind, which formed a pleasing contrast to the restless, yet gloomy anxiety, which was so visible in his manner and behaviour when we met.
