

# How the Rector Laid the Ghost

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

In Leicestershire there is a house standing in its own grounds, with a lake several acres in extent. When the moon is full, a woman may be seen on the water, with a small black monkey sitting in the bows of the boat in which she is drifting along. But most times she is rowing. In any event her destination is always the boathouse, where she finally disappears. This is the ghost of the wife of a former sporting owner, who, while duck-shooting, shot her right through the head, by accident, with the result that the boat went down and both she and her monkey were drowned.

There is another Leicestershire ghost, whose story I will now tell.

In the *Daily Chronicle* of August 23, 1913, there was an article headed "Ghost laid by Rector. Thirty years of Weird Pranks." It contained an account of a ghost which had haunted Asfordby Rectory, standing in a lonely parish about three miles from Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire.

According to the facts contained in the article—

The Rectory is a very old one, and has been lived in by many celebrated people, and been the scene of many grim and daring deeds. The ghost the Rector has now laid was an apparition who haunted certain rooms in the house, tearing the bedclothes from the beds of those who slept in them, and troubling the household generally by tramping round the corridors of the house at night and scaring the inmates.

The Rev. C. H. Strudwick, Vicar of the neighbouring parish of Whetstone, slept for several nights in the haunted room. He has borne testimony to the fact that on the first occasion he was alarmed in the small hours of the morning by a violent tugging at his bedclothes. He held on as tightly as he could, but in vain; the clothes were forcibly stripped off and lay in a disordered heap on the floor. No one could have been playing a practical joke, for the door was locked. The sister of the Rector, who subsequently slept in the same room, had the same alarming experience.

The Rector put on his cassock and surplice, and going into the room bade the spirits depart in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

A special correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* investigated the matter, and his report, which I extracted, with kind permission, from that paper of August 25, is as follows. He says—

"I could not repress a shiver as I made my way through the rather gloomy grounds of the 'haunted' Rectory at Asfordby last night. The house is a typical country Rectory, rather bleak in appearance, and surrounded by fairly well-wooded grounds. It is dominated by the spire of the old church, and the churchyard is not far away. If ghost there is, or has been, it had quite the thrilling fiction writer's Christmas setting.

"Fortunately I had with me a companion who is used to country rectories. Otherwise I do not know how I should have found my way from the grounds at the conclusion of a courteously accorded interview with the Rev. Gage Hall, the Rector, and Mrs. Gage Hall. The place was then in pitch darkness—the sort of impenetrable inky darkness that town-dwellers never know. I was led like a blind man about the grounds to the highway. It was a weird experience. Mrs. Gage Hall told me that there is some difficulty in getting the

superstitious villagers to come to the house after nightfall. I do not wonder at this. Also, Mrs. Gage Hall thinks there may be a difficulty in keeping servants unless it is made abundantly clear that there is not a ghost in existence at the present time.

Often when the dog is locked out at night I go down at three o'clock in the morning to let him in,' Mr. Gage Hall told me, 'and I am not a bit afraid.'

" 'When we first came to live here,' said the Rector, telling me the story of the ghost, 'five years ago, I was deserted by many of my relatives because they thought the house was haunted—as it is in some book of alleged haunted houses of England, I believe. It is due to a misunderstanding that the statement is made that I held a solemn exorcism recently: As a matter of fact, I held the service soon after my arrival, and I thoroughly believe it to have been successful.

" 'The experience of the Rev. Mr. Strudwick of Whetstone has, of course, revived the matter; but it must be remembered that before he retired for the night when he was a visitor here, he must have listened to our stories of what the ghost had done in the past. I understood from him in the morning that when he was disturbed by the tugging at his bedclothes he commanded the spirits to depart in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and that after that he had no further trouble. Anyhow, it is my decision to make the room Mr. Strudwick slept in a dressing-room, so that no guests in future will be asked to sleep in it.

" 'During the last five years I have kept a book which I have asked reliable Visitors to sign, affirming that during their stay they have not encountered the ghost. Mr. Strudwick's complaint is the first I have had for years.

" 'One of my relatives sent a photograph of the house to a young female, who professed to see from it that a crucifix was buried in the house, and that the ghost would not depart until it was unearthed. This is, of course, sheer nonsense, and it is the sort of thing I do not want believed.

I am convinced, at the present time, that the Rectory is not haunted. I do not want a lot of spiritualists and other ghost experts here, or people asking if they may be allowed to go over the house, so please make it clear that under no circumstances can I entertain such a request. The ghost is "laid," and I am only sorry that the matter has cropped up again.'

"Mrs. Gage Hall, who lived at the Rectory in her maiden days and thoroughly believes that at that time it was haunted, frankly confessed to me that she did not care about returning with her husband when, some years after their marriage, the rectorship became vacant.

I was afraid then, but I am not a bit afraid now,' she smilingly assured me.

"In the village the inhabitants—about a thousand in number—treat the matter as a joke."