

The Little White Dog

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

Many families, particularly Irish ones, are haunted by a bird or animal, which appears, and howls or screams, before a death in the family. The howling is not in the least like an ordinary sound of the kind, but is an indescribable kind of death-wail.

A friend has given me the following true experience of her own, of which she has kindly allowed me to make use.

“I was sitting in the garden,” she said, “with a Sandhurst friend of ours, a relative of General French, who was staying in the neighbourhood. As we were talking, I saw a little white dog run under his chair and apparently hide there, for it did not come out. Knowing that it did not belong to the house, I said to our friend ‘Look, a little white dog has just gone under your chair. I wonder whose it is and where it came from. Do pick it up and let me see it. I love dogs, and this is such a pretty one.’”

“He got up instantly and moved his chair. But there was no dog. It had suddenly vanished in the most extraordinary way. I noticed that he looked about for it in rather a half-hearted manner, and at last, turning to me, he said gravely, ‘To tell you the truth, there is no dog here. This is a warning for me. In our family a little white dog always appears before a death.’ Trying to speak lightly and laugh it off, he went on, ‘I hope it’s for nobody I care for, but for some old fogie I’ve never seen.’”

“When we next met, some time after, he told me that an uncle in Ireland, to whom he was very

much attached, had died the same night of the day on which the little white dog had appeared. I remarked what a strange thing it was that I had seen the dog and not he, but he said that on many previous occasions the wraith had appeared to some one quite unconnected with the family, only always near to a member of the family, to whom it was invisible.”

Another strange instance of hereditary death-warning is that of the knocking heard in the Woodd family.

Dr. Robert Plot in his *History of Oxfordshire* gives some details of this mysterious knocking and of some cases in which it has been heard. He says—

“I must add also a relation, as strange as ’tis true, of the family of one Captain Wood, of Hampton, now of Brise Norton, Captain in the late wars for the King. Some whereof before their death have had signal warning given them by a certain knocking, either at the door without, or on a table, or shelves within; the number of strokes and the distance between them and the place where, for the most part, respecting the circumstances of the persons to die or their deaths themselves, as will easily be collected from the following relation.

“The first knocking that was heard, or at least observed, was about a year after the restoration of the King, in the afternoon, a little before night, at or upon the door, it being then open, as it was apprehended by Mrs. Elinor Wood (mother to Captain Basil Wood, who only heard it, none being thereby or about the house but herself; at which she was very much disturbed, thinking it boded some ill to her or hers, and within fourteen nights

after she had news of the death of her son-in-law, Mr. George Smith, who died in London.

“About three years after that there were three great knocks given very audibly to all that were then in the house, viz, to the aforesaid Mrs. Elinor Wood, Mr. Basil Wood and his wife, Mrs. Hester and some servants, which knocks were so remarkable that one of the maids came from the well, which was about twenty yards from the place, to see what was the matter, and Mrs. Elinor Wood and another maid that was within the house saw three great pans of lard shake and totter so, upon a shelf in the milk-house, that they were like to fall down. Upon this violent knocking, Mr. Basil Wood and his wife, being then in the hall, came presently into the milk-house to their mother, where, finding her somewhat disturbed, and inquiring the reason, she replied, ‘God Almighty only knew the matter.’ She could tell nothing, but she heard the knocking, which, being indoors, Mr. Basil Wood concluded must be for some of the family at home, that upon the door being for a friend abroad, which accordingly fell out, three of the family, according to the number of the knocks, dying within little more than half-a-year after, viz. Mrs. Hester Wood (wife to Mr. Basil Wood), a child of Mr. Wood’s sister, and Mrs. Elinor Wood, his mother.

“About August 16, 1674, Mr. Basil Wood, Junior, son of Mr. Basil Wood aforesaid, living at Exeter, in Devonshire, heard the same kind of knocking, at which, being disturbed, he wrote word of it to his father here at Bampton, in Oxfordshire, viz, that one Sunday he and his wife and her sister and his brother did distinctly hear upon a table in their chamber, as they stood by it, two several knocks, struck, as it were, with a cudgel, one of them before and other after morning prayer, a little before dinner; which letter was shown to Mr. Wood, senior (as the other knockings before the death of any that died, were beforehand told) to several neighbouring gentlemen, after which, within about fourteen days, Mrs. Hester Wood, a second wife of Mr. Basil Wood, senior, and about a quarter of a year after, her father, Mr. Richard Usset, died both at Bampton, since which time they have heard nothing more as yet.

“Among such unaccountable things as these, we may reckon the strange passages that happened at Stock in Anno 1649.”