

# Ghosts Seen by Famous People

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

NAPOLEON I.—LORD BROUGHAM—LADY CHATTERTON—LORD ERSKINE—  
SIR ALBERT FYTCH—THE HON. G. F. BERKELEY

In writing about well-known people who have seen hosts, I am reminded of one of my relatives who wrote to ask me if I knew that the Rev. Charles Kingsley believed in ghosts and actually had seen one, and did I know the story? I did, for Charles Kingsley told it himself in one of his letters:

“Of Button-cap—I knew him well. He used to walk across the room in flopping slippers, and turn over the leaves of books to find the missing deed, whereof he had defrauded the orphan and the widow. Nobody ever saw him; but in spite of that he wore a flowered dressing-gown and a cap with a button on it. Sometimes he turned cross and played Poltergeist, as the Germans say, rolling the barrels in the cellar with surprising noise, which was undignified. So he was always ashamed of himself, and put them all back in their places before morning. I believe he is gone now. .

“Perhaps someone had been laying phosphoric paste about, and he ate thereof, and ran down to the pond, and drank till he burst. He was Rats.”

And so the story of old Button-cap was exploded. All the same, many well-known people have seen ghosts, and have recorded their experiences. Two Lord Chancellors—Lord Brougham and Lord Erskine—are among the number whose ghost-stories, told in their own words, are given here. Lord Castlereagh saw “The Radiant Boy,” the famous ghost of Corby Castle. Sir Robert Peel saw a ghost, so did Lord Byron, and so did Mozart. General Garfield, the poet Shelley. Goethe, Napoleon, all saw apparitions.

Napoleon’s ghost story, told by General Montholon—his companion in exile—is as follows:

“The Emperor was pretty calm during the night, until about four in the morning, when he said to me with extraordinary emotion, ‘I have just seen my good Josephine, but she would not embrace me; she disappeared at the moment when I was about to take her in my arms. She was seated then. It seemed to me that I had seen her yesterday evening; she had not changed; still the same—full of devotion to me. She told me that we were about to see each other again, never more to part. She assured me that. Did you see her?’

“I took great care not to say anything which might increase the feverish excitement, too plainly evident to me. I gave him his potion and changed his linen, and he fell asleep. But on waking he again spoke of the Empress Josephine, and I should only have uselessly irritated him by telling him it was ‘only a dream.’”

How often the expression “it was only a dream” is used to explain away any kind of vision or apparition! Dreams can account for much, but I prefer to believe that the spirit of the Empress Josephine vered round the dying Emperor and appeared to at the last.

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In collecting material for my ghost books I am always specially glad to include these instances of ghosts seen by well-known and distinguished people, who have not been afraid boldly to confess their own experiences. I have related many cases of the kind, but have not so far included the Brougham ghost story which, although much talked of years ago, may be new to many of my readers.

Henry, Lord Brougham and Vaux, became a member of the Whig Ministry under Earl Grey, on the fall of the Wellington Ministry in November, 1880, as Lord Chancellor of England. He took

part with Earl Grey in carrying through the great Reform Bill of 1832, and was the founder of the *Edinburgh Review*, he was Attorney-General for Queen Caroline, and defended her at her trial; was Lord Rector of Glasgow University, and held many other distinguished positions. On his retirement from the Woolsack he published many literary works, and, like Disraeli, he brought his contemporaries, slightly veiled, into a novel.

During his travels in Norway he not only saw a ghost, but wrote down the facts in his journal afterwards, with a subsequent comment in 1862. In his travels he was accompanied by Charles Stuart, eldest son of Sir Charles Stuart, who was the fourth son of John, third Earl of Bute. Mr. Stuart was not only his travelling companion but the most intimate friend he ever had. Lord Brougham records his experience as follows:

“December 19. We set out from Gottenburg at nine, determining to make for Norway, in the almost certain expectation of finding a vessel there for some part in Scotland. At Kongelf we stopped to eat some of our cold provisions, and then continued our journey in the dark.

“At one in the morning, arriving at a decent hotel (in Sweden), we decided to stop for the night, and found a couple of comfortable rooms. Tired with the cold of yesterday, I was glad to take advantage of a hot bath before I turned in. And here a most remarkable thing happened to me—so remarkable that I must tell the story from the beginning.

“After I left the High School, I went with G—, my most intimate friend, to attend the classes in the University. There was no divinity class, but we frequently in our walks discussed and speculated upon many grave subjects—among others, on the immortality of the soul and on a future state. This question, and the possibility—I will not say of ghosts walking, but of the dead appearing to the living, were subjects of much speculation; and we actually committed the folly of drawing up an agreement, *written with our blood*, to the effect that whichever of us died the first should appear to the other, and thus solve any doubts we had entertained of ‘the life after death.’

“After we had finished our classes at the college C— went to India, having got an appointment in the Civil Service. He seldom wrote to me, and after the lapse of a few years I had almost forgotten him. Moreover, his family having little connection with Edinburgh, I seldom saw or heard anything of them, or of him through them, so that all the old schoolboy intimacy had died out, and I had nearly forgotten his existence.

“I had taken, as I have said, a warm bath, and while lying in it and enjoying the comfort of the heat after the late freezing I had undergone, I turned my head round, looking

towards the chair on which I had deposited my clothes, as I was about to get out of the bath. On the chair sat C—, looking calmly at me.

“How I got out of the bath I know not, but on recovering my senses I found myself sprawling on the floor. The apparition, or whatever it was that had taken the likeness of G—, had disappeared. This vision produced such a shock that I had no inclination to talk about it, even to Stuart; but the impression it made upon me was too vivid to be easily forgotten, and so strongly was I affected by it that I have here written down the whole history, with the date, 19th December, and all the particulars as they are now fresh before me.

“No doubt I had fallen asleep; and that the appearance presented so distinctly to my eyes was a dream, I cannot for a minute doubt. Yet for years I had had no communication with C—, nor had there been anything to recall him to my recollection; nothing had taken place during our Swedish travels either associated with G— or with India, or with p. anything relating to him, or to any member of his family. I recollected quickly enough our old discussion, and the bargain we had made.

“I could not discharge from my mind the impression that C— must have died, and that his appearance to me was to be received by me as proof of a future state; yet all the while I felt convinced that the whole was a dream, and so painfully vivid, and so unfading was the impression that I could not bring myself to talk of it, or to make the slightest allusion to it.

“I finished dressing, and as we had all agreed to make an early start I was ready by six o’clock, the hour of our early breakfast.”

On October 16th, 1862, Lord Brougham added:

“I have just been copying out from my journal the account of this strange dream. *Certissima mortis imago!* And now to finish the story, begun above sixty years since.

“Soon after my return to Edinburgh there arrived a letter from India, announcing G—’s death, and stating that he had died on December 19th. Singular coincidence! Yet when one reflects on the vast number of dreams which, night after night, pass through our brains, the number of coincidences between the vision and the event are perhaps fewer and less remarkable than a fair calculation of chances would warrant us to expect. Nor is it surprising, considering the variety of our thoughts in sleep, and that they all bear some analogy to the affairs of life, that a dream should sometimes coincide with a contemporaneous or even a future event. This is not much more wonderful than that a person whom we had no reason to expect should appear to us at the very moment we had been thinking or speaking of him. So common is this that it has for ages grown into the proverb: ‘Speak of the devil . . .’

“I believe every seeming miracle is, like every ghost story, capable of explanation.”

Lord Brougham then goes on to tell the story of Lord Lyttelton’s ghost (it is related in full detail in my “Grey Ghost Book”), which he says his father told, but coupled with his entire conviction that it was either a pure invention or the accidental coincidence of a dream with the event. The evidence in favour of Lord Lyttelton’s strange experience being a genuine visitation from the spirit world is, however, far too strong for it to be explained away a “coincidence.”

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Lady Chatterton, who had the following remarkable experiences, was the daughter of the Rev. Lascelles Iremonger, prebendary of Winchester Cathedral and vicar of Goodnorth Clutford, near Andover, Uants. At the end of her first season in London she married Sir William Chatterton. She had the privilege of meeting most of the interesting people of her time, and has left on record a charming account of them.

One evening, when she was dining with Lockhart and his daughter, the conversation turned on ghosts. It was a very pleasant dinner party, the guests being "a set of wits and remarkable people," but after the company had left, her host persuaded her to stay on and relate her ghost story to him. Lockhart told her he had the greatest wish to believe in the existence of ghosts, as showing the reality of a spiritual world, and he made her write down an account of her experiences. This she did, and her story is told in her "Memoirs," edited by her second husband, Edward Heneage Dering, published in 1878. Here is the experience in Lady Chatterton's own words:

"I could scarcely have been four years old when we were staying at Sherborne Castle, an old place belonging to Lord Digley, in Dorsetshire. It was built by Sir Walter Raleigh, and is situated on a height overlooking a large piece of water, with the ruins of an older castle on the farther bank.

"The castle was so full on our arrival that my old Scotch nurse and I were put into a large room, which I afterwards heard was said to be the haunted room. Nobody would sleep in it, and strange noises were heard at night to come from it. My nurse did not know this at the time, nor did my mother.

"My impression is that I was much pleased to find myself in this large room, for it was on the third storey, and the views from its windows over the beautiful terrace garden, which sloped down to the water and the ruined castle beyond, enchanted me.

"I slept in a little cot which had been placed close to a large, old-fashioned bed of carved oak with red velvet curtains, where my nurse slept. In the middle of the night I was awoke by a brilliant light that shone upon the wall. As I looked wonderingly at it, figures of men fighting seemed to pass over it, like the reflections produced by a magic lantern. Groups of figures passed to and fro, shouting as they advanced and retreated. The colours were very vivid; I saw red coats and black, and flashing of firearms, and heard horrible noises.

"I was very much frightened, and looked round to my nurse for help. She was sitting up in bed, and to my still greater horror I saw she was not awake, but her eyes were fixed, though she seemed to be making signs to the figures, talking to them and motioning them to go away, while they were yelling and quarrelling.

"I could neither cry out nor move—I was so frightened; but continued to look at the strange appearance. Suddenly it vanished, and all was dark and silent. A feeling of horror and dread, which I still feel when I happen to think of it, kept me awake until the day dawned through the window curtains, when I went to sleep. I never mentioned this horrible scene to my nurse, nor to anybody else, till many years afterwards, when I told her about it, and asked if she had any recollection of it. She answered that she had not.

"We often stayed at Sherborne Castle afterwards, but I never heard of anyone being put into that room to sleep. It was directly over the one my mother generally had, and one

night she was roused by a violent knocking overhead. She described it as of dead bodies falling or being thrown about on the floor overhead. My father heard it too, and as there was a little turret staircase that wound up to the floor above out of their room, he determined to go and see what it could be.

“He lighted a candle and ascended the narrow winding staircase. He found the door of this large mysterious room open, but no one was in it. He had the courage (as I afterwards thought) to pass through the room and went out at the other door, which opened on the great staircase, and came down again to my mother. The strange noises had ceased, and they never heard them again.

“I often went into that haunted room when I was staying there afterwards. I used to stand near the large, carved oak bedstead, just where my little cot had been, and try to account for the strange effect I remembered so well. The vision or appearance had been on the wall opposite the windows, and I tried to fancy that the moonlight could have shone in and produced some kind of pattern on the wall. But the paper on it was a kind of dull green with a very slight pattern, and I remembered that the dark red damask curtains of the windows had been drawn, so that had the moon been shining no light could have come in, except through some small crevices, and this could not have formed the large vision all along the breadth of the wall, nor the lurid light that awoke me out of my sleep.”

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On another occasion Lady Chatterton had a mysterious experience, this time at Prebendary House, Winchester. Her mother had been rather ill, but was then convalescent; and she had left her in the drawing room in excellent spirits and gone to bed. Awaking in the night, she saw reflected on the white curtains of her bed the figure of her mother, dreadfully pale, lying on her bed with blood flowing from her lips. She touched the curtain, but still the vision remained, although the curtain moved to and fro as she touched it. Throwing on a cloak she rushed to her mother's room and found her just as she had seen her on the curtain, with the sheet covered with blood and two doctors in attendance.

Her mother was delighted to see her, although too ill to speak, and pressed her hand. One of the doctors said that all danger was now over, he hoped, and that her mother had not sent for her because, knowing that she had gone to bed early with a cold, she did not wish her to be disturbed.

Lady Chatterton adds that although these were the only two occasions when she has seen any phenomena, she often had positive perceptions of the danger or death of dear friends.

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Lord Erskine, youngest son of the tenth Earl of Buchan, began his career as a midshipman on board H.M.S. *Tartar*, and next bought a commission in the second battalion of the 1st Royal Regiment of Foot. He afterwards decided to go to the Bar, and rose to be Lord Chancellor. The following ghost story is related in his own words:

“When I was a very young man, I had been for some time absent from Scotland. On the morning of my arrival in Edinburgh, as I was descending the steps of a close, on coming out from a bookseller’s shop, I met an old family butler.

“He looked greatly changed—grey, wan, and shadowy as a ghost. ‘Eh, old boy,’ I said, ‘what brings you here?’ He replied: ‘To meet your honour and solicit your interference with my lord to recover a sum due to me, which the steward at the last settlement did not pay.’~

“Struck by his looks and manner, I bade him follow me to the bookseller’s, into whose shop I stepped back; but when I turned round to speak to him he had vanished.

“I remembered that his wife carried on some little trade in the Old Town. I remembered even the house or flat she occupied, which I had often visited in my own boyhood. Having made it out, I found the old woman in widow’s mourning. Her husband had been dead for some months, and had told her, on his deathbed, that my father’s steward had wronged her of some money, but that when Master Tom returned he would see her righted.

“This I promised to do, and shortly after I fulfilled my promise. The impression was indelible.”

Lord Erskine’s story can be found in Lady Morgan’s “Book of the Boudoir.”

In this entertaining book, Lady Morgan gives her first impressions of Lord Erskine, with whom she kept up a correspondence until his death. She had long wished to know him, and had made a hero of him; but when her dream was realised and she met the famous Lord Chancellor, she admits that she was disappointed to find “that he spoke like other persons, was a thin, middle-aged gentleman, and wore a brown wig!” However, in spite of this disenchantment, she fell under the spell of his personal magnetism. One day they met at an “elegant salon” of the day, much frequented by the most distinguished members of the Upper and Lower Houses.

Lord Erskine, the Duchess of G—, and Lady Morgan as guests were talking together, and the conversation turned on ghosts and second sight, in the latter of which both Lord Erskine and the

Duchess acknowledged their belief. Lady Morgan expressed her surprise at such “superstition,” and was promptly snubbed by the Duchess, who afterwards, to convert her, related a curious and romantic tale of second sight in her own family.

Not to be outdone, Lord Erskine thereupon related the above incident, which, as Lady Morgan adds, he evidently believed from the way in which he told it.

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Lieut.-General Sir Albert Fytch, C.S.I., Chief Commissioner of British Burma and agent to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, related the following ghost story in his “Burma, Past and Present,” which he dedicated to his cousin, Lord Tennyson:

“A remarkable incident occurred to me at Maulmain, which made a deep impression upon my imagination.

“Believers in the supernatural are laughed at in these days of material science; ghost stories are specially derided. And yet, whilst I was residing at Maulmain I saw a ghost with my own eyes in broad daylight, of which I could make an affidavit.

"I had an old schoolfellow, who was afterwards a college friend, with whom I had lived in the closest intimacy. Years, however, passed away without our seeing each other. One morning I had just got out of bed and was dressing myself when suddenly my old friend entered the room. I greeted him warmly, told him to call for a cup of tea in the veranda, and promised to be with him immediately.

"I dressed myself in all haste and went out into the veranda, but found no one there. I could not believe my eyes. I called to the sentry who was posted in front of the house, but he had seen no strange gentleman that morning. The servants also declared that no such person had entered the house. I was certain I had seen my friend. I was not thinking about him at the time; yet I was not taken by surprise, as steamers and other vessels were frequently arriving in Maulmain.

"A fortnight afterwards news arrived that he had died, six hundred miles off, about the very time I saw him at Maulmain.

"It is useless to comment upon this story. To this day I have never doubted that I really saw the ghost of my deceased friend."

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The Hon. Grantley F. Berkeley, son of the fifth Earl of Berkeley, once saw a ghost, not at Berkeley Castle, as one might imagine, but at Cranford House, near Hounslow, Middlesex, one of the dower houses settled by his father on his mother. He tells the story in his "Life and Recollections," to the effect that before he left the Guards he and his brother Moreton, while down at Cranford, were one night sitting up fully armed ready to go out for a brush with the poachers who had been very active lately in killing the keeper's fowls in a neighbouring hen-roost.

"It was the rule of my mother's house," writes Mr. Berkeley, "that all the servants should be in bed at ten o'clock, and on the night of the ghost we were not to go forth till midnight, when there would be enough of a moon to dispel the pitchy darkness induced by a partial fog, that at first was an ample protection to the game. My brother and myself were together, and well armed, in no mood to be nervously excited, and little inclined to be afraid of anything.

"We passed by the still-room, intending, by crossing the kitchen and going through the scullery, to reach the courtyard by the back way.

"The large old house was as still as death when my hand turned the handle of the kitchen door, which, opening, partially admitted me to the room, at the bottom of the long table which, starting from between the entrance where I was and the door of exit to the scullery, ran up to my left in its full length to the great fireplace and tall and expansive kitchen screen. The screen stood to the right of the fireplace as I looked at it, so that a large body of glowing embers in the grate threw a steady, distinct glare of red light throughout the entire length of the apartment, making the smallest thing distinctly visible, and falling full on the tall figure of a woman, divided from me only by the breadth of the bottom of the table.

"She was dressed, or seemed to be dressed, as a maidservant, with a sort of poke bonnet on, and a dark shawl drawn or pinned tightly across her breast. On my entrance she slowly turned her head to look at me, and as she did so every feature ought to have stood

forth in the light of the fire, but I at once saw that there was, beneath the bonnet, an indistinctness of outline not to be accounted for.

“Holding the door open with my left hand, with the right against the post, I addressed to my brother, who was behind me, simply the word ‘Look.’ As I uttered this, the figure seemed to commence gliding, rather than proceeding by steps, slowly on up the kitchen towards the fireplace, while I lowered my right arm to let my brother in, then closed the door, locked it, and put the key into my pocket.

“In reply to me Moreton said, ‘I see her—there she goes.’

“I had not told him what I had seen, and therefore could in no way have suggested the idea he seemed to entertain.

“After I had thus locked the door, on turning round there was no woman to be seen, so I asked my brother whither she had gone. He instantly replied, ‘Up the kitchen towards the screen.’

“‘Come on, then,’ I cried, ‘let’s have some fun and catch her to see who it is.’

“Our impression was that it was one of the maid-servants, sitting up long after the usual hours, and we at once proceeded, each taking a separate corner of the screen, and meeting on the side next the fire—but there was nothing there.”

The two brothers then made a most minute search of the kitchen, even looking up the chimney and into every nook and cranny. The windows were tightly shut, and the only other door leading into the scullery was locked with the key in the kitchen side of it.

“Here I offer to my readers,” Mr. Berkeley concludes, “a fact impossible to be accounted for—an apparition visible to two persons who, when they saw it, thought that it was a living body, each supposed it to be a woman and, fearless of spiritual agency, pursued it, but in vain.

“The form certainly resembled no one we had ever known; it came to indicate no treasure, nor to point to any spot of perpetrated crime. It came we knew not why, and went we knew not whither.”