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**Poems On Several Occasions**

**Gay, John**

**London, 1745**

A true Story of an Apparition.

**urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-1716**



*A true STORY of an APPARITION.*

**S**cepticks (whose strength of argument makes out  
 That wisdom's deep inquiries end in doubt)  
 Hold this assertion positive and clear,  
 That sprites are pure delusions rais'd by fear.  
 Not that fam'd ghost, which in presaging found  
 Call'd *Brutus* to *Philippi's* fatal ground ;  
 Nor can *Tiberius Gracchus'* goary shade  
 These ever-doubting disputants persuade.  
 Straight they with smiles reply ; those tales of old  
 By visionary Priests were made and told :  
 Oh might some ghost at dead of night appear,  
 And make you own conviction by your fear !  
 I know your sneers my easy faith accuse,  
 Which with such idle legends scares the Muse :  
 But think not that I tell those vulgar sprites,  
 Which frighted boys relate on winter nights ;  
 How cleanly milk-maids meet the fairy train,  
 How headless horses drag the clinking chain,  
 Night-roaming ghosts, by saucer eye-balls known,  
 The common spectres of each country town.

D 4

No,



No, I such fables can like you despise,  
 And laugh to hear these nurse-invented lies.  
 Yet has not oft the fraudulent guardian's fright  
 Compell'd him to restore an orphan's right?  
 And can we doubt that horrid ghosts ascend,  
 Which on the conscious murd'ers steps attend?  
 Hear then, and let attested truth prevail,  
 From faithful lips I learnt the dreadful tale.

Where *Auden's* forest spreads its limits wide,  
 Whose branching paths the doubtful road divide,  
 A trav'ler took his solitary way;  
 When low beneath the hills was sunk the day.  
 And now the skies with gath'ring darkness lour,  
 The branches rustle with the threaten'd shower;  
 With sudden blasts the forest murmurs loud,  
 Indented lightnings cleave the fable cloud,  
 Thunder on thunder breaks, the tempest roars,  
 And heav'n discharges all its watry stores.  
 The wand'ring trav'ler shelter seeks in vain,  
 And shrinks and shivers with the beating rain;  
 On his steed's neck the slacken'd bridle lay,  
 Who chose with cautious step th' uncertain way;

And



And now he checks the rein, and halts to hear  
 If any noise foretold a village near.  
 At length from far a stream of light he sees  
 Extend its level ray between the trees ;  
 Thither he speeds, and as he nearer came  
 Joyful he knew the lamp's domestick flame  
 That trembled through the window ; cross the way  
 Darts forth the barking cur, and stands at bay.

It was an ancient lonely house, that stood  
 Upon the borders of the spacious wood ;  
 Here towers and antique battlements arise,  
 And there in heaps the moulder'd ruine lies ;  
 Some Lord this mansion held in days of yore,  
 To chase the wolf, and pierce the foaming boar :  
 How chang'd, alas, from what it once had been !  
 'Tis now degraded to a publick Inn.

Straight he dismounts, repeats his loud commands ;  
 Swift at the gate the ready landlord stands ;  
 With frequent cringe he bows, and begs excuse,  
 His house was full, and ev'ry bed in use.  
 What not a garret, and no straw to spare ?  
 Why then the kitchin-fire and elbow-chair

D 5,

Shall!



Shall serve for once to nod away the night.  
 The kitchin ever is the servant's right,  
 Replies the host ; there, all the fire around,  
 The Count's tir'd footmen snore upon the ground.

The maid, who listen'd to this whole debate,  
 With pity learnt the weary stranger's fate.  
 Be brave, she cries, you still may be our guest,  
 Our haunted room was ever held the best ;  
 If then your valour can the fright sustain  
 Of rattling curtains and the clinking chain,  
 If your courageous tongue have power to talk,  
 When round your bed the horrid ghost shall walk ;  
 If you dare ask it, why it leaves its tomb,  
 I'll see your Sheets well air'd, and show the room.  
 Soon as the frighted maid her tale had told,  
 The stranger enter'd, for his heart was bold.

The damsel led him through a spacious hall,  
 Where Ivy hung the half-demolish'd wall ;  
 She frequent look'd behind, and chang'd her hue,  
 While fancy tipt the candle's flame with blue.  
 And now they gain'd the winding stairs ascent,  
 And to the lonesome room of terrors went.

When



When all was ready swift retir'd the maid,  
The watch-lights burn, tuckt warm in bed was laid.  
The hardy stranger, and attends the sprite  
Till his accustom'd walk at dead of night.

At first he hears the wind with hollow roar  
Shake the loose lock, and swing the creaking door ;  
Nearer and nearer draws the dreadful found  
Of rattling chains, that dragg'd upon the ground :  
When lo, the spectre came with horrid stride,  
Approach'd the bed, and drew the curtains wide !  
In human form the ghastful Phantom stood,  
Expos'd his mangled bosom dy'd with blood,  
Then silent pointing to his wounded breast,  
Thrice wav'd his hand. Beneath the frighted guest  
The bed-cords trembled, and with shudd'ring fear,  
Sweat chill'd his limbs, high rose his bristled hair ;  
Then mutt'ring hasty pray'rs, he mann'd his heart,  
And cry'd aloud ; Say, whence and who thou art,  
The stalking ghost with hollow voice replys,  
Three years are counted, since with mortal eyes  
I saw the sun, and vital air respir'd.  
Like thee benighted, and with travel tir'd,

Within



Within these walls I slept. O thirst of gain!  
 See, still the planks the bloody mark retain;  
 Stretch'd on this very bed, from sleep I start,  
 And see the steel impending o'er my heart;  
 The barb'rous hostess held the lifted knife,  
 The floor ran purple with my gushing life.  
 My treasure now they seize, the golden spoil  
 They bury deep beneath the grass-grown soil,  
 Far in the common field. Be bold, arise,  
 My steps shall lead thee to the secret prize;  
 There dig and find; let that thy care reward:  
 Call loud on justice, bid her not retard,  
 To punish murder; lay my ghost at rest,  
 So shall with peace secure thy nights be blest;  
 And when beneath these boards my bones are found,  
 Decent inter them in some sacred ground.

Here ceas'd the ghost. The stranger springs from bed,  
 And boldly follows where the Phantom led;  
 The half-worn stony stairs they now descend,  
 Where passages obscure their arches bend  
 Silent they walk; and now through groves they pass,  
 Now through wet meads their steps imprint the grass;



At length amidst a spacious field they came :  
There stops the spectre, and ascends in flame.  
Amaz'd he stood, no bush, nor briar was found,  
To teach his morning search to find the ground ;  
What could he do ? the night was hideous dark,  
Fear shook his joints, and nature dropt the mark ;  
With that he starting wak'd, and rais'd his head,  
But found the golden mark was left in bed.

What is the statesman's vast ambitious scheme,  
But a short vision, and a golden dream ?  
Power, wealth, and title elevate his hope ;  
He wakes. But for a garter finds a rope.



The