

## **The Spectre; or, The Ruins of Belfont Priory** by Sarah Wilkinson

This Gothic chapbook was first published in 1806 (London: J. Ker). “Belfont Priory” is mentioned in Lady Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon*, published in 1816.

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In the reign of our eighth Henry,<sup>1</sup> when the religious houses were suppressed, and their treasures seized by the monarch, Belfont Priory, was among the number of those who vainly resisted the command, and by an appeal to Rome, endeavoured to keep possession of their domain, which was extensive, and liberally endowed. This served no other purpose but to draw down on their heads the vengeance of their irritated sovereign: they were forced to seek shelter in another soil, and a great part of the Priory was levelled to the ground. The lands they possessed from the founder of the order were sold; but the edifice remained a stately ruin, unnoticed by the rich, and shunned by the peasantry, who entertained a firm belief that it was haunted. Not the most courageous among them could be prevailed upon to pass by it after sun-set. In this manner it remained till the reign of Elizabeth; when she made a grant of the Priory to Cecil Lord Burleigh: but his lordship being in possession of several magnificent seats, he did not chuse to incur the expence of rendering it fit for the reception of his family.

Soon after this period, Theodore Montgomery left his native country (Scotland) to seek a shelter from his vindictive relations in England. This brave youth was the heir of Earl Gowen, a Scotch nobleman of great wealth and power. His son, by espousing Matilda Maxwell (a young lady endowed with mental perfections as well as personal beauty, but no fortune) incurred his displeasure, as well as the rest of his relatives: for the family had set their hearts on his marrying the heiress of the Earl of Glencoe. The unfortunate Montgomery and his beloved Matilda, were persecuted with every action cruelty could invent, or malice suggest: wearied out with being drove from place to place, they resolved to seek a refuge in England.

By the sale of some valuables they possessed, they raised money sufficient to call their scheme into execution, and they set out on their journey, with only two domestics, on whose fidelity they were conscious they could depend. They arrived at the metropolis without any particular occurrence or discovery taking place. Montgomery immediately made himself known to Lord Burleigh, to whose lady his wife was distantly related, and informed him of his marriage, and subsequent misfortunes.

Lord Burleigh assured him of his protection, till he could be reconciled to his family; and that he would maintain an inviolable secrecy in regard to their retreat, and he informed them of the ruined Priory. They accepted the proposal with joy, and the next morning began their tour of Cornwall. The beautiful scenery of the surrounding country enlivened their spirits, and they felt happy in their exile. When they arrived at Truro they discharged the carriage and attendants, and proceeded on foot till they came to the Priory. It was near eight in the evening when they entered the avenue that led to the gates - the surrounding objects could scarce be distinguished through the gloom that now pervaded, and the tall trees waving over their heads, inspired them with melancholy sensations, which the ruins they approached to was not formed to dispel. Theodore led the way to the habitable part, according to the account he had received from Lord Burleigh, and entered a wooden arch of the most antique appearance: it led to a small door - he placed the key which was given him, in the lock, and with difficulty opened it: they struck a light and kindled their torches, when they found themselves in a large hall, with painted windows, and a vaulted roof: from this place there opened several doors and passages, that led to the interior of the building - upon examining they found that this part that was left undemolished was the offices of the Priory, and not immediately joined to the edifice, and therefore escaped devastation. as the ravagers thought it unnecessary to search for treasures in a part appropriated to domestic purposes. To their extreme consolation they found the furniture yet remained, though covered with rust and dirt. Donald<sup>2</sup> gathered such materials as he could then find at hand, and made a fire in one of the rooms that looked more comfortable than the rest, and here they set down to rest from their fatigue, and to air

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<sup>1</sup> Henry VIII was king from 1509 to his death in 1547.

<sup>2</sup> One of the two “domestics” (the other is Donald’s wife, Blanche) accompanying Theodore and Matilda. The abrupt and unexplained introduction of minor characters is a common occurrence in chapbooks and bluebooks, which were often written and printed with considerable haste.

such things as they could collect for their bedding. After a repast on some cold provisions they had brought with them, they retired to rest: and for that night they resolved to lay their different mattresses in the same room, that they might be near each other. Wearied with their journey, sleep soon sealed their eyes, and the thoughts of their new situation did not hinder their repose: it was late the next morning when they arose, nor felt no traces from their fatigue: they employed that day in making their habitation comfortable, and succeeded beyond their hopes - they completed three bed rooms, a parlour, and a kitchen, in a neat, though antique style, and piled up the lumber in a large dismal room they did not like to use.

They agreed that Donald should go every week to the next town, to purchase provisions, at the dusk of evening, and return as privately as was possible.

As soon as their necessary arrangements were made they spent their time in exploring the ruins. The great hall was still left; it was about seventy feet long and thirty-four broad, and the height was seventeen feet. On the North side there was an ascent to this place, by a direct staircase, about two yards wide: the roof was vaulted, and supported by twenty arches, which rose gradually one above another, till you entered the hall. Opposite the stair-case, on the South side of the room was a chimney, about twelve feet wide: on each side of the fireplace was two large gothic windows, adorned with sculptures of fruit and leaves. On each side of the hall were eight triangular pillars, placed at equal distances, and supported by three busts: the grandeur of the architecture inspired them with delight. The chambers which led from this place were now levelled with the ground, or only a part of the walls remained standing. They now descended the noble staircase, and crossing the court yard of the ruins entered the chapel, but only a small part remained in its former state - they examined what monuments was in their view, and Theodore was much surprised to observe on a stone, scarcely legible, the titles of Earl Gowen joined to that of Belfont, but the rest of the inscription, (and which consisted of many lines) was too much injured by time for him to decypher: after much study and pains, he was obliged, with much chagrin, to give up the pursuit, and rest in ignorance. Leaving the chapel and turning to the left, they came to the library - the principal of the books had been removed and only a few volumes were left on the shelves, but this was a pleasing acquisition to Theodore and Matilda: they were just going to retire, when Blanche pulled open a small oak door, which had escaped the notice of her mistress, and uttering a loud scream, fell on the floor! Donald flew to her assistance, but on casting his eyes towards the place that had caused her such alarm, he became in no better plight than the terrified damsel - his whole frame shook like an aspen leaf, and his eyes glared with a frightful wildness - the gentle Matilda clung to Theodore's arm, and besought him to protect her; he gently carried her back to the habitable apartments, and placing her in a great chair, he returned to his servants, whom he found in the same posture he had left them, but to his astonishment the door had closed without aid. He assisted Donald to rise, who resuming his wonted frame of mind at the presence of his master, he assisted in conveying Blanche (who still remained in a state of insensibility) to Matilda, who saw them return with pleasure. As soon as the domestics were recovered from their fright, Theodore desired they would relate the cause of it. Blanche said, that as soon as she pulled open the door, an erect tall figure met her view, approached towards her and waved one of its hands; that its visage was a deadly white, with terrible large eyes! Donald corroborated this account, with the addition of its having a bloodstained sword in its right-hand, which it brandished with a menacing air. 'Mercy on me!' re-echoed Blanche, 'so it had. I remember, but the fright has deprived me of my senses - Oh, it was a terrible Spectre!'

Theodore now ordered Donald to follow him, that they might search the ruins, to see if the object of their alarm still continued; the trembling Blanche flung herself on her knees before Theodore. 'O! my lord' said the maiden, 'I conjure you not to go, if the ghost should murder you and Donald, what will become of me and my dear lady!'

Theodore smiled at the artless simplicity of the affectionate girl, but would not be dissuaded from his purpose, and commanded Donald, who stood like a motionless statue, to accompany him without further delay to the hall.

Matilda now arose from her seat and declared her resolution to go with them, saying that her fears for the safety of her lord would not permit her to remain behind.

Her beloved husband after some gentle remonstrances yielded to her request, and Blanche, who was ashamed to appear less heroic than her mistress, joined the party, and they proceeded to the library. Donald exclaiming all the way, that he would rather face a regiment of Frenchmen than one Spectre - 'I never was a coward' said the man (and in this he spake truth, for he had shewn several instances of valour), 'but I hate these supernatural beings.' 'Peace, you blockhead' said Theodore hastily, as they came to the oak door, which he flung open, while his lady and servants gave a sudden start occasioned by their apprehensions, which were now arrived at the highest pitch: nought appeared, and all was silent as the grave.

The party entered, and they proceeded to investigate the furniture, which appeared more ancient than any they had yet met with in the Priory, the hangings were of rich tapestry, on which were exquisitely displayed several passages of historical tradition, the whole bordered with a lovely wreath of flowers: the chairs were made to correspond with the work, but the tables were of a beautiful carved wood of the most curious form. At one end stood a large folding press<sup>3</sup> of ebony, which Theodore opened - his blood curdled with horror at the dreadful scene which presented itself to his view: no less than three decayed human bodies hung up in this place! - at the bottom of the press was a dagger, with a handle of solid gold, embossed with various characters; from the appearance of the blade, he had no doubt but it was that with which the murder had been committed.

The murdered persons, by the remains of their dress that was not effaced by the all-subduing hand of time, appeared to be of high rank in life: there was a gentleman, a lady, and a little boy, apparently about seven years of age - the assassins did not appear to be of the common stamp. to whom plunder would have been a chief object, for there were several ornaments of considerable value left on their persons; the most conspicuous was a diamond cross, that was suspended by a chain of gold to the bosom of the lady - after a minute search nothing could be found to elucidate the mystery, who was the assassin, and they returned to their apartments overwhelmed with horror; the dreadful knowledge they had obtained made the asylum they had once deemed so comfortable, hateful to them, and disturbed their repose, but necessity obliged them to continue in their retreat.

One evening, when Donald had accompanied his master to the next town, to purchase some few articles, that they wanted, they were much delighted with the various conversations they heard about the haunted Priory: lights had been seen, and the figures of men and women walking in the ruins: all which was judged to be supernatural, and every account much exaggerated— some affirmed that the spectres had no heads, and some that they were above a dozen in the ghostly party. Theodore demanded of one of them who seemed the most loquacious, what reason was given for the reappearance of those, who by divine and natural laws, ought to rest in the quiet sepulchre; the man (who proved to be the village notary) informed him that the Priory was not built till the reign of Edward the IVth in the year 1461 by Robert Earl of Belfont, who was a powerful man, and in great favour with the monarch, to whom he was a faithful subject, and vigilant in his cause against the house of Lancaster, and was one of the chief in hurling the unfortunate Henry the VIth from the regal dignity.<sup>4</sup> This building was erected for the performance of a vow he had made in the field of battle, so to do, if God granted him victory over the enemies of his sovereign: this proved to be decisive in favour of the York line, and the Earl fulfilled his religious promise. He endowed it with munificence, and the edifice was supposed to be the most beautiful structure of any religious house in the kingdom. The Earl lived to a very advanced age, but at the time the vile Duke of Gloucester<sup>5</sup> ascended the throne, he retired from the world in disgust, and became one of the brethren of Belfont Priory.

Thus he continued exercising the prescribed rules with the most rigid exactness, till the decease of Hugh de

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<sup>3</sup> A large, free-standing cabinet or cupboard for holding books, clothing, or domestic articles.

<sup>4</sup> Henry VI, of the House of Lancaster, was king of England from 1422 -1461 and then again briefly from 1470-71. That interval in Henry's reign came when he was deposed by Edward IV, of the House of York, in the famous War of the Roses. Henry's return to power in 1470 lasted only a few months; his problematic mental stability led to him being dethroned again by Edward VI and consigned to the Tower of London, where he was murdered in May 1471.

<sup>5</sup> This would be Richard, Duke of Gloucester and brother of Edward IV, who is said to have murdered Henry VI in the Tower, and who later became King Richard III of England (1483 – 1485), and the subject of one of Shakespeare's more famous history plays. Richard was killed in a battle – the last English king to die in combat – against forces loyal to the Tudor family; the leader of this family, Henry Tudor, became King Henry VI, the first Tudor monarch.

Burgh the Prior, when he was elected in his room, by universal consent, and died much lamented; he was buried in the chapel, but the monument is now enclosed in the mass of ruins. His son succeeded him in the earldom: he was the worst of tyrants — arrogant, cruel, and vindictive: he espoused Lady Margaret, a daughter of the Earl of Gowen — (Theodore could not avoid a convulsive start) this lady expired in giving birth to their first child, a daughter who received the name of Avis: the Earl was chagrined in not having a male heir to his titles and estates, and deplored that circumstance more than the loss of his amiable spouse—he entered into second nuptials in a few months after this fatal event, and had no offspring, and the Earl and Countess lived in a very discontented manner; she died some years before her husband, not without some suspicion of poison being given to her in some wine.

The lovely Avis was much neglected by her father, and long before his death retired into a convent at Sheen, where she remained till she had attained her thirtieth year. The Earl on his being informed by his physicians that he had not many hours to live, declared a nephew of his first wife lady Margaret, his heir in case he espoused Avis, and a dispensation could be procured from Rome to emancipate her vows. This was accordingly done, but neither the young Earl of Gowen nor Avis was forward for the marriage; they were both handsome and agreeable, but they had not a mutual inclination for each other. The Earl had used his affections elsewhere, but as he could not have the estate without complying with the will of his late uncle, therefore he chose to dissemble and espoused the heiress: they lived near seven years in the utmost harmony with each other. The Earl possessed a noble and elevated mind, and he scorned to behave ill to the amiable countess, he strove to forget his first love, and paid Avis the most assiduous attention, while she on her part returned his kindness with duty and complacency. About this period of time Gowen introduced at his castle Sir Leopold de Courcy, who had arrived unexpectedly from Germany — upon his entering the room where Avis was sitting working tapestry with her women, she raised her eyes, and on beholding the graceful knight, fell from her seat and fainted: the Earl was much shocked, but the lady attributing her emotion to a sudden and violent indisposition, he was satisfied, and she retired to her chamber.

After some time spent in conversation on different subjects, the alarm of the countess on the entrance of his friend, recurred to the memory of the still doubting husband. ‘Pray Sir Leopold’ said the Earl, ‘did you ever visit the late Earl of Belfont the last time you honoured our native land with your presence?’ The knight answered in the affirmative. ‘Perhaps’ said his friend, ‘you were then acquainted with lady Avis his daughter?’ Sir Leopold replied he had never seen her to his knowledge: ‘But why that question’ continued the knight.’ ‘Nothing particular’ said the Earl, with some hesitation. ‘I only thought you and my lady might probably have been acquainted before.’ Here the entrance of dinner interrupted their conversation. One of the domestics brought word that the countess was too ill to appear at table, and the rest of the company being arrived, they sat down to the sumptuous repast. On this very day was the Priory of Belfont destroyed by an edict from his Majesty, when it had only stood seventy-four years. - The Earl who was a most zealous reformer, heard the news without the least regret: besides, to his extreme consolation, the large sums he was charged with annually, by the will of Robert, the founder of the Priory, he was now freed from obligation to pay - but the case was far different with lady Gowen, she venerated this, and all religious houses, and was for some time inconsolable. The offices of the Priory, the principal hall, and a large room which had been the chamber of the superior, was still left, and his lordship applied to the king for leave to make it a temporary residence in the hunting season; this was readily obtained for the Gowens had always been favourites with the Henries, for their strict adherence to the Lancaster family. But fate so ordained that the Earl never enjoyed the privilege he obtained - in less than three months after the arrival of Sir Leopold, Gowen was obliged to attend his monarch on account of his marriage with Ann of Cleves.<sup>6</sup> Being one night (during his stay at the court) invited to a splendid banquet - towards the end of the entertainment, the gentlemen got a little inebriated with drinking the health of their majesties. Lord Weston facetiously rallied the Earl upon entertaining one who had been the paramour of his wife. Lord Gowen waited on that nobleman the next day, declared his ignorance of the circumstance to which he had alluded the preceding evening, and desired an explanation, which Lord Weston gave him in the following words: Sir Leopold de Courcy for a length of time paid his addresses to the heiress of Belfont; but the Earl refused his consent, declaring he had other views for his daughter, and desiring

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<sup>6</sup> Anne of Cleves was the fourth wife of King Henry VIII, from January to June of 1540, when Henry had their marriage annulled for non-consummation.

the knight to discontinue his visits; this proved a great affliction to Leopold and Avisia, but they connived private meetings at the house of the lady's nurse, which continued for some length of time, till one of the herdsmen informed Lord Belfont of the affair, and Avisia was confined to her chamber, and soon after sent to the monastery at Sheen: and Sir Leopold finding all his schemes for recovering his mistress frustrated retired to his own country, where he soon after met with a rich widow whom he espoused. Here the Earl of Gowen interrupted him, with remarking that he well knew the lady, and that he first became acquainted with Sir Leopold at the celebration of their nuptials at the Spa - to this he added that Lady de Courcy being dead was the reason of the knight's return to England, in order to alleviate his grief. Lord Weston resumed his discourse by informing the Earl that Lady Avisia was only placed in the convent as a boarder, but on receiving the account of Leopold's marriage, she insisted on taking the veil, which she did in utter disregard of the commands of Belfont to the contrary, and he was so much exasperated at the conduct of his daughter, that he never went to the grate to visit her during the many years she survived this transaction. 'But I never heard, said Lord Weston, 'that any thing criminal had been suspected between the lovers, and I hope their actions now will be dictated by honour and rectitude.' Here the noblemen parted, and the Earl of Gowen went back to his lodgings in a frame of mind the most wretched that can be conceived. 'But here it may be necessary to inform you', said the notary, 'that Lord Weston was a relation of the late Earl's second wife, and was better acquainted with the affairs of the family than the nephew Earl Gowen, who had resided in Scotland till his nuptials with Avisia.' By this time Theodore and his companion had arrived at the end of the village: the night was drawing on apace, and made his further stay dangerous to himself and distressing to the feelings of Lady Matilda, who doubtless would be alarmed at his unusual delay. He therefore informed the notary that he was anxious to get to his abode, which lay in a distant village. But that he was so much interested in the story he had been so obliging to relate, that he would meet him at the inn to hear the remainder of the narrative, any time he would be pleased to mention; the notary appointed tomorrow evening, and they parted.

Theodore and Donald made the best of their way across the forest, till they arrived at the Priory, where they were received with pleasure by the Lady Matilda and her faithful Blanche, to whom Theodore, related what had just been told by the notary. 'I now find', said he, 'the reason of the tombstone in the chapel, bearing the names and quartered arms of the families of Belfont and Gowen, and tho' so closely connected by two marriages, the dreadful scenes that doubtless occurred, prevented my father from mentioning the affinity between them, for I often remarked he did not like to talk of his ancestors.'

The next evening Theodore repaired to the inn, and found the notary true to his appointment and resumed the thread of his discourse as follows: Earl Gowen as soon as he could retire from the court with propriety, returned to Belfont castle, which was situated some miles distant from the Priory, at the town of Launceston: he resolved on his journey how he should act in consequence of the news he had heard. To deny Sir Leopold to continue his visit at the castle, without assigning the reasons of the act would appear like a breach of hospitality. He was assured in his own mind that the intentions of the knight were not honourable, or he would not have denied being acquainted with Lady Gowen. But he acquitted Avisia of entering any knowledge of the arrival of Sir Leopold, and he determined to challenge him to single combat and wipe out the blot his honour had sustained. The Earl travelled with such speed that he arrived at the castle much sooner than expected by the inhabitants, who appeared agitated and surprised. The Earl leaped from his proud steed and eagerly inquired of the domestics the cause of the consternation so visible in their countenances, but could obtain no satisfactory answer. He was proceeding to the apartment of his Lady, when the groom of the chambers with some hesitation informed him that Lady Gowen had left the castle the preceding evening, in company with Sir Leopold, and the young Lord Montgomery, with only two attendants, that belonged to the knight: when they went, they told him they were going to view the mines: and when he found it dark, and they did not return he became uneasy, and accompanied by some of the domestics, he went in search of them, fearful some dreadful accident had occurred; but all his inquiries were in vain, and he was certain they had not been at the mines, nor could he get any intelligence of them.

The Earl gave himself up to the most violent paroxysms of rage, vowing revenge on his perfidious wife, and false friend. He dispatched his vassals every road he could think on, mounted on fleet coursers to pursue them, but all his endeavours were useless, and filled him with despair.

Bitterly did he reproach himself for espousing Lady Avis, and forsaking Lady Julia Malcolm, who was the real object of his affections, and to whom he had often made the most solemn declarations of his love. He regained his misfortunes as the dispensation of heaven, as a just reward for his perjury, and he cursed the Belfont estates as the means of his undoing.

Some weeks passed and no tidings were obtained of the fugitives, till Roland one of the Earl's huntsmen brought intelligence of a surprising nature: he related that being in pursuit of his game, chance led him near the Priory, just as there came on a violent shower of hail; he was alone, and tho' he wished to seek shelter from the inclemency of the weather, he was not fond of entering the ruins, as it was reported by the peasantry that since the edifice was demolished the ghost of the founder was seen wandering about the windings of the ruins: but the storm continued with such violence he had no choice left, and he stood under a large portico. He had not been in this retreat many minutes, when he heard the voices of different persons as if conversing at some distance: this rather startled him. but presently it recurred to him that it might be some travellers, who like himself, had sought shelter from the weather; and he resolved to search for them, that he might join their party. He dismounted from his horse, and fastening it at the image that remained in the wall, he attentively listened from whence the sound proceeded. and he ascended the noble stair-case, and entered the hall, the persons appeared to be in a room beyond. Roland called to mind that some furniture had been moved there from the castle, in order to render that room fit for the reception of his master in the hunting season, and he thought that was the reason for their choosing that apartment, which lady Avis had fitted up with exquisite taste. He was just going to enter the door, when to his extreme terror and surprise, he became sensible that one of the persons was Sir Leopold De Courcy. Resuming his courage, he peeped through the crevice of the door, and beheld the knight, Lady Cowen, and her son, with the two attendants: he understood from their conversation that they had concealed themselves in that retreat ever since they left Belfont Priory, but that night they meant to begin their journey, they was to depart at the mid hour, and a suit of man's apparel had been provided for the Lady, which she was to wear till they arrived at Germany. The man with difficulty escaped unseen: for Sir Leopold entered the hall the moment Roland had gained the stairs: he mounted his horse and made a precipitate flight, for he had no doubt of being assassinated, was he caught in that place. The Earl rewarded the huntsman for his fidelity, and commanded him to keep the affair secret from his fellows. About nine in the evening Earl Gowen privately quitted the castle, and repaired to the ruined Priory; he arrived there just as the clock of the adjacent village announced the eleventh hour. He proceeded cautiously to the hall, the door of the inner apartment was open, and he had a full view of his lady, and the treacherous knight: he was persuading her to put on the attire he procured for her, to which she appeared to acquiesce with reluctance, but at last consented, telling him with most affectionate air that she would sacrifice her life to oblige him.

Sir Leopold embraced her and remarked the hour was drawing near, that he fondly hoped would rescue them from their irksome solitude, and from the fear of being surprised by their enemies. Lady Gowen returned an answer so endearing, that the Earl could no longer restrain his vengeance, he rushed into the room and plunged a dagger in her breast. Surprise had unnerved the arm of Sir Leopold, but recovering from his stupor, he drew his sword and made a furious thrust at the unfortunate husband, but missed his aim and received a mortal wound from the weapon, still reeking with the blood of his mistress.

Sir Leopold staggered a few paces, and exclaiming he would not fall unrevenged ran his sword through the heart of the child (Lord Montgomery) who was sleeping on a seat in a little travelling dress; he uttered not a word, but instantly his pure unspotted soul winged its way from its earthly tenement, and flew to the realms of bliss. The Earl was almost in a state of distraction, his revenge had been dear bought: he loved his son with the most enthusiastic fondness, and beheld the fatal stroke with honour that beggars all description, he placed the hapless victim in an oak press,<sup>7</sup> and locking the door, rushed with dire frenzy from the scene of blood. He regained his castle in safety, tho' crossing one of the courts he heard the trampling of horses in the track that led to the Priory: he remembered for what purpose they were going, and a transient wish came across his mind that their escape had not been prevented. Agony of woe, and the most heart-rendering sensations for the loss of his beloved boy, soon affected his brain, and he became a miserable maniac, in which state he continued near three years, during which time he uttered the most dreadful expressions. Roland was the only one of his

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<sup>7</sup> The press is ebony when it is first mentioned – perhaps another indication of hasty composition.

attendants that believed his ravings about murder, but he kept the fatal secret confided to his own bosom.

About a week before the death of the unfortunate Earl, he became sensible, and sending for a priest made a public confession; the case was immediately reported to the king, who ordered every attention to be paid to Gowen, and duly considering the unfortunate and aggravating circumstances of the case, he granted him a full pardon under his seal, in case he should recover his health. But the estates of the Belfont family were seized by the crown, but had no interference with that of the Gowens. The Earl just lived to receive the pardon, uttered a petition to Heaven and expired. By his own desire he was privately interred amid the ruins of the chapel belonging to the Priory. He was succeeded in his estates at Scotland by his brother Adolphus. For what cause I know not, but the monarch ordered the bodies of the murdered persons to remain unburied. and their spirits are frequently seen hovering about the spot. Here the notary finished his sad relation, with a wish that they might be permitted to have the funeral rites performed. After some mutual civilities passing they parted, and Theodore resolved in his own mind the dreadful circumstances, and sincerely deplored the fate of his ancestors.

The small circle that composed their family were sitting round the cheerful fire, attentively listening to Theodore's recital of the account the notary had given. Matilda shuddered at the horrid tale, while the hair of the two domestics stood erect on their heads: they drew their chairs close to their superiors, and shewed every symptom of terror. Theodore had just concluded his narration, and was telling Donald to fetch a bottle of wine from the chest, that by an enlivening glass they might exhilarate their spirits, and disperse the gloom that overspread each visage. Donald was preparing to obey the commands of his master, when the door of their apartment (which was always bolted with care on the inside, as soon as they were assembled for the evening) flew suddenly open, grated on its hinges, and then shut again with violent force: this was repeated three times, and then all was silent as before. Theodore was the first that recovered from the shock and confusion, into which this affair had thrown them - when he endeavoured to calm their apprehensions, by assuring them that they had neglected to secure the door, which was thus blown by the winds. He advanced to examine it, with a firm believe that he should find the bolts undrawn - but how was he staggered to behold it completely fastened in the usual manner: the most extreme terror took possession of each of these unhappy fugitives. - Lady Matilda declared that she would rather beg her bread, than continue in a place so replete with horror. They passed the night with the most dreadful apprehensions, listening to every sound with acute misery, but nothing further happened to disturb them. They arose early the next morning weary and ill for want of rest, and they determined to seek a more comfortable asylum without loss of time. All that day the rain poured in torrents, and detained Theodore and his servant from taking the route that was intended.

From the unfavourable state of the weather, it was not possible for them to remove from the Priory, and Theodore to calm the apprehensions of Matilda, determined with the assistance of Donald, to inter the remains of the guilty victims and the innocent child, in one of the aisles of the ruined chapel. He sent his servant to procure a pick axe and a spade; and placing their remains in an old chest, they performed the duty so necessary to the obsequies of the dead.

Theodore endeavoured to persuade his Lady and the domestics to remain some time longer in their present abode, in hopes that now the dreadful spectacle was removed, they should be permitted to rest in peace: after some arguments on both sides, they consented to his proposal, and endeavoured to arm themselves with fortitude.

The moon now shone with resplendent brightness, and the season of the year was uncommonly fine and warm. Theodore and Matilda often roved about the grounds, while their faithful attendants, who entertained a sincere affection for each other, followed at a distance. In one of these nocturnal rambles, they wandered insensibly a great distance from their abode: the striking of the clock in the neighbouring town, warned them it was the much dreaded hour of midnight, and they returned towards the Priory with as much haste as they could possibly effect: they had just gained the ruins when the Spectre who appeared to the view of Donald and Blanche, on their first entering the hall, crossed the path, uttering a most dismal groan, and surveying the party with a scrutinizing eye. and then vanished from their view. They proceeded slowly on without uttering a word, so great was their affright, which was still more augmented when ascending the stairs that led to the room where they commonly sat, the same figure impeded their passing to it, by planting itself in the narrow passage.

Theodore disengaging himself from the grasp of the terrified Matilda, and advancing boldly towards the Spectre, conjured him, by every sacred obligation, to relate the reason of its thus bursting from the confines of the dead, and haunting that abode of horror. The Spectre, in a solemn voice, commanded him to follow, and turned down another winding of the passage, while Theodore followed in silent awe, yet resolved to obey the summons, and learn, if possible, the dreadful mystery. His ghostly conductor led the way down a narrow flight of stairs, while a blue flame cast a faint light on the surrounding objects. At the bottom of the descent they entered a spacious vault: in the middle of the place was a broad square stone, where the Spectre stopt, and addressed the youth:

‘Behold! thou heir of Gowen, the wandering spirit of Robert, lord of all Belfont’s rich domains: whose deeds of benevolence endeared him to his vassals - but know, he was a murderer!’ Theodore uttered a deep sigh - the Spectre proceeded. ‘My elder brother was a noble youth. We beheld each other with the most affectionate regard, nor had we a sentiment we concealed; all was candour and fraternal love. I had just entered my eighteenth year when, unfortunately, I fell violently in love with the fair Elizabeth, niece of the Duke of Somerset, who, unknown to me, was previously engaged to my brother. I soon made a declaration of my affection, which she refused. Shortly after I learned the cause of her refusal was because she favoured my brother. From that hour jealousy, deadly hate, and revenge, took possession of my soul: I hired four ruffians, who waylaid him in a private path: he made a brave resistance, but fell covered with wounds - they dug a deep hole, and hid the cruel deed from the eyes of mortals. Never was the dire murder discovered. I even concealed it from my confessor, but my conscience burthened with the sin, was a torment to me. Some years after I obtained the hand of Elizabeth, who yielded with much reluctance to the wishes of the Duke, who was anxious for a union with our family. Heaven did not smile propitious on a marriage founded on blood. Elizabeth died the second year of our nuptials, in giving birth to my son. The annals of my race, are they not stained with murder, dishonour, and most horrid deeds? In you, noble Theodore, the virtues of my brother live again. Remove his stone; dig some feet down, and there you will find the skeleton of the hapless Edward! Pay funeral honours to it - have masses said for the repose of my soul, and then shall my perturbed spirit have the rest so long denied it. According to my vow in the civil wars, I erected this Priory, and I chose the spot when the murder had been done, in hopes to expiate the fault - *Curst fratricide!*’

Here the spirit of Earl Robert vanished, with the most dreadful groans, and the blue flame gradually faded away. Theodore was left in total darkness - he groped round the walls in hopes to find the passage by which the Spectre conducted him to the dismal vault, but his endeavours were unsuccessful: in vain he made the place ring with his voice, he was only answered by the echo resounding from the lofty roof, and he began to feel the most terrific apprehensions for his fate, when he found his hand grasped by another of the most icy coldness - this invisible agent led or rather pulled him forcibly to a considerable distance, and the youth presently perceived that he was in a narrow passage by which he entered the vault: this circumstance revived his drooping spirits, and he began to think that the same Spectre led him, though veiled in darkness from his sight, and he felt perfect confidence in his conductor. His feet now stumbled against the winding stairs, and to his great joy, he found that he was near his own apartments and his beloved Matilda, whose distress at his absence he well knew would be excruciating. The cold hand let go his hold; a slow mournful voice exclaimed. ‘I can go no further - this is the utmost step of my limited bounds: proceed, and all good angels guard you.’ The tone was far different from that of Earl Robert. Theodore was lost in amazement - a great light now shone behind him, he turned round, and beheld a sight that filled him at once with pity and horror: the ghost of the murdered Edward (for such it doubtless was) stood at some distance! his body covered with wounds, and one large gash in his forehead, from which the blood still appeared to flow in copious streams. Montgomery’s eyes were fixed on the dreadful spectacle, but the view was but transient, it instantly disappeared from his sight, and with a soft sigh exclaimed. ‘Theodore! the only remaining hope of two noble families, fulfill the request of my murderer - the deed will amply repay you.’

Theodore was obliged to stop some moments to recover his surprise, when he hastened on and entered their apartments in safety. The two domestics were endeavouring to conceal their own apprehensions, and to give comfort to their afflicted mistress, but in vain, grief had taken possession of her soul, and she declared her Theodore was lost for ever: at this instant he appeared and fondly clasped her in his arms. Overpowered with the pleasing surprise, she fainted, while Donald and Blanche knelt down and returned their thanks to heaven

with fervour, that their beloved master was restored to them in safety. As soon as Lady Matilda was restored to life, and the serenity of the family restored, Theodore complied with their anxious requests, and acquainted them with every particular that had occurred during his painful absence: he concluded his account with a wish that he could perform the injunctions he had received from the hapless spectres, but was fearful of involving themselves in ruin, as such a step must of necessity disclose to his cruel and relentless father where they had sought a retreat from the dread of his power, and he might form some dire project of tearing from him, his beloved Matilda, whose situation now required more tenderness than ever.

Matilda besought him to let no concern for her. however just, deter him from an act, which heaven must approve, and in its own time reward.

‘Pray my Lord’ (said the artless Donald, with a simplicity that forced a smile from Theodore,) ‘pray my Lord bury the ghost, or else he may seek for revenge and tear you to pieces!’

After various resolutions on the subject, they agreed that they ought to take no step of consequence without Lord Burleigh’s concurrence, and to refer the matter to him. Theodore arose early the next morning, and equipping himself in the disguise he travelled in, took an affectionate leave of Matilda, and mounting his horse rode to Launceston attended by Donald - here he met with a proper vehicle to convey him to the metropolis: he sent his faithful servant back to the Priory, giving him strict charge to take great care of his Lady and Blanche during his absence, which he would make as short as possible. He arrived at Lord Burleigh’s without meeting with any incident on the road worth recording; he was received by that nobleman with every mark of friendly attention - but nought can equal the surprise of Cecil, when he was informed of the reason of the visit, he was no stranger to the murder of Sir Leopold de Courcy and the Countess of Gowen, but of the rest he was ignorant, and he admired the inscrutable ways of providence, in bringing hidden murder to light. ‘I have now’, said the Earl, ‘as great a surprise in store for you as that you have been communicating to me; let me now congratulate you upon your accession to wealth, splendour, and title.’ ‘Explain yourself my Lord’ said the astonished Theodore! Lord Burleigh informed him that he that morning received an account of the decease of the Earl of Gowen, that he expressed before his death, the most sincere repentance of his ill treatment to his son and his amiable lady, to whom he had written with his own hand, intreating her not to hate his memory. ‘I know the virtues of your Matilda so well’ added Lord Burleigh, ‘that I am sure she will banish all resentment from her breast; your father has left you all he possessed, nor have I been idle in your favour. I have implored our beloved queen,<sup>8</sup> and she has ratified my grant of all the lands of the Priory and castle of Belfont to your Lady, which I now hold as a gift from my sovereign: you took Matilda without a portion in preference to the rich heiress of Glencoe; you have endured poverty and misery for the sake of each other, and now you are rewarded. I never meant one of our family to be portionless, but I resolved to conceal my intentions and try your virtues and sentiments, they have exceeded my fondest hopes, and behold in me a firm friend, that loves you equal with his own children: here are the deeds of the estates, they are your own, and with regard to the supernatural visit you have received, you are at liberty to act as your wishes prompt you.’ Theodore was not slow in expressing his gratitude. As soon as he had been to the court and paid his devoirs<sup>9</sup> to his sovereign, he returned to Cornwall.

Matilda could not suppress her tears when informed of the death of the Earl, and the alteration of his sentiments in her favour, and sincerely regretted he had not survived once more to behold and bless them. These affectionate remarks endeared her to her amiable husband, who felt the same regret as herself, at the death of the Earl, whom he revered, notwithstanding the cruel treatment he had received; and even this was forgot when he heard the love he expressed for him, before he breathed his last.

The notary was the first person to whom Theodore revealed his rank; the hair of the old man stood erect with terror when informed of the Spectres that had appeared to the Earl, and Theodore was obliged to exert all his eloquence to persuade him to return with him to the Priory; at last he consented, and accompanied the Earl,

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<sup>8</sup> The last 3 monarchs of the Tudor line were women: Queens Jane (for 9 days in July of 1553), Mary (1553 – 1558), and Elizabeth I (1558 – 1603).

<sup>9</sup> “A dutiful act of civility or respect; usually in pl., dutiful respects, courteous attentions, addresses; chiefly in phr. to do or pay one’s devoir(s) (to some one).” (OED)

with many apologies for the freedom he had formerly treated him with. 'Continue it, I beseech you' said Theodore; 'sincerity is what I esteem.'

Donald had procured two men, and by the aid of torches they descended the winding stairs, and pursuing the way the Spectre had shewn Theodore, they arrived at the vault.

The Earl led them to the stone, which they removed, and dug a good depth before they came to the object of their search. The skeleton was much decayed, but the head was most perfect: the Earl minutely examined it and could plainly perceive that it had a deep wound in its forehead, corresponding with the second Spectre he had seen.

They carefully placed the remains in a coffin they had brought with them; and while they was performing this duty, they heard the most sweet and solemn music, which shewed how highly acceptable was this service to their wandering manes. The next day the funeral took place at Launceston, with great pomp and magnificence, and an elegant monument was erected in Launceston church, to the memory of Lord Edward - on which was engraved the melancholy story of the two brothers.

Theodore, on clearing the ruins of the Priory, discovered an iron chest, containing an immense quantity of gold and jewels; there was a parchment enclosed therein, which described it to be the property of Hugh de Burgh, the first Prior of the foundation, who on his renouncing the world, being offended by his relations buried his wealth, and bequeathed it to them that should be so fortunate as to discover it. Thus by a singular whim of the Prior, Theodore became possessed of a valuable treasure, which he set aside for liberal purposes. He built a noble mansion, on the site of Belfont Priory, at which he resided some months every year, and never felt the least disturbance from any supernatural visitors: all was peace and tranquillity, and the unhappy spirits no longer wandered to disturb the repose of mortals.

Theodore and Matilda were blest with a lovely and dutiful offspring. They were revered by the tenants and domestics, and lived respected and happy, to extreme old age: they died within a few days of each other, and even that short space was painful to the survivor.

Donald and Blanche married soon after Theodore came to the Earldom, who settled them in a valuable farm in Scotland: and ever retained, with his Matilda, a sincere regard for these faithful domestics.