

The Yorkshire Boggart

Folk-Lore And Legends: English

English

Advanced
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A boggart intruded himself, upon what pretext or by what authority is unknown, into the house of a quiet, inoffensive, and laborious farmer; and, when once it had taken possession, it disputed the right of domicile with the legal mortal tenant, in a very unneighbourly and arbitrary manner. In particular, it seemed to have a great aversion to children. As there is no point on which a parent feels more acutely than that of the maltreatment of his offspring, the feelings of the father, and more particularly of his good dame, were daily, ay, and nightly, harrowed up by the malice of this malignant and invisible boggart (a boggart is seldom visible to the human eye, though it is frequently seen by cattle, particularly by horses, and then they are said to “take the boggle,” a Yorkshireism for a shying horse). The children’s bread and butter would be snatched away, or their porringers of bread and milk would be dashed down by an invisible hand; or if they were left alone for a few minutes, they were sure to be found screaming with terror on the return of the parents, like the farmer’s children in the tale of the Field of Terror, whom the “drudging goblin” used to torment and frighten when he was left alone with them.

The stairs led up from the kitchen; a partition of boards covered the ends of the steps, and formed a closet beneath the staircase; a large round knot was accidentally displaced from one of the boards of this partition. One day the farmer’s youngest boy was playing with the shoe-horn, and, as children will do, he stuck the horn into this knot-hole. Whether the aperture had been found by the boggart as a peep-hole to watch the motions

of the family, or whether he wished to amuse himself, is uncertain, but sure it is the horn was thrown back with surprising precision at the head of the child. It was found that as often as the horn was replaced in the hole, so surely it was ejected with a straight aim at the offender's head. Time at length made familiar this wonderful occurrence, and that which at the first was regarded with terror, became at length a kind of amusement with the more thoughtless and daring of the family. Often was the horn slipped slyly into the hole, and the boggart never failed to dart it out at the head of one or the other, but most commonly he or she who placed it there was the mark at which the invisible foe launched the offending horn. They used to call this, in their provincial dialect, "laking wit boggart," i.e., playing with the boggart. As if enraged at these liberties taken with his boggartship, the goblin commenced a series of night disturbances. Heavy steps, as of a person in wooden clogs, were often heard clattering down the stairs in the dead hour of darkness, and the pewter and earthen dishes appeared to be dashed on the kitchen floor, though, in the morning, all were found uninjured on their respective shelves.

The children were chiefly marked out as objects of dislike by their unearthly tormenter. The curtains of their beds would be violently pulled backward and forward. Anon, a heavy weight, as of a human being, would press them nearly to suffocation. They would then scream out for their "daddy" and "mammy," who occupied the adjoining room, and thus the whole family was disturbed night after night. Things could not long go on after this fashion. The farmer and his good dame resolved to leave a place where they had not the least shadow of rest or comfort.

The farmer, whose name was George Gilbertson, was following, with his wife and family, the last load of furniture, when they met a neighbouring farmer, whose name was John Marshall, between whom and the unhappy tenant the following colloquy took place—

"Well, George, and soa you're leaving t'ould hoose at last?"

"Heigh, Johnny, ma lad, I'm forc'd till it, for that boggart torments us soa we can neither rest neet nor day for't. It seems loike to have such a malice again't poor bairns. It ommost kills my poor dame here at thoughts on't, and soa, ye see, we're forc'd to flitt like."

He had got thus far in his complaint when, behold! a shrill voice, from a deep upright churn, called out—

“Ay, ay, George, we ’re flitting, you see.”

“Confound thee,” says the poor farmer, “if I’d known thou’d been there I wadn’t ha stirrid a peg. Nay, nay, it’s to na use, Mally,” turning to his wife, “we may as weel turn back again to t’ould hoose, as be tormented in another that’s not sa convenient.”

They are said to have turned back, but the boggart and they afterwards came to a better understanding, though it long continued its trick of shooting the horn from the knot-hole.

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