

Even ordinary apparitions seem to be having their day again, though the fact is that every one of us, however sceptical, has always cherished one ghost story. As in the case of the ecclesiastical apparition, the phantom is really seen. "Believe in ghosts!" said Coleridge, "No, Madam, I have seen too many of them." We had once the curiosity to look through the principal ghost stories in order to learn on what evidence they had been believed. The only one that would have stood its ground at all under cross-examination by Mr. Blake was that of the wicked Lord Lyttelton. It was perfectly well attested that Lord Lyttelton had recounted to his friends a supernatural communication which he pretended to have received, warning him that he would die at a certain hour; and that, at that hour, his valet, entering his bedroom, found him dying on the floor. But the explanation is easy: the voluptuary sated with his vicious life had resolved to commit suicide, and the warning apparition was a trick devised by him to mask the nature of his death. It was not very likely that the laws of nature would be suspended to announce the approaching exit of a debauchee. No less a personage than the historian Clarendon has a ghost story which he tells with pomp and is evidently disposed to believe. It relates to a supernatural warning supposed to have been conveyed to the Duke of Buckingham on the eve of his assassination by Felton, and by the Duke to have been communicated to his mother. But on inspection we find that Clarendon himself vouches for no part of the evidence except the fact that the old Duchess appeared less surprised and moved than might have been expected on receiving the news of her son's murder. More than one account of her comparative apathy might be suggested; and here again we may observe that Heaven was not likely to attach quite so much weight to the concerns of the Duke of Buckingham as was attached to them by Lord Clarendon. We have said that everybody cherishes one ghost story. Our's is that of the children who, scampering along a dark passage at the end of which they would have fallen into a well, were stopped by the ghost of their mother.