
We have often congratulated ourselves on having flourished after the extinction of chivalry, the decline and fall of the empire of ghosts, and the introduction of potatoes into this island. We never could have endured a shirt of mail – and we shudder at the thought of having been obliged to scale one of those immeasurable horses that used to carry the knights of old. The luxury of being negligently dressed, of lying diffused all day over a sofa, was then unknown – and gentlemen sat down to rest themselves, in those days, under about two cwt. of iron. We suspect, too, that good eating and drinking were then in their infancy. Short were the strides which cookery had made. Gentlemen assailed beeves that came out of the kitchen just as they went in, with the slight alteration of roasting; and we may judge of their skill in liquids from this fact, that

“They drank red wine through the helmet barred.”

That satisfactory and satisfying smack of the lips, which now ratifies a rummer, was then smothered in metal – and there was no room for that sympathetic communication between mind and mind, which good cheer now-a-days spreads over a party assembled at a rump and dozen. Such, we conceive, were the chief drawbacks from human happiness during the age of chivalry. To these, no doubt, might be added that eternal skirmishing so incompatible with the possession of a sound skin, and the annual rape, murder, and arson of our wives, children, and houses.

All this must have been uncomfortable enough; but, in our apprehension, a trifle in comparison to that constant state of fear in which, we frankly confess, we should have dragged out our miserable existence, had we lived during the administration of witches, ghosts, and the devil. We are sufficiently afraid of such gentlefolks, even now when we no longer believe in their mundane existence; but what would have become of people with weak nerves like us, when every church-yard was in the habit of nocturnally sending out its quota of spectres – when hobgoblins were prowling about in all directions – when you could not turn a corner but an evil-spirit came bouncing against you – when you were on no occasion sure of your man, who would frequently take his leave of you, without finishing a sentence, in a blaze of fire – and when, with all civility be it spoken, the devil himself placed his amusement, to an extent not altogether compatible with a due sense of his personal dignity, in rambling, without any very definite object, over both town and country, and keeping a great majority of our forefathers in continual hot-water.

Neither were there potatoes in those days – and, without that vegetable, say, what were a dinner?

“A world without a sun.”

From the very bottom of our souls do we pity our ancestors. There is no philosophy in saying, that the universal love of the potato, did the potato itself create. That love must have pre-existed in the elements of our nature, just as the desire for Eve pre-existed in Adam, and was only called forth into action by that accomplished
female. There must, therefore, have been, ever since the arrival of the Saxons in this island, unknown, at least not understood, by our forefathers,

“A craving void left aching in their hearts.”

A void which, within these last hundred years, has been filled up, so that little seems now to be wanting, under our free government, to the perfection of our social and domestic happiness. It would be a curious enquiry, to shew the effects of this vegetable on the moral, intellectual, and physical character of the people of a sister kingdom; and on some future occasion we hope to sift this subject to the bottom. There can be no doubt, that the sudden extinction of the potato in Ireland would be as fine a subject for a poem from the pen of Lord Byron, as the sudden extinction of light, some of the evils of which imaginary event his Lordship has, with his usual vigour, delineated in that composition entitled, “Darkness.” Not to go too much into particulars, we may just remark, that bulls are in Ireland fed chiefly on potatoes, and that those fine animals would be in danger of becoming extinct with the root on which they now grow to such prodigious size.

Our readers will pardon these speculations of ours, which would, perhaps, be more in place in the Edinburgh Review, or some such sober and philosophical journal, and are not altogether compatible with the plan of our Magazine, which aims chiefly at lighter and more amusing matter. But, after all, we suspect that mere fun and jocularity may be carried a little too far, and therefore it is that we occasionally seek, as at present, to address ourselves to the gravity of our very gravest readers.

Come, then, most grave and gracious friend, and turn over with us a few pages of old Daniel De Foe's Essay on Apparitions. Mayhap, thou hast never, in spite of all thine erudition, had this volume in thine hand - but even if it be familiar to thee, all Daniel’s things can bear re-perusal – if thou thinkest otherwise, wait for Odoherty’s campaigns, and be thankful.

And first, let us see what were De Doe’s ideas of the devil. Some people, says he, speak “as if nothing but seeing the devil could satisfy them there was such a person, and nothing is more wonderful to me, in the whole system of spirits, than that Satan does not think fit to justify the reality of his being, by appearing to such in some of his worst figures, and tell them in full grimace who he is, when, I doubt not, they would be as full of panic as other people.” The great mistake into which De Foe accuses his contemporaries of falling on this subject is, that people will either allow no apparition at all, or “will have every apparition to be the devil, as if none of the inhabitants of the world above were able to shew themselves here, or had any business among us but the devil, who, I am of opinion, has really less business here than any of them all.”

Holding this opinion, De Foe gives us but a very short chapter “on the appearance of the devil in human shape.” It begins in a very soothing and encouraging tone, which must, no doubt, have been beyond measure delightful in those days to the timid reader. “Pray observe,” says Daniel, “that when I am speaking of the appearance of the devil, it is not to tell you that he can and does appear among us at this time – so you need not look over your shoulders to see for him, or at the candles to see if they burn blue, at least not yet – ’tis time enough for that by and by.”
Our author exposes the extreme absurdity of supposing every spirit that confabulates with mankind on earth “the devil.” Many of these come on good errands, and to prevent mischief – “all of which things are very much out of the devil’s way, remote from his practice, and much more remote from his design.” Should, however, the devil appear to any of his readers, De Foe advises them not to be flurried – not to shun him and fly from him, but to speak to him. “If,” says he, “you would ask me what you should say to it, ‘tis an unfair question in some respects – 'tis not possible for any one to dictate, without the proper circumstances be described. The old way you all know: in the name of, &c. as above, is the common road. I will not cry down the custom, because ‘tis the usual way, and the words are good;” but, on the whole, he recommends a short ejaculatory prayer, and “then a plain what are you? is, I think, compliment enough for the devil.” Waving, therefore, all particular instructions, our judicious author observes, that each particular occasion will certainly administer the substance of what you should say, and that it is almost impossible to go wrong, if you only keep up a good heart, and put a good face upon it. We perfectly agree with De Foe in thinking, that an extempore address of a few pithy words is, in such cases, infinitely preferable to a long set speech. Indeed, we have observed, in all accounts of the devil’s appearances, that he is very lame at a reply, and that if you take up strong ground at first - ground on which you can depend - it is the easiest thing in the world to give him a set-down - a complete squabash. We suspect that the devil is wont to a very impolitic degree to prepare his speeches. There is an air of too much study about most of them. They smell too much of the shop; and he is a terrible mannerist. Were a collection of his speeches to be made, he would be found to repeat himself even more than Counsellor Phillips. At the same time, it is but justice to him to admit, that there is a deal of fire in much that he says, and that he often suits the action to the words. The worst of it, according to De Foe, is, that he does not in general appear “in all his formalities and frightfuls,” “but to-day in one disguise, to-morrow in another - you see him, and you don't see him - you know him, and you don't know him - and how then can any one tell you what to say to him, or how to talk with him.” It would have been a very simple matter for De Foe, or any other man of talents, to draw up Instructions for Young Persons how to parley with his Majesty, if he chose always to exhibit himself adorned with the regalia. But he tries to get people upon the hip by personating a friend, or a comely stranger in a well-brushed suit of black - and honest men are thus laid flat on their backs before they have fairly taken hold of the wrestler. “‘Tis the opinion of the learned divines,” quoth Daniel, “that the devil would do much less harm if he appeared as a mere devil, with his horns, his cloven hoof, and his serpent's tail and dragon's wings, as fancy figures him out, and as our painters dress him up, than he does in his disguises, and the many shapes and figures he assumes to himself.” On the whole, it would seem that De Foe, though willing to allow some merit to the devil, did not consider him as a very formidable character, except from the weakness of his opponents. He also thinks that the devil, whatever else he may be, is no prophet; “for when asked what should be to some, the devil was always nonplust, and generally lied in his answers - so that none could depend on what he said. In a word, the devil was not able to foretell any thing - he can predict nothing, for he knows nothing; and if any apparition comes to be seen or heard, who takes upon it to tell what should come to pass, you may depend upon it that apparition is not from the devil.” This, too, is our opinion.

Taking leave of his Satanic Majesty for the present, let us hear what De Foe has got to say about “the apparition of unembodied spirits.” His speculations on this
subject remind us of our learned and ingenious friend, Francis Maximus Macnab, a most sonorous name. He cannot agree with those who maintain that there must be inhabitants in all the planetary worlds, some of whom may occasionally visit earth in the capacity of spectres. “Saturn and Jupiter are uncomfortably cold, insufferably dark, would congeal the very soul (if that were possible), and so are not habitable. Mercury and Venus are insufferably hot, that the very water would always boil, and the fire burn up the vitals. In Mars, so very dry in its nature, no vegetables or sensitives could subsist that we have any notion of, for want of moisture, and the men that lived there must be dried up sufficiently for pulverizing on any suitable occasion.”

If Saturn, therefore, be inhabited, De Foe remarks, that the people must either live without eyes, for what is the use of eyes when there is no light? or be so illuminated from their own internal heat and light, that they can see sufficiently from their own beams. In Jupiter, the good folks, (if any) must live in twilight, by the reflection of its own moons, and in continual frosts. In Mercury, the species must be all salamanders, and live in fire more intense than what would be sufficient to burn all their houses, and melt copper, lead, and iron, even in the mine. In Venus, the heat would boil the blood in the body, and a set of human bodies be found that would live always in a hot-bath. Now, it is plain that the spectres that have from time to time been seen upon our earth, have not at all answered the description of any of the natives above - and we must seek out for them another origin. De Foe, therefore, conceives, “that they dwell in the invisible world, and in the vast nowhere of unbounded apace.” This, we think, is plausible and satisfactory theory.

Several very good stories of the life and behaviour of these phantoms, from the land of Nowhere, are interspersed through the volume. We are told of a man who travelled four years through most of the northern countries of Europe, with a personage erroneously supposed to be the devil, but who was unquestionably an inhabitant of Nowhere. He guided him through desarts and over mountains - over frozen lakes, and little seas covered with snow - he diverted him with discourses of various subjects. He was acquainted wherever he came, and procured his fellow-traveller entertainment and good usage. He knew the affairs of every country, and the very people too - he spoke every language, German, Persic, Polish, Prussian, Russian, Hungarian Tartarian, and Turkish. This is a description that would exactly suit Christopher North, Esq. the Editor of this Magazine; but what follows can hardly be affirmed of that eminent, literary, political, poetical, theological and philosophical person. “Sometimes he would be seen at a distance a mile or more, to day on his right; tomorrow on his left hand - and keeping even pace with him, came into the same village or town where he lodged and took up at another time; but if he enquired for him in the morning, he was always gone, and the people knew nothing of him, except that they just saw such a man in the evening before, but that he did not stay.”

On one occasion, this mysterious personage advised the traveller not to sail in a certain vessel from Gottenburgh, as he foresaw it would be wrecked, but the traveller, who at this time thought the spirit “only a strange, intelligent, foreseeing man,” disregarded his advice, and was cast away “at Stralsund, a sea-port of Pomeran.”

When walking on the quay there, a stranger accosted him, and invited him to join a party of gentlemen at an Inn. After some days spent in the most friendly manner, the stranger disappeared, leaving our traveller in possession of bills to a great amount. Not even the three gentlemen to whom he had introduced the traveller, knew any
thing about him, and that he was a spirit seemed manifest. The fortunate traveller set out to Dantzick, with his three new friends; and on the third day, after they had passed the Oder, in that wild and desart country, they observed a man, mean in apparel, but "appearing something more than merely what poverty represents, "travelling the same way as they did, but always keeping at about the distance of half a mile from them on their left hand." This continued for three days, during which, they made several attempts to get nearer to him, which were all alike unsuccessful, till arriving at a village, the unaccountable Parallel entered a small house. The traveller and his friends went into the hut, and told the woman of the house what they had seen. “What?” says she, “have you seen the Owke Mouraski? That Owke Mouraski never calls at any house in the town, but some or other in the family dies that year.” This woman then informed the traveller, that he was “no devil, but a good man, who knew more than all the men in the world;” and from her conversation, it seemed that he was thought to be a messenger of God who sometimes foretold death, and sometimes predicted recovery from disease. No sooner had they left the hamlet, than there was the same object moving along as before, who continued to accompany them all day, till they came to a wide river. They crossed the bridge, and kept their eyes on the creature, who seemed to take a momentary pause on the edge of the river, and then to appear going up the rising grounds on the other side, “without their being capable of giving the least account how he passed the water.” As soon as they entered the town, their guide told them to look towards the door of an Inn, a little beyond their own, and “there they saw him plain eating a piece of bread, and having a pot or jug of Polish beer standing by him. One of the gentlemen walked up in his boots to the place, seeing him sitting all the while he was going, till coming very near, and happening to turn his eyes but one moment from him, when he looked again, the man was gone.” When the innkeeper was told that he was the Owke Mouraski, he was greatly agitated, and seemed glad that he had moved off, even though he had not paid his bill. Next day, the travellers saw him enter into another house, as before; but its inmates, when spoken to, blessed the mysterious phantom, and said that he was a bringer of good tidings. He accompanied the travellers to Dantzick, and then disappeared.

There, too, the party broke up; and our traveller, having picked up a new acquaintance, determined to go to Petersburgh, by the way of Konisberg. This fresh acquaintance “told him so many stories of different kinds, that he looked as if he knew all the world, and all the people in it, and all the things that had happened in it, or would happen in it for ever to come, and something longer.” At Konisberg they separated - and our traveller, desirous of continuing his journey, inquired in the city if there were any gentlemen travelling towards Riga. An ancient man, habited like a Russ, or rather like a Greek priest, with a long venerable beard, a purple robe such as the Russians wear, a high stiff-crowned fur-cap, and a close vest about his body, girded with a silk sash, declared himself for Riga. He offered our traveller a horse - and they set out as equestrians. But to make a long story short, for four years ramble, this most fortunate of all travellers, no sooner said farewell to one good friend, than another slipt into his shoes; till at last being in Turkey, “his latest companion discovered to him, that he was an inhabitant of an invisible region, that he had been in his company in all his journies, in all the different figures that he had met with, that he embarked with him in Ireland, landed with him in Norway; left him at Gottenburg, found him at Straelsand, dogged him upon the way to Dantzick, sailed with him to Konisberg, lent him a horse to go to Riga, and so on,” &c.
In the same chapter we meet with another story, far from being unamusing, of which here is the outline: A certain rich man having occasion to go to Aix-la-Chapelle, left some domestics to guard his house. They being afraid of robbers, got some grenades, in case of being attacked - and one night, as they had feared, the robbers in good truth came. The servants, meanwhile, entrenched themselves in an upper story, and barricadoed the staircases. On the robbers breaking into a fine well furnished parlour, where the family usually sat, behold, in a great easy chair, a grave ancient man, with a long full-bottomed black wig, a rich brocade gown, and a lawyer's laced band, who, looking as if in great surprise, made signs to them for mercy, but said not a word; one of the rogues exclaiming, “Ha! Who’s there?” while another proposed cutting his throat. The old gentleman, with great signs of terror, beckoned to a door, which they opened, and rushing through a lobby, they entered a grand saloon, and beheld the same old gentleman, in the same dress, and the same chair, sitting at the upper end of the room, making the same gestures and silent entreaties as before. Enraged at this, and believing that he had slipt in by another door, they threatened instantly to knock out his brains, unless he shewed them where the treasure was stowed away - on which, he pointed to a door leading into another apartment. The robbers, on pouring into it, and looking at the farther end of the room, beheld the ancient man again, in the same dress and posture as before. It had so happened, however, that a few of the robbers had staid behind in the other room - and while those who had advanced, cried out, “Here is the old rogue before us again;” the party answered from the parlour, “How the devil can that be, he is here still in his chair, and all his rubbish.” It is no wonder that they were a good deal disconcerted with this self-multiplying patriarch, and one of the robbers, aiming a blow at him with his fuze, it burst into a thousand pieces, broke his own head, and knocked him head-over-heels, while it appeared that there was no old gentleman at all in the chair. Others of the gang went to attack the other old gentleman in the parlour, but he too was gone, and terror and confusion fell upon the banditti. They then ran into the third room, when they saw the figure sitting in his armchair, but “instead of his pitiful looks and seeming to beg his life as he did before, he was changed into the most horrible monster that ever was seen, and in his hands were two large fiery daggers, not flaming, but red-hot - in a word, the devil or something else,” &c. Meanwhile, the servants up stairs, not knowing what was going on below, threw three hand-grenades down a chimney that had three funnels, each communicating with one of the three rooms in which were the robbers and the Triple old man. One of the hand-grenades exploded in the chimney of the room in which the greatest number were assembled, and they, not doubting it was the work of the old sedentary, scampered in terror into the other rooms, and were just in time to encounter another similar explosion in each, which killed and wounded a great number of them. Very luckily, the three explosions set fire to the chimney, and the neighbours, alarmed to the spot, met the surviving robbers attempting to escape, and made them all prisoners. Who this old gentleman, or these three old gentlemen were, Daniel De Foe does not inform us - that he or they were the devil or devils no one will imagine - but whether it were a supernatural copartnerly, or in one divisible firm, this much will be allowed, that the whole affair exhibits a singularly fortunate concurrence of natural and preternatural agency, and that the spirit must have counted upon the three hand-grenades and the three funnels. At the same time, the story has an air of truth about it that will not suffer us to disbelieve it.
One other story from this volume and we have done. A gentleman having married a second wife, had no rest night or day till he would consent to disinherit his son by his first marriage, who had for some years been unheard of, and who, his stepmother asserted, must have died. It happened one evening that they had a violent quarrel upon this subject, “when, on a sudden, a hand appeared at the casement endeavouring to open it, but as all the iron casements used in former times opened outward, and were fastened in the inside, the hand seemed to try to open the casement, but could not.” Some dispute having occurred as to whom this hand belonged, the wife exclaimed “Why, if ’twas the devil, ’twas the ghost of your son; it may be come to tell you that he has gone to the devil,” &c. The husband, incensed at this coarse attack, cried aloud, “Alexander, Alexander,” and at these words, the casement opened again of itself, and his son Alexander looked in with a full face, and staring directly upon the mother with an angry countenance, cried here, and then vanished in a moment. Of course fits followed with the lady; but in about a year or so, she plucked up courage, and threatened to bring her husband to trial for dealings with the devil, unless he consented to disinherit his absent son. The affair was at last referred to arbitration, and “the two arbitrators were invited to dinner on the occasion.” The writings were about to be engrossed, when, on a sudden, they heard a rushing noise in the parlour where they sat, at which the arbitrators were sorely afraid, but the infatuated wife insisted that her husband should sign the deed though forty devils should appear. That moment the casement flew open, “and the shadow of a body was seen standing in the garden without, and the head reaching up to the casement, the face looking into the room with a stern and an angry countenance. Hold, said the spectre, as if speaking to the woman, and immediately clasped the casement to again, and vanished.” The wife screamed as before - the husband plucked up courage - the arbitrators refused to proceed - and in about half a year, the long lost son came home from the Indies - and we hope continued fierce upon his step-dame for the rest of her life.

We suspect that we have already exceeded the limits allowed us by the Editor. If not, Mr Christopher will allow our article to proceed.

There is a curious enough chapter on “Apparitions in Dreams, and how far they are or are not real Apparitions.” The question is debated, whether a person who complies with the devil’s temptation in a dream be as guilty of the fact as if he had been awake? - and though De Foe “leaves it only as a head of reflection,” he certainly seems to lean to the affirmative. He supposes a poor man tempted by the devil in a dream to strip a little child of a valuable necklace and other ornaments; on waking, he looks back on it with a double regret, first, that he is disappointed of his prize, and, secondly, that the devil had humbugged him into guilt. It seems that a person who had so dreamed narrated his dream to De Foe with the bitterest remorse. “I robbed it,” says he, “in my imagination, and deserve as much to be hanged for it, as if I had committed the horrid fact at noon-day. - Aye,” said he, “with a kind of horror, I ought to be hanged for it, and to be damned for it too.” Another gentleman, who lived apart from his wife, on reasonable suspicion of her infidelity, dreamt that a former mistress came to him with a smiling countenance, and telling him that his wife was dead, offered herself to his embraces, and was not repulsed. “When he found it was all a dream, he was exceedingly afflicted, and looked upon himself as really guilty as if he had been awake, and I cannot say but he had some reason.” De Foe adds, that he could give an instance of another person whom the devil haunted in like manner, “and
that sometimes he was prevailed on to consent, but always happily prevented by waking in time - but the person is too much known to allow the farther description of it without his consent.” Surely De Foe is here rather too stern a moralist. Only a few nights ago, we dreamt that we drank up all the water in the reservoir on the Castle Hill, from the pure love of mischief - though, Goodness knows, that in our waking hours, we delight to think of the many thousand teakettles boiling away of an evening in this city; and that, for our own taste, a very small quantity of water doth in general suffice.

Such of our readers as have been amused with our account of this curious volume are referred to it for a great deal of very odd matter, which we have no room to abridge. We recommend to their especial attention a chapter on the many strange inconveniences and ill consequences which would attend us in this world, if the souls of men and women, unembodied and departed, were at liberty to visit the earth, from which they had been dismissed, and to concern themselves about human affairs, either such as had been their own, or belonged to other people. He proves that such a system would never do in practice - and that the belief of it is quite untenable by a person of sound understanding. A person of sound understanding will not hold such a creed - but is satisfied with believing in spirits from the “vast land of nowhere,” and in the peregrinations of the evil one, whose whole life on earth is one continued masquerade.