

REMARKS

IN REFUTATION OF

AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY

OF A

SUPERNATURAL APPEARANCE,

RELATED BY

THE REV. RICHARD WARNER, F.A.S.

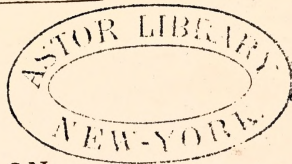
IN HIS

“LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS.”

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BY THE REV. THOMAS JERVIS.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

BY THE REV. THOMAS LEWIS

LONDON

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*To JOHN DISNEY, Esq.*

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MY DEAR SIR,

As to you I am indebted for drawing my attention, several months ago, to a statement of some circumstances in the "Literary Recollections" of the Rev. Richard Warner; I make no apology for troubling you with a few observations resulting from the perusal of that gentleman's account of, what he calls, "a singular fact," connected with an interesting event which took place many years since, in the family of the late Marquis of Lansdowne, at Bowood Park.

The work referred to contains much to approve, and much to admire; it is fruitful in biographical anecdote, and in lively and pertinent remarks upon men and manners, expressed with point and energy; in which the writer has displayed the happy talent of arresting the attention of his readers, while he combines instruction with amusement. I am, however, compelled to add, that the satisfaction which many parts of it afforded me, was not wholly unmixed or unalloyed. Not having the pleasure of his personal acquaintance, my knowledge of Mr. Warner is grounded on the reputation he has justly established by the various productions of his fertile pen, which has often been honourably and successfully employed, in adding to the common stock of useful knowledge and improvement, stimulated by an ardent zeal in the cause of piety and virtue. With high respect for his character, it is not without considerable reluctance that I undertake the ungracious task of animadverting upon anything that he has advanced. But I trust he will be disposed to receive my observations with candour, and consider them as proceeding, not from a disposition to cavil, but from a sincere regard to truth, and an earnest desire to maintain it.

Mr. Warner does not profess to have had any personal knowledge of the circumstances which he relates, but to have given them merely upon hearsay evidence. In a case therefore where he has manifestly been led into involuntary errors by the overheated imagination, and fanciful representations of others, I am persuaded he will readily admit the propriety of correcting them by an accurate statement of facts.

The traits of character interspersed through the following pages, and more particularly developed in the conclusion, have arisen out of the detail of circumstances, of peculiar interest to myself, and which cannot be wholly uninteresting to those who are capable of appreciating the value of high intellectual endowments, or who love to contemplate the fairest forms of moral excellence, purity, and innocence.

In connexion with the present subject, you will not think it strange that my mind reverts to another and more recent instance of domestic privation. The similarity which, in some points, may be traced will naturally awaken in your breast, as it has in mine, the recollection of an event in which you were yourself most nearly and painfully concerned. But I forbear to touch further upon a circumstance so deeply interesting to you, fearing to open afresh those wounds which time has in some degree healed, and for which reflection alone can find an adequate remedy.

I have only to hope that the following remarks will be found to have been dictated in the spirit of christian moderation, and expressed in that tone of liberality and courtesy which should ever regulate and harmonize the mutual intercourses and communications of literary men.

I am, my dear Sir,

Very sincerely Yours,

T. J.

## EXTRACT

*From Mr. Warner's "Literary Recollections."*

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"MY sincere respect for the memory of the Rev. Joseph Townsend, would, were I to follow its impulse, lead me into a length of remark upon his character and attainments, incompatible with the nature of my work: I will therefore close this biographical sketch with the communication of a very singular fact, related to me, in the first instance by him; but which has since been confirmed, by a voucher scarcely to be resisted,—an indisputably true report, of Dr. Alsop's *viva voce* declaration on his dying bed.

"Lord William Petty was the third son of the old Marquis of Lansdowne, and brother of the present highly gifted Lord of Bowood. He had attained the age of seven or eight years; as remarkable for the precocity of his understanding, as he was unfortunate in the delicate state of his constitutional health. The Marquis, called to London by his parliamentary duties, had left the child at Bowood, for the winter, with Mr. Jervis his tutor, and suitable domestics. The late Dr. Priestley also, the Marquis's librarian, made one of the party. On an ill-omened day, beautiful and brilliant,

but intensely cold, the gamekeeper, in compliance with Lord William's request, took the lad before him on horseback. His Lordship rode with his waistcoat open, and chest exposed, and an inflammation on the lungs was the immediate consequence of this incaution.

“On the first appearance of indisposition, Mr. Alsop of Calne, the family apothecary (himself much attached to the child), was summoned to attend his Lordship. His treatment promised a favourable result; and after a few days he left him, in the forenoon, apparently out of danger. Towards evening, however, the symptoms becoming decidedly worse, the family were alarmed; and Mr. Jervis thought it right to call for Mr. Alsop's immediate assistance. It was night before this gentleman reached Bowood; but an unclouded moon showed every object in unequivocal distinctness. Mr. Alsop had passed through the Lodge gate, and was proceeding to the house, when to his utter astonishment, he saw Lord William coming towards him, in all the buoyancy of childhood, restored, apparently, to health and vigour. ‘I am delighted, my dear Lord,’ he exclaimed, to see you; but, for Heaven's sake, go immediately within doors; it is death to you to be here at this time of night.’ The child made no reply; but, turning round, was quickly out of sight. Mr. Alsop, unspeakably surprised, hurried to the house. Here, all was distress and confusion; for *Lord William had expired a few minutes before he reached the portico.*

“The sad event being, with all speed, announced to the Marquis of Lansdowne, in London, orders were

soon received at Bowood for the interment of the corpse, and the arrangement of the funeral procession. The former was directed to take place at High Wickham, in the vault which contained the remains of *Lord William's mother*: the latter was appointed to halt at two specified places, during the two nights on which it would be on the road. Mr. Jervis and Dr. Priestley attended the body. On the first day of the melancholy journey, the latter gentleman, who had hitherto said little on the subject of the appearance to Mr. Alsop, suddenly addressed his companion, with considerable emotion, in nearly these words. 'There are some very singular circumstances connected with this event, Mr. Jervis; and a most remarkable coincidence, between a dream of the late Lord William, and our present mournful engagement. A few weeks ago, as I was passing by his room door one morning, he called me to his bedside. "Doctor," said he, "what is your christian name?" "Surely," said I, "you know it is Joseph." "Well, then," replied he, in a lively manner, "if you are a *Joseph*, you can interpret a *dream* for me, which I had last night. I dreamed, Doctor, that I set out upon a long journey; that I stopped the first night at *Hungerford*; whither I went without touching the ground; that I flew from thence to *Salt-Hill*, where I remained the next night; and arrived at High Wickham, on the third day; where my dear mamma, beautiful as an angel, stretched out her arms, and caught me within them." 'Now,' continued the Doctor, 'these are precisely the places where the dear child's corpse will remain on this

and the succeeding night before we reach his mother's vault, which is finally to receive it.'

"I make no further remark on this singular narrative, than to assure the reader of my own solemn belief of the truth of all its particulars."

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THE narrative in question is given in a detached, isolated, and totally unconnected passage, which is introduced by way of episode, in the second volume of the work, chap. xiv. pp. 114—119, and is marked throughout by so great a degree of incorrectness, that it can scarcely be allowed to pass without notice. It is especially desirable to set this matter in its true light, because of its manifest tendency to revive, even in these days of boasted light and progressive knowledge, the dark and exploded notions of supernatural agency; to enslave the minds of the weak and ignorant by the diffusion of error, and to raise in the timid and credulous, wild dreams and fanciful delusions, and all the “unreal mockery” and mystery of a gloomy superstition.

It is not a little remarkable that this strange story, having no foundation but the slender and fallacious grounds of vague fancy and report, should have been brought forward, though in this “questionable shape,” under the sanction of a writer of acknowledged intelligence and taste; who gravely assures us of his “*own solemn belief of the truth of all its particulars.*”

Mr. Warner states his account as, “related to him in the first instance by the Rev. Joseph Townsend, rector of Pewsey in Wiltshire.” The writer of these remarks was well acquainted with Mr. Townsend, and highly esteemed him as a man of great worth and respectability, of various and extensive information, par-

ticularly on subjects of natural science and philosophy. But those who knew him best, and respected him most, will allow, that the ardour and enthusiasm of his nature predisposed him to entertain some visionary and romantic notions of supernatural appearances. Mr. Townsend was, on various occasions, a visitor at Bowood; but the present writer has no recollection of his having been there about the period when these extraordinary occurrences are said to have taken place;—*he* therefore *must* also have received them as matter of hearsay and doubtful report. Be this as it may, it is now too late to institute an inquiry. This worthy man has long been gone to that land of darkness and oblivion, “whence none return, and whither all must go.”

The author has faltered even on the threshold of his details, by mis-stating the *address, designation, age,* and *disorder* of the young nobleman who forms the immediate subject of his narrative—whom he styles “*Lord William Petty, third son of the Marquis of Lansdowne.*” The Earl of Shelburne, afterwards created Marquis of Lansdowne, had, by his first marriage, with Lady Sophia Carteret, daughter of Lord Viscount Granville, only two sons, viz.: John Henry, Lord Viscount Fitzmaurice, and the Honourable William Granville Petty. His Lordship’s *third* son was the offspring of his second marriage, with Lady Louisa Fitzpatrick, daughter of the Earl of Upper Ossory—the present Marquis, now a distinguished member of His Majesty’s Government, who succeeded to the title on the demise of his brother John Henry, ~~the late Marquis~~, the late Marquis.

The Honourable William Granville Petty finished his short career of life not in the *eighth*, but in the *tenth* year of his age, when the dawn of reason held out the early promise of a bright intellectual day, and disclosed a splendid prospect of blooming virtues, and the fondest hopes. It is next said, this young gentleman “rode before the gamekeeper, with his waistcoat open and chest exposed; and that inflammation of the lungs was the immediate consequence.” In this there is a material deviation from the fact. The complaint which terminated so fatally, was inflammation—not of the *lungs*—but of the *bowels*: of the other circumstances in that account, it will be a sufficient refutation to add, that such occurrences were wholly incompatible with the plan of personal and domestic discipline which, as well as the studies of his pupils, it was the province of Mr. Jervis their preceptor to conduct and maintain.

After all, these are circumstances of trivial importance, further than as they may be considered strong indications of the very slight evidence upon which the whole story has been received.

The reader will be no less surprised, when he is informed, that the particulars of a conversation which is said to have passed on the road, (not to *Wickham*, but to High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire,) are “as idle tales,” wholly without foundation. The fact is, that neither Dr. Priestley nor Mr. Jervis attended the funeral: the former continued with his family, and the latter remained with his surviving pupil at Bowood, now severed from his brother by the hand of death,—

“one taken and the other left ;” while the remains of the much-lamented deceased were conveyed to Wycombe, and deposited near those of his excellent mother, in the family vault.

The subject of that supposed conversation is equally remote from truth :—no communication of the nature alluded to was ever made to Mr. J. on this or any other occasion ; and such was the free and friendly intercourse subsisting between these two gentlemen, that had such a circumstance occurred to either, it would have been unreservedly imparted to the other. It is stated in the account, that as Dr. Priestley was passing the chamber door of the young and interesting sufferer, “he was called into his room, and cheerfully accosted by him.” To this it may suffice to observe, that Dr. Priestley had no apartments in the mansion at Bowood, nor was he ever accustomed to sleep there ; but resided in a house at Calne. It may also be confidently asserted, that Dr. Priestley never saw Mr. Petty during his short and fatal illness. In justice to this truly enlightened and upright man, let me add, that his cheerful temper, his calm and philosophic tone of mind, would not easily be misled by the weakness of credulity, or the delusions of a morbid and distempered imagination.

There is yet another instance in this remarkable case, where the testimony of a medical man is brought forward as *irresistible* evidence. It is stated that “Mr. Alsop’s treatment promised a favourable result ; and after a few days he left his patient, in the forenoon, apparently out of danger. Towards evening, however,

the symptoms becoming decidedly worse, the family were alarmed; and Mr. Jervis thought it right to call for Mr. Alsop's immediate assistance;” and, on this his “*last visit*,” a remarkable circumstance is said to have been observed by him. Mr. Alsop's account, as reported by the author of the “*Recollections*,” relates to two circumstances,—one previous to the crisis of the disease, the other to an extraordinary phenomenon subsequent to that period. On the subject of the latter, the “*appearance to Mr. Alsop*,” as it is termed, the narrator asserts that the information received, in the first instance, from a most respectable quarter, was “confirmed by a voucher scarcely to be resisted,—an indisputably true report of Dr. Alsop's *viva voce* declaration on his dying bed.”

Without going into the minutiae of this detail, it may be briefly observed, that if the incident mentioned by Mr. Alsop had really occurred, it is not a little singular that it should have remained a mystery to the present writer, who never heard of any such occurrence till now;—no distant rumour, not even a whisper of the kind, ever reached him, even “by the hearing of the ear,” till pointed out by a friend, within a few months past, in Mr. Warner's late publication.

Mr. Alsop was a practitioner, of considerable skill and experience in his profession; and, as such, was called in to attend the family at Bowood on all occasions where medical aid was required. He was of course sent for at the commencement of Mr. Petty's attack; but so short was the illness of the youthful sufferer,

that Mr. Alsop had no opportunity of seeing his patient more than once ! Mr. Alsop was a man of strong mind while in the possession of health and the exercise of his mental faculties, and apparently not subject to fanciful illusions ; but, how far he might have been reduced by sickness and debility at a later period, no one can say who had not an opportunity of witnessing the last hours of his life. It is however very possible, that his mind, weakened and impaired, his ideas confused, and his judgment clouded by infirmity or disease, might give way to the suggestions of fancy and the delusion of an imaginary scene. This worthy man has long been dead ; and though the writer avows himself entirely unacquainted with the time or circumstances of his death, yet when it is considered how many inaccuracies, in the former part of Mr. Warner's Narrative, he has been enabled to contradict by facts, he sees no impropriety in ascribing the extraordinary "appearance to Dr. Alsop," to a supposition at once the most probable and the most rational.

Whether it be or be not in itself of any importance, after the lapse of so many years, when the means of further inquiry are no longer attainable, to revive these anxious recollections ; or to give a corrected statement of circumstances, which, in common with all the occurrences of this passing scene, have long been carried down the rapid stream of time ; might perhaps be questioned, had they not excited a degree of surprise and curiosity in the minds of some readers. The writer further acknowledges, that, influenced by senti-

ments of consideration and deference towards persons of high respectability, whose names are severally introduced, he feels himself called upon to protest against such misrepresentation, from whatever cause arising, and to correct the errors into which the worthy author has been so unaccountably betrayed. In addition to these considerations, he cannot regret, that a legitimate opportunity is now afforded him of paying a just tribute of respect and regard to the memory of one, whose name should not be allowed to sink into silent oblivion.

Having been resident at Bowood for some years previous to this lamented event, engaged in the office of preceptor to the two sons of the first Marquis of Lansdowne, the writer trusts he shall be pardoned for expressing himself with confidence and freedom. The facts connected with this case being familiar to his mind, and still fresh in his recollection, he presumes to think he is justified in asserting his competency to bear his testimony to the truth of what he has adduced, and which he hesitates not to say could not be supplied from any other source.

It now only remains to give a brief outline of some of the leading circumstances which occurred, narrated with the simplicity of truth,—from which the reader may draw his own conclusions.

The Honourable William Granville Petty, *second* son of the Marquis, and younger brother of Lord Fitzmaurice, though of a florid complexion, and to all appearance enjoying a state of good general health, was

not of a robust constitution. His intellectual faculties were naturally vigorous and alert ; while a thoughtful turn of mind occasionally disposed him to contemplative habits very unusual at his age. His countenance was animated and intelligent, and when lighted up by adverting to any elevated sentiment or generous action, bore the significant impress of his mind. In the routine of recreations appointed for these young noblemen, riding was their constant and regular exercise, without either a too rigid attention to, or an inconsiderate disregard of, the state of the weather. On a fine winter's morning in the month of January, frosty, but under the influence of a clear sky and a bright sun, *carefully protected by warm and suitable clothing*, Mr. Petty mounted his favourite pony, in company with his brother and Mr. Jervis, and, attended by their groom, took his customary ride.

Though sensible to the cold while on horseback, he returned home apparently as well as usual ; and at dinner conversed freely, and with his wonted cheerfulness, with Lord Fitzmaurice and their mutual friend, in whom he uniformly placed the highest confidence, towards whom he always evinced unqualified esteem and attachment, and by whom he was tenderly beloved. He discovered no symptom of indisposition till late in the evening, when he complained of internal pain to a faithful and respectable domestic, his personal attendant, whose care was constant and unremitting. Mr. Alsop was sent for ; who, observing no indications at that time that could reasonably create apprehension or



alarm, administered some medicine, and took his leave. The application afforded temporary relief, and some abatement of pain; but these favourable symptoms were of short continuance. Inflammation soon ensued, which baffled the power of medicine; so violent and so rapid in its progress, that the fatal result took place on the evening of the second day,—within twenty-four hours after the first appearance of indisposition,—and, in his *tenth* year, terminated a life of the highest promise, and of inestimable value!

The attack was so sudden, that no real danger was apprehended till it was too late to profit by the means of human aid; and before Mr. Alsop came to make a second visit, his interesting patient was removed from all mortal suffering.

The Marquis had very recently left Bowood to pass the remainder of the winter in London; and it was Mr. Jervis's painful task to communicate the account of this distressing event by an immediate express to town. It were vain to attempt to state the effect which intelligence so overwhelming had upon the noble father, for whom his young heart was impressed with the genuine sentiments of high veneration and the warmest filial affection,—the sure indications of a generous and noble nature. It will however be readily believed, that this severe and unexpected stroke inflicted a deep and lasting wound upon the mind of the Marquis,—the painful remembrance of which never ceased occasionally to interrupt his tranquillity through the subsequent period of an important life, honourably and

usefully spent in a course of vigorous and manly exertions in the cause of patriotism, liberty, and peace!

“ Though now no longer life’s warm current glides  
Through the fair frame which *the* cold marble hides;  
O let not man in ignorance complain  
That *virtue* dies,—that innocence is vain!  
*He* lives!—where angels shall a *brother* greet,  
Where parted friends to part no more shall meet;  
And where, as heaven’s blest inmates undefiled,  
Again the Father shall behold his child.”—CALAMY.

The character of this young nobleman was marked by strong indications of virtue, genius and acquirement far above his tender years. With the spotless purity and innocence of childhood, he combined the finest moral and mental feelings, and the admirable principles of undeviating rectitude of purpose and of conduct. Endued with a quick perception of what was due to propriety and decorum, and influenced by a strict regard to the *decens atque verum* in morals and in manners, he revolted at the slightest departure from the rules of probity and integrity. A sacred love of truth, a high sense of honour, elevated notions of liberty, justice, and humanity, and an unaffected piety, invariably inspired his youthful breast. An energy of mind, a vivid imagination, a singularly retentive memory, a fondness for reading, and a love of knowledge, with an insatiable desire of acquiring it by close attention and diligent application,—were qualities by which he was no less eminently distinguished. To these were added the engaging influence of a gentle, yet animated disposition, an artless, undesigning temper,

and a generous, feeling heart. He discovered great quickness in the discrimination of character, and uniformly showed a marked distinction between those whom he thought entitled to regard, and those whom he considered less worthy of esteem.

The sentiment so happily expressed by a celebrated poet, in his pointed and appropriate eulogy on his friend, may be justly applied on this occasion :

“ In wit a man, simplicity a child.”

So early a development of talent, and so rare a combination of manly virtues and shining qualities, as those which adorned the character of this incomparable youth, cannot be regarded without admiration and delight, and clearly prove he was a being of no common order;—in whom we might contemplate “ virtue in its own shape lovely,” and attractive. And, had it pleased Providence to have spared a life so precious, he would no doubt have been an ornament to his country, the pride of his family, and an honour to human nature!—“ Qui summam spem civium, quam de eo jam puero habuerant, continuò adolescens incredibili virtute superavit ;—Quid dicam de moribus facillimis, de pietate in *Patrem*, liberalitate—bonitate in suos, justitiâ in omnes ?” \*

\* It may not be unworthy of notice, that Mr. Petty had been reading, with his preceptor, the interesting chapter in Cicero's Essay from which the above passages are cited, within a day or two only of his death. (Cic. de Amicitia, cap. 3.)

It has often been remarked, that precocity of intellect and extraordinary powers of mind are unfavourable to the duration of human life ; that they tend to impair the constitution, exhaust the bodily frame, and impede its progress to maturity ;—an observation painfully exemplified in the affecting instance of Mr. PETTY. Alas ! how soon were the fond anticipations of hope withered by disappointment, of which even the distant recollection “ maketh the heart sick ! ”

By his early removal, he escaped the perils and disasters to which he might have been exposed, and the various evils of a corrupt and unfeeling world, which would have deeply wounded a spirit so tenderly alive to every virtuous feeling, and all the generous sensibilities of our nature.

“ Ere sin could blight, or sorrow fade,  
 Death came with friendly care,  
 The opening bud to heaven convey'd,  
 And bade it blossom there.”—COLERIDGE.

His earthly race was only just begun, ere he arrived at the fatal goal, and his brief career was terminated in the grave. There, “ quietly inurned ” amidst the tombs of his fathers, he is numbered with the mighty dead !—Peace to his memory !—Though his perishable remains have long since been resolved into their original element, yet we may rejoice in the reflection, that he still lives in the wide world of immortal and intellectual beings ; and think of him as gone to his native home, the abode of eternal purity

and truth. May we not here ask, in the touching and impressive language of the great master of Roman eloquence ;—“ Cui censemur cursum ad deos faciliorem fuisse, quam SCIPIONI ? ”

Those who knew, and could appreciate the uncommon excellence of this amiable and engaging child, endeared by many interesting recollections, may surely still be permitted to regret the loss of one, the remembrance of whom can never be obliterated by any distance of time, but will be cherished so long as life itself shall last, with a devotedness of affection, sacred and indelible !

THE END.