

The Demon of Stackpole Court

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

In the little village church of Cheriton, in Pembrokeshire, where, not long since, Lord Cawdor was laid to rest beside the grave of his father, the third earl, is the tomb of its founder, Sir Elidur de Stackpole.

His effigy lies on the north side of the chancel, under a stone canopy, his right hand on his sword and his left bearing his shield. In the days when he was alive and lived in Stackpole Court, an extraordinary event happened, which, according to the legend, was known to everybody in the neighbourhood.

Stackpole Court, the residence of the Earls Cawdor, takes its name either from the Stack Rocks, at the mouth of the estuary of Broadhaven, or else from Sir Elidur himself, who was one of its first owners. The present mansion is modern, built on the site of the old house, which was garrisoned for Charles I. It stands close to the sea, and the park is famous for its beautiful lakes and magnificent trees.

In the time of Sir Elidur de Stackpole the Crusader, a strange spirit appeared at the house, under the guise of a red-haired young man named Simon, who entered boldly at the door.

Seizing the keys from the person entrusted with them, he made himself steward, and performed the duties of his post so prudently and well that everything flourished under his rule, and there was never any shortage of provisions.

On the contrary, he seemed to divine the inner thoughts and wishes of his master and mistress, and when they secretly thought of having any special dish or wine, he would procure it without any direction, merely saying, "You wished that to be done, and I have done it for you." He knew, without being told, the whereabouts of their treasures and secret hoards, and if they were ever inclined to be avaricious in household affairs he would say, "Why do you fear to spend all that gold and silver? Life is short, and the money you hoard so carefully will never do you any good."

He fed the servants and rustics right royally with the very choicest meat and drink, saying that as these things were acquired by their labours, it was right that they, as well as their master and mistress, should enjoy themselves.

It was noticed that the strange steward never went to church nor uttered a single holy word, but his influence over Elidur de Stackpole and his lady was so great that they dared not compel him to do anything. Silently and expeditiously he went about his work, and by his own wish did not sleep in the house, but was always ready at his post the first thing in the morning.

One may be sure that so capable a steward, although so good a caterer, would be certain to rouse envy in the minds of the other servants, and Simon's movements, when off duty, were secretly watched by some members of the household. He was followed at night and seen to hold converse near a pool of water with a woman, and also with some unearthly and diabolical-looking creatures.

Elidur de Stackpole was informed, and the steward, who had now been at the house about forty days, was sent for next morning by his master and mistress and given his discharge. After he had delivered up the keys, Sir Elidur begged him earnestly to say who

he was, and he answered, quite truly, that his mother was a woman still living in the parish and his father was a demon, who had fallen in love with her. The woman was interrogated, and openly avowed that such was really the case.

Then the steward left the court and went back to the village, and kept his ghostly tryst, night after night, at the pool, which he still haunts at midnight.

Another famous ghost, the spirit of the wife of a subsequent owner, was laid at Stackpole. She was known as Lady Mathias, and appeared at the hour of midnight as an old lady without a head, in a coach drawn by two headless horses, and driven by a headless coachman from an adjacent village to the church.

So greatly did this ghost haunt the neighbourhood that at last it was decided to call in Parson Pritchett, the rector of St. Patrox, close by, to lay her, which he proceeded to do most expeditiously.

The clever parson quietly set old Lady Mathias the task of emptying a large pond by means of a cockle-shell, and as she has never been seen from that day to this, it is concluded that she is still engaged on her uncongenial occupation!