

The patent ghost 1863

Modern researches in spiritualism have led to one practical result - the discovery of a ghost. Not of an ordinary old-fashioned ghost appearing in the midnight hour to people with a weak digestion, haunting graveyards and old country mansions, and inspiring romance writers into the mischief of three volume novels; but of a well-behaved, steady, regular, and respectable ghost, going through a prescribed round of duties, punctual to a minute - a patent ghost, in fact. This admirable ghost is the offspring of two fathers, of a learned member of the Society of Civil Engineers, Henry Dircks, Esq., and of Professor Pepper, of the Polytechnic. To Mr. Dircks belongs the honor of having invented him, or as the disciples of Hegel would express it, evolved him from out of the depths of his own consciousness; and Professor Pepper has the merit of having improved him considerably, fitting him for the intercourse of mundane society, and even educating him for the stage. After having bowed to the public at the Polytechnic institution, he some weeks ago made his debut upon the boards of the Britannia Theatre in a new and highly original drama, entitled, "The Widow and Orphans, - Faith, Hope, and Charity," in which piece he continues to present himself nightly to crowded audiences with the highest imaginable success. It is a domestic drama, with three murders, one suicide, two conflagrations, four robberies, one virtuous lawyer, 23 angels, and a ghost. There are three heroines in the piece, Faith, Hope, and Charity the first, an elderly lady, widow of a clergyman, and in straitened circumstances; and the other two, her daughters, pretty and poor, and of course models of perfection, as indicated by the label. The plot turns upon the possession of the lease of a house, which Sir Gilbert Northlaw, a proud and scheming baronet, class representative of the bloated aristocracy, has acquired by fraud from the clerical widow. Before the parchment is restored to the right owner, a number of violent incidents take place, which, although in no perceptible connection with the story, yet seem to charm the audience to an immense degree, as evinced by frequent thundering applause. A burning house, in particular, gives rise to tremendous excitement in the gallery. The scene shows a woman getting out of the widow and walking along the outer ledge to a tree, where a man takes her in his arms, after which the tree, by some magic means, bows to the ground with its human burthen. Various minor accidents, murders and manslaughter, follow, till at length the lease is stolen by an honest man from the pocket of the wicked baronet. With a fine feeling of virtue, the audience show their appreciation of this act of pickpocketing by three rounds of applause. But the aristocratic villain is not yet defeated, for it turns out that the lease which the honest man has stolen is but a duplicate after all, and that the fiendish nobleman remains in possession of the original. This discovery breaks the heart of Faith, and sets Hope and Charity a-crying so loud that all the

bystanders get into convulsions. The question of the lease appears still as undecided as ever when the curtain falls over the terrestrial part of the drama, to open again, after a few minutes' interval, for the spiritual portion. All the souls of all the people murdered, slain, burned, and bruised in the new and original drama are now carried up to heaven by a regiment of little angels, in flaxen hair and short petticoats. Midway between heaven and earth they make a halt, which allows time for the inspection of the tableau, and the due seasoning of the mind in its contemplation. It is evident that the impression created upon the audience is of the deepest, preparing all eyes and ears for the still greater things to come. There are now no more discharges of ginger-beer artillery from above and behind, the sucking of oranges and cracking of nuts has entirely ceased, and even the numerous, babies have left off crying. Presently the vast house sinks into obscurity, only a few flickering gas jets being left here and there to create a faint twiiiight. Once again Sir Gilbert Northlaw steps on the stage, closely followed by - a skeleton. The apparition is certainly striking. It gradually and almost imperceptibly evolves itself out of the air, and after various movements vanishes with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. A second time, it comes and goes as before, and immediately after appears a female form, the exact counterpart of Faith, the widow. Closely as the eye may watch the operation of the whole proceeding, it is impossible to detect the source of the fine optical delusion. There the figure certainly stands, walks, and talks, but disappears as instantaneously as if fashioned out of the mere vapor of the air. On the second appearance of widow Faith, or rather widow Faith's ghost, Sir Gilbert Northlaw takes courage, and, rising from his seat, attacks her with the sword. But the sharp steel, aimed at a walking and speaking human figure, meets no resistance but the empty air, and the would-be murderer is mocked by a loud sardonic ha, ha, ha ! This is the crisis of the spectacle. While the baronet is making desperate effortsd to grasp the widow, the spectre vanishes in the twinkling of an eye, leaving the echo of a mocking voice resounding from afar. Whatever the means by which this curious scene is effected, it is undoubtedly a most clever and wonderfully striking bit of stage effect. Those in want of a new sensation can do nothing better at the present moment than to pay a visit to the Britannia Theatre and to the "Patent Ghost."