

Two sections excised from *The Afterlife Confirmed* when it was merged with other books to create *The Hereafter Trilogy* in 2015. Written/compiled by Miles Edward Allen.

Terror at Tedworth¹

Mr. John Mompesson was a justice of the peace of excellent reputation with deep familial roots in the south of England. One day in mid-April, 1661, when Mompesson returned to his home in Tedworth from a trip to London, he found his household in an uproar. His wife claimed that, during the previous night, loud and frightening noises had been heard as if vandals were destroying the place. Mompesson was concerned but puzzled, as there were no signs of forced entry and nothing seemed to be damaged or missing.

A few nights later, he experienced the phenomena for himself, when his rest was shattered by very loud knocks on the doors and walls of his house. Jumping from bed in alarm, he grabbed his pistols and went to investigate. He opened each door and went around the outside of his house but could detect no cause for the banging. When he returned to his bed, more puzzled than ever, the thumping seemed to come from the roof. Finally, it faded away, seemingly into the night sky.

This was the beginning of a two-year siege during which the family was terrorized by hundreds of intrusions of an astonishing assortment including:

- Knocks both outside and inside the house, knocks loud enough to make the floor shake and the windows rattle, many so loud that they awakened the neighbors in the not-so-nearby village. The sounds generally started within a half-hour of the household's retirement for the night and continued for two or more hours.
- Drum beats, often of well-known patterns. One witness claimed that the phantom drummer would honor requests and play particular beats.
- Scratching beneath and behind beds.
- Ferocious banging on the children's beds of such violence that all present expected the beds to fall apart.
- Chairs and stools moving about when no one was near them.
- Shoes, bedstaves,² and other small items being hurled around the room with no apparent motive force.

These and other mysterious events were witnessed by numerous people of every social rank, nearly always on calm, clear nights. Despite almost constant vigilance and thorough investigations, no natural cause could be detected. But it didn't take long for Mr. Mompesson to

¹ This case is based on a narrative written by the Reverend Joseph Glanvil, chaplain to King Charles II and a Fellow of the Royal Society, based on his personal observations and on testimony provided directly to him by the principal of the case. "Tedworth," now Tidworth, lies just north of Salisbury, England.

² A bedstaff is a wooden pin used to hold bedclothes to the frame.

decide what, or rather who, was likely the unnatural cause.

It seems that just a month before his troubles began, Mompesson was in the town of Ludgershall, a couple of miles from his home, when he had cause to examine the papers of a vagrant who had been annoying the local citizenry by loudly banging a drum and demanding alms. The vagrant's name was William Drury and the beggars permit he proffered had clearly been forged, so Mompesson had the drum confiscated. Leaving Drury in the custody of the local constable, and the drum in the custody of the bailiff, Mompesson returned to his home and shortly forgot about the supposedly inconsequential incident. The drummer was soon released, but the bailiff, being uncertain what to do with the drum, decided to send it to Mompesson. It had arrived at the JP's house in mid-April, just as he was leaving on his trip to London.

It didn't take long for Mompesson to become convinced that Drury was the cause of all his troubles, so he had the drummer arrested on a charge of witchcraft. Drury was not convicted of being a witch, but he was put on trial, and his trial provided opportunity for numerous witnesses to testify under oath as to the events they had observed.

Überskeptics have typically tried to laugh off this case as being too incredible to bother disputing. If it stood alone, they would have my support. But there are many such cases.

Another popular evasion is to quote from a book by Charles MacKay³ who, in 1858, concluded that Mompesson's trouble was obviously caused by gypsy cohorts of the drummer. Being concerned with the nutty things people will do when part of a group, MacKay focused on how the events at Tedworth may have been inflated by excited servants, peasants, and children — as such stories typically are. In trying to chalk it all up to gullibility and fraud, however, MacKay conveniently forgets to tell his readers just how a band of gypsies managed to move all manner of household items through the air of a child's bedroom without being seen by several intent observers. Neither did he suggest how they accomplished, in a similar invisible mode, the feat of striking a bed so hard that the floors shook and the windows rattled. Überskeptics, of course, are typically good at claiming something was a trick, but a bit weak on explaining how the trick might have been executed.

It is also noteworthy that no critic has ever suggested where this band of pranksters might have been living throughout the two years that the disturbances continued. It was, after all, a very close-knit community, and any strangers in the neighborhood would surely have been noticed. In fact, there was never any indication that Drury had any co-conspirators, nor has any motive been suggested beyond the rather petty one of the confiscated drum.

Those who'd like to think that Mompesson himself contrived the entire pageant should first consider these words of chaplain Glanvil's:

³ Mackay, Charles, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, first published 1841, reprint Harriman House, 2003.

“[Mr. Mompesson] suffered by it in his name, in his estate, in all his affairs, and in the general peace of his family The unbelievers in the matter of spirits and witches took him for an impostor. Many others judged the permission of such an extraordinary evil to be the judgment of God upon him for some notorious wickedness or impiety. Thus his name was continually exposed to censure, and his estate suffered by the concourse of people from all parts to his house; by the diversion it gave him from his affairs; by the discouragement of servants, by reason of which he could hardly get any to live with him. To which I add, the continual hurry that his family was in, the affrights, and the watchings and disturbance of his whole house (in which himself must needs be the most concerned). I say, if these things are considered, there will be little reason to think he would have any interest to put a cheat upon the world in which he would most of all have injured and abused himself.”⁴

A Confounding Castle

Moving forward to the opening of the 19th century, we have a tale of a spooky castle that seems made for telling on dark and stormy nights. It has, however, been well attested to by the men involved — the two principals being Councilor Hahn, a high ranking official in the Prussian government and Charles Kern, a cornet in a hussar regiment.⁵

In November of 1806, these men were assigned to temporary duty at a castle in Upper Silesia.⁶ They were alone in the castle except for three servants. Being old friends, they decided to occupy the same apartment. Councilor Hahn was a student of philosophy and a confirmed materialist. Writing in the third person, he submitted a lengthy report of the events, the larger portion of which is copied here:

“During the first days of their residence in the castle, the two friends amused their long evenings with the works of Schiller, of whom they were both great admirers. Three days had thus passed quietly away, when, about nine o’clock in the evening as they were sitting at the table in the middle of the room, their reading was interrupted by a small shower of lime, which fell around them. They examined the ceiling, but could perceive no signs of it having fallen thence. As they were conversing of this, still larger pieces of lime fell around them. This lime was cold to the touch, as if detached from an outside wall.

“They finally set it down to the account of the old walls of the castle, and went to bed and to sleep. The next morning they were astonished at the quantity of lime that covered the floor, the more so as they could not perceive on walls or ceiling the slightest appearance of injury. By evening, however, the incident was forgotten, until not only the same phenomenon

⁴ Glanvil, Joseph, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, London, 1689, p. 334.

⁵ This case is taken from *Die Scherin von Prevorst* [The Seeress of Prevorst] by Dr. Justinus Kerner, 1842.

Both Mrs. Crowe’s and Mr. Owen’s translations have been relied upon.

⁶ An area that is now part of Poland.

recurred, but bits of lime were thrown about the room, several of which struck Hahn. At the same time loud knockings, like the reports of distant artillery, were heard, sometimes as if on the floor, sometimes as if on the ceiling. Again the friends went to bed; but the loudness of the knocks prevented their sleeping.

“Kern accused Hahn of causing the knockings by striking on the boards that formed the under portion of his bedstead, and was not convinced of the contrary till he had taken the light and examined for himself. Then Hahn conceived a similar suspicion of Kern. The dispute was settled by both rising and standing close together, during which time the knockings continued as before. Next evening, besides the throwing of lime and the knockings they heard another sound, resembling the distant beating of a drum.

“Thereupon they requested of a lady who had charge of the castle, Madame Knittel, the keys of the rooms above and below them; which she immediately sent them by her son. Hahn remained in the chamber below, while Kern and young Knittel went to examine the apartments in question. Above they found an empty room, below a kitchen. They knocked; but the sounds were entirely different from those that they had heard, and which Hahn at that very time continued to hear, in the room below. When they returned from their search, Hahn said, jestingly, ‘The place is haunted.’

“They again went to bed, leaving the candles burning; but things became still more serious, for they distinctly heard a sound as if someone with loose slippers on was walking across the room; and this was accompanied also with a noise as of a walking-stick on which someone was leaning, striking the floor step by step; the person seeming, as far as one could judge by the sound, to be walking up and down the room. Hahn jested at this, Kern laughed, and both went to sleep, still not seriously disposed to ascribe these strange phenomena to any supernatural source.

“Next evening, however, it seemed impossible to ascribe the occurrences to any natural cause. The agency, whatever it was, began to throw various articles about the room; knives, forks, brushes, caps, slippers, padlocks, a funnel, snuffers, soap, in short, whatever was loose about the apartment. Even candlesticks flew about, first from one corner, then from another. If the things had been left lying as they fell, the whole room would have been strewed in utter confusion. At the same time, there fell, at intervals, more lime; but the knockings were discontinued. Then the friends called up the two coachmen and Hahn's servant, besides young Knittel, the watchman of the castle, and others; all of whom were witnesses of these disturbances. ...

“From the table, under their very eyes, snuffers and knives would occasionally rise, remain some time in the air, and then fall to the floor. In this way a large pair of scissors belonging to Hahn fell between him and one of the coachmen, and remained sticking in the floor.

“For a few nights it intermitted, then recommenced as before. After it had continued

about three weeks, (during all which time Hahn persisted in remaining in the same apartment) tired out, at length, with the noises which continually broke their rest, the two friends resolved to have their beds removed into the corner room above, so as to obtain, if possible, a quiet night's sleep. But the change was unavailing. The same loud knockings followed them; and they even remarked that articles were flung about the room which they were quite certain they had left in the chamber below. ...

“A month had passed; the story of these disturbances had spread over the neighborhood, and had been received by many with incredulity; among the rest, by two Bavarian officers of dragoons, named Cornet and Magerle. The latter proffered to remain alone in the room; so the others left him there about twilight. But they had been but a short time in the opposite room, when they heard Magerle swearing loudly, and also sounds as of saber-blows on tables and chairs. So, for the sake of the furniture at least, they judged it prudent to look in upon Magerle. When they asked him what was the matter, he replied, in a fury, ‘As soon as you left, the cursed thing began pelting me with lime and other things. I looked everywhere, but could see nobody; so I got in a rage, and cut with my saber right and left.’

“The party now passed the rest of the evening together in the room; and the two Bavarians closely watched Hann and Kern, in order to satisfy themselves that the mystery was no trick of theirs. All at once, as they were quietly sitting at the table, the snuffers rose into the air, and fell again to the ground behind Magerle; and a leaden ball flew at Hahn and hit him upon the chest. Presently afterwards, they heard a noise at the glass door, as if somebody had struck his fist through it, together with a sound of falling glass. On investigation, they found the door intact, but a broken drinking glass was on the floor. By this time the Bavarians were convinced, and they retired from the room to seek repose in one more peaceful. ...

“Hahn resolved that he would investigate them seriously. He accordingly, one evening, sat down at his writing table, with two lighted candles before him; being so placed that he could observe the whole room, and especially all the windows and doors. He was left, for a time, entirely alone in the castle, the coachmen being in the stables, and Kern having gone out. Yet the very same occurrences took place as before; nay, the snuffers, under his very eyes, were raised and whirled about. He kept the strictest watch on the doors and windows; but nothing could be discovered. ...

“The Chief Ranger, Radezensky, spent a night in the room; but although the two friends slept, he could get no rest. He was bombarded without intermission and, in the morning, his bed was found full of all manner of household articles. ...

“Inspector Knetch, from Koschentin, resolved to spend a night with Hahn and Kern. There was no end of the peltings they had during the evening; but finally they retired to rest, leaving the candles burning. Then all three saw two table-napkins rise to the ceiling in the middle of the room, there spread themselves out, and finally drop, fluttering, to the floor. A porcelain pipe bowl, belonging to Kern, flew around and broke to pieces. Knives and forks flew

about; a knife fell on Hahn's head, striking him, however, with the handle only.

“Thereupon it was resolved, as these disturbances had now continued throughout two months, to move out of the room. Kern and Hahn's servant carried a bed into the opposite chamber. No sooner had they gone, than a water bottle that was standing in the room moved close to the feet of the two who remained behind. A brass candlestick also, that appeared to come out of a corner of the room, fell to the ground, before them. In the room to which they removed, they spent a tolerably quiet night, though they could still hear noises in the room they had left. This was the last disturbance. ...

“The story remained a mystery. All reflection on these strange occurrences, all investigation, though most carefully made, to discover natural causes for them, left the observers in darkness. No one could suggest any possible means of effecting them, even had there been, which there was not, in the village or the neighborhood, any one capable of sleight of hand. And what motive could there be? The old castle was worth nothing, except to its owner. In short, one can perceive no imaginable purpose in the whole affair. It resulted but in the disturbing of some men, and in the frightening of others; but the occupants of the room became, during the two entire months that the occurrence lasted, as much accustomed to them as one can become to any daily recurring annoyance.”

The above narrative is subscribed and attested by Hahn as follows: “I saw and heard every thing, exactly as here set down; observing the whole carefully and quietly. I experienced no fear whatever; yet I am wholly unable to account for the occurrences narrated.

“Written this 19th of November, 1808 — Councilor Hahn”