

## The Dead Debtor

The Survival Files — Case 27 — ESS = 209.6

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The following quoted material is excerpted<sup>1</sup> from a letter written by a British priest, the Rev. Charles McKay, to the Countess of Shrewsbury, dated 21 October 1842.

"In July, 1838, I left Edinburgh, to take charge of the Perthshire missions. On my arrival in Perth, the principal station, I was called upon by a Presbyterian woman (Anne Simpson by name) who, for more than a week, had been in the utmost anxiety to see a priest. On asking her what she wanted with me, she answered,

‘Oh, sir, I have been terribly troubled for several nights by a person appearing to me during the night.’

‘Are you a Catholic, my good woman?’

‘No, sir: I am a Presbyterian.’

‘Why, then, do you come to me? I am a Catholic priest.’

‘But, sir, *she* (meaning the person that had appeared to her) desired me to go to the priest, and I have been inquiring for a priest during the last week.’

‘Why did she wish you to go to the priest?’

‘She said she owed a sum of money, and the priest would pay it.’

‘What was the sum of money she owed?’

‘Three-and-tenpence, sir.’

‘To whom did she owe it?’

‘I do not know, sir.’

‘Are you sure you have not been dreaming?’

‘Oh, God forgive you! for she appears to me every night. I can get no rest.’

‘Did you know the woman you say appears to you?’

‘I was poorly lodged, sir, near the barracks, and I often saw and spoke to her as she went in and out to the barracks; and she called herself Maloy.’

"I made inquiry, and found that a woman of that name had died who had acted as washerwoman and followed the regiment. Following up the inquiry, I found a grocer with whom she had dealt, and, on asking him if a person, a female, named Maloy owed him any thing, he turned up his books, and told me she did owe him three-and-tenpence.<sup>2</sup>

"I paid the sum. The grocer knew nothing of her death, nor, indeed, of her character, but that she was attached to the barracks. Subsequently the Presbyterian woman came to me, saying that she was no more troubled."

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<sup>1</sup> Published in *Anatomy of Sleep*, by Dr. Edward Binns, 1846. Excerpted by Owens.

<sup>2</sup> That is, 3 shillings and 10 pence. As best as I have been able to calculate, this amount of money would buy between 7 and 8 pounds of butter in Australia in 1838. (A shilling was worth one-twentieth of a pound, a pence was one-twelfth of a shilling.)

## Discussion

In commenting on this case, Owen points out the implausibility “that for so paltry a sum a tradesman should concert with an old woman (she was past seventy years of age) to trump up a story of an apparition and impose on the good nature and credulity of a priest. Had it been such a trick, too, it is scarcely supposable that the woman should not have mentioned the grocer’s name.”

The persistent haunting until the debt was paid, and the cessation once it was, earns a bonus.

## ESS Score

The CS rating is “i+”, CS = 144.

Witness Reliability rating is “F”, WR = 65.

The Character/Complexity of Information rating is “i.” IC = 0.6.

Total ESS Score:  $144 + 65 + .6 = 209.6$

For Further Information See: [\*Footfalls On The Boundary Of Another World\*](#) by Robert Dale Owen, first published in 1859 by J.B. Lippincott & Co., reprinted by Kessinger Publishing, pages 402-403.

END CASE 27  
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