



Trembling Terriers

by Alfred Russel Wallace

From "Are There Objective Apparitions," *The Arena*, January 1891, as published in Wallace's *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, George Redway Publishers, 1895, pages 239-244. Extracted by Miles Edward Allen, 2014. Spelling and style have not been altered; minor punctuation changes were made to improve readability.

We now come to a group of phenomena which, although frequently recorded in the publications of the Society for Psychical Research, have received no special attention as bearing on the theories put forth by members of the Society, but have either been ignored or have been attempted to be explained away by arbitrary assumptions of the most improbable kind. It will, therefore, be necessary to refer to the evidence for these facts somewhat more fully than for those hitherto considered.

I have already mentioned the case of the female figure in white, seen by three persons floating over a hedge ten feet above the ground, when the horse they were driving "suddenly stopped and shook with fright." In the remarks upon this case in *Phantasms of the Living*, no reference is made to this fact, yet it is surely the crucial one, since we can hardly suppose that a wholly subjective apparition, seen by human beings, would also be seen by a horse. During the tremendous knocking recorded by Mr. Garling, and already quoted, it is stated that there was a large dog in a kennel near the front entrance, especially to warn off intruders, and a little terrier inside that barked at everybody; yet, when the noise occurred that wakened the servants sixty feet away, "the dogs gave no tongue whatever; the terrier, contrary to its nature, slunk shivering under the sofa, and would not stop even at the

door, and nothing could induce him to go into the darkness."

In the remarkable account of a haunted house during an occupation of twelve months by a well-known English Church dignitary, the very different behaviour of dogs in the presence of real and of phantasmal disturbances is pointed out. When an attempt was made to rob the vicarage, the dogs gave prompt alarm and the clergyman was aroused by their fierce barking. During the mysterious noises, however, though these were much louder and more disturbing, they never barked at all, but wore always "found cowering in a state of pitiable terror." They are said to have been more perturbed than any other members of the establishment, and "if not shut up below, would make their way to our bedroom door and lie there, crouching and whining, as long as we would allow them."¹

In the account of haunting in a house at Hammersmith near London, which went on for five years, where steps and noises were heard and a phantom woman seen, "the dog whined incessantly" during the disturbances, and "the dog was evidently still afraid of the room when the morning came. I called to him to go into it with me, and he crouched down with his

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research*, part vi. p. 151.

tail between his legs, and seemed to fear entering it."²

On the occasion of a "wailing cry" heard before a death in a rectory in Staffordshire, a house standing quite alone in open country, "we found a favourite bulldog, a very courageous animal, trembling with terror, with his nose thrust into some billets of firewood which were kept under the stairs." On another occasion, "an awful howling followed by shriek upon shriek," with a sound like that caused by a strong wind was heard, although everything out of doors was quite still, and it is stated, "We had three dogs sleeping in my sisters' and my bedrooms, and they were all cowering down with affright, their bristles standing straight up; one—a bulldog—was under the bed, and refused to come out, and when removed was found to be trembling all over."³ The remark of Mrs. Sidgwick on these and other cases of warning sounds is, that "if not real natural sounds, they must have been collective hallucinations." But it has not been shown that "real natural sounds" ever produce such effects upon dogs, and there is no suggestion that "collective hallucination" can be telepathetically transferred to these animals. In one case, however, it is suggested that the dog might have "been suddenly taken ill!"

In the remarkable account by General Barter, C.B., of a phantasmal pony and rider with two native grooms seen in India, two dogs which immediately before were hunting about in the brushwood jungle which covered the hill, came and crouched by the General's side, giving low, frightened whimpers; and when he pursued the phantasm the dogs returned home, though on

all other occasions they were his most faithful companions.⁴

These cases, given on the best authority by the Society for Psychical Research, can be supplemented by a reference to older writers. During the disturbances at Mr. Mompesson's house at Tedworth, recorded by the Rev. Joseph Glanvil, from personal observation and inquiry, in his work *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, "it was noted that when the noise was loudest, and came with the most sudden surprising violence, no dog about the house would move, though the knocking was oft so boisterous and rude that it hath been beard to a considerable distance in the fields, and awakened the neighbours in the village, none of which live very near this."

So in the disturbances at Epworth Parsonage, an account of which is given by the eminent John Wesley, after describing strange noises as of iron and glass thrown down, he continues: "Soon after, our large mastiff dog came and ran to shelter himself between them (Mr. and Mrs. Wesley). While the disturbances continued, he used to bark and leap, and snap on one side and the other, and that frequently before any person in the room heard any noise at all. But after two or three days he used to tremble, and creep away before the noise began. And by this the family knew it was at hand; nor did the observation ever fail."⁵

During the disturbances at the Cemetery of Ahrensburg, in the island of Oesel, where coffins were overturned in locked vaults, and the case was investigated by an official commission, the horses of country people visiting the cemetery

² *ibid.*, part viii, p. 116.

³ Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research, part xiii. pp. 307-808.

⁴ *Ibid.*, part xiv. pp. 469-470.

⁵ The account of these disturbances is given in Dr. Adam Clarke's *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*; in Southey's *Life of Wesley*; and in many other works.

were often so alarmed and excited that they became covered with sweat and foam. Sometimes they threw themselves on the ground, where they struggled in apparent agony, and notwithstanding the immediate resort to remedial measures, several died within a day or two. In this case, as in so many others, although the commission made a most rigid investigation, and applied the strictest tests, no natural cause for the disturbances was ever discovered.⁶

In Dr. Justinus Kerner's account of *The Seeress of Prevorst*, it is stated of an apparition that appeared to her during an entire year, that as often as a spirit appeared, a black terrier that was kept in the house seemed to be sensible of its presence; for no sooner was the figure perceptible to the Seeress than the dog ran, as if for protection, to someone present, often howling loudly; and after his first sight of it he would never remain alone of nights. In this case no one saw the figure but the Seeress, showing that this circumstance is not proof of the subjectivity of an apparition.

In the terrible case of haunting given to Mr. R. Dale Owen by Mrs. S. C. Hall, who was personally cognisant of the main facts, the haunted man had not been able to keep a dog for years. One which he brought home when Mrs. Hall became acquainted with him (he being the brother of her bosom friend) could not be induced to stay in his room day or night after the haunting began, and soon afterwards ran away and was lost.⁷

In the wonderful case of haunting in Pennsylvania given by Mr. Hodgson in *The Arena* of September 1890 (p. 419), when the apparition of the white lady appeared to the informant's brother, we find it stated: "The third night he saw the dog crouch and stare,

and then act as if driven round the room. Brother saw nothing, but heard a sort of rustle, and the poor dog howled and tried to hide, and never again would that dog go to that room."

Now this series of cases of the effect of phantasms on animals is certainly remarkable, and worthy of deep consideration. The facts are such as, on the theories of telepathy and hallucination, ought not to happen, and they are especially trustworthy facts because they are almost invariably introduced into the narratives as if unexpected; while that they were noticed and recorded shows that the observers were in no degree panic struck with terror. They show us unmistakably that large numbers of phantasms, whether visual or auditory, and even when only perceptible to one of the persons present, are objective realities; while the terror displayed by the animals that perceive them, and their behaviour, so unlike that in the presence of natural sights and sounds, no less clearly proves that, though objective, the phenomena are not normal, and are not to be explained as in any way due to trick or to misinterpreted natural sounds. Yet these crucial facts, which a true theory must take account of, have hitherto been treated as unimportant, and, except for a few casual remarks by Mr. Myers and Mrs. Sidgwick, have been left out of consideration in all the serious attempts hitherto made to account for the phenomena of phantasms.

∞

⁶ R.D. Owen's *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, pp. 186-192.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 326-329.