

**MASTERPIECES OF
MYSTERY. IN
FOUR VOLUMES.
GHOST STORIES**

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Masterpieces of mystery. In four Volumes. Ghost stories by Joseph Lewis French

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JOSEPH LEWIS FRENCH

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Edited by
Joseph Lewis French



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FOREWORD

THE ghost story is as old as human speech,—and perhaps even antedates it. A naive acceptance of the supernatural was unquestionably one of the primal attributes of human intelligence. The ghost story may thus quite conceivably be the first form of tale ever invented. It makes its appearance comparatively early in the annals of literature. Who that has read it is likely to forget Pliny's account in a letter to an intimate of an apparition shortly after death to a mutual acquaintance? Old books of tales and legends are full of the ghost story. It has persisted throughout the ages. It began to attain some real standing in literature,—to take its definite place,—a little more than a century ago. Like the apparition it embodies it had always been—and is still to-day even—more or less discredited. Mrs. Radcliffe gave it a new being and even a certain dignity in her "Castle of Otranto"; and after her came Sir Walter Scott who frankly surrendered to the power and charm of the theme. The line of succession has been continuous. The ghost has held his own with his human fellow in fiction, and his tale has been told

Foreword

with increasing skill as the art of the writer has developed. To-day the case for the ghost as an element in fiction is an exceedingly strong one. There has indeed sprung into being within a couple of decades a new school of such writers. Nowadays almost every fictionist of account produces one good thriller at least of this sort. The temptation is irresistible for the simple reason that the theme imposes absolutely no limit on the imagination.

The reader will find here a careful selection illustrating the growth in art of this exotic in literature during the past fifty years, and for a contrast, spanning the centuries, the naïve narration of Pliny the Younger.

JOSEPH LEWIS FRENCH.

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