

CANTO IV--Hys Nourytur

"Oh, when I was a little Ghost, A merry time had we! Each seated on his favourite post, We chumped and chawed the buttered toast They gave us for our tea."

"That story is in print!" I cried. "Don't say it's not, because It's known as well as Bradshaw's Guide!" (The Ghost uneasily replied He hardly thought it was).

"It's not in Nursery Rhymes? And yet I almost think it is - 'Three little Ghosteses' were set 'On posteses,' you know, and ate Their 'buttered toasteses.'

"I have the book; so if you doubt it--" I turned to search the shelf. "Don't stir!" he cried. "We'll do without it: I now remember all about it; I wrote the thing myself.

"It came out in a 'Monthly,' or At least my agent said it did: Some literary swell, who saw It, thought it seemed adapted for The Magazine he edited.

"My father was a Brownie, Sir; My mother was a Fairy. The notion had occurred to her, The children would be happier, If they were taught to vary.

"The notion soon became a craze; And, when it once began, she Brought us all out in different ways - One was a Pixy, two were Fays, Another was a Banshee;

"The Fetch and Kelpie went to school And gave a lot of trouble; Next came a Poltergeist and Ghoul, And then two Trolls (which broke the rule), A Goblin, and a Double -

"(If that's a snuff-box on the shelf," He added with a yawn, "I'll take a pinch)-next came an Elf, And then a Phantom (that's myself), And last, a Leprechaun.

"One day, some Spectres chanced to call, Dressed in the usual white: I stood and watched them in the hall, And couldn't make them out at all, They seemed so strange a sight.

"I wondered what on earth they were, That looked all head and sack; But Mother told me not to stare, And then she twitched me by the hair, And punched me in the back.

"Since then I've often wished that I Had been a Spectre born. But what's the use?" (He heaved a sigh.) "THEY are the ghost-nobility, And look on US with scorn.

"My phantom-life was soon begun: When I was barely six, I went out with an older one - And just at first I thought it fun, And learned a lot of tricks.

"I've haunted dungeons, castles, towers - Wherever I was sent: I've often sat and howled for hours, Drenched to the skin with driving showers, Upon a battlement.

"It's quite old-fashioned now to groan When you begin to speak: This is the newest thing in tone--" And here (it chilled me to the bone) He gave an AWFUL squeak.

"Perhaps," he added, "to YOUR ear That sounds an easy thing? Try it yourself, my little dear! It took ME something like a year, With constant practising.

"And when you've learned to squeak, my man, And caught the double sob, You're pretty much where you began: Just try and gibber if you can! That's something LIKE a job!

"I'VE tried it, and can only say I'm sure you couldn't do it, e- ven if you practised night and day, Unless you have a turn that way, And natural ingenuity.

"Shakspeare I think it is who treats Of Ghosts, in days of old, Who 'gibbered in the Roman streets,' Dressed, if you recollect, in sheets - They must have found it cold.

"I've often spent ten pounds on stuff, In dressing as a Double; But, though it answers as a puff, It never has effect enough To make it worth the trouble.

"Long bills soon quenched the little thirst I had for being funny. The setting-up is always worst: Such heaps of things you want at first, One must be made of money!

"For instance, take a Haunted Tower, With skull, cross-bones, and sheet; Blue lights to burn (say) two an hour, Condensing lens of extra power, And set of chains complete:

"What with the things you have to hire - The fitting on the robe - And testing all the coloured fire - The outfit of itself would tire The patience of a Job!

"And then they're so fastidious, The Haunted-House Committee: I've often known them make a fuss Because a Ghost was French, or Russ, Or even from the City!

"Some dialects are objected to - For one, the IRISH brogue is: And then, for all you have to do, One pound a week they offer you, And find yourself in Bogies!