

ence. But by what process of thought can we bring experience to bear on the world of the dead? It lies entirely beyond us, a *terra incognita* of cloud and darkness; and yet the thing at our side — the thing over which we can stretch our hand, the thing dead to us but living to it — has entered upon it; and, however uninformed or ignorant before, knows more of its dark, and to us inscrutable mysteries, than all our philosophers and all our divines. Is it wonder that we would fain put it to the question; that we would fain catechise it, if we could, regarding its newly-acquired experience; that we should fill up the gaps in the dialogue, which its silence leaves to us, by imparting to one another the little we know regarding its state and its place; or that we should send our thoughts roaming in long excursions, to glean from the experience of the past all that it tells us of the occasional visits of the dead, and all that in their less taciturn and more social moments they have communicated to the living? And hence, from feelings so natural and a train of associations so obvious, the character of a country lykewake, and the cast of its stories. I say a *country* lykewake; for in at least all our larger towns, where a cold and barren scepticism has chilled the feelings and imaginations of the people, without, I fear, much improving their judgments, the conversation on such occasions takes a lower and less interesting range.

I once spent a night with a friend from the south — a man of an inquiring and highly philosophic cast of mind — at a lykewake in the upper part of the parish of Cromarty. I had excited his curiosity by an incidental remark or two of the kind I have just been dropping; and, on his expressing a wish that I should introduce him, by way of illustration, to some such scene as I had been describing, we had